

Istanbul airport stays shut as snow pummels Mediterranean

January 25 2022, by Fulya Ozerkan and Helene Colliopoulou In Athens



Monday's blizzard in Istanbul shut the main airport and left much of the city at a standstill.

Europe's busiest airport in Istanbul delayed its reopening on Tuesday and Greece declared a public holiday as the eastern Mediterranean

neighbours began digging themselves out of a rare snowstorm that ground their capitals to a halt.

Turkish officials ordered all [private vehicles](#) off the snow-clogged streets of Istanbul while the Greek military joined rescuers in trying to evacuate hundreds of stranded drivers in Athens.

Major highways were closed across both countries and basic services such as food delivery shut down.

But much of the international attention focused on the fate of Istanbul's main [airport](#)—a gleaming glass-and-steel structure that offers connecting flights spanning much of the world.

A blizzard on Monday closed Istanbul Airport for the first time since it took over from the old Ataturk Airport as the new hub for Turkish Airlines in 2019.

Its press service pushed back its planned reopening hours a handful times before admitting defeat and shutting it down for the night.

An airport official told AFP that workers were trying to clear one of the runways on Tuesday so that airborne flights could land from Mexico and the United States.

But Turkish Airlines decided to suspend all operations at its main international hub until midnight.

Istanbul Airport serviced more than 37 million passengers last year despite disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Yet President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's critics had long questioned his decision to place the airport on a remote patch along the Black Sea coast

that is often covered with fog in winter.

Istanbul's second airport on its Asian side near the Sea of Marmara stayed open throughout the storm.



The Greek parliament in Athens suspended its session because of the unusually heavy snow.

'Zero concern'

Numerous passengers stuck aboard stranded flights took to Twitter to air their grievances with the airport's customer service and lack of updates.

"Not even a bottle of water offered. Zero concern for women with children," user Chris Wiggett wrote in a typical tweet.

"Not even blankets for stranded passengers at night."

A burst of sunshine over the city of 16 million people on Tuesday raised hopes that the storm had finally passed and normal life could slowly start to resume.

But forecasts warned of more possible snow on Tuesday evening and officials ordered all cars off the streets.

The situation appeared just as chaotic in Greece.

The Athens public prosecutor's office opened a investigation as officials traded blame over who was responsible for the closer of the city's main road leading to the Greek capital's international airport.

Greek civil protection minister Christos Stylianides issued a formal apology for the chaos on Monday.

But he also blamed the private Attiki Odos motorway management company for "failing to keep open a busy road".

The management company issues its own apology.

But it also said the problems were due to "vehicle breakdowns or to the lack of experience of motorists, some of whom were afraid".

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Citation: Istanbul airport stays shut as snow pummels Mediterranean (2022, January 25) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-01-istanbul-airport-pummels-mediterranean.html>

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