
ACI ADVISORY BULLETIN

Safety and security awareness and monitoring in the context of aviation worker shortages

Montreal, 22 June 2022 – The sudden variations in traffic generated by the lifting of measures and rapid recovery of demand have generated an unprecedented situation in terms of manpower for many airport operators. Concerns have been raised about the shortage of workers and high turnover rates in several parts of the world. These staff shortages are often causing disruptions to aircraft operations, a degraded passenger experience due to significant delays and flight cancellations, and in some cases, limitations to airport capacity. The scarcity of labor also generates economic challenges to airports, and other aviation stakeholders, at a time when many are still struggling to recover from the impact caused by the pandemic.

This Advisory Bulletin for ACI Members seeks to provide background information and short-term considerations to identify and mitigate potential safety and/or security issues caused by staff shortages and higher turnover rates. ACI, through the Task Force on Airport Workforce is currently working on the development of a White Paper seeking to address medium- and long-term solutions to the evolving aviation workforce situation.

Background

The aviation ecosystem is strongly reliant on the availability of a large workforce of well-trained and competent professionals in adequate numbers to cater to the diverse roles found across the sector. This diverse workforce ensures the delivery of a multitude of services required to make the aviation system function on a day-to-day basis across all regions of the world. The availability of this workforce is critical to ensuring that the now increasing demand in aircraft movements can be accommodated in a safe, secure, and efficient manner.

A large number of workers left the industry during the COVID-19 pandemic, either being made redundant, put-on long-term furlough, or asked to take early retirement schemes. In parallel, the so-called “Great Resignation,” which is resulting in many workers changing jobs and industries, is significantly decreasing the available number of aviation workers needed to meet the increasing demand in passenger, cargo, and aircraft movements. This is compounded by general demographic changes, a perceived loss of attractiveness of

the aviation industry, and other megatrends that began before the pandemic. The high turnover rates are also creating a knowledge gap through the loss of experienced personnel.

Short-term actions to be considered by airport operators

On a global level, there are no immediate significant safety or security concerns related to the shortage of aviation workers that have been reported or identified. However, to mitigate the negative impacts on the overall efficiency and reliability of the aviation ecosystem, as well as potential latent safety and security risks, it is recommended that airport operators consider the following actions to be taken in coordination with the relevant stakeholders for the specific context.

The execution of these actions should not become an increased burden for an already strained workforce, but rather, seek to effectively support ongoing operations. Encouraging the development of cross-functional work groups to carry out these actions can be a practical way to engage a greater number of people and reduce the burden or possible overload felt by particular teams. Leveraging existing forums, such as the Runway Safety Team or Apron Safety Team, can also increase effective collaboration and monitoring.

- **Increase stakeholder engagement**

Collaboration across the airport ecosystem with all relevant stakeholders, including State actors, is critical to ensuring the efficient and best use of all available human and physical resources. Stakeholder engagement should seek to expedite administrative processes, such as the delivery of airport security passes where possible and ensure communication and coordination across the airport system.

- **Leverage collaborative decision-making concepts**

The management of the overall airport system capacity is critical to delivering the best possible service to airport users. Leveraging collaborative decision-making principles across the airport system facilitates the exchange of valuable intelligence amongst all stakeholders. It is important to identify any emerging operational or capacity challenges due to workforce limitations and implement actions to mitigate the impacts as best as possible.

- **Reinvigorate the commitment to safety and security culture**

Remind staff, including newly hired staff, of airports' absolute commitment to aviation safety and security, including the reporting of concerns and non-punitive policies. Ensure that these priorities are adequately supported by senior management across all airport stakeholders.

- **Conduct a risk and/or vulnerability assessment**

The assessment should serve to identify the areas that are more vulnerable to safety or security risks due to staff shortages and high turnover rates, where relevant, and seek to identify appropriate mitigation measures. From a security perspective, the insider threat remains a cause of concern at the global level and should be considered as part of the airport's security risk assessment. From a safety perspective, the increased pressures on staff can lead to shortcuts and inherent mistakes or errors in the application of procedures.

- **Increase monitoring**

Based on the results of the risk and/or vulnerability assessment, airports should strengthen monitoring in the risk areas identified and of the resulting level of safety and security. Ensuring the operational supervision of activities can support the adherence to standards and the quick resolution of potentially challenging situations.

- **Collect data**

Collecting and analysing data from events, occurrences (errors, violations, near miss, flight delays, etc.), incidents, and accidents might reveal new trends and potentially help establish new leading indicators. Conducting investigations to identify root causes are essential.

- **Focus on training**

Resume, where practically feasible, classroom training instead of online training solutions to enhance and guaranty effective knowledge transmission. Implementation of rapid training or briefing concepts to boost the levels of competence of returning personnel, in addition to standard safety and security training programs should be considered. Airport operators, as part of their monitoring, should ensure that all personnel, especially new recruits, receive adequate training before being deployed into operations.

- **Monitor the health and safety of workers**

The health and safety of aviation workers during times of increased operational pressure can be put at risk. It is important to actively monitor workers' health and safety and take any appropriate actions to alleviate the impact of staff shortages and high turnover rates. Mental health and fatigue are particularly important, as levels of stress can significantly increase. Measures to improve staff wellbeing, including motivation and engagement, should be considered to ensure staff retention and a reduction in turnover rates.

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Notes

ACI World has established a Task Force on Airport Workforce with the purpose of reviewing short-, medium-, and long-term trends affecting the global airport workforce and assessing how these trends will impact airports from a global policy, operational, sustainability, and resilience angle. The results of this analysis will be consolidated into recommendations to the global airport industry, in the form of a White Paper to be released in the fourth quarter of 2022.

About ACI World

Airports Council International (ACI), the trade association of the world's airports, was founded in 1991 with the objective of fostering cooperation among its member airports and other partners in world aviation, including the International Civil Aviation Organization, the International Air Transport Association and the Civil Air Navigation Services Organization. In representing the best interests of airports during key phases of policy development, ACI makes a significant contribution toward ensuring a global air transport system that is safe, secure, efficient, and environmentally sustainable. As of January 2022, ACI serves 717 members, operating 1950 airports in 185 countries.

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