

**IATA  
GLOBAL  
MEDIA DAYS**



# Air Travel Accessibility

**Linda Ristagno**

Assistant Director External Affairs

7 and 8 July 2021

**#IATAMediaDays**



**#FlyInclusive:**

**Moving air travel  
accessibility forward**



# Agenda

- Why it matters
- Patchwork of regulatory requirements
- Progress during COVID-19
- Mobility Aids Task Force



## Introduction and agenda

We want to speak to you about passengers with disabilities and these are the topics that I want to discuss today. Accessibility is a priority as the industry recovers and rebuilds from this crisis.

## Why it matters

Over 1 billion people globally experience disability

### Why accessibility matters



Source: World Health Organisation, 2011 and 2018.

Accessible and inclusive aviation is not just about people with disabilities or older people, **it is about everyone.**

Bringing the **freedom to travel** to more people.



- Accessibility is about everyone, not only about people with disabilities
  - Approximately one in five people in the United States, or 64 million, have a disability
  - More than 10% of the population in the EU suffer from reduced mobility – mainly the disabled and the elderly
- The world's population is aging: virtually every country in the world is experiencing growth in the number and proportion of older persons in their population

IATA and its member airlines are committed to ensuring that all passengers can enjoy the freedom offered by air travel, no matter their abilities or limitations. This is not only the right thing to do for our passengers, it is also good for business. Passengers with disabilities will represent a growing segment.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPDR) came into force in May 2008 and is the first international instrument on passengers with disabilities that is binding on member states that ratify it.

The instrument targets non-discrimination and seeks to ensure that people with disabilities are treated as active and equal members of society.

In addition to the UNPDR, States are called to implement the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDG principle is to leave no one behind and disability crosses most of the goals.

## Patchwork of regulations



Since the adoption of the UNPDR, there has been a positive increase in the level of awareness and policy actions surrounding disability in air transport; many regulators, for instance, have implemented or are implementing domestic rules regarding accessible air travel.

This has resulted in some positive movement but has also slowly created a landscape of differing national regulations across the globe.

This regulatory patchwork creates challenges for travelers, airports and airlines alike. By its very nature, international air transport operates across multiple national jurisdictions and relies on global standards. For passengers with disabilities, different accessibility regimes in different jurisdictions can result in differing expectations and frustration. For airlines and airports, this fragmentation increases compliance complexity and costs.

It is important to build globally enacted principles and a harmonized regulatory framework for the mutual benefit of people with disabilities and the aviation community.

This is where IATA is looking to bring the key players together to develop and encourage global approaches and solutions that don't leave anyone behind.

Example: Canada One person one fare, the upcoming ATPRR in Canada included the anonymous feedback as an example of patchwork regulations; safety and the transport of Portable Oxygen Concentrators

## Advancing accessibility during COVID-19

- **Passengers with disabilities expressed concerns with how new COVID-19 regulations in air travel would affect them**
  - Specific worries on issues such as face masks, potential seat barriers, and distancing rules for personal assistance
- **Industry worked with Accessibility organizations to develop guidance on accessible air travel in response to COVID-19**
  - Includes guidance on masks for travelers with disabilities, harmonizing mask exemption policy



The economic impact of COVID-19 on IATA member airlines has not diminished their commitment to supporting passengers with disabilities. On the contrary - airlines recognize that there cannot be a sustainable restart without a renewed commitment to those passengers.

The unprecedented difficulties created by COVID-19 restrictions have created additional challenges to passengers with disabilities and to airlines in when looking to assist them. We partnered with disability organizations to understand the views of passengers and get greater insights on their concerns. Many passengers stated they need more information from airlines, greater harmonization of biosafety measures, and better communication overall. In particular, passengers who had difficulties breathing with a mask were worried about requirements for passengers to wear a mask on board. For a person with respiratory difficulties, it is very challenging to breathe through a mask. Another concern was that airlines were going to have to put barriers between seats, making access much more difficult.

To respond to these concerns, airlines teamed up with IATA's Accessibility Working Group and with two accessibility associations – the Open Doors Organization and Reduced Mobility Rights Limited – to develop guidance for the airline industry for the restart of air travel.

