



WP2: Pathfinder Research

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



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Executive summary

The aim of the research was to identify the precise needs and barriers related to accessibility and participation in the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage for people with disabilities. This research was carried out in 5 partner countries: Spain, Portugal, Poland, Romania and Slovenia during the period May-October 2024. The research was conducted through focus groups and surveys with relevant stakeholders, including people with disabilities, carers, youth workers and representatives of organisations working with people with disabilities. The project partners designed and produced a series of resources within the Inclusive Camino de Santiago project based on the information gathered. The partnership reached 69 focus group participants and 179 survey respondents. Focus group and survey participants discussed the main barriers to travel/outdoor activities, such as access to information, lack of motivation and family support. Many benefits of the Camino were mentioned and how to support young people with disabilities before and during the trip.

Key words: young people with disabilities, accessible travel, Camino de Santiago, obstacles, focus group, recommendations.

Introduction

The INCASA project aims to improve the accessibility and participation of young people with disabilities. It aims to create a user-friendly and convenient web application and training platform for carers and youth workers. The project aims to promote similar initiatives across Europe to encourage participation of people with disabilities in cultural and outdoor activities.

The main outputs of the INCASA project are a comprehensive research report on the obstacles and needs of young people with disabilities when travelling; an accessible web application for the Camino de Santiago with useful and up-to-date information related to disability issues; a training platform with resources and courses for carers, youth workers and staff; two LTTAs: Online staff training followed by a 3-day practical excursion on the Camino de Santiago; A documentary video capturing the journey and impact of the project.

The target groups for our project activities are young people with disabilities, carers, youth workers and staff from organisations working with people with disabilities. Their responses provided a broader perspective on the accessibility challenges and needs associated with the pilgrimage. They have also shared with us their recommendations on how to improve the accessibility of the Camino de Santiago. These recommendations are shared with local authorities and organisations, contributing to wider efforts to make the pilgrimage more inclusive. Young people with disabilities are their own advocates and should be treated as equal partners. As citizens of society, they must be actively involved in shaping their environment. Active participation of young people with disabilities can be achieved if the right conditions and support mechanisms are provided. The individual needs of the participants should be identified during the preparation process. Information is needed not only for the organisers, but also for the participants and their families.

Methodology and participants' profile

The research used the following methods:

- Six focus groups in partner countries, a research technique used to collect data through group interaction;
- Survey through questionnaires;
- Contacting organisations experienced with the Camino de Santiago and local authorities to gather their expertise on the Camino routes.

Viva Femina, with feedback from its partners, developed a set of guidelines with questions for the participants.

A focus group is a research method that brings together a small group of people to answer questions in a moderated setting. Focus groups are a type of open-ended qualitative research. In our six focus groups, we gathered a total of 69 participants who have experience with the Camino, mobilities or other travel activities organised for young people with disabilities. The survey questionnaire was distributed to over 200 respondents and the partners collected 179 completed questionnaires.

The respondents to the research included people with disabilities, carers, youth workers and staff from organisations that work with people with disabilities.

HYPOTHESIS presented to the participants:

1. Young people with disabilities want to have an experience abroad, and many of them have already been abroad. They'll be able to share their feedback and make recommendations on how to improve the inclusion of people with disabilities in the Camino experience.
2. The key role of youth workers and other support staff is crucial. They are an important cornerstone of successful support for young people with disabilities going abroad.
3. Only a demand-driven approach will allow sending and hosting structures to adapt their activities and support to young people with disabilities.

Focus groups

The total number of participants in the focus groups in the partner countries was 69. In Poland the participants were youth workers; from Romania we had 12 people with visual impairments, including 10 who were totally blind, accompanied by 5 personal assistants or supporters, 1 guide dog and 1 member of staff from the Arad Blind Association; from Spain we had 12 participants with a wide range of educational backgrounds, including degrees and training in social work, social education, health care, graphic design, history, occupational therapy, teaching, medicine and social integration. In Slovenia we had special and general education teachers with experience in inclusive classrooms and outdoor activities. They had 7-15 years of teaching experience and focused on the integration of students with disabilities in mainstream and extracurricular activities. In Portugal, the focus group was composed of 6 participants with disabilities (of which 1 was a Paralympian), 1 youth worker, 2 representatives of organisations (ANDO Portugal and School of Health Sciences of Alcoitão) and 1 personal assistant. Due to geographical distance, 2 of the participants provided their contributions and interacted in the session via online.

During the focus groups, discussion focused on the following topics and the partners designed key questions to help explore responses and capture authentic and natural responses from respondents, as well as honest observations from participants:

- Main obstacles: What are the main barriers for young people with disabilities when travelling?
- Accommodating needs: How to accommodate the needs of young people with disabilities during the pilgrimage/mobility/travel.
- Good practices and resources: What tools and resources do you use in the organisation of travel for young people with disabilities (best practices)?



- Benefits of Camino: What are the benefits of Camino for young people with disabilities?
- Expectations of Camino.
- Open feedback: Participants were encouraged to think about future needs and challenges that may arise as travel trends change.
- Recommendations.

