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# The Challenges of Audio Description in Ireland: Bridging Education, Users and Industry (ADESI)

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**Vision Ireland**

**A report by Lucía Pintado Gutiérrez  
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## ADESI in Short

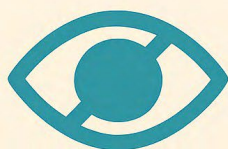
Around 5% of the population in Ireland is blind or visually impaired, highlighting the urgency of improving access to media and culture. Although progress has been made, the provision of audio description (AD) remains inconsistent, with variations in quality, availability, and sectoral coverage. European directives such as the European Accessibility Act and the Audiovisual Media Services Directive set important standards, yet their implementation across Member States, including Ireland, has been uneven. National measures like the Online Safety and Media Regulation Act (2022) mark progress, but enforcement gaps and limited application across non-broadcast settings persist.

The ADESI report identifies multiple barriers: insufficient training pathways, lack of certification, and unsustainable funding models that undermine professionalism and trust. Smaller organisations face particular challenges due to resource constraints, reliance on external providers, and the high costs of producing quality AD. Opportunities exist in fostering in-house expertise, encouraging collaboration between academia, industry, and users, and ensuring active end-user involvement in service design.

Awareness also remains low; most users encounter AD informally, reflecting weak promotional strategies. While AI technologies offer potential, skilled human describers remain essential. To secure an inclusive cultural landscape, Ireland must adopt unified standards, strengthen accountability, and embed accessibility as a consistent, long-term priority across all entertainment platforms.

## ADESI IRELAND

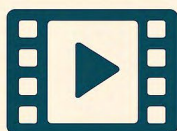
### Audio Description Research Project



**1 in 20**  
blind or visually  
impaired in Ireland



**9.1% AD in  
Higher  
Education**



**50% AD in  
entertainment  
industry**



**No formal  
certification  
in Ireland**

### Awareness of AD services

TV 26% VOD 20% Museums 16% Theatre 13%  
Cinema 12% Sports 8% Videogames 4% Opera 2%

## Acknowledgements

This research project, *The Challenges of Audio Description in Ireland: Bridging Education, Users and Industry (ADESI)*, was made possible through the generous support of the Irish Research Council under the New Foundations scheme. I am also especially grateful to Vision Ireland, a key partner in this project, whose collaboration and commitment to advancing accessibility were invaluable throughout the research. I would like to express my special thanks to Kevin Kelly, with whom I have worked since 2018. His generosity and engagement made this project possible.

Special thanks are due to all the respondents who generously shared their time, experiences, and expertise—across higher education, the entertainment industry, and the audio description user community. Your insights formed the foundation of this study.

I am grateful to the members of the ADESI Steering Group for their guidance, critical feedback, and ongoing support in aligning the project with sectoral needs.

I would like to extend my deep thanks to Dr Nguyen Nguyen, whose background in translation, sustainability and ethical approaches brought valuable insight and rigour to the project.

My thanks to Dr Hannah Leonard for her careful reading of a full draft of the report, and to Prof Agnes Maillot, Head of SALIS at DCU at the time of drafting this report, for her continuous encouragement and support throughout the project.

Finally, to all those working to make media, arts and entertainment sectors more accessible and inclusive in Ireland—your efforts are both necessary and inspiring, and this project is dedicated to furthering that work.

## Executive Summary

Approximately 1 in 20 people in Ireland are blind or visually impaired, and while Ireland is making steady progress in audio description (AD) and media accessibility (MA), significant challenges remain to ensuring inclusive access to culture, media, and entertainment not only as a legal requirement, but as a social responsibility.

While the European Union has led the way in promoting accessibility through various directives and regulations—such as the European Accessibility Act and the Audiovisual Media Services Directive—implementation across Member States remains uneven. This disparity is attributed to differences in legislative priorities, funding and public awareness. The findings of this report highlight several key challenges in the provision of AD services and training in Ireland, as well as opportunities for improvement. For example, the introduction of measures such as the Online Safety and Media Regulation Act (2022) represents great advances, however, challenges remain in the consistent enforcement and the broad application of such laws across all forms of entertainment and media. According to the ADESI report, without robust regulations and effective accountability mechanisms, progress in audio description risks stalling (see *Steering Group, Section 6.3*), with accessibility confined to only a few sectors. While positive strides have been made in television, other cultural and entertainment venues—such as cinemas, theatres, and museums—often lack clear, enforceable guidelines for AD provision. Establishing unified standards and ensuring compliance across all entertainment platforms is essential to guarantee that everyone, regardless of venue or medium, can fully enjoy cultural, artistic, and recreational experiences. Such a comprehensive approach to accessibility would help ensure that AD becomes a consistent part of Ireland’s inclusive cultural landscape, not limited to what’s available on TV.

Findings reveal that provision of AD services remains inconsistent, both in availability and quality, resulting in discrepant experiences for users. This inconsistency is influenced by overall limited training, a lack of formal standards (at least in some sectors), sustainability of funding, and technical limitations. A fully user-focused approach in designing and delivering AD is not yet standard practice, despite strong evidence for the value of end-user participation in accessibility service development (Greco, 2018).

Effective change in accessibility requires cross-sector collaboration. Partnerships between academia, industry and users have the scope to become drivers of innovation and improvement, helping to bridge the persistent gaps between policy, practice, and real-world outcomes. Nonetheless, the lack of formal training and certification continues to pose a risk to service quality and professionalism. Without recognised qualifications for audio describers, standards remain variable, which impacts user trust and the wider effectiveness of AD services.

Operational realities—such as the industry’s reliance on external providers in some cases, concerns over capacity, financial viability, and resource allocation—further complicate efforts to deliver sustainable, high-standard AD services. The costs involved in producing quality audio description, combined with limited available funding and the need for specialised skills, represent ongoing barriers to consistent AD provision.



These practical constraints impact the scale and frequency with which AD can be offered, particularly by smaller organisations and venues. As such, the importance of fostering in-house expertise, utilising local talent, and building robust, professional pathways for audio describers is becoming increasingly clear for the future growth and viability of the industry.

Promotion of AD services is another area where gaps in awareness and understanding limit user engagement. Many users remain unaware of the availability and value of AD, suggesting a disconnect between promotional strategies and the actual needs and experiences of the blind and visually impaired community in Ireland. ADESI shows that 83% (see *Study Group, Section 4.3*) of users are unaware of any advertising or promotion for AD within the entertainment industry and most users discover AD informally rather than through effective information campaigns. This lack of targeted communication is more than a minor shortcoming; it represents a fundamental obstacle to greater engagement and participation. Promotion should be more targeted, clearly conveying the value and reliability of available AD services and reaching a wider audience who could benefit from them.

While technological advances, including developments in AI, offer exciting opportunities to further support AD, the human element remains vital in creating meaningful and engaging user experiences. A balance between technological solutions and the irreplaceable input of qualified human describers is essential for providing high-quality, impactful AD.

In sum, while there have been meaningful advancements—especially in digital and broadcast media—gaps persist in the consistent delivery of high-quality AD across media and entertainment sectors. Persistent inconsistencies in standards and availability risk reinforcing inequities in access to cultural and entertainment experiences, especially for blind and visually impaired audiences outside major urban centres. Given the limited foundational research in this area, this report aims to shed light on the current landscape, clarify ongoing challenges, and provide an evidence base for continued progress towards a more accessible and inclusive society. Section 9 (*Toward a National Strategy for Audio Description*) offers clearer, structured guidance, providing actionable recommendations for policymakers and practitioners. These guidelines aim to inform future frameworks, support cross-sector collaboration, and ensure audio description becomes an integral and sustainable part of Ireland’s media and cultural landscape.

The future of media and entertainment in Ireland must be accessible to all if we are to truly foster an inclusive society. Making audio description, captioning, and other accessibility tools standard practice—not afterthoughts—is essential to ensure that cultural and entertainment experiences are available to everyone.

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## Acronyms

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<b>AD</b> .....	Audio description
<b>ADESI</b> .....	The Challenges of Audio Description in Ireland: Education, Users and Industry
<b>ADI</b> .....	Arts & Disability Ireland
<b>AI</b> .....	Artificial Intelligence
<b>BBC</b> .....	British Broadcasting Corporation
<b>CSO</b> .....	Central Statistics Office
<b>DCU</b> .....	Dublin City University
<b>Ofcom</b> .....	Office of Communications
<b>RTÉ</b> .....	Raidió Teilifís Éireann
<b>MA</b> .....	Media accessibility
<b>FAI</b> .....	Football Association in Ireland
<b>LOI</b> .....	League of Ireland
<b>GAA</b> .....	Gaelic Athletic Association
<b>IRFU</b> .....	Irish Rugby Football Union
<b>EU</b> .....	European Union
<b>VI</b> .....	Vision Ireland
<b>CNAM</b> .....	Coimisiún na Meán
<b>BAI</b> .....	Broadcasting Authority of Ireland
<b>SDGs</b> .....	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>ISL</b> .....	Irish sign language
<b>SDH</b> .....	Subtitles for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
<b>HE</b> .....	Higher Education
<b>S1</b> .....	Study (group) 1 (HE)
<b>S2</b> .....	Study (group) 2 (industry)
<b>S3</b> .....	Study (group) 3 (users)
<b>SG1</b> .....	Steering group 1 (AD and education)
<b>SG2</b> .....	Steering group 2 (AD, industry and users)
<b>SG3</b> .....	Steering group 3 (AD awareness and National Strategy)
<b>ADC</b> .....	Audio description commentary
<b>RQ</b> .....	Research question
<b>VOD</b> .....	Video on demand
<b>UEFA</b> .....	Union of European Football Associations

## Appendices

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### Appendix 1 Members of the Steering Group

### Appendix 2

- **Map 1**.....HE institutions who responded by county
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# 1. Introduction to the ADESI Project: Exploring Audio Description Across Ireland

Over the past two decades, interest in accessibility has grown significantly across various domains—from academic research to public debate—on dismantling physical, technological, and social barriers to ensure equal access and participation for all individuals in social, cultural, and economic life. The growing prominence of accessibility is evident in both national and international legislation (Greco, 2022),<sup>1</sup> at least within the context of the European Union (EU), where the development of accessibility policies has led to both the revision of existing regulations and the adoption of the European Accessibility Act, EU Directive (2019/882).<sup>2</sup> This EU Directive, adopted in 2019, aims to enhance the accessibility of products and services across the EU, including media services.

Audio description (AD) is a vital component of accessibility, particularly in the context of media, arts, and information. AD is specifically designed to make visual content accessible to people who are blind or have visual impairments, and is defined as “a verbal commentary that provides information about the visual elements of a performance, event, or visual art object for the benefit of blind and partially sighted people.” (Fryer, 2016, 1)<sup>3</sup> The aim of AD is to ensure that those who cannot access the visuals can still understand and enjoy films, television, theatre, museum, exhibitions, and other visual media or live events as fully as possible.

The 2019 EU Directive, however, does not specifically address AD, and its implementation is left to the discretion of Member States, that is, it falls to each Member State to develop its own laws to determine how these regulations will be implemented, meaning that accessibility practices differ substantially from one country to another.

On the other hand, the Audiovisual Media Services Directive,<sup>4</sup> adopted in 2018, requires Member States to ensure that communication services are accessible to people with visual and hearing impairments, as well as older adults, so they may participate fully in the social and cultural life of the EU. This includes the provision of AD (as well as sign language interpreting and subtitling for the deaf or hard of hearing). Governments are expected to ensure that media providers under their jurisdiction meet these accessibility requirements.

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<sup>1</sup> Greco, G. M. (2022). Universalist, user-centred and proactive approaches in media accessibility: The way forward. *The Journal of Specialised Translation*, 39, 3-10.

<sup>2</sup> Commission of the European Union. (2019). *Directive (EU) 2019/882 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on accessibility requirements for products and services*. Official Journal of the European Union. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32019L0882>. On 28 June 2025, the European Accessibility Act will enter into force, introducing significant innovations to ensure accessibility of products and services in the European Union. This regulation mandates that a broad range of sectors, such as e-commerce, transport, and banking, must comply with accessibility requirements, thereby promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities throughout the EU.

<sup>3</sup> Fryer, L. (2016). *An introduction to audio description: A practical guide*. New York, NY: Routledge.

<sup>4</sup> European Parliament and Council. (2018). *Directive (EU) 2018/1808 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 November 2018 amending Directive 2010/13/EU on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the provision of audiovisual media services (Audiovisual Media Services Directive)*. Official Journal of the European Union. <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/es/policies/avmsd-content-distribution>.

Given that each EU country differs in population profile, needs, resources, policies, and traditions regarding accessibility, this report examines how Ireland addresses the issue of AD as an accessibility resource. ADESI<sup>5</sup> is a national project (2023–2025) funded by the Irish Research Council therefore seeks to explore the landscape of AD in Ireland. It looks at the training and provision of AD—as a service or modality that ensures accessibility for blind and visually impaired individuals—while considering user needs in the Irish context. The project offers a mapping of AD establishing bridges between education, the entertainment industry, and AD users and explores ways to address existing gaps and use the knowledge gained to improve the AD scope in Ireland. ADESI fosters intersectoral collaboration across education, industry, AD users and civic society through a partnership with Vision Ireland. By prioritising these areas, ADESI hopes to contribute to building a successful social infrastructure and ensure wellbeing and access for all. Ultimately, ADESI aims to promote accessible leisure and social interaction, both at the core of leading to a sustained improvement in living standards and quality of life for all citizens. The mission of ADESI includes developing new evidence and considering a strategic plan of action for AD, emphasising the need to promote accessibility, equality, and diversity. These are aligned with some of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),<sup>6</sup> explained in detail in Section 2.2 (*ADESI in Ireland: A Case Study Profile*).

The report examines the legal framework, public policies, and social impact of AD in Ireland and presents an analysis of the ADESI project as a case study. This includes a review of the research development, its context, methodology, and data collection instrument, followed by a presentation of the results, research conclusions and a set of recommendations and proposals that provide clear, actionable courses of action in response to the issues, problems, or opportunities identified in the report.

## 2. Research Context

### 2.1. Audio Description: Legislation, Policies, and Society

Ireland's legislative and policy framework on AD has made positive strides, despite significant challenges that will be discussed throughout this report. Generally speaking, Ireland's legislative landscape regarding AD is relatively underdeveloped compared to other European countries. While there has been broader progress on accessibility, specific measures for developing and implementing AD remain limited—both in legislation and in the institutional strategies adopted to improve this area.

In Ireland, MA is regulated by Coimisiún na Meán (CNAM), known as the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) until 2023. Although CNAM's accessibility regulations—like those of its predecessor—require broadcasters to provide accessible content, the focus has

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<sup>5</sup> The project 'ADESI: The challenges of audio description in Ireland: uniting education, users and industry' (NF/2023/1338) received funding from the Irish Research Council (2023–2025).

