



WORKING PAPER

ASSEMBLY — 41ST SESSION

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 13: Facilitation Programmes

**FACILITATION OF AIRPORT OPERATIONS AND
PASSENGER MOVEMENTS IN AIR TRAVEL RECOVERY**

(Presented by Singapore, and co-sponsored by the Federated States of Micronesia and the International Air Transport Association (IATA))

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper highlights the need to plan, coordinate and implement policies and measures to facilitate smooth airport operations and passenger movements as global air travel recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic. Through deliberate coordination amongst stakeholders, airports and airlines can be better prepared to ensure adequate resources and capacity ahead of demand. In addition, States should review passenger facilitation measures such as entry requirements and health declarations at airports as well as develop a robust crisis management framework incorporating lessons from the pandemic.

Noting the uneven air travel recovery globally, it is crucial that ICAO work with States and industry to restore the international air connectivity in a safe, secure and orderly manner.

Action: The Assembly is invited to:

- a) encourage States to leverage the National Air Transport Facilitation Committee (NATFC) to coordinate implementation plans and address passenger facilitation and airport operations issues to enable a smooth air travel recovery;
- b) urge States to review current COVID-19 related entry requirements and procedures to enhance passenger facilitation and airport operational efficiency;
- c) urge States to develop a crisis management framework to remain vigilant for future public health events; and
- d) encourage ICAO to take a leading role in restoring international air connectivity and improving the aviation resilience to public health emergencies, through effective implementation of recommendations arising from the HLCC 2021 and the work of the ICAO Council Aviation Recovery Task Force (CART).

<i>Strategic Objectives:</i>	This working paper relates to the Strategic Objective <i>Security & Facilitation</i>
<i>Financial implications:</i>	None
<i>References:</i>	International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Annex 9 – <i>Facilitation</i> ICAO Council Aviation Recovery Task Force (CART) <i>Take-off: Guidance for Air Travel through the COVID-19 Public Health Crisis</i> Doc 10160, <i>High-level Conference on COVID-19</i>

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Global air travel recovery has gathered momentum as more States relax COVID-19 restrictions. However, with the rapid return of passenger traffic, some airports are now facing a capacity crunch, leading to a diminished passenger experience. Particularly, shortage of airport personnel, reduced competencies and onerous airline and airport processes brought about by COVID-19, have resulted in several operational issues at airports, such as long queues at check-in, security and immigration, slower baggage presentation, increase in mishandled baggage, flight delays and missed connections. Such issues have an adverse knock-on effect on the global air connectivity.

1.2 Moreover, the air travel recovery has been uneven globally. Airports would typically start to experience capacity constraints when their passenger traffic recovers to more than 50 per cent pre-COVID levels. There is much to learn from the pandemic as well as the current air travel recovery. ICAO and States must work together to enable smooth and robust recovery for the aviation sector and strengthen the resilience of the aviation sector to deal with future public health crises.

2. MEASURES TO FACILITATE AIRPORT OPERATIONS AND PASSENGER MOVEMENTS IN AIR TRAVEL RECOVERY

Leveraging the National Air Transport Facilitation Committee (NATFC) for Effective Coordination

2.1 Coordination and collaboration among key stakeholders across government agencies, airport and airline community is just as critical in the air travel recovery process as in the response to the pandemic. As recommended in the ICAO CART Take-off Guidance and the recommendations of the ICAO HLCC 2021, the National Air Transport Facilitation Committee (NATFC) is an effective forum to bring together all key stakeholders to discuss passenger facilitation and airport operations issues and plan for adequate facilities and manpower ahead of recovery.

2.2 Manpower constraint is one key operational challenge faced at airports as it is not easy to ramp up manpower, competencies and passenger handling capacity at short notice. For instance, significant lead time is needed to train new staff to meet the safety and work requirements of their roles, before they can be deployed. As such, planning needs to be done ahead of demand to provide time for staff on-boarding. It would be particularly helpful when stakeholders can address issues collectively on a sectoral level and work out satisfactory solutions to operational problems. For instance, adjustments to flight schedules to de-peak flights at certain hours or changes to operational processes could alleviate congestion at airports, without resorting to flight cancellations.

