



ASSEMBLY — 42ND SESSION

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 12: Facilitation Programmes

FIT FOR THE FUTURE – A LONG-TERM STRATEGIC PLAN FOR FACILITATION

(Presented by the United Kingdom and the International Air Transport Association (IATA))

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Facilitation, as outlined in Annex 9 — *Facilitation* to the Chicago Convention, has a broad scope of increasing complexity, covering many different policy areas, crossing the boundaries of several government departments within a state. This makes coordination of the different actors and compliance with the 440+ Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) a complex undertaking.

A companion document to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Strategic Plan, the development of a long-term Strategic Facilitation Plan is proposed. This would go beyond the triennium work programme and would seek to systematically improve compliance with the Annex 9 SARPs through a prioritization exercise that provides focus for States on both current priorities and future aspirations.

By developing a long-term strategic plan, States can better coordinate their resources and plan for the future. At the global level, the goal would be increased compliance with and adoption of key Facilitation SARPs, ultimately leading to greater streamlining among the numerous regulatory requirements that exist between jurisdictions for more predictable air journeys with fewer barriers. This does not mean other areas of facilitation would be neglected, rather there would be a more methodical approach to address the most pressing issues.

Action: The Assembly is invited to:

- a) Task the ICAO Secretariat to support the Facilitation Panel to build a long-term Strategic Facilitation Plan that prioritizes specific SARPs for attention with the aim of increasing compliance with, and harmonized implementation of, these SARPs to prevent unnecessary inconvenience or delays to aircraft, passengers and cargo; and
- b) Encourage States and industry representatives to actively participate in the development of the long-term Strategic Facilitation Plan by contributing to efforts to prioritize facilitation work areas and highlight issues for future focus.

<i>Strategic Goals:</i>	This working paper relates to Strategic Goals: Seamless, Accessible, and Reliable Mobility; No Country Left Behind
<i>Financial implications:</i>	None
<i>References:</i>	Strategic Plan 2026–2050 Annex 9 — <i>Facilitation</i> Doha Declaration on Facilitation in International Air Transportation

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 “The chapters within Annex 9 are as diverse as the global aviation community itself, with numerous stakeholders working together to achieve its overarching objective: to simplify and standardize international air transport procedures.”¹

1.2 In 2024 the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) marked the 75th anniversary of Facilitation and Annex 9 — *Facilitation* to the Chicago Convention. Over the 75 years since its inception, Annex 9 has evolved, developed and diversified. While its aim remains the same – to implement measures which prevent unnecessary delays to aircraft, passengers, crews and cargo – Annex 9 has had to adapt over time and now covers a large array of different subjects with remits that stretch beyond aviation and into the spheres of health, immigration, customs and law enforcement, labour organizations and beyond.

1.3 Compliance with the 440+ Annex 9 Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) is a feat of coordination reaching across multiple and diverse government and regulatory stakeholders with the cooperation of industry and consumer groups. In addition, only a small number of Annex 9 SARPs are currently audited – partly due to the wide-ranging policy areas that are covered. It is not surprising, therefore, that Annex 9 compliance rates are relatively low and States can find themselves running to stand still as trends and technology evolve.

1.4 The publication of the ICAO Strategic Plan 2026–2050 provides impetus to think more strategically across the ICAO disciplines. Facilitation is a key enabler to deliver the strategic goal to: *Ensure that regulations, procedures and systems facilitate seamless [air navigation and] travel through airports and borders for all flights, passengers, air cargo and air crew with easily understood, well-coordinated, predictable and affordable access to quality international travel services.*

1.5 Improved understanding of and adherence to the general principles of facilitation, increased compliance with the Annex 9 SARPs, and a proactive focus on innovation and best practice will be key enablers for achieving this strategic goal. This can be encouraged through the development of a long-term strategic plan for Annex 9 that focuses on those areas of facilitation that will have the biggest impact on delivering seamless travel through airports and borders.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 The Doha Declaration on Facilitation of International Air Transport (2025) urges States, ICAO, International and Regional Organizations, Industry and Other Stakeholders to: *Develop a strategic, prioritized, forward-looking vision that addresses emerging trends, technological advancements, and global imperatives such as seamless movement of people and goods, inclusivity and sustainability*

2.2 A Strategic Facilitation Plan, a companion document to the wider ICAO Strategic Plan, would provide a suitable vehicle for the development of a forward- looking vision as well as helping to tackle some of the other barriers to implementation and compliance with the large number of diverse Annex 9 SARPs.

2.3 Some key considerations for the development of a Strategic Facilitation Plan would include: a better understanding of compliance with the Annex 9 SARPs across States and regions; a strategic review of which SARPs have the biggest impact on the goal of Facilitation (to implement measures that prevent unnecessary delays to aircraft, passengers, crews and cargo); methodological selection of SARPs for prioritization in the next triennium and beyond based on compliance levels, audit programmes and impact on facilitation goals; development of action plans to achieve higher compliance with the prioritized SARPs

¹ [A Brief History of Annex 9 - Facilitation to the Chicago Convention](#)

and ensure ‘No Country is Left Behind’ (for example, pair States with high compliance with those that require assistance); horizon scanning exercise to highlight future challenges and opportunities; and consideration on how better to review and evaluate success criteria.

2.4 While it should fall to the Facilitation Panel to develop and deliver a Strategic Facilitation Plan to the Council, ICAO working groups, regional groups, contracting States and industry would all have a part to play in contributing to the plan through input into prioritization exercises, examples of best practice and highlighting areas for future focus.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 As stated in the introduction to the ICAO Strategic Plan 2026–2050: *“This Strategic Plan comes at a decisive moment for international civil aviation. Traffic growth has resumed and is forecast to accelerate. This will also increase facilitation challenges to manage this growth. While ICAO continues to support Member States in their ongoing efforts to comply with current international standards, it is important to anticipate and prepare for the world that lies ahead.”*

3.2 The development of a Strategic Facilitation Plan that sits alongside the wider ICAO Strategic Plan will assist States in the delivery of their Facilitation Programmes by providing a more systematic, methodological pathway to compliance with Annex 9 and the aims of Facilitation; it will consider future challenges and opportunities; and allow for continuous improvement.

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