

High-Level Meeting on Safe International Travel

Ibiza, Spain, 7-8 July 2022

Chair's Summary

1. Ministers and Representatives of State, Government and international organizations met in Ibiza on 7-8 July 2022 to discuss and identify areas where action could be taken to accelerate safe international travel, to facilitate and sustain the return to pre-pandemic levels of cross-border travel, and improve preparedness against future global crises. The meeting was chaired by Ms. María Reyes Maroto Illera, the Minister for Industry, Trade and Tourism of Spain. This document reflects the chair's assessment of the issues discussed by Ministers and other participants.
2. Although Russia was not invited to the meeting, the issues discussed were of relevance to all countries. A number of countries expressed deep concern about Russia's unjustifiable, unprovoked and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, which is a flagrant violation of international law that shakes the very foundation of the international order. Any unilateral attempts to change it and redraw internationally recognised borders by force or by other means is unacceptable. Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine is affecting people in all corners of the world. Countries that have been struggling to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic now face further challenges to food and nutrition security, energy, commodity prices and public finances. These impacts are caused by the Russian war of aggression and are wholly avoidable. Participants called on Russia to immediately cease all hostile and provocative actions against Ukraine, withdraw all military and proxy forces from the country, and turn to good-faith diplomacy and dialogue in order to bring a peaceful end to its ongoing war as soon as possible. Participants stand in solidarity with Ukraine.
3. Participants in the meeting and preparatory sessions praised and supported the efforts by the Indonesian G20 Presidency to raise the issue of coordinating health protocols for travel as one of the key subjects to be tackled by all countries as part of the Health Working Group. They also acknowledged the need for international organisations to join forces to ensure a more coordinated and resilient international travel environment, and recognised the strategic leadership the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) play in this matter.
4. The meeting recognised the role travel restrictions have played in containing the spread of COVID-19 in some situations, but there was recognition that the recovery of cross-border travel would require easing and lifting COVID-related travel restrictions as much as possible, while protecting public health with the ultimate goal of removing all COVID-related travel restrictions if and when the public health situation permits.
5. Participants recognised the persistence of the current health crisis, the high probability of an endemic state for COVID-19 in the near future and the necessity to build more sustainable and resilient international mobility systems to improve preparedness against future global health crises. Taking forward the lessons from COVID-19, this implies improving the coordination mechanisms on health and international mobility at national and international levels, taking into account and strengthening existing provisions such as the International

Health Regulations (IHR) and the ongoing work of the intergovernmental negotiation body to draft and negotiate a WHO convention, agreement or other international instrument on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response.

6. Participants recalled how, faced with rising levels of COVID-19 infection and mortality rates, which placed huge pressures on health services, countries introduced a range of measures, including travel restrictions¹, which they considered necessary at the time, to contain or slow the spread of the virus.
7. Participants recalled how the economic consequences of these, and other, decisions were wide ranging and deep. At the height of the pandemic, in 2020, the global economy fell by 4.2%², with a considerable contribution to this decrease from the travel and tourism sector. Although many economies have subsequently recovered, the social and macroeconomic impact of restricting international mobility will take a long time to be fully resolved as show by the fact that the economic contribution of tourism in 2021 (measured in tourism direct gross domestic product) is estimated at US\$2.1 trillion, above the US\$1.6 trillion in 2020, but still well below the pre-pandemic value of US\$ 3.5 trillion³. In particular, Ministers took note of the fact that countries with the largest travel and tourism sectors and greater travel and tourism exposure experienced the largest economic impact, with severe implications for national economies and societies. In 2020, for each additional percentage point of GDP that travel and tourism contributed to national economies in 2019, their GDP contracted by 0.3%.
8. Participants acknowledged the uneven pace of recovery and the positive impact on restoring mobility of easing travel restrictions. The number of international arrivals in the first quarter of 2022 remained 61% below pre-pandemic levels⁴. However, given that different countries are in different levels of easing COVID-19 related travel restrictions⁵, there remains a large variation in recovery levels of cross border travels between regions. Europe – in particular Southern and Mediterranean Europe – have seen the strongest recovery (43 % and 27 % below pre-pandemic levels, respectively, in Q1 2022 and sustained in the subsequent months), while the Asia and the Pacific region has recorded the largest decrease in international arrivals over 2019 (93 %). Participants remained determined to work together to ensure that international travel is safe, seamless and sustainable for residents, visitors and workers, in order to stimulate further development and foster resilience in the tourism and travel sector.
9. Participants were determined to work to step up the necessary measures and coordination mechanisms that advance the preparedness for future health threats either from new variants

