

# Accessibility guide for cinemas

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## The cinema belongs to everyone

Digital film distribution has diversified the opportunities for viewers to enjoy films even in a cinema environment, regardless of their individual characteristics. Exploiting these new opportunities requires the film industry to adopt new operating models, cooperate with disability organisations and have a positive attitude towards serving all audiences, taking into account their special needs.

This guide seeks to advise and provide more information to cinemas in order to promote the accessibility of screenings and to identify practical problems. The guide has been drawn up in cooperation with film industry partners, disability organisations and their cultural organisations. The implementation of equality is based on the following considerations:

- **Accessibility** is more than just unobstructed entry to the cinema. Areas of accessibility include the functioning of the built environment and facilities, the accessibility of communications, economic accessibility, social accessibility and accessibility through different senses. Services that promote the accessibility of film screenings include, for example, subtitling and audio description.
- **Accessible film screening** means that all people are offered the best possible opportunities to watch films independently on the big screen and to participate in film events and festivals.

The Film Accessibility Forum, which is a joint platform of the film industry, disability organisations and the Culture for All Service, sets three short-term goals for cinemas in the spirit of the Non-Discrimination Act:

- Every cinema is accessible.
- Every Finnish film screening is accessible to everyone.
- Every viewer feels equally welcome in the cinema and feels safe.

## Accessibility of films in cinemas

### 1 Accessibility of films in Finland

Almost all Finnish films are now subtitled for the hard of hearing or deaf people who use sign language, and provided with an audio description for visually impaired people. These are made during production for feature films and documentaries that receive marketing and distribution support from The Finnish Film Foundation. The Finnish Film Foundation supports the production of subtitles and audio descriptions.

Distribution companies must inform cinemas about subtitled versions and audio descriptions of their films, so that the cinemas can inform their customers about the services.

Film production companies and distribution companies must ensure that they obtain both subtitling and audio descriptions from professional experts in the field. Feedback on the quality of subtitling and audio descriptions is collected by the Finnish Association of the Deaf and the Finnish Federation of Hard of Hearing as well as Näkövammaisten Kulttuuripalvelu ry.

New cinemas are built to be easily accessible in accordance with existing laws and regulations. The Finnish Film Foundation can support accessibility improvements in older cinemas by providing cinema equipment and modernization support for such projects.

## 2 Technical solutions for subtitling, audio description and accessibility

**Subtitling**, in this context, refers specifically to CCAP subtitles for the hard of hearing or deaf people who use sign language, where off-screen sounds are marked separately and speakers are identified in the dialogue or discussion by name or colour. The CCAP subtitles are in the same language as the dialogue in the film. The subtitles also benefit language learners and the elderly.

The subtitles are included in the theatrical copy as their own file, which is activated by the cinema during the screening. The subtitles appear on the screen for all viewers. As technology advances, subtitles that appear in personal glasses may also be an option.

**Audio description** refers to a recording in which the audio describer describes the events, persons and images on the screen. In Finland, audio descriptions are distributed using the **MovieReading** app when the movie is viewed in a cinema. The recorded audio description is played to the viewer via the MovieReading app, which is downloaded to a smartphone or tablet. Before the screening of the film, the viewer downloads the audio description on their mobile device. During the screening, the audio description starts automatically and can be listened to with headphones on the device. For cinemas, audio description does not require any action other than allowing the use of mobile devices during the screening and assisting customers where necessary. Customers should also be informed about films for which an audio description is available through the app.

**Accessibility** means not only unobstructed movement in the cinema, but also the viewer's entire trip from home to the cinema and back. This includes, in addition to private or public transport, the cinema's wheelchair lifts or person lifts, auditorium wheelchair spaces, accessible toilet, induction loop in the auditorium and at the box office as well as exit routes. The ability of the cinema staff to assist and advise disabled customers at the various stages of the visit is also key to achieving accessibility. The exit address of the cinema must be mentioned separately.

Accessibility solutions and staff training are the responsibility of the cinema owner.

## 3 Accessibility practices in cinemas

Cinema operations in Finland are run by cinema chains, independent cinemas and municipal cinemas. Accessibility objectives under the Non-Discrimination Act apply to all cinemas regardless of their form of ownership. It is recommended that the disabled person's assistant has free admission to the cinema. Customers have the right to bring their guide or assistance dogs to the cinema.

The Film Accessibility Forum encourages each cinema to make its own **accessibility plan**. Help for making the plan is available from disability organisations as well as various organisations promoting the accessibility of culture and cultural activities for disabled communities. Useful links can be found on the last page of this guide.

**The cinema should commission an accessibility survey** that provides information on the current state of the accessibility of its activities. The accessibility checklist for cinemas helps in the self-assessment of the accessibility of facilities. The last page contains links to checklists and mapping forms of the Finnish Association of People with Physical Disabilities.

