A Global Movement at Work: World Blind Union Quadrennial Report 2021-2025

This report provides a concise account of the World Blind Union’s work during the quadrennium 2021-2025, focusing on achievements in advocacy, capacity building, organizational excellence, and partnerships.

# Message from the President

Dear Members and Colleagues,

It is my privilege to introduce this Quadrennial Report of the World Blind Union. Over the past four years, our Union has worked steadily to strengthen its role as the global voice of persons who are blind or partially sighted.

We have advanced accessibility at the international level, supported members through crises, and built new partnerships that will continue to serve us in the years ahead. This report sets out what has been accomplished, both globally and regionally, and it highlights the practical benefits of belonging to a strong, united movement.

As we approach the General Assembly in São Paulo, I hope this report provides a clear picture of how far we have come and where we are heading. I want to thank our members, regional unions, officers, and staff for their contributions to this progress.

Sincerely,

Martine Abel-Williamson

President, World Blind Union

# Message from the CEO

Dear Members, Partners, and Friends,

Since becoming CEO in January 2022, my priority has been to strengthen the Union’s capacity to deliver value to its members and to raise the profile of our advocacy in international arenas. The period covered in this report shows clear results in both areas.

We have established WBU as a recognized voice on digital rights, climate change, and inclusive urban development. We have taken practical steps to support members, including solidarity initiatives for Ukraine, the relaunch of scholarships, and the creation of new advocacy tools. At the same time, we have worked to modernize our own systems, from governance and communications to financial planning and partnerships.

This report is intended to provide members with a clear, factual account of what has been achieved. It is a record of progress made together, and it offers a foundation for the work that lies ahead. I am grateful to all who have contributed to these efforts and look forward to building on them in the next strategic period.

Sincerely,

Marc Workman

CEO, World Blind Union

# Who We Are & How We Work

The World Blind Union (WBU) is the recognized global organization of persons who are blind or partially sighted, representing hundreds of member organizations from every corner of the world. Our structure is built on six strong regional unions—Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe, Latin America, North America and the Caribbean, and Asia. These regional unions provide leadership and coordination within their areas, while connecting members to the global work of the Union.

WBU is governed by its General Assembly, which meets every four years, and by an Executive Committee and Officers who oversee work between Assemblies. The leadership is supported by committees and working groups that focus on specific thematic areas, ranging from accessible built environments to youth, women, and technology.

Since 2021, WBU has organized its work around three strategic pillars:

* Advocacy – ensuring that the rights of persons who are blind or partially sighted are recognized and implemented in international, regional, and national frameworks.
* Capacity Building – supporting our members to strengthen their organizations, develop leadership, and respond to challenges in their local contexts.
* Organizational Excellence – building the systems, policies, and resources that allow WBU to operate effectively and sustainably.

These pillars provide a common direction for the Union, while giving flexibility to adapt to emerging opportunities and challenges. They are the framework for the activities and results described in the rest of this report.

# Advocacy — Changing Systems, Setting Standards

## Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction

In 2023, WBU secured observer status with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This allowed WBU to participate officially in the COP28 climate discussions for the first time. The delegation highlighted the importance of including persons who are blind or partially sighted in climate adaptation, mitigation, and emergency preparedness planning.

Our focus has been to link climate change, disaster risk reduction, and accessibility. Many members face increasing risks from extreme weather events and natural disasters, yet persons with disabilities are often overlooked in disaster planning. WBU has used its new position to emphasize that accessibility must be a standard component of resilience and emergency systems, from early warning alerts to evacuation and recovery planning.

The COP28 delegation was a milestone, but it also marked the beginning of a longer-term engagement. WBU now has a platform to ensure that international climate processes reflect the realities faced by persons who are blind or partially sighted, and to support members in bringing these priorities into national climate strategies.

## Digital Rights and the Global Digital Compact

Since 2022, WBU has expanded its role in digital policy. Through our partnership with the Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs (G3ICT), WBU co-chairs the Digital Accessibility, Standards, and Harmonization (DASH) work group. This platform has enabled WBU to contribute directly to global discussions on digital accessibility, artificial intelligence, and emerging technologies.

A major focus has been the development of the United Nations Global Digital Compact (GDC), a framework intended to guide digital cooperation among states, companies, and civil society. WBU engaged actively in the consultations leading up to the Summit of the Future, ensuring that accessibility and the rights of persons with disabilities were explicitly included in draft language.