¹ As of 28 April 2020, 100% of all worldwide destinations had introduced travel restrictions in response to the pandemic and completely or partially closed their borders to tourists (source: 2nd Report UNWTO COVID - 19 Related Travel Restrictions A Global Review For Tourism, 28 April 2020 <https://webunwto.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2020-04/TravelRestrictions%20-%2028%20April.pdf>)

² <https://doi.org/10.1787/39a88ab1-en>

³ World Tourism Organization (2022), UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, volume 20, issue 3, May 2022, UNWTO, Madrid, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18111/wtobarometereng>.

⁴ UNWTO 2022: Tourism grows amidst uncertainty. TOURISM NEWS #41 <https://www.unwto.org/un-tourism-news-41-tourism-grows-amidst-uncertainty>. Madrid, 31 March 2022.

⁵ As of 28 June, 54 countries had removed all COVID-19 related travel restrictions - World Tourism Organization and International Air Transport Association (n.d.), UNWTO/IATA Destination Tracker, dashboard constantly updated, UNWTO, Madrid, online available at: <https://www.unwto.org/tourism-data/unwto-iata-destination-tracker> [23-06-2022].

of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, or from new health emergencies; and in doing so they will seek to protect public health, while ensuring the social and economic impacts are minimised. In the context of international travel, participants identified a number of issues where improved coordination would be required in order to make international travel safer and easier for travellers.

10. The meeting therefore committed to recognise a set of common principles and procedures. The meeting focused on the following issues: interoperability of digital systems for health certificates recognition among different international approaches for demonstrating vaccination and testing status; responding to new variants of concern by ensuring coordinated, evidence-informed and risk-based approaches to travel regulations; the development of a coordinated set of risk-based criteria for international mobility; and how such criteria might evolve for use in future pandemics to promote appropriate health measures for travel and advance consistency in policies on international travel. Improving these issues will depend upon a healthy global data ecosystem, strong data sharing partnerships and enhanced governance, supported by a clear coordination mechanism, articulation of how data is leveraged to support public health decision-making and protected to ensure the privacy and human rights of all citizens.
11. In working towards a framework that ensures a safe, adaptable and seamless travel environment, the meeting identified a wide range of factors, such as public health goals, countries' logistical, technological and infrastructure capacities, and legal-ethical concerns that should be taken into account by policymakers. In this regard, participants welcomed the efforts undertaken by multiple international organisations, including the EU Digital COVID Certificate, which is currently being used by more than 70 countries, the ICAO Visible Digital Seal (VDS), the WHO guidance on safe international travel and Digital Documentation for COVID certificates, the OECD Blueprint for Safe International Mobility, the ICAO Council's Aviation Recovery Task Force (CART) initiative, the Vaccination Credential Initiative (VCI), the UNWTO International Code for the Protection of Tourists and other efforts, including non-digital options.
12. Vaccination, test and recovery certificates for COVID-19 are instruments currently being used by some countries to control international border entry and, to a lesser extent, domestic access to specific venues and services with higher risk of transmission. Participants acknowledged the role of such methods in a risk-based approach, but called for countries to ease such measures as soon as the overall situation allows and for a more comprehensive and coordinated approach among countries to achieve a more harmonized and resilient global travel environment.
13. Participants also recognised the need to promote a set of high-level principles to guide policies and practices supportive of the continuing and seamless recovery, and better preparedness and resilience of international mobility,⁶ of which they highlighted:
 - a. *Risk-based approach*: to ensure a sustainable reopening of international mobility, evidence-based, appropriate and balanced measures to mitigate the risk of COVID-19

⁶ Some of the policies and practices inspired by these principles include, for example, improvement of countries' capacities in managing cases among travellers, or increasing travellers' awareness on hygiene precautions and adherence to rules.

transmission and restore public and travellers' confidence should be considered a priority now and in future health crisis;

