Project title:

The development of the innovative educational method of ACCESSIBLE tourism in Central Europe

Public Opinion on

- **Accessible Tourism in Romania**

- the results of the questionnaire survey -

Sapientia University

Faculty of Economics, Socio-Human Sciences and Engineering, Miercurea-Ciuc

Dr. Bálint Blanka

Miercurea-Ciuc, 13th of June 2024.

„Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them."

Erasmus+

ACCESSIBLE
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INNOVATIVE EDUCATIONAL METHOD OF ACCESSIBLE TOURISM IN CENTRAL EUROPE

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

Research Methodology

To survey public opinion, an online, self-completed questionnaire survey was conducted among the adult Romanian population (18 years and older), commissioned by the ACCESSIBLE research group of the SAPIENTIA - Hungarian University of Transylvania, Faculty of Economics, Socio-Human Sciences and Engineering, Miercurea Ciuc. The survey was conducted by Transylvania Inquiry (a market research and public opinion polling company) between 20 January and 21 February 2024, mainly through paid targeted advertising to Facebook users.

Questionnaires were sent to respondents using quota sampling, with Facebook ads targeting strata based on gender, age, region, and community type variables. The rate and speed of completion were much lower than in previous research. To increase responsiveness, the questionnaire was also linked to several public groups related to people with disabilities, such as Information for People with Disabilities, People with Disabilities and Personal Assistants, League of People with Disabilities, and Community of People with Disabilities in Romania. As a result, people with disabilities and their relatives are overrepresented in the sample.

A total of 1,046 people responded to the questionnaire, 834 of whom completed it and 212 completed it partially but to a great extent.

To increase the representativeness of the sample, the results are weighted by gender, age, and educational attainment, according to the distribution of the Romanian population aged 15 and over, based on the latest census data (December 1, 2021)—the characterisation of the sample after weighting is presented below.

Demographic characteristics of the sample

Based on the weighted data, the sample is characterised by a slight female predominance (52.4%), proportionally corresponding to the gender distribution of the Romanian population aged 15 and over (see Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of the population in the sample and the resident population (aged 15 years and older) by gender

	Sample		Population	
	N	**Percent**	**N**	**Percent**
male	457	45.8	7590827	47.7
female	541	54.2	8314252	52.3
Total	**998**	**100**	**15905079**	**100.0**

Source: own calculation based on the research results and census data as of 1 December 2021

The age weighting was done along three major age groups, distinguishing between young (29 and under), middle-aged (30-59) and old (60 and over), as the gender and age distribution, including the distribution by educational attainment, is available in the census by 10-year age groups. The majority of respondents are middle-aged (52.4%), followed by old (28.3%), with the most minor proportion of young (19.3%). Therefore, the sample's age distribution is similar to the Romanian population aged 15 and over (see Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of the population in the sample and the resident population (aged 15 years and older) by major age groups

	Sample		Population	
	N	**Percent**	**N**	**Percent**
29 and younger	192	19.3	2947720	18.5
30-59	523	52.4	8048493	50.6
60 and older	283	28.3	4908866	30.9
Total	**998**	**100**	**15905079**	**100.0**

Source: own calculation based on own research results and census data as of 1 December 2021

We also distinguished three main groups for the highest level of completed education: low (less than primary, primary and lower secondary education), medium (upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education) and high (tertiary education, including postgraduate education). Most respondents (54.1%) have completed secondary education, which aligns with the Romanian population aged 15 and over. This is followed by those with a low level of education, at just over a quarter of the sample. The lowest proportion, similar to the national figures, is among those with tertiary education, at almost two-tenths (see Table 3).

Table 3. Distribution of the population in the sample and the resident population (aged 15 years and older) by educational attainment level

	Sample		Population	
	N	**Percent**	**N**	**Percent**
low	260	26.1	4572281	28.7
medium	539	54.1	8285684	52.1
high	198	19.9	3047113	19.2
Total	**998**	**100**	**15905079**	**100.0**

Source: own calculation based on own research results and census data as of 1 December 2021

The socio-demographic data also included the respondents' place of residence. As shown in Table 4, one-seventh of respondents live in the capital, just over two-tenths in large cities, over one-quarter in medium-sized cities, 16.9% in small towns, and only two-tenths in villages.

Table 4. Distribution of respondents by type of residence

	N	**Percent**
capital city	148	14.9
regional centre: between 250,000 – 500,000 inhabitants	81	8.1
big city: between 100,000 – 250,000 inhabitants	131	13.1
medium-sized city: between 25,000 – 100,000 inhabitants	273	27.4
small town: between 10,000 – 25,000 inhabitants	110	11.0
small town with less than 10,000 inhabitants	59	5.9
village	197	19.7

Total	**998**	**100.0**

Source: own research results

For further analysis, we have distinguished two main types of settlements by place of residence, which we believe may explain the differences in the population's opinions. The first is urban areas, which include urban settlements with a minimum population of 25,000 or more; the second is rural areas, which include urban places with a population of less than 25,000 and villages. Based on this, we can say that two-thirds of respondents come from urban settlements, while one-third come from rural areas (see Table 5).

Table 5. Distribution of respondents by type of settlement

	N	Percent
urban (cities with a minimum of 25.000 inhabitants	633	63.4
rural (small towns with less than 25.000 inhabitants and villages	365	36.6
Total	**998**	**100.0**

Source: own research results

In the case of opinions on accessible tourism, the fact that someone in their family, friends or close acquaintances has a disability, or if they do not have one, can be an essential factor. The data show that four-fifths of respondents have a person with a disability in their family or among their friends or close acquaintances, and only two-tenths do not (see Table 6).

Table 6. Distribution of respondents having a person with a disability in their family, friends or acquaintances

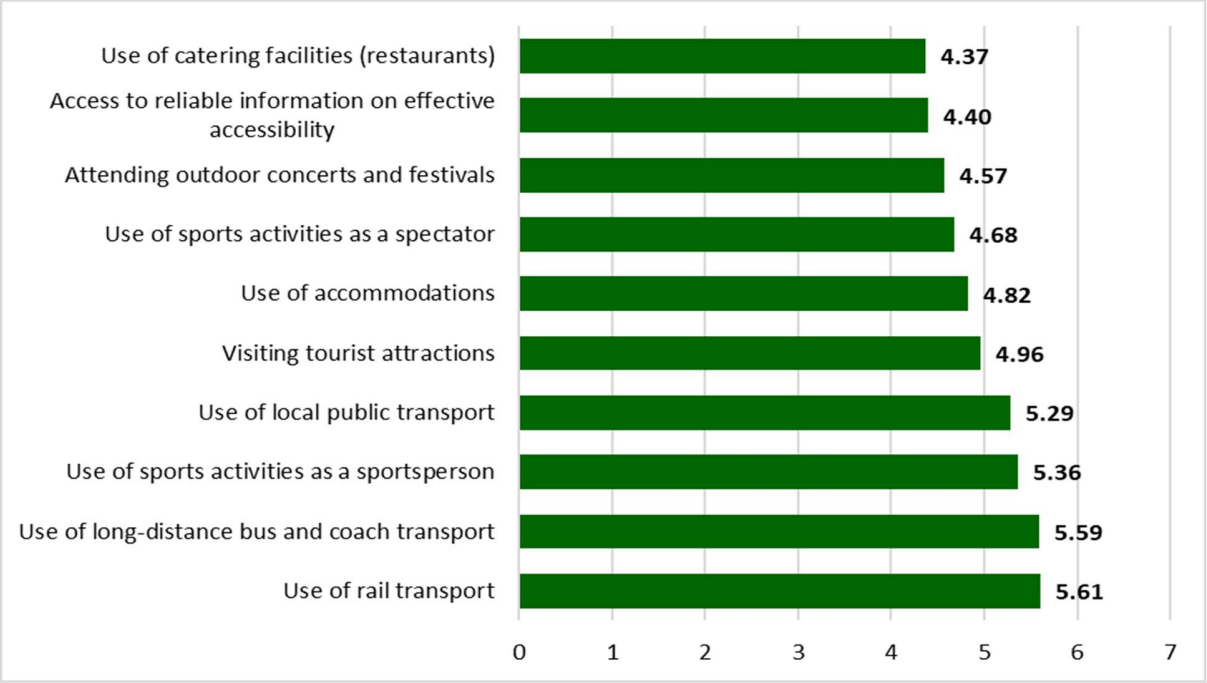
	N	Percent
There are people with disabilities in their family, friends or close acquaintances.	785	80.6
There are no disabled people in their family, friends or close acquaintances.	189	19.4
Total	**974**	**100.0**

Source: own research results

Perceived difficulties of people with disabilities in different areas

The first question in the survey asked respondents to rate the difficulty that people with disabilities face in different areas on a scale of 1 to 7 (where 1 means no difficulty at all and 7 indicates severe difficulty). Examining the mean scores, respondents (*N* = 724-939) rated the use of rail transport (*M* = 5.61, SD = 1.921) and use of long-distance bus and coach transport (*M* = 5.59, SD = 1.802) as the most difficult for people with disabilities. This is followed by using sports activities as a sportsperson (*M* = 5.36, SD = 1.866) and using local public transport (*M* = 5.29, SD = 1.931), but also having difficulty visiting tourist attractions (*M* = 4.96, SD = 2.016). According to the respondents, the least demanding part is using catering facilities (restaurants) and access to reliable information on effective accessibility (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. In general, what difficulties do you think people with disabilities face in the following areas?
average values of the answers
(1-No difficulties at all, 7-Very serious difficulties)



Source: own research results

If we look at the question according to the different explanatory variables, we find differences according to the level of education. Contrary to what might be expected, people with secondary or tertiary education perceive, on average, fewer difficulties for people with disabilities than people with low levels of education. In all but two cases, these differences are significant (Significant results of the t-test for independent samples are shown in bold type in Table 7.). One of these is rail transport, rated as very difficult on average, regardless of educational attainment. The other was visiting tourist attractions, which were considered to be of a similar level of difficulty regardless of the level of education.

