

Following dialogues with the Commission and national consumer protection authorities, 16 major airlines have committed to better information and timely reimbursement of passengers in case of flight cancellations. The Commission had alerted the [Consumer Protection Cooperation](#) (CPC) enforcement authorities in December 2020 to address several airlines' cancellation and reimbursement practices in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Commissioner for Justice, Didier **Reynders** said: *“It is good news for consumers that airlines cooperated during the dialogues, and committed to respecting passengers' rights and improving their communication. In the early phase of the pandemic, some airlines pushed vouchers on passengers. They were acting against EU consumer protection rules. That was unacceptable. Following our joint action, I am pleased that most of them have now agreed to refund these vouchers. I call on authorities to ensure that the remaining airlines also offer a money refund for such vouchers.”*

Commissioner for Transport, Adina **Vălean** said: *“I welcome the fact that the bulk of the reimbursement backlog has been cleared and that all airlines concerned have committed to solve remaining issues. This is crucial to restoring passengers' confidence. The recovery of the air transport sector depends on this. This is why we are also currently assessing regulatory options to reinforce passenger protection against future crisis, as foreseen in our Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy.”*

Overview of airlines' commitments

Following the dialogues, these are the commitments made by the airlines:

- remaining **reimbursement backlogs have been cleared** in the vast majority of cases and passengers will be refunded within 7 days as required under EU law;
- **passengers will be informed more clearly about their passenger rights** in the event of a flight cancellation by an airline;
- airlines will give **equal prominence** on their websites, e-mails and other communication to passengers **to the different options the passenger has in the event of a flight cancellation** by the airline: rerouting, refund in money and – if offered by the airline – refund in a voucher;
- airlines will, in their communication to passengers, **clearly distinguish flight cancellations by the airline**(and the passenger's ensuing statutory rights) **from flight cancellations by the passenger** (and possible contractual rights that the passenger may have in those cases under the airline's terms and conditions of carriage);
- **passengers can be given vouchers only if they expressly choose them.** Most airlines agreed that unused vouchers that the passengers at the early stages of the pandemic had to accept, can be reimbursed in money if the passenger so wishes;
- passengers who booked their flight through an intermediary and **have difficulties getting reimbursement from the intermediary can turn to the airline and request to be refunded directly.**Airlines are expected to inform passengers about this possibility and any conditions for requesting a direct refund on their websites.

Next steps

The CPC network will now close its dialogues with all airlines, but will continue to monitor whether commitments are correctly implemented. National authorities will decide how to deal with the outstanding issue of non-refundable vouchers that were pushed onto consumers in the early phase of the pandemic. The CPC network will also exchange information on ongoing investigations by their members about possible unfair practices of certain intermediaries, notably in the way they inform consumers about their services' conditions and fees.

Background

In view of the continuation of difficult reimbursement conditions for consumers, and following an alert by the EU level consumer umbrella organisation BEUC, the Commission alerted the national authorities in December 2020.

In February 2021, the network of national consumer authorities led by six coordinating authorities – from Belgium, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain and Sweden – and with support of the European Commission, requested information from the 16 airlines most frequently mentioned in consumer complaints.

The airlines involved in the dialogue were: Aegean Airlines, Air France, Alitalia, Austrian Airlines, British Airways, Brussels Airlines, Easyjet, Eurowings, Iberia, KLM, Lufthansa, Norwegian, Ryanair, TAP, Vueling and Wizz Air.

This is the biggest CPC action in the CPC network's history and the first action that was based on an alert from the Commission. This alert was triggered via external alerts by BEUC and national consumer associations and a large number of complaints that the Commission, European Consumer Centers and national authorities had received on airlines' COVID-19 related cancellation and reimbursement practices.

The CPC action was based on the results of a survey launched earlier this year to collect data on airlines' cancellation practices and review the practices surveyed in relation to [Regulation \(EC\) 261/2004 on air passenger rights](#) and [Directive 2005/29/EC on unfair commercial practices](#).

Flights booked as part of a package were not concerned by this action.