

GUIDANCE LEAFLET FOR DISABLED PERSONS & PERSONS WITH REDUCED MOBILITY (PRM) WHO MAY BE “INFREQUENT” OR “FIRST-TIME FLYERS”

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As a disabled person or a person with reduced mobility (PRM), you should be able to enjoy the same opportunities to travel by air as everyone else.

In E.U. Member States your rights are protected under Regulation (EC) 1107/2006.

Most services you will need will be provided free of charge, e.g. assistance with boarding the aircraft. But it is worth making sure, when booking, that there will be no charges made. In E.U. Member States, the Regulation sets out the assistance that both the airport and the airline must provide and specifies that this assistance must be “free of charge”. Non-European States should apply similar provisions as recommended by the European Civil Aviation Conference (ECAC).

To ensure all goes smoothly and your journey is as stress free and comfortable as possible, there are some simple “points” to follow:

- Make sure you have all the information you need before finalising your travel plans.
- Be realistic about your own needs, particularly if you cannot walk long distances without help. The distances between the check in desks and the departure gates can be very long.
- Check that the airline or tour operator is able to meet those needs.
- Contact them to make sure they know, understand and can meet your particular needs.
- Don’t assume that help will be available “on demand”. Pre-booking assistance at least 48 hours in advance is the best approach.
- Don’t assume that the Special Assistance staff know the best way to lift or transfer you - if they don't ask, tell them! Even though, in all European states they should all have been trained in safe lifting, etc, it is always best to tell them what your particular needs and preferences are.

The airline also has responsibilities to you as a passenger. You must both play your part if the journey is to be as comfortable and stress free as possible.

Under international agreements and E.U. law, compensation for lost or damaged personal baggage (which includes mobility equipment) is subject to limits that may not cover the true costs of replacement or repair.

It is recommended that before you travel you should check the limit of your travel insurance and make sure your travel insurance provides cover for your mobility equipment. You may need to extend your insurance policy in this area.

Getting the information you need

Assistance

There may be specialist organisations in your country who can advise you on the services offered by various airports and airlines. They will generally be well experienced in dealing with disabled persons and PRMs and can offer informed advice on the services available. Some may also be able to make your travel arrangements direct.

Alternatively, you may want to use a particular travel agency or booking agent. It is vital when you make your booking that you tell the agent about your particular travel needs so that they can be recorded as part of your booking. It is recommended that you should request written confirmation to ensure that they have recorded your requirements accurately.

Your needs

Airlines use an internationally recognised coding system to identify the level of assistance they will need to provide to disabled persons and PRMs. An indicative list is included in the following pages.

The questions the agent (or through them, the airline) asks may seem intrusive, but they are necessary to ensure that you receive the type of assistance you need.

The following are some examples of the questions you might be asked:

1. *What are your needs?*
2. *Are you able to walk through the airport terminal to the aircraft, or will you require a wheelchair / buggy?*
3. *If you require a wheelchair will you be using your own wheelchair?*
4. *Is your own wheelchair:*
 - collapsible?
 - power-operated?

(Not all aircraft can accommodate wheelchairs with batteries in the aircraft hold for safety reasons. It is very important to check before you travel.)
5. *How heavy is your chair and how big is it (width and length)?*
6. *Do you need someone to push you in your wheelchair?*
7. *Are you able to walk up and down aircraft steps, or will you require assistance boarding and disembarking?*
8. *Can you transfer from a wheelchair unaided?*
9. *Are you able to walk about inside the aircraft, or will you need to use an on-board wheelchair (aisle chair), if there is one?*
10. *Do you need to know if there will be a toilet on the plane that is accessible to the onboard wheelchair (aisle chair)?*
11. *What assistance will you need, if any, during the flight? Please specify. The airline cannot assist with feeding, lifting, communicating, medicating and providing assistance inside the toilets. If you need help with those you will need to be accompanied.*
12. *What type of seat suits you best?*
13. *Are you taking any medical equipment?*
14. *Are you asthmatic or do you have other breathing difficulties?*

If you also have a serious medical condition, you must contact the airline and it may be necessary to provide a « Fitness to fly » certificate. You may be asked at the airport to confirm your fitness to fly.

Booking

You will be able to have access to all types of ticket, e.g. economy, business, etc., but not all of those types of ticket may be able to offer the facilities you require. For example, if you need extra legroom, an economy class seat may be unsuitable.

You are strongly advised to make your reservation in advance where possible 7 days in advance, but at least 48 hours before you intend to travel. This should ensure that the assistance you need is made available. It may also save disappointment.

Some airlines limit the number of disabled passengers who can travel on any flight; limits are related to the size of the aircraft and the level of service required by the passenger. By booking early you can increase your chances of travelling when you want.

Of course, if you need to cancel a reservation you should let the airline know as soon as practicable, so that your seat is made available for other disabled persons or persons with reduced mobility.

Boarding and disembarking

If your pre-planning has worked, then all your needs should be met in accordance to your booking.

If you use a wheelchair, you need to be aware of what will happen to it during the flight.

