



# CAA | Transport Focus | NATS Outage Incident in August 2023

Qualitative research to explore consumer feedback



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# 1. Introduction

Background, objectives, method, sample and stimulus overview

# Project context and research objectives

The overall aim of this research is to provide the review panel at the CAA with deeper insight regarding how people were impacted by the issues with the UK air traffic control systems in August 2023<sup>1</sup>.

- The **Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) is conducting an independent review** to understand why the NATS outage incident in August 2023 happened, and what could be done to prevent similar incidents in the future
- The **consumer impact is an important element of this review**, so that human stories can feed into the reports that the review panel will produce about the impacts of the outage

## Key areas for the research to explore

- **All impacts** of the outage on the individual, any people travelling with them, and their journey and their experiences with airlines and airports in respect of the outage:
  - **Practical:** immediate and subsequent (short, medium, longer term) challenges to the journey created directly by the outage
    - The extent to which the airport/airline informed and helped them, along with, what did they have to do themselves
  - **Wider impacts:** for example, other people, costs (and whether concerns about or the need to pay for things up front influenced their behaviours/outcomes) issues/problems, knock on effects created by the change to their journey
  - **Emotional:** specific stress points/difficulties and who/what this related to in terms of the 'key players' in their specific journey experience
- Any **ongoing issues**, e.g. disputes
- Any thoughts for **what might have made a difference** in the situation and this unforeseen problem



<sup>1</sup> Technical issues with the UK air traffic control computer systems managed by National Air Traffic Services (NATS) on the August bank holiday 2023 led to a large number of delayed and cancelled flights

# Sample: 42 respondents were interviewed in online one-to-one, depth or paired interviews and quad group discussions

This involves 30 separate journeys and their respective passenger circumstances and experiences

Sample variables	Coverage achieved
Wide geographical coverage in the UK	Respondents resident in: North East, North West, Midlands, London, South East, South West, Wales
Different airports of departure and arrival in the UK	Cardiff, Bristol, East Midlands, Exeter, Leeds Bradford, London Airports (Gatwick, Heathrow, Luton, Stanstead), Manchester, Newcastle
Different airports of departure and arrival abroad	Alicante, Amsterdam, Antalya, Crete, Croatia, Greece, JFK, Kefalonia, Larnaca (Cyprus), Malaga, Milan, Mumbai, Nice, Palma, Pisa, Menorca, Zante, Zurich
Different airlines	Air India, Aer Lingus, BA, EasyJet, Jet2, KLM, Loganair, Ryanair
Different travel destinations – long and short haul	<b>Long haul:</b> India, Israel, USA <b>Medium haul:</b> Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Spain <b>Short Haul:</b> France, Italy, Netherlands, Switzerland, UK
Different purposes of travel – leisure and work	39 travelling for <b>leisure</b> 3 travelling for <b>business</b>

- All were impacted by the NATS (National Air Traffic Services) outage in August 2023 i.e. had a flight delayed or cancelled on 28 or 29 August due to technical problems with the air traffic control systems
  - **Delayed flight must have been for 2+ hours from original departure time.**

Additional criteria represented:

- **Spread of overall impacts to journey**, e.g. length of delays, requirements to source alternative/new flight options, accommodation, etc
  - Varying degrees of support within this
- **Spread of age, gender, ethnicity and income level** (including those with economic limitations)
- Spread of **size of travelling party**
- Representation of respondents that have additional needs i.e.
  - Those who are disabled / with long-term health conditions
  - Those who were travelling with children

Fieldwork took place between 2-31 January 2024

## 2. Headlines

# Headlines

A good range of experiences are represented in this report

- Aside from mix of airports (UK and abroad), airline/provider, destination and travelling circumstances (size of party, purpose, outward or homeward, other factors) there were a spread of more and less positive experiences
- Levels of support and outcomes varied greatly - passengers vary from:
  - Those with minimum impact arising from a few hours' delay with no additional expense, to people stranded abroad for 3 days at great financial cost and stress to themselves
  - Those who were well supported by their providers through the issue and resolution of their journey and those who experienced little to no support

Factors which improved passenger experience or helped mitigate some of the difficulties are consistent

- **Communication and information:** While this was positive and facilitating in some cases, it was often criticised and directly contributed to the difficulty of the experience
- **Airport environment:** While there are clearly constraints around how airports can operate, it was felt some could have done better to help alleviate some passenger problems
- **Staff:** Linked to both the above, staff availability and contribution was often instrumental to the overall positivity/negativity of an experience

Passengers were generally unaware of their rights

- Showing information about rights during the research process highlighted that few were aware of their rights
- This new information did create further consideration around their experience (and how well they were supported or communicated to) and raised suggestion for this to be communicated to passengers by travel providers at the time of booking to help them understand eventualities, rights and responsibilities in the event of an incident such as this outage

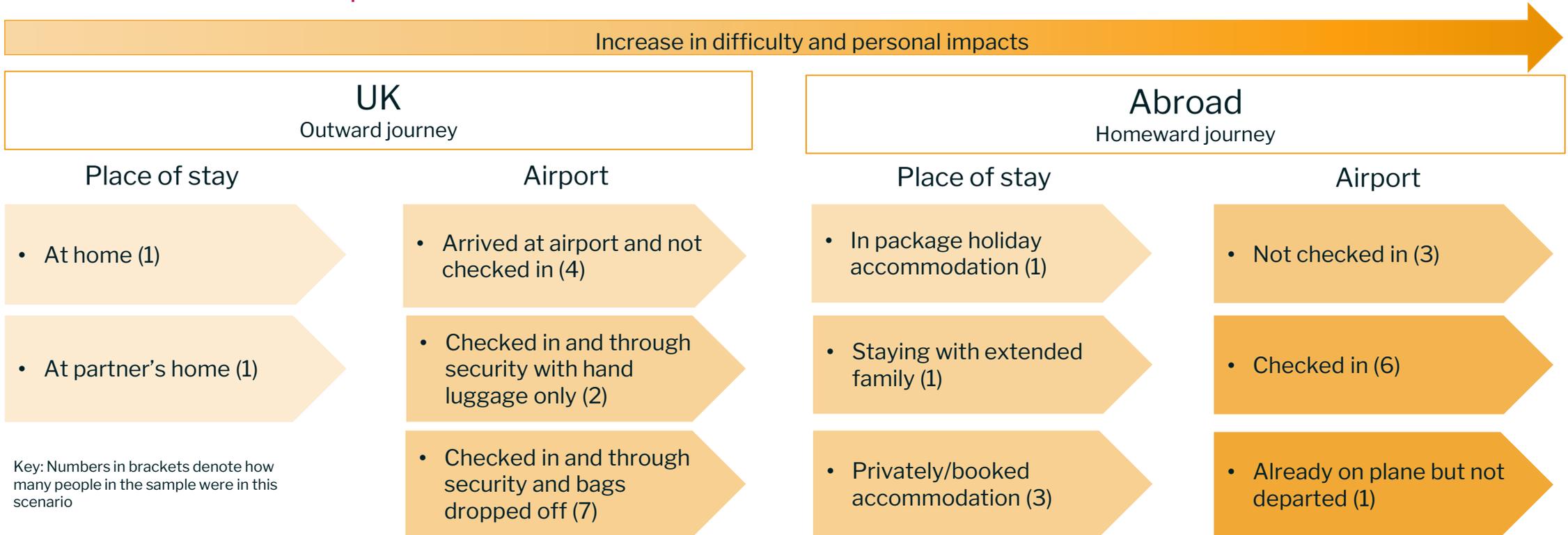
## **3. Key findings**

Passenger circumstances, impacts and needs

# Passenger circumstances

# Where passengers were when the outage / cancellation happened made a difference to their options and experience

As might be expected, those who were at home in the UK had the fewest overall impacts, while those in airports abroad were the most impacted

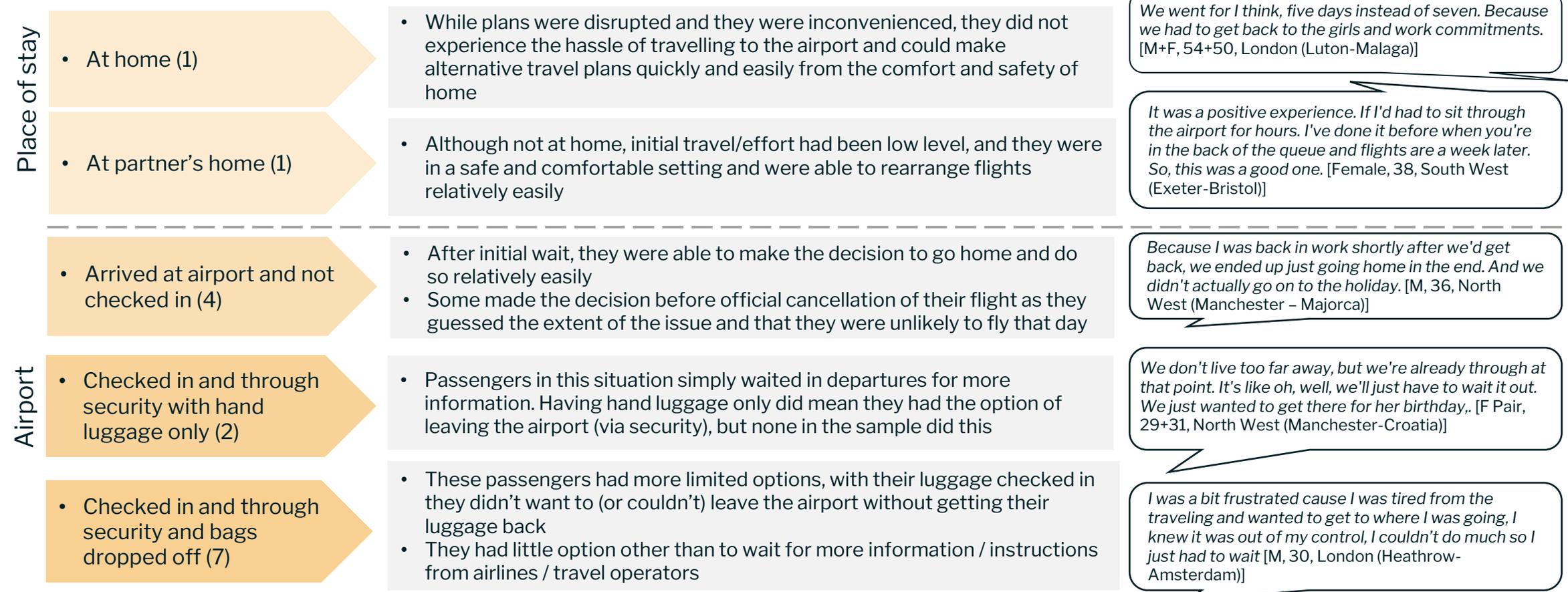


**While there may be exceptions, negative impacts seemed greater in volume or strength for those who were further into the start of their journey / had left their accommodation**

# For those passengers in the UK, those further into their journey had fewer options and more difficulties which impacted their overall experience

Levels of disruption and discomfort increased as their understanding and control over what they could do or decide diminished

Experience and range of impacts varying somewhat across



11 **Passengers whose flights were cancelled after lengthy wait at airport were the most frustrated by the experience**

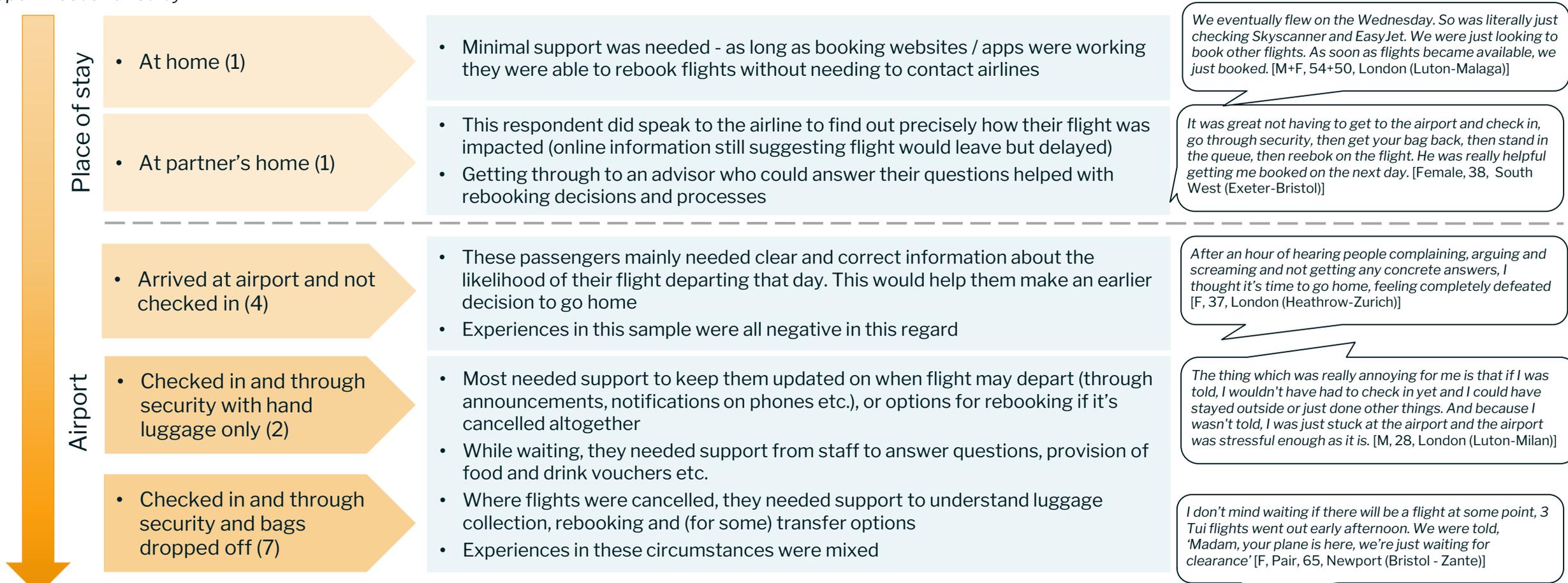
Key: Numbers in brackets denote how many people in the sample were in this scenario



# In line with this, communication and support needs increased the further passengers were into their journey from the UK

