



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

STATISTICS

Air transport: 2021

Information for Cardiff Airport including aircraft movements, passengers and freight handled and international air passenger traffic for 2021.

First published: 8 June 2022

Last updated: 8 June 2022

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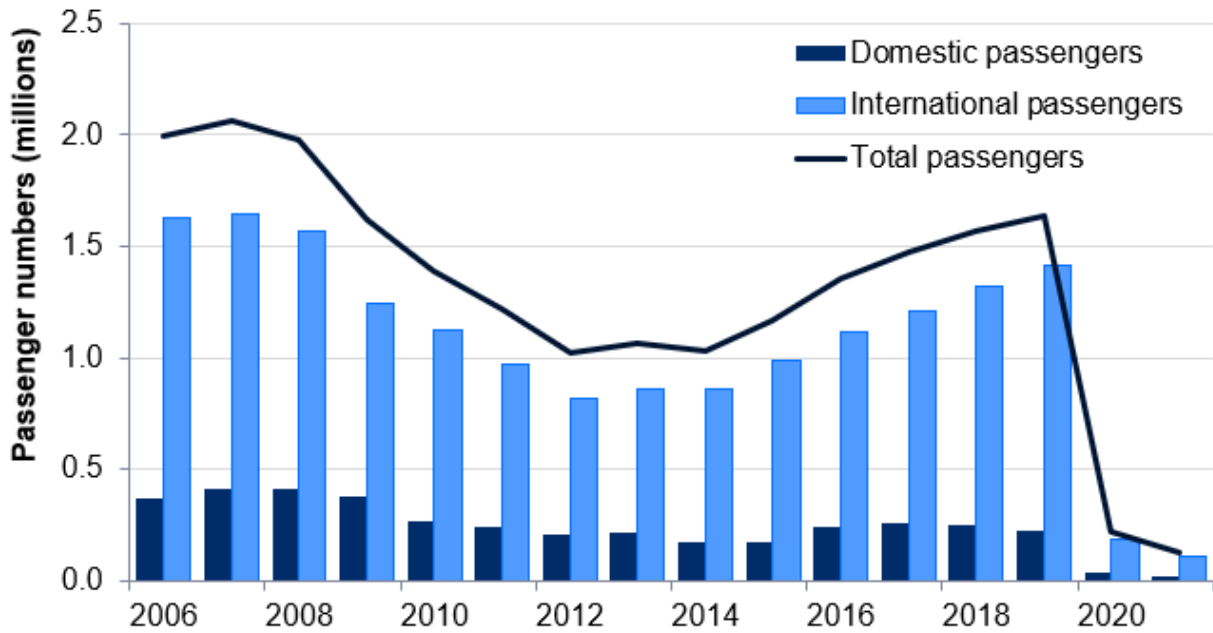
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Overview

- Air transport in Wales was significantly affected in 2020 by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic due to the impact of both domestically imposed travel restrictions and worldwide restrictions. This impact was still seen in 2021 with some travel restrictions still in place, contributing to a further decrease in air passenger numbers.
- The number of passengers using Cardiff Airport fell sharply at the start of the COVID pandemic in 2020. In 2021 passenger numbers decreased by 44% compared with 2020 to 123,000 (Chart 1). This includes both arrivals and departures.
- Air freight movements through Cardiff Airport in 2021 was 368 tonnes, an increase of 16% compared to 2020, but a decrease of 93% compared to 2019.
- There were around 11,000 flights in and out of Cardiff Airport in 2021, a 11% increase on 2020, and a decrease of 65% on 2019
- During 2021, there were 53 international destinations that operated out of Cardiff Airport.

Care should be taken when interpreting percentage changes as figures are much lower than the historical time series and therefore more volatile.

Chart 1: Passengers at Cardiff Airport from 2006 to 2021



Source: Welsh Government analysis of Civil Aviation Authority data

Impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on air transport

Main dates that impacted air travel in Wales in year 2020 can be found in our [2020 Air transport release](#).

In 2021, Cardiff Airport continued to experience travel disruption in both domestic and international passenger numbers likely due to coronavirus (COVID-19) travel restrictions.

Context

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.

