



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

**INTEGRATED CRISIS PREPAREDNESS AND OPERATIONAL
CONTINUITY FOR A RESILIENT INTERNATIONAL AIR TRANSPORT
SYSTEM**

(Presented by Qatar)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recent disruptions, including the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical events, operational disruptions and climate-related challenges, have highlighted the interconnected nature of the global aviation ecosystem and exposed persistent vulnerabilities in different regions. These disruptions demonstrated that aviation resilience depends not only on the preparedness of individual stakeholders, but also on effective coordination across the entire aviation ecosystem, including regulators, airlines, airports, air navigation service providers and other public authorities. Drawing on Qatar's experience gained through major international disruptions, this paper emphasizes the importance of strengthening integrated resilience frameworks, maintaining continuity of essential aviation functions, enhancing crisis preparedness and ensuring appropriate regulatory and operational flexibility during exceptional circumstances.

Action: The conference is invited to:

- recognize that aviation resilience requires coordinated preparedness across the entire aviation sector, reflecting the interdependencies among regulators, airlines, airports, air navigation service providers and other relevant stakeholders;
- encourage States to establish mechanisms enabling timely regulatory and operational flexibility during exceptional circumstances;
- encourage States to consider, as appropriate, mechanisms within Air Services Agreements (ASAs) and related arrangements between aeronautical authorities that support the continuity and orderly restoration of international air services during crises and exceptional circumstances, considering relevant International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) guidance;
- encourage States to consider the continuity and restoration of essential air connectivity as part of aviation resilience planning and recovery strategies; and
- request ICAO to continue supporting States through the exchange of lessons learned and best practices relating to aviation resilience and continuity of essential aviation functions.

*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:*

<i>References:</i>	ICAO Strategic Plan 2026–2050 Assembly Resolution A42-26 ICAO High-level Conference on COVID-19 (HLCC 2021) ICAO State Letter EC 2/16 – 24/75
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The past several years have been characterized by significant disruptions affecting international air transport, including the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical developments, airspace restrictions, climate-related events and operational disruptions. These events demonstrated the depth of interdependencies within the aviation sector and highlighted the systemic nature of risks affecting aviation.

1.2 The experience revealed persistent structural vulnerabilities and uneven resilience across regions, market segments and States. While some aviation systems recovered relatively quickly, others experienced prolonged disruptions and slower restoration of essential connectivity. These developments further highlighted the importance of preparedness, adaptability and coordinated response mechanisms.

1.3 As international air traffic is projected to more than double by 2050, the development of resilient aviation systems capable of maintaining essential functions during disruptions will become increasingly important.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 Aviation resilience extends beyond the capabilities of individual organizations. The continuity of international air transport depends on effective coordination among civil aviation authorities, airlines, airports, air navigation service providers, customs, immigration, public health authorities, security agencies, foreign affairs authorities and other stakeholders.

2.2 Recent disruptions demonstrated that challenges affecting one component of the aviation system can rapidly generate cascading effects throughout the broader network. Consequently, aviation resilience planning should increasingly adopt a whole-of-ecosystem approach, reflecting the interconnected nature of modern international aviation.

2.3 One of the principal lessons emerging from recent crises is the importance of maintaining essential aviation functions during periods of significant disruption. These functions may include repatriation operations, humanitarian flights, medical transport, cargo operations supporting critical supply chains, airport and air navigation services, and minimum levels of international connectivity. The ability to sustain or rapidly restore such functions can contribute significantly to national resilience, economic continuity and international cooperation. The maintenance of essential aviation services should therefore form an integral part of national emergency preparedness and business continuity frameworks.

2.4 Qatar's experience across public-health emergencies, regional airspace restrictions and security-related disruptions demonstrated that effective alignment among the civil aviation authority, airlines, relevant ministries, embassies, health authorities and the airport consistently proved decisive in restoring essential services with a resilient national carrier and hub central to sustaining core connectivity.

2.5 Our experience across multiple disruption types has shown that resilience depends on a pre-defined crisis governance structure, supported by established regulatory and diplomatic coordination mechanisms enabling rapid and proportionate response. Qatar Airways Group's resilience-driven approach reinforces this: embedded in day-to-day operations rather than activated only in crisis, through intensified monitoring of geopolitical developments and proactive, scenario-based contingency planning that safeguards passengers, employees, and other stakeholders and enables earlier decision-making.

