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1. Introduction

In this chapter, we will present the accessibility services at Slovene public broadcaster RTV Slovenija – Radio and Television Slovenija. The paper is based on the experiences and on the actual workflow and production process for implementing various accessibility services, but mainly we will focus on audio description at TV Slovenija. The chapter is divided into several parts. First we will describe the role of RTV Slovenija and the legal framework that determines its operations, then we will briefly present the accessibility services we offer, with a focus on the audio description production process. We will describe the development of the production process from the beginnings to the current state. The questions which are implicit in our paper are: where does theory meet practice? Does practice benefit from theory? How can theory help practice, and to what extent does theory underly practice? These questions will also need to be answered at a more advanced stage, when accessibility services will no longer have the label of adaptation or something which is done in post-production but will be planned following the principles of inclusive design from scratch in the production of Radio, TV or web content. Such an approach will have to be planned together with the implementation of new technologies in the production chain. At the moment at RTV Slovenija we are searching for solutions which are possible with the technologies we use for the creation of the content and for broadcasting it. Quality is a very important issue for us, at the beginning stage perhaps even more important than quantity. Why? Because we think that if you start with high standards you will strive to maintain them together with the increase in quantity. And our goal is to provide ever higher quality accessible content for our viewers, listeners and readers.

2. RTV Slovenija

RTV Slovenija is a non-profit organisation of special cultural and national importance, performing its activities in the field of radio and television broadcasting in accordance with the RTV Slovenija Public Act. It produces programmes for two national TV channels, two regional TV channels, two TV channels for the Italian and Hungarian minority communities, three national radio channels, two regional radio programmes and radio programmes for foreign
citizens. Radio Capodistria and Pomurski madžarski radio/Muravidéki Magyar Rádió are also part of RTV Slovenija, producing programmes for the Italian and Hungarian minority communities in Slovenia. Part of the production consists of radio programmes for the Romany ethnic community, radio and TV programmes for Slovene national communities in neighbouring countries, for Slovene emigrants and immigrants. Additional TV programmes are produced as live broadcasts and transmissions of parliamentary sessions and conferences of parliamentary committees. The production of RTV Slovenija is successfully complemented by the Multimedia Centre and information on websites and theme portals, mobile apps and on teletext.

3. The legal framework of RTV Slovenija operations

As a body governed by public law, RTV Slovenija must uphold both the EU and state laws. The laws and directives that bind us to adapt our programmes for visually impaired persons and the deaf and hard of hearing are listed next. More detailed versions of these laws and directives can be found in the appendix to this chapter.

3.1 The Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia (hereinafter constitution)

Human rights and fundamental freedoms shall be exercised directly on the basis of the Constitution (Article 14, paragraph 1 of the Constitution) and shall only be limited by the rights of others and in such cases as are provided by the Constitution (Article 15, paragraph 3 of the Constitution).

3.2 International legislation

3.2.1 European convention for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms (hereinafter ECHR)

Article 14 of the ECHR secures the enjoyment of rights and freedoms for every individual, irrespective of any personal circumstance. Pursuant to Article 10 of the ECHR, everyone has the right to freedom of expression without interference by public authority and the freedom to hold opinions.

3.2.2 Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities (hereinafter CRPD)

EU Member States adopted the CRPD in 2006 (UN, 2006) with the intention of fostering, protecting and guaranteeing full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for persons with disabilities and recognising their inherent dignity.

3.2.3 Audiovisual media services directive (hereinafter AVMSD)

Parts 22 and 23 of the AVMSD state:

(22) ensuring the accessibility of audiovisual content is an essential requirement in the context of the commitments assumed under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
(23) the means to achieve the accessibility of audiovisual media services under Directive 2010/13/EU should include, but need not be limited to, sign language, subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing, spoken subtitles and audio description.

Article 7 specifies the obligations for the Member States:

Article 7 is replaced by the following: “Article 7 1. Member States shall ensure, without undue delay, that services provided by media service providers under their jurisdiction are made continuously and progressively more accessible to persons with disabilities through proportionate measures”.

3.3 Specific legislation on accessibility in the Republic of Slovenia

3.3.1 Equalisation of the opportunities for persons with disabilities act (hereinafter ZIMI)\(^5\)

For the purpose of realising the commitments from the CRPD (UN, 2006) and creating equal opportunities for persons with disabilities in all areas of life, the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia passed the Equalisation of the Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities Act (ZIMI) in 2010.

3.3.2 Electronic communications act (hereinafter ZEKom-1)\(^6\)

Pursuant to Article 135, paragraph 1 of the ZEKom-1, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia may, at the proposal of the relevant ministry, lay down by decree the technical and functional requirements that must be met by providers of electronic communications services to provide disabled end-users with access to electronic communications services that is equivalent to the access enjoyed by the majority of end-users.

3.3.3 Audiovisual media services act (hereinafter ZAvMS)\(^7\)

Pursuant to Article 11 paragraph 1 of the ZAvMS, the Republic of Slovenia shall encourage audiovisual media service providers to gradually provide access to their services for persons with a visual or hearing impairment. Currently a new Audiovisual Media Services Act is in the final stages of being adopted and it will include the commitments from the recast AVMSD.\(^8\)

3.3.4 The implementation of the principle of equal treatment act (hereinafter ZUNEO)\(^9\)

Pursuant to Article 2 of the ZUNEO, equal treatment is guaranteed to everyone irrespective of any personal circumstance, including equal treatment with regard to access to goods and services available to the public.

3.3.5 Slovenian sign language act (hereinafter ZUSZJ)\(^10\)

ZUSZJ lays down the right of deaf persons to use the Slovenian sign language and the right of deaf persons to have access to information using techniques adapted to their needs (Article 1).
3.3.6 Mass media act (hereinafter ZMed)\textsuperscript{11}

The Mass Media Act (ZMed) is the basic legal act that regulates the mass media in the Republic of Slovenia. Pursuant to Article 6 of the ZMed, mass media activities shall be based on the freedom of expression, the inviolability and protection of human personality and dignity, the free flow of information, media openness to different opinions and beliefs and to diverse content, the autonomy of editorial personnel, journalists and other authors/creators in creating programmes in accordance with programme concepts and professional codes of conduct and the personal responsibility of journalists, other authors/creators of pieces and editorial personnel for the consequences of their work.