Participants brought a wide range of educational backgrounds to the discussions, including degrees and training in social work, social education, health care, graphic design, history, occupational therapy, teaching, medicine and social inclusion.

The level of education of the participants ranged from those with a university degree to those with high school or post-secondary education.

Focus groups results

Main obstacles

Our focus group participants have identified the main obstacles for young people with disabilities to participate in the Camino de Santiago and other outdoor activities. We have divided them into several categories. This way we can clearly see the barriers that young people with disabilities face when travelling.

The first barrier people usually face is **making the decision** to walk the Camino and **finding motivation**. According to our respondents, participating in the Camino or similar outdoor activities is challenging for most young people with disabilities; they leave their familiar surroundings, communities and countries. During the pilgrimage they are confronted with new situations, cultures, languages and peer groups. For young people with disabilities, these activities can be particularly challenging. Young people with disabilities can often feel less encouraged to participate in travel activities/ pilgrimages; their previous experiences (or lack thereof) influence their motivation to participate in such programmes. Young people with disabilities very often have to deal with a lower level of self-esteem or self-determination, which prevents them from staying motivated. A good reason not to participate may be the risk of encountering inappropriate structures, reduced opportunities for participation or, even worse, more substantial forms of discrimination.

Another barrier is a **general lack of information**. In some countries, the Camino de Santiago is not as well-known as it is in Spain and Portugal. Planning the Camino according to the needs of young people with different disabilities takes time and practical knowledge that is sometimes incomplete, inaccessible, unavailable or in a foreign language. As a result, it can take more time to plan a pilgrimage for



young people with disabilities, to ensure they get adapted transport and accommodation, and to provide all the support they need. This means that they often have to start planning well before other participants. The support and information available is mostly for able-bodied people.

Lack of support from peers and family is a social barrier. The social environment of young people with disabilities can often have an impact on their participation in an activity. Young people with disabilities are more likely to develop an interest in cross-border travel if their families and/or friends are supportive and actively involve them in researching and organising their trip. Conversely, if families and/or friends are unsupportive or fearful of sending them abroad, young people with disabilities will be less likely to participate in such programmes.

Difficult and varied terrain. When considering the main obstacles, the participants explained: "It is extremely important to have a description of the pavement along the different parts of the chosen path. This information should be visible beforehand, which would allow them to choose the path, but more importantly, it would allow them to adjust their mentality and awareness. Examples were given such as: "If the surface is too rocky, what is the gradient, does it have big holes or does it have small holes, which can sometimes be more worrying for people who twist their ankles" (especially worrying for people who can walk but drag their feet due to their condition). In the same discussion, it was suggested that information about weather conditions should always be available. Rain or extremely hot weather can affect people's attitudes and the movement of the wheelchair in the mud.

Accessible transport and accommodation. Transport challenges include limited availability of accessible vehicles, lack of specialised transport services and inadequate public transport infrastructure. Accommodation needs are often unmet due to inaccessible



accommodation, lack of facilities for people with disabilities and insufficient training of staff on inclusivity. Pilgrims travelling the Camino de Santiago in a wheelchair may not be able to find accommodation in public hostels, as not all are accessible. Pilgrims should book accommodation in advance and make sure that the facilities are 100% accessible.

The other main barrier mentioned by the Portuguese participants was associated with **fear. Psychological and emotional factors**, such as feeling safe, should be the main concern when organising travel for young people with disabilities. Participants would like to be able to use GPS tracking in case of an accident. The app would transmit the GPS coordinates of the mobile phone and have an emergency button with GPS location.

During the focus groups we had participants with different types of disabilities who explained the challenges they face or might face during travel and outdoor activities.

Barriers and needs according to respondents with physical disabilities:

- Problems with accessible toilets and frequent need for assistance affecting independence.
- Uneven surface, poor loading, unreliable (or absent) ramps and inadequately maintained access features such as poorly marked ramps.
- Lack of personal equipment such as wheelchairs. In addition, the need for well trained staff/volunteers and comprehensive disability training.
- People with chronic health problems - including those using mobility aids such as crutches or walkers - need regular stops and access to medical assistance along the route.
- The need for accessible transport and mobility aids along difficult sections of the route was also an important issue. It was also



highlighted that they often lack well-trained staff and their training in disability issues.

Barriers and needs according to respondents with sensory disability:

- The lack of visual aids such as Braille signs or tactile routes is a significant problem. It is essential for visually impaired people to have visual support and clear and accessible information along the route.
- Better marked trails and tactile maps. In addition, the lack of clear and consistent audio directions to navigate the route was highlighted as a major constraint.
- Communication with people with hearing impairments is a major problem as there is no support for this issue. It was commented that it would be better to have guides who know sign language and that visual aids should be used to facilitate communication and information.

Barriers and needs according to respondents with cognitive disability:

- Participants highlighted that too much information can be overwhelming for a person with Autism, for instance. People with cognitive impairment need clear, organised and simple information.
- Pictogram-based signage and other adapted visual aids help them to better understand the route and its challenges.
- Professionals from the Padre Villoslada Occupational Centre pointed out that people with autism spectrum disorders need structured environments and predictable routines. Sudden changes in route or schedule can be particularly distressing. They



also need calm, quiet spaces to retreat to when they feel overwhelmed by sensory stimuli.

