

# 5 government interventions urgently-needed to support air transport, tourism sector

By [Muhammad Ali Albakri](#)

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The air transport industry was one of the hardest hit in 2020 with traffic and revenues falling off a cliff at the end of last March following the imposition of worldwide Covid-19 containment restrictions on travel.



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Although Africa represented about 2% of the pre-pandemic global market, its five biggest markets, i.e. South Africa, Egypt, Morocco, Ethiopia and Algeria, experienced a more than 90% fall in traffic compared with 2019. In socio-economic terms, the pandemic and recession have jeopardised 3.9 million African jobs supported by air transport and US\$32bn in contributions to Africa's combined GDP.

**The prospects for 2021 remain grim and more jobs will be lost without five urgently-needed government interventions.**

1. Providing emergency short-term financial relief to all components of the industry, regardless of public or private ownership

2. Cutting the red tape to let the UD\$30bn in pledged industry aid from international finance bodies flow to Africa's air

transport and tourism industry

3. Implementing a single global set of Covid-19 testing measures and standards for travellers before departure instead of arbitrary, confusing and unnecessary quarantines or other measures that are deterrents to travel
4. Establish a reliable cold-chain distribution network for Covid-19 vaccines and then secure it against physical and cyber-attacks, theft, corruption or other interference.
5. Adopting the African Union's Single Africa Air Transport Market framework to ignite connectivity throughout the continent. This will stimulate sustainable economic growth, create jobs and support livelihoods

While Covid-19 has temporarily redefined the market, the drivers for air transport in Africa remain intact and undiminished. The continent's population is still the fastest growing worldwide with urbanisation is continuing at a rapid clip. Governments have to feed, house, service, educate, provide health care to and create meaningful employment opportunities for the continent's inhabitants.

The best way to meet this challenge is by opening up and safely re-connecting markets and stimulating trade, travel and tourism. Fortunately, the framework for this already exists in the form of the African Union's Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM). It just needs to be implemented. So far 34 of Africa's 54 countries have signed up, but only 10 have put any of its concrete measures in place.

All of this remains moot without traveller confidence being restored. Vaccines offer hope, but more immediately people need assurances that air travel is clean and safe and that they will not have their journeys disrupted or inconvenienced by quarantines and other arbitrary restrictions and measures. Covid-19 testing of travellers before departure is the only sensible solution. Rapid tests have been developed and are being rolled out at various airports and by several airlines around the globe and will become the norm, just as x-rays and liquids and gels restrictions have.

The pandemic has also been a catalyst for two rival phenomena. First was the broad embracing of work-from-home and virtual meetings solutions. Although probably not intended as a permanent substitute to face-to-face meetings, Zoom, MS-Teams and similar platforms have wiped out (hopefully temporarily) a large portion of the business travel market and with it, what had for many airlines' been their most dependable source of profit.

In parallel, Covid-19 sparked the accelerated development of contactless and smart technology to facilitate air travel, even though much of it had its genesis in work that began several years ago. Just as IATA was able to eliminate paper air tickets and migrate travellers to e-tickets and self-service check-in during the mid-2000s, going forward we can expect to see paper inoculation certificates, passports and touch-screen check-in kiosks being rapidly replaced by initiatives such as IATA's Travel Pass, biometric chips and point-and-scan personal hand-held devices.

Elements of the technology are already in use or in final testing and their convergence is inevitable. Governments will be compelled to move with the technology if they have any aspirations of their countries being competitive destinations for business and leisure tourism.

The convergence of Covid-19 testing and smart technology is being driven by the need for a global information infrastructure to securely manage, share and verify coronavirus test data matched with traveller identities in a standardised format that complies with border control requirements. That's the job of the IATA Travel Pass, that will be rolled out in the coming weeks.

It will incorporate four open-sourced interoperable modules to provide users with a global registry of health requirements and testing/vaccination centres, an app to let laboratories share test results and vaccination certificates with passengers and a contactless travel app that functions as a digital passport, verifies travel itineraries, Covid-19 tests and vaccination certificates.

## The IATA Travel Pass will provide:

- Governments with the means to verify the authenticity of tests and the identity of those presenting the test certificates.
- Airlines with the ability to provide accurate information to their passengers on test requirements and verify that a passenger meets the requirements for travel.
- Laboratories with the means to issue digital certificates to passengers that will be recognised by governments, and;
- Travelers with accurate information on test requirements, where they can get tested or vaccinated, and the means to securely convey test information to airlines and border authorities.

## ABOUT MUHAMMAD ALI ALBAKRI

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