

The International Air Transport Association ([IATA](#)) released January 2021 data for global air cargo markets showing that demand returned to pre-Covid or January 2019 levels for the first time since the beginning of the crisis.

January demand also showed strong month-to-month growth over December 2020 levels, according to IATA.

All comparisons made in this release are between January 2019, which followed a normal demand pattern, and 2021 due to distorted monthly results throughout 2020.

To start, global demand, measured in cargo ton-kilometers (CTK), was up 1.1 percent compared to January 2019 and increased 3 percent in comparison to December 2020.

All regions saw month-to-month improvement in air cargo demand, and North America with 27.4 percent of world share and Africa with 2.1 percent were the strongest performers at an 11.7 percent increase and 21.2 percent, respectively.

Due to new capacity cuts on the passenger side, measured in available cargo tonne-kilometers (ACTK), the recovery in global capacity shrank 19.5 percent and fell 5 percent compared to December 2020, the first monthly decline since April 2020.

North America saw a decrease of 6.8 percent, Europe a 19.9 percent drop and Latin America a 30.7 percent drop in ACTK.

According to the release, conditions in the manufacturing sector remain robust despite new Covid-19 outbreaks that dragged down passenger demand.

The global manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) was at 53.5 in January, indicating growth from the prior month.

The new export orders component of the manufacturing PMI continued to point to further CTK improvement, though the performance of the metric was less robust compared with fourth-quarter 2020 as Covid-19 cases rose.

"Air cargo traffic is back to pre-crisis levels and that is some much-needed good news for the global economy. But while there is a strong demand to ship goods, our ability is capped by the shortage of belly capacity normally provided by passenger aircraft," Alexandre de Juniac, IATA's Director General and CEO said.

"That should be a sign to governments that they need to share their plans for a restart so

that the industry has clarity in terms of how soon more capacity can be brought online. In normal times, a third of world trade by value moves by air."

"This high-value commerce is vital to helping restore COVID damaged economies—not to mention the critical role air cargo is playing in distributing lifesaving vaccines that must continue for the foreseeable future," de Juniac said.

January Regional Performance

North American, Middle Eastern and African carriers posted increases in international cargo demand in January compared to the same month in 2019 with 8.5 percent, 6.0 percent and 22.4 percent, respectively.

Asia-Pacific, European and Latin American carriers reported declines of 3.2 percent, 0.6 percent and 16.1 percent, respectively.

International capacity decreased throughout all six regions compared to numbers from January 2019.