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Introducing a Global Covid Travel Pass to Get the World Moving Again

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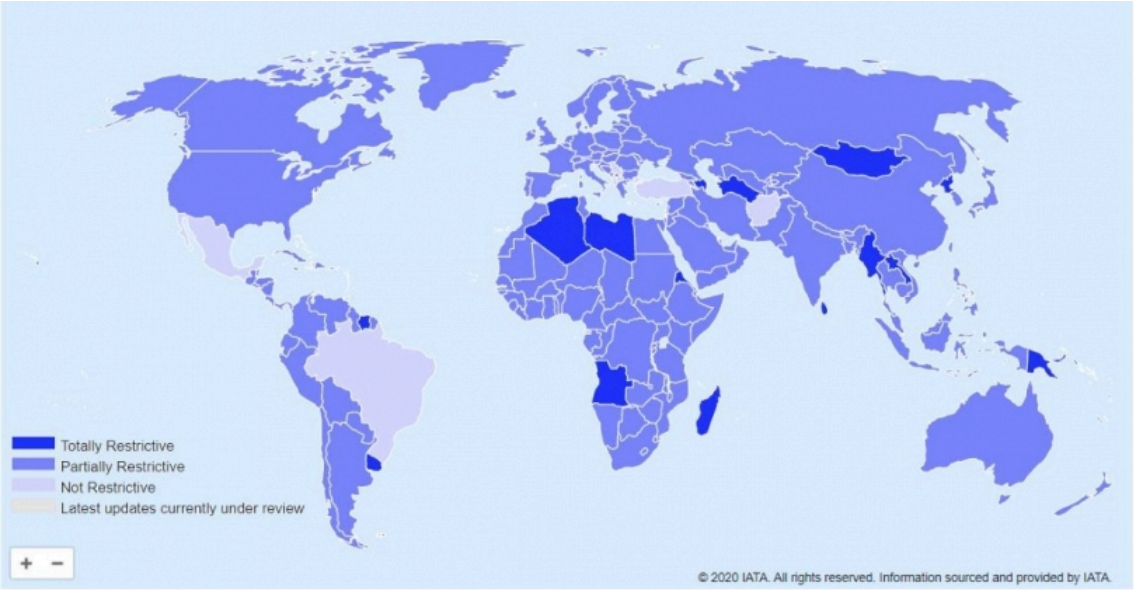
Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic and the ensuing lockdowns and travel bans have led to the most profound de-connecting of society since the Second World War.¹ Reconnecting the world, by means of reopening international travel, is going to require a coordinated effort that manages the risks of Covid-19 and offers uniform standards on testing and vaccines across borders.

The emergence of several new strains of Covid-19, specifically the strains out of Kent, South Africa and Brazil, have added an additional dimension to discussions surrounding the reopening of global travel. The fact that Covid-19 mutates is not unique – all viruses do – but this virus’s mutations have included some which are much more transmissible and could potentially elude vaccines in the future.

In response to these new strains, the UK has introduced its strictest quarantine measures of the pandemic, including the recent reports that some inbound travellers will need to quarantine at a hotel for ten days upon arrival. It is important that the government has a plan to implement an effective process for lifting these restrictions and reenabling safe international travel as soon as possible. To facilitate this, an international Covid Pass is inevitable. In some instances travel passes are already a reality, and when they are absent – such as the disruption caused to hauliers crossing the English Channel in December 2020 after France temporarily closed its border – we have seen the human and economic consequences. The UK faces a choice: lead or be led. If we choose to wait, a confusing array of different passports await our citizens. We can avoid this and the complications of multiple passes and varying travel requirements if the UK takes the lead on developing a single, global Covid Pass. In the year of the UK’s G7 presidency, there has never been a more momentous opportunity – or need – for the government to show global leadership. This paper sets out recommendations on what that would look like.