It may be possible to store a manual, folding wheelchair in the passenger compartment if suitable accommodation is available.

It is more likely, however, that your wheelchair will be stowed in the luggage hold; this would certainly be the case for all powered wheelchairs.

In either case, airports and airlines should allow you to remain in your own wheelchair to the door of the aircraft. They should also deliver your wheelchair to the same place upon arrival at your destination. In the case of heavy, non-collapsible powered wheelchairs this may not be possible. If, for safety reasons, the wheelchair needs to be stowed in a particular way in the aircraft hold, or at airports where wheelchairs have to be lifted up and down stairs at the gate and staff would be at risk, it may not be able to allow you to remain in your own wheelchair.

You also need to be aware of security arrangements which apply to all passengers but may be particularly significant if you need to use mobility equipment or carry medication with you on the flight. All mobility equipment, including wheelchairs is subject to rigorous security checks. However, these checks should be done in a way that minimizes your inconvenience or stress.

You may also be subjected to a body search. If you would prefer to have this done in private because of the nature of your disability, you can ask to be taken to a separate screening area.

In some airports you will be required to transfer to an airport wheelchair to pass through the scanning equipment so that your chair can be thoroughly checked. Searches may also be made of the content of your hand luggage. This should always be done with discretion and items should always be replaced in the same order.

There is currently a restriction on the carriage of liquids on board aircraft to a maximum of 100 ml per container. However, you are allowed to carry essential medicines of more than 100ml in your hand baggage, but you will need prior approval from the airline and departure airport and supporting documentation (e.g. a letter from your doctor or a prescription).

Make sure you have any necessary medication in your hand baggage and check that you have packed enough to cover any delays to your flight or in case of a lost or delayed baggage.

On board

If you require the use of an onboard wheelchair (aisle chair), then this should have been confirmed when you made your booking. You will not be able to use your own wheelchair on board any flight because the aisles are too narrow to be able to move up and down. If you have a sensory impairment, the airline staff should make themselves known to you and should offer the appropriate level of assistance during the flight. For example, they should explain the emergency procedures and they can assist with food packaging.

If you have breathing difficulties and require supplementary oxygen for the duration of the flight, the airline may provide supplementary oxygen. Some airlines will make a charge for this service. Some airlines will allow you to carry your own oxygen – you should always check with your airline beforehand. Airlines are not required to carry oxygen for first aid purposes although many do. They are only required to carry oxygen for passenger use after a cabin de-pressurisation and in medical emergencies.

At the end of your journey

If the airline meets all your needs - in accordance with your booking - then your journey should be as comfortable as anyone else's. But if things do go wrong, it is worth notifying the problems promptly to the relevant bodies.

For flights within the European Union or provided by an E.U. airline, you should complain in the first instance to the managing body of the airport concerned or to the air carrier concerned, or to the tour operator if you do not know the air carrier. If you are not satisfied with the way your complaint is handled through these channels, you can complain to the National Enforcement Body for the country concerned. A list of contacts for such bodies in the European Union is published on the European Commission website:

http://ec.europa.eu/transport/air_portal/passenger_rights/prm/doc/2006_07_05_national_enforcement_bodies_en.pdf

For airports and air carriers outside the E.U. you should follow the same procedure but you may not have the same level of legal redress. If you are not satisfied with the response you receive then you may want to consider taking it up with the aviation authority or the ministry of transport in your country.

AIRLINE CODES

Air carriers have defined codes to specify the condition and special needs of passengers with a disability or reduced mobility that they carry. These codes, which are standardised, are essential for each operator in the travel chain (air carriers, airports), so as to organise the service needed. They are explained hereunder, for information purposes only. Selecting the appropriate code remains the sole responsibility of the respective air carrier.

WCHR	Passenger who can walk up and down stairs and move about in an aircraft cabin, but who requires a wheelchair or other means for movements between the aircraft and the terminal, in the terminal and between arrival and departure points on the city side of the terminal.
WCHS	Passenger who cannot walk up or down stairs, but who can move about in an aircraft cabin and requires a wheelchair to move between the aircraft and the terminal, in the terminal and between arrival and departure points on the city side of the terminal.
WCHC	This category covers a wide range of passengers. It includes those who are completely immobile, who can move about only with the help of a wheelchair or any other means and who require assistance at all times from arrival at the airport to seating in the aircraft or, if necessary, in a special seat fitted to their specific needs, the process being inverted at arrival. This category also includes passengers whose disability only affects the lower limbs and who require assistance to embark and disembark and to move inside the aircraft cabin but who are otherwise self-sufficient and can move about independently in their own wheelchair at the airport. Specifying the level of autonomy at the time of booking will avoid the provision of inappropriate assistance.
DEAF	Passenger who is deaf or hard of hearing, or a passenger who is deaf without speech.

- BLIND Blind or visually impaired passenger.
- DEAF/BLIND Blind and deaf passenger, who can move about only with the help of an accompanying person.
- DPNA Disabled Passenger with intellectual or developmental disability needing assistance. This covers disabilities such as learning difficulties, dementia, Alzheimer's or Down's syndrome and who will need assistance. ♦