



International Civil Aviation Organization

Council Aviation Recovery Task Force (CART)

Phase III

High-Level Cover Document

introducing recommendations and guidance of CART
in light of latest developments of the COVID-19 crisis

Montréal, Canada, 10 March 2021

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

To: President of the Council
From: Chairperson, Council Aviation Recovery Task Force
(CART)

I have the honour to submit the High-Level Cover Document of the Council Aviation Recovery Task Force (CART) and the associated third edition of *Take-off: Guidance for Air Travel through the COVID-19 Public Health Crisis*.

The CART Phase III was faced with a challenging task of striking a balance between the global crisis and growing uncertainty, the promising advancements towards a foreseeable resolution and the need to ensure a harmonized approach in these rapidly-evolving times. I am confident that the presented CART outcomes provide the timely, targeted and essential guidance the civil aviation system requires at this point in time. As the situation unfolds, possibly in the very near future, cooperation and alignment will be even more important to support our Member States in adapting the new and on-going challenges. In this regard, my heartfelt appreciation goes to our partner organizations, in particular the World Health Organization (WHO), for their support and involvement with the hope to continue our close cooperation.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all members and observers of CART for their commitment and contributions, in particular to the members of the two working groups and their respective co-rapporteurs (United States, Singapore, Colombia and Spain).



Estanislao Esono Anguesomo
Chairperson

Recommendations

This is a summary of recommendations contained in this Document, which complement the original eleven recommendations of the CART Report in June 2020¹ and the three additional recommendations presented in the High-Level Cover Document in November 2020².

Recommendation 12 (Revised)

Member States should plan to put in place the necessary measures to mitigate risks associated with prolonged regulatory alleviations, and to avoid extending alleviations (both core and extended COVID-19 Contingency Related Differences (CCRDs)) beyond 31 March 2021. States that are in need of alternative actions to enable service providers and personnel to maintain the validity of their certificates, licenses, and other approvals during the COVID-19 pandemic should use the Targeted Exemptions (TE) system from 1 April 2021. In addition, States are encouraged to facilitate cross-border access to medical and training facilities, including flight simulation training devices used for flight crew (national and foreign) and Air Traffic Controllers (ATCOs) to maintain their certifications, recency of experience, and proficiency.

Recommendation 14 (Revised)

States considering the formation of a Public Health Corridor (PHC) should actively share information with each other to implement PHCs in a harmonized manner. To facilitate the implementation, the ICAO Implementation Package (iPack) on establishing a PHC is available to States, in addition to PHC-specific tools published on the ICAO website and the App providing a template PHC arrangement between States.

Recommendation 15

Member States are urged to implement Addenda Nos. 1 and 2 to the *Technical Instructions for the Safe Transport of Dangerous Goods by Air* (Doc 9284) without delay in order to facilitate the transport of COVID-19 vaccines and to permit certain dangerous goods to be carried on board aircraft to provide for a safe, sanitary operating environment for passengers and crew. If any State wishes to be more restrictive, they are reminded of their obligation to file a State variation to the Technical Instructions.

Recommendation 16

Member States are encouraged to consider the temporary lifting of restrictions to air cargo operations, including but not limited to granting extra-bilateral rights, in particular for all-cargo services, to foreign airlines to facilitate the transportation of essential goods, supplies and COVID-19 vaccines.

¹ <https://www.icao.int/covid/cart/Pages/CART-Report---Executive-Summary.aspx>

² <https://www.icao.int/covid/cart/Pages/Recommendations.aspx>

Recommendation 17

Member States should implement testing certificates based on the protocol, minimum dataset and implementation approaches outlined in the *Manual on Testing and Cross-Border Risk Management Measures* (Doc 10152) to facilitate air travel. States are encouraged to request evidence of testing that is secure, trustworthy, verifiable, convenient to use, compliant with data protection legislation and internationally/globally interoperable. Existing solutions should be considered and could incorporate a visible digital seal. This may be applicable to vaccination certificates.

Recommendation 18

Member States should facilitate access for air crew to vaccination as quickly as possible within the World Health Organization (WHO) Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (SAGE) Stage III recommendations³.

Recommendation 19

Vaccination should not be a prerequisite for international travel. If and at such time as evidence shows that vaccinated persons would not transmit the SARS-CoV-2 virus or would present a reduced risk of transmitting the virus, Member States could consider exempting such persons from testing and/or quarantine measures, in accordance with a State's accepted risk threshold, national framework, the COVID-19 situation and the multilayered risk mitigation framework described in the *Take-off: Guidance for Air Travel through the COVID-19 Public Health Crisis*.

