

Annex N

**GUIDELINES ON AWARENESS AND DISABILITY EQUALITY FOR ALL
AIRPORT AND AIRLINE PERSONNEL DEALING WITH THE
TRAVELLING PUBLIC**

Introduction

1. Disability awareness and disability equality training for airline and airport personnel is crucial in order to ensure that passengers with disabilities receive the assistance they may need and that they are treated with respect.
2. Personnel who have an understanding of disability and its diversity, and the types of barriers people with disabilities experience in society, will be better able to provide a high quality service that respects the safety, independence and dignity of each passenger.
3. These guidelines are intended to be a source of information to identify best practice for personnel employed in the air passenger transport industry dealing directly with the travelling public. They focus mainly on the attitudinal barriers that disabled people are facing in air travel, and they offer solutions to some of those.
4. These guidelines need to be complemented with general information on ECAC recommendations, IATA guidance and relevant EU legislation in order to acquire comprehensive knowledge on the rights of disabled air passengers and how to best provide assistance to those passengers.
5. Training must cover the full range of disabilities. These guidelines provide information on how best to interact with and provide assistance to people with varying special needs. Training should be provided to all employees dealing with the general public, including refresher training when appropriate. Passenger feedback should be constantly analysed and any necessary improvements fed into training programmes. The most important thing to remember when interacting and assisting disabled passengers and people with reduced mobility is to be respectful - what counts is to provide a high quality customer service, rather than necessarily to follow these guidelines word for word.

General Disability Awareness

6. Disabled people make up approximately 10 % of the population in Europe. Disabled people have the same right to non-discrimination and equal treatment as all other citizens and have the right and need to participate fully in all aspects of life, including air travel.
7. Disabled people are just like everybody else. It is important to remember that a person may have a disability, but the person himself or herself is not the disability. Therefore, the first thing to remember when interacting with a disabled person is to *focus on the person instead of the disability*.
8. Disabled people are a diverse group. They include people with reduced mobility, people who are blind or partially sighted, deaf or hard of hearing, people who have a learning difficulty or people with a mental health problem. There are also many people who have an invisible disability or a chronic illness. Other people have a combination of two or more types of disabilities. It is important to recognize this diversity.
9. When you are communicating with disabled people, it is important to communicate directly with the person, whenever possible, and not via a personal assistant, a sign language interpreter or any other accompanying person or assistant. However, some people may feel intimidated or anxious when you speak directly to them. In those cases, it might feel better for the passenger if you communicate via the accompanying person. It is important to respect a person's privacy when giving assistance.

Remember that the specific needs of an individual passenger with a disability are not always visible and may not be covered by a code, such as IATA's classification on disability. When appropriate, you should therefore encourage the disabled passenger to explain about his or her individual needs for assistance when travelling by air. The majority of disabled people are experts in their own needs and are familiar with this procedure.

Providing assistance to disabled air passengers

10. In order to allow disabled air passengers to enjoy a "seamless" travel experience in the same way as able-bodied passengers, your assistance may be needed. Seamlessness is a concept that aims at providing a comfortable, safe and uninterrupted journey, with the provision of assistance that is adapted to the needs of each individual.

11. Most disabled people, irrespective of their disability, are capable of acting for themselves and/ or travelling on their own. Asking for, or receiving, practical assistance from you means that your action can enable the person to retain his or her independence. Always ask the person if he or she needs the assistance and what kind of assistance he or she actually needs in connection with travelling by air in order to understand their capabilities. Bear in mind that the disabled person might have experienced similar situations before.

12. Remember that information about a person's disability is personal. Some passengers are also reluctant to explain their needs in detail and this should be respected. Seek feedback from the disabled person to ensure that you are providing appropriate assistance.

13. Think of your assistance to a disabled person as providing professional service, to which the person is entitled, and avoid giving the impression that you are acting out of compassion or that you are doing them a favour. This could for example be done by avoiding giving the person with a disability special treatment apart from what is needed due to the disability.

14. Remember that some people will not be familiar with a particular airport and/or language and might therefore have difficulty in knowing what their needs are at that airport. Your support and information is needed and appreciated in such cases.

