



SMART

DIGITAL
INCLUSIVE
TOURISM

Guide for SMART Inclusive Tourism

*Capacity Building for SMART Tourism
and Inclusive Destinations*



Co-funded by the
European Union



Editorial

Project Number: 2022-1-ES01-KA 220-VET-000086688

SMART websites:

<https://smart-tourism-project.eu/>

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Introduction

This GUIDE for Inclusive SMART Tourism and Destinations aims at supporting professionals, SMEs, and tourism organisations in their efforts to contribute to inclusive and smart tourism ecosystems. It is available in four languages: English, French, Spanish, and Greek and will also be of interest to Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers and training professionals in the tourism sector to raise awareness about the necessity of making tourism offers more inclusive and catering to all groups of the population when designing tourism offers, experiences, and strategies.

In the context of inclusion, this GUIDE also highlights the need for digital skills development in the tourism sector in order to meet current demands by employers and developments linked to the twin transition. The structure of the document has been developed by EURAKOM with the feedback and contributions of DomSpain and Green Village. Overall, the GUIDE is a joint effort by the partners with all of them having contributed to developing the content and being in charge of researching their local and national contexts and challenges linked to inclusion and the role of digitalisation in making their tourism ecosystems more inclusive. This key document is also available for download and will be exploited as part of project webinars and workshops in Spain, France and Greece as well as during the international webinar in English.

The GUIDE can be used together with the SMART Practice Manual developed as part of the predecessor project of which details can be found on the aforementioned website (editorial). This latter document focused on digital tools and practices that promote sustainable tourism, (predominantly linked to environmentally friendly tourism) but the scope of the project did not make it possible for the partners to include tools that focus on inclusion. Together, the SMART Practice Manual and the GUIDE for INCLUSIVE SMART Tourism will provide a comprehensive package for tourism professionals to cater to diverse target groups by focusing both on positive impact on the environment and inclusive tourism for disadvantaged target groups in the context of digitalisation.



Objectives

The GUIDE aims at supporting the acceleration of the sustainable transition of professionals within the tourism ecosystem by anticipating skills needs and offering tools to adapt to new expectations linked to inclusion and digitalisation within the sector.

Developing a more inclusive tourism offer and experiences is a fundamental part of sustainable tourism development and management but is still mostly seen as a completely separate topic and tourism professionals often lack the necessary knowledge to adapt experiences to disadvantaged target groups or anticipate their needs. The GUIDE will support the project partners in raising awareness about the need for more training offers and curricula that take inclusion into account. The GUIDE will also constitute a practical and hands-on tool that can be used in a professional context and remains relevant in the longer term. Although it can be used as a stand-alone document it will be particularly powerful when used in the context of a workshop, webinar or a coaching session. The GUIDE also includes guidelines for educators that will support the use of the project materials in an educational context as part of training sessions, and workshops within CVET and VET provision.

According to “The future of vocational education and training in Europe” (Cedefop, 2023), the uptake and development of relevant CVET programmes has had moderate success in previous years and there is a need for more materials for professionals to adapt to new labour market needs through transversal skills and competencies. The GUIDE caters specifically to these needs and can, because of its availability in four languages, be used in Spain, France, Greece and at a more European level in its English language version.

Inclusion in tourism is a major issue to ensure fair access to leisure and travel for all, particularly for vulnerable groups. However, approaches vary from one country to another and from one stakeholder to another. This GUIDE aims to examine the situation in Europe and in partner countries, identify the main challenges, present the existing tools and analyse the obstacles to their deployment.



Who is this Guide for?

Direct Target Groups

- Professionals working in the tourism sector (SMEs, tourism organisations, tourist offices, stakeholders interested in destination management and sustainable tourism destinations)
- Professionals working in the areas of inclusion and accessibility of destinations, adaptation of tourism offers, etc.
- VET and adult education professionals in the sectors of tourism and hospitality (VET providers, education centres, community organisations, NGOs and associations)
- FINAL BENEFICIARIES: Tourism professionals

Project Stakeholders

- Destinations wanting to develop a smarter and more inclusive tourism offer and become more resilient
- Public local and regional authorities and tourism development agencies

SMART INCLUSION

Introduction to the project

SMART Digital Inclusive Tourism aims to empower the tourism industry in its ambition to become more inclusive, sustainable and digital. Our project focuses on accessibility, inclusion, digital tools, and environmental responsibility. Through strategic capacity-building, we aim to create smarter and more resilient tourism destinations that benefit all travellers, hosts and residents, including those with disabilities or fewer opportunities.

Our primary goal is to support tourism by encouraging more inclusive and accessible destinations using advanced digital tools. We want to empower tourism professionals, SMEs, and public authorities to adopt digitalisation and sustainability in the context of addressing the needs of diverse travellers. By doing so, we aim to enhance the overall quality of experiences in a destination and promote a more resilient, inclusive industry.



State of Play of Inclusion in Sustainable Tourism

State of Play of Inclusion in Sustainable Tourism in Europe

In 2022, 38.4% of EU citizens did not participate in tourism. The primary reasons were financial constraints for individuals aged 15–64 and health-related issues for those aged 65 and above. These findings underscore significant economic and health-related barriers affecting tourism participation across Europe (Transition Pathway for Tourism).

According to Eurostat data, in 2022, almost 3 out of 10 Europeans (27.9%) were not able to afford a week's annual holiday. This proportion varies considerably from country to country. In Romania, for example, 62.5% of the population are unable to afford a week's holiday, while in Sweden the rate is 10.2% (Eurostat, 2022).

Finally, in Europe, around 25% of citizens face accessibility obstacles when they plan to travel, including problems linked to infrastructure, transport or available information (Excelia Group Tourism).

The European Union encourages accessibility and inclusion in tourism through various programmes and initiatives. However, their implementation varies from country to country, and the European Union does not have a harmonised approach. Some countries have adopted dedicated policies and funding for people with disabilities or in precarious social situations, while others are lagging. In 2021, 56% of Europeans aged 15 or over had made at least one tourist trip. The Dutch (81%), the French and the Swedes (78%) are among the most frequent travellers (Touteleurope.eu, 2022).

Accessibility policies vary from country to country. For example, the Netherlands has introduced measures to make 80% of its public transport stations accessible to wheelchair users by 2019. Among the trends observed:

- *Holiday support programmes for vulnerable groups in several Nordic countries and Spain*
- *Initiatives led by the non-profit sector and local authorities, with varying levels of commitment depending on the national context*
- *Growing recognition of accessibility as a quality criterion in tourism development, but still few concrete actions for broader social inclusion*
- *Northern European countries generally offer more support systems for vulnerable groups, whereas Southern and Eastern Europe have fewer structured policies on these issues*

The role of digital tools in enhancing inclusion digitalisation presents both opportunities and challenges for inclusion in tourism. On the one hand, digital tools can significantly enhance access to tourism information, simplify administrative procedures, enable remote booking and participation, and provide assistive technologies for people with disabilities. On the other hand, the digital divide can also reinforce existing inequalities, particularly for elderly people, low-income populations or those with limited digital literacy.

