

## **MENTAL HEALTH RESEARCH STARTING**

**Rotterdam The Hague Airport, The Netherlands - for release in African Aerospace**

The scale of mental health problems in aviation is unknown, according to the International Civil Aviation Organization ICAO. Attention to wellbeing has drastically risen since the start of the Corona pandemic. "The industry, however, does not gather data on wellbeing", said Dr. Lucas van Gerwen, lead researcher in this domain with AviAssist. "Some staff fear reporting mental health problems or accepting help, for instance peer support programs". Dr. Van Gerwen has been involved with aviation worker wellbeing and the impact on performance for over 20 years.

The AviAssist Foundation is starting ground-breaking research through the AviAssist Safety Promotion Centre (ASPC)-Rwanda. The research aims to improve the understanding and management of mental health issues for cabin and flight crew. It will be coupled with several training courses for Africa, hosted in Kigali in September in the week of Aviation Africa. RwandAir will become the first airline to join this leading research project.

"The mission of RwandAir is dedication to the highest levels of safety", RwandAir CEO Yvonne Manzi Makolo underlined. "RwandAir is known as a leader for innovation in aviation across the continent and our role in research reinforces our commitment to driving the safety of our industry forward through research and innovation."

Tom Kok, director AviAssist, said: "Greater awareness of mental health issues and training in appropriate and effective responses to crisis situations should be part of our workplace. Peer support groups, training and awareness activities do not take place regularly across Africa. AviAssist aims to change that as part of a Return to Normal Operations from Covid-19. We're delighted to welcome RwandAir to this research project. As an innovative airline focused on the future challenges of safety, efficiency and sustainability, there is much overlap between RwandAir's aims and the research at the ASPC-Rwanda. We look forward to working together to deliver the improvements required in this domain and 'build back better'."

An awareness campaign on the subject has started with an episode of AviAssist Focus Sessions dedicated to mental health. The Focus Sessions are Africa's monthly safety promotion TV shows to inform, inspire and entertain African aviation safety. The sessions explore the exciting world of safety and its professionals. Three other videos on the topic are available for viewing on the Foundation's YouTube channel as part of the awareness campaign. You can find the channel at [www.youtube.com/AviAssistFoundation/](http://www.youtube.com/AviAssistFoundation/)

"We welcome cabin and flight crew in the study to help us better look after their mental health," said Felicien Izaturwanaho, coordinator at the AviAssist Safety Promotion Centre in Rwanda. "We can only improve our support to mental health with their help".

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**The AviAssist Foundation** has been leading, building and supporting aviation safety promotion in African since 1995. It provides impartial, independent, expert safety guidance and resources to Africa's aviation industry. It provides its guidance & resources through training courses, social media and Africa's only dedicated safety promotion magazine - SafetyFocus. More at [www.aviassist.org](http://www.aviassist.org)