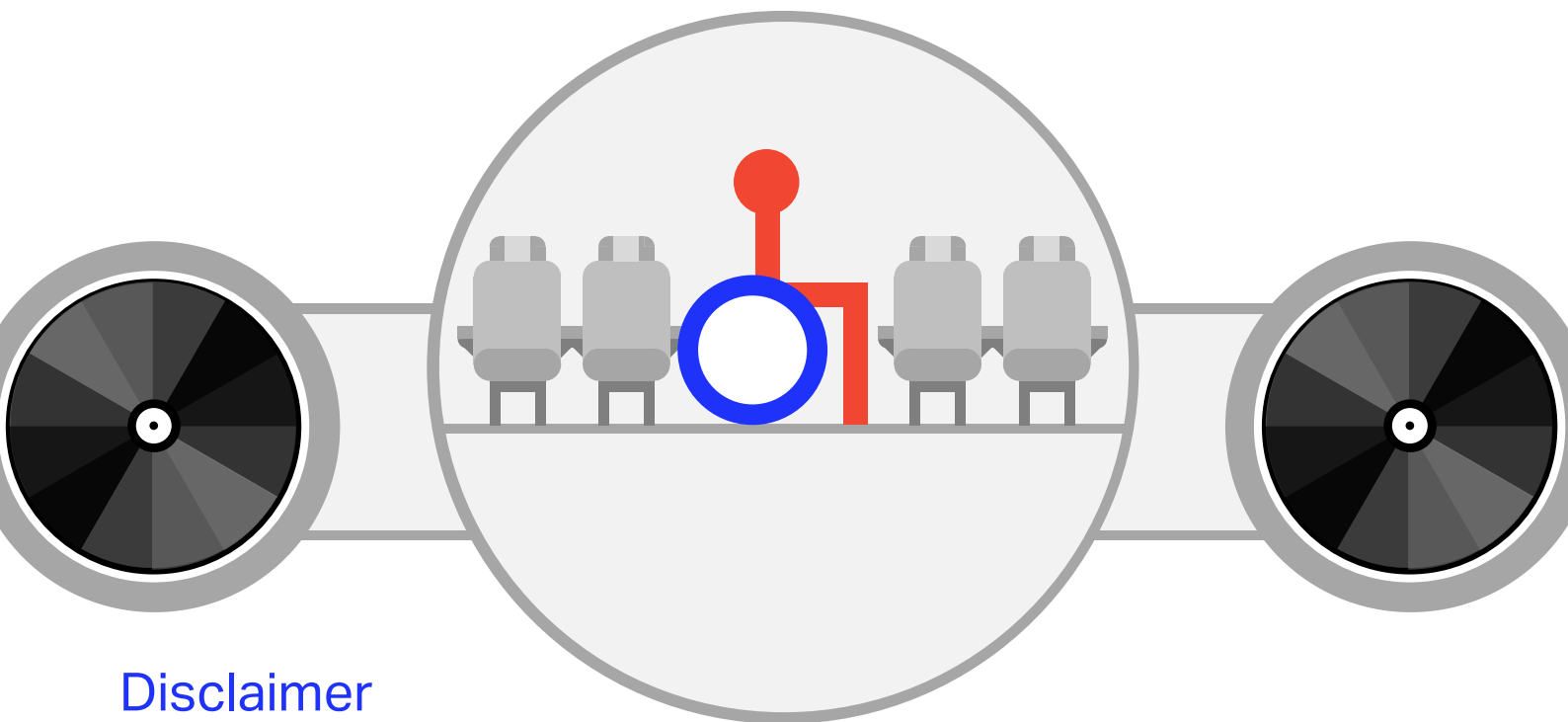# Guidance on Accessible Air Travel in Response to COVID-19
Edition 1 – 31 August, 2020

Disclaimer

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance and best practice examples for airlines to support passengers with disabilities within their organization in response to COVID-19. The guide is not intended to endorse any current regulation, nor to provide any mandatory requirements. The intended audience for this guide is IATA member airlines. It may also be a useful reference for other aviation stakeholders such as airports, regulatory bodies, and organizations dealing with accessibility. The information contained in this publication is subject to constant review in the light of changing requirements and regulations. No reader should act on the basis of any such information without referring to applicable laws and regulations applicable to reader jurisdiction and/or without taking appropriate professional as well as technical advice. Although every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, IATA shall not be held responsible for any loss or damage caused by errors, omissions, misprints or misinterpretation of the contents hereof. Furthermore, IATA expressly disclaim any and all liability to any person or entity in respect of anything done or omitted by any such person or entity in reliance on the contents of this publication. This document was produced by IATA. The party asserts the right to control the distribution and use of the content.

