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Media Briefing

Lessons learned from the Pandemic

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WHO advice was to not close borders

"There is no reason for measures that unnecessarily interfere with international travel and trade. We call on all countries to implement decisions that are evidence-based and consistent."

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director General,
World Health Organization, February 2020

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- The affects of the COVID pandemic on aviation are not over, but as the pandemic recedes and aviation is on a recovery path, it is a good opportunity to reflect on the lessons of the past two years.

- When COVID-19 emerged, the WHO were clear that border restrictions were not the right approach.

- World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Ghebreyesus said: "*There is no reason for measures that unnecessarily interfere with international travel and trade. We call on all countries to implement decisions that are evidence-based and consistent.*'"

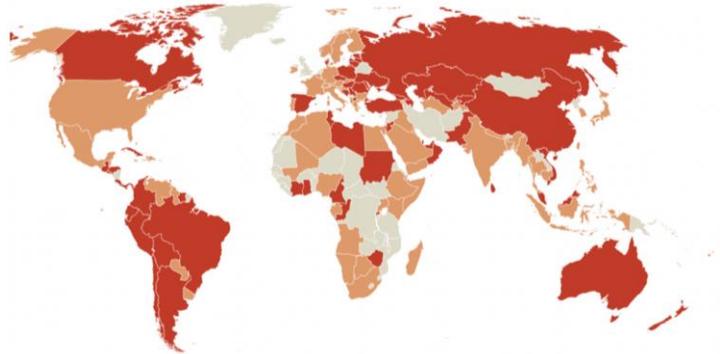# Governments put restrictions in place

Despite WHO advice, governments put restrictions in place

This map created by the Pew Center shows the restrictions in place by the end of March 2020

These measures failed to prevent the spread of COVID.

Countries with borders closed to the movement of noncitizens and nonresidents as of March 31, 2020

■ Complete closure   ■ Partial closure

- Unfortunately, governments didn't listen to the WHO. This map shows the border restrictions in force at the end of March 2020. Some 93% of the world's population were impacted by restrictions.

- This pattern continued for almost the following two years. Even in January of this year, some 100,000 different measures affecting international travel were in place.

- The result was a devastating economic blow. Not just to the millions directly employed by aviation, but to the millions more in aviation-supported industries such as tourism. And to wider supply chains and other business sectors that rely on the swift movement of people and goods across borders.

- So, we must never again find ourselves in a situation where borders are closed by governments in the face of advice and all the prevailing evidence. Lessons must be learned.

Lesson One: Border measures are not an effective global strategy for COVID

New evidence from OXERA/Edge Health showed the futility of border restrictions.

Even if restrictions are imposed immediately on identification of a new variant, it only prevents peak infections by a few days

Oxera/Edge Health model of Omicron infection spread in Italy
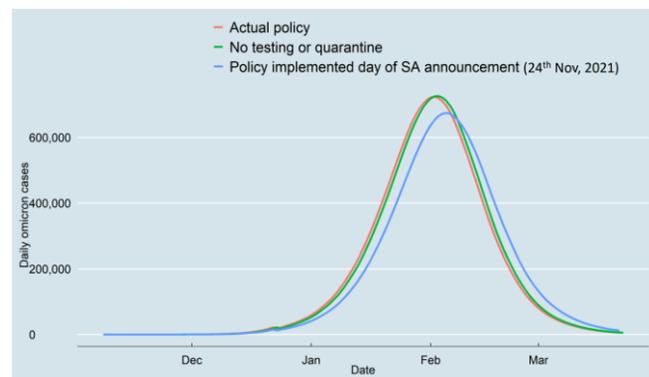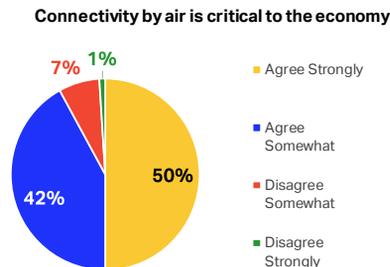

- Lesson number 1: the evidence shows that border measures are not an effective global strategy to control COVID

- The WHO's advice not to close borders comes from years of experience. But this was backed by new evidence that emerged during the pandemic.

- Research from OXERA/Edge Health during the emergence of the Omicron variant revealed the futility of border restrictions.

- In the case of a new variant being discovered and border restrictions being implemented immediately, this delayed the peak of infections by just four days.

- In the – far more likely - case that border restrictions would come in a week after a new variant was discovered, this would delay the peak by just two days, and in some cases by no difference at all.

- So there is very little justification for continuing with border restrictions at this point. The virus is endemic and efforts should be focused on domestic measures to protect and care for the most vulnerable.