15. Remember also that unexpected occurrences – late gate change, delayed flights, emergency evacuations of an aircraft or of an airport etc – are already stressful for the non-disabled passenger, but are often particularly difficult for disabled people. Be prepared to respond to the individual needs of disabled people in these situations.

16. In order to provide assistance corresponding to the needs of the individual passenger, you and the passenger will also benefit from a better understanding of the different barriers that disabled people face.

17. There are different kinds of barriers and these barriers affect people with different types of disabilities in different ways. You will find some examples of barriers for people with specific impairments in the following section. However, this is not an exhaustive list and is given only as a guide to the challenges you may face.

18. Common for all is the *attitudinal barrier*, which is perhaps the most difficult obstacle for disabled people to overcome. A person does not feel equal unless you treat him or her as an equal. Negative attitudes towards disabled people exist everywhere, starting at a very early stage in life.

19. When we meet people who are different from what we are used to, we feel unsure about how to react and think. The attitude we have to life, to ourselves and our surroundings, influences our behaviour. If we are able to change our attitude we are able to change our behaviour.

20. Research studies show that non-verbal communication has a significant impact on how people feel they are being treated. Spoken words are only a part of the experience that the passenger will have when interacting with you.

The diversity of disability

21. As disabled people form a heterogeneous group, the specific assistance needs will vary considerably from one individual to the other. In this section you will however find some basic information about the needs of people with some common types of impairment. Keep in mind that you are dealing with individuals and that these guidelines may not always be appropriate. Also, health and safety requirements may in a limited number of cases oblige you to avoid giving a certain kind of assistance to an individual.

Wheelchair users

22. Wheelchairs can be manual or electric and have various functions and dimensions. Wheelchair users rely on their chairs, which are often adapted to their individual needs. The wheelchair is the most vital part of the independence and dignity of the user. Therefore it is important to let the person stay in his or her individually adapted chair as long as possible during the journey. As an example, in order to be able to use an accessible toilet before the departure of the flight, many wheelchair users depend on their own chair. Be aware that the vast majority of wheelchair users are unable to use the small toilets which are provided in aircrafts.

Useful hints:

- Look directly at the wheelchair user. For long conversations, kneel down to the height of the wheelchair user or bring a chair in order to allow for a more comfortable conversation.
- Do not lose eye contact when standing up.
- If the height of a check-in or ticket office desk is not adapted to the needs of wheelchair users, think about coming around to their side of the desk.
- Offer to help opening heavy doors or picking up things that might have fallen on the floor. Ask if the person wants help with luggage or to reach anything that is at a non-accessible level.
- Do not lean on or push the wheelchair without asking first.

23. Be aware that the design of the airport infrastructure or the aircraft may prevent wheelchair users from moving around independently. This is the case for example if there are steps in the airport environment or if a ramp is too steep.

People with walking difficulties

24. Many people with walking difficulties use walking aids, like sticks, crutches or zimmer frames, but some will not use any aids at all.

25. Some people with reduced mobility prefer to sit down. Others prefer to stand because of pain when sitting or difficulties to get up from the seated position.

Useful hints:

- Whenever possible, offer a seat.
- Offer help with coats, bags or other belongings.

- Offer to open heavy doors, to pick up items that might have fallen on the floor etc.
- People who have walking aids may find it difficult to use their hands when they stand up.
- Many diseases cause pain that can severely limit mobility. They can make holding and grabbing difficult or impossible. Weakness in limbs makes it difficult to move and maintain balance.
- People with amputated limbs, arthritis etc may have an increased sensitivity to touch and also to pain. The pain may increase in hot or cold conditions. Unskilled assistance may also hurt. Therefore, always ask prior to doing anything.
- Be aware that many people with walking difficulty will prefer to use a lift, where available, rather than an escalator or steps. Walking long distances at the airport can also be difficult or impossible.

People who are deaf or hard of hearing

26. Some people are deaf. Very many people are hard of hearing. This is an invisible disability.

27. People who have been deaf since birth or childhood often use sign language as their mother tongue. Those people normally rely on visual communication modes. Sometimes their literacy skills may have been affected – it is difficult to learn to write and read a language which you have never heard spoken, and, in addition, is not your mother tongue. Sign language is completely different from a spoken language and has its own grammar, lexicon and idioms. Spoken language is therefore for many deaf people their second or even third language.

