![BCD travel logo]

ACCESSIBILITY IN TRAVEL

September 2023

Introduction

Travel can be stressful for everyone but travelers with disabilities have more reasons to be worried about how smooth it will go. On a trip, they can experience a wide range of difficulties and barriers due to the way that services and environments are designed. **Accessibility to communications, facilities, products and services for all should be a central part of any sustainable travel policy.**

According to the World Health Organization, an estimated 1.3 billion people - about 16% of the global population - currently experience significant disability, and this number is increasing.[1]

The potential market of people with disabilities in the European Union (EU) is 135 million people.[2] In Asia-Pacific, the market size is 690 million people[3], in Latin America and the Caribbean this figure reaches 85 million people[4], while in Africa more than 80 million have some form of disability[5]. In the United States, there are over 42 million people with disabilities, making up 13% of the population[6], while in Canada this number makes up 6.2 million persons aged 15 and older.[7]

These figures keep growing with population growth, medical advances and the ageing process.[1] At the same time, a big number of people with disabilities possess the financial and physical capabilities to travel. In the EU, their share makes up 70% of all people with disabilities.[8]

[1] WHO, March 2023
[2] WHO, Sept. 2019
[3] ESCAP, UN, 2018
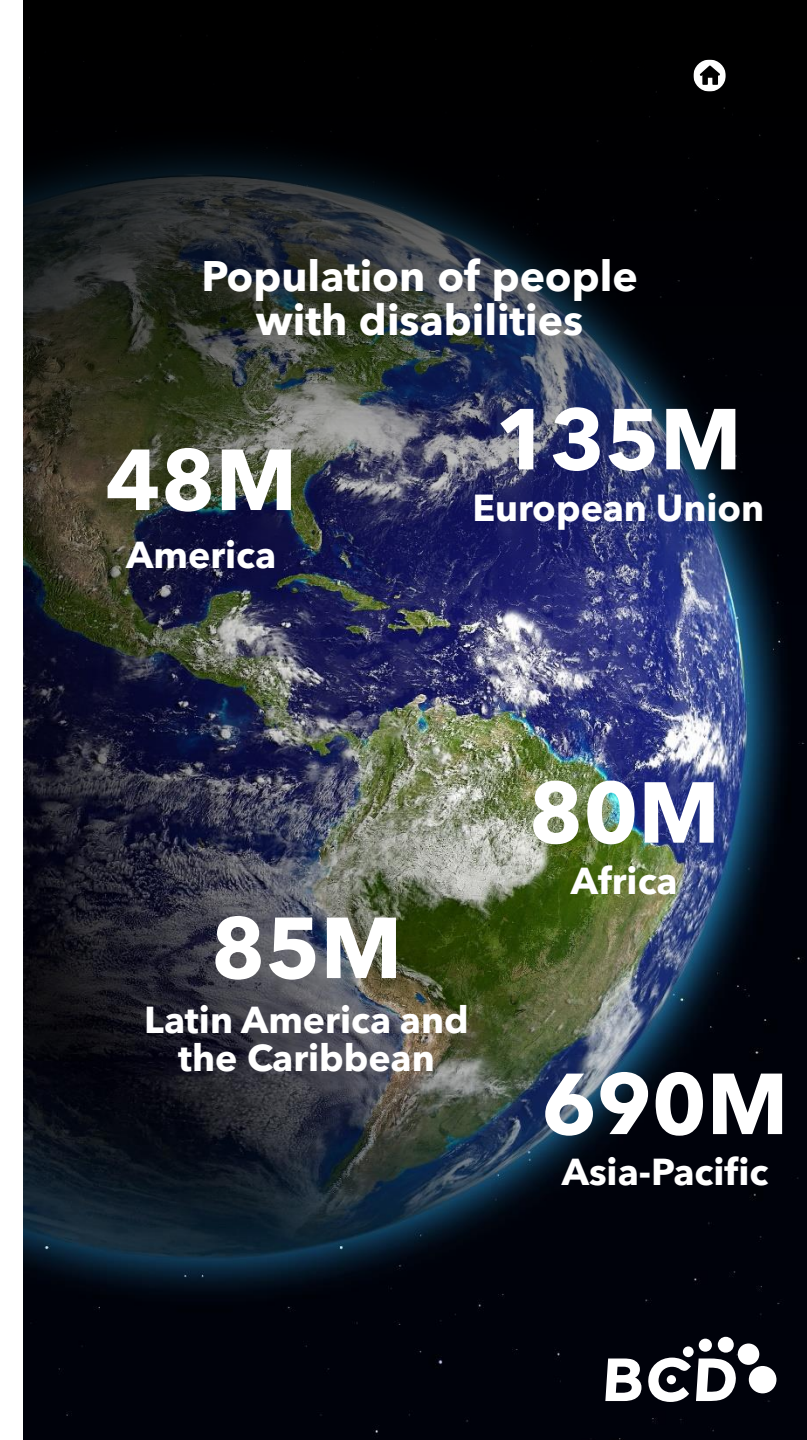[4] World Bank, 2020
[5] UN, 2018
[6] Pew Research Centre, U.S. Census Bureau data, 2021
[7] Employment and Social Development Canada, 2017
[8] Bowtell. J., 2015

