

Broken aviation complaints system favours the interests of airlines over passengers: Which?

Which? has recently criticised Ryanair compensation arrangements.

Nowadays, airlines are able to pick and choose between schemes which suits them. It can result in different results for the victim passengers.

According to Which?, a major overhaul of aviation complaints is needed. All airlines should be made to sign up to a single dispute resolution service that makes binding decisions within a reasonable timeframe.

The situation arose because of one recent Ryanair's behaviour.

Which? has disclosed that Ryanair was asked to pay more than £3.6 million in handling fees and compensation in 2018. But it quit the aviation complaints body which later became a controversial decision.

Ryan Air's Hidden Charges

Jan 2006	Jun 2008	Oct 2009	Nov 2013	Sep 2016	Oct 2016	Jun 2017	Jan 2018	Nov 2018
Charges £2.50 per bag for checked luggage	£4 Priority Boarding charge introduced	£5 online check-in fee or face a £40 airport charge	Passengers pay £5 to choose seats	'Family tax' enforces £4 charge to reserve under 12s' seats – an airline first	Airport check-in rises to £45 and timeframe shortens	Seat reservation costs up to £15 or risk being split up	Passengers who do not pay £6 for priority boarding are no longer allowed to board with two pieces of hand luggage	Non-priority customers must pay £8 for their 10kg hand luggage and leave it at bag drop, or face a £25 charge at gate

Rise in Revenue

£79m
2003

£518m
2009

£1.7b
2018

With such ostrich like actions, airlines shirk their responsibilities towards their passengers. Ryanair may apparently have saved millions for itself – but it invites a huge loss in its credibility. It leaves its passengers jumping from pillar to post to get the compensation they deserve. This happens when Ryanair like airlines refuse to pay out when their flights are delayed or cancelled.

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The aviation world has recently seen airlines go bankrupt one after another. A given airline has to go through a number of difficulties like strikes, bad weather, maintenance issues, bird-hits, delays and stiff competition. Besides, airlines regularly undergo a plethora of other financial problems. But, they are all well-known risk factors. The due cover must have been envisaged before undertaking an airline business.

Most of the largest airlines flying from the UK are signed up to one of two UK schemes, Aviation ADR or CEDR. Although both

have been authorised to handle escalated passenger complaints, none of these have become mandatory since 2016.

In the first 11 months of 2018, Aviation ADR received more than 14,000 Ryanair complaints and the airline was told to pay out more than £2.6 million to passengers in compensation between October 2018 and the end of March 2019, according to the most recent complaints data.

Ryanair also had to pay at least £75 for each complaint Aviation ADR handled – suggesting a bill for more than £1 million in fees alone during 2018.

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But after Ryanair cut ties with the arbitration scheme at the end of November 2018, only 553 passengers in total pursued claims with the Civil Aviation Authority in the following four months – resulting in a huge saving in fees and compensation for Ryanair. It can not be compelled to pay out even if the aviation regulator finds the ruling in a passenger's favour.

As of April 2019, 466 of these claims were unresolved and official figures do not reveal if anyone had received compensation.

Even when Ryanair was with Aviation ADR, passengers complained of waiting as long as a year to receive any money – despite a pledge that claims would be processed within 90 days.

Which? has suggested the aviation sector to have a single mandatory resolution scheme which handles complaints swiftly and has some real power to implement.

This will possibly put an end to the current damaging behaviour.

Until these changes are made, it will continue to be far too easy for airlines like Ryanair to get away from promptly refunding consumers who are left out of pocket through no

fault of their own.

Rory Boland, Which? Travel editor said: "The broken aviation complaints system allows them to wriggle out of paying compensation and putting many people off claiming at all. The uphill struggle that many have faced trying to claim the compensation they are owed has left thousands of holidaymakers significantly out of pocket for delayed and cancelled flights. It demonstrates why all airlines must be made to sign up to a single resolution scheme with real power to ensure passengers are treated fairly and money is paid out where it's due."

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