

Simply Services Speaker Series

"COVID-19, cross-border mobility and trade"

20 July 2021, 13h30-14h30

Introductory statement by the moderator

INTRO

- Good afternoon from Geneva, and welcome to this session of Simply Services on "COVID-19, cross-border mobility and trade".
- For those who are not familiar with the concept, **Simply Services** is an informal platform set up by the Services Division of the WTO Secretariat for the exchange of knowledge and information on trade in services. It convenes experts to the WTO, so that they may share their latest relevant work, initiatives or experiences.
- Today's Simply Services is the fifth webinar of 2021. It will discuss how cross-border mobility, which plays a crucial role for trade but has been significantly curtailed by COVID-19, might be safely restarted. Cooperative efforts are currently under way, and we will hear about relevant initiatives and perspectives from our panellists, representing four international organizations.

BACKGROUND

- By way of background, let me start by pointing out the obvious: COVID-19 has dramatically **reduced cross-border mobility**. To contain the spread of the virus, governments around the world have introduced an unprecedented number of border closures, travel restrictions and health-related entry conditions. Just to give you a sense of the scale, data from the International Organization for Migration indicates that, at the beginning of this month, around 110'000 travel-related measures had been introduced worldwide.
- International **trade and investment have always relied on the cross-border mobility** of individuals, and this is particularly so for trade in services. In order to be traded, several services require physical proximity between producers and

consumers, and international mobility is one way to attain this proximity. The cross-border movement of businesspeople is also an important indirect facilitator of services trade, for instance in relation to services that are supplied remotely or through a commercial presence abroad, as well for goods trade, given that it helps reduce information and transaction costs.

- It will therefore come as no surprise that **trade in services has been severely impacted** by the temporary border closures and travel restrictions introduced to mitigate the risks of COVID-19 transmission. Latest available estimates suggest that, in 2020, the value of global services trade was down 21% year-on-year, more than double the decline, of "only" 9%, for trade in goods. Among the sectors that have suffered most are, again unsurprisingly given their reliance on mobility, tourism and travel. Indeed, it is no coincidence that the two sectoral International Organisations represented here today deal precisely with tourism, and air transport services.
- Against this background, with the Northern summer in view and vaccination roll-out gathering pace in many economies, increasing attention is being devoted to how to international mobility might be safely reopened. A growing number of **health passes** are being created, many in digital format, with a view to facilitating the sharing of information about travellers' COVID status. In this context, interoperable solutions for cross-border verification of the health certificates take on special significance. At the same time, new variants of concern are creating new challenges.
- Transnational mobility measures create international spill-overs, and cooperative efforts aimed at safely restarting cross-border mobility are currently under way. Today's Simply Services aims to provide an overview of the perspectives and relevant initiatives of four international organizations.
- We are fortunate to have with us a very distinguished panel. I would like to express our deep gratitude to all our speakers for taking the time to be with us today. Let me introduce them, in the order in which they will intervene.
- First, we have **Doctor Nedret EMIROGLU**, who is Director of Country Readiness Strengthening in the Health Emergencies Programme at the World Health Organization Headquarters. Nedret is a medical doctor and health expert with over 30 years of experience, mostly in the United Nations, and her expertise spans all

fields of public health and development work. Before taking up her currently role, Nedret held other positions at WHO, where she has led efforts to support countries prepare for and respond to health emergencies, and to prevent and control infectious diseases.

- Next, we will hear from **Javier LOPEZ GONZALEZ**, a senior economist at the Trade and Agriculture Directorate of the OECD and one of the authors of the OECD Blueprint for Safer International Travel. Javier's other work has focused on digital trade, including identifying potential economic costs and benefits of digital trade; mapping the evolving regulatory environment; and investigating regulatory approaches to cross-border data flows. He has previously worked on the drivers and implications of participation in global value chains. Javier holds a PhD in Economics from the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom.
- We also have with us **Mr. Ciarán [Kiran] CAROLAN**, who is Programme Officer in Aviation Security and Facilitation at the International Civil Aviation Organization in Montreal. He is responsible for the operational management of ICAO's Public Key Directory (PKD) and is Secretary of the PKD Board of State representatives. He also lends his expertise in the domains of digital identity, biometrics and travel documents to support ICAO's efforts to facilitate cross-border movements. *Kiran* previously worked for the European Union Agency for large-scale IT systems. He has an undergraduate degree in pharmacy and a PhD in computational chemistry from Trinity College Dublin, Ireland, and an MBA from IE Business School in Madrid, Spain.
- Last, but definitely not least, is **Ms. Sandra CARVAO** who is Chief of Market Intelligence and Competitiveness at the "other WTO", the UN World Tourism Organization, based in Madrid. Sandra has been in her current position since June 2018, having previously served as UNWTO's Chief of Communications and Publications for 8 years and Deputy Chief of the Market Trends, Competitiveness and Trade in Tourism Services Department for three years. Prior to joining UNWTO, Sandra worked in the Portuguese National Tourist Office in Lisbon. Sandra has a degree in International Relations, Economics Branch, from the Technical University of Lisbon and a post-graduate degree in Marketing by the Universidad Complutense of Madrid.

- Finally, my name is **Antonia Carzaniga**, I am Counsellor in the Trade in Services and Investment Division of the WTO Secretariat and will be moderating today's session.