

THE CONTROLLER

OCTOBER 2026

JOURNAL OF AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS:



ATTRACT THEM, VALUE THEM, KEEP THEM

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Update on IFATCA Annual Conference 2027
- JCHMS Team Article: AI in the OPS Room
- Mindfulness in Air Traffic Control
- Orchestrating Transformation in Our Skies





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THE CONTROLLER



The four IFATCA regions:
Though our accents and regions
may differ, our professional
frequency is still the same!

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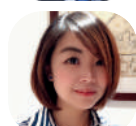
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From The Executive Board

Welcome to This Edition of the Controller Magazine

By: Jean Francois Lepage, IFATCA Deputy President (DP)

Connections. A word we use regularly, yet rarely question its meaning. According to Merriam-Webster, a connection can refer to many things. It can define the act or state of joining things together. It can describe a logical or causal relation through which ideas are associated. It can be the link that moves people and goods faster across our transportation networks. And finally—perhaps most importantly—a connection can be a relationship, whether between family, friends, or colleagues.

When I think of IFATCA and the profession we represent, we collectively **embody** all of these definitions. We enable people to stay connected by safely facilitating their movement around the world. By collaborating within our Federation, we foster the sharing of **insights**, ideas, and projects. Through our daily work, we also ensure aircraft move efficiently and expeditiously through the airspace under our responsibility.

What I have come to realize after more than twelve years with IFATCA is that our Federation is a powerful enabler of unique, precious, and essential human connections.

These relationships span every definition mentioned above. Each of us **has** built professional bonds with colleagues from around the globe and formed deep, lasting friendships.

This shared experience makes us a remarkably unique family—one that truly doesn't exist anywhere else.

Connections. This is exactly what IFATCA is about, yet the word does not appear anywhere in our mission, vision, or objectives. We, collectively, are connecting the world.

With the regional meetings just around the corner, we will soon have another occasion to connect. I invite you to reflect on what these connections represent for you. Personally, I live by two simple yet paramount rules: nurture the bonds we have already built, and seize every opportunity to create new ones.

This is how we reinforce the network of connections that makes IFATCA so powerful.

Sincerely,
JF



Vision Statement

IFATCA is the global voice of Air Traffic Controllers.
It furthers air traffic safety, influences the sustainable evolution of aviation, and embraces all members of its community. The apolitical federation provides guidance, representation, training, and other services to advance the status and professionalism of air traffic control. It collaborates with other international organizations to achieve mutual goals.

Mission Statement

To enhance air traffic safety, to promote the air traffic control profession, and to shape the future of air traffic management





From The Editorial Team

By: Nicola ni Riada (Editor)

*Brittney Armbrust (Deputy Editor),
Natasha Mijat Krstevska (Graphics Editor)*

Welcome to the Autumn 2026 issue of the Controller magazine. This edition is just in time for International Day of the Controller and the IFATCA Regional Meetings. This year we also celebrate the 65th birthday of the Federation, founded in 1961!

In this edition, we have an important update for Annual Conference 2027, a sneak peek of the Regional Meetings, and of course, updates from our IFATCA Task Forces and Standing Committees.

Several Industry Partners contributed to this edition. Indra provided a thoughtful leadership piece looking at change in relation to the human being. This is echoed in CANSO's article covering the launch of the white paper on change management, with IFATCA making significant contributions.

Also in this edition, we are featuring a piece from the JCHMS Team on AI in the OPS room. You will also find a

very useful graphic on Workplace Intoxicants, along with inspirational articles on volunteering and further education.

Mental Wellbeing is covered by a fantastic piece on mindfulness, with an additional article on CISM.

We bid farewell to "Charlie's Column" and introduce "IFATCA Connects". If you have followed our Controller Pilot series on social media, or if you are a bit of an AvGeek, you will enjoy reading the articles on Farnborough, Oshkosh and the Best VFR Flight with some very cool photos in all three.

As always, THANK YOU to all the contributors (both our internal leadership and external authors) to the Editorial Team and wider Comms Team. Everyone works so hard all through the year, to make IFATCA's work visible. But most importantly, to you our gentle readers, for your interest and attention.



October 20th
INTERNATIONAL DAY OF
AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS



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IFATCA



Important Update to IFATCA Annual Conference 2027

By: Jean-François Lepage, IFATCA Deputy President (DP) & Executive Board (EB) Lead for Conference

The email sent to all member associations on July 31st 2026, outlined the Executive Board decision to relocate the 2027 Annual Conference.

Over the past few months, we have been following current events and monitoring statistics, travel conditions, restrictions, quarantine requirements, and so on.

The board concluded that the best — and possibly the only — course of action, in the best interests of both our members and our host in Uganda, was to move the conference to another location.

Believe me, this is a decision none of us wanted to have to make. We are fully aware of the time and effort our colleagues in Uganda have invested so far in preparing to host us next year; we hope these efforts will not go to waste and that a future bid from Uganda will eventually allow us all to gather in Africa again for a conference.

We also wish to thank the associations that were approached and considered the possibility of hosting annual conference. Those able to prepare a bid and compile a comprehensive proposal had to do so in record time. Tasks that normally take months were accomplished in just a few weeks. We extend our heartfelt thanks to Trinidad and Tobago for putting together such a strong proposal so quickly.

Ultimately, the Executive Board decided to relocate the 2027 Annual Conference to Türkiye. Building on the bid submitted in 2025 and leveraging the experience gained from the regional meeting taking place this autumn in Cappadocia, I have no doubt that our Turkish association will deliver a Conference that meets your expectations.

Your Executive Board and the Organizing Committee in Türkiye are already hard at work finalizing arrangements with the host hotel, setting up the registration website, and managing all other logistics for the event.

We can confirm that the Annual Conference will be held in Istanbul on the previously announced dates: 12-16 April, 2027.

We are fully aware of the magnitude of the task ahead and the tight timeframe we are working within. We also recognize that you, our members, want to know all the relevant details about the Conference as soon as possible, so you can prepare effectively. Rest assured that you will be the first to be informed, as preparations progress.

Once again, on behalf of the Executive Board, I wish to thank you for your patience, understanding, and support as we work hard to successfully manage this transition to Türkiye.

Sincerely,
JF





SANTIAGO Awaits the AMA Regional Meeting 2026

Chile Prepares to Welcome the Americas Region with Professional Excellence, Breathtaking Scenery and Renowned Hospitality.

By: Jorge Caro Gálvez, (ATC CHILE, Chile)

A Meeting Designed for Professionals

The Colegio de Controladores de Tránsito Aéreo de Chile is proud to host the 42nd IFATCA Americas Regional Meeting in Santiago, Chile, from October 6 to 8, 2026. Backed by the Chilean Civil Aviation Authority (DGAC), this landmark event, to be held at the DoubleTree by Hilton, offers delegates a first-class modern venue.

We welcome air traffic controllers from across the Americas to combine expert talks, professional networking, and a chance to explore South America's top destinations.

Located in a vibrant, easily accessible Santiago district, the hotel features top-tier conference spaces and upscale accommodations. It offers an ideal setting for productive technical sessions, committee meetings, and professional networking.

Celebrating Aviation

The Opening Ceremony will be held at the National Aeronautical and Space Museum, one of Chile's most important aviation landmarks. Surrounded by historic aircraft and immersive exhibitions, delegates will celebrate both the history and the future of aviation in a unique setting.

The event will conclude with a Gala Dinner at an exclusive country club, located at the foot of the Andes Mountains.

This spectacular scenery, combined with exceptional Chilean cuisine and hospitality, will provide a memorable conclusion to the regional gathering.



Santiago: The Gateway to Chile

Santiago is the perfect starting point for discovering Chile. Within a short distance, visitors can explore internationally recognized vineyards, the Pacific coast, and the colorful city of Valparaíso.

Those wishing to extend their stay will discover a country of remarkable contrasts. From the Atacama Desert in the north -recognized as the world's driest desert- to the glaciers and fjords of Patagonia in the south, Chile offers landscapes found nowhere else.

More Than a Conference

The organizing committee believes that the greatest value of the Regional Meeting lies beyond the conference rooms. The event is designed to encourage dialogue, strengthen friendships, and promote the exchange of operational experience among air traffic controllers throughout the Americas Region.

Professional cooperation has always been one of IFATCA's greatest strengths. Santiago 2026 provides another opportunity to reinforce those relationships, while sharing ideas that contribute to safer and more efficient air traffic management.

A Warm Chilean Welcome

The Chilean air traffic control community looks forward to welcoming colleagues from across the region. Visitors will experience an outstanding technical meeting along with the warmth, generosity, and enthusiasm for which Chile is well known.

We look forward to welcoming you to Santiago, in October 2026



In the Shadow of Fairy Chimneys:

Bringing Together Europe's Air Traffic Controllers

By: Tuğberk Teber (TATCA, Türkiye)

Every morning, hundreds of hot air balloons rise above the fairy chimneys of Cappadocia, creating one of the world's most recognisable aviation landscapes. This October, another community connected by the sky will gather beneath them. From 13 - 15 October 2026, the IFATCA European Regional Meeting (ERM 2026), hosted by the Turkish Air Traffic Controllers' Association (TATCA), will welcome air traffic controllers and aviation stakeholders from across Europe to one of Türkiye's most iconic destinations.

A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Cappadocia is renowned not only for its extraordinary geological formations but also for its rich history, underground cities and breathtaking scenery. For air traffic controllers, however, the region offers something more: a unique setting where colleagues from across Europe can exchange knowledge, operational experience and ideas while surrounded by a landscape that has inspired travellers for centuries.

The agenda of ERM 2026 covers a broad range of operational and professional topics directly affecting air traffic controllers. Among the key sessions are discussions on operations near conflict zones and the growing challenges created by Europe's increasingly congested airspace.

European airspace is heading into one of its busiest periods in years. With around 37,000 flights expected on peak days, significant portions of available airspace remain restricted due to ongoing geopolitical developments.

As traffic is redistributed onto alternative routes, congestion continues to increase within specific air corridors and control sectors. For controllers, this means managing increasingly complex traffic flows while maintaining the highest standards of safety.

Operations near conflict zones present an additional layer of complexity. Airspace closures and restrictions force aircraft onto longer or alternative routes, increasing traffic and workload in neighbouring sectors and countries. As a result, developments in one part of Europe—or beyond—can directly affect controllers working hundreds or even thousands of kilometres away.

Growing traffic demand, capacity constraints and staffing challenges have therefore become shared concerns across the region.

For controllers, these developments are far more than operational statistics; they define the reality of everyday operations. Reduced available airspace, increasing sector complexity and constantly changing traffic patterns demand exceptional situational awareness, sound decision-making and close international cooperation. Sharing operational experience and learning from colleagues facing similar challenges has therefore never been more valuable.

ERM 2026 is designed to provide exactly that opportunity. Air traffic controllers, professional associations and aviation stakeholders from across Europe will gather to exchange experiences, discuss common challenges and explore ideas that will help shape the future of the profession.

The contrast between Cappadocia's timeless landscape and the constant movement of Europe's skies is a fitting reminder of the profession that brings participants together. While the scenery has remained largely unchanged for centuries, controllers work every day in an environment defined by continuous change and constant responsibility. By bringing colleagues from across the region together, ERM 2026 will strengthen professional cooperation, encourage the exchange of operational expertise and reinforce the collaboration that helps keep Europe's skies safe.





Welcome to Tokyo: IFATCA Asia Pacific Regional Meeting 2026

By: Naoto Ishii, (JFATC, Japan), IFATCA APRM 2026 Organising Committee

The Japan Federation of Air Traffic Controllers (JFATC) welcomes air traffic controllers, aviation professionals, and industry partners to the 42nd Asia Pacific Regional Meeting (APRM) in Tokyo, October 20 - 22 2026. This marks a significant milestone for JFATC, as it is the first time in 21 years that Japan has hosted this regional event. The organizing committee is working to prepare an engaging and productive environment building professional networks and advancing the global objectives of IFATCA.

The main theme for APRM 2026 is "A Seamless Sky-Voice, Data & Runway Safety". As air traffic density continues to increase globally, preventing runway incursions and maintaining safety on the ground remain top priorities. In addition, the meeting will highlight the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies and their associated challenges in modern air traffic management. Finding the right balance between advanced automation and human expertise is a critical issue, and this event will serve as an essential platform to explore best practices and collaborative technical solutions.

A unique highlight of this year's meeting is our strong collaboration with the pilot community. APRM 2026 will be held in parallel with the International Federation of Air Line Pilots' Associations (IFALPA) Asia Pacific Regional Meeting, hosted by ALPA Japan, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary. While both organizations will conduct their respective business and technical sessions in separate rooms, joint sessions will bring controllers and pilots together, offering a rare and valuable opportunity to foster closer professional relationships outside the operational environment.

We have received strong support from our industry partners. Multiple Japanese companies involved in air traffic control and aviation technology are sponsoring this meeting. These partners will set up exhibition booths to showcase their latest technologies and solutions.

Focus will be on the mental well-being and resilience of ATCOs: we are working with the IFATCA Mental Well-being Task Force (MWTF) to organize a session that will share Japan's experience and expertise in Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM), which is well established and active here.

The Member Association Report sessions are specifically designed to encourage interactive dialogue, allow representatives to share regional experiences, and strengthen closer professional connections. This will provide participants with a broader perspective on the diverse operational realities across the Asia-Pacific region.

Beyond the conference agenda, our organizing committee is preparing a warm welcome for all delegates. Following the initial Welcome Party, our Gala Dinner will offer attendees a wonderful opportunity to experience Japanese culture and hospitality, while enjoying the spectacular night views of the Tokyo metropolis. With the support of the Tokyo Convention and Visitors Bureau, expect a smooth and comfortable experience for all. Further information can be found on our official website at aprm2026.org.

JFATC sincerely looks forward to welcoming everyone to Tokyo for an engaging, collaborative, and memorable meeting. Let us work together to build regional collaboration and ensure a safer, more seamless sky.





JORDAN 2026: Where AFM Aviation Professionals Meet

BY: Yousef Alaghwan (JATCA, Jordan)



October 26th to 28th 2026, Amman will proudly host the 37th IFATCA Africa and Middle East Regional Meeting (AFM37), welcoming air traffic controllers and aviation professionals from across the region. Organized by the Jordanian Air Traffic Controllers Association (JATCA), the meeting will provide an important forum for professional exchange, regional cooperation, and the strengthening of relationships within the air traffic management community, via Jordanian hospitality.

AFM37 will bring together representatives of IFATCA Member Associations to discuss key issues shaping the future of aviation, including air traffic management, safety, human factors, technological innovation, workforce development, and the evolving role of air traffic controllers. More than a conference, the meeting reflects a shared commitment to collaboration, operational excellence, and the continuous improvement of aviation safety across the Africa and Middle East Region.

For JATCA, hosting AFM37 is both an honour and a responsibility. It demonstrates Jordan's commitment to supporting the advancement of the air traffic control profession and contributing to regional and international cooperation through IFATCA. The Association remains dedicated to promoting professional development, encouraging knowledge sharing, and supporting initiatives that strengthen the global aviation community.

Amman provides an ideal setting for this important event. Located at the crossroads of Asia, Africa, and Europe, Jordan's capital combines modern infrastructure with a rich cultural heritage and renowned hospitality. Delegates will benefit from excellent conference facilities, convenient international connectivity, and a welcoming environment that reflects the warmth of the Jordanian people.

Beyond the conference programme, participants will have the opportunity to experience some of Jordan's most iconic destinations.

From the timeless beauty of Petra and the spectacular landscapes of Wadi Rum to the unique waters of the Dead Sea and the vibrant atmosphere of Amman, Jordan offers visitors an unforgettable cultural and historical experience.

AFM37 will also provide an opportunity to build lasting professional relationships and strengthen cooperation among Member Associations throughout the region. By bringing together colleagues from diverse operational environments, the meeting will encourage the exchange of ideas, best practices, and innovative solutions that contribute to safer and more efficient air navigation services.

The Jordanian Air Traffic Controllers Association looks forward to welcoming colleagues and friends from across Africa and the Middle East to Amman in October 2026, where professional excellence, regional unity, and Jordanian hospitality will come together to make AFM37 a memorable and successful event.





Orchestrating Transformation in Our Skies

Co-Designing Change through a People-Centred Framework



By: HELENA SJÖSTRÖM FALK, IFATCA PRESIDENT & CEO and Trish Gilbert, IFATCA EVP Professional

All of us who work in Air Traffic Control know that things are always (and some would say, much too often) changing. Our rules and regulations, systems, training methods, rostering practices, technical tools, procedures, and much more are continually evolving. In a complex and highly technological environment such as air traffic, transformation is inevitable.

Over the coming decades, emerging technologies, such as AI and advanced automation, are likely to drive change at an even faster pace and on a larger scale than we have experienced before. The question we must ask ourselves is: **How can we manage this transformation safely?**

The Global ATC Alliance (an organization of six ATC unions: USA, Canada, Spain, Australia, New Zealand and the UK) in conjunction with the Civil Air Navigation Services Organisation (CANSO), initiated work to publish a white paper with the aim of challenging the sector to re-think how we manage transformation. They invited IFATCA, International Federation of Air Traffic Safety Electronics Associations (IFATSEA) and the International Federation of Aeronautical Information Management Associations (IFAIMA), to join the work. The group was also supported by academic and independent experts. Participating from IFATCA was PCX Helena Sjöström Falk and EVPP Trish Gilbert. The work began in the spring of 2026 and after 10 drafting meetings and as many versions of the paper, the final result was published on September 10th, 2026.

The white paper does not prescribe a single change-management methodology or organizational model. Instead, it provides a practical, people-centred framework that organisations can adapt to their own circumstances and help leaders test whether they have the governance, organizational readiness, safety intelligence, workforce involvement and capacity needed to manage continuous transformation successfully.

The paper emphasizes that the transformation ahead cannot be delivered by any single organization, profession or part of the aviation ecosystem acting alone. It requires collaboration across traditional boundaries and shared responsibility for how change is designed, introduced, adopted and sustained. It further advocates for having people at the centre of transformation. Where we often have heard the phrase “the human in the loop”, this white paper instead puts the human at the very core of transformation. This means early and continuous involvement of those affected by change. Co-design provides a structural way of bringing perspectives together.

This does not mean that every stakeholder participates in every decision, nor that co-design replaces clear accountability. Rather, the people and expertise relevant to a particular change should have meaningful opportunities to influence it at the stages where their knowledge and experience can add value.

Transformation is more likely to be successful and sustainable when people are involved from the beginning and given the opportunity to develop it alongside the organisation. This requires clear responsibilities, the right skills and resources, along with an environment built on trust, open communication and continuous learning.

In other words, successful transformation is not only about managing what technology can do. It is equally about understanding how people experience, interpret, and ultimately use that technology in their everyday operations.

Read the full paper here: <https://ifatca.org/wp-content/uploads/White-Paper-Orchestrating-Transformation-in-Our-Skies.pdf>





Winds of Change:

Constitution and Administrative Committee (CAC) Update

By: Robert Mason (Civil Air, Australia) CAC Chair

We are in a time of change. Of course, that is always the case. IFATCA constantly evolves to address the needs of our membership, and our industry. This is very evident in the lists of work items for Standing Committees year on year as we seek to understand and hopefully address emerging issues, anticipating the needs of our members.

At Conference this year, we accepted the most significant update to our Constitution and Administrative manual since the formation of the Federation. This could be easily written off as simply a new face for an old document, but it is much more than this. In the 64½ years of IFATCA, we have constantly developed and refined rules, procedures, and processes. The accretion of 6 decades of procedural change has inevitably led to a difficult to navigate and sometimes contradictory rule set. Procedural complexity can delay or stop us from concentrating on the real task of representing the professional and technical needs of Air Traffic Control and its practitioners worldwide.

