

Ongoing impact of COVID-19 weakens aviation recovery - ACI

The lasting adverse impact of the COVID-19 crisis is forecast to remove an additional 5.2 billion passengers by the end of this year compared to the pre-COVID-19 forecast for 2021, according to new Airports Council International (ACI) World data.

Despite recent positive news of certain markets reopening their borders, global passenger traffic in 2021 is still expected to reach only half of what it was in 2019, with total traffic for 2021 forecast to be only 4.6 billion of the 9.2 billion passengers served two years ago.

Domestic passenger traffic continues to recover faster than the international market, expecting to reach more than 3.1 billion passengers by the end of the year, a level corresponding to 58.5% of that achieved in 2019.

Linked to traffic reductions, ACI World estimates that the world's airports are expected to lose more than \$111 billion in revenues this year, \$3 billion more than projected in the previous assessment of July 2021.

While the new data worsens the expected annual financial performance of the world's airports, especially for the fourth quarter of the year, ACI still expects each quarter of 2021 to show an improvement compared to the previous one.

Compared to the pre-COVID-19 forecast for 2021, the quarterly revenue shortfall is projected to improve from a 69.9% decline in the first quarter to a 47.4% decrease in the fourth quarter.

"The speed of the recovery continues to depend substantially on several stakeholders and the level of coordination pursued by national governments worldwide," ACI World Director General Luis Felipe de Oliveira said.

"While the global travel market is still mostly depressed, more and more countries are moving towards the gradual reopening of their borders to vaccinated travelers. Despite a delayed recovery as compared to earlier forecasts, this trend brings a renewed optimism that air travel could see an uptick in 2022, moving the industry closer to recovery. We hope that the imminent easing of travel restrictions in the US will pave the way for other countries to safely reopen their borders.

"ACI World continues to advocate the importance of a pragmatic and risk-based approach to managing the sustainable recovery of the aviation industry as it prepares for a return of air traffic demand. Government action to promote safe travel - including a coordinated and risk-based approach to testing and vaccination - is critical, rather than governments enforcing full-scale restrictions and blanket measures."

New projections reveal that the COVID-19 crisis is expected to remove more than 3.6 billion passengers for 2022, representing a 28.3% decrease from 2019 levels.

Similarly, the impact of the pandemic is expected to reduce airport revenues next year by an additional US\$78.6 billion, or by 29.3%, compared to 2019. However, it is expected that like 2021, each quarter of 2022 will see an improvement over the previous one.

ACI World will soon release the 2021 Annual World Airport Traffic Report, which provides a detailed

review of 2020 operating and airport traffic trends as well as an analysis of 2021 in the world's major aviation markets.