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

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AGENDA ITEM 5:   AVIATION SECURITY AND FACILITATION

CONTACTLESS TRAVEL AND DIGITALIZATION OF PROCESSES

Presented by the International Air Transport Association (IATA)

SUMMARY

Contactless travel is more relevant than ever now, given the COVID-19 pandemic experience. Contactless travel will enable passengers to arrive at the airport 'ready to fly' having completed travel document checks in advance and go through touchpoints at the airport with biometric-enabled identification without the need to present documents. There are two essential elements to achieving contactless travel, digitalization of document checks and use of digital identity and biometrics. Digitalization of document checks can tap into existing government health platforms and the use of digital identity and biometrics can be based on recommended practices, guidance and technical specifications being developed by ICAO and IATA. But contactless travel can be achieved only through cooperation between governments and industry, with governments playing a crucial role in enabling the ecosystem.

CONTACTLESS TRAVEL AND DIGITALIZATION OF PROCESSES

1.   INTRODUCTION

1.1   The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges to the aviation industry, but also has reinforced the need for contactless travel. Making processes at the airport as contactless as possible aims to not only avoid or minimize physical contact between travelers and airline/airport staff, but also ease congestion and subsequently improve overall facilitation in the airport environment.

1.2   During the pandemic, airlines were required to check multiple documents for departing passengers, e.g. health declaration, proof of negative test results and vaccination, hotel booking, insurance, etc. These documents were often manually checked by check-in agents as well as authorities at departure/arrival, resulting in lengthy processing time at the airport. Manual, paper-based health processes have proven to be unsustainable while the traffic was low, and the situation will worsen with the increase in traffic as borders reopen.

1.3   To address this challenge, States have increasingly introduced government health platforms through which they can collect information directly from passengers prior to departure and issue a digital notification of approval to passengers. The setting up of such health platforms and issuance of a notification of approval to travel to passengers is also a Recommended Practice contained in the Amendment 29 to Annex 9 – *Facilitation* endorsed by the ICAO Council[1]. These government health platforms can enable pre-travel verification of information that passengers have provided and thus can help simplify and automate check-in and arrival processes at the airport.

1.4   For contactless travel, document checks undertaken by airlines should be minimized and digitalized. The scope of existing health platforms can be extended to include other information as well, such as immigration and customs-related information, for a more extensive pre-travel verification. Upon review of the information submitted, governments can then issue passengers a single notification of approval to travel, through which passengers can be assured that they have met all the entry requirements. This single notification of approval will help simplify and digitalize airlines' process in checking travel documents for a passenger.

1.5   In addition to digitalization of document checking processes, the use of digital identity and biometrics is another essential element to achieving contactless travel. In the recent years, technologies have evolved and standards have been developed in this area. Since interoperability is key for international travel, close cooperation between governments and industry is required.

2.   DISCUSSION

2.1   Government health platforms complement existing travel authorization platforms, e.g. electronic visa, given that both platforms 'pre-screen' information about a passenger from different aspects. As such, there is an opportunity to utilize these platforms to include more comprehensive information, i.e. health declaration, immigration and customs declaration, visa and other travel documents that are required to enter the country, so that a single digital notification of approval would be sufficient to demonstrate that the passenger has met all the entry requirements. Passengers can then share this notification of approval with airlines in a digital manner to complete check-in. This would enable airlines to avoid manual intervention at check-in counters at the airport as they would not need to check physical documents and therefore achieve a more complete off-airport process. A robust government health platform will not only help digitalize airlines' document checking processes, but also enable a more extensive pre-travel verification and direct communication between governments and passengers. This will help governments to ensure only those passengers authorized to travel will travel and thus to reduce the number of inadmissible passengers with improper documentations, which will eventually help enhance border security.

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1 Recommended Practice X.X (2) to become applicable in November 2022 under the Amendment 29 to Annex 9.

2.2   In reality, however, some challenges exist. Even though many States in Asia-Pacific have introduced digital health platforms, in most cases, airlines are still required to physically check passengers' health documents at check-in due to government regulations. Also, apart from the health documents, airlines had to check other documents as well, such as entry approval, insurance proof, hotel accommodation, etc. as these documents were usually not incorporated in such platforms. To achieve contactless travel, all human intervention should be avoided. For this, effective collaboration and coordination among government agencies is crucial. Only through collaboration and coordination can the health platforms include additional information about passengers and provide a more comprehensive pre-travel verification.

2.3   There are some examples of such concepts being implemented in the Asia-Pacific region. Singapore has incorporated health declaration into the existing arrival declaration platform for immigration, so that passengers can use a single platform to submit their required information before entry. In the case of Australia, the Digital Passenger Declaration (DPD) is expected to replace the current Incoming Passenger Card that passengers are required to submit on arrival. New Zealand is also planning the same. In all these cases, there was good collaboration across government agencies and with industry. A National Air Transport Facilitation Committee (NATFC) can be an effective forum to lead such collaboration and coordination between government agencies as recommended through the ICAO CART guidance.

2.4   Where applicable, a notification of approval can be linked with an interactive Advance Passenger Information (iAPI) system, so that airlines automatically know at check-in whether a passenger meets all the entry requirements, without having to look for the notification of approval separately. This is in line with a Recommended Practice from the Amendment 29 to Annex 9 – *Facilitation*[2].

2.5   The other key element to achieving contactless travel is the use of digital identity and biometrics. By sharing the notification of approval to travel with airlines during online check-in, passengers can ensure document checks are completed in advance and thus arrive at the airport 'ready to fly'. When such off-airport processes are combined with biometric-enabled identification, truly contactless travel can be achieved. In addition to the notification of approval to travel, passengers can share their digital identity along with other relevant credentials, such as flight information, with airlines, airports and governments of the destination country. As digital identity data is more accurate than the current Advance Passenger Information (API) data airlines manually collect from passengers and transmit to governments, it will also enable a more reliable assessment of passengers prior to their arrival at the destination country. This will then allow more automation in arrival immigration and customs processes. By using digital identity information, airports can facilitate a biometric-enabled process across touchpoints.

2.6   There has been a lot of developments in these areas over the recent years. ICAO provides technical specifications for trusted digital credentials, such as the electronic Machine Readable Travel Documents (eMRTDs), the Digital Travel Credential (DTC), Visible Digital Seal for Non-Constraint environments (VDS-NC), Digital Travel Authorization (DTA), Electronic Travel Systems (ETS), etc. As technologies evolve and new standards emerge in the area of digital credentials, interoperability will be necessary for global implementation.

2.7   IATA has been leading the One ID initiative in collaboration with airlines, airports, governments and solution providers across the globe to develop recommended practices and implementation guidance for the industry. The initiative aims to enable biometric-enabled identification with a focus on digitalizing document checks and streamlining passenger processing at the airport by removing the need for repetitive presentations of travel documents throughout touchpoints.

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2 Recommended Practice X.X (3) to become applicable in November 2022 under the Amendment 29 to Annex 9.

3.   **ACTION BY THE CONFERENCE**

3.1   The Conference is invited to recommend that:

   a)   Asia-Pacific States enhance the use of digital health platforms, where applicable, and simplify the processes by removing the need for airlines to check physical documents at check-in;

   b)   Government agencies in individual Asia-Pacific States coordinate and collaborate among themselves to provide a single platform for the collection of comprehensive information about passengers and issuance of digital notification of approval to travel;

   c)   Asia-Pacific States take note of the international recommended practices, guidance and technical specifications being developed by ICAO and IATA in relation to digital credentials and contactless travel; and

   d)   Asia-Pacific States cooperate with industry to achieve truly contactless travel.

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