



Development suggestions for PRM customer journey in Finnair flight disruptions

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Abstract

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<p>The population of the world is aging at an unprecedented pace and with age, the chance of experiencing a disability increases. Despite the demographic change, or other global challenges and crisis that pandemics, geopolitical conflicts etc. present to us now and in the future, every person, with or without disability, should have an equal opportunity and access to experience life and other cultures. To enable universal inclusivity and accessibility the aviation sector needs to work together and continually develop sustainable ways of doing business.</p> <p>This development-oriented thesis is commissioned by Finnair, and its topic combines the elements of social sustainability, customer experience, and flight disruptions. The purpose of this research is to acquire in-depth new knowledge about how passengers with reduced mobility (PRM) perceive Finnair's services when their flights have been disrupted. The research approach for this project is a case study as the data was gathered from Finnair customer feedback. The study is conducted utilizing a qualitative data analysis tool to find out the emerging themes and patterns in the feedback. Some elements of quantitative data are also included. The expected results and development suggestions are intended to benefit Finnair in fostering social sustainability. Development of accessibility and inclusivity in today's changed operating environment and market situation for the airlines also aims at strengthening Finnair's competitiveness.</p> <p>The theoretical framework of this study explains the key concepts and terms of PRM customer, customer journey, customer experience, flight disruption, and inclusive and accessible air travel. In addition, the regulatory framework binding the aviation sector is presented.</p> <p>The results reveal that most PRM customers needed a wheelchair assistance during their customer journey, however, did not receive it at all or the service was in some way insufficient. The most typical flight disruption type was a delayed flight to Helsinki which consequently caused new challenges, such as a missed connecting flight, for PMR customers. Customers also perceived that lack of communication during flight disruption and prolonged travel time (due to re-booking) caused utmost stress, exhaustion, and feeling of disrespect.</p> <p>Analysis and interpretation of the results is discussed in the last part of this thesis. An imaginary User persona was created to demonstrate the findings from a practical perspective. Based on the most significant deficiencies arising from the feedback the researcher suggests that the resources for the wheelchair assistance service at Helsinki Airport are optimized in a more accommodating way to consider disruptions in Finnair flight schedules. To improve customer communication in flight disruptions the researcher also recommends that Finnair App is developed to show a real-time status of a disrupted flight. Finally, to better assist also the hearing-impaired customers, the researcher suggests a new kind of Chat to be launched, a Disruption Chat.</p> <p>This thesis was written between March 2023 and December 2023.</p>
Keywords Passenger with Reduced Mobility (PRM), customer journey, customer experience, flight disruption, accessible air travel, inclusive air travel

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1 Introduction

“Our most important destination is the future.” (Finnair 2023a.)

This year, while it’s important to celebrate Finnair’s centenary, it is as important to look forward and make plans for the next 100 years and beyond. To succeed and strive in the years to come, Finnair, among other aviation sector players, must consider sustainability a priority. Practicing airline business in a responsible and sustainable manner has long lasting positive effects on world economy and cultural relations. The environmental, social, and governance aspects of sustainability are equally important and together form a balanced entity wherein one element is complemented by another.

The topic of this thesis relates to Finnair’s sustainability and more precisely social sustainability. Within the context of social sustainability, the research focuses on customers with reduced mobility or disability, their perception of Finnair flight disruptions, and most importantly the development of accessible and inclusive Finnair services when those disruptions occur. In sum, building business upon sustainable solutions by developing accessibility and inclusivity contributes to a prosperous and vigorous future for Finnair.

1.1 Background information

The world’s population is aging (WHO 2023a) and with it the number of disabilities increases as well (WHO 2023b). Despite the changing demographics, the COVID-19 post-pandemic challenges, geopolitical conflicts and other past and future global crisis, people will always have a deep human need to travel, explore the world, and experience new things. (Finnair 2023a.) This urge of travel exists equally among aging people and those with mobility hindrances or other impairments, and therefore providing them with an equal opportunity to travel is fundamentally important. This research has great relevance to this topic as it aims to improve accessibility and inclusivity at Finnair for the growing group of passengers with mobility issues.

Finnair – first established as Aero in 1923 – is one of the oldest airlines in the world still operating today. (Finnair 2023b.) It is a national carrier of Finland and a member of the **oneworld** airline alliance. Finnair is a network airline specializing in passenger and cargo traffic and flying to over 80 destinations in Europe, North America, and Asia via its Helsinki hub. (Finnair 2023b.) In 2022, Finnair’s business continued to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, but at the same time faced another crisis with the closure of the Russian airspace caused by the Russia’s invasion to Ukraine (Finnair 2022, 3). The war changed the operating environment for Finnair dramatically and required the company to quickly adjust its operations and strategy. (Finnair 2022, 3.) The new strategy aims

at restoring Finnair's profitability with a geographically more balanced network, leveraging the use of **oneworld** partners, strengthening of unit revenues, reduction of unit costs, and sustainability. (Finnair 2022, 3.) The number of carried passengers prior to the pandemic in the record high year of 2019 was 14.7 million (Finnair 2019, 3), whereas the corresponding figure in 2022 was 9.1 million (Finnair 2022, 3).

This development-oriented thesis is commissioned by Finnair and the expected results and development recommendations are intended to benefit the target organization in fostering sustainability. The researcher's current job role is Customer Journey Lead in Disruptions Customer Experience (CX) organization, and the work is positioned at the Finnair Operations Control Center (OCC). Upon deciding the topic of this thesis, the researcher consulted the target organization and expressed a personal wish to find a topic that combined three elements that most resonated to her; Sustainability, customer experience, and flight disruptions. Customer experience and flight disruptions were already familiar to the researcher through work experience, whereas sustainability was a new area to "conquer" in the context of this thesis and the studies of Sustainable Aviation Business. The researcher's unique viewing platform on flight operations and disruptions at the OCC through the "eyes of a customer" supported conducting this thesis. Also, the researcher's long and diverse work history at Finnair, aviation sector and customer service added value to the research. In response to the researcher's wish of the theme of the thesis, the final version of the topic was ideated by the target organization.

At Finnair, accessibility means "providing accessible end-to-end customer experiences and delivering excellent service to all Finnair customers, including those who need special attention and adaptation to their particular needs". (Finnair 2023c.) This means having a place, environment, or event that is set up from the start to be accessible to all individuals and that everyone has an equal opportunity to fly with Finnair. Accessibility is also one of Finnair's social sustainability objectives (Finnair 2023d), and therefore this research contributes to this important objective.

Inclusivity goes "hand in hand" with accessibility. Inclusion means having a "set of behaviors that promote equal access to opportunities and resources for individuals who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized". (Finnair 2023d.)

Inclusive and respectful customer interaction allows for more accessibility for customers with disabilities and creates a more supportive and open environment. Accessible customer service is great customer service for everyone. (Finnair 2023d.)

This study focuses on customers with reduced mobility or disability. A person with reduced mobility (PRM) or disabled person is:

Any person, whose mobility when using transport is reduced due to any physical disability, intellectual disability or impairment, or any other cause of disability, or age, who needs appropriate attention and adaptation of the service made available to all passengers to their particular needs. (EC 2006, 3.)

The topic of this thesis is important and very relevant. Sustainability and responsible business practices within the airline and the entire aviation industry are widely discussed topics right now, and in the new operating environment and market situation it is essential for Finnair to be involved in these discussions and sustainability developmental work. As Finnair states it: "Small things matter" and joint efforts are needed when reaching for a bigger, more meaningful goal.

1.2 Research problem, purpose, and objectives

The central focus of this research is to find out more in-depth information about how PRM customers perceive Finnair's services when their flights are disrupted. Changes in the airlines' operating environment have led to an increasing number of elderly and PRM passengers on Finnair flights (Mattila 16 May 2023). Finnair's network is also reshaping after the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukrainian war with a consequent new strategy, and hence with new or more frequent routes cultural differences may escalate and therefore they need to be addressed, understood and evaluated to be able to meet PRM customers coming from different cultures in a respectful manner. In addition, operational challenges and difficulties with interpreting accessibility regulation have also led to initiating this research.

The purpose of this research is to create new knowledge and insights about how PRM customers currently experience their customer journey when a Finnair flight has been disrupted. In short, what this particular phenomenon happening right now is like. The new knowledge is acquired from studying the relevant customer feedback. Based on the new information, the objective of this research is to produce suggestions for the target organization to improve the PRM customer journey in Finnair flight disruptions. The recommended improvements may concern an existing service, product, or a process at Finnair, or an entirely new element to be implemented. These development suggestions and improvements support Finnair's sustainability commitments concerning social responsibility.

Through this study, the researcher also hopes to increase general knowledge and understanding about PRM customers' journey in flight disruptions at Finnair and within the aviation stakeholders. What is important and why for the PRM customers when their travel is disrupted? How do these disruptions affect PRM customers and what is their view of Finnair in terms of accessibility and inclusivity?

In sum, this study is important because it aims to promote social good and equality through research as well as contribute to Finnair's long term sustainability target.

1.3 Research development task questions

To achieve the objectives defined in the previous subchapter, this thesis aims to find answers to two development task questions:

Q1: What are the most significant challenges or deficiencies arising from the feedback?

Q2: What can be done to improve the PRM customer journey in Finnair flight disruptions?

1.4 Scope and demarcation of the study

This study focuses solely on PRM customers. Customers who have physical or intellectual disability, are wheelchair users, have hearing and/or sight-impairment, or are of higher age (elderly/senior citizens) are considered PRM customers of this study. Finnair flight disruptions included in the study are mainly delays and cancellations, but also a few denied boardings and one downgrade situation is in the scope of the study. Other customer or flight disruption types, such as diversions or baggage irregularities, on-time Finnair flights, and non-Finnair and partner airlines' flights, whether they operated on time or not, are excluded from the study. In other words, only those disrupted flights that were operated by a Finnair aircraft are included in the study.

The in-depth knowledge of the current phenomenon was acquired by studying 33 relevant feedback from PRM customers, who had experienced a Finnair flight disruption during 1 July 2022 – 31 July 2023. This time frame was selected as it was sufficiently broad and covered an entire year of Finnair operation with both lower and higher travel seasons. Also, it was important to study the feedback that was as "fresh" as possible to exclude any COVID-19 dependencies as the pandemic-related issues were not relevant for the purpose of this study.

Feedback written in both English and Finnish are covered while feedback provided in other languages are not covered. The language selection included English and Finnish because the researcher had full proficiency in only these languages. This may have limited the findings and conclusions of the study to some extent as the information in the feedback in the excluded languages was not studied. However, the researcher believes that the scope of 33 feedback in English and Finnish languages provided a sufficient knowledge base to answer the development task questions of this research. Such careful research demarcation was necessary also because the original database provided to the researcher by the target organization was exceptionally large.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is organized in a traditional format, and it comprises of five chapters – Introduction, theoretical framework, methodology, results, and discussion. There are no appendices in this thesis.

Chapter 1 presents the research topic and the related background information. The commissioning organization, Finnair, is introduced in brief as is also the role of the researcher in the target organization. The research problem, the development task questions, objectives, and the purpose of the study are explained. Lastly, the scope, demarcation, and the structure of the thesis is outlined.

In Chapter 2, the topic-related existing research and literature is reviewed by explaining the key concepts, terminology, and the regulatory frameworks relevant to the study. The first three sub-chapters explore the theory of customer experience and customer journey, accessible and inclusive air travel for passengers with reduced mobility, and how a flight disruption is theoretically understood. The last part of the chapter covers the complex regulations binding the aviation and airline industry.

The research methodology is discussed in Chapter 3. This study is a development-oriented research project conducted with a case study approach. The empirical data used to study and analyze the current phenomenon is mainly qualitative, but a bit of quantitative data is also included. In addition to presenting the data in detail, the chapter discusses and justifies the strategic methodological choices for the research execution.

Results of the study are covered in the 4th chapter. Based on the thematic analysis carried out in Chapter 3, the findings are introduced according to thematic grouping; flight disruption type, PRM customer type, communication, care and assistance, and service recovery of customer disruption handling, and customer experience i.e., customers' emotions. To complement the descriptive results of qualitative analysis, numerical results of the closed-ended questions (quantitative data) are shared at the end of Chapter 4.

Discussion is the last chapter of this thesis and critically addresses the key findings of the study in relation to the objectives and the theoretical literature of the research. Through the eyes of an imaginary User persona, a summarized illustration of a disrupted customer journey is presented. The researcher's own voice is heard throughout the chapter, and the raised observations are not only based on the results of the study, but also on the researcher's work experience. Lastly, Chapter 5. provides answers to the development task questions and proposes suggestions to improve PRM customer journey in Finnair flight disruptions. Further, ethical viewpoints, limitations, and future development recommendations are debated, and finally, the researcher reflects upon the entire research process.

2 Theoretical framework

Theory of this thesis will be presented in a realizing model which means that the author will take an active role in commenting on the content, i.e., the author's own voice is heard wherein the concept is familiar to her. Personal reflection is done through the author's work experience and used in cooperation with the literature.

This chapter presents the key concepts and terms related to the thesis topic. Explaining the terminology aims at increasing the reader's holistic understanding of the subject.

2.1 Customer Experience (CX) and customer journey

There are multiple definitions to customer experience. Lemon and Verhoef (2016) conclude that "customer experience is a multidimensional construct focusing on a customer's cognitive (thinking), emotional (feeling), behavioral (acting), sensorial (sensing), and social responses to a firm's offerings during the customer's entire purchase journey". In practice, this means that whenever the customer is interacting with a corresponding company, his/her customer experience is built up through various touch points in multiple phases of customer's decision process. Depending on how (s)he perceives the services or products – the quality of customer care, advertising, packaging, ease of use, reliability etc. is ultimately how customer experience is constructed.

Lemon and Verhoef (2016) conceptualize customer experience as a customer's journey with a firm over time during the purchase cycle across multiple touch points. Customer experience is a dynamic process (Figure 1) that flows from prepurchase (including search) via purchase to post purchase. In each stage, customers experience touch points, only some of which are under the firm's control.

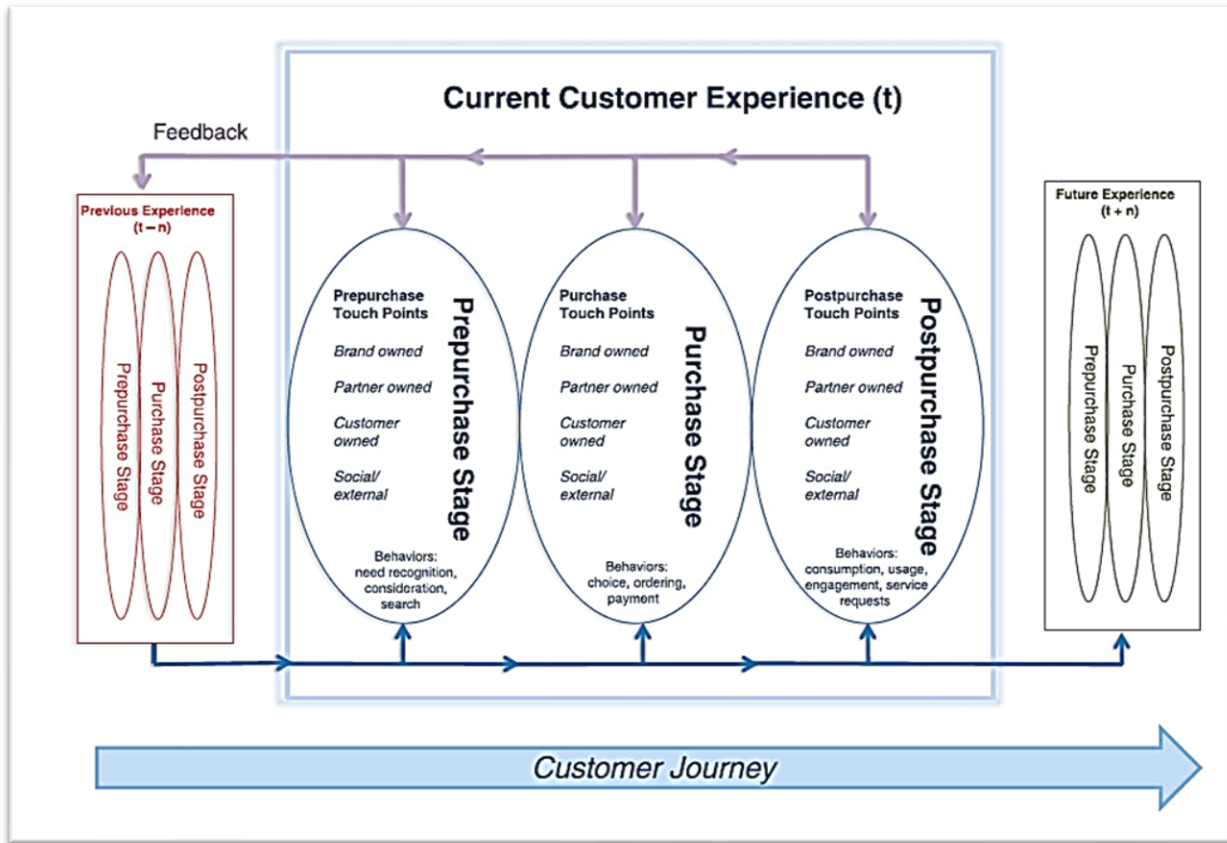


Figure 1. Process Model for Customer Journey and Experience (Lemon & Verhoef 2016)

As illustrated above, customer experience and customer journey are introduced as one entity and, although not synonymous, do not exist without the other.

Another study by Laming and Mason (2014, 15) defines customer experience as:

the physical and emotional experiences occurring through the interactions with the product and/or service offering of a brand from point of first direct, conscious contact, through the total journey to the post-consumption stage.

Logically, when customers are truly satisfied with the firm's offerings, the respective customer experience is also at a good level. Good customer experience accumulates loyalty to the brand, and loyalty delivers revenue, profitability, and growth to the company. Ultimately, it is every company's aim to have customers who are loyal to the brand, and thereafter become advocates, who remain loyal even in the most "turbulent" times and thus are willing to both recommend and defend the company brand to others. A strong brand is attractive to consumers and furthers the company's ability to differentiate itself from its competitors.

Further, Gahler, Klein, and Paul (2023) conclude that the experience context comprises of an individual, who experiences an event through a touchpoint at a certain stage of customer journey, and thus should any of these fundamental elements change, it would result in experience to be different. Each customer interaction context is defined by a customer (individual) interacting with an experience partner (event) at a specific type of touchpoint during a certain point in time of customer journey. The experience partner can be a brand, an employee, or other customers. The type of touchpoint can be online or offline, and the customer journey stages are prepurchase, purchase and post purchase (Gahler & al. 2023), as also demonstrated in Lemon's and Verhoef's Figure 1. It is important to note, that customer experience is always subjective as only the individual who is experiencing a specific event knows what it's like to be in that situation and hence, the customer experience is unique from that single customer's point of view.

At Finnair, customer experience is seen as:

customers' holistic perception of their experience. It is the result of every interaction that customers have with Finnair, navigating the website, using products, contacting customer service etc. In addition, everything that customers hear, see, and feel affects the customer experience. (Finnair 2023e.)

Within Finnair values of Working together, Commitment to care, Simplicity, and Courage, as seen in Figure 2, customer experience is highlighted, as well.

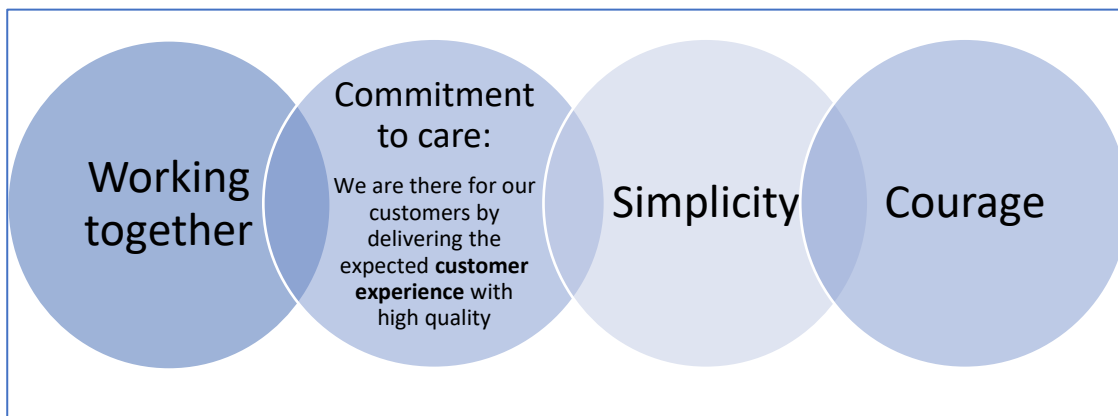


Figure 2. Finnair value Commitment to care includes customer experience (Finnair 2023f)

As already mentioned earlier, customer experience and customer journey are inseparable, and this also shows at Finnair. Customer journey process, as seen in Figure 3, consists of various steps along the customer's path from the early phases of product awareness and travel planning, to purchasing decisions, preparations for travel, embarkation, flying, connecting, arriving at the destination – and finally reflecting and possibly contacting customer service in post-travel related matters.



Figure 3. Finnair customer journey process (Finnair 2023g)

To support the process of customer journey and multiple internal functions related to each phase, the model is aligned and also visible to customers at Finnair website: Prepare, Travel & Fly and Customer support. (Figure 4.)



Figure 4. Finnair customer journey at Finnair website (Finnair 2023h)

Finally, a customer's journey is aligned with the relevant organization chart, the one that I am also a part of as a Customer Journey Lead; CX & Products and Disruptions CX. Each unit is responsible for different phases related to the customer's journey. (Figure 5.)

Mapping and visualizing the customer journey internally and externally is important as it makes this strategic "building block" more tangible. It helps the employees to better understand the customer needs and expectations at each phase of the customer lifecycle.



Figure 5. Finnair customer journey aligned in the CX & Products organization chart (Finnair 2023i)

Personally, excellent customer service is very important to me. Over the years, I've become a keen observer of customer service across the industry myself and thus consider customer service that exceeds expectations to be one of the success pillars of any company. There is an old Finnish saying: Niin metsä vastaa kuin sinne huutaa, meaning roughly if you treat others with respect and kindness, they will respond to you in a similar way. To me, this message resonates strongly. Also,

the biblical teaching of “do to others whatever you would like them to do to you” has even been one of the guiding principles of my life and well applies to customer service, too. Good promotes good and great customer service always “pays back” in returning profits and positive customer speak-outs.

2.1.1 Finnair CX metrics

To be able to monitor customer experience, the level of customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction, Finnair uses Net Promoter Score (NPS) as the main customer experience Key Performance Indicator (KPI) to measure customers' willingness to recommend Finnair. Another important metric to measure customers' feelings after the journey is Emotion score.

The NPS is based on a single question in Finnair's Customer Voice survey: *How likely are you to recommend Finnair to a friend or colleague?* As illustrated in Figure 6, the scale is from 0 (not at all likely) to 10 (extremely likely) and divides respondents into promoters (ratings 9-10), passives (ratings 7-8), and detractors (ratings 0-6). Promoters are customers who are happy, passives are inactive customers, and detractors are unhappy customers. The NPS is calculated by subtracting the percentage of detractors from the percentage of promoters.

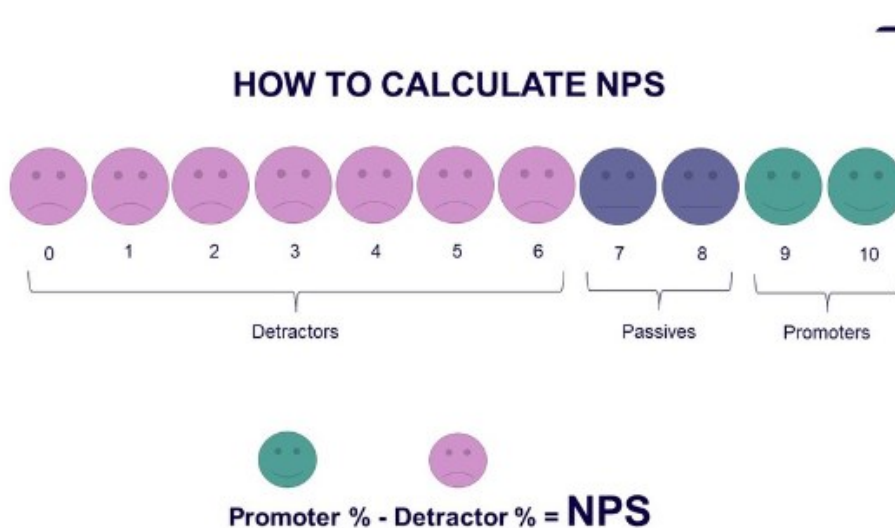


Figure 6. NPS formulation model (Finnair 2023j)

In addition, Accessibility NPS measures the PRM customers' willingness to recommend Finnair. (Finnair 2023k.) According to Mattila (14 November 2023), this metric has been monitored at Finnair since the beginning of year 2023 and contains information only from the wheelchair users.

Emotional attachment is a key component of customer experience, as mentioned earlier. Customers who are emotionally engaged will be more likely to return, ignore the competition, and be valuable brand advocates to promote and engage other people. Emotion score is measuring customers feelings after the journey on a single question in Finnair's Customer Voice survey: *Overall, how do you feel about your experience across all aspects of this journey?* The scale is from 1 to 5: Irritated (1), disappointed (2), neutral (3), happy (4) or delighted (5).

In addition to the Customer Voice survey, Finnair has multiple other ways to collect customer insights depending on the need. Following are listed a few:

- Customer Community: An online platform to contact customers using different methods.
- Website React & Share: Survey to collect feedback about Finnair.com and online digital services.
- Customer Relations and Contact Center CSAT: Surveys to collect information about customer satisfaction (CSAT) about Finnair customer care.

2.2 Passengers with Reduced Mobility (PRM)

According to International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) a passenger with reduced mobility (PRM) is defined as:

any person whose mobility is reduced due to a physical incapacity (sensory or locomotor), an intellectual deficiency, age, illness or any other cause of disability when using transport and whose situation needs special attention and the adaptation to the person's needs of the services made available to all passengers". (ICAO 2013.)

Within the European Union (EU), the Regulation No 1107/2006 of the European Commission (2006, 3) states a PRM passenger similarly as:

any person whose mobility when using transport is reduced due to any physical disability (sensory or locomotor, permanent or temporary), intellectual disability or impairment, or any other cause of disability, or age, and whose situation needs appropriate attention and the adaptation to his or her particular needs of the service made available to all passengers.

EASA (European Union Aviation Safety Agency), on the other hand, views SPCs (Special Categories of Passengers) as "passengers who, when carried on a flight, require special conditions, assistance and/or devices and their situation needs appropriate attention and adaptation to their particular needs". (EASA 2023.) In addition, EASA determines (2023) that "these passengers shall not be allocated, nor occupy, seats that permit direct access to emergency exits or where their presence could impede crew members in their duties, obstruct access to emergency equipment or impede evacuation of the aircraft".

In the United States, the Department of Transportation (DoT) and its rule in the Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA) defines a person with a disability as:


any individual who has a physical or mental impairment that, on a permanent or temporary basis, substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment. (US DoT 2008.)

The rule prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in air travel for all flights (US and foreign airlines) to, from and within the US. (US DoT 2022.)

To summarize, the definitions among ICAO, EU, EASA, and DoT are very similar in content. A PRM is simply a passenger who needs assistance from another person when traveling by air.

The type and level of assistance required by the airport, the airline and/or the third-party service-provider varies depending on the different needs that PRM passengers have when traveling by air. ICAO provides recommendations on how to manage PRM travel, and their general guidelines are set out in an ICAO Manual on Access to Air Transport for Persons with Disabilities, also known as Document 9984.

To identify the needed level of support as well as the type of assistive technology required for a PRM passenger, IATA has pre-defined and prescribed a recommendation for all airlines and airport operators to use Special Service Requirement (SSR) codes for acceptance and carriage of passengers needing special assistance. As seen in Figures 7 and 8, SSRs are distributed by physical and intellectual disabilities. In addition, medical cases require their own descriptive codes.

Physical Disabilities		Wheelchair Codes	
CODE	DESCRIPTION	CODE	DESCRIPTION
BLND	Blind Passenger	WCBW	Wheelchair (wet cell battery)
DEAF	Deaf Passenger	WCMP	Wheelchair (manual powered)
MAAS	Meet and Assist	WCMB	Wheelchair (lithium ion battery) 
WCHR	Wheelchair for distance, can ascent and descent steps	WCOB	On-board Wheelchair provided by airline
WCHS	Wheelchair for distance and steps, can walk to cabin seat		
WCHC	Wheelchair, passenger is completely immobile		

Note: May travel with Service Animal

Note: Battery powered wheelchairs require advanced notice for preparation/(dis)assembly.




Figure 7. IATA SSR codes and description for PRM travel (IATA 2019a, 32)

Intellectual Disabilities		Medical Cases	
CODE	DESCRIPTION	CODE	DESCRIPTION
DPNA	Passenger with intellectual or developmental disability ↗ Alzheimer Disease ↗ Down Syndrome ↗ Autism ↗ Mental retardation ↗ Learning difficulties ↗ etc.	LEGL	Left leg in cast
		LEGR	Right leg in cast
		LEGB	Both legs in a full cast
		OXYG	Passenger needing oxygen during flight
		PPOC	Personal Portable Oxygen Concentrator
		STCR	Stretcher Passenger

Note: Airlines may request passengers to be accompanied

Note: Airlines may request a medical certificate or medical clearance




Figure 8. IATA SSR codes and description for PRM travel (IATA 2019a, 33)

Information about the needed special service is transferred from the booking system to the airline(s) and further to the stakeholders; airport(s), ground handling, caterers, and service providers. With advance information airlines can prepare for PRM needs e.g., by arranging transportation of mobility and medical equipment as well as reserving special seating in the aircraft, thus airports can allocate their resources (assistance staff, ambulifts, wheelchairs etc.) accordingly.

2.2.1 Accessible and inclusive air travel

The population of the world is aging, and it is estimated by the World Health Organization (WHO) that by 2030 the number of people aged 60 years or older will be 1.4 billion, whereas the same number in 2019 was 1 billion. According to WHO (2023a), the increase in the subsequent number is occurring at an unprecedented pace and will accelerate in the coming decades, particularly in the developing countries. By 2050, there will be approximately 2.1 billion people aged 60 years or older. (WHO 2023a.) With age, our chance of experiencing a permanent or temporary disability is increased. An estimated 1.3 billion people – or 16 % of the global population – experience a significant disability today. (WHO 2023b.)

Accessibility is an important aspect of realizing the rights of the world's aging population. Accessibility means that something is within reach. Whether it be a product, a service, or a possibility to see other countries is everyone's right regardless of the type of passenger, with or without a disability. It is having a place, environment, or event set up from the start to be accessible to all individuals. (Finnair 2023d.)

Providing equal access and freedom to fly for all, including those who are hesitant to travel by air as they fear that their mobility aids may be mishandled or broken, is an airline industry goal set by IATA (29 April 2022, min. 0:04-0:33). Safe, reliable, and dignified air travel should be equally accessible to all passengers, hence an unanimously agreed resolution among the global airline leaders was agreed upon in the IATA Annual General Meeting (AGM) in June 2019. (IATA 2023a.) According to the resolution and its policy principle of accessibility (IATA 2019b, 2), inclusiveness and universal accessibility need to continually be promoted by the air transport sector for all passengers, including persons with disabilities. The aim of this and other practical principles is to “change the focus from disability to accessibility and inclusion by bringing the travel sector together with governments to harmonize regulations and provide the clarity and global consistency that passengers expect”. (IATA 2023a.)