Table 7. Perceptions of various difficulties faced by people with disabilities according to educational attainment (Results of the independent samples t-test)

	low			medium or high					
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Use of rail transport	241	5.59	2.009	698	5.61	1.892	-.143	395.916	.887
Use of long-distance bus and coach transport	210	5.82	1.586	649	5.51	1.861	2.352	410.736	**.019**
Use of local public transport	194	5.76	1.783	637	5.14	1.953	3.919	830	**.000**
Use of accommodations	190	5.22	1.831	633	4.70	1.935	3.304	821	**.001**
Use of catering facilities (restaurants)	189	4.80	2.290	619	4.24	2.015	3.017	283.651	**.003**
Use of sports activities as a sportsperson	188	5.71	1.906	594	5.25	1.841	2.924	780	**.004**
Use of sports activities as a spectator	187	5.19	2.107	591	4.52	2.019	3.896	776	**.000**
Attending outdoor concerts and festivals	185	4.97	2.134	575	4.45	2.034	2.995	758	**.003**
Visiting tourist attractions	185	5.09	2.144	568	4.92	1.973	.966	292.873	.335
Access to reliable information on effective accessibility	183	4.72	2.062	567	4.30	2.130	2.338	748	**.020**

Source: own research results

However, the difficulty of using rail transport is perceived differently by respondents of different genders. Men perceive it more difficult (*M* = 5.75, *SD* = 1.880) to use rail transport for people with disabilities than women (*M* = 5.49, *SD* = 1.949); the difference is significant according to the independent samples *t*-test: *t*(920.2) = 2.14, *p* = 0.03. Gender differences were also found in the perception of access to reliable information on effective accessibility. Again, men considered this more difficult (*M* = 4.62, *SD* = 2.196) compared to women who found it less difficult (*M* = 4.23, *SD* = 2.043) for people with disabilities (*t*(693.7) = 2.50, *p* = 0.01).

In all cases, people who do not have a relative, friend or acquaintance with disability perceive, on average, the difficulties that people with disability may face to be lower than those who do (see Table 8). In most cases, these differences are significant according to the independent samples *t*-test, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Assess the different difficulties faced by people with disabilities, based on whether they have a relative, friend or acquaintance with disability (Results of the independent samples t-test)

	YES			NO					
	N	**M**	**SD**	**N**	**M**	**SD**	**t**	**df**	**p**
Use of rail transport	737	5.65	1.884	177	5.32	2.076	2.040	913	**.042**
Use of long-distance bus and coach transport	677	5.60	1.764	159	5.34	1.988	1.487	220.626	.138
Use of sports activities as a sportsperson	621	5.44	1.834	140	4.91	2.040	2.999	759	**.003**
Use of local public transport	650	5.31	1.880	159	4.97	2.146	1.837	220.636	.067
Visiting tourist attractions	595	5.03	1.979	138	4.55	2.168	2.528	731	**.012**
Use of accommodations	645	4.87	1.896	157	4.42	1.996	2.596	800	**.010**
Use of sports activities as a spectator	617	4.79	2.058	140	4.16	2.113	3.273	755	**.001**
Attending outdoor concerts and festivals	602	4.62	2.040	137	4.10	2.105	2.692	737	**.007**

Access to reliable information on effective accessibility	593	4.57	2.098	138	3.81	2.166	3.814	729	**.000**
Use of catering facilities	636	4.37	2.091	150	4.13	2.097	1.279	784	.201

Source: own research results

Significant differences were also found for some questions on the perception of difficulties faced by persons with disability by type of settlement. Respondents in urban areas perceived more significant challenges than those in rural areas in using sports activities as spectators, attending outdoor concerts and festivals, visiting tourist attractions, and accessing reliable information on effective accessibility (see Table 9).

Table 9. Perceptions of different difficulties faced by people with disabilities: significant differences between urban and rural areas (Results of the independent samples t-test)

	urban			**rural**					
	N	**M**	**SD**	**N**	**M**	**SD**	**t**	**df**	**p**
Use of sports activities as a spectator	496	4.89	2.094	282	4.32	1.948	3.739	776	**.000**
Attending outdoor concerts and festivals	482	4.71	2.093	279	4.35	2.012	2.303	758	**.022**
Visiting tourist attractions	477	5.11	2.014	277	4.71	2.000	2.614	752	**.009**
Access to reliable information on effective accessibility	479	4.53	2.185	270	4.18	1.985	2.227	604.376	**.026**

Source: own research results

Significant differences were also found for age. Young people perceive using rail transport, catering facilities (restaurants) and access to reliable information on effective accessibility more difficult than middle-aged and older people (see Table 10). However, the use of accommodation for people with disabilities is perceived as more difficult by middle-aged and older people than

by young people. The differences between the means are significant according to the independent samples t-test.

Table 10. Significant differences between young and older people in how they perceive the difficulties faced by disabled people (Results of the independent samples t-test)

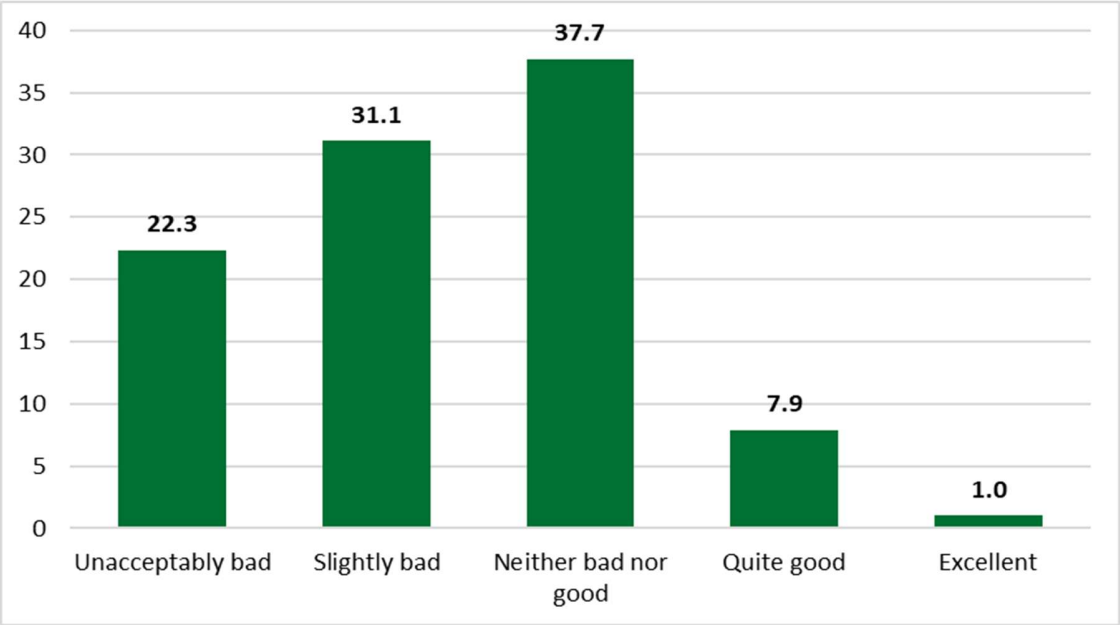
	youth			middle-aged and elderly					
	N	**M**	**SD**	**N**	**M**	**SD**	**t**	**df**	**p**
Use of rail transport	166	5.87	1.838	773	5.55	1.935	1.907	937	**.057**
Use of accommodations	161	4.53	1.740	662	4.89	1.960	-2.320	268.074	**.021**
Use of catering facilities (restaurants)	156	4.67	1.965	652	4.30	2.120	2.002	806	**.046**
Access to reliable information on effective accessibility	149	4.90	2.007	601	4.28	2.131	3.195	748	**.001**

Source: own research results

Opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in tourism in Romania

The majority of respondents (53.4%) consider the opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in tourism to be bad (slightly bad or unacceptably bad). There is also a significant proportion of ambivalent respondents, with almost two-fifths (37.7%) considering the situation of people with disabilities participating in tourism to be neither bad nor good. A much smaller number (7.9%) think that the opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in tourism are quite good, and only one per cent believe they are excellent in the country (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. In general, what chances do you think people with disabilities in your country have in participation in tourism? (percentage, N = 992)



Source: own research results

A chi-square test of independence was then performed to examine differences between different groups in their perceptions of opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in tourism. No significant differences were found between gender, age group or type of municipality on this question. However, based on the chi-square test, significant differences can be found along the educational attainment ($\chi^2(4, N = 991) = 18.941, p < .001$): people with a high level of education perceive the opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in tourism to be worse than people with a lower level of education (see Table 11).

