



Press Release

RP4 Performance Plan Assessment: A Risk to Future Resilience in European ATM

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The Air Traffic Controllers European Unions Coordination (ATCEUC), the European Transport workers' Federation (ETF), the International Federation of Aeronautical Information Management Association (IFAIMA), the International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers' Associations (IFATCA), the International Federation of Air Traffic Safety Electronics Associations (IFATSEA) and the International Flight Information Service Association (IFISA) wish to express serious concerns regarding the European Commission's ongoing assessment of national performance plans under Reference Period 4 (RP4) of the Single European Sky (SES) framework.

ATCEUC, ETF, IFAIMA, IFATCA, IFATSEA and IFISA have identified a significant and unjustifiable risk: several States may be effectively prevented from increasing capacity at a time when demand is rising sharply, due to an inappropriate application of cost-efficiency targets. This approach threatens to undermine the overall performance, innovation, and resilience of the European Air Traffic Management (ATM) system—precisely when strengthening these elements is most critical.

Rising Demand and Emerging Threats: Come at a Cost!

The latest massive airplane orders and deployment, driven by societal demand for connectivity and mobility, lead not only to a steady growth but eventually a sharp increase of traffic in various areas of the European Network.

Meeting this demand, while ensuring the same or higher safety level, along with fulfilling the requirements set out in the European ATM Master Plan, requires forward-thinking investments rather than short-term cuts.

Some ANSPs have taken bold, proactive steps to prepare for the future—choosing the more difficult path of innovation, digitalisation, and enhanced service quality. Penalising them now for this vision by refusing key investments is short-sighted and counterproductive.

Innovation is not free. Cybersecurity threats are an undeniable reality, also driving urgent investments that the European vision for ATM rightly prioritizes at its core. Reducing or rejecting these costs, duly approved by National Supervisory Authorities and thoroughly discussed with key stakeholders, would force ANSPs to scale back or abandon essential initiatives. Such setbacks would seriously undermine Europe's ability to develop its competitiveness, maintain its leadership in air traffic management and to provide the essential air navigation services that underpin mobility, connectivity, and public benefit across the continent.

Prioritising Workforce Sustainability

The workforce is increasingly relied upon to compensate for structural shortfalls through overtime arrangements—a practice that may offer short-term flexibility but is not sustainable in the medium-long



run. Across Europe, air traffic controllers are facing high workloads, extended working hours, and persistent staffing challenges. This operating environment is contributing to rising levels of disengagement, fatigue and an observable increase in sickness-related absences, which in turn further strain service continuity and workforce resilience. Some trained professionals are even choosing to leave the profession entirely.

Compounding the problem is the lengthy and complex process of training new controllers. Becoming fully qualified can take several years, meaning that the consequences of recruitment delays or missteps yesterday and today will be felt well into the future. Mistakes made now—by underestimating future needs or curbing investment in staffing—will be difficult and costly to reverse.

Short-term efficiency must not blind us to the systemic risks this creates. Neglecting the sustainability of the workforce undermines the entire system's resilience.

Human performance is not optional—it is foundational to ATM/ATC safety and capacity.

Resilience Is Not Optional

ATM resilience is already under pressure. These vulnerabilities are not always visible—but they manifest in multiple, often unexpected ways.

Delaying investments, ignoring workforce signals, or undervaluing innovation adds risk to an already vulnerable system. Efficiency must be pursued, yes—but never at the expense of safety, stability and sustainability. Resilience is not a luxury—it is a strategic requirement, and it must be well funded and protected.

A Call for Responsibility

The European Commission assesses cost-efficiency targets based on the long-term and forecasted DUC (Determined Unit Cost) trend and benchmarking against similar providers. While an increase in DUC may be accepted if it stems from targeted investments to expand capacity, ATCEUC, ETF, IFAIMA, IFATCA, IFATSEA and IFISA urge a smart and balanced interpretation of what “expanding capacity” truly entails. Excluding training costs, staff resilience measures, and preparation for the anticipated wave of retirements from this possibility risks undermining workforce planning—a well-known scenario that has proven both highly counterproductive and unsafe in the past.

ATCEUC, ETF, IFAIMA, IFATCA, IFATSEA and IFISA call on the European Commission, and relevant stakeholders, to fully recognise the implications of their decisions during this critical assessment phase. We urge them to support, not undermine, the investments that will safeguard Europe's ATM system—its stability, its performance, its people, and its passengers—for the years to come.

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