European Union Aviation Safety Agency

English Language Proficiency

Where can I find the requirements on language proficiency for vehicle drivers at EU aerodromes?

Answer

Regulation (EU) No 139/2014 on aerodromes requires that any person that intends to drive on the manoeuvring area of an aerodrome must demonstrate language proficiency at least at an operational level in the English language and any other language or languages used at the aerodrome for radio communication purposes with the air traffic services (ATS) unit at the aerodrome.

The Regulation allows aerodrome operators to issue authorisations for driving on the manoeuvring area without the drivers having demonstrated language proficiency at an operational level until January 2026 as regards the English language, while language proficiency for any other language already applies as of 7 January 2023.

Regulation (EU) No 139/2014 can be accessed via the Official Publication of the European Union. It is also available on the EASA website as Commission Regulation (EU) No 139/2014 and under Easy Access Rules for Aerodromes, where you can also find a consolidated version of the Regulation along with the related Acceptable Means of Compliance and Guidance Material (points ADR.OPS.B.024 and ADR.OPS.B.029, including AMC & GM).

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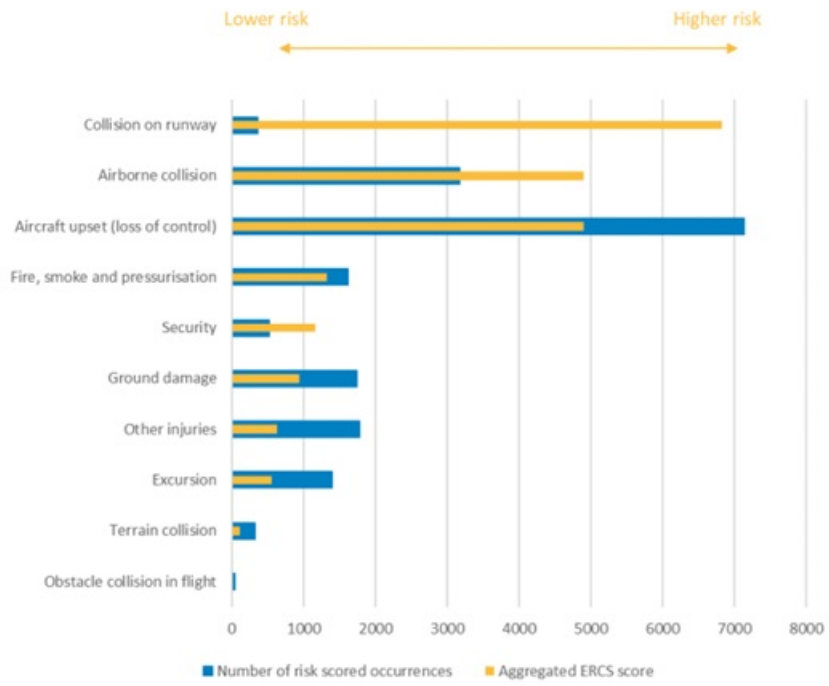
Why did the European Union decide to require (English) language proficiency? What are the safety issues?

Answer

Runway incursions are one of the high-risk accident occurrence categories identified by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). Runway-safety-related accidents account for the majority of all accidents at global level. According to the EASA Annual Safety Review 2024

(see graph below), collision on the runway represents the higher-risk category for commercial air transport (CAT) and non-commercial operations with complex aeroplanes (NCC).

See Annual Safety Review 2024:



Appendix 2 Figure 1 KRAs by aggregated ERCS score and number of risk-scored occurrences involving CAT complex aeroplanes and NCC aeroplanes

EASA's Notice of Proposed Amendment NPA 2018-14, published on 17 December 2018, contains references to several occurrences and accidents where insufficient communications, misunderstandings or lack of understanding between the air traffic services (ATS), the aircraft taking off or landing, and the driver, contributed to the occurrence/accident. Examples of safety recommendations that were found to be relevant to the regulatory proposal in 2018 were included in NPA 2018-14.

