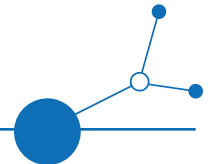


Territorial Planning for Accessible tourism in Rural Regions of Central Europe - A Joint Strategy



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1. Introduction and executive summary

Border regions in Central Europe are mostly remote rural areas, often poorly connected to larger urban centres, **with less economic opportunities**. However, they are rich in natural and cultural heritage, they offer escape from busy urban lives, which is an opportunity for developing sustainable tourism, boosting local economies and reducing economic and social disparities. In the meantime, estimates point out **over 100 million people with different level of disabilities living in the EU**. Putting these two factors together, **accessible tourism has a big potential**, however, persons with disabilities are often a neglected group of potential travellers.

This is the reason why a group of Central European regional development-oriented actors joined their efforts in the frame of the [Interreg Central CE-Spaces4All](#) project: its aim is **to improve governance and cooperation of multi-level, cross-sectoral stakeholders for better territorial planning, and implementation of accessible tourism for persons with disabilities in rural border regions**.

As part of the project, **pilot actions have been carried out** in three regions, namely in the Slovenian-Croatian-Hungarian trilateral border area of Pomurje, Međimurje and Zala county; in the Austrian-Czech border area connecting Lower Austria and Southern Moravia; and in Podkarpackie region, one of the remotest border regions in Poland. After identifying barriers related to both physical and non-physical accessibility of public spaces, as well as accessible tourism attractions and services, the pilot activities focused on **testing different solutions to raise awareness on the importance of inclusion, to build capacities of partners and key stakeholders and to carry out joint field work to foster the accessibility of the tourism offer of the regions concerned**.

Of course, during the project implementation, several hindering factors have emerged, on the one hand, in several cases the **lack of adequate accessible physical infrastructure** itself, on the other hand, the soft skills, meaning the **lack of capacity of decision makers, planners and service providers**, which results in a low level of implementation of proper, effective, and meaningful aspects of accessibility in spatial planning.

Taking into consideration these bottlenecks, and the lessons learnt during the implementation of the pilot activities, **a Joint Strategy has been elaborated to support Territorial Planning for Accessible Tourism** - this document provides guidelines on how to incorporate the aspect of accessibility into tourism-related territorial planning and its institutional system, and how to support local service providers in this field. The key measures are the following:

- 1. Stakeholder involvement and participatory planning: more effective territorial planning for accessible tourism.**
- 2. Fostering capacity building and training on what true accessibility entails: both for decision-makers and service providers.**



3. Evidence-based and data-driven approach: GIS-services for planners and users.
4. Promoting digital tourism tools, encouraged by the EU digital compass and tourism data space.
5. Thinking ahead: Accessibility Consultants to support authorities in planning and project implementation.
6. Cooperation with accessibility certification schemes.
7. Facilitating access to their rights: the European Disability Card and European Parking Card.

In the end, this Strategy envisions fully inclusive tourism regions in Central Europe, where every person, including persons with disabilities can equally enjoy cultural, natural and recreational experiences, including in remote and rural destinations; **a rural tourism ecosystem that is accessible by design, inclusive by intent, and resilient through innovation.**

2. Strategic background and the embeddedness in the European strategic context

On 12 December 2006, the *United Nations General Assembly* adopted the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (UNCRPD / *the Convention*) to ensure the protection of rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. Since that, the Convention has a near-universal ratification, with 193 States Parties worldwide, including the European Union itself as a regional integration organization and its 27 member states.

The Convention includes not only general statements and overarching principles, but also **directly addresses the accessibility of tourism through three specific articles:**

- Article 9 - Accessibility: **To enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life:** States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas.
- Article 20 - Personal mobility: States Parties shall take effective measures to **ensure personal mobility with the greatest possible independence for persons with disabilities.**
- Article 30 - Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport: States Parties recognize **the right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life**, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities:



- enjoy access to cultural materials in accessible formats;
- enjoy access to television programmes, films, theatre and other cultural activities, in accessible formats;
- enjoy access to places for cultural performances or services, such as theatres, museums, cinemas, libraries and tourism services, and, as far as possible, enjoy access to monuments and sites of national cultural importance.

By signing the Convention, the European Union has legally expressed its intention to ensure the full participation of people with disabilities in the society and is now bound to implement the Convention in areas of EU competence. Therefore, in March 2021, the European Commission adopted the [European Disability Strategy 2021-2030](#) with the aim of promoting equal opportunities and full inclusion for persons with disabilities in Europe - in general terms, it is the policy framework for the European Commission to implement the Convention. Respectively, the Strategy directly targets *improving access to art and culture, recreation, leisure, sport, and tourism*, as **accessible tourism for persons with disabilities is key to support participation as well as socio-economic development**.

If we approach the topic from the other side, from the perspective of tourism, we also see strategic documents that address the accessibility of the sector, which, of course, is in line with the objectives of the Convention. The European Commission introduced the [Transition Pathway for Tourism](#) on 4 February 2022, as part of the EU's broader industrial strategy. Its main purpose is to accelerate the transformation of tourism sector in three key areas: green, digital, and resilient tourism. It has been developed through a co-creation process involving over 30 stakeholder workshops and meetings - in the end, the Pathway outlines 27 thematic areas of actions that shaped the backbone of the [European Agenda for Tourism 2030](#), a specific work programme for Member States, the Commission, and stakeholders - among the key topics, under priority area "*Resilience and inclusion*", "**accessibility of tourism services**" is explicitly listed, highlighting the importance of making tourism more inclusive.

However, beyond this clear, direct link, it should be noted that inclusive, accessible tourism, and thus the Spaces4All Joint Strategy, affects virtually every pillar of the Agenda, either directly or indirectly:

- **Priority area - Enabling policy framework and governance:** among others, this area aims at improving the availability and coverage of tourism statistics, as well as collaborative and data-based decision-making. Spaces4All directly contributes by promoting GIS-services for planners and users, furthermore, it promotes the involvement of Accessibility Consultants to support authorities in planning and project implementation.



- **Priority area - Green transition:** this area includes the aim to increase the number of accommodations awarded with ecolabels or equivalent voluntary labels. Spaces4All fosters the cooperation with accessibility certification schemes.
- **Priority area - Digital transition:** the goal of this area is to encourage and participate in tourism-relevant data sharing to support innovative services. Spaces4All both contributes to and promotes the use of open datasets of accessibility of tourism locations and services.
- **Priority area - Resilience and inclusion:** this is the direct link mentioned above through the key topic of “accessibility of tourism services”, furthermore, Spaces4All aims at promoting the benefits of the European Disability Card and European Parking Card.
- **Priority area - Skills and support for transition:** this area targets both relevant public authorities and service providers. In line with the Pact for Skills in Tourism, a European Commission initiative under the European Skills Agenda, Spaces4All fosters capacity building and training of decision-makers and service providers, as well as stakeholder involvement and participatory planning.

