FINAL REPORT

Argentine Chamber of Commerce and Services (CAC) at Business at OECD (BIAC)

Business Roundtable: introducing the OECD Initiative to promote Covid-free International Mobility

11 February 16:30-18:00 (Paris time)
Zoom Virtual Conference

A) Background information

On the occasion of the OECDs 60th Anniversary, December 14, 2020 Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez of Spain called on the OECD to work on an **agreement to enable COVID-19-free international travel**.

B) Key facts

(i)   the enormous economic impact of reduced international mobility;

(ii)   the possible use of tests as part of a covid-free international mobility initiative;

(iii)   the possible information that would be needed to verify compliance with national requirements for tests;

(iv)   possible ways in which any consensus on the topic might be turned into international agreements.

C) About the OECD Initiative to promote Covid- free International Mobility

- a transition strategy that countries may apply starting from a period when the epidemiological context may warrant easing of travel restrictions, while still requiring the use of safeguards to make travel safer for everyone.

- offered for the consideration of governments and focused on the enhanced use of testing as a mechanism for making travel safer.

- proposes a system which is designed to be implemented as a package; that said, at some stages, the proposal presents different options, for discussion to enable flexibility for countries to identify the option that best suits those choosing to adopt the blueprint.

- applies to those countries which voluntarily agree to participate in the system; that is, it is an agreement between parties, not a universal system.

- additional requirements may be applied for travel involving countries that are not part of the agreement

- the system can be implemented unilaterally, bilaterally, plurilaterally or multiterally

- the protocol should aim to <u>reduce the impact of the risk to a residual level that is considered acceptable by national authorities</u> and in line with the World Health Organisation (WHO).

- the system should <u>have in consideration the local epidemiological situation</u>: restrictions on international travel should be commensurate with the epidemiological situation in the country of origin and destination.

- the system must consider an <u>appropriate use of self-isolation and quarantine</u>: self-isolation is when travellers are asked to remain in one place, unsupervised, without mixing. By contrast, quarantine is supervised and plays a different role, particularly useful to seal borders.

- the initiative aims to <u>achieve an appropriate use of self-isolation, considering that testing can provide relevant information about the prevalence of the disease among travellers</u>. Quarantine would continue to be an instrument available to authorities when appropriate.

- stablishes that <u>countries participating in the system will accept tests that have been approved by the national authorities of other participating countries</u>.

- <u>simplicity and reliance on existing systems</u>: The complexity of processes and amount of information collected and transferred across borders should be minimised. The system should be based on collecting strictly necessary data only, and on drawing as much as possible on existing tools and systems for sharing information.

- <u>interoperability, security and privacy protection by design</u>. The system should be interoperable and based on a common nomenclature and format for information transfers (to be agreed). The system should also abide by the principles of "privacy by design", in which the contents, collection mode, purpose for collection, and length of storage for any or all data being collected will be made clear to the data subject at the outset.

- <u>The system will involve agreement among participating countries on</u>:
    a) a common set of information under a common nomenclature, to be developed, to prove COVID status.
    b) provision of this this information to the traveller at the testing stage in an 'eye readable' format, as well as with an automatically generated and 'machine readable' QR or bar code codifying the information in a common order and format.
    c) If unable to create a QR or bar code, test results will have a unique identifier to enable travellers to link their ID to the test.
    d) Definitions on the type of test providers that are authorised to issue results to travellers in the commonly agreed format

- <u>Travel protocol</u>. Participating countries will:
    a) Use common epidemiological criteria for COVID-19 case notification rate, testing rate, and test positivity rate, as reported to the WHO under the International Health Regulations and reflecting WHO definitions.
    b) Define green, orange, red, and dark red categories of risk according to the severity of community spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in each country.

c) Take into account the prevalence of SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern, especially variants which increase transmissibility and fatality, as well as the level of genome sequencing carried out, regardless how the area concerned is classified.
d) Minimise the amount of information requested from travellers to that agreed under the common nomenclature.
e) Protect and secure any data that is collected in accordance with relevant domestic regulations.
f) Limit, as much as possible, the amount of data to be transferred across international borders and rely on existing mechanisms where transfers are needed (e.g. informed consent)

D) Business Perspective about the OECD Initiative to promote Covid- free International Mobility)

1.What would you think are the essential elements for such an initiative from the business perspective? Are there any specific elements that raise concerns?

The world needs a plan to safely restart international travel which proposes establishing a harmonised system, built on systematic pre-departure testing and the mutual recognition of the validation process for test results issued in different countries. The business community faces challenges about international travel, a vital part to the economic activity of many sectors and key in moving towards a resilient and inclusive rebuild after this crisis.

The new economic paradigm must be based on a) public investment; b) reduction of inequalities; c) renewed multilateralism and d) international cooperation – at a regional level – to improve articulation between private and public sector.

