Global Tourism Outlook: An Aviation Perspective

Dr. Negar Rezvany

Industry Analysis

IATA Sustainability and Economics

28 October 2026

Air transport directly connects South Africa to 42 different countries

Air connectivity in South Africa, 2025

186 scheduled passenger routes

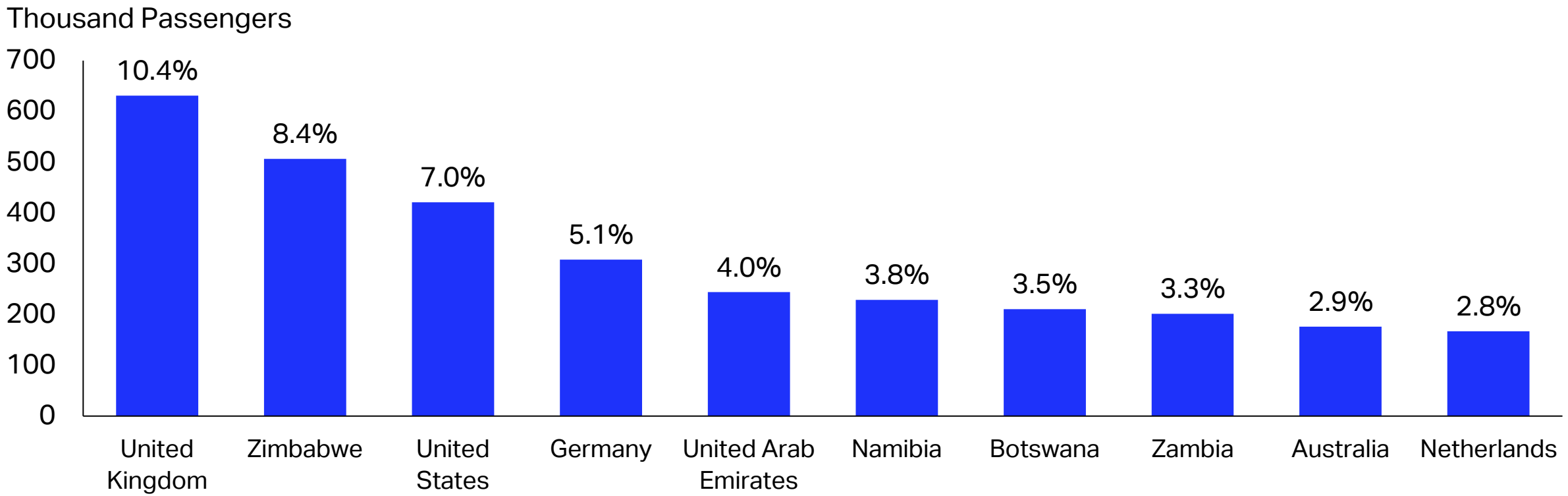
42 countries

142 daily international departures

Source: : IATA Sustainability & Economics using OAG & DDS data.

Most international travelers come to South Africa from the UK

International traffic to South Africa from its top10 origin markets, 2025



Source: : IATA Sustainability & Economics using DDS data.

Air travel from South Africa in 2025, Origin-Destination

6.1

million

international passenger departures

GROWTH

15.6%

10-year growth

7.5%

year-on-year growth

RANK

55th

Global

No change since 2015

3rd

in Africa

No change since 2015

SHARE

0.3%

of global international departures

7.0%

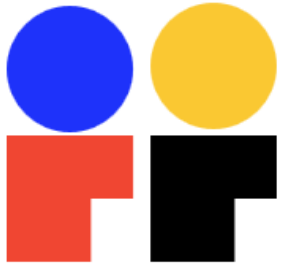
of African international departures

Source: IATA Sustainability and Economics using DDS data.

The economic impact of aviation in South Africa

GDP and employment created by aviation in South Africa in 2025

		Africa	World
7.4 USD billion	**1.7%** of GDP	**2.8%** of GDP	**4.3%** of GDP

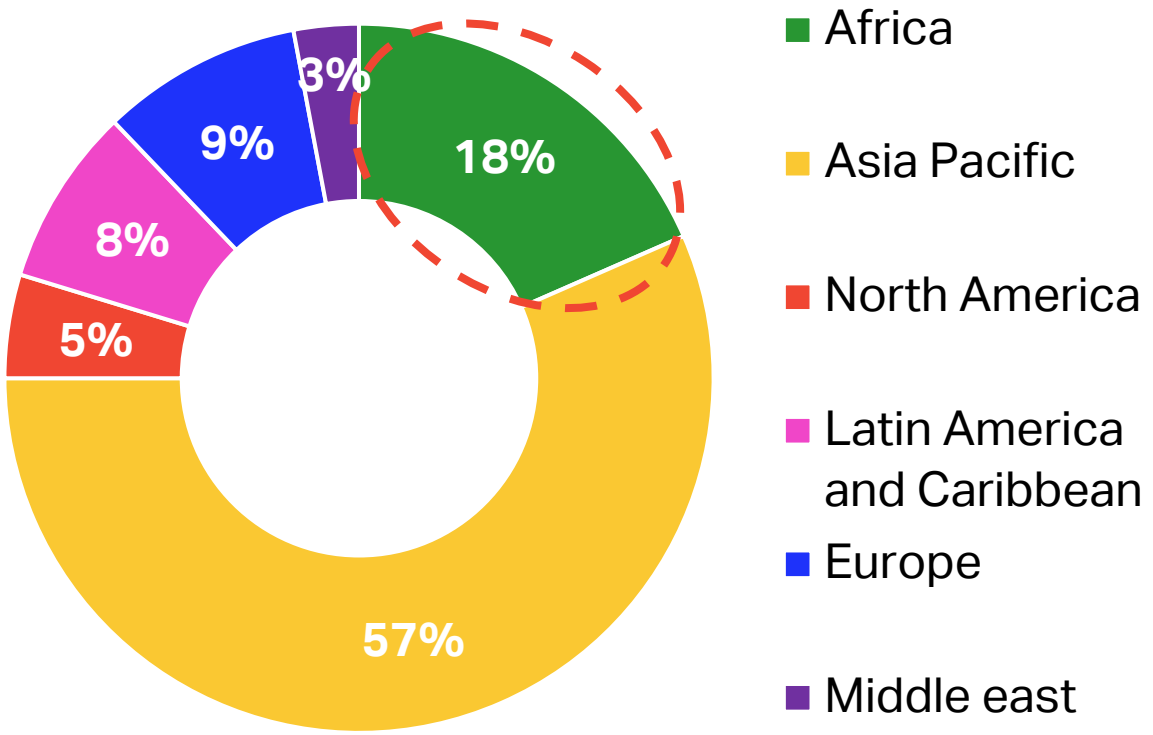


		Africa	World
328.6 thousand jobs	**1.2%** Of employment	**1.3%** of employment	**2.7%** of employment

Source: Air Transport Action Group, 2026. Aviation Benefits Beyond Borders report based on data from Oxford Economics.

