SESSION 14 – EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Moderator: Mathieu Angelo

Speakers: Marco Pizzio, Roberto Scano, Simon April, Verónica Gómez, Tiago Valente

The session "Education and Training" explored how accessible tourism can be strengthened through structured learning, professional capacity building, and cross-continental collaboration. Moderated by **Mathieu Angelo from CAWaB, Belgium**, the discussion brought together experts from Europe and the Americas to examine how education can bridge the gap between policy and real-world practise.

Marco Pizzio and Roberto Scano opened the session by presenting AccessibleEU, the European Commission's flagship initiative under the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030. Pizzio outlined the programme's four pillars —built environment, transportation, ICT, and policy— highlighting its mission to promote knowledge exchange, connect national experts, and support the implementation of EU accessibility legislation, including the European Accessibility Act entering into force in June 2025. He emphasised the importance of training personnel at all levels —hospitality workers, drivers, and information staff— to ensure that accessibility investments translate into inclusive experiences. Scano focused on the ICT dimension, explaining that accessibility must be built into design processes rather than added later. He warned against "quick-fix" solutions such as plug-ins and stressed the role of standards (EN 301 549, WCAG 2.2) in harmonising digital accessibility across Europe. Scano underlined that technology, when properly implemented, enhances autonomy and inclusion for everyone, from blind travellers using AI-powered glasses to multilingual visitors navigating digital tools. The speakers called for a European certification system to recognise professional competence in accessibility training.

Simon April, Director of Training and Advocacy at Kéroul (Canada), presented Quebec's hands-on training model, which involves trainers with disabilities as co-facilitators. The programme covers hospitality, events, transport, and museums, offering both theoretical sessions and immersive workshops. Each session blends technical knowledge with empathy-building exercises such as roleplay and safe transfer simulations. April reported measurable results: 90% of participants feel more confident interacting with travellers with disabilities, and 84% of organisations implement changes within six months. He

stressed that accessibility must be taught as a living culture—adaptable, experiential, and evidence-based.

Verónica Gómez, Director of ISTO Americas, concluded with a presentation on the Costa Rican Network for Accessible Tourism, a nonprofit alliance that promotes fair and inclusive tourism through collaboration among local communities, businesses, and public authorities. The network's projects illustrate that accessibility is both a right and a driver of sustainable development, expanding markets while fostering equity and environmental responsibility. Gómez closed with a call to "be an ally" in building tourism for all, reminding participants that true inclusion combines technical expertise with empathy and human connection.

The session ended with a shared reflection: while technology and standards are essential, the heart of accessible tourism lies in training people to understand and serve others with respect, competence, and care.

Watch Session 14 on YouTube. (run time 1:24:07)