

Temporary relief from the slot utilisation rules at Community airports due to the COVID-19 pandemic

2020/0358(COD) - 16/12/2020 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to grant aviation stakeholders temporary relief from airport slot use requirements at Community airports for the summer 2021 scheduling season in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

PROPOSED ACT: Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: the European Parliament decides in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure and on an equal footing with the Council.

BACKGROUND: due to the decline in passenger demand caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, air carriers have made major changes to their schedules since 1 March 2020, which have resulted in a slot utilisation rate at coordinated airports falling far below the 80% threshold imposed by the Slot Regulation. This situation is likely to continue to negatively impact air carriers up to and including winter 2024/2025.

For the period starting after more than a year of waiving the ‘use-it-or-lose-it’ rule (from 1 February 2020 to 27 March 2021), which preserves air carriers’ 2019 grandfathered slots until the end of the winter 2021 /2022 scheduling season, the Commission proposes to establish a pathway to return to a normal application of the ‘use-it-or-lose-it’ rule.

The return to normal should not be sudden to avoid destabilising the aviation market to the detriment of air carriers, connectivity, EU consumers, and the environment. It should take place in line with future increases in traffic levels toward 2019 levels or by a stabilisation of air traffic to a new market situation.

CONTENT: the Commission proposes that from the start of the summer 2021 scheduling period, the normal application of the slot utilisation requirements of the Slot Regulation should reapply, but that the rate should be set at 40/60 % instead of 80/20 %.

Relief should be targeted at air carriers whose intention is to operate their grandfathered slots as soon as demand sufficiently recovers and flights are once again economically viable. Consequently, slot series newly allocated to an air carrier for the first time would not be covered by the planned relief.

The proposal foresees a deadline for air carriers to return unwanted slots to the coordinator if they want to benefit from the relief. A deadline of three weeks before the planned operational date for that slot would give airports and other airport service providers visibility on the required capacity and the volume of operations that they are expected to make available adequate infrastructure, facilities and staff.

The proposal also clarifies under what circumstances coordinators could withdraw slots from air carriers.

The Commission could adopt delegated acts to further extend the period during which the relief applies if the COVID-19 pandemic is not resolved and continues to have a negative impact on the air transport sector, including on historical grandfather rights.