28. People who have become deafened at a later stage in life more often use lip or speech reading, written messages or basic signs when communicating. Those people have developed and used the spoken language.

29. People who are hard-of-hearing often use a hearing aid and/or use lip or speech reading. A hearing aid can also be used together with other listening devices such as induction loop and desk loop.

Some people who are deaf or hard of hearing use hearing dogs.

Useful hints:

- The best thing is to ask how an individual prefers to communicate rather than guessing.
- People with a slight hearing loss can often manage without a hearing aid, but they are dependent on certain conditions for communication: good acoustics, no background noise, good lighting and clear speech. However, it may not always be possible to ensure such conditions in an airport environment.
- People who have a severe hearing loss and those who have lost their hearing as adults can benefit from supportive signs and information in written form if such information is available. Other kinds of visual information might also be useful in some cases.
- You may need to attract the attention of a person who has reduced hearing by lightly touching his or her shoulder or indicating with your hand.
- Do not shout when speaking, but use a normal speaking tone. This is important as it is more difficult to lip-read when a person is shouting, nor does not make the message clearer, just

louder. Speak rather slowly, looking at the person, and use other words if the person has difficulties understanding what you mean. Use signs and body movements to make yourself understood.

- Face the light and keep your hands away from your mouth.
- You can also write down shorter messages if this makes the conversation easier.
- Deaf people and people who are hard of hearing need the same range of information as all other passengers.
- Be aware that people who are hard of hearing will have difficulties if important information is only communicated by audible means or if there are no induction loops at the main facilities of the airport. In the same way, a person who is hard-of-hearing will have difficulties following important video information on board, such as safety information, if there is no subtitling and/or sign language interpretation.

People who are blind or partially sighted

30. A person with a visual impairment may be totally blind or partially sighted. They might need guiding and assistance for orientation purposes, including directions to important services. Although people who are partially sighted may have some useful vision, they may still need help to find their way.

31. Many, but not all, people who are blind or partially sighted use a mobility aid, mainly a white cane or guide dog. The mobility aid is also a distinctive symbol that a person is blind or partially sighted. Some partially sighted people use special glasses rather than having a mobility aid.

32. Most blind or partially sighted people need to be guided in airports, from the point of arrival in the airport to their seats on board an aircraft as well as from the aircraft seat to the point of departure from the airport.

33. People who are blind or partially sighted may have problems with orientation, but not with mobility as such. Assistance given to them should be geared to their specific needs, for example a wheelchair would not be appropriate, unless a person specifically asks for one.

Useful hints:

- When addressing a person who is blind or partially sighted, introduce yourself by explaining your position and speak to him or her directly. Say when you are leaving - otherwise he or she could find himself or herself talking to an empty space.
- Always ask a person who is blind or partially sighted if he or she wants help. Some may not need any assistance. Never grab someone and take charge.
- Always ask a person who is blind or partially sighted how he or she would like to be guided. Some people may prefer to take your arm or may feel more comfortable if you take theirs. Some people, in particular those with partial sight, may only need oral guidance.
- A guide dog in harness is a working animal and should never be distracted. Do not feed or tend to a guide dog without first asking the owner if he or she minds. If a person has a guide dog you should approach him or her from the side opposite the dog. Do not take hold of the harness or lead as the person with sight loss needs these to control the dog. Some guide dog owners prefer

to walk at your side without holding your arm. In some situations you can also walk in front – the dog will follow you.

- Warn about changes in ground surface and gaps, and explain loud noises which may alarm a person who is blind or partially sighted. If there are steps, let the person know if they go up or down. When approaching a door, say which way it is opening and on which side. Also, say if it is a revolving or a sliding door.
- Never back a person who is blind or partially sighted into a seat. Describe the seat to him or her (e.g. dining chair, low sofa) and place their hand on the back, arm or seat of the chair, whichever seems best. Also tell the person which way the chair is facing.
- When leaving a person who is blind or partially sighted, give some indication as to how long you will be away. If you have to be away for a longer period of time, give information about where assistance can be found during your absence. Schedule changes and other unexpected information must be communicated to him/her as soon as possible.
- When handing something over to a person who is blind or partially sighted (e.g. passport, ticket), specify what it is and place it in the hand – do not simply leave it on the counter or desk.
- Be aware that a person who is partially sighted may find it difficult to get around independently when, e.g. signs are not in large, clear and well contrasted print, lighting is not adequate, or transparent doors not clearly marked with contrasting coloured strips.
- Blind people and people who are partially sighted rely on audio information, information in Braille for those who read it, large print, or websites that are accessible for blind people (for example websites designed in accordance with the WAI guidelines¹). Also, blind people cannot read websites if computers do not have screen reader software installed. Therefore, you should not assume that they are aware of all relevant information if that information was not provided in those formats, and you should be prepared to communicate this information in an accessible way.