Through the clear logical chain presented above, the Spaces4All Joint Strategy contributes to the tourism vision of the European Union and the principles laid down in the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, and thus to the active participation in society of our fellow citizens with disabilities, and hopefully, further progress can be achieved through awareness-raising, both on the part of decision-makers and service providers.

3. Objectives, priorities, and proposed interventions

The overall objective of the strategy is to establish an **inclusive, sustainable, and competitive rural tourism offer** that is accessible to everyone, regardless of disability.

To achieve this overall objective, the following specific, medium-term objectives are defined:

- **Ensuring and improving the accessibility of tourism infrastructure and tourist sites**, so that it is safe and available for everyone.
- **Implementing training and awareness-raising programmes** for decision-makers and service providers, presenting the tasks of accessibility, the needs of persons with disabilities, and the appropriate methods of communication with them.
- **Improving the accessibility of digital tools and platforms**, including websites, mobile applications, innovative solutions and online booking systems.
- **Introducing and applying assistive devices and technologies**, such as induction loops, audio guides, or other supportive solutions.



- **Organising inclusive tourism programmes and events** that are accessible and enjoyable for everyone, regardless of individual abilities.

In order to achieve the specific objectives, it is necessary to define the **priorities** which ensure the fulfilment of these objectives and provide direction for the related measures and interventions. These priorities are the following:

Priority 1: Inclusive planning and governance

Strengthening participatory planning and ensuring the meaningful involvement of persons with disabilities and their representative organisations.

Priority 2: Capacity building and skills development

Providing training for decision-makers and service providers, improving knowledge on accessibility standards and schemes, inclusive service delivery, and appropriate communication.

Priority 3: Data-driven and digital innovation

Promoting the use of GIS-based solutions, digital tourism tools, and participation in the European Tourism Data Space to enhance planning and visibility of accessible services.

Priority 4: Accessible infrastructure and services

Removing physical and informational barriers in accommodations, cultural institutions, transportation, natural attractions etc.

Priority 5: Communication and promotion

Raising awareness about accessible tourism, developing a branding strategy, and ensuring that accessible offers are effectively communicated to international audiences.

Priority 6: Monitoring and evaluation

Establishing indicators, benchmarks, and feedback mechanisms to measure progress, ensure accountability, and facilitate continuous improvement.

The implementation of the above priorities will be supported by the pilot activities presented in Chapter 4 and the strategic and practical guidelines introduced in Chapter 5. These pilots and guidelines together demonstrate how accessibility can be effectively integrated into territorial tourism planning, governance, and service delivery.

They provide tested and transferable measures - from participatory planning and training initiatives to digital innovation and accessibility certification - which serve as concrete areas of intervention to achieve the objectives of this Strategy.

In this way, the Strategy ensures that the proposed actions are not only theoretical but also based on real-life examples and replicable solutions tested across Central European rural regions.



4. CE-Spaces4All pilot actions and lessons learned

Tourism is an important driver of well-being and social participation. It serves as a vehicle for both individual and collective fulfilment and should be accessible to everyone - regardless of whether they live with a disability. However, for persons with specific access needs, equal participation in tourism often remains a considerable challenge.

The group of persons with disabilities is diverse and not easily defined. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), more than 16% of the global population - around 1.3 billion people - live with some form of disability, meaning that one in six people is affected.¹ In the European Union, the most recent official data indicate that in 2024, 23.9% of the population aged 16 and over lived with some form of disability or activity limitation (Eurostat, 2024). While figures vary by country, this proportion corresponds to an estimated more than 100 million people living with a disability in the EU.²

Tourism infrastructure, products, and services are frequently not designed with these needs in mind, creating barriers for customers in both developed and emerging economies.³ Despite this, 70% of persons with disabilities in the EU have the purchasing power to travel.⁴ This demonstrates that accessible tourism is not only a matter of social inclusion but also represents a significant economic opportunity.

Estimates of the potential tourism demand generated by persons with disabilities are often incomplete – most available assessments focus only on Europe – and the figures vary considerably regarding the number of potential travellers. Nevertheless, there is broad consensus that this demand is characterized by several distinctive features:

- Steadily growing it continues to increase as infrastructure, information, and facilities improve.
- Multi-customer effect: for each traveller with a disability, an average of 1.5 companions usually travel as well.
- Positive destination branding: accessible tourism can enhance the overall image and reputation of a destination.
- Seasonality reduction: it helps mitigate the strong seasonal patterns of some destinations.
- Higher economic impact: on average, it generates greater revenue compared to conventional tourism.⁵

¹ Source: WHO (2023): Global Report on Health Equity for Persons with Disabilities

² Source: Eurostat (2022): Disability statistics - prevalence and demographics.

³ Source: UNWTO (2021): Accessible Tourism for All: An Opportunity within Our Reach.

⁴ Source: European Commission (2014): *Economic Impact and Travel Patterns of Accessible Tourism in Europe*

⁵ Source: UNWTO (2015): Manual on Accessible Tourism for All



The situation in Central Europe reflects these broader trends. Accessible tourism continues to face numerous challenges; however, with appropriate measures, it has the potential to deliver tangible economic and social benefits to local communities and society at large.

When considering persons with disabilities, it is important to include their family members and personal assistants or interpreters, as they often travel together, making this group one of the largest yet frequently underappreciated market segments in tourism. Demand from persons with disabilities and older adults is estimated to account for tens of millions of leisure trips across Europe each year, although the frequency and quality of these trips are often limited by barriers.

According to a 2025 survey conducted by MMGY Travel Intelligence, the European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT), and the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), nearly 46% of European travellers with mobility or accessibility needs take at least one international leisure trip per year yet regularly encounter obstacles during their travels. The study highlights that the greatest challenges are related to transportation and access to information: many travellers experience difficulties at airports and train stations, and information on accessibility is often incomplete or unreliable.⁶

In Central European countries (e.g. Hungary, Slovenia, Austria, Czech Republic, Poland, etc.), the most significant barriers can be identified in the following areas:

- **Physical accessibility:** a large proportion of buildings, accommodations, transport hubs, and natural attractions are either not accessible or only partially accessible.
- **Information barriers:** tourists often struggle to find reliable and detailed information on the accessibility of services, or online platforms do not comply with accessibility requirements.
- **Attitudinal and capacity-related shortcomings:** service providers and local decision-makers frequently lack adequate knowledge, and proper training opportunities that would present the needs of people with disabilities are often missing. This undermines both the quality of services and the overall attractiveness of the destination.
- **Fragmented regulation:** there are significant differences between Central European countries in terms of accessibility standards, monitoring mechanisms, and incentive systems.

At the same time, accessible tourism presents several opportunities, some of which will be elaborated in detail in Chapter 5:

- **Economic potential:** the market represented by persons with disabilities and the elderly generates a growing and stable demand for tourism services.

