

IATA reports 5.6% growth in global air cargo demand in January

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Dhaka: The International Air Transport Association (IATA) released data for January 2026 global air cargo markets, showing a 5.6% year-on-year increase in total demand, measured in cargo ton-kilometers (CTK). International operations recorded a stronger 7.2% rise compared to January 2025.

Capacity, measured in available cargo tonne-kilometers (ACTK), increased by 3.6% year-on-year. International capacity grew by 5.7% during the same period, reflecting continued fleet expansion and network adjustments across key cargo markets.

“The demand for air cargo had a robust start to 2026,” said IATA’s Director General Willie Walsh. He noted that growth was polarized across regions, with Africa, the Middle East, Asia-Pacific, and Europe outperforming the global average, while carriers in the Americas

reported overall contractions.

Walsh added that the resilience of air cargo would be tested in the coming months due to evolving US trade policies and renewed hostilities in the Middle East. He said these issues would feature prominently at the upcoming World Cargo Symposium in Lima, Peru, scheduled for March 10-12, 2026.

Several operating environment factors supported January's performance. Global goods trade expanded 4.9% year-on-year in December 2025. Jet fuel prices declined 6.5% year-on-year in January, easing cost pressures for airlines.

Manufacturing sentiment also strengthened. The global Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) rose to 51.8 in January, surpassing the 50-point expansion threshold and reaching its highest level in over 18 months. The PMI for new export orders climbed to 49.9, its strongest reading in 10 months.

Regionally, Asia-Pacific airlines posted a 7.8% year-on-year increase in cargo demand, with capacity up 3.3%. European carriers recorded a 6.9% demand rise and a 4.9% capacity increase.

Middle Eastern airlines saw demand grow 9.3%, while capacity surged 9.9%, marking the strongest capacity expansion among all regions. African carriers led overall growth, reporting an 18.2% jump in demand and a 6.5% increase in capacity.

In contrast, North American carriers experienced a 0.5% decline in demand and a 0.2% drop in capacity. Latin American and Caribbean airlines reported a 2.0% contraction in demand, despite a 2.3% rise in capacity.

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