A national project exploring the landscape of audio description (AD) in Ireland, its training and provision as a service for blind and visually impaired individuals.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations. (2020). *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020*. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/>.

traditionally been more on subtitling and sign language interpretation than on AD (BAI, 2019).

However, while Irish national television channels RTÉ 1, RTÉ 2, and RTÉ Junior aimed to reach 10% AD content in 2023, actual figures surpassed that: 13.8% for RTÉ 1 and RTÉ 2 (mainly in drama series and original programming such as *The Dry* and *The Gone*), and 15% for RTÉ Junior (CNAM, 2023)<sup>7</sup>. Despite exceeding minimum targets, these rates still fall significantly short compared to those in the UK, where networks like the BBC, ITV, Channel 4, and Sky have committed to at least 20% of content being audio described (Ofcom, 2024).<sup>8</sup> This gap reveals the need for a more robust legislative framework for AD in Ireland (Flynn & O'Dell, 2021).<sup>9</sup> In July 2024, a new draft of Accessibility Rules was published, followed by a public consultation. In November 2024, new accessibility guidelines and standards were released covering the period for 2025, 2026 and 2027. The document includes best practice standards that establish the obligation for broadcasting service providers to ensure high-quality production in ISL, SDH, and AD. Apart from public consultation, CNAM is currently in the process of drafting and publishing an "Accessibility Action Plan" that details its improvement proposals in accordance with the Media Service Code & Rules. Furthermore, CNAM has been designated as the authority responsible for supervising and ensuring compliance with the legal accessibility requirements in audiovisual services under the European Accessibility Act of 2025, guaranteeing that providers comply with the established regulations. Other legislative advances include policy initiatives such as the National Disability Inclusion Strategy (2017–2021),<sup>10</sup> which, while not directly addressing AD<sup>11</sup>, focused on improving sign language interpreting services, access to education, employment, social services, and physical accessibility, among others.

By contrast, other European countries demonstrate alternative practices that merit examination. German public broadcasters ARD and ZDF provide extensive AD services supported by strong legal frameworks (Vercauteren, 2007).<sup>12</sup> Spain has made significant advances thanks to its General Law on Audiovisual Communication,<sup>13</sup> which mandates

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<sup>7</sup> Coimisiún na Meán. (2023). *Access Rules: Report on the performance of broadcasters in 2023*. [https://www.cnam.ie/app/uploads/2025/01/20241114\\_AccessRulesReport2023\\_v1.0\\_NMC\\_LML-1.pdf](https://www.cnam.ie/app/uploads/2025/01/20241114_AccessRulesReport2023_v1.0_NMC_LML-1.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Office of Communications (Ofcom). (2024). *Television and on-demand programme services: Access services report, January–December 2024*. <https://www.ofcom.org.uk>

<sup>9</sup> Flynn, R. (2022). *Monitoring media pluralism in the digital era: Application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European Union, Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia & Turkey in the year 2021. Country report: Ireland*. European University Institute, Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom. <https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/74693/MPM2022-Ireland-EN.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

<sup>10</sup> Department of Justice and Equality. (2017). *National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017–2021*. National Disability Authority. <https://nda.ie/monitoring/national-disability-strategies/national-disability-inclusion-strategy-2017-2022>

<sup>11</sup> Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. (2023). *Annual Report 2022*. Government of Ireland. <https://assets.gov.ie/276513/1dc5f357-c1d3-4e15-b2ae-12d9b87428d3.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Vercauteren, G. (2007). Towards a European guideline for audio description. In J. Díaz-Cintas, P. Orero, & A. Remael (Eds.), *Media for all: Subtitling for the deaf, audio description, and sign language* (pp. 139–149). Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Rodopi.

<sup>13</sup> Gobierno de España. (2022). *Ley 13/2022, de 7 de julio, General de Comunicación Audiovisual* (BOE núm. 163, de 8 de julio de 2022). Boletín Oficial del Estado. <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2022/07/08/pdfs/BOE-A-2022-11311.pdf>

minimum weekly hours of AD depending on the type of broadcaster (public, private, or on-demand services).

Although it does not mandate specific programmes for AD, the law encourages the inclusion of widely consumed content of general interest, constraints and low prioritisation of accessibility in media policies (Matamala & Orero, 2016).<sup>14</sup> In the Netherlands, broadcasters collaborate with tech companies to deliver AD via mobile apps, enhancing user access, and Sweden has integrated AD into public service media, drawing on user feedback to continuously improve services. Meanwhile, countries like Bulgaria and Romania offer limited AD services, primarily due to financial issues.

In addition to legal and media policy frameworks across Europe, EU-funded research projects have played a crucial role in training audio describers and fostering consistency and quality across member states. Projects like ADLAB (2011–2014)<sup>15</sup> and ADLAB PRO (2016–2019)<sup>16</sup> have developed standardised AD materials and best practices. These efforts highlight the value of cross-border collaboration and shared resources (Matamala & Orero, 2016).<sup>17</sup>

In Ireland, Vision Ireland (VI), a non-profit organisation supporting blind and visually impaired individuals, has become a vocal advocate for AD, highlighting the country's lag behind other EU nations in broadcasting AD. VI collaborates with broadcasters, policymakers, and various cultural and sporting institutions to expand AD provision<sup>18</sup>. It also partners with academic and industry stakeholders to reduce isolation and eliminate barriers to education, employment, and social participation. Since 2018, VI has actively collaborated with translator and linguist training programmes at Dublin City University, initiating workshops, awareness campaigns, and the development of accessibility in translation modules. While these efforts have laid the groundwork for researching AD in tertiary education, its widespread curricular integration remains in the early stages (Pintado Gutiérrez & Torralba, 2022).<sup>19</sup> These advocacy efforts, nonetheless, have encouraged a space for a cross-sector debate and gradual expansion of AD in broadcasting, entertainment, and sports. The ADESI report, however, underscores the need for more substantial changes and a comprehensive strategy to advance AD policies and avoid reliance on isolated initiatives.

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<sup>14</sup> Matamala, A., & Orero, P. (2016). Audio description and accessibility studies: A work in progress. In A. Matamala & P. Orero (Eds.), *Researching audio description: New approaches* (pp. 1–8). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>15</sup> ADLAB Project. (2011–2014). Funded by the European Union under the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP). <http://www.adlabproject.eu/home/>

<sup>16</sup> ADLAB PRO. (2016–2019). Funded by the European Union under the Erasmus+ Programme, Key Action 2 – Strategic Partnerships (Project No. 2016-1-IT02-KA203-024311). <https://www.adlabpro.eu>

<sup>17</sup> Matamala, A., & Orero, P. (2016). Audio description and accessibility studies: A work in progress. In A. Matamala & P. Orero (Eds.), *Researching audio description: New approaches* (pp. 1–8). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>18</sup> Vision Ireland. (2023). Press release: Vision Ireland, the new name for NCBI, ushers in a change in sight after a century of service provision. <https://vi.ie/ncbi-is-vision-ireland/>

<sup>19</sup> Pintado Gutiérrez, L., & Torralba, G. (2022). New landscapes in higher education: Audio description as a multilayered task in FL teaching. *The Language Learning Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2022.2158209>



Other organisations, such as Arts & Disability Ireland (ADI), also work to ensure cultural events and visual arts become more accessible. For instance, ADI provides in-house training for audio describers and collaborates with cultural institutions to integrate AD into their offerings.

ADI's training programmes have significantly improved the quality and availability of AD in live theatre performances (Naughton, 2022<sup>20</sup>). These efforts are essential in addressing gaps left by legislative and policy shortcomings.

Other recent cross-sector collaborations, such as the technical report funded by CNAM's *Diversity Learning and Development Sectoral Programme* (2023),<sup>21</sup> also help bring visibility to the AD field and its needs.

Overall, the implementation of AD in Ireland remains fragmented, despite national initiatives and the EU's leadership in promoting accessibility through various directives and regulations. This situation reflects diverse legislative priorities, funding levels, resources, and public awareness that shape the field.

## 2.2. ADESI in Ireland: A Case Study Profile

The Republic of Ireland currently has a population of over five million, according to the 2022 report by the Central Statistics Office.<sup>22</sup> The census also reported that over 296,000 people in Ireland are blind or visually impaired—accounting for more than 6% of the population.<sup>23</sup> A 2023 report by the European Audiovisual Observatory on content accessibility for persons with disabilities,<sup>24</sup> pursuant to the Broadcasting Act, noted that the BAI in Ireland was required to establish accessibility standards which, once adopted, would immediately come into force and set targets for broadcasters (Article 43.1). The 2019 standards remained in effect until the end of 2024—when this research took place. These set annual quotas for each type of accessible service (subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDH), sign language interpretation, and AD) across multiple channels (RTÉ1, RTÉ 2, RTÉ Junior, Virgin Media 1, +1, and HD). Such quotas were to increase annually between 2019 and 2023, and broadcasters were required to report to the BAI every six months on their progress. In relation to AD, the goal was for RTÉ 1 and RTÉ 2 to increase AD programming from 5% to 10%, a target they surpassed as noted in Section 2.1. The Online Safety and Media Regulation Act,<sup>25</sup> passed in 2022, updated the earlier Broadcasting Act, requiring

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<sup>20</sup> Naughton, P. (2022). *Audio description in live theatre, and the cultural rights of blind and visually impaired audiences: Legal perspectives on creative practice as seen through a CRPD lens* (Master's thesis). Centre for Disability Law and Policy, National University of Ireland Galway.

<sup>21</sup> Coimisiún na Meán. (2023). *Sectoral Learning & Development Programme: Guide for applicants*. [https://www.cnam.ie/app/uploads/2025/01/20241105\\_SecDev\\_App\\_Guide\\_vFinal\\_EF.pdf](https://www.cnam.ie/app/uploads/2025/01/20241105_SecDev_App_Guide_vFinal_EF.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Central Statistics Office. (2022). Census of Population 2022 – Preliminary results. <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpr/censusofpopulation2022-preliminaryresults/>

<sup>23</sup> Vision Ireland. (2023). Press release: Vision Ireland, the new name for NCBI, ushers in a change in sight after a century of service provision. <https://vi.ie/ncbi-is-vision-ireland/>

<sup>24</sup> European Audiovisual Observatory. (2023). *Accessibility of audiovisual content for persons with disabilities*. Strasbourg, France. <https://rm.coe.int/iris-plus-2023-01en-accessibility-of-audiovisual-content-for-persons-w/1680ab1bdc>

<sup>25</sup> Government of Ireland. (2022). *Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022*. <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2022/act/41/enacted/en/html>

both traditional broadcasters and online platforms to provide AD, SDH, and other accessibility modalities, thereby ensuring access to media content for individuals with visual and hearing disabilities. On 15 March 2023, the BAI was dissolved and replaced by Coimisiún na Meán (CNAM) under the 2022 Act.<sup>26</sup>

Since 2023, CNAM is responsible for ensuring that broadcasting and on-demand video services are accessible to persons with disabilities (Cabrera Blázquez *et al.*, 2023).<sup>27</sup> The agency launched a public consultation on draft Access Rules for Television Broadcasters in 2024 and opened for public consultation between July and August 2024.<sup>28</sup> The revised rules include best practice standards requiring broadcasters to ensure high-quality production for Irish sign language (ISL), SDH, and AD. This is a prime example of how general awareness of the need for improved accessibility has increased in Ireland in recent years, thanks in part to legislation. Previous examples include increased visibility of ISL in media (particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic)<sup>29</sup> and growing efforts by governmental agencies and media outlets to raise quotas in this area. Works such as Hermosa-Ramírez's (2022)<sup>30</sup> echo these trends elsewhere.

While CNAM continues efforts to improve AD quotas in media through its 2024 consultation, additional areas need attention beyond CNAM's remit. These include identifying whether specific AD training exists in Ireland (particularly in Higher Education (HE)), understanding the actual availability of AD services in the entertainment industry beyond television (e.g., cinemas, theatres, museums, sports and other live events), and assessing whether this supply meets users' real needs. Further advances on AD in Ireland include a 2023 CNAM-funded study<sup>31</sup>—conducted in collaboration with RTÉ, DCU, IADT, and VI—where 42 AD professionals were surveyed. This study is about improving the consistency and quality of AD services for blind and vision impaired viewers by investigating how the volume of the original programme is reduced to make the AD narration clear.

In Section 2.1, we referred to the progress, status, and initiatives related to AD in various European countries—such as Spain, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. In this context, it is worth noting that although AD has been increasingly integrated into university curricula in Europe, particularly within translation and interpreting faculties, Ireland has yet to institutionalise audiovisual accessibility training.

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<sup>26</sup> Government of Ireland. (2022). *Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022*. <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2022/act/41/enacted/en/html>

<sup>27</sup> Cabrera Blázquez, F. J., Cappello, M., Larcourt, A., & Munch, E. (2023). Accessibility of audiovisual content for persons with disabilities. *IRIS Plus*, European Audiovisual Observatory, Strasbourg. <https://rm.coe.int/iris-plus-2023-01en-accessibility-of-audiovisual-content-for-persons-w/1680ab1bdc>

<sup>28</sup> Coimisiún na Meán. (2024). Coimisiún na Meán launches consultation on revised rules to improve accessibility of television broadcasters. <https://www.cnam.ie/coimisiun-na-mean-launch-consultation-on-revised-rules-to-improve-accessibility-of-television-broadcasters/>

<sup>29</sup> Cradden, 2023: Cradden, J. (2020, April 9). Coronavirus highlights continuing marginalisation of deaf community. *The Irish Times*. <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/health-family/coronavirus-highlights-continuing-marginalisation-of-deaf-community-1.4213870>

<sup>30</sup> Hermosa-Ramírez, I. (2022). Designing, making, and validating accessible products and services: An updated account of users' perspectives. *Journal of Audiovisual Translation*, 5(2), 57–75. <https://doi.org/10.47476/jat.v5i2.2022.229>

<sup>31</sup> Lynch, K., O'Neill, O., & Ward, T. (2023). Investigating a standardised approach to setting audio description dip values: Final report to Coimisiún na Meán, Ireland. Dublin: Coimisiún na Meán. [https://www.cnam.ie/app/uploads/2023/06/20230619\\_Investigating-a-Standardised-Approach-to-Setting-Audio-Description-Dip-Values\\_vFINAL-1.pdf](https://www.cnam.ie/app/uploads/2023/06/20230619_Investigating-a-Standardised-Approach-to-Setting-Audio-Description-Dip-Values_vFINAL-1.pdf)



In these countries, the integration of AD into university curricula reflects both a well-established academic tradition in audiovisual translation and the presence of legal frameworks that guarantee cultural and MA (Remael *et al.*, 2016<sup>32</sup>; Matamala & Orero, 2007<sup>33</sup>).

