



WORKING PAPER

FACILITATION PANEL (FALP)

FOURTEENTH MEETING

Montréal, 20 to 24 April 2026

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

REVISED DEFINITIONS AND PROPOSED STANDARDS AND RECOMMENDED PRACTICES FOR ICAO DIGITAL TRAVEL CREDENTIALS

(Presented by New Zealand as Chair of the ICAO Implementation and Capacity Building Working Group (ICBWG))

SUMMARY

This working paper proposes new and revised definitions and the creation of two Standards and one Recommended Practice related to *Doc 9303, Machine Readable Travel Documents* to be incorporated into *Annex 9 — Facilitation*. The Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) are intended to include Digital Travel Credentials (DTCs) in the ICAO regulatory framework in a similar way to Machine-Readable Travel Documents (MRTDs) and Electronic Machine-Readable Travel Documents (eMRTDs). The proposal will ensure DTCs are interoperable and standardised to a level of integrity and security appropriate for border and immigration clearance purposes. The working paper will also seek to define a DTC in the Annex, which will distinguish them from other verifiable credentials currently under development or in use in the travel continuum.

The Facilitation (FAL) Panel requested that the Implementation and Capacity Building Working Group (ICBWG) review the revised definition of a travel document proposed at the Thirteenth Meeting of the Facilitation Panel (FALP/13). ICBWG and the Technical Advisory Group on the Traveller Identification Programme (TAG/TRIP) believe the intent of the definition should remain, though some changes are resubmitted for consideration.

The proposals for Annex 9 SARPs have been discussed by experts from the Technical Advisory Group on the Traveller Identification Programme (TAG/TRIP).

Action by the FAL Panel:

The Facilitation Panel (FALP) is invited to agree to the proposed additions to Annex 9 SARPs as found in Appendix A of this working paper.

1. INTRODUCTION ON DIGITAL TRAVEL CREDENTIALS

1.1 Most Member States are now issuing Electronic Machine-Readable Travel Documents (eMRTDs), and many are taking advantage of the enhanced passenger facilitation and improved security of border management that eMRTDs can provide. The digitization of the traveller's biographic and biometric data stored in the integrated circuit (IC or chip) of the ePassport generates significant benefits, including more seamless verification of the passport bearer's identity using facial recognition, and providing authorities with the tools to authenticate the travel document and its data.

1.2 The eMRTD and its digital biometric provides further opportunities for the creation of verifiable digital credentials. Industry and Member States began to explore verifiable digital credentials for travel around a decade ago. However, the absence of a standardised approach to these digital credentials threatens to undermine global interoperability and security in the traveller identification ecosystem.

1.3 The fast-moving landscape of verifiable digital credentials prompted the New Technologies Working Group (NTWG) to seek a standardised approach to the issuance of travel credentials in a digital format, to ensure global interoperability and security was maintained – particularly where digital credentials are intended for the purpose of border control and immigration clearance.

1.4 In 2020, the first set of technical specifications for the Digital Travel Credential (DTC) were formally approved by the Technical Advisory Group on the Traveller Identification Programme (TAG/TRIP) for inclusion in Doc 9303, *Machine Readable Travel Documents*. The globally interoperable DTC is intended to temporarily or permanently substitute a conventional passport with a digital representation of the traveller's identity, which can in turn be validated using the travel document issuing authority's public key infrastructure. Phased work on extending the specifications to include additional physical devices is ongoing, as is work on the security of information transfer (DTC transmission protocol).

1.5 The DTC Guiding Principles and Technical Specifications are available on the ICAO Traveller Identification Program (TRIP) publications site.¹

1.6 Many types of verifiable digital credentials are now in use around the world, including mobile driver licenses and verifiable digital barcodes like the ICAO Visible Digital Seal. There is no question that digital credentials are transforming the way information can be used and verified across many industries, and aviation is no exception.

1.7 Industry and Member States are now actively piloting different types of verifiable digital credentials for different purposes within the travel continuum. While there are some use cases within the aviation ecosystem that may require differing levels of identity assurance, border clearance and immigration still requires an identity credential that represents the highest level of digital security and integrity – which is what the ICAO DTC intends to achieve. A DTC is therefore distinct from other types of verifiable credentials, just like an ePassport is distinct from other documents that may be presented in the travel continuum.

1.8 Unlike eMRTDs, however, Annex 9 does not specifically refer to DTCs or the requirement for these credentials to comply with Doc 9303. To ensure global interoperability and security, the ICAO regulatory framework must include Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) that govern the creation and use of DTCs. The Implementation and Capacity Building Working Group (ICBWG), with the

¹ <https://www.icao.int/icao-trip/publications>

endorsement of TAG/TRIP and close support of the NTWG, were tasked with drafting initial suggested Annex 9 SARPs for the DTC.

