



The Consumer Council

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This guide is available in other formats on request.



Introduction

European Regulation¹ states that all airports and airlines in the EU have a responsibility to assist disabled passengers or passengers with reduced mobility, for example, because of their age or because of a temporary injury such as a broken leg. If your booking is made through a tour operator or travel agent they must pass on your assistance needs to the airline who must inform the departure and arrival airports of the services required.

¹Regulation (EC) No 1107/2006 'Access to Air Travel for Disabled Persons and Persons with Reduced Mobility'

The Consumer Council has produced this guide to highlight the assistance you can expect from the airport or airline during your journey, from booking your flight, check-in, boarding and leaving your destination airport. We have also included information on how to complain if something should go wrong.

The EU Regulation - Access to Air Travel for Disabled Persons and Persons with Reduced Mobility - makes it illegal for airlines, tour operators or travel agents to refuse a booking on the grounds of disability or reduced mobility.

The only exceptions are:

- Restrictions imposed for safety reasons;
- The size of the aircraft or its doors prevents access by the passenger requiring assistance.



However, due to some airlines' safety rules and the level of assistance you require, an airline may ask you to arrange for another person (family member, friend or carer) to accompany you on your journey. An airline's safety rules must be made publicly available and can be found on the airline's website or by contacting them directly.

If an airline does refuse a booking they must explain why. If a booking is refused the airline, tour operator or travel agent should make reasonable efforts to provide an alternative arrangement.



If requested, airports must provide assistance from arrival at the airport, through to boarding the plane. This includes assistance at check-in, security and other facilities at the airport. Destination airports must also provide assistance, if required, including helping passengers off the plane, retrieving baggage and any other assistance the passenger may need until they leave the airport.

Individual passengers can choose the types and levels of assistance that they require and should not be charged for this service.

Assistance on board the flight is the responsibility of the airline.





Other relevant Regulation

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) also states that airports, travel agents and tour operators have a responsibility not to treat unjustifiably a disabled person less favourably, or refuse to make a reasonable adjustment when providing a service. This covers airport facilities, flight bookings and air travel information (aircraft and onboard services are currently exempt from DDA).



Staff training

All airport and airline staff should be trained to meet the needs of passengers with a disability or reduced mobility. This also includes staff sub-contracted by the airport. Well trained staff will help to ensure your travelling experience is easy and hassle free.



If you feel that a member of staff does not provide a reasonable level of service you should inform a member of the airport management.

If you are not happy with the response, contact the Consumer Council on **0800 121 6022** for further advice.



What you can expect during your journey

Booking a flight

Airlines, tour operators and travel agents must provide all ticketing and booking information in a clear and user friendly format. You can request large print or audio formats at no extra cost.

Before you book your flight consider what assistance you will need. When booking, or no later than 48 hours in advance of travel, provide clear and detailed information to the airline, tour operator or travel agent of your assistance requirements.

If for some unforeseen reason or in the case of last minute travel you do not provide more than 48 hours' notice, the airport and airline are still required to make all reasonable efforts to assist you.

Always check if the airline has any safety or security restrictions on certain medical equipment such as oxygen cylinders.

You may wish the assistance you have requested to be confirmed in writing. This may help if something does go wrong and you need to make a complaint.



Top Tip

When booking make sure to request your assistance needs no later than 48 hours in advance of your flight.

If you require a person to travel with you on your journey, you can request that they get a seat next to you and the airline is obliged to make all reasonable efforts to do this.

It is the responsibility of the airline, tour operator or travel agent to pass on your requirements to your arrival and departure airport. The responsibility to inform the airports of your requirements does not lie with you.



Before you fly

You may be asked to provide medical clearance if your health could be affected when you fly. If you are unsure if this is required you should check with your airline, tour operator or travel agent before your journey.

If you need to carry liquid medicines or medical equipment in your hand luggage you should bring a letter from your doctor stating that you need to bring these items with you through the security area.



Arriving at the airport

Airports should provide visible help points at each arrival area, including terminal entrances, car parks, bus and rail stops. There may be an assistance desk, call button or telephone in place so you can announce your arrival.

