



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

**FROM CRISIS RESPONSE TO NATIONAL RESILIENCE:
STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL AIR CONNECTIVITY
THROUGH ECONOMIC RESILIENCE**

(Presented by Saudi Arabia)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Air transport is exposed to disruptions of different origins but with recurrent economic consequences, including loss of connectivity and capacity, higher operating costs, supply and workforce disruptions, and risks to fair competition. COVID-19 demonstrated the scale of such exposure, but public-health emergencies are only one example. Airspace restrictions, extreme weather, cyber incidents, supply-chain disruptions and the failure of critical operators or service providers may generate similar systemic effects. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) is developing a global framework for crisis preparedness and response and already provides important principles for temporary, targeted and proportionate measures. A national implementation challenge nevertheless remains. Existing ICAO guidance provides important elements of crisis preparedness, but these elements are not yet consolidated into a single adaptable national framework that brings together leadership, essential connectivity, common data baselines, rapid economic-impact assessment, coordination arrangements, decision thresholds and exit criteria. The implications may be particularly significant for States with limited analytical and institutional capacity.

This paper proposes a dedicated ICAO Economic Resilience Module comprising practical guidance, indicators and assessment tools, together with a model National Air Transport Crisis Management and Economic Resilience Strategy for voluntary adoption or adaptation by States according to their national circumstances, with implementation support, where appropriate, through relevant No Country Left Behind activities. The proposed approach would also strengthen regional cooperation among civil aviation authorities, contingency planning and timely information exchange in support of international air connectivity during major disruptions.

Action: The Conference is invited to consider the actions in Section 5.

*Strategic
Goals:*

This working paper relates to Strategic Goals: *The Economic Development of Air Transport Assures the Delivery of Economic Prosperity and Societal Well-Being for All; Aviation Delivers Seamless, Accessible and Reliable Mobility for All; and No Country Left Behind.*

<i>Financial implications:</i>	Initial work can be undertaken within existing ICAO programmes and expert groups. Targeted implementation support may require voluntary contributions, partnerships and resource mobilization.
<i>References:</i>	Assembly Resolution A42-13 – <i>Strategy on disaster risk reduction and response mechanism in aviation</i> Assembly Resolution A42-26 – <i>Consolidated statement of continuing ICAO policies in the air transport field</i> ICAO Strategic Plan 2026-2050 ICAO Annual Report of the Council to the Assembly 2025 Report on the Evaluation of ICAO's Response to COVID-19 Council Aviation Recovery Taskforce (CART) Recommendation 10 ICAO Guidance on Economic and Financial Measures (Version 1.2) A42-WP/556, <i>State of the Industry and Outlook for Airport Traffic</i>

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The measure of resilience is not only how quickly air transport recovers from a disruption, but whether the system is better prepared for the next one. Air transport is exposed to shocks of different origins, including public-health emergencies, airspace restrictions, extreme weather, cyber incidents, supply-chain disruptions, workforce shortages, and the failure of critical operators or service providers. Although the causes differ, the economic effects are often similar: sudden losses of demand or capacity, interruption of essential connectivity, liquidity pressure, higher operating and travel costs, supply and labour disruptions, and risks to fair competition.

1.2 COVID-19 illustrates the scale of the exposure, but not its only form. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) estimated that the number of passengers carried globally fell by 60 per cent in 2020, representing approximately 2.7 billion fewer passengers than in 2019. Airlines' gross passenger operating revenue losses were estimated at USD 370 billion, while airport and air navigation service provider revenue losses reached approximately USD 115 billion and USD 13 billion respectively. Because aviation supports trade, tourism, supply chains and access to essential services, disruptions to air transport can rapidly create economic and social impacts beyond the aviation sector itself.

1.3 ICAO is advancing a global framework for crisis preparedness and response. This creates a timely opportunity to ensure that economic readiness is designed alongside operational contingency planning and public-health preparedness. This paper addresses a remaining implementation challenge: translating global guidance into adaptable national air transport crisis-management and economic-resilience strategies, reflecting States' differing capacities and national circumstances.

2. THE NATIONAL READINESS GAP

2.1 Crisis decisions are taken primarily at national level. They determine which air links and services must be preserved, how aviation, finance, competition, labour, tourism, security and health authorities coordinate, what data are shared, which exceptional measures may be activated, and when those measures should end. Without a strategy agreed before a crisis, these responsibilities remain dispersed and decisions are made under severe time pressure and incomplete information.

2.2 ICAO has already established important policy foundations. Assembly Resolution A42-13 directs the Council to establish a crisis-response policy and disaster-risk-reduction strategy in aviation, assist States in implementation with priority for least developed countries (LDC), landlocked developing countries (LLDC) and small island developing States (SIDS), and establish a network of crisis coordination structures. This paper complements that mandate by addressing its economic-resilience and national implementation dimensions. The Council Aviation Recovery Taskforce (CART) Recommendation 10 called for exceptional measures to be inclusive, targeted, proportionate, transparent, temporary, consistent with ICAO policies and without prejudice to fair competition. ICAO's economic and financial guidance provides a menu of possible measures, while the evaluation of ICAO's COVID-19 response recommended a comprehensive crisis-management framework, pre-developed tools, and clear de-escalation and exit strategies.

2.3 Existing ICAO material provides important elements of crisis preparedness. The remaining challenge is to strengthen the institutional bridge between these global principles and practical national readiness. These elements are not yet consolidated into a single adaptable national strategy bringing together multi-risk assessment, designated leadership, inter-agency coordination, essential-connectivity priorities, economic-impact assessment, common data baselines, decision thresholds, communication protocols, and time-bound review and exit criteria. The gap addressed by this paper is therefore primarily one of systematic implementation rather than policy intent. Strengthening this implementation layer would help States determine, in advance, which authorities lead, which air links and services should be prioritized, what information is required to support decisions, and when exceptional measures should be reviewed or withdrawn.

