International Civil Aviation Organization

WORKING PAPER

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SEVENTH WORLDWIDE AIR TRANSPORT CONFERENCE (ATCONF/7)

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Agenda Item 3: Strengthening regulatory and institutional frameworks
3.2: Enhancing air connectivity through progressive economic and regulatory aviation frameworks for international air transport

BUILDING A SEAMLESS SKY TO STRENGTHEN AIR TRANSPORT CONNECTIVITY, AFFORDABILITY AND RESILIENCE

(Presented by El Salvador and supported by 17 LACAC Member States[2])

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Regional air connectivity is essential for economic development, tourism, trade, social integration and State resilience, particularly in regions with small markets or highly interdependent economies. In this context, subregional facilitation and connectivity agreements can serve as progressive instruments for reducing administrative barriers, optimizing airport procedures and promoting more affordable, efficient and sustainable air services.

Building on the Cooperation Agreement for the Facilitation and Development of Air Operations signed in 2006, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras adopted the Regulations for the Development of Air and Airport Operations (CA-4). These instruments have established a differentiated regional regime for certain intraregional operations, including measures to streamline procedures and applicable charges, without prejudice to States' international obligations on safety, aviation security, facilitation, migration, customs, public health, data protection and other sovereign responsibilities.

Action: The conference is invited to:

a) Recognize the need for specific International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) guidelines and guidance material on common aviation markets and schemes within the same intraregional corridor with the aim of promoting the growth and development of air transport and regional connectivity;
b) Urge ICAO, through its specialized panels, to study the intraregional corridor model under "seamless skies" agreements as a best practice that could prove useful for the development of international air transport; and
c) Task the ICAO Council to give priority to updating the guidance material in the *Manual on the Regulation of International Air Transport* (Doc 9626) and *The Facilitation Manual* (Doc 9957), as well as the Traveller Identification Programme (TRIP) Strategy guidelines, in order to develop a comprehensive regulatory framework that recognizes, standardizes and facilitates the operationalization of common aviation markets, regional single windows for data and intraregional accessibility protocols.

[1] Spanish version provided by El Salvador.
[2] Belize, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

Strategic Goal:	This working paper relates to Strategic Goal: *The Economic Development of Air Transport Assures the Delivery of Economic Prosperity and Societal Well-Being for All.*
Financial implications:	This requires the allocation of resources from the regular programme of the Air Transport Regulation Panel (ATRP) and the Facilitation Panel (FALP) to update existing guidance material.
References:	*Convention on International Civil Aviation* (Chicago Convention), Articles 10, 13, 22 and 23. Annex 9 – *Facilitation* ICAO Assembly Resolution A42-17, *Consolidated statement of continuing ICAO policies related to facilitation* Doc 9626, *Manual on the Regulation of International Air Transport* Doc 9957, *The Facilitation Manual*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Regional air connectivity is a key component of economic development, tourism, trade, social integration and State resilience. Assembly Resolution A42–17 and the Doha Declaration (FALC 2025) urge States to implement unified and comprehensive facilitation criteria, promoting the seamless movement of people and goods and the use of innovative technologies to achieve a truly seamless sky.

1.2 Global experiences and industry reports confirm that successful liberalization models require three key elements: strong political will, widespread awareness of the economic and social benefits for users and a progressive roadmap that translates commitments into tangible and implementable actions.

1.3 In light of this conceptual and regulatory gap and building on the historic 2006 Cooperation Agreement for the Facilitation and Development of Air Operations, and under the Central American Economic Integration Subsystem (Guatemala Protocol), El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras have developed the Regulations for the Development of Air and Airport Operations. These regulations grant intraregional routes domestic-like treatment, eliminate international airport charges and allow for flexibility in traffic rights. However, the lack of a comprehensive International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) regulatory framework limits the full potential of these initiatives and hinders the replication of these models in other developing regions.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 Traditional regulation of international air transport has been based primarily on the distinction between domestic and international operations. However, the evolution of economic blocs, subregional agreements and common markets has highlighted the need for practical guidance to assist States in developing progressive intraregional facilitation and connectivity measures without affecting the international nature of flights or obligations under the Convention on International Civil Aviation (Chicago Convention).

2.2 The rigidity of traditional international definitions leads to systemic inefficiencies in economic blocs undergoing integration. In the absence of ICAO guidelines governing the progressive transition of a flight from international to regional domestic status, States face obstacles that undermine the effectiveness of:

a) **Taxes and Fees Policy**: States moving toward integrated regional schemes may face difficulties in determining how to handle fees, charges or taxes applicable to intraregional operations. The *Manual on the Regulation of International Air Transport* (Doc 9626) does not provide clear guidelines on how to streamline charges without affecting the principles of non-discrimination, transparency, cost recovery and financial sustainability of airports and related services.

b) **Data Governance (API/PNR)**: While Resolution A42–17, Appendix D, requires the implementation of Advance Passenger Information (API) and Passenger Name Record (PNR) systems for international flights, current regulations do not specify how these data flows should be handled across borders within the same intraregional corridor. In the absence of guidelines for a "Regional Single Window" architecture, air operators face duplicative requirements for the same intraregional corridor.

c) **Accessibility and Crisis Management**: Guidance on the inclusion of persons with disabilities *Manual on Access to Air Transport by Persons with Disabilities* (Doc 9984) and health resilience protocols for emergencies are based on a strictly national approach. The lack of coordinated regional criteria can lead to differences in assistance, information, infrastructure and applicable procedures within the same intraregional corridor.

2.3 Examples of countries in the same region sharing a single intraregional corridor demonstrate that connectivity and facilitation can be enhanced through institutional coordination, streamlined procedures and cooperation among authorities. This experience could provide useful input for ICAO to identify best practices, common challenges and guidance material applicable to other regions.

2.4 ICAO could play a facilitating role by gathering regional experiences, developing practical guidance material and promoting tools that enable States to progressively advance towards integrated regional facilitation schemes. This approach would be consistent with the need to update air transport policies and guidance in response to States' evolving circumstances and needs, without imposing one-size-fits-all models or affecting the pace of individual regions.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 Regional facilitation and connectivity agreements are a concrete tool for promoting the economic development, regional integration, affordability and resilience of air transport, particularly in regions with small markets or States with a high level of economic interdependence.

3.2 The experience of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras shows that intraregional coordination schemes can contribute to the progressive realization of a seamless sky through simplified procedures, streamlined applicable charges, and cooperation among authorities, in line with Annex 9, Resolution A42–17 and ICAO’s strategic goal: “The Economic Development of Air Transport Assures the Delivery of Economic Prosperity and Societal Well-Being for All.”

3.3 The development and implementation of relevant ICAO guidance material would help States design regional schemes that are consistent with the Chicago Convention, the provisions of Annex 9, ICAO’s economic principles and current connectivity, accessibility, interoperability and resilience needs.

3.4 Consequently, El Salvador proposes that ICAO strengthen its leadership in this area by promoting integrated regional facilitation frameworks that are progressive, robust, transparent, sustainable and oriented towards the economic development of international air transport.

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