



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

## STATISTICS

# Air transport: 2020

Information for Cardiff Wales Airport including aircraft movements, passengers and freight handled and international air passenger traffic for 2020.

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## Main points

- Air transport in Wales was significantly affected in 2020 by the coronavirus

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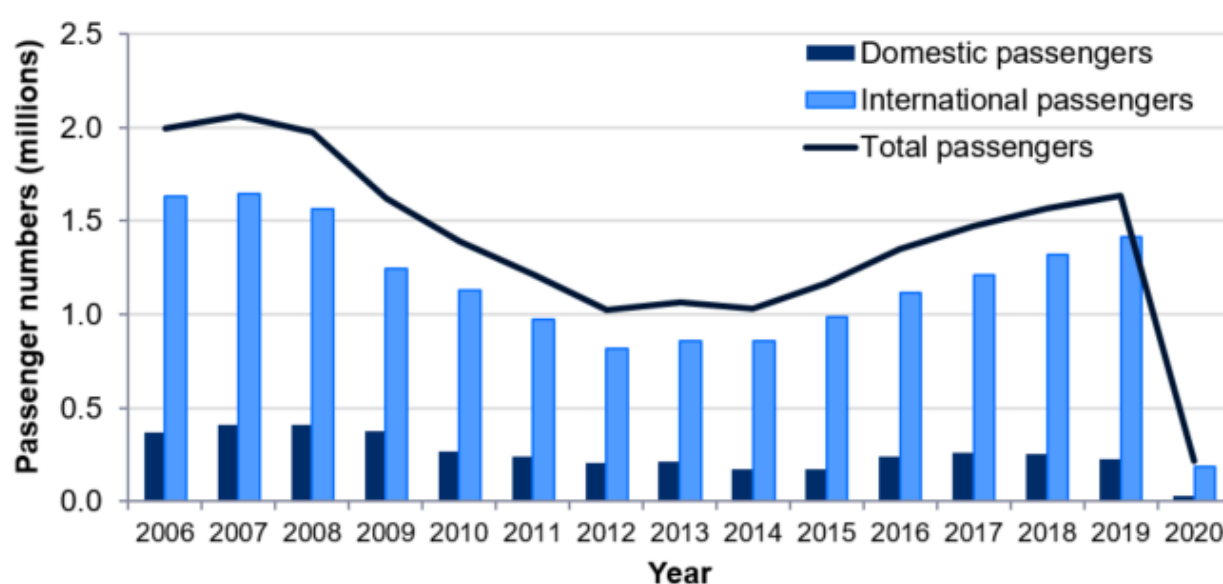
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(COVID-19) pandemic due to the impact of both domestically imposed travel restrictions and worldwide restrictions. Non-essential travel was restricted for much of 2020, resulting in a significant reduction of both the number of commercial passenger flights, cargo flights as well as domestic and international travelers.

- The number of passengers using Cardiff International airport in 2020 decreased by 87%<sup>[1]</sup> compared with 2019 to 218,000 (Chart 1). This includes both arrivals and departures.
- Air freight movements through Cardiff airport in 2020 fell by 82% (317 tonnes) compared to 2019.
- There were around 10,000 flights in and out of Cardiff International airport in 2020, a 68% decrease on 2019.
- During 2020 there were 51 international destinations that operated out of Cardiff International airport, 25 fewer than in 2019.

<sup>[1]</sup> Figures do not sum to 100% due to rounding.

**Chart 1: Passengers at Cardiff Airport from 2006 to 2020**



Source: Welsh Government analysis of Civil Aviation Authority data

# Main dates impacting travel in Wales in 2020

March 2020: The UK and Welsh governments advise against all but essential travel.

June 2020: Regulations come into force in Wales meaning residents and visitors entering the country from overseas must self-isolate for 14 days.

July 2020: Stay local requirements are lifted. Welsh Government amends regulations to exempt those travelling from a list of specified countries from quarantine requirements. From this point onwards, countries are reviewed and routinely added or removed from the exemption list.

September 2020: Local lockdowns begin in Wales, limiting movement to and within certain local authorities.

