

E-1899/06EN

Answer given by Ms Reding
on behalf of the Commission
(22.6.2006)

Promoting equal access for people with disabilities to the Information Society is the goal of the actions proposed in the eAccessibility Communication adopted in September 2005¹. One of the areas covered is access for visually impaired and hearing impaired people to television (TV) programmes.

Several actions on accessibility requirements and standards, Design for All, and in the field of research are specifically addressing this issue. The Commission is supporting standardisation work on accessibility to television through the European standardisation organisations, and in addition has given a mandate to the European standardisation organisations to develop a standard on accessibility requirements for information and communications technologies (ICT) to be used in public procurement. It is envisaged that this would cover requirements for accessible TV.

The Commission has also supported research projects that address accessibility to television programmes. These projects have worked, for example, on the automatic generation of subtitles for TV programmes, the development of sign language computer-assistance for deaf persons, and the development and trials of audio description services for blind persons.

There is no requirement in Community law for broadcasters in Member States to provide services such as subtitling and audio description. In fact, provision of assistive services falls under the competences of the Member States in accordance with the subsidiarity principle. This issue is not covered by the “Television Without Frontiers” Directive² which is essentially an Internal Market, content Directive whose objective is to facilitate the free movement of television broadcasts within the European Community.

The Commission, as stated in the eAccessibility Communication, will continue to promote a consistent approach to eAccessibility initiatives in the Member States on a voluntary basis and to foster industry self-regulation. Two years after the publication of the Communication, an assessment of the eAccessibility situation is foreseen. The Commission may then consider additional measures, including new legislation if deemed necessary.

The Commission is also working with Member States and consulting stakeholders on defining the broader European eInclusion agenda. A next major step in this process has been the Ministerial Conference on “ICT for an Inclusive Society”³. In this conference, a Ministerial Declaration was adopted on ICT and inclusion, which will also address eAccessibility issues.

¹ COM(2005) 425 final

² Council Directive 89/552/EEC of 3 October 1989 on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by Law, Regulation or Administrative Action in Member States concerning the pursuit of television broadcasting activities, OJ L 298, 17.10.1989

³ Riga, 11 June 2006 - 13 June 2006