Table 11. Perceptions of the opportunities for participation of people with disabilities in tourism according to educational attainment

	bad or unacceptably bad		neither bad nor good		quite good or excellent		Total	
	N	**Percent**	**N**	**Percent**	**N**	**Percent**	**N**	**Percent**
low	135	51.9%	113	43.5%	12	4.6%	260	100.0%
medium	271	50.7%	206	38.5%	58	10.8%	535	100.0%
high	123	62.8%	55	28.1%	18	9.2%	196	100.0%
Total	**529**	**53.4%**	**374**	**37.7%**	**88**	**8.9%**	**991**	**100.0%**

Source: own research results

Similarly, people who have a person with a disability in their family, friends, or close acquaintances have significantly ($\chi^2(2, N = 967) = 19.871$, $p < .001$) worse perceptions of the opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in tourism than those who do not have close contact with such people (see Table 12).

Table 12. Perceptions of the opportunities for participation of people with disabilities in tourism according to whether they have a person with a disability in their family, friends or close acquaintances

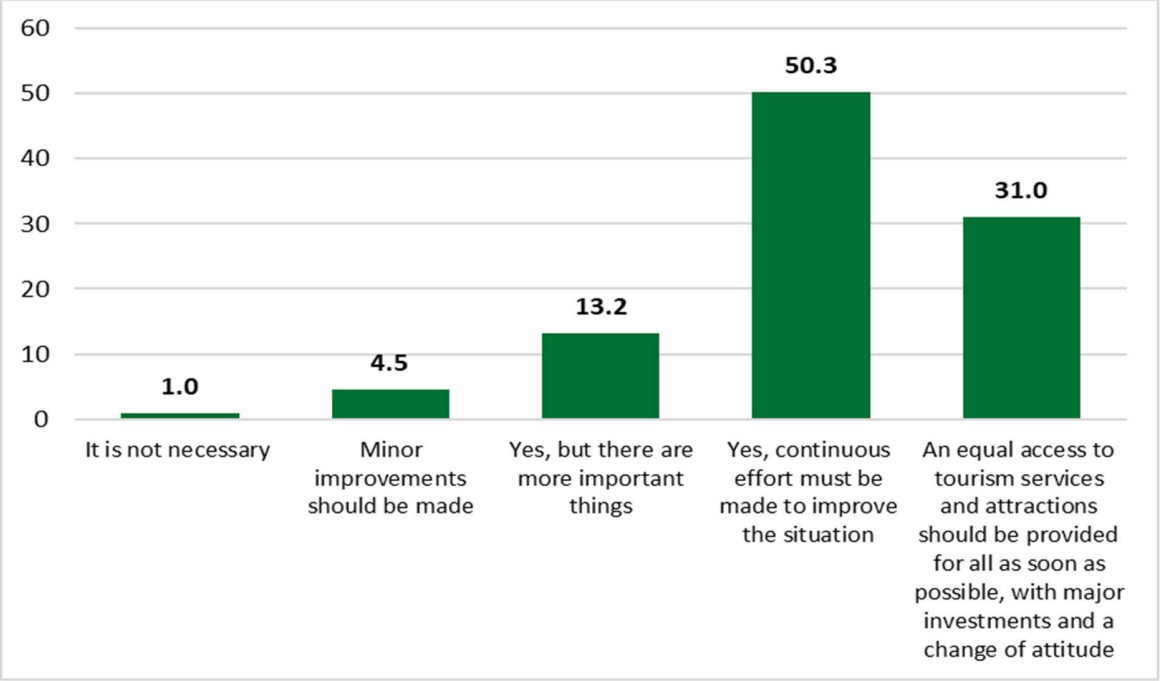
	bad or unacceptably bad		neither bad nor good		quite good or excellent		Total	
	N	**Percent**	**N**	**Percent**	**N**	**Percent**	**N**	**Percent**
Yes	434	55.5%	291	37.2%	57	7.3%	782	100.0%
No	75	40.5%	81	43.8%	29	15.7%	185	100.0%
Total	**509**	**52.6%**	**372**	**38.5%**	**86**	**8.9%**	**967**	**100.0%**

Source: own research results

Unsurprisingly, most respondents believe that continuous efforts should be made to improve the situation of accessible tourism, and a third of them think that equal access to tourism services and attractions for all should be ensured as soon as possible, with major investment and a change of attitude. Almost one in seven respondents felt that while it is essential to improve the situation

of accessible tourism in the country, there are more important things to do, and a small proportion of those felt that it is not necessary to improve the situation (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Do you think that the situation of accessible tourism should be improved? (percentage, N = 998)



Source: own research results

Looking at the opinions in more detail, the chi-square test revealed a significant difference for gender, $\chi^2(2, N = 987) = 6.609$, $p = .037$. More than four-fifths of women (83.4%) believe that continuous efforts must be made to improve the situation or that significant investment and attitudinal changes should be made to ensure equal access for all as soon as possible, compared to slightly less than four-fifths of men (see Table 13).

Table 13. Do you think that the situation of accessible tourism should be improved? - responses by gender

	It is not necessary, or minor improvements should be made		Yes, but there are more important things		Continuous effort must be made, or equal access should be provided for all as soon as possible		Total	
	N	**Percent**	**N**	**Percent**	**N**	**Percent**	**N**	**Percent**
male	23	5.1%	73	16.2%	356	78.8%	452	100.0%
female	32	6.0%	57	10.7%	446	83.4%	535	100.0%
Total	**55**	**5.6%**	**130**	**13.2%**	**802**	**81.3%**	**987**	**100.0%**

Source: own research results

In terms of age, the dividing line is between young and old. The difference is significant according to the chi-square test, $\chi^2(2, N = 988) = 15.979$, $p < .001$. The middle-aged and older people are much more likely than the young to think that continuous efforts or immediate interventions are needed to improve the situation of accessible tourism in the country. However, most of the latter (71.6%) also think so. (see Table 14).

Table 14. Do you think that the situation of accessible tourism should be improved? Responses according to age groups

	It is not necessary, or minor improvements should be made		Yes, but there are more important things		Continuous effort must be made, or equal access should be provided for all as soon as possible		Total	
	N	**Percent**	**N**	**Percent**	**N**	**Percent**	**N**	**Percent**
youth	19	10.0%	35	18.4%	136	71.6%	190	100.0%
middle-aged and elderly	36	4.5%	95	11.9%	667	83.6%	798	100.0%
Total	**55**	**5.6%**	**130**	**13.2%**	**802**	**81.3%**	**987**	**100.0%**

Source: own research results

Further significant differences were found based on the chi-square test according to the type of settlement where respondents live, $\chi^2(2, N = 988) = 6.823$, $p = .033$. The data show that a higher proportion of the rural population (84.4%) see the need for continued efforts or immediate investment to ensure equal access for all through a change in attitudes than the urban population. However, an overwhelming majority (79.5%) also think so (see Table 15).

Table 15. Do you think that the situation of accessible tourism should be improved? responses according to settlement type

	It is not necessary, or minor improvements should be made		**Yes, but there are more important things**		**Continuous effort must be made, or equal access should be provided for all as soon as possible**		**Total**	
	N	**Percent**	**N**	**Percent**	**N**	**Percent**	**N**	**Percent**
urban	33	5.2%	96	15.3%	500	79.5%	629	100.0%
rural	22	6.1%	34	9.5%	303	84.4%	359	100.0%
Total	**55**	**5.6%**	**130**	**13.2%**	**803**	**81.3%**	**988**	**100.0%**

Source: own research results

The results show (see Table 16) that a higher percentage of respondents with higher education (88.7%) believe that continuous efforts should be made to improve the situation of accessible tourism in the country or that equal access to tourism services and attractions should be provided for all as soon as possible, compared to respondents with secondary education (82.1%) or lower education (74.4%). The differences are significant by chi-square test, $\chi^2(4, N = 987) = 21.652$, $p < .001$.