In my opinion, inclusiveness is realized through accessibility and vice versa. The feeling of exclusion equals to a genuine personal sense of having no access or limited access to something which is accessible to others. The more a person can fully participate, get involved or engaged in something, the more (s)he perceives being included in society, including freedom of movement via e.g., by air.

In air travel and onboard aircraft, the aspect of accessibility is emphasized. With narrow aisles, there is limited space for movement for everyone, let alone the wheelchair users. At airports, going through various checkpoints and smooth wayfinding in widespread and multi-layered terminal buildings can challenge any traveller. Without accessibility and assistance service, air travel for PRM passengers would simply be extremely difficult or even impossible. Therefore, in my opinion, creating and continually developing accessible solutions to advance inclusivity and equity is critically important.

2.3 Flight disruptions

According to Jimenez Serrano and Kazda (2017, 4) flight disruption is defined as “situations where a scheduled flight is cancelled, or delayed for two hours or more, within 48 hours of the original scheduled departure time”. Another analysis conducted by Hassan, Santos, and Vink (2021, 2) summarizes that flight disruptions are operative irregularities such as flight cancellations and delayed departures or arrivals caused by e.g., poor weather conditions, congestion at hub airports, and aircraft mechanical problems. In addition to previous reasons, there are many other common causes that prevent airlines from operating their flight schedules as planned. (Figure 9.)



Figure 9. Ten common causes for flight disruptions (Gershkoff 2016, 10)

Disruptions are very common in the airline industry, and consequently greatly impact the realized operational performance. Disruptions also increase various operational costs, such as crew overtime, fuel usage, and passenger compensations and re-accommodation (alternative flights, hotels).

According to EUROCONTROL (2023), the average delay per flight in Europe in 2022 increased to a 5-year high of 17.3 minutes, compared to 2021 where the average delay per flight was 9.2 minutes. Also, the arrival punctuality for 2022 sharply deteriorated as only 64.5 % of flights arrived within 15 minutes or earlier than their scheduled time of arrival (STA). The poor delay performance in 2022 was strongly influenced by the aviation industry in general struggling to accommodate the high numbers of passengers and flights following the gradual liftings of travel restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. (EUROCONTROL 2023.) The biggest delay contributors were reactionary (the knock-on/domino effect), airline, and en-route ATFM (Air Traffic Flow Management) as seen in Figure 10.

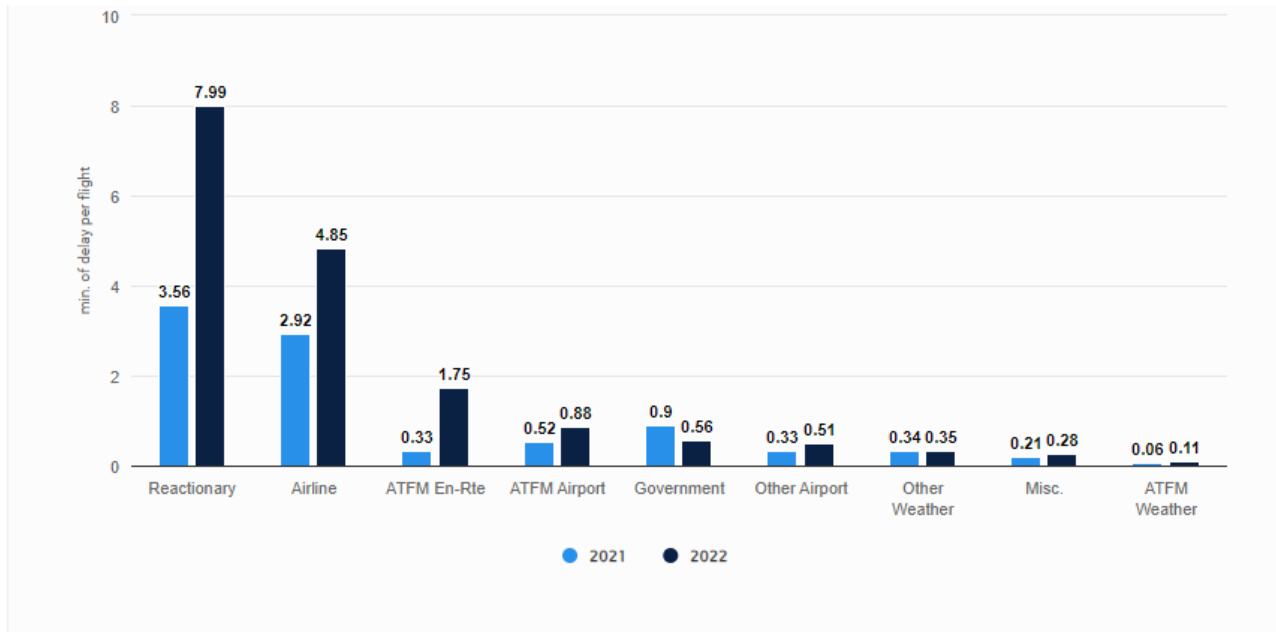


Figure 10. Causes for average flight delays in Europe in 2021 and 2022 (EUROCONTROL 2023)

The disruption knock-on effect means that a single flight event triggers multiple other disrupted flights. Often, the disruption problem spreads virally, because the flight that is e.g., cancelled in one city was planned to provide an aircraft for another flight elsewhere. As air travel is not only flying from point A to point B, but also transferring from A via B to C, passengers may end up missing their connecting flights if their inbound flight is delayed. “It is like a massive jigsaw puzzle, where many of the pieces change shape as a result of unpredictable events”, summarizes Gershkoff (2016, 4). The complexity of the industry is well demonstrated in Figure 11. A disruption occurring at an incident airport has ripple effects on secondary flights and even beyond those.

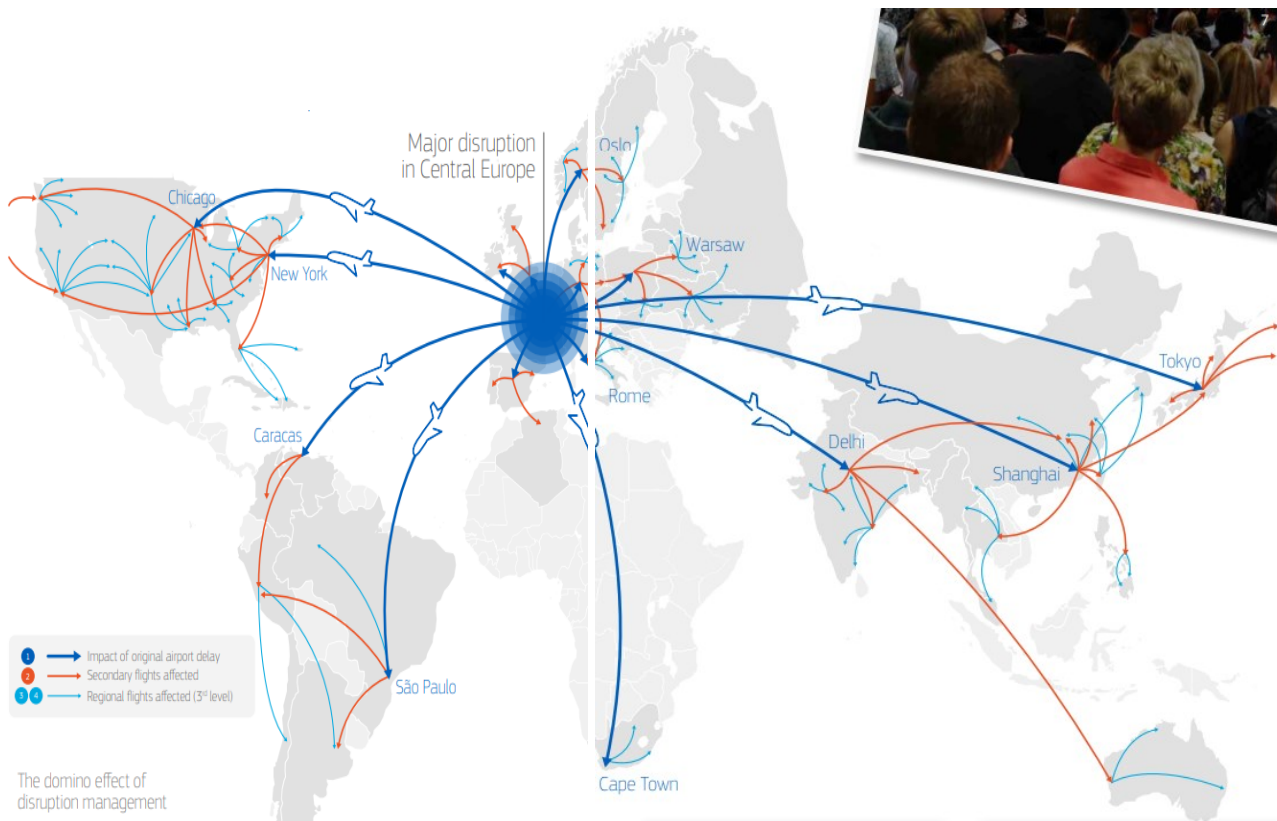


Figure 11. The ripple effect of flight disruption (Gershkoff 2016, 6-7)

The airline-related causes for delays include e.g., ground handling and staff shortages, whereas ATFM delays are due to air space usage restrictions in various FIRs (Flight Information Region). For example, from 22 February 2022 the ATFM delays increased due to the Ukrainian crisis as traffic flows shifted following the closure of the Ukrainian FIR. (EUROCONTROL 2023.)

As we know, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted global air travel since March 2020. Although, the most difficult times related to the coronavirus pandemic seem to have been bypassed, the effects of it are still ongoing and will be realized in years to come. In the past decade or so, there has been several major external incidents such as the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001, the SARS outbreak in 2003, and the Icelandic ash cloud in 2010, just to name a few. These previous shocks, along with others, have profoundly impacted air travel at the time, but in comparison to the pandemic they may still look like minor disruptions. In sum, the pandemic is the biggest disruption and greatest challenge the aviation industry has ever faced.

ICAO's role as the legal umbrella for the air transport industry is to coordinate and suggest common principles as well as to produce guidance materials for its' 193 (ICAO 2023) member states (countries), including Finland, how consumers (passengers) shall be protected in case of flight disruption. ICAO categorizes (2018, 2) flight disruptions into three types; cancellations, delays and

denied boardings (overbookings). Regulatory practices about passenger rights and assistance implemented in various ICAO member states are summarized in ICAO's document C-WP/14804 as follows:

Type of disruption. Most of the consumer protection regulations distinguish flight disruption into three types: flight cancellation; flight delay; and denied boarding due to overbooking. The term "massive disruption" or "mass disruption" is rarely used because the regulations do not differentiate flight disruption by scale (for example, no differentiation between disruption of one flight and disruption of the numerous number of flights caused by an extraordinary event of long duration). Consequently, the same provisions concerning assistance may be applicable in all circumstances.

Scope of application. The scope of application of consumer protection regulations varies from State to State, which might lead to overlapping regimes in certain cases. While in some States the regulations are applicable only to flights departing from their own territory, in others they are applicable to flights to and from the airports of the country. Some States also apply different regulations for domestic and international flights, or just cover one or the other.

Obligations for the airline. The regulations generally provide obligations for the airline towards their passengers in case of flight disruptions. Mostly, the airline is required to reimburse the ticket price paid by the passenger, reroute the passengers to their final destination, or provide services during the waiting time caused by the delay. These services are similar in most regulations and usually include items such as free access to communications, refreshments, meals, accommodation, and transport. (ICAO 2018, 2.)

Furthermore, the paper also highlights the fact that compensation practices vary significantly between the member states. Differences may occur in the amount of compensation, how the compensation is calculated, and/or under which circumstances the airline is not required to compensate the passenger. Most regulations also include provisions for extraordinary circumstances, force majeure, or situations beyond the airlines' control, albeit definitions and interpretation of these circumstances vary. (ICAO 2018, 2-3.) The EC regulation (2004) defines these unforeseen circumstances as "circumstances which could not have been avoided even if all reasonable measures had been taken". However, many other regulations do not clearly define what is considered as an extraordinary circumstance. Generally, in such circumstances, airlines are exempted from obligation to compensate passengers, but nevertheless are required to offer assistance (reimbursement and rerouting) and basic services, such as care to the inconvenienced passengers. (ICAO 2018, 3; IATA 2023b.)

ICAO's efforts in challenging governments to unify their principles on passenger rights are supported by IATA. This is important because unification of regulations across various "players" in the

aviation value chain requires common goals. Representing, leading, and serving the airline industry, IATA has taken an active role in campaigning the implementation of ICAO's regulatory measures. (IATA 2023b; IATA 2023c.) IATA also offers guidance for passengers with Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ), which helps passengers seek help in right instances when facing travel disruption or issues with an airline or travel agent. (IATA 2023b.) As visualized in Figure 12, IATA also states that harmonized regulations and rules for PRM customers are lacking in air travel, hence persons with reduced mobility are referred to contact respective airlines directly. (IATA 2023b.)

Frequently Asked Questions



Can IATA help me with my airline/travel agency complaint?



What are my rights with regard to an incident or accident related to a journey by air?



Are there consumer organizations that I can contact?



Is there a government authority I can contact for my airline/airport complaint?



Are there rules for persons with reduced mobility that airlines should follow?

→ Unfortunately, there are no harmonized regulations. Please refer to what the different airlines offer.

Figure 12. IATA FAQs in case of travel disruption (IATA 2023b)

As Jimenez Serrano and Kazda (2017) suggest, a flight is considered disrupted if it is cancelled or at least two hours delayed within 48 hours of the original scheduled departure time. Aligned with ICAO's similar categorization, Finnair views disruptions as:

- An operative defect in getting the customer from origin A to destination B as planned,
- A service defect in delivering the promised service elements connected to the customer's journey, and
- Every day small changes the customer faces in the journey.

Defects and every day small changes are described in Table 1.

Table 1. Finnair's categorization of disruption

Operative defect	Service defect	Every day small changes
Delay	Inflight wi-fi not functioning	Departure gate change
Cancellation	Inflight pre-order meal not received	Other small changes
Overbooking (denied boarding)	Pre-paid baggage not visible in check-in system	

To further explain the meaning of an operative defect at Finnair, it refers to a cancellation, an overbooking, or a delay occurring within 48 hours of the original scheduled departure time. Outside this 48-hour “window” there are traffic plan adjustments including so-called planned/controlled cancellations, and schedule changes, which are implemented at the latest 14 days prior to departure. In addition, potential overbookings are monitored and resolved by e.g., changing an aircraft type or activating a voluntary passenger search in advance. These proactive measures aim at a well-balanced and functioning Finnair “daily ops”, which contributes to a good On-Time Performance (OTP) metric, which again promotes high levels of customer satisfaction. To conclude, everything affects everything in the complex airline business as already explained earlier. The better traffic and daily program are prepared, the smoother and more successful they usually turn out to be.

Apart from “normal ops”, which may even include some irregularities such as aborted take-offs or landings, disruptions come in all “shapes and sizes” and people perceive disruptions differently. What one may consider a major disruption, is a minor one to another. Passengers who fly frequently are more used to “hick-ups” in their journey, whereas others may be flying for the first time in their lives, hence everything is new to them. Nevertheless, both have a need to fly and are expecting Finnair to transport them as stated in passengers’ itineraries.

Besides delays, cancellations, and overbookings, the three most common disruptions, followed is a spectrum of other Finnair disruptions with short descriptions:

- *Diversion*: An en-route aircraft diverting to a different destination than the originally scheduled destination due to unforeseen circumstances, e.g., unruly passenger or medical emergency.
- *Return to ramp*: An aircraft that is off blocks but not yet airborne and needs to return to the ramp due to e.g., technical problems.

- *Wetlease*: An aircraft and crew renting arrangement, e.g., Finnair has wetleased Iberia's aircraft and crew for its Madrid and Barcelona routes.
- *Stressed connection*: Referring to Helsinki Hub Control Center's (HCC) decisions on transfer passengers' connecting flights, which are either will wait, pending, or missed.
- *Delayed / damaged baggage*: Passenger's checked luggage does not arrive at the destination simultaneously (on time) with the passenger or is damaged/broken during air transportation.
- *Downgrading*: Cabin change to a lower travel class due to e.g., aircraft change resulting in overbooking of Business class.
- *Congestion*: Congestion at various touch points of customer journey due to e.g., peak travel times during high seasons or staff shortage at airport security control. Congestion may result in long waiting times and queues for passengers and consequently delayed departures.
- *Extraordinary circumstances*: Any set of conditions or sudden events which Finnair couldn't have predicted, happening on a larger scale and/or affecting several flights/days, such as industrial action (strikes), extreme weather conditions, or acts of terrorism.

In case of denied boarding, cancellation, or delay of two hours or more, Finnair follows the rules set in the EC Regulation 261/2004. Based on the regulation Finnair Notice on Passenger Rights defines how compensations and assistance to passengers is provided. In regard to extraordinary, or unforeseen circumstances, Finnair Notice on Passenger Rights defines them as:

Circumstances which could not have been avoided even if all reasonable measures had been taken. Such are for instance strikes, meteorological conditions, unexpected flight safety shortcomings and air traffic management decisions. (Finnair 2020.)

Similarly, in the context of Finnair's General conditions of carriage (2023m), Force Majeure means "unusual and unforeseeable circumstances beyond one's control, the consequences of which could not have been avoided even if all due care had been exercised".

This thesis combines PRM customer journey and Finnair flight disruptions. Having worked in the Finnair customer service frontline in hundreds of various flight disruptions, I perceive them a normality in flight operations. Things happen, as in life, too. What makes the situation in aviation unique is the fact that highly regulated operations do not tolerate much maneuver or "out of the box" flexible thinking in resolving irregularities. Safety is the number one priority and after that come other concerns. Also, air travel evokes a lot of emotions within people as there are high expectations or long-awaited anticipation usually involved. Flying out to see a long-lost relative, saying goodbye to a loved one, or returning home after an exhausting business trip are all "magnified"

in regard to emotions if disruption occurs. A sense of own control in a new travel plan is many times perceived as near-zero, although options exist, customers may think that the given options are not tangible enough. The challenge, for the airline, in my opinion, is how to efficiently, yet taking into consideration the individual needs of customers, recover the service. Restoring customer confidence in a stressful situation is no easy task, and for a PRM passenger an even more challenging one as flight changes usually require rebooking new SSRs which, as we know from before, normally need to be booked well in advance.

Today, Finnair disruption management is at a good level. Agreed processes and well-established procedures have been implemented and guide everyday work when disruptions occur.

2.4 Regulatory frameworks

This subchapter focuses on presenting the information about the regulatory frameworks existing today for PRM customers when traveling by air. The literature will be presented on a global, European, and national level. The current implementation and practices of the regulations at Finnair are presented at the end. Explaining the topic-related regulations is important as it provides the reader in-depth knowledge about the legal requirements as well as a “framed lens” through which the data analysis will be reflected upon.

2.4.1 Globally

The United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) along with its Optional Protocol was adopted on 13 December 2006 and entered in force on 3 May 2008. (UN 2006a.) Article 1 of the Convention describes the purpose of the Convention: “To promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity”. (UN 2006b.) This means that the principles stated in the Convention foster respect and equality as well as access and inclusion of persons with disabilities.

The two CRPD implementation mechanisms; the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities monitors the implementation, and the Conference of States Parties considers matters regarding implementation. The Optional Protocol, also an international treaty, aims at strengthening implementation and monitoring of the Convention with procedures of individual communications and authorizing the Committee to undertake inquiries of violations of the Convention. (UN 2006c.)

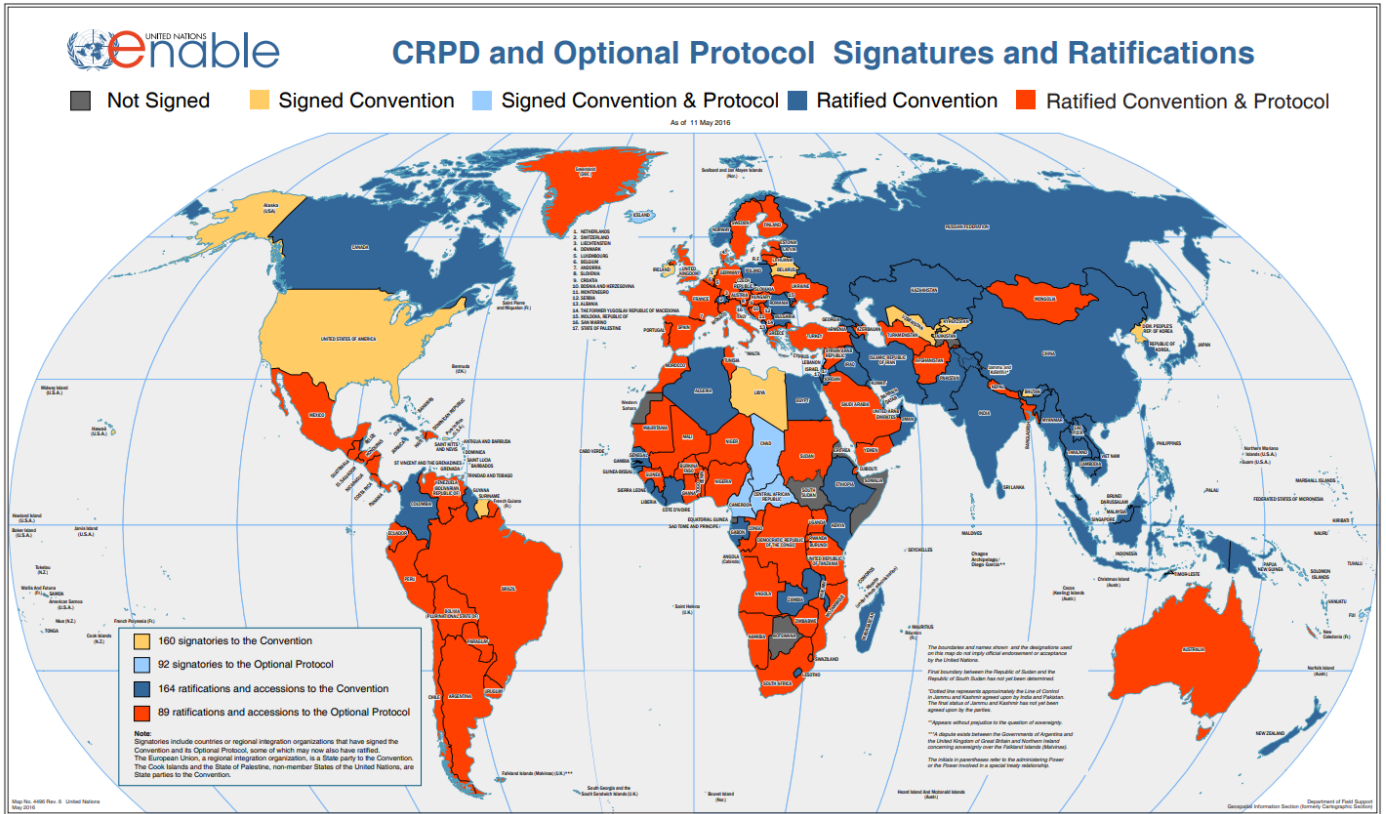


Figure 13. Status of signatures and ratifications of UNCRPD (UN 2016)

Globally, there are differences as to which country has signed, but not yet ratified the Convention and/or the Optional Protocol, whereas others may have signed and ratified either only the Convention or also the Optional Protocol. (Figure 13.) The total of signatories to the treaty of Optional Protocol is for example only 94. (UN 2023.) The nations that have ratified the Convention are legally bound to respect the standards of it. For other countries, the Convention represents an international standard which is to be respected. (UN 2006c.)

As mentioned already earlier, persons with disabilities should have equivalent access to air travel. They have the same international rights as other citizens, such as full and effective participation and inclusion in society, including freedom of movement and freedom of choice. (UN 2006d.)

Furthermore, article 9 of the UNCRPD handles accessibility and states: “To enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life” and calls states parties to take appropriate measures:

to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural area. (UN 2006e.)

Article 9 also speaks (UN 2006e) for the elimination of obstacles and barriers to accessibility, including all transportation and facilities.

Lastly, article 30 concerning the participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure, and sport of the Convention calls states parties to “ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy the benefits of tourism”. (UN 2006f.)

Since the adoption of the UNCRPD in 2006, the 100th ratification of the Convention was reached in May 2011 and 163rd in February 2016. On May 11, 2016, Finland became the 164th country to ratify the CRPD, however, the topical question remains: When will the globe be covered with 100 % ratification? (Facebook 17 May 2016, min. 0:14-0:29.)

In addition to the previously mentioned UNCRPD articles 3, 9 and 30, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as seen in Figure 14, and ratified in 2015, provide a framework for all nations to achieve a better and more sustainable future.



Figure 14. United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals (UN 2015)

Accessible and inclusive air travel for persons with disabilities is imbedded into SDGs as they address the global challenges of poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice. (UN 2015.) In particular, goal 10 is closely linked to disability as it “strives to

reduce inequality within and among countries by empowering and promoting the social, economic and political inclusion of all, including persons with disabilities". (UN 2015.)

As we have learned before, IATA is advocating for a joint government and airline industry approach that meets the needs of passengers with disabilities, while ensuring efficient and safe air transport. Collaborating with ICAO, IATA is campaigning with states to closely involve the airline industry in the inclusion of the UNCRRPD into national aviation legislation and policies related to accessible air transport. In 2019, an airline commitment of the Resolution (700) on Passengers with Disabilities was approved by the IATA members. (IATA 2019b.)

The resolution:

- Recognizes the previous steps already taken by airlines to advance safe, reliable, and dignified air travel for disabled passengers,
- Applauds the aims of UNCRRPD, and
- Acknowledges the importance of government and industry collaborative efforts to support the travel needs of people with disabilities and the need to always prioritize safety. (IATA 2019b.)

In response to advancing accessible air travel, the first edition of the IATA Passenger Accessibility Operations Manual (IPAOM), as seen in Figure 15, was released in February 2021. Its goal is to support airlines in handling disabled passengers, including those with reduced mobility and hidden disabilities, with the ultimate goal of delivering a seamless and dignified air travel experience throughout the passenger's journey. IPAOM also provides a broader understanding of agreed industry standard procedures, the recommended best practices and existing national regulations that airlines need to comply with. (ICAO 2022, 3.)

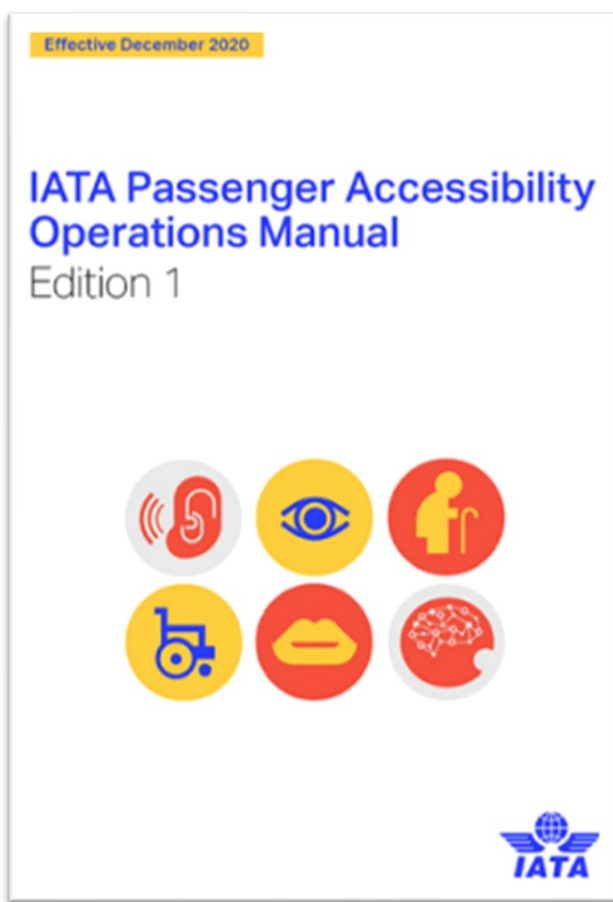


Figure 15. IATA publication of PAOM was released in February 2021 (Facebook 8 February 2022)

The general obligations under the UNCRPD are also supported by an ICAO Document 9984. The manual was created for the purpose of developing the relevant Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) in Annex 9 handling the facilitation, as well as assisting the civil aviation community in their implementation of the UNCRPD. (ICAO 2013, ix.) Chapter 8H of ICAO's Annex 9 talks about facilitation of the transport of persons with disabilities and presents (ICAO 2017, 8-4 – 8-6) altogether 17 recommended practices. Among these practices five have been addressed in July 2021 and proposed (ICAO 2021, 2-3) for amendment to update them to standards (instead of recommendations). Figures 16 and 17 show these five recommended practices prior to amendment proposal and thereafter.

8.22 Recommended Practice.— *When travelling, persons with disabilities should be provided with special assistance in order to ensure that they receive services customarily available to the general public. Assistance should be provided in a manner that respects the dignity of the individual.*

8.29 Recommended Practice.— *Measures should be taken to ensure that the hearing- and vision-impaired are able to obtain flight service-related information in accessible formats.*

8.30 Recommended Practice.— *Designated points for the pick-up and drop-off of persons with disabilities at a terminal building should be located as close as possible to main entrances and/or exits. To facilitate movement within the airport, access routes should be free of obstacles and be accessible.*

8.32 Recommended Practice.— *Adequate parking facilities should be provided for people with mobility needs and appropriate measures taken to facilitate their movement between parking areas and the terminal buildings.*

8.40.1 Recommended Practice.— *Advance notice should strongly be encouraged where assistance or lifting is required.*

Figure 16. Recommended practices by ICAO Annex 9 to facilitate the transport of persons with disabilities (ICAO 2017, 8-4 – 8-6)

8.22 – *Contracting States shall ensure, that wWhen travelling, persons with disabilities ~~should be~~ are provided with special assistance in order to ensure that they receive services customarily available to the general public. Assistance ~~shall~~ ~~should~~ be provided in a manner that respects the dignity of the individual.*

8.29 – *Contracting States shall ensure that necessary mMeasures are taken ~~should be~~ to ensure that the hearing- and vision-impaired are able to obtain flight service-related information in accessible formats.*

8.30 – *Contracting States shall take steps to ensure that dDesignated points for the pick-up and drop-off of persons with disabilities at a terminal building ~~should be~~ are located as close as possible to main entrances and/or exits. To facilitate movement within the airport, access routes ~~shall~~ ~~should~~ be free of obstacles and be accessible.*

8.32 – *Contracting States shall take steps to ensure that aAdequate parking facilities ~~should be~~ are provided for people with mobility needs and appropriate measures taken to facilitate their movement between parking areas and the terminal buildings.*

8.40.1 – *Contracting States shall encourage aAdvance notice ~~notification~~ ~~should strongly be encouraged~~ where assistance or lifting is required.*

Figure 17. Proposed amendments to recommended practices by ICAO Annex 9 to facilitate the transport of persons with disabilities (ICAO 2021, 2-3)

According to ICAO (2021, 2), these practices are already implemented by most States, and, consequently, should become Standards. In addition, ICAO suggests that the recommended practice of

8.28, as below in Figure 18, should be modified with an added text of “manual lifting should be avoided”. This is because “manual lifting as a means to assist is a sensitive concern and bears risks, both for the passenger as well as the service provider”. (ICAO 2021, 3.)

