

# Cinema without Barriers



## Accessibility of film culture for persons with sensory and motor disabilities

in selected Central and Eastern  
European countries

RESEARCH REPORT

<b>Introduction and background to the study</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Research</b> .....	<b>7</b>
Objectives, methodology and course of research .....	<b>8</b>
Research results: selected aspects .....	<b>20</b>
Expert meta-comments .....	<b>69</b>
Conclusions and recommendations .....	<b>90</b>
Final comments .....	<b>114</b>
<b>Situation of persons with disabilities in the different countries researched</b> .....	<b>119</b>
Romania .....	<b>121</b>
Slovenia .....	<b>137</b>
Hungary .....	<b>155</b>
Slovakia .....	<b>167</b>



# Introduction and background to the study

The aim of the “**Cinema without Barriers**” project, both its international and Polish editions, is to make film culture more accessible to persons with sensory and mobility impairments. It was created to enhance social inclusion and accessibility of culture internationally. The Polish edition was launched in 2021 at the Pałacowe Cinema in the ZAMEK Cultural Centre in Poznań, and the following year, it was also implemented at the Echo Cinema in Jarocin and the New Horizons Cinema in Wrocław.

The project organises film screenings accessible for deaf and blind people through audio-description, subtitles and Polish Sign Language translation. The screenings take place at times that are convenient for them, e.g. on Tuesday mornings for the visually impaired, which makes it more comfortable for them to get to the cinema while it is still daylight, and on Thursday evenings for the deaf, who in turn prefer the afternoon hours, after they finish work.

**Cinema without Barriers** combines those screenings with current premieres attended by other viewers within the non-disability norm so that the project participants can follow the latest films in the same way as other audiences. The project representatives also work with cultural institutions such as the National Cultural Centre and the Polish Film Institute to promote accessibility as a standard in the film industry. Industry conferences are organised to discuss ways forward and standardise accessibility solutions.

With the support of the **Creative Europe** programme and the **Audience Development & Film Education** initiative, the project is expanding to include other Central and Eastern European countries such as Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia and Hungary, where local cinemas are adapting screenings for audiences with sensory disabilities, for example by installing induction loops or audio-description devices. Social research is part of an effort to support organisations in those countries in fulfilling the idea of accessible cinema. As was the case with other projects, including those preceding the development of the Polish version, it was decided that including the perspective of audiences and participants is crucial to best adapt the prepared offer being developed to their needs.

In this report, based on research conducted in all countries participating in the project (“Cinema without Barriers”), the research team decided to synthesise the main problem

groups related to the (non)participation of persons with sensory and mobility impairments in institutional, public film events.

The analysis demonstrated that in the context of the access of persons with disabilities (PD) to film culture, the differences between Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania and Hungary were minimal, which helped outline a common landscape of structural, communication and financial barriers. Any specific local aspects are covered in a separate section of the report, where the situation of the PD in each of these countries has been briefly overviewed, thus making it easier to embed the findings in specific realities.

The summary contains universal recommendations that can be applied in all the countries researched. These recommendations enable the development of inclusive access to film culture and support the implementation of good practices internationally.



PART I

# Research

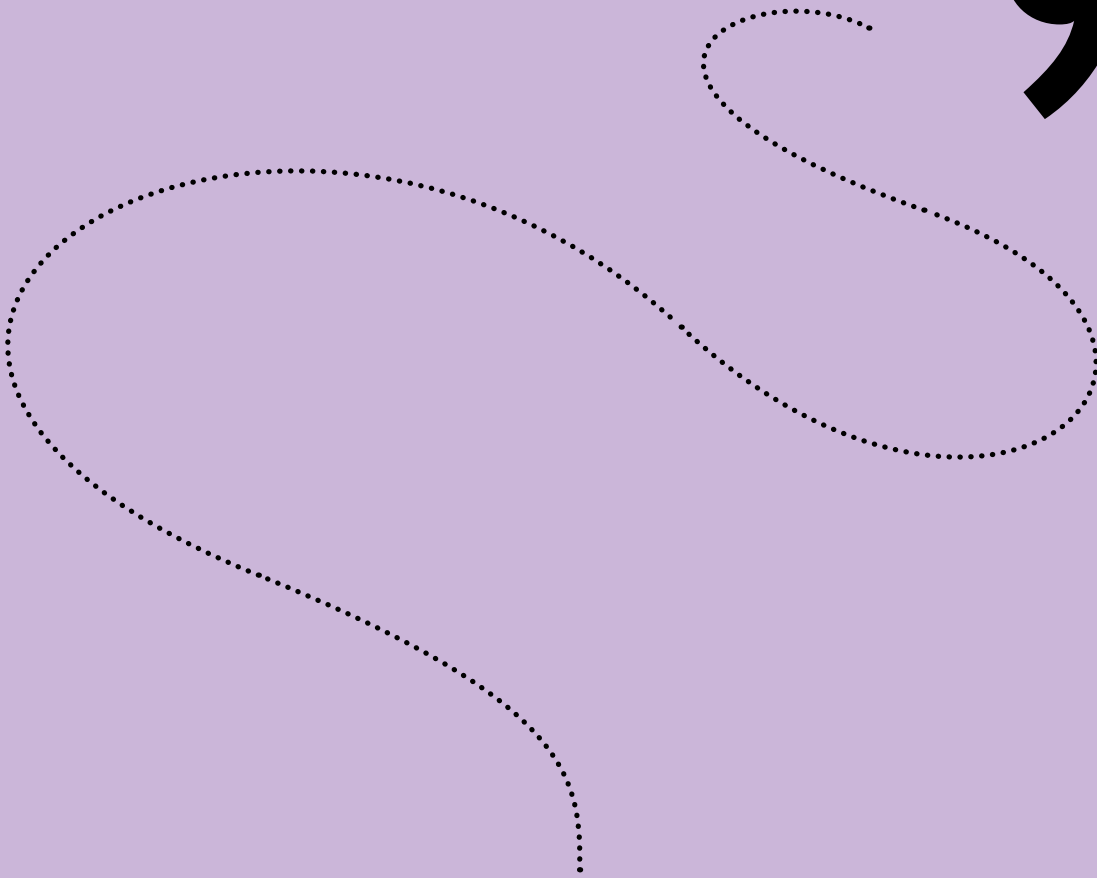


**Objectives,  
methodology  
and course  
of research**

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***Persons with disabilities should be part of the decision-making process. Their voice is essential to ensure that the solutions implemented actually respond to real needs.***

# **Objectives of the research/methods used and course of the research process/time and structure of the report**

The research aimed to gather detailed information on the barriers and challenges to the participation of persons with sensory and mobility impairments in film culture, in its institutional, public version, in four Central and Eastern European countries (Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania and Hungary). The following objectives and scope of the research served to comprehensively capture the experiences and needs of the PD in the context of the accessibility of cultural institutions such as public cinemas.

## **Main objectives of the research:**

- 1.** To collect the opinions of representatives of the PD, including senior people living in Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania and Hungary. The research covered their experiences and perceptions of attending film events, including cinema screenings and accompanying events, due to possible difficulties arising from their health and sensory situation.
- 2.** To identify the most relevant needs, barriers and difficulties that persons with disabilities face in using regular cinema screenings. To explore the barriers that limit the full participation of the PD in cultural life, including technical, infrastructural and communication

aspects, as well as those related to the current state of public knowledge and awareness of cultural accessibility.

- 3.** To characterise selected aspects of the PD pathway of participation in film culture, focusing on the regular cinema offerings in each project country. This included consideration of both technical standards and the availability of resources necessary to ensure comfortable participation in film culture by the blind, the visually impaired, the deaf or those with reduced mobility.
- 4.** The development of guidelines and recommendations for the years to come which would aim to improve cinema accessibility for audiences with disabilities in all the project-covered countries. The recommendations include proposals for both ad hoc actions and long-term strategies aimed at developing inclusive practices, as well as implementing infrastructural and organisational changes that can support the PD in equal access to film culture.
- 5.** To collect additional views and comments from experts involved in PD advocacy, including representatives of NGOs, the public sector and academia. This was to add to the knowledge of systemic challenges affecting cultural accessibility, potential solutions, and innovative practices that can improve the quality of life for the PD in the countries mentioned.

## Research methods:

The research was based on qualitative research methods and desk research. The key research tools were:

1. Desk research involving the analysis of existing reports, legal documents and content available on websites related to the issue of accessibility for the PD. This stage aimed to obtain reliable information on the situation of those persons in individual countries and identify specific legal regulations or standards applicable there.
2. Focus group interviews (FGI): a total of 12 sessions (lasting an average of 60 minutes) were conducted with the following groups:
  - visually impaired - 4 groups, one in each country (20 participants in total);
  - hard of hearing and/or d/Deaf - 4 groups, one in each country (19 participants in total);
  - seniors (65 years and over) - 4 groups, one in each country (16 participants in total).

A total of 55 people participated in the focus group interviews, including 35 women and 20 men.

3. Individual in-depth interviews (IDI): conducted with people in expert positions or active in NGOs, as well as representatives of public institutions. Five such interviews were conducted in each country, lasting an average of 60 minutes, resulting in 20 interviews (involving 14 women and 6 men). The interviews provided information on specific challenges and potential strategies to make culture more accessible to the PD.

A total of 75 people were interviewed. The selection of participants followed the guidelines of the research leader, and local project coordinators were responsible for the recruitment process in the partner countries.

## **Organisation and conduct of the research process**

The research project was carried out by an international research team, which resulted from the practical needs of the project. In addition to people involved on the Polish side, including the leader, responsible for developing the research concept, choosing the methodology, creating the research tools and coordinating all research activities, the project involved representatives of partner organisations – coordinators of the “Cinema without Barriers” project from the partner countries (5 people), as well as researchers working there (4 people). The key to the interviews

was that they were carried out in the respondents' mother tongues, which ensured greater comfort and authenticity of responses.

The research carried out as part of the project consisted of group interviews (FGI), individual interviews (IDI), and desk research based on scenarios developed by the research leader. The interview scripts were translated into English and provided to the researchers. The scope and content were discussed in advance with the project coordinators in each country. The research leader also consulted the tools and scenarios with the researchers to ensure consistency and relevance of the methodology in the different national contexts.

The project coordinators in each country were responsible for recruiting participants for the group interviews, following the criteria developed by the research leader. The list of experts for individual interviews was consulted in advance. Most of the interviews were conducted live with the researcher, and in situations requiring remote contact, instant messaging was used (after ensuring that participants could use it freely). Interpreters assisted interviews with the d/Deaf who used sign language.

The individual and group interviews were transcribed, and a note was made of each one containing additional observations, such as the circumstances of the meeting or the mood of the conversation. The transcriptions were then

translated into Polish (for interviews conducted in Slovak, Slovenian, Romanian and Hungarian) and subjected to coding and analysis by the Polish research team.

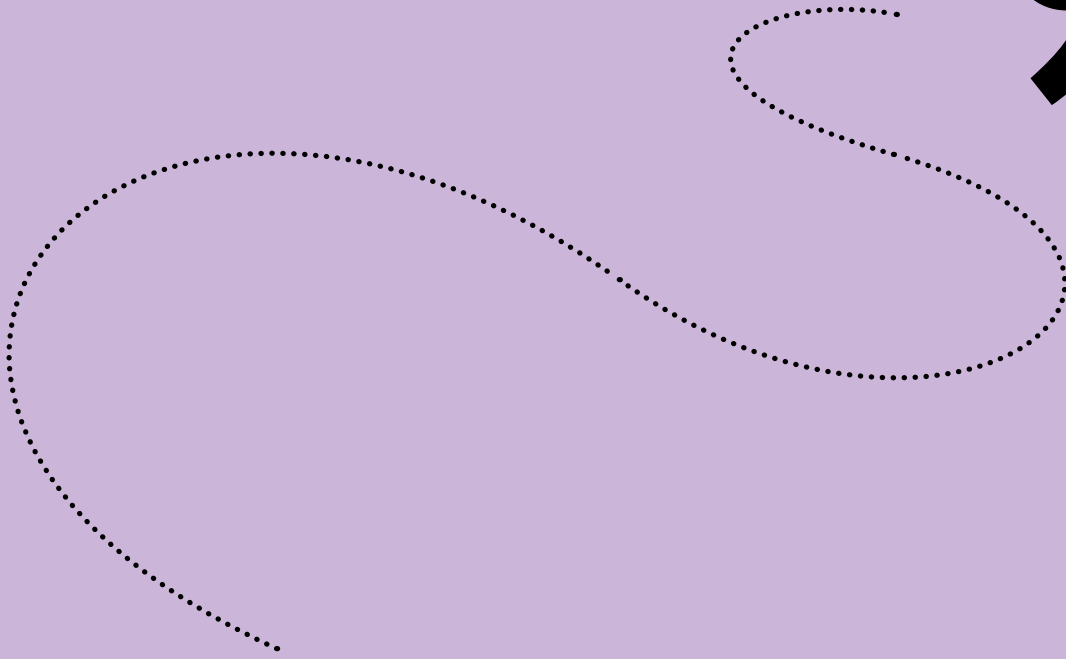
All participants were informed of the research aims, the scope thereof, and the fact that the interviews would be recorded for future analysis, and they were assured of full anonymity.

Duration of research: June – September 2024.

## **Research group and sample selection**

The sample was purposive, based on the principle of participant availability. The support of Slovak, Slovenian, Romanian and Hungarian partners in selecting interviewees ensured diversity in terms of gender, age and education. Although the research was not representative, it allowed for the collection of material providing rich contexts and diverse perspectives, broadening knowledge of the PD's needs, difficulties and experiences in accessing film culture. It is imperative to bear in mind that all the arbitrarily selected and presented groups are intrinsically diverse. While some general observations have been drawn from the research, it would be a mistake to generalise and draw conclusions essentialising the groups described.

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***Blind people need to be part of this process. We are the ones who know best what we need, so we should have a say in the design of accessible spaces***



## Characteristics of participants with disabilities

### 1. People with sensory disabilities:

- hard of hearing,
- deaf, who have lost their hearing during their lifetime,
- deaf from birth, who have grown up outside the culture of phonic language,
- visually impaired,
- blind, who have lost their sight during their lifetime and have grown up in the visual culture,
- blind from birth, who grew up outside the visual culture.

### 2. People with mobility impairments, including seniors (65+), who face specific difficulties related to mobility and accessibility of public spaces.

## Characteristics and subgroups of persons with mobility impairments:

- 1. Reduced mobility:** a group including people for whom getting around independently or for longer distances is significantly difficult. This sub-group requires special attention in adapting the cinema space, e.g. by eliminating architectural barriers, providing lifts, ramps and parking spaces near entrances. This also applies

to the adaptation of seating areas and the appropriate planning of spaces inside cinemas to allow free access to all areas, including restrooms and lounge areas.

- 2. Mobility with assistive devices (wheelchairs, walkers, crutches):** a group that requires specialised design solutions due to the need for external assistance. The key issues for this group of people are wheelchair-accessible seats, easily navigable walkways and corridors, and the presence of additional support staff to access the building.
- 3. Reduced manual dexterity:** in this subgroup special attention is paid to the ability to open doors, operate small buttons (e.g. on ticket machines) and easily access restrooms. The simplicity of equipment interfaces and clear signage for people with reduced manual dexterity significantly enhance their ability to independently navigate the cinema space.
- 4. Seniors (65+):** although age is not synonymous with disability, seniors often experience an accumulation of limitations related to mobility, declining manual dexterity and specific sensory requirements (e.g. limited vision and hearing). For this group, it is critical to provide conditions such as stable and comfortable seating, lighting to facilitate spatial orientation, the ability to reserve seats at the entrance, and additional assistance when needed (e.g. staff trained to support the elderly).

## **Non-representativeness of the research**

The research was not representative, which means that the information and conclusions collected cannot be directly extrapolated to the entire population of the PD living in the participating countries. However, through qualitative methods and an exploratory approach, the research helped gather a wide range of experiences and perspectives, which provides valuable insights into the needs and difficulties encountered by persons with disabilities in the context of accessing film culture.

Therefore, the research lays the foundation for further efforts towards PD inclusion in the cinema space, allowing an understanding of specific needs that, although not always representative, sheds light on the diversity and depth of the PD experience in Central and Eastern Europe.



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**Research  
results:  
selected aspects**

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## **Time constraints and flexibility to choose where to watch films**

In the context of the accessibility of film events, there is a clear need for time flexibility, which – especially for those with little free time or heavy organisational requirements – is becoming a barrier to using traditional forms of reception, such as cinema. The choice of home streaming platforms is becoming increasingly important as they provide viewers with the freedom to choose when and where they watch. Such freedom is becoming an increasingly important factor in accessing films, highlighting a progressive shift in preference to digital media.

*I really enjoy going to the cinema, but for certain time reasons this is not always possible. So I watch films on Netflix.* <sup>R1\_FG\_SJ</sup>

## **Technological barriers to accessing streaming platforms**

Technological accessibility and the ability to use streaming platforms continue to challenge some audiences. Elder generations and those unfamiliar with modern technology often perceive streaming platforms as difficult to use, leading them to use more traditional forms of media, such

as television. From a technological accessibility perspective, therefore, mastering how to use the platforms becomes a significant barrier – especially for elder people – and traditional channels remain a more intuitive option for some sections of society.

*I've heard about all those Netflixes, but I have no idea how it works. I just prefer TV where I can turn it on and watch it.*

R4\_FG\_SA

## **Inclusivity requirements. Limitations on the accessibility of audio-description**

The availability of audio-description, especially for the blind or visually impaired, is becoming an indispensable aspect of enjoying films fully and comfortably. By offering audio-description features, streaming platforms address specific audience needs that often remain unmet in a brick-and-mortar cinema. For such audiences, cinemas lose their appeal due to the lack of suitable facilities, which further contributes to the growing popularity of films available online.

*I prefer to watch films at home on platforms such as Netflix, where I can turn on the audio-description.*

*At the cinema, I don't have this option, so I go there less and less.* <sup>R3\_FG\_RO</sup>

## **Adaptation of the home space to individual needs**

The home cinema becomes a space that the viewer can customise, avoiding some of the barriers they may encounter in a regular cinema. For those with specific accessibility requirements, a home viewing environment can be more welcoming and comfortable, making a traditional cinema a non-necessity for them. Customising a private space to suit individual needs and preferences makes home viewing a more accessible option.

*I watch films mainly at home because that's where I have everything that I need to make a film accessible to me.*

<sup>R5\_FG\_SA</sup>

## **Lack of audio-description as a barrier to accessing cinema culture**

The lack of audio-description is one of the main obstacles to the full participation of persons with visual impairments in cinema culture. Audio-description, which describes the essential visual elements and non-dialogue context,

is essential for understanding the plot of a film, especially in scenes where the action or emotions are conveyed solely through the image. A lack of access to this form of support leads to exclusion from the reception of film culture, as people who are blind or visually impaired are unable to follow the essential moments of the plot. In such cases, without the support of audio-description, viewers can only listen to the dialogues, which, however, is not enough to feel and understand the entire film message. The gap between the dialogues and the rest of the visual narrative thus leads to a fragmented and limited film experience.

*In the film, not everything is dialogue, most of the content is conveyed through images. Without the audio-description, I have no idea what is going on. I actually stop watching because I don't understand the plot.* <sup>R1\_FG\_RO</sup>

*In the cinema, I often miss key moments of a film because there is no audio-description. Without it, I just sit and listen to the dialogue, but I can't see what's happening on screen.* <sup>R2\_FG\_RO</sup>





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***For me, the more  
detail the better.  
I don't want to miss  
anything that others  
see on the screen.***

## **Fragmentation of the film experience without audio-description**

A predominantly visual medium, such as cinema, becomes incomplete for people without visual perception. The lack of audio-description results in an experience similar to “listening to part of a conversation through a door”: only hearing the voice parts, the viewer does not have access to the full context of the scenes and narrative. This severely disrupts the reception of the film, where the essential information for the story and the emotional aspects presented in the image remain inaccessible. For many, this means abandoning the cinema, as participation becomes meaningless.

