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AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION FOR INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBILITY (AVTIA): DESIGNING PROJECT OUTPUTS INFORMED BY A DOCUMENT ANALYSIS INDICATING THE CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES IN SERBIA

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), in the European Region, there are around 190 million people with some form of hearing loss or deafness, and approximately 90 million people living with some form of vision impairment or blindness. The current paper provides an analytical overview of qualitative primary data (legislations, reports, news articles, etc.) in order to shed light on the current state of affairs in Serbia regarding the position of people living with these disabilities by assessing inclusiveness and accessibility to education and information. Furthermore, the paper illustrates how the document analysis served as the basis for designing study materials for lecturers and translators in the field of audiovisual translation (AVT).

Keywords: audiovisual translation, audio description, hearing impairment, multimodal translation, subtitling, visual impairment

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2023), in the European Region, there are around 190 million people who suffer from some form of hearing loss or deafness. This is to say that 20% of the European population, or 1 in 5 people, are affected by some degree of hearing impairment or deafness. Furthermore, there are approximately 90 million people living with some form of vision impairment or

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blindness, which adds up to 9% of the European population or 1 in 10 people (WHO, 2023). Therefore, every effort made toward improving the quality of life of those affected cannot be overestimated. From the medical point of view, healthcare systems focus on integrating people-centred healthcare for those affected by these sensory disabilities. However, the issue can be addressed in a multitude of ways, including improving inclusion and accessibility to information and education. One aspect of such a multidisciplinary issue can be tackled from the philological perspective by educating and empowering future generations of translators and interpreters in the field of audiovisual translation, which represents the primary objective of the Audiovisual Translation for Inclusion and Accessibility (AVTIA)¹ project co-funded by Erasmus+ (Project Number: 2024-1-RO01-KA220-HED-000249675).

Audiovisual translation (AVT) indisputably represents a modern approach to old and new challenges, especially taking into account that its far-reaching potential is now being enhanced with assistive technologies. Pérez-González (2020: 30) defines audiovisual translation as the practices, processes and products that focus on or result from the transfer of multimodal and multimedial content across languages and/or cultures. By *multimodal* it is meant that the content and the translation output inevitably comprise multiple semiotic modes such as speech, image (moving or still), music and sound effects, etc. At the same time, such multimodal content is conveyed by means of multiple media, i.e. it is *multimedial*. More precisely:

“In assistive translations, the meaning conveyed in the source text through acoustic or visual signifying means is reencoded in written or spoken language – in subtitles for the hard of hearing and audio description for the blind, respectively.”

Pérez-González (2020: 30)

Since the team of the University of Belgrade is in charge of the modules related to the essentials of subtitles for the d/Deaf and hard of hearing (SDH), it should be noted that the term d/Deaf will be used throughout the paper when referring to the target audiences that “include people who are deaf or hard of hearing and identify themselves with the mainstream hearing society, as well as members of the linguistic and cultural minority of the Deaf community”, as proposed by Zárte (2021: xix); except when reporting original statements that do not follow this nomenclature.

The outputs of the AVTIA project are timely and aligned with the European Commission’s intentions to facilitate access to education for people with these disabilities. The *Audiovisual Media Services Directive - AVMSD* (European Commission 2010, 2018) states that the rights of the elderly and of the persons with disabilities to be involved in and to be an integral part of the public life are closely

¹ <https://avtia.ro/>

related to the provision of accessible audiovisual media services that should include, but are not limited to, sign language, subtitles, audio description. The efforts towards this direction are also reflected in the *European Accessibility Act* as it specifically addresses the services providing access to audiovisual media services which are expected to ensure:

“...that the accessibility components (access services) of the audiovisual media services such as subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing, audio description, spoken subtitles and sign language interpretation are fully transmitted with adequate quality for accurate display, and synchronised with sound and video, while allowing for user control of their display and use.”

(European Commission, 2019)

In addition, the *Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030* was adopted in 2021. This document represents an umbrella directive from which other important acts and directives stem from. Also, it is in alignment with the *United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* and it outlines accessibility, promoting the rights of persons with disabilities globally, and ensuring equal opportunities and access to education as some of its main priorities (European Commission, 2021).

At the local level, previous research investigated accessibility of TV programmes to people with sensory disabilities in Serbia while emphasising the significance of sign language and audiovisual translation (Ćitić, 2021). Another study has highlighted how barriers in communication faced by blind or visually impaired persons can adversely affect their access to healthcare (Brestovački Svitlica, 2023).

In light of these developments, the aim of the present paper is to provide an updated overview of the current state of affairs in Serbia in terms of the prevalence of audiovisual translation in relation to the position of people living with hearing loss or visual impairment by assessing inclusiveness and accessibility to education and information, and to illustrate how the document analysis approach served as the basis for designing study materials for lecturers and translators in the field of audiovisual translation (AVT). Therefore, the research questions we endeavour to address are as follows:

1. What is the current legal framework and real-life situation in Serbia in terms of inclusion and accessibility achieved through audiovisual translation?
2. How can these findings be applied in order to create study materials for prospective translators and interpreters in the field of AVT that will contribute to sustainable and continuing improvement of the position of people who are d/Deaf or hard of hearing and those living with visual impairment or blindness?

