

# Omicron impact immediate and substantial for Europe's airports

***More pain ahead if Governments keep restricting travel despite ECDC advice to the contrary***

## ACI EUROPE

10 Rue Montoyer (Box 9)  
1000 Brussels, Belgium  
www.aci-europe.org

**Brussels, 23 December 2021:** European airport trade body, ACI EUROPE, today released preliminary data on the impact of the Omicron variant on European passenger traffic, along with its full air traffic report for November 2021.

## OMICRON IMPACT IMMEDIATE & SUBSTANTIAL – OUTLOOK UNCERTAIN

In the 3 week period (**weeks 47 to 49**) following the first report from South Africa to the WHO of the Omicron variant (24 November 2021), **passenger traffic** at Europe's airports is estimated to have fallen by **-20%**<sup>1</sup>. Over the same period, **load factors** on flights to/from European airports are estimated to have decreased from 66% (week 46) to **54%** (week 49).

However, the past week (week 50), which corresponds with the start of the end-of-the-year festive season, saw passenger traffic increasing by +9% over the preceding one (week 49), with load factors re-gaining 2 points at 56%.

**Olivier Jankovec, Director General of ACI EUROPE** commented: *"It is no surprise that the flight bans to Southern Africa and the patchy travel restrictions imposed by many Governments on other markets - including within Europe - have directly impacted traffic levels in the past weeks. Business travel has been the first to recede, now followed by leisure travel given the extreme uncertainty and prospects of more restrictions both on travel and local life. Last week's data shows that only 'Visiting Family and Relatives' travel is somehow holding up for now, as Europeans are craving getting together and reuniting with loved ones for Christmas."*

ACI EUROPE further warned that the reversal of the recovery dynamic in passenger traffic over the past weeks and for the remainder of the year means 2021 will end up below its forecast of -60% in passenger traffic for the European airport network, compared to pre-pandemic (2019) volumes.

Jankovec added: *"Beyond the holiday season, there is no doubt that Omicron will take its toll on passenger traffic in the first quarter of 2022. But the extent to which we need to revise our expectations will primarily depend on whether Governments continue with knee-jerk reactions or not. Omicron is fast becoming the dominant variant across Europe, which according to the ECDC makes travel restrictions ineffective from a public health perspective and highly damaging both economically and socially."*

## NOVEMBER PASSENGER TRAFFIC IMPROVING MARGINALLY

In November, **passenger traffic** in the **European airport network** still decreased by **-35.2%** compared to the same period pre-pandemic (2019) – a marginal improvement compared to the previous month (-36.7% in October).

---

<sup>1</sup> Preliminary estimate based on data collected from 40 airports across 25 European countries, including all segments (from major hubs to small regional airports).

While airports in the **EU+ area** kept improving over previous months, they did so at a rather low pace despite the reopening of the transatlantic market (-**38.1%** in November compared to -41.2% in October). This mainly reflects the impact of Omicron on their performance towards the end of the month. Meanwhile, airports in the **rest of Europe** saw their performance worsening in November (-19.0%), compared to October (-17.4%).

#### HEATHROW BACK IN THE TOP 5

The easing of restrictions for travel to North America during the month of November clearly benefitted **the Majors** (Top 5 European airports in 2019), as they saw passenger traffic decreasing by **-41.6%**, up from -45.6% in October.

While Istanbul (-30.4%) remained the busiest European airport, London-Heathrow (-50.8%) rejoined the top league for the first time since May 2020, in 5<sup>th</sup> position.

Paris-CDG (-40.8%) came second, followed by Madrid (-35%) and Amsterdam-Schiphol (-41.8%). Frankfurt (-42.8%) did not make it to the Top 5 league but came in at 6<sup>th</sup> position.

#### REGIONAL AIRPORTS LOSING STEAM

Conversely, smaller regional airports (Group 4: less than 5 million passengers per annum) saw passenger traffic worsening in November (-25.3%) compared to the previous month (-22.8%).

#### FREIGHT & AIRCRAFT MOVEMENTS

**Freight traffic** in November stood at **+8.5%** above pre-pandemic volumes, with EU+ area airports (+10.5%) largely outperforming those in the rest of Europe (-4.3%).

**Aircraft movements** in November decreased by **-25.1%** compared to pre-pandemic levels, with a sharp contrast between airports in the EU+ area (-26.8%) and those in the rest of Europe (-14.8%).

**## ENDS ##**

#### **For more information, contact:**

Virginia Lee  
Director, Media & Communications  
Tel: +32 2 552 09 82  
Email: virginia.lee@aci-europe.org

Agata Lyznik  
Communications Manager  
Tel: +32 2 552 09 89  
Email: agata.lyznik@aci-europe.org

**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.