

Social Sustainability

IFALPA has identified a vision to rethink, reimagine, and reset the aviation industry as it rebuilds from the devastation of the COVID-19 crisis. The Federation recognizes the hard-won opportunity to play a major role in rebuilding an industry on the core values of financial sustainability, environmental sustainability, and social sustainability. This editorial will focus on social sustainability.

[Social Sustainability, as explained by the UN Global Compact "...is about identifying and managing business impacts, both positive and negative, on people."](#)

For the last few decades, governments have allowed the market to find its own balance through deregulation and a focus on growth, low fares, and increased connectivity. Over this period there have been hundreds of airline bankruptcies. Just prior to this crisis, most airlines were not making enough money to cover the cost of capital. The boom/bust cycle has been entrenched to the detriment of all stakeholders. The post-COVID-19 recovery must differ from past industry recoveries which led to further deregulation, increasingly precarious work, and increased social costs.

Those costs include the obvious costs of lost jobs, maintaining social protections, income disparity, decreased economic and national security, and rising political unrest. Some less obvious costs can include physical and mental health issues, substance abuse, and domestic unrest. These affect the individual and their family, community, and society.

Liberalization in aviation has created a skewed system in which many airlines are no longer obligated to take financial or social responsibility for the markets to which they enjoy access. Aviation should be an engine of improvement; not a scheme to extract value and dump its social costs in return. A socially sustainable industry will create valuable employment; not degrade and destroy it.

The response to this crisis cannot be to increase precarious employment. Without social sustainability, there will be no economic sustainability and healthy competition needs a rulebook and referees. A safe and sustainable aviation industry requires a firm link of liability and responsibility between finance, the environment, labour, and society; and governments, owners, and management accountable for maintaining that link.

The global community doesn't need more dirt-cheap airplane tickets. It doesn't need airlines creating and demanding unreasonable competition. It needs a sustainable, economical transportation system built according to the fair and equitable treatment of the people who keep it running. Workers' rights are human rights and the aviation industry will not properly recover without solid interventions acknowledging this reality.

Consider now how we can either influence this recovery; or become victims of it. IFALPA urges all aviation stakeholders to take an active role in developing a new, socially sustainable aviation industry based upon a principle of creating prosperity *within*, not just *from*, the markets it has the privilege of serving.

Herb Kelleher, former CEO of Southwest Airlines said that his airline's success was based on putting employees first, customers second, and shareholders third, that way everything takes care of itself. We believe this is a good approach toward a socially sustainable aviation industry as well.