In Ireland, however, audiovisual accessibility training remains largely absent from official university programmes, reflecting the weaker institutionalisation of AD in HE. Historically, AD provision has been driven by voluntary, cultural, or technology-based initiatives, which has hindered its professionalisation (CNAM, 2023<sup>34</sup>; Fryer, 2016<sup>35</sup>). This contrast highlights not only a structural gap in training but also differing conceptions of the university's role in advancing accessibility—an issue further examined in the following sections.

The introductory overview of AD in Ireland, along with a preliminary review of existing studies, suggests that research in this field is limited—not only within individual sectors but also across key stakeholder groups, including education, organisations and national agencies, industry, and end-users. In practice, the provision of AD seems to be largely shaped by local initiatives, which may be constrained by budget, institutional support, or other resources. Formal research and discussions between such stakeholders have informed this report, which aims to build on and coordinate existing individual and local efforts.

The absence of a coordinated national strategy for the development and implementation of AD across sectors, along with a lack of dedicated studies, reveals several key issues that informed the ADESI research:

- (1) Inconsistent provision of AD services within the entertainment industry, extending beyond MA.
- (2) Limited access to centralised information on AD services for potential users.
- (3) Lack of formal AD training pathways within HE institutions.
- (4) Absence of established frameworks for the professionalisation of AD roles.
- (5) Limited representation of AD end-users' voices.

Despite existing efforts, the ADESI report highlights a continuing lack of inter-institutional dialogue on AD in Ireland. Its core aim is to examine the current landscape of AD and foster collaboration among academia, the entertainment industry, and end-users, in partnership with Vision Ireland. By mapping the status of AD across sectors and identifying key gaps, ADESI seeks to raise the profile of AD nationally and provide actionable guidelines to enhance access to entertainment and social participation for blind and visually impaired individuals, thereby contributing to overall quality of life.

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<sup>32</sup> Remael, A., Reviere, N., & Vercauteren, G. (Eds.). (2016). *Audio description: New perspectives illustrated*. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins.

<sup>33</sup> Matamala, A., & Orero, P. (2007). Accessible opera in Catalan: Opera for all. In J. Díaz-Cintas, P. Orero, & A. Remael (Eds.), *Media for all: Subtitling for the deaf, audio description, and sign language* (pp. 201–214). Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Rodopi.

<sup>34</sup> Coimisiún na Meán. (2023). *Sectoral Learning & Development Programme: Guide for applicants*. [https://www.cnam.ie/app/uploads/2025/01/20241105\\_SecDev\\_App\\_Guide\\_vFinal\\_EF.pdf](https://www.cnam.ie/app/uploads/2025/01/20241105_SecDev_App_Guide_vFinal_EF.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> Fryer, L. (2016). *An introduction to audio description: A practical guide*. New York, NY: Routledge.

This mission aligns with broader national and international frameworks, including *Ireland 2040*,<sup>36</sup> which outlines priorities for social, cultural, and economic development, as well as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In particular, ADESI supports SDG 4 (quality education)<sup>37</sup> and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), both of which emphasise accessibility, inclusion, and equal participation in cultural and educational life. These goals are further reinforced by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which advocates for universal access to information, culture, and education. Through these commitments, ADESI contributes to the development of a strategic national approach to AD, focused on accessibility, equality, and diversity, and ultimately helping to build a more inclusive social infrastructure.

### 3. Study: Audio Description, Education, Users and Industry

#### 3.1. Context and Research Questions

The underlying assumption that there is much scope to improve AD in Ireland does not imply that this field has been entirely neglected. Localised initiatives—driven by both governmental bodies and dedicated volunteers—are commendable (Moorkens & Pintado Gutiérrez, 2026)<sup>38</sup>. Indeed, efforts to meet AD quotas on national broadcasters like RTÉ and the enactment of the 2022 Online Safety and Media Regulation Act, along with initiatives by organisations like Vision Ireland and Arts & Disability Ireland, and governmental agencies such as CNAM, constitute important developments in this area. However, with the introduction of recent EU directives setting specific targets and requirements for accessibility, including those as recent as 2025, a qualitative leap in the provision of AD in Ireland is needed and a call for a stronger and more cohesive national legislative and a strategic framework to ensure full and equitable access to AD is therefore essential.

The key issues outlined in Section 2.2 highlight significant systemic barriers to the effective development of AD services. Inconsistent provision across the entertainment industry undermines equitable access for blind and visually impaired individuals, while the lack of centralised information further restricts awareness and uptake. The absence of formal training pathways and professional frameworks not only leads to variability in service quality but also limits the recognition and sustainability of AD as a legitimate career, while the limited representation of end-users' voices, may result in services that may not meet the users' actual needs or lived experiences.

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<sup>36</sup> Government of Ireland. (2023). *National Planning Framework – Ireland 2040*. <https://www.npf.ie/wp-content/uploads/Project-Ireland-2040-NPF.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> United Nations. (2020). *Policy guidelines for inclusive Sustainable Development Goals*. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Disability/SDG-CRPD-Resource/policy-guideline-sdg4-education.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> Moorkens, J., & Pintado Gutiérrez, L. (2026). Audio describing football: A case study of Bohemians FC. In C. Declercq & G. W. van Egdom (Eds.), Special issue on Sports Translation / Translating Sport, *Journal of Specialised Translation*, 46.

Overall, these gaps hinder the mainstreaming of AD and perpetuate exclusion, underscoring the pressing need for coordinated efforts across education, policy, and industry to develop and professionalise AD while maintaining a user-centred approach.

In order to explore and address these challenges, the ADESI project aims to create a space for dialogue and awareness-raising around the need for cross-sectoral collaboration—particularly between tertiary education institutions and the visual arts and entertainment sectors—and to build stronger connections with AD end-users. Through this initiative, the project seeks to lay the groundwork for future developments in (media) accessibility training, promote greater consistency in AD provision and policy-making, and support a more inclusive and professional approach to AD in the Irish context.

The research questions (RQs) addressed by this study are:

RQ1. How aware are educators in Ireland of MA and AD, and to what extent is AD included in tertiary education?

RQ2. How aware is the entertainment industry in Ireland of MA and AD, and to what extent is AD offered in this sector?

RQ3. What are the experiences and needs of AD users in Ireland, and how well do existing services meet their accessibility requirements?

## **3.2. Methodology**

The methodology employed by ADESI is based on an exploratory investigation of three stakeholder groups integral to the provision and development of AD in Ireland. It aims to produce a national mapping of cross-sectorial AD across the sectors of training, provision, and needs, through collecting and analysing primary data in HE (Survey 1), the entertainment industry (Survey 2), and AD users (Survey 3). The results will identify the context and current situation in all three areas, the possible gaps, the interaction between them, and the outline of future opportunities for the training of audio-describers and policy-makers to enhance the end-users' experience. Exploratory, anonymous online surveys were used. The surveys contained both quantitative and qualitative elements offering an overview of the respondents' profiles, experience and perspectives on the subject matter. In addition to the surveys, a Steering Group was set up to identify possible courses of action based on the results obtained. Comprising AD users, broadcasters, and representatives from both governmental and non-governmental visual, arts and sports organisations, this group played a pivotal role in formulating recommendations for the education, government, and industry sectors. The discussion focused on actionable insights to guide future policies, training programmes, and user-centered improvements in AD services. The meeting was audiorecorded, transcribed, and analysed looking for recurring themes to inform future developments in AD in Ireland.

This approach is supported by several key considerations. Given the limited prior research in this area, an initial mapping exercise was essential to collect direct data on AD provision, practices, and perception across the country.

Participant-centred research is increasingly recognised in AD studies (Greco, 2019)<sup>39</sup>, and this project was grounded in that principle. The ADESI project prioritised the voices and experiences of different stakeholders through interviews, surveys, and steering group involvement, ensuring their insights directly informed both the research process and its outcomes. Sequential exploratory designs (Creswell & Plano, 2011)<sup>40</sup> typically begin by engaging participants to identify real-world needs and variables, filled by the use of quantitative questions to capture broader trends and perceptions. This methodological approach ensures the research is both theoretically grounded and relevant in practice, reflecting the lived experiences of different stakeholder groups directly or indirectly involved with AD. Quantitative surveys are particularly effective for gathering representative data and identifying general patterns, thereby laying the foundation for more in-depth future investigations. Qualitative elements were added to enrich the set of results and provide deeper insights into the participants' perspectives, experiences, and motivations. Such elements will be discussed where relevant.

### 3.3. Data Collection Tool

The online surveys were created using Microsoft Forms, piloted among 15 faculty members and Vision Ireland staff in the months prior to data collection, and approved by the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee (Reference: DCUREC/2024/009). Participants received full information about the study and provided informed consent before completing the survey. The surveys were distributed between March and May 2024. Participation was voluntary and took an average of 10 minutes to complete Survey 1; 12 minutes to complete Survey 2; and 25 minutes to complete Survey 3.

The surveys, inspired by the quantitative part of the ADLAB PRO project (2019) were designed as follows:

#### Survey 1: Higher Education

Survey 1 included 36 questions divided into four sections:

- Section 1 [Questions 1–6]: Participant profile (gender, age, nationality, university, department, programme type, and teaching experience)
- Section 2 [Questions 7–10]: Familiarity with MA and AD research
- Section 3 [Questions 11–21]: Teaching related to MA
- Section 4 [Questions 22–36]: Technical and practical aspects of AD relevant to the respondent

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<sup>39</sup> Greco, G. M. (2019). Towards a pedagogy of accessibility: The need for critical learning spaces in media accessibility education and training. *Linguistica Antverpiensia, New Series – Themes in Translation Studies*, 18, 23–46. <https://doi.org/10.52034/lanstts.v18i0.518>

<sup>40</sup> Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

## Survey 2: Industry of entertainment

Survey 2 included 54 questions divided into four sections:

- Section 1 [Questions 1–7]: Participant profile (gender, age, nationality, industry, remit, work experience, private/public sector, location)
- Section 2 [Questions 8–11]: Familiarity with MA and AD
- Section 3 [Questions 12–26]: Accessibility provision
- Section 4 [Questions 27–38]: Audio describers in the workplace
- Section 5 [Questions 39–54]: The relevance of AD

## Survey 3: Industry of entertainment

Survey 3 included 35 questions divided into four sections:

- Section 1 [Questions 1–5]: Participant profile (gender, age, nationality, location)
- Section 2 [Questions 6–10]: Familiarity with accessibility
- Section 3 [Questions 11–16]: AD awareness and use
- Section 4 [Questions 17–20]: AD needs and provision
- Section 5 [Questions 21–23]: Perceptions of AD
- Section 6 [Questions 24–29]: AD in live performances
- Section 7 [Questions 30–35]: Awareness of AD promotion

## 4. Findings

The study had 139 participants overall: 128 agreed to participate in the surveys (S1, S2 and S3) and the Steering Group was composed of 11 members.

### 4.1 AD in Higher Education

Fourteen Irish universities participated in the study and a total of 55 responses were collected. The four sections of the questionnaire respond to RQ1 (How aware are educators in Ireland of MA and audio description, and to what extent is AD included in tertiary education programmes?), and three research subquestions which guided this component of the study:

**RQ1a.** Are tertiary education instructors in Ireland familiar with the concept of MA and the practice of AD?

**RQ1b.** To what extent is AD included as a curricular element in degree programmes across Ireland?

**RQ1c.** What specific training programmes on AD are available in Irish tertiary education?

#### 4.1.1 Knowledge of Media Accessibility and Audio Description in Irish Higher Education

##### a. Teachers' Profile and Knowledge of MA and AD

More than half of the respondents (56.4%) work across multiple Dublin universities. The remainder are employed at institutions throughout Ireland—see Map 1. Of the participants



in the study, 80.1% were based in public universities, 9.10% in technological universities, 1.80% in institutes of technology, 3.60% in colleges ascribed to the National University Ireland, 3.60% in colleges of education, and 1.80% in private colleges<sup>41</sup>—see Table 1 and Table 2 in the appendix. While the sample size is relatively small, the diversity of participating institutions offers a broad and representative view of the Irish higher education landscape. Most respondents are affiliated with Faculties of Humanities and teach in departments of Modern Languages or Applied Linguistics (60%), Audiovisual Communication and Journalism (16.4%), Education (14.5%), or Translation (12.7%).

Regarding familiarity with MA and AD, 65% of respondents stated they recognise both terms. However, 12.7% reported not knowing what MA is, and 22% were unsure of its meaning. For AD, 16% of respondents said they were unfamiliar with the term, while 18% were unsure.

While a higher degree of familiarity with MA and AD does not necessarily correlate with greater curricular presence, the results indicate that such familiarity is not widespread among respondents. In fact, if 35% of respondents are unfamiliar with one of the two key concepts—media accessibility or audio description—it is reasonable to infer that these educators are unlikely to include AD-related content in their teaching. Furthermore, not all teachers associate both terms with each other: some are familiar with MA but not AD, and vice versa, albeit less commonly. This suggests that knowledge in this area is not only limited but also fragmented.

## **b. Teaching Experience and AD**

Respondents' teaching experience ranged from one year to over 15 years. The majority have considerable experience: 47% have taught for over 15 years, 22% for 9 to 15 years, 20% for 4 to 8 years, and 11% for 1 to 3 years.

Only 9.1% of the respondents indicated they provide AD-related teaching. All of them had more than four years of teaching experience: 40% have taught for 11–15 years, another 40% have taught for 4–8 years, and 10% have taught for over 15 years. In terms of how long they had been teaching AD specifically, 20% had done so for one year (as part of in a Master's in Translation), while the rest had done so for 4 years (20%), 5 years (40%), and 7 years (20%) in various programmes such as undergraduate degrees in Languages and Translation, postgraduate courses in Translation and Modern Languages, and postgraduate or doctoral programmes in Music Technology.

These figures show that the backgrounds and curricular contexts in which AD is taught are diverse, spanning different levels of tertiary education (from undergraduate to doctoral) and disciplines (from languages to digital technology).

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<sup>41</sup> Ireland's higher education system includes universities, which focus on academic and research-based degrees; institutes of technology, which offer practical, career-oriented programmes; colleges of education, which specialise in teacher training; specialist colleges, which focus on niche fields like art or theology; and private colleges, which are independent institutions offering professionally focused courses, often in business or IT. The main differences lie in their focus (academic vs. vocational), governance (public vs. private), and whether they grant degrees independently or through partnerships.



Such diversity also indicates that AD training has not yet been formally integrated or standardised within the Irish university system. The low number of instructors involved and the fragmented nature of initiatives suggest that AD training remains dependent on individual efforts rather than institutional planning.

#### 4.1.2. Presence of Audio Description as a Curricular Element

The inclusion of AD in tertiary education curricula, according to the survey results, remains limited. Only 9.1% of respondents reported covering AD-related content in any of their modules. This scarcity highlights the marginalisation of AD within Irish higher education and signals an opportunity for action by institutions related to audiovisual media, including governmental agencies, the industry and other sectors. Such initiatives could include training workshops and incentives for developing modules within degrees in audiovisual communication, visual arts, journalism, and translation, or partnerships to develop specific (training) courses that meet the actual needs in Ireland.

