



WP2: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCEMENTS

INCASA - INCLUSIVE CAMINO DE SANTIAGO: AN ACCESSIBLE JOURNEY FOR ALL



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Foreword

Recommendations for Enhancements is the follow-up to our Pathfinder research into the barriers and needs of young people with disabilities when travelling. This document includes recommendations and guidelines to support a young person with a disability to have a successful travel experience. The set of recommendations developed will improve the accessibility of the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage. These recommendations will be shared with local service providers and organisations, contributing to wider efforts to make the pilgrimage more inclusive.

In this document we present recommendations that come directly from our target groups: young people with disabilities, associations working with them, carers, trainers, etc.

The objective of the INCASA project is to improve the accessibility and participation of young people with disabilities in the pilgrimage and travel experiences of the Camino de Santiago.

Theoretical framework

In our project we use **the social and human rights model** when designing our outcomes and activities for people with disabilities. In the social model, society is responsible for creating barriers for people with disabilities because of the way it is organised. In the case of the Camino de Santiago, travel and outdoor activities, people with disabilities cannot fully participate because travel, accommodation, restaurants and Camino routes are not fully accessible. In the human rights approach, we must all recognise the rights of people with disabilities who cannot be discriminated against.

Inclusion is an environment and society in which all people, regardless of their characteristics or abilities, are active participants in everyday life. Diversity should be seen as the norm in modern society.

What is the definition of **disability**?

The World Health Organisation ¹(2001) distinguishes between:

- impairment as "any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function".
- disability as "any limitation or absence resulting from an impairment of the ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being" (European Forum on Disability, 2009).

¹ <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/youth-and-disabilities>

Young people with disabilities in Europe

In our project we focus mainly on young people with disabilities and their participation in the Camino de Santiago or similar outdoor activities. According to Eurostat, 27 per cent of people in the EU have some kind of disability; for women the figure is almost 30 per cent. The challenges faced by more than a quarter of the population need to be recognised by society and policy makers².

Disabled people by age group in 2023³ :

- From 16 to 19 years: 6.9%
- From 20 to 24 years: 9.4%
- From 25 to 34 years: 11.6%
- From 35 to 44 years: 14.7%
- From 45 to 64 years: 26.8%
- 65 years or over: 51.7%

The urgency of removing the barriers faced by people with disabilities is clear from the data.

Among the many barriers faced by people with disabilities are those related to travel. Every year in the EU, people with disabilities have problems boarding planes, trains or buses, or arrive at their destination to find their assistive devices broken with no hope of full compensation. The same problem of accessibility exists in accommodation, restaurants, cafes, tourist attractions, etc.

² <https://www.socialeurope.eu/persons-with-disabilities-removing-the-barriers>

³

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/hlth_silc_12_custom_12991083/bookmark/table?lang=en&bookmarkId=ea0144d5-bcc7-49fb-9553-d857fbec7ea7

Camino De Santiago for people with disabilities

As we know from history, since the Middle Ages there have been pilgrims who have gone to Santiago de Compostela in the belief that they will heal themselves and find a cure for all their ailments.

Nowadays, there are Camino routes, such as the French Way (Castilla y León and Galicia routes), which are adapted for everyone, allowing people with different disabilities to share in this incredible experience.

There are also organizations, like DisCamino de Santiago (<https://discamino.org/>) which promotes physical sports activity in people with disabilities and help all people with different disabilities complete a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela.

Tourism affects people with disabilities in 3 ways. In the physical aspect, it improves the functions of the body or physical rehabilitation. In the psychological aspect it means psychotherapy, while in the social dimension it means social rehabilitation, socialisation or resocialisation. In addition, tourism has several important functions. The most important are certainly the recreational, cognitive and educational functions. For each of these functions, there are 4 basic elements: health-promoting behaviour, sightseeing, the formation of positive attitudes and the integration of disabled people into the social environment.

Recommendations for people with disabilities and organizers of Camino De Santiago

The planning of the Camino is crucial and, according to our respondents, a very important phase of the Camino in which organisers and people with disabilities should work together. Young people with disabilities can often feel less encouraged to participate in the Camino or other forms of travel; their previous experiences (or lack of them) affect their motivation to travel. They often face lower levels of self-esteem or self-determination that prevent them from staying motivated. A good reason for not participating can be the risk of encountering inappropriate structures, reduced opportunities for participation or, worse, more serious forms of discrimination.

