



WORKING PAPER

SEVENTH WORLDWIDE AIR TRANSPORT CONFERENCE (ATCONF/7)

Montréal, HQ, 16 to 20 November 2026

Agenda Item 2: Fostering aviation growth and air connectivity through investments in infrastructure, human capital and partnerships

2.2: Investment for the development and modernization of civil aviation infrastructure

**SUPPORTING AVIATION WORKFORCE RETENTION AND ATTRACTION -
DEVELOPMENT OF STATE AND INDUSTRY GUIDANCE THROUGH NATIONAL
PLANNING AND SOCIAL DIALOGUE**

(Presented by the Dominican Republic, 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)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper examines the role of aviation workforce resilience and support as a critical component of supporting civil aviation national development. It highlights that human capital constraints – including workforce supply challenges, skills gaps, and retention challenges – increasingly reflect system-level coordination challenges. These challenges represent a structural risk to sustainable aviation growth, connectivity and investment outcomes. The paper highlights the importance of coordinated, system-wide approaches to workforce development, supported by inclusive stakeholder engagement and strengthened governance frameworks. The paper proposes that States consider aligning workforce planning, skills development, and inclusive career pathways into national aviation and economic development strategies, supported by coordinated engagement between governments, industry, Personnel Representative Organisations (PROs) and international bodies including the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO). By strengthening coordination with other workforce actors, States can enhance the effectiveness of aviation investments and ensure long-term sector sustainability. Ultimately, States need to encourage and assist industry to adapt to a changing workforce whose priorities do not line up with the current industry model.

Action: The conference is invited to:

- a) recognise aviation workforce development and support as a key enabler of integrating aviation into national development plans;
- b) encourage Member States to incorporate structured social dialogue and engagement with PROs into national aviation and investment strategies, consistent with ICAO Next Generation of Aviation Professionals (NGAP) objectives; and
- c) commit to specific and direct engagement between ICAO, the ILO and stakeholders under the ICAO-ILO Agreement to coordinate and enhance workforce pathways and conditions.

<i>Strategic Goal:</i>	<i>The Economic Development of Air Transport Assures the Delivery of Economic Prosperity and Societal Well-Being for All.</i>
<i>Financial implications:</i>	Proposed engagement between ILO and ICAO to facilitate policy coherence and cooperation between ICAO NGAP and ILO work programmes.
<i>References:</i>	Assembly Resolution A42-24: <i>Next Generation of Aviation Professionals - Global Aviation Talent Development</i> ICAO NGAP Strategy 2024 A42-WP/21, A42-WP/151, A42-WP/152, A42-WP/153 & ILO TMGCAS/2023/9

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The aviation sector is facing persistent workforce challenges across multiple professions, including labour supply challenges, recruitment barriers, and retention and attraction difficulties. These challenges impact not only operational resilience, but also the effectiveness of national aviation development strategies and interests. These pressures are often not solely the result of insufficient numbers of entrants, but rather reflect misalignments within the broader workforce system, including gaps between education, training, licensing, employment readiness, and career progression pathways.

1.2 Aviation plays a critical role in national economic development, supporting employment, trade, tourism and connectivity. The availability of a skilled and sustainable workforce is a foundational condition for aviation investment to deliver on national outcomes. To achieve these objectives, it is imperative that this talent is tapped from the whole population. Women and ethnic minorities have often been left behind in the majority licenced aviation professions, and this has reduced the availability of these professions in the pipeline.

1.3 United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 has called upon organizations to foster inclusivity in their employment strategies. The aviation industry has struggled to integrate these policies in their recruitment, advancement, and retention strategies. Furthermore, it can be argued that industry has failed to address the specific underlying issues around recruitment and retention. Those issues are driven by a new generation who are demanding a different work-life balance and will potentially result in more complex labour solutions. These challenges underscore the need for a comprehensive and coordinated workforce strategy aligned with the International Civil Aviation Organization's (ICAO) Next Generation of Aviation Professionals (NGAP) initiative that is integrated into national aviation planning frameworks as a system-wide policy priority.

2. ROLE OF STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

2.1 The development of a sustainable aviation workforce requires effective coordination between multiple stakeholders, including regulators, other government agencies, industry, education providers, and aviation professionals. Collaboration and partnerships can be crucial to supporting development and capacity building. In this context, States are encouraged to strengthen inclusive governance mechanisms that bring together relevant stakeholders across aviation, personnel and education systems in order to improve alignment between education, training and industry requirements.

2.2 Personnel Representative Organisations (PROs) (professional associations, worker organisations, trade unions, etc.) can contribute to these coordination efforts by:

- a) identifying skills gaps and emerging competency requirements;
- b) supporting training standards and professional development frameworks;

- c) levelling the playing field and tackling barriers to workforce entry, progression and retention;
- d) promoting clear aviation career pathways; and
- e) contributing to policies that enhance workforce sustainability and recognize the role of family in healthy work-life balance.