3.3.7 Radiotelevizija Slovenija act (hereinafter ZRTVS-1)\textsuperscript{12}

Pursuant to Article 4, paragraph 1 of the ZRTVS-1, Radiotelevizija Slovenija (RTV Slovenija) shall pay special attention to persons with disabilities and any content associated with them and provide programming intended for the blind and visually impaired and for deaf and hearing-impaired persons using systems adapted for such persons.

4. Accessibility on RTV Slovenija

As a public institution, RTV Slovenija follows the fundamental principles stated in the directives and laws and has been striving for many years to prepare its contents using techniques for accessibility needed by viewers, listeners and readers. Unlike some other countries, Slovenia has not passed legislation which would define the types of techniques for accessibility and the quotas or shares of adapted production, nevertheless RTV Slovenija has a high degree of accessible content, especially compared to similar countries. The accessibility of the programme is not just a matter of law, but an ethical obligation of a public broadcaster. The viewers, listeners and readers of television, radio and Internet content want and have the right to follow this content in an accessible manner. Certain groups of viewers and listeners need different adaptations. For our viewers with hearing-impairment, we interpret selected television and radio content into Slovenian sign language; additionally, there are subtitles so that persons with hearing-impairment can follow our TV programmes. People with vision impairment can follow selected television programmes with the additional audio subtitles (read by Slovene speech synthesis) and audio descriptions. Each of these accessibility techniques requires an adaptation or a change and supplementation of the work process.

The RTV Slovenija Department for Accessibility was formally established at RTV Slovenija in 2018, although we have been providing accessibility services for many years. Forming a special department and its inclusion in the official organisational chart of national media, this represented a recognition of legitimacy and equality in the field of accessibility in relation to other, traditionally established professional units. The Department for Accessibility at RTV Slovenija strives for accessible television, radio and web offerings. We create two specialised web portals: Dostopno.si and Enostavno.info that we will discuss next. Our work covers several fundamental areas: we strive for an inclusive placement of topics related to the lives of people with disabilities in our radio and television programmes and on our websites; we introduce and develop accessibility techniques, such as audio descriptions and audio subtitles, subtitling and include sign language interpreters in our programmes; we participate in international projects for developing accessibility techniques and new television and radio formats, financed by the European Union and we actively participate in the European Broadcasting Union (EBU),
where we are part of the EBU Access Services Experts Group. We work closely with users, associations and organisations for people with disabilities and public institutions responsible for this field. The Department for Accessibility cooperates in development and coordinates the implementation of new production processes at TV Slovenija, in addition to organising and monitoring the process of equipping the programmes with accessibility techniques for the blind and visually impaired (audio descriptions and speech synthesis or audio subtitles) and for the deaf and hard of hearing (Slovenian sign language interpreting and subtitling).

4.1 The 2018 recommendations

In 2018, we adopted an internal instrument, not only striving to have more accessible reporting, but with the awareness that it is our duty as the public broadcaster to create content accessible to the broadest reach of the general population. This instrument entitled “Recommendations for Accessible Reporting in Times of Crisis, Natural Disasters, Humanitarian Catastrophes and Other States of Emergency in the Country” binds us to accessible reporting in times of crisis. The internal instrument precisely describes the organisational protocol during potential states of emergency. Thus, it enables a fast and efficient organisation of all its employees in the production chain during a state of emergency and enables accessible reporting in real time. This protocol has proven useful during this year’s health crisis when the Covid-19 pandemic spread all around the globe. Our pre-set production protocols were set in motion the moment the coronavirus reached Slovenia and we made essential information accessible to every person in Slovenia with access to television signals.

4.2 The web portal Dostopno.si

The RTV Slovenija Department for Accessibility is creating and managing content on Dostopno.si which is a web portal entirely in the Slovene language. In a few words, Dostopno.si is a thematically specialised web portal. We have been endeavouring to follow current events in all areas of life of disabled people, from legal to social and cultural matters and report on those matters consistently and ethically in our programmes. On the Dostopno.si web portal there are articles from the field of legal rights, employment, life and the inclusion of people with disabilities into society; at the same time the portal collects radio and television content on these topics, and the programmes are equipped with special accessibility techniques. In short, the portal Dostopno.si also functions as an archive of all the shows in adapted technologies that TV Slovenija offers: audio descriptions, audio subtitles, sign language and SDH subtitles. The portal offers quick access to information to persons with disabilities, predominantly to the deaf and hard of hearing, blind and visually impaired and seniors with deteriorating sight or hearing. Additionally, the portal enables quick access to the weekly TV show Prisluhnimo tisini (Hear the silence), created in Slovenian sign language, in cooperation with the Slovenian Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Under the heading Announcements, we talk about upcoming radio and television programmes focused on those topics and about programmes equipped with special accessibilities techniques.

According to “Recommendations for Accessible Reporting in Times of Crisis, Natural Disasters, Humanitarian Catastrophes and Other States of Emergency in the Country” and with the awareness that people with reading disabilities have very limited access to information, we created a special section of Easy-to-Understand news on Dostopno.si when the Covid-19 epidemic reached Slovenia in March 2020. The section was named LAHKO BRANJE which means Easy-to-Read and was primarily focused on giving the basic updates on the Covid-19
situation and useful information regarding the epidemic measures and restrictions. In the summer months of 2020, the section was thematically expanded also to other areas – politics, sports, interesting events around the world, and so on – and finally on 4th January 2021 it became an independent web portal in Easy-to-Understand language Enostavno.info, though it remains connected with Dostopno.si, as the latest three items, published on Enostavno.info, appear in the section ENOSTAVNO (previously LAHKO BRANJE), integrated in the Dostopno.si. The basic aim of the Dostopno.si portal is to be transparent, current and easily accessible for individuals with different types of disabilities. It is developed and organised according to WCAG standards and recommendations for greater accessibility, with adapted contents and design.