8.28 Recommended Practice.— *Contracting States should ensure that lifting systems or any other appropriate devices are made available in order to facilitate the movement of persons with disabilities between the aircraft and the terminal on both arrival and departure as required where telescopic passageways are not used.*

8.28 Recommended Practice.— *Contracting States should ensure that lifting systems or any other appropriate devices are made available in order to facilitate the movement of persons with disabilities between the aircraft and the terminal on both arrival and departure as required where telescopic passageways are not used. **Manual lifting should be avoided.***

Figure 18. Proposed amendment to avoid manual lifting as a means to assist persons with disabilities (ICAO 2021, 3)

Established in the United States in 1986, the Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA) was aimed to guarantee that people with disabilities would receive consistent and nondiscriminatory treatment when traveling by air. The act regulates both US and foreign carriers from discriminating against passengers on the basis of disability. (US DoT 2008.) To carry out the act, the US Department of Transportation has issued several regulations and requirements for airlines to make aircraft, other facilities, and services accessible, and to take steps to accommodate passengers with a disability. (US DoT 2022.) According to DoT (2008), airlines with 19 or more passenger seats, must designate one or more Complaints Resolution Officials (CROs) to be consulted, if needed, by passengers with disabilities in the following situations:

In any situation in which any person complains or raises a concern with your personnel about discrimination, accommodations, or services with respect to passengers with a disability, and your personnel do not immediately resolve the issue to the customer's satisfaction or provide a requested accommodation, your personnel must immediately inform the passenger of the right to contact a CRO and then contact a CRO on the passenger's behalf or provide the passenger a means to do so (e.g., a phone, a phone card plus the location and/or phone number of the CRO available at the airport). Your personnel must provide this information to the passenger in a format he or she can use.

DoT also states (2008), that:

Each CRO must be thoroughly familiar with the requirements of this part and the carrier's procedures with respect to passengers with a disability. The CRO is intended to be the carrier's “expert” in compliance with the requirements of this part.

In India, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has stated (Chandra 2022) in its Civil Aviation Requirement (CAR) on Carriage by Air – Persons with Disability, that “Airline shall not refuse carriage of any person on the basis of disability and/or reduced mobility”. In the update from 21 July 2022 (DGCA 2023), CAR highlights the fact that the airline cannot deny boarding a disabled passenger who may be showing “signs of panic” unless confirmed by a doctor that the passenger is indeed not fit to fly. Prior to the amendment of the rule, CAR only required airlines to provide a reason for denying boarding to a disabled person but didn’t call for a medical opinion. (Chandra 2022.) According to the Indian Ministry of Civil Aviation (2023, 159) CAR also recognizes senior citizens who require special assistance subject to the condition that request for provision of assistance is submitted in advance to the airline. DGCA also provides information to passengers with disabilities on their website and mentions (DGCA 2020), that the facilitation of special assistance includes, upon request, free buggy service in the terminal building, as visualized in Figure 19.



Figure 19. Buggy service for disabled passengers at Delhi Airport (Delhi Airport 2019)

2.4.2 Within Europe

The European Union (EU) Regulation EC 1107/2006, which was signed on 5 July 2006, mandates (EC 2006, 6), that all EU airports handling over 150,000 passengers annually must provide, free of charge, help and assistance to disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility when traveling by air. ‘Disabled persons’ and ‘persons with reduced mobility’ mean - in this context - the same as

definition for a PRM passenger, which was discussed in the Terminology chapter. Wheelchair users, elderly people, and those with communication, social interaction or 'hidden' disabilities have the same right as all other citizens to free movement, freedom of choice and non-discrimination. The regulation not only applies to EU airports but also to passengers departing from a third country airport to an EU airport if the operating carrier is an EU air carrier. (EC 2006.)

According to the Regulation (2006), help and assistance should be provided at the airport as well as on board an aircraft, by employing the necessary staff and equipment and moreover, this assistance should be received without additional charge due to grounds of social inclusion.

The Regulation also states (2006, 5) that clear signage to and from a designated pick-up and drop-off point is necessary to ensure high and equivalent standards in making the PRM customer journey as smooth as possible:

These points should be designated at least at the main entrances to terminal buildings, in areas with check-in counters, in train, light rail, metro and bus stations, at taxi ranks and other drop-off points, and in airport car parks. (EC 2006, 1.)

Those airports and airlines that are covered by the Regulation, should in co-operative means organize the assistance in a harmonized way so that throughout a single market EU area disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility receive the help they are entitled to. Along with 18 Articles of the Regulation concerning various principles, e.g., prevention of refusal of carriage, exceptions, transmission of information, quality standards of assistance service, training, and complaint procedure, annexes I and II distinguish the differences between the managing bodies of airports and the air carriers.

The EC Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 (Figure 20), published on 3 March 2021, aims to deliver further significant improvements to all areas of the lives of persons with disabilities within the EU and beyond. (EC 2021, 32.) The strategy supports the Member States and the EU institutions at adopting and implementing the UNCPRD. Regarding air travel, the EU legislation of PRM passengers' rights is highlighted in the publication as well. The goal of the Strategy is to ensure that persons with disabilities in Europe enjoy their human rights, have equal opportunities and access to participate in society and economy, can freely move in the EU regardless of their support needs, and no longer experience discrimination. (EC 2021.)

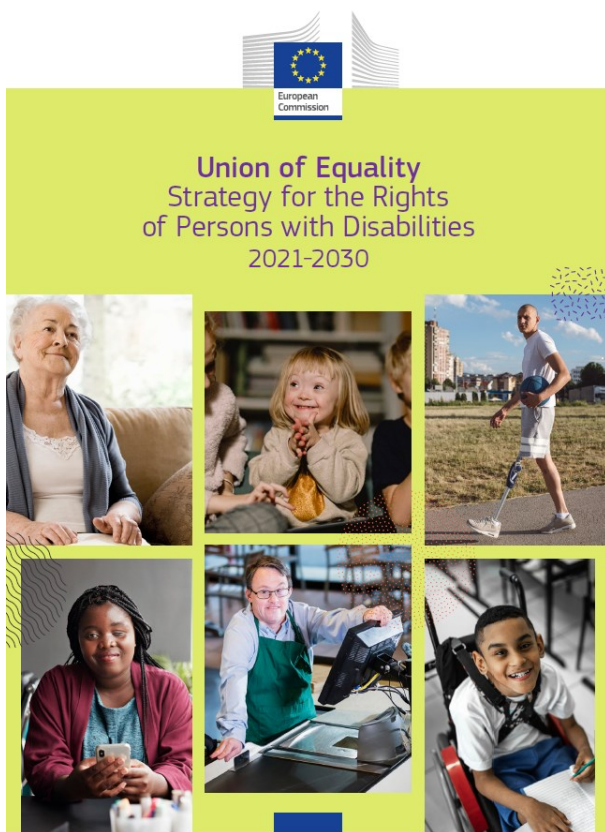


Figure 20. The EC Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 (EC 2021)

Along with the Regulation EC 1107/2006, disabled passengers' rights are also set out in the European Civil Aviation Conference's (ECAC) Doc 30, Part I, Section 5. (ECAC 2018, 5-1.) Founded in 1955, ECAC seeks to harmonize civil aviation policies and practices amongst its 44 Member States and to promote understanding on policy matters between the Member States and other parts of the world. (ECAC 2023.) Doc 30, Part I, Section 5 is used as a reference to harmonise the implementation of EC 1107/2006 measures also in the non-EU ECAC Member States. (ECAC 2018, 5-1.) Various European countries belonging to various European industry organizations, as visualized in Figure 21, result in a complex regulatory patchwork.

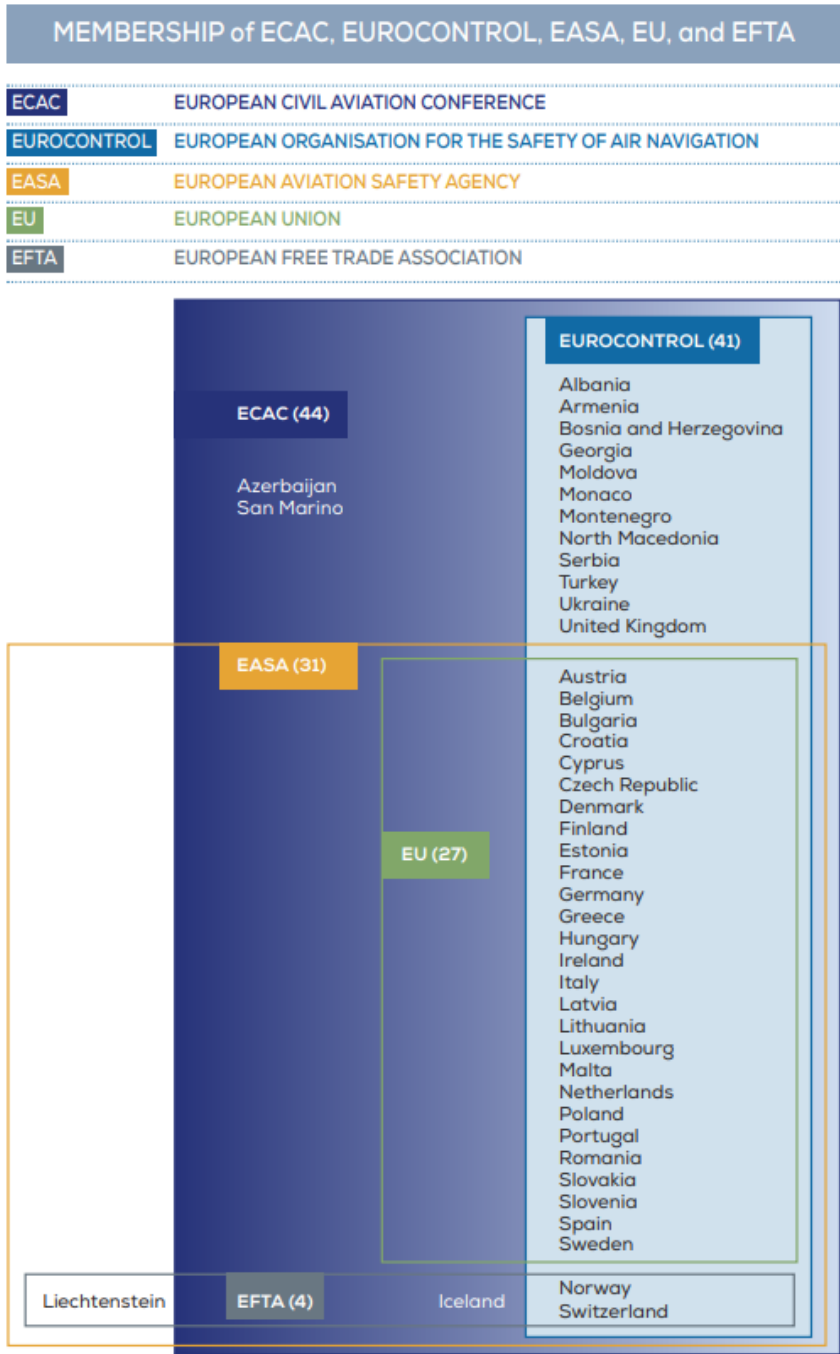


Figure 21. Membership of ECAC, EUROCONTROL, EASA, EU, and EFTA of European countries (ECAC 2021, 53)

Annex 5C in the ECAC’s Doc 30, Part I, Section 5 is known as the Code of Good Conduct in Ground Handling for Persons with Reduced Mobility. The Annex underlines (ECAC 2003, 1), that “Air carriers, Ground Handling Companies and Airports should work together at a local level to organise special assistance for PRMs”, hence the Annex “provides guidance on the general nature and scope of the special assistance services to be provided and delivered at an airport in

accordance with local, national & European legislation in order to ensure professional and seamless services to PRMs”. (ECAC 2003, 1.)

In the United Kingdom (UK), as it is no longer in the EU, the EU laws in general do not apply anymore. However, according to the UK Civil Aviation Authority (UK CAA 2021), the EC Regulation 1107/2006 still applies as it was transposed into the UK legislation when the country exited the EU in the end of December 2020. Disabled persons and PRMs have a right to “support, commonly known as Special Assistance, when traveling by air” when:

- flying on any airline from a UK airport,
- flying on an EU or a UK registered airline to a UK airport, or
- flying from outside of the UK or EU to the EU on a UK carrier.

(UK CAA 2023.)

According to Weaver (2022), CAA warned the UK airports that “they will face enforcement action if they keep failing disabled and less mobile passengers” after the UK airports of Manchester, London Gatwick, and London Heathrow had failed to offer the needed special assistance for three disabled passengers in May and June 2022. “We hope that the CAA will keep a close watch on the situation and use any powers it has to ensure disabled travellers get the support they need”, said Fazilet Hadi, the head of policy at Disability Rights UK, in the article when interviewed by Weaver (2022). The incident at London Heathrow happened in a Finnair aircraft. (Frank Gardner 15 May 2022.)

Along with EC 1107/2006 rights of PRMs and disabled passengers, the EC Regulation 261/2004 determines the rights of passengers in flight disruptions within the EU.

2.4.3 Within Finland

The Non-Discrimination Act in Finland entered into force at the beginning of 2015. (Eduskunta 2014.) Section 8 of the Act underlines (Finlex 2014, 3), that:

no one may be discriminated against on the basis of age, origin, nationality, language, religion, belief, opinion, political activity, trade union activity, family relationships, state of health, disability, sexual orientation or other personal characteristics. Discrimination is prohibited, regardless of whether it is based on a fact or assumption concerning the person him/herself or another.

The practical brochure on the contents of the Non-Discrimination Act, published by the Ministry of Justice (2014), provides information on what kind of compensation and other sanctions may be applied for on the basis of the law if e.g., a disabled person is discriminated against.

The responsibility of the Finnish Transport and Communications Agency Traficom is to regulate both transport and communications sectors in Finland, hence the rights of disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility in air transport are supervised by Traficom. (Traficom 2021.) Traficom provides practical information about the rights of PRM passengers on their website, and guides disabled passengers e.g., on how to request assistance prior to air travel.

Another important thesis-related legislation concerns accessibility of digital services in Finland. The Regional State Administrative Agency (Aluehallintovirasto) is the authority enforcing the compliance with accessibility requirements in Finland. Good accessibility of digital services, i.e., websites and mobile applications, is essential for some people and useful for us all. (Regional State Administrative Agency s.a1.) Persons with visual disabilities, impaired hearing and deafness, physical and motor skill constraints such as muscle weakness, intellectual and developmental disabilities etc. may experience challenges if websites and mobile applications are not designed and implemented sufficiently. (Regional State Administrative Agency s.a1.) Fully accessible digital services take into account the different situations and user needs so that anyone can use the services smoothly. As we know, accessibility increases equality and sense of inclusion and consequently enables independence.

The Act on the Provision of Digital Services (the Digital Services Act) in Finland entered in force on 1 April 2019, and it obliges the public sector along with some private and third sector organizations to comply with accessibility requirements in their digital services. (Regional State Administrative Agency s.a2.) The Act is based on the European Accessibility Directive (EU) 2016/2102 as well as the UNCRPD. The EU Directive on the accessibility of the websites and mobile applications of public sector bodies states (EC 2016, 1-2) that:

- Accessibility should be considered when designing, constructing, maintaining, and updating websites and mobile applications in order to make them more accessible, in particular to persons with disabilities.
- In preparing the ‘universal design’ of products, environments, programs, and services that all people are able to use, assistive devices for particular groups of persons with disabilities should not be excluded.
- Delivery of air transport service information including real-time travel information through websites, mobile device-based services, interactive information screens and interactive self-service terminals, required by passengers with disabilities in order to travel, should be covered. This could include information about the service provider’s passenger transport products and services, pre-journey information, information during the journey and information provided when a service is cancelled, or its departure is delayed.

The Digital Services Act requires compliance with the criteria of the international Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1. (Regional State Administrative Agency s.a3.) Criteria of the WCAG 2.1. may include the most concrete obligations, however there are also other laws mandating accessibility compliance. (Regional State Administrative Agency s.a4.)

2.4.4 Finnair implementation

The rules and regulations concerning PRM passengers and flight disruptions have been covered in the previous subchapters. As a service provider, Finnair, among other EU airlines, is committed to these requirements. Finnair Ground Operations (GOPS) unit is responsible for the Compliance and Regulatory functions at Finnair. By complying with the legal requirements, GOPS's top priority is uncompromised operational safety at all times. In addition, operational efficiency and customer experience are the key ingredients for successful ground operations.

Various manuals, bulletins, guides, agreed processes, instructions etc. direct Finnair's everyday activities at Helsinki Airport and across the network to secure safe and efficient ground services for both customers and aircraft. Finnair's Ground Operations Manual (AY GOM) defines (Finnair 2023n) the detailed guidelines, procedures, practices, and company policies for all staff members who are involved in aircraft and customer handling duties. The contents of AY GOM originate from the IATA Ground Operations Manual (IGOM), but AY GOM is enhanced with Finnair specific restrictions and guidelines. International and national aviation regulations and requirements together with recommended practices by IATA and ICAO are imbedded in the AY GOM and the manual is updated regularly with new revisions as needed.

Chapter 1. of AY GOM handles Passenger procedures, moreover, its' two subchapters: Special Categories of Customers, and Passenger Disruptions include more detailed information and instructions on how passengers with disabilities and flight irregularities need to be taken care of. EC Regulation 1107/2006 is explained in conjunction with passengers with disabilities and highlights the role of ground handling personnel to make sure that each station is handling all PRM's according to Finnair quality standards and regulations. For example, the manual clarifies the responsibilities between the EU airports and airlines for PRM passengers as follows:

- The airport authorities at EU airports are responsible for providing assistance for passengers with reduced mobility.
- Airlines shall provide information about PRM customers on their flights to airports 36 hours prior the departure.

A seamless flow of information about the needed special service from the customer to the airline and further on to the airport is necessary to enable PRM customer a journey as smooth as possible, as was already discussed earlier.

Refusing a PRM passenger to board a Finnair flight requires a legitimate reason. Bases for refusal of carriage in general are listed in the Finnair's General conditions of carriage, and reasons for refusal of carriage of a disabled passenger in AY GOM's subchapter of passengers with disabilities. In handling PRM passenger complaints to/from the US, i.e., denied boardings, DoT regulations apply, hence a Finnair CRO may be consulted by telephone, if needed. CROs work in the Finnair Operations Control Center (OCC) in Service Recovery team. They are Finnair's experts on disability-related issues in air travel and have authority to resolve complaints in operational situations on behalf of Finnair. (Finnair 2023d.)

In the effort of providing the passengers with a higher quality of service and having harmonized minimum standards for the aviation sector, Finnair is a member of a voluntary airline passenger commitment, which is "an outcome of a concerted action on air passenger rights initiated by the ECAC and the European Commission". (Finnair 2023o.) Even as a non-legally binding commitment, the commitment advances the reinforcement of the regulatory frameworks as it strengthens the collaborative work between not only the European airlines and airports but also consumer organizations, organizations representing persons with reduced mobility, and the travel trade. Cooperation across all stakeholders reduces the regulatory patchwork, which still remains to be the biggest obstacle in the aviation sector to overcome. In regard to commitment's elements of rights of disabled passengers and flight disruptions, Finnair agrees (2023o) to:

- Notify passengers of known delays, cancellations, and diversions,
- Assist passengers facing delays,
- Provide assistance to passengers with reduced mobility and passengers with special needs,
- Meet passengers' essential needs during long on-aircraft delays,
- Reduce the number of passengers who are involuntarily denied boarding, and
- Be responsive to passengers' complaints.

In addition, the commitment talks about meeting the needs of PRMs. Basic assumptions and airline practices are presented in a detailed manner and this, in my opinion, promotes transparency and open communication about PRM air travel.

Digital accessibility implementation at Finnair aims at making the Finnair website and app more accessible to everyone, i.e., also for PRM passengers. (Finnair 2023p.) The commitment is based on the WCAG requirements, and the Finnair accessibility statement describes the conformance of

each digital service. This information is openly communicated to all at Finnair website. As discussed in the previous subchapter, the regulatory authority in digital accessibility is the Regional State Administrative Agency.

Finnair Special Customer Working Group was established in January 2022 (Mattila 16 May 2023) and comprises of experts representing different competences related to the PRM customer journey. According to Mattila (16 May 2023), the group meets once every three months, or more frequently if needed, and is led by Sustainability at Finnair. Operative stakeholders from Helsinki Airport, as well as Finnair's Inflight, Service Recovery, and Customer Relations are represented in the meetings. Finnair legal department is consulted if necessary. (Mattila 16 May 2023.)

According to Mattila (16 May 2023), the working group was established due to:

1. Changes in the operational environment
 - a. An increasing number of elderly and PRM passengers on Finnair flights
 - b. More Finnair flights to the USA and India (cultural differences),
2. Challenges with interpreting accessibility regulation
 - a. An increasing number of customer complaints and legal claims regarding accessibility
 - b. An increasing number of requests from authorities (Traficom, DoT) regarding clarification of Finnair PRM processes, and
3. Operational challenges
 - a. Unclear roles and responsibilities regarding PRM processes at Finnair
 - b. Departments handling special assistant requests and legal claims at Finnair were heavily overloaded.

The purpose of the working group is to develop accessibility-related processes and deficiencies at Finnair. One aim is to also make sure all employees are familiar with the topic and that especially those who are working directly with PRMs (such as customer service) are well "equipped" with the knowledge of regulations and the binding obligations and commitments of it. Required for all employees at Finnair, and developed by the working group, an Accessibility and inclusion in Finnair services e-learning was launched in January 2023. The e-learning course provides information about the terms related to accessibility and inclusion of Finnair's services and deepens the understanding of the concepts of accessibility and inclusion. Also, it underlines the fact that PRM customers need to be served in the same respectful, friendly, and individual way as all other customers. Doing this, one doesn't need to know all disabilities and their special features in advance, but rather, proactively ask the PRM customer if (s)he needs help and what kind of help is needed. As seen in Figure 22, the customer journey of a PRM passenger is somewhat similar to the one that

was explained earlier, however requesting assistance service prior to departure and thus receiving it along the different touchpoints of the customer journey makes it different.



Figure 22. The customer journey of a PRM passenger (Finnair 2023d)

AY GOM's subchapter of Passenger disruptions includes information and guidelines on how traffic irregularities are handled at Finnair. Providing accurate information about the disruption for all customers in a timely manner and at regular intervals is a must-do, according to AY GOM (Finnair 2023n, 59). To help the ground personnel in explaining and apologizing to the passengers in the event of irregularity Finnair has published five different notices to be used. These are cancellation notice, delay notice, diversion notice, downgrading notice, and involuntary notice for an over-booked flight. In addition to these notices, a copy of the Finnair Notice on Passenger Rights (as seen in Figure 23), based on EC Regulation 261/2004 must also be given to all customers affected by the disruption.

Finnair Notice on Passenger Rights

This Notice is based on Regulation (EC) No 261/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council. In the event of denied boarding, long delay or cancellation of flights, Finnair will assist passengers in the following manners:

Denied boarding

When the number of passengers exceeds the number of seats on a flight, Finnair will call for volunteers to surrender their reservation in exchange of agreed benefits.

If an insufficient number of volunteers come forward, Finnair will compensate passengers who have been denied boarding against their will, with a one-time compensation amounting to

- EUR 250 for flights of 1,500 kilometres or less;
- EUR 400 for all intra-Community flights of more than 1,500 kilometres, and for all other flights between 1,500 and 3,500 kilometres;
- EUR 600 for other than intra-Community flights longer than 3,500 kilometres.

The above-mentioned compensations are reduced by half if an alternative transport does not exceed the scheduled arrival time of the flight originally booked by more than two hours (in the first case), by more than three hours (in the second case) or by more than four hours (in the third case).

The compensation will be paid except where there are reasonable grounds to deny boarding such as reasons of health, safety or security, or inadequate travel documents.

In such cases Finnair will additionally offer

- refreshments and/or a meal as well as communication facilities and if an overnight stay becomes necessary, hotel accommodation including transport between the airport and place of accommodation; and
- the choice between either an alternative transport to the final destination at the earliest opportunity; or at the later date at the passenger's convenience, subject to availability of seats; or
- reimbursement of the ticket if the flight is no longer serving any purpose in relation to the passenger's original travel plans, and the passenger decides to cancel the journey. In case the journey has already started, Finnair will then transport the passenger back to the first point of departure indicated in the ticket.

Long delays

Finnair will offer refreshments and/or a meal as well as communication facilities, when a flight is expected to be delayed

- for two hours or more in the case of flights of 1,500 kilometres or less; or
- for three hours or more in the case of all intra-Community flights of more than 1,500 kilometres and of all other flights between 1,500 and 3,500 kilometres; or
- for four hours or more in the case of other than intra-Community flights longer than 3,500 kilometres.

In case the estimated flight departure is postponed to the next day, Finnair will offer hotel accommodation if necessary. In delays of at least five hours, if the flight is no longer serving any purpose in relation to the passenger's original travel plans, the passenger has the right to cancel the journey, in which case Finnair will reimburse the ticket. In case the journey has already started, Finnair will then transport the passenger back to the first point of departure indicated in the ticket.

In delays of at least three hours the passenger is entitled to the same amount of compensation as in the event of denied boarding unless the delay is caused by extraordinary circumstances.

Flight cancellation

If a flight is cancelled, Finnair will offer the choice between reimbursement of the ticket or re-routing to the final destination including assistance and care as previously mentioned in case of denied boarding.

If a flight has not been cancelled due to extraordinary circumstances or the passenger has not been informed about the cancellation in reasonable time, Finnair might be liable to pay the same amount of compensation as if the passenger had been denied boarding.

The right to compensation does not apply if

- the passenger is informed of the cancellation at least two weeks before the scheduled time of departure; or
- between two weeks and seven days before the scheduled time of departure and offered re-routing, allowing to depart no more than two hours before the scheduled time of departure and to reach the final destination less than four hours after the scheduled time of arrival; or
- less than seven days before the scheduled time of departure and are offered re-routing, allowing to depart no more than one hour before the scheduled time of departure and to reach the final destination less than two hours after the scheduled time of arrival; or
- the cancellation is caused by extraordinary circumstances which could not have been avoided even if all reasonable measures had been taken. Such are for instance strikes, meteorological conditions, unexpected flight safety shortcomings and air traffic management decisions.

In all the above cases, reimbursement may be paid either in cash, by electronic bank transfer, bank orders or bank cheques, or with the signed agreement of the passenger, in travel vouchers. The ticket shall be reimbursed within seven days.

If a passenger is faced with a situation described in this Notice and feels that Finnair has not acted in accordance with the Notice, the passenger may contact Finnair Customer Relations after the journey. Contact information and a contact form are available at www.finnair.com/contacts. The mail address is Finnair Plc, Customer Relations, SL/403, 01053 FINNAIR, FINLAND.

If the passenger can not reach an agreement with Finnair Customer Relations, the passenger may contact the local consumer body for inquiries. In Finland the passenger may turn to the Consumer Disputes Board:

Consumer Disputes Board
P.O. Box 306
00531 HELSINKI FINLAND
Tel. +358 29 566 5200
E-mail: krii@oikeus.fi

In Finland the Consumer Ombudsman and the Finnish Transport and Communications Agency are responsible for the enforcement of this Regulation regarding airlines.

Finnish Competition and
Consumer Authority /
the Consumer Ombudsman
P.O. Box 5
FI-00531 HELSINKI, FINLAND
Tel. +358 (0)29 505 3000
Email: kirjaamo@kkv.fi

Finnish Transport and
Communications Agency
(Traficom)
P.O. Box 320
FI-000590 TRAFICOM
Switchboard: +358 29 534 5000
Registry: kirjaamo@traficom.fi

English 2/2020 SL



Figure 23. Finnair Notice of Passenger Rights (Finnair 2020)

Besides complying with the legal requirements, Finnair also always provides customer care regardless of the source of the irregularity. Good care of the passengers and Finnair's legal responsibility are not always the same thing. The principle of taking good care of the passenger means looking after his/her welfare irrespective of whether the company has a legal obligation to do so or not.

In case of disruption, Finnair provides information and further guidance to customers on topical questions and issues that need to be resolved in flight disruptions. (Finnair 2023q.) In Finnair General conditions of carriage for passengers and baggage (2023m), article 7 includes information about disabled passengers' right for acceptance for carriage provided all necessary prior arrangements (booking SSR) have been made, and article 9 about denied boarding compensation, cancellations, and long delays.

3 Methodology

This chapter discusses the research methodology. The approach of the study will be first introduced, followed by the chosen method, the research process itself, data introduction and the analysis. Finally, the ethical issues of the research will be covered.

The objective of this study is to understand the phenomenon and the current status of PRM customer journey in Finnair flight disruptions. Two customer feedback databases will be studied and based on the acquired new in-depth knowledge, development suggestion(s) are introduced to the commissioner of the study to improve the PRM customer experience at Finnair. In sum, the study aims to answer two research questions: 1) What are the most significant challenges or deficiencies arising from the feedback, and 2) What can be done to improve the PRM customer experience at Finnair?

3.1 Research approach

As explained before, the topic of this thesis was ideated by the target organization Finnair. Along with a pre-set topic combining the researcher's three elements of interest; Sustainability, and in more specific social responsibility, customer experience, and flight disruptions, also the related data to be analyzed, and the research approach were pre-defined making it easier for the developer to perceive the entity of the research project in beforehand, and not having to decide which research strategy would be the best suited, and/or method to be implemented. In sum, the case study approach was a natural choice of research strategy for this development work as its focus was to study a specific Finnair real-life case. The approach allowed the developer to explore a phenomenon happening right now among the PRM customers in Finnair flight disruptions, and therefore obtain concrete and contextual in-depth knowledge as to why and how the phenomenon was topical. A thorough understanding of the existing situation provided a solid ground to develop a product, service, or a process or even create new subsequent solutions to mitigate the existing challenges.

According to Moilanen, Ojasalo, and Ritalahti (2022) the case study approach is one of the most typical research strategies for any development work and it always aims for just a few or even a single development target. From the very beginning of this thesis project, it was clear that the development task questions would be most likely best answered with a case study approach as it allowed the researcher to examine the subject in a thorough, detailed manner. Going through the extensive raw data of PRM customer feedback and complaints in flight irregularities enabled the researcher to identify common patterns and themes as well as cause-and-effect relationships.

As aptly concluded by Njie and Asimiran (2014, 39): “A case study is an interesting approach to consider when a researcher is motivated to expend time and effort to a situation, area, program, a group or person with the aim of answering the how and why conundrums.” Also, with case study approach, research questions cannot be answered instantly as the strategy requires “a lot of time, patience, and energy to work loose complex issues to knit together an explanation”. (Njie & Asimiran 2014, 39.) Hence, a case study approach was a well-grounded research strategy for this thesis as it not only was readily pre-defined by the commissioner but also because the researcher’s personal characteristics of thoroughness, determination, and motivation supported such execution. Additionally, the researcher’s study leave enabled full focus and deep investigation of the research topic.

