



Brussels, 21-05-2026

EurECCA's contribution to the European Commission call for evidence supporting the competitiveness and global leadership of the European aviation and aeronautical industries

The European Cabin Crew Association (EurECCA), the largest independent association representing cabin crew professionals across Europe, welcomes the European Commission's initiative to strengthen the competitiveness and global leadership of the European aviation and aeronautical industries.

As aviation is a strategic sector for Europe's economy, connectivity, sovereignty and employment, any future aviation strategy must recognise that competitiveness cannot be built solely on industrial performance, technological innovation or environmental transition. It must also be grounded in high and strong social standards, fair working conditions and the protection of aviation professionals who ensure the daily functioning, safety and resilience of the sector.

Cabin crew are frontline aviation professionals responsible not only for passenger service, but above all for safety, security, emergency response and operational continuity. They are certified safety professionals responsible for emergency procedures, onboard security, medical incidents, evacuation management, dangerous goods awareness and passenger protection in increasingly complex operational environments. At the same time, they are among the workers most exposed to the consequences of deregulated competition, fragmented employment models and social dumping practices within the European aviation market.

For EurECCA, Europe's global leadership in aviation can only be sustainable if social sustainability is treated with the same importance as environmental and economic sustainability.

1. Building competitiveness through fair competition and high social standards

The future competitiveness of European aviation must not be based on a race to the bottom in labour standards. Over the last decade, the European aviation market has increasingly witnessed business models built around labour arbitrage rather than genuine operational efficiency.

Wet leasing and ACMI operations have expanded significantly, often without sufficient social safeguards or effective oversight. Temporary agency work, brokered contracts, bogus self-employment schemes and abusive posting arrangements have become widespread tools to reduce labour costs and bypass national labour protections. In some cases, cabin crews are forced to bear the costs of mandatory training or are employed through structures specifically designed to avoid stronger social legislation.

These practices distort competition within the Single Aviation Market and place socially responsible airlines at a disadvantage. Airlines that respect collective labour agreements, national labour law and social dialogue cannot continue to compete against operators relying on legal fragmentation and social dumping.

The level playing field referred to by the Commission must therefore also apply to social standards, and not only to environmental obligations or market access rules.



EurECCA believes that legislation and oversight shopping must become impossible within the European aviation market. The “home base” principle concept must remain the determining factor for the applicable labour and social security legislation. Greater scrutiny of wet leasing practices is essential, and the misuse of ACMI operations to circumvent labour protections must be addressed through stronger European legislation.

Europe should also ensure that universal human rights are integrated into aviation external policy. Landing rights should not be granted to carriers operating from countries where basic human rights, labour rights and union rights are not guaranteed. Fair competition cannot exist without respect for fundamental rights.

Europe cannot achieve strategic autonomy in aviation while progressively weakening its own aviation workforce through precarious employment models and social fragmentation. A resilient and competitive aviation sector requires stable, skilled and socially protected aviation professionals.

2. Strengthening labour protection, occupational health and mental health

The Commission correctly identifies labour challenges and the attractiveness of aviation professions as a strategic issue for the future of the sector. EurECCA strongly welcomes this recognition.

However, aviation is increasingly facing difficulties in attracting and retaining professionals because working conditions have deteriorated considerably over recent years. Unstable rosters, precarious contracts, fatigue-inducing scheduling practices, forced geographical mobility and weak social protection are discouraging younger generations from entering or remaining in the profession.

This is not merely a recruitment problem. It is a structural quality-of-employment problem.

Behind every discussion on competitiveness, digitalisation or operational efficiency, there are cabin crews facing increasing pressure, chronic fatigue, irregular lifestyles and growing psychosocial risks. The long-term sustainability of European aviation depends not only on infrastructure and technology, but also on the physical and mental sustainability of its workforce.

The European Labour Authority (ELA) should therefore be significantly strengthened and become the central overseeing agency for mobile aircrew regarding the determination and enforcement of applicable labour and social legislation.

Furthermore, the social dimension of aviation should no longer be dictated exclusively by Flight Time Limitations (FTL). The European Working Time Directive for aircrew 2000/79/EC must be revised to ensure that cabin crew benefit from adequate social protection comparable to workers in other sectors.

Occupational health and safety protection also remains insufficient. Aircraft are still not recognised as workplaces under the general framework of Directive 89/391/EEC, creating major legal and practical gaps in protection for cabin crew working onboard aircraft.

Cabin crew are exposed daily to risks linked to fatigue, irregular schedules, cabin air quality, fume events, disruptive passengers, infectious diseases, reproductive health risks and psychological stress. The COVID-19 crisis clearly demonstrated that aircraft are workplaces and that cabin crew are essential transport workers requiring robust occupational health protection.



Cabin crew are also increasingly exposed to psychosocial risks linked to unpredictable schedules, operational pressure, social insecurity and extended periods away from home and family life. Mental health must therefore become a central pillar of European aviation policy and occupational safety frameworks.

As cabin crew remains a highly feminised profession, aviation social policies must also better address gender-related occupational risks, including reproductive health, maternity protection, harassment prevention and work-life balance.

EurECCA therefore calls for a dedicated European directive specifically addressing occupational health and safety in airborne workplaces. Hygiene standards, onboard safety conditions, protection against fume events and mental health protection must become integral components of the future aviation strategy.

