



Article Name: Airport Ground Handling in Kenya

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## Airport Ground Handling in Kenya

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Airport ground handling is a crucial aspect of aviation operations, involving the management of services required by an aircraft while it is on the ground and between flights. In Kenya, the efficiency of ground handling operations at major airports such as Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (JKIA), Moi International Airport (MIA), and Kisumu International Airport (KISU) plays a pivotal role in ensuring smooth and timely operations. As air traffic continues to grow, driven by Kenya's strategic location and economic development, the ground handling sector faces several challenges, but also presents numerous opportunities for improvement.

### ***Challenges Faced by Ground Handling and Companies***

- **Infrastructure Limitations:** Despite being a key regional hub, Kenya's airport infrastructure often struggles to keep up with the rising demand. The facilities at JKIA, for example, are frequently stretched, leading to congestion and delays, especially during peak hours. Limited parking space for aircraft and inadequate ground support equipment further exacerbate these issues.



- **High Operational Costs:** The cost of ground handling services in Kenya is high - relative to global standards. Airlines operating in the country have raised concerns over expensive handling fees, which increase operational costs and reduce competitiveness.
- **Regulatory and Bureaucratic Challenges:** Navigating the regulatory landscape in Kenya can be complex, with various compliance requirements that can lead to operations delays. Securing necessary clearances and permits is often slow, affecting the overall efficiency of ground handling services.
- **Talent Shortages and Training Gaps:** There is a shortage of adequately trained personnel in the ground handling sector. This is compounded by the slow adoption of modern technologies and automation, which could alleviate some of the demands for manual labor.
- **Environmental Concerns:** The push for more environmentally friendly ground handling practices is gaining momentum globally. However, in Kenya, the adoption of green technologies, such as electric ground support equipment (GSE), is still in its nascent stages.

## **Successes**

Kenya Airways, the national carrier, has made significant strides in ground handling, recently securing the IATA Safety Audit for Ground Operations (ISAGO) accreditation for its operations at JKIA. This recognition underscores the airline's commitment to maintaining high safety and operational standards in ground handling.

A growing focus is on incorporating digital technologies and automation in ground-handling operations. For instance, the use of autonomous mobile robots (AMRs) and AI for baggage handling and other ground operations is being explored to enhance efficiency and reduce delays.

Continuous investments are being made to upgrade airport infrastructure, including the expansion of runways, terminals, and the acquisition of modern ground handling equipment. Such developments are crucial in addressing the capacity issues at major airports.



Kenya has also seen the entry of global players like DNATA, which has invested significantly in JKIA's ground-handling services. These partnerships bring in international expertise and advanced technologies, helping to improve the quality of services offered.

The ground handling sector in Kenya plays a vital role in the country's aviation industry, contributing to its position as a key regional hub. While the sector faces significant challenges, particularly in infrastructure, costs, and regulatory compliance, clear efforts are being made to address these issues. Accreditations, investments in technology, and strategic partnerships are positive steps that can help overcome these challenges.

### ***Potential Solutions to alleviate the challenges faced***

Expanding the country's airport infrastructure, particularly at JKIA, will be crucial in alleviating congestion and accommodating future growth. This includes building additional terminals, parking bays, and upgrading existing facilities.

There's a need for a revision of ground handling fees to make Kenya more competitive. This can be achieved through regulatory reforms and fostering a more competitive market environment for ground-handling service providers.

Similarly, enhancing training programs for ground handling staff – especially those supporting operations out of the main airports – with a focus on modern technologies and safety protocols will help bridge the talent gap and improve service delivery.

The adoption of environmentally friendly technologies, such as electric GSE, should be accelerated. This will not only reduce the carbon footprint but also position Kenya as a leader in sustainable aviation practices in Africa.

By addressing these challenges and building on the strengths of the sector, Kenya can ensure that its airports continue to operate efficiently, contributing to the overall growth of the country's economy and its aviation industry.



***\*References: Insights drawn from recent reports on ground handling operations in Kenya, including IATA accreditation announcements, and discussions on infrastructure and operational challenges within the sector.***

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I have over twenty years experience in Ground Operations. Born into aviation as both parents worked in the field. Developed the travel bug early in life, started traveling at an early age and also developed a hobby in plane spotting, I still get excited on hearing the sheer mighty roar of the engines as they prepare for take off.