3.2 Research methodology

Descriptively explained by Goundar (2012, 4) the word research is composed of ‘re’ and ‘search’ wherein re is a prefix meaning again, anew, or over again, and search is a verb meaning to examine closely and carefully, to test and try, or to probe. “Together they form a noun describing a careful, systematic, patient study and investigation in some field of knowledge, undertaken to establish facts or principles.” (Goundar 2012, 4.) The aim of this study is to find answers to the two research questions by systematically investigating the existing phenomenon, and then come up with (a) development suggestion(s) to improve PRM customer’s journey in Finnair flight disruptions. Systematic investigation not only covers the topic-related theory but also the techniques and methods for data collection and analysis. And there are many varied ways and methodological choices to consider when executing research. Depending on what is sought to be found as an outcome of the research the method selection should be done accordingly. In this study the research methodology is aligned with the case study research approach, and hence qualitative methods were used.

Njie and Asimiran state (2014, 35) that qualitative methodology – as implied in its name - emphasizes on the underlying qualities of entities and processes and their implicit meanings. A similar viewing of qualitative research is that of Patel M. and Patel N. (2019, 49): “As the name itself suggests, qualitative research is concerned with the qualitative process. It generally works with the study of human behavior.” Patel M. and Patel N. also refer (2019, 49) qualitative research as “motivation research”, which in my opinion is well said as the qualitative data investigated in this study may shed light on those precise motives reflected in the customers’ feedback. For example, customers may not always clearly comment on what has ultimately driven them to give feedback, and hence the motives for them to take action and give feedback may well lie elsewhere. Experiencing a flight disruption may only be the “last straw” and a consequent act in a much wider context of “life management”, or rather “life disruption”.

Qualitative research is non-numerical, descriptive, applies reasoning and uses words. (Goundar 2012, 9), meaning people's judgements, opinions, feelings of comfort, emotions, ideas, beliefs etc. can be described with words. (Walliman 2010, 71.) Quantitative research, on the other hand, is based on the measurement of quantity or amount. (Goundar 2012, 9.) Mathematical procedures and models can be used to analyze numerical data, whereas words cannot be mathematically manipulated. (Walliman 2010, 71-72). Qualitative and quantitative research methods both have their unique characteristics, purpose and need, and in sum, you could pointedly express quantitative data as "hard facts" and qualitative data as "soft facts", I think. Data to be analyzed in this study will be presented in more detail in subchapter 3.4., but the research methodology along with its justification for this project will be explained next.

This thesis aims at improving a PRM customer's journey and customer experience in Finnair flight disruptions, and therefore acquiring a comprehensive holistic picture of the researched topic was the first must-do in the research process. After conducting a relevant literature review in Chapter 2., suitable research methodology needed to be clarified. As mentioned before, the topic, the approach, and the related data to be analyzed generated from the development need of the target organization Finnair, and hence the best suited research methodology was also accordingly aligned. It was agreed with Mattila (30 March 2022) and Kuovi (12 May 2022), the fellow Finnair employees of the researcher and members of the steering group of this thesis, that topical feedback was to be studied and analyzed and based on the insights and new knowledge, a development suggestion was the expected outcome of the research.

The source of information for the analysis was the database of Finnair customer relations & feedback, more precisely the scope of Finnair PRM customer feedback when traveling with Finnair and experiencing a flight disruption. The decision about delimitation (time range) of the data was made by the researcher herself. First, it was decided that the feedback would be gathered from May 2021 to May 2022, however, this time range was questioned and re-evaluated in August 2023 as the researcher wanted the data to be as current as possible. In addition, updating the time range most likely also resulted in exclusion of any possible COVID-19 -related feedback, which was beneficial for the purpose of the study as there was no need to view COVID-19 customer effects. Therefore, the feedback was collected from July 2022 to July 2023.

As discussed before, qualitative data is non-numeric data and provides information on how people see things and perceive various situations, and hence feedback used for this study is precisely comprised of PRM customers' opinions, thoughts, feelings, ideas etc. and how they have experienced and perceived a flight disruption. To clarify, the qualitative data in this study was not collected by the researcher herself, instead the data was given to the researcher by the

commissioner, after which the actual data analytics was done by the researcher. Apart from the qualitative data a slight addition of quantitative data was also included in the study as there were some closed-ended questions (ratings) with numeric data in the customer feedback form. Viewing the numerical customer ratings can be considered secondary data and added value to the primary qualitative data. This study will not include other typical qualitative methods such as observations or interviews, moreover the focus was on studying the massive empirical feedback database which undoubtedly, in researcher's opinion, included adequate amount of information to be analyzed.

In addition to the qualitative and quantitative methods the researcher also utilized her own work experience and personal expertise on PRM customers, flight disruption and customer feedback handling, and customer service and customer experience when viewing and observing the data.

3.3 Research process

From the start of this development project the most important thing to keep in my mind was a realistic timetable and careful planning of the entire thesis work. As I had no prior bachelor (BBA) studies before the master (MBA) studies, this thesis was the 1st thesis for me to ever conduct, and hence at first it seemed massively overwhelming and intimidating. Yet, I was confident that with my strong work and life experience as well as my personal characteristics such as eternal drive for self-development and personal growth, I would succeed and therefore welcomed the research project with curiosity and excitement. Before everything, I considered this research project to be a 'chance of a lifetime' and a wonderful learning opportunity, which I most certainly did not want to pass.

Big projects demand a great deal of planning and a lot of time. The better the planning and the sturdier the foundation of the whole project is, the smoother it is to continue 'building' the thesis block-by-block until it is finished. This was my strategy as well. In addition, I took advantage of all the various supportive measures, such as Haaga-Helia's written guidelines for thesis writing, thesis workshops, method workshops, master seminars, library and information services, expertise of the thesis steering group, peer support groups (Riittävän hyvä oppari and thesis café), wellbeing support groups (Life Skills), and study coach services. My husband and other family members, friends, colleagues at work, supervisors, and my employer Finnair also played an important role in pushing me forward along every phase of the research process.

According to Haaga-Helia UAS (2023), thesis can be divided into three main stages:

- Thesis stage 1: Planning
- Thesis stage 2: Implementation
- Thesis stage 3: Finalizing

Moilanen & al. (2022) present the above staging as a simple process of a transformation project with corresponding phases as planning, implementation, and evaluation. Interestingly, and as seen in Figure 24, this simple process does not necessarily end in the last stage but can in fact restart in the form of a new development project grounded on the findings of the original research. (Moilanen & al. 2022) This research and its process will be reflected upon these stages as they cover the entire lifecycle of the project.

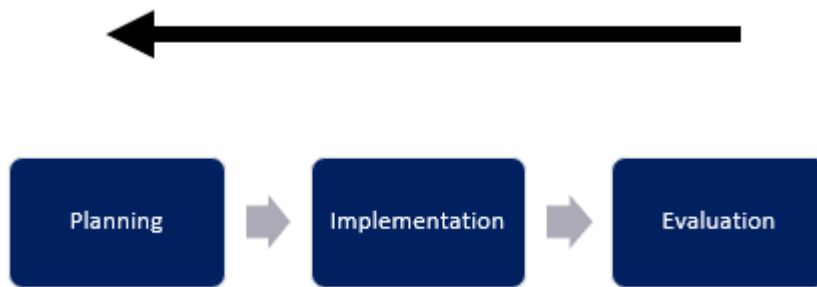


Figure 24. A simplified process of research project (Moilanen & al. 2022)

Although the planning stage is presented above to commence in the beginning of the project, it actually continued along the entire research process. Changes required modification to the original plan and rescheduling the intermediate stages and personal deadlines was also done regularly. As the researcher's knowledge and understanding of the topic and the entire research process gradually grew, implementation and evaluation were also more or less permanently on-going stages. Constant reflection and self-brainstorming proved valuable and even necessary to reach the goal of a completed thesis. Therefore, a more realized research process for this particular study is shown in Figure 23. It has similarities compared to the simplified process but also distinct differences. For this study, going back and forth through the various stages was not something that was planned, yet it turned out to be needful as it enabled refining the content and making sure the overall structure of the study was clear, logical, and well-balanced. Full-time work and life's other commitments while studying and proceeding with thesis most certainly required flexibility in all stages of the research process.

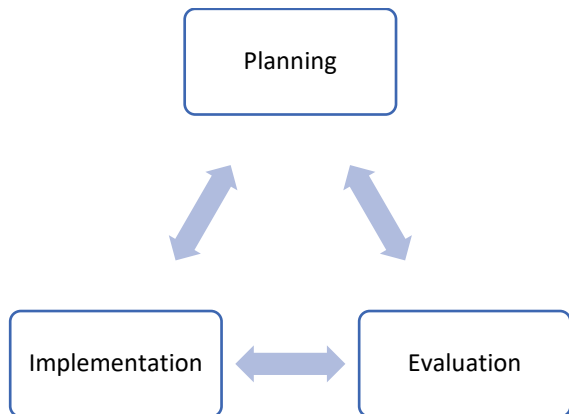


Figure 25. A continuing sequence of research process stages in a form of a multidirectional cycle

Within the planning stage, in March 2022, the research topic was discussed with the commissioner of the thesis. The topic was then defined more precisely, and the thesis plan submitted in May 2022. Implementation of the plan, the actual thesis work began in March 2023 with getting familiar with the existing theory and submitting the theoretical framework in May 2023. Execution of the research included presenting the methodological choices, data itself, analysis, and the ethics of the project. This part of the research was processed during September 2023. By the end of November 2023, the results of the analysis were shared and discussed which completed the implementation stage of the research process. Finally, writing the introduction chapter, providing suggestions for further development, reflecting on own learning, and reviewing the thesis content entity was finished by mid-December 2023.

3.4 The empirical data

This subchapter introduces the data used in the study and how it was gathered. Also, to deepen the understanding of the reader, the overall process of PRM customer giving the feedback to Finnair is explained and illustrated in detail. This is important to get a better holistic perspective of the customer's view while providing his/her feedback.

3.4.1 Process of giving feedback

Finnair collects customer feedback on flight disruptions via different channels and touchpoints, however, this study focuses on feedback collected through a feedback form provided to customers on Finnair web page. To submit a claim request, a customer needs to first navigate to the home page of customer feedback and compensation. This process is visualized step-by-step in Figure 26.



Figure 26. Customer navigation process to feedback and compensation home page

Alternatively, the feedback form can also be accessed with the search function in the top right corner of the Finnair home page.

For qualitative analysis, two separate feedback databases were included in this study:

1. Flight disruptions and
2. PRM customers.

The topic of this thesis combines flight disruptions and PRM customers, and hence both databases were relevant for this research. The current categorization of the feedback and compensation form offers customers five options to choose from and as highlighted in Figure 27, two categories enable submission of feedback about either booking and travel experience or a flight disruption. Depending on the situation, a PRM customer may provide feedback on flight disruption through either category. Figures 27 through 37 illustrate the various phases of the process of giving feedback.

Feedback and compensation

We appreciate your feedback and are here to assist you with your claims and other concerns. Your feedback is valuable to us in developing our services further. For more general topics, please check our frequently asked questions, or get assistance from our chat service at any time.

Retrieve previous feedback
Retrieve your previous feedback with your family name and case reference number, check the progress of your case or add additional documents.

Let us know about booking and travel experience
Share your experience, positive or negative feedback or concerns regarding our services.

Submit a claim request for the flight disruptions or baggage issues
Claim compensation for flight disruptions or baggage issues occurred on past travels.

Apply for a refund of an unused ticket or service
Apply for a refund of an unused flight ticket or service purchased directly from our channels (Finnair.com, Finnair app or Finnair customer service).

Check our frequently asked questions or contact our customer care
Select this option to find the best way to contact us. Check our Frequently Asked Questions for more general queries or concerns or get help from our customer care via our chat service, over the phone or on social media.

Figure 27. Start menu of Finnair feedback and compensation request (Finnair 2023r)

As PRM customers may also provide positive feedback about booking and travel experience or even flight disruption it is important to note that such data is excluded from this study because the development target of PRM customer journey in Finnair flight disruptions is more likely to be found when analyzing only the critical and constructive feedback.

In addition, any feedback from a PRM customer concerning a non-disrupted flight is excluded as is also feedback which concerns disrupted flight but not a PRM customer. Other delimitations and filtering are explained in the next sub-sections of qualitative and quantitative data.

From the home page of customer feedback and compensation, in flight disruptions, the customer can choose to fill in the form for him/herself, on behalf of the travel companion, or as an authorized representative of a company. (Figure 28.) When choosing the 1st option, one needs to authenticate him/herself and log in as a Finnair Plus member or create a new Finnair profile. This is due to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which was enacted by the European Union (EU) in 2018. (EU 2023.) Identification helps Finnair in categorizing feedback and excluding fake profiles. It also enables automated compensation handling if certain criteria are met. (Kuovi 14 August 2023.)

Feedback and compensation

We appreciate your feedback and are here to assist you with your claims and other concerns. Your feedback is valuable to us in developing our services further. For more general topics, please check our frequently asked questions, or get assistance from our chat service at any time.

Retrieve previous feedback
Retrieve your previous feedback with your family name and case reference number, check the progress of your case or add additional documents.

Let us know about booking and travel experience
Share your experience, positive or negative feedback or concerns regarding our services.

Submit a claim request for the flight disruptions or baggage issues
Claim compensation for flight disruptions or baggage issues occurred on past travels.

I am applying for myself or my travel companion
You may contact us on behalf of yourself or your travel companion if you and your companion recently travelled with us on the same booking.

I am applying on behalf of another person
You may contact us on behalf of your family member or any other person who recently flew with us.

I am an authorized representative of a company
You may contact us if you are an authorized representative of a claim company, travel agency or any other organization.

Apply for a refund of an unused ticket or service
Apply for a refund of an unused flight ticket or service purchased directly from our channels (Finnair.com, Finnair app or Finnair customer service).

Check our frequently asked questions or contact our customer care
Select this option to find the best way to contact us. Check our Frequently Asked Questions for more general queries or concerns or get help from our customer care via our chat service, over the phone or on social media.

Figure 28. Start menu of flight disruption feedback form (Finnair 2023r)

Next step is to select what type of flight disruption is concerned. As already discussed before, the most common flight disruptions are delays, cancellations, and overbookings. Therefore, similar categorization in the feedback form is logical. Downgrading has been added as its own category, too, as seen in Figure 29. The process of giving feedback regarding denied boarding due to overbooking is the same as in delays or cancellations, however there were no such flight disruption cases found in this study.

Category selection

Share your experience, positive or negative feedback or concerns regarding our services.

- Flight disruptions**
Delayed or cancelled flight, overbooking, downgrading
- Flight delay or cancellation**
Share feedback or claim compensation for a delayed or cancelled flight.
- Denied boarding due to overbooking**
Share feedback or claim compensation for denied boarding due to flight overbooking.
- Downgrading**
Share feedback or claim compensation for being downgraded to a lower cabin class or not receiving a pre-purchased travel class upgrade.

- Baggage issues**
Delayed or damaged baggage

Figure 29. Categorization of flight disruptions

In the next phase, the customer needs to provide booking information including booking reference, flight date, flight number, departure city and destination city as well as information about the customer's residence and possible travel companion. After this, a type of claim is selected. (Figure 30.) This means that the customer may here directly claim EU Standard compensation (see 2.3. and 2.4.) and/or other disruption-related additional expenses such as transportation, accommodation, and meal costs.

Request type

Specify the request type.

Claim EU Standard compensation
 Select this option to claim compensation under the EU 261/2004 regulation. You can specify the additional expenses on the next step.

- €350 Finnair gift card / €250 Cash**
For flights up to 1,500 km
- €200 Finnair gift card / €125 Cash**
50% deduction for flights up to 1,500 km if the delay was less than two hours
- €550 Finnair gift card / €400 Cash**
For flights from 1,500 km to 3,500 km
- €300 Finnair gift card / €200 Cash**
50% deduction for flights from 1,500 km and 3,500 km if the delay was less than three hours
- €800 Finnair gift card / €600 Cash**
Flights over 3,500 km
- €400 Finnair gift card / €300 Cash**
50% deduction for flights over 3,500 km if the delay was less than four hours

Claim additional expenses
 Select this option to claim for additional expenses incurred during the disruption.

Share feedback
 Share your feedback with us.

Figure 30. Delay and cancellation claim types

A customer willing, (s)he may also in this phase opt for different feedback sub-categories and rate services based on how (s)he has perceived them in the flight disruption. These sub-categories actually show as child sub-categories for Finnair customer relations agents as well as in the database provided to the researcher. As seen in Figure 31, sub-categories include care and customer management, rerouting and rebooking, customer service attitude and friendliness, reachability of the customer service, digital services, and information. Finally, open feedback (up to 3000 letters) can be given in the comments box and hence this content is the empirical data for flight disruptions feedback analyzed in this study.

Request type

Specify the request type.

Claim EU Standard compensation
Select this option to claim compensation under the EU 261/2004 regulation. You can specify the additional expenses on the next step.

Claim additional expenses
Select this option to claim for additional expenses incurred during the disruption.

Share feedback
Share your feedback with us.

- Care and customer managing: Meals, hotel, transport, and others
- Rerouting and rebooking
- Customer service attitude and friendliness
- Reachability of the customer services
- Digital services
- Information

Additional comments (optional)

Figure 31. Delay and cancellation feedback sub-categories and open feedback box

All applicable claim types and feedback sub-categories can be selected. Before submitting the feedback, a summary is given to the customer to review the details. (Figure 32.)

Summary

Claimant details

Marianna Vikman
[Redacted]

Category selection

Flight disruptions
Flight delay or cancellation

Booking information

ABCDEF
2 Nov 2023
AY41
HEL - ICN

Customer details

Marianna Vikman
[Redacted]
Finland

Requested compensation

EU standard compensation in cash	1 x 600.00 €
Total requested amount in cash	600.00 €

Feedback

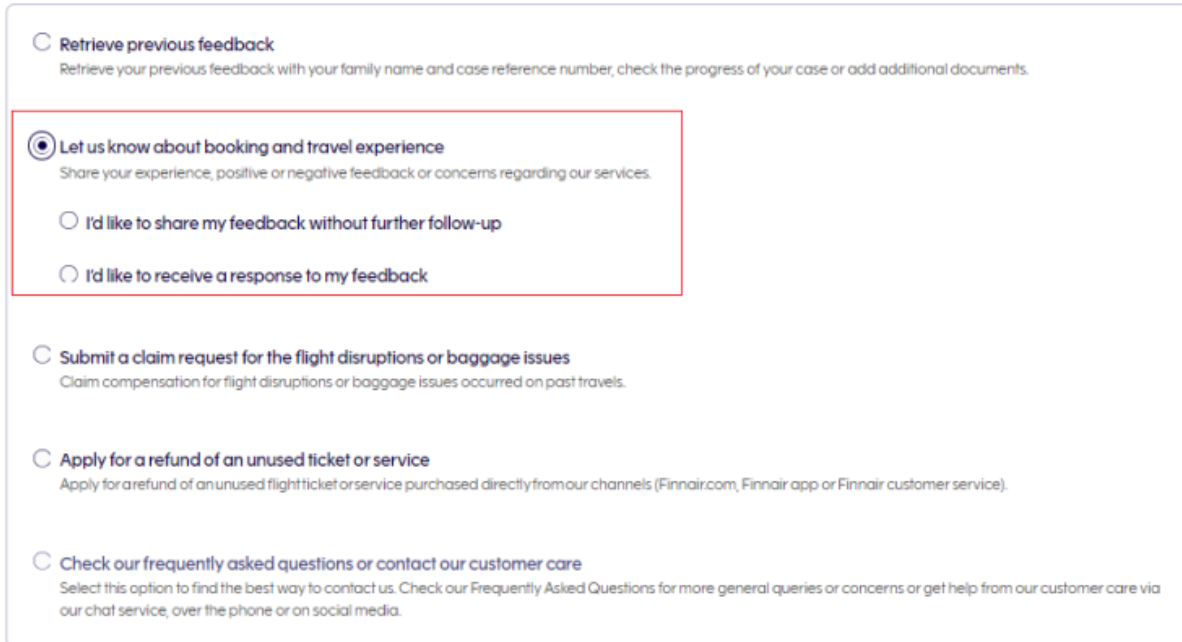
Care and customer managing: Meals, hotel, transport, and others	1 / 5
Rerouting and rebooking	4 / 5
Customer service attitude and friendliness	4 / 5
Reachability of the customer services	1 / 5
Information	2 / 5

Figure 32. Summary of flight delay or cancellation feedback case

If the customer chooses to give feedback about booking and travel experience, (s)he may request a response to the feedback if so desired. (Figure 33.)

Feedback and compensation

We appreciate your feedback and are here to assist you with your claims and other concerns. Your feedback is valuable to us in developing our services further. For more general topics, please check our frequently asked questions, or get assistance from our chat service at any time.



The image shows a feedback form interface with several radio button options. The first option, 'Retrieve previous feedback', is unselected. The second option, 'Let us know about booking and travel experience', is selected and highlighted with a red border. Below it are two more options: 'I'd like to share my feedback without further follow-up' and 'I'd like to receive a response to my feedback', both unselected. Further down are three more options: 'Submit a claim request for the flight disruptions or baggage issues', 'Apply for a refund of an unused ticket or service', and 'Check our frequently asked questions or contact our customer care', all unselected.

- Retrieve previous feedback
Retrieve your previous feedback with your family name and case reference number, check the progress of your case or add additional documents.
- Let us know about booking and travel experience
Share your experience, positive or negative feedback or concerns regarding our services.
 - I'd like to share my feedback without further follow-up
 - I'd like to receive a response to my feedback
- Submit a claim request for the flight disruptions or baggage issues
Claim compensation for flight disruptions or baggage issues occurred on past travels.
- Apply for a refund of an unused ticket or service
Apply for a refund of an unused flight ticket or service purchased directly from our channels (Finnair.com, Finnair app or Finnair customer service).
- Check our frequently asked questions or contact our customer care
Select this option to find the best way to contact us. Check our Frequently Asked Questions for more general queries or concerns or get help from our customer care via our chat service, over the phone or on social media.

Figure 33. Start menu of booking and travel experience feedback form

Next step is to select what kind of services the feedback concerns, and thus as the 2nd database includes PRM customers the relevant category here is the special assistance services. (Figure 34.) Other categories are irrelevant for this study.

Category selection

Share your experience, positive or negative feedback or concerns regarding our services without further follow-up.

- Booking and travel experience**
Booking and reservations, airport and onboard experience, travel extras, special assistance services and Finnair Plus
- Bookings and reservations**
Share feedback about your experience on ticket fares and rules, digital sales services, Finnair customer services, customer service by other suppliers or schedule changes.
- Airport experience**
Share feedback about your experience on arrival services, check-in, gate service or other services provided at the airport.
- Onboard experience**
Share feedback about your experience on cabin crew, food and drink, in-flight entertainment, seats or other services provided onboard.
- Travel extras**
Share feedback about your experience on travel extras such as seats, meals, baggage, upgrades or other travel extras.
- Special assistance services**
Share feedback about your experience on special travel assistance services such as for customers with disabilities or medical condition, unaccompanied minor service or travelling with pets.
- Finnair Plus program**
Share feedback about your experience on Finnair Plus service, membership benefits, awards, marketing, terms and conditions and other subjects.

Figure 34. Categorization of booking and travel experience

Further sub-category selection is needed in the next phase as seen in Figure 35. There are four relevant sub-categories: Assistance services for customers with disabilities, assistance services for customers with medical condition, assistance services for elder customers, and wheelchairs and other mobility aids.

Category

Kindly select the category you'd like to share your experience and feedback about.

<input type="radio"/> Assistance services for customers with disabilities Booking experience, airport experience and inflight experience.
<input type="radio"/> Assistance services for customers with medical condition Booking experience, airport experience and inflight experience.
<input type="radio"/> Assistance services for elder customers Booking experience, airport experience and inflight experience.
<input type="radio"/> Travelling with children Booking experience, airport experience and inflight experience.
<input type="radio"/> Unaccompanied minor service Booking experience, airport experience and inflight experience.
<input type="radio"/> Wheelchairs and other mobility aids Wheelchairs and other mobility aids as checked or additional baggage.
<input type="radio"/> Travelling with pets Booking experience, airport experience, inflight experience, duration of the delivery of pet on hold (AVIH) and condition of the pet carrier when returned (AVIH).

Figure 35. Sub-categorization of special assistance services

After this, booking details and information of customer's residence and possible travel companion is needed. Next, a customer may again opt for different feedback sub-categories and rate services based on how (s)he has perceived them when traveling with Finnair. As seen in Figure 36, sub-categories for customers with disabilities, medical condition or elder customers include booking, airport, and in-flight experiences.

Feedback

You can share additional feedback or submit your claim directly.

Booking experience

Airport experience

Inflight experience

Additional comments (optional)

Figure 36. Feedback sub-categories and open feedback box for customers with disabilities, medical condition, and elder customers

For wheelchairs and other mobility aids, sub-categories concern the condition and handling of the mobility aid. Finally, in the comments box the customer can give open feedback (up to 3000 letters), and hence this content is the empirical data for PRM customers' feedback analyzed in this study. Before submitting the feedback, a summary is given to the PRM customer to review the details. (Figure 37.)

Summary

Please review the details you've entered and make sure all the information is correct.

Category selection	Booking and travel experience Special assistance services Assistance services for customers with disabilities						
Booking information	ABCDEF 2 Nov 2023 AY41 HEL - ICN						
Feedback	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%;">Airport experience</td> <td style="text-align: right;">1 / 5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Inflight experience</td> <td style="text-align: right;">4 / 5</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">This is a test case</td> </tr> </table>	Airport experience	1 / 5	Inflight experience	4 / 5	This is a test case	
Airport experience	1 / 5						
Inflight experience	4 / 5						
This is a test case							

Figure 37. Summary of PRM customer's feedback case

3.4.2 Qualitative data

The qualitative data used for this study consisted of two separate databases. In practice, these databases were Excel documents, and as explained before, the information in the documents was not collected by the researcher herself. Instead, the raw empirical data was provided to the researcher by the commissioner and the researcher's task was to study and analyze this data.

The two Excel documents differed greatly in size. The database 1 (DB1) included feedback from flight disruptions and contained 32739 rows, whereas the database 2 (DB2) included feedback from PRM customers and contained 305 rows. Each row represented a single feedback case. All feedback was gathered over the course of one year; from July 2022 to July 2023.

Finding the relevant feedback from both databases was the first step toward conducting an analysis. Manual 'cleaning up' was not possible especially for the extensive DB1, and hence an appropriate technical solution or an analytics tool was needed to assist with the job. The researcher had previously taken the Data Analytics -course in Haaga-Helia UAS and learned how to use the Python programming, however this tool and course focused on handling structured data, e.g., numerical figures. Therefore, another more suitable way to process non-numerical and unstructured feedback data had to be found. Microsoft Azure and Access systems were studied and tested but soon abandoned as utilization of them would have required more in-depth expertise. In the end, with the help of a colleague, husband, a Haaga-Helia UAS lecturer, and a lot of independent self-learning the researcher was able to overcome the existing clean-up challenge with DB1.

The study concerned only Finnair flight disruptions, and therefore all feedback from both databases including non-Finnair or partner airlines' flights was removed with Excel filtering function. Next, data which did not include any text in the open feedback comments box was also filtered out, and duplicate cases removed with the corresponding Excel function in the Data tool. Finally, also the feedback cases written in any other language besides Finnish or English were removed. For this purpose, and to distinguish Finnish content, the Excel rule was set to find feedback including letters 'ä' or 'ö'. However, this search was not 100 % reliable as it also surfaced some Swedish and German feedback, which were then manually removed. In the end, the removed languages were Korean, Japanese, Thai, Chinese, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, German, French, Italian, Estonian, and Czech. It should be highlighted that originally only English data was planned to be included in the study but after finding out that DB2 included only one relevant feedback in English, the researcher decided to include also Finnish data, and consequently Finnish and English data together resulted in an adequate amount of data. Lastly, some columns in the Excel documents, such as Finnair Plus tier level for the customer and the case reference number were hidden as they also

included irrelevant information. After altering the data, DB1 contained 9507 rows, whereas DB2 contained 209 rows.

Reading through 9507 feedback of DB1 was still an insurmountable task. Therefore, based on the previously explained sub-categories for special assistance services, relevant PRM customers' feedback were searched in DB1 with key words senior, wheelchair, disability, medical, blind, deaf, and elder(ly). Using these words for searching was justified also because they originate from the IATA SSR codes, which was discussed earlier in sub-section 3.1.1. For Finnish feedback, same words in Finnish were used; eläkeläinen, pyörätuoli, vamma, lääketieteellinen/sairaus, sokea, kuuro, and iäkäs. This search succeeded and surfaced all together 16 feedback cases, that met the criteria of a PRM customer who experienced a Finnair flight disruption. In sum, a list of these 16 cases is shown in Table 2, and explanations for abbreviations are found under the table.

Table 2. DB1 list of feedback cases included in the study

Feedback #	Flight date	Flight #	Departure airport	Destination airport	Language of feedback	Flight disruption type	PRM customer type
1.	19.7.2022	AY1764	FCO	HEL	FI	CNL	Disability
2.	30.7.2022	AY1144	WAW	HEL	FI	CNL	Disability
3.	20.8.2022	AY1432	BER	HEL	FI	DB	Blind
4.	25.8.2022	AY1305	AMS	HEL	EN	CNL	Wheelchair
5.	1.9.2022	AY490	KAO	HEL	FI	DEL	Blind
6.	17.9.2022	AY1772	BLQ	HEL	FI	DEL	Wheelchair
7.	21.11.2022	AY2060	FUE	HEL	FI	DEL	Elderly
8.	21.11.2022	AY1672	AGP	HEL	FI	CNL	Elderly
9.	21.11.2022	AY1164	KRK	HEL	FI	CNL	Disability
10.	21.11.2022	AY1674	AGP	HEL	FI	CNL	Wheelchair
11.	22.11.2022	AY1964	DXB	HEL	FI	CNL	Deaf
12.	30.12.2022	AY1362	MAN	HEL	EN	CNL	Disability
13.	7.1.2023	AY954	CPH	HEL	FI	CNL	Deaf
14.	24.1.2023	AY146	BKK	HEL	FI	DEL	Deaf
15.	25.3.2023	AY1386	DUB	HEL	FI	CNL	Disability

16.	8.5.2023	AY1732	FNC	HEL	FI	DEL	Wheelchair
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FCO = Leonardo da Vinci-Fiumicino Airport, Rome, Italy
WAW = Warsaw Chopin Airport, Poland
BER = Berlin Brandenburg Airport, Germany
AMS = Schiphol Amsterdam Airport, the Netherlands
KAO = Kuusamo Airport, Finland
BLQ = Bologna Guglielmo Marconi Airport, Italy
FUE = Fuerteventura El Matorral Airport, Spain
AGP = Málaga-Costa del Sol Airport, Spain
KRK = John Paul II International Airport Kraków-Balice, Poland
DXB = Dubai International Airport, United Arab Emirates
MAN = Manchester Airport, United Kingdom
CPH = Copenhagen Kastrup Airport, Denmark
BKK = Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport, Thailand
DUB = Dublin Airport, Ireland
FNC = Funchal Madeira Airport International Cristiano Ronaldo, Portugal
HEL = Helsinki Airport, Finland
FI = Finnish
EN = English
CNL = Cancellation
DEL = Delay
DB = Denied boarding

Studying the smaller database DB2 was a smoother process compared to that of DB1. All 209 feedback were read through and manually organized into three categories: Y (yes), M (maybe), and N (no). Feedback which included a disrupted flight were categorized as Y and included in the study. Feedback with M category were cases which could potentially be included in the study, but in the end were not as there were enough Y cases. Feedback with N category did not include a flight disruption, and hence were excluded from the study. In sum, a list of 17 feedback cases, that met the criteria of a PRM customer who experienced a Finnair flight disruption is shown in Table 3, and again explanations for abbreviations are found under the table.

