

## Mind The Gap? CANSO reports on ATCO staff forecasts and remuneration

One of CANSO's key strategic goals is to support the harmonisation of global ANS and improve ATM service delivery. CANSO's global benchmarking activities across key areas of operational performance are a vital part of the quest to raise ATM performance, and as part of that process, the CANSO Human Resources Workgroup (HRWG) has recently published two important reports: the Fourth ATCO Remuneration Report, and a Global ATCO Staffing Forecast Report. The Remuneration Report is prepared every two years and contains refined performance data, analysis and results covering the period 2008/9. The data draws comparisons across ANSPs, plus analysis of trends in ANSP performance from 2003-2009. The Staffing Forecasts Report contains data, analysis and results and predictions for the period 2008-2015.

"The development of an effective performance framework is essential if we are to understand and improve the performance of our organisations" says CANSO's Director of Industry Affairs Samantha Sharif. "Global benchmarking of ANSP safety, human resource, economic, environmental, and quality performance measurements remains one of the most effective management tools to support improvements in ANS service provision." An example of this is that the remuneration report allows ANSPs to quickly identify any large discrepancies in the pay and conditions offered to ATCOs. The report also contains a number of key conclusions and notes some interesting trends.

The Report provides comparison data for 6 levels of ATCO employees in relation to gross pay, net pay, composition of pay, and in core conditions such as hours of work. The figures show that pay increases have declined from 2007 to 2008 and that further declines are expected in 2009.

An alternative comparison approach has been trialed this year, with the inclusion of national average wages to provide a means of providing a "relative wealth" comparison. Substantial variation exists in core conditions, such as hours of work and leave provisions, which have a direct impact on efficiency of resource deployment and cost of service provision.

Nearly three-quarters of respondents were 3% or more above or below the mean annual working hours (excluding holidays/leave) which is a substantial variation in the utilisation of an expensive and critical resource.

The significant levels of overtime being worked by ATCOs (the average across ANSPs being 130 hours p.a.), which is not associated with ATCO absenteeism rates indicates that ATCO staffing

remains under pressure and this is supported by the CANSO ATCO Staffing Forecasts Report 2008-2015.

"We were well aware of the IFATCA estimate in March 2008, suggesting an immediate need for 3000 ATCOs globally" explains Billy Josefsson, senior advisor on ATM and Human Performance issues at LFV, and a co-chair of the HRWG. "And in May 2009 they revised this figure up to



ATCOs on the move? ICAO English language requirements may make it easier for ATCOs to transfer.

5000, but as an industry there was no consensus around this, and we felt that some concrete work was needed to understand the numbers more accurately." Josefsson and the HRWG decided to survey CANSO members and other ANSPs on their workforce plans, recruitment and training. The main purpose of this survey was to gain a better understanding of the global demand for ATCOs, whether or not a shortage existed, and on what scale. Implications and mitigating factors were discussed, along with other data from the survey concerning recruitment and training.

"The findings from the survey highlighted a global ATCO shortage, and that that this shortage is fairly widespread – around 80% of ANSPs reported a headcount shortage for 2008" says Josefsson. "The shortage is most evident in Europe, where headcount numbers are on average approximately 8% below what is required – around 466 ATCOs." This is consistent with the IFATCA 2008 estimate. Globally, the data suggests a total shortage of around 5% below the required headcount on average.

The shortage is expected to reduce in the near future, however, and predictions suggest there should no longer be any shortage by 2015. So how does this translate in terms of actual headcount numbers? CANSO estimates the global number of ATCOs to be around 70,000. If this is the case, this would put the total ATCO shortage at 3500 – just over IFATCA's initial 2008 estimate of 3000, but below their revised 2009 estimate of 5000.

IFATCA shared its most recent data with CANSO and an analysis of the figures indicated a possible error which would bring the total IFATCA estimate closer to 4000 ATCOs. Based on this it appears that IFATCA's most recent estimate may be overstated. However the figures are reasonably consistent and when extrapolated globally tend to reinforce IFATCA's original estimate of 3000. This suggests that ATCO shortages are a real issue facing the industry, and are fairly widespread.

It is important to note that while there is data confirming anecdotal evidence

that not all ANSPs are experiencing a shortage, with some reporting headcount surpluses of up to 3%, these ANSPs tend to be the odd ones out. But according to the survey responses, the problem looks like it will gradually ease over the coming 3–6 years, rather than worsen. Based on data provided, the estimated future headcount requirements are set to increase, but will do so at a slower rate than the increase in projected headcounts. Whereas the problem is currently largest in Europe, it appears Europe may also be quicker to close the gap: estimates suggest a break even point at 2013, where actual headcount should match required headcount. The rest of the world should eliminate the gap by 2015, indicating that although the scale of the problem is not so great, it may persist for longer.

### We need to ask ourselves why an ATCO moving from one part of Europe to another needs a whole year of retraining

If it is the case that individual ANSPs over-report ATCO needs then these individual figures should not necessarily be extrapolated to measure the shortfall in the entire system. However it is possible that the numbers may be too optimistic. The majority of ANSPs have indicated in this survey that they do not take into account attrition in their workforce planning. Data from 2006 and 2007 show higher rates of ATCOs transferring than in previous years. This may become an even larger issue in the future, especially if the growth powerhouses of India, China and South-East Asia take off as predicted. The introduction of ICAO's Level 4 English requirements is likely to facilitate greater movement between ANSPs in the future. Samantha Sharif notes that the data raises as many questions as it answers. "It is not clear how ANSPs will be closing the gap," she says. "The most obvious

place to look is the planned recruitment rates. However estimates of future intake numbers do not appear to be any higher than current levels – if anything, the figures given indicate a decrease in ab initio intakes."

Billy Josefsson agrees that ANSPs are restricted by available training capacity. "Capacities are not anticipated to increase much over the next 3 years, especially for on-the-job training which is where the bottle-neck is likely to occur. We also need to ask ourselves why an ATCO moving from one part of Europe to another needs a whole year of retraining." Other solutions being considered to help with the shortage include reorganising shifts, collapsing sectors, and reducing leave availability, but these do not increase headcount. Raising the retirement age is also being considered by a small number of ANSPs, and Josefsson notes that ANSPs are still sometimes caught out by large numbers of retirees. It is also an issue which may be exacerbated by the calls for retirement to be standardised at 52.

The current economic downturn is another factor that needs to be taken into consideration. In fact, there may be a silver-lining for those ANSPs with shortages, in that it may allow the gap between actual and required headcounts to close more rapidly. If ANSPs continue to recruit and train at current levels, in spite of the downturn, they may find themselves in a stronger position to overcome any shortage once normality returns and the growth engines throughout Asia and the Middle East take off.

The ATCO Staffing Forecasts and Remuneration benchmarking process is ongoing and CANSO is repeating this exercise every two years to refine its analysis on trends in ANSP performance. Over time, with each successive report, the organisation aims to make significant advances in terms of global participation, data relevance and integrity. The group is working on harmonising metrics and is leading the way on research in this field. However, with ATCO remuneration and numbers so crucial to current ANSP performance and future planning, it is clear that it will be a major focus for CANSO members for many years to come. ➔