A 2020 study by the European Commission found that 42% of Europeans lacked basic digital skills (Digital Economy and Society Index, 2020). This can prevent a large part of the population from benefiting from online tourism services, including accessible travel information, e-bookings, and virtual customer support.

To bridge this gap, some projects and initiatives have emerged:

- “Tur4All” in Spain: a collaborative app and platform listing accessible tourist infrastructures, available in multiple languages and designed with user-friendly digital interfaces
- “Digital Welcome”: a European project promoting digital and media skills among young migrants through creative workshops, which indirectly facilitates cultural participation, including tourism
- Online platforms and tools developed under EU-funded projects (ex COSME, Erasmus+) to train tourism professionals in inclusive service provision and accessibility

Examples of European initiatives:

- *The COSME programme: Funding for projects promoting accessibility in tourism, such as “Tourism for All”*
- *European labels: “Accessible Tourism Label” encourages destinations to adapt their infrastructures to make them more accessible*
- *Erasmus+: Certain training courses include the theme of accessibility and social tourism*
- *Pioneer countries: Sweden and the Netherlands have advanced regulations on accessibility and support to travel*

In Spain, initiatives such as “Tur4all” list accessible infrastructures, while other countries are struggling to set up similar tools



State of Play of Inclusion in Sustainable Tourism in France

Progress has been made regarding inclusion in tourism in France but the industry is still marked by significant inequalities and obstacles, particularly for people with disabilities, those in precarious situations or those with other vulnerabilities. Although the 2005 law established a framework for making establishments accessible to people with disabilities, the implementation of these standards is uneven. Many facilities still benefit from exemptions and do not meet their accessibility obligations. This observation highlights the carelessness and slowness of the reforms, despite a legal framework that is supposed to guarantee universal access to public facilities.

At the same time, the issue of poverty in tourism, although often invisible, is a major challenge. As the EURAKOM interview with Vacances Ouvertes underlines, it is sometimes “better” to be disabled than poor, given how poverty is stigmatised and marginalised in public policy. Tourism remains a difficult activity to access for many people living below the poverty line, with a significant proportion of the population not going on holiday, estimated at 25 million people in France (INSEE, 2022). Financial barriers, combined with a lack of suitable methods for financing holidays for the most disadvantaged, are great obstacles to inclusion.

Existing programmes, such as those run by Vacances Ouvertes, attempt to address this gap by offering appropriate funding solutions, but they are largely dependent on collaboration with public and private stakeholders. However, the lack of co-creation with vulnerable groups and rigid administrative approaches limit the effectiveness of these solutions. The lack of training for tourism professionals in the specific needs of these groups is also a major obstacle. This lack of skills and awareness leaves a large proportion of these groups marginalised within the tourism sector.

There is a need to rethink administrative approaches and open up the field to more flexible and adapted solutions, taking into account the realities experienced by these groups. Co-creation initiatives, where the people concerned are involved in designing solutions, are essential to ensure that inclusion initiatives genuinely meet their needs and aspirations. The challenge is to destigmatise access to holidays and simplify the process, while ensuring that vulnerable people feel able and worthy to go on holiday, without having to overcome a multitude of administrative or social obstacles.

The digital divide is also a major issue in France. According to INSEE, in 2021, around 17% of the population lacked basic digital skills, and 13 million people are considered digitally excluded. This has a direct impact on access to tourism services, many of which require online interactions, from information search to booking and payments.

Some initiatives attempt to respond to this challenge:

- The Sac à Dos platform by Vacances Ouvertes: a digital tool facilitating holiday access for young people, though its uptake remains limited among vulnerable populations due to digital literacy gaps
- Digital mediation programmes by associations and local authorities, supporting individuals in using digital tools for holiday planning
- National plans to combat digital exclusion (for example "Pass Numérique") that could be better integrated into inclusive tourism strategies

Existing initiatives and programmes:

- L'Agence Nationale pour les Chèques-Vacances (ANCV): Finances holidays for 150,000 people in difficulty every year
- Vacances Ouvertes: Helps disadvantaged people organise their trips. Network of 600 associations, impact on self-esteem and integration (40% of young people who go on holiday go back to training/employment)
- Label Tourisme & Handicap: Attributed to more than 5,500 tourist sites, but considered too strict by many and difficult to obtain



State of Play of Inclusion in Sustainable Tourism in Spain

As one of the key tourism destinations in Europe, Spain attracts millions of visitors. An estimated 10% of international tourists in Spain have some form of disability, representing roughly 10 million travelers annually. Both on national and regional levels, the importance of developing and promoting inclusive and sustainable tourism has increasingly been recognised.

Notable progress through national policies and regulations at improving accessibility in public spaces, transport, and tourism has been made. The General Law for Rights of People with Disabilities and their Social Inclusion (Ley General de Derechos de las Personas con Discapacidad y de su Inclusión Social) (2013) establishes the legal framework for ensuring accessibility rights, including measures for tourism environments. Catalonia has proactively integrated inclusive tourism and accessibility into its regional policies through the Catalan Law for Accessibility (Llei d'Accessibilitat) (2014), promoting adaptations in urban areas, transportation, tourism facilities, public services to attract a diverse range of tourists.

Major cities like Madrid and Barcelona offer tactile exhibits, audio guides, videos, etc. to provide tailored experiences for visitors with special needs. According to the Spanish Tourism Institute (TURESPAÑA), approximately 60% of hotels and public tourist sites are equipped to accommodate travelers with disabilities, but many facilities still need improvements. The Catalan Tourism Agency (Agència Catalana de Turisme) reports that around 70% of major cultural attractions in Barcelona are accessible, including ramps, audio guides, and tactile maps. However, rural and less-visited areas still face significant gaps.

Several initiatives can stand out as good practice cases:

- **Accessible Tourism Certification** - initiative aimed at improving accessibility in tourism services, facilities, and destinations and promoting compliance with national and EU regulations through a platform for accessible tourism, managed by the Spanish Government's Ministry of Industry, Commerce, and Tourism.
- **European Network for Accessible Tourism** (ENAT) with local chapters in Spain advocates for best practices in the sector and developed the Accessible Route uniting different regions in Spain, including Madrid, Barcelona, and Andalusia.



- Red Española de Turismo Accesible: an independent platform and a network of organisations dedicated to improving accessibility in accommodation, transportation, activities, and services for travellers with disabilities or reduced mobility.
- "Barcelona Accessible": a platform with information on accessible attractions, transportation options, and facilities. It also includes interactive maps, audio guides, and multilingual content, which allows visitors with sensory and mobility impairments to plan their visits.
- INSERSO (Institute for Social Services and Tourism for Seniors): a government-backed initiative of accessible tourism programmes tailored for seniors
- FITUR 4all: an initiative dedicated to enhancing quality, diversity, and inclusion in tourism, focusing on the latest trends, best practices in accessible tourism, social sustainability, innovative technology, and optimizing the accessible tourism value chain.

State of Play of Inclusion in Sustainable Tourism in Greece

Greece's GDP and therefore its development (both economic and social) relies heavily on its tourism industry. For the last few years, the country has been actively trying to advance inclusive and smart tourism, aiming to create accessible, sustainable, and digitally enhanced travel experiences. Recognising the importance of catering to all travellers, including those with disabilities and reduced mobility, Greece has recently developed and implemented various strategies and initiatives to promote equality and accessibility in tourism.