*Watching a film without an audio-description is like listening to part of a conversation through a door: you hear the voices, but have no idea what's going on.* <sup>R4\_FG\_RO</sup>

## **Technological solutions to support accessibility: induction loops and subtitles as essential support for people with hearing difficulties**

In the context of accessibility of cinemas for people with different needs, the research carried out reveals that

the adaptation of audio and visual systems remains an important challenge. Previous studies have pointed to the limitations resulting from the lack of audio-description, which exclude people with visual difficulties. An equally significant problem, albeit concerning hearing-impaired audiences, is the lack of assistive audio technologies, such as induction loops and subtitles that would allow the storyline to be followed on an equal footing with other viewers.

## **Induction loop**

An induction loop is one of those solutions that would significantly improve the accessibility of the cinema experience for people who use hearing aids. The loop amplifies sound by transmitting it directly to the hearing aid, while eliminating interference and improving the quality of reception. Our research shows that the lack of this system in cinemas makes it difficult for people with hearing loss to fully receive sounds, leading to frustration and reduced satisfaction.

*Even when I go to the cinema, I often can't hear well. I need my hearing aid, and the cinemas don't have special systems to pick up the sound better.*

*R10\_FG\_SA*

## Subtitling

Subtitling is another solution that significantly affects the accessibility of cinemas, although, according to the research, its usefulness depends on the individual needs and cognitive abilities of the audience. Respondents indicate that subtitling is particularly helpful for elderly deaf audience, who may not be able to catch all the sounds and dialogue. However, the speed at which subtitles are displayed, as well as their intelligibility, is sometimes a challenge. Nevertheless, subtitling is considered a critical element that enables viewers to follow the plot and understand the content of a film more fully, which directly affects their ability to participate in film culture.

*For the elderly generation of deaf people, subtitles are helpful but not always understood, as those audiences have difficulty following them. But essentially, subtitles would give them access to information about what is happening in the film.* <sup>R1\_IDI\_SA</sup>

## **Subtitles quality and availability in the context of film accessibility: the need to improve visibility, translation and speed of display**

When analysing the results of the research on the accessibility of film events, one cannot fail to notice that the quality of subtitling and its adaptation to the needs of different audiences becomes an important thread. Previous sections of the research have noted that subtitles themselves can provide important support for persons with hearing impairments, but their effectiveness is often limited by technical problems and a lack of adequate visual adaptation. Recipients point to several vital problems: the low contrast of the subtitles, their inadequate pace and the lack of descriptive elements that could enrich the reception of the film.

### **Subtitle visibility challenges: contrast and size**

One of the most frequently reported challenges is the low contrast of the subtitles and the font size being too small, which significantly limits their readability, especially for the elder people and viewers with visual impairments. Low-quality subtitles that blend into the background or are displayed at a small size make it difficult for viewers to fully understand the storyline, leading to frustration and feelings of exclusion. Simple interventions, such as introducing a dark background under the subtitles, could improve the viewing experience by making them more readable and accessible.

*The subtitles in the cinema are small and blurred, and I have a problem with my eyesight. Even when I'm close, I can't see well, especially when they're bright against a light background. This makes cinema pointless for me.* <sup>R7\_FG\_SA</sup>

*Why don't the subtitles in the videos have a dark background? Everything is white on white and you can't see. It's not a big deal, and it could make it easier for all the elder people to watch the films.* <sup>R6\_FG\_SA</sup>

## **Subtitle display speed and individual needs**

Another barrier is that subtitles are displayed at too fast a pace, which can create problems keeping up with the text, especially for elder people or those who have difficulty processing text quickly. The lack of options to adjust the speed of the subtitles means that some viewers are unable to fully follow the action of the film, and this negatively affects their overall cinema experience.

*Subtitles are sometimes too fast, It's hard to keep up. They should be tailored*

*to our needs as not everyone reads  
equally fast.* <sup>R11\_FG\_SA</sup>

## **Lack of detailed descriptions of sounds and emotions**

Subtitles on streaming platforms often include additional information describing sounds and effects, which are crucial for deaf people to fully experience the film. The absence of such details in cinema subtitles leaves viewers without the emotional and narrative context that, in the case of a hearing person, would be conveyed by the sounds. Audiences point out that subtitles enriched with descriptions of sounds (e.g. footsteps, the slamming of a door closing, the sound of a car) would allow them to be more fully immersed in the world of the film and better understand the plot.

*I need subtitles which include  
additional information, such as engine  
sound or footsteps, which gives  
me more excitement about what  
is happening in the film.* <sup>R2\_FG\_SJ</sup>

## **Lack of subtitles in mother-tongue and dubbed films**

An additional problem is the lack of subtitles in mother-tongue and/or dubbed productions, which deprives deaf people of the opportunity to watch films in their own

language. When, for example, Slovak films and animations are not subtitled, deaf people are forced to wait for versions available on streaming platforms that provide better accessibility. This limitation particularly affects the feeling of exclusion from participation in national culture by depriving the viewers of the opportunity to experience native productions.

*I'd like to go see a Slovak film, but it doesn't have subtitles, so I'll have to wait until it comes out on Netflix.* <sup>R1\_FG\_SJ</sup>

*Thanks to Netflix, I can watch Slovak films with subtitles that I wouldn't watch on TV because there are no subtitles there.* <sup>R3\_FG\_SJ</sup>

The research shows that proper adaptation of subtitles can be crucial for the deaf and/or visually impaired to fully participate in film culture. Simple adjustments to the contrast, size and detail of audio descriptions, as well as ensuring the availability of subtitles in all cinema productions, would make a significant difference to the viewing experience and integration of these groups into cinema culture.



## **Deaf audience preferences: subtitles instead of sign language translation and the problem with dubbing**

The analysis of the respondents' statements to date indicates that subtitles are the most commonly preferred form of adaptation of films screened in cinemas for persons with hearing impairments, as opposed to sign language interpretation. The research points out that while sign interpreters play an important role at cultural events, their presence in cinemas is perceived as less practical and distracting from the film itself. Deaf audiences express the need for regular subtitled screenings that would allow them to focus on the film without having to watch an interpreter, which can be perceived as distracting or limiting the full cinema experience.

*The subtitles option is perfect because I can focus on the film without having to watch a sign interpreter. They are important, but I prefer subtitles in the cinema.* <sup>R5\_FG\_SA</sup>

*Sign language interpreter in the cinema? It's awkward. I just want to watch the film, not focus on the interpreter next to me.* <sup>R4\_FG\_SA</sup>

*We need regular screenings with subtitles. A sign language interpreter is fine at larger events, but it would be better not to obstruct the screening.*

R1\_FG\_SA

Films with sign language interpretation may be less attractive to deaf viewers in countries where there is no tradition of including a “window” with a sign interpreter in TV programmes and films. In societies where this form of interpretation is rarely used, viewers are not used to following the film and watching the sign interpreter at the same time. Lacking this experience, this form of reception can seem distracting, and the sign language interpreter – rather than helping the viewer to enjoy the storyline – becomes a distractor from what is happening on screen.

## **The barrier of dubbing for deaf people**

The research also indicated that dubbing is a significant barrier for deaf audiences. Animated films and productions aimed at younger audiences are often dubbed, leaving deaf people unable to receive them due to the lack of subtitles. The choice of dubbing without alternative subtitles makes certain film genres, especially animation and family films, virtually inaccessible to this audience. Respondents indicate that there are no subtitled screenings in cinemas, which limits their ability to attend film productions aimed at the general public.

*Animated films are great, but they are often dubbed, and then they come with no subtitles. That's a big barrier for us.*

R3\_FG\_SA

*Films with dubbing are useless to me. I need subtitles and such screenings are scarce.* R5\_FG\_SA

## **Varying needs and expectations of audio-description detail**

As a leading tool to enable blind and partially sighted people to receive films more fully, audio-description plays an important role in making film culture accessible. However, the research reveals significant variation in needs and preferences regarding the level of detail in the audio-description. For some audiences, an overly elaborate description of each scene can be overwhelming, introducing an excess of information that limits their own interpretation and space for imagination. For these audiences, it is important that the audio-description leaves some margin to allow for personal interpretation of events.

*Sometimes the audio-description is too detailed and tells you everything that is going on. I would prefer*

*it to leave some space for my own interpretation.* <sup>R12\_FG\_SA</sup>

On the other hand, some viewers expect as detailed a message as possible, so as not to miss any important plot element or visual nuances. An audio-description that takes into account every detail, from character movements to scenery, allows such audiences to perceive the film in a more complete manner, similar to that of sighted people. For these audiences, the maximum detail in the audio-description is an indispensable part of their film experience.

*For me, the more detail the better. I don't want to miss anything that others see on the screen.* <sup>R13\_FG\_SA</sup>

The research indicates that the diversity of audio-description preferences requires a flexible approach and potential consideration of options for adjusting the level of detail.



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***I don't go to the cinema with my children because the cartoons are dubbed and there are no subtitles. We sit for an hour and a half and don't understand anything of what's going on.***

## **Exclusion of children with sensory disabilities in accessing films for the youngest and lack of an inclusive approach in audience education**

The research points to a serious problem of the inadequacy of the cinema offer for children with sensory disabilities, in particular for deaf children. In most cinemas, animated and family films are only available in dubbed versions, without subtitles, which automatically excludes young deaf audiences from receiving the content. Without subtitles, those children are unable to understand the dialogue or the storyline, and cinema, which for other peers is a space for fun and education, remains inaccessible for them.

Furthermore, even if films for the youngest audiences were subtitled, the format and language may still create barriers for deaf children. For younger children with only the basics of sign language, subtitles may not be accessible enough. The grammar and rules of written language are different from sign language, which may further hinder reception. For such children, the film message should be adapted to take into account their specific cognitive needs, enabling them to understand the content without using complex language structures.

*There is virtually nothing in cinemas for deaf children. Children's films*

*are dubbed, without subtitles,  
so our children are excluded.* <sup>R5\_FG\_SA</sup>

*I don't go to the cinema with my  
children because the cartoons  
are dubbed and there are no  
subtitles. We sit for an hour and  
a half and don't understand anything  
of what's going on.* <sup>R2\_FG\_SJ</sup>

The inadequacy of film offerings for deaf children has significant consequences not only on an individual level, but also on the societal one. The lack of accessible cinema screenings for hearing-impaired youngest audiences leads to their marginalisation from an early age. If deaf children do not have the opportunity to participate in cultural life, they lose the chance to build a relationship with the cinema as a space for cultural reception. This translates into a lack of habits and experiences of going to the cinema, resulting in low interest from adult deaf audiences in the future. In this way, cinema, instead of fulfilling an educational and inclusive role, unwittingly contributes to the exclusion of this social group from cultural participation.

This problem points to the need to rethink educational strategies and to implement more accessible forms of reception, which, over time, can contribute to an increase in the number of adult deaf audiences in cinemas.

The cinemas themselves need to develop a range of films that are fully adapted to the needs and abilities of children.

## **Neglected potential of cinema in education and cultural habit-building**

It is also worth noting the need to accustom the PD to participating in film culture from an early age. As research shows, some adult viewers with disabilities give up on cinema because they have never developed the habit of attending such events. Lack of accessible content and barrier cinema experiences result in low attendance among adult deaf and blind audiences, for whom cinema is not an attractive cultural space. One respondent mentions that although she used to go to the cinema regularly, now, faced with barriers and changing demands, she no longer sees the need to do so.

*The last time I went to the cinema was ten years ago. In those days, when I was younger, we went to the cinema regularly, but now I don't see the need to go.* <sup>R5\_FG\_SA</sup>

The inclusive and emotional value of cinema therefore remains untapped. Adapting cinemas to the needs of the PD and promoting film culture to them can not only increase



attendance, but also create a space of community, support and mutual understanding, which will have a positive impact on their social perception and relationships.

## **Indiscrimination as a result of limited cinema offerings: lack of adapted screenings and incomplete education of audiences with sensory disabilities**

The research on the accessibility of cinema culture for persons with sensory impairments reveals a phenomenon of “indiscrimination” due to limited access to films with audio-description (AD) or subtitles. Many respondents highlight that due to the small number of screenings adapted to their needs, they settle for any available film that offers adequate support. The lack of a wide range and variety forces audiences to give up their own genre or quality preferences, leading to a situation where cinema ceases to be a space of choice and taste and simply becomes an accessible “here-and-now” experience.

This attitude can be seen as a result of the “maleducation” of audiences with sensory disabilities by cultural institutions that do not provide them with opportunities to develop their film preferences. The limited offerings mean that these audiences are not used to a wide selection or a critical choice of films, which over time affects their habits and makes them stop expecting a better offer.

The lack of adapted screenings creates a situation where each screening equipped with audio-description or subtitles is perceived as a unique opportunity – regardless of its artistic value or subject matter.

The limited offer leads to a phenomenon where persons with disabilities cannot shape their preferences because the cinema does not offer them enough variety. As a result, cinema culture becomes a space of passive reception for them, without the possibility to decide, which has the effect of limiting their experience and may result in the cinema failing to meet their cultural needs in the long run.

## **Untapped value of cinema as a space of inclusion and emotional experience for persons with disabilities**

The cinema, as a space of contact with cinematography, offers much more than just the opportunity to watch a film. The research reveals the deeply neglected potential of cinema as a place for the integration of the PD community and as a therapeutic tool for experiencing emotions together and building bonds. The atmosphere of the cinema, reinforced by the presence of other viewers, creates a unique climate that allows them to experience film emotions on a more intense level, which is difficult to achieve at home. It is clear in the respondents' statements that for many people the cinema is more than just a place

of screening: it is a space where they can share emotions, experience them together with others and immerse themselves in the atmosphere of the film. For some viewers, especially those with disabilities, the opportunity to watch a film in a group and accompany others in their reactions becomes a valuable experience. Experiencing films and emotions together, be it sadness, laughter or affection, often has a therapeutic function, as it enables viewers to connect more deeply with their own feelings and to process them. For example, viewers sharing their emotions after a film – as in the case of a respondent from Slovakia, who felt a bond with the story unfolding on screen about the loss of a close pet – point to the therapeutic possibilities that cinema can offer.

*There's a slightly different atmosphere in the cinema, a different sound, you get caught up in the crowd, you feel the emotions of the film in a different way.*

*R7\_FG\_SJ*

*It was a very powerful experience for me, I cried because I was reminded of my dog. It touched me deeply.* <sup>R3\_FG\_SJ</sup>

## **Cinema as a tool for relationship and community building**

The research also shows that cinema has a potential as a space for developing relations and integrating with other members of the PD community. Watching a film together and then discussing it can enrich the viewing experience and serve as a means of mutual understanding and sharing opinions and feelings. A meeting in such a form becomes particularly valuable when the screening is followed by a meeting with the filmmakers – directors or actors. It stimulates deeper reflection and exchange of insights. Respondents for whom it is important to share their impressions emphasise that the opportunity to talk about a film with others is an important element of its reception.

*I definitely prefer to watch films with someone, then we can talk about the film, exchange opinions.* R5\_FG\_SA

## **Cinema as a “third place”: a space for social integration and building relations**

The research points to an important aspect of cinema as the “third place”: a space that goes beyond the role of the screening room itself, responding to the audience’s needs for integration and social bonding. This approach to the

arrangement of the cinema space, where there are not only places to watch films, but also cafés, gardens or meeting spaces, makes the cinema a conducive environment for interaction and integration, which is particularly important for the PD.

For many audiences, including the PD, the cinema as a “third place” becomes an important part of everyday life, offering opportunities for developing social relations and participation in social life. Where the cinema space is arranged in this way, it allows people to experience a film together, and to interact with others, which in turn builds a sense of community and understanding. Unlike the streaming platforms, where films are mainly watched in isolation, the cinema offers the added value of a tangible meeting place that responds to the need to be part of a community and participate in culture.

The example of the Slovak Lumière cinema, described by one of our interviewees, shows that the proper organisation of space and the necessary additional activities of the staff can create an aura that attracts diverse audiences. In addition to the screening itself, elements such as the special atmosphere of the cinema and the spaces and conversation areas there allow people to feel at ease, creating an environment that supports integration and building relations.

*The Lumière cinema is different not only in terms of composition and content, but also because it has this café and those outdoor spaces, that people come together, and the genius loci is so great here, I praise it a lot.*

*R12\_FG\_SJ*

## **Cinema as an antidote to loneliness and a space for building social relations**

The analysis of the responses shows that for many viewers cinema is of great importance not only as a place to enjoy culture, but also as a space for social interaction and to counteract loneliness. Viewers, especially seniors, emphasise the need to share emotions after a screening and to experience films together with others. The very act of watching a film becomes an opportunity to build bonds, both with loved ones and with the cinema community. For people who experience loneliness, going to the cinema is often one of the few opportunities to interact with others. However, the lack of company can mean that the positive experience is stifled by feelings of emptiness.

Respondents describe the need to share their impressions after a film as something that completes the cinema

experience. Going to the cinema without someone to talk to after the screening can leave the viewer without the opportunity to express and share the emotions evoked. This aspect of cinema sociability, although subtle, has a significant impact on the emotional wellbeing of lonely people. The lack of company when visiting the cinema, as mentioned by the respondent, reveals this need in the context of social relations that gradually fade with age.

*I would like to go with someone, but unfortunately, I don't have a second half, so I go alone. But I leave the cinema and I want to talk to someone. I'm full of spirit, fulfilled and I don't have anyone to talk to about it.* <sup>R12\_FG\_SJ</sup>

*I have no one to go to the cinema with. We used to go together with friends, but now most of them have passed away. It's sad.* <sup>R13\_FG\_SA</sup>

## **Cinema as a social experience that requires accessibility**

However, cinema seen as a community experience requires appropriate accessibility standards in order to fulfil its social

function for all audiences, including the PD. Statements such as the one below highlight the need to simultaneously consider the accessibility and social atmosphere of the cinema, which allows for full participation in film culture. When cinema meets these conditions, it becomes a place where everyone, regardless of their abilities, can enjoy engaging company and establish and nurture relationships.

*I think cinema should be a social experience, but it also needs to meet certain accessibility standards so that we can take full advantage of it.* R8\_FG\_SJ

Therefore, the cinema – as a space for meeting and interaction – has a unique potential to become a support in the fight against loneliness, provided, however, that it is properly adapted to the needs of all audiences.



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***The last time I was at the cinema for a film was with my sister, who read the subtitles for me and commented on the plot. We try to go to screenings where there are not too many people so as not to disturb others.***

## **In/dependence: challenges in using the cinema faced by persons with sensory impairments**

Research indicates that for persons with sensory impairments, a visit to the cinema is often associated with a high degree of dependence on others. Independent participation in a film event is limited by a number of barriers – from a lack of audio-description and adapted subtitles to problems with signage and staff support. For many audiences, having to rely on the assistance of others limits their sense of independence and spontaneity, which means that going to the cinema has to be carefully planned.

The interviewees' responses demonstrate that the incomplete accessibility of the cinema infrastructure forces persons with sensory impairments to rely on companions to help them buy tickets, choose seats or even follow the film plot. One respondent, who is assisted by her sister, points out that the need for companions influences their choice of screenings: they prefer the less frequented ones, so that comments do not disturb other viewers. This limitation of choice forces persons with disabilities to fit into circumstances that fully able-bodied viewers may ignore.

*The last time I was at the cinema for a film was with my sister, who read the subtitles for me and commented*

*on the plot. We try to go to screenings where there are not too many people so as not to disturb others.* <sup>R6\_FG\_SJ</sup>

In the absence of adapted cinema screenings, many viewers with sensory disabilities rely on relatives or friends to offer them an “amateur” audio-description. This solution, while allowing a certain level of participation in film culture, is nonetheless ad hoc and must be considered a substitute support rather than a full-fledged film experience.

