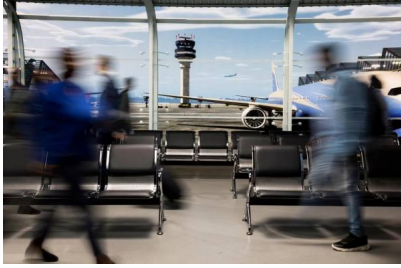


# EUROPEAN AIRPORT PASSENGER TRAFFIC SEES FIRST DECLINE SINCE 2021



now.

April 2026 brought a dip in air travel across European airports, the first annual fall since rebound efforts started in April 2021. Data from Airports Council International shows numbers dropped 0.7 percent when measured against April of the prior year. Not large - yet still significant - the change breaks a steady climb seen through recent years. Movement in passenger volume had held upward until

## A Tale of Two Europe

Among Europe's air passenger traffic trends, differences are hard to ignore. While the EU+ zone saw slight expansion at 0.6%, growth within just the EU reached 1.4%. That rise stands out when set beside the steep 7.6% drop elsewhere beyond those borders. **Performance outside the bloc fell well behind during the same stretch.**

Destinations tied closely to the Middle East feel pressure as unrest drags on. Airports in Israel drop over seventy-three percent - numbers hit hard by prolonged tension. Falling passenger numbers appear next in Turkey, where movement shrinks 5.1 percent. Then come sharper drops: Azerbaijan slips nearly thirteen percent, Georgia almost seventeen. Each figure reflects how regional shocks ripple through nearby economies.

Pressure grew due to timing and local conditions. This spring, Easter split across March, making April data harder to interpret. Meanwhile, transport in Germany froze during a national strike, weighing heavily on regional numbers. A full week of disruption pulled broader results downward.

## Winners and Losers Across Major Markets

Across Southern Europe, growth in passenger traffic emerged clearly. Leading that rise, Spain saw its figure climb by 3.7 percent. Not far behind, Italy posted a gain of 2.2 percent. In sharp contrast, Germany faced a steep downturn - shrinking 8.5 percent overall. Within it, key cities bore the brunt: Munich dropped close to 16 percent, Frankfurt dipped roughly 11. Meanwhile, the United Kingdom showed a decrease of 2.1 percent. Falling more gently, France registered a dip of just under one point.

Of Europe's major international hubs, just several kept rising. Barcelona led with an increase of 4.1%. Close behind came Madrid, up by 3.3%. Growth at Amsterdam-Schiphol reached 2.7%. Meanwhile, passenger numbers at Paris Roissy held steady - no change recorded. On the opposite path, Istanbul's primary airports fell. The main Istanbul facility dropped 6.8%. Sabiha Gökçen saw a smaller dip: down 3.4%.

## Medium and Smaller Airports Adapt to Changing Conditions

Surprisingly, it was the modest hubs that held up best under pressure. Airports serving one to ten million travelers each year expanded by 2.1%, whereas the tiniest ones jumped ahead at 5.5%. With most flights staying within Europe, these sites avoided much of the turmoil tied to distant routes and global tensions.

Albania, along with North Macedonia and Moldova, saw growth jump by more than 24%. Fresh interest in travel destinations played a role. These nations also gained from improved links to global routes. Distance from unrest in eastern regions helped too.

**Despite growth driven by budget airlines expanding routes, passenger numbers still trail behind 2019 levels at many hubs.** While shifts toward shorter European trips offer some stability, full recovery remains out of reach - for now.

## **Outlook**

Even though the drop was just 0.7%, it shows how easily outside events can shake European airports. With ongoing global conflicts and temporary seasonal effects wearing off, the next few months should clarify whether growth inside the EU+ area will balance wider challenges - or get drowned out by weaker performance beyond its borders. Right now, numbers highlight a patchy skies landscape across Europe, where shifting quickly and paying attention to local conditions help airlines stay steady amid uncertainty.

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