The lack of training is particularly concerning given that the lack of AD content is not confined to a few institutions but appears to be a systemic issue across the Irish tertiary education landscape—and likely affects other levels, such as vocational training and adult education.

One might assume that academics who (a) are familiar with MA and/or AD, and (b) conduct research in related areas, are more likely to integrate AD into their teaching. However, this hypothesis does not hold, as in fact 60% of those who teach AD do not conduct research in the field. This disconnect between teaching and research echoes findings across European institutions, as highlighted by the European Commission report (2017)<sup>42</sup>, which observes that in many higher education institutions, teaching and research continue to be treated as separate spheres.

O'Hagan (2007)<sup>43</sup> also pointed out that in disciplines like audiovisual translation and accessibility, many training programmes have emerged in response to professional or technological demands, rather than from an established theoretical foundation. Gambier (2013)<sup>44</sup> similarly argued that in such fields, teaching has often preceded research, driven by market forces and the need to train professionals.

In this context, the teaching of AD content does not always stem from active research but rather from other factors, such as: (a) its growing curricular relevance, (b) individual interest from instructors beyond their research agendas, or (c) recognition of the social value of accessibility. The development of a more active research community around AD could

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<sup>42</sup> European Commission. (2017). A renewed EU agenda for higher education (COM(2017) 247 final). Brussels: European Commission. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52017DC0247>

<sup>43</sup> O'Hagan, M. (2007). Video games as a new domain for translation research: From translating text to translating experience. *Revista Tradumàtica*, 5, 1–7. <https://ddd.uab.cat/pub/tradumatica/15787559n5/15787559n5a9.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> Gambier, Y. (2013). Recent developments and challenges in audiovisual translation research. In L. Pérez-González (Ed.), *Between text and image: Updating research in screen translation* (pp. 45–67). Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins.

serve as a crucial foundation for knowledge exchange, interdepartmental collaboration, and the systematic integration of AD into university curricula.

### **4.1.3. Specific Training on Audio Description in Higher Education**

As for the AD courses offered, most take the form of short training sessions—typically under 10 hours—likely providing only a basic introduction to key concepts. Approximately 80% of reported modules or courses fall into this category, while the remaining 20% range between 21 and 30 hours in duration. This suggests that although more comprehensive training is available, it remains relatively uncommon.

Some 60% of content focuses on AD in audiovisual media, while a smaller portion addresses other educational materials relevant to AD, for instance images used to foster description skills as part of the AD process (20%). Topics covered include: understanding the needs of blind and visually impaired individuals (80%); translating AD into the L1 of students in language or translation degrees (60%); scriptwriting for AD (40%); voice usage for AD narration (40%); AD software (20%); and AD recording (20%).

Proposed activities include: AD analysis (60%); discussions on AD guidelines (60%); AD theory presentations (60%); and AD production (20%).

These results reveal that AD training is mainly offered through brief sessions, suggesting it is not treated as a core curricular component. Although limited presence alone does not prove an urgent need for greater visibility, it does raise questions about how well students and educators are prepared in a field that is increasingly relevant professionally. More comprehensive AD content could enhance competence among both teachers and students in key areas such as audiovisual communication, journalism, translation, and linguistics.

Such content, aligned with European recommendations on accessibility and inclusive education as well as in tune with Irish needs, could also support the creation of certification programmes or specialised courses, and foster stronger commitment to the various MA modalities and AD techniques.

## **4.2 Provision of Audio Description Services in the Irish Entertainment Industry**

The second study explores the provision of AD within the Irish entertainment industry, aiming to identify the range of AD services available across different sectors. Additionally, it seeks to gain a deeper understanding of several key elements, including the participants' familiarity with accessibility and AD provisions, as well as the training (or lack thereof) provided to audio describers in different sectors.

Twenty one responses were collected and the survey which looked at the awareness of industry professionals in Ireland of MA and AD, and the extent to which AD is offered in the entertainment sector, addressed three sub-questions:

**RQ2a.** Are those working in the entertainment industry in Ireland familiar with the terms MA and AD?

**RQ2b.** To what extent is AD offered in live events and entertainment productions in Ireland?

**RQ2c.** What specific training or resources related to AD are available for or offered by the entertainment industry in Ireland across the various sectors?

## **4.2.1 Awareness of Media Accessibility and Audio Description in the Irish Entertainment Industry**

### **a. Profile of the industry and experience**

The respondents in this study represent a diverse range of sectors within the Irish entertainment industry, even though the response rate was low: of 128 invitations across various sectors (theatre, museums, broadcasters, cinema, translation and technological companies, VOD and sport), there were 21 responses.

Of those who responded, most (32%) work in theatres, followed by others who work in broadcasting (20% in television and 8% in streaming platforms), and 20% in museums. A smaller proportion of respondents are involved in live sports (8%), cinemas (4%), and other areas (8%) such as music, comedy, performance, and visual arts.

While 52% work in the public sector and 29% in the private sector, 52% work in both—possibly based on the fact that some work on a freelance basis. In terms of distribution, 59% of the respondents are based in Dublin, 14% in Cork, 9% in Meath, followed by 5% of respondents who work in Galway, Kerry and Limerick, that is, most of the respondents are located in Dublin, and the rest are based throughout Ireland—see Map 2. The experience of the respondents in the workplace at the moment of completing the survey varies: many (38%) have been in a company or an agency for 4 to 8 years, 29% over 9 years, and 29% between 1 and 3 years. Their roles are equally diverse, with a large number of respondents working in a non-profit organisation (23.8%), followed by audio describers (23.7%), and box officers (14.3%). The rest represent broadcasting companies (9.5%) or museums (4.7%), work as audio description testers (4.7%), curators (4.7%), or tour guides (4.7%).

This data suggests that the Irish AD landscape within the entertainment industry is diverse and multifaceted, with a clear need for cross-sector collaboration. Firstly, the study reveals an underrepresentation of certain sectors, with some industries failing to respond—see Table 3, Table 4 and Table 5 in the appendix. This lack of engagement may indicate gaps in sectoral engagement, a lack of awareness, or potentially a lack of interest in AD, all of which could hinder the development of a cohesive and inclusive AD strategy across the industry. However, 2025 marks a clear change in this trend—large organisations such as the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU), and the League of Ireland (LOI) are now actively embedding AD or related accessibility services. Croke Park’s<sup>45</sup> AD commentary (ADC) service, launched in partnership with Vision Sports Ireland, offers live audio descriptive commentary for visually impaired spectators at GAA

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<sup>45</sup> Croke Park is the headquarters of the GAA.

Championship matches,<sup>46</sup> while also providing other initiatives like sensory rooms.<sup>47</sup> The IRFU has followed suit with sensory support initiatives across clubs to support fans who are blind or visually impaired partnering with [Field of Vision](#), to bring accessibility at the 2025 [Men's and Women's Six Nations Championships](#).<sup>48</sup> While the League of Ireland dedicated ADC in 2025 for the first time suggests growing dissemination of accessible audio content.<sup>49</sup>

The variety of roles and sectors represented by the participants further complicates the interpretation of the overall state of AD in Ireland. Respondents came from a range of positions, including those working in broadcasting, museums, theatres, live sports, and even box office roles, highlighting the wide spectrum of professionals involved in AD, but some respondents may have limited exposure or expertise in the broader AD landscape. This variation in professional experience and sectoral focus underscores the complexity of understanding the current level of knowledge and implementation of AD services across the country.

There is a mix of experienced and emerging professionals and a clear concentration of AD provision in Dublin—although this seems to be followed by a growing regional involvement. This regional expansion highlights the potential for broader accessibility, though it also indicates that Dublin continues to play a pivotal role in driving AD initiatives, both in terms of resources and infrastructure.

These findings clearly reveal that a coordinated and inclusive approach to AD would favour the development and implementation of policies and practices that ensure accessibility for all. The presence of respondents working in ticket offices, along with the underrepresentation of certain sectors and the lack of response from others, suggests that further targeted outreach and collaboration are necessary to address gaps across the AD industry. Therefore, a more comprehensive engagement across all relevant sectors is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and equitable AD landscape throughout Ireland.

## **b. Awareness of MA and AD**

While all participants are familiar with AD, 14% reported not knowing what MA is. It appears that MA and AD are not universally connected across sectors, with respondents' knowledge likely shaped by the specific field in which they work. In this context, increasing awareness of accessibility-related content is essential. Promoting and providing such initiatives—whether through local projects, national or European funding, or legislation mandating these services—would significantly benefit the entertainment industry.

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<sup>46</sup> Croke Park. (2025). *ADC commentary*. <https://crokepark.ie/matchday/adc-commentary>

<sup>47</sup> Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA). (2025, June 20). *Croke Park's match day experience now an even more inclusive one*. <https://www.gaa.ie/article/croke-park-s-match-day-experience-now-an-even-more-inclusive-one>

<sup>48</sup> Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU). (2025, July 21). *IRFU launches recruitment drive for audio description volunteers*. <https://www.irishrugby.ie/2025/07/21/irfu-launches-recruitment-drive-for-audio-description-volunteers/>

<sup>49</sup> Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU). (2024, October 14). *IRFU launch portable sensory boxes to enhance inclusive rugby experience*. <https://www.irishrugby.ie/2024/10/14/irfu-launch-portable-sensory-boxes-to-enhance-inclusive-rugby-experience/>

These findings highlight varying degrees of awareness, suggesting that initiatives designed to unify and expand this knowledge could act as catalysts for the broader and more effective integration of AD, MA, and other accessibility modalities. Strengthened institutional support would help foster a more uniform understanding and, ultimately, implementation of AD and accessibility practices across the entertainment sectors.

#### 4.2.2 AD Service Provision by the Irish Entertainment Industry

The provision of AD services within the Irish entertainment industry represents a complex landscape, containing both progress and significant challenges. According to the data, 81% of surveyed workplaces offer various accessibility services, while 14% do not, and 5% are unsure. The services which are offered consist of a range of accessibility modalities including subtitles (57.1%), voiceover (28.6%), AD (23.8%), ISL interpreting and dubbing (14.3%) along with the provision of transcripts, hearing loops,<sup>50</sup> AD touch tours,<sup>51</sup> relaxed performances, and NaviLens<sup>52</sup> This reflects a growing commitment not only to accessibility but also to diversifying accessibility modalities. However, despite the positive trend in offering multiple accessibility features, there is still a significant percentage of workplaces that do not offer provision of AD, or that are uncertain, suggesting significant growth potential in this area. The gaps in communication about available services, along with the limited implementation of AD and clear policies regarding accessibility modalities, likely contribute to this underdevelopment.

In response to questions focused on AD, the data indicate that 50% of participants provide AD services in their workplace, with 56% of these adhering to European guidelines and/or Irish regulations. While European and Irish regulations play a significant role in shaping AD provision, 22% of respondents were uncertain about regulatory details pointing to potential gaps in communication or understanding of accessibility provision within some organisations. This uncertainty could result in inconsistent implementation of AD services, thereby hindering efforts to create a fully accessible socio-cultural environment. The majority of the participants offering AD services have been doing so for 4 to 8 years (44%) or over 10 years (33%). However, at an organisational level, the distribution of AD service provision is more varied: some organisations have provided AD for just one year (11%), between 1 to 3 years (11%). While some organisations began offering AD as recently as 2018, 2019, 2020, or 2022, others have been involved in AD provision since 2009, when they “piloted and worked with Arts & Disability Ireland to implement it.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> A hearing loop system transmits sound directly to hearing aids or cochlear implants equipped with a telecoil (T-coil).

<sup>51</sup> A touch tour is a pre-show or pre-exhibit experience for blind or visually impaired people to explore costumes, props, sets, or objects through touch. It helps provide context and enriches understanding of visual elements in performances or exhibitions.

<sup>52</sup> NaviLens is an innovative wayfinding and labelling technology designed primarily to support blind, low-vision, and sighted users in navigating spaces and accessing information more easily (See: <https://www.rnib.org.uk/living-with-sight-loss/assistive-aids-and-technology/navigation-and-communication/navilens/>).

<sup>53</sup> ADI, personal communication.



The frequency of AD provision varies considerably depending on the nature of each sector of the industry: 28.5% offer AD on a daily basis (e.g., 19% television; 9.5% museums); 28.5% provide it weekly (e.g., 19% television; 9.5% live sports); 9.5% monthly (e.g., museums), and 19% of the AD is offered in theatres, typically on a per-performance basis, ranging from every 2-3 months in some venues to every six months in others. In some cases, AD services are offered on an occasional basis.

This means that television is the sector with the most extensive and frequent AD provision—offering nearly 40% of the total reported services on a daily or weekly basis. Other sectors like museums, live sports, and theatres show growing but less consistent engagement with AD.

Commitment to AD services is particularly strong in Dublin, where 65% of respondents report that their organisations offer AD. Dublin’s status as the capital and central hub for cultural and media activities likely contributes to the concentration of AD services in the city. This phenomenon is not unique to Dublin, as urban areas, particularly capital cities, are often the frontrunners in implementing accessibility services due to their higher concentration of resources and infrastructure (Drury and Punch, 2000<sup>54</sup>; Fryer and Freeman, 2014).<sup>55</sup> However, this centralisation raises concerns about the accessibility of AD services in rural or less urbanised areas. Organisations outside of Dublin have more limited access to AD, potentially exacerbating existing inequalities in access to cultural and entertainment experiences, particularly since 40% of the Irish population resides in rural or town areas (CSO, 2022).<sup>56</sup> Beyond Dublin, AD, according to the participants, is provided at specific events throughout different parts of the country. These findings suggest that while there might be a strong commitment to providing AD services across Ireland throughout a number of initiatives, there is a pressing need for broader distribution to ensure that all individuals, regardless of location, have equal access to these services.

### 4.2.3 Professionalisation, Investment and Audio Description Training in the Irish Entertainment Industry

According to the data, all AD services in the surveyed workplaces are provided by trained professionals: 56% of organisations employ in-house audio describers, while the remaining 44% outsource the service. This is typically due to (TV) programmes already being audio described by external companies, the use of freelance audio describers, or the need for specialised AD professionals for certain programmes or services. These findings underscore the critical role that professional AD plays within the Irish entertainment industry, ensuring the delivery of high-quality services, whether the audio describers are

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<sup>54</sup> Drury, P. J., & Punch, M. (2000). Economic restructuring, urban change and regeneration: The case of Dublin. *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland*, 29, 215–234.

<sup>55</sup> Fryer, L., & Freeman, J. (2014). Can you feel what I’m saying? The impact of verbal information on emotion elicitation and presence in people with a visual impairment. In A. Felnhöfer & O. D. Kothgassner (Eds.), *Challenging presence: Proceedings of the 15th International Conference on Presence* (pp. 99–107). Vienna, Austria: facultas.wuv.

