



FACILITATION PANEL (FALP)

FOURTEENTH MEETING

Montréal, 20 to 24 April 2026

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

INCORPORATION OF NON-VISIBLE DISABILITIES IN ICAO ANNEX 9 TO INCREASE UNIVERSAL ACCESSIBILITY IN AIR TRANSPORT

(Presented by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela)

SUMMARY

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela proposes amendments to ICAO Annex 9 — *Facilitation* to incorporate non-visible disabilities in recognition of non-obvious conditions that impact universal access to air transport. This initiative is in line with the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* and reinforces equitable facilitation with clear definitions, specialized training and tailored operational protocols, with a comprehensive non-discriminatory approach.

Action by the FAL Panel:

- Incorporate precise definitions of non-visible disabilities into Annex 9;
- Develop and implement global operational protocols to guide all aviation personnel handling facilitation arrangements in efficiently accommodating non-visible disabilities in international civil aviation;
- Establish global indicators for monitoring and reporting in order to assess compliance with and effectiveness of inclusive measures.

¹ Spanish version provided by Venezuela.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela presents this working paper to draw attention to and address non-visible disabilities in international civil aviation. Such conditions affect more than 80 per cent of persons with disabilities in the world, as estimated by organizations such as the UN and ICAO.

1.2 This proposal arises from national experience in inclusion efforts and international commitments undertaken by Venezuela, which has become a driver of equity under the strategic goal of *No Country Left Behind* in the ICAO 2026-2028 Business Plan.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 Passengers with non-visible disabilities encounter significant barriers at the airport and on board aircraft including long lines, exposure to intense sensorial stimuli such as noise and lights, standard security protocols that do not consider hidden sensitivities, and uncomprehending personnel, all of which can result in unjustified denial of boarding, extreme stress for the affected passengers, and potential operational risks incurred by an unaddressed crisis.

2.2 This problem not only undermines basic human rights, but contradicts the principles of safe and efficient facilitation promoted by ICAO, in particular the need for broader and more inclusive approaches. Venezuela proposes to expand these frameworks by means of an evidence-based action plan supported by work streams in international fora such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) that have been driving the transition from charitable approaches to a model founded on equal rights. Global data justify this undertaking. More than one billion people live with some kind of disability, most often not visible, and their participation in air transport is essential for post-pandemic connectivity and sustainable development. Without targeted measures, gaps persist in the implementation of Annex 9 such as a lack of sensitivity training and flexible protocols. This potentially increases the number of complaints and lawsuits, with higher costs accruing to airlines and States. Not only will this proposal mitigate these risks, but it will elevate global facilitation standards, align to the UN Agenda 2030, and make ICAO a benchmark for universal accessibility.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 We propose to include in Annex 9 — *Facilitation* a dedicated section on non-visible disabilities with standard definitions (e.g., non-obvious conditions that impact functional or cognitive ability), requirements for voluntary medical certificates, and mandatory sensitivity training for ground, security and on-board personnel.

3.2 Develop and implement operational protocols including the creation of calm paths, sensory rooms and adapted signage in terminals, alternative communication such as sign language and pictograms, priority handling and in-flight support, with an emphasis on discretion to avoid stigmatization.

3.3 Establish an annual monitoring mechanism with quantitative indicators (e.g., number of passengers assisted, denied boarding rates for passengers with non-visible disabilities) for reporting to ICAO Assemblies, inviting member States to pilot national programs and share best practices.

APPENDIX A

**PROPOSED STRUCTURE FOR AMENDMENTS TO ANNEX 9 ON
NON-VISIBLE DISABILITIES**

Component	Detailed description	Specific measures	Implementation time frame
Recognition	Definitions and guidance for non-invasive identification	Voluntary certificates; lists of common conditions (sensorial sensitivity, special assistance requirements, etc.)	2026
Training	Standard programs for all personnel	ICAO on-line modules; mandatory certification	2027
Operational protocols	Adaptations for airports and in-flight	Sensorial spaces; crisis protocols; inclusive communication	Immediately after approval
Monitoring and reporting	Global indicators and audits	Annual reports; sharable ICAO database	Annual starting in 2027

APPENDIX B

QUICK TRAINING FOR AVIATION PERSONNEL

Objective: Safely and respectfully identify and assist passengers with non-visible disabilities.

Duration: Two hours; renewable every two years.

1. Common signs:

- **Autism/autism spectrum disorder (ASD):** Repetitive behaviours, noise/light sensitivity;
- **Anxiety/ADHD:** Restlessness, sweating, discomfort waiting in lines;
- **Chronic disorders (fibromyalgia):** Fatigue, pain with movement.

2. Recommended actions:

- Discreetly ask, “Do you require special assistance?”;
- Offer: Priority queuing, quiet space, simple communication;
- Avoid: confrontation, forceful physical contact.

3. Stepping through the passenger experience:

- **Security/Check-in:** Alternative scanner, accommodation of accompanying persons;
- **Boarding:** Priority access to quiet lounges;
- **In-flight:** Clear communication, medical kit at the ready.

4. Rapid reaction:

- **Autism episode:** Private area, pictograms;
- **Panic or anxiety:** Calm voice, distraction.

Evaluation: Practical test (80 per cent pass)

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