

## **Resilience and Efficiency Through Leadership and Cooperation**

### **Introduction**

*Last year will go down as the worst year ever in the history of international civil aviation.<sup>1</sup>*

*Just as aviation recovered from previous crises, the industry will recover again from this pandemic, but for this recovery to happen quickly, all stakeholders have to align as best possible.<sup>2</sup>*

*Leadership is everything.<sup>3</sup>*

The theme for this year's aviation discussion, initiated by Hermes Air Transport Organization, is "Resilience and Efficiency Through Leadership and Cooperation." Fourteen (14) briefs on this theme were received from various aviation organizations. This report attempts to distill the key observations from the briefs to arrive at recommendations for the aviation industry as it moves forward from the COVID-19 pandemic.

In soliciting the briefs from the aviation organizations, Hermes asked that three (3) major questions be considered as follows:

- What are the shared goals of the stakeholders in the aviation industry?
- Who should assume a leadership role in industry decision-making?
- Are there cooperative arrangements that could be put in place to guide individual state actions?

The responses to each of these questions are discussed, in turn.

### **Shared Goals in the Aviation Industry**

As noted in the brief by AFRAA, since the COVID-19 pandemic was unanticipated by aviation organizations, it exposed weaknesses in industry leadership and the ability of aviation to coordinate an effective response to the pandemic. However, once these coordinated efforts were underway, there were goals shared by several industry and governmental associations. These included the following:

- Restore confidence in the safety of the aviation system. This involves taking measures to increase safety. The AACO brief cites the safety of air travel and notes that 97.1% of

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<sup>1</sup> ACI World Position Paper: Resilience and Efficiency through Leadership and Cooperation.

<sup>2</sup> ERA Position Paper: Resilience and Efficiency through Leadership and Cooperation.

<sup>3</sup> AFRAA Position Paper: Resilience and Efficiency through Leadership and Cooperation.

infections are locally generated and that only 0.0000004% of infections occurred during air transport. It is paramount that the safety procedures implemented in the industry and the safety record of aviation be conveyed to the public and to policymakers.

- Conveyance and management of timely and relevant safety information. A key to the restoration of confidence in the aviation system is the transparent conveyance and management of information on aviation safety to the public.<sup>4</sup> For example, the ACAO brief states:

*The path to establishing a more resilient aviation system is based on comprehensive communication, including the establishment of close, transparent and continuous communication between all stakeholders, as well as towards the public. Coordinated and clear information and an emphasis on safety, security and operational integrity of aviation systems will enhance compliance with actions taken to reduce risks and help develop resilience to crises while addressing recovery and demand growth.*

- Keep infected passengers away from flying. Although viral transmission may be rare during flights, the JAATO brief notes that aviation contributed to the COVID-19 pandemic by transporting infected passengers around the globe, thus leading to the spread of the virus. As a result, a shared goal of the industry is to keep infected passengers away from flying. There are several ways that this can be done; for example, through rapid testing or the use of “green passports”. The proposed methods may vary across the different regions, but the overall goal of keeping infected passengers off airplanes is universal.<sup>5</sup>
- Coordinate safety initiatives. Some briefs received by Hermes expressed frustrations with unilateral state actions that closed borders and restricted air traffic. The AASA brief is illustrative of this sentiment, stating that during the pandemic, “we have seen the most amazing display of the use of state authority to enforce regulations ... to impose restrictions and measures to control their citizens in ways not considered possible in an open society.” The brief recommends that governments abide by internationally agreed plans or provide reasons why these plans are not embraced and/or supported.
- “Build back better” is a common goal mentioned in several of the briefs. The IFATSEA brief, for example, notes that the pandemic has created the opportunity for managers, companies, and employees to learn from the crisis. Quoting Winston Churchill, the European Commission discussion paper further intones, “never let a good crisis go to waste.” The briefs note that the pre-pandemic aviation system had significant problems; for example, the EUROCONTROL brief states that the aviation industry was already under tremendous pressure prior to the pandemic with flight delays and an aviation management system, “struggling to deliver enough airspace capacity and cost-efficiency, and unable to advance on key dossiers, particularly regarding the slow pace of delivering the Single European Sky (SES).” Other briefs cite the environmental record of the aviation industry. Along these lines, in his interview with Hermes Magazine, ICAO Council President Salvatore Sciacchitano states, “The post-COVID period will no doubt provide aviation with

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<sup>4</sup> The EUROCONTROL brief, for example, notes the provision of “think papers”, weekly assessments, dashboards and daily data tweets.

<sup>5</sup> The AFCAC brief, noting the importance of safety measures in aviation, is quite adamant that proof of vaccine should not be a prerequisite for international travel.

a tremendous opportunity to build back better, to recover greener. This is an opportunity to accelerate the transition of the global air transport network toward its decarbonized future.”

- Make better use of technology. Certainly, one way to build back better is to focus on the realization of technological advancements. For example, although privacy and fairness are major issues, using technology to increase the efficient and safe movement of passengers and cargo is a shared goal of the associations. Digitalization and the effective use of Artificial Intelligence were also extensively discussed in the 2020 Hermes report.

