



Unlocking Africa's aviation potential

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The African aviation market is often described as having high-growth potential.

That growth is underway, but it is constrained by a structural gap. Demand for air travel is rising across the continent, yet connectivity remains limited in many regions.

With 54 countries and widely dispersed population centres, as well as limited transport alternatives, aviation is essential to economic activity and mobility across the continent.

African airlines recorded the strongest international traffic growth of any global region in January 2026, with demand increasing 11.7% year-on-year (IATA), and yet, African operators still account for a small share of the global commercial fleet.

The market is still catching up rather than reaching maturity, with demand building quickly whenever routes are introduced and capacity is added. The opportunity lies in enabling airlines to respond to this demand in a scalable way.

Libérer le potentiel aérien de l'Afrique

Le marché aérien africain progresse vite, mais reste freiné par un déficit de connectivité. Avec 54 pays, des populations dispersées et peu d'alternatives de transport, l'aviation est essentielle à la mobilité du continent. En janvier 2026, les compagnies africaines ont affiché la plus forte croissance du trafic international au monde (+11,7 % sur un an, IATA) — tout en ne représentant qu'une faible part de la flotte mondiale.

Les freins persistent : mise en œuvre inégale du SAATM, accès limité au financement et coûts élevés (redevances, carburant) qui pèsent sur la rentabilité.

La stratégie de flotte devient un levier clé. Sur les lignes à faible densité, les avions

Constraints that continue to slow progress

The barriers for Africa are well known and continue to shape how the market develops. Regulation remains one of the main challenges. There have been efforts to open up air travel between African states through the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM), but implementation is uneven. Airlines are still restricted in how freely they can operate across borders, which limits network development and slows down connectivity between key markets.

Financing is another important constraint. Access to capital has historically been limited, influenced by perceptions of risk and higher borrowing costs, which can restrict airlines' ability to secure aircraft and invest in growth. Cost pressures also play a major role. Airlines across the continent face high airport charges, air navigation fees and fuel costs which have risen further in recent months, with some markets also experiencing supply constraints.



These factors directly impact profitability and limit operators' ability to reinvest in fleet expansion. At the same time, infrastructure development varies widely. Some countries are investing in modern facilities and improving efficiency, while others continue to face operational constraints.

Opportunity exists across the continent, but accessing it requires careful planning and a clear understanding of local conditions.

Fleet strategy as a growth lever

Fleet decisions in Africa are closely linked to how airlines grow. African networks are built around thinner routes and developing demand.

This supports the use of regional aircraft and turboprops, such as the ATR 72, Dash 8-400 and Embraer E-Jet family, which allow airlines to build connectivity without taking on unnecessary risk. These aircraft are well suited to shorter runways and secondary airports, which remain common across the continent.

Narrowbodies play an important role on higher-density routes, but overall, aircraft requirements are driven by flexibility rather than scale. Airlines need to match capacity to demand and build networks gradually.

Airline capacity is now being shaped by a global shortage of aircraft. New deliveries are limited and the secondary market is tight. Airlines are increasingly turning to leasing and pre-owned aircraft to secure capacity, focusing on what is available in the near term rather than waiting for future delivery slots. Access to aircraft has therefore become a key factor in determining how quickly airlines can expand.

In a constrained market, it is increasingly important for airlines to work with trusted advisors that understand both local market conditions and the global aircraft landscape. Inventory is not always available through traditional channels, particularly for operators working within tight timelines or specific fleet requirements. Access to global networks, market insight and transaction expertise can play a key role in helping carriers secure the aircraft they need to support growth.

Financing and growing confidence

African carriers are building stronger track records and improving operational performance. As a result, confidence among financiers is increasing. There is capital available, including from within Africa, but it requires clear planning and disciplined execution.

régionaux et turbopropulseurs (ATR 72, Dash 8-400, Embraer E-Jet) développent la connectivité sans risque excessif. Face à la pénurie mondiale d'appareils, l'accès aux avions — via la location et l'occasion — devient déterminant.

Chez Jetcraft Commercial, notre partenariat avec Absa Group illustre cette évolution. L'Afrique ne manque pas de demande : l'enjeu est de réunir les conditions pour y répondre.

More transactions are now being completed, which is helping to build momentum and demonstrate that the market can support investment. As this continues, access to financing should become more straightforward for airlines with credible business models.

At Jetcraft Commercial, we are actively supporting this shift. Our partnership with Absa Group is one example of how access to financing is evolving, helping to unlock new pathways for airlines to secure aircraft and structure transactions more effectively. By combining regional banking expertise with global aircraft trading experience, we are enabling carriers to move forward with greater confidence.

Turning potential into reality

Africa's aviation sector remains underdeveloped relative to its population and economic potential, but the direction of travel is clear. Demand is growing, airlines are gaining experience, and the wider ecosystem is evolving. Africa does not lack demand. The focus now is on ensuring the right conditions are in place to meet it.

Unlocking the next phase of growth will depend on consistency. Governments need to create the right conditions through policy and cost structures. Airlines must continue to take a disciplined approach to fleet and network planning. Industry partners play a role in providing access to aircraft and supporting complex transactions.

At Jetcraft Commercial, we see this progress taking shape across the continent. By combining regional understanding with global reach, we support airlines in securing the aircraft they need to grow. To find out more, visit <https://www.jetcraft.com/inventory/commercial/>



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