



WORKING PAPER

**SEVENTH WORLDWIDE AIR TRANSPORT CONFERENCE
(ATCONF/7)**

Montréal, HQ, 16 to 20 November 2026

Agenda Item 1: Overview of developments in the field of air transport

1.2: Air transport in ICAO's long term strategic plan: Accelerating aviation towards 2050

**BUILDING ON THE ILO AND ICAO'S FOUNDATIONS ON LABOUR
AND SOCIAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO
ENSURE WORKFORCE SUSTAINABILITY**

(Presented by the United Nations - International Labour Organization (ILO),
International Air Transport Association (IATA), International Transport
Workers' Federation (ITF), International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers'
Associations (IFATCA), International Federation of Air Line Pilots' Associations
(IFALPA), Aviation Services Association (ASA World))

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Building on the foundation laid by the three previous Worldwide Air Transport Conferences, and by the International Labour Organization's (ILO) 2023 Conclusions and Recommendations for the civil aviation sector, this paper calls for the increased and deepening collaboration between both United Nations regulatory bodies to ensure policy coherence, and efficiencies to "Deliver as One", by leaving no country behind. In 2022, the ILO and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) signed a cooperation Agreement that is set to expire in March 2027. The renewal of the 2022-2027 ILO-ICAO Agreement and strengthening of ILO and ICAO collaboration would ensure policy coherence, and the delivery of balanced and more comprehensive guidance on labour and social matters for Member States, workers and the aviation industry.

Action: The Conference is invited to:

- a) request Member States to recall, reaffirm and build upon the labour and social principles and recommendations adopted by the previous Worldwide Air Transport Conferences and the ILO 2023 Conclusions and Recommendations for the aviation sector;
- b) request ICAO to take effective action and attach high priority to the renewal of the ICAO-ILO Agreement before its expiration date, including the development of a joint work-plan based on the new Agreement, and
- c) authorize ICAO to work with the ILO in matters related to the Agreement and workforce sustainability, including attraction and retention of the aviation workforce, just transition planning, and key occupational safety and health concerns, such as work and rest times.

¹ English, Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish versions provided by ILO.

<i>Strategic Goal:</i>	This working paper relates to Strategic Goal: <i>The Economic Development of Air Transport Assures the Delivery of Economic Prosperity and Societal Well-Being for All and No Country Left Behind.</i>
<i>Financial implications:</i>	Not applicable.
<i>References:</i>	ATConf/7-WP/1, ATConf/7-WP/2 and ATConf/7-WP/4. Assembly Resolution A42-24: <i>Next Generation of Aviation Professionals -Global Aviation Talent Development</i> , 2025. ILO, Conclusions and Recommendations on the promotion of decent work to shape a green, sustainable and inclusive economic recovery for the civil aviation sector, 2023. A42-WP/205. A41-WP/354. Agreement between the International Labour Organization and the International Civil Aviation Organization, 15 March 2022. ATConf/6: Report (Doc 10009), 2013. ATConf/5: Report (Doc 9819), 2003. ATConf/4: Report (Doc 9644), 1994.

1. BACKGROUND AND ANTECEDENTS ON LABOUR AND SOCIAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 The International Labour Organization (ILO) is the United Nations regulatory agency overseeing the ‘world of work’. The unique tripartite structure of the ILO gives an equal voice to workers, employers (industry) and 187 Member States to ensure that their views are closely reflected in setting labour standards and shaping policies and programmes. The first time the ILO considered civil aviation matters – in the form of the generalization of the reduction of hours of work – was in 1938.

1.2 In 2023, the ILO convened a Technical meeting on a green, sustainable and inclusive economic recovery for the civil aviation sector. The meeting adopted Conclusions and Recommendations, including for the ILO’s tripartite membership as well as actions seeking to increase and intensify the ILO and the International Civil Aviation Organization’s (ICAO) collaboration including, among others:

- a) “strengthen coordination, synergies, and cooperation with relevant multilateral organizations, in particular with ICAO, including on the Next Generation of Aviation Professionals, and continue the ILO–ICAO Agreement beyond 2027, adding value with a new area of common concern: “decarbonization and just transition”, in order to promote policy coherence, and involve social partners therein”;
- b) “facilitate, together with ICAO, a workshop with the social partners to explore priorities and challenges of just transition planning in the aviation sector and decide on any further strategic actions, steps and opportunities for tripartite cooperation”; and
- c) “collaborate with ICAO, through consultation with tripartite constituents, and within the ILO–ICAO agreement, to work towards evaluating the need for effective labour and social standards specifically as it pertains to aviation, particularly on key occupational safety and health concerns, such as work and rest times”.