All IATA Covid19 related guidance materials can be found at
https://www.iata.org/en/programs/covid-19-resources-guidelines/

For additional information on the IATA accessibility policy please contact IATA at gia@iata.org

Contents

Revision record

Symbol	Meaning
□	Insertion
△	Amendment
⊗	Deletion

Revised text is shown in red.

Revision table

Revision	Date	Section	Significant changes
Edition 1	31 Aug, 2020	N/A	New issue

Introduction

Accessibility is not just a requirement exclusively designed to meet the need of persons with disabilities. It is important to consider accessibility in the design of aviation-related policy and in the development of inclusive products and services to ensure air travel is open to all. Done with empathy and scientific rigour, the act of mainstreaming accessibility within the field of the overall passenger experience will benefit not just airlines but the aviation ecosystem as a whole.

To help airlines craft an inclusive response to COVID-19, the IATA Accessibility Working Group has developed this guidance document in collaboration with international, national and local partners as well as the disability community such as Open Doors Organization[1] and Reduced Mobility Rights Limited[2].

The purpose of this guidance document is to explore, in brief, the aspects that should be considered within the concept of accessible travel in order to appropriately adapt existing policies during COVID-19 and beyond. IATA hopes that these recommendations will ensure consistency and identify opportunities to improve the overall travel experience for passengers with disabilities. As the COVID-19 pandemic is still evolving with myriad unknown variables, this guidance document should be considered as a live tool that will be revised and updated as necessary.

1 Regulation

Further to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)[3] , efforts were made to change the focus by considering the environment as a disabling factor and by taking a more positive view, oriented towards accessibility as a measure to create inclusive environments, irrespective of the capabilities of each individual, i.e. environments for all.

Instead of being seen as solely a characteristic of the individual, the CRPD asserts that "disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society[4]." This more positive view challenges governments and corporations to create accessible and welcoming environments, i.e., environments for all that function for everyone irrespective of their capabilities, size or age.

Among other crucial accessibility topics, Article 9 of the CRPD requires state regulators to ensure that persons with disabilities can access transport services on an equal basis with others. One of the most important changes generated by the so-called social model[5] and stated in the UN International Convention is the adoption of a new term: person with disabilities.

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[1] https://opendoorsnfp.org/
[2] https://www.reducedmobility.eu/
[3] United Nations Organization (2006), Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-15&chapter=4
[4] UN CRPD, Art.1
[5] In response to the medical view, the UNCRPD termed the 'social model': disability is recognized as the consequence of the interaction of the individual with an environment that does not accommodate that individual's differences. This lack of accommodation impedes the individual's participation in society. Inequality is not due to the impairment, but to the inability of society to eliminate barriers challenging persons with disabilities. This model puts the person at the centre, not his/her impairment, recognizing the values and rights of persons with disabilities as part of society.