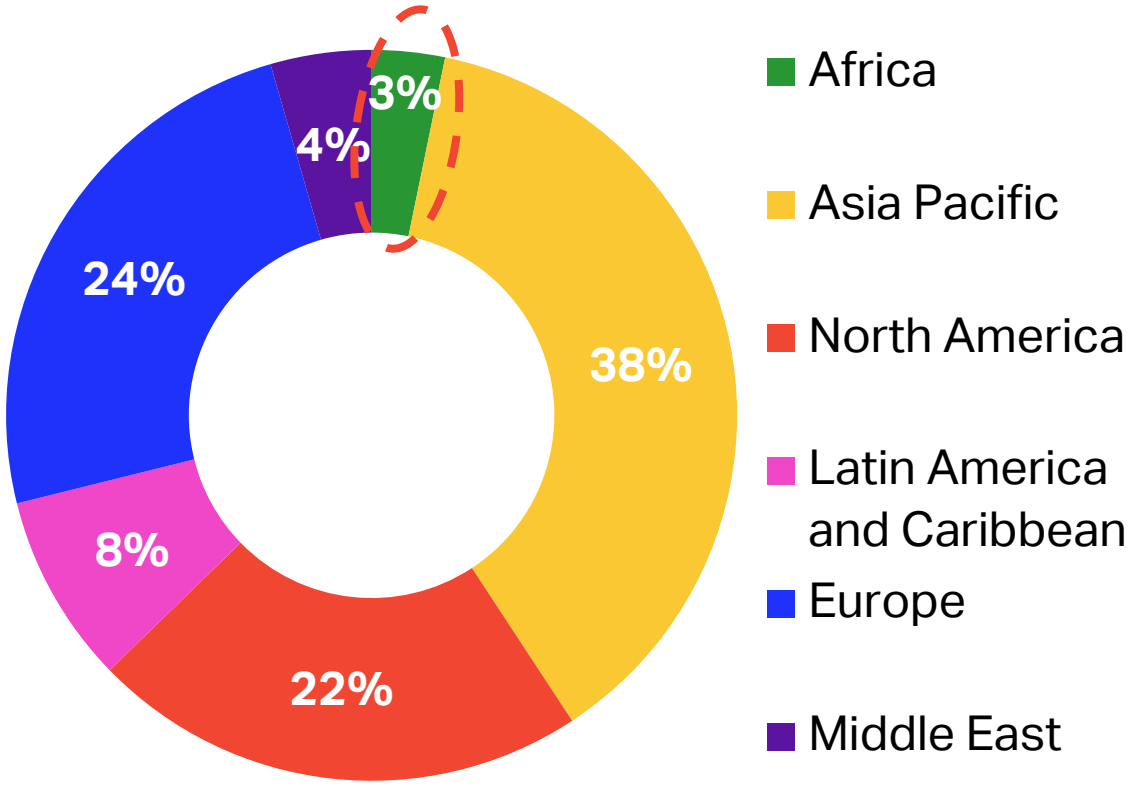
Africa represents 3% of global seat capacity, while it has 18% of the world's population

Share of regions' population, 2024



Source: United Nations, World Population Prospects.

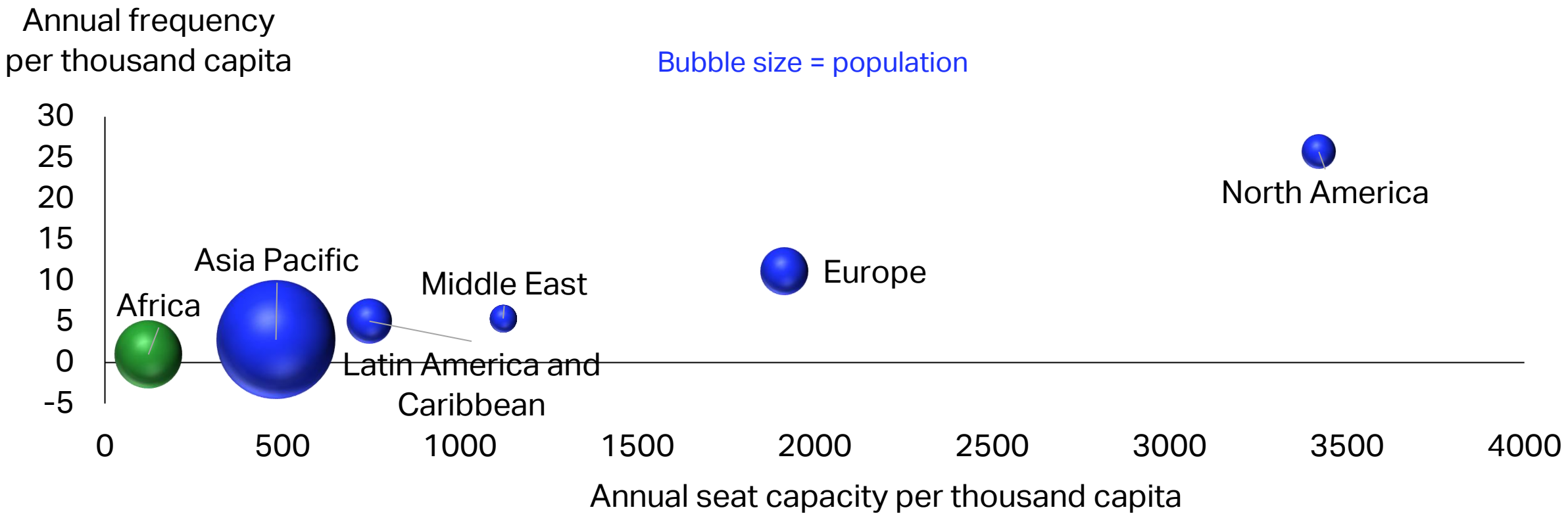
Share of seat capacity by region, 2024-2026



Source: IATA Sustainability and Economics, OAG.

Africa has the poorest air connectivity within regions

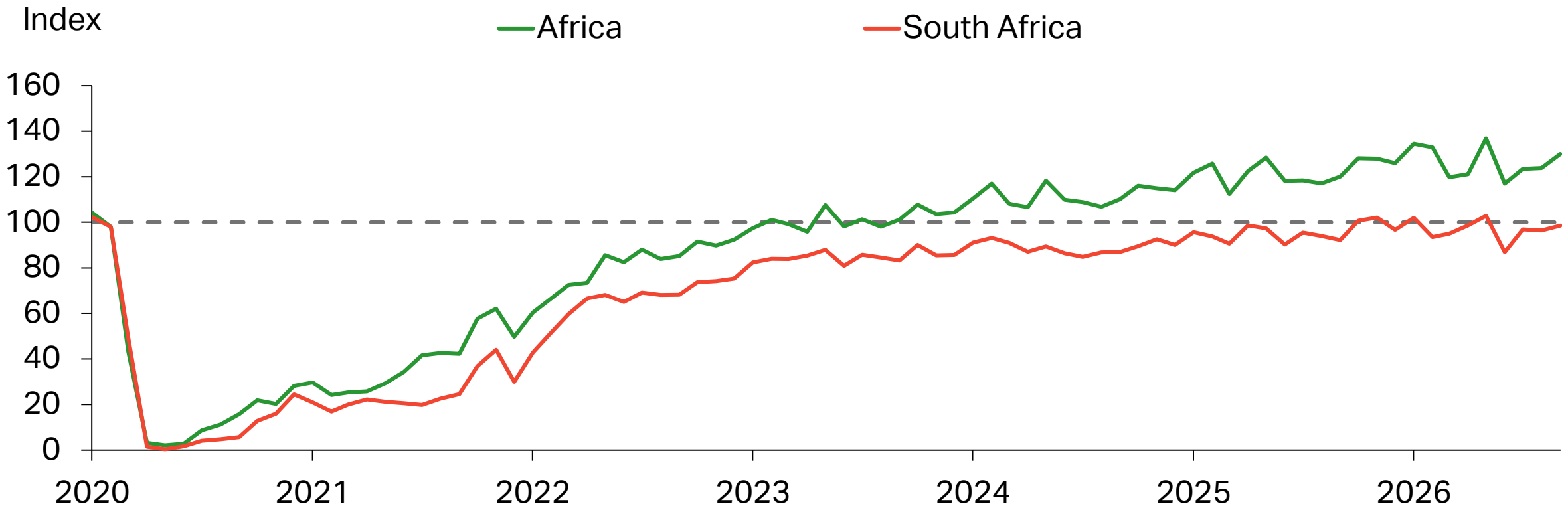
Annual frequency and seat capacity per thousand capita, by region, 2024



