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Building a Resilient Aviation Workforce

Attraction and retention strategies
for the airport and ground handling
ecosystem stakeholders

Airports Council International (ACI) World advances the collective interests and acts as the voice of the world's airports and the communities they serve, and promotes professional excellence in airport management and operations. The Aviation Services Association (ASA), the only internationally recognized non-profit trade association for Aviation Services Providers — including Ground Handling (passengers, luggage), Cargo Handling, Catering, Fueling, and MRO — represents the men and women responsible for ensuring the safety and comfort of billions of travelers worldwide.

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Introduction

The aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges to the aviation industry, particularly impacting stakeholders at airports. This document builds upon the Memorandum of Understanding signed between Airports Council International (ACI) and Airport Services Association (ASA) in 2021, as well as ACI's 2022 initiatives on workforce development. It responds to ACI World's General Assembly Resolution 2022/6, which emphasizes the importance of creating a robust and diverse airport workforce to meet future demands and ensure long-term sustainability and resilience within the aviation system. Additionally, it aligns with the Airports Service Association Board's vision to support airport ecosystem stakeholders in fostering attractive places of employment and meeting evolving workforce expectations.

This document is in line with the agreement between the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to promote decent work and foster a more human-centered recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in the aviation industry. It underscores the importance of effective labour and social standards for aviation personnel, as well as prioritizing their safety and health concerns through enhanced cooperation.

This paper endeavours to provide a comprehensive overview of the current landscape within the aviation industry, with a particular focus on the airport ecosystem stakeholders and their service providers, including ground handlers. By examining its existing state and the challenges confronting the industry, the objective is to enhance working conditions for employees and foster a competitive and attractive environment. This work aims to support airport operators, ground handlers, and aviation ecosystem stakeholders to ensure that aviation remains an attractive field to work in and the employment of choice for current and future workers.

Through the development of this document, ACI World and ASA have established a wide range of key recommendations, also laid out collectively in the Summary of Recommendations section towards the end of the document (Section 8), addressing the core topics of attraction and retention of workers, with a focus on communication, the work environment, employer engagement, reward and remuneration, training, and social dialogue. Given the important role States play in the aviation ecosystem, a number of recommendations have equally been formulated for consideration by governments and international organizations.

General Context

2.1 The evolution of aviation careers

Airports and their service providers, offering global hubs for travel and logistics, play a crucial role in connecting communities and driving economic opportunities. However, they face challenges such as labour shortages, limited career advancement, transportation issues, the need for specialized training, and other unique factors in the aviation industry. These obstacles make attracting and retaining talent increasingly difficult.

In recent times, the aviation industry has grappled with the challenge of sustaining its appeal as a career choice, notably due to industry unpredictability and ongoing environmental debates. External events and cost-reduction efforts contribute to this uncertainty, emphasizing the importance of long-term employment policies in preserving expertise for a sustainable aviation future.

As the aviation community rebounds and traffic grows, there's an urgent need to address workforce concerns. Challenges predating the pandemic — evolving demographics, tough work conditions, high turnover, and low pay for certain roles — have intensified. Workers at airports, essential for an airport's competitive positioning and future aspirations as an “airport of the future,” face compound challenges, underscoring the industry's need for comprehensive solutions.

2.2 The benefits of aviation

The economic and social impact of aviation is significant, influencing regions and the lives of industry workers. Aviation generates diverse job opportunities, from pilots to ground crew, contributing to lower unemployment and regional economic stability. Airports, acting as economic engines, attract businesses and investments, fostering growth and higher wages. They also serve as tourism, trade, and logistics gateways, boosting business activities and employee financial well-being.

The aviation sector not only provides job opportunities but also supports skills development and career progression, ensuring economic security for employees. Beyond economics, aviation promotes social connectivity, bringing people together from diverse backgrounds and creating vibrant communities. Recognizing these impacts is crucial for resilient airport workforces, necessitating fair compensation of workers.

In 2022, ACI published a **White Paper “The Evolution of Airport Workforce”** addressing the aviation workforce shortage during the pandemic recovery. It guides airports in assessing their unique workforce needs, offering recommendations for operators, stakeholders, and governments to build a robust and sustainable workforce. ACI Regions, through dedicated HR Forums or Committees, tackle workforce challenges regionally. Various industry initiatives and state-level efforts focus on attraction, retention, and development, reflecting a collective commitment to a thriving aviation workforce.

2.3 Primary objectives

This White Paper addresses the challenges related to attraction and retention within the ecosystem of airports and their service providers, such as ground handlers. This is crucial for enabling airport stakeholders to ensure safe, efficient, and competitive airport operations while fostering a positive community and economic relationships. It also aims to provide measures that can be taken to reduce the staff shortages which directly impact the ability to meet passenger, cargo, and employee needs.

With the intent of helping airport ecosystem stakeholders attract and retain a sufficient workforce to face current and future demand, this White Paper provides high-level guidance for all employers at the airport, such as air operators, ground handlers, concessionaires, government entities, and many others. It addresses work conditions and the work environment across the airport ecosystem and promotes practices that will make the industry more competitive and attractive, including diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, actions such as outreach programs for future aviation workers, and engagement with unions through social dialogue.

This White Paper provides guidance and general principles and aims to be non-prescriptive in its formulation, understanding that there are regional and national differences in the approaches taken to addressing workforce challenges.

