

Chair: **Mieke Broeders**, Director, Flemish Agency for Accessibility

Good morning everyone and a very warm welcome to Flanders. Today I will be your guide, which is challenging before an audience of professional tourist guides. I will do my best. I am not a professional guide. I know something about accessibility.

My name is Mieke Broeders. I am the director of a brand new agency for accessibility initiated by the Ministry of Equal Opportunity of Flanders. It is comprised of 5 organisations which have been active on accessibility for a long time, working with municipalities, project developers, architects, schools and so on. The agency is active in research and of course tourism. That is today the subject of today's conference: tourist guides guiding people with learning difficulties.

There is a lot that is being done in accessibility and tourism in Europe. You will excuse me if I mention ENAT, the European Network for Accessible Tourism, the frontrunner for accessibility and tourism in Europe. ENAT brings the accessibility sector and the tourism sector together in order to make tourism an exciting experience for everyone.

I'm very glad we are focusing on tourist guides today. That has not been often the case yet. I think, you all know, tourist guiding brings a lot of added value to the tourism experience. And of course, this is an important part of the tourism supply chain. Today we will learn how we can make this tourism experience also exciting for people with learning difficulties.

I'm sure that we will establish today that it is not only an enrichment for people with disabilities, but that this diversity, guiding for a diverse audience, makes it a better guiding tour for everyone.

We have quite a heavy program. We will start with an opening session to introduce the project. Then there will be more about challenges and requirements in guided tours for all in Europe. Later on, we will have more information about the T-GuIDE E-learning program and a panel discussion with the possibility for you to ask questions about the project.

So, I will give the floor to **Sarah LeFevre**. She is an expert for Tourism Flanders. I have to excuse Peter de Wilde, CEO of VisitFlanders. Sarah is taking his place. I'm sure she will talk about the excellent role that VisitFlanders has taken on accessibility in Flanders and Europe.