

Health council urges night flight ban at Brussels Airport

- A Monitor Desk Report

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Brussels: Belgium's health authority called Tuesday (May 7) for a ban on night flights to and from Brussels airport to protect around 160,000 residents from noise pollution.

The Superior Health Council of Belgium pointed to several risks from excessive noise, including sleep disorders, learning difficulties in children, high blood pressure and depression.

Belgian health minister Frank Vandenbroucke welcomed the body's recommendation.

"There is no future for night activities at an airport in this densely populated region," he said. "I am therefore in favour of a gradual, realistic but systematic reduction in night flights, first by stopping the flights of the loudest aircraft."

The Brussels Airport operator insisted night-time air traffic was important, especially for freight and the transport of "critical goods, like pharmaceutical products".

In its recommendation, the council pointed to figures from 2019 -- before the Covid pandemic -- to note that there were around 27,000 flights between 11:00 pm and 7:00 am, representing more than 11 percent of the total that year.

Some 163,000 residents were exposed to airborne noise above 45 decibels.

The World Health Organization has "strongly recommended" reducing noise exposure to below 40 decibels due to the negative health impact.

Belgian officials cited a study of German primary school children, which found aircraft noise near Frankfurt airport impaired children's ability to learn how to read.

A top German court in 2011 banned flights between 11:00 pm and 5:00 am, a measure still in place except in the case of weather or security issues.

An average of 20 to 25 million passengers transited through Brussels airport every year for the past decade, except during 2020 and 2021 because of the pandemic.

The airport says it is one of the main employers in Belgium's Flemish region, alongside the port of Antwerp.

Freight activity at the airport, which accounts for 50 percent of night flights today, "represents 7,000 jobs", according to the airport's operator.

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