Our advocacy stressed that digital transformation must align with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Accessibility cannot be treated as optional—it must be built into digital products and services from the design stage, monitored with accountability mechanisms, and enforced through procurement and regulation.

Through DASH and the GDC process, WBU positioned itself as a credible and authoritative voice on digital rights. This work provides members with new tools and arguments to use in national advocacy on accessible technology and digital inclusion.

## Inclusive and Accessible Cities and Communities

WBU has made accessibility in cities and communities a central part of its advocacy. During the quadrennium, we have built formal partnerships with United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and UN-Habitat. In 2023, WBU signed a memorandum of understanding with UCLG—the first such agreement between UCLG and an organization of persons with disabilities. This agreement commits both parties to promoting accessibility and inclusion in municipal policies and planning.

WBU has also been active in international forums such as the World Urban Forum, where we co-hosted sessions, contributed policy input, and raised the visibility of accessibility as a core element of sustainable urban development. These platforms allow us to bring local perspectives into global policy spaces and to share practical guidance with mayors, planners, and city leaders.

The goal is clear: cities must be designed and managed so that persons who are blind or partially sighted can move, work, study, and participate fully. The partnerships developed over the past four years provide members with stronger leverage to advocate for accessible transport, housing, public spaces, and emergency systems in their own countries.

## Marrakesh Treaty and Access to Information

Access to books and information remains a cornerstone of equality for people who are blind or partially sighted. WBU has continued to prioritize the Marrakesh Treaty, which facilitates the production and cross-border sharing of accessible format books.

Since 2022, WBU has developed toolkits to support members in their national advocacy for ratification and implementation of the Treaty. We have paid particular attention to regions where implementation has lagged, including several African countries. Our rapid-assessment briefs and advocacy resources have been used by members to engage with governments and highlight the benefits of accessible libraries and resource-sharing.

WBU’s work on Marrakesh demonstrates how global agreements can be turned into practical results. By equipping members with concrete tools, the Union helps ensure that the Treaty delivers on its promise: ending the “book famine” for people who are blind or partially sighted.

## Policy Positions and Public Voice

Over the past four years, WBU has strengthened its role as a policy leader on issues affecting persons who are blind or partially sighted. We have developed and released position statements on key topics, including:

* Education (jointly with the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment, ICEVI), emphasizing inclusive systems that deliver quality education from early years through adulthood.
* Transport and autonomous vehicles, calling for standards that ensure accessibility and safety as new technologies are introduced.
* Healthcare access, highlighting the barriers faced by people who are blind or partially sighted and the need for inclusive health systems.

These statements are designed not only for international advocacy but also as practical tools for members. They provide clear language and evidence that can be used in discussions with governments, regulators, and other stakeholders.

# Capacity Building — Powering Members to Lead

## Accessibility GO!

Accessibility GO! is a practical tool developed jointly by WBU and CBM Global to guide governments, service providers, and organizations in creating accessible environments. Since 2022, WBU has prioritized dissemination and uptake of the tool among members.

We have organized regional training sessions, translated materials into multiple languages, released our podcast series Unpacking Accessibility Go!, and provided technical support to members who want to adapt the tool for local use. In Asia-Pacific, for example, members have used Accessibility GO! to train officials on accessible communications and inclusive event planning.

The value of Accessibility GO! lies in its adaptability. It is not a one-size-fits-all checklist, but a framework that allows countries and organizations to benchmark progress and identify specific actions. By promoting Accessibility GO!, WBU equips members with a recognized and credible resource they can use in advocacy with governments, municipalities, and service providers.

This work also demonstrates WBU’s dual role: shaping global standards while ensuring members have the tools to apply those standards at the national and local levels.

## Ukraine Response and Recovery

When the war in Ukraine began in 2022, WBU acted quickly to support persons who are blind or partially sighted who were affected. Together with our members and partners, we established the Ukrainian Unity Fund, a solidarity mechanism to channel donations directly to organizations of blind people in Ukraine and neighboring countries.

A highlight of this effort was the “We’re With U” virtual concert, which brought together artists, allies, and supporters from around the world. Combined with grassroots fundraising campaigns, the initiative raised over USD 130,000, far exceeding expectations.

Funds from the campaign were used to address both immediate and longer-term needs. This included the distribution of hundreds of white canes. A portion of the funding also supported the establishment of the first Ukrainian-language library for the blind, an important step in expanding access to information and culture during a time of crisis.