- b. *Reliance on scientific evidence and consideration of the epidemiological situation*: the reliance on scientific expertise as the main source of evidence-based policymaking is particularly important, as the need to build a future-proof and swiftly adaptable framework becomes urgent with the emergence of potential variants of concern and/or new public health challenges;
- c. *Equity and inclusion of travellers and essential transport personnel*: measures taken by countries to develop and implement systems to verify health credentials should take into account the different vaccination and recovery certificate formats as well as the technological, testing and vaccination capacities of other nations (including other factors such as language, educational and age of travellers) to avoid imposing discriminatory barriers on international mobility, including ensuring that participants in vaccine clinical trials and passengers with medical exemptions are not unfairly disadvantaged, as well as ensuring that air, maritime and land crews are not imposed unnecessary burdens and barriers to their work, including through exemptions, to avoid impacts on critical continued aviation, maritime and land transport operations⁷;
- d. *Privacy-by-design and data collection transparency*: in accordance with article 45 of the International Health Regulations (2005), any method of passenger health status verification should adhere to the principle of data minimization;
- e. *Multilateral engagement*: the need for a continuous sharing of epidemiological information and mutual efforts between countries to recognise different testing methods vaccine manufacturers and foreign recovery certificates as valid health status certifiers when supported by clear scientific evidence and authorized in the country of destination.

Interoperability of digital systems for vaccine certificate accreditation

14. There was consensus that an interoperable, flexible and pragmatic approach to the adoption of vaccination, recovery and testing certificates as an instrument to improve the safe and seamless recovery of international travel is vital. Participants strongly highlighted that these certificates must be accepted in both digital and non-digital formats in order to guarantee comprehensive accessibility and equity in international travel (i.e. either through smartphone applications or in paper formats).
15. Participants recognised the need to ensure reading and processing of health certificates between countries' border authorities, flexibility in terms of the health regulations in place and the ability for them to be swiftly and conveniently modified and complied with in accordance with changing epidemiological contexts. With these issues in mind, participants therefore acknowledged the benefits presented by digitally verifiable systems, and welcomed initiatives to increase availability of such systems. The meeting noted that initiatives are currently implemented in several countries with different levels of technological capabilities

⁷ In addition, the need to guarantee the international protection of tourists, especially in the context of emergency situations, and also including guidelines in respect to consumer rights was also acknowledged by participants as a relevant factor to be considered.

and available in open-source solutions for other nations to implement. The meeting noted that the sharing of technological expertise from countries and regions with more advanced systems is paramount to ensure comprehensive adherence to digitally verifiable instruments. In that context, the meeting called for increased cooperation and assistance from technically advanced jurisdictions.

16. In order to ensure seamless and functional interoperability between different types of certificates, participants encouraged countries to work towards technological solutions that promote recognition in line with legal provisions applicable across countries of different types of interoperable certificates, which could also include the establishment of a system of systems, i.e. a global directory of trusted digital services and a trust network federator that facilitates trust across certificates' formats and their implementations. Participants noted with appreciation the noteworthy experiences of the EU Digital COVID certificate, the ICAO VDS, VCI-HL7 SMART Health Cards, the DIVOC platform, among others, and encouraged the development of a global network which builds interoperability between these systems and other digital vaccination credentials. Furthermore, participants took note with appreciation of the decisive efforts and leadership from the G20 Chair Indonesia in pursuance of promoting comprehensive international health related mobility policies, such as through the G20 Pilot for interoperability of vaccination certificates.

Responding to New Variants of Concern

17. The emergence of variants of concern (VoCs) of COVID-19 poses a major challenge for countries to balance appropriate, evidence-informed and risk-based containment measures with precautionary actions when faced with the unknown epidemiological characteristics of a new variant. Participants noted that VoCs can result in radical changes in public health protocols due to possible limitations on vaccines' effectiveness and their potentially increased transmissibility and/or mortality rates. Nevertheless, the meeting acknowledged that blanket travel bans towards countries where new VoCs were first reported have generated further challenges to global health efforts by discouraging active and cooperative reporting of new VoCs from national health authorities, and may have also generated additional economic burdens. Although participants recognise the importance of limiting to the maximum extent possible the use of blanket travel restrictions, this measure is understandable in some cases as a precautionary public health instrument.
18. In such cases, participants recommended that countries implement relevant modifications of health guidelines for international travel in accordance with the following principles:
 - a. Transparency to travellers, private stakeholders and other countries on the measures taken and their epidemiological and/or public health justifications;
 - b. Continuous evaluation by public health authorities of the measures' appropriateness, effectiveness and adherence to epidemiological and/or public health justifications, with a view to lift measures as soon as possible;
 - c. Continuous cooperation, support and exchange of scientific information with the national health authority or authorities that first reported the new VoC.

