



International Civil Aviation Organization

South American Regional Office

Fifth Virtual Meeting of Civil Aviation General Directors of the South American Region on the Response to COVID-19

(Lima, Peru, 1 August 2021)

Agenda Item 2: Innovation in aspects of Operational Safety, Capacity and Efficiency in the provision of services and navigation infrastructure in the framework of recovery

SAFEGUARDING THE SAFETY OF FLIGHT DURING/POST PANDEMIC

(Prepared by International Air Transport Association)

SUMMARY

This working paper presents some of the challenges related to safely navigating the aviation industry recovery as it relates to adequate staffing for improved flight operations.

The varying traffic levels, changing conditions on the ground, and interactions between the flight crew and air traffic control are critical to understand stressors in the system and address them adequately.

There is a critical need for States to ensure alignment and harmonization in the dissemination of operational and safety critical information and for service providers to ensure adequate staffing.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on flight operations, Airports, Air Traffic Control (ATC) facilities resulting in sometimes reduce controller staffing or shut down temporarily remains a hurdle in working towards safety navigating the industry recovery. With the Delta variant of COVID-19 continuing to impact the region, its likely facility closure known as “ATC Zero events” will continue impacting flight operations.

1.2 ATC Zero events identified during the pandemic introduced new risk to the system amongst others identified by the Pan America -Regional Aviation Safety Team (PA-RAST) as key safety areas to watch though issue of Safety Advisory 6 which identifies guidance material populated by stakeholders to address these areas.

1.3 Mores so, with operational safety events resulting in increased workload due to ATC staffing such as aircrafts attempting to land on wrong runway, causing other aircrafts to abort landing, put emphasis on adequate aviation staffing from Air Navigation Services Providers to safeguard and improved flight operations.

1.4 IATA, along with its partners, the Civil Air Navigation Services Organization (CANSO), and the International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers' Association (IFATCA), have developed information bulletins related to the impact of COVID-19 on human factors and competency for ATCOs and dispatchers, which are accessible in section 3 of this working paper.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 Reduction in staffing levels have the potential to impose longer working hours for the remaining staff, or condensed hours which can introduce the risk of fatigue as noted in the 2nd edition of the IATA Safety Issue Review Bulletin (SIRM).

2.2 Constantly changing and unclear aeronautical information regarding airport/airspace availability/capacity are some of the aspects to consider especially as flight crew will need to have confidence in the availability and capability of alternate airports which are required for the safe execution of a flight.

2.3 The impact of COVID-19 on maintaining serviceability of navigation aids at locations with limitations related to inspection aircraft has been noted. As the availability of technical and support staff who are needed to ensure the availability and validity of critical infrastructure is often impacted. Due to the new landscape created by the pandemic, there is also a risk of diminished Air Traffic Safety Electronics Personnel (ATSEP) system knowledge and maintenance skills.

2.4 Increased non-standard flight operations at airports with changing availability of infrastructure may result in operation in and out of an airport may be affected by the combination of parked aircraft and changing availability of airport infrastructure a factor to consider for adequate staffing. The changes in the availability of airport infrastructure may cause confusion during operation and result in potential wrong surface operation or runway incursions. Visibility of airport signage and markings may be obstructed by parked aircraft. Obstacle limitation surfaces may be obstructed at some airports because of parked aircraft.

2.5 Some of the aspect for Air Traffic Control (ATC) facilities should include review of safety and operational management tools, modify as necessary tools to address COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 pandemic challenges considering the following:

- ATC Staffing
 - Leverage lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic to modify training programs and staffing requirements to oversee the increased personnel training and checking requirements.
 - Accelerate ATC vaccination plan to remove barriers associated with reduced controllers in air traffic units, as well as the measures adopted for the reduction of social distancing
- Operations procedures
 - Adopt a LOSA-type programs for timely feedback on communications issues due to reorganizing of controlling sectors and frequencies.
- ATC Surveillance
 - Ensure air traffic controllers are operating in accordance with any established COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 pandemic training and standard operating procedures.
- ATC Training
 - Provide training and qualification procedures for air traffic controllers shifting within facilities for position realignment or single controller expanded coverage areas with single controller handling multiple frequencies during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Develop capacity recovery plans that considers the number of ATC's available for operation including real demand for operations according to each airport needs

2.6 The implementation of collaborative decision-making process is highly recommended, including airlines, ATC, and Airports, to monitor and balance demand/capacity, as well as to guarantee the safety application of the current and new procedures.

3. SUGGESTED ACTION

3.1 The Fifth Virtual Meeting of Civil Aviation Directors of the South American Region is invited to:

- a) take note of the information presented in this working paper; and
- b) Encourage adoption of best practices presented in this working paper
- c) Safeguard the provision of ATC services, for which some states have adopted the suggestion of closed working groups
 - i. Expedite with the ministries of health the vaccination plan for the ATC
 - ii. Enable air traffic locations (Towers and Control Centers) to allow for reduction of social distancing.
 - iii. Design an operational recovery plan that allows for the reactivation of the markets, air safety, and health of controllers.
- d) Review the Regional Aviation Safety Group – Pan America Safety Advisory 6: Key Safety Areas to Watch
 - i. <https://www.icao.int/RASGPA/Pages/RASGPA-SA.aspx>
- e) Access the following guidance materials
 - i. <https://www.iata.org/en/programs/safety/>
 - ii. <https://www.iata.org/contentassets/5c8786230ff34e2da406c72a52030e95/bulletin-3-flight-crew-and-atco-interface-during-restart-final.pdf>
 - iii. <https://www.iata.org/contentassets/5c8786230ff34e2da406c72a52030e95/bulletin-4-traffic-management-and-airport-operations-during-covid19-fnal.pdf>