Table 3. DB2 list of feedback cases included in the study

Feedback #	Flight date	Flight #	Departure airport	Destination airport	Language of feedback	Flight disruption type	PRM customer type
1.	2.9.2022	AY33	HEL	SEA	EN	DEL	Wheelchair
2.	23.9.2022	AY868	GOT	HEL	EN	DWN	Wheelchair
3.	18.10.2022	AY1331	HEL	LHR	FI	DB	Disability
4.	19.10.2022	AY1691	HEL	TFS	FI	DEL	Wheelchair

5.	19.11.2022	AY122	DEL	HEL	EN	DEL	Wheelchair
6.	21.11.2022	AY122	DEL	HEL	EN	DEL	Wheelchair
7.	25.11.2022	AY1164	KRK	HEL	EN	DB	Disability
8.	18.12.2022	AY450	OUL	HEL	FI	CNL	Wheelchair
9.	21.1.2023	AY20	DFW	HEL	EN	DEL	Disability
10.	11.2.2023	AY1532	GVA	HEL	EN	CNL	Wheelchair
11.	9.5.2023	AY1752	MLP	HEL	FI	DEL	Wheelchair
12.	10.5.2023	AY2	LAX	HEL	EN	DB	Disability (service dog)
13.	7.6.2023	AY1305	HEL	AMS	EN	DEL	Wheelchair
14.	7.6.2023	AY813	HEL	ARN	EN	DEL	Wheelchair
15.	15.6.2023	AY1983	ARN	DOH	EN	DEL	Wheelchair
16.	10.7.2023	AY1936	GZP	HEL	FI	CNL	Disability
17.	8.7.2023	AY121	HEL	DEL	EN	DEL	Wheelchair

SEA = Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, USA

GOT = Gothenburg-Landvetter Airport, Sweden

LHR = London Heathrow Airport, United Kingdom

TFS = Tenerife Sur Reina Sofia Airport, Spain

DEL = New Delhi Indira Gandhi International Airport, India

KRK = John Paul II International Airport Kraków-Balice, Poland

OUL = Oulu Airport, Finland

DFW = Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport, USA

GVA = Geneva Airport, Switzerland

MLP = Milan Malpensa Airport, Italy

LAX = Los Angeles International Airport, USA

AMS = Schiphol Amsterdam Airport, the Netherlands

ARN = Stockholm Arlanda Airport, Sweden

DOH = Doha Hamad International Airport, Qatar

GZP = Gazipasa Alanya Airport, Turkey

HEL = Helsinki Airport, Finland

FI = Finnish

EN = English

CNL = Cancellation

DEL = Delay

DWN = Downgrading

DB = Denied boarding

To conclude, the primary data used for this study includes a total of 33 feedback cases. The content of this feedback is analyzed in subchapter 3.5.

3.4.3 Quantitative data

As explained before, when giving feedback, customers may provide further insight into their feedback in the closed-ended questions. This added insight means evaluating the various Finnair services during their travel on a scale of five ratings as follows:

- Poor
- Fair
- Good
- Very good
- Excellent

These ratings translate into numeric data, i.e., quantitative data, which is the secondary data used in this study. Poor equals 1, Fair equals 2, Good equals 3, Very good equals 4, and Excellent equals 5. The numeric value for each rating is visible for the customer in the feedback summary review, whereas the average of the customer rating is visible for the Finnair customer relations agents. Table 4 summarizes the number of customers who rated Finnair services in addition to their open feedback.

Table 4. Summary of quantitative data included in the study

Rating	DB1	DB2
Poor = 1	4	10
Fair = 2	2	-
Good = 3	-	-
Very good = 4	-	-
Excellent = 5	-	-

To conclude, the secondary data used for this study includes a total of 16 customer ratings (out of 33), and hence the analysis for this follows in the next subchapter.

3.5 Analysis of the data

According to Walliman (2010, 65), data is elusive and ephemeral. It may be true for a time in a particular place as observed by a particular person but might be quite different the next day. Data is

also corruptible (Walliman 2010, 65) as hearsay, secondhand reports and biased views are often paraded as facts. Without a doubt, this view is realistic as we live in an information age and the amount of information is profoundly massive around us. Therefore, before analyzing the qualitative data of this study, it is important to understand that whatever information is found in the feedback it may not be 100 % accurate in terms of facts, e.g., the customer may comment that his/her flight was cancelled, however, the flight in question was not perhaps cancelled in an operative sense, but instead the customer may have missed his/her flight for some reason and due to this interprets the flight being cancelled for him/her. Another example would be that a customer may have missed his/her connecting flight and criticizes Finnair for not taking responsibility for rerouting and/or customer care according to the EC Regulation 261/2004 (see 2.3. and 2.4.), however, the customer may have had two separate plane tickets, i.e., two separate contracts of carriage, in which case transiting and making it in time for the connecting flight is entirely at customer's own responsibility. In any case, this is just to demonstrate that the qualitative data in this study provided only a one-sided view of the flight disruption, and how the disruption was perceived by a particular PRM customer.

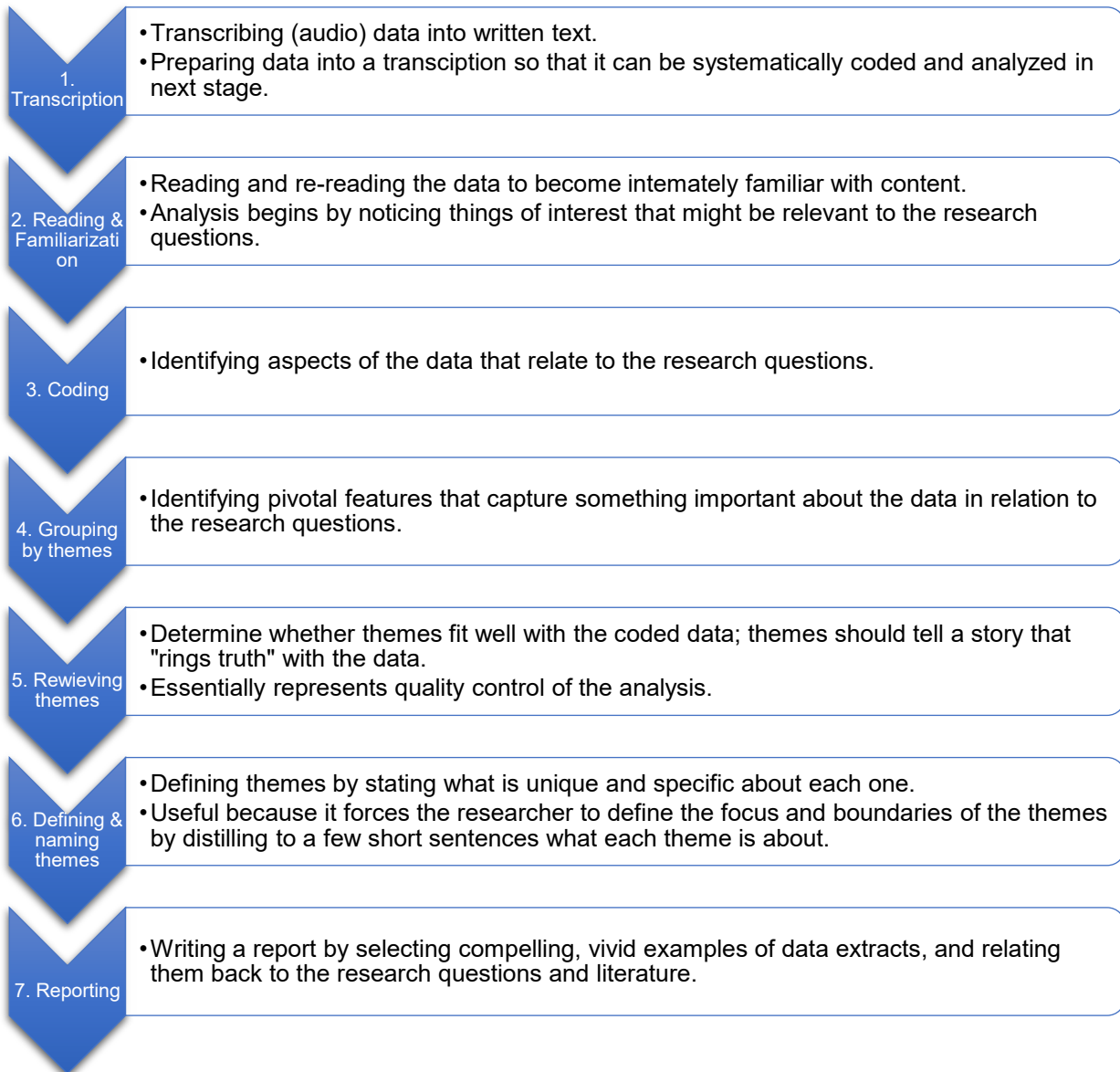
The recipient of the feedback is the commissioning company who investigates the case and replies to the customer if required. The researcher, however, only uses the data as is without a possibility to verify the facts in the feedback, and hence analysis, findings, and conclusions are not infallible. The outcomes of this research will consequently not be the absolute truths but rather researcher's own likelihood 'soft' statements derived from the customers' truths. In viewing and analyzing the feedback, the researcher also utilized her own professionalism in the subject matter.

Previously, qualitative and quantitative data was introduced. The raw data was first 'tuned' or 'polished' to find the 33 feedback cases that fit the criteria of the research topic. Data reduction by removing and hiding unnecessary information was an essential step to simplify the complex databases. Arranging the feedback chronologically by time and flight information in Tables 2, 3, and 4 also clarified the researcher's overall picture and understanding of the data.

The original request from the commissioner of this thesis was to rake through the PRM customers' feedback and see if certain themes or topics emerge from the data, and based on the findings produce a development suggestion for the commissioner to improve the PRM customer's customer journey in Finnair flight disruptions. Derived from this request the thematic analysis method was chosen. Analyzing the data thematically enabled the researcher to identify common patterns and themes as well as cause-and-effect relationships. This was important in terms of the objectives of the research.

As mentioned before, this thesis along with its data analysis is the 1st to be conducted for the researcher. Although already possessing an analytical mindset, the researcher had no prior experience using qualitative analysis methods and was therefore drawn to Braun and Clarke's approach and application on thematic analysis as a practical and suitable analyzing method for the beginners. (Craver 2014, 1.) According to Craver (2014, 1), Braun and Clarke define thematic analysis as a method for identifying themes (or patterns of meaning) across dataset in relation to a research question. Braun and Clarke describe (Craver 2014, 1) thematic analysis as a relatively unique qualitative analytic method, which simply only provides a method for analyzing a data, and does not comment on methods of data collection, theoretical positions, epistemological or ontological frameworks. In addition, Braun and Clarke argue (Craver 2014, 1), that the method is flexible and can be used to answer almost any type of research question using almost any type of data and/or theoretical orientation as long as the analysis is crafted in such a way that it matches what the researcher wants to know. As seen in Table 5, Braun and Clarke offer practical guidance for applying thematic analysis in a consistent and rigorous way in a seven-stage workflow, which starts with transcription and ends with reporting. Writing the report corresponds in this study to presenting the results of the analysis, and thus ultimately answering the research questions. At different stages of the analysis, it is important to keep in mind the research questions. This helps to stay focused in the research work.

Table 5. Braun and Clarke's seven stages of thematic analysis. (Craver 2014, 2)



The researcher chose Delve as a qualitative data analysis tool to conduct thematic analysis. The "polished" databases DB1 and DB2 were first imported to Delve after all identifiable personal customer data (name, email address, telephone number etc.) was removed to maintain confidentiality of the customer data. In Delve, DB1 and DB2 were transcribed into two separate transcripts as illustrated in Figure 38.

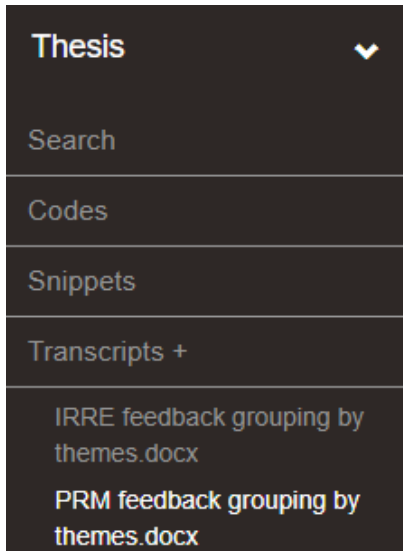


Figure 38. Delve analysis tool's view of DB1 and DB2 transcripts

Next, the researcher familiarized herself with the data. Reading and re-reading through the transcripts gradually enabled the researcher to make observations and find meanings and patterns in the data. In reference to the 1st research question, "What are the most significant challenges or deficiencies arising from the feedback?" certain challenges and deficiencies in the feedback started recurring already. Interestingly, at this point, some topics resonated strongly to the researcher, which could be explained with the researcher's prior knowledge and work experience at Finnair.

Coding the data was initiated next. Codes were created to represent the meanings and patterns in the data. All 33 feedback cases were read through again in more detail, and topic-related quotations were applied with the codes. As we know, people perceive and react to situations differently, and hence they express their views by choosing various words. Expressions that represented the same meaning were applied with the same code, for example emotions such as anxiety, distress, and stressful were grouped together. Bringing together all the quotations associated with fitting codes helped the researcher to form a better holistic picture of data in a more structured way. Code collations were monitored separately also, as shown in Figure 39. For example, lack of communication was mentioned in 10 feedback cases appearing in both transcripts.

Lack of communication (10)

Appears in 2/2 transcripts

Code added by Marianna Vikman

IRRE feedback grouping by themes.docx (6)

PRM feedback grouping by themes.docx (4)

Write a description or thoughts about this code

Edit

Sort By Most Recent

IRRE feedback grouping by themes.docx

Figure 39. Code details for Lack of communication in the data

Grouping codes into themes was the next step in analyzing the data. In this study, a common denominator was quickly identified for many codes, however some codes were more detached from others. In addition to being directly linked to the research topic, the created main themes were also descriptive and nuanced providing yet another perspective into the subject. The data resulted in creating 46 codes and six themes as demonstrated in Figure 40. Organizing codes and themes into one compact and visual illustration helped the researcher (and the reader) gain a quick comprehensive view of the data.

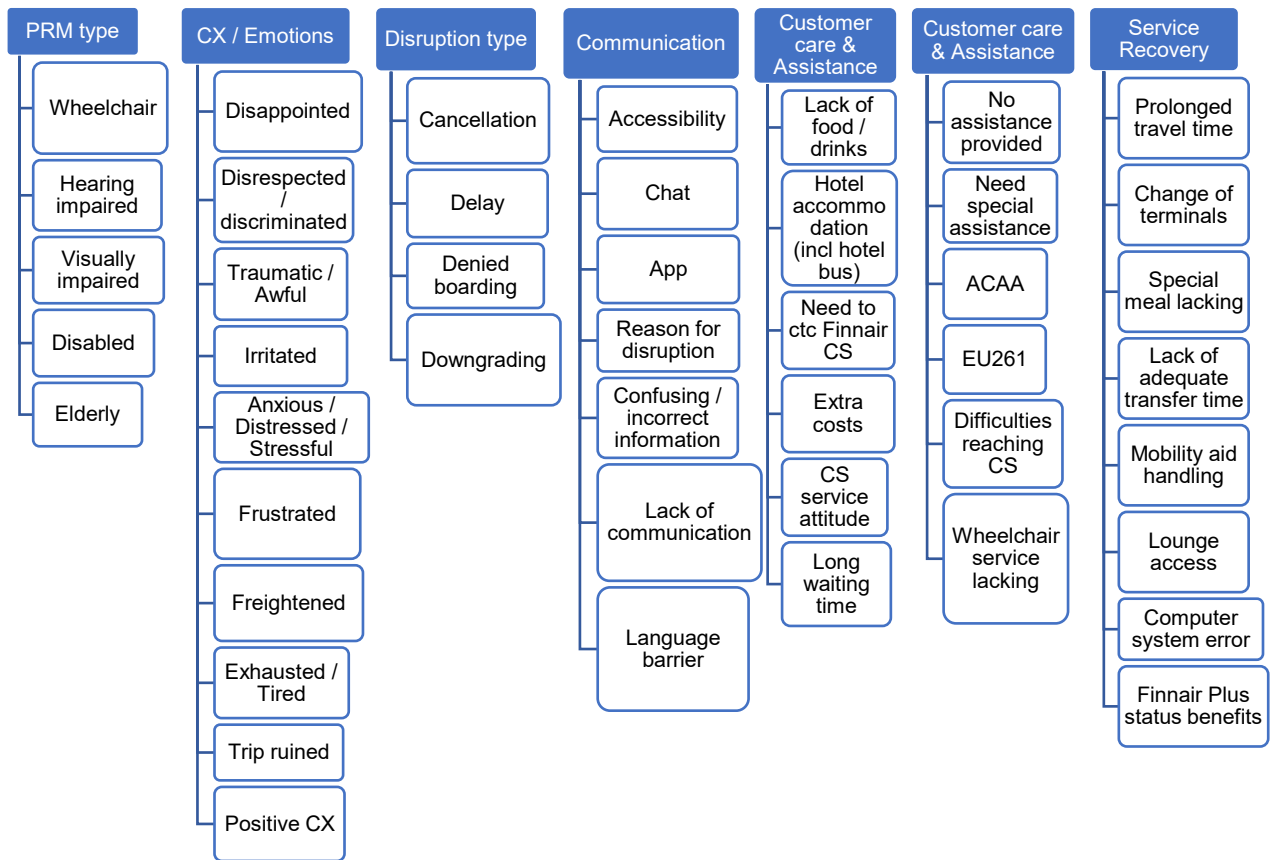


Figure 40. A hierarchic list of thematic codes and themes of the data

In reviewing and revising codes and themes the researcher checked back at the data again. Was everything relevant included and coded into the themes? Were the themes distinct and supported by enough data? Were there any codes that needed to be relocated under another theme or were there some codes which could be completely ignored and deleted as they were not relevant to the study? Were there still some similarities within the codes so that they could be merged with one another? As a result of this critical lookback, some fine-tuning was performed; however, no major revisions were needed as the researcher was content with the existing codes and themes.

In summary, DB1 and DB2 provided a good and versatile sample of the PRM customers' feedback in Finnair flight disruptions. There was a total of 19 feedback cases provided in Finnish and 13 in English. Interestingly, Finnish language was very dominant in DB1 and English language in DB2.

This fact reveals that including the Finnish feedback was a correct decision by the researcher as otherwise there would have been only two feedback cases included in DB1. Feedback cases categorized by the disruption type were as follows:

- 13 Cancellations
- 15 Delays
- 4 Denied boardings
- 1 Downgrade

The emphasis being on cancellations and delays is a logical find as they are the most common disruptions (see 2.3). It is also good to note that in denied boarding -cases customers consequently also endured a delay in their travel, however, in this analysis only one disruption type per feedback was accounted for.

Referrals to the EU261 (see 2.3. and 2.4.) as well as ACAA (see 2.2. and 2.4.) airline regulative obligations were mentioned in some feedback, and hence this signals that PRM customers are nowadays aware of their passenger rights in flight disruptions. Wheelchair was mentioned in 16 feedback, which is nearly 50 % of all the analyzed cases.

Further findings and in-depth results of the actual customer feedback, in terms of what were the most significant challenges or deficiencies arising from the feedback, and what could be improved in the PRM customer journey in Finnair flight disruptions will be presented and discussed in Chapter 5.

4 Results

This chapter discusses the research findings. Based on the thematic grouping and coding presented in the previous chapter, the corresponding results will be introduced by flight disruption type, PRM customer type, the main elements of customer disruption handling, and customer experience (customers' emotions). Also, results of the closed-ended questions are covered, and in the end, the first research question is answered. The results are reflected on by referring back to the theoretical framework. Additionally, the factors that have influenced the results are considered.

4.1 Results and distribution by flight disruption type

In 33 feedback cases, 15 flights were delayed, and 13 cancelled. In four cases a PRM customer had been denied boarding his/her original flight, and one PRM customer had been involuntarily downgraded from business class to economy class.

4.1.1 Cancellations

DB1 included 10 cancellations and DB2 three cancellations. Majority of cancellations occurred in Europe, one flight in Finland and one in Asia. Cancellations concerned 12 flights bound for Helsinki, whereas only one flight concerned a cancellation out from Helsinki. This could be at least partially explained with the fact that Finnair's own maintenance is located at Helsinki Airport, and therefore departing flights with e.g., technical problems can be better monitored and fixed at Helsinki Airport compared to a similar situation elsewhere at Finnair route network stations, wherein technical challenges can be fixed only to a certain extent. Consequently, if an aircraft gets stuck at an outstation due to technical problems, Finnair sends its Helsinki-based maintenance personnel to fix the problem in order to get the aircraft back to Helsinki, and back in operation.

Nine cancellations occurred in 2022, out of which four cancellations happened on November 21-22 because of a transport worker union's strike. The researcher was working during the transport worker union's strike, and therefore identified those four cancellations to have been resulted from the strike. A simple illustration shows (Figure 41) the occurrence of cancellations domestically, in Europe and outside Europe.

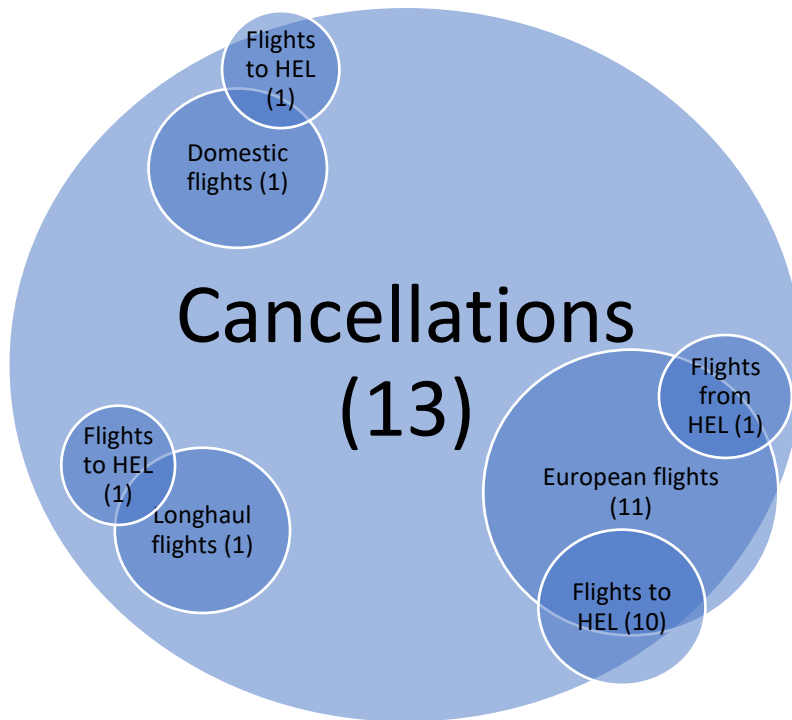


Figure 41. Cancellations by geographical distribution

4.1.2 Delays

DB1 included five delays and DB2 ten delays, and hence delays represented the largest proportion of the study's flight disruptions. The study showed that delays were geographically distributed more evenly than cancellations as there were seven delays both in Europe and outside of Europe. Additionally, one delay concerned a domestic flight. Ten delays concerned a flight bound for Helsinki, and four delays out from Helsinki. In addition, one delay concerned a flight out from Stockholm Arlanda in Sweden (ARN) to Doha in Qatar (DOH). Seven delays occurred in 2022 and eight in 2023. Figure 42 shows the occurrence of delays domestically, in Europe and outside Europe.

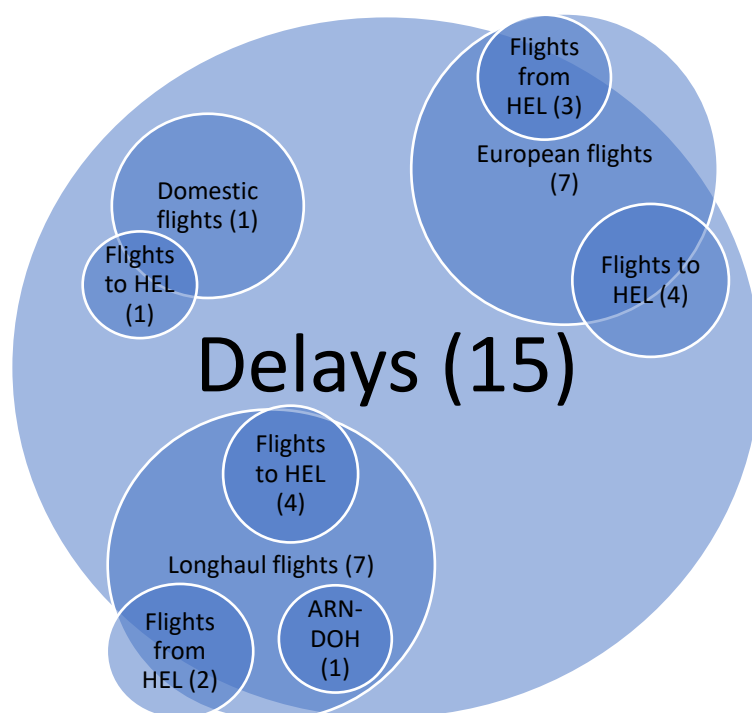


Figure 42. Delays by geographical distribution

In reference to ICAO's categorization of three types of flight disruptions (ICAO 2018, 2), delays, cancellations, and denied boardings, the research results by distribution and flight disruption type are aligned. The researcher also agrees that most Finnair flight disruptions are delays, followed by cancellations.

4.1.3 Denied boarding

In the study there were four PRM customers who had been denied boarding their original flight. Three cases originated from DB2 and one from DB1. Three cases concerned a European flight, and one a US flight from Los Angeles (LAX) to Helsinki (HEL). Three cases occurred in 2022 and one in 2023. It is important to note that in denied boarding situations the customer's journey is consequently also delayed, and hence these "double disruptions" are stressful situations for anyone, let alone customers with reduced mobility. In two separate cases, a PRM customer was denied boarding due to 1) a booking problem of the customer's service dog and 2) a suspicion of customer being drunk. However, in the latter case, a customer had a medical condition instead and upon being accused of being drunk an alcohol testing was requested by the customer. This, too, was denied to the customer. In the first case, due to a miscommunication from Finnair to the customer, the reservation for a service dog had only been confirmed for customer's long-haul flight but not for the connecting flight. This resulted in a loss of a long-haul flight as well and the entire

journey to be changed. In both cases, customers ended up buying new tickets for another airline, and hence claimed the extra costs from Finnair to be compensated after the journey.

In two other cases, customers were denied boarding due to check-in – and ticketing problems, i.e., their tickets were not correctly associated in the check-in system, and hence customers were not accepted onto their flights. In either case, the check-in – and ticketing problem was not due to the customers' fault but was caused by an erroneous rerouting and a malfunction of the check-in system. Following the flight departure, the problems were resolved, and customers were provided with a new solution. According to ICAO (2018, 2), denied boardings are usually caused by overbooked flights, but in this study none of the denied boardings were resulted from an overbooked flight but due to reasons explained earlier. It is also a common rule of practice at Finnair *not* to deny PRM customers access to their flights even if they are overbooked. In overbookings, Finnair always first looks for volunteers who can change their travel plans, and only if there aren't enough volunteers, the necessary number of customers are involuntarily transferred to alternative flights.

Another interesting find concerning the four denied boarding cases was that all feedback was relatively long and written in detail. This may be due to the “double disruption”, which undoubtedly resulted in customers pouring their genuine frustration and dissatisfaction in their feedback. In two cases customers also requested substantially high reimbursements and compensations due to what they had experienced.

4.1.4 Downgrading

There was one downgrading case in the study. Prior to the downgrading, which was realized at the airport of departure, the customer's flight schedule had also changed for the next day (24-hour delay). The case concerned a European flight bound for Helsinki and occurred in 2022.

4.2 Results by PRM customer type

As explained before, a PRM customer is any person whose mobility is reduced due to any physical or intellectual disability or impairment, or any other cause of disability, or age, and whose situation needs appropriate attention and the adaptation to his or her particular needs of the service made available to all passengers. In other words, categories and types of disabilities vary significantly by nature, severity, and impact on daily functions.

In this study, physical disabilities include wheelchair users, and persons with sight or hearing disabilities. The respective SSR codes used are WCHR, WCHS, WCHC, BLND, and DEAF. Intellectual or developmental disability means having difficulties with learning and understanding new things. The way intellectual disability affects an individual person's life (and travel) varies to a large

degree. The SSR code indicating such a disability is DPNA. Also, neuropsychiatric disorders, which refer to mental health conditions, such as ADHD, autistic spectrum disorders, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, Alzheimer, and other dementias are grouped under the SSR code DPNA. Another PRM customer type which clearly appeared in the study was senior citizens. This is understandable as the world's population is aging rapidly, as explained earlier, and hence seniors are nowadays a large group of passengers with an increasing need for accessible and inclusive air travel. Aging affects people in different ways. For some customers aging does not restrict their ability to move around independently, but others may need a lot of assistance to be able to travel smoothly. Depending on their specific needs, senior citizens may fall under various SSR codes as some rely on wheelchairs if they have issues with walking long distances, and others may have developed a neuropsychiatric disorder such as dementia or Alzheimer.

In this study, most PRM customers were in need of a wheelchair. Nearly half of the feedback cases, sixteen out of thirty-three, had requested or commented in their feedback about the need for a wheelchair. The study also revealed that there were two cases with sight-impaired customers, and three with hearing impaired customers. Ten cases mentioned some other kind of disability, not clearly specifying whether it be a physical or an intellectual one. Consequently, this feedback was simply grouped as Disabled. Elderly/senior citizen passengers were referred to in seven feedback and in five of them also wheelchair need, or other disability was mentioned. This was a logical and descriptive finding in the feedback of elderly passengers. The number of the five main PRM customers is visualized in Figure 43.

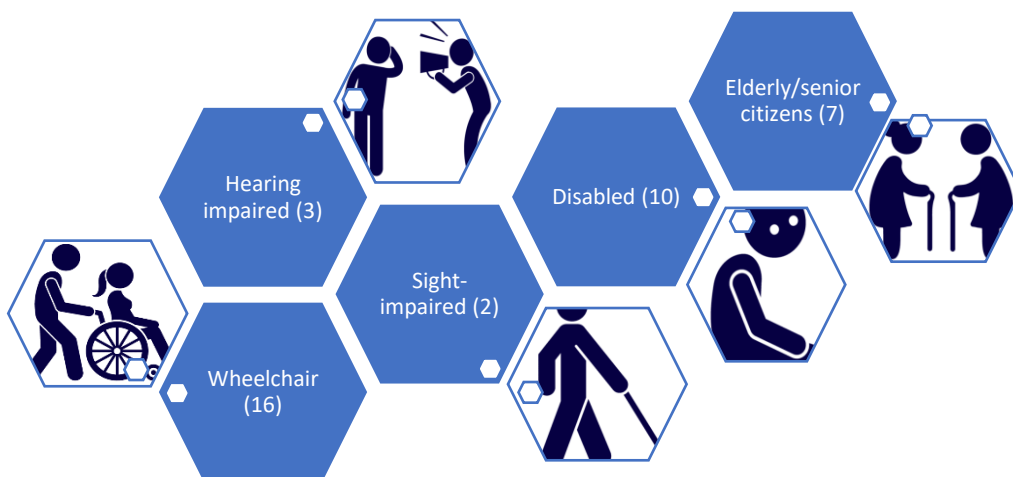


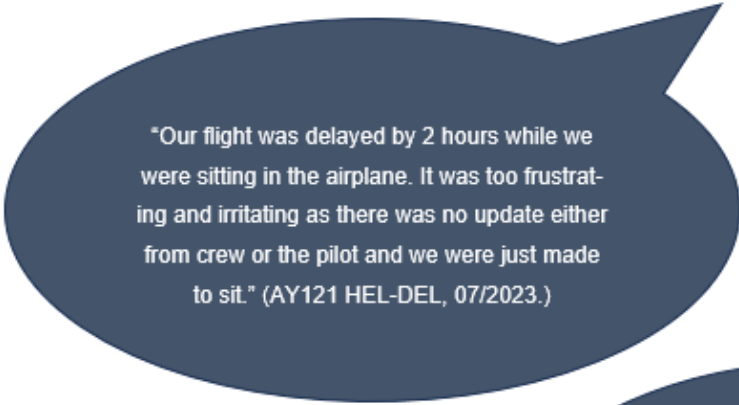
Figure 43. The number of PRM customers in the study

In sum, wheelchair was the most needed disability aid requested by the PRM customers. Other physical and intellectual disabilities were also clearly reflected in the feedback. The third biggest group of PRM's was that of the elderly passengers.

