

PRESS RELEASE

ECTAA welcomes the Commission's comprehensive package on travel and tourism but regrets its lack of ambition and leadership in taking concrete actions

Brussels, 13 May 2020. ECTAA welcomes the adoption of a comprehensive package on travel and tourism today. It recognises the 'dramatic impact' of covid-19 on the EU's tourism ecosystem and proposes a coordinated approach at European level for the resumption of travel and tourism and a long-term strategy for a more resilient and competitive tourism industry.

Said Pawel Niewiadomski, President of ECTAA: "A coordinated approach for the resumption of travel and tourism is necessary to lift blanket travel restrictions, apply non-discriminatory and proportionate health and safety standards for travel and tourism services to ensure safe travelling and thus boost consumer confidence in travel. Accurate and up-to-date information on accessibility of travel and tourism services in key as well. This is essential if we want to save the summer holiday season which is important for citizens, businesses and many economies".

Of particular importance in the package of measures adopted today for tour operators is the recommendation to Member States on vouchers proposed to customers as an alternative to reimbursement for cancelled package travel and transport services in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While ECTAA welcomes the efforts of the Commission to set principles for vouchers to safeguard consumer protection and has adopted a common approach for both transport and package travel, ECTAA regrets that the Commission has not been more ambitious and taken leadership in proposing legislative initiatives.

Said Pawel Niewiadomski: "The principles set out in the Recommendations are very commendable, but what good are they, if Member States are not required to follow them? Today we have already a patchwork of different initiatives across Europe, such as different sorts of vouchers, extended refund periods, state financed refund schemes, etc. Member States are three steps ahead of the Commission. The Recommendation is welcome but it is too little and too late."

ECTAA calls instead for a change of existing legislation to introduce these principles into law and enforce them to ensure high level of consumer protection for vouchers. Covid-19 pandemic is exceptional in every way, but we must acknowledge that such events could happen again in future, so we must review existing legislation and make it future-proof. Such review should not be limited to refund requirements and vouchers, but also the concept of full liability and unlimited assistance which is an incalculable and uninsurable risk in exceptional circumstances such as covid-19 where all travel is coming to a halt over a longer period.

ECTAA strongly welcomes that for the first time the Commission acknowledges the need for better consumer protection against airline failures. While this is only for vouchers, ECTAA will work with the Commission to flesh out a more concrete proposal for airline insolvency protection that would not only apply for vouchers issued in the covid-19 context but any ticket issued by airlines in normal times.

Concluded Pawel Niewiadomski: “We have no intention to deprive our customers from their rightful refunds. But when we do not get any refunds from our suppliers, then we must look at the best alternative solution, which are vouchers. They are refundable, flexible and, unlike reimbursement in money, protected against the insolvency of the travel company. We would really like to encourage customers to accept vouchers that meet these features, as they offer the highest protection in the current context”.

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Today, the European Commission adopted a Communication on Travel and Tourism together with four proposals. The aim of this package is to help European tourism overcome the disruptive effect of the COVID-19 pandemic through immediate relief measures, propose a coordinated approach for the resumption of travel and tourism as confinement measures are gradually lifted, and set a European strategy for recovery with a long-term vision to build a resilient and competitive tourism ecosystem. It also contains a Recommendation to member states on vouchers proposed to customers as an alternative to reimbursement for cancelled package travel and transport services in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

About ECTAA

ECTAA represents some 70,000 travel agents and tour operators in Europe, which provide consultancy and sell transport, accommodation, leisure and other tourism services as well as combined products to leisure and business customers.

For more information, please contact:

Mr Eric Drésin
Secretary General
ECTAA - Group of National Travel Agents' and Tour Operators' Associations within the EU
Rue Dautzenberg 36, B-1050 Brussels
Office tel: +32 2 644 34 50
e-mail: edresin@ectaa.eu