With the aim of ensuring clarity and proper interpretation of the project results, we will introduce the project itself prior to diving into the core of this study. For this reason, the following section will provide additional context surrounding the project's origin, functioning, and impact at the national and international level.

1.1 AVTIA: The Prologue

In response to the global imperative of promoting inclusion through audiovisual translation, the AVTIA project is coordinated by G.E. Palade University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Science, and Technology of Târgu Mureș (Romania), which has established a consortium with five international partners: *West University of Timișoara* (Romania), *University of Parma* (Italy), *University of Lleida* (Spain), *University of Belgrade* (Serbia), and *Pixel* (Italy). Guided by the EU's core values of human rights, equality, freedom, dignity, and democracy, the project seeks to advance inclusion and accessibility through several key objectives. First of all, it aims to equip higher education (HE) lecturers with the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to teach and assess inclusion in the field of audiovisual translation. It also focuses on strengthening the competences of university students in inclusive AVT, particularly in subtitling for the d/Deaf and hard of hearing (SDH) and in audio description (AD) for the visually impaired, preparing them for the current labour market. Finally, the project aspires to foster attitude change and enhance awareness within the HE sector regarding the importance of ensuring equitable access to information for individuals with disabilities. Accordingly, the project addresses several target groups: lecturers and trainers in philological disciplines; undergraduate and postgraduate students specializing in AVT; early-career translators seeking retraining or professional development in AVT for inclusion and accessibility; and, finally, decision-makers and policymakers within HE institutions (e.g. rectors, deans, BA and MA programme coordinators, university Senate members, etc.).

The project's main activity is dedicated to the design and implementation of two training packages, one for lecturers and the other for students, encompassing theoretical foundations, pedagogical activities and practical tools for teaching and learning. Additionally, the project brings together academic experts and HE decision-makers in a collaborative effort to raise systemic awareness of the importance of inclusive access to media and video-based content, thereby ensuring that the future workforce is equipped with the necessary qualifications to address these societal needs. Accordingly, the AVTIA project will deliver concrete outcomes for academic communities by developing a comprehensive training package for lecturers, focused on teaching and assessing inclusion in audiovisual translation. In addition, it will provide a tailored training package for students, offering practical guidance in subtitling for the d/Deaf and hard of hearing as well as in audio description for blind and partially sighted audiences. Complementing these educational resources, the project will

produce a set of policy recommendations designed to foster inclusive approaches and practices in audiovisual translation within university curricula and course design.

Both training packages are structured into five modules, each comprising three learning units, and have been developed by the five partner institutions. The University of Belgrade, represented by the Faculty of Medicine, the Faculty of Philology, the School of Dental Medicine, and the Faculty of Sport and Physical Education, is responsible for Module 2: *Subtitling for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (SDH) – The Essentials*.

The official website of the AVTIA project (<https://avtia.ro/index.php>) serves as a central dissemination platform, presenting detailed information on the project's objectives, activities, partnership, and outcomes. It hosts both training packages, with materials continuously uploaded as they are developed, and includes policy recommendations to support inclusive practices in AVT. Upon its completion, the platform will serve as a sustainable learning and resource hub, designed to support the continuous professional development of the project's target groups.

2. DATA COLLECTION

In the process of project application, i.e. while putting together the project proposal that would reflect the rationale behind implementing this particular project in Serbia, the authors were asked to delineate relevant needs analyses undertaken in the field at national level and provide qualitative and quantitative data, including any other reliable indicators. We were also required to indicate the original sources providing the primary data we collected in order to prove that implementing the project in our country was of supreme importance.

Therefore, we obtained primary data with the aim of pinpointing the current circumstances surrounding the necessity for implementing AVT in different segments of public life. All documents included in the study were available online, i.e. in the digital format. In order to make every effort to secure the participation of the University of Belgrade in the AVTIA project, we relied on the existing legal framework, as well as the reports found on the webpages of news portals and organisations assisting persons with visual and hearing impairments. When it comes to inclusion criteria, the search terms we looked for within the documents included *accessibility, audio description, inclusion, blind, deaf, communication, information, education, subtitles*, etc. to help identify the segments addressing the subject of our interest. In other words, the documents had to precisely address the position of people with visual and hearing impairments and their access to information and education in order to be included in the study. The documents that did not have direct connection with these criteria were excluded. Figure 1 shows the distribution of different types of documents included in the analysis. For instance, *Guidelines for Communication with Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons and Cooperation with Sign Language Interpreters* does not address

AVT but focuses on sign language and for this reason was not further extrapolated (City Organization of the Deaf of Belgrade & Association of Sign Language Interpreters, n.d.). As opposed to this, the *Law on Sign Language* and *An Implementation Analysis of the Law on the Use of Sign Language in the Republic of Serbia* were taken into account as they represent indicators of the legal framework supposed to facilitate accessibility, on the one hand, and an analysis of the actual circumstances concerning this matter, on the other hand.