Deafblind people

34. If a person has difficulty hearing and seeing he or she can be called deafblind or ‘dual sensory impaired’. A person is regarded as deafblind if his or her combined hearing and vision loss causes difficulties with communication, mobility and access to information’. Some deafblind people can be identified by the red and white cane they use to navigate their way around.

35. The different degrees of hearing and vision loss that deafblind people experience mean that their individual needs will vary from person to person. The needs of a deafblind person are also affected by when he or she loses his or her hearing and sight. A person who is born deaf and then loses sight will have different experiences and needs to a person who is blind or partially sighted and then loses his or her hearing. A person who is born totally deaf and blind will have limited communication and may often rely on touch to communicate.

Useful hints:

The hints on communication given in the section on people who are deaf or hard of hearing and on communication with and the guiding of people who are blind or partially sighted are also useful

¹ For more information, please see www.w3.org/WAI/

when you are assisting a deafblind person. However, there are also some specific steps you can take when communicating with a deafblind person.

For example:

- Lightly touch the deafblind person's shoulder to attract his or her attention.
- Ask the person how he or she communicates and take time to make sure he or she understands to help lessen possible anxiety.
- If the person communicates using lipreading, speech or sign language you will need to make sure that you are in a good position for them to see you before you start to communicate and that the lighting is on your face.
- If the person prefers to communicate using written messages make sure that they are written in large print with a thick felt tip pen in a colour that contrasts with the paper.
- Some people use a Braille alphabet card which they will hold out to you so that you can place their fingertip on the Braille version of the letters.
- Some people may travel with a support worker, friend or family member who will be able to help you to communicate.

People with impaired speech

36. Many people have speech or language difficulties for various reasons. Do not assume that the person has a learning difficulty, as this is often not the case.

Useful hints:

- Concentrate on the communication and be patient and respectful. If you do not understand completely, tell the person that you do not understand, or repeat what you did understand in order to let the person fill in the gaps.
- Do not fill in the end of the phrases if a person speaks slowly. Let the person take his/her time to speak.
- If the person finds it difficult or tiring to speak, try only to ask questions that need a short answer, preferably just a nod or a shake of the head.
- Be aware that speaking a foreign language can be a barrier for any passenger, but in particular for a person with speech impairment.

People with learning difficulties

37. Remember first and foremost that a person with a learning difficulty has a wide range of skills and abilities which should be respected. Many of these people can live very independent lives and will need help only in some very precise areas of life (for example some can read but have difficulties with numbers, some can count and calculate but have difficulties reading the time on a clock, etc). Be patient when speaking to a person with a learning difficulty. Explain things easily and slowly and encourage the communication without patronising.

Useful hints:

- When you want to explain something:

- Do not assume any previous knowledge of what you are talking about.
 - Use concrete expressions. Try to avoid metaphors and explain the ones you use.
 - Use familiar and short words, explain difficult words and avoid professional vocabulary or dialect. Avoid using directional terms, like right-left, east-west. Use words that relate to things you both can see.
 - Try always to use the same word for the same idea or concept.
 - Try to avoid negatives, but if you have to use negatives, accompany it with a shaking of your head.
 - One sentence should not contain more than one idea.
 - Do not give too much information at once. Try to present only the most important information.
 - Give instructions in the order a person needs to follow them.
 - Do not assume that the person is not listening just because you do not get oral or visual feedback. Rather ask if the person understands what you mean.
- When you need to get information or answers from a person with a learning disability:
 - Ask one question after another,
 - Give them time to answer,
 - Be reassuring.
 - People with learning difficulties can find it difficult to read notices. So it helps to explain the notice in an accessible way. Important information should also be provided in easy-to-read format, but remember that some people will need an explanation orally.
 - Make sure that you have made yourself understood before leaving the passenger. If you are told that you were not understood, it might be because of:
 - A difficult word: try to explain this word or to use another word that is more easily understood;
 - Too much information: go through the different parts of the information separately;
 - Any other reason: try to find out what created the misunderstanding.
 - Remember that most people with learning disabilities speak only one language. It might be reasonable to ask for help from a person who speaks the native language of the passenger.
 - Be aware that a person with an intellectual disability may not be aware of important information communicated before the journey, if this information was not provided in easy-to-read format. Therefore, be prepared to communicate this information in one of the ways explained above.

