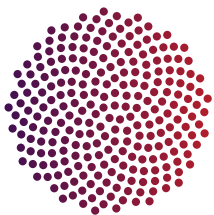


Supporting the Irish audiovisual sector



Audiovisual
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The impact of the crisis on the Irish audiovisual sector

COVID-19 has had a very severe impact on the sector. It caused film, television drama production and other shoots to cease with associated temporary closures and layoffs. While production has continued in sectors such as animation, post-production and factual television productions, it has been impacted by remote working and the use of social distancing. Cashflow is an enormous problem for the sector. This problem will increase as many companies are currently surviving on existing contracts and have no new projects. A separate problem is that many people with essential but transferable skills may leave the industry prior to it recovering.

Phase 1 Actions to support the Irish audiovisual sector in the next 100 days

- 1. Approve recommencement of filming:** This should occur once restrictions are eased and industry specific protocols for modified COVID-19 safe work practices are devised and authorised for implementation. Funding should be provided for protocol training.
- 2. Provide significant additional Exchequer funding for all entities that commission independent productions:** Fund an early summer round of the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland's Sound and Vision Fund that provides extended commitments. Companies need immediate help regarding cashflow to sustain them during 2020.
- 3. Enhance effectiveness of S.481 tax relief:** Extend it to cover payments to individuals forced to work from abroad due to the COVID-19 crisis, subject to the individual subsequently locating to Ireland to complete the role. Finalise processing S.481 applications that are currently experiencing severe delays in the compliance process.

Phase 2 Actions to support the Irish audiovisual sector by end of 2020

- 1. Establish a public service/industry group under the framework of the Audiovisual Action Plan to develop a strategy to reboot and reimagine the screen sector:** The Action Plan provides a long term strategy but a specific response is needed to the challenges created by COVID-19.
- 2. Launch a marketing campaign involving Screen Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland:** This should promote Irish produced content and reaffirm to international investors and co-production partners that the screen sector is a national priority and that it will be sustained during and after the crisis.
- 3. Continue transposing the Audiovisual Media Services Directive and the Copyright Directive:** Government must engage with industry during the transposition process.



Phase 3 Actions to support the Irish audiovisual sector by 2023

- 1. Expedite all necessary TV licence fee reform measures:** This is to ensure that the future of national public service media, both in Irish and in English, is put on a more sustainable footing. Estimates indicate that over €50 million is being lost annually which impacts on sustaining the independent production sector.
- 2. Restore Screen Ireland's annual capital funding to its pre-crash level of €20m:** Benchmark funding-levels against the resources available to its main international competitors. Restore €6m to the TG4 budget as strongly recommended since 2018 by the BAI and the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Irish language.
- 3. Combat digital piracy:** A task force should be established with the involvement of An Garda Síochána, the Revenue Commissioners and the relevant government departments to combat digital piracy in view of the threat it poses to the screen industries. Irish residents make over 500 million visits annually to all pirate websites leading to a significant loss in employment and Exchequer revenue.

Impact of phased action on the Irish Audiovisual sector

To keep companies viable and retain workers in the sector, an immediate infusion of cashflow is needed via both the S.481 tax relief and additional funding for those who commission productions. Approved protocols are needed so filming can restart. Extended funding is required through Screen Ireland as productions will be more expensive under such protocols. An international marketing campaign is necessary to hold Ireland's market share. A joint public service/industry strategy needs to be devised within the Audiovisual Action Plan framework. To shore up the sector's long term finances, measures are needed to address digital piracy and television licence fee evasion.

‘We call on Government to appoint a Minister for Digital and Communications to take measures to ensure that the industry is protected from the economic fallout of the pandemic and are heartened to see that Irish audiences have in particular been turning to Irish content during this time of crisis’

Andrew Lowe

Director, Element Pictures and Chair of Audiovisual Ireland

Reboot & Reimagine

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