International Civil Aviation Organization

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WORKING PAPER

SEVENTH WORLDWIDE AIR TRANSPORT CONFERENCE (ATCONF/7)

Montréal, HQ, 16 to 20 November 2026

Agenda Item 2: Fostering aviation growth and air connectivity through investments in infrastructure, human capital and partnerships
2.1: Integrating civil aviation into national development and investment plans

THE SAUDI ARABIAN NATIONAL AVIATION STRATEGY AS A PROTOTYPE MODEL FOR ADVANCING AIR TRANSPORT CONNECTIVITY, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND RESILIENCE, IN LINE WITH DIFFERENT COUNTRIES VISIONS

(Presented by Saudi Arabia)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The International Civil Aviation Organization's (ICAO) Strategic Plan 2026–2050 and the theme of the Seventh Worldwide Air Transport Conference (ATConf/7) place connectivity, socio-economic development, resilience and the *No Country Left Behind* Strategic Goal at the centre of aviation's future. Achieving those ambitions at national level depends not only on infrastructure and investment, but also on the capacity of States to define coherent, long-term civil aviation strategies aligned with national development priorities. States, however, have differing levels of institutional capacity, technical expertise and strategic-planning resources. This working paper therefore proposes that ICAO assess the feasibility of an ICAO National Aviation Strategy Support Framework (NASSF), building on existing implementation-support mechanisms and drawing on voluntary expertise from Member States and relevant international organizations. The framework would support State ownership through an adaptable methodology, needs-based expert assistance and initial implementation guidance. This paper also refers to Saudi Arabia's related information paper as one national experience from which transferable lessons may be drawn.

Action: The conference is invited to:

a) recognize the importance of strengthening the capacity of States to develop comprehensive national civil aviation strategies aligned with national development priorities and ICAO's Strategic Plan 2026–2050, in support of connectivity, economic development, resilience and the *No Country Left Behind* Strategic Goal;
b) invite ICAO to assess the feasibility of developing an ICAO NASSF, building on existing ICAO capacity-development and implementation-support mechanisms, including an adaptable methodology and options for needs-based expert support to States; and
c) encourage Member States to voluntarily share relevant national experiences, good practices and expertise in support of this assessment, and invite ICAO to consider, as appropriate, the participation of relevant international organizations in the development of any future framework.

[1] English and Arabic versions provided by Saudi Arabia.

Strategic Goals:	This working paper relates to Strategic Goals: *The Economic Development of Air Transport Assures the Delivery of Economic Prosperity and Societal Well-Being for All;* and *No Country Left Behind*.
Financial implications:	The proposed feasibility assessment should, to the extent practicable, make use of existing ICAO mechanisms and resources. Any additional resource implications would be identified as part of the assessment.
References:	ICAO Strategic Plan 2026–2050 Assembly Resolution A42-23 Assembly Resolution A42-26 ATConf/7 agenda, theme and objectives ATConf/7-WP/192 (Saudi Arabia), *The experience of Saudi Arabia in building up the National Aviation Strategy (NAS)*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The International Civil Aviation Organization's (ICAO) Strategic Plan 2026–2050 establishes a long-term vision for a safe, secure and sustainable international civil aviation system that connects the world for the benefit of all nations and people. It also positions aviation as an integral part of a connected, accessible, inclusive and affordable transport system that contributes to socio-economic development while ensuring that no country is left behind. The Seventh Worldwide Air Transport Conference (ATConf/7) translates this long-term direction into a policy discussion under the theme "*Air Transport: Powering Global Connectivity, Economic Development and Resilience in a Dynamic World*".

1.2 For this global vision to produce sustainable national outcomes, States need the institutional ability to determine where their civil aviation sector is heading, how it supports wider national priorities, and how infrastructure, connectivity, regulation, human capital, investment and implementation can be developed as parts of one coherent framework. A national civil aviation strategy can provide that link between global objectives and national action.

1.3 States do not, however, begin from the same level of institutional capacity, technical expertise or strategic-planning resources. The resulting planning gap can limit the ability of some States to sequence investments, coordinate stakeholders, establish measurable priorities and translate aviation potential into durable economic and social benefits. The issue is therefore not whether States should follow a single model, but whether all States should have a fair opportunity to develop a strategy suited to their own circumstances.

2. STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT AND THE IDENTIFIED GAP

2.1 The proposed approach is closely aligned with Agenda Item 2 of ATConf/7, which addresses aviation growth and air connectivity through investments in infrastructure, human capital and partnerships, including the integration of aviation development into national development plans through policy alignment and coordination. The Conference also seeks to strengthen institutional and human capacity and enable sustainable and inclusive growth. Long-term national strategic planning is a practical means of connecting these elements rather than addressing them in isolation.

