



# PASSENGERS WITH REDUCED MOBILITY (PRMs)



PRMs represent one of the fastest-growing demographics in aviation. This brochure provides ERA members with advice and information on the definition of PRMs and what rights they have as passengers.

## SUMMARY AND BACKGROUND

The annual growth in PRM numbers is at least six times that of the overall rate of passenger growth at many airports globally. Therefore, understanding the requirements and potential obstacles for PRMs is of increasing importance to both airlines and airports alike.

### WHAT IS A PRM?

Most airlines/airports will define a PRM under one of the following three categories:

- 1. A passenger who is unable to walk long distances** – A buggy (where available) or wheelchair should be provided at the airport to assist with the (sometimes) long distance to the gate.
- 2. A passenger who is unable to ascend stairs** – A lift on/off the aircraft should be provided by use of an ambulift. Where an ambulift is unavailable, some airports are now introducing ramps to give easier wheelchair access to the aircraft and thus providing more empathy to the PRM.
- 3. A passenger who is completely immobile** – A buggy (where available) or wheelchair should be provided to escort the passenger to the aircraft, where an ambulift will be used to lift the passenger on/off the aircraft. Where an ambulift is unavailable, some airports are now introducing ramps to give easier wheelchair access to the aircraft.

A PRM is not to be confused with other passengers that have another form of disability, including full or partial visual impairment, hearing impairment and/or speech impediments. Although these passengers may be able to walk themselves to and board an aircraft, it is imperative from a safety perspective the airline is made aware of their disability prior to boarding, thus allowing cabin crew the opportunity to prepare and provide an adequate pre-flight safety demonstration that takes their disability into consideration.

### SAFETY ON BOARD AN AIRCRAFT

The primary responsibility of cabin crew, regardless of the duration of flight, is the safety of all passengers on board the aircraft. In the event of an emergency, the operator must show that the aircraft, emergency equipment and emergency procedures allow for the evacuation of the aircraft at full seating capacity, including cabin crew, in 90 seconds or less. For this to be achieved, the aircraft operator must have a procedure in place that determines specific requirements for the seating of PRMs on board the aircraft. For example, the PRM may find the space in an emergency exit row or aisle seat more comfortable, however this could compromise the cabin crew's ability to evacuate the aircraft swiftly and thus impact upon the safety of the passengers, especially in the case of a smaller regional aircraft. Therefore, the operator must handle such cases with empathy to the PRM from a moral obligation, but also take into consideration an operational evaluation in terms of safety, security, in-flight service and use of on-board toilets, etc.



## SECURITY AT THE AIRPORT

Some aircraft operators have drawn attention to the fact that there has been an increase in abuses by passengers falsely claiming that they are a PRM and thus requiring use of a wheelchair. Such abuses occur because these passengers are actually attempting to find a way of passing through security checks and other lines at the airport more quickly. This deception has also been observed at the departure gate, where genuine PRMs and other passengers requiring assistance are normally boarded first. It is therefore imperative that the airport authority and aircraft operators enforce the same level of security checks on all passengers, regardless of their disability. Finally, there is concern over landside wheelchairs being allowed to pass through security checkpoints. Although this affords the PRM a swifter transition to their gate/plane, there is a potential security loophole, so a secondary airside wheelchair for the PRM to continue the transfer may be an option to counter this threat.



## PRMs AND ACCOMPANYING CARERS

In certain cases, a PRM may require the accompaniment of a carer who is capable of providing the assistance required, meeting applicable safety requirements on board the aircraft. The carer should be an able-bodied person aged 16 or over, should sit adjacent to the PRM and be prepared to provide assistance in all circumstances. The latter is of particular importance in the event of an emergency evacuation and carers should therefore receive a specific safety briefing from the cabin crew. A carer will normally be required when the disability of the PRM meets one of the following criteria:

- will or may be reliant on supplementary oxygen;
- are incapable of feeding themselves;
- are incapable of moving from their passenger seat to a wheelchair;
- are unable to either communicate or understand cabin crew instructions;
- are or may be unable to use the on-board toilet facilities unaided; and
- are incapable of self-administering medicines.

Ideally, the aircraft operator should be informed of all necessary information regarding a PRM who requires a carer to accompany them on board the aircraft.

## CARRIAGE OF ELECTRONIC MOBILITY AIDS (EMAs)

Safety requirements for the carriage of Electronic Mobility Aids (EMAs) by PRMs can be located in the ICAO Technical Instructions and reproduced within the International Air Transport Association (IATA) Dangerous Goods Regulations. Although aircraft and airport operators both have an obligation to enable a PRM to travel by air with an EMA, it is important that details containing the make and model of the EMA are communicated to the aircraft operator.

There are many different types of EMA and the means of inhibiting circuits (to prevent accidental operation) and protecting battery terminals from short circuit is not always apparent. Cases have been reported where an EMA's electrical circuit had not been protected from inadvertent operation prior to loading, resulting in short circuit and fire. Ground handlers sometimes find themselves presented with an EMA that has not been made safe for transport, and obtaining the necessary information from the PRM on how to make the device safe is not always possible.

Disconnecting power cables from the battery terminals prior to carriage is not usually necessary to make the device safe and indeed if not done properly, can actually increase the risk of a fire.

## REGULATORY GUIDELINES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

From an airline perspective, refusal to provide carriage or the requested assistance should always be exceptional and therefore alternative methods of providing the service should be considered. With the number of PRMs in Europe growing steadily for the past few years, European Regulation (EC)1107/2006 concerning the rights of disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility when travelling by air, has defined the responsibilities of airlines and airports. Consequently, this has provided PRMs with a new set of rights. In short, the intention of the regulation was to allow PRMs the same access to air travel as passengers without mobility limitations.

Regulation (EC)1107 makes reference to the related PRM handling charge by stating that it should be “reasonable, cost-related, transparent and established by the managing body of the airport in cooperation with airport users, through the Airport Users Committee where one exists or any other appropriate entity”. However, since airports have taken responsibility for the handling of PRMs, many airlines are finding they are facing higher charges for PRM handling, even though they could provide the same service more cost efficiently. For the smaller, regional operators already on a tight budget, this

is an additional and unnecessary financial burden. Additionally, abuses from false PRM passengers are unacceptable and should be legally penalised, as they cause inefficiencies in the normal course of the operation and incur unnecessary costs for airlines.

Airlines and airports must also have systems and processes in place to ensure that all the information about a PRM’s assistance requirements can be passed on to the relevant staff. In the case of airlines, this includes both ground staff and cabin crew as it may require passengers to be relocated from their assigned seats to accommodate the needs of the PRM. However, this can present a challenge to the smaller regional airlines that operate multi-sector days encompassing short turnarounds. The time for such critical and detailed information to be accurately relayed may not always be possible, with the result being either a delayed departure or refusal to board the PRM. The latter could damage an airline’s reputation.

ERA will continue to support the rights of passengers with reduced mobility. However, the rights of PRMs (as is the case with all passengers) MUST NOT at any time infringe upon the safety of the aircraft and its operation.

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