Recommendation 20

Member States should ensure that ICAO's CART guidance is taken into consideration by the wider State administration in the decision-making processes on national recovery planning.

³ <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/who-sage-roadmap-for-prioritizing-uses-of-covid-19-vaccines-in-the-context-of-limited-supply>

1. INTRODUCTION: GENERAL CONTEXT

A global health public crisis continues. Despite the slight signs of improvement towards the end of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified across the globe alongside the spread of new and more aggressive variants of the virus. The resurgence of cases and fatalities has prompted governments to reintroduce strict lockdowns, border closures as well as travel restrictions, resulting in even larger social and economic ramifications than initially predicted. Globally, the recovery of air transport has virtually stalled, severely hampered by the renewed outbreaks, consequential patchworks of travel restrictions including quarantine requirements, and wavering travellers' confidence.

On the upside, a foreseeable horizon to the end of the crisis has been shaped by favorable news on the substantial progress in the development of vaccines, their approval and distribution. Aviation plays a crucial role in the safe, quick and efficient transportation of vaccines worldwide. In awaiting the vaccination of a large majority of the global population, States may need to resort to other mechanisms to restore the flow of people and goods as well as business activities while remaining compliant with the public health risk management frameworks in place.

New and updated guidance. The ICAO Council Aviation Recovery Task Force (CART) reconvened in early 2021 to review and update its guidance for States to counter the headwinds and accelerate the momentum for aviation restart and recovery. As a "living document", the CART guidance can only be of a transient nature. Following the emergence of virus variants, progress in vaccine rollouts and new tools for combating COVID-19, the work of CART has targeted specific issues related to testing and vaccination of passengers as part of a State's multilayer risk management strategy. CART also took into account the position of the World Health Organization (WHO) that "national authorities and conveyance operators should not introduce requirements of proof of COVID-19 vaccination for international travel as a condition for departure or entry"⁴.

As part of CART endeavors, the third edition of the *Take-off: Guidance for Air Travel through the COVID-19 Public Health Crisis* (TOGD), originally issued in June 2020 and revised in November 2020, provides latest operational and public health guidance related to air travel reflecting technological and medical advancements. The recommended multi-layer risk management strategy has been supplemented with considerations on testing protocols and proof-of-results certification interoperability, as well as evidence of vaccination for crew and passengers. The guidance on Public Health Corridors (PHCs) and appropriate masks for air travel was also updated.

Furthermore, the *Manual on Testing and Cross-Border Risk Management Measures* (Doc 10152, referred to hereinafter as "the Manual"), issued in November 2020, was revised in close collaboration with the Collaborative Arrangement for the Prevention and Management of Public Health Events in Civil Aviation (CAPSCA). This second edition of the Manual provides detailed guidance on risk management and PHCs, information on recent scientific developments regarding COVID-19 testing, as well as a new section on vaccination and its interdependencies with other tools of a State's multilayer risk management framework.

Call to action for States. The COVID-19 crisis has required States to confront difficult trade-offs associated with health, economic and social challenges. The resources available in response to

⁴ WHO Interim Position Paper, 5 February 2021: <https://www.who.int/news-room/articles-detail/interim-position-paper-considerations-regarding-proof-of-covid-19-vaccination-for-international-travellers>.

emergency needs are often limited and characterized by high political pressure and urgency. Recognizing that health is the overriding priority, States should take into consideration aviation's crucial role in the fight against the pandemic when defining their national policy and spending priorities. Global supply chains, emergency and humanitarian responses and the swift distribution of the vaccine rely predominantly on air transport. Beyond that, aviation can stimulate recovery and growth of national economies by acting as an enabler and multiplier of economic activity. Authorities responsible for civil aviation are, therefore, called upon to ensure that the guidance presented here is used in national decision-making processes.

2. STRATEGIC DRIVERS AND OUTCOMES FOR CART PHASE III

The recommendations and technical guidance provided by CART aims to address the specific needs and challenges of stakeholders in the aviation industry to facilitate restart and recovery. Industry-wide and international cross-sectorial cooperation has been a fundamental component in the development of harmonized, cohesive and comprehensible guidance. Accordingly, the guidance provided in the TOGD and the Manual is therefore consistent with, or can feed into, the ongoing work and frameworks of United Nations' organizations, especially the WHO, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), as well as other partner organizations such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Aviation safety-related measures. Differences for temporary departures from ICAO Standards filed under the COVID-19 Contingency Related Differences (CCRD), or any other COVID-19-related regulatory alleviations granted by States, were intended to be temporary in nature. Prolonged differences and alleviations, such as those related to personnel certification and licensing, could result in an elevated operational safety risk. On 23 December 2020, State letter 20/136 was issued to request States to plan a transition back to normal compliance, i.e. not to extend alleviations (both core and extended CCRDs) beyond 31 March 2021, unless circumstances dictate otherwise.