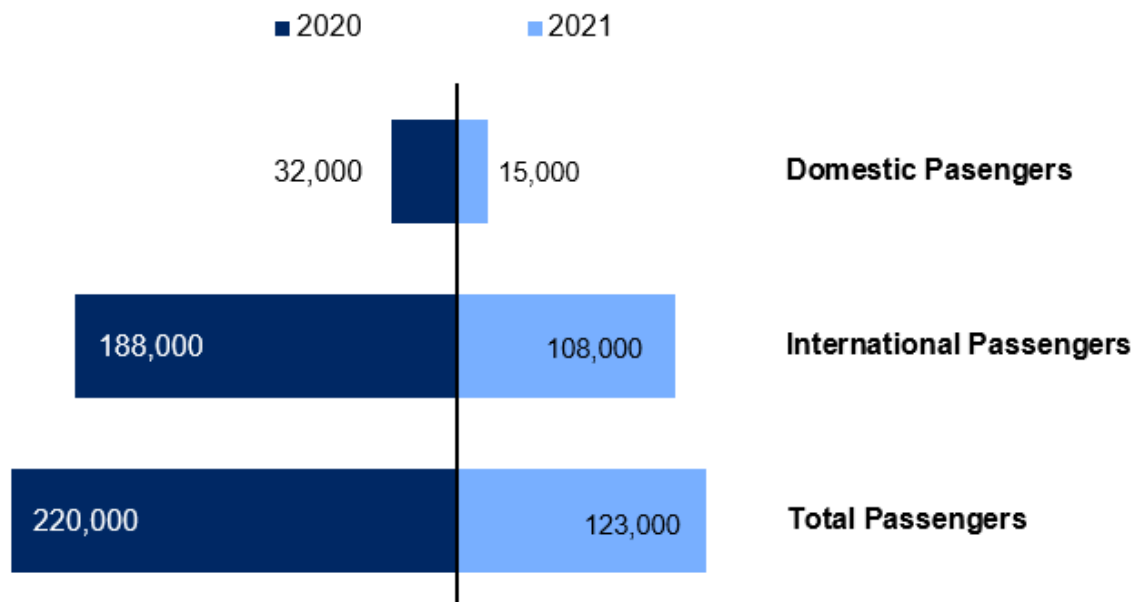
During 2021, there were 64 million passenger journeys through UK airports compared with 74 million in 2020 and 297 million in 2019. Heathrow was the busiest (19.4 million), followed by Stansted (7.1 million), Gatwick (6.3 million) and Manchester (6.1 million). Cardiff was the 25th busiest airport in the UK (out of 51) with 123,000 terminal passengers, which was 0.2% of the UK total.

Cardiff Airport

Cardiff Airport is the only major domestic and international airport in Wales.

In 2021, 88% of passengers from Cardiff Airport flew to international destinations whilst 12% used domestic destinations. Compared to the previous year, international passenger numbers dropped by 43% whilst domestic passenger numbers dropped by 55%.

