



ECAC Facilitation Sub-Group on the Transport of Persons with Reduced Mobility

Interview with Marie Hauerová

Senior Officer in the Civil Aviation Department at the Ministry of Transport of the Czech Republic, and chair of the ECAC Facilitation Sub-Group on the Transport of Persons with Reduced Mobility

1. What is the PRM Sub-Group?

The Sub-Group on the Transport of Persons with Reduced Mobility (PRMs) is a great platform for sharing experiences, exchanging information and best practices, and preparing new guidelines and information and working papers. All with the aim of improving travel for persons with reduced mobility and to ensure they benefit from the same opportunities to travel by air as everyone else.

Currently, the PRM sub-group comprises delegates from 24 ECAC Member States and 12 observers (including EDF, IATA, ACI, European Commission), and organises regular meetings with experts from the aviation industry on PRM assistance.

The legal basis for the work of the sub-group is mainly ICAO Annex 9, the *Manual on Access to Air Transport by Persons with Disabilities* (ICAO Doc 9984), and Regulation (EC) 1107/2006. All provisions are reflected in ECAC Doc 30, Part I, Section 5 and its Annexes (Annex 5A – Annex 5L), a very important tool on the effective implementation and harmonisation of these provisions in all ECAC Member States. The ECAC Secretariat maintains a database of PRM complaints and every year prepares an annual report which allows the sub-group to better identify the areas of concern in the implementation of Doc 30, Part I and Regulation (EC) 1107/2006.

2. What topics is the group currently focusing on?

The work of this group is extremely varied. Currently, there are four study groups working within the PRM sub-group. These are: the Study Group on Amendment to Doc 30, Part I, Section 5, the Study Group on Hidden Disabilities, the Study Group on Call-Point Signage, and the Study Group on PRM Charges, and I really appreciate the progress being made by these groups.

At the last meeting (FAL-PRM-SG/67, 18 February 2021), the new amendment to Doc 30, Part I and its Annexes was introduced, featuring the incorporation of guidance material on hidden disabilities, and the amendment to Annex 5-A - *Guidance leaflet for persons with reduced mobility who may be infrequent or first-time flyers*, which should now be clearer and more helpful for persons with reduced mobility.

In cooperation with the Network of Chief Economists, a document on PRM charges is being finalised. This paper presents key elements for Member States' consideration on PRM charges and takes into account the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and its effect on PRM charges as well.

I must also mention the sub-group's active cooperation with ICAO on Annex 9 and the manuals, especially this year, with the ICAO FAL Panel taking place in July. We expect the sub-group will present a working paper on upgrading some Recommended Practices to Standards in Chapter 8, and the new Recommended Practices proposal on health issues.

I really regret that pilot phase II of the ECAC Quality Assessment Programme on the Assistance to Persons with Reduced Mobility could not be pursued last year due to COVID-19. Five pilot assessments were organised very successfully in Italy and Romania between July and September 2019. Based on these assessments, the *Guidance Material for PRM Assessments* was created, which is included in Doc 30, Part I, Annex 5-L. This Annex is an important tool for ECAC Member States to ensure the effective and harmonised implementation of Doc 30, Part I, Section 5 recommendations. Several members of the sub-group expressed their continued support for taking part in this programme, as team members or host State, and we all believe the programme will be able to restart during the year.

