

## Air passenger markets remain weak in February

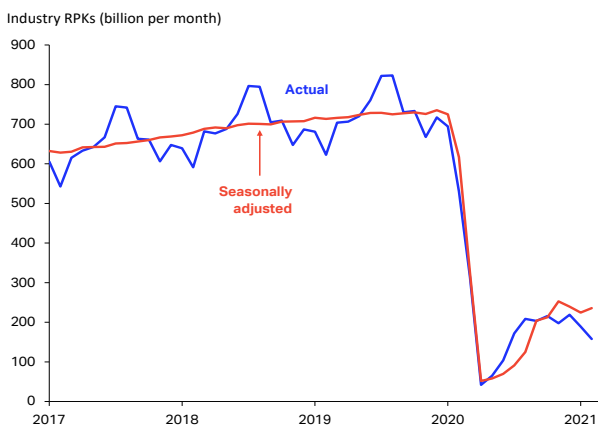
- Passenger traffic remained weak in February. Industry-wide revenue passenger-kilometres (RPKs) were 74.7% below pre-crisis levels in February 2019, compared to January's level which was 72% down. This weakness was driven by deteriorations in most international markets (down 88.7% overall on February 2019) as well as in domestic China (down 51.2%).
- While COVID cases have fallen globally in February, they remain high, and slow vaccination progresses in many countries have led many governments to maintain strict travel restrictions.
- Positive signs were seen in domestic markets such as India, Australia and the US, which improved. Scheduled flights and bookings patterns point to a moderate rebound of RPKs in March.

### Air travel remains weak...

In February 2021, new COVID-19 cases remained elevated globally and governments maintained travel restrictions. As a result, industry-wide revenue passenger-kilometres (RPKs) remained weak, at a level 74.7% lower than February 2019 – a pre-crisis month that allows to better understand growth outcomes. In January, there was a 72.2% fall versus January 2019.

The upwards trend in seasonally adjusted (SA) RPKs has also flattened off since November. There was a slight improvement versus January (Chart 1).

**Chart 1 – Air passenger volumes**



Sources: IATA Economics, IATA Monthly Statistics

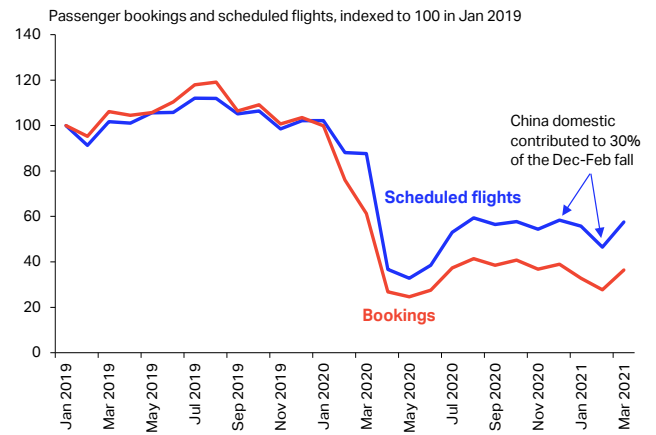
### ...but traffic may moderately rebound in March...

Actual and seasonally adjusted volumes diverge slightly regarding the trend in traffic. However, other

indicators point to a deterioration in February. There was a 30% decline between global bookings for travel in December and those for travel in February. Over the same period, global scheduled passenger flights fell by close to 20%.

More positively, early values for March point to a moderate rebound in passenger traffic (Chart 2). Overall, it has been a weaker start to 2021 than expected in current forecasts.

**Chart 2 – Trends in passenger bookings and flights**



Source: SRS Analyzer and IATA DDS

### ...with dom China being a key contributor

Growth performance continues to be patchy and inconsistent across the main markets. Domestic US and domestic Australia improved in February for instance. But most international markets deteriorated, with Europe and Latin America being among the main contributors to the global downward trend.

## Air passenger market overview - February 2021

To aid understanding, the table includes both % comparisons with pre-crisis 2019 months and 2020 months.