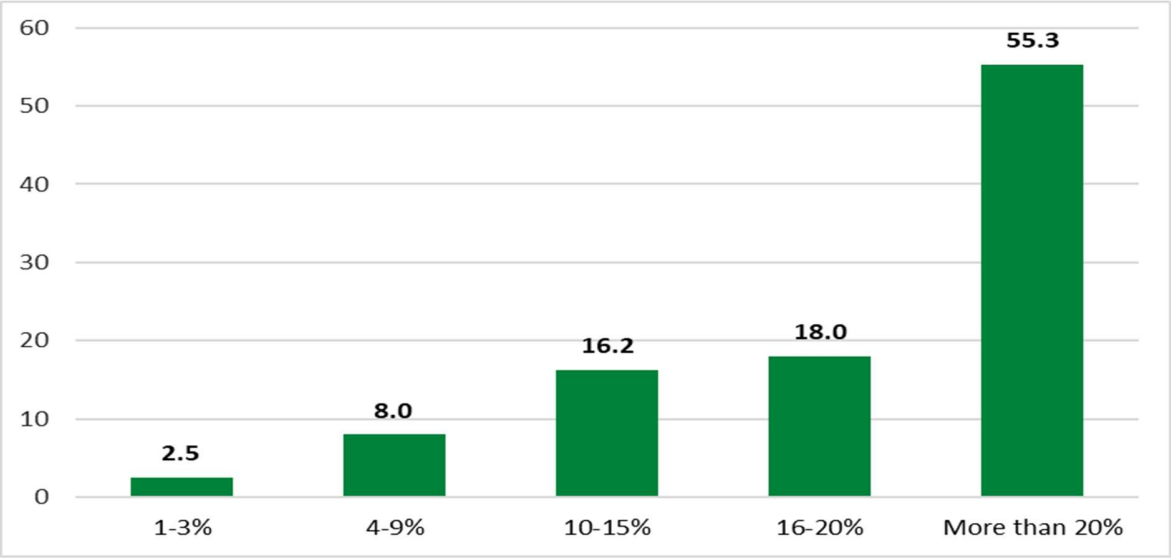
Table 16. Do you think that the situation of accessible tourism should be improved? Responses by level of educational attainment

	It is not necessary, or minor improvements should be made		Yes, but there are more important things		Continuous effort must be made, or equal access should be provided for all as soon as possible		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
low	15	5.8%	51	19.8%	192	74.4%	258	100.0%
medium	36	6.7%	60	11.2%	439	82.1%	535	100.0%
high	3	1.5%	19	9.8%	172	88.7%	194	100.0%
Total	54	5.5%	130	13.2%	803	81.4%	987	100.0%

Source: own research results

When asked what percentage of the country's population could be targeted by accessible tourism, the majority (55.3%) estimated it to be over twenty per cent. They were followed by those who estimated the proportion of the population targeted by accessible tourism to be between 16 and 20 per cent. Still, a similar proportion of respondents estimated the proportion to be between 10 and 15 per cent (see Figure 4). According to the latest data from the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity (31 December 2023), 4.22% of the population of Romania is considered disabled. This proportion was reported by less than a tenth of respondents. Although the target group for accessible tourism may not only be people with disabilities, the overestimation of the proportion of this target group is substantial.

Figure 4. What percentage of the domestic population do you think could be the target group of accessible tourism? (percentage, M = 946)



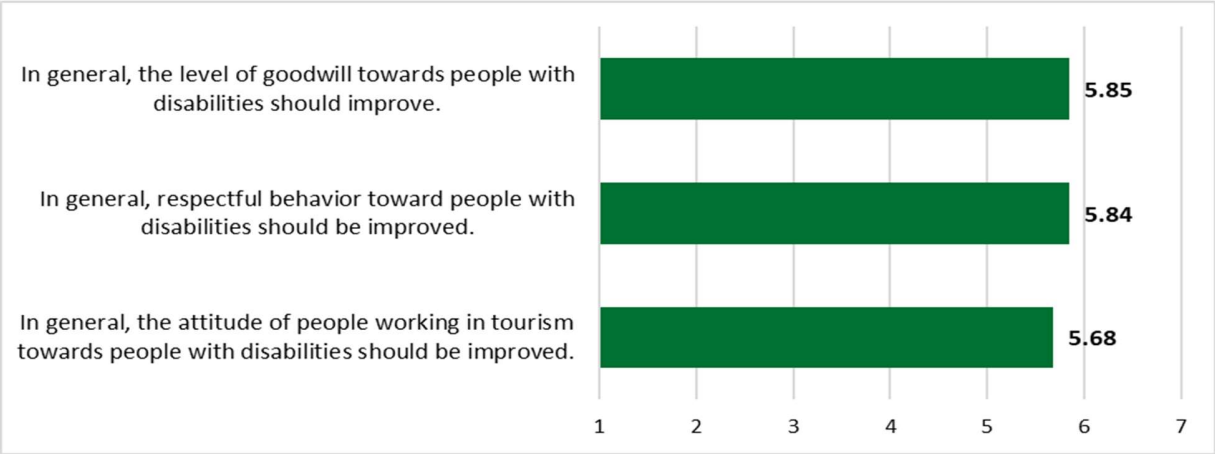
Source: own research results

Treatment towards people with disabilities

On average, respondents strongly agree that goodwill and respectful behaviour towards people with disabilities should be improved. They also strongly agree that the attitude of tourism workers towards people with disabilities should be improved. The average levels of agreement with these statements are shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. How much do you agree with the following statements?

Average values on a scale from 1 to 7



Source: own research results

When the question is examined according to the various explanatory variables, we find significant differences in educational attainment: on average, those with secondary or higher education agree more with the above statements than those with less education (see Table 17).

Table 17. How much do you agree with the following statements?
according to educational attainment
(Significant results according to the independent samples t-test)

	low		medium or high				
	N	**Mean**	**N**	**Mean**	**t**	**df**	**P**
In general, the level of goodwill towards people with disabilities should improve.	192	5.48	650	5.95	-2.361	269.143	.019
In general, respectful behaviour toward people with disabilities should be improved.	189	5.45	645	5.96	-2.571	264.218	.011

In general, the attitude of people working in tourism towards people with disabilities should be improved.	194	5.06	647	5.86	-4.077	278.148	.000

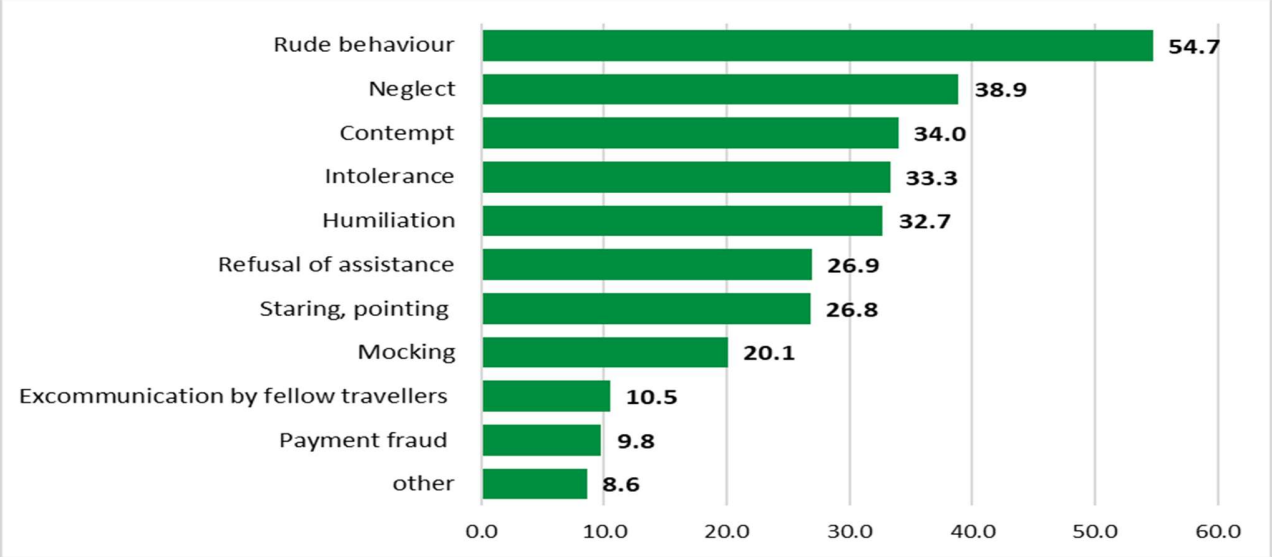
Source: own research results

Respondents who have a person with a disability in their family, friends, or close acquaintances are, on average, more likely (*M* = 5.90) to agree that respectful behaviour towards disabled people should be improved than those who do not (*M* = 5.48). The differences are significant by the chi-square test: *t*(226.00) = 2.023, *p* = .044.

