Working Group on Accessibility of audiovisual media

CONCEPT PAPER
Athens, 24 October 2019

The purpose of this working group is to focus on the recent trends in the regulatory approach to increasing the accessibility of audiovisual media services for people with visual or aural disabilities. EPRA last addressed this subject at the 37th meeting in Kraków in 2013.

The time is certainly ripe to revisit these issues in the context of:
  o the strengthening of obligations in this area in the revised AVMS Directive,
  o the significant rise in the use of non-linear media services and the need to regulate these services
  o the major advances in the technology that delivers additional content and services, which enhance audiovisual content

The working group will consist of two presentations followed by a discussion of the main issues among EPRA members with a view to exchange of experiences and best practice. A background paper outlining recent trends in regulation will be provided in advance of the Athens meeting.

Setting the scene: trends in the regulation of accessibility of audiovisual services.
The first presentation of the group will outline the recent developments in this area by presenting details from a wide range of jurisdictions. The findings of research carried out (via EPRA questionnaire) by regulators in Sweden (2015), Ireland (2017) and Serbia (2019) will be used to highlight some key questions and issues that have arisen for regulators. Among others, these include:

  o To what extent has the revised AVMS Directive increased obligations on audio-visual media services with regard to accessible content?
  o How to approach the gradual implementation of obligations on service providers, for example with the step-by-step quota systems?
  o What approaches are being taken to regulate on-demand services?
  o In particular is there a preference for co-regulatory models?
  o How are disability organisations involved in regulatory policies?
  o Are distinctions made between types of channels and services?
  o Are there links between foreign language subtitling and accessibility subtitling?
  o What ways are there to mitigate costs for the service providers?
  o Have any types of incentives been introduced to encourage audiovisual services to increase the volume of content that is accessible?

Glimpsing the future: challenges and opportunities of new technology
For the second presentation of the group, the EPRA will invite an expert in the area of broadcast and new media technology to discuss technological advances which may be useful in the provision of accessibility services. As noted above, the significant consumption of non-linear content has required that many of these services are regulated in a similar way to linear

services. In addition, the multiplicity of delivery platforms requires co-operation and standardisation in the formatting and delivery of content for various platforms. But can technological developments also provide some solutions for regulators and service providers in enhancing and increasing the range of accessible audiovisual content for people with sensory disabilities? There are considerable efforts at co-operation and knowledge-sharing in the public sector in this area, as facilitated by the EBU. Hence, the speaker will provide the perspective of a public service broadcaster involved in research and use of innovative technologies. At the same time, the EU is funding ways to increase audiences for European content, which include automated approaches to subtitling and signing. Looking at a range of developments in the presentation of content using algorithms, automatic subtitling and avatars, the second speaker will present some current innovations and focus on a range of questions including:

- What innovations exist for delivering content with built in subtitling and signing?
- How is AI being used to enhance these technologies?
- Can these improve the effectiveness of delivering accessible content?
- Are there also ways for innovative solutions regarding audio-description?
- How can broadcasters, on-demand service operators and content producers use these tools to co-operate in the process of increasing the availability of accessible content?
- Are there potential solutions for reducing costs for the audiovisual media service providers?

Discussion: implementation, co-operation and innovation
This group may well be the first of several intended to enhance co-operation between the regulators in this area. The sharing of best practice with regard to placing obligations on media service providers will be a key issue, in particular as regards distinctions between types of channels, services and operators.

Ways in which regulators can facilitate co-operation between the various stakeholders (organisations representing people with disabilities, content producers, broadcasters, distributors) can be discussed.

The significant issue of costs for operators can be a stumbling block in the implementation of regulation. The sharing of experiences with regard to incentives, funding or other approaches in this area should be addressed.

Innovative technologies, as outlined in the second presentation, may have the benefit of increasing the amount of accessible content and doing so in a faster and cost-effective manner. This may also serve to mitigate costs for service providers. To what extent can the regulators increase awareness of such technologies. In what way can regulators encourage co-operation between broadcasters, on-demand services, and distribution companies in order to collectively reap the benefits of such technologies?

The group will be chaired by EPRA Vice-Chair *Oliver Gerber*. Independent Media Consultant *Deirdre Kevin* (Commsol), will be the content producer of the Group and will set the scene in the introductory presentation. The second speaker will be Mr. *Martin Spycher* of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SRG SSR), an expert in the field of accessibility and new technologies.