International Civil Aviation Organization

WORKING PAPER

ATConf/7-WP/196
16/10/26
(Information Paper)
English only

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

STRENGTHENING CONSUMER PROTECTION THROUGH AIR TRANSPORT SERVICE ASSESSMENT: EXPERIENCE OF THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA

(Presented by the Republic of Korea)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper presents the framework and operational experience of the Republic of Korea's Air Transport Service Assessment, which supports consumer protection and preparedness for irregular operations. Key cases include the development of practical criteria through attribution review in consumer redress cases, the introduction of an indicator reflecting long delays, and adjustments to the approved operating plan completion rate in response to flight reductions. The paper also describes how verifying emergency response exercises and improvement implementation supports the effectiveness of protection measures, and shares experience in adapting the assessment scheme to changing industry conditions and passenger protection challenges.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Protecting air passengers requires not only an appropriate regulatory framework but also continuous verification that measures such as information provision, consumer redress and responses to flight disruptions are actually implemented in the course of service delivery. As the air transport market evolves and flight disruptions become increasingly diverse, there is a need to identify the harm incurred by passengers and the manner in which airlines respond, and to encourage service improvements accordingly.

1.2 The Republic of Korea's Air Transport Service Assessment evaluates service quality, the implementation of passenger protection measures, preparedness for irregular operations and improvement efforts. By identifying areas for improvement and encouraging airlines to take appropriate action, the assessment supports passenger protection and continuous improvement in air transport services.

1.3 This information paper outlines the basic framework of the Republic of Korea's Air Transport Service Assessment and explains how the assessment of airline services supports consumer protection and preparedness for irregular operations. It shares Korea's experience in adapting the assessment scheme to changes in industry conditions and passenger protection challenges through the development of practical criteria for attribution review in consumer redress cases, the incorporation of long delays into the assessment, and adjustments to the approved operating plan completion rate in response to flight reductions.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 Overview of the Air Transport Service Assessment

2.1.1 The Republic of Korea conducts the Air Transport Service Assessment pursuant to Article 63 of the Aviation Business Act. The assessment aims to protect the rights and interests of air passengers and to improve service quality, and is carried out by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport (MOLIT) and the institutions entrusted with the assessment, each in accordance with its designated role.

2.1.2 The assessment is conducted separately for airline services and airport services. For airline services, airlines are ranked in descending order of passenger traffic, and those falling within the first 98 per cent of cumulative passenger share are selected. Korean airlines are included irrespective of their cumulative share. The airline service assessment comprises the following four domains.

Table 1. Domains and key items of the airline service assessment

Assessment domain	Key assessment items	Method and scope
Operational Performance	On-time Performance (OTP); Long-delay; Approved Operating Plan Completion Rate; Qualitative Assessment of Operational Service; Domestic Route Operation	Domestic and international services for Korean airlines; international services for foreign airlines
Passenger Protection	Passenger Protection Arrangements; Consumer Redress; Enforcement Action Related to Passenger Protection; Qualitative Assessment of Consumer Protection	Verification of plans, information provision, redress request channels and exercises; analysis of complaint and redress data; attribution review and expert assessment
Safety	Aircraft accidents and serious incidents; Safety-related Enforcement Action; SMS Implementation	Korean airlines: accident and enforcement records; SMS implementation
Passenger Satisfaction	Satisfaction with reservation and ticketing; check-in; information; cabin comfort; in-flight services; staff courtesy; fares	Actual service experience reflected through passenger surveys

2.2 Assessment for Consumer Protection

2.2.1 Preventing and mitigating harm caused by flight disruptions, and ensuring appropriate protection and redress once harm has occurred, are both essential elements of consumer protection. Korea's assessment scheme addresses these elements together under the domains of operational performance and passenger protection.

