Brussels, 09 November 2026

EurECCA Position Paper

EU Sustainable Tourism Strategy putting Cabin Crew at the heart of European sustainability

Response to the European Commission Communication COM(2026) 777 final

1. A European ambition that must also be a social ambition

The European Cabin Crew Association (EurECCA) welcomes the publication of the European Commission's EU Sustainable Tourism Strategy, which recognises tourism as a strategic asset for Europe's competitiveness, prosperity, resilience and international influence.

The Strategy rightly acknowledges that tourism is much more than an economic activity. It connects people, supports regional development, sustains communities and embodies the European principles of freedom of movement, diversity and openness.

However, a truly sustainable European tourism model cannot be measured solely through economic performance, environmental achievements or visitor satisfaction. Its credibility must also be assessed through the treatment of the people whose work makes tourism possible.

There can be no sustainable tourism without sustainable employment.

For Europe's Cabin crew, this principle is particularly relevant.

Every day, thousands of Cabin Crew connect European regions, support tourism, facilitate mobility and contribute directly to the safety, accessibility and quality of the travelling experience.

Yet the social dimension of this essential contribution remains insufficiently recognised in European aviation policy.

EurECCA believes that the new Tourism Strategy offers an important opportunity to correct this imbalance and ensure that social sustainability becomes an integral part of Europe's ambitions for tourism and connectivity.

2. The missing link between tourism competitiveness and aviation employment

The Commission identifies seamless and sustainable connectivity as a fundamental condition for Europe's tourism competitiveness. It also announces the revision of the Air Services Regulation and refers to the forthcoming renewed EU Aviation Strategy.

These initiatives cannot be considered independently of the social conditions underpinning European air transport.

Over the past decades, liberalisation has transformed European aviation, generating new opportunities for connectivity, mobility and economic development. However, it has also exposed weaknesses in the European regulatory framework, particularly where competition between airlines increasingly intersects with different national employment systems and social protection arrangements.

For Cabin Crew, the consequences can include legal uncertainty, fragmented employment relationships, artificial employment structures and difficulties enforcing applicable social rights.

The expansion of atypical employment arrangements, the misuse of employment agencies, complex wet-leasing operations and fictitious home bases illustrate the risks arising when economic integration develops faster than effective social safeguards.

These practices should not be regarded as inevitable consequences of competition.

They reveal a fundamental political question: What kind of competitiveness does Europe wish to promote?

A European aviation market that rewards regulatory arbitrage and the reduction of employment protections cannot provide a credible foundation for a socially sustainable tourism industry.

EurECCA therefore calls on the European Commission to ensure that the revision of Regulation (EC) No 1008/2008 and the renewed EU Aviation Strategy fully reflect the social objectives of the Sustainable Tourism Strategy.

This includes establishing clearer responsibilities for airlines operating across borders, improving transparency regarding their actual operational presence and ensuring fair competition based on legitimate economic activity rather than differences in the enforcement of employment law.

At the same time, existing European ownership and effective control requirements must be preserved. These rules remain an important element of the European aviation regulatory framework and should not be weakened in the pursuit of greater market openness.

European competitiveness must be built on fair competition, not social dumping.

3. Sustainability begins with the health, safety and wellbeing of cabin crew

The Tourism Strategy places considerable emphasis on resilience, quality, innovation and the attractiveness of employment.

EurECCA supports these objectives but believes that their practical implementation requires a broader understanding of the challenges faced by aviation personnel.

Cabin crew work in a highly specific environment characterised by irregular schedules, disrupted circadian rhythms, night duties, prolonged periods of fatigue, exposure to occupational hazards and increasing psychosocial pressures.

Their workplace is the aircraft, an environment where occupational risks cannot always be addressed through the conventional mechanisms applicable to ground-based employment.

While European aviation safety regulations provide essential operational safeguards, aviation safety compliance must not be treated as a substitute for occupational health and safety protection or social employment rights.

EurECCA has consistently advocated for a dedicated European occupational health and safety framework for aircrew under Directive 89/391/EEC, taking account of the unique characteristics of their working environment.

Such an approach would allow the European Union to address more effectively issues including fatigue, occupational exposure, cabin air contamination and fume events, mental health, psychosocial risks and the long-term consequences of irregular working patterns.

It would also reinforce the Commission’s broader ambitions concerning quality employment and the prevention of occupational risks.

A tourism model that promises high standards of safety, quality and resilience for passengers must apply equally ambitious standards to those responsible for delivering these services.

The health and wellbeing of cabin crew are not secondary considerations. They are fundamental components of a sustainable European aviation system.

4. From the Quality Jobs agenda to genuine social sustainability

EurECCA welcomes the recognition within the Tourism Strategy that fair working conditions, collective bargaining and social dialogue are essential to attracting and retaining skilled personnel.

This recognition is particularly significant in the context of the Commission's Quality Jobs agenda and the Fair Labour Mobility Package.

However, political commitments must translate into practical improvements.

For Cabin Crew, employment protection is frequently complicated by the cross-border nature of airline operations, differences in national labour legislation and uncertainty over the competent authorities responsible for enforcement.