Accompanying persons read the subtitles, describe the plot or comment on the film’s crucial moments, which on the one hand allows the PD to follow the plot, but on the other hand requires adaptation to the screening conditions in order not to disturb other viewers. A respondent who used her sister’s assistance indicates that they choose screenings with smaller attendance to avoid disturbing others.

## **Arranging a company: a necessity rather than choice**

For many audiences with disabilities, being able to go to the cinema on their own is a luxury they cannot always afford. They often have to organise company to support them in getting to and navigating the cinema. This planning, driven by necessity, limits their spontaneity and can discourage them from participating in film culture.

*I need to think about whether I can get there on my own or whether I need a companion. If I need someone to help me, I need to plan ahead.* <sup>R7\_FG\_SA</sup>

The aforementioned limitations create a situation in which persons with sensory impairments are dependent on the environment, which reduces their sense of comfort and independence.

## **Problems getting to and finding one's way in the cinema**

Many respondents also describe difficulties in navigating the cinema building. The lack of appropriate signage or trained staff makes finding a hall or seat problematic. Blind and partially sighted people have to ask for help, which often creates a feeling of being a burden. Respondents from Romania indicate that cinema staff do not always know how to provide adequate help, which makes persons with disabilities feel discouraged from using the cinema on their own.

*Finding a seat in the cinema on my own is a challenge for me. I need help and the staff don't always know how to guide me.* <sup>R2\_FG\_RO</sup>

## **Constraints related to the lack of technology supporting self-reliance**

The research also shows that the lack of accessible technology such as audio-description apps limits the autonomy of viewers with disabilities. If mobile solutions for audio-description existed, persons with disabilities could decide for themselves to visit the cinema without having to plan for additional support. Respondents point out that such apps could significantly increase their freedom by giving them more control over how they enjoy the film.

*It would be great if there were phone apps that could give audio-description independently of what the cinema offers. That would give more freedom.*

*R1\_FG\_W*

## **Audiences with disabilities as co-creators of culture: the need for active participation in the creative process**

The research highlighted the growing need for the PD to be involved in the process of cultural creation and not just in the reception of culture. Our interviewees from the Romanian association Asociația Tandem emphasise that PD integration in the cultural field should include their active

participation in artistic projects – as creators, co-directors or artists who bring their own perspectives and experiences to culture. Involving the PD in the creative process is important for spreading social awareness and opening up new ways of self-expression that enrich the whole cultural community.

Examples of theatre and dance projects where blind people play an active role – as mentioned by one expert – show that such involvement not only develops the participants' individual skills, but also strengthens their presence in the society and makes visible the value of diverse ways of perceiving the world. Enabling the PD to co-create cultural content can lead to greater inclusivity in the arts and in the labour market, where they often face barriers that limit their potential.

Interviewees point out that such activities benefit not only the participants themselves, but also the society, broadening the horizons of the audience and promoting integration through shared experiences.

## **Integration of so-called regular and special events: balance between inclusion and adaptation**

The division of cultural events into “regular” and “special” often limits integration and deepens the sense of separation among audiences. Rather than organising events aimed

exclusively at selected groups, such as persons with disabilities or senior citizens, many respondents with a similar profile and type of disability – participants in our other research – advocate creating spaces that allow for the joint participation of all categorical groups. With this approach, the participants not only experience culture together, but also feel that they can be part of an accessible, undivided stream of events.

On the other hand, there are also opinions emphasising that overly universal events often fail to take into account the specific needs of elderly audiences, who feel marginalised. According to some respondents, cultural programmes are mainly geared towards younger audiences, which excludes seniors from full participation. The following statement by a respondent is an example:

*It seems that everything is addressed to the young. We need more events that are tailored to us, elder people.*

R11\_FG\_SA

Creating events that are both inclusive and tailored to the specific needs of different groups is an important challenge. Such a formula would allow every audience to participate in cultural events without feeling out of place and without having to choose between “special” and “regular” events.

## **Auteur cinema vs. so-called light cinema: the challenge of accessibility and the need for diversity**

As for film content, the audiences' preferences vary widely, highlighting the need for a wide repertoire. When auteur cinema, especially festival cinema, is valued for its artistic values and often tackles socially important topics, some viewers – like the Romanian respondent – feel a lack of “lighter” film offerings. Films that win awards often focus on difficult, emotional topics, which may discourage viewers looking for entertainment and an escape from everyday concerns in cinema.

*I don't like films that win awards because they often deal with sad subjects. I'd like to see something more entertaining.* <sup>R2\_FG\_RO</sup>

It is also worth noting that, in practice, it is the arthouse and studio cinemas, rather than the large multiplexes, that most often take the initiative to adapt screenings to the needs of the PD. The problem is that the former often focus on European and arthouse repertoire that requires a certain cultural and interpretive competence, which may limit its accessibility to a wider audience. Audiences with a preference for lighter content may struggle to find their way around such repertoire, which is a barrier to taking full advantage of the offerings adapted by arthouse cinemas.



Thematic diversity including both auteur cinema and entertainment-oriented productions could be key in opening accessible cinema events to a wider audience, meeting the needs of both reflective audiences and those who would rather enjoy less demanding entertainment.

## **Access to film culture: inequalities between large cities and smaller towns**

Limitations in access to film culture are not only due to repertoire differences, but also to the place of residence. Even in larger cities, including the capital: Bratislava, Ljubljana, Bucharest and Budapest, the availability of screenings adapted to the needs of persons with sensory impairments (e.g. films with audio-description or subtitles) is limited and does not meet the viewers' expectations. Although urban centres offer a greater choice of cultural institutions, the number of adapted screenings remains insufficient and is often limited to arthouse cinemas, where the repertoire focuses on auteur productions requiring specific audience competences.

In smaller towns and away from the metropolis, the situation is even more acute. Respondents point out that the lack of adapted cinemas forces them to travel long distances to watch a film with subtitles or audio-description, which becomes problematic both logistically and financially. In many towns and smaller cities, streaming platforms

remain the only alternative as they allow the use of appropriate features at home. For many viewers, this is the only way to ensure access to film culture.

*I live in a small town and there are no screenings with subtitles here. I have to travel to bigger cities to see something in the cinema.* <sup>R4\_FG\_SA</sup>

*There is no cinema where I live that offers audio-description. That's why I mainly use Netflix, because there I can turn on the audio-description when I want.* <sup>R3\_FG\_RO</sup>

These inequalities, apparent both between smaller towns and large cities, including capital cities, indicate a significant gap in access to film culture. Even in large urban centres, audiences with sensory disabilities have to choose between a limited number of adapted screenings and access to culture only at home.

## **The need for representation: persons with disabilities on screen**

The interviewees' responses show that the presence of characters with disabilities in films and TV series

is important for viewers to identify with those experiences. An interviewee from Slovakia points out that films dealing with the lives of deaf people are of particular interest to her because they present a perspective similar to her own. The visibility of such stories in film culture – which still remains rare – enables the PD to find something close to their own lives in film.

*Sometimes I choose films or TV shows that deal with issues relating to the deaf because they are of particular interest to me.* <sup>R1\_FG\_SJ</sup>

Wider representation of the PD on screen can also help build public awareness. Through films that show the everyday life and challenges faced by the PD, audiences can better understand their experiences, which are often marginalised in mainstream culture.

The visibility of the PD on screen plays an important role, not only informative but also empowering one, for them. Films and TV shows depicting characters with disabilities can build a sense of pride and worth among viewers who perceive that their experiences have a place in the mainstream culture. Such representation fosters identity and strengthens bonds within the PD community, enables the sharing of experiences and builds a sense of belonging. At the same time, it should not be forgotten that it is wrong to assume that all people with experience of disability

must show an interest in the subject; as part of the situation, they are first and foremost viewers, people who want to see a good film.

## **Film preferences of audiences with sensory disabilities: the narrative, genres and need for clarity of message**

The diversity of film preferences among persons with sensory impairments clearly shows that elements such as the narrative, plot clarity and the choice of genres that best suit their mode of reception are decisive. The d/Deaf often prefer action and crime films where the plot is dynamic and based on clear visual events, making it easier for them to follow the story. Our interviewee from Slovakia emphasises that this type of narration allows him to better understand the course of events even without fully participating in the audio side of the film.

*The d/Deaf love action films that have a plot, because then it's easier for them to understand what's going on. I love going to the cinema, but it's really rare now.* <sup>R3\_FG\_SJ</sup>

On the other hand, the blind or visually impaired viewers prefer films that rely heavily on dialogue and a well-defined narrative. For them, genres where the story is not based

solely on visual effects, but rather on the relations between characters, sounds and descriptions are important. In the case of action films, rich in fast-paced visual changes, they find it difficult to follow events, which can be tiring and distracting.

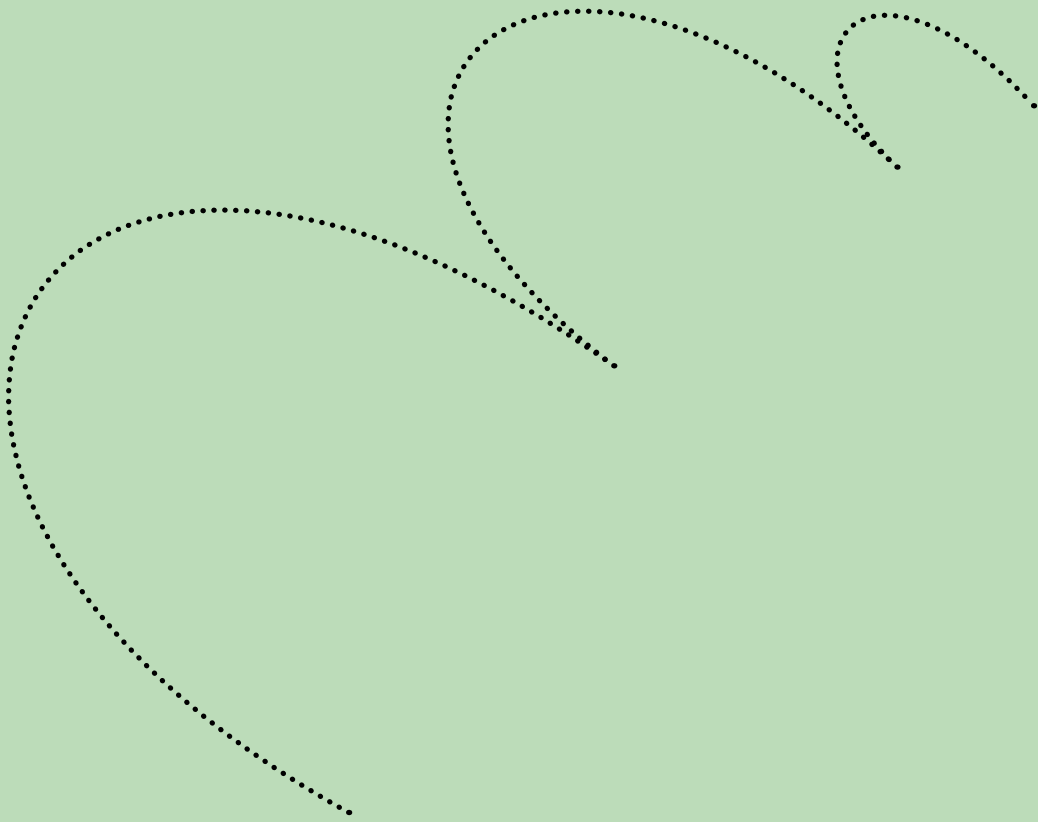
*Action films are hard for me to watch. There are too many visual changes that I can't follow.* <sup>R9\_FG\_SA</sup>

*Dramas and thrillers are my favourite genres because in them it's the story that matters, not so much the visual effects.* <sup>R1\_FG\_W</sup>

The variation in preference also applies to seniors, who often choose more cheerful films with fewer violent twists and overwhelming special effects. Films that rely on a warm narrative or present positive stories resonate with the need for a friendly, clear message that does not require intensive visual or auditory analysis.

Those differences in preferences show that it is not so much the film genre that matters to viewers with sensory disabilities, but also the way the storyline is carried out, the clarity of the dialogue and the pace, which allows them to fully enjoy the film experience.

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***In cinemas, they often don't even know what audio-description is, I had to explain it, and after all, it's not my role.***

## **Education of cultural personnel: technical competence and the need for better preparation of cinema staff**

The interviewees' responses highlight the need to increase technical and social competencies among cinema staff and those involved in organising film events. For audiences with sensory disabilities, staff competencies have a significant impact on the comfort of enjoying film culture. An interviewee from Slovakia points out that despite the introduction of modern solutions even in areas such as beverage and popcorn machines, communication still remains a challenge. Many viewers have to use the phone to explain their needs, which limits their freedom and independence.

*Nowadays, cinemas have automatic drinks and popcorn machines, but communication is still difficult. Sometimes I have to use my phone to show the staff what I want.* R2\_FG\_SJ

Low awareness of the needs of the PD and a lack of knowledge of solutions such as audio-description further limit the cinema experience. Audiences with disabilities note that cinema staff often do not know what audio-description is, forcing them to explain basic technical issues and creating additional discomfort and a sense that their needs are being ignored.

*Sometimes I feel that cinema staff have no idea what audio-description is, and this limits my experience a lot. I feel ignored.* R3\_FG\_RO

*In cinemas, they often don't even know what audio-description is, I had to explain it, and after all, it's not my role.* R6\_FG\_SA

The lack of appropriate signage and inadequate support from staff presents a further challenge for audiences with disabilities, who feel compelled to ask for help, often leading to a sense of being a burden. Respondents highlight that higher levels of competence among staff, including knowledge of audio-description or the ability to provide support, could significantly improve their cinema experience.

*Just getting to the cinema is a challenge. There is no proper signage or help from staff. I feel like I'm in the way by asking for help.* R5\_FG\_RO

In some cases, training is offered that includes the basics of sign language or covers issues relating to accessibility. These initiatives prove to be effective as they reduce the distance between audiences and staff, which in turn facilitates communication and helps meet the needs



of the audiences. Similar training is a step towards creating a more inclusive environment and better preparing cultural staff to work with people with different needs.

*Our team received training in the basics of sign language to better communicate with the d/Deaf. This has bridged the gap between staff and audiences and helped us better understand their needs.* <sup>R2\_IDI\_SJ</sup>

Furthermore, according to the respondents, creators and organisers of cultural events should have a broader understanding of accessibility, including not only infrastructure such as lifts and ramps, but also the adaptation of cultural content to different sensory needs.

## **Educating audiences about available solutions: the need for information campaigns**

The results of the research indicate a significant need to educate audiences, including the PD, about accessible assistive technologies. It is often found that despite the implementation of accessibility solutions, many viewers do not know how to use them or are unaware of their existence. One of the respondents notes that the lack of information campaigns means that those interested

in audio-description do not receive clear guidance on how to activate this feature or how it is used during a screening.

*People did not know how to use the audio commentary... There are no information campaigns to explain this.*

*R4\_FG\_SJ*

Without sufficient information on the facilities available, these technologies may be underutilised or remain out of reach of the intended audience.

## **Tailored promotion: the importance of format and appropriate communication channels**

Effective promotion of film events targeting persons with sensory impairments requires a precise choice of both form and communication channels. Respondents point out that standard invitations may not be sufficient: visual materials that clearly present the theme of the film are particularly valuable. A deaf person from Slovakia emphasises that video invitations with a short description of the storyline can be effective in encouraging the d/Deaf, allowing them to better assess whether a film will interest them.

*It is important to create a video invitation, and to explain a bit about*

*what the video will be about, so that deaf people are motivated to see it.*

*R3\_FG\_SJ*

Romanian respondents point to the popularity of platforms such as Facebook, TikTok and Instagram, which offer a quick visual message well suited to deaf people. TikTok, with its strongly visual nature and short formats, as well as captions added by the authors, is an attractive medium for communicating information and building interest in cultural events.

## **Film introduction to set context and facilitate reception**

Respondents emphasise that a short introduction to the film, setting it in context, can significantly facilitate the reception, especially for persons with sensory impairments. An introduction containing information about the plot, main characters or themes allows viewers to better understand the basic premise of the film, which is particularly appreciated by the d/Deaf and the visually impaired. Such an introduction can also explain what viewers can expect, which not only simplifies the viewing experience, but also increases their engagement with the story presented on screen.

For viewers with disabilities, the introductory commentary can be crucial in understanding subtle plot elements and cultural context that might normally be overlooked.

## Post-screening events as a valuable extension of the film experience

Respondents indicate that the opportunity to participate in meetings after screenings is an important added value that could increase their involvement in film culture. Discussions or meetings with the director allow viewers to gain a deeper understanding of the film and to exchange insights with other participants, which is particularly valued by the d/Deaf and the visually impaired. For many viewers in this group, the opportunity to talk about the plot, production details and themes of the film creates a space to process and organise their own impressions, making the film experience more complete.

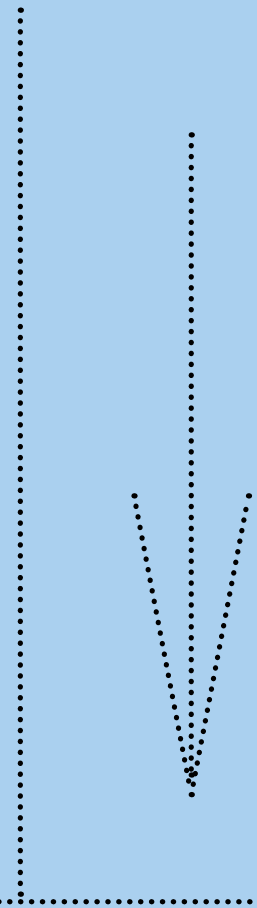
*I would really welcome an opportunity to talk to others after the film about what went on. It would be good if the director could be invited.* R2\_FG\_RO

*If there were some kind of meetings after the film where we could talk about what we had seen, I would certainly have been more willing to go to the cinema.*

R5\_FG\_SA

# Expert meta- comments

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## **Understanding accessibility: expert perspectives**

Experts participating in the research highlighted the complex meaning of accessibility, which goes beyond the traditional understanding related to the removal of physical barriers. This approach includes a broader view of accessibility as part of inclusivity, openness to groups with diverse socio-economic and socio-cultural backgrounds. Such a perspective is represented by the respondent quoted below, who indicates that accessibility must address both the physical aspects and the more diverse needs arising from social circumstances.

*We see accessibility as more than just the physical removal of barriers... It is about opening up to socio-economically, but also socio-culturally diverse groups.* <sup>R1\_IDI\_SJ</sup>

A more flexible approach to the definition of disability promoted by the AMAIS organisation in Romania also appears in the research. The expert stresses that disability should not be equated exclusively with a permanent health condition. Instead, he points out that disability can be temporary or contextual, referring to different life situations such as pregnancy or recovery from surgery. The aim of this approach is to change the societal view of disability and create a more flexible, yet inclusive environment.

*AMAIS promotes the idea that disability does not always have to be seen as permanent or medically related. We emphasise that disability can be temporary, contextual, and relate to different aspects of life.*  
<sup>R2\_IDI\_RO</sup>

## **Accessibility as a tool for education, development and empowerment**

The experts emphasised that the accessibility of film culture cannot be seen solely in terms of providing entertainment, but rather as a prominent part of education, personal development and social integration. Access to culture acts as an empowerment tool, enabling the PD not only to passively participate, but also to actively co-create available solutions. An expert representing the PD community points out that blind people should have a direct voice in the process of creating accessible spaces, as they know their needs best.

