



Performance of Airports in Turkey During the Normalization Process

by Muhammed Yilmaz

Due to the pandemic, on March 28th all international flights from Turkey were cancelled and on April 4th all domestic flights were completely suspended. Scheduled flights could not be conducted for nearly 2 months, and during this period airports hosted only a designated number of evacuation flights and cargo flights. With the implementation of a process called controlled normalization, domestic flights in our country were launched on June 1st and

on June 11th international flights started again gradually.

Turkish Airlines conducted its first international flight to Düsseldorf from Istanbul Airport and its first domestic flight to Ankara Esenboğa Airport. Pegasus Airlines, on the other hand, realized its first domestic flight to Izmir and its first international flight to Cologne. The first international flight from Istanbul Sabiha Gökçen Airport was carried out by Anadolujet Airlines with a flight to London.

At this stage, the number of Turkish Airlines' destinations increased to 222 on the flight schedule for September, and according to its flight plans for September, Pegasus Airlines is available to fly to 63 destinations in 42 countries.

As the whole world pursues its fight against the Coronavirus pandemic with considerable determination, many ambiguities remain for those wishing to travel. Presently, as per the decisions adopted by

the governments in line with the course of the pandemic, there are no exact guidelines or processes for traveling around the world. Even members of the European Union impose different sets of rules and implementations for visitors. Therefore, particularly the number of international flight passengers is far below the expected level. The market for domestic flights has shown a slight improvement across the world.



Performance of our airports June 2019 & June 2020

The best source from which to analyze patterns of passenger air travel in Turkey during the controlled

normalization process is the monthly aircraft, passenger and air freight statistics of the General Directorate of State Airports Authority.

Flights were relaunched in June after a suspension of two months and during this month domestic passenger traffic via airports in Turkey reached 2,403,971 where the number of international flight passengers was just 366,448. Throughout the month, including the direct transit passengers, the total passenger traffic has reached 2.750.992.

To interpret these figures, we should take a closer look at the figures of June 2019. During that period, domestic passenger traffic at airports in Turkey was 9,080,111 and international passenger traffic was 11,504,383. Including direct transit passengers, the total passenger traffic was 20,606,926. According to these figures, there was a decrease of 75% in the number of domestic passengers in June, and a

97% decrease in the number of international passengers, compared to the same period of the previous year. In other words, it is possible to say that airline travel tendencies of passengers have not been high during the process of controlled normalization.

In June 2020, the number of aircraft arrival/departure at airports in Turkey was 38,550 via domestic lines and 8,210 via international lines. Services were provided to a total of 55,814 aircraft, overflights included.

On the other hand, in June 2019, the number of aircraft arrival/departure at our airports was 73,487 via domestic flights and 73,476 via international lines. The total number of aircraft traffic reached 188,153 in that period. The sharp fall in aircraft traffic compared to the previous year clearly reveals the decline in the number of passengers. It is possible to observe through these figures the inability to launch flights

to many countries in June and the gradual increase of frequency in domestic flights.

Air freight traffic (cargo, airmail and luggage) at our airports reached a total of 115,173 tons in June 2020; 25,925 tons carried on domestic lines and 89,248 tons on international lines. In 2019 during the same period, the total weight of air freight carried was 257,106 tons, consisting of 70,131 tons carried on domestic flights and 186,975 tons on international flights. There has been a significant decrease in air freight which coincides with the decrease in passengers due to the pandemic. Although airline companies have tried to survive by conducting more air freight operations, some even reconfiguring many of their planes to carry a maximum amount of freight, overall air freight weight figures have still dropped by 55% due to the impact of reduced commercial flights on overall air freight operations.

	Turkey Total		Istanbul Airport		Sabiha Gökçen Airport		Ankara Esenboğa Airport		Antalya Airport	
	Domestic	International	Domestic	International	Domestic	International	Domestic	International	Domestic	International
2019 June	9.080.111	11.504.383	1.653.878	4.330.363	1.879.103	1.191.147	968.685	208.054	624.148	4.131.085
2020 June	2.403.971	366.448	455.528	149.134	451.725	60.733	164.457	22.868	113.225	25.754
Rate of Change (%)	73,5	97,0	72,5	96,6	76,0	94,9	83,0	89,0	81,9	99,4
2019 July	9.122.161	12.897.411	1.519.052	4.681.166	1.977.680	1.363.690	968.353	253.323	670.750	4.748.340
2020 July	4.608.184	1.614.484	805.184	594.831	968.049	257.571	311.049	65.318	257.046	360.294
Rate of Change (%)	49,5	87,5	47,0	87,3	51,1	81,1	67,9	74,2	61,7	92,4
2019 August	9.115.332	14.115.749	1.507.952	5.256.869	1.988.353	1.441.271	952.307	282.377	661.478	4.932.588
2020 August	5.758.283	3.810.011	844.751	1.086.018	1.376.564	436.598	392.386	80.326	353.861	1.403.377
Rate of Change (%)	36,8	73,0	44,0	79,4	30,8	69,7	58,8	71,6	46,5	71,5

Controlled normalization failed to prevent the sharp decline

In June, when the controlled normalization process started, total arrival-departure flight traffic via the Istanbul Airport reached 7,068; 4,100 on domestic lines and 2,968 on international lines. Total passenger traffic reached 604,662; 455,528 on domestic lines and 149,134 on international lines.

