

Pilots' Briefing



REAL
REAL Passenger REAL Person


Department
for Transport

Key Messages

Disabled people and persons with reduced mobility (PRMs) are a large and growing segment of flyers.

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Numbers of PRMs are increasing more than twice as fast as passenger numbers overall.

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This is partly due to greater availability of low-cost travel and partly due to ageing populations worldwide.

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People are increasingly likely to have one or more disabilities as they age, including mobility, sensory and cognitive impairments and long-term health conditions.

The Law

Under European Regulation 1107/2006 on the rights of disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility when travelling by air, there is a fundamental principle of ‘a right to free movement, freedom of choice and non-discrimination’.

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The law currently applies in all 27 European Union Member States, plus Switzerland, Norway and Iceland. It applies to all airlines registered in a Member State. It also continues to apply in the UK and has been taken into UK law.

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Responsibility for providing assistance to a PRM, from their point of arrival at the airport to their seat on the aircraft, rests with the airport managing body.

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Passengers needing assistance should notify the airline at least 48 hours before the flight.

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The airline is responsible for passing on the information to the airport so that assistance can be arranged.

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If the passenger does not give advance notice, the airport must still make ‘all reasonable efforts’ to provide the necessary assistance to get them on board.

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There is no obligation on the passenger to provide proof of disability or reduced mobility.

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The cost of providing assistance must not be passed on to the PRM.

What is a PRM?

This includes anyone whose mobility is reduced when travelling as a result of a physical, sensory or cognitive impairment, age or any other cause.

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The European Commission definition includes young children travelling with their parents, people who are obese, and pregnant people whose mobility is affected.

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Everyone included in this definition is entitled to free assistance from their point of arrival at the airport to their seat on the aircraft (and in reverse upon arrival at their destination airport).

Dementia

An important category of disability that airlines are increasingly seeing is people with dementia. In many cases, passengers in the early stages of dementia may be flying alone, before they have a diagnosis and/or when the condition is relatively limited in its impact on day-to-day life.

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The unfamiliarity of the aircraft cabin and other factors such as on-board air supply may trigger episodes of acute confusion or distress.

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Pilots should be aware of this trend and cabin crew should receive training.

Refusing to Carry a Passenger

There are only two grounds in law on which a PRM can be denied boarding.

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The first is safety. To be able to travel unaccompanied, a PRM must be able to meet the following basic safety requirements:

- Reach an emergency exit unaided (by any means, not necessarily by walking)
- Understand the safety briefing and use of on-board safety equipment

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The airline should generally accept a passenger's word that they can meet these requirements. It's vital not to make generalised assumptions about someone's abilities.

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Note that a passenger's ability to use the toilet or feed themselves are matters of comfort not safety and cannot be used as a reason to refuse carriage.

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The second reason is the size of the aircraft. This is primarily in the case of small aircraft that cannot physically accommodate disabled passengers, for example if a number of passengers have large powered wheelchairs and these cannot be safely accommodated in the hold.

Accompanying Person

If a passenger cannot meet the safety requirements to travel alone, they need to be accompanied by someone who can help them during an emergency.

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The accompanying passenger must be allocated a seat next to the PRM.

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If a PRM is travelling alone but is judged as unable to travel safely, a volunteer from among the other passengers can be allocated before boarding.

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Off-loading, or denying boarding to a PRM should only be considered as an absolute last resort, particularly if the PRM is at a remote destination rather than near home.

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Airlines are required by law to carry up to two pieces of mobility equipment free of charge, regardless of weight or size. These can be wheelchairs, walking frames, scooters, etc. Small aids should be stowed in the cabin and take precedence over hand luggage.