<sup>56</sup> Central Statistics Office. (2023). *Census of Population 2022 – Summary results*. <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsr/censusofpopulation2022-summaryresults/>.



employed in-house or outsourced. The use of in-house audio describers may reflect organisations' investments in their own staff development, either to maintain high standards of AD or to cultivate expertise in specific AD subfields, such as television, theatre, museums, or sports. This could explain the fact that 11% of audio describers are recruited without requiring prior training. In contrast, the reliance on outsourced audio describers (44%) likely stems from a lack of internal resources or specialised knowledge within these organisations and a significant overreliance on external expertise—which could perhaps be due to a lack of native expertise.

Outsourcing AD provision can provide access to specialised skills and knowledge, but it also presents challenges in maintaining consistent quality and ensuring that services meet the specific needs and standards of each organisation. The crucial role of professional training in delivering high-quality AD services has been highlighted by Orero (2007), who claims that trained professionals are more likely to offer accurate, engaging, and effective descriptions, thereby enhancing the accessibility of visual content for blind and visually impaired audiences. The fact that all organisations providing AD services employ trained professionals demonstrates the industry's recognition of the importance of training in ensuring the effectiveness of AD services. However, the variability in service provision—whether in-house or outsourced—reflects the diverse strategies organisations employ to meet their accessibility objectives. For instance, until now, AD in live sport events has mostly been delivered on a voluntary basis (Moorkens & Pintado Gutiérrez, 2026).<sup>57</sup>

In 78% of cases, a dedicated budget is allocated specifically for AD. For organisations without a separate AD budget, access performances—incorporating AD—are typically funded through limited in-house budgets, the use of in-house volunteers, or external project funding.

In terms of investment in AD, where a budget is provided specifically for it, 44% entails public budget, while 25% is private, and 11% rely on donations. Specific budget ranges from €1,000 to €8,500 per annum.

Finally, in relation to training, 87% of respondents confirm that audio describers must undergo training before commencing their work. In some instances, agencies work with the same audio describers for all performances once they have completed the required training. In other cases, audio describers receive training through organisations such as ADI or Vision Ireland, or are trained by AD professionals from outside Ireland, some based in the UK (P2, P7).

44% of respondents report that their industry provides training for audio describers through workshops and various vocational courses, rather than through formal academic programmes. Among these, half are workshops, while the remainder involves in-house training (25%), or one-on-one instruction (25%).

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<sup>57</sup> Moorkens, J., & Pintado Gutiérrez, L. (2026). Audio describing football: A case study of Bohemians FC. In C. Declercq & G. W. van Egdom (Eds.), Special issue on Sports Translation / Translating Sport, *Journal of Specialised Translation*, 46.

The length of the training varies: 50% of the sessions last between 10 to 20 hours, while 25% expand beyond 30 hours. In all cases, training groups are small, with fewer than 10 participants per session. The primary focus of the training includes voice techniques for AD, understanding the needs of visually impaired audiences, and AD recording. Other topics covered include AD software, drafting, and translation. Activities typically involve analysing existing AD, discussing AD guidelines, and producing AD content. It is worth noting that no certification is awarded upon completion of the training in any instance.

Between 2021 and 2024, 75% of respondents reported that fewer than 20 individuals participated in AD training, while 25% indicated that between 21 and 40 people took part. In sum, the provision of AD services in Ireland is supported by a mix of public, private, and donation-based funding, and its provision is relatively limited with a lack of formal training and standardised certifications even when formal training is delivered, which may impact the scalability and consistency of AD services.

### 4.3 Audio Description and the User Experience

The third study investigates the perceptions and experiences of AD users in Ireland. It aims to assess the awareness of accessibility and AD services among blind and visually impaired individuals, explore whether they use AD in media and live performances, and identify the challenges they encounter in accessing and using AD services.

Fifty two responses were collected for this survey that looked at the experiences and needs of AD users in Ireland, and whether existing services meet their accessibility requirements. This RQ unfolded into three sub-questions:

**RQ3a.** To what extent are blind and visually impaired individuals in Ireland aware of AD services and how much do they use them?

**RQ3b.** How do blind and visually impaired individuals perceive the availability and quality of AD services in both MA and live performances?

**RQ3c.** What challenges do blind and visually impaired individuals face in accessing and using AD services in Ireland, and how do these challenges vary between media and live performance contexts?

#### 4.3.1 Accessibility and Audio Description for End Users

The respondents in this study display a diverse range of visual impairment status, with 58% being visually impaired, 29% blind, and 13% not blind or visually impaired. This diversity reflects varying degrees of reliance on and need for AD services, which are essential for both daily media consumption and full accessibility, benefiting not only those who are directly affected by visual impairment but also indirectly affected individuals—including those who work closely with the blind and the visually impaired, relatives, AD advocates, or those who may be AD users without being blind or visually impaired.

In terms of age distribution, 27% of respondents fall within the 46-55 age range, and 23% are between 56-70 years old. Other age groups represented include 17% aged 36-45, 13% aged 26-35, 10% aged 18-25, and 10% over 70 years old. The significant presence of

middle-age and older adults indicates that they might be more committed to or dependent on accessibility services, and therefore AD plays a crucial role in these demographic groups as part of their social inclusion and access to entertainment.

A vast majority, 69% of the respondents, are familiar both with MA and AD. The usage of AD services among respondents reveals a strong reliance on AD for mainstream media: 61% report regular engagement with AD services for television (TV), video on demand (VOD), cinema, and sport, highlighting AD's integral role in making these platforms accessible to visually impaired individuals. In contrast, engagement with AD in live performances (theatre, museums, sports) shows more variability: while some users consistently use AD during live events (19% every time and 22% sometimes), it is clear that AD provision at such venues is critical for enhancing accessibility and ensuring that all individuals can enjoy these cultural experiences—36% say that they rarely use AD services for live performances and 22% never do so.

In terms of awareness, all but one respondent are aware of the availability of AD services across various platforms. These include TV (26%), VOD (20%), museums (16%), theatre (13%), cinema (12%), sport events (8%), videogames (4%), and other activities such as opera (2%). This widespread awareness underscores the recognition of AD services in diverse areas of entertainment and media.

However, when it comes to use, the levels of engagement vary across different platforms: 30% of respondents use AD on TV; 19% on VOD; 13% for museums; and 10% in the cinema and the theatre. Additionally, 6% use ADC for sport events, and 2% AD for videogames. Only 7% of respondents report that they do not use AD services at all, indicating a clear pattern of consumption among most participants, particularly for TV and VOD, while other platforms like videogames and live performances have a much more limited engagement.

These findings highlight the diverse needs and experiences of individuals who are blind or have visual impairments in relation to AD services for a population with varying degrees of reliance on AD for daily media consumption and cultural engagement, underscoring the essential role of AD in fostering accessibility. AD is most commonly used and recognised in mainstream media, particularly television and VOD services, where it serves as a key tool for equal access to entertainment. In contrast, engagement with AD in live cultural and recreational settings—such as museums, theatre, and sports—remains more limited, suggesting both a need and opportunity for expanded provision. Middle-aged and older adults form a significant portion of the user base, underscoring AD's importance in promoting lifelong inclusion. While general awareness of AD is strong, actual usage across platforms is uneven, pointing to gaps in availability, promotion, and perhaps user confidence or opportunity. Overall, the findings indicate a general appreciation of AD, but they also point to the importance of strengthening AD provision and outreach across all forms of media and cultural participation to support a fully inclusive society.

### 4.3.2 Experience and Satisfaction of Audio Description Users

In terms of satisfaction with AD provision in Ireland, while it varies across different sectors, the overall perception among users indicates a widespread sense of lack of availability, alongside limited awareness of existing services: only 7.7% of respondents believe that there is sufficient AD available for television programmes, 5.8% for streaming platforms, 5.8% for cinema, and just 1.9% for video games.

These figures imply that while some AD provision is in place, this is either inconsistently implemented or insufficiently promoted to the audiences who require it. This is further reflected in the proportion of respondents who were uncertain about the availability of AD: 65.4% for video games, 30.8% for cinema, 25% for streaming platforms, and 11.5% for television.

Other sectors including theatre, museums, and sport also received predominantly “not enough” or “unsure” responses on AD provision. Museums were identified as offering more AD than other sectors, with 9.6% of respondents stating that there is sufficient provision. In contrast, only 3.8% reported the same for either theatre or sport.

These findings suggest that across nearly all domains, the provision of AD in Ireland remains limited, leaving many sectors largely inaccessible to blind and visually impaired audiences. This inaccessibility appears to stem from either a lack of service provision or insufficient communication about existing supports. The overall trend highlights an urgent need to improve both the availability and visibility of AD across media and services in other sectors. In particular, enhancing public awareness, standardising provision across platforms, and supporting organisations in implementing accessible practices are essential steps toward creating a more inclusive cultural landscape in Ireland. The case of video games presented a stark contrast to other sectors, where respondents indicated the scarcity of accessible gaming options or limited knowledge about them—younger participants may have responded differently, in this study 50% were over 46 years old. Addressing this uncertainty will require targeted outreach and stronger integration of accessibility features within the gaming industry—see Section 4.3.3.

Furthermore, there is near-unanimous agreement (94%) among respondents that providers in Ireland should take greater action to ensure consistency in the availability of AD across media and sociocultural events. This data supports earlier findings in the study and further emphasises the need for coordinated national strategies, clearer standards, and greater accountability among service providers to ensure equitable access to audio description.

This study highlights a general dissatisfaction with the state of AD in Ireland, reflecting limited availability across both media platforms and live sociocultural events. Few respondents find AD adequate for television, cinema, or digital platforms, suggesting a broader lack of awareness and accessibility for end-users. While museums appear to offer more consistent AD provision, sectors such as theatre, sport, and gaming remain largely inaccessible. Participants consistently call for greater reliability and reach, underscoring the urgent need for more widely available and user-friendly AD services throughout the country.

### 4.3.3 Challenges for Improvement

Despite widespread recognition of inadequate AD provision, nearly 60% of respondents acknowledge significant progress in the Irish industry over the past five years—21% strongly agree and 38% agree.

AD is regarded not just as an access service, but as an essential provision. It empowers blind and visually impaired audiences to fully engage with the content they watch, with nearly 60% strongly claiming that this is the case, and another 25% agreeing with it. Moreover, an overwhelming majority recognise AD as a vital and effective way to access creative content (46.2% strongly agree and 44.2% agree).

According to the results in this study, museums reported the highest use of AD services (25%), followed by cinemas (21%) and theatres (19%). Sporting events have the lowest usage, with only 8% of respondents using AD services. Additionally, 21% of respondents have never attended a live performance event at a public venue. These figures indicate uneven access to AD services, with clear gaps in sports and a notable portion of people not attending live events at all.

Section 4.3.2 already highlighted the issue of poor communication regarding AD provision, which becomes evident in this section, as 83% of respondents report being unaware of any advertising promoting AD within the entertainment industry. Most respondents discover audio described events through friends or family (24%), Vision Ireland (22%), advertising (19%), or other sources which were not explained (26%). Only 7% learn about these events through campaigns.

Therefore, while AD is clearly perceived as a vital accessibility tool, challenges around its availability and visibility persist across Ireland's entertainment industry landscape. Despite progress in recent years, AD access remains uneven—particularly in sectors like sport and live performance—and many users remain unaware of available services due to poor communication and limited promotion. The findings underscore not only the essential role AD plays in enabling meaningful engagement with cultural content, but also the pressing need for better outreach, consistency, and sector-wide implementation to ensure truly inclusive access for all. These concerns are echoed consistently throughout the report, reinforcing a strong and urgent call for systemic improvements in AD provision and accessibility.

## 5. Key Research Outcome per Study Group

### 5.1 Study Group 1: Higher Education

Overall, while the current presence of AD in Irish higher education is small and uncoordinated, these findings point toward a range of actionable steps that can help move us toward more inclusive, accessible, and informed teaching practices:

- **In terms of general awareness**, the study found that knowledge of MA and AD among university educators in Ireland is limited and fragmented. This overall lack of



awareness may hinder the development of this area as invisibility tends to be aligned to a lack of relevance. **It would be beneficial to raise awareness and understanding of MA and AD across higher education. This might include professional development opportunities, public talks, or targeted workshops.**

- **Most of the educators surveyed are ascribed to Humanities**, particularly departments like Modern Languages, Linguistics, and Communication, which shows some disciplinary alignment with where AD might naturally fit, but there is no consistent or systemic approach across institutions. **Universities could promote collaboration across departments, encouraging joint projects or interdisciplinary modules where audio description plays a key role.** <sup>58</sup>
- **The inclusion of AD in Irish Higher Education** is minimal and largely overlooked. Only a small group of educators currently do so—and their efforts are scattered across different programmes and levels, from undergraduate courses in languages to postgraduate work in music technology and translation. These initiatives appear to be individual rather than institutional, which points to a lack of strategic planning or policy support. **There is a need to develop and share teaching resources that can help integrate AD into existing modules—especially in areas like translation, media studies, and digital communication. Also, those educators who are already engaged in this work could be supported by building communities of practice—spaces where they can share expertise, codevelop curriculum, and elevate AD visibility as a vital part of inclusive education.**
- **The absence of AD in tertiary education reflects a wider, systemic gap that likely extends beyond universities to other educational sectors like vocational and adult learning.** Rather than being driven by formal academic structures, AD teaching tends to arise from professional demand, individual educator interest, or a commitment to accessibility. The field lacks an established theoretical foundation, and AD content is usually introduced reactively—responding to market or societal needs rather than through structured curricular planning. **Institutions, industry and policymakers could take proactive steps helping to embed AD into curriculum frameworks, and given the current lack of formal AD training among educators, professional development would be essential. In fact, collaboration with industry—including broadcasters and accessibility professionals—can provide students with practical, real-world experience, aligning academic learning with professional demands. Raising awareness of AD’s social and cultural value is critical. Promoting its importance and recognising educators who champion accessibility can help foster a more inclusive and forward-thinking educational culture.**

Although AD currently operates within a limited social, professional, and educational ecosystem, identifying and understanding these constraints is a vital first step toward institutional reinforcement and sustained curricular integration.

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<sup>58</sup> For instance, integrating AD into translation and interpreting programmes—as is common in many European countries—might be a way to leverage the disciplinary synergy between accessibility and specialised translation. Adopting a similar approach in Ireland could institutionalise AD training and align it with practices implemented in a well-established European trajectory. Of course, there are alternative ways to optimise training and resources.



Ireland's lower AD implementation quotas, lack of research tradition in the field, limited curricular content, and lack of professionalisation highlight the need for comprehensive, standardised educator training. This would ensure consistent and effective AD delivery in all educational settings (Matamala & Orero, 2016) and empower educators with the skills and confidence to incorporate accessibility principles into their teaching (Fryer & Freeman, 2014). Without such training, educators are left to navigate AD complexities on their own, which can lead to inconsistent practices and user experiences.

