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Securing the Future of Air Traffic Management Through a Collaborative Approach to the Global ATCO Shortage

Presented by Emirates Aviation Association (EAA)

SUMMARY

This paper addresses the global shortage of qualified air traffic controllers, a growing challenge that threatens the safety, efficiency, and sustainability of international air transport. It proposes collaborative and strategic actions among stakeholders, including regulatory bodies, service providers, and industry partners, to enhance recruitment, training, working conditions, and technology integration in air traffic management. The paper calls for a unified and sustained global response to this issue through harmonized policies, data sharing, innovation, and continuous review.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The safe and efficient movement of aircraft relies heavily on the work of qualified air traffic controllers (ATCOs). However, the aviation industry is facing an increasing shortage of these professionals due to factors such as retirements, limited training capacity, and growing air traffic demands. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers' Associations (IFATCA) recognize the urgency of this issue and emphasize the need for joint efforts to mitigate its impact. This paper outlines strategic areas for collaborative action to ensure a resilient and sustainable air traffic management system.

2. DISCUSSION

- 2.1. Enhanced Recruitment and Training:
 - Promotion of ATC Careers: Increase public awareness about ATC as a vital and rewarding profession through outreach campaigns.
 - Competency-Based Training: Develop and adopt training programs aligned with industry needs and technological developments.
 - Innovative Training Tools: Utilize simulation and digital platforms to streamline and improve the training process.
 - Inclusive Access: Reduce entry barriers and promote equal access to training for diverse populations.

- 2.2. Improved Working Conditions and Retention:
- Fair Compensation and Benefits: Advocate for appropriate remuneration and working conditions tailored to local contexts.
 - Well-being and Support: Foster supportive environments that prioritize mental health and work-life balance.
 - Fatigue and Stress Management: Implement effective shift planning and workload distribution practices.
 - Career Development: Establish clear pathways for advancement to enhance job satisfaction and retention.
- 2.3. Technological Innovation and Automation:
- Integration of New Technologies: Adopt automation and advanced systems to increase capacity and reduce controller workload.
 - Controller Involvement: Engage ATCOs in the early phases of technology design and deployment.
 - Training for Innovation: Provide targeted training for new tools and systems to ensure smooth adoption.
 - Knowledge Exchange: Facilitate international sharing of best practices in technological implementation.
- 2.4. Data Sharing and Collaboration:
- Global Data Exchange: Encourage the sharing of anonymized data on training, workforce planning, and retention.
 - Stakeholder Platforms: Create forums for continuous dialogue and coordination among all aviation stakeholders.
 - Support for R&D: Promote research focused on addressing root causes and identifying effective interventions.
- 2.5. Global Harmonization:
- Standardization of Practices: Support the alignment of ATC standards, procedures, and training requirements.
 - Guidelines and Recommendations: Contribute to the creation of ICAO-compliant frameworks for ATC human resources.
 - Capacity Building: Assist States in developing or improving training and assessment programs.
- 2.6. Regular Review and Evaluation:
- Performance Monitoring: Establish mechanisms for periodic assessment of implemented strategies.
 - Dynamic Adaptation: Revise and update approaches to reflect emerging trends and changing needs.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1. The global shortage of air traffic controllers presents a significant risk to the safety, stability, and growth of the aviation sector. Addressing this complex issue requires a coordinated and sustained effort from all stakeholders. By enhancing recruitment strategies, modernizing training, improving working conditions, embracing innovation, and fostering international collaboration, the aviation community can build a resilient and future-ready ATC workforce.
- 3.2. This paper reaffirms the shared responsibility and collective capability of regulators, service providers, and professional organizations to ensure that the skies remain safe and efficiently managed. Proactive and collaborative measures taken today will lay the foundation for a stronger, more sustainable air traffic management system tomorrow.

4. DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1. It is recommended that IFATCA urge uniting unite in addressing the global ATCO shortage. Collective action is essential to safeguarding the integrity and sustainability of air traffic management systems worldwide.

5. References

- 5.1. International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) – Global Air Navigation Plan
- 5.2. IFATCA – Policy Statements and Working Papers
- 5.3. ICAO Next Generation Aviation Professionals (NGAP) Initiative
- 5.4. Eurocontrol – Challenges in ATM Human Resources
- 5.5. IFATCA Think Papers on Staffing and Automation in ATM
- 5.6. ICAO Manual on Air Traffic Controller Competency-based Training

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