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DIRECTORS GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION
ASIA AND PACIFIC REGIONS**

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AGENDA ITEM 6: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF
AIR TRANSPORT

**THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA'S POLICIES ON AVIATION
RECOVERY FROM COVID-19**

(Presented by the Republic of Korea)

INFORMATION PAPER

SUMMARY

This Paper is to share the Republic of Korea's policies to maintain the aviation ecosystem and achieve early recovery from COVID-19 with member states for reference in the event of the next pandemic.

THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA'S POLICIES ON AVIATION RECOVERY FROM COVID-19

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the aviation ecosystem has experienced an unprecedented crisis, with international airline flights virtually halted.

1.2 Since then, as the pandemic has subsided, travel demand has surged globally, but there have been cases of flight cancellations and baggage chaos due to delays in restoring airport staffing.

1.3 Therefore, we would like to share the Korean government's policies to maintain the aviation ecosystem during the pandemic and measures to recover the workforce so that they can serve as a reference for future pandemics and workforce recovery in aviation.

2. DISCUSSION

COVID-19 Aviation Supportive Policy

2.1 The Korean government has implemented more than ten supportive measures to minimize the business crisis in the aviation industry and actively support employment stability, while airlines have made efforts to maintain their competitiveness, such as operating domestic flights and converting passenger flights to cargo planes. Representative supportive measures include:

1. **Financial supports:**

- a) Providing a total of 3.9 trillion won (2.9 billion US dollars) of policy finance and long-term industry stabilization funds to airlines experiencing liquidity shortages since February 2020;
- b) 580 billion won (435 million US dollars) in employment stability support for airlines and aircraft handling companies; and
- c) a total of 2.75 trillion won (2.1 billion US dollars) in support for airport facility fees incurred during aircraft takeoffs and landings, moorings, and rental fees of commercial facilities, such as duty-free shops and offices in international terminals.

2. **Operational supports:** Promoting supportive policies such as a retention on international traffic rights and slots, simplified air cargo handling authorization, No-Landing duty-free Flights, and travel bubbles with Northern Mariana Islands and Singapore.

Aviation Professionals and Airport staffing shortages

2.2 While the aviation ecosystem has been maintained through the above-mentioned efforts of the government and industry, inevitably, the number of airline employees (pilots, mechanics and cabin crew), ground handling workers, and aviation security officers has decreased due to the sharp decline in aviation demand.

2.3 In the private sector, airlines were able to minimize the number of retirees with the government's employment retention support and manage the workforce flexibly through rotational leave. However, in the case of some ground handling companies, due to the prolonged COVID-19, many workers moved to other industries, and it was difficult to recruit new workers due to relatively poor working conditions.

2.4 In the second half of 2022, as the pandemic began to subside and aviation recovery became visible*, delays in hiring and reinstatement of flight attendants and shortages of airport workers, such as ground handling, carts, cleaning and security** emerged.

* *Note. ROK's International flight recovery measures (June 2022), ROK's Policy to eliminate PCR for arrivals (September 2022)*

** *For example. Flight attendants 14,563(December 2019) → 7,321(August 2022) 50.3%, Ground Operations (Incheon) 6,219(December 2019) → 4,269 (August 2022) 68.6%*

2.5 On the other hand, from March 2020 to April 2022, when the number of passengers plummeted due to COVID-19, the recovery rate of international passengers was less than 10% compared to 2019, but it started to rise in May 2022, exceeded 50% in December 2022, and is currently at 79.1% as of June 2023.

2.6 In order to identify the current status and address the problem, the Republic of Korea formed a Task Force team in Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, and Transport (MOLIT) in August 2022 and has been seeking countermeasures through on-site inspections and meetings with people in different aviation fields.

2.7 As the pandemic turned into an endemic in 2023, we have been operating a total of three divisions, excluding the epidemic prevention field, as follows:

- a) Part 1: pilots, mechanics and flight attendants
- b) Part 2: airport operations personnel such as security, cleaning, carts, etc.
- c) Part 3: ground handling crew

Workforce measures by administrative entity

2.8 Airlines. As mandatory rotational leaves ended and new hires started after operation resumption, airline workers, including pilots, aviation mechanics and flight attendants, continued to recover modestly, with more than 90% recovery as of June 2023.

2.9 Airport Corporation. Workforce in aviation security and sanitation managed by the Airport Corporation has recovered by more than 90% with the support of resumed new hires and existing personnel retained during the coronavirus period.

2.10 Ground Handling. Even the world's leading airports were experiencing difficulties due to a shortage of ground-handling workforce. In ROK, there was an urgent need to support the recruitment efforts of ground-handling companies that were struggling to hire workers during the recovery period. Accordingly, under the Airport Manpower TF, the Emergency Response Team for Ground Handling and the Airport Facility Safety Operation Team were formed from March 2023 and have been implementing countermeasures such as:

- a) Transportation support: New and expanded transportation services, free transportation passes for certain routes, discount coupons for car sharing, and free parking at cargo terminals;
- b) Recruitment support: recruitment subsidies and airport recruitment events (weekly, monthly);
- c) Environmental improvement: reduced time for issuing airside pass, installation of equipment to support loading and unloading of luggage and operation of shuttle buses for remote sites; and
- d) Ground safety: education support, expansion of safety equipment, and preparing and implementing safety management procedures in case of disasters such as lightning strikes.

2.11 Based on these efforts, the aviation industry has achieved a nearly 90 % recovery of its labor force as of the end of June 2023. In particular, ROK is considering to allow airports to hire foreign workers in ground handling to overcome the labor shortage.

3. Action by the Conference

3.1 The Conference is invited to note the information contained in this Paper.

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