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Guidance for Contingency Planning Impact of COVID-19 on Travel Document Issuers

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SUMMARY

This paper is intended to raise awareness among travel document issuers of a possibly unmanageable rapid increase of applications for passports and related documents as international travel recovers.

Suggested actions to take are included.

It was prepared by the ICAO Implementation and Capacity Building Working Group (ICAO-ICBWG).

Issuing authorities globally saw a huge reduction in applications for travel documents as COVID-19 reduced international travel. Many of these “missing” applications will likely return very quickly as international travel recovers and may lead to disruption in your service.

National measures to control the pandemic reduced the capacity of issuers to cope with the lowered demand and may leave you in a difficult position when international travel resumes.

The ICAO ICBWG therefore recommends that issuing authorities begin, or expand, preparations for a surge in travel document applications. To not prepare risks lengthy delays for customers, raw material and other supply chain shortages, and financial and other strategic consequences as the volume of applications becomes overwhelming.

How issuing authorities receive, process and issue travel documents varies greatly across the globe, but there are some common precautions to consider. National experts will be able to assess which of these are relevant as well as to develop other local responses.

SUGGESTIONS FOR BUSINESS CONTINGENCY MEASURES TO CONSIDER

- a) Alert your government that a surge in applications could happen at very short notice and may be unmanageable in the short term. This would lead to disruption for travellers, whether for vacation, business or other reason, and potentially affecting economic recovery.
- b) Understand the impact that COVID-19 has already had on application numbers. Consider what a “normal” year looks like, if you were unable to process applications during the pandemic have you built up an internal backlog, also how many applications did you not receive during pandemic. Having this data will support you in preparing your communication artifacts and during your planning activities.
- c) Do you have an understanding of how much effort it will take to process the applications for travel documents that will flow in during a surge?
- d) Do you have insight into the possible bottlenecks in the process of processing the applications for travel documents that arrive during a surge?
- e) Consider requesting access to additional resources to prepare as well to cope. This could be actual or a reserve facility to call upon when the time comes.

- f) Plan for an increase in demand for emergency travel documents needed by citizens outside of your home country. As travel restrictions are loosened, customers located abroad may be requesting renewal of their travel documents in increased numbers. Some States may choose to adopt more flexible policies on the use of emergency documents as a temporary measure, however note that ICAO **Annex 9 does not permit alteration of expiration dates or extension of validity on existing travel documents.**
- g) DO NOT plan to reduce your internal security measures or any part of the integrity of your system.
- h) Commission insight into travel intentions and/or work with the travel industry to predict when the surge will come.
- i) Prepare a communications plan to include public messaging encouraging a staggered return and that expectations for application turn-around times are realistic. Specialist media and business groups should be briefed so they can understand your situation and then amplify and support your messages. Your national airline and any travel associations may be very willing to assist you.
- j) Consider measures to pull demand forward, this could be achieved via targeting customers who's travel document has lapsed during the pandemic or through general communications.
- k) Speak to suppliers and other partners, such as municipal authorities and contractors as applicable, to agree a joint approach on coping with the surge.
- l) Arrange with your supplier sufficient stock semi-finished (chips, paper, polycarbonate) and end products to answer the need for documents.
- m) Recruit and train new staff as necessary. These may be new hires, internal transfers, or loans from other government departments, but all will need to be trained in good time and to existing national standards. Your partners may also need to recruit and train. Consider if you are able to target new staff to process less risky renewal type applications with your current staff processing higher risk applications.
- n) Acquire, or arrange for a guaranteed minimum level of, a full range supplies. These could include extra blank documents, the capacity to handle additional enquiries (whether in person, by telephone, written correspondence, or over the internet), delivery services, and additional public counter and processing space for staff should be among the measures considered.
- o) Adjust opening hours if needed to be able to process requests for travel documents.

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