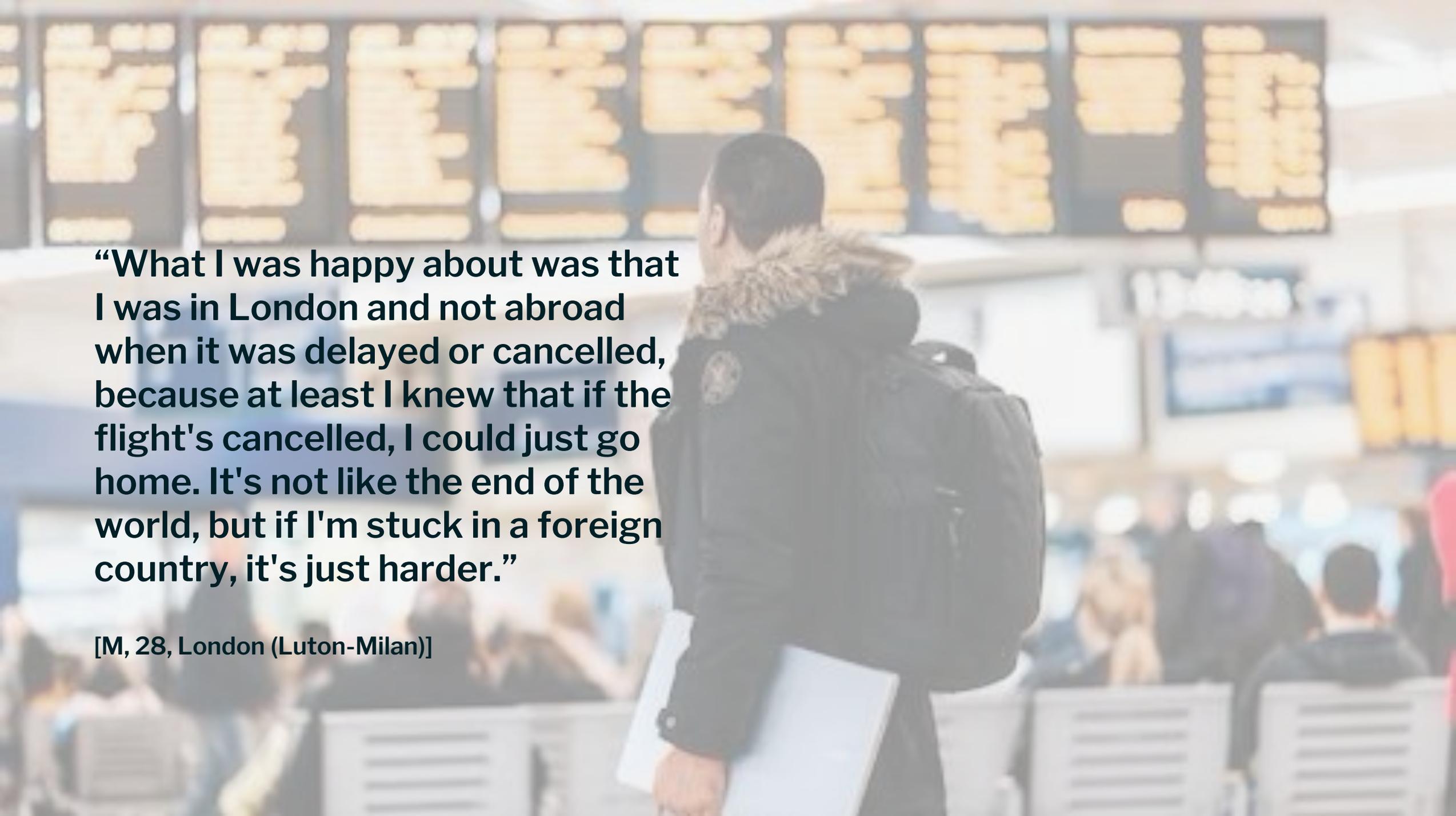
Those with the longest delays/disruption were more critical of the support and communication received

Support needs varied by



**While understanding that airlines were not responsible for the disruption, passengers were frustrated by the lack of clear / transparent information from airlines**





**“What I was happy about was that I was in London and not abroad when it was delayed or cancelled, because at least I knew that if the flight's cancelled, I could just go home. It's not like the end of the world, but if I'm stuck in a foreign country, it's just harder.”**

**[M, 28, London (Luton-Milan)]**

# If hearing about the outage while at home in the UK - examples

## Notified of cancellation night prior to departure

- Couple travelling to Malaga from Luton on Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> August
- Received email from EasyJet confirming flight cancellation the night before, while still at home
- Rather than wait for rebooking information, decided to book new flights as soon as possible
- Looked online to find next flights and booked again with EasyJet for Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> August and departed with no further delays
- Main impact was on the duration of their holiday, which was two nights less than planned, but as they were staying with friends in Spain there were no implications for accommodation or transfers abroad

## Alerted to disruption by news bulletins while packing at partner's home, prior to departing for the airport

- Female travelling from Newcastle to Exeter on Monday 28<sup>th</sup> August with Loganair
- Had been staying with partner in Newcastle for the weekend and due to fly home to Exeter in the afternoon
- Decided to call Loganair before they left home for the airport
- Was told that flight was about to be cancelled and rebooked onto the same flight the following day
- She was due into work the next day, but dialled into calls the following morning before flying back 24 hours later than originally planned
- The early cancellation meant that she and her partner could relax and enjoy the rest of the day together, without the hassle of travelling to the airport only to then find out that her flight was cancelled and wait in a queue to rebook

# If hearing about the outage while at UK airport - examples

## Arrived at airport after receiving cancellation notification on train to airport

- Female travelling solo to visit family in Zurich, due to fly from Heathrow on Monday 28<sup>th</sup> August
- Decided to continue to the airport to see what alternative options would be available as there was no further information in the cancellation notification
- Airport was busy and chaotic
- Tried to find out more information from the helpdesk and online, and waited for 45 minutes to 1 hour, but with no further information and tensions building she decided to go home

## Flight showing as delayed on departure boards after going through security

- Female couple travelling from Manchester to Croatia on Monday 28<sup>th</sup> August
- Arrived at airport at around 6am and went straight through security as had hand luggage only (had checked in online)
- Flight was showing as delayed but with no set time and they were getting notifications from EasyJet which gave some reassurance, so were willing to sit it out and wait
- Departed 3 hours later than scheduled, so missed some of first day of holiday

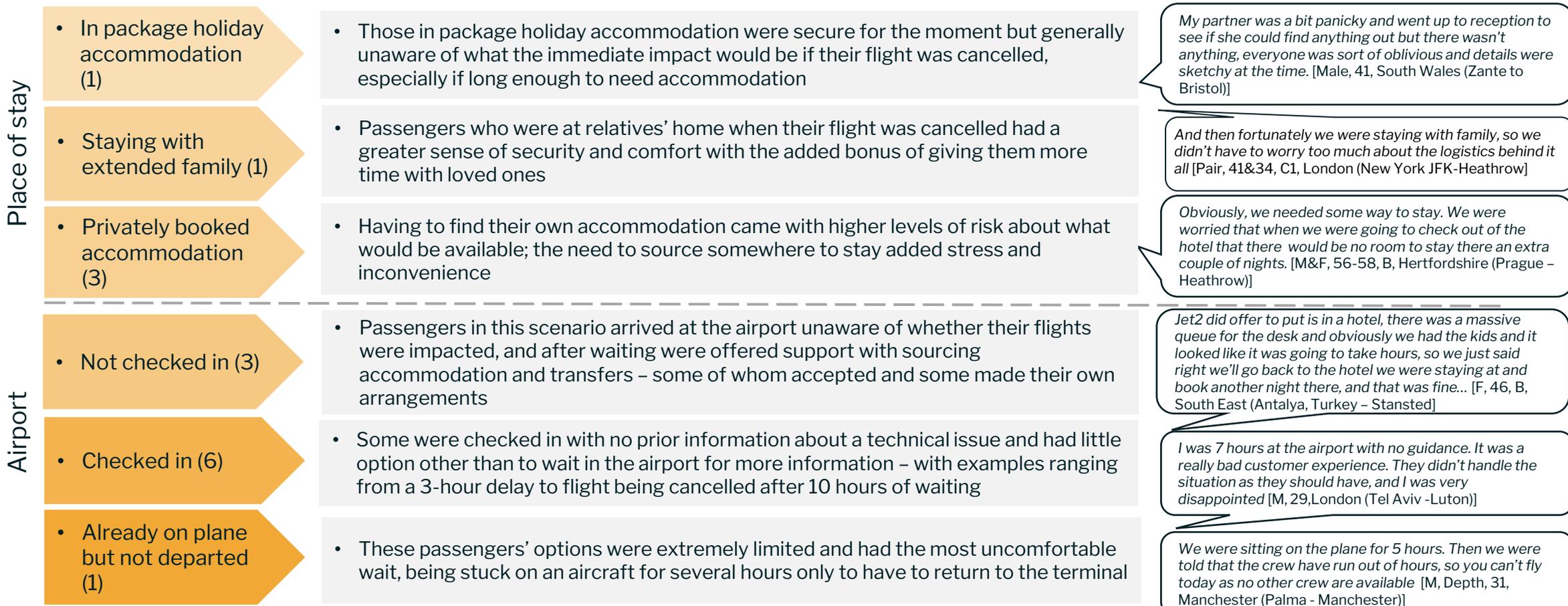
## In departure lounge waiting for flight departure information

- Female sisters travelling from Bristol to Zante on Monday 28<sup>th</sup> August
- Flight delay kept going up, Jet 2 rep insisted flight would be taking off that day so willing to wait if that was the case
- After waiting at the airport for 10 hours, informed that all flights (and therefore their package holiday) were cancelled and to follow a member of staff to collect their luggage
- Had to walk to furthest part of the airport to collect luggage and leave airport at 9pm and find their own way home to South Wales (which they did via National Express coach)
- The following day they rebooked flights to Zante for Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> August and friends in Zante sourced accommodation for them

# There was greater uncertainty for all passengers abroad that impacted their experiences

However, as with those in the UK at the time, experiences worsened and options became more limited for passengers that were checked in at airports abroad or already on the plane

Experience and range of impacts varying somewhat across



**For those with more personal decisions/actions to take, where passengers had clear information about rebooking flight options, this helped make the experience less negative**

Key: Numbers in brackets denote how many people in the sample were in this scenario



# Support needs were high for those abroad and experiences were mixed, impacted by where they were in their journey home and how much help was provided by travel operators

Passengers who were checked in or on the plane had the most negative experiences of support and communication from airlines

Support needs varied by



*It was all sorted out for us. We were basically told where to go and what to do. I think we were lucky that we stayed in the resort we were in. So to us it was just like an extra day's holiday really. [Male, 41, South Wales (Zante to Bristol)]*

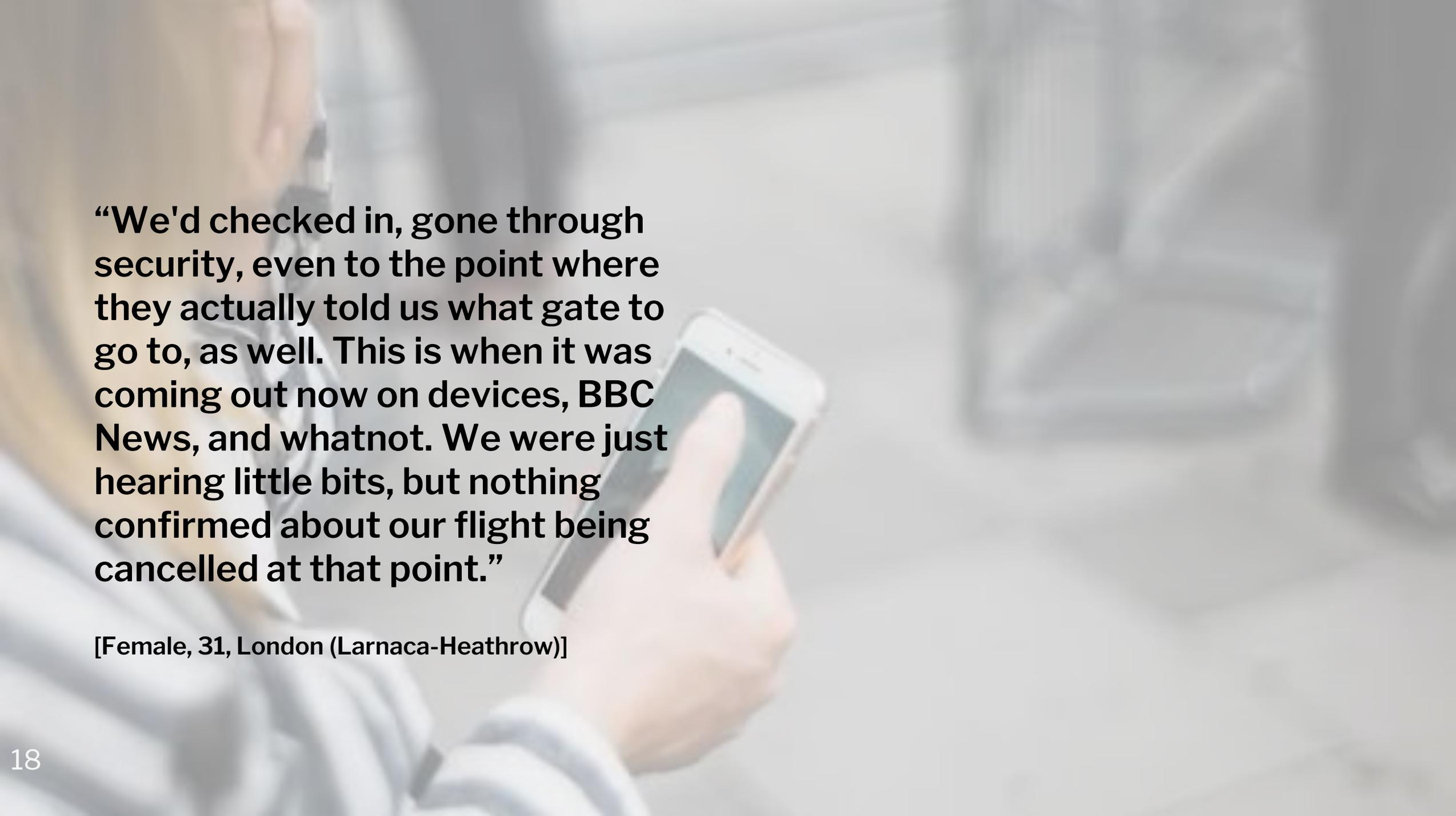
*So, we all amended our flight and went to speak to the hotel first of all, obviously to find out if we could stay the extra [M&F, 56-58, Hertfordshire (Prague – Heathrow)]*

*Once it was done and they'd laid on some shuttle buses for us that took us to the hotel, the hotel was ready and waiting so we were up in our rooms very quickly and relaxing. So that part of it was okay. [M, 55, Cardiff, Business Traveler, (Palma - Bristol)]*

*We were told that staff will tell you what to do, but in that 5 hours we were sitting on the plane all the accommodation had been taken. Jet 2 staff didn't know about the situation. We didn't get the vouchers that were promised – staff didn't know anything about them. Then we were told to sort yourself out as there's nothing left or you can stay in the airport [M, Depth, 31, Manchester (Palma - Manchester)]*

**Passengers abroad needed more communication about options and support with rebooking flights and accommodation to help reduce the worry about how they would get home**



A person wearing a white uniform, likely an airport staff member, is holding a smartphone in their right hand. The background is a blurred airport terminal with people and structures. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

**“We'd checked in, gone through security, even to the point where they actually told us what gate to go to, as well. This is when it was coming out now on devices, BBC News, and whatnot. We were just hearing little bits, but nothing confirmed about our flight being cancelled at that point.”**

**[Female, 31, London (Larnaca-Heathrow)]**

# If hearing about the outage while at accommodation abroad - examples

## Staying with in resort hotel, notice of cancellation day before due to fly home

- Family of four in Zante were in resort and due to fly home on Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> August.
- After initial panic of what it would mean for their flight home, Jet 2 made alternative arrangements for flight home one day after original flight (30<sup>th</sup> August), so the family could relax in the resort and enjoy an extra day's holiday.

