

ETF PRESS RELEASE

Rising Traffic Demands Binding Safety Targets and Urgent Investment in ATM Staff

As flight numbers surge, the system designed to keep Europe's skies safe is under growing strain. EU policies continue to demand more with less — putting safety, sustainability, and workers' wellbeing in jeopardy.

The European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF) expresses deep concern over the persistent flaws in the EU's Air Traffic Management (ATM) performance and charging regulation, particularly as the sector prepares for the 4th Reference Period (RP4). The lack of meaningful reform threatens not only the future performance of the network but also its core responsibility: the safe management of Europe's skies.

Despite consistent warnings, the European Commission continues to pursue a model that prioritises capacity and cost-efficiency over safety and sustainability. Challenging capacity targets have once again been set, while Air Navigation Service Providers (ANSPs) are simultaneously urged to cut costs. This imbalance undermines the stability of the system and has directly contributed to the ongoing staffing crisis across ATM roles.

The ETF highlights the pressing need for a shift in the regulatory mindset. After over a decade of underfunding and unrealistic targets, it is essential that ANSPs are given the capacity to recruit and retain skilled professionals, including Air Traffic Safety Electronic Personnel, whose expertise is critical to managing ageing infrastructure and integrating modern technologies.

ETF Chair of the ATM Committee, Gauthier Sturtzer, stressed:

“Safety is not negotiable — it must be backed by binding targets and structural investment in the workforce. It is unacceptable that Europe's air traffic network is pushed to do more with less, while the real cost is borne by workers and passengers alike. Without serious action, we risk repeating the chaos seen in Paris-Orly last week, and worse.”



The ETF calls for:

- Binding safety targets in performance plans, not just aspirational guidelines.
- Ambitious, long-term investment in ATM personnel, training, and working conditions.
- A genuine commitment to sustainability that recognises staff and safety as part of environmental and operational resilience.

The ETF has submitted its feedback on RP4 and is actively updating its proposals to ensure RP5 reflects the real challenges facing ATM. Europe needs a fit-for-purpose regulation that values workers, protects passengers, and puts safety first. We will continue to work with our affiliates and stakeholders to advocate for a future where performance is built on a foundation of well-supported workers and safe, secure skies.

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