



Summer of Chaos Ahead. Don't blame the workers!

Open letter
Brussels, 20 June 2022

The summer of 2022 has not got off to a good start for the aviation sector. Millions of passengers are suffering from both cancellations and delays across the industry. The worst affected areas are on the ground, where passengers are being subjected to – rock bottom service levels due to lack of staffing in check-in, boarding, security as well as loading and baggage. Furthermore, flights are also being cancelled due to a lack of cabin crew, and inflight delays are skyrocketing due to a lack of qualified ATM staff.

The cause of this system wide operational chaos is simple, a lack of staff.

Why a lack of staff?

In 2021, the [ETF called for a number of changes to be made to the aviation sector](#) to ensure the industry could recover quickly from the pandemic. We pressed regulators to ensure that people would be at the heart of the aviation sector, and that pushed for capacity in the form of staffing levels, must be maintained. Unfortunately, nobody listened.

The reality is working in the aviation sector is not what it once was. Today, workers in the sector are faced with low wages, long hours and precarious contracts including agency work, zero-hour contracts and even self-employment. Workers are routinely expected to work long hours beyond the point of fatigue as was [recently made clear by Wizz Air CEO Jozsef Varadi](#), and this is only getting worse as passenger numbers increase, capacity remains stagnant and the industry reliant on overtime.

Pushing workers to the limit is nothing new. The industry has long been subjected to a race to the bottom in job quality. For decades we have seen the end of decent work, and the introduction of jobs with low pay, bad conditions and high workloads. This has been brought on by push for 'free market' economic policies of the EU which have prioritised the maximisation of profits for business owners at the expense of aviation workers across Europe.

Don't blame the workers!

With the increased delays and increased frustration amongst passengers, there has been an increase of disruptive passenger incidents. Throughout the pandemic, workers have been exposed to a range of anti-social behaviour and violent outbursts by passengers - particularly by those who refused to wear masks or those with incorrect documentation or tests for travel. This disruption has not gone away. Now passengers are venting their anger on workers due to delays caused not by them, but by their employers, governments,





and regulators.

We are today calling on passengers not to blame the workers for these issues, but to focus their discontent squarely at aviation executives who used this pandemic as an excuse to lower the number and quality of jobs in the aviation sector. In addition, they should lay blame at regulators and governments who have failed to provide a decent level of service and connectivity to passengers by providing companies with billions, and allowing them simultaneously to lay off their staff, and point a finger at the European Commission who has set the stage for this terrible situation by failing to understand the sector and liberalising it beyond to the detriment of passengers and staff.

A summer of discontent

This summer we will see a wave of discontent, major delays, cancellations, and industrial action across the continent. We anticipate industrial action throughout Europe, and so far, unions in the UK, France, Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, Denmark, and Italy have all called or had some form of industrial action in the face of the chaos. This will continue and will only grow over the coming months as workers are pushed to the brink and forced to deal with the failings of aviation executives and regulators. But it is clear that such action is a product of a failing industry, and not the cause.

This summer we also expect significant operational disruption, and the ETF will support its affiliates through what is sure to be a very difficult summer for workers and passengers alike. To make clear that workers in aviation will no longer stand for the race to the bottom and will not work, at their own expense, for the benefit of executives and greedy shareholders. While we recognise some employers have engaged with unions to resolve the issues being faced in specific workplaces, a system and fundamental change is needed in the economics of the European aviation sector.

We are demanding:

- **Collective bargaining, and sectoral social dialogue between all unions and aviation companies in Europe in line with national applicable or European law**
- **Fair pay, decent work and fair conditions for all aviation workers**
- **An end to all forms of precarious work, in particular bogus self-employment**
- **General pay increases to at least match high inflation**
- **Protection of EU ownership and control rules within the aviation sector**
- **Rejection of the SES2+ proposal in the Air Traffic Control sector which aims only to liberalise the sector**
- **A review of how Ground Handling services are provided in Europe, and an end to liberalisation of the sector**
- **It is time to change how this industry works and make it more suitable to the people who are in the sector every day, be them workers or passengers. It is time to end corporate greed in the aviation**





sector and rebalance our industry. Most of all, workers will not accept further cuts like those in previous crises in the aviation sector. Enough is enough.

Our message is clear: passengers, don't blame the workers; they are doing their best to help you in the worst possible conditions and in a situation not of their making!

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