2. DISCUSSION ON DTC

2.1 In order to maintain integrity, security and interoperability, DTCs (e.g. those intended to replace a passport for part or all of border clearance) must comply with Doc 9303. This precedent was set many years ago with MRTDs and eMRTDs. Digital credentials and their development, however, represent a fundamental shift for travel document issuing and border authorities. There are existing processes, systems, infrastructure and investment that needs to be considered. Despite the desire for faster pace, DTC implementation also cannot be at the expense of aviation security or global interoperability. Technical and policy issues still remain, which are being addressed concurrently with digital credential and DTC development.

2.2 DTC usage is emergent but occurring at pace through various pilots. The development of Doc 9303 specifications for the DTC is therefore occurring in phases, as technical experts resolve interoperability and security issues associated with different use cases – particularly with additional devices (e.g. mobile phones) and the secure transmission of verifiable identity information.

2.3 The first phase of DTC development in 2020 specified a common ‘Virtual Component’, which is an exact copy of the information on the eMRTD chip (biodata, facial biometric and digital signature used to verify the information is authentic). This is sometimes referred to as a DTC ‘Type 1’ and can, for example, be provisioned into a wallet by entities within the travel continuum (e.g. airlines, airports and Member States) and sent to touch points in advance to facilitate travel.

2.4 Most current pilots are using a DTC ‘Type 1’ Virtual Component. Provided the digital information remains unchanged from the chip and retains the signature of the passport issuing authority (e.g. from the national Public Key Infrastructure), in accordance with Doc 9303, then the credential will be considered ‘issued’ by the travel document issuing authority irrespective of which entity created or generated the Virtual Component. It should be noted that for DTC ‘Type 1’ implementations, it is intended that checks of the DTC ‘virtual component’ continue to be anchored by checks of the source eMRTD that has already been issued by the travel document issuing authority.

2.5 Introducing a standard that requires a DTC to be ‘issued in accordance with Doc 9303’ will ensure that the DTC will be interoperable and secure, regardless of the entity provisioning or creating the DTC. This approach will also future-proof DTC development as subsequent phases of the DTC are specified, and interoperability and security questions are resolved.

2.6 Like the eMRTD before it, ICAO Member States must take steps to ensure that the DTC is consistently created and used, so that our issuing authorities and border authorities can make the most cost-effective investments that align with a global standard and set of specifications, while also providing seamless and secure facilitation for people.

3. INTRODUCTION ON TRAVEL DOCUMENT DEFINITION

3.1 ICBWG presented WP/28 at FALP/13, which outlined proposed changes to Chapter 3 of Annex 9, encompassing revisions to three definitions and 14 Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs), and a proposed new Recommended Practice.

3.2 Among the three revised definitions, ICBWG proposed the following definition of a Travel Document, which removed ‘official document of’ and added ‘document which may be accepted in lieu of a passport:

Travel document. A passport, or other ~~official document of identity~~ **document which may be accepted in lieu of a passport**, issued by a State or organization, which may be used by the rightful holder for international travel.

3.3 The intent was to add clarity to the travel document definition’s reference to official identity documents, by noting that other documents accepted for international travel would normally only occur if a passport is not available. The intent is also that, over time, the definition will shift to reflect the fact that not all documents accepted for travel need to be called travel documents (e.g. a driver license may be used in some circumstances, but lacks the security and global interoperability that ICBWG would see as representative of a specified travel document).

3.4 The Panel agreed to the proposals to amend Annex 9, except for the definition for “travel document.” The Panel requested the ICBWG to review the definition, in particular, the use of the word “in lieu” and to report to the Panel at the next meeting of the Facilitation Panel.

4. DISCUSSION ON TRAVEL DOCUMENT DEFINITION

4.1 ICBWG and TAG/TRIP reviewed the wording and agreed that the intent of the definition still represents the desired direction towards travel documents being secure and interoperable (e.g. a passport), and distinct from other documents that may be presented for travel in some circumstances.

4.2 Continuing to describe other documents (e.g. driver license, birth certificate) as travel documents that exists on the same level as a passport by virtue of being officially issued by a State or organisation will come at the expense of minimum security and global interoperability standards.

4.3 The term ‘in lieu’ may be substituted by ‘in place of’ or ‘instead of’ and still maintain the intent of the definition.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 The FALP is invited to:

- a) agree to the proposed amendments to Annex 9 SARPs as found in Appendix A of this working paper.