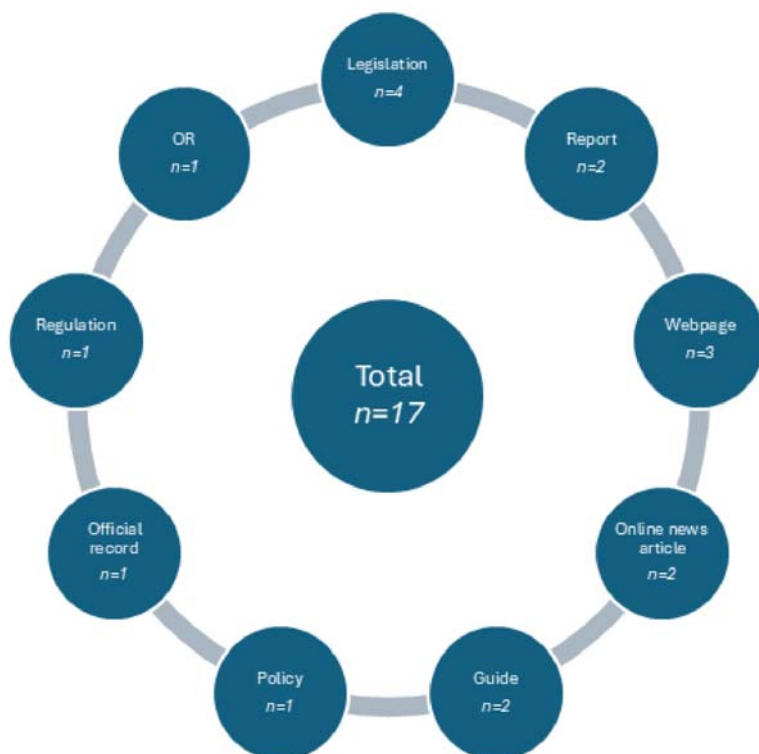


Fig. 1: The distribution of the documents included in the study based on their type (OR=official recommendation)

The total number of documents included in the analysis was 17. The data were classified into 8 categories based on their type. The detailed distribution of the dataset was as follows: legislation (n=4), report (n=2), webpage (n=3), online news article (n=2), guide (n=2), policy (n=1), official record (n=1), regulation (n=1), official recommendation (OR) (n=1).

To wrap up, this section introduced the dataset included in the present document analysis which will be elucidated in the following section.

3. METHOD

Given the heterogeneity of the data obtained, as described in the previous section, the research method we opted for was document analysis. Document analysis represents a qualitative research method that approaches documentary evidence in a systematic manner in an attempt to answer research questions (Gross, 2018, p. 545). Depending on the focus of their study, researchers may choose from a variety of documents such as policies and regulations, reports, budgets, charts, journal articles, advertisements, newspaper articles, webpages, etc. and these may be classified as either primary data (first-hand records) or secondary data (the result of an analysis of primary data accompanied by the researcher's interpretation) (Gross, 2018, pp. 545-546). While documents can have a purely descriptive function when, for instance, they are used for the purpose of a comparative analysis of the types of legislations in different countries², they can also be perceived as highly significant statements whose intention is to convey political actions and what they do in practice is signalling a political intention (Karppinen & Moe, 2012, 185). Employing such an approach allowed us to consolidate the existing data on the topic of audiovisual translation in Serbia that could subsequently be used as the basis for the design of study materials for lecturers and students who represent (prospective) translators in the field of AVT.

Interestingly, the situation in Serbia has slightly changed since the moment our project application was submitted in early 2024 and then approved for funding later that same year. Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, we have included additional data and the presentation of the key findings obtained will follow a temporal organisation, i.e. the data will be organised in chronological order with the aim of illustrating how the situation has evolved during the past decade.

4. RESULTS

In this section, we will first present the findings of the document analysis conducted, followed by a thorough presentation of one of the project results (Module 2, compiled by the team of the University of Belgrade) whose purpose is to improve inclusion and accessibility by empowering AVT lecturers by introducing SDH.

4.1 Document Analysis: The Truth is Out There

The search for truth, no matter how strenuous, can still be viable when approached with scientific diligence and systematicity. The goal of the present document analysis was to offer answers regarding the current circumstances in terms of the position of

² A comparative overview of AVT guidelines at the European level and in the partner countries of the universities making up the AVTIA project consortium is part of Module 1 within the Package for lecturers (provided by G.E. Palade University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Science, and Technology of Târgu Mureş). These findings are part of the study material and include accompanying tasks in order to elicit a comparative analysis of these guidelines.

people living with sensory disabilities, i.e. hearing and visual impairments, in Serbia. The findings were then used as the starting point that has guided the design of the project outputs in the form of modules for lecturers and students. Table 1 contains the key highlights from the primary data included in the study, along with the metadata presented as the year of publication, the title, the type of publication, and the source of publication.

Year	Title	Type	Source	Key points
2009	<i>Law on the Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities</i>	Legislation	Official Gazette No. 42/2009	Stipulates accessibility to information, communication and other services, including electronic services and emergency services (<i>Article 9</i>). Contracting states are required to ensure access to education for persons, particularly children, who are deaf, blind, or deafblind (<i>Article 24</i>).
2014 (amended in 2015, 2016, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2025)	<i>Law on Public Service Broadcasters</i>	Legislation	Official Gazette No. 83/2014, 103/2015, 108/2016, 161/2020, 129/2021, 142/2022, 92/2023, 51/2025	The public media broadcasting service is required to take into account the linguistic and speech standards of the deaf and hard of hearing and to make efforts towards adapting their contents to the blind and persons with visual impairments (<i>Article 18</i>).
2015	<i>Law on the Use of Sign Language</i>	Legislation	Official Gazette No. 38/2015	Media service providers are required to make efforts towards ensuring accessible audio-visual media services by using the services of sign language interpreters or any other services that the deaf find acceptable (<i>Article 17</i>).