October 2020: 2 week firebreak begins in Wales, with people asked to stay at home.

December 2020: International travel regulations are amended, reducing the period for which self-isolation is required from 14 to 10 days. Wales moves into level 4 restrictions, with no travel (local or international) allowed without a reasonable excuse.

## Introduction

Air transport is an important driver for economic development. It connects Wales to the global economy which facilitates inward investment and trade. It provides a gateway for business and leisure passengers, which is an enabler for tourism and helps support industry.

The passenger data presented in this report are the total number of passenger journeys (outbound and inbound flights combined), *not* the number of different individual passengers. This is because it is not possible to identify arrivals and

departures from the source data. In this report we use the term terminal passengers, or passengers, to mean the total number of passenger journeys. On many routes the number of individual passengers is likely to be very close to half the total number of passenger journeys, because most are return journeys.

During 2020, there were 74 million passenger journeys through UK airports compared with 297 million in 2019. Heathrow was the busiest (22 million), followed by Gatwick (10 million), Stansted (8 million) and Manchester (7 million). Cardiff was the 22nd busiest airport in the UK (out of 51) with 219,000 terminal passengers, which was 0.3% of the UK total.

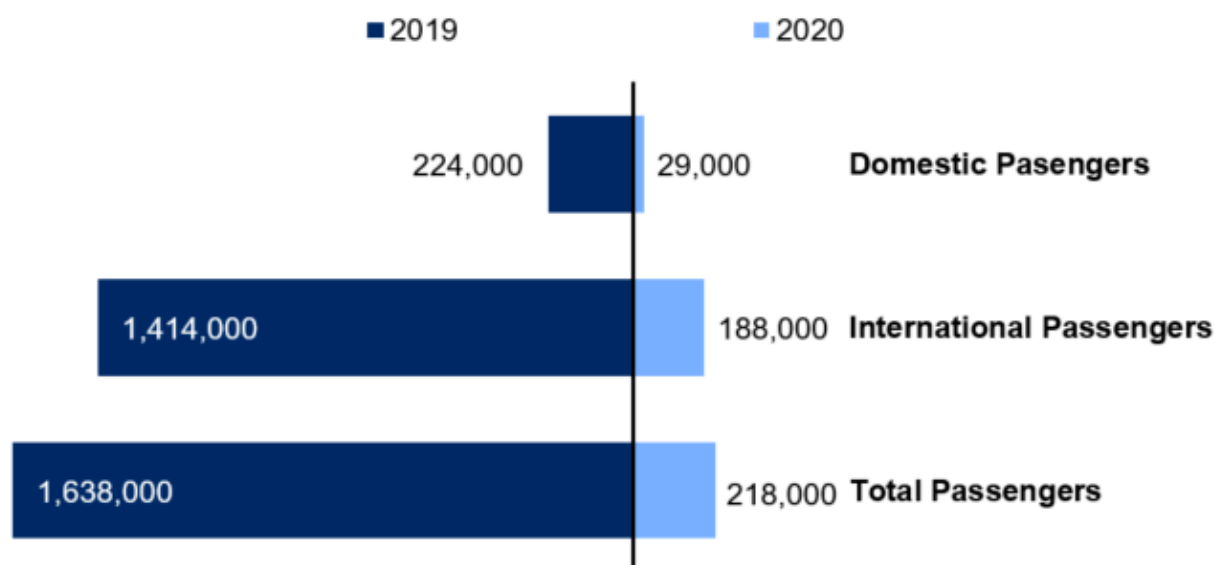
## Cardiff airport

Cardiff airport is the only major domestic and international airport in Wales. In 2020 it saw an 87% decrease in passenger numbers from 1.6 million in 2019 to 218,000 (Chart 2). This is as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

87%<sup>[2]</sup> of passengers from Cardiff Airport flew to international destinations whilst 14% used domestic destinations. The decrease in passenger numbers was similar for both international and domestic passengers, 87% and 87% respectively.

<sup>[2]</sup> Figures do not sum to 100% due to rounding.

