Reconnecting the world
Developing roadmaps for recovery

Overview

Battling the COVID-19 crisis is the world's top priority and the airline industry is committed to the fight. At the same time, the pandemic is destroying livelihoods as well as lives; the pandemic has put more than 46 million jobs, normally supported by aviation, at risk. COVID-19 has also been catastrophic for air travel; in 2020 passenger traffic declined by 66% - by far the sharpest decline in aviation history.

As a result of increasing COVID-19 infections around the world, many governments have announced additional travel restrictions and border entry measures to add a further layer of protection to safeguard public health. These measures have been implemented rapidly and unilaterally resulting in a complex and mainly uncoordinated patchwork of restrictions globally.

Accordingly, in many countries borders are closed, and air travel is at a total standstill. Even where borders are open, the fragmented approach to restrictions and rules creates confusion for travelers and logistical challenges for airlines.

This fragmented and the increasingly severe negative impact on lives and livelihoods means that there is an urgent need for each country to develop a clear roadmap for reopening borders and reconnecting their country to the world, including managing the roll-out period where countries will be moving at different speeds depending on their access to vaccine supplies and during which it is expected that testing and vaccination will overlap. These roadmaps will need to have the flexibility to reflect the specific circumstances of individual countries yet remain founded on common principles and standards.

A multi-layered toolkit

Due to the estimated amount of time needed for global vaccine rollout, and the differing pace of vaccination in different countries, there will not be a single roadmap template. Fortunately, there are many tools available to governments to help in reopening borders and resuming international travel.

As governments consider the roadmaps to re-establishing the freedom to travel, several key elements will be considered:

- **Vaccinations:** Vaccines offer the best hope to bring an end to the devastation caused by the pandemic. Most governments are pursuing a vaccination strategy to protect their health care workers and most vulnerable populations first. IATA supports (position paper) re-opening borders to travel when this has been achieved, as the greatest public health risks will have been mitigated. Several governments have also proposed that vaccinated individuals should be immediately exempted from travel restrictions, including quarantine, and IATA welcomes these developments.

- **Vaccine harmonization:** It is important there is a globally consistent and standardized approach to minimize complexity. This is particularly critical with regard to equivalent treatment of different vaccines

and mutual recognition and acceptance of vaccination certificates. ICAO, WHO and CAPSCA are taking the lead in this development and IATA will contribute to and support the work of these organizations.

- **Testing:** Global vaccine rollout will take time, and vaccines may not be widely available in many developing economies until 2022 or even 2023. Many countries recognize that they cannot afford to keep their borders closed for that long, due to the severe consequences for their economies and the livelihoods of their citizens. Therefore, COVID testing will be required in these markets to enable borders to reopen without quarantine. Many governments are already implementing testing regimes to facilitate travel, which IATA supports. While rapid antigen tests are preferred for their speed and cost advantages, it is clear that PCR testing will play a role as many governments are requiring tests within a 48- to 72-hour window prior to travel. The OECD is laying the foundation for a global framework to help governments trust testing data based on mutual recognition of testing results. A trusted framework will ensure that travelers are not caught in the middle when governments do not recognize each other's testing regimes. Standardizing the appropriate testing certificates is also essential.

- **IATA Travel Pass:** IATA is building the information infrastructure to safely re-start travel with the IATA Travel Pass. It is an industry solution that will help governments, airlines and individual travelers manage vaccine or testing requirements with accurate information, secure identification and verified data. Pilot programs are underway with a growing number of partnerships.

- **Exemptions for aircrew:** The ICAO-CART guidance recommends that crew be exempted from testing processes and restrictions that are designed for passengers. IATA supports crew health management protocols which include, for example, regular testing and health checks at home bases, along with strict guidelines limiting interaction with the local community during crew layovers. This enables airlines to manage the risks of COVID-19 while maintaining operational viability.

- **Vaccination of Aviation Workers:** Recognizing the importance of air transport in the distribution of vaccines, IATA calls on governments to prioritize aviation workers for access to vaccination once the elderly, vulnerable groups and health workers have been vaccinated. The WHO's Roadmap for Prioritizing Uses of COVID-19 Vaccines outlines priority populations for vaccination based on epidemiologic setting and vaccine supply scenarios and includes transportation workers alongside other groups of essential and front-line workers such as, for example, police.

The measures outlined above are complementary to the measures contained within the ICAO 'Take-Off' guidance and which already provide multiple layers of protection to mitigate the risk of transmission during air travel.

Collaboration and consistency will be essential

IATA will continue to partner with governments to facilitate an efficient and effective approach to restoring global air connectivity by developing roadmaps for recovery.

For international travel it is important there is a globally consistent and standardized approach to minimize complexity. This is particularly critical with regard to equivalent treatment of different vaccines and mutual recognition and acceptance of vaccination certificates. ICAO, WHO and CAPSCA should lead on ensuring harmonization in these areas.

In developing roadmaps, governments should also look ahead to the post-pandemic phase and should set out guidance and trigger points for managing the removal of the temporary measures that have been applied to address the COVID crisis.