



# **Mapping of Skills and Training Needs to Improve Accessibility in Tourism Services in Europe**

*Case Study 12. HERMES Airports, Cyprus*

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**European Commission  
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“Mapping skills and training needs to accessibility in tourism services”  
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**Case Study  
Hermes Airports, Cyprus**

Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY..... 4  
1.0 INTRODUCTION..... 5  
2.0 OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION ..... 7  
3.0 CONTENT, TRAINING MATERIAL AND AVAILABILITY ..... 10  
4.0 TARGET AUDIENCE, COMMUNICATIONS AND BARRIERS ..... 13  
5.0 EVIDENCE OF IMPACT ..... 15  
6.0 CONCLUSIONS..... 17  
7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS..... 18

## Executive Summary

The accessibility training presented in this case study takes place at Larnaka and Paphos International Airports in Cyprus, implemented by the Passengers with Reduced Mobility (PRM) Unit of the operator Hermes Airports Ltd. The training is targeted at practically any front line staff that travelers may meet at any point when using the airport services, many of which are SMEs of the conventional market (such as shops and cafes) . The training offered with regards to suitable customer care provides added value, and becomes more meaningful itself, within a context of accessible infrastructure, facilities and services of the airport, which are continuously monitored and enhanced by the PRM Unit.

The origin of the initiative is traced back to the EU Regulation 1107/2006 regarding the rights of disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility when travelling by air, whereby training provision has formed part of the Aviation Regulations of the country and is thus of a compelling character. It is important however not to overlook that the drivers of this scheme owe greatly to the individual initiative of the responsible trainer, from content development to monitoring and on the spot interventions, as much as to active partnerships held with the Cyprus Paraplegic Organisation and the Ministry of Communication and Works, which have provided valuable feedback on aspects of the training and share the common aim to spread disability awareness training across the country.

Key features adding to the effectiveness of the training are continuity, as refresher courses are offered once a year or every two years depending on the role of staff, the wide range of topics and access needs covered as well as hands on training, which is differentiated according to the duties of the staff trained. The method of delivery and the messages communicated as part of the training, inside and outside of the airport, are vital in overcoming common barriers which have to do with limited understanding of the relevance and benefits of accessible services in the tourism sector. The training has indeed made great difference to the quality of services offered at the airport, which is proven by the positive feedback often provided on impulse by passengers with reduced mobility as well as training participants.

In the light of the insights offered by the case study at hand, including the wider national legal context and performance in accessible tourism, a strong recommendation that emerges touches on the necessity for top-down measures so as to achieve large scale up-take of accessible training in the tourism sector.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Considering that the case study at hand forms part of the national regulations of Cyprus, with the adoption of the EU Regulation 1107/2006 regarding the rights of disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility when travelling by air, it is helpful to review related contextual factors which showcase opportunities for the development of accessible tourism in the country. These relate to the strengths of the tourist economy as much as to national efforts to raise the profile of accessible tourism.

Looking at available figures of traveller movement from 1980 to 2012<sup>1</sup> it becomes apparent that Cyprus has maintained steadily rising levels of tourist arrivals in the last decade, reaching (3,872,292) arrivals in 2012, whilst experiencing a slight decrease in 2009 (at 3,571,532). The number of tourist arrivals had already sharply increased between 1980-2000 starting from 528,000 and reaching 3,540,880 respectively. The most recent statistics show a 3.3% retreat of tourist arrivals in January-September 2013 as compared to the same period in 2012<sup>2</sup>, after experiencing a rise of 4.6% with respect to figures in 2011<sup>3</sup>. Nevertheless, tourist revenue does not seem to have suffered as much, taking into consideration figures available from July 2013, which noted a 12.3% increase in revenue with respect to the same period in 2012<sup>4</sup>. The steady increase in tourist revenue is also evidenced by figures showing a rise of 9.9% as compared to July 2011.<sup>5</sup> The mean tourist expenditure per capita was estimated at €786 in 2012, making a case for a strong tourist economy<sup>6</sup>.