*Blind people need to be part of this process. We are the ones who know best what we need, so we should have a say in the design of accessible spaces.* <sup>R2\_IDI\_W</sup>

Accessibility in culture, the experts emphasise, is therefore not only a practical dimension of participation, but also a catalyst for social inclusion and personal development accessible to everyone regardless of limitations resulting a disability.

*Cultural accessibility is more than entertainment. It is about education,*

*development and social inclusion.  
Everyone has the right to participate  
in culture, regardless of their disability.*

*R1\_IDI\_SJ*

## **Universal design: accessibility for all users**

Experts point to the importance of a universal design approach, which involves creating spaces and solutions that are adapted to the widest possible audience, regardless of their physical or sensory abilities. In the context of film culture, universal design would mean cinema spaces, technological solutions and organisational practices that do not require adaptation or special adjustments for the PD. Rather than adapting existing structures, the aim of the universal design is to design them from the ground up in such a way that they are intuitively accessible to all users without excluding any social group.

## **Lack of research and invisibility of the needs of persons with disabilities and other minority groups**

The needs of the PD and other minority groups are often overlooked due to the lack of research in this area. The scarcity of data on the preferences and requirements



of the PD means that their needs are not prioritised by cultural institutions (including cinemas) located in the countries researched. This translates into a lack of appropriate adaptation measures and limits the awareness of how important accessibility can be in attracting new and diverse audiences.

*Cinemas do not feel that this group of people is significant in terms of audience... and the available technology is expensive.* <sup>R2\_IDI\_SJ</sup>

Failure to address these needs not only limits the PD access to film culture, but also reinforces their marginalisation, as cultural institutions often fail to see the potential of developing accessible solutions for a wider audience. Inevitably, maintaining current practices excludes those who represent alternative motor and/or sensory abilities from participation.

## **Lack of trained and competent staff**

Cultural institutions often lack people with the right competences to deal with accessibility for the PD. This problem relates both to the knowledge of assistive technologies and the ability to carry out accessibility audits. An interviewed civil servant living in Slovakia notes that before taking action, it was necessary to check whether

the institutions had sufficient staff resources to deal effectively with accessibility issues.

*Before addressing this topic, we needed to find out whether there was professional capacity in our institutions to address these issues.*

*R2\_IDI\_SJ*

In addition, the number of experts who could carry out accessibility audits or train other staff is clearly insufficient in many countries, including Slovakia. The lack of experts hinders the implementation of accessibility standards, with the result that institutions are often unable to assess and improve their practices themselves.

*There are no experts capable of carrying out a comprehensive accessibility audit. We do not have enough such people in Slovakia.* *R2\_IDI\_SJ*

The available supporting technologies are not fully used due to a lack of technical knowledge. An urgent need for training to enable effective use of existing solutions is emphasised, as well as the provision of technical support during cultural events.

*We have the technology, but we don't always know how to use it. We need training to use what we have, as well as technical support at events.* <sup>R1\_IDI\_SA</sup>

## **Lack of funding and short-term financial support**

A key challenge that limits the ability to implement accessibility in film culture remains inadequate and short-term funding. Although budgets of cultural institutions are beginning to take accessibility needs into account, the lack of stable, long-term support prevents the implementation of solutions on a wider scale. Without stable funding, many projects remain at the pilot stage or are only temporary.

*Although accessibility is beginning to be factored into budgets, long-term funding is lacking, limiting the ability to implement such solutions on a wider scale.* <sup>R5\_IDI\_SJ</sup>

The interviewees' responses also indicate the importance of public sector co-funding, which could significantly improve the material situation of small cinemas and cultural institutions. However, public funding for accessibility measures is still insufficient, limiting the ability

of institutions to cover the costs of assistive technologies, such as induction loops or audio-description.

*The public sector can and should step in with public funds...  
With some level of co-financing of activities... R3\_IDI\_SJ*

The lack of financial support at the local level particularly affects smaller institutions that do not have the budgets to purchase expensive assistive technologies. Small cinemas are therefore often left without access to such solutions, closing off the possibility for them to fully adapt for the PD.

*Small cinemas do not have the funds to install induction loops or audio commentary... these are expensive technologies and support at local level is lacking. R3\_IDI\_W*

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***The institutions  
do not cooperate.  
Each institution  
operates separately,  
which makes it difficult  
to implement uniform  
accessibility standards.***

## Lack of regulation and standardised accessibility standards

The lack of consistent legislation and accessibility standards is a significant problem that results in a wide variety of approaches to accessibility across cinemas. In many countries, accessibility remains a matter of individual decision-making by cinema owners, meaning that the implementation of supportive solutions is often solely dependent on their goodwill. This situation, as one interviewee notes, means that accessibility standards are not uniform and there are no binding rules governing their application.

*There are no standards in our country regarding the accessibility of cinemas..., it depends on a given cinema itself whether it wants to implement this.*

*R1\_IDI\_SJ*

Experts also stress that the lack of state involvement and the absence of binding guidelines make it difficult to introduce systemic solutions. Uniform regulations would be essential to create standards applicable to all cultural institutions, which could guarantee accessibility for all audiences.

*There are no uniform guidelines for accessibility. Each cinema decides for itself, and we need systemic solutions that are mandatory for all.*

*R3\_IDI\_SA*

The lack of cooperation between institutions further complicates the situation, as each institution operates separately, preventing consistent implementation of accessibility. It is pointed out that greater government support and public pressure could speed up the process of creating regulations that would uniform the standards and enforce accessibility solutions in cinemas.

*The institutions do not cooperate. Each institution operates separately, which makes it difficult to implement uniform accessibility standards.* *R3\_IDI\_SJ*

*More public and political pressure is needed for cinemas to start taking accessibility seriously... we need to put pressure on legislators.* *R1\_IDI\_SA*

## **Low public awareness and lack of solidarity towards the needs of persons with disabilities**

The low level of public awareness of the needs of the PD, particularly in the context of film culture accessibility, is a major challenge that further limits the implementation of accessibility solutions. Statements from respondents indicate that many people are unaware of the difficulties that blind or deaf people face when trying to enjoy a film. Lack of education and public dialogue means that the needs of the PD often remain misunderstood and overlooked.

*Often, people don't even realise how difficult it is for a blind person to enjoy a film. We need to talk more about these problems so that everyone understands our needs better.* <sup>R1\_IDI\_W</sup>

Public education is, according to experts, a key element in building a more inclusive society that is aware of the challenges faced by persons with disabilities. Developing knowledge both in the general public and among the staff of cultural institutions could significantly improve the understanding and effectiveness of accessibility measures, which at the moment remain marginal.



*Education is a key element. Without building awareness in the society and among cultural workers, accessibility will remain only marginal.* <sup>R4\_IDI\_SA</sup>

Respondents emphasise that a systemic approach to education is needed, involving both the staff of cultural institutions and the general public, which would allow a better understanding of the needs of the PD and develop solidarity in supporting them.

*We need to educate both the public and the staff of institutions to better understand the needs of persons with disabilities and be able to support them accordingly.* <sup>R4\_IDI\_SJ</sup>

## **Lack of forward thinking and recognition of the potential for investment in accessibility**

The lack of forward thinking in terms of cinema accessibility is a clear problem that limits the implementation of sustainable solutions. Many policy makers and cinema owners see infrastructure adaptation as a cost rather than an investment that could attract a larger and more diverse audience. Respondents point out that changing this

approach requires greater technological support and an understanding of the long-term benefits of accessibility.

*People don't understand that adapting a cinema is an investment. It requires a change in approach and more technological support, but it is possible.*

*R2\_IDI\_SA*

The example of visually impaired audiences, especially seniors, shows that accessibility does not only serve people with permanent disabilities, but can respond to the needs of a wider audience, including the elderly. A cinema adapted for the blind and visually impaired could attract more seniors, which, from a long-term perspective, would add value not only to the institution itself, but also to the local community.

*Most people with sight problems are senior citizens. A cinema accessible to the blind and visually impaired would also attract elder people.* *R2\_IDI\_W*

A decorative graphic consisting of several curved dotted lines in black, starting from the left and moving towards the right. To the right of these lines is a large, bold, black double quote mark (”).

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***The government needs to start acting on this, but also private cinemas need to understand that accessibility is not an add-on, but a necessity. Together we can do something.***

## Not enough pressure by the PD communities on accessibility issues

There is a noticeable lack of a clear push from the PD community on the need to implement accessibility in film culture. Respondents point out that, at the moment, the demand for accessible solutions is not sufficiently expressed by the PD groups, which weakens the power of impact of this demand on the decision-makers. According to a respondent, a stronger push and a stronger expression of expectations could have a greater impact on decisions to implement accessible solutions in cultural institutions.

*I don't see enough demand from these groups... that we just push the fact that we want it... R5\_IDI\_SJ*

It is also important that persons with disabilities be actively involved in decision-making processes to better adapt the available solutions to their real needs. The lack of such participation often leads to situations where the solutions implemented are only superficial or misguided.

*Persons with disabilities should be part of the decision-making process. Their voice is essential to ensure that the solutions implemented actually respond to real needs. R3\_IDI\_SJ*

## Low demand and self-fulfilling prophecy: few persons with disabilities visit cinemas

The paradoxical situation in which low demand for accessible screenings for the PD leads to even less commitment from cinemas and distributors perpetuates the problem of inaccessible film culture. Low attendance at screenings with audio-description and subtitles, often due to a lack of promotion and insufficient commitment to arranging convenient dates, reinforces the perception that demand for such events is negligible. As a result, cinemas abandon investment in accessibility, which they perceive as unprofitable.

*We had a screening of a film with audio-description, but the attendance was not high, we expected more people. Maybe the timing was wrong, but it shows that more promotion is needed.*

*R3\_IDI\_SJ*

This mechanism resembles a self-fulfilling prophecy: a lack of accessible events and promotion leads to low interest from the PD, which in turn reinforces cinema operators' belief that investment in accessibility has no purpose. If cinema operators and film distributors

recognised the potential demand and needs of this group, they would probably be more likely to seek funding for PD-tailored technology and content.

*If distributors and cinema operators felt that there was a demand on the part of these groups... they would be more intensive in asking for ... funding for this audiovisual content and technology.*

*R2\_IDI\_SJ*

## **Lack of coordination and leadership and spotty operations**

In the countries researched, the issue of film culture accessibility is mainly addressed in the form of scattered, piecemeal initiatives that do not add up to a coherent, systemic solution. There is no clear leader to comprehensively address and promote accessibility at the public level. Respondents note that activities are limited to individual initiatives which, while valuable, are not sufficiently agential to make a real difference.

*This is all fine, but these are individual small initiatives. It is not something that works systemically.* *R3\_IDI\_SJ*

Coordination of efforts and strong leadership are fundamental for film accessibility to be treated as a mandatory standard and not an optional extra. As one of our interviewees points out, both those in power and private cinema owners should take concerted action, realising that accessibility is a necessity and not just an add-on. Otherwise, the problem of accessibility will continue to be addressed only in the form of scattered, short-term measures.

*The government needs to start acting on this, but also private cinemas need to understand that accessibility is not an add-on, but a necessity. Together we can do something.* <sup>R1\_IDI\_SA</sup>

The lack of a leader able to coordinate efforts and present the problem in public communication exacerbates the fragmented nature of the actions taken. The example of the situation in Poland, where accessibility initiatives are beginning to gain support and coherence, shows that a comprehensive approach requires strong commitment from both authorities and the private sector.

*It takes a leader who will treat the issue as their cause and present it in public communication and finds a solution or develops one together.* <sup>R5\_IDI\_SJ</sup>

## **Lack of accessibility coordinators and risk of loss of motivation for those involved**

One of the significant problems related to the accessibility of film culture is the lack of coordinators responsible for implementing accessibility solutions on a large scale. Although there are people who are knowledgeable about subtitling and audio-description, the lack of structural support and dedicated coordinator positions means that these activities remain fragmented and depend on individual commitment.

*People do subtitles or know how to do audio commentary, but there are no coordinators able to implement this effectively on a large scale.* <sup>R1\_IDI\_RO</sup>

Respondents point out the risk of people involved in accessibility losing motivation. Such activities are often implemented on the initiative of individuals passionate about the subject, but the lack of support and formal structures can lead to their exhaustion. The fear that their energy will be used up calls into question the sustainability of the solutions implemented. The lack of adequate support and coordination systems raises a risk that initiatives that underpin accessibility in many cinemas will disappear.



*My fear is that when the energy of these individuals is exhausted, what then? Maybe others will emerge, maybe not.*

*R1\_IDI\_SJ*

## **Lack of training for distributors and contact with target group representatives**

Distributors and cinema owners often lack access to training to help them better understand the needs of the PD and implement appropriate solutions. The lack of regular training leaves cultural institutions without a basic knowledge of accessibility as well as knowledge of supporting technologies. As one of the respondents points out, even a small amount of training and direct contact with target groups could significantly improve the quality of adaptations, while at the same time increasing distributors' awareness of the real needs of viewers with disabilities.

*There are no mini-trainings to help cinemas... There is no direct contact with the groups.* <sup>R3\_IDI\_SA</sup>

The lack of such educational initiatives means that cinema distributors and operators have limited knowledge of audiences with disabilities, which in turn leads to inappropriate or incomplete solutions.



# 3

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## **Conclusions and recommendations**

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On the following pages we present the most important recommendations that directly result from the mapped problems and difficulties. We realise that most of them require a more systemic approach, such as in relation to legislation and the creation of accessibility standards, but many of them can already be implemented. The accessible culture model, which we discuss a little more below, is a certain framework to help structure our thinking about accessible culture. Importantly, it is worth remembering that it is not necessary to change everything at the same time. It is possible to implement changes gradually, initially inviting only one of the groups with impeded access to film culture to our institutions.





## The accessible culture model

The path of participation, by the Polish Culture without Barriers Foundation, is based on the concept of the recipient's journey through the entire cultural experience, taking into account the different stages and potential barriers. The approach analyses the journey that a person with a disability goes through from obtaining information about an event, to buying a ticket, to getting to the venue, to participation itself and returning home. Each stage takes into account the different needs of users, such as accessibility in terms of seeing, hearing, moving, understanding and feeling.

This model serves to identify and address barriers at a detailed level, enabling cultural institutions to analyse accessibility at every step and apply precise solutions that respond to the specific needs of different audiences.

With reference to this model, further, successive recommendations, recommendations, proposals are presented. The idea is to look at one's own activities as a complex service, which only seemingly consists of the main, key event. It is paramount to see all the stages that precede the climax (in this case the screening of the film) and that take place afterwards and their importance in creating a satisfying experience.



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***Working with organisations such as the blind association or the deaf association has allowed us to better tailor our screenings. We started holding regular meetings to learn about their needs.***



## Cyclical research

It is recommended to conduct systematic social research and consultations with the PD, especially those with sensory disabilities, and seniors. Regular mapping of needs allows cultural institutions to better understand the specific expectations of these groups, identify new barriers, and respond effectively to their changing requirements. Such consultations also support the creation of more inclusive solutions, enabling institutions to tailor their offer to truly respond to their audiences' daily challenges and needs.

It can be concluded that the knowledge of persons with sensory impairments as recipients of film culture in the countries researched is currently fragmented and largely based on observation and experience.

Fragmentation means that individual organisations or institutions have some view, insights, and knowledge about selected groups. Therefore, advocacy organisations have a range of knowledge about their community.

Public institutions are most likely to relate to the groups they target. And what activities are initiated is not always dictated by an in-depth analysis of the needs of diverse groups, but more by the proximity and visibility of a topic. As an example, one of the public institutions offers programmes aimed at people on the autism spectrum:

its involvement in those activities is partly due to the fact that some of the staff have people on the spectrum among their relatives. This observation does not, of course, negate the need for a programme for neurodiverse people, but merely refers to the fact that there is no good audience analysis.

The described fragmentation results in a lack of an overall picture: there are still plenty white spots on the map. In contrast, knowledge derived from experience and observation, which is often very useful, can be based on cognitive errors. One of them may be the accessibility heuristics: when we focus on what we can see, what is easily accessible, and ignore what is invisible, unmapped, inaccessible for some reason. This research can therefore be seen as an attempt to fill in some of the blanks on this map.



## **Accessibility as a value**

Accessibility is worth considering as a universal value, embracing all audiences. Designing events with accessibility in mind from the planning stage, allows you to create a space which becomes more and more barrier-free and more inclusive.

People with hearing and visual impairments repeatedly stressed that cinemas must offer universal solutions,

e.g. audio-description and subtitling, which enable all viewers to fully understand film content. Audio-description should be an integral part of every screening, not just an add-on. One interviewee is convinced that this is a standard in other countries, e.g. Poland (in fact, in our country, audio-description is only mandatory in productions that have received funding from the National Film Institute). Thus, audio-description and subtitling will be a standard in accessible cinema. The expert (leader of an organisation supporting the visually impaired), based also on her own experience, stressed: “We know from experience that visually impaired people very rarely go to the cinema because they don’t see the point – literally – in watching films without appropriate tools such as audio-description”.



## **Universal design**

The respondents stressed that accessibility must not be seen as an add-on for the PD, but as a standard available to all. One expert said: “I think the goal should be to create all films in this way, because I wouldn’t want people to make the mistake, as is the case with a lot of cinema websites, of creating a blind-friendly version, which was created in 2010 and has remained the same ever since. And then there is the so-called sighted version, which is updated daily, and the other part is forgotten. I don’t think



we should separate them, but the aim here should be, as in universal design, to give all existing target groups equal access to a given film”.

Universal design makes it possible to create events for everyone – the whole family can then go to the cinema. Accessible events must not create a sense of segregation, but be inclusive-oriented, open to everyone.



## **Information accessibility**

Informational accessibility is a key element in ensuring full participation in cultural events. Audiences will not take the risk of a trip to the cinema without clearly communicated accessibility information. Clear, understandable information is needed about what support and facilities are offered. Full information allows people to decide whether it is worth going to a screening. Information accessibility therefore means adapting websites so that navigating them (viewing available repertoire, booking and purchasing tickets) is easy and intuitive. Similarly, the promotion of the programme by traditional means (available posters and flyers) and on-site information accessibility should also be developed.



## Regular screenings and screening times

Varied days and times of screenings, as well as regular screening offer, would make cinemas more accessible to different audiences, including working people and seniors. One of the respondents notes:

*I would like to go to the cinema more often, but the show times are often inappropriate. Evenings are better for me because I work earlier.* <sup>R12\_FG\_SJ</sup>

The visually impaired and elder people prefer earlier screening times, especially in winter when dusk falls sooner. Combined with limited transport accessibility, getting home in the evening is seen as very challenging. The cinema could therefore organise screenings in the morning or afternoon to welcome audiences whose mobility is hindered after dark. One interviewee puts it this way: “There are times, especially in winter, when a film should not end after dark, so we would prefer earlier hours, for example a Saturday morning screening”. Some of the persons with hearing impairments prefer screenings in the afternoon or evening, as well as at weekends. Available screenings could take place once or twice a month.



## How far to the cinema?

We recommend carrying out an in-depth analysis of the ways in which audiences commute to cultural institutions, taking into account travel times, public transport accessibility, and barriers related to private transport. For many people, especially those with disabilities and seniors, a lack of adequate connections or logistical difficulties can be a significant barrier to attending cultural events. If, as a result of such a research, transport barriers prove to be a significant obstacle, it is worth considering other alternative forms of participation in organised events (e.g. home delivery cinema, a situation where films are watched in institutions of permanent residence).



