



Agenda Item 8A: Other Matters

MOVING TOWARDS THE MULTILATERALISM OF ACCESSIBILITY MEASURES

(Presented by the International Air Transport Association)

SUMMARY

People with disabilities are an essential segment of air travel demand, contributing to the diversification of travel products offered to meet the needs of this group. With an estimated population of over 1.3 billion, the proportion of people with disabilities continues to grow as the population ages. The accessibility regulatory framework is expected to expand significantly as more countries adopt the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) into their national regulations. One of the primary outcomes of the ICAO/IATA/ACI Symposium held in Montreal, Canada, on 2-3 December 2024 was a high-level strategy outline that includes defined principles to provide consistent guidance to Member States in developing accessible air transport policies and aviation industry stakeholders in developing and implementing accessible air transport processes and procedures.

Action: The RAAC/18 is invited to:
Support this paper and the outlined strategy

References:

- None

ICAO Strategic Objectives:

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 People with disabilities are an essential segment of air travel demand, contributing to the diversification of travel products offered to meet the needs of this group. With an estimated population of over 1.3 billion, the proportion of people with disabilities continues to grow as the population ages. In Canada, for example, 27% of Canadians have at least one disability (up from 22% in 2017), and in 2023, it is estimated that passengers with disabilities generated almost 15% of air carrier revenue.

1.2 The United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) requires its parties to take appropriate measures so that persons with disabilities have equal access to the physical environment, transportation, information and communication, including information technologies and systems, and other facilities and services in urban and rural areas.

1.3 The UNCRPD has also identified the need for international cooperation to create a legislative framework with a concrete, enforceable and time-bound benchmark for monitoring the gradual implementation of accessibility for all.

1.4 Intending to adhere to the UNCRPD and consistently apply policy, standards, products and processes, ICAO General Assembly Resolution A41-15 mandated the ICAO Council to develop an effective strategy and work program on accessibility for passengers with disabilities. This strategic framework should be aligned with other ICAO and UN accessibility initiatives, such as the CRPD, to protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all persons with disabilities, including freedom of movement and choice.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 The accessibility regulatory framework is expected to expand significantly as more countries adopt the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities into their national regulations. IATA has been working with ICAO to advocate for a global approach for several years, which could substantially impact the future of accessibility regulations in aviation.

2.2 The ICAO Council designated 2024 as the Year of Facilitation in recognition of the 75th Anniversary of Annex 9 – Facilitation. Currently, Annex 9 contains 440 Standards and Recommended Practices, with 20 dedicated to accessibility in aviation for persons with disabilities.

2.3 IATA, jointly with Airports Council International (ACI) and ICAO, conducted a Symposium on Accessibility at ICAO Headquarters in Montreal, Canada, from 2 to 3 December 2024.

2.4 Air transport facilitation refers to the clearance of aircraft, people, and goods through the formalities required at international borders. Effective facilitation management improves the quality and cost-effectiveness of aviation services and enhances the passenger experience.

2.5 Under the proposed theme “*Inclusive and universally accessible Air Transport for Persons with Disabilities and Reduced Mobility*”, the Symposium addressed the facilitation of air transport by air of persons with disabilities and reduced mobility and improve their air travel experience, aligning with ICAO Assembly Resolution A41-15: *Accessibility in International Civil Aviation*.

2.6 The Symposium informed a high-level strategy outline document prepared by the ICAO Working Group on Accessible Aviation (Annex 1) to provide consistent guidance to Member States in developing accessible air transport policies and aviation industry stakeholders in implementing accessible air transport processes and procedures.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 The Assembly is invited to:

- a. Support this paper and the outline strategy.

Annex 1

Draft proposal ICAO Accessibility Strategy

1. Background

This paper refers to the structure and content of the ICAO Strategic Plan on Aviation Accessibility currently under development.

2. Process and Timeline

It is proposed that ICAO, under the lead of the Working Group on Accessible Aviation (WGAA), schedules its work on the development of the Strategy on Accessibility considering the following timeframes:

- a) September – December 2024: discussion within the WGAA to determine:
 - a. Objectives of the ICAO Strategy,
 - b. Proposed ICAO Vision on Aviation Accessibility, and
 - c. Structure and deliverables of the Strategy (to be presented at the ICAO Symposium in December 2024).
- b) January – April 2025: finalize the Strategy after consultation with stakeholders, including:
 - a. Industry
 - b. Organizations representing persons with disabilities
 - c. ICAO Facilitation Panel, and
 - d. ICAO Council and Air Transport Committee.
- c) May – August 2025: Draft Strategy on Accessibility Working Paper for submission to the 42nd ICAO Assembly.
- d) September 2025: Submission of the Strategy on Accessibility to the 42nd ICAO Assembly.

3. Suggested content of an ICAO Strategy on Aviation Accessibility

a) Background

People with disabilities are a vital-essential segment of air travel demand, contributing to the diversification in travel products being developed and offered to meet the needs of this group. With an estimated population of over 1.3 billion, the proportion of people with disabilities continues to grow as the population ages. IN Canada, for example, 27% of Canadians have at least one disability (up from 22% in 2017), and, in 2023, it is estimated that passengers with disabilities generated almost 15% of air carrier revenue.

The United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) requires its parties to take appropriate measures so that persons with disabilities have equal access to the physical environment, transportation, information and communication, including information technologies and systems, and other facilities and services open or provided to the public in urban and rural areas.

The CRPD has also identified the need for international cooperation to create a legislative framework with a concrete, enforceable and time-bound benchmark for monitoring the gradual implementation of accessibility for all.

With the aim to adhere to the CRPD and create consistency in the application of policy, standards, products and processes, ICAO General Assembly Resolution A41-15 has mandated the ICAO Council to develop an effective strategy and work program on accessibility for passengers with disabilities. This strategic framework should be aligned with other ICAO and UN accessibility initiatives, such as the CRPD to protect

and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all persons with disabilities, including freedom of movement and freedom of choice.

The categories of barriers that persons with disabilities encounter in the air travel industry, which are often exacerbated for those living in remote areas due to lack of connectivity and mobility, include the following:

1. Institutional barriers include policies, practices, or processes that actively fail to facilitate access for persons with disabilities.
2. Physical barriers, which prevent access for persons with disabilities to physical environments such as airports, aircraft, and various transport facilities connected to the air transport (e.g. in remote locations it would be the accessible public means of transport).
3. Informational barriers, which prevent access particularly for those passengers with visual or intellectual impairments, to both the form and content of information that may be provided on websites and mobile applications, among many other ways that information is presented in aviation.
4. Communication barriers such as international sign language interpretation for deaf persons, inaccessible technology such as websites and/ or videos without captioning, or websites that are inaccessible to screen readers used by blind persons.
5. Attitudinal barriers, including lack of understanding about disability issues of people in society (e.g. persons having dementia or other invisible disabilities) present some of the most pervasive barriers to equal access for persons with disabilities.
6. Cultural barriers, which may prevent persons with disabilities from traveling and having access to air transport. Cultural barriers may include stereotypes about disability that are rooted in culture and that generate misunderstanding and assistance issues, particularly on psycho-social disabilities.

Current challenges and emerging issues (for discussion and possible inclusion in an implementation document).

1. Application of accessibility laws
2. Training: personnel interacting with people with disabilities require sensitivity training to assist persons with disabilities in a safe and dignified manner, and technical training to provide appropriate assistance through their travel
3. Infrastructure
4. Mobility aids: proper handling and securement of mobility aids to protect from damage, and to ensure the aid travels on the same flight as the person and is made available to them immediately on arrival.
5. Service dogs: development and harmonization of standards for service dog training assuring good behaviour in an aircraft cabin.

6. Consistent application of accessibility laws and regulations: to provide a seamless experience for persons with disabilities who travel internationally.

b) Vision

Achieve a safe, secure and inclusive global aviation system that empowers and connects people worldwide, where all individuals, including persons with disabilities, can access and utilize air transport without barriers.

c) Mission

ICAO facilitates the adoption and implementation of international standards, recommended practices, policies, tools and services that ensure accessibility in aviation, promote the rights of passengers with disabilities, and foster a culture of inclusion across the global aviation industry.

This could also highlight the critical role of partnering with persons with disabilities, industry, and other organizations to carry out this mission.

d) Principles

This section sets out the high-level principles underlying the Strategy, such as:

- i) Accessibility of air travel is a priority of ICAO and Member States, and of all civil aviation stakeholders. ICAO and the air transport sector should continue to promote inclusiveness and universal accessibility for persons with disabilities, and ensure coordination between all stakeholders, i.e. safety and security
- ii) Dignified air travel must allow persons with disabilities to exercise choice and autonomy, with access to infrastructure and support where needed, without undue incremental costs.
- iii) Accessibility must be achieved through consultation with the aviation industry and organizations representing persons with disabilities before legislation, policies, procedures or practices are adopted. Such consultation processes should be transparent and meaningful.
- iv) National laws and regulations improving accessibility for persons with disabilities should be harmonized to the greatest extent practicable. The principle of harmonization should apply equally to the policies, procedures and practices implemented pursuant to national laws and regulations.
- v) Air transport sector stakeholders and governments should coordinate their approach in order to deliver consistent end-to-end service to passengers with disabilities regardless of location and national borders.

e) Accessibility: Focus Areas

This section should lay out how ICAO will fulfil the mission, for example:

Focus Area 1: Enhance Regulatory Framework

5.1.1: Finalize compendium of accessibility regulations and best practices.

5.1.2: Review and update ICAO Annex 9 SARPs to reflect current best practices in accessibility.

5.1.3: Review and update the ICAO Manual on Access to Air Transport by Persons with Disabilities (DOC9984) and any other guidance materials that may impact accessibility.

5.1.5: Promote the adoption of ICAO accessibility SARPs.

Focus Area 2: Foster Collaboration and Partnerships

5.2.1: Strengthen collaboration with international organisations, NGOs, and industry stakeholders to promote accessibility.

5.2.2: Establish partnerships with organizations representing persons with disabilities to ensure their perspectives are included in policymaking.

5.2.3: Encourage the sharing of best practices and innovative technologies among Member States and industry partners.

5.2.4: Engage with aviation regulatory bodies to foster harmonization of accessibility standards globally.

5.2.5: Explore the development of assistive technologies to enhance accessibility in air travel

Focus Area 3: Enhance Awareness and Training

5.3.1: Develop and implement training programs for aviation personnel on accessibility needs and best practices.

5.3.2: Launch awareness campaigns to educate the public and industry stakeholders about the importance of accessibility in aviation.

5.3.3: Promote the inclusion of accessibility modules in aviation training curriculums worldwide.

Focus Area 4: Monitor and Evaluate Progress

5.4.1: Develop metrics and indicators to assess the progress of accessibility initiatives.

5.4.2: Establish a reporting mechanism for Member States to share their progress and challenges in implementing accessibility standards and measures.

5.4.3: Conduct regular reviews and updates of ICAO accessibility policies based on passenger feedback and emerging needs.

f) Implementation Plan (include possible dates)

Implementation of this Strategy will take place in phases, with a view to gradually layering on to the international aviation system iterative changes that will advance accessibility for persons with disabilities.

An implementation plan will be developed and include the following priorities:

1. Review and update ICAO Annex 9 SARPs related to accessibility and review how they are structured, ensuring an end-to-end approach centered on users.
2. Launch a global awareness campaign on aviation accessibility.
3. WGAA will complete the compendium of accessibility regulations and best practices in 2024.
4. Tools that can be used by ICAO Member States, airlines and airport authorities to address challenges:
 - Develop and enforce regulations, awareness campaigns, training programs, etc., to adhere to ICAO SARP's and guidance materials
 - Conduct awareness campaigns so that persons with disabilities will understand how to obtain services to meet their disability-related needs;
 - Develop and implement training programs so that employees of government agencies and transportation service providers are able to use existing resources to provide better services to persons with disabilities;
 - Conduct audits of existing facilities (e.g., airports, aircraft) to identify barriers and prioritize modifications (e.g., restroom, boarding ramps, signage) and inclusivity for new or expanded facilities;
 - Optimize the accessibility of equipment so that airlines are using all of the accessibility features available that have been developed for aircraft;

- Explore and adopt assistive technologies (e.g., mobile apps for navigation, communications devices) to enhance accessibility at airports and during flights;
- Develop standardized protocols for assisting passengers with disabilities, including pre-boarding assistance, seating arrangements and in-flight support; and
- Ensure accessible communication methods for passengers with disabilities to request assistance and provide feedback.

g) Roles and Responsibilities for implementation

Accessibility of the global aviation system is a shared responsibility. The following highlights relevant areas of responsibilities and engagement by different participants in the system.

1. ICAO: As the recognized international organization of states for international civil aviation, ICAO develops policies and standards related to facilitation and accessibility, undertakes compliance audits, performs studies and analyses, develops recommended practices, provides assistance and builds aviation capacity through many other activities and the cooperation of its Member States and stakeholders.
2. Member States: Commit to prioritize accessibility and recognize their obligations under the Convention on International Civil Aviation (Chicago Convention) to ensure the provision of an accessible air transportation system. They participate in ICAO decision making on accessibility, implement ICAO standards and recommended practices, enforce regulatory frameworks in their jurisdictions, and support ICAO and other Member States in their efforts to improve accessibility.
3. Industry: International air sector associations provide international leadership and coordination of industry efforts to improve accessibility and bring industry expertise on air operations to the work of ICAO. Transportation service providers will prioritize universal accessibility and barrier-free design, and implement accessibility when developing and implementing travel solutions from the outset, rather than adapting and modifying later.
4. Role of aircraft manufacturers, airport design and architecture firms
5. International groups representing persons with disabilities bring the voice and lived experience of persons with disabilities to the work of ICAO on accessibility. Organizations representing persons with disabilities will be engaged at all steps and provide feedback on priorities, actions and impact.

h) Assistance with Implementation

ICAO will establish a mechanism to provide advice and support to those Member States seeking assistance with the above.