2.2 The proposal is also consistent with Assembly Resolution A42-23, which recognizes that ICAO capacity development and implementation support is essential to achieving the *No Country Left Behind* Strategic Goal and calls for a One-ICAO approach focused on relevance, consistency, efficiency and effectiveness in meeting States' needs. In the air transport field, Resolution A42-26 further requests the Council, where beneficial, to consult expert representatives from Member States through appropriate means, including panels or Secretariat study groups of qualified experts.

2.3 ICAO already provides implementation support to States, including through Civil Aviation Master Plan activities and other tailored capacity-development projects. These mechanisms provide a valuable foundation. The opportunity identified in this paper is to examine whether they could be complemented by a globally accessible strategic framework focused specifically on helping States develop comprehensive national civil aviation strategies, while avoiding duplication of existing ICAO functions and products.

3. ICAO NATIONAL AVIATION STRATEGY SUPPORT FRAMEWORK

3.1 Saudi Arabia proposes that ICAO first assess the feasibility of developing an ICAO National Aviation Strategy Support Framework (NASSF). At this stage, the proposal is deliberately limited to a feasibility assessment. It does not prescribe a permanent structure, funding arrangement or implementation model; these matters would be considered by ICAO, as appropriate, through any subsequent framework and terms of reference.

3.2 Subject to the outcome of the assessment, NASSF could provide: a common but adaptable methodology for national civil aviation strategy development; a needs-based approach for determining the nature and level of support required by a requesting State; an expert-support mechanism drawing, where appropriate, on the ICAO Secretariat and qualified experts nominated voluntarily by Member States; and initial guidance to assist States in moving from strategy development to implementation.

3.3 State ownership should remain a core principle. The civil aviation authority would serve as the official State focal point, while the strategy itself would be tailored to national circumstances, development priorities and aviation-system maturity. The purpose of the framework would be to support, guide and transfer knowledge, not to impose a standardized national model. Relevant international organizations could, where appropriate, participate or provide specialized perspectives so that States benefit from a balanced and integrated approach.

3.4 The feasibility assessment should also consider an appropriate governance and expertise model. Under ICAO oversight, participation could combine relevant Secretariat expertise with specialists made available voluntarily by Member States, while relevant international organizations could be associated, where useful, as participants, observers or technical contributors. The precise composition, mandate and working methods should be determined only after the feasibility assessment and through any future terms of reference.

3.5 The assessment could further examine how NASSF would interface with existing ICAO planning and implementation-support products, how States could request assistance, how an adaptable strategy-development methodology could be structured, and how knowledge transfer and initial implementation guidance could be embedded. This phased approach would allow the Organization and Member States to test the added value of the concept before considering any permanent mechanism.

4. LEVERAGING NATIONAL EXPERIENCE AND GOOD PRACTICES

4.1 In this context, Saudi Arabia has submitted ATConf/7-WP/192 presenting its experience in aligning a national aviation strategy with broader national economic and development priorities. That experience illustrates how strategic planning can connect infrastructure, connectivity, institutional reform, human capital, investment and sector development within a common national direction.

4.2 The purpose of referring to the Saudi experience is not to promote replication of a single national model. Rather, it is to demonstrate the value of identifying transferable principles and lessons. As part of any feasibility assessment, ICAO could invite Member States representing different levels of aviation-system maturity and institutional capacity to share relevant strategies, methodologies, lessons learned and good practices. Such contributions would help ensure that any future framework is practical, adaptable and responsive to diverse State needs.

4.3 A structured collection of national experiences could become an important input to the feasibility assessment. Rather than ranking or categorizing States, ICAO could seek examples from States with different aviation-market characteristics, institutional arrangements and levels of system maturity. This would help identify common building blocks while preserving the flexibility required for national circumstances and would strengthen a cooperative knowledge base for future support.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 ICAO has established a global vision for aviation to 2050, and ATConf/7 is focused on the policies, partnerships and capacities needed to power connectivity, economic development and resilience. Converting that vision into national results requires strategic-planning capacity at State level. A feasibility assessment of NASSF would represent a measured first step: it would build on existing ICAO capabilities, mobilize voluntary knowledge from Member States and partners, preserve State ownership, and explore how more States can be supported in moving from global vision to coherent national action. The Conference is therefore invited to take the actions set out in the Executive Summary.

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