



Air Travel Accessibility

Fact Sheet

Industry Resolution

- In June 2019 at the IATA Annual General Meeting in Seoul, IATA member airlines voted unanimously in favor of an industry resolution to improve the air travel experience for travelers with disabilities.
- Through the AGM resolution, airlines have reconfirmed their commitment to improve accessibility in air transport and urge states to work in partnership with the air transport industry when developing policies related to accessible air transport.
- The resolution is founded on robust [core principles](#) that support and promote a consistent, global approach to passengers with disabilities traveling by air, with an emphasis on consultation, coordination and communication with all stakeholders involved in making accessible travel possible.
- This industry commitment to doing the right thing is just the first step. IATA's role is to help the air transport industry take the next steps to advance that commitment into concrete action that benefits the travelers who need it.

Collaborative Approach

- Disability inclusion cannot be approached by different stakeholders individually. Those stakeholders (i.e. governments, airlines, airports, etc.) must work in partnership and reflect such a partnership approach in the accessibility policies and programs they put in place.
- Most importantly, this must put individuals with disabilities at the very center of such a collaborative approach, in order to balance the accessibility needs of passengers, with operational realities that shape how airlines and airports deliver their services to those passengers. This will in turn help to maintain safety as the number one priority of the air transport industry.
- A major focus must be placed on ensuring that policy and regulations related to accessibility in different countries are harmonized and in line with IATA's principles on passengers with disabilities. This will create the consistency and continuity needed to avoid confusion and discomfort for passengers. IATA will be working closely with policymakers around the world to encourage them have this at the forefront of their plans if they intend to put new regulations/policies in place.

COVID-19 and Other Recent Initiatives

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the worst crisis in the history of air transport. To restart air travel, a series of new biosafety measures have been implemented around the world (e.g. the wearing of masks and social distancing measures). IATA is working with all relevant stakeholders to ensure that such measures take into account the needs of travelers with disabilities and thus do not create barriers to travel for those travelers:

- **Industry guidance in response to COVID-19:** IATA worked with its existing Accessibility Working Group and teamed up with two accessibility associations, Open Doors Organization and Reduced Mobility Rights Limited, to develop guidance to the airline industry for the restart of air travel. The [IATA Guidance on Accessible Air Travel in Response to COVID-19](#) presents considerations and guidance on how to approach health and safety measures within the concept of accessible air travel. The aim of the guidance is to help support and inform inclusive policy as airlines welcome passengers with disabilities back to the skies.
- **Guidance on masks for travelers with disabilities:** IATA has worked with state regulators and disability associations to develop guidance on the use of masks and personal protective equipment for passengers with disabilities, as part of the [IATA Guidance on Accessible Air Travel in Response to COVID-19](#). This includes considerations for airlines regarding passengers who cannot put on or remove a face mask themselves, small children, and those who have

certain types of medical conditions who may not be able to tolerate the use of face-coverings or masks for lengthy periods.

- **IATA Global Accessibility Symposium:** The only event of its kind with a focus on air travel and accessibility brought together accessibility advocacy groups, travelers, airlines, policymakers and other stakeholders. The 2nd edition took place online in October 2020 and brought together some 400 people. The focus was to continue to facilitate a dialogue between the accessibility and aviation communities, by sharing real experiences and expertise as well as to update attendees on the latest industry initiatives including COVID-19 guidance.
- **AIR Hackathon – Reduced Mobility:** The [AIR Hackathon on Reduced Mobility](#) took place at the Microsoft headquarters in Seattle in February 2020, just prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. The hackathon registered a record participation of 180 attendees with a team composed of 120 developers who were supported by mentors, airlines, travel agents, airports, aircraft manufacturers and [members of the disability community](#). The innovators looked at how to tackle issues around the digital booking, tracking, safe storage and transportation of wheelchairs with the aim to give peace of mind to passengers and airlines, and lead to fewer cases of damaged or misplaced wheelchairs.
- **IATA Passenger Accessibility Operations Manual (IPAOM):** The [first edition of the manual](#) was released in February 2021. The guidance manual is the result of an intensive one-year consultation with the industry and input from disability organizations. It intends to provide reference to support airline members in assisting travelers with disabilities, with the aim of delivering a smooth and dignified travel experience throughout the passenger journey. The manual is primarily designed to promote a much broader understanding of established industry processes in alignment with major existing rules and regulations.

New Mobility Aids Action Group

- The safe handling of mobility aids including wheelchairs has been identified as a key topic to advance air travel accessibility. When damage or loss events occur, it can be devastating to passenger as these devices are extensions of their body and crucial to their independence. It also represents a reputational issue for the airline.
- To address this issue from a holistic perspective, the creation of the Mobility Aids Action Group was announced in July 2021. It will be the first action group of its kind aimed at tackling issues around the safe and secure transport of mobility aids. It will also provide advice and recommendations to stakeholders concerning the establishment of policy, process and standards related to the handling and transport of mobility aids.
- The Action Group will involve the full range of stakeholders impacted by this issue, including accessibility organizations (representing travelers with disabilities), airlines, ground service providers, airports and mobility aids manufacturers. It will be the first time a mobility aids manufacturer will be invited to participate in an IATA task force.

The Future

- Emphasis is placed on creating an inclusive flying experience, and specifically, on ensuring that air travel is accessible for travelers with disabilities. The IATA focus on accessibility is integral to efforts to restore public confidence and interest in air travel. On the path to restoring air transport, no person should be left behind because of barriers that we have the ability to eliminate.
- The IATA Global Accessibility Symposium continues to be a crucial vehicle for dialogue between the accessibility community, airlines, regulators and other relevant stakeholders going forward. The next event will be part of the Global Airport, Passenger & Accessibility Symposium (GAPAS) in November 2021.
- Future IATA development in the area of accessibility will include:
 - Continue advocating for policy convergence in coordination with forward-thinking regulators and disability associations
 - Opening up and facilitating dialogue between airlines, airports, regulators and the accessibility community
 - Standardizing processes to streamline the handling of wheelchairs and other mobility aids
 - Developing policy for consistent and dignified assistance to travelers with invisible and intellectual disabilities
 - Promoting "universal design" principles by reviewing how the industry can in the future be accessible to the largest number of people possible without the need for individual and tailor-made accommodations
 - Supporting airlines to provide more empathetic assistance to their customers through educational and learning material