



ICAO, ILO and IMO issue joint call to world governments on need for 'key worker' designations for essential air and sea personnel

For immediate release

Montréal, 26 May 2020 – ICAO joined the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) today in issuing a new Joint Statement on the need to ensure 'key worker' designations for the millions of skilled personnel now maintaining essential global air and sea trade capacities.

The call to world governments comes as COVID-19 restrictions and guidelines continue to curtail travel and restrict border movements, ports and airports are being closed and ships and aircraft are being denied entry, and entire transport hubs are being affected.

The UN agencies are encouraging States to ensure the 'key worker' designation for seafarers, marine personnel, fishing vessel personnel, offshore energy sector personnel, aviation personnel, air cargo supply chain personnel, and airport and port services personnel.

Signed on behalf of ICAO Secretary General Dr. Fang Liu, IMO Secretary General Kitack Lim, and ILO Director General Guy Ryder, the joint statement highlights that air transport moved some 4.5 billion passengers and 35% of all global cargo combined by value last year, and that the total number of licensed aviation professionals, which include pilots, air traffic controllers and licensed maintenance technicians, was 887,000 in 2019, according to most recent ICAO data.

It also underscored how more than 80% of global trade by volume is moved by maritime transport and the world's 2 million seafarers, including much of the global food supply. As early as the middle of June, estimates indicate that 150,000 seafarers a month may require international flights for repatriation or to sign onto new ships.

"Our three Organizations seek to ensure that seafarers, marine personnel, fishing vessel personnel, offshore energy sector personnel, aviation personnel, air cargo supply chain personnel, service provider personnel at airports and ports are designated as 'key workers', regardless of nationality, to exempt them from travel restrictions, to ensure their access to emergency medical treatment and, if necessary, to facilitate emergency repatriation," the statement reads.

"We are seeking the support of Governments to facilitate crew changes, operations essential to maintain the global cargo supply chains and operations related to humanitarian aid, medical and relief flights. For humanitarian reasons – and the need to comply with international safety and employment regulations – crew changes cannot be postponed indefinitely."

The Joint Statement is copied in its entirety below, and includes further details on the specific actions needed by governments and the relevant COVID-19 information and response materials already issued by the respective UN agencies.



Resources for Editors

[ICAO's COVID-19 portal](#)

A Joint Statement on designation of seafarers, marine personnel, fishing vessel personnel, offshore energy sector personnel, aviation personnel, air cargo supply chain personnel, and service provider personnel at airports and ports as key workers, and on facilitation of crew changes in ports and airports in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has placed the entire world in an unprecedented situation. To slow the spread of the disease and mitigate its impacts, travel is being curtailed and borders are being closed. Transport hubs are being affected. Some ports and airports are being closed and ships and aircraft denied entry.

More than 80% of global trade by volume is moved by maritime transport, which is the lifeblood of the global economy, and is dependent on the world's 2 million seafarers who operate the world's merchant ships. It is estimated that from the middle of June 2020 around 150,000 seafarers a month will require international flights in order to be changed over from the ships that they operate, about half travelling by aircraft for repatriation, the other half joining ships.

Commercial fishing provides a major source of the world's food, and the crews of fishing vessels must also be periodically changed to avoid fatigue.

Air transport carried about 4.5 billion passengers in 2019, according to preliminary ICAO figures while airfreight represents 35% of the value of goods shipped in all modes combined. The total number of licensed aviation professionals, which include pilots, air traffic controllers and licensed maintenance technicians, was 887,000 in 2019, according to ICAO personnel statistics and forecasts.

Material and relevant information produced during the COVID-19 pandemic so far by the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) is set out in the annex. In particular, this includes, inter alia:

- IMO Circular Letter No.4204/Add.14 of 5 May 2020, Coronavirus (COVID-19) - Recommended framework of protocols for ensuring safe ship crew changes and travel during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic;

- IMO Circular Letter No.4204/Add.13 of 5 May 2020, Coronavirus (COVID-19) - Recommendations for Governments and relevant national authorities on facilitating the movement of offshore energy sector personnel during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- ICAO State letter EC 6/3 – 20/46 of 18 March 2020, Adherence to relevant ICAO Annex 9 – Facilitation Standards; and Actions taken by Member States to reduce the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) by air transport and to protect the health of air travellers and the aviation personnel;
- ICAO State letter EC 6/3 – 20/55 of 15 April 2020, Speedy authorization of repatriation flights; and
- ICAO Electronic Bulletin 2020/30 of 11 May 2020, Implementing a public health corridor to protect flight crew during the COVID-19 pandemic (cargo operations)..