3. TRAFFIC RECOVERY IS NOT THE SAME AS RESILIENCE

3.1 Airports Council International (ACI) reported to the forty-second session of the ICAO Assembly that global airport passenger numbers reached 9.4 billion in 2024, or 103 per cent of the 2019 level. Yet airport revenues remained below pre-pandemic levels and recovery continued to vary across regions. Aggregate traffic can return while route diversity, affordability, infrastructure finances, workforce availability and service reliability remain fragile.

3.2 In the absence of pre-agreed baselines, indicators and decision rules, interventions may overlap, conflict or persist beyond the need that justified them. Essential routes may not be identified early enough; support may be poorly targeted; competition and consumer impacts may not be assessed consistently; and temporary measures may become difficult to withdraw. The result is avoidable economic loss and a slower, less balanced recovery.

3.3 Major disruptions affecting interconnected airspace and international route networks may require coordination beyond national boundaries. Pre-arranged authority-to-authority communication, timely operational information exchange and coordinated contingency arrangements can improve situational awareness, support operational continuity and help sustain international air connectivity. Such cooperation should complement national crisis-management responsibilities and remain adaptable to the institutional arrangements and circumstances of participating States.

3.4 The implications of major disruptions may be particularly significant for States with limited analytical and institutional capacity, including LLDC and SIDS for which air connectivity may constitute a critical economic and social lifeline. A global framework that is not accompanied by practical implementation support may be difficult for capacity-constrained States to implement effectively. For a small island developing State served by a single international airport and lacking a practical transport alternative, even a short period of unplanned aviation disruption can interrupt access to medicines,

humanitarian supplies, essential services and economic lifelines. In such circumstances, connectivity is not merely a transport consideration; it is an element of national resilience.

3.5 ICAO's *No Country Left Behind* Strategic Goal is therefore directly relevant. Under the ICAO Strategic Plan 2026-2050, it links implementation support, capacity-building and resource mobilization to the ability of all States to implement ICAO policies and programmes and to overcome constraints affecting infrastructure, finance, training, supply-chain access and coordination. Economic resilience should be brought within that implementation logic.

4. CLOSING THE GAP

4.1 The gap can be closed through two connected ICAO deliverables. The first is a dedicated Economic Resilience Module, comprising practical guidance, indicators and assessment tools, within ICAO's global framework for crisis preparedness and response. The second is an ICAO model for a National Air Transport Crisis Management and Economic Resilience Strategy, capable of adaptation to each State's risks, market structure and institutional arrangements. Together, these deliverables would help States translate global guidance into practical national arrangements aimed at preserving essential international air connectivity and supporting coordinated and proportionate economic responses during major disruptions.

4.2 At minimum, a national strategy could address: (a) a multi-risk assessment and essential-connectivity map, in which essential connectivity means the minimum air links and services that a State determines must be maintained to protect access to health and humanitarian services, territorial and economic continuity, and critical passenger and cargo flows; (b) designated leadership, institutional responsibilities and national coordination arrangements, including, where appropriate, mechanisms for regional authority-to-authority coordination; (c) common data baselines, readiness indicators and rapid economic-impact assessment; (d) a pre-identified menu of regulatory, financial and operational measures; (e) crisis communication and information-sharing protocols; (f) safeguards for competition, consumers and commercially sensitive data; and (g) activation, review, de-escalation and exit criteria. Strategies should be tested periodically through simulation exercises and updated after exercises and actual events. Exit criteria may, for example, include sustained restoration of an agreed share of baseline seat or cargo capacity, stabilization of service reliability, and restoration of key connectivity indicators within nationally defined ranges. These indicators should guide decisions, not operate as automatic or uniform global thresholds.

4.3 Implementation could be supported through relevant No Country Left Behind activities. ICAO could provide a model strategy, self-assessment checklist, indicator catalogue, data template, rapid impact-assessment tool, training and regional exercises; assess State needs; and mobilize partnerships and voluntary resources for States requiring assistance. Support should be differentiated: States with advanced systems may focus on interoperability and stress-testing; developing States may require analytical tools, training and institutional strengthening; and institutionally fragile or severely capacity-constrained States may require phased, hands-on implementation assistance. Where appropriate, voluntary partnerships and existing assistance mechanisms could support implementation without creating new mandatory financial obligations for States or ICAO. This would not rank States or transfer national responsibility to ICAO. It would provide States, particularly those facing capacity constraints, with a practical pathway to strengthen national readiness according to their circumstances.

4.4 Strengthening national preparedness and economic resilience can enhance the ability of States to preserve essential international air connectivity and respond effectively to future disruptions. The Seventh Worldwide Air Transport Conference (ATConf/7) provides an opportunity to further align ICAO's global crisis-preparedness efforts with practical national implementation.

5. ACTION BY THE CONFERENCE

5.1 The Conference is invited to:

- a) recognize that crises affecting air transport may arise from multiple and evolving sources and that recovery from one crisis does not demonstrate readiness for the next;
- b) encourage States to establish, update and periodically test, as appropriate and in accordance with their national circumstances, a National Air Transport Crisis Management and Economic Resilience Strategy;
- c) request the Council to develop a dedicated Economic Resilience Module, comprising practical guidance, indicators and assessment tools, within ICAO's global framework for crisis preparedness and response, together with an ICAO model national strategy and the practical tools described in paragraph 4.3; and
- d) request the Council to integrate implementation of this work within relevant *No Country Left Behind* strategic goal activities, including needs assessment, capacity-building, regional cooperation and voluntary implementation support, with particular attention to States facing significant capacity constraints.

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