In 2024, Greece welcomed a record 35.95 million travellers, marking a 9.8% increase from the previous year. This translated into €21.7 billion in tourism revenues, highlighting the sector's vital role in the nation's economic landscape.

While Greece has made strides in promoting accessible tourism, challenges persist. A satisfaction survey among tourists with disabilities revealed that 40.3% found the existing infrastructure inadequate, highlighting the need for continued improvements. Despite these challenges, initiatives like the Accessible Beaches Programme and the Olympus Riviera Digital Platform demonstrate Greece's commitment to enhancing accessibility in tourism.



Sustainability has become a focal point of Greece's tourism strategy. The country has introduced measures such as the Climate Resilience Tax to mitigate the environmental impacts of tourism, particularly in over-saturated destinations like Santorini and Mykonos. These efforts aim to balance tourism growth with the preservation of natural and cultural resources.

The Greek National Tourism Organization (GNT0) and the Institute of the Greek Tourism Confederation (INSETE) have been at the forefront of promoting inclusive tourism. In May 2024, the GNT0 released a comprehensive guide detailing accessible travel options across Greece, including information on archaeological sites, museums, accommodations, and transportation services equipped with necessary facilities such as ramps and special pathways.

INSETE's studies emphasise the need for the tourism sector to focus on five key areas: raising awareness, improving accessibility to public spaces, ensuring access to accurate information, providing reskilling and upskilling opportunities for tourism professionals, and implementing targeted actions by the private sector to develop socially responsible policies and inclusive travel experiences.

- Accessible Beaches Initiative

Greece has transformed 147 of its beaches into accessible destinations for people with reduced mobility, with plans to increase this number to 287. This initiative includes the installation of Seatrac systems, which are remote-controlled chairs that allow individuals to enter and exit the sea independently. The project also encompasses the development of accessible facilities such as parking lots, walkways, changing rooms, and shaded areas.

- Olympus Riviera Digital Platform

In the Pieria region, the development of the Olympus Riviera Digital Platform aims to promote the area as an "Accessible Tourist Destination." This digital platform provides detailed information on the accessibility of routes, public spaces, and points of interest, enabling tourists with disabilities, the elderly, and others with mobility challenges to plan their visits confidently. The platform's initial phase focused on the Platamonas area, documenting 68 points of interest and 97 routes, with plans to expand coverage across the region .



- Inclusive Greece Certification

InclusiveGreece is the official licensee in Greece responsible for the "Travel for All" certification initiative. This certification system evaluates and records barrier-free tourist offerings, ensuring that travelers have access to up-to-date and reliable information about accessible destinations. The initiative promotes inclusivity by providing a standardised assessment of accessibility across the tourism sector.

- AccessibleEU Greece Conference

Organised by AccessibleEU in collaboration with the National Confederation of Disabled People of Greece (NCDP), this awareness-raising event brought together public authorities, tourism bodies, and Disabled Persons Organisations to share experiences and strategies for developing accessible tourism in Greece. The conference aimed to stimulate new initiatives and contribute to the enlargement of the AccessibleEU Community of Practice in Greece.



Barriers and Challenges to more Inclusive Tourism Development

Barriers and Challenges in France

France has a long tradition of social tourism, supported by organisations such as Vacances Ouvertes, which EURAKOM interviewed in the course of writing this GUIDE. This organisation's model is based on financial aid to help vulnerable families, young people in difficulty and isolated senior citizens go on holiday. However, there are a number of limitations. One of the main barriers is the dependence on public funding, with a significant drop in subsidies in recent years. This situation undermines initiatives aimed at making tourism accessible to all.

Moreover, the tourism industry is still struggling to adapt to the specific needs of these populations, whether in terms of physical accessibility, affordable rates or social mediation. Despite some progress, tourism professionals are still not sufficiently aware of the challenges of inclusion, and those involved in tourism are still largely untrained in the specific needs of people with disabilities, people in precarious situations or other vulnerable groups. This lack of training is compounded by rigid administrative approaches that do not take into account the realities experienced by these groups, making inclusion even more difficult.

At the same time, the lack of co-construction with vulnerable groups results in solutions that are poorly adapted to their real needs and expectations. This situation is exacerbated by stigmatising social representations of people who don't go on holiday, who are often seen as incapable or unworthy of enjoying these moments. Mistrust and fear of the unknown are also major obstacles, both for the people concerned and for professionals in the sector.

It is therefore essential to rethink inclusion by emphasising collaboration and co-creation, by taking the realities experienced by vulnerable groups into account in order to build genuinely appropriate solutions, and by shifting the focus from administrative procedures to more human and personalised support. As Vacances Ouvertes emphasises, it is crucial to overcome the fear of the unknown, not only among beneficiaries, but also among those involved in tourism, to open the doors of travel to everyone.

EURAKOM also interviewed Pas-de-Calais Tourisme. The main challenges that emerged were :

- Lack of mandatory training on inclusion for professionals
- Need for a deeper understanding of inclusive tourism as a concept beyond physical accessibility.
- Professional training needs to include more aspects of social and cultural inclusion.
- Perceived cost of facilities.
- Lack of synergy between tourism professionals, stakeholders and associations.
- Few university or vocational training courses incorporate the inclusion dimension.
- Lack of specific modules on social and inclusive tourism.
- Lack of sustainable funding for structures involved in inclusion.

We also interviewed the person in charge of education and training at the Campus des métiers et des qualifications d'excellence tourisme et innovation (Campus of professions and qualifications of excellence tourism and innovation). The Campus works in the hotel, restaurant, tourism and food sectors and focuses on improving the skills of teachers. The Campus des métiers travels extensively to consult professionals, listen to expressed and implied needs, monitor the market and meet with business leaders to ensure that training programmes are in line with the real needs of the market.

During this interview, EURAKOM learned that many professionals are questioning the inclusiveness and accessibility of their facilities. There is a curiosity among professionals that pushes them to find out more about the subject, but initiatives take a long time to get off the ground due to a lack of interest or resources, which poses difficulties in terms of development to bring about modernity and adaptation.

Seminars on web visibility, AI, digital tools and, more generally, digital skills, are organised by the Campus with tourism educators because many of them work far from the reality and evolution of the profession and think that their students, tomorrow's professionals, will simply be working in tourist offices and won't need these skills. Through these seminars, teachers are educated and in turn learn how to properly train their students so that they acquire the digital skills needed for the sector's digital transition. The interviewee recognised the importance of the digital aspect of inclusion and stressed that support and training are essential to avoid a lack of knowledge that could create a digital divide that would subsequently exclude certain categories of the population.



Barriers and Challenges in Spain

As a tourist destination, Spain has made great strides in the area of accessible tourism and has developed various strategies and measures over the years. However, the regulations are scattered in various laws and are not always implemented. Nor do they address the challenges that tourism professionals face when adapting their offers. Accessibility is often seen as an “additional” element and not as a structural part of tourism design. Although awareness of the issue is growing and more and more professionals are interested in learning more about it, they often lack access to practical guidance and targeted training.