Applicability

3.1 Regional consideration

Workforce challenges are not the same on a regional scale, with significant differences in the approach taken, the relationships between employers and employees, the regulatory frameworks, and managerial expectations in different regions. These differences are in part due to the social, geopolitical, economic, and regulatory frameworks that are found around the world, but can also differ due to cultural and societal reasons. In this context, it is important to understand that the content of this document should be considered and applied within specific national or regional conditions. When it comes to managing the challenges related to the workforce in aviation, one size certainly does not fit all. What is applicable in one region may be totally inapplicable in another region of the world, or potentially even have unintended consequences that would not be desirable.

Different regions of the world also have varying degrees of maturity and cultural norms that are applicable, in particular when it comes to relationships between workers and employers. These differences can be due to the maturity of the region when dealing with workforce-related topics, due to the regulatory structures in place, or due to managerial and cultural norms.

In considering the diverse regional perspectives and the cultural norms influencing worker-employer relationships, it's equally imperative to acknowledge the wide spectrum of air operators served by the ground handling and airport communities. These range from the legacy carriers, who tend to have higher overhead costs, to low-cost operators, which aim for lower operating cost structures, each introducing unique variations that merit careful consideration in building the future workforce. Given these differences, it is important to ensure that a complete understanding of the local circumstances is achieved whenever assessing the implementation of actions related to the workforce. What is applicable in one context may not be applicable in another.

3.2 Stakeholder responsibilities

The aviation ecosystem is made up of a range of public and private stakeholders who share the overall common goal of connecting people and goods around the world in a sustainable manner. When it comes to the workforce, these stakeholders all have different responsibilities for their direct employees, for those employees working on their sites or within their facilities, or for subcontractors and third parties. These responsibilities will range from direct control over certain aspects related to workers to having no direct control. These varying degrees of control and responsibilities need to be considered in the context of any strategies put in place across the airport ecosystem and need to be clearly addressed prior to initiating any actions.

In the airport ecosystem, every stakeholder is responsible for the workforce, meeting employment requirements, and complying with labour laws and regulations at all levels. This includes ensuring transparent employer-employee relationships and aligning practices with legal frameworks.

Stakeholders also bear secondary responsibilities for contractors and subcontractors, ensuring their practices adhere to established laws. This approach promotes clarity and accountability throughout the employment chain in the airport ecosystem.



The Evolving Aviation Landscape

The aviation industry is currently facing a significant capacity challenge, beyond infrastructure limitations, due to workforce availability. This challenge is projected to intensify as global passenger volumes are expected to more than double by 2042, reaching nearly 20 billion passengers travelling through airports. A strong and diverse workforce is essential to meet this soaring demand.

The shortage of skilled aviation workers can adversely affect service quality, operational efficiency, and the industry's capacity to accommodate growth. These constraints can result in economic losses for both the aviation sector and local economies, given aviation's role as an economic engine for communities and regions.

The aviation industry, a complex ecosystem with various stakeholders, relies heavily on a well-trained workforce. Prior to the pandemic, the industry supported a total of 87.7 million jobs worldwide and provided 11.3 million direct jobs linked to aviation [1] with about 60% of these positions based at airports. These roles encompass vital functions such as aviation security, ground handling, maintenance, operations, customer service, and more. Each role is crucial for the daily functioning of the global aviation system. To thrive in this competitive landscape and attract top talent, the aviation sector must position itself as an employer of choice. This means offering not only competitive compensation and benefits, but also a workplace that values diversity, equity, and inclusion, and an attractive work environment.

The industry is currently grappling with a substantial capacity challenge, not solely limited to infrastructure constraints but also exacerbated by the evolution of automation and technological advancements. The landscape is shifting, and these changes are redefining the requirements of various jobs and roles within the sector. It's important to note that while automation and technology are transforming the industry, they do not replace the fundamental need for a skilled and adaptable workforce. In fact, as aviation embraces these innovations, the human element remains indispensable.

In this era of automation and technological change, the aviation industry is compelled to take a human-centric approach. This entails recognizing that technology should complement and empower the workforce rather than substitute it. As organizations implement automation and new technologies, it is imperative to consider the human interfaces and interactions that play a crucial role in operational success, customer experience, and overall service quality.

[1] Air Transport Action Group | ATAG

The integration of technology should be guided by the principle that it enhances the capabilities of aviation professionals, augments safety measures, and streamlines processes, all while valuing the invaluable role of human expertise. By prioritizing a human-centric approach and maintaining a delicate equilibrium between technological advancements and human capabilities, the aviation industry can set itself apart as an employer of choice.

To become an employer of choice, actions such as investing in training and upskilling programs to equip the workforce with the necessary skills and competencies to meet future challenges are necessary. Employers that focus on creating an inclusive culture that welcomes talent from diverse backgrounds, ensuring that all employees feel valued, safe, and empowered to contribute their best, tend to be more attractive.

Furthermore, these forward-thinking organizations prioritize work-life balance, offer clear career advancement paths, and communicate their commitment to sustainability and innovation. By doing so, they can differentiate themselves from other sectors and attract the talent needed to sustain growth. The aviation industry's ability to attract and retain talent is critical for its sustainability and continued growth. To achieve this, it must not only address workforce challenges but also strive to become an employer of choice that appeals to a diverse and dynamic workforce.

International Frameworks

Labour is regulated internationally through a range of frameworks that are applicable to States that ratify the conventions, those treaties and protocols established by the United Nations agencies addressing various aspects of labour. In the context of aviation, certain aspects related to labour are regulated by the conventions of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), such as flight crew duty and rest times, or air traffic controller duty times; however, many aspects are regulated by the frameworks of the International Labour Organization (ILO).^[2]

5.1 The International Labour Organization: Decent Work



Decent Work has emerged as a crucial component of the United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, encapsulated in Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all.

