

Air Freight Forwarding - Market Share Analysis, Industry Trends & Statistics, Growth Forecasts (2026 - 2031)

Market Report | 2026-02-09 | 150 pages | Mordor Intelligence

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Report description:

Air Freight Forwarding Market Analysis

The Air Freight Forwarding Market was valued at USD 94.27 billion in 2025 and estimated to grow from USD 98.88 billion in 2026 to reach USD 125.55 billion by 2031, at a CAGR of 4.89% during the forecast period (2026-2031).

Growth stems from resilient cross-border e-commerce, a surge in temperature-controlled pharmaceuticals, and sustained freighter-conversion programs that counteract belly-hold capacity shortages. Competitive activity is marked by scale-seeking mergers, with the DSV-Schenker combination reshaping pricing power and contract negotiations across major trade lanes. Digitalization, including real-time cargo-visibility tools, improves service reliability and enables premium pricing. At the same time, sustainability mandates and volatile jet-fuel costs complicate forwarders' margin management and prompt strategic capacity diversification.

Global Air Freight Forwarding Market Trends and Insights

Global E-commerce Boom

Cross-border e-commerce now represents more than 50% of Asia-originating air cargo volumes, compressing peak-season timelines and amplifying forwarder demand for express capacity. It is forecasted that global online retail penetration to reach 24% worldwide and 26% in the United States by 2025, reinforcing demand for fast transit solutions that favor air over ocean. The

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scheduled removal of the U.S. de minimis exemption on August 29, 2025, increases customs-clearance complexity and is expected to lift international parcel volumes as shippers consolidate shipments to reduce compliance burdens. Forwarders respond by reallocating block-space agreements toward lanes with high small-parcel density, particularly Asia-North America, while deploying API-based booking engines that shorten quotation cycles. These dynamics raise yield volatility yet reward operators that can flex network capacity to seasonal surges.

Near-shoring & Time-Critical Supply-Chains

Regionalization of manufacturing has spawned new North America-centric corridors as companies prioritize resilience over lowest-cost sourcing, pushing secondary U.S. airports such as San Bernardino International and Wilmington Air Park to record cargo growth in 2024 and 2025. Near-shoring dynamics shift volume away from congested coastal gateways toward inland facilities that offer faster truck-to-air transfers, enhancing supply-chain agility for high-value electronics and automotive components. Cross-border hubs in Tijuana and Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport illustrate how specialized infrastructure accelerates Mexico-U.S. e-commerce flows. Distributed networks mitigate slot constraints at tier-1 airports and disperse geopolitical risk. Forwarders leverage these routes to differentiate service offerings aimed at customers seeking shorter replenishment cycles.

Volatile Jet-Fuel Prices

IATA projects average jet-fuel at USD 87 per barrel in 2025 versus USD 99 in 2024, yet fuel still accounts for 26.4% of airline operating costs, putting pressure on forwarder procurement margins. Sustainable Aviation Fuel mandates elevate cost variability because SAF trades at a significant premium to kerosene. Production volumes are slated to reach 713.26 million gallons in 2025, but supply limitations keep prices elevated. Forwarders hedge exposure through index-linked contracts, yet smaller shippers often resist fuel-surcharge escalations, squeezing margins. Net-zero commitments press carriers to adopt SAF irrespective of cost, embedding structural price risk into air cargo economics.

Other drivers and restraints analyzed in the detailed report include:

Growth in Temperature-Controlled & High-Value Cargo
Freighter Conversions Unlocking Latent Capacity
Sustainability-Driven Modal Shift to Sea & Rail

For complete list of drivers and restraints, kindly check the Table Of Contents.

Segment Analysis

General cargo accounted for 61.35% of 2025 revenues, anchoring the air freight forwarding market size through volumes generated by electronics, apparel, and spare parts. Its growth rate remains modest as pricing competition intensifies and modal shift options proliferate. Special cargo and others are expected to climb at a 4.38% CAGR (2026-2031) because temperature-controlled pharmaceuticals, dangerous goods, and high-value electronics demand elevated service standards. This segment benefits from regulatory moats created by IATA and ICAO rules that limit new entrant penetration and underpin attractive yields.

Freighter conversions have disproportionate benefits for special cargo because main-deck access and specific load configurations accommodate outsized items better than belly holds. DHL's 2025 acquisition of CRYOPDP, which manages more than 600,000 clinical-trial and biopharma shipments annually, demonstrates strategic investment in special-cargo capacity. General cargo retains resilience from the e-commerce surge, but margin dilution persists as shippers commoditize basic services. Specialized cargo, by contrast, maintains pricing power that shields operators from fuel-surcharge debates, contributing positively to the air freight forwarding market share held by high-service providers.

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The Air Freight Forwarding Market Report is Segmented by Cargo Type (General Cargo and Special Cargo & Others), Destination (International and Domestic), End-User Industry (E-Commerce & Retail, Manufacturing & Automotive, Healthcare & Pharmaceuticals, Perishables & Fresh Produce, and More), Geography (North America, South America, Europe, Asia-Pacific, and More). The Market Forecasts are Provided in Terms of Value (USD).

Geography Analysis

Asia-Pacific accounted for 34.62% of global revenues in 2025 and is projected to advance at a 5.14% CAGR (2026-2031), propelled by China's export engine, India's 6-9% projected cargo growth, and intra-regional e-commerce expansion. Wide-body freighter scarcity in India offers growth prospects for forwarders that can deploy capacity quickly, while hubs like Anchorage enable efficient trans-Pacific transfers.

North America maintains a significant share through embedded e-commerce infrastructure and near-shoring trade with Mexico and Canada. Regional gateways expand to accommodate time-critical flows, with San Bernardino and Wilmington illustrating how inland airports capture volumes that once funneled through Los Angeles or New York. Sustainability pressures are lower relative to Europe, granting growth runway for express freight services.

Europe faces tighter environmental regulations that nudge shippers toward sea or rail for non-urgent cargo. Still, pharmaceuticals and high-value electronics sustain air freight demand, and carriers leverage joint ventures to optimize capacity amid stringent slot allocations. The Middle East and Africa serve as connective hubs linking Asia, Europe, and Africa. Investments in data centers and e-commerce infrastructure, paired with the region's geographic advantage, foster specialized freight flows for IT equipment and perishables.

List of Companies Covered in this Report:

DHL Supply Chain & Global Forwarding Kuehne + Nagel DSV UPS Supply Chain Solutions Expeditors International Nippon Express Hellmann Worldwide Logistics Kintetsu World Express CEVA Logistics GEODIS Sinotrans Yusen Logistics C.H. Robinson LX Pantos Rhenus Logistics Scan Global Logistics Kerry Logistics AWOT Global Logistics Group DACHSER Savino Del Bene

Additional Benefits:

The market estimate (ME) sheet in Excel format
3 months of analyst support

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