

**STUDY - ANALYSIS OF DIFFICULTIES AND BARRIERS FOR PROVIDING ACCESSIBLE  
TOURIST SERVICES**

August, 2022

# INTRODUCTION

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The development of tourism is constantly accompanied by challenges, limitations and threats regardless of their nature. Although in the last three years, more than ever, the focus has been on the challenge of tourism and health preservation, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the most important challenge for tourism must not be forgotten - to be accessible to everyone and for everyone to have the opportunity to know, experience and enjoy tourist trips, because that is the basis of tourism.

Around the world, many tourist destinations face the challenge of being accessible to all and how to achieve it. There are numerous examples that show that this can be achieved, but even more numerous are the challenges for those who strive for this goal (<http://accessitpro.eu/>; <https://disabledaccessibletravel.com/accessible-destinations-europe/>; <file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/-martin-zsarnoczky-accessible-tourism-in-the-european.pdf> / [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320226151\\_Accessible\\_Tourism\\_in\\_the\\_European\\_Union](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320226151_Accessible_Tourism_in_the_European_Union) ). Although the Pelagonia region has a modest share in the absorption of tourists in the Republic of North Macedonia with a modest 6% (State Statistical Office, 2022), it should be emphasized that it represents an exemplary region in which various activities are carried out in the direction of attracting tourists, regardless whether they are initiated by the local communities, the Center for Development of the Pelagonia Planning Region, the business community, educational, cultural, sports institutions or the non-governmental sector. In this context, the implementation of the ALTER TRIP Project by the Association of Persons with Physical Disabilities of Bitola, Demir Hisar and Resen - MOBILNOST Bitola is important, which initiates the identification and overcoming of obstacles and difficulties in provision of accessible tourist services in Pelagonia. Identifying this very important aspect for tourism is a challenge not only for MOBILNOST Bitola and the Pelagonia region, but even more so for everyone who is directly or indirectly related to tourism and the need to provide accessible tourist services. This challenge stems from the commitment of MOBILNOST Bitola through ALTER TRIP to make the Pelagonia region an accessible and inclusive tourist destination that will support the sustainable development of tourism. Of course, the experience from this project will be valuable and wider

in the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia and in the border region with Greece, where the project is implemented as part of the program for cross-border cooperation within the framework of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Call of the Interreg IPA CBC Programme Greece – Republic of North Macedonia 2014-2020.

The analysis of the difficulties and barriers for providing accessible tourist services in catering-tourist, sports, recreational and cultural facilities in the Pelagonia region is the goal of this Study. According to the defined work tasks for the preparation of the Study that are specified in Article 4 of the Contract for the preparation, this study should be developed based on the findings of the previous two Studies (Guidelines for tourism stakeholders regarding the legal requirements for providing accessible tourist services, facilities and capacities and analysis and Assessment of existing available tourist services and facilities in the Pelagonia region) of the ALTER TRIP project and to provide analyses, conclusions and recommendations that will serve to answer the question:

-What are the difficulties and barriers to providing accessible tourist services and how can they be overcome?

Therefore, during the preparation of the Study, *the research is based on the application of the method of critical analysis of the research* conducted in the previous two studies. Such an analysis is applied in order to make a critical observation about the conducted analysis of the legal regulation and the identified accessible tourist facilities and services in the Pelagonian region. This methodological approach is throughout the entire process of making the Study. Furthermore, equally important methods that are applied are *inductive and deductive methods, quantitative and qualitative methods* because they contribute to the process of drawing conclusions and formulating recommendations as key elements of the Study. As part of the analysis in this study to determine the difficulties and barriers in providing accessible tourist facilities and services, the method of *research and data collection is applied through the use of data sources from relevant institutions and resources* that deal with the issue of accessibility for people with a disability.

Based on the conditions for the preparation of the Study and the applied methodological framework of research, this document covers the following:

**First:** a review of the characteristics, specifics and meaning of accessible tourism is provided in order to apostrophize the importance of provision of accessible services by service providers to tourists with disabilities.

**Second:** it approaches the presentation of the potentials for the development of the Pelagonia region as an accessible tourist destination, without going into the process of inventorying and valorizing the natural and cultural values because such an approach will burden this Study whose focus is to determine the obstacles and difficulties to ensure available tourist services and facilities. However, this Study should be the basis for implementing this process in the future in order to identify and map the natural and cultural values that can be used to create accessible tourist products - tours.

**Third:** in accordance with the conditions for preparation, this Study will analyze the findings of the previous two Studies in order to determine what the situation is with the legal regulation that treats accessibility in the Republic of North Macedonia, taking into account international and national regulations. The conducted analysis will serve to identify what is specifically applicable or has conditions for possible applicability of relevant international and national regulation on accessibility to tourist services in the Pelagonia region.

**Fourth:** analogously follows an analysis of the conducted assessment of the existing available tourist services and facilities in the Pelagonia region in order to be able to determine what the real applicability of the regulation for providing accessible tourist services and facilities in the Pelagonia region.

**Fifth:** the findings will be the basis for determining the real applicability of the regulation and enabling accessibility to tourist services and facilities in the Pelagonia region. Such an approach in the preparation of this Study will allow to analyze the difficulties and barriers for providing accessible tourist services and facilities in the Pelagonia region, to reach certain conclusions regarding the conditions for providing accessible tourist services and to give recommendations. With this Study, opportunities are created to make future planning predictions for the development of accessible tourism over a longer period of time.

*Accessible tourism in this region should represent a recognizable category.* In this context, it should be emphasized that certain researches for this area have been carried out and strategic plans have been adopted. This takes into account the orientation of the Center for Development of the Pelagonia Planning Region to achieve balanced development of the region, which will make it a competitive and desirable destination for living and tourism. Inclusion and accessibility in the Pelagonia region is a strategic orientation of the Center for the Development of the Pelagonia Planning Region (2022), according to which physical accessibility in public facilities and public city and intercity transport for people with disabilities should be improved. At the same time, indicators (number of ramps/elevators in public facilities and public transport for persons with

disabilities) have been defined to indicate the realization of the set goal. This commitment of the Pelagonia Planning Region to provide conditions for equal accessibility for all is commendable because more strategic priorities have been defined that will ensure accessibility in all socioeconomic activities. In particular, the following should be highlighted: improvement of physical accessibility in public facilities and public transport for persons with disabilities; opening and supporting day care centers for people from vulnerable categories; implementation of cultural events and inclusion of vulnerable groups; increasing the population's awareness of the acceptance and inclusion of vulnerable groups; installation of appropriate infrastructure for vulnerable categories of citizens (ramps, sound signals, light signals). Insufficiently developed awareness of the environment in relation to socially excluded persons and insufficient/inadequate implementation of the convention on equalizing the rights of persons with physical disabilities was also identified (Center for Development of the Pelagonia Planning Region, 2022).

## 1. Accessible Tourism - Tourism for All (Basic Features, Specifics and Meaning)

Tourism as a massive socio-economic phenomenon has been a necessity of our life for many decades. There is no difference in people's need to go on a summer vacation, to stay in a mountain place, to experience the traditional moments of the countryside or to enrich the cultural sights. This need is universal, but what makes the difference is the equal opportunity of people with disabilities for accessibility and affordability to be able to engage in tourism, as there are various and numerous barriers. That is why it is necessary to enable tourism accessible to all, the basis of which is the satisfaction of human needs. This also applies to persons with disabilities. Providing accessible travel is a social imperative as well as a business opportunity. In fact, according to the World Health Organization (WTO, 2021), "almost all of us may experience a temporary or permanent disability at some point in our lives. Over one billion people - about 15% of the world's population - live with some form of disability and this number is increasing". According to data from the European Disability Forum (2019), over 100 million people with disabilities live in the European Union, of which about 1 million people are estimated to be cared for in appropriate institutions, and therefore are not represented in the survey. This indicates that within the EU there are around 22% of the population who are persons with disabilities. According to Eurostat (2022), in 2021 more than 1/5 of the population, or 20.8% of the EU population is over the age of 65, and in that structure there are about 45% of the population with certain types of disabilities.