This goal aims to elevate economic productivity by prioritizing high-value-added and labour-intensive sectors, ensuring full and productive employment, and fostering safe and secure working environments that protect labour rights.

The ILO, the specialized agency of the United Nations that addresses and develops labour regulation on a global scale, provides a tailored approach through numerous Decent Work strategies to ensure the sector's resilience and sustainability. The main efforts include promoting social dialogue, improving working conditions, and analysis of employment relationships and their impact on decent work.

The ILO defines “Decent Work” as employment that is productive, respects workers’ rights, provides fair income, offers social protection, ensures job security, and promotes safe and healthy working conditions. It encompasses principles such as equal opportunities, work-life balance, and social dialogue.

In the context of the aviation industry, the notions enshrined in the concept of Decent Work are central for the attraction and retention of aviation workers. These principles are applicable in varying ways based on the regional and local frameworks, but also with respect to the individual employers who must consider their applicability overall.

- **Employee well-being:** Decent Work principles ensure that aviation workers are treated fairly, have access to essential services, and are protected from workplace hazards. This promotes their overall well-being and job satisfaction.

^[1] Both the ILO and ICAO are specialized agencies of the United Nations addressing their specific domains. The ILO has 187 Member States and the ICAO has 193 Member States (at the time of writing).

- **Job security:** The aviation industry can be subject to economic fluctuations and external shocks, such as pandemics. Providing job security within the principles of decent work can help retain skilled employees during challenging times.
- **Competitive positioning:** Airlines, airports, and other employers at the airport that prioritize Decent Work principles create a positive reputation, making them more attractive to job seekers. They are also better positioned to attract and retain top talent.
- **Safety and productivity:** Ensuring safe and healthy working conditions is not only a legal and ethical responsibility but is also essential for maintaining a skilled and productive workforce. Workers who feel safe are more likely to perform well.
- **Workforce diversity and inclusion:** Decent Work principles emphasize equal opportunities, which can help diversify the aviation workforce. Diverse teams bring varied perspectives and can lead to improved problem-solving and innovation.
- **Retention and loyalty:** Employees in aviation are more likely to stay with an employer that provides Decent Work conditions. Reduced turnover rates translate to cost savings associated with recruitment and training.
- **Social dialogue:** Encouraging open communication and collaboration between employers and workers can lead to constructive solutions for workplace issues. This can boost employee morale and loyalty.
- **Sustainable growth:** A workforce that is content, fairly compensated, and secure in their jobs is more likely to contribute to an organization's long-term success and growth.

As for all sectors, the ILO's concept of Decent Work, built into international labour regulation, is essential for the aviation industry as it ensures that aviation workers are treated fairly, work in safe conditions, and have opportunities for personal and career development. This, in turn, enhances their job satisfaction, loyalty, and overall well-being, making the aviation industry more attractive to prospective employees and facilitating the retention of skilled workers.

5.2 The International Civil Aviation Organization



The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) collaborates closely with the ILO to ensure international labour standards are upheld within the aviation industry, guaranteeing safe and equitable working conditions for aviation personnel, and enhancing the overall safety and sustainability of global civil aviation.

In 2022, ILO and ICAO solidified their commitment to this cooperative effort through a Memorandum of Understanding. This partnership underscores the shared recognition of the significance of human factors in aviation safety, with a focus on labour practices and working conditions that impact the well-being of aviation workers. ILO's dedication to skills development and equitable employment practices aligns seamlessly with the objectives of ICAO, which strives to foster a skilled and competent aviation workforce.

The Next Generation of Aviation Professionals (NGAP), initiated by ICAO in 2009, is crucial for ensuring an ample supply of qualified aviation professionals to operate the future air transport system. With a significant portion of the current workforce nearing retirement, NGAP addresses challenges in affordable aviation education and training. It promotes harmonized competencies, raises awareness about diverse aviation careers, and involves multiple stakeholders. NGAP collaborates with education and labour partners globally to cultivate a competent workforce for a safe and sustainable air transportation system.



5.3 Recommendations for States

In many cases, workforce development can be supported by actions taken at a State level to support industry. These actions can range from funding mechanisms, to technical cooperation, to engagement across departments and ministries, to the establishment of policies and protocols that will drive change within a State or a region. Many of these actions will also involve multilateral collaboration across a range of actors or through global State organizations, such as the ILO or ICAO.

With the intention of providing support to industry and striving to meet the needs of the future workforce, the following State-level actions have been identified as courses of action that can be taken either individually or through cooperative mechanisms. These actions should be considered within the national legislative context and involve the application of regional norms and approaches taken to addressing workforce-related topics. The ACI World White Paper The Evolution of the Airport Workforce (2022) contains many recommendations for States. The following recommendations are taking a higher level approach to the engagement needed between States and industry as well as on a multi-national level.

Key recommendations for States

- Support the ICAO Next Generation of Aviation Professionals (NGAP) initiative and other industry or State-level efforts to attract and retain aviation workers.
- Collaborate with industry to create and develop outreach programs to increase the communication channels around the jobs available within the aviation industry.
- Promote and where applicable create policies to make the industry more competitive and attractive while removing barriers to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).
- Collaborate with industry and global entities to increase awareness of the benefits of aviation among the general public, highlighting its significance and contributions to global connectivity and economic development.
- Engage with unions and labour organizations through social dialogue.
- Encourage Education Ministries or other appropriate governmental bodies to foster the development of aviation-related education schemes.

