

## **Air travel: achieving compatible global accessibility standards**

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Air travel is a fundamental part of day to day mobility for business, leisure and tourism purposes for growing numbers of people around the world.

As populations age and air fares become more affordable, many older people are flying more frequently. Legislation on accessibility standards for airports and airlines in the USA, Canada and Europe among others is also encouraging and enabling many more people with disabilities to travel by air.

However the day to day experience of many travellers with disabilities is often unpleasant and undignified. Even in parts of the world in which legal requirements exist, the reality often falls far short of the standards that should be in place. And in many countries and regions there are still no legal requirements and people with disabilities face the reality of never knowing if they will be allowed to board a flight and, if they are, how their needs will be met. Will the right equipment be available to enable people with mobility problems to board and disembark safely or will they face the terrifying prospect of being manhandled up and down steps?

Loss and damage to mobility equipment (wheelchairs in particular) is a daily occurrence around the world and the consequences of being stranded away from home without your own wheelchair can be very serious indeed both to the health and mobility of the individual.

To enable older and disabled people to travel with confidence and dignity we need both compatible standards around the world and – most importantly – comprehensive training of all staff who deal with the travelling public – from the check in desk to the cockpit. This must include both a fundamental understanding of the rights and needs of people with disabilities and practical operational experience of how to deliver appropriate high quality services.