Source: IATA Sustainability and Economics, OAG, and United Nations, World Population Prospects.

Traffic to/from Africa has recovered from covid
But South Africa lags behind, though close to recovery

Africa and South Africa RPK, Index, 2019= 100



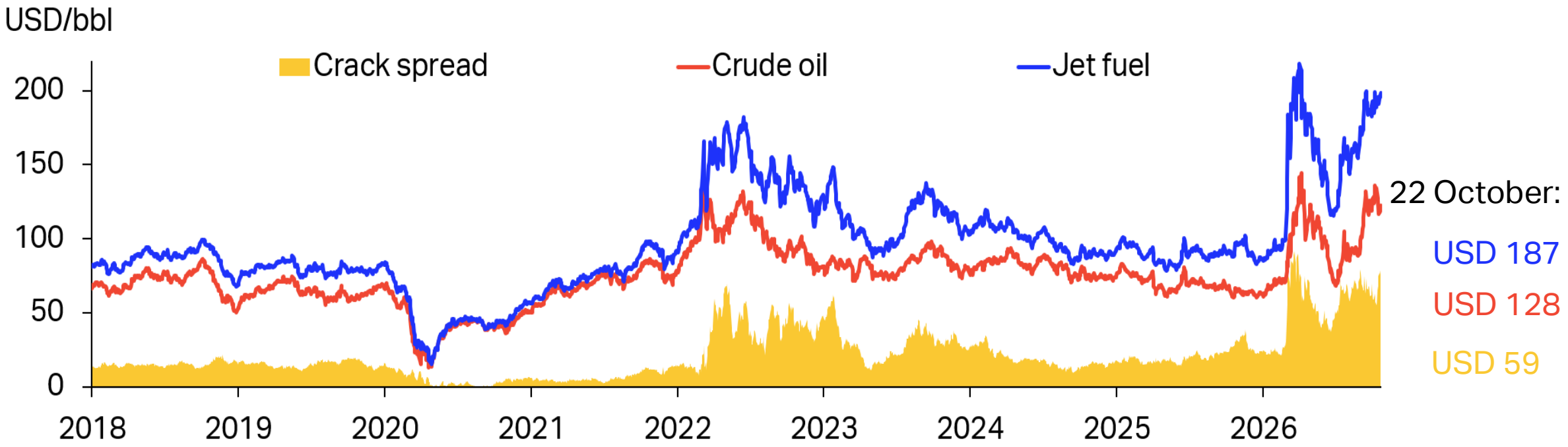
Source: IATA Sustainability and Economics using DDS data.

RPK: Revenue Passenger-Kilometers

Macroeconomic context

Oil price shock and record-high jet fuel price

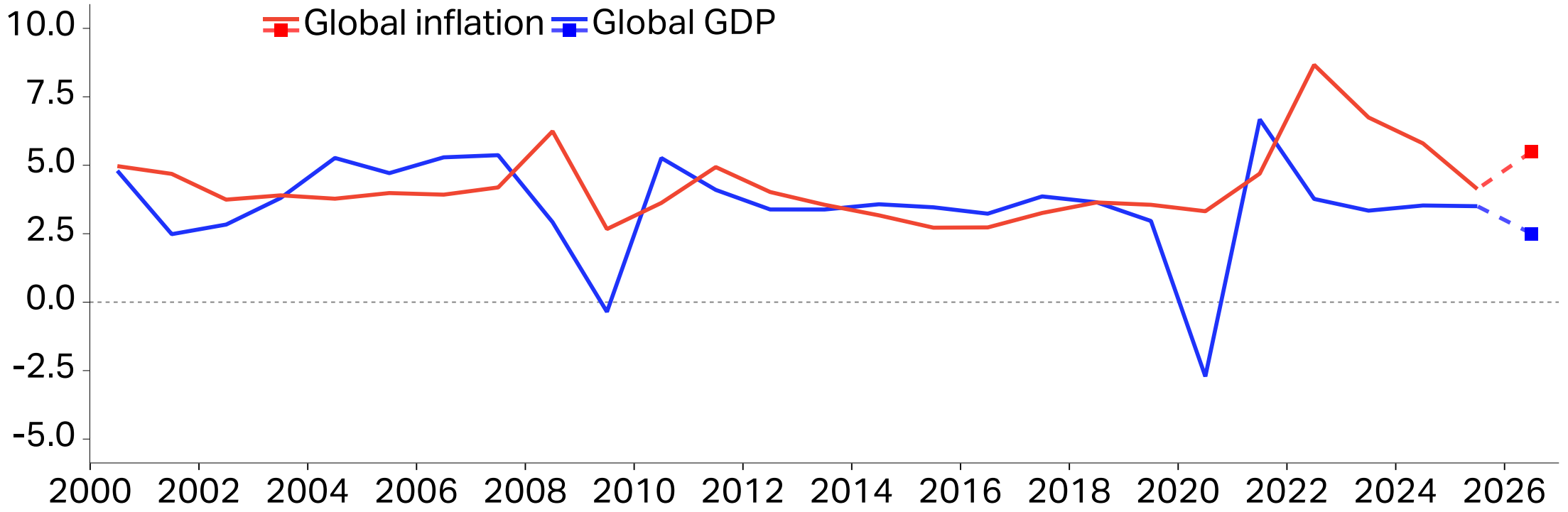
Jet fuel price, crude oil price, and the spread between the two (crack spread), USD per barrel



Source: IATA Sustainability and Economics, S&P Global Energy Platts.

