

Iata launches Focus Africa to strengthen aviation on the continent

The International Air Transport Association (Iata) has unveiled Focus Africa, a collaborative initiative to tackle the major challenges and impediments to Africa's air transport industry, jobs and economic growth. "Africa accounts for 18% of the global population, but just 2.1% of air transport activities (combined cargo and passenger). Closing that gap, so that Africa can benefit from the connectivity, jobs and growth that aviation enables, is what Focus Africa is all about," says Willie Walsh, Iata's director general.



Image source: [Gallo/Getty](#)

The initiative aims to strengthen aviation's contribution to Africa's economic and social development and improve connectivity, safety and reliability for passengers and shippers. The initiative will align private and public stakeholders to deliver measurable progress in six areas.

Infrastructure constraints, high costs, lack of connectivity, regulatory impediments, slow adoption of global standards and skills shortages affect the customer experience and are all contributory factors to African airlines' viability and sustainability. The continent's carriers suffered cumulative losses of \$3.5bn for 2020-2022. Moreover, IATA estimates further losses of \$213bn in 2023.

Delivering on Africa's opportunities

Sustainably connecting the African continent internally and to global markets with air transport is critical for bringing people together and creating economic and social development opportunities. It will also support the realisation of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) for Africa of lifting 50 million people out of poverty by 2030. In particular, trade and tourism rely on aviation and have immense unrealised potential to create jobs, alleviate poverty, and generate prosperity across the continent.

Africa has a solid foundation to support the case for improving aviation's contribution to its development. Pre-Covid aviation supported 7.7 million jobs and \$63bn in economic activity in Africa. Projections are for demand to triple over the next two decades.

"Africa stands out as the region with the greatest potential and opportunity for aviation. The Focus Africa initiative renews IATA's commitment to supporting aviation on the continent. As the incoming chair of the IATA Board of Governors, and the first from Africa since 1993, I look forward to ensuring that this initiative gets off to a great start and delivers measurable benefits," said Yvonne Makolo, CEO of RwandAir and first female Chair of the IATA Board of Governors (2023-2024).

Six critical areas

"The limiting factors on Africa's aviation sector are fixable. The growth potential is clear. And the economic boost that a more successful African aviation sector will deliver has been witnessed in many economies already. With Focus Africa, stakeholders are uniting to deliver on six critical focus areas that will make a positive difference. We'll measure success and will need to hold each other accountable for the results," says Walsh.

The six focus areas are:

- **Safety:** Improve operational safety through a data-driven, collaborative program to reduce safety incidents and accidents, in the air and on the ground.
- **Infrastructure:** Facilitate the growth of efficient, secure, and cost-effective aviation infrastructure to improve customer experience and operational efficiency.
- **Connectivity:** Promote the liberalisation of intra-African market access through the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM).
- **Finance and distribution:** Accelerate the implementation of secure, effective and cost-efficient financial services and adoption of modern retailing standards.
- **Sustainability:** Assist Africa's air transport industry to achieve the **Net Zero by 2050** emissions targets agreed to by industry and the UN's International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) member states.
- **Future Skills:** Promote aviation-related career paths and ensure a steady supply of diverse and suitably skilled talent to meet the industry's future needs.

The power of partnerships

"Partnerships will differentiate the outcome of Focus Africa from previous efforts to stimulate Africa's development with air transport. By partnering, stakeholders will effectively pool their resources, research, expertise, time and funding to support the common goals of the six work areas," says Kamil Al Awadhi, IATA regional vice president for Africa and the Middle East.

The partners will be announced and join forces in Addis Ababa on 20-21 June to officially launch the Focus Africa initiative with more details for each task area.

The timing is right

Africa continues the path to recovery from the Covid-19 crisis. Air cargo is 31.4% over 2019 levels and air travel is 93% of 2019 levels. Full recovery for air travel is expected in 2024.

"The tasks for Focus Africa are not new. Work is already underway as part of the work of IATA and other stakeholders in Africa. But after the financial trauma that the pandemic brought to African aviation, we are at a unique time of rebuilding. By launching Focus Africa now, we can ensure that the recovery from COVID-19 moves aviation to an even better place than we were in 2019," says Al Awadhi.

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