

**57th CONFERENCE OF
DIRECTORS GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION
ASIA AND PACIFIC REGIONS**

*Incheon, Republic of Korea
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**AGENDA ITEM 6: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF
AIR TRANSPORT**

**LESSONS LEARNED FROM COVID-19
AND PREPAREDNESS FOR FUTURE PANDEMICS**

Presented by the International Air Transport Association (IATA)

SUMMARY

The global response to COVID-19 has shown the limitations of the existing multilateral framework. The fragmented nature of the measures imposed by States has resulted in a complex patchwork of border restrictions and health measures that has created confusion for both travelers and operators and which has impeded the recovery in international aviation.

While the COVID-19 pandemic is not over, many countries have taken significant steps to facilitate the restoration of international mobility. IATA requests ICAO to develop guidance for the eventual de-escalation of COVID-19 measures and encourages governments to develop roadmaps for the removal of such measures.

IATA encourages ICAO to take stock of the response to COVID-19, including a full review of the CART Take-Off Guidance in order to learn lessons that can support a faster and more coordinated response to future health emergencies.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM COVID-19 AND PREPAREDNESS FOR FUTURE PANDEMICS

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 As the trade association for the global airline industry, IATA reaffirms the commitment of airline members to implement globally-agreed protocols to manage the spread of communicable diseases during public health emergencies of international concern by air travel. IATA is a non-State actor and as such has a workplan agreed with the WHO, the current edition of which is valid until end of 2023.

1.2 Effective cross-sectoral coordination and reliable public-private cooperation are essential to an effective global response to pandemics and public health emergencies and the experience of COVID-19 has shown that much work needs to be done along both of these dimensions to ensure that air transport is not affected by future health emergencies in the way it has been devastated by COVID-19.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 ICAO Member States acknowledged the challenges created by the fragmented response to COVID-19 and the profound impact that they have had on global connectivity and mobility as well as the recovery of the global economy, at the High-Level Conference on COVID-19 (HLCC) in November 2021.

2.2 The HLCC also recognized the role of air transportation in the distribution of vaccines as well as essential medical supplies and personal protective equipment in support of the global effort to combat the COVID-19 pandemic as well as other crises and emergencies.

2.3 States committed to follow a “risk management strategy for international civil aviation, which is adaptable, proportionate, non-discriminatory and guided by scientific evidence in close cooperation and coordination with public health sector, with agreed practices harmonized to the greatest extent possible and underpinned by regular review, monitoring and timely information-sharing among States.”

Restoring international mobility

2.4 COVID-19 has had an unprecedented impact on international mobility and air travel in particular. While the pandemic is not over, many countries have taken significant steps to facilitate the restoration of international mobility. With COVID-19 now expected to be endemic in many, if not most, parts of the world, IATA encourages ICAO and States to prepare for and facilitate the full recovery of international air travel.

2.5 When the Take-Off Guidance by the Council Aviation Recovery Task Force (CART) was initially published in May 2020, the overriding priority was to facilitate the urgent resumption of some level of air travel. As the duration and evolution of the pandemic was subject to such uncertainty at the time, there was little consideration of a moment at which the measures set out in the guidance would no longer be needed. As a result, the CART guidance does not include recommendations on exit strategies and pathways for the removal of public health mitigation measures. IATA requests ICAO to develop guidance for the eventual de-escalation of COVID-19 measures.

2.6 Similarly, IATA encourages those governments which have not done so already to develop clear and transparent roadmaps for the removal of remaining public health mitigation measures in order to facilitate a full recovery of international air connectivity.

Lessons learned from COVID-19

2.7 The publication of the CART Take-Off Guidance in May 2020 was instrumental in the first steps towards the restart of international air travel. The guidance was developed at admirable speed, reflecting the urgency of the situation at that time. As the pandemic was still in its early stages and much

was still unknown both about the dynamics of virus transmission and the effectiveness of various measures at limiting the spread of the virus, the multi-layered approach following the “Swiss cheese” model was appropriate.

