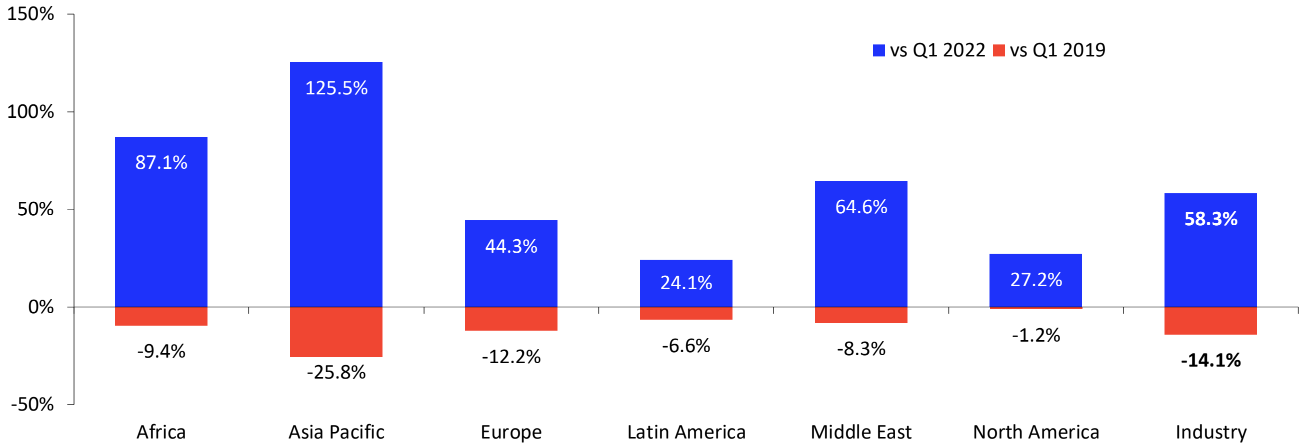
Chart of the Week

12 May 2023

Passenger demand rebounds sharply in first quarter of 2023

Growth in revenue passenger-kilometers (RPKs) by airline region
% change in Q1 2023



Source: IATA Monthly Statistics

- Global passenger traffic ended the first quarter of 2023 on a strong note, with revenue passenger-kilometers (RPKs) increasing by 58.3% year-on-year. This growth recovered global RPKs to 85.9% of pre-pandemic levels, signaling a significant improvement from the previous year.
- Although the recovery in passenger traffic has been broad-based, the Asia Pacific region was a major force behind the recent developments in industry RPKs. The reopening of China's air travel markets has played a pivotal role in driving the region's significant rebound, supported by the continued easing of travel restrictions. Asia Pacific carriers experienced a remarkable 125.5% surge in RPKs during Q1 2023 compared to the same period last year, leading other regions in terms of growth. However, when compared to pre-Covid traffic levels in Q1 2019, the Asia Pacific region still has some ground to cover, with RPKs currently at 74.2% of the levels observed during that period.
- Carriers in Africa and the Middle East also demonstrated impressive passenger traffic recovery, with annual growth rates of 87.1% and 64.6%, respectively, during the first quarter of 2023. While RPKs for African carriers remained 9.4% lower than Q1 2019 levels, Middle East airlines achieved RPKs within 8.3% of their Q1 2019 levels. Both regions have outperformed the global recovery trend. Meanwhile, European air passenger traffic has rebounded rapidly since early spring last year, continuing its positive trajectory through the first quarter of 2023. European carriers recorded a robust 44.3% increase in total passenger traffic compared to the same period in 2022. Although not fully recovered, the airlines managed to narrow the gap to just 12.2% below pre-pandemic levels by the end of the first quarter.
- In North America and Latin America, airlines grew their first quarter passenger traffic by 27.2% and 24.1%, respectively, compared to Q1 2019 levels. These regions have made substantial strides in recovering their pre-pandemic RPKs, with North American airlines reaching 98.8% and Latin American airlines achieving 93.4% of their 2019 levels. These recovery rates are the highest among all regions, highlighting the strength of the air travel markets in these areas.
- A comprehensive overview of passenger and cargo developments across various regions will be provided in our forthcoming Quarterly Chartbook (2023Q1) next week.

IATA Sustainability & Economics
economics@iata.org