## Staying with family abroad, notice of cancellation just prior to leaving for airport

- Family of four (parents and two children aged three and seven) due to fly from JFK to Heathrow on Monday 28<sup>th</sup> August with BA.
- Staying with family in the USA and were packing when they received notification that their flight was cancelled Monday afternoon, about 4-5 hours before their flight was due to depart.
- BA sent information about how to book new flights, which they were eventually able to access and book for a flight the following day. Flew home on Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> August.

## In café day prior to departure, flight status shown as cancelled when checking in online

- Group of friends in Prague, due to fly back to the UK on Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> August.
- Went to check-in online the day before they were due to fly, to see that the flight was cancelled. Had not received any prior notification from BA that the flight was cancelled.
- BA app offered alternative flights 48 hours later (31<sup>st</sup> August). Called BA who stated that was the earliest flight they could offer and confirmed that additional costs could be claimed back.
- Returned to hotel to book additional nights' stay – hotel could accommodate them.

# If hearing about the outage while at airport abroad - examples

## Heard about disruption via daughter's social media feed before leaving hotel

- Tried to contact Jet2 for more information when discovered there was an issue, but given there was no information about their flight, they had to travel to the airport as planned on Monday 28<sup>th</sup> August.
- Informed by a Jet2 staff member that the flight would not be departing for at least 24 hours and that they should wait for accommodation to be provided.
- Decided not to wait for Jet 2 to arrange accommodation and returned to their hotel and checked in for another night
- Flight departed following day.

## In departure lounge when news started to filter through of a technical issue with ATC system

- Waiting in departure lounge and flight showing as delayed (with no further information).
- News app / other passengers alerted them to a technical issue.
- Shortly afterwards were instructed to move to a gate / waiting area that they could not leave and waited there for approximately 3 hours.
- Very little information provided about what had happened and how long they would be waiting, so just had to wait until flight departed 3 hours late.

## Told vague information about 'an issue in London' when on the plane

- Sat on the plane for 5 hours not being told very much about the technical issue – they were provided with updates every 30 minutes, but little information given other than 'waiting for further information'.
- After 5 hours told that crew had run out of hours and could no longer fly, and that no other crew was available.
- Returned to the terminal to collect luggage and told to make own arrangements for accommodation and transfers.

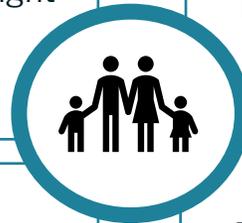
# Passengers with children had additional concerns and needs to those travelling without children

## Well-being

- While many parents reported that their children handled the situation as well as possible, they were concerned about their children's emotional and physical wellbeing during the disruption:
  - Making sure they were comfortable during lengthy delays was a key concern, especially when needing to sleep during overnight delays
  - Managing children's disappointment that holidays were cancelled / delayed was also a consideration for parents

## Food and Entertainment

- Parents were having to spend a lot of money buying food for their family
- Keeping children occupied during lengthy delays was a challenge for parents with different ages bringing specific challenges



## Safety

- Making sure they could sit together on rescheduled flights was a concern for some families, as well as not being able to all sit together in overcrowded airport lounges

## Education impacts

- The timing of the outage, near the end of the summer holiday, also caused greater anxiety and meant the options to delay trips by a few days was not possible without impacting on school attendance

*They gave us some vouchers to get a drink, a £10 voucher thing - so people were using that but there were a lot of children that were hungry, and you can't really get much for £10 in the airport - it's so expensive [F, 54, Sheffield, (Rhodes-East Midlands)]*

*We went upstairs and sat with all our bags in the cafeteria, because I just thought 'I can't be standing around with a three year old for ages' - because it's going to be very quick that she starts to get bored, tired, frustrated [F, 44, Kent (Gatwick-Nice)]*

*Panicking a bit about how the baby was going to behave and how long it would take [Pair, 33&31, Sheffield, (Manchester-Alicante)]*

**Parents wanted more support to help with comfort of children, e.g. Opening up lounges and prioritising access to passengers with additional needs (including those travelling with children), providing them with activity packs to keep them occupied, supplying charging points for tablets, food and drink supplies/vouchers**

# Passengers with other additional needs (either themselves or within their party) had extra considerations which led to higher anxiety or specific needs for support

## Physical health issues

- Some children of passengers in this sample had long term health conditions that caused added concern and also impacted choices available to families:
  - Child with Chrohns disease had packed a certain amount of medication that needed to be factored into alternative plans made
  - Child with a long-term health condition had medication that was packed in suitcase when family were delayed abroad and transferred to overnight accommodation. On rearranged flight, parent made sure that the medication was in their hand luggage
- Respondents in Bristol reported seeing disabled passengers in wheelchairs not receiving any assistance to collect luggage (which could only be accessed via numerous sets of stairs)

## Mental health issues

- Some passengers suffering from severe depression and anxiety found the situation very anxiety-inducing
- With longer delays some passengers reported running low on their medication – they did have enough, but had they been stranded a couple more days they would have run out, which added to the anxiety of the situation

*I just wanted to get somewhere where I could get in the suitcases to get the medication. The rest of the medication had been put in the suitcases to go home [F, 54, Sheffield, (Rhodes-East Midlands)]*

*We'd measured out what he needed and got the doctor's note, so it takes planning. [M+F, 48+46, North West (Manchester-Menorca)]*

*Part of the reason it was also stressful is that the couple that we were with, the wife suffers very badly from anxiety. [M&F, 45-47, London (Heraklion, Crete – Luton)]*

*[Additional needs] Yes, to a certain extent, because both myself and my friend were close to running out of medication, hers is like an antidepressant type...So we got to the point where we spoke to the hotel that if we needed to get a prescription or something like that, what the procedure for it was. We were lucky that the second flight didn't get cancelled, so we actually had just enough pills till we got home. [M&F, 45-47, London (Heraklion, Crete – Luton)]*

**The possibility of problems around medication added to anxiety. Management of medication in the context of possible delays or accessibility difficulties tended to come up as a hindsight issue and may be an area where passengers would benefit from general travel advice.**

**Passenger impacts**

# The disruption caused wide-ranging impacts on passengers

Individuals varied in terms of which and how many impacts they experienced but for some these were extensive

Financial & employment	Practical	Emotional
 <p><b>Loss of earnings</b> for self-employed passengers</p>	 <p>Time wasted at airports</p>	 <p><b>Stress</b> – Compounded if time-sensitive things to sort out or if involving others or specific risks</p>
 <p><b>Additional costs</b> on accommodation, flights, food and drink <b>or lost money</b> spent on accommodation that they couldn't use</p>	 <p>Arrangements for things like childcare and pet care was disrupted</p>	 <p><b>Anxiety</b> – If feeling vulnerable</p>
 <p>Annual leave –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Additional annual leave</b> had to be taken by some employees</li> <li>• <b>Losing annual leave</b> for a trip that did not happen</li> </ul>	 <p>Lack of essential provisions, e.g. medication</p>	 <p><b>Anger</b> – Where experiencing a lack of support and / or unable to take control of situation themselves</p>
	 <p>Missing days of holidays</p>	
	 <p>Missed appointments and events</p>	

Note: Not everyone was given food and drink vouchers. However, £5/6 did not meet needs if multiple meals were needed. Other minimum requirements of sourcing accommodation and providing transfers were also not always met. Some passengers who made their own travel arrangements did not receive a full refund for costs incurred.

Awareness of these 'rights' sometimes only arose when shown CAA information in stimulus material.

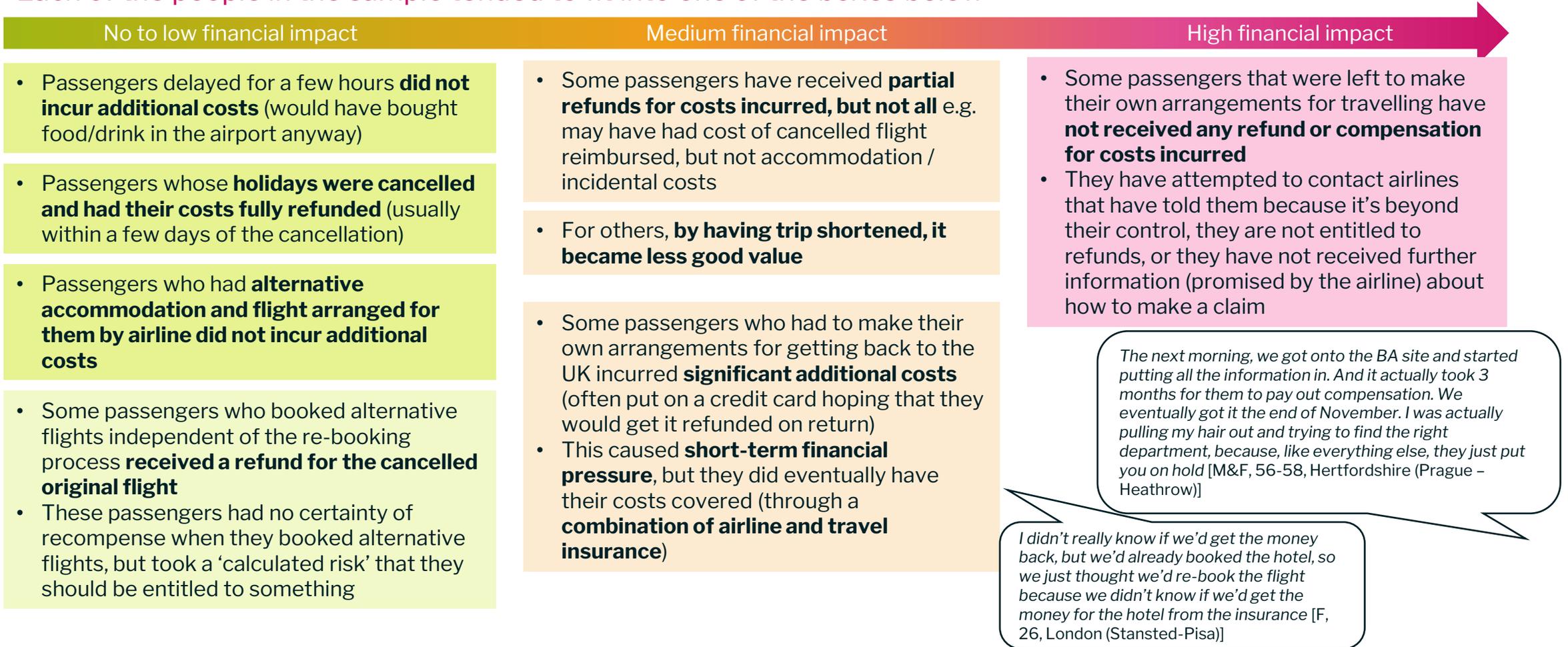
*We missed the day, and it was a short trip anyway and it really annoyed us, and we were tired, so it felt like such a waste, and a waste of a night in a hotel because we didn't need it, because we got so late all we did was sleep [F, 26, London (Stansted-Pisa)]*

*My husband owns his own business, so he had to be shut for longer which meant a loss of earnings. [Female, 31, C2, London (Larnaca-Heathrow)]*



# The extent of financial impact of disruption on passengers depended on how much support they were given and what they were refunded

Each of the people in the sample tended to fit into one of the boxes below



An aerial, high-angle photograph of an airport terminal building. The terminal is a large, multi-story structure with a complex, somewhat circular or polygonal layout. Numerous aircraft are parked at gates along the terminal's perimeter. The image is in grayscale and has a slightly faded, artistic quality. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

**“Our costs were £230, and we got £175. They were very picky under the circumstances...we were delayed about 30 hours...The claim was sent in at the beginning of September and the money came in at the start of November.”**

**[M, Depth, 31, Manchester (Palma - Manchester)]**

# Passenger needs

# Passengers in this sample identified three key areas where they feel better delivery by the organisations involved would have improved their experience by lessening negative impacts

## Communication & information

- While these passengers recognised that the circumstances were unusual and challenging to manage, **almost all felt that communications could have been significantly improved**
- Needs depended somewhat at where they were in their journey but **in general, they felt that:**
  - **more reassurance would have helped** with understanding at the start the extent of the issue and how they might be impacted
  - there could have been better information support (via various channels and from all organisations involved) to help them resolve issues at points in their journey
- **Criticisms were made in relation to proactivity of communicators, timeliness of communications and usefulness of content**

