

# IATA & UNTWO both state travel restrictions unnecessary

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) has urged governments to accelerate the relaxation of travel restrictions, calling for:

- Removing all travel barriers (including quarantine and testing) for those fully vaccinated with a WHO-approved vaccine
- Enabling quarantine-free travel for non-vaccinated travelers with a negative pre-departure antigen test result
- Removing travel bans
- Accelerating the easing of travel restrictions in recognition that travelers pose no greater risk for COVID-19 spread than already exists in the general population.

Willie Walsh, IATA Director General, stated: “With the experience of the Omicron variant, there is mounting scientific evidence and opinion opposing the targeting of travelers with restrictions and country bans to control the spread of COVID-19. The measures have not worked. Today Omicron is present in all parts of the world. That’s why travel, with very few exceptions, does not increase the risk to general populations. The billions spent testing travelers would be far more effective if allocated to vaccine distribution or strengthening health care systems.”

In its statement, IATA quoted a recently published study by Oxera and Edge Health(i) demonstrated the extremely limited impact of travel restrictions on controlling the spread of Omicron. While the study was UK based, its findings can certainly be extrapolated to much of the world. “It is clear that travel restrictions in any part of the world have had little impact on the spread of COVID-19, including the Omicron variant. The UK, France and Switzerland have recognized this and are among the first to begin removing travel measures. More governments need to follow their lead. Accelerating the removal of travel restrictions will be a major step towards living with the virus,” said Walsh.

## **UNWTO and WHO agree**

And IATA is far from alone. Last week the WHO Emergency Committee confirmed their recommendation to “Lift or ease international traffic bans as they do not provide added value and continue to contribute to the economic and social stress experienced by States. The failure of travel restrictions introduced after the detection and reporting of Omicron variant to limit international spread of Omicron demonstrates the ineffectiveness of such measures over time.”

UNTWO has also released a statement that “Blanket travel restrictions don’t work,” quoting IATA, WHO and the study quoted by IATA.

UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili says: “When it comes to stopping the spread of new virus variants, blanket travel restrictions are simply counterproductive. In fact, by cutting the lifeline of tourism, these restrictions do more harm than good, especially in destinations reliant on international tourists for jobs, economic wellbeing and sustainable change.

“It is imperative we restart tourism and so kickstart recovery and get back on track towards meeting the SDGs while responding to Climate Imperatives,” Mr Pololikashvili adds. “UNWTO welcomes WHO’s

new guidance, highlighting the ineffectiveness of blanket travel restrictions, and we also amplify their recommendations against using vaccination status as the sole condition for welcoming tourists back, especially when vaccination rates remain so uneven.”

Statements released by both IATA and UNWTO reiterate that the world must learn to live with this endemic virus; with research showing that with few exceptions travelers present no greater risk than the general population.