Population of people with disabilities

48M America

135M European Union

80M Africa

85M Latin America and the Caribbean

690M Asia-Pacific

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Types of accessibility

Disability comprises a broad range of circumstances, with varying impacts on accessibility. According to the Americans with Disabilities Act, a disability is "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities." Different categories of disabilities include vision, mobility, hearing, neurological, cognitive, medical and psychological.[9]

Consequently, when talking about improving accessibility, we may distinguish between the following three types:[10]

Physical accessibility	**Communication accessibility**	**Web accessibility**
Improving spaces and infrastructure to create an environment where people can move around freely.	Ensuring communication is clear, direct, and easy to understand and is available in multiple formats so that all users have equal access.	Making booking services and related websites easier to access.

In other words, we may distinguish between physical and digital accessibility, the latter including communication formats and online booking tools.

[9] The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
[10] European Commission, 2023

Why accessibility is important

Universal accessibility in tourism is about:[11]

1. Equality, diversity and inclusion, regardless of our abilities

2. Understanding the integrity of the accessible tourism value chain

3. Ensuring infrastructure, products and services for all people

4. Environments enjoyed by both travelers and locals

5. Improvements in people's comfort, safety and life quality

6. Change of mindset by fostering the sector's interest in accessibility

7. New experiences, revenue streams, innovation and improved business results

8. Consumer loyalty and worker satisfaction

9. Coordination between administrations, private sector and local communities

10. Working together with organizations of persons with disabilities

11. Training and continuing education of professionals in the tourism sector

By committing to equality, tourism companies become more sustainable, attract new audiences, and can employ people with various diversity dimensions, generating business opportunities and greater product differentiation.

[11] UNWTO, 2021

Accessible tourism for all

ISO Standard 21902 Accessible tourism for all establishes a comprehensive set of guidelines for key players in the tourism value chain to support their efforts in making their infrastructure, products and services accessible.[11]

Why is this standard relevant for business travel? It provides tools to:

- **Eliminate** all kinds of access barriers for travelers

- **Ensure** the integrity of the tourism value chain

- **Raise** awareness in the industry

- **Train** corporate travel professionals

- **Analyze** the offering of competitors and understand the market

- **Gain** knowledge on the benefits and business opportunities that accessible business travel entails

- **Optimize** customer service

- **Improve** product design, marketing and promotion

- **Deliver** quality accessible experiences

- **Explore** economic and fiscal incentives for companies to implement accessibility

- **Save** on costs for improvements in coordination by including accessibility in the planning stage