Figure 1 – Global Covid-19 travel regulations by country

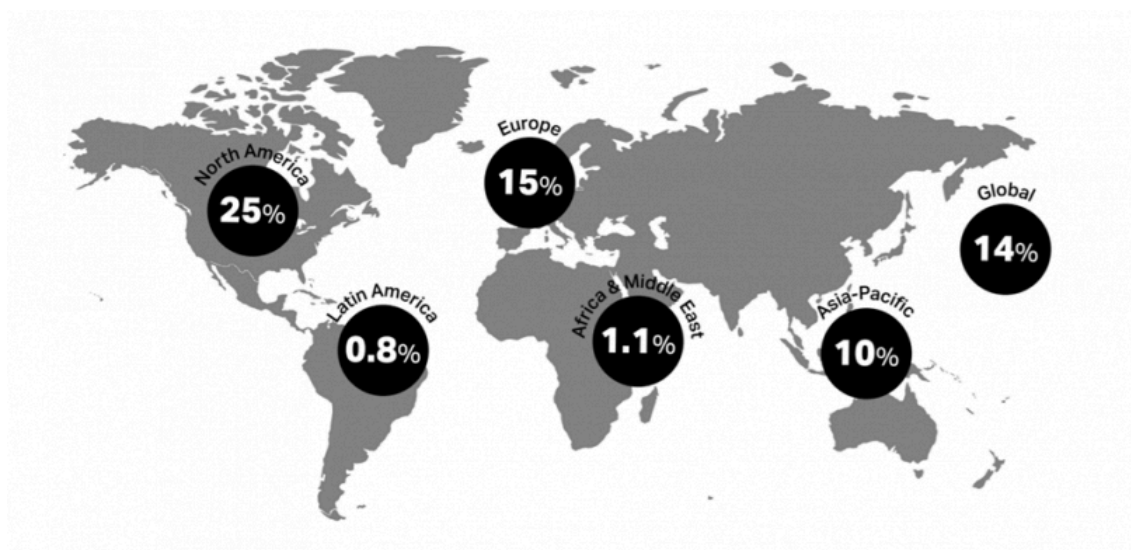


The Impact of Covid on Global Travel

Global travel decreased dramatically in 2020, causing the airline industry to incur a \$118.5 billion (£87 billion) net loss for the year.² The World Tourism Organization reported that every country in the world had imposed some form of Covid-19-related travel restrictions by April 2020, which resulted in the most extensive travel restrictions in history.³ These restrictions ranged from border closures and flight suspensions to quarantine and self-isolation requirements for travellers. More recently, passengers have been required to show proof of negative Covid-19 test results upon arrival in most countries.

Last year, passenger airline traffic was reduced to 1999 levels, which not only impacted the travel industry but tourism as well. Travel and tourism account for more than 10 per cent of global GDP⁴, and estimates from the UN Conference on Trade and Development suggest that the world's tourism sector will lose value worth 1.6 to 2.8 per cent of global GDP as a result of the pandemic.⁵

Figure 2 – Government financial aid as a percentage of 2019 airline industry revenues



Source: IATA Annual Review 2020

Government financial aid to airlines due to Covid-19 now totals \$123 billion worldwide, ranging from 0.8 per cent of industry revenues in South America to 25 per cent in North America. Financial aid of this kind is likely to be unsustainable going into 2021 as pressures on the Treasury increase, and as 55 per cent (\$67 billion) of the government aid to airlines lands them with more debt for the future. The airline industry, supported by bodies such as International Air Transport Association (IATA), have put forward

proposals to recommence wider air travel safely and efficiently. With government aid drying up and without a distinct increase in passenger numbers, 2021 could see a record number of airlines collapse, taking thousands of jobs with them.⁶

Despite the government issuing a warning to Brits that it's too early to book overseas holidays, demand for travel is currently still high. While this could be impacted by further developments on mutations of the virus and/or UK travel requirements, bookings for this summer with easyJet holidays are up 250 per cent on last year. EasyJet CEO Johan Lundgren told the BBC, "We know there is pent-up demand – we have seen that every time restrictions have been relaxed, and so we know that people want to go on holiday as soon as they can."⁷ The UK airline industry is traditionally strong, with the third largest aviation network in the world.⁸ Its success is the bedrock of the whole UK travel and tourism sector.