Global growth slows, and inflation accelerates

Global GDP and global inflation forecasts, annual, %

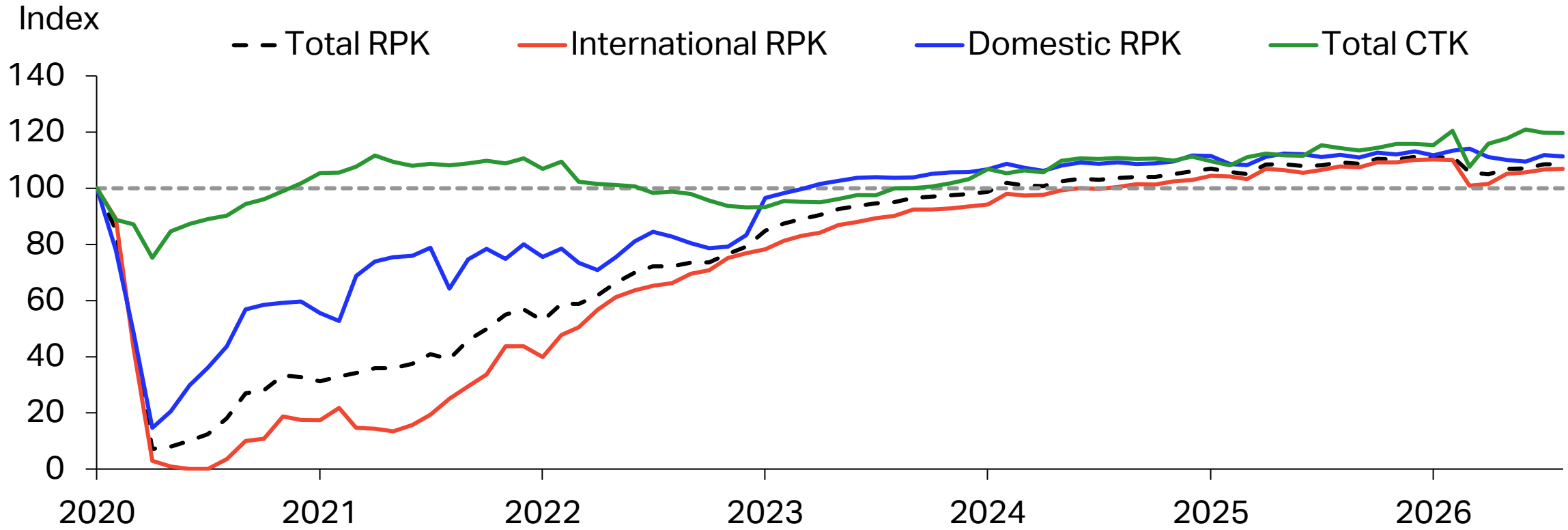


Source: IATA Sustainability and Economics, Macrobond.

Air Traffic

Global industry traffic is expanding but decelerating after recovery from covid

Industry RPK and CTK, Seasonally Adjusted, Index, Jan 2020 = 100

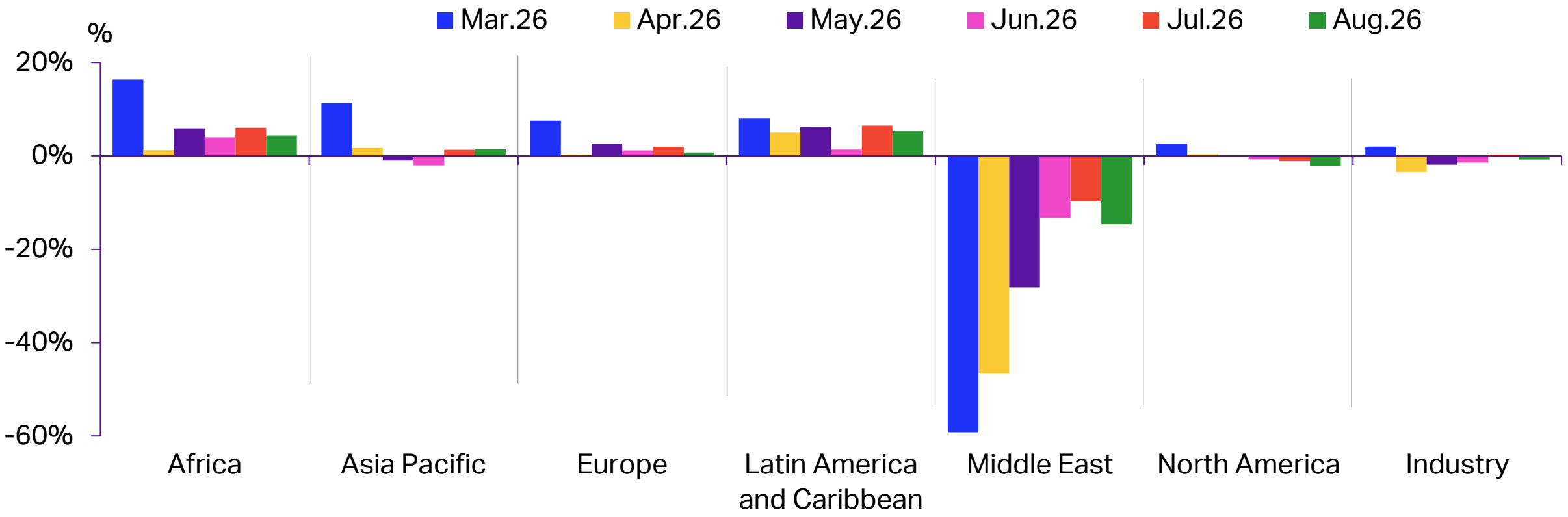


Source: IATA Sustainability and Economics, IATA Information and Data – Monthly Statistics.

RPK: Revenue Passenger-Kilometers; CTK: Cargo Tonne-Kilometers

Conflict impacts Middle East but most other regions continue growing

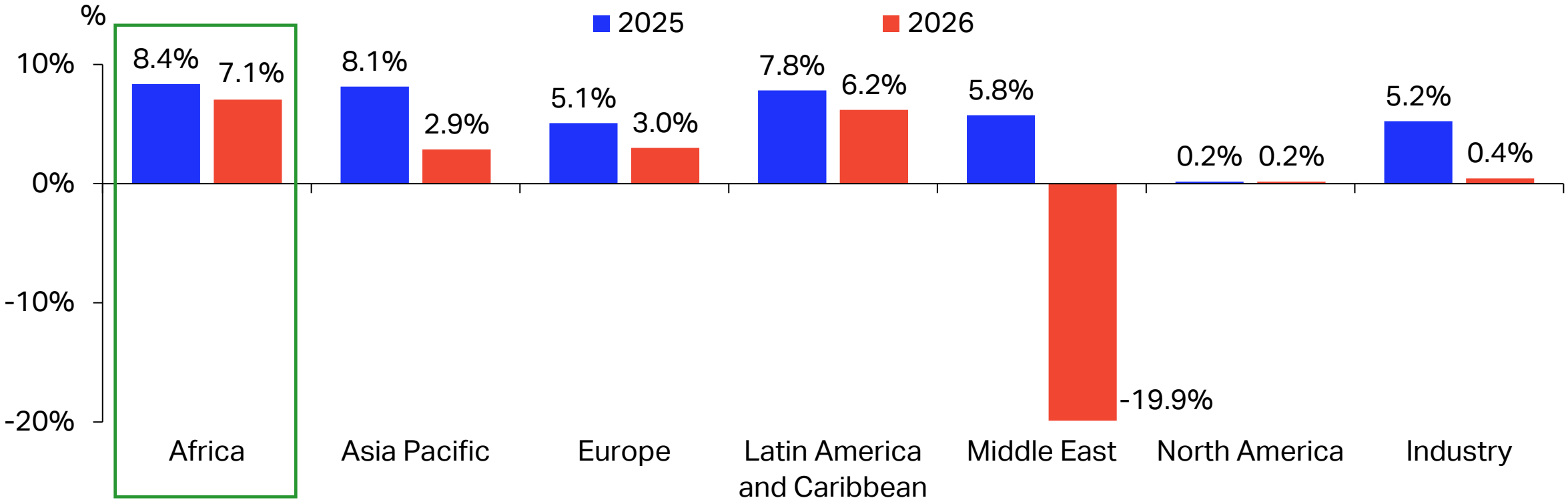
RPK growth rates by airline region of registration in 2026, YoY %



Source: IATA Sustainability and Economics, IATA Information and Data – Monthly Statistics.