- It was considered essential that in many cases it is helpful to have a support professional to provide support throughout the journey. The need to be patient and offer personalised support to help them along the way was emphasised.

Accommodation of needs

As we can see from the previous chapter, people with disabilities face a number of barriers when travelling. Travel planning needs to be tailored to meet their needs. Travellers with a range of disabilities can face barriers when travelling internationally. However, many businesses, service providers and tourist attractions around the world are finding ways to improve accessibility. You can ensure you have a positive and fulfilling experience by taking the time to plan ahead.

It is important to assess and clarify the individual needs of all participants before designing the trip activities. It is a good idea to develop a registration form that includes questions to collect personal information, e.g. questions about the type of assistance needed, food preferences and dietary restrictions, etc. It is also very important to include a space for comments where participants can elaborate on their specific needs and concerns.

Prior to the implementation of activities, a face-to-face meeting between the youth worker/trainer and the participant (and his/her family) can lead to a better understanding of the participant's needs, the needs of the target group, and to more appropriate schedules, agendas and tailor-made activities. In addition, such a meeting provides an opportunity for people with disabilities to openly express



individual needs or concerns. It can also lead to the development of personal relationships between the organiser, the youth worker and the participants, which will ensure the successful delivery of any travel activity.

Participants have underlined some of their good practices concerning communication:

- Avoid difficult overly technical or foreign terms.
- Avoid abbreviations or explain what they mean.
- Use consistent wording throughout.
- Avoid idioms, metaphors, jokes.
- Keep your sentences short and provide one message per sentence.
- Use active language rather than passive language.
- Use positive language.

Young people with disabilities are their own advocates and should be treated as equal partners. As citizens of society, they must be actively involved in shaping their environment. Active participation of young people with disabilities can be achieved if the right conditions and support mechanisms are provided. The individual needs of the participants should be identified during the preparation process. Information is needed not only for the organisers, but also for the participants and their families.

We must emphasise the important role of personal assistants/carers for people with disabilities. The personal assistant deals with the daily challenges faced by the young person with a disability, which may be perceived as too great to overcome during the pilgrimage without the support of a qualified personal assistant.

Examples how to accommodate needs of people with disabilities during travel, according to our respondents:



- Include colours in the application according to the different types of Camino routes.
- Characteristic images and symbols that are easy to understand, combined with language accessible to participants with intellectual disabilities, are a need that should be met.
- Contact the hotels/hostels before arriving and express that even small changes can be made to better accommodate the participant (for example, bathmats, touchable indicators to show which side the water is cold or hot, spacious bathrooms and rooms to be reserved for the participants, etc.).
- Include information in the app about how far it is to the nearest water point, accommodation, rest points and support. This kind of information was considered fundamental because normally people plan how many kilometres they are going to do in a day, but there is information in the middle that needs to be taken into account and for the participants to be informed, such as places to use the toilet.
- Improving accessibility includes providing better signage, ensuring compliance with accessibility standards, and providing more detailed information on how to access facilities upfront. People with visual impairments highlighted cleanliness as the most critical factor when travelling. Because of their visual impairment, they are unable to avoid unhygienic areas, which increases their risk of contracting infections and diseases. They emphasised the need for their accommodation to be simple and basic, but clean at the same time. In addition, hotel staff should avoid moving their personal belongings, such as pyjamas, toothbrushes, toothpaste and shoes, without informing them.
- Accommodation should be simple but clean, and personal belongings should not be moved without notification. In restaurants, detailed descriptions of food and drink placement



are essential, especially without a personal assistant. Properly recognising and accommodating guide dogs is essential to avoid exclusion from services. They also need to be able to communicate directly with those serving them.

Benefits of Camino

Participants recognise that travel and outdoor activities have several benefits for young people with disabilities. The experience of the Camino, if properly prepared, can be very beneficial for people with disabilities, improving their social, physical and professional lives.

Personal skills. International mobility can build self-esteem and a sense of adventure through travel and intercultural experiences. Travel and outdoor activities show young people with disabilities that they are capable and can do anything they want because they have learnt to thrive outside their comfort zone. This gives them self-awareness, confidence and independence.

Soft skills. The acquisition of soft skills sought by employers (adaptability, communication, self-management, curiosity) is the key employability benefit of going abroad. For young people with disabilities, it is a crucial pathway to employment as it enables them to acquire demonstrable independence, resilience and coping skills, as well as leadership and adaptability, all of which are essential in challenging negative attitudes towards the employment of people with disabilities.

Physical and mental health. Physical activity means an improvement in emotional well-being, a general improvement in physical fitness and a reduction in stress and anxiety. Spending time in nature has therapeutic benefits.



Intercultural skills. During the pilgrimage, young people learn to work and communicate with people from different cultures, backgrounds, situations and languages. They learn to trust others, ask for help and build relationships.

Empowerment:

- Young people with disabilities can participate alongside others, which helps to normalise their presence and reduce social stigma.
- The completion of the Pilgrim's Way is a source of empowerment for people with disabilities, giving them a sense of achievement and reinforcing the idea that they can achieve important goals in spite of their difficulties.

