

**Carlos Ortega**, President of the European Federation of Tourist Guides' Associations (FEG).

Good morning. On behalf of FEG, the European Federation of Tourist Guides Associations, I would like to thank you for being here.

I would first like to take the opportunity to tell you a few words about the activities FEG is involved in today.

FEG is based in France but you can find us in more than 25 countries in Europe. We also have strong links outside the EU as well. We are the voice of more than 80.000 professional tourist guides across Europe.

Tourist guides are a bunch of similar, but also diverse people. They are trained professionals, but training, legislation and regulation on tourist guides differ from country to country.

This is for the simple reason that tourist guiding is an *area specific activity*. But what does this mean?

As mentioned, I come from the Gran Canaria islands, where the weather is a bit better. Nevertheless, I have a very good knowledge of Brussels. I would be able to guide you here. But I wouldn't be able to guide you in Rome, Paris, or London. This is what we mean by area specific.

All tourist guides have the same mission. This is, by all means, to share knowledge with all of you about the region, the cities or countries where we are accredited and qualified to guide.

Not only should we provide this knowledge, but also a warm welcome. There is a lot of preparation that is needed in these respects.

By doing this, the proper way, tourist guides become an ambassador of excellence. This is important. It depends a lot on them whether the visitors feel welcome or if they visit a destination again.

It is a profession for which *Continuous Professional Development* plays an important role in order to keep up to date.

Tourist guides have to improve their skills and knowledge by taking new courses, and gaining new practical and technical skills. As well as additional qualifications like the one we might acquire as a result of the T-GUIDE project.

We have to say, that FEG as an organisation, is very much in favour of standards. We support all standards available throughout the European countries. All the representative organisations are strongly supporting the latest European Norm, *EN 15565*, which includes the necessary modules for the training of the tourist guides.

We are happy to see as well that more and more countries are adopting these standards, which aim to set guidelines for organisations, public or private, that deliver training to tourist guides.

Tourist guides are a main pillar of the tourist industry. All countries spend hundreds or thousands of millions to attract visitors from all other continents to Europe.

Once we have the visitors here, we have to ensure that they have the best experience. That includes visitors with learning difficulties.

We have to consider this market and their expectations. Setting up special training programmes, combining knowledge, guiding skills, communication and business skills are all important.

People with disabilities are a growing consumer market, while inclusive tourism has gained a strong role in the last few years in Europe.

Still, there is a big gap between demand and the ability of the tourist industry to provide for this.

Studies have shown, these are public figures, that tourists with disabilities are potentially a large market. There are more than 130 million people with some kind of disability in Europe. This means 27% of the European population.

Where accessible infrastructure and services are provided, these normally tend to be for people with physical and sensory disabilities. Those with intellectual disabilities are being excluded most of the times.

There is in general lack of awareness of the needs and suitable service provisions in many destinations, venues and attractions.

Today you can find many tourist guides who use the sign language for instance or know how to provide services to blind visitors. But the skills required to guide visitors with learning difficulties have been generally unknown.

In the last few years, FEG is offering training courses, including training related to guiding people with disabilities. We still have not been able to build a programme or seminar to train professional guides to guide people with intellectual difficulties or learning difficulties.

FEG is very proud to be a partner in this project and to contribute to the development of suitable training so as to give people better chances at enjoying a guided tour.

The completion of this project gives all of us a new opportunity to produce and deliver this kind of training in the future.

We are prepared to train future guides to guide people with learning difficulties.

Thank you.