2.3 Within such frameworks, structured engagement between personnel, employers and policymakers can support the development of balanced and responsive workforce policies, improve workforce attraction and retention and enhance system resilience. The ICAO NGAP framework recognizes that workforce development must address the full lifecycle of aviation careers, including attraction, training, transition into employment, and retention.

2.4 In 2022, the ICAO signed a memorandum of understanding with the International Labor Organisation (ILO), the agency of the UN for labour issues. Taking action under that Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), in 2023 the ILO committed to strengthening coordination and cooperations with ICAO, including on the NGAP in order to promote policy coherence and involve social partners. The conclusions of the ILO's technical meeting on a green, sustainable and inclusive economic recovery for the civil aviation sector also recognized the need to increase cooperation to accelerate diversity and inclusiveness, including through social dialogue, and requested States to actively foster equal and inclusive employment policies in the sector. Such policies should promote full employment, decent work and equal pay for work of equal value.

2.5 Aviation faces being perceived as a career path that is volatile, uncertain and complex. Overcoming this challenge will require the concerted efforts of industry, PROs, and the ILO together with that of ICAO and States to develop a joint plan to attract, train and retain skilled workers.

2.6 Retention of talent should be a high priority for operators and industry. Human resource departments should be encouraged to design policies that address the risks of women, in particular, leaving the profession early due to a lack of advancement, scheduling and retention initiative.

2.7 It also emphasizes the importance of aligning education and training systems with the evolving needs of industry and the needs of the workforce (especially the new generation). A human centred approach is needed to promote decent work and invest in training, upskilling and continuous development while integrating new technology.

2.8 The 42nd ICAO Assembly has highlighted the need for improved coordination across government, industry and education stakeholders, and for stronger integration of workforce strategies into national aviation plans. These priorities support a shift from fragmented interventions toward integrated, system-level workforce planning approaches.

2.9 A number of specific challenges should be considered:

- a) *Fragmentation across Workforce Pipelines* – disconnections between training systems, regulatory requirements, and employment pathways can lead to inefficiencies, delays in workforce entry, and underutilisation of trained personnel.
- b) *Barriers to Entry* – a key challenge arises between training completion and entry into employment. Where structured pathways are limited, graduates may experience delays, underemployment or attrition. Transparency in required qualifications, recruitment processes, and job opportunities is essential at all levels.

- c) *Retention and Workforce Sustainability* – retention challenges are linked not only to working conditions, but also to the availability of clear progression pathways, the ability to retain a balanced family life and early-career support. Weaknesses in these areas may contribute to loss of skilled personnel from the sector.
- d) *Skills Gaps and Emerging Competencies* – technological change requires continuous adjustment of training systems to ensure that new competencies are developed in alignment with future operational needs.
- e) *Limited System Coordination and Data* – In many cases, workforce policies are developed in isolation, without sufficient system-wide data or coordination mechanisms to guide decision-making.

2.10 The following measures can be adopted to effectively address these challenges:

- a) *Adopting a System-Wide Workforce Perspective* – States are encouraged to address workforce challenges as part of an integrated system supported by the collection of credible data, ensuring alignment between education, peer support programs, regulatory requirements, and employment outcomes.
- b) *Strengthening Workforce Pathways and Transitions* – States should consider developing clearer and more structured pathways from education into employment; and improving alignment between training outputs and industry entry requirements by developing required courses.
- c) *Improving Coordination across Stakeholders* – States should strengthen coordination between aviation, education and labour/manpower systems to ensure workforce strategies secure retention of experienced personnel whilst also attracting new talent.
- d) *Enhancing Workforce Planning and Data Systems* – States should consider developing workforce indicator frameworks covering supply, demand, training outcomes, and retention.
- e) *Strengthening Partnerships and Implementation Mechanisms* – where appropriate, States may consider establishing or strengthening coordination mechanisms or platforms that utilise social dialogue between government agencies, NAAs, PROs and other industry organizations to promote and coordinated approaches to workforce development.
- f) *Ensuring Inclusion and Access* – improving access to aviation careers remains essential, including through grassroots efforts and outreach, financial support mechanisms, and inclusive policies.
- g) *Supporting Evolving Skills Needs* – Education and training systems should remain adaptive, incorporating emerging technologies and future competency requirements.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 Workforce challenges in aviation are increasingly systemic in nature and require coordinated global responses. Aligning training, regulatory frameworks, and employment pathways is essential to ensuring that aviation workforce development supports national investment and growth objectives. Improved system design and strengthened engagement with PROs and industry associations can help ensure that workforce pipelines are efficient, responsive and sustainable.

3.2 The Conference is invited to support NGAP by requesting ICAO to establish and maintain engagement with the ILO with a view to sharing best practices and coordinating approaches to aviation workforce challenges.

3.3 Member States are encouraged to integrate these approaches into national aviation planning, consistent with ICAO NGAP objectives, to support a resilient and future-ready aviation sector. States need to work collaboratively with PROs and industry associations to adapt to a changing workforce. To resolve retention and attraction issues of the next generation of aviation professionals, we need to address the needs and new reality of a workforce with different priorities.

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