On arrival, make your way to the designated help point or check-in desk specified by your airline, tour operator or travel agent. If you have not been given a specific help point or arrival time when you booked, then you should arrive no later than two hours before departure.



Top Tip

If you have a disability or reduced mobility check with the airport if they provide a special car park rate. For example, you may be able to park in the short stay car park close to the terminal building at a reduced price.



Check-in



At check-in you should confirm any pre-booked assistance for boarding or arriving at your destination airport. If you check-in online, you should have the option to confirm the assistance required and select the most appropriate seat. If you check-in using a self-service desk there should be staff available at the airport to provide assistance.



Mobility equipment

In addition to medical equipment, you can take up to two items of mobility equipment with you. **There should be no charge for this.**

It is important to note that if your mobility equipment is lost or damaged there are limits on the amount of compensation airlines are required to provide. It is important to ensure your travel insurance provides adequate cover.

If you are a wheelchair user, it may be possible to stay in your own wheelchair to the departure gate. This will depend on your disability and whether your wheelchair can be loaded inside the plane. If not, your wheelchair will be checked in and you will be transferred to an airport wheelchair.

Airlines should ensure that wheelchairs are protected and kept intact. Staff should have received training on the safe handling, loading and carriage of mobility equipment.



Assistance around the airport

Security

When going through security, staff should have received specialist training and be aware of your needs to ensure searches are carried out appropriately.

For example, it may be more suitable for searches to be carried out in a private area. If you would prefer this, just ask security staff.

Public facilities

Facilities and services at an airport are covered by the Disability Discrimination Act. For example, there should be clear signage, accessible toilets, low-level telephones, text phones and induction loops.

There should be reserved seating for disabled passengers or passengers with reduced mobility. These seats should be clearly sign-posted and where possible be close to a help desk, information screens and accessible toilets.

Information regarding your flight should be easily accessible. All displays and signs should be clearly visible and easy to read.

If required, airport staff must help you access toilet facilities before and after your flight.



Shopping and food outlets

Airports should provide passengers with assistance accessing shops, restaurants, currency exchange etc. Airport staff may accompany passengers or provide them with mobility equipment or paging devices to arrange assistance.



Suitable arrangements, such as time to spend in shopping areas, should be made between staff and passengers depending on individual circumstances.



Boarding the plane

Disabled passengers and passengers with reduced mobility are usually called to board the plane first. Staff should make sure you are kept informed of any announcements, for example, if there are any delays.



Boarding the plane will depend on the position of the plane and the equipment required for boarding. On some occasions an air-bridge will be used, this allows level access from the boarding lounge onto the plane.

If a bus is being used to transfer passengers from the terminal to the aircraft, the bus should have low flooring to allow easy boarding.



In some airports they will use specialist lifts, stair climbers or boarding chairs to lift passengers in wheelchairs onto the plane. Once on board, if you are unable to walk to your seat staff should help to transfer you to a specialist wheelchair that can be used on the plane.



On board the plane

Seating

When on board the flight you should not be moved from your allocated seat other than for safety reasons.

The Regulation states that airlines are not allowed to seat disabled passengers or passengers with reduced mobility where they may obstruct access to emergency equipment or emergency evacuation points.

Cabin crew should receive disability awareness training, which will help ensure they are aware of passenger needs and be able to provide appropriate assistance.

On-board safety and emergency briefings

Airlines need to ensure they communicate all essential information regarding safety briefings, emergency announcements and information regarding delays or connections to passengers.

Assistance dogs

If required, assistance dogs are permitted to travel in the passenger cabin, at no extra cost. However, under the UK Pet Travel Scheme, dogs are only allowed to enter the UK on certain routes so remember to check the route you wish to fly beforehand.

The NI Pets Travel Scheme for Assistance dogs requires that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development issues an import licence in advance of travel. More information is available from:

www.dardni.gov.uk





Getting off the plane

If you have a disability or reduced mobility you will usually be the last to leave the cabin as it is easier for you to exit once the cabin is empty. However if you need to get off the plane quickly, for example if you have to catch a connecting flight, you should inform a member of cabin crew.



Your mobility equipment should be available shortly after leaving the plane. If any of your equipment is lost or damaged, the airport is required to provide a temporary replacement, however it may not be on a like for like basis.