The European Union must ensure that freedom of movement and the Single Market operate alongside effective and enforceable social rights.

This requires stronger cooperation between national authorities, a more effective European Labour Authority with clear responsibilities regarding civil aviation, and digital tools capable of improving the transparency and verification of employment and social security arrangements.

EurECCA therefore supports a coherent European approach combining fair labour mobility, effective enforcement and modernised regulatory instruments such as the European Social Security Pass.

These initiatives should be designed to reflect the realities of highly mobile sectors, including civil aviation.

At the same time, greater attention must be paid to the relationship between operational requirements and social working-time protections.

The protection of rest periods, the prevention of excessive working hours and the recognition of all work-related duties are essential both to cabin crew wellbeing and to the long-term resilience of the aviation workforce.

The Commission's ambition to improve the attractiveness of tourism employment cannot succeed if existing structural weaknesses in the organisation of work remain unaddressed.

5. A just environmental transition must also protect employment

EurECCA recognises the importance of reducing the environmental impact of tourism and supports the European Union's objective of developing a cleaner, more efficient and more resilient transport system.

The environmental transformation of aviation is necessary. However, it must also be socially responsible.

Technological innovation, new operational models, changes in connectivity and the evolution of consumer behaviour will progressively reshape the European aviation industry.

These transformations will affect not only airlines and their business models but also the people they employ.

A successful transition must therefore anticipate its social consequences, support workforce adaptation and ensure that the costs of environmental transformation are not disproportionately transferred to cabin crew.

Training, professional development, meaningful consultation and the protection of employment standards must form part of the transition process.

The social and environmental dimensions of sustainability should reinforce one another rather than compete.

Europe cannot credibly defend a sustainable tourism model if environmental progress is accompanied by deteriorating employment conditions. A green transition that leaves the workforce behind is not a just transition.

6. Giving Cabin Crew a voice in Europe's tourism future

The Commission's proposal to establish a high-level EU Tourism Alliance represents an opportunity to strengthen cooperation across the tourism ecosystem.

EurECCA welcomes this initiative and the intention to bring together institutions, businesses, regional authorities and other stakeholders to guide the implementation of the Strategy.

However, the legitimacy of such a governance structure will depend on its ability to reflect the diversity of those contributing to European tourism. Air transport is an essential component of the tourism ecosystem, and Cabin Crew are among its most visible representatives.

Their experience provides valuable insight into the practical realities of passenger mobility, operational resilience, accessibility, employment conditions and the quality of services.

EurECCA therefore considers that Cabin Crew representatives should be directly involved in the relevant consultations, working groups and governance mechanisms established under the Tourism Strategy.

A European tourism policy that seeks to become more inclusive must ensure that the people working across the sector have a meaningful opportunity to shape its future.

Cabin Crew must not simply be recognised as contributors to European tourism. They must be recognised as stakeholders in its development.

7. EurECCA's call for a coherent European approach

The Sustainable Tourism Strategy provides the European Union with an opportunity to develop a more integrated vision of economic prosperity, environmental responsibility and social progress.

EurECCA calls on the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council to ensure that this ambition is reflected consistently across the EU's forthcoming legislative and policy initiatives.

1. A genuine social dimension in the revised Air Services Regulation and renewed EU Aviation Strategy, ensuring that market competitiveness does not come at the expense of employment rights or fair competition.

2. The recognition of Cabin Crew occupational health and safety as a European policy priority, including the development of a specific framework reflecting the unique characteristics of the aircraft as a workplace.

3. Effective application of the Quality Jobs agenda and the Fair Labour Mobility Package to civil aviation, addressing cross-border employment complexity and strengthening enforcement.

4. A socially responsible environmental transition, supported by meaningful consultation, training and appropriate employment safeguards.

5. Direct and meaningful participation of Cabin Crew representatives in the implementation of the EU Sustainable Tourism Strategy, including relevant activities of the future EU Tourism Alliance.

These objectives should not be viewed as additional constraints on European competitiveness.

They are essential conditions for making European competitiveness durable, legitimate and consistent with the Union's social model.

Conclusion — The Europe we want to connect

Europe's strength as a global tourism destination is not merely the result of its infrastructure, geographical diversity or economic attractiveness.

It also reflects the quality of its services, the professionalism of its workforce and the values that distinguish the European social model.

Cabin Crew contribute to this European identity every day.

They connect people, cultures, regions and communities. They represent Europe to millions of passengers while carrying out essential responsibilities for safety, security and passenger wellbeing.

The European Union now has an opportunity to ensure that the future of tourism reflects the same principles of fairness, dignity and solidarity that it seeks to promote internationally.

For EurECCA, the central question is not simply how Europe can attract more visitors or increase the competitiveness of its tourism industry.

It is whether Europe is prepared to build a tourism model in which economic success, environmental responsibility and social progress advance together.

Sustainable tourism must not be defined only by how people travel, but also by how the people who make travel possible are treated.

That is the European vision EurECCA stands for.

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 across Europe. EurECCA is composed of cabin crew unions from EU Member States and neighbouring countries and works on working conditions, wages, social protection and health and safety at work.

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