

Taking Africa's aviation sector to the skies

 By [Khangi Khoza](#)

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From an economic perspective, the aviation industry has arguably been among the sectors hardest hit by the pandemic - which has had a dramatic impact on the economic and social benefits that aviation generates in Africa. In fact, according to IATA Economics, prior to Covid-19 the aviation sector contributed US\$63bn to Africa's GDP and supported 7.7m jobs, including nearly 0.5m aviation jobs. The health crisis put US\$36bn of this economic activity and 3.9m jobs at risk.



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Yet, despite the devastation, it has also shown just how well our sector is able to adapt and become more agile in the face of adversity. If anything, this year has reemphasised the need for planning, adaptability, and passion - critical pillars when operating in uncertainty.

Looking beyond 2022, air travel should continue to rise with domestic markets continuing to lead the travel economy, with passenger traffic to, from and within Africa reaching pre-pandemic levels in 2026. And while leisure travel is expected to recover fully in the medium and long term, we are likely to see more permanent changes to business travel, as hybrid business models and video have become more accepted ways of doing business.

The World Trade Organisation also forecasts world trade to grow 5.6% in 2022 as companies continue to restock and recover and as such, aviation cargo demand is expected to exceed pre-Covid levels by 13%.

So, while the pandemic impacted aviation in unprecedented ways, the sector is still geared for good recovery. However, we know that political and regulatory changes, social and economic adjustments, technology and new ways of doing things - as well as environmental factors and sustainability policies – will continue to drive transformation in this sector.

So, what is on the horizon for the African aviation sector in 2022 and beyond?

- **Travel will be the same, but different:** Expect new routes, new airlines and consolidation in the space. Health and safety will continue to remain a priority so expect new processes, contactless solutions and digital health passports and vaccination visas. We are also likely to see the rise of online shopping and ecommerce for food and beverages and even duty-free products. The idea of frictionless travel will rise – putting a strong emphasis on technology, biometrics and high-tech solutions for people - , including flow management and virtual queueing for social distancing.

- **Sustainability will come to the fore:** If COP26 is anything to go by, we are likely to see a watershed year when it comes to sustainability and the aviation sector is no different. While the global aviation is only responsible for 2 – 3% of all human-induced carbon dioxide emissions, this sector and its industry associations are relentless in their efforts to increase operational efficiency and further environmental sustainability.

In fact, individual efforts by airlines, airports, service companies and other stakeholders have all contributed to a tangible reduction in greenhouse emissions, notably CO2 and we are likely to see the industry continue to prioritise technological investment, efficient use of resources and investment in eco-friendly equipment and infrastructure. The aviation industry's decarbonisation roadmap will need continued dedication, innovation, investment and more than anything else, collaboration, to deliver on its ambitious goals, especially if air travellers may soon have to pay an extra carbon tax for flights.

- **Skills development will grow:** The Aircraft Ground Handling Market is highly competitive and estimated to grow at more than 5% a year through to 2025. This means a need for increased skills to meet this growing demand as well as the high level of skills that a global work culture demands. Artificial Intelligence, automation, and robotics mean in the future almost all jobs will change. And the reality is that global standard operating systems are a prerequisite for digitisation – where the use of data and metrics will help drive efficiency. For continued passenger services, ramp, and cargo handling, fuelling, executive aviation and lounge hospitality, training, skills development and innovation remain central pillars to the day-to-day operations as well as augmenting the human role in the space.

- **Collaboration will be critical:** Opportunities now exist to drive meaningful transformation across the broader industry and there is significant potential to drive closer collaboration between different partners and stakeholders for the sector's revival going forward. Expect to see some changes and innovative and perhaps some unexpected partnerships in the next 12 – 18 months.

Twenty twenty-two will be a challenging, but exciting, year for aviation. As customer expectations increase, together with regulation and sustainability requirements improving efficiency and operations will remain the underlying driving force for this sector. Like any industry, aviation must continue to adapt and improve and ensure stakeholders within this sector support this approach and requirement. We will continue to strive for advancements in security, safety and sustainability – and in fact, these factors will become critical in remaining competitive, in years to come.

ABOUT KHANGI KHOZA

KhangI Khoza is an experienced Economist with a demonstrated history of working in the public and private sector. Skilled in research, consulting, capital raising, management, teamwork, and business strategy.

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