Educational skills:

- Get to know the historical sites and cultural heritage of the Camino de Santiago.
- The journey offers educational opportunities that broaden horizons and deepen understanding of different local cultures and travellers.
- Gain knowledge of wildlife and ecosystems.
- To learn survival skills such as navigating, map reading and basic first aid to prepare for outdoor adventures.
- Develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of the environment, promoting conservation values and encouraging sustainable practices.

Best practices and resources

In this section we present good practice and resources from respondents working with people with disabilities and young people with disabilities themselves, by partner country.

POLAND

Best practices:

- The best way to prepare for the Camino is to start walking regularly. It is best to start a few months before you plan to walk, gradually increasing distance and time. It is also a good idea to test the footwear you intend to use. Light trekking shoes for all types of terrain (in summer) are ideal.
- Prepare a detailed questionnaire for the participants to know their needs and accessibility.
- Involve participants in the planning of the pilgrimage.
- Explain the risks and possible solutions.
- Organise a meeting with person(s) who are experienced pilgrims to share their experiences and motivate others.

One of the best ways to motivate people with disabilities to travel is to equip them with the skills they need to succeed. There are several Camino routes in Poland and organisations that provide all kinds of support for pilgrims. Young people with disabilities can start training for the Camino in their own country.

Resources in Poland:

<https://camino.net.pl/stowarzyszenie/o-stowarzyszeniu/> - The association brings together pilgrims, supporters of the Camino de Santiago and people involved in various ways in the revival, organization, information and promotion of the Way of St. James in Poland.

<https://www.pomorskadrogaswjakuba.pl/> - Pomeranian Way of St. James

SPAIN

Best practices:

- Participants highlighted the importance of verifying information found on the internet by calling the accommodation directly: they mentioned that accommodation information was generally unclear or not updated.
- Many participants highlighted the challenge of finding group accommodation suitable for large groups of people with disabilities. They noted that in some cases sleeping in sports halls was a more comfortable and accessible option.
- Joining online groups/pages and forums, such as Facebook groups dedicated to the Camino de Santiago, was recommended. These platforms allow participants to ask questions and receive advice from experienced pilgrims.
- It has been suggested that the inclusive Camino app should include a section dedicated to books and other resources of interest. There is a comprehensive bibliography on the Camino de Santiago.

Resources in Spain:

Websites:

- Predif's Guide to the Camino de Santiago: This guide, developed with Fundación ONCE (Discapnet), Fundación Vodafone España and Junta de Castilla y León, is available for download on Google Play and App Store. It provides comprehensive information on accessible routes and accommodation - <https://www.discapnet.es/>
- Gronze: A popular website offering detailed information on the Camino de Santiago, including maps, stages and accommodation options (<https://www.gronze.com/>).



- Amigos del Camino: This website offers a wealth of information for pilgrims, including advice, tips and community support- <https://www.amigosdelcamino.com/>.
- Official website of the Camino de Santiago: Managed by the Xunta de Galicia, this site offers official information about the Camino, including routes, services and accessibility- <https://www.caminodesantiago.gal/es/inicio>.
- Wikiloc: An online platform where users can find and share outdoor trails, including detailed routes of the Camino de Santiago- <https://es.wikiloc.com/>.

Organisations: Fundación ONCE, Asociación de Amigos del Camino de Santiago, Federación Española de Asociaciones de Amigos del Camino de Santiago (FEAACS), Asociación Jacobea de Almería- Granada.

PORTUGAL

Best practices

Participants suggested "keeping one's feet on the ground" and thinking before speaking. Be careful with the language you use and do not promote the idea that everything is possible. As organisers, youth workers mentioned that "you can't guarantee that everyone will be able to do it and be aware of how difficult it can be for the person to make a decision". On another point, one participant reiterated the importance of participants' willingness to adapt by giving an example of a previous mobility to Paris where they asked for a bath seat and there wasn't one, but as it was a bathtub, the participant managed to move the chair into the bathtub.

Resources in Portugal

Regarding resources, a participant mention that uses the Lazarillo app- <https://lazarillo.app/>, which has been quite helpful for visual impaired people. Organizers of youth activities, book accommodations in advance, establishing protocols and provide guidance to host/hotels to support the minimal adaptation possible.

SLOVENIA

Best practices

Participants advised on the type of language used and the need for autonomous adaptability by the Camino participants. It was also suggested that the app be produced according to other apps designed for the visually impaired.

Accessible travel apps help identify accessible destinations, accommodations and facilities. Customisable checklists ensure all necessary accommodations and modifications are planned, including accessibility needs, medications and preferences. Online forums and networks offer advice and peer support from others who have organised similar trips.

Ensure that all accessibility needs are met through early planning and communication, as well as direct communication with service providers. For example, early coordination with hotels and transport services helps to ensure the availability of accessible rooms and vehicles. Tailoring the itinerary to individual needs, for example by including rest breaks and avoiding strenuous activities, improves the overall experience. One successful strategy is to adapt a walking route to accommodate a range of mobility levels and interests. Carry out site visits before the trip to assess accessibility and make any necessary adjustments. For example, visiting a campsite in advance to make sure it meets all accessibility requirements.

