



Family Assistance in Aviation Disasters: **UAE's Regulatory Roadmap**

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Agenda

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Introduction

Family assistance is the provision of services and information to address the concerns and the needs of the aircraft accident victims and their families.



The goal of Family Assistance is to support victims and their families by addressing their concerns and needs and providing them with clear information about the accident investigation's progress.

- From the start, survivors and families should be told about the investigation's purpose, following the guidelines of Annex 13.



The UAE Family Assistance Framework is designed to provide comprehensive support and assistance to families across the Emirates.

Evolution of Family Assistance Regulations

History of Current CAR – FAP

The current CAR for Family Assistance Plans in the UAE is the peak of extensive consultation with stakeholders, including airlines, government agencies, and representatives of passenger organizations.

History of Current CAR – FAP



2017

Issued on 5 December 2017, applicability 1 June 2018



2019

Four assessments were conducted on:

- Emirates (July 2019)
- Etihad (September 2019)
- Flydubai (December 2019)
- and Air Arabia (November 2022)



2019

Participated in one family assistance exercise with Etihad (September 2022)

A Need for **Reissue**

- Absence of governance framework to clarify roles of stakeholders outside aviation.
- Lack of clear communication and coordination process between air operators, aerodromes, and other stakeholders.
- Inadequate criteria for activating national-level family assistance.
- Insufficient financial assistance standards, remaining handling, and personal belongings return.

“... to establish legislation, regulations and/or policies to support victims of civil aviation accidents and their family members...”





Challenges of Current CAR-FAP

The UAE's aviation sector is dynamic and diverse, with numerous foreign operators contributing to its growth and connectivity.

Challenges

- Stakeholders outside aviation have passive responsibilities.
- Communication and coordination between operators, aerodromes, and other stakeholders lack clarity.
- Criteria for activating State-level family assistance are lacking.
- Standards and guidelines for financial assistance, remains handling, and personal belongings return are inadequate.



Legal Challenges of Taskforce Matrix

Legal challenges identified in the taskforce matrix majorly include:

- Jurisdictional issues
- Data privacy and confidentiality
- Liability concerns
- Crisis management and communication
- Regulatory compliance

National Family Assistance Plan (NFAP)



To address these challenges, the UAE has opted to develop a comprehensive "**National Family Assistance Plan (NFAP)**" that covers the duties and responsibilities of all stakeholders, both within and outside the aviation sector.

National Family Assistance Plan (NFAP) – Cont.

- NFAP ensures the UAE’s commitment to swiftly provide sufficient support to aircraft accident victims and families, addressing their mental, physical, and spiritual well-being.
- NFAP is applicable to commercial aircraft accidents within the UAE and abroad involving UAE operators.
- NFAP activation criteria and scope depend on accident severity and location.



The image shows a row of seven dice on a dark surface. The top row of dice spells out 'MISSION' from left to right. The bottom row of dice shows 'M', 'I', 'S', 'S', 'I', 'O', 'N'. The word 'MISSION' is written in white text over the top row of dice.

General Mission Tasks

Upon its activation, the **NFAP** covers the following mission tasks:

- Notify families using verified passenger lists and available information.
- Offer logistical support and services to victims and families.
- Monitor search and recovery operations and assist as required.
- Provide daily updates to families on recovery progress, victim identification, investigation, and other relevant matters.
- Arrange memorial services if requested by families.
- Return personal belongings to authorized persons or authorities.

Responsibilities – Stakeholders of NFAP

The following stakeholders are responsible for the regulatory, enforcement, review and oversight, and implementation functions of the NFAP:

- The General Civil Aviation Authority;
- The National Family Assistance Plan Coordinator (National Coordinator);
- Commercial air transport operators;
- Aerodrome operators; and
- The ministries, federal government authorities, local emirates authorities and departments, private organizations, and voluntary bodies, as per the roles assigned to them in the NFAP.

Commercial air transport operators and aerodrome operators are required to develop Organization Family Assistance Plans (OFAPs) that align with the NFAP and form an integral component of it.