*The development of tourism for people with disabilities represents an opportunity for selectivity, where the disability with the specific needs and requirements will be the bases and directions in which this type of tourism will be developed in the Pelagonia region.* However, with the development of this type of tourism, the social character of tourism should come to the fore by providing equal opportunities and inclusion of all people on an equal basis in tourism with respect for diversity. Disability results from the interaction of persons with disabilities with the barriers of the environment and obstacles that make it difficult for the efficiency and full participation of persons with disabilities in the social system. Accessible tourism is gaining more and more importance because this type of tourism deals with the inclusion of people with different types of disabilities in tourist flows. Many tourists have different accessibility needs related to their age, disability, accident or illness. This disability can be temporary or permanent and is related to mobility, sensory or communication limitations. There are numerous definitions, researches, projects and scientific works that deal with the problem of accessibility of tourist places, destinations, means of transportation, accommodation facilities, access paths, entrances, as well as architectural barriers. Studies related to these aspects, how tourists with disabilities decide to visit certain destinations, indicate that the tourist stay and the choice of the place are influenced by the conditions provided and the respect and application of the regulations that enable the smooth travel of tourists with disabilities.

*Accessible tourism is tourism that enables tourism destinations, products and services to be accessible to all people, regardless of their physical or intellectual limitations, disabilities or age.* This tourism in its essence is complex, composed of many segments that need to be specialized in order to ensure accessibility, i.e. availability, this primarily refers to the accessibility of public transport, accommodation facilities that are available for any disability, availability of tourist attractions, availability of information about tourist destinations in terms of their availability. Providing a tourist service with all its segments that will meet the needs of tourists with disabilities makes the tourist destination distinctive and recognizable in the tourist market. Through accessible tourism, which is guided by the motto "tourism for all", conditions should be created for the exercise of this right, providing everyone with equal, equitable and non-discriminatory participation in tourist flows.

Accessible tourism as a term means tourism that should provide accessibility, accessibility and inclusiveness to people with special needs because it should be accessible to everyone. In fact, tourism for people with disabilities or accessible tourism represents inclusive tourism because the word inclusion itself means including or enabling equal access for all people. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) inclusive tourism is a form of tourism that includes

strategically planned collaborative benefits between stakeholders that enable people with specific access and mobility requirements, as well as visual, auditory and cognitive dimensions of access, to function independently and with fairness and dignity through the delivery of universally designed services and environments. This tourism deals with the tourism needs not only of people with disabilities but also with the needs of the elderly, families with young children and people with specific medical illnesses, people with temporary disabilities, and strives to remove barriers to accessibility, but not only the architectural ones, but also the barriers in communication, in informativeness, in the way of thinking and in behavior. The World Tourism Organization provides its own definition of tourists with disabilities according to which: "a tourist with a disability is any person whose full and effective participation in society, on an equal basis with others in travel, accommodation and other tourism services, is impeded by barriers in the environment in which is also found by the barriers in attitudes". This organization in its Framework Convention on Ethics in Tourism emphasizes in Article 2 that the goal of the UNWTO (2020) is to promote responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism. And the Member 10 calls on member states to encourage and facilitate tourism for persons with disabilities.

Inclusive tourism or accessible tourism or accessible tourism are different names, but the essence is the same. The development of this specific tourism is inevitable. In the world, 15% of the world's population are people who live with some kind of disability, it is a huge number that the tourism industry takes into account. Social circumstances are changing, progress in technologies, overall progress, and it is inevitable to change the approach to people with disabilities in the direction of ensuring conditions so that they can have equal rights to tourist trips and experiences.

*Accessible tourism is a specific type of tourism that has complex characteristics, is characterized by a human dimension, allows to remove barriers in order to achieve equality and equality, respect for the rights and dignity of all people in the world. Therefore, knowing and increasing awareness of the importance of this type of tourism for people with disabilities is a necessity in order to determine the meaning, place and role of the development of this type of tourism in the content of the tourist offer during the tourist stay of tourists who have disabilities. This is precisely why it is necessary to emphasize the significance and role of the ALTER TRIP Project because through its activities it will contribute to raising awareness of the importance of accessible tourism in the overall tourist development of Pelagonia as a tourist destination, but at the same time it will contribute to the determination and establishment of certain practical and theoretical knowledge that will find appropriate application among tourism stakeholders in the*

*region*. In this way, not only the practical but also the research dimension of this project will come to the fore, which will further lead to the achievement of specific goals.

The inclusion of persons with disabilities in tourism presupposes research into their interests and desires related to tourism. In what way do they imagine their tourist stay, but also what are their needs and requirements related to the tourist stay, resulting from their disability. That is why it is important to investigate how people with disabilities will get information related to the tourist offer, but also what is the accessibility of the corresponding tourist offer for tourists. A careful and appropriate approach to this issue is needed, since every disability is different, so we need an appropriate offer that will suit each disability separately.

The specificities of disability must be respected in order to meet their needs. But what needs to be paid attention to by the providers of tourist services is that a tourist stay for people with disabilities should be organized that will be adapted to their special needs. In function of this, *it is important to pay equal attention to all aspects related to the tourists' stay*. So, for example in accommodation facilities, depending on the characteristics of the accommodation facility, adaptation will depend on which disability accessibility will be provided (whether it is for guests with physical disabilities, where accessibility will refer to overcoming architectural barriers because it is not only an accessible path of entry, but is a broad term and includes appropriate width of doors, size of the elevator, square footage of the hotel room required for movement (e.g. with a wheelchair), size and equipment of bathrooms with assistive devices, appropriate hotel furniture in the rooms starting with the beds and their height and many other things that need to be adjusted. For tourists with other disabilities, besides physical, a much greater part of the specificity is related to accessibility to the tourist service, such as the inability to communicate, receive and transfer information.

*Providing a tourist stay for people with disabilities that will be filled with a variety of content from several aspects, in addition to accommodation and food, is also a very important aspect of accessible tourism*. This is especially important because the need to escape from everyday life routine, which for these people is associated with monotony, closed circles of movement, the same people with whom they communicate, comes to the fore. The need and desire to see, experience something new, to make friends or to have something interesting happen during the change of the environment and life routine that is related to the disability is much more expressed, because the tourists who are disabled are not in any way different from other tourists when it comes to the wishes and needs for entertainment, animation, recreation, relaxation, cultural upgrading and experience, or new gastronomic experiences. However, what distinguishes tourists with disabilities from other tourists is the provision of conditions for all this



to be available to them, given their needs. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the provision of appropriate accessible services and the creation of a content offer that will be adapted to be able to be used by tourists with disabilities.

Since the creation of an offer with accessible tourist services is not only a part of the offer of tourist businesses, but, much more, it is an overall offer at the destination level, *the role of local self-government in creating objective conditions, respect for positive legislation (such as the removal of barriers not only architectural but also communicative and informational) and a correct approach in organizing, enabling and providing prerequisites for the development of tourism for persons with disabilities is very important.* Therefore, during the planning and realization of infrastructural and communal solutions, institutional facilities and events (cultural, sports, manifestations, festivals, etc.) it is necessary to provide conditions that will enable accessibility and availability for the Pelagonia region not only for tourists with disabilities, but also for its citizens with disabilities.

*The role of the local self-government in developing and raising the awareness of the local population about accessible tourism as an integral part of the community's tourism development should come to the fore,* because a significant part of them directly or indirectly benefit from tourism. Here, the associations, institutions and organizations that operate and implement various activities in the direction of developing and raising awareness and the attitude towards these people in their community as a tourist destination, and beyond, have their role. In fact, *it is not only about the development of accessible tourism, but about the daily attitude towards our fellow citizens who are persons with disabilities.* The attitude towards people with disabilities is an indicator of the awareness of the population in tourist destinations, local communities, but also the degree of development of a society, and even more so its attitude, responsibility and commitment to disability. According to Article 1, paragraph 2 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, under the term persons with disabilities are considered those persons with physical, mental, intellectual or sensory disorders which, in interaction with various obstacles, may prevent their full and effective representation in society on an equal basis with others (United Nations Organization, 2006). In the Republic of North Macedonia, in the part of the laws and by-laws that regulate the rights of persons with disabilities, terms are used that indicate different types of disability, and precisely because of these differences, disability is recognized as a need to promote and protect human rights of all people with disabilities (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; 2006) because disability is not a disease, but a condition.

