

A4E's Call for action on Air Traffic Controllers (ATC) strikes

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As travel restrictions have been lifted, 2022 saw an increase in ATC strikes. In the last seven months of 2022, Airlines for Europe (A4E) member airlines were forced to cancel over 2,000 flights as a result of the different calls for strikes, with millions of travellers affected also through associated delays.

This trend shows no sign of abating. Since the start of the year, these strikes have already resulted in over 28,000 hours of delay for flights in Europe. Over 3000 flights were cancelled and an additional 23,000 were delayed, impacting over 10,7 million passengers.

As we head into the summer months, A4E member airlines strongly fear more strikes will continue to severely impact passengers, create delays and costs, while also undermining the environmental efforts of the aviation sector due to additional fuel burned and increase in CO2 emissions caused by the route changes to avoid affected airspace(s).

Given the significant costs placed on European travellers and the pan-European nature of the issue, A4E **calls on the European Commission to provide guidance and support to Member States** to ensure better information and accommodation for European travellers during those disruptions, including through:

- **Mandatory arbitration** before ATC unions can threaten strike action.
- A **21-day advance notification** of strike action.
- Provide a **72h advance individual notification** of participation in industrial action.
- **Protection of overflights**, while ensuring this is not at the expense of departures and arrivals in the country where the strike originates.
- **Right of redress with ANSPs** for the impact of disruption.

These disruptions are concentrated in a small number of EU countries but may have EU-wide impacts on air traffic. In general, the cost of these disruptions is borne almost entirely by the users of the air traffic system, rather than by the providers.

ATC Strikes in Europe

Aviation by its very nature is a cross-border issue and people across Europe are affected by strikes, thus making it a matter of EU relevance.

This year a particularly pronounced, and concerning, trend is the increasing share of Air Traffic Controllers (ATC) industrial action that is not directly related to the ATC sector. Solidarity calls for strike related to the pension reform in France for instance accounted for a significant share of the total disruption of ATC services in Europe since the start of the year, while strikes directly related to the working conditions of ATC workers were a clear minority.

It is not up to airlines to resolve the social issues in ATC that is between employers and employee representatives. The same holds true for solidarity strikes disrupting air services. Airlines and passengers should not suffer from issues outside of their control.

A4E calls for measures to anticipate and better handle the impact of these strikes on citizens, businesses, and environment in the EU, **through voluntary commitments by unions (both ATC and other) / ANSPs and regulatory measures at EU and national level.**

A4E welcomed the 2017 European Commission staff working document “Practices favouring ATM Service Continuity” providing recommendations on measures to improve service continuity in ATM. It was the first-ever step taken by the European Commission to address the ATC strike problem. Unfortunately, it has not been updated to take stock of the evolving scenario and no concrete action at EU level has followed.

A4E is not questioning the fundamental right to strike. Through the roll-out of the previously discussed measures we believe we can ensure ease and certainty of travel for European passengers, in full respect of workers’ social rights.