Looking ahead, WBU is working with members in Denmark and Norway to support rehabilitation camps and leadership initiatives for Ukrainians who are blind or partially sighted. These activities demonstrate WBU’s ability to mobilize quickly, respond effectively in emergencies, and sustain support as needs evolve.

## Scholarships

In 2025, thanks to administrative support from our Canadian member, CNIB, WBU relaunched its Scholarship Program, offering direct support for people who are blind or partially sighted to pursue education, professional training, and leadership development.

The program received a strong response, with 168 applications submitted by 105 individuals. Of these, 82 applicants applied for a single scholarship, while 23 applied for multiple awards. The applications came from every WBU region, reflecting both the global reach of the program and the unmet need for financial support in accessing education and training.

Applicants represented a wide geographic spread, including countries in Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East, as well as smaller island states and low-income contexts where educational opportunities are often most restricted.

This level of demand underscores both the importance of the program and the barriers many individuals continue to face in achieving their educational goals. Through the Scholarship Program, WBU is investing in the next generation of leaders, ensuring that the movement remains strong and that people who are blind or partially sighted are prepared to contribute fully in their communities and beyond.

## Regional Support for General Assemblies

Between 2022 and 2025, WBU provided financial support totaling approximately USD 80,000 to three of our regional unions—ABU, AFUB, and ULAC—to enable them to hold their General Assemblies.

These assemblies are vital for the governance and renewal of the regions. They provide opportunities to elect leadership, debate priorities, and strengthen accountability to members. They also serve as a platform for networking, peer learning, and strategic planning across countries within each region.

WBU’s support ensured that these assemblies could take place despite financial constraints and, in some cases, difficult external circumstances. The investment has helped to stabilize regional structures, refresh leadership mandates, and connect regional priorities more directly with WBU’s global strategy.

Supporting regional assemblies also strengthens WBU as a whole. When regional unions are active and well-governed, they are better able to serve national organizations, channel local priorities into global advocacy, and ensure that WBU remains grounded in the lived experience of people who are blind or partially sighted in every part of the world.

# Organizational Excellence — Building the Engine

## Brand and Website Redesign

A major milestone in this period was the rebranding of the World Blind Union and the launch of our new website in July 2025. The project was designed to modernize WBU’s public identity, strengthen our global communications, and ensure that members and partners can easily access resources and information.

The new website is fully accessible and available in multiple languages, reflecting WBU’s commitment to inclusion and to serving a diverse global membership. It also introduces new features such as:

* The Global Resource Library, where members can find advocacy tools, policy statements, and practical guidelines.
* Improved navigation and search functions, making it easier to locate information quickly.
* Stronger integration with social media and communications channels, ensuring that WBU’s advocacy messages reach wider audiences.

The rebrand extended beyond the website to include updated logos, templates, and communications products. This creates a consistent and professional identity for the organization, supporting credibility with external partners and donors while giving members a sense of shared belonging to a global movement.

The launch of the new brand and website marks a significant step forward in WBU’s communications capacity. It provides the foundation for more effective storytelling, stronger advocacy campaigns, and improved visibility of the work being carried out across regions.

## Communications Capacity and Innovation

Communications has been an area of both challenge and growth for WBU during this period. For parts of 2022 and 2023, the Union did not have dedicated staff capacity to manage communications, and this limited the reach and consistency of our external messaging.

In 2024, WBU created and filled the position of Communications Specialist, a role that has since provided much-needed stability and expertise. The impact of this investment is already visible:

* The regular release of our newsletter, Global Outlook, which highlights WBU activities and shares stories from members.
* The launch of WBU’s podcast, Global Voice, providing an accessible platform for in-depth conversations on issues affecting people who are blind or partially sighted.
* Expansion of WBU’s social media presence, including the launch of an Instagram account to reach new and younger audiences.

These initiatives broaden the reach of WBU’s advocacy, amplify member voices, and strengthen the Union’s identity as a credible, visible, and connected global organization. They also provide members with practical channels to share their own experiences and successes.

The establishment of a dedicated communications role has transformed communications from a gap into a growing strength, positioning WBU to engage more effectively with both members and external partners.

## Governance and Financial Stewardship

Over the past four years, WBU has worked to strengthen its internal systems so that the organization is governed effectively and its resources are managed responsibly. This has involved updating policies, clarifying roles, and adopting financial practices that safeguard WBU’s long-term sustainability.

