

**INCLUSIVE TOURISM: ACCESSIBILITY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

**Irtaza NAWAZ**

Senior Lecturer, Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies, Uzbekistan

E-mail: [Irtaza.joiya@yahoo.com](mailto:Irtaza.joiya@yahoo.com)

ORCID ID: 0009-0004-1794-7740

**Marjona AMONOVA**

Research Assistant, Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies, Uzbekistan

E-mail: [amonova994@gmail.com](mailto:amonova994@gmail.com)

ORCID ID: 0009-0007-6943-5829

**Abstract**

This article addresses the issue of inclusive tourism, focusing on the availability of tourism infrastructure and services for people with disabilities. The relevance of this topic is driven by the need for sustainable development in the tourism industry, which advocates for creating and providing equal opportunities for all categories of tourists and the principles of social equality. The aim of the study is to identify barriers and opportunities for improving accessibility in the tourism sector and to determine the role of digital technologies and public policy in promoting the principles of ‘Tourism for All’. The research employs an analysis of scientific publications from 2010 to 2025, statistical data from the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), and a comparative review of the best international practices.

**Keywords:** Inclusive tourism, accessibility, people with disabilities, digital technologies, sustainable development, tourism for all.

**INTRODUCTION**

A rising area of study and application, inclusive tourism reflects the global push for sustainability, equality, and universal accessibility. The World Health Organisation estimates that 16% of the world’s population, which is around 1.3 billion people, lives with a handicap. However, there are very few accessible tourist destinations for individuals with disabilities. For instance, according to the VisitBritain report on ‘Accessible and Inclusive Tourism’, roughly 30% of rooms (hotels, etc.) in the UK have some form of accessibility (e.g., step-less entry, and at least one room for the disabled). This difference demonstrates the pressing need for a structural development in the way the travel and tourism sector plans and provides its services.

The concept of ‘*Tourism for All*’, promoted by the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), emphasises that travel is a human right and that accessible tourism benefits not only people with disabilities but also elderly travellers, families with young children, and individuals with temporary mobility restrictions. Accessibility is also a key element of *Sustainable Development Goals of the UN 2030 Agenda* – Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). Here, inclusive tourism can be considered as a crucial component of sustainable development, boosting destination competitiveness, social equity, and economic diversification, not only a social concern. Also, it should be mentioned that a few destinations and facilities are equipped to serve tourists with disabilities, notwithstanding global attempts to create standards and guidelines aimed at enhancing accessibility in the tourism industry.

The primary barriers are insufficient social and policy support, a lack of specialised services, low awareness among tourism staff, and a lack of physical and informational accessibility. These elements severely limit this group’s travel options and prevent them from being socially included.

It is well known that in recent decades tourism has emerged as one of the most profitable economic sectors. In 2024, 10.9 trillion US dollars, or 10% of the world economy, was generated by travel tourism, according to the World Organisation’s EIR’s most current data (ODO, 2024). The value to the local

economy could be added by travellers with disabilities, who frequently travel with family members or friends, in addition to the fact that they used to spend more money and stay longer than other tourists. However, permanent obstacles, which include a lack of infrastructure, inadequate staff training, poor, trustworthy information on accessible destinations, and restricted digital inclusion, prevent this potential from being fully realised.

The main goal of this study is to identify the major barriers and possibilities for the growth of inclusive tourism and the function of institutional mechanisms and digital technologies in enhancing accessibility within the tourism industry.

The following research goals are established in order to accomplish this goal:

- i. To examine regional and worldwide patterns in the growth of inclusive travel.
- ii. To determine the informational, attitudinal, and infrastructure obstacles to accessibility.
- iii. To analyse how digital change may support inclusive travel.
- iv. To create proposals for incorporating accessibility concepts into sustainable travel plans.

The study keeps its main focus on the elaboration of inclusive tourism in the context of sustainable development and global digitisation. It also examines how social, economic, and technological factors impact the accessibility of tourism services for people with disabilities.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study explores the main challenges, opportunities, and drivers of inclusive tourism elaboration within the context of sustainable development and digital transformation. The research employs a qualitative and analytical approach, comparing government practices and analysing secondary data from reports and statistics provided by leading international organisations.

The report, which spans the years 2010 to 2025, examines the impact that accessibility guidelines, legislative frameworks, and technological advancements have on the tourism industry. The exploratory research aims to provide a comprehension of inclusive tourism by integrating information from academic and institutional sources.

When discussing the information sources used for the article's statistics, both domestic and foreign sources were consulted:

- i. World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO, 2023, 2025);
- ii. World Health Organisation (WHO, 2023);
- iii. World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2024).

Academic literature was collected from various databases, such as Cyberleninka, Google Scholar, and Scopus, using search terms like '*inclusive tourism*', '*sustainable tourism*', and '*Tourism for All*'.