4.3 The web portal Enostavno.info

The creation of the specialised portal Enostavno.si is strongly linked to the participation in the EU Erasmus+ programme EASIT (Easy Access for Social Inclusion Training) in which RTV Slovenija is one of the partners. The concept of Easy-to-Understand Audiovisual Journalism is one of the subjects of research in the EASIT project. To create Easy-to-Understand journalistic content it is very important to understand the mechanisms of journalism (Kovach & Rosentiel, 2014; Sisson, 2006; Smith & Higgins, 2020), the needs of the end-users, to have the knowledge to create the audiovisual content in a simplified way (e.g. Arias-Badia & Matamala, 2020; Bernabé & Orero, 2019) and of course to be familiar with standards and principles of writing Easy-to-Read texts or texts in Plain Language. The Enostavno.info portal is divided into five sections: Slovenia, World, Sports, Interesting events, Useful information. Every day we publish from one to three articles, supported with graphic and photographic material. We are also in contact with end-users and institutions and non-governmental associations which are working with our target readers. The findings of the EASIT project and the training materials that have been developed (https://transmediacatalonia.uab.cat/easit/) will be very useful for the further development of the web portal Enostavno.info and for training new professionals in accessible audiovisual journalism, such as journalists specialised in writing in Easy-to-Read or Plain Language.

4.4 A focus on AD

This section and the following will focus on audio descriptions and present the production process which enables the blind and visually impaired audience to follow certain TV programmes simultaneously with others, using audio description.

In recent years the efforts to increase the share of accessible programmes have led to an introduction of new work processes in the production of television programmes in particular. While changing the technical production processes, the objective can be clear, but the path to reaching this objective is not always straight. The objective that RTV Slovenija had set for itself almost 20 years ago, when the first attempts at audio descriptions of television content for the blind and visually impaired were made, was to make it possible for the blind and visually impaired audiences to follow the television programmes at the same time as other viewers, in real time. The objective was met in October 2018. The path to fulfilling this ambition consisted of several stages. We shall describe the beginnings of audio description at TV Slovenija and how we used our experience and technology development to design the production process, which involves various occupational profiles and requires the cooperation of different production units in the entire production chain.
5. The beginnings of audio description at RTV Slovenija

The actual beginning of audio describing in Slovenia goes back to the year 2000. The first project was led by Marko Prpič, an employee of RTV Slovenija and a person with visual impairments, who heard about audio description while visiting a Dutch TV station in 1999 and decided to make an attempt at audio describing in Slovenia as well. He invited Maja Moll, a radio speaker, to join the project and they decided to audio describe a documentary film about France Prešeren, a Slovene national poet. Neither of them had had any experience in audio describing, but they relied on their common sense, Moll’s experience as a radio speaker and Prpič’s experience with blindness and visual impairment. The technical part of the project proved more complicated than just writing the text. During the realisation process they followed the example of the Italian RAI (Radiotelevisione Italiana, the Italian national public broadcasting company), which at that time used a medium wave radio transmitter to transmit audio description. Prpič and Moll prepared the text for audio description in advance and then sat with texts in a small radio studio, where there was also a television set. Audio description was created or read live – simultaneously while watching the documentary film on the television – and was broadcast via radio frequencies. The blind and visually impaired viewers had to have their radio and television sets turned on at the same time. Of course, the television and radio signals were not completely synchronised; the audio description was delayed, which made watching a little difficult. But it was a start.

The next attempt was made in 2010. This time Marko Prpič and Maja Moll prepared the audio description of a Slovene movie, Petelinji zajtrk (The Rooster’s Breakfast, director Marko Naberšnik; 2007). They recorded the audio description in an audio synchronisation studio on the 3rd and 4th channel – the original sound of the film is on the 1st and 2nd. The first two channels were broadcast on TV and the 3rd and the 4th on the radio frequencies. It was a step forward because the audio description was recorded, so the gaps between dialogues were calculated more precisely than in the first, live attempt – but it was not optimal. The main problem was having to watch the film on TV and listen to the description on the radio and consequently there was a discordance between the radio and TV signal. The first attempts were the fruit of an enthusiastic approach and as such, experimental. Most importantly they changed the opinion that television programmes could not be adapted for visually impaired persons and revealed the need for a systematic approach to this field. Between that enthusiastic period and the present systematic approach, there was a preparation period of several years. The preparatory period for implementation of audio descriptions into the TV Slovenija programmes included: 1) learning about the needs and wishes of the target audiences and 2) the training of audio describers. These two stages will be illustrated in the following paragraphs.

5.1 Learning about the needs and wishes of the target audiences

To learn the needs and wishes of the target audiences, we worked closely with the Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted of Slovenia and studied specialised literature about blindness and visual impairment. During this process we obtained a lot of useful data, especially about the information the blind and the visually impaired need while following films, documentaries and other programmes on television, to be able to grasp the stories in their entirety. Cooperation with the target audience has been continuous from the beginning and takes place on different levels. It starts with the choice of content to be audio described, because we take into account the wishes and suggestions from the representatives for the blind and the visually impaired. This cooperation was and still is of the utmost importance for the education of audio
describers. They are the ones who must study the specifics of how persons with blindness or vision impairment perceive and take in the contents. Namely, when transporting the visual contents into words, we have to “see” the way a person with blindness or vision impairment sees, because that is the only way to fill in the narrative gaps and offer the viewer a wholesome experience.

5.2 The training of audio describers

RTV Slovenija employs numerous staff, including speakers, radio commentators, speech coaches, proofreaders and many other experts with excellent knowledge of the Slovenian language, proper diction and knowledge of the rules for making television programmes and films, all of which is beneficial, if not only for a good audio description, but also for television. When selecting future audio describers, we focused on the aforementioned profiles of staff, selected a few and tested their description skills at a language level and on the suitability of their vocal interpretation.