Africa sees the fastest growth in passenger demand

RPK growth by airline region of registration, YTD (January-August), % YoY



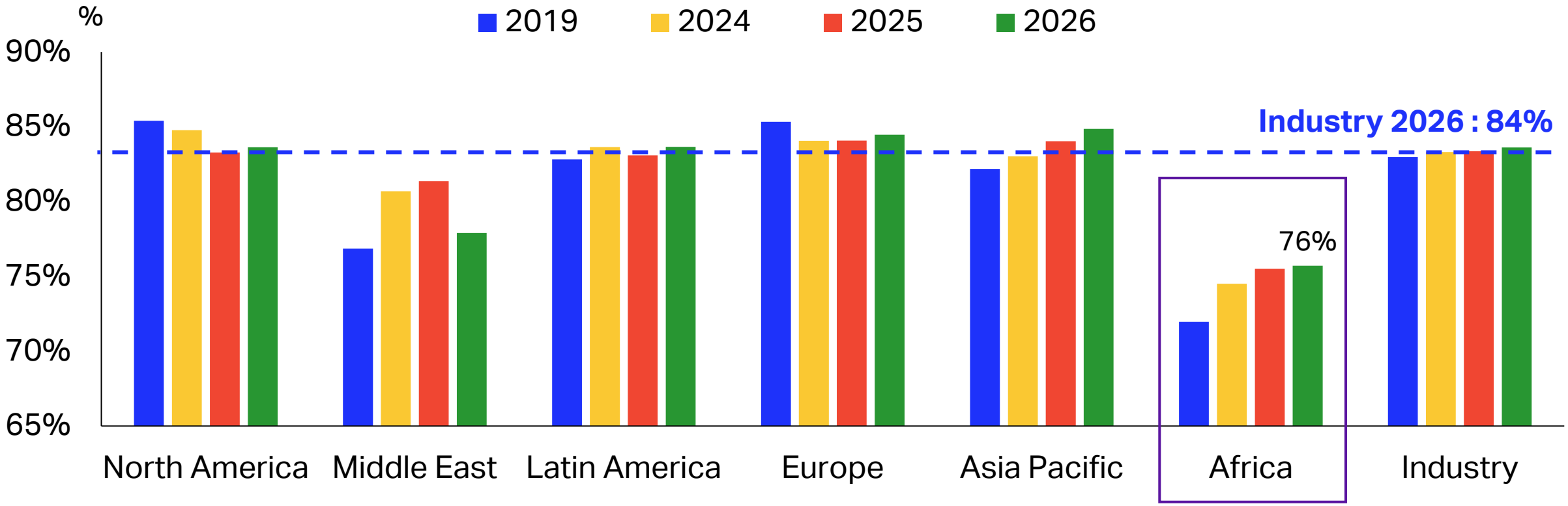
Source: IATA Sustainability and Economics, IATA Information and Data – Monthly Statistics.

RPK: Revenue Passenger-Kilometers

African carriers have the lowest seat occupancy across regions

While flights are fuller than ever globally

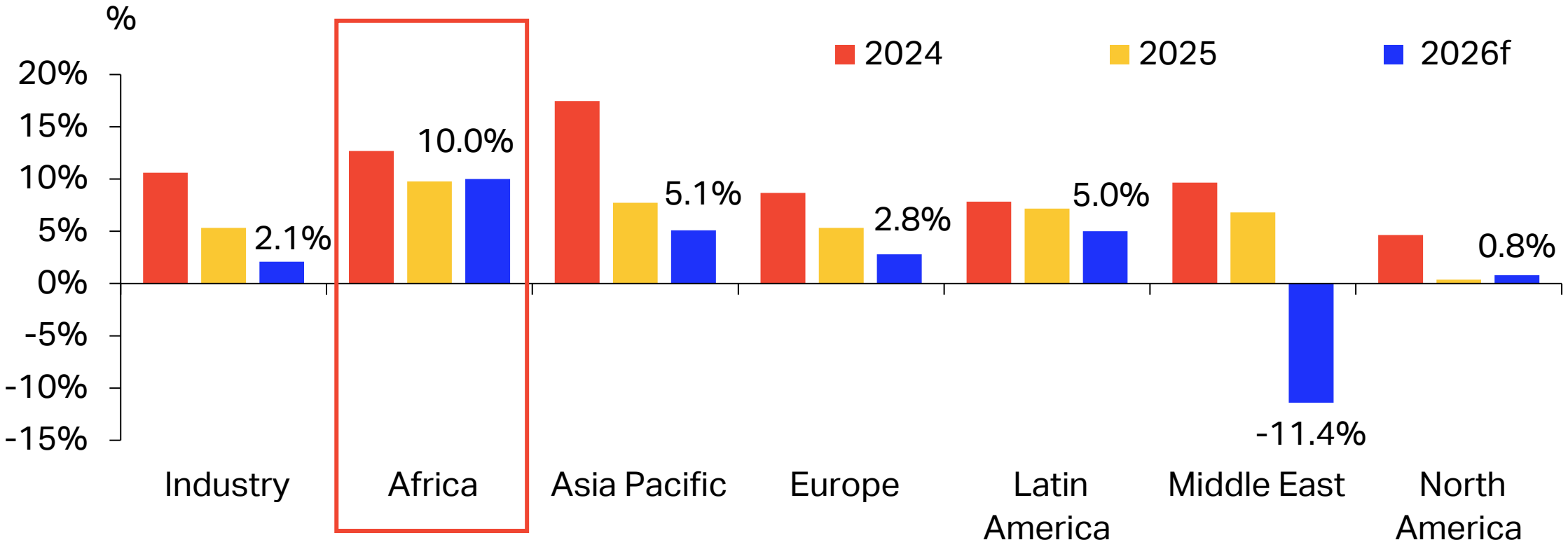
Passenger load factor, YTD (January – August), %



Source: IATA Sustainability and Economics, IATA Information and Data – Monthly Statistics.

