



**COVID-19
RESPONSE**

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UNWTO Inclusive Recovery Guide

Sociocultural Impacts of COVID-19

Issue 1: Persons with Disabilities

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UNWTO Inclusive Recovery Guide – Sociocultural Impacts of Covid-19, Issue I: Persons with Disabilities

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World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)
Calle Poeta Joan Maragall, 42
28020 Madrid, Spain

Tel.: (+34) 915 678 100
e-mail: info@unwto.org
Website: www.unwto.org

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Issue 1: Persons with Disabilities

#Accessibilityforall

#Inclusiverecovery

#Buildbackbettertourism

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Note

The *UNWTO Inclusive Recovery Guides* on the sociocultural impacts of COVID-19 are living guidelines, subject to revision as the health situation evolves and more information becomes available on the most effective ways to make tourism inclusive and accessible for all.



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An inclusive response for persons with disabilities

Persons with disabilities and seniors have been hit hard by COVID-19. Many have been excluded from communications on public health and travel updates, decision-making and information on accessibility of basic tourism services.

These customers generally encounter a wide range of barriers due to the way environments and services are often designed, without considering these visitors' different access requirements.

Ensuring good accessibility is not a "favour" to visitors with access requirements but rather a game-changer for businesses, helping them to combat the effects of COVID-19.

All guests will be able to appreciate the accessibility and safety measures that are put in place, **as our abilities vary** over time, due to health conditions, ageing and many unpredictable factors.

Destinations and companies should see travellers with disabilities, seniors and families with young children as important source markets for their businesses to thrive again.

Recommendations

Assistance provided during pandemics

- **Repatriate passengers without delays:** Maintaining accessibility is important during repatriation, so everyone can benefit (accessible transport, routes, information and communication). **Compromising accessibility entails safety risks.**
- **Provide courtesy accessible accommodation:** The assistance should observe specific access needs of stranded travellers and be **extended to “essential staff”** or accompanying persons. These measures require planning since **some services entail costs** that need to be borne by governments, companies or individuals. Accessibility after all is about “equality” and not about “privileges”.
- **Engage in DMO/DPO peer support:** Tourism ministries, destinations, regional and local administrations should work with disabled peoples’ organizations (DPOs) in understanding different **obstacles for clients with disabilities and the ways to bridge them.** DPOs may assist DMOs, not only in emergencies but also by playing an active role in co-designing accessible experiences.

Adaptation of protocols to different needs

- **Adapt sanitary protocols:** The new rules set by destinations should **avoid a one-size-fits-all approach as travellers have different abilities.** Decisions on physical distancing, signage, use of sanitary devices and equipment require suitable adjustments so everyone can enjoy a comfortable and safe travel experience.

- **Keep accessibility features across the value chain:** Transportation providers need to keep their assistance staff and facilities operational amidst the pandemic. Accommodation facilities, cultural attractions and venues, and natural settings, should **keep their accessibility measures**, as people with access needs still travel.

Inclusive policies in post-COVID-19 tourism

- **Gather data on accessible tourism:** Decision-making on future developments in the sphere of accessible tourism should be based on specific and comparable data. Data needs to reveal the profile, the behaviour and the expenditure patterns of travellers with access needs, their families and the essential staff. **Quality data collected globally would make the business case of Tourism for All much more evident.**¹
- **Adjust accessibility policies and strategies:** Administrations should keep their role in **mainstreaming accessibility in marketing and training programmes**, and in inspiring their industry partners to do the same. Customers with disabilities should be targeted by mainstream marketing channels and not considered as a niche market.

Inclusion of accessibility in business planning

- **Treat accessibility as a competitive advantage:** Companies will reap the benefits of putting accessibility in place once they realize its competitive advantages. **Designing inclusive experiences produces personalized services and accommodates the widest range of potential visitors**, their

1 These statistics would need to be developed within the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST).

needs and their preferences. Confronting COVID-19 requires embracing a greater **diversity of clients to ensure economic sustainability**.

