

Women in aviation

Gender equality at full throttle

Only 22% of personnel in European transport are women, according to the European Commission's ['2017 Report on equality between women and men in the EU'](#). Aviation, at a male/female 60/40% split, fares better than land (86/14%) and nautical (80/20%) segments (hence the collectively low 22% statistic) – but that hasn't diminished efforts to redress the gender imbalance. As the EU's recently launched ['Women in Transport – Platform for change'](#) gathers momentum, representatives from Europe's aviation ecosystem discuss the initiatives enabling a more equitable distribution of gender across the workforce.

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Aviation's labour pool may be 40% female, but that cumulative figure is deceptive. It reveals little of the skill distribution between the sexes, the extent of female presence in senior roles, nor – looking towards the future – the gender ratio of tomorrow's workforce, which will require a completely new range of additional skills to augment the established job functions we know today. Even the presence of women in aviation's high visibility roles can be misrepresentative of the equality drive – for example, only 4% of the world's commercial airline pilots are female.

“While no aggregated data exists for controllers, country level data shows that in the late 70s and 80s there were nearly no women in the ATC working environment. Nowadays, gender parity in the

ops room is no longer a real issue, with some countries like Turkey or France where the majority of the air traffic controllers are women. Where there are challenges are in the executive and governance level, with few women holding high level positions,” observes Marc Baumgartner, SESAR Coordinator for the International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers' Associations (IFATCA). Global representative figures for airlines are hard to come by too, but it is estimated that 4-5% of pilots worldwide are women. This is reflected in the figures from European airlines, which are seeking to reverse the trend in the cockpit and the boardroom.

The Commission's ['2017 Report on equality between women and men in the EU'](#) notes that “the transport sector is male-dominated” and

that the “work-life balance may pose particular challenges” due to “atypical and long working hours, sometimes far away from home”. In 2016, steps were taken at EU level to confront stereotypes, improve working conditions and reduce harassment in transport.

EU Transport Commissioner Violeta Bulc accentuates the challenge ahead: “If we want our society to flourish, we need to engage all of its talents, all of its human resources, at all levels. By engaging women and men, together, towards gender equality we will make it happen”. Addressing the point that the sector will require new skills, she says that “innovation and digitalisation will mean new types of transport jobs and this is an opportunity for better gender balance.”



To that end, last November SESAR Joint Undertaking along with a raft of Europe's transport actors signed up to the Commission's ['Declaration on equal opportunities for women and men in the transport sector'](#), in support of the [Women in Transport platform](#), and is raising visibility around its members' activities. These activities seek to convert policies and aspirations into tangible initiatives to eradicate glass ceilings; offer flexible working conditions whilst parents (of both sexes) juggle work and childcare; and for women returning to work after a career break – create a path to re-entry.

Show and tell

But before we even get to those stages it's imperative to boost the influx of female talent into the sector, and that means inspiring young minds and fostering engagement with prospective employees in their formative years.

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María Ángeles Martí, Airbus

Airbus, for example, is striving to promote diversity through inviting female high school students to visit its facilities and meet its female employees to discuss their experiences via the [Elles du Futur](#) and similar initiatives.

"Women's networks and mentoring programs at Airbus are actively promoting a more balanced leadership within the company," says Pauline Bourg of Airbus's Customer Services.

María Ángeles Martí, A350 RFE Program at Airbus adds that "Gender diversity is proven to bring better business results. But additionally, gender diversity can leverage societal evolution. Everybody should have the same opportunities to pursue their dreams and develop professionally."

In a similar vein, NATS hosted a 'Bring Your Daughter to Work Day' last July. Sixty 13 to 18 year olds met with ATC engineers at NATS' sites in Whiteley, Swanwick and Prestwick, for a day packed with interactive talks, tours and activities. It's all part of NATS' Early Careers recruitment scheme, aimed at motivating the next generation of female controllers, engineers and technicians by raising awareness of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics) related career paths in aviation.

"NATS' initiatives really do promote women in the workplace, and my own daughter enjoyed taking part in the 'Bring your Daughter to Work Day'" says Dr Alison Roberts, NATS SESAR Contribution Manager and Programme Committee Observer on the Scientific Committee.

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But even if young women can be inspired to study STEM subjects, they'll need the determination to overcome lingering prejudices in the transport sector, says Sara Bagassi, PhD, Assistant Professor in Aerospace Structures and Design, University of Bologna: "I approached aeronautics very early in my life due to my family's involvement in the sector, however it took a pretty long time to realise that this might become part of my professional life. And when I realised that, I had to face pre-existing stereotypes." Bagassi says that the [University of Bologna](#) actively promotes gender balance through a set of integrated actions targeting all components of the academic community: "Now, after ten years' experience in aeronautical research and education, I can say to young girls that nothing can really stop a strongly motivated student becoming a prominent professional in this field."

The importance of role models
Another path to attracting female talent at an early stage of career development is the trending paradigm of mentoring: "We believe that gender diversity in the workplace is vital to innovation and key to our business performance," says Marie-Pierre Bettoni, Head of Global Communications at Thales, which encourages internships and apprenticeships allowing female candidates to gain hands-on experience.

