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Consumer groups launch EU-wide complaint against 17 airlines for greenwashing

Today, BEUC and 23 of its member organisations* from 19 countries have filed a complaint to the European Commission and the network of consumer protection authorities (CPC) denouncing misleading climate-related claims by 17 European airlines.¹ According to legal analysis commissioned by BEUC, such claims breach the EU rules tackling unfair commercial practices.²

We are calling for a Europe-wide investigation into the issue and for the concerned airlines – and the entire sector – to stop making claims that give consumers the impression that flying is sustainable. This is simply untrue as flying is not sustainable and is not bound to become so in the near future. Where airlines have proposed consumers to pay extra ‘green’ fees based on such misleading claims, CPC authorities should request airlines to reimburse their customers.

BEUC members have identified numerous examples of misleading practices targeting consumers:

- **Claims that paying extra credits can “offset”, “neutralise”, or “compensate” the CO2 emissions of a flight are factually incorrect** as the climate benefits of offsetting activities are highly uncertain, while the harm caused by the CO2 emissions from air travel is certain.
- **Airlines are misleading consumers when charging them more to contribute to the development of ‘Sustainable Aviation Fuels’ (SAFs):** Such fuels are not market-ready and recently adopted EU legislation sets very low targets for how much they should represent in aircrafts’ fuel mix. This means that until SAFs will be massively available - beyond the end of the 2030s - they will at best only represent a minor share in planes’ kerosene tanks.³
- **Implying that air travel can be “sustainable”, “responsible” and “green” is deceptive.** None of the strategies deployed by the aviation sector are currently able to prevent Greenhouse Gas emissions. It is important to stop these claims as with air traffic set to increase, emissions will keep rising for years to come.⁴

Ursula Pachi, BEUC’s Deputy Director General of BEUC, commented:

“When it is crystal clear that air travel causes a significant and increasing share of greenhouse gas emissions, it beggars belief that airlines freely lure consumers with climate-friendly messaging such as “CO2 compensated” or “CO2 neutral”. We urge authorities to take the matter into their hands and crack down on this greenwashing practice seriously misleading consumers.”

“Whether you pay a ‘green fare’ or not, your flight will still emit climate-harmful gases. Technological solutions to decarbonise aviation won’t become a massive-scale reality any time soon, so depicting flying as a sustainable mode of transport is pure greenwashing. At a time when many want to travel more sustainably, airlines should urgently stop offering consumers a fake peace of mind.”

“Shifting consumer demand towards more sustainable transport modes is critical to cut emissions. Airlines must stop giving consumers the false impression that they are choosing a sustainable transport mode. In addition, decision makers must push for solutions to provide consumers with reliable, attractive, and sustainable alternatives such as higher-quality long-distance rail connections.”

* BEUC member organisations participating in this action are: Arbeiterkammer (**Austria**), Testachats/Testaankoop (**Belgium**); Асоциация Активни потребители (**Bulgaria**); Forbrugerrådet Tænk (**Denmark**); CLCV and UFC-Que Choisir (**France**); Kuluttajaliitto – Konsumentförbundet ry (**Finland**); EKPIZO (**Greece**); Tudatos Vásárlók Egyesülete (**Hungary**); Altroconsumo (**Italy**); Consumentenbond (**Netherlands**); Forbrukerrådet (**Norway**); Fundacja Konsumentów and Federacja Konsumentów (**Poland**), DECO (**Portugal**), Spoločnosť ochrany spotrebiteľov (S.O.S.) (**Slovakia**), Zveza potrošnikov Slovenije (**Slovenia**), ASUFIN, CECU and OCU (**Spain**), Sveriges Konsumenter (**Sweden**), Fédération romande des consommateurs (**Switzerland**). vzbv (**Germany**) issued legal warnings to several traders identified in the alert.

Documentation:

[Q&A for the media](#): The coordinated enforcement action by consumer groups in a nutshell

[Main findings and conclusions](#)

[Targeted airlines & identified practices](#)

[Study](#) accompanying the external alert submitted by BEUC to the CPC Network

¹ In alphabetical order: Air Baltic, Air Dolomiti, Air France, Austrian, Brussels Airlines, Eurowings, Finnair, KLM, Lufthansa, Norwegian, Ryanair, SAS, SWISS, TAP, Volotea, Vueling, Wizz Air.

² Under the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive (2005/29/EC).

³ See European Parliament [press release](#) “Fit for 55: Parliament and Council reach deal on greener aviation fuels”, 25/04/2023.

⁴ EASA report. Available at: <https://www.easa.europa.eu/en/newsroom-and-events/press-releases/european-aviation-environmental-report-2022-sustainability>.