Our three Organizations seek to ensure that seafarers, marine personnel, fishing vessel personnel, offshore energy sector personnel, aviation personnel, air cargo supply chain personnel, service provider personnel at airports and ports are designated as 'key workers', regardless of nationality, to exempt them from travel restrictions, to ensure their access to emergency medical treatment and, if necessary, to facilitate emergency repatriation.

We are seeking the support of Governments to facilitate crew changes, operations essential to maintain the global cargo supply chains and operations related to humanitarian aid, medical and relief flights. For humanitarian reasons – and the need to comply with international safety and employment regulations – crew changes cannot be postponed indefinitely.

To facilitate crew changes in ports and airports in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we encourage Governments and relevant national and local authorities to:

- designate seafarers, marine personnel, fishing vessel personnel, offshore energy sector personnel, aviation personnel, air cargo supply chain personnel, service provider personnel at airports and ports, regardless of nationality when in their jurisdiction, as 'key workers' providing an essential service;¹
- grant seafarers, marine personnel, fishing vessel personnel, offshore energy sector personnel, aviation personnel and service provider personnel at airports and ports any necessary and appropriate exemptions from national travel-related, health-related or movement restrictions in order to facilitate their joining or leaving ships, aircraft, airports and cargo facilities;²;
- accept, inter alia, official seafarers' identity documents, discharge books, STCW certificates, employment agreements, fishers' work agreements and letters of appointment from the employer, as evidence of being a seafarer, marine personnel, fisher, offshore energy sector personnel or personnel at ports, where necessary, for the purposes of crew/key personnel changes;
- accept, inter alia, official air operator crew identity cards and Crew Member Certificates (CMC) as evidence of being aviation personnel, where necessary, for the purposes of crew changes;
- permit seafarers, marine personnel, fishers and offshore energy sector personnel respectively, to disembark ships in port and transit through their territory (i.e. to an airport) for the purpose of crew changes and repatriation;

¹ See Statement of the Officers of the Special Tripartite Committee of the MLC, 2006 on COVID-19 available at https://www.ilo.org/global/standards/maritime-labour-convention/special-tripartite-committee/WCMS_740130/lang--en/index.htm

² Ibid.

- implement appropriate approval and screening protocols for seafarers, marine personnel, fishers, offshore energy sector personnel, and aircraft crew seeking to disembark ships and aircraft, respectively, for the purpose of crew changes and repatriation;
- provide information to ships and aircraft and their crews, on basic protective measures against COVID-19 based on WHO advice;³
- adhere to the relevant Annex 9 Standards intended to ensure sustainable air cargo operations and global air cargo supply chain;
- Implement a Public Health Corridor as outlined in the Electronic Bulletin 2020/30 published on 11 May 2020 to protect flight crews of cargo operation;
- expedite authorization of “repatriation flights” and flights for the purpose of conducting crew changes during the COVID-19 pandemic as per State Letter 2020/55 dated 15/04/2020; and
- ensure the avoidance of undue or inadvertent restrictions.

We invite Governments and other stakeholders to bring the contents of this joint statement to the attention of the competent authorities and all concerned.

Fang Liu
Secretary-General
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)

Kitack Lim
Secretary-General
International Maritime Organization (IMO)

Guy Ryder
Director-General
International Labour Organization (ILO)

About ICAO

A specialized agency of the United Nations, ICAO was created in 1944 to promote the safe and orderly development of international civil aviation throughout the world. It sets standards and regulations necessary for aviation safety, security, efficiency, capacity and environmental protection, amongst many other priorities. The Organization serves as the forum for cooperation in all fields of civil aviation among its 193 Member States.

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