



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

STATISTICS, DOCUMENT

Air transport: 2023

Information for Cardiff Airport including aircraft movements, passengers and freight handled and international air passenger traffic for 2023.

First published: 30 May 2024

Last updated: 30 May 2024

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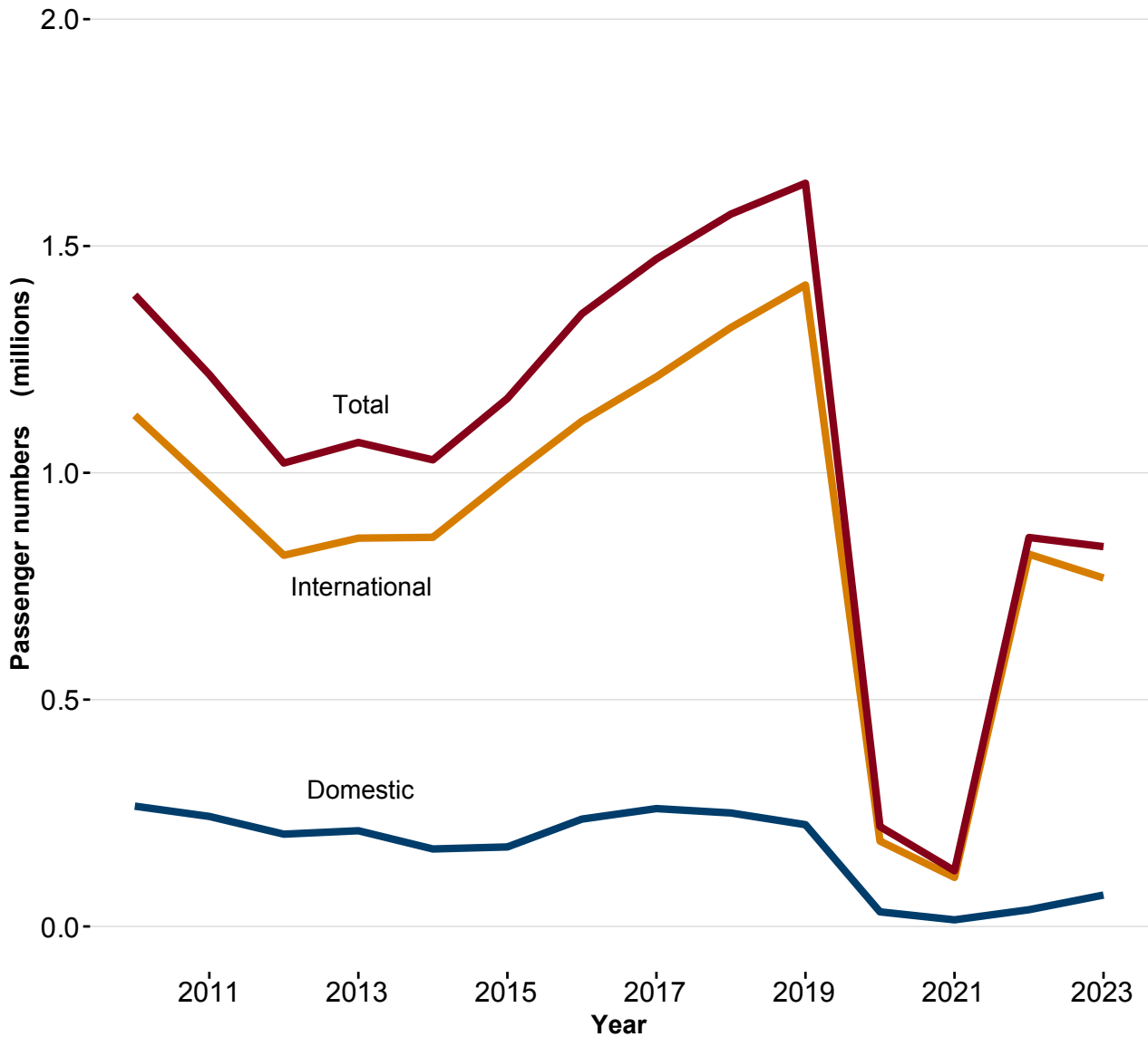
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Main points

- In 2023, around 837,000 passengers used Cardiff International airport (Figure 1). This is a decrease of 2.4% compared with 2022 and is around half of the number of passengers in 2019 (prior to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic). This includes both arrivals and departures passengers.
- There were 16,000 flights in and out of Cardiff International airport in 2023, a 15.6% decrease compared to 2022, and around half of the number in 2019.
- During 2023, there were 68 international airports within 32 countries outside of the United Kingdom that were served by Cardiff Airport International airport, broadly similar to the previous year.

