

Your Guide to Flight Delay Compensation

UK passenger rights explained in plain English



A practical guide to delays, cancellations, denied boarding, care at the airport, evidence to keep and how to make a claim.

Updated for UK passenger-rights guidance available in August 2026. This guide is general information, not legal advice. Eligibility depends on the facts of each journey.

1. When UK passenger-rights rules may apply

UK261 provides important protections for many journeys to, from and within the UK. In broad terms, UK law can cover flights departing from a UK airport on any airline, flights arriving in the UK on a UK or EU airline, and flights arriving in the EU on a UK airline.

A delay or cancellation does not automatically mean compensation is due. The cause of the disruption, the length of the delay and the route all matter.

Quick eligibility checklist

- Did your journey fall within the territorial scope of UK261?
- Did you reach your final destination 3 or more hours late, or was the flight cancelled/you were denied boarding?
- Was the disruption within the airline's responsibility rather than caused by extraordinary circumstances?
- Do you have your booking details and evidence of the disruption?

The UK Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) is the key official source for passenger-rights guidance.

2. How much compensation could be due?

For eligible UK261 delay claims, the fixed compensation amount is linked mainly to flight distance and, for some long-haul flights, the length of the arrival delay. It is not based on the ticket price.

Flight distance	Typical eligible delay	Fixed amount
1,500 km or less	3+ hours late	£220
1,500-3,500 km	3+ hours late	£350
Over 3,500 km	3-4 hours late	£260
Over 3,500 km	4+ hours late	£520

These figures reflect current CAA guidance for UK261 delay compensation. Cancellation and denied-boarding cases have additional timing rules, so they should be checked separately.

3. Your right to care while you wait

Care and assistance can be due even where fixed compensation is not payable. The CAA says airlines should provide care after certain departure-delay thresholds: at least 2 hours for flights under 1,500 km, 3 hours for flights between 1,500 and 3,500 km, and 4 hours for flights over 3,500 km.

Depending on the circumstances, care can include:

- Food and drink appropriate to the length of the wait.
- A way to communicate, such as phone calls or emails.
- Hotel accommodation if an overnight stay becomes necessary.
- Transport between the airport and the accommodation.

If the airline cannot organise reasonable care and you have to pay yourself, keep itemised receipts. Avoid luxury or excessive spending, as reimbursement is generally based on reasonable necessary costs.

If a delay reaches 5 hours or more and you decide not to travel, refund rights can also arise.

4. Cancellations, denied boarding and extraordinary circumstances

Cancellation compensation can depend on how much notice you received and on the timings of any alternative flight offered. If the airline gives sufficient notice or arranges a replacement flight within the legal timing windows, fixed compensation may not be due.

Denied boarding

If you are involuntarily denied boarding despite checking in on time, you may have rights to compensation and assistance. Different rules apply if you volunteer to give up your seat.

Extraordinary circumstances

Fixed compensation is generally not payable where the airline can show that the disruption was caused by extraordinary circumstances outside its responsibility and could not reasonably have been avoided. Examples can include severe weather, air-traffic-control restrictions or certain security events. Each case is fact-specific.

Other rights, such as care, rerouting or refunds, can still apply even when extraordinary circumstances prevent fixed compensation.

5. What evidence should you keep?

Good records make it easier to assess and support a claim. Keep as much of the following as possible:

- Booking confirmation, e-ticket or itinerary.
- Boarding pass, if available.
- Flight number, date, departure airport and destination.
- Airline emails, app notifications and text messages about the disruption.
- Photos of airport departure boards where useful.
- Receipts for reasonable food, transport or accommodation costs.
- Notes of what airline staff told you, including approximate times.
- Any written rejection or explanation sent by the airline.

You can often start an eligibility check without every document, but more complete evidence usually helps resolve a claim more efficiently.

6. Step-by-step: making a claim

1. Check the journey

Confirm the route, airline, disruption type and arrival delay.

2. Check the likely cause

Find out whether the disruption appears to have been within the airline's responsibility.

3. Gather evidence

Collect booking details, messages, receipts and any airline explanation.

4. Submit the claim

Use the airline's preferred claim process or a claims service if you choose to use one.

5. Keep records

Save copies of everything you send and note dates and responses.

6. Escalate if necessary

If a claim is rejected, review the reason. Depending on the airline, an approved ADR body or the CAA may be able to help after the airline complaint process has been followed.

7. Common questions

Does a 3-hour departure delay automatically qualify?

No. For delay compensation, arrival at the final destination is important, and the cause of the disruption also matters.

What if my flight was cancelled?

You may have refund or rerouting rights and, in some cases, fixed compensation. Notice periods and replacement-flight timings are important.

What if the airline says bad weather caused the delay?

Severe weather can amount to extraordinary circumstances, but the position depends on the actual cause and facts of the disruption.

Can I claim expenses as well as fixed compensation?

Potentially. Care/expense rights and fixed compensation are separate. Keep receipts for reasonable necessary costs.

Where can I check the official rules?

Use the UK Civil Aviation Authority passenger-rights pages and UK legislation for the formal legal framework.

Official sources

UK Civil Aviation Authority: <https://www.caa.co.uk/air-passengers/travel-problems-and-rights/flight-delays-and-cancellations/>

UK legislation: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/eur/2004/261/contents>

Ready to check a flight?

Use the DelayClaim eligibility form to enter your airline, airports, date and disruption details. The calculator provides an approximate indication only; the final outcome depends on the facts and applicable law.