

Quality of international letter mail service in Europe reflects structural challenges faced by postal operators

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Brussels, 20 March 2024 - The IPC UNEX™ 2023 CEN measurement results released today show an overall decrease in the quality of the postal processes within Europe. In 2023, mail was delivered in 3.9 days, on average. 56.6% of the mail has been delivered in three working days (speed indicator) and 84.4% in five working days (reliability indicator).

Holger Winklbauer, IPC CEO said: *“Over the past few years, postal operators have continuously experienced operational and structural challenges which have made it difficult to maintain the same levels of letter mail performance. Despite a slight recovery in 2021 and 2022, the 2023 results show a decline in cross-border transit times again, reflecting operational changes linked to letter mail volume decline but also structural challenges such as the lack of flight capacity for untracked envelope-letter mail within Europe and increasing relaxation of service standards at domestic levels”.*

One of the key challenges for European postal operators to recover pre-Covid years' quality levels are the low availability of flight connections and the limited capacity to transport untracked letter mail on these flights. While road transportation can be organised efficiently for short distances and neighbouring European countries, bottlenecks are faced when road transport is replacing transportation by air, generally increasing the times of delivery.

The decline in mail volumes in Europe has reached around 30% in Europe over the past six years and is expected to decrease further. That decrease and the continuous strive for cost-efficiency meant that postal operators have shifted their operational focus from untracked letter mail to tracked and

registered products. For e-commerce postal products, posts are actively working on quality aspects to maintain or expand their market shares. Furthermore, in many countries, regulators adjusting national service standards for the postal operators, have a direct effect on several cross border postal flows no longer being able to achieve the required international J+3 or even J+5 service standards.

Finally, the 2023 performance levels of postal operators in Europe were also affected by the consequences of cyber-attacks and the ongoing difficulty to attract and retain staff in specific functions and/or areas.

The IPC UNEX™ CEN measurement is end-to-end: from posting in the origin country, to delivery to the final addressee in the destination country. Due to the end-to-end nature of the measurement, the challenges encountered in the posts impacted their postal partners and vice versa. This includes the postal operations' time for collection in the origin country, sorting, international transportation, and processing and delivery in the destination country.

[The UNEX™ results published today](#) are from the UNEX™ CEN measurement, which is conducted independently by the external research firm Kantar in the United Kingdom.

The 2023 results of the UNEX™ CEN module are based on a total of 135,000 test letters sent and received by 4,600 volunteers spread within 31 countries, participating in the measurement, the 27 EU Member States together with Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Overall, 710 country-to-country flows were measured. IPC's UNEX™ mail monitoring system measures quality of service performance for end-to-end cross-border priority letter mail. The test letters are representative of real mail in terms of mail formats, induction and franking methods, delivery methods and geographical spread within each of the measured European countries. All test letters contained Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) tags, which are recorded by the RFID readers as they pass through the postal facilities.

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About International Post Corporation

International Post Corporation (IPC) is the leading service provider of the global postal industry that provides leadership by driving service quality, interoperability and business-critical intelligence to support posts in defending existing business and expanding into new growth areas. It is a cooperative association of 26 member postal operators in Asia Pacific, Europe and North America. IPC's

solutions and services are used by over 190 posts worldwide. Since 1989 IPC has set standards for upgrading quality and service performance and developed technological solutions that help members enhance service for international letters, packets and parcels. IPC engages in industry research, creates business-critical intelligence, provides a range of platforms and programmes for member post CEOs and senior management to exchange best practices and discuss strategy. IPC also manages the system for incentive-based payments between postal operators. For more information, please visit our website.

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The UNEX™ results 2023 brochure is available at: [Results | International Post Corporation \(ipc.be\)](#)

More information about UNEX™:
<https://www.ipc.be/services/operational-performance-services/unex>

