



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

**SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY TO POWER GLOBAL
CONNECTIVITY, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND
RESILIENCE IN A DYNAMIC WORLD**

(Presented by the Dominican Republic and the Airport Services Association (ASA World), the International Federation of Air Line Pilots' Associations (IFALPA), the International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers' Associations (IFATCA) and the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), and co-sponsored by Oman and the International Labour Organization (ILO))

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Aviation workers are at the centre of global connectivity, economic development and the industry's resilience. This truth was highlighted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent restart and recovery, but there are signs that this lesson has been forgotten. Aviation sustainability is composed of social, economic and environmental sustainability – and all three are inseparable, interrelated and mutually supportive.

We request the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to move beyond acknowledgement and awareness of social sustainability and work to meaningfully institutionalize the concept within the work processes of the organization. One of the most effective ways to accomplish this goal is through the renewal and expansion of the ICAO-International Labour Organisation (ILO) Agreement signed in 2022. Expanding this cooperation is necessary to address workforce priorities, including workforce resilience to ensure a sustainable, human-centric and future-ready aviation industry – which is exactly what the Seventh Worldwide Air Transport Conference (ATConf/7) and ICAO should aim to achieve.

Action: The Conference is invited to:

- ensure the renewal, and amendment, as required, of the ICAO-ILO Agreement before its expiration date in 2027;
- call for a renewed continuation of the closest consultation between the Secretariats of the two organizations, in order to operationalize and implement the current and renewed ICAO-ILO Agreement;
- request that a central feature of the renewed ICAO-ILO Agreement includes a commitment to ensure the operationalization of the goals, areas of common concern and interest, and priorities; and
- request that ICAO develop guidance for States that identifies those areas in which social sustainability needs to be supported by regulatory standards and infrastructure supports that reaffirm ICAO's commitment to the *No Country Left Behind* (NCLB) Strategic Goal.

*Strategic
Goals:*

The Economic Development of Air Transport Assures the Delivery of Economic Prosperity and Societal Well-Being for All; and No Country Left Behind.

<i>Financial implications:</i>	No financial implications.
<i>References:</i>	ICAO Assembly Resolution A40-21, Assembly Resolution A41-24, and A41-WP/55 Agreement between ILO and ICAO, 2022 Conclusions and Recommendations of the ILO Technical Meeting on a <i>Green, Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Recovery for the Civil Aviation Sector</i> , 2023, TMGCAS/2023/9 Doc 9587, <i>Policy and Guidance Material on the Economic Regulation of International Air Transport</i> Reports of the ATConf/5 (2003) and ATConf-6 (2013) ICAO A42-WP/205 Council Aviation Recovery Task Force (CART) Final Report, 2020 CART Updated List of Key Principles and Recommendations, 2021

1. GAINING TRACTION: ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

1.1 There is a growing International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) history of recognition of social sustainability as interrelated and directly connected to the safety and growth of civil aviation. The sector does not need another pandemic to be reminded that labour is foundational to aviation's safety, growth and resilience.

1.2 In 2020, the Council Aviation Recovery Task Force (CART) placed protection of the workforce at the very centre of its restart and recovery framework. The first of CART's ten Key Principles committed States and industry to "*protect people*", explicitly extending that protection to "*passengers, crew, and other staff throughout the travel experience*" — placing aviation's workforce on equal footing with passengers in ICAO's highest-level pandemic recovery guidance. CART's own report recognized that a "*healthy aviation industry is critically important for ensuring high levels of aviation safety and security*," directly tying workforce viability to the safety outcomes ICAO exists to protect.

1.3 Social sustainability has been examined during the three last consecutive ICAO Assemblies (see Assembly Resolution A40-21, Assembly Resolution A41-24, A41-WP/55 and A42-WP/205). Specifically, in 2025, A42-WP/205, which was widely supported by the Assembly, pointed out that there is significant work being done with respect to economic development under the Air Transport Committee at the direction of the ICAO Council (AT-SD 223/3). A42-WP/205 also noted the critical link between Positive Safety Culture and the social dimension. States and Regulators are increasingly aware that liberalization and growth need to be balanced and measured to provide an equivalent or higher level of safety. The Air Transport Regulation Panel (ATRP) has examined various aspects of economic liberalization and has noted *social and labour standards as important for aviation workers* and is currently developing specific language to address these concerns in a prospective Template Air Services Agreement (TASA).

