

UK bats better airport access for disabled travelers

- A Monitor Desk Report

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The UK's aviation regulator, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), is demanding that airports put more effort into providing prompt assistance for disabled passengers.

The warning comes in the wake of a concerning incident that left a quadriplegic woman waiting for over 90 minutes for airport assistance that ultimately never showed up.

According to Reduced Mobility Rights, the CAA has issued a letter to all airports in its jurisdiction demanding an end to delayed assistance for disabled passengers. The media and advocacy firm for the disabled notes that the CAA acknowledges that the majority of disabled passengers are receiving prompt assistance. At the same time, however, the aviation regulator is also expressing disappointment over a decline in quality of service in recent months, with the letter saying: "Our own reporting framework tells us that many more disabled and less mobile passengers have had to wait longer for assistance than usual. Although obviously a concern to us and frustrating for those passengers it has affected, we do understand the recruitment challenges for staff to provide the assistance service as part of the general recruitment challenge in aviation,"

The CAA letter comes about a week after British Airways passenger Victoria Brignell was left waiting for over 90 minutes for Gatwick Airport assistance.

Brignell told the BBC that she had reserved assistance services three months in advance and reminded the airport two weeks prior to her flight. While her wheelchair arrived promptly, the staff tasked with helping her get off the aircraft were nowhere to be found. After waiting for an extended period of time, British Airways staff ultimately stepped in to assist.

"More effort is needed"

With the number of incidents of extremely delayed or forgotten disabled passenger assistance on the rise, the CAA notes that more effort is needed to solve the issue. The regulator says that there should be "local operational working groups to ensure that operational resilience is enhanced so that the current general disruption does not unduly impact assistance provision."

While staff shortages may be one factor, the CAA believes that better management and coordination will go a long way in resolving much of the problem. This includes airports, airlines, and contracted service providers "across the entire passenger journey."

UK legislation currently exists to ensure that service and support is available for passengers who are disabled or have reduced mobility. Divided between airports and airlines, the former must assist passengers from the moment they arrive at the airport until they board their flight. Airlines are then responsible for assisting passengers on the aircraft while also charged with transporting personal wheelchairs.

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