## Chart 2: Air passenger numbers at Cardiff airport in 2020

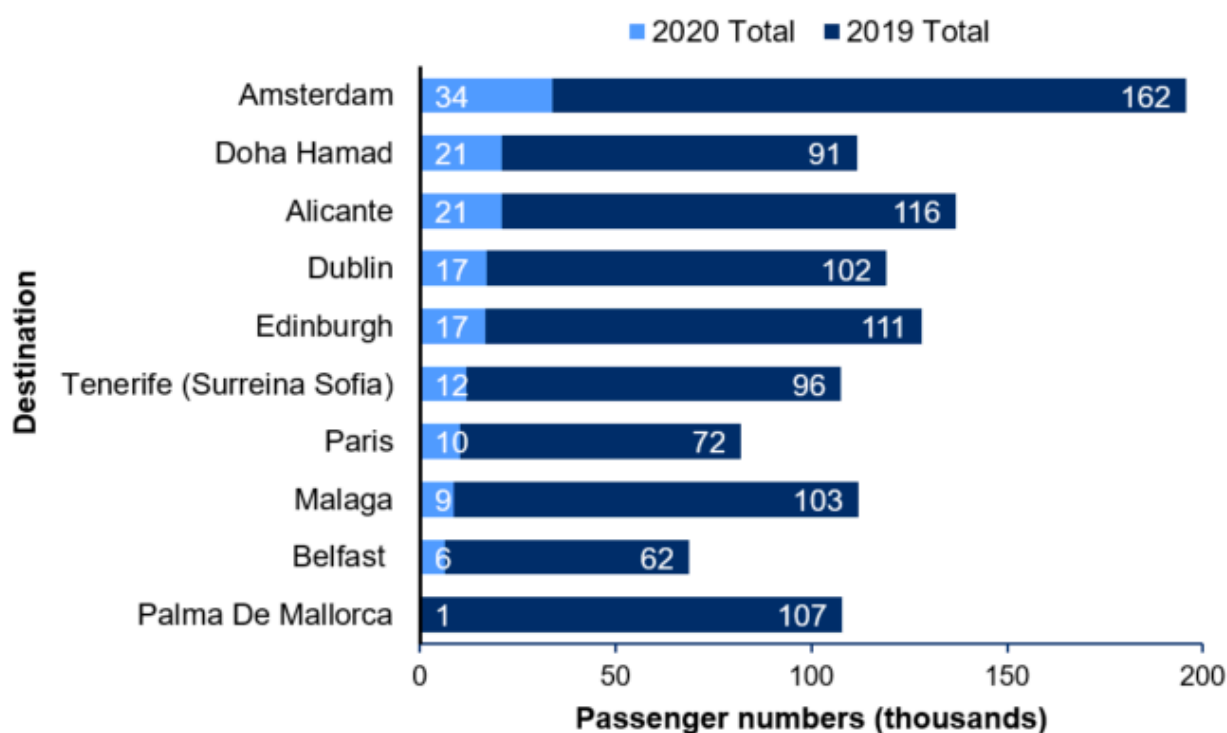


Source: Welsh Government analysis of Civil Aviation Authority data

The number of domestic passengers who used scheduled flights decreased by 88% in 2020 compared to 2019 whilst those on chartered flight fell by 33% over the same period (based on unrounded numbers).

All top ten destinations from Cardiff airport in 2020 experienced large falls in passenger numbers. There was a 79% fall in air passengers operating between Cardiff Airport and Amsterdam, Edinburgh -85%, Belfast -90%, Paris -85% and Palma De Mallorca -99% compared to 2019. Amsterdam remained the most popular international destination and Edinburgh the most popular domestic destination, although with much fewer passengers than the previous year (Chart 3).

**Chart 3: Most common destinations from Cardiff airport in 2020**



Source: Welsh Government analysis of Civil Aviation Authority data

## Long term trends

There was a 50% fall in passengers at Cardiff airport between 2007 and 2012, from 2.1 million to 1.0 million (Chart 1). This corresponded with the global recession in 2008, which resulted in some carriers reducing capacity and others ceasing trading altogether. 2019 saw an increase of 4% in passengers compared with 2018, driven by an increase in international passengers.

