



European Union Aviation Safety Agency

CONCEPT PAPER¹

GROUNDHANDLING ROADMAP

Staff Turnover

¹ The cover page might be adjusted following the format of those bodies it is addressed to.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Concept Paper is intended to trigger discussions on the impact of high staff turnover on the safe delivery of Groundhandling (GH) services.

The concept paper on staff turnover should be read in combination with the other concept papers on key areas identified in the GHSP domain: management systems, oversight of GH activities, ground support equipment (GSE), training of personnel and operational standards.

This concept paper includes a brief analysis of possible causes and effects of high staff turnover affecting GHSP; it also describes the staff turnover related problems that have been identified by GH stakeholders.

This concept paper is not a rulemaking exercise. Therefore, it does not propose rulemaking options. Instead, it lists a number of actions for the roadmap to address the identified gaps. Further discussions on critical areas will be necessary to support decision making on the best ways forward.

Setting up a regulatory framework with basic common pan-European training requirements for staff is one example of the measures that could be envisaged to retain workers within the sector and reduce the cost of constantly having to retrain new workers who have already received basic common training elsewhere. The ability to retain well-trained and experienced staff will have a direct effect on the number of accidents and incidents caused by GH activities. Putting GH on the European aviation safety map should include a strategic campaign across the industry to increase the confidence in Groundhandling service providers (GHSPs) as full partners in the safety chain. This will also improve the prestige of jobs in GH services.

At the same time, putting GH on the European safety map helps giving proper recognition to the importance of the GH domain in the broad picture of safety in aviation.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	BACKGROUND	4
2	DESCRIPTION OF THE ISSUE	4
2.1	IDENTIFICATION OF THE ISSUE.....	4
2.2	IDENTIFICATION OF THE POSSIBLE OPTIONS	5
2.3	ANALYSIS OF IMPACTS FOR THE POSSIBLE OPTIONS.....	5
	2.3.1 SAFETY IMPACT	5
	2.3.3 SOCIAL IMPACT	6
	2.3.4 ECONOMIC IMPACT.....	6
	2.3.5 IMPACT ON EXISTING ORGANISATIONS INCLUDING THE AGENCY	6
3	CONCLUSION	6



1 Background

Groundhandling is one of the largest safety-critical domains of aviation in terms of number of staff. Until the recent application of Regulation (EU) 2018/1139 GH was not covered directly by European aviation safety regulation. On the one hand, not being under EASAs scope until now, although this part of the industry has always been present and functional but not subject to consistent European regulatory requirements, creates a challenge, in particular because many GHSPs run international operations. Consulted stakeholders have identified the staff turnover as a major challenge, especially in airports with high seasonal peaks. The difficulty to have sufficient numbers of well-trained and qualified staff can also become a safety risk.

On the other hand, the analysis of stakeholders' feedback revealed that a hard regulatory actions and a one-size-fits all approach might be counterproductive.

Aim of this concept paper

The aim of this concept paper is to:

- provide a basis for the development of the GH Roadmap, including:
 - identifying causes and effects of high staff turnover in GHSPs;
 - performing an analysis between what exists today and where we aim to be, in order to identify the shortcomings of the current system;
 - identifying possible actions to address these gaps; such actions could include rulemaking activities, or safety promotion and other non-regulatory actions, or a combination of both;

2 Description of the issue

2.1 Identification of the issue

The business volume on an airport depends on the season, the weekday and even the time of the day. Although main hubs are able to overcome this effect, small regional airports often struggle to stimulate their activity during the off-peak season and off-peak hours. GH duties and staff are undoubtedly positively correlated with this trend in demand.

As a consequence, GHSPs are often not able to offer full-time jobs or contracts round the entire year. On top of that, shifts might be split, late night or very early in the morning. The combination of these elements added to the stress during the peak of operations and the lack of clear defined career opportunities do not make a lifetime occupation in GH an appealing choice. The need of GHSPs to constantly hire and retrain new and often unexperienced staff is not only costly but also a stress factor for the new comers which creates an additional strain on the more experienced staff and might in the worst case have negative impact on safety.

For the reasons mentioned above, attracting and retaining motivated and qualified staff has been reported by GHSPs to be a major challenge.