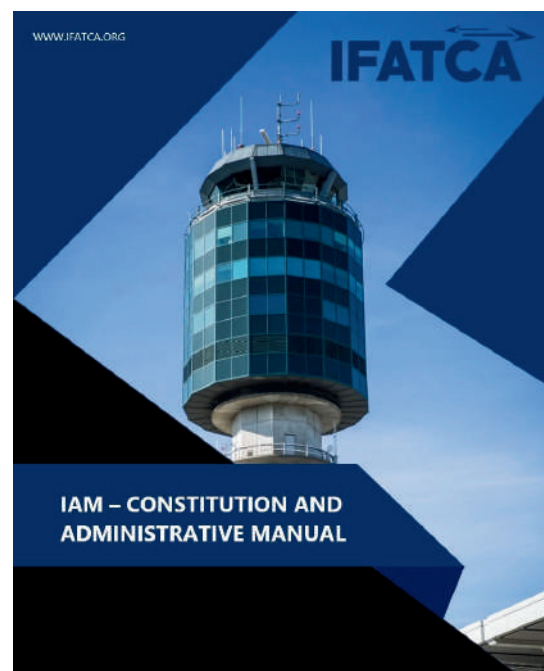
This was a significant achievement, but the work is far from done. Before we left the Conference, we already had a full work programme. Inevitably there will be more items to come. Amongst our tasks:

- Use of automated means to establish Quorums and manage voting and propose rule changes to facilitate
- Review timelines for Annual Conference agenda publication in line with current practices
- Review document definitions and processes (standing item)
- Streamline procedure process in line with “Roberts Rules”
- Review MA expulsion processes
- Updates to processes to manage Industry Partner interactions including possible participation in TOC/PLC meetings where mutually beneficial
- Review use of funds
- Consider effect of partial payment for MAs on termination list (possible move to Suspended)

CAC, with only a Chair and 3 elected members (Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal) is one of the smaller Committees of IFATCA, but there continues to be strong interest. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the involvement of our Corresponding Members (Djibouti, Germany, Kenya, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda, and Zimbabwe). All members contribute and provide invaluable insight and operate with the unswerving support of the Deputy President – our beloved JF. We only meet in person once between Conferences with our Finance Committee (FIC) siblings. Procedural change to get the best value out of our collective budget is both important, and in our own self-interest.

As controllers, we are all aware of the importance of a rules set that serves us, rather than the other way around. It should enable, rather than hinder. CAC constantly seeks to remove obstacles and emplace processes to support our needs. We don’t always get it right and that is your part. Keep us on the straight and narrow. IFATCA serves you. Get involved. We’d love to have you.

For more information contact your MA director, Regional EVP or cac@ifatca.org





Technical and Operational Committee (TOC) Fall Update:

Get to Know about the Committee and the Upcoming Working Programme

By: Jaymi Steinberg (NATCA, USA) TOC Chair

2026-27 Technical and Operational Committee

The Technical and Operational Committee (TOC) bridges the gaps between the technical and innovative side of the room, along with the controllers that utilize it. The group strives to provide a variety of voices and working topics.

TOC is proud to have a diverse array of voices, which allows for global representation. The current elected Member associations are: Belgium, Canada, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Philippines, Singapore, and the United States. The group is supported by Alex Leung (Hong Kong), Special Advisor for Air Traffic Flow Management. Additionally, TOC is supported by ICAO Representatives including, but not limited to: Rick Taylor (who is authoring a paper), Ignacio Baca, Oliviero Barsanti, Lim De Wei, Eric Avila and Eugenio Diatolevi. TOC is well supported by EVP Technical, Benjamin van der Sanden. The wide net of support is further bolstered through ICAO LO David Perks and Technical and Professional LO Fred Cosgrove.

I would like to extend thanks to the MAs which support all of our team members in their endeavors.

Working Programme

The Technical and Professional Manual (TPM) requires consistent analysis and updates. This year the group will investigate the validity of several policies in their current state including: AAS 1.8 4D Trajectory Concepts/Management, ATS 3.21 In Trail Procedures, and at the suggestion of ICAO members present at the 65th annual conference- ATS 3.2 Clearances.

The team will also work in overlap with Professional and Legal Committee (PLC), as the teams address topics such as: unplanned outages, impacts of birds and late go arounds, wake energy retrieval, and the third part of the Air Traffic Flow Management Trilogy. TOC will also provide feedback on the use of video in ambient workplace recording.

TOC will also provide feedback on the use of video in ambient workplace recording.

Several of the topics were generated by the concerns of MAs. Throughout the year MAs can take the opportunity to fill in a job card submission via the website or reach out directly to the relevant chair or EVP to have their topic assessed for inclusion in upcoming work programmes. This year those topics include simultaneous parallel approaches and adaptations to existing systems.

Several topics were proposed that are broad in nature, but can impact how controllers work. These include what integration means to them, a look into the future of L-band digital aeronautical communication system (LDACS), and investigating turbulence reporting systems for actionable ATCO use.

Some of the topics that were presented this year at the 65th Annual Conference in Bucharest warranted further investigation, including High Altitude Operations (HAO) and A Study of eVTOLs – Implications for ATM.

Future Planning

The group met in September at GATE Aviation in Copenhagen, Denmark. During this first meeting, the authors presented their initial research and set the course to continue the work leading up to the conference. TOC would like to extend thanks to GATE Aviation for hosting. This provides a unique opportunity to interact with an industry partner, strengthening the link between industry and active ATCOs. TOC would also like to thank DATCA for their support and sponsorship. This meeting was the first for Fred Cosgrove, serving in the role of Technical Professional Liaison Officer. It is clear that the role of TP LO will prove useful in the committee's future endeavours.



TOC will meet alongside PLC in January. This will allow the two groups to collaborate on their work in a face to face environment. During the second meeting, the groups will finesse their papers for their final presentation at the 66th Annual Conference, in Türkiye.

To learn more about TOC, and the other standing committees, visit our website at: [IFATCA Standing Committees – IFATCA](#)



IFATCA Announces Appointment of Fred Cosgrove as Technical and Professional Liaison Officer

The International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers' Associations (IFATCA) is pleased to announce the appointment of Fred Cosgrove to the newly redefined role of Technical and Professional Liaison Officer (TP LO).

This appointment follows a strategic redefinition of the position (previously known as the Technical and Professional Secretary). It now accurately reflects its function as a connective hub between the Federation's technical and professional portfolios.



Fred brings more than 25 years of operational and technical experience to the role, including his extensive work as an Operational Systems Requirements Specialist at NAV CANADA and his leadership as the Technology Branch Chairperson for the Canadian Air Traffic Controllers Association (CATCA).

Fred is uniquely qualified for this liaison role, having served as an active member of both the Technical and Operations Committee (TOC) and the Professional and Legal Committee (PLC). His expertise in air traffic management systems, ICAO policy development, and committee leadership will be instrumental in his new duties.

In this capacity, Fred will be responsible for:

- Promoting close cooperation and information sharing between the Technical and Professional portfolios.
- Maintaining the Technical and Professional Library and ensuring all documentation remains current and accessible.
- Monitoring industry developments to highlight technical and professional procedures relevant to IFATCA stakeholders.

IFATCA congratulates Fred on his appointment and looks forward to his contributions in aligning the Federation's working groups, standing committees, and external partners.





The Issues That Matter

Inside the Professional and Legal Committee's (PLC) Year Ahead

By: Donna Field (Civil Air, Australia) PLC Chair

At its core, PLC is dedicated to the controller. This year's work program includes: initiatives on controller wellbeing, peer support, and safe workplace practices alongside studies into the effects of media coverage and noise abatement procedures on professional standards. We have begun another ambitious year of work aimed at supporting and advancing the profession worldwide

As preparations begin for the 66th IFATCA Annual Conference, PLC has already commenced work on an extensive programme covering many significant issues facing air traffic controllers.

This year's committee brings together 12 elected members from across the globe, representing Italy, Nigeria, Egypt, the Netherlands, Spain, Romania, Greece, Portugal, the United States, the Dominican Republic, Malaysia and Taiwan. The breadth of experience and cultural perspectives within the committee ensures that a truly international view is applied to every area of work.

A Global Team Working Together

One of the unique strengths of our committee is the involvement of members from diverse regions, backgrounds and operational environments. Throughout the year, members collaborate virtually across multiple time zones before coming together for face-to-face meetings to progress policy development and working papers.

PLC is also supported by corresponding members, committee alumni and subject matter experts who contribute specialist knowledge, research, operational insights and peer review throughout the drafting process. These members play a vital role in ensuring the committee's work reflects the realities faced by controllers worldwide and helps maintain the high standard expected of IFATCA policy documents.

The value of corresponding members cannot be underestimated. Their expertise and experience provide additional perspectives that strengthen both the discussion and the final outcomes of our work.

Key Priorities for 2026-27

Some of our focus this year will be to examine proficiency and the growing concerns surrounding controller deskilling. The committee will also conduct a detailed review of refresher training requirements within the Technical and Professional Manual (TPM), ensuring policy remains relevant to contemporary operational challenges.

Another significant project is the development of a proposed introductory preamble for the TPM. The work seeks to better define concepts such as duty of care, professionalism, accountability and the importance of controllers exercising sound judgement in complex operational environments. The committee is also taking a comprehensive look at the air traffic controller career journey, from recruitment and licensing through to retirement. Areas under consideration include the ICAO minimum licensing age of 21, retirement requirements and age-related regulations across different regions.

Supporting this work is a comprehensive global survey that has already generated valuable preliminary insights from Member Associations around the world. The survey is examining retirement provisions and age related regulations across the different regions. The first phase of this project will be to focus on the collection, followed by presenting the factual information received. We will subsequently analyse the data in greater detail, examining the potential impacts of different approaches on retirement considerations, retention and workforce sustainability. This analysis will form the basis of a future PLC working paper.



The PLC's programme extends well beyond traditional professional issues. Members are currently examining the impact of aircraft noise abatement measures not just on the environmental outcomes, community expectations and financial considerations, but the impact that they have on the operational workload, along with the controller themselves.

The committee will also continue exploring how media reporting influences ongoing safety investigations and public understanding of aviation events.

In addition, PLC remains actively engaged in addressing the protection of air traffic controllers operating in conflict zones, building on recent ICAO initiatives and discussions. Occupational health and safety remains another priority area, with work underway to ensure the TPM continues to provide comprehensive guidance supporting safe and healthy workplaces for all controllers.

Collaboration Across IFATCA

Many of today's challenges require a coordinated approach, and PLC will be working closely with TOC, the Mental Wellbeing Task Force and the Training Task Force throughout the year. This collaborative approach recognises that technical, professional and human factors issues are increasingly interconnected, requiring broad engagement across the federation.

Looking Ahead

The committee's first in-person meeting will take place in Santiago, Chile, in October 2026, immediately prior to IFATCA's Americas Regional Meeting. By then, members will have completed the first draft stage of numerous working papers and begun refining proposals that may ultimately shape future IFATCA policy.

With a wide-ranging work programme and strong international representation, the year ahead promises to be both challenging and rewarding as the PLC continues its mission of supporting the global air traffic control profession.



The DATS Information Package Document is Available to Member Associations on the IFATCA Website.



This document serves as a reference for Member Associations (MAs) whose ANSPs desire to implement Digital Aerodrome Air Traffic Services (DATS). It outlines the role of the DATS Task Force (DATS TF), provides repository information, and provides a framework of guidance for future DATS implementation.



IFATCA and the International Labour Organization (ILO)

By: Julian Ogilvie (HelvetiCA, Switzerland) IFATCA ILO Liaison officer

IFATCA has had a Liaison Officer to the ILO for quite some time. Traditionally, it has been the Swiss association that occupies the position, as the ILO seat is in Geneva. The last person to hold the post was Christoph Gilgen, retired Geneva ACC controller. However, the ILO position was not given the support that it may have required. I was appointed to the role this year as part of the IFATCA leadership focus on our relationships with other organizations.

The ILO is part of the United Nations and was founded in 1919, to promote decent and productive work with freedom, equity, security and dignity. It serves as a partnership of governments, employers and workers, shaping labour standards and policies.

Their work encompasses all aspects of labour markets and regulation around the world, from agricultural worker's rights in India to fishery worker's labour conditions in Peru. Industries such as civil aviation have representation in a much larger, 'transport' sector. They promote training (Global Social Partners Academy), social justice and cooperation via social dialogue. Developing 'International Labour Standards' is also a major part of their work. These standards are made up of conventions and protocols which are legally binding, and recommendations which are not.

The ILO also offers training courses, diplomas, masterclasses and other educational programs through its international training centre. Topics include gender equality, international labour standards and responsible business conduct. Their packages are available through their comprehensive website. The website is also an important source of information for anything employment related, with a particular focus on statistics of the labour market. These can include productivity, labour supply, working conditions, poverty and inequality.

The ILO is currently experiencing a turbulent period in its history, due to funding issues created by geopolitical decisions. As such, the remaining personnel within the organization are facing employment uncertainty and an increase in the scope of their existing portfolios.

IFATCA does not have a permanent position within the ILO, as it is a professional federation and not an international trade union body. We rely on our relationship with the International Transport Worker's Federation (ITF), to participate in transport sectoral meetings.

From our perspective, a relationship with the ILO will help promote IFATCA's professional policies at a very high level. Shared topics with ILO like 'Just Culture', CISM, fatigue and training standards could benefit all air traffic controllers globally, not just those that are members of IFATCA.

IFATCA EVP Professional has created a professional leadership panel, including the ILO Liaison Officer. It is hoped that over the next years, we can strengthen dialogue with the ILO and the ITF, and be invited by them to contribute to the ILO aviation sector. This would promote a better working environment, especially for those ATCOs that do not yet enjoy things that we take for granted.



**International
Labour
Organization**



Navigating the High Stakes: IFATCA Guidance on Substance Misuse in Air Traffic Control

A Comprehensive Framework for Safety, Rehabilitation, and a Duty of Care



Context Summary: Balancing strict safety compliance with a humane approach to professional health in the high-pressure environment of aviation, emphasizing rehabilitation and proactive disclosure over punishment.

The Spectrum of Psychoactive Substances



Alcohol

Widely Accepted

Alcohol is a widely accepted psychoactive substance with predictable metabolic rates that allow for informed duty decisions.



Cannabis (THC and CBD)

While THC is the primary psychoactive component, CBD products can contain trace amounts of THC, potentially leading to unintended positive test results.



Illicit Drugs

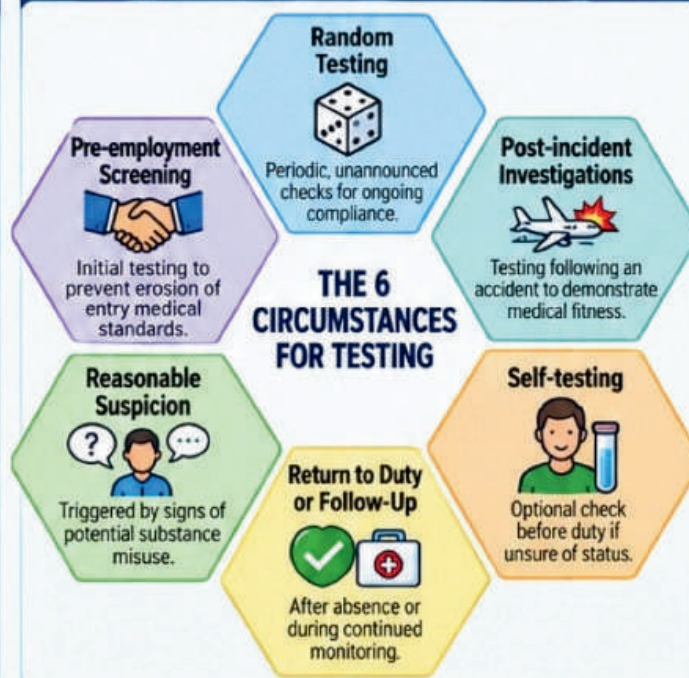
Any substances manufactured or obtained illegally for pleasure or performance.



Controlled & OTC Medications

Prescribed or over-the-counter drugs, can "trigger positive tests" even if used for routine conditions.

The 6 Circumstances for Testing



Impairment vs. Under the Influence: The Operational Risk Gap



Impairment

A "reduced or altered physical or cognitive ability" or a "diminishment of function" that impacts safety.



The 'Operational Risk Gap'

Existing tests detect substance presence, but there is currently no scientific test for measuring real-time cognitive performance during duty.



Under the Influence

Often a "violation of policy" where a "detectable trace" exceeds a defined threshold, regardless of active intoxication.

The Cannabis Challenge



Metabolism & Persistence

THC metabolites (THC-COOH) have long half-life, detectable days/months after effects fade.



Transport Canada's 28-Day Policy

Mandatory abstinence for at least 28 days before reporting for duty, based on brain recovery science.



The CBD Risk

Hemp-derived CBD oils/lotions can contain trace THC, leading to unintended positive drug tests.

Testing Safeguards & Redress



Sample Integrity

ATCOs should receive sealed identical samples for independent employer-paid analysis.



Gender Neutrality

Random testing should avoid gender quotas to prevent unfair, repeated selection.



Timing of Tests

Ideally occur before staff commence duty to minimize operational risk.

Rehabilitation & Responsibility



Rehabilitation Priority

Policies should prioritize rehabilitation programs over punishment, assisting safe return to duty.



Individual Responsibility

ATCOs responsible for ensuring medications do not compromise safety, consult aviation medical examiners.



Compassion in Self-Reporting

"Proactive disclosure should be handled with compassion and fairness, without fear of a punitive response."

SAFETY FIRST. PEOPLE ALWAYS.

A culture of care strengthens the safety of our skies.



IFATCA Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Task Force

From our June Campaign to the ICAO Global Gender Summit in Luanda: Safe, Seen, Valued & Included



By: Sverre Ivar Elsbak (NATCA, Norway) EDITF Chair and Betsy Beaumont (NATCA, USA) Co-Chair

Safe. Seen. Valued. Included.

Every June, EDITF highlights that simple message: “Every air traffic controller, everywhere in the world, should feel safe, seen, valued and included.”

This year, we linked these four words to the theme of the IFATCA annual conference:

“Controllers: Attract them, Value them, Keep them.”

The connection was quite natural.

The aviation industry is facing major challenges in recruiting and retaining people. Air traffic control (ATC) is no exception. Training takes a long time, and fatigue, workload, working conditions and burnout are concerns in many parts of the world.

Our three June videos looked at these challenges through **Attract, Value and Keep**.

To attract the next generation, we need to show that ATC is more than technology, responsibility and salary. People also want to know that they belong.

To value new colleagues means giving them the support and environment they need to succeed. Feeling valued does not mean lowering standards. People are more likely to perform and grow when they feel supported and respected.

And finally, we need to keep the people we recruit and train. Training is an investment and takes time. We need to make sure people want to stay. Sometimes people leave not because they don’t like being controllers, but because they are unhappy with the working environment.

From June to Luanda

In July, Lumbiwe Hara (Zambia) represented IFATCA at the ICAO Global Aviation Gender Summit 2026, together with Nadine Cristovao Jorge and Pava Antonia de Jesus Cristo Adao (Angola).

The summit, held from 21–23 July under the theme “Advancing Aviation Through the Empowerment of Women,” brought together aviation leaders, regulators, ANSPs and international organizations from around the world. For IFATCA, it was an important opportunity to bring the voice of air traffic controllers to the discussion about gender equality and the future aviation workforce.