Back in 2011, the company partnered with [Elles Bougent](#), the association which provides networking opportunities for young women and promotes careers in science and technology. Under this

partnership, Thales women act as mentors and share their passion for engineering. "Currently, over 150 Thales women are Elles Bougent mentors," says Bettoni.

Additionally, Thales is actively involved in the annual [Réseaux et Carrières au Féminin](#) forum, the [Journée des Sciences de l'Ingénieur au Féminin](#) event and various other initiatives promoting careers in science and technology to female pupils, students and graduates.

At the University of Bologna, mentoring is also ingrained into the educational plan, says Assistant Professor Bagassi, citing [Alma Orienta](#), a mentoring event where thousands of young students come to explore their

learning options. "The idea is to balance the attendance of female students in STEM areas". This coordinates directly with a cycle of seminars about gender dimension in EU research projects "to stimulate young researchers to include the gender dimension in their projects' applications". The University also coordinates the H2020 EU project [PLOTINA](#) (Promoting gender balance and inclusion in research, innovation and training) and was partner in the FP7 LLP [IN2SAI](#) (Increasing Young Women's Participation in Science Studies and in the Aeronautic Industry). Bologna's University is also the Italian representative in [WiTEC](#), the European Association for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology.



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Work-life balance is key

For many companies, seeking the talent of women is embedded into corporate recruitment policy. Case in point, ENAIRE: "Our Strategic Plan, the Flight Plan 2020, establishes various actions aimed at achieving equality between men and women via programmes that reconcile work and family life," says Lourdes Mesado Martínez, People Director at ENAIRE.

"As a society, we need to translate the promises and declarations of intent made into specific and feasible goals, with the aim of encouraging a paradigm shift in terms of establishing the place that women occupy in society and thus eliminating any hindrances impeding advancement". The Spanish ATM provider's Corporate Social Responsibility Manager, María López Fernández-Pacheco, adds: "At ENAIRE, we have women leading key areas of sustainability in our business, such as the environment, social action and contracting areas, thus contributing to our social responsibility in the Spanish air transport sector."

The work-life balance is also about providing flexible working methods, says DLR: "Cutting-edge research requires excellent minds – particularly more females – at all levels." says Professor Doctor Pascale Ehrenfreund, Chair of the DLR Executive Board. "Equal opportunities and a range of support measures for a better work-life balance have therefore long been the central pillars of DLR's HR policy".



Pauline Bourg (Airbus), Bettina Arendt (Frequentis), Alison Roberts (NATS), María Ángeles Martí (Airbus), Pascale Ehrenfreund (DLR), María López Fernández-Pacheco (Enaire), Lourdes Mesado Martínez (Enaire), Sara Bagassi (University of Bologna), Marie-Pierre Bettoni (Thales)

WOMEN IN TRANSPORT – EU PLATFORM FOR CHANGE

With only 22% of women, the transport sector is not gender balanced. The objective of the Women in Transport – EU Platform for change (hereafter the Platform), launched on 27 November 2017, is to strengthen women's employment and equal opportunities for women and men in the transport sector thanks to the actions brought about by the Platform members. It will also serve as a forum to discuss and exchange good practices.

How to get involved:
Sign the Declaration to ensure equal opportunities for women and men in the transport sector. Become a member and initiate action to encourage gender balance in your organisation.

Find out more:
https://ec.europa.eu/transport/themes/social/women-transport-eu-platform-change_en



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Violeta Bulc, EU Commissioner for Transport

The organisation also says it wants “to reach a much fairer participation of women in the scientific-technical area in particular, also in leadership positions” – which it intends to achieve by setting “target quotas that should be reached in the next few years.”

On a practical level, DLR provides “flexible work-time models, the possibilities of alternating teleworking and mobile working, consulting and intermediary

services in matters of child support care and dependent relatives”. And when women have taken a break to raise children, it offers a “structured career re-entry process after a period of family-related absence.”

DLR also joined the [Women in Aerospace Europe](#) (WIA-E) network in 2009, which encourages female employees to form networks, dedicated specifically to “the promotion of women to senior positions

within the European aviation and aerospace industries”. Work-time flexibility has also been key for NATS’ Dr Alison Roberts: “NATS has provided a supportive and encouraging environment for me to pursue a fulfilling career whilst bringing up my three children. Although I have worked part-time for almost twenty years, I have been able to take part in some of our most high-profile programmes.”

A further example is provided by Frequentis: “Nowadays the importance of a good gender-mix is undisputed, especially in safety-critical environments. Female characteristics such as intuition, cognitive abilities and team spirit build an important cornerstone for successful business. Frequentis provides the perfect environment for women to bring in those strengths,” says Bettina Arendt: Human Performance Expert at Frequentis, which, as a family-owned company group, maintains “a special focus on work-life balance and the compatibility of family and career”, offering “a range of parental leave possibilities and childcare programmes.”

All on board

“Together, we can make gender equality happen,” says Commissioner Bulc. “To do this, both women and men should be on board. I mean that seriously – I want our male colleagues to be on board, because we may not be too far from the day where they will need our help to be equally represented!”

Find out more about initiatives on gender equality by SESAR members:
www.sesarju.eu/women-aviation

