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Agenda Item 32: Aviation Safety and Air Navigation Regional Implementation Coordination Mechanisms

STRENGTHENING REGIONAL COOPERATION INITIATIVES FOR SAFETY OVERSIGHT, SAFETY MANAGEMENT AND ACCIDENT AND INCIDENT INVESTIGATION

(Presented by the Council of ICAO)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Regional cooperation plays a key role in improving global aviation safety through regional safety oversight organizations (RSOOs), regional accident and incident investigation organizations¹ (RAIOs) and other regional mechanisms.

Since their inception, regional cooperation initiatives have faced many challenges, including lack of funding, limited technical resources and most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. ICAO has played an active role in supporting these organizations through the establishment of various programmes, such as the RSOO and RAIO Cooperative Platforms, the Aviation Safety Implementation Assistance Partnership (ASIAP) and the Global Aviation Safety Oversight System (GASOS). It is important to update the ICAO Regional Cooperation Policy to reflect these important programmes.

During the pandemic, these regional initiatives facilitated the provision of harmonized safety risk mitigation measures and helped implement safe recovery measures at a regional level, thus providing an integral service to their Member States. Throughout the years, it has become evident that States benefit from the support of these regional initiatives. As a result, continued support from ICAO, its Member States and industry is necessary to continue to strengthen regional cooperation. Furthermore, as these regional initiatives are strengthened, the provision of technical assistance through RSOOs and RAIOs will benefit their Member States.

¹ For the purpose of this WP, the use of the term RAIO encompasses an RAIO or an investigation cooperative mechanism indistinctively, which would be any regional or sub-regional accident and incident investigation body that assists a group of States in meeting their accident and incident investigation obligations or carries out accident and incident investigation activities to support a State or group of States.

<p>Action: The Assembly is invited to:</p> <p>a) urge States to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) establish sustainable funding mechanisms, appropriate legal frameworks and adequate structures to support the strengthening of RSOOs and RAIOS; 2) actively support and encourage the participation of RSOOs and RAIOS in ICAO initiatives such as the RSOO Cooperative Platform (RSOO CP), the RAIO Cooperative Platform (RAIO CP) and the Global Aviation Safety Oversight System (GASOS); 3) support ICAO in the continued development and implementation of GASOS, RSOO and RAIO CPs and associated documentation and guidance material; 4) include the industry and other relevant stakeholders to support the sustainability of these regional initiatives; and 5) leverage RSOOs and RAIOS for the provision of technical assistance to Member States; and <p>b) request the Council to revise and update the ICAO Policy on Regional Cooperation to reflect new initiatives.</p>	
<p><i>Strategic Objectives:</i></p>	<p>This working paper relates to the Safety Strategic Objective.</p>
<p><i>Financial implications:</i></p>	<p>The ICAO activities referred to in this paper are expected to be undertaken within the resources available in the 2023-2025 Regular Programme Budget and/or from extra budgetary contributions as guided by the ICAO Business Plan 2023-2025.</p>
<p><i>References:</i></p>	<p>Doc 10160, <i>High-level Conference on COVID-19 (Montréal, 12 to 22 October 2021). Report</i></p> <p>Doc 10140, <i>Assembly Resolutions in Force (as of 4 October 2019)</i></p> <p>Doc 10046 <i>Second High-level Safety Conference 2015. Montréal, 2-5 February 2015. Report</i></p> <p>Doc 10004, <i>Global Aviation Safety Plan</i></p> <p>Doc 9946, <i>Manual on Regional Accident and Incident Investigation Organization</i></p> <p>Doc 9734, <i>Safety Oversight Manual, Part B — The Establishment and Management of a Regional Safety Oversight Organization</i></p>

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 For over two decades, Regional Safety Oversight Organizations (RSOOs) have played an important role in assisting their Member States to meet their safety oversight obligations. Most recently, regional cooperation in the area of accident and incident investigation has played a key role in improving global aviation safety through mechanisms such as Regional Accident and Incident Investigation Organizations (RAIOS). Neighbouring States with similar aviation challenges, activities and common cultural aspects have come together to establish regional organizations with the knowledge that cooperation can help them achieve their safety obligations through economies of scale, exchange of information and regulatory harmonization.

