

**ACI EUROPE**

10 Rue Montoyer (Box 9)  
1000 Brussels, Belgium  
[www.aci-europe.org](http://www.aci-europe.org)

# Airports warn of irreversible consequences to air connectivity, tourism and local economies

## *Industry body calls for measures to enable summer season re-start*

**Brussels, 12 May 2020:** ACI EUROPE today revealed that Europe's airports saw a **-98.6%** drop in passenger traffic during the month of April compared to the same period last year, resulting in a loss of **-202 million passengers**. The European network of 500+ airports welcomed **only 2.8 million** passengers during April, a volume that was handled in that same month last year by Dublin airport alone.

Olivier Jankovec, Director General of ACI EUROPE commented: *"Europe's airports are on their knees. They have lost more than 315 million passengers since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak and they will pass exceed half a billion passengers lost before the end of May. All their revenue sources have essentially dried up, most of their staff furloughed and investments stopped - yet cash is still flowing out in running costs as most have remained at least partially open."*

Jankovec warned: *"This cannot last much longer before large scale and irreversible damage is inflicted not just on staff, local sub-contractors and business partners – but also on air connectivity, tourism and regional economies. If some air traffic and revenue generation capabilities are not restored in time for the peak Summer months, we will see airports across Europe going bust, with a far-reaching domino effect upon local communities."*

As smaller regional airports were already facing structural financial viability challenges before COVID-19<sup>1</sup>, they are the most exposed. The high seasonality of their business - with the Summer holiday period accounting for up to 70% of their revenues – is compounded by the risks of not seeing travel and border restrictions eased over the coming weeks. However, as Jankovec pointed out: *"Beyond smaller regional airports, business continuity is a systemic issue for the airport industry - with larger airports across Europe also fighting for survival. "*

### **SUPPORTING AIRPORTS WILL PROTECT LIVELIHOODS**

With European States mostly focused on supporting airlines, ACI EUROPE made clear that protecting air connectivity, tourism, jobs and regional development also requires supporting airports. Such support will be needed beyond the current crisis. As the new normal of the post COVID-19 environment will come with fundamentally changed trading conditions which will redefine the economic model of airports.

As part of its OFF THE GROUND project, ACI EUROPE therefore called today for the European Commission to revisit State aid rules<sup>2</sup> beyond the temporary framework already in place to respond to COVID-19 by:

## **CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1**

- Clarifying that the maintenance of airport operations to accommodate essential air traffic during the COVID-19 crisis falls within the public remit and can thus be financially compensated by States without being considered as State aid.
- Provide temporary derogations to the 2014 Aviation State Aid Guidelines to increase the possibility for airports with up to 3 million passengers to receive public financing - including for decarbonisation - and to provide maximum flexibility as regards start-up aid to airlines to enable the reopening of vital air routes.

### **COORDINATED AND ALIGNED SANITARY MEASURES REQUIRED**

With the immediate priority being restarting operations, ACI EUROPE reiterated its call for European States to fully coordinate and align the conditions under which current restrictions to air travel can be lifted. This should include the lifting of quarantine requirements for incoming travelers.

Ahead of the release by the European Commission of guidelines on that matter, which will be complemented by much needed EASA Guidance on sanitary measures for aviation, Jankovec commented: *“There can be no compromise when it comes to the health and safety of passengers and staff. COVID-19 confronts us with an unprecedented challenge as a vaccine or an effective treatment are still distant prospects. Just as everyone is doing in our daily lives, we must adapt on an on-going basis to operate our airports and protect livelihoods in ways that reduce transmission risks as much as possible. This means looking at the most effective combination of measures, which must be fully coherent across all transport modes and tourism activities.”*

This combination of measures<sup>3</sup> includes wearing masks and the availability of disinfectant gels in terminals, increased cleaning and sanitising protocols for airport facilities, improved ventilation and air conditioning quality, personal protection equipment and new procedures for staff and physical distancing. Of all these measures, physical distancing is clearly the most challenging for any mass transport system infrastructure – including airports.

While strict physical distancing is feasible with a few flights and (very) low passenger volumes, it means airports will be constrained to operate with just 20% to 40% at most of their capacity (depending on their layout) as soon as demand and traffic increase. It then involves queues of hundreds of metres at each of the key operational airport processes such as check-in, security checks, border control, boarding and disembarkation. Strict physical distancing at airports is thus a significant limiting factor for the entire air transport system – as recognised by EUROCONTROL’s Network Manager.

## **CONTINUED ON PAGE 3**

## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

Strict physical distancing at airports also comes with negative health consequences. It requires passengers to come earlier to the airport and spend more time there. This results in more crowded facilities – which can defeat its intended purpose.

*Jankovec concluded: “As long as physical distancing will be part of deconfinement strategies for all transport modes, airports should be required to ensure it in ways that are operationally feasible and under conditions that are effective at reducing transmission risks. Airports need their health authorities to work cooperatively with them to adapt physical distancing to their specific layout and operations.”*

**## ENDS ##**

### Notes to Editors

1 Before the COVID-19 crisis, 71% of smaller regional airports (less than 1 million passengers/year) were loss making.

2 View the [ACI EUROPE OFF THE GROUND Working Paper on State Aid](#).

3 ACI EUROPE provided a detailed assessment of these measures to the European Commission, EASA and European States on 28 April as part of its OFF THE GROUND project.

For more information, contact:

Virginia Lee, Director, Media & Communications, ACI EUROPE  
Telephone: +32 (0)2 552 09 82  
Email: [virginia.lee@aci-europe.org](mailto:virginia.lee@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 46 European countries. Our members facilitate over 90% of commercial air traffic in Europe: **2.5 billion passengers, 20.7 million tonnes of freight** and **25.7 million aircraft movements** in 2019. In response to Climate Emergency, in June 2019 our members committed to achieve **Net Zero** carbon emissions for operations under their control **by 2050**, without offsetting.*

**EVERY FLIGHT BEGINS AT THE AIRPORT.**