## 2. Potentials of the Pelagonia Region as a Destination for Accessible Tourism

The Pelagonia region is recognizable for its important tourist-geographic position. Pelagonia, which according to its volume is the largest valley in the Republic of North Macedonia, besides its mountainous surroundings, also extends to the territory of Greece, enabling the contact of this area with its parts to Florina and Thessaloniki Field. Such scope allows it to be characterized by polyvalence in function of utilizing the values that the coastal area of the Aegean Sea has along with the continental relief structure in the Republic of North Macedonia and in Greece. This provides opportunities for creating combined tourist products of different character that will satisfy the needs of all tourists. The urban and rural configuration of the Pelagonia region ensures the presence of receptive-emissive spatial entities in the function of tourism development based on the use of the notable natural and cultural heritage. The natural and cultural heritage has values that have significant recreational, curiosity, aesthetic and cultural attractive properties, representing a source of creative tourist opportunities and also a rich basis for the development of accessible tourism, which implies the use of different values and attractions that are authentic and accessible for all. Of course, it should be taken into account that the creation of accessible tourist content that will include natural and cultural values should be a function of accessibility for all.

The border character of the Pelagonia region opens up opportunities for the creation of tourist products with international content, which further highlights the international dimension of compliance with standards, criteria and regulations for providing accessible tourist services. In this way, it is possible for such tourist products and services to be recognizable and competitive in the tourist market.

Since ALTER TRIP is a project of cross-border cooperation, the activities carried out in the function of accessible tourist services will contribute in the future to enable conditions for more intense dynamism of tourist movement in the Pelagonia region and the border region of Greece. Tourist products and services in this sense can have a stationary or excursion character.

*Accessible tourism in the Pelagonia region should contribute to improving the content of the stay of all tourists in the region, as well as those with special needs or disabilities.* In this way, it will contribute to a more intensive inclusion and affirmation of the localities and facilities, as well as the various urban and rural entities in the tourism offer of the region. In order to exploit the tourist potential, the largest number of stakeholders can be involved in the development of

accessible tourism. The tourism products and services that will be created for this purpose will enable income diversification and improved socio-cultural development.

*For this purpose, it is necessary to carry out the inventory and valorization of tourist values and attractions as part of the tourist offer with accessible tourist services and products. Since such a methodological approach is not foreseen for the preparation of this Study, space is left to carry out future research that will be of great importance in order to gain knowledge about the availability of resources and values from the natural and cultural heritage in function of the development of an accessible tourism. The knowledge obtained will be the basis for the process of mapping the content elements for the creation of tourist products for accessible tourism. Thus, the tourist products will have an operational character and will be able to be used originally, and at the same time they will contribute to the development and promotion of tourism in environments that are not sufficiently included in their tourism affirmation. Furthermore, the mapping will make it possible to locate and illustrate the places of interest for tourists with disabilities and special needs, but also service providers. In this way, it will be possible to differentiate location frames for special tourist values that will be accessible to all people.*

This will lead to the provision of qualitative and quantitative parameters with spatial and temporal determination in function of the development of accessible tourism and overall tourist development of the Pelagonian region as a tourist destination. Such an approach, which has a multifunctional character, will allow all stakeholders of tourism to recognize the values in the environments of the Pelagonian region and at the same time promote them, which will bring to the fore their promotional character of the region as an accessible tourist destination. In this way, the promotion of values will enable the recognition of the Pelagonia region as a humane, inclusive, accessible, natural and cultural environment and tourist destination, which will create conditions for sustainable economic and social development. The commitment to encouraging and developing accessible tourism in the region will contribute to recognizing the creative approach in the use of resources that deserve special attention as elements of natural and cultural heritage, and contents that will enable overall sustainable development.

In order for accessible tourism to be affirmed as a recognizable content of the Pelagonia region, it is necessary to have a complex approach to the natural and cultural contents and dimensions that will enable tourists to exchange attitudes, opinions, experiences and experiences. The creative approach in the development of accessible tourism should use the opportunities to connect different types of tourism based on selectivity in the function of a complex tourist offer of the region and its promotion in international frameworks as a special brand. In this way, an attractive accessible tourist offer will be created with different components and forms of tourist

services, the base of which is located in this area. The good communicability of the Pelagonia region, which allows it to be connected to different spatial units, is another factor that strengthens its competitiveness in the tourist market.

### 3. Providing Accessible Tourist Services in the Pelagonia Region

In this section, the application of appropriate regulation is taken into account, which should remove the difficulties and barriers for providing accessible tourist services, because it is a key element for providing such services in the Pelagonia region. In doing so, the method of critical analysis of the regulation that treats this problem from an international and national perspective is used. This approach is necessary in the preparation of this study because it is the basis for determining applicability in the hospitality-accommodation and other tourist facilities and institutions. In this context, it should be emphasized that the application of appropriate regulation for the provision of accessible tourist services represents a significant responsibility not only for the providers of such services in the region, but equally in national and international frameworks.

Previously, when elaborating on the importance of providing accessible services for persons with disabilities, several international institutions and organizations were mentioned that pay due attention to these aspects, but also several definitions and terms for this issue from the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities within the United Nations were cited. This shows us that the regulation in this area has a global dimension that binds all the countries of the world, including the Republic of North Macedonia.

As for many areas, it is especially important for this area to have the appropriate legal and by-law framework that will enable the application of defined norms and standards that must be respected in order to ensure appropriate conditions for accessibility for persons with disabilities, but also for appropriate accessible tourism services and products. *When talking about the legal regulation regarding accessibility in the Pelagonia region, it is usually associated with the provision of certain architectural and technical norms and standards that are valid and should be applied during the design and construction of buildings in order to ensure accessibility for all people in them. But of course, such legal regulation should be in accordance with international regulations in this area, because their compliance contributes to the recognition of the conditions provided for persons with special needs, regardless of where they are represented (in the sense*

*of which countries). In that way, the legal regulations will be correctly applied, they will meet international standards and they will be recognizable to foreign tourists in the Pelagonia region.*

For this purpose, it is necessary to take into account the relevant regulations that have international applicability for this issue, and then through the analysis of the regulation of the Republic of North Macedonia to determine its most significant characteristics and to make a comparison with the international one. The critical analysis carried out in the Study on the Guidelines for tourism stakeholders regarding the legal requirements for providing accessible tourist services, facilities and capacities covered the following aspects of the regulation: ensuring accessibility within the UN and the specialized organizations at the UN; international accessibility standards; European system for ensuring accessibility and the regulation for ensuring accessibility in the Republic of North Macedonia.

The analysis showed what is the structure of the relevant regulations that regulate accessibility according to the defined prerequisites and how it is applied in tourism. Such a critical analysis is a new basis for determining the most important thing: the real situation in terms of the applicability of the regulations in the Pelagonian region. In function of this, a systematic analysis of the structure of the international regulation was carried out because the national one respects the international dimension and applies it according to the specific conditions at the level of the Republic of North Macedonia.

### 3.1. Structure of Relevant International Regulations on Accessibility with Applicability in Tourism

The analysis of the presented legal regulation in the sphere of providing accessibility in the Republic of North Macedonia includes documents that are based on the application of an appropriate structure of regulations that are also applicable in tourism. In this context, a review was made of regulation from the highest level - the UN to the national level. It is emphasized that the provision of accessibility within the framework of the UN and its specialized organizations is an obligation of all member states of the UN, thus guaranteeing the provision of equal accessibility through the world system of this organization. In this way, the equality of all persons is guaranteed in providing accessibility without any kind of discrimination with equal opportunities to use the benefits of life.

It is mandatory to take into account *the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (which is mentioned in section 1 of this study) which has worldwide applicability in contributing to the promotion and provision of conditions for the participation of persons with disabilities in all spheres of human activity through equal opportunities regardless of the level of development of the countries, and in that context also the access to tourist services.* The Republic of North Macedonia, as a signatory state to this Convention from 2007, undertakes to apply the provisions and respect the rights of persons with disabilities. It should be emphasized that under the Convention, these persons are recognized as having the right to have access to and enjoy places of cultural performances or services, such as theatres, museums, cinemas, libraries and tourist services, and to the extent possible to enjoy in access to monuments and sites of national cultural importance (Article 30, paragraph 1 (c)), persons with disabilities have the right to participate on an equal basis with others in social life, and all appropriate measures should be taken to ensure that persons with disabilities will have access to sports, recreational and tourist facilities (Article 31, paragraph 5 (c)) and access to services with organized recreational, tourist and sports activities (Article 31, paragraph 5 (g)).