As the social model of accessibility has evolved, the concept of accessibility for passengers with disabilities is laid out in several standards, rules, regulations and guidelines, including the following:
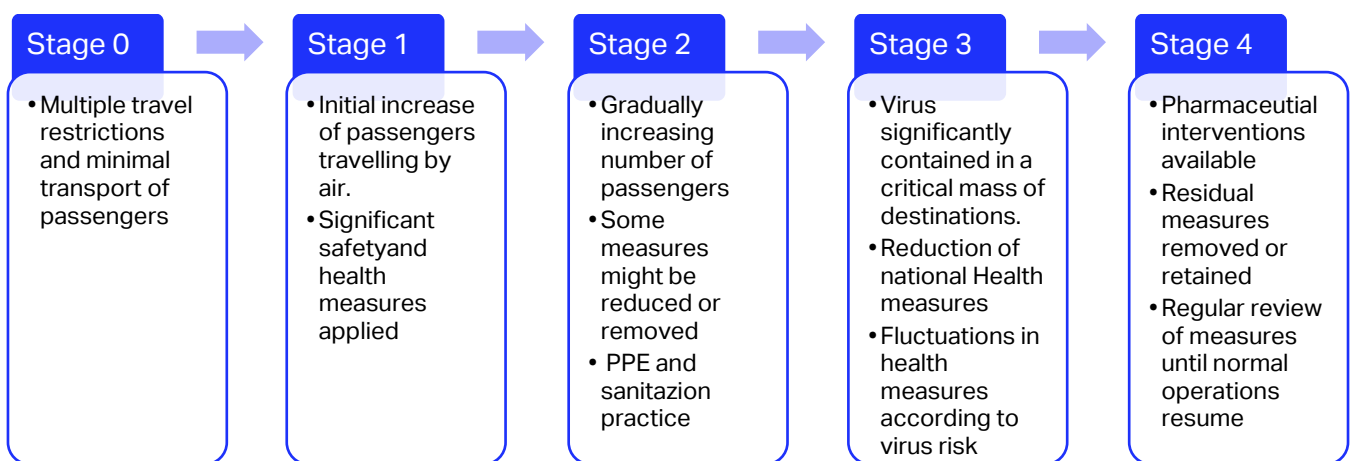
- ICAO Annex 9, Chapter 8 H
- Manual on Access to Air Transport by Persons with Disabilities (ICAO Doc 9984)
- Regulation (EC) No 1107/2006
- US Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA)
- Canadian Accessible Transportation for Persons with Disabilities Regulations, Phase 1
- ECAC Doc 30, Part I, Section 5 Recommendations
- IATA Resolution 700
- IATA AGM Resolution on Passengers with disabilities and its core principles

2 ICAO Council Aviation Recovery Taskforce (CART) Take off Guidance

The deliverables of the ICAO Council's Aviation Recovery Task Force (CART)[6] are aimed at providing practical, aligned guidance to governments and industry operators in order to restart the international air transport sector and recover from the impacts of COVID-19 on a coordinated global basis.

When developing their policy and mitigation procedures to restore passenger air travel, airlines should be guided by the ICAO CART Take off guidance .

The guidance recommends a phased approach (from stage 0 to stage 4) to enable the safe return to high-volume domestic and international air travel. It is important to note that there are several different phases to resuming full operations.

Stage 0	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
• Multiple travel restrictions and minimal transport of passengers	• Initial increase of passengers travelling by air. • Significant safetyand health measures applied	• Gradually increasing number of passengers • Some measures might be reduced or removed • PPE and sanitazion practice	• Virus significantly contained in a critical mass of destinations. • Reduction of national Health measures • Fluctuations in health measures according to virus risk	• Pharmaceutial interventions available • Residual measures removed or retained • Regular review of measures until normal operations resume

In all the above stages, airlines should consider the need to raise additional awareness and educational messaging for passengers with disabilities and older adults before the re-start of operations.

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[6] https://www.icao.int/covid/cart/Pages/CART-Take-off.aspx

3 Key principles

3.1 Safety and security

In developing the assistance measures airlines should be guided by the underpinning principles of aviation: Safety and Security. Any measure applied to support passengers with disabilities should be commensurate with the health risk level of the country and shall not compromise the safety and security of the ground staff, the crew nor the passengers themselves.

3.2 Assistance to passengers with disabilities

Assistance to passengers with disabilities should include safe handling, transferring, and storing of their mobility equipment during travel in addition to supporting passengers themselves.

Passengers with disabilities should be allowed to access the terminal with their family members, travel companions, personal assistants and if applicable qualified, trained assistance dog meeting existing travel criteria (training, certificate by an accredited entity, Pet Passport, required vaccinations).

This means that physical distancing measures and restrictions on non-traveling individuals should not hinder passengers with disabilities from being in close contact with their family members, travel companions and assistants. This may mean allowing a non-passenger to enter a terminal in order to assist or meet a passenger with a disability even when other non-passengers are barred from entry. Staff of transport services should be aware of this

3.3 Access

Ensuring access to aviation facilities, services and information is fundamental to a disability inclusive COVID-19 response and recovery. If public health information, airport terminals, transport, communications, technologies and goods and services are not accessible, persons with disabilities may not be able to live and travel independently.