## Assisted mobility

Assistantship and volunteering are an important part of making cultural institutions more accessible, especially to seniors and the PD. As one respondent noted:

*If young people from local schools could act as volunteers and accompany*

*seniors, this could not only solve the problem of transport, but also create valuable intergenerational relationships.* <sup>R5\_IDI\_SJ</sup>



## **Connecting cinema**

Inclusive sessions play an important role in building social bonds and fostering interpersonal relationships. As highlighted by one of the respondent:

*It's not just films. It's an opportunity for people to meet, talk and exchange experiences. Watching films together creates strong bonds between the centre's residents.* <sup>R5\_IDI\_SJ</sup>



## **Follow-up meetings**

Diversifying the repertoire and organising accompanying events are of paramount importance in creating an accessible cultural offer that meets the needs of different

audiences, including the elderly, families with children and the PD. A programme that takes into account novelty, genre diversity and accompanying events allows the offer to be tailored to meet diverse expectations. As respondents pointed out:

*We organise film workshops that integrate children, the elderly, but also persons with disabilities... We teach them how to make films, how to express themselves through the audiovisual medium. (...) we have a flexible programme to adapt to the needs of elder people, families with children and persons with disabilities. We try to organise screenings at convenient times and choose films that are suitable for them. (...) we have screenings for people with dementia, during which we provide additional psychological support. It is important that carers also have a space to talk and reflect.* <sup>R4\_IDI\_SJ</sup>

*I think It's very important that the film is entertaining. I wouldn't show them, say, a horror film or a drama, but rather something entertaining and hopeful that makes them feel good.* <sup>R3\_IDI\_SJ</sup>

This approach is inclusive, provides a comfort level of participation and creates a positive and supportive environment that encourages regular participation in film culture.

”

***Tickets sell out quickly because everyone buys them online.***

***Seniors often find out about them later and no longer have a chance to buy them.***



## Promotion as a relation

Promotion of cultural events should be based on building relationships with audiences and adapting communication channels to their preferences. Lack of appropriate information can significantly limit participation, especially for elder people and the PD. As one respondent said:

*Even if there were such shows,  
I don't know how I could find out about  
them. There is no information posted  
in channels I follow.* <sup>R3\_FG\_RO</sup>

Adapting communication to the audience's habits and the presence of information in their everyday spaces increases accessibility and engages the community.



## Creating partnerships and PD experts

Consultations, especially with persons with disabilities, and the creation of partnerships are fundamental in the design of accessible cultural spaces. Taking into account the perspective of audiences with diverse needs allows for a better understanding of the real barriers and more



effective removal of them. As one interviewee highlighted:

*Blind people need to be part of this process. We are the ones who know best what we need, so we should have a voice in the design of accessible spaces.* <sup>R2\_IDI\_W</sup>

Working with PD representatives and partner organisations allows for more relevant and inclusive solutions.



## **Various ticket purchase methods**

The ticket price and purchase process often limit access to events, especially for seniors and those with limited internet access. As a respondent stated:

*Tickets sell out quickly because everyone buys them online. Seniors often find out about them later and no longer have a chance to buy them.*  
<sup>R6\_FG\_RO</sup>

Providing alternative ticketing channels can level the playing field for participation, especially for less technology-proficient persons or the digitally excluded.



## Evaluation

Developing evaluation reports of ongoing projects and event cycles is fundamental to systematically improving accessibility. Analysing what has been done well and identifying areas for improvement allows specific improvements to be made to subsequent initiatives, thereby increasing their effectiveness and reach.



## Model cinemas

There was a suggestion that leading centres should be selected and considered as model centres. A model cinema that implements full accessibility could serve as a model for other institutions and show how to practically create a barrier-free space, which was raised in one of the interviews:

*Maybe it's worth picking one cinema that really wants to do it and let them do it in a year, two years... it could be a case research of barrier-free cinema. It's worth talking about it more...*

*If we have one such cinema as a case study... it would be nice if those concerned took a positive approach to it.* <sup>R5\_IDI\_SJ</sup>

The creation of such a space can serve as a reference and inspiration for other institutions seeking to increase accessibility. The cinemas and cultural venues that contribute to the Cinema without Barriers project are often just such model spaces.



## **In need of cooperation**

Successful improvement of accessibility to film culture requires extensive cooperation between the film sector, cultural institutions, NGOs and the PD. As one interviewee noted:

*Working with organisations such as the blind association or the deaf association has allowed us to better tailor our screenings. We started holding regular meetings to learn about their needs.* <sup>R4\_IDI\_SJ</sup>

Interaction with local authorities and cultural institutions further supports accessibility for groups such as seniors. Another respondent highlights:

*Cooperation with local authorities and cultural institutions could significantly improve the accessibility of culture for our seniors.* <sup>R3\_IDI\_SA</sup>



## **Developing accessibility standards**

One of the major challenges requiring action at the macro level remains the legal ordering of cultural accessibility. The introduction of consistent accessibility standards covering, among other things, architectural, audiovisual and communication requirements, goes beyond the capacity of individual institutions and requires systemic legislative solutions. Only consistent implementation of such standards can ensure lasting and widespread changes in access to culture for all citizens. However, it is worthwhile to organise (network) and create – together with the self-advocates – groups of pressure on both local and state authorities.



## Increasing budgets for accessible cinema

Related to the above is another very important, if not key, demand. Financial support from the state, and a system of incentives such as tax breaks, can significantly increase the accessibility of cinemas. As another respondent said:

*If there were tax breaks or other incentives, more cinemas could invest in accessibility technology.* <sup>R5\_IDI\_SJ</sup>

Such mechanisms would support cultural institutions to invest in accessibility solutions, enabling them to better tailor their offer to the needs of the PD.



## Consistency in action

Ensuring that cinemas are fully accessible is a long process that requires the involvement of many actors, including the state, which plays a primary role here.

*I believe that accessible cinema can be the norm, but we need to*

*keep working on awareness, training and investment. It's a long process, but we are seeing positive results from our efforts.* <sup>R4\_IDI\_SA</sup>

A coordinated effort involving education, training and investment is needed to make cinema accessibility a norm.



## **Education**

Continuous improvement of accessibility-related skills plays a key role at multiple levels. It is necessary to systematically educate cultural staff and officials about the needs, motivations and ways of living of the PD and seniors. At the same time, it is important to educate the public through information and public awareness campaigns on accessibility and inclusion.

A third important aspect concerns the education of people with experience of disability themselves about accessible solutions and how to use them. Developing skills in the use of accessibility tools and strengthening self-awareness and community involvement support their role as advocacy groups. As one interviewee in Hungary emphasised: “Nothing about us without us”.



## New technologies

Artificial intelligence (AI) has great potential to support the accessibility of film productions and screenings for persons with sensory and mobility impairments. We used ChatGPT to see what specific actions it could be. Here is the response we received:

“Here are five examples of the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to support the accessibility of film productions and screenings for persons with sensory and mobility impairments:

### **1. Automation of subtitling and sign language translation**

AI-based systems using speech recognition technology can generate real-time subtitles and automatically translate dialogue into sign language. Such solutions are particularly important for the deaf and hard-of-hearing, enabling them to enjoy films more fully and independently.

### **2. Automatic audio-description**

The use of AI for the automatic creation of audio-description makes it possible to generate descriptions of the most relevant visual elements and actions on the fly, which is invaluable for the blind or visually impaired.

Automatic audio-description can significantly reduce the costs associated with preparing accessible versions of films and extend their accessibility.

### **3. Personalisation of control interfaces**

AI systems make it possible to adapt film screening interfaces and controls to the needs of people with reduced mobility. These solutions include, among other things, voice control and adaptation of the visual interface, making film screenings and the devices required to operate them more accessible.

### **4. Analysis of the spatial accessibility of cinemas**

Thanks to their spatial analysis capabilities, AI systems can support the assessment of the infrastructural accessibility of cinema halls by, for example, adjusting seating arrangements, providing space for wheelchairs and installing technology to support the reception of audiovisual content by persons with sensory impairments.


### **5. Supporting education and awareness campaigns**

AI-powered platforms can serve as an educational tool, providing information on accessibility and the supporting technologies used. This education can apply both to the general public and to organisations working to make cultural events more accessible.



In conclusion, it is impossible to ignore the important question that keeps coming back, be it on the Baltic, the Adriatic or the Black Sea or Lake Balaton: “Is it even worth it to us?”

We discussed this issue extensively in a research project carried out in Poland in winter 2023.

You can read the details  [HERE](#)

In countries such as Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia and Romania, the accessibility of cinemas for the PD and senior audiences is still sometimes seen as a costly investment with low returns. A limited number of disabled audiences and high costs of adaptation are cited as a disincentive for cinema owners and policy makers. There is also a lack of perspective on the issue of accessibility.

Meanwhile, adapting cinemas not only expands their audience, but also – in the longer term – prepares them for the changing demographic needs. An ageing population will require increasingly accessible services in the coming years. Everyone, regardless of their current state of health, may experience a decline in sight, hearing or mobility in the future.

Introducing accessibility now can have long-term benefits. Accessible cinemas become more friendly to seniors and people whose abilities will decline with age. This approach not only increases the return on investment, but also builds a positive image of cinemas as institutions that respond to real community needs.

A large, bold, black number '4' is centered in the upper half of the page. The background features abstract, flowing shapes in shades of orange and light blue. A horizontal dotted line is positioned below the number.

4

**Final  
comments**

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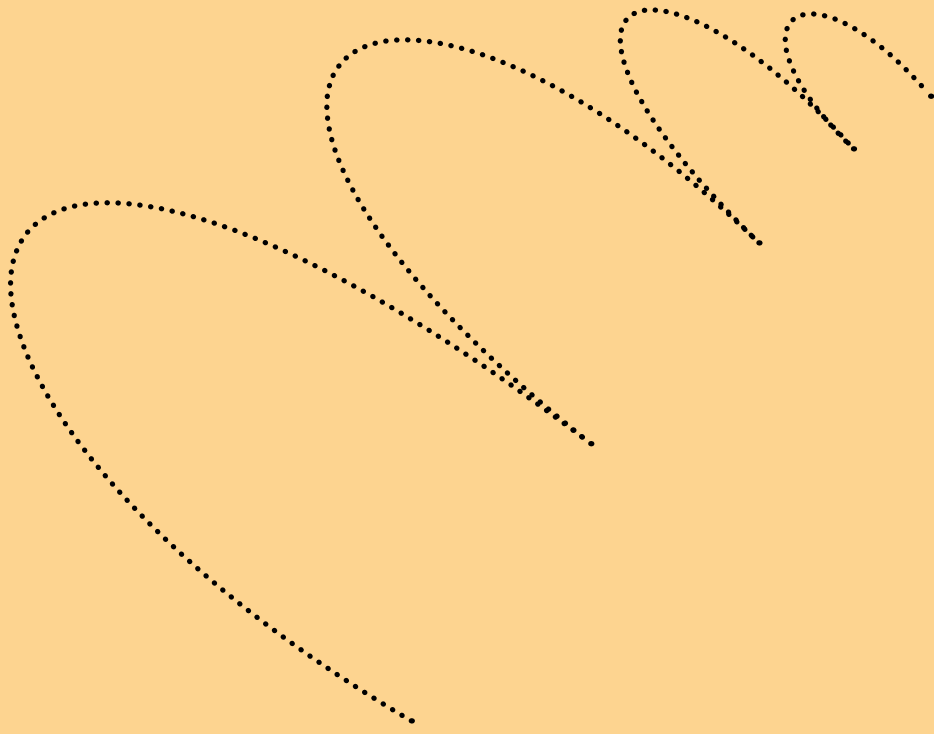
On the basis of the focus group and expert interviews, it can be assumed that persons with sensory impairments constitute a small, but permanently present audience. At the same time, the researched group is interested in the cinema offer and would use it more often and more willingly if cinemas were accessible. Carrying out extended audience research in each of the participating countries (Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, Hungary) would provide insight into that group's potential. The offer of a free audit by a partner advocacy organisation has not been welcomed with interest among the owners and representatives of establishments and institutions in one of the counties. One reason for this is the fear of having to implement many expensive facilities in which they do not see the potential.

There is a definite lack of broader and comprehensive research about the specific needs of the PD and the barriers they face when attending film screenings. The participants in this research were mostly urban, economically active, some were socially active.

Hence, we do not know, for example, what cinema-going and cinema-culture consumption practices occur among people from rural areas. We have not been able to reach such people directly, just as we have not been able to reach another group about which information is lacking – young people and young adults. During the interviews it was pointed out that it is difficult to engage them, to encourage them to participate in culture. According to the respondents, younger generations have different viewing practices – the Internet and streaming platforms are the most attractive for them. Gender should also be taken into account in the analysis. According to one expert, women are more active, open and interested in participating in society: “They are more open to social issues, easier to talk to, easier to catch on, I think, in many cases than men”. The issue of cultural capital, education and material situation also seems to be important. According to an expert, the majority of persons with hearing impairments have vocational and primary education,

with only a small group having completed higher education. Typical occupations here, according to the interviewee, are upholsterer, carpenter, seamstress, warehouseman, cleaning staff: “basically anything that is related to vision, and thus more related to another sense”.

The incompleteness and fragmented nature of the data described here significantly limit the possibility of preparing a single cinema programme for the PD. This is worth bearing in mind. However, this does not mean that the themes, topics and suggestions collected in this research do not give us the opportunity to move forward. On the contrary, the fact that most of the comments appeared in all the countries researched (including Poland) is an important starting point. However, it is important to remember that the audience is internally diverse, that it is not a homogeneous group. There are still many people, including those with disabilities, about whom we know little or nothing.



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***We even involved those who can't even get out of their beds, so we took them with their beds into this multi-purpose room and they watched the film there as a group so they felt like they were in a cinema.***



PART II

**Situation of  
persons with  
disabilities  
in the different  
countries  
researched**

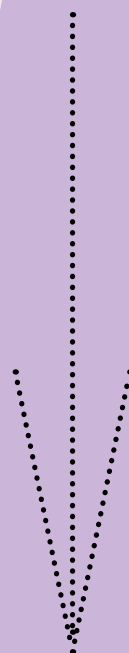
The following pages present selected comments on the situation of the PD in individual countries (Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, Romania) and possible additional comments (distinguishing the situation of a country from the others – if applicable). The overview of the situation in each country is always discussed in four sections: Seeing, Hearing, Mobility and Legislation. The information gathered relates to the analysis of source texts, mainly the content of reports, studies and news appearing on websites. The researcher performing the desk research looked for information in English (if appropriately prepared sub-sites existed). If the only available data came from sources developed in the national languages of the countries included in the analysis, then Polish translations prepared by AI (artificial intelligence) were used. It cannot be ruled out that this may have sometimes resulted in errors, although the researcher always sought confirmation of the information in another source. The analysis is not complete and, although content was reviewed against the same criteria, it was not always possible to reach all answers of interest.

After the part resulting from the found content analysis, there is additional information that comes from the qualitative research conducted.





# A



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# Romania

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In 2023, in Romania, there are **approximately 900,000** registered **PD**, representing about 4.5% of the total population, the majority being women. There are also about **77,000 children** in this group. PD in Romania often have a lower level of education and difficulties in accessing the labour market; 16,000 of them live in social care centres, but a significant number of them resides in other institutions, such as psychiatric hospitals.<sup>1</sup>

## Seeing



It is estimated that in 2020 there were 3.4 million people in Romania experiencing some form of sight loss. Of these, 59,000 were blind.<sup>2</sup> By 2024, this number will have risen to 100,000.

### Challenges for the blind in Romania:

- 1. Limited access to medical services.** Many people find it difficult to access specialist ophthalmic services, especially in rural areas.

1 (<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/romania/brief/disability-inclusive-social-protection-in-romania>, [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Disability\\_statistics\\_-\\_poverty\\_and\\_income\\_inequalities](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Disability_statistics_-_poverty_and_income_inequalities)) dostę: 26.11.2024

2 <https://www.iapb.org/learn/vision-atlas/magnitude-and-projections/countries/romania/>

- 2. Social integration.** Blind people face difficulties in social and professional integration due to inadequate infrastructure and lack of access to modern assistive technologies.
- 3. Access to education.** The visually impaired have limited opportunities for education, often due to a lack of adapted educational materials and technical support.
- 4. Lack of guide dogs.** There are relatively few guide dogs in the country, which limits the mobility and independence of blind people.

In view of these challenges, there are organisations in Romania, e.g. Light Into Europe, whose support to blind people includes guide dogs and mobility training to assist in daily life and social integration.<sup>3</sup>

## Participation in culture

The Association of the Blind in Romania (Asociația Nevăzătorilor din România) operates in the country and offers support for access to culture, education and entertainment. The organisation helps to adapt various cultural events and fights for the rights of the PD. The association provides the following services:

- access to books in all formats for the blind and visually impaired (Braille, audio, electronic, large print);

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<sup>3</sup> <https://lightintoeurope.ro>

- providing books in accessible formats for the visually impaired through branch libraries and audio-libraries across the country;
- providing information to blind people through Braille, audio and print publications;
- organising vocational and artistic competitions in the fields of music, literature and the press;
- organising competitions in the efficient use of Braille for adults;
- organising social integration competitions for visually impaired women;
- organising screenings of films accessible to the blind through audio-description.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, and among others, cultural participation is supported by the following organisations:

- **Fundatia Cartea Călătoare**, which mainly makes books and educational materials accessible to blind people. It provides audiobooks, books in Braille and other materials accessible to the visually impaired. The foundation also develops technologies to support the education of blind children and adults.<sup>5</sup>
- **Sense International România**, a branch of an international organisation supporting people with dual

4 <https://www.anvr.ro/serviciile-oferite-si-programele-desfasurate/>

5 <http://www.fcc.ro>

disabilities (blind and deaf), which offers educational and rehabilitation programmes and support for families; works with educational institutions and hospitals to provide better access to therapy and rehabilitation.<sup>6</sup>

- **Asociația Tandem**, promoting an active lifestyle among blind and partially sighted people through sport and culture. Among other things, it implemented a project to create a sensory theatre performance based on harnessing the creative potential of the visually impaired, initiated by the Theatre School for the Blind “Theatre and Nights”. Their last cultural project was in 2021.<sup>7</sup>
- **Asociația Pontes**, a non-governmental organisation that works for the blind people, offering them access to culture, education and new technologies; it organises language courses, vocational workshops and integration events to support the development and build independence of the blind.<sup>8</sup>
- **Asociația Nevăzătorilor din România** supports blind people through the development of social, professional and sports skills; it organises sports competitions, development workshops and cultural events that help integrate and activate blind people socially.<sup>9</sup>

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6 <https://surdocecitate.ro/en/home/>

7 <https://www.asociatiatandem.ro/tandem-art/>

8 <https://www.pontes.ro>

9 <https://www.anvr.ro/blog>

## Access to film culture

Film culture in Romania is significantly limited for blind people. Large festivals such as the Transilvania International Film Festival (TIFF), Next Film Festival or Festivalul de Film și Televiziune Simultan do not have audio-description events in their programmes.

The **Grand Cinema & More** in Bucharest has the necessary equipment for audio-description and, as it assures on its website, offers it during most of its events<sup>10</sup> (however, to inquire about a specific title, you should call the cinema office). Elvire Popesco Cinema, thanks to the “Cinema without Barriers” project, will be the first cinema in the country with a regular offer of screenings adapted to the needs of the hearing impaired and the blind.<sup>11</sup> However, information about the project is not strongly displayed and finding specific titles is difficult (there is no corresponding tab).