Figure 1: Terminal passengers at Cardiff Airport, 2010 to 2023



Description of Figure 1: A line chart showing the trend in composition of air passengers at Cardiff airport. International passengers account for the majority of passengers at the airport.

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 due to coronavirus (COVID-19) travel restrictions. However, in 2022, there were no coronavirus restrictions remaining on travel which led to large increases in the numbers of passengers using the airport even though the numbers remain below pre-pandemic levels. There were no coronavirus impacts in 2023.

Introduction

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.

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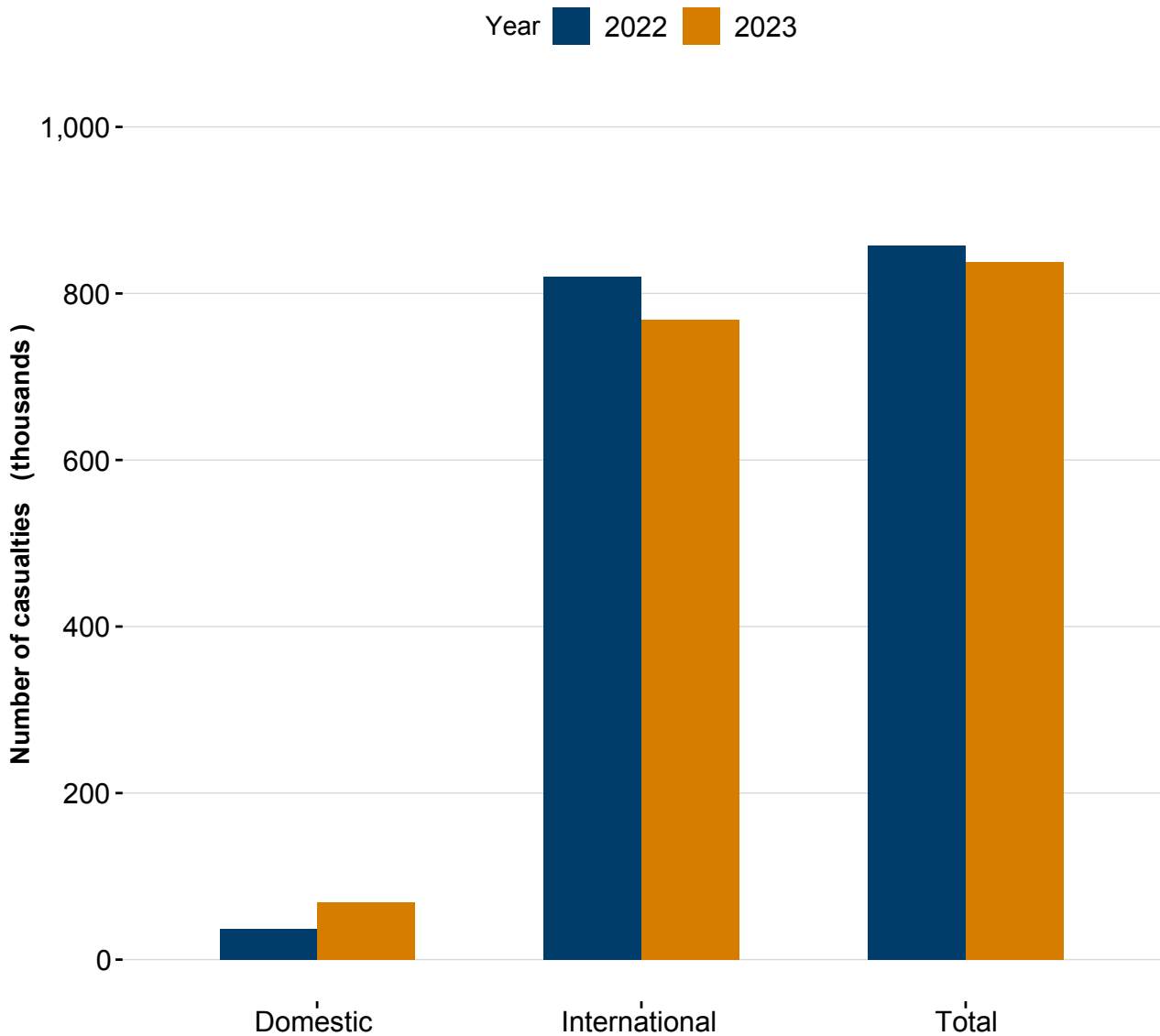
During 2023, there were 272.8 million passenger journeys through UK airports compared with 221.8 million in 2022 and 296.8 million in 2019. Heathrow was the busiest (79 million), followed by Gatwick (41 million) and Manchester (28 million). Cardiff was the 19th busiest airport in the UK (out of 49 airports) with 837,000 terminal passengers, which was 0.3% of the UK total.