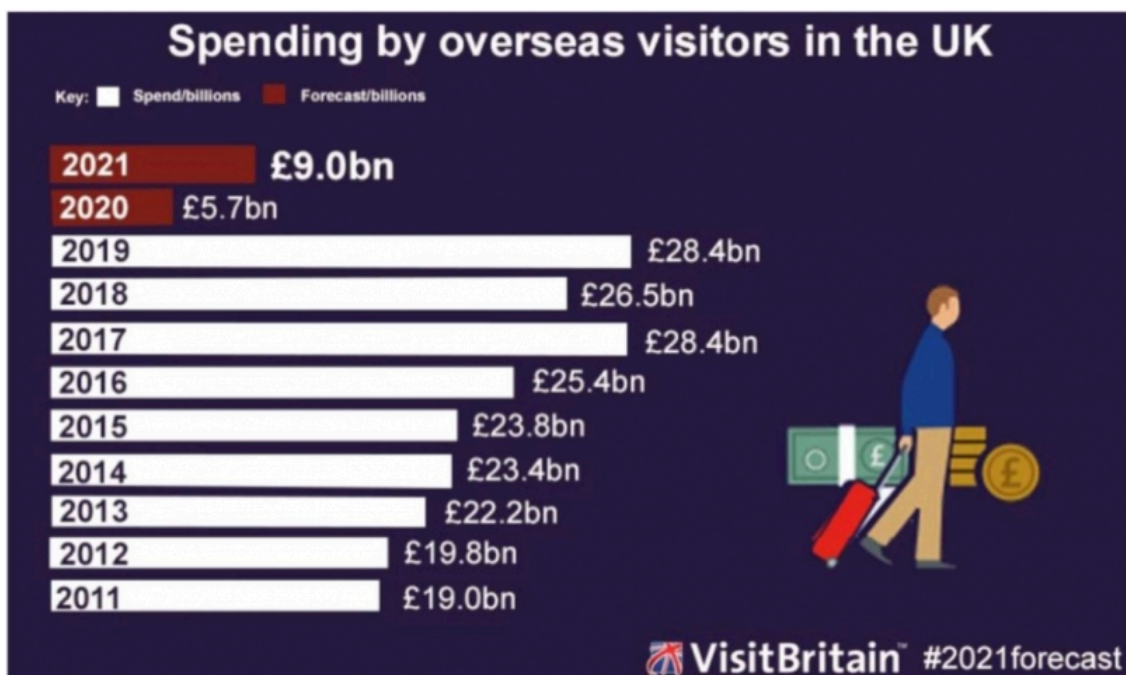
The Impact on the UK's Travel and Tourism Sectors

Tourism and travel to and within the UK have been affected as well. The number of passengers at Heathrow Airport was just 22 million in 2020 – a sharp decline of 73 per cent from the previous year. Travel from Heathrow to North America, a vital route for both tourism and business, was hardest hit with passenger numbers one-fifth of normal levels. In 2019, passengers from the US accounted for 12 per cent of all inbound visitors to the UK and spent £3.8 billion in the UK during that year.⁹

A report published in September 2020 – which was jointly commissioned by Airlines UK, International Airlines Group, Heathrow Airport Limited and Collinson Group – detailed the daily cost to the UK economy caused by the lack of an air link to the US.¹⁰ The report found that:

- £121 billion in UK exports and £417 billion in foreign direct investment were at risk when the air link was closed between the UK and one of its most important trading partners.
- £3.5 billion was lost from American tourism and business travellers, which has had a major impact on the restaurant, hospitality and retail sectors, jeopardising thousands of jobs.

