

# FACTSHEET

# Unfair fees and policies in air travel

Airlines' business models increasingly rely on charging extra fees for **services** like hand-luggage or seat choice and the **monetisation of basic passenger needs**. This not only means significant **additional costs** for passengers but also **reduced price transparency** and limited ability to enforce their rights. Policymakers **should define minimum services** which should be included in the airfare as well as optional supplements (ancillary services) whose price should be clearly displayed alongside the final price. That will improve transparency for passengers.

## Fly light, pay heavy: the need for legal clarity on hand luggage rules

Airlines' different luggage policies create confusion and are a source of distress at booking, check-in and boarding times. This results in a constant number of complaints and a high financial harm for passengers.



Average price of a piece of hand-luggage on budget airlines



Over 480 million passengers affected in 2024 alone



Up to €2.88-36 billion in potential financial losses for passengers

Source: BEUC 2025 action [Fly light, Pay heavy](#). These fees vary according to the airline, destination, dynamic pricing, seasonality, and booking channel, etc.

In 2024, BEUC member **Consumentenbond** conducted a [survey](#) with 11,552 Dutch consumers.

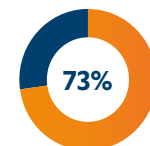
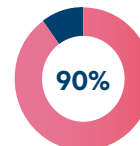
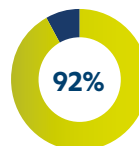
78% want clearer hand-luggage rules

51% want a cabin suitcase and a small item included in the fare

35% consider a larger suitcase should also be part of the ticket fare

86% want a least hand-luggage to be included in the ticket price

Belgian, Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese consumers draw similar [conclusions](#):



- want standardised rules across all airlines
- believe hand-luggage should be part of the ticket price
- luggage fees are used to mislead passengers and boost profits

### Minimum dimensions



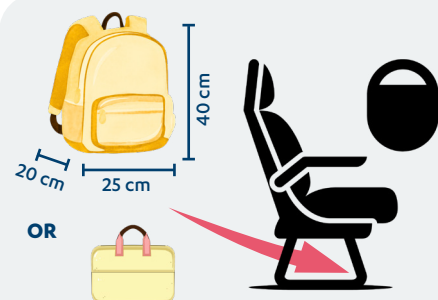
### RECOMMENDATION

Ensure that consumers can bring a **small item** and a **piece of hand luggage onboard**, at no extra cost (**part of the basic ticket price**).



Must comply with applicable safety requirements. Carrier shall establish the maximum dimensions and weight permitted.

+



OR

Must fit under the front seat and comply with applicable security requirements

# Sitting with your family: from logistical to financial hurdles

One growing trend is to charge consumers to choose their seats. Fees can be significant depending on the airline, route, and fare.

**This is now also the case for passengers who wish to sit next to people on the same booking, including children.**



## RECOMMENDATION

**Prevent airlines from charging people under the same booking to be seated together, especially families with children.** These fees **are unfair and may compromise safety.**



## Seating fees: BEUC's analysis of 29 airlines' practices

**€80-200** average surcharge for a family of **4**, highest case exceeding **€300**.

Total surcharge can amount to **30-50%** of the original ticket price.

Some airlines also charge infant fees for children under **2**.

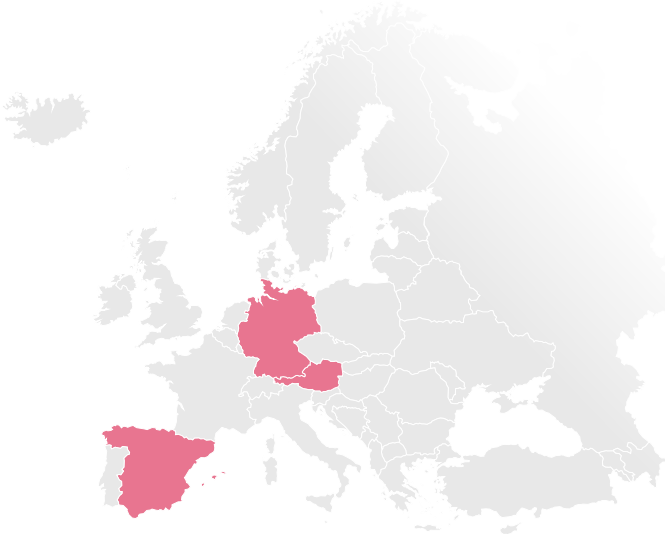
# "No-show" policies: widespread with a big financial impact on consumers

Airlines use "no-show" clauses when selling their tickets, which can have significant financial consequences for consumers. If passengers miss the first leg of multi-leg itinerary, they may discover, upon arriving at the airport to board the following leg, that their entire ticket has been cancelled. In such cases, they are forced to either buy a new ticket last minute or pay a fee to be able to use the original ticket.

## BEUC's analysis of 29 airlines' practices



Passengers suffer an average financial detriment of €770 (2) per booking when airlines fail to provide rerouting care, and assistance, a frequent outcome of "no-show" policies.



No-shows declared **illegal and unenforceable** in **Austria, Germany and Spain**

**76%** of airlines include a "no-show" clause in their conditions

**4 out of 29** have unclear contractual clauses which could be interpreted as "no-show" clauses

**only 3 out of 29** do not apply a "no-show" policy

**only 1 out of 29** explicitly informs consumers about the existence of the no-show policy



## RECOMMENDATION

**Forbid "no-show" clauses for all types of flights and journeys** (e.g. 'point to point' and 'connected flights').

(2) A. Noorderhaven, Understanding additional costs for passengers due to flight disruptions, Lennoc, 2025, p.2 <https://www.lennoc.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Research-paper-additional-costs-for-passengers.pdf>