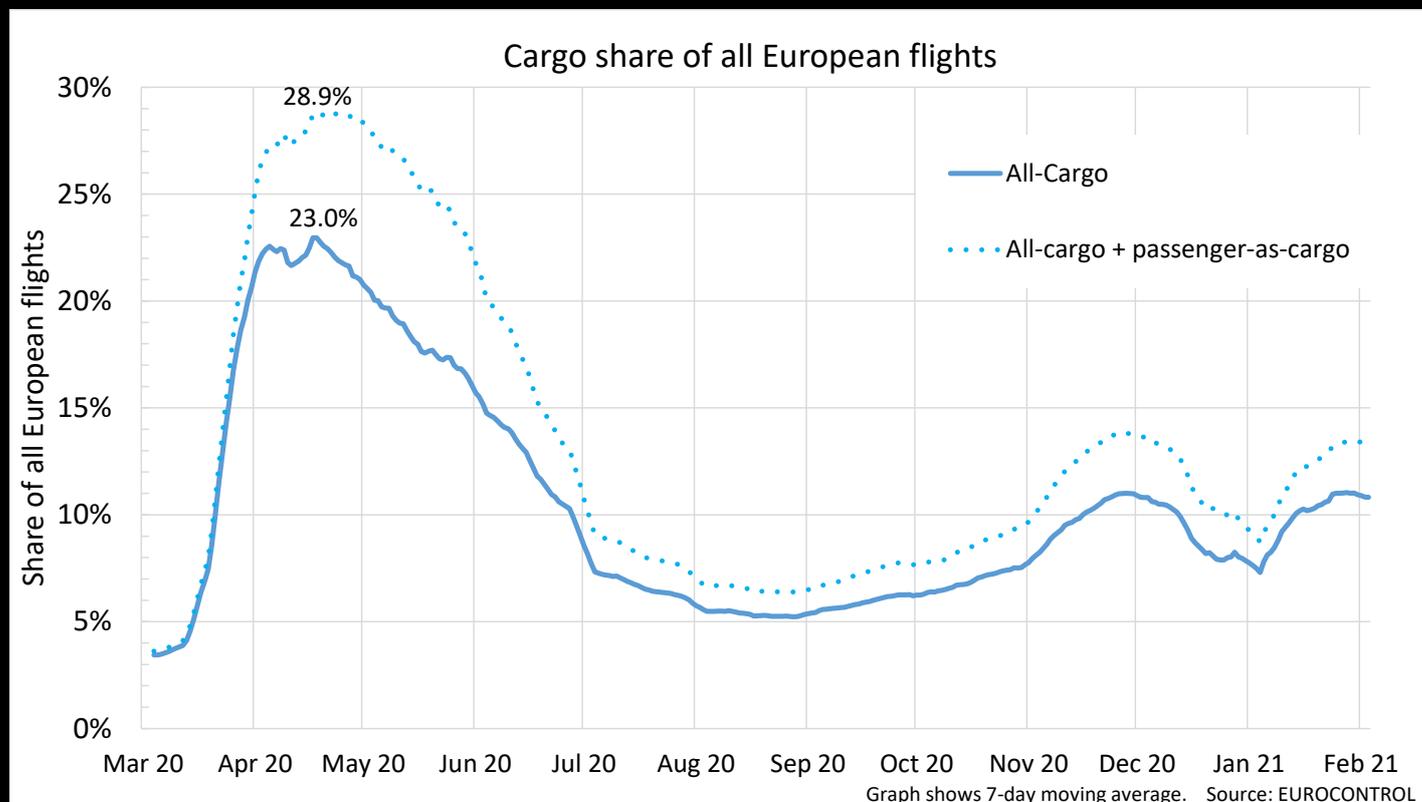


# EUROCONTROL Data Snapshot

All-cargo flights continue to have 3-4 times their normal market share in Europe, boosted by passenger aircraft flown as cargo.



23 February 2021



More than half of air cargo – freight and mail – is carried in dedicated “all-cargo” freighter aircraft and the rest in the holds of passenger aircraft. Though they carry a little over half of the cargo, all-cargo flights in normal years make up just 3 or 4% of total European flights.

In the first wave of COVID-19, boosted by the need to ship medical equipment, flights by the all-cargo segment of the market declined by ‘only’ 6% in April and May 2020. Meanwhile other market segments collapsed, giving a decline of nearly 90% for total flights. Since June, the number of all-cargo flights has actually been slightly higher than 12 months before: typically 2-4% higher, but 14% up in December 2020. All-cargo is the only market segment staying above 2019 flight counts. The graph shows that, as a result, the all-cargo segment’s share of flights at first grew rapidly to more than 20% of the total market. More recently, all-cargo has a market share of 10-11%, which is 3 or 4 times the normal share.

Even in normal times, cargo in the belly hold can make the difference between a profitable and a non-profitable route for a passenger airline. With passengers mostly unable to travel, cargo has become a commercial lifeline. So airlines have sought to maximise their cargo capacity. This includes use of empty passenger aircraft to carry cargo, even with cargo in the passenger compartment. We call this ‘passenger-as-cargo’ and some are referring to it as ‘preighter’.

We identify and count these ‘passenger-as-cargo’ flights using their flight plans. This might miss a few, but we believe that it gives a good estimate. At the peak, these flights were adding 5-6% to the market share of cargo, and even in recent weeks they have added around 2%: 5,400 such flights in January 2021 on top of 26,900 normal all-cargo.

**Technical Bits:** The statistics shown are for flights in the EUROCONTROL Network Manager area, so Europe in a wide sense as well as some neighbouring States. The ‘passenger-as-cargo’ flights are those that we would not normally identify as [all-cargo flights](#), but nevertheless reporting ‘cargo’ in the remarks on the flight plan. Boeing reports that more than half of air cargo is carried by all-cargo aircraft in its ‘World Air Cargo Forecast’.