2.6 Qatar Airways Group's approach was tested during severe airspace closures that brought airline and airport movements to a complete ground stop. Flexible network and capacity redeployment, route adjustments, pre-identified alternate airports and aircraft parking arrangements, alternative operating hubs, and stranded-passenger and crew contingencies (including cross-border transport and repatriation flights) proved critical to sustaining essential services.

2.7 The successful implementation was enabled by the collective efforts of air navigation service providers, civil aviation authorities, airports, defence and government agencies, public transportation agencies among many others, including maintaining safe corridor access, ensuring safe flight separation, prioritizing essential traffic under constrained airspace conditions and enabling temporary crew duty-time flexibilities. In parallel, government agencies and the airport operator enhanced operational procedures and passenger and staff safety arrangements for the 2026 regional crisis, including airport evacuation and sheltering arrangements.

2.8 Also, during COVID-19, Qatar's airport operator in close cooperation with the health and immigration authorities, established a dynamic operating model with the scope to rapidly adjust airport flows (terminal to airside and vice versa), and apply segregation requirements throughout airport touch points. Specific equipment was installed at critical airport areas to support health services personnel in monitoring and specialized disinfection protocols were implemented at all passengers' touchpoints. Also, during the Pandemic, the conversion of Qatar Airways' passenger aircraft into freighters preserved access to essential goods and medical supplies when dedicated cargo capacity could not meet demand, while alternative operating hubs and cross-border trucking sustained cargo flows when established routes were disrupted. Qatar Airways' dedicated repatriation charters also reconnected stranded passengers while much of the global aviation network remained constrained by border closures.

2.9 The geopolitical events of 2025 and 2026 also generated lessons in command and control, business continuity, contingency planning, workforce resilience, crisis communications, stakeholder coordination and recovery. Their institutionalization has strengthened Qatar's aviation preparedness and Qatar Airways Group's resilience framework.

2.10 In all cases, recovery was achieved through the same coordinated multi-agency action, with services restored in phases and readiness re-verified before scaling back to normal operations. This reinforces the value of embedding pre-agreed resilience arrangements into national and international aviation frameworks rather than developing them anew for each crisis.

2.11 The recommendations emerging from the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) High-level Conference on COVID-19 (HLCC 2021) emphasized the importance of crisis preparedness, business continuity planning, information sharing, coordinated risk management and the maintenance of essential aviation functions. These principles remain highly relevant for future resilience planning and preparedness activities.

2.12 Recent disruptions have demonstrated the importance of timely regulatory and operational flexibility during exceptional circumstances. In many situations, rapid adaptation of operational arrangements may be necessary to maintain essential air services, support emergency operations and

facilitate the movement of passengers, cargo and humanitarian assistance. Appropriate flexibility may include expedited administrative procedures, enhanced coordination among aeronautical authorities, rapid consultation mechanisms and practical implementation measures within the framework of existing air services agreements.

2.13 Pursuant to Assembly Resolution A41-27, the Air Transport Regulation Panel (ATRP), developed guidance to assist States in responding to crises and exceptional circumstances while preserving the integrity and continued effectiveness of Air Services Agreements (ASAs). ASAs remain particularly relevant during major disruptions because they provide the legal and operational framework under which international air services are authorized, operated and restored. The guidance, subsequently circulated through ICAO State Letter EC 2/16 – 24/75, encourages States to minimize disruptions to international air services, consider practical alternatives to suspension or cancellation of operations, maintain timely consultation and communication among affected Parties, apply measures transparently and on a non-discriminatory basis, and establish objective arrangements for the resumption of services. The guidance also includes optional text that may be incorporated into ASAs, under which a Party introducing temporary crisis-related restrictions would have due regard to ICAO guidance to ensure that ASAs continue to provide a predictable framework for international air transport during periods of disruption.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 The disruptions experienced by international aviation over recent years have reinforced the importance of resilience as a strategic requirement for sustainable aviation development. Effective preparedness and coordinated response mechanisms are essential for maintaining continuity and supporting recovery during major disruptions.

3.2 Building resilience requires integrated approaches that involve all components of the aviation ecosystem. Strong coordination among public authorities, airlines, airports, air navigation service providers and other stakeholders is critical to maintaining essential aviation functions and restoring connectivity during times of crisis.

3.3 The ability to provide appropriate regulatory and operational flexibility during exceptional circumstances, while preserving safety, security and effective oversight, represents an increasingly important component of aviation resilience.

3.4 As aviation continues to grow towards 2050, strengthened crisis preparedness, operational continuity planning, regular testing of emergency arrangements and improved coordination across the aviation ecosystem will contribute to a more resilient, adaptable and sustainable international air transport system.

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