These conditions should be ensured by the relevant stakeholders of tourism in the Pelagonia region.

*The Declaration on the Facilitation of Tourist Travel, adopted by the World Tourism Organization (2009), promotes the facilitation of tourist travel for persons with disabilities as an essential element of any policy for the development of responsible tourism. Therefore, disability as an integral part of the relevant strategies for sustainable development should be part of tourism policies and practices, providing for the inclusion of persons with disabilities, and in order to achieve fair and accessible tourism for all, it should be incorporated into the tourism policy of Republic of North Macedonia. Unfortunately, the last strategy for tourism does not envisage any goals in the direction of providing conditions for the inclusion of people with disabilities in tourism.*

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as a UN specialized body on tourism very seriously supports the development of accessible tourism for persons with disabilities, and in its Recommendations on Accessible Tourism (2013) indicates that accessibility is and should be a central element of any responsible and sustainable tourism policy and that it must be understood that accessible tourism is not only in the function and benefit of people with special needs but in the function of everyone.

*Providing a safe, communication and accessible tourist destination means providing adequate infrastructure that will make the destination recognizable and accessible to everyone. An accessible destination means not only for people with disabilities, but equally for the elderly and those with small children and babies.* This orientation of the Pelagonia region as a destination represents a significant development perspective for the sustainability of tourism, especially if it is taken into account that very often people with disabilities are prevented from participating in tourist trips and visiting tourist destinations because they face problems related to accessibility, information about accessibility, so unfortunately they are prevented from enjoying the freedom of travel, like other people. There are many difficulties and barriers, and thus the problems related to accessibility for people with disabilities, as they face them in every part of tourist trips: from the very beginning of travel planning due to the absence or lack of information, inadequate opportunities to access information, opportunities to use local transportation, conditions in accommodation facilities, visits and participation in cultural or sports events, etc.

Tourists with disabilities have equal rights to tourism services and opportunities in terms of independent travel, accessible facilities, trained staff, confidential information and inclusive marketing. Since the demand for accessible tourism is on the rise, all tourism stakeholders should see it as an opportunity, not an obligation, because through this approach, the quality, sustainability and competitiveness of tourist destinations will be maintained and developed. *The orientation and development of a concept of tourism that will be accessible to all represents a great opportunity for the development of tourism in the Pelagonia region because accessible tourism is not only providing access to people with disabilities, but it represents tourism for all in destinations that create universally designed environments, they support and attract everyone who has a certain disability and needs better accessibility.*

Accessibility in tourism within the European framework is made possible through a mechanism of charters, conventions, recommendations, directives, agreements and strategies that are implemented by the member countries of this community. In this context, the EU Strategy 2021-2030 should be emphasized, which focuses on several aspects of the problem of accessibility, paying special attention to the improvement of access to facilities for art and culture, recreation, leisure, sports and tourism. According to this strategy, accessible tourism for people with disabilities is crucial for supporting their participation in all spheres of life, as well as for the socio-economic development of countries. In this section, it is pointed out that within the EU, the development of accessible tourism will be promoted, especially in cities, through the European Capital of Smart Tourism award (EU Disability Rights Strategy 2021-2030).

In the study on the legal requirements for providing accessible tourist services, facilities and capacities, an analysis was made of the international standards that have application in tourism, and they are:

1. ISO 14785:2014 Tourist information offices — Tourist information and reception services — Requirements
2. ISO 13009:2015 Tourism and related services — Requirements and recommendations for beach operation
3. ISO 17049:2013 Accessible design — Application of braille to signage, equipment and appliances
4. ISO 23599:2019 Assistive products for the blind and visually impaired - Indicators for tactile walking surfaces
5. ISO 21902:2021 Tourism and related services — Accessible tourism for all — Requirements and recommendations

*The overall regulation stated in the Study - Guidelines regarding the legal requirements for providing accessible tourist services, facilities and facilities, has been analyzed through the application of the qualitative analysis method. Furthermore, in order to observe the applicability of these documents in tourism, the deductive approach was applied. In order to select the regulation that may have specific applicability, a table view was drawn up that can be seen in Table 1. In this view, the relevant regulations for accessibility in tourism are given which have a worldwide and international dimension and which according to their content and ratification by countries in the world are also binding in national regulations. The purpose of this summary is to give an overview of the specific applicability of the regulation that is and should be applicable in the Pelagonia region.*

**Table 1: Specific applicability of international regulation on accessibility to tourist services**

<b>Institutions – Regulation - Standards</b>	<b>Applicability in tourism</b>
<b>*Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006)</b>	<i>Access to and enjoyment of places for cultural performances or services, such as theaters, museums, cinemas, libraries and tourist services, enjoyment of access to monuments and sites of national cultural importance (Article 30, paragraph 1 (c ))</i>



	<i>Access to sports, recreational and tourist facilities (Article 31, paragraph 5 (c)) and access to services organized by recreational, tourist and sports activities (Article 31, paragraph 5 (g))</i>
<b>** Declaration for Relief of Tourist Trips (UNWTO, 2009)</b>	<p><i>Facilitation of tourist trips for people with disability as an essential element of any policy for the development of responsible and sustainable tourism.</i></p> <p><i>Disability should be an integral part of relevant sustainable strategies and be part of tourism policies and practices.</i></p>
<b>**Recommendations for Accessible Tourism (UNWTO, 2013)</b>	<i>Ensuring a safe, transport, communication and accessible tourist destination with means providing adequate destination infrastructure by which the destination will be not only recognizable but also accessible to everyone, including people with disabilities, the elderly as well as those with babies.</i>
<b>*EU Strategy 2021-2030</b>	<p><i>Improving access to facilities for art and culture, recreation, leisure, sports and tourism. Accessible and inclusive art and culture, sports, leisure, recreational activities and tourism are necessary for full participation in society. They increase well-being and enable everyone, including people with disabilities, to develop and fulfill their potential. Accessible tourism for persons with disabilities is crucial for supporting their participation in all spheres of life, as well as for socio-economic development of countries.</i></p> <p><i>Promoting the development of accessible tourism especially in cities through the European Capital Award smart tourism.</i></p>
<b>**ISO 14785:2014 Tourist Information Offices — Tourist Information and Reception Services</b>	<p><i>Dedicated standard for tourism, but a special aspect is the following:</i></p> <p><i>Establishing minimum quality requirements for the services provided by tourist information offices, of any type and size, regardless of whether they operate under public or private management, and in order to meet the expectations of visitors.</i></p> <p><i>Through this standard, the goal is to help such offices to become more accessible to everyone, taking into account things such as the entrance and accessibility through the door, parking, as well as the ability to access the information they distribute, taking into account voice, visual and other abilities.</i></p> <p><i>This standard uses the terms tourist information office and visitor.</i></p>
<b>** ISO 13009:2015 Tourism and related services — Requirements</b>	<i>Dedicated standard for tourism, but a special aspect is the following:</i>

<p><b>and Recommendations for Beach Operation</b></p>	<p><i>It emphasizes the importance of beaches being accessible to all, beach recommendations for beach accessibility, such as the design of accessible ramps and walkways, as well as site facilities, including toilets, showers and drinking fountains.</i></p> <p><i>The objectives of this standard are to provide guidance to help establish international benchmarks for management and safety on the beaches, as well as assistance to the operators of beaches, to make better informed beach management decisions. It also includes: beach safety education and information, signage, access and zoning, surveillance and rescue, water quality and beach facilities.</i></p>
<p><b>*ISO 17049:2013 Accessible Design — Application of Braille on Signage, Equipment and Appliances</b></p>	<p><i>The scope of this International Standard specifies the basic requirements for Braille used on signs, equipment and appliances, including the dimensional parameters of Braille and the characteristics of the materials used, as well as the instructions for practical implementation.</i></p>
<p><b>*ISO 23599:2019 Assistive products for blind and vision-impaired persons — Tactile walking surface indicators</b></p>	<p><i>Provides product specifications for tactile walking surface indicators and recommendations for their installation to aid safer and more independent mobility for the blind or visually impaired.</i></p> <p><i>Specifies 2 types of tactile indicators on the walking surface:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attention models and</li> <li>- Guidance models.</li> </ul> <p><i>Both types of models can be used indoors premises and outdoors throughout the built environment, where there are not enough way-finding signs or for certain dangers.</i></p>
<p><b>**ISO 21902:2021 Tourism and related services — Accessible tourism for all — Requirements and recommendations</b></p>	<p><i>Dedicated standard for tourism, but a special aspect is on the following:</i></p> <p><i>It provides appropriate guidance and recommendations to assist accessibility provisions, covering a wide range of information: from policy-making, strategy, infrastructure, products and services, relevant to the entire tourism supply chain.</i></p> <p><i>It is applicable to all types of stakeholders in tourism.</i></p>
<p><b>**ISO 21902:2021, Tourism and related services — Accessible tourism for all - Requirements and recommendations</b></p>	<p><i>Dedicated standard for tourism, but a special aspect is the following:</i></p> <p><i>Establishes the requirements and provides guidelines for "accessible tourism for all". Its purpose is to ensure through it:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Equal access and enjoyment in tourism;</li> <li>- From the widest range of people;</li> <li>- Of all ages and abilities.</li> </ul> <p><i>The standard has easily applicable norms, and is subject to constant improvement. The best approach is his gradual</i></p>

