

Seligson, David

Working Paper

Women and aviation: Quality jobs, attraction and retention

ILO Working Paper, No. 117

Provided in Cooperation with:

International Labour Organization (ILO), Geneva

Suggested Citation: Seligson, David (2024) : Women and aviation: Quality jobs, attraction and retention, ILO Working Paper, No. 117, ISBN 978-92-2-031441-8, International Labour Organization (ILO), Geneva,
<https://doi.org/10.54394/GYUN3488>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/301179>

Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:

Die Dokumente auf EconStor dürfen zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden.

Sie dürfen die Dokumente nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, öffentlich zugänglich machen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Sofern die Verfasser die Dokumente unter Open-Content-Lizenzen (insbesondere CC-Lizenzen) zur Verfügung gestellt haben sollten, gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der dort genannten Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

Terms of use:

Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes.

You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.

If the documents have been made available under an Open Content Licence (especially Creative Commons Licences), you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the indicated licence.



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



International
Labour
Organization

► ILO Working Paper 117

July / 2024

► Women and aviation

Quality jobs, attraction and retention

Author / David Seligson





This is an open access work distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>). Users can reuse, share, adapt and build upon the original work, as detailed in the License. The ILO must be clearly credited as the owner of the original work. The