⁶ Source: MMGY Travel Intelligence - ENAT - WTTC (2025): *Portrait of European Travellers with Mobility & Accessibility Needs*



- Innovation and digitalisation: new digital tools, mobile applications, and geographic information system (GIS) solutions can support persons with disabilities in navigation and enhance their travel experience.
- Networking and knowledge sharing: projects such as Spaces4All create opportunities to collect and adapt good practices, as well as to strengthen cooperation at local and regional levels.
- Awareness-raising and training: through training initiatives and projects, decision-makers and service providers will gain access to educational materials and strategies that can bring about long-term, sustainable change in the tourism sector.

Building on this context, the Spaces4All project has tested concrete solutions through a series of pilot activities carried out in different Central European locations. These pilots provided valuable insights into how accessibility challenges can be addressed in practice, showcasing approaches that not only improve the travel experience of persons with disabilities but also enhance the overall quality and inclusiveness of destinations. The following section presents the main pilot actions highlighting solutions that can be replicated or scaled up in other contexts.

- **Slovenian-Croatian-Hungarian Pilot Region**

- Slovenian pilots:

- 1. Accessible travel programme for all:**

The pilot aims to develop an accessible travel program that offers tourism experiences accessible to persons with various disabilities (intellectual, sensory, and psychosocial impairments). The program was developed in several steps: mapping European good practices, pilot testing locations and activities with the involvement of persons with disabilities and refining the program through consultations with relevant organizations.

The strength of the pilot lies in its integration of the needs of multiple disability groups, addressing real requirements through collaboration with disability organizations, and serving as a model that can be easily adapted in other regions.

- 2. Hearing loop toolbox for inclusive tourism:**

As part of the pilot, six portable hearing loops were purchased for health centres and hospitals in the Pomurje region of Slovenia, providing a valuable solution for both residents and tourists when needed. The Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing of Pomurje collaborated in selecting the appropriate equipment and identifying the suitable recipient institutions.

The pilot's advantages include immediate and visible improvements in accessibility, low cost and flexibility, and the strengthening of cooperation between tourism, healthcare, and disability organizations.

- 3. Conference-to-action: Inclusive tourism toolbox:**



The objective is to develop the Inclusive Tourism Toolbox. The toolbox provides an example for organizing events on inclusiveness, from defining objectives to implementation and evaluating long-term impacts. It includes a program agenda, logistical and accessibility checklists, communication templates, and evaluation tools.

The strength of the pilot lies in its comprehensive approach, drawing on experiences from multiple countries from various sectors and actively involving persons with disabilities and their organizations. This ensures that real needs are addressed and provides a model that can be replicated in other regions for organizing inclusive events and creating long-lasting impacts.

- Croatian pilots:

1. Empathy Simulation Toolkit:

The pilot aims to raise awareness and foster empathy by providing participants with hands-on experiences of the daily challenges faced by persons with disabilities. The toolkit includes wheelchairs, white canes, and communication barrier scenarios, allowing participants to navigate obstacle courses and engage in real-life simulations. It encourages understanding, dialogue, and motivates participants to support inclusion initiatives within the community.

2. Inclusive Tourism Accessibility Guide in Međimurje

The pilot focuses on developing a practical guide for tourism providers to make their services and facilities accessible and welcoming for all visitors, including persons with disabilities. The guide covers physical adaptations, communication strategies, staff training, and the use of assistive technologies, emphasizing flexibility, individual approaches, and continuous feedback. It also includes checklists, signage guidance, and examples of good practices to support effective implementation of accessibility measures.

3. Empathy Simulation Toolkit: "In the Shoes of Persons with Disabilities"

This toolkit supports interactive workshops for tourism professionals, simulating the experiences of persons with physical, sensory, and communication disabilities. Participants engage in hands-on activities using props such as blindfolds, wheelchairs, and earplugs, following instructions and reflection prompts to increase awareness. The pilot fosters inclusive attitudes and inspires practical improvements in tourism services, creating more accessible and welcoming environments.

4. Entrance Accessibility Improvement Toolkit

The pilot provides public institutions and tourism facilities with a step-by-step guide to removing physical barriers at building entrances. It covers the entire process, from initial assessment to implementation and communication of improvements. The toolkit emphasizes stakeholder involvement, compliance with legal standards, and transparent communication to ensure that accessibility upgrades are effective and sustainable.

- Hungarian pilot:



1. Development and promotion of accessible hiking trails for persons with mobility impairments:

The activity seeks to develop and promote accessible hiking trails for visitors with mobility impairments, which can be safely and comfortably navigated by wheelchair users, either independently or with assistance. The trail descriptions provide detailed information on the length, difficulty, and infrastructure of each route. During the selection and planning process, close collaboration took place with organizations representing persons with disabilities, as well as with the operators of the sites, and wheelchair users were actively involved in testing the final trails.

The pilot's strength lies in offering a genuine, nature-based, and inclusive experience, accessible to multiple target groups (persons with mobility impairments, elderly visitors, families with strollers, and visually impaired persons). The prepared descriptions and maps will be published on various platforms, ensuring broad accessibility.

Joint Slovenian-Croatian-Hungarian pilot

A promotional video was created in the tri-border region to showcase the local accessible attractions. The video features fully accessible tourist sites, including hotels, rural hospitality venues, museums, and other points of interest. Its aim is to highlight the many opportunities available in the rural area for visitors with disabilities—whether they have mobility, visual, or hearing impairments—ensuring that everyone can find suitable leisure activities.

- **Austrian-Czech Pilot Region**

Accessibility Information Toolkit for Tourism Providers

Offers tools to support tourism providers in publishing accessibility information that is relevant and helpful for customers with reduced mobility (seniors, wheelchair users, families with small children).

This free **online resource platform contains:**

1. Manuals to create Accessibility Guide

The pilot developed and tested manuals for tourism providers that help cover the essential accessibility features of facilities, thereby offering reliable information to visitors with disabilities. The pilot includes three manuals (accommodation, gastronomy, and tourist attractions), providing examples, photographs, and step-by-step guidance for creating an Accessibility Guide.

The project tested Manuals that provide guidance to service providers on which information to publish for a group of customers with limited mobility. However, the structure of this concept can be expanded in the future to include other disabilities. Additional accessibility attributes can simply be added according to the specific disability group. The aim is to teach service providers to get used to the fact that publishing accessibility information is a standard practice in Europe.



2. Practical video tutorial

This video presents each part of the Accessibility Guide to service providers step by step and explains how to create it, so that any tourism business can easily develop one. It also includes examples of photo documentation of accessibility attributes and discusses possible challenges.

3. Accessibility Guide Web Icon

A unified presentation of accessibility information is important for customers to easily navigate tourism businesses' websites. Therefore, an official Accessibility Guide icon is available for download on the online platform, offered in several colour variations to match different website designs.

4. Accessibility Guide

The pilot focuses on making tourism facilities' accessibility information publicly available through an online Accessibility Guide. By providing basic details and photographs, the guide enables visitors with limited mobility to make informed choices and plan their trips independently. Online resource platform offers tourism providers examples of published Accessibility Guides to enhance their interest in this concept.

