



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

PRESS RELEASE

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Passenger rights: unfair refusals 'still a problem' for disabled air travellers says Commission

Many disabled and reduced mobility air travellers still face problems of unjustified refusals, and other unfair demands when attempting to travel. As thousands of disabled Paralympians and spectators prepare to travel to London for the 2012 Olympic Games, the Commission has published guidelines to clarify their rights when travelling by air.

Vice-President Siim Kallas, European Commissioner responsible for Transport, said: *"Dealing with disability in life is a tough enough challenge: things shouldn't get even tougher when you arrive at the airport"*.

The guidelines cover travellers at all EU airports and the operations of EU carriers anywhere in the world. They also cover non-EU carriers within or leaving Europe.

The aim is to clarify existing EU rules on passenger rights for disabled people and people with reduced mobility travelling by air (EC Regulation 1107/2006). They deal with problems in 22 areas on access to air travel without discrimination.

The key concerns are:

1. Pre-notification: The guidelines highlight the importance of pre-notification. In order to allow service providers (airports or airlines) to arrange the required assistance, it is essential that disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility notify their needs at least 48 hours before the published time of departure.

2. Unjustified refusals: Passengers report recurring problems with refusals and inconsistent requirements for medical certificates and for passengers to be accompanied.

- **Medical Certificates:** The guidelines clarify that medical certificates should, as a norm, not be required for those with a stable condition – for example blind people or those confined to wheelchairs.
- **Accompanying persons.** The guidelines clarify that if you are self-reliant, the norm is that you should not be required to be accompanied, except where there are specific safety requirements of which you should be advised.

3. Problems with medical and mobility equipment

- Mobility equipment: The guidelines underline that disabled passengers and passengers with reduced mobility are allowed to have two pieces of mobility equipment transported for free. A passenger using an electric wheelchair is obliged to notify the carrier at least 48 hours in advance. The guidelines further underline that recognised guide and assistance dogs shall travel within the cabin subject to appropriate prior notice. As for any passenger, sports equipment which is not mobility equipment is covered by the airlines' general rules on luggage
- Oxygen on-board: Passengers needing to travel with oxygen must pre-notify in advance. The guidelines clarify that it is for the airline to determine whether passengers can bring their own oxygen and there is no requirement on an airline to provide oxygen. However, this information must be made clearly available by the airline.

Commenting on the new guidelines Vice President Siim Kallas said, *"My message to disabled passengers is: if you want an easier journey, tell them in advance that you are coming."*

And to the airlines and airport operators I would say, *"Disabled and reduced mobility passengers will usually need your assistance. These guidelines are there to help you, in helping them."*

Mr Yannis Vardakastanis, President of the European Disability Forum, said: *"Quality assistance is very important for persons with disabilities and it is positively addressed into the interpretative guidelines. The European Commission chose a balanced approach and therefore manages to protect the interest of passengers with disabilities as well as passengers with reduced mobility in a proportionate manner"*

Xavier González, Chief Executive Officer of the International Paralympic Committee, the organizers of the Paralympic Games, said: *"We welcome the publication of these guidelines and hope airports and airlines across Europe take note immediately"*.

"Just like the many passengers with a disability who fly on a daily basis, our athletes regularly experience unnecessary problems travelling through airports and with airlines. This should not be the case when we are striving for equality in society"

"This summer 4,200 athletes will be travelling to London for the biggest ever Paralympic Games. The experience they have travelling on airlines and through airports could shape how they view the success of the Games regardless of their athletic performance"

Background

Despite EU legislation on passengers rights, disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility continue to come across problems when travelling by air: a lack or unequal level of quality of service in Europe; too often unjustified refusals or restrictions of reservations or boarding based on unclear safety reasons; inconsistencies in the treatment of passengers who need medical oxygen on-board; limited level of awareness of passengers regarding their rights; limited percentage (around 40%) of pre-notification of assistance needs before travelling, which is of crucial importance to allow service providers to prepare the required assistance; lack of harmonised application of the Regulation by national enforcement bodies (NEBs); and lack of effectiveness in the treatment of complaints.

The guidelines are based on a detailed assessment of the existing Regulation concerning the rights of disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility when travelling by air¹(EC Regulation 1107/2006).

The guidelines have been thoroughly discussed with all stakeholders: national authorities, aviation industry (airline and airport organisations) as well as consumer and user associations, notably those representing disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility.

The guidelines will help facilitate air travel for disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility and thus assist air carriers and airports to improve the application of the Regulation. They will also assist national authorities with the enforcement of the Regulation. They will provide a real added value to the increased travel activity by disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility expected for the Paralympics.

For more information please see [MEMO/12/422](#)

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¹ ["PRM" Regulation \(EC\) n°1107/2006, OJ L 204, 26.7.2006, p.1](#)