

TOURISM FOR ALL

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Accessible tourism can be defined as “a form of tourism that entails strategically planned collaboration processes between stakeholders that enable **people with access requirements, including mobility, vision, hearing and cognitive dimensions** of access, **to function independently and with equity and dignity** through the delivery of universally designed tourism products, services and environments” (Darcy and Dickson, 2009)”.

To better understand the importance of accessible tourism, it is important to take into account a series of aspects that fundamentally affect European countries: (a) **Decline in population** in most European countries; (b) Significant growth of the group **65plus**; (c) Increase in the number of **people with severe disabilities**; (d) **Labor force expected to shrink** significantly; (e) Number of **women aged 85plus** expected to be significantly higher than men in the same age group; (f) Around 80 million people live **with a slight or severe disability** in the European Union; (g) According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 15% of the world's population (1 billion people) is **estimated to live with some form of disability**. These factors, according to Taleb Rifai, Secretary General of the UNWTO from 2006 to 2009, lead us to the fact that accessible tourism should be a central element of any responsible and sustainable tourism policy. Moreover, accessible tourism is an exceptional business opportunity and not only benefits people with accessibility problems, but also benefits everyone.

According to (UNWTO, 2016), accessible tourism benefits different groups. Among these groups, it is worth highlighting people with **social disabilities** (Autism Spectrum Disorder - ASD- and Asperger Syndrome), people with **physical disabilities** (wheelchair users, people who require the use of walking sticks or crutches, etc.), people with a **sensory disability** (visual, hearing and speaking disabilities), people with **intellectual disabilities** (mental retardation, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy...), people with **mental** (anorexia, depression, epilepsy...) **or physical** (cancer, respiratory insufficiencies, celiac disease...) **illnesses** and **seniors** (over 60 years old). However, everyone **will go through situations in which they will have a need for accessibility**.

But, what does it mean to put accessible tourism into practice? Putting accessible tourism into practice means that facilities and services should be usable and accessible in the usual manner, without major complications and without assistance.

To do this, attention must be paid to aspects such as **structural barriers** (narrow passageways/doors, stairs, differences in level or high longitudinal gradient...), **sensory barriers** (low contrast, missing visually contrasting or tactilely detectable signage or information), **barriers in service** (no wheelchair compatible tables, counters with great height...), **barriers in interpersonal behavior** (uncertainties in dealing with guests with disabilities) and **information barriers** (lack of information on usability and accessibility).

Some basic requirements for barrier-free infrastructure and service are the "Wheels-Foot rule" (offers should be available for both wheelchair users and walking people), the "Principle of two senses" (information should be not only in writing, but also perceptible by at least two of the senses) and the "KISS rule" (Information should be provided according to the "Keep It Short and Simple" method).

More specifically, **among the mechanisms to eliminate accessibility barriers**, we can highlight aspects such as access without steps, leaving enough maneuvering space, high contrast design and tactile perception, the display of information not only in writing but also in pictograms, the visual contrast between the floor covering and the stairs, the use of an easy and visual language, the use of a screen reader with Braille display, voice output, and audio description, etc.