

EUROPEAN AVIATION AND TOURISM REQUIRES A COORDINATED APPROACH TO CROSS-BORDER TRAVEL

An open letter to the Portuguese EU presidency ahead of 1 March extraordinary Ministerial summit



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We, the undersigned aviation, travel, and tourism stakeholders, urge you to swiftly restore and protect the European tourism sector and air connectivity.

On 1 January 2021, the Portuguese presidency of the Council of the EU began, setting the tone with the ambitious motto: 'Time to deliver: a fair, green and digital recovery'.

On 26 January, Portuguese presidency representatives addressed the European Parliament's Committee on Transport and Tourism. They affirmed the presidency's agreement with Council conclusions on tourism's role in the EU post-COVID-19 recovery, including the need for improved coordination on the recognition of coronavirus tests, passenger locator forms and vaccination certificates. Additionally, your presidency has committed to a swift recovery of the travel and tourism sector, including guaranteeing the capacity to ensure the mobility of people and goods in the EU, as one of your main priorities. We agree - 2021 needs to be the year when Europe recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.

As you may know, a broad coalition of aviation stakeholders including airlines, employers, trade unions and NGOs signed up to the Aviation Round Table Report in November last year. As part of this group, airlines, together with European aviation social partners, outlined the role aviation plays in the overall functioning of Europe's economy. We provided recommendations on how to restore European air connectivity, making sure other sectors that depend on aviation, such as tourism, can resume their activity.

Just like aviation, tourism has been hit hard by the coronavirus crisis. A large number of tourist sites and tourism-related businesses remain closed during the ongoing crisis. It is clear today that coordination of COVID-19 related measures amongst all EU Member States, including coordinated travel restrictions, is essential if we are to restore confidence in both the tourism and aviation sector in time for the upcoming season. In view of your extraordinary meeting on 1 March, we would urge you to put your efforts into the coordination of all restrictive measures related to Covid-19 among the Member States. **These restrictive measures, such as travel restrictions, vaccination certificates, and testing requirements, continue to negatively affect both tourism and aviation in Europe and should be removed when possible, taking a risk-based approach.**

While we understand that COVID-19 related vaccination and testing strategies are a Member State competence, it is high time for EU Member States to finally agree to **ensure a common approach to cross-border travel.**

In particular, harmonisation in the following areas is required based on a commonly agreed scientific approach:

TESTING RULES AND REQUIREMENTS

- Notwithstanding, reliable, affordable, and rapid tests should be widely used to ease current travel restrictions.
- Reliable antigen or other rapid tests should be used as part of an effective response to COVID-19.
- It is not proportionate to subject air travellers that have already tested negative to additional quarantine requirements.

- Member States should agree on when tests should be conducted (ideally before departure, whilst allowing on-arrival testing if testing capacity is limited in the country/region of departure)
- Test certificates should be valid if the test took place 72h before departure
- Test certificates should be acceptable in English or the language of the departure or arrival country
- Exemptions on transport workers should remain as they are essential to ensuring connectivity and transport of people and goods, including Personal Protective Equipment and vaccines.

VACCINATION DOCUMENTATION

- Vaccinated air travellers should be exempted from testing, quarantine and other travel restrictions, based on the latest scientific evidence.
- Vaccination must not be a pre-requisite to travel but should be used to assist in the restart of air travel.
- Form and requirements for vaccination documentation and/or certificates should be urgently agreed upon between Member States so forms can be issued as the vaccine roll-out accelerates.
- Airlines, airports and their workers must not be responsible nor liable for checking the proper sanitary documentation for embarking passengers.

We believe that the European Union can save what remains of the tourism and air transport sectors by applying a coordinated approach to the challenges referenced above. The current patchwork of restrictions across Europe is causing confusion among Europe's travel and tourism industries and its workers. Clarity surrounding these restrictions will also serve the overall purpose of preventing the spread of COVID-19.

Lack of predictability on these measures effectively impedes air transport connectivity, which puts employment at risk across the sector. Unilateral approaches implemented by the Member States inevitably risk harming the EU both economically and socially --businesses and workers will be similarly affected. A clear set of coordinated measures will help restore public confidence and is the only chance to save the upcoming summer season. Collaboration between the EU Member States will be essential to achieve the goal you have set for your current presidency. Failure to do so could lead to hundreds of thousands of additional job losses across Europe. As you say, it is now time to deliver.

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