ECAC/EU DIALOGUE

with the European air transport industry
Flying sustainably – from buzz to reality

Session 1: Social sustainability of the sector – meeting social expectations

The aviation sector is facing calls to meet expectations from its workers and from the public to address their social needs and behave responsibly. This is needed to achieve sustainability by attracting and retaining high quality staff across all areas of aviation. Is the industry demonstrating its social sustainability? Or does it need to change the way it engages with its workers and related business practices to achieve this?

This session will provide a high-level overview of what the term "social sustainability" means in the context of today's expectations of the aviation sector. It will highlight why it is important to address the expectations of the public and aviation sector workers in this area. Through exploration of the topic, it will be an opportunity to consider how social sustainability practices can build resilience and help to maintain aviation's reputation as an attractive career choice.

The speakers will draw on their personal experiences to provide their perspectives on social sustainability. They will give examples of initiatives and practices that aviation sector stakeholders have put in place in different areas to address certain social expectations. These will include addressing the needs of workers in the sector in terms of working conditions, and creating a more diverse and inclusive environment.

The discussions should underpin what is important in practical terms for the aviation sector to achieve social sustainability and where there remain gaps or challenges that need to be addressed if this is to become reality. This session will also demonstrate the wide range of stakeholders that need to be engaged with for the aviation sector to become truly sustainable.

Session 2: Creating the conditions for environmental sustainability

Environmental sustainability has become crucial for governments and businesses alike – and particularly for sectors like aviation, which is still largely perceived as negatively impacting climate change, and unsustainable. Is this a fair depiction of the sector in light of the environmental improvement programmes, technological developments and other actions being taken to reduce aviation's emissions nationally and on the global scale?

This session will offer various insights into how environmental sustainability trends have developed in the aviation sector. Speakers will comment on the extent to which different approaches for improving the environmental record of aviation have taken off, and which ones remain to be proven or have failed to live up to the hype they have generated. There will be a chance to consider the effectiveness of different environmental sustainability trends and practices, and how impacts can be correctly monitored and reported.

It is recognised that it is not just industry action that is needed to address environmental concerns in aviation – but also that there is a role for regulators and policymakers in setting and ensuring goals are met. Speakers will comment on the frameworks that have been built to address this need. They will consider which frameworks are enabling industry stakeholders to develop new technologies to reduce their environmental impacts. There will also be an opportunity to consider what other frameworks could create the right conditions for sustainable aviation to flourish.

The part of the session dedicated to "pioneering initiatives and testbeds" will allow speakers to focus on case studies they have been part of which have been implemented as a change to business practices to demonstrate environmental responsibility from some of aviation's key stakeholder groups. The discussion should also seek to reflect on best practice and lessons learnt through these case studies, to ensure that progress can continue to be made on environmental sustainability by others and under new initiatives.

Session 3: Economic sustainability – is the sector economically viable?

Whilst environmental and social sustainability are accepted as critical components of the aviation sector's future strategy, the economic pressures they bring to the aviation sector cannot be ignored.

This session will focus on the impact of environmental and social expectations on the economic sustainability of the aviation sector, asking how it can be possible to meet these expectations without increasing the risk of economic collapse.

In the post-pandemic aviation sector, challenges remain very really in terms of connectivity and market liberalisation. There are differences of opinion on specific policies under these themes, yet it is recognised that to sustain aviation globally for the benefit of the economy at large and citizens, connectivity needs to the optimised. This session should also consider the interlinkages and potential trade-offs that may develop between connectivity and sustainability. Speakers will analyse the current situation that airlines and airports face to consider to what extent both connectivity and environmental goals can be met.

This session will also take a specific look at what investments are being made into sustainable technologies and practices. Contributors under this part of the session will provide their own perspectives on how investments are aiding the aviation sector's drive for sustainability as well as they can. It will also be a chance to consider where investment is likely to be made in the coming years.

Dialogue conclusions

The Dialogue should result in short- and long-term concrete recommendations and proposals to address current gaps and existing challenges to establishing a sustainable aviation sector in Europe and globally that addresses social, economic and environmental needs.