In 2014, when we were beginning the project of audio describing, Joel Snyder visited Slovenia at the invitation of the Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted of Slovenia and held a training course that lasted a few days. Our future audio describers attended the course and gained a wealth of knowledge, which they further upgraded by studying specialised literature. They used materials, for instance, those created within the ADLAB project (www.adlabproject.eu/), especially the guidelines (Remael et al., 2015), to familiarise themselves with the principles of audio description. Our audio describers soon implemented the theory of universal guidelines of audio describing into practice, while considering the language specifics of the Slovenian language.

Before broadcasting the first audio descriptions, we tested them with a group of people with blindness or vision impairment. The comments we received were studied, synthetised and analysed on different levels, but predominantly on the language and content levels. This was done in working groups and the findings were not published, because they are only used internally at RTV Slovenija. There were many contradictory comments and quite a few comments that opened up new aspects and offered new insight into the way the blind and visually impaired “watch” television programmes. These findings were very useful for our already trained audio describers and for training new staff. At the moment we do not have in-house training, but when we need to train new audio describers we will use the materials created in the ADLAB PRO project (www.adlabpro.eu/coursematerials/). We keep in regular contact with our audiences and the audio describers communicate with the blind or visually impaired, who advise and guide them when creating an audio description.

As all of our audio describers are normally excellent interpreters (i.e., voice talents), two of them are also speech coaches on RTV Slovenija and so they did not require additional speech coaching. The interpretation of an audio description is of crucial importance for the blind and the visually impaired (Jankowska et al., 2017; Perego, 2019). It is the only way this audience can follow audiovisual materials in a quality manner, which is their right. A quality description, phonetically perfect diction and excellent interpretation are an important upgrade of an audiovisual production as a whole which usually has great artistic value. That is why we strive for the highest level of proper use of the Slovenian language and excellent interpretation. Our position is that a high-quality audio description is an important factor for maintaining the overall quality of the artwork such as a feature film or a documentary and a sign of respect for dignity towards the blind and the visually impaired, because they can only follow the sound part and not the visual part of the content.
Special attention must be paid to the quality of audio descriptions for children and the young (see Fryer, 2019 on AD quality and training), who learn the language and proper pronunciation while listening to descriptions, as well as learning from the content. In addition to training audio describers, we also had to adapt or supplement the production of television content and come up with a broadcasting manner that would be best suited for our end-users. For RTV Slovenija it was also very important to participate in the ADLAB PRO project, the continuation of ADLAB. You can learn more about the ADLAB PRO project on the website www.adlabpro.eu/ (see also Perego, 2017)

6. TV Slovenija audio description production chain

6.1 Selection of content

The first condition for selecting content which TV Slovenija provides with audio descriptions is to obtain all the necessary copyrights, meaning that such adaptation is legally permitted. This condition also means that we currently only audio describe audiovisual productions created in the Slovenian language, namely audiovisual works from our own production, or those where RTV Slovenija is a co-producer. TV Slovenija creates content covering various genres: documentary and educational shows for the young and children, feature films, documentaries, crime procedurals and many others. Among those we select are the ones suitable for audio description. We do not equip news and news talk shows with AD. Dubbed children’s programmes are also currently not equipped with audio descriptions, but we are planning to provide it in the future. To understand the process of implementing audio descriptions into the TV Slovenija production process, it should be noted that Slovenia is a country which uses subtitles. This means that most content in foreign languages is subtitled, with the exception of programmes for young children who cannot read – that is to say, programmes for children under six years of age. Currently we are not yet providing foreign fiction production with audio description. The reason is simple: all the dialogues are subtitled and would have to be dubbed for the needs of audiences with vision impairment, to guarantee, in our opinion, a quality and satisfactory viewing experience. We also do not provide AST for foreign fiction content as we have just one artificial voice/speech synthesis and we think that we would not achieve the quality we are striving for with only one synthetic voice for all the characters in the film. The genre of documentary programmes, on the other hand, where the performers usually narrate and do not act, is a suitable combination of audio description and dubbing or voice-over and AST. We have been using foreign documentary content to try out the Slovenian speech synthesis for text-to-audio subtitles and this service will be available to our viewers soon. The speech synthesis is already being used in our news programmes. But we must mention that we do not yet have the reverse technology, namely speech-to-text conversion for the Slovenian language.

On special occasions we also audio describe live shows. The first two occasions were state celebrations for the Slovenian Cultural Holiday and for the Slovenian Independence and Unity Day in 2020. The production process in both those examples differs greatly from the practiced process of audio descriptions, so we will present it later.

6.2 The production process

At TV Slovenija, audio describing is an upgrade, in other words, we adapt already made programmes by adding audio description and thus making the programmes accessible for a special segment of our audience.
6.2.1 Selection of content

The audio describing workflow begins with the selection of content, appropriate for equipping with audio description. The initial selection is made based on suggestions of editors from individual departments. The editors prepare lists of programmes that will air in the following months, together with information on individual programmes: content, length, genre, target audience and time of airing. The Accessibility Services staff then goes through the lists and, following various criteria, decides which programmes will be audio described. We try to provide a variety of topics and genres and meet the needs of various target groups (adults, the young, children), taking into account the characteristics of individual programmes. One of the key criteria for the selection is, for example, the ratio of dialogues and gaps; some contents are so saturated with dialogue it is almost impossible to “squeeze” additional descriptions, and without them, the programmes would be only partially understandable for the blind and visually impaired. In the future we are planning to prepare special audio editorials, which will be available as trailers on our web portal dostopno.si and later available as part of the programme in our free archive. There is also a very arbitrary reason for the selection of content: there are only limited funds available for audio descriptions, therefore we must carefully allocate them. However, TV Slovenija increases the quantity of audio described content every year.

