



ASSEMBLY — 42ND SESSION

ECONOMIC COMMISSION

Agenda Item 26: Economic Development of Air Transport

SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY IN CIVIL AVIATION TO ENHANCE SAFETY AND ENABLE THE SUCCESS OF ICAO'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

(Presented by Austria, the International Federation of Air Line Pilots' Associations (IFALPA), the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), and the International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers' Associations (IFATCA))

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To grow, civil aviation needs more people: more passengers, more people shipping cargo, and more workers. Globally, civil aviation has recovered unevenly from the COVID-19 pandemic, partly because unfavorable employment conditions led aviation workers to seek jobs outside the industry. In other words, the lack of social sustainability in civil aviation has hampered robust recovery. Aviation safety is enabled by social sustainability as well. When workers are prioritized, a non-retribution culture can thrive, and robust reporting of safety issues can result. This "positive safety culture" has been critical to improving civil aviation's already exemplary safety record.

The 40th and 41st Sessions of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Assembly recognized the need to make civil aviation socially sustainable (Resolutions A40-21 and A41-24, and A41-WP/55). The ICAO Council's creation of two "Small Groups" on ICAO's leadership in economic development of air transport and on social sustainability provides a foundation for further work. These Assemblies also committed ICAO to do its part to attain the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to partner with others within the UN system. To that end, ICAO entered into a renewed agreement with the UN's International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2022. The ICAO-ILO relationship holds promise for achieving ICAO's goals of social sustainability and economic development if the agencies pursue the relationship vigorously. Expanding this cooperation to address emerging workforce priorities, including workforce resilience, and just transition policies, would ensure a sustainable and future-ready aviation industry.

Action: The Assembly is invited to:

- a) reaffirm ICAO's commitment to social sustainability for civil aviation;
- b) request the ICAO Council, the Air Transport Committee (ATC), the Air Transport Regulation Panel (ATRP), and the Secretariat to commit to the pursuit of social sustainability, to help ensure ICAO's Strategic Goals are achieved;
- c) request ICAO to engage with the ILO on areas of common concern to operationalize and implement the ICAO-ILO agreement; and
- d) commit to renew, and amend as required, the ICAO-ILO agreement before its expiration date in 2027.

<i>Strategic Goals:</i>	This working paper relates to the Strategic Goal – The Economic Development of Air Transport Assures the Delivery of Economic Prosperity and Societal Well-Being for All.
<i>Financial implications:</i>	The ICAO activities referred to in this paper are expected to be undertaken within the resources available in the 2026-2028 Regular Budget and/or from extra-budgetary contributions as guided by the ICAO Business Plan 2025-2028.
<i>References:</i>	Resolutions A40-21 and A41-24, and A41-WP/55, Aviation’s contribution towards the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; Agreement between the ILO and ICAO, 15 March 2022; Conclusions and Recommendations of the ILO Technical Meeting on a Green, Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Recovery for the Civil Aviation Sector, 24-28 April 2023, ILO document: TMGCAS/2023/9; Information Paper A41-WP/540, Sustainable Development Goal 8 – Recognising the Role and Opportunities for Collaboration with the International Labour Organization; Doc 9587, Policy and Guidance Material on the Economic Regulation of International Air Transport; and Report of the 5th Worldwide Air Transport Conference, 2003 (ATConf/5), Agenda Item 1.1 (f).

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Assembly, through Resolution A41-24, *Aviation’s contribution towards the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, recognized that “the benefits enabled by air transportation” happen only if air transport is “economically viable,” and delivers “significant socio-economic benefits.” The Assembly recognized that it must partner with other actors and other United Nations (UN) agencies to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The International Civil Aviation Organization’s (ICAO) work on the economic development of air transport should contribute to the attainment of the SDGs, in particular SDG 8 described as the promotion of sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all.¹

1.2 Resolution A41-24 went on to “urge Member States to recognize the significant contributions of aviation to sustainable development realized by stimulating employment,” and urged Member States to support civil aviation “by robust air transport sector strategic plans and civil aviation master plans, thereby leading to the attainment of the SDGs.” *Id.*, para 1, 2, 5. Thus, employment is key to aviation, and sustainable aviation employment for all categories of aviation workers, including pilots, cabin crew, ground staff, aircraft maintenance, air traffic controllers and air traffic safety electronics personnel is an integral factor that Member States should include in the civil aviation policies and plans.²

2. ICAO’S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES RELATING TO SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

2.1 ICAO’s work on the economic development of air transport is the purview of the Air Transport Committee (ATC), at the direction of the ICAO Council AT-SD 223/3. In examining various aspects of economic liberalization, the Air Transport Regulation Panel (ATRP) recognized continuing

¹ General Assembly Resolution A/Res/70/1 pp19-20/35.