Another difference was found in age: middle-aged and older people were more likely (*M* = 5.76) to agree that tourism workers' attitudes towards people with disabilities should be improved than young people (*M* = 5.27). The differences are significant by chi-square test: *t*(180.07) = -2.27, *p* = .024.

These opinions do not seem unfounded when you consider that more than half of respondents (54.7%) had personally experienced rude behaviour towards people with disabilities while travelling, almost two-fifths had experienced neglect, and a third had experienced contempt, intolerance or humiliation (see Figure 6). More than a quarter of respondents had also experienced refusal of assistance or being stared at or pointed at, while two-tenths had experienced mocking. A tenth of respondents also experienced excommunication by peers or even payment fraud. Other responses mentioned indifference to people with disabilities, not getting discounts, but also having to pay extra.

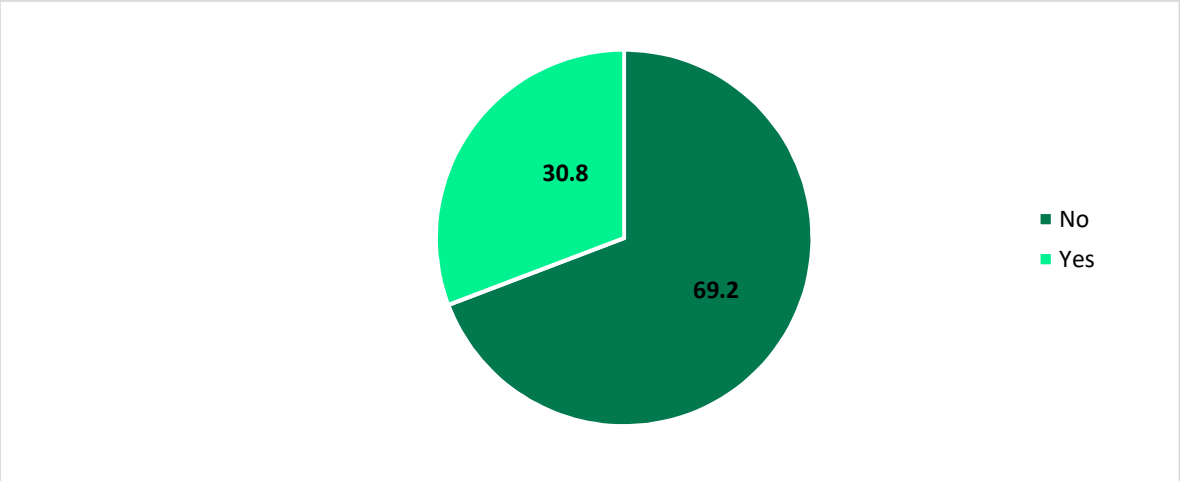
Figure 6. Discrimination against disabled people personally seen/experienced while travelling (Frequency of mentions among those who completed the questionnaire in full)



Source: own research results

In addition to discrimination and adverse incidents, there are also positive examples, with a third of respondents having seen good practice in helping people with disabilities participate in tourism (see Figure 7). A further 9.6% of respondents had seen good examples at home and abroad, and almost half of the respondents (47.2%) had seen positive examples of how to help people with disabilities participate in tourism at home.

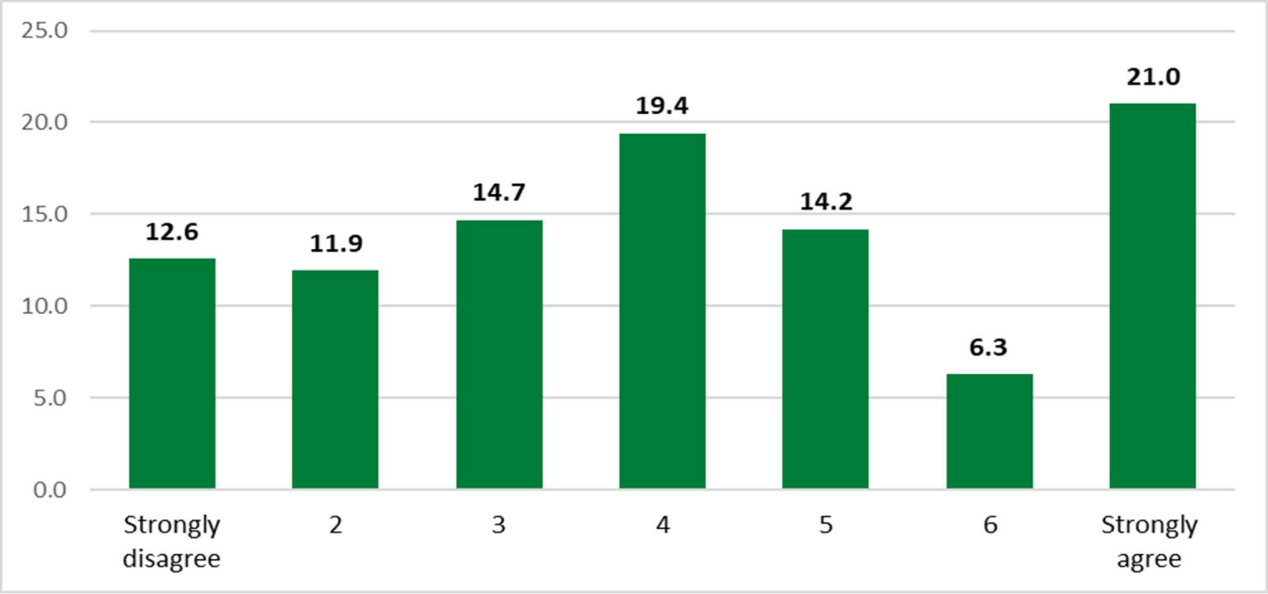
Figure 7. Have you seen good examples of helping people with disabilities to participate in tourism? Percentage distribution of responses to this question (N = 851)



Source: own research results

Respondents' opinions about misinformation from accommodation providers and other facilities were contradictory. Two-thirds (41.5%) agreed it was becoming less common in the country. Still, a similar proportion (39.2%) disagreed that false communication about accessibility by accommodation providers and other institutions was becoming less common (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. False communication about accessibility by accommodation providers and other institutions is becoming less and less common in my country (percentage, N = 753)

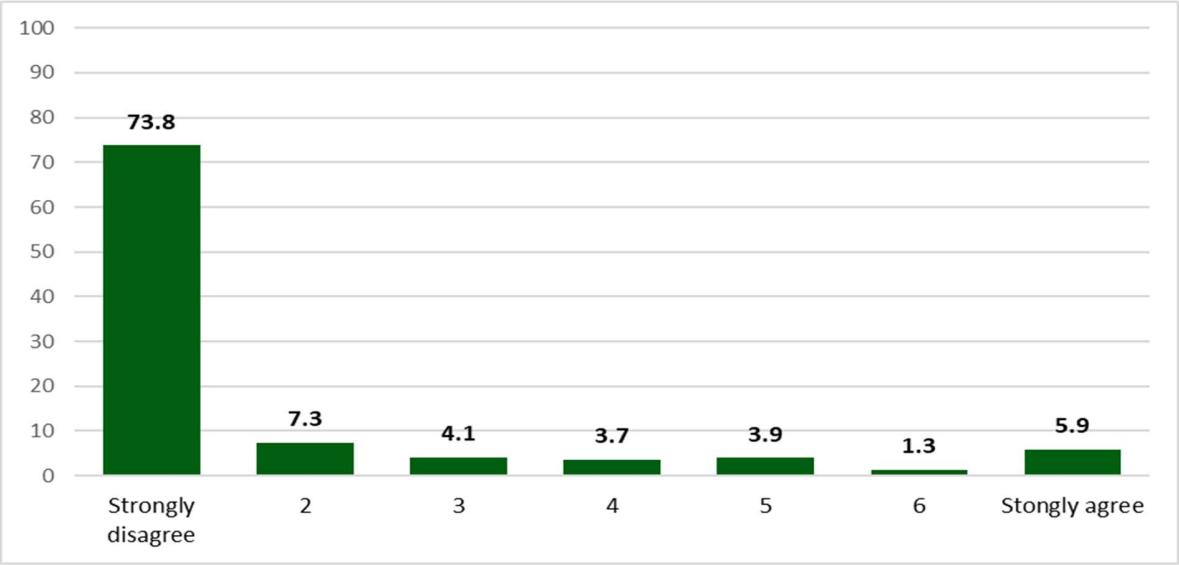


Source: own research results

Not surprisingly, respondents disagree with the statement that *Tourism service providers are becoming more prepared and open to receiving guests with disabilities* (*M* = 3.72) or with the statement that *The opportunities for accessible tourism are constantly improving in my country* (*M* = 3.99). Mean scores were on a scale of 1 to 7, with one strongly disagreeing and seven strongly agreeing.