2015	<i>Report on the Position of the Deaf Community in Serbia in the Field of Media, Availability of Interpreter Services and Education</i>	Report	Viribus Unitis Foundation	According to the records of the Deaf Union of Serbia, there are 84 sign language interpreters, about 30 of whom are active in the field – an alarmingly low number. Consequently, a large majority of the deaf and hard of hearing in Serbia still rely on their family members or friends, who can also be hard of hearing, in order to bridge the communication gap between the hearing and themselves. Yet, they are often excluded from the conversations and only receive brief snippets that are often related to their habits, problems, and recommended therapies. Insufficient amount of accessible content in the media (through using Serbian subtitles or sign language). This results in limited access to information and education. Inadequately educated teaching and professional staff at special schools and inadequate curricula and expected learning outcomes. Lack of adequate support to deaf students within regular education.
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2017	<i>About the Law on the Use of Sign Language</i>	Webpage	Association of Serbian Sign Language Interpreters	In 2015 Law on the Use of Sign Language. In 2017 the Law on the Use of Sign Language translated into Serbian Sign Language (Project: <i>Translation of the Law on the Use of Sign Language into Serbian Sign Language and Promotion of the Sign Language Interpreter Profession</i>).
2019	<i>An Implementation Analysis of the Law on the Use of Sign Language in the Republic of Serbia</i>	Report	City Organization of the Deaf of Belgrade & Association of Sign Language Interpreters	The Law on the Use of Sign Language does not explicitly recognise two key rights when it comes to the deaf – the right to communicate in sign language and the right to be educated in sign language, which is a prerequisite for feeling dignified and for fostering personal development and growth. The Law on the Use of Sign Language does not recognise a whole population of <i>deafblind</i> persons who also use Serbian Sign Language, along with translation services which differ from those used by the deaf.
2019	<i>In Serbia there are Around 30 Sign Language Interpreters per 70,000 people</i>	Online news article	Radio Television of Serbia (RTS)	30 sign language interpreters per 70,000 people in Serbia who use sign language as their primary language of communication. Bylaws required in order to fully implement the Law on the Use of Sign Language.

2020	<i>Strategy for the Improvement of the Position of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Serbia 2020-2024</i>	Policy	Official Gazette No. 44/2020	Despite the existing legal framework, persons with sensory disabilities still find it hard to access information and to communicate as, for instance, print media are usually not made accessible to the blind and visually impaired. 2019 statistics of the Ministry of Justice: 22 sign language interpreters in Serbia Insufficient number of sign language interpreters and their inability to attend high-quality training programmes. The importance of audio description is recognised in light of increasingly more available software solutions and its widespread usage across the European Union. Recommends increased use of subtitles and sign language in the media. Emphasises the need to improve information accessibility and to exercise the right to access education.
2022	<i>Guidelines for Monitoring the Implementation of the Strategy for the Improvement of the Position of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Serbia 2020-2024 at the Local Level</i>	Guide	Center for Independent Living of Persons with Disabilities of Serbia	Proposes achievement measurements and indicators for local self-government units that are supposed to gauge to what extent the Strategy 2020-2024 and its accompanying Action Plan (available for every year within the timeframe) are being implemented. Acknowledges the number and type of accessible cultural, sports, and other contents as an indicator of accessibility to information and communication.

2022	<i>Guide to the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Serbia</i>	Guide	Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, Sector for the Protection of Persons with Disabilities & National Organization of Persons with Disabilities of Serbia (NOOIS)	Acknowledges the right to inclusive education throughout primary, secondary, tertiary education, and adult education. The Law on Electronic Administration stipulates that state authorities and organisations must design, implement, maintain, and update software solutions that follow accessibility standards in order to ensure access to the services of electronic government without technical, audio-visual, semantic, or linguistic barriers.
2022	<i>Cultural Discrimination: Cultural Contents Inaccessible to Persons with Disabilities</i>	Online news article ³	Danas	85% of cultural institutions partially or completely inaccessible. In 2007, the Festival of Films Adapted to Persons with Visual Impairments paved the way for the development of audio description Two TV series broadcast by the Radio Television of Serbia (RTS) now contain audio description. Audio description in theatres at its initial stage. Museums and art exhibitions mostly inaccessible.

³ The author of this article is a blind person who holds a Bachelor Degree in Psychology and a Master's Degree in Communication Studies and aims to raise awareness about people with disabilities and accessibility. The article is a result of a project implemented by the Center for Media Professionalization and Media Literacy (CEPROM) and co-funded by the Republic of Serbia.