Its strength lies in clearly presenting accessibility conditions, supporting self-reliant travel. While currently tailored to the needs of people with reduced mobility, the guide can be expanded in the future to include other disability groups and serve as a model for sharing comprehensive accessibility information.

5. Provider story: Unlocking opportunities - How Accessibility Guides benefit tourism businesses and customers

The Accessibility Guide offers many benefits for both customers and tourism service providers. In the video, a hotel owner talks about these benefits for his business.

6. Marketing

Includes instructions for the service providers on how to promote their accessible business to customers with disabilities.

Education

1. Webinars for tourism providers

Within the project, online tutorial webinars were organized for tourism providers, aimed at demonstrating how to create the Accessibility Guide. Participants gained detailed insights into the content of each chapter and received examples of how to correctly document accessibility features.

The pilot's advantage is that it was delivered conveniently in an online format, making it cost-effective while reaching a wider and more diverse audience. The webinar's content and format can also be easily applied in other regions.



2. Webinars for tourism authorities

To spread the new concept of Accessibility Guides among tourism operators, it is essential to introduce it to organizations responsible for tourism development in the region. As part of the project, online webinars are being organized to highlight the importance of building trust and predictability for customers with disabilities.

Consultation service for tourism providers

1. On-site consultations

During the pilot, on-site consultations were held for tourism providers, with Accessibility Guide entries prepared based on field assessments. Experts provided guidance on aspects such as photographing building entrances and restrooms, and in some cases, wheelchair users also contributed to the development of accessibility information.

The consultations offer personalized support, strengthen providers' commitment, foster relationship-building, provide immediate feedback, and create valuable learning opportunities for participants.

2. Advisory support

As part of the project, service providers in the pilot area can receive support from the project team. They primarily use this support for the final review of their completed Accessibility Guide. They also make use of support when uploading the Accessibility Guide to their website.

Leaflets

1. Leaflet for customers - Znojmo and Weinviertel without barriers

Leaflets highlighting accessible tourist sites and routes were created for the Znojmo and Weinviertel regions. These publications provide practical information for visitors with reduced mobility and seniors, including details on accessible locations, designated parking for persons with disabilities, restrooms, requirement of mobility assistance, and the difficulty level of the routes. The leaflets also feature QR codes linking to digital platforms (e.g., VozejkMap, Weinviertel website) for additional information. Printed copies are available at tourist information centers and local service providers, and they can also be accessed online.

2. Leaflet for tourism businesses - Accessibility Guide

The leaflet presents the benefits of the Accessibility Guide and offers a simple guide for its creation. Through a QR code, it provides access to the online resource platform (Accessibility Information Toolkit for Tourism Businesses). The publication aims to give service providers clear and consistent guidance, supporting the accurate and standardized preparation of the Accessibility Guide, thereby facilitating independent travel planning for persons with disabilities.

3. Awareness raising video for adapting tourism to visually impaired persons



The awareness-raising video, created for tourism providers and authorities, demonstrates how travel experiences can be adapted to the needs of visually impaired persons. Filmed in Eggenburg in the Weinviertel region, the video follows the day of two participants with different visual impairments, highlighting potential barriers and ways to reduce or eliminate them, as well as illustrating appropriate communication with visually impaired individuals. The video serves as an effective tool for increasing awareness, and a short English version is also being prepared for international dissemination.

- **Poland Pilot Region**

- 1. VR Goggles with 360-degree films**

The pilot focuses on use VR goggles and 360° films for visitors with mobility impairments and wheelchair users, allowing them to experience locations and activities that are otherwise inaccessible due to physical barriers. The films showcase, for example, the basements of Łańcut Castle and the activities at the MedyniaGłogowska Pottery Centre, providing visitors with a fully immersive and realistic experience through VR technology. The pilot's strengths include increased accessibility, the use of modern and engaging technology, and the enhancement of the cultural institutions' image as inclusive and innovative.

- 2. Tour guide system**

The pilot aims to implement a digital tour guide system that enables visitors with hearing impairments to fully enjoy guided tours in noisy or acoustically challenging locations. The system consists of a transmitter and receivers, allowing mobile and flexible use, enhancing visitor comfort, and reinforcing the institution's inclusive image. Its advantages include attracting new audience groups

5. Guidelines on planning and implementing territorial accessible tourism strategies

This chapter offers both practical and strategic guidance for local and regional authorities, planners, and tourism stakeholders on embedding accessibility into territorial tourism development in rural Central Europe. Drawing on the project's lessons learned, tested pilot solutions, and EU frameworks for inclusive and sustainable tourism, it aims to support the creation and implementation of accessibility strategies that are future-oriented, people-centered, and place-based.

The guidelines focus on key enablers of systemic change: stakeholder engagement, capacity building, evidence-based planning, digital innovation, and institutional support. The chapter also highlights the importance of emerging roles (such as Accessibility Consultants), alignment with EU initiatives (like the Pact for Skills and the European Disability Card), and stronger cooperation with accessibility schemes to ensure tangible, long-term impact.



The implementation and achievement of the guidelines presented in this chapter are supported by the pilot activities introduced in Chapter 4, which were carried out within the framework of the project. These pilots serve as practical examples for decision-makers, as well as for organisations and service providers committed to advancing accessible tourism. The pilot actions provided valuable insights into the challenges and solutions associated with developing accessible tourism at local and regional levels. They made it possible to test various approaches - from participatory planning and stakeholder involvement to digital and data-driven innovations.

Initiatives such as the **Inclusive Tourism Toolbox** and the **Empathy Simulation Toolkit** highlighted the crucial role of training and awareness-raising, while the **Web Accessible Viewer (WAV)**, a GIS-based tool, demonstrated the importance of data-driven, evidence-based planning. Digital innovations - including **VR-based experiences** and the **Accessibility Information Toolkit for Tourism Businesses** showed how technology can support inclusivity. Furthermore, the **on-site consultations** pointed to the potential of establishing an accessibility consultant role to ensure the professional and flawless implementation of accessibility improvements.

These experiences directly contributed to the development of the principles and recommendations presented in this chapter, ensuring that the guidelines offer not only a theoretical framework but also practical, transferable solutions that can be applied in other regions.

5.1. Stakeholder involvement and participatory planning

Effective territorial planning for accessible tourism must be grounded in broad and meaningful stakeholder involvement. Beyond local authorities, tourism service providers, and policymakers, the active participation of persons with disabilities (PWD) and their representative organisations is essential. Their lived experience and insights are irreplaceable in identifying actual needs, prioritising interventions, and co-designing solutions that are both practical and inclusive.

Participatory planning ensures that accessible tourism is not planned for persons with disabilities, but with them. This approach fosters ownership, relevance, and the long-term sustainability of implemented measures.

It is highly recommended that a diverse range of disability organisations - including those representing people with mobility, visual, hearing impairments, as well as people with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities - be involved at every stage of planning, from needs assessment to project evaluation.