The discussions in Luanda reinforced many of EDITF’s messages.

The summit focused strongly on moving from good intentions to measurable action. The summit also looked at recruitment, mentorship, leadership, STEM, new technology, retention and workplace culture.

IFATCA members have contributed to the development of the ICAO Mainstreaming Women’s Advancement and Empowerment in Aviation Toolkit, alongside ICAO and the global network of Gender Focal Points.

Having Lumbiwe, Nadine and Pava there was therefore highly relevant. They brought the perspective of our profession into an international discussion about how we build the aviation workforce of the future.

The EDI work continues. We are already looking ahead and are excited to see you all again at the IFATCA Regional Meetings this autumn. There is still much to do, and we need to keep the conversation going. Whether we are talking about attracting the next generation, valuing new colleagues or keeping experienced controllers, the message is simple:

Safe. Seen. Valued. Included.

Because when people thrive, our profession thrives. We Are IFATCA.





Are We Selecting for Ability, or Designing for Capability?

Rethinking Medical Standards and the Future of Recruitment

By: Cheryl Chen, IFATCA EVP ASP

I was asked a question: "I have mild strabismus. Can I still become an air traffic controller (ATCO)?"

I did not answer immediately. Not because I was unfamiliar with the medical certification standards, but because his question raised a larger one that I could not stop thinking about: are aviation medical examinations selecting or eliminating?

Are we selecting for ability, the physiological attributes a person happens to possess? Or are we selecting for capability, whether a person, given appropriate training, tools, and institutional support, can safely perform the work?

The two often overlap, but they are not the same thing. The distance between them may be one of the most important questions facing our profession.

Aviation is not the only industry with entry barriers, but ours are among the most demanding in the world. ATCOs undergo medical certifications. The rationale is beyond dispute: safety first. But that is not the same as treating today's standards as permanent. History tells a different story. Myopia once disqualified candidates from flying; corrected vision is now widely accepted. Numerous medical conditions that once meant automatic rejection are today acceptable because medicine has advanced.

Medical standards have evolved continuously and every evolution has been driven not by a lowering of standards, but by the same recurring question: does what we measure still reflect what the job actually requires?

Successful professions do not merely maintain entry requirements. They continuously examine whether those requirements still measure what really matters and make adjustments if not.

The aviation industry worldwide is preoccupied with recruitment, training and retention. We face shortages. Industry forums, ICAO working groups, and national administrations all repeat the same refrain: we must expand the pool.

Yet as we search for new talent, we rarely look inward at the barriers we ourselves have erected. Are entry restrictions genuinely necessary for safety, or simply inherited assumptions or requirements that made sense for the operational environment of 1976, but deserve re-examination in the operational environment of 2026?

Every unnecessary restriction carries a double cost: excluding individuals who could contribute, and shrinking the very talent pool the industry insists must expand. ICAO's Next Generation of Aviation Professionals initiative recognises that the industry must reach populations it has not traditionally reached. But outreach alone is insufficient if those barriers remain.

I arrived at this thought after meeting Sheila Xu, the first Deaf Asian Pilot and ambassador for advocating space access for disabled people. Because of her, I began re-examining the profession I know best: air traffic control.

Radiotelephony is the backbone of the profession, and so a controller's hearing must be excellent. That assumption was entirely reasonable for an era in which voice was the sole channel of communication.

Considering Controller-Pilot Data Link Communications (CPDLC) allows clearances to be exchanged as text. ADS-C provides automatic position reporting. Digital and remote towers are moving from trials to operations. AI-assisted speech recognition and transcription are maturing rapidly.

Under frameworks such as the ICAO Global Air Navigation Plan and the ASBU roadmap, an ever-greater share of safety-critical information is being conveyed as data rather than as sound.

If that is where our operational environment is heading, then the honest question becomes: is the capability we fundamentally require hearing or is it the ability to comprehend information, exercise judgment, and manage risk?

I am not suggesting that hearing is unimportant. Any controller will rightly point to radio failure, degraded modes, and emergencies in which voice remains the last line of defence. Those objections are valid for the systems we operate now. My question is directed at the systems we are designing for tomorrow: as the operational environment transforms, are we selecting for ability, or designing for capability?

We habitually speak of "air traffic control" as a single job. In reality, it is a family of jobs. Within any air navigation service provider, professionals with controller expertise perform safety investigation, procedure design, human performance analysis, AI system validation, traffic flow management, and much more. Every one of these functions demands deep operational knowledge, but their physiological requirements differ profoundly. Working a radar position in real time and other roles in ATM are not the same. They should not carry identical medical prerequisites.

When we deconstruct the work, we begin to deconstruct our concept of skills. A candidate whose medical condition precludes a control position may be precisely the person our profession most needs in other areas where operational insight is scarce and demand is growing. As automation, digitalisation, and AI reshape the distribution of tasks within air traffic management, this family of jobs will only grow larger and more varied. The mismatch between a single entry standard and a diverse portfolio of roles will only become more visible.

The question, then, is not "can this person be a controller?" It is "have we designed this profession so that assorted people can contribute to it?"

By now it should be evident that this article is not really about disability, nor about medical certification.

It is about whether our institutions can improve because of the diverse people who enter them.

Safety management already works this way. The core question of any Safety Management System is never "who made the error?" but "how does the system become better?" Human performance thinking does not expect perfect humans; it designs systems in which humans succeed. Just Culture does not select for people who never err; it builds institutions that learn. These principles are settled doctrine in our field endorsed by ICAO, embedded in State Safety Programmes, and championed by professional bodies including IFATCA.

If we accept that safety systems must be continuously redesigned, then consistency demands that we ask the same of recruitment, training, technology deployment and yes, medical standards. This ensures they keep measuring what genuinely matters, as the work itself transforms. Coming back to the original question, I replied to check with the aviation medical center. In the future I hope to answer: "Tell me what you want to contribute and let us see whether the system can support you doing it safely."

For decades, our implicit question has been: can people fit the system? I would like to propose that our profession begins asking can the system become better because of the variety of people? A truly safe system has never been one that expects everyone to be identical. It is one that becomes safer precisely because its people are not.





Flight Plan for the Future: Re-engineering the ATC Value Chain

By: Renz Bulseco (CAAP, Philippines) IFATCA Training Task Force Chair

At the IFATCA Annual Conference the panel **"Flight Plan for the Future - The New ATC Value Chain: Attract, Recruit, Train and Retain,"** was insightful with genuine engagement from the audience. We had excellent questions from the floor that we simply could not address in the allotted time. To ensure these were not lost, we asked our distinguished speakers to provide written responses.

What follows is an editorial synthesis of their responses.

On Next-Gen Candidate Matrix: Gamers, IQ, and Selection Realities

A recurring question centred on who we are selecting and how we evaluate them. Some in the aviation industry look toward gamers as prime targets for ATC recruitment. Our panellists agreed that while the cognitive overlap (spatial awareness, multitasking under pressure, and rapid information processing) is completely real, it represents only half the battle. The fundamental paradox: gaming environments inherently reward high-risk taking and tolerate failure as play, whereas air traffic control demands the exact opposite, requiring zero-defect outcomes, disciplined phraseology, and strict operational protocols. Training must explicitly bridge these behavioural gaps early, before operational habits form, rather than assuming cognitive aptitude will automatically carry a candidate through. European operational data show that targeting gamers has had a limited impact on overall training success. The key issue is the behavioural competencies similar to those listed above.

A broad behavioural profile is a more reliable predictor of success than isolated cognitive traits. Selection and training frameworks must evaluate a comprehensive competency matrix to identify suitable candidates and effectively improve retention outcomes. The consensus was clear: prioritising raw IQ over multifactorial assessment yields subpar results and below-par controllers. The consensus was clear: prioritising raw IQ over multifactorial assessment yields subpar results and below-par controllers.

The FEAST system, for example, does not aim to select high-IQ individuals,

it is designed to assess job-relevant cognitive abilities (such as attention, processing speed, and multitasking) alongside dynamic work-sample tests and personality questionnaires. Cognitive ability is easy to measure, but fails to capture psychological resilience and adaptability.

Shifting the Training Paradigm: Flexibility, Trajectories, and Changing the Box

Can we adapt our rigid training structures without compromising safety standards? The answer was a resounding yes. Traditionally, ANSPs have forced students into an administrative box of uniform progression, though human development rarely functions linearly. Our systems must move toward performance-based, adaptive pacing. Compare this to elite sports, where individuals reach peak performance at different ages and at different rates. The objective must be the final competency standard, not the shape of the historical curriculum. Hybrid training models that combine 24/7 on-demand digital materials with live instructor guidance sessions vastly improves basic theory training, building crucial confidence before high-paced simulator environments.

Training flexibility proves critical when distinguishing between a slow learner who requires more time and a trainee who will never meet the required standard. There is a need to look at the overall learning trajectory, rather than a single performance snapshot.



Slower learners display steady, gradual progress; they absorb feedback, reduce error patterns, and adapt to increasing complexity over time. Conversely, those unsuitable for the role tend to plateau completely, repeatedly making identical errors and failing to form a reliable mental traffic picture despite targeted intervention and extensive support.

Accommodate Gen Z learners: training strategies must incorporate shorter feedback loops, localised scenario-based simulation, and highly transparent progress metrics.

Re-examining traditional barriers also means evaluating upper age limits. Operational data show that older students can face steeper cognitive learning curves, particularly regarding processing speed and learning rates. However, mid-career entrants frequently bring invaluable maturity, stress tolerance, and communication skills that younger candidates lack, making a risk-based approach to age limits highly beneficial.

The System Manager of Tomorrow: AI and Automation Monitoring

The question remains: are we designing systems for controllers, or forcing controllers to adapt to systems? Historically, the industry bought complex systems and expected operators to bridge design gaps. With modern digitalisation, integrated AI support, and remote operations, this traditional approach is entirely unsustainable. We are entering an era of human-machine teaming in which the controller transforms from a hands-on tactical operator into a strategic systems manager.

This transformation drastically alters the human factors landscape. The relative importance of specific cognitive traits is shifting: requirements for explicit manual planning and visualisation may decrease due to advanced support tools, but demands for visual scanning, perceptual speed, sustained attention, and complex problem-solving during system degradations will skyrocket. The primary hazards are no longer just tactical overloads but complacency, mode confusion, and the critical need for proper trust calibration with automated decision-support tools.

Most ANSPs are not yet adequately preparing trainees for this shift. Current curricula remain heavily focused on procedural execution. To resolve this, the industry must design intuitive, human-centric interfaces while building training scenarios that explicitly address automation supervisor skills and recovery from unexpected system anomalies. Strikingly, the panellists did not view AI as a recruitment threat.

Younger candidates view AI as a natural component of modern professional practice and adapt quickly to digital tools. The industry's primary task is to clearly communicate that AI is a tool for decision support, not an absolute replacement, meaning human accountability for safety and separation remains non-negotiable.

Structural Sustainability, Wellbeing, and Instructors as Professionals

Fixing the global ATCO shortage requires structural changes over superficial marketing. Increased recruitment simply pushes the bottleneck further downstream if our training capacity, instructor availability, and retention models remain broken. Structural fixes must include multi-year funded training pipelines, expanded simulator capacity, and modular progression models. Furthermore, long-term retention relies on addressing the impacts of shift work, stagnant career paths, and insufficient mental health support.

For Gen Z, well-being and workplace culture are core professional criteria. The panellists noted that younger generations are perfectly willing to face the high-stress environment of ATC if they feel valued and supported by their institutions. Positioning the profession sustainably requires a transparent mental health infrastructure, peer support networks, predictable scheduling that honours recovery time, and open organisational cultures where asking for assistance is viewed as a strength rather than a weakness.

Crucially, this cultural evolution hinges on On-the-Job Training Instructors (OJTIs). The panel adamantly agreed that being an exceptional controller does not automatically make someone an effective instructor. **Instruction is a distinct professional discipline requiring emotional intelligence, communication skills, empathy, and coaching adaptability.** Instructor selection must move away from regulatory box-ticking and instead treat instructing as a highly valued career track.

The Flight Plan Ahead

The discussions demonstrate that the ATC value chain cannot be quickly fixed. From attraction to retention, every link in the chain requires an organisational willingness to change. Our global community must protect our non-negotiable safety standards while ruthlessly modernising our methods, tools, and mindsets. Only by building an adaptive, human-centric training ecosystem can we ensure that the flight plan for the future remains secure for generations of controllers to come.





From Human Error to Human Performance

The Variable We Measure... But Are We Using It to Its Full Potential?

By: Sanja Sadiković (BHANSA, Bosnia and Herzegovina)

For more than half a century, the aviation community has invested enormous effort in understanding one of its most valuable resources, the human being. What began in the 1970s as research into human error and the impact of shift work on safety gradually evolved into a much broader field of Human Factors research and, more recently, Human Performance. The focus is no longer limited to understanding why people make mistakes, but rather how physiological, psychological and operational factors influence their ability to perform safely and effectively.

As early as the 1970s, research demonstrated that shift work was not merely an organisational issue, but a factor directly affecting sleep, physiological functioning and controller performance. During the 1990s these studies entered a new phase. In addition to subjective assessments, researchers began using objective methods to measure attention, reaction time, memory and vigilance – fundamental components of human performance. The findings were remarkably consistent: the same controller does not demonstrate the same level of performance throughout the shift cycle, with the most pronounced changes occurring during night shifts and periods of circadian low.

As research methods advanced, so did the interest of major aviation organisations in understanding human performance. FAA, EUROCONTROL, ICAO, SESAR, EASA and many other institutions have invested significant resources into research that no longer views human performance as a subjective feeling or personal perception, but as an objectively measurable phenomenon. Neurophysiological measurements, eye-tracking, psychomotor vigilance tests and other validated methods have enabled researchers to observe and quantify changes in human performance in ways that would have seemed almost unimaginable only a few decades ago.

Particular attention in recent years has been devoted to understanding differences between day and night operations.

In 2024, EASA completed one of the largest European studies on controller fatigue, while in 2025 Peukert and colleagues investigated the dynamics of fatigue and performance during morning, afternoon and night shifts in an operational European Area Control Centre. Among their key findings were:

- Morning shifts showed relatively stable subjective fatigue.
- Fatigue increased progressively during afternoon and evening shifts.
- Night shifts exhibited the highest fatigue during the Window of Circadian Low (WOCL) – the period of the day when the human organism is biologically programmed to have the lowest level of alertness and cognitive performance.
- Objective Psychomotor Vigilance Test (PVT) results demonstrated a measurable decline in performance during the middle of the night shift, followed by only partial recovery later in the shift.
- Overall fatigue levels were significantly higher during night shifts than during daytime operations.





From Research to Operational Practice

The knowledge gained through decades of Human Performance research has not remained confined to scientific publications. It has fundamentally changed the way aviation operates.

It has reshaped the selection and training of air traffic controllers through initial and recurrent training, Team Resource Management (TRM) and Human Factors programmes. It has influenced the design of shift systems, minimum rest requirements and break scheduling through Fatigue Risk Management. It has become an essential element in the design of human-machine interfaces, automation concepts and decision-support tools developed by EUROCONTROL and SESAR. Finally, it has transformed the way the aviation community understands safety itself, becoming an integral part of incident investigation, safety assessment and change management.

In other words, the knowledge generated through Human Performance research has become embedded in almost every major area of modern Air Traffic Management.

Have We Used This Knowledge to Its Full Potential?

Despite these achievements, one question remains. If decades of Human Performance research have already shaped training, fatigue management, operational procedures, system design and safety management, **have we truly made full use of what we have learned?**

Are there other areas of Air Traffic Management where this knowledge could provide additional value?

One area that deserves discussion is sector capacity planning.

More than three decades after IFATCA recognised Human Performance as one of the factors influencing capacity, operational capacity models continue to quantify primarily complexity and workload. The current CAPAN methodology considers

radio communication, coordination, flight data human performance mainly through the time required to complete operational tasks – radar tasks, processing and conflict search.

CAPAN models one hour of controller work.

But which hour? The first hour of a morning shift? 11:00 a.m.? 06:00 a.m. after an entire night on duty? The last hour of a demanding night shift?

Current methodologies do not explicitly distinguish between these physiological states. Circadian rhythm, fatigue, sleep inertia, chronotype and other scientifically established components of Human Performance are not currently included as explicit variables in sector capacity planning.

Questions Worth Asking

This article does not propose a new methodology, nor does it argue that current capacity models are incorrect.

It simply asks whether the time has come to begin a professional discussion.

- Does the declared sector capacity implicitly assume that controller performance remains constant throughout the day?
- Should declared sector capacity remain unchanged if human performance is demonstrably dynamic rather than constant?
- If we are capable of objectively measuring Human Performance, why is it not considered as one of the potential inputs for future capacity planning methodologies?
- Operational capacity is routinely adapted to changing weather conditions, equipment failures and technical constraints. Should future discussions also consider whether objectively measurable changes in Human Performance deserve a place in that conversation?

The question is no longer whether Human Performance changes.

The evidence suggests that it does. Perhaps the real question is whether we have already made full use of everything we have learned?



ENAIRE's "Clear to Calm" Experience

Mindfulness in Air Traffic Control: From Stress Mitigation to Operational Benefits

By: David Garcia Hermosilla (USCA, Spain)

An air traffic controller often works under high cognitive demand, constant multitasking, growing automation and the absolute need to stay precise and "fit for duty". On top of all of those items, they need to cope with circadian rhythm disruption caused by shift work and the frequently challenging work-life balance. In this environment, where the margin for error is extremely narrow, stress is not just a personal or health issue: it becomes a systemic safety risk. It often degrades situational awareness and decision-making and, over time, leads to burnout, weakening the whole safety chain.

This article does not come from theory, but from the experience of someone "on the frequency." As an active ATCO and a certified MBSR instructor, I have seen how training the mind and emotional balance improves not only wellbeing but also the professional skills operational performance depends on. Back in 2015, working a busy Mallorca departures sector, my body reached a point of exhaustion I was not even aware of, until a colleague asked: "Are you ok?" Only then did I realize I was not, even though I was performing "normally." Labor conflicts, three relocations in five years with new ratings, and the birth of two daughters had silently eroded my resilience. That disconnection between body and mind is a common professional hazard: we are trained to continuously monitor the radar, but we rarely monitor the very biological core of the operation, ourselves.

To see why mindfulness is also an operational tool, we must look at the biology of stress. The "fight or flight" response is triggered whenever the brain perceives a threat, and it does not matter whether that threat is real or imagined, present or merely anticipated. The hypothalamus fires the sympathetic nervous system, cortisol and adrenaline flood the body, and every non-vital process is put on hold. Useful for short-term survival; damaging when it never switches off. Sustained high cortisol acts as a neurotoxin on the prefrontal cortex, the seat of executive function, reasoning and emotional regulation. The result is the well-known "amygdala hijack": the irrational brain takes over, producing cognitive tunneling and a loss of resources.

For an ATCO this is critical, because the very tools we

need, working memory and situational awareness, are the first to degrade. As I often put it, we are using a Stone Age autonomic nervous system and brain hardware to navigate a modern, globalized, automated and virtual world, prone to sensory overload and attention deficit. A body kept on constant chemical alert slowly loses its ability to recover during rest, the cumulative fatigue that precedes an incident.