[11] UNWTO, 2021
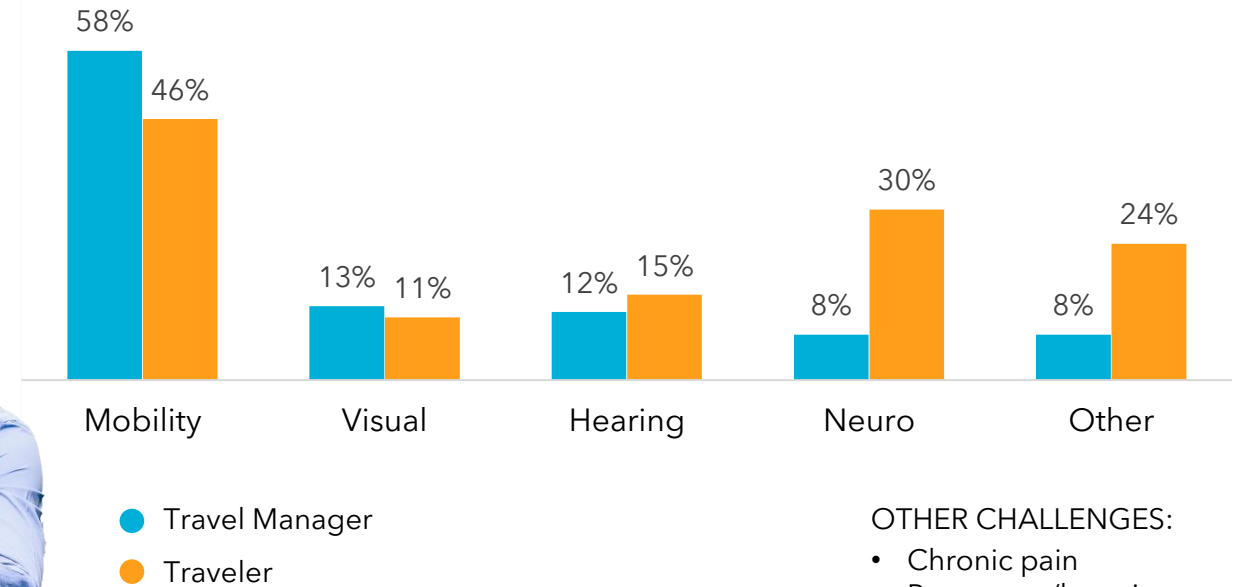
Accessibility in business travel

According to a study by Accessio Consulting[12], 70% of travel managers don't know how many of their travelers have accessibility requirements. Some travel managers believe that they have none. 24% estimate the population at 5-10%, which is much lower than the 47% of travelers who identify as having requirements. Travelers use a much broader definition that includes temporary conditions, food allergies, size, chronic pain and more. Traveler satisfaction with their business travel experience is 17 points lower among those with accessibility requirements (57% vs. 74% of satisfied and very satisfied respondents).

As a result, there has been little focus on accessibility, with just 15% of travel management teams having a part-time or a full-time person dedicated to accessibility and 69% saying they don't spend time on accessibility arrangements. Over 40% do not make policy adjustments. So, accessible travel support is generally either missing (41% provide no support) or is ad hoc through the TMC (36%).

Also, 60% of travel managers would not estimate the types of accessibility challenges their travelers face. Those who did overestimated mobility and underestimated neurological and other challenges. This could lead to them providing solutions that do not adequately address the needs of those with neuro and other requirements.

Main Accessibility Challenges

	Mobility	Visual	Hearing	Neuro	Other
Travel Manager	58%	13%	12%	8%	8%
Traveler	46%	11%	15%	30%	24%

● Travel Manager
● Traveler

OTHER CHALLENGES:
- Chronic pain
- Pregnancy/lactation
- Severe allergies
- Size
- Temporary conditions

[12] Accessio Consulting, 2022

Accessible travel services

In business travel, accessibility is gradually starting to gain awareness and focus. 30% of travel managers are currently working on accessibility or would like to do so by the end of the year. Another 22% would like to but are currently focused on other priorities.

Travel suppliers are starting to pay more attention to the subject. Today, travelers with disabilities have better access to appropriate transportation and adapted hotel rooms. European regulation no. 1107/2006[13] stipulates that all European airports and airlines are required to offer free assistance to persons with disabilities or reduced mobility. The guidelines cover travelers at all EU airports and the operations of EU carriers coming into, within and leaving the EU. They also cover non-EU carriers within or leaving Europe.[14] Rail companies also offer a free care and traveler assistance service for people with disabilities or reduced mobility. Travel companies dedicated to travelers with disabilities have appeared in the market to tackle the issue of inaccessibility.

Universal design[15] is seamlessly implemented into a building's design. Examples include easy-grip handles, wayfinding signs in different languages, self-opening doors, large hallways, and accessible outlets and technology. Universal design allows travelers to be more independent when seeking out their plane, train, hotel, conference center or meeting room.

However, these small but important details are in many instances still missing. Information about the distances at airports, width of doors and availability of elevators at restaurants, availability of bathrooms for people with disabilities, braille signs at every doorway – these are some of the measures that need to be introduced by every player of the travel industry.