3. Ensuring compliance, enforcement and independent oversight

European aviation legislation can only be effective if it is properly enforced. One of the major weaknesses of the current system is the unequal implementation and enforcement of European rules among Member States and operators.

National Aviation Authorities and airlines must fully comply with European social and safety standards. Oversight authorities should be adequately resourced and held accountable for effective enforcement.

EurECCA also believes that EASA's independence must be fully guaranteed. Regulatory authorities responsible for safety oversight should not become financially dependent on the industries they supervise, as this may create conflicts of interest and undermine public confidence.

In parallel, stronger measures are required to combat corruption risks linked to Comprehensive Air Transport Agreements (CATAs) and aviation market access negotiations.

The role of trade unions and collective bargaining must also be protected. Across Europe, union busting practices continue to undermine social dialogue within aviation. All cabin crews' representatives must be recognised as essential partners in building a sustainable and resilient aviation industry.

4. Safety cannot be separated from social conditions

Aviation safety and working conditions are deeply interconnected. Safety cannot be treated independently from the socioeconomic realities experienced by aviation professionals.

Social dumping is not only a labour issue. It is also a safety issue. Excessive fatigue, precarious employment, fear of reporting safety concerns and economic pressure on crew members directly affect the safety culture upon which European aviation is built.

Fatigue remains one of the most serious operational risks affecting aviation safety today. EurECCA believes that functioning and independently monitored Fatigue Risk Management Systems (FRMS) should become mandatory throughout the industry. Commercial pressure must never override operational safety.

The relationship between social conditions and aviation safety must also be formally recognised in European policy-making. Reports identifying links between safety risks and socioeconomic factors should be published without delay, and concrete corrective actions should become mandatory.



A stronger safety culture is also needed across the sector. Cabin crew and other aviation professionals must be able to report safety concerns directly to relevant authorities through non-punitive and independent reporting systems without fear of retaliation.

Safety culture cannot exist where workers fear disciplinary consequences for reporting operational risks.

Cabin crew are increasingly confronted with disruptive passenger behaviour, verbal abuse, physical aggression and situations linked to alcohol, drugs or mental distress onboard aircraft. These realities must be recognised as occupational safety risks requiring coordinated European action.

5. Managing digitalisation and artificial intelligence responsibly

The Commission highlights the importance of digitalisation and AI deployment across aviation. EurECCA supports technological innovation where it genuinely improves safety, operational efficiency and passenger experience.

However, digitalisation must remain human-centred.

AI-driven management systems, algorithmic rostering, biometric technologies and automated performance monitoring systems raise significant concerns regarding privacy, fatigue management, transparency and workers' rights. Technology must support aviation professionals rather than replace operational judgment or increase workplace pressure.

Cabin crew are safety professionals whose human expertise, situational awareness and emergency response capabilities remain irreplaceable. Human oversight must remain central to aviation operations.

6. Building European resilience and strategic autonomy

The Commission rightly identifies resilience and strategic autonomy as essential objectives for the future of European aviation.

For EurECCA, resilience must be understood not only in technological or industrial terms, but also in geopolitical, energy and human terms.

Europe should ensure sufficient production capacity for both conventional jet fuel and Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF) within the European Union in order to reduce external dependencies and strengthen strategic autonomy.

Geostrategic risks should also play a greater role in aviation external relations and market access negotiations. When negotiating Comprehensive Air Transport Agreements, the European Union should carefully assess the long-term consequences for European connectivity, resilience and fair competition before granting additional landing rights.

EurECCA also believes that the EU must respond firmly to situations of unfair competition linked to geopolitical distortions. Some third-country operators benefiting from routes crossing Russian Federation airspace while European airlines remain excluded from such access create serious market distortions that undermine fair competition.

Strategic autonomy cannot coexist with structural competitive imbalances.



At the same time, Europe's aviation resilience also depends on maintaining a skilled, experienced and motivated workforce capable of responding to crises and ensuring operational continuity under difficult circumstances. During the COVID-19 crisis, geopolitical disruptions and major operational emergencies, cabin crew played a central role in maintaining passenger safety and the continuity of European air transport operations.

Conclusion

EurECCA strongly supports a new European aviation strategy that protects competitiveness, accelerates innovation and strengthens Europe's industrial leadership.

However, Europe must avoid repeating the mistakes of the past decade, where competitiveness was too often pursued through labour fragmentation and downward social pressure.

The future of European aviation must be built on three inseparable pillars: industrial excellence, environmental sustainability and social justice.

Cabin crew stand at the intersection of all three.

Europe cannot claim global leadership in aviation while tolerating social dumping, precarious work, weakened occupational health protection and deteriorating working conditions for the professionals who guarantee passenger safety every day.

A strong aviation sector requires strong aviation workers.

Europe's aviation future will not be secured solely in factories, boardrooms or technological laboratories. It will also be secured onboard aircraft, every day, by the aviation professionals who guarantee safety, security, operational continuity and passenger confidence across Europe and beyond.

Protecting cabin crew means protecting the resilience, safety and future competitiveness of European aviation itself.

For EurECCA, the future competitiveness of European aviation depends not only on what Europe builds, but also on how Europe treats those who keep aviation flying.

EurECCA stands for fair skies and fair work

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.

EurECCA European Cabin Crew Association AISBL
Avenue Louise 143/4
1050 Brussels, Belgium

www.eurecca.eu
contact@eurecca.eu