



UNITED NATIONS  
OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

## OSCE and UNOCT discuss ways to responsibly use passenger data to prevent return of foreign terrorist fighters

The OSCE Transnational Threats Department's Border Security and Management Unit and the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) organized the fourth OSCE-wide Seminar on Passenger Data Exchange on 29 and 30 October 2020, bringing together more than 250 passenger data experts from OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation.

This year's event, held online, aimed at identifying the technical assistance needs of States in their implementation of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2396. This Resolution, passed in 2017, focuses on preventing the return of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) by mandating States to adopt and use both Advance Passenger Information (API) and Passenger Name Record (PNR) data systems to check against national and international watchlists of known and suspected terrorists, and in accordance with international law and human rights. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) similarly requires its members to use both API and PNR.

“Advance Passenger Information and Passenger Name Record systems play a central role in enabling a targeted and risk-based approach to screening travellers, minimizing disruption to legitimate movements, while hindering, detecting and investigating those of terrorists and other criminals,” said Vladimir Voronkov, the UN's Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism. “These systems, made mandatory by the Security Council, are also very complex to establish. That is why we established the United Nations Countering Terrorist Travel Programme. Our goal is to help Member States build their capabilities to collect and analyse data related to known and suspected terrorists, and to disseminate the results to national and international authorities.”

Ambassador Igli Hasani, Albania's Permanent Representative to the International Organizations in Vienna and Chairperson of the OSCE Permanent Council, said: “As Chair of the OSCE this year, Albania hopes to translate Resolution 2396 into the OSCE's body of commitments, as part of a new Ministerial Decision on Public-Private Partnerships against terrorism. This Decision would help ensure that the OSCE provides more expansive technical assistance and capacity-building to support

participating States in their establishment and operation of API/PNR systems, in line with associated international guidelines and standards.”

Ambassador Luca Fratini, Director of the Office of the OSCE Secretary General, added: “The UN Security Council has mandated implementation of API and PNR data and the OSCE plays a major role in supporting participating States’ efforts to establish their respective API/PNR systems. So far, we have drafted 12 National Roadmaps for Implementation. These roadmaps cover the operational, administrative and financial steps required to set up such a system.”

As well as exploring counter-terrorism issues, experts from participating States, international organizations and the private sector delivered presentations on how passenger data could be used to trace COVID-19 cases and help the authorities address challenges posed by the global pandemic while upholding human rights.

“Countries can responsibly use PNR to respond to a range of threats,” said Hillary Batjer Johnson, Deputy Co-ordinator for Homeland Security, Screening, and Designations in the Bureau of Counterterrorism in the U.S. Department of State. “For example, PNR analysis and traveller screening can also help governments identify and notify travelers who may have been exposed to diseases like COVID-19 so they can obtain appropriate medical care. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, PNR was one of the only tools we had to identify and contact travellers who had been exposed to the disease while traveling, and it remains an essential tool as the aviation industry seeks to resume international activity.”

Over the course of the event, discussions highlighted good practices in establishing Passenger Information Units, while key IT service providers presented their API/PNR analysis systems. UNOCT representatives introduced the Countering Terrorist Travel Programme, including the goTravel software and participants also elaborated the importance of fostering regional co-operation by establishing Informal Working Groups on API/PNR.