HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON COVID-19 (HLCC 2021)

FACILITATION STREAM

Montréal, Canada, 12 to 22 October 2021

Agenda Item 9: Future approaches to the management of sustainable health-related Facilitation measures for the passenger experience and advancing the implementation monitoring

MITIGATING IN ALL TIMES THE BARRIERS TO ACCESSIBILITY TO AIR TRANSPORT SERVICES FOR ALL PASSENGERS, INCLUDING THOSE WITH DISABILITIES

(Presented by the Secretariat)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is an increasing need to ensure accessibility in aviation for all passengers globally, including the most vulnerable, such as those with disabilities. The number of elderly and persons with disability travelling by air continues to increase, as they benefit from increased opportunities for domestic and international air travel. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) requires the full and effective participation and inclusion in society of all individuals, including freedom of movement and freedom of choice. However, there are barriers that limit the ability of elderly and disabled persons to take full advantage of international air transportation services, such as different requirements and at times even incompatible, lack of national laws or enforceable measures for accessibility throughout the passenger journey.

Action: The Conference is invited to:

a) review the information and assessments provided in this working paper;
b) endorse the conclusions presented in paragraph 3; and
c) adopt the recommendations presented in paragraph 4.

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<th>Strategic Objectives:</th>
<th>This working paper relates to the Strategic Objectives Safety and Security and Facilitation.</th>
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<td>Financial implications:</td>
<td>Development and implementation of ICAO’s provisions will continue over the next triennia, additional resources are required, both financial and human, to ensure increased and effective implementation of Annex 9 provisions by all ICAO Member States.</td>
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<td>References:</td>
<td>HLCC reference material is available at <a href="https://www.icao.int/Meetings/HLCC2021/Pages/default.aspx">https://www.icao.int/Meetings/HLCC2021/Pages/default.aspx</a>.</td>
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The number of elderly as well as persons with disabilities make up a significant and growing percentage of the world’s population and constitute the world’s largest minority. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that this number is increasing through population growth, medical advances and the ageing process. Aviation, like all other transport modes, needs to recognise and accommodate this growing passenger segment.

1.2 Persons with disabilities have the same international rights as other citizens, such as accessibility, and full and effective participation and inclusion in society, including freedom of movement and freedom of choice (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, articles 3.c) and 3.f).

1.3 The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a powerful framework to guide local communities, countries and the international community toward the achievement of disability-inclusive development.

1.4 The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Assembly Resolution A40-16, Consolidated statement on the continuing ICAO policies related to facilitation, urges Member States to, inter alia, give due regard to Doc 9984, Manual on Access to Air Transport by Persons with Disabilities in their implementation of relevant provisions of Annex 9 — Facilitation.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 The number of elderly and persons with disability travelling by air continues to increase, as they benefit from increased opportunities for domestic and international air travel. However, there are still many barriers that limit the ability of elderly and disabled persons to take full advantage of international air transportation services. These barriers, in addition to having an adverse humanitarian effect on many potential air travellers, have proven to be more challenging with the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.2 There is not a global approach to meeting the needs of the large and growing population of travellers with disabilities; often requirements are different and at times even incompatible. In many parts of the world, there are no laws or standards and passengers with disabilities have no certainty or confidence in the level of service they will receive. Although there is the ICAO guidance for Persons with disabilities (PWD) travelling by air, they are often ignored. Clear, unequivocal, consistent and above all enforceable standards for accessibility throughout the journey would be a major step forward in giving persons with disabilities the confidence to travel.

2.3 The pace at which new technology is being introduced in airports increases the likelihood of facilities for persons with disabilities not being considered. More airports have introduced self-service check-in machines instead of staffed desks. Some PWD may have difficulties to use such technology, either because the screen and controls are too high or because there is no audible instruction on their usage. Modern airports operating on a commercial basis are increasingly designed as major retail outlets rather than simply as points of departure and arrival. This often means that the size of terminals and the distances that have to be covered from check in to departure gate have increased in recent years. Additionally, a distressing event is the loss or damage to mobility equipment and inconsistent practice in the immediate action needed to restore mobility to the person concerned.
2.4 The way in which information is provided to persons with disabilities before and during the journey is essential, especially for the majority of people who do not fly frequently, as it is difficult to know what questions to ask or what to expect, including what the boarding process will entail. Clearer and more comprehensive information and communication about every step of the journey would help to inform and empower passengers with disabilities. Additionally, lack of training to relevant airline and airport personnel can affect staff providing direct assistance to PWD. Commitment to training at all levels is fundamental to improving standards.