When changing the circulation patterns of passengers to facilitate physical distancing, it is important to maintain accessible entrances and step-free routes and minimize lengthen walking distances.

3.4 Communication

Governments, travel agents, airports and airlines all have a role to play to communicate COVID-19 measures and identify the best channels to reach out to passengers with disabilities. This could include websites, social media, text messages, signage, print brochures, etc. Information, prior to travel and throughout the travel process should be universally accessible, clear, accurate, simple and as consistent as possible across the entire passenger journey and all channels of communication.

Airlines should adapt their communication to passengers with all types of disabilities—physical, sensory, cognitive, hidden, medical--and explain why certain requirements are in place as well as the additional measures that they are taking to ensure the health and safety of those who require assistance services.

For their safety and reassurance, passengers, including those with disabilities and older adults should seek information ahead of their journey to clear all the formalities to which they may be subject. Whereas passengers might have been familiar with the previous travel policies will likely be less familiar with the additional health measures required to prevent the spread of COVID-19 especially as these may change over time. It is therefore critical that passengers are informed before reaching the airport.

3.5   Application of consistent measures

In principle, passengers with disabilities require a consistent level of accessible conditions and services that are adapted to meet their individual needs, wherever they travel. Airlines, governments and airports should therefore strive to apply international measures and standards as much as possible. This principle is especially important to strengthen passengers' confidence during COVID-19 pandemic. While national and regional needs may require different safety approaches, it is of paramount importance to avoid a global patchwork of incompatible health safety measures. Measures that impose unreasonable costs or burdens on the industry, without any scientific basis, must be avoided. Instead, carefully considered and justifiable measures should be adopted to promote safety and public health while boosting confidence of passengers and crew[7].

4 Persons with disabilities and COVID-19

Some persons with disabilities may be more likely to experience severe or fatal symptoms if they contract COVID-19, particularly older individuals or those with chronic health conditions such as Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), heart disease or diabetes. The fact that they are at higher risk, however, does not mean that they should be subject to a more stringent medical screening or clearance than that required for other passengers. To be equitable, the standards applied should be the same.

In the interests of safety, a passenger whose medical condition may pose a "direct threat" to his or her safe transportation or to the health of other passengers and the crew may be asked to provide additional medical documentation (e.g. MEDIF[8]) to ensure that they are fit-to-fly.

Certain government regulations regarding accessibility in air travel do not prohibit air carriers from assessing whether a passenger is fit-to-fly. They provide grounds for requiring a medical clearance to support that assessment in situations where the person in question has a medical condition or communicable disease that threatens his or her safe transportation or the health of other passengers and the crew. Other government regulations regarding accessibility in air travel do not address communicable diseases, as this is a topic separate from disability[9].

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[7] https://www.icao.int/covid/cart/Pages/CART-Report---Executive-Summary.aspx

[8] The MEDIF is the name given to the forms used by airlines to manage passengers requiring special assistance and medical clearance. For additional guidance see the IATA medical manual For example the U.S. Air Carrier Access Act regulations (14 CFR Part 382) define "direct threat" as "a significant risk to the health or safety of others that cannot be eliminated by a modification of policies, practices, or procedures, or by the provision of auxiliary aids or services." In accordance with public health guidelines, this currently includes passengers whose symptoms, e.g., a fever, indicate that they may have COVID-19.
For additional guidance, see Air Carrier Access Act, part 382.19 and part 382.21 which address medical clearance for persons with disabilities and passengers with communicable diseases : https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?node=pt14.4.382&rgn=div5

[9] This is the case for European regulation EC1107/2006 and for the Canadian Accessible Transportation for Persons with Disabilities Regulations (ATPDR).

5 Establishing an airline policy

Airlines should develop a specific and detailed company policy for the assistance and support to passengers with disabilities that is consistent across their network during the COVID-19 crisis. This policy should be robust, based on science and endorsed by senior management.