Development of a coordinated set of risk-based criteria for international mobility during the COVID-19 pandemic

19. A risk-based approach to international mobility during the COVID-19 pandemic relies strongly on a set of health procedures that are applied in a context-specific manner to facilitate a safe environment for travellers and reduce, as appropriate, the importation, further transmission and exportation of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and its impact on health systems. The approach should establish a clear set of guidance in relation to specific border measures that apply to the COVID-19 virus, i.e. the assessment of health status through vaccines, testing and recovery certificates and, where justified by the overall situation, the determination of possible quarantine and isolation periods. As raised by the Indonesian G20 Presidency, the standardising of such protocols is a major necessary step to ensure a truly seamless mobility of passengers between countries.
20. Countries attending the HLM recognised how constantly changing and uncoordinated travel protocols for health status verification have not always been effective in stopping the spread of COVID-19, but created substantial confusion for travellers, travel companies and border authorities, which ultimately limits the economic recovery of the affected sectors and creates setbacks in terms of compliance with such regulations. Delegates also emphasized that countries need to build upon identified lessons in the future, called for improved coordination and underlined that stronger mechanisms must be implemented in order to increase resiliency in international travel for the next health crises. Furthermore, participants in the HLM recognised that international travel guidelines for future pandemics should be as coordinated as possible and countries should strive to maximise maintaining guidelines internationally harmonised. They also agreed on the need to ensure transparent, reliable and updated information to travellers on existing travel regulations.
21. Participants acknowledged the challenges in accessibility that may occur in the utilisation of health certificates by users with disabilities. Therefore, they stressed that all digital and non-digital solutions related to health certificates as well as all travel regulations information and implementation should include features that ensure they are fully accessible.
22. Participants acknowledged that there should be specific measures for workers designated as “key workers” in accordance with national legislation, in order to facilitate their safe and unhindered movement across borders, also in observation to each countries’ laws, recognizing relevant documentation carried by them as evidence of this status, which might entail the application of temporary measures including (where possible under relevant law) waivers or exemptions from any visa or documentary requirements, as appropriate⁸.

How guidelines might evolve for use in future pandemics

23. Finally, participants were committed to promoting the issues and policies raised during this HLM not only in the context of the current pandemic, but also as necessary steps to ensure a more resilient global health and international mobility systems aimed at responding more efficiently to future health emergencies. In that sense, the meeting reiterated the need to maintain vigilance, to continue surveillance of and widely share information on communicable

⁸ Some participants to the HLM also noted the necessity of including recommendations concerning the guarantee of access of travellers to their respective national consulate in countries in the context of lockdown measures.

diseases and sequencing, conducting risk assessments and applying where possible evidence-based measures as situations change.

24. Countries were also supportive of further multilateral efforts to implement the proposed technical guidelines and recommendations in other existing instruments of health status verification, such as the WHO's International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis (ICVP) and the International Patient Summary (IPS) being advanced by the Global Digital Health Partnership. In particular, countries noted how progress derived from this HLM and relevant G20 meetings concerning technical characteristics and increased digitalisation of personal health information can stimulate a central element of the resilience cycle: adapting systems to future shocks. Therefore, participants stressed that the adverse social and economic effects of future health crises should be minimised by directing efforts to learn from the crisis, build upon and reinforce the effectiveness of the instruments that have supported countries during the COVID-19 pandemic.
25. The meeting participants also noted that the WHO, in the context health emergency situations, advises that travel should only take place in essential circumstances. Participants also drew attention to the relevant WHO guidance on this issue.

Next Steps

26. In conclusion, participants encouraged the G20 Presidency, supported by key stakeholders such as the OECD, the WHO, ICAO and the UNWTO to take forward work to address the issues identified in this meeting, taking into account other relevant initiatives being carried out in the G20 process.

Ibiza, 8 July 2022

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