2023 (amended 2025)	<i>Law on Electronic Media</i>	Legislation	Official Gazette No. 92/2023 & 51/2025	The Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media is in charge of promoting the enhancement of accessibility of media services to persons with disabilities (<i>Article 7</i>). Acknowledges the proportion of contents adapted to persons with disabilities (especially with visual and hearing impairments) as a factor that is used for determining the fee for exercising the right to provide a media service (<i>Article 48</i>). Stipulates that media service providers must protect the rights of persons with disabilities by adapting their contents to people with visual and hearing impairments and ensuring continuing efforts are made towards including Serbian Sign Language, subtitles, and audio description. Media service providers are obliged to submit annual reports about the measures taken (<i>Article 73</i>).
2024	<i>Rulebook on the Accessibility of Program Content for Persons with Hearing and Visual Impairments</i>	Regulation	Official Gazette No. 43/2024	Further regulates the obligations of television media service providers concerning the accessibility of media content to persons with visual and hearing impairments. Emphasises the use of Serbian Sign language, subtitles, and audio description with the aim of exercising the right to access public information (Articles 1-4).

2024	<i>Recommendation of Measures for Achieving Equality and Protection Against Discrimination</i>	Official recommendation	Commissioner for the Protection of Equality	Points out the importance of accessibility to information and communication and provides an overview of the existing legal framework. Emphasises the fact that some media service providers have made an effort to ensure accessible contents, while others have failed to do so. All media service providers with national frequency are urged to take measures in order to ensure accessible contents, especially news programmes and service information, and to adapt their contents to viewers with hearing and visual impairments to the highest extent possible.
2024	<i>Programmes with audio description</i>	Webpage	RTS Planeta	5 TV series now include audio description
2025	<i>Electronic Register of Permanent Court Translators and Interpreters</i>	Official record	Ministry of Justice	23 sign language interpreters

2025	<i>About the Union of the Blind of Serbia</i>	Webpage	Union of the Blind of Serbia	12,000 persons who are blind or suffer from severe visual impairment. The Library of the Serbian Blind Association “Dr Milan Budimir” has in its possession over 6,000 audio titles and over 50,000 books in Braille. Regularly publishes audio books. “From Visual to Verbal” – a workshop on audio description (27 November 2024, Convenor: Joel Snyder – one of the first audio describers in the world)
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Table 1: A chronological synthesis of the state of affairs regarding accessibility, the blind or visually impaired, the d/Deaf or hard of hearing, and AVT in Serbia

The initial step towards recognising the rights of people with disabilities to access information and education, including those with visual and hearing impairments, was made in 2009 when Serbia ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Articles 9 and 25 of the *Law on the Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* clearly stipulate accessibility to information, education, communication and other services, including electronic services and emergency services.

Ever since the legal framework has been updated to further reflect and regulate these intentions (e.g. *Law on Public Service Broadcasters*, *Law on Electronic Media*, *Law on the Use of Sign Language*, *Rulebook on the Accessibility of Program Content for Persons with Hearing and Visual Impairments*, *Guidelines for Monitoring the Implementation of the Strategy for the Improvement of the Position of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Serbia 2020-2024 at the Local Level*, *Guide to the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Serbia*), various types of official reports (e.g. *Report on the Position of the Deaf Community in Serbia in the Field of Media*, *Availability of Interpreter Services and Education*, *An Implementation Analysis of the Law on the Use of Sign Language in the Republic of Serbia*), statistics (Ministry of Justice) and news coverage (RTS, Danas) have revealed the fact that the

law is being only partially implemented. The *Strategy for the Improvement of the Position of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Serbia 2020-2024* revealed the 2019 Statistics of the Ministry of Justice stating that there were only 22 sign language interpreters in Serbia. A news article (RTS, 2019) from 2019 stated that there were not more than 30 sign language interpreters per 70,000 people who use sign language as their primary language of communication. On inspecting the official record of the Ministry of Justice (*Electronic Register of Permanent Court Translators and Interpreters*), we could see that there are now 23 registered sign language interpreters in Serbia. Finally, audio description in theatres is at its initial stage, while museums and art exhibitions remain mostly inaccessible (Danas, 2022). However, *The Sign Museum* project carried out in 2014 by the City Organization of the Deaf of Belgrade and the Association of Sign Language Interpreters should be introduced as a step towards introducing sign language with a view to improving accessibility in the Museum of Yugoslavia (City Organization of the Deaf of Belgrade & Association of Sign Language Interpreters, n.d.). It should also be noted that the population of *deafblind* people is recognised in the *Law on the Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*; however, *An Implementation Analysis of the Law on the Use of Sign Language in the Republic of Serbia* highlighted the fact that this was not the case with the *Law on the Use of Sign Language*.

Finally, in 2024 the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality issued an official recommendation (*Recommendation of Measures for Achieving Equality and Protection Against Discrimination*) to urge media service providers with national frequency to adapt their contents following the accessibility principles to the highest extent possible, especially taking into consideration viewers with hearing and visual impairments.

Nevertheless, there are certain indicators that the situation is constantly improving. Namely, the City Organization of the Deaf of Belgrade was part of the project within which the *Law on the Use of Sign Language* (passed in 2015) was translated into Serbian Sign Language in 2017. Furthermore, the Radio Television of Serbia used to broadcast two TV series with audio description in 2022 (Danas, 2022), which has increased to five in 2024 (RTS, 2024). Additionally, in 2024, the Union of the Blind of Serbia organised a workshop on audio description whose convenor was Joel Snyder – one of the first audio describers in the world, which is particularly commendable along with the fact that the Union's library holds more than 6,000 audio titles and over 50,000 books in Braille that are at disposal to an estimated 12,000 blind or severely visually impaired people in Serbia⁴.