In addition, the Global Action Plan for the Prevention of Runway Incursions (GAPPRI), endorsed by all major aviation industry stakeholders, recommends developing a 'phased plan for all communications in the English language'.

Based upon safety recommendations and feedback from Member States and stakeholders, EASA and the European Commission identified a need to enhance the situational awareness between pilots, air traffic controllers (ATCOs), and vehicle drivers when operating on the manoeuvring area, as a measure to prevent runway and taxiway incursions. Therefore, Commission Regulation (EU) No 139/2014 (the 'Aerodromes Regulation'), as updated through Regulation (EU) 2020/2148, requires that vehicle drivers intending to operate on the

manoeuvring area must demonstrate language proficiency at least at an operational level (level 4) in the English language and any other language or languages used at the aerodrome for purposes of radio communication with the ATS unit at the aerodrome. The assessment criteria to assess the English language of an operational level are included in AMC1 ADR.OPS.B.029(b).

The Aerodromes Regulation allows Member States to derogate from the requirement to demonstrate English language proficiency, based on a safety assessment that can cover one or several aerodromes (for example low traffic, only national traffic, etc.). This derogation, which applies only to English language proficiency, is included in point (g) of ADR.OPS.B.029.

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When a Member State decides to derogate from the English Language Proficiency, does this require an approval by EASA or the European Union?

Answer

No, neither EASA nor the European Commission are involved in reviewing or approving the derogation or the underlying safety assessment. It is up to the Member State to decide if a derogation is appropriate for one or several aerodromes.

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Does Regulation (EU) No 139/2014 require a common frequency for vehicle drivers, air traffic control (ATC), and pilots, the so-called 'Triple One' concept?

Answer

No, Commission Regulation (EU) No 139/2014 does not require a common frequency to be used by vehicle drivers, air traffic control (ATC), and pilots when operating on the runway. Even if the aerodrome continues to use a separate Ground/ATC frequency in the national language, English language proficiency can be considered beneficial as it can increase safety by

improving situational awareness and by allowing vehicle drivers to understand safety-critical information provided in English.

Some airports in the European Union have found solutions where vehicle drivers can either listen to the ATC frequency at all times or only in certain high-risk scenarios (accessing the runway).

During an emergency situation, English language proficiency is considered beneficial for aviation safety. For more information on the safety benefits, please see NPA 2018-14. For an overview of the different practices regarding frequencies and their use, please refer to a recent study commissioned by EASA on the Triple One Concept Implementation.

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Will all communications on the manoeuvring area have to be conducted using the same communication channel that is used by air traffic controllers (ATCOs) and flight crews and in English language as of January 2026?

Answer

No, the rule does not mandate either the use of a common communication channel between air traffic controllers (ATCOs), flight crews, and vehicle drivers or the exclusive use of the English language on the manoeuvring area.

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What does English language proficiency mean in practice?

Answer

Language proficiency for vehicle drivers is the demonstration of their ability to:

- communicate effectively in voice-only and in face-to-face situations;
- communicate on common and work-related topics with accuracy and clarity;
- use appropriate communicative strategies to exchange messages and to recognise and

resolve misunderstandings in a general or work-related context;
- handle successfully the linguistic challenges presented by a complication or unexpected turn of events that occurs within the context of a routine work situation or of a communicative task with which they are otherwise familiar; and
- use a dialect or accent that is intelligible to the aeronautical community.

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Why is there a deferred applicability of English language proficiency?

Answer

As the implementation of the language proficiency in the English language and any other language used at the aerodrome for communication with air traffic services (ATS) requires preparation, training, and qualification, a transition period has been granted at the time of the adoption of Regulation (EU) 2020/2148 (6 years for the English language and 3 years for other languages).

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What is the meaning of operational Level 4 of English language proficiency?

