

Ethiopian Airlines sees passenger rebound from Covid this year

By [Duncan Miriri](#)

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Ethiopian Airlines expects its passenger business to recover to pre-pandemic levels in its financial year ending in June, its chief executive told Reuters.



An Ethiopia's Airlines Boeing 737 Max 8 plane to take off on a demonstration trip to resume flights from the Bole International Airport in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia February 1, 2022. REUTERS/Tiksa Negeri

Africa's biggest carrier will ferry 12.7 million passengers during the year, Mesfin Tasew Bekele said in an interview, up from 8.6 million passengers in the previous financial year and 12.1 million before the pandemic struck.

Mesfin attributed the forecast to the lifting of restrictions on movement around the world, the carrier's own expansion in terms of new planes and destinations, and a peace deal signed last month to end a two-year conflict in the north of the country.

Any delays in re-opening of China could however curb the projections, Mesfin said, since it is a key market for both passengers and cargo.

"China is lagging behind in relaxing Covid restrictions... If it doesn't gradually relax the restrictions starting in January, it may have an adverse impact on us," said Mesfin, who took over as CEO in March.



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Alexander Cornwell 12 Jan 2022



Ethiopian Airlines fared much better than other African carriers during the pandemic, thanks to its cargo business which was able to compensate for a steep drop in passenger traffic.

It is already looking beyond the health crisis with an expansion plan to double its fleet and network, and boost annual revenue and passengers by 400% and 440% respectively, by 2035.

"Unless we grow, we cannot be successful," Mesfin said, adding that a larger network will give the business economies of scale.

Under the expansion plan, Ethiopian is ordering new planes from Boeing, Airbus and De Havilland across all categories, aiming to double the size to 271, he said.

It has started new routes to Zurich, Amman and Bulawayo since July, Mesfin said, and it is targeting Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Karachi, Copenhagen and Atlanta, part of the drive to double international destinations to 207 by the target year.

The airline is also investing in new airport and training facilities, the chief executive said.

Ethiopian is in final negotiations with the Nigerian government to set up a national airline for the west African nation in a joint venture, Mesfin said, adding the company has also signed an agreement with the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo for a similar arrangement.

"These two are big countries with big economies and populations providing a strong base for national carriers. We are very eager to start these airlines in partnership," he said.

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