

Eight West African Countries Commit to Preserving their Audiovisual Heritage

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The Directive establishing the audiovisual legal deposit in the eight Member States of the West African Monetary and Economic Union (UEMOA), which was published on 1 December in UEMOA's Official Journal, is the first of its kind in the world. This Directive, which is the only existing example of a common audiovisual legal deposit initiative, will facilitate the preservation of audiovisual heritage in an economic area with 112 million inhabitants, comprising Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo.

The audiovisual legal deposit is a legal mechanism that allows States to collect audiovisual material for the purpose of preservation, research, and education. Under the Directive adopted by UEMOA, radio and television programmes, as well as films, videos, and multimedia documents can now be safeguarded, instead of being irretrievably lost, as most of them have been, for years. The transition to digital broadcasting (Digital Terrestrial Television, or DTT, in particular) makes it possible, today, to systematically capture radio and television programmes, allowing for simpler and less expensive conservation.

The process of creating the audiovisual legal deposit Directive for the UEMOA area began in 2014, with the "Digital Capital" project implemented by the International Organisation of the Francophonie (OIF), with the support of the European Union and the ACP Group of States. The document was ratified in 2015 by the Culture Ministers of the countries in question, and subsequently adopted on 21 September 2018, in Abidjan, by the UEMOA Council of Ministers. The actual drafting of the Directive was done by the UEMOA, with the help of experts from the French National Audiovisual Institute (INA), which has first-rate audiovisual legal deposit experience. INA ensures the daily collection, documentation, and archiving of, and provides public access to the programmes of 169 French radio and television channels, which represents more than one million hours of air time per year, and a cumulative volume of almost 16 million hours, since the establishment of a legal deposit for audiovisual material in France, in 1995.

In comparison, a 2014 study estimated the total volume of digitised programmes in the eight UEMOA countries to be approximately 30,000 hours, which amounted to less than 1% of the radio and television programmes broadcast since 1995 in these countries.

The Directive, which recently entered into force, will have to be transposed by each State, within a period of two years. The safeguarding of audiovisual memory made possible by this Directive, also paves the way for the creation of a legal database (especially of the rightful owners of the works in question). The audiovisual heritage capitalised as a result of this initiative, can also help to revive the production and broadcasting of audiovisual programmes in West Africa.

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