## Airport environment

- Furthermore, **passengers felt the airport infrastructure could have been set up or adapted to make the wait less uncomfortable and support their information needs**
- Criticisms included not enough use of airport communication systems to keep passengers informed, poor facility management (cleanliness/stock levels) and a lack of (comfortable) seating

## Staff

- Overall, passengers acknowledged that most staff were doing their best in a very difficult situation, with many being sympathetic to the amount of pressure staff seemed to be under
- They did, however, feel that there needed to be **more staff on the ground to manage traffic, provide support, guidance and information and to help manage an increasingly tense atmosphere**
- Other criticisms were when (in hindsight) passengers realised that staff had misinformed them about their flight status or provided inconsistent information about the support they would receive

*So after like an hour of waiting at this gate, again, not being told not one thing by any member of staff. They gave us a five euro voucher. And then they said okay, here's a voucher for five euros, we will inform you in the next hour. That is all we were told. Again, nothing about cancelled flights or anything. [F, 31, London (Larnaca-Heathrow)]*

## **Support: Communications and information**

# Lack of timely, clear and transparent communication was passengers' main issue with how the disruption was handled

The shortcomings in information and communication contributed significantly to the negativity of their experience and the ease of finding solutions and getting situations resolved (especially if abroad)

Most experienced a lack of communication about what was happening and how they would be impacted

- Many passengers in this sample did not receive direct notifications about the cancellations / delays to their flights – they found out by chance from friends or when they checked in online 24 hours before their flight was due or happened to check emails and see that flights had been rescheduled / cancelled

*It was disappointing that we hadn't been informed. I wouldn't have wasted my time going to the airport and they had my contact details so they could have done. No nothing. It was literally when we got to the airport. And the only telltale sign, which I didn't pick up on at the time, was the masses of people. [M+F Pair, 55+45, London (Heathrow to Spain)]*

Where communication was provided, it was felt to be unclear and lacking transparency

- Signs in airports showed flights as being delayed but didn't give any indication of length of delay
- When information was provided it was often considered vague and unhelpful
- Some passengers did not feel that it was clear what their options were, what they should do next or what they could claim for

*But within that what is within their control is communication – so being able to communicate with them... Having enough agents that you can have a conversation and I think that in those particular moments – I keep going back to being a parent – but particularly with children you want to talk to somebody, not just an AI system [M+F Pair, 41&34, London (New York JFK-Heathrow)]*

Getting through to airlines was difficult / impossible

- Where respondents tried to call airline help lines, they reported long waiting times, getting cut off, or not being able to get through at all

*The airline, frankly, was impossible to get hold of – once I left the airport and started calling to figure out what happens with the flights, I couldn't get through for more than 24 hours [F, 44, Kent (Gatwick-Nice)]*

**Passenger expectations for information were much higher than that delivered. Passengers were seeking proactive, timely communication – from a message forewarning them that there may be disruption to manage passenger expectations, to regular updates via apps, email, text, airport tannoy systems and information boards**

# Passengers highlighted the following as things they wanted clearer, transparent communication about from airports and airlines or holiday providers

Overall, experience was very mixed with some getting needs met and others not

## Delayed

## Cancelled



- **Notification that gives forewarning that there may be disruption** – this will help to manage expectations and help passengers to prepare for delays e.g. bring more food, drink, power chargers etc. and find out more information before they set off for the airport
- Explanation that there is a technical issue with ATC, that it's **out of their hands, but they are doing everything they can to find a solution and will keep passengers updated as they know more**
- **Multi-channel:** Sent via email, text and in-app notifications to maximise chances of being received and viewed



### Length of delay



Information about **what their options are** and **what support they are entitled to** (could be provided via a leaflet that supports information from other channels)



**Regular updates** on flight status (even if nothing changes)



**Reason for delay** (to help passengers understand the extent of the disruption)



**Confirmation of cancellation** through proactive push communication to prevent people travelling to the airport unnecessarily



**Clear information about their options for rescheduling or seeking a refund** (with links to relevant websites)



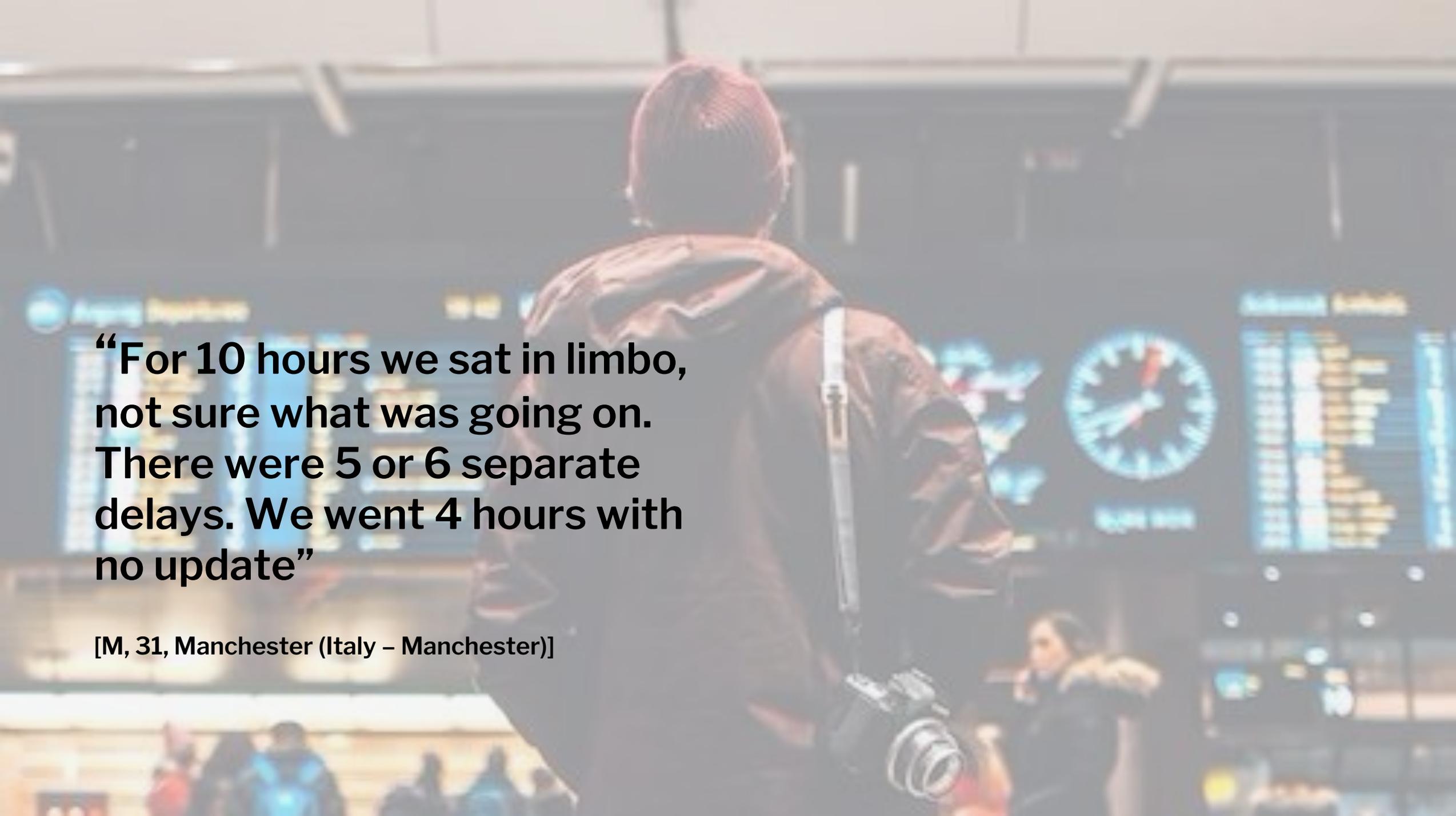
Information about **what support / compensation they are entitled to** (could be provided online, or via a leaflet distributed at airport, as well as verbally by staff)



**Reason for cancellation** to provide justification



**Follow-up email acknowledging the disruption, apologising for any inconvenience experienced, clarifying what they are entitled to**

A person with a camera on their back is seen from behind, standing in an airport terminal. The background is filled with blurred lights, including a large clock and flight information screens. The overall atmosphere is one of waiting and uncertainty.

**“For 10 hours we sat in limbo,  
not sure what was going on.  
There were 5 or 6 separate  
delays. We went 4 hours with  
no update”**

**[M, 31, Manchester (Italy – Manchester)]**

**Support: Airport**

# Airports quickly became overcrowded and uncomfortable places to be

Emotions were running high in airports with reports of angry fellow passengers, shouting at airline staff and creating a tense atmosphere

## Overcrowded

- Many respondents reported airports feeling overcrowded and chaotic as people tried to find out what was happening with their flights

## Lack of comfortable seating

- A lack of seating meant passengers had to stand for long periods of time which made the wait very uncomfortable
- Furthermore, where seating was available it was not comfortable to sit in for any length of time
- With seating at a premium, some families had to sit apart from each other which created some anxiety

## Tense atmosphere

- Some respondents witnessed other passengers getting angry and frustrated;
  - We heard reports of shouting at staff in Manchester, Leeds and Luton and people were getting increasingly tense in Bristol
- This made the atmosphere unpleasant and frightening for some

## Facilities

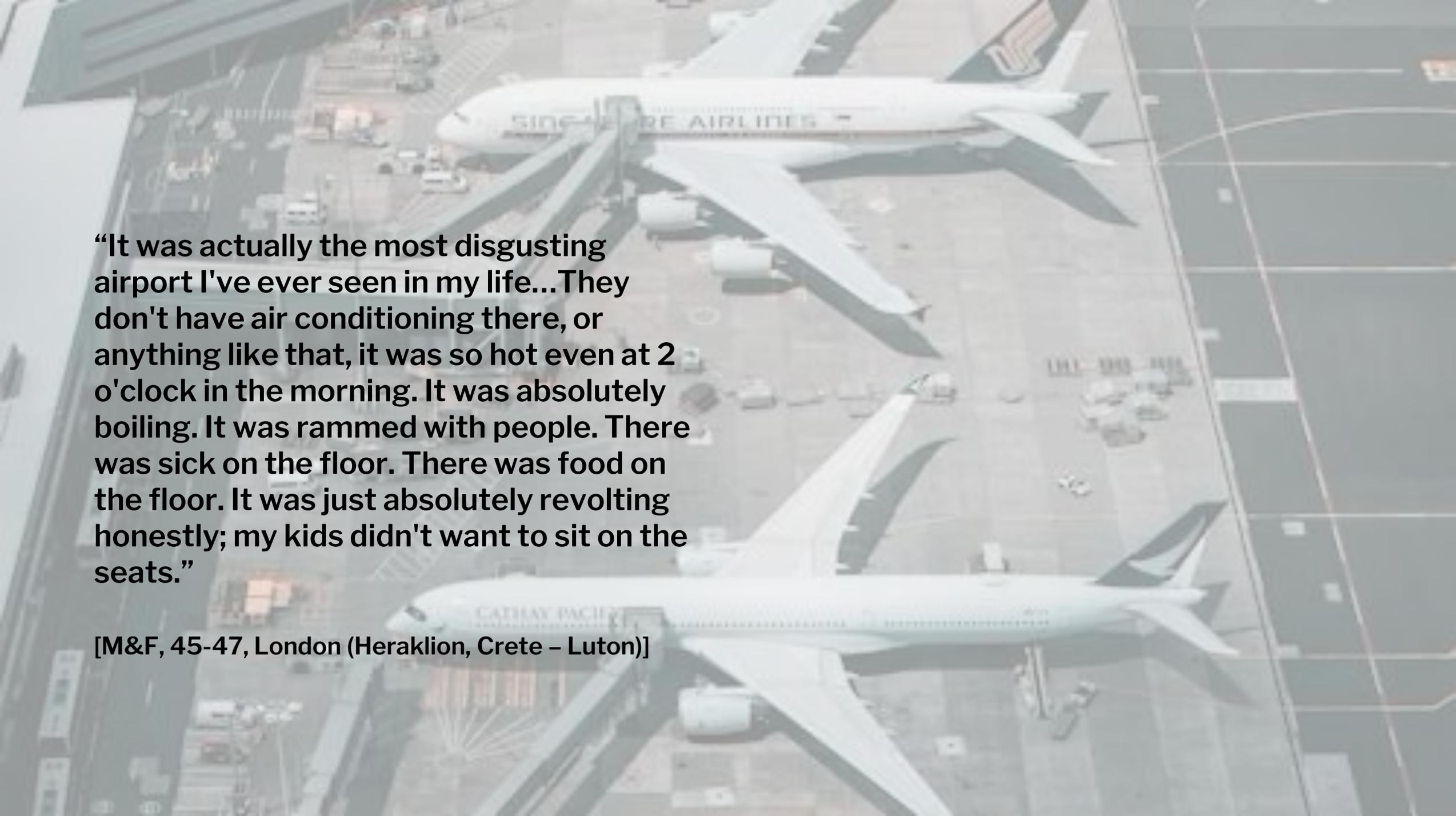
- Availability and cleanliness of facilities was poor in some airports e.g.
  - Crete and Palma airports lacked facilities
  - Some toilets in Heathrow were closed meaning passengers had to walk a long way to use the facilities
  - Poor cleanliness of toilets in Heathrow and more generally in Crete

*It felt really congested. There was people who were sitting down on the floors because there were no seats and all the bars were really busy. I felt quite uncomfortable and fairly unsafe because I didn't know what was going on. [M, 36, North West (Manchester – Majorca)]*

*We missed our connection flight from Dublin so we had a 2-hour wait there and it was chaotic, it was really busy, and there weren't many places to sit. We couldn't all sit together which was unsettling [M+F, 44, South Wales (Orlando-Heathrow (via Dublin))]*

*I've never seen anything like it, people just sat in the airport arguing and stressed out. [(F, 37, North East, (Leeds Bradford-Greece)]*

*The queue for the toilets were out the door. Everything was just so busy. You couldn't just go get a drink. It was unbearable really. The toilets weren't clean, people were hanging around in there too. [M+F, 55+45, London (Heathrow to Spain)]*

An aerial photograph of an airport tarmac. Two large commercial airplanes are parked at gates. The top airplane is a Singapore Airlines Airbus A350-900, with the airline's name and logo visible on the fuselage and tail. The bottom airplane is a Cathay Pacific Airbus A350-900, with the airline's name and logo visible on the fuselage and tail. The tarmac is paved and has various ground service equipment and vehicles scattered around. The background shows airport buildings and runways.