Each document and dataset was evaluated based on its credibility, publication date, and relevance. The primary focus was on official papers and well-known global organisations' research. Because of the fact that this study is more conceptual and exploratory, quantitative data were compiled descriptively and highlighted key trends instead of running statistical tests. Hence, all materials used in the study were freely available. There was no private or confidential information used or examined. The study complies with academic integrity standards, guaranteeing openness, accurate citation, and intellectual property recognition. Thus, the analytical approach used provides evidence-based understanding of the term '*inclusive tourism*' and its significance for both sustainable and digital transformation in the tourism industry.

## **FINDINGS**

In today's travel, making trips comfortable and accessible for all is a tremendous economic opportunity and a social requirement. The study mentioned several times that about 1.3 billion individuals worldwide who live with disabilities (WHO, 2023) constitute a sizable yet underdeveloped portion of the travel industry. Although accessibility still varies significantly from region to region, there have been clear improvements, especially in developed countries.

In the study of one of the factors of sustainable development, it is impossible not to mention the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030, where Goals 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) most accurately convey the significance of inclusive tourism. Achieving these goals is facilitated by involving more people in both cultural and economic life, bringing people together, and promoting equal development around the world. Frequently, improvements in one aspect of life contribute to the development of others. For example, inclusive tourism initiatives will support large-scale changes and infrastructure improvements that will be used not only to attract more visitors, but also by local families and seniors. Therefore, a concept which is becoming increasingly popular in modern tourism management research is created by such kind of investments in availability across the world.

As stated by HTF Market Intelligence, the accessible tourism industry is expected to double its value by 2032 (HTF, 2025). However, it is not possible to realise the economic potential of inclusive tourism if there is no government policy support. For example, countries like Japan, Australia, and Spain used to have more competitive destinations and higher satisfaction rates because of their comprehensive legal frameworks. Based on the examples above, it is proposed that a policy be agreed upon and implemented, which is a vital element of market growth.

There are three different approaches worldwide for the development of inclusive tourism:

- i. **Regulatory Model:** This approach uses laws and enforcement, seen in the EU and Japan;
- ii. **Market-Driven Model:** Here, innovations will be given priority if there is a demand and a benefit - North America;
- iii. **Emerging Hybrid Model:** This approach is a mix of the previous two, meaning that when laws do not exist, innovations take over, and vice versa.

Best success requires a combination where we can observe both technology, social awareness, and policy; however, these three methods taught a couple of valuable lessons.

In general, we should observe inclusive tourism as a pivotal part of sustainable economic growth rather than just a charitable effort. Creativity, uniqueness, and adaptability are opened up by the weave of accessibility, technology, and policy in the global tourism industry.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

At present, when the whole world is focused on sustainable development, the prospect of equalising the rights of each individual in all areas of life, including tourism, seems the most important. Accessibility is a fundamental human right, not simply one of the elements of economic competitiveness, highlighted in the report. About 1.3 billion people with disabilities worldwide struggle with travel opportunities, which are complicated by issues related to infrastructure, awareness, and attitudes, according to findings. From an economic perspective, inclusive tourism is a fast-growing sector. Frequently, customers with special needs are ready to pay for their comfort and quality of service due to their disposable income. Thus, this sector, which aims to make travel cosy, should be considered the most beneficial investment in the future.

Currently, a vital factor in every field of life, including the tourism industry, is digital transformation. Independent travel and expanded participation options for tourists are promoted by innovative tools: artificial intelligence, AR, smartphone applications, and accessible booking platforms. Nevertheless, one of the challenges in developing countries is digital inequality, which remains even nowadays. If we want to liquidate this gap and maintain sustainable development in the foreseeable future, governments, independent businesses, and international organisations must work together. Innovative tools (artificial intelligence, AR, smartphone applications, and accessible booking platforms) encourage independent travel as well as increase the options for participation of tourists. These technologies not only contribute to the increased convenience but also lead to the sustainability and responsible tourism practices by enhancing visitor experiences and making them more accessible (Nawaz & Iqbal, 2025).

In summary, the transition to inclusive tourism should be viewed not only as a moral obligation but also as a strategic necessity for sustainable development worldwide. Also, destinations that focus on accessibility will be in a favourable position from a socio-economic perspective, offering a comfortable visit both for local residents and visitors, and boost their global reputation.

### **Recommendations**

- i. Monitoring systems need to be established by governments, so that they would be able to follow the UN Tourism's recommendations for inclusive tourism and make accessibility a key part of their national tourism goals.
- ii. To make their services more convenient and accessible, tourism businesses ought to invest in employee training and digital tools.
- iii. Educational institutions should include inclusive tourism management in their programs to build professional skills.
- iv. The main focus of technology developers should be on creating open and compatible accessibility standards.

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