

**57th CONFERENCE OF
DIRECTORS GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION
ASIA AND PACIFIC REGIONS**

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AGENDA ITEM 3: AVIATION SAFETY

**AVIATION PERSONNEL AS THE FOUNDATION TO
AVIATION SAFETY**

Presented by CANSO, IATA, IFALPA and IFATCA

SUMMARY

As traffic recovers, States/Administrations, ANSPs, airlines need to focus special attention on aviation safety. Early anticipation of any safety issues and measures to preempt them will ensure high safety performance. Risks can increase with under investment in new equipment, insufficient staff, lack of exposure to heavy traffic, or poor training. The community also needs to ensure that a positive safety culture exists for all aspects in the workplace especially for any occurrence investigation. Fundamental to this is creating an environment where everyone in the aviation ecosystem believes they can report occurrences and deficiencies without fear of arbitrary punishment and sanction. There are many opportunities for the community to share tools and guidance materials on competence training and support to the frontline operations staff.

AVIATION PERSONNEL AS THE FOUNDATION TO AVIATION SAFETY

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aviation safety, which is the most critical foundation of our industry, is one of the four main focuses addressed in The Beijing Declaration endorsed by the 2018 ICAO's APAC Ministerial Conference. The States agree to pursue cooperative progress on objectives relating to aviation safety oversight, State Safety Programme (SSP) implementation, airport certification, the timely implementation of the Asia/Pacific Seamless Air Navigation Plan, and the sharing of information and best practices for air navigation and search and rescue services.

1.2 The global COVID pandemic has hit our industry heavily. The traffic growth of the Asia Pacific Region, which was once forecasted to have the most growing potential amongst all the regions, has been forced to stay low in the past two years. Looking at the positive side of it, there was a significant fall in all aspects of risk estimates in 2020 according to the safety risk assessment from the Regional Airspace Safety Monitoring Advisory Group (RASMAG/26), which mainly reflects the reduction in traffic volumes.

1.3 Seeing the light of global recovery from the pandemic, at ICAO High-Level Conference on COVID-19 2021, the Ministers made a declaration that they will "commit to ensuring a safe, secure, and orderly flow of traffic with operational readiness of aviation personnel, in particular aircrew and air traffic controllers, as well as the airworthiness of aircraft." With traffic ramping up, we need to anticipate any safety issues and preempt them.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 The significant reduction in air traffic has led most aviation professionals not being able to perform their normal tasks. Some might be doing a substantially different job, and others might not be working at all or at a substantially reduced frequency. The extended period of low recency is different from the usual sick leave or sabbatical leave and is affecting a large number of aviation personnel.

2.2 The reduced traffic volume also has a huge economic impact on most Air Navigation Service Providers (ANSPs) and airlines, whose revenues rely highly on the air service fees and travel expenses. Many ongoing plans by ANSPs and airlines in upgrading their air navigation equipment and technologies have been postponed or suspended due to financial challenges. Some may have stopped recruitment of new staff as those retiring left. This can impact the implementation timeline of the ICAO Global and Regional Air Navigation and Aviation Safety Plan.

2.3 During the downtime due to the pandemic, five key safety risk areas in aviation have been identified by States, which includes:

- a) Flight crew proficiency,
- b) Safety impact of degraded financial situation of aviation service providers,
- c) Safety management capabilities within aviation service providers,
- d) Surveillance capabilities within the CAA, and
- e) Airworthiness of aircraft.

2.4 Although the proficiency of flight crew has been specifically pointed out, it is an equally important issue for all the aviation personnel. Maintaining and regaining the proficiency of aviation personnel as well as mental well-being and health are one of the key challenges as aviation recovers.

2.5 The training and re-training of aviation personnel takes time. Existing training routine may not be sufficient as it is designed for the period of normal operation, and many new or updated

procedures have been introduced as a result of the pandemic. The States should review the existing and updated procedures and ensure that personnel are trained in the new/updated procedures. Some ANS facilities may not have local training simulators, or they share centralized training simulator located far away. The use of cloud-based simulator easily accessible to simulate the stress of normal traffic may be relevant for some.

2.6 Personnel are the most essential asset of an organization. However, during the pandemic, some aviation personnel have left the job voluntarily, due to job insecurity, or passively, due to the financial constraints of their employers. These vacancies may become a potential hazard to the recovery of the traffic as we need “people” to move the traffic. We have recently seen the chaos caused by insufficient workforce in handling bouncing-back traffic in several main airports in Europe. This could be a hint for our region, and the States are encouraged to review and re-evaluate the workforce needed to sustain the growing traffic.

2.7 Maintaining a good level of workforce as well as carrying out the management and monitoring work can be costly. Yet, the financial constraints have been the impediment for ANSPs and airlines to function as they used to be, let alone implementing new systems and technologies to fulfill the goal of regional navigation network. The financial system is a rolling cycle. The States are urged to continue their financial supports to the ANSPs and the airlines, give them some time to clear any loans or debt, until they are able to run on a good revenue cycle again. States should evaluate all measures that will ensure the greater financial sustainability and social sustainability of the industry going forward.

2.8 Apart from the basic maintenance issues, it is also crucial to pay attention to the broader environment. Safety culture of an organization is a strong complement to every initiative because it creates a positive feedback loop within the organization and in return profoundly affects how personnel execute their tasks and perceive safety. It is important to provide an environment in which all the staffs are encouraged to ask for help and to discuss issues they face without having fears of losing their job or being punished.

2.9 Positive safety culture, which looks at errors from a systemic perspective and appreciate personnel for identifying possible risks in their daily operations, is one of the key elements in promoting safety. With positive safety culture in place, staffs will reinforce the importance of their actions on safety and will be encouraged to be proactive in maintaining their level of proficiency to the best of their ability.

2.10 There are many opportunities for States, ANSPs and airlines to share lessons here to better manage aviation safety as traffic returns to normal.

3. ACTION BY THE CONFERENCE

3.1 The Conference is invited to:

- a) Encourage States/Administrations to pay special attention to the quality and quantity of aviation personnel with the ramping up of traffic post-COVID;
- b) Request States/Administrations to ensure that positive safety culture is in place for any incident/accident investigation and is valued by everyone in the organization; and
- c) Invite States/Administrations to develop more tools and guidance materials on competence training, to provide concrete support to the frontline operations staff during the post-COVID recovery period and to share their post-COVID best practices with each other.