	<p><i>application, not to force completely, suddenly without the states being sufficiently prepared!</i></p> <p><i>The requirements and recommendations are applicable to all providers of tourist services. Travel service providers will make the necessary changes in order for their offer to be inclusive and accessible to all, bearing in mind the principle of reasonable adjustment.</i></p>
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\*applicability in different areas, but the parts for applicability in tourism are drawn

\*\*full applicability in tourism

The analysis shows that there is a comprehensive international regulation that has applicability in the field of tourism. The provision of the defined prerequisites (Described in the Study - Guidelines for tourism stakeholders regarding the legal requirements for the provision of accessible tourist services, facilities and capacities) enables adequate accessibility of persons with disabilities and gives them equal opportunity in tourist trips, stay, access and enjoyment in various sports, recreational and cultural contents in the Pelagonia region. In this way, people with disabilities are guaranteed the right of everyone to have equal access to these facilities and contents.

### 3.2 National Accessibility Regulations with Applicability in Tourism

*Similar to the international one, the accessibility regulation of the Republic of North Macedonia is in accordance with it and meets the criteria derived from world and international standards. But in the function of this study, a critical and qualitative analysis of documents, regulations and acts that are relevant for the purposes of the research was made. The analysis indicates the presence of several such documents that basically have applicability in different areas and spheres of activity for persons with disabilities, and specific applicability in the sphere of tourism and hospitality (Table 2).*

In this sense, according to the National Strategy for the Equalization of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2010-2018), as the most relevant national strategic document of the Republic of North Macedonia, which foresees activities for the period 2010-2018 in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, activities that should meet the needs of

people with disabilities are covered. The basic motto of the strategy is "nothing for us, without us", and the focus is on enabling conditions and taking measures and activities in order to ensure the rights and meet the needs of people with disabilities. Based on the elaborated principles, goals, tasks, measures and activities that are planned to be implemented in 17 areas, the availability of services and aids; housing, mobility and accessibility; participation in cultural life; recreation and sports are areas that are directly related to determining the conditions for meeting the needs for accessibility to tourist services in the Pelagonia region. Given that this strategy also foresees the conditions for ensuring accessibility, it should be emphasized that a particularly important aspect is the provision of mandatory application of accessibility standards in all areas, especially for facilities, transport services, etc. premises and services open to the public, and information and communication technologies and systems as well as real provision of access to facilities, transport services and public institutions and other services, which in this context should also be tourist services.

Although the Law on Tourism Activity and the Law on Catering Activity do not specify provisions and conditions for the provision of services that will be accessible to all, the fulfillment of the conditions for the provision of accessible tourist-hospitality services is in accordance with certain by-laws that define the mandatory prerequisites for the provision consent. In this context, the following should be singled out: Rulebook on minimum technical conditions for carrying out tourist activity; Rulebook on minimum technical conditions for catering activity; Rulebook on conditions for the categorization of facilities for performing catering activities; Rulebook on the technical characteristics and dimensions of the path of movement of persons with physical disabilities and visually impaired persons; Rulebook on the method of ensuring unhindered access, movement (horizontal and vertical), stay and work of persons with disabilities, to and in, buildings with public and business purposes, buildings for housing in residential buildings, as well as buildings with residential and business purposes and Rulebook for urban planning.

*According to the same methodological approach for international regulation, table 2 highlights the conditions that, according to these by-laws, must be met in order to provide accessible tourist and catering services, while in the Study "Guidelines for tourism stakeholders regarding the legal requirements for providing accessible tourist services, facilities and capacities" within the ALTER TRIP Project, the conditions in the above-mentioned by-laws that are regulated to ensure accessibility to tourist-catering services have been taken and shown in detail.*

**Table 2. Specific applicability of national regulation on accessibility to tourist services in the Pelagonian region**

<b>Institution – Regulation - Standards</b>	<b>Applicability in tourism in the Pelagonia Region</b>
<p><b>*National Strategy for equalizing the rights of persons with disabilities 2010-2018</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Developing mechanisms for accessibility to information and communications for persons with disabilities;</i></li> <li>- <i>Regulations that should ensure physical, information and communication accessibility for persons with disabilities, through the introduction of certain standards and regulations for the removal of physical and any other type of barriers;</i></li> <li>- <i>building buildings with lowered curbs, intersections with sound traffic lights, with tactile surfaces for blind people, as well as sound and visual announcements in public transport vehicles, with the possibility for a blind person to use a guide dog in all means of public transport and entrance to all buildings for public purposes.</i></li> <li>- <i>In city and intercity public traffic, the goal was to introduce adapted low-floor buses, as well as special attention to the introduction of adapted intercity bus lines. The availability of public transport on all lines, accessibility of the timetable and vehicles and provision of clear and accessible information at the terminals and in the vehicles is necessary.</i></li> <li>- <i>Ensuring access to information and communications for all persons with disabilities</i></li> <li>- <i>To provide access to persons with disabilities to cultural institutions, museums, galleries, theaters, cinemas, concert halls, etc., and monitoring their programs using modern technical achievements;</i></li> <li>- <i>To enable persons with disabilities to access and professional information, that is, to experience cultural wealth.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>**Rulebook on minimum technical conditions for performing catering activities</b></p>	<p><i>Facilities should be arranged and equipped in such a way as to enable rational use of space, unhindered movement of guests and employed staff, unhindered transfer of material, correct and hygienic preparation, handling, storage, serving and delivering food products, protecting the health of guests and employees staff.</i></p>
<p><b>**Rulebook on conditions for categorization of facilities for catering activities</b></p>	<p><i>Annex I Categorization of hotels - hotels, boarding houses and motels:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>certain scoring is given for the existence of rooms for disabled people, in the different categories of hotels, boarding houses and motels, with different number of stars, and for different categories of disability.</i></li> </ul>

	<p><i>It is important that all provisions for these persons are made and adopted with the common inclusiveness of the association for disabled persons. In this attachment, a categorization of 5 different categories of disabilities has been made, namely:</i></p> <p><i>A Category, Disabled persons who are partially dependent on a wheelchair;</i></p> <p><i>B Category, People with walking disabilities who need a wheelchair permanently;</i></p> <p><i>C Category, Blind or visually impaired persons; D Category. Deaf or visually impaired persons;</i></p> <p><i>E Category, which combines categories B, C and D.</i></p> <p><i>Appendix II Categorization of tourist apartments and residences:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>- in the section on Entrances, amenities are provided for people with disabilities<sup>74</sup>, including a wheelchair, an obligation that must be fulfilled by new buildings built after 2006, with a capacity of 100 or more apartments, for blocks and units.</i></li> <li><i>- there should be special aids in common rooms and sanitary areas, namely:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>- Ramps;</i></li> <li><i>- Automatic doors;</i></li> <li><i>- Brackets;</i></li> <li><i>- Electric switches at a lower height.</i></li> </ul> </li> <li><i>- regarding the existence of rooms for people with disabilities, in tourist apartments and residences, Annex II states that this is an obligation only for new facilities, built after 2006, in blocks and units, that is, in:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>- Facilities with a capacity of 100 apartments must have at least 1 apartment;</i></li> <li><i>- For every further 100 apartments, plus at least 1 more apartment each.</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>**Rulebook on the technical characteristics and dimensions of the path of movement of persons with physical disabilities and visually impaired persons</b></p>	<p><i>A dedicated Rulebook for providing conditions for the movement of these persons, the applicability of which should enable better conditions for movement in tourist destinations.</i></p>
<p><b>**Rulebook on the method of ensuring unhindered access and unhindered movement, the applicability of which</b></p>	<p><i>Dedicated Rulebook for ensuring conditions for unhindered access and unhindered movement, the applicability of which should enable better conditions for movement in accessible facilities in tourist destinations. It is particularly important to apply the accessibility signs that indicate the applied accessibility</i></p>