The objectives of the AVTIA project are in alignment with these improvements. Therefore, the next section will be devoted to describing how project outputs were

⁴ Brestovački Svitlica (2023, pp. 66-67) points out that the data of the European Blind Union (EBU) suggest there are approximately 1.4 million visually impaired people in Serbia, out of whom about 24,000 are blind.

designed to facilitate the process of introducing AVT in the educational system in Serbia.

4.2 AVTIA: Act I, Module II

As previously mentioned, the University of Belgrade is responsible for the same module (Module 2: *SDH – The Essentials*) within both the lecturer and student packages. Since the package for lecturers, being the first project result, has already been completed at the time of writing this paper, we will focus on its Module 2 to demonstrate how we developed materials for lecturers and translators in AVT.

The training package for lecturers consists of five modules, each containing three learning units (LUs): *The Audiovisual Landscape on Inclusion, Subtitling for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (SDH) – The Essentials, Subtitling for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (SDH) – The Practice, Audio Description (AD) – What and Who?*, and *Audio Description (AD) – Who and How?* Each module includes an introductory video tutorial, presentations, listening comprehension tasks, discussion points, critical article reviews, and multiple-choice quizzes.

Module 2 (*Subtitling for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing – The Essentials*) is structured around the following learning units: *Understanding Hearing Impairment, SDH Features, Challenges, Guidelines*, and *SDH for Different Age Segments*. Each unit begins with an introductory/brainstorming session, followed by presentation-based theoretical material. This is complemented by an application and consolidation section with YouTube video-based listening comprehension tasks (discussed in-class or via an online forum), an assignments section focusing on critical article reviews and error correction tasks, and interactive multiple-choice quizzes designed to support knowledge retention and consolidation.

The overarching aim of the first learning unit (LU1) in Module 2 is to foster a thorough understanding of hearing impairment (HI) and its influence on language acquisition and speech production, thereby providing a foundation for enhanced educational and accessibility approaches. Its specific focus is on examining segmental errors in spoken production, such as voicing, substitution, and omission⁵, and analysing their consequences for translation and communication in contexts with hearing audiences. LU1 opens with a brainstorming activity aimed at activating students' prior knowledge of the topic. In this session, students share ideas and perspectives on hearing impairment, reflecting on the challenges faced by individuals with hearing impairments in a predominantly hearing society. After watching an illustrative video, participants engage in pair or small-group discussions to critically reflect on hearing impairment and the challenges individuals with hearing impairments encounter in daily life. In addition, they analyse articulatory patterns and segmental errors in

⁵ Detailed definitions are part of LU1 to be posted on the project website (<https://avtia.ro/training-package-lecturers.php>)

spoken production to deepen their understanding of the linguistic implications of hearing loss. Following a detailed review of the key concepts outlined in a PowerPoint presentation, the practical component (i.e. the application and consolidation section) reinforces learning through experiential engagement. Students are provided with three video resources, each addressing a core subtopic such as the societal position of d/Deaf and hard of hearing individuals, featuring a personal account that illustrates real-life segmental and suprasegmental speech errors, as the speaker was born profoundly deaf and later acquired spoken language. The second video presents a computer-based auditory training programme, highlighting it as an innovative method for auditory rehabilitation that can support the development of listening skills in individuals with hearing impairments. The third video addresses the challenges faced by hearing impaired individuals in learning a foreign language. Each video is accompanied by listening comprehension and discussion questions, which may be addressed in class, assigned as homework, or discussed in an online forum if class time is limited. These activities are designed to strengthen listening skills while promoting critical reflection and analytical thinking. Finally, students complete a written assignment, critically analysing selected articles on the role of cued speech in speech perception and first-language development in children with cochlear implants and teaching English as a foreign language to hearing impaired individuals. Guided by the questions provided, students are expected to produce a 500-word critical review for each article. The section concludes with a five-item error correction exercise aimed at enhancing participants' reading comprehension skills.

The objectives of the second learning unit (LU2) are to examine and critically analyze the principal characteristics of SDH, including non-verbal and paralinguistic elements in audiovisual texts, as well as to evaluate and implement established SDH guidelines in the production of accessible subtitles for d/Deaf and hard of hearing audiences. The unit begins with a brainstorming activity in which participants consider how SDH differs from other types of subtitling. They are first shown a short video clip without subtitles and with the sound turned off, and are asked to reflect on which sound cues might be relevant to the scene and to share their ideas with the group. The same video is then replayed with sound on, but still without subtitles, prompting participants to discuss what additional information became available and what a viewer with hearing loss would be unable to access in the absence of subtitles. Subsequently, participants are divided into small groups to brainstorm potential elements of subtitling guidelines. They are then provided with excerpts from an official source (e.g. the BBC Subtitle Guidelines⁶) and asked to compare their predictions with the established standards. This activity both familiarizes them with professional conventions and encourages critical reflection on the rationale behind such rules. The application and consolidation phase once again relies on listening