2.5 The Twelfth Meeting of the Facilitation Panel (FALP/12), (13-22 July 2021) recommended the upgrade of certain Annex 9 Recommended Practices RPs: 8.22, 8.28, 8.29, 8.30, 8.32 and 8.40.1, on Facilitation of the transport of persons with disabilities, to Standards, in order to strengthen the international regulatory framework.

2.6 State letter EC 6/3-21/25 (1 June 2021) urged Member States to complete an online survey on accessibility in aviation that mirrors the relevant Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) of Annex 9 — Facilitation, aimed at collecting information from Member States on their regulations, statutes, and policies relating to accessibility in aviation to support the development of a compendium of regulation, statutes, and policies relating to accessibility in aviation.

2.7 Replies to the survey from 76 States indicate that the majority have implemented regulations, statutes and policies on giving persons with disabilities equivalent access to air transport, as well as, regulations and policies relating to provision of special assistance, such as, safety briefings, and accessible wayfinding information.

2.8 Some States identified challenges in implementing ICAO SARPs relating to persons with disabilities, such as, coordination and implementation of SARPs related to other stakeholders including operators, and long regulatory processes implementing SARPs into national legislation.

2.9 Regarding a program for validating compliance by airlines and or airports related to accessibility in aviation, a majority of States have such a compliance program, but not all do. Some States indicate that their program includes compliance monitoring for both airlines and airports, while some indicate compliance monitoring for either airline or airport.

2.10 With regards to coordination amongst States and industry, not all States coordinate or consult with airlines and/or airports when developing regulations, policies, programs or plans, including training programs.

3. CONCLUSIONS

3.1 Persons with disabilities (PWD) should have equivalent access to air travel. These international rights apply to air travel as to all areas of life. Aviation, like all other transport modes, needs to fully recognize and effectively accommodate this growing passenger segment.

3.2 The 2030 Agenda for SDGs pledges to leave no one behind, including persons with disabilities and has recognized disability as a cross-cutting issue, to be considered in the implementation of all of its goals.

3.3 ICAO already has SARPs and guidance material in Doc 9984 — Manual on Access to Air Transport by Persons with Disabilities related to facilitating transport for persons with disabilities, and
these generally seek to ensure that airport facilities and services are adapted to their needs. In this regard, it is strongly recommended that States provide special assistance in a manner that respects the dignity of the individual, and cooperate suitably so that all elements of a journey are accessible to persons with disabilities.

3.4 ICAO continues to promote not only accessible air transport, but also the removal of barriers to such access, in order to enable the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in air transportation.

3.5 Development and implementation of ICAO’s provisions will continue over the next triennia, additional resources are required, both financial and human, to ensure increased and effective implementation of Annex 9 provisions by all ICAO Member States.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 In light of the above, and under the proposed generic title Recommendation 9.1/x Mitigating in all times the barriers to accessibility to air transport services for all passengers, including those with disabilities, the following recommendations are proposed for consideration by the Conference:

a) States should increase their level of implementation of the relevant Annex 9 provisions on facilitation of the transport of persons with disabilities, giving due regard to ICAO Doc 9984, Manual on Access to Air Transport by Persons with Disabilities;

b) States should take steps to implement measures to mitigate the barriers that limit the ability of elderly and persons with disabilities in times of abnormal processes, such as during health-related pandemics;

c) States should ensure to provide special assistance to persons with disabilities travelling by air in a manner that respects the dignity of the individuals;

d) States should ensure that airport facilities and services are adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities, including during health-related pandemic;

e) States should ensure that lifting systems or any other appropriate devices are made available in order to facilitate the movement of persons with disabilities between the aircraft and the terminal on both arrival and departure as required where telescopic passageways are not used;

f) States should ensure that appropriate measures are taken to ensure that the hearing- and visually-impaired are able to obtain flight service-related information in accessible formats;

g) States should ensure that designated points for the pick-up and drop-off of persons with disabilities at a terminal building should be located as close as possible to main entrances and/or exits;

h) States should ensure that adequate parking facilities are provided for people with mobility needs and that appropriate measures are taken to facilitate their movement between parking areas and the terminal buildings; and
i) States should consider voluntary contributions, both financial and human, to ensure increased and effective implementation of Annex 9 - Facilitation provisions by all ICAO Contracting States.