1.4 Also, in 2022, the ICAO– International Labour Organisation (ILO) Agreement provided an opening for the two United Nations regulatory agencies to collaborate on common issues and sharing expertise that could contribute to the overall sustainability of civil aviation. In 2027, there is an opportunity for ICAO to engage in a renewed Agreement and take advantage of the ILO's expertise in social issues and expand the progress already achieved in the areas of common concern and interest (women and aviation, the future of decent work, and data collection).

1.5 In 2023, the ILO Technical Meeting on a *Green, Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Recovery for the Civil Aviation Sector* gathered governments, industry and aviation workers that adopted recommendations laying out a number of aviation social sustainability principles based on decent work, including:

- a. 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.*
- b. *A safe and healthy work environment is interrelated to operational safety*, and a key occupational safety and health concern includes work and rest times (duty time limits).
- c. *Positive Safety Culture aims to make the industry safer without fear of retaliation*, and could effectively level playing fields between countries, support compliance with technical regulations, and can proactively address violence, harassment and other incident and event reporting concerns.
- d. A *'just transition' to a future of work that contributes to sustainable development includes social dialogue, with collective bargaining at its heart.* Social dialogue reconciles and paves the way for workers, employers and governments to realize a human-centred approach to the future of work, in order to ensure the sector's growth, continuity, stability, and overall sustainability, in years to come.

2. EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES – PEOPLE FIRST

2.1 A lack of adequate workforce is a problem in any industry, but aviation relies on a significant number of highly trained and expert labour groups not only for resilience but especially for growth. There is no meaningful growth if there is a bottleneck created by a social dimension that inhibits retention and attraction of a skilled workforce. This is especially true for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

2.2 The accelerating deployment of Artificial Intelligence (AI), automation and advanced data analytics across air traffic management, aircraft operations, maintenance and passenger processing cannot come at the expense of the workforce, that remains central to safe operations. Where technology is introduced without social dialogue, and the corresponding investment in training and reskilling, it risks widening capacity gaps rather than closing them — particularly in States that lack the resources to adapt quickly.

2.3 A people-first approach to emerging technology requires that States and industry treat workforce transition as a planned process rather than a by-product of innovation. This means identifying through social dialogue which skills will be displaced, which will be created, and ensuring mechanisms exist (retraining programmes and updated competency frameworks) to move workers into new roles rather than out of the industry. The ILO's concept of "Just Transition," referenced by governments, industry and workers at the 2023 ILO Technical Meeting, provides a framework ICAO can draw on rather than develop independently.

2.4 The link between technology adoption and Positive Safety Culture is direct. AI-enabled systems still depend on human oversight, judgement and trust; a workforce that is anxious about job security, inadequately trained on new systems, or excluded from decisions about how technology is deployed is less likely to report concerns openly or engage constructively with new tools. Embedding social

sustainability considerations into the governance of emerging technology is therefore not a side social issue, it is a precondition for the safety case that new technologies are meant to strengthen.

2.5 This is especially pressing for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS, where limited institutional and human capacity means the gap between early adopters and those left behind could widen further, absent deliberate support. Guidance developed jointly by ICAO and ILO, reaffirming *No Country Left Behind*, should explicitly address how emerging technologies are introduced in a manner that builds local capacity rather than substituting for it.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 Social sustainability is inseparable, interrelated and mutually supportive of economic/financial and environmental sustainability. A safe, resilient and growing aviation sector requires a workforce that is valued, trained, protected and consulted through meaningful social dialogue in decisions that affect their livelihoods, including decisions about the introduction of technologies reshaping how aviation work is done.

3.2 The acknowledgement and foundation of the sector's social sustainability principles has been recognized across CART, ATRP, and three consecutive ICAO Assemblies, the 2023 ILO Aviation Conclusions and Recommendations. Therefore, the renewal and expansion of the ICAO–ILO Agreement offers a concrete, achievable mechanism to institutionalize these principles; promoting policy coherence and the practical application and operationalization of a partnership that already exists.

3.3 The Seventh Worldwide Air Transport Conference (ATConf/7) has an opportunity to realize a human-centred approach to the future of aviation, and move forward this pursuit, as aviation grows and modernizes, and while recognizing the strong, complex and crucial links between social, trade, financial, economic and environmental policies.

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