Airports send stark warning over potential summer chaos due to COVID-19 checks

Brussels, 31 May 2021: ACI EUROPE today warned about the risk of travellers having to spend hours at Europe's airports over the summer due to COVID-19 checks.

With the on-going and expected further easing of travel restrictions both within Europe and beyond on the back of improving epidemiological situations, Europe's airports are looking forward to welcoming travellers back. Passenger traffic is set to increase nearly three-fold from 47 million passengers this month to 125 million passengers in August.

Although this will still be well below pre-pandemic (2019) traffic levels[1], managing such an increase will amount to an **unprecedented operational challenge** due to the unique combination of the following factors:

- **Space constrained facilities.** The implementation of physical distancing where possible through all airport processes[2] has resulted in constrained spaces across terminals – severely reducing available physical capacity and increasing passenger processing times. These operational impacts are particularly pronounced during peak times. They have been reviewed and assessed by Eurocontrol in cooperation with ACI EUROPE and are well documented.[3]

- **More peaks in air traffic.** Airlines' current plans are pointing to air traffic being very much concentrated on peak periods this summer – more than last year or even more than in summer 2019 at some airports. Traffic peaks are a usual feature of airport operations driven by airline scheduling, with airport facilities designed to efficiently accommodate the concentration of large passenger volumes. But, doing that becomes extremely challenging when capacity is reduced as a result of physical distancing and when seamless operational processes are no longer possible due to additional COVID-19 checks.

- **Multiple and diverse COVID-19 checks.** Passengers are now subjected to additional checks at airports aimed at verifying COVID-19 test certificates, passenger locator forms and quarantine documentation. These checks are usually performed by public authorities, airlines and/or ground handling companies. They vary depending on their point of origin and destination, based on rules which remain largely unaligned and unstable across Europe. In addition, they are being carried at multiple times both at departure and upon arrival, most of the time manually – resulting in inefficiencies and considerably slowing passenger processing time. For example, checks on COVID-19 tests upon departure are currently duplicated or even triplicated at 77% of Europe's airports.

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[1] Europe's airports welcomed more than 262 million passengers in August 2019.
[2] Entry health check, check-in, security, commercial services/areas, immigration, gate area, boarding/de-boarding, baggage reclaim and customs controls.
[3] Airport Operations Eurocontrol/ACI slide

Olivier Jankovec, Director General of ACI EUROPE said: *"Airports are desperate to see their facilities coming back to life, reconnecting their communities, and supporting the much-needed recovery of Europe. But the level of both uncertainty and complexity in planning for the restart is just mind blowing for now. With each passing day, the prospect of travellers enduring widespread chaos at airports this summer is becoming more real. We absolutely and urgently need Governments to step up advance planning on the full range of issues involved - and work more closely with airports and airlines."*

ACI EUROPE is therefore urging European Governments to:

1. **Adopt and implement in a uniform manner the proposed revised EU Council Recommendation for travel within the EU, published by the European Commission today.**

    This should guarantee consistency with the Recommendation for travel into the EU recently adopted by the Council and thereby ensuring the lifting of travel restrictions for vaccinated travellers as well as for tested and recovered travellers.

2. **Ensure that they will be ready to issue common and interoperable EU digital COVID-19 certificates by 1 July at the latest and that, together with the European Commission, they also recognize both digital and manual COVID-19 certificates issued by EU neighbouring countries as well as other third countries which are easing travel restrictions with Europe.**

3. **Ensure that COVID-19 checks are not duplicated during the travel journey (integrating both departure and arrival processes at airports) and that these checks take place as early in the passenger process as possible (in particular through online check-in).**

4. **Deploy adequate State resources (staff) at airports to ensure that manual checks and border control processes do not delay travellers.**

ACI EUROPE is also calling on EASA and ECDC to reconsider physical distancing requirements at airports based on the evolution of the epidemiological situation and the fact that an increasing proportion of travellers will be fully vaccinated.

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ACI EUROPE is the European region of Airports Council International (ACI), the only worldwide professional association of airport operators. ACI EUROPE represents over 500 airports in 55 countries. Our members facilitate over 90% of commercial air

traffic in Europe. Air transport supports 13.5 million jobs, generating €886 billion in European economic activity (4.4% of GDP). In response to the Climate Emergency, in June 2019 our members committed to achieving Net Zero carbon emissions for operations under their control by 2050, without offsetting.