

Green (F)lying

The coordinated enforcement action by consumer groups in a nutshell


What is the alert about? What are the identified infringements?

Aviation is the most carbon-intensive mode of transport as well as Europe's fastest growing source of emissions. In a move to appear "greener", airlines are making climate-related marketing claims (also called "carbon offsetting claims") calling on consumers to compensate, offset or neutralise the CO2 emissions of their flights. We believe that these practices are misleading and deceptive for consumers under the EU rules on unfair commercial practices (Directive 2005/29/EC), and amount to greenwashing. While consumers are led to believe that their flights are "carbon neutral" or "compensated", the projects in which airlines invest in correspond in no way to the climate damage caused by the CO2 emissions of the flights.

Who is behind the alert?

22 consumer groups from 18 countries take part in this action coordinated by BEUC.

BEUC members taking part in the coordinated action



The image displays a map of Europe with 22 consumer group logos arranged around it, representing 18 countries. The logos are as follows:

- AK** ÖSTERREICH
- testachats**
- !ACTIVE CONSUMERS**
- FORBRUGERRÅDET**
- tænK**
- KULUTTAJALIITTO KONSUMENTFÖRBUNDET**
- CLCV** CONSOMMATION LOUWEMENT ET CADRE DE VIE *Cherchez la qualité*
- UFQUE CHOISIR**
- DECO**
- S.P.S.** SPOLOČNOST OCHRANY SPOTREBITEĽOV
- ZPS** ZVEZA POTROŠNIKOV SLOVENIJE
- cecu**
- OCU** la fuerza de tus decisiones
- frc** FÉDÉRATION ROMANDE DES CONSOMMATEURS *Activement à vos côtés.*
- verbraucherzentrale Bundesverband**
- E.K.Π.Ο.Ι.Ζ.ω.** ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΟΡΓΑΝΩΣΗ ΠΡΟΣΤΑΣΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΑΣΦΑΛΕΙΑΣ ΤΗΣ ΚΑΤΑΝΑΛΩΣΗΣ
- Tudatos Vásárlók**
- ALTROCONSUMO** Il tuo punto di forza
- FORBRUKERÅDET**
- fk** Federacja Konsumentów
- Fundacja Konsumentów**
- SVERIGES KONSUMENTER** THE SWEDISH CONSUMERS ASSOCIATION
- asufin** ASOCIACIÓN DE USUARIOS FINANCIEROS

Who are the airlines targeted by this alert?

We reported claims used by 17 airlines¹ that are operating across Europe, including Europe's top 10 (part of Ryanair, Lufthansa Group, Wizz Air, Vueling, SAS or Air France/KLM). However, the problem doesn't stop at these airlines, it is a sectoral one.

To which authorities is the alert sent?

BEUC and its members have sent an external alert to the European network of national consumer authorities (CPC-Network), which is coordinated by the European Commission. This possibility is foreseen under EU Regulation 2017/2394. The BEUC network used this tool several times in the past ([see this page](#)) to report EU wide infringements of consumer rules. In parallel, BEUC members also reached out to their national authorities to inform them.

What are we asking authorities to do?

We urge authorities to send a clear and strong signal to the concerned airlines and the entire aviation sector that they must stop misleading consumers through climate-related marketing claims. Whereas airlines may invest in climate-protection projects, consumers should be clearly informed that the latter cannot be viewed as neutralising or compensating flights' emissions. Airlines must be transparent that flying is not sustainable and will not be so in the near future.

Where airlines proposed consumers to pay extra fees for greener fares, we also call on the authorities to request airlines to reimburse them. If the amounts are small and the concerned consumers cannot be easily identified, the unduly received fees should be dedicated to an environmental or consumer protection cause.

Beyond the action: policy recommendations to address greenwashing and to support sustainable mobility

Beyond this coordinated enforcement action, some policy changes are needed for the green transition:

- *On tackling greenwashing/misleading green claims:*
 - Carbon neutral claims should be explicitly banned in the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive (via the proposal for a Directive on Empowering Consumers in the Green Transition).
 - Commission should define high-integrity offsets with robust quality criteria (real added value of the offsetting project, no adverse environmental effect, permanence, etc), which go beyond the proposed Carbon Removals Certification Framework.

- *On sustainable mobility:*
 - Until at least the end of the next decade, there will not be any massively available technology to decarbonise aviation. The only way to decrease emissions from the aviation sector is therefore to curb demand.²
 - Promote alternatives to planes for trips shorter than 1,500 to 2,000 km. Increase investments to develop a much denser network of high-speed trains and night trains, while increasing the frequency and service quality of cross-border rail connections.

¹ In alphabetical order: Air Baltic, Air Dolomiti, Air France, Austrian, Brussels Airlines, Eurowings, Finnair, KLM, Lufthansa, Norwegian, Ryanair, SAS, SWISS, TAP, Volotea, Vueling, Wizz Air.

² Even with continued improvements in aircraft technology and operations efficiency, the aviation sector could emit three times more GHG in 2050 than it does today (see: https://theicct.org/sites/default/files/publications/Alternative_fuel_aviation_briefing_20190109.pdf)

- Correct price signals: the fuel tax exemption for airlines needs to be ended and a European-wide kerosene tax should be introduced of which revenues could be used to fund more sustainable alternatives such as cross-border rail connections.