**“It was actually the most disgusting airport I've ever seen in my life...They don't have air conditioning there, or anything like that, it was so hot even at 2 o'clock in the morning. It was absolutely boiling. It was rammed with people. There was sick on the floor. There was food on the floor. It was just absolutely revolting honestly; my kids didn't want to sit on the seats.”**

**[M&F, 45-47, London (Heraklion, Crete – Luton)]**

# There is more that airports can do if a similar scenario occurs in the future

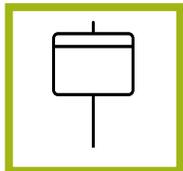
Desired improvements span an airport's role in providing information and in adapting / responding to the changes to help reduce discomfort and manage the impact on those who have no choice but to wait



## Announcements

- Several respondents felt that more tannoy announcements would have helped them if providing more information / understanding of the extent of the issue

*People clearly knew there was chaos – even just some announcements to maybe say ‘we understand’ or even if you don’t have all the information let people do a Tannoy or at least have your app properly updated [F, 44, Kent (Gatwick-Nice)]*



## Information boards / signage

- Setting up more information boards around the airport, especially around entrances would have given passengers more clarity on what was happening
- More signs would have helped them know where to go

*Eventually, after like a couple of hours they even closed some of the toilets, which was quite annoying. So, we had to walk a bit and stuff so yeah, the setup there was like getting worse and worse every hour. [F, 34, London, (Heathrow – Mumbai)]*



## Facilities

- Vital to keep facilities like toilets open and clean
- Food outlets need to be well stocked, water dispensers should be replenished

*They could have opened more of these kinds of lounges that they have at airport earlier for people to access more facilities, more childcare facilities, more vulnerable care facilities. [F, 34, London, (Heathrow – Mumbai)]*



## Lounge areas

- Opening up lounges for passengers with additional needs e.g. elderly, disabled, people travelling with young children

*People were having to pay for car park pick up and drop off charges, they should have waived those. Bristol Airport made a killing. [F, Pair, 65, Newport (Bristol - Zante)]*



## Car Parking charges

- As a gesture of goodwill, waiving car parking charges (including pick up / drop off charges) would be welcomed by passengers

**Support: Staff**

# Staff at airports were generally considered to be handling the issue as best as they could, albeit with limited information

Greater presence and accessibility of staff at airports would have provided more reassurance to passengers

Where staff were present, it gave passengers some reassurance that they were getting the most up to date information

- Even if all staff were saying was 'we don't know what is happening or when, but **we will let you know as soon as we can**', it was felt this would go some way to calm anxieties and frustrations of passengers
- Many passengers in the sample acknowledged that staff were under a lot of pressure and were often on the receiving end of passengers' feelings of anger and frustration
- **Staff 'walking the floor' to talk to passengers, answer questions, etc. was well received where experienced**

Every 15-20 minutes, the staff would come and give us an update. Often that update was, there is no update. But I think we all knew that they were closer to what was going on and any information coming through, was gonna get there. [M, 55, Cardiff, Business Traveler, (Palma - Bristol)]

By contrast, lack of presence of staff was widely criticised as passengers were left feeling uninformed and unsupported (especially for those abroad)

- **Multiple examples were given of where no airline staff were present** e.g.
  - no EasyJet staff in Tel Aviv
  - no BA staff in Larnaca
  - Ryanair staff in Italy appeared only when the gate opened (9 hours after original flight time)
  - Jet 2 staff who had been present all day in Bristol airport disappeared 15 minutes before all flights were cancelled

For 10 hours we sat in limbo, not sure what was going on. There were 5 or 6 separate delays. We went 4 hours with no update [M, Depth, 31, Manchester (Italy - Manchester)]

Passengers would also appreciate staff being more transparent about what they know / don't know

- Passengers were more sympathetic and understanding when they received honest and transparent information from staff, so not promising flights would be departing when there could be no such guarantee
- Furthermore, they felt it was **vital that staff demonstrate empathy to passengers' plight**, provided **clear information** and **made passengers feel supported** (some did this more effectively than others)

I don't mind waiting if there will be a flight at some point, 3 Tui flights went out early afternoon. We were told, 'Madam, your plane is here, we're just waiting for clearance' [F, Pair, 65, Newport (Bristol - Zante)]

## **Response to selected CAA information in respect of the incident**

# Stimulus: Respondents were shown information about passenger rights and CAA statements in relation to the NATS outage towards the end of the session

## Travel rights information from CAA website

### Your rights when a flight is delayed

Under UK law, you have legal rights on many flights to, from or within the UK.

To be covered, your flight must be either:

- departing from an airport in the UK on any airline, or
- arriving at an airport in the UK on an EU or UK airline, or
- arriving at an airport in the EU on a UK airline.

**Rearranging your flight**

If your flight has been delayed or cancelled, the airline should inform you when you will be able to fly to your destination. You can also ask staff at the airport, check the airline's website (often the quickest way) or call them.

### While you wait for your flight

If your flight is delayed or cancelled, the airline should provide you with the following services:

Reason for flight	Maximum time
Flight delayed for 1-2 hours	1 hot drink and 1 snack
Flight delayed for 2-5 hours	2 hot drinks and 2 snacks
Flight delayed for 5+ hours	3 hot drinks and 3 snacks

**Other services you may be entitled to:**

- Access to mobile phone, food and drink, transport to and from the airport
- Access to a hotel or other accommodation if you are stranded overnight
- Access to a car or other transport if you are stranded overnight
- Transport to and from the airport if you are stranded overnight

The airline should also offer you a refund if you decide not to travel on the day of the delay, or at a later date.

### Decide whether you still want to fly

If you have been delayed for more than five hours and no longer wish to travel then you are entitled to a refund.

If you are a transfer passenger and missed your connection flight because your first flight was delayed, you are also entitled to a flight back to your original departure point.

Once you decide to take a refund or to travel later than the first available flight, your airline has no obligation to provide you with food, drink or accommodation.

If you are on a package holiday and you decide not to travel on your outbound flight, you may lose your holiday too.

### Getting to your destination

- If you still want to travel then your airline must get you to your destination.
- Sometimes airlines may advise you to make alternative travel arrangements, then claim back the cost later. If you do this, try to keep costs down as much as you can, keep receipts and record the name of the person giving this advice. Book with the same airline if at all possible.

## CAA Statements

### UK Civil Aviation Authority guidance to industry on 30 August 2023

- The CAA is providing guidance to airlines and airports on how to manage any of the implications of losing other passengers' connections through disrupted overseas flights.
- The guidance covers aspects such as how to manage the delay and how to manage the cost of providing alternative flights, food and drink, and other services.
- The CAA is also providing guidance to airlines and airports on how to manage the cost of providing alternative flights, food and drink, and other services.

### Statement from UK Civil Aviation Authority on 30 August 2023

We know there are many passengers overseas that are impacted by flight delays and cancellations which can be frustrating when wanting to get home after a trip abroad.

The scale of the disruption has meant passengers have faced longer delays and in some cases are waiting several days for alternative flights, but airlines are working around the clock, putting on extra capacity to resolve the issue.

If you are still waiting to come home, airlines have a responsibility to look after you while you wait. This means providing you with meals, refreshments and hotel accommodation. If airlines cannot do this, you can organise your own meals and accommodation then claim costs back.

We are engaging with airlines and know that more flights are being provided, but in circumstances where this has not been possible due to the volume of passengers, consumers can book their own alternative air travel and claim the cost back from their airline.

If you end up paying for things yourself or booking your own replacement flight or hotel, keep every receipt and make sure your claim is not excessive.

Clear and accurate communication is important during times of disruption, and we are working closely with airlines to rectify any instances of wrong information being provided to passengers.



# Awareness of entitlements was either partial or non-existent in this sample – while some had awareness of some aspects (but not all), others were completely unaware

Where knowledge did exist, it was patchy and tended to be from past experiences and claims

## While you wait for your flight

Under UK law, airlines must provide you with care and assistance if your flight is significantly delayed. The law splits the set timeframes into three categories:

Length of flight	Waiting time
short-haul flight of under 1,500km (e.g. Glasgow to Amsterdam)	more than two hours
medium-haul flight of 1,500km – 3,500km (e.g. East Midlands to Marrakesh)	more than three hours
long-haul flight of over 3,500km (e.g. London to New York)	more than four hours

This means they must provide:

- A reasonable amount of **food and drink** (often provided in the form of vouchers)
- A means for you to **communicate** (often by refunding the cost of your calls)
- **Accommodation**, if you are re-routed the next day (usually in a nearby hotel)
- **Transport** to and from the accommodation (or your home, if you are able to return there)

- Some awareness from previous experience, but many didn't realise there was a difference between length of flight and when care and assistance would be activated (most assumed it was 2 hours across the board, regardless of flight distance)

- Many were aware and expected that food and drink vouchers would be provided, however:
  - Not all passengers in the sample received these
  - When they were issued, they were not deemed to be of sufficient value to buy a meal
- Means of communication not expected or required given prevalence of mobile phones, although might be more relevant in some destinations not represented in this sample
- There were lower levels of awareness around provision of accommodation and transport, and this was not always provided to the sample of passengers who were eligible

*I didn't know that the long haul flights needed to be 4 hours, I thought it was just more than 2 for all of them [M, 30, London (Heathrow-Amsterdam)]*

*I knew about the timings for each type of flight, and I knew about food and drink because that's been provided with me before, even with Wizz, they gave me vouchers, I knew about the hotel, I didn't know about the transport [F, 26, London (Stansted-Pisa)]*

*Reasonable amount of food and drink.....there wasn't that because it was a tiny voucher They gave me €12 vouchers [M&F, 56-58, Hertfordshire (Prague - Heathrow)]*

*Didn't know about transport to or from accommodation or your home if you were able to return there [F, 44, Kent (Gatwick-Nice)]*

**These passengers were not aware of any communication about these rights from airlines during or after the disruption and they felt that this information should be included in communications from airlines with flight bookings and issued proactively in response to the delays and disruption caused by incidents like the outage**

# There was very little knowledge of the rights of passengers to decide not to fly or that airlines have an obligation to get you to your destination

This stimulus provided new information that gave some sense of empowerment and reassurance to passengers

## Decide whether you still want to fly

If you have been delayed for more than five hours and no longer wish to travel then you are entitled to a refund.

- No one in the sample was aware of this entitlement

*I didn't know that boxed bit about five hours. [M+F, 55+45, London (Heathrow to Spain)]*

## Getting to your destination

If you still want to travel then your airline must get you to your destination.

- Definition of destination led some to question if that was to the airport or their end destination?
- Given delays, some passengers arrived too late for pre-booked or public transport and had to find alternative modes of transport to their final destination

*I guess it's new information, the most recent thing that happened when I was with EasyJet they delayed it by 2 hours and 55 minutes so they just took off in time but the when it landed there was no trains or anything, and no one told us - it landed at 2 in the morning and there was no way to get home [M, 30, London (Heathrow-Amsterdam)]*

Sometimes airlines may advise you to make alternative travel arrangements, then claim back the cost later. If you do this, try to keep costs down as much as you can, keep receipts and record the name of the person giving this advice. Book with the same airline if at all possible.

- Feels like it's devolving responsibility to passengers and away from airline
- Not all passengers would want or be able to fund additional costs and the advice to keep costs down is too non-specific to be helpful
- However, advice to keep receipts etc. is helpful

*Who wants to pay out of their own money... some people might not even have the money to actually do this... especially at the end of their holiday [F, 54, Sheffield, (Rhodes-East Midlands)]*

**Passengers felt that onus should be on airlines to provide them with alternative travel arrangements, but if they are advised to take responsibility for it then greater clarity is needed in terms of what they can / can't do and what level of costs would be accepted / rejected**

# Very few respondents actively looked for CAA information during the disruption, but some did see social media posts while trying to find out more information



- Very few respondents saw the CAA Twitter/X posts during the incident (and some questioned how digitally excluded people would access such information)
- Some passengers abroad did not prioritise looking at social media as they were more focused on trying to book flights home, plus using the internet abroad (without wi-fi) would have incurred additional charge on their phones
- Some passengers welcomed the publication of an incident report to ensure that something similar did not happen again

*I think the thing is, you know, all these things are very well, but nobody, nobody's like attributed blame...it's almost like there's no like apology or anything like that from the people that caused the issue. So, nobody really owning it. [M&F, 45-47, London (Heraklion, Crete – Luton)]*

*What happens if you don't have Twitter? You're not on Twitter. You would never have seen this. I'm not on Twitter. Never been on Twitter never had it...This should be sent to you as an email, from British airways to my inbox [M&F, 56-58, Hertfordshire (Prague – Heathrow)]*

*It's not actually a very reassuring statement is it, because it says passengers 'will be expected' to be provided with food and drink, but that isn't confirmation that they have a duty to do it. Expectation isn't confirmation. [M+F Pair, 29+27, Wales, (Palma-Bristol), Non-integrated]*



# Very few respondents actively looked for CAA information during the disruption, but some became aware after returning home

Content and tone was seen as open to interpretation and dismissive, with no one taking responsibility for refunds / compensation

## UK Civil Aviation Authority guidance to industry on 30 August 2023

- On 30 August, [we wrote to airlines and provided guidance](#) on making sure of the importance of looking after passengers, particularly those delayed overseas.

- In this guidance we also set out that we consider the delays and cancellations and knock-on effects caused by the NATS technical issue are likely to be extraordinary circumstances.

- As a result, passengers are unlikely to be entitled to compensation for cancellations and delays in these circumstances.