In this context, services addressing the needs of travelers with disabilities or other groups with reduced mobility can enhance profitability of the tourist sector, a perception that seems to be already nurtured by the Cyprus Tourist Organization (COT). There are a number of initiatives implemented in the direction of accessible tourism, starting from the development of guidelines for

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<sup>1</sup> Statistical Service of the Cypriot Decmocracy (2012) *Movement of Travellers 1980-2012*

<sup>2</sup> Statistical Service of the Cypriot Decmocracy (2013) *Tourist Arrivals, September 2013*

<sup>3</sup> Statistical Service of the Cypriot Decmocracy (2012) *Tourist Arrivals, September 2012*

<sup>4</sup> Statistical Service of the Cypriot Decmocracy (2013) *Revenue from Tourism in July 2013*

<sup>5</sup> Statistical Service of the Cypriot Decmocracy (2012) *Revenue from Tourism in July 2012*

<sup>6</sup> Statistical Service of the Cypriot Decmocracy (2012) *Per capita and per day tourist expenditure January-December 2012*

Statistics Available at  
[http://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/services\\_71main\\_gr/services\\_71main\\_gr?OpenForm&sub=1&sel=1](http://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/services_71main_gr/services_71main_gr?OpenForm&sub=1&sel=1)

the adaptation and evaluation of hotel accessibility, published on the trade portal of the organization [www.visitcyprus.biz](http://www.visitcyprus.biz) , to audits carried out by the relevant service of CTO after the expressed interest of the businesses, which so far count 47 entries. Information about accessible accommodation, transport and other tourist facilities and services is available to the public through a dedicated portal for disabled visitors and a published guide named “Accessible Cyprus”<sup>7</sup>.

Moreover, since 2008, five beaches have been made accessible, while two cases will be further included, within the framework of a pilot program implemented by CTO in partnership with local authorities. Up-to-date equipment for autonomous access to sea has also been piloted at three more locations. In addition, the national tourist organization has played an active role in shaping current draft law for investment incentives aimed at enhancing quality of the tourist product, in which accessibility is proposed as a prerequisite for investments in the hospitality industry, while favourable construction terms are also considered to be granted for building accessible rooms. Funding for adaptations in hotels is also available through the new strategy for tourism 2011-2015.

Finally, and with direct relevance to this case study, CTO has prepared in partnership with accessibility consultants, including the Passengers with Reduced Mobility (PRM) Unit of the airport operator Hermes Airports which forms good practice in this study, a 32 page guide for front line customer service for people with disabilities or reduced mobility, so as to provide services with respect, responsibility and discretion as it is pointed out. The guide has been distributed to 4,000 tourist businesses across Cyprus.

It is important to note nevertheless that despite efforts, the tourism industry has ground to cover in developing a sufficient level of accessibility across the tourist sector, as suggested by the interviewees in this report. Besides the business case for accessible tourism, it is important not to overlook citizens’ rights for equal participation. National legislation such as the [People with Disabilities Act of 2000 \(N.127\(I\)/2000\)](#) which safeguards the full inclusion to social and economic life making specific reference to participation in social, cultural and leisure activities (Article 4(2)), is a further driver to be exploited in this direction.

**Box 1: Hermes Airport Mission Statement**

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.visitcyprus.com/wps/portal/getting\\_to\\_cyprus/disabled\\_visitors](http://www.visitcyprus.com/wps/portal/getting_to_cyprus/disabled_visitors)

Hermes Airports Ltd

Mission Statement

- To manage safe, friendly, clean, efficient and profitable airports in an innovative manner, striking a balance between passengers' and stakeholders' expectations.
- To develop key strategic relationships with tourism stakeholders, so as to ensure suitable growth.

## 2.0 OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

**The case study focuses on the working of the Passengers with Reduced Mobility (PRM) Unit of Hermes Airport Ltd, operator of Larnaka and Pafos International Airports in Cyprus, which has developed and implements personnel training on disability awareness and customer service for frontline staff across key airport-based services and facilities.**

**Offering accessibility training as requested by Aviation Regulations and the EU Regulation 2006 is one of the key roles and responsibilities** of the PRM Unit in furthering the positive experience of interested travellers when flying. The training takes place in a context of high standard accessible infrastructure and services which are continuously monitored and improved<sup>8</sup>.