6.2.3 Script preparation

The selected programme is assigned to one of our audio describers. We take care to assign audio describers whose voices are suitable for the programme and we also select the audio describers according to the field they are specialised in. Some are more universal and can cover a broader spectrum of content, others are more narrowly specialised and suitable for a certain genre. We also take into account the prior knowledge of an audio describer – if we are audio describing an art history documentary, we select an audio describer, who is also an art historian and has an in-depth knowledge of the subject. Thus, we think of various criteria when selecting the audio describer. Currently, audio describers who cooperate with TV Slovenija are not employed by TV Slovenija, rather they are outworkers and we sign a contract for the copyrighted work. At RTV Slovenija we have four audio describers and they are at the same time voice talents: they write the text for audio description and interpret that audio description. From an audio describer we expect the following functional skills and knowledge:

1. the highest level of proficiency in the Slovenian language and knowledge of its rules, a high level of care for the proper use of the Slovenian language;
2. the ability to proofread the text;
3. excellent interpretation of the text;
4. in-depth knowledge of the specific requirements for creating descriptions that meet the needs of the blind and visually impaired persons’ perception;
5. knowledge of the rules of film narration;
6. completed specialist training and participation in workshops with blind and visually impaired persons.

An audio describer’s work is independent and mostly individual. An audio describer prepares the audio description autonomously and has enough time to do quality work. That is why it is vitally important to plan the work process and have a solid programme scheme with few deviations in the programme schedule, which do not affect the work process significantly. A person responsible for audio descriptions in the Accessibility Services is always available to the audio
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describer, to help obtain any additional information, or provide contact with the film-makers if that is necessary, to clear up any questions about the film the audio describer is working on. Additionally, the audio describer can contact persons with blindness or the visually impaired, who are always happy to help solve any dilemma that may arise.

After the preliminary viewing of the film, the description process includes studying individual shots several times. The describer must carefully combine time constraints with the rational use of words that reflect the action and the actors’ emotional nuances and efficiently communicate those actions and nuances to the blind or visually impaired person.

Word selection for conveying certain actions and emotions depends on the genre, so different synonyms have to be considered and chosen to suit the content. Different options can be used within the standard or standard-conversational language. That is why the Slovenian Language Dictionary (Slovar slovenskega knjižnega jezika) and the Slovenian Orthography (Slovenski pravopis)\textsuperscript{15} are mandatory accessories when preparing audio descriptions.

The describer must have a good feeling for the events in the film, recognise the meaningful silences and non-verbal actions which guide the viewer in the story and know how to not influence those. The work includes continuous checking of how the timing and the contents of individual sequences align. After completing the description, the author checks the contents of the description and how it matches up with the time available. The description-making process takes hours upon hours of precise, filigree work and concentration – excellent knowledge of language rules and a rich vocabulary are a must. By the time the process reaches the end phase of creating the audio description in the studio, the describer/voice talent knows practically every second of the events in the film. Furthermore, audio describers regularly participate in promotion events, take part in training at the Union for the Blind and Partially Sighted and in training workshops given by experts from abroad.

\hspace{1cm} 6.2.4 Recording at TV Slovenija

At TV Slovenija the audio describer is also the interpreter of the audio description, so the deadline to prepare the audio description corresponds with the time of recording in the synchronisation studio. The responsible person in the Department for Accessibility plans the availability of audio synchronisation studios and sound engineers. The dates and times in the synchronisation studio are planned a month or two in advance, depending on the number of audio descriptions and availability of studios. When recording the audio descriptions, the audio describer/interpreter and a sound engineer cooperate together. If necessary, the responsible person from Accessibility Services joins them in the studio, namely for the purpose of supervising the quality of work. The audio describer comes to the studio with the prepared text. It means that the audio describer knows exactly where the audio description text will be inserted. While following the film/programme, the audio describer records the audio description text and adapts it as necessary, shortening it where needed or lengthening it if possible. In cooperation with the sound engineer, the audio describer adapts the speaking speed and perhaps the manner of interpretation. The sound must be recorded clearly and comprehensively and it must match the original sound of the film or programme. In the early stages of sound description on TV Slovenija, in the period from 2014 to 2018, the sound engineer inserted the sound description into the original sound of the film. This created an audio track where the audio description and the original sound intertwined and were prepared for broadcasting as a whole. That created two versions of the programme: the programme with the original sound only and the programme with the audio description. This was important from a broadcasting point of view.
6.3 The broadcasting of audio descriptions in the 2014–2018 period

When we broadcast programmes with oral descriptions during that four-year period, all viewers watching the programme heard the audio description. However, the audio description is predominantly intended for specific audiences and considered an accessibility technique; it is an adaptation of the programme to which the target audience is entitled. So, we placed the programmes with audio descriptions in the schedule specially, which means a special time slot had to be allotted for those programmes. The time slots planned for programmes with audio descriptions varied depending on which target audience the programme was intended for. Children and youth programmes were usually aired during the morning and afternoon hours, and documentaries as well, while films or programmes tackling more serious topics aired during the late evenings. TV Slovenija has two national channels. Prvi programme (First channel) mostly airs premieres and live programmes, such as daily news programmes and talk shows, while Drugi programme (Second channel) has more time slots available for reruns. Due to the specific broadcast programming and the fact that most of the programmes with audio descriptions were reruns, not premieres, the majority of those programmes were aired on our second national channel. The programmes with audio descriptions were archived on our web portal dostopno.si, where they can be accessed – under conditions for internet streaming. This broadcasting method was not ideal. Firstly, the air times we could provide for audio descriptions were irregular and added into the broadcasting programming, meaning we somehow moved the audience with vision impairment to a special time slot, intended just for them. Additionally, the audio descriptions were intertwined with the original sound, audible to everyone, though the hearing audience does not need the information included in the audio description – the translation of visual information into audio information; it is redundant for them and can disturb their experience of the programme contents. As it is important to enable access to television content for the blind and the visually impaired, we continued this broadcasting method until we developed the technical conditions to broadcast these programmes differently. The 2014–2018 audio description workflow is synthetised in the following diagram:

Figure 38.1 Diagram of the 2014–2018 audio description workflow at RTV Slovenija
7. Audio description workflow from 2018 onwards

The new production and broadcasting system was introduced in October 2018. With this new method, visually impaired persons can follow the programmes equipped with audio descriptions simultaneously with other viewers, and the aforementioned programmes are not obtrusive for the majority of viewers, the seeing viewers.