Professionals interviewed often mentioned their limited knowledge of how to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities or other disadvantaged groups. Employees in SMEs reported that they do not know how to adapt their experiences beyond simple physical access. Often, employees rely on their personal sensitivities or assumptions, which can lead to unintentional exclusion.

This situation is compounded by the fact that inclusion is still rarely addressed in education and training programmes. Vocational training centres and adult education organisations mostly focus on environmental sustainability, and topics such as social inclusion, accessible service design or inclusive communication are largely missing from the curricula. The trainers themselves expressed that they need further training and concrete tools to discuss these topics with learners.

Digital accessibility is still a major obstacle when planning trips. Websites are often inaccessible or difficult to use for people with different types of disabilities. Only about 35% of them are fully accessible according to WCAG standards - and tourism professionals don't always know how to create or assess accessible digital content. This creates a digital divide and limits opportunities for independent travel.

Lack of uniform accessibility standards across regions and sectors. For example, accessible destinations may differ significantly between popular tourist destinations like Barcelona and less-developed areas.

Transport infrastructure can be a real challenge for people with disabilities from access to transport itself, to infrastructure such as train stations and airports, to transport services at the destination. There are still many barriers, and some accessible services are not always available, reliable or easy to book.



Information and orientation are another challenge, both in urban and rural areas of Spain. In general, there is limited availability of clear and accessible information about destinations, transport, and services as many websites do not provide details on accessible features. When in the destination, signage is not adapted and visitors need assistance to find their own way. Even when people book an “accessible” room, they often encounter obstacles when they arrive. There is almost no provision of accessible/adapted activities or services for people with autism, and destinations are unsure how to approach this group of travellers.

These examples show that inclusion and accessibility are still treated as niche topics and that tourism professionals and educators often lack the necessary tools, knowledge and support networks to integrate them into daily practice.

Barriers and Challenges in Greece

Despite a growing awareness and notable progress, several barriers continue to hinder the development of a truly inclusive tourism ecosystem in Greece. These challenges exist at multiple levels - from professional practices to education and broader systemic issues.

Professional Challenges

Many tourism professionals in Greece still lack adequate knowledge and understanding of the specific needs of people with disabilities, older travelers, and other groups requiring accessible services. Accessibility is often perceived narrowly, limited to physical infrastructure such as ramps or elevators, without a deeper understanding of the broader service and communication needs. For instance, front-line staff may not be trained to interact appropriately with guests who have visual, hearing, or cognitive impairments, affecting the overall visitor experience.

Additionally, a significant portion of SMEs, which dominate Greece's tourism sector, often view investments in accessibility as a financial burden rather than an opportunity for market expansion. There is also a lack of tailored business support services that could help companies adapt their offerings to be more inclusive while maintaining economic sustainability.



Educational Challenges

The limited integration of accessibility and inclusion of topics into tourism and hospitality education further compounds the problem. Most university and vocational programmes in Greece still do not systematically address inclusive tourism principles. Training on accessibility issues, disability awareness, and inclusive service design remains sporadic, often depending on individual initiatives rather than being an embedded part of the curriculum.

Furthermore, continuing professional development opportunities (such as workshops or certifications focused on inclusive tourism) are scarce, leaving current employees without pathways to improve their competencies in this crucial area. This educational gap perpetuates a cycle where new tourism professionals enter the workforce without the necessary skills or mindset to contribute to a more accessible and inclusive tourism environment.

Systemic Challenges

Finally, it is evident that the advance and adoption of inclusive tourism models requires a rather systemic approach. Even though there are dedicated ministries and organisations at the national and local level to design and ensure uptake initiatives to this end, it is true that a broader cooperation between different authorities is needed in order to efficiently implement comprehensive interventions in policy and practice. The lack of comprehensive national strategies and incentives for promoting inclusive tourism poses a systemic barrier. While initiatives like the Accessible Beaches Programme are valuable, a coordinated and sustained policy effort is needed to drive real transformation across the sector.



Tools for Inclusion

International examples and overview

Inclusion in tourism relies on tools and strategies that ensure accessibility on sites and even before and after the experiences. Around the world, destinations and businesses are adopting innovative strategies to create welcoming environments for all travellers, including those with disabilities, language barriers and other specific needs. Below is an international overview of key tools and initiatives that encourage and make inclusion easier.

UN Tourism (formerly the World Tourism Organisation) has published a number of best practice guides on accessibility, offering recommendations to those involved in the sector who wish to improve the welcoming of people with disabilities. These documents provide practical advice on adapting infrastructures, staff training and inclusive communication. Digital tools are playing an important role in making travel accessible. Apps such as Wheelmap, developed in Germany, allow users to find and rate wheelchair-accessible locations, while Be My Eyes, from Denmark, connects visually impaired travellers with volunteers who can assist them remotely. Moreover, platforms like Euan's Guide in the UK provide detailed accessibility reviews for hotels, restaurants and attractions, ensuring that travellers with disabilities can plan their journeys with confidence and can have all the information they need. For people travelling and facing language barriers, translation tools are extremely useful, we all know Google Translate and SayHi but some apps focus on another kind of translation, for instance, HandTalk offers AI-powered sign language translation to improve communication for people with hearing impairments.

Beyond technology, many destinations have taken steps to ensure inclusivity. Spain, for example, is widely recognised as one of Europe's most accessible countries, offering barrier-free beaches, adapted public transportation and a wide range of accessible cultural experience. Additionally, smart beaches have begun to appear around the globe, in Spain, Turkey and even Dubai. It is the combination of technology and the beach, where technology is a tool to make the beach safer, more sustainable and accessible. This modernisation of beaches through digital tools enhances the beach experience for all, including those with disabilities.

Smart beaches allow for tourists and inhabitants to access real-time information on air quality, humidity, solar radiation, noise level, water quality and even crowd density, thus ensuring a safe and enjoyable visit for everyone while allowing for the pollution to be measured and assessed. Other destinations outside Europe, such as Singapore focus on universal design to integrate accessibility design into its urban planning, ensuring that hotels, transport, and public spaces are designed for people of all abilities. Sydney has also made significant progress through its Sydney for All initiative, which provides extensive accessibility information for visitors, making it easier for people with disabilities to navigate the city.

Social inclusion in tourism also extends to programmes that support marginalised communities. In Canada, ElderTreks specialises in adventure travel for people over 50, ensuring that aging travelers are not excluded from enriching experiences. On a broader scale, the Planeterra Foundation, part of G Adventures in Canada, works to integrate local communities into the tourism economy, empowering Indigenous groups, women, and other disadvantaged populations to benefit from global travel.

Certifications and policy frameworks also play a critical role in encouraging inclusive practices. UN Tourism's Inclusive Tourism Guidelines provide a roadmap for destinations looking to improve accessibility, while certification programmes such as Tourisme & Handicap in France and Australia's Wheelchair Accessible Tourism label help travellers identify businesses and services that meet accessibility standards.

