

Flight delay and cancellation compensation

Check if you may be owed £220 to £520 per person depending on distance and delay, then claim it yourself, free. Includes a claim letter you can copy.

Read this first

General information, not legal advice. This guide explains the UK rules in plain English. Every case is different, airlines can and do refuse claims, and no outcome is guaranteed.

Up to, not always. Compensation depends on your route, how late you arrived and why the flight was disrupted. Many claims are rejected, especially where the cause was outside the airline's control.

Free routes first. You can claim from the airline directly and, if needed, use a free independent scheme. You do not need a claims company (see "Should I use a claims company?" below).

Rules checked against the UK Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) on 26 October 2026. The government is also reviewing aviation law, so check the CAA website before you claim.

Step 1: Does UK law cover your flight?

The rules are called UK261 (UK Regulation (EC) No 261/2004). Your flight is covered if it was:

- **departing from a UK airport, on any airline, or**
- **arriving at a UK airport from outside the UK, on a UK or EU airline, or**
- **arriving in the EU on a UK airline.**

Flights arriving in the UK on a non-UK, non-EU airline (for example, a US airline from New York) are **not** covered by UK261. Flights from an EU airport may be covered by the EU's own version of the rules instead, so check that too. The CAA has a table showing which rules apply to each type of journey.

Step 2: How much could you be owed?

Compensation is a fixed amount **per person**. It is not linked to the price you paid. It depends on the distance of your journey and, on the longest flights, how late you arrived.

Delays

Flight distance (great circle)	Arrival at final destination	Compensation per person
Under 1,500km (e.g. Glasgow to Amsterdam)	More than 3 hours late	£220
1,500km to 3,500km (e.g. East Midlands to Marrakesh)	More than 3 hours late	£350
Over 3,500km (e.g. London to New York)	Between 3 and 4 hours late	£260
Over 3,500km	More than 4 hours late	£520

- **Delay is measured when you arrive at your final destination**, not when the plane leaves. If your booking includes connections, the distance is measured from the first airport to the last airport on that booking.
- Work out the distance with a free "great circle distance" calculator online. The CAA uses this method.
- The airline may offer vouchers. You can ask for the payment in money.

Cancellations

If the airline cancelled your flight with **less than 14 days' notice**, you may be able to claim, unless it was caused by extraordinary circumstances (see below). The amount is the same £220, £350 or £520 for distance. In some cases it is halved (to £110, £175 or £260), or nothing is due, depending on how much notice you had and how close the replacement flight's times were to your original flight. The CAA's Cancellations page has the exact tables. You can also choose a **refund** (or a replacement flight) when your flight is cancelled.

Step 3: Was there an "extraordinary circumstance"?

The airline does not have to pay compensation if the disruption was caused by extraordinary circumstances that it could not have avoided even if it had taken all reasonable measures. The CAA gives extreme weather and air traffic control or airport employee strikes as examples. Routine technical problems are generally not treated as extraordinary, but each case is decided on its own facts. The airline has to show that an exemption applies, so ask it for the reason in writing.

Even when there is no compensation, you may still be owed care and expenses

If your flight is delayed or cancelled you are entitled to **care** whatever the reason: food and drink, two phone calls or emails, and a hotel with transport if you are delayed overnight.

The delay must pass a threshold before care applies: 2 hours for flights under 1,500km, 3 hours for 1,500km to 3,500km, 4 hours for longer flights (measured from scheduled departure).

If the airline does not provide it, you can make reasonable arrangements and claim the cost back. Keep itemised receipts. Alcohol and luxury hotels are unlikely to be refunded.

If your flight is delayed by 5 hours or more you can choose not to travel and get a refund for the flights you have not used.

Step 4: Time limits (do not leave it too late)

What	Limit
Going to court	Usually about 6 years from the flight in England and Wales and 5 years in Scotland (the CAA doesn't say what applies in Northern Ireland, so check before you rely on a date).
Free independent scheme (ADR)	Within 6 years of the problem (5 in Scotland), and within 12 months of the airline's final response. If the airline never replied, within 12 months of your last written message to it.
Escalating to ADR	You can go to ADR if the airline rejects you, or has not answered within 8 weeks of your written complaint.

The sooner you claim, the easier it is to find records. The airline also has to be given the chance to deal with it first.

Step 5: How to claim, free

1. **Collect your evidence** (checklist below).
2. **Work out the amount**: distance, delay at the final destination, number of passengers.
3. **Claim from the airline that operated the flight**, in writing, using its online form or the letter on the next pages. Claim for compensation and for expenses (they may be separate claims). Keep copies.
4. **Wait for the answer**. If the airline rejects your claim or does not reply within **8 weeks**, you can escalate.

5. **Escalate:** take it to the airline's approved ADR scheme if it has one (AviationADR or CEDR; free; usually a decision within about 3 months). If the airline is not in an ADR scheme, ask the CAA's Passenger Advice and Complaints Team (PACT) to help. PACT cannot make a binding decision.
6. **Court is the last resort.** You do not have to accept an ADR decision, and you can still go to court. Get free advice (for example from Citizens Advice) before you start a court claim.

