



ASSEMBLY — 41ST SESSION

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 13 Facilitation Programmes

**“HARMONISING AIR TRAVEL”  
A UNIVERSALLY RECOGNISED AND HARMONISED HEALTH REQUIREMENT  
FRAMEWORK FOR AIR PASSENGERS**

(Presented by Saudi Arabia)

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Harmonising Air Travel (HAT) is a proposal that seeks to establish the long-term policy objectives and pathways towards achieving the creation of a universally recognised and harmonised health requirement framework that facilitates and simplifies the air passenger journey and experience. HAT principally aims to improve the global air transport sector’s resilience to external global public health events through:

- i. Harmonised passenger health information protocols;
- ii. Improved information sharing and transparency;
- iii. Enhanced health and safety protections for air passengers; and
- iv. Restored and retained passenger trust in civil aviation regulation.

The proposal builds on recommendations stemming from the October 2021 High-level Conference on COVID-19 - Facilitation Stream (HLCC 2021).

**Action:** The Assembly is invited to take the actions in paragraph 6.

<i>Strategic Objectives:</i>	This working paper relates to two of ICAO’s Strategic Objectives. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Enhancing global civil aviation security and facilitation (Security and Facilitation)</li><li>• Fostering the development of a sound and economically-viable civil aviation system (Economic Development of Air Transport)</li></ul>
<i>Financial implications:</i>	The activities referred to in this paper will be undertaken subject to budgetary resource availability and/or from extra budgetary contributions from Member States.
<i>References:</i>	Annex 9 – <i>Facilitation</i> (specifically chapters 2, 3, 8, 10 and 11) ICAO - Ministerial Declaration of the High-level Conference on COVID-19 Riyadh Aviation Declaration HLCC 2021- WP/17

## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The underpinning principle of the Harmonising Air Travel (HAT) proposal is that the provision of an enhanced universally recognised and accepted international health requirement framework for air passengers is essential to improve the resilience of the global air transport sector in the foreseeable future.

1.2 The HAT proposal seeks to support the recovery of the air transport sector from the impacts of Covid-19 and to enhance its resilience against future health crises, restoring and retaining passenger trust in air travel.

1.3 By providing passengers with easily accessible, simple-to-understand, reliable, and consistently applied health requirements for international air transport across all countries, the impacts on air transport from future health events should be felt less. Global and regional harmonisation of procedures is essential to strengthen confidence in air travel.

1.4 Other values that form part of the HAT proposal include: (i) health protection of the traveling public, (ii) health protection of the aviation workforce across the aviation supply chain in contact with the traveling public (crews, airport frontline employees, public transportation system to and from airports, etc.), (iii) health protection / integrity of the populations of the destination countries.

## 2. BACKGROUND

2.1 External shocks have the potential to greatly impact air transport services and subsequent economic growth. COVID-19 has severely disrupted air traffic and passenger travel across the globe. As a result, passenger traffic is not expected to return to pre-2019 levels until 2024 and air transport remains vulnerable to other future global health crises. Despite past efforts to get passengers back in the sky, the unilateral and fragmented approach taken by most countries to coordinate and communicate travel restrictions continues to hamper air passenger traffic recovery, while also making the air transport industry vulnerable to future health crises.

2.2 Subsequent to the SARS outbreak, attempts were made to harmonise health requirements for air travel. For example, in 2006 ICAO put in place the Collaborative Arrangement for the Prevention and Management of Public Health Events in Civil Aviation (CAPSCA) which had put forward objectives and recommendations that states could adopt to help with preparedness and response to global health events. In addition, there are the ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPS) from ICAO Annex 9 – specifically Chapters 2, 3, 8, 10 and 11, which include standards and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of international health regulations and promote close collaboration between countries, ICAO and the WHO to prevent the spread of communicable disease by air.

2.3 Finally, following the onset of COVID-19, several other initiatives were immediately introduced by ICAO to resume air travel in 2020 while taking into consideration public health requirements, such as the recommendations listed through the Council Aviation Recovery Task Force (CART), including the Public Health Corridor concept, CART had established many of the first steps taken toward setting out measures and recommendations to harmonise procedures for the safe and efficient restart and recovery of civil aviation and to restore the sector's resilience.

