

Africa airline industry lost \$55 bn from virus shutdowns

July 2 2020



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Africa's travel and tourism industry has lost \$55-billion due to the closure of borders to limit the spread of coronavirus, the African Union said Thursday.

On a continent where safaris are a powerful tourist magnet, the sector has been badly hit by lockdowns that shuttered air, land and sea borders.

"The impact is really severe," African Union commissioner Amani Abou-Zeid said at a virtual briefing organised by the World Economic Forum and the World Health Organisation (WHO).

"We are talking here about \$55 billion (49 billion euros) lost within three months in a year when we were supposed to see an increase in [travel](#) and air transport," she warned. "There are airlines that may not survive COVID-19."

"In Africa tourism is not luxury," she said. "This is our livelihood."

Despite a steady rise in coronavirus cases, countries across Africa are forging ahead with plans to resume air traffic.

A handful of states reopened their borders last week, including Zambia and Sierra Leone. Senegal has announced the resumption of international air travel from July 15.

"As we are going to open... we are also now pushing for intra-African tourism," Abou-Zeid said, calling for lower taxes, reduced ticket fees and visa facilitation to encourage "Africans to see Africa".

She hoped the reopening of the skies would "cushion some of the serious impacts on ...air transport and tourism".

Africa has recorded more than 420,000 coronavirus cases and over 10,000 deaths.

South Africa is the hardest-hit country in sub-Saharan Africa, accounting for around a third of total cumulative numbers in the region.

WHO regional chief Matshidiso Moeti has warned of a "certain underestimation of cases" due to test kit shortages and the tendency to

test only symptomatic patients

Prosper Zo'o Minto'o of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) described the virus' impact on the African airline industry as "alarming".

Aircrafts flew 60 million less passengers on international routes over the past three months, and 30 million less for domestic travel.

Zo'o Minto'o estimated that airlines would require at least \$20 billion (18 billion euros) in stimulus aid for them to take back to the skies.

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Citation: Africa airline industry lost \$55 bn from virus shutdowns (2020, July 2) retrieved 20 September 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2020-07-africa-airline-industry-lost-bn.html>

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