



ASSEMBLY — 41ST SESSION

TECHNICAL COMMISSION

Agenda Item 31: Aviation Safety and Air Navigation Standardization

FOLLOW-UP ON THE MEASURES FOR ASSESSING PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL FITNESS AND MANAGEMENT OF THE RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH MENTAL HEALTH

(Presented by Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), with the support of Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Surinam and Uruguay)²)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of the relevant findings from the Safety Stream of the High-level Conference on COVID-19 (HLCC 2021), this working paper presents the actions taken and raises the need for follow-up actions to continuously explore the current state of mental health of the aeronautical population in the circumstances arising from COVID-19 in order to obtain reliable data to identify emerging mental health-related hazards and guide safety risk management.

Action: The Assembly is invited to:

- a) take note of the information presented in this working paper;
- b) ensure that States and industry conduct or continue to conduct studies to explore the mental health status of the aeronautical population as a consequence of the circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, similar to or as suggested in this note; and
- c) join efforts to guide actions that can be taken both by the departments of aviation medicine, in connection with the aviation medical certificate, and by air service operators in terms of the human factors.

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| <i>Strategic Objectives:</i> | This working paper relates to the Safety Strategic Objective. |
| <i>Financial implications:</i> | Not applicable. |
| <i>References:</i> | HLCC 2021-WP/136: <i>Study to determine the mental health status of the aeronautical population as an emerging hazard in the circumstances arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and for safety management</i> |

¹ Spanish version provided by Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

² Working Paper supported by 11 Member States of the SAM Region and 1 of LACAC.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Lockdown, social distancing, remote activities, temporary or permanent unemployment, problems in States' health and/or economic conditions are factors that, among others, have played and continue to play a critical role in this pandemic among aviation personnel. This has necessitated adaptation to these changes, in particular in lifestyle habits, all within the overall context of fear of contracting the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

1.2 The need to restructure the work of operators, crew members, or other types of personnel who lose their jobs and take operational or medical leave, and in general, the impact on the conditions of well-being, among others, brought about in this pandemic factors conducive to situations that affect mental health.

1.3 The identification of these concerns and their impact on the mental health of aviation personnel was put forward by the Venezuelan State at the third virtual meeting of Directors General of Civil Aviation of the South American (SAM) Region on the response to COVID-19, held in Lima, Peru, on 22 September 2020.

1.4 As a result, the SAM Region engaged in a joint effort, together with experts from other States, on the aviation medicine panel of the Regional Safety Oversight Cooperation System (SRVSOP), at which Advisory Circular AC-PEL-67-003 on the mental health of aviation personnel during the COVID-19 pandemic, was published and disseminated through a webinar organized by the ICAO Regional Office in Lima on 12 October 2020.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 The HLCC 2021-WP/136 working paper put forward at the HLCC 2021 presented details of this initiative to guarantee the optimum psychological and physical fitness of aviation personnel, through efforts which go beyond regulatory medical assessments. There may be a risk, in particular when dealing with an aeronautical population that has been eager to start or to resume operations, and in that way to maintain their ratings, of information being withheld, or of being nuanced in an advantageous way, during individual clinical examinations in the area of mental health.

2.2 To this end, the Venezuelan State has promoted the design and application of an instrument developed by the Venezuelan Association of Aeronautical Psychology (AVEPSA), entitled: *Instrument for the Assessment of Mental Health in the Venezuelan Aeronautical Operational Population* (VSM-POA 2020). This instrument is a survey, distributed remotely and accessible from any smart electronic device. Its application is anonymous; a very important feature which ensures that information may be obtained with the least possible bias, without fear of any punitive action against the surveyed population. The use of this instrument has been recommended and it is available in AC-PEL-67-003, on the mental health of aviation personnel during the COVID-19 pandemic, developed as part of the activities of the SRVSOP for the States of the SAM Region.

2.3 This instrument was applied to different groups of aeronautical personnel (crew members, air traffic controllers, ground support personnel, maintenance technicians and other air navigation services providers) to collect information on the following aspects: psychosocial stressors (economic situation, work area, health situation), psychobiological habits (sleeping disorders, alcohol consumption), psychopathological disorders (acute stress disorders, generalized anxiety, severe depression) and levels of satisfaction and well-being linked to biological (physical), psychological and social circumstances.

2.4 The information obtained has been of great value in guiding health actions for the resumption and recovery of aviation activity. At the same time, the results obtained have made information available to the aviation authority, together with the industry's safety coordination groups, for it to focus on emerging hazards in the aviation sector and to manage emerging risks, within the framework of its State Safety Programme (SSP), by setting in place preventive measures together with the industry and disseminating practices that will help members of the aviation profession to deal with the symptoms identified.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 The regular application of this type of instrument with a view to assessing the performance of the identified areas of concern, and by comparing results with previous data, will be key during the recovery period of the aviation sector, and later in terms of the resilience it must acquire. The information obtained will make it possible to determine the effectiveness of the joint measures between the State and the industry.

3.2 It is therefore important that States, in coordination with the industry, promote widespread and regular exploratory studies of the aeronautical population through the use of anonymous surveys, as a tool for gathering information on safety in order to mitigate the risks associated with the potential loss of mental health.

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