

European governments must act now to reduce COVID-19 impact on aviation

Urgent measures needed include:

- Immediate passing of temporary airport slots waiver through summer season
- Deferment or waiver of new aviation taxes at EU or national level.
- Immediate clarity for airlines and passengers on COVID-19 counting as an extraordinary circumstance under Regulation 261/ air passenger rights.

Brussels, 12 March 2020 – In light of the mounting impact of newly imposed COVID-19 travel restrictions in the U.S. and widespread flight cancellations across Europe, A4E airlines are demanding immediate action from European and national governments to reduce the economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the aviation sector.

Urgent action on the following measures is required both to support Europe's airlines in the short-term and aid in the industry's economic recovery:

1. **Confirmation and immediate implementation of the 80/20 airport slots waiver through the end of the summer season (25 Oct.).** A4E welcomes the swift decision taken by the European Commission (EC) to grant airlines a temporary waiver on the "use it or lose it" airport slots regulation, however we are yet to see any clarity on the duration of the waiver. Such a waiver should be valid for the duration of the summer season and requires swift passage in both the European Council and the European Parliament.
2. **Deferment or waiver of any new aviation taxes at EU or national level** to aid in the sector's future recovery. It will take time and hard work for Europe's airlines to recover from the damage caused by the COVID-19 outbreak. New fiscal burdens should be postponed until the industry is back on a sound operational and financial footing. This includes the provisions applicable to aviation in the Energy Taxation Directive (Council Directive 95/60/EC).
3. **Clarity on COVID-19's inclusion as an extraordinary circumstance under Regulation (EC) No 261/2004 on air passenger rights and guidance on the extent of the right to care under the current exceptional circumstances.** Given travel restrictions have already been introduced by several Member States and third countries, consideration should be given as to whether the current re-routing requirement is practical in all circumstances or if a longer time-frame for re-routing could be permitted without giving rise to compensation payments, provided there is appropriate justification.

“This crisis again underlines the urgent need to adopt the Commission’s 2013 proposal to revise Europe’s air passenger rights regulation. We are now faced with another situation in which there are no formal rules to limit the financial liability of our airlines in case of extraordinary circumstances, be it the eruption of an Icelandic volcano or the current COVID-19 outbreak,” said Thomas Reynaert, Managing Director at Airlines for Europe (A4E).

In 2013, the Commission had proposed that air carriers may limit the right to accommodation to three nights, with a maximum of €100 per night / per passenger. A4E is urging EU Member States and/or National Enforcement Bodies (NEBs) to apply this limit under the current crisis, pending the future revision. Guidance from the European Commission on this would also be helpful.

As the situation develops, airlines would welcome supportive measures by EU and national governments to help the sector weather the storm and aid in its long-term recovery.

“We urge the Commission and the Member States to support these measures. To be clear, airlines will continue to look after our passengers and our staff as best as we can under the circumstances -- but immediate action to alleviate the impact of this crisis on our sector is greatly needed. It is also vital that any national measures proposed by third countries to support their national industries do not undermine the competitiveness of European airlines or otherwise disadvantage EU aviation,” Reynaert added.

A4E will continue to work closely with the EU Institutions in the coming weeks to monitor the situation and re-evaluate the required measures and any additional actions that may be required.

About A4E

Launched in 2016, Airlines for Europe (A4E) is Europe’s largest airline association, based in Brussels. The organisation advocates on behalf of its members to help shape EU aviation policy to the benefit of consumers, ensuring a continued safe and competitive air transport market. With more than 720 million passengers carried each year, A4E members account for more than 70 per cent of the continent’s journeys, operating more than 3,000 aircraft and generating more than EUR 130 billion in annual turnover. Members with air cargo and mail activities transport more than 5 million tons of goods each year to more than 360 destinations either by freighters or passenger aircraft. Current members include Aegean, airBaltic, Air France-KLM Group, Cargolux, easyJet, Finnair, Icelandair, International Airlines Group (IAG), Jet2.com, Lufthansa Group, Norwegian, Ryanair Holdings, Smartwings, TAP Air Portugal, TUI and Volotea. In 2019, A4E was named “Airline & Aviation Business Development Organisation of the Year” by International Transport News. Follow us on Twitter @A4Europe.