Some tools provide outdated or incomplete information. Certain adaptive equipment was not always available at the destination sites. To overcome this, equipment was rented in advance from specialised providers. Alternatively, participants were encouraged to bring their own equipment where possible.

Additional advice: Make use of the services of specialist travel agencies if necessary. Use comprehensive planning tools. Get involved in

leverage communities, as they can provide valuable insights and first-hand experiences from others who have organised similar trips.

ROMANIA

Best practices

The most important recommendation participants made was to make sure that they knew everything they needed to know before travelling. By complete information they meant tours, opening hours of different attractions, timetable of activities, availability of hotel facilities - spa, swimming pool, bowling, tandem bikes, dances, shows etc. They also stressed the importance of having a guide to show them around and explain what they are visiting - historical and geographical facts etc.

Cleanliness in the room and staff not moving things around are important to more than half of respondents. They also have an expectation that hotel staff will alert them to potential "hazards" - steps in the way, various ornaments or plants that might be in their way, etc.

In a restaurant, it's very important for them to get information about what they're eating and how it's positioned on the plate. They like it when the waiter tells a story about the food to make it more interesting. It is very useful for the waiter to read them the menu and not just talk to the person they are with, ignoring them completely.

They believe that their needs are not unusual and that with a little information and guidance, any hotel or restaurant should be able to accommodate and serve visually impaired people without any problems.

Visually impaired people prioritise receiving complete and detailed information when travelling. This includes information about tours, attractions, timetables and hotel facilities. They also emphasise the need for a guide to provide historical and geographical context. In hotels, cleanliness and clear communication about potential disabilities are crucial, while in restaurants, detailed descriptions of food and inclusive service are important. They consider their needs to be



reasonable and manageable. With adequate information and guidance, hotels and restaurants can accommodate them effectively.

Expectations from the Camino

Poland

All the participants emphasised that they had no experience in organising the Camino de Santiago, as it is not popular or well known in Poland. However, they understand the preparation for the pilgrimage, as some of them have this experience from Poland. The respondents are very interested in the Camino and its benefits for young people with disabilities.

The expectation is to learn more about the Camino routes, all the practical issues and how to prepare participants with disabilities. It is also important to have a database of local organisations that offer different services to pilgrims and can be helpful during the Camino.

On the other hand, it is crucial to ask participants what their expectations and motivations are for taking part in the Camino de Santiago. Participants with disabilities may have different expectations than the rest of the people who walk the Camino: religious reasons, the hope of "finding myself", to experience a spiritual or meaningful journey, to test oneself, etc.

As youth workers/trainers, we should advise people with disabilities not to expect too much, but to try and enjoy the opportunities Camino can offer.

Spain

Participants expect the Camino de Santiago to offer personal growth and fulfilment, combining both social and solitary experiences. They expect to gain a deeper appreciation of the historical and spiritual significance of the pilgrimage, to challenge themselves, to build resilience and to achieve self-discovery. The journey is seen as an



opportunity to overcome personal barriers, develop mental and physical strength and find satisfaction in achieving their goals despite potential difficulties.

Portugal

One participant mentioned that his expectation was to really understand the adaptation to the specifics of accessibility for people, for each disability, because each disability is so specific. There was also an expectation to create a form of dialogue so that people could nourish, maintain and grow a friendship along the way. From another point of view, imagining themselves doing the Camino, some participants expressed their fears and reservations, such as "Can people with two prostheses really make it all the way? How can I stop? Where can I stop? What support will I have if, for example, my muscles don't cooperate with me when they get too tired?"

Other participants expressed their excitement at the possibility of doing something challenging that would test their will and push them to their limits. Participants also expressed an expectation that the process itself would be a confidence-building exercise.

Slovenia

Primary expectations for taking part in the Camino: The participants in the focus group expect that the Camino experience will promote personal growth and a sense of achievement as the participants complete challenging routes and achieve their goals. In addition, they expect that the Camino will enable participants to make new friends and to strengthen existing relationships by sharing and experiencing each other. Focus group participants also believe that young people will gain greater self-confidence and independence by successfully completing the journey and overcoming obstacles.

Impact on the physical health and fitness of young people with disabilities: The physical activity involved in walking and hiking the Camino is expected to improve endurance and stamina, leading to



better overall fitness. During preparation for and participation in the Camino, regular physical activity is likely to build strength, particularly in the legs and core, and improve mobility, which may contribute to better overall health. Consistent physical activity during the Camino will help with weight management and contribute to a healthier lifestyle.

Mental or emotional benefits: The experience of being immersed in nature and being physically active is expected to reduce stress levels and anxiety. Participants are likely to benefit from the mood-boosting effects of physical exercise and the sense of accomplishment of completing the journey, leading to improved mental well-being. Successfully completing the Camino will help boost self-esteem and confidence by demonstrating their ability to overcome challenges and achieve personal goals.

Romania

Participants who have a personal assistant didn't seem very worried about an experience like Camino. They said they were more curious than worried and open to the experience.