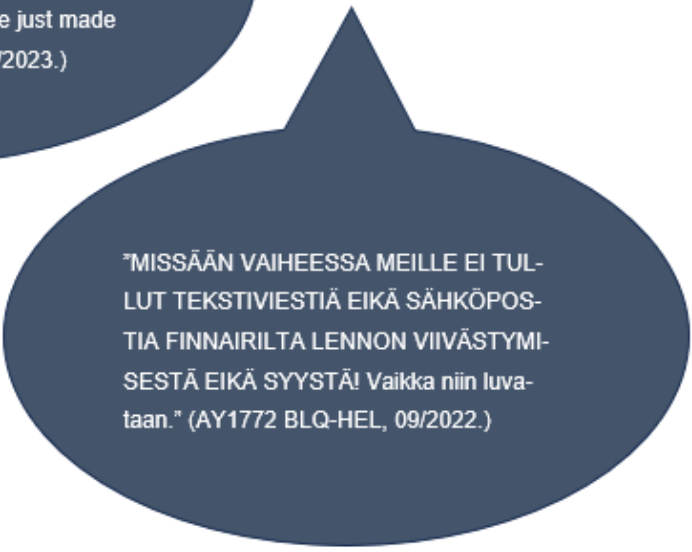
4.3 Results by customer disruption handling

4.3.1 Communication

The biggest claim topic about customer communication in flight disruptions was lack of it. Ten customers pointed out this deficiency in their feedback. Lack of communication was evident and evenly distributed in delays (4 cases), cancellations (4 cases), and denied boardings (2 cases). All the deaf customers of the study had experienced difficulties in being informed during the disruption, and hence they had tried to find more information about the situation themselves through Finnair chat, App, or social media, which however had not been of help to them. Customers commented that the chat was either unavailable (closed) at the time of disruption or repeatedly full and would not accept new customers in queue. Another customer wrote that the App was not Up-ToDate as it incorrectly claimed that the cancelled flight was in fact already “en route”, which resulted in even more confusion for the customer. Customers' voice about the lack of communication can be clearly heard in the below speech bubbles.



"Our flight was delayed by 2 hours while we were sitting in the airplane. It was too frustrating and irritating as there was no update either from crew or the pilot and we were just made to sit." (AY121 HEL-DEL, 07/2023.)



"MISSÄÄN VAIHEESSA MEILLE EI TULLUT TEKSTIViestiä EIKÄ SÄHKÖPOSTIA FINNAIRILTA LENNON VIIVÄSTYMISESTÄ EIKÄ SYYSTÄ! Vaikka niin luvataan." (AY1772 BLQ-HEL, 09/2022.)

"The wheelchair assistance person was one of the rudest and unkind people that me and my wife have ever met. She was not able to empathize with our age, health, and inability to speak proper English. When we asked her to take us to the lounge, she took us for some security check and was unable to explain to us what was happening. The security check person was unable to explain to us what was happening." (AY33 HEL-SEA, 09/2022.)

"Tiedotus peruutuksesta oli huono näin kuoron näkökulmasta. Koska minulla ei ollut ruumaan meneviä matkatavaroita, ajattelin asian selviävän transfer-tiskillä, mutta siellä hoidettiin vain SASin asioita. Tietokoneella oli kerrottu Menzens-matkatoimistosta, mutta ainoat yhteydenottotavat olivat puhelinsoitto (mahdotonta kuurolle) tai tiskille meneminen. Yritin myös saada apua Finnair-sovelluksen chatista, mutta robotista ei ollut mitään apua. Jouduin siis poistumaan laukkuhinojen läpi saadakseni tiedon, että riittää kun odotan hetken saadakseni Finnairilta sähköpostitse ja sovellukseen uuden lentolipun. Jos olisin tiennyt tämän niin olisin voinut jäädä porttien alueelle odottamaan ilman turhaa liikkumista. Myös tekstiviesti peruutuksesta tuli vasta tunti alkuperäisen lähtöajan jälkeen eli olin jo tuolloin ehtinyt Menzens-tiskille ja saanut tietää, että pitää vain odottaa Finnairilta ilmoitusta." (AY954 CPH-HEL, 01/2023.)

Another deficiency arising from the feedback regarding communication was confusing or misleading information. This was mentioned in five feedback cases, of which one was that of a visually impaired customer. One customer was denied access to his/her original flight due to a miscommunication error concerning the booking process of customer's service dog. This error was discovered at the airport just prior to the flight departure. A common feature for this feedback topic was that when something was promised by Finnair to the customer in an earlier phase of the customer journey, it could not be delivered for the customer in the next phase of the travel by another Finnair representative, and therefore this caused dissatisfaction and frustration for the customers. Below

speech bubbles demonstrate how confusing or misleading communication was perceived by the customers.

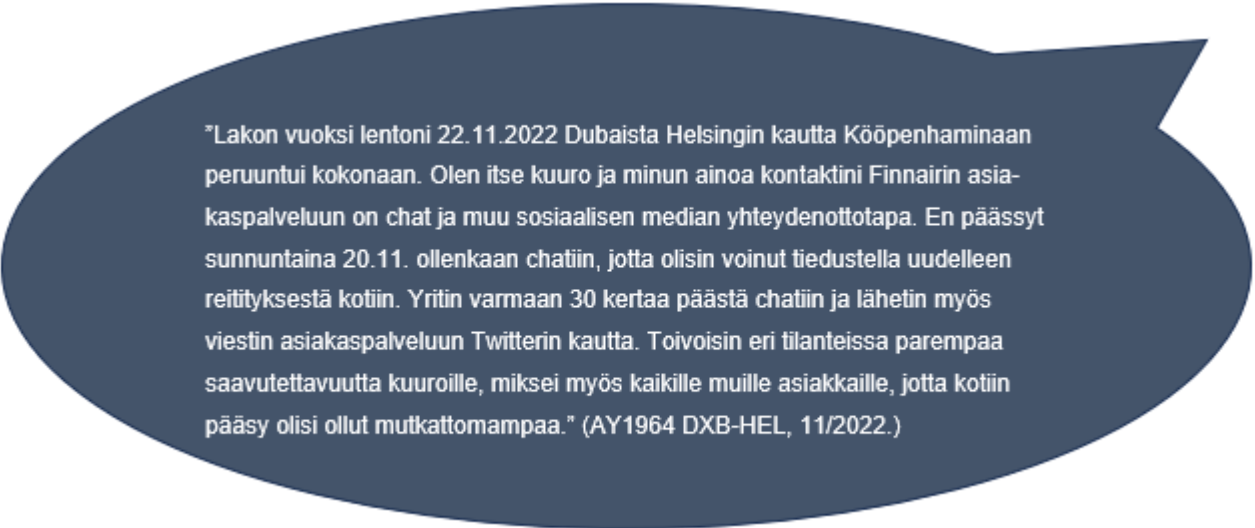
"Kuusamon kenttä oli hurjan ystävällinen ja huolehtivainen koko ajan mutta HEL tulopalvelussa kyllä kesti huolella, kun arpominen mm. hotellivaihtoehdon kanssa ei ollut aivan selvää. Että työnnetään kaksi KAO ZRH jatkomatkustajaa (joista toinen näkövammaisen ja liikkui maapalveluiden avustamana) lentokentän Scandic Airportiin kuten meille Kuusamossa kerrottiin vai kuskataanko meidät jonnekin lähialueen hotelleista." (AY490 KAO-HEL, 09/2022.)

"Upon arrival at LAX on my departure date, 10th of May, I was met with an inexplicable discrepancy due to your internal communication failure. Your check-in staff could not find any reference to my service dog in their system and as a result, I was refused boarding. Despite my patient attempts to rectify this error, including a lengthy two-and-a-half-hour wait for the staff to connect with your office, the issue remained unresolved. This situation was deeply distressing and caused significant emotional turmoil." (AY2 LAX-HEL, 05/2023.)

"Olen liikuntavammaisen ja olin tilannut saattopalvelun pyörätuolilla koneeseen ja takaisin. HKI-Vantaalla tämä toimi mutta kun saavuimme Teneriffalle, minut ja 83 v äitini laitettiin kävelemään lentokoneesta rappuset alas ja kävelemään terminaalissa koska kukaan ei tullut meitä hakemaan. Finnairin matkustamohenkilökunta valehteli meille pyörätuolien odottavan kentällä, kunhan kävelemme rappuset alas." (AY1691 HEL-TFS, 10/2022.)

In addition, three customers commented that they had not been communicated with the reason for their flight being disrupted, and a few customers criticized that they had no accessibility to the

information about their disrupted journey as the Finnair App and chat were unavailable to use. It was emphasized especially by the deaf customers, that Finnair App and chat are the primary communication channels for them to use because calling Finnair customer service is not an option for them. The feedback in the below speech bubble demonstrates well how a deaf customer perceived a sudden cancellation of the flight.



"Lakon vuoksi lentoni 22.11.2022 Dubaista Helsingin kautta Kööpenhaminaan peruuntui kokonaan. Olen itse kuuro ja minun ainoa kontaktini Finnairin asiakaspalveluun on chat ja muu sosiaalisen median yhteydenottotapa. En päässyt sunnuntaina 20.11. ollenkaan chatiin, jotta olisin voinut tiedustella uudelleen reitityksestä kotiin. Yritin varmaan 30 kertaa päästä chatiin ja lähetin myös viestin asiakaspalveluun Twitterin kautta. Toivoisin eri tilanteissa parempaa saavutettavuutta kuuroille, miksei myös kaikille muille asiakkaille, jotta kotiin pääsy olisi ollut mutkattomampaa." (AY1964 DXB-HEL, 11/2022.)

Finally, some elderly customers also experienced disruptions, especially stressful because of their own lack of language skills.

4.3.2 Care and assistance

The study shows that the most valued (and criticized) customer care activities for the customers in flight disruptions were the concrete, tangible, and essential needs, such as food and drinks, accommodation, interaction (communication) with Finnair staff, and in most cases also the wheelchair service. Only after these 'basics' came other concerns such as Customer Service's service attitude and reasonable waiting time to get in touch with Finnair staff.

Nine customers reported that they were not provided with enough food and/or drinks (even water) in relation to the waiting time due to a delayed journey. In addition, two customers pointed out that as they were taken to the aircraft first and deboarded last (as assisted passengers are), the time spent in the aircraft, especially with a delayed departure, was longer than that for the non-assisted 'normal' customers, and hence water service was then especially important because they needed to take (extra) medicine. The below feedback in the speech bubble illustrates how adequate water service during a flight delay is considered an important basic need for a customer.

"Meidät vietiin koneeseen ensimmäisinä jo klo 7.30 ja laskeuduimme vasta klo 16.10 (klo 18.10 Suomen aikaa) eli jouduin istumaan yli 10,5 h minulle hankalassa ja kivuliaassa asennossa, koska ylös nouseminen oli minulle erittäin vaikeaa. Olisin tarvinnut verenohennuspiikit, jos olisin tiennyt joutuvani istumaan näin kauan paikoillaan, minulla raja menee yli 6,5–7 h. Minun olisi pitänyt ainakin juoda yli 3 litraa vettä tukosten estämiseksi, mutta sain vettä kerrallaan vain 0,5 pahvimukillista kerrallaan ja kun heti pyysin lisää, että saisin otettua lääkkeeni (6 kpl) ei hän kaatanut sitä heti vaan lähti pois ja vasta 15 min kuluttua, kun sain jo kolmatta kertaa huudettua, anteeksi mutta saisinko sitä vettä lisää, sain toisen vajaan pahvimukillisen vettä." (AY1691 HEL-TFS, 10/2022.)

The study also revealed that some customers were out of reach of service (meal/refreshments) vouchers as distribution of them for the non-assisted passengers was done at the departure gate, while the assisted PRM customers had to wait in a separate assisted passengers -room until their flight started boarding and they were picked up by the wheelchair service provider and taken to the gate. Receiving the service vouchers at that point anymore was of no use as the customers didn't have enough time to use those vouchers. Customers' feedback of being excluded from the service vouchers can be seen in the below speech bubbles.

"...mieheni jäi odottamaan avustajaa ja minä menin muille matkustajille olevalle portille. Siellä jaettiin ateriakuponeja ja selitettiin myöhästymisen syytä muille matkustajille. MEILLE EI SIIS TARJOTTU MITÄÄN VIRVOKKEITA, meidät oli täysin unohdettu informoida ja virvokkeiden jaosta. Mieheni soitti, että silloin avustaja oli paikalla, joten en ehtinyt käyttää portilla saamaani virvokekupunkia." (AY1772 BLQ-HEL, 09/2022.)

"Missään ei päästy mitään syömään, sillä pyörätuoli avustuspalvelu käärsi meidän jostain lentokentän takareittejä pitkin HELPPoint-huoneeseen. Sieltä siirsivät koneelle, kun oman lennon pre-boarding alkoi." (AY1674 AGP-HEL, 11/2022.)

Similarly, another customer complained that his/her elderly mother couldn't get the service voucher either as there was no Finnair ground staff available to give it out to her. The inbound flight had been delayed and the elderly mother had consequently missed her original connecting flight, and hence was then rerouted by Finnair to her final destination with another connection. However, during the prolonged transfer and long waiting time the customer felt his/her mother wasn't properly taken care of. The customer feedback is shown in the speech bubble below.

"Finnair oli vain antanut ruokasetelin äidille, mutta se oli haettava Finnairin palvelupisteeltä Heathrow'n kentällä ja sieltä saisi muutakin apua. Valitettavasti Finnairin palvelupisteellä ei ole ikinä kukaan paikalla, vaikka sen pitäisi olla auki. Minun äitini piti kävellä jalka kipeänä edestakaisin monta kertaa odottaakseen apua, mutta mitään ei tapahtunut." (AY1331 HEL-LHR, 10/2022.)

Two deaf customers complained that as they didn't know if their meals were covered by Finnair during the disruption they just ate 'reasonably' at their own expense and were asking to be compensated for those costs afterward. Speech bubbles below demonstrate this customer perspective.

"Me olisimme toivoneet tietoa mitä tehdä ateriakorvauksen kanssa tai mitä korvauksia saisimme myöhästyneestä lennosta, joten me vain kävimme syömässä ja yritimme olla kohtuullisia." (AY146 BKK-HEL, 01/2023.)

"En tiennyt, että korvataanko aterioinnit ja ostin niukat ateriat ensin Dubaissa ja myöhemmin sitten Münchenissä." (AY1964 DXB-HEL, 11/2022.)

Hotel accommodation was mentioned in 12 feedback. Two customers claimed that there was no Finnair staff available at the airport to assist with hotel accommodation, and hence they stayed the night at the airport. Additionally, eight customers organized the hotel accommodation themselves either by extending their own hotel booking, or by changing the hotel offered by Finnair to a hotel that was more adaptable to the customer's disability needs e.g., including accessible toilet, and

baggage carrying services. Two customers also highlighted that staying at a hotel as close to the airport terminal as possible was important because it enabled a smoother transition from the hotel back to the airport, and a longer resting time prior to the new departure time for a potentially longer journey than originally planned. The two feedback in below speech bubbles show how hotel accommodation was perceived by the customers in a flight disruption.

"Myös voin ilmoittaa, että Pestina Royal hotellissa on vain yksi inva-vessa koko rakennuksessa ja hyvin vaikeasti saatavilla, myös inva-huone ei ole mitenkään suunniteltu pyörätuolissa liikkujalle ja vielä henkilökunta tulee töihin vasta klo 8 aamulla. Siellä ei ole apua antaa tavaroiden kuljetuksille." (AY1732 FNC-HEL, 05/2023.)

"After my flight was cancelled, (then rescheduled for the next day) I received a text offering overnight accommodation and instructed me to contact the ground staff at the airport. We tried to contact them via the number on the website: 0870 241 4411. This number didn't work. Therefore, I arranged my own hotel accommodation. Due to my disability and the change of flight date and a much earlier departure time, it was imperative that I stayed at a hotel as close to the terminal as possible to prevent a flare up of my condition by having as much sleep as I could before my much longer journey. This meant that I didn't need to get up at 1am to be able to get to the airport in time to check in for my flight. Instead, I could get up at 3.45am. It would have been impossible for me to travel otherwise." (AY1362 MAN-HEL, 12/2022.)

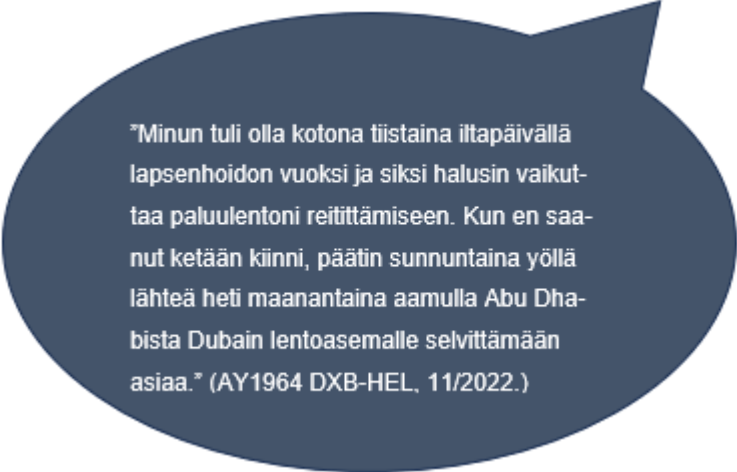
In Addition, one customer complained about the hotel bus transportation as it was unsuitable to accommodate his/her specific needs. As a wheelchair user, the customer would have needed wheelchair-accessible transportation to the hotel and back to the airport and ultimately had to organize such transportation self-sufficiently, as seen in the feedback below.

"Hei, Teillä ei ollut mitään palveluita järjestetty Invaliidi kuljetukseen. XX ei olisi voinut matkustaa bussissa missä eri ollut mitään pyörätuolipaikkaa ja se oli liian korkea. Jos ei olisi tiedetty itse Accesivel by Wheelchair invataksista olisi matka hotelliin ja takaisin ollut mahdoton." (AY1732 FNC-HEL, 05/2023.)

Thirteen customers reported in their feedback about the extra costs incurred by them during their delayed customer journey. These additional expenses were caused by e.g., extra hotel nights, ground transportation and/or parking fees, new flight tickets, and food and/or drinks. The study showed that the extra costs were posed in all flight disruption types and for all PRM customer types, in other words, there was no difference as to which flight irregularity or customer disability type was concerned the most in extra costs -related feedback. Also, four customers had tried to contact Finnair customer service for assistance and guidance in flight disruption but had not succeeded in doing so, and therefore had independently made the necessary arrangements to accommodate their new travel plan.

According to the study, eight customers had a need to get in touch with Finnair customer service regarding their disrupted journey. These customers either wanted to find out more about the disruption itself and/or their different options for rerouting (in case of cancellation), decline the rerouting solution they had been provided with, ask about compensation or refund policy for food and delayed journey, or out of insecurity confirm their original return journey since their outward journey had already started disruptively. Six of these customers also reported that they had had difficulties reaching customer service. Below speech bubbles reveal the feedback of customers who found it difficult to get in touch with Finnair customer service.


"Meille ei tullut mitään ilmoitusta myöhästyneestä lennosta, Appiin ei päivittynyt mitään eikä varaustietoon. Periaatteessa Google pelasti, kun sieltä tarkistin tilanteen. Ja oli tosi vaikeata saada asiakaspalveluun yhteyttä ja saada mitään tietoja koko hommasta. Oltiin ihan ulapalla ja odotettiin vain lisätietoja mitä ei saatu koskaan." (AY146 BKK-HEL, 01/2023.)



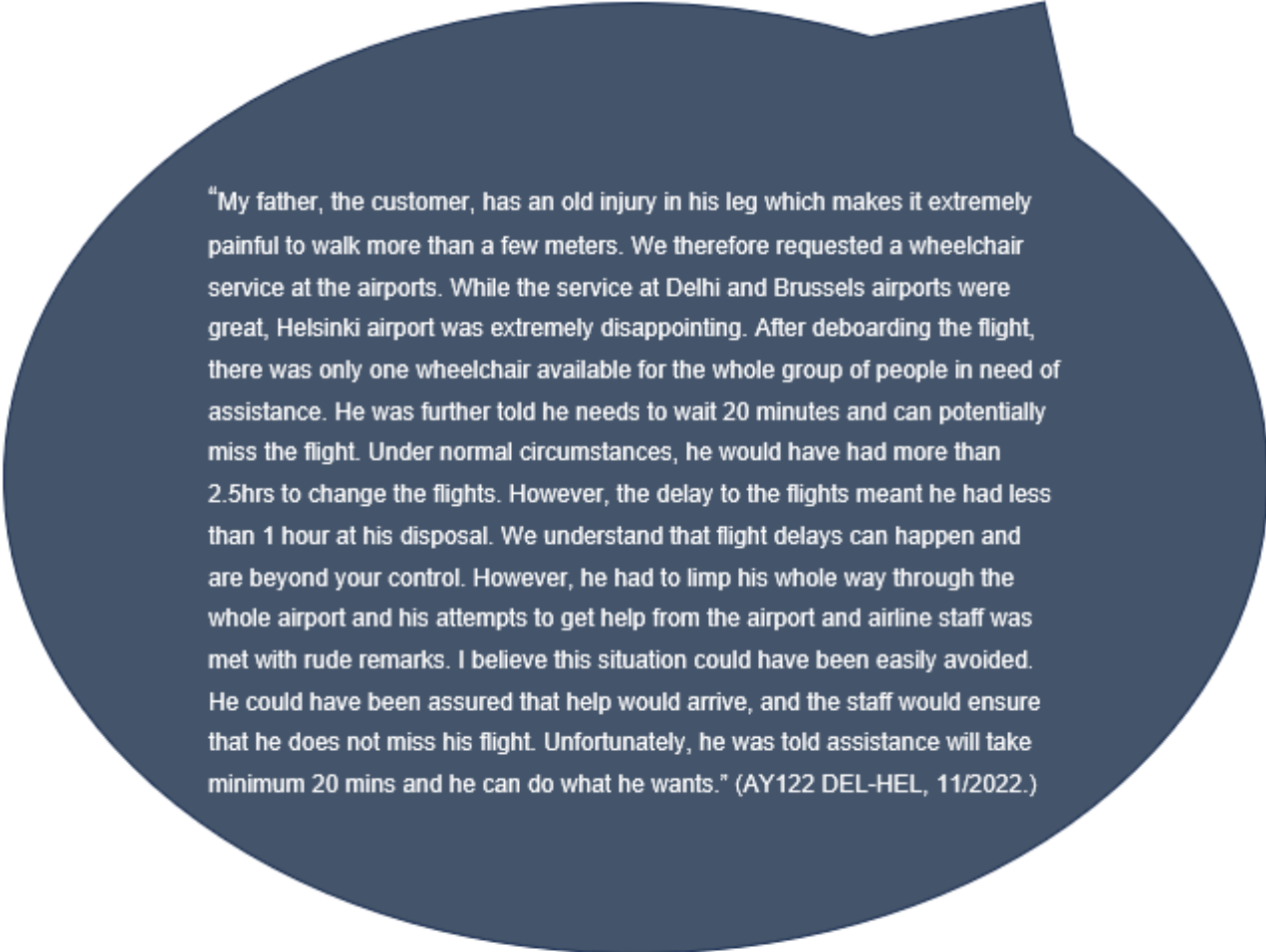
"Minun tuli olla kotona tiistaina iltapäivällä lapsenhoidon vuoksi ja siksi halusin vaikuttaa paluulentoni reitittämiseen. Kun en saanut ketään kiinni, päätin sunnuntaina yöllä lähteä heti maanantaina aamulla Abu Dhabista Dubain lentoasemalle selvittämään asiaa." (AY1964 DXB-HEL, 11/2022.)

Seven customers in various phases of the customer journey commented about a long waiting time during the disruption. Customers waited, for example, to receive further information about their flight disruption and/or new travel plan, for the wheelchair assistance to come and help them, to be guided by the ground staff to the hotel, or just to get through by phone to the Finnair customer service after queueing.

The feedback also revealed that 13 customers had problems with walking (longer distances) and consequently struggled to find their way amid their disrupted journeys. To make the travel smoother, ten of these 13 customers had booked a wheelchair service in advance, but in the end, did not receive it at all or received it with a delay. Wheelchair service was also lacking or delivered late for the customer in individual cases at individual outstations, such as Tenerife, Copenhagen, Istanbul, Doha, and Gothenburg. At Helsinki Airport, however, the wheelchair service was lacking or delivered late for most as six customers with walking difficulties complained about it. More worryingly, three customers reported that they also missed their connecting flight because their inbound flight was first delayed, after which the wheelchair assistance service they had booked was also delayed or not delivered throughout the transfer time. The below speech bubbles show how lack of wheelchair assistance affected customers' journey in flight delays.

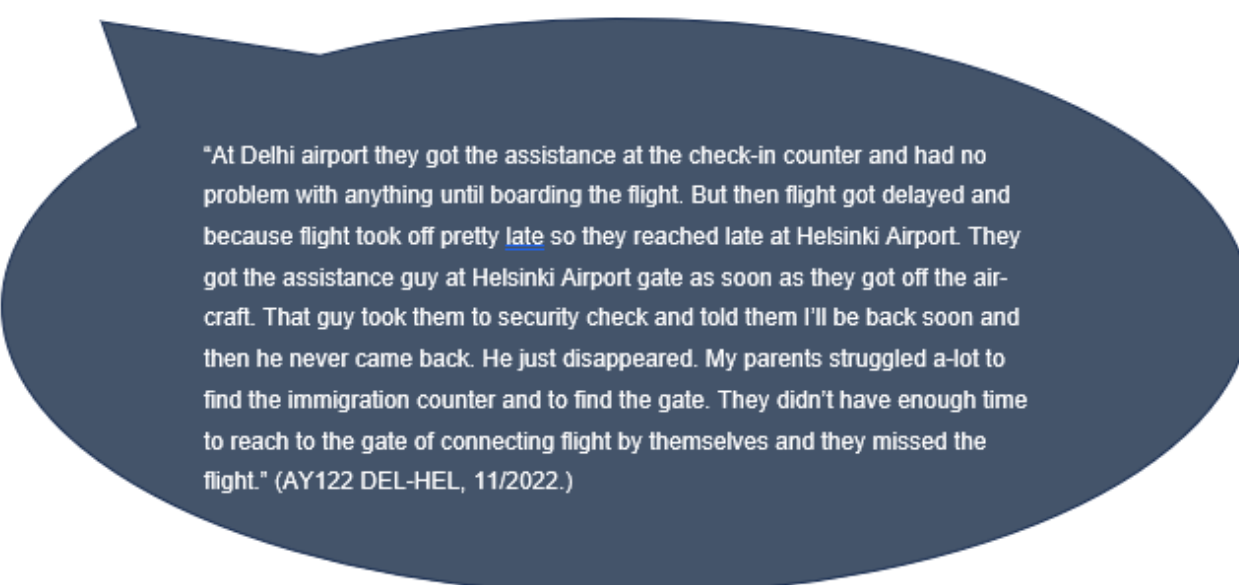


"Regrettably, our overall experience was marred by a significant delay in receiving wheelchair assistance at the Helsinki airport, which ultimately resulted in us missing our connecting flight. As individuals with mobility limitations, we had specifically requested wheelchair assistance during the booking process to ensure a smooth and comfortable travel experience. However, upon our arrival at the airport, we encountered an unreasonable delay in receiving the necessary assistance, leading to the missed connection." (AY813 HEL-ARN, 06/2023.)



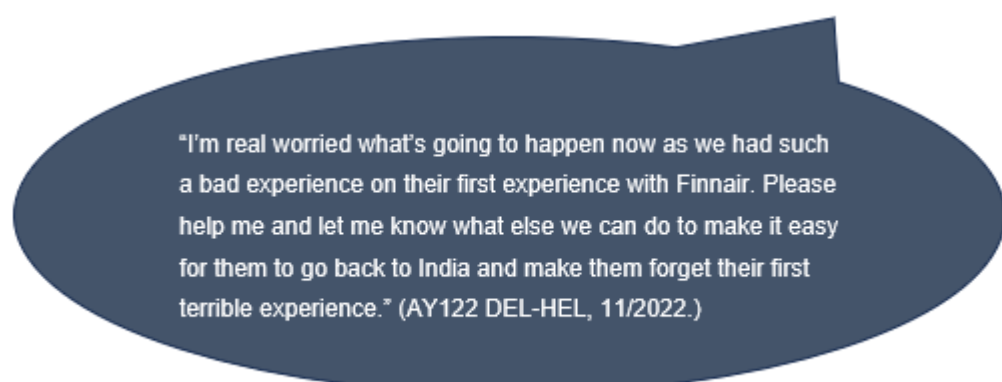
"My father, the customer, has an old injury in his leg which makes it extremely painful to walk more than a few meters. We therefore requested a wheelchair service at the airports. While the service at Delhi and Brussels airports were great, Helsinki airport was extremely disappointing. After deboarding the flight, there was only one wheelchair available for the whole group of people in need of assistance. He was further told he needs to wait 20 minutes and can potentially miss the flight. Under normal circumstances, he would have had more than 2.5hrs to change the flights. However, the delay to the flights meant he had less than 1 hour at his disposal. We understand that flight delays can happen and are beyond your control. However, he had to limp his whole way through the whole airport and his attempts to get help from the airport and airline staff was met with rude remarks. I believe this situation could have been easily avoided. He could have been assured that help would arrive, and the staff would ensure that he does not miss his flight. Unfortunately, he was told assistance will take minimum 20 mins and he can do what he wants." (AY122 DEL-HEL, 11/2022.)

One customer complained about the wheelchair assistance service at Helsinki Airport on behalf of his/her parents who were traveling outside their home country for the first time. The feedback revealed that the wheelchair assistance person first met the passengers upon arrival in Helsinki and then took the parents to the security check. However, after this, the wheelchair assistant vanished leaving the passengers to take care of themselves without any assistance, which led to passengers consequently missing their connecting flight. The feedback is shown in the below speech bubble.



"At Delhi airport they got the assistance at the check-in counter and had no problem with anything until boarding the flight. But then flight got delayed and because flight took off pretty late so they reached late at Helsinki Airport. They got the assistance guy at Helsinki Airport gate as soon as they got off the aircraft. That guy took them to security check and told them I'll be back soon and then he never came back. He just disappeared. My parents struggled a-lot to find the immigration counter and to find the gate. They didn't have enough time to reach to the gate of connecting flight by themselves and they missed the flight." (AY122 DEL-HEL, 11/2022.)