Examples of airlines in ADR schemes (the CAA keeps the full list): AviationADR includes easyJet, Ryanair, Wizz Air, TUI Airways, KLM, Air France and Virgin Atlantic. CEDR includes British Airways and BA CityFlyer. Always check which scheme your airline uses on the CAA's Alternative Dispute Resolution page.

Evidence checklist

- ☐ Booking reference and the names on the booking (all passengers)
- ☐ Flight number, date, departure and arrival airports
- ☐ Boarding passes or e-tickets
- ☐ Proof of the actual arrival time (airline emails or texts, a flight-tracking screenshot, a photo of the arrivals board, or your own photo of the time you landed)
- ☐ The airline's reason for the disruption, if it gave one (screenshots)
- ☐ Receipts for food, drink, hotel and transport, itemised if possible
- ☐ Copies of all your messages with the airline

Should I use a claims company?

You can, but you do not have to, and you give up part of any payment. Fees are often **25% to 50% including VAT**. For example AirHelp states a 35% fee including VAT, which can rise to 50% if legal action is needed. Check the terms of any company before you sign up. The CAA also says ADR is free and you do not need a claims management company to use it.

If the airline pays £520	You keep
Claiming yourself	£520
With a firm charging 35% including VAT	£338 (fee £182)
With a firm charging 50% including VAT	£260 (fee £260)

A claims company may help if you cannot handle the paperwork or the airline is in a country where it is hard to claim. For most UK flights, writing yourself is a straightforward option.

Letter 1: your claim to the airline

Replace everything in [yellow square brackets] and delete anything that does not apply. If the airline has an online claim form, put the same details into it. Do not put your bank details in a letter or email. Ask how to give them securely.

[Your full name]

[Your address and postcode] [Email] [Phone]

[Date]

To: [Airline name], Customer Relations / Compensation Team

[Postal address or email shown on the airline's website]

Subject: Claim for compensation under UK261. Flight [flight number], [date], booking reference [reference]

Dear Sir or Madam,

I was a passenger on your flight [flight number] from [departure airport] to [arrival airport] on [date of flight], booking reference [reference]. The flight was due to arrive at [scheduled arrival time]. [It arrived at [actual arrival time], which is [number] hours and [number] minutes late. / It was cancelled on [date], [number] days before departure.]

UK261 (Regulation (EC) No 261/2004 as it forms part of UK law) applies because [the flight departed from a UK airport / the flight arrived in the UK from outside the UK and you are a [UK / EU] airline].

The distance from [first airport] to [last airport] is about [number] km (great circle distance). Under Article 7 of UK261 the compensation for a flight of this distance and delay is £[amount] per passenger. There were [number] passengers on the booking: [names of all passengers]. I am therefore claiming £[total amount] in compensation.

[You gave the reason for the disruption as [reason]]. If you rely on extraordinary circumstances, please provide evidence of the circumstances and of the measures you took to avoid the delay.] [OR delete this paragraph if no reason was given.]

[I also incurred expenses of £[amount] for [food and drink / accommodation / transport] because [reason]. Itemised receipts are enclosed.]

Please confirm that you will pay this and tell me how to give you my bank details securely. If you reject the claim, please give your reasons in writing and tell me which ADR scheme you are signed up to. If I have not received a final response within 8 weeks, I will refer the complaint to the relevant ADR scheme.

Enclosures: [booking confirmation, boarding passes, proof of arrival time, receipts]

Yours faithfully,

[Your name]

Letter 2: follow-up if they reject you or do not reply

[Your name] [Address] [Date]

To: [Airline name], Customer Relations **Subject: Flight [number], [date], booking reference [reference]. Claim made on [date]**

Dear Sir or Madam,

On [date] I claimed £[amount] compensation under UK261 for the above flight. [I have not received a reply. / You replied on [date] saying [summary of the reason].] [I do not accept your reason because [short explanation and evidence].]

Please send me your final response and confirm in writing which ADR scheme you are a member of, with its contact details. If I do not receive a satisfactory final response within [14 days], or 8 weeks have passed since my first written claim, I will refer my complaint to [AviationADR / CEDR / the CAA's Passenger Advice and Complaints Team]. I also reserve my right to take legal action.

Yours faithfully,

[Your name]

Where the rules come from

- CAA, Delays: <https://www.caa.co.uk/air-passengers/travel-problems-and-rights/flight-delays-and-cancellations/delays/>
- CAA, Cancellations: <https://www.caa.co.uk/air-passengers/travel-problems-and-rights/flight-delays-and-cancellations/cancellations/>
- CAA, Alternative Dispute Resolution and list of airlines: <https://www.caa.co.uk/air-passengers/travel-problems-and-rights/travel-complaints/alternative-dispute-resolution/>
- CAA, Does UK law apply to your flight?: <https://www.caa.co.uk/media/jn3npj1h/uk-261-annex-1.pdf>
- AirHelp fees: <https://www.airhelp.co.uk/price-list/>

OwedHub is free and never takes a cut of what you get back.