Figure 3 – VisitBritain infographic showing spending by overseas visitors in the UK since 2011



Source: [VisitBritain](#)

Travel within the UK has slowed as well, with domestic passenger levels at 30 per cent of normal numbers. In October it was estimated that foreign tourist spending in London was set to drop £7.4 billion in 2020, according to the mayor's office, with domestic tourism falling by £3.5 billion.¹¹ Tourism accounts for almost 12 per cent of London's GDP. Other cities, where hospitality makes up a significant proportion of the economy, have also been affected by the decrease in both global and domestic travel. For example, with 4.8 million overnight visits and 59 million day visits, tourism is worth £4.5 billion to Manchester's economy and secures 50,440 jobs across the city.¹²

The Economic Value of Outbound Travel to the UK

Outbound tourism is often represented as making a negative impact on the UK's trade deficit versus domestic or inbound tourism. Findings from studies, however, show that holidaymakers spend an average of £532 per person, equivalent to £31.2 billion annually, in the UK on products and services before they depart for their holidays overseas, from spend with travel agents to clothes, accessories and toiletries. Nearly £1.8 billion is spent in the UK on duty-free shopping before outbound tourists step onto a plane.

Other statistics support the argument that outbound travel from the UK makes a significant contribution to the UK economy:

- Outbound travel contributes £37.1 billion in gross value added (GVA) to the UK economy, which amounts to around 1.8 per cent of UK GDP.
- With the inclusion of contributions made by industries supplying the sector, the total economic impact rises to more than £54 billion or 3.8 per cent of UK GDP.
- The sector directly sustains 221,000 UK jobs – a higher employment figure than the entire wholesale and retail distribution of motor vehicles and motorcycles, and also more jobs than the UK's iron, steel or electrical-equipment-manufacturing industries
- Total expenditure within the UK by residents engaged in outbound travel reached £45.7 billion in 2017.
- Spending by UK travellers here, before departure, exceeds the amount spent in every overseas holiday destination combined.¹³

The Current Response

The current approach to international travel is disjointed. An uncoordinated system has led to sets of country-specific travel requirements and procedures that leave travellers and potential travellers confused and uncertain about their journeys. And these restrictions aren't set in stone; they are constantly changing to reflect the state of the virus in each country.

Enhanced border measures to prevent new mutations from spreading have caused more severe disruption to travel in recent weeks. In addition, the fear of future mutations will be a key factor in policy discussions surrounding travel, as will the additional border-control measures that will be necessary in the case of outbreaks or mutations.

Almost every country in the world has travel restrictions in place, yet it can be difficult to work out exactly what is required in each destination, and what is required to return home. Below is a chart that outlines the various travel requirements for the UK and several other countries.

Table 1 – Travel requirements for the UK and eight other countries

Country	Travel Bans	Self-Isolation Period	Negative Test Result
UK	Individuals who have travelled to or through these 28 countries in the last 10 days cannot enter, with specific exceptions	10 days	Negative PCR, LAMP or antigen test result received no more than 72 hours prior to departure.
Italy	Non-residents, people without a resident family member or spouse, non-EU/EEA members, non-visa holders, those without negative tests, and those who have entered certain countries cannot enter, with specific exceptions	10 days for passengers coming from certain countries, 14 days for others	Negative molecular or antigenic test result received no more than 48 hours prior to arrival, or test result taken from nasal swab within 72 hours if travelling from UK/have been to UK in last 14 days

France	Non-residents, people without a resident family member or spouse, non-EU/EEA members and non-visa holders cannot enter, with specific exceptions	Passengers could be subject to quarantine or isolation	Negative molecular test result from test taken no more than 72 hours prior to departure
Germany	Non-residents, people without a resident family member or spouse, non-EU/EEA members, non-visa holders and students who cannot complete their studies outside of Germany cannot enter, with specific exceptions	10-day quarantine if arriving from a risk area	Passengers coming from or who have travelled through Brazil, the Republic of Ireland, South Africa or the UK must have a negative test result within 48 hours of arrival. Accepted tests include antigen, PCR, RT-LAMP and TMA tests. Other passengers from certain countries could be subject to a test upon arrival.
South Korea	Short-term visas issued on or before 5 April 2020 are no longer valid, with specific exceptions	14-day quarantine and a negative PCR test within 3 days of arrival	PCR negative test result received within 72 hours prior to arrival. Certificate must be in English or Korean
USA	Non-residents, people without a resident family member or spouse, non-visa holders, those without	Varies by state	Antigen or NAAT negative test result, received within 72 hours prior to arrival. Test must indicate