Attraction and Retention Strategies

A better understanding of the challenges and the needs of an airport's employees is essential for attracting and retaining new aviation workers. The skilled workforce needed by the aviation industry provides an excellent opportunity to showcase the industry to the next generation of workers and demonstrate how exciting it can be to enter a fast-changing industry, driven by technological advancements, automation, and digitalization of processes. These changes require continuous training and adaptation, which can serve as a stepping stone to reskill the workforce, providing mobility and career development opportunities within the industry. Due to the high competitiveness of other industries, it is essential that the airport workforce feels heard, ensuring a good work-life balance, competitive compensation, and a safe and inclusive environment.

The **ACI World White Paper The Evolution of the Airport Workforce: Turning Challenges into Opportunities (2022)** and the work done by the various ACI Regions address some of the fundamental attraction and retention strategies that can be applied across the industry. These strategies, as well as those contained in this document, can be applied by industry stakeholders to support the sustainable development of the workforce.

As a general principle, the recommendations made in this section of the document are applicable to most stakeholders established at airports, including ground handling service providers. Their individual or collective applicability to an airport ecosystem partner should be considered in the context of the explanation provided in Section 3 above.

6.1 Self-assessment

As a first step, it is important for organizations to conduct an assessment of their individual situation so as to better understand the causes and leading factors that are challenging the attraction and retention of employees.

This assessment should encompass various key areas, including employee well-being, skills development, compensation packages, and overall working conditions. By conducting such assessments, employers can gain invaluable insights into their workforce dynamics and identify areas that work well, as well as those that require attention and improvement. These evaluations will serve as a foundational step in devising effective strategies to address the pressing issues of staff and skills shortages. It will allow organizations to tailor their attraction and retention initiatives to the specific needs of their workforce, ensuring a more targeted and impactful approach.

In essence, the act of self-assessment is not just a one-time activity but a continuous process that enables employers to adapt, evolve, and maintain a resilient workforce in the face of ever-changing industry dynamics. Once the assessment is completed, it's essential to continue the conversation. Ongoing dialogue allows organizations to refine strategies, implement necessary changes, and ensure that workforce initiatives remain aligned with evolving needs.

By understanding the challenges related to workforce attraction, the industry can retain its current workforce by improving employee well-being, implementing policies for mobility, offering competitive compensation packages, and developing training programs to upskill its workforce due to the rapidly changing nature of the industry.

6.2 Communication and promotion of aviation

To rekindle interest in the aviation industry, effective communication plays a pivotal role. When people are asked about aviation, they often think of pilots, flight attendants, and air traffic controllers. However, there are numerous other career opportunities within this industry. The question is, does the industry adequately promote these opportunities and roles?

Effective communication should commence early, with efforts to showcase the industry's potential. It can also take place within airports, targeting passengers as they travel, raising awareness about the aviation sector among the public, and inspiring potential candidates of all ages. By implementing successful communication strategies, awareness is created, and a desire is instilled in the population to explore the benefits and growth prospects that aviation offers.

The existing workforce also have a role to play in promoting it. They can share their experiences, explaining to the world the beauty of our industry in enhancing global connectivity and travel possibilities. Effective storytelling can capture the essence of aviation careers, allowing the public to relate to someone's work life and inspiring potential candidates.

In this rapidly evolving industry with unprecedented challenges, the upcoming years provide a unique opportunity to generate excitement about automation, new technologies, and career development to attract and retain future workforce. Given these considerations, it is essential to rethink how job descriptions are crafted to be more inclusive. The way that the industry communicates about the available jobs within the sector needs to be revamped, ensuring a smoother flow of information that is easily accessible to everyone. This is crucial for sparking curiosity and enabling individuals to see themselves possessing the necessary skills for these roles.

To address the broader theme of education, the aviation industry should actively engage with educational institutions and promote aviation-related programs and vocational training.

By collaborating with educational institutions and building vocational programs that focus on aviation, messaging to the younger generation is facilitated, ensuring that they are exposed to the possibilities and career prospects within the industry.

Effective communication strategies must also include reaching out to the next generation through appropriate channels and methodologies. Connecting with young people through the digital and social platforms they engage with is necessary to foster their interest in aviation careers. In many cases, the traditional communication channels are not used by this generation.

Self-promotion of the industry is vital. Creating ambassadors who can advocate for the sector, utilizing digital platforms for awareness-building, and promoting relevant information across platforms for the exchange of experiences can enhance the industry's branding and visibility.

In summary, effective communication, engagement with educational institutions, self-promotion, and utilizing digital platforms are all integral to nurturing interest in the aviation industry and ensuring its sustained growth.

Key recommendations

- **Diverse audience engagement:** Promote aviation careers to a diverse range of individuals, showcasing the industry's inclusivity and varied opportunities.
- **Compelling storytelling:** Utilize effective storytelling to capture the essence of aviation careers, making them relatable and inspiring to potential candidates.
- **Enhanced industry awareness:** Increase awareness about the aviation sector among the general public, highlighting its significance and contributions to global connectivity.
- **Educational collaboration:** Engage with educational institutions, schools, and universities to raise aviation awareness and showcase industry opportunities.
- **Effective communication strategies:** Develop improved communication strategies to convey the benefits and growth prospects of aviation professions more effectively.
- **Optimized job information:** Streamline the communication of job roles and available opportunities within the aviation industry, making information easily accessible to interested individuals. Stop using acronyms and make sure it is understandable for everybody.