Total passenger traffic to grow 2.1% in 2026
Africa at 10%, but from a lower base

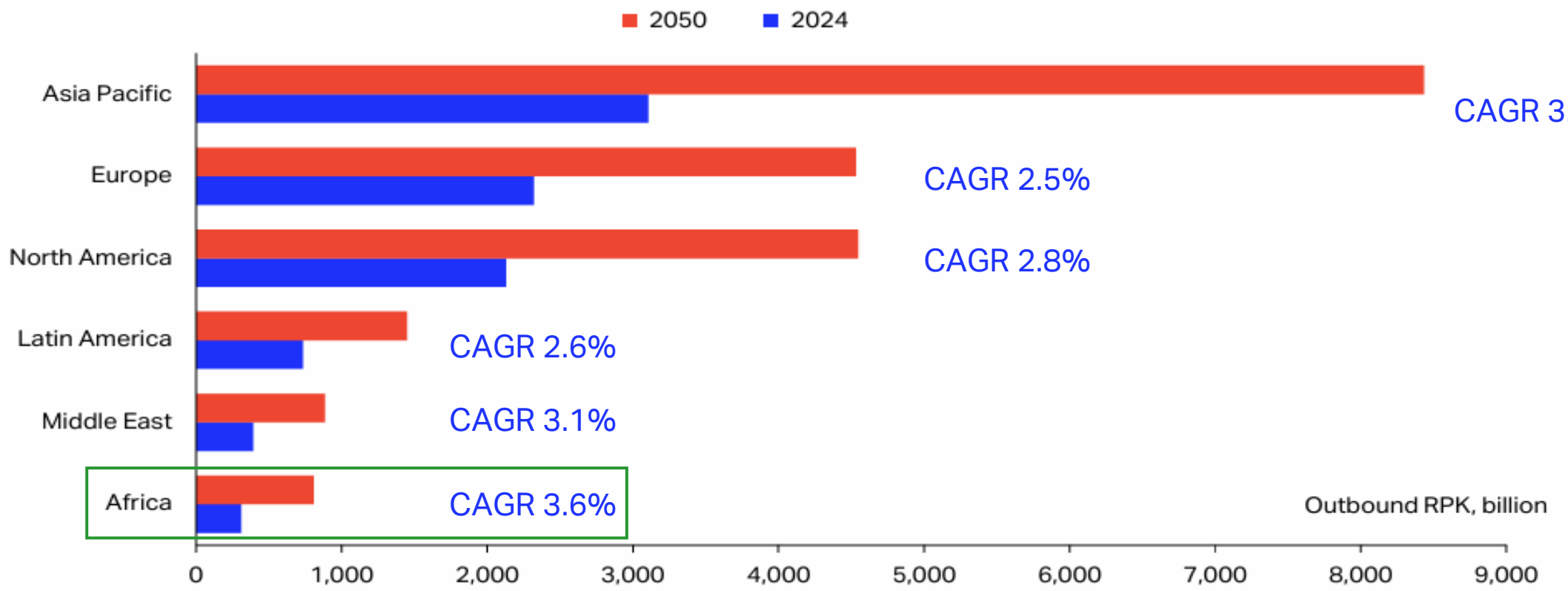
Annual growth in Revenue Passenger-Kilometers (RPK) by region



Source: IATA Sustainability and Economics.

Long-term demand projections: Africa to grow 3.6% CAGR until 2050

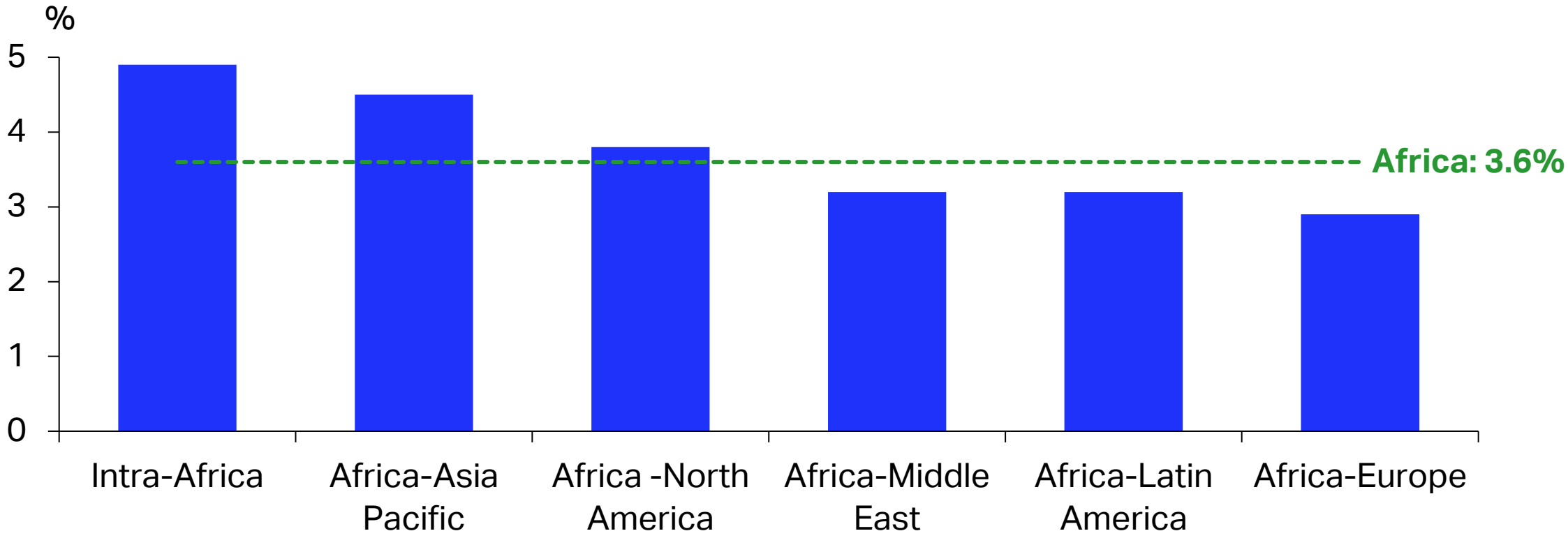
Projected outbound RPKs by region 2024 versus 2050, billion, under the mid-growth scenario



Source: IATA Sustainability and Economics.

Intra-Africa to grow the most among region-pairs

Projected RPK growth by region pair across the mid-growth scenario, %, 2024-2050



Source: IATA Sustainability and Economics.

