

VDR WHITE PAPER

Business travel during and after the coronavirus pandemic

Back to the future of business travel

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Get back to business means get back to business travel

Economic growth depends on business trips

Our aim is to create conditions that will allow companies to resume business trips to the extent necessary for the success of their business and consequently the success of our entire economy.

- Around 190 million business trips took place in Germany in 2019.
- The coronavirus pandemic will change the number and structure of business trips. Initially, there will be fewer business trips. In the short term, these will be limited to essential business trips. Virtual meetings will become the norm. These consequences of the pandemic will have a positive effect on the costs and climate impact of business trips.
- However, for one of the largest global economies and a strong export nation, business travel will remain a key success factor.
- Hundreds of thousands of people work in the business travel sector in Germany.

Kick-starting business travel safely and quickly is an important requirement for positive economic development.

Decisions by government are crucial

Business travel sector has clear expectations

Companies and service providers need to be able to plan with confidence. Health is the top priority. That is why plans and measures may change at short notice in response to the current situation. When it comes to kick-starting the economy however, only moving forward when the way ahead is clear is ultimately counterproductive. What is needed here is a master plan, with clear rules and deadlines:

1. Consistent nationwide approach | Ideal: consistency throughout the EU

Many German companies engaging in business travel, and the vast majority of service providers, operate nationwide. It is not viable for companies and service providers to have to deal with regional discrepancies in rules and regulations on hygiene, openings, travel into and out of countries. The same applies to the EU, which is the key destination for international business trips. The VDR calls for a consistent nationwide and EU-wide approach.

2. Pooling regulations, recommendations and information

Companies and service providers have to, and want to, comply with state regulations and follow the recommendations. Yet, anyone researching the regulations and recommendations applying at federal, state and regional level is currently faced with a complex task and a major challenge due to the many different sources. To ensure the consistent compliance of the business travel sector, we need to pool at least the relevant regulations, and the recommendations too if possible, in one central place. The rules of other EU countries, on entry to the country for example, should also be made available in English.

3. Opening up borders with clear rules on exit and entry

One in seven business trips has a foreign destination, usually another EU country or a country in the connected economic areas. This is where Germany's most important trading partners are. Kick-starting the economy calls for clear rules on exit and entry and these rules need to be centrally communicated. It is unlikely that business trips will take place while there are still quarantine obligations and travel warnings in place.

Service providers prepare for kick-start

Keeping track of state guidelines and customer expectations

1. Public information on the specific implementation of hygiene requirements | Ideal: consistency across industry sectors

Service providers in the business travel sector and companies whose employees travel on business need to comply with hygiene requirements and have a duty of care towards their employees. Within this given framework, there is an urgent need for information on how travel can be carried out in practice (rules on travel by train and plane, conduct at railway stations and airports, in hotels and guesthouses, in taxis and rental cars, at trade fairs and other events with a physical presence, and much more). Service and mobility providers are encouraged to communicate their respective measures and rules to their business customers, which should ideally be consistent across industry sectors.

2. What business travellers need to/are advised to do

The information for business customers mentioned above will result in new guidelines for travellers. These should be made available to them when planning their business trips and not just before the start of their journeys.

3. Information on state regulations abroad, on entry/exit and on local hygiene requirements

Before the coronavirus pandemic, many travellers – especially frequent travellers – knew exactly what visa and reporting obligations they had to comply with when travelling abroad. They will need to update this knowledge. Travel agencies and travel visa providers will increasingly be required to provide current information.

Companies and travellers get ready

Concerns about health, uncertainties over regulations and new procedures

1. Implementing duty of care and hygiene rules

After coronavirus, it will not be possible for business travellers to just go off on a business trip as they used to before the pandemic. Companies will have to protect their employees and shoulder their responsibilities. State hygiene rules will have to be followed on business trips too.

2. VDR guidelines for healthy business travel

- Travellers should question the need to travel and choose alternatives if possible
- Inform colleagues
- Safety and protection on the journey
- Insurance cover in case of illness and repatriation

3. Make adjustments to in-house rules and procedures

Adjustments will have to be made to the company’s business travel policy. Each company will have to carry out their own adjustments – they will be different for each company and cannot be specified centrally. Updated information will be required and measures will have to be implemented to protect the health of the business traveller, which will need to be agreed with employee representatives. Temporary new rules for healthy travel and corresponding internal procedures will be required for this. In the long term, a few of these temporary changes may well be incorporated into existing guidelines.

Support provided by VDR

Actively helping to restart business travel

Supporting government decision making

- Communicating the specific requirements of the business traveller, companies, service and mobility providers
- Participating in formulation of policies and information

Platform for current information

- Communication platform for current provider information as service for companies and travellers
- Participating in formulation of industry-wide policies

Recommendations for companies

- Reliable information for companies in the form of “VDR guidelines for healthy travelling”, checklist for business travellers and communication of best practice examples for in-house implementation.
- Pooling of company requirements to government agencies as well as service and mobility providers

Verband Deutsches Reisemanagement e.V. (VDR – German Business Travel Association)

The Verband Deutsches Reisemanagement e.V. (VDR) is Germany's association for business travel. It represents the interests of German companies on issues affecting the general and competitive conditions for business travel and mobility. It campaigns for efficient, economical, safe and unhindered global travel possibilities for businesses. With over 560 member companies, it represents total sales in the business travel sector of more than twelve billion euros annually.

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