

New COVID-19 slot relief to help airlines and avoid ghost flights: Council adopts mandate

The EU is preparing **new temporary rules to help air carriers cope with the drastic decline in air traffic** caused by the Coronavirus crisis and **avoid operating empty flights**. Today, member states' ambassadors agreed on a negotiating mandate for granting airlines **relief from airport slot use requirements** for summer 2021, while taking initial measures to start relaunching the industry and encourage competition. The new rules will also give flexibility to adapt to different scenarios and allow for measures to be taken up to the summer 2022 scheduling period.



With COVID-19 still very much around, it would be premature to go back to the old 'use it or lose it' rule. The new slot relief provisions strike a balance by providing much-needed help to airlines, encouraging competition in the industry and preparing for a gradual return to normality as soon as that becomes possible, while avoiding ghost flights and reducing emissions. I would like to highlight the excellent cooperation between the European Parliament and the Council, allowing both institutions to envisage a swift adoption of this legislation.

Pedro Nuno Santos, Portuguese Minister for Infrastructure and Housing, President of the Council

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. The **Council text** grants airlines the possibility to return 50% of their slot series but expects them to use at least 50% of the remaining slots.

The Commission will be empowered to adopt delegated acts for one year to cover the following two seasons. With these acts, the Commission may change the minimum utilisation rate to between 30% and 70%. This grants the necessary flexibility to adapt to different air traffic levels based on traffic data and forecasts and other indicators.

Procedure and background

Today's mandate was approved by ambassadors meeting in the Council's Permanent Representatives Committee (Coreper). Both the Council and the European Parliament will need to agree on the final text.

The negotiations between the co-legislators on the proposal are being held as a matter of urgency, with a view to having the new rules in place in time for the start of the summer 2021 season on 28 March 2021.

The Commission adopted the proposal on temporary slot relief on 18 December 2020. Before that, in March 2020, the EU adopted a full slot waiver for summer 2020. That slot waiver was then extended by secondary legislation covering winter 2020-2021.

Eurocontrol figures indicate a continued year-on-year fall in air traffic of around 74% as from mid-June 2020. Based on forward bookings, Eurocontrol forecasts and epidemiological forecasts, it is not possible to predict when the period of severely depressed demand is likely to end.