As the world moves toward a more inclusive future, these tools and initiatives highlight the importance of designing travel experiences that cater to everyone. Whether through technology, destination planning, social programs, or even workplace policies, inclusivity is becoming a central focus in both tourism and broader society.



Tools in France

In France, a range of digital tools and platforms have emerged to support inclusive tourism by making accessibility information more visible, interactive, and actionable. Collaborative platforms such as Handiplanet allow disabled travellers to share reviews and practical information about accessible destinations, accommodation, and activities. Toolib provides a platform where users, both with and without disabilities, can offer or search for accessible accommodation, supported by users' feedback that enhances planning and trust. Similarly, Jaccede.com offers a community-fed directory of accessible public places, helping travellers find suitable venues based on real-world experiences.

Another major actor in France is Handiroad, which provides a digital mapping platform dedicated to accessible tourism. Its mobile-friendly interface allows users to consult, evaluate, and share accessible travel routes and services across France, supporting both individual travellers and local authorities in developing more inclusive environments, connecting all people and stakeholders together.

Digital innovation is also becoming increasingly important in more traditional approaches. For example, the Handiplage initiative incorporates digital signage and QR-based services to inform beachgoers about available facilities in real time: despite not being inherently digital, this initiative integrates this aspect in its offer to diversify and simplify it. Likewise, the Destination pour Tous label is evolving to include digital assessment tools, allowing places to better measure and improve their level of accessibility.

Despite these initiatives and the positive evolutions, challenges remain, particularly regarding the digital divide affecting both users and professionals. Many tourism operators lack the training and resources to implement inclusive digital solutions, while some vulnerable users face difficulties in accessing or navigating these tools. Continued efforts in digital skills development, design and co-creation are essential to ensure that inclusive tourism in France is not only legally compliant, but truly accessible and empowering for everyone concerned.



Existing tools:

- Good practices guides: UNWTO has published several handbooks on accessibility that can be used for France.
- Collaborative platforms: Handiplanet or Handiroad gives a platform to disabled travellers to share their experiences, including in France.

Digital innovations being implemented: labels like Handiplage or Destination pour Tous work to implement more inclusive digital tools.

Tools in Spain

In Spain, several entities and organisations work to ensure equal opportunities for people with disabilities in the field of tourism.

One of the most prominent is ONCE, which promotes inclusion and social support through training with adapted materials and assistive technologies. Its activity is carried out through the ILUNION business group, which employs more than 71,000 people, 58% of whom have a disability. Within this group, ILUNION Hotels has positioned itself as a benchmark in universal accessibility, with 30 hotels in the main cities of Spain.

Digital Guides on Accessibility of Tourist Destinations

Various platforms provide information on the accessibility of tourist destinations, allowing travellers with special needs to check if a site is adapted to their needs and plan their trips with confidence and security:

- TUR4all is a platform of cities in Spain accessible for visitors and residents that work directly with local suppliers and promote the zero footprint. The group also has a travel agency, TUR4all Travel, specialising in personalised trips.
- ibaaccessible.com platform, created by ASPAYM and PREDIF, allows tourists to check the accessibility of hotels, restaurants and other services in the Balearic Islands.
- COCEMFE, one of the key associations of people with physic and sensory disability in Spain, has developed accessible tourism guides with detailed information on the accessibility of natural parks, reserves, museums and accommodation, facilitating the planning of adapted trips.



- EQUALITAS VITAE offers accessibility sheets with detailed information verified by specialised technicians. Its web portal is a reference in Spain, providing updated data on more than 3,000 accessible tourism resources.

SMART Museum Experiences

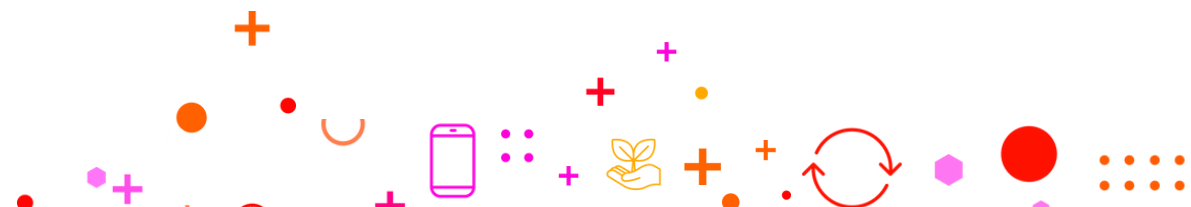
- AR, VR: Museum of Art of Girona has integrated AR and VR technologies. <https://visyon360.com/project/girona>
- Virtual Tours: Various museums, including Picasso Museum, Gaudi Museum, provide virtual 360° tours and accessible online content. <https://museupicassobcn.cat/picasso-i-barcelona/itinerari-virtual-per-la-barcelona-de-picasso>
- Sign Language Apps for Cultural Sites: the Catalan Museum of Archeology offers sign language video guides (QR codes placed around the exhibits) to make information accessible to visitors with hearing impairments. The Museum of La Rioja offers videos with sign language and subtitles, enhancing inclusivity for visitors with hearing disabilities. <https://visitmuseum.gencat.cat/en/museum/museu-darqueologia-de-catalunya-barcelona>

Collaborative tools

- ACCESSALOO: User-generated app that allows upload and locate accessible toilets nearby
- MAPCESIBLE: collaborative app to map accessibility of beaches and coastal areas. It complements DALCO (Dispositivo de Accesibilidad en Playas y Costas) guidelines, providing real-time information on accessible facilities and services, such as ramps, walkways, and adapted amenities, to facilitate access for people with disabilities or reduced mobility.

SMART Tourism Technologies

- Incorporating Tourism Intelligence Systems in various regions and cities, for example by the municipalities of Sevilla and Malaga to collect, analyse, and visualize vast amounts of data to support local tourism, using Business Intelligence to enhance strategic planning with predictive and diagnostic insights, ultimately serving to improve the city.
- NaviLens Codes: allow visually impaired individuals to access contextual information by scanning a code with a mobile.



- **Laberintus Park** in Malaga has incorporated biotech technology to offer interactive and accessible experiences, combining nature and technology for all visitors (HuffPost, 2025).
- **The Guide to Good Practices in Accessibility for Smart Tourism Destinations** includes 21 initiatives implemented to improve accessibility in different parts of Spain

Thanks to these initiatives, Spain is moving towards a more inclusive tourism model, ensuring that everyone, regardless of their abilities, can fully enjoy their trips.

Tools in Greece

Digital innovation is increasingly playing a key role in enhancing accessibility and inclusiveness in Greece's tourism sector. Several digital tools have been developed in recent years to promote destinations and services to all visitors, including people with disabilities.

One prominent initiative is Greece **No Limits**, an online platform designed to promote accessible tourism services throughout the country. It offers detailed information on accessible hotels, transportation, beaches, cultural sites, and recreational activities. It enables travelers with different accessibility needs to plan their trips with greater confidence and transparency.

Another example is the **Digital Tour of the National Archaeological Museum of Athens**, which provides an immersive, virtual exploration of one of the country's most important museums. This digital solution offers 360-degree views, interactive exhibits, and information available in multiple formats (including audio guides and captions), thus making the museum accessible to people with mobility challenges or those unable to visit in person.