Chart 2: Air passenger numbers at Cardiff Airport in 2020 and 2021

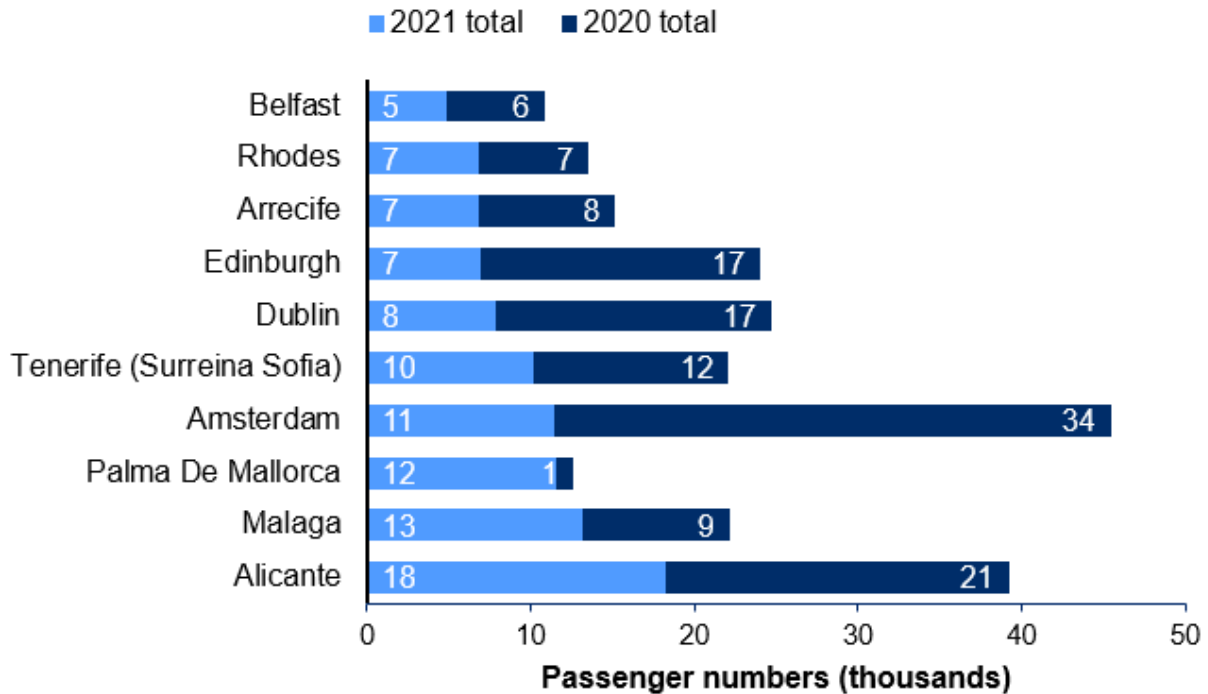


Source: Welsh Government analysis of Civil Aviation Authority data

The total number of passengers who used scheduled flights decreased by 53% in 2021 compared to 2020, whilst those on chartered flight fell by 28% over the same period (percentages calculated using unrounded numbers).

Seven of the top ten destinations from Cardiff Airport by air passenger numbers in 2021 experienced falls in passenger numbers. There was a 66% fall in air passengers operating between Cardiff Airport and Amsterdam, followed by Edinburgh (-59%), Dublin (-54%) and Belfast (-25%) compared to 2020. Alicante was the most popular international destination and Edinburgh the most popular domestic destination, although with far fewer passengers than the previous year (Chart 3).

Chart 3: Most common destinations from Cardiff Airport in 2020 and 2021



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. This corresponded with the global recession in 2008, which resulted in some carriers reducing capacity and others ceasing trading altogether.

After falling from the peak in 2007, passenger numbers increased between 2014 and 2019. There was then a large decrease in passenger numbers of 87% in 2020 when compared to the previous year, following the start of the coronavirus

(COVID-19) pandemic.

International passenger numbers peaked at 1.65 million in 2007 and subsequently fell to 0.8 million in 2012 before steadily increasing again until 2019. In 2020 international passenger numbers dropped by 83% to 188,000. This number decreased by 43% between 2020 and 2021, to 108,000 passengers, the lowest level since the time series began. Spain is consistently one of the most common destinations and accounted for 42% of all international passengers in 2021.

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

Key international routes from Cardiff Airport in 2021 also experienced reduction in passenger numbers compared to 2020 figures. Paris, Amsterdam and Dublin are key European hub cities that offer the opportunity for onward connections to a wider range of destinations.

In 2021 air passenger numbers via Paris airports dropped to 1,076 (-90%), Amsterdam dropped to 11,000 (-66%) and Dublin dropped to 8,000 (-54%) when compared to the previous year.

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

Aircraft movements (flights)

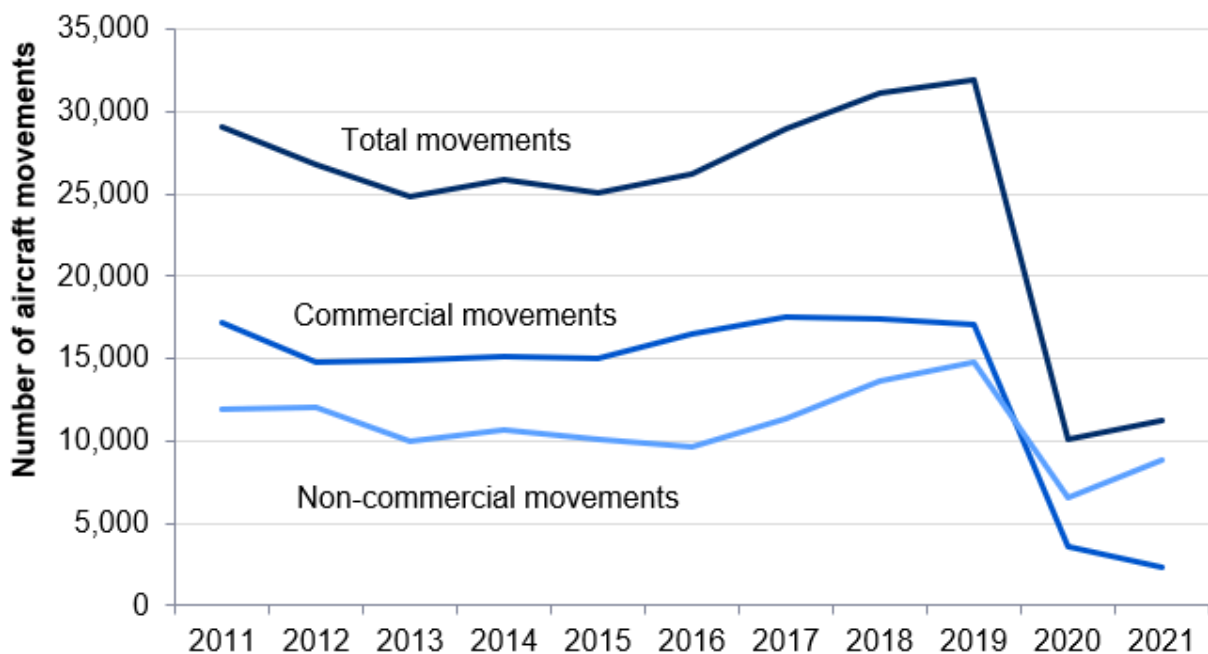
An aircraft movement is an aircraft taking off or landing at an airport.

