



**SECTORAL DIALOGUE
COMMITTEE
CIVIL AVIATION**

**Minutes of the Ground Handling Working Group meeting
2 March 2022**

1. Adoption of the draft agenda and approval of minutes of last meeting on 21 January 2021

The draft agenda was adopted. The draft minutes of last meeting on 21 January 2021 were adopted.

2. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

The chairmanship of the Ground Handling working group changed from Karsten John Christensen (ETF) to Bastiaan De Bruijne (ACI). Vice-president is now Daniela Modonesi (ETF). The election was followed by a tour de table of all participants.

The new chair expressed his concern about the terrible events in Ukraine.

3. Update from all social partners on the impact of COVID-19 & the prospects for recovery

ACI presented the impact of COVID-19 on Ground Handling, recovery prospects and EU Policy (see slides) and invited the participants to be active in the dialogue with Steer under agenda point 8.

ASA informed that they will meet the consultant Steer. Furthermore, ASA reported on an unprecedented skills shortage leading to a change in priorities with much more focussed emphasis on that topic. The major part of staff that had been furloughed decided not to come back. ASA raised the issue of a fundamental flaw in the way the airline-ground handling relationship is structured (master and servant relationship) leading to a lot of stress for ground handlers. A three days event in September 2022 in Athens (Greece) on the application of just culture in the working relationship between airlines and ground handlers is planned. State aid support of ground handling was poor. ASA sees a trend of growing call for mergers and acquisitions.

The chair clarified the temporary state aid rules.

ETF clarified that state aid in Italy is mainly for airports and suggested to adapt the slides in this regard. ETF stressed that the lack of social fibre of the Council Directive 96/67/EC triggered unhealthy competition among ground handling service providers and underlined the need for a clear agreement on levels of competition and pricing regulation delivering the sustainability of the sector for employers, employees and travelling public. The pandemic sharpened the already existing social and economic problems. The system of the market access has consistent issues with achieving economic, social and environmental sustainability. ETF pointed out to the social and psycho-social impacts of the pandemic on all workers. Precarious working conditions and lack of training impact safety and do not attract young people.

ACP underlined that apart from state aid in aviation, loans were granted that need to be paid back. Market is volatile. The hub system of network carriers for the business travel has not revived. Network carriers will have to be more responsive to the market movements. Additionally, environmental issues and the impact of major events add to the difficult situation.

The social partners shared their concern and support with the colleagues at the Ukrainian airports.

4. Update from ICAO with focus on “social sustainability”

International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF) presented International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)’s efforts to strengthen the regulation of Ground Handling (see slides). Fragmentation of the ground handling led to a fragmentation of safety. Guidance material is not sufficient to set up safety management systems (SMS) at national level. All stakeholder should be involved to strengthen the regulation. Social dialogue stakeholders should establish necessary procedures through a positive safety culture rooted in just culture. ITF stressed the importance to propose amendments jointly. European social dialogue could be used to make the link to the international level and share good examples.

ETF commented that the link between Europe and the rest of world needs to be strengthened setting possibly some best practices. All sectors in aviation should act together.

ASA reported that a request was sent to ICAO to be a recognised partner by ICAO. ASA asked for support from ETF, ITF and ACI.

5. Unruly PAX – ETF’s work and future work with EASA

ETF reported about major issues of unruly passengers with ground handling workers linked to the pandemic. At Bologna airport data were collected from workers and unions. 67% of assaults were related to COVID-19 restrictions. Passengers are not used to travel anymore and attack ground handling staff. ETF works together with EASA on this issue. There is an EASA campaign “Ready for the summer”.

ETF read out the draft statement to all participants and invited the workers organisations to comment and sign the joint statement.

The chair concluded that the social partners recognise this statement and that the draft statement will be annexed to the minutes (see annex).

ASA added that there is a similar initiative with ETF in the Air crew working group and mentioned the need for coordination. ETF replied that this statement is specific for airports.

6. NLR study on social conditions and safety at Amsterdam Schiphol

NLR presented the study on social conditions and safety at Amsterdam Airport Schiphol (NLR/Ecorys/Leiden University).

Furthermore, NLR provided an overview on the on-going EASA ASSESS III study regarding an impact assessment on ground handling, aviation financial size and social data for specific aviation sectors. A survey was shared to be submitted to GHSP in the participants' country.

ASA commented that the aspect of the commercial relationship between airlines and ground handlers seems to be missing in the presented study.

ITF mentioned that this case could be used as best practice and inspirational for other airports.

ETF thanked for the presentation of the study. It is important to have the wider picture – airports and industry as a whole. ETF cited a Spanish example in 2007 with a SLA to transfer staff when a loss of license occurs.

A4D asked whether NLR works with EASA on safety.

7. Discussion on attracting and maintaining workers in ground handling during the recovery of COVID-19

The chair invited the social partners to list concrete key actions to attract and maintain workers in ground handling which could be summarised in a joint one pager. A tour de table followed to gather ideas.

ETF mentioned as key elements a more stabilised sector, wage increase, better working conditions, to standardise and avoid competition only on costs.

ASA agreed to ETF points and added the passage of a SLA that punishes to a SLA that encourages.

The chair summarised the impacts of COVID-19 raised under the previous agenda points. The concerns of Social Partners is the competition and the pressure on social conditions as a result of the competition. The chair proposed as a general message to Steer that the social dimension needs to be taken into account. The impact of COVID-19 is not only an economic but also a social one.

ETF added that in the perception the relation between safety and ground operations is overseen. Safety on the ground is key for ground handlers.

ITF concluded that stability is needed in ground handling and the industry as a whole. The challenge is to acknowledge that the industry is fragile and needs to be stabilised. Learning from the past lessons is key in order not to repeat the same issues.

8. Dialogue with Steer on their study on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on aviation

Steer expressed that they are pleased to listen to the views of social partners in ground handling.

The chair summarised the points gathered previously: lack of stability, staff leaving sector in pandemic, remaining staff is under pressure to perform in recovery, impact of competition on social dynamics, need for more stability on social elements and no race to the bottom. Social partners feel that ground handling has been overlooked. While much focus is put on the green agenda, social partners want to include a reference, if possible in the report, to the social agenda and social sustainability. Safety and social sustainability are linked to each other. Moreover, the lack of state aid for ground handlers was mentioned. The chair stressed that social partners look for stability and recognition of the social dimension.

ETF expressed that the sector suffers a lot with an open market without protection and stressed to focus more on social issues. As an example the minimum team number under an aircraft was mentioned. Furthermore, ETF stated that there is more fatigue than before and increased pressure on ground handling staff. ETF underlined the importance to look at the whole picture and try to learn from past mistakes in the sector.

Steer stated that it is too early to make observations on the ground handling market as further interviews will take place. Steer shared awareness of the difficult social conditions before the COVID crises and a deterioration during the pandemic.

ETF inquired on the study process and stressed that also high skilled workers left. The whole sector will experience a big issue for safety.

The chair proposed to summarise shared concerns of social partners to be included in the Steer report. ETF and ASA agreed to this approach. A draft one-pager will be circulated next week to comment and then sent to Steer around mid-March.