

European Commission DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, Tourism Policy. **Antonella Correra**, Policy Officer

Good morning. I am happy to see some faces I recognize.

I am from DG GROW, the Tourism Unit in particular, which has been investing a lot on accessible tourism the past year. I would just like to give a background of the reasons behind that, what accessible tourism represents, and why I was keen to be here in particular. As well as share the results of projects carried out this past year.

Accessible tourism represents 3% of European tourism in Europe. It is quite a significant part of the economic output of tourism, which is the third economic sector of European industries.

What is more, according to research that we carried out, persons with disabilities do not travel as much as they would like to, because of the lack of suitable facilities. It is not only about infrastructure or buildings, but more importantly, the lack of information and suitable skills in the sector to welcome persons with disabilities. So I believe that this project helps to fill a crucial gap.

At least 24-30% of people with disabilities would travel more with additional economic input for the European industry and GDP.

At the same time, we also found out that there is a lack of skills and training in this sector. According to a study in which ENAT participated, we did a mapping of the skills and training needs, and the competences needed in the sector to welcome persons with disabilities.

The conclusion was significant. The exact wording, I remember, was that there is an urgent need to train, first, to increase the awareness of the importance of accessible tourism, and to engage the tourist sector in training to improve the quality of services.

I would also underline the result of another study on the supply of accessible tourist services, which showed that the first barrier is not the lack of financing, but the lack of guidance on what needs to be done.

This is why I was very happy to come here today. This project leads us to the right direction. Where there is a lack of suitable facilities, the presence of the right skills can help overcome many difficulties. You can have excellent facilities. But if you don't have the right skills, it is useless.

So, I would stop here. I don't want to take more of your time.

I think, the message I would like to leave with you is that it is important to invest in the right skills to welcome persons with disabilities.

The tourist guide is the "face" of a destination, they shape the first experiences of tourists when visiting a place. It is important that the right skills are in this frontline.

Thank you to those involved in the project and to all that are here today. I would like to see the fruits of the project and wider dissemination and continuation of the project. Thank you very much.