There is currently no official public data on how many AD professionals are active in Ireland. Governmental and cultural bodies do not maintain accessible records, hindering efforts to assess professional development in the sector. Arts & Disability Ireland (ADI), a pioneer in arts accessibility, trained five audio describers and subtitlers between 2008 and 2009 as part of its early initiatives—which were followed up by other training in the mid-2010s and further initiatives in 2025/2026.

To formalise any efforts, institutions could introduce specialised tracks or certification programmes in AD. These could be integrated into existing degrees or offered as standalone qualifications, signalling professional competence and helping graduates stand out in the job market. These developments should align with European and national goals for accessibility and inclusive education. Embedding AD within such frameworks would reinforce its social value and underline the institution's commitment to equity and inclusion.

## 5.2 Study Group 2: Entertainment Industry

The Irish entertainment industry is diverse but uneven in its engagement with AD (and MA):

- **Although sectors like theatre, broadcasting and museums were represented, many areas remain underrepresented**, highlighting gaps in awareness and engagement. Overall responses were lower than anticipated across industries, notably with limited representation from sports associations and cinemas. **Target outreach efforts to underrepresented sectors to raise awareness and encourage involvement in AD initiatives. Foster partnerships across sectors to share expertise and best practices.**
- **The provision of AD services varies widely in frequency and scope across Ireland.** While many organisations offer multiple accessibility options, including SDH and ISL, AD is less consistently available. Dublin leads in offering AD, benefitting from greater infrastructure and resources, whereas rural and less urbanised areas face limited access. This geographic imbalance highlights challenges in ensuring equal cultural participation for all, with AD services often provided irregularly or on an *ad hoc* basis outside the capital. **Proposals for actionable steps should include a number of aspects such as developing national guidelines and standards aligned with European directives; supporting the growth of AD services outside Dublin by building capacity in regional areas is of utmost importance, ensuring more equitable access across Ireland; or investing in sustainable funding models—that increase**

**and diversify investment in AD by encouraging public–private partnerships, offering grant incentives, and integrating AD into mainstream arts and culture funding schemes.**

- **Professionalising and training in AD are prioritised in the entertainment industry**, with services typically delivered by trained audio describers—either in-house or outsourced. Training takes place through workshops and short courses, and although formal, there is no certification. Funding for AD is a mix of public, private, and donation sources, often limited in size and scope, which may restrict the growth and consistency of the service provision. Organisations employ varied strategies to meet accessibility goals, reflecting differing levels of investment and expertise, but no details were shared. **Professionalising AD training and certification—perhaps in collaboration with academic institutions and professional bodies—can help raise the status of AD and ensure consistent quality. Showcasing effective programmes as models to inspire and guide other sectors in adopting accessible entertainment practices, encouraging the development of standardised training and certification pathways, securing more sustainable funding, and fostering greater collaboration across industry to ensure wider and more consistent access for audiences.**

The Irish AD landscape in the entertainment industry is diverse and complex, involving a wide range of sectors like theatre, broadcasting, museums, and live sports, that call for a strong need for collaboration. Overall, the provision of AD in Ireland’s entertainment industry reflects a growing commitment to accessibility but also reveals major challenges in consistency, awareness, and distribution. While a majority of workplaces offer some form of accessibility service, only a fraction provide AD, and many are uncertain about relevant guidelines or policies. AD provision varies widely by sector, with television leading in regularity, while sectors like theatre, museums, and sports offer AD more sporadically or at special events. Dublin remains the central hub for AD activities, but regional involvement is growing, highlighting the need to address urban-rural disparities in accessibility. Both public and private sectors, including non-profit organisations, contribute to AD services, suggesting opportunities for strengthened partnerships. The mix of experienced professionals and newcomers brings a valuable balance of knowledge and innovation.

To ensure the long-term sustainability and quality of AD services in Ireland, it is essential to strengthen in-house expertise through dedicated funding and training support, reducing reliance on external providers. Sector-specific guidelines and case studies can help organisations implement AD in ways that suit their unique contexts. Raising public awareness through national campaigns will further normalise accessibility as a standard practice, while systematic monitoring and evaluation will provide the data needed to inform policy, measure impact, and drive continuous improvement across the industry.

### 5.3 Study Group 3: End Users

The perspectives of blind and visually impaired respondents are key in finding out what end-users think about AD and its development in Ireland. Their insights reveal AD as a crucial tool for inclusion and emphasise the need for more consistent, user-informed approaches to accessibility across all sectors:

- **The respondents show strong familiarity with AD services**, especially for mainstream media like TV, VOD, and cinema. While there is some awareness of AD for live performances, its usage is much lower, with many rarely or never using AD in such settings. Awareness of AD spans multiple sectors, though engagement outside mainstream media remains limited. **Expanding and promoting AD in live performance and cultural sectors seem natural, perhaps by working with different venues to introduce and promote AD, and involving blind and visually impaired users in shaping accessible experiences.**
- **Satisfaction with AD provision, on the other hand, is generally low across sectors.** Very few users believe there is sufficient AD for television, streaming platforms, cinema, arts, sports or video games. Areas such as theatre, sport, and gaming are largely seen as inaccessible. A major barrier seems to be poor communication and lack of promotion, with most users unaware of advertising for AD services. Nearly all respondents agree on the urgent need for consistent and visible AD provision. **Ensuring consistent and visible AD provision could be enhanced by supporting providers with resources and funding to increase AD availability, especially in underrepresented areas, as well as working on targeted communication campaigns to improve visibility, ensuring audiences know where and how to access AD services.**
- **While many acknowledge some progress in AD provision over the past five years, major gaps remain**, particularly in live performances, where usage is low. Promotion of AD is poor or does not reach users, with most of them learning about services informally through friends, family, or advocacy groups rather than campaigns—which, according to the participants, are non-existent. The findings underscore that AD is an essential service for social inclusion and access to creative content, emphasising the urgent need for a more standardised, widely promoted, and consistently available AD services across all sectors to ensure equal access for blind and visually impaired audiences in Ireland. **Building a coordinated national AD outreach framework would help to establish a centralised platform to promote AD services across all sectors, where cultural institutions, broadcasters, and advocacy groups ensure clear, widespread communication.**

Despite modest progress, end-users express frustration over the lack of visibility, promotion, and consistent standards for AD services. Their experiences underscore the urgent need for more structured, accessible, and publicly supported audio description across Ireland's media and cultural sectors to ensure equal access and meaningful inclusion for blind and visually impaired audiences.

Across education, industry, and user perspectives, the findings point to a growing awareness of AD's value—but also reveal considerable fragmentation in how it is taught, delivered, and experienced. Inconsistencies in training, service provision, and access—particularly outside major urban or mainstream media contexts—highlight the need for more joined-up thinking. These insights provide the foundation for the recommendations developed by the Steering Group in Section 6.

## 6. Steering Group: Strategic Insights and Action Plans

The Steering Group (SG) was made up of representatives from Vision Ireland, broadcast and media organisations, regulatory bodies, academic institutions, and the arts and sports sectors. Together, the 11 members brought expertise in accessibility, advocacy, policy, research, inclusive media, and cultural engagement to support people who are blind or vision impaired.

In the context of the ADESI study, the SG served an essential role in bridging perspectives across academia, the entertainment industry, and the AD user community. Established after the primary data collection phase, the group contributed to identifying key accessibility needs that have been translated into actionable recommendations based on the findings of all three surveys and the SG discussion. Comprising AD users, broadcasters, and representatives from governmental and non-governmental organisations across the visual, arts, and sports sectors, the Steering Group offered multidisciplinary insight to inform policy, training, needs, and service development. Their discussion—recorded, transcribed, and thematically analysed—was instrumental in shaping practical strategies aimed at enhancing AD provision, promoting inter-institutional collaboration, in order to support a more inclusive cultural and social environment for blind and visually impaired individuals in Ireland.

The themes identified and discussed are structured as per below:

Steering Group (SG)		
SG1 AD and Education	SG2 AD, Industry and Users	SG3 AD Awareness and National Strategy
SG1.1 Interaction with Academia	SG2.1 Current Practices and Challenges	SG3.1 Regulation and Enforcement
SG1.2 Training and Certification	SG2.2 Regulations and Governance	SG3.2 Strategic Awareness
SG1.3 Career Development	SG2.3 Awareness and Accessibility	SG3.3 Collaboration and Advertising
SG1.4 Community and Volunteer Involvement	SG2.4 Finance and Strategy	SG3.4 Capacity Building
SG1.5 Awareness Campaigns	SG2.5 AI in AD	
SG1.6 Lessons from Related Fields		
SG1.7 Sector-Specific Initiatives		

An analysis of the key SG findings according to the sector and themes, and a final summary follow:

## **SG1 AD and education (AD Training and Practice)**

### **SG1.1 Interaction with academia:**

- **Interest in Audiovisual within Academia: Growing interest, fragmented collaboration.** A significant issue is the lack of content related to AD in higher education, but more concerning is the fact that no AD training courses seem to be offered. This means that there is no formal recognition for AD courses in higher education, contributing to a lack of professionalisation in the field.

### **SG1.2 Training and Certification**

- **Training and Practice: Lack of certification, course quality concerns, European guidelines.** The absence of AD courses in higher education also means that there is insufficient alignment between training programmes and industry needs in Ireland. In relation to the (limited) AD-related content, there is also certain mistrust around who delivers AD content and the quality of the training, especially in relation to different AD contexts like live broadcasting or pre-recorded content.

### **SG1.3 Career Development**

- **Career prospects: Limited job opportunities, remote work challenges.** Career prospects in AD are currently limited; without clear job opportunities and remote working solutions, professionals may not invest time in training, especially outside urban centres.

### **SG1.4 Community and Volunteer Involvement**

- **Community-based vs professionalisation debate, volunteers' role, certification barriers.** The debate continues on balancing community-based volunteer efforts with the need for professional certification, considering budget constraints and the feasibility of intensive, limited courses.

### **SG1.5 Awareness Campaigns**

- **Importance of awareness and accessibility: A need for campaigns and integration along with ISL.** Awareness campaigns and integration with existing accessibility practices like Irish Sign Language could support growth.

### **SG1.6 Lessons from Related Fields**

- **European initiatives could serve as models for broader contexts.** Examples like UEFA training in sports AD are good examples that could be followed elsewhere.
- New legislation, such as the 2024 Broadcasting Act amendments, introduces formal rights for complaints about AD quality to the broadcasting authority in Ireland, but enforcement across sectors (broadcasting vs arts) remains inconsistent.



## SG2. Industry and Users

### SG2.1 Current Practices and Challenges.

- **AD Status and Practice. Poor AD in cinemas, equipment issues, duplication, and demand:**
  - Pre-recorded AD availability is poor in cinemas despite legal rights, with industry reluctance to purchase AD services compared to SDH, leading to fragmented and inconsistent access.
  - Duplication of work and lack of clarity on ownership of AD content further complicate distribution.
  - Facilities and equipment often exist but remain underutilised due to low awareness and perceived lack of demand, such as at stadiums like Aviva and IRFU venues.
  - The system is fragile and highly dependent on a few committed individuals, risking sustainability.
  - Practical challenges include differentiating AD from radio commentary in sports, with some sports benefiting theoretically less from AD.

### SG2.2 Regulations and Governance

- **Governance gaps and enforcement challenges, multiple possible authorities discussed:**
  - Governing bodies have yet to take clear responsibility or develop a cohesive strategy, with questions about which authority should lead—be it the National Disability Authority, CNAM, tourism, or arts bodies.
  - The recently approved Accessibility Act 2025 is expected to set quotas and increase provision, but funding remains irregular and insufficient, with calls for agencies to incorporate accessibility into funding criteria.

### SG2.3 Awareness and Accessibility

- **Importance of raising awareness, facilities underused, audience engagement issues:** greater awareness is needed to increase demand and utilisation of AD services, especially in cinemas.

### SG2.4 Finance and Strategy

- **Funding irregularities, need for agency requirements, equipment costs.** Equipment costs and venue responsibility remain barriers, with a disconnect between venues and the audience with disabilities they serve.

### SG2.5 AI in AD

- **Synthetic voices, quality concerns, user complaints, AI cost considerations:**
  - Synthetic voices for AD are currently inadequate, lacking context, nuance, and accuracy (especially with Irish names or terms).
  - AI use in AD is time-consuming and labour-intensive, failing to match the quality of human describers.

- Users can submit complaints about both AI and human AD to CNAM, but private broadcasters may choose synthetic voices for cost reasons.
- Shifts to AI require careful quality management to maintain standards.

### SG3. Awareness and National Strategy

#### SG3.1 Regulation and Enforcement

- **Need for regulatory frameworks under CNAM, enforcement, standards:**
  - The sector calls for clear regulatory frameworks under CNAM to enforce compliance and provide equipment standards across all organisations.
  - Without regulations and accountability mechanisms, progress will stall; reporting and enforcement on standards are essential.

#### SG3.2 Strategic Awareness

- **Awareness in theatre, cinema, galleries, museums.** Awareness must extend beyond broadcasting to include cinemas, theatres, galleries, and museums.

#### SG3.3 Collaboration and Advertising

- **Collaboration between Arts Council, Dept, promoting AD services, homegrown talent.** AD services exist but suffer from poor promotion and visibility, especially outside major urban centres.

#### SG3.4 Capacity Building

- **Building local AD industry, supporting freelancers, learning from other examples:**
  - The current industry situation in Ireland is unsatisfactory in terms of quantity, quality, and sustainability of AD, with overreliance on imported productions that meet quotas but do not develop local capacity.
  - Support and funding from bodies like the Arts Council and government are crucial, as commercial sectors are relatively better resourced than the arts.
  - Homegrown talent—Irish actors, actresses, and AD providers—should be prioritised and recognised alongside other disability access measures.
  - Freelance AD providers face challenges with sporadic work and limited opportunities, especially in theatre and live performance contexts.
  - There are promising international models (e.g., UK Royal Ballet linking captions and AD) that Ireland could adapt.

