Environment and climate impacts of aviation continue growing

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Improving technology, more efficient operations, better airports and market-based measures have not been enough to mitigate the aviation sector’s growing impacts on the environment, climate and people's health. These are the key findings of a new report, published jointly today by the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA), the European Environment Agency (EEA) and EUROCONTROL.

The European Aviation Environmental Report 2019, published jointly by EASA, the EEA and EUROCONTROL, provides an updated assessment of the environmental performance of the aviation sector in Europe.

The report states that, while aviation has produced economic benefits, stimulated innovation and improved connectivity within Europe, the sector's growth has also increased its negative impacts on climate change, noise and air quality.

Hans Bruyninckx, EEA Executive Director, said that "the report confirms that the current trends and outlooks in aviation are not compatible with protecting the environment, climate and people’s health. Europe must lead the way towards a more sustainable aviation sector at home and abroad. Strong policies and robust implementation can mitigate future impacts of a growing sector as well as foster innovation and the fundamental shift needed in consumer behaviour."

Key findings of the report:

The number of flights (EU28 + EFTA) increased by 8 % between 2014 and 2017, and is expected to grow by 42 % from 2017 to 2040 in the most-likely forecast.

Technological improvements, fleet renewal and increased operational efficiency have been able to partially counterbalance the impact of recent growth, but there has still been an increase in overall noise and emissions since 2014.

In 2016, domestic aviation and international aviation were together accountable for 3.6 % of the total EU28 greenhouse gas emissions and for 13.4 % of the emissions from transport.

The environmental efficiency of aviation continues to improve and, by 2040, further improvements are expected in average fuel burn per passenger kilometer flown (-12 %) and noise energy per flight (-24 %).

By 2040, CO2 and NOX emissions from aviation are expected to increase by at least 21 % and 16 %, respectively.

The EEA has previously analysed the environmental and climate impacts of aviation in its 2017 TERM report ‘Aviation and shipping — impacts on Europe's environment’.