

AIRPORTS' STAFF SHORTAGES COMPLICATE THE AIR TRAVEL



The situation at airports is currently dramatic and will become even more so in the coming weeks. The main cause of the air travel problems is the bottlenecks that do not allow smooth access to the aircraft for passengers.

In fact, this is obviously not the case for all hubs, but for the most important ones, i.e. those hosting an airline hub.

The problems are according to experts caused by the lack of anticipation on the part of managers regarding the resumption of air travel activity.

Scalded by the sad experience of 2020, when after a summer of serious recovery, traffic collapsed again in the fall, decision-makers were more than a little skittish about expectations of recovery, even though these were largely predictable.

In fact, the air travel traffic started to flow again, as if the lid of a pressure cooker had been opened and the passengers' impatience had been boiled away.

The problem is that in order to make an airport function properly, it is essential to make the passengers' pathway fluid in a space that is necessarily small and where there are many obstacles to overcome.

In no particular order, access to parking lots, then to terminals, then to primary security filters where they exist, then to check-in counters, then to screening checkpoints, then to customs and passport control, then finally to boarding, all these barriers constitute potential bottlenecks.

The only way to avoid them is to put enough people at each of them, provided that the facilities are adequate.

Overall, airports are equipped to handle peak traffic, provided that all facilities are operational.

This is not always the case, and many airports have not yet opened up to full capacity, for good reason: they do not have the staff to fill all the positions.

The matter is further complicated by the fact that the authorities are different depending on the function between the police forces, the subcontractors' staff, the companies' employees and the airports' employees. And coordination between them is not always easy, each defending its own prerogatives and working conditions.

Finally, the lack of anticipation on the part of airport decision-makers also plays an important role.

It was very likely that air traffic would pick up very strongly once the vast majority of the population had been vaccinated, the borders would open up and the sanitary constraints would be lifted.

During the pandemic, many employees, often specialized, were forced to leave their jobs, voluntarily

or not. Replacing them was certainly not an easy task, especially since the employment conditions and salaries are not particularly attractive.

It is therefore curious that recruitment did not start as early as the end of 2021, as training in many jobs is rather long and administrative approvals are often necessary and difficult to obtain. After all, an airport is a particularly sensitive place. At German airports, for instance, around 7,200 employees are missing according to the result of a study by the Institute of German Economics.

The consequence is the near impossibility of treating passengers in a normal way, who are waiting with understandable impatience for the blessed moment when their flight will take off, with them on board of course.

Instead, they are currently offered several hours of stress, while many are already apprehensive about flying, in conditions of comfort that are simply unacceptable.

However, we are only at the beginning of the summer season and the traffic peaks are far from being reached.

The question is: won't the current air travel experience discourage customers from traveling? Will they be able to bear to repeat this experience? And then, after the outbound flight, there is the return trip, often from a foreign country where neither the languages, nor the habits, nor the cultures are familiar to them?

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