AccessLab is another key initiative supporting inclusive tourism in Greece. It is a digital toolkit designed to help local authorities, SMEs, and tourism organizations assess and improve the accessibility of their facilities and services. It provides online self-assessment tools, best practice guidelines, and resources to promote systematic improvements, helping destinations move beyond compliance toward true inclusion.



- Finally, **COSMOTE CHRONOS** leverages virtual reality technology to offer an innovative experience for visitors with disabilities. It provides virtual reconstructions of important historical sites and cultural heritage monuments, such as Ancient Olympia, allowing users to experience them as they originally were, regardless of physical accessibility barriers.

In addition to digital tools, several organisations in Greece play a key role in promoting inclusive tourism:

- **ENAT Greece** (European Network for Accessible Tourism – Greek Branch): ENAT Greece works closely with national and local tourism bodies to promote policies and practices that enhance accessibility in tourism. It supports research, training, and development projects focusing on inclusive travel experiences.
- **NGO "Me Alla Matia"** (Με Άλλα Μάτια): This non-profit organisation advocates for the rights of people with disabilities and works on creating more accessible urban and tourism environments. They organize awareness-raising events and provide consulting services to businesses aiming to improve accessibility.
- **Accessible Rhodes**: Focused on the island of Rhodes, this initiative maps and promotes accessible facilities and services for tourists. They offer detailed guides and collaborate with local authorities to improve accessibility infrastructure on the island.
- **Association of People with Disabilities of Northern Greece** (AMEA Northern Greece): Beyond advocacy for rights, AMEA Northern Greece also promotes accessible tourism opportunities, highlighting the need for inclusive hospitality services and providing consultation to businesses willing to improve.



Challenges in Deploying Tools

Challenges in France

The implementation of digital tools to promote inclusion in tourism faces a number of complex challenges. First of all, the digital gap remains a major obstacle, as many vulnerable groups, such as the elderly and people on low incomes, have limited technological skills. In addition, the inaccessibility of digital platforms, with interfaces that are not adapted for people with disabilities, makes them difficult to use. The lack of human support or mediation to guide these users through the process further complicates access to online tourism services. Furthermore, the adaptation of existing infrastructures might be expensive and the lack of training in digital tools for tourism professionals exacerbate the situation, limiting their ability to meet the specific needs of vulnerable tourists. Another challenge is the lack of harmonised European regulations on accessibility, which makes it difficult for accessibility labels to be mutually recognised across countries. In addition, there is a lack of information on existing inclusion initiatives, making it difficult for tourism stakeholders and tourists themselves to find suitable solutions. Finally, the perception that inclusion is a secondary issue to economic profitability is holding back the investment needed to improve digital tools for truly inclusive accessibility. To overcome these challenges, it is crucial to adopt a hybrid approach combining technology and human mediation, integrating the diversity of user needs and simplifying administrative processes while guaranteeing the accessibility of infrastructures.

Challenges in Spain

In the Spanish context, DomSpain encountered several key challenges when introducing the tools. While the overall interest in sustainable tourism has increased, the aspect of inclusion is still under-emphasised, leading to several obstacles.

Low awareness about inclusion as part of sustainability: Many stakeholders, especially in rural areas of Spain, still associate sustainable tourism solely with environmental concerns. This limited understanding made it difficult to generate initial interest in tools focused on social inclusion and accessibility.

Resistance to digitalisation: Small tourism businesses often lacked the time, resources or motivation to introduce new digital tools. Some expressed doubts about the return on their investment, especially if they found the tools too complex or not directly applicable to their daily work.

Skills and capacity gaps: There is a clear lack of digital and pedagogical knowledge among both tourism professionals and VET trainers, which limits their ability to make sense of the tools on offer. Customised support and training were necessary but resource intensive.

Difficulty in engaging stakeholders: Some organisations such as new or marginalised stakeholders (e.g. micro-enterprises) are proved more difficult than expected to reach. **Fragmentation of local efforts:** Collaboration between tourism providers and inclusion-oriented organisations is still minimal. As a result, there have been few common platforms or communication channels to drive inclusive practices across sectors.

These challenges reflect the wider structural problems in the Spanish tourism system, where inclusive tourism is still being prioritised. There is still a need for greater cross-sector collaboration, more investment in digital training and clearer national or regional strategies that consider inclusion as a core component of sustainable tourism development.

Challenges in Greece

Despite relevant efforts and growing interest in recent years several challenges persist in the development, implementation, and adoption of digital tools by professionals and destinations towards promoting inclusive tourism in Greece.

Technical Barriers

Many digital tools still face technical limitations related to accessibility standards. Apps and websites are not always fully compatible with assistive technologies such as screen readers or alternative navigation systems. Furthermore, high-quality 3D or VR experiences, like COSMOTE CHRONOS, require strong internet connectivity and devices with high technical specifications, which are not universally available across all Greek regions, especially in rural or island areas.



Organisational Challenges

Tourism operators, especially SMEs, often lack the internal capacity to integrate digital accessibility solutions. Limited budgets, lack of technical expertise, and low prioritisation of inclusive technology within overall business strategies contribute to slow adoption. Many initiatives remain isolated pilots rather than being scaled up across destinations.

Digital Skills Gaps in the Tourism Workforce:

A significant obstacle is the lack of digital skills among tourism professionals. Many workers in the Greek tourism sector—particularly in smaller businesses—have limited training in using or managing digital tools. Skills gaps exist not only in general digital literacy but also in understanding accessibility standards and how to develop or promote inclusive digital services. Without systematic upskilling programs, even the best tools risk underuse or ineffective implementation

Gaps in regulations and Implementation Efficiency

Although Greece aligns with the EU's Accessibility Act (effective from 2025 for digital services), enforcement mechanisms are still under development. Currently, there is no systematic national framework requiring that tourism-related digital tools meet accessibility standards, leaving implementation largely voluntary.

Audience and Take-Up Issues:

Awareness among users about the availability of inclusive digital tools is relatively low. Many travellers with disabilities are unaware of platforms like Greece No Limits or AccessLab. In addition, some potential users face digital literacy barriers, especially older tourists or those with multiple disabilities, limiting the reach and impact of such tools.

For an efficient implementation of digital inclusion in Greece's tourism sector, technical upgrades, stronger policy frameworks, better coordination among tourism actors, and targeted awareness-raising among both providers and users are essential. Scaling up successful initiatives and ensuring that future digital innovations integrate accessibility "by design" will be key to creating a smart, inclusive tourism ecosystem.



Skills Needs

Skills Needs in the EU

As the tourism industry increasingly embraces digitalisation, the need for inclusive digital tools and accessible content has become a crucial challenge. While many tourism professionals recognise the importance of inclusivity, there remains a significant skills gap in effectively integrating digital accessibility into their services.

One of the most pressing needs is training in universal design and digital accessibility standards, such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). These guidelines ensure that websites, mobile apps, and booking platforms are navigable by people with disabilities, including those using screen readers, voice commands, or other assistive technologies. However, many tourism stakeholders lack the expertise to implement these principles effectively. Basic improvements - such as adding captions to videos, providing alternative text for images, ensuring high contrast in design, and simplifying navigation - can enhance accessibility with minimal effort.

