



ECA
Piloting Safety

PRESS RELEASE

Summer travel chaos challenges passengers and air crew alike

Brussels, 13 July 2022

The summer chaos in Europe’s aviation is putting not only passengers under considerable strain but also the tens of thousands of aviation workers which are still available after two years of pandemic. Despite high levels of stress, growing fatigue and exhaustion, pilots are doing their utmost to bring passengers safely, comfortably, and timely to their destinations. But as the chaos unfolds, the motivation of crew is plummeting and concern about the safety of operations is rising.

“It is frustrating to see that despite aviation workers’ tremendous efforts to limit the disruption’s impact on our passengers, air travel this summer comes with multiple delays, cancellations, long queues at security checkpoints and mountains of unprocessed baggage”, says ECA President Otjan de Bruijn. “And the disruption within many airlines is just as present as on airports, albeit far less visible to passengers. Sometimes unrealistic flight schedules with very little buffers put pressure on crew to work longer hours and more days – and this in an operational environment that is full of unforeseen events all day long. All this has a price: dangerously rising levels of air crew fatigue.”

“Aircrew fatigue is one of the biggest threats to air safety, causing slower reaction times, lower concentration and impaired decision making. We know this, airlines know this, the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) knows this”, says ECA Secretary General Philip von Schöppenthau. “And yet, we still see pressure on the crew to push through. They are just assumed to cope and [‘go the extra mile’](#), to extend flight duties beyond limits and to ‘help out’ by flying on their off days. This is clearly not putting safety first and it is time to ease the pressure on crew now.”

Last week, the European Cockpit Association, asked EASA to urgently issue a Summer Disruption Safety Bulletin with guidance on how airlines and airports can safely manage the summer chaos. In addition, ECA published guidance for pilots on [preventing fatigue](#) and a dedicated ‘Summer Disruption Checklist’ to help them cope with the multiple pressures of operating during the summer.

Such guidance is even more necessary for this summer, because – in addition to the regular disruption causes, such as weather, limited capacity or occasional equipment failure – pilots are now confronted with a variety of new issues during their daily operations. Ranging from lack of aircraft cleaning to lack of fuel trucks or stairs, numerous of these small disturbances pile up during the day on an already strained operation with few buffers. Quick fixes however might do more harm than good. Instead, the entire aviation system must think safety first – and we hope that EASA will show leadership and issue clear safety guidance to the industry.

In the coming months, we must also jointly look at the root causes of this crisis. And staff shortage is not a root cause; it is just a symptom of a serious underlying condition.

“The current crisis is not simply the result of mere logistical pains, sudden staff shortages and post-pandemic bottlenecks,” continues Otjan de Bruijn, ECA President. “Today’s problems are ultimately the clear consequence of years of cost-cutting, social dumping, bad management, and a lack of social sustainability vision in all levels of the aviation industry. This industry is increasingly run by excel-sheet managers, treating people as a commodity and putting short-term profits over longer-term sustainability and quality of service.”

The aviation industry had lost its appeal already long before the pandemic, due to a mix of deteriorating working conditions, precarious atypical aircrew employment, irregular and tiring shift work, and – in the case of pilots – expensive, mostly self-financed training. With the glamour long gone, people are now hesitant to (re-)enter an industry that offers very little job security and many uncertainties. We estimate that [18.000 pilots](#), almost a third of the entire pilot population in Europe, lost their job or were put on furlough during the COVID crisis. The ones currently still working, are not only asked to fly more but also at reduced terms and conditions. This adds more pressure, with crew feeling underappreciated and their motivation to push through a challenging summer being reduced.

“The opportunity to come out of the pandemic stronger, resilient, and ready to face the challenges ahead seems to have been largely wasted,” says ECA President Otjan de Bruijn. “If this industry wants to grow and remain relevant, it needs to show that it cares for the people: the passengers, who deserve a safe and comfortable travel. And the workers, who deserve to work in a socially sustainable industry. Meanwhile, we may not be able to prevent a chaotic summer, but we must do all we can to prevent a tragic one.”

For further information, please contact:

Kameliya Encheva, Senior PR & Communications Manager, Tel: +32 490 411 203

Note to editors: ECA is the representative body of European pilot associations, representing over 40.000 pilots from across Europe, striving for the highest levels of aviation safety and fostering social rights and quality employment for pilots in Europe.

Website: www.eurocockpit.be & twitter [@eu_cockpit](https://twitter.com/eu_cockpit)