

IATA global airline industry statistics show devastating effects of Covid-19

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) has released its IATA World Air Transport Statistics (WATS) publication.



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The publication shows performance figures for 2020 demonstrating devastating effects on global air transport during that year of the Covid-19 crisis:

- 1.8 billion passengers flew in 2020, a decrease of 60.2% compared to the 4.5 billion who flew in 2019
- Industry-wide air travel demand (measured in revenue passenger-kilometres, or RPKs) dropped by 65.9% year-on-year

- International passenger demand (RPKs) decreased by 75.6% compared to the year prior

- Domestic air passenger demand (RPKs) dropped by 48.8% compared to 2019
- Air connectivity declined by more than half in 2020 with the number of routes connecting airports falling dramatically at the outset of the crisis and was down more than 60% year-on-year in April 2020
- Total industry passenger revenues fell by 69% to \$189bn in 2020, and net losses were \$126.4bn in total
- The decline in air passengers transported in 2020 was the largest recorded since global RPKs started being tracked around 1950

"Twenty-twenty was a year that we'd all like to forget. But analyzing the performance statistics for the year reveals an amazing story of perseverance. At the depth of the crisis in April 2020, 66% of the world's commercial air transport fleet was grounded as governments closed borders or imposed strict quarantines.

"A million jobs disappeared. And industry losses for the year totalled \$126bn. Many governments recognized aviation's critical contributions and provided financial lifelines and other forms of support.

"But it was the rapid actions by airlines and the commitment of our people that saw the airline industry through the most difficult year in its history," said Willie Walsh, IATA's director-general.

Key 2020 airline performance figures

Passenger

- Systemwide, airlines carried 1.8 billion passengers on scheduled services, a decrease of 60.2% over 2019
- On average, there was a \$71.7 loss incurred per passenger in 2020, corresponding to net losses of \$126.4bn in total
- Measured in ASKs (available seat kilometres), global airline capacity plummeted by 56.7%, with international capacity being hit the hardest with a reduction of 68.3%
- Systemwide passenger load factor dropped to 65.1% in 2020, compared to 82.5% the year prior
- The Middle East region suffered the largest proportion of loss for passenger traffic* with a drop of 71.5% in RPKs versus 2019, followed by Europe (-69.7%) and the Africa region (-68.5%)
- China became the largest domestic market in 2020 for the first time on record, as air travel rebounded faster in their domestic market following their efforts to control Covif-19

The regional rankings (based on total passengers carried on scheduled services by airlines registered in that region) are:

1. Asia-Pacific: 780.7 million passengers, a decrease of 53.4% compared to the region's passengers in 2019
2. North America: 401.7 million passengers, down 60.8% over 2019
3. Europe: 389.9 million passengers, down 67.4% over 2019
4. Latin America: 123.6 million passengers, down 60.6% over 2019
5. Middle East: 76.8 million passengers, a decrease of 67.6% over 2019

6. Africa: 34.3 million passengers, down 65.7% over 2019

The top five airlines ranked by total scheduled passenger-kilometres flown, were:

1. American Airlines: 124 billion
2. China Southern Airlines: 110.7 billion
3. Delta Air Lines: 106.5 billion
4. United Airlines: 100.2 billion
5. China Eastern Airlines: 88.7 billion

The top five route areas by passenger demand (RPKs), with the largest drop being seen in routes within the Far East:

1. Within Europe: 290.3 million, down 70.7% from 2019
2. Europe - North America: 122.9 million, decreased 80.4% from 2019
3. Within Far East: 117.3 million, a decrease of 84.1% from 2019
4. Europe - Far East: 115.3 million, a decrease of 79% from 2019
5. Middle East - Far East: 104 million, down 73.6% from 2019

The top five domestic passenger airport-pairs were all in Asia and outperformed top international routes as domestic recovery returned faster, particularly in China:

1. Jeju - Seoul Gimpo: 10.2 million, up 35.1% over 2019
2. Hanoi - Ho Chi Minh City: 5.9 million, an increase of 54.3% from 2019
3. Shanghai-Hongqiao – Shenzhen: 3.7 million, up 43.4% from 2019
4. Beijing-Capital - Shanghai-Hongqiao: 3.6 million, increased by 11.8% from 2019
5. Guangzhou - Shanghai-Hongqiao: 3.5 million, up 41.2% from 2019

The top five nationalities travelling by air (international) were:

1. United States: 45.7 million, or 9.7% of all passengers
2. United Kingdom: 40.8 million, or 8.6% of all passengers
3. Germany: 30.8 million, or 6.5% of all passengers
4. France: 23.3 million, or 4.9% of all passengers
5. India: 17.4 million, or 3.7% of all passengers

Cargo

Air freight was the bright spot in air transport for 2020, as the market adapted to keep goods moving—including vaccines, personal protective equipment (PPE) and vital medical supplies—despite the massive drop in capacity from the bellies of passenger aircraft.

- Industry-wide available cargo tonne-kilometres (ACTKs) fell 21.4% year-on-year in 2020

- This led to a capacity crunch, with the industry-wide cargo load factor up 7.0 percentage points to 53.8%. This is the highest value in the IATA series started in 1990.

- At the end of the year, industry-wide cargo tonne-kilometres (CTKs) had returned close to pre-crisis values. However, the yearly decline in cargo demand (CTKs) was still the largest since the Global Financial Crisis in 2009, at a sizeable 9.7% year-on-year in 2020.

The top five airlines ranked by scheduled cargo tonne-kilometres (CTKs) flown were:

1. Federal Express: 19.7 billion
2. United Parcel Service: 14.4 billion
3. Qatar Airways: 13.7 billion
4. Emirates: 9.6 billion
5. Cathay Pacific Airways: 8.1 billion

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