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AERODROME CERTIFICATION IMPLEMENTATION AS A MEASURE TO INCREASE EFFICIENCIES IN THE STATE'S SAFETY MANAGEMENT

(Presented by Secretariat)

SUMMARY

This information note presents some direct benefits of aerodromes certification that could be analysed by the States in a context in which the CAAs are called upon to maintain or raise their safety standard with fewer resources, due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aerodrome Certification has been an ICAO standard since 2001 (Annex 14, Vol. I - Aerodrome Design and Operations), including the implementation of a Safety Management System (SMS) as a requirement for certification.

1.2 Since the signing of the Bogota Declaration in 2013, the number of certified international airports in the South American Region has increased from just 8% in 2013 to 46% in 2021. Despite the great progress, more than half of the International airports in the Region, including **some of the most important by traffic**, remain uncertified. Some States even have none of their aerodromes certified or a low percentage of them.

1.3 The low percentage of certification in the Region, despite having updated ICAO guides (through Aerodromes PANS), training and even direct assistance at no cost to Member States from the SRVSOP, denotes that perhaps there are misconceptions about the costs of carrying out a certification process versus the benefits it brings.

1.4 Since 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the certification rate has been drastically reduced because some of these processes have been stopped and postponed. Many States allege the inability to carry out on-site inspections and the difficulty to meet in person in order to carry out the process as reasons for it, however, other States have taken steps to continue with the documentation preparation and review processes, which is an important part of the process. Those States have identified the benefits that aerodrome certification brings, not only in regulatory compliance, but also in the efficiencies and potential savings in surveillance management for reasons of this activity.

2. AERODROME CERTIFICATION SCOPE

2.1 The scope of the certification process and its benefits are described below in order to sensitize Directors to facilitate decision-making and prioritization of this important process for the benefit of the safe and orderly development of air transport.

2.2 The certification process is described in the PANS Aerodromes (Doc 9981). Generally, it begins with the presentation, by the aerodrome operator, of a formal request to the national authority responsible for civil aviation, which includes basic information about the aerodrome operator (*who will be awarded the certification at the end of a successful certification process*), the aerodrome itself and its facilities, and the planned operations.

2.3 It continues with an exhaustive review by the authority of the aerodrome manual, a key document presented by the aerodrome operator, which details the daily procedures for the operation of the aerodrome, as well as the information related to its planning and design.

2.4 The process is followed by technical inspections and on-site verification by the authority of the aerodrome facilities and the operational procedures, including its safety management system, in order to complete the analysis and ensure compliance with the applicable provisions, as well as the suitability of the operating procedures.

2.5 The process ends with the granting of the aerodrome certification, which may include details on the specific characteristics or limitations related to the operations that arise from the certification process, information on the main facilities and the validity of the certificate.

2.6 Two-thirds of the certification process are “desk” activities, that is, they are activities for the preparation and review of documentation that can be carried out largely virtually, while the on-site verification phases do require the presence of inspectors. However, to the extent that the documentary phases can be carried out in greater detail, it facilitates the face-to-face phase.

2.7 After the initial certification (which in some States is only carried out once and is permanent), the CAA must initiate permanent surveillance procedures. Annex 14 Vol. I indicates that “*The certification process also establishes the baseline for continued monitoring of compliance with the specifications*”, however, the PANS Aerodromes indicate that it may not be necessary for permanent surveillance measures to be so comprehensive, but must be based on principles that ensure compliance is maintained throughout the planning of appropriate surveillance measures.

2.8 In principle, the planning of permanent surveillance measures can take into account the safety performance of the aerodrome and its exposure to risks. After initial certification, ongoing oversight of an issue may not require a full audit of all items and may instead be based on a sample assessment of selected items based on the risk profile.

3. BENEFITS

3.1 If States manage to implement a plan adjusted to current conditions to advance the certification of their airports (even with the help of the Regional Office or SRVSOP), they can achieve a number of benefits, including:

For the Regulator:

- a) Compliance with Annex 14 Vol. I SARPs.
- b) Potential % increase in effective SARP implementation under a USOAP audit or activity.
- c) Potential reduction of surveillance inspections missions (travel expenses), supported by a continuous surveillance plan, based on the operator's risk profile instead of prescriptive inspection of all elements.
- d) Ensure implementation, maturity and continuous improvement of the operator's SMS
- e) Better distribution of resources
- f) The CAA would be better prepared to face and disengage from possible international responsibilities for a breach of ICAO standards.

For the Operator:

- a) Have a mature safety management system that reduces exposure to risk and promotes a safer operation
- b) Regulatory compliance
- c) Potential reduction of insurance premiums (due to having a risk reduction system and in compliance with State legislation)
- d) Identification of necessary investments to guarantee a safe operation (according to corrective action plan)
- e) Conducting compatibility studies and safety assessments to address operational issues in a sustainable way, to facilitate the aerodrome accommodation of new, larger or more demanding aircraft, and to develop operational procedures and operational restrictions, if necessary.
- f) Prioritization of necessary staff training
- g) Have structured procedures approved by the regulator (Aerodrome Manual) that facilitate safe operation.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 In conclusion, Aerodrome Certification offers benefits that can be directly exploited by the regulator, to the extent that a management based on clearly identified risks in each operator, would allow targeting and monitoring more precisely and efficiently, thus saving the State valuable resources to be implemented in other sectors.