2.2.2 Passenger Protection

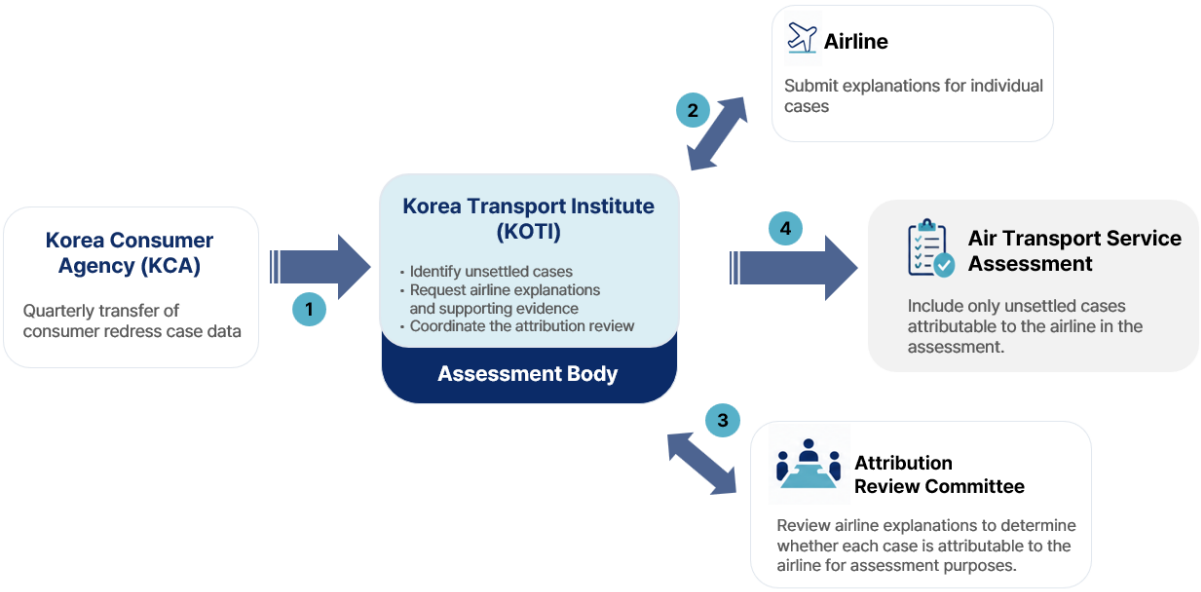
2.2.2.1 The passenger protection domain comprises passenger protection arrangements, consumer redress, enforcement action related to passenger protection, and qualitative assessment of consumer protection. Passenger protection arrangements cover the establishment and publication of service plans, consumer redress plans and conditions of carriage; the provision of information on terms and conditions; the establishment and operation of redress request channels; and emergency response exercises. The consumer redress item assesses complaints and consumer redress cases received, unsettled cases and dispute mediation outcomes. Enforcement actions related to passenger protection and airlines' improvement efforts are assessed under separate items.

2.2.2.2 In assessing consumer redress, the numbers of complaints, consumer redress cases received and unsettled cases are calculated per one million passengers to account for differences in traffic volume. The assessment body identifies unsettled consumer redress cases from data provided by the Korea Consumer Agency (KCA). Airlines submit explanations, which the Attribution Review Committee,

composed of consumer affairs experts, reviews to determine whether each case is attributable to the airline for assessment purposes. Cases found not to be attributable to the airline are excluded from the unsettled case count used in the assessment. Figure 1 illustrates this attribution review process.

2.2.2.3 The significance of attribution review extends beyond determining whether individual cases are included in the assessment. Reviewing recurring types of passenger harm and airlines' responses helps develop practical criteria for the issues to be examined, the attribution of cases to airlines for assessment purposes, and the implementation of protection measures. Airlines can draw on this experience to improve their consumer redress and customer response procedures, enhancing consistency and predictability in the handling of similar cases.

Figure 1. Attribution Review Process for Consumer Redress Cases



2.2.2.4 Figures 2 and 3 present quarterly passenger traffic, consumer redress cases received by the KCA and the unsettled case rate from the first quarter of 2019 to the second quarter of 2025. The unsettled case rate is calculated by dividing the total number of unsettled consumer redress cases by the total number of consumer redress cases received by the KCA in each quarter. It includes cases irrespective of whether they are attributable to the airline and is distinct from the adjusted count used in the assessment. The figures show a downward overall trend in the unsettled case rate, alongside a recovery in passenger traffic and an increase in cases received in recent years.