2.3 Through the NATFC, which States are required to establish under ICAO Annex 9¹, regulators, airlines, airport operators and other stakeholders including public health authorities can come together to coordinate implementation plans. States can take a step-by-step approach to pace traffic growth in tandem with capacity build-up across the value chain. A first step is to assess the capacity of key airport services and facilities for end-to-end processing of aircraft, passenger and cargo traffic. Considerations such as changes in processes due to COVID-19, demand at peak periods, and the desired service levels could be included to determine the expected capacity. It would be helpful to set a realistic traffic growth target with a timeline and to assess the capacity resources needed to meet the growth target. For the manpower ramp up, it is important to identify the critical vocations required and provide a reasonable buffer to account for absenteeism. Triggers for adjustments to the resource capacity could also be identified as well as the lead time and steps to make these adjustments.

¹ ICAO Annex 9 Standard 8.19 (now Standard 8.20 in Amendment 29 to Annex 9): Each Contracting State shall establish a National Air Transport Facilitation Committee, and Airport Facilitation Committees as required, or similar coordinating bodies, for the purpose of coordinating facilitation activities between departments, agencies, and other organizations of the State concerned with, or responsible for, various aspects of international civil aviation as well as with airport and aircraft operators.

Formulating contingency plans to deal with unplanned surges in traffic demand or other unanticipated events that would adversely impact resource capacity would also be advisable.

Streamlining Passenger Facilitation

2.4 As recommended in the HLCC 2021², States should regularly assess the health-related entry requirements for their relevance and lift the restrictions at an appropriate time. The review should be conducted considering the prevailing COVID-19 situation and States' local circumstances³.

2.5 As air travel recovers with borders being re-opened progressively by States, the restrictions and requirements in the pandemic, such as physical checks by airlines on health documents, continue to be required in several States. Additional COVID-19-related document checks have extended the time required to complete airline check-in and pre-boarding processes. To enable on-time departure of flights, there is a need to streamline entry requirements and health declarations to reduce the departure check-in processing at the airport.

2.6 To enhance operational efficiency, reduce physical interaction and reduce human errors, document checks should be minimised and digitalised as far as possible. For instance, it would be helpful to digitalise health and arrival immigration declarations⁴, which would enable digital verification of documents at the back end without the need to sight hard copy documents. This would be in line with proposed Recommended Practices⁵, which will become applicable in November 2022 under the Amendment 29 to ICAO Annex 9.

2.7 COVID-19 had halted a number of automated processes at the airport due to the need for additional document checks. In line with the streamlining of entry requirements, States could progressively resume the use of automated airport processes, such as check-in kiosks, bag drops, or immigration gates, thereby increasing resource capacity and providing some relief to airport manpower. The use of biometric passenger processing promotes contactless interaction while reducing the number of paper-based identity checks and enhancing airport security.

Developing a Crisis Management Framework

2.8 Under ICAO Annex 9, States are required to establish a dedicated national aviation plan in response to communicable disease outbreaks⁶. Although borders have re-opened for international air travel, it is necessary to remain vigilant and maintain operational readiness should the COVID-19 situation worsen. Aviation stakeholders must work with relevant governmental agencies particularly the public health authorities, to develop a coordinated response plan to new variants of concern⁷.

² Under HLCC 2021 Agenda Item 6 (Facilitation operational measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond)

³ ICAO CART Recommendation 5: In order to support the fastest possible return to normal aviation operations, Member States should regularly review the necessity of continuing the application of risk mitigation measures as the risk of COVID-19 transmission diminishes; and measures which are no longer needed should be discontinued.

