



AIR TRANSPORT INDUSTRY TURNS TO DIGITALIZATION AS BAGGAGE MISHANDLING RATES VIRTUALLY DOUBLE AMID GROWING PASSENGER VOLUMES

News / Airlines



Airlines and airports are facing a surge in baggage mishandling rates amidst the growing number of passengers, with the number of mishandled bags almost doubling from 2021 to 2022 to 7.6 bags per thousand passengers, according to SITA's [2023 Baggage IT Insights](#) report released today. The shortage of skilled staff, resumption of international travel, and congestion at airports has made it challenging to manage bags and ensure their smooth handling at airports – particularly during peak travel periods. The overall increase in mishandling is forcing the industry to focus on digitalization and automation, with technology investments that deliver greater automation and self-service being a top priority.

Delayed bags accounted for 80% of all mishandled bags in 2022, lost and stolen bags increased to 7%, and damaged and pilfered bags decreased to 13%. The surge in the mishandling rate comes after more than a decade of reduction in mishandled baggage. Significant process improvements helped the mishandling rate per thousand passengers fall by 59.7% between 2007

and 2021. However, given the pressure of staff shortages on operations post-COVID, the 2022 mishandling rate of 7.6 bags per thousand passengers represents a 75% increase from 2021.

Transfer bags have historically accounted for the majority of mishandled bags. This was no different in 2022, with a one-percentage point increase from 2021, pushing the proportion of bags delayed at transfer to 42%. This increase is attributed to the resurgence of international and long-haul travel, leading to loading errors and greater transfer mishandling rates. The failure to load bags accounted for 18% of all mishandled bags in 2022, representing a 3% decrease from the previous year. Loading errors more than doubled compared to the previous year, accounting for 9% of all delayed bags in 2022, stemming from operational strains on baggage systems.

David Lavorel, CEO, SITA said: “After a decade where the mishandling rate more than halved between 2007 and 2021, it is disheartening to see this rate climbing again. As an industry, we need to work hard to ensure passengers are once again confident to check in their bags. We at SITA are working directly with airlines and airports to help solve key pain points in the baggage journey through smart automation, tracking, and digital platforms.”

Investing in real-time baggage status information has become a key priority for airlines, with 57% of airlines providing their staff with mobile access to real-time baggage status information. This figure is expected to increase significantly to 84% by 2025, and 67% of airlines plan to offer real-time baggage status information directly to passengers, marking a substantial improvement from 25% today.

SITA has developed [the WorldTracer Auto Reflight](#) system in direct response to the high mishandling rates observed at transfer. This solution automatically identifies bags that are not likely to make their planned connecting flight and rebooks them on the next possible flight using the existing bag tag – all while keeping the passenger informed.

SITA estimates that automation of reflight operations could save the industry up to \$30 million per year. Lufthansa and SITA’s recent partnership using the technology aims to digitalize the manual reflight process, and the results of their Proof of Concept suggest that they can automatically reflight as much as 70% of Lufthansa’s mishandled bags at Munich Airport.

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