After falling significantly from 2007, domestic passenger numbers increased between 2014 and 2019. 2020 saw a decrease of 87% in domestic passengers compared to 2019.

International passenger numbers peaked at 1.65 million in 2007 and subsequently fell to 0.8 million in 2012 before steadily increasing again. During

2020, 188,000 passengers travelled between Cardiff airport and overseas destinations representing a decrease of 83% compared to 2019. Spain is consistently the most common destination, and accounted for 40% of all international passengers in 2020.

Detailed breakdowns of international passengers are available on [StatsWales](#).

Key international routes from Cardiff Airport in 2020 had also experienced reduction in passenger numbers compared to 2019 figures. Paris, Amsterdam and Dublin are key European hub cities that offer the opportunity for onward connections to a wider range of destinations.

Compared to year 2019 in 2020 air Passenger numbers via Amsterdam in the Netherlands dropped to 34,000 (-79%), Dublin in the Republic of Ireland dropped to 17,000 (-83%) and Paris Charles de Gaulle airport in France fell to 10,000 (-86%).

Further details of long-term trends for different routes are available in the [Air Transport 2019](#) report.

## Aircraft movements (flights)

An aircraft movement is an aircraft taking off or landing at an airport.

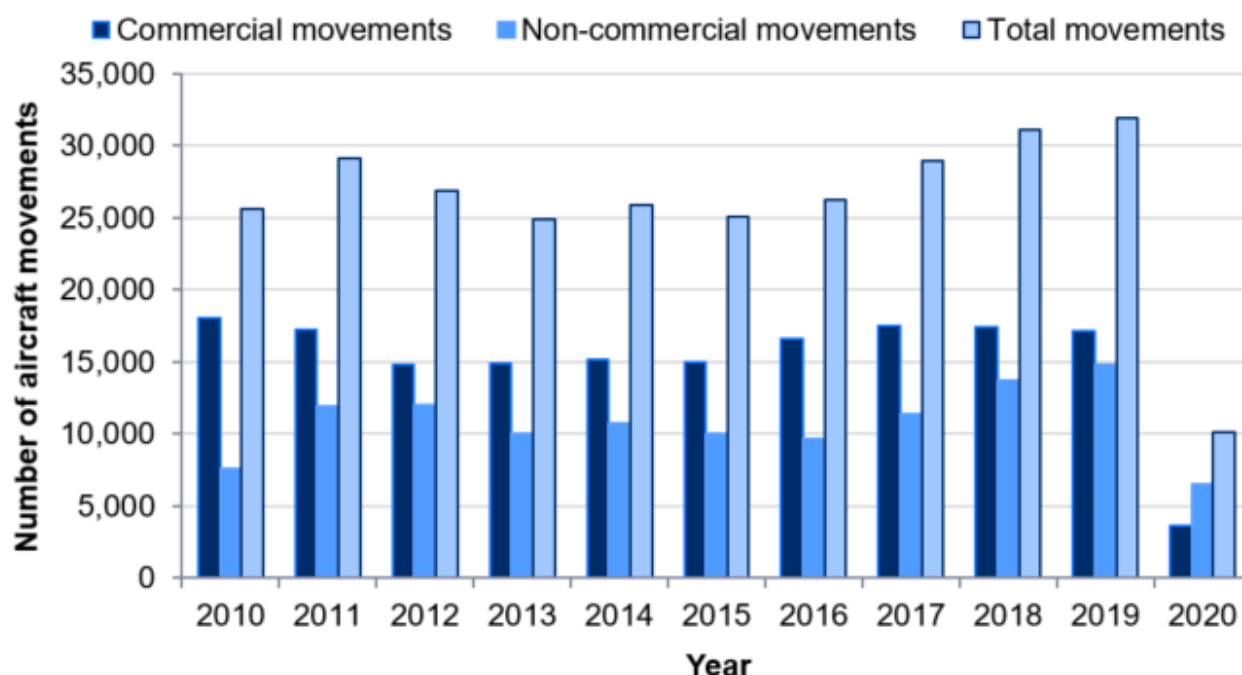
Commercial flights involve aircraft engaged in the transport of passengers or cargo on commercial terms, as well as positioning flights and local movements.