It is recommended that company policy be properly communicated to all airline employees who assist passengers with disabilities as well as their managers and supervisors. It needs to be workable and translatable into practical operational procedures.

It is recommended that such a policy be guided by the underpinning principles of aviation: Safety and Security. Any applied measure should be commensurate to the risk level and shall not compromise the safety and security of passengers with disabilities, other passengers, ground staff and the crew.

The policy should consist of the following provisions:

- Modifications of assistance services to minimize health risks while remaining responsive to specific needs;
- Provide appropriate training to employees (e.g. ground staff and cabin crew) to assist passengers with disabilities during COVID-19;
- Provide appropriate and consistent information to passengers' pre-travel and throughout all airline channels;
- Develop processes to manage specific health procedures such as physical distancing; and
- Inform passengers on what to do in specific cases when recommended health procedures are not possible due to a person's medical condition or disability, e.g. in case of face masks/coverings.

Airlines should provide reasonable accommodation to passengers aligned with measures recommended by health authorities. Provision of such accommodation must be consistent with operational feasibility and without imposing a disproportionately high safety burden on fellow passengers. This will help to ensuring that all passengers exercise their human rights and their fundamental freedoms in an equitable manner.

6 Information to employees

It is recommended that the company policy related to accessibility and safety measures during COVID-19 be communicated throughout the organization and especially to frontline ground employees and crew members who may be the first point of contact with passengers with disabilities and their assistants.

Effective and consistent internal communication on how to assist passengers with disabilities travelling during COVID-19 will reassure employees that they are supported by management and encourage them to work with peace of mind.

A communication campaign could be launched and implemented to inform employees and passengers about the safety and security as well as cleaning protocols in place at airports and onboard aircraft.

Airlines may also want to have specific communication procedures to inform all ground staff, including vendors/suppliers who perform assistive services cabin crew and flight crew regarding:

- Protocols developed for assisting passengers with wheelchairs and sanitizing any equipment provided, e.g., transport wheelchairs, electric buggies, ambu-lifts, boarding chairs, hoists, transfer slings, etc;
- Procedures for the adequate use of gloves, wipes, hand sanitizer, face covering and masks when coming into close contact with passengers and their mobility equipment;
- Protocols developed for communicating with and guiding visually impaired passengers;
- Protocols to safely and effectively communicate with passengers with hearing loss;
- Protocols in place to assist passengers with hidden or invisible disabilities such as autism or dementia.

7 Information to passengers

Some passengers with disabilities may be more vulnerable to COVID-19 and will likely seek additional reassurance that measures are in place to prevent transmission of infection from those who are assisting them, before they decide to travel. Airlines should be mindful of this and may need to consider how best to communicate the specific protocols and procedures they have adopted to protect the health of these passengers at the airport and onboard the aircraft[10].

Prior to travel, airlines should communicate with passengers with disabilities about applicable policies and procedures, solicit information on the assistance needed and encourage them to review all the formalities they need to comply with at departure and arrival.

Individual airport websites would be the primary resource for this information; however, airlines could also consider a public section in their company website dedicated to COVID-19 policies including any additional requirements or exceptions for passengers traveling with a disability.

In addition, social media could be used in emergency situations to keep passengers abreast of the status of the ongoing health crisis, as well as to promote the airline policy and airport emergency facilities.

7.1 Search and book

Passengers with disabilities should carefully check government websites and fill out the necessary information required for additional measures. Once the booking is performed, passengers should promptly contact airlines and provide all the required information to accommodate their individual needs.

Airlines may also want to encourage their passengers with disabilities to check the following information:

- The health protocols in place in origin country and destination and related bio-safety protocols;

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[10] IATA Guidance for Cabin Operations During and Post Pandemic, Second Edition, May 2020
https://www.iata.org/contentassets/df216feeb8bb4d52a3e16befe9671033/iata-guidance-cabin-operations-during-post-pandemic.pdf)

- Information on cancellation policies and eventual insurance schemes if they contract COVID-19 while travelling or at the destination;
- Whether a COVID-19 data app is available at destination (e.g. national contact tracing apps).

7.2   On your way

For their safety, when possible, passengers with disabilities should arrive at the airport ready to fly, by checking-in online, via a mobile device or by using an accessible check-in kiosk at the airport.