On the governance side, key steps included the development of a Code of Conduct and a Code of Ethics and Conflict of Interest Policy, both of which reinforce accountability and integrity across all WBU activities. WBU also introduced or revised a number of practical governance tools, including a travel policy, position descriptions for table officers, and clearer roles and responsibilities for board members and staff. Together, these measures provide greater clarity and consistency in how WBU is led and how responsibilities are shared.

In parallel, WBU has advanced its approach to financial management. A Reserve Fund Policy was developed to guide decision-making on savings and risk management, providing a buffer against financial uncertainty. The organization also strengthened its grant management systems, overseeing significant partnerships such as the multi-year collaboration with CBM Global, while maintaining compliance and transparency in reporting. These steps have positioned WBU to diversify its revenue streams while ensuring that core funds are used efficiently and strategically.

By addressing governance and finance together, WBU has reinforced the foundations of the organization. Clearer roles, stronger policies, and responsible financial planning ensure that WBU can continue to deliver value to its members and act as a credible global voice for people who are blind or partially sighted.

# Membership Systems and Processes

During this quadrennium, WBU placed renewed focus on strengthening the systems that connect and support our members. Recognizing that the value of membership must be clear, accessible, and responsive, WBU developed and began implementing a Membership Engagement Strategy. The strategy aimed to improve retention of current members, re-engage inactive ones, and create more opportunities for new members to join.

Much of this strategy has already been put into practice, particularly in the area of communications. We reinstated regular updates to members through newsletters, strengthened our use of social media, and invested in accessible tools such as webinars and online forums. These efforts have created more consistent opportunities for two-way communication and sharing of resources across regions.

At the same time, WBU has recognized that data management and information systems remain a gap. To address this, WBU has been accepted into Salesforce’s Power of Us Program, which provides eligible nonprofits with up to 10 free licenses for the Salesforce Nonprofit Success Pack. This will allow WBU to establish a modern member management database in 2026. Once implemented, the system will centralize records on membership status, communications, and participation, making it easier to track engagement and respond to member needs.

Together, these developments mark progress toward a more structured and reliable approach to membership management. By improving communication channels now and investing in data systems for the future, WBU is building a stronger foundation for sustained engagement and clearer value for members worldwide.

# Partnerships & Alliances — Moving Faster Together

Building strong alliances has been central to WBU’s progress in this period. Partnerships allow WBU to amplify its voice, extend its reach, and share resources and expertise. Between 2022 and 2025, WBU signed memoranda of understanding (MoUs) and strengthened collaboration with a wide range of organizations, from global UN agencies to regional unions and technical partners.

## Strategic Partnerships

* CBM Global Disability Inclusion — A multi-year partnership that combined advocacy, capacity building, and member support. This collaboration has provided both financial resources and technical expertise, enabling WBU to deliver programs and strengthen accountability.
* United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and UN-Habitat — In 2023, WBU signed a landmark MoU with UCLG, the first such agreement between UCLG and an organization of persons with disabilities. Alongside cooperation with UN-Habitat, this partnership ensures that accessibility is part of the urban development agenda worldwide.
* International Disability Alliance (IDA) — Through IDA, WBU contributed to joint advocacy across UN forums, ensuring that the rights of persons who are blind or partially sighted are fully represented within the broader disability movement.
* G3ICT and the Digital Accessibility, Standards, and Harmonization (DASH) work group — Co-chairing DASH positioned WBU as a global leader on digital rights and accessibility standards, influencing the UN’s Global Digital Compact and related digital governance processes.
* ICEVI (International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment) — Continued close collaboration, including joint policy statements on inclusive education and co-organization of advocacy initiatives.

## Why Partnerships Matter

These partnerships demonstrate how WBU maximizes its impact by working with others. Each MoU and collaboration opens doors to new policy arenas, funding opportunities, and technical expertise. Most importantly, they ensure that the voice of blind and partially sighted people is present in decision-making spaces where accessibility and inclusion must be built in from the start.

# Impact Stories — Change in Action

The work of the World Blind Union is best understood through the tangible changes it helps to unlock. Policies, partnerships, and programs are important, but their true value lies in how they improve the lives of people who are blind or partially sighted. The following stories highlight how WBU’s advocacy and solidarity efforts translate into real-world impact.

## Standing with Ukraine: Solidarity in Action

When Ukraine was invaded in 2022, blind and partially sighted people faced displacement, loss of services, and heightened risks to safety and well-being. WBU moved quickly, launching the Ukrainian Unity Fund and rallying global solidarity through the “We’re With U” concert and campaign.

The outcome was more than financial: over USD 130,000 was raised, enabling shipment of white canes and establishment of Ukraine’s first library for the blind. Rehabilitation camps and psychosocial support were also initiated.