To implement this participatory approach in both small-scale and large-scale initiatives, the following actions are proposed:

- Accessible roundtable consultations involving local disability advocacy groups and individuals with lived experience;



- Accessibility-focused tourism workshops bringing together public, private, and civil society stakeholders;
- Creative co-design workshops and idea labs, where the needs of persons with disabilities are presented alongside the current tourism offer. These sessions help tourism providers understand specific accessibility requirements and the type of information that needs to be clearly communicated;
- Ongoing collaboration with national disability councils and umbrella organisations representative of persons with disabilities at both regional and local level, ensuring alignment with national and EU-level policy frameworks.

In addition, municipalities and planning bodies should establish local accessibility advisory boards or include disability experts in existing development councils, as foreseen by article 4.3 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. These structures can ensure continuity, institutional learning, and accountability beyond the scope of individual projects.

5.2. Fostering capacity building and training: both for decision-makers and service providers

Decision-makers and tourism service providers often lack sufficient knowledge of accessibility standards, available solutions, and the real needs of persons with disabilities. Service providers - including accommodation hosts, restaurants, and operators of tourist attractions - are frequently unaware of what true accessibility entails, whether from a digital (e.g. accessible websites, booking systems, use of pictograms etc.), communicational, or attitudinal perspective. This lack of understanding can result in poorly designed developments and unusable solutions, ultimately leading to frustrated and dissatisfied visitors.

Therefore, capacity building and targeted training are essential for the sustainable development of accessible tourism. Acquiring the right skills – Including green and digital competencies, inclusive attitudes, and cross-sector collaboration - is crucial for service providers and decision-makers to respond to future challenges effectively.

The **EU Pact for Skills** and the **Tourism Transition Pathway** both highlight the importance of large-scale, ecosystem-wide training initiatives, especially in the tourism sector. These frameworks emphasize:

- the need for green and digital transformation skills,
- stronger inclusion and accessibility competences,
- and the importance of collaboration across sectors to implement meaningful change.

The **Pact for Skills** aims to support public and private organisations with maximising the impact of their investment in upskilling and reskilling, so they can thrive through the green



and digital transitions. Within the EU Pact for Skills, the Large-Scale Partnership for the Tourism Ecosystem (LSP) brings together key actors – tourism businesses, training providers, social partners, and public authorities – to jointly address the sector’s skills needs. It commits to upskilling or reskilling 60 % of the tourism workforce annually by 2030, especially in digital, green, and inclusion-related competencies. Through national or regional partnerships, it ensures that training is tailored to local needs and integrated into tourism development strategies.⁷

The programme focuses on three main areas of competence – directly linked to the “Tourism Transition Pathway”:

- Green skills: sustainable tourism, environmentally friendly operations
- Digital skills: data management, use of digital tools, online accessibility
- Inclusion and accessibility: deeper mindset shift, concrete service provision protocols

The goal is to ensure that training programmes are flexible and quickly adaptable – in line with the principles of lifelong learning.

Training programmes under the Pact for Skills can help service providers acquire practical knowledge. For example, many providers are often unsure how to properly communicate with guests with different types of disabilities, or what basic requirements must be met to ensure technical, physical, or digital accessibility. With this knowledge, and by improving the accessibility of tourism services, the visitor experience can be significantly enhanced, target groups expanded, and the overall competitiveness of a destination strengthened.

The programme does not only target service providers – it also aims to raise awareness among decision-makers and planners. System-level accessibility can only be achieved if those involved in planning and development processes understand the importance of inclusion. The Pact also encourages public sector actors to participate in sectoral partnerships and training initiatives.

Another key element of this subchapter is the **Tourism Transition Pathway (TTP)**, one of the pillars of the EU’s 2030 tourism development strategy. The document provides concrete recommendations on how the tourism sector can become more sustainable, digitally advanced, and resilient. It identifies capacity building, training, and knowledge sharing as crucial components of the proposed actions.

Similar to the Pact for Skills, the TTP stresses that the transition can only be successful if those working in tourism - including decision-makers and service providers - are equipped with the appropriate knowledge and skills. The recommended skillsets focus not only on sustainable practices and the use of digital tools but also on ensuring inclusiveness and

⁷ <https://pact-for-skills.ec.europa.eu/>



accessibility of services. It is also essential that such training programmes are embedded into national and regional tourism development strategies.

Another key insight of the TTP is the need for close cooperation between educational institutions, tourism providers, policymakers, and civil society organisations. These partnerships help ensure that training programmes are practical, locally relevant, and tailored to specific needs.

Finally, the document also emphasizes that tourism can only be truly sustainable and competitive if it is accessible to everyone, including persons with disabilities. To this end, the awareness-raising, appropriate training, and the development of standards are essential.

When it comes to training, it is especially important to involve persons with disabilities and/or their representative organisations in the design and content development of training programmes, to ensure that they effectively respond to real-world needs.

These efforts are not only crucial for addressing current skills gaps but also for ensuring that the tourism sector evolves in line with the values of sustainability, digitalisation, and inclusion. Investing in capacity building and inclusive training is an investment in the future resilience and competitiveness of tourism across Europe.

5.3. Evidence-based and data-driven approach: GIS-services for planners and users

Territorial planning and tourism development can only be effective if they are based on real, reliable data and on-the-ground assessments. Ensuring accessibility is not only a technical or design-related task, but also a social issue. In order for decision-makers and planners to properly respond to existing needs, accurate and trustworthy information is required about the condition of current infrastructure, existing gaps, and the needs of persons with disabilities. This is why applying a data-driven approach is essential during the planning process. It supports decision-makers, service providers, and planners in identifying targeted interventions and in using available resources more efficiently.

Therefore, it is crucial to regularly assess tourism-related infrastructure, update and maintain data, identify shortcomings, and share best practices. These steps contribute to enabling more people to enjoy leisure activities and discover the beauty of nature. A well-structured and reliable database not only supports the work of decision-makers and planners, but also directly assists persons with disabilities or other special needs in planning their travels. For this reason, the collection and availability of accurate and credible information is of utmost importance.

Today, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) make it possible to display and analyse various types of data in a spatial context. From the perspective of accessible tourism planning, GIS is particularly valuable as it enables the mapping of existing accessible sites, facilities, and services. This helps identify areas that are lacking or in need of



improvement, while also providing information that is easy to interpret and use for people with disabilities.

GIS-based tools support informed planning and service development through interactive maps, filterable datasets, and visualizations that take user perspectives into account. The Web Accessibility Viewer (WAV), developed within the framework of the Spaces4All project, also serves this purpose. It not only provides up-to-date data for decision-makers and service providers but also offers people with disabilities information on the accessibility of tourist sites in their area.

The WAV and similar tools are critically important for both decision-makers and planners, as well as for persons with disabilities. While organizations responsible for regional development collect data on, for example, non-accessible sites and gaps in accessible services, and use this information to set intervention priorities and territorial coverage, users receive information about accessible accommodations, restaurants, tourist attractions, and accessible transportation connections. Through interactive maps, databases, and route planners, visitors can plan their trips in advance according to their individual needs, avoiding obstacles such as stairs, steep slopes, or narrow passages etc.