Before reaching the airport, passengers should check airport websites and get informed about measures in place to comply with health regulations. Once at the airport, passengers should allow additional time to navigate measures such as physical distancing. They should carry their own hand sanitizer meeting airport security standards and face coverings as required. This applies to all passengers, not just those with disabilities.

7.3   At destination

For the safety of passengers with disabilities and to support rebooting of travel and tourism, airlines could consider promoting the accessibility and health protocols available along the tourism value chain (accommodation, transportation, restaurants, attractions) included whether the destinations are open for business[11].

8 Assistance to passengers

8.1   Passengers with reduced mobility

Airlines and airports should develop COVID-19 health protocols and procedures for assisting passengers with wheelchairs during the airport navigation and boarding process.

Wherever possible, passengers with physical limitations or receiving assistance should be allowed to use a dedicated queue or go to the head of the line. To limit their exposure to COVID-19, some passengers may prefer to self-mobilize or have their own companion or family member to provide wheelchair assistance at the airport; this is an option that should be communicated wherever available.

Accessible entrances and step-free routes should not be blocked due to changes in in circulation paths, e.g., to enable one-way flow, or other physical distancing measures. Any such changes in routes, should be communicated to passengers in advance, on the airport and airlines website[12] and where feasible, dedicated waiting areas.

As physical distancing might be impossible, while assisting passengers with reduced mobility, during the lifting, boarding and de-boarding procedures, assistance should include the appropriate use of

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[11] See also UNWTO 'Reopening Tourism for passengers with disabilities: how to provide safety without imposing unnecessary obstacles' (**https://www.unwto.org/accessibility**)
[12] EDF Recommendations on exit measure for transport services in light of COVID-19, May 2020 (**http://www.edf-feph.org/newsroom/news/edf-recommendations-exit-measures-transport-services-light-covid-19**)

gloves, wipes, hand sanitizer and masks where needed. This is particularly important during the processes of wheelchair transport, securement and lift transfer during boarding and de-boarding.

Where transport wheelchairs, electric buggies, ambu-lifts, boarding chairs or other types of equipment are provided, airlines or service companies should consider additional cleaning procedures, e.g., cleaning them after each use.

8.2   Passengers with sensory disabilities

During COVID-19, airlines should address the communication and assistance needs of passengers with hearing and/or vision loss. Ground staff and cabin crew should take measures to ensure that these passengers can access information through easily findable, clear and easy to understand instructions at the airports and onboard[13].

Communication systems employed by airlines before and during the journey should be inclusive and accessible to all. This may be achieved by means of multiple, redundant means of communication, i.e., verbal, visual and virtual (digital).

For passengers who are blind or have low vision, information may be provided audibly via public announcements and spoken instructions, visually by use of larger fonts with good colour contrast and no glare, or virtually on an accessible website, mobile application or via text message.

For those who require a sighted guide to navigate the airport, airlines should develop a set of procedures to ensure that this assistance service is provided as safely as possible despite the lack of physical distancing. Ground staff and cabin crew providing assistance should first ask how the passenger wishes to be guided. Some passengers may wish to receive verbal instructions or to hold the end of their cane, while others may want to hold a shoulder rather than an elbow or give their guide dog a "follow" command. To reassure these passengers regarding safety, ground and cabin staff should let them know that staff and other passengers are wearing masks and respecting physical distance guidelines[14].

For passengers who are deaf or hard of hearing, the availability of detailed information pre-trip via websites, apps, emails, text messages and chat lines minimize the need for communication at the airport. This is especially important during COVID-19 when the use of non-transparent masks creates a communication barrier for those who rely on lip reading, and physical distancing also limits the ability to hear. Having visors or transparent masks available for frontline staff can help alleviate the problem. Also helpful are counter and gate hearing/induction loops, visual information on gate and flight information displays (GIDS and FIDS), plexiglass shields at counters to allow for closer approach, and pen and paper or tablet readily at hand to write a message if necessary. Some airports now offer Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) to facilitate communication via sign language.

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[13] EDF Recommendations on exit measure for transport services in light of COVID-19- May 2020
[14] Guidance on this topic is available online from Open Doors Organization (https://opendoorsnfp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Guidance-for-Airline-Service-Companies.doc).

