

Review 2018: High punctuality of air traffic control despite sustained growth in traffic

Geneva, January 22, 2019 - Air traffic in the airspace above Switzerland managed by skyguide and in the delegated areas grew significantly faster in 2018 than Eurocontrol had forecast. Total flight movements rose by 5% compared with 2017 (forecast: 2.2%). Swiss airports recorded an increase of 2.8% in arrivals and departures. Despite the high growth in traffic, air traffic control delays remained relatively low. 96.5% of all flights were handled punctually by air navigation services.

Swiss record year

Traffic growth in skyguide's airspace of 5% exceeded Eurocontrol's original February 2018 forecast of +2% for Geneva's Area Control Center (ACC) and +2.6% for Zurich's ACC. The number of arrivals and departures at Swiss airports rose by 2.8%, with the trend at the two national airports contrasting (-1.8% for Geneva, +3.1% for Zurich).

Growth in Swiss airspace was similar to that in neighbouring Italy (+6%), Germany (+4%) and France (+2.7%).

Continued high punctuality overall

Despite the higher traffic volume, punctuality decreased only slightly: 96.5% of flights were handled on time, compared to 97% in the previous year. Route delays rose from 10.1 seconds in 2017 to 17.1 seconds last year. These delays were mainly due to adverse weather conditions (41%), short-term capacity bottlenecks (39%) and illness (17%).

Delays at Geneva Airport increased by 27.9%. The main reasons for the delays were unfavourable weather conditions (55%), insufficient runway capacity (20%), staff shortages due to illness (19%) and insufficient approach capacity (3%).

Delays at Zurich Airport increased by 13.6%. As in Geneva, these were mainly due to adverse weather conditions (56%), insufficient runway capacity (18%), environmental protection requirements (13%) and insufficient approach capacity (10%).

The traffic increase of more than 10% in certain months at the ACC Zurich (district control centre) is remarkable. Due to staff shortages at the neighbouring control centres in Karlsruhe, Maastricht and Reims, an unexpected number of airlines made use of the available capacity in Switzerland, resulting in temporary congestion. Eurocontrol would like to reward skyguide's extraordinary efforts, which ultimately relieved the pressure on the entire European network, with a "write-off" of minutes of delay for which it is not responsible. This would reduce the average delay in ACC Zurich's airspace from 18.7 seconds (0.31 minutes) to 15.8 seconds (0.26 minutes) per flight.

Instrument flight rules¹ flights handled in 2018:

	2018	2017	Veränderung
Instrument flights	1 298 754	1 237 098	+5,0%
of which en-route-traffic	808 445	751 946	+7,5%

Skyguide handled an average of 3 558 flights per day in 2018, surpassing its previous record of 3 389 flights per day in 2008. The peak traffic day in 2018 was 13 July with 4 401 flights - a new daily record.

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Skyguide is responsible for providing air navigation services in Switzerland and in certain adjacent parts of neighbouring countries. With its workforce of some 1 500 employees who are active at 14 locations in Switzerland, skyguide safely and reliably guides some 1.2 million civil and military flights a year through Europe's busiest airspace. Skyguide is well integrated into the international air navigation services community and, with its innovative and customer-minded solutions, helps enhance Switzerland's appeal as a place to live, work and do business. The company is majority-owned by the Swiss Confederation, and is headquartered in Geneva.

¹ Instrument flight rules or IFR flights are flights that are performed in controlled airspace and require air traffic management services to ensure their safe and efficient operation.