Recommendations:

- Prepare a questionnaire for participants to find out about their needs and requirements in relation to different types of disability. Book in advance to avoid surprises in a foreign country.
- Anyone planning to do the Pilgrim's Way should do some training beforehand in order to avoid difficulties during the pilgrimage. It is also advisable to walk the Pilgrim's Way in advance to familiarise yourself with the routes and possible difficulties. This will allow better planning and adaptation to the specific needs of the participants.
- Daily distances should be adapted for people with disabilities, especially for people who are not used to regular physical activity or who need assistance.

- A careful analysis of the needs of people with disabilities is essential because each person with a disability is different and will need different support during the pilgrimage. It is important to involve people with disabilities in the planning of the pilgrimage, so that they feel informed and can participate in the pilgrimage on their own terms.
- It is essential to select volunteers/personal assistants who understand the disability of the participants and who behave with respect and professionalism. Empathy and disability training are essential to provide adequate support during the Camino.
- Create a pilgrim's itinerary with a detailed description of each day's distances, accommodation, restaurants, rest stops, etc.
- Provide a mandatory pre-trip training programme for all participants, including people with disabilities and their caregivers. The programme should cover essential topics such as physical preparation, route familiarisation, understanding the unique challenges of the Camino and emergency protocols.
- Develop individual support plans for each participant with a disability, outlining their specific needs, required assistance and preferred methods of communication. Share these plans with accommodation providers and support staff to ensure a seamless and supportive experience.
- Check the accessibility of accommodation (e.g. hotels with adapted bathrooms and accessible rooms), transport (accessible buses, trains, planes) and tourist attractions. In addition, researching accessible routes and paths is highlighted as crucial for a smooth travel experience.
- Create clear and accessible emergency protocols for various scenarios, including medical emergencies, accidents and lost or stolen property. Provide contact information for local emergency

services, hospitals, pharmacies and transportation options in multiple languages.

- Introduce participants to assistive technology applications, such as GPS devices with audio navigation and smartphone apps with accessibility features, to increase the independence and safety of pilgrims with disabilities.
- First aid kits for wheels was one of the recommendations made by the participants. This is something that should be basic on an accessible route. If there's a hazard along the way and there's a problem with participants' chairs, the organisers should have a kit with tools to fix it. In addition to the kit, there should also be some information from the workshop along the route.
- Important documents such as passport, credit cards and cash should always be with you. Even when you go to the shower.
- Mobility equipment logistics: Ensuring that mobility equipment such as wheelchairs or scooters are allowed and properly accommodated on the transport is essential. Hiring equipment at the destination is also mentioned as a contingency.
- Personal assistance: Planning for a personal assistant or travel companion who is aware of the traveller's specific needs and prepared for all eventualities is considered important for people with disabilities.
- Special considerations for people with intellectual disabilities: Travellers with intellectual disabilities need detailed step-by-step planning and clear communication, as they may not be able to plan for themselves.
- Work with organisations representing people with disabilities to ensure inclusivity in the planning and delivery of the pilgrimage. Many Spanish and Portuguese organisations with experience of the Pilgrim's Way have been gathered during the project and



shared with our target groups. You can find them on our project website.

Recommendations for hotels, restaurants and others service providers

Restaurants, hotels, cafes, picnic areas and other businesses offer a wide variety of places to eat and drink along the Pilgrim's Way. It makes good business sense to ensure that these services are accessible to diners with disabilities. People with disabilities represent a large and growing market (not to mention the family, friends and colleagues who often accompany them).

Speak naturally, clearly and directly to your client. Be patient, people with some types of learning disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond. Try to provide information in a way that works best for your client. For example, have paper and pencil available.

Recommendations:

- Provide practical, reliable and, most importantly, up-to-date information on the availability of facilities, places and rooms.
- Ensure that facilities are accessible, including ramps, lifts, accessible toilets and adapted rooms. Make sure you understand your guests' needs.
- Training of staff in disability awareness and etiquette so that they can provide excellent service to guests with disabilities.
- Provide menu in accessible formats like braille, large print, etc.
- Always ask before making physical contact with people with disabilities; avoid touching their wheelchairs, canes, etc., as people with disabilities consider their equipment to be part of their personal space.
- Avoid two main views of people with disabilities. They are either seen as remarkable/heroic or as victims. We should all avoid these two contrasts, both victimisation and heroism, and make

sure that we understand that people's disabilities are an essential aspect of their lives, personal qualities and very much a part of who they are. In other words, disability is an attribute of diversity. It is important to use sensitive and accurate language, as you are setting an example that can influence the behaviour and tone of others.