There is still a lot to be done by travel suppliers to alleviate the concerns of travelers with disabilities though they're increasingly introducing services for people with reduced mobility. Below are a few examples. Travel managers need to consider which of these need to be offered by their travel programs to employees with accessibility requirements, in addition to specialist travel insurance.

[13] European Parliament, 2006
[14] European Commission, 2012
[15] Centre for Excellence in Universal Design

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> As an industry, we're experiencing increased interest, dialogue and action in improving accessibility for travelers with disabilities. **To create inclusive travel programs, we must consider the needs of all travelers.** When we design, build and communicate with accessibility in mind, everyone benefits.

Yvette Bryant
Senior Vice President, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at BCD Travel

Adapted hotel rooms

Hotels are innovating when it comes to enhancing the comfort of travelers with reduced mobility. Roll-in showers with seats, automatic door-opening buttons, outside buzzers are just a few examples of the features that fully accessible hotels have. Accor introduced its Smart Room, a new hotel room concept that allies accessibility with well-being and offers from height-adjustable shower heads, basins and beds to furniture with curved edges and wheeled bedside tables. Best Western offers hotels with accessibility throughout the building and room facilities for travelers with disabilities.

Adapted cars for rent

Various car rental companies, such as Europcar or Hertz, offer hire vehicles which have been specially converted for wheelchair users. Another option, Wheeliz, is the leading online network for peer-to-peer hiring of adapted vehicles.

Door-to-door transfer

Specialized companies offer adapted transfers via adequate adapted vehicles required to assure safe and comfortable travel. Wheelchair accessible vehicles with transfer seats, rear ramp access, a hydraulic lift, a side entry or any mobility equipment accommodate the needs of travelers with disabilities.

Door-to-door baggage delivery

Specialist companies, like Luggage Free or Eelway, offer a delivery service that dispatches traveler bags to their destination ahead of them.

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Mobility equipment hire

Business travelers may not be able to bring all the special equipment they may need at their business destination. Specialized services can solve this issue. Mobility Equipment Hire service provides rental and delivery of wheelchairs, mobility scooters and mobile hoists.

Collaborative networks for people with disabilities

AccessibleGo offers booking experience for people with disabilities and access to a community of people with disabilities sharing travel advice.

Jaccede helps find establishments (restaurants, hotels, supermarkets, etc.) that meet traveler requirements in terms of accessibility.

Streetco, an inclusive and collaborative GPS application, is designed to help pedestrians find the most accessible way of getting into and around town. It's complete with real-time consideration of obstacles (steps, slopes, impractical pavements, etc.) and nearby points of interest (accessible toilets, bus stops, etc.).

