ACI EUROPE
AIRPORTS COUNCIL INTERNATIONAL

ACI EUROPE
Boulevard du Régent 37-40 (5th floor)
1000 Brussels, Belgium
www.aci-europe.org

Full passenger traffic recovery finally in sight for Europe's airports

But significant performance variations between airports will remain due to geopolitics and structural market changes

Brussels, 11 October 2023: The August 2023 air traffic report and the updated *Airport Traffic Forecast 2023-2027*, both released today by ACI EUROPE, reveal the continued resilience of passenger demand while also highlighting structural changes in the European aviation market.

AUGUST PERFORMANCE DRIVEN BY INTERNATIONAL FLOWS

Passenger traffic across the European airport network in August stood at just **-3.4%** compared to pre-pandemic (August 2019), a similar level to the one achieved in the previous month (July 2023 at –3%).

When compared to August 2022, passenger volumes increased by **+11.6%**, with international passenger traffic (+13.2%) expanding at twice the rate of domestic passenger traffic (+6%).

FULL PASSENGER TRAFFIC RECOVERY IN SIGHT

Taking stock of the strong performance of passenger traffic over the Summer and the continued resilience of demand, despite lasting inflationary pressures, persistently higher air fares[1] and increased geopolitical tensions, ACI EUROPE now predicts:

- **Passenger traffic in 2023 reaching 95.5% of pre-pandemic volumes (2019)**, up from 91% in its previous forecast (December 2022).

- **A full passenger traffic recovery in 2024**, compared to 2025 in the previous forecast. Accordingly, passenger traffic at Europe's airports is set to stand at +1.4% over pre-pandemic (2019) levels in 2024 (rather than -2% as per the previous forecast).

- **Passenger traffic by 2027 at +9.2% over pre-pandemic (2019) levels** – only marginally higher than in the previous forecast (+9%).

[1] Air fares for travel in October on intra-European air routes currently stand at +36% over their 2019 levels.

PERFORMANCE VARIATIONS HERE TO STAY

However, ACI EUROPE has cautioned that behind these headline network-wide figures, airports across Europe will continue to report significant variations in their passenger traffic performance - at least in the medium-term.

Olivier Jankovec, Director General of ACI EUROPE commented: "*What we are seeing is that not all airports are recovering at the same pace. While close to 50% of Europe's airports have now exceeded their pre-pandemic passenger volumes - with some even experiencing exponential growth – all others remain below, with some still struggling to recover more dynamically. This means that many airports might not get back to their pre-pandemic volumes before 2026, or even later."*

As of last August, the delta in performance against pre-pandemic passenger levels across national markets ranged from -34% to more than +100%, something Jankovec said was unprecedented*: "In the past, when faced with systemic shocks such as 9/11 or the global financial crisis, most airports tended to recover at a similar pace. Not this time."*

WAR IN UKRAINE AND STRUCTURAL MARKET CHANGES

"This is down to the war in Ukraine and resulting restrictions on air traffic impacting certain markets, along with structural changes in the aviation market post-Covid-19."

Chief among these **structural changes in the aviation market** are:

- **The prominence of leisure travel & Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) demand,** as well as **the strength of international intra-European and transatlantic demand**. Both factors are driving the evolution of airlines' route networks, much to the benefit of airports serving popular tourism destinations or communities with extensive diasporas.

- **The remarkable yet selective expansion of Ultra-Low Cost Carriers and relative retrenchment of Full Service Carriers**, with the notable exception of Turkish Airlines. This tends to favour secondary and regional airports rather than larger hubs.

The best passenger traffic performances amongst the different segments of the airport industry in August, compared to pre-pandemic levels (August 2019), largely reflect these structural changes in the aviation market:

- Among **the Majors** (top 5 European airports), **Istanbul** (+12.4%) remained the only one having exceeded its pre-pandemic passenger levels. **London-Heathrow** (-1.6%) was very close to a full recovery, thanks in large part to its strong position on the transatlantic market – followed by **Paris-CDG** (-

12.7%), **Amsterdam-Schiphol** (-11.1%) and **Frankfurt** (-15.3%).

- Among **other large airports**[2], the best performances came from **Paris-Orly** (+10.8%), **Istanbul Sabiha Gokcen** (+8.8%) **Athens** (+8.4%), **Lisbon** (+5.4%), **Palma de Mallorca** (+2.1%), **Antalya** (+1.4%) and **Dublin** (+0.8%) – all of them having exceeded their pre-pandemic volumes.

- A number of airports acting as large **Low Cost Carrier bases** recorded impressive increases: **Bergamo** (+14.3%), **Charleroi** (+16.5%), **Beauvais** (+46.7%) and **Memmingen** (+60.5%).

- **Several regional and smaller airports**[3] also posted passenger traffic results well above their pre-pandemic levels: **Perugia** (+203%), **Kutaisi** (+122.1%), **Tirana** (+108.5%), **Samarkand** (+99.3%), **Zadar** (+91.4%), **Lodz** (+48%), **Oviedo-Asturias** (+42.3%), **Funchal** (+40.1%), **Pristina** (+36%), **Santorini** (+32.5%), **Bournemouth** (+28.4%), **Kerkyra** (+27%), **Turin** (+25.3%) and **Naples** (+24.3%).

DOWNSIDE TRAFFIC RISKS

While demand remains strong into the autumn, ACI EUROPE also cautioned about downside traffic risks. These risks include economic slowdown in Europe, ongoing inflation and higher oil prices, constraints on airline capacity growth due to aircraft and spare parts supply issues, and increased geopolitical risks.

AUGUST DATA BY AIRPORT GROUPS

During the month of **August**, airports welcoming more than 25 million passengers per year (Group 1), airports welcoming between 10 and 25 million passengers (Group 2), airports welcoming between 5 and 10 million passengers (Group 3) and airports welcoming less than 5 million passengers per year (Group 4) reported an average performance of **-6.4%**, **-8.0%**, **+5.4%** and **+3.2%** when compared to pre-pandemic traffic levels (August 2019).

The airports that reported the highest increases in passenger traffic for August 2023 when compared with August 2019 are as follows:

GROUP 1: Istanbul IST (**+12.4%**), Paris-Orly (**+10.8%**), Istanbul SAW (**+8.8%**), Athens (**+8.4%**) and Lisbon (**+5.4%**).

GROUP 2: Naples (**+24.3%**), Porto (**+19.2%**), Milan BGY (**+14.3%**), Marseille (**+10.7%**) and Málaga (**+9.7%**).

[2] Airports with more than 25 million passengers per annum (2019).
[3] Airports with less than 10 million passengers per annum (2019).

GROUP 3: Sochi (**+115.6%**), Almaty (**+42.9%**), Belgrade (**+22.9%**), Valencia (**+20.6%**) and Palermo (**+17.3%**).

GROUP 4: Grenoble (**527.7%**), Trapani (**334.4%**), Perugia (**203.0%**), Kutaisi (**122.1%**), San Sebastián (**109.3%**).

ENDS

For more information, contact:

Agata Lyznik
Director of Communications & Media
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.