Respondents generally have no objection to being in the same place as a person with a disability, even if the disability is visible. However, there is still work to be done to change this mentality, as a small group of people are still reluctant to be in the same place as a person with a visible disability when travelling (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. During my travels, I don't like to be in the same place as people with visible disabilities (percentage, N = 825)



Source: own research results

This attitude is more prevalent among men (*M* = 2.04), rural people (*M* = 2.09), people with at least secondary education (*M* = 1.96) and those who do not have a person with a disability in their immediate environment (*M* = 2. 13), compared to women (*M* = 1.67), urban dwellers (*M* = 1.71), those with low levels of education (*M* = 1.43), or respondents who have a person with a disability in their family or among friends or close acquaintances (*M* = 1.80).

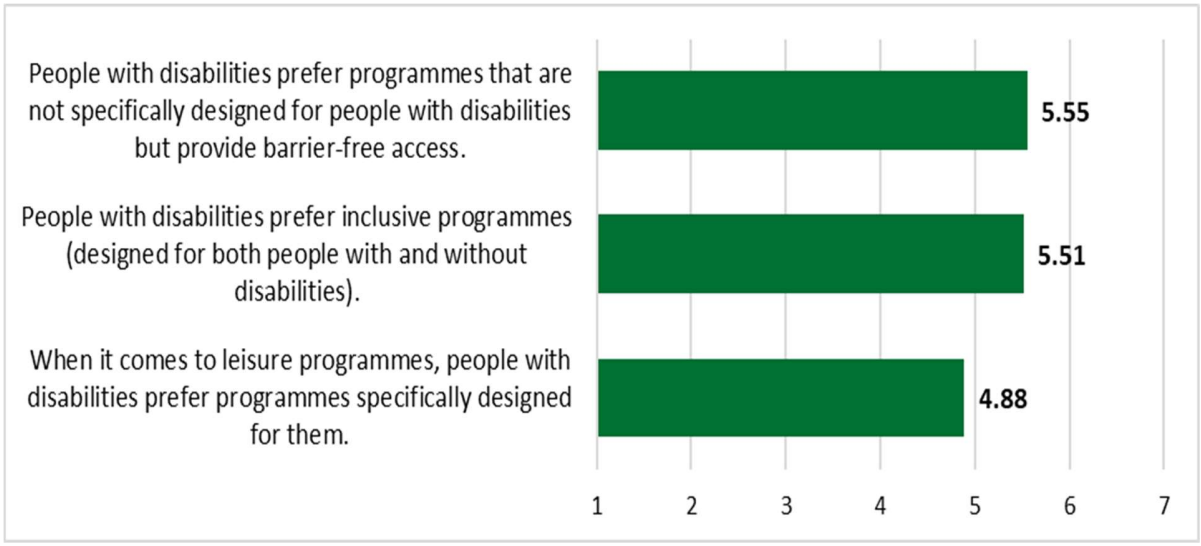
Opinions on people with disabilities preferences

The survey also asked the public about the tourism preferences of people with disabilities. As can be seen in Figure 10, respondents believe that people with disabilities prefer programmes that are not explicitly designed for them but provide barrier-free access (*M* = 5. 55) but also agree that people with disabilities prefer inclusive programs designed for both people with and without

disabilities (*M* = 5.51). Finally, on average, significantly fewer people (*M* = 4.88) agree that people with disabilities prefer programs specifically designed for them in recreational programs.

Figure 10. How much do you agree with the following statements?

Average values of the answers (1 - Strongly disagree, 7- Strongly agree)



Source: own research results

For the latter question, significant differences were found for gender and type of settlement. On average, women (*M* = 5.02) and rural respondents (*M* = 5.07) were more likely than men (*M* = 4. 73) and urban residents (*M* = 4.78). (Results of t-test for gender difference: *t*(797) = -1.981, *p* = .048. Results of t-test for the type of settlement: *t*(797) = -1.940, *p* = .053.)

However, respondents who have a person with a disability in their family or among their friends or close acquaintances have a higher average (*M* = 5.64) perception that people with disabilities prefer programmes that are not specifically designed for them but provide barrier-free access compared to those who do not have such a person nearby (*M* = 5. 13). The difference between the two variables is significant by t-test: *t*(756) = 2.946, *p* = .003. Similarly, those with lower education (*M* = 5.88) have a similar perception to those with intermediate or higher education

(*M* = 5.46). The difference between the two variables is significant by t-test: *t*(285.564) = 2. 684, *p* = .008.

No significant differences were found by age for these questions.

Opinions on the tourism preferences of people with disability

On average, respondents tend to agree that people with disabilities do not travel abroad much for leisure (*M* = 5.14) as well as that domestic leisure travel by people with disabilities is well below the national average (see Table 18).

Table 18. Assessing the frequency of travel by people with disabilities, descriptive statistics

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
People with disabilities do not travel much within their countries for leisure purposes.	862	1	7	5.04	2.162
People with disabilities do not travel much abroad for leisure purposes.	809	1	7	5.14	2.091

Source: own research results

Looking at the question in more detail, we found a significant difference in the mean response rates by the type of municipality where the respondent lives. The mean values of rural respondents' responses are higher than those of urban respondents (see Table 19).

Table 19. Perceptions of travel frequency of people with disabilities: significant differences by urban-rural area (Results of independent samples t-test)

	urban		rural				
	N	**M**	**N**	**M**	**t**	**df**	**p**
People with disabilities do not travel much within their countries for leisure purposes.	558	4.86	304	5.36	-3.301	672.882	.001
People with disabilities do not travel much abroad for leisure purposes.	520	5.03	289	5.35	-2.151	622.502	.032

Source: own research results

When looking at the frequency of domestic travel by people with disabilities, we found differences according to whether or not they have a family member or friend with a disability a close friend or not. On average, the former are more likely to agree ($M = 5.22$) with this statement than those who do not have such a person in their immediate environment ($M = 4.63$). The difference between the two variables is significant according to the t-test: $t(220.679) = 2.985$, $p = .003$.

There were differences by age in the perception of travel abroad, with young people being more likely to agree ($M = 45.6$) that leisure travel abroad by people with disabilities is well below the national average compared to middle-aged and older people ($M = 4.93$). The difference between the two variables was significant according to the t-test: $t(251.908) = 4.540$, $p < .001$.

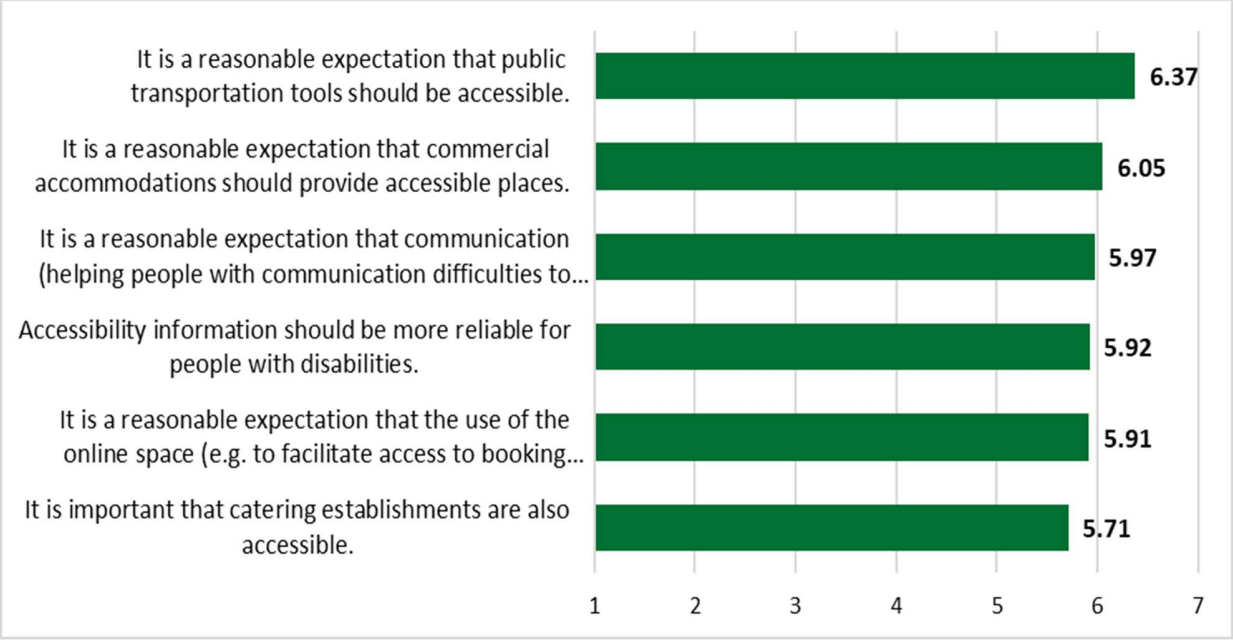
Reasonable expectations of accessibility

Respondents believe that it is reasonable to expect people with disabilities to have access to a range of services (see Figure 11). The mean scores for statements relating to this are very high, up to a score of six on a scale of one to seven, with one being the least agree and seven being the most agree. Of these, access to public transport and the fairness of accessible places in

commercial accommodation were the most strongly decided upon. This is followed by the expectation to help people with communication difficulties get their messages across with tools and trained staff. Respondents also agree that information on accessibility needs to be more reliable for people with disabilities and that the online space (e.g., facilitate access to booking services and related websites) needs to be accessible to people with disabilities. The lowest average value is for the statement catering establishments, which must be accessible, but this value is also close to six.

