

AIR TRANSPORT IN EUROPE RETURNS TO NORMAL SOONER THAN EXPECTED



Despite the succession of crises, the airline industry continues its positive development. After two complicated years, in which traffic was severely reduced, European skies are now full of planes again.

In February, the passenger volumes across the European airport network stood at -39%, up from -45.7% in January. These are the data released by ACI Europe.

"Improvements to passenger traffic in February reflected the fact that States started to ease restrictions as the Omicron wave subsided, both at the local level and those relating to travel," stated the association's director-general, Olivier Jankovec.

While the volatility of oil is causing fears of a sharp rise in air prices, according to the European Organization for the Safety of Air Navigation air transport will reach 92% of 2019 by the end of 2022. **Air transport has come a long way, it is even possible to speak of a renaissance.**

The year 2020 was one of the worst years in the history of the sector, with dramatic melting in the number of passengers (-60% compared to 2019 according to IATA), 2021 will not have been much better.

The prevailing gloom seems to have disappeared in the aviation industry, at least according to the latest Eurocontrol statistics. According to the European Organisation for the Safety of Air Navigation (Eurocontrol) 9.3 million flights could be registered in 2022. This year the traffic in Europe will reach 84% of its pre-pandemic level.

"Aviation has continued to recover well over the past few weeks, and there is a steady increase from 68% in January to 79% in early April over 2019 levels, even taking into account the impact on the network and fuel prices of Russia's unprovoked aggression against Ukraine," says Eamonn Brennan, director-general, Eurocontrol.

The latest scenarios of the authority, based on statistics from April to December 2022, are rather optimistic. They forecast steady growth from April through the summer peak, reaching 89% of 2019 traffic by August in our base case, with that level rising slowly to end the year at 92%.

While some were predicting a return to normal operations not before 2024, it is possible that the airports will have as many planes as in 2019 as early as... next year.

Due to a change of strategy in Europe, concerning the management of the epidemic, travel is becoming easier, with lighter protocols, as in Indonesia for example or in Thailand.

"Airlines are adding a lot of capacity, and some are already exceeding their pre-pandemic levels. It is entirely possible to reach 90% or more of 2019 traffic at peak summer times, and we expect vacation destinations and some other parts of the network to exceed 100% of their 2019 levels," continued the manager.

However, this improvement could be slowed down by the rise in the price of oil, which will push companies to cancel routes due to lower profitability or depending on the number of passengers. But that's not all. **There are also social tensions, with staff shortages in some parts of the sector, particularly in airports.**

In addition, the war in Ukraine will have an impact on the time of departure of the Europeans and also on the routes of the planes. The recovery is thus more fragile than it seems.

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