So, what is mindfulness? Beyond its "new age" or relaxation-only misconceptions, it is rigorous mental training: a non-judgmental, moment-to-moment awareness of our thoughts, emotions and sensations. It fosters neuroplasticity, strengthening the connection between the prefrontal cortex and the amygdala so we can observe a stressful stimulus without being overwhelmed by it. It is not about "emptying the mind," but about training the "attention muscle" to stay present, enabling deliberate responses instead of automatic, stress-driven reactions. The gold standard is the MBSR program developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn: scientifically established, an eight-week structure, and non-religious. Unlike "McMindfulness" or surface-level workshops, a full MBSR has been shown to change brain structure, with fMRI studies (Lazar and Hölzel, Harvard) showing a thickening of the cortex in areas linked to memory, learning and self-awareness, alongside a reduction in the size and activation of reactivity-related areas such as the amygdala.

And this is not a fringe concept. IFATCA itself recommended mindfulness in its 2020 guidance "Coping with COVID-19," and EUROCONTROL did the same in "Managing Stress in ATM". It is not new to aviation either. Argentina presented a mindfulness-based stress program, "Mindful Systems," at ICAO in 2016, and at Maastricht UAC (MUAC) stress and fatigue workshops have run for years.

The mental rigor of our profession runs parallel to elite sports and special operations. Phil Jackson brought mindfulness to Michael Jordan's Chicago Bulls and the LA Lakers; Novak Djokovic credits daily practice for his resilience; and elite military units use it to sharpen situational awareness. These performers know that maximum performance



not maximum potential, but maximum potential minus interferences, and most interferences come from the default mode network: the wandering, worried mind. Mindfulness trains us to switch that network off. If an ATCO can stay "calm under fire," their cognitive resources remain available for managing traffic.

That was the hypothesis behind "Clear to Calm" at ENAIRE, a study we ran at the Barcelona Area Control Centre testing a full MBSR among controllers. From October 2019 to March 2020, 56 volunteers from Barcelona Tower and ACC, completed the program in two groups of 28; the second group, starting three months later, acted as a control for the first. Through periodic, simultaneous SCL-90-R tests on both groups, we verified, with a 95% confidence level, a significant reduction of stress-related discomfort of about 65%, along with the associated somatization symptoms.

We also saw clear gains in emotional regulation and cognitive skills: better memory and concentration, less irritability, sadness, tension and exhaustion. On the operational side, a questionnaire designed by the Safety Division showed increased concentration and attention, fewer distractions, and the capacity to capture and process more stimuli, meaning enhanced situational awareness and better decision-making. In short, it improved every core TRM (Team Resource Management) skill: teamwork, communication, empathy and personal commitment. The training does not only mitigate stress and fatigue: it is not a soft skill or an HR perk, it is an operational intervention that improves performance and safety.

Two more editions have followed. "Clear to Calm II" ran online in 2022, to reach personnel in different locations; "Clear to Calm III" ran from January to March 2026 in a hybrid format, with an online platform reinforced by weekly in-person sessions I delivered.

Format has emerged as a key finding: the first edition thrived on in-person, group energy; the purely online second edition was effective in depth but faced adherence hurdles, showing that digital fatigue can hinder the transformation, often for those who need it most. The hybrid third edition combines online flexibility with the in-person reinforcement that proves essential, guided by an instructor who understands the specific nuances of ATC.

A common fear is that this is a cost. The evidence says it is an investment. When Transport for London offered its staff a full mindfulness program, days lost to stress, anxiety and depression fell by 71%, and absences for all reasons by half (UK All-Party Parliamentary Group on Mindfulness). Wellbeing is a prerequisite for operational safety, and the return is measured in both.

The most powerful validation, however, comes from the controllers themselves. One noted: "When you sit on frequency after a meditation, you feel focused, you don't miss a single detail; even the pilot's voice transmits more information than before." Another described the shift in the whole unit: "In this month we have gone from thirty stressed faces to thirty smiling faces... we are minimizing the seriousness of problems. It is a great feeling!" That move from a reactive, stressed culture to a calmer, kinder one may be the greatest contribution to systemic safety.

None of this stands alone. ICAO's guidance frames mental health and wellbeing at the heart of a positive safety culture, built on layers of protection, from peer support to self-care, and the resilience they build. But there is a harder truth beneath it. Controllers rarely admit a mental-health problem or look for advice, because it can feel like risking their medical certificate, and that silence can be a safety risk itself. After the Germanwings tragedy, ICAO pointed to peer support as the way to raise such issues in confidence, within a just, non-punitive culture. In my experience, after years in CISM, what works best is peer support from well-trained colleagues, respected and accepted as equals, resting on confidentiality and proper training, always with a clinical supervisor to lean on when a case needs referral.

EASA is also revising how mental fitness is assessed with projects like MESAFE, so that asking for help becomes normal, not a threat to a career. Mindfulness fits squarely within that self-care layer: the daily training that keeps a controller fit for duty. The IFATCA Mental Wellbeing Task Force is also doing vital work, and it deserves our full support.

A word of caution, and it is a point I never leave out: mindfulness is not a cure-all, and a stress-reduction program must never become an excuse to avoid fixing the real stressors of the job, rostering, the workload, the staffing, the working hours, the management style. Wellbeing works alongside those fixes, not instead of them.

As the first "Clear to Calm" study concluded, even during the COVID-19 confinement those who had done the training showed a further 9% drop in stress symptoms months later, proving that if it is done with consistency, these are not temporary fixes but life-changing skills that last. It is time to apply the same operational rigor to mental fitness that we apply to our technical proficiency: it is time to move from the frequency of stress to the frequency of calm.

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ELSSE - Specialised Language Project

Eliciting Language Specific Signatures for Expertise (ELSSE) in the Human Brain

By: David Johnson (GATCO UK) SEP Lead

ELSSE is a brilliant research project being undertaken in the language and brain laboratory of the Faculty of Linguistics, Philology and Phonetics at the University of Oxford, UK. At the centre of the project is Dr Hilary Wynne, a senior research associate and fellow of the Kellogg College specialising in Psycholinguistics. Together with Henry Emery of Latitude Aviation Services, they have devised this project to deduce the contribution of specialised language codes to expertise in certain fields of work, such as aviation and medicine.

I was delighted to take advantage of a wonderful opportunity to be part of the project; the opportunity arose from my connections with linguistic acquaintances made through my involvement in IFATCA's fantastic Speak English Programme (SEP). This programme brings together Air Traffic Controllers and pilots from across the globe in friendly conversation, to enrich the confidence and vocabulary of second language English speakers.

The session was really fascinating. Dr Wynne first gave brief details of what to expect and then I was fitted with an EEG skull cap. Conductive goo was then applied between the electrodes and my scalp. After a brief test of conductivity, Dr Wynne sat me in a soundproof booth and I was given a series of simulated ATC transmissions.



I was then asked to answer yes or no to whether certain things had been heard during the transmissions. I am sworn to secrecy as to the exact nature of the test, in case any of you wish to participate. Knowing the objective may distort the outcomes. I really would encourage anyone who can do so, to participate!

After five sets of around 6 minutes of transmissions were completed (the first being a test bank), I was released from the booth. Dr Wynne explained that she was pleased with my inputs and allowed me to wash my hair, to remove the thick gel used to facilitate the conductivity of the electrical signals. She then explained in more detail, the purpose and goals of the tests. Again, I can't go into too much detail, but suffice to say that detection of erroneous phraseology elements is a factor.

This was a fascinating experience and Dr Wynne and her assistant, Jiamin Cheng, were delightful hosts. Reasonable travel expenses are paid to participants and I'd really encourage anyone to give a couple of hours of your time to this project, which is intended to promote safety in phraseology and language perception.

If you'd like to find out more, the projects webpage is:

<https://brainlab.web.ox.ac.uk/elsse-project>

If you'd like to participate, email Dr Hilary Wynne at: oxfordelsseproject@gmail.com



Critical Incident Stress Management at the European Conference

By: Marc Baumgartner, (Helvetica, Switzerland)
SESAR Coordinator



The E-CISM Network is a Swiss Association which was founded in Geneva on 23 June 2021, to enhance the psychological wellbeing of people working in organisations in Europe by delivering CISM training and promoting its practice. The E-CISM network will serve its members by providing the ICISF standard of crisis intervention in their own countries given the various languages, histories, and cultures of its populations.

The European CISM conference took place in Rome at the Casa dell'Aviatore, on the 20th and 21st of March. It was also available online.

This network brings together professionals from a broad spectrum of various backgrounds (from aviation to firefighters, to military domain etc.). During the two-day workshop, many interesting presentations were delivered to the audience of this hybrid conference.

During the Aviation session on day one, IFATCA was able to present some of the history of creating CISM programs at the global level and the need to evolve

towards a mental wellbeing program based on peer support programs. Examples were given such as those being implemented among the pilots community, in particular in the US but as well in Europe as required by the [EU 2020/745](#) commission implementation regulation.

Based on the work of the Mental Wellbeing TF, the table below was presented.

Several ATCOs and members of IFATCA participated in person during the two days in Rome or online as part of their refresher training.

The e-CISM conferences are very valuable to exchange information on the peer support based systems. In particular, the importance of having the ICISF CISM method, across different industries.

Sesar.coord@ifatca.org

Action	Motivation
Prevent crises before they happen by implementing peer support programs.	Proactive care and peer support rather than just crisis intervention Programs for early intervention and prevention
Create psychological safety for help-seeking (just culture)	Strong support from the organizations, controllers must feel safe to disclose their problem Clear confidentiality protocols Collaboration between organizations and unions (like the project Wingmen)
Fatigue management	Fatigue and sleep management is connected to high stress levels Sleep & shift work, science behind it Fatigue risk management (this also connects with organisational wellness culture and support from our companies)
Mental health should have the same priority as the physical health	We deserve mental health professionals that are aviation trained; we deserve to be understood And supported FAA is training mental health professionals to understand aviation culture
Regulations	We need organisational, structured, peer and individual support (on all levels) Organizations must not just get involved but lead. they need to design rosters, cultures, and policies that protect the controllers; we should not be left to fight the battle on our own
Collaborations/experiences	Good practices from the pilots, firefighters, police and military PSP (Australia, NZ)





IFATCA Speak English Programme

“First Solo” - Tales of Novice Facilitators

By: David Johnson (GATCO UK) SEP lead

Our fabulous Secretariat team are caretakers of the fantastic Speak English Program. One of the best jobs in IFATCA is bringing together ATCOs and pilots from all around the world in a friendly and immersive online chat family. We get to interact freely and sociably while all the time assisting second language English speakers to practice listening and speaking English comfortably, without judgement of their proficiency.

Having retired, it's been a long time since I validated my ATC ratings, but it's much more recently that I “went solo” as a facilitator in SEP. I now act as mentor and assessor of new facilitators. How does facilitating your first solo SEP session compare with your first transmission on the ATC frequency?

I asked Tatsiana from Minsk in Belarus and Miyu from Nagoya in Japan, recently validated facilitators, to answer that question.

TATSIANA - My SEP path started 2 years ago. I remember how excited I was to become a participant. What a wonderful opportunity to enhance my language proficiency, and to speak with my colleagues around the globe!

It turns out to be not only about language skills, it's an absolutely unique environment in terms of self-development. Through the SEP sessions you can easily find motivation and inspiration to grow professionally, to study the language, to exercise more, to read more or even to cook something unusual! It makes you want to explore different spheres of life, because when you speak with people in another language it's like wearing a new pair of glasses. The world stays the same, but suddenly you notice details you have never seen before, in others, and in yourself.

You might think a participant needs to speak English at an advanced level, but it's a common misconception. Actually, the facilitator adjusts the conversation to where you are. What you really need is to enjoy the process and not to be embarrassed to ask questions if you don't understand.

I always thought that being a facilitator would be a highly responsible role, like being a conductor of a small orchestra. You would need to set the direction of the conversation so that everyone can follow it with interest. I was right! I have tested it in practice. Yes, you are responsible. But for an ATCO, that's not a problem! If I compare my first solo transmission as a facilitator to my first solo transmission as an ATCO, they are quite similar and quite different at the same time.

In both cases I was nervous and a bit stressed, extremely attentive, overwhelmed in a positive way and absolutely captivated by the process.

What else do these two roles have in common? Constant scanning; an ATCO, I scan for traffic, readback errors, potential conflicts etc. As a facilitator, I “scan” the group, who wants to speak, who is hesitating, who has that “I don't understand” look on their face. In both roles, I must listen actively while planning the next move.

What's different? When I control air traffic I never forget that I can't make a mistake. When I facilitate, I know that stakes are not so high. It doesn't make me less responsible, but it's less pressure. Just like in air traffic control, more practice is needed to truly master it.





MIYU - “You like speaking English, right? Don’t you want to talk with ATCOs from all over the world?” This simple question from one of my colleagues about four years ago introduced me to the Speak English Program. Since then, SEP has been adding a little bit of spice into my life.

As a participant, I enjoyed meeting ATCOs around the world and learning through conversations with experienced facilitators and fellow participants. When the Secretariat first invited me to become a facilitator, I hesitated. I admired the facilitators I had met and wasn’t sure I could lead a session as well as they did, so I decided to remain a participant a little longer.

At the beginning of 2026, however, I felt it was time to change myself. It is my fifth year as an ATCO, I am about to turn 30, and I wanted to step outside my comfort zone. Although I still lacked confidence, I accepted the invitation.

What surprised me most was that I felt even more nervous facilitating a session than handling traffic. As controllers, we spend years training before working independently. In contrast, I became a facilitator simply by saying “yes.” There was no formal training, only trust, experience as a participant, and a willingness to learn. That made every session exciting, challenging, and a little intimidating.

Fortunately, I have never felt alone. The other facilitators understand exactly what that first solo experience feels like because they have all been through it themselves. They are always ready to offer encouragement, share advice, and remind me that improving comes with practice.

Becoming a facilitator has also changed the way I learn. As a participant, I focused on improving my English by listening and joining conversations. As a facilitator, I am learning how to guide conversations, change topics naturally, and make sure everyone has a chance to talk. Every session teaches me something new.

For anyone looking for a friendly place to practice aviation English, SEP is the perfect environment. It is not a test, and nobody is there to judge your language ability. Instead, people encourage each other and share perspectives on aviation and many other subjects from around the world.

Tatsiana and Miyu both say the people are the most rewarding part of the SEP journey. Both love meeting people from different countries, learning about different cultures, and exchanging ideas. The human connection is amazing and they are never without someone to give advice and support.

Both are proud to be part of this wonderful community.





When the Test Becomes the Training:

The Hidden Impact of ICAO Language Proficiency Testing

By: Mehdi Roohi (IRANATCA, Iran)

Every air traffic controller knows the importance of clear communication. In aviation, a single misunderstanding can escalate into a serious safety event. That is precisely why the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPR) were introduced—to ensure that pilots and controllers possess the English language skills needed not only to use standard phraseology, but also to communicate effectively when routine procedures are no longer enough.

But what happens when the test itself begins to shape the way people learn?

My research explored the washback effect of the ICAO Language Proficiency Test—a well-known concept in educational assessment that describes how examinations influence teaching, learning, and learner behaviour. While every high-stakes test changes how people prepare, the ICAO LPR is unlike most others. Its outcome affects careers, licensing, operational readiness, and, ultimately, aviation safety.

The study investigated the experiences of Iranian air traffic controllers, pilots, and aviation English instructors using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The findings revealed that the LPR test has a profound influence on classroom practices, training materials, and learning strategies.

Participants consistently reported that courses increasingly revolve around passing the examination, rather than developing long-term communicative competence.

This is where the distinction between teaching English and teaching the test becomes critically important.

When instructors feel pressured to prepare candidates for predictable exam tasks, authentic communication can gradually give way to rehearsed responses, memorisation, and intensive practice of familiar question formats. Learners become more concerned with achieving Level 4 than with developing the flexibility to handle unexpected operational situations—the very scenarios where plain English becomes essential.

Fortunately, the study also highlights an encouraging reality: washback is not inherently negative. Well-designed assessments can drive positive learning, encourage better teaching, and reinforce operational communication skills. The challenge is ensuring that language training remains focused on genuine proficiency, rather than exam performance alone.

The implications extend well beyond the classroom. Regulators, training organisations, language testing providers, and operational managers all play a role in ensuring that assessments promote the competencies they are intended to measure. Language testing should encourage confidence, adaptability, and effective communication under pressure—not simply familiarity with an examination format.

For the global ATC community, this raises an important question: Are we preparing controllers to pass a language test, or are we preparing them to communicate safely when phraseology is no longer enough?

As aviation continues to become more international and operational environments grow increasingly complex, the answer matters more than ever. The ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements remain an essential safety barrier, but their true value depends on how they influence learning. When testing promotes authentic communication, it strengthens safety. When it narrows learning to examination techniques, valuable opportunities for professional development can be lost.

Ultimately, the goal should never be to produce better test-takers. It should be to produce better communicators—professionals who can remain calm, clear, and effective when the unexpected happens. In aviation, that difference may one day save lives.



NATCA Communicating for Safety (CFS) 2026

By: *Nicola NI RIADA, IFATCA COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR*

Communicating for Safety (CFS) is the premier aviation safety conference in the United States. It is an annual event, hosted by the National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA). It brings together safety professionals from across the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), industry, military, and international aviation community for three days of collaboration, innovation, and real-world problem-solving. This is done in a combination of panels, keynote speeches, workshops and breakout sessions. Attendees are given ample opportunities to network with aviation professionals in an extensive industry area. This was my 4th year attending on behalf of IFATCA and every year I learn something new, make new friends and feel part of the NATCA family.

Perhaps the most significant item for IFATCA was the launch of a Global Blueprint for Change: "Orchestrating Transformation in Our Skies". NATCA EVP Emeritus and IFATCA EVP Professional Trish Gilbert joined Firstfruits Services CEO Ben Stanley (moderator) and fellow panelists Canadian Air Traffic Control Association (CATCA) President and Global ATC Alliance (GATCA) President Nick von Schoenberg, NATCA President and GATCA Vice President Nick Daniels, Oliver Wyman Vector independent advisor and former FAA Executive Director Kim Pyle. The panel discussed a central theme of the paper: "Transformation cannot be achieved by any single organization, profession, or part of the aviation ecosystem acting alone. Most importantly, it needs to be built with the workforce, not around it."



Transformation is not complete when a capability is deployed. It is complete when it is safely adopted and delivers real operational value."

At Communicating For Safety 2025, an international panel brought together labor leaders from around the world to address shared issues of staffing, technology, and rising traffic. In 2026, NATCA Safety Chair John Murdock reconvened this panel. I was honored to be on this panel and to represent IFATCA as the Communications Coordinator and Irish Air Traffic Controllers Association Executive Board Member. I was joined by NATCA Western Pacific Regional Vice President and GATCA Executive Board member Joel Ortiz, Civil Air Australia President Scott Nugent, and CATCA & GATCA President Nick von Schoenberg for a progress check on staffing, technology, and safety pressure facing controllers well beyond U.S. airspace.

IFATCA's Technical Operational Committee (TOC) chair Jaymi Steinberg (Washington Center, ZDC), received a NATCA Professionalism award from NATCA professional Standards members Patrick Carter (Dallas/Fort Worth TRACON, D10) Chris Keyes (Washington Center, ZDC) and Lydia Baune (Spokane ATCT, GEG and IFATCA Professional Legal Committee (PLC) elected member). Other recipients were Maurice Pitts (Los Angeles ATCT, LAX), John Cordova (Falcon ATCT, FFZ), and James Anzaldi (Engineer, Eastern Region, EEA) — one honoree from each Service Area and NATCA Region X.