Finally, for GIS systems to function effectively, regularly updated databases are essential. To achieve this, it is important to actively involve public institutions, local governments, civil organizations, and local tourism offices in data collection and verification, as well as to integrate user feedback. Additionally, digital and linguistic accessibility must be ensured (for example, interfaces compatible with screen readers and multilingual content), and a sustainable operational and financing model needs to be established for the long term.

High-quality data, especially when recorded in a standardized and structured format, can serve as the foundation for planning, project preparation, and the development of strategic documents.

5.4. Promoting digital tourism tools, encouraged by the EU digital compass⁸ and tourism data space⁹.

Digitalization is one of the most important tools for developing inclusive tourism, particularly in rural areas. Digital solutions help overcome geographical barriers, improve access to information, and provide reliable tools for people with disabilities to plan and carry out their trips. The European Union supports this transition through strategic frameworks such as the **EU Digital Compass 2030** and the continuously evolving European **Tourism Data Space**, both aimed at accelerating the digital transformation of tourism and related sectors.

⁸ https://eufordigital.eu/search/?wpv_view_count=143-TCPID172&wpv_post_search=tourism

⁹ **Tourism Data Space** (under development by the EU) will be a shared ecosystem to improve data exchange and innovation in tourism: <https://data.europa.eu/en/news-events/news/deploytour-new-project-future-european-tourism-data>



The **EU Digital Compass 2030** sets out Europe's digital vision for 2030, based on four key pillars: **digital skills, secure and sustainable digital infrastructures, digital transformation of businesses, and digitalization of public services**. These are particularly relevant for the development of accessible tourism.

In terms of digital skills, it is essential that tourism service providers and local authorities have knowledge of digital tools and accessibility standards. Developing these competencies contributes to the delivery of inclusive services and the effective use of data-driven solutions. In addition to human resource development, it is vital to ensure that rural areas have access to real-time, accessible tourism information, enabled by high-speed internet, cloud-based services, and interoperable digital platforms.

When it comes to the digitalization of SMEs operating in tourism and local municipalities, it is often observed that they lack a comprehensive digitalization strategy. However, making websites, tourism portals, and online planning tools accessible (such as screen reader compatibility, the use of pictograms, and easy-to-understand content) is of fundamental importance. Moreover, implementing online booking systems with accessibility filters and user-friendly marketing tools can attract a wider audience - including people with disabilities.

The **European Tourism Data Space** initiative aims to promote **data sharing, innovation, and collaboration within the tourism sector**. It creates a secure and interoperable environment in which tourism stakeholders can share their data to enable smarter decision-making.

From the perspective of rural and accessible tourism, this means that structured, regularly collected data are available on accommodations, transportation, attractions, and routes, allowing for visibility at the European level. The collected data are updated in real time, and user feedback is integrated, ensuring that information is always accurate and up-to-date.

Participation in the Data Space offers regions the opportunity to showcase their accessible tourism offerings, monitor their progress, and explore and co-develop innovative solutions together with other European destinations.

Beyond the two initiatives already presented, a wide range of digital tourism tools are now available that help enhance accessibility and inclusivity. These **include interactive maps and route planners** with accessibility filters, allowing users to avoid stairs, identify slopes, or locate accessible toilets. **Mobile applications** provide real-time accessibility information, with multilingual support and screen reader compatibility, while **virtual tours and 360° experiences** enable people with disabilities to explore destinations in advance. **Online booking systems** that integrate accessibility information serve as a fundamental requirement, ensuring that all visitors can make well-informed decisions, and **AI-based recommendation systems** offer suggestions tailored to individual needs. These tools not only support the independent travel of people with disabilities but also



significantly enhance the overall visitor experience and increase the competitiveness of destinations.

5.5. Thinking ahead: Accessibility Consultants to support authorities in planning and implementation, including monitoring the implementation of the strategy

In many cases, accessibility considerations are only addressed at the end of a project or in a formal manner, which reduces their effectiveness and the inclusivity of investments. Furthermore, many **local authorities lack the necessary expertise** regarding accessibility standards and best practices, even though **EU and national strategies increasingly require inclusive approaches**. A practical solution to this challenge is the involvement of **Accessibility Consultants**. Engaging them from the planning phase through to evaluation ensures that each development or investment meets the required criteria and fully addresses the needs of people with disabilities. Beyond ensuring compliance with standards, these experts also support the integration of EU directives and contribute to the design of genuinely inclusive solutions through their specialized knowledge.

The responsibilities of Accessibility Consultants include ensuring that projects comply with accessibility principles and standards from the conceptual stage, and later monitoring that the implementation meets the prescribed requirements. At the same time, they coordinate with relevant stakeholders and, if necessary, involve them in any testing processes.

These experts can operate at multiple levels, assisting decision-makers at municipal, county, or regional levels. Municipalities can engage them as consultants, allowing them to participate directly in development processes. At regional and national levels, an expert network can be established, enabling local authorities to access the appropriate consultants as needed. Continuous training and professional development of these experts can be supported through the previously mentioned EU Pact for Skills and national training programs.

The involvement of Accessibility Consultants is strategically important in the long term. It ensures that accessibility is not treated as a one-off project task, but as a continuous consideration in all developments. Their engagement improves the quality of investments, ensures efficient use of resources, and strengthens institutional learning and sustainable implementation.

5.6. Cooperation with accessibility certification schemes

While integrating accessibility principles and criteria is important, it is essential to connect with **existing certification schemes** to ensure credibility and visibility on the international tourism market. Such certifications provide an objective benchmark through which tourism providers and destinations can demonstrate their commitment to



inclusivity, while also offering reliable and transparent choices for people with disabilities.

A range of European and national certification systems exist to verify the accessibility of services. Examples include the **ENAT (European Network for Accessible Tourism) Quality Label**¹⁰, the **ISO 21902:2021 standard**¹¹ on tourism and disability, as well as national-level labels and certifications such as **Slovenia's Green Scheme** or the **Access4you** certification. In addition, the **European Access City Award** serves as a good practice example, encouraging inclusive developments at the city level.

Cooperation can take place at **multiple levels**: **municipalities and service providers** may join certification programs directly, while **regional** pilot projects can be launched to serve as models for other destinations. At the **national level**, expert and institutional networks can be established to support and facilitate the certification process. Participation can also be encouraged through funding opportunities and training, helping to overcome barriers related to costs and knowledge gaps.

Joining accessibility certification schemes not only demonstrates the commitment of providers to inclusivity but also carries significant **marketing value**. Certificates and labels can be **communicated to international markets**, thereby enhancing the competitiveness and visibility of destinations. At the strategic level, such cooperation ensures that accessibility is not treated as a one-off project requirement but rather as an **integral and embedded component of tourism development**.

5.7. Facilitating access to their rights: the European Disability Card and European Parking Card¹²

Accessible tourism is not only about improving infrastructure and services but also about ensuring that the **rights of persons with disabilities** are effectively enforced in everyday life and throughout their tourism experiences. The unified card schemes introduced by the European Union, such as the **European Disability Card** and the **European Parking Card**, play a key role in this regard. These tools ensure that the rights of persons with disabilities are recognized **across borders**, thereby strengthening mobility and the principle of equal treatment within EU Member States.