### **Leadership in Industry Decision Making**

To achieve the goals cited above, there must be cooperative initiatives in the aviation industry and these initiatives require leadership to be launched and to succeed. Several briefs note the leadership of ICAO during the pandemic, especially through the ICAO Council Aviation Recovery Task Force (CART), that provides a forum for determining risk management strategies for the industry. ICAO, in conjunction with other intergovernmental organizations, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), will undoubtedly continue to lead in determining how best to operate aviation safely, efficiently, and environmentally following the pandemic.

Other initiatives have taken place at the regional level. For example, the European Aviation Round Table (ART) developed industry proposals to facilitate aviation post-pandemic. The LACAC brief describes a roundtable, in which directors and representatives of the aeronautical authorities of Latin America and the Caribbean, with the support of the Aeronautical Authority of Singapore, discussed how to restart civil aviation and build resilience in the industry and its related business ecosystem.

The main shortcoming of the initiatives is not lack of leadership, but the failure of states to implement the guidelines and policies enunciated through these collaborative efforts, resulting in inconsistent, unpredictable policies, even within regions. EUROCONTROL writes: “State actions during COVID have shown that different legislative frameworks across Europe create a patchwork of confusing and fragmented measures. Without coherent legislative frameworks, the airlines in particular but also the associated industry partners do not have the certainty and predictability that they need to return to profitability and then to grow in a sustainable manner.” These views are echoed by ERA: “The current patchwork of restrictions across Europe is still, one year later, causing confusion among Europe’s travel and tourism industries, its workers and passengers. 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.” A similar situation exists in Africa, as stated in the AFRAA brief: “Travel restrictions by Governments in a bid to curb the spread of the pandemic negatively impacted demand for air travel and disrupted supply chains thus resulting in adverse consequences for the air transport industry. There seems to be over-reliance on States to decide for the industry with or without consultation.”

Therefore, the way forward from the COVID-19 pandemic is not only to determine effective leaders – ICAO, industry associations, and regional organizations can certainly assume this mantle, but to

better ensure that the guidelines put in place at forums initiated by these leaders are followed by the relevant authorities.

## **Cooperative Agreements**

There is widespread sentiment among the industry and governmental groups that cooperative agreements need to be established to guide the industry in the post-pandemic world. Although there are debates over the content of these agreements, the associations recognize that the current “patchwork” system of regulations that have developed during the pandemic are inefficient, inequitable, and unsustainable. The U.S. airline trade group, A4A, for example, states the following:

*We believe that the continued recovery of aviation and increased resilience of global governance frameworks are dependent on two equally critical elements:*

- 1) ongoing and frequent engagement by industry stakeholders; and*
- 2) improved cooperation and collaboration between governments worldwide...*

*The inconsistent approach taken by each region throughout the COVID-19 pandemic has led to fragmented policies regarding travel restrictions and preventative measures. This patchwork not only adds costs that hamper recovery but also creates uncertainty for businesses and travelers throughout the world... It is critical that existing guidance, such as that produced by ICAO CART, is implemented by all participating nation states to allow for a more coordinated approach to the resumption of travel.*

As noted above, the major issue is having governments and other decision makers follow international guidelines. With this in mind, JAATO proposes a “future risk” research body that will support contingency planning and provide evidence-based solutions to potential industry problems, such as how the industry should respond to the next pandemic. Certainly, an independent organization that can proactively conduct research into risks assessment and mitigation for the industry could be useful when confronting governments contemplating unilateral actions in crisis management.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the briefs submitted to Hermes Air Transport Organization, it appears that the industry is quite unified in its shared goals to restore confidence in aviation and to build back a better industry. There is strong sentiment, as well, that intergovernmental and inter-industry associations should lead the post-pandemic recovery. Finally, cooperative initiatives are seen as key to developing guidelines for recovery.

With these thoughts in mind, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Develop ongoing cooperative research initiatives for risk assessment and risk abatement. Evidence-based research can be key to reducing threats to the industry from unilateral state initiatives in crisis management, as well as in providing important information to disseminate to the public, the policymakers and all other involved stakeholders.

- Continue industry initiatives under leading organizations, most notably ICAO, to develop industry guidelines and protocols to enhance safety and efficiency and boost confidence and morale in the airline industry.
- Build back better. Although the COVID-19 pandemic contributed an unprecedented blow to the aviation industry, it also represents an excellent opportunity to build back better. Therefore, the industry should further the cooperative initiatives developed during the pandemic to implement innovative technologies and procedures, both evolving and disrupting. These will facilitate aviation processes, contribute to safety and security, increase efficiency, and reduce the environmental footprint of the industry.

As climate change and the need for sustainable development moves up the political agenda, now more than ever we need to show that aviation is part of the solution, and not part of the problem. Such aggressive targets as the development of net zero carbon goals will help assure the right kind of conscientiousness from our industry.

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