Cardiff airport

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

In 2023, 91.7% of passengers from Cardiff Airport flew to international destinations whilst 8.3% used domestic destinations. Compared to the previous year, international passenger numbers decreased by 6.4% whilst domestic passenger numbers increased by 88.0%.

Figure 2: Air passenger numbers at Cardiff airport in 2022 and 2023 (thousands)



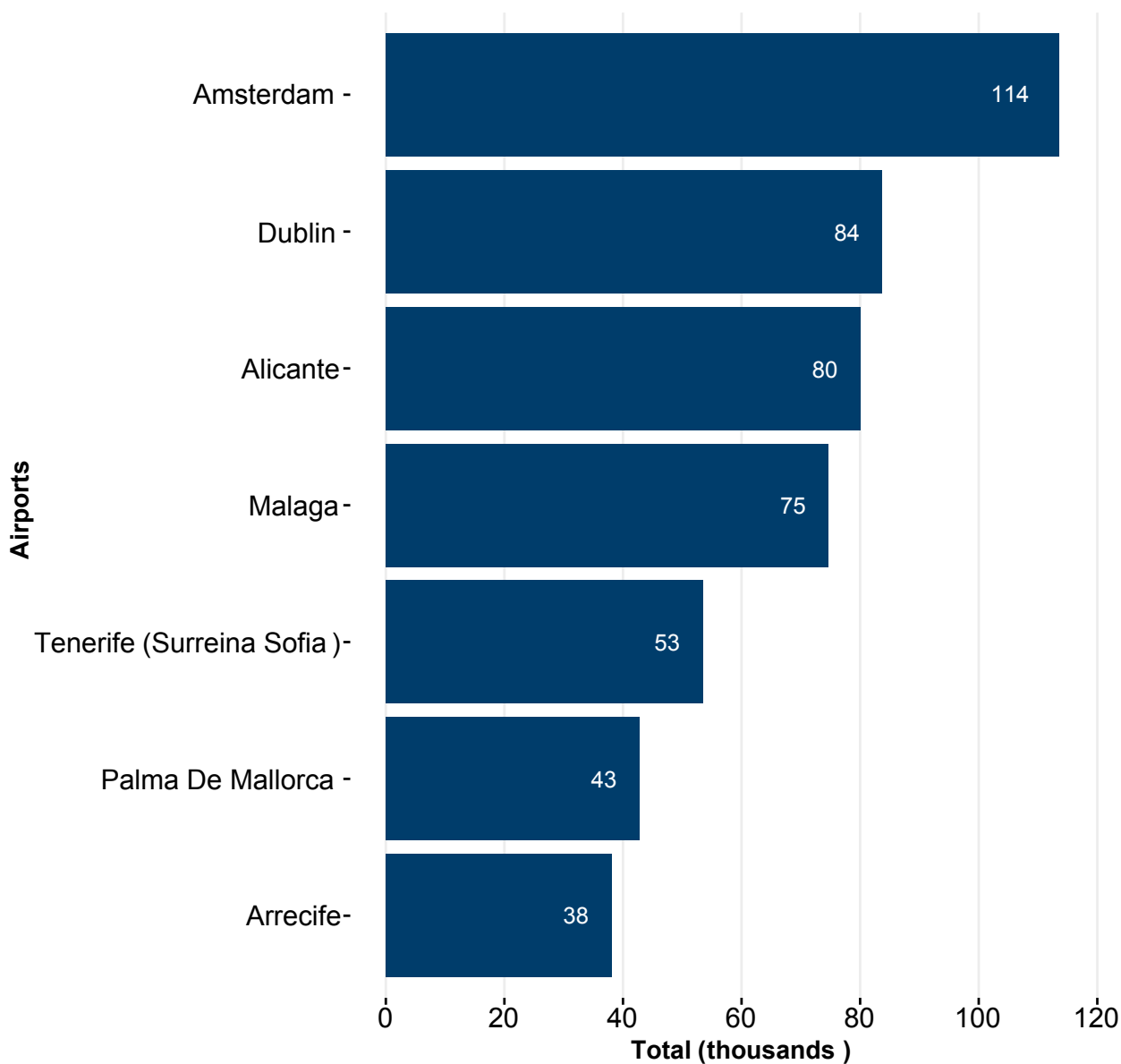
Description of Figure 2: A bar chart showing the number of air passengers at Cardiff airport by type of destination in 2022 and 2023. In 2023, 91.7% of passengers flew to international destinations.

