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European air passenger volumes almost back to pre-pandemic in March

Revised forecast for 2024 now at +3.2% above pre-pandemic levels — but divergences in performance remain significant across both national markets and individual airports

Brussels, 8 May 2024: European airport trade body ACI EUROPE today released its air traffic report for March and the first quarter (Q1) of 2024, along with a revised passenger traffic forecast for the full year 2024.

Passenger traffic across the **European airport network** increased by **+10.2%** in **March** compared to the same month last year, with the growth being predominantly driven by international (+11.7%) rather than domestic passengers (+5.6%).

As a result, passenger traffic came very close to a full recovery – standing just **-1.5%** below pre-pandemic volumes (March 2019). As has been the case since the start of the year, international passenger volumes exceeded pre-pandemic volumes (+2.7%) while domestic traffic remained below (-13.2%).

The **Q1** results are equivalent to the March data, with passenger traffic across the European network also increasing by **+10.2%** compared to the same quarter last year and standing **-1.3%** below pre-pandemic volumes (Q1 2019).

Olivier Jankovec, Director General of ACI EUROPE commented: *"Overall, passenger traffic has kept growing dynamically during the first 3 months of the year. While the Catholic Easter holidays coming earlier helped, demand for air travel generally remained strong against a background of modestly improving macro-economic conditions in the EU and the UK."*

"Looking ahead, we have revised upwards our traffic forecast for the full year and now see passenger volumes in 2024 exceeding pre-pandemic volumes (2019) by +3.2% – instead of +1.4% previously[1]. This reflects positive prospects for the Summer season, with demand set to remain strong as consumers keep prioritising travel despite much higher air fares. This also reflects sustained but selective capacity expansion from Ultra-Low Cost Carriers, as well as the largest Full Service Carriers finally getting closer to their pre-pandemic capacity levels."

Jankovec however cautioned: *"The market remains very fragmented in terms of traffic performance, with only 43% of Europe's airports having recovered their pre-pandemic passenger volumes. And downside risks are ever-present, in particular linked to geopolitics and supply pressures".*

PERFORMANCE VARIATIONS ACROSS SUB-REGIONAL & NATIONAL MARKETS

Airports in the **EU+ market**[2] led the passenger growth dynamic in March, at **+11.5%** over the same month last year, while those in the **rest of Europe**[3] grew by only **+2.8%**.

- Within the **EU+ market**, the highest increases compared to March 2023 were posted by airports in the Czech Republic (+32.6%), Malta (+30%) and Slovenia (+22.7%), while the weakest performances came from those in Sweden (-1.2%), Norway (+0.3%) and Finland (+2.5%).

  <u>When compared to pre-pandemic levels</u> (March 2019), the **EU+ market** stood at **-1.4%**, with airports predominantly relying on leisure/VFR[4] demand largely exceeding their pre-pandemic volumes – including Malta (+32.5%), Portugal (+23.1%), Greece (+19.6%), Poland (+19.2%) and Spain (+14.5%). Conversely, airports in Slovakia (-34.9%), Slovenia (-27.8%), Sweden (-27%), Finland (-24.4%) and Germany (-22.9%) remained farthest from a full recovery. Amongst other large markets, airports in Italy (+8%) posted the best results, followed by those in the UK (-2%) and France (-6.4%).

- In the **rest of Europe**, the best performances compared to March 2023 came from airports in Albania (+71.9%), Georgia (+31.3%) and Kosovo (+29.7%), while those in Ukraine remained closed for traffic, and airports in Israel (-51%) and Russia (-17.4%) registered significant decreases.

  <u>When compared to pre-pandemic levels</u> (March 2019), impressive results were posted by airports in Albania (+233%), Uzbekistan (+159%), Kazakhstan (+95%) and Armenia (+91%). Meanwhile airports in Türkiye (0%) achieved a full recovery and those in Israel (-47%) and Russia (-19%) remained in the red.

PERFORMANCE VARIATIONS ACROSS AIRPORT CATEGORIES

Passenger traffic at **the Majors**[5] expanded by **+10.1%** in March when compared to the same month last year but remained at **-1.8%** when compared to pre-pandemic volumes (March 2019):

- **London Heathrow** (+7.9% vs. Mar 2023 | +3% vs. Mar 2019) remained the busiest European airport, with **Istanbul** (+2.7% vs. Mar 2023 | +8.2% vs. Mar 2019) coming second and followed by **Paris-CDG** (+6.6% vs. Mar 2023 | -9.6% vs. Mar 2019).

- **Madrid** (+10.8.% vs. Mar 2023 | +8.9% vs. Mar 2019) came fourth, followed by **Amsterdam Schiphol** (+14% vs Mar 2023 | -7.3% vs. Mar 2019).

- **Rome-FCO's** impressive growth (+28.1% vs. Mar 2023 | +6.5% vs. Mar 2019) boosted the performance of the Majors.

Amongst **Mega and Large airports**[6], the highest increases in March came from **Antalya** (+32% vs. Mar 2023 | +14.7% vs. Mar 2019), **Prague** (+31.2% vs. Mar 2023 | -5.2% vs. Mar 2019), **Budapest** (+21.7% vs. Mar 2023 | +10.5% vs. Mar 2019), **Alicante** (+21.3% vs. Mar 2023 | +27.3% vs. Mar 2019) and **Athens** (+20.1% vs. Mar 2023 | +21.5% vs. Mar 2019).