The examples below showcasing continuous intervention for enhancing accessibility were provided by the Senior Officer of the PRM Unit, Hermes Airports, owner of the training material developed and certified trainer in providing accessibility training, within but also outside the borders of the airport.

### Figure 1: Vision statement of Hermes Airports

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<sup>8</sup> Detailed map of accessible services at Pafos and Larnaka international airports available at <http://www.hermesairports.com>

To have World Class Airports for Cyprus, playing a leading role in the island's economy and in particular in the tourist industry.

Continuous monitoring of sub-contracted Special Assistance Services and resolution of possible complaints as per EU Reg.1107/2006 is also one of the responsibilities of the PRM Unit so as to ensure that assistance provided “reflects clear-cut procedures and effectively safeguards the safety, comfort and dignity of all PRM passengers at both LCA & PFO airports”

For these purposes, spot checks are performed routinely at both airports with an average of 3 random spot checks per week, at all stages of the departure and arrival procedures (Drop-off, Check-in, PRM Desk, Immigration, Retail Shops, Boarding etc). A specified list of indicators is used, based equally on European regulations as with ECAC Recommendations in PRM Assistance, an official document of aviation regulations. The criteria relate also to human resources and customer service quality in service provision.

**Box 2: Specific example**

*A specific example could be when in the past we had a PRM who wanted to stay in their own scooter until boarding. All went well and the PRM was at the Boarding Gate where I was also present conducting a spot check with another PRM passenger.*

*While there, I heard the Ground Handling Staff in charge of the boarding tell the PRM that he should have handed over his scooter during check-in and that he was not supposed to board with his own scooter. I discreetly intervened and briefed the lady in question that the passenger has every right to board with his own scooter if he so wishes.*

*I later took this matter up with the management of the said Ground Handling Company, asking them to remind all their staff that PRM have the right to board the a/c when they so wish provided they are at the airport in a timely fashion as per EU Reg.1107/2006.*

*Sophia Christofidou, Senior Officer PRM Unit*

*Hermes Airports*

The Hermes Airports Disability Awareness & Equality Training, was introduced in 2008 for frontline staff of the PRM Service Provider and other airport



stakeholders and owes greatly to the EU Regulation but also to individual efforts since the beginning, where there has been a strong perception that providing accessible services is not distinct from using such services, and as such there is vested interest for all citizens.

The openness of the company to consider accessibility issues at a high decision making level even before this became more compelling with the issuing of the relevant European regulation, had prepared the ground for effective implementation, as Mr Lambrianides, President of the Cyprus Paraplegic Organisation explained in the interview for the current report.

A key driver in the very development of the training content and method of delivery was the active involvement of the Cyprus Paraplegic Organisation from the beginning and the close co-operation maintained with the Senior Officer of the PRM Unit and co-ordinator of the training program, which has been decisive in shaping foremost a right-based approach towards disability.

The training is supported and subsidised by the Cyprus Human Resources Development Authority (HRDA) and can thus be provided at a very low cost to subcontracted providers and SMEs based at the airport. Since 2008 more than 600 airport based staff has followed training, while around 100 individuals have participated in disability awareness and equality training outside the airport.

*What also helped as a driving force for the creation of this training and the passion for its delivery ever since, was the partnership with Mr Dimitris Lambrianides, President of the Cyprus Paraplegic Organisation, and Ms Clelia Petridou, Head of the Bureau for the design of measures for the accessibility of persons with disabilities at the Ministry of Communication &*

*As PRM themselves and full time wheelchair users, they have been my teachers and mentors in discovering the challenges, difficulties and discrimination faced by PRM every day, from the morning they leave the house until they return home in the evening.*

*They were amongst the first to be toured in the new Terminal Buildings of PFO & LCA and provide their feedback in relation to our facilities. They have approved our DISABILITY AWARENESS & EQUALITY PROGRAMME and myself as a Trainer. Until today we are supporting each other with an aim of maintaining high standards of PRM Assistance at our airports but we are all also committed in creating awareness in Disability & Accessibility Issues to Cyprus as a whole.*

