

Beyond the Statistics: *First-Hand Consumer Experiences of EC261 in Practice*

Euroconsumers' national members in Belgium, Italy, Spain, and Portugal operate dedicated consumer helplines — a direct line to the challenges passengers face in practice. The testimonies below are a small sample of what Altroconsumo, Testachats / Testaankoop, OCU, and DecoProteste hear every day.

Denied boarding due to overbooking despite confirmed check-in

A group of travellers, having completed their online check-in and received their boarding passes with assigned seats, were denied boarding at the gate. While they were already waiting in the boarding queue, their boarding passes were replaced with new ones bearing the mention "WL" (waiting list), and then **access to the aircraft was refused on grounds of overbooking.**

Rebooked on a flight departing six hours later, the passengers **attempted several times to contact the airline by email and phone, without ever receiving a response.** The airline classified the incident as a simple "delay," thus avoiding recognition of the denied boarding and the corresponding compensation.

Flight cancellation without explanation and a complete absence of response

A passenger scheduled to travel received, four days before departure, **a cancellation notification for his flight without any explanation.** The flight was rescheduled three days later, **causing additional costs** on site (transportation, meals, accommodation). Despite an immediate email to customer service, a request at the departure airport counter at the arrival airport, and an official complaint filed on the airline's website, the passenger received only a vague document mentioning "operational reason." **To date, no compensation has been paid and no clear response has been provided.**

€260 out of pocket, complaint disappeared

After a **flight was cancelled with less than two hours' notice**, passengers were offered a rerouting arriving 14 hours late, which they deemed unacceptable. They **made their own way home via taxi and Flixbus** from Berlin to Belgium, incurring nearly €260 in costs. A formal complaint was filed citing EC261.

The **airline never followed up, and the complaint later disappeared** entirely from the airline's own tracking system.

Contradictory information to justify the refusal of compensation

For a flight that arrived more than three hours late, the airline **invoked "unfavourable weather conditions" to refuse compensation**. However, another passenger on the same flight received a different message mentioning an "operational problem." **Official airport weather data indicated conditions compatible with departures**, and several other long-haul flights took off normally during the same time slot.

Despite these glaring contradictions and repeated requests for detailed evidence in accordance with European regulations, the **airline refused to provide the required proof** and only offered a goodwill gesture of 75 euros.

Excessive reimbursement delays and absence of follow-up

Following the cancellation of a flight just minutes before boarding, a passenger **provided all requested documentation for reimbursement** of her accommodation and transportation costs. Six months after her request, only meal costs (13.66 euros) have been reimbursed, while 324 euros in accommodation and transportation costs remain unpaid. Each contact with customer service results in the same response: "you will hear from us the following week," without this ever materialising. **Complaint emails remain unanswered**.

Left on board, left without answers or air conditioning

A family of four **endured a 5-hour delay on board due to an air conditioning** fault the captain acknowledged as the airline's responsibility. Babies were shirtless in the heat. **Despite the delay clearly meeting the EC261 threshold, the airline rejected the claim** — falsely attributing it to congested airspace. After months of unanswered chats and circular referrals, the family remains without compensation and without any clear path to redress.

Same journey, different justice

A couple missed their connecting flight due to a delay on the first leg, arriving over six hours late. One passenger received €400 compensation within weeks. The other — despite identical circumstances and the same booking — has received no response after months of follow-up calls and emails. **The airline split the booking without explanation, effectively creating a two-tier outcome for passengers on the same journey**.

Cancelled twice, compensated never

A passenger was rebooked twice on the day of travel, ultimately spending the night in Paris due to a second cancellation the airline never formally communicated. No hotel was provided and no assistance offered. The passenger paid out of pocket. **The airline subsequently closed the complaint as resolved — without having resolved it.**