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ACCESSIBLE TOURISM IS BIG MONEY

At a congress held last week by the European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT), over 200 representatives from international disability organisations, tourist boards and private enterprise came to the overwhelming conclusion that accessible tourism is the fastest-growing business opportunity in the tourism industry.

Delegates heard that, according to figures from the European Disability Forum, there are around 50 million people with a disability in Europe. Take into account the fast-growing population over 65 and the fact that people with disabilities rarely travel alone and the market nearly trebles. A recent study by the University of Surrey estimates that 127 million people, or 27% of the EU population, would benefit from accessible tourism, and that this niche industry has an estimated value of 80 billion euros per year. That figure doesn't include pregnant women, families with young children and – vitally – travellers from the US, Australia and the rest of the world.

Not a small niche, says ENAT's co-ordinator Ivor Ambrose, summing up the conference mood: "Accessible tourism is big money and the market is growing fast. Partly because we're all getting older. The tourism industry is realising that open access benefits all customers – it's a competitive advantage, not just a social or legal responsibility."

The three-day congress was organised by ENAT's Spanish partner Fundación ONCE and held in Valencia, Spain. Simultaneous Spanish-English translation, sign language and subtitles allowed 200 members from 22 countries to participate, many of them with a wide range of disabilities themselves.

More information and presentations from the congress can be found on the ENAT website, www.accessibletourism.org.

ENAT is supported by the European Commission DG for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities with the aim of mainstreaming disability policies in the tourism sector. It is coordinated by EWORX SA, Greece, with eight international partners from Belgium, Greece, Ireland, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Since its launch in May 2006, it has attracted over 380 members from 43 countries. From January 2008 ENAT will operate as an International NGO, registered in Belgium. The network is open to all who support – or want to know more about – accessible tourism.

For more information please contact the ENAT Press Officer Monica Guy on press@accessibletourism.org or call +33 1 4209 5614.

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