6.3 Work environment

6.3.1 Access

To build a resilient airport workforce for the future and successfully attract and retain talent, fostering an exceptional work environment is paramount. The geographical location of airports can sometimes deter potential workers. Poor transportation accessibility and challenging shift schedules can make commuting to work difficult, resulting in decreased engagement.

Creating an improved work environment hinges on two critical factors: accessibility of the workplace and provisions for employee well-being. This involves ensuring easy access to the airport for all stakeholder employees. Recognizing the reality of shift work in 24/7 operations and the diversity of airport locations, there may be challenges when designing work schedules. It is essential to acknowledge the broader issues related to accommodating overnight shifts, including required rest periods, and ensure employee well-being.

Providing safe and reliable transportation for workers at all hours is not an easy goal to achieve. In many cases, ground transportation is not necessarily the responsibility of the airport and it is often the local, state, or federal government that has the authority and funding for mass transit to airports. Airport operators and other airport stakeholders, such as air operators or ground handling service providers, can engage with these entities to identify challenges aviation workers have getting to their jobs and encourage public transport entities to help facilitate transport to the airport, especially considering that in many cases the transportation network will benefit from the passengers, whether airport workers or other users. When transportation is limited, many airports offer shuttle rides, ride-sharing options, or shuttle busses for employees of various stakeholders.

6.3.2 Facilities

Once these foundational criteria are met, it becomes essential to provide appropriate hospitality facilities. This goes beyond merely suggesting the use of public restaurants, as these may not always be affordable or convenient for workers. To address this concern, establishing a staff canteen that is open to all employees and offers affordable options can be of benefit. Negotiating reduced pricing in public food outlets can be another option used to support aviation workers. Providing well-maintained amenities, including an accessible and reasonably priced on-site dining area, fosters a sense of community engagement and collaboration. While the responsibility for these facilities often lies with the employer, many airport operators offer centralized facilities accessible to all stakeholders.

Historically, the aviation industry has been criticized for a lack of gender diversity. However, the next generations of workers prioritize environments and facilities that actively promote diversity and inclusion, where all employees feel valued and respected. This is the case for restrooms that need to reflect the gender diversity found at an airport and need to be accessible by all in an equal manner. To accommodate the work-life balance needs of employees, employers can consider providing services such as sports and gym facilities or childcare facilities, supporting those with families, and contributing to a more balanced work-life equation. By actively cultivating inclusivity and recognizing the preferences of the upcoming workforce, the aviation industry can create a workplace that not only attracts but also retains talent.

Key recommendations

- Inclusive work environments: Create environments that promote diversity and inclusion, ensuring all employees feel valued and respected.
- Appropriate facilities: Provide adequate and well-maintained facilities for employees, ensuring their comfort and productivity.
- Accessible transportation: Facilitate easy access to the airport for employees by offering reliable transportation options, especially for those working night shifts, by designing work schedules and facilities to accommodate shift workers, ensuring their convenience and well-being.
- Childcare services: Offer accessible childcare services to support employees with families, contributing to a balanced work-life equation.
- Other services and facilities: Offer other facilities such as gyms or other sports facilities to promote work-life balance and employee wellness.



6.4 Employer engagement

6.4.1 Diversity, equity and inclusion

One prevalent aspect that cannot be overlooked is the urgent need for an inclusive work environment. The future workforce seeks to work in environments where everybody feels valued, safe, and welcomed, with barrier-free employment opportunities open to all, regardless of background. This ensures a level playing field for all individuals.

Diversifying the talent pool aims to improve decision-making by considering a wider range of perspectives and potential consequences in business. It can also enhance overall employee engagement, making employees more engaged in their work. Additionally, it aids in problem-solving when facing complex issues, as diversity allows organizations to approach problem-solving from various angles.

Furthermore, diversity increases the adaptability of the workforce in a rapidly changing industry, enabling organizations to adapt more quickly. When facing difficulties in attracting and retaining talent, considering a wider talent pool, including more diversity, will help the industry tap into a broader range of potential candidates.

By considering diversity as a key factor in engagement, the industry can improve its overall reputation and attractiveness. To ensure better inclusivity at all levels, there's a need to promote inclusive leadership. This means fostering an environment where diverse perspectives contribute to decision-making. Leadership is also demonstrated through the creation of robust policies and regulations that embed DEI principles, fostering an inclusive working culture.

Key recommendations

- Barrier-free employment: Ensure equal opportunities for all, but recognize essential barriers, particularly related to security backgrounds and convictions. This maintains necessary safeguards while fostering inclusivity in the hiring process.
- Inclusive leadership: Promote diverse leadership at all levels, fostering an environment where various perspectives contribute to decision-making.
- Robust policies and regulations: Develop comprehensive policies and practices that embed DEI principles, fostering an inclusive working culture.
- Talent pool diversification: Create strategies to diversify the talent pool, broadening the range of recruitment sources for a more inclusive workforce.
- Engaged organizational culture: Cultivate an organizational culture that promotes engagement, establishing a framework encouraging meaningful interactions and collaboration among employees.

6.4.2 Employee opportunity

Working in an industry that connects people and cultures while ensuring the safety and efficiency of everyone's travel and trade goes beyond promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). It encompasses employee wellness, a crucial aspect in retaining our workforce and shaping the future of our airports.

Promoting employee wellness means prioritizing flexibility and work-life balance by implementing adaptable work arrangements where possible. These arrangements empower employees to effectively balance their professional and personal commitments, addressing the new challenges posed by COVID-19 and meeting employee expectations. Such flexibility is essential for both attracting and retaining our staff.

