

European ATC remains inefficient, expensive and unreliable for millions of passengers

- **ATC structural issues responsible for 71% of en-route traffic delays this year (+114% delay minutes vs. 2017)**
- **Up to 30% longer flight routings in place to avoid ATC bottlenecks, increasing CO2 emissions**
- **Persistent ATC strikes compound structural issues and continue to wreak havoc on airlines and passengers**
- **European governments must make air traffic management reform a top political priority**

Brussels, 10 July 2019 – Structural issues at Europe’s air traffic control (ATC) centres continue to cause delays for passengers this year. ATC capacity and staff shortages were responsible for more than 70% of all en-route flight delays between January and June 2019, resulting in 114% more delay minutes than in 2017. This has already impacted the travel plans of around 25 million A4E passengers this year.

European travellers were subjected to an unprecedented 19 million minutes of ATC delays in 2018 (+104% v 2017). As a consequence, action was taken to avoid known ATC bottlenecks in Germany and in France. Unfortunately, this has resulted in longer flight times, additional fuel burn and unnecessary CO2 emissions. A recent EU environmental report¹ found that network flight inefficiencies in 2017 caused a 5.8% increase in CO2 emissions.

Airlines are implementing hundreds of additional measures to mitigate any further increase in delays this summer. This includes specific operational efficiency improvements, such as refuelling during boarding, as well as significant investments in additional staff and dedicated spare aircraft across Europe.

Meanwhile, persistent ATC strikes in Europe continue to compound existing structural issues and wreak havoc on airlines and their passengers. Repeated strikes earlier this year by Belgium’s monopoly air traffic control provider, skeyes, led to more than 500 flight cancellations among A4E airlines, affecting over 200,000 passengers.

“ATC strikes continue to undermine future investments and improvements to Europe’s air traffic management system. In the meantime, A4E airlines are investing millions of Euros in stabilizing flight operations to at least partially compensate for delays caused by air traffic control. It’s high time that all affected stakeholders work together to immediately put into place voluntary solutions which would minimize the disruption and cost of these strikes on European airlines and our passengers”, said Christina Foerster, CEO, Brussels Airlines.

“Too little is being done too late by national ATC providers and their governments. The modernisation of Europe’s airspace is both urgent and long overdue. We need a long term solution not only to improve consumers’ journeys but to avoid unnecessary carbon emissions. We could do it tomorrow -- yet, politicians have been discussing this for 18 years and absolutely nothing has happened”, said Willie Walsh, CEO, IAG.

A review of the Single European Sky (SES) regulatory framework together with future-proof investments in processes, new technologies and human resources is still urgently needed.

“The European Commission and the Member States must implement the EU’s delayed seamless European airspace by allowing the recommendations from the recent Airspace Architecture Study to be fully realised. This would result in more efficient routings, quicker journeys and lower costs – not to mention a 10% reduction in CO2 emissions”, said Thomas Reynaert, Managing Director, Airlines for Europe (A4E).

¹European Aviation Environmental Report 2019 <https://www.eurocontrol.int/sites/default/files/publication/files/eaer-2019.pdf>

Notes to Editors

Structural ATC issues include:

- Not enough air traffic control staff (ATCOs) to manage traffic in a specific region.
- Inefficient deployment of existing staff, aggravated by an inefficient airspace structure.
- A staff shortage at one ANSP which cannot be easily filled by moving controllers from a neighbouring centre. (Unlike pilot licenses, ATCO licenses are linked to their current place of work. This makes shifting resources between air navigation service providers (ANSPs) a complex and time-consuming process.

About A4E

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 700 million passengers carried each year, A4E members account for more than 70 per cent of the continent's journeys, operating more than 2,900 aircraft and generating more than EUR 110 billion in annual revenue. 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. Members include Aegean, airBaltic, Air France-KLM, Cargolux, easyJet, Finnair, Icelandair, International Airlines Group (IAG), Jet2.com, Lufthansa Group, Norwegian, Ryanair, TAP Air Portugal, Smartwings and Volotea. Follow us on Twitter @A4Europe or visit www.a4e.eu.