	World share <sup>1</sup>	February 2021 (% ch vs the same month in 2019)				February 2021 (% year-on-year, 2020)			
		RPK	ASK	PLF (%-pt) <sup>2</sup>	PLF (level) <sup>3</sup>	RPK	ASK	PLF (%-pt) <sup>2</sup>	PLF (level) <sup>3</sup>
<b>TOTAL MARKET</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>-74.7%</b>	<b>-63.1%</b>	<b>-25.3%</b>	<b>55.4%</b>	<b>-70.3%</b>	<b>-59.3%</b>	<b>-20.4%</b>	<b>55.4%</b>
International	45.7%	-88.7%	-77.9%	-38.8%	40.8%	-87.3%	-76.5%	-34.7%	40.8%
Domestic	54.3%	-51.0%	-37.1%	-18.3%	64.3%	-37.5%	-25.8%	-12.0%	64.3%

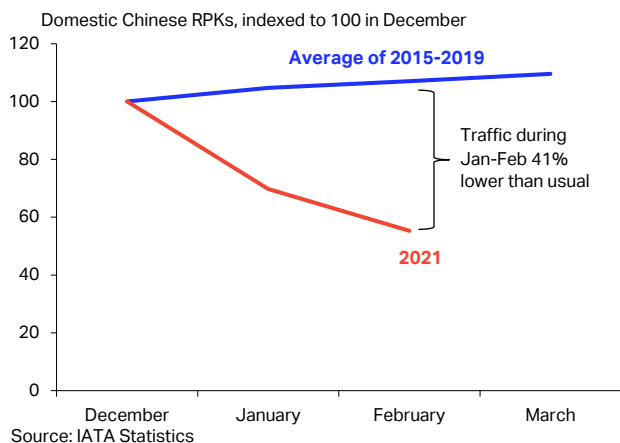
<sup>1</sup>% of industry RPKs in 2020

<sup>2</sup>Change in load factor vs same month in 2019

<sup>3</sup>Load factor level

The fall in traffic within China has been driven by government requests that citizens stay at home during the [traditional new year travel period](#). 'Chunyun' typically leads to January and February traffic volumes being close to those of December or March. In 2021 however, RPKs during those two months combined were roughly 40% below usual (Chart 3).

**Chart 3: Domestic RPKs in China around Chunyun**



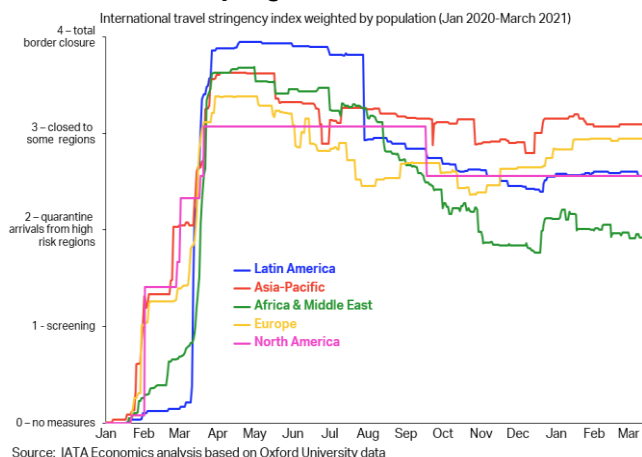
The good news is that the decline may reverse in March, with flights scheduled in domestic China climbing above pre-crisis values. Air fares have also rebounded in March in that market, indicating that the gap between supply and demand is closing.

**High cases and slow vaccination create risk aversion**

Global new COVID-19 cases were on a downward trend in February (around 40% below January), in particular in North America. That said, they remain worryingly high in markets such Europe and Latin America and were also growing in the Middle East.

Moreover, vaccination programs progress slowly and at the end of February, there had only been 3.3 doses given per 100 people worldwide. Of the main regions, North America has progressed the furthest. But in Africa and APAC, vaccinations have barely started. This has discouraged governments from lifting most lockdowns and travel restrictions (Chart 4).