Figure 2. Quarterly passenger traffic and consumer redress cases received by the KCA

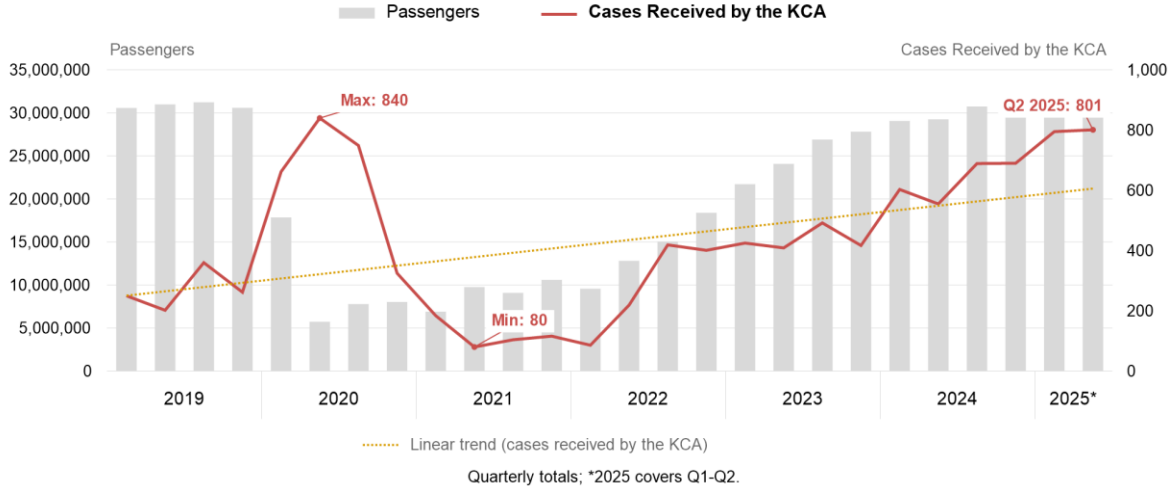
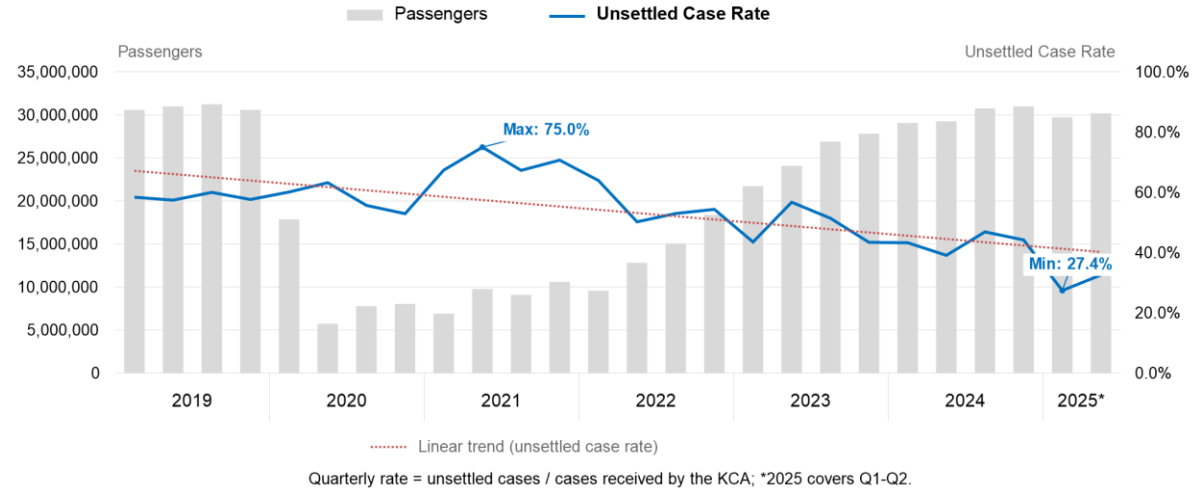


Figure 3. Quarterly passenger traffic and unsettled case rate



Quarterly rate = unsettled cases / cases received by the KCA; *2025 covers Q1-Q2.