3. What challenges do you see arising in the future?

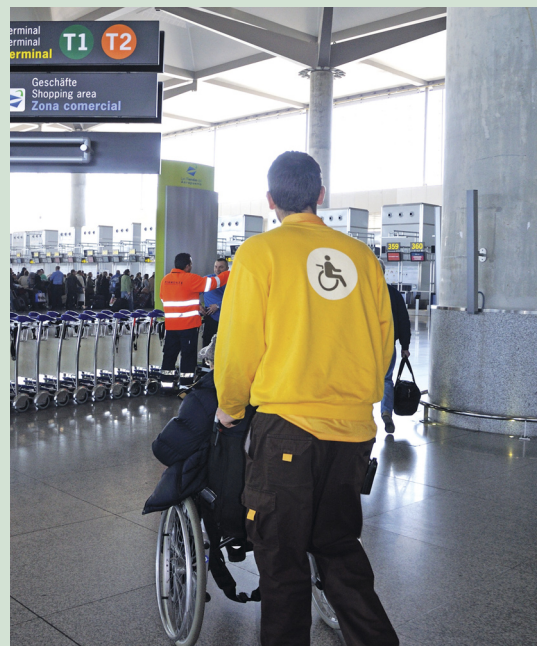
As we all know, aviation faces the most difficult crisis in its history and it will be a challenge to restart it. COVID-19 has resulted in significant changes to the passenger experience when flying, PRMs included. It is clear that current legislation (Regulation (EC) 1107/2006, ICAO Annex 9) ensures that the opportunities for air travel for persons with reduced mobility are comparable to those of other citizens, as well as the availability of assistance to meet their particular needs, but this legislation does not (and could not) take into account the situation caused by the pandemic and its impact on them when travelling by air. The approach on health measures was not harmonised in the Member States and PRMs have faced many differing na-

tional requirements (for example face covering, entry to the terminal restricted to travellers only). Lack of a common approach and harmonised guidelines and communication related to COVID-19 measures, requirements and restrictions had a crucial impact on the PRM service providers. That is a great challenge for the sub-group – to update Doc 30, Part I, Section 5 to reflect the main developments and health-related matters, in particular relating to lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic, and to develop best practices and guidance material for the assistance provided to persons with reduced mobility in case of pandemics generally. COVID-19 will be the main topic of a workshop and a meeting with experts on PRM assistance planned in autumn and - I hope - as physical meetings.

4. What main challenges for ECAC Member States do you see emerging/being discussed by the group at future meetings?

Some issues will continue to be the focus of the sub-group's attention. The first is the "assistance animal" (in accordance with ICAO Annex 9) or the "recognised assistance dog" (in accordance with Regulation (EC) 1107/2006). The sub-group is prepared to cooperate with the European Commission on this matter because it is necessary to define and harmonise the requirements for certifying assistance dogs in the EU and to ensure they are trained according to safe and recognised standards. The sub-group would be happy to discuss this issue with the Commission in connection with revision of Regulation (EC) 1107/2006 and its Interpretative Guidelines.

Other issues to be discussed by the group are the correct transmission of assistance needs, use of the right codes regarding certain persons with reduced mobility, improvement of the pre-notification rate for PRM assistance, and solving inappropriate and insensitive handling of PRMs. As I mentioned, the work of this sub-group is really varied and extensive.



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5. Some final words?

The position of chair of the sub-group is a great honour for me but mainly an enormous responsibility. Please allow me to be a little nostalgic: the PRM sub-group meeting was my first international meeting; it was in 2002 and the chair at that time was Ann Frye from the United Kingdom. I looked up to her and to all the group members with tremendous respect! I admired their knowledge, experience, professionalism and enthusiasm but mainly the cooperative and friendly atmosphere offered by the group. The subsequent chairs, Cinzia Mariani (Italy) and Teresa Antunes (Portugal), continued in this spirit and were excellent chairs. To be chair of this group is therefore a big commitment for me.

My aspiration as chair is to enlarge the group. I would like to encourage more Member States to join and participate actively, sharing their experiences and knowledge and contributing to the work of this group. ■

Marie Hauerová has worked in the Civil Aviation Department at the Ministry of Transport of the Czech Republic since 2001. In the field of facilitation, she is responsible for ICAO Annex 9 - *Rights of passengers*. She coordinates the National Facilitation Committee in the Czech Republic and also cooperated in developing the National Civil Aviation Facilitation Programme. Marie gained a lot of experience in facilitation as an alternate and later as the Czech Republic member of the ICAO Facilitation Panel. She has been a member of the ECAC Sub-Group on the Transport of Persons with Reduced Mobility (PRMs) since 2002 – from 2016 as deputy chair and since February 2021 as chair, and as a moderator of the ECAC Study Group on Amendments to ECAC Doc 30, Part I. Marie studied at the University of Transport in Žilina (Faculty of Operation and Economics of Civil Aviation) and at Charles University in Prague (Faculty of Education).