**Chart 4: Stringency of government international air travel measures by region**



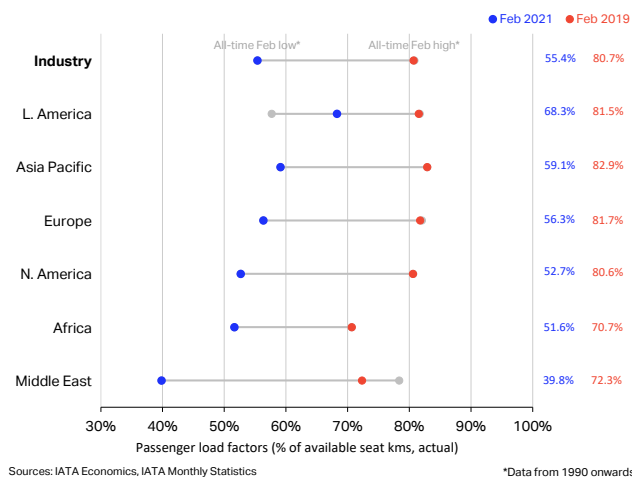
Even in countries where vaccination is more advanced, international travel is kept limited in order to avoid importing new variants and because both sides of the route require low infection rates. Of the main regions, only Africa and the Middle East have eased flight restrictions around February.

**Another month of record-low load factors**

Industry-wide available seat-kilometres (ASKs) were 63.1% lower than pre-crisis outcomes in February 2019, after a 59.2% fall in January. The largest fall was in Europe (75.0%), while North America was the most resilient with a 48.1% drop in ASKs. SA ASKs have been stable in the past few months.

February was another month of record-low load factors, with the industry-wide metric down 25.3 percentage points (ppts) compared with February 2019, to 55.4%. Except Latin America, all the regions posted a record low value for the month (Chart 5).

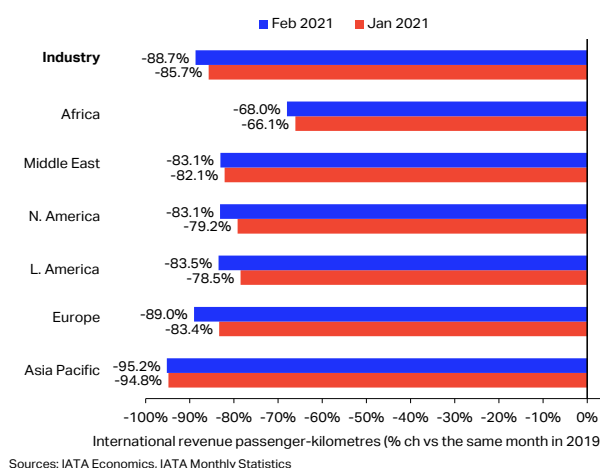
**Chart 5 – Passenger load factors by region**



**All international markets deteriorated in February...**

Global international RPKs fell by 88.7% in January 2021 versus January 2019, the worst growth outcome since July 2020. All the regions we track contributed to the decline (Chart 6).

**Chart 6 – International RPK growth versus the same month in 2019 (airline region of registration basis)**



Reported COVID cases in [Africa](#) were falling in February. International travel restrictions remained less strict than elsewhere, helping carriers based in the region to top the international RPKs performance chart for the fifth consecutive month, with a 68.0% decline compared to pre-crisis outcomes (Chart 6).

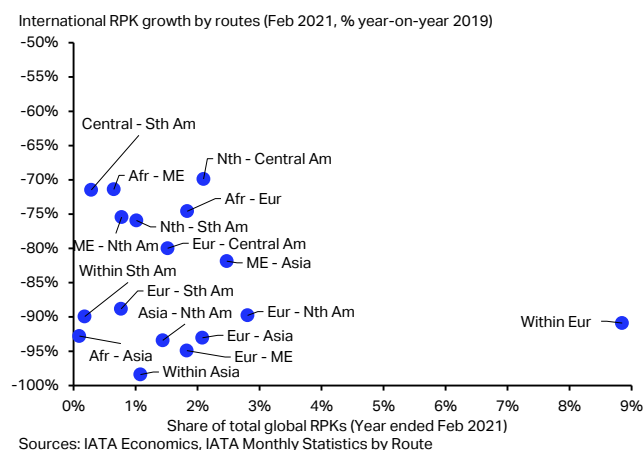
International RPKs of airlines in [North America](#) and the [Middle East](#) both declined by 83.1% compared to February 2019. Those outcomes were only modest deteriorations compared to January (79.2% and 82.1%).

