

COVID-19 transport measures: Council signs off on slots and licences



The Council today adopted two sets of temporary rules to **support the transport sector**, which continues to be heavily impacted by the coronavirus pandemic.

Relief from airport slot use requirements will protect airlines and prevent the environmental harm that would be caused by running empty flights merely for the sake of keeping the slots for the next year. An extension of the possibility to **temporarily prolong the validity** of driving licences, roadworthiness tests and other **specific licences, certificates and authorisations** will help transport operators and citizens who are unable to fulfil certain administrative requirements because of COVID-19 restrictions.

Slot relief

Under the general EU airport slot requirements, airlines must use at least 80% of their take-off and landing slots in order to keep them the following year. Airlines will now be granted the possibility to return 50% of their slot series before the start of the 2021 summer season, but they will have to use at least 50% of the remaining slots if they want to hold on to them.

The Commission will be empowered to adopt delegated acts for one year to cover the following two seasons. With such acts, the Commission may change the minimum utilisation rate to between 30% and 70% in order to respond flexibly to different air traffic levels.

The possibility to hand back 50% of the entire slot series only applies to summer 2021. However, airlines will have to return any slot they do not intend to use, no less than three weeks before the planned flight, so that other airlines have the possibility to take up this unused capacity. This three-week rule will also apply if the measures are extended by delegated acts. The rules on handing back slots are an example of the measures to start relaunching the industry and encourage competition that are included in the regulation.

The swift adoption of the regulation gives the industry a stable legal framework to plan their operations for the coming seasons. It also means that the new rules will be in place in time for the start of the 2021 summer season on 28 March 2021.

The slot relief follows on from a full slot waiver applicable in summer 2020 and winter 2020-2021.

Document extensions

The renewed rules on document extensions continue to cover road, rail and inland waterway transport, as well as maritime security.

The validity of certificates, licences and authorisations with expiry dates falling between 1 September 2020 and 30 June 2021 can be extended by 10 months if the member state in which renewals are to be issued is facing restrictions due to COVID-19.

Member states which do not need the extensions may opt out of them. However, they will have to accept those certificates, licences and authorisations whose validity has been extended in other member states. This will ensure the smooth functioning of the single market and continued cross-border activity.

Transport safety and security concerns are paramount for both the Council and the European Parliament. The approved text establishes that if renewals remain impracticable for a longer period, the affected member state may seek authorisation from the Commission for a further extension. However, it must be clear that the requested extension will not lead to disproportionate risks in terms of transport safety or security.

The first set of rules on licence extensions was adopted in May 2020.

Procedure and next steps

Both regulations were adopted by the Council by **written procedure**.

The Council and the European Parliament agreed on a fast-track procedure and worked closely together to reach a common understanding, which allowed for quick adoption of the files. The Parliament voted on 10 February.

The legal acts will now be signed by both institutions and published in the EU Official Journal. They will enter into force the day after their publication.