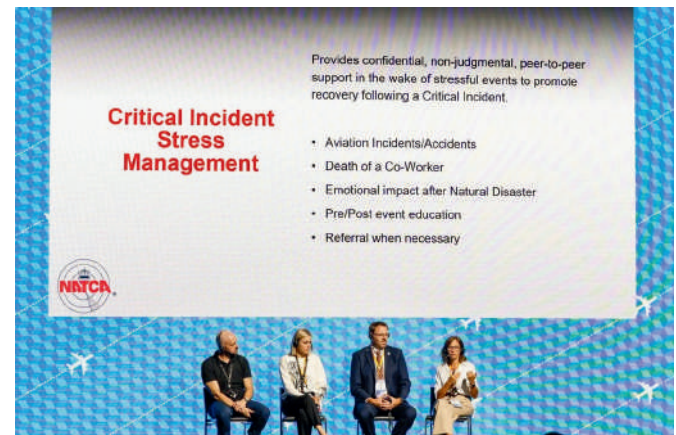


Professional standards also hosted a well attended breakout session. Every year this session is particularly well attended, especially by the international delegates proving that professionalism is without borders. Lydia Baune (IFATCA PLC member) was also part of a panel on peer support, which was topical, informative and thought provoking.

CFS is always an opportunity to meet with Industry Partners too. This year was no different, producing positive interactions with many of our existing partners and providing several new contacts.

CFS is also a great opportunity to be part of pilot/controller interactions. These are inherently worthwhile, giving both sides of the microphone the opportunity to understand the other, while in a relaxed and personable environment.

Thank you to NATCA USA for having IFATCA present at CFS, and thank you to all the ATCOs and industry representatives who engaged with us there.



AI in the Ops Room: Assistant, Partner—or Replacement?

What controllers need to know about artificial intelligence and why the profession must help shape it before it reshapes the job

By: Marc Baumgartner, Stathis Malakis, Anthony Smoker and Nora Berzina, on behalf of IFATCA's Joint Cognitive Human-Machine System Team (JCHMS)

Artificial intelligence is evolving aviation regulation, research & simulator trials. For controllers, the decisive question is not whether an algorithm can produce an impressive output. It is whether new technology helps understand the traffic, make sound decisions, manage the unexpected and remain in control—without making the tactical picture less transparent while responsibility stays with us.

The question behind the headlines

Imagine your next shift. In the tower, a tool predicts a possible runway-occupancy conflict. In a terminal area, it proposes a new arrival sequence after an unexpected go-around. En-route, it warns that weather deviations will overload a sector and recommends transferring selected flights to an automated assistant.

Does 'What the display presents' appear credible and consistent with how a controller will make sense of what is displayed? Would you use it? Probably—if it genuinely helps.

Would you follow it without question? Of course not.

You would want to know what the recommendation is based upon: how certain it is, whether it has considered local constraints and procedures, and what happens if its picture is incomplete. Can you challenge or reject it? Will the system respond sensibly? Who carries responsibility if the output is misleading, poorly calibrated or operationally unsuitable? At the very least, it must not become a distraction or obstacle to your workflow, whether you accept its advice or not.

The word “assistant” is convenient, but it can mislead. An AI tool is not a colleague. It has no license, professional duty, moral judgement or accountability. We should avoid anthropomorphising it—describing it as if it understood, intended or cared in the human sense.

This is the real AI discussion for controllers.

AI and machine learning—in plain language

Artificial intelligence, or AI, is a broad label for

for computer systems that perform tasks associated with human intelligence. Machine learning, or ML, is one family of AI techniques: developers train a model on data so that it can identify statistical patterns and generalise to new cases. Large language models, or LLMs, are one type of machine-learning.

Traditional automation might be programmed: “If these conditions are met, generate this alert.” A machine-learning system might examine many traffic situations and learn which combinations of demand, weather and sector configuration are often followed by high workload. This can be useful: machines can compare large volumes of data, detect patterns and continue monitoring while human attention moves elsewhere.

A system may present one proposed solution or several candidates, drawn from historical or simulated cases. More options can help, but controllers still need to know how they were generated and ranked, which data shaped them, how exceptional events and outliers were treated, and how quickly bad data can be corrected. Frequency is not proof of sound practice: an unusual workaround, local compromise or poor decision may also appear in the data. Operational expertise and data governance must make those distinctions explicit.

Recognising a pattern is not the same as understanding an operational situation. An algorithm does not automatically know why today differs from its training data, nor does it share the controller's goals, local knowledge, judgement or accountability. Operational AI is usually narrow: it can be excellent at one defined task and unreliable outside its intended conditions, while still producing a confident and plausible output.

Will AI replace controllers?

The honest answer is that AI will change controller tasks and work. It may also be used to challenge roles, staffing assumptions and ways of organising service provision.



Pretending that nothing will change would not reassure controllers; it would reduce trust.

But automating a task is not the same as replacing a profession.

Controllers do far more than detect conflicts and issue clearances. They decide what matters now and continually revise a traffic picture built from incomplete and uncertain information. This picture is never finished: it changes with every transmission, manoeuvre, system update and coordination call. Controllers anticipate, coordinate, balance competing goals, create margins and, when plans or systems fail, adapt and see the situation through safely.

The profession earns its value when reality departs from the plan: an emergency, a blocked frequency, a runway event, severe weather—or several at once. Imagine a go-around just as a runway inspection begins and frequency congestion delays coordination. A sequencing tool may continue to offer a neat plan based on assumptions that have already expired. This impacts the controller. They must recognise that the problem has changed, and act, whether the tool still helps or not.

Such situations are hardest to represent in training data, predict and certify. The safe question is not “human or machine?” Nor is it whether they “collaborate” as equal partners. It is how people, tools, procedures, training and organisations should work as a joint system.

The trap: out of the loop, but still responsible

Automation can create a familiar trap. It takes over routine, frequent work and leaves the controller with rare and ambiguous situations it cannot handle. Reduced hands-on practice may then weaken the skills needed to intervene. This is the “leftover” problem, one of the classic ironies of automation. Monitoring is not simply a passive version of controlling; it is a different job.

AI can also move workload rather than reduce it. A tool may add alerts, explanations, confirmations and mode awareness. Workload may shift from controlling traffic to monitoring, interpreting, verifying and recovering from the support system. Poor integration can also disrupt established coordination patterns.

The worst arrangement is one where technology has real operational influence while the controller has limited understanding or ability to intervene—but remains fully accountable. Where the controller is expected to remain accountable, the controller needs the time, information, competence and authority to exercise meaningful control. Responsibility should never exceed effective control.

An AI system may generate an unsafe output, but

it cannot carry moral or professional responsibility. Responsibility must therefore be allocated among designers, manufacturers, regulators, ANSPs and operational staff according to their actual authority and influence—not simply assigned to the last human in the chain.

Some proposed systems use eye tracking, workstation interaction or estimates of workload and attention. Safety benefits may accrue, but it raises privacy, data-ownership and Just Culture questions. Data collected to support the controller must not quietly become performance surveillance or punitive evidence; rules for access, retention and secondary use must be agreed before deployment.

IFATCA is already shaping the answer

IFATCA is not solely watching the debate. The Federation and its JCHMS team are already working where the future is being defined: professional guidance, regulation, legal analysis and operational research.

JCHMS has published a structured approach for the design and use of new technologies, including AI and ML. Its central idea is simple: do not assess the “AI tool” and the “human user” as separate pieces. Assess the complete working system—the controllers, teams, procedures, training, interfaces, technology, organisation and regulatory environment.

A technically accurate algorithm can still create an unsafe operation if it disrupts coordination, degrades situational awareness, encourages over-trust or provides no workable degraded mode. JCHMS asks whether technology supports the controller’s real cognitive work e.g. setting goals, anticipating, coordinating, planning, and staying in control. Controllers must be active participants, not emergency backups waiting for a rare handover.

IFATCA’s policy is clear: AI- and ML-based systems should only be implemented as decision-support systems and shall not replace the ATCO’s decision.

From regulation to the simulator

EASA’s AI Concept Paper distinguishes systems that support human decisions from more advanced levels in which an AI-based system may select or implement actions under human oversight. Ultimately this will evolve to advanced automation with greater authority. EASA’s Rulemaking Task RMT.0742, proposed Detailed Specifications for Artificial Intelligence trustworthiness (DS.AI).



IFATCA participated in this task bringing operational experience into the emerging framework.

Behind the formal language are operational questions. How was the system trained and tested? Where is it expected to work—and where is it not? Can it explain an output in a useful form and at the right time? Can the controller challenge or reject it?

The European Union AI Act adds a wider legal framework, including requirements for risk management, data governance, traceability, transparency, human oversight, accuracy, robustness and cybersecurity. The Act became generally applicable on 2 August 2026; high-risk requirements apply from December 2027 or August 2028, depending on legal classification.

AWARE—Achieving Human–Machine Collaboration with Artificial Situational Awareness—builds on AISA, the earlier AI Situational Awareness Foundation for Advancing Automation project. AWARE extends artificial situational awareness to include aspects of the controller’s attention, intent and goals. The prototype provides advisory and execution modes with current ATCOs in human-in-the-loop simulation.

These projects move the debate from slideware to working systems that controllers can challenge. They can expose outputs that are technically plausible yet poorly timed or inconsistent with safe controller practice. Research is not operational approval. Successful demonstrations do not prove safety in every unit, traffic pattern or degraded condition. Simulation is where weak concepts should be exposed early.

ATCO participation cannot be limited to a final acceptance test. Controllers must help define the problem, develop scenarios, set requirements, test normal and abnormal operations, shape training, assess safety and monitor the system after introduction. Involvement throughout the development lifecycle should be a policy-backed requirement, not a courtesy consultation.

Six tests before an AI tool reaches operations

Controllers and their representatives should be able to obtain clear answers to six questions.

- What operational problem is it solving—and for whose benefit? Make safety, workload, capacity and cost trade-offs explicit.
- What data shaped it, and where are its limits? Explain selection, correction, outliers, operating conditions, uncertainty and known failure modes.
- Is its explanation operationally useful? The controller needs the right information at the right time—not only after the event.

- Can the controller challenge, reject and override it? Oversight needs time, authority and an interface that supports action without extra disruption.
- What happens when it is misleading, mis-calibrated or unavailable? Design degraded modes, fallbacks, competency maintenance and recurrent simulation from the start.
- Who controls the data, the decision and the responsibility? Accountability must follow actual authority, influence and ability to intervene.

One principle sits behind all six: no AI for ATC without continuous ATCO involvement.

Keep the controller in the room—and in control

AI will not arrive in ATM as one dramatic event. It will arrive function by function: a prediction here, an alert there, a suggested sequence, an adaptive display. Each change may appear small. Together, poorly integrated functions can redesign controller work, skills, authority and professional identity—and overload cognitive processing until meaningful control is eroded.

Fear about jobs cannot be answered with slogans. Nobody can promise that every task, post or staffing model will remain unchanged. Equally, a system that performs selected tasks in nominal conditions has not replaced the profession

The strongest safeguard is professional influence.

Controllers need sufficient AI literacy to ask hard operational questions, recognise unrealistic promises and participate confidently in design, validation and regulation. IFATCA must remain present wherever future rules, concepts and systems are shaped.

The objective is to preserve safe control, professional expertise, meaningful human work and responsibility. Let machines carry more calculation, comparison and data processing where they can amplify what controllers bring. Let controllers retain the judgement, authority, teamwork and adaptive capacity needed when traffic does not follow the model.

“Keep the human in the loop” is no longer enough. The controller must be able to understand the loop, influence the loop and recover the operation when the loop breaks.

Keep the controller in the room where the future is designed—and keep the controller in control when the aircraft are moving.





Farnborough Airshow 2026

A Different Perspective

*By: Amanda Rhodes (GATCO UK) &
Tom Copestake a Senior First Officer with Wizz Air UK*



Farnborough International Airshow originated in 1948 when the Society of British Aircraft Constructors (SBAC) established a permanent home at the historic Farnborough Airport in Hampshire, England. The event evolved from a small national trade exhibition, into one of the world's most influential aerospace and defense events.

Amanda and Tom took part in Pioneers of Tomorrow Day, the dedicated public and youth-focused careers event held on the final Friday of the biennial event. Amanda represented ATC as part of the charity Flyforward <https://www.flyforward.co.uk/> which gives young people the chance to speak to aviation professionals in person.

Amanda: Tom asked me the evening before the event, and I jumped at the chance! I'd not attended the Farnborough Airshow for over 30 years. I attended with my Dad as a child. I was as in awe today, as I was 30 years ago. Never did I think I'd be attending the Farnborough airshow as a valid radar controller of 25 years and the vice president of communications for GATCO, much less representing a profession I adore and connecting with people from across the globe.

The Pioneers of Tomorrow was a sell-out event!! Children, young people, and families from all over the world attended. To be able to be part of such a fun, informative, and inspirational day was incredible. I got the chance to break down misconceptions about our industry. I was finally a face behind the voice, for people to come and talk to in person. No standard phraseology or mandatory read-backs, just me. The woman behind the headset.

It was a day of inspiring and showcasing what the world of aviation has to offer, regarding future careers: hands-on activities, a careers hub, and inspirational speakers.

The airshow itself was amazing. Opening with the Red Devil parachute display team and including displays from the Typhoon, F-35, A350, Fursan Al Emarat display team, and of course the VA-1X, eVTOL. They showcased their first-ever public electric vertical take-off and landing earlier in the week.

We forget how far-reaching our industry is as controllers. Social media, flight tracker apps, and events like this bring it all into focus. This event gave me the chance to meet those I speak to, work alongside (in voice alone), those who aspire to be one of us, and those that just appreciate what we do. I took a moment to step back and watch the next generation of aviation professionals take their first steps into an industry I love. It was a truly full circle moment.

It made me appreciate what I do, a small part in a much bigger picture. I learned so much from those I met. They gave me a fresh perspective, for which I am incredibly grateful. Then, as the F-35 roared overhead, I became 10-year-old Amanda again, pointing and giggling just as I did all those years ago. Some things never change.

Tom: No matter how young or old you are, you just can't help but let out a little yelp when an F-35 blasts off with full afterburner. And I can confirm that this was the case for me, whilst watching the aerial displays at the Pioneers of Tomorrow day at Farnborough International Airshow. The last day of the airshow aims to introduce the next generation of talent, to the various roles available within the industry. What better place to do that than at Farnborough? The main airshow has over 1,400 exhibitors from all over the world, demonstrating their wares and doing deals. It's only right that the final day should be dedicated to introducing the industry to emerging future talent.



Those of us who work in the industry know aviation can be quite siloed... No matter how hard we try, there just are inherent barriers. An example would be between flight crews and the various controllers who guide us and our passengers safely throughout the skies. So when FlyForward asked me to join them to meet some of the future generation of workers and to do so alongside other professionals from across the industry, how could I refuse?

FlyForward is a relatively new non-profit organisation established to help demystify the industry to those looking to develop a career within aviation. Tim (the man behind the organisation) is himself only just setting out on his career journey, which makes it all the more remarkable that he was able to arrange a presence at one of the most influential aviation events on the calendar! I didn't start my pilot training until I was in my mid-thirties, so I'm a big advocate for breaking down barriers and offering a bit of guidance to those who also want to break into this industry.

And so in what sounds like the start of a bad joke, an ATCO, a pilot, an airport firefighter, an aviation safety analyst and an ATC consultant came together to represent facets of the industry to anyone who wanted to listen.

It turns out, a lot of people wanted to listen!

Over the course of the day, we met 50+ people with all sorts of interests in aviation. It was great being able to talk about the multiple roles that exist within aviation. Yes, I'm a pilot, but most importantly the role is about customer service. I suggest customer service is at the heart of what all of us do- without the customers I wouldn't have a flying job, and without the airlines the role of ANSPs would be considerably diminished.



We chatted with a number of college graduate-age young adults who had questions about training, direction and career potential. Meanwhile, at the other end of the scale, we spoke to a number of early-teens who didn't have quite the same level of questioning, but who just loved being around the static displays, and the "buzz".

And actually my take-away from the event was exactly that: no matter what instrument each of us plays within this massive orchestra that we call "aviation", there's one common thread that holds us together. Whether it was seeing the giant GE Test Bed 747-400, to walking through the Airbus pavilion collecting key rings and exploring their new technologies, seeing the unbridled joy on the face of a young 'un who "gets it" and from feeling the kick in your chest of an F-35 as it thunders down the runway with a trail of afterburner blazing behind it, it is quite simply the buzz we get from it.





EAA Air Venture, Oshkosh

Furthering the Education

By: Brittney Armbrust, NATCA USA, IFATCA World Comms, AMA Regional Comms Chair



This was my second year representing NATCA in our booth at the world's largest airshow, Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) AirVenture. This event is held every year at Wittman Regional Airport, in Oshkosh Wisconsin. This week is our best opportunity to connect and engage with our aviation community from all over the world. EAA AirVenture 2026 set record attendance with around 734,000 attendees, 98 countries represented and approximately 6,000 volunteers to make the week a resounding success.

NATCA once again hosted a booth, with 34 members from around the country. These volunteers provided briefings which allowed pilots to earn Wings Credit. They also participated in various forums at different locations around the airshow, and inspired future aviators at Kid Venture.

We held 4 briefings daily, on a large variety of subjects to help educate the flying community and curate productive discussions to improve the safety of our National Airspace System. (More details on the specific subjects available in The Controller Magazine Issue 2, September 2025.)

Along with the briefings, we were invited to participate in various forums across the airshow throughout the week. EAA Radio (a one-of-a-kind radio station run by EAA volunteers) produces a weeklong radio show, with various segments featuring different speakers from all sectors of aviation. NATCA is fortunate to be invited to a daily radio spot, to provide a controller perspective on various topics.

I participated in two separate segments; Situational Awareness in the Flight Deck, and VFR Flight Following: Why it's important. All segments from this year and past years are available on the EAA AirVenture website.

New this year was ATC101, or as we called it "Mic Fright," located at the EAA Learn to Fly Center. It was created to help pilots who are uncomfortable talking with ATC, an opportunity to chat with air traffic controllers. We had a scripted scenario where a pilot calls up to request pattern work at their local airport. The scenario went through every phase of flight including obtaining the Automated Terminal Information Service (ATIS), talking to both ground and tower control using real intercoms and headsets. This helped to create a more real-world experience. I hope we were able to help give some peace of mind to pilots and encourage them to call ATC more frequently, with added confidence.



WomenVenture aimed to inspire women and young girls to start their aviation journey through booths, presentations and a variety of different organizations focused on women in aviation. NATCA was invited to present “A Day in the Life”, which provided a look at what life looks like behind the mic followed by a Q & A session. The panel was led by NATCA member Rachel Gilmore (Indianapolis Center ZID), and included NATCA members Stefania Graziano (Washinton National Tower, DCA), Allison Schwaegel (St. Louis ATCT, STL) and myself (Colorado Springs Tower and Tracon, COS). This was one of my favorite panels to participate on during the week. The attendees were very engaged and asked a lot of good questions. We had a few young girls come up afterward stating they had applied or were looking to apply to become a controller, which was rewarding and excellent to see.

Also new this year, Master Instructor Continuing Education Program (MICEP), invited NATCA to engage in a Q & A with one of the organizers and an audience of flight instructors, to help further their education. NATCA member Jesse Strickland (Houston Center-ZHU) and I took part in one of the two sessions we had with them during the week.

We know not everyone can make it to the NATCA booth for presentations. So, we love when new outlets pop up for us to provide insight into our profession and chat with pilots, especially those training the next generation of pilots.