The **European Disability Card** aims to provide people with disabilities a unified document through which they can access various benefits and services, for instance in **cultural institutions, leisure facilities, or transport services**. One of its main advantages is that cardholders can anticipate in advance what rights and benefits they are entitled to in a given country, allowing them to plan their trips with greater security and predictability.

¹⁰ <https://www.accessibletourism.org/>

¹¹ <https://www.iso.org/standard/72126.html>

¹² Source: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/disability/union-equality-strategy-rights-persons-disabilities-2021-2030/european-disability-card-and-european-parking-card-persons-disabilities_en



The **European Parking Card** is another important tool, granting harmonized parking rights across EU countries. With this card, persons with disabilities can more **easily access tourism services and attractions**, especially in rural areas where **public transport options are more limited**.

Both cards are closely linked to accessible tourism strategies: they **enhance trust and predictability for travellers** with disabilities and contribute to strengthening the inclusive image of destinations. Local authorities and tourism providers therefore have an important role to play in preparing for the acceptance of these cards, communicating the opportunities they offer, and embedding them in local tourism ecosystems—for example, in **ticketing systems or parking facilities**.

At a strategic level, participation in and acceptance of these card schemes brings multiple benefits:

- **awareness-raising campaigns** and training can be launched for tourism stakeholders,
- **regional pilot projects** can be implemented, serving as models for other destinations,
- **digital integration** of the cards allows tourists to access information on entitlements and services already during the trip planning phase through online platforms.

The European Disability Card and the European Parking Card are thus **not merely administrative tools**, but powerful enablers of inclusive tourism, enhancing the competitiveness and attractiveness of destinations on the tourism market.

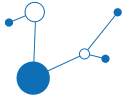
6. Mainstreaming and uptake

The **primary goal** of this chapter - and of the document as a whole - is to ensure that accessible tourism becomes not merely a project-based or temporary initiative, but an integral part of spatial planning and tourism development in the rural regions of Central Europe. Achieving this requires the formulation of a clear, realistic, yet ambitious vision that connects the results achieved so far with future long-term objectives, while embedding them within the relevant European Union strategic frameworks.

6.1. Vision

The **vision of the CE-Spaces4All project** has already been largely outlined in the previous chapters: *Fully inclusive tourism regions in Central Europe, where every person - regardless of disability - can equally enjoy cultural, natural, and recreational experiences, both in remote and rural destinations.*

This vision envisages a Central Europe by **2035 and beyond** where:



- **Accessibility** is a fundamental principle in all tourism developments - from the planning phase to operation.
- **Persons with disabilities and/or their representative organizations** are active partners in tourism development and decision-making processes at all territorial levels.
- **Rural regions** - which have long faced economic and infrastructural disadvantages - become competitive, inclusive tourism destinations, contributing to the strengthening of local economies and social cohesion.
- **Data-driven and digital solutions** become part of everyday practice, enabling both planners and visitors to access accurate and reliable accessibility information seamlessly.

6.2. Presentation of the results on different territorial levels

It is essential that the strategy, along with the project's results, experiences, and tools, reach those **decision-makers, planners, service providers, and stakeholders** who can directly apply them in practice. Therefore, it is recommended to ensure the **broad integration and effective communication** of the strategy's outcomes at the **local, regional, national, and European levels**.

The **local level** is the most direct level of accessible tourism, where actual tourism experiences take place and physical as well as service accessibility is realized. The active involvement of **municipalities, tourism service providers, civil organizations, and local communities** is of key importance.

The dissemination of results is recommended through **workshops, training sessions, and study visits**. In addition, it is crucial to integrate accessibility considerations into **local development and planning documents**, and to ensure the **continuous training of relevant actors** to improve the quality of services.

The **regional level** plays a key role in **mainstreaming accessible tourism**, as it both coordinates local initiatives and connects them with national policies and strategies.

The **national level** is responsible for establishing the **strategic framework and legislative background**, as well as ensuring **macro-level coordination**. A priority objective is to **mainstream accessibility principles** into national tourism strategies and operational programmes, and to support the **professional recognition and networking of accessibility consultants**.

Furthermore, it is necessary to **develop national data collection and monitoring systems** to track progress on accessibility, and to **expand and refine tourism statistics**.

EU level enables **exchange of experiences** between countries, promotes **mutual learning and innovation**, and supports the **development of common standards and tools**. In doing so, it contributes to EU-level initiatives such as the **European Tourism Data Space**, the



Pact for Skills in Tourism, and the Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030. At the EU level, it would be advisable to establish a **Central Europe Accessible Tourism Data Hub** that would be seamlessly integrated into the European Tourism Data Space. This data hub would enable accessibility-related data from the Central European region to become available and interoperable at the European level, thereby strengthening the common European accessible tourism ecosystem and promoting the development of inclusive tourism.

6.3. Maintaining cooperation

Even after the closure of the project, it is essential to continue the cooperation. It is important that the established partnerships, networks, and digital platforms (WAV) remain active beyond the project's lifetime. The formalization of this cooperation can be supported by the Memorandum of Understanding developed within the framework of the project.

Building on the project's results, it is recommended to establish a “**Central European Accessible Tourism Network**”, which connects national, regional, and local tourism organizations, municipalities, professional and civil actors (including organizations representing persons with disabilities). This network could serve as a platform for continuous exchange of experiences and mutual learning, while also ensuring opportunities for policy advocacy at the local, national, and EU levels.

A **joint digital knowledge base** - such as the proposed **Central Europe Accessible Tourism Data Hub** or a common information platform - would support the regular updating of information, the joint monitoring of indicators, and the wide dissemination of best practices.

Finally, the sustainable operation of the network requires the provision of **financial, human, and infrastructural resources**, which can be partly covered by EU (e.g. Interreg, Erasmus+, Horizon, etc.) or national funding sources.

6.4. Communication and promotion

The success of **mainstreaming accessible tourism** largely depends on the extent to which the key stakeholders - **decision-makers, service providers, and tourists belonging to the target groups** - understand the **importance of accessibility** and are aware of the **available opportunities and tools**.

Achieving this requires a **well-designed, multi-channel communication and promotion** that effectively raises awareness of the **benefits and practical implementation of inclusive tourism** among the widest possible audience.

Furthermore, **communication plays a key role** in ensuring the **visibility, acceptance, and long-term sustainability** of the strategy.



The dissemination of the project's results and key messages should take place through **various channels tailored to the needs of specific target groups** - including **digital platforms** (such as social media: Instagram, Facebook), **educational videos**, **printed materials** (e.g. leaflets, brochures), and **audiovisual tools** (e.g. promotional videos, VR content). In addition, communication should also occur through EU and national **tourism platforms**, **newsletters**, **professional publications**, and **during workshops and conferences**.