8.3   Passengers with intellectual disabilities

Passengers with intellectual and developmental disabilities may find it particularly challenging to adjust to the new routines as they fly from one country or airport to another, each with its own requirements. Some of these passengers may have more difficulty understanding the COVID-19 policies and may need additional assistance and reassurance from ground staff and cabin crew.

Airlines should remind ground staff and cabin crew that not all disabilities are visible and that they should use a variety of approaches to communicate the new policies, for example:

- verbal assistance, using simple plain language that is easy to understand;
- visual, simple representations of physical distancing;
- notification in advance that sensory rooms and special lounges might not be available;
- availability online of social stories that show passengers and staff wearing face masks as they go through journey points at the airport and onboard; and
- being patient with adults or children who have intellectual and developmental disabilities and may need more time or additional guidance.

Passengers with intellectual disabilities who are traveling alone may need assistance to navigate the airport of departure or arrival. While this wayfinding assistance does not usually require physical contact, it does involve proximity between employee and passenger and therefore ground staff and cabin crew should adhere as much as possible to health and hygiene measures including use of face masks. In those countries where gate passes for non-travelers are still an option during COVID-19, passengers with intellectual disabilities traveling alone may prefer to have a family member or caregiver provide escort to/from the gate.

9 Health measures

9.1   Physical distancing

To ensure the right of equal travel by passengers with disabilities, while considering COVID-19 confinement and exit strategies, several safeguards and measures might be put in place by airlines and airports. To the extent feasible, passengers with disabilities should be able to maintain physical distancing consistent with World Health Organization (WHO) or applicable state health guidelines.

Additionally, air carriers should adopt adequate risk-based measures tailored to the needs of passengers with disabilities. If physical distancing cannot be guaranteed because of the passenger load, seat configuration or other operational constraints (for example some passengers with physical disability rely on physical contact to get support), then passengers with disabilities and crew members on board an aircraft should adhere at all times to all the other preventive measures including strict hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette and should wear a face covering[15].

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[15] EASA – ECDC COVID-19 Aviation Health Safety Protocol Operational Guidelines for the management of airline passengers in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic

9.2 Use of face covering, mask and protective personal equipment

Face coverings for passengers, ground staff and cabin crew is a critical part of a layered approach to safety measures implemented temporarily to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

All operators, including airline ground staff, handlers and cabin crew assisting passengers with disabilities, should be equipped with personal protective equipment (PPE)[16]. Ground staff and airline crew should wear face coverings consistent with the applicable public health guidelines and government regulations.

The type of face covering (non-medical or medical) should be selected based on the level of risk and the availability of such masks while taking into consideration the potential risks and disadvantages of wearing masks.

Best practices should be followed regarding when and how to wear, remove, replace, and dispose of masks and face coverings, as well as the adoption of hand hygiene after removal. It is recommended that PPE of staff assisting passengers with disabilities be changed after each time assistance is provided to a passenger.

Some passengers, such as those who cannot put on or remove a face mask themselves, small children, and those who have certain types of medical conditions may not be able to tolerate the use of face coverings or masks for a lengthy period. Airlines should consider this within their risk assessment process and identify whether additional questions and/or supporting medical documentation as permitted by local laws and regulations are necessary at pre-screening stage(s), and whether any exceptions in the acceptance of these passengers can be made within their policy. Exceptions should be made in consideration of the health authorities' recommendations and the risk level. Where exceptions are made, other passengers may need to be advised of the reasons and additional steps to mitigate the risks in order to reassure them and prevent discomfort between passengers.

The use of fraudulent documentation by passengers to obtain an exemption from the requirement to wear face masks has been drawn to IATA's attention and is of concern. Airlines should consult with their legal department on procedures for addressing the validity of exemption documentation under local requirements.

9.3 Hygiene measures

Hygiene materials should always be available for all passengers. These should be at easily reachable accessible locations, and easy to find with accessible signage indicating their location at transport facilities. The mechanism and information to dispose of hygiene and sanitary materials must be accessible as well.

