The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Group of Disabled People Barred From Boarding Flight

By Yekaterina Kravtsova

October 08, 2012



The six wheelchair users were forced to find another flight to Dusseldorf after being turned away by AirBerlin staff at Domodedovo Airport. **Andrei Makhonin**

A group of people in wheelchairs were blocked from boarding an Air Berlin flight to Germany at Domodedovo Airport early Monday due to an airline policy limiting the number of immobile passengers in wheelchairs on a flight.

One person in the group, which was traveling to Dusseldorf for a conference on creating accessible environments for people with disabilities, said the incident highlighted the need to pass legislation specifying the transportation rights of people with disabilities.

Vladimir Krupennikov, one of the disabled conferencegoers and a State Duma deputy, said the 34-member group had passed a security checkpoint and passport control before some passengers were turned away from the flight. Six members of the group were in wheelchairs, he said.

When the passengers were boarding, the airplane's captain said he couldn't allow so many disabled passengers due to safety issues, stranding 13 passengers at the airport, including all six group members in wheelchairs.

Anton Steklov, one of the group members who did not board the flight, told RIA-Novosti that the captain cited an internal Air Berlin regulation stating that only two wheelchair users are allowed on a single flight.

"When we asked them to show us the regulation, Air Berlin representatives refused," Krupennikov said.

He said the group had notified the airline a month earlier that a large group of disabled people in wheelchairs would be traveling on the Monday morning flight.

"Two weeks before the flight, they made us give them information on the wheelchairs we use but said nothing about possible problems with allowing us onto the flight," he said.

An Air Berlin spokesman said that the group had provided incorrect information regarding their passengers in wheelchairs and that the captain was following airline rules.

"Two of the disabled passengers were registered as incapable of moving at all, while four others were listed as in need of a wheelchair only until the airstairs. During boarding, it turned out that all six wheelchair users couldn't move unaided," the spokesman said.

The captain then decided to allow only two of the wheelchair passengers on board, in accordance with Air Berlin internal safety regulations, the spokesman said. All the group members in wheelchairs declined to board after the captain's decision, however.

Krupennikov said that he considered the incident at Domodedovo a violation of disabled people's rights and that it highlighted the need to change the law on air transportation to clearly state their rights.

Members of the group are going to sue Air Berlin seeking compensation for the unused plane tickets and for emotional distress, he said.

Representatives of Air Berlin offered to transport the group members on different flights. The airline has two daily flights to Dusseldorf.

But the 13 group members got tickets on an Aeroflot flight out of Sheremetyevo Airport instead, Krupennikov said.

Related articles:

- Medvedev Signs Law Ratifying UN Convention on Rights of Disabled
- Moscow Region Expands Housing Rights for Disadvantaged
- Russia Finishes 2nd at Paralympics

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/10/08/group-of-disabled-people-barred-from-boarding-flight-a18385