

**60<sup>th</sup> CONFERENCE OF  
DIRECTORS GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION  
ASIA AND PACIFIC REGIONS**

*Sendai, Japan  
28 July - 1 August 2025*

**AGENDA ITEM 3:      AVIATION SAFETY**

**SUPPORTING AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS' INCIDENT  
REPORTING AND INVESTIGATION WITHIN A JUST  
CULTURE ENVIRONMENT**

(Presented by International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers (IFATCA),  
co-sponsored by New Zealand and International Air Transport Association (IATA))

**SUMMARY**

This paper seeks to highlight the negative impact on the work of air traffic controllers, and air traffic service delivery, generated by the absence of a Just Culture focused safety environment in parts of the Asia Pacific region. It seeks to imply commonalities between staffing deficiency, data capture and collaboration with Positive Safety Culture in APAC

## **AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLER INCIDENT REPORTING AND INVESTIGATION WITHIN A JUST CULTURE.**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 The aviation industry is preparing for unprecedented growth, with Asia Pacific forecast to be the region with the largest increase in traffic. Coupled with this growth, ANSPs and air traffic controllers are already dealing with the development and implementation of future air navigation services, unmanned traffic management (UTM) initiatives, and increasing use of digital and AI technologies. Integrating this forecast traffic growth with current conventional and new airspace users will require additional layers of safety enhancement and assurance.

1.2 The emergence of new technology, and the need for integration between existing and future ATM systems, requires unprecedented levels of collaboration. Interoperability will be required to ensure seamless sharing of data across multiple platforms and borders. Collaboration will be required to ensure seamless efficiency for the least possible environmental impact and best possible safety outcomes across boundaries. The same level of collaboration applies to collecting and sharing safety data.

1.3 At the DGCA59, several States detailed a collaborative safety data sharing initiative (see DGCA59/DP/3/5). Seven safety occurrences, derived from the mandatory reporting items from the participating States, were listed for the initial round of safety data sharing. However, the ‘iceberg’ theory tells us that occurrences contained in the mandatory reports represent a relatively small proportion of safety events in the system – the majority of occurrences exist out of view ‘below the water line’.

1.4 In their paper to the DGCA58 (DP/3/7), the Association of Asia Pacific Airlines and Flight Safety Foundation pointed out the need to encourage open reporting of safety incidents, without fear of retribution, to deliberately and relentlessly identify potential safety risks. This reflects the notion that the more data provided through voluntary reporting, the richer and more accurate the risk analysis, prediction and likelihood of prevention of future occurrences. Underpinning a reporting culture must be a well-established Just Culture within the organization.

1.5 Airways New Zealand (Airways) has benchmarked success in promoting a safety culture underpinned by Just Culture and embedded throughout all areas of the business. This positive safety culture encourages and facilitates the reporting of incidents and promotes individual responsibility and ownership of safety in an environment of trust and transparency. Airways and its Air Traffic Control Group staff have a collaborative approach to aviation and aviation safety.

1.6 Whilst Just Culture is acknowledged as a fundamental foundation on which a Positive Safety Culture is built, based on a pulse survey conducted by IFATCA, the widespread and effective deployment of Just Culture across Asia Pacific States needs improvement. The survey was undertaken at the end of April 2025 across 19 IFATCA Asia Pacific member associations and the results are included as Appendix 1. The results indicate that Just Culture is not being practiced successfully or extensively across many of the region’s States, despite many years of effort promoting a positive safety culture in this region. Please note that the results are not apportioned to individual member associations.

### **2. DISCUSSION**

2.1 The reporting and management of safety data is integral and fundamental to safety in all aspects of the aviation industry. To achieve this, controllers and all the other aviation personnel must feel safe to report ALL reportable incidents without the fear of recourse, punitive measures or punishment. Whilst ANSPs may currently feel they have a robust reporting system in place, IFATCA’s recent survey indicates that there is still room for improvement.

2.2 Positive Safety Culture must be more than a catch phrase. It is measurable in tangible terms such as safety indicators, full circle action, implementation and assurance. *Examples and Indicators of a Positive Safety Culture* presented by several International Organizations during DGCA59 (DP/3/9) provides solid examples of the measurability of implementation and effectiveness. Whilst ‘integrity’ cannot be measured, safety reporting and outcomes can be.

2.3 One critical step that States must take for increasing trust and collaboration on safety reporting and safety data collecting is a firm stance, backed up by actions, on non-punitive reporting principles.

2.4 ANSPs may require support from regulators to develop, establish and enable monitoring of a Positive Safety Culture process with Just Culture at its heart. Ensuring Just Culture is embedded within the safety culture, and having a positive safety culture foundation within an ANSP and Regulator, will also encourage new recruits into the aviation industry by demonstrating that it is a secure and safe career option.