1.2 During the COVID-19 pandemic, these regional organizations facilitated the harmonization of their Member States' reporting of their COVID Contingency Related Differences (CCRD), a sub-system of the Electronic Filing of Differences (EFOD) system that was developed to allow States to file temporary differences to Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) and to publish the differences they were prepared to accept from other States. The RSOOs also facilitated the implementation of mitigation measures at a regional level, thus providing an integral service to their Member States. It was evident that States benefitted from the support of these regional initiatives.

1.3 Despite the continuous development of regional cooperation, some of these regional organizations still face specific challenges such as lack of financial and human resources and the necessary legal frameworks that prevent them from providing the valuable and necessary assistance to their Member States. As a result, continued support from ICAO, its Member States and industry is needed, in order to continue to strengthen these regional initiatives.

1.4 ICAO has been working to strengthen mechanisms to further support regional cooperation through different programmes and activities that are directly or indirectly related to regional cooperation:

- a) RSOO and RAIO Cooperative Platforms, which facilitate the exchange of experiences and mutual support;
- b) the Global Aviation Safety Oversight System (GASOS), an assessment and recognition mechanism for RSOOs and RAIOS; and
- c) Aviation Safety Implementation Assistance Partnership (ASIAP), the framework used to coordinate efforts for the provision of assistance to States and for sharing and prioritizing assistance needs.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The Forum on RSOOs for Global Aviation Safety, co-organized by ICAO and the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) held from 22 to 24 March 2017 in Swaziland (now Eswatini), supported the global strategy and action plan to improve RSOOs and establish a global system for the provision of safety oversight. The proposed strategy supported by the Forum included the establishment of an RSOO cooperative platform to facilitate sharing experiences between RSOOs, their interfacing with ICAO, as well as the coordination of technical assistance, with the overall objective to strengthen RSOOs.

2.2 During its 40th Session, the Assembly adopted Resolution A40-6 — *Regional cooperation and assistance to resolve safety deficiencies, establishing priorities and setting measurable targets*. This resolution endorsed the implementation and further development of GASOS to help strengthen, assess and support RSOOs, RAIOS and Cooperative Development of Operational Safety and Continuing Airworthiness Programme COSCAPs with the goal of assisting Member States in improving safety oversight, and accident and incident investigation.

2.3 At the HLCC 2021, the Safety Stream agreed on Recommendation 4/1 – Enhancing safety by advancing and strengthening regional cooperation. Under this recommendation, it was agreed that States should support the strengthening of RSOOs and RAIOS through the establishment of sustainable funding mechanisms, appropriate legal frameworks and adequate structures, processes and systems, as well as to encourage their RSOOs and RAIOS to participate in ICAO initiatives such as the RSOO CP and GASOS. Furthermore, ICAO should continue to develop and evolve the RSOO CP, GASOS and the ASIAP; and update the ICAO Policy on Regional Cooperation in order to reflect new initiatives.

2.4 The Joint ICAO/EASA Strengthening Regional Cooperation Conference, held on 20 January 2022, pursuant to the recommendations of the HLCC 2021, also concluded that while States remain the primary supporters for the continued operation of regional initiatives, the inclusion of additional stakeholders, such as industry, is critical for their sustainability.

3. PROGRESS ON ICAO INITIATIVES SUPPORTING REGIONAL COOPERATION

3.1 RSOO and RAIO Cooperative Platforms

3.1.1 Regional cooperation in safety oversight and accident and incident investigation has played a key role to support many regions and their Member States during the operational challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic caused. The RSOO Cooperative Platform actively encouraged and guided the exchange of relevant information that enabled regions to harmonize safety risk mitigation strategies in support of the safe restart of operations.

3.1.2 Following the success of the RSOO CP, ICAO established the RAIO Cooperative Platform (RAIO CP) in May 2021. Its main objective is to help strengthen existing RAIOS or Investigation Cooperative Mechanisms (ICMs) and to assist in establishing any new RAIO or ICM to become more effective and efficient in supporting their Member States.

3.1.3 ICAO is presently revising the *Safety Oversight Manual, Part B – The Establishment and Management of a Regional Safety Oversight Organization* (Doc 9734) and the *Manual on Regional Accident and Incident Investigation Organization* (Doc 9946), in order to improve the guidance for States, RSOOs and RAIOS.

3.2 Global Aviation Safety Oversight System (GASOS)

3.2.1 GASOS was created to strengthen RSOOs and RAIOS by providing an objective assessment mechanism to ensure the qualifications and capabilities of those organizations to perform certain functions assigned to them by a State. As part of the necessary processes and procedures to successfully launch the GASOS programme, ICAO has developed guidance material.