Source: Welsh Government analysis of [Civil Aviation Authority data](#)

The total number of passengers who used scheduled flights decreased by 5.1% in 2023 compared to 2022, whilst those on chartered flights stayed broadly similar over the same period.

Figure 3 shows the most common destinations from Cardiff airport in 2023. Amsterdam recorded the highest number of passengers arriving from Cardiff airport (114,000) whilst Belfast International recorded the highest percentage increase in passenger numbers between 2022 and 2023, increasing from 262 to 12,000 air passengers. The increase in passengers to and from Belfast is likely due to the introduction of Ryanair new route in 2023 from Cardiff Airport.

Figure 3: Most common destinations from Cardiff airport in 2023



Description of Figure 3: A bar chart showing common destinations at Cardiff airport in 2023. Amsterdam was the main destination for international travellers with 114,000 passengers.

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 87%(r) to 188,000 (the percentage marked with (r) has been revised from 83% as published in the Air Transport 2022 bulletin as it was previously calculated incorrectly).

In 2023 the number of international passengers decreased by 6.4% compared to the previous year and remained lower than pre-pandemic levels (45.7% fewer than 2019). Spain is consistently one of the most common destinations and accounted for 44.6% (343,000) of all international passengers in 2023.

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

Paris, Amsterdam and Dublin are key European hub cities that offer the opportunity for onward connections to a wider range of destinations. In 2023 air passenger numbers via Paris airports decreased to 8,000 from 22,000 recorded

in 2022 (89.2% below pre pandemic levels), Amsterdam increased to 114,000 in 2023 (but 29.9% below pre pandemic levels) and Dublin increased to 88,000 over the same period (but 18.0% below pre pandemic levels).

