

Frankfurt airport traffic nosedives to three-decade low

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The company that runs Frankfurt's airport said Monday that passenger numbers in 2020 plunged to their lowest since the 1980s as the coronavirus pandemic devastated the travel sector.

Some 18.8 million passengers passed through Germany's largest airport in 2020, 73 percent fewer than the previous year and the lowest level since 1984, operator Fraport said.

In France, airport operator Aeroport de Paris said that traffic at the capital's two main airports was 69.4 percent lower last year.

Charles de Gaulle airport north of Paris reported a drop of 70.8 percent at 22.3 million passengers, while smaller Orly to the south was down by 66.1 percent at 10.8 million.

Figures compiled by the International Civil Aviation Organization underscore the pandemic's effect on air travel globally.

ICAO data show the overall number of passengers fell by 60 percent to 1.8 billion worldwide, a level last seen in 2003.

In 2019, around 4.5 billion people globally had travelled on board planes, the UN body said.

Air traffic came to an almost complete standstill between April and June during the first coronavirus lockdown and, in Germany, "weekly passenger figures plummeted by up to 98 percent year-on-year", Fraport said.

Traffic at the German hub recovered in the third quarter of 2020, before falling again as restrictions were ramped up in face of a resurgence of the virus late in the year, it added.

In December alone, passenger traffic was down by 82 percent year-on-year to just over 890,000 people.

"The year 2020 brought extreme challenges to the entire aviation

industry," Fraport chief executive Stefan Schulte said.

In the middle of the year, the company said it would cut 3,000 to 4,000 jobs, or around 15 percent of its workforce.

The Fraport CEO suggested that owing to recent vaccination rollouts, "Frankfurt's passenger traffic will rebound noticeably in the second half of 2021".

All the same, Schulte said he expects 2021 traffic to reach only 35 to 45 percent of the 2019 passenger numbers, in what he forecast would still be a "difficult year".

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