Lesson two: balance measures with social and economic impacts

The economic impacts of the pandemic shutdown of aviation were considerable

Around 44 million jobs and $1.7 trillion in GDP were affected

The public instinctively understand the economic importance: 93% agree that air connectivity is critical to the economy

Connectivity by air is critical to the economy

- Agree Strongly
- Agree Somewhat
- Disagree Somewhat
- Disagree Strongly

7% 1%
42% 50%

Source: IATA passenger survey

|	World
Employment supported	
Pre-Covid	87.7 m
Post-Covid (end 2021)	43.8 m
% change	**-50%**
Economic activity supported	
Pre-Covid	$3.5 trillion
Post-Covid (end 2021)	$1.8 trillion
% change	**-49%**

Source: Air Transport Action Group

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- Lesson number two: governments should balance health measures with economic and social impacts'
- The evidence for border restrictions is shaky. The evidence for the economic and social benefits of air connectivity is incontrovertible.
- Politicians therefore cannot ignore these benefits when weighing up the need for health-related travel restrictions.
- In 2019, aviation supported nearly 90 million jobs and $3.5 trillion in global GDP. By the end of 2021 those supported jobs were down to less than 44 million. I already touched on the huge social damage that was caused, and many of these impacts may not be completely understood for years.
- But the public instinctively understands. Throughout the pandemic, we have polled travelers to hear their opinions on travel, COVID, the environment, and other matters.
- An incredible 92% of those polled agree either "strongly" or "somewhat" that air connectivity is "critical" for the economy. Professional pollsters will tell you, getting 92% of people to agree on anything these days is an extraordinary feat.
- So politicians would do well to understand better the economic importance of keeping travel and transport open. That would lead to a more flexible and nuanced approach towards restrictions.
- But we're keen governments don't just take our word, or the opinions of the public, or the economic facts into account. We would support independent research into this.
- What we need is strong evidence on the importance of balancing health measures with the social and economic benefits of air connectivity, with a view to agreeing a set of

global recommendations for handling future health crises.

There are still barriers to travel even today

Although most major restrictions have been removed and the world is increasingly open, governments are still making travel unnecessarily difficult.

Complicated paperwork, COVID testing and mask-wearing are still common for travel despite these requirements being lifted in domestic settings.
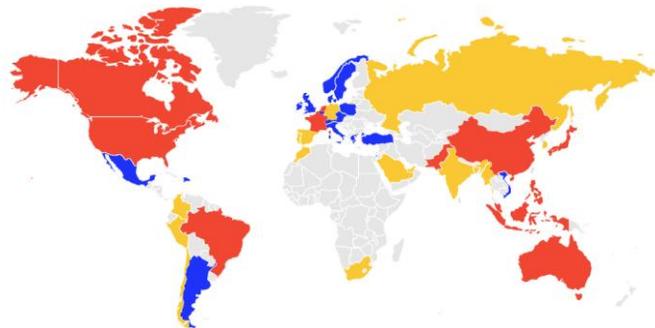
Map of top 50 aviation markets (Source: IATA)
Red – 16 states still imposing significant entry restrictions and/or quarantine
Yellow – 15 states, largely lifted restrictions but some measures still in place for non-vaccinated passengers
Blue – 19 states lifted all travel restrictions & border measures

- Although most major restrictions such as total closures and quarantines have been removed and the world is increasingly open, governments are still making travel unnecessarily difficult.

- Restrictions such as complicated paperwork, COVID testing and mask-wearing are still commonplace for travel despite these requirements having been lifted in domestic life.

- Our analysis of the top 50 passenger markets—which comprise 89% of 2019 global demand—shows 17 of those states still impose significant entry restrictions and/or quarantine measures.

- The third and final lesson for governments is that traveler confidence requires logical rules and clear communication
- We're seeing an uneven and poorly-coordinated recovery from COVID. That's partly because of the border restrictions and travel rules I mentioned earlier. But its also because of the illogical stop-start nature of the rules that have been in place throughout the pandemic.
- Frankly, public confidence has been damaged by arbitrary rules and poor or contradictory information.
- I already mentioned that 100,000 different measures were in place at the start of the year. Well, it's no surprise that navigating this fragmented system has been confusing and caused major operational complexities for carriers.
- Our passenger survey shows why it is important that governments adopt a consistent approach to travel rules. 59% of people still report that "understanding the rules was a real challenge", 57% that "paperwork was a challenge to arrange", and 56% that "the travel experience was much less convenient".
- So how can governments generate greater confidence in the predictability of travel? We would suggest:
  - That they adopt guidance for how public health measures, once introduced, will be scaled back or removed. Sunset clauses, for example, would generate an automatic review process
  - If additional travel bureaucracy and paperwork is required, focus on digitizing it and making it as simple as possible. Agreeing common standards and mutually-recognizing similar systems in other states would also speed up adoption and understanding.

In summary

Governments should heed the three lessons from the pandemic

1. **Border measures ineffective** for global anti-COVID strategy
2. **Economic and social impacts** must be taken into greater account
3. **Logical rules** and **good communications** are key to retaining public confidence
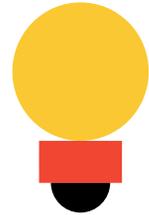
We need **independent research** into the effectiveness of policies which balance health measures with the social and economic benefits of air connectivity, with a view to agreeing a set of global recommendations for handling future health crises.

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- We've set out three lessons that we believe will help to guide governments when the next health crisis emerges.

- One concrete action that could begin at once is for independent research to be undertaken into the effectiveness of policies which balance health measures with the social and economic benefits of air connectivity, with a view to agreeing a set of global recommendations for handling future health crises.

- As the world emerges from COVID and remaining travel restrictions are removed, hopefully very soon, we will return to a situation where our greatest concerns will focus on the sustainable growth of global connectivity.

- But that cannot mean that we forget the lessons we've learned, nor the awful impact of what a world closed to travel was like.

- It is likely there will be more global health threats. Applying these lessons to future crises is the best way to ensure that the sacrifices made by millions of people were not made in vain.

- Thank you.