

## Joint call on EU policymakers to uphold and strengthen air passenger rights

Brussels, 26 May 2026

European consumers deserve clear, enforceable and effective passenger rights. Any rollback would remove concrete protections from millions of Europeans and weaken citizens' trust in the Union's ability to deliver tangible rights. At a time when passengers still face frequent delays, cancellations, and complex, often ineffective complaint procedures, **current discussions on the revision of the Air Passenger Rights Regulation are moving in this risky direction.**

**Any outcome that weakens current rights is unacceptable, and maintaining the existing rules would represent a better option** in the absence of real improvements. Current rules have demonstrably and tangibly improved travel experiences and increased consumer confidence in the market.

**Passenger rights must not become an adjustment variable in response to geopolitical developments.** This is a Treaty-based obligation. Article 12 TFEU requires the EU to integrate consumer protection across all Union policies. Article 169 TFEU mandates a high level of consumer protection and the promotion of consumers' fundamental rights and interests.

Consumer and civil society organisations remain firmly committed to improving existing protections. Against this background, we, the undersigned, call on the EU institutions to ensure that the revised Regulation includes the following key elements:

### 1. Maintain the current compensation thresholds and amounts

Proposals to raise compensation thresholds to 4 and 6 hours would **deprive over 60% of currently eligible passengers of their compensation rights**<sup>1</sup>. The **EU must also maintain current compensation amounts to ensure they remain effective, proportionate and dissuasive.** Reducing compensation amounts by 67% from €250 to €83 and shortening the cancellation protection period from 14 days to 48 hours would grant airlines greater operational flexibility while shifting costs and uncertainty onto passengers – in clear contradiction of the EU's core duty to ensure a high level of consumer protection. These amounts have already eroded in real value as they have not been adjusted for inflation since the original 2004 regulation.

Current rules work and create strong operational reliability incentives for airlines. They reduce long delays of more than three hours on arrival by up to 70%. while short-haul long delays fall by up to 66%. Same-day cancellations occur over 20% less often than in the United States. Airline compliance costs remain low (~€1.73/passenger), and evidence shows no link between strategic cancellations and the three-hour threshold<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Impact of EU 261/2004 Revisions: Data-Driven Analysis of Potential Regulatory Changes updated with 02-06-2025 political agreement, [available here](#), last consulted on 14.04.2026.

<sup>2</sup> Air Passenger Rights at the Crossroads: Economic Impact of the Proposed EC261 Reform, Dr. Hinnerk Gnutzmann, Dr. Piotr Śpiewanowski, October 2025, [available here](#), last consulted on 14.04.2026.

## 2. Align the list of extraordinary circumstances with EU Court of Justice case law

Raising compensation thresholds while simultaneously expanding the list of disruptions qualifying as “extraordinary circumstances” would exclude even more passengers from compensation and severely weaken the Regulation. Airline staff strikes must never qualify as extraordinary circumstances since they are intrinsically linked to airlines’ own staff management. Finally, carriers **should proactively provide passengers with the reason** behind disruptions in writing within 14 days, and not upon passenger request.

## 3. Ensure effective enforcement through pre-filled compensation and reimbursement forms and binding obligations

Low awareness and burdensome procedures prevent passengers from exercising their compensation rights. According to the European Commission, **only 38% of eligible passengers receive compensation**.<sup>3</sup> A majority of travellers do not even complain<sup>4</sup>. This failure has driven the growth of claim agencies.

Airlines should **proactively send mandatory pre-filled reimbursement and compensation forms for all disruptions**. This would inform passengers of their rights in real time, enable simple and immediate claims, and cut reliance on third-party agencies.

## 4. Prohibit unfair ancillary fees and unfair practices

Airlines increasingly charge consumers for basic needs through unfair practices. **From fees of up to €75 for hand luggage<sup>5</sup>, seating fees of up to €300 for a family of four to sit together<sup>6</sup>, to boarding pass printing charges**, these practices exploit passengers, undermine price transparency and must be prohibited at EU level.

The revised Regulation must **explicitly confirm that the basic ticket price includes a small personal item and a piece of hand luggage**, in line with clear EU case law confirming that reasonably sized hand luggage cannot be subject to additional charges<sup>7</sup>. The widespread use of **no-show clauses<sup>8</sup>** prevents passengers from boarding subsequent legs of a multi-leg journey, forcing them to rebook and bear care and assistance costs themselves, **averaging €770 per booking<sup>9</sup>**.