Popular pilot Sarah Daniels, who is flying her pink Cirrus around the country with the goal of visiting every airport in the US, joined us at the booth for ATC & You: Teaming Up When Trouble Hits. Our briefing covered inflight emergencies. Sarah gave her first-hand experience, with a partial power loss and how ATC helped her out in that scenario. It was great to meet her and have her with us to provide the pilot perspective and help shape the briefing in a unique way.

This event has quickly become one of my favorites; it is truly rewarding to represent NATCA and ATC in this capacity. I hope to see some of my international ATC community at the event in the future. Save the date for next year! **26 July -1 August 2027**





By: Philippe Domogala (EGATS)

My Best VFR Trips

As many of you know, I always try to make a local VFR trip in the country I am visiting. Many of these such flights were while attending IFATCA meetings. I wrote many articles on those flights for The Controller magazine, over the years. As we have more and more VFR pilots among controllers, our new Editor asked me to write about my favorite ones.

Every country is a new experience and some countries offer a better landscape than others! Overflying the Grand Canyon (Las Vegas Conference, 2016) or Niagara Falls (Toronto Conference, 2017) were spectacular flights. But the most spectacular ever was the Annapurna mountain range in Nepal, before the Kathmandu Conference in 2012.

Climbing to 4000m below the summit, looking at that vertical granite wall still going 2000m above you, is unique. One must choose the right moment, early in the morning before the clouds and the turbulence starts (typically around 10:00am) and there has to be no wind at all. The lightest wind can ruin your plans at this altitude.

Then there is my list of “extraordinary flights”. During a Regional meeting in 2013 in Iran, the local association arranged a flight for me in a Piper PA28 from the military flying school in Shiraz. There are no civil VFR private flights allowed in Iran. I flew with a flight instructor, but on the seat behind us was a revolutionary guard watching every movement I made and which photo I took. We overflew Persepolis ruins and a Table Mountain and a nearby location that looks like Monument Valley in Colorado. Super flight!

In Stavanger in Norway, overflying the icy fjords at low level was a great VFR flight, as was landing in Vestmannaeyjar Island in Iceland on a TB20 with 60 Km/h winds and avoiding the birds.

The most VFR friendly countries are those with no landing fees and numerous airfields, that are kindly open to visitors. Most Eastern European countries like Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia are among the best.

USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, France, Germany and the UK are among the best too, as they have very historical VFR activities and industry, with hundreds of Flying clubs in each.

As for the technical side, flying an amphibian in Canada was exceptional. It was a Cessna185 in Oshawa, where I learned to make water landings. I managed 4 or 5 of them and got the technique and the traps. I also learned how to mentally calculate density altitude from a bush Pilot in Nairobi, Kenya, flying a C172 above the rift valley. In Poland (2000) I made an Antonov 2 type rating on my License, as it is a single piston engine. I made 5 circuits and landings and got the endorsement signed. Never flew one again, sadly!

The oddest Flight? In South Africa, the pilot that acted as FI with me was very nervous. I thought it was because of my flying skills. I learned afterwards that we were transporting a bag full of gold in the baggage compartment. Apparently, after a few robberies, the local gold mine had decided to diversify the transportation of their daily catch! We had to make an unscheduled landing in another small airfield near Pretoria, where an armored vehicle with armed security guards was waiting at the end of the runway. On the second leg, the guy was far more relaxed and even joking. I did not have to pay for the flight in the end!



USA : Grand Canyon . Renting a PA28 from Henderson airport near Las Vegas, and overflying all the nearby national parks

But the best one for me is certainly the one in San Diego, California, in the 1990s when there were less stringent restrictions. During an IFALPA meeting, I contacted a local flying school to rent a C172 for a couple of hours to do a bit of VFR sightseeing. Although I have an FAA License, I always take a local pilot with me to keep me outside of restricted airspace. And trust me, there is quite a lot around San Diego! It is generally a Flight instructor, as I have to do a rental check anyway, so I keep them afterwards. This time it was a young lady ex-controller from the US Navy. Learning I was a controller too, we connected. After the check, she offered me the opportunity to make a low pass in the nearby Miramar Navy base (yes the one from TopGun!). She of course knew the controller on duty and was able to do the appropriate coordination. We made the low pass with the F18s parked there. But then came the real bonus: She asked me if I had ever done an approach on an aircraft carrier! We then headed for Coronado Bay naval base, where the large US aircraft carriers are maintained. She of course knew the frequency and asked if we could do a low pass on one of the 3 carriers moored there. The Kitty Hawk was the largest and empty of aircraft. We got the green light on one condition: no photos and no touching the deck. I could go as low as I wanted above the deck but no "touch and go". She guided me all the way, avoiding the Control tower turbulence as we went below, leveling 10 feet above the deck.

VFR flying is great and it is a very nice way to both discover the world and unite people who share the same passion. If you are thinking of doing a PPL, please do! As a controller, it also drastically improves your understanding from "the other side", and you always get a lot of directs, as you know how to ask for them.



NEPAL . Facing the Annapurna 1 (there are 3 of them) with 8000 m (of FL 265 !) standing in front of you . (Nepal 2012)



NEPAL flying inside the Annapurna mountain range at FL 140



IRAN : crew PA 18 with a B747 in Shiraz airport (Iran 2013)



POLAND Getting the Antonov 2 type rating



POLAND : the Antonov 2 : in Grudziądz airfield, (Poland 2000)



CANADA : floatplane C185 in Oshawa airfield, (Canada 2017 From the Controller 2017 , issue 2)



NORWAY : Stavanger fjords , inside the fjord and flying the C172 Stavanger, (Norway 2015)



NORWAY: Flying the C172 over and inside the Fjords



IFATCA, EUROCONTROL & the SESAR JU Conference: “Navigating the Operational Impacts of Environmental Measures”

As aviation accelerates its commitment to addressing climate and environmental challenges, this conference focused on the implications for operations both on the ground and in the air. Bringing together operational professionals, regulators and subject-matter experts, the event explored the practical realities where environmental ambition meets operational feasibility. IFATCA Deputy President Jean-François Lepage, opened the conference with the keynote address.

The discussions covered human factors, implementation constraints, local trade-offs (such as noise and air quality) and broader climate considerations, tracing the path from policy goals to daily operations. Marc Baumgartner, IFATCA SESAR coordinator was the co moderator with EUROCONTROL Marylin Bastin, with IFATCA members Tim Rees, Australia, and Byron Post, South Africa participating on the panel.

Key topics included:

- Non-CO₂ effects: Latest science, modeling approaches and implications for policy and operational metrics.
- Operational challenges: Managing environmental measures without overloading pilots or ATCOs, while accounting for network effects and capacity-fuel trade-offs.
- Local vs. global trade-offs: Balancing noise, local air quality and climate objectives, addressing the measurement and communication challenges, and aligning local acceptance with global emissions goals.
- Human factors: Understanding workload, accountability and safety culture, and exploring how training and a just culture can help manage complexity safely.
- Climate impacts on operations: How day-to-day air traffic management is affected by a changing climate.





IFATCA and Global Airspace Radar Partner for Better ATM visibility

By: Vincent Lambercy, Global Airspace Radar Publisher

IFATCA, the International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers' Associations, announced Global Airspace Radar as its first media partner. Working with an established media outlet present across multiple channels will allow IFATCA to expand its reach beyond its members and share messages globally. Global Airspace Radar will gain better insights on the work done by IFATCA and get direct access to the federation's executives.

Global Airspace Radar will report on the open parts of IFATCA events and will maintain its editorial independence. This direct access will give Global Airspace Radar the opportunity to report based on interviews, rather than relying on statements.

Both partners recognise that Air traffic Control (ATC) is a critical infrastructure, but it remains mostly invisible when everything goes well. Public attention often arrives only in case of negative events: delays, disruption, incidents, staffing shortages. This can lead to a distorted view and better communication helps explain both the profession and the challenges it faces. ATC is good at communicating with aircraft, but perhaps not so good at communicating about itself.

This lack of awareness can contribute to the recruitment crisis that many ANSPs face. Communicating in a broader way will bring more visibility to a usually invisible profession. Pilots and cabin crew are in view of the public, while air traffic controllers work away from public view. Showing what controllers actually do, the technology they work with and the responsibilities they carry can help make ATC a more visible career choice for the next generation.

ATC is also going through a period of significant change. New technologies, increasing automation, the integration of drones and new airspace users, capacity constraints and environmental considerations are changing both the systems and the role of the people operating them. These developments are often discussed from a technological or institutional perspective, while the operational perspective of air traffic controllers can receive less attention.

This wider audience includes not only the ATM industry itself, but also the broader aviation community and people who may have little direct exposure to air traffic control. Bringing the controller perspective into discussions about the future of aviation is therefore an important part of the partnership. Readers can also expect more expertise from IFATCA experts and more controller voices in Global Airspace Radar, bringing an additional perspective to the publication.



Global Airspace Radar





Technology Moves at the Speed of Innovation - Change Moves at the Speed of Trust

By: Victor Martinez, Executive Vice President Air Traffic, Indra.

Over the last few years, our reliance on technology has rocketed in a way of a speed that was almost impossible to predict. Every morning, aviation professionals across the globe wake up to an alarm set on their mobile phones, ask a virtual assistant to play a podcast, or a song. They check their favourite app, to decide how to commute to work and drive while following the turn-by-turn instructions of a synthetic voice. Finances, payments, and, of course, shopping are activities that we can no longer conceive without a device. I have the exaggerated illusion that horses were still the main mode of transport the last time I visited a physical bank. That is just how deeply embedded technology has become in our day-to-day lives.

Those of us old enough to recognize the term “Millennium Bug” surely remember that it was not always this way. News about road incidents caused by blindly following navigation instructions used to be quite common, and the fear of sharing credit card details made the introduction of e-commerce very slow. Furthermore, the ability to walk into a physical office was a major factor for many people when choosing a bank, a utility provider, or a travel agency, among many other services.

What has changed? Naturally, there are many factors. One of them is the technology itself, which is far better and more secure today than it was years ago.

However, I would like to focus on the human element and reflect on a fundamental ingredient for adopting technology in our lives: trust.

Take the example of the most popular navigation apps. Every day, millions of users trust them to get from point A to B. We surrender control - with human supervision, of course.

I am sure we all have interesting stories of when technology made decisions that were a bit more “exotic” than we would have liked. And yet, we trust them to the point that most of us no longer keep physical, printed maps in our cars.

To me, this is the core ingredient in adopting any technological solution. While technology moves at the speed of innovation, humans move at the speed of trust. We can have an urgent need and amazing technical solutions to address it, but if people do not trust the technology, it will simply not be accepted and used.

Let's apply this reflection to Air Traffic Management (ATM) technology. I believe there is a wide consensus around the need for it. Some airspace in Europe is seeing a 30%+ increase in traffic, compared to pre-pandemic levels; a capacity crunch is no longer a distant risk, but a short-term reality. Advanced technology is a must to enable Air Traffic Controllers to reduce the workload stemming from routine tasks, allowing them to safely manage increased traffic complexity.

ATCOs are highly trained professionals, who perform safety-critical tasks using legacy technologies, that lack high levels of automation. They are expected and used to maintaining wide situational awareness and being in full control. Reducing their routine workload inherently means relying more on technology and having confidence that it will provide the correct answer. From an emotional perspective, this requires trust, and it can easily feel like giving up full control.

I am not talking about a dystopian world where autonomous AI robots take over the operations room. Of course, ATM technology must continue to evolve; becoming more flexible, more modular, and making greater use of cloud technologies, artificial intelligence, advanced resilience, and protection against shifting cyber threats.

I am discussing technology that we have today that proactively calculates thousands of combinations, to highlight future conflict situations to the controller. It does this using a simple red-amber-green colour code before they instruct a reroute, a level change, or a heading.

This involves an explainable, tested algorithm that has undergone all necessary safety and software assurance processes, and it is in operation in Europe. Unarguably, it must be reliable to work in a safety-critical environment. Yet, even with all of that, the fundamental ingredient remains the ATCO trusting the tool enough to accept its output.

This is why I believe the biggest challenge we face in the coming years with ATM technology is adoption. The best ATM tool provides no benefit, if it is not accepted and used by ATCOs. The human aspect is a fundamental part of this equation, one that is sometimes underestimated.

It might sound like an unusual statement coming from someone who works for one of the major ATM technology providers, but having the best, top-notch tech solution to resolve every need is simply not enough.

In fact, the more advanced the technology is compared to the legacy system, the bigger the challenge. A massive leap of faith is not the best way to earn an ATCO's trust on this journey.

So, how do we square this circle?

While the answer is far from simple, I believe there are a few essential building blocks that must be present in any adoption strategy:

- Ensuring ATCOs feel part of the technology delivery team: Undertaking collaborative activities to explain and refine the technology to earn their trust.
- Creating transition strategies that enable a step-by-step introduction of technology: Doing this wherever possible rather than relying on giant leaps. This approach may look slower on paper, but it pays off very quickly by providing certainty.
- Applying a solid change management approach: Ensuring the right balance between the future and the present is achieved. This must, of course, be adapted to our safety-critical, highly regulated sector. But let's not forget, even the most experienced coachman would probably suggest installing reins to turn a car, if he had never had the chance to use a steering wheel.

Only by addressing these challenges can we ensure that the speed of technology is still fast but not overwhelming, and that the speed of trust accelerates, enabling progress whilst keeping people onboard.



INDRA GROUP





The Future Is Still a Choice

Designing Artificial Intelligence Around the People Who Make Air Traffic Control Safe

By: Nicola Cavagnetto, Senior Human Factors Consultant, Deep Blue

Artificial intelligence is opening new possibilities for air traffic control, yet technology does not determine one inevitable future. The choices made today will shape the role of tomorrow's controllers and the environment in which they will work.

Looking beyond what is possible

When considering new technologies, we often begin by asking what they can do. Which tasks can be automated? Which decisions can be supported? Which improvements in capacity, efficiency or safety could be achieved?

These questions are essential, but not the only ones.

We should also ask what kind of future we want to create for the people working within the system. At Deep Blue, our horizon-scanning work explores how emerging technologies may reshape operations. It is not only about anticipating what might happen, but also about distinguishing between futures that are possible and those that are desirable.

A desirable future should improve performance without treating human wellbeing as an afterthought.

Preserving the value of human work

An activity should not be automated simply because it can be.

Some tasks may seem suitable for automation while helping controllers maintain their skills, situational understanding, sense of control or professional identity. Removing them could reduce workload, but also make the remaining role more passive or less meaningful.

This does not mean preserving every current task. Artificial Intelligence can reduce unnecessary complexity, support controllers in demanding situations and remove activities that provide little operational or professional value.

However, automation decisions should consider what each task contributes to the controller's role.

The aim should not merely be to keep a human in the process. It should be to preserve a human contribution that remains active, skilled and meaningful.

This supports a good fit between people and their working environment. When job demands, human capabilities and professional needs remain aligned, wellbeing and performance can reinforce each other.

Evolution, not replacement

New technologies will influence training, competency profiles and selection. Controllers may need greater familiarity with the limits of artificial intelligence, stronger automation-supervision skills and an ability to calibrate trust in complex systems. These needs should be anticipated before major changes are introduced.

Yet this should be an evolution in continuity with the profession, not a search for a different type of person able to fit an environment designed primarily around technology.

Today's controllers are already selected for judgement, adaptability, responsibility and the ability to manage complexity. Future competency and selection profiles may require careful adjustments, but these qualities should remain their foundation.

Find them, value them and keep them

Finding future controllers means understanding how the profession will evolve while preserving the strengths that already sustain it. Involving them in decisions about desirable futures to keep the human as the most valuable contribution for safety, creating environments in which they can continue to feel competent, responsible and proud of their contribution.

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When the Roster Meets Reality

Why Air Traffic Control Needs Workforce Planning that Keeps Pace with the Operational Day

By: Dragutin Miholic, Product Manager, Klising, VIBE

A roster can be perfectly correct on the day it is published and still not survive the operational day. Traffic changes. Someone reports sick. A sector opens earlier than planned. Training has to take place. A controller swaps a shift. Standby staff are called in. Breaks are rearranged. ATC operations do not stop changing once the roster is signed off. What happens next: managing the workforce through the operational day, matters just as much as building the plan in the first place.

The monthly roster is only the beginning

Strategic or monthly, planning is where most attention is spent, and rightly so. A good monthly roster has to respect a long list of conditions at the same time. ATCOs hold different endorsements, which decide which positions they can work. Rest requirements and fatigue rules limit how shifts can be arranged. Each unit has staffing minima that must be met around the clock. Leave has to be honoured. Training has to be fitted in. Personal preferences, where possible, should be taken into account.

Producing a roster that satisfies all of this at once is demanding work. Yet a roster that is technically valid is not the same as one that will hold for the whole month. It is a starting position, not a finished result. The moment it is published, reality begins to move, and the plan has to move with it.

From who is working, to who is working where

The monthly roster answers one question. Who is coming to work? The operational day asks a harder one. Which qualified person is on which position, at what time, and when do they take breaks? Also the most important question that supervisors ask: Do I have enough ATCOs today?

This is the point at which duty planning becomes genuinely operational. In VIBE, our specialized workforce management system for ANSPs, the Break Planner works at fifteen-minute granularity.

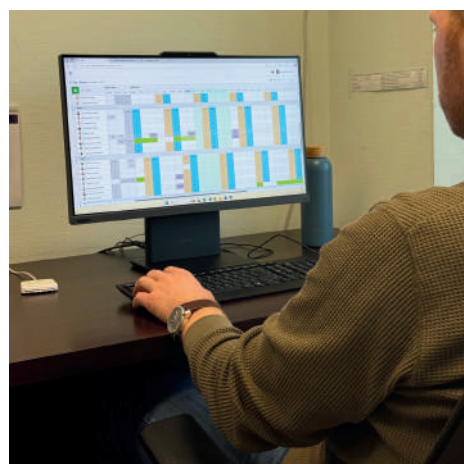
It links each position assignment to the competency information of the person assigned to it. A supervisor can see, across the whole day: who is where, who is due a break, and whether the person about to take a position is actually cleared to work it. Also, the possibility to integrate with flow (ATFM) data and MET data makes it a more powerful tool in the Supervisors pocket.

This distinction is specific to air traffic control. A general workforce tool can confirm that enough people are present. It rarely understands that presence and suitability are different things. On the operational floor, that difference is the whole point.

Competency belongs inside the plan

Competency has to be treated as part of planning, not as a separate record kept somewhere else. The VIBE Competency module tracks ratings (rating endorsement) and connects them to sectors, operational hours and training. It does not treat availability as sufficient on its own. It works from a simple but important principle. An available person is not the same as a qualified person.

When qualifications, ratings, training data and legal/HR framework status live in the same system as the roster, the plan can be checked against them as it is built. Assignments that would place someone on a position they are not cleared for are caught early, rather than discovered on the day.



When reality changes

Then the day happens. Someone reports sick. Standby staff have to be activated. A shift swap is requested. A position needs covering at short notice. Handling this well is difficult, because every option carries conditions of its own.

The VIBE Shift Coverage function is built for exactly this moment. When a gap appears, the system can check fatigue conditions and rank the possible replacements, taking into account factors such as accumulated overtime. It then records the outcome of each contact – whether the person accepted, declined or did not answer. The supervisor is left with a clear, ordered picture of who can safely be called and what each of them said. This is a real operational problem, not a feature in search of a use. It is the kind of decision that used to rely on memory, phone calls and a whiteboard.

Automation should assist, not replace judgement

It is tempting to describe all of this as artificial intelligence solving rostering. We prefer to be more careful. Automation is very good at one thing. It can evaluate constraints, qualifications and staffing requirements far faster than a person can compare hundreds of combinations by hand. That is genuinely useful, and it removes work that is tedious and prone to error.