2.5 Development of an embedded Just Culture environment within air traffic control and the wider aviation community is achievable in Asia Pacific through governance, oversight and collaboration.

2.6 Safety must remain the highest priority, with public perception of the safety and integrity of the aviation safety system maintained at the highest possible level.

### **3. ACTION BY THE CONFERENCE**

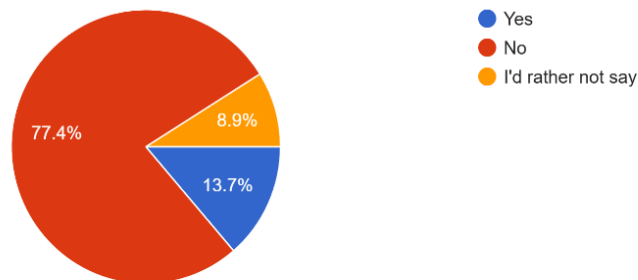
3.1 The Conference is invited to:

- a) Encourage the region’s ANSPs to implement a Just Culture focused positive safety policy that not only protects and supports air traffic controllers but enables a harmonized understanding, and fair and consistent application of just culture principles across all organizational areas, hierarchies and functions. A policy that can be operationalized through elements such as capacity-building, relevant processes and organizational structure that ensures essential checks and balances. Such policy would foster trust within the organization, which is essential for the continuous flow of open and proactive safety reporting.
- b) Invite States and International Organizations in the region to form an Asia Pacific Positive Safety Culture working group to create a framework covering all aspects of an inter Asia Pacific Positive Safety Culture including planning, implementation, measurability and mentoring. This framework should be sufficiently mature and adaptable to be integrated into current safety reporting systems.
- c) Encourage States to note the IFATCA policy (see Appendix 2) in support of ICAO ANNEX19 as a demonstration of their commitment to the overall safety and human resource development provisions of the Delhi Declaration.
- d) Encourage the formation of an oversight committee to support the integration of Just Culture within the ANSP, fostering trust and openness in incident reporting.

## Appendix 1: Asia Pacific Region IFATCA Safety Culture Survey

Have you NOT reported an incident in the last 6 months?

146 responses



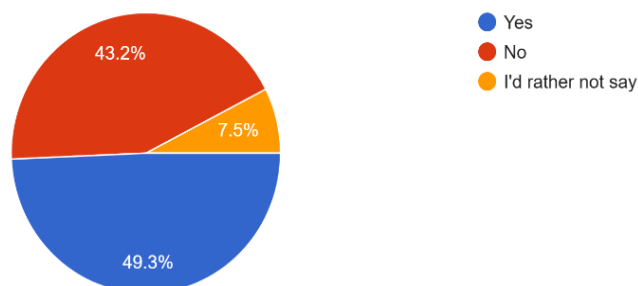
Potentially 22.6% (13.7+8.9%) of controllers did not report an incident when required to do so in the last 6 months.

Top three reasons given:

1. 29.5% The investigation is not fair or transparent
2. 26% Concerned about consequences
3. 21.2% Nothing ever happens when they do report

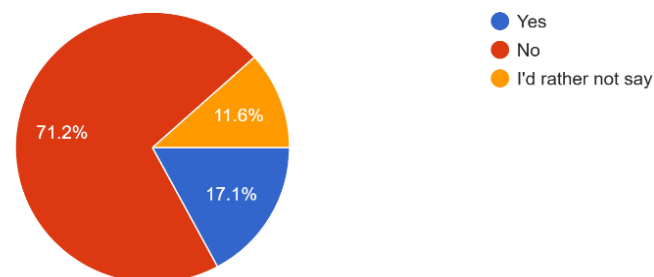
Have you observed a colleague have an incident that she/he did not file?

146 responses



Thinking about the previous question, did you then file the report?

146 responses



Potentially 82.7% (71.2 + 11.6) of controllers did NOT report an incident when required.

Top three reasons given:

1. 30.1% Concerned about what colleagues would think
2. 28.8% Concerned about consequences
3. 21.9% Nothing ever happens when they do report.

## **Appendix 2:**

# **IFATCA Policy on Just Culture in Incident Investigation**

A Just Culture in Incident Investigation is defined as follows:

*“A culture in which front line operators or others are not punished for actions, omissions or decisions taken by them that are commensurate with their experience and training, but where gross negligence, willful violations and destructive acts are not tolerated.”*

Just Culture requires a corresponding national legal framework because the administration of justice is the responsibility of States. IFATCA shall encourage ICAO to foster the establishment accordingly in its Member States.

Member Associations shall promote the creation of mandatory incident reporting systems based on confidential reporting in a just culture among their service provider(s), Civil Aviation Administration(s), National Supervisory Authority(ies) and members.

Member Associations shall promote the creation of voluntary incident reporting systems provided that the reported information will never be used against the reporting person. Compliant with the guidelines of the ICAO SAFETY MANAGEMENT MANUAL.