	negative tests and those who have entered certain countries cannot enter or transit, with specific exceptions		“negative” or “not detected”; a result of “invalid” is not accepted
South Africa	Travellers can only land at Cape Town, Durban or Johannesburg airports	Passengers and airline crews are subject to screening	PCR negative test result received no more than 72 hours prior to arrival
Israel	Non-residents, non-nationals and non-diplomats not allowed to enter or transit, with specific exceptions	14 days	Arrivals could be subject to PCR test
UAE	Flights from South Africa are currently suspended until 29 January; tourists are allowed to enter Dubai and Sharjah airports if they have proof of their return/onward journey	Passengers from UK are subject to a PCR test upon arrival and must quarantine until a result is given	Negative printed PCR test result received no more than 96 hours prior to departure for the UAE; passengers from the UK must have a negative result from no more than 72 hours prior to departure for the UAE.

Existing Global Networks

The CommonTrust Network

The CommonTrust Network is a network of public and private partners committed to empowering individuals with digital access to their health information based on open, interoperable standards so they can protect and improve their health, and demonstrate their health status to safely return to travel, work, school and life, while protecting their data privacy.

Participating health organisations agree to provide the individuals they serve with digital access to their health information by issuing verifiable credentials using the [SMART Health Cards specification](#) based on W3C and HL7 FHIR standards or via a secure HL7 SMART on FHIR connection, and to be listed in the CommonTrust Registry.

The CommonTrust Network is designed to ensure that only verifiable lab results and vaccination records from trusted sources are presented for the purposes of cross-border travel. The Network includes a global registry of approved labs and vaccine sites, standard formats for lab results and vaccination records, and standard tools to make those results and records digitally accessible.

The Network also creates a common global, machine-readable format for governments to publish their health-screening entry rules and a global repository of those rules, making it easier for travellers and the travel industry to understand and comply with each jurisdiction's requirements.

Current Travel Pass Initiatives

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) Travel Pass

The IATA Travel Pass is a global and standardised solution that can validate all country regulations regarding Covid-19 passenger travel requirements. The Travel Pass will incorporate four open source and interoperable modules which can be combined for an end-to-end solution. The modules include a registry of entry requirements, a registry of labs, test centres or vaccination providers, a means for passengers to securely upload test or vaccination certificates on their phones and share them when appropriate, and a digital identity to verify the owner of the certificate.¹⁵

The entry-requirement registry is already in use, and all four modules are expected to be ready by the end of March. Where no travel pass exists, these modules can work together as one complete end-to-end solution. For countries or airlines that have partial systems of their own, the modules can be used separately to complement systems that are others are building or currently use.¹⁶

The IATA has partnered with Emirates and Etihad Airways to trial the IATA Travel Pass. The trial will include a mobile app designed to help passengers easily and securely manage their travel in line with any government requirements for Covid-19 testing or vaccine information.

Travel Pass enables Emirates and Etihad passengers to create a “digital passport” to verify that their pre-travel test or vaccination meets the requirements of the destination. Passengers will also be able to share their test and vaccination certificates with authorities and airlines to facilitate travel. The app will enable travellers to manage all travel documentation digitally throughout their journey.¹⁷

IATA is well positioned to support an initiative like this – the entry requirements will use IATA’s Timatic database which has been used by the industry for decades and is easily integrated with airline and airport IT systems. The Timatic database contains documentation requirements for passengers traveling internationally via air, for example, health, passport and visa requirements. In addition, the basic features of the Travel Pass are being built to comply with defined global standards, where they exist.

