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WORKING PAPER

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Agenda Item 6: NAM/CAR Regional Aviation Security/Facilitation Implementation

PROGRESSING DEVELOPMENTS TOWARDS ACCESSIBLE AIR TRANSPORT

(Presented by IATA- International Air Transport Association)

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| <p>Ensuring the rights of persons with accessibility needs is a key component of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.</p> <p>Recognizing this, the 2019 ICAO Consolidated Statement of Continuing Policies related to Facilitation (A40-16) adopted at the 40th Assembly requested the Council to develop a work programme aimed at meeting the accessibility needs of persons when traveling by air.</p> <p>As the aviation industry begins to emerge from the COVID-19 crisis, this paper proposes taking the next steps toward the accessibility work programme requested by the 40th Assembly, which should ultimately form part of the ICAO Strategic Objectives and work programs¹.</p> | |
| Action: | <p>Request the ICAO Council to provide the ICAO Secretariat with a mandate to coordinate the development of an accessibility work programme. The programme should include a set of clearly defined objectives, founded on the establishment of principles that could provide consistent guidance to [1] Member States in their development of accessible air transport policy, and [2] aviation industry stakeholders in the development and implementation of accessible air transport processes and procedures.</p> |
| Strategic Objectives: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Safety• Air Navigation Capacity and Efficiency• Security & Facilitation• Economic Development of Air Transport• Environmental Protection |

¹ Resolution A-40: Directs the Secretary General to continue monitoring and reviewing, when applicable, the contributions made towards the attainment of the SDGs through the implementation of ICAO Strategic Objectives and work programmes;

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| <i>References:</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities • UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) • ICAO Consolidated Statement of Continuing Policies related to Facilitation (A40-16) • ICAO Assembly Resolution A40-21 Aviation’s contribution towards the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development • IATA AGM Resolution on Passengers with disabilities and its Core Principles • IATA Guidance on Accessible Air Travel in Response to COVID-19 • FALP 12/ IATA- ACI WP24 Taking Accessibility to the Next Level |
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 According to the World Health Organization, approximately one in five people has a disability globally—some permanent, some temporary, some visible, and some invisible. And as the population ages, that proportion is set to increase.

1.2 As the trade association for the global airline industry, IATA reaffirms its commitment to providing safe, dignified and accessible transportation to passengers with disabilities and to support state regulators in their application of the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) into national regulation, including “the identification and elimination of obstacles and barriers”².

1.3 IATA also reiterates its commitment to ongoing engagement with state regulators to support the development of harmonized accessibility regulations that establish clearly defined, measurable policy objectives that lead to a safe and positive travel experience to passengers with disabilities. Since March 2020, the aviation industry has experienced its greatest crisis since the first international commercial flight a century ago. The collapse of air travel as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic effectively emptied the skies.

1.4 As travel starts to resume, there is a need for the aviation industry to build back better and create an industry that is truly accessible, sustainable and inclusive, so that no passengers and no countries are left behind.

1.5 This is only possible through a collaborative approach to eliminate barriers that limit accessibility through proactive identification, removal, and prevention of these barriers from all stakeholders in the travel chain.

² United Nations, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 9.

2. THE AVIATION INDUSTRY RESPONSE TO ACCESSIBLE TRAVEL

2.1 Despite the devastating effects of the pandemic on air transport, the aviation industry has not stopped efforts to ensure and improve air transportation accessibility during the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to consider accessibility improvement opportunities, identify barriers, and implement innovative solutions.

2.1.1 IATA has partnered with accessibility associations to develop the ‘IATA Guidance on Accessible Air Travel in Response to COVID-19’, which outlines accessibility considerations for COVID-19 measures and policies, during the pandemic and beyond. The guidance advocates for a coordinated, predictable, and non-discriminatory approach to accessibility policy as airlines welcome passengers with disabilities back to the skies.

2.1.2 Guidance on masks for travellers with disabilities: The aviation industry also worked with state regulators and disability associations to develop new policy and standards on the use of face-coverings, masks, and personal protective equipment. This included guidance for airlines regarding passengers who cannot put on or remove a face mask themselves, small children, and those with medical conditions who may not tolerate the use of masks for lengthy periods. In particular, new standards have been developed to allow airlines to capture information regarding additional documentation checks and mask exemptions and communicate with third party ground handlers, cabin-crew, partner carriers or internal airport teams.