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[16] PPE could include gloves, medical masks, goggles or a face shield, and gowns or aprons

All entry points to transport facilities must be treated with the same hygiene protocols as all other parts of the service. This includes cleaning handrails of ramps or staircases, accessibility handles/ buttons for doors, and other surfaces.

9.4   Cleaning and disinfection of equipment

All assistive equipment such as wheelchairs, ambu-lifts, minivans, buggies as well as mobility equipment of passengers that are handled by assistance or other transport staff, must be cleaned and sanitized after each use. Where onboard wheelchairs are provided, airlines should adopt additional cleaning procedures to ensure they remain clean between each use.

A nightly deep cleaning and sanitizing protocol should be established for all ground-based wheelchair equipment. Improved routine cleaning and sanitization should be communicated as it provides reassurance to passengers with disabilities and is an important, additional layer of protection.

10 Staff training

It is key that airline staff employed on the ground and in the cabin have specific guidance to assist passengers with disabilities during the COVID-19 crisis minimizing the health risk to both parties. In order to function effectively when assisting passengers, it is suggested that staff have clearly defined procedures in the company policy that apply to them.

It is therefore suggested that all training and awareness requirements and procedures be linked to the overall company policy at different levels (e.g. passengers' facilitation, aviation security, cabin safety and external affairs). For the sake of consistency, it is also suggested that airlines determine specific training and awareness needs independent of the routes, origin and destination airport where the staff is employed.

The training program should comply with relevant national and international guidelines. It should provide knowledge on how to assist and support passengers with disabilities during COVID-19 on the ground and on board of the aircraft. It should be tailored to the level of knowledge required by staff according to their individual duties.

11 Conclusion

The aviation industry is experiencing unprecedented challenges from COVID-19, as the pandemic has forced the world to a standstill. Persons with disabilities might have underlying health needs that can increase the morbidity and mortality of the disease and/or may require assistance that limits social distancing. In this scenario, it is important to note how persons with disabilities are uniquely impacted by the pandemic in various aspects, including in the transport area. As countries relax their border control systems and airlines resume their services, accessibility and inclusion of persons with disabilities in aviation's COVID-19 response and recovery is a vital part of achieving the pledge to leave no one behind. Such inclusive strategies are central to the IATA's commitment in order to achieve transformative and lasting change regarding disability inclusion and accessibility.

Annex A - Helping Blind Travelers During COVID-19

By Pat Pound, ODO IT Consultant

As people who assist blind travelers through airports, you will face new challenges due to COVID-19. Below find some thoughts about ways to maximize safety and health for everyone.

1. Wear your mask at all times. If it is your company's policy that persons being assisted wear masks, share this with them. Please always let blind travelers know you are wearing a mask, otherwise they may worry you are not.

2. It has never been more important to ask the individual how you may best assist them. Some blind people have enough low vision that they can follow you, perhaps allowing for social distancing. Some guide dogs have been trained to follow, which may also allow for social distancing. Some blind people may want you to walk behind them and provide verbal instructions for which way to go. Others may need some form of tactile guiding. They might ask you to hold the opposite end of their cane in order to be guided while having social distance. Service companies might consider providing a six-foot PVC pipe for such purposes. In all of these situations, it will be vitally important to warn the individual of any variation in floor level and/or steps.

3. Some blind people may prefer to take your arm in the usual fashion of sighted guide. They may want to use gloves or paper towels which they have brought along when holding your arm to decrease personal contact.

4. Advise the traveler of the behavior of others. For example when leaving them at their gate, advise them of how many people are wearing masks. Also let them know when you are passing hand sanitizer stations. If scanning boarding passes is required of passengers, ask the traveler how they wish to handle this task.

5. The traveler may decide to use a remote visual assistance service like AIRA or Be My Eyes. They may use it independently or in conjunction with airport services. The traveler will let you know what they want from you. If you are unsure, please ask for clarification.

6. If you observe a blind traveler who looks confused or lost, offer assistance. Finding lines has always been difficult but more so with social distancing. Blind travelers with dogs will not be able to find the end of the line without asking for assistance. Dogs see people as obstacles so they take you right around them, often to the front of the line. Policies that allow persons with disabilities to go to the front of the line would be especially helpful during the Covid-19 recovery phase, especially for those who can't see to social distance.