Table 2 – The four modules of IATA Travel Pass

Registry of health requirements

Registry of testing/ Vaccination Centres

Lab App

Contactless T

Enables passengers to find accurate information on travel, testing and vaccine requirements for their journey

Powered by the IATA Timatic

Enables passengers to find testing centres and labs at their departure location that meet the standards for testing/vaccination requirements for their destination

Enables authorised labs and test centres to securely send test results or vaccination certificates to passengers

Enables passengers to

1. Create a certificate that meets requirements
2. Verify the certificate meets requirements
3. Share test results and certificates to facilitate travel

Can be used by airlines to manage travel requirements digitally and securely throughout the travel experience

Source: [IATA Travel Pass Initiative](#)

CommonPass

Recognising that not every government will agree on a common set of entry-rule requirements, CommonPass is a solution built on the CommonTrust Network that is designed for flexibility and interoperability. Countries would implement their own border-entry and health-screening requirements, including whether and what type of lab tests or vaccinations are required. CommonPass then verifies that incoming travellers' health data satisfies the destination country's entry requirements and generates a travel certificate that airlines and countries can rely on to allow someone to board a flight or enter a country.

More specifically, the CommonPass platform lets individuals present the health information they have accessed from government-approved laboratories and vaccination sites at their point of origin to demonstrate that they meet the health entry requirements of their destination. If they meet the requirements, the platform generates a simple yes/no CommonPass certificate that they can use to demonstrate their compliance without revealing any personal health information.

CommonPass's Interaction with the CommonTrust Network

CommonPass queries both the CommonTrust data sources and the destination rules for a given journey and runs them against its rules engine to provide a traveller with a CommonPass certificate if their compliance with those rules is validated.

Inbound Travel vs. Outbound Travel

In order to enable inbound travel, the government must only provide the entry rules for its jurisdiction and accept compliant test results for the labs within the CommonTrust Network. In order to enable outbound travel from their origin airports, governments must provide a list of approved labs and vaccination sites that can be used as data sources to comply with the entry requirements of other governments.

The Value for Governments

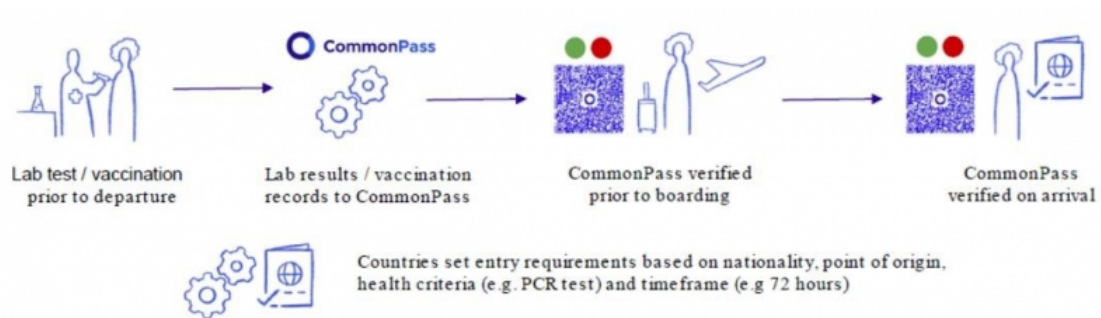
Governments that use CommonPass can quickly verify compliance with health entry rules for their jurisdictions through a visual inspection of the CommonPass certificate (or by scanning a QR code) without having to review a traveller's personal health information. Instead of being presented with multitudes of different kinds of paper or PDF test certificates, and then having to verify that the specific test complies with the entry requirements, CommonPass does all of the verification before the passenger boards the plane.

The Value for Travellers

Travellers are able to understand the entry requirements for their specific traveller journey before they arrive at the airport so that they can ensure that they get the right type of test in advance of the flight. Additionally, they are able to verify their compliance with the entry rules of the destination by generating a CommonPass certificate by allowing the CommonPass rules engine to be run against their personal health information. Finally, passengers are able to keep their personal health information private as it never is shared or stored with a third party.

As Covid-19 vaccination becomes more common over time for international travelers, the use of open standards and interoperability will be key to ensure that individuals are able to move across borders with their own health data and have that data recognised by other governments.

