

## Call for safe reopening of air services in Africa

The International Air Transport Association (IATA), Airports Council International- Africa (ACI Africa) and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Regional Offices for African States have united to call on governments in Africa to rapidly implement ICAO's global guideline for restoring air connectivity to ensure the safe and harmonised restart of aviation in the region



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These guidelines are contained in Takeoff: Guidance for Air Travel through the COVID-19 Public Health Crisis, which was approved by the ICAO Council. They have also been adopted into the African Union's Restart and Recovery Strategies during and after COVID-19 for the African Aviation Sector.

"Developed based on the latest medical evidence and consistent with health best practices the ICAO Takeoff guidance provides governments with a framework for restarting aviation while protecting public health. Governments in Africa are encouraged to implement the guidance urgently and in a harmonised and mutually recognised way to allow aviation to safely start contributing to Africa's economic recovery post-Covid-19. Air connectivity is critical to economic and sustainable development in and across the continent," said Barry Kashambo, regional director, ESAF speaking on behalf of the ICAO Regional Offices accredited to African States.

"ICAO's Take-off guidance is a global way forward for aviation. Implementation should give governments the confidence to open borders without quarantine, and passengers the confidence to fly. But guidelines mean nothing if they are not implemented. And that is our main message to governments in Africa.

"Deviations from the guidance and mandatory approaches, especially on quarantine and social distancing, will damage public confidence, make it harder to operate effectively, slow down the industry restart and increase the economic pressures already created by COVID-19. This would be harmful to public health at the economic recovery," said Muhammad Albakri, IATA's Regional Vice President for Africa and the Middle East.

“Safety and security remain the industry’s main priority, and both are firmly entrenched into every airport’s operations and corporate culture. Building on this track record, the ICAO Take-off guidance is fully aligned with our industry’s focus on passenger and staff wellbeing. We, therefore, urge African States to urgently adopt these guidelines so that we can ensure the implementation of consistent, harmonised and effective measures across the region, a prerequisite for passengers to return to air travel in all confidence, and for the swift restoration of air connectivity for the sustainable recovery of the travel, business and tourism sectors the continent,” said Ali Tounsi secretary-general, ACI Africa.

## **Effect of Covid-19 on aviation in Africa**

Covid-19 has crippled the air transport industry in Africa. Demand is forecast to fall by 58.5% in 2020 year on-year – the largest drop of all the regions. Airlines in the region are expected to post a net loss of \$2bn this year as passenger revenues decline by over \$6bn compared to the previous year. Concurrently, African airports are expected to lose 51% of their revenues in 2020, i.e., around \$2.2bn. Job losses in aviation and related industries in the region could reach 3.1 million and GDP supported by aviation could fall by \$28 billion. Before the Covid-19 crisis, aviation supported 6.2 million jobs in the region and generated \$55.8bn GDP.

## **A layered and phased approach**

The ICAO Guidance proposes a layered and phased approach to restarting aviation and identifies a set of generally applicable risk-based measures. In line with recommendations and guidance from public health authorities, these will mitigate the risk of transmission of the Covid-19 virus during the travel process.

### **Measures include:**

- Physical distancing to the extent feasible and implementation of “adequate risk-based measures where distancing is not feasible, for example in aircraft cabins”,
- Wearing of face coverings and masks by passengers and aviation workers;
- Routine sanitation and disinfection of all areas with potential for human contact and transmission;
- Health screening, which could include pre- and post-flight self-declarations, as well as temperature screening and visual observation, “conducted by health professionals”;
- Contact tracing for passengers and aviation employees: updated contact information should be requested as part of the health self-declaration, and interaction between passengers and governments should be made directly through government portals;
- Passenger health declaration forms, including self-declarations in line with the recommendations of relevant health authorities. Electronic tools should be encouraged to avoid paper;
- Testing: if and when real-time, rapid and reliable testing becomes available.

The organisations are also urging states to identify every opportunity where travel restrictions could be lifted through bilateral or multilateral arrangements among countries - as soon as the epidemiological situation allows for it.

## **Supporting the restart of the industry**

ICAO, IATA and ACI Africa also pledged their commitment to providing support to industry stakeholders in the region to help ensure implementation and compliance with the recommended ICAO Take-off guidance. This includes the development of more detailed operational procedures in four specific areas – Airport, Aircraft, Crew and Cargo - based on the Take-off guidance.

"Restarting international connectivity safely while ensuring that aviation is not a meaningful source for the spread of Covid-19 is not an option but a must. Aviation is facing the biggest challenge of its history; we need all hands on deck to get the industry up and running again and we are committed to making the journey as seamless and risk-free as possible.

"We will collaborate with and support states to implement these guidelines in the fastest and most efficient way and encourage governments and other industry stakeholders to reach out to us for support," said Albakri.

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