



WORKING PAPER

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

Montréal, HQ, 16 to 20 November 2026

Agenda Item 3: Strengthening regulatory and institutional frameworks

**3.3: Strengthening emergency planning mechanism and consumer protection
for a resilient aviation system**

**STRATEGIES FOR OPERATIONAL CONTINUITY AND RESILIENCE OF AIR TRANSPORT
IN THE EVENT OF NATURAL DISASTERS**

(Presented by Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) and supported by 16 LACAC Member States²)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper presents Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)'s experience following the earthquakes of 24 June 2026. The immediate response was to make strategic use of alternate airports, thus preventing the interruption of national and international air connectivity. This event demonstrated that air transport continuity during and after a natural disaster is vital to ensure humanitarian assistance.

Action: The Conference is invited to:

- a) encourage States to incorporate continuing training programs in crisis management and operational adaptability into personnel training plans, recognizing human talent as the fundamental pillar of service continuity; and
- b) request the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to develop a Manual on Air Connectivity Resilience to Natural Disasters including suggestions for streamlining regulatory procedures. Regulatory streamlining should allow the granting, within 72 hours, of temporary traffic rights and route adjustments for the airlines impacted by a major airport shutdown.

<i>Strategic Goal:</i>	This working paper relates to the 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>	The activities mentioned in this working paper are subject to the availability of resources from the 2026–2028 Regular Budget and/or extrabudgetary contributions and/or voluntary contributions, such as those from the Voluntary Air Transport Fund.
<i>References:</i>	Annex 9 - <i>Facilitation</i> Annex 11 - <i>Air Traffic Services</i> Doc 9971, <i>Manual on Collaborative Air Traffic Flow Management (ATFM)</i>

¹ Spanish version provided by Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

² Belize, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Chile, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Devastating natural events represent a recurring systemic risk to international civil aviation. Whether in States with single- or multi-hub airport networks, the sudden loss of operational capacity at one or more hub airports (main hubs) generates knock-on effects that compromise regional connectivity, destabilize cargo flows and saturate air traffic management (ATM) capacity in adjacent Flight Information Regions (FIRs). On June 24, 2026, two earthquakes of 7.2 and 7.5 in magnitude struck northern Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), immediately activating the damage and infrastructure assessment protocols of the country's main Simón Bolívar International Airport in Maiquetía, which suffered crippling damage.

1.2 The timely reaction and the ability to reorganize air traffic flows were thanks to technical cooperation. Support from neighbouring States mitigated the effects of the contingency and helped keep Venezuelan airspace open without major connectivity failures.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 If an Area Control Centre (ACC) temporarily goes off-line or a strategic aerodrome shuts down, the global system depends on the capacity of adjacent FIRs for orderly traffic diversion. In this case, the earthquake put the Maiquetía ACC out of action for 19.5 hours. However, the backup antennas and servers remained functional, preventing the loss of communications and surveillance. A team of five air traffic controllers was able to execute the contingency plan and safely divert aircraft in flight to the adjacent FIRs of Bogotá, Barranquilla, San Juan, Amazónico, Georgetown, Piarco and Curacao, while local approach controllers handled domestic traffic. Because the local office was temporarily unable to issue advisories, action was taken together with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Regional Office to publish an *air traffic control (ATC) Zero* Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) for a contingency evacuation. The NOTAM was graciously issued then extended by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) of Colombia at the request of the Venezuelan State. The international NOTAM office in Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) restored connectivity on the morning of June 25, 2026.

2.2 In parallel to these air navigation actions, within the first 48 hours of the disaster, the Venezuelan aviation authority, in coordination with national and international airlines and airport authorities, began reorganizing the affected routes to four alternate airports that were undamaged, namely: Arturo Michelena International Airport (SVVA), General José Antonio Anzoátegui International Airport (SVBC), Los Tacariguas Airport (SVBS), and El Libertador Air Base (SVBL).

2.3 In the specific case of the SVBL, the military infrastructure transitioned to dual use as part of strategic action to expand the absorptive capacity of the alternate network. This process culminated in the issuance of the commercial activation NOTAM and the official incorporation of the aerodrome specifications in the Aeronautical Information Publication (AIP).

2.4 This strategy achieved the restructuring of 84 per cent of domestic routes and 73 per cent of international routes in just 8 days, ensuring the continuity of public air transport, minimizing the impact on passengers, and maintaining uninterrupted support for cargo operations.

2.5 The issuance of permits for international humanitarian assistance flights was coordinated as a priority, channelling rescue teams, and medical and emergency supplies through the serviceable airport hubs.

2.6 Continuing air connectivity rested on the following pillars of resilience management:

- i. **Immediate activation of alternate airports:** coordinated diversion of passenger and cargo flights to functional alternate terminals with adequate technical capacity and infrastructure.
- ii. **Flexible air traffic control (ATC):** Rapid reconfiguration of airspace control sectors and contingency routes to absorb the traffic surge at secondary airports.
- iii. **Real-time technical assessment:** inspection of runways, taxiways, control towers and navigation aid systems, to rule out structural damage prior to the gradual resumption of operations.
- iv. **Institutional coordination:** continuous communication between the aviation authority, airlines and airport authorities.

2.7 Lessons learned:

- a) Prior designation and continual updating of alternate airport capacity is key to absorbing sudden spikes in demand.
- b) Resilience is not limited to physical infrastructure, but also involves the adaptability of operational personnel. Crisis management techniques and regulatory flexibility allowed air flows to be reconfigured safely in highly unstable conditions.
- c) The sustainability of the aviation system in the event of disasters depends on the well-being, alertness and fortitude of emergency technical personnel who ensure a dependable operational response without exhausting human resources.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 Air transport resilience goes beyond the physical durability of runways and terminals; it lies in the adaptability, competence and flexibility of humans. The successful reorganization of routes and redistribution of air traffic in the first 48 hours showed that, for infrastructure to remain operational in a crisis, everything depends on the people, their organizational culture, and their ability to make contingency plans work. Therefore, continuous investment in personnel readiness is essential to ensure public service continuity without compromising safety.

3.2 Natural disasters will continue to pose a critical challenge to global aviation. Learning operational lessons will make the international aviation community more cohesive, ensuring that air transport holds up as the vital artery of development and emergency relief for our nations. Therefore, the development of a Manual on Air Connectivity Resilience to Natural Disasters as a technical guide is directly aligned with ICAO's strategic vision of ensuring the capacity, efficiency and continuity of the global air navigation system, responding to the need to provide States with standardized guidance to:

- a) plan a coordinated operational response with alternate airports and secondary networks;
- b) grant temporary regulatory flexibility to air operators to maintain connectivity; and
- c) safeguard critical supply chains through harmonized regional facilitation and coordination mechanisms.