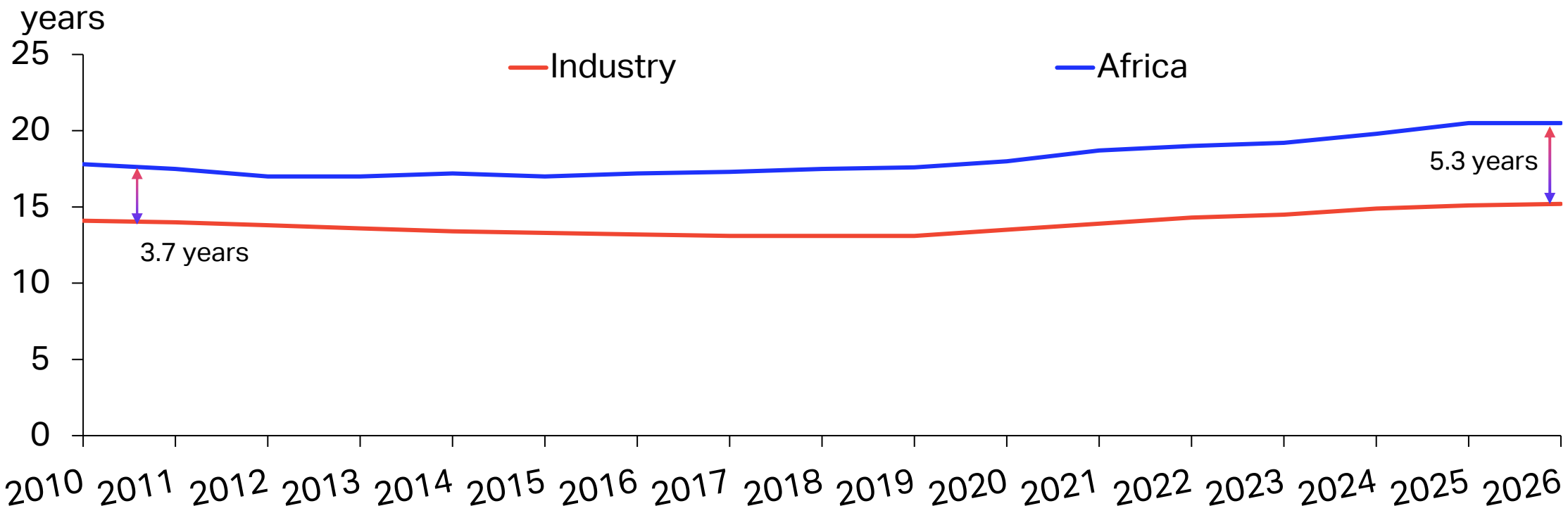
Operating challenge, Financial performance, and Fleet

Africa: Challenging Operating Environment

- High unit cost of operations
- On average 5 years older than global -> Fuel & maintenance
- Blocked funds and currency volatility
- Fuel costs are a major contribution
- High taxes and charges
- Price-sensitive demand
- Fragmented market -> limited economy of scale
- Disadvantaged infrastructure

Africa operates the oldest fleet in the world

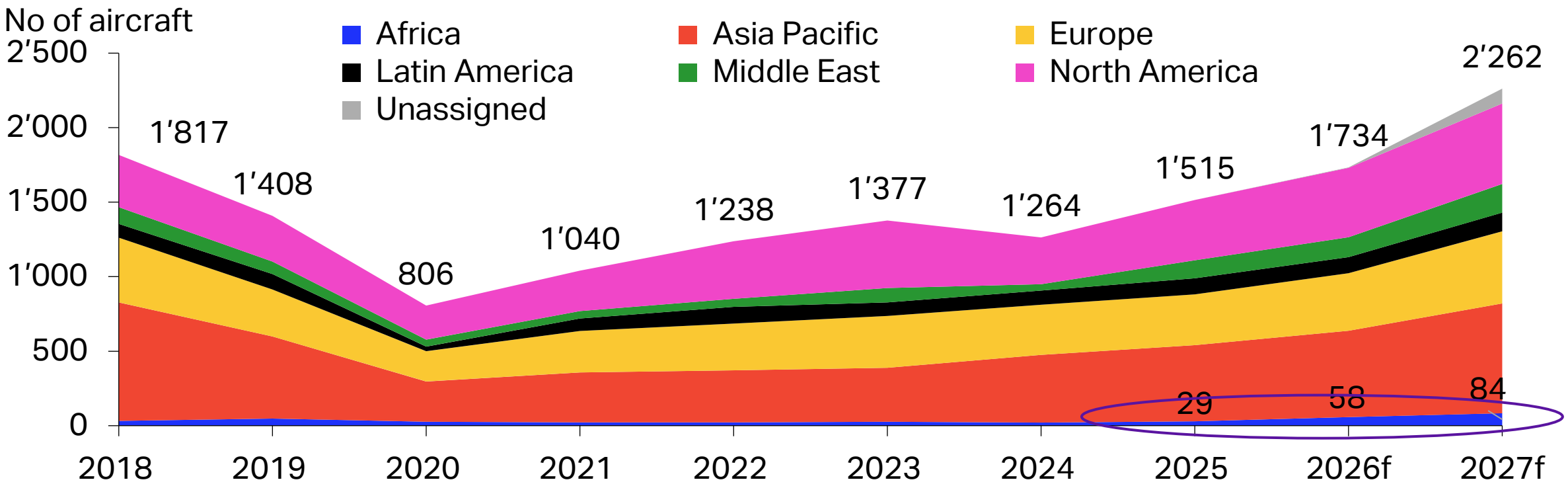
Average age of commercial fleet, years



Source: IATA Sustainability and Economics, Cirium Fleets Analyzer.

Weak access to new fleet is a drag on growth in Africa

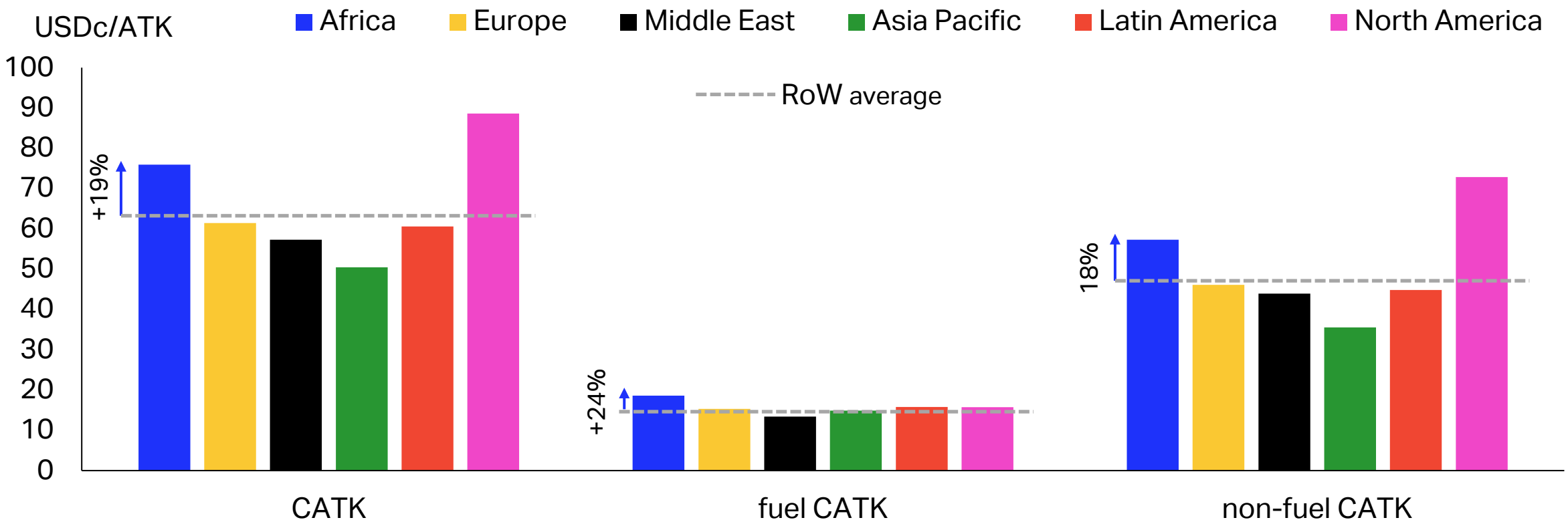
Aircraft deliveries by region



Source: IATA Sustainability and Economics, Cirium Fleets Analyzer. * October 2026 update