2.2.2.5 The qualitative assessment of consumer protection involves expert review of airlines' systems for preventing and responding to consumer complaints; cooperation with stakeholders such as the KCA, travel agencies and sales agents; and improvement plans and implementation records addressing the previous year's assessment results. This is intended to ensure that issues identified in individual redress cases and through the assessment lead to improvements in airlines' procedures and services.

2.2.3 Operational Performance

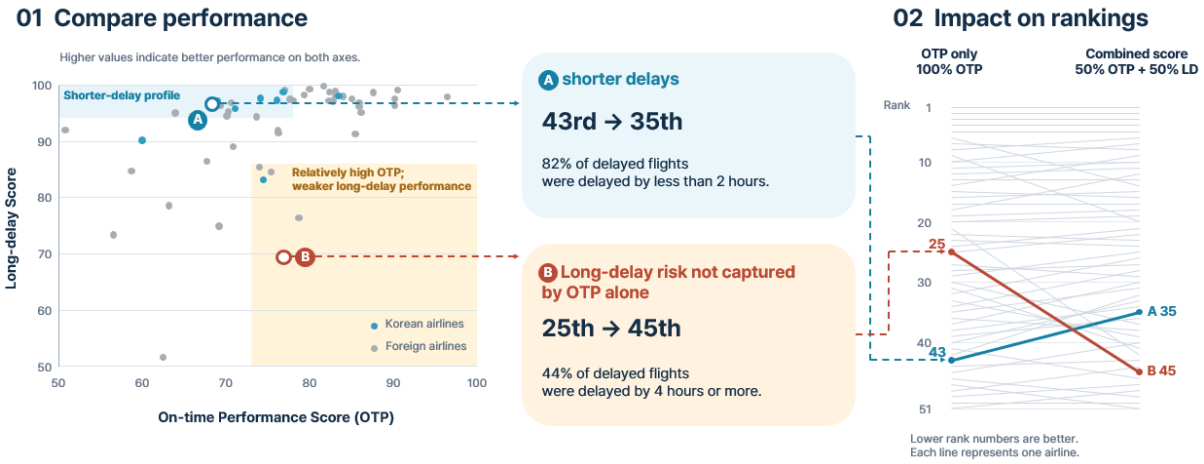
2.2.3.1 The operational performance domain encourages airlines to deliver planned services reliably and reduce passenger inconvenience caused by delays and cancellations. On-time performance (OTP) and the long-delay indicator assess operational outcomes. The qualitative assessment of operational service reviews the responsible organization and its accountability, contingency measures and response systems, and the development and implementation of improvement plans based on assessment results. Additional points and point deductions are applied based on the approved operating plan completion rate. Under the domestic route operation item, additional points are awarded for maintaining, increasing or launching domestic services.

2.2.3.2 OTP applies a 15-minute threshold to classify delays and measures the proportion of scheduled flights operated on time, with cancellations counted as not on time. However, the occurrence of a delay alone does not sufficiently distinguish between the impacts of short and long delays on passengers. Since long delays can disrupt onward connections and subsequent travel plans and may give rise to additional costs such as accommodation and ground transportation, it is necessary to assess the duration of delays as well as their frequency.

2.2.3.3 In 2025, the Republic of Korea introduced a long-delay indicator. It calculates the proportion of flights delayed in each duration category relative to all flights operated and assigns greater weight to longer delays, so that long delays have a greater influence on the assessment. Delays attributable to circumstances beyond the airline's control, such as weather, airport and border control procedures, and air traffic flow management, are excluded from the calculation.

2.2.3.4 This indicator highlights airlines with relatively good OTP but a high proportion of long delays among their delayed flights, encouraging them to address these prolonged disruptions. Using the same operational data, Figure 4 plots airlines according to their OTP and long-delay scores, the latter reflecting the weighted delay rate, with higher scores indicating better performance on both axes. It compares OTP-only rankings with rankings based on a combined score assigning 50 per cent to OTP and 50 per cent to the long-delay score (LD). The rankings of 17 of 51 airlines changed by at least five places. This approach encourages airlines to reduce both delay frequency and duration, limiting disruption to travel plans and additional passenger costs.