Basically, the workflow changed in the phase of recording the audio description. The audio describer still comes to the synchronisation studio with the prepared text; when recording and watching the programme at the same time, the describer cooperates with the sound engineer in real time. Then the sound engineer no longer mixes the audio description with the original programme audio but lays the audio description on an additional audio channel. The audio description is thus recorded on an independent audio channel, synchronised with the original sound.

The file of the film with the audio description includes an additional audio channel apart from the original. If we use the file to broadcast the programme on TV Slovenija, we put it on a playlist. A playout system automatically mixes the additional sound on the extra channel (audio description) with the primary audio. TV Slovenija has a Junger interface\textsuperscript{16} between the broadcasting server and the broadcasting point. The Junger interface has the appropriate pre-settings to automatically mix the original audio with the audio description. When the interface detects the audio description, it lowers the volume of the primary audio and sends the mix of both to an added audio channel. This means that TV Slovenija uses the broadcast mix method. The audio description is aired automatically, on premieres and reruns and the users select what audio channel to listen to on their device. Even if the additional channel does not include an audio description, the primary audio is available there, so the settings on the user’s device can be permanent.

The speech synthesis is also aired on this additional audio channel – spoken subtitles for news programmes. The viewers who require these services can keep the additional audio channel open permanently, without having to turn on the service for every individual programme. By recording the audio description on an independent audio channel, the broadcasting and distribution of programmes with audio descriptions change. The technology enables us to broadcast certain audio channels in different ways. The setting of the additional audio channel depends on the type of receiver, the cable provider the user receives the TV Slovenija signal from and the type of signal.

Our key objective is to bring a correct and quality signal to the user and to provide a reliable service so that the user can follow the programme without disruption. There are several different methods of receiving TV signals on different receivers. Slovenian cable providers forward the television signal to the users via IPTV, cable system, DVB-t and satellite. That is why we had to find a universal solution for turning on the additional audio channel. The solution was to ask the users to set the primary language on their receivers to Finnish. When the Finnish language option is turned on, the receivers on the territory of the Republic of Slovenia detect the additional audio channel and play a quality sound for the user. Why Finnish? No cable provider in Slovenia offers Finnish channels and at the same time, all TV sets have the option to select Finnish as the primary language. This solution is somewhat demanding for the people who are visually impaired to apply independently. That is why we set up a 24-hour call centre with a helpdesk, at the same time we started with this service.

What changed with the introduction of the additional audio channel? The production method was simplified, because there is no need to mix the audio description with the original audio. This also means that there is no need to create a new version of the programme with
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audio description, which is very important regarding broadcasting as well as archiving. After airing “live”, the programme with an audio description is available for streaming from the web archive. But most importantly, the users of this service can follow the programmes on equal terms with all other users.

8. Live audio descriptions

Television programming is very diverse and the production system adapts to it. Even though the preparation, broadcasting and distribution of audio descriptions is systemised, there are exceptional cases, when the whole process must be adapted to a certain situation. We had set a new challenge by starting live audio descriptions. We prepared a live description of state celebrations for the Slovenian Cultural Holiday and for the Slovenian Independence and Unity Day.

The first attempt at live audio describing was made on 7th February 2020. Cooperating with the State Celebrations office of the Republic of Slovenia and the Prešeren Celebrations Committee, we decided to audio describe the state celebration for the Slovenian Cultural Holiday celebrated on February 8, the day France Prešeren, a great Slovenian poet, died. His stanzas are also the lyrics of the Slovenian national anthem. The Prešeren celebration is an important cultural event with recitals from actors, singers, a choir, dancers and of course those awarded the annual prize for culture. This year’s Prešeren celebration was held in Cankarjev dom, the main culture hall in Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia. The preparations for live audio descriptions began a long time beforehand as the technical aspects of the execution had to be determined. To prepare the audio description, it was of utmost importance to receive a detailed script early on, with all the performers and all the performances listed, so that the two audio describers could look up additional information in advance, which could be included in the description. The creators of the celebration wanted to have the audio description for the audience in the theatre hall as well as for the viewers at home. The two different audio descriptions were prepared by audio describers who usually prepare audio descriptions for TV programmes. Both audio describers participated in the technical rehearsal and the dress rehearsal which took place on the day before the celebration and the day of the celebration, respectively. The dress rehearsal, which is much like the “live” performance – without stopping – gave them the opportunity to note the gaps between performances and speeches, the way the speakers and performers enter and exit the stage – in other words, everything that could be described and which could help the blind and visually impaired audience to follow the events. They assessed the time frames as precisely as they could and timed the gaps which they filled with the framework text they prepared ahead of time.

The audio describer in Cankarjev dom was located in a special booth, where she described the events live, with the help of the pre-prepared text. The blind and visually impaired visitors at the celebration followed the audio description using headphones. The same system was utilised as for simultaneous interpreting.

The audio description of the television broadcast took place in a special studio at TV Slovenija. The audio describer was in the commentator’s booth in this studio, where he followed the TV broadcast of the celebrations and at the same time audio described it. The audio description was available to the TV audience on the additional audio channel, where they usually hear audio descriptions prepared and recorded in advance.

The workflow for live audio description is quite similar to that of the process for sports competitions with live commentary by a commentator. The audio describer’s voice is transported to the broadcasting chain and mixed with the original audio via the Junger...
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interface, in the same way as audio description is recorded. For the reruns, the live audio description is recorded on a separate audio channel and is then automatically played with the reruns.

