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### **Coronavirus crisis: No trade-off between consumer rights and supporting the travel sector**

The European Consumer Organisation (BEUC) said today that supporting a travel sector deeply hit by the Coronavirus crisis and upholding consumers' rights in case of cancellations should not be a trade-off. In order to mitigate the economic impact of the Coronavirus travel bans and lockdowns, some EU Member States are considering measures to help package travel operators who may face reimbursement claims due to cancellations.

BEUC and its member organisations are conscious of the vast difficulties the travel sector is confronted with. However, the crisis will also hit consumers hard, many of whom will suffer financially. Under EU law, if package travel is cancelled due to 'extraordinary circumstances,' consumers can claim reimbursement for the cost of travel. This reimbursement must happen within 14 days.

As measures are being discussed for the travel sector we reiterate the need for consumers to always have a choice, for instance between reimbursement and a voucher. Such vouchers must come with practical conditions (they must for instance be valid for a sufficiently long time) and be guaranteed by governments in case the travel company becomes insolvent.

National measures, as is the case in Belgium, which would require consumers to accept vouchers instead of reimbursement would be the wrong approach. BEUC calls on Member States to make sure existing consumer rights are not reduced when taking measures to support the economy.

Monique Goyens, Director General of The European Consumer Organisation, commented:

"As consumers we also have a responsibility to overcome this exceptional situation. But consumer rights are there to protect people, especially since we will all be facing challenges due to the Coronavirus crisis. Not every consumer is free to choose when to go on a trip or can afford to wait a long time to get reimbursed. Reimbursement of cancelled package travels is a long-established European right and must not be abandoned, even if voluntary flexible measures to support travel companies should be possible."

ENDS

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