SG summary	
Steering Group (SG)	SG – Key Themes and Findings
SG1. Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Growing interest in AD training, but collaboration remains fragmented.- Concerns over course quality, lack of certification, and need for alignment with European guidelines.</li> <li>➤ Limited job opportunities and challenges related to remote work in the AD field.</li> <li>➤ Ongoing debate between community-based volunteering and the push for professionalisation; certification seen as a barrier for some.</li> <li>➤ Highlighted the need for awareness campaigns and integration with Irish Sign Language (ISL).</li> <li>➤ Examples like UEFA's training in sports AD illustrate sector-specific approaches.</li> <li>➤ Training discussions addressed initiatives in broadcasting, theatre, and other sectors.</li> </ul>
SG2. Industry and Users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Poor availability and quality of AD in cinemas; technical issues and duplication of efforts noted.</li> <li>➤ Gaps in governance and unclear enforcement responsibilities; several potential authorities identified.</li> <li>➤ Emphasis on raising awareness as facilities are often underused and audience engagement is low.</li> <li>➤ Funding is inconsistent; discussions on agency mandates and the cost of equipment.</li> <li>➤ Emergence of AI in AD: concerns over synthetic voice quality, user dissatisfaction, and cost-effectiveness.</li> </ul>
SG3. Awareness and National Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Urgent need for regulatory frameworks under Coimisiún na Meán (CNAM), with clear enforcement mechanisms and standards.</li> <li>➤ Strategic awareness needed across cultural sectors: theatre, cinema, galleries, and museums.</li> <li>➤ Collaboration encouraged between entities like the Arts Council and government departments to promote AD services and support local talent.</li> <li>➤ Importance of capacity building in the local AD industry, support for freelancers, and learning from successful models like those in the UK.</li> </ul>

## 7. Conclusions

The ADESI report highlights that, although recent legislative and policy developments have led to incremental improvements in AD provision in certain sectors such as broadcasting, major challenges persist, particularly in Ireland's visual arts, and sociocultural landscape, where initiatives remain largely local. This shows rather inconsistent and fragmented AD services, affecting the ability of blind and visually impaired audiences to engage fully with cultural, social, and entertainment opportunities. The limited access to AD is likely to extend beyond leisure activities, affecting other vital areas such as education and access to information, with significant implications for overall quality of life.

The insufficient and inconsistent provision of AD services is closely linked with their limited promotion and lack of awareness to potential users. This means that not only are AD services unevenly available across media and cultural sectors, but many blind and visually impaired individuals remain unaware of when, where and how to access them. Without effective visibility—through targeted promotion, announcements on various platforms, or updated programme guides—AD risks remaining inaccessible in practice, even when technically available. Addressing both the supply and visibility of AD is therefore essential to enhance user awareness and engagement, ultimately improving inclusion and access across all entertainment platforms. Where AD is unavailable or poorly promoted, unequal access to cultural, educational, and entertainment services becomes more pronounced, raising significant concerns about equity, inclusion, and compliance with national and international accessibility standards. Ensuring consistent availability and effective promotion of AD across all venues is essential to fulfill legal obligations, promote diversity, and create a truly inclusive society where everyone can access and enjoy cultural experiences equally.

A further concern lies in the level of public awareness around AD. The study suggests that when promotion of these services does not reach audiences effectively, it not only limits AD user uptake but also hinders broader public understanding of the value of AD and the rights of visually impaired audiences.

These limitations can have broader sectoral and economic implications. When AD is underdeveloped, opportunities to include and engage a wider, more diverse audience are missed—potentially impacting audience growth, participation, and sustainability in Ireland's creative industries at the expense of being excluded from shared cultural experiences that are otherwise central to social connection. This also involves constraining potential revenue growth.

Stakeholder feedback also highlights concerns over the quality and authenticity of AD—particularly as some providers explore increased use of AI and synthetic voices, which are not yet consistent with user expectations for meaningful, engaging experiences. The need for formalised training, accreditation, and professional standards is repeatedly underscored as a route to ensuring service excellence across all forms of media and live performance.

Recognising these challenges, the report proposes a number of courses of action to support improvement and long-term sustainability—see Section 9. Strengthening policy frameworks will be essential, with coordinated national guidelines and standards to support the

implementation of AD across all relevant sectors. Alongside this, investment in training and certification for audio describers will help to build professional capacity and ensure consistent service delivery.

Though regulatory initiatives—such as revised binding targets for television broadcasters and plans for public consultation—signal progress, both users and advocacy groups consistently call for more ambitious and wider-ranging standards. Extension of these standards to sectors beyond television, including on-demand services, cinemas, theatres, and museums, is needed to support a more comprehensive and equitable approach.

Equally important is the need for increased funding, particularly in areas where resources are currently limited. Targeted investment could help address sectoral and regional disparities and ensure more equitable access. Furthermore, public awareness must be significantly improved through user-informed campaigns that promote AD as a standard, valued service across Irish cultural life.

Finally, fostering collaboration between stakeholders—from public bodies and industry leaders to service users and advocacy organisations—will be key to developing a shared understanding and coordinated approach. With these measures in place, Ireland can take meaningful steps towards a more inclusive cultural infrastructure, where accessibility is not an add-on, but an integral part of participation for all.

Overall, the ADESI project underscores the urgent need for coordinated action to create a more inclusive entertainment environment. It is essential to establish consistent policies that mandate and support AD across all sectors and regions, expand formalised training and certification programmes for audio describers to improve service quality, and increase funding for accessibility initiatives. By implementing these measures and setting cross-sector standards, AD can become a fundamental feature of Ireland's accessible, inclusive, and culturally rich society.

## 8. Limitations and Future Avenues for Research

While this study provides valuable insights into the current state of AD in Ireland, it is important to acknowledge several limitations that shaped its scope and findings.

As the first comprehensive, cross-sectoral exploration of AD in the country, ADESI was developed in the absence of prior national data. This meant the project necessarily aimed to establish a broad foundation—an approach that, while ambitious, may not capture the full complexity of each sector.

The limited sample size may affect the overall representativeness of stakeholders, and some findings should be interpreted with caution. Also, while the Steering Group brought together participants from a broad range of relevant sectors, certain perspectives—particularly from niche artistic disciplines or underrepresented communities—may not have been fully captured. As a result, the findings may not reflect the complete diversity of experiences and needs across Ireland's sociocultural AD landscape. Additionally, some sectors, such as smaller or rural venues, informal clubs, or areas with little tradition of AD



provision, were underrepresented—partly due to practical constraints in outreach and participation.

The study employed a cross-sectional design, collecting data at a single point in time through surveys and a structured discussion with a Steering Group. Although this approach provided a valuable snapshot of current practices and perceptions across sectors, it does not capture how attitudes, policies, or services may evolve over time. As such, it also limits insights into the long-term impact of audio description on user engagement, cultural participation, and overall quality of life.

Furthermore, the data collected were self-reported. While this provides valuable first-hand insights, responses may have been influenced by varying levels of awareness or understanding of MA and AD. As a result, the findings should be viewed as an informed approximation rather than a definitive or uniform perspective across all sectors.


Although the research identified significant gaps in training and certification for AD professionals, the proposed models remain conceptual at this stage and have not yet been tested in practice. Future work will also need to consider how the skills required for AD may vary across different contexts. The competencies necessary for AD in broadcast television and cinema, for example, are likely to differ from those needed for live broadcasts, theatre performances, museum exhibitions, sports or educational settings. Addressing these contextual distinctions would support the development of more targeted training frameworks and contribute to clearer professional standards within the field of AD.

Finally, the scope of the ADESI project—focusing on mapping the current landscape of AD in Ireland—meant that emerging technologies such as synthetic speech and AI were acknowledged but not explored in depth. Topics such as their ethical implications, long-term integration, and impact on user experience were not a central focus for the industry, regulators, or participants during this phase of the research. However, as these technologies continue to evolve and become more integrated into media production, they are likely to play a more prominent role in future discussions around AD policy and practice.

These limitations suggest multiple pathways for future research. For instance, longitudinal studies following users over time could help assess how changes in AD provision impact inclusion, participation, and well-being. Similarly, in-depth national case studies of successful AD initiatives—whether in theatres, cinemas, or sports—could provide replicable models for others to follow.

While the ADESI report mentions some international AD initiatives and practices, further comparative international analyses would also be valuable, helping to situate Ireland's progress within a broader context and offering insights into how different policy environments shape AD development. In parallel, experimental studies piloting new training approaches—such as micro credentials or blended learning models—could inform the creation of effective, scalable education frameworks.

Given the growing role of AI in accessibility, further investigation into practices and audience responses to machine-generated AD is warranted, particularly around emotional reception and cognitive engagement. Expanding the research lens to include a more diverse range



of users—including non-native English speakers, children, neurodiverse individuals—would also deepen our understanding of how AD can serve broader audiences.

From an operational perspective, future work might focus on developing sustainable economic and operational models, exploring cost structures and funding mechanisms to support widespread, consistent AD provision.

Moreover, the establishment of national benchmarks and performance indicators would be instrumental in tracking progress, evaluating outcomes, and guiding policy decisions.

Together, these avenues for future research offer a strong foundation for building a more inclusive, effective, and user-centred AD ecosystem in Ireland.

## 9. Toward a National Strategy for Audio Description: Recommendations for Policymakers and Practitioners

This brief outlines eight key recommendations to improve the provision, consistency, and visibility of AD services in Ireland. Recommendations are non-binding, grouped by stakeholder responsibility and framed with clear expected impacts, supporting policy champions and decision-makers in translating insight into action.

### 9.1 Legislative and Regulatory Action

**Stakeholders:** Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media; Coimisiún na Meán; Government policymakers.

Ireland is making meaningful progress in accessibility legislation; however, further steps are needed to ensure that existing frameworks are fully implemented and enforced across all platforms—including cinema, streaming services, and live performance venues, not just television.

**Recommended actions:** Introduce clear, measurable accessibility targets across sectors; mandate minimum AD quotas for funded or licensed content; and develop sector-specific guidelines (e.g., for live theatre or film exhibition), co-created with user input where possible.

**Expected Impact:** A consistent national baseline for AD provision, improving access for blind and visually impaired audiences across all cultural and media experiences.

### 9.2 Cross-Sector Collaboration for Systemic Change

**Stakeholders:** Arts Council, Screen Ireland, RTÉ, education institutions, user organisations (e.g. Vision Ireland).

The complexity of accessibility challenges demands a joined-up approach. Collaboration between academia, industry, and advocacy groups must be prioritised to co-design solutions grounded in real-world user needs.

**Recommended actions:** Establish formal partnerships between key stakeholders; support collaborative pilot projects; and co-develop standards and toolkits for accessible media production. Also, set up a Register of Audio Describers in Ireland, both for voice over and script writing.

**Expected Impact:** Stronger coordination and consistency in AD services, leading to more effective innovation and better integration of accessibility into mainstream practice.

### 9.3 Mainstreaming Accessibility as a Standard

**Stakeholders:** Broadcasters, cultural institutions, theatres, cinemas, streaming platforms, app developers.

Accessibility tools such as audio description, captioning, and sign language interpretation should be embedded into content production and exhibition—not treated as optional add-ons.

**Recommended actions:** Require minimum accessibility standards for publicly funded or regulated content; integrate AD into commissioning and funding criteria; and include accessibility planning at early production stages.

**Expected Impact:** Normalised, routine inclusion of AD in cultural and media content, raising audience expectations and industry accountability.

### 9.4 Balancing Innovation and Human Expertise in AD

**Stakeholders:** Technology developers, broadcasters, AI researchers, end-user groups.

While AI and synthetic voices offer promising advantages, their integration into AD must be approached with caution. The human voice remains crucial for delivering high-quality, emotionally resonant descriptions. There is a growing concern that AI and synthetic voices may be adopted primarily as a cost-saving measure, potentially compromising quality. Establishing clear quality standards for AD production will therefore be essential.

**Recommended actions:** Where suitable, future policies should consider hybrid models that combine technological tools with the expertise of trained human describers, guided by ongoing user feedback.

**Expected Impact:** Scalable AD solutions that maintain quality, emotional resonance, and user trust.

### 9.5 Developing Professional Standards through Certification

**Stakeholders:** Higher education institutions, training providers, Department of Education and Skills, professional arts bodies, broadcasting authorities, The Arts Council, ADI, Sport associations.

The absence of recognised qualifications for audio describers limits service quality and professionalisation.

**Recommended actions:** Establish a national certification framework aligned with European standards; develop accredited, interdisciplinary training pathways; and ensure content remains relevant to emerging tech and creative practices.

**Expected Impact:** A qualified, professional AD workforce, raising quality and consistency while supporting career development in the field.

## 9.6 Investing in Local Talent and Industry Capacity

**Stakeholders:** Arts and education funders, drama schools, local authorities, AD practitioners.

Ireland has the creative talent to support a thriving AD sector.

**Recommended actions:** Fund local talent development initiatives, including voice training, narration, and sound production; create regional training hubs; and support mentorship for underrepresented or rural communities.

**Expected Impact:** A diverse, sustainable AD talent pipeline and greater regional equity in AD access.

## 9.7 Strategic Investment in Viability and Reach

**Stakeholders:** Department of Public Expenditure and Reform; cultural and broadcasting funders.

Long-term AD sustainability depends on more than production funding alone.

**Recommended actions:** Establish a national accessibility fund to support small organisations and regional venues; invest in delivery infrastructure (e.g., headsets, digital platforms); and fund promotion, maintenance, and user support.

**Expected Impact:** Broader reach and continuity of AD services across all regions and sectors, including under-resourced settings.

## 9.8 Enhancing Visibility through Targeted Promotion

**Stakeholders:** Marketing and communications teams; user advocacy groups; broadcasters.

Many users remain unaware of the AD services currently available.

**Recommended actions:** Launch user-informed promotional campaigns tailored to different audience groups (e.g., families, educators, older adults); integrate AD information into mainstream communications; and use both digital and traditional media.

**Expected Impact:** Increased awareness, uptake, and audience engagement with AD services across platforms.

**\* For More Information:** This report is part of the ADESI project's effort to promote accessible media in Ireland. For further findings or if you would like further discussions, contact [lucia.pintado@dcu.ie](mailto:lucia.pintado@dcu.ie)



## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Members of the Steering Group

#### **Megan Connolly**

Megan is the Research and Insights Project Officer at Vision Ireland. Megan works within the Impact and Insights team with a focus on Vision Ireland's research activities.

#### **James Flanagan**

James has over 15 years' experience in disability sports, focusing on accessible services at live sporting events in Ireland. He currently serves as Disability and Inclusion Fan Network Coordinator at Football Supporters Europe. In this role, he supports and connects fans with disabilities across Europe to improve accessibility in live football.

#### **Kevin Kelly**

Kevin is the Head of Policy, Partnerships & External Affairs with Vision Ireland. Kevin has held a broad range of roles across multiple sectors spanning government, media, politics and the not-for-profit sector. Kevin is blind.

#### **Lina Kouzi**

Lina is the Head of Library Access Service in Vision Ireland. Lina manages the Vision Ireland Library and accessible production services.

#### **Niamh McCole**

Dr. Niamh McCole is Assistant Director in the Media Landscape Division of Coimisiún na Meán with responsibility for broadcast and video-on-demand compliance with accessibility obligations.

#### **Madeleine McNamara**

Madeleine is the Advocacy and Engagement Administrator at Vision Ireland. Madeleine works with service users who are blind or vision impaired to engage in advocacy and campaigns with Vision Ireland. Madeleine has low vision.

