

ACI World data shows COVID-19's effect on international air traffic



Although domestic markets continue positive trend, recovery prospects remain fragile

Airports Council International (ACI) World data has revealed that the devastating impact of the global pandemic continued in June with global passenger traffic declining by -85.6% year-over-year.

This was a slight improvement compared to the -91.3% year-over-year result in May and the second consecutive month with a marginal progress.

Falling by another six percentage points compared to the previous month to -58.5% for the first six months of 2020, global passenger traffic continued to decline. The 12-month rolling average for the global industry continued to move further into negative territories and was recorded at -27.3% by the end of June.

Compared to the passenger market, air freight continued to be less impacted by the effect of COVID-19. Global air freight volumes experienced an improvement in June with year-over-year volumes revealing a decline of -11.4% in June compared to a decline of -17.9% in May, resulting in a -12.3% drop for the first six months of 2020. The global 12-month rolling average continued its downward trend to reach a -7.3% drop by the end of the June.

“In the early days of the crisis, there were predictions that June would be the turning point with the recovery of the aviation industry beginning. In fact, June results shows only a slow recovery in domestic markets in China and the United States, while the international passenger segment continued to be practically non-existent, heavily affecting the financial results of the airports and postponing the recovery.

While we noted some signs for optimism in June, the industry has remained on the ground for much longer than anticipated. In addition to the recovery taking longer than previously expected, uncertainty persists for the aviation industry.

The recovery of air travel is crucial in the wider global economic recovery but, to succeed, it will need passengers to have confidence in the industry's focus on their health and welfare and for governments to pursue harmonized, proportionate, evidence-based health measures.

Unilateral national measures, especially a quarantine requirement for instance, is damaging to both the industry and passenger confidence and ACI has urged governments to follow a robust and consistent protocol for testing, which should be implemented only when necessary and as an alternative to broad-brush requirements for quarantine,” explains Luis Felipe de Oliveira, Director General, ACI World.

ACI collects and analyses data from a significant sample of airports that provide regular reports on monthly passenger and air freight statistics, forming part of the world's most comprehensive source for airport data.

Passenger traffic

With the exception of Asia-Pacific and North America, all regional markets posted improved global passenger traffic in June compared to May – all other regions posted declines above -90%. The recovery of the domestic traffic in Asia-Pacific and North America helped them to record significantly better global traffic volumes in June with decline of -76.9% and -81.2%, respectively compared to -82.5% and -90.3% in May.

International passenger traffic continued to be virtually halted for a third consecutive month with all regions recording decline above -95% year-over-year for June. The 12-month rolling average for the international segment was recorded at -29.6% and -64.5% for the first six months of 2020.

Aside from Asia-Pacific and North America, domestic passenger markets continued to be severely impacted. Africa remains the most effected region with a year-over-year decline of -94.3% in June, while Asia-Pacific, North America and now Europe show signs of improvement with decreases of -63.2%, -78.1% and -81.1%, respectively. Latin America-Caribbean improved in June compared to May, but remains severely impacted with decline of -88.3% of its domestic passenger market.

Air freight

Globally, air freight volumes were much less impacted by the effect of the pandemic. Although passenger traffic was reduced by more than 85%, air freight volumes dropped by slightly more than a tenth year-over-year in June (-11.4%) compared to a drop of -17.9% in May.

All regions apart from North America recorded significant losses in June with Latin America-Caribbean posting a drop of -28.6%, Africa at -27.0%, and Middle East at -26.3%, while Asia-Pacific and Europe recorded lesser losses with decreases of -16.0% and -15.6%, respectively. North America experienced its total air freight volume return in positive territories with an increase of 3.9% in June compared to June 2019.

This was mostly because of its strong domestic market (+11.7%), which compensated for the losses of -6.4% of its International freight market.

The international air freight markets losses were eased in June with a decline of -15.2% year-over-year compared to -19.6% in May. Domestic freight volumes also improved and are now at only -2.4% of June 2019 volumes largely due to the strong performance of the North America domestic market, which recorded an increase of 11.7% in June compared to last year.