Those who did not have an assistant said that without someone to guide them, they would never dare to go, relying only on the white stick. The presence of a guide/assistant in this experience is crucial, not only for safety reasons, but also to tell them what they are looking at, how everything looks, to tell them about the landscape, flora, fauna etc.

Some asked about the cost, as it may be a financial burden, but otherwise they were very excited about the idea. Others asked about accommodation. Some wanted to know if they could go in groups, in couples, if they could travel by car or train if they got tired. They also wanted to know about the final destination, the cathedral, whether they would be able to hear and understand the sermon, etc.



Overall, the experience of having a personal assistant is viewed positively by those who have one, as they feel curious and open to new experiences. On the other hand, those who do not have an assistant express concerns about safety and guidance, pointing to the importance of having an assistant for such activities. While there are practical considerations such as cost and accommodation, there is a general excitement and curiosity about the idea, with particular interest in group travel options and the destination.

Open feedback

Poland

Our participants have highlighted an important factor that we all need to understand: a disabled person may be considered a person with a disability in one society or setting, but not in another, depending on the environment and context. Disability is not something that characterises the individual as a result of some impairment. Disability resides in society, not in the individual. For example:

1. A person in a wheelchair may find it difficult to participate fully in the Camino not because of their condition, but because there may be environmental barriers, such as inaccessible buses/hotels or roads in the place where the trip takes place, that prevent them from accessing it.
2. A visually impaired young person wants to read the map/guide when travelling with their sighted friends. If we ensure that full text audio recordings are available, visually impaired young people can participate in cultural activities/travel on an equal basis with everyone else.

The social model of disability suggests that disability is caused by the way society is organised, rather than by a person's impairment or difference.

Spain

People with reduced mobility often face challenges due to the lack of accessible bathrooms in accommodation, inadequate or non-existent ramps and poorly signposted routes. People with visual impairments highlighted the need for Braille signage and better visual aids. In addition, many participants noted the importance of personal assistance, particularly for those with severe disabilities who need help with daily tasks such as drinking water or navigating unexpected problems during the pilgrimage.

Professionals working with this target group also faced many challenges. They highlighted the importance of thorough pre-trip training for both professionals and volunteers. According to the experts, support staff to prepare and motivate the journey, precision in route planning and the ability to deal with unexpected situations are crucial to the pilgrimage. The ability of people with disabilities and their carers to walk and hike is an important factor in the success of the journey.

Despite these challenges, both groups (young people with disabilities and professionals) came to understand the many benefits of participating in the Camino de Santiago. The pilgrimage offers young people the opportunity to interact with different groups of people, which they see as a unique experience. The journey can help them to develop their physical and mental health, which can help them to feel better. The pilgrimage, many said, allowed them to become more resilient, overcome personal obstacles and step out of their comfort zone.

The professionals saw similar benefits. They said that the Camino de Santiago is a powerful tool for self-improvement and development, especially for young people with disabilities. The trip encourages the development of independence and exploration of their environment,



promoting sensory and cognitive engagement. It also provides a structured environment in which people with disabilities and their carers can develop and refine their problem-solving skills, which are essential in overcoming the various obstacles they encounter along the way.

Portugal

Participants expressed the importance of the language used. One participant mentioned that the best way to approach these challenges is to say: "you can do it, but you're going to have these difficulties" and they have to make a conscious decision. As an organiser, the most important task, according to the participants, is to put reality into the person and that "the most important thing is for the person to decide what they want to do, whether they can do it or not". It's also very valuable when you consider that accessibility is not just a physical issue, but also a more intellectual one. Following this information, it is also important to do the Pilgrim's Way, a part or a section of it, for example by walking, in order to arouse interest. In this way, the spaces are captured and made known. What is more, it allows people to think that it is indeed possible for them to do this type of route and that it is not the worst choice.

There was also a desire for an option that would allow all types of disabilities to use the same route, and for this information to be displayed in the app. There should be accessible routes for everyone. Participants gave examples such as: "What kind of accessibility is there on this road? There isn't on this stretch", which should always be shown in a positive light. Ultimately, this is what universal design should be, "a design that everyone can walk along and everyone can walk together and still talk".

Disability is a key characteristic that is linked to and influences travel behaviour in its own right - not just as a result of the distinctive socio-demographic profile of people with disabilities. However, the travel behaviours, attitudes and experiences of people with disabilities are far from homogeneous, and variations need to be understood in the context of a range of other individual characteristics, including age, location and life stage - both at a particular point in time and as part of the ageing process. The nature or extent of an individual's disability is often important (and often more important than the general characteristic of being disabled) in explaining travel behaviour. So, while people with disabilities tend to travel less than people without disabilities, and their experiences and attitudes to travel tend to be more problematic, this trend cannot be applied to all groups of people with disabilities or to all travel contexts. On the other hand, there are quite different patterns in relation to particular modes and aspects of travel, such as commuting. This points to the importance of context, in addition to characteristics, in understanding behaviour.