*I believe that teaming up and creating close relationships with local disability organisations is vital when setting up a training programme, since they have the experience and knowledge to assist you with things that as an able bodied person "you don't know you don't know"!*

*Sophia Christofidou  
Senior Officer PRM Unit  
Hermes Airports*

### 3.0 CONTENT, TRAINING MATERIAL AND AVAILABILITY

The “Disability and Equality Awareness Training” is provided by Hermes Airports PRM Unit to the PRM Service Provider once a year, while new recruits must be trained before commencing their duties. Practical Hands-On training for Lifting Techniques is also provided to this group. Airport based frontline staff is trained every 2 years, through authorised trainers of the respective stakeholders who receive the Hermes Train the Trainer Programme and subsequently deliver the training internally to their front line staff.

The training is conducted in a semi-formal manner to small groups by a certified trainer. Participant groups are clustered according to common traits of their frontline service, for instance common training is provided to companies or entities such as the Cyprus Tourism Organisation, the Bank of Cyprus, Car Rental companies, Retail Shops and F&B Outlets.

The material includes presentations and videos customised to the job description of the audience, while group participation and interaction is encouraged. An innovative and highly effective aspect of the training, as pointed out, is the Experiential Exercises section, although time restrictions set by companies may limit their availability.

- ✓ *Training Videos*
- ✓ *Use of Statistics and Visual material.*
- ✓ *Practical advice*
- ✓ *Differentiated content according to occupational role*

#### Box 3: Trainer qualities

As described in ECAC Doc. 30, a **trainer** in Disability & Equality Awareness should:

- Have significant practical experience at a senior level in the assistance of disabled persons and PRMs in air travel.
- Have a full understanding of the relevant standards, legislation and recommendations.
- Have knowledge and experience in instructional techniques.
- Have qualification to instruct from recognised training entity or international organisations in aviation.
- Use available expertise and receive feedback from disability organisations.

Figure 2: Training areas covered according to target groups ECAC Doc. 30

5G - 11

**A – Initial training**

Training modules	Training areas Target groups	Legislation	Disability awareness	Equipment awareness	Job-related items and exercises	Kinetics of lifting	Test	First Aid
		Module1	Check-in/gate agents *	√	√	√	√	
Security check *	√		√	√	√		√	
Airport information *	√		√	√	√		√	
Ticket offices *	√		√	√	√		√	
Lost& found *	√		√	√			√	
Border police *	√		√	√			√	
Customs / immigration *	√		√	√			√	
Bar/rest./shops *	√		√	√			√	
Parking police *	√		√	√			√	
Ramp agents *	√		√	√			√	
Airport Management	√		√	√			√	
Modules 1+2	PRM assist. Provider	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
	PRM project manager	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Modules 1+3	Cabin crew *	√	√	√	√	√	√	

## HERMES Airports, Cyprus

5G - 12

### B. Refresher course

Training modules	Training areas Target groups	Training areas						
		Legislation	Disability awareness	Equipment awareness	Job-related items and exercises	Kinetics of lifting	Test	First Aid
Module1	Check-in/gate agents *	√	√	√	√		√	
	Security check *	√	√	√	√		√	
	Airport information *	√	√	√	√		√	
	Ticket offices *	√	√	√	√		√	
	Lost& found *	√	√	√			√	
	Border police *	√	√	√			√	
	Customs / immigration *	√	√	√			√	
	Bar/rest./shops *	√	√	√			√	
	Parking police *	√	√	√			√	
	Ramp agents *	√	√	√			√	
	Airport Management	√	√	√			√	
Modules 1+2	PRM assist. Provider	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
	PRM project manager	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Modules 1+3	Cabin crew *	√	√	√	√	√	√	

**4.0 TARGET AUDIENCE, COMMUNICATIONS AND BARRIERS**

The following table gives an overview of the placements of trainees' groups providing frontline services to airport passengers.