The global connectivity that the aviation industry offers should not be limited to our passengers alone. The opportunity to work alongside individuals from all corners of the world is an invaluable asset that should be harnessed. By fostering opportunities for employees to explore various roles and departments, we enable career growth and skill development across the organization. This, in turn, enhances employee engagement and commitment.

Cultivating a work environment that encourages active participation, open communication, collaboration, and a strong sense of belonging is pivotal. It not only promotes DEI but also contributes to a vibrant and motivated workforce poised for success.

Key recommendations

- Workforce mobility: Foster opportunities for employees to explore various roles and departments, enabling career growth and skill development across the organization.
- Employee participation: Cultivate a work environment that encourages active participation, open communication, and collaboration, promoting a sense of belonging and purpose with employees.
- Flexibility and work-life balance: Implement flexible work arrangements that empower employees to balance their professional and personal commitments effectively.

6.4.3 Employee engagement

In the dynamic airport environment, fostering employee engagement is paramount to ensure a vibrant and motivated workforce. This begins with establishing clear and transparent communication channels at the leadership level. Leaders must actively engage with employees, creating a sense of proximity and openness. When leaders communicate openly and honestly, employees feel valued and informed, which boosts their engagement and trust in the organization.

Simultaneously, it is crucial to cultivate an organizational culture that consistently promotes engagement as a core value. This involves establishing a framework that encourages meaningful interactions, collaboration, and shared goals among employees. When the organizational culture prioritizes engagement, employees are more likely to feel connected, motivated, and invested in their work.

Implementing effective monitoring programs to track employee satisfaction and promptly address concerns is essential. This not only benefits decision-making at leadership levels but also ensures the overall satisfaction of our employees, contributing to a more motivated and committed workforce.

By focusing on these principles, aviation stakeholders can create a workplace where employees are not only productive but also enthusiastic contributors to the aviation industry. This, in turn, enhances the overall passenger experience and the airport's reputation as a hub of excellence.

Key recommendations

- Effective leadership communication: Establish clear and transparent communication channels from the leadership level, fostering proximity between leaders and employees.
- Organizational culture of engagement: Cultivate an organizational culture that promotes engagement, establishing a framework that encourages meaningful interactions and collaboration and communication among employees.
- Structured monitoring: Implement effective monitoring programs to track employee satisfaction and address concerns promptly.
- Just culture: Foster the development of a culture where employees can trust employers will take appropriate and measured action to address safety concerns or other events that are voluntarily reported. This will enhance communication and open reporting of relevant issues.

6.5 Reward and remuneration

In the pursuit of building a resilient airport workforce for the future, ensuring competitive reward and remuneration for all employees should be a consideration of each stakeholder in regards to its direct employees. A competitive wage structure and equitable compensation practices are crucial not only for attracting and retaining talent but also for ensuring the long-term viability of the industry. It is essential to consider the implications of equitable reward systems on staff turnover, productivity, and economic development, particularly in emerging markets and developing countries, to ensure equity.

The aviation industry thrives when it can offer competitive wage structures that reflect the skills and responsibilities of its workforce. The race to the bottom in terms of pricing, while tempting for cost-cutting measures, can have detrimental consequences. Considering value-based procurement schemes, focused not just on price but also on the value and quality of the services procured, can support a more balanced approach to competition within markets.

High staff turnover is a persistent challenge within the sector, and it comes with significant costs, not only in terms of recruitment and training but also in lost productivity and operational disruptions. Fair remuneration practices are an effective way to reduce staff turnover and increase employee engagement and satisfaction. Employees who are compensated fairly are more likely to stay with their employers, enhancing workforce stability and continuity.

Equitable reward systems are not only about attracting and retaining talent but also about optimizing employee performance and productivity. When workers are compensated fairly, they tend to be more motivated, engaged, and productive. This translates to higher service quality, better operational efficiency, and a more competitive aviation industry overall.

Fair compensation holds the power to uplift workers out of working poverty, particularly in emerging markets and developing countries. The broader economic benefits of ensuring that aviation workers are economically sound are multifaceted. It results in increased consumer spending, which stimulates further demand for goods and services, thus driving economic growth and creating more opportunities for prosperity. Moreover, elevating workers out of working poverty aligns with social and corporate responsibility objectives, contributing to the sustainable development of communities and regions.

Ensuring competitive reward and remuneration within the industry is not solely an issue of cost but a social sustainability imperative. It is pivotal for creating a resilient airport workforce that can navigate the challenges of the future, sustain industry growth, and drive economic development.

Key recommendations

- **Equitable compensation:** Employers should seek to ensure that compensation for their employees aligns with the skills and responsibilities of their work. Competitive wages and equitable benefits are needed to attract and retain talent, ensuring the long-term viability of the aviation industry.
- **Fair remuneration:** Organizations should endeavour to prevent the underpayment of their employees, which can lead to job dissatisfaction, high turnover, and increased costs for training and potentially disrupted operations. By ensuring that employees are compensated fairly, the industry can enhance workforce stability and operational continuity.
- **Economic uplift and social responsibility:** Fair compensation practices of their employees by individual organizations promote the economic uplift of workers, especially in emerging markets and developing countries. This can be incorporated into broader aviation strategies to stimulate economic growth, drive consumer demand, and contribute to sustainable community development.

6.6 Training

Maintaining a well-trained and skilled staff is paramount for ensuring the safety and efficiency of operations at an airport. However, training also holds significant potential for employees' growth and opportunities. It centres on employee development by prioritizing initiatives aimed at enhancing skills, knowledge, and overall career prospects through continuous learning and development.