² ICAO made similar conclusions in ATConf/5 in 2003. Agenda Item 1.1 (f).

issues of concern, including social and labour standards for aviation workers, as important “safeguard” matters to be addressed in further ICAO policies.³

2.2 The ICAO Council has a Small Group on ICAO’s Leadership in Economic Development of Air Transport and recently established a Small Group on the Social Dimension of Sustainability in Aviation to address the concerns discussed by an industry Informal Briefing to the ICAO Council on Social Sustainability reaffirming ICAO’s understanding that social aspects are linked to aviation’s growth.

2.3 Consistent with Resolution A41-24, ICAO and the International Labour Organization (ILO) concluded an Agreement in 2022. Under the Agreement, the parties agreed to formalize closer collaboration in relation to areas of common interest, including but not limited to the future of decent and sustainable work in aviation.

3. SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY AND POSITIVE SAFETY CULTURE

3.1 In Annex 19 and supporting guidance material, ICAO has recognized the importance of Positive Safety Culture.

3.2 Positive Safety Culture is foundational for a fully functional Safety Management System (SMS). A culture must exist in which aviation workers and all stakeholders trust the system sufficiently to actively participate in identifying hazards and reporting errors. A robust Positive Safety Culture is directly connected to those States and businesses that prioritize social sustainability – in other words, supporting processes, structures and elements that benefit society and protect people⁴. Where States and operators treat social sustainability as a priority, Positive Safety Culture can flourish; where social sustainability is not considered a priority, Positive Safety Culture has difficulty taking root and will likely wither. The people who report using SMS systems must have confidence that they will be treated as valued safety partners and not face retribution. Leaders at all levels, from operators to regulators, must demonstrate commitment to social sustainability as a critical component of creating a foundation for Positive Safety Culture through words and actions.

4. ICAO-ILO AGREEMENT INCLUDES DECENT WORK AND EMPLOYMENT-RICH GROWTH

4.1 According to the ICAO-ILO Agreement, both agencies will collaborate on specific activities in different areas by conducting “joint research, joint technical meetings, joint technical advisory services, joint training, and collaboration on the development of appropriate guidelines...” They have also agreed on three areas of common interest: women and aviation, the future of decent and sustainable work in aviation and data collection. Considering ICAO resources constraints, there is an opportunity for ICAO to engage with ILO under this agreement and take advantage of their expertise in social issues for the progress of these areas.

4.2 Decent Work principles have been articulated in the 2023 ILO Technical Meeting on a Green, Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Recovery for the Civil Aviation Sector, by setting forth a number of elements, including: employment opportunities (i.e., improving the attractiveness of the industry); adequate earnings and productive work (improving employment terms to retain workers); safe

³ ATRP/17 “yellow cover” report, para 1.2.2, 1.2.3, 1.2.6.

⁴ UN Global Compact

work environment and decent hours (furthering positive safety culture, and duty time limits); social dialogue, workers' and employers' representation (stabilizing the employer-worker relationship); and expanding the talent pool.

4.3 In the 2023 ILO meeting, governments, industry, and aviation workers recommended that the ILO collaborate with ICAO on several topics, including just transition planning, evaluating the need for effective ILO standards that reflect ICAO's key occupational safety and health concerns, strengthening cooperation on the Next Generation of Aviation Professionals (NGAP), and promoting policy coherence in relation to the future of decent and sustainable work in aviation.

4.4 ICAO has acknowledged that the attainment of the SDGs will require it to actively promote them. Resolution A41-24 directs the Council and the Secretary General, within their respective competencies, to demonstrate that ICAO continues to serve as an advocate for aviation by raising awareness among Member States, including relevant authorities beyond the air transport sector, the UN system, the donor community and all relevant stakeholders about aviation's contributions to sustainable development and the attainment of the SDGs.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 ICAO has embraced the need for civil aviation to be socially, economically and environmentally sustainable to support industry growth. Policies should support decent job creation, attraction and retention of workers and the constant improvement of safety management in aviation workplaces.

5.2 The establishment of the Small Groups on ICAO's Leadership in Economic Development of Air Transport and on Social Sustainability are significant steps towards this goal. The conclusion of the ICAO – ILO Agreement is also a significant step towards implementing it.

5.3 Continued attention must be paid to social sustainability through all relevant work groups at ICAO, including the above Small Groups, the ATC, and the ATRP.

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