The Guidance Material provides a framework for addressing the support to passengers with disabilities during the current COVID-19 pandemic, including mitigation measures needed to reduce health risk to these passengers while strengthening confidence for traveling.

### Face mask policy:

Airlines also worked with state regulators and disability associations to develop new policy and standards on the use of face coverings, masks and personal protective equipment.

This included considerations for airlines regarding passengers who cannot put on or remove a face mask themselves, small children and those with medical conditions who may not be able to tolerate the use of masks for lengthy periods.

# Advancing accessibility during COVID-19

## – Bringing industry and the community together: Accessibility Symposium

- Around 400 online participants and 31 speakers
- Share real experiences and expertise
- Set up the priorities for 2021



## – Air Hackathon on Mobility Aids

- First IATA Hackathon focused on leveraging data, technology and design for wheelchair travelers
- Digital booking, tracking, storage and transportation of wheelchairs
- 180 attendees
- 120 developers



### Accessibility Symposium:

- Focus on IATA's principles on policy and procedures
- 400 online participants from across the globe
- Broad spectrum of the disability community
- Speakers represented the full spectrum of the aviation supply chain including airlines, handlers, passengers, airports, aircraft manufacturers, travel agents, regulators, and Air Navigation Service Providers.
- Role of technology
- Tourism Industry

### Hackathon:

- AIR Hackathon on Reduced Mobility took place at the Microsoft headquarters in Seattle in February 2020, just prior to the COVID-19 outbreak
- Registered a record participation of 180 attendees, with teams 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 overall aim to give peace of mind to passengers and airlines, and lead to fewer cases of damaged or misplaced wheelchairs
- This was the first hackathon held by IATA focusing on leveraging technology to improve the journey for travelers with disabilities

# Mobility aids

The damage that can occur to mobility aids removes independence from the passenger, creates costs for the airlines and affects reputations of airline members.



*"Passengers with disabilities have high levels of anxiety when travelling"*

Accessibility Manager, Accessibility Charity, (US)



*"It's a different experience at every airport." Need for consistency to give customers confidence of what will happen"*

Founder, International tour operator specializing in passengers with disabilities (South America)



While the industry has had standards for persons traveling with disabilities for some time there are still gaps. Damage to mobility aids has been an area that has been identified as a key topic to address from the disability community.

While airlines have made efforts to improve, damage or loss is still occurring. And when it does, it is highly distressing to the passenger as these devices are more than equipment—they are extensions of their body and essential to their independence.

Travelers with mobility aids face risks to their health and safety if their wheelchair or mobility equipment is lost, damaged or destroyed, as replacements are not always provided, and if provided, are not always suitable for the person's needs.

The loss or damage of wheelchairs or other mobility equipment takes away the independence of the traveler and affects every aspect of their daily lives until the matter is resolved appropriately.

A recent survey from Able Move identified that among those who actively continue to fly, 55% say the biggest single cause of concern when flying was the fear of their wheelchair being damaged or lost.

# New Mobility Aids Action Group

In coordination with disability community and range of aviation stakeholders. First time a mobility aids manufacturer will also be invited to an IATA task force.

## Will examine and develop solutions in these areas:

- Rethink wheelchair journey
- Support passengers with information along the travel chain
- Outlines for mobility devices handling training



## **New Mobility Aids Action Group**

IATA and its member airlines had participated in a working group of the Canadian Transportation Agency (CTA) on the safe loading and security of mobility aids in the cargo hold and in a similar group of the US DoT. These groups encouraged IATA to work with the international community to develop policy and processes to address this issue, including the provision of adequate training to those persons who carry out handling functions.

The number of events of destroyed, damaged or lost mobility equipment of passengers with reduced mobility is linked to the correct handling and stowage of mobility equipment.

The Action Group will be the first of its kind aimed at tackling issues around the safe and secure transport of mobility aids. It will also provide advice and recommendations to airlines and other stakeholders concerning the establishment of policy, process and standards related to the handling and transport of mobility aids.

The newly formed Mobility Aids Action Group will invite a range of stakeholders including accessibility organizations (representing travelers with disabilities), airlines, ground handlers, airports and even mobility aid manufacturers.

It will be the first time a mobility aids manufacturer will be invited to participate in such an action group.