

Airports under fire after disabled reporter is left stranded on plane

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The BBC's security correspondent has criticised airlines over their treatment of disabled passengers after he was left behind on an easyJet flight when it landed at Gatwick.

Frank Gardner, 55, who was paralysed from the waist down when he was shot six times by al-Qaeda sympathisers in 2004, said on Twitter that he had been left on the aircraft for 30 minutes after all other passengers had disembarked because special assistance staff failed to turn up.

The journalist, who was returning from the French Alps, lambasted the outsourcing group OCS, which is responsible for disability access at the airport, but also criticised easyJet for not using an airbridge that was standing within sight of the plane.

"It happens so bloody often, that it's

just really tedious. Time and time again if the plane lands at a British airport and [it is] not on an airbridge, disabled passengers like me have to wait for the high lift to come and get you off," he said.

"Sometimes it arrives on time, which is great. But often, and last night was one of those times, when the minutes are ticking, all the passengers are off, they're already going through customs, some of them will even have gone out to their friends and taxis and I'm still on the plane and the cleaners have started to come on board, and ground staff."

Under EU law, airlines are required to assist disabled passengers with boarding and disembarking an aircraft.

Mr Gardner, who received a stream of responses from passengers who had faced similar experiences, said that the airline had failed its disabled passengers by not preparing adequately for their needs. "I think it's perfectly



A previous delay had an upside for Frank Gardner as he met Gloria Gaynor

reasonable to say disabled passengers shouldn't have to get off at the same time as everybody else, it would cause a congestion," he added.

"But once everyone else is off, get them off the plane. Don't keep people waiting there so long that the cleaner's

already on the plane for the next flight." He also posted a selfie with the US singer Gloria Gaynor, who suffers from a form of arthritis, as they waited to disembark from a previous flight to Paris after all of the other passengers had left.

The incident comes a week after the paralympic athlete Anne Wafula Strike spoke of her humiliation at being forced to wet herself on a train because there was no working disabled lavatory. Mr Gardner said the experience of disabled passengers was unlikely to change unless financial inducements or penalties were introduced.

A spokesman for easyJet apologised to Mr Gardner, adding: "We have taken this up with OCS, who are the special assistance provider to all airlines at London Gatwick airport and are in contact with Mr Gardner about his experience." OCS did not respond to requests for comment.