1.3 ICAO has been at the heart of international aviation safety for 80 years, working with 193 Member States to build the standards, tools, and partnerships that keep billions of passengers safe each year. In 2026, ICAO's Seventh Worldwide Air Transport Conference (ATConf/7) will produce recommendations on policy guidance and harmonized regulatory framework for the sustainable development of international air transport, as well as future actions by States and ICAO, by building on the foundation laid by the three previous Worldwide Air Transport Conferences.² In addition, ICAO's Secretariat has identified "organizational capacity and workforce sustainability" as a priority for strengthening regulatory oversight capacity and institutional frameworks.³

1.4 In terms of social and labour principles, these conclusions and recommendations constitute the foundations laid by the previous three Worldwide Air Transport Conferences:

- a) The Conference (ATConf/4) recognized *"that any change in approach to international air transport regulation should have due regard to the objective participation and to the interests of all stakeholders in international air transport, including air carriers [...], airports, distribution intermediaries and labour."*⁴
- b) The Conference (ATConf/5):
 - a. concluded that *"liberalization may have various implications for labour, which should continue to participate as an important stakeholder for the development of the air transport industry. States should observe and respect the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and take the necessary measures to promote social dialogue with the active participation of labour as a way to find innovative and socially responsible solutions."*⁵
 - b. also adopted the ICAO 'Declaration of Global Principles for the Liberalization of International Air Transport' that establishes:⁶
 - i. as an Overall Principle that *"1.1 ICAO and its Contracting States, together with the air transport industry and other stakeholders in aviation, will work to ensure that international air transport continues to develop in a way that: [...] has due regard for the interests of all stakeholders, including air carriers, and other operators, [...] airports, communities, labour [...]"*
 - ii. that *"5.2 Cooperation between and among States facilitates liberalization and avoids conflicts, especially in dealing with competition law/policy issues and labour conditions involving international air transport."*
- c) The Conference (ATConf/6) adopted the following conclusions and recommendations:⁷

² ATConf/7-WP/1, para. 1.2.

³ ATConf/7-WP/4, para. 2.2.(c).

⁴ Doc 9644 ATConf/4, Recommendation para. 4.1, sub-para. 1(g)(7). *Also see:* Conclusions in sub-paras. 2.2.5.1 and 2.2.6.1.

⁵ Doc 9819 ATConf/5, Conclusion 1.1.3.1(f).

⁶ Doc 9819, ATConf/5, Declaration 4.2.3.

⁷ Doc 10009, Conclusion 2.1.3.1 (b) and Recommendation 2.2.4(d).

- a. *“liberalization is a means and process, not an end. The objective of regulatory evolution is to create a favourable environment in which international air transport may develop and flourish in an orderly, efficient, economical and sustainable manner, without compromising safety and security, while respecting social and labour standards;”*
- b. *“ICAO should initiate work on the development of an international agreement to liberalize air carrier ownership and control, taking into consideration safety and security concerns, the principle of reciprocity, the need to allow a gradual and progressive adaptation with safeguards, the need to take account of regional experiences, the requirements of various States’ domestic laws, and the effects on all stakeholders, including labour;”*

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 Labour costs, productivity and social sustainability are central to any carrier or aviation business’ competitiveness and success. Therefore, evolving regulatory and institutional frameworks must be adaptive, aligned and responsive to the social sustainability and economic development of aviation and its workforce ecosystems. Moreover, in terms of organizational capacity and socially responsible sustainability, effective workforce attraction and retention efforts should be rooted in the strengthening of social, labour and human capital development strategies through “decent work” and the ILO’s Fundamental Principles and Right at Work.

2.2 The aviation industry is committed to remain one of the safest modes of transport. But in order to attract and encourage workers to remain in the industry, career prospects and terms and conditions of work should be competitive and promote decent work. While the aviation industry creates many decent jobs, further improvements are necessary in areas relating to occupational safety and health, working conditions, and to prevent and manage violence and harassment in the workplace. Ensuring decent work, including by reaffirming the continued relevance of the employment relationship as a means of providing certainty and legal protection to civil aviation workers, is paramount to attract and retain low- and high-skilled workers, and preserve jobs, while recognizing the particularities of the sector.

2.3 A human-centred approach is needed to promote decent work and invest in training, skilling and lifelong learning. To continue with high safety and quality standards, the assessment of labour market needs is necessary, and should include addressing skills shortages through retraining and upskilling – by the analysis of best practice cross-border skills recognition, professionalization certification, apprenticeships, lifelong learning, and the establishment of mechanisms for tripartite collaboration. This will help restore the attractiveness of the industry, and promote more diversity in the workforce, while ensuring operational safety. Public funding mechanisms could support these goals.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 Since the previous Air Transport Conference (ATConf/6), the pace of economic regulatory measures that might lead to further liberalization has been affected by the COVID19 pandemic and geopolitical tensions. Attraction, retention, decent work and safe and healthy working environments are interrelated to economic regulatory measures, business sustainability, profitability and operational safety.

3.2 The ILO has consistently propounded a “decent work” approach to contribute to ICAO’s analysis of labour and social matters, whether at previous ATConfs, Assemblies, Council informal working groups, a Gender Aviation Summit, Next Generation of Aviation Professionals (NGAP) meetings, and Air Transport Regulation Panels (ATRPs). The ILO would welcome the continuation and a deepened sectoral collaboration with ICAO within the framework of a renewed ILO-ICAO Agreement.

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