We prepared the live audio description of the Independence and Unity Day celebration on June 24 in the same way. The only difference was that this celebration was held outdoors, which made the technical aspect of things a little bit more complicated. Let us also note that both celebrations were also subtitled live and interpreted into the Slovenian sign language for the deaf and hard of hearing audience. This enabled equal accessibility for almost all target groups. In the future we may adapt programmes into a simpler language, in all accessibility techniques. Judging by the response we received, the audio description of the celebrations was a success and well received, but unfortunately, we could not perform a thorough analysis and evaluation with users, due to the coronavirus pandemic.

9. Conclusion

RTV Slovenija is a large and complex system. As a public and cultural institution, it must not lag behind in technological development and at the same time, it has to be the driving force of social progress. We have made great progress regarding awareness of the various needs of people. The regulations in this field have become stricter and technological development is very rapid. The problems RTV Slovenija is facing while implementing new technologies lie elsewhere. Slovenia is a small country and only about two million people speak the Slovenian language. Therefore, the Slovenian language is financially not interesting for the developers of speech technologies. Consequentially, we have only had one quality speech synthesis appropriate to be used in television production for a few years, but we still do not have a voice recognition programme for the Slovenian language. RTV Slovenija does not have the funds to develop these technologies, therefore it is the founder of the public broadcaster – the State of Slovenia – who will have to take care of the development of these technologies. RTV Slovenija has a vision of accessibility development. Our objective is to follow the technological development of accessibility techniques and implement them into our production systems, to educate expert staff and to increase the share of contents in all accessibility techniques, to guarantee equal access to our contents for all our viewers.

Notes

2 Act Ratifying the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, as amended by protocols nos. 3, 5 and 8, and supplemented by protocol no. 2, and the ECHR’s protocols nos. 1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10 and 11
3 Act Ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
5 Equalization of the Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities Act (Zakon o izenačevanju možnosti invalidov) (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, nos. 94/10 and 50/14).
7 Avdiovisual media Services Act (Zakon o avdiovizualnih medijskih storitvah) (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, no. 87/11).
9 The Implementation of the Principle of Equal Treatment Act (Zakon o uresničevanju načela enakega obravnavanja) (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, no. 93/07).
10 Slovenian Sign Language Act (Zakon o uporabi slovenskega znakovnega jezika) (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, no. 96/02).
11 Mass Media Act (Zakon o medijih) (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, nos. 110/06 – official consolidated text, 36/08 – ZPOmK-1, 77/10 – ZSFCJA, 90/10 – odl. US, 87/11 – ZAvMS, 47/12 and 47/15 – ZZSDT).
15 Slovene language dictionaries are accessible at the platform fran.si.
16 You can learn more about Junger software and hardware for audio production here: https://jungeraudio.com/.

9. Further reading


European Committee for Standardization (CEN). (2019). Design for all – Accessibility following a design for all approach in products, goods and services – Extending the range of users (EN 17161:2019).

10. References


1 The Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia (hereinafter Constitution)

Human rights and fundamental freedoms shall be exercised directly on the basis of the Constitution (Article 14, paragraph 1 of the Constitution), and shall only be limited by the rights of others and in such cases as are provided by the Constitution (Article 15, paragraph 3 of the Constitution). The manner in which those rights are exercised may be regulated by law (Article 15, paragraph 3 of the Constitution), whenever the Constitution so provides or where this is necessary due to the particular nature of an individual right or freedom. Human rights and fundamental freedoms are guaranteed to everyone, irrespective of any personal circumstance (Article 14, paragraph 1 of the Constitution). The right to freedom of expression is guaranteed by Article 39 of the Constitution.

2 International legislation

2.1 European convention for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms (hereinafter ECHR)

Article 14 of the ECHR secures the enjoyment of rights and freedoms for every individual, irrespective of any personal circumstance. Pursuant to Article 10 of the ECHR, everyone has the right to freedom of expression without interference by public authority and the freedom to hold opinions.

2.2 Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities (hereinafter CRPD)

EU Member States adopted the CRPD in 2006 with the intention of fostering, protecting and guaranteeing full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for persons with disabilities and recognising their inherent dignity. In Article 4 the CRPD obliges the States Parties to adopt all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognised in the CRPD, and to eliminate discrimination on the basis of disability, and to undertake research and development of universally designed goods, services, equipment and facilities. In Article 8 of the CRPD the States Parties undertake to adopt measures to raise awareness regarding persons with disabilities and to foster respect for the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. Pursuant to Article 9 of the CRPD the States Parties shall adopt appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access,
on an equal basis with others, to services, goods, information and communication. Pursuant to Article 21 of the CRPD the States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities can exercise the right to freedom of expression and opinion, including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information.

2.3 Audiovisual media services directive (hereinafter AVMSD)

Recitals 22 and 23 of the AVMSD state:

(22) ensuring the accessibility of audiovisual content is an essential requirement in the context of the commitments taken under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In the context of Directive 2010/13/EU, the term “persons with disabilities” should be interpreted in light of the nature of the services covered by that Directive, which are audiovisual media services. The right of persons with an impairment and of the elderly to participate and be integrated in the social and cultural life of the Union is linked to the provision of accessible audiovisual media services. Therefore, Member States should, without undue delay, ensure that media service providers under their jurisdiction actively seek to make content accessible to persons with disabilities, in particular with a visual or hearing impairment. Accessibility requirements should be met through a progressive and continuous process, while taking into account the practical and unavoidable constraints that could prevent full accessibility, such as programmes or events broadcast in real time. In order to measure the progress that media service providers have made in making their services progressively accessible to people with visual or hearing disabilities, Member States should require media service providers established on their territory to report to them on a regular basis. (23) The means to achieve the accessibility of audiovisual media services under Directive 2010/13/EU should include, but need not be limited to, sign language, subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing, spoken subtitles, and audio description. However, that Directive does not cover features or services providing access to audiovisual media services, nor does it cover accessibility features of electronic programme guides (EPGs). Therefore, that Directive is without prejudice to Union law aiming to harmonise the accessibility of services providing access to audiovisual media services, such as websites, online applications and EPGs, or the provision of information on accessibility and in accessible formats.