For members in Ukraine, this support provided immediate relief and practical tools for survival and recovery. For WBU globally, it demonstrated the power of our network: when crisis strikes, solidarity can mobilize resources and show that no member is left behind.

## Accessibility on the World Stage: The World Urban Forum

Global events often set the tone for national policy. At the World Urban Forum events in 2022 and 2024, WBU worked with UN-Habitat and local government partners to ensure accessibility was visible and practical — not an afterthought.

Through joint sessions, policy input, and advocacy, WBU helped shape commitments that made both Forums some of the most accessible major UN gatherings to date. Delegates reported improved access to materials, spaces, and discussions, and accessibility was explicitly acknowledged in the final outcomes.

For city leaders present, this was a model: accessibility is achievable when it is prioritized. For WBU members, it provided leverage back home — a global standard they could point to in conversations with municipal governments.

## Shaping the Digital Future: Accessibility in the Global Digital Compact

As governments and companies negotiate the rules that will govern the digital world, accessibility is often at risk of being overlooked. For people who are blind or partially sighted, that can mean exclusion from education, work, communication, and public services.

Through its co-chair role in the Digital Accessibility, Standards, and Harmonization (DASH) work group, WBU became a leading voice in the development of the United Nations Global Digital Compact. WBU engaged in consultations, submitted inputs, and worked closely with partners to ensure that accessibility was not treated as optional, but as a core requirement aligned with the CRPD.

The result: draft language of the Compact includes explicit recognition of accessibility-by-design and accountability mechanisms for governments and private actors. This positions WBU and its members with a powerful advocacy tool: the ability to point to global consensus when pressing for accessible digital services, AI governance, and procurement standards at national level.

For people who are blind or partially sighted, the impact is forward-looking but profound. The rules being written today will shape the digital landscape of tomorrow — and thanks to WBU’s leadership, accessibility is embedded in that future.

## Why These Stories Matter

* Immediate crisis response, providing solidarity and practical support in Ukraine.
* Visible accessibility improvements, demonstrated at the world’s largest policy forums.
* Long-term systemic change, embedding accessibility in the digital governance frameworks of the future.

They show that WBU’s value is not only in convening meetings or issuing statements, but in delivering change that members can feel, use, and build upon.

# Looking Ahead — Preparing for the Next Strategic Period

The coming months mark a natural transition for the World Blind Union. New Table Officers will be elected at the General Assembly in São Paulo, and they will lead the process of developing and finalizing WBU’s 2025–2029 Strategic Plan. While the final direction of the organization will rest with the incoming leadership, important groundwork has already been laid.

Over the past year, WBU has begun structured conversations about the future. These have included:

* Interviews with current leaders to capture insights about emerging priorities and organizational needs.
* Discussions at recent Officers’ meetings to identify the political, economic, and social contexts shaping WBU’s work.
* Preparation for member engagement, including a dedicated session at the World Blindness Summit on the future of the global blindness movement.

These reflections are helping WBU to better understand the contexts in which it operates: shifting global political dynamics, economic pressures on members, the evolving relationship between WBU and its regional unions, and the priority issues already identified by current leaders.

The next phase will involve broadening these conversations with members and partners, ensuring that the strategic plan reflects the realities and aspirations of the global movement. The final strategy will be developed and approved by the new Table Officers in the early part of the next quadrennium.

In short, while the exact priorities are still to be determined, the process is underway. WBU is entering this next period with a strong foundation, clear processes for consultation, and a commitment to ensuring that the voice of members is central in shaping the path ahead.

# Acknowledgements

The achievements reflected in this report are the result of the collective effort of many people and organizations across our global movement.

We thank our members — national organizations, regional unions, and international partners — for their leadership, creativity, and determination in advancing the rights of blind and partially sighted people.

We acknowledge the dedication of our Table Officers, Executive Committee, and regional leaders, whose guidance and oversight have ensured that WBU remained strong and responsive through times of challenge and change.

We recognize the contributions of our staff and consultants, who provide the day-to-day expertise and support that allow WBU to deliver on its mission.

We are deeply grateful to our donors and partners, whose financial and technical support have made it possible to extend our reach and impact.

Above all, we thank the many blind and partially sighted people around the world who continue to demand equity, inclusion, and opportunity. It is their lived experience, leadership, and persistence that give purpose to the work of the World Blind Union.

Together, we have shown what is possible when solidarity meets action.