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## Position Paper

### **A landmark legal victory: early retirement rights recognised for Cabin Crew in Spain**

The European Cabin Crew Association -EurECCA- welcomes and strongly supports the historic legal victory achieved by its Spanish member organisation, STAVLA (Sindicato de Tripulantes Auxiliares de Vuelo de Líneas Aéreas), concerning the recognition of early retirement rights for cabin crew in Spain. This ruling, delivered by the Court of First Instance in Madrid on 25 March 2026, constitutes a decisive breakthrough not only for Spanish cabin crew but for the entire European aviation sector.

For the first time, a judicial authority has explicitly recognised that cabin crew are entitled to benefit from the provisions of Royal Decree 1559/1986, which reduces the retirement age for aircrew engaged in particularly demanding and hazardous working conditions. Historically, this legal framework had been applied exclusively to pilots and technical flight personnel. The court's decision to extend its application to cabin crew represents a fundamental shift in the legal and social recognition of the profession.

At the heart of the judgment lies the principle of "identity of reason", whereby the court established that there is no objective justification for treating cabin crew differently from other categories of aircrew. The ruling acknowledges that cabin crew perform essential safety functions on board aircraft and are exposed to comparable levels of physical strain, fatigue, and operational risk. By affirming that the nature of their work entails equivalent hardship and danger, the court effectively dismantles a long-standing structural inequality within aviation labour frameworks.

Equally significant is the court's explicit recognition of the physiological and occupational impact of cabin crew duties. The judgment underlines that cabin crew experience accelerated physical wear, premature ageing, and continuous exposure to demanding working environments, including irregular schedules, time zone disruptions, and safety-critical responsibilities. These elements, long documented but insufficiently reflected in legal protections, are now formally acknowledged as justifying access to early retirement mechanisms.

The ruling also carries important constitutional implications. By stating that denying cabin crew access to the benefits of Royal Decree 1559/1986 would constitute discrimination under Article 14 of the Spanish Constitution, the court elevates the issue beyond sectoral labour rights and into the broader realm of fundamental rights and equal treatment. This dimension is particularly relevant at European level, where the principles of non-discrimination and social protection form a cornerstone of the Union's legal order.

EurECCA considers this judgment to be a landmark precedent with far-reaching consequences. It establishes a legal foundation upon which similar claims can be built across Member States and reinforces the argument that cabin crew must be fully recognised as aircrew in all relevant regulatory, social, and occupational frameworks. The decision also highlights the inadequacy of current interpretations that artificially separate cabin crew from other flight personnel despite the integrated nature of their roles in ensuring flight safety.



This case further illustrates the critical role played by trade unions in defending cabin crews' rights in a sector characterised by increasing complexity, cross-border employment models, and persistent risks of social dumping. The success of STAVLA demonstrates that well-founded legal action can challenge entrenched practices and lead to meaningful structural change. It also exposes the resistance that still exists within certain institutional frameworks, as evidenced by the initial position of the Spanish Social Security authorities, which had unjustifiably excluded cabin crew from the scope of the decree.

From a European policy perspective, this ruling reinforces the urgent need for a more coherent and harmonised approach to the recognition of cabin crew working conditions. EurECCA has consistently advocated for the formal recognition of aircraft as a workplace and for the full application of occupational health and safety legislation to all categories of aircrew. The STAVLA case provides concrete judicial backing to these demands, demonstrating that the specificities of aviation work cannot be selectively acknowledged depending on professional category.

Furthermore, the decision highlights broader structural challenges within European aviation, including the fragmentation of labour standards and the persistence of unequal treatment between different categories of workers performing safety functions. It underscores the necessity for EU institutions to address these inconsistencies and to ensure that the principles of fairness, equality, and social protection are effectively implemented across the sector.

EurECCA therefore calls on European policymakers, national authorities, and industry stakeholders to take full account of this landmark judgment and to translate its implications into concrete regulatory and legislative action. The recognition of cabin crew as workers exposed to the same level of occupational risk as other aircrew must be reflected in all relevant areas, including social security, retirement schemes, and health and safety standards.

In conclusion, the STAVLA ruling marks a turning point in the recognition of cabin crew rights. It corrects a long-standing injustice, affirms the fundamental principle of equal treatment, and opens the way for a more coherent and equitable regulatory framework in European aviation. EurECCA reiterates its full support for its Spanish affiliate and reaffirms its commitment to pursuing this momentum at European level to ensure that all cabin crew benefit from the rights, protections, and recognition they deserve.

**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 50,000 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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