⁴ The Singapore Arrival Card (SGAC) is such a platform which allows passengers to submit their required information before entry, and airlines to automatically know at check-in whether a passenger meets all the entry requirements, without having to look for a notification of approval. The SGAC e-service is available at <https://eservices.ica.gov.sg/sgarrivalcard>.

⁵ Contracting States requesting standardized health documents and/or health-related documentation should consider developing a health digital platform where passengers can apply for obtaining a notification of approval to travel by the States of destination and transit. When Contracting States establish a health digital platform, aircraft operators should, where required, perform checks at the point of embarkation to ensure that each passenger has been granted approval for travel by the States of transit and destination.

⁶ ICAO Annex 9 Standard 8.16 (now Standard 8.17 in Amendment 29 to Annex 9): A Contracting State shall establish a national aviation plan in preparation for an outbreak of a communicable disease posing a public health risk or public health emergency of international concern.

⁷ This is in line with the following HLCC 2021 Recommendations:

Agenda Item 6 (Facilitation operational measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond) – That States should ensure and promote multi-sector communication, coordination and collaboration between all relevant stakeholders including industry in the development of an aviation COVID-19 pandemic response plan.

Agenda Item 7 (Enhancing National Coordination and International Cooperation) – That States should endeavour to ensure that those measures mandated by the health authority that have an impact on the aviation industry are understood, evaluated and, if necessary, supplemented by aviation stakeholders prior to their enactment, in particular by the entity in charge of facilitation.

2.9 Such a response plan can take a risk-based approach. While the risk assessment from the public health authorities would guide the concept of operations, it would be prudent for aviation stakeholders to establish plans to ensure operational readiness of airports to address public health threats under various risk scenarios. This would mean keeping some medical resources, manpower, and facilities on warm standby for activation within an agreed and practical timeframe with the relevant stakeholders. The plans should be regularly reviewed, evaluated and exercised for effectiveness.

ICAO's Role in Coordinating Travel Recovery Efforts and Improving Effectiveness and Responsiveness to Public Health Emergencies

2.10 ICAO, States and industry must work together to restore international air connectivity and mitigate the impact of uneven global recovery. ICAO can play a leading role to drive effective implementation of recommendations arising from the HLCC 2021 and the work of the CART. This effort would include strengthening the role of CAPSCA, enhancing guidance to coordinate implementation by States, as well as to develop effective crisis response to public health emergencies. States are also encouraged to share information and experience on their crisis response plans and aviation recovery. In this regard, Singapore is pleased to collaborate with ICAO to jointly develop and implement the ICAO-Singapore DGCA programme for Aviation Resilience, which aims to reach out to some 80 DGs from various regions to draw lessons learnt from the pandemic and prepare States for aviation recovery and resilience.

2.11 In addition, as recommended in the HLCC 2021⁸, ICAO should develop a unified framework to improve the effectiveness of global management of public health risk in aviation together with relevant stakeholders, and develop a multi-scenario framework for implementing Public Health Corridors (PHCs) during public health emergencies in close coordination with relevant stakeholders. This would help with a coordinated and prompt response of international border and health-related measures for an effective crisis response and air travel recovery.

3. ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN

The Assembly is invited to:

- a) encourage States to leverage the National Air Transport Facilitation Committee (NATFC) to coordinate implementation plans and address passenger facilitation and airport operations issues to enable a smooth air travel recovery;
- b) urge States to review current COVID-19 related entry requirements and procedures to enhance passenger facilitation and airport operational efficiency;
- c) urge States to develop a crisis management framework to remain vigilant for future public health events; and
- d) encourage ICAO to take a leading role in restoring international air connectivity and improving the aviation resilience to public health emergencies, through effective implementation of recommendations arising from the HLCC 2021 and the work of the CART.

— END —

⁸ Under HLCC 2021 Agenda Item 7 (Enhancing National Coordination and International Cooperation)