

05/02/2014

EU air travel rights take off

EU laws on the rights of air passengers when flights are cancelled, delayed or boarding is denied were voted on this afternoon by the European Parliament in plenary session in Strasbourg.

MEPs have done a major job in improving a flawed Commission proposal by strengthening passengers' rights in many areas. For example, assistance to stranded passengers; missed connection flights; enforcement of passengers' rights; better redress options and clarity on what constitutes "extraordinary circumstances".

Disappointingly however, MEPs chose not to fully endorse the European Court of Justice's rulings on compensation for delays of 3 hours at arrival. Now consumers will only benefit from this right if it is a short haul flight.

Other key issues decided were:

- A ban on 'no-show' clauses in tickets – This bans the common practice of airlines cancelling the return of passengers who miss or do not take an outbound flight. There will be a ban on cancelling return flights, a significant consumer victory.
- Right to accommodation – This has been limited to 5 days of accommodation when "in extraordinary circumstances", otherwise the right remains open-ended. This makes it harder for airlines to neglect passengers.
- "Extraordinary circumstances" – Cancellations or long delays due to aircraft technical problems only exempt the airline from paying compensation to passengers if due to hidden manufacturing defects. This is an increase in legal clarity and will help consumers enforce their rights.
- Right to financial compensation when delayed – subject to the thresholds below:
 - After 3 hours delay for journeys of 2,500km or less (€300 compensation);
 - After 5 hours delay for intra-Community journeys of 2,500km+; or to third-countries 2,500-6,000km (€400 compensation);
 - After 7 hours delay for journeys to/from third countries of more than 6,000 kilometres (€600 compensation).

Monique Goyens Director General of The European Consumer Organisation commented:

“MEPs have given this industry a wake-up call by improving our travel rights. Unfortunately however, they have also lowered the standards set by the European Court of Justice’s judgments on the critical issue of compensation for long delays.

“Airlines turning a blind eye to their obligations are among the top consumer problems in Europe. MEPs have given a signal not to reward those who have been disrespecting current laws.

“Passengers do get frustrated with airlines clearly passing on or denying their responsibilities to provide compensation or assistance in case of delayed or cancelled flights as appropriate under law. The result of the vote today would help to make passenger rights easier to enforce and to hold airlines accountable.

“No-show clauses are unjustifiable and result in huge expense to passengers. If someone arrives in an airport and is denied boarding because they did not take the outgoing flight, not only do they face huge inconvenience, but also the enormous expense of losing their purchased ticket and buying another home on the spot. MEPs have striven to make such practices history for return flights.”

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See BEUC Factsheet on air passengers’ rights [here](#)