

Safe Reopening of Borders to Save Lives, Economies and Livelihoods in Africa



ICAO





A. INTRODUCTION

During the second joint meeting of African ministers responsible for health, ICT and transport on the rollout of the Africa Against COVID-19: Saving Lives, Economies and Livelihoods campaign, a call was made to African countries to work together towards harmonizing travel entry and exit requirements, and to increase mutual recognition and cross-border information exchange for enhanced surveillance. The meeting called for collaboration between different sectors and stakeholders. The African Union, through the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), and all the organizations and institutions represented here and listed, being the members of the Multi-Sectorial Technical Taskforce on Trusted Travel and Re-Opening of Borders that resulted from the joint ministerial meeting hereby resolve as follows:

1. **Acknowledging** the recently launched Africa Against COVID-19: Saving Lives, Economies and Livelihoods campaign and its further endorsement on 20 August 2020 during the teleconference of the Bureau of the Assembly of the African Union Heads of State and Government with chairpersons of the Regional Economic Communities of the African Union, and fully monitoring the progression of the pandemic in the African continent;
2. **Recognizing** that a multi-sectorial approach through collaboration, coordination and communication is the most robust mechanism to comprehensively address the complexity around the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic imposes on the African population. We are therefore joining our efforts as a multi-disciplinary taskforce to support existing response and control measures established by Member States through the leadership of the African Union, Africa CDC and WHO to achieve a joint continental response success;
3. **Taking cognizant** of the adverse effect that the COVID-19 pandemic is imposing on the lives, economies and livelihoods of the African population;
4. **Fully aware** of the prevailing African economic initiatives and developmental agendas aiming at economic transformation and promoting continental integration;
5. **Noting** the absence of effective pharmaceutical treatment measures and aware that the COVID-19 vaccine rollout will be uneven in all 55 Member States, but conscious of the progress made in science on the same;
6. **Recognizing** the need to define our “new normal” by striking a balance between saving lives, re-opening of economies and revitalizing livelihoods within the African continent;
7. **Mindful** of the diversity observed on the preventive and control measures instituted by Member States especially for border control and travel such as post-arrival mandatory quarantine, pre-entry border testing, and presentation of COVID-19 PCR negative test certificate;
8. **Closely monitoring** the developments in border re-opening and easing of travel restrictions and how the diversified measures by Member States as a pre-requisite for travel are affecting travelers while putting in jeopardy the good intention of reviving the economy and minimizing the risk of increased transmission.



B. INTENTION

Using the strengths, mandates and functional personalities of our organizations, we commit to supporting Member States and the African continent to minimize risks during travel and ensure safe re-opening of borders by:

9. Calling for the harmonization of travel entry and exit requirements (mandatory quarantine, testing, and post-travel tracking, contact tracing and vaccination) across the continent. Our commitment to ensuring harmonization will be achieved only if all stakeholders continue to engage and provide accurate and timely guidance to Member States based on evidence, and provide technical support for the standardization of measures to minimize cross-border transmission. Such harmonization will facilitate a smooth travel experience, help maintain public health safety corridor, common recognition of measures and mutual trust, and to promote integration and collaboration among Member States.
10. Ensuring compliance in the implementation of existing multinational treaties, international frameworks, guidelines and recommendations aiming to promote human rights, regional/continental/global health security, economic growth, social cohesion and good international relations. Compliance will ensure that each State Party fulfills their responsibilities to facilitate smooth travel and movement of people and goods within and across borders.
11. Promoting the use of innovation and technology within the African continent to harmonize requirements and timely transmission of critical information across borders, including test results, and fostering coordination among key players.



C. CALL TO ACTION

On behalf of the African Union ministers responsible for health and transport we hereby call on all African Union Member States and Governments to harmonize travel entry and exit requirements by abiding by the recommendations given by the WHO, Africa CDC, Africa High-level Taskforce on the Recovery of the Air Transport Industry, ICAO, IATA, and other organizations with a stake in travel and movements, and operating in Africa. We further call the attention of Member States to the following areas of implementation:

i. Travel entry and exit requirements

12. Consider applying alternative measures to border closure and mandatory quarantine through instituting and strengthening the recommended non-pharmaceutical public health and social measures before, during and after travel. In doing so, Member States should consider applying the alternative measures in a stepwise manner while being guided through a risk-based approach.
13. Harmonization of alternative measures to allow mutual recognition and trust in the information shared among Member States about travelers. The harmonization should include the validity period of the negative SARS-CoV-2 test certificate for countries requiring a PCR test as entry and exit requirement. The validity period selected should be reasonable, taking into consideration the waiting period for getting tested, the turnaround time for the results to travelers, and accessibility of testing facilities. Based on the average set time observed across the continent, and in the absence of any scientific contraindication, countries should consider five days as a reasonable and feasible validity period.
14. Consider alternative testing protocol for travel that uses the rapid diagnostic antigen test to in situations where PCR testing is not readily available or where result turnaround time is long. Given the new evidence presented to the task force by the African Task Force for Coronavirus Disease Response laboratory working group, the overall public health impact of RDT in assisting to maintain the public health safety corridor during travel is high because of its high accessibility, affordability, scalability, ease of administration, and quick turnaround time.
15. Based on temporary recommendations of the 6th WHO IHR emergency committee not to impose COVID-19 vaccination certificates as a mandatory travel entry and exit requirement until there is satisfactory access to vaccines globally, reasonable vaccination coverage is attained, and sufficient evidence and guidance on the use of the vaccine for travel is available.

ii. Maintaining safe public health corridor before, during and after travel

16. Remain vigilant to all applicable regulations, laws, guidelines and standards issued by national and international authorities aiming to minimize infection and to maintain a safe public health corridor during travel. Specifically, all State Parties should ensure that preventive measures such as frequent handwashing with soap and water or alcohol based sanitizer, physical distancing, infection prevention and control, and the correct wearing of masks are observed at all times.

iii. Compliance to multinational treaties and regulations

17. Reminding countries to comply with the international treaties signed by State Parties that protect governments, authorities and travelers. Specifically, African Union Member States are reminded to comply with article 40 of the International Health Regulations (2005), which requires State Parties to not charge travelers for interventions meant to protect public health.



D. ORGANIZATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS REPRESENTED

1. African Airlines Association (AFRAA)
2. African Civil Aviation Commission (AFCAC – CAFAC)
3. Airport Council International (ACI) – Africa
4. International Air Transport Association (IATA)
5. International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)
6. The Afrochampions Initiative
7. The World Health Organization (WHO)
8. Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC)

¹ <https://www.who.int/news-room/articles-detail/interim-position-paper-considerations-regarding-proof-of-covid-19-vaccination-for-international-travellers>

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