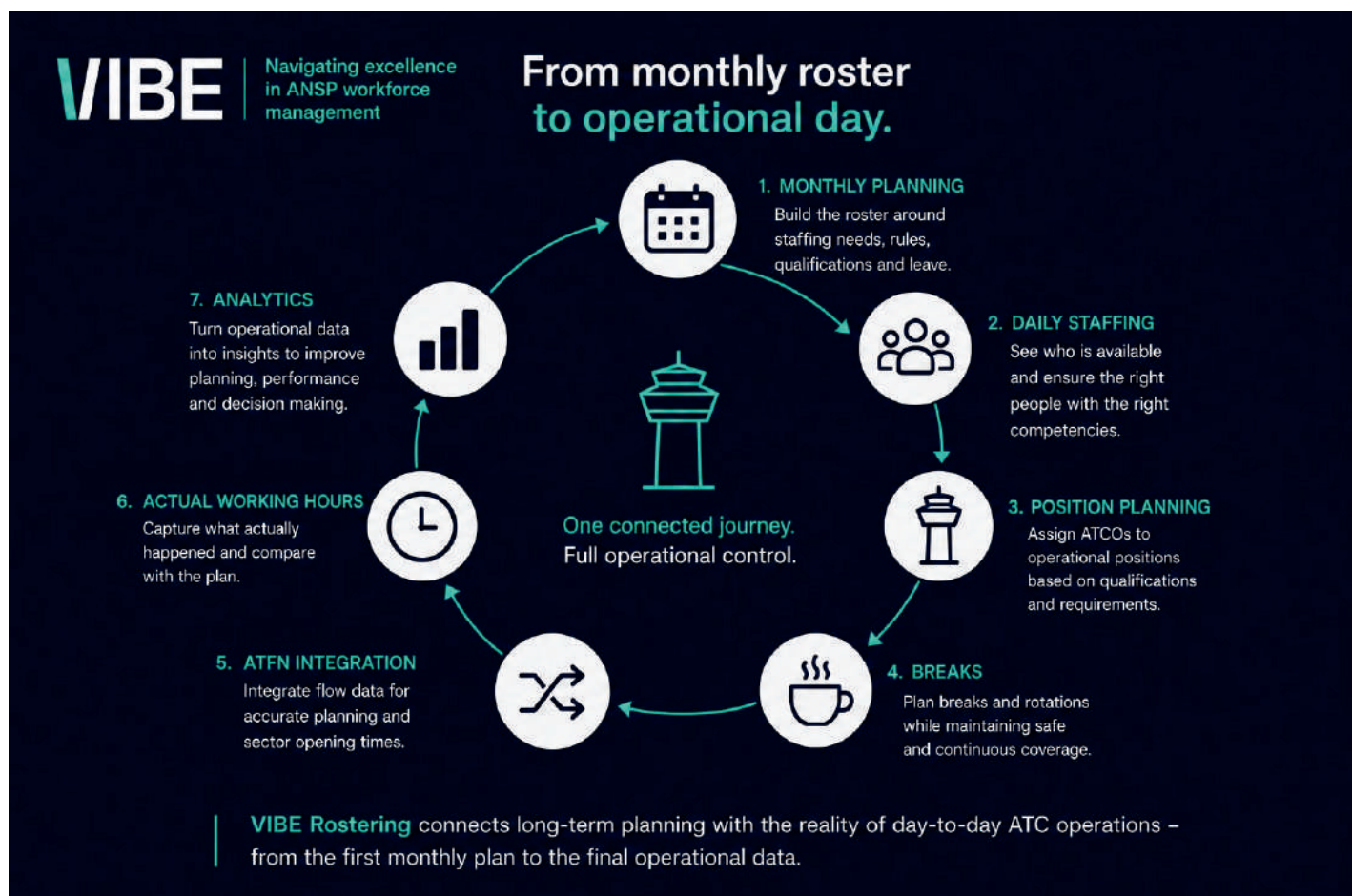
But the roster admin remains responsible for the result. The system proposes; the administrator reviews, simulates, adapts and decides. ATCOs tend to trust this description far more than the promise that software will simply build the roster for them. It respects the reality that operational judgement cannot be handed to an algorithm.

Connected, not just automatic

The future of workforce management in air traffic control is not simply automatic AI rostering. It is connected workforce management. Planning, competency, training and the operational day all draw on the same underlying information, so a change in one place is understood everywhere else. A qualification that lapses, a training OJTI/Trainee connection, flow data change, MET data impact on sector opening hours, a sudden absence -> each is reflected across the whole picture rather than in a single isolated document.

That is what turns a correct roster into an operation that stays correct as the day unfolds. The plan is only the beginning. Keeping it true to reality is the real work.

dragutin.miholic@edge-group.info



Bjarne Nilssen

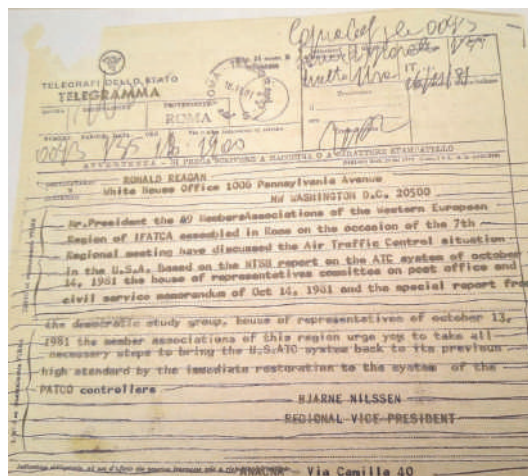
1941-2026

By: Philippe Domogala (EGATS)

Bjarne Nilssen (Norway), the first IFATCA Regional vice President Europe West (1980-1982), passed away in May of 2026 at age 85.

IFATCA created the position of Regional Vice Presidents in 1980, with Europe divided into East and West by the iron curtain until 1990. After which the position became known as Executive Vice President Europe, reuniting both parts.

Bjarne was active in IFATCA and instrumental in many changes and improvements for ATCOS worldwide. In November 1981, 3 months after the PATCO strike and the firing of over 11.000 controllers in the USA, Bjarne organized a regional meeting in Rome, together with ANACNA. He had to manage the very heated debates between those who wanted to call a European strike in support of our US colleagues and those who wished to refuse to handle US aircraft. Along many were those arguing that IFATCA was not a Union and we should stay neutral. It required all of Bjarne's legendary calm and courtesy to keep the groups apart and reach a compromise in the end.



The Telegram to Ronald Reagan sent by Bjarne in 1981

Money was collected and brought to PATCO. A strongly worded telegram was sent to then President Reagan requesting the immediate restoration of the PATCO controllers in their jobs. Bjarne became somewhat of a hero of the resistance to the FAA and the US administration back then. Rome was also where he met Teresa, a Spanish controller from Palma de Mallorca. They married in 1990 and remained together until the end.

Bjarne became a very good and close friend, from his term as RVP in 1980. In those days he organized our IFATCA meetings in his home in Asker, near Fornebu airport, the former Oslo international airport. We traveled using the Norwegian friendly airlines that he knew, mostly Braathens and Fred Olsen, on their Cargo Lockheed Electras. They flew at night, midnight departures from Cologne, arriving at 03:00 am in Oslo. And despite the time, Bjarne would collect us with his small car from the airport. We all slept in his home or when we were too many, in his colleagues' homes. There were no hotels and no per diems in those days.

Bjarne always supported IFATCA, until the end. He attended many Conferences, always soft spoken but very sharp on his arguments. He was a true Norwegian gentleman and a great friend, he will be greatly missed.

On his retirement, he moved to Barcelona. He did not stop working though, initially teaching English to the young Spanish controllers. Eventually, he was an instructor in the FTE school in Jerez. He remained there until he was 79. He was a real air traffic controller, one that never stops..

He will be sadly missed not only by his wife Teresa, but by all those that knew him. Bye my friend.





Charting Her Own Airspace

How an Unconventional Journey Through Dance, Photography, and Adversity Led One Woman into the Male-Dominated Worlds of Drones and Air Traffic Control.

By: Emily Cloutier, UAS Pilot, Photographer

Looking back, the interview should have intimidated her.

A glass conference room, inside a private aviation hangar. Eight seasoned aviation professionals seated around a massive oval table. One woman in a black pantsuit, neutral lip gloss, and carefully chosen French-tip nails, trying to strike the impossible balance women in male-dominated industries know all too well: polished, but not “too feminine”; confident, but not threatening.

After ninety minutes of technical questioning, one of the men leaned forward and said, “We’re going to take a break. When we come back, teach us something.”

It was an unusual request for a drone pilot candidate competing against more than one hundred applicants. But for Emily Cloutier, whose career path had already zigzagged through photography studios, dance floors, and mission trips around the world, unconventional had become familiar territory.

“I remember thinking, ‘If I’m going down, I’m going down in flames,’” she recalls.

When the panel returned, she led eight aviation executives into the lobby and taught them how to dance the merengue.

She got the job.



It would become the first of many moments where refusing to shrink herself, became her greatest professional advantage.

Long before aviation entered the picture, Cloutier planned to become a photographer. In high school, she was pursuing an Advanced Diploma through accelerated art courses and secured an internship with a prominent wedding photographer in New York. What should have been the beginning of her creative career, instead became a defining detour after an inappropriate encounter when the studio owner forced her to leave the internship.

The school informed her it was too late to secure another placement. Years of work toward her diploma suddenly appeared lost.

Instead of giving up, she made one phone call that changed everything: an appeal to the owner of a local Arthur Murray Dance Studio. After hearing her story, the studio owner offered her an internship, allowing her to graduate on time.

What initially felt like a derailment, became the start of a seven-year career as a professional Ballroom and Latin dance instructor.

“Dance taught me things aviation never could,” she says. “How to lead, how to follow, how to read people instantly, how to connect with strangers and how to stay calm under pressure.”

Ironically, those skills would later distinguish her in aviation far more than technical knowledge alone.

Years later, photography found its way back into her life through automotive and motorcycle photography. Then she heard two words that changed her trajectory yet again: *drone photography*.

There was only one problem. She had no aviation background.

When she applied for her first drone pilot position, she was told she needed an FAA Part 107 license in two weeks. She immersed herself in sectional charts, METARs, NOTAMs, airspace classifications, and flight fundamentals. She failed her first exam by a single question; regrouped, retested, and passed with an 86.

At the time, women represented less than 2% of the unmanned aircraft systems industry.

“That statistic didn’t discourage me,” she says. “It motivated me.”

Her persistence paid off when she became the company’s first female UAS pilot, opening the door to work with emerging drone technologies and, eventually, alongside air traffic control professionals.

Today, Cloutier serves in the training department at one of the busiest air traffic control towers in the world, helping support the next generation of aviation professionals while contributing to the future of flight technology.

Women still make up only a fraction of both drone and air traffic control industries. Professionals like Emily are steadily changing the landscape—not by conforming to expectations, but by expanding them.

Looking back, she no longer views the setbacks in her life as interruptions. They were preparation.

“The moments that felt like failures were actually refinements,” she says. “Every unexpected turn built skills I would later need in rooms I couldn’t yet imagine walking into.”

And sometimes, the thing that makes you stand out in aviation has nothing to do with aviation at all.

Author Bio: With over 21 years as a professional photographer, Emily has dedicated her career to capturing moments that inspire and tell a story. In 2025, she debuted her aviation gallery, *First in Flight*, combining her passion for historic documentation with her love of aviation. Her fascination with flight began in 2019, when she earned her Commercial UAS Pilot License. Her drone work has been featured in commercials and the film industry. That journey led her to one of the busiest Air Traffic Control Towers in the United States, where she helps educate the next generation of Air Traffic Controllers. Emily is the Course Coordinator for the new electronic flight strips technology being implemented across the United States. When she isn’t contributing to the advancements shaping the future of aviation, she can be found laughing with close friends or dancing salsa in the kitchen with her little three-legged dog.





*By: Natasha Mijat Krstevska (MATCA, North Macedonia)
IFATCA World Comms Team*

COMUFEST

Controllers' Music festival



*David Daniele, Brindisi ACC,
Organising Team COMUFE*

Life moves in truly unbelievable ways. Never in my dreams could I imagine that something like a Controllers Music Festival would exist, and even less that I would stand beneath the stage lights to open its very first chapter, in the year of 2018.

8 years later, life brings another surprise. Here I am doing an interview with Davide Daniele, a fellow controller from Brindisi ACC, one of the key organizers of COMUFE and has shared the story behind this brilliant Festival.

When was the COMUFEST idea born?

While collaborating with the Brindisi Radar Club (which has around 100 members) we identified the need to provide affordable live music for our members, during the annual Christmas and summer events. This led to the idea of inviting local bands to perform. Since our local music scene involved only a small number of musicians among club members, they would often rotate between groups. This created new and entertaining line-ups for each event.

Following the success of a few early performances, we launched a website in the summer of 2016, to gauge international interest in our concept. Within just two months, we received around 30 emails from bands around the world expressing their willingness to take part. Encouraged by this response, we officially announced the event in 2017, with the inaugural edition taking place in the summer of 2018.

Tell us more about the CONTROLLERS MUSIC FESTIVAL

The first one was in 2018, welcomed around 120 participants and featured 11 bands performing over three-days. From 2019 onwards, the festival expanded to a five-day programme: three days dedicated to guest bands, one day featuring local bands and one additional day.

Over the years, the festival has been held in three different venues across Puglia, resulting in five memorable editions, organised by a six-member board.

Attendance and participation grew steadily year after year, reflecting the increasing popularity of the event. This ultimately led to reaching 250 participants in 2023.

The most recent edition (2024) was our now well-known Controllers' Music Festival – cruise edition. This event brought together 15 bands, 4 DJs, and more than 500 participants, from more than 30 countries. The festival has always been organised by the four-member board of the Brindisi Radar Club. The event is also supported by presenters, volunteers, and friends who have contributed in different ways, whether through small gestures or major support.

Over the years, we have welcomed guests from all across Europe, as well as from Canada, USA, Chile, Iran, and Australia.

Today, our community includes more than 2,000 members representing 45 countries worldwide. What began as a small local initiative has grown into an international community, united by a shared passion for music, friendship and aviation.



"MIYATTA & The Control Freaks" opening act of the very first edition of the COMUFE Festival



In the beginning, were you aware that there are so many controllers around the world driven by music?

We had no idea how many air traffic controllers around the world played a musical instrument. One of our greatest sources of pride has been seeing new bands come together specifically for the festival and then continue to grow, developing into some of the audience's most popular acts. Supporting and promoting live music has become the most rewarding aspect of this entire journey.

What were some of the challenges you and your team faced along the years of organizing the COMUFE Festival?

Over the years, we have faced many challenges. One of the biggest was dealing with bad weather, as the festival was designed as an open-air event. Our contingency plans were often difficult to compare with the primary setup, which featured 100-square-metre stages, LED walls, professional lighting, advanced sound systems and live camera production.

One memorable edition, in 2022, was affected by a severe thunderstorm on the festival's second day. The organising board worked closely with the participating bands and quickly redesigned the schedule. Only one band and two DJs, in particular, were willing to work with a quickly revised plan.



Special recognition and mad respect to them for their flexibility and professionalism. Although the performance had to be moved to a smaller indoor setting, it still benefited from a high-quality technical setup and created a uniquely intimate atmosphere between the performers and the audience.

It taught us adaptability and teamwork—qualities that not everyone brings when plans suddenly change, but are well known by ATCOs!

COMUFE 's last edition was the most exclusive one, on a cruise ship?

The cruise festival was organised by four people, as not everyone on the original board shared the vision of expanding the festival beyond its traditional format and reaching a wider audience.

Adapting part of a cruise ship to meet the needs of our festival was an extremely complex task. This was made possible only through the professionalism and support of our partner, Costa Cruises.

For months, we analysed, anticipated, and solved countless challenges before they could arise. Even so, it was impossible to foresee every situation we would face. The project required three separate site inspections and continuous coordination, with both the shore-based teams and the ship's crew.

On the first day alone, we loaded more than 15 tonnes of audio, lighting and stage equipment in just eight hours. During that same time, we assembled the entire production setup, adapted the concert venue to comply with the ship's strict safety regulations, completed all sound checks, and opened the festival with performances by four bands and one DJ, all on the very first evening.

The preparation extended far beyond the technical aspects. We also had to manage customs documentation, collect travel information, official documents for every participant and coordinate an enormous logistical operation. Compared with our land-based editions, the complexity increased dramatically, making the cruise by far the most demanding project we have ever undertaken.

Negotiating and finalising contract agreements worth several hundred thousand euros with our partner, Costa Cruises, was a major challenge in itself. For an organisation of our size, it was a significant responsibility and, at times, an intimidating one.





German band "Kikk Kosmikk" performing at COMUFE Cruise edition

We were accountable not only to our partner, but also to every participant who had placed their trust in us. We're only ATCOs, not professional event organisers.

The experience itself was unforgettable. During the ship's stopover in Barcelona, we also hosted the fourth edition of the ATC Padel Cup, by Brindisi Radar Club. On the final evening, we gathered all our guests in the ship's magnificent theatre for the festival's closing ceremony, providing a fitting finale to an extraordinary event.

What's in for the future of COMUFE?

At the moment, the festival is going through cloudy skies. Following the successful 2024 edition, we recognised the need for some restructuring and long-term planning. Unfortunately, that process was interrupted during the summer of 2025, before we had the opportunity to move forward with the next phase of our project.

Our plan had been to establish an international board that would be responsible for defining the festival's future direction, safeguarding its core values and quality standards, and evaluating host proposals from around the world. The objective was to preserve the festival's identity while ensuring that every future edition would meet—or exceed—the standards we had worked so hard to achieve.

During that same period, the ideas and elements that had developed within the festival board became part of another initiative, organised independently from the original board. This was a major roadblock in the story of the festival and personally, a difficult one to experience, particularly because it happened before we had the opportunity to put our own plans for the next phase into place.

Nevertheless, I remain proud of the legacy we created. Legacies are easy to inherit, but much harder to honour. I only hope ours will continue to be guided by the values that created it, while also finding its own way to evolve. Hopefully there will be another COMUFEST again, in the near future.

Music is only one of the things that brings ATCOs together. Watch out for further articles on some of those things.





A HISTORY OF AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL AS A CULTURAL HERITAGE

A Permanent Exhibition of Air Traffic Control

By: Nikola Tomic (SRBATCA, Serbia)

Three years ago, the most important volume dealing with the history of our profession was published - 100 YEARS AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL 1922-2022: AN INCOMPLETE HISTORY. The special value of the book is that it collected national ATC histories around the world. It already has iterations and will need further additions. This demonstrates that this branch of civil aviation is not just a passive relic of the past, but a dynamic category, thereby framing an ATC history as a cultural heritage. Which creates an obligation to us all, to preserve it.

The expanded edition of the book features my six-page text on the history of air traffic control, in former Yugoslavia and today's Serbia and Montenegro. The text is the result of a three-year research leading to the creation of a historical collection and permanent exhibition of ATC. This will be located in the lobby of the Air Traffic Control Center at the Nikola Tesla Airport in Belgrade, and is due to be opened on this year's International ATCO Day.

Formation of the historical collection

In the past, there were several attempts by senior colleagues to form a historical collection within the company. Unfortunately, this was not successful. Even sporadic cooperation with the famous Aeronautical Museum in Belgrade yielded no results. Then in 2023, before it was too late to save at least some of the relics, I presented the project to the top management of SMATSA (Serbia and Montenegro Air Traffic Control Agency), who luckily gave support for the formation of a permanent exhibition of the materials.