2.8 Since May 2020, a great deal has changed:

2.8.1 the virus has evolved significantly, such that the predominant variant in mid-2022 has very different characteristics to the wild-type virus;

2.8.2 the development and distribution of highly effective vaccines and treatments has increased the ability of States to manage the impacts of COVID-19 in many parts of the world;

2.8.3 there is much greater understanding on which of the public health mitigation measures are effective in managing the spread of the virus and which measures are less useful.

2.9 Although the pandemic is not over, as the recovery in international air travel gathers pace, it is timely to take stock of the initial response to COVID-19 – as codified in the Take-Off Guidance and ICAO Document 10152 – in order to capture the lessons learned and inform a faster and more effective response to future health emergencies that minimizes the disruption to international aviation.

2.10 IATA therefore suggests that ICAO should commission a full review of the CART Take-Off Guidance. The review should seek input from the COVID-19 Aviation Scientific Assessment Group (CASAG) and report to the Council.

Towards a Framework for responding to future outbreaks

2.11 In order to promote greater consistency and predictability in the response to future health emergencies that may affect international travel, there is a need for a common response framework. The framework should be informed by the lessons learned and be sufficiently flexible to be easily adapted to the specifics of the pathogen of concern. At a minimum, the response framework should include the following elements:

2.11.1 A proportionate set of risk mitigation measures that may be applied if needed. Special consideration should be given to minimizing the burden of any measures on crew, recognizing the crucial role of air transport in keeping global supply chains open, including facilitating the distribution of vaccines, medicines and other medical equipment.

2.11.2 Guidance on the possible introduction of public health risk mitigation measures should also give clear recommendations about the process of de-escalation and/or removal of such measures, for example through the use of sunset clauses.

2.11.3 A set of common standards for health credentials to support mutual recognition as well as similar protocols for the provision of contact tracing information, where necessary. Although the development of digital health credentials has been a major success of the global COVID response, further efforts are required to increase the standardization and facilitate mutual recognition of the different platforms for digital health credentials. This work should be integrated with the WHO Smart Vaccine Certificate initiative. Efforts around digital health credentials should recognize the need of those without access to digital technology and be consistent with the goal that no country be left behind.

2.11.4 Transparent risk assessment: Recognizing that decisions taken by ICAO States around health risks are a sovereign matter for the individual states, response to future health events would be facilitated by greater transparency and better communication about the risk assessments made by States. This is already set out in the International Health

Regulations (IHR). ICAO should facilitate a platform for sharing risk assessments in order to give greater predictability and forward visibility for operators.

2.11.5 A common platform for data sharing of travel measures applied to passengers and crew: Data from the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) indicates that over 100,000 different measures affecting international travel were in place at the start of 2022. Navigating this fragmented system of measures has been confusing for travelers and caused major operational complexities for operators – especially where measures vary between passengers and crew. In many cases, operators are subject to large fines if non-compliant passengers are inadvertently allowed to travel. In addition, crew scheduling has been hugely challenging throughout the pandemic. A common global platform should be put in place for the sharing and communication of this information.

2.12 As the WHO publishes and administers the IHR, ICAO and WHO will need to work effectively together. Such collaboration between aviation and health stakeholders will need to be replicated at global, regional, national and local levels. For this, the role of CAPSCA should be strengthened and formalized.

3. ACTION BY THE CONFERENCE

3.1 The Conference is invited to:

- a) Request that ICAO develops guidance for the eventual de-escalation of COVID-19 measures;
- b) Encourage governments to develop roadmaps for the removal of such measures;
- c) Request that ICAO commissions a full review of the Take-Off Guidance published by the Council Aviation Recovery Task Force (CART); and
- d) Call on ICAO to lead the development of a framework for responding to future health emergencies that may affect international travel.

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