



WORKING PAPER

FACILITATION PANEL (FALP)

FOURTEENTH MEETING

Montréal, 20 to 24 April 2026

Agenda Item 3: Amendments to Annex 9 — *Facilitation*

**TOWARD A MORE INCLUSIVE AIRPORT:
“IF IT DOES NOT EXIST, IT DOES NOT MEAN IT CANNOT BE DONE.”**

(Presented by Italy)

SUMMARY

With Resolution 12/3 of the Assembly’s 42nd Session, Member States were urged to prioritize the inclusion and accessibility of air transport services for persons with disabilities and persons with reduced mobility. The sharing of best practices, learning from national experiences such as the one of Italy, should be encouraged at ICAO level for the benefit of all ICAO States. This should also include best practices on the conduct of national inspections on accessibility.

Action by the FAL Panel:

The FAL Panel is invited to:

- invite the ICAO Working Group on Accessibility in International Civil Aviation to consider drafting best practices for national periodical inspections; and
- recommend that ICAO widely disseminate the best practices outlined in this working paper, encouraging their application.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The increasing number of passengers with reduced mobility (PRM), together with the diverse factors contributing to this trend, is a well-established reality in international civil aviation. Commitments to ensure accessible air transport for persons with disabilities require the support of effective and practicable policies, including the active involvement of Civil Aviation Authorities in promoting accessibility across the airport environment.

2. INSPECTIONS BEST PRACTICES

2.1 At present, inspections and audits related to airport accessibility are not implemented in a harmonized manner, at international and regional levels. There are several national and regional

programmes that are worth mentioning. The United States Airport Disability Compliance Program provides for the conduct of periodic airport compliance reviews. Within the European Union, Regulation (EC) No. 1107/2006 provides for the designation of National Enforcement Bodies responsible for ensuring the correct application of the Regulation concerning the rights of passengers with disabilities and reduced mobility; however, it does not establish specific provisions related to verification methodologies or oversight mechanisms on airport accessibility. Within the European Civil Aviation Conference (ECAC) region, the ECAC Secretariat launched in 2024 the Quality Assessment Programme on Assistance to Persons with Reduced Mobility (PRMs), established to assess the quality of assistance provided to the growing number of PRMs in the aviation sector. The Programme supports ECAC Member States in monitoring the implementation of the provisions set out in Doc 30, Part I, Section 5 by airport managing bodies and airlines, by conducting assessments at airports in accordance with the requests of ECAC Member States. A relevant example of good practice at a national level is provided by Ireland, which in 2024 published reports on accessibility inspections conducted in 2023 at six national airports, identifying findings and demonstrating transparency in the oversight activities related to airport accessibility.

2.2 The Italian Civil Aviation Authority (ENAC) is the National Enforcement Body for Regulation (EC) No. 1107/2006, and regularly conducts audits on airport accessibility at main national airports. ENAC is currently leading the initiative “Toward a More Inclusive Airport”, an integrated program designed to enhance accessibility of airport spaces and pathways, technological innovation in airport services and systems, staff training and operator development, internal and external communication strategies within the airport organization. The program focuses on meeting the evolving principles of universal design and accessibility, aiming to create an inclusive travel experience for all passengers, regardless of physical, intellectual, developmental, visible or invisible disabilities. At present, this project applies to a limited number of strategic airports and involves collaboration with airport operators, industry associations, disability groups, and assistance services to promote an inclusive culture and ensure that passengers with disabilities can experience a seamless and inclusive journey. The project "Towards a More Inclusive Airport" has been launched through pilot projects at major airports including Aeroporti di Roma (Fiumicino), SEA Aeroporti di Milano (Malpensa and Linate), and SAVE (Venice). These initiatives seek to promote a more welcoming, functional, and inclusive airport environment, enhancing the overall travel experience for passengers with various needs. The project includes an assessment of the accessibility gaps at airports, based on national and international regulations. Following this assessment, initiatives and best practices are identified to enhance the accessibility of the airport and improve the usability of airport services for passengers with disabilities or reduced mobility.

2.3 ENAC INITIATIVES AND BEST PRACTICES: Major Italian airports, such as Fiumicino, Malpensa, and Venice, have been involved in the project's initial phase. These airports are increasingly impacted by significant events like the 2025 Jubilee of Disabilities and the 2026 Winter Olympics and Paralympics in Milan-Cortina, which feature athletes overcoming both physical and mental barriers. These high-profile events provide a unique opportunity for ENAC to highlight its inclusive vision through the "Towards a More Inclusive Airport" project.

