

Hundreds of flights across Italy to be impacted by national Air Traffic Control (ATC) strike tomorrow

First strike of the year follows 30 ATC strike days in 2018, with millions of travellers affected

- Strike will take place between 12:00 - 16:00 UTC (13:00 – 17:00 local time)
- Hundreds of flight cancellations and delays are expected, disrupting travel plans for thousands

Brussels, 10 January 2019 -- 2019 is already off to a bad start for travellers with the first national ATC strike taking place in Italy tomorrow afternoon. A4E airlines are being forced to cancel hundreds of flights in advance as controllers at Air Traffic Control centres in Rome, Milan, and Brindisi go on strike, affecting both domestic and intra-European flights to and from Italy. Intercontinental flights as well as overflights are not expected to be impacted.

Travellers may face additional headaches as workers at Catania, Turin, Genoa, Perugia, and Pescara airports are also expected to participate in the strike action, particularly impacting families returning from their holiday breaks as well as visitors travelling to Milan for the start of Men's Fashion Week.

"The new year is a chance for a fresh new start. Unfortunately, when it comes to Europe's air traffic control strikes, old habits re-emerge year after year. The result is millions of travellers will continue to have their travel plans disrupted this year unless EU and national policy makers make this issue a priority", said Thomas Reynaert, Managing Director, Airlines for Europe (A4E).

In the countries most affected by controllers' strikes, A4E is calling for an improved continuity of service for passengers and has proposed a number of solutions to address the situation, including a mandatory 72-hour individual notification period for employees wishing to strike and protection of overflights (while not at the expense of the country where the strike originates). In addition, investments are required in technology, processes and human resources to make Europe's overall air traffic management system capable of coping with ever-increasing traffic.

"There is a clear increase in the frequency and duration of ATC strikes in Europe, with 30 days of strike in 2018 compared with 24 days in 2017. This is a trend which cannot continue – we urge national and EU politicians to address the situation immediately. European aviation's reputation is at stake", Reynaert added.

"We acknowledge the right to strike, but this cannot be at the expense of travellers in Europe. We join A4E in their call to national and European regulators to address the issues as a matter of urgency to avoid continuous travel disruptions for business travelers and holiday-makers", said Pawel Niewiadomski, President of ECTAA.

ATC strikes have a costly impact on tourism, European economies and the environment:

1. Customers' journeys and supply chains are severely disrupted.
2. Diversions to avoid closed air space result in much longer flights and burn more fuel, resulting in higher CO2 emissions.
3. Tourism is most affected due to cancelled flights to prime holiday destinations, putting small and medium size businesses at risk.

4. Airlines have to pay passengers compensation for the delays and rebook them on other flights, significantly disrupting customers' travel plans and the airlines' operations. Airlines don't have the right to recover these costs from the air navigation service providers who have caused them.

5. Tour operators have to offer alternative travel arrangements and possible refunds for services not performed according to contract, which can be significant when re-routing in high season is more difficult.

6. A recent study* estimates air traffic strikes have cost the EU economy €13.4 billion since 2010.

*"Economic Impact of Air Traffic Control Strikes in Europe", PriceWaterhouseCooper for A4E, Brussels, 2016

About ECTAA

ECTAA regroups the national associations of travel agents and tour operators of 30 European countries. It represents approximately 70.000 travel agents and tour operators in Europe, which provide consultancy and sell transport, accommodation, leisure and other tourism services as well as combined products to leisure and business customers.

About A4E

Launched in 2016, Airlines for Europe (A4E) is Europe's largest airline association, based in Brussels. The organisation advocates on behalf of its members to help shape EU aviation policy to the benefit of consumers, ensuring a continued safe and competitive air transport market. With more than 635 million passengers carried each year, A4E members account for more than 70 per cent of the continent's journeys, operating more than 2,800 aircraft and generating more than EUR 100 billion in annual turnover. Members with air cargo and mail activities transport more than 5 million tons of goods each year to more than 360 destinations either by freighters or passenger aircraft. Current members include: Aegean, airBaltic, Air France-KLM, Cargolux, easyJet, Finnair, Icelandair, International Airlines Group (IAG), Jet2.com, Lufthansa Group, Norwegian, Ryanair, TAP Portugal, Travel Service and Volotea.