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Position Paper

Unruly passengers in Civil Aviation

Unruly and disruptive passenger behaviour poses a significant threat to the safety and well-being of both crew members and passengers in civil aviation. Such incidents include violence against crew and other passengers, harassment, verbal abuse, smoking, failure to follow safety instructions, and other forms of riotous behaviour. Although these acts are committed by a minority of passengers, they have a disproportionate impact, creating inconvenience, threatening health, safety, security, and leading to significant operational disruptions and costs for airlines.

Current Situation

Recent statistics indicate an alarming increase in unruly passenger incidents. In 2023, there was one incident for every 480 flights globally, up from one incident for every 568 flights in 2022. Non-compliance with crew instructions was the most frequent issue, with reports of verbal and physical abuse also on the rise¹².

Within the European Union, the situation is equally concerning. The European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) reported that every three hours, a flight within the EU is threatened by unruly or disruptive passengers, with at least 70% of these incidents involving some form of aggression. In severe cases, such behaviour has necessitated emergency landings, occurring approximately once a month³⁴.

Challenges

One of the primary challenges in addressing unruly passenger behaviour is the legal jurisdiction over offenses committed onboard aircraft. The Tokyo Convention of 1963 grants jurisdiction to the state where the aircraft is registered, which can lead to complications when dealing with incidents that occur on international flights. This often results in unruly passengers escaping prosecution due to jurisdictional gaps.

¹ <https://www.iata.org/en/iata-repository/pressroom/fact-sheets/fact-sheet-unruly-passengers/>

² <https://www.iata.org/en/programs/passenger/unruly-passengers/>

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Air_rage

⁴ <https://apnews.com/article/ryanair-alcohol-drink-limit-eu-airports-ff197c69dbd738cf221b24e591a1d52e>



Recommendations

To effectively address the issue of unruly passengers, a comprehensive approach involving multiple stakeholders is essential:

1. **Enhance Legal Frameworks:** Encourage all states to ratify the Montreal Protocol 2014 (MP14), which extends jurisdiction to the state of landing, thereby closing existing legal loopholes and ensuring that unruly passengers can be prosecuted effectively⁵.
2. **Implement Preventive Measures:** Airlines and airports should adopt a zero-tolerance policy towards unruly behaviour. This includes conducting awareness campaigns to inform passengers about the consequences of such behaviour and training staff to recognize and manage potential incidents before they escalate.
3. **Regulate Alcohol Consumption:** Given the correlation between alcohol consumption and unruly behaviour, it is crucial to enforce stricter controls on alcohol sales both at airports and onboard aircraft. Measures could include limiting the number of alcoholic beverages sold to passengers and monitoring consumption more effectively.
4. **Strengthen Reporting and Data Sharing:** Establish standardized reporting systems across airlines and jurisdictions to collect data on unruly incidents. This data can be used to identify patterns, assess the effectiveness of preventive measures, and facilitate collaboration between stakeholders⁶.
5. **Support Crew Members:** Provide cabin crew with comprehensive training in de-escalation techniques and ensure they have the necessary support when dealing with unruly passengers. This includes clear protocols for involving law enforcement when necessary⁷.

Addressing the issue of unruly passengers requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders in the aviation industry. By enhancing legal frameworks, implementing preventive measures, regulating alcohol consumption, strengthening reporting systems, and supporting crew members, we can work towards ensuring a safer and more enjoyable air travel experience for all.

**EurECCA represents, protects and develops the rights
and needs of all cabin crew all over Europe.**

FLYING TOGETHER – PROTECTING EACH OTHER

About EurECCA: established in Brussels in 2014, the European Cabin Crew Association, EurECCA, represents, protects and develops the rights and needs of cabin crew all over Europe. It is composed of cabin crew unions from European Union Member States as well as accession and bordering states and represents some 23,000 cabin crew accounting for 60% of all organized cabin crew in Europe. EurECCA has no political connections. EurECCA's work is around Cabin Crew working conditions, wages, social protection and health and safety at work.

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⁵ https://www.icao.int/Meetings/LegalSeminar/Documents/TC_State_of_the_Issue_of_Unruly_Passengers.pdf

⁶ <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5c0f8aade5274a0ae393d9cf/international-comparison-of-disruptive-passenger-prevalence.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.easa.europa.eu/en/unruly-passengers-campaign-get-involved>