Beyond technical knowledge, there is a growing need for professionals to develop inclusive digital communication strategies. This includes ensuring that content is not only accessible but also relevant to diverse audiences. Writing in clear, easy-to-read language, offering multilingual options, and considering the needs of neurodivergent users are essential steps toward making digital content inclusive.

However, as Marc Pili from Vacances Ouvertes highlights, a major issue in digital tool development is the lack of co-creation with the people these tools are meant to serve. Too often, digital accessibility solutions are designed without direct input from disadvantaged groups, leading to tools that are either inadequate or underused. Instead of assuming what marginalised communities need, professionals should engage in participatory design processes, working alongside users with disabilities, elderly travelers, low-income groups, and other underrepresented audiences. This ensures that digital tools are practical, intuitive, and truly useful rather than creating new barriers.



In summary, the digital skills most in demand in the tourism sector for inclusivity include:

- Technical accessibility expertise (e.g., WCAG compliance, assistive technology integration)
- Inclusive content creation (e.g., easy-to-read formats, multilingual accessibility)
- Digital co-creation with disadvantaged groups (ensuring tools are relevant and user-friendly)
- Understanding of universal design principles (creating services that work for everyone, not just those with specific needs)



While there have been efforts to enhance accessibility and inclusivity in France, the lack of training and awareness among tourism professionals remains a major challenge. The label 'Tourisme et Handicap,' introduced by Atout France in 2003, is the only certification dedicated to accessible tourism in France and globally. However, many eligible businesses do not apply for it due to limited understanding of accessibility issues. This highlights the need for better training and awareness among tourism professionals to foster inclusive tourism practices.

Despite this need, expecting a large-scale training initiative to bridge this knowledge gap is unrealistic. A more effective approach, as suggested by the European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT), would be the creation of dedicated positions focusing on accessibility in tourism. These specialised roles could act as key reference points within organisations, guiding inclusive practices and ensuring accessibility considerations are integrated into tourism offerings.

Another critical skill needed in inclusive tourism is financial management. Currently, many inclusive tourism initiatives rely heavily on public funding, which has been steadily declining. Even private leisure structures on the coast often receive between 25% and 40% of their funding from public subsidies. To ensure the sustainability of inclusive tourism, professionals must develop competencies in securing alternative funding sources such as sponsorships, private partnerships, and philanthropy. Strengthening financial resilience will be key to maintaining and expanding accessibility initiatives despite budget constraints.

The development of social tourism, aimed at making tourism accessible to economically disadvantaged individuals, is also closely tied to political priorities. Historically, government support for social tourism has fluctuated, with significant progress made between 1997 and 2002 under the Jospin administration. Since then, shifts in policy have made it more challenging to sustain and expand social tourism efforts. Nevertheless, some associations, such as VVF and Renouveau Vacances, continue to promote social tourism despite financial and policy-related hurdles.



Digital tools present opportunities to enhance inclusivity in tourism, particularly for low-income travelers. Applications that facilitate 'woofing' (work-for-accommodation schemes) have gained popularity among young adults (20-30 years old), enabling cost-effective travel options. As accommodation represents the largest expense for tourists, leveraging digital solutions to provide alternative lodging and experience-sharing platforms can significantly enhance accessibility to travel.

In conclusion, addressing the skill gaps in inclusion and digitalisation within the French tourism sector requires a multifaceted approach. This includes increasing awareness and training on accessibility, creating dedicated accessibility roles, improving financial management skills, and leveraging digital tools to enhance inclusive tourism. A combination of these strategies will be essential to making tourism more accessible and sustainable in the long term.

Skills Needs in Spain

Inclusive tourism in Spain requires that tourism professionals develop specific skills to ensure accessible and satisfying experiences for all travellers. In addition, adaptability is vital to tailor services and activities to the individual needs of each tourist.

An essential competence is empathy, which enables them to understand people with diverse abilities and assist them professionally as well as anticipate their needs. Accessibility training is equally crucial, ensuring that employees are aware of and apply inclusive standards and practices. It is also essential that tourism professionals are familiar with digital tools that support accessibility, including NaviLens codes, speech assistant tools, digital maps with accessibility layers, tools to create customized content.

In the digital sphere, technological literacy has become an indispensable skill. For example, the use of inclusive chatbots, such as those developed by Sayobo, make it easier for visually impaired people or those with little technological contact to access tourist information in a simple way that is adapted to their needs. These chatbots use artificial intelligence and big data to provide personalised responses, improving the user experience (Merca2, 2021).

Developing these skills and adopting inclusive digital tools is fundamental for Spain to move towards truly accessible and enriching tourism for all.



Skills Needs in Greece

In Greece, the transition towards accessible and digital tourism presents both a significant opportunity and a pressing challenge for the sector. While awareness of accessibility and digitalization is growing among both tourists and professionals, many tourism stakeholders—particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that constitute the vast majority of the tourism sector in the country—lack the necessary skills to effectively implement inclusive and technology-driven practices.

Hard skills in high demand include a solid foundation on digital literacy, such as using content management systems, managing online booking platforms, and applying digital marketing techniques. Stakeholders must also acquire technical knowledge of web accessibility standards, including creating and maintaining accessible websites, mobile apps, and digital materials (e.g., alternative text for images, captioned videos, and easy-to-navigate interfaces). Knowledge on the use of assistive technologies such as screen readers, text-to-speech software, and adaptive devices is increasingly important. Additionally, skills in data analytics can help tourism businesses better understand the needs and preferences of diverse travelers, enabling them to tailor inclusive digital experiences.

Soft skills' needs are equally important. Empathy, active listening and emotional intelligence are essential for understanding and responding to the specific needs of guests with disabilities, seniors, or travelers from different cultural or linguistic backgrounds – to efficiently provide personalised services. Also, intercultural communication can enable staff to engage respectfully and effectively with diverse clientele. Adaptability and a problem-solving approach are particularly important in hospitality environments, where staff may need to respond to unexpected challenges and/or requests. On a managerial level, leadership skills that promote inclusivity, staff empowerment, and continuous improvement are key to cultivating a supportive and accessible work culture.

To address these gaps, investment and dedication to vocational and continuous professional development programmes are needed, tailored to different roles in tourism as well as the promotion of inclusive design as a core business strategy. This will contribute towards the embedment of both digital transformation and accessibility in everyday tourism practice.



Educators in vocational education and training and in higher education have the task of equipping future professionals with the skills to create inclusive and SMART tourism. The recommendations make it easier for learners in the tourism industry to improve their awareness and skills by making the best use of the resources in this handbook.

The first point to consider is the integration of inclusive tourism concepts into existing curricula. This requires educators to adapt their teaching materials to include topics such as accessibility, diversity and the effective use of digital tools in tourism. For example, case studies of successful inclusive tourism initiatives can be introduced into discussions to inspire students and showcase best practices. Teachers can also use simulation exercises to address real-life challenges related to accessibility and social inclusion and give learners hands-on experience in problem solving.