Invisible disabilities

38. A high proportion of disabilities are not visible or observable in other ways. However, an

invisible disability can have implications for an air passenger to the same extent as a visible disability. You should, therefore, always be open to needs related to disabilities that you can not observe. An open attitude will be an important element in encouraging people with invisible disabilities to tell you about their needs.

39. Bear in mind that it is not always easy for a person to talk about an invisible disability, since people living with such disabilities are often met with doubt or even suspicion. Therefore, a passenger with an invisible disability will in many instances expect you to be discreet e.g. in relation to other passengers or staff members.

40. The widely varying needs of people with invisible disabilities will demand different kinds of assistance. It is important to remember that a passenger with an invisible disability might need to bring specific assistive devices, medication or other material in order to be able to travel.

41. Mental health problems may cause anxiety, restlessness and even panic attacks. Medication may cause drowsiness and slower reaction.

Useful hints:

- People with mental health problems usually appreciate kindness, consideration and encouragement. Calm and reassuring behaviour makes the passenger feel safe. However, over friendly and enthusiastic service may seem aggressive.
- Here again, offer your help, but do not impose it.

Other disabilities

42. It is impossible to cover all types of disabilities in a document like this. In this section some of the most common impairments have been mentioned, but there will of course be many people who experience other kind of disabilities, visible or invisible, that are not mentioned above, but which will also need particular attention in an airport environment. Let the person express their needs if he or she wishes to do so, and do your very best to meet the individual needs.

43. Remember also that older people, with or without disabilities, might need particular consideration.

The role of assistance dogs

44. Guide dogs assist blind and visually impaired people by avoiding obstacles, stopping at kerbs and steps, and negotiating traffic. The harness and U-shaped handle fosters communication between the dog and the blind partner. In this partnership, the human's role is to provide directional commands, while the dog's role is to insure the team's safety even if this requires disobeying a command that the dog judges to be unsafe.

45. Hearing dogs assist deaf and hard of hearing individuals by alerting them to a variety of sounds such as a door knock or doorbell, alarm clock, telephone, baby cry, name call or smoke alarm. Dogs are trained to make physical contact and lead their deaf partners to the source of the sound. Hearing dogs are identified by an orange collar and leash and/or vest.

46. Assistance dogs give support to physically disabled people by retrieving objects that are out of their reach, by pulling wheelchairs, opening and closing doors, turning light switches off and on, barking for alert, finding another person, assisting ambulatory people to walk by providing balance and counterbalance and many other individual tasks that may be needed by a disabled person. Assistance dogs can sometimes be identified by a backpack or harness.

47. Remember that assistance dogs will need particular attention in the case of long delays, cancellations or other exceptional situations. As an example, these dogs might need to drink or be given a run during a delay or at the arrival of a long haul flight.

Glossary

Avoid using

Use instead

Confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound

Wheelchair user

Crippled

Has a mobility disability, person with tetra/quadruplegia

Lame

Has a mobility disability, person with tetra/quadruplegia

Deaf-dumb

Deaf, hard of hearing

Handicapped, invalid

Disabled person

Insane, crazy, psycho, maniac

Has a mental health problem

Retarded, idiot, "downs"

Has a learning disability or an intellectual disability

Normal, healthy

Able-bodied, non-disabled

Suffers from, afflicted by, victim of...

Has e.g. cerebral palsy/autism/epilepsy...

Dwarf, midget

Person of short stature