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

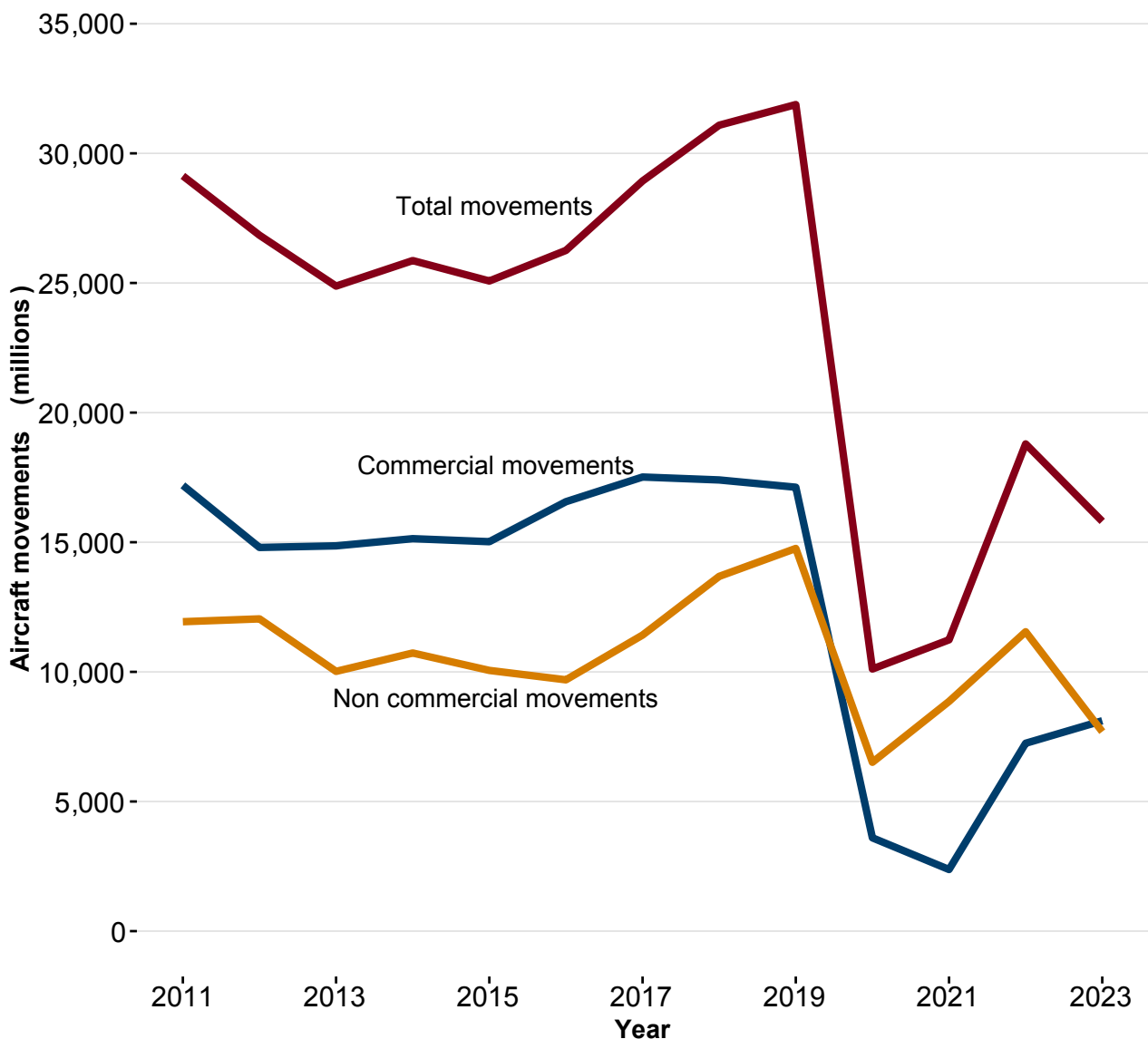
Aircraft movements (flights)

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 slightly in 2021. There were 16,000 aircraft movements at Cardiff International airport in 2023, a decrease of 15.9% compared with 2022 (19,000) (Figure 4) and a decrease of 50.4% compared to 2019 (32,000).

Figure 4: Number of aircraft movements at Cardiff Airport from 2011 to 2023



Description of Figure 4: A line chart showing the trend in aircraft movement at Cardiff airport. Commercial movements were the only type of movement to show an increase in the number of movements in 2023 compared to previous year.

Source: Welsh Government analysis of [Civil Aviation Authority data](#)