Travel companion services

Such companies as Travelers Care or GoMo travel provide travel companions and assistance for vulnerable travelers and persons who prefer to not fly alone.
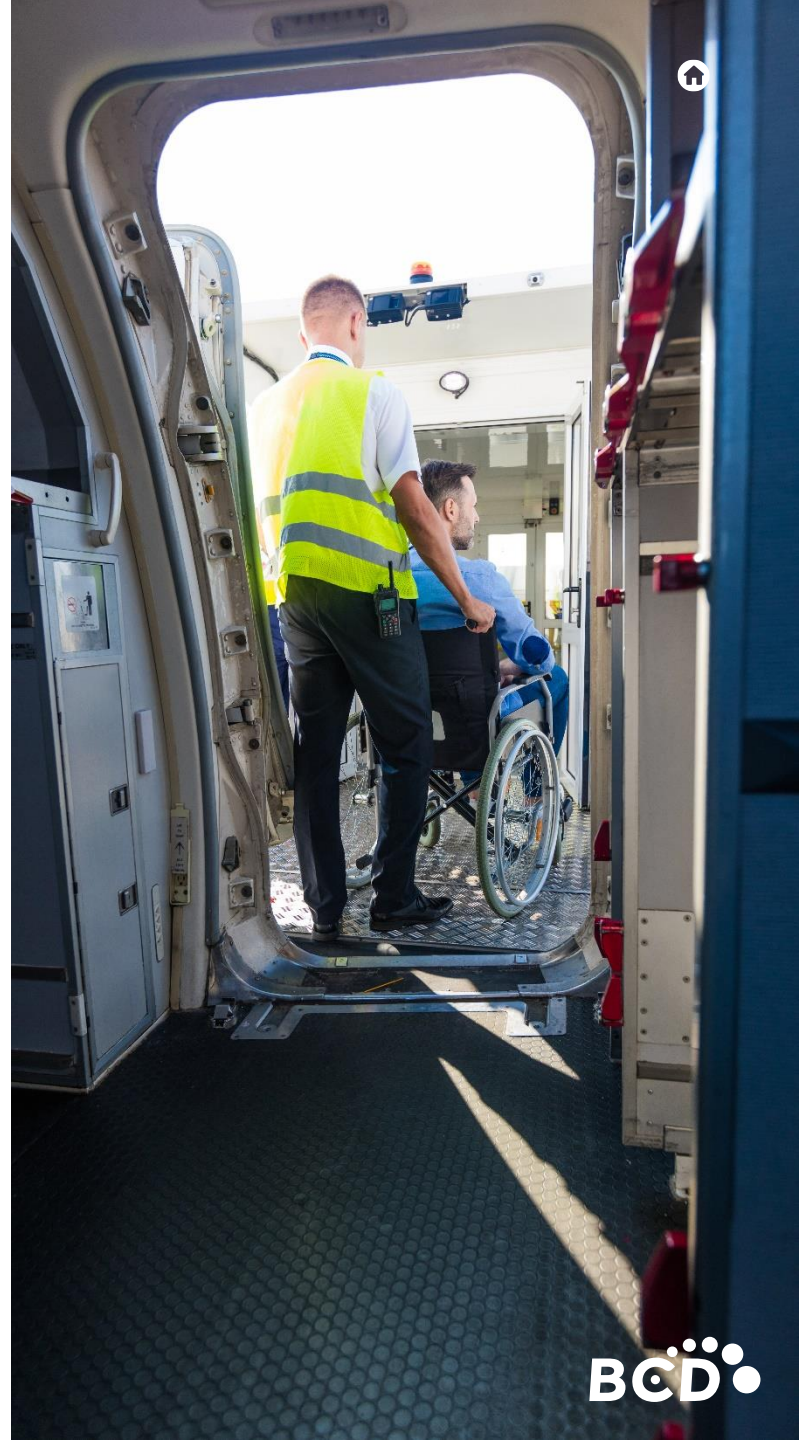
Communication

In addition to working with specialized suppliers and coming up with travel policies that include accessibility, travel managers need to tailor communication for employees with various disabilities that may rely on assistive technologies such as screen readers or mouth sticks. It's important to also use the right color palette and contrast, provide information in various formats, use alternative text or add captions (and sign language support) to videos. All these will help the content comply with accessibility requirements.[16] Testing for accessibility is important to make sure every traveler has access to the information they need, and all employees are equally engaged.

Information available via online booking tools should be universally accessible too.[17] It may be hard to find via mainstream channels, it might be too technical, or it might simply be out of date. This is a challenge often experienced by travelers with disabilities. It's compounded by the fact that many online booking websites continue to have accessibility gaps for those with various impairments. Making online booking tools universally accessible is just another key point to keep in mind when striving for accessible travel for all. Improving the current situation and alleviating stress of business travelers with accessibility needs will bring benefits to both the organizations and their employees.

HOW BCD TRAVEL CAN HELP

TripSource® turns on AI-driven accessibility widget

Travelers can easily access an AI-driven accessibility tool in TripSource, BCD's traveler engagement & booking platform. The widget supports users with visual, auditory, physical and speech needs, ensuring a more inclusive workplace environment for every business traveling employee. The accessibility menu offers options for:

- Screen reader
- Color contrast
- Text size
- Text spacing
- Dyslexia friendly fonts, and more

HOW BCD TRAVEL CAN HELP

Advito Traveler Engagement can help build a cohesive Diversity, Equity and Inclusion driven communications strategy that is digitally accessible to everyone.

- Diverse imagery
- Alternative text
- Video captioning
- Color contrast accessibility
- Screen-reader functionality
- Translations
- OBT banner magnification
- Policy Assessment

16 Advito
17 Booking.com

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The information presented in this report represents the latest view as of August 2, 2023. We have carefully researched and checked the information contained. However, we do not guarantee or warrant the correctness, completeness or topicality of this article and do not accept any liability for any damage or loss as a result of the use of the information contained within this article.

If you have any questions or comments regarding this report, please email natalia.tretyakevich@bcdtravel.eu to share your thoughts.

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