

YOUNG AVIATION WORKERS

CALL FOR CHANGE!

From the outside, aviation may still seem like a glamorous industry. But for many young workers – aircrew, ground staff, and air traffic management (ATM) personnel – the daily reality is a grind of fatigue, insecurity, and unsustainable schedules.

In two recent workshops hosted by the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF), young aviation workers shared their lived experiences around the topics of work-life balance and mental health. These testimonies have revealed a worrying picture of unpredictability, burnout, and isolation among the next generation of aviation professionals.

If the industry wants to attract new workers and put an end to labor shortages, it must listen to the young people who still cope with it.

And they demand change!

Unpredictable schedules, broken routines

Aviation workers, especially the young, are trapped in a system where flexibility is demanded only from them. Rosters are handed out with little advance notice. Shift times change last-minute. Unpredictable working hours leave workers unable to plan basic aspects of life: family time, medical appointments, social life, sports – or even a decent night's sleep.

Split shifts have a profound impact on work-life balance, especially when we consider that airport-based jobs usually imply long commutes. Between split shifts, there is little incentive for workers to return home or the city center for non-professional activities, given how much time they spend commuting.

Workers regret missing out on key moments with their loved ones, and never knowing whether leave will align with the school holidays of their children, or important life events – "We must be so nice to passengers. We should be able to be nice to our loved ones as well."

Too many are juggling multiple jobs just to make ends meet, leading to chronic fatigue and further eroding rest time. Even basic health care becomes difficult to access. In such conditions, there can be no real balance – only survival.

Unfit rules will no longer fly

Young aircrew strongly criticize the inhumanity of current Flight Time Limitations (FTL) rules and enforcement. FTL rules should not be based only on medical physical indicators but also consider mental health and the social needs of workers. These rules reduce fatigue to numbers. This

gives workers the feeling that it is always someone else determining if they are fatigued or not, if they are fit or unfit to fly.

At the ground level, workers have long been demanding stronger rules that reduce the risk of violent encounters with unruly passengers. There are not sufficient protection and prevention tools. Young workers are particularly affected because they may lack the experience to deal with risk situations, and adequate training is still not there.

In ATM, as air traffic increases, the EU keeps imposing a cost-efficiency logic on service providers, demanding more activity without more staff. This leads to increasing pressure on the workers themselves, who cannot compromise on their crucial safety duties. The generalized insufficient staff also means that workers are systematically obliged to work overtime.

Many young workers, especially aircrew, also protest against how behavioral standards are vague and discretionary, leaving them under the constant stress of not knowing whether they are doing the “right” thing. This is especially a cause of anxiety for those new to the job or still on temporary contracts, many of whom then decide not to cope with it and try another sector.

Technology in work-life: employers abuse, workers isolate

Technology, while useful, is becoming a double-edged sword for workers. Today we can communicate instantly with one another, and access all sorts of information and entertainment at ease. However positive these innovations are to our personal lives, they are creating new problems in work life, which must be addressed.

Workers report being contacted by management during their time off – violating the right to disconnect. These contacts are used, for instance, to change rosters at the last minute or try to recruit substitutes to cover for sick colleagues. Although these requests may be compensated, they amount to chronic fatigue and mental health issues.

Any contact from management, within or out of work time, adds more pressure on a worker who is under precarious contractual ties. Their freedom to say “no” is not really there – and companies take advantage of this power.

Smartphones have turned rest areas into silent zones. Workplace camaraderie is decreasing, and it becomes harder and harder for workers to develop trust and personal connections. We must guarantee these conditions, as they are the cornerstone of solidarity.

Precarity leads to fear – fear leads to burnout

Young workers face fear of speaking up, precarious contracts, and pressure to accept extra shifts – all contributing to burnout. The overall mental toll is heavy on aviation workers, whether they are aircrew, ground or ATM staff.

Aviation is an increasingly fragile industry. Different factors, from extreme climate events to geo-political instability, keep aviation operators and workers – especially the young ones – in a constant feeling of insecurity regarding their future. Routes and airports can be shut down, operators can go bankrupt or restructure, jobs can be gone from one day to the other.

Peer support programs seem to be a valid solution to some mental health problems. However, the industry's approach to peer support also demands revision. Most of these programs are no longer provided on the basis of workers listening and helping other workers. They are outsourced by the companies to external entities. Without the proper link of trust and identification, workers fear participating. They hesitate to share personal struggles if there is the chance that these reports may end up in the hands and ears of management.

HOW CAN WE FIX IT?

ETF affiliates fight every day for quality jobs in aviation. Uniting young workers' voices, listening to their demands, and making them heard is how we can change our sector and make it more attractive to the new generations.

We must demand humane rules that consider mental and social well-being aspects!

We must fight any attempt to disrupt every workers' right to disconnect!

We must ensure everyone's right – and information – to say no to extra work!

We must negotiate rostering schemes that allow us to predict life and find our balance!

We must guarantee safe, predictable and easy commuting!

We must demand adequate staffing levels in all aviation roles!

We must strengthen peer support programs and bring them back into workers' hands!

And we must keep bringing these demands to all regulators, from those sitting in Brussels, at EASA, or at the national level.

We must keep bringing them to negotiation tables with our companies, and conquer success through collective bargaining.

**We must stay united,
younger and more experienced workers,
in our unions and within ETF.**

Join the ETF Civil Aviation Youth Network today:

[registration form](#)

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