

FABEC traffic sees recovery accompanied by uncertainty and volatility

8 September 2021: Functional Airspace Block Europe Central (FABEC) traffic rose steadily in the first half of 2021 to just over 1 million flights, still well below the volume handled prior to the pandemic in 2019. In June 2021, traffic reached 43.7% of 2019 flight movements, up from just 32.8% recorded in January, as FABEC Air Navigation Service Providers (ANSPs) scaled up services during COVID recovery. Airport traffic also increased, rising to 46% of 2019 levels in the first half of the year.

Returning traffic shows significant disparity between ANSPs, for example Skyguide and skeyes recorded highest growth while Maastricht and DFS grew more slowly. Airport results, during the month of June, were even more pronounced, ranging from nearly 40% of 2019 activity in Germany to 55% in Belgium and nearly 60% in Luxembourg. This traffic volatility is hard to predict and makes planning resources a challenge. While the forecast scenarios compiled by STATFOR provide a picture of anticipated air traffic development, these predictions are expressed in average values which fail to represent the peaks and troughs that characterise the real market.

Florian Guillermet, FABEC Champion Operations and CEO DSNA said: “Volatile traffic patterns place extra demands on limited resources, especially in Europe’s core area. FABEC ANSPs have a strong record of cooperation and are working together to develop regional solutions that deliver on capacity and environmental performance targets.”

Traffic recovery was accompanied by strong environmental performance, with FABEC ANSPs achieving close to optimum Horizontal Flight Efficiency (HFE). During the 12 months from July 2020 to June 2021, the HFE rose to 97.20%, surpassing the 96.75% target set by the performance scheme. There is a positive correlation between flight efficiency, traffic and capacity and the increase in traffic during the first half of 2021 caused a gradual decline in environmental performance during 2021.

The airspace of the six FABEC States of Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Switzerland is one of the busiest and most complex in the world. The majority of major European airports, major civil airways and military training areas are located in this area. FABEC airspace covers 1.7 million km² and handled 2019 over 55% of European air traffic. In 2020, FABEC won the ATM Environment Award for the second consecutive year.

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