The revised Regulation should also **ensure that passengers have the right to check-in online or at the airport without incurring additional charges**. Passengers should be able to **choose to use a boarding pass either in paper or digital format**, as proposed by the Parliament. This is

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<sup>3</sup> See European Commission: Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport and Steer, *Study on the current level of protection of air passenger rights in the EU – Final report – Study contract*, Publications Office, 2020, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2832/529370>

<sup>4</sup> Idem

<sup>5</sup> See BEUC [Report](#), Fly light, Pay Heavy, accompanying the complaint to the European Commission and the Consumer protection cooperation regulation, 21 May 2025.

<sup>6</sup> See BEUC factsheet, [Unfair fees and policies in air travel](#), April 2026.

<sup>7</sup> C-487/12 of 18 September 2014 (so called “Vueling case”).

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.beuc.eu/sites/default/files/publications/BEUC-X-2026-032\\_Unfair\\_fees\\_and\\_policies\\_in\\_air\\_travel.pdf](https://www.beuc.eu/sites/default/files/publications/BEUC-X-2026-032_Unfair_fees_and_policies_in_air_travel.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> See Understanding additional costs for passengers due to flight disruptions, Adeline Noorderhaven, available [here](#). Last consulted on 14.04.2026.

applicable for all passengers and especially relevant for passengers with disabilities and reduced mobility, as some air carriers do not allow online check-in, requiring them to check-in at the airport.

## 5. Expand the scope of the Regulation to all flights to the EU

Recent geopolitical crises have exposed that current rules leave many passengers without assistance or re-routing options when they are travelling to the EU with non-EU carriers, often resulting in severe financial losses. Expanding the scope to cover all flights to the EU would ensure consistent consumer protection levels, create fair competition between EU and non-EU airlines, and strengthen enforcement provided that all airlines operating flights to the EU designate an EU-based legal representative.

## 6. Strengthen the rights of passengers with disabilities, reduced mobility and small children

The revised Regulation must address the gaps that continue to exclude and discriminate passengers with disabilities, reduced mobility, and small children. Building on the proposals from the Parliament and the Council, EU policymakers must ensure full compensation for mishandled mobility equipment, for delay or lack of assistance, provision of adjacent seating free of charge and priority boarding, among others.

We, the undersigned, remain committed to constructive engagement with the institutions to deliver meaningful improvements to the Air Passenger Rights reform.

Sincerely,



## SIGNATORIES

1. The Association for Consumer Rights (ACR) Malta
2. Associazione Europea Consumatori Indendenti
3. AK Österreich - Bundesarbeitskammer
4. ANEC – The European Consumer Voice in Standardisation
5. ASUFIN – Asociación de Usuarios Financieros
6. BEUC – The European Consumer Organisation
7. BNAAC - Bulgarian National Association ACTIVE CONSUMERS
8. CAI Ireland
9. CASA DEL CONSUMATORE
10. CECU – Federación de Consumidores y Usuarios
11. CODICI – Centro per I Diritti del Cittadino
12. Consumatori Italiani per l'Europa
13. Consumentenbond - NL
14. Cyprus Consumers' Association (Kypriakos Syndesmos Katanaloton)
15. DECO – Portuguese Consumer Association
16. European Consumer Centres (ECC) Network<sup>10</sup>
17. European Disability Forum - EDF
18. EKPIZO - Association for the Quality of Life - GR
19. European Large Families Confederation - ELFAC
20. European Passenger Federation - EPF
21. Federacja Konsumentów – PL
22. Forbrugerrådet Tænk - Danish Consumer Council
23. Forbrukerrådet – Norwegian Consumer Council
24. KEPKA - Consumers' Protection Center - GR
25. Kuluttajaliitto ry - The Consumers' Union of Finland
26. Neytendasamtökin – NS Iceland
27. Organizacija na potrošvacite na Makedonija – OPM
28. Que Choisir Ensemble – FR
29. Save your rights, save your flights – European Citizens Initiative
30. Spoločnosť ochrany spotrebiteľov (S.O.S.) - SK
31. Sveriges Konsumenter - Swedish Consumers' Association
32. Union Luxembourgeoise des Consommateurs nouvelle a.s.b.l. - ULC
33. Vartotojų Aljansas - Lithuanian Consumers Alliance
34. Verbraucherzentrale Bundesverband – vzbv - Federation of German Consumer Organisations

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