- Remember disability etiquette. Don't assume that everyone with a disability needs help. If the environment is accessible, people with disabilities can be independent. Offer assistance only if the person seems to need it. A person with a disability will often let you know when they need help. Ask first!
- People in wheelchairs have different disabilities and different abilities. They can use their arms and hands, get out of their wheelchairs and even walk short distances.
- During a meal, it can be helpful to explain to a blind person how the food is arranged on the plate according to a clock orientation. Be careful when ordering food - the kitchen knows not to put anything on the plate that isn't edible.
- Be positive, respectful, sensitive and willing to create an inclusive environment. Ask participants about their needs and, of course, be prepared to celebrate your "mistakes" and see them as learning experiences.
- Provide information about the history of the place, local food, places of interest, historical monuments. This would be particularly motivating for the visually impaired.
- Set up a communication system for tourists with special needs regarding the facilities available in a given area and accessible places.
- Raising the awareness of the inhabitants of a given area and introducing educational activities on the subject of disability in order to increase tolerance and openness.

Recommendations for post travel reflections

In order to ensure a comprehensive and constructive post-trip reflection process, particularly for travellers with disabilities, the following steps were recommended:

- Engage in meaningful conversations: Initiate discussions with fellow travellers, professionals and support staff to share insights and experiences. Networking with peers can provide valuable perspectives.
- Reflect on the experience: Take time to reflect on the trip when you return home. Consider keeping a travel journal to document and summarise experiences, challenges and highlights.
- Conduct appropriate evaluations: Evaluate both the overall experience of travelling with a disability and the specific conditions encountered. Evaluate what went well and identify areas for improvement.
- Seek feedback from all stakeholders, including travellers, staff and accommodation providers. Understanding different points of view helps to identify what could be improved.
- Identify gaps and make recommendations: Make a list of missing items or areas for improvement. Develop recommendations to improve accessibility and support, and consider how to motivate facilities that lack accessibility to make the necessary changes.
- Consider the need for support and assistance: Reflect on the level of support received and how this can be increased or improved in the future. Consider ways to improve community support and inclusion.
- Reflect on challenges and learning opportunities: Consider any difficulties or failures as opportunities for growth. Reflect on how

overcoming challenges contributes to personal strength and learning.

- Use questionnaires: Distribute questionnaires to gather detailed impressions and feedback from participants. This structured approach can provide insights into the effectiveness of the trip and areas that need attention.
- Encourage inclusion and open dialogue: Encourage conversations with people who have had similar experiences to explore possibilities for future activities. Discussing the pros and cons of such trips can open doors to better planning and implementation.
- Share experiences and good practice: Share experiences with other groups involved in similar leadership activities. Discussing what worked and what didn't can help refine future trips and support strategies.

By following these recommendations, travellers with disabilities can gain a better understanding of their experiences, contribute to improved planning and promote a more inclusive environment for future travel.

Additional literature

1. INCASA Pathfinder Research report.
2. Accessible tourism destination management handbook- chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgicfindmkaj/https://business.turismodeportugal.pt/SiteCollectionDocuments/all-for-all/accessible-tourism-destination-management-handbook-enat.pdf
3. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs
4. Social Inclusion- <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/disability-issues/promoting-accessible-tourism-for-all>
5. European Network for Accessible Tourism- <https://www.accessibletourism.org/>
6. Accessible tourism- <https://www.unwto.org/accessibility>
7. Savoir Vivre Guide For Better Understanding People With Disabilities-chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgicfindmkaj/https://bon.wspa.pl/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Poradnik-ENG-www.pdf.

Conclusions

Despite many unfavourable circumstances and barriers, the participation of people with disabilities in tourism is increasing and can bring them great benefits. Tourism is one of the most effective forms of rehabilitation for people with different disabilities. It is a great way to spend time, improve physical functions, but it is also a way to social activation. Tourism for people with disabilities should be promoted by raising awareness and encouraging people with reduced mobility to take advantage of leisure travel opportunities. According to doctors, rehabilitators and people dealing with the problem of social exclusion of people with disabilities, tourism activities help to achieve a wide range of positive effects, both in the physical and mental spheres. Being in a natural environment with able-bodied people significantly improves the quality of life and strengthens the sense of self-confidence, independence and self-sufficiency.

Benefits of accessible tourism:

1. To empower people with disabilities to take the initiative in informing society at large about their needs and to insist that they are met.
2. To overcome prejudice and increase the benefits for both disabled people and society. People with disabilities will be able to become increasingly independent, while society will gain a better understanding of disability issues.
3. The opportunity to develop a specialised tourism sector focusing on a not inconsiderable niche of the market.

Annexes

- Annex 1. Needs Assessment Form for People with Disabilities.
- Annex 2. Accessibility and Evaluation Sheet Adaptation of Establishments/service providers.
- Annex 3. Stakeholders list from each partner country.

PARTNERSHIP



INCASA - Inclusive Camino de Santiago: An Accessible Journey for All

