

For immediate release

UK ECC reports a surge in airline flight cancellation advice

The UK European Consumer Centre (UK ECC) has received a record number of enquiries in the last 48 hours with over 1000 consumers seeking its expertise and advice in relation to airline flight cancellations. This is the biggest influx of consumer enquiries since the 2010 Icelandic volcanic ash cloud chaos.

Ryanair, based in Ireland, is required by European legislation to offer a refund or rerouting because of the cancellation of their flights and it is up to the consumer to determine which solution is best suited to their circumstances and needs.

From the enquiries received by the UK ECC, it's clear that airlines are asking consumers to take vouchers for future flights instead of issuing refunds and where a refund is requested the airline suggest this may take months to process. If choosing the latter consumers should not rely on legislation stating this should be done within seven days and will have to wait for their refund or take the airline to court.

The UK ECC suggest that with the current difficulties being caused by COVID-19 complications, consumers should consider the unique situation the global pandemic presents and be mindful that if they were to opt for the court route, the process may take months to complete. Thought should be given to whether the time and trouble of pursuing such a complaint via courts is balanced against the inconvenience of accepting a voucher.

For those that still wish to seek refunds, they must do so within six weeks and must retain proof of sending communications with the airline either via email or through recorded delivery as proof of postal communication.

Those affected should also consider looking into refunds via insurers and may be able to claim from their credit card company or bank if there is proof of a breach of contract, although the consumer will only be entitled to be reimbursed once.

In response to this, CTSI Chief Executive, Leon Livermore, is urging airlines to treat consumers quickly and reasonably: "When it comes to flight cancellations, I fully understand consumer frustration. Now more than ever, people may need a refund depending on their varying personal circumstances. For instance, some will have lost their jobs, others may be high risk and are forced to isolate while some may have lost their living as they are self-employed and need their money back for food, essential shopping and to pay their bills."

"With current travel restrictions, it is unreasonable to hold the monies when consumers have no idea when they will be allowed to travel again to redeem them."

He added: "We all recognise the difficulties faced by businesses in the face of such an unprecedented event especially when having to process large numbers of cancellations. Consumers should take this into account and consider a compromise where possible. Opting for other routes of redress if available should also be considered."

Director of UK ECC, Andy Allen, noted: "Since leaving the EU the existence and future of our Centre has been under threat but this dramatic rise in consumers seeking our help shows the immense value of the service we are offering. Whilst our advisors had to adapt their methods and place of work due to social distancing measures, we are proud of this achievement. We will continue to help consumers and play our part in the resolution to some of their problems during these difficult and frightening times."

Anyone wishing to pursue a refund who is struggling to obtain a response from the airline should contact the UK European Consumer Centre by email to ecnet-uk@ec.europa.eu. Please include proof of your original booking, copies of letters or emails to the airline that demonstrates your attempt to resolve the issue and any responses from the airline, these must be supplied as scanned copies only, be mindful that a response from Ryanair may take up to 60 working days due to coronavirus.

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Editors notes

For press queries, email CTSI Press Office: pressoffice@tsi.org.uk

The Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI) is a training and membership organisation that has represented the interests of the trading standards profession since 1881, both nationally and internationally. It aims to raise the profile of the profession while working towards a safer, fairer, and better-informed society for consumers and businesses. CTSI's members deliver frontline trading standards services in local authorities. www.tradingstandards.uk.

The UK European Consumer Centre (UK ECC) is the UK-based specialist advice service for consumer disputes within Europe and has been hosted by the Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI) since 2008. A member of the European Consumer Centres Network, or ECC-Net, it plays a pivotal role in empowering consumers to confidently conduct business with European markets. Thanks to its diligent team, which handles an impressive 4,000 hours of calls yearly from concerned consumers, it is now recognised as one of the most prolific centres on the Network.