Finnish films have a special status as film productions funded by The Finnish Film Foundation. The full potential of Finnish films with subtitles and audio descriptions can be realised through the following objectives and measures in cinemas:

### Screening objective for films with subtitles and audio descriptions

- At least 50% of the screenings of each Finnish film during and outside prime time are subtitled.
- Subtitled screenings are announced on the cinema's website in conjunction with other screening time information, for example, as follows: **The screening is subtitled for the hard of hearing**. It is also a good idea to provide a list of all subtitled screenings or to include subtitles as a search criterion.
- The cinema should contact the local member association of the Finnish Federation of Hard of Hearing or the Finnish Association of the Deaf about cooperation in communication and possible special screenings.

- Live audio description and sign language interpretation: it is possible and sometimes even desirable to organise screenings with, for example, live audio description. The costs of these and similar special screenings are eligible for the Finnish Film Foundation's regional operational support for cinemas.

## Cinema customer service

Promoting accessibility is also a question of attitudes on the part of staff and cinema audiences. Cinemas should conduct staff induction and ensure their ability to act correctly in different situations. In addition, the operating culture and practices can be developed by organising training in cooperation with disability organisations in order to serve and help all customers. For example, visually impaired customers who require an audio description may need help in using the app at the beginning of the screening. A positive attitude from staff can, at best, be reflected on all viewers.

## Cinema website

Promoting accessibility is also about active communication. Attention must be paid to the accessibility of online services and mobile apps to ensure their proper and unobstructed functioning for all customers. The Film Accessibility Forum recommends that all cinemas comply with the accessibility criteria of the Act on the Provision of Digital Services, even if they are not covered by the act.

Each cinema or theatre company has its own website. It is important to provide information about the accessibility of the cinema's facilities and services in the **Accessibility section** of its website. This section should be found in the main menu. The section includes information about entering and exiting the cinema, staff contact details, wheelchair spaces, accessible toilet, assistants' free admission, assistance and guide dogs' access to the cinema, etc. Example links and a guide on accessibility to communication are available at the end of this guide.

The website must also include information about subtitled screenings and the possibility of audio descriptions, for example, as follows:

### **”Information on accessible cinema screenings**

Many of the Finnish films we screen include additional services for the deaf, hard of hearing and visually impaired. Using these services, all our customers can enjoy the film.

**Descriptive subtitling** helps deaf people who use sign language or hard-of-hearing viewers to enjoy the film screening. The subtitles include all the lines of the film as well as a description of the sounds of the film. Subtitles are now made for almost all Finnish films with the support of The Finnish Film Foundation. Subtitled screenings are marked separately in our programme. You can search for subtitled screenings using the search function on our website. In addition, there is a separate list of subtitled screenings on our site: (link to list). For more information about subtitles and subtitled screenings, please contact our staff. If you want to provide feedback on the quality of subtitling and on how easy it is to find subtitled screenings on the website, please send it to the Finnish Federation of Hard of Hearing/ the Finnish Association of the Deaf using this form: [q.surveypal.com/tekstityspalaute](https://q.surveypal.com/tekstityspalaute). The form is currently available only in Finnish and Swedish.

**Audio descriptions** help visually impaired customers to enjoy the film. Audio description refers to a recording in which the audio describer describes the events, persons and images on the screen. To hear the recording, you need the **MovieReading** app on your mobile phone or other smart device. You also need to download the recording for the film before the screening starts. During the screening, the audio description starts automatically and can be listened to with headphones. Audio descriptions are now made for almost all Finnish films with the support of The Finnish Film Foundation. For more information about screenings for which an audio description is available, please contact our staff. If you want to provide feedback on the quality of audio descriptions, please send it to Näkövammaisten kulttuuri palvelu ry. A link to the feedback form can be found on this website: [www.kulttuuripalvelu.fi/fi/kuvailutulkkaus](http://www.kulttuuripalvelu.fi/fi/kuvailutulkkaus) The form is currently available only in Finnish.”

## 4 Cooperation with experts

The Film Accessibility Forum has had good experiences of cooperation with disability organisations and film industry partners. Cooperation is the best way to achieve accessibility solutions. All disability organisations have local or regional associations that are happy to provide expert assistance. It is largely about solving practical issues. A positive attitude will take you far.

In terms of legislation, accessibility is promoted by the following laws, regulations and declarations:

- Cultural rights are enshrined in the Constitution of Finland. Everyone has the right to develop themselves without being prevented by economic hardship (Section 16). Equality (Section 6).
- UN Declaration of Human Rights 1948, Article 27: Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.
- UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Article 30 concerns participation in cultural life. The convention entered into force in Finland in 2016.
- Non-Discrimination Act:

The purpose of the Act is to promote equality and prevent discrimination in all areas of life.