⁶ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/accessibility/forproducts/guides/subtitles/#Subtitle-Guidelines>

comprehension activities based on two videos. The first video features a software engineer who discusses how artificial intelligence can help bridge the communication gap between d/Deaf and hearing communities. Drawing on his personal experiences with communication barriers – particularly the absence of interpreters in contexts such as medical appointments – he introduces *Omnibridge*, an AI-driven platform designed to translate American Sign Language (ASL) into English, thereby promoting communication and inclusion. The second video addresses the underrepresentation of d/Deaf individuals in research and in the film and television industry, which has direct implications for the quality of subtitles. Presenting a study on how d/Deaf audiences experience suspense in film, the video underscores the need for greater investment in accessibility and calls on both the media industry and policymakers to implement more inclusive subtitling practices. Each video is supplemented with listening comprehension and discussion questions that can be tackled during class, assigned as homework, or explored in an online forum when class time is insufficient. In the assignment component of LU2, participants engage in critical reviews of two thought-provoking articles which address the labelling of sound effects and the use of subtitles for d/Deaf and hard of hearing audiences. Their understanding is further reinforced through an error correction exercise which closes the LU2.

Lastly, the third learning unit (LU3) is dedicated to exploring the main characteristics and conventions of SDH as adapted for various age groups, i.e. young children, school-age children, adults, and older viewers, while also offering guidance on age-sensitive subtitling strategies. The brainstorming session engages participants in discussing how SDH practices may vary across different age groups. They reflect on ways in which non-verbal elements can be represented through subtitles according to the needs of specific audiences, how immersive media (e.g. VR, 360° videos) may be integrated into SDH, and how technological innovations are shaping subtitling practices for diverse age segments. To stimulate reflection on their transformative potential, participants are also encouraged to view selected video clips. In the application and consolidation phase, participants watch two videos: one presenting the guidelines for producing effective and accessible subtitles, with practical advice on timing, phrasing, and formatting; and another introducing a powerful tool that generates written transcripts for both pre-recorded audio/video and live speech, providing instant text output. These informative videos are accompanied by comprehension questions that not only assess participants' listening skills but also encourage deeper engagement with the content, fostering critical reflection and discussion. Finally, this critical component is incorporated into the assignment section of LU3, where participants engage with two articles focusing on *creative* subtitles and VR 360° subtitles. Comprehension questions guide participants in analysing the texts and composing critical reviews. LU3 concludes with a five-item error correction exercise designed to consolidate participants' knowledge and understanding.

Module 2 concludes with a 15-item multiple-choice quiz designed to review and reinforce the knowledge acquired across all three learning units.

5. DISCUSSION

In the previous section (See 4.1), we shed light on the issues that impede access to information and education. While the law recognises audiovisual translation, i.e., subtitling for the d/Deaf and hard of hearing (SDH) and audio description for the blind and visually impaired (AD), as an essential tool that could improve the position of individuals affected with these sensory disabilities, it has been reported that the blind or visually impaired persons, as well as the d/Deaf and hard of hearing, are still not satisfied with the extent of inclusion that has taken place in reality, especially in terms of communication and access to audio and visual translation.

Therefore, this section will be devoted to a discussion pertaining to practical solutions arising from the project outputs that can be implemented in order to improve access to AVT.

5.1 Sustainability and implementation of the project results

The impact of the AVTIA project will extend across several levels. At the University of Belgrade (UB), and particularly within the Faculty of Philology, the project will foster inclusion, diversity, digital transformation, and cross-disciplinary collaboration, while reinforcing the university's commitment to multi- and interdisciplinary education. The project will also align closely with UB's broader initiatives, as both emphasise raising awareness of the position of individuals with sensory impairments. By promoting inclusion, diversity, and digital transformation, the project will complement UB's ongoing efforts to ensure accessibility of media content for sign language users and visually impaired audiences. In this way, both the project and UB's strategic activities will contribute to equal opportunities, the improvement of conditions for persons with disabilities, and the promotion of intellectual growth, human values, and ethical principles.

Project results will be sustained through integration into study programmes, potentially as an elective course in audiovisual translation, thereby ensuring long-term visibility within higher education. However, the successful implementation of such curricular changes will depend on institutional support and the availability of qualified teaching staff. The project will also address the needs of specific target groups. Students, lecturers, and trainers in philology will gain access to specialized study materials and guidelines, while novice translators will benefit from opportunities for professional development and upskilling. Policymakers in higher education will be encouraged to consider issues of accessibility for individuals with sensory impairments.

Beyond academia, the project already engages national associations, such as organizations representing the blind and visually impaired and the d/Deaf and hard of

hearing, and government bodies concerned with disability rights. These stakeholders will be able to adopt project results in their training activities, integrate them into digital platforms, and apply them in policy reports or needs analyses. Nevertheless, their capacity to implement project outputs consistently may vary, particularly in resource-constrained settings.

Finally, the wider community of students, teachers, policymakers in the media, and the general public, will benefit through greater awareness of communication accessibility. Sustainability will be supported by opportunities for continuous education (seminars, workshops, webinars), dissemination of self-study resources, and promotion of project-related publications. Yet, the long-term impact will ultimately depend on the ongoing interest, funding, and collaboration. Importantly, the project's outputs have the potential to serve as a foundation for future international initiatives.

