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EXPERT COMMENTARY

IATA Timatic: Managing Passenger Passport and
Travel Document Compliance
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IATA

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) is the trade association for the world's airlines, representing some 267 airlines or 83% of total air traffic. IATA supports many areas of aviation activity and helps formulate industry policy on critical aviation issues. IATA helps airlines operate safely, securely, efficiently and economically under clearly defined rules. Professional support is provided to all industry stakeholders, with a wide range of products and expert services. The IATA Timatic database is a one-stop shop for reliable and up-to-date visa immigration rules information. Having cooperated with Henley & Partners on the HVRI – looking at the number of destinations an adult holder of any ordinary passport can visit visa-free or with a visa-on-arrival for a short-term stay, in 2015 IATA extended its cooperation with researchers to contribute data also to the QNI, providing an array of crucially important datasets for the production of the QNI, which you are holding in your hands.

Why Do Airlines Check Passengers' Travel Documents?

Have you ever wondered why airlines check your passport? After all, it is not as if they really mind what nationality you have… In short, it is the airline's responsibility to ensure that every passenger has sufficient travel documents for their destination and any transit points. Where airlines do not perform this task, or mistakenly carry a passenger with insufficient travel documents, they will normally be fined by the Immigration Department, with such fines reaching into the thousands of dollars.

The vast majority of rejections are for three reasons:

1   Passport validity – each country demands that travelers' travel documents must be valid for a certain length of time, and in many cases it will vary by the nationality of the passenger

2   One-way tickets – most countries have regulations that non-nationals must have a return or onward ticket showing that they do not intend to stay in the destination country; however, few actually enforce this

3   Visa – passengers do not have a visa or it is invalid. This is becoming an increasingly complex area as many countries are starting to accept visas issued by other countries, e.g. Mexico will accept US visas

Airlines are also protecting their travelers from taking a flight where they will not be admitted to the destination country. Can you imagine a couple going on a long-awaited vacation and being refused entry to their holiday destination as their passports expire in five months, whereas the destination country requires them to be valid for six months?

IATA TIM and Timatic

The Travel Information Manual (TIM) and Timatic are two IATA products which help airlines and other actors operating within the international airline arena manage passenger travel document compliance. The TIM and Timatic range of solutions contains immigration regulations covering the following areas:

• Passport regulations and recommendations

• Visa regulations and recommendations

• Health regulations and recommendations

• Airport tax to be paid by the traveler at either departure or arrival airport

• Customs regulations relating to import/export of goods and small pets by a passenger

• Currency regulations relating to import and export by a passenger

The TIM was first launched in 1954, and is still published and distributed to thousands of users around the world every month. It was followed in 1985 by Timatic, which is an electronic version integrated into airline and travel agent reservation systems. Since then, the product has continued to develop with web-based versions. However, such manual systems are inefficient and require passengers to queue up to have their documents checked, as we have all experienced at some time in our life.

Self-service Check-in: Simplifying the Passenger's Travel Experience

In 2006 Timatic AutoCheck was launched, which combines the Timatic data with a rules engine, thereby enabling airlines and travel agents to automate the travel document check as part of the check-in process, and to provide personalized travel document advice to passengers at the time of reservation.

Timatic AutoCheck works by having the passenger or agent scan their passport or travel document as part of check-in. This travel document data is then combined with the itinerary information, and submitted to Timatic AutoCheck for processing. An instant response is sent back to the airlines as to whether the travel documents are sufficient, and if not, why not. In the majority of cases a positive response is sent back and the passenger can continue with check-in without even being aware that the document check was performed. Only where there is an issue is the passenger directed to an agent.

Timatic AutoCheck is used by most of the world's leading airlines to power their check-in products, including both agent and self-service check-in such as kiosk and online. In 2017 approximately 400 million passengers will have their travel documents checked against the Timatic database, so it is likely that you will benefit from the service.

Where and How Does IATA Collect the Travel Regulations in Timatic?

On average 72 immigration regulations updates are made to the Timatic database every day. The key to the success of Timatic solutions is the quality and reliability of the Timatic data. Should the immigration regulations contained within Timatic be incorrect, this would lead to passengers not being informed of the correct travel documents necessary, as well as airlines carrying improperly documented passengers and paying the resulting fines.

A good example of how Timatic is updated was the US Presidential Executive Order in 2017, which banned certain nationalities from entering the US. As the order was implemented, the regulations were updated in the Timatic database and were instantly applied to passenger check-ins around the world. Similarly, as the situation developed and the courts ruled the ban illegal, the regulations changes were reversed in Timatic.

Another key feature of the data is that it represents the actual immigration regulations as they are enforced. In many cases there may be a difference between the regulations published by the immigration authorities and their interpretation or enforcement. While the Timatic team works very closely with the immigration and border control authorities in nearly all countries in the world, our role

is to represent our airline members and not just to be a publishing vehicle for immigration authorities. A good example of the divergence between regulations and actual enforcement is the rules surrounding one-way tickets. The majority of countries regulate that foreign passengers must hold a return or onward ticket; however, in practice few countries actively enforce this regulation. Such regulations are typically only enforced where there are suspicions as to the passenger's intentions. Should such regulations be enforced, airlines would in practice not be able to carry passengers on one-way tickets. A differentiation is made in the Timatic rules engine so that the check-in is only stopped where the passenger has a one-way ticket and the regulation is being actively enforced.

In order to collect and publish the immigration regulations and actual enforcement policies, IATA relies on over 1,400 information sources around the world. These sources can be divided between government sources and airline sources. Government sources can be categorized into several different types including border control, immigration, consular departments of foreign affairs, and ministries of health. There is no more reliable source of worldwide, up-to-date immigration rules in force than Timatic, which contributes to the reliability and transparency of the Quality of Nationality Index which is based, in large part, on the Timatic data processed by IATA Timatic team members.

Henley & Partners is the global leader in residence and citizenship planning. Each year, hundreds of wealthy individuals, families and their advisors rely on our expertise and experience in this area. Our highly qualified professionals work together as one team in over 25 offices worldwide.

The concept of residence and citizenship planning was created by Henley & Partners in the 1990s. As globalization has expanded, residence and citizenship have become topics of significant interest among the increasing number of internationally mobile entrepreneurs and investors whom we proudly serve every day.

The firm also runs a leading government advisory practice which has raised more than USD 6 billion in foreign direct investment. We have been involved in strategic consulting and the design, set-up and operation of the world's most successful residence and citizenship programs.