Article 7 specifies the obligations for the Member States:

Article 7 is replaced by the following:

Article 7 1. Member States shall ensure, without undue delay, that services provided by media service providers under their jurisdiction are made continuously and progressively more accessible to persons with disabilities through proportionate measures. 2. Member States shall ensure that media service providers report on a regular basis to the national regulatory authorities or bodies on the implementation of the measures referred to in paragraph 1. By 19 December 2022 and every three years thereafter, Member States shall report to the Commission on the implementation of paragraph 1.3. Member States shall encourage media service providers to develop accessibility action plans in respect of continuously and progressively making their services more accessible to persons with disabilities. Any such action plan shall be communicated to national regulatory authorities or bodies. 4. Each Member State shall designate a single, easily accessible, including by persons with disabilities, and publicly available online point of contact for providing information and receiving complaints regarding any accessibility issues referred to in this Article. 5. Member States shall ensure that emergency information, including public
communications and announcements in natural disaster situations, which is made available to the public through audiovisual media services, is provided in a manner which is accessible to persons with disabilities.

3 Specific legislation on accessibility in the Republic of Slovenia

3.1 Equalization of the opportunities for persons with disabilities act (hereinafter ZIMI)

For the purpose of realising the commitments from the CRPD and creating equal opportunities for persons with disabilities in all areas of life, the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia passed the Equalization of the Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities Act (ZIMI) in 2010. Article 3 of the ZIMI defines discrimination on the basis of disability as any direct or indirect differentiation, exclusion or restriction on the basis of disability, additionally in Article 14 as any kind of obstruction of regular and equal access to information available to the public.

Pursuant to Article 8, paragraph 1 of the ZIMI, it is prohibited to discriminate based on disability in any area of life when providing access to goods or services available to the public or offering goods and services to persons with disabilities under different or inferior conditions (Article 8, paragraph 2 of the ZIMI). Article 8, paragraph 3 determines the measures for eliminating obstructions to accessing goods or services, the measures shall be used if they do not place a disproportionate burden on private and public entities (Article 8, paragraph 4). In Article 38, paragraph 1 of ZIMI sets a deadline for the suitable adjustment of accessibility to goods and services referred to in Article 8 of the ZIMI, the deadline shall not exceed five years from the date ZIMI enters into force.

3.2 Electronic communications act (hereinafter ZEKom-1)

Pursuant to Article 135, paragraph 1 of the ZEKom-1, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia may, at the proposal of the relevant ministry, lay down by decree the technical and functional requirements that must be met by providers of electronic communications services to provide disabled end-users with access to electronic communications services that is equivalent to the access enjoyed by the majority of end-users. The Republic of Slovenia shall give particular support to the creation and broadcast of programmes intended for blind, deaf and Deaf-Blind users using technologies adapted to their needs, and the development of the corresponding technical infrastructure (Article 135, paragraph 2 of ZEKom-1).

3.3 Audiovisual media services act (hereinafter ZAvMS)

Pursuant to Article 11 paragraph 1 of the ZAvMS, the Republic of Slovenia shall encourage audiovisual media service providers to gradually provide access to their services for persons with a visual or hearing impairment. Currently a new Audiovisual Media Services Act is in the final stages of being adopted, and it will include the commitments from the recast AVMSD.

3.4 The implementation of the principle of equal treatment act (hereinafter ZUNEO)

Pursuant to Article 2 of the ZUNEO, equal treatment is guaranteed to everyone irrespective of any personal circumstance, including equal treatment with regards to access to goods and services available to the public.
3.5 **Slovenian sign language act (hereinafter ZUSZJ)**

ZUSZJ lays down the right of deaf persons to use the Slovenian sign language and the right of deaf persons to have access to information using techniques adapted to their needs (Article 1). Pursuant to Article 10, paragraph 3 of the ZUSZJ, in accordance with special regulations, deaf persons shall have the right to have access to information using techniques adapted to their needs.

3.6 **Mass media act (hereinafter ZMed)**

The Mass Media Act (ZMed) is the basic legal act that regulates the mass media in the Republic of Slovenia. Pursuant to Article 6 of the ZMed, mass media activities shall be based on the freedom of expression, the inviolability and protection of human personality and dignity, the free flow of information, media openness to different opinions and beliefs and to diverse content, the autonomy of editorial personnel, journalists and other authors/creators in creating programmes in accordance with programme concepts and professional codes of conduct, and the personal responsibility of journalists, other authors/creators of pieces and editorial personnel for the consequences of their work.

Pursuant to Article 4, paragraph 3 of the ZMed, The Republic of Slovenia shall provide extra support to the creation and dissemination of programmes intended for the blind and the deaf using techniques thereto adapted, and to the development of the appropriate technical infrastructure.

3.7 **Radiotelevizija Slovenija act (hereinafter ZRTVS-1)**

Pursuant to Article 4, paragraph 1 of the ZRTVS-1, Radiotelevizija Slovenija (RTV Slovenija) shall pay special attention to persons with disabilities and any content associated with them, and provide programming intended for blind and visually impaired and for deaf and hearing-impaired persons using systems adapted for such persons. Pursuant to Article 24 of the ZRTVS-1, the Programme Board shall appoint a Programme Committee for the issue of programme content for disabled persons. The Programme Committee shall perform the functions in the field of issue of programme content for the disabled, and may offer initiatives and proposals to bodies of public institution, which shall be bound to deal with them and indicate their position in that regard.

Pursuant to Article 2 of the ZRTVS-1, the Republic of Slovenia shall ensure the institutional autonomy and editorial independence of RTV Slovenija, and to ensure appropriate financing for the provision of its public service. Pursuant to Article 4 paragraph 2, RTV Slovenija shall provide the major portion of the cultural, artistic, informational, documentary and educational content within the channels referred to in Article 3, paragraph 1 of the ZRTVS-1.