

Contact: Andrew Canning – press@beuc.eu
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BEUC welcomes the European Commission's call on Member States to work on solution to help the travel industry albeit protecting consumers' rights

BEUC welcomes a call today by European Commissioner for Justice, responsible for consumer protection, Didier Reynders, for Member States to work on solutions to address the problems of the travel and tourism industry due to COVID-19 but to respect European consumers' rights.

BEUC Director General, Monique Goyens, said:

"It is not only businesses that are facing liquidity problems due to COVID-19: consumers are too. EU rules allow consumers to get a full refund for cancelled package travel as well as for flights or other transport means even if it's in 'unavoidable or extraordinary' circumstances, such as COVID-19.¹ But some EU countries have been pushing to water down consumer rights, trying to force consumers to accept vouchers instead of a refund. This is unacceptable.

"Our members are in daily contact to listen to and advise angry and confused consumers, who are not properly informed about their rights, are pushed to accept non-insolvency protected vouchers instead of a refund, are asked to make more expensive re-bookings or they are simply left in the dark if they will ever receive their money back. National governments and EU institutions should now work together to establish economic mitigation measures to help both consumers and the travel industry".

BEUC's proposals for a way forward:

1. Ensuring travel organisers have liquidity which allows them to quickly reimburse consumer claims – such solutions have been already adopted in Denmark via a state aid solution and should be used across the EU. This solution should also be used to cover flights or other single travel tickets
2. Set up an EU fund that helps cover insolvency protection for operators and for voluntary vouchers
3. Vouchers could be an attractive alternative for consumers but only if they are insolvency protected and valid for at least two years. The choice to accept vouchers instead of a refund must remain the consumers in line with EU law

Note to Editors

¹ The right to reimbursement in case of cancellation in extraordinary circumstances like the COVID-19 pandemic is granted to passengers in all modes of passenger transport (air, rail, bus etc.) according to the EU passenger rights regulations.

ENDS

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