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# EBU Focus Number eleven, October 2020.

# Audiodescription; EBU calls for inclusion in all events.

## Three more language versions now available!

EBU Focus newsletters are now available, as word documents only, in [Polish](http://www.euroblind.org/sites/default/files/documents/ebu-focus-audio-desc_polish_pl.docx), [Serbian](http://www.euroblind.org/sites/default/files/documents/ebu-focus-audio-desc_serbian_sr.docx) and [Turkish](http://www.euroblind.org/sites/default/files/documents/ebu-focus-audio-desc_turkish_tr.docx). We hope that these translations will enable this information to reach a wider audience.

## Blind People Want To Be Able To Watch Television Too

By: **Dr. Markus Wolf**, President, Austrian Federation of the Blind and Partially Sighted (BSVÖ)

Cicero said, “A picture paints a thousand words.” My wife recently watched a film on television in which there was a scene in which a forest was searched for a missing person. For minutes there was no dialog at all. All that was shown, I was told, were people searching and the anxious looks of the father of the missing person, who was part of the search team. Had this film had audio description, I would have been able to follow the scenes exactly. The scenes of the film would probably have required quite a lot of words to give an accurate description.

Yes, blind people enjoy “watching” films too. Unfortunately, only a very small percentage of films is adequately adapted for blind and severely partially sighted people.

If you are a sighted person you might now be asking, what is audio description exactly? Audio description is the description of films and live events, such as sports events, for blind and partially sighted people, so that they can adequately follow the actions or proceedings. The gaps in the dialogs are used to describe the visual scenes to those people who cannot see them. For this purpose a second channel is normally used, so that persons following the film can choose whether or not to listen to the audio description. These dialog gaps are very often quite short, so short, precise descriptions must be inserted that describe the main elements of visual information.

Some films have a lot of dialog. Those films I as a blind person can follow to some extent because the story can be followed through what the characters say to one another. Situation comedies generally have a lot of dialog. Some other genres have much less. Some typical Western movies build up suspense through a lack of dialog and an exchange of glances between characters. These are almost impossible to follow as a blind person. Needless to say, however, all films can be more enjoyably listened to by blind people if the scenes are adequately described. This does not only apply to films. Nature documentaries general have good commentators, but even here commentaries are limited, the picture presented is seldom described and this is where audio description can fill the important gaps.

Sports events are important too. A football match with audio description is just as gripping for me as it might be to you. This is similar to the old-fashioned radio commentary of football in which detailed descriptions of the players’ positions, the gesticulations between the coach and the players as well as individual scenes of individual members of the audience are verbally communicated. All this paints the big picture. This type of description has become very popular in Austria and I have been told on more than one occasion by sighted people that they enjoy listening to the audio description too.

The problem is that audio description has been around since the 90s of the last century, yet it is still only available in a small proportion of films and events. Audio description is a form of information and blind and partially sighted people have an equal right to information as sighted people do (the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities makes that very clear).

## Equal Participation in Cultural life: EU obligations under the UNCRPD as background to EBU campaigning regarding funding of the film industry

By **Antoine Fobe**, EBU Advocacy & Campaigning

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), entered into force on 3 May 2008, is the first international, legally binding instrument setting minimum standards for rights of people with disabilities. The first human rights treaty to which the EU has become a party and to ever have been ratified by a regional organisation, the CRPD is a powerful tool to explore and promote ways of fulfilling the rights of persons with disabilities by developing and implementing legal, policy and practical measures. All the EU Member States have signed and ratified the convention.

The European Union (EU) itself acceded to the CRPD on 23 December 2010, and it entered into force in the EU on 22 January 2011. The EU is responsible for implementation of the Convention to the extent of its competences. This of course includes EU funding. As required by Article 33(2) of the CRPD, the EU established a framework to promote, protect and monitor implementation of the CRPD, for matters of EU competence. It also defined a European Disability Strategy for 2010-2020, currently being revised for the next 10-year period.

Article 30, paragraph 1, of the CRPD defines the right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life. Among other, it obliges State Parties to “take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities (…) enjoy access to (…) films (…) in accessible formats”.