5.2 Implications for AVT development in Serbia

A key strength of the AVTIA project lies in its network of associated partners, which is to include institutions, associations, non-governmental organizations, universities, and other stakeholders engaged in the field of inclusion. To date, the University of Belgrade has secured three associated partners: the City Organization of the Deaf of Belgrade, the Centre for Independent Living of Persons with Disabilities of Serbia, and the Association of Sign Language Interpreters and Translators *Ruke govore (Hands Speak)*. Dedicated to supporting and empowering d/Deaf and hard of hearing individuals, as well as persons with disabilities, these organizations are closely aligned with the project's objectives. Their involvement will contribute to sustainability by facilitating the exchange of expertise during and after the project, particularly in the areas of inclusion, accessibility, and communication support. Through their well-established networks of members, collaborators, and partner organizations, they will actively promote the project, disseminate its outcomes, and integrate results into both regular and project-based activities, thereby contributing to further development of AVT in Serbia.

In addition, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation, relevant professional associations, non-governmental organizations, and national awareness-raising campaigns (e.g. *The Eyes are the Mirror of the Soul*⁷, 2023; *Education for all*⁸) could play an important role in extending the reach of the project results across different sectors and audiences.

⁷ *Oči su ogledalo duše* (<https://eklinika.telegraf.rs/vesti/107156-kampanja-oci-su-ogledalo-duse-ukazuje-na-izazove-slepih-i-slabovidih-i-znacaj-redovnih-ofthalmoloskih-pregleda>)

⁸ *Obrazovanje za sve* (<https://gogb.org.rs/projekti/obrazovanje-za-sve/>)

6. CONCLUSION

Owing to the mutual effect of technological and statutory developments, the beginning of the 21st century has initiated a major and prompt expansion in the provision and study of assistive forms of audiovisual translation whose primary objective is to facilitate access to media content for sensory-impaired viewers (Pérez-González 2020: 30). However, inaccessibility of media content impedes access to information, whereas persons with sensory disabilities very often find it difficult to access educational resources, as well. Audiovisual translation (AVT) has a major role in overcoming these challenges.

Focusing on the position of persons with sensory disabilities and AVT, the current study has provided a synthesis of the key information obtained from a document analysis of legislations, reports, news articles, etc. The findings indicate that although the relevant legal framework is in alignment with the current social needs and relies on European audiovisual legislations, its implementation has been rather partial. However, even though the progress seems to be slow, initiatives directed towards improving accessibility to education and information through audiovisual translation are emerging and the AVTIA project represents one such example. Finally, we have provided an in-depth deconstruction of one of the project outputs the University of Belgrade was in charge of (Package for lecturers: Module 2: *Subtitling for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (SDH) – The Essentials*) in order to offer practical solutions for AVT development in Serbia.

When it comes to the limitations of this study, subjectivity has been identified as one of the obstacles in the document analysis approach, which is a valid point when it comes to the present study, as well. Even though we used the search terms related to the topics of interest in the process of compiling the dataset, it remains possible that some relevant documents were not included in the analysis. Still, we believe that the systematic representation and the heterogeneity of the data have provided sufficient evidence for the current state of affairs related to AVT practices in Serbia and the fact that we managed to obtain funding for this project based on the evidence and indicators gathered proves this point.

Also, the situation has slightly changed since we submitted the project proposal in early 2024. Therefore, we have expanded the initial analysis by including more recent data. This is to say that the AVT seems to be gaining momentum in Serbia and that future investigations should be conducted to keep up to date with the latest developments.

As a closing remark, the AVTIA project, we believe, is a prime example of how linguistics can be applied to contribute to improving the quality of life when its efforts are corroborated by empirical findings and enthusiasm of project team members.

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**AUDIOVIZUELNO PREVOĐENJE U SLUŽBI INKLUZIJE I PRISTUPAČNOSTI
(AVTIA): KREIRANJE PROJEKTNIH MATERIJALA NA OSNOVU ANALIZE
DOKUMENTACIJE KOJA SVEDOČI O TRENUTNOM STANJU U SRBIJI**

Rezime

Prema podacima Svetske zdravstvene organizacije (SZO), u Evropi skoro 190 miliona ljudi ima neki stepen oštećenja sluha ili su potpuno gluvi, dok približno 90 miliona ljudi živi sa nekim stepenom oštećenja vida ili su potpuno slepi. Kroz analizu relevantnih dokumenata kvalitativnog karaktera (zakonskih akata, izveštaja, novinskih članaka...), ovaj rad pruža uvid u trenutno stanje u Srbiji kada je reč o osobama sa navedenim senzornim invaliditetima, posebno imajući u vidu inkluziju i pristup obrazovanju i informacijama. Pored toga, prikazano je na koji način je analiza dokumentacije poslužila za izradu nastavnih materijala namenjenih nastavnicima i prevodiocima u oblasti audiovizuelnog prevođenja. Ponuđene su i ideje za postizanje održivosti projekta, kao i njegovu implementaciju na nekoliko nivoa - institucionalnom, obrazovnom, kao i na nivou organizacija koje takođe mogu biti krajnji korisnici rezultata projekta AVTIA.

Ključne reči: audiovizuelno prevođenje, audio deskripcija, oštećenje sluha, multimodalno prevođenje, titlovanje, oštećenje vida