

Persons with sensory disabilities as a target group for the tourism industry – Exchange of good practices

Desk research, Portugal

In statistical terms, nobody knows how many deaf people there are in Portugal, but the official number is around 26 thousand. However, there are 115,000 people in our country who do not speak Portuguese sign language but have a hearing impairment.

To better understand the offers for this type of population regarding tourism, a small survey was conducted, with some of the main tourism agencies operating in the Greater Porto Region (National Tourism Registration Platform), by conducting a survey on the supply available for people with sensory (visual and hearing) disabilities. We only got a response from one of them, indicating that they had no “offers specific to this condition.”

Hands to Discover Project

The “Hands to Discover” project has developed an online platform that allows the deaf community to get to know Porto in a more complete and enriching way, making known what Greater Porto has to offer: such as hotels, restaurants, museums, nightlife spaces, hiking, among other possibilities. Parallel to this publicity of the spaces is the objective of sensitizing partners to issues that concern the deaf community and the difficulties that it encounters daily.

Making Porto a more inclusive city is the main objective of the “Hands to Discover” platform, pioneering work that allows real accessibility and autonomy in places of tourist interest for deaf citizens who plan their leisure time.

There you can find information about places, scheduling visits, choosing points of interest (for deaf citizens like anyone who wants to travel to Portugal). Users also have the option of accompanying an accredited Sign Language interpreter.

The platform is essentially informative and was promoted in Europe and the United States. It is an innovative idea, national and European. The project started in Porto, but intends to spread to other cities.

One of the mentors of “Hands to Discover” is Ana Bela Baltazar, graduated in Clinical Psychology, but with over twenty years of experience as a sign language interpreter - she is an official interpreter of RTP (*Rádio e Televisão de Portugal*) and author of the Portuguese Sign Language Dictionary.

According to the information obtained from this person in charge, the platform has recorded contact from both agencies and individuals, but cannot estimate an accurate number of people covered.

From the visits already made, it can be said that the public is mainly interested in cultural and gastronomic tourism, and that the problems lie in access to information and consequent lack of autonomy.

The responsible for the creation of “Hands to Discover” also mentions that the platform is seen by European entities as an innovation, unlike entities from North America, which are already familiar with the concept.