Figure 4. Effect of the Long-delay Indicator on Airline Rankings



2.3 Preparedness for Irregular Operations

2.3.1 In the event of large-scale flight disruptions, the implementation of consumer protection measures depends on preparedness in normal times and cooperation among stakeholders. Korea's assessment verifies whether airlines have conducted emergency response exercises for three scenarios: ticketing system failure, weather-related disasters, and large-scale disruption to air transport caused by strikes of aviation personnel. Weather-related disasters include natural hazards such as heatwaves, heavy snowfall and typhoons.

2.3.2 Exercises are recognized in the assessment only on the basis of evidence confirming that they were conducted during the relevant assessment year. Airlines are required to submit exercise schedules, attendance lists, scenario-specific manuals, records of the procedures performed, and photographs. This requirement verifies not only that an emergency response plan is in place, but also that designated personnel have practised their response in accordance with the specified scenarios and procedures.

2.3.3 Preparedness for irregular operations is also linked to the qualitative assessments of operational service and consumer protection. These assessments review the accountability of the responsible organization, emergency response systems, the handling of consumer inquiries outside business hours, and cooperation with relevant agencies. Additional points are awarded for participation in government-led disaster response exercises for large-scale air transport disruptions and for the provision of replacement aircraft to other airlines during irregular operations. This approach encourages both individual airline preparedness and joint responses to reduce passenger inconvenience during flight disruptions.

2.4 Evolution of the Assessment Scheme

2.4.1 The Republic of Korea has adjusted its assessment items and methods in response to changes in industry conditions and patterns of passenger harm. Changes to the approved operating plan completion rate illustrate this approach. In response to reductions in domestic services and the suspension or discontinuation of regional routes that came to the fore during the COVID-19 pandemic, the indicator was introduced in 2023 to encourage airlines to maintain their originally planned domestic operations. This item was subsequently removed from the 2025 assessment framework.

2.4.2 Subsequently, flight reductions and suspensions driven by factors such as rising fuel prices brought renewed attention to schedule changes and additional costs borne by passengers who had relied on planned flights. In 2026, the approved operating plan completion rate was therefore reintroduced with additional points and point deductions, and its scope was extended to international services. The rate compares the number of flights actually operated with the number specified in the initially approved operating plan. The initially approved plan remains the reference even if the airline subsequently revises its operating plan. The item covers designated major domestic routes and all international routes of the assessed airlines.

2.4.3 These adjustments are intended to make visible in the assessment the impact of airlines' changes to their operating plans on passengers, and to encourage airlines to maintain planned services and to exercise due care before reducing operations. The experience of extending an indicator originally designed to sustain domestic services to international services demonstrates that the scope and method of the same assessment item can be adapted to evolving industry conditions and protection challenges.

2.4.4 The introduction of the long-delay indicator and the institutionalization of attribution review are further examples of operational experience being incorporated into the assessment framework. The long-delay indicator reflects differences in passenger inconvenience that are not adequately captured by the occurrence of delays alone. Attribution review translates experience gained from individual consumer redress cases into more concrete practical assessment criteria.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 The Republic of Korea's Air Transport Service Assessment provides a comprehensive review of operational performance, passenger protection, safety and passenger satisfaction. It supports the effective implementation of consumer protection through passenger surveys, consumer redress case reviews, verification of exercises, and assessment of improvement plans and implementation records.

3.2 Korea's operational experience highlights the importance of developing practical criteria through consumer redress case reviews, reflecting passenger inconvenience caused by long delays in the assessment, and adjusting assessment items in response to flight reductions. States may wish to consider these approaches, taking into account their respective legal and institutional frameworks and the characteristics of their aviation markets.

3.3 An assessment scheme that continuously monitors airlines' implementation of consumer protection measures, their emergency preparedness and cooperation among stakeholders, and that drives improvement, can serve as a means of preparing for unexpected flight disruptions and crises affecting the aviation industry. Such monitoring and improvement in normal times can strengthen airlines' capacity to minimize harm to passengers and to restore air services promptly in a crisis, thereby contributing to the resilience of the Republic of Korea's aviation industry.

— END —