



Europäischer Wirtschaftssenat e.V.  
Wirtschaftskompetenz für Europa



Taxpayers Association  
of Europe

## Strengthening and preserving vital European regional air connectivity

**Air transport is essential to the connectivity of Europe's regions for social and economic cohesion.** It is part of the interrelated entities that constitute the regional ecosystem and plays a social role for communities in several mainland regions, outermost regions and islands, and also contributes to the economic development of those regions (increasing tourism, investment and employment).

**Regional carriers and regional airports have been hugely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.** Since 2020, several routes have been dropped as they are no longer financially viable and some regions – especially islands, outermost and peripheral – are facing significant problems due to the current lack of connectivity. At present, some domestic and regional routes are still at risk due to financial difficulties.

**Greater certainty about the conditions of travel is needed to restore passenger confidence.** The patchwork of national rules and the rhythm to which they continuously change make it impossible to plan, which is hugely detrimental for tourism and business alike. A co-ordinated EU roadmap to restart travel must be adopted swiftly, with the EU Digital COVID Certificate (DCC) modalities implemented in a coherent and consistent way across the whole of the EU.

**Adopt a specific approach and adapt constraints for regional air transport. There is the need to develop an effective EU policy to ensure proper connectivity in all regions, both for freight and passenger traffic, whilst fostering the sector's sustainability.** The policy should establish explicit air transport connectivity objectives between airlines and airports. Lowering airport visit costs (such as through public ownership or economic regulation) and ensuring effective airport charges for domestic services (lower landing charges, fuel discounts and so on) may incentivise airlines to deploy more domestic routes.

**Blanket bans on short-haul flights can harm regional connectivity, while not providing the intended environmental benefits and hampering the zero-carbon potential of the sector.** Such bans only make sense where indisputably better environmental alternatives are available. Aviation cannot be systematically replaced by high-speed trains due to a lack of rail infrastructure and uncompetitive connection times. Building the necessary rail infrastructure would come with its own CO<sub>2</sub> impacts, as well as damaging effects on wildlife habitats and local communities. Equally, short-haul flight will be the first to implement zero-carbon technologies and offer passengers a solution both in terms of climate change impact and connectivity.

**A review of the public service obligation (PSO) regime in Europe is needed.** PSO routes have to remain a key instrument for Europe's connectivity and social and economic cohesion. Maintaining these essential routes is vital for the future viability of regional airlines and the connectivity and services they provide for the communities they serve. This can be done by providing emergency PSO routes and reviewing the criteria (frequencies and other) for PSOs operated commercially prior to the crisis. Consideration needs to also be given to simplify and expedite the, currently slow, procedure for approving PSOs and to extend the current list of PSO routes.



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### **About Airport Regions Council (ARC)**

ARC is the association of regional and local authorities with an airport situated within or near their territories. ARC represents the interests of its members and brings together a wide range of expertise at the interface of airports and air transport with local and regional policies. A common concern is to maximise the benefits generated by airports and minimise their environmental impact in order to improve the life quality of citizens living nearby airports.

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### **About European Economic Senate (EES)**

The European Economic Senate (EES) is a European committee of selected, successful companies and personalities. In order to shape the future of Europe, they provide political decision-makers with their knowledge and experience in a dialogue based on partnership. The guiding principles of the EES are the "Social Market Economy" and the basic values of the "Honourable Businessman". As a European body, the EES faces the challenges of our time free of ideological or political constraints.

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### **About European Regions Airline Association (ERA)**

Founded in 1980, European Regions Airline Association (ERA) is a non-profit trade association representing over 50 airlines plus around other 150 companies involved in European air transport, and is the only association that bring together the entire spectrum of companies involved in European aviation. The association supports and defends the airline industry in providing safe, efficient and sustainable air connectivity to all regions of Europe. By lobbying European regulatory bodies on policy matters, ERA promotes and protects social responsibility, environmental sustainability and the development of regional economies and local communities.

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### **About Taxpayers Association (TAE)**

Taxpayers Association of Europe is a federation of 29 national taxpayers associations throughout Europe with more than one million members. It works towards a society with lower taxes and more individual freedom.

It wishes to stimulate efficiency and economy in the public sector.

It supports legislation to limit tax burdens, prevent unjust harassment by tax collectors, and provide clear information about government taxation and expenditure.

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