The EBU Statement related to Article 30 describes the related accessibility needs for blind and partially sighted persons: “Television, film and video productions need to be audio described and audio subtitled, distributed through normal channels and made available at the same time and cost”.

Requirements for the accessibility of films are further elaborated in the same statement, as follows:

* Television broadcasters, programme manufacturers, film producers and manufacturers of DVD and other digital reproductions of audio visual presentations must be required to produce and distribute all their products with audio description and audio subtitling.
* Blind and partially-sighted people must have access to the same range and quality of access to digital television programmes via audio description and audio subtitling as other people in their community. Other television services, such as programme guides and interactive services must also be fully accessible.
* All cinemas, theatres, sporting and cultural venues open to the public must provide audio description and audio subtitling services of all their performances for blind and partially-sighted people.

Genesis of a new EBU campaign – With all the above considerations in mind, EBU started to look into funding to the film industry, to argue that the EU could use more of its leverage to promote good practices. The idea came from our German member organisation, DBSV, who informed us of the state of play in their country and the room for progress at EU level. Our first public expression on the matter was in the form of our [Statement on European Elections 2019](http://www.euroblind.org/sites/default/files/documents/ebu_statement_european_elections.docx), among a list of 10 key issues for the new legislative period. This naturally led us to make concrete recommendations in a [first position paper](http://www.euroblind.org/new-ebu-position-paper-media-funding-european-film-industry-promote-equal-access-culture-persons) about MEDIA funding to the film industry, released in the context of EU discussions on the proposed regulation on the Creative Europe Programme for 2021-2027.

The coming months will be critical to make progress, as the budget negotiations, including on Creative Europe, are expected to conclude rapidly.

## The Need For Accessible Films

By **Merve Sezgin**, Head of International Relations, German Federation of the Blind and Partially-Sighted

### State of play in Germany

The idea for this EBU campaign has been developed by the German experience. The German Federal Film Board executes the Film Funding Act. A recast of the law in 2013 mandated that the Film Board can only fund accessible films. This has two immediate consequences: film production projects are only eligible for funding, if their detailed project description budgets in an audio description and; film distribution projects are only eligible for funding, if the distributed film includes an audio description. The idea is that the German practice can serve as a best practice model for Creative Europe in the EU to increase the level of accessibility in the cultural sector.

### Current MEDIA rules

The MEDIA sub-programme of Creative Europe supports the EU film and audiovisual industries financially in the development, distribution and promotion of their work. It helps to launch projects with a European dimension and reach new audiences. Currently the regulatory framework of MEDIA simply includes support for audio-description of audiovisual works. Disappointingly, the European Commission’s proposed new regulation on the Creative Europe Programme for the period 2021-2027 contains even weaker language.

Article 7 of the revised EU Directive on audiovisual media services also requires media service providers in Europe to make their services continuously and progressively more accessible to persons with disabilities, including through audio description and audio subtitling. Therefore, the EU should support the implementation of the Directive on audiovisual media services through the Creative Europe Programme.

### Our new campaign: equal access to culture for persons with visual impairments in the EU

Visually impaired persons need audio description and audio subtitling to have equal access to a film. Innovative rules in several Member States have expanded the percentage of available accessible cultural content with audio description. The EU can learn from these experiences, make films more accessible and create an inclusive cultural area in Europe. To reach this goal we have developed our position paper, suggesting that accessibility should be considered among the selection criteria of the programme. If implemented as we suggest, it is a cost-neutral way for the MEDIA programme to contribute to the increase of accessibility measures.

### Our demands

For the next period 2021-2027 we demand that MEDIA should extend its eligibility criteria for funding to accessibility requirements: the bottom line is that the Creative Europe Programme for 2021-2027 should, at least like its predecessor, include support for audio-description of audiovisual works among support measures for the MEDIA sub-programme. We demand in our position paper that audio description and audio subtitling should be included among the selection and award criteria on the basis of which proposals eligible for MEDIA funding are assessed. For the first time frame until 2027 at least 25% of films that receive MEDIA funding should have an audio description and audio subtitling. The percentage of films complying with accessibility standards should increase progressively until all of them include audio description.