## Hearing



According to a report prepared by the European Federation of Hard of Hearing People, the estimated number of people reporting any hearing problems in Romania is around 19.5%.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, the European Union of the Deaf estimates that the number of deaf people using Romanian

<sup>10</sup> <https://archive.grandcinema.com/hearing-visual/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://institutfrançais.ro/bucuresti/cinema-fara-bariere/#/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://efhoh.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Getting-the-numbers-right-on-Hearing-Loss-Hearing-Care-and-Hearing-Aid-Use-in-Europe-March-202473.pdf>

Sign Language (Limba Mimico-Gestual Romanesc) is around 24,000; this is the number of users registered with the National Association of the Deaf in Romania.<sup>13</sup>

## Participation in culture

There are a growing number of cultural events in Romania that are accessible to the hard of hearing. Here are some examples:

### 1. Timișoara 2023 – European Capital of Culture.

Among the many events associated with the European Capital of Culture programme were concerts in Piața Unirii (Union Square, the largest in the city), during which deaf people benefited from sign language interpretation by acclaimed interpreters Lavinia Chițu and Denis Blidariu.<sup>14</sup> The promotional materials read: “Hearing-impaired audiences in Timișoara will for the first time be able to benefit from the artistic interpretation of the concerts that will take place on Piața Unirii. On Friday 17 February, Lavinia Chițu, one of the few Romanian concert sign language interpreters, will stand on stage with the artists and interpret the words and transmit the rhythm of the music so that people with hearing loss can enjoy this unforgettable performance”.<sup>15</sup>

13 <https://www.eud.eu/member-countries/romania/>

14 <https://jurnalul.ro/cultura/muzica/timisoara-2023-la-nesfarsit-concerte-cu-interpretare-in-limba-semnelor-romane-si-transport-accesibilizat-950395.html>

15 <https://www.radioromaniacultural.ro/timisoara-2023-capitala-europeana-a-culturii/deschiderea-timisoara-2023-o-sarbatoare-incluziva-pentru-intreaga-comunitate-id36297.html>

## 2. **Animest International Animated Film Festival.**

In 2024, the festival offered specially adapted screenings with visual description and sign language translation. In addition, two feature-length films for all ages and a selection of short films for children were provided with simplified subtitles.<sup>16</sup>

3. **The ToMiMEUs** (Towards a Multisensory and Inclusive Museum for Individuals with Sensory Disabilities) project operated in Romania as a collaboration between the Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania in Cluj-Napoca and partners from Greece, Turkey and Hungary. Its aim was to increase the accessibility of museums for persons with sensory impairments, including the hard of hearing. Museums organised training for staff to better understand the needs of visitors with hearing and visual impairments. Part of the project were workshops and also technology was implemented to facilitate visits.<sup>17</sup> However, based on the analysis of the museum's website, it is not possible to conclude that accessibility was put on the agenda, meaning that the impact resulting from participation in the project was insufficient and did not translate into the institution's offer.<sup>18</sup>

16 <https://danielurda.ro/evenimente/animatii-accesibilizate-pentru-persoane-cu-deficiente-de-auz/>, <https://www.radoromania.ro/cultura/animest-2024-filme-accesibile-pentru-spectatorii-cu-deficiente-de-auz-id31076.html>

17 <https://tomimeus.eu>, <https://www.muzeul-etnografic.ro/ro/articole/evenimente/muzeele-isi-diversifica-oferta-culturala-pentru-persoanele-cu-deficiente-de>

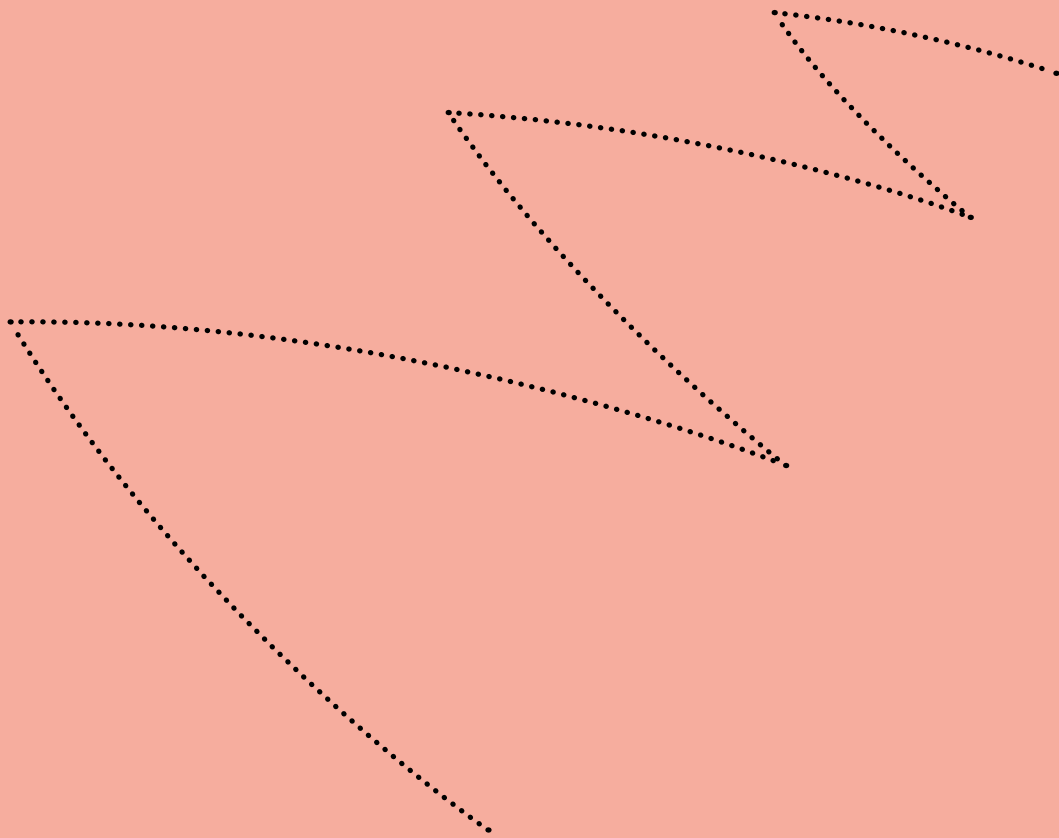
18 <https://www.muzeul-etnografic.ro/en>



## Participation in film culture

Apart from the previously described Animest festival and the Romanian edition of the “Cinema without Barriers” project, it is difficult to find information on events accessible to the hard of hearing or d/Deaf. Increased attention to these issues could be observed in connection with the declaration of Timișoara as European Capital of Culture in 2023, but the extent of adaptations can be assessed as rudimentary and focusing only on tools rather than on the comprehensive inclusion of people and organisations representing the PD community in the co-creation of events.

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***It is very difficult to get around the city if you are a wheelchair user. The whole city seems inaccessible.***

# Mobility



The situation for wheelchair users still needs to be improved, especially in terms of accessibility of public spaces, transport and the labour market. Here are its key aspects:

## Infrastructure accessibility

According to data from 2010-2016, it is estimated that between 110,000 and 297,000 people in Romania use or need wheelchairs. Challenges they face include a lack of adequate wheelchair-adapted services, as well as limited access to public infrastructure and transport. In 2017, only 7 per cent of schools there were fully accessible to pupils with mobility impairments, severely limiting their educational opportunities.<sup>19</sup>

Organisations such as **Fundatia Motivation România** run numerous initiatives, such as the Mobility Caravan, which offers health and rehabilitation services for wheelchair users. The aim of these projects is to improve the quality of life and mobility of persons with mobility impairments.<sup>20</sup>

Despite these measures, accessibility barriers remain a challenge, with many wheelchair users struggling with a lack of adequate funding and limited access to good quality equipment.

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19 [https://www.wheelchairnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/MotivationRomania-Needs-Assessment-Report\\_Oct2017.pdf](https://www.wheelchairnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/MotivationRomania-Needs-Assessment-Report_Oct2017.pdf), <https://motivation.ro/en/blog/36-people-with-disabilities-participated-at-mobility-and-health-caravan-organized-this-year/>

20 <https://motivation.ro/programe-si-proiecte/caravana-mobilitatii/>

In Romania, persons with mobility impairments, including people in wheelchairs, face numerous difficulties in their daily lives due to the inadequate accessibility in public buildings and means of transport. Although there are regulations requiring the adaptation of public spaces, many of them are still not up to standard. The biggest problems relate to the lack of ramps, lifts and low-floor buses.<sup>21</sup>

## Participation in culture

The wheelchair accessibility of cultural institutions in Romania remains a challenge, although some of the needed solutions have already been implemented in some places. According to the 2021 research, only a few cultural institutions are fully adapted to the needs of the PD. Examples of positive developments include the **Grigore Antipa National Museum of Natural History**, the **National Library of Romania** and the **Excelsior Theatre** in Bucharest, which provide ramps, properly adapted restrooms and lift access. Nonetheless, most cultural institutions in the country do not meet basic accessibility standards.

According to a 2021 World Bank research, about three quarters of venues do not have accessible restrooms, more than 60% do not have reserved seats for persons with disabilities, almost 90% do not provide sign language translation of events. The same research indicates that accessibility is not taken into account at cultural events, with the exception of a few major cities and Bucharest.

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21 <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?oldid=561947>

At the same time, the websites of cultural institutions lack information about accessibility (or the lack thereof) so that persons with disabilities can plan their visit.<sup>22</sup>

## Participation in film culture

In Romania, the accessibility of cinemas for wheelchair users is limited, but some establishments are taking steps to improve this situation. For example:

1. In Timișoara, facilities such as ramps and parking spaces have been introduced for events organised by **Ceau, Cinema!** and during cultural events related to the **Timișoara – European Capital of Culture 2023** programme, facilities such as ramps and parking spaces have been introduced for wheelchair users. These initiatives are part of a wider programme to improve the accessibility of cultural events in the city.<sup>23</sup>
2. In its analysis of cinema infrastructure in Romania, the Culturadata report indicates that in larger cities such as Bucharest, Timișoara and Cluj-Napoca, wheelchair accessibility of cinemas is at a higher level, especially in modern multiplexes. However, many rural regions lack cinema infrastructure in general, further limiting access for the PD.<sup>24</sup>

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22 <https://www.code4.ro/ro/raport-dizabilitati-cultura-si-participarea-civica>, <https://ultima-ora.ro/studiu-privind-accesul-persoanelor-cu-dizabilitati-in-institutiile-publice/>

23 <https://www.tion.ro/stirile-judetului-timis/timisoara-culturala-din-perspectiva-persoanelor-cu-dizabilitati-1778676/>

24 <https://culturadata.ro/interactiv/publication/the-cinema-network/access-to-cinema/>

3. Other venues, such as **Cinema City Cotroceni** in Bucharest, also report wheelchair-friendly facilities, including wide entrances, parking spaces and lifts, making them more accessible to the PD.<sup>25</sup>

While these initiatives show some progress, many cinemas in Romania still need to be upgraded in terms of accessibility for people with reduced mobility.

## Legislation



In Romania, the rights of the PD are regulated by several flagship laws, regulations and other acts guaranteeing their equality and possibility to integrate in society. Here are the most important ones:

1. Law No. 448/2006 of 6 December 2006 on the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities
  - It is the main law regulating the rights of the PD in Romania. It addresses a wide range of issues such as:
    - **access to education** – ensures equal access to education at all levels;
    - **employment** – supports labour market integration, including the provision of adapted workstations;

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25 <https://disabilityhorizons.com/2017/06/accessible-romania-vibrant-welcoming-country/>

– **access to public space** – regulates the accessibility of public buildings, transport and other public services.

## 2. United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (ratified by Romania in 2010)

- Romania has ratified the United Nations Convention, which obliges states to ensure equal rights for the PD, including in access to education, work, health, justice and political life.
- **Source:** UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities<sup>26</sup>

## 3. Government Regulation No. 137/2000 on preventing and combating all forms of discrimination

- The Act prohibits discrimination against the PD in all aspects of society, including employment, education and access to services.

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<sup>26</sup> <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-crpd>

## **Additional comments. Research information:**



In Romania, the problem of PD accessibility is particularly serious. As one respondent states:

*Nothing is available in this country.*

*R4\_IDI\_RO*

Accessibility of urban infrastructure, especially for wheelchair users, remains far from sufficient. One interviewee points out the difficulties associated with mobility in urban spaces:

*It is very difficult to get around the city if you are a wheelchair user.*

*The whole city seems inaccessible.*

*R3\_IDI\_RO*

Despite these challenges, attempts have been made to improve the situation. In Timișoara, including in connection with the city's declaration as European Capital of Culture in 2023, accessibility audits were carried out in selected premises of cultural institutions – museums, exhibition halls, etc. The audits were aimed at assessing the adaptation of spaces to the needs of different groups, with a particular focus on blind people.





**B**



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**Slovenia**

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In Slovenia in 2023, approximately **15.6 per cent of the adult population** (persons aged 16 years and older) declared limitations in daily activities related to disability. This value includes people reporting both mild and severe limitations. This compares with an average rate of about 26.8 per cent of the PD across the European Union. Women in Slovenia declared it slightly more often than men, especially in elder age groups.

The number of people at risk of poverty among the PD is also significantly higher than among people without disabilities, which is a general trend in the EU. In Slovenia, this indicator is also at a high level.

These data are mainly derived from reports by Eurostat and other European institutions monitoring the situation of the PD in member states.<sup>27</sup>

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27 <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/SEPDF/cache/122127.pdf>

# Seeing



In Slovenia, the number of blind and severely sight-impaired people is estimated to be around 30,000. According to data from international organisations such as the **International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB)**, the majority of cases involving total blindness in Slovenia concern people over 50 years of age, which is in line with global trends. More than 59% of those with sight problems are women, due to differences in life expectancy and health factors specific to women.<sup>28</sup>

The most common causes of sight loss there are diseases such as cataracts, glaucoma and age-related macular degeneration. Medical care in Slovenia is at a relatively high level, but there are still problems with access to specialised ophthalmic services in the provinces.<sup>29</sup>

## Participation in culture

In the country's capital, measures have been taken to make cultural events more accessible to people with different types of disabilities, including the blind and visually impaired. Museums in Ljubljana and other cities offer specially adapted tours with audio guides and the possibility to touch the exhibits. In addition, there are organisations such as the Association of the Blind and Visually Impaired

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28 <https://www.iapb.org/learn/vision-atlas/magnitude-and-projections/countries/slovenia/>, [https://www.iapb.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Vision-Atlas\\_Evidence-Series\\_Magnitude-of-Vision-Loss\\_24022021.pdf](https://www.iapb.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Vision-Atlas_Evidence-Series_Magnitude-of-Vision-Loss_24022021.pdf)

29 <https://www.stat.si/StatWeb/en/News/Index/12883>, <https://www.iapb.org/learn/vision-atlas/magnitude-and-projections/countries/slovenia/>

in the country that support the participation of those people in cultural life through access to literature in Braille and the promotion of adapted forms of entertainment. Despite the progress, the availability of cultural content with audio-description is still limited, and only a small percentage of books are available in formats accessible to blind people.

*An increasing number of public and cultural facilities are equipped with induction loops and lifts, and public transport is more accessible. Under the Butchers' Bridge (Mesarski most), persons with disabilities can also access tourist boats on the Ljubljana River, and a special 65+ information point is available for elder people and people with special needs.*<sup>30</sup>

In Slovenia, there are several cultural institutions adapted to the needs of blind and visually impaired people which actively support their access to culture:

- 1. National Gallery** in Ljubljana offers special facilities such as free admission for the PD and classes using tactile replicas of paintings. Visually impaired visitors can use audiovisual and tactile materials to help them learn about works of art.
- 2. Museum of Puppetry** in Ljubljana has audio guides in 14 languages, which are adapted for the blind and visually impaired. In addition, visitors can touch the exhibits, which is an important part of the interaction with the exhibition.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> <https://www.slovenia.info/en/plan-your-trip/accessible-tourism>

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

**3. Center IRIS**, Centre for Education, Rehabilitation, Integration and Counselling for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Ljubljana offers support in accessing education and culture; it cooperates with other centres in Slovenia to provide access to cultural materials in formats adapted for blind people.<sup>32</sup>

Outside the capital, **the museums of the municipality of Radovljica** have very well developed accessibility at the level of mobility, seeing and hearing. There are a number of tactile objects in the Museum of Beekeeping that enable blind and visually impaired visitors to learn about the most important exhibits and their history (tactile replicas of selected museum objects). The museum also provides the opportunity to touch some of the original exhibits. The exhibition is complemented by sound recordings and audio content. On a computer tablet is a unique board with a cross-section of a beehive developed especially for the Beekeeping Museum by the Slovenian company Feelif. This innovative technology allows visually impaired visitors to experience the image through combined vibrations, sound and visual information (audio-description). Museum brochures in Braille are available at the Beekeeping Museum as well as the Blacksmithing Museum, the City Museum and the Hostage Museum in Begunje na Gorenjskem.<sup>33</sup>

It is, however, difficult to find institutions outside the capital that include information on their websites regarding

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<sup>32</sup> <http://center-iris.si/>

<sup>33</sup> <https://mro.si/dostopnost>

solutions for the blind and visually impaired. Interestingly, the Regional Museum in Kopra and the museum at Škofja Loka Castle publish rules on visiting the institution with a dog in their portals under the accessibility tabs, and these do not apply to guide dogs, but to any dog.<sup>34</sup>

## Participation in film culture

In Slovenia, cinemas accessible for the blind and visually impaired are scarce. Accessibility solutions are mostly available at selected festivals, while permanent, everyday solutions are lacking. The glorious exception is the Kinodvor cinema, which we will come back to at the end of this section.

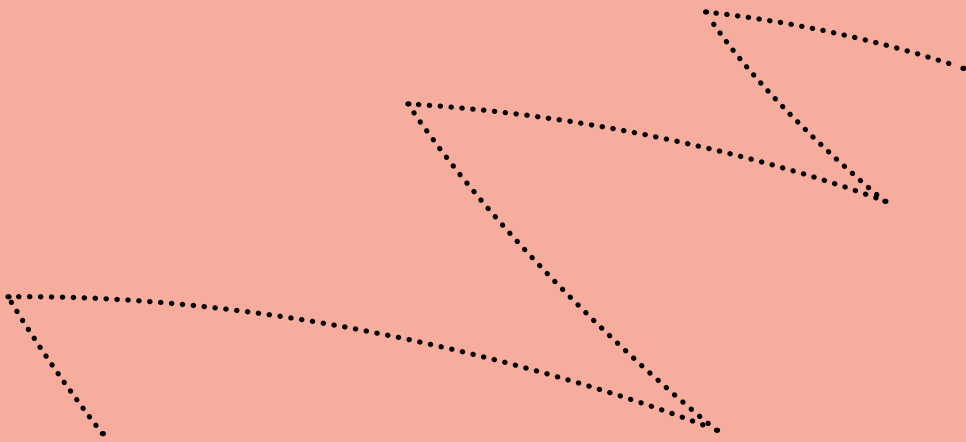
**Slovenska Kinoteka** organises the FeKK Ljubljana Short Film Festival, where films with audio-description were presented in 2023. It is difficult to find information about other such screenings.<sup>35</sup>

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34 <https://www.loski-muzej.si/en/accessibility/>, <https://www.pokrajinskimuzejkoper.si/en/informacije/psom-prijazen-muzej>

35 <https://www.kinosiska.si/en/dogodek/fer-fekk/>

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***Many of our residents have hearing and sight problems, which means that even if they can watch a film, they are not always able to fully understand it, especially if there are no subtitles or there is a lot of fast-paced action.***

# Hearing



It is estimated that there are about 1,500 d/Deaf people in Slovenia, of whom about 1,000 use sign language as their first language. In 2021, Slovenian Sign Language was officially recognised as a cultural minority language, and enshrined in the Slovenian Constitution which provides its users with certain rights, including access to interpreter.<sup>36</sup>

Also the Union of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Slovenia supports persons with hearing impairments, helping them with social integration and promoting their rights.