Survey

The survey was conducted to collect data through a short online questionnaire to provide quantitative information on the travel habits of young people with disabilities. The survey was designed to explore the experiences of young people with disabilities, whether they had been abroad or not. A set of questions was developed to explore barriers and needs to travel, as well as recommendations for youth workers and youth. The survey was carried out in Polish, Spanish, Portuguese, Slovenian and Romanian. In all 5 partner countries we reached 179 respondents. Below we summarise the results in each country.

COUNTRY SHEET: ROMANIA

In Romania we had 36 respondents. 78.9% of the respondents had sensory impairments, 10.5% had physical impairments and 5.3% had behavioural or emotional impairments. 44.4% of the respondents were young people with disabilities, followed by 25% youth workers, 16.7% carers, 8.3% trainers and 5.6% others. The survey found that 85.7% of respondents require a personal assistant when travelling, with two respondents also requiring a service dog. This reflects the fact that the majority of respondents are visually or physically impaired. Respondents also highlighted the need for a white cane and internet access.

In terms of travel habits, 77.2% had travelled outside Romania, with the majority travelling abroad 1-3 times per year. The majority travel with friends (55.9%) or family (26.5%) and usually organise their own trips, sometimes using travel agencies. Transport preferences depend on distance, although those with service animals emphasised the need for their dogs to be accepted.

When asked about travel challenges, respondents rated the difficulty of various aspects on a scale from 1 (least difficult) to 5 (very difficult).

Motivation and inspiration was not a challenge for 13 respondents, while 7 found it very difficult. Researching and planning a trip was difficult for many, with 11 respondents rating this at level 4 and 8 at level 5. Making decisions and booking was moderately challenging for most, while experiencing and enjoying the trip was easy for 18 respondents. Sharing and reflecting on their experiences was also not difficult for 14 respondents.

The main barriers to travel were environmental (52.8%), followed by internal (38.9%) and interactive (5.6%). Language barriers and lack of access to the internet were additional concerns.

Respondents identified financial support, accessible accommodation and transport, and the presence of a personal assistant as crucial needs for young people with disabilities when travelling. Cultural and leisure activities were also considered important.

Among the most popular benefits of travelling and walking the Camino were personal growth and discovering other cultures with 30 votes each, while enjoying foreign cuisine, meeting new people and experiencing sights, sounds, etc. received a total of 25 votes. Leaving one's comfort zone was chosen by 24 respondents, while increased independence and social connection each received 23 votes.

COUNTRY SHEET: SLOVENIA

The survey in Slovenia involved a total of 35 participants, providing a variety of perspectives from professionals, carers and friends who work with or care for young people with disabilities in Slovenia.

The survey results show that the majority of participants travel regularly, with 42.9% travelling 1-3 times a year, 20% travelling 4-6 times a year and 11.4% travelling more than 6 times a year. A smaller group, 25.7%, said they never travelled.



A significant majority, 97.1% of respondents, indicated that they need a personal assistant when travelling. This highlights the crucial role that personal assistance plays in facilitating accessible travel for many people. 20% of respondents reported the need for a service animal. Service animals are essential for some travellers, providing assistance with mobility, emotional support and other critical functions. 17.6% of respondents reported a need for wheelchair accessibility. This includes the availability of ramps, accessible transport and suitable accommodation for wheelchair users. A smaller percentage of respondents, 2.9%, cited the need for sign language interpretation services. This requirement is vital for travellers who are deaf or hard of hearing and ensures that communication barriers are minimised.

The results of the survey suggest that although travellers with disabilities face moderate challenges in different aspects of the Camino or the trip, none of these stages are perceived as insurmountable. Motivation and inspiration require some effort, but research, planning, decision-making and booking are manageable for most. Experiencing, enjoying and reflecting on the journey presents some challenges but is not seen as overly difficult. Overall, with the right support and resources, travellers with disabilities could successfully navigate and enjoy their travel experiences.

The survey on barriers for young people with disabilities in Camino/mobility/travel shows that the most significant challenges are interactive barriers, which affect 57.1% of participants. Internal barriers were identified by 34.3%, while environmental barriers affected 31.4%. These findings highlight the need for improved support in social interaction and communication for young travellers with disabilities.

COUNTRY SHEET: POLAND

In Poland we had 35 respondents, mostly young people with different disabilities (32 respondents), one youth worker and 2 trainers. The most important thing we learned from the answers to the questionnaire in Poland is that the majority of the respondents had never travelled before (88,6%) and our respondents were mainly young people with disabilities (32). Only a few people had travelled before and mainly with friends and/or family.

In terms of accessibility needs, the majority of respondents indicated the need for a personal assistant/friend when travelling (82.8%), wheelchair accessibility (17.2%), sign language interpretation/application (10.3%), one respondent indicated the need for a service animal.

Polish respondents indicated that each stage of preparing for the Camino was very difficult for them, with the exception of: experiencing/enjoying and sharing/reflecting.

The main barriers are of an internal, environmental and interactive nature and respondents identified some specific barriers such as:

- Lack of family support.
- Lack of travel experience and fear.
- Lack of personal assistant/friends to travel with.
- Hypersensitivity to stimuli.

