

Copyright treaty for visually impaired

EU must support a binding treaty for visually impaired and not a "voluntary recommendation"

Tomorrow, Tuesday June 8th, an EU Council working group coordinated by DG Internal Market and the Spanish Presidency will decide the EU position concerning the proposal for a Treaty for the visually impaired (sponsored by Brazil, Mexico, Ecuador and Paraguay) that shall be considered at the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in Geneva on June 20th.

Ska Keller, Green MEP and member of the Development Committee comments:

"Blind and other visually impaired persons suffer a severe "book famine" and that is why an international treaty has been proposed at WIPO with the support of the World Blind Union. Nevertheless, under the intense lobbying pressure of publishers, the European Commission has promoted the support of "voluntary recommendations and agreements" instead of supporting a binding treaty at WIPO as demanded by all EU blind organisations.

While a binding treaty would establish a global legal norm for the exception and limitation of copyright for the visually impaired, the draft EU proposal is much less ambitious in its scope and effectiveness for satisfying the right to read enshrined in the UN Convention for the Rights of Disabled Persons. The EU voluntary proposal is very narrow (starting with a project of only 100 books out of millions published), will not create the needed legislation on exceptions to copyright in many countries of the South and will not apply to the content in many audio formats used by most blind persons and, finally, will not deliver to blind persons the respect they deserve in an international treaty. I ask the Commission and the Member States to support a binding treaty in the WIPO framework."

More information:

Blind and other visually impaired people face a "book famine". In the North less than 5% of books published are available for reading disabled people. In the South the figure is less than 1%. Most accessible books are made by specialist agencies using charitable money. At present, such agencies, operating in different countries, but with a common language, often both transcribe the same book. They cannot avoid this needless and expensive duplication by sharing one accessible file or copy. This is because, under present copyright law, reading material in Braille, or formatted digitally for visually impaired people, cannot legally cross borders. This lack of resources for the duplication of formatted works significantly hinders access to reading for the world's 300 million visually impaired people, especially the poorest.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities says that disabled people have a right to read. The best way to guarantee this right is the adoption of a binding treaty that establishes limitations and exceptions to copyright for the non-commercial production and distribution of accessible books. The

World Blind Union (www.worldblindunion.org), representing over 160 million blind and partially sighted persons in 177 member countries, has now drafted a " WIPO Treaty for Improved Access for Blind, Visually Impaired and other Reading Disabled Persons" to combat the "book famine". It is now being considered by the World Intellectual Property Organization where it has been sponsored by Brazil, Mexico, Ecuador and Paraguay. . More information about the Treaty can be found at www.euroblind.org and www.keionline.org).

It should be noted that a global exception on copyright for works formatted for the visually impaired would not cause any economic loss to publishers or writers because it practically only affects non-profit and non-commercial markets.

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Ska Keller

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