APPENDIX A

Proposal for amendments to Annex 9 – *Facilitation*

CHAPTER 1. DEFINITIONS AND GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Proposed New Definition

Digital Travel Credential (DTC). A travel credential in a digital format that conforms with the specifications contained in Doc 9303 and is meant to temporarily or permanently substitute a conventional passport with a digital representation of the traveller's identity.

Revised Travel Document Definition

Travel document. A passport, or other official document of identity document which may be accepted instead of a passport, issued by a State or organization, which may be used by the rightful holder for international travel.

CHAPTER 3: ENTRY AND DEPARTURE OF PERSONS AND THEIR BAGGAGE

Proposed New Standard – Travel Documents

3.xx When a Contracting State issues a Digital Travel Credential (DTC), it shall do so in accordance with the specifications of Doc 9303.

Note – Where an entity creates a DTC Virtual Component in accordance with Doc 9303, it is considered 'issued' by the issuing authority.

Proposed New Standard – Inspection of Travel Documents

3.xx Contracting States verifying DTCs for the purposes of immigration control or border clearance shall perform passive authentication in accordance with Doc 9303 to determine if the DTC was issued by the issuing authority and to confirm data integrity.

Note – Performing passive authentication, the baseline security method for inspecting eMRTDs, proves that the contents of DTC Virtual Component are authentic and not changed.

Proposed New Recommended Practice – Inspection of Travel Documents

3.xx Contracting States should accept only DTCs issued in accordance with Doc 9303 specifications for the purposes of immigration control or border clearance.

APPENDIX B

**NEW or REVISED SARP PROPOSAL: AMENDMENT, ANNEX 9, CHAPTER 1, 3
 [STANDARD/RECOMMENDED PRACTICE]**

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

1. What is the problem that this proposal is designed to address?

Please include specific details

Industry and Member States are now actively piloting verifiable digital credentials for different purposes within the travel continuum, including Digital Travel Credentials intended to facilitate passengers through immigration and border control.

Although DTC specifications have been developed by TAG/TRIP in Doc 9303 – *Machine-Readable Travel Documents*, Annex 9 does not contain the necessary DTC-related Standards and Recommended Practices required to ensure security and interoperability.

Without the requirement to follow a harmonised and consistent approach to DTC creation and use, there is a risk that significant cost, complexity and confusion will be introduced into the aviation ecosystem – particularly for border clearances processes. For integrity and security, the identity of the traveller and their identity data must be able to be authenticated in a consistent and harmonised way.

Like MRTDs and eMRTDs, DTCs need to comply with agreed ICAO SARPs – hence new SARPs are required in Annex 9.

2. What alternatives to SARPs were considered to solve the problem?

None	Circular	Manual	Policy	<i>Other (please explain)</i>
X				

3a. What is the impact of this proposal on a **State**?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Implementing this proposal will enhance civil aviation safety		X			
<i>Rationale:</i> Like MRTDs and eMRTDs, a standardised approach to traveller identification is required to ensure States do not have to make multiple or duplicate investments to process travellers using different types of travel credentials. If DTCs are created in the same way, consistently across the aviation ecosystem, investment is focussed and the treatment of risk can be more targeted to ensure the correct passengers are flying, and traveller identification is performed with integrity.					
Implementing this proposal will increase air navigation capacity and improve efficiency			X		
<i>Rationale:</i> N/A					
Implementing this proposal will enhance global civil aviation security and facilitation (taking	X				

into account impact on human rights, health and privacy, if any)					
<p><i>Rationale:</i> As stated before, as with MRTDs and eMRTDs, a standardised approach to traveller identification is required to ensure States do not have to make multiple or duplicate investments to process travellers using different types of travel credentials. If DTCs are created in the same way, consistently across the aviation ecosystem, investment is focussed and the treatment of risk can be more targeted to ensure the correct passengers are flying, and traveller identification is performed with integrity.</p> <p>A compliant Doc 9303 DTC will be more secure because the credential will be created consistently, with security and global interoperability as a requirement. With regard to facilitation benefits and convenience, IATA surveys indicate a desire from passengers to hold a digital credential that can be shared securely from a mobile device. For border clearance purposes, a DTC must still represent the highest degree of trust and security, while also being able to be used and validated in different parts of the world in the same way, just as interoperable travel documents are.</p>					
Implementing this proposal will foster the development of a sound and economically-viable civil aviation system	X				
<p><i>Rationale:</i> Globally interoperable DTCs contribute to more seamless passenger flows. The ability to share verifiable traveller information in advance, in order to pre-process, de-risk and facilitate flow on arrivals is the next step in leveraging the power of the eMRTD.</p> <p>DTCs have a significant contribution to make to an economically viable civil aviation system, provided they meet interoperability and security standards, which is why the Annex 9 SARPs are critical.</p>					
Implementing this proposal will minimize the adverse environmental effects of civil aviation activities			X		
<p><i>Rationale:</i> Not applicable</p>					

3b. Do the benefits of this proposal justify the cost of its implementation?