The communication activities are closely linked to the **European Disability Card**, the **European Parking Card**, and the **European Tourism Data Space**, all of which enhance access to information and foster European-level cooperation in the field of accessible tourism.

6.5. Funding opportunities

The implementation of the strategy's objectives requires long-term, sustainable financing, in which European Union funds, national and regional support, and the involvement of the service sector together provide a stable foundation.

European Union Funds

- **Interreg Programmes:** Support cross-border cooperation, territorial development, and innovative projects in inclusive tourism.
- **Cohesion Policy - ERDF and ESF+:** The European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund Plus provide opportunities for development, digital solutions, capacity building, and training.
- **Erasmus+ and Horizon:** Promote further training and exchange of experience among tourism professionals, particularly in the field of inclusive tourism.
- **Green Deal and NextGenerationEU:** Support sustainable, environmentally friendly tourism investments and inclusive development, including infrastructure renewal.

National and Regional Funding

- **Tourism Development Programmes:** Support infrastructure improvements, accessibility investments, and grant schemes assisting service providers.
- **Operational Programmes and Rural Development Funds:** Provide support for local development projects focusing not only on accessibility but also on innovation and regional development.



7. Governance and Accountability

7.1. Implementation framework

The implementation of the Spaces4All Joint Strategy will rely on coordinated, multi-level cooperation among project partners, regional and local authorities, organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), tourism boards, and further relevant stakeholders.

A key enabler of this cooperation is the *Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)* to be signed by partners and selected associated partners involved throughout the Space4All project. The MoU expresses the partners' shared intention to apply and promote the principles of this Strategy beyond the lifetime of the project. It provides an organizational framework for further collaboration, encouraging partners to integrate the objectives of the Joint Strategy into their own organizational work, including planning, development, and communication activities.

Through the MoU, partners declare their willingness to:

- maintain and build on the partnerships created during the project,
- exchange knowledge, data, and good practices,
- support inclusive and data-driven planning,
- continue awareness-raising and training activities, and
- explore future opportunities for cooperation and funding in the field of accessible tourism.

The main operational tools to translate the Strategy into practice, are the **Action Plans** to be elaborated **for the three pilot regions** of Spaces4All, namely for the Slovenian-Croatian-Hungarian trilateral border area of Pomurje, Međimurje and Zala county; in the Austrian-Czech border area connecting Lower Austria and Southern Moravia; and in Podkarpackie region. They will define:

- concrete actions to overcome the barriers through local, national and transborder actions,
- key responsible organisations,
- specific projects,
- with public and private funding possibilities for their implementation.

The aim of the activity is also to **build future new partnerships** and to **prepare follow-up projects** for long-term cooperation of cross-sectoral stakeholders in the three project regions for further joint development of accessible tourism.

Mainstreaming of Joint Strategy will be based on **capacity building and training events** for policy and decision makers, tourism and regional development stakeholders. Events will be held at:



- transnational/EU level by the Final Conference in Brussels,
- attending key EU-level events by European Disability Forum,
- presentation at international conferences attended by project partners and associated partners,
- national capacity building seminars in each country,
- local/regional events for municipalities and regional authorities in the pilot regions.

Regarding the coordination of the project activities as well as for the actions planned after the project's lifetime, each region is encouraged to designate and maintain a **coordination structure** - for example relying on a regional authority, an existing tourism board, regional development agency, or accessibility-focused institution - to facilitate implementation, stakeholder engagement, and monitoring as well. Of course, the exact structure is determined by the regional situation, as well as on the quality of cross-border relationships due to the transnational nature of the project.

At a transnational level, partners intend to maintain a **'light' coordination mechanism** - for example, through a steering or working group formed by the signatories of the MoU to exchange information, and to monitor progress. Meetings could take place periodically, depending on available resources and partner interest, as well as on the status of the follow-up projects.

7.2. Roles and responsibilities of key actors

As it was mentioned, the exact structure of coordination is determined by the regional reality, but indicatively, the **different sectors listed here can contribute to the realization of the Strategy as follows:**

1. National authorities

- Align national tourism and disability policies with the principles outlined in the Joint Strategy.
- Allocate and provide funding and guidance for accessible tourism initiatives.
- Promote the harmonization of data collection and monitoring systems.

2. Regional and local authorities

- Integrate accessibility considerations into territorial and tourism planning.
- Encourage investments and initiatives that improve accessibility of infrastructure and services.
- Support collaboration and serve as a bridge between OPDs and local communities.

3. Organizations of persons with disabilities



- Act as key partners in planning and evaluation, ensuring that measures reflect real user needs.
- Participate in awareness-raising, training, and consultation processes.

4. Tourism boards and destination management organizations

- Promote accessible destinations and communicate inclusive offers.
- Support tourism providers in joining accessibility certification schemes.
- Facilitate data sharing and visibility of accessible services.

5. Accessibility consultants

- Offer professional advice and assist planning bodies and service providers.
- Take part in planning infrastructure investments and supervising their implementation.
- Contribute to training and capacity-building activities.

6. Educational and research institutes

- Support education, research, and innovation on accessibility in tourism.
- Disseminate results and contribute to knowledge transfer.

7. Private sector and SMEs in tourism

- Improve physical and digital accessibility of services and products.
- Participate in training programmes and adopt inclusive communication practices.
- Collaborate with local authorities and OPDs to test and refine accessibility solutions.

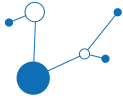
Involving a well-balanced mix and wide range of the actors listed during the implementation of the Strategy through the Action Plans **contributes to high-quality developments in the tourism sector that truly serve the needs of target groups, thereby contributing to the efficient use of often limited financial resources.**

7.3. Monitoring, evaluation and review

Progress in implementing the Strategy will be observed through **voluntary monitoring and information exchange between partners**, coordinated through the mechanism foreseen by the MoU.

Common **key performance indicators (KPIs)** may include:

1. Stakeholder participation - number and sector of actors engaged.
2. Accessibility improvements - facilities and services upgraded or assessed.



3. Digital and data accessibility - availability of accessibility information on online platforms or GIS tools.
4. Capacity building - number of participants trained and feedback on training quality.
5. Awareness and visibility - communication actions carried out, reach, and engagement.

Each region may adapt these indicators to its own context and capacities. Partners may jointly prepare short annual updates summarising main developments and key-findings.

7.4. Sustaining cooperation

After **CE-Spaces4All** has provided an initial framework for cooperation, the **Memorandum of Understanding** establishes the foundation for continuing collaboration in a flexible and voluntary form. Building on this framework, partners may decide to maintain informal working contacts as well, thematic task groups, or digital communication channels to exchange experiences, share data, and coordinate new initiatives.

Depending on future opportunities and available resources, **this collaboration could gradually evolve toward broader networking activities in Central Europe and beyond**, supporting ongoing dialogue and policy learning in accessible tourism.

By maintaining communication and mutual support as foreseen in the MoU, **partners can ensure that the Joint strategy remains a living reference document** - adaptable, relevant, and anchored in shared values of inclusion, sustainability, and innovation.