



ECAC Facilitation Working Group

Interview with Teresa Antunes

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1. What is the Facilitation Working Group? What are the group's objectives?

The Facilitation Working Group (FAL) has been dedicated to one of ECAC's strategic priorities – facilitation – for more than 30 years. We can highlight two key objectives for this group: to improve the passenger's experience, and to facilitate legitimate trade.

The group comprises representatives of all ECAC Member States, and observers from non-ECAC Member States, organisations and industry stakeholders. It meets twice a year, and follows an annual work programme, subject to approval by Directors General.

ECAC Doc 30, Part I – *Facilitation* is the policy statement in the field of civil aviation facilitation. It contains ECAC policy recommendations on facilitation matters such as persons with reduced mobility (PRMs), immigration, cargo and health, and it is constantly updated. At present, Doc 30, Part I is in its 12th edition and it offers a comprehensive approach to facilitation, consistent with ICAO Annex 9 and compatible with the security provisions compiled in ECAC Doc 30, Part II – *Security*.

The Facilitation Working Group delivers a series of amendments to ECAC Doc 30, Part I and its Annexes, seeking consistency or introducing new topics such as safety investigations for air accident victims and their families, Advance Passenger Information Systems, hidden disabilities or health recommendations.

2. What topics is the group currently focusing on?

For the last two years, the main focus has – naturally – been on the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, our reality was to adapt to the continuous growth in global air transport; and then, from January 2020, we faced an abrupt decrease in passengers at the same time as countries were imposing multiple travel restrictions, brutally impacting the civil aviation industry and creating one of the biggest challenges ever for facilitation.

The group is also discussing the impact of the Schengen Entry Exit System (EES) and the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS), which will enter into force this year. This topic will certainly be on our agenda in the near future.

An additional challenge concerns the increasing requests from States to receive passenger data. Some

progress was made after the introduction of new Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) into ICAO Annex 9, but the problematic continues for European States and for airlines.

Recognising the need for a more comprehensive review of ECAC, Doc 30, Part I, in October 2021 it was agreed to establish a study group under the Facilitation Working Group to review the document from a broad facilitation perspective and to incorporate the inputs from the sub-groups on immigration and the transport of persons with reduced mobility.

A quick word here to mention that the majority of Member States participating in the FAL Working Group also contribute to the work carried out by the European Coordination Group for Facilitation (ECG-FAL), which proposes working papers and information papers to be presented to the ICAO Facilitation Panel, the ICAO Assembly or, recently, the ICAO High-level Conference on COVID-19. ECG-FAL also provides a forum to discuss documents presented by other States or organisations vis à vis the European legislation and priorities.

3. What challenges do you see arising in the future?

One of the challenges will be to contribute actively to the post-pandemic situation, removing the layers of restrictions that have been added to air travel over the past two years, which caused confusion for passengers, undermined their confidence in travel and often created chaos at airports.

At the same time as the current health crisis has forced the aviation community to re-think processes, practices and systems, it has opened up the possibility of exploring new ways to optimise the passenger journey, and minimise all kind of disruptions.

Aviation must take benefit from emerging new technologies, while at the same time guaranteeing non-discrimination and taking into consideration disabilities, reduced mobility and the equity of access to digital solutions.

In developing these technological tools, interoperability must be considered to ensure harmonisation and avoid unnecessary obstacles for air travel.

The key word for the future must be **harmonisation**, as the best way to restore confidence in travel.