



## **'Accessibility of information and communication technology and broadcasting content intended for persons with disabilities and special needs'**

Accessibility of TV/video programs for persons with disabilities is a global problem. Around 80 million people in the European Union only are affected by a disability to some degree. Due to the aging of the European population, the figure is expected to increase to 120 million by 2020. Accessibility is a precondition to their equal participation and active role in society, and it can contribute to ensuring smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

TV/video accessibility refers to all forms of TV/video content (traditional TV, IPTV, Integrated Broadcast Broadband System (IBB), Hybrid Broadcast Broadband TV (HBB)), and to the electronic program guides (EPG), remote controls and TV devices.

In most European countries, there are clear provisions of acts and regulations that are binding for the public broadcasting services. Some provisions oblige the national TV stations with a market share of more than 5% to have a broadcast which includes sign language or subtitles.

In some countries, the main TV channels (such as the Public Service Broadcaster of Catalonia) contain around 70% of the accessible content (content with subtitles, audio description) and almost 90% of the content in the children's programs are closed-captioned, and with audio description. In the United Kingdom, TV/video programs of four broadcasters (BBC, Chanel 4, Chanel 5, ITV) have 92-100% accessible programs, while regulatory standards declare that between 80-100% of all TV /video programs are accessible for persons with disabilities. The situation is similar in Holland and Belgium (90-95% of all TV/video programs are accessible for persons with disabilities). However, many European countries implement this process at a slower pace.

Unlike these countries, the TV/video programming accessibility is particularly alarming in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro. The total share of programs for Persons with Disabilities in public media is below 1%. The percentage is slightly higher in news programmes because some informative programmes are translated into sign language. However, those programmes are broadcast daily for a few minutes only. Audio films are broadcast once a month during late night hours. In some countries, there are no audio films at all. Almost in all the countries, there are no programs intended for children with disabilities.

Considering that broadcasting is a highly regulated area, regulators and legislators play a key role in implementing provisions on accessible services as well as in harmonizing national provisions with international standards. In the digital transition, legislators and regulators are identified as stakeholders that need to have a deep understanding of accessible television services.

In the developing countries, the NRAs are highly demanded to introduce the mandatory quotas, which may not be feasible due to reluctance by the NRAs, mainly because the digital switch-over is well under way. However, the process is not fast enough to enable access to the benefits of Electronic Programme Guides in full. In digital transition, it should be ensured that public broadcasters have adequate funding to provide access services as well as emergency information and public safety announcements. Besides, it is crucial to establish targets and reporting requirements for delivery of access to services.

Besides the issues of quotas, the quality of service and accessible contents (be it web content, closed captions or audio description) is concerning. Therefore, developing technical standards/guidelines is of high importance. Countries could consider developing their standards based on ITU Recommendations for TV accessibility, and there is also the ISO standard for audio description. However, these requirements should be set as mandatory requirements for content producers to develop.

Creation of accessible information is not only a legal obligation but also an expansion of the circle of users, who make up 15% of the population. By creating new ways of access to the creation of audio-visual and textual content, new possibilities for creating and transmitting information are opened, not only for Persons with Disabilities but also for the general population following the modern trends.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has been actively participating in the work of ITU-D Study Group Question 7/1 on „*Access to telecommunications/ICT Services by persons with disabilities and with specific needs*” as one of the rapporteurs since September 2014. Bosnia and Herzegovina also contributed to raise awareness and build capacity on this topic while bringing together the relevant stakeholders throughout the Region to work together in creating an ICT ecosystem accessible to the persons with disabilities and thus ensuring digital and social inclusion to all citizens in the Europe region. To overcome this problem on a regional basis, a Regional initiative has been created between Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Croatia, Montenegro and Republic of Serbia with the following objectives:

- Strengthen and support regional cooperation and engagement of all relevant stakeholders in line with European Accessibility Act, development, and implementation of ICT accessibility policies and solutions in the Europe region.
- Raise awareness and promote relevant guidelines on public policies, including exchanging knowledge and sharing good practices on ICT accessibility products and services for PwD, through regional and sub-regional meetings and workshops.
- Develop regional and in-country capacity through relevant web accessibility training to ensure that government websites/ and related services are available and accessible to All citizens, including the PwD.
- Develop regional and in-country capacity to promote and deliver to all stakeholders that are involved, training courses in ICT Accessibility including the training on public procurement as a tool to improve inclusion of PwD in education, employment, economic and social life.
- Encourage regional cooperation between research centers and academia in speech technologies (TTS, Text-Speech, for everyone who can listen, Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR), Speech-Text for everyone who can read). Improving these technologies can help to overcome disabilities.
- Raise awareness about accessibility possibilities of TV and video programming in digital platforms and implement available solutions.
- Encourage implementation and related measurement progress of regional/national ICT activities and projects aiming to eliminate disparities in the use and access to ICTs of public institutions websites and government education programs, services and information.