In light of the unexpected duration and magnitude of the crisis, it has been acknowledged that a number of States still require alleviations to enable service providers and personnel to maintain the validity of their certificates, licenses, and other approvals during the pandemic. To support these States in the transition to normal operations and, if necessary, in the event of unforeseeable circumstances, a new Targeted Exemptions (TE)⁵ system will be launched, replacing the CCRD system from 1 April 2021 with a three-month transition period. Only the "approval to operate" information submitted by States to the CCRD will be migrated to the TE system. States that have issued alleviations with temporary differences are encouraged to return to normal operations as soon as possible, and if circumstances do not allow them to do so, to enter their targeted exemptions into the TE system.

The TE system will remain operational for at least one year with the view that States should resume international operations without exemptions as soon as possible. A least a three-month advance notice will be provided before the system is closed down. The need for the TE system will be assessed using the COVID-19 Alleviation Status Dashboard⁶ and by continuously monitoring of operational safety risks reported by States.

⁵ Targeted Exemptions are exemptions granted by States, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, that are tightly scoped and time limited.

⁶ <https://www.icao.int/safety/COVID-19OPS/Pages/Status-Dashboard.aspx>

States are strongly encouraged to refer their operators to the ICAO Operational Safety Measures⁷ and the Roadmap to OPS Normal⁸ websites for up-to-date guidance on safe and orderly resumption of flight operations. The website contains links to guidance documents developed by ICAO, Airports Council International (ACI), Civil Air Navigation Services Organisation (CANSO), International Air Transport Association (IATA), International Coordinating Council of Aerospace Industries Associations (ICCAIA), and others.

Recommendation 12 (Revised)

Member States should plan to put in place the necessary measures to mitigate risks associated with prolonged regulatory alleviations, and to avoid extending alleviations (both core and extended COVID-19 Contingency Related Differences (CCRDs)) beyond 31 March 2021. States that are in need of alternative actions to enable service providers and personnel to maintain the validity of their certificates, licenses, and other approvals during the COVID-19 pandemic should use the Targeted Exemptions (TE) system from 1 April 2021. In addition, States are encouraged to facilitate cross-border access to medical and training facilities, including flight simulation training devices used for flight crew (national and foreign) and Air Traffic Controllers (ATCOs) to maintain their certifications, recency of experience, and proficiency.

Implementation of Public Health Corridors (PHCs): States are strongly encouraged to consider PHCs as a useful way to structure a collaborative approach to managing cross-border health risks. For example, exchange of information through PHCs will enable States to mutually recognize their respective public health risk management frameworks and to establish temporary and exceptional bilateral or multilateral arrangements within which air travel can be resumed. To support States in the establishment of PHCs, ICAO has developed: a) targeted assistance in the ICAO Implementation Package (iPack)⁹; b) general tools published on the ICAO PHC Website¹⁰; and c) a new App featuring a PHC arrangement template and online builder to facilitate discussions between two or more States and/or a region¹¹.

Recommendation 14 (Revised)

States considering the formation of a Public Health Corridor (PHC) should actively share information with each other to implement PHCs in a harmonized manner. To facilitate the implementation, the ICAO Implementation Package (iPack) on establishing a PHC is available to States, in addition to PHC-

⁷ <https://www.icao.int/safety/COVID-19OPS>

⁸ <https://www.icao.int/safety/OPS/OPS-Normal>

⁹ <https://www.icao.int/secretariat/TechnicalCooperation/Pages/establishing-a-public-health-corridor.aspx>

¹⁰ [https://www.icao.int/safety/CAPSCA/Pages/Public-Health-Corridor-\(PHC\)-Implementation-.aspx](https://www.icao.int/safety/CAPSCA/Pages/Public-Health-Corridor-(PHC)-Implementation-.aspx)

¹¹ The PHC App provides a generic legal and operational template framework to develop bilateral or multilateral arrangements considering States' sovereignty, public health capacity, and epidemic situation. Data and information used in this App are provided by the WHO and States. The App is located on the ICAO COVID-19 Response and Recovery Implementation Centre (CRRIC).

specific tools published on the ICAO website and the App providing a template PHC arrangement between States.

