



International Civil Aviation Organization
South American Regional Office

Second Virtual Meeting of Civil Aviation General Directors of the South American Region on the Response to COVID-19

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PROCEDURE FOR REPATRIATION FLIGHTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

(Presented by Venezuela)

SUMMARY

This working paper explains the importance of establishing effective procedures for processing “repatriation flights”, which are defined as special flights for the repatriation of citizens and other admissible persons to the States, without embarkation or disembarkation of other passengers transported for “remuneration or hire” during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Reference:

- State letter No. EC 6/3-20/55, dated 15 April 2020, on fast-track authorisation of “repatriation flights” during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Humanitarian flights are those aimed at serving the citizens of the States during emergencies resulting from meteorological catastrophes or other adverse situations. The COVID-19 coronavirus, defined as a pandemic last March by the World Health Organization (WHO), has caused alarm worldwide, largely affecting the population and productive sectors, since States have restricted or suspended international flights in face of the threat of entry and spread of COVID-19 in their territory.

1.2 As a result of the closing of borders, thousands of people, who had travelled for work, holiday, health and other reasons, were unable to take a flight back to their country of residence.

1.3 Accordingly, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), through State letter EC 6/3-20/55, dated 15 April 2020, urged States to review their authorisation procedures to ensure fast approval of repatriation flights, in compliance with the provisions on non-scheduled international flights contained in Section F, Chapter 2 of Annex 9-*Facilitation* of the Convention on International Civil Aviation or Chicago Convention.

1.4 This situation led many States, like Venezuela, to coordinate actions to address these situations through the delivery of humanitarian aid (medical equipment and supplies, food, inputs, and others), and the repatriation of citizens through the creation of the so-called “air bridges”, as a way of dealing with affected passengers.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 In the case of Venezuela, despite restrictions applied for epidemiologic control in the COVID-19 pandemic, the aeronautical authority designed and approved the *Air Bridge Plan to address the Contingency - March 2020*, with a view to coordinating and defining a minimum required protocol for the transport by air of the required medical inputs, health personnel, patients and samples collected in events of interest for public health or to take care of any public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC), as well as for the transfer of citizens who, for different circumstances, were away from the national territory at the time the borders were closed and whose return to their country of origin is warranted.

2.2 To this end, Venezuela, through the aeronautical authority, and following approval by the national Executive, has authorised several humanitarian flights to date with the main objective of repatriating citizens for free, through the *Back to the Homeland Plan* and letting nationals of other countries leave, following all the health protocols and the recommendations of WHO and ICAO. The destination of these flights has been: Aruba, Barbados, Bonaire, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Spain, Italy, Martinique, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Dominican Republic, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay. Likewise, passengers from the United States were repatriated via Mexico.

2.3 The procedure applied by Venezuela to authorise said humanitarian flights starts with a request by the embassy of the country interested in the repatriation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is referred to, and assessed by, the Presidential Committee for the Follow-Up, Control and Prevention of COVID-19. Following the respective analysis, the Committee approves and establishes the criteria for conducting the operation, which can be carried out through commercial, general or official aviation. Once the authorisation is obtained, the aeronautical authority provides flight details and coordinates with the operational areas involved, namely: air transport, air navigation services, facilitation, airport authority, health and migration.

2.4 To conduct these flights, the following steps are followed:

- Before embarkation in the repatriation flight, the corresponding health protocols are followed (rapid COVID-19 screening tests, temperature measurement, disinfection of passengers, crew, baggage and aircraft, distribution of face masks, among others).
- Upon arrival at national territory, the health protocol is repeated.
- Then, as part of the biosafety measures applied by Venezuela, passengers arriving in repatriation flights must comply with a mandatory quarantine period of fourteen (14) days at centres authorised by the Executive and under the control of the Ministry of Health (MPPS), during which time the State covers sustenance costs.
- Seven (7) days into the quarantine, screening tests are applied again.
- Once the quarantine is over, the rapid screening test is applied for the third time.
- If the passenger warrants being transferred to another city, the health protocols are applied again, and arrangements made with the Ministry of Transport for the transfer to the city of destination, either by air or land, for free, where they are quarantined for one week.
- Following that, they must self-quarantine at home.
- If positive in any of the rapid COVID-19 screening tests, passengers are transferred to State health centres (hospitals, integrated diagnostic centre) where the PCR test is applied, and medical treatment and free assistance provided.