Non-commercial flights cover all other types of flight, including private and Aero Club flights (Flying clubs).

In 2020, there were only 10,000 aircraft movements at Cardiff International airport, a decrease of 68% compared with 2019 (32,000) (Chart 4). This is the largest recorded decrease in aircraft movement at Cardiff Airport.



**Chart 4: Number of aircraft movements at Cardiff Airport from 2010 to 2020**



Source: Welsh Government analysis of Civil Aviation Authority data

## Air freight

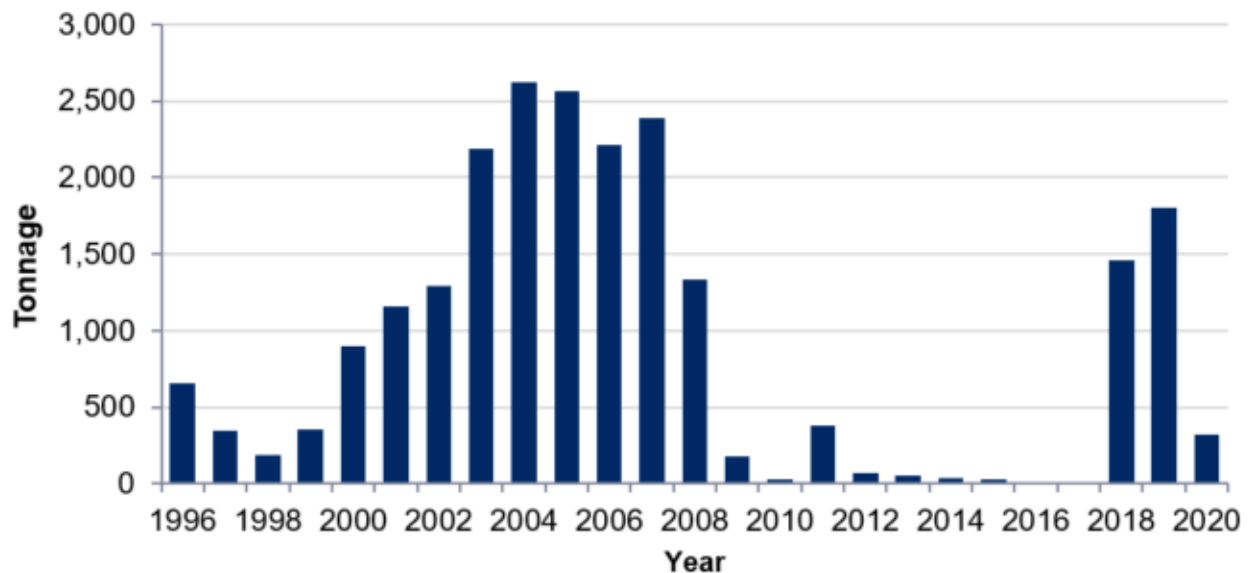
Historically, the volume of freight moving through Cardiff airport has been volatile (Chart 5). The volume peaked in 2004 at 2,600 tonnes, but fell by 93% between 2007 and 2009, from 2,400 to 178 tonnes. Thereafter it remained at low levels and in 2017 just 4 tonnes of freight were moved through the airport, the lowest figure on record.

In 2018 freight levels increased to 1,500 tonnes, driven primarily by the introduction of the Qatar route in May 2018, which transports significant volumes of cargo as well as passengers. In 2019 air freight through Cardiff airport further increased by 24% to 1,800 tonnes when compared to 2018. In 2020 air freight through Cardiff airport fell by 82% to 317 tonnes when compared to 2019.

Users of air freight include those with high value goods which need to be

transported in small quantities or perishable goods, such as food and medicine, which have a short lifespan. Items commonly transported by air include electronics, telecoms, vehicles and auto parts, and biotech and health products.

