

New TV Series Adaptations Drive Licensing Changes Across Europe

Licensing frameworks for television content in Europe are being reshaped as a growing number of TV series adaptations move between broadcasters and streaming platforms. The shift reflects a broader realignment in how rights are negotiated, territories are defined, and catalogues are structured for international audiences.

Adaptation Activity Intensifies

Over the past two years, the number of TV series developed from existing formats, books, or films has risen sharply. Production companies in France, Germany, Spain, and the Nordic countries have all accelerated their acquisition of adaptation rights. The trend is not limited to English-language originals. Spanish dramas are being remade for German audiences, Swedish thrillers are finding new life in Italy, and French comedies are being reworked for Polish broadcasters.

This wave of activity has put pressure on the standard licensing model, which traditionally granted a single broadcaster exclusive rights for a defined territory for a fixed period. That model assumed a linear broadcast window followed by a catch-up period, after which the content might move to a third party. Streaming has disrupted that sequence. A [TV series](#) now often premieres on a platform, moves to a free-to-air channel, and reappears on a different service within months. Rights holders are asking for contracts that reflect this multi-window reality.

Territorial Rights Under Strain

The European single market was built on the principle of territorial exclusivity. Broadcasters pay a premium for the right to be the only service in a given country to carry a particular show. Adaptations complicate that picture because the same underlying property can generate multiple versions in different languages. A format owner may license the original show to a streamer for all of Europe while separately licensing the adaptation rights to a local producer in each territory. The original and the adaptation can end up competing for the same audience. Some rights holders now insert clauses that prevent the original version from being available in a territory where an adaptation is in production or on air.

Negotiators report that the most contentious point is the definition of the adaptation window. Producers want the right to develop a local version as soon as the original has aired its first season. Broadcasters, wary of confusing viewers, often demand a delay of two to three years.

The tension is most visible in markets with strong local production sectors, such as the United Kingdom, France, and the Nordic region.

Streaming Platforms and Catalogue Strategy

Streaming services have become the primary drivers of adaptation activity. A platform that holds global rights to a finished TV series can commission local versions for multiple markets simultaneously. That approach shortens the production timeline and allows the platform to release a local adaptation within weeks of the original. The business case is straightforward: a proven story with a built-in fan base reduces the risk of a new commission. The challenge is legal. Rights for the original show are often held by a studio or distributor that sold the streaming license on a territorial basis. The platform must then negotiate separate adaptation rights, sometimes from a different entity that controls the underlying intellectual property.

Several European co-production treaties are being updated to reflect this new reality. The European Commission has signalled that it will review the cross-border distribution of audiovisual works as part of its broader digital single market strategy. Industry groups have proposed a voluntary code of conduct that would standardise the key terms for adaptation licenses, including the duration of the exclusivity period, the geographic scope, and the revenue share between the format owner and the local producer.

Independent Producers Seek Clarity

Independent production companies, which originate many of the formats that later become international hits, are particularly affected by the current uncertainty. A small producer in Belgium or the Netherlands may create a format that performs well domestically but lacks the resources to negotiate separate adaptation deals in a dozen territories. Those producers often sell the global adaptation rights to a larger distributor as part of the original commission. The distributor then sub-licenses the rights to local producers. The original creator receives a share of the adaptation revenue, but the percentage is rarely disclosed publicly.

Some independent producers have started to retain a portion of the adaptation rights when they sell the original show. That strategy gives them a seat at the table when a local version is planned, and it can generate a long-term revenue stream that outlives the first run of the original. The approach requires the producer to have a reliable legal partner in each target territory, which is expensive. A few European funds have stepped in to cover those costs, viewing format adaptation as a way to strengthen the region's production infrastructure.

Technology and Metadata Standards

The technical side of licensing is also evolving. A single TV series can exist in multiple language versions, each with its own metadata, artwork, and age rating. Rights management systems need to track which version is licensed to which platform in which territory, and for how long. The lack of a common metadata standard forces broadcasters and platforms to maintain separate records for each version, increasing the risk of errors and disputes.

An industry working group has proposed a unified metadata schema that would assign a unique identifier to each version of a title and link it to the original format. The schema would include fields for the adaptation status, the original language, the target language, and the territorial scope of the license. If adopted, the standard would reduce the time spent on rights clearance and make it easier for smaller producers to participate in the adaptation market.

Outlook for the European Market

The adaptation trend shows no sign of slowing. Broadcasters are investing in local versions of proven international hits because the audience data is predictable and the marketing costs are lower than for an untested concept. Streaming platforms see adaptations as a way to fill their catalogues with culturally specific content without starting from scratch. The regulatory environment will take time to catch up, but the direction is clear: the old model of a single license for a single territory is being replaced by a more flexible system that accommodates multiple versions, multiple windows, and multiple platforms.

Industry lawyers expect the next round of contract negotiations to focus on the duration of the adaptation exclusivity period and the revenue split between the format owner and the local producer. Both issues are likely to be resolved through market practice rather than legislation, at least for the near term. What is certain is that the business of adapting a TV series for a new market has become a core part of the European content economy, and the legal framework that supports it will continue to evolve as the volume of adaptation activity grows.