New infections are falling and vaccinations are rising in North America – in particular in the US. Looking ahead, there are [signs traffic will pick up](#) soon in that region. The Middle East continues to be impacted by the closure of its long-haul routes. That said, the robust recovery on the large India-Middle East route is a positive (down roughly 60% in January).

Performance of carriers based in [Latin America](#) and [Europe](#) worsened more than other regions. International RPKs were down respectively 83.5% and 89.0% in February compared to the same month prior to the pandemic in 2019.

Governments in Latin America have imposed relatively loose travel restrictions, helping to support several key international routes, such as Nth-Central America and Central-Sth America (Chart 7). But cases are climbing again in that region and the economic impact of the crisis is expected to be significant. European traffic continued to be impacted by the spread of COVID and slow vaccination programs.

**Chart 7 – International RPKs by route (segment-based)**



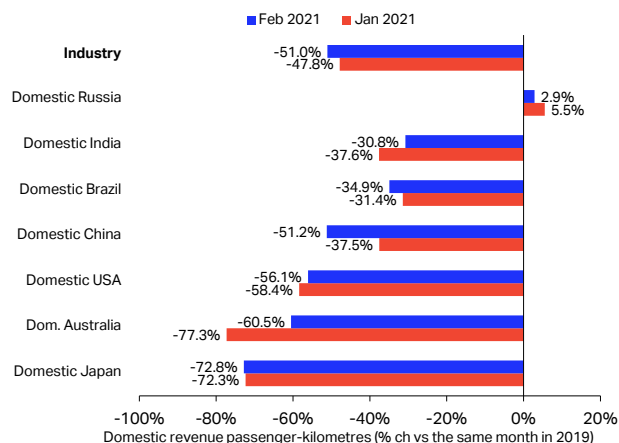
There was still no improvement for international passenger traffic of airlines registered in [Asia Pacific](#). Indeed, international RPKs were down 95.2% in February, as traffic was limited by strict travel restrictions in that region.

**...but some domestic markets rebounded**

Both international and domestic markets contributed to the deterioration in RPKs in February. Indeed, industry-wide domestic RPKs fell by 51.0% this month

versus February 2019, after declining 47.8% in January (Chart 8).

**Chart 8 – Domestic RPK growth versus the same month in 2019, registration basis**



Domestic [China](#) was the main contributor to the overall domestic fall, with domestic RPKs being down 51.2% in February 2021 versus February 2019.

But some markets grew. In February, domestic RPKs of [Russian](#) airlines increased by 2.9% compared to the same month in 2019. New COVID infections have been diminishing since early January and travel restrictions within the country are relatively limited.

Domestic traffic was resilient in [India](#) and [Brazil](#), falling by respectively 30.8% and 34.9% compared to February 2019.

In India, new cases were low in February, and vaccinations have started. But cases increased again in March, and the large economic impact from the crisis will delay a return to the strong growth rates of the recent past. Brazil's domestic air travel benefits from light-touch control measures, but its RPKs performance was the weakest since October this month.

Domestic [USA](#) and [Australia](#) registered improvements in passenger traffic, with falls of respectively 56.1% and 60.5% compared to the pre-crisis month of February 2019.

The improvement in the US is driven by falling rates of contagion while vaccination is also accelerating. In Australia however, vaccinations have been limited, but new cases fell back to low numbers, after a brief spike that triggered increased restrictions in January.

Domestic [Japan](#) was the weakest of the key markets we track, with domestic RPKs down 72.8% in February. After improvement during H2 2020, traffic has returned to levels last seen in June-July.

## Air passenger market detail - February 2021

To aid understanding, the table includes both % comparisons with pre-crisis 2019 months and 2020 months.

