

UN aviation body sees recovery to pre-pandemic air travel in 2023

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The ICAO sees air travel exceeding pre-pandemic levels by the end of 2023.

Demand for commercial travel is expected to make a full recovery in 2023, with volumes exceeding the 2019 level at the end of the year, a UN aviation body said Wednesday.

Forecasting a "complete and sustainable" recovery, the International Civil Aviation Organization said demand will reach pre-pandemic levels on most routes by the end of the first quarter and exceed the 2019 levels by around three percent by the end of 2023.

The body projected that 2024 air [passenger](#) demand would be four percent above the level in 2019.

The ICAO's [press release](#) did not discuss problems frequently cited by aviation experts as potential constraints on growth. These include shortages of pilots and other key aviation personnel and delays in the construction of airplane engines needed for new planes.

The outlook came as the UN body released data that showed a significant uptick in travel last year compared with 2021, when more of the world still lived under severe COVID-19 restrictions amid limited distribution of vaccines.

In all, air passenger numbers reached 74 percent of pre-pandemic levels in 2022, while passenger revenues were estimated to have hit 68 percent of 2019 levels.

The ICAO said the number of air passengers carried in 2022 increased by 47 percent compared with the prior year.

The projections come as airplane makers Boeing and Airbus have also seen a significant surge in new plane orders.

That is due to pent-up demand after pandemic restrictions and the desire to replace older aircraft with newer planes that use less [jet fuel](#) and emit less carbon.

But both companies have cautioned that supply chain problems will

constrain the ramp-up of production.

US carriers have also cited these challenges, along with a labor crunch for airplane and air traffic personnel as another potential challenge to boosting capacity.

Citing these factors, United Airlines characterized 2023 industry capacity projections as "unachievable, similar to 2022" in a presentation earlier this month.

The United presentation characterized elevated flight cancellations as "proof of the real-world constraints on growth."

The number of worldwide air passengers sank by 60 percent between 2019 and 2020 as COVID-19 spread throughout the world, wreaking havoc on commercial airline travel.

ICAO has estimated that the cratering of demand caused global airlines to lose \$372 billion in 2020 and another \$324 billion in 2021.

But ICAO's latest outlook said airlines are expected to return to operating profitability in the last quarter of 2023 after three consecutive years of losses.

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