



EU Transport Ministers discuss ‘Atypical employment’ and its harmful effects

Europe’s pilots urge Council to stop abuse of atypical aircrew employment

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ECA welcomes the upcoming Transport Ministers’ debate on the “Social dimension of the aviation industry” (08/06/2017), based on a Memorandum from the Netherlands which calls for leadership on tackling problematic employment practices. But discussion alone is not enough. After years of debate and monitoring, it is time to come up with concrete European and national commitments to stop airlines abusing ‘atypical employment’, Pay-to-Fly schemes or (bogus) self-employment of aircrew.

The Ministers’ debate comes against the background of a profound change in the aviation labour market: More than 1 in 6 pilots in Europe are ‘atypical’ employees, i.e. working through a temporary work agency, as (bogus) self-employed, or on a zero-hour contract with no minimum pay guaranteed. In some ‘new business models’ the percentage of atypical employees can go up to 70%, with young people being particularly exposed: 40% of 20-30 year old pilots are flying without being directly employed by the airline. And Pay-to-fly offers – requiring pilots to pay an airline for gaining flight hours and experience on regular passenger flights – continue to fill the inboxes of young, unemployed pilots.

“It is high time we recognise that some airlines profit from such ‘employment models’. They avoid social contributions, rob their employees of the security and fair treatment to which they are entitled, and escape national taxation and social security obligations,” says ECA President Capt. Dirk Polloczek. “However, even today, the EU continues to give subtle unjustified support to such abusive ‘new business models’ by taking no action to stop them, and in some cases even actively promoting them. Instead, the EU and its Member States must send a loud and clear message that this will change; and that concrete actions both at European and national level will be taken to stop this abuse of atypical employment.”

Flight safety is at stake too: recent studies have already shown that atypical employment can affect the safety of airlines. For example by limiting the ability and willingness of pilots to take independent safety-critical decisions, as revealed by the 2015 [Ghent University study on atypical employment in aviation](#). And a 2016 [London School of Economics study](#) found that corporate safety culture is lower for airlines using atypical employment. For example atypically employed pilots feel more obliged to take uncomfortable risks and are less inclined to voice safety concerns. These findings are worrying because low safety culture is a precursor of potential safety problems in such airlines.

“But there is some good news, as some Member States are already setting the tone,” says ECA Secretary General Philip von Schöppenthau. “One such example is the decisive action taken by German authorities against the atypical employment model of certain airlines and potential taxation and social security fraud. We call on Ministers to follow such examples.”

Measures to limit atypical employment are already in place for other parts of the aviation industry, such as for maintenance staff. To prevent abuses of atypical employment of aviation safety professionals – including aircrew – it is necessary to establish an EU-wide principle of direct employment as the norm and a limitation of non-direct employment or subcontracting to exceptional circumstances.

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Note to editors: ECA is the representative body of over 38,000 pilots from across Europe, striving for the highest levels of aviation safety and fostering social rights and quality employment for pilots in Europe. – Our Website: www.eurocockpit.be & on twitter [@eu_cockpit](https://twitter.com/eu_cockpit)