New digital air cargo technical specifications guidance

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The UN's International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) have completed new digital air cargo technical specifications guidance.

The new guidance is designed to help to accelerate the transition towards safer and more resilient supply chains, while supporting Covid-19 response and recovery efforts.

Digital innovations are helping the air transport sector to transition away from paper-based documents used to facilitate the movement of global airfreight, promoting a contactless air cargo environment and greater cross-border trade resilience in the face of future pandemic threats.

In line with the recommendations of the ICAO Council's Aviation Recovery Task Force (CART), the specifications aim t0 help reduce physical contact among international trade and transport professionals, and in so doing better protect the fluidity of cross-border trade and international transport operations from pandemic-related restrictions.

"The latest innovations reflect ICAO's integrated, collaborative, and multilateral approach to transport policies encompassing air cargo and mail supply chains, and will play an important part in addressing both current and future pandemic risks," highlighted ICAO secretary general Juan Carlos Salazar. "It's our expectation that they will help address the tremendous double strain now being placed on global supply chains, whether by the COVID-19 pandemic itself, or the incredible surge in international e-commerce which has accompanied it."

ICAO's collaboration with UNECE on supply chain digitalisation is an outcome of the Joint Statement on the Contribution of International Trade and Supply Chains to a Sustainable Socioeconomic Recovery in COVID-19 Times, which was signed by eight UN agencies in September 2020.

Digital specifications will now replace the formerly paper-based Air Waybill (AWB), Dangerous Goods Declaration (DGD), and the Consignment Security Declaration (CSD). These in turn form part of a broader suite of deliverables for multimodal transport data sharing, applicable to air, road, rail, maritime and inland water transport.