- **Improve customer service:** Tourism service personnel usually **lack training on catering for customers with disabilities and therefore lack confidence**. Staff can expect that travellers with disabilities have varied aspirations and, with careful planning, many activities that might not be considered as “accessible” can be adapted for those with access needs (e.g., adventure tourism, visits to archaeological sites, etc.). **The pandemic opens opportunities for destinations and companies to embrace a more inclusive tourism**.
- **Encourage feedback from end-users:** Visitor feedback and reviews should be harnessed for **further improvements**. Potential clients should have access to **accurate and timely information** which needs to be objective and reliable so travellers can make travel decisions with confidence. Statements such as, “We are 100% accessible” are misleading and strongly discouraged.
- **Apply international standards:** Tourists need the same accessibility conditions, wherever they travel. **Applying standards can ensure the same level of accessibility for tourism products and services worldwide**. The standards also help to resolve doubts for service providers and clients by supporting a common understanding of accessibility, while ensuring service quality.

Training and labour inclusion for all

- **Extend professional training by including safety:** Employees require **capacity building on health, safety and sanitary measures in order to reassure customers** of the smooth functioning of services and facilities. An appropriate attitude also helps the guests feel comfortable and safe, regardless of their abilities.
- **Ensure labour inclusion:** Employment in the tourism sector should adhere to **principles of equal opportunity**. Workplace adaptations, job design and skill matching can enable everyone to access the labour market. Teleworking, as an option for employees with access requirements, can facilitate independence, reduce costs and lead to better customer service.

New technologies and social innovation improve accessibility

- **Use innovative technology:** Technologies should be a **lever in making travel easier** for all. **Alternative formats**, e.g. large print, easy reading, simple language, subtitles, audio descriptions and Braille, should be incorporated in information provision, facilities and services. Translations into widely spoken languages and sign languages are extremely helpful.
- **“Build back better” tourism:** Now is the time to finally adopt an inclusive approach to tourism by developing sustainable and accessible solutions. **Tourism for all brings many benefits to visitors and local communities and a better quality of life for all**.



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Facts and figures

- [1 billion people live with some form of disability](#) (15% of global population).
- [By 2050, 1 out of 6 people will be aged more than 65](#). 1 in 4 persons living in Europe and North America could be aged 65 or over.
- More than [46% of older persons \(over 60\) already have disabilities](#).
- [More than 250 million of older persons experience moderate to severe disability](#).
- Travellers with disabilities tend to travel accompanied by [2 to 3 persons](#).
- [The potential market of people with disabilities in the European Union \(EU\)](#) is of more than 80 million people (130 million if we add senior citizens and accompanying persons).
- [70% of people with disabilities in the EU](#) have financial and physical capabilities to travel.
- In Asia and the Pacific, the market size is of [690 million people](#) and in Latin America and Caribbean this figure reaches [85 million people](#).
- The economic impact of disability travel reaches [USD 58.7 billion in the United States of America](#).
- Trips taken by the citizens from the United Kingdom with an impairment and their travelling companions made up [15% of domestic overnight trips in 2015 and 20% of day visits in 2018](#).
- [Average holiday expenditure of tourists with disabilities is EUR 800+](#) compared to EUR 600 of tourists without any disability, in Spain.
- In Australia, when domestic and inbound markets are added the total [accessible tourism market is worth AUD 10.8 billion](#).



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Useful links

[Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) calls the State Parties, through Article 30, to recognize the right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others, in cultural life, recreational, sporting and leisure activities, including tourism.

[UNWTO Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics](#) underlines in Article 2 its aim to promote responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism. Article 10 calls the State Parties to encourage and facilitate tourism for persons with disabilities.

[UNWTO Recommendations on Accessible Tourism for All](#)

[UNWTO Recommendations on Accessible Information in Tourism](#)

[Accessible Tourism for All: An opportunity within our Reach](#)

[Manual on Accessible Tourism for All: Principles, Tools and Good Practices](#)

[Manual on Accessible Tourism for All: Public-Private Partnerships and Good Practices](#)

[International Standardization Organization \(ISO\)](#)

[UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Disability and UN Convention](#)



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