<p><b>requires access, movement (horizontal and vertical), stay and work of persons with disabilities, to and in, buildings with public and business purposes, buildings for housing in residential buildings, as well as residential-business buildings</b></p>	<p><i>elements in trade, catering and/or tourist facilities, postal and/or telecommunications facilities, facilities for providing money exchange services, etc. financial services, administration, etc. purpose, health-social and rehabilitation purpose, cultural purpose, traffic purpose, sports and recreational purpose, areas for public purpose and other purposes.</i></p>
<p><b>*Rulebook on Urban Planning</b></p>	<p><i>Mobility and Accessibility Standards for Persons with Disabilities to overcome urban barriers and ensure functional accessibility and mobility of land for general use, public spaces, to and within buildings and areas within and outside settlements for all citizens, and especially for persons with disabilities and persons with reduced mobility. This refers to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>- Public traffic and other pedestrian areas of land for general use from the groups of purpose classes D-Greenery, recreation and memorial spaces, as well as E-Infrastructure;</i></li> <li><i>- Residential and residential-business buildings with 10 or more apartments from the group of purpose classes A-Housing and residence;</i></li> <li><i>- Buildings for public use with institutional, business and commercial uses from the groups of use classes B- Commercial and business uses and C- Public activities and institutions.</i></li> </ul>

**\* applicability in different areas, but it is drawn for applicability in tourism**

**\*\* full applicability in tourism**

The analysis shows that the regulation that deals with accessibility includes numerous regulations and acts that more broadly or specifically refer to this sphere in the Republic of North Macedonia. Analogously, they refer to the Pelagonia region. All of them equally incorporate the postulates of equality, non-discrimination, respect and care for persons with disabilities. However, it should be noted that the six by-laws presented most specifically regulate this issue, and to the greatest extent can be applied in the sphere of providing accessible tourist and hospitality services to persons with special needs in the region.

#### 4. Accessible Tourist Facilities and Services in the Pelagonia Region - Real Applicability

The quantitative and qualitative analysis of the tourist facilities in the Pelagonia region includes catering and accommodation facilities, travel agencies and other facilities and institutions with cultural, recreational, sports, educational and informational contents that are the function of tourism in this area. According to the downloaded and processed data from the State Statistical Office ([www.stat.gov.mk](http://www.stat.gov.mk)) in 2020 in the Republic of North Macedonia, out of a total of 2124 business units in the catering industry, 155 or 7.3% are located in the Pelagonia region. The conducted analysis shows that accommodation facilities as part of catering facilities represent a basic factor for the development of tourism in tourist destinations. Therefore, their analysis should be considered from the aspect of the structure of the accommodation facilities in the Pelagonia region according to their representation in the municipalities. This indicator indicates the availability of individual spatial entities in the Pelagonia region with catering facilities, and is the basis for future analysis of their conditions for providing accessible tourist services.

According to the latest Census of catering facilities in the Republic of North Macedonia conducted in 2016 (State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia, 2016) out of a total of 4378 catering establishments and shops in the Republic of North Macedonia, 389 or 8.9% are located in the Pelagonia region (Table 3). In the Pelagonia region, there are 103 or 18.1% accommodation facilities out of a total of 570 accommodation facilities within the catering facilities of the Republic of North Macedonia.

Table 3. Overview of listed catering facilities, shops and accommodation facilities in the Pelagonia region (number and structure)

Region / Municipality	Catering facilities, shops			Accommodation facilities			
	No.	%	% of NMK	No.	%	% of NMK	Accommodation facilities in relation to catering facilities
<b>Pelagonia Region</b>	<b>389</b>	100	8.9	<b>103</b>	100	<b>18.1</b>	<b>26.5</b>
Bitola	256	42.6	3.8	44	42.7	7.7	26.5
Demir Hisar	26	4.9	0.4	1	1	0.2	5.3
Dolneni	16	2.5	0.2	-	-	-	-
Krivogashtani	7	2.1	0.2	-	-	-	-
Krushevo	22	5.7	0.5	16	15.5	2.8	72.7
Mogila	8	2.1	0.2	-	-	-	-



Novaci	3	0.8	0.1	1	1	0.2	33.3
Prilep	128	32.9	2.9	14	13.5	2.5	10.9
Resen	25	6.4	0.6	27	26.2	4.7	10.8

Source: *State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia (2016), Census of catering facilities in the Republic of Macedonia - 2016, Skopje*

Most of the catering facilities, shops and accommodation facilities in the region are located in Bitola, of which 42.6% of the catering facilities and shops and 42.7% of the accommodation facilities. Accommodation facilities account for 26.5% in relation to other catering facilities. This concentration indicates that in Bitola there is the largest offer that is in line with the demand for tourist services from foreign and domestic guests. Unlike Bitola, Prilep has only 14 accommodation facilities, which represents 13.5% of the facilities in the region. This situation indicates the fact that in this municipality there is room for investments in this sector, which will attract more guests. But according to the number of catering establishments and shops, it participates with 32.9%, which is 1/3 of the total number of catering establishments and shops. Resen follows with 27 accommodation facilities recorded, which is almost 2 times more than the accommodation facilities in Prilep and represents 8% more than other catering facilities. It shows the tourist predisposition of this municipality for the development of tourism along the Prespa Lake. The data in table 3 indicate the weaknesses of the tourist and accommodation catering offer in Krushevo with only 22 listed catering facilities and shops, and only 16 accommodation facilities. Considering the variety of natural and cultural tourist values in this city, the share of 15.5% in the total accommodation facilities in the region is relatively small, which reduces the competitiveness of Krushevo as a destination with potential for the development of winter, active, cultural and accessible tourism. The other municipalities in the region (Demir Hisar, Novaci Dolneni, Krivogashtani and Mogila) do not have any or have only one recorded accommodation capacity.

*Of special interest for this Study are the findings from the research conducted within the Study on the existence of available tourist services and facilities in the Pelagonia region.* Most of the business catering-tourism units in the region represent a combination of accommodation facilities and facilities for food and beverages. The volume of accommodation facilities that have 10 to 20 rooms, which represent smaller-scale facilities, dominates. Unfortunately, the number of facilities that have rooms for people with disabilities is very small. The results of the research show that about 25% of the accommodation facilities in the region do not have rooms for people with disabilities. Only 5% of the facilities have more than 4 rooms/apartments, and 10% each

have 1 or 2 rooms/apartments. It is noticeable that 85.7% of the capacities have an internal area of less than 100m<sup>2</sup>, which indicates small capacities. *If we take into account the Rulebook on the conditions for the categorization of facilities for performing catering activities, according to which, in relation to the existence of rooms for persons with disabilities, in tourist apartments and residences, in Annex II it is stated that this is an obligation only for new facilities, built after 2006, in blocks and units, i.e. in:*

- *Facilities with a capacity of 100 apartments must have at least 1 apartment;*
- *For every further 100 apartments, plus at least 1 more apartment*

*and if it is taken into account that more of these facilities, as stated in the above-mentioned Study for the assessment of existing available tourist services and facilities in the Pelagonia region, have been operating for 15 years and more, then this situation is a reflection of the real situation with the accessibility conditions in the accommodation facilities in the region.*

The same applies to the situation with the absence of ramps, automatic doors, brackets and electrical switches at a lower height, because the obligation to meet these conditions in newly built buildings is after 2006 and with a capacity of 100 or more apartments for blocks and units.