Answer

The operational level 4 is described in the rating scale included in AMC1 ADR.OPS.B.029(b) 'Language proficiency'. It explains the different rating elements for all levels with regard to pronunciation, language structure, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, interaction, and should be used when assessing if a vehicle driver is proficient and at what level.

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Is there any guidance for language schools on language training curricula in the context of aviation?

Answer

Language proficiency requirements already apply to flight crews and air traffic controllers (ATCOs). Aerodromes are advised to contact their competent authority, approved training organisations (ATOs), and air navigation service providers (ANSPs) for further information concerning the implementation of language proficiency.

Commission Regulation (EU) No 139/2014 is supported by numerous acceptable means of compliance (AMC) and guidance material (GM) with detailed information on how to conduct the training and the assessments (see also the Easy Access Rules for Aerodromes). The requirements are based on the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) language proficiency concept and are therefore familiar to aviation stakeholders.

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Why does Regulation (EU) No 139/2014 refer to the ICAO operational level 4 for English language proficiency, which has not been developed for aerodrome vehicle drivers, but flight crew and air traffic controllers (ATCOs)?

Answer

Flight crews, air traffic controllers (ATCOs), and aerodrome vehicle drivers are operating in the same environment; therefore, it is appropriate to require the same minimum level of language proficiency, which is level 4.

International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Document 9835 on language proficiency states in Section 2.3.4 that the recognition of possible (language) errors *“contributed to the construction of ICAO Operational Level 4 which is considered to be the minimum level acceptable to ensure safe operations”*. Since the role of the personnel in question (flight crew, ATCO, or aerodrome vehicle driver) is irrelevant to the possibility of making an error, it should be considered appropriate that ICAO’s Operational Level 4 is equally applicable to the aerodrome vehicle drivers as the minimum acceptable level. Indeed, even Level 3 of

proficiency as described in AMC1 ADR.OPS.B.029(b) is insufficient to prevent impaired communication caused by errors in comprehending the meaning, which may result in failure to understand a situational complication or an unexpected turn of events.

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What is the difference between assessment/proof of English language proficiency and assessment/proof of national language proficiency?

Answer

The same method and criteria described in AMC1 ADR.OPS.B.029(b) apply to both English language proficiency assessments and assessments of the national language. AMC1 ADR.OPS.B.029(b) describes the rating scale in a table format, indicating the language proficiency levels and the criteria for each level that should be used for the assessment. The proficiency levels and criteria are in line with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

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How can the aerodrome perform an assessment of language proficiency?

Answer

AMC2 ADR.OPS.B.029(e) contains the assessment method. The assessment should comprise the following three elements:

1. listening: assessment of comprehension;
2. speaking: assessment of pronunciation, fluency, structure, and vocabulary; and
3. interaction.

To assess proficiency in listening and speaking, the aerodrome operator should ensure that the method assesses the ability to switch between aviation phraseology and plain language.

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Reassessment of language proficiency

Answer

Language proficiency, irrespective of the language, needs to be reassessed every 4 years if the proficiency level that is demonstrated is operational (Level 4) and every 6 years for the extended level (Level 5). Persons that have demonstrated expert level (Level 6) do not need to be reassessed. See also point ADR.OPS.B.029(d).

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Why does the language proficiency requirement apply to the manoeuvring area, which includes taxiways, and not only to the runway?

Answer

The manoeuvring area is a controlled area, and persons operating there need to have the same understanding of the instructions given. By limiting the language proficiency requirement only to persons that drive on the runways, the risk of a runway incursion is increased, since persons who do not meet the language proficiency requirements may operate very close to an active runway.

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Is there a definition of the manoeuvring area?

Answer

Yes, Annex I to Commission Regulation (EU) No 139/2014 contains a definition of the manoeuvring area: *‘manoeuvring area’ means that part of an aerodrome to be used for the take-off, landing and taxiing of aircraft, excluding aprons*.

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