Referencing Istanbul Airport's June 2019 performance, total arrival-departure flight traffic was 38,001 composed of 10,675 arrivals/departures on domestic lines and 27,326 arrivals/departures on international lines. The passenger traffic on domestic lines was 1,653,878 and 4,330,367 on international lines, which equates to a grand total of 5,984,245 passengers that passed through the airport in 2019. The jaw-dropping difference between the figures from June 2019 and June 2020, a decline of almost 90% at Turkey's greatest center of aviation, clearly illustrates the devastating effects of the pandemic on the sector.

1,879,103 domestic flight passengers and 1,191,147 international flight passengers were hosted in June 2019 at Istanbul Sabiha Gökçen



Sabiha Gökçen Airport

Airport. Whereas in June 2020, the airport hosted 451,725 domestic flight passengers and merely 60,733 international flight passengers. The massive difference between the numbers of passengers at this airport, which typically has Turkey's highest number of domestic flight passengers and is considered to be the heart of Pegasus Airlines, clearly reveals signs of the sector's vulnerability.

June 2020 performance of the Ankara Esenboğa Airport was quite low as well. In June 2019, the airport hosted 968,685 domestic flight passengers and 208,054 international flight passengers. Upon the launch of controlled normalization in June 2020, Esenboğa Airport served 164,457 domestic flight passengers and 22,868 international flight passengers. Again, the

June 2019 and June 2020 numbers demonstrate that Ankara, the capital of Turkey, lost 83% of its domestic flight passengers and around 90% of its international flight passengers.

Turkey's most popular and significant summer destination Antalya hosted a total of 624,148 domestic flight passengers and a record-breaking number of 4,131,085



The social distance & measure of COVID-19, Sabiha Gökçen Airport

international flight passengers in June 2019. The figures we come across for June 2020 are without doubt quite different. 113,225 domestic flight passengers and only 25,754 international line passengers flew to Antalya Airport during June 2020. Hence, Antalya saw one of the most dramatic declines.

Performance of our airports July 2019 & July 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic caused an abrupt slowdown in the global aviation sector, yet in July the domestic market regained dynamism. The physical conditions of airports across the globe were rearranged according to social distancing measures and stringent disinfection processes continued uninterrupted as part of the COVID-19 Free Airport project, and in this way in July the number of passengers travelling by plane and passing through our airports reached 6 million 224 thousand.

Throughout the month, the number of domestic flight passengers was 4,608,184 and international flight passengers reached 1,614,484 at airports across Turkey. Accordingly, the total traffic of passengers including direct transit passengers was 6 million 224 thousand 921 in July 2020.



Istanbul Airport

In July 2019, the traffic of domestic flight passengers via Turkey's airports came in at 9,122,161 and international flight passenger traffic was 12,897,411. Therefore, the number of domestic flight passengers decreased by nearly 50% and the number of international flight passengers dropped by 90%, compared to the same period of the previous year.

The number of arriving/

departing aircraft at our airports in July 2020 was 61,002 on domestic flights and 19,166 on international flights. The total aircraft traffic, including overflights, was 92,192. However, in July 2019, 79,311 aircraft traffic was comprised of domestic flights and 83,547 were international flights, adding up to 207,518 in total aircraft traffic.

The decrease in air freight displayed a slight recovery

in July 2020. During July, a total of 196,621 tons of air freight traffic composed of 50,719 tons on domestic flights and 145,902 tons on international were realized. While in July 2019, air freight traffic had reached 279,632 tons, consisting of 76,452 tons on domestic and 203,180 tons on international flights.

In July 2020, the number of domestic flight passengers came in at 805,184 and the total



The social distance & measure of COVID-19, İstanbul Airport



Antalya International Airport

number of international flight passengers was 594,831 at the Istanbul Airport. During the month of July, a total of 1,400,015 passengers used the airport. In July 2019, the number of domestic flight passengers was 1,519,052 and the total of international flight passengers was 4,681,166. The airport served a total of 6,200,218 passengers throughout the month of July, 2019.