*Apart from having the largest number of accommodation facilities with 10 to 20 rooms/apartments, there is quite a large number of facilities with less than 10 rooms/apartments (20%). 15% are facilities that have 21-30 rooms/apartments and more than 40 rooms/apartments. Since this volume of facilities does not presuppose mandatory fulfillment of accessibility conditions, the absence of these conditions is evident.*

*Taking into account the conditions that need to be provided so that people with disabilities can use the services in the tourist facilities, the real situation in the Pelagonia region indicates that there is a lack or absence of such services and facilities in this area as a potential tourist destination for accessible tourism. There is an awareness of the importance of providing accessibility conditions, but it is mostly related to the perception that space should be provided for the movement of wheelchairs and in most cases they do not comply with the standards. The results of the conducted research on the existence of appropriate conditions for the accessibility of persons with disabilities or with reduced mobility at the entrance to the catering-accommodation facilities show that in 19% of the facilities there are no such conditions because the entrance is accessible because there are no height differences and other obstacles; 9.5% do not, although there are height differences and other obstacles; 23.8% have a ramp; 4.8% have*

mechanical ways to overcome entrance obstacles and 42.9% have other provisions for ensuring adequate conditions for accessibility.

A special parking place for people with disabilities in the parking spaces of the facilities is provided by 33.3%, while 57.1% do not have special places in the parking lots for people with disabilities, and 9.5% do not have their own parking space at all. This situation is worrying because it represents a big barrier for people with disabilities to visit these facilities. The situation is similar with elevators as an important aid for ensuring accessibility in the facilities, because 71.4% of the facilities do not have elevators, and only 9.5% of the facilities have elevators that are of an appropriate size and the control panels in front of and in the elevator cabin are on appropriate height: 90-120 cm from the floor. The other facilities have elevators that are not designed according to accessibility standards.

In terms of fulfilling the conditions for providing toilets for persons with disabilities, 23.8% of employees are not familiar with this legal obligation, 14.3% are not aware of this because they believe that it is not provided for by law, which actually indicates that about 1/3 of employees in tourist facilities are not familiar with the regulation that refers to providing conditions for accessibility. That is, the percentage of employees or owners who are not aware of the legal regulations for providing accessibility conditions for persons with disabilities and/or reduced mobility is quite large. Unfortunately, only 4.8% stated that they are very well acquainted with the regulations for this area. This situation is alarming and indicates that attention should be paid to overcoming it by implementing activities to raise awareness about this issue. In fact, employees consider it important to have better knowledge of serving people with disabilities or reduced mobility, but still around 43% of them consider that they have average knowledge in terms of their ability to serve these people. The training of employees to improve their abilities and knowledge to serve these people should contribute to improving this situation because about 2/3 of them, or 66.7%, did not attend trainings or similar educational activities for accessibility for people with disabilities and/or reduced mobility and serving them with tourist services and contents.

*Similar to catering and accommodation facilities and other tourist facilities, which, as stated at the beginning of this topic, are institutions with cultural, recreational, sports, educational and information content, do not meet and to the greatest extent do not apply the accessibility standards according to the legal regulation. There are very few that have specially adapted programs for visitors with disabilities, and even fewer that have content adapted for special types of disabilities such as impaired hearing, speech or voice. A positive example is the Museum in Bitola, which offers content for the visually impaired to gain a tactile experience and audio*

narrations for some of the exhibits. Videos in sign language are also available for people with hearing, speech and voice impairments. But this is too little as an offer with contents for accessible tourism in the Pelagonia region, considering that the region has an enviable number of museums, galleries, theaters, memorial houses and other cultural institutions that have rich contents in their settings. It is recommended that other institutions follow this example, for which it is necessary to pay attention to the training of employees in these institutions to enable them to work with people with disabilities and/or reduced mobility and greater respect and full application of the disability regulation. Although almost 2/3 of the institutions are visited by persons with disabilities, they still need interventions in the spaces and contents in order to ensure better accessibility, but also promotion and visibility as accessible institutions.

Another, very important aspect for the Pelagonia region as an accessible tourist destination is its communication, which was mentioned in point 2 of this Study where the potential for its development as an accessible tourist destination was elaborated. In this context, it should be noted that there are many shortcomings that need to be overcome and removed in terms of communal arrangement, traffic signaling and transport accessibility in the municipalities and their surroundings in order to improve accessibility for all visitors. In that way, the current situation characterized by an obvious insufficient or absence of implementation of the legal regulation on accessibility for persons with disabilities in the Pelagonia region will be overcome. This will enable development and improvement of the situation of certain tourist facilities, institutions and attractions in the region, easier accessibility and movement of visitors with disabilities, but also the recognition of Pelagonia as an accessible tourist destination.

## 1. Conclusions and Recommendations

The development of accessible tourism in the Pelagonia region is directly related to the observance and application of the regulation that defines the prerequisites for enabling people with special needs to use accessible tourist services. Accessibility should be represented in catering-tourist cultural, sports and recreational facilities, public institutions and other institutions that provide services and products for all persons, especially those with disabilities. Therefore, it is necessary that as direct providers of accessibility services, in localities that have to adopt the regulations that treat the sphere of accessibility, bearing in mind that it is necessary to provide products and services that will be based on the concept of "Universal Design" so they can be used to the greatest extent by all who stay or visit this region.

The following conclusions and recommendations arise on the basis of the conducted analysis of the findings relating to the determination of the regulations in relation to the legal requirements for the provision of accessible tourist services, and the assessment of the existing available tourist services and facilities in the Pelagonia region:

1. **Accessible tourism is tourism that will enable the Pelagonia region as a tourist destination to be accessible to all people, regardless of their physical or intellectual limitations, disabilities or age.** The provision of tourist services and facilities that will meet the needs of tourists with disabilities will make the region a distinctive and recognizable tourist destination on the tourist market.

**Recommendation:** Through accessible tourism, which is guided by the motto "tourism for all", conditions should be created in the Pelagonia region for the realization of this right by enabling equal, equitable and non-discriminatory participation of everyone in tourist trips.

2. **Accessible tourism represents an opportunity for selectivity, where the disability with the specificities in needs and requirements will be the bases and directions in which this type of tourism will develop in the Pelagonia region.** Through it, the social character of tourism is highlighted because equal opportunities are provided for the inclusion of everyone in tourism on an equal basis with respect for diversity. This tourism is gaining more and more importance because it implies the inclusion of people with different types of disabilities in the tourist flows.

**Recommendation:** A greater commitment is needed from all stakeholders of tourism in the region towards providing conditions for accessible tourism, first starting with raising awareness of the importance of accessibility in the hospitality-tourist, cultural, recreational, sports, educational, communicative, informational, transport and other capacities in tourism, and then undertaking specific activities to ensure accessibility so that the region can be an example region that is accessible to all visitors. In this way, the Pelagonia region will develop as a tourist destination with opportunities for a more equal experience of its tourist content by removing accessibility barriers.

3. **Accessible tourism in the Pelagonia region should contribute to improving the content of the stay of all tourists in the region as well as those with special needs or disabilities.** In this way, it will contribute to a more intense inclusion and affirmation of the localities and facilities, as well as the various urban and rural entities in the tourism offer of the region.

**Recommendation:** In order to exploit the tourist potential, a large number of stakeholders should be involved in the development of accessible tourism. The tourist products and services that will be created for this purpose will enable income diversification and improved socio-cultural development of the region, so that accessibility will not be a difficulty or a barrier as it is now, but an advantage for the development of tourism.

4. **Accessible tourism should be affirmed as a recognizable content of the Pelagonia region.** This can only be achieved with a complex and creative approach in the development of this type of tourism, which should complement and connect with different types of tourism based on selectivity, such as cultural tourism.

**Recommendation:** To enable the creation of a complex tourist offer of the region and its promotion in international frameworks as a tourist destination accessible to all. The good communicability of the Pelagonia region will contribute to this, which allows it to be contacted with different spatial units.

5. **The application of appropriate regulation for the provision of accessible tourist services represents a significant responsibility not only for the providers of such services in the Pelagonia region, but also more widely in national and international frameworks.** Of particular importance is the provision of accessible services for people with disabilities, which is why numerous international institutions and organizations pay due attention to these aspects, so the regulation in this area has a global dimension that binds all countries of the world, including the Republic of North Macedonia.

**Recommendation:** Since the national regulation is in line with them and provides appropriate acts that regulate the problem related to accessibility that has applicability in the sphere of providing accessible tourist facilities and services, it is necessary to apply it realistically in practice, which is an obvious lack.

