Ops to Europe: How to Get a Third Country Operator (TCO) Approval

OPSGROUP Team
13 August, 2025

If you want to operate commercially into the EU (or certain associated states), you'll need a Third Country Operator (TCO) Authorisation from EASA. The process is free and straightforward if you meet ICAO standards – just a bit time-consuming to get all the paperwork together.

What is it, and who needs one?

A Third Country Operator is **any non-European aircraft operator conducting commercial air transport flights into the EU**. That includes BizAv charter flights intending to operate commercially. **Private flights are exempt**.

There's also a provision for "one-off" or short-notice non-scheduled commercial flights without a TCO authorisation. These are strictly limited to urgent public interest missions – such as humanitarian, disaster relief, or air ambulance flights – and can be approved for operations of up to 12 weeks.

What's being assessed?

The regulation requires TCOs to hold an authorisation issued by EASA to confirm they meet international operational and safety standards in line with ICAO requirements.

Common Gotchas

- Do you have a **Safety Management System** (SMS)? Even if SMS is not required by your local regulator, EASA expects these applicable international standards to be complied with when operating to the EU.

- You need a **Flight Data Analysis Programme** (FDAP) if your aircraft's MTOW is greater than 27,000 kg (59,500 lbs).

- Do you comply with the reinforced **cockpit door regulations**?
- Are you compliant with **Mode S Elementary, ADS-B Out, and Mode S Enhanced Surveillance**? Or do you have a plan in place to retrofit?

If you're a Part 121-style operator from a well-regulated state, you'll likely already meet these standards. **Part 135 operators may need to address a few gaps**.

You can check who already has a TCO here: EASA TCO Holder List.

How closely will EASA check?

EASA applies a **risk-based approach** when reviewing applications. This takes into account:

- Your own safety performance and history
- The safety record of your State of Operator and State of Registry
- Your level of exposure to European citizens

Operators from well-regulated states with a clean record and modern fleet – for example, an Australian operator with no incidents – will generally face less scrutiny than those from higher-risk environments.
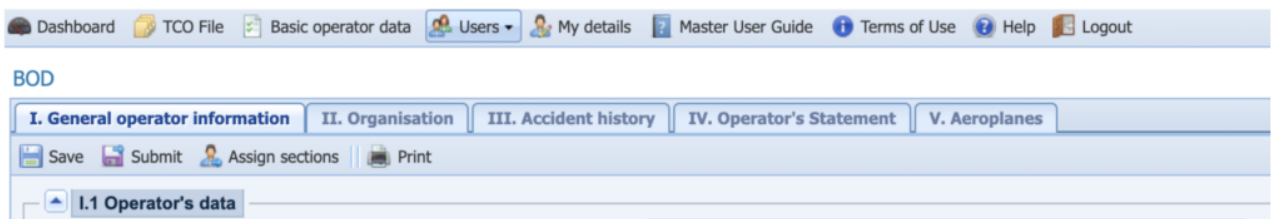
Note: **You do not need IS-BAO certification to obtain a TCO**. If you have it, great, but EASA assesses each application individually and may request extra info if needed.

How to get a TCO?

The good news? It's still **free to apply**, and the process is straightforward if you have your paperwork ready. Here's how it works in 2025:

It's actually pretty simple to apply:

1. **Submit your application** – Download the latest application form from the EASA website, complete it, and email it to **tco.applications@easa.europa.eu** (cc **tco@easa.europa.eu**) – electronic submissions only. Attach the mandatory documents: Certificate of Incorporation, Air Operator Certificate (AOC) or Air Carrier Certificate (ACC), and Operations Specifications (Ops Specs).

2. **Complete the Basic Operator Data** – Once you receive login credentials for the TCO web-interface, log in immediately and **complete the Basic Operator Data within 7 days**. It takes a few hours, so gather AOCs, insurance certificates, and aircraft documents in advance. The portal is still clunky, so hit "save" often. Keep your fleet and contact details up to date.

3. **Submit and respond to follow-ups** – **EASA's technical evaluation can take up to 30 days**. They may ask follow-up technical questions; you'll need to reference your manuals and reply via the portal.

4. **Get your approval** – Once satisfied, EASA will issue your TCO authorisation. **It has no expiry date, but continuous monitoring applies**, so be ready to respond to periodic information requests.

For most operators, getting and keeping a TCO is free. **EASA only charges fees if your risk profile warrants it** – for example, if they need to hold a technical meeting (from €10,000) or conduct an on-site audit (from €19,000 plus travel costs).

What's next after approval?

Maintain compliance – EASA monitors operators through ramp checks and document reviews, so be prepared at all times. Keep your TCO portal information up to date, and respond promptly to any EASA communication.

Remember, your **TCO authorisation is simply EASA's safety thumbs-up**. **You may still need to arrange the usual overflight/landing permits from each EU Member State**, depending on the nature of your flight and the national rules in place. In other words, TCO gets you through the safety gate, but you still have to knock on the door of each country you plan to operate to.