Yes	No	Not sure	Not applicable
X			

4a. What is the impact of this proposal on **Industry**?

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
Implementing this proposal will enhance civil aviation safety		X			
<p><i>Rationale:</i> The same safety rational for Member States applies to Industry.</p>					
Implementing this proposal will increase air navigation capacity and improve efficiency			X		
<p><i>Rationale:</i> Not applicable</p>					

Implementing this proposal will enhance global civil aviation security and facilitation (taking into account impact on human rights, health and privacy, if any)	X				
<i>Rationale:</i> Note that the same rationale applies – Industry need the confidence to develop products and services that integrate well with aviation and border processes, to enable the most convenient and efficient facilitation of passengers. Note also that DTCs can work within the aviation ecosystem alongside other verifiable credentials that could be generated by airlines and airports (for example, proof of age for alcohol purchase, proof of flight, lounge access). DTCs are intended for high-security and high integrity processes (e.g. border clearance).					
Implementing this proposal will foster the development of a sound and economically-viable civil aviation system	X				
<i>Rationale:</i> As described, interoperable DTCs provide facilitation benefits for the entire ecosystem.					
Implementing this proposal will minimize the adverse environmental effects of civil aviation activities			X		
<i>Rationale:</i> Not applicable					

4b. Do the benefits of this proposal justify the cost of its implementation?

Yes	No	Not sure	Not applicable
X			

5. How long would it take for States and Industry to implement this proposal?

Already implemented	0-1 years	1-2 years	2-5 years	5-10 years	More than 10 years
	X				

6. Financial implications of the proposal

<p>The cost impact on States would include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The creation and acceptance of a DTC is not mandatory – therefore the costs associated with DTCs are optional. • If a State chooses to allow DTCs for the purposes of border and immigration, they will likely already be facilitating passengers using eMRTDs and so base technology and approach exists already. • Depending on the integration, States may need to build a technical mechanism to receive and validate digital information in advance. As this is not mandatory, and is aligned with the way common systems perform already, the expected cost is not prohibitive – but would need to be balanced against the benefits expected to be gained. • Aligning existing pilots with Doc 9303 specifications (if they are not already).
<p>The cost impact on the industry would include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aligning existing border clearance pilots with Doc 9303 Specifications (if they are not already).

IMPLEMENTATION TASK LIST AND OUTLINE OF GUIDANCE MATERIAL

1. IMPLEMENTATION TASK LIST

1.1 Essential steps to be followed by a State in order to implement proposed amendments¹

Introduction of SARPs for Digital Travel Credentials

1.1.1 For States that are developing or planning to implement DTCs, the creation and validation of DTCs must be in accordance with Doc 9303.

1.1.2 This may involve:

1.1.3 Assessment of current pilots and and/or implementations and identification of gaps between implementation and Doc 9303;

1.1.4 Alignment of proposed future DTC implementations with Doc 9303 in terms of States' creation of a DTC, or the acceptance of a DTC for border clearance and immigration purposes;

2. STANDARDIZATION PROCESS

2.1 Effective date: [Month/Year]: to be completed by Secretariat

2.2 Applicability date: [Month/Year]: to be completed by Secretariat

3. SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION:

3.1 ICAO documentation:

Title	Type	Publication date
ICAO Guide for Assessing the Security of Handling and Issuance	Guidance Material	2016 and currently under review
Doc 9957, <i>The Facilitation Manual</i>	Guidance Material	
ICAO Guide for the Implementation of DTCs	Guidance Material	Under development
ICAO DTC Policy and Guiding Principles	Guidance Material	2026

3.2 External documentation:

Title	External Organization	Publication date

¹ Amendment of a format or clarification nature are not allowed in this Appendix.

4. **IMPLEMENTATION ASSISTANCE TASKS**

Type	Global	Regional
ICAO TRIP Symposia	Annual TRIP Symposium	TRIP Regional Meetings and Symposia
Working Group and Board Meetings	TAG/TRIP, ICBWG, NTWG and PKD	TAG/TRIP, ICBWG, NTWG and PKD

5. **UNIVERSAL SECURITY AUDIT PROGRAMME (USAP)
OR UNIVERSAL SAFETY OVERSIGHT PROGRAMME
(USOAP)compliant an**

5.1 SARPs fall under the USAP programme in terms of compliant and secure issuance of travel documents.

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