2.1.3 Bringing industry and the community together: The 2nd edition of the IATA Accessibility Symposium brought together some 400 people from around the globe. The aim was to continue building a better understanding between the accessibility and aviation communities by sharing real experiences, perspectives, and expertise. Panel discussions looked at how airlines can provide the best service to travellers with disabilities, including topics like wheelchair assistance and the loading of mobility aids. The Symposium also featured sessions with stakeholders in travel and tourism, and dialogue with forward-thinking regulators on their upcoming regulations. This highlighted the importance for industry and regulators to work together to make certain that future policy and regulation related to accessibility is consistent for everyone, ensuring that no one is left behind.

2.1.4 Sharing global best practices: The first edition of the IATA Passenger Accessibility Operations Manual (IPAOM) was released in February 2021. The guidance manual is the result of an intensive one-year consultation with the industry and input from disability organizations. Its goal is to provide reference to support airlines in assisting travellers with disabilities, with the aim of delivering a smooth and dignified travel experience throughout the passenger’s journey. The manual is primarily designed to promote a much broader understanding of established industry processes in alignment with major existing rules and regulations.

3. **LOOKING AHEAD: A LONG-TERM STRATEGIC PLAN**

3.1 Since the adoption of the landmark UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPDR) in 2006, there has been a positive increase in the level of awareness and policy actions surrounding disability in air transport. Many regulators have implemented, or are implementing, domestic rules regarding accessible air travel.

3.2 However, the lack of a globally coordinated approach to accessible air transport policy and the practical implementation of such policy is increasingly creating a landscape of differing national regulations across the globe that are, at times, leading to financial and operational issues for airlines, but more importantly confusion and discomfort for passengers with accessibility needs.

3.3 IATA applauds the work that ICAO has already done to address this issue, most notably through the set of provisions contained in Annex 9 of the Chicago Convention. It is now time to build on that solid platform by developing a more long-term, strategic and holistic approach to making air transport accessible to all.

3.4 Recognizing this, the 2019 ICAO Consolidated Statement of Continuing Policies related to Facilitation (A40-16) adopted at the 40th Assembly requested the Council to develop a comprehensive work programme aimed at meeting the accessibility needs of persons when traveling by air.

3.5 IATA believes that the time is right, and ICAO is best placed to take a leadership role in taking the logical next step i.e. in developing that work programme, which should be built around key priorities and should be outcome-focused, achievable, and cost-effective. IATA envisages this plan being developed through input from Member States, relevant international and regional organizations, the accessibility community, and aviation industry stakeholders, with the ICAO Secretariat playing a coordinating/secretariat role.

3.6 Transparent consultation between all relevant stakeholders should be used to define more precisely the work programme's desired outcomes. However, intuitively this could start with the establishment of principles that could provide consistent guidance to [1] Member States in their development of accessible air transport policy, and [2] aviation industry stakeholders in the development and implementation of accessible air transport processes and procedures.

3.7 ICAO has an excellent track record taking a similar approach in other areas with the development of strategic frameworks approach and global plans. Such programmes provide the foundation for States, aviation industry stakeholders and ICAO to work together with the common goal of achieving tangible, positive outcomes for passengers, States and the aviation industry. A similar approach could be considered in relation to air transport accessibility.

3.8 The development of a compendium of regulations, statutes and policies relating to accessibility in aviation, based on the results of the Survey on Advancing Accessibility in Aviation (ICAO State Letter EC 6/3 – 21/25, 1 June 2021) could constitute the starting point.

4. **CONCLUSION**

4.1 IATA fully supports ICAO's goal of leaving no country and no person behind. In this regard, they are fully committed to making air transport accessible to all.

4.2 There has been a lot of positive progress already made by ICAO in certain areas and by individual states or groups of states on this critical issue. Now is the time to bring all of those efforts into one long-term, strategic and holistic approach to air transport accessibility, which will help address the growing danger of a patchwork of inconsistent accessibility policy that could act as a barrier to making air travel a comfortable and positive experience for all.