Extra Reading:

- EASA TCO Website
- EASA TCO FAQs

EUROPE: Third Country Operators (TCO)

Declan Selleck
13 August, 2025

A TCO is an authorization issued by EASA to any third-country operator wishing to perform commercial air transport in any of the following European countries:

- 28 EU Member States

- Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland

Plus the following territories:

- Gibraltar, Aland Islands, Azores, Madeira, Canary Islands, Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Martinique, Reunion, Saint-Martin, Mayotte

Applications are made directly to EASA using their application form.

https://www.easa.europa.eu/document-library/application-forms/fotco00160

You will need to provide the following documentation:

- AOC

- Operating Specifications

- Insurance

Contact details for applications are made to:

European Aviation Safety Agency
Applications Handling Department
Postfach 10 12 53
D-50452 Köln
Germany

Fax: +49 (0)221 89990 ext. 4461
E-mail: tco.applications@easa.europa.eu

Should EASA deem the application in order the operating authorization process is completed in approximately 30 days. Some flights can avoid this requirement, such as Air Ambulance or Humanitarian flights.

Please note:

- Overflights of the above states do not require a TCO permit.

- EU member states cannot issue a permit for their country if the operator does not already hold a TCO operating authorization.

If you plan to operate to these areas, we'd suggest getting your TCO right away, even if you don't have a planned flight at the moment. They can take some time to obtain.

Monday Briefing: Kenya concerns, Serbia flooding

Declan Selleck
13 August, 2025

19MAY Operators have cancelled flights to **HKMO/Mombassa** amid increasing terrorist concerns in the north-east of Kenya; some have repatriated tourists mid-stay. The US Embassy is reducing staff numbers.

19MAY **Catastrophic flooding in Serbia and Bosnia** has led into increased aid traffic at LYBE/Belgrade and delays and parking restrictions may apply; the flooding is the worst since records began.

LYBE/Belgrade is seeing increased traffic due to aid activity as a result of flooding in the country. Delays of up to 2 hours for non-scheduled traffic possible.

LSGG/Geneva – anticipate high traffic volume and some delays due to EBACE traffic 20-22MAY. Aircraft static display is open on 22MAY.

SKCG/Cartagena, Colombia has restrictions until 28MAY requiring non-scheduled operators to seek permission at least 24H before arrival (though longer is recommended) SKBQ/Barranquilla is a sensible alternate during this period.

VYYY/Yangon, Myanmar is closed 29MAY 0730-0815Z for a live fire drill.

EGLL/London Heathrow ATC Regulation Trial continues, with a pre-tactical EGLLTC regulation of 52 aircraft per hour in place 0400-0800 daily until 31OCT.

HLLB/Benghazi, Libya closed until further notice due to security situation.

LDPL/Pula, Croatia is closed 23MAY 1600-1800Z due emergency exercise.

LIML/Milan Linate will close overnight for runway repairs between 03JUN-04JUL.

ULLI/St. Petersburg SPIEF International Economic Forum 21-24MAY. Refueling is available only on arrival and crews must be at the airport no less than two hours ahead of their departure time. Slots allocated to allow approx 10 arrivals per hour for the Forum. No overnight parking is available for unconnected flights during this period.

UKxx/Ukraine FIR's (L'viv, Kyiv and Dnipro FIRs) Several airline reports of loss of GPS signals flying through this airspace.

Brazil has issued airport slots for World Cup 2014 on 15MAY, most are allocated already. An AVANAC domestic operating permit is required for all operators before a slot can be requested. Slot validity is 15 minutes. All pax and most crews will require a visa before arrival during World Cup operations – there is no possibility to obtain on arrival.

European Union The European Commission has adopted a new regulation that requires commercial air transport (CAT) operators from outside the European Union (EU), also known as "third-country operators" (TCOs), to obtain a single EU-wide safety authorization to fly to, from or within the EU. The registration requirement applies to CAT TCOs, who must demonstrate to the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) compliance with ICAO standards. CAT operators include all airlines and charter operators. The TCO authorization is a single process for all operators flying to the 28 European Union states, EU overseas territories and the four European Free Trade Association (EFTA) states (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and

Switzerland). The authorization will be a prerequisite to operating in these states and territories. A TCO authorization is not required for operators only overflying the EU member states, EU overseas territories and the four EFTA states. All existing operators must reapply for authorization, even if they hold authorization from individual EU member states. The regulation is in effect from 26MAY and EASA recommends approval be gained within 6 months.

Turkey The previously announced Turkish e-Visa scheme, abolishing Visa on Arrival, scheduled to become effective 10APR14, has been postponed until 31DEC14. https://www.evisa.gov.tr/en/ for an e-Visa.

United States The FAA's Flight Standards Service (AFS) has created OpSpec/MSpec/LOA A153, a new and more efficient operations authorization for U.S.-registered aircraft in order to comply with early automatic dependent surveillance – broadcast (ADS-B) directives mandated by a growing number of other countries, primarily in the Asia-Pacific region. The new approval is in the final stages of development and is expected to be available to operators at the end of June 2014.

Belarus A visa-free regime will be in place for the official participants of the 2014 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship and foreign tourists for the period from 25 April until 31 May 2014. An original or electronic ticket to a game of the 2014 IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship will become the basis for a visa-free entry in the territory of Belarus for tourists.