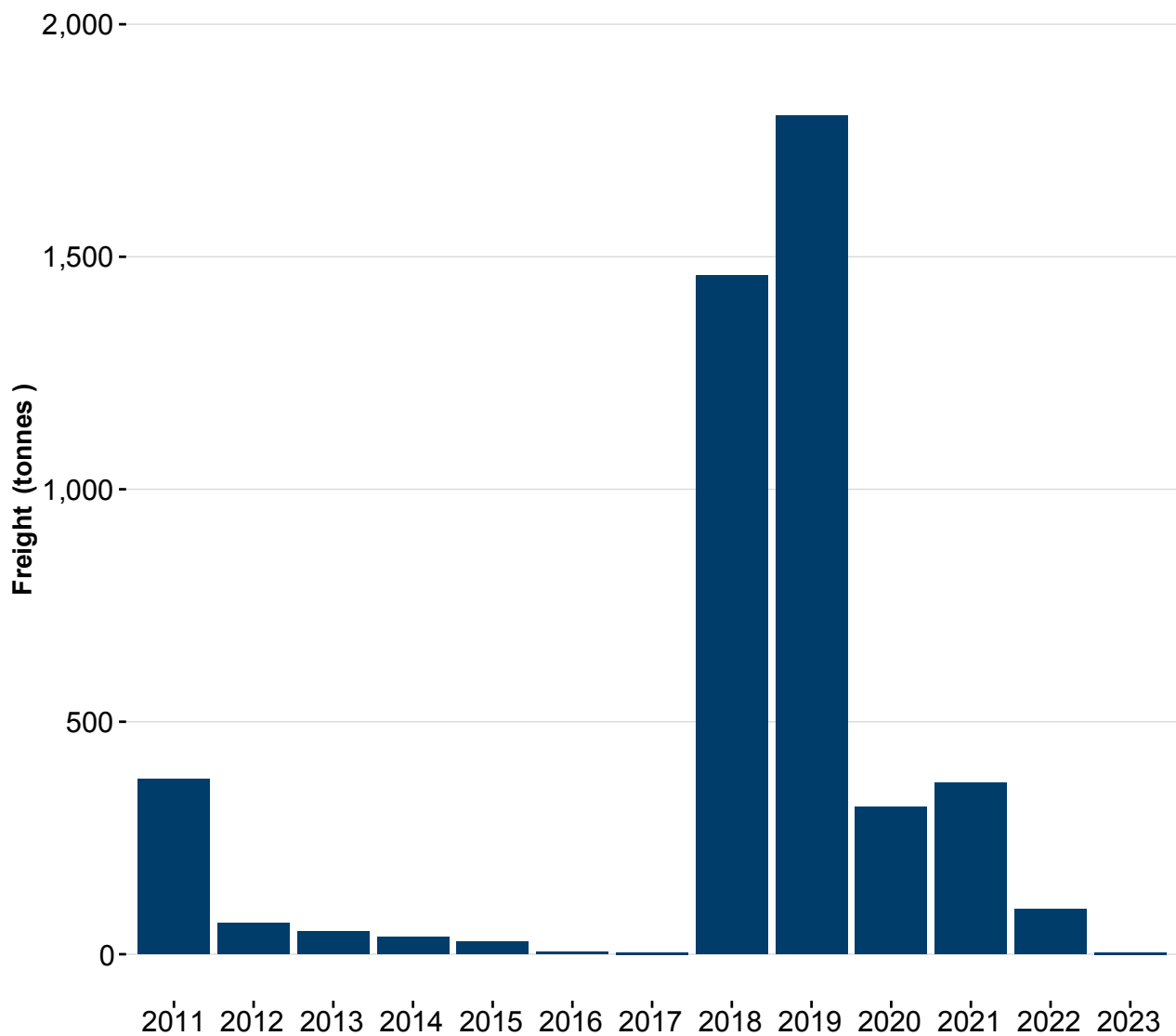
Air freight

Historically, the volume of freight moving through Cardiff airport has been volatile (**Figure 5**). The volume peaked in 2004 at 2,600 tonnes, but fell by 93% 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 2023 air freight through Cardiff airport fell by 96.2% to 4 tonnes when compared to 2022, similar levels as recorded in 2017. This decline is primarily related to the suspension of the Cardiff to Doha service, in 2020.

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.

Figure 5: Freight at Cardiff airport, 2011 to 2023



Description of Figure 5: The column chart shows the amount of tonnage by year that had passed through Cardiff airport. The trend is volatile and in 2023 it fell by 96.2% compared to the previous year.

Source: Welsh Government analysis of [Civil Aviation Authority data](#)

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 [Office for National Statistics \(ONS\)](#) also publish [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 \(CAA\)](#) and includes the CAA's own notes around 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

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purpose of these statistics, where flights are operated on a sub-charter basis, the operator is identified according to the flight number and 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.

CAA departing passenger survey – topics covered in survey questions

The CAA departing passenger survey 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 [Air Transport 2019](#) statistical bulletin. More detailed information relating to the [2019 passenger survey report can be found on the CAA website](#).

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](#). Historically, this information was released in Chapter 11 of 'Welsh Transport Statistics' and excel spreadsheets.

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,

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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 [Well-being 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 well-being assessments and local well-being plans.

We want your feedback

We welcome any feedback on any aspect of these statistics which can be provided by email to stats.transport@gov.wales.

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