2.4 Despite these past efforts to harmonise health requirements for travel, restrictions continue to be fragmented from country to country and coordination between member states is lacking, both in terms

of specific information requested from passengers as well as format (e.g., paper, on-line declaration, apps, interviews).

2.5 In October 2021, a working paper (HLCC 2021- WP/179) was presented by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during the High-level Conference on COVID-19 (HLCC 2021) Facilitation Stream, which proposed to ICAO to: (a) include under Annex 9, a specific provision/chapter relating to travel facilitation during pandemics, for the purpose of developing Standards and Recommended Practices for enabling seamless travel during pandemic situations (b) provide common standards, including travel protocols and recommended practices, to facilitate seamless movement of international air traffic within the shortest possible time during COVID-19, and similar pandemic situations in future, in a globally coordinated manner.

### 3. DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Based on the recommendations of the above referenced working paper, on 9th May 2022 at the Future Aviation Forum, Saudi Arabia launched a White Paper providing further context and detailed proposals to address the current challenges associated with air travel restrictions and facilitation. The HAT policy reaffirms the Kingdom's commitment to recommendation (b) within the HLCC working paper

3.2 The proposed harmonised health requirements framework proposed as part of the HAT policy white paper comprises four pillars:

#### PILLAR 1: A Harmonised Reporting System for All Countries

3.2.1 Which will help countries to establish and communicate health requirements for international travel in a harmonised way. This would in practice lead to a single health declaration that could be used by all countries involved in the journey of a passenger. It would also enable integrated and harmonised health requirement management for civil aviation and for border crossing.

#### PILLAR 2: Communication Systems for States and Other Stakeholders

3.2.2 To increase information sharing, interoperability, and transparency among countries. As well as enhance health information and statistical systems to better future-proof the system against health crises. And to strengthen co-operation among all administrations and government agencies involved in border crossing so that health requirements can be captured without increasing the burden on the travel facilitation process.

#### PILLAR 3: Governance and Coordination Mechanisms

3.2.3 To promote a more consistent application and reporting of health regulations and status globally. And allow customers to make more informed decisions about their own health and safety. And help to maintain minimum levels of essential services in times of crisis

#### PILLAR 4: Compliance Mechanisms

3.2.4 To establish global standards that provide passengers with certainty and predictability. And improve customer service, while maintaining appropriate health security requirements. As well as to help passengers navigate health requirements of different countries. And to increase passengers' willingness to travel again and continue to travel during future health crises.

3.3 With a focus on achieving the objectives of the HAT White Paper, sustained coordination and an open, reliable, and harmonised framework are expected to result in the restoration of trust and confidence in the air transport sector, an increase in the number of passengers and ultimately sustainable economic development of the entire civil aviation system.

#### 4. **CONCLUSION**

4.1 The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia remains committed to the process of providing common standards, including travel protocols and recommended practices, to facilitate seamless movement of international air traffic within the shortest possible time during COVID-19, and similar pandemic situations in future, in a globally coordinated manner.

4.2 The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia invites Member States to consider the HAT proposal and share experiences and best practices to strengthen the implementation process.

#### 5. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

5.1 In alignment with HLCC 2021 recommendation 6/1n and 7/1f, the HAT framework will require clear governance and coordination mechanisms to maintain a relevant and reliable inter-operable system for passengers. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia requests that the Assembly consider the establishment of (i) a Governance Body consisting of ICAO, WHO and UNWTO representatives, (ii) an Operational Body overseen by ICAO, (iii) a Technical Committee, (iv) an Implementation Body.

5.2 The Assembly is also requested to agree on a framework to support the development of reliable and harmonised framework with related to the health requirements to result in the restoration of trust and confidence in the air transport sector.

#### 6. **ACTION**

6.1 The Assembly is invited to:

- a) note that this working paper seeks to build on work already undertaken by ICAO and Member States
- b) request ICAO Council to support the initiation of a process to establish a framework that: (i) increases understanding of country-specific information requirements – particularly for air passengers; and (ii) harmonises health requirements
- c) support the recommendations outlined in Item 5.