Figure 11. How much do you agree with the following statements?

(Averages values; 1 - Strongly disagree, 7-Strongly agree)



Source: own research results

On average, men are more likely to agree (*M* = 6.15) that it is reasonable to expect that the use of the online space should be accessible than women (*M* = 5.71). The difference between the two variables is significant according to the t-test: *t*(841.249) = 3.256, *p* = .001.

There are also significant differences by age group (see Table 20), with young people more likely than older people to agree that commercial accommodation and restaurants should be more accessible to people with disabilities. Similarly, providing access to online space (e.g. more accessible access to reservation services and related websites) for people with disabilities is also essential.

Table 20. Young and older people's views on access - significant differences (Results of independent samples t-test)

	youth		middle-aged and elderly				
	N	**M**	**N**	**M**	**t**	**df**	**p**
It is reasonable to expect that commercial accommodations should provide accessible places.	127	6.42	683	5.98	3.059	228.955	.002
It is essential that catering establishments are also accessible.	127	6.16	692	5.62	3.323	230.971	.001
It is reasonable to expect that the online space will be accessible.	146	6.21	706	5.85	2.286	241.010	.023

Source: own research results

Providing access to different services for people with disabilities is considered more important by people with secondary or higher education than by those with lower education (see Table 21). In their case, the emphasis is mainly on access to intellectual access, with mean scores above six, such as access to online space (*M* = 6.16), communication (*M* = 6.12), or reliable information on accessibility (*M* = 6.06). Still, they consider access to catering services necessary (*M* = 5.80).

Table 21. Significant differences of opinion on access by educational attainment (Results of independent samples t-test)

	low		medium or high				
	N	M	N	M	t	df	p
It is important that catering establishments are also accessible.	183	5.37	636	5.80	-2.161	253.516	.032
It is reasonable to expect that the online space will be accessible.	191	5.05	660	6.16	-5.540	240.033	.000
It is a reasonable expectation that communication should be accessible.	192	5.45	648	6.12	-3.468	252.621	.001
Accessibility information should be more reliable for people with disabilities.	189	5.46	645	6.06	-3.011	254.453	.003

Source: own research results

Differences were found for this group of questions regarding having a family member, friend, or acquaintance with a disability. If someone has a person with a disability in the family or among friends and acquaintances, access to certain services (such as access to accommodation and catering or helping people with communication difficulties to get their messages across) is considered more critical than for those who do not have such a person in their immediate circle of close contacts (see Table 22).

Table 22. Significant differences in reasonable expectation of access based on whether there is a person with a disability in the family or among friends and acquaintances (Results of independent samples t-test)

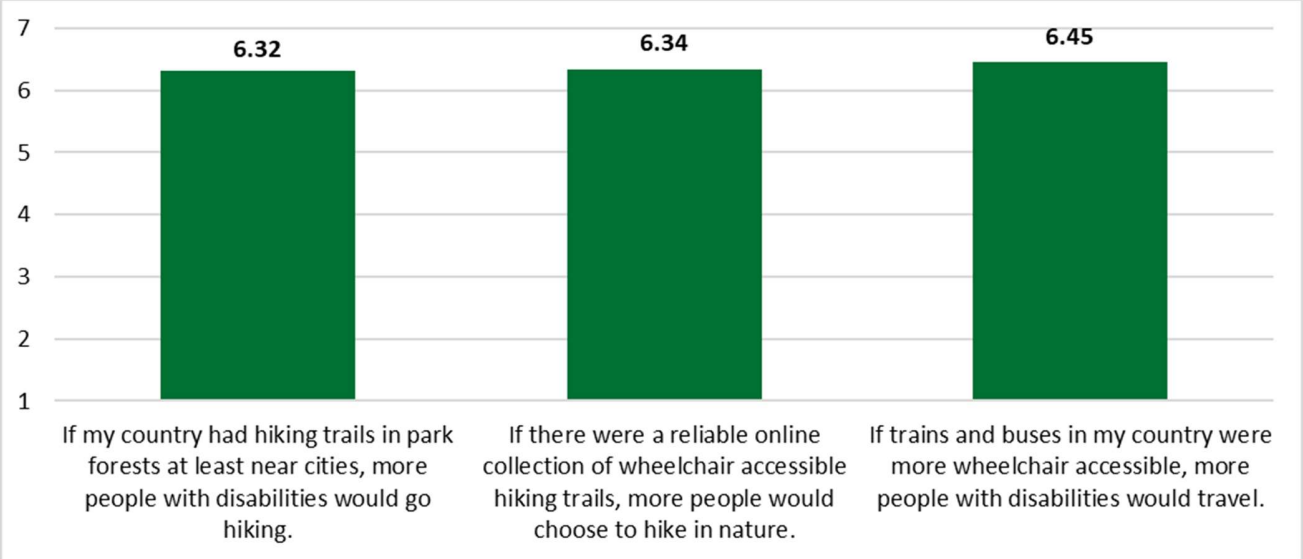
	yes		no				
	N	M	N	M	t	df	p
It is reasonable to expect that commercial accommodations should provide accessible places.	642	6.17	150	5.48	3.446	192.221	.001
It is important that catering establishments are also accessible.	646	5.79	152	5.33	2.209	208.950	.028
It is a reasonable expectation that communication should be accessible.	656	6.05	163	5.57	2.518	227.830	.012

Source: own research results

Expectations about accessibility also apply to the expansion of tourism opportunities for people with disabilities (see Figure 12), with respondents mainly agreeing (*M* = 6.45) that making trains and buses accessible would help to increase the number of people with disabilities travelling. Respondents think a reliable online collection of wheelchair-accessible hiking trails (*M* = 6.34) would help people with disabilities enjoy hiking in nature. However, hiking trails in park forests near cities would also help (*M* = 6.32).