COVID-19 vaccine safe, quick and efficient transport by air. Vaccination is a key element in efforts to overcome the public health crisis and to enable the recovery of economies worldwide. In this regard, the aviation industry is playing a vital role in ensuring that COVID-19 vaccines and other essential medical supplies are transported safely and quickly around the world as an integral part of a complex multi-modal supply chain. States should be aware of the challenges that may slow the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, especially those linked with the significant increase in the volume of vaccines to be transported worldwide on a timely basis despite reduced air connectivity.

Specific areas related to the transport of vaccines on commercial aircraft require attention and action by pharmaceutical manufacturers, operators and regulators. The amendments to the *Technical Instructions for the Safe Transport of Dangerous Goods by Air* (Doc 9284; Addenda Nos. 1 and 2)¹² were made to ensure that these vaccines will be safely accepted, handled and transported. The transport of vaccines must comply with the detailed provisions of the Technical Instructions when the vaccines are classified as dangerous goods, or the vaccines are shipped with dry ice as a refrigerant, or data loggers and cargo tracking devices powered by lithium batteries are included in packages or attached to packages or overpacks. The amount of dry ice needed to transport vaccines may exceed limits currently specified for an aircraft type. Guidance on increasing these limits is contained in the safe transport of COVID-19 vaccines on commercial aircraft website¹³. In addition, a specific allowance permits alcohol-based sanitizers and alcohol-based cleaning products to be carried aboard an aircraft for use during the flight or series of flights for the purposes of passenger and crew hygiene.

Recommendation 15

Member States are urged to implement Addenda Nos. 1 and 2 to the *Technical Instructions for the Safe Transport of Dangerous Goods by Air* (Doc 9284) without delay in order to facilitate the transport of COVID-19 vaccines and to permit certain dangerous goods to be carried on board aircraft to provide for a safe, sanitary operating environment for passengers and crew. If any State wishes to be more restrictive, they are reminded of their obligation to file a State variation to the Technical Instructions.

To ensure sufficient air cargo capacity during the pandemic, exceptional measures for lifting restrictions of air cargo operations have been introduced by certain States, for example, granting temporary “Seventh Freedom” traffic rights for all-cargo operations. While noting the importance to facilitate essential air cargo operations and help reduce additional costs, introduction of such measures should be in line with overall risk management strategy of the State.

Recommendation 16

Member States are encouraged to consider the temporary lifting of restrictions to air cargo operations, including but not limited to

¹² In addition, associated guidance is provided at <https://www.icao.int/safety/OPS/OPS-Normal/Pages/Vaccines-transport.aspx>.

¹³ https://www.icao.int/safety/OPS/OPS-Normal/Pages/Safe-transport_guidance.aspx

granting extra-bilateral rights, in particular for all-cargo services, to foreign airlines to facilitate the transportation of essential goods, supplies and COVID-19 vaccines.

Globally accepted and verifiable testing certificates for air travel. Many States require pre-departure testing for COVID-19 as an entry requirement. ICAO has established a minimum dataset for testing certificates to facilitate States' recognition and harmonization of their use for air travel. These data sets are provided in the Manual (Doc 10152).

The solutions adopted for the verification of certificates should be secure, trustworthy verifiable, convenient to use, compliant with data protection legislation and internationally/globally interoperable. ICAO is developing a solution based on Doc 9303 – *Machine Readable Travel Documents* specifications, incorporating the concept of Visible Digital Seals (VDS). Other solutions and trials on mutually recognised travel and health certificates are also being conducted by the IATA (Travel Pass), World Economic Forum (WEF)/The Commons Project (CommonPass), the ICC (AOK) and others using existing solutions. The OECD is developing a blueprint for the verification of testing certificates in line with the ICAO recommendations.

Recommendation 17

Member States should implement testing certificates based on the protocol, minimum dataset and implementation approaches outlined in the *Manual on Testing and Cross-Border Risk Management Measures* (Doc 10152) to facilitate air travel. States are encouraged to request evidence of testing that is secure, trustworthy, verifiable, convenient to use, compliant with data protection legislation and internationally/globally interoperable. Existing solutions should be considered and could incorporate a visible digital seal. This may be applicable to vaccination certificates.

Vaccination. The WHO recommends that vaccination should not be a pre-condition for air travel. Vaccination may play an important role in aviation recovery as the vaccinated proportion of the global population increases over time. States are encouraged to recognize aircrew, front-line aviation workers and aviation workers in critical safety and security positions as essential workers to ensure the availability of air transportation during the COVID-19 pandemic. They should be encouraged to be vaccinated as an added layer of individual protection and follow the recommended vaccination considerations and protocols as outlined in the Manual (Doc 10152). States should facilitate the vaccination of these essential air transport workers in accordance with the WHO Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (SAGE) Stage III recommendations, and as quickly as possible for air crew within these recommendations. At such time as evidence shows that vaccinated persons would not transmit the SARS-CoV-2 virus or would present a reduced risk of transmitting the virus, such individuals may be exempted from testing and/or quarantine measures, in accordance with a State's accepted risk threshold, national framework, the COVID-19 situation and the multilayered risk mitigation framework described in the TOGD.