	World share <sup>1</sup>	February 2021 (% ch vs the same month in 2019)				February 2021 (% year-on-year, 2020)			
		RPK	ASK	PLF (%-pt) <sup>2</sup>	PLF (level) <sup>3</sup>	RPK	ASK	PLF (%-pt) <sup>2</sup>	PLF (level) <sup>3</sup>
<b>TOTAL MARKET</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>-74.7%</b>	<b>-63.1%</b>	<b>-25.3%</b>	<b>55.4%</b>	<b>-70.3%</b>	<b>-59.3%</b>	<b>-20.4%</b>	<b>55.4%</b>
Africa	0.0%	-66.1%	-53.6%	-19.0%	51.6%	-65.8%	-55.9%	-15.1%	51.6%
Asia Pacific	38.6%	-74.9%	-64.8%	-23.8%	59.1%	-56.7%	-50.1%	-9.0%	59.1%
Europe	23.6%	-82.8%	-75.0%	-25.4%	56.3%	-82.8%	-75.2%	-25.1%	56.3%
Latin America	5.7%	-62.4%	-55.1%	-13.3%	68.3%	-63.8%	-56.8%	-13.2%	68.3%
Middle East	7.4%	-81.7%	-66.8%	-32.5%	39.8%	-82.0%	-67.3%	-32.6%	39.8%
North America	22.7%	-66.1%	-48.1%	-27.9%	52.7%	-67.2%	-50.3%	-27.3%	52.7%
<b>International</b>	<b>45.7%</b>	<b>-88.7%</b>	<b>-77.9%</b>	<b>-38.8%</b>	<b>40.8%</b>	<b>-87.3%</b>	<b>-76.5%</b>	<b>-34.7%</b>	<b>40.8%</b>
Africa	1.6%	-68.0%	-54.6%	-20.5%	49.1%	-67.5%	-56.6%	-16.4%	49.1%
Asia Pacific	10.9%	-95.2%	-87.5%	-50.0%	31.1%	-93.0%	-84.7%	-37.0%	31.1%
Europe	18.5%	-89.0%	-80.5%	-36.0%	46.4%	-89.0%	-80.5%	-35.8%	46.4%
Latin America	2.2%	-83.5%	-75.4%	-26.7%	54.6%	-83.5%	-75.4%	-26.7%	54.6%
Middle East	7.0%	-83.1%	-68.6%	-33.4%	39.0%	-83.3%	-69.0%	-33.5%	39.0%
North America	5.4%	-83.1%	-63.9%	-41.9%	36.7%	-82.4%	-62.8%	-41.1%	36.7%
<b>Domestic</b>	<b>54.3%</b>	<b>-51.0%</b>	<b>-37.1%</b>	<b>-18.3%</b>	<b>64.3%</b>	<b>-37.5%</b>	<b>-25.8%</b>	<b>-12.0%</b>	<b>64.3%</b>
Dom. Australia <sup>4</sup>	0.7%	-60.5%	-59.4%	-2.1%	75.8%	-59.2%	-59.0%	-0.4%	75.8%
Domestic Brazil <sup>4</sup>	1.6%	-34.9%	-30.3%	-5.4%	77.0%	-37.3%	-33.2%	-5.0%	77.0%
Dom. China P.R. <sup>4</sup>	19.9%	-51.2%	-34.7%	-22.2%	65.5%	220.1%	130.2%	18.4%	65.5%
Domestic India <sup>4</sup>	2.1%	-30.8%	-17.5%	-14.4%	74.9%	-35.9%	-24.7%	-13.0%	74.9%
Domestic Japan <sup>4</sup>	1.4%	-72.8%	-59.4%	-23.7%	48.1%	-72.1%	-60.9%	-19.3%	48.1%
Dom. Russian Fed. <sup>4</sup>	3.4%	2.9%	-5.4%	6.7%	83.4%	-4.5%	-13.3%	7.7%	83.4%
Domestic US <sup>4</sup>	16.6%	-56.1%	-38.3%	-23.5%	58.0%	-59.3%	-43.2%	-22.9%	58.0%

<sup>1</sup>% of industry RPKs in 2020

<sup>2</sup>Change in load factor vs same month in 2019

<sup>3</sup>Load factor level

<sup>4</sup>Note: the seven domestic passenger markets for which broken-down data are available account for approximately 46% of global total RPKs and 84% of total domestic RPKs

**Note:** The total industry and regional growth rates are based on a constant sample of airlines combining reported data and estimates for missing observations. Airline traffic is allocated according to the region in which the carrier is registered; it should not be considered as regional traffic.

### Get the data

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