

## Audio Description: lifelong access for the blind

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**ADLAB** (Audio description: lifelong learning for the blind) is a three-year (2011-2014) project financed by the European Union under the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP). The project aims to create a series of reliable guidelines - usable throughout Europe - for the practice of audiodescription (AD): namely the insertion of short verbal descriptions illustrating the essential visual elements of an audiovisual product (including films, television programmes, documentaries, advertisements, but also such audiovisual phenomena as art galleries, museums, dance performances, city tours, live events, etc.) for the blind and visually impaired community.

The need to find norms at European level relating to the provision of quality AD is paramount: in a large member country such as Italy there are between 352,000 and 380,000 registered blind people, and more than 1,500,000 people can be described as having low vision, often due to the ageing process or following illness. These figures, which are proportionally similar in all western countries, are likely to rise in the future as two major demographic trends impact on access to visual media: the increasing longevity of the European population with the consequent rise in age-related impairments, and the increasing expectancy of the baby-boomer generation, now entering old age. As the number of people needing varying degrees of assistance in gaining access to audiovisual material rises, the provision of audiodescription should evolve into a mainstream, professional service everywhere. The variety and permutation of languages and methods involved in audiodescription clearly requires a European perspective: sporadic work on a national, regional or local basis has inevitably led to imbalances and even incomprehension

among the EU countries, resulting in great disparity in terms of AD acceptance and provision.

The project has eight partners from six European countries: the Department of Language, Interpreting and Translation Sciences at the University of Trieste (co-ordinating institution) and the Senza Barriere association in Italy, the Autonomous University of Barcelona (Spain), the Instituto Politécnico de Leiria (Portugal), Artesis University College (Belgium), Adam Mickiewicz University (Poland) and the television companies Bayerischer Rundfunk (Germany) and Vlaamse Radio en Televisie (VRT), Belgium.

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