**Table 1: Target audience**

Company / Entity Name	Airport Staff in direct contact with the traveling public
Ground Handling Companies  Passenger Handling Companies	Check-In Agents  Information Desk Agents  Lost & Found Desk Agents  Baggage Inquiries Desk Agents  Information & Reservation staff  Dispatchers
Immigration	Border Control & Immigration
Civil Aviation	Airport based front line staff
Airport Police	Security Screening ( <i>to be trained separately</i> )  Police Lost & Found
Customs	Airport based front line staff
Medical Services / Nurse	Airport based front line staff
CTC/ARI – Retail Shops	All front line staff
Cyprus Airports F&B Outlets	All front line staff
Hellenic Tzilalis Cleaning Company	All front line staff
Car Rental companies	Airport based front line staff

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G4S Security Services	Airport based front line staff
Cyprus Tourism Organisation	Airport based front line staff
Bank of Cyprus	Airport based front line staff
Travel Agents & Tour Operators	Airport based front line staff

### Barriers

Initial barriers in the implementation of the training scheme had to do with reluctance on behalf of the airport companies to invest additional training time for their employees who were already expected to follow a series of airport related trainings. What has worked in eliminating such barriers is the competency of the training program itself, gaining gradually the interest of participants over time as reported by the responsible trainer and Senior Officer at the PRM Unit.

Considering that the training is compulsory for airport staff, the main concern has been about developing a stimulating and informative training programme. The training material is continuously reviewed and updated through the process so as to maintain high levels of interest.

The cost of participation is not actually a barrier since it is subsidized. As pointed out, even in the current economic context the capacity of businesses to participate is not affected.

The most challenging aspect is making the training seem relevant to the potential trainees. The messages communicated through the training aim at shifting dominant perceptions that view accessibility as distinct from their own interests to an understanding that it concerns all.

Particularly with SMEs across the tourism sector, this involves understanding that accessible service provision is about offering an equal level and quality of services to disabled travelers as with any other customer, along with opportunities for profitability in addressing the specific needs of this diversified clientele.

As the representative of the Cyprus Paraplegic Organisation expressed, the advanced quality of services provided positively affects the tourism industry, as travelers with disabilities will express preference for the destination in the future, while the satisfactory experience will spread to personal networks and across the disability community. It should also be kept in mind that accessible services provide safety and comfort to all visitors and travellers. As remarked, there are examples of hoteliers who report that there is demand for accessible rooms by non-disabled people precisely for the raised standards of service they offer.

## 5.0 EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

Hermes Airports have a very good track record in the quality of its PRM Service Provision. The total number of Passengers with Reduced Mobility assisted at the Larnaka International Airport in 2012 amounted to almost 34,000, in which process five complaints and 13 appreciation letters were received. At Pafos, around 23,000 PRM were assisted in the same year, with two complaints cases and ten appreciation letters received.

Customer satisfaction surveys form part of the monitoring procedure evaluating aspects of service provision such as waiting time, professional and friendly manner, catering for specific individual needs, good working order of equipment, and overall rating of the passengers' travelling experience.

It is worth noting here that complaint management has also got a role to play in ensuring long-term impact in enhanced service provision. In the current case study the standard procedures for following up complaints ensure 24 hour response or further investigation withholding findings and points for action, standing out as good practice on further grounds.

Similarly, the positive impact of the training program is evidenced by evaluation questionnaires completed by the participants through, who value highly the content and delivery of the training offered, while the training program at hand receives the highest satisfaction rating among all training schemes provided by Hermes Airports to Hermes Staff.

The impact of the training expands outside the airport, as training has been completed with the Cyprus Tourism Organisation, a number of Cyprus Municipalities and

*For instance, a transportation service to and from the airport will need to provide accessible services at an equal level and quality of the airport services. The same applies to hotels, so as to provide a seamless accessible travel experience.*

*Dimitris Lambrianides, President of the Cyprus Paraplegic Organisation*

some hotel businesses. The PRM Unit was also involved in the production of the “*Customer Service Guide for Disabled Persons and Persons with Reduced Mobility*” published and distributed by the Cyprus Tourism Organisation.

As reported by the Senior Officer and Trainer, airport based training is highly effective, however experience of training on a request basis has shown that management staff do not often participate, with questionable impact as to whether and how decisions affecting accessibility are taken after training.

Finally, the President of the Cyprus Paraplegic Organisation pointed out the potential of the training in raising standards for services linked with the airport since every aspect of tourist service provision forms part of a chain.