#### **Pádraig Naughton**

Pádraig is Executive Director of Arts & Disability Ireland, which champions the creativity of artists and promotes inclusive experiences for audiences. Pádraig represents Project Arts Centre as an Expert Collaborator on the Europe Beyond Access consortium.

#### **Nguyen Nguyen**

Nguyen is a researcher with a background in Translation Studies, inclusive language use and responsible AI. His current work focuses on Sustainable Development Goals terminology, ethical approaches to AI-powered translation, accessibility and cross-cultural communication. Nguyen provided research assistance to ADESI through targeted support in data analysis, mapping and reporting.

#### **David Nason**

David is the Accessibility Manager on the Customer Experience team in Sky Ireland. His role is to be a voice for customers with disabilities and alternative needs. Working internally and externally, David looks to ensure that all customers have an equally excellent experience with Sky.

## Óran O'Neill

Óran is RTÉ's Audio Description Specialist and Director of AD within Access Services. Blind since 2009, he ensures RTÉ meets regulatory targets and collaborates nationally and across Europe on accessibility, policy, and training initiatives.

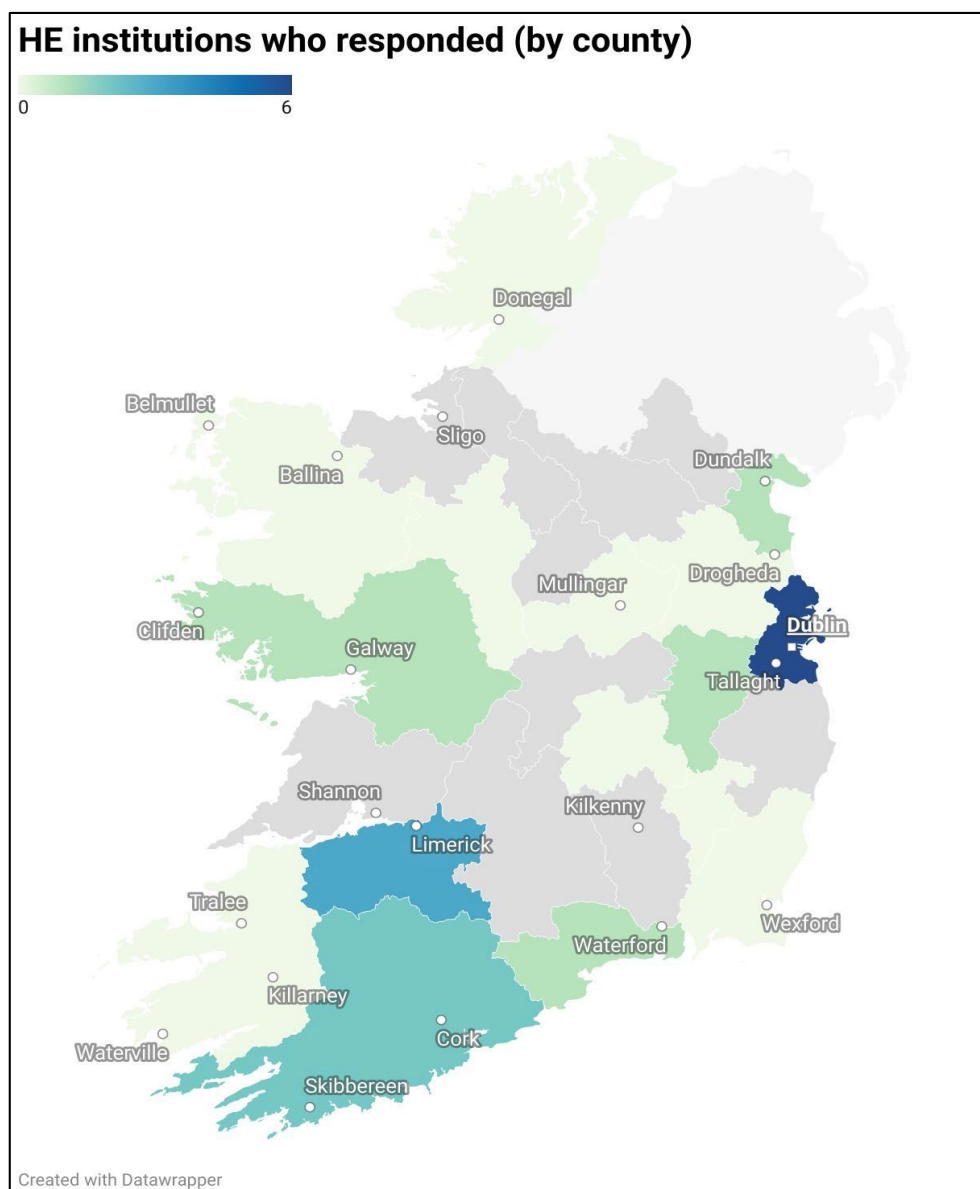
## Lucía Pintado Gutiérrez

Dr Lucía Pintado is a lecturer in the School of Applied Languages and Intercultural Studies at Dublin City University and leads ADESI (Audio Description in Ireland), a national project promoting accessibility for blind and visually impaired individuals across Ireland's education, industry practice and cultural and public life.

## Appendix 2. Maps and tables

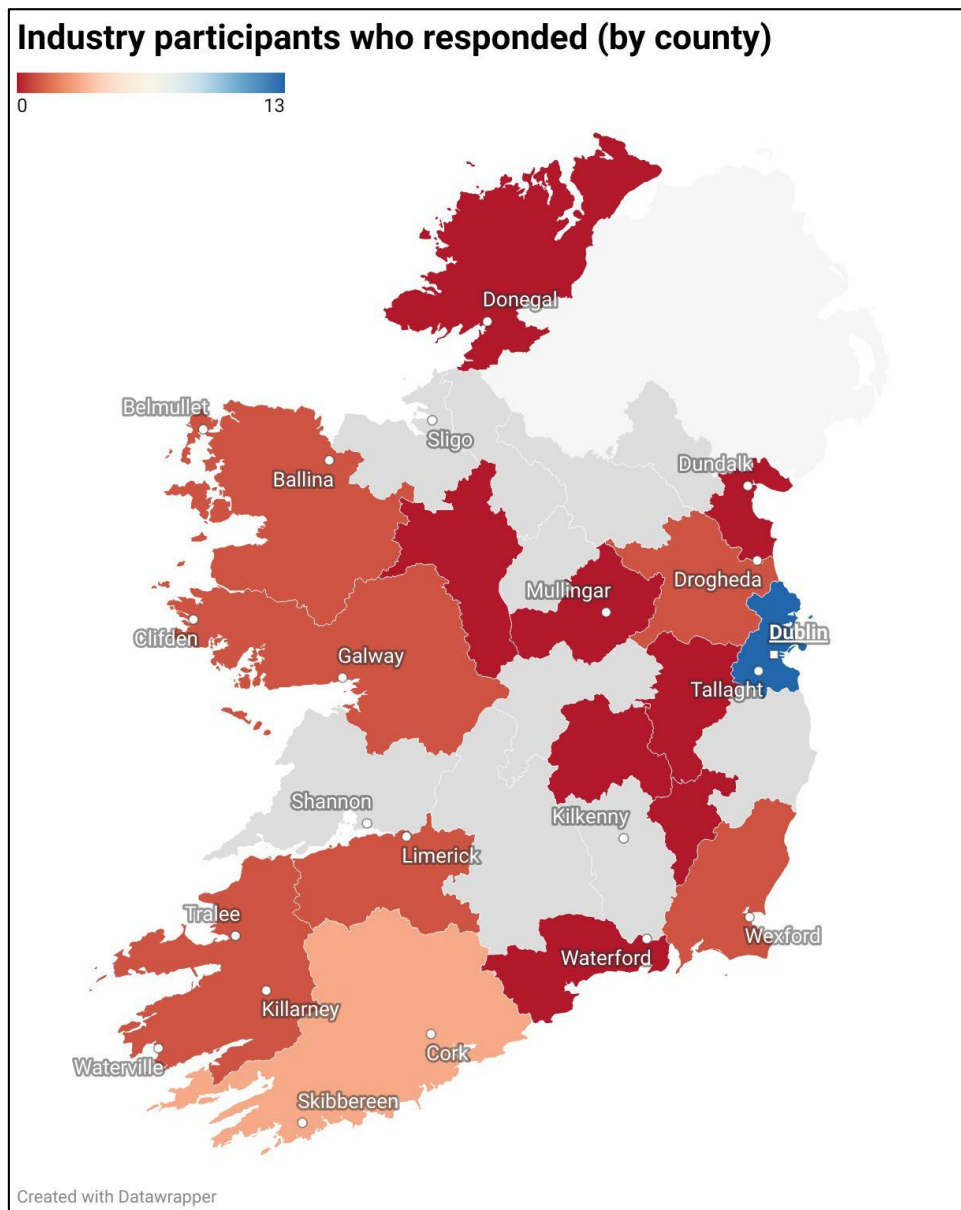
### Map 1. HE Institutions who responded by county

A map of Ireland showing higher education institutions that responded to the survey, with counties highlighted or marked according to the presence of participating institutions.



## Map 2. Industry participants who responded by county

A map of Ireland displaying industry participants who responded to the survey, with counties shaded or marked to indicate the number or presence of respondents.



**Table 1. Invited HE institutions**

**A table listing higher education institutions in Ireland that were invited to participate in the survey, organised by name and possibly county or type of institution.**

Invited HE institution
Atlantic Technological University (ATU)
Cork Institute of Technology (CIT)
Dublin City University (DCU)
Dublin Cultural Institute (DIC)
Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT)
Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT)
Griffith College (GC)
Institute of Public Administration (IPA)
Mary Immaculate College (MIC)
Maynooth University (MU)
Munster Technological University (MTU)
National College of Art and Design (NCAD)
Royal Irish Academy of Music (RIAM)
South East Technological University (SETU)
Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin)
Technological University of the Shannon (TUS)
The Institute of Education (IOE)
Trinity College Dublin (TCD)
University College Cork (UCC)
University College Dublin (UCD)
University of Galway (UG)
University of Limerick (UL)
Waterford Institute of Technology (merged with SETU May 2022)

**Table 2. Respondents per type of institution**

**A table showing the number of survey respondents grouped by type of institution, such as universities, technological universities, institutes of technology, and other higher education providers.**

Type of HEI	%
Institutes of technology	1.8%
Private college(s)	1.8%
Recognised college of the National University of Ireland (NUI)	3.6%
Technological universities	9.1%
Traditional universities	80.1%
University-level college(s)	3.6%

**Table 3. Organisations invited per sector**

**A table listing the number of organisations invited to participate in the study, grouped by sector such as arts, culture, education, technology, and media.**

Sector	Organisations invited
Arts & culture	4
Cinemas	26
Entertainment Start-ups	4
Museums	33
Sports Associations	4
Theatre	30
TV Broadcasters	3

**Table 4. Participants per sector**

**A table showing the number of participants who took part in the study, organised by sector such as arts, culture, technology, and media.**

Sector	Participants
Arts & culture	2
Cinemas	1
Entertainment Start-ups	1
Museums	5
Sports Associations	2
Theatre	8
TV Broadcasters	5

**Table 5. Full list of invited industries per sector**

**A table providing a detailed list of all industries invited to participate in the study, organised by sector such as arts, culture, technology, and media.**

Cinemas
Cineworld
Eye Cinema Galway
Fís Éireann (Screen Ireland)
Gate Cinema (Cork, Mallow, Midleton)
Irish Film Institute, Dublin
IMC (General Inquiries)
IMC Athlone
IMC Carlow
IMC Dún Laoghaire
IMC Galway
IMC Mullingar



IMC Savoy
Irish Multiplex Cinemas
JM-Films
Light House, Dublin
Movies@
Odeon Cinemas
Omniplex Cinema Cork
Omniplex Cinemas
Pálás Cinema Galway
The Arc Cinema Cork
The Arc Cinema Wexford
Triskel Arts Centre and Cinema
Triskel Cinema Programmer
Vue Cinemas

<b>Theatre</b>
Abbey Theatre, Dublin
An Taibhdhearc, Galway
Athlone Little Theatre
Aula Maxima, Maynooth
Bord Gáis, Dublin
Ciaran Taylor with Sightless Cinema Project, Dún Laoghaire
Corcadorca Theatre Company, Cork
Cork Arts Theatre
Dean Crowe Theatre, Athlone
Draíocht Arts Centre, Blanchardstown
Druid Theatre Company, Galway
Everyman Palace Theatre, Cork
Gaiety Theatre, Dublin
Granary Theatre, UCC, Cork
The Everyman Cork
The Gate Theatre
The Helix, DCU, Dublin
Lime Tree Limerick & The Bell Table
Mullingar Arts Centre
National Opera House (Wexford)
Olympia Theatre, Dublin
Pavillion Theatre Dún Laoghaire
Project Arts Centre, Dublin
Royal Theatre, Castlebar
Siamsa Tíre Theatre, Tralee
Smokey Alley, Dublin
The Presentation Arts Centre, Wexford
Theatre Royal, Dublin
Town Hall Theatre, Galway
Solstice Arts Centre

<b>TV Broadcasters</b>
RTÉ
Sky
TG4

<b>Museums &amp; Galleries</b>
Butter Museum, Cork
Chester Beatty Library, Dublin
Computer and Communications Museum of Ireland, Galway
Crawford Art Gallery
Crawford Art Gallery, Cork
Cork Public Museum
Donaghmore Famine Workhouse Museum, Laois
Epic Museum, Dublin
Fisheries Tower Museum, Galway
Foynes Flying Boat & Maritime Museum
GAA Croke Park, Dublin
Galway City Museum
GPO, Dublin
Guinness Storehouse, Dublin
Hugh Lane, Dublin
Irish Agriculture Museum, Wexford
Kilmainham Gaol, Dublin
Military Museum Collins Barracks (Cork)
Museum of Country Life, Castlebar
National Famine Museum - Strokestown Park, Roscommon
National Gallery of Ireland
National Museum of Ireland
National Museum of Ireland for Archaeology
National Museum of Ireland for Decorative Arts & History
National Museum of Ireland for Natural History
Passage West Maritime Museum, Cork
Rugby experience Limerick
The Hunt Museum, Limerick
The Irish Museum of Time & Irish Silver Museum, Waterford
The People's Museum, Limerick
Thomond Park Museum, Limerick
Titanic Experience Cobh
Waterford Treasures Medieval Museum

<b>Arts &amp; culture</b>
Aosdána
Arts & Disability Ireland
Visual Artists Ireland
The Arts Council (An Chomhairle Ealaíon)

<b>Sports Associations</b>
Bohemians FC
Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA)
Rugby Football Union (IRFU)
Soccer FAI

<b>Entertainment Start-ups</b>
Children's Entertainers
Kiddies Entertainment
Planet Entertainment (Athlone, Cork, Galway)





# DCU

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Bhaile Átha Cliath  
Dublin City University

DCU