



International Civil Aviation Organization

WORKING PAPER

A41-WP/590

EX/273

13/9/22

(Information paper)

English only

ASSEMBLY — 41ST SESSION

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 12: Outcomes of High-level Conference on COVID-19

NEW DEAL FOR AVIATION

(Presented by the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF))

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper offers a framework to States for a sustainable recovery of the civil aviation industry. The paper contends that only genuine sustainability- economic, social and environmental- can insulate the aviation industry from its vulnerability to crisis. It focuses on building strong national bodies, based on social dialogue, to coordinate across the industry, increase safety oversight and develop sustainability initiatives for a genuine carbon neutral growth.

<i>Strategic Objectives:</i>	This information paper relates to all Strategic Objectives.
<i>Financial implications:</i>	None.
<i>References:</i>	

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The aviation industry is lurching between crisis and chaos. COVID-19 exacerbated economic inequality and aviation workers were on the frontlines of the global shutdown. Recovery from COVID-19 had barely begun with the lifting of pandemic-related travel restrictions before the rapid increase in demand for flights and passenger numbers exposed the decades' old fault lines.

1.2 In a majority of the world's largest aviation markets passengers have faced thousands of cancellations, delays, capacity reductions and even flight capping at some of the world's largest airports. Part of this crisis has been caused by the huge lay-offs during COVID-19. But the structural changes of the past four decades in the aviation industry: privatisation, de-regulation and fragmentation laid the foundations for this crisis.

1.3 Globally the aviation industry reduced its workforce by over a third in response to the global shutdown. The response by the aviation industry to prioritise cash flow and minimise losses sent shockwaves through countries as governments grappled with the social and economic impact of decisions by the industry.

1.4 Trade unions warned that the mass lay-offs imposed by employers would lead to a worker shortage and trigger another crisis in this highly skilled, safety-critical industry. The alarm was raised. Governments stepped in to keep the industry afloat and injected vast sums of money into some parts of the industry, with almost no strings attached.

1.5 At the same time, the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) and affiliated trade unions launched a three-step response calling for relief, recovery and reform of the aviation industry. We campaigned for an industry-wide response and coordination between employers, unions, and governments, to keep the industry afloat, while planning for a safe and sustainable recovery from the pandemic. This response was focused on building an industry that is fit for purpose and resilient to future crises, addressing the underlying structural issues that were exacerbated by the Covid-19 crisis. So far, only a few governments responded positively and established meaningful dialogue with aviation unions at the national level. We are not disheartened by the lack of cooperation and will continue our efforts to this end.

1.6 Without serious, urgent measures, worker shortages will continue in different parts of the industry. For example, in air traffic services, freezes on the three-year training pipeline during the pandemic are already triggering a new worker shortage at some airports. Combined with redundancies and early retirement programmes, the shortage of air traffic controllers will once more lead to cancellations and delays.

1.7 Without a coordinated response that addresses both immediate and longer-term worker shortages, alongside structural transformation, aviation will continue to move from crisis to crisis.

1.8 Without serious, urgent measures, worker shortages will continue in different parts of the industry.

2. FOUNDATIONS OF THE CURRENT WORKER CRISIS

2.1 Aviation, once a nationalised industry, has been steadily privatising for decades. While aviation today is more accessible to the world's population, it is also an industry that is environmentally, economically, and socially unsustainable.

2.2 The aviation industry today is fragile. The highly interdependent service chain that gets aircraft full of passengers and cargo safely to their destinations has been heavily fragmented. For example, a shortage of workers or faulty equipment to load luggage and cargo on to planes triggers delays and cancellations. The same is true for blockages in any other part of this chain: cleaning services, refuellers, check-in staff, mechanics, or air traffic services. No measures in any one of these services alone can achieve a successful, timely and safe operation of air services. Yet, there has been a determined trend towards fragmenting the service chain and lowering barriers of entry.

2.3 Downturns in the industry that trigger large cancellations, such as pandemics, environmental events, or political crises, send shocks through these chains. Cancellations by airlines trigger revenue losses across the service chain. The fragility and regularity of these shocks disincentivise long-term capital investments in initiatives such as equipment upgrades, worker retention and upskilling, and sustainability initiatives.

