

ASSA-i



AVIATION SECURITY
SERVICES ASSOCIATION
INTERNATIONAL

Statement

Observations and Recommendations on the COVID-19 Situation

April 2020

Most regions of the world have gradually moved to a complete lockdown since mid-March in response to the spreading of the SARS-CoV2 virus. The aviation industry is badly hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Across Europe, many airports have shut down or witness a steep drop in passenger traffic. As a consequence, aviation security companies are witnessing a severe collapse of business – with immediate consequences for the employability of staff in these service segments and liquidity of companies, but also with repercussions on training and licensing of security agents. These are matters that require an urgent, targeted response, as airport security staff is vital for the functioning of air traffic – also once the COVID-19 situation is under control.

Even though the hopes are that, in Europe, the epidemic may recede in the next few weeks, other regions are at different stages and use different means of addressing the crisis, thereby implementing flight restrictions or whole country bans. Even within Europe, aviation experts are not expecting the mobility and air traffic to get back to pre-COVID-19 levels any time soon. According to IATA's latest [impact assessment](#) on 14 April 2020, full-year passenger demand (domestic and international) is expected to be down 48% compared to 2019. The [latest figures released by ACI Europe](#) indicate that airports have lost 106 million passengers in March alone, which represents a drop of 59.5%, dragging Q1 passenger traffic down by -21%. But while Europe's airports still handled 5,120,000 passengers on 1 March (-11.7% compared to the same day in 2019), that number had reduced to just 174,000 by 31 March (-97.1% compared to the same day in 2019).

The main difficulty for businesses in dealing with this crisis right now is uncertainty. Even once mass-testing will be carried out, and vaccine and treatment solutions are found, it is unclear if the recovery will take a V or U shape and how long it will take (if at all) to get back to pre-Covid19 levels.

This document collects observations and recommendations and may be updated over time, as the situation evolves. Some of them are actionable by the European and International aviation safety organisations, some at the National Civil Aviation Authorities and National Authorities in general.

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The need for a consistent, common approach on European and International level

ASSA-i is grateful for the measures taken by DG MOVE, in particular those addressing the suspension of certain airport security legislation and the extension of certification and recertification. However, as already highlighted in the aviation chapter of the [CoESS Best Practice document on transport security](#), while the EU has a very advanced aviation security legislation, it is still too open to national interpretation. In a crisis situation this fact is even more problematic, and ASSA-I therefore advocates in favour of a consistent, common, approach to this crisis. Adaptation, flexibility and consistency across the EU (and even beyond, i.e. at ICAO level) are crucial elements for Private Security Companies (PSCs) that are operating across the world, so that they are able to streamline efforts and get through the crisis in an “acceptable” condition. We illustrate some concrete examples of helpful measures below.

Private security is an essential service to airports and requires targeted support. Private security is not a service like any other: it is an essential service for society in general, and airports cannot function without it. The staff, in particular the security agents and screeners, are the main resources of PSCs and of course it is the companies’ utmost priority to protect their health, safety and security.

In order to economically protect the staff while contributing to the efforts during the health crisis, an out of the box idea could be to employ airport staff in other locations. This may entail legal, liability or insurance hurdles, but under the circumstance, exceptional temporary measures may need to be adopted. For example, hospitals or other locations that face a temporary rise in demand for private security protection, may be served by staff previously employed in airports. The point above on protecting the staff’s health is, of course, a precondition for such temporary solution.

PSCs are available to support the authorities during the crisis, as they always have been in normal times, and in times of crises. In working together, we would like to refer to the guidelines on Public-Private Partnerships outlined in the [CoESS White Paper on “The Security Continuum”](#);

Authorities shall establish and maintain a special information channel with PSCs for this reason, so that PSCs can react appropriately as and when requested;

Below are some more specific remarks:

- **Support to airports:** As the whole airport ecosystems are suffering, and the current situation is unprecedented in nature and impact, there needs to be strong support from the Member States to airports, which play a central role in their economies and exchanges. Different countries are taking different approaches. We call for an agreed EU approach.



- **Support to airlines:** PSCs are also facing many issues with airlines, as their revenues are severely reduced during the crisis. Many are asking for price reductions of up to 20% and are extending payment terms. Some may file for financial protection programmes in their respective countries to avoid bankruptcy. Airlines are the main drivers of the airports and their situation needs to be closely monitored.
- **Workforce organisation:** It is difficult to organise the workforce in an uncertain time, especially since the workforce in question has been selected, vetted, background checked and trained - a process which is long and costly. Every short-term decision needs to be balanced against the exit of the crisis.
- **Certification and training:** It is essential to initiate a dialogue with National Civil Aviation Authorities (CAAs) in order to redesign common certification and training processes for security agents, in particular in relation to x-ray operations, allowing the implementation of effective and adequate CBT distance-learning trainings and initial / recurrent certification measures. Such process, through the implementation of specialized security training systems, allows for effective supervision and control of CAAs. Such process should, however, be adopted across the EU. Also, a minimum extension period for certification and recertification processes of x-ray operators, including DGR certification for category 12, should be considered.
- **Adapt measures to minimise contamination risks:** CAAs and PSCs need to discuss how the current security control processes within the aviation ecosystem can be revised in such a way that it minimizes the risk of contamination and the spreading of the virus:
 - o Modifications of the screening process to maximise the use of technological solutions;
 - o Confirmations of such measures within the regulatory measures across the EU.
- **Occupational health and safety:** CAAs and PSCs need to ensure the implementation of adequate SOPs and training packages focused on health and safety measures in relation to the pandemic, and thereby produce a revised security process that can be in place in the short term and applicable during the period following the pandemic where the risk of a relapse is still high.
- **Consistency:** With the aim to avoid or manage (a) potential relapse(s), these measures shall be implemented in a consistent manner across the aviation ecosystem.
- **Anticipation of risks:** Crisis management, contingency planning, crisis response and business continuity should be addressed to better anticipate any future relapse or other health crisis.
- **Temporary exemptions:** CAAs need to provide exemptions or modifications of certain regulations. The obligation to staff security lanes with 4 or 5 agents, as currently in place, should be temporarily suspended, and the numbers adopted in proportion to the reality in the field and to the operational need.



About ASSA-i - Aviation Security Services Association – International

Established in 2002, ASSA-i is the single voice for aviation security providers. Its vision is *professional, efficient and seamless security services* for individuals, luggage and cargo, so that people and goods can fly safely and securely. To this end, ASSA-i's members constantly seek to optimise security solutions, where both technology and people are selected and combined to provide high quality security.