You can read our position paper on MEDIA funding to the European film industry [here](http://www.euroblind.org/new-ebu-position-paper-media-funding-european-film-industry-promote-equal-access-culture-persons).

## Support to audio-description by National Film Funds

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EFAD (European Film Agency Directors association) is the voice of national European Film Agencies, bringing together the national film and audiovisual agencies across Europe. The 35 EFAD members of the Brussels-based association are government or government-associated public bodies, in charge of national funding for the audiovisual sector and with the responsibility to advise or regulate on all aspects of audiovisual policies.

At national level, EFAD members have already integrated the needs of the blind and partially sighted citizens into their schemes. Specific support to audio-description and audio-subtitling are indeed in place in several countries:

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| --- | --- |
| France  CNC | Specific [scheme for the creation of audiodescription](https://www.cnc.fr/professionnels/aides-et-financements/cinema/production/soutien-a-la-realisation-de-fichiers-daudiodescription-et-de-soustitrage-pour-les-publics-atteints-de-handicaps-sensoriels_191627) and subtitling files for audiences with sensory disabilities. (website in French) |
| Germany  FFA | Creation of an audiodescription and subtitle version is an eligibility criterion for any project submitted to production support.  Exploitation and distribution: in cinemas an accessible version must be proposed (generally the GRETA system via cell phone). |
| Belgium (French speaking)  CCA | French speaking part: Since 2016, all supported films get an additional grant of 5000€ for the creation of an audiodescription version: <https://www.amisdesaveugles.org/films-belges-audiodescription.html> |
| Belgium (Dutch speaking)  VAF | VAF gives 5.000 EUR extra for feature films and long animation films (majority) that received production support from us. |
| Denmark  Danish Film Institute | Concerning audio-description for the blind and partially-sighted our bylaws requires this to be available for films released in cinemas. This means that the Producer needs to include the costs in the production budget which will be an eligible cost for production support. |
| UK  BFI | All Production funded projects are contractually obliged to make Audio Description files (as well as HOH subtitles).  All titles funded for Distribution are also contractually required to create Audio Description (again, as well as HOH subtitles).  These costs are supported by the BFI. |

Regarding the MEDIA programme, EFAD have been advocating in favour of a stronger budget and more ambitious initiatives to foster European coproductions and the promotion of European works.

EFAD does also support the EBU call for strengthening the accessibility of works. Support to audio -description is already well included in the eligible costs of distribution and sales agent schemes of the MEDIA programme but could be better exploited by beneficiaries and serve as leverage for good practices in the film industry.

**Julie-Jeanne Régnault,** Secretary General

Website: [europeanfilmagencies.eu](https://europeanfilmagencies.eu/)

## Interviewing Massimiliano Smeriglio, European Parliament Rapporteur (Committee on Culture and Education) on the proposed Regulation establishing the Creative Europe programme (2021-2027)

**In May 2018 the European Commission published its proposal for a regulation establishing the successor for 2021-2027 of the current popular Creative Europe programme. In March 2019 the European Parliament adopted its first-reading position. What are the main issues for the European Parliament?**

The text voted in plenary in April 2019 represents the mandate of the European Parliament in the negotiations with the Council, which began in the autumn of last year and stalled after strong opposition from Member States on key issues for the future of the programme. During the negotiation phase, the Parliament has always had a clear objective: to have a programme capable of supporting cultural, artistic, creative, audiovisual projects, with European added value, which can circulate in several countries of the European Union and also outside, thus strengthening the EU's economic dimension and competitiveness in this field. The Creative Europe programme must be aimed at promoting the active participation of citizens with particular attention to the new generations and to accessibility. As negotiations resume, the Parliament will most of all want to resolve the issue of inclusion, as indicated in the replies to the following questions of this interview

**In its position paper, EBU asks for the new EU regulation to contain wording as least as strong as the current one, for MEDIA funding mindful of the accessibility needs of visually impaired persons. As Rapporteur for the European Parliament, do you find that the proposal published by the European Commission in May 2018 goes in the right direction? What amendments are proposed by the Parliament?**