2.4 The pressure to lower costs to keep airlines competitive also impacts airline workers, such as pilots and cabin crew, and ripples through the service chain leading to lower wages and working conditions, reduced staffing levels, intensified work and fatigue risks, and reduced quality standards of equipment. Improvements made in one enterprise that increase costs make it uncompetitive, and low barriers of entry with minimal standards make it easy to be replaced by a cheaper enterprise delivering the same service. In an increasingly global environment, the same competitiveness between national aviation industries triggers similar consequences.

2.5 For aviation workers, the industry is now characterised by inadequate capacity, precarious employment, increased safety risks, long, unsociable working hours, increased fatigue and injuries, and declining pay.

2.6 The aviation industry is facing an unsustainable future.

3. **FRAMEWORK FOR AN ECONOMICALLY, SOCIALLY AND ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR THE CIVIL AVIATION INDUSTRY**

3.1 Strong regulation and industry- wide coordination:

- formation of national aviation bodies that bring together industry stakeholders, including employers, governments and unions, to ensure a resilient and safe aviation service delivery chain;
- introduction of robust operating standards for all aviation services as a condition of entry into the industry;
- empowerment of airport authorities to coordinate and set standards for service provision at airports; and

- inclusion of provisions that safeguard sustainable employment and high safety standards into air service agreements that regulate the operation of air traffic between nations.

3.2 A zero-risk culture that puts health and safety first:

- elimination of all forms of violence and harassment against aviation workers by implementing the provisions of mechanisms such as Montreal Protocol 14 and International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 190 into national law;
- promotion of a strong safety culture that introduces safety management systems including confidential reporting systems to all aviation services;
- implementation of public awareness and worker training programmes that combat human trafficking;
- formation of health and safety committees, such as those described in ITF's Safe Airports initiative, that include workers and employers at enterprise and worksite level, such as at airports where multiple enterprises operate in the same environment; and
- elimination of safety risks caused by precarious work, work intensification and poor mental health by:
 - ensuring adequate staffing levels and decent conditions of employment;
 - initiating non-punitive reporting and assistance programmes and fatigue risk management systems; and
 - developing well-funded apprenticeship, training and upskilling programmes.

3.3 A genuine pathway to a zero- carbon future industry:

- commitment to genuine carbon neutral growth beyond 2019 traffic levels;
- embedding of aviation workers in decision making through Just Transition Committees at all levels to ensure the industry can retain the highly skilled and experienced workforce that will be crucial to identifying, developing and deploying sustainability initiatives;
- mobilisation and coordination of investment, both public and private, with robust environmental, social and governance (ESG) principles, that develop technologies that contribute to a fossil-fuel free, environmentally sustainable aviation industry; and
- facilitation of access to technology to emerging aviation markets to ensure global equity and responsibility in the implementation of sustainability initiatives.

3.4 A digital future that works for workers and passengers:

- inclusion of workers in decision-making related to the need, development and deployment of digital technologies that complement a highly skilled, safety-critical industry and maintain the human interaction that passengers rely on;
- workers' ownership, oversight and control of the data that they produce to enable decision-making, planning and development in the aviation industry;
- protection against malpractice in data being used against workers in any way that penalises workers exercising their fundamental rights to freely associate and collectively bargain; and
- regular review of data processes and algorithms to ensure that they do not discriminate against workers or passengers on the grounds of their demographics.

4. COMMENT AND CONCLUSION

4.1 The ITF strongly believes that genuine coordination between government, employers and trade unions will provide the pathway for a sustainable future of the civil aviation industry.

4.2 The recent Memorandum of Understanding between the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and ILO is an important step forward at global level to ensure that labour factors form part of the ICAO's future work. This must be replicated at regional and national level as well.

4.3 The ITF is a democratic, affiliate-led global federation of 670 trade unions in 147 countries, representing over 18 million workers in all transport sectors. The ITF passionately campaigns for transport workers' rights, equality and justice.

4.4 The ITF, as an observer at the ICAO, offers its support to the ICAO and any Member States in the implementation of measures as prescribed in this paper.

— END —