6. **There are numerous regulations that refer to the regulation of accessibility in the Republic of North Macedonia, but there is also a lack and absence of application of the prescribed provisions and standards for ensuring accessibility.** The regulation that refers to accessibility is composed of numerous regulations and acts that are in compliance with international standards and regulations, EU standards and regulations, and is applied in accordance with national legal frameworks. In this context, there are laws and by-laws that refer to meeting the needs and requirements for accessibility of persons with

disabilities. Special mention should be made of the Regulations relating to the following: Rulebook on minimum technical conditions for performing tourist activities; Rulebook on minimum technical conditions for catering activity; Rulebook on conditions for the categorization of facilities for performing catering activities; Rulebook on the technical characteristics and dimensions of the path of movement of persons with physical disabilities and visually impaired persons; Rulebook on the method of ensuring unhindered access, movement (horizontal and vertical), stay and work of persons with disabilities, to and in, buildings with public and business purposes, buildings for housing in residential buildings, as well as buildings with residential and business purposes; and Rulebook on urban planning. Despite the fact that these acts precisely regulate the problem for which they are intended, and are created and harmonized to be able to be applied in the defined conditions, however, their application does not meet the real needs for ensuring accessibility conditions, while encountering barriers to the use of the services in facilities that provide hospitality-tourist services and other services related to access and movement of persons with disabilities in facilities for such a purpose. Although the regulation of the Republic of North Macedonia is in accordance with the international one, and although it is comprehensive and specifically defined, its adequate and complete application is still lacking.

**Recommendation:** Since the insufficient and/or absence of knowledge and the lack of information among the owners, managers and employees about the regulations governing this issue have been identified; the non-mandatory obligation to fulfill the minimum technical conditions for the catering-accommodation and other tourist facilities and institutions related to the volume of the facilities and the construction time; insufficient financial resources; the insufficient internal and/or external space to ensure access for persons with disabilities, these conditions should be overcome, changed and/or improved through appropriate activities such as: trainings, workshops, tribunals, debates and campaigns.

- 7. The Pelagonian region is dominated by accommodation facilities that have 10 to 20 rooms, representing smaller-scale facilities.** Most of the business catering-tourism units in the region represent a combination of accommodation facilities and facilities for food and beverages. The number of facilities that have rooms for people with disabilities is very small. According to the Regulation on conditions for the categorization of facilities for performing catering activities, according to which, in relation to the existence of rooms for persons with disabilities, in tourist apartments and residences, in Annex II it is stated

that this is an obligation only for new facilities, built after 2006 and as it has been ascertained that the facilities in the Pelagonia region are functioning for 15 years and more, then this situation is a reflection of the real situation with the conditions for accessibility in the accommodation facilities in the region. This is precisely why people with disabilities face difficulties in accessing and using services in tourist facilities in the region.

**Recommendation:** To provide conditions for these facilities for extension/rearrangement of appropriate spaces/rooms that will enable better accessibility but not harm the volume of the space, through various funds (projects, donations, cooperation programs) and appropriate expertise and consultations.

8. **Taking into account the conditions for providing accessible tourist facilities and services, the real situation in the Pelagonia region indicates that there is a lack or absence of them in this area as a potential tourist destination for accessible tourism.** Regarding the provision of adequate parking space for persons with disabilities in the parking spaces of the facilities, only about 1/3 of them have provided such spaces, while the rest do not have special places in the parking lots for persons with disabilities or do not have their own parking space at all. This situation is worrying because it represents a big barrier for people with disabilities to visit these facilities. The situation with adequate elevators to ensure accessibility in the facilities is similar, and if we take into account the fact that over 70% of the facilities do not have this, this is another very big barrier to accessibility.

**Recommendation:** To provide conditions from these facilities for the expansion/rearrangement of appropriate spaces that will enable better accessibility.

9. **There is a certain level of awareness of the importance of providing accessibility conditions, equally among managers, owners or managers, and among employees.** But that awareness is usually related to the perception that a space for movement should be provided for people with disabilities who use wheelchairs, and unfortunately, in most cases, those spaces do not comply with the standards. Except in a small number of cases, absence, lack or inadequate access constitute a barrier for persons with disabilities. In fact, the level of knowledge among employees about the obligations and the conditions for ensuring adequate accessibility in their facilities and institutions is very low. This situation is alarming and should be overcome.



**Recommendation:** Conduct activities to raise awareness of this issue in the form of trainings, workshops or tribunes, which will contribute to overcoming the difficulties and barriers faced by people with disabilities in the Pelagonia region.

10. **Apart from catering and accommodation facilities, also other tourist facilities and institutions with cultural, recreational, sports, educational and informative contents, do not satisfy and to the greatest extent do not apply the accessibility standards according to the legal regulations.** Unfortunately, there are very few that have specially adapted programs for visitors with disabilities, and even fewer that have content adapted for special types of disabilities such as impaired hearing, speech or voice.

**Recommendation:** It is recommended that the numerous museums, galleries, theaters, memorial houses and other cultural institutions from the Pelagonia region that have rich contents in their settings pay attention to introducing such contents. Adequate conditions for movement through these institutions should also be ensured with respect and full application of the disability regulation. In this way, accessibility will not be a barrier or a difficulty for their visit, but on the contrary it will represent an opportunity and an advantage to visit them.

11. **Communal arrangements, traffic signals and transport accessibility in the municipalities and their surroundings should be in function of improved accessibility for all visitors.** Communicability and mobility throughout the Pelagonia region should be an advantage, not a difficulty and a barrier.

**Recommendation:** Such difficulties and barriers can be overcome if a plan of actions is drawn up in order to overcome and eliminate many shortcomings in this matter. This will make it possible to overcome the current situation and provide conditions for easier accessibility and movement for all visitors, but especially for those with disabilities throughout the region.

12. **Creating an accessible tourism offer should not only be a part of the offer of tourism businesses, but, much more, it is an overall offer at the destination level.** Here, the role of the local self-government is especially important, which in accordance with its competences, and together with the Center for Development of the Pelagonia Planning Region, the local, regional and central institutions in the field of education, health, communal services, cultural, sports and other institutions and organizations, non-governmental civil organizations and societies, should contribute to the creation of

objective conditions, respect for positive legislation (such as the removal of barriers not only architectural but also communicative and informational) and a correct approach in organizing, enabling and providing prerequisites for the development of tourism for persons with disabilities. Therefore, during the planning and realization of infrastructural and communal solutions, institutional facilities and events (cultural, sports, manifestations, festivals, etc.) conditions should be ensured that will enable the removal of barriers and difficulties for accessibility and availability throughout the Pelagonia region not only for tourists with disabilities but also for their citizens with disabilities.

**Recommendation:** Improving and/or strengthening the cooperation of the mentioned stakeholders in the region in the direction of providing better conditions for accessibility.

**13. The current situation regarding the accessibility of the Pelagonian region as a tourist destination is characterized by an obvious lack of adequate implementation of legal regulations, a real absence of accessible tourist facilities and services for people with disabilities.**

**Recommendation:** Increased awareness is necessary for its application. In order to achieve this and enable the development and improvement of the catering-tourism facilities, institutions and attractions in the region, and to reduce and/or remove barriers and difficulties, it is necessary to use the recommendations and take into account above all the strategic documents of the World Tourism Organization, which is very seriously committed to accessibility in tourism, and the European Network for Accessible Tourism through examples of good practice for accessible tourist destinations (as appendices to this study are the most significant documents in which recommendations are given on how to act to conditions are created for the development of accessible tourism, and examples of good practice). In this way, easier accessibility and movement of visitors with disabilities will be enabled, as well as the recognition of Pelagonia as an accessible tourist destination.

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Accessible tourism deserves special attention because its development will improve the quality of life of people with disabilities and their equal participation in all spheres of social life. But the biggest challenge for destinations is how to remove difficulties and barriers to provide accessible tourist services for all. This challenge can only be overcome by raising the awareness of tourism workers, the local population and competent institutions that accessibility is important for all of

us regardless of who and what role we have in our environment and by respecting the regulations and standards for enabling accessibility for all. Because the line to disability is very narrow.

Accessible tourism, like all other types of tourism, should enable the satisfaction of the wishes, interests and requirements of persons with disabilities as tourists, but what is important is that tourism workers and service providers of persons with disabilities should be properly trained and adapt tourist services and their facilities to the needs of this type of tourist clientele.

Ohrid,

14.08.2022

Key Expert on Tourism,

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