Note: Citizens are monitored by the Ministry of Health all the time.

Appendix A to this working paper contains a summary of repatriation flights carried out by Venezuela, following the aforementioned procedure.

3. **SUGGESTED ACTION**

3.1 The Virtual Meeting of General Directors of Civil Aviation of the SAM States is invited to:

- a) take note of the information contained in this working paper; and
- b) encourage States to continue adopting procedures to give more flexibility to the authorisation of repatriation flights, in line with ICAO recommendations.
- c) The SAM Regional Office is invited to monitor the processes established for repatriation flights in SAM States.

- END -

APPENDIX A

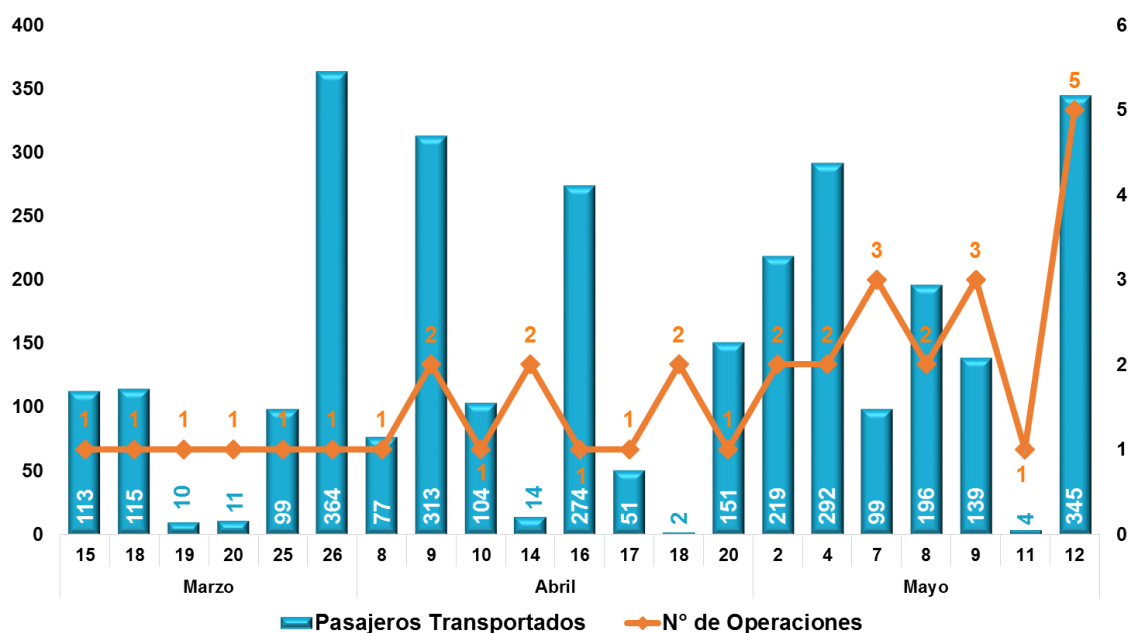
REPATRIATION FLIGHTS CONDUCTED BY VENEZUELA AS A RESULT OF COVID-19

Aware of the importance of preserving this type of air service, Venezuela is committed to continue working in coordination with the Region to ensure safe operations that protect the health of passengers and crew, without neglecting safety and civil aviation standards.

Accordingly, between March and the first half of May 2020, **thirty-five (35)** air operations have been conducted to transport **two thousand nine hundred and ninety-two (2,992)** passengers, as shown in the following graph:

Number of operations and passengers carried in repatriation flights as a result of COVID 19

March-May 2020



Source: Oficinas de Calidad de Servicio de la GGTA y Gerencia de Operaciones de la Aviación Civil
 Prepared by: Área de Trabajo de Análisis Estadístico del Transporte Aéreo. INAC. May 2020

**Number of operations and passengers carried
in repatriation flights as a result of COVID 19
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Prepared by: Área de Trabajo de Análisis Estadístico del Transporte Aéreo. INAC. Mayo 2020