

# APAC and Gulf recovery will be slow, but still best in world

While Airports Council International (ACI) research shows recovery in both Asia-Pacific and the Middle East will be “slow and uncertain,” these two regions will be the fastest to restart growth, according to the World Air Traffic Forecasts 2020-2040.

The Asia-Pacific region will have closed out 2020 with a decline of 58%, according to forecasts. Airports in the region are now expected to have returned to 2019 pre-COVID passenger volume of 3.4 billion passengers by 2023.

The passenger decline in the Middle East was worse than APAC, with declines of 72% forecast for year-end 2020. This region is expected to take until 2024 to return to pre-COVID 2019 passenger numbers of 405 million.

Total passenger traffic is forecasted to see a compound growth rate of 5.2% in the Middle East and 4.7% in Asia-Pacific. Among the top 10 fastest-growing countries above 50 million passengers by compound growth rate from 2019 to 2040 are Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Iran in the Middle East; and Indonesia, India, Vietnam, Philippines and China in Asia-Pacific.

Meanwhile, freight traffic recovery for both regions is expected to be more positive, with expected returns to 2019 levels of cargo by 2022.

“This forecast is based on the assumption that an effective vaccine is distributed in 2021, and broader population vaccination is largely accomplished by early 2022. Limited vaccine supply and slow distribution combined with a prolonged economic downturn risks postponing the recovery of the whole region to 2024,” said Stefano Baronci, Director General, ACI Asia-Pacific. “For the aviation industry to continue providing vital services and supporting the global vaccine distribution undertakings, ACI Asia-Pacific urges the inclusion of all aviation workers and airport staff as essential workers as part of the World Health Organization’s Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization recommendations and national vaccination plans.”