Other needs: travelling with other people with disabilities to support each other; avoiding noisy places; using APPs for the deaf to communicate with others; communicating properly with people who are deaf or have hearing problems (just ask if you have problems understanding).

In conclusion, we can see from the results of the questionnaires that Polish young people with disabilities have very little/no experience of

travelling. They will feel comfortable participating in Camino if all stages of the trip are organised for them and the presence of an assistant is guaranteed. Motivation is very important to start Camino/change life and we have to emphasise the important role of families of young people with disabilities. Financial issue is another factor that is problematic for young people with disabilities, and participation in mobilities funded by EU is a solution.

COUNTRY SHEET: PORTUGAL

In Portugal, 35 respondents took part in the survey, thanks to the collaboration of Portuguese non-governmental organisations for people with disabilities (NGOPD) registered with the National Institute for Rehabilitation (INR). These NGOPDs were contacted by e-mail, using the contacts publicly available on the INR website, and the questionnaire explicitly asks for the participants' consent to the treatment of their answers, where no personal identity data are collected.

The majority of respondents were young people with disabilities, with 14 respondents. This is followed by carers with 11, trainers with 3 and youth workers with 2.

19 respondents have never participated in a Camino/mobility/travel abroad and 16 respondents have travelled abroad.

The analysis of travel accessibility needs highlights a predominant need for wheelchair accessibility and personal assistants. A significant proportion of respondents have not participated in international travel, with many citing accessibility issues as a barrier. Those who do travel often prefer to do so with family or friends, highlighting the need for a familiar and supportive environment.

The research and planning, decision making and booking stages are identified as the most challenging for people with disabilities. This suggests a critical need for improved resources, better accessibility information and supportive booking systems. Once the trip is underway, the difficulties diminish, suggesting that the main barriers are logistical rather than experiential.

Environmental barriers, such as architectural and legal barriers, are the most commonly reported challenges. Interactive and internal barriers also play a significant role, highlighting the importance of inclusive social interactions and overcoming personal mental and physical challenges. Specific issues such as accessibility of transport and finding suitable guides further complicate travel for young people with disabilities.

The importance of needs before and during the trip - Accessible transport and venue accessibility are rated as the most important needs, closely followed by support services and appropriate accommodation. Financial support and cultural activities, while still important, are considered slightly less critical. This prioritisation highlights the need for practical accessibility measures to facilitate travel.

COUNTRY SHEET: SPAIN

The survey included 38 participants, with almost equal numbers of men and women (19 each). The majority of respondents (33) were aged 30 and over, followed by 4 people aged between 26 and 30, and only 1 person aged between 19 and 25.



The most common level of education among the participants was a Master's degree (11), followed by a Bachelor's degree (7) and a Diploma (6).

The results of the survey highlight several challenges and needs reported by the participants in relation to the accessibility of the Camino de Santiago. These include: physical barriers such as a lack of ramps, accessible toilets and adapted accommodation; limited information about accessibility features along the Camino; the need for personal assistance and support during the pilgrimage; the importance of financial support and accessible transport options.

Benefits of the Camino de Santiago: social contacts and personal growth; the opportunity to meet new people and discover different cultures; the positive impact on their independence and self-confidence.

CONCLUSIONS

During our research it became clear that travel, participation in the Camino de Santiago and other outdoor activities are possible for people with disabilities if they are well planned and organised. We must emphasise the important role of the personal assistant or carer in assisting with such activities. The success of a Camino de Santiago pilgrimage can be summarised by four key behaviours:

- Making a person with a disability aware of their real need.
- Empowering a person with a disability to identify challenges for him/herself and to actively participate in finding the necessary solution.
- Open communication between organisers and people with disabilities.
- Ensure flexibility in the planning of activities and plan these activities in advance so that they can be better adapted to the needs of young people.

During our research we also collected some tips for the APP:

- GPS option in case of accident. The application would transmit the GPS coordinates of the mobile phone and have an emergency button with the GPS location.
- Include colours in the app according to the different types of Camino routes.
- Include in the app information on the distance to the nearest water point, accommodation, rest areas and assistance. This type of information was considered fundamental, because normally people plan how many kilometres they are going to do in a day, but there is information in the middle that needs to be



taken into account and communicated to the participants, such as rest stops.

- To include a section on books and other resources of interest. There is an extensive bibliography on the Camino de Santiago.
- Online forum and networks to offer advice and peer support from others who have organised similar journeys.

In the next step, **INCASA Compass Web App** was created, a map that highlight the ease or difficulty of reaching destination – Santiago de Compostella.

INCASA Compass Web App is an Accessible Map where users can find accessible lodging options, amenities, and unique accessibility features. This information is easily accessible to pilgrims with disabilities, making the planning and execution of the Camino more feasible and less daunting.

Recommendations for enhancements are presented in a dedicated report of recommendations and guidelines to support a young person with a disability to have a successful travel experience. The accessibility of the Camino de Santiago will be improved through the set of recommendations developed. These recommendations will be shared with local authorities and organisations, contributing to wider efforts to make the pilgrimage more inclusive.



PARTNERSHIP



INCASA - Inclusive Camino de Santiago: An accessible journey for all