Assistance at your destination airport

Airport staff at your destination airport should be provided with details of your assistance requirements from your airline or tour operator. Staff should provide assistance with:

- Getting off the aircraft;
- Moving from the aircraft to the baggage collection point;
- Retrieving baggage;
- Moving through immigration and customs points;
- Getting to any facilities that you require, for example toilets and shops;
- Moving from baggage collection to a designated point, which may be the airport car park; and
- Reaching any connecting flights.





What if things go wrong?

During your journey, if you are not satisfied with the service you receive from the airline or airport, it is best to raise this immediately. This will allow the airline or airport to address your issue and provide you with the assistance you need during your journey.



After your journey, if you are not satisfied with the assistance you received contact the airline, airport or tour operator.

If you remain dissatisfied with the response provided you should contact the Consumer Council. We can investigate the complaint further on your behalf.

Complaints line: **0800 121 6022** (Freephone)

Tele/Textphone: **028 9067 2488**

Fax: **028 9065 7701**

Email: **complaints@consumercouncil.org.uk**

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If your departure or arrival flight was outside Northern Ireland but within mainland UK, you can contact the Equality and Human Rights Commission. Alternatively if your flight was within the Republic of Ireland contact the Commission for Aviation Regulation.

If you have a particular query regarding the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) you can contact the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland directly for further advice.



Useful contacts

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

Telephone: 028 9050 0600
Textphone: 028 9050 0589
Enquiry Line: 028 9089 0890
Fax: 028 9024 8687
Website: www.equalityni.org

Address:

Equality House
7 - 9 Shaftesbury Square
Belfast BT2 7DP

Equality and Human Rights Commission Helpline – England

Telephone: 0845 604 6610
Textphone: 0845 604 6620
Fax: 0845 604 6630
Website: www.equalityhumanrights.com

Address:

Freepost RRLG-GHUX-CTRX
Arndale House
Arndale Centre
Manchester M4 3EQ

Equality and Human Rights Commission Helpline – Wales

Telephone: 0845 604 8810
Textphone: 0845 604 8820
Fax: 0845 604 8830
Website: www.equalityhumanrights.com

Address

Freepost RRLR-UEYB-UYZL
3rd Floor
3 Callaghan Square
Cardiff CF10 5BT

Equality and Human Rights Commission Helpline – Scotland

Telephone: 0845 604 5510
Textphone: 0845 604 5520
Fax: 0845 604 5530
Website: www.equalityhumanrights.com

Address:

Freepost RRLG-GYLB-UJTA
The Optima Building
58 Robertson Street
Glasgow G2 8DU

Commission for Aviation Regulation

Telephone: +353 (0) 1-6611700
Fax: +353 (0) 1-6611269
Website: www.aviationreg.ie

Address:

3rd Floor Alexandra House
Earlsfort Terrace
Dublin 2

The Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC)

Telephone: 028 9072 6020
Textphone: 028 9072 6016
Fax: 028 9024 5500
Email: info@imtac.org.uk
Website: www.imtac.org.uk

Address:

Enterprise House
55-59 Adelaide Street
Belfast BT2 8FE

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD)

Telephone: 028 9052 4999
Textphone: 028 9052 4420
Email: dardhelpline@dardni.gov.uk
Website: www.dardni.gov.uk

Address:

Dundonald House
Upper Newtownards Road
Belfast BT4 3SB



Belfast International Airport

Telephone: 028 9448 4848
Email: infodesk@bfs.aero
Website: www.belfastairport.com

Address:

Airport
Belfast International Airport
Belfast BT29 4AB

George Best Belfast City Airport

Telephone: 028 9093 9093
Fax: 028 9093 9094
Email: info@belfastcityairport.com
Website: www.belfastcityairport.com

Address:

Belfast BT3 9JH

City of Derry Airport

Telephone: 028 7181 0784
Fax: 028 7181 1426
Email: info@cityofderryairport.com
Website: www.cityofderryairport.com

Address:

Airport Road Eglinton
Co. Derry BT47 3GY

Dublin Airport

Telephone: +353 (0)1 814 1111
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