

Unruly passenger incidents on the rise

- A Monitor Desk Report

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The International Air Transport Association (IATA) released a new analysis showing an increase in reported unruly passenger incidents in 2022 as compared to the previous year.

IATA called for more states to take the necessary authority to prosecute passengers under Montreal Protocol 2014 (MP14). The latest figures show that there was one unruly incident reported for every 568 flights in 2022, up from one per 835 flights in 2021. The most common categorizations of incidents in 2022 were non-compliance, verbal abuse and intoxication. Physical abuse incidents remain very rare, but these had an alarming increase of 61 per cent over 2021, occurring once every 17,200 flights.

“The increasing trend of unruly passenger incidents is worrying. Passengers and crew are entitled to a safe and hassle-free experience on board. For that, passengers must comply with crew instructions. While our professional crews are well-trained to manage unruly passenger scenarios, it is unacceptable that rules in place for everyone’s safety are disobeyed by a small but persistent minority of passengers. There is no excuse for not following the crew’s instructions,” said Conrad Clifford, IATA’s Deputy Director General said on Sunday.

Although non-compliance incidents initially fell after the mask mandates were removed on most flights, the frequency began to rise again throughout 2022 and ended the year some 37 per cent up in 2021. The most common examples of non-compliance were smoking of cigarettes, e-cigarettes, vapes and puff devices in the cabin or lavatories.

Failure to fasten seatbelts when instructed, exceeding the carry-on baggage allowance or failing to store baggage when required, consuming own alcohol on board and the Two-pillar strategy are some examples of unruly behaviour of the passengers.

A two-pillar strategy is in place for the needed zero-tolerance approach to unruly behaviour.

A possible solution is for the governments to have the necessary legal authority to prosecute unruly passengers, regardless of their state of origin and to have a range of enforcement measures that reflect the severity of the incident. Such powers exist in the Montreal Protocol 2014 (MP14), and IATA is urging all states to ratify this as soon as possible. To date, some 45 nations comprising 33 per cent of international passenger traffic have ratified MP14.

Various ways to prevent and de-escalate incidents, such as to prevent incidents through collaboration with industry partners on the ground (such as airports, bars and restaurants and duty-free shops), including awareness campaigns on the consequences of unruly behavior.

Additionally, sharing best practices, including training, for the crew could also help de-escalate such incident. A new guidance document was published at the beginning of 2022 featuring best practices for airlines and providing practical solutions to governments on public awareness, spot fines, and fixing jurisdiction gaps.

“In the face of rising unruly incident numbers, governments and the industry are taking more serious measures to prevent unruly passenger incidents. States are ratifying MP14 and reviewing enforcement measures, sending a clear message of deterrence by showing that they are ready to prosecute unruly behaviour,” said Clifford.

“For the industry’s part, there is greater collaboration. For example, as the vast majority of intoxication incidents occur from alcohol consumed prior to the flight, the support of airport bars and restaurants to ensure the responsible consumption of alcohol is particularly important,” he added.

“No one wants to stop people from having a good time when they go on holiday, but we all have a responsibility to behave with respect for other passengers and the crew. For the sake of the majority, we make no apology for seeking to crack down on the bad behaviour of a tiny number of travellers who can make a flight very uncomfortable for everyone else,” said Clifford.