At Istanbul Sabiha Gökçen Airport, 1,977,680 passengers were hosted on domestic lines and 1,363,690 passengers on international lines in July 2019. However, in July 2020, domestic lines hosted 968,049 passengers and international lines merely 257,571 passengers. Despite the major fall in the figures compared to the statistics of the previous year, it can be seen that

in July 2020 the number of passengers at Sabiha Gökçen Airport doubled in domestic lines and quadrupled in international lines compared to just a month prior, June 2020.

Having hosted 968,353 domestic flight passengers and 253,323 international flight passengers in July 2019, Ankara Esenboğa Airport served a total of 311,049 domestic flight passengers and 65,318 international flight passengers in July 2020. Compared to June 2020,

the number of domestic flight passengers at Esenboğa Airport doubled while the number of international flight passengers tripled.

In July 2019, Antalya Airport hosted 670,750 domestic flight passengers and 4,748,340 international flight passengers. In July 2020, 257,046 domestic flight passengers and 360,294 international flight passengers flew to Antalya Airport. Similar to other airports,

managing to double its average domestic flight passengers in July and June, Antalya Airport increased its number of international flight passengers by approximately 15 times compared to the previous month upon the relaunch of the charter flights in June, particularly from Russia. This increase has been way over the increases in passenger numbers at all other airports in Turkey. Despite all these achievements, the airport failed to reach the passenger figures of the previous year.

Performance of Our Airports in August 2019 and August 2020

The mobility that started at the airports in our country in July also continued in August. As part of the COVID-19 Free Airport project, the number of domestic passengers was 5,758,283 and the number of international passengers was 3,810,011 in August 2020 at airports where physical conditions were rearranged according to social distancing measures and where the disinfection processes had continued uninterrupted. Thus, the total passenger traffic, including direct transit passengers, was recorded as 9,573,876 throughout the month.

In August 2019, domestic passenger traffic at airports across all of



The Social Distance & Measure of COVID-19, Antalya International Airport

Turkey was 9,115,332, international passenger traffic was 14,115,749, and the total passenger traffic was recorded as 23,262,843, including direct transit passengers. Despite the recovery trend, it is evident that the number of passengers is far from the figures of the same period of the previous year. Considering the figures of this year and August 2019, the number of domestic passengers at our airports has decreased by around 40% and the number of international passengers nearly by 75%.

The number of arriving/ departing aircraft at our airports in August 2020 was 69,389 on domestic flights and 32,041 on international flights. The total aircraft traffic, including overflights, was 115,913.

In August 2020, the number of arriving/ departing aircraft at our airports was 76,699 on domestic flights and 86,019 on international flights. Throughout the month, the total aircraft traffic, including overflights, was 207,239.

The recovery trend in air freight continued in August. In August 2020, the total air freight volume was 240,246 tons, with 65,274 tons on domestic lines and 174,972 tons on international lines.

The air freight performance in August



Antalya Airport

2019 was 354,078 tons in total, with 92,033 tons on domestic lines and 262,045 tons on international lines.

In August 2020, the number of total passengers at the Istanbul Airport was 1,928,769; 844.751 of which were domestic flight passengers and 1,084,018 were international flight passengers. In August 2019, the number of domestic flight passengers was 1,507,952 and the number of international flight passengers was 5,256,869. The airport served a total of 6,764,821 passengers throughout the month.

At Istanbul Sabiha Gökçen Airport, 1,988,353 passengers were hosted on domestic lines and 1,441,271 passengers in international lines in August 2019. However, in August 2020, domestic lines hosted 1,376,564 passengers and international lines merely

436,598 passengers. The increase, compared to July 2020 figures, in the number of international passengers at Sabiha Gökçen Airport, which is far below compared to the same period of the previous year, is also noteworthy.

Having hosted 952,307 domestic flight passengers and 282,377 international flight passengers in August 2019, Ankara Esenboğa Airport served 392,386 domestic flight passengers and 80,326 international flight passengers in August 2020. Compared to June, there was a slight increase in the number of domestic and international flight passengers at Esenboğa Airport.

In August 2019, Antalya Airport hosted 661,478 domestic flight passengers and 4,932,588 international flight passengers. In August 2020, 353,861

domestic flight passengers and 1,403,377 international flight passengers flew to Antalya Airport. The number of domestic passengers continued to increase in August, but the significant increase was seen in the number of international passengers at Antalya Airport. The number of international passengers hosted throughout August was 40 thousand, which is just less than the total number of international passengers hosted in the first 7 months of 2020. In other words, within just the month of August, the number of international passengers has doubled the total from the first 7 months of this year. However, these figures, in any case, are far below the number of passengers we are used to seeing at Antalya Airport, especially during the summer season 🌞