- 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).

The number of aircraft movements decreased sharply at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, before increasing in 2021. There were 11,000 aircraft movements at Cardiff Airport in 2021, an increase of 11% compared with 2020 (10,000) (Chart 4) but a decrease of 65% compared to 2019 (32,000).

Chart 4: Number of aircraft movements at Cardiff Airport from 2011 to 2021



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%

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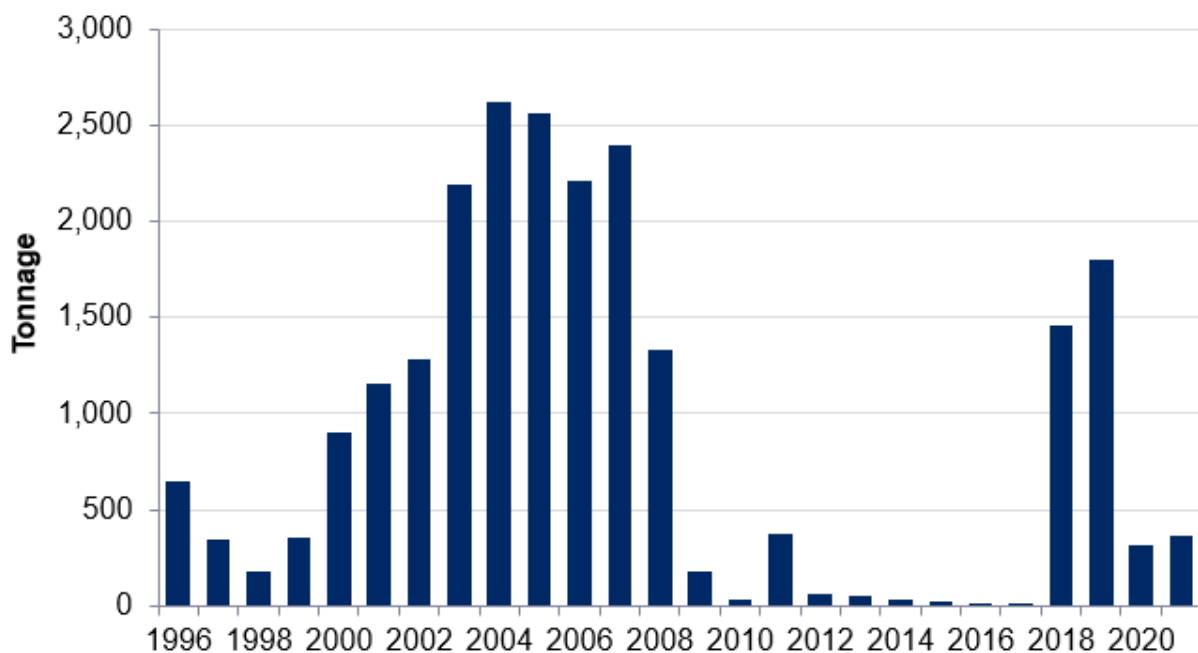
between 2007 and 2009, from 2,400 to 178 tonnes. Thereafter it remained at low levels and in 2017 just 4 tonnes of freight were moved through the airport, the lowest figure on record.

- 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.
- In 2021 air freight through Cardiff Airport rose by 16% to 368 tonnes when compared to 2020.

The decreases in both 2020 and 2021 likely reflect the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions in place during these time periods.

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 2021



Source: Welsh Government analysis of Civil Aviation Authority data

Air passenger survey

The Civil Aviation Authority's (CAA) 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 and asks questions relating to the person, the airport and the airline and the journey. 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 on [page 9 of our 2019 release](#). More detailed information relating to the [2019 passenger survey report can be found on the CAA website](#), there was no survey conducted in 2020 or 2021.

Notes

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). The information includes the CAA's own notes about the figures. The **CAA data** are outside the scope of National Statistics.

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 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.

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 wellbeing 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. Under section 10(8) of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, where the Welsh Ministers revise the national indicators, they must as soon as reasonably practicable (a) publish the indicators as revised and (b) lay a copy of them before the Senedd. These national indicators were laid before the Senedd in 2021. The indicators laid on 14 December 2021 replace the set laid on 16 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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