- Felt to be issued too late to be useful – many of our respondents had travelled by the 30 August

- Reassuring to know there is a regulatory body that can keep airlines accountable
- Some passengers who were in the UK during the disruption felt this excluded them

- Respondents were surprised and irritated at the definition of the technical issue as 'extraordinary circumstances'
- It left them with a perception that authorities were devolving all responsibility for the incident and resultant disruption, costs etc.
- CAA seen as excusing the airlines from taking responsibility

- This angered passengers, especially those who were severely disrupted and/or had not had full or any refund for costs incurred
- Further clarity on the difference between compensation and refunds would help passengers understand the distinction and what they would be entitled to

*I mean, if you're late for a flight then fine... you're not going to expect an airline company to take on the problem of your flight. But when it's something completely external that's happened that you have no control over... seem slightly outrageous [F, 44, Kent (Gatwick-Nice)]*

*What I don't like is the fact they consider it extraordinary circumstances. Who determines that. That's basically letting everyone off the hook. [M+F, 55+45, London (Heathrow to Spain)]*

*That's what we were told by the insurance company....they were saying it's an act of God. There's no real kind of blame...After a few days they softened up. Because I think more and more people complaining. I think the frustration for passengers was that it was a tech issue, these things are someone's responsibility. It's not like lightning struck a tower. [M&F, 45-47, London (Heraklion, Crete – Luton)]*

**Provision of information from the CAA in airline and holiday provider communications with passengers would have been helpful so passengers could understand what they were entitled to and why compensation was not guaranteed (though refunds would be?)**

# While offering some reassurance that there was regulatory oversight, the CAA statements were generally thought too vague to be helpful

While respondents believed it was good that the CAA had provided updates to passengers, some were frustrated as the content seemed not reflective of their experience

We know there are many passengers overseas that are impacted by flight delays and cancellations which can be frustrating when wanting to get home after a trip abroad.

- Reassuring that there is regulatory oversight and has an air of authority
- Could make passengers abroad feel 'seen'

*You know, it's got gravitas, it's coming from the UK Civil Aviation Authority and reassuring you. [Pair, 41&34, London (New York JFK-Heathrow)]*

The scale of the disruption has meant passengers have faced longer delays and in some cases are waiting several days for alternative flights, but airlines are working around the clock, putting on extra capacity to resolve the issue.

- Helpful to know that airlines are increasing capacity – offers some reassurance that issue could be resolved soon

*It's good that they're letting people know to keep receipts [M, 30, London (Heathrow-Amsterdam)]*

If you are still waiting to come home, airlines have a responsibility to look after you while you wait. This means providing you with meals, refreshments and hotel accommodation. If airlines cannot do this, you can organise your own meals and accommodation then claim costs back.

- Provides clarity about what airlines have responsibility for and backs up information given to passengers by airlines with regards to organising their own accommodation and claim costs back

*I feel angry, they're saying here not be excessive... have they not been in another country before? Paid for stuff in an airport before? They're saying don't be excessive, but it is going to be expensive, especially in August [F, 54, Sheffield, (Rhodes-East Midlands)]*

We are engaging with airlines and know that more flights are being provided, but in circumstances where this has not been possible due to the volume of passengers, consumers can book their own alternative air travel and claim the cost back from their airline.

- Some passengers in the sample were told this by airlines (with varying degrees of detail and support), but the process of claiming costs back was not as straightforward as this statement suggests

If you end up paying for things yourself or booking your own replacement flight or hotel, keep every receipt and make sure your claim is not excessive.

- Instruction to keep receipts helpful, as not all the sample had done this
- There were also instances where receipts were not accepted during claims process, and some passengers did not receive a full refund for costs incurred
- 'not excessive' felt to be too subjective and open to interpretation and some guidance on a daily allowance or cap would be more helpful – it gave airlines an opportunity to get out of paying full refunds in some circumstances

*The clear and accurate communication is important. They didn't do that. You couldn't contact BA by phone, their lines had gone down. You couldn't contact them through the website, the website had gone down and they didn't even have reps at these airports [Female, 31, London (Larnaca-Heathrow)]*

Clear and accurate communication is important during times of disruption, and we are working closely with airlines to rectify any instances of wrong information being provided to passengers.

- Some respondents did not feel that this was the case as they received no communication whatsoever from airlines

**While the statement went some way to reassure, it was felt CAA could have gone further by explaining more about what happened and why, conveying more ownership around the issue and giving more specific guidance on what passengers would be entitled to**

## 4. Conclusions

# Conclusions: What these passengers thought could be done better in future

Airlines / providers

Airlines/providers could deliver better on **communication** to help passengers understand and manage their situation and journey

- ✓ Inform people at booking about their **rights/entitlements** in relation to a problem arising
- ✓ In the event of a problem, **inform people as early as possible that there might be disruption** (even if extent of it is unknown) – this helps to manage expectations, gives them time to plan and prepare e.g. buying more food / drink before arriving at the airport, give them an opportunity to make a plan B if necessary
- ✓ Provide **regular updates on flight status** – through app/text/email notifications
- ✓ **Call centres** need to be better resourced **to cope with higher call volumes**
- ✓ **Websites / apps** need to be able **to cope with increased traffic, provide up to date information and clear guidance** on what passengers should do, what they are entitled to and where to go for help
- ✓ Provide clear and consistent information about what passengers are entitled to in terms of support and refunds e.g. guidance on how much they are able to spend to support themselves
- ✓ Deliver **a straightforward (and quick) claims process** for issuing refunds and be more flexible / understanding when similar disruptions and costs occur

Airlines/providers could deliver better, more consistent support in the airport

- ✓ **Mobilise staff presence** throughout the airport to reassure passengers, provide information, answer questions / concerns
- ✓ **Issue information to passengers** in airports via leaflets that support other information that passengers are getting – it is crucial that all information is clear and consistent about what their options are
- ✓ Make sure all eligible passengers receive **food and drink vouchers** (and the value of these reflects current airport prices and are accepted in all outlets at the airport)

Airports

Airports could also support passengers better

- ✓ More **tannoy announcements** to keep passengers informed about what is happening and why, as well as available support
- ✓ **Information boards / signage** that help passengers know where to go for assistance / information
- ✓ Make sure **facilities remain open, accessible and clean**
- ✓ **Open up lounges** so passengers have places to sit
- ✓ Ensure **food and drink outlets are well stocked**
- ✓ Provide **activity packs for children** to help keep them occupied
- ✓ Provide **pillows / blankets for passengers needing to sleep in airport** overnight
- ✓ Make **charging points** available for charging devices
- ✓ **Open up car parking** to allow for free pick up / drop offs

## 4. Appendix

## **Case studies: Detailed examples of different journey experiences**

## About passenger

Female, 43, from Manchester. Works in education, married with two children (aged 11 and 18). Has crohn's / colitis. Travelling with husband (children left at home with her parents)

## Flight details

Travelling from: **Ibiza**  
Travelling to: **Manchester**  
Travel date: **31.08.23**  
Travel party: **2**

Location: **Accommodation in Ibiza**  
Journey purpose: **Leisure**  
Airline: **Jet 2**  
Length of delay: **3 days**

### Background:

- Holiday was booked in two parts – original booking was for a Jet 2 package holiday, but the respondent wanted to extend the holiday and change the date of the outward flight, but Jet 2 would not allow that, so they booked an earlier/separate outbound flight plus a self-catering apartment for 3 days before travelling across the island to join friends in upmarket hotel in Ibiza
- Had informed Jet 2 of their plans and that they would not be on the outbound flight that was part of the package holiday, but would be on the return flight, and had confirmation from Jet 2 in emails and chat messages that they acknowledged this

### What happened in immediate aftermath of outage

- Received email from Jet 2 just as they were about to leave self-catering accommodation informing them that their package holiday was cancelled but no reason why. It said they would receive a full refund for the cancelled holiday
- This left them panicked as Jet 2 clearly assumed they were still in the UK. They started Googling and watched the news unfold on their phone and wondered what to do - book a flight home or continue to hotel?
- Tried to contact Jet 2 but just kept receiving automated responses and there was no information on the Jet 2 website
- Decided to continue to the hotel and on arrival, the hotel knew nothing about the situation and checked them into hotel
- Thought that by the time they were due to leave (in 4 days' time), the issue will have settled down and they'd book an alternative flight home

### Rearranged travel

- Tried repeatedly to contact Jet 2 to explain what had happened and ask them what to do, but could not reach them and kept getting automated responses
- In the meantime, flights were getting booked up and increasing in price
- Eventually booked flights home 2 days later than original date

### Impact

- Did receive a full refund for the cancelled holiday from Jet 2, which covered the additional costs for 2 extra nights in the hotel (£560 a night), flights home (£350 each), taxi to the airport and 2 extra days' subsistence - all of which went on the credit card
- However, the holiday was effectively ruined - most of the friends they were due to meet didn't get out to join them, and those that did were put on alternative flights home one by one; they spent the whole holiday unable to relax, or reach Jet 2, worrying that they would be ejected from the hotel at any point; they sat by the pool looking at return flights home, watching the prices go up rapidly and totally stressed and worrying about their 11 year old daughter at home without them; she wished they had gone home on 29th when a flight had been available at £100 a ticket

*We were watching the news and panicking as we had kids at home we needed to get back to [F, 43, Manchester (Ibiza- Manchester)]*

*With the email that said the holiday was cancelled, there was no extra information in it - we didn't know why it was cancelled [F, 43, Manchester (Ibiza- Manchester)]*

*I was in tears with the hotel manager. I'd spent 4 days on the phone trying to get hold of Jet 2 and looking at flights in tears...Every time I asked where the Jet 2 rep was, they said she'd disappeared for days [F, 43, Manchester (Ibiza- Manchester)]*

*I felt like we were in no man's land with no means of getting home. I felt vulnerable and scared. The rep should have been there at the times listed on the poster in the hotel [F, 43, Manchester (Ibiza- Manchester)]*

*I didn't enjoy it. I didn't sleep - the holiday was ruined [F, 43, Manchester (Ibiza- Manchester)]*



## About passenger

Married couple (C1, aged 45-47) with 2 children aged 8 and 11, travelling for a holiday with two other couples and their children.

## Flight details

Travelling from: **Heraklion, Crete**  
Travelling to: **Luton**  
Travel date: **28.08.23**  
Travel party: **12 (6 adults, 6 children)**

Location: **Crete**  
Journey purpose: **Holiday**  
Airline: **EasyJet**  
Length of delay: **3 days**

### What happened in immediate aftermath of outage

- Initially heard about issues with flights to and from UK on the news, but were unaware whether affected their flight
- Continued to check the airline app throughout the day but the flights were scheduled to go ahead as usual
- C. 2 hours before transfer to airport, received a text from airline to say that flight was cancelled. Text did not contain any information about why or next steps
- Some of the adults started looking online for new flights, and others went to hotel reception to ask if they could book an additional night's stay
- Unable to get hold of EasyJet on the phone to get any clarity about what they were / were not entitled to in terms of reimbursement
- There were no available alternative flights for 3 days. They were able to arrange to stay in the hotel for the extra 3 nights, but had to move rooms each night

### Rearranged travel

- Eventually able to book a flight with Jet2 to Birmingham 3 days after the original flight, which took off as planned, then had to book a transfer from Birmingham to London

### Impact

- Main impacts were anxiety caused by uncertainty about how and when they would get home
- Fear that one of the adult members of the party would miss an important business meeting, and one of the children would miss her birthday party
- Fear that two of the adult members of the party would run out of medication before getting home
- Significant initial outlay in cost for additional days stay at hotel, new flights and transfer home, without guarantee of compensation

*We got to sort of the early evening...and randomly maybe two and a half hours before we were supposed to be picked up to go to the airport, we got a text. I think it was just saying the flights been cancelled. [M&F, 45-47, London (Heraklion, Crete - Luton)]*

*The thing that was quite frustrating each day is that we didn't know if we had a room until obviously 11 o'clock. Every morning we woke up, not knowing if we needed to pack up and go. We had to pack basically every morning for checkout... We were fortunate that the hotel always had a room, but we did have to change 3 times. [M&F, 45-47, London (Heraklion, Crete - Luton)]*

*I think you kind of you naturally go into a bit of panic mode...especially when you've got children. And you basically just then need to think right, we've got to sort out accommodation. We've got to sort out flights. We've got to do all these things. [M&F, 45-47, London (Heraklion, Crete - Luton)]*

*Myself and my friend took medication, and were close to running out...So we got to the point where we spoke to the hotel that if we needed to get a prescription or something like that, like what the procedure for it was. We were lucky that the second flight didn't get cancelled so we actually had just enough pills till we got home. [M&F, 45-47, London (Heraklion, Crete - Luton)]*

*I mean, we just put everything on the credit, and it was about 400 pounds to get back from Birmingham because there was a mini-bus to bring 8 of us back...we had to order new transfer from the airport from the hotel to the airport and the transfer from Birmingham to London. [M&F, 45-47, London (Heraklion, Crete - Luton)]*



## About passenger

Female, 34, Asian – Indian, travelling to visit family in India with husband and 4 year old son.