All aviation roles require some degree of training. Some are highly skilled roles requiring months or years of training, while others will require lesser levels with simply an induction training for the basic principles of safety and security at an airport and then some job-specific training. Nonetheless, whether it is for highly qualified roles or those needing lesser levels of qualification, recognition of previous training and qualifications is fundamental to promoting mobility in the workforce. However, it is important to highlight that even a "basic" level of training can impact both flight safety and service levels, influencing overall customer experience.

In some regions, the notion of a training passport, similar to the licensing schemes established for certain roles in aviation such as pilots or air traffic controllers, is being worked on by various organizations seeking to achieve recognition of basic and recurrent training for certain roles and skills, in particular in ground handling.

The recognition of these skills between one employer and another will equally facilitate the mobility of workforce and reduce the time needed for a new employee to be considered proficient and qualified in a function, in turn reducing the time needed for an employee to be active in operations. Consideration of airside access and background checks need to be taken, as well as the recognition of the qualification by the contract holder when possible. Furthermore, involving the national or regional civil aviation authorities in these discussions is essential so as to ensure an appropriate framework is established to address any operational, safety, or security concerns.

Facilitating cross-community mobility, when practicable within the organizational or legislative context, is a key strategy that encourages employees to explore diverse roles and departments within the aviation ecosystem, both nationally and globally. This mobility not only enables our workforce to create connections with fellow employees from various backgrounds but also fosters a sense of belonging. Providing mobility opportunities allows employees to discover new roles and gain a deeper understanding of different job aspects and their interconnectedness. This, in turn, boosts employee engagement and empowers them with opportunities for growth and career progression.

Succession planning is an equally important program that should be in place to ensure a pipeline of talent and leadership continuity, while well-defined career pathways offer employees opportunities for growth and advancement. All these aspects, collectively considered, enable airports to align their workforce with the strategic needs of the business, ensuring long-term success and competitiveness.

Key recommendations

- Cross-community mobility: Where applicable and possible, foster mobility across the airport community, enabling employees to explore diverse roles and departments.
- Clear career pathways: Establish well-defined career pathways, empowering employees with growth opportunities and progression.
- Focused employee development: All employers should be encouraged to prioritize employee development initiatives to enhance skills, knowledge, and overall career prospects.
- Succession planning: Implement programs that allow for the identification of rising stars or key performers, allowing them to be moved into positions where they will thrive and be capable of taking over from more senior staff when they move on.

6.7 Social dialogue

Effective social dialogue is supported by open communication, negotiation, and collaboration among employers, employees, and labour unions with the common aim to foster harmonious relationships and address collective concerns within the airport community. Individual employers are responsible for the engagement in dialogue with their labour union representatives where appropriate and within the scope of their competence.

Social dialogue at the workplace, enterprise, national, regional, and international levels should be encouraged in order to contribute to the development of a resilient aviation industry. Changes and evolutions in aviation activities need to be discussed through meaningful, transparent, results-oriented, and productive social dialogue, reflecting existing, and anticipated conditions. The primary intent is to seek collaboration in engagement between employers and employees through such practices.



Conclusion

The aviation sector plays a crucial role in providing job opportunities to communities, supporting career advancement, and contributing to regional economic development and stability. As the industry continues to evolve, there is a pressing need for workforce development under optimal conditions to ensure the safety, efficiency, and competitiveness of airport operations. Additionally, cultivating a positive community atmosphere is paramount for attracting and retaining a skilled workforce capable of meeting the anticipated future demand in passenger traffic.

The insights and recommendations outlined in this White Paper are aimed at promoting a deeper understanding of the industry's current state, taking into account regional disparities, and addressing the various challenges faced by aviation workers. Through collaborative efforts and strategic initiatives, the aspiration is to create a more resilient and adaptable aviation ecosystem that can thrive in the face of evolving demands.

Summary of Recommendations

The following table contains all the recommendations developed through the document in a single consolidated section, allowing for a rapid overview of the proposed actions. These need to be considered given the context of the individual sections they are associated with, as well as their applicability to the local context.

Key recommendations for States



- Support the ICAO Next Generation of Aviation Professionals (NGAP) initiative and other industry or State-level efforts to attract and retain aviation workers.
- Collaborate with industry to create and develop outreach programs to increase the communication channels around the jobs available within the aviation industry.
- Promote and where applicable create policies to make the industry more competitive and attractive while removing barriers to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).
- Collaborate with industry and global entities to increase awareness of the benefits of aviation among the general public, highlighting its significance and contributions to global connectivity and economic development.
- Engage with unions and labour organizations through social dialogue.
- Encourage Education Ministries or other appropriate governmental bodies to foster the development of aviation-related education schemes.