The Parliament's goal is to create an increasingly inclusive European cultural reality and this also involves making a programme like Creative Europe, the only European fund aimed at supporting culture, more inclusive, with particular attention to persons with disabilities. The Commission's 2018 proposal certainly represented a step forward in many respects compared to previous programming. However, it is not a sufficiently ambitious proposal when it comes to promoting inclusion. The reference to inclusion is present in the text, but in a general way, understood as mere social inclusion. The Parliament, thanks to the amendments it tables - which represents a fundamental moment of the European assembly’s activity - has worked to make the text and therefore the programme more inclusive, supporting the circulation of European works through coordinated distribution strategies that encourage the use of subtitling, dubbing and audio description tools. In particular it proposes to insert, among the stated objectives, making the programme truly accessible and inclusive, with particular attention to gender equality, the inclusion of persons with disabilities and of those living in disadvantaged situations.

**What is the state of play in the EU inter-institutional negotiations, and which are the items that give rise to difficulties? Can we expect the Parliament to stand firm on the need for the EU to promote the social inclusion of persons with disabilities?**

To date, inter-institutional negotiations have seen a timid resumption under the new German presidency of the Council. The goal shared by both co-legislators is to conclude the negotiations by next November so that the new program can be ready for January 1, 2021, avoiding interruptions in programming. The resumption of the negotiations is characterized by an intense debate aimed at solving the most important issues, which we hope will find a solution shared by all; in particular, the aforementioned theme of inclusion, that of music, understood as a sectoral action worthy of due attention in the next seven years, especially after the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Last but not least, the issue of governance, considered by the Parliament as a horizontal issue of fundamental importance for the future of the three programs within the remit of the European Parliament's Committee for Culture and Education (CULT).

The Parliament has always been sensitive to the issue of social inclusion, understood above all as the inclusion of persons with disabilities; it demonstrated this when it firmly decided to block the negotiations against the risk of a downward agreement on the issue of inclusion. Similar is the attention to the promotion of the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the use of audiovisual media, which, according to the provisions of the AVMS directive, must be constantly made more accessible through proportionate measures. This obligation falls on the Member States, but the Parliament will monitor the effective transposition of the directive in question so that audio description and subtitles are increasingly used.

## Audio description in France: what is the state of play?

By **Chantal Le Soliec**, Confédération Française pour la Promotion Sociale des Aveugles et Amblyopes – (CFPSAA)

Visually impaired people love the cinema and enjoy it as much as their French fellow citizens! However, audio description, for these people, is an essential parameter for a good understanding of a film. In France, for a long time, audio description only concerned a small percentage of films and the quality was not always good.

Today, we are seeing real progress with a growing number of audio-described films. Blind and partially sighted people have made their voices heard and our associations have worked with public authorities and film professionals to make audio description an essential part of film production and to improve its quality. The CFPSAA has, in particular, highlighted the need for audio description by creating the "Marius de l'Audiodescription" prize which aims to reward, according to a jury composed of visually impaired users, the best audio description on a list of films corresponding to those competing for the "César" awards of French cinema. This event, which was held for the third time in 2020, has raised awareness among film professionals.

Today, there are positive developments on the subject:

The CNC (Centre National du Cinéma), which supports our approach, has decided to set up an observatory dedicated to monitoring audio description. This observatory should be the guarantor of good practices in terms of quality. Moreover, since January 1st, 2020, all producers who apply for financial approval from the CNC are subject to an obligation of accessibility, and therefore of audio description and audio-subtitling, of their productions.

The CSA (Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel), for its part, is in the process of finalizing a charter that will take the form of a guide of good practices for the accessibility of productions and quality audio description.

Finally, France Télévision has just published a document that reflects its desire to improve the quality of the audio description that accompanies the programs broadcast on all its channels.

So there is real progress, but the issue of audio description remains intact and our networks, which remain vigilant, will continue to support all these initiatives as closely as possible to their implementation.

ENDS.

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