With the help of workmates and external collaborators, we moved to field work in the collection, classification and processing of artifacts from the ATC past. This meant contact with all work units, going to airports and digging through moldy storerooms, communicating with historians and retired colleagues and their families, and cooperating with institutions such as the Archives of Yugoslavia, the Program Archives of the Radio Television of Serbia, and the Faculty of Transport and Traffic Engineering. Considering the fact that headquarters of all predecessors of SMATSA have always been located in Belgrade,

the most important testimonies from the past remained here.

The development of civil aviation in the Western Balkans is outlined in both the book and the exhibition. It has paralleled global trends, while being influenced by a number of social, geopolitical, military and technological factors. During the 20th century, Yugoslav Air Traffic Control evolved through its pioneer and modern eras within the former joint state of the South Slavs - Yugoslavia, whereas the contemporary era is taking place in separate, independent national states which emerged from its dissolution.

The pioneer era covers the period of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia between two World Wars, when civil aviation served to connect the remote centers of the newly formed state. The first air navigation law was enacted, international airports were constructed, and the first direction finders were installed. After World War II, the modern ATC era took place within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. It brought the creation of ATC service and institutions, along with the intensive modernisation and evolution of the profession, as well as the establishment of the training center in Belgrade



and the Yugoslav Air Traffic Controllers Association (JUKL) in the 1960s.

The permanent exhibition will contain a variety of devices and other two-dimensional and three-dimensional artifacts from all three eras listed below, as well as digitized audiovisual collections. To name but a few of the items: a pair of reconstructed ATC working consoles; a few old school radar screens; Link Trainer GAT-1; old work uniform of a Yugoslav air traffic controller; numerous documents and textbooks; archival photos, videos and audio recordings, along with many more. The exhibition contains reference to so many interesting aspects, including the mid-air collision near Zagreb in 1976. This event specifically resulted in significant reforms not just in Yugoslav civil aviation, but worldwide. Many legal and legislative changes were adopted in its wake. Issues such as excessive stress, controllers' responsibilities and adequate working conditions caught public attention. After the first-of-its-kind medical research was conducted, substantial benefits were negotiated for Yugoslav air traffic controllers.

Towards the 1980s, a rise in ethnic tensions in Yugoslavia culminated in the wars of the 1990s.

The joint state of the South Slavs disintegrated in 1992, so the different republics of former Yugoslavia established their own national ATS providers: Slovenia Control, Croatia Control, M-NAV (North Macedonia) and BHANSA (Bosnia and Herzegovina). The former Federal Air Traffic Control Authority (SUKL) continued to control the airspace of Serbia and Montenegro until 2003, when it morphed into the Serbia and Montenegro Air Traffic Services (SMATSA). The turn of the millennium marked the beginning of the contemporary era of civil aviation in the Western Balkans. Hopefully, in the future, all former Yugoslav ATC centers might collaborate to include some shared historical item, thereby jointly preserving common ATC heritage.

Preparations for the opening of the exhibition are going in the right direction. A dear collaborator on the book, Philippe Domogala, will be our special guest at the modest ceremony. Any of our colleagues from across the globe are welcome to see the set up after the opening. Feel free to contact SRBATCA at office@srbatca.rs, in order to coordinate the visit with SMATSA. And of course, make sure to read the book!





Persistence, Purpose, and the Power of Showing Up

Journey to the Women in Aviation International Harvard Emerging Leaders Scholarship

By: Evelyn Oye Lamptey (GHATCA, Ghana Civil Aviation Authority)

“Sometimes, the greatest journeys are born from the moments that almost made us give up.”

Every great achievement carries a story the world never sees: sacrifices made in private, tears wiped before anyone sees. Evelyn's story, her road to becoming a recipient of the prestigious Women in Aviation International Harvard Emerging Leaders Scholarship, is one such. It is not about luck, but about a woman who held on to her dream even when the path ahead was uncertain.

THE GIRL WHO CHOSE THE SKY

Her career took flight with Ghana Airways, before she joined Ghana Civil Aviation Authority in March 2003 as an Aeronautical Information Services Trainee. It would have been easy to stay there, however, she seized the opportunity to move into Air Traffic Control, climbing steadily from Aerodrome to Approach, until she stood where few women ever do, as an Area Controller.

This woman's voice is calm and unwavering, guiding aircraft carrying thousands of lives safely through open skies. That kind of responsibility does not simply happen, it is built, shift after shift, decision after decision, out of an unshakable belief that you are where you belong.

Evelyn did not stop at the radar screen. She served as President of the Ghana Civil Aviation Ladies Association; VP, Professional Controllers Association (Ghana); Global Vice President of the Young African Women Congress, and as a member of IFATCA Africa and Middle East Women Support Group, to name a few. In 2007, she officially joined Women in Aviation International, an experience that awakened her belief in the power of women lifting up other women.

STRENGTH THROUGH ADVERSITY

No story of triumph is honest without its valley, and Evelyn's was devastating. One of the darkest chapters in her career unfolded while she was away pursuing professional growth. She had made the agonising decision every working mother knows too well, to leave her young children at home so she could build a better future for them. She returned from that training not to open arms and good news, but to unimaginable grief: the loss of her eleven-month-old daughter in a domestic accident.

“There are no words for that kind of pain. None. I returned home from pursuing my future to bury part of it. Some people held me. Others judged me. I carried both. And yet somehow, I kept moving — not because the pain disappeared, but because I learned, in the cruelest way possible, that resilience is not the absence of grief. It is the decision to rise inside it anyway.”

In those words is a truth so many of us are too afraid to say out loud: that some of us are still standing not because we healed, but because we chose, over and over, to rise anyway. Evelyn's grief did not disappear. She simply refused to let it become the end of her story.

THREE APPLICATIONS, ONE SCHOLARSHIP, COUNTLESS LESSONS

Perhaps the most quietly heroic chapter of Evelyn's journey is the one that looks, from the outside, the most ordinary: an application form, submitted again and again.

For three consecutive years, she applied for the Women in Aviation International Harvard Emerging Leaders Scholarship.



For two of those years, she was told no. Not one rejection, but two. Two moments of opening an email with hope in her chest, only to close it with disappointment settling in. Each rejection hurt, she refused, every single time, to let disappointment write the final chapter. She kept learning. She kept serving. She kept believing, even when belief was the only thing she had left to hold on to.

Then, at last, came the email that changed everything. Evelyn was selected as a recipient of the highly contested Women in Aviation International Harvard Emerging Leaders Scholarship for the 2026 Cohort, earning her a place in the Professional and Executive Development Programme at Harvard University. A dream deferred twice was at last, a dream fulfilled.

Even then, the road refused to be easy. Before the journey could begin, Evelyn faced yet another painful setback, one more moment where the dream she had fought so hard for seemed, once again, to be slipping through her fingers. But she had come too far, survived too much, to just let go.

“Participating in the Harvard Emerging Leaders Programme was transformative. Learning alongside such accomplished women was both inspiring and humbling. The diversity of experiences, perspectives, and leadership journeys represented in the room created a powerful environment for learning, and meaningful conversations.”

LESSONS FROM THE JOURNEY

Looking back, Evelyn is convinced that the greatest leadership lessons rarely arrive wrapped in recognition. More often, they arrive disguised as small, thankless responsibilities. The willingness to volunteer when no one is watching. The quiet 'yes' to the task everyone else overlooked. The choice to serve faithfully, long before anyone applauds you for it. These, she has learned, are the true foundations of growth.

She has also learned something harder; not everyone will understand your journey. Not everyone will support your dreams. Not everyone will celebrate your progress. And that is okay. Know your worth. Move accordingly.

To every reader who feels the sting of rejection right now. To every woman grieving something the world cannot see and will never fully understand. To everyone quietly wondering whether their small, faithful steps are actually adding up to anything at all — Evelyn wants you to hear this, directly, from someone who has lived it:

They do. Keep showing up. Keep believing. Embrace every opportunity to serve. And most importantly — never, ever give up.

THE SKY IS ONLY THE BEGINNING

Evelyn's journey continues. One truth stands unshakable: growth is a lifelong journey of learning and service, not a destination you arrive at and stop. She remains grateful for every opportunity, every challenge, and every milestone that has shaped her path.

As she looks to the future, Evelyn remains committed to advancing aviation, empowering women, and inspiring the next generation to believe that the sky is not the limit. It is only the beginning.

Her story is still being written... And so is yours.





Stepping Forward:

A Reflection on 16 Years with EGATS and the Joy of Being a Volunteer

By: Alessandro Mercatti (EGATS)

After 16 years as a board member of EGATS, including eight years as President, I have recently stepped away from the association. Leaving a role that has been such an important part of my professional life naturally brings with it a moment of reflection. More than anything, it has made me realise how much being involved in a professional association has given me, both as an air traffic controller and as a person.

When I first became involved, I certainly did not have all the skills I would eventually need. I had much to learn about representing colleagues, building consensus, communicating, negotiating and, perhaps most importantly, knowing when to listen.

I learned them by getting involved.

Over the years, being part of EGATS gave me opportunities that I might otherwise never have had. It challenged me to step outside my comfort zone, to take responsibility, to work with people with different perspectives and to learn how to deal constructively with difficult and sometimes complex issues.

Some of those experiences were directly related to our operational environment at Maastricht UAC. Being involved in discussions with management and colleagues gave me a much broader understanding of the challenges facing our profession and taught me how important it is to approach change as a professional and constructive partner, while never losing sight of the interests of the people we represent.

Looking back, I realise that these experiences were valuable not only because of what they allowed me to contribute, but because of what they taught me. They helped me become a better communicator, a better listener and, ultimately, a more complete professional. Just as importantly, they helped me grow as a person.

And I believe this is one of the less obvious benefits of becoming active in a professional association. You may initially join because you want to contribute to your colleagues or your profession, but along the way you often discover that the experience contributes just as much to your own development.

But the value of those 16 years went far beyond what we achieved locally. Being part of EGATS also meant becoming part of the much larger IFATCA family. This international dimension has been one of the most rewarding parts of the journey.

Over the years, I had the privilege of meeting fellow controllers from all over the world. We came from different ANSPs, operational environments and cultures, but many of the challenges we faced were remarkably similar. The experience of a colleague from another country could provide a completely different perspective on an issue we were facing at home. When difficulties arose, the support and experience of colleagues who had already faced similar situations at their own ANSP could be invaluable.

And then there were the friendships.

Some of the best memories were made outside the meeting rooms — sharing a meal, discovering a city, having a drink after a long day of discussions, or simply spending time together. The formal meetings were important, but the relationships built around them often became just as valuable. These personal connections are one of the things that make the IFATCA community unique.

My journey started with my first IFATCA conference in Dubrovnik in 2009. Sixteen years later, I attended my farewell meeting at the European Regional Meeting in Bologna in 2025.



Looking back from Dubrovnik to Bologna, it has been an enjoyable, challenging and enormously enriching journey. It has shaped me professionally, but also personally. It has given me opportunities to develop skills I did not have when I started, to contribute to changes affecting our operations, to learn from colleagues around the world and to build friendships that will remain long after my time on the EGATS Board has ended.

And this brings me to the message I would most like to leave with the younger generation of controllers.

Professional associations are only as strong as the people who choose to become involved in them.

This is particularly important as our profession enters a period of profound technological change. Artificial intelligence, machine learning, automation and increasingly sophisticated decision-support tools are becoming part of the aviation environment. These developments will bring opportunities, but they will also raise fundamental questions about our profession, our responsibilities and the role of the human controller.

These questions cannot be left for others to answer on our behalf. So, to the younger controllers reading this: **step forward.**

Join your local professional association. Put your hand up for a project. Attend a meeting. Volunteer for a working group. Bring your perspective to the table.

You do not need to wait until you have decades of experience. You do not need to know everything. You certainly do not need to have all the answers before you start.

Get involved. Ask questions. Challenge assumptions. Listen to colleagues. Share your experience — and be ready to learn from others. You may be surprised by how much you can contribute. But even more importantly, you may be surprised by how much the experience will give back to you.

I hope that the next generation will take the same opportunity — and live it as intensively as I did.

The future of air traffic control will be shaped by technological developments, but it will also be shaped by the people who choose to engage with them. The profession is yours to shape.





Goodbye To CHARLIE'S COLUMN

(1991-2026)

By Philippe Domogala (EGATS), Former Editor of The Controller Magazine

When Terry Crawhurst (UK) took over as editor of the Controller magazine in 1991, he wanted a revamp of the layout and to add a satirical light page at the end of the magazine. He envisioned something similar to what the UK "FLIGHT" magazine had at the time with their popular "Straight and Level" (which absolutely everybody was reading) or the "Grass cuttings" in GATCO's "TRANSMIT". As a newly promoted "Deputy Editor", I accepted the challenge.

I chose the name "Charlie" from the French "Charlie Hebdo", which was a magazine I had a subscription to at that time. It was both controversial and funny and would fit the purpose. (Charlie Hebdo was not known outside a small Circle in France at the time, but it became very famous in 2015 after the terrorist attacks that killed most of its cartoonists and many in the world "became Charlie")

The contents of *Charlie's Column* were also a bit controversial at times. We also received quite a few complaints from some Member Associations that did not like that their country was subject to jokes. Nobody outside the Editor and I knew who Charlie was...not even the Executive Board (EB). We always kept it a secret. In 1995 when Chris Stok (UK) succeeded Terry as the editor, he fully supported the *Charlie's Column*, as did the various EBs. And so, I continued it.

After I became editor in 2005, Philip Mairén became Deputy Editor and we started to fill the column jointly. When he became Editor in 2010, he took over *Charlie's Column* and the contents completely.

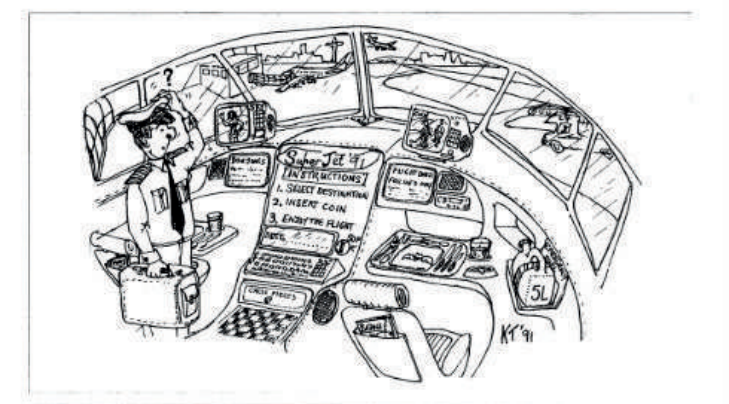
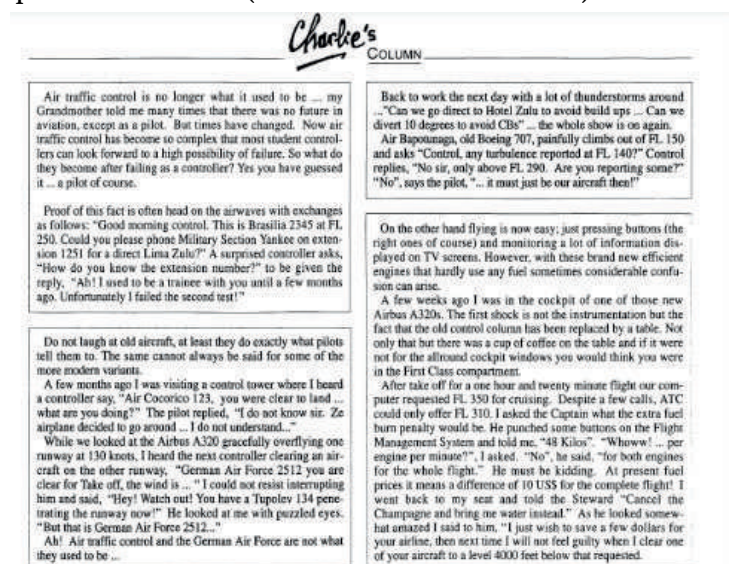
The famous *Charlie's Column* is no longer here. Why stop now? Our world has changed and is still changing fast. There are also less "funny" things happening, as the definition of what is funny is changing too.

Making jokes and sarcasm was always subjective and sometimes culturally specific. It is becoming increasingly more important to be careful of our words and deeds.

We see people being killed for cartoons, books or speeches that are made when one exposes oneself to the violent tribunal of social media, while being too provocative. IFATCA is a non-political federation. We pride ourselves on that. This means that we have to walk that walk too.

So the final decision was made that the column should retire. A big thanks to Philip Mairén for having continued *Charlie's Column* for all these years. Without him and his dedication, it would without doubt have died much earlier.

Illustration . The very first Charlie/s column published in 1991 (Controller issue # 2 1991)



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IFATCA CONNECTS:

A Small World: An Unexpected Reunion in Madrid

By: Ivica Janev (MATCA, North Macedonia)

The aviation community is often described as a global network of professionals, united by a common mission: ensuring the safe, orderly, and efficient flow of air traffic. Every now and then, something occurs that transforms this concept from a simple statement into a tangible reality.

During a recent refresher training course at SENASA in Madrid, I met a group of Angolan Air Traffic Controllers undertaking Approach Radar training. Among them was a familiar face: Deise, who was a participant in one of my previous Speak English Program (SEP) sessions, and her colleague Zenite who also participates in the program.

What initially appeared to be a chance encounter, quickly became a reminder of the remarkable reach and lasting impact of IFATCA's SEP.

English proficiency remains one of the cornerstones of aviation worldwide. While ICAO phraseology provides a standardized framework for routine operations, controllers and pilots must often rely on plain language communication when situations become non-routine. The ability to communicate effectively in English is not merely a regulatory requirement; it is a critical operational tool that improves safety and efficiency throughout the aviation system.

Recognizing this need, IFATCA's SEP helps ATCOs around the world strengthen their English skills through sessions delivered by volunteer facilitators. Beyond language development, the program provides participants with increased confidence in professional communication and greater readiness to engage in international training environments.

The encounter in Madrid offered a perfect illustration of this broader impact.

While language training alone does not create operational expertise, it can help open doors to further education and offer professional development opportunities. Effective communication skills provide a foundation upon which additional technical knowledge and competencies can be built.

This encounter was especially rewarding for me, because I am a new-ish facilitator, just over a year.

That being said, I do have more than 25 years of operational experience as an air traffic controller, working both Tower and Approach at Skopje Airport - LWSK. It was particularly gratifying to see Deise again, this time in a completely different training environment and at a different stage of her professional development. Meeting participants in unexpected places and under entirely different circumstances, offers a unique perspective on the long-term value of SEP.

Programs such as IFATCA's SEP help strengthen these connections. They create opportunities for sharing of knowledge and experience, professional networking, and personal growth that extend well beyond those obtained in a classroom.

The aviation world is vast, stretching across continents, cultures, and languages. Yet moments like these make it feel surprisingly small, highlighting the interconnected nature of the global ATC profession. Controllers from different continents, operating in different environments and facing different operational challenges, remain linked through common standards, shared objectives, and a commitment to continuous learning.

I would like to wish success to Deise, Zenite, and all of the Angolans. Their commitment to learning and growth leaves little doubt that they will make valuable contributions to the future of air traffic services in Angola. I also hope that our paths will cross again, whether in another training environment, an IFATCA event, or a future SEP session.

Moments like these serve as a powerful reminder that IFATCA's Speak English Program truly connects ATCOs everywhere.





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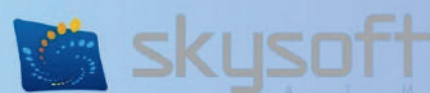
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