

# Airlines must treat passengers better when flights disrupted, say regulators

Regulators have told airlines that they must treat passengers better when dealing with disruption.

In a joint letter to carriers, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) and the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) said passengers “could experience significant harm unless airlines meet their obligations”.

They said some airlines were not doing enough to avoid “engaging in one or more harmful practices”.

These include selling more tickets for flights “than they can reasonably expect to supply”, not always “fully satisfying obligations” to offer flights on alternative airlines to passengers affected by cancellations, and failing to give consumers “sufficiently clear and upfront information about their rights”.

The letter said the CMA and CAA will continue to monitor airlines and that they “share consumer protection law enforcement powers”.

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It comes as airlines continue to axe flights, adding to the tens of thousands that have already been cancelled in recent months.

One of the main reasons is staff shortages – many aviation workers were let go during the early months of the coronavirus pandemic, while travel was severely restricted.

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Passengers have been left paying the price, with long queues, luggage problems, and flight delays and cancellations.

The CMA and CAA said airlines should “not continue marketing tickets for flights if they cannot be reasonably confident they will go ahead”.

If a flight is cancelled, airlines that cannot offer a “timely replacement” must give passengers the option of flying with another carrier, the letter said.

Some carriers have been asking passengers to make their own arrangements in these situations but the watchdogs said that some passengers do not have the ability to do this.

“We urge airlines operating this practice to quickly put in place mechanisms for these consumers to ensure re-routing is a viable option for them,” the letter said.

Passengers’ rights must be “presented clearly”, and they “should not be required to hunt for such information”, they added.

Rocio Concha, Which? director of policy and advocacy, said: “It’s good to see regulators setting out their concerns and raising the prospect of enforcement action, but we know they have limited powers to effectively hold airlines to account when they break the rules.

“Passengers need the CAA to be more proactive in its approach to enforcement. To help with that, the government must give the aviation regulator powers to fine airlines directly when they step out of line.”