Figure 4 – CommonPass user journey



Source: commonpass.org

EU Vaccine Certificate

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis has set forth an initiative for a common digital European Covid-19 vaccination certificate that would enable those who are vaccinated to travel freely within Europe without Covid-19 testing.¹⁸

Qantas

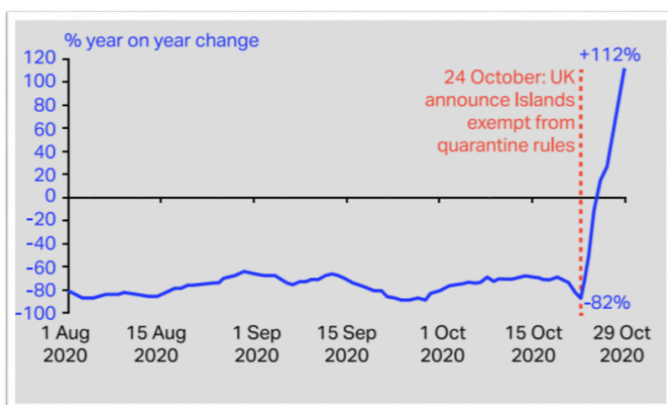
The Australian airline Qantas has said that from 2021 all passengers will need to provide proof they have received a Covid-19 vaccine. Australia's response to the pandemic has been stringent, with the country's borders closed to international travellers since March 2020, and those returning home required to quarantine for 14 days.¹⁹

Preparing for Future Demand

Passenger numbers are expected to grow to 2.8 billion in 2021. Although that would be a billion more than in 2020, it is still 1.7 billion fewer travellers than 2019. According to the IATA, the biggest factors impeding the industry’s recovery are travel restrictions and quarantine measures that effectively prevent a meaningful revival of travel.

The overwhelming influence of quarantine measures is best exemplified in the case of travel to the Canary Islands from the UK last October. When the Canary Islands were removed from the UK’s list of countries that required self-isolation upon return, ticket sales soared.

Figure 5 – Ticket sales growth from the UK to the Canary Islands, August to October 2020



Source: IATA Economics, using data from DDS

The demand for air travel will return, but at what pace will be largely determined by the level of restrictions, consumer confidence, and the extent to which these travel guidelines are uniform across the board. Having a global Travel Pass will be a key component to the recovery of international air travel and tourism.

Conclusion & Recommendations

As mass-vaccination campaigns roll out across the globe at dramatically different paces, disparities are already emerging between countries – with significant implications for the normalisation of international travel. Even within countries, short to medium term, there will be distinctions between those who have been vaccinated and those who have not. The only way to navigate allowing people to travel internationally again will be for travellers to show their current status on Covid-19. This must include a traveller's vaccine status and/or testing status.

For these reasons, we recommend the government urgently seeks to put in place a global Covid-19 travel pass, compatible across international travel systems. The UK should then lead global efforts to see this pass approved and introduced around the world.

Key recommendations:

The UK should use its presidency of the G7 to make the safe reopening of borders a global objective

The UK should place the creation of a global Covid-19 travel pass as a key item on the G7 agenda. Seeking agreement among the world's largest economies will be a critical first step in securing wider global agreement.

The UK should establish a G7 working group charged with:

1. **Agreeing worldwide standards on testing and vaccines**
2. **Developing a single, interoperable travel pass**

We call on the UK, under its G7 presidency, to establish a working group that brings together health and transport ministers from the world's largest economies, the World Health Organisation, and key organisations including The Commons Project Foundation, IATA and technology providers. This group should be convened now and by 1 June 2021, deliver:

- A global travel pass framework that allows countries to develop their own, interoperable digital and paper-based solutions
- Shared global standards on the types and validity of the vaccinations and tests that can be used to allow for international travel to resume safely.
- International agreement that validation of a vaccination or test that meets these standards would satisfy entry into a country

Footnotes

1. ^ IATA
 2. ^ IATA Economics Economic Performance of the Airline Industry, Midyear 2020
 3. ^ <https://www.unwto.org/covid-19-travel-restrictions>
 4. ^ The Circium Airline Insights Review 2020
 5. ^ https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/ditcinf2020d3_en.pdf
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