

The European Aviation Safety Agency

The European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) is one of the EU's decentralised bodies. Based in Cologne, it has specific regulatory and executive tasks in the field of civil aviation safety and environmental protection. The Agency prepares draft rules, provides technical, scientific and administrative support, conducts standardisation inspections and investigations and certifies aviation products. The scope of its competences might be extended in the framework of the revision of its Basic Regulation, which the Commission has announced will form part of a wider package of proposals on aviation, anticipated for later this year.

Context

The route to establishing a European agency for aviation safety was opened, in the context of liberalisation, by the [Treaty on European Union](#) signed in 1992 which provided, for the first time, for 'measures to improve transport safety' in the EU. Before that, aviation safety was mainly the preserve of EU Member States, subject to their obligations as members of the International Civil Aviation Organization ([ICAO](#)).

The first common standards and procedures for aviation safety in the EU were developed in the group of European aviation regulators known as the Joint Aviation Authorities ([JAA](#)). JAA [worked](#) on the basis of minimum standards and voluntary coordination, which left ample room for national interests and diverging interpretations. This fed the debate on the need for a specific European agency. EASA was established by [Regulation](#) (EC) 1592/2002 and became operational in 2003.

Objectives and tasks

The Agency's [general objective](#) is to promote a high uniform level of safety and environmental protection in civil aviation in Europe. EASA participates in rulemaking, by preparing [draft](#) rules for consideration under the EU's legislative procedures, and providing the European Commission and the Member States with **technical, scientific and administrative support**. EASA monitors the uniform implementation of standards through **standardisation inspections** in the Member States. It collects data, analyses and research to improve aviation safety. It also assists the EU and the Member States in their relations with third countries.

The Agency participates in the **investigation** of aviation safety incidents. Recently, the Agency examined, for example, the preliminary conclusions of the investigations on the Germanwings plane crash which occurred on 24 March 2015. Based on the initial information that the co-pilot was, at the moment of the accident, alone in the cockpit and deliberately caused the plane to crash, the Agency published on 27 March a [temporary recommendation](#) to ensure that at least two crew are in the cockpit at all times during the flight.

Furthermore, the Agency has, along with national authorities, several operational tasks, such as **certification** of aviation products. EASA is responsible for safety and environmental type-certification of aircraft, engines and parts. Some other EU certificates (e.g. individual certificates for aircraft) continue to be issued, under EASA monitoring, by national authorities in the Member States.

Regulation (EC) 216/2008 (known as its [Basic Regulation](#)) which repealed Regulation (EC) 1592/2002 extended the scope of Community safety rules and the related EASA responsibilities to air operations, pilots' licences and safety of third-country aircraft flying into or from the EU. Furthermore, [Regulation](#) (EC) 1108/2009 extended EASA's rulemaking and standardisation role to the safety of aerodromes, air traffic management and air navigation services.

Structure and functioning

To [ensure](#) that the Agency can fulfil its objectives and tasks, it has technical, financial and legal autonomy. EASA is led by an Executive Director and by a Management Board made up of one representative from each

EU Member State, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland and one representative of the European Commission. Among other tasks, the Management Board adopts the Agency's work programme and annual general report, appoints the Executive Director (for a five-year term) and advises him on strategic development of aviation safety. Since 2013, the position of [Executive Director](#) has been held by Patrick Ky. The Agency's staff [consists](#) of more than 700 aviation experts and administrators.

The Agency is mainly financed from fees (paid for certificates issued by the Agency) and charges (for publications, training and other services provided by the Agency), as well as from contributions from the EU, third countries and the Member States. In 2014, EASA's budget was €162 million, with €34.2 million of this coming from the EU budget. The EU's total financial contribution for the 2014-20 financial period is [set](#) at €248.5 million. Every year, the European Court of Auditors (ECA) surveys the accounts and the legality of EASA's transactions. In [2014](#), ECA issued (for the financial year 2013) a positive statement of assurance therein, while calling to improve the transparency of outsourcing and to reduce the level of carry-over of committed appropriations.

The Agency works in close cooperation with the Commission, Member States and national aviation authorities (NAAs). Together they form the so-called '[EASA system](#)'. Additionally, the Member States involved in the EASA system are members of ICAO and thus have legal obligations under the [Chicago Convention](#). EASA also cooperates with [Eurocontrol](#) and aviation authorities outside the EU. Although the EASA system has in general been effective, it faces several challenges. Some consider that it is not sufficiently responsive to a market where innovative operations (e.g. drones) and business models (e.g. outsourcing and leasing) evolve quickly. Critics also claim that the system is too complex and that international-level responsibilities within the EASA system are sometimes unclear and scattered.

Recent and future developments

The EU has taken steps to improve the governance, efficiency and accountability of the EU's decentralised agencies, including EASA. In 2012, the EU adopted the [Common Approach](#) and the [Roadmap](#) with concrete timetables for the revision of EU agencies. In 2014, the Commission started the relevant impact assessment work and supporting studies and held, as too did EASA, a [public stakeholder consultation](#) on the revision of EASA's Basic Regulation. Although most respondents [found](#) that the level of aviation safety in the EU is very high, they also saw the need to revise EASA's Basic Regulation. They called, for instance, to accommodate, drones, multinational operations, outsourcing and leasing in the current framework and make the present regulatory system more proportionate and less costly. The legislative proposal on the [revision](#) of EASA's Basic Regulation is expected to be presented within an Aviation Package by the end of 2015.

Drawing on the replies received within the public consultation, in March 2015 the Agency adopted an [opinion](#) on the revision of its Basic Regulation. Measures proposed include, for example, broadening its regulatory scope to safety aspects of drones, ground-handling and security, promoting a performance-based approach to safety, including (optionally and partially) state services (e.g. fire-fighters and police) in the current framework and ensuring stable funding for the Agency.

The European Parliament

Over the years, the EP has strengthened EASA's role. Parliament sought from the outset that EASA would be independent of the Commission. It also [requested](#) that the Agency should be allowed to impose financial penalties if safety standards are not correctly implemented. EASA representatives appear regularly before the Committee on Transport and Tourism. In September 2014, EASA's Executive Director participated in an [exchange of views](#) on aviation safety following the Malaysian Airlines MH17 crash. On this occasion he called for the establishment of a European alert system covering all the components of the aviation system and emphasised the importance of sharing appropriate information between different bodies. In November 2014, EASA presented its Rulemaking Programme for 2014-17 to the Committee, and in June 2015, its activities relating to the investigation of the Germanwings crash.

Several Members have sent written questions to the Commission on EASA, on for example, its future competences in relation to [drones](#), and its [personnel remuneration](#) and [environmental budget](#). The EP adopts an annual discharge decision on the Agency's accounts, the [latest](#) of which (for the financial year 2013) was taken in April 2015. In the accompanying resolution, the EP agreed with the points raised by the European Court of Auditors in 2014. Moreover, it called on EASA inter alia to adopt comprehensive policies for the management of situations where conflicts of interests arise and to sign a headquarters agreement with its host Member State.