

UNWTO International Conference on Accessible Tourism

Tourism for All: Advancing accessibility for destinations, companies and people

San Marino, 16-17 November 2023

Concept Note

Background

Tourism is a human right since it represents a vehicle for both individual and collective fulfilment. However, for **1.3 billion people**, 16% of the population (WHO, 2023), that experiences significant disability, and millions of others with specific access requirements, participating in tourism on an equal basis is still challenging.

These customers encounter barriers **due to the way tourism infrastructure, products and services have been designed**, in developed and emerging economies alike. People come in diverse shapes and sizes and have different abilities. Nevertheless, we all still wish to travel without obstacles and experience life to its fullest.

Recent global shocks made us realize that **advocating for inclusiveness, accessibility and diversity, is good for tourism and good for people; good for destinations and good for business**. Accessibility also creates an environment of belonging for both employees and customers. This enhances decent work conditions, revenue streams and clients' loyalty. Ensuring accessibility is not a charity; it is **a game-changer for tourism businesses as it's helping them to confront the post-pandemic effects**. Shifting our mindset, unlocking the economic potential, and understanding a full spectrum of people's specific requirements, should be on top of our agendas.

Within the EU, 70% of persons with disabilities have the **purchasing power to travel** (Bowtell, 2015). Whereas in emerging economies this figure is lower, the overall multiplier effect on tourism spending of travellers with disabilities accompanied by their families, friends and caregivers, is undeniable immense. **It reaches as much as a 2 to 3 people per each traveller with disability, thus implying a major income share.**

In addition, accessibility is a critical aspect for the **ageing population**. By 2050, 1 in 6 people will be over the age of 65, according to the World Population Fund; in Europe, people aged 55 or more, the so called "baby boomers", already account for over one third of the total EU population (EU, 2019). As people grow older, the odds of experiencing a permanent or temporary disability are high, and the desire to travel does not necessarily fade away.

People with disabilities who do not usually travel find it stressful or even feel turned away by some destinations and businesses. Given the fact that they are extremely loyal customers when they do travel, and tend to repeat destinations, the sector is failing to embrace this diverse demographic.

Many destinations and service providers have made great strides to improve their accessibility levels. Some of the success stories were already featured in the **1st UNWTO Conference on Accessible Tourism in Europe, hosted by San Marino in 2014**. As we gather for the **International Conference on Accessible Tourism**, UNWTO and San Marino will provide a platform for governments, destinations, and the private sector to further discuss best ways to prioritize accessibility in any tourism policy or strategy. This time the focus will go beyond the European region.

The conference will demonstrate once more why **making tourism destinations and companies accessible now is paving the way for the future - places where locals and visitors spend quality time together, throughout their lives.**

Accessible Tourism: Main opportunities and challenges

There have been **systematic accessibility improvements** within the tourism sector in the last decade. As societies and economies evolve, as well as new easy-access solutions, our industry still needs to take a full grasp of opportunities that can increasingly improve people's access to travel and tourism.

The **UNWTO International Conference on Accessible Tourism** will tackle some of the critical points on the global accessible tourism agenda, while putting advanced policies and innovative experiences designed by destinations and service providers, in the spotlight.

The gathering will include debates on the development and implementation of accessibility strategies and standards, the business case of accessibility, as well as the **overall contribution of access for all in tourism to quality of life, and quality of services.**

Conference format and duration

The Conference consists of **one and a half day** proceedings.

On Day 1 (16 November) the opening ceremony will be followed by a setting the scene section, a ministerial round table and a special thematic feature in the morning. In the afternoon, the technical panels I and II will be held. The Government of San Marino will convene all participants for a Gala Dinner in the evening.

On Day 2 (17 November), a special feature segment will be followed by the last technical panel (panel III) and the reading of the San Marino Declaration, leading to the closing ceremony. The host will cordially invite all attendees for a technical tour with light lunch, prior to delegates' departure from San Marino.