Whilst in the past a part of the attractiveness of working in GH would often come with the social prestige and the incentives (e.g. staff travel tickets) of being a staff member of an airline, nowadays the majority of GH jobs are offered by GHSPs that are not part of an airline. This, in combination with the adversities of part time contracts, shift work and the lack of defined professions and does not contribute to the attractiveness of GH jobs.

It should also be mentioned that GH is a low margin business with 70-75% of costs related to staff. The wish of many GHSPs to pay higher salaries is confronted with the reality of a highly competitive market, in particular at the attractive all year round airports.



This latter factor has spurred agency workers with daily or weekly contracts so that companies can better adjust their workforce according to the operational needs. Unfortunately, this solution also presents an important drawback related to absenteeism. Staff members are more prone to fail to go to work if they do not feel to belong to an organisation and the perceived income does not balance the effort invested in a particular day (inclement weather, heavy workload expected, strenuous physical activity, etc.).

At the same time, training cannot be used as motivation factor because such workers are hired to perform very specific tasks that only require limited training. Opportunities are missed with those newcomers who enter the GH sector through temporary or part time arrangements and their first experience is a job that neither offers stability nor the perspective to obtain a qualification that is recognised throughout the GH sector.

2.2 Identification of the way forward

The identified possible actions for tackling the issue are listed below:

- a) Share best practices of fostering systems that allow for more precise monthly and weekly planning. Providing employees with a reasonable amount of notice for shift changes so that they have enough time to rest and a proper work-life balance will have a positive impact on safety and help to retain staff members. At the same time, GHSPs should be encouraged to assess their operational risks emanating from the need for new employees, potential excesses in the workload, an uneven work distribution and work pressure.
- b) Encourage GHSPs to assess the impact of outdated GSE that make the work on the ramp at times more physically demanding than necessary.
- c) Develop a coordinated high level communications strategy aiming to enhance the perception of the GH sector as a crucial element of the aviation safety chain. The EASA activities on GH should be the starting point to raise the awareness of the public. Additional actions should give the GH sector the deserved level of consideration and social prestige by explaining that GH is a part of the aviation safety system.
- d) Design common training methodologies and standards based on existing industry standards and best practices to build a system of training recognition throughout the sector. This can facilitate the mobility of GH staff in Europe and can help to acknowledge GH jobs as recognised professions so the expectations of a new generation of workforce might be met.

2.3 Analysis of impacts for the possible options

2.3.1 Safety impact

The main safety impacts are to be expected from an increased capability to retain trained staff who will also contribute with more expertise to the reporting system of a GHSP. Further positive safety improvements are expected to result from encouraging GHSPs to include work load management and staff issues into their considerations on safety risk management.

Another mitigation of a safety risk may arise from the introduction of new equipment. By using new technologies or equipment, less physical work might be carried out and less stress should be created.



2.3.3 Social impact

The deserved recognition of GH as one crucial element of the European aviation safety system will increase the prestige on such jobs. This, combined with the adequate common set of training standards and the recognition of qualifications, will offer a career path that might be explored not only by current employees with part time and temporary work arrangements but also for a new generation of GH workforce.

Placing GH on the European aviation safety map might also have a catalytic effect on the attractiveness of the sector due to the dissemination of information about the sector by the stakeholders.

2.3.4 Economic impact

A positive economic impact is expected for GHSPs stemming from a reduction of initial training if staff can be retained and qualifications from other GHSPs are accepted.

2.3.5 Impact on existing organisations including the Agency

The future requirements will directly impact on GHSP and the NAA, and indirectly the aerodrome operators and aircraft operators in Europe.

All aspects described in the previous chapters will increase the safety of GH services in Europe.

3 Conclusion

This Concept Paper gives a high level description of some elements that may be underlying causes to the current staff turnover in GH. It identifies a set of options to address these issues. Although the issues are identified clearly and potential areas of improvement are highlighted, it is acknowledged that some solutions are related to social and labour related subjects, which are outside of EASAs remit.

The Agency can, however, propose a strategic campaign to raise awareness on GH and its crucial part within the system in order to boost the prestige of the sector.

At the same time, regulatory actions can help establishing common requirements and training objectives, which should be widespread across the GH domain. Such actions should aim at improving and promoting a career path which could be further acknowledged with documented evidence of successfully completed training.