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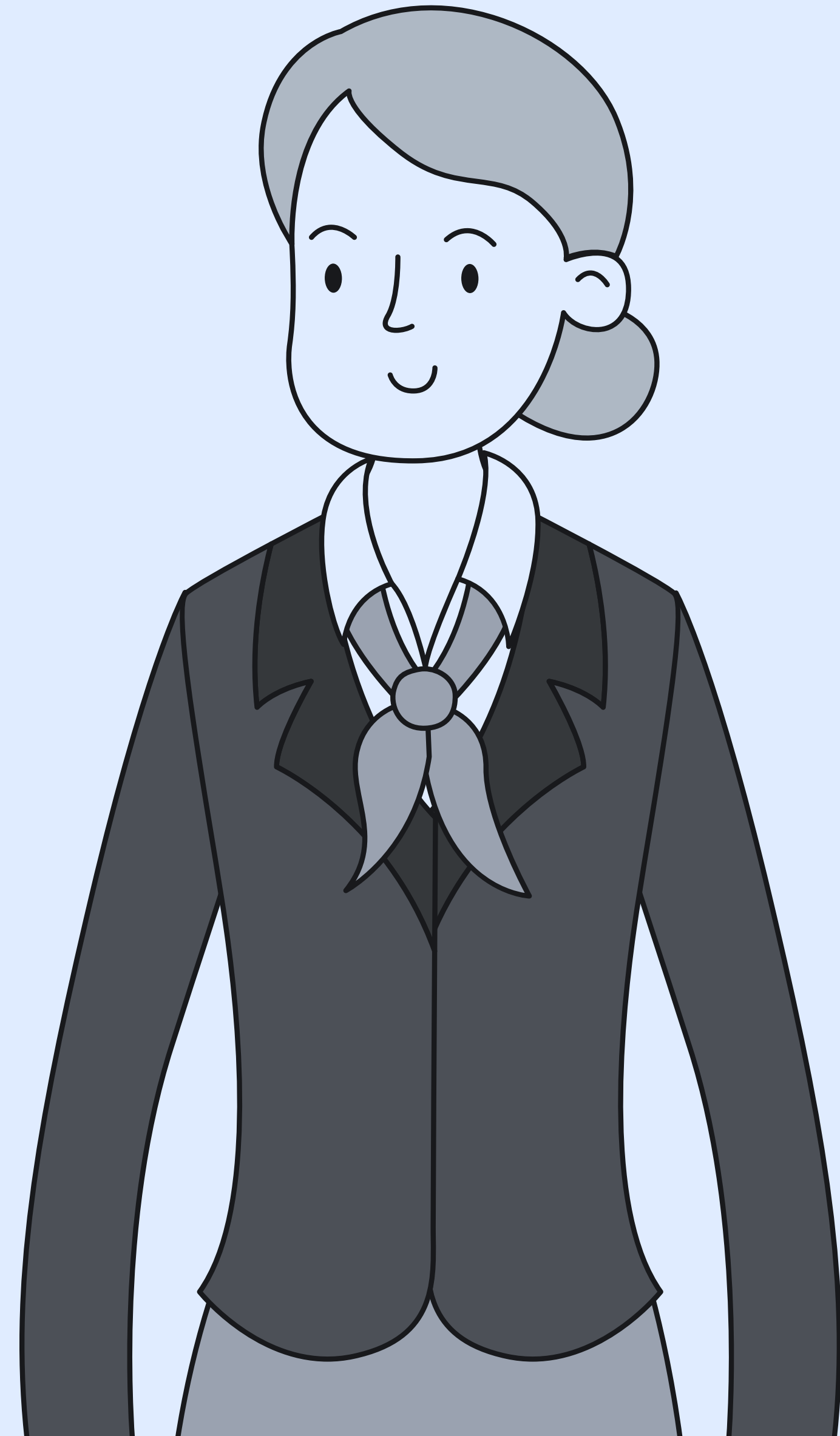
Pilots have the final decision on whether a powered wheelchair can safely be carried in the hold.

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Medical equipment must be carried free of charge but the passenger must have a doctor's note confirming that it is necessary.

Communication

In any situation, it can help to ask yourself **‘What is the barrier in this situation?’** to avoid viewing a PRM as ‘the problem’ or conveying that sense to the PRM themselves.



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For example, if two passengers have already checked in with two electric wheelchairs and the hold cannot accommodate any more, that is the barrier or problem, not the third passenger who also uses an electric wheelchair.

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If there isn't a solution to the particular barrier, it is important to understand the frustration of the passenger and, while not accepting that you or the airline are to blame, expressing that you understand the gravity and impact of the barrier.

Challenging Behaviour

Many people under stress can exhibit challenging behaviour.

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Disabled people are as likely to do this as anyone else.

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Some disabled people may be very anxious about flying.
They may fear the loss of control, for example if they are
without their usual wheelchair. They may feel overstimulated
by noise, light and novel experiences such as going
through security.

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If you feel any passenger's behaviour is dangerous or a problem for other passengers, remember to consider whether it may be related directly or indirectly to disability. Remain calm and polite whenever possible.

Reassurance and acknowledgement may help to take the heat out of many situations.

REAL

Respect

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Empathise

REAL

Ask

REAL

Listen

REAL Passenger REAL Person



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