European Fatigue Survey 2.0

Key points from the Baines Simmons report 'A fatigue survey of European Pilots – 2026'

–Briefing Note–

In short:

- **Almost no change over the past 3 years:**
  Since the last report (2023), none of the survey dimensions showed any significant improvements in airlines' fatigue risk management, as experienced by European pilots. Overall, significant challenges remain in effectively managing fatigue-related safety risks in European aviation.
- **Some do better than others:**
  While in some countries improvements are reported by pilots flying for airlines having their AOC there, such as the Netherlands or Finland, other AOC countries, such as Ireland & Malta, consistently feature among the bottom 2 (or 3), as they did in 2023.
- **Business models matter:**
  While network carriers perform comparatively better than others, particularly Low Cost Carriers (LCCs) and 'ACMI'[1]/wet-lease operators perform negatively on most survey dimensions – on some significantly.

Key numbers / findings - 2026:

1. Managing pilot fatigue:
   Over half of the pilots consider that fatigue risk is not well managed in their airline (50.3%).

2. Reporting crew fatigue:
   - only 14.1% consider their airlines communicate well about fatigue reports
   - only 11.9% trust their airline's fatigue reporting system
   - only 11.3% think their fatigue reports led to operational changes to improve safety

3. Extending flight duties:
   Over one third of pilots used Commander's Discretion ('CD') to extend flight duties at least once in the past 4 weeks (38.3%), while 15.3% extended them twice or more.

4. Extending flight duties:
   Well over 3 in 5 pilots are (slightly, moderately or highly) concerned about the negative consequences if they refused to extend a flight duty under CD (69.1%). Over 2 out of 5 were highly or moderately concerned (44.3%).

[1] ACMI = Aircraft with Crew, Maintenance and Insurance, usually also referred to as 'wet-lease' operators.

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5. Reporting 'unfit' due to fatigue
   - Less than 2 out of 5 pilots usually report unfit when fatigued (37.2%).
   - A quarter of pilots usually do not report and fly fatigued anyway (24.2%).
   - Every second pilot has operated in the last 3 months when, with hindsight, they realized that they should have reported unfit due to fatigue (52%).

6. Flight roster (in)stability

   Over 1 out of 3 pilots experienced a (moderately or very) unstable flight roster in the past 4 weeks (35.6%).

7. (In)Sufficient rest:

   Over 1 out of 3 pilots had usually or always insufficient rest in the past 4 weeks to prevent cumulative fatigue (38.8%). 7 out of 10 at least sometimes (76.8%).

8. Microsleeps in the cockpit:

   Over 3 out of 4 pilots experienced at least one microsleep whilst operating an aircraft in the past 4 weeks (76.8%) – and one quarter reported 5 or more microsleeps (24.7%).

Beyond the numbers – as seen by ECA:

1. **Tip of the Iceberg:**

   The Baines Simmons report's analysis shows that a considerable share of fatigue is unlikely to show up in any fatigue risk management process and/or official statistics, as it remains hidden from the system and a significant part of airlines' fatigue and related data goes unaccounted for.

   Fear of negative repercussions when submitting fatigue reports, declaring themselves unfit, or denying to extend a flight under CD, are likely to encourage pilots to fly fatigued and to not submit fatigue reports.

   The overall low level of effectiveness, ease of access, and trust in fatigue reporting systems – as experienced by pilots – is likely to make airlines turn blind as to the fatigue-related safety risks they carry.

2. **Fear of negative repercussions:**

   The issue of pilots being concerned about negative consequences for themselves is a recurring issue in the report. Both in the answers to questions and in free-text comments.

   Pilots providing free-text comments overwhelmingly report negative experiences with their airlines' fatigue risk management and fatigue reporting.

   Well over one third of those providing comments reported about fear of a punitive or retaliatory response to submitting a fatigue report.

   Furthermore, 44% were *highly or moderately* concerned about negative consequences when refusing to extend a flight duty under Commander's Discretion (70% if you add 'slightly concerned' pilots). These levels of moderate/high concern increase for pilots in airlines with their AOC in Ireland and Malta (55.2% / 47.7%) and pilots flying for low-cost carriers and ACMI/wet-lease companies (59.7% / 57.4%). In comparison, levels of concern in e.g. Germany were at 4.7%, and 3.5% in the Netherlands.

3. **Safety Culture at stake:**

   Baines Simmons refers repeatedly to the importance of safety culture as an 'essential component' of safety and fatigue risk management. Where the safety culture results in pilots continuing to fly when they have identified that they are not fit to do so, this has the potential to be a clear reduction in safety margins.

4. **In need for strong(er) national safety oversight:**

   The report shows a high 'variability' between AOC countries, indicating a lack of standardisation in oversight by national aviation authorities and low enforcement of regulatory requirements in certain countries.

   While some countries perform well, such as Netherlands and Finland, others do less so. Ireland and Malta, in particular, are consistently among those AOCs that usually display low performances (regularly featuring in the bottom 3) in the pilots' feed-back on fatigue management, reporting, rest, or use of Commander's Discretion and fear of refusing it. They already did so in 2023, and the data shows no improvement.

5. **Some airline types deserve particular attention:**

   Pilots at network carriers usually experience their airlines' overall fatigue risk management more positively, compared to other types of operations.

   Low-Cost point-to-point Carriers (LCCs) and ACMI/wet-lease operators consistently feature among the bottom performers in most areas. This in particular regarding negative experiences with their airlines' fatigue risk management, low trust in fatigue reporting, higher use of Commanders' Discretion and concern about refusing to use it.

   Business and cargo operations show a mixed picture: both benefit from a comparatively higher level of trust in the fatigue reporting system, but pilots were the most likely to report very unstable rosters and business jet pilots reported the highest use of Commander's Discretion.

The 2026 survey:

Survey duration: 4 weeks (4 Aug. – 7 Sept. 2026)

Number of fatigue-related questions: 9 (+ 1 sub-question)

Number of European countries covered: 32

Total number of respondents: 7.198 – "This is a large, robust dataset, and comparisons with the 2023 survey, provides confidence in the results presented." (p.59)

Analysis & report (Oct. 2026) by Baines Simmons.

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