In addition, losing the original connecting flight resulted in new problems for the customers as some had to pay for changing their tickets (afterward they were refunded for those costs though), and others were lacking the wheelchair assistance service also in their final destination as the wheelchair service request (SSR) for the new flight had not been booked well in advance, as it should have been to be confirmed. Also, according to one feedback, the customers' baggage was left behind at Helsinki Airport due to change of flights. All in all, some customers experienced multiple disruptions within their single journey as their inbound flight was first delayed, the wheelchair assistance service was lacking at the transfer station, the connecting flight was lost, the wheelchair assistance service was lacking again at the final destination, and finally the baggage was delayed as well. This chain of events was apt to cause concern also for the passengers' return journey as demonstrated through the eyes of a customer in the below feedback.




"I'm real worried what's going to happen now as we had such a bad experience on their first experience with Finnair. Please help me and let me know what else we can do to make it easy for them to go back to India and make them forget their first terrible experience." (AY122 DEL-HEL, 11/2022.)

The need for special attention and assistance in PRM customer journey during flight disruption could be clearly 'heard' in most feedback. In nine cases, customers also emphasized this issue as

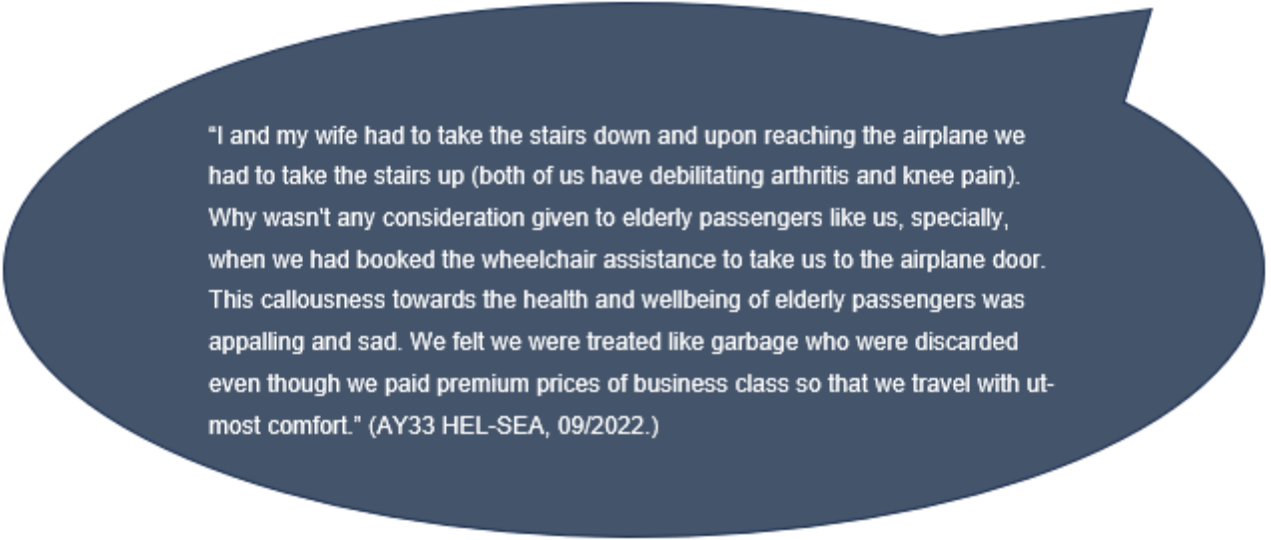
they felt that they were not assisted the way they should have been assisted. Two wheelchair customers traveling in business class, and a Finnair Plus Gold member with a hearing impairment also complained that they were not able to utilize the airport lounge benefit during their disrupted journey. This is an important find because waiting in the business class lounge for a delayed departure not only is something the customer has paid for but also enables him/her a more meaningful and comfortable waiting time with food and refreshments available compared to having to wait in a separate assisted passengers -room and at worst being excluded from the use of service vouchers, as discussed earlier. The below two feedback from the business class passengers show how the lack of lounge benefit in a flight delay was experienced.

"Olen Finnairin Gold-asiakas ja en yrityksistäni huolimatta päässyt loungeen Dubain lentoasemalla (ja en myöhemmin edes yrittänyt Münchenissä tapella asiasta). Kävelin ensin Lufthansan loungeen, jossa sanottiin, etteivät vastaa Finnairin asiakkaista ja minun tulisi mennä Finnairin puolelle. Menin sitten Finnairin loungeen, jossa sanottiin, ettei minulla ole pääsyä sinne, kun en ole Finnairin lennolla. En siinä viitsinyt uudestaan mennä kyselemään asiasta uudemman kerran Lufthansan puolelle. Gold-asiakkaana olisin toivonut parempaa kohtelua ja etuisuutta lentomatkan aikana. Nyt se ei valitettavasti toteutunut ja en päässyt nauttimaan Gold-jäsenyyden tuomista eduista paluumatkan aikana." (AY1964 DXB-HEL, 11/2022.)



”Meillä oli business-luokan liput. XX oli varattu avustus ja henkilö tulikin noutamaan check-inistä ja vei turvatarkastuksen läpi. Siinä vaiheessa kävi ilmi, että lounge olisi ollut ennen turvatarkastusta eikä sinne voinut enää palata. Saattaja vei meidät avustettavien henkilöiden erityiseen kohtaan ja sanoi, että meitä tullaan hakemaan 45 minuuttia ennen koneen lähtöä. Jossain vaiheessa huomasimme näyttötaululta, että lähtöaika on siirtynyt puolella tunnilla. Kuitenkin n. 45 min ennen uutta lähtöaikaa meitä tultiin noutamaan alas koneeseen nousua varten. Avustus oli ko. kentällä erityistä ajoneuvoa käyttäen, joka nostaa pyörätuolissa koneen oven luo. Jonkin aikaa odoteltuamme meidät vietiin takaisin samaan odotustilaan ylempään kerrokseen, jossa olimme olleetkin. Syyksi kerrottiin, että lento myöhästyy lisää. Näyttötauluilta näimmekin noin puolen tunnin välein olevia lisäyksiä. Jossain vaiheessa, kun näytti siltä, ettei lento lähde vielä moneen tuntiin kysyimme muita avustettavia hakevilta henkilöiltä emmekö tosiaan voi mennä takaisin turvatarkastuksen taakse loungeen. Se ei käynyt. Lento lähti 5 tuntia myöhässä.” (AY1772 BLQ-HEL 09/2022.)

Regarding customer service and the service attitude itself in disruption handling, six customers described it as rude, disrespectful, unkind, non-empathic, appalling, dismissive, and humiliating. One customer complained that he was treated with prejudice and disrespect as he was questioned about his/her physical appearance due to his/her medical condition. Also, as we learned before, another customer's disability was mistakenly interpreted as being drunk which led to the customer being denied boarding his/her flight. These findings were unfortunate, as according to Finnair (2023d), inclusive customer service means that persons with disabilities are treated with the same respect and friendliness as everyone else. Customers also appreciate effortless service, during which their special needs are not made a big deal of. (2023d.) The below speech bubble demonstrates how elderly business class passengers perceived Finnair service in flight delay.



"I and my wife had to take the stairs down and upon reaching the airplane we had to take the stairs up (both of us have debilitating arthritis and knee pain). Why wasn't any consideration given to elderly passengers like us, specially, when we had booked the wheelchair assistance to take us to the airplane door. This callousness towards the health and wellbeing of elderly passengers was appalling and sad. We felt we were treated like garbage who were discarded even though we paid premium prices of business class so that we travel with utmost comfort." (AY33 HEL-SEA, 09/2022.)

Based on the study, there was one case with a direct referral to the ACAA (see 2.2. and 2.4.) regulation, and 12 cases referring to either a general compensation or an EU compensation (see 2.3. and 2.4.) concerning the rights of the disabled passengers as well as the rights of passengers in flight disruptions, and hence it is a solid find, that PRM customers are nowadays well aware of their entitlements when traveling by air. The researcher has also found this to be true through her own work experience.

4.3.3 Service recovery

In this study, service recovery is referred to as a process of addressing and 'repairing' the problems that customers encounter when their Finnair flights are disrupted. By handling disruptions with care and efficiency in a timely manner, the aim of service recovery is to restore customers' faith and satisfaction in Finnair despite the disruption.

In cancellations and denied boardings, the primary service to be recovered is the flight itself but also the flight-related services or products (ancillaries). Most commonly baggage, seats, travel class upgrades, and special meals are such. For PRM customers however, as we've learned before, the SSRs to assist them due to their disability are also essentially important to be recovered. With delays and downgrades, the original flight remains the same while the changed schedule and/or travel class still have disruptive effects on customer journeys and how customers perceive disruptions. At Finnair, if the reserved services cannot be recovered during the disruption, they are fully refunded to customers afterward. Keeping in mind the customer experience holistically, though, it is always best if the service, whatever it may be, can be maintained despite the disruption as then the customer is more likely satisfied and may not even need to make a claim about

his/her travel experience. In short, the quicker, more effectively, and customer-oriented disrupted services are recovered, the less “damage” is done from the customer’s point of view.

Recovering the disrupted flight means rebooking or rerouting the customer onto a new flight. Similarly, recovering the lost service(s) in connection with a new flight means rebooking the service(s) as well. According to the feedback, the most critique concerning rebooking was given about a long(er) travel time (13 customers), and lack of adequate transfer time (3 customers). Also, individual customers complained about a change of terminals (in Paris, France), lack of airport lounge access and not being able to benefit from their Finnair Plus tier statuses (Gold, Platinum Lumo), poor handling of a mobility aid, and lack of special meals.

Based on the comments about the prolonged travel time, whenever a single direct Finnair flight (for example KRK-HEL) had been changed into a new solution with two (or more) flights (for example KRK-LHR > LHR-ARN > ARN-HEL), rebooking caused much anxiety, stress, exhaustion, and dissatisfaction among the PRM customers. After all, the more flights and airports are involved in a customer’s journey, the more challenging it is to reach the final destination smoothly. Certainly, with two (or more) new flights, instead of one direct flight, it is riskier to travel as well as one may lose the connecting flight if the inbound flight is delayed. This applies not only to PRM customers but to all customers alike. Direct flights are always the most seamless option, this we know for a fact.

The feedback clearly confirms that a prolonged journey puts a great toll on PRM customers’ health and wellbeing. Of course, flight disruptions will test anyone’s patience and wellbeing, but we may still safely say that disabled customers are among the most vulnerable passengers, in terms of physical and/or mental exhaustion, when flights get cancelled or delayed. The below feedback reveal how customers experienced their prolonged travel time.

"Sähköpostiin tuli uudelleenreititystiedot. Olen mieheni omaishoitaja, hän liikuntarajoitteinen, meillä WCHS avustuspalvelu. Mieheni ilmoitti, ettei jaksakaan 20 h rupeamaa. Päätettiin lopulta puh. virk. kanssa, että YRITETÄÄN jaksaa AGP-MAD-Lontoo-HEL. Koviille otti. Näin pitkä matka-aika oli liikaa. Juuri tämän takia ostanne aina suorat lennot. Valitettava tuo lakko, joka sotki Finnairin lennot." (AY1674 AGP-HEL, 11/2022.)

"Hän sai teiltä seuraavan päivän 3 lennot, mikä sai hänet lähtemään hotellista klo 6 ja saapumaan Helsinkiin seuraavana päivänä klo 00.20, eli saapumispäivä oli 21.7.2022. Hän söi ja joi hyvin vähän ahdistuksesta. Olen ollut hänen kanssaan puhelimesta monta tuntia rauhoitellakseni häntä. Näin pitkä matka on ollut todella raskas hänen terveysongelmiensa vuoksi." (AY1764 FCO-HEL, 07/2022.)

"Hei, lennon uudelleenreititys kokemuksena oli kammottavan huono. Matkustin vammaisen lapsen kanssa, joka vaatii lisää aikaa ja valmistelua, pyysin uudelleenreititystä nopealla yhteydellä ja annoin jopa kaikki lennon numerot ajat ym. mutta asiakaspalvelu kieltäytyi ja väitti että ei saa KLM:llä reitittää, vaikka toinen sanoi, että on ok. Sen sijaan, että pääsisimme kotiin klo 1645 KLM:llä laitoitte meidät Lontoon ja Tukholman kautta ja joka lento oli myöhässä, pääsimme Helsinkiin vasta klo 01. (AY1164 KRK-HEL, 11/2022.)

Five customers highlighted that they had deliberately booked the shortest connection to their destination to keep the travel time as short as possible. This topic is reflected in the below feedback.

"Finnair ilmoitti peruutuksesta ja tarjosi uuden reitityksen Pariisin kautta, jossa terminaalin vaihto, Helsinkiin, kolme päivää myöhemmin 24.11. Olen kielitaidoton, polvivammaisen eläkeläinen, joka ei koskaan ota lentojaan välilaskuilla. Aina suora lento ja vastaanottopäässä joku vastassa. Mahdoton hyväksyä tällainen "pomppulento" joten en hyväksynyt tätä vaihtoehtoa. Miehelleni, joka ei voi matkustaa yksin, uusi reititys oli 21.11. Madridin ja Pariisin kautta Helsinkiin???" (AY1672 AGP-HFI 11/2022)

"I had specifically chosen the flights I had originally booked so that it was the shortest travel time possible, and so wouldn't negatively affect my health. This much earlier start and much longer journey, without being able to take my usual rests, meant that my brief holiday lost a further day as I needed to recover the following day from the exhaustion of the extra travelling." (AY1362 MAN-HEL, 12/2022.)

Having enough time to transfer between the flights is important, because then you may proceed to your connecting flight's gate with peace of mind. For PRM customers, adequate transfer time is especially important as they often depend on being guided and assisted to their next flight. Wheelchair users and other customers relying on mobility aids cannot hurry or run to their next departure gate as non-assisted customers may do if the connecting time is tight. Inadequate connecting time caused problems in a flight delay, as seen in the below feedback.

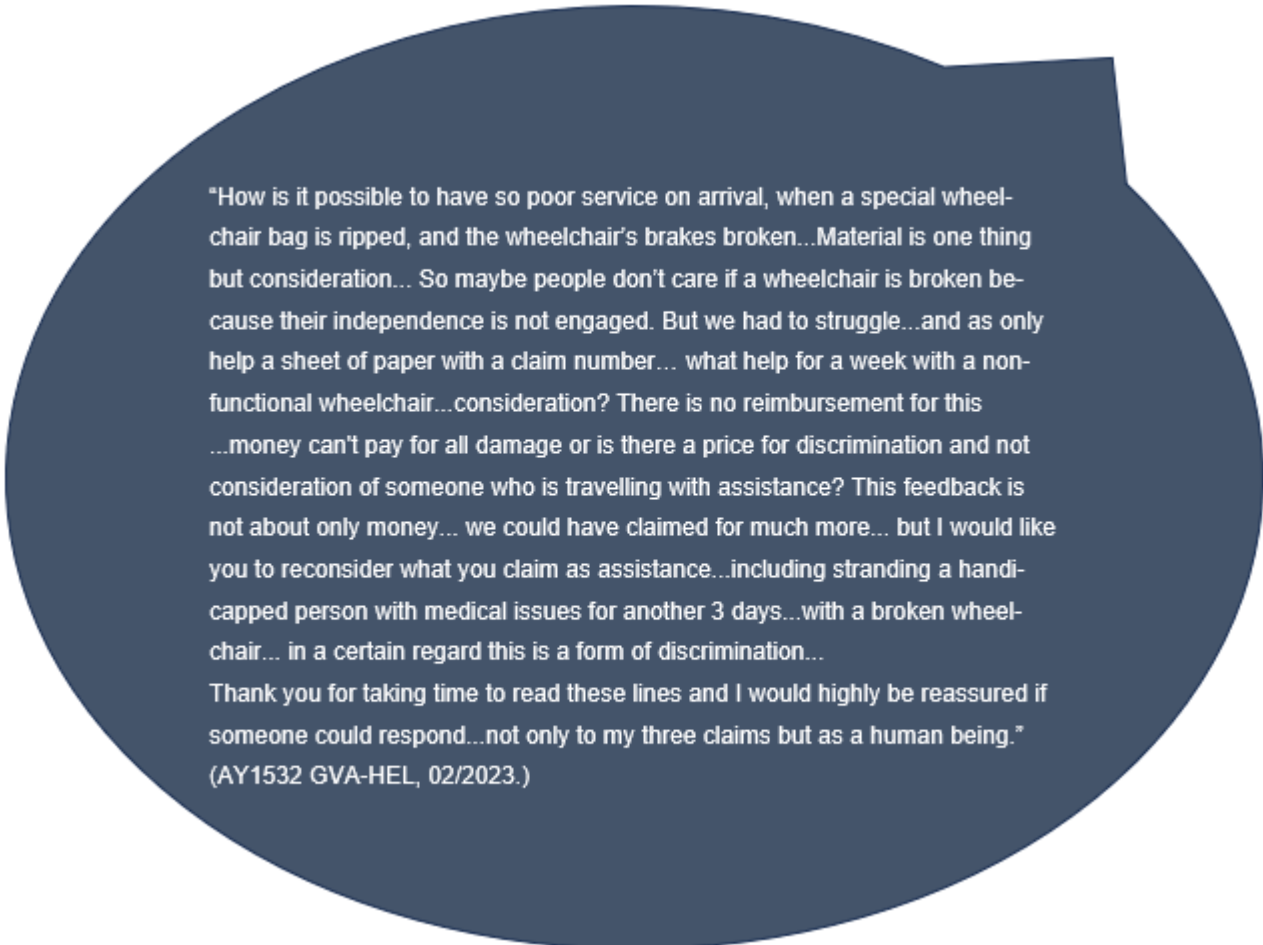
"Due to delay, our transit time at Helsinki airport was reduced to 1 hour which was earlier 3+ hours. To make matters worse, there was no wheelchair assistance available at the Helsinki airport while we requested it at the time of booking and was confirmed by the Finnair. However, we had to alight from the aircraft by stairs, then take a bus and finally had to run (literally) to catch our connecting flight. Can you even imagine the trauma we had to go through as there was no one to assist at the airport and no wheelchair assistance that was provided when we requested well in advance. How do you think a person who has issues in walking can catch a connecting flight because of delayed flight by Finnair? Is it just a formality to book wheelchair assistance as I see no improvement in the services compared to my previous experience. Somehow, with great difficulty, we managed to catch the flight." (A121 HEL-DEL, 07/2023.)

Also, changing terminals while transferring to the next flight is far from smooth, according to one feedback. The customer complained that (s)he always prefers direct flights as (s)he has mobility issues due to bad knees.

Findings about not being able to access the airport lounge while traveling on a rerouted journey, possibly on an alternative airline, were already presented earlier. Taking into consideration the fact, that among PRM customers there are also business class passengers as well as Finnair Plus tier members (Silver, Gold, Platinum, Platinum Lumo), it would be good if the higher priced tickets and frequent flier benefits could also be used during disruptions. The below feedback from a Finnair Plus tier member proves that even in a flight cancellation, the customer expected a tier-tied benefits and better service recovery from Finnair.

"LUMONA odotin parempaa ja Finnairinkin pitäisi parempaa tarjota. 13 h lennot Krakovasta Helsinkiin vammaisen lapsen kanssa on törkeää eikö teidänkin mielestänne? EU-korvauksin lisäksi odottaisinkin nyt Finnairilta asiakaspalveluelettä pisteiden muodossa hyvittääksenne tämän kokemuksen." (AY1164 KRK-HEL, 11/2022.)

One customer complained that during their family's disrupted journey the wheelchair of their disabled child had been broken, and hence caused a lot of problems for them. However, what was even more upsetting for the customer was how the situation with a broken wheelchair was handled upon their flight arrival. It was valuable to find out, that the disabled customer's feeling of worth and respect were even more important to the customer than the broken mobility aid. In the study, besides this individual feedback, there were no other mobility aid mishandling claims but based on my work experience I fully agree with this finding.



"How is it possible to have so poor service on arrival, when a special wheelchair bag is ripped, and the wheelchair's brakes broken...Material is one thing but consideration... So maybe people don't care if a wheelchair is broken because their independence is not engaged. But we had to struggle...and as only help a sheet of paper with a claim number... what help for a week with a non-functional wheelchair...consideration? There is no reimbursement for this ...money can't pay for all damage or is there a price for discrimination and not consideration of someone who is travelling with assistance? This feedback is not about only money... we could have claimed for much more... but I would like you to reconsider what you claim as assistance...including stranding a handi-capped person with medical issues for another 3 days...with a broken wheelchair... in a certain regard this is a form of discrimination...
Thank you for taking time to read these lines and I would highly be reassured if someone could respond...not only to my three claims but as a human being."
(AY1532 GVA-HEL, 02/2023.)

4.4 Results by Customer Experience (CX) and customer journey

As this study is a development project and aims at improving the PRM customer journey in Finnair flight disruptions, the researcher's focus in studying the feedback was mainly on the negatives arising from the cases. This approach was also justified as the first research question was about finding the most significant challenges or deficiencies in the feedback. Yet, the positives of the feedback will be also shortly presented because the researcher believes that providing an overall view of the customers' experiences will provide the most truthful and comprehensive understanding of

the current phenomenon. The research's case study strategy also underlines the importance of understanding the topic holistically, meaning the merits and demerits of the phenomenon.

As we have learned before (see 2.1), the customer experience is formed by the combined effect of many things along the customer journey. It is what and how the customer is thinking, feeling, doing, and sensing all that is happening to him/her when (s)he interacts with a company's (Finnair's) offerings (flights and flight-related services or products, and customer care). (Lemon and Verhoef 2016.) Although all 33 feedback of this study only shed light on the individual one-time disruptions, the consequent customer experiences may have also been affected by the customers' previous experiences with Finnair, as demonstrated in Figure 1.

The most frequently repeated emotions arising from all feedback were stress, distress, anxiety, exhaustion, disrespect, discrimination, and trauma. In addition, customers experienced frustration, fear, irritation, disappointment, injustice, and inconvenience and discomfort during their journeys. These findings were in line with the researcher's own presumptions based on her personal work experience i.e., nothing completely surprising surfaced, however the intensity of the comments and how certain emotions were repeated in single feedback over again caught the researcher by a slight surprise. Then again, reflecting back upon some of the most memorable personal customer experience situations, in good or bad, the researcher too, has "poured her heart out" because at that moment, the situation really did affect strongly and triggered a lot of emotions.

In this study, the customer experience results will be reflected in more detail upon the most significant deficiencies presented in the results of customer disruption handling: Communication, care and assistance, and service recovery. These are:

1. Lack of communication (Communication),
2. Lack of or adequate wheelchair service (Care and assistance), and
3. Prolonged travel time (Service Recovery).

Focusing on the above main challenges, and how they were experienced by the customers, was necessary as the development suggestions of this study were logically derived from these challenges. Not all the deficiencies can be fixed at once as development takes time, but it is good to start with something. Also, it may be that development in one area leads to a positive effect and refining customer experience elsewhere, too, and therefore the entire customer journey is improved. Meaning, even the smallest progress contributes to a bigger goal, as we know from any other project in work, study, or life in general.

Seven out of ten customers who had complained about lack of communication during their journey had experienced being disrespected, exhausted, stressed, and even traumatized. Also, feelings of

irritation, frustration, and fear were described. The below feedback reveals experiencing these negative emotions in regard to lack of communication.

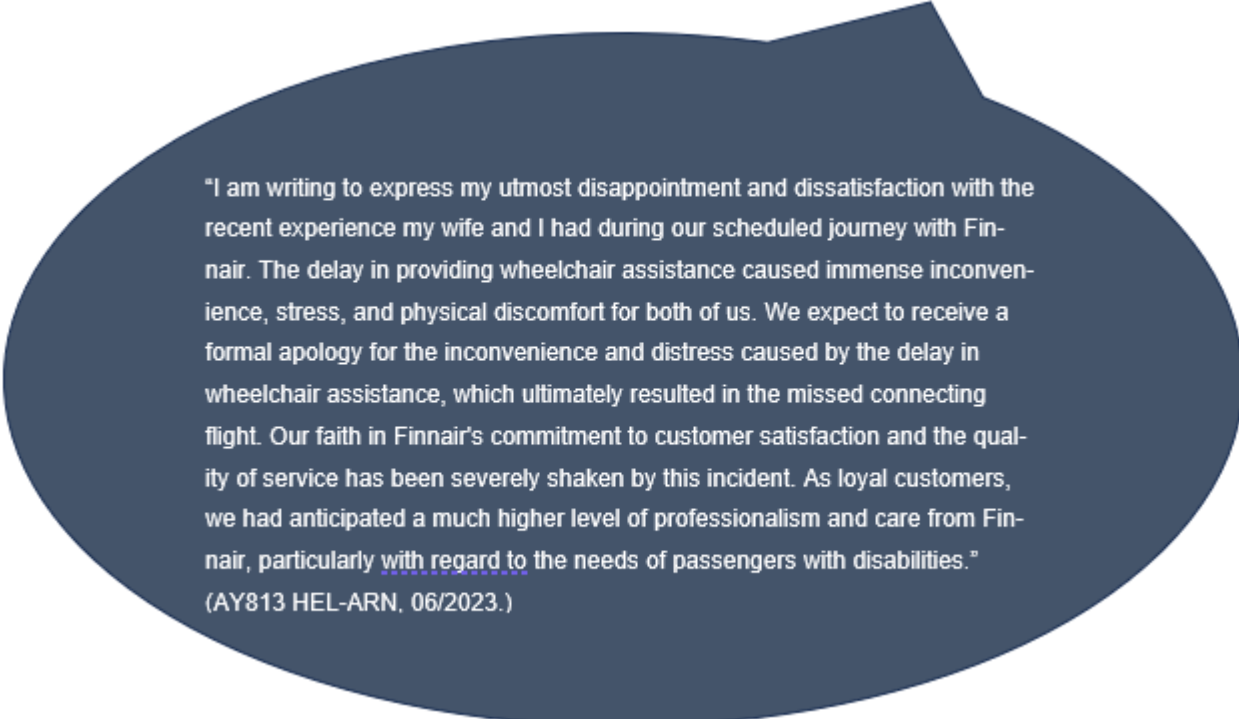
"I am writing to formally express my profound disappointment and serious concern regarding grave internal communication errors on your part during my scheduled travel from Los Angeles to Stockholm via Helsinki. The handling of the situation lacked the appropriate sensitivity, and their dismissive behavior was both humiliating and deeply distressing. I was not treated with the dignity and respect I deserved as a passenger and as a person reliant on a service animal for my well-being." (AY2 LAX-HEL 05/2023.)

Interestingly, the three remaining customers who also expressed their concern about lack of communication did not have negative emotions at all, but rather more of a neutral or even positive approach to the situation. Two of these customers were both deaf and had been on delayed flights and were suggesting that Finnair should 'do something' about accessibility of information through chat, App, or social media. The feedback about suggestive development actions can be seen in the speech bubbles below.

"Tehkää jotain paremmin Chat-palvelun kanssa. Olisi hyvä, jos olisi jokin yksi linja, joka on tarkoitettu niille jotka eivät kuule, esim. tekstiviesti tai chat suunnattu heille, kiitos tosi paljon." (AY146 BKK-HEL, 01/2023.)

"Eikö näistä asioista olisi voinut ohjeistaa esimerkiksi Finnair-sovelluksessa (siinä väitettiin lennon olevan matkalla)?" (AY954 CPH-HEL, 01/2023.)

Ten customers, who had requested wheelchair assistance in advance, but did not receive it or received it with a delay, as discussed before, experienced stress, disrespect, and disappointment above all as seen in the below feedback.



"I am writing to express my utmost disappointment and dissatisfaction with the recent experience my wife and I had during our scheduled journey with Finnair. The delay in providing wheelchair assistance caused immense inconvenience, stress, and physical discomfort for both of us. We expect to receive a formal apology for the inconvenience and distress caused by the delay in wheelchair assistance, which ultimately resulted in the missed connecting flight. Our faith in Finnair's commitment to customer satisfaction and the quality of service has been severely shaken by this incident. As loyal customers, we had anticipated a much higher level of professionalism and care from Finnair, particularly with regard to the needs of passengers with disabilities."
(AY813 HEL-ARN, 06/2023.)

Similarly, when customers' journey was prolonged due to rebooking, the corresponding emotions were exhaustion, stress, and disrespect. The physical and emotional fatigue was an obvious consequence of a prolonged travel time, as can be well presumed. The comments about prolonged travel time regarding exhaustion also revealed that customers had not been provided enough of food and/or drinks during the disruption, and hence they had purchased the food themselves and were now requesting the extra costs back in their claims. Also, as we have learned before, with long delays and cancellations customers may be entitled to compensation according to the EU261 regulation. This fact was also brought up by the customers themselves in their feedback. In sum, the longer the disruption is, the more important it is to take care of customers by providing them with enough food/drinks (and the possibility to rest) to prevent any unnecessary exhaustion. All these customer experience cause-and-effect findings were interesting, and hence will be discussed more in the next chapter.

The most dominant negative customer emotions in the feedback regarding lack of communication, lack of or adequate wheelchair service, and prolonged travel time are visualized with a word cloud in Figure 44.



Figure 44. Word cloud of the negative customer emotions in disruptions with lack of wheelchair service, lack of communication, and prolonged travel time.

In nine feedback, in addition to the critical comments, the customers reported about their experience also in a positive way. The overriding feeling was gratitude when things had gone smoothly, and hopeful and trusting, that the next journey would go even more seamlessly than the one they had just experienced. Friendly and knowledgeable customer service was also appreciated. The positives about the feedback are visualized with a word cloud in Figure 45.



Figure 45. Word cloud of the positive experiences in the feedback.

These results speak volumes of the importance of smooth travel to the PRM customers in disruptions. The researcher continues to discuss these positives in more detail in the next chapter.

4.5 Results of the closed-ended questions

A total of 16 customers, nearly 50 % of all customers, had chosen to answer the closed-ended question in connection with their open feedback. Fourteen of them rated Finnair services as poor (1), and two as fair (2). The rest of the customers had not provided any numerical rating, and hence good (3), very good (4), or excellent (5) ratings were not given at all. Interestingly, both fair ratings were provided by the two sight-impaired customers, and 11 poor ratings by the wheelchair customers.

Based on the ratings, it is evident that these 16 customers perceived their customer journey and disruption experience with Finnair as bad. Therefore, it is likely that the remaining customers also perceived their customer journey and disruption experience as bad. This is backed up by the content of the open feedback as well, which in all 33 feedback was mainly critical in tone.

5 Discussion

This chapter focuses on the research analysis and interpretation of the results. Significance and relevance of the new knowledge acquired from the research outcomes will be discussed and compared to the existing literature and theories. To demonstrate the findings from the practical point of view, an imaginary User persona is introduced and her customer journey in a Finnair flight disruption visualized. Through analysis, User persona's thoughts, emotions, and behaviour during various phases of her customer journey are discussed, summarized, and reflected upon the development task questions and ultimately the topic of this thesis. Through the researcher's own know-how and prior work experience on PRM customers, flight disruptions, customer feedback handling, and customer service and customer experience, further context to the findings is also brought into discussion.

In addition, the ethical viewpoints of the study and its limitations as well as the recommendations for future research are discussed in this chapter. Finally, the researcher's self-reflection and concluding thoughts of the entire research project are expressed.