2.4 The objective of the project is grounded in the sharing of common policy principles that make it possible to understand passengers' needs and address them within the specific operational context of each individual airport. This approach is inspired by universal design, with the aim of identifying universal needs and encouraging airport operators to implement inclusive solutions through the monitoring activity of the Civil Aviation Authority. In this framework, the local presence of ENAC at airports plays a key role as a sentinel on the ground, capable of identifying critical issues and providing appropriate responses, while also promoting approaches that can be scaled and implemented at national level. The goal is to ensure that airports become inclusive environments in which all passengers feel fully part of the travel experience and are never left behind.

2.5 In 2024, the project began with an analysis of the airport systems involved. Key findings included the following:

- A steady increase in the number of passengers with disabilities, many of whom wish to travel independently without relying on PRMs services;
- The current airport system primarily addresses motor disabilities, with less focus on sensory or invisible disabilities; and
- In some areas, accessibility is solely provided through the PRM service.

2.6 As a result, airport operators have been asked to focus on addressing these gaps and planning initiatives in line with the project's goals. On May 22, 2025, a site visit at Fiumicino Airport was conducted by ENAC, assessing actions implemented in line with the Project's objectives. These actions included:

- New assistance call prototype totem and interactive information totem: innovative call points and information totems, fully accessible for different types of disabilities;
- App “Be My Eyes”: a remote visual assistance service that connects people with visual impairments with the operators, who are ready to provide real-time support to help them navigate within the airport;
- Chatbot: Information and updates on flight status are delivered directly to passengers' mobile phones via WhatsApp. The chatbot also provides recommendations for shops and restaurants and offers immediate responses to user inquiries. The service is available in English and Italian;
- Reserved “Dining Boot” area: dedicated and welcoming spaces designed for all individuals who, due to specific needs, may feel uncomfortable eating in crowded or overly exposed environments. These areas provide a calm and protected setting, allowing passengers to enjoy a moment of rest; and
- Autonomous wheelchair “Whill”: innovative electric mobility devices designed to support autonomous mobility within the airport, providing a comfortable alternative to traditional wheelchairs (currently in testing phase).

2.7 As stated, the initiatives implemented form part of an iterative process of deployment, testing, and review, aimed at the continuous improvement of the travel experience. Furthermore, ENAC has requested that operators complete the testing phases by collecting user feedback, with a view to subsequently promoting the most effective solutions as best practices.

2.8 Another initiative recently developed by ENAC in the field of inclusive air transport is the project “Inclusion – Interoperability – Disability – Artificial Intelligence”, which aims to enhance accessibility for passengers with hearing impairments through the implementation of artificial intelligence-based communication systems. The system features avatars that can communicate in both spoken language and sign language, offering a more natural and accessible communication channel for passengers in real-time. The goal is to break down communication barriers, providing personalized communication options for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, ensuring an inclusive travel experience for all. Within this project, a dedicated information totem has been developed, capable of recognising sign language and animating an avatar that interacts with users through both written text and sign language. In

addition, passengers can receive flight status updates via WhatsApp in the form of a sign language video accompanied by written text describing any changes to the flight. Although complex in its development, the project represents a truly innovative step forward and is currently used to provide essential airport information, such as the location of accessible facilities, as well as real-time flight status and key travel-related details including boarding gate information. The initiative was developed in collaboration with the Italian National Association of the Deaf. In parallel, further developments are underway to enable the system to respond to all spoken passenger queries. At present, multilingual communication is already supported, including Italian Sign Language (LIS) and International Sign Language. The next phase will extend these capabilities to airport websites, allowing passengers to ask questions directly using their voice, thus ensuring continuity of accessibility across both physical and digital airport environments.

3. ACTIONS BY THE FAL PANEL

3.1 The FAL Panel is invited to:

- recommend that the ICAO Working Group on Accessibility in International Civil Aviation consider the introduction of best practices aimed at the conduct of annual inspection programmes based, at a minimum, on strategically selected airports;
- recommend that ICAO widely disseminate the best practices outlined in this working paper, encouraging their application.

— END —