The tools discussed in the previous sections can be introduced through practice-based learning. For example, students can be encouraged to explore digital platforms such as Tur4All or COSMOTE CRONOS to understand how technology is currently being used to meet accessibility needs. Teachers can also guide students to evaluate local tourism offers and use the tools to make suggestions on how they can be improved in terms of inclusion and accessibility.

Digital accessibility should be treated as a cross-cutting competence and learners should familiarise themselves with the basic principles as found in the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. Activities such as evaluating tourism websites for usability or designing simple digital communication materials are useful in this regard. These tasks also help to develop a digital mindset that takes into account a wide range of user needs.

In the classroom, simulations and role-playing can provide valuable hands-on experience. These methods encourage learners to take on the role of different types of travellers with special needs, whether due to disability, age, income level or digital illiteracy, and propose solutions in real time. Educators can support learners in designing inclusive tourism experiences that take into account physical, sensory, cognitive or financial barriers, based on user feedback or testimonials.



Training should promote a co-creation approach. This includes working with stakeholders from the field, such as local associations working with people with disabilities, to ensure that learners are not only designed for, but with, disadvantaged groups. The presence of guest speakers and external speakers can provide valuable context and feedback that enhances the work and understanding of learners.

Educational professionals should also reconsider how student performance is assessed. Assessment should include learners' ability to apply inclusive principles in a professional context, focussing on empathy, creativity and the practical relevance of their solutions. The practical application of inclusive tourism tools should be rewarded as much as theoretical knowledge.

Collaborative and interdisciplinary activities can further strengthen the learning experience. Bringing together students from tourism, IT, education or social work will create a learning environment that reflects the real-life, cross-sectoral nature of inclusive tourism. The SMART Inclusive Tourism guide and toolkit can also serve as resources for teacher training. Educators and trainers can use them to reflect on their own practices and gain confidence in addressing topics such as inclusion, accessibility and digital readiness in their organisations.

By incorporating the principles and tools presented in this guide into their teaching practices, educators can actively contribute to ensuring that the future tourism workforce is capable, aware and committed to creating destinations that are truly inclusive and sustainable.



Assessment to pick the right tools

In the context of promotion of smart inclusive tourism, selecting the right digital or non-digital tools according to the objectives set and the specific needs is of high importance. Tourism professionals, SMEs, and organisations must carefully assess their needs to ensure that any technology or approach they adopt genuinely contributes to their objectives — whether that is improving accessibility, enhancing customer experiences, or meeting sustainability and inclusion goals. A structured assessment process is indicative described below.

Step 1: Define Clear Objectives

Before choosing any tool, organisations must first clearly articulate their goals.

Examples could include:

- Enhance accessibility information on websites and booking platforms.
- Offer immersive, inclusive cultural experiences (e.g., virtual museum tours).
- Improve communication with visitors who have specific needs.
- Attract 40% more visitors with specific needs within one year

A helpful method is to define S.M.A.R.T. objectives, ensuring goals are:

- Specific – Clear and detailed, answering who, what, where, and why.
- Measurable – Quantifiable to track progress and success.
- Achievable – Realistic given available resources and constraints.
- Relevant – Aligned with broader mission and user needs.
- Time-bound – Having a clear deadline or timeline for achievement.

Using S.M.A.R.T. objectives keeps project goals focused and achievable, helping tourism professionals better match tools to their real needs.

Step 2: Conduct a Needs Analysis

A thorough needs analysis helps identify gaps and requirements. Key questions include:

- Who are the target audiences (e.g., people with mobility, visual, hearing impairments, elderly travelers)?
- What are the accessibility and inclusivity standards that must be met?
- What resources are available for tool implementation and maintenance?
- What are the skills needed when it comes to the HR that will operate the tools?

This phase should involve consultations with diverse user groups, including persons with disabilities, internal staff etc. to ensure real needs are understood.

Step 3: Set Criteria for Tool Selection

Establish a list of selection criteria tailored to the project goals. Criteria might include:

- Usability: How easy is it for all users to interact with the tool?
- Compatibility: Does the tool integrate with existing systems and platforms?
- Accessibility Standards Compliance: Does the tool comply with regulations (ex. the European Accessibility Act or WCAG standards)?
- Cost and Return Of Investment (ROI): What is the total cost of ownership, and what value will it provide?
- Uptake potential and Flexibility: Can the tool grow with your organization's needs or adapt to new target audiences?

Step 4: Map and Evaluate Available Tools

Proceed with a mapping of available tools and create a shortlist of tools that meet the defined criteria. Evaluate them through:

- Product Demos and Free Trials: Hands-on experience with the tool to test accessibility features and usability.
- User Reviews and Case Studies: Research how similar organisations have used the tools successfully (or not).
- Interviews: Engage with suppliers to understand the tool's development roadmap, support services, and accessibility credentials.

If possible, pilot the tool on a small scale to collect feedback before full-scale implementation.

Step 5: Assess Risks and Barriers

Every digital tool comes with potential risks — technical failures, data security issues, low staff uptake, or limited user engagement. Conduct a risk assessment considering:

- Technical support and updates.
- Data privacy compliance (especially if dealing with sensitive information).
- Staff training needs to ensure full utilisation of the tool.



Conclusion

We hope that this SMART Guide will support stakeholders in both their twin transitions and the development of more inclusive tourism. The Guide and its work reflect a broader European ambition to adapt tourism to the social and technological demands of the 21st century, by addressing the needs of the most vulnerable populations and striving to meet the full spectrum of inclusion challenges, whether related to disability, financial insecurity, aging, or digital exclusion.

The analysis of inclusion in tourism across Europe, particularly in France, Spain, and Greece, reveals uneven yet converging efforts toward greater accessibility in both infrastructure and visitor experiences. While several initiatives, both public and private, have emerged and may serve as examples (such as Tur4All in Spain, Vacances Ouvertes in France, or the Accessible Beaches Programme in Greece), stakeholders continue to face common obstacles in building truly inclusive tourism: lack of dedicated training, limited co-creation with affected individuals and local communities, administrative rigidity, and insufficient digital literacy.

This Guide highlights potential solutions, including digital tools (apps, collaborative platforms, immersive technologies) as well as international best practices that can help bridge access gaps. However, their rollout is often hampered by limited digital skills, resource constraints - especially among SMEs and the public sector - and a lack of strong connection between tourism stakeholders and the people these initiatives aim to serve. Vocational education and training are therefore called to play a key role by fully embedding inclusion into curricula, promoting the use of adapted tools, and fostering co-design processes with target groups.

The Guide aims to offer a methodology to assess needs, select the right tools, and ensure their long-term relevance and impact. It calls for a shift in perspective, one that sees inclusion not as an add-on or obligation, but as a core pillar of a tourism sector that is more resilient, humane, and sustainable, and as a new opportunity for responsible economic development.

This transformation demands not only technical skills, such as digital accessibility and universal design, but also human qualities like empathy, training, and adaptability at every level of the tourism value chain. By combining technological innovation, sustainable tourism, social commitment, and economic growth, the sector can finally open its doors fully, to everyone.

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Project number: 2023-2-ES01-KA210-VET-000184968

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them."