In this regard; the Argentine Chamber of Commerce and Services (CAC) finds the following as essential elements:

- **Flexibility**. The countries and the industry will need a level of flexibility to update their health entry requirements as the pandemic evolves and science progresses.
- **Privacy considerations.** Individuals should consent to have the lab results used to validate their COVID19 status without revealing any other underlying personal health information. In this regard, only the minimum amount of personal data should be included and these must be only stored to the extent necessary and never used for any other purpose
- **Data security**. Data must be protected against the possibility of fraud or cyberattacks. The use of new technologies such as blockchain could be considered for such purpose.
- **Innovation.** Many solutions are being developed to ensure safe, seamless and touch free testing experience. We recommend Governments that harness technology and increment their e-capabilities in order to ensure rapid, accessible, verified and trusted digital health data sharing.
- **Scalability**. The proposal submitted do not consider vaccination certificates. As it happens with Covid19 results, vaccines will come from a variety of providers. Therefore, vaccine information sharing will soon be crucial. The scalability of the agreement must be considered in this early stage to smoothly and quickly include information on vaccination certificates once interested parties agree to it.

- **Universality.** In order to be truly effective, the system should be recognized and accepted across all jurisdictions and industries Even though this is not a universal initiative, it should facilitate the widest possible adoption globally.

2. Requiring tests before travel is expensive; requiring travellers to self-isolate is burdensome and excludes tourism and much business travel. Do you think travellers could absorb the extra costs of testing to enable an increase in travel on a meaningful scale?

The cost of testing should be subject to public/private articulation. **The lack of common protocols for testing, medical screening and quarantines not only hinders economies, but it may also not provide a comprehensive response to mitigate public health risks**. At the same time, rapid technological developments in diagnostic tests, including new antigen tests, have opened up possibilities for the quick and reliable diagnosis of SARS-CoV-2 infection as well as for managing international travel in a safer, more effective way.

Equity considerations must be taken into account in the price-setting decisions. Many people travel for other reasons apart from recreation, such us family reunification; business; etc., Therefore, the system should allow as people as possible from all over the world to travel

3. What constraints does your sector face when resuming or planning to resume international travel, and what approaches that countries have followed have you found effective or ineffective, and why?

The Argentine Chamber of Commerce and Services (CAC) carried out, between December 15 and 20 (2020), the eighth national survey on companies and covid-19 to find out the specific needs faced by organizations in the sector. Once again, the data contributes to the design of proposals for mitigation measures in pursuit of the recovery of commercial activity. It should be noted that 56% companies sell less than before the pandemic, that 27% sell more, while 17% did not register any variation. In addition to sales, the survey considers other variables such as salary payments, average bonus, taxes and services.

On the other hand, if the current restrictions continue for the next 60 days, 54% of the companies consulted reported that they will be able to continue operating, 19.5% will suffer significant losses, 17.2% will have to reduce their size, and 11.5% could close their doors (more than one answer was allowed for this question). Finally, it is emphasized that only 25.3% of companies have investment expectations for the coming months.

With the pandemic, the first thing that appears affected, and that affects tourism, is transport, because there is no doubt that the virus spread throughout the world as a result of transport. It occurred a triad made up of tourism, transport and the pandemic that caused an unprecedented experience that we still find it difficult to measure in its scope and consequences.

The **lack of coherence among the measures taken by each country** is not only making it more difficult for individuals to travel for business or leisure but also for health authorities to mitigate public health risks. Besides the existing patchwork of approaches, an **insufficient and late communication** of such measures adds uncertainty and might prevent people from travel planning.

It might be burdensome for travelers to get **accurate and trusty information on the documentation required to enter a given country**. Such requirements should be accessible and clear in order to make it easier for them to know what documentation they need for any destination. The new standardized set of rules should be broadly communicated and displayed in an easy manner to ensure the information is widely available for travelers.

Finally, **travelers' confidence need to be restored** with a view to putting the industry back on track. Passengers need to feel safe and be sure that they travel with non- or low-risk in order to reestablish international travel.

The lack of coherence is also manifested internally, in many countries different conditions apply for income to certain provinces or states. Insufficient communication is not only towards users or passengers but also with businesses that are affected by tourist activity. This creates confusion for customers. Maybe it would be appropriate to propose that the **standardization of protocols be encouraged at least among regional blocs and perhaps in this way the ambitious objective can be achieved in a slightly less complex way**.

E- Conclusion

To conclude, the Argentina's Chamber of Commerce and Services (CAC) highly appreciate the opportunity to take part in this public-private conversation. We firmly sustain that business engagement is crucial to bring expertise and experience to the discussion table and ensure that policy makers are fully connected with to the real experience of international trade.

In this particular case, we recommend that Governments partner with the tourism & travel industry to better understand the operation reality and deploy a right risk based approach for travel.

We also reinforce our concern with the state of the travel and tourism industry. As a matter of fact, the World Travel and Tourism Council predicts that over 190 million people may lose their travel related jobs in 2020 due to the COVID-19 outbreak. This will result in $5.5 billion in lost GDP.

Harmonization and simplification of current standards are crucial to help return global travel and trade to pre-pandemic levels in a safe manner.