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COVID-19: EUROPEAN AVIATION NEEDS TO PROTECT GROUND HANDLING WORKERS AND AIRPORT INFRASTRUCTURE FOR A SAFE TAKE-OFF

The aviation industry has received a lot of attention since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, in Europe and beyond. It was severely hit very early on, and the rebuilding process will likely be slow. **And while airlines have been at the forefront of the recovery discussions, a different vital part of infrastructure – the airports and ground handling service providers – is often overlooked.**

The aviation eco-system consists of three vital elements of infrastructure: air traffic management, airlines and airports. Just like airlines and ATM systems, many airports had to remain in operation during the pandemic to provide infrastructure for freight transport, as well as patient transport and special flights, such as for repatriation.

Thousands of ground handling workers continued to work throughout this time, ensuring that aeroplanes are safe and operations reliable. Others were temporarily let go, and most are currently still covered through the different special unemployment schemes. As soon as these will come to an end in the coming months, however, a big wave of dismissals is expected. Ground handling workers are the less visible workforce of aviation. Yet, a lot of the efficiency and safety of aviation operations relies solely on them. **We must ensure that they are not left out of the expected financial aid – it is time that ground handling workers are recognized for their essential work and protected.**

START THE ENGINE

The ETF calls on the national governments, as well as on the European institutions to swiftly offer financial help to the airports and ground handling service providers in Europe. It is now crucial that they receive the same financial aid as the other players of the industry.



President Frank Moreels

Vice Presidents Ekaterina Yordanova
Jan Villadsen

Acting General Secretary Livia Spera



BRAKES

- **Conditionality**

While financial aid is key, certain conditions need to be introduced to ensure the social sustainability of the industry.

In the event of insolvency, transfer of staff to the remaining GH service providers at an airport or to the airport companies must be granted to ensure that the services required on the ground for flight operations can be continued.

The measures taken to help the airports and GH service providers may go from state loans to public ownership/partnerships.

This financial aid must be conditional on job retention and income protection measures, as well as a ban on pay-out of dividends to shareholders in 2020 (as a minimum) and a ban on stock buybacks by companies.

- **Occupational health and safety**

To ensure that the rebuilding of the industry is safe and sustainable, we must make the occupational health and safety of the ground handling workers a priority. It is a legal obligation of each employer in every single European airport to ensure the health, safety and welfare of personnel at work. The pandemic has shed light on employer practices that have failed to provide protection, and relevant authorities must ensure that this changes.

ALL CLEAR

Strong support from governments, social sustainability, and protection of ground handling workers' health, safety and welfare needs to be part of any plan for reviving and strengthening European aviation. If the rebuilding is done comprehensively, taking into account the critical pieces of infrastructure and the workers that are at the heart of them, the industry stands a chance to take off on the right note.

More information on ETF proposals on the future of European aviation is available [here](#) and [here](#).



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