Medium airports[7] registered the best passenger traffic performance, with an average increase of **+13.4%** in March compared with the same month last year and standing at **+8.1%** above their pre-pandemic (March 2019) volumes.

Airports reporting the highest increases in that category included **Strasbourg** (+184% vs. Mar 2023 | -8.6% vs. Mar 2019), **Girona** (+105% vs. Mar 2023 | +34.9% vs. Mar 219), **Tirana** (+71.9% vs. Mar 2023 | +233% vs. Mar 2019), **Olbia** (+56.5% vs. Mar 2023 | +24.4% vs. Mar 2019) and **Kutaisi** (+38.8% vs. Mar 2023 | +139% vs. Mar 2019).

As in the past months, larger **Low Cost bases** kept outperforming <u>when compared to pre-pandemic levels</u> (March 2019): **Memmingen** (+76.4%), **Beauvais** (+72%), **Bergamo** (+32.5%) and **Charleroi** (+24.5%).

Conversely, **Small airports**[8] posted the weakest performance with a **+3.2%** increase in passenger traffic in March when compared to the same month last year – and remained **-35.7%** below their pre-pandemic levels (March 2019).

FREIGHT & AIRCRAFT MOVEMENTS

In March, **freight traffic** across the **European airport network** increased by **+7.6%** compared to the same period last year, with **EU+ airports** at **+7.5%** and those in the rest of Europe at **+8.2%**. Overall, freight traffic remains at a **-5%** deficit <u>compared to pre-pandemic levels</u> (March 2019).

Amongst the top 10 European airports for freight traffic, the best performances in March compared to the same month last year came from: **London Heathrow** (+20%), **Liège** (+15.5%), **Madrid** (+14.4%), **Milan-MXP** (+14.2%) and **Amsterdam** (+12.1%).

Aircraft movements increased by **+6.2%** in March across the **European airport network** compared to the same period last year, and remained **-8%** <u>below pre-pandemic levels</u> (March 2019).

DATA BY AIRPORT GROUPS

Throughout March, airports welcoming more than 40 million passengers per year (Majors), airports welcoming between 25 and 40 million passengers (Mega), airports welcoming between 25 and 10 million passengers (Large), airports welcoming between 1 million and 10 million passengers per year (Medium), and airports welcoming between 1000 and 1 million passengers (Small) reported an average change in passenger traffic of -1.8%, +1.2%, -6.5%, +8.1% and -35.7% as compared to their pre-pandemic (March 2019) levels.

The airports that reported the highest increases in passenger traffic (vs March 2019) are as follows:

MAJORS: Madrid MAD (+8.9%), Istanbul IST (+8.2%), Barcelona BCN (+7.9%), Rome FCO (+6.5%), London LHR (+3%).

MEGA: Athens ATH (+21.5%), Lisbon LIS (+19%), Palma de Mallorca PMI (+17.5%), Antalya AYT (+14.7%), Istanbul SAW (+11%).

LARGE: Sochi AER (+73.4%), Milan Bergamo BGY (+32.5%), Málaga AGP (+29.5%), Catania CTA (+28%), Alicante ALC (+27.3%).

MEDIUM: Tirana TIA (+232.3%), Samarkand SKD (+158.9%), Kutaisi KUT (+139%), Astana NQZ (+95.3%), Almaty ALA (+95.3%).

SMALL: Babimost IEG (+164.6%), Baia Mare BAY (+144.4%), Batumi BUS (+96.6%) La Gomera GMZ (+88.8%), Castellon CDT (+87.5%).

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[1] October 2023 Forecast (ACI EUROPE)
[2] EU, EEA, Switzerland and UK.
[3] Albania, Armenia, Belarus, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Georgia, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Russia, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.
[4] Visiting Friends and Relatives
[5] Airports with more than 40 million passengers per annum (2023).
[6] Airports with 10 to 40 million passengers per annum (2023.
[7] Airports with 1 to 10 million passengers per annum (2023)
[8] Airports with less than 1 million passengers per annum (2023).

ENDS

Note to editor:

Download the ACI EUROPE European Airport Traffic Forecast Scenarios – May 2024 here.

ACI EUROPE Airport Traffic Reports are the only air transport reports to include all types of airline passenger flights to, from and within Europe: full service, low cost, charter and others. ACI EUROPE has recently expanded their monthly coverage to include over 450 airports, representing over 95% of European airport traffic.

The ACI EUROPE Airport Traffic Reports are a dedicated service for ACI EUROPE members and accredited journalists, available in the password protected sections of the 'Media Room' and the 'Members Room' on our website www.aci-europe.org.

For your password to access these sections, please contact us by e-mail at: caroline.kjaergaard-heiss@aci-europe.org. Your request will be validated and the password will be e-mailed to your work address.

The report presents data for ACI EUROPE Members and might not be representative of the total European airport traffic.

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ACI EUROPE is the European region of Airports Council International (ACI), the only worldwide professional association of airport operators. ACI EUROPE represents over 500 airports in 55 countries. Our members facilitate over 90% of commercial air traffic in Europe. Air transport supports 13.5 million jobs, generating €886 billion in European economic activity (4.4% of GDP). In response to the Climate Emergency, in June 2019 our members committed to achieving Net Zero carbon emissions for operations under their control by 2050, without offsetting.