



WORKING PAPER

**SEVENTH WORLDWIDE AIR TRANSPORT CONFERENCE
(ATCONF/7)**

Montréal, HQ, 16 to 20 November 2026

Agenda Item 3: Strengthening regulatory and institutional frameworks

3.2: Enhancing air connectivity through progressive economic and regulatory aviation frameworks for international air transport

**ENHANCING RESILIENCE AND CRISIS PREPAREDNESS
THROUGH LIBERALISING ALL-CARGO SERVICES**

(Presented by the United Arab Emirates)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Air cargo plays a critical role in maintaining global supply chains and ensuring the timely movement of essential and time-sensitive goods, particularly during periods of disruption and crisis.

Recent crises have demonstrated the importance of flexible and reliable cargo connectivity. However, restrictions in air services arrangements may limit the ability of air cargo operators to rapidly adjust capacity, routings and networks in response to emerging needs.

While recognising the overall significant benefits of liberalised all-cargo services, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) emphasises the paramount importance of including further liberalisation of all-cargo services as part of States' crisis preparedness. Establishing enhanced market access in advance of any future crises can strengthen resilience and enable faster response when international supply chains are disrupted.

Action: The Conference is invited to:

- a) recognize the critical role of air cargo in strengthening aviation resilience and crisis preparedness;
- b) encourage States to further liberalise market access (flight frequencies, capacity, route and traffic rights) for all-cargo operations in air services arrangements; and
- c) request the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to continue supporting Member States in developing flexible regulatory approaches for international all-cargo services.

<i>Strategic Goal:</i>	This working paper relates to Strategic Goal: <i>The Economic Development of Air Transport Assures the Delivery of Economic Prosperity and Societal Well-Being for All.</i>
<i>Financial implications:</i>	Nil
<i>References:</i>	Doc 9587, <i>Policy and Guidance Material on the Economic Regulation of International Air Transport</i> <i>Wings of Prosperity – Economic Growth Through Air Transport</i> , ICAO, First Edition, August 2024

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Air cargo is an essential component of international connectivity and global supply chains, enabling the rapid movement of high-value, time-sensitive and essential goods. Its importance becomes particularly evident during crises and periods of disruption, when speed, flexibility and reliable connectivity are critical.

1.2 Recent crises and disruptions have demonstrated that resilience depends not only on operational capability, but also on the regulatory framework governing international all-cargo services. Therefore, removing regulatory impediments and creating operational flexibility for air cargo operators is of critical importance in keeping global supply chains moving during crises and disruptions.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 Air cargo has a distinct role in crisis response and supply chain resilience. During crises, such as geopolitical tensions, natural disasters, pandemics, trade shocks and other emergencies, cargo networks may need to redirect capacity, establish alternative routings and respond rapidly to changing demand. It is estimated that air cargo constitutes more than one-third of global trade by value, illustrating its importance to the continuity of international trade and the movement of critical goods.

2.2 However, the ability of air cargo operators to respond rapidly can be constrained by restrictive market access arrangements, including limitations on flight frequencies, capacity, route and traffic rights. Should additional traffic rights need to be requested after a crisis has already occurred, the ability to deploy cargo capacity quickly will be hindered.

2.3 Recent experience during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the value of alleviating regulatory restrictions on air cargo operations to sustain supply chains and prevent shortages of essential goods. In many cases, however, such relief was granted on a temporary and ad hoc basis after the disruption has occurred. This supports a more proactive and liberal approach in which appropriate flexibility for all-cargo services should be established before a crisis occurs.

2.4 Further liberalisation of all-cargo services can strengthen crisis preparedness by giving operators greater flexibility to deploy capacity, adjust networks and serve alternative markets when normal supply chains are disrupted. States should therefore consider granting more liberal market access for all-cargo operations in their air services arrangements, such as unlimited flight frequencies and capacity, open route schedules, and availability of fifth freedom traffic rights at any intermediate/beyond points.

2.5 In this context, liberalisation of all-cargo services should be implemented on a reciprocal and non-discriminatory basis, providing fair and equal opportunities for the air cargo operators concerned. Liberalisation should also support balanced market access and ensure that the rights granted are capable of being exercised in a commercially viable manner.

2.6 A more liberalised framework for all-cargo services should be viewed not only as a means of facilitating trade and connectivity, but also as an element of aviation resilience. Establishing such flexibility in advance can support faster and more effective response when future crises or disruptions affect international supply chains.

2.7 Where possible, such flexibility should be incorporated into air services arrangements on a standing basis, rather than on a temporary or ad hoc basis, so that air cargo operators can undertake the advance planning and network development necessary for an effective crisis response.

2.8 Adopting proactive and liberal regulatory approaches for all-cargo services will not only prepare States to be crisis ready, but also enable air cargo operators to take advantage of those flexibilities in normal times, thereby reinforcing the significant benefits of liberalised all-cargo services.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 Air cargo is a critical component of global trade and crisis response. Its ability to adapt quickly to disruption makes it an important part of the resilience of international air transport and global supply chains.

3.2 The United Arab Emirates considers that all-cargo services should be further liberalised as part of crisis preparedness. Providing greater flexibility on market access in advance can help ensure that cargo capacity can be deployed efficiently when and where it is needed during periods of disruption.

3.3 In this regard, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) should continue to support Member States in developing flexible regulatory approaches for international all-cargo services.

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