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WG2 on access by the Disabled to Audiovisual Media Services - Outline

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Access services refer to providing text captions to enable deaf and hard-of-hearing people to follow TV broadcasts, as well as providing audio description to blind and short-sighted people¹. Such services are usually regarded as potentially beneficial to a much broader part of the population as disabled people.

The level of availability of access services on television across Europe is commonly regarded as low. Reference studies broadly refer to the **accessibility 'deficit'** (low level of access services are barriers to the inclusion of people with disabilities), the **accessibility 'gap'** (the European average compares poorly to the situation in the United States, Australia and Canada) and the **accessibility 'patchwork'** (national situations in different European countries vary greatly)².

The workshop, which will be organised in the form of a round table, could discuss the following issues.

1. Accessibility policies towards media services

How can broadcasters be brought to provide (more) access services? If legal provision is usually the most effective way to increase access service availability, obligations towards broadcasters regarding accessibility may vary in a diversity of ways.

Who sets the rules: the legislator, the Government or the regulatory authorities? How are the targets set (percentages, hours of programs, types of programs,)? Are the rules progressive, and if so, according to what criteria? What differences are made between private sector and PSB regarding access services? How is the application of these measures monitored?

2. Cost structures

One of the biggest restraints to better propagation of access services is their cost.

What are the different possible ecosystems and financing schemes for access services? Is state intervention unavoidable? Can a progressive approach be practical to impose levels of availability? If so, what criteria should such a progressive approach be based on (budget, audience, program format,)?

3. Digital switchover as an opportunity and as a threat

Digital switchover can potentially lead to better accessibility for media services, through better technology like DVB Subtitles. However, these aspects need special attention from the authorities in order to deliver any benefit. Moreover, without appropriate care or consideration from the authorities, digital switchover is more likely to actually result in lower availability and quality of access services.

What are the conditions for a fruitful approach of digital switchover regarding accessibility? Beyond access services availability, what other parts of the television value chain need to be taken into account (interoperability of terminals, common standards for access services implementation)?

4. European level benchmarking

When evaluating the level of availability of access services, quantitative comparison with other countries is often seen as a good method. However, there is no common measurement methodology so far for establishing and comparing the levels of availability of access services, making any comparison hazardous. National media regulation authorities are in a good position to contribute to status monitoring due to their central position in the audiovisual media landscape.

To what extent is it possible to set a common status monitoring methodology for access services availability that would take into account factors such as access technology, population reach, time of availability, type of programs, or market size?

¹ For a complete introduction, see the EBU Technical report on Access Services EBU I 044 at <http://tech.ebu.ch/docs/i/i044.pdf>

² "Measuring progress of eAccessibility in Europe" (MeAC)

http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/einclusion/library/studies/meac_study/index_en.htm