5.1 Analysis and interpretation of the results

In this study, the main findings are:

- Delays and cancellations form majority of Finnair's flight disruptions and represent approximately 85 % of all feedback cases.
- Most PRM customers, nearly 50 % of all feedback, were wheelchair users, and consequently dependent on being assisted and helped upon flight departure, transferring to a connecting flight, and/or upon flight arrival.
- In customer disruption handling, the most surfaced deficiencies in the feedback were 1) lack of communication, 2) lack of adequate wheelchair service, and 3) prolonged travel time.
- In disruptions, and regarding the above listed deficiencies, PRM customers experienced above all stress, exhaustion, and disrespect.
- In approximately 27 % of all feedback, despite the disruption, PRM customers also expressed emotions of gratitude, hope, and trust.

In analyzing and interpreting the results, the researcher clearly sees a cohesive story that the data tells. All findings are truthful in light of the researcher's work experience as well and did not reveal anything much out of the ordinary or unfamiliar to the researcher. This tells the writer of this thesis that a 25+ -year long work experience from the aviation and airline industry as well as a 35+ -year work experience from customer service provided a sufficient knowledge and competence base to

support this research with personal reflection. Therefore, argumentation of the findings, critical analysis, and development suggestions are well grounded.

The outcomes of this study are significant and very relevant in today's changed operating environment for Finnair and all airlines. The world's post-pandemic situation and the recent geopolitical conflicts affect us all, and hence aviation sector, among other industries, is attempting to figure out what direction to navigate into, and which strategy to implement to sustain profitable business also in years to come. Regardless of the ongoing global crises (see 1.1 and 2.3), the world's population is nevertheless aging and with people getting older, the number of disabilities grows as well. This is a permanent and continuous trend which is caused by multiple reasons, such as improvements in healthcare systems. The technological advancements and general development with Artificial Intelligence (AI) will only accelerate in the future, therefore the researcher does not see the trend of aging people to end, quite the opposite in fact. This means that companies that manage to incorporate this reality of aging people into their ways of doing things and ultimately into products and services will succeed and even dominate business in the future's new competitive market situation.

In addition to adjusting business to accommodate the individual needs of aging people and other PRM customers, flights will factually continue to be disrupted in the future, too. There will always be changes on top of changes and the only way to keep up with these never-ending twists and turns is to embrace them, learn from them, and adapt to them. In fact, the researcher believes that the "new norm" in today's operating environment for the airlines is more or less disruptive. The research finds that the most typical flight disruptions at Finnair are delays and cancellations. Representing the largest proportion of the study's flight disruptions, delays occurred evenly all-around Finnair's global network. Cancellations, on the other hand, concentrated in Europe and mainly on flights bound for Helsinki. The researcher finds these results rational and not surprising from the perspective of her practical work experience. Flights are sensitive to delays but only cancelled as a last resort. Even a heavily delayed flight is better than a cancelled flight both from the perspective of Finnair and the customer.

Another logical find in the study was that most PRM customers were using wheelchairs and were therefore relying on receiving assistance during the different phases of their customer journey. As Laming and Mason present (2014, 15), customer experience is perceived through the total customer journey from the first point of contact to the last point of consumption. Therefore, and as the feedback reveal, wheelchair customers who did not receive assistance and help during the various phases of their disrupted customer journey and interaction with Finnair, experienced repeated stress, disrespect, and disappointment, and hence their overall customer experience was not good. The researcher is concerned about these results as they suggest that due to insufficient wheelchair

service, the customers have not been served in a respectful and individual manner and as is required in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. (UN 2006a.) The results also tell that when accessibility and assistance was lacking, traveling, and moving around the airport became extremely difficult or even impossible for the wheelchair users, and hence this contradicts with Finnair quality standards and regulations in regard to EC Regulation 1107/2006. (Finnair 2023d and 2023n.)

In addition to inadequate wheelchair service during flight disruptions, the results highlighted that PRM customers felt they weren't kept sufficiently informed about their disrupted flight and journey. Customers expressed dissatisfaction and frustration because due to lack of information they had attempted to seek more information about their flight themselves through e.g., Finnair's digital channels (chat, App) but had not succeeded in doing so. This indicates to the researcher that there really hasn't been enough information available to the customers during the disruption as if there had been, the customers most likely would not have had the need to seek it themselves. In passenger disruptions, with referral to information and communication to passengers (Finnair 2023n, 60), Finnair provides accurate information immediately and at regular intervals. This means:

- ensuring staff are briefed for consistent delivery of information,
- briefing staff on the estimated time of departure, estimated time of arrival, and any provisions being offered,
- providing passengers with written information about their rights according to applicable regulations, upon request or as required, and
- providing information in alternate formats to passengers with impairments.

Regarding the last stipulation about disabled customers' alternate ways of being informed about flight disruptions, the researcher proposes a further discussion about what these alternate formats in practice are as the researcher herself is not aware of them. Also, the researcher urges to pay special attention to the general guidance of providing accurate information in a frequently timely manner, even if it means informing customers that there is no further information for the time being. Based on the work experience in Finnair operative work the researcher understands that it is not always easy to determine or predict what will happen with operations, what kinds of implications various situations have on flights let alone what to communicate about them to the customers, however, the researcher also thinks that the process of customer notification in operational disruptions at Finnair should be even more proactive and transparent. If the new estimated time of departure for a delayed flight cannot yet be published due to uncertainties, then the process of "next info" (informing customers that there is no further information for the time being) should be utilized more. The researcher thinks that this would improve the concept of providing accurate information about flight disruptions at regular intervals, and therefore customers would not be left "in the dark" of

what's going on with their flight. Deaf customers in the study, for example, underlined that if no information is received from Finnair about their disrupted flight, their only way for communication was through chat or App, which however were either closed or full at the time of their flight disruption.

The 3rd deficiency arising from the study was customers' complaints about prolonged travel time due to flight disruption. This caused additional concern and exhaustion for the customers, and thus revealed yet another deficiency to develop, i.e., PRM customers' access to service vouchers to purchase food and drinks during disruptions especially in situations where they have been taken to a separate assisted passengers -room to wait for their flight departure. As stated before (see 2.4.4), Finnair always needs to take care of its passengers regardless of the source of the irregularity, and hence making sure PRM customers, too, have full access to food and refreshments when their travel is prolonged, is crucially important as it minimizes physical and emotional fatigue.

Based on the results of this study, the aim of this thesis is to develop PRM customers' journey in Finnair flight disruptions. Expectedly, a wide array of customer emotions was experienced when PRM customers' journey was disrupted. Most were stressed and tired, but some were expressing positive emotions, too, when things had gone smoother. These positives are also important to take pride in and recognize, which the researcher sees as reinforcing Finnair's strengths.

Customer experience is deeply rooted in Finnair's values (Finnair 2023f), which the researcher is extremely happy about, however, developing customer experience in practice requires a lot of persistent and long-term work. When evaluating how customer experience could be improved and what development should be pursued, the researcher wishes to highlight that all customers benefit from accessible and inclusive services, not just the PRM customers. Therefore, acknowledging this and working from this perspective enables new, more agile, and most importantly sustainable solutions that can be utilized by anyone.

Today, the customer's journey typically consists of many different elements making the travel more personalized and tailored. This means that customers most likely have higher expectations toward their travel as well because with personalization things do become more personal. Then, when disruptions occur, all of these elements and add-ons enhancing the travel experience are "shaken", and the level of disappointment to the customer, when these high expectations are not met, is consequently even greater. The knock-on effect (Gershkoff 2016, 4) is realized even within an individual customer journey, as we have learned from the feedback. In sum, the researcher thinks that the customer journeys today are even more vulnerable to disruptions than before when the ancillary business was still non-existent. To address the challenge, the processes, services, and products need to be as flexible and lean as possible to enable successful recovery from the disruption. "By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail" is a commonly known saying, and the researcher

shares this same viewpoint. Being well-prepared is not only wise and sustainable in terms of resources and time management, but also one of the key attributes to succeed in flight disruptions.

Developing sustainable solutions and building responsible models of operation is the way to go forward. According to Topi Manner (30 January 2023, min. 27:09-27:28), sustainability is in the core of Finnair strategy, and even during the past crisis the company's sustainability goals have remained intact. In addition to Finnair's own company goals, Manner emphasizes (30 January 2023, min. 28:58-29:58), that the entire aviation sector needs to work together and move forward "in a very determined fashion" to turn emerging plans and industry-wide ambitions to concrete actions in fostering sustainable aviation. All stakeholders including airlines, airports, aircraft manufacturers, oil companies etc. need to be "on board" to make things happen. Unleashing the potential of the full value chain can really make the difference on a larger scale, Manner proclaims, and continues that more momentum is still needed. (30 January 2023, min. 29:59-31:02.) The researcher agrees with Manner and considers this research project to be a practical example of collaborative development in social sustainability as one of the recommended development ideas involve an important stakeholder of Finnair, Finavia. In addition, the researcher views this research as an important concrete employee-engaged sustainability development initiative and feels especially honoured to present it this special year of Finnair's 100th centenary.

According to Manner (30 January 2023, min. 26:30-27:08), Finnair's customer experience and customer satisfaction is already at a great level, but there is still room to develop it and use this development as a source of growth. The topic of this research supports this aim. Finnair represents "people's business" also in the next 100 years to come, Manner explains (30 January 2023, min. 31:29-31:40), and therefore, the researcher sees that investing in customer experience equals investing in Finnair's future.

5.2 An imaginary User persona and disrupted Finnair customer journey

In this subchapter the researcher demonstrates and summarizes the findings of the study by introducing an imaginary User persona and illustrating her disrupted Finnair customer journey. The idea of presenting the main findings through the eyes of a Finnair PRM customer ignited during the Haaga-Helia's summer 2023 course of Development of Customer Journey and Leading Customer Experience. Also, as the researcher's current job role is Customer Journey Lead, which is a part of the CX & Products and Disruptions CX organization, it was a natural way to approach and share the results to the readers of this thesis. The User persona was created based on what the most common PRM customer type was (wheelchair user), and how the researcher in general envisioned the customer based on the other prevalences of the study. A delay of a long-haul flight bound for Helsinki was the most common flight disruption. Also, Delhi – Helsinki was the only route pair, that

repeated twice in the study, and hence this was selected to illustrate the travel route of the User persona. The nationality (Indian) of the User persona generated directly from the route pair. The User persona's name, age, profession, reasons to engage or not to engage with Finnair, interests, motivations, skills, dreams, and expectations are fictional and based on the researcher's work experience and knowledge of customer service. The main elements of customer disruption handling, and customer experience (customers' emotions).

Ms. Padma Kumar is a family-oriented elderly Indian woman living in Delhi and dreaming of traveling to New York to see her son and his family. Due to her age, Ms. Kumar has health issues with her knees and is dependent on mobility aids, such as wheelchairs. Ms. Kumar has not travelled much and therefore, although being fluent in English, is a little hesitant about the trip. How much is it going to cost? Will she get a wheelchair and assistance from Finnair while traveling? What happens if the flights are delayed? Despite these concerns, Ms. Kumar is highly motivated to make a booking for Finnair and has a positive attitude that everything goes smoothly after all. Ms. Kumar's User persona is introduced in Figure 46.

User persona – Ms. Kumar



Figure 46. An imaginary User persona Ms. Kumar.

Next, Ms. Kumar's 5-staged customer journey is mapped out from the pre-travel phase to the post-travel phase. Lemon and Verhoef describe (2016) this process similarly as prepurchase and post

purchase stages, whereas Finnair's customer journey process (Finnair 2023g) is a bit more detailed including eight phases. All in all, customer journey proceeds consistently with a similar context with all models.

In the Planning stage, Ms. Kumar starts making preparations for her travel to New York. She finds out about flight connections, ticket prices, hotel costs, and most importantly wheelchair assistance service. She is overwhelmed by all the information and feels anxiety and stress but is also hopeful that her trip will be a smooth one.

In the Booking stage, Ms. Kumar makes the needed reservations and arrangements for traveling. She thinks the total costs are a lot, but in the end is also relieved when everything is settled.

Just before the trip, Ms. Kumar has a need to manage her booking by changing the travel date and ordering a special meal. She also wants to know more about wayfinding and transferring at Helsinki Airport, and therefore contacts the Finnair customer service. She is helped in the most friendly and attentive way and this positive customer experience gives Ms. Kumar more confidence and reassurance that her travel to New York is "in good hands".

As Ms. Kumar starts her travel at Delhi Airport everything goes smoothly. She is assisted among the first customers to board the aircraft. Unfortunately, however, Ms. Kumar's flight to Helsinki departs an hour delayed from Delhi, which raises worries with Ms. Kumar about her connection to New York. Upon arrival at Helsinki Airport, Ms. Kumar waits for 25 minutes until she is picked up by a wheelchair assistance service and taken via security control to her next departure gate. All this takes time as there are long queues at the security control and this results in even more worrying for Ms. Kumar. She is stressed and very concerned if she will make it in time for her New York flight. As Ms. Kumar feels that she is not kept well informed about her delayed journey and tight connection, she tries to find out more information by herself via Finnair App. Luckily, Ms. Kumar catches her New York flight just in time, but still feels disappointed, tired, and disrespected as she was made to wait exceptionally long for her wheelchair assistance service. A delayed arrival of the Delhi-Helsinki -flight on top of a long waiting time to be assisted with a wheelchair and at the security control at Helsinki Airport "ate up" all of Ms. Kumar's connecting time.

After returning home, and upon reflecting on the trip, Ms. Kumar feels relieved and accomplished to have made the trip. She is happy to have spent time with her family but also disappointed in having such a disrupted journey from Delhi to New York. Ms. Kumar is especially dissatisfied with the poor wheelchair assistance service at Helsinki Airport and therefore decides to give feedback to Finnair about it. She hopes that her comments and customer experience will be taken into account in improving the wheelchair assistance service at Helsinki Airport. Despite the negatives, Ms.

Kumar is nevertheless optimistic and trusting that her next travel to New York will be smoother. Ms. Kumar's customer journey is visualized in Figure 47.

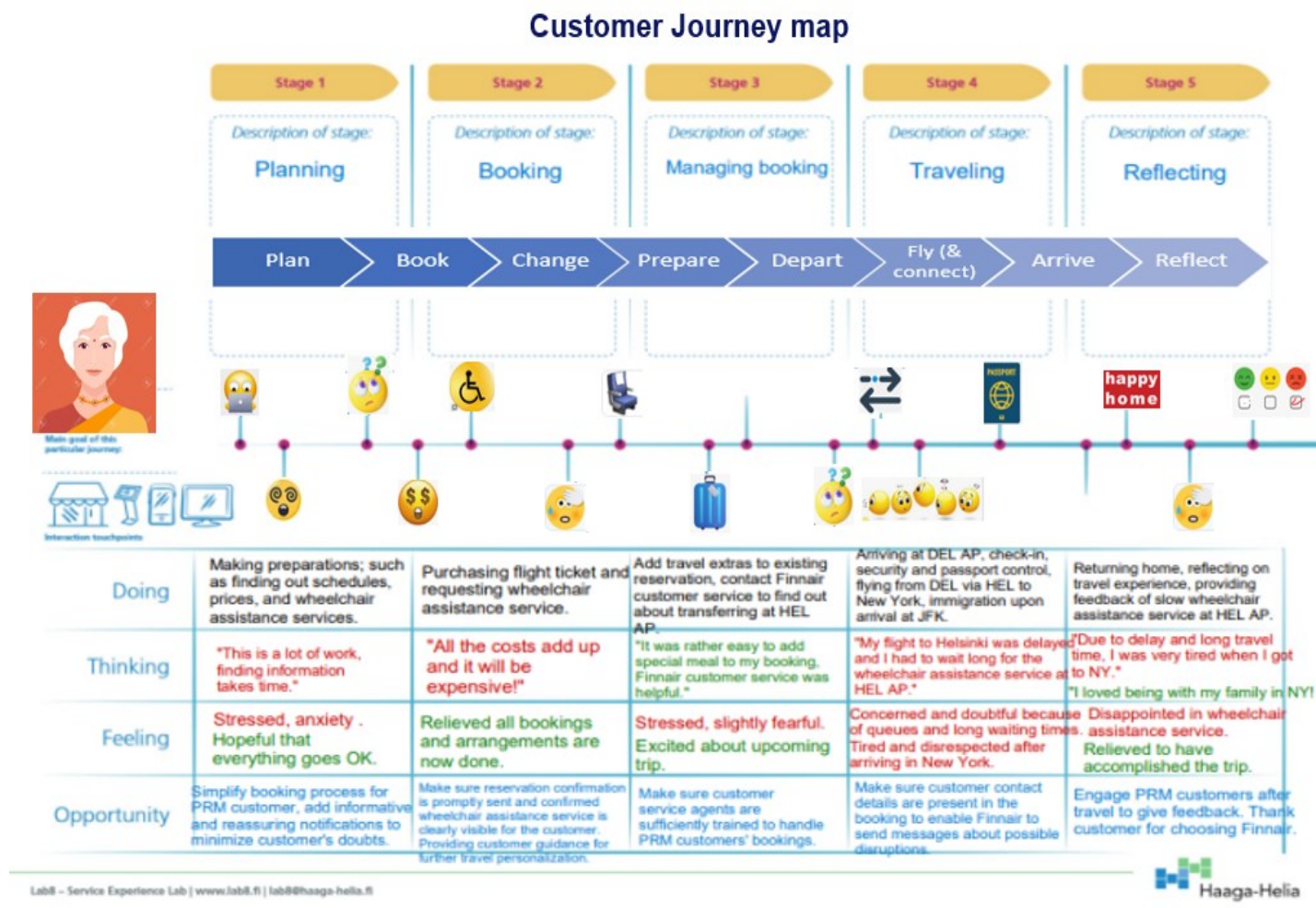


Figure 47. Ms. Kumar's customer journey in Finnair flight disruption.

To summarize, an hour's delay of Ms. Kumar's 1st flight from Delhi to Helsinki resulted in multiple consequences for the customer journey. As PRM customers using wheelchairs are dependent on receiving assistance and help with proceeding their journey, the researcher thinks that it is necessary to critically assess the process of wheelchair assistance service when flights are disrupted. How is the service adapted to accommodate delayed flights? Are the resources of the service provider's staff optimized accordingly and if not, shouldn't they be? The researcher thinks they should. The results of the three wheelchair customers on Delhi flights as well as according to the researcher's work experience indicate that most wheelchair requests concern Delhi flights.

...there was only one wheelchair available for the whole group of people in need of assistance. (AY122 DEL-HEL, NOV/22.)

This raises a concern with the researcher that the resources of the wheelchair assistance service at Helsinki Airport are either inadequate or not optimized according to Finnair flights' operational disruptions. Therefore, and in reference to the topic of this thesis, the researcher proposes the 1st development to be:

- Re-evaluate the process of wheelchair assistance service at Helsinki Airport to make sure it meets the needs of Finnair's PRM customers in situations when flights are delayed.

In other words, optimization and change management of the wheelchair assistance service when Finnair flights arrive and/or depart delayed need to be reassessed. Customers' journeys are changed also in cancellations and other disruptions, and therefore the service would ideally need to accommodate and consider those as well, however, the researcher proposes a more realistic approach and suggests that the first steps of development include only delays. This development is important because it also enhances collaboration between Finnair and Finavia in reaching a common goal of making air travel more accessible and inclusive for PRM passengers.

As Ms. Kumar's customer experience also demonstrated, another important area of development is customer communication in flight disruptions. During a delay and a minimal transfer time at Helsinki Airport Ms. Kumar's experience was that she was not well-informed of her disrupted journey. She would have benefited from a real-time customer communication through a Finnair App/Chat whether her connecting flight was waiting for her or not. Therefore, the researcher proposes the 2nd development suggestion to be:

- Add enhanced feature to Finnair App that enables customers to follow-up their disrupted flight status in real-time and check if their connections still "hold".
- In addition, in operational flight disruptions, prioritize PRM customers' contact requests in Finnair Chat over other "regular" (not urgent) customer contacts. Call this new chat a Finnair Disruption Chat.

Based on the researcher's work experience at Helsinki Airport customer service, assisting PRM customers in flight disruptions is a priority and therefore development of similar service in Finnair App/Chat would harmonize and align Finnair's ways of handling disruptions, and thus provide PRM customers a much-needed exclusive channel (Chat) to get in touch with customer service when they most need it. The researcher believes that these improvements would enhance PRM customer experience and develop consistent ways of working at Finnair.

5.3 Answering the development task questions

The objective of this thesis was to produce suggestions for the target organization to improve the PRM customer journey in Finnair flight disruptions. Another objective was to increase the general

knowledge and understanding about PRM customers' journey in flight disruptions at Finnair and within the aviation stakeholders.

To come up with the befitted development suggestions, the research aimed at finding answers to two development task questions:

Q1: What are the most significant challenges or deficiencies arising from the feedback? and

Q2: What can be done to improve the PRM customer experience/journey in Finnair flight disruptions?

The research findings support the purpose and objectives of this thesis. The resurfaced new knowledge in the data was mostly familiar and resonating to the researcher due to her prior work experience, however, "intensity" of some feedback startled the researcher slightly. During the study, the researcher's in-depth understanding of the topic increased, and therefore the researcher assumes that the readers of this thesis have also gained new learnings and deeper understanding of the topic. This means that the other more general objective to raise awareness of the PRM customer journey in flight disruptions was also achieved. Through careful study and analysis of the data, the results enable answering the development task questions in full comprehension.

The primary contributions of this study and the messages to the commissioner of this research are as follows,

A1: The three most significant deficiencies arising from the feedback are lack of communication, lack of or inadequate wheelchair service, and prolonged travel time.

A2: PRM customer journey in Finnair flight disruptions can be improved with development of:

1. Optimization of the wheelchair assistance service resources at Helsinki Airport according to Finnair flight disruptions (delays),
2. Real-time flight information status follow-up in Finnair App, and
3. Finnair Disruption Chat to assist PRM customers in flight disruptions.

Throughout the research, several other development ideas surfaced for the researcher as well, however, the above three suggestions were the most relevant and useful in the researcher's opinion. They are directly addressing the deficiencies found in the feedback. In sum, the researcher calls Finnair and Finavia for collaborative action to develop the wheelchair assistance service at Helsinki Airport in a way that accommodates flight disruptions (delays) in a more balanced and

flexible way. With regard to disruption customer communication, developing Finnair App and Chat is also necessary, especially for the benefit of deaf customers. Concerning the actualization and application of the development suggestions, the researcher wishes to leave them to the experts and responsible persons of PRM customer processes at Finnair and Finavia to take further.

5.4 Research ethics and quality

Research is the quest for knowledge obtained through systematic study, thinking, observation, and experimentation. While different disciplines may use different approaches, they each share the motivation to increase our understanding of ourselves and the world in which we live. (ALLEA 2023, 3.)

This study meets the revised code of conduct mentioned above and systematically follows the ethical principles developed by the European Federation of Academies of Sciences and Humanities (ALLEA). The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity has served the researcher as framework for independent research work from the very beginning of this project. In Finland, research integrity is monitored by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK, which has also issued a set of guidelines for research ethics. (TENK 2021.) ALLEA's and TENK's principles are aligned, however, the researcher paid special attention to the revised version of ALLEA as it was the most recent and taking into account for example changes in data management practices, i.e., GDPR (see 3.4.1).

The purpose of responsible conduct of research is to ensure that the research is ethically acceptable, reliable, and credible. Ethics and quality are important to the researcher personally as well, and therefore applied in the researcher's own everyday life and work. Reliability, honesty, consistency, and open communication are the cornerstones to succeed not only in life but also in any project, such as this research, and hence this study was executed with integrity, meticulousness, and accuracy. It was important for the researcher to proceed with the research as independently as possible to learn as much as possible during the process, however, when support was needed, the researcher reached out to collaborate and communicate with members of the thesis steering group, in particular the thesis supervisor, in a consistent and open manner to maintain transparency and mutual understanding of what was going on in the project and which uncertainties, confusions, or questions were troubling the researcher.

The subject of the research is very topical and current in today's post-pandemic world as it is trying to find new sustainable ways to do business not only in the aviation sector but also within other industries. The population of the world is growing and aging and this means people will have more disabilities in years to come. Any study that investigates how things can be improved to ensure

accessible and smooth air travel for passengers with disabilities is “thinking forward” and taking responsibility to prepare the business for sustainable ways to operate.

With respect to the work of other researchers' work, appropriate referencing to the publications was used in this study, and sources of information listed according to the reporting guidelines provided by Haaga-Helia UAS. The researcher also made notes and thus documented important steps of the research process to enable better planning and scheduling of the intermediate goals. These goals were realistic and reached punctually. As mentioned before, the researcher's study leaves also enabled full concentration on the project, and hence a thorough time-consuming study was executed in a way that also satisfied the researcher personally.

To increase reliability and validity of this study, triangulation was utilized. Versatile sources of information were used throughout the research, and both qualitative and quantitative methods exploited to better understand the researched phenomenon and analyze the data.

Confidentiality and anonymity of the customer feedback were initially a concern for the researcher. How to handle this confidential data in a proper way and yet publish the results and the entire study? This concern was however resolved by itself in the analyzing phase because all identifiable personal customer data was removed at that point by the researcher leaving only the flight information and the feedback content itself as was. In Chapter 5, when reporting the results of the research, some customer feedback in their original wordings were used in citations to highlight the relevant findings, however, the flight date information of these feedback was then removed to further protect anonymity of the customers. The researcher considered that attaching this open feedback in customers' own words in Chapter 5 was important, because it reveals customers' thoughts and emotions in an authentic way enabling customers' own voice to be heard in the study, too. The researcher did not want to rephrase these expressions, and according to Kuovi (6 November 2023), use of speech bubbles with direct customers' quotations was acceptable if it didn't include any personal information, which it doesn't. During the entire research project, the complete customer data was visible only to the researcher and Mirja Kuovi.

Conducting this research in the best possible way was important to the researcher. All phases, steps and processes have been described in as much detail as possible to make it clear for the reader how the project was carried out. Also, the researcher aimed to produce well-balanced research, that had all the main chapters in smooth correspondence with one another in a way that is easy for the reader to follow.

Another important goal was also to use professional English, which was rich in its expression. The researcher's proficiency in English language originates from spending an exchange student year in

the US in 1989-90 and having frequently visited the country ever since. Therefore, it was natural for the researcher to use American English text in writing this thesis as opposed to British English text. In this context, ChatGPT was used as a supportive tool to check the correct spelling between the American and British English, e.g. with words such as toward vs. towards, cancelled vs. canceled, traveling vs. travelling, honored vs. honoured, aging vs. ageing, and analyze vs. analyse. This was important as the researcher wanted to sustain a consistent style of using only American English. Artificial Intelligence (AI) was also utilized to generate synonyms for frequently used words, e.g. development and process, and check grammatically correct ways to express some words, e.g. subchapter vs. sub-chapter. Using ChatGPT to generate ideas to make the text more vivid and nuanced and simultaneously improve the researcher's English vocabulary has only contributed to a better quality of this study. In sum, AI has only been used in this study as a "supporting intelligence" as instructed by Haaga-Helia UAS.

The researcher's extensive work experience and professionalism in the subject matter also supported the execution of an ethically correct and high-quality study.

5.5 Limitations and recommendation for future development

The researcher acknowledges the limitations of this study. As only the feedback written in English and Finnish are covered in the study, some topic-related and relevant feedback in other languages may have been excluded from the study. The study may have benefited from a more diverse set of feedback, e.g., comments and experiences of Swedish, French, and German speaking customers. Nevertheless, the researcher is not concerned about the validity of the outcomes as the scope of the research and inclusion of 33 topical feedback generated a sufficient knowledge base to conduct the analysis.

The researcher also thinks that this study may have advantaged from a few semi-structured interviews from organizations that represent the people with physical disabilities in Finland, e.g. The Finnish Association of People with Physical Disabilities (Invalidiliitto) or Disability Partnership Finland (Vammaiskumppanuus, Vammaisjärjestöjen kehitysyhteistyö). Interviewing the Finnair experts and process owners about PRM customer practices would have also complemented the research, but as the commission of this thesis was to acquire the new knowledge from the PRM customer feedback, the researcher honored this request and focused to collect data through this method only, and thus other forms of data collection were excluded from the study. When reviewing the feedback, the researcher also perceived that processing the larger database (DB1) in particular was going to be time-consuming and demanding, so limiting the study was necessary.

Despite these limitations and their potential effect on the outcomes of this study, the researcher is fully confident that the validity and generalizability of the results is not jeopardized.

For future research, the writer of this thesis recommends digging even deeper into the core of accessible and inclusive PRM customer journey in air travel. To widen the topic on a global level and research on how the cooperating airlines could align and unify their processes to make the PRM customers' journeys smoother, despite the disruptions.

During the study, the researcher also got acquainted with an interesting project of Inclusive Aviation (INCLAVI) which aims at enabling smooth journeys for all air travelers no matter what their special conditions or disabilities may be. (INCLAVI 2023a.) In addition to the consortium members of the project, INCLAVI has also partnered with airBaltic, Finavia, and The Association of Finnish Travel Industry (SMAL AFTA). (INCLAVI 2023b.) The researcher sees that Finnair's participation in this project, or any other topic-related project, in which Finavia is also involved would further strengthen the mutual cooperation of Finnair and Finavia.

Based on the study and an existing gap of knowledge in the Finnair CX metrics, the writer of this thesis also recommends future research and development of PRM customers' NPS and Emotion score in particular when flight disruptions occurred. As the Accessibility NPS currently only includes data from wheelchair users, the researcher thinks it is important to contain information also from other PRM customer types, such as deaf and elderly customers. Further, the researcher recommends another customer experience metric, Emotion score, to be developed so that it provides data from PRM customers' emotions when their flights have been disrupted. Research and development of these CX metrics is essential as it not only provides means to monitor PRM customer satisfaction holistically, but also supports the development of such processes and services. Without data of how PRM customers perceive and feel their journeys in Finnair flight disruptions, it is harder to understand which developmental actions are the most needed ones.

5.6 Closing words

What a ride this has been! As I am now reflecting on what I have gone through during the past year while working on this thesis I am in an awe and a little loss for words. Yet, I will try to "pull myself together" and say something smart.

My wise friend told me at some point of my thesis process: "Marianna, remember to also look back on what you have already accomplished." This was such a valuable advice. Looking back was truly important because it allowed me to recognize the work that I had already done and take pride in it. With the new confidence gained, it was then easier to move forward again. Slowly but surely, sentence by sentence, I got closer to the finishing line.

“Well-planned is half-done” has been a guiding work principle for me throughout this thesis project. I am happy that I succeeded in planning a realistic timetable and was able to stick to that schedule from the beginning of this thesis work to the end. It wasn’t easy and required a lot of prioritization, but I did it.

This thesis work has been by far the biggest writing achievement of my life. Although I consider myself a strong writer and good at expressing myself in English, I have still learned significant new skills in academic writing. I also value the fact that I am now more conscious about various types of sources of information and can critically assess their origins.

When I started this thesis journey, I saw myself standing in a valley surrounded by high mountains. These mountains represented the various obstacles that I needed to overcome to reach my goal of a completed thesis on the other side of the mountains. The goal was then too far to see or even think of and the entire project felt intimidating and overwhelming. Nevertheless, after taking the first daunting step, the process moved forward steadily and firmly, and here I am with a finished thesis. Standing proudly on the other side of those mountains and looking forward to seeing what tomorrow will bring upon me.

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