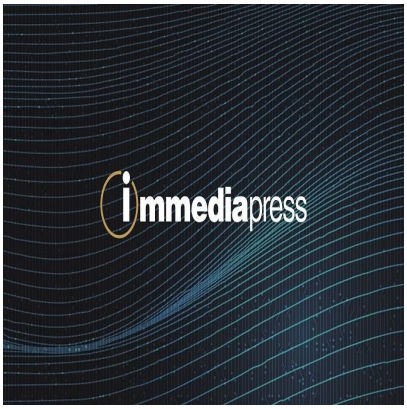


Breda University: disabled air travellers still face barriers despite existing regulations

Descrizione

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Breda University of Applied Sciences (BUas) research maps the full journey of air travellers with physical and mental disabilities and calls for a co-creation approach just as European accessibility law enters its second year.

BREDA, Netherlands, July 1, 2026 /PRNewswire/ â?? As millions of Europeans prepare for summer holidays, this study sheds light on a reality that often goes unnoticed. With nearly one in four adults in the EU living with a disability â?? some 90 million people â?? making air travel accessible is a mainstream necessity and an increasing priority for the industry. Yet, despite extensive regulations and current standards, flying still is often a stressful and sometimes undignified experience for those passengers. The research shows that barriers persist at every stage of the journey.

The risk of exclusion

The study, published in Research in Transportation Business & Management (Elsevier), comprises passengers with a wide range of disabilities, including wheelchair users, people with visual or hearing impairments, and those with hidden conditions such as autism or anxiety. The researchers examined each touchpoint of the passenger journey, from (online) booking to baggage claim, with the goal of better understanding and supporting the current situation.

With expected passenger growth in the coming decade, the industry risks scaling a system that excludes a substantial share of the population. To address this, BUas is working with European university partners on INCLAVI (Inclusive Aviation), an EU Erasmus+-funded project developing the education and knowledge needed to make air travel more inclusive. The researchers introduced two new concepts: the cumulative effect of barriers and standardised flexibility.

The problem runs deeper than infrastructure

While physical barriers remain widespread, the study highlights something more pervasive: the cumulative effect of barriers. A missing detail at bookings, staff who fail to pass on disability-related information at check-in, a wheelchair damaged in the hold â?? none of these is catastrophic in isolation. Together, they form a pattern that exhausts passengers and erodes their dignity and trust in the aviation system.

â??Many regulations and standards exist, yet the struggles remain,â?? says Simone Moretti, senior researcher in Tourism Impacts on Society at BUas. The aviation sector has good intentions, but consistent, dignified service requires more than compliance. It requires truly understanding what these passengers go through.â??

A call for co-creation

The researchers call on the aviation industry to actively involve passengers with physical and mental disabilities in the design of new services and infrastructure. Only through genuine co-creation can systemic change take root. Aviation does not have to choose between uniform safety standards and individual adaptability; improvements can be consistent across all airports while still being tailored to each passengerâ??s specific needs. As a practical resource, BUas and its partners have developed a free training course for aviation professionals.

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Note to editors

Breda University of Applied Sciences is an internationally oriented higher education institute with different study programmes in the leisure, tourism and hospitality field.

View original content to download multimedia:https://www.prnewswire.co.uk/news-releases/breda-university-disabled-air-travellers-still-face-barriers-despite-existing-regulations-302811948.html

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