## **6.0 CONCLUSIONS**

The case study reviewed an accessibility training scheme addressed at airport based frontline staff at Larnaka and Paphos International Airports, operated by the Passengers with Reduced Mobility (PRM) Unit of Hermes Airports. One of its innovative features involves a clear rights based approach to customer service, which owes greatly to the involvement of a local representative disability organization from design to evaluation of the scheme.

Disability awareness and equality training is coupled with training on legislation, technical standards and hands on assistance where applicable (manual handling techniques training), while experiential training activities are used as complementary to training. The content is differentiated according to the roles of staff ensuring relevance of the training, while the training material is also approved by the disability representative organization on behalf of the target groups it seeks to assist and serve. Overall, the training addresses real market needs as reportedly there is little understanding so far of the benefits of accessible tourism in Cyprus.

The training scheme at hand, within a context of a number of national initiatives aimed at raising the profile of accessible tourism service provision, contributes greatly to the spreading of positive messages for ensuring access for all. The impact of the training is evidenced by the high customer satisfaction from services expressed in the respective surveys and feedback, as much as by positive evaluations of trainers and staff trained under the scheme. The range of businesses and entities included in the training, many of which are SMEs of the wider tourist market (shops, catering, hiring services, travel agents, etc) define its wide scope of transferability across the tourism industry. At the same time, there is a significant opportunity offered to SMEs based at the airport to participate at low cost since the scheme is nationally subsidised.

## 7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Indicators of effective training proposed by the Senior Officer of the PRM Unit relate to the relevance to the trainees' needs and expectations, easy to follow content, an engaging method of delivery and ability to apply knowledge on daily tasks as an outcome. Knowledge and experience on the subject matter on behalf of the trainer, as much as their effectiveness in conveying these, are also seen as crucial factors.

In terms of the method of delivery more specifically, training should reportedly include visualization of the barriers and discrimination that disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility face every day. *“Experiential Exercises are an absolute MUST in the training agenda”* according to Ms. Sophia Christofidou. This is identified as a key success factor so that trainees can perceive the level and kind of barriers experienced by users of services with disabilities, and as such realize their responsibility in eliminating them. Related to this is the need to actively involve representative disability organizations in the design of training schemes, as further supported by the case study.






The current case study also makes a case for a more compelling character in making available accessibility training, as it urges stakeholders to consider issues previously little thought through and commit time and resources for the completion of the training.

The top priorities in an EU agenda supporting the development of accessibility training schemes should, according to the interviewees, clearly outline the long term benefits of “Access for All” and Disability Awareness Training for staff in the front line, underpinned by an understanding that investment in accessible services is an investment for the society as a whole.

To this end, there should be wide communication of facts and figures about the situation of persons with disabilities in Europe and the extent of social exclusion they experience from lack of access to mainstream goods and services, as specified by Mr. Dimitris Lambrianides. Finally, supporting efforts for a wider scale uptake of accessibility training, such as policy and funding, should also work in a context of incentives for investment in accessible infrastructure and services across the tourist sector.

## Annex I

Table 2: Criteria and justification for best practice

Criteria	Justification	On track/off track
<b>Innovative</b>	Disability equality/ awareness training coupled with understanding of legislation, technical standards and hands on assistance where applicable (moving and handling training). Use of experiential training activities. Involvement of a local representative disability organization from the start/ design level.	
<b>Relevant</b>	Differentiated content according to roles of staff; approved by a local disability representative organization. Reportedly, little understanding of the benefits of accessible tourism training in Cyprus overall.	
<b>Transferable</b>	Covers all airport based frontline staff, many of which are staff of SMEs of the wider tourist market (shops, catering, hiring services, travel agents, etc). While some aspects are highly specialized (security control), all trainees receive training on disability awareness.	
<b>Efficient &amp; Effectiveness</b>	Minimum cost for participants; refresher courses available. Compulsory character of training within the airport.	
<b>Impact</b>	High customer satisfaction from services (surveys, appreciation letters); minimal complaints which are followed through.	
<b>Sustainable</b>	Compulsory training (EU Reg Air Travel) plus Part of national aviation regulations.	