Recommendation 18

Member States should facilitate access for air crew to vaccination as quickly as possible within the World Health Organization (WHO) Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (SAGE) Stage III recommendations¹⁴.

Recommendation 19

Vaccination should not be a prerequisite for international travel. If and at such time as evidence shows that vaccinated persons would not transmit the SARS-CoV-2 virus or would present a reduced risk of transmitting the virus, Member States could consider exempting such persons from testing and/or quarantine measures, in accordance with a State's accepted risk threshold, national framework, the COVID-19 situation and the multilayered risk mitigation framework described in the *Take-off: Guidance for Air Travel through the COVID-19 Public Health Crisis*.

Communication and advocacy strategy. In meeting the enormous challenges of the COVID-19 crisis, governments face diverging and competing requests from different ministries and/or authorities. Consequently, the immediate response prioritizes public health measures and those aimed at limiting the overall impact on the economy, rather than the recovery of specific sectors such as aviation and tourism. Travel restrictions are a clear demonstration of the efforts being made to curb the virus notwithstanding the potential negative impacts on aviation and its contribution to the economic recovery. However, as a State prepares for recovery from the pandemic, it is important that authorities responsible for civil aviation ensure that key decision makers across government are aware of the value of the guidance contained in the TOGD and the Manual. As the context of the crisis changes, active engagement with the relevant national coordinating bodies and government agencies is required to make the guidance available in the decision-making processes for possible incorporation into the State's risk management strategy for national recovery planning.

Recommendation 20

Member States should ensure that ICAO's CART guidance is taken into consideration by the wider State administration in the decision-making processes on national recovery planning.

3. WAY FORWARD

The guidance presented in the TOGD and the Manual (Doc 10152) is under constant revision as new scientific evidence becomes available. ICAO continues to closely monitor the scientific and technological developments, in particular those related to vaccination and their impact on travel by air. In this regard, ICAO has been working with other international organizations, especially the WHO, to align efforts and is ready to incorporate each new development in its guidance.

¹⁴ <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/who-sage-roadmap-for-prioritizing-uses-of-covid-19-vaccines-in-the-context-of-limited-supply>

As the vaccination is being rolled out globally, increasing number of passengers will be vaccinated in the near future. This will result in a growing uncertainty with different epidemiological realities from one State to another. It is intended that further iterations of the CART guidance will give consideration to the following near- and long-term issues:

- In planning a national risk management strategy which aims at reducing the need for public health risk mitigation measures and reactivating economic activities, the aviation sector will require particular attention. Such overall strategy should involve an orderly and phased removal of COVID-related restrictions on travel, developed in close coordination with relevant authorities based on proportionate evidence-based risk assessments, and taking into account the benefits that the recovery of aviation can have for the society and economy. The guidance contained in the TOGD and the Manual provides the building blocks needed to address and define the civil aviation component of the national risk management strategy.
- In time, the pandemic will recede; however, its profound impact has already reshaped economies and society, propelling the aviation industry towards re-thinking their businesses. Growing attention is being brought, for example, to personal health-related aspects throughout the travel processes. Cleanliness and sanitation may be at the forefront for air travelers, from check-in through security to boarding their flight. While moves towards more seamless travel processes were already underway prior to the pandemic, the on-going shift to digitalization can accelerate this transformation to a speedy, healthier and safer contactless travel experience.
- Beyond addressing issues arising from the current crisis, States and industry need to use the lessons learned to improve crisis preparedness, enhance economic and environmental sustainability, and enable smarter operations. Building a more resilient international civil aviation system will require intra- and cross-sectoral cooperation and alignment while accounting for the sovereignty and authority of States and their varying capacities to meet operational, technological and regulatory requirements.

ICAO will convene a High-Level Conference on COVID-19 (HLCC 2021) in October 2021. Aiming at creating a path to post COVID-19 recovery, the Conference will consider short- and long-term implications engendered by the crisis, proposals for States to use in tackling safety, operational and economic challenges, and streamlined policy responses to post-pandemic state of aviation. It will also provide an opportunity to share experiences among States and industry, and strengthen and demonstrate multilateral cooperation, States' individual and collective engagements, as well as efforts and political commitments to building sustainable, resilient aviation.