Figure 12. Perception of tourism opportunities for people with disabilities

Average values on a scale from 1 to 7



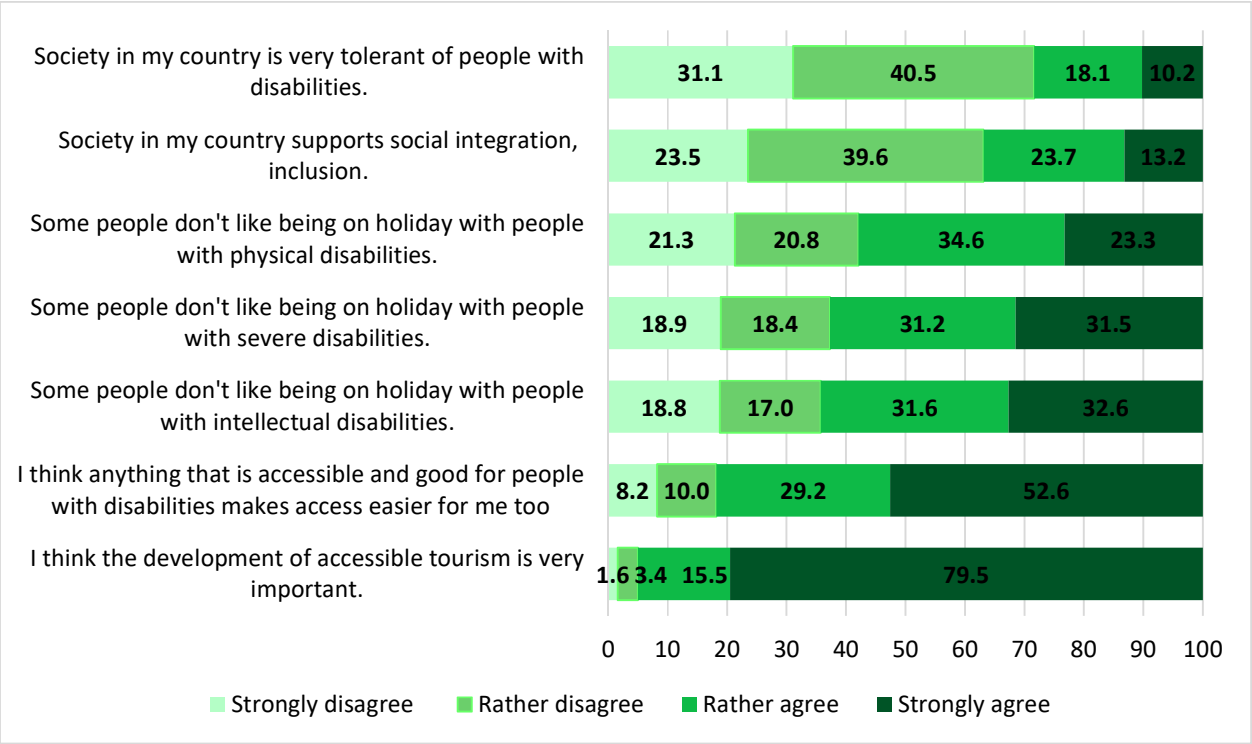
Source: own research results

General opinions on disability and accessible tourism

In addition to their own opinions, the survey also asked about their general perceptions of members of society, which are presented in Figure 13. This shows that respondents have a negative opinion of the attitude of the population towards people with disabilities, with the vast majority (71.6%) disagreeing with the statement that *Society in my country is very tolerant of people with disabilities*, just as the majority (63.1%) do not agree that *Society in my country supports social integration, inclusion*. In addition, two-fifths (42.1%) assume that some people do not like to go on holiday with people with physical disabilities. Still, a similar proportion (37.3%) also believes that some people do not like to go on holiday with people with severe disabilities. More than a third of respondents (35.7%) think that some people do not like to go on holiday

with people with intellectual disabilities. Most respondents (81.8%) believe that anything accessible and suitable for people with disabilities makes it easier for them to access. Perhaps this contributes to the fact that almost all (95.0%) agree that it is essential to develop accessible tourism.

Figure 13. Opinions on people with disabilities and accessible tourism (percentage)



Source: own research results

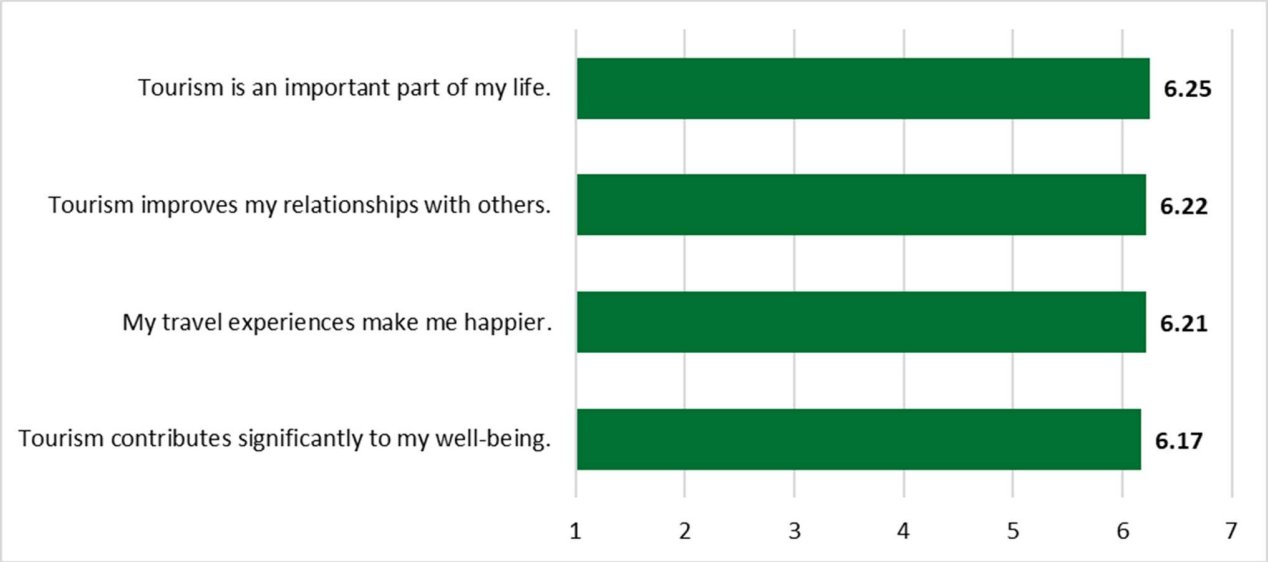
Tourism preferences

The survey also asked respondents what tourism means to them and how much they like to use modern technology when they travel. Again, opinions were asked on a scale of one to seven, with one being a strongly disagree and seven being a strongly agree. As shown in Figure 14 below, the statement *Tourism is an important part of my life* received the highest average score, followed

by the statement *Tourism improves my relationships with others*. The importance of tourism is also indicated by the statements: *My travel experiences make me happier*, and *Tourism contributes significantly to my well-being*, scoring above six. Tourism is essential to respondents' lives, making them happy, contributing to their well-being, and improving their relationships with others.

Figure 14. Opinions on tourism

(Average values on a scale from 1 to 7)



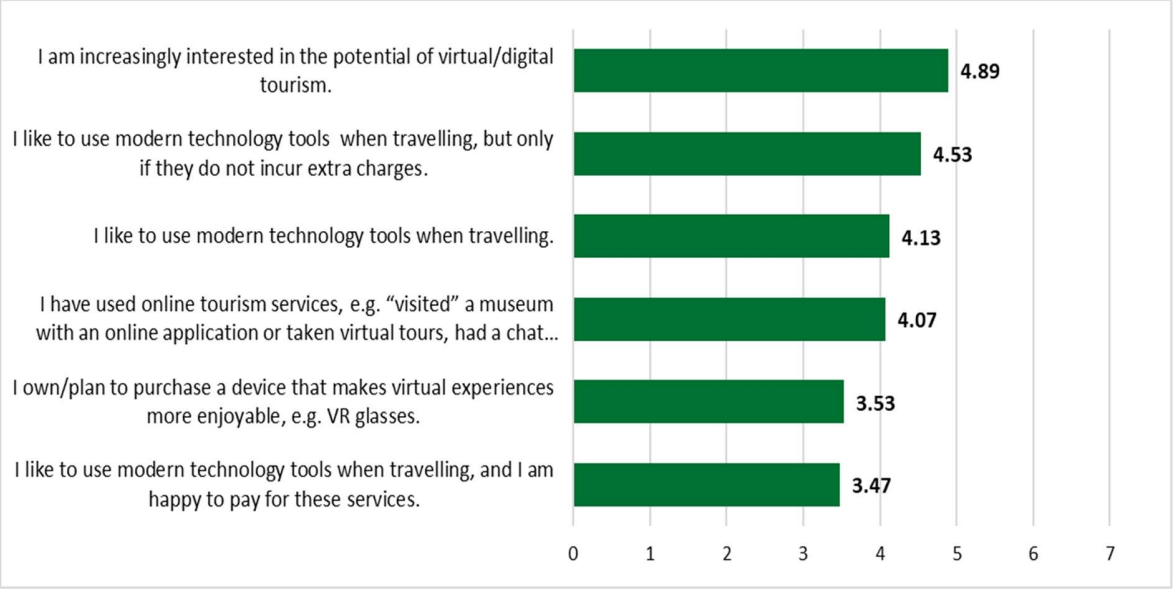
Source: own research results

As for the use of modern technological tools such as apps, augmented reality and virtual reality tools that facilitate and enhance the travel experience, it can be said that they are not yet widespread in the country (see Figure 15). There is interest in them, and they are willing to use them as long as they are free but not willing to pay. Many people do not have the tools to make virtual experiences more enjoyable but do not plan to buy them. Online tourist services such as virtual tours, online museum "visits", or chatting with a chatbot are slightly higher than this, but

the average score is just above a four. The country's widespread use of modern technological tools remains to be seen.

Figure 15. Opinions on the use of modern technology in tourism

(Average values on a scale from 1 to 7)



Source: own research results

Summary

In summary, the Romanian population is broadly aware that the situation of people with disabilities is not the most appropriate in the country. They believe that even basic things such as rail transport and long-distance bus travel are difficult for people with disabilities. They also think that there are shortcomings in accessibility, but despite some positive examples, attitudes towards people with disabilities are not the best.

Generally speaking, the difficulties, problems and challenges faced by people with disabilities are, on average, perceived to be lower by those who do not have a disabled person in their family, friends or acquaintances than by those who do.

The majority acknowledge that the opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in tourism are inadequate; presumably, because of this, their leisure travel frequency is well below the national average, both for domestic and international trips. However, to achieve this, it is not enough to invest in accessibility; it is essential to improve the attitude of tourism workers towards people with disabilities and the general population's helpfulness and respectful behaviour towards people with disabilities. Continuous efforts must, therefore, be made to improve the situation of accessible tourism, with significant investment and a change of attitude to ensure equal access for all to tourist services and attractions. This is particularly important as tourism makes most people happy, contributes to their well-being and improves their relationships with others.