Section 15: Reasonable accommodation to realise equality of persons with disabilities. An authority, education provider, employer or provider of goods and services has to make due and appropriate adjustments necessary in each situation for a person with disabilities to be able, equally with others, to deal with the authorities and gain access to education, work and generally available goods and services, as well as to manage their work tasks.

## Useful links

Guides and information packages on the website of the Culture for All Service: [www.cultureforall.fi/accessibility\\_guides](http://www.cultureforall.fi/accessibility_guides)

What about accessibility? How to communicate about the accessibility of a cultural venue (available only in Finnish and Swedish): In Finnish [www.kulttuuriakaikille.fi/saavutettavuus\\_tietopaketit\\_ja\\_oppaat\\_viestinta](http://www.kulttuuriakaikille.fi/saavutettavuus_tietopaketit_ja_oppaat_viestinta), in Swedish: [www.kulturforalla.fi/tillganglighet\\_guider\\_kommunikation](http://www.kulturforalla.fi/tillganglighet_guider_kommunikation).

Examples of cinema accessibility information

- FFF's cinema Kino K-13: <https://www.ses.fi/en/kino-k-13s-accessibility>
- Accessibility at Savon Kinot cinemas: <https://www.savonkinot.fi/esteettomyys>

Checklists for accessibility assessment

- An accessibility checklist for cinemas is available at [www.invalidiliitto.fi/tarkistuslistoja](http://www.invalidiliitto.fi/tarkistuslistoja). The checklist has been produced by Accessibility Centre ESKE of the Finnish Association of People with Physical Disabilities.
- Culture for All Service checklists
- ESKEH survey forms and guide for surveying accessibility: [www.invalidiliitto.fi/eskeh-kartoituslomakkeet-ja-opas](http://www.invalidiliitto.fi/eskeh-kartoituslomakkeet-ja-opas)
- Symbols for communication: [www.cultureforall.fi/accessibility\\_symbols\\_for\\_communication](http://www.cultureforall.fi/accessibility_symbols_for_communication)

The Finnish Film Foundation's support for film audio descriptions and subtitling for the hard of hearing: [https://www.ses.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/SUPPORT-GUIDE\\_Subtitling-and-audio-description.pdf](https://www.ses.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/SUPPORT-GUIDE_Subtitling-and-audio-description.pdf)

## Expert organisations

Autism Finland: [www.autismiliitto.fi](http://www.autismiliitto.fi)

Finnish Association of People with Physical Disabilities: [www.invalidiliitto.fi](http://www.invalidiliitto.fi)

Finnish Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities:  
[www.kehitysvammaliitto.fi](http://www.kehitysvammaliitto.fi)

Culture for All Service: [www.kulttuuriakaikille.fi](http://www.kulttuuriakaikille.fi)

Finnish Federation of Hard of Hearing: [www.kuuloliitto.fi](http://www.kuuloliitto.fi)

Finnish Association of the Deaf: [www.kuurojenliitto.fi](http://www.kuurojenliitto.fi)

Threshold Association: [www.kynnys.fi](http://www.kynnys.fi)

Näkövammaisten kulttuuripalvelu ry: [www.kulttuuripalvelu.fi](http://www.kulttuuripalvelu.fi)

Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired: [www.nkl.fi/en](http://www.nkl.fi/en)

SAMS – Samarbetsförbundet kring funktionshinder: <https://samsnet.fi>

## Film industry partners

Audiovisual Producers Finland: <https://apfi.fi>

Finnish Cinema Association (SEOL):  
[www.filmikamari.fi/suomen-elokuvateatteriliitto-seol-ry](http://www.filmikamari.fi/suomen-elokuvateatteriliitto-seol-ry)

Finnish Film Distributors' Association (SEL):  
[www.filmikamari.fi/suomen-elokuvatoimistojen-liitto-sel-ry](http://www.filmikamari.fi/suomen-elokuvatoimistojen-liitto-sel-ry)

Finnish Film Foundation: <https://ses.fi>

**Participation in cultural life is a fundamental right for everyone. Films also belong to everyone!**

## Film Accessibility Forum

The guide is based on the work of the Film Accessibility Forum. The following parties took part in the forum in 2017–2020: Finnish Film Foundation, Finnish Chamber of Films, Finnish Film Distributors' Association (SEL), Finnish Cinema Association (SEOL), Finnish Film Producers, Finnkino, Atlantic Film, Finnish Federation of Hard of Hearing, Finnish Association of the Deaf, Threshold Association, Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired, Näkövammaisten kulttuuripalvelu ry, and Culture for All Service/ The

Finnish Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities:  
[www.kehitysvammaliitto.fi](http://www.kehitysvammaliitto.fi)

Culture for All Service: [www.kulttuuriakaikille.fi](http://www.kulttuuriakaikille.fi)

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Finnish Film Distributors' Association (SEL):  
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