Africa has high unit cost of operations

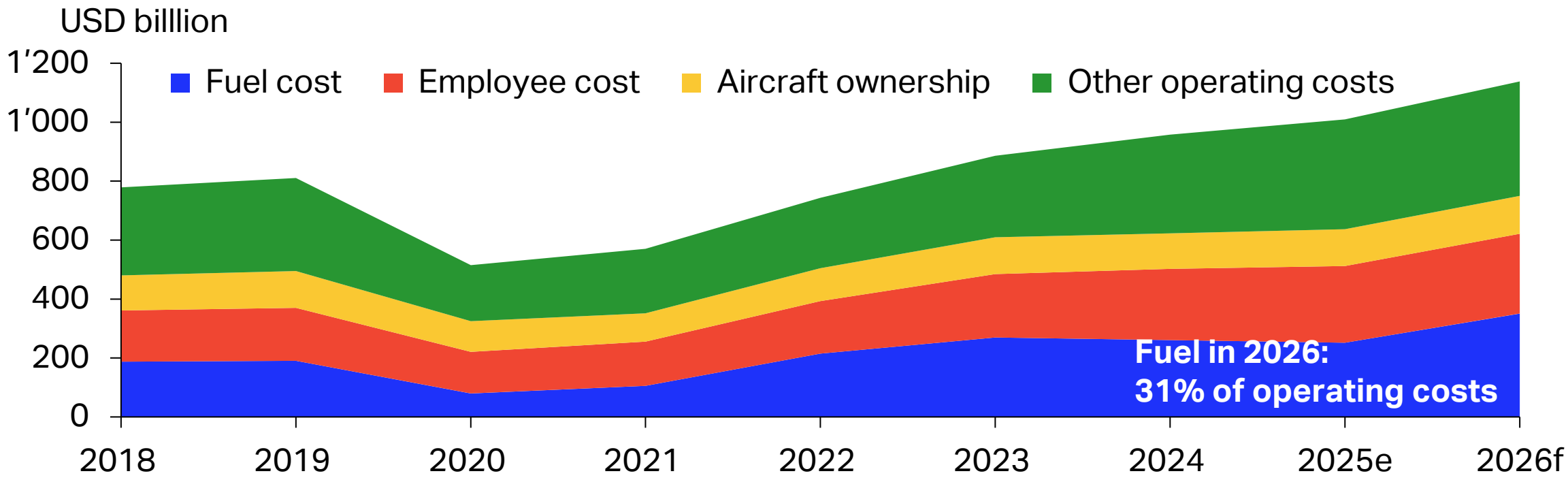
Cost category per ATK, as of 2025, USD cents



Source: IATA Sustainability and Economics.
based on a sample of 12 African airlines excluding Ethiopian
ATK: Available Tonne-Kilometers

Fuel costs rises to 31% of all costs vs. 25% last year

Breakdown of costs, pre-tax level, USD billion

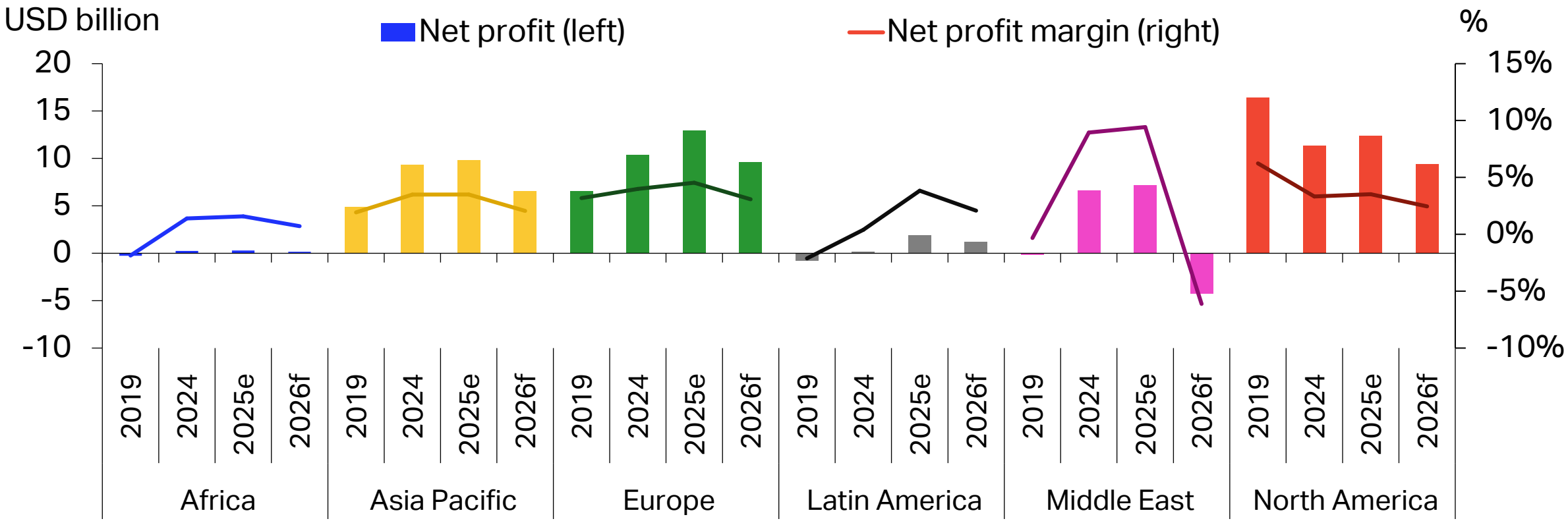


Source: IATA Sustainability and Economics using data from Airfinance Global.

Profit forecast per region in 2026

Africa has the weakest profit among all regions

Airline net profit per region, USD billion, and net margin, % of revenue



Source: IATA Sustainability and Economics using data from Airfinance Global.

Net profit is at USD 0.4 per passenger for Africa in 2026

Net profit per passenger by regions, USD per passenger

USD	2025E	2026F
Middle East	31.5	-21.4
Europe	10.3	7.5
North America	10.8	8.1
Latin America	5.9	3.5
Asia Pacific	5.3	3.4
Africa	2.1	0.4
Industry	**9.1**	**4.5**

Source: IATA Sustainability and Economics.

The industry keeps growing, but flexibility is essential for resilience

Aviation is the backbone of global tourism, connecting people, markets, and opportunities across borders.

2026 outlook: Passengers still want to travel. Global traffic continues to expand despite higher fares and geopolitical disruption, but at a reduced growth rate.

Growth of traffic in the region dependent on infrastructure development.

Value Chain disruptions and costs affect profitability in the continent. Aging (and older) fleet, high fuel prices and labor costs put a strain in airlines bottom line.

Thank you!

You can contact us

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