**Chart 5: Freight at Cardiff airport, 1996 to 2020**



Source: Welsh Government analysis of Civil Aviation Authority data

## Air passenger survey

The CAA's departing passenger survey can be used to identify which airports are used by people travelling to or from Wales. The survey collects data from a sample of UK airports annually. The latest survey to include all of the major airports used by travellers to and from Wales was conducted in 2019 and results can be found in our [previous release page 9](#). There was no survey conducted in 2020.

# Notes

## Context

### Related publications

The Department for Transport produce a series bringing together documents relating to **UK Aviation Statistics**.

Transport Scotland produce a compendium publication titled '**Scottish Transport Statistics**' which includes a chapter on Air Transport.

The Department for Regional Development in Northern Ireland produce a publication titled '**Northern Ireland Transport Statistics**', Chapter 7 includes information on Air Transport.

The Office for National Statistics also publish **experimental daily UK flight numbers** and rolling seven-day average, including flights to, from, and within the UK.

## Data source

The information on air transport through Cardiff airport in this bulletin and associated StatsWales tables reproduces the statistics compiled by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). Its work is gratefully acknowledged. The **CAA data** are outside the scope of National Statistics. The information includes the CAA's own notes about the figures.

## Definitions

Air transport movements: Landings or take offs of aircraft engaged in the transport of passengers or cargo on commercial terms. All scheduled service movements, whether loaded, empty, or positioning, and charter movements

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transporting passengers or cargo and air taxi movements are included. For the purpose of these statistics, where flights are operated on a sub-charter basis the operator is identified according to the flight number, an internal flight is counted as a single air transport movement.

## **Domestic service**

Services flown entirely within the United Kingdom, Isle of Man or Channel Islands.

## **International service**

Services flown between the United Kingdom, including the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands and places outside.

## **Charter services**

All air transport movements other than scheduled services.

## **Scheduled services**

Those performed according to the published timetable including supplementary timetables, available for use by the members of the public.

## **Passengers**

All revenue and non-revenue passengers on air transport movement flights.

## **Terminal passenger**

A passenger joining or leaving an aircraft at the reporting airport. A passenger travelling between two reporting airports is counted twice, once at each airport.

A passenger who changes from one aircraft to the other, carrying the same flight number is treated as a terminal passenger.

## **Transit passenger**

A passenger who arrives and departs from a reporting airport on the same aircraft. Each transit passenger is counted only once.

## **Freight**

The weight of property carried on an aircraft including for example the weight of vehicles, excess baggage and diplomatic bags, but excluding mail and passengers' and crews' permitted baggage. Freight in transit through the airport on the same aircraft is excluded.

# **Civil Aviation Authority departing passenger survey: topics covered in survey questions**

The **CAA departing passenger survey** asks questions relating to the person, the airport and the airline and the journey.

## **Quality information**

### **Relevance**

The statistics are used both within and outside the Welsh Government to monitor air transport trends and as a baseline for further analysis.

## Accuracy

This is described by the CAA at the link given under 'data source' above.

## Timeliness and punctuality

The information in the bulletin, covering air transport through Cardiff Airport, is based on the most recent annual UK Airport Statistics from the CAA.

## Accessibility and clarity

This statistical bulletin is pre-announced and then published on the [Statistics for Wales](#) website, with the underlying figures published on [StatsWales](#).

## Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFG)

The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The Act puts in place seven wellbeing goals for Wales. These are for a more equal, prosperous, resilient, healthier and globally responsible Wales, with cohesive communities and a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language. Under section (10)(1) of the Act, the Welsh Ministers must (a) publish indicators (national indicators) that must be applied for the purpose of measuring progress towards the achievement of the wellbeing goals, and (b) lay a copy of the national indicators before Senedd Cymru. The 46 national indicators were laid in March 2016.

Information on the indicators, along with narratives for each of the well-being goals and associated technical information is available in the [Wellbeing of Wales report](#).

Further information on the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#).

The statistics included in this release could also provide supporting narrative to the national indicators and be used by public services boards in relation to their local wellbeing assessments and local wellbeing plans.

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