Communication and promotion of aviation

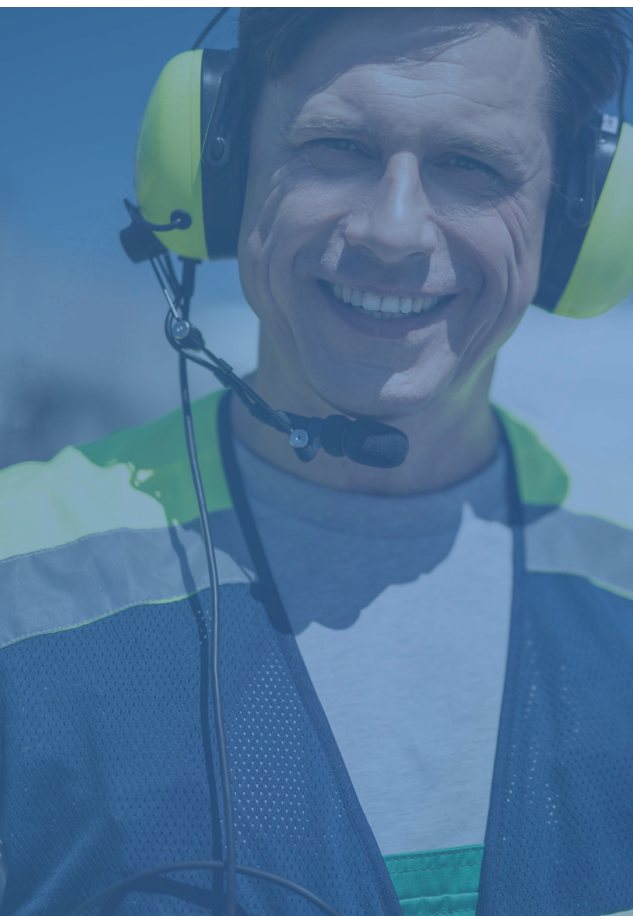
Key recommendations



- Diverse audience engagement: Promote aviation careers to a diverse range of individuals, showcasing the industry's inclusivity and varied opportunities.
- Compelling storytelling: Utilize effective storytelling to capture the essence of aviation careers, making them relatable and inspiring to potential candidates.
- Enhanced industry awareness: Increase awareness about the aviation sector among the general public, highlighting its significance and contributions to global connectivity.
- Educational collaboration: Engage with educational institutions, schools, and universities to raise aviation awareness and showcase industry opportunities.
- Effective communication strategies: Develop improved communication strategies to convey the benefits and growth prospects of aviation professions more effectively.
- Optimized job information: Streamline the communication of job roles and available opportunities within the aviation industry, making information easily accessible to interested individuals. Stop using acronyms and make sure it is understandable for everybody.

Work environment

Key recommendations



- Inclusive work environments: Create environments that promote diversity and inclusion, ensuring all employees feel valued and respected.
- Appropriate facilities: Provide adequate and well-maintained facilities for employees, ensuring their comfort and productivity.
- Accessible transportation: Facilitate easy access to the airport for employees by offering reliable transportation options, especially for those working night shifts, by designing work schedules and facilities to accommodate shift workers, ensuring their convenience and well-being.
- Childcare services: Offer accessible childcare services to support employees with families, contributing to a balanced work-life equation.
- Other services and facilities: Offer other facilities such as gyms or other sports facilities to promote work-life balance and employee wellness.

Employer engagement

Key recommendations

- **Barrier-free employment:** Ensure equal opportunities for all, but recognize essential barriers, particularly related to security backgrounds and convictions. This maintains necessary safeguards while fostering inclusivity in the hiring process.
- **Inclusive leadership:** Promote diverse leadership at all levels, fostering an environment where various perspectives contribute to decision-making.
- **Robust policies and regulations:** Develop comprehensive policies and practices that embed DEI principles, fostering an inclusive working culture.
- **Talent pool diversification:** Create strategies to diversify the talent pool, broadening the range of recruitment sources for a more inclusive workforce.
- **Engaged organizational culture:** Cultivate an organizational culture that promotes engagement, establishing a framework encouraging meaningful interactions and collaboration among employees.



Employee opportunity

Key recommendations

- **Workforce mobility:** Foster opportunities for employees to explore various roles and departments, enabling career growth and skill development across the organization.
- **Employee participation:** Cultivate a work environment that encourages active participation, open communication, and collaboration, promoting a sense of belonging and purpose with employees.
- **Flexibility and work-life balance:** Implement flexible work arrangements that empower employees to balance their professional and personal commitments effectively.

Reward and remuneration

Key recommendations



- **Equitable compensation:** Employers should seek to ensure that compensation for their employees aligns with the skills and responsibilities of their work. Competitive wages and equitable benefits are needed to attract and retain talent, ensuring the long-term viability of the aviation industry.
- **Fair remuneration:** Organizations should endeavour to prevent the underpayment of their employees, which can lead to job dissatisfaction, high turnover, and increased costs for training and potentially disrupted operations. By ensuring that employees are compensated fairly, the industry can enhance workforce stability and operational continuity.
- **Economic uplift and social responsibility:** Fair compensation practices of their employees by individual organizations promote the economic uplift of workers, especially in emerging markets and developing countries. This can be incorporated into broader aviation strategies to stimulate economic growth, drive consumer demand, and contribute to sustainable community development.

Training

Key recommendations

- **Cross-community mobility:** Where applicable and possible, foster mobility across the airport community, enabling employees to explore diverse roles and departments.
- **Clear career pathways:** Establish well-defined career pathways, empowering employees with growth opportunities and progression.
- **Focused employee development:** All employers should be encouraged to prioritize employee development initiatives to enhance skills, knowledge, and overall career prospects.
- **Succession planning:** Implement programs that allow for the identification of rising stars or key performers, allowing them to be moved into positions where they will thrive and be capable of taking over from more senior staff when they move on.

Further reading

- **Air Transport Action Group | ATAG**
- **ACI North America 2023 DEI Report (airportscouncil.org)**
- **Goal 8 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs (un.org)**
- **Next Generation of Aviation Professionals (NGAP) (icao.int)**
- **ACI White Paper on the Evolution of the Airport Workforce (aci.aero)**
- **ILO: New recommendations call for human-centered approach in the aviation sector (ilo.org)**



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