



New research shows travel restrictions in the EU had little or no impact on the spread of Omicron

Airlines and Airports urge all EU states to respect today's EU Council Recommendation and remove travel restrictions for all vaccinated /recovered passengers in light of emerging evidence

1 Feb 2022 (Brussels/Geneva) – ACI EUROPE (Airports Council International) and the International Air Transport Association (IATA) urged European Governments to lift all travel restrictions for fully vaccinated/recovered individuals holding a valid Covid Certificate – as advised by the new regime for travel within the EU which comes into force today.

This new regime, set out by an EU Council Recommendation adopted on 25 January, is based on the health status of travellers, rather than the epidemiological situation of their country or area of origin.

Independent research¹ conducted in Finland and Italy provides insight into developing a Europe-wide policy for removing restrictions. The research made public today confirms the validity of the traveller-centric approach, highlighting the inefficiency of recent travel restrictions imposed by European countries in mitigating the risks to public health and society posed by COVID-19.

New analysis produced by Oxera and Edge Health reveals that pre-departure testing requirements are likely to be ineffective at stopping or even limiting the spread of the Omicron variant. The analysis of testing restrictions imposed by Italy and Finland on 16 December and 28 December 2021 respectively on all incoming travellers made no distinguishable difference to transmission of Omicron cases in those countries. Conversely, the impact of these restrictions, and in particular the limitations to the free movement of people, resulted in significant and unnecessary economic hardship - not just for the travel and tourism sectors and their workforce, but for the whole European economy.

Crucially, the report also shows that:

- Maintaining pre-departure testing requirements for vaccinated/recovered travellers further will have no impact whatsoever on the future spread of the Omicron variant in Italy and Finland.
- Imposing these restrictions earlier – i.e. on the very day the Omicron variant was identified as an issue by the WHO – would not have stopped its spread nor significantly limited it in Italy and Finland. This is inherent to the fact that variants circulate well ahead of the time by which they are identified, which is the reason why both the WHO and ECDC generally consider travel restrictions to be ineffective.

¹ [Impact of travel restrictions on Omicron in Italy and Finland – Oxera/Edge Health research](#)

The fact that both countries are now lifting their pre-departure testing requirements is very welcome. However, concerns remain that:

- Both countries could have lifted them much earlier or altogether avoided imposing them in the first place – lessons must be learned to avoid repeated economic damage with no attendant public health benefit.
- While Finland has lifted restrictions for all incoming vaccinated/recovered travellers, Italy has done so only for incoming travellers from within the EU/EEA. This now needs to extend to all incoming travellers, as there is no health safety benefit in delaying this step any longer.

With the coming into force today of the new regime for intra-EU/EEA travel, and in light of the robust data now made public, ACI EUROPE and IATA urge those countries which continue to deviate from the common EU framework to rapidly align with it². Specifically, we call upon the Governments of Austria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Lithuania and Malta to address this issue as a matter of urgency and abandon unnecessary and damaging restrictions.

In addition, there are no compelling reasons why vaccinated/recovered travellers should be subjected to a different regime whether they travel within the EU/EEA or come from other countries. It is now urgent that the EU Council aligns its outdated Recommendation for travel into the EU (from third countries) with the new regime for intra-EU/EEA travel that comes into force today.

"The new regime for intra-EU/EEA travel is right to focus on a 'person-based approach' and to recognise that both vaccinated and recovered travellers should not be subjected to any restriction. But having common EU regimes has so far not prevented States from going their own way. This must stop. We now have further proof – travel restrictions do have a significant effect – but it's not on public health, it's on economic stability and livelihoods. In short: they are causing more harm than good," said **Olivier Jankovec, ACI EUROPE Director General**.

"The research is clear that the inevitable delay in identifying new variants means that transmission already occurs by the time travel restrictions are imposed. It's the classic case of closing the stable door after the horse has bolted. Keeping testing in place for vaccinated passengers therefore seems completely ineffective from the health point of view, but damages passenger confidence and national economies. This latest research should give governments confidence to implement the EU recommendation in full, enabling Europe to get moving again," said **Conrad Clifford, IATA Deputy Director General**.

² [Mapping of Travel Restrictions \(1st February 2022\)](#)

###ENDS###

Notes to Editors:

Key results from the Oxera/Edge Health research in Italy and Finland:

- The modelling shows that the imposition of testing measures made no distinguishable difference to numbers of Omicron cases in Italy and Finland
- Even if no travel restrictions had been in put in place at all, the peak in cases would only have come three days earlier in both Italy and Finland compared to a scenario where they were introduced on November 24 (when WHO first announced Omicron)
- If all restrictions had been lifted on 1 January, the maximum impact would be an increase in cases of 0.23% in Italy and 0.07% in Finland

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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.

About IATA (International Air Transport Association)

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) is the trade association for the world's airlines, representing some 290 airlines or 82% of total air traffic. We support many areas of aviation activity and help formulate industry policy on critical aviation issues.