## Flight details

Travelling from: **Heathrow**  
Travelling to: **Mumbai**  
Travel date: **28.08.23**  
Travel party: **3 (including child)**

Location: **Airport – checked in**  
Journey purpose: **Leisure**  
Airline: **Air India**  
Length of delay: **10 hours**

### What happened in immediate aftermath of outage

- Due to fly at 21.00 on Monday 28<sup>th</sup> August - arrived at airport early to allow enough time to get through immigration
- Had checked in and was in departure lounge waiting - flight was showing as delayed (but no indication of length of delay)
- Tried to find out more / get help but nothing was forthcoming – people were starting to panic and get stressed
- Manager from Air India was walking the area and talking to passengers – she relied on them for most correct / up-to-date information. At one point he informed them that the issue would take a long time to get resolved
- Provided with a discount voucher for food to be used in a certain restaurant
- Airport facilities struggled under the pressure – shops were running out of food; toilets became unusable, and some were closed so they had to walk to ones that were further away
- Did consider going home, but was concerned about leaving luggage at the airport as it contained valuables for family in India, so decided to wait it out
- Felt vulnerable when realised they would be spending the night at the airport
- At one point laid on the floor to try and get son to sleep - had been challenging to keep him occupied and comfortable and at points he became scared and upset

### Rearranged travel

- Boarded the plane but it sat on the tarmac for about an hour waiting for airspace to take off
- During this hour, they were given a cup of noodles as air crew realised it would take a while to depart
- Flight eventually took off 9-10 hours after its scheduled departure time

### Impact

- Delayed start to holiday with family in India – they arrived 10 hours later than planned and were exhausted after a long journey, so needed a day or two to recover
- Cost impacts were on subsistence at the airport – did contact airline asking about compensation, but told that as it was out their hands there was nothing they could do

*I spent a lot of time at the airport, about 12 hours and then finally we got onto the plane it was actually on the tarmac for a long time, for at least an hour. So, everything was really really delayed and slow and plus a very long flight to India. So, my experience was terrible. [F, 34, London, (Heathrow – Mumbai)]*

*We were just relying on the staff. There was a manager who was walking around quite a bit. So at that time, I was trying to ask him as much as I can. Whatever information was coming from. I was trusting him. I had no other choice. [F, 34, London, (Heathrow – Mumbai)]*

*I don't think they had the infrastructure to actually take care of so many people. [F, 34, London, (Heathrow – Mumbai)]*

*We were given the option if you want to go back, but they told us to get back to your suitcases, that is going to take a lot of time because there are already other planes and airlines who are in the queue, and you might just get lost, or your suitcases might get lost if they actually come out of the safe area. [F, 34, London, (Heathrow – Mumbai)]*

*It was positive in a way[when plane took off], but I think I was too exhausted to really get that excitement in my head. And plus, I had a really long flight, like nine hours. So, for me, it was like my holiday was gonna start as soon as I reach home. [F, 34, London, (Heathrow – Mumbai)]*



## About passenger

Male, 55, travelling alone for business. Works part-time in a call centre.

## Flight details

Travelling from: **Palma, Majorca**  
Travelling to: **Bristol**  
Travel date: **28.08.23**  
Travel party: **1**

Location: **Airport (not checked in)**  
Journey purpose: **Business**  
Airline: **EasyJet**  
Length of delay: **1 day**

### What happened in immediate aftermath of outage

- Initially flight showing as delayed but after few hours, EasyJet staff member informed them that it was cancelled
- Had been standing or sitting on floor waiting to find out what was happening, limited seating and facilities and it was very hot, so not a very comfortable wait
- Airport felt chaotic, lots of people, emotions running high
- Was not provided with any refreshments – luckily had been given sandwiches by his hotel and those sustained him while he waited
- Lot of uncertainty and took a long time to sort out (5 hours), but eventually informed that he would not be flying on that day
- Airline gave them option of arranging own accommodation or having it arranged for them. He decided to let the airline make all the arrangements as they would have more information about what was available and when

### Rearranged travel

- Alternative accommodation and transfers arranged by EasyJet and that all went very smoothly
- Airport the following day felt a lot calmer – while it was busy, it was clear that there was a plan in place
- Flew home on Tuesday 29th August

### Impact

- Minimal – was not due in work until Thursday so not concerned about missing work (passengers around him were concerned about this)
- Reimbursed costs for both flights (had been delayed on outbound flight by 3+ hours)
- Was not required to pay for any accommodation as that was all covered by EasyJet
- He paid for lunch the following day but didn't claim back (since discovered that fellow passengers who he went to lunch with did successfully claim that back as expenses)

*We hadn't checked in and the queue was quite huge. We were all clustered in the main hall. It's not the greatest airport in Palma, it's a bit sparse on seating and facilities, so it wasn't the greatest thing. [M,55, business traveller, Cardiff (Palma to Bristol)]*

*It wasn't very comfortable at all, there were no seats, we were sitting on the floor and standing a lot and moving around a lot, and it was very hot as well. So, it was quite uncomfortable. [M, 55, business traveller, Cardiff (Palma to Bristol)]*

*I left it to them, because they told us quite early on that they think most of this is going to be done tomorrow. To arrange the flights, we're not the experts, they could obviously arrange things quicker, they were going to lay on extra flights, and they've also got contacts with hotel in the area, so I left it for them to sort it. [M, 55, business traveller, Cardiff (Palma to Bristol)]*

*That was all fine once it was done. They laid on some shuttle buses to take us to the hotel. The hotel was ready and waiting and we were in our rooms very quickly and relaxing. [M, 55, business traveller, Cardiff (Palma to Bristol)]*

*I wasn't due back into work until the Thursday so luckily for me I had a good 3-4 day window before it turned into a crisis. [M, 55, business traveller, Cardiff (Palma to Bristol)]*





## About passengers

Couple from Cardiff (aged 29 and 27) returning to Bristol after holiday in Palma. Male works as a manual labourer; female works in education

## Flight details

Travelling from: **Palma, Majorca**  
Travelling to: **Bristol**  
Travel date: **28.08.23**  
Travel party: **2 adults**

Location: **Airport (checked in)**  
Journey purpose: **Leisure**  
Airline: **EasyJet**  
Length of delay: **4 days**

### What happened in immediate aftermath of outage

- They had checked-in when they saw information coming through on boards that flights were being cancelled. Weren't sure if it would affect them at first but then saw an update that theirs was also cancelled.
- Initial confusion and panic, not sure who to speak to and rushing around trying to get luggage back.
- Eventually directed to an EasyJet representative, who was overwhelmed with the amount of people trying to speak to her, and just gave leaflets and told passengers to read them and then sort themselves out.
- Used the link provided on the leaflet to get in touch with EasyJet, who offered a flight in five days time but one night at a hotel, which left them feeling abandoned and confused about what to do for the next four days.
- As a result they opted to use booking.com to book their own hotel close to the airport at their own expense.
- No refreshments were offered or provided by either airport or airline staff.
- Spent lots of time on first couple of days on phone and back and forth to airport trying to book alternative flights, but were really struggling to find anything as everything was quickly snapped up.

### Rearranged travel

- Eventually Tui representative (company with which package holiday was booked) at airport was able to offer them flights home via Dublin free of charge on Thursday 31.
- The layover in Dublin was significant and no refreshments were offered, but they were able to make it home by 9pm Thursday.

### Impact

- Significant – in total spent around £900.00 on alternative accommodation, taxis to/from airport, clothing and food. Offered refund for cost of flights which has not yet been processed despite saying it would take a week.
- Large amount of stress incurred: both needed to return home to work or could face significant impact to employment. Male partner was able to organise cover for himself in time but still lost money on missed jobs.
- Felt totally let down by EasyJet throughout process and would not book flights with them in future.

*It was actually quite a panic and worrying because the woman on the EasyJet desk gave no information, no help, she just said, here's a leaflet, read this, go and do what we suggest which is make your own plans to get home, find a flight, find a hotel, and then come back to us for reimbursement. [M+F Pair, 29+27, Wales, (Palma-Bristol) , Non-integrated]*

*But obviously, everyone else was told that, so all the flights were booked. There was no transfers to get to other hotels or other flights. Basically, we were left in the dark about it all because no one could give us an answer, and we were told to just sort ourselves out and crack on with it basically, with no help from anyone. [M+F Pair, 29+27, Wales, , (Palma-Bristol), Non-integrated]*

*They offered this accommodation, even though that delayed their next flight out that they'd offered us was five days away, but they would only cover for the one night of accommodation. So that was pretty pointless. [M+F Pair, 29+27, Wales, , (Palma-Bristol), Non-integrated]*

*It was literally sat at your phone trying to find some way to get home, because every day that I was there was a day that I wasn't booked out at work, and I was losing money every single day. So it was like a bit of desperation really towards it. [M+F Pair, 29+27, Wales, (Palma-Bristol) , Non-integrated]*

*EasyJet sent us an email to say we'll issue a refund for your flights, we accepted the refund for that, and they said it would be refunded in seven days. That was for now five months ago and there's still been no refund at all. [M+F Pair, 29+27, Wales, (Palma-Bristol), Non-integrated]*





## About passenger

Male and female couple (30s) travelling from Palma, Majorca to Manchester with Jet2.

## Flight details

Travelling from: **Palma, Majorca**  
Travelling to: **Manchester**  
Travel date: **28.08.23**  
Travel party: **2**

Location: **On plane**  
Journey purpose: **Leisure**  
Airline: **Jet2**  
Length of delay: **30 hours**

### What happened in immediate aftermath of outage

- Arrived at airport 2.5 hours before flight was scheduled and met with massive queues of people stretched outside the front doors – departure boards just said ‘delays’
- Checked in and went through security with 15 minutes to spare before plane was due to leave
- Sat in the on the plane for 5 hours, at which point were informed that the crew had run out of hours and they could not fly today as there was no other crew to take them
- Luggage was removed from the plane and they were told to make their way back to departures

### Rearranged travel

- Staff on plane had informed them that once in departures they would be given vouchers (worth approx. £160-175) for food and accommodation and transfer travel costs, and that Jet2 staff at the airport would be there to advise them about what to do next
- However, Jet2 staff in departures had no idea of the situation and didn’t have vouchers to give them. They were told to ‘sort themselves out’
- By this time all the (decent / affordable) accommodation had gone and all they could find within the price permitted by the airline was a hostel in the centre of Palma, which they paid for on a credit card and took a taxi to Palma town
- Following morning received a text from Jet2 telling them to return to the airport by 11am and they would be transferred to a hotel for the night
- Transferred by coach from airport to hotel and 1 hour after arriving at the hotel they received another text to say that they would be flying today, so were transferred back to the airport and flew at 5pm (30 hours after original flight)

### Impact

- Submitted claim for £230 additional costs to Jet2 at beginning of September. Received a payment of £175 at the start of November.
- Not all of their costs were reimbursed as some of the receipts were not deemed suitable / official enough to be accepted e.g. taxi was not able to provide an ‘official’ receipt and a food outlet in Palma gave them a receipt that wasn’t itemised in a way that Jet2 thought was suitable / they didn’t recognise the code or didn’t accept the food item once translated into English.

*We were sitting on the plane for 5 hours. Then we were told that the crew have run out of hours, so you can't fly today as no other crew are available [M, Depth, 31, Manchester (Palma - Manchester)]*

*We were told that staff will tell you what to do, but in that 5 hours we were sitting on the plane all the accommodation had been taken. Jet 2 staff didn't know about the situation. We didn't get the vouchers that were promised – staff didn't know anything about them. Then we were told to sort yourself out as there's nothing left or you can stay in the airport [M, Depth, 31, Manchester (Palma - Manchester)]*

*I'm not sure anything was handled well – it was all changing continuously, and they weren't talking to each other [M, Depth, 31, Manchester (Palma - Manchester)]*

*We were tired and stressed out, it was a long day. By the time we got to the hostel it was 9pm and the original flight was midday [M, Depth, 31, Manchester (Palma - Manchester)]*

*Our costs were £230, and we got £175. They were very picky under the circumstances...we were delayed about 30 hours...The claim was sent in at the beginning of September and the money came in at the start of November [M, Depth, 31, Manchester (Palma - Manchester)]*





## About passenger

Male, 29 from Manchester. Flying back to Luton from Tel Aviv where he had attended a wedding. His partner was staying in Israel for a few more days, but he had to return for work

## Flight details

Travelling from: **Tel Aviv**  
Travelling to: **London Luton**  
Travel date: **28.08.23**  
Travel party: **1**

Location: **Airport – checked in**  
Journey purpose: **Leisure**  
Airline: **EasyJet**  
Length of delay: **20 hours**

### What happened in immediate aftermath of outage

- Arrived at airport and checked in as normal – no indication of any issue
- Once through security saw news alert referring to the NATS issue, but it said only a small number of UK flights were affected
- Went to gate he was supposed to be flying from and saw a 'Delay' sign and sat in waiting area; no announcements from the airport and no communication from the airline
- No presence of EasyJet staff in the area to get information from, so some passengers started calling EasyJet but nobody could get through
- Tried to use the EasyJet app to track the progress of his flight; he could see that the plane had taken off from the UK so he knew the plane was in the air so he hoped it would be at Tel Aviv at some point; other than that, there was no information at all on the Easy Jet app as to what the current situation was and what he should expect or do next
- Four hours after the original departure time (3pm), passengers were asked by airport staff to congregate at another adjacent gate where an airport rep spoke in Hebrew to announce that the flight had been cancelled (other passengers translated the information for him); they were all given a leaflet from Easy Jet, which gave information on what to do in this situation – to call EasyJet or go on their website and rebook a flight
- They were then instructed by airport staff to go back through security and collect their luggage, but there was no further information on what to do next in terms of organisation of transfers, accommodation or getting an alternative flight

### Rearranged travel

- He returned to the hotel where his partner was staying (via a 1.5 hour taxi ride)
- He kept checking the EasyJet app but there was no information so booked a new flight home via Wizz Air, which was due to leave at 1pm the following day (Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> August)
- Checked the EasyJet app one final time before going to bed and saw that the flight had been rescheduled to 8am the following day (29<sup>th</sup>)
- Returned to airport the following morning and checked into EasyJet flight, but didn't cancel Wizz Air flight until the EasyJet flight was ready for boarding
- The plane was only a third full which suggested to him that many of the other passengers had not received or seen the message from EasyJet about this new flight time; he had only checked the app by chance and had not received a notification informing him there was an update

### Impact

- He lost a day of annual leave for the delay
- He spent around £500 (£350 on the Wizz Air flight, £70-80 in transfers, £30-40 in additional meals).
- He received £80 from EasyJet for the taxi transfers and £150 of vouchers from Wizz Air – EasyJet did not respond to his claim for the Wizz Air flights which he felt he had no choice but to purchase, given the lack of communication from EasyJet

*There was a lack of bodies on the ground. There has to be some presence of someone in an Easy Jet uniform, and a bottle of water would have been nice [M, 29, London (Tel Aviv -Luton)]*

*BA flights went in the afternoon, but Easy Jet's didn't go and I was seriously delayed. Does BA get preferential treatment or are they just better equipped to deal with the situation? [M, 29, London (Tel Aviv -Luton)]*

*I know the situation was beyond the control of the airlines, but in this day and age it's easy to send 250 people an email to say your flight is postponed until 8am. More than half the seats were empty. That confirms to me that they had not received any communication, which is very frustrating and annoying [M, 29, London (Tel Aviv -Luton)]*

*I am philosophical about it now – I could see the magnitude of the situation from my phone, but communication is everything in this situation. If there had been an Easy Jet representative there it would have been better [M, 29, London (Tel Aviv -Luton)]*