3.2.2 Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, GASOS activities, such as the follow-up activities for the pilot assessments, were significantly delayed. In recent months, as the aviation community starts to resume operations, ICAO has been working closely with the RSOOs, taking part in the pilot assessments.

3.2.3 Given the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic experienced by all stakeholders, including States, RSOOs and ICAO, it is essential to explore alternative ways to continue the strengthening of safety oversight capabilities of the regional organizations. Therefore, ICAO, through the RSOO CP, will continue to support these organizations and develop documentation such as the assessment questions (AQs) and the GASOS Electronic Management System (GEMS) tool for the RSOOs and RAIOS. The development of guidance material and/or training to assist RSOOs and RAIOS to conduct self-assessments and use the GEMS remains important, as does providing those organizations with tools to identify deficiencies and ultimately develop strategies to rectify them.

3.3 Aviation Safety Implementation Assistance Partnership (ASIAP)

3.3.1 The Aviation Safety Implementation Assistance Partnership (ASIAP) was established as an outcome of ICAO's High-level Safety Conference (HLSC) in February 2015. ASIAP's main priority is to promote coordination and cooperation amongst key stakeholders to further advance aviation safety and implementation assistance capacity in the aviation community. The ASIAP platform enables partners to coordinate and collaborate on technical assistance activities, in order to promote transparency, ensure effectiveness of assistance and reduce duplication of efforts.

3.3.2 Further to the fifth ASIAP meeting, held as a side-bar to the 40th Session of the Assembly, it was agreed to hold meetings based on regional areas, in order to focus the discussion and facilitate possible opportunities for collaboration. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact on aviation operations worldwide, technical assistance activities significantly decreased and in most cases were halted. As a result, ASIAP activities were suspended for most of 2020, however as aviation activities began to open up, it was possible to re-engage with partners about assistance activities. Discussions on assistance for the Caribbean, Central and South American Region, the Asia and Pacific Region, as well as the European and North Atlantic Region have been held. Additionally, two global meetings were conducted. Further meetings for the Africa-Indian Ocean (AFI) Region and Middle East (MID) Region are envisioned.

3.3.3 To support regional initiatives, ICAO has begun coordination between ASIAP and the RSOO CP. This will identify specific technical assistance needs for RSOOs and facilitate direct coordination and cooperation with RSOOs to help prioritize and develop technical assistance projects for their Member States, when possible.

4. THE ROLE OF REGIONAL COOPERATION IN TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROJECTS

4.1 Considering that more than 160 States are directly or indirectly a part of a regional initiative, RSOOs and RAIOS are in the best position to provide clear and coordinated plans for their Member States (including industry) to adopt a common path and set goals to be achieved. It is therefore critical that ICAO continues to provide the necessary support and guidance to help strengthen these regional cooperation initiatives.

4.2 Sustainable regional initiatives, when capable, will allow for the provision of effective and efficient technical assistance to their Member States. Technical assistance implemented through a regional approach will also facilitate the harmonization and standardization of services within the region and will help facilitate compliance with ICAO SARPs.

5. THE NEED TO UPDATE THE ICAO REGIONAL COOPERATION POLICY

5.1 At the request of the 187th Session of the ICAO Council, ICAO's Policy on Regional Cooperation was developed in 2009². The Policy was developed in response to conclusions reached at the EC-ICAO Symposium on Regional Organizations held in Montréal from 10 to 11 April 2008 and the ICAO Air Transport Symposium held in Abuja, Nigeria from 28 to 30 April 2008. The Symposiums underlined the need for ICAO assistance and an ICAO policy pertaining to regional cooperation.

5.2 Considering the new programmes and activities developed by ICAO to support regional cooperation since the Swaziland Forum in 2017, and HLCC Recommendation 4/1 (g), it is necessary for ICAO to update its Policy on Regional Cooperation. When updating the Policy, ICAO will highlight the importance of working with various types of regional cooperation mechanisms, as well as more recent programmes and policies such as GASOS, the RSOO and RAIO CPs.

² <https://www.icao.int/Meetings/AMC/HLSC/Documents/POLICY.pdf>

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 Regional cooperation has proved its effectiveness not only during normal operations but also in times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Continued support from States, industry and ICAO is critical to ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of RSOOs and RAIOS to assist States comply with ICAO SARPs and ultimately enhance aviation globally. Furthermore, the updating of the ICAO Policy on Regional Cooperation will highlight the work being undertaken by ICAO to support these important initiatives.

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