Responsibilities – General Civil Aviation Authority

The General Civil Aviation Authority is responsible for:

- Development and maintenance of the NFAP;
- The review and acceptance of the OFAPs submitted by the commercial air transport operators and aerodrome operators;
- Conduct regular assessments of OFAPs to ensure compliance with regulations.
- Designating the National Coordinator.

Responsibilities – National Coordinator

The National coordinator is responsible for:

- Coordinate NFAP activation and implementation.
- Organize regular exercises to assess NFAP effectiveness.

Upon activation of the NFAP, the National Coordinator shall:

1. Direct and facilitate the operations of the Joint Family Support Operations Center (JFSOC);
2. Obtain a copy of passenger name list (PNL) and the verified PNL;
3. Coordinate assistance efforts among stakeholders, victims, and families;
4. Facilitate communication between victim identification authorities and families, arranging briefings on recovery and identification efforts;

Responsibilities – National Coordinator – Cont.

5. Coordinate with the investigator-in-charge for providing key information about the investigation progress before the information is released to the public;
6. Coordinate with the investigator-in-charge for safe family visits to the accident site;
7. Assess logistical needs and quality of Family Assistance Center (FAC) with commercial air transport operators.
 - The National Coordinator shall be appropriately trained to meet the competencies required for effective Plan implementation.
 - The name and contact details of the National Coordinator shall be published appropriately.

Responsibilities – Commercial Air Transport Operators and Aerodrome Operators

- Commercial air transport operators and aerodrome operators must submit their OFAPs to the General Civil Aviation Authority for approval.
- The OFAP can be presented as a separate document or integrated into the organization's emergency response plan as mandated by the Civil Aviation Regulations' Part XI for Aerodrome Emergency Services and Part X for Safety Management System.



A photograph of an air traffic control room. Two controllers are visible from behind, wearing headsets. They are seated at a desk with multiple computer monitors displaying flight data and maps. A window in the background shows a clear sky with an airplane flying. The title 'Foreign Commercial Air Transport Operators' is overlaid in large white text on the image.

Foreign Commercial Air Transport Operators

- The National Coordinator will collaborate with the General Civil Aviation Authority department overseeing foreign operator review and safety to ensure foreign commercial air transport operators flying into the UAE have an accepted family assistance plan.
- Foreign operators must submit a signed letter from the accountable manager to the GCAA, confirming a compliant family assistance plan meeting regulatory requirements and committing to its prompt activation in UAE accidents.
- This requirement ensures foreign operators prioritize passenger and family well-being by implementing adequate family assistance measures in the UAE.
- The GCAA will provide the National Coordinator with a copy of the signed commitment letter.

Aftermath and Contingency Plan

- If an accident occurs and the foreign operator lacks family assistance regulations, the country's contingency plan will be activated.
- This plan includes the national response and business continuity management.
- It will detail the state's involvement in handling the aftermath.



Steps to Achieve Regulatory Balance

Addressing Over-Regulation Concerns



Assess current regulations and stakeholder responsibilities to identify gaps in family assistance provisions and coordination protocols.

Carry Out A Gap Analysis

Proposal development

Formulate regulatory proposals that strike a balance between safety requirements and operational flexibility.

Seek input from industry stakeholders and affected parties to refine regulatory proposals.

Consultation and Feedback

Implementation

Roll out updated regulations and establish mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and enforcement.



Future Directions

- Foster closer collaboration among aviation and non-aviation stakeholders to improve coordination and response capabilities in aviation incidents.
- Explore the integration of advanced technologies, to streamline communication, enhance situational awareness, and expedite response efforts.
- Implement regular training programs and drills for stakeholders to ensure readiness and proficiency in family assistance procedures and crisis management.
- Benchmark against global best practices in family assistance and aviation incident response to identify areas for improvement and implement relevant enhancements.
- Establish robust mechanisms for soliciting feedback from affected individuals, families, and stakeholders to continually refine and enhance family assistance provisions and response protocols.



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