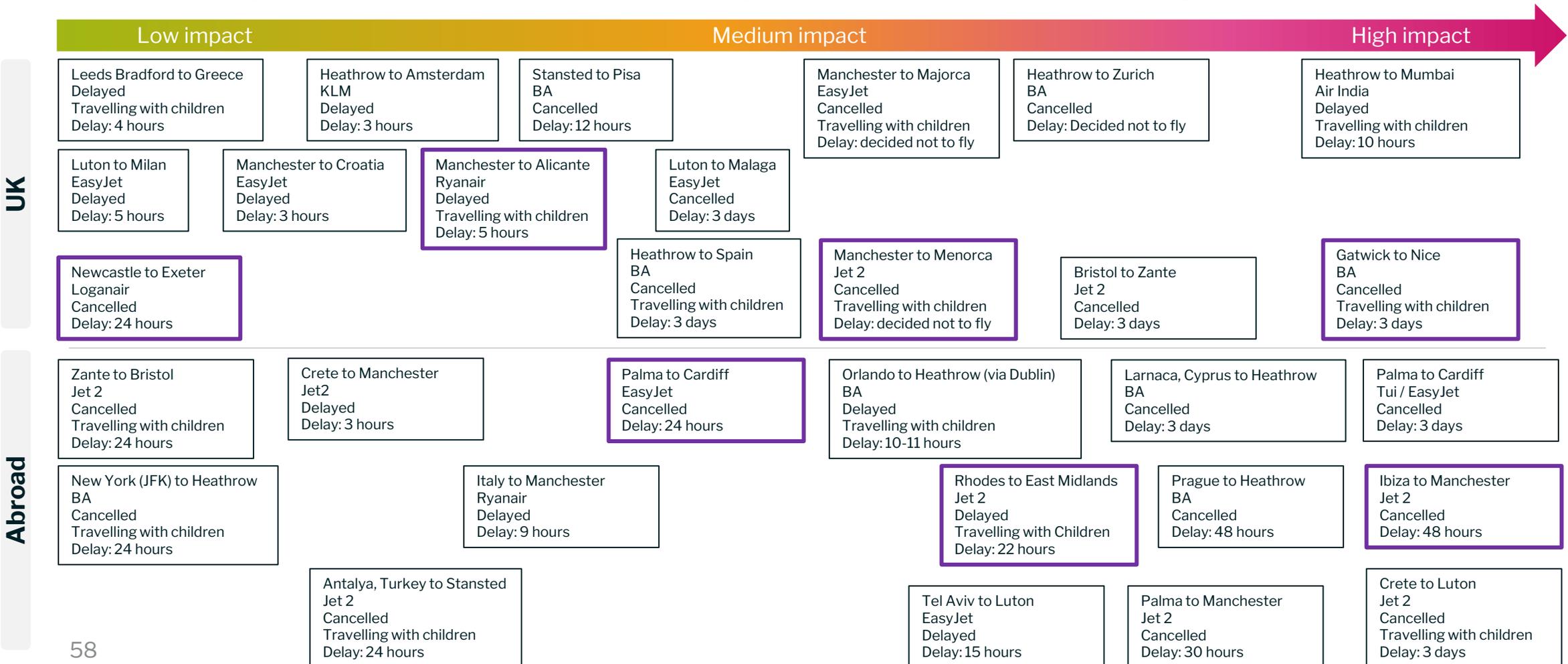
## **Overview of journeys**

# Summary of all journeys represented in sample, mapped by the perceived extent of impact on the passenger

**Key:**  
 Departing airport – Destination  
 Flight status  
 Travelling with children (where relevant)  
 Length of delay / Time until new flight departed

Instances marked with purple outline included people with additional needs, including long-term health conditions, neuro-diversity and mental health conditions

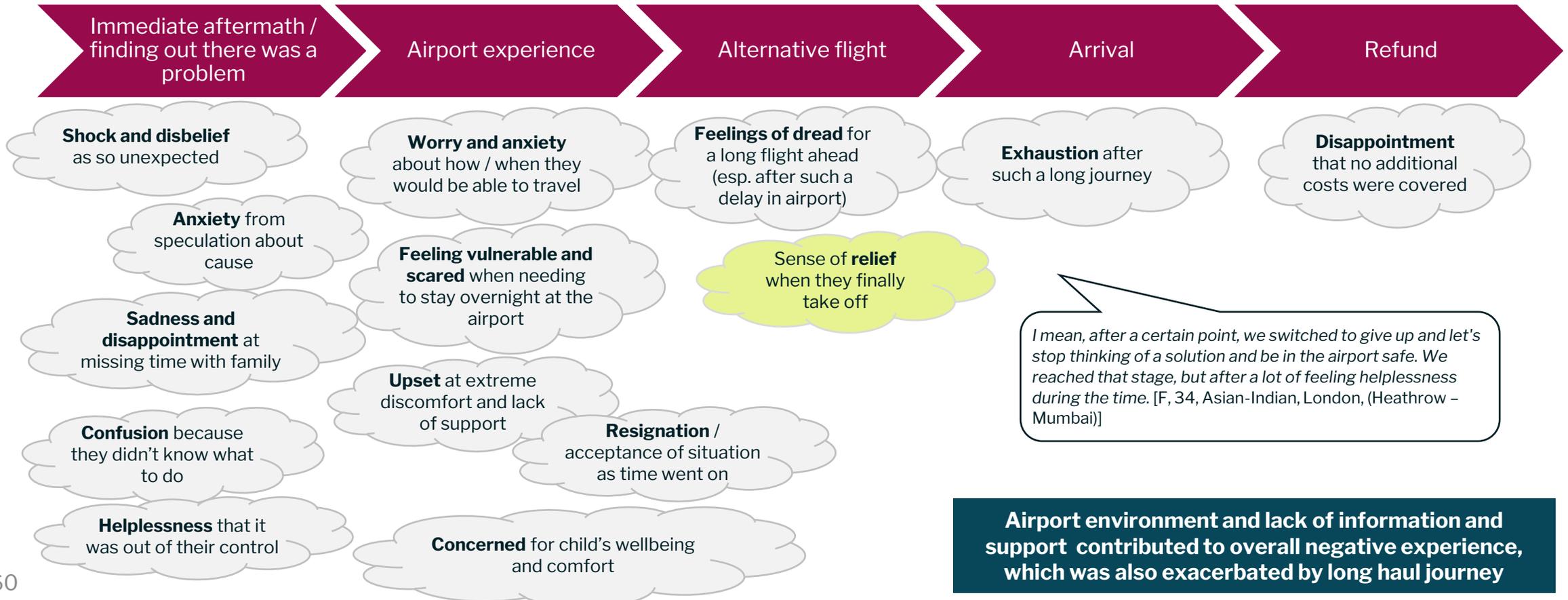
‘Impact’ is inevitably partly subjective but includes extent of negative experience across length of delay, inconvenience, loss and stress alongside the extent this was offset by support received



## **Case studies: Examples of emotional experience across journey**

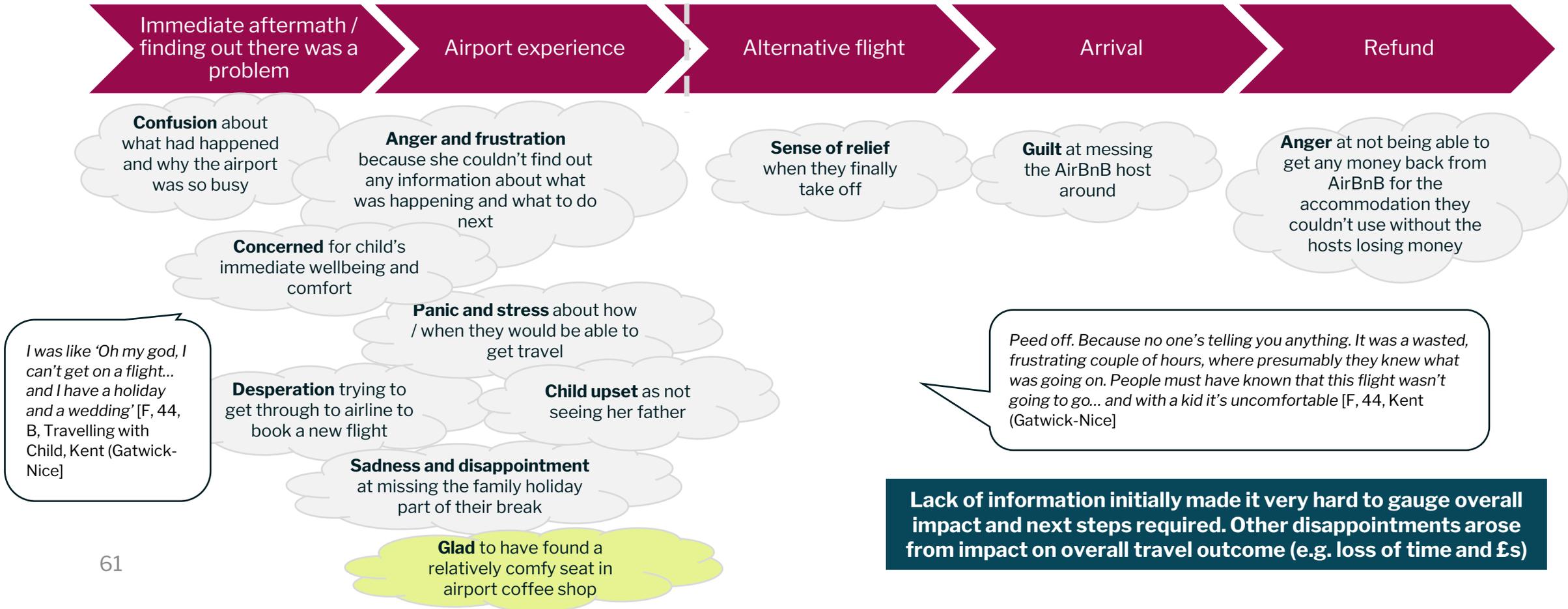
# Some passenger journeys were particularly fraught and covered a range of negative emotions during the outage that exacerbated their feelings about losing their original journey 1

**High emotional impact scenario: Family of 3 (inc. 4 year old boy) due to fly from Heathrow to Mumbai on Monday 28<sup>th</sup> August at 9pm. Flight was delayed by 9-10 hours and departed the following morning, meaning they spent the night in the airport**



# Some passenger journeys were particularly fraught and covered a range of negative emotions during the outage that exacerbated their feelings about losing their original journey 2

**High emotional impact scenario: Mother and 3 year old daughter due to fly from Gatwick to Nice on Monday 28<sup>th</sup> August to meet partner for a family holiday, before attending a wedding in France. Flight was cancelled so she returned home and eventually booked a flight for Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> August meaning they missed the start of the holiday**

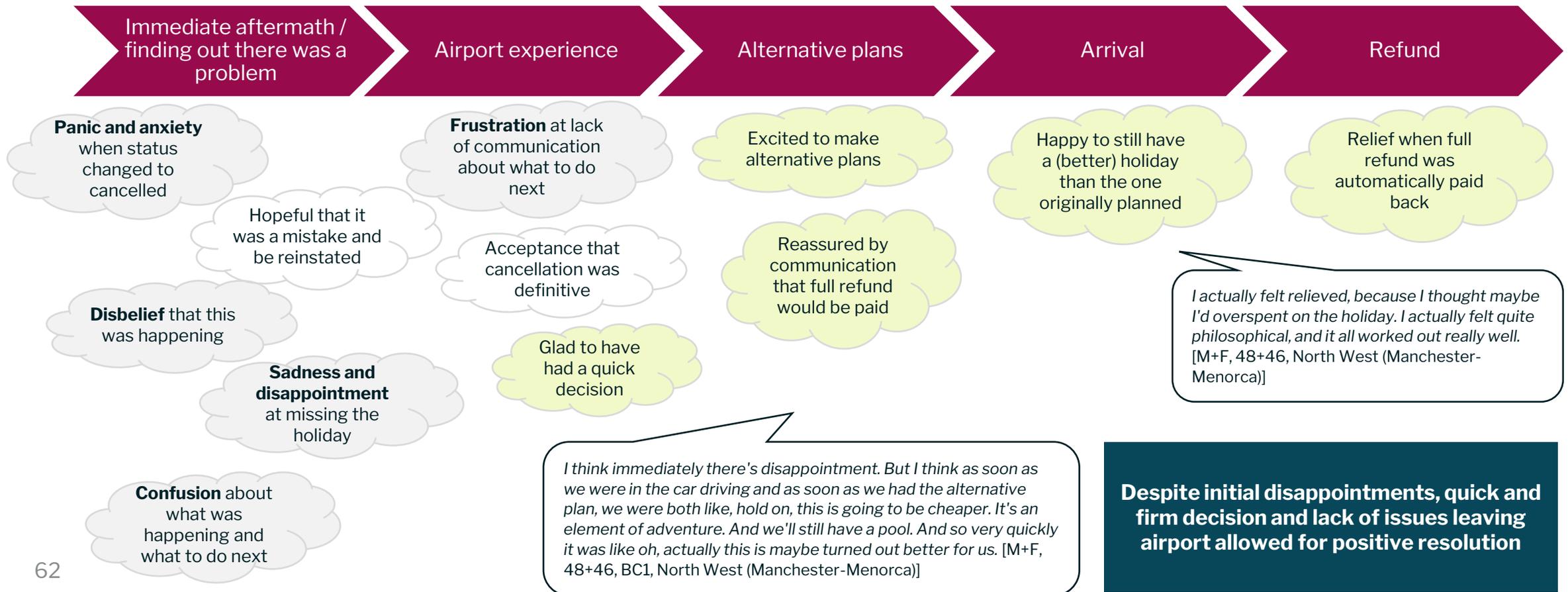


**Lack of information initially made it very hard to gauge overall impact and next steps required. Other disappointments arose from impact on overall travel outcome (e.g. loss of time and £s)**



# Those who had more certainty had less emotional stress overall

**Lower emotional impact scenario : Family of four (including 2 teenage boys aged 13 and 15), travelling to Menorca from Manchester on Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> August. Holiday cancelled after they had checked into the airport. They collected their luggage and went to France for a holiday instead**



**define**<sup>o</sup>  
INSIGHT & STRATEGY

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