## Participation in culture

- 1. Interpreter's Theatre** is an initiative which enables d/Deaf people to watch theatre performances with sign language interpretation. It has included such screenings at the Municipal Theatre in Ljubljana as the musical *The Addams Family*.<sup>37</sup>
- 2. The House of Sign Language**, a newly established centre in Ljubljana, will not only be an educational venue, but also a museum dedicated to the history and culture of d/Deaf people in Slovenia. Its aim is to promote the cultural heritage of this community.<sup>38</sup>

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36 <https://www.deafblindinternational.org/slovenia-became-the-first-country-to-include-the-language-of-the-deafblind-in-the-constitution/>

37 <https://www.nlb.si/inclusion-of-the-deaf-into-the-world-of-the-hearing>

38 <https://www.deafhistory.eu/index.php/component/zoo/item/the-house-of-sign-language>



- 3. Ljubljana City Museum** is accessible for the deaf and hearing impaired. Guided tours are arranged by prior appointment.
- 4. Some Slovenian institutions are also participating in the AccessCULT project** which focuses on making **cultural heritage** more **accessible to persons with disabilities** in Europe. Its aim is to create tools, educational materials and programmes that support professionals involved in the cultural and heritage sector in adapting their activities and facilities to the needs of people with different disabilities. The project also aims to raise awareness of accessibility and promote good practices in the field.<sup>39</sup>

## Participation in film culture

- 1. Kinodvor in Ljubljana** regularly organises special film events for the deaf and hearing impaired, offering subtitles in Slovenian and sign language interpretation. Ten such events are planned for 2024, including discussions with guests, interpreted live into sign language.<sup>40</sup> The main hall is equipped with an induction loop.<sup>41</sup>
- 2. The Cinema without Barriers** project: thanks to this international initiative, within the framework of which this research has been conducted,

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<sup>39</sup> <https://accesscult.eu/about-the-project/>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.ljubljana.si/en/news/kinodvor-for-the-deaf-and-hard-of-hearing/>

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.kinodvor.org/en/visit-us/>

accessible screenings have been introduced at the cinema in Kulturni dom Cerknica. This is part of a wider strategy to increase the accessibility of film culture in Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>42</sup>

## Mobility



Exact statistics on the number of wheelchair users in Slovenia are not readily available.

Compared to other European countries, Slovenia is one of the more wheelchair-friendly countries, especially in terms of tourism. The capital city Ljubljana, with its numerous facilities in museums, galleries and public spaces, has won awards for accessibility: the Access City Bronze Award in 2015 and Silver Award in 2018.<sup>43</sup>

There is an official website on accessible tourism in Slovenia, offering information on tourist attractions (including cultural institutions) adapted to the PD. The country tries to be friendly to people with reduced mobility and many cities, such as Ljubljana, Postojna and the seaside resorts, provide accessible restrooms, ramps and other facilities. The website also informs users of accessibility in hotels, thermal pools and national parks, as well as accessible transport, such as Kavalir electric vehicles.<sup>44</sup>

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42 [https://accessible-eu-centre.ec.europa.eu/content-corner/news/cinema-without-barriers-development-accessible-cinematography-central-and-eastern-europe-2024-09-24\\_en](https://accessible-eu-centre.ec.europa.eu/content-corner/news/cinema-without-barriers-development-accessible-cinematography-central-and-eastern-europe-2024-09-24_en)

43 <https://www.feelnoimits.com/news/slovenia-is-one-of-the-most-wheelchair-friendly-destinations-in-europe-2021-03-23>

44 <https://www.slovenia.info/en/plan-your-trip/accessible-tourism>

## Participation in culture

Many museums, galleries and other cultural spaces in Ljubljana, such as the **City Museum** or the **National Gallery**, offer ramps, lifts, and accessible restrooms. In other cities (Piran, Maribor or Koper), so-called barrier-free paths have been organised, making these places more accessible to people with reduced mobility.

- 1. National Museum of Slovenia** in Ljubljana provides full access to the building via ramps and lifts.
- 2. National Gallery of Slovenia** in Ljubljana offers free admission and special facilities (including accessible restrooms) for the PD.
- 3. Museum of Puppetry** in Ljubljana is wheelchair accessible; it is equipped with audio guides and has adapted spaces.
- 4. The Škofja Loka Castle** museum is accessible for wheelchair users.
- 5. Military History Park in Pivka** offers access to all parts of the exhibition via ramps and lifts.
- 6. Copra Regional Museum** offers full wheelchair access, with staff prepared to assist the PD in overcoming architectural barriers.

## Participation in film culture

1. An example of a Slovenian cinema accessible to wheelchair users is the aforementioned **Kinodvor** in Ljubljana. The institution's website offers detailed information on facilities such as accessible entrances, lifts and wheelchair space; the Kinodvor café and bookshop are fully accessible to wheelchair users. The main hall is accessible by lift and has easy access to the accessible restroom. However, access to the small hall is limited.<sup>45</sup>
2. **The Maribox** in Maribor is a cinema without architectural barriers: it is equipped with a lift and wheelchair space and offers free tickets to its users.<sup>46</sup>
3. The **Mestni Kino Ptuj**, on the other hand, is poorly accessible. However, in line with the principle that accessibility is also information, it is worth noting how the organisers communicate the lack of accessibility: *The cinema is poorly accessible. It has a larger and smaller auditorium and a summer theatre in the courtyard. There are ramps leading up to the building and into the courtyard, but these are too steep, do not have adequate handrails and do not allow independent use. There is an adapted side entrance for wheelchair users directly next to the main entrance. The seats in the larger hall are immobile. There are no wheelchair accessible seats. The smaller auditorium is only*

45 <https://www.kinodvor.org/en/visit-us/>

46 <https://invalidska-kartica.si/en/ponudnik/maribox/>

*accessible by stairs. There are no accessible restrooms in the theatre. The halls are not equipped with an induction loop.*<sup>47</sup>

## Legislation



In Slovenia, accessibility for persons with disabilities is regulated at both national and European level, and this law covers the provision of access to products, services and public buildings.

1. The **Accessibility of Products and Services for Persons with Disabilities Act** (adopted in 2023) implements the **European Accessibility Act**. Under the law, from 2025 persons with disabilities will have equal access to a wide range of products and services, including computers, smartphones, telecommunications services and public transport. The law also places obligations on businesses to ensure that their own products and services are accessible.<sup>48</sup>
2. **Most architectural barriers** in public spaces are envisaged to be removed by 2025 under the Slovenian Act on PD Equality. Although in some cases accessibility in public buildings remains an issue, there are active initiatives such as Dostopnost that monitor obstacles and provide assistance in removing them.

<sup>47</sup> <https://invalidska-kartica.si/en/ponudnik/mestni-kino-ptuj-center-interesnih-dejavnosti-ptuj/>

<sup>48</sup> [https://accessible-eu-centre.ec.europa.eu/content-corner/news/european-accessibility-act-adopted-slovenia-2023-12-19\\_en](https://accessible-eu-centre.ec.europa.eu/content-corner/news/european-accessibility-act-adopted-slovenia-2023-12-19_en)

**3. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**, which Slovenia has ratified, obliges the country to further improve the accessibility of infrastructure, especially in public services such as social welfare centres.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> <https://www.theioi.org/ioi-news/current-news/ombudsman-s-special-report-on-accessibility-of-social-work-centres-for-people-with-disabilities>



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***Regular film screenings or other cultural events really do make a huge difference to the mental health of our residents. When they attend such events, their mental state improves significantly. It's part of our therapy, but also a way of improving their quality of life.***

## **Additional comments. Research information:**



The Kinodvor cinema in Slovenia is distinguished by an approach in which accessibility is a key part of its identity. The cinema adapts not only its space but also its film content to make it more accessible to persons with sensory impairments. As one of its representatives points out:

*For us, accessibility is more than just building ramps and providing lifts. It's also about accessibility of content: audio-description, subtitles for the deaf, and technology to help us reach audiences with disabilities.* <sup>R1\_IDI\_SA</sup>

One social care home in Ljubljana took an innovative approach to film accessibility: it enabled elder people who cannot leave their beds independently to attend film screenings together. As one staff member notes:

*We even involved those who can't even get out of their beds, so we took them with their beds into this multi-purpose room and they watched the film there as a group so they felt like they were in a cinema.* <sup>R4\_IDI\_SA</sup>



The mobile projector and screen provided by cultural associations allow film screenings to be organised on site, making culture more accessible to seniors. Staff at the nursing home emphasise the therapeutic impact of such events on the mental state of the residents:

*Regular film screenings or other cultural events really do make a huge difference to the mental health of our residents. When they attend such events, their mental state improves significantly. It's part of our therapy, but also a way of improving their quality of life.* <sup>R4\_IDI\_SA</sup>

For seniors who have perceptual limitations, audio-description and subtitling are extremely important as they allow them to understand films better:

*Many of our residents have hearing and sight problems, which means that even if they can watch a film, they are not always able to fully understand it, especially if there are no subtitles or there is a lot of fast-paced action.* <sup>R4\_IDI\_SA</sup>

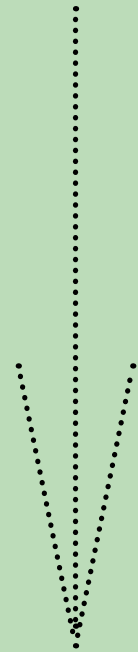
The introduction of screenings with audio-description and subtitles enables wider participation and improves the reception of film culture for elder people. The respondent continues her reflections on this topic:

*If we could show films with subtitles or audio-description more often, I think more people could benefit from it. It really helps people who have difficulty understanding the image or sound alone.* <sup>R4\_IDI\_SA</sup>

This example shows that the availability of film culture can play not only an integrative role, but also a therapeutic one, significantly influencing the living comfort and mental state of elder people.



C



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**Hungary**

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According to 2011 data, there were approximately **500,000 PD** living in Hungary, which includes both people with physical, sensory and intellectual disabilities.<sup>50</sup>

They face significant challenges, including difficulties in accessing education, employment, healthcare and culture.<sup>51</sup>

One of the main problems is the lack of progress in the process of **deinstitutionalisation**, i.e. moving people from large care institutions to smaller, local, more “home-like” facilities. The government continues to invest in maintaining care institutions, which is criticised especially in the context of the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.<sup>52</sup>

Persons with disabilities in Hungary are also at higher risk of poverty and social exclusion.<sup>53</sup>

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50 [http://www.mdac.org/sites/mdac.info/files/factsheet\\_tophaz\\_report\\_1.pdf](http://www.mdac.org/sites/mdac.info/files/factsheet_tophaz_report_1.pdf)

51 [https://www.eca.europa.eu/ECAPublications/SR-2023-20/SR-2023-20\\_EN.pdf](https://www.eca.europa.eu/ECAPublications/SR-2023-20/SR-2023-20_EN.pdf)

52 <https://validity.ngo/2023/11/25/hungary-remains-responsible-for-grave-and-systematic-violations-of-disability-rights/>

53 [https://www.eca.europa.eu/ECAPublications/SR-2023-20/SR-2023-20\\_EN.pdf](https://www.eca.europa.eu/ECAPublications/SR-2023-20/SR-2023-20_EN.pdf)

# Seeing



It was estimated that around **1.8 million** people living in Hungary in 2020 experience some kind of sight problem, of which **36,000** are completely blind. This means that about **0.4%** of the country's population suffers from total sight loss and nearly **19%** experience sight loss to varying degree. The majority of people losing their sight are women (62%).

The biggest challenges blind people face in Hungary are difficulties in accessing specialised healthcare and architectural barriers that hinder social integration. In addition, they often have limited access to modern assistive technologies, such as devices or software to make life easier for people losing their sight.<sup>54</sup>

## Participation in culture

The **Hungarian National Association of the Blind and Visually Impaired (MVGYOSZ)** works for the integration of blind people by offering, among other things, an audio library and educational programmes to help them better access cultural resources.<sup>55</sup>

Some institutions take initiatives to ensure accessibility for blind people, both in Budapest and outside the capital.

54 <https://www.iapb.org/learn/vision-atlas/magnitude-and-projections/countries/hungary/>

55 <https://www.mvgyosz.hu/en/about-us/>

1. The **Sensory Garden in Budapest**, built in 1972 in the City Park as a Blind Garden; in 2018, its infrastructure was extensively upgraded to meet the modern demands of accessibility for the visually impaired. Among other things, the park features a special tactile path, raised flower beds with Braille signage, fountains, sports and recreational equipment and playgrounds adapted for children with disabilities.<sup>56</sup>
2. The **Invisible Exhibition** in Budapest is an interactive exhibition run by blind people. Visitors experience everyday activities performed in total darkness. The exhibition provides a better understanding of the challenges that blind people face.<sup>57</sup>
3. The **Hungarian National Gallery** in Budapest organises tours with audio-description and other special programmes for, for visually impaired visitors who can enjoy very detailed descriptions of works of art during their visit. These programmes are part of the museum's regular offer and can be booked upon request.<sup>58</sup>
4. The **Museum of Fine Arts** in Budapest also offers programmes for the blind, including tactile exhibitions. Museum educators organise workshops and guided tours to help blind people experience art through senses other than sight.<sup>59</sup>

56 <https://ligetbudapest.hu/en/the-project/sensory-garden>

57 <https://www.lathatatlan.hu/en/what-is-it/>

58 <https://en.mng.hu/programmes/for-visitors-with-special-needs/>

59 <https://www.mfab.hu/events/blind-and-partially-sighted-visitors/>

## Participation in film culture

The researchers could not find cinemas or specific shows accessible to blind and partially sighted people based on internet searches.

The organisation **AKKU** (Az Akadálymentes és Korlátlan Kultúráért Egyesület, Association for Barrier and Restriction Free Culture) works with various partners to enable visually impaired people to use, for example, audio-description at film and theatre screenings. Thanks to this initiative, Hungarian cinemas have already been offering selected screenings with audio-description since 2017, allowing visually impaired people to participate in culture more fully.<sup>60</sup>

## Hearing



According to the European Union of the Deaf, approximately 9,000 people in Hungary use sign language as their primary means of communication.<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, based on data from the website of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, in 2022 there were more than 24,000 people who were hard of hearing and more than 6,000 d/Deaf people, making a total of about 30,000 people.<sup>62</sup> Broader data are hardly available.

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<sup>60</sup> <https://akku Egyesulet.hu/esemenynaptar/szinhaz/>

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.eud.eu/member-countries/hungary/>

<sup>62</sup> [https://www.ksh.hu/stadat\\_files/ege/hu/ege0033.html](https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/ege/hu/ege0033.html)

## Participation in culture

It is difficult to find information on cultural events translated into sign language. Apart from a few musical events held in Veszprém, which was one of the European Capitals of Culture in 2023,<sup>63</sup> no relevant examples were found.

Under a “Special needs – hearing problems” tab, the **Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest** only informs its users that the descriptions of the works are bilingual [sic].<sup>64</sup>

## Participation in film culture

No information was found on films translated into sign language, but information was found on subtitled films distributed on streaming platforms.<sup>65</sup> It is, however, impossible to determine whether a subtitled option was available and used in cinemas.

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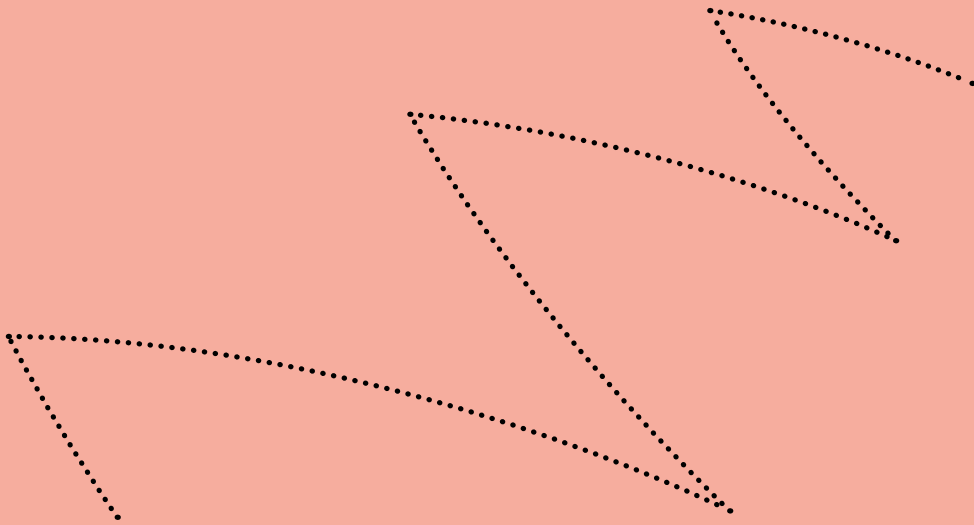
63 <https://helloveb.hu/hir/jelnyelvi-tolmacsolassal-kisert-koncerteken-bulizhattak-a-siketek-es-nagyothallok-a-gyarkert-kulturparkban>

64 <https://www.mfab.hu/events/deaf-or-hard-of-hearing-visitors/>

65 <https://thevore.com/hungarian-movies/>



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***So for us, the aim is to make sure that it is appropriate, that the accessibility is suitable for the needs of our target group. Unfortunately, I can't say that this is often applied. I think they're worried that we're going to ask for too much or similar things, whereas we're used to coming up with solutions that are as cheap as possible but are otherwise useful.***

# Mobility



There is no accurate data on the number of people who use wheelchairs/have mobility impairments. The Hungarian Statistical Office only provides approximate information. According to the 2022 data concerning the PD, about **112,000** people have severe mobility problems, which probably includes not only wheelchair users.<sup>66</sup> These data are derived from national research and censuses, through which information on disability and access to assistive devices is updated every few years.

## Participation in culture

**Museums and galleries.** Most major institutions, such as the **Hungarian National Museum** and the **Hungarian National Gallery** in Budapest, offer accessible entrances, lifts and restrooms accessible for the PD. Special attention is paid to space arrangement, so that wheelchair users can easily enjoy exhibitions and events.

**Thermal baths.** Budapest's famous baths, such as the **Széchenyi Thermal Baths**, **Gellért Thermal Baths** and **Rudas Thermal Baths**, offer pool lifts and adapted restrooms and changing rooms, allowing wheelchair users to enjoy these popular attractions.

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<sup>66</sup> [https://www.ksh.hu/stadat\\_files/ege/hu/ege0033.html](https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/ege/hu/ege0033.html)

**Public facilities.** Many public places, such as the **Parliament building** and the **Hungarian State Opera**, offer special entrances and lifts so that people with limited mobility can participate in cultural events.

## **Participation in film culture**

Specific information on the architectural accessibility of individual cinemas is difficult to come across. Budapest's **Cinema City Arena** and **Cinema City Mammut** have adapted halls, restrooms and car parks for people with alternative mobility, but there is only residual information on the solutions provided on the website.<sup>67</sup>

It is worth noting an interesting example of inclusion that is **Premier Kultcafé**, one of Europe's largest community and cultural spaces employing persons with intellectual disabilities. There is a café, a cinema and a barrier-free event hall. Premier Kultcafé organises film screenings, concerts and exhibitions; it offers fully accessible cinema rooms (unfortunately, there is no information on whether accessibility refers only to architectural issues or also to sensory aspects).<sup>68</sup>

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67 [https://www.cinemacity.hu/cinemas/arena/1132?lang=en\\_GB#/facilities](https://www.cinemacity.hu/cinemas/arena/1132?lang=en_GB#/facilities)

68 <https://www.premiercafe.hu/english/>

# Legislation



In Hungary, the protection of the PD rights is mainly resolved under Act XXVI of 1998 on the rights and equal opportunities of persons with disabilities. The Act aims to guarantee equal opportunities, independent living and active participation in society. The accessibility provisions include the right to employment, education and social integration; they also require the provision of reasonable adjustments in the workplace and public spaces.

Another important document is the National Programme for Persons with Disabilities, which focuses on increasing employment through rehabilitation and incentives for employers to create jobs for people with reduced work capacity.<sup>69</sup>

Despite the legislation, international organisations continue to highlight systemic problems such as the limited decision-making autonomy of persons with disabilities, as well as issues related to the over-institutionalisation of the functioning of the PD in public/social life in Hungary and the insufficient availability of equality education.

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<sup>69</sup> <https://disabilityin.org/country/hungary/>

## **Additional comments. Research information:**



Accessible cinema is still not a standard in Hungary for several reasons. One of them is the low awareness of accessibility among cinema owners and decision-makers. The lack of knowledge translates into a failure to see the potential in creating accessible film programmes.

Cinemas and other institutions in Szolnok (home of one of the partner organisations) can benefit from a free accessibility mapping service offered by one of the NGOs providing comprehensive support to the visually impaired. Accessibility mapping is a kind of audit. The interviewee describes it as follows:

*So for us, the aim is to make sure that it is appropriate, that the accessibility is suitable for the needs of our target group. Unfortunately, I can't say that this is often applied. I think they're worried that we're going to ask for too much or similar things, whereas we're used to coming up with solutions that are as cheap as possible but are otherwise useful.* <sup>R1\_FG\_W</sup>

Ignorance combined with concerns about the costs of introducing accessibility solutions translates into a lack of political support and appropriate state regulation. The lack of a legal obligation to provide audio-description for productions co-financed with public funds (as is the case in Poland and other countries) is cited as an example. At the same time, without financial support from the state, the implementation of accessible solutions will remain unsatisfactory in terms of extent and pace.

NGOs choose a conciliation strategy here, relying on education and persuasion, encouraging the implementation of different solutions. They reject the assertion of the PD rights through litigation. One expert said:

*We could even bring regular prosecutions against service providers and public institutions, for example for breaches of equal treatment or equal access, but I do not believe in that. I believe in partnership. I believe in discussion on the issue.*

*R2\_FG\_W*



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**Slovakia**

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In Slovakia, PD make up **about 30% of the population**<sup>70</sup> and, as in other countries in the region, they face many problems despite the reforms introduced. Here are the main challenges:

- 1. Poverty risk.** Although Slovakia has one of the lower poverty risk rates among the PD in the European Union (18.6%), those people continue to face economic hardship and the gap in living standards between the PD and the rest of the population remains significant.
- 2. Access to the labour market.** The PD often have difficult access to employment. Its rate is much lower than the EU average, which is linked to the lack of appropriate support programmes and workplace adjustments.<sup>71</sup>
- 3. Accessibility of social services.** Although reforms, such as the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Plan (its Polish equivalent is the *KPO*), aim to improve the availability of social services, there are no individual services oriented towards the needs of the PD. The insufficient number of specialists – medical practitioners and social workers – further hinders full access to the already existing forms of support.

70 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/pl/infographics/disability-eu-facts-figures/#0>

71 <https://www.edf-feph.org/publications/european-semester-spring-package-2023-how-well-does-it-reflect-the-issues-faced-by-persons-with-disabilities/>



**4. Problems with disability assessment.** The disability assessment process is complex and complicated in Slovakia, leading to a fragmented benefits system and unequal access to services. Reforms are underway to simplify the system and ensure better assessment of the needs of people with different types of disability.<sup>72</sup>

## Seeing



In Slovakia, the number of blind and partially sighted people is estimated to be around 100,000. The Union of the Blind and Visually Impaired of Slovenia (UNSS) actively supports this group by offering services such as Braille instruction, white cane use and assistive technology training. The UNSS also runs eight regional centres that provide free services to blind and visually impaired people. Nevertheless, one of the main challenges remains the high level of unemployment, where many employers still avoid hiring visually impaired people.<sup>73</sup>

## Participation in culture

**1. The Bratislava Cultural and Information Centre (BKIS)** organises special city walks adapted to the needs of the visually impaired: for example, guided tours that describe the city's architecture and history in a way that is adapted to the visually impaired.

72 <https://ivpr.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/DAR-Slovakia.pdf>

73 <https://www.euroblind.org/convention/article-26/slovakia>, <https://reportersonline.eu/things-improve-slowly-for-the-slovakian-blind-and-partially-sighted/>

Such initiatives aim to integrate people with various disabilities into the cultural life of the city.<sup>74</sup>

2. Various projects, including **ARCHES**, introduce modern technologies, such as mobile apps and tactile replicas of works of art to help blind people make better use of museum collections. The projects aim to eliminate barriers to accessing cultural heritage through innovative tools such as tactile representations of images (tactile prints) and audio-description.<sup>75</sup>
3. In Slovakia, accessibility of museums for the blind is slowly improving, and several institutions already offer special facilities. One example is the **Archaeological Museum in Bratislava** (a branch of the National Museum of Slovakia), which offers tactile models of exhibits and audio terminals, allowing blind people to visit the museum independently. Other museums, such as **Stará Ľubovňa Castle** and parts of the exhibitions at **Bojnice Castle** and the **Speleological Museum** in Liptovský Mikuláš, have also adapted their exhibitions for the visually impaired visitors by offering tactile replicas of the exhibits and descriptions in Braille.<sup>76</sup>

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74 <https://bratislava.sk/en/blog/accessible-bratislava-christmas>

75 <https://cordis.europa.eu/article/id/413505-technical-innovations-help-overcome-access-barriers-to-cultural-spaces>

76 <https://unss.sk/slovak-blind-and-partially-sighted-union/>, <https://slovakia.travel/en/disabled-access-travel-in-slovakia>

## Participation in film culture

Based on available online sources, and as a result of one of the expert interviews, it was possible to find information about the Usmev cinema in Kosice, which is the second accessibility-oriented cinema, right next to the Lumière cinema in Bratislava. At the same time, it is worth noting that the annual report on the condition of the Slovak audiovisual sector does not address the topic of accessibility of cinematography and its presentation at all (the last report was published in 2022).<sup>77</sup>

Among the rare examples of good practice is the **Audiovision without Barriers** initiative, which operates within the framework of the documentary film festival **Jeden Svet**, where audio-description is added to selected films.<sup>78</sup>

The **Lumière** cinema in Bratislava is also a partner of the European initiative **“Cinema without Barriers”** and organises screenings for persons with sensory impairments.<sup>79</sup>

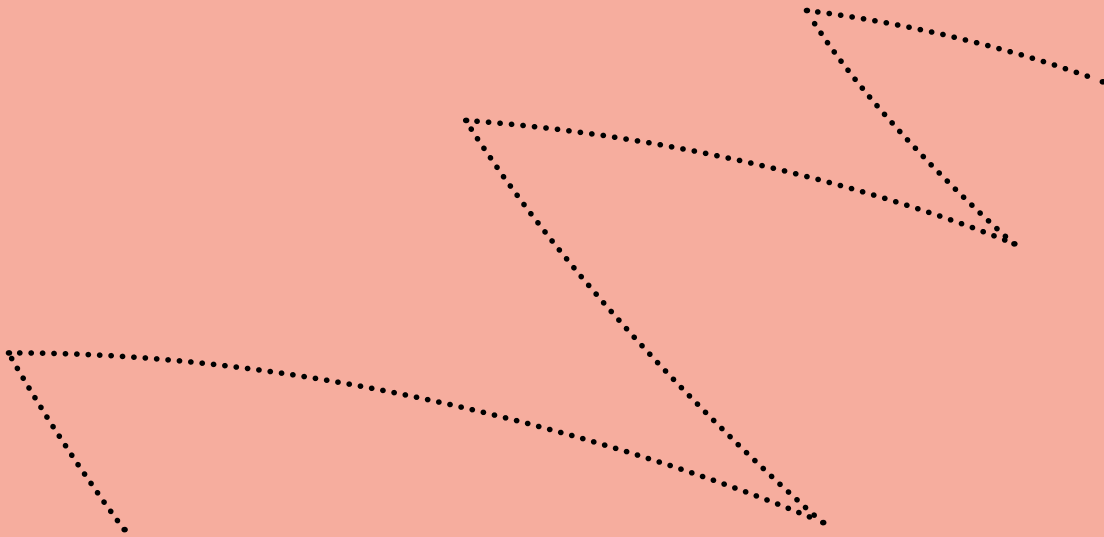
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77 [https://cedslovakia.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/REPORT-2022\\_web.pdf](https://cedslovakia.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/REPORT-2022_web.pdf)

78 <https://www.jedensvet.sk/en/podujatie/audiovision-without-barriers-ii-blind-people-have-the-right-to-cinema-too/>

79 [https://accessible-eu-centre.ec.europa.eu/content-corner/news/cinema-without-barriers-development-accessible-cinematography-central-and-eastern-europe-2024-09-24\\_en](https://accessible-eu-centre.ec.europa.eu/content-corner/news/cinema-without-barriers-development-accessible-cinematography-central-and-eastern-europe-2024-09-24_en)

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***We offer  
six cycles that  
are accessible to  
vulnerable groups...  
Deaf Friendly...  
Blind Friendly.***

# Hearing



Slovak demographic data on people with hearing loss are very general. It is estimated that in a country with a population of around 5.4 million, around 200,000 people may experience it to varying degrees. This group includes a minority community of Deaf people.

The main challenges faced by d/Deaf people in Slovakia are limited access to specialised education and, directly correlated with this, a higher incidence of joblessness compared to hearing people.<sup>80</sup>

According to the 2021 census, around **2,000** people declared Slovak sign language as their mother tongue. This, however, does not include all its users, as many hard-of-hearing people or those using other methods of communication may use sign language occasionally and not as their primary means of communication.<sup>81</sup>

Slovak Sign Language, like other sign languages, is an independent and fully-fledged language with its own grammar and vocabulary, distinct from spoken language, making it an extremely important cultural tool for the deaf community.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> <https://dennikn.sk/388217/lekar-hluchotu-ludia-stale-beru-osud-zmieria-sa-nou/>

<sup>81</sup> <https://www.ta3.com/relacia/23042/posunkovy-jazyk-uviedlo-za-svoj-materinsky-takmer-dvetisic-ludi-ake-zaujimavosti-prinieslo-scitanie-obyvateľstva>

<sup>82</sup> <https://www.teraz.sk/slovensko/podla-odbornika-je-pocet-posunkujuci/609923-clanok.html>

## Participation in culture

Sign language interpreting is sometimes, but rarely, offered in theatres; it is usually only available during special events organised, for example, in connection with the International Deaf Day. Those events usually take place in large cities such as Bratislava, which limits accessibility for people from other parts of the country. In some cases, the integration of sign language interpreting in performances is limited and is sometimes seen as an additional, later-introduced element rather than a full-fledged part of the performance, which reduces the artistic quality of the reception by d/Deaf audiences.<sup>83</sup>

The general accessibility of museums for deaf people in Slovakia is still not widespread and is mainly limited to local initiatives undertaken in cooperation with organisations working with the deaf communities. The “Art & Signs” project is one example of activities aimed at making museums more accessible to the deaf people. This programme offers training for museum staff in dealing with d/Deaf people and involves, among other things, learning the basics of sign language and visual communication strategies. The aim is to enable d/Deaf visitors to better understand art and learn about the exhibits.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> [https://www.sav.sk/journals/uploads/10041755WLS\\_3\\_2024\\_Verebova\\_Perez.pdf](https://www.sav.sk/journals/uploads/10041755WLS_3_2024_Verebova_Perez.pdf), <https://www.bridge.ff.ukf.sk/index.php/bridge/article/view/124/96>

<sup>84</sup> <https://www.artsignsproject.eu/platform/cor/art-culture-deaf-audience/>

## Participation in film culture

The international documentary film festival Jeden Svet is a significant example of a national good practice. Jeden Svet enables access through SDH, audio-description and interpretation into Slovak Sign Language. A deaf or blind person can find out from the website what to do if they want to watch a film (the programme includes options to filter for subtitles, AD, or Slovak Sign Language). During the festival, trained sign language volunteers are present at the screening venues, wearing T-shirts with the sign language logo. They also help blind or visually impaired visitors to orient themselves in the cinema and provide guidance to and from the screening venuei.<sup>85</sup>

However, in general, the availability of films in cinemas on a daily basis, including during standard screenings, is limited. In contrast to countries such as the Czech Republic, where subtitled films are more accessible, in Slovakia similar screenings are rather rare and most often only take place during festivals or screenings for specific category groups.

In summary, films in Slovakia are accessible to d/Deaf people mainly during special events, but accessibility in cinemas and on a large scale remains insufficient.

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<sup>85</sup> <https://www.jedensvet.sk/en/about-us/>

# Mobility



The number of wheelchair users in Slovakia is not precisely known, but some clues can be drawn from statistics on benefit recipients. In 2023, the number of people entitled to receive benefits was around 220,000 and included people with various disabilities, including mobility impairments. In recent years, due to unfavourable changes in legislation for those concerned, the number of people receiving such benefits has declined.<sup>86</sup>

## Participation in culture

Slovak cultural institutions are gradually becoming more accessible to wheelchair users, although there are still areas for improvement. Organisations such as **“Kultúra bez Barrier”** monitor and promote the removal of physical and informational barriers to cultural access for the PD. Their portal provides detailed information about cultural institutions in Slovakia that are accessible to people with various disabilities, including wheelchair users.<sup>87</sup>

Many museums, including the **Museum of Jewish Culture** in Bratislava, offer appropriate facilities, such as lifts, ramps and assistance with minor obstacles such as stairs.<sup>88</sup> The Slovak Ministry of Culture also runs programmes to subsidise institutions that want to improve accessibility

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<sup>86</sup> <https://www.iz.sk/sk/projekty/zdravotne-postihnuti/invalidni-dochodcovia>

<sup>87</sup> <https://kulturabezbariery.sk/kto-sme/>

<sup>88</sup> <https://www.snm.sk/muzea-snm/muzeum-zidovskej-kultury/muzeum-zidovskej-kultury/navstivte/informacie-pre-navstevnikov>



by installing adapted entrances, lifts and special equipment.<sup>89</sup>

However, there is still a need for other projects, especially in smaller towns and in historic, listed buildings, to ensure full access to culture for all people with limited mobility.<sup>90</sup>

Institutions where accessible architectural solutions are beginning to be introduced, although they are not always perfect:

- Some branches of the **Slovak National Museum**, including the aforementioned Museum of Jewish Culture in Bratislava, offer the possibility to enter through the annexe after informing security in advance.<sup>91</sup>
- For a list of other institutions accessible to people with alternative motor skills, see:  
<https://kulturabezbariery.sk/kulturne-institucie/osoby-s-poruchou-pohyboveho-aparatu/>

## Participation in film culture

The **Úsmev cinema** in Košice offers assistants and various forms of support for the PD, but is still working on the complete removal of architectural barriers, such as stairs leading to the cinema halls. Further investments are planned to make the cinema fully accessible.

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<sup>89</sup> <https://www.culture.gov.sk/ministerstvo/dotacie-mk-sr/dotacie-2021/program-2-kultura-znevyhodnenych-skupin-na-rok-2021/program-2-kultura-znevyhodnenych-skupin-na-rok-2021-podprogram-2-5/>

<sup>90</sup> <https://www.ecav.sk/aktuality/spravodajstvo/kultura-pre-vsetkych-debarierizacia-v-cirkvi>

<sup>91</sup> <https://www.snm.sk/en/visit/information-for-visitors/information-for-visitors>

For several years now, as we also learn from the interviews, the Úsmev cinema has been actively involved in making film art and cultural events accessible to different PD groups in order to promote integration. They organise sensory-friendly screenings: dementia friendly, deaf friendly, blind friendly.<sup>92</sup>

## Legislation



Slovak PD-related legislation includes a number of laws and regulations that aim to protect their rights and promote their integration into society. The most important include:

- **Act on disabilities and equal opportunities.**  
In Slovakia, **Act No. 5/2004 on Employment** is in force, which provides for the promotion of PD employment, including the obligation for employers to employ a certain percentage of persons with disabilities (3.2% for companies with more than 20 employees). The Act also provides for grants and subsidies for the adaptation of workstations for the PD.
- **Entitlement to social benefits.** Persons with disabilities can apply for **social benefits** such as pensions, care allowances or technical support, including the purchase of equipment (e.g. wheelchairs).
- **Law on accessibility of public space.** Slovakia has a **barrier-removal** policy in place, which means that public institutions must gradually remove architectural

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<sup>92</sup> <https://kinousmev.sk/pristupnost/>

barriers to ensure PD accessibility, especially in the context of public infrastructure, culture and transport.

- **Rules on access to education.** According to the legislation, persons with disabilities have the right to education in facilities adapted to their needs. The Education System Act obliges schools to make the necessary adaptations, including teaching materials and improving the relevant infrastructure
- **Anti-Discrimination Act.** In Slovakia, **Act No. 365/2004 on Equal Opportunities** is in force, which prohibits any discrimination on the basis of disability in various areas of public life, including employment, access to services, education and health care.

The aforementioned legislation provides protection and support for the PD in various aspects of life, and places an obligation on public and private institutions to adapt services and infrastructure to their needs.

## **Additional comments. Research information:**



In Slovakia, blind people have access to Slovak and Czech films through libraries offering mp3 audio-description tracks. One interviewee explains:

*Our films are in Slovak and Czech libraries for the blind. There is actually only a soundtrack in mp3 format with audio-description. I choose them on the basis of what is known, iconic.* <sup>R1\_FG\_SJ</sup>

The cinema in Košice attracts a diverse audience: deaf people, the visually impaired, senior citizens, children on the autism spectrum and families with young children. To better meet the needs of those groups, meetings are organised with their representatives. As our respondent underlines:

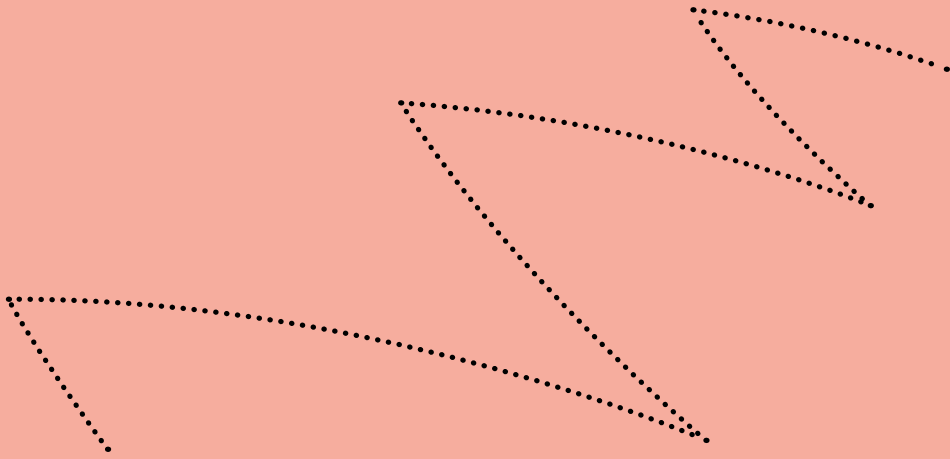
*We conducted a needs research and knew which cycles we wanted. The chairman of the Council of Senior Citizens of Košice, members of the Association of the Blind and Visually Impaired of Slovakia, the Association of the Deaf and the Regional Centre of Košice were present.* <sup>R4\_IDI\_SJ</sup>

The Úsmev cinema in Košice also offers special film cycles, such as Deaf Friendly, aimed at deaf people, and Blind Friendly, for the visually impaired and blind.

*We offer six cycles that are accessible to vulnerable groups... Deaf Friendly... Blind Friendly.* <sup>R4\_IDI\_SJ</sup>

However, the question arises whether such special events, while increasing accessibility, do not create some sort of accessibility “islands” or “ghettos”, separating those groups from other mainstream events.

”



***Watching a film without an audio-description is like listening to part of a conversation through a door: you hear the voices, but have no idea what's going on.***

## **Research team:**

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Partners:

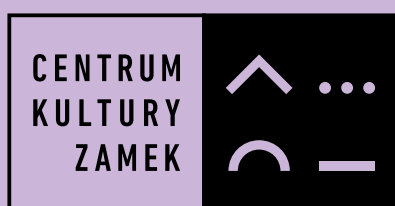
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Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



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