



ASSEMBLY — 41ST SESSION

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 13: Facilitation Programmes

ACCESSIBILITY TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES:  
DIGNIFIED AIR TRAVEL FOR ALL

(Presented by Czechia on behalf of the European Union and its Member States<sup>1</sup>, the other Member States of the European Civil Aviation Conference<sup>2</sup>, Canada, Airports Council International and the International Air Transport Association)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Persons with disabilities and reduced mobility form a large and growing proportion of the world's population. The drive towards greater social inclusion forms an integral part of the global sustainability agenda and is increasingly prioritized in the UN strategic framework, including a recent General Assembly Resolution, which stresses the need to identify and eliminate obstacles and barriers that limit the access of persons with disabilities to transportation, among others. Therefore, ICAO's leadership is both necessary and urgent, to provide a basis for States to take action and confirm that accessibility is a priority for the next triennium as part of the broader ICAO agenda.

**Action:** The Assembly is invited to adopt a new Resolution on accessibility of air transport to persons with disabilities and persons with reduced mobility, which recognizes the need for ICAO's leadership and the air transport sector to advance the accessibility of air transport for passengers with disabilities and reduced mobility.

<i>Strategic Objectives:</i>	This working paper relates to the <i>Security and Facilitation</i> Strategic Objective.
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<i>Financial implications:</i>	
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<i>References:</i>	
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<sup>1</sup> Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.

<sup>2</sup> Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Iceland, Republic of Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, San Marino, Serbia, Switzerland, Türkiye, Ukraine and United Kingdom.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Persons with disabilities and reduced mobility form a large and growing proportion of the world's population (1.2 billion people, representing more than 15% of the world population). While definitions may vary, according to the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. It is likely that many of these passengers decide not to travel by air, or travel less, because of the barriers they might face during the course of their journeys.

1.2 Similarly, populations in many parts of the world are ageing. It is estimated that by 2050, the number of people aged 60 years and older will double compared to 2020 (reaching 2.1 billion) while those over 80 years will triple compared to 2020 (reaching 426 million)<sup>3</sup>. The phenomenon is not restricted to high-income countries: by 2050, two-thirds of the world's population over 60 years will live in low- and middle-income countries<sup>4</sup>.

1.3 Throughout society, COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on persons with disabilities as well as the elderly: the pandemic deepened pre-existing inequalities, exposing the extent of exclusion, and highlighting that work on disability inclusion is imperative<sup>5</sup>.

1.4 Digitization and innovation are creating new opportunities as well as new challenges for persons with disabilities and reduced mobility. Autonomous wheelchairs, beacons, assistive devices and virtual reality tours of airports for persons are examples of solutions that can contribute to better journeys for persons with special needs. However, an increasing reliance on digital solutions, such as mobile phones and biometric processes, may create a “digital divide” where travel is simplified for many but harder for others.

1.5 The drive towards greater social inclusion forms an integral part of the global sustainability agenda. The UN Sustainable Development Goals no. 4, 8, 10, 11 and 17 all underpin the importance of disability inclusion. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>6</sup>'s Goal 11.2 refers specifically to transport, aiming to “provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all [...] with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons”.

1.6 The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognized that accessibility, liberty of movement and personal mobility are major rights of persons with disabilities and that respecting these rights involve a broad range of different stakeholders. The Convention has been ratified by 184 States.

1.7 Within the UN system, an ambitious Disability Inclusion Strategy<sup>7</sup> was launched in 2019 to provide “the foundation for sustainable and transformative progress on disability inclusion through all pillars of the work of the United Nations”. Through the Strategy, the UN system commits to embedding the rights of persons with disabilities into its work, both externally and internally.

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<sup>3</sup> Source: Ageing and Health, webpage, World Health Organization, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ageing-and-health>

<sup>4</sup> Source: Fact sheet: [Ageing and health, World Health Organization, 4 October 2021 \(who.int\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ageing-and-health)

<sup>5</sup> Source: Policy Brief: A Disability-Inclusive Response to COVID-19, United Nations, May 2020 ([https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg\\_policy\\_brief\\_on\\_persons\\_with\\_disabilities\\_final.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_policy_brief_on_persons_with_disabilities_final.pdf))

<sup>6</sup> Source: TRANSFORMING OUR WORLD: THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT [sustainabledevelopment.un.org A/RES/70/1](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/A/RES/70/1)

<sup>7</sup> Source: Disability Inclusion Strategy, United Nations, 2019 [UN Disability Inclusion Strategy english.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/disability_inclusion_strategy_english.pdf)

1.8 Sustainability encompasses environmental as well as social and economic considerations. More and more organizations, including those in the aviation industry, are embracing diversity and inclusion and making it part of their corporate strategies, positively impacting customers, users and staff.

## 2. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

2.1 At the last Assembly, the Consolidated statement of continuing policies related to facilitation (Assembly Resolution A40-16) requested the Council “to develop a work programme on accessibility for passengers with disability in order to reach for a disability-inclusive air transport system”.

2.2 The ICAO Council, during its 225th Session, adopted Amendment 29 to Annex 9 – *Facilitation*. Amendment 29 includes, inter alia, the elevating of five Recommended Practices on the Facilitation of the transport of persons with disabilities to international Standards. The new provisions relate to the accessibility of flight service-related information for persons with hearing and vision impairments, the basic right to assistance for passengers with disabilities, and the establishment of designated parking and drop off areas for persons with disabilities at terminal buildings. The Amendment to Annex 9 became effective in July 2022.

2.3 The 12<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Facilitation Panel additionally endorsed that the Annex 9 provisions related to accessibility be subject to a holistic review to be presented to the 13<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Facilitation Panel.

2.4 A survey of States has been completed to report on the level of implementation of Annex 9 provisions relating to facilitation of the transport of persons with disability. The results will facilitate the development of a Compendium of regulations, statutes and policies regarding accessibility in aviation.

## 3. RECOGNIZING THE IMPORTANCE OF INCLUSION, DIGNITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION IN AIR TRANSPORT

3.1 In [Resolution A/RES/76/154](#) adopted on 16 December 2021, the United Nations General Assembly recognized “the importance of accessibility for persons with disabilities in all aspects of life [...] and the need to identify and eliminate prejudice, discrimination, obstacles and barriers that limit the access of persons with disabilities to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications”.

3.2 A similar Resolution should be adopted for international civil aviation. Persons with disability should enjoy full and effective participation to air transportation, on an equal basis with others and in all circumstances. Therefore, ICAO’s leadership on this issue is thus both necessary and urgent, to provide a basis for States to take action and confirm that accessibility is a priority for the next triennium, as part of the broader social sustainability agenda.

3.3 It is also necessary for States and for ICAO to recognise the essential nature of such services and to provide equal access to air transport for all passengers, regardless of the circumstances – including emergencies and health crises. ICAO should consider revising its SARPs accordingly.

3.4 The Assembly is invited to adopt a Resolution on accessibility of air transport to persons with disabilities, which is provided in the Appendix.

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## APPENDIX

### RESOLUTION

#### **Resolution A41/xx – Accessibility in International Civil Aviation**

*Whereas* persons with disabilities and reduced mobility form a large and growing proportion of the world's population;

*Whereas* the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol promotes, protects and ensures the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, including freedom of movement and freedom of choice;

*Recalling* the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy, which provides the foundation for sustainable and transformative progress on disability inclusion through all pillars of work of the United Nations;

*Recalling* that the UN Resolution A/RES/76/154 adopted by the General Assembly in 2021 recognized the importance of accessibility for persons with disabilities in all aspects of life and the need to identify and eliminate prejudice, discrimination, obstacles and barriers that limit the access of persons with disabilities to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications;

*Noting with concern* that, despite these instruments and undertakings, persons with disabilities and reduced mobility continue to face barriers in their participation as equal members of society, including barriers to their free movement;

*Acknowledging* that the aviation community needs to accommodate the demand of growing number of persons with visible and invisible disabilities, as well as persons with reduced mobility and aging populations;

*Recognizing* the importance of government and industry working together to support the travel needs of persons with disabilities and reduced mobility while prioritizing safety in all circumstances;

*Affirming* that diversity and social inclusion are concepts that are essential to the sustainable growth of international civil aviation;

*Recognizing* the essential nature of air transport services and the need to provide equal access to such services for all passengers;

*Also acknowledging* that digitization and innovation are creating new opportunities as well as new challenges for persons with disabilities, with reduced mobility and aging populations;

*Reemphasizing* the relevant Standards and Recommended Practices contained in Annex 9 – *Facilitation* as well as the procedures and principles contained in Doc 9984 – *Manual on Access to Air Transport by Persons with Disabilities*;

*The Assembly:*

1. *Resolves* that dignity and non-discrimination are universal rights that apply to all persons, including persons with disabilities and persons with reduced mobility traveling by air;
2. *Requests* the Council to:
  - a) ensure that ICAO exercise continuous leadership on sustainability, including the social sustainability imperatives of inclusion and accessibility;
  - b) develop an effective strategy and work programme on accessibility for passengers with disabilities and reduced mobility in order to reach for a disability-inclusive air transport system;
  - c) ensure that Annex 9 – *Facilitation* SARPs recognize the essential nature of accessible services for persons with disabilities and reduced mobility;
3. *Urges* Member States to prioritize the inclusion and accessibility of air transport services to persons with disabilities and reduced mobility;
4. *Encourages* all Member States to strive for uniformity in their air transport accessibility regulations, standards and procedures, to the greatest extent practicable and working closely with disability groups;
5. *Encourages* Member States to ensure that the transport sector coordinates its approach in order to deliver accessible end-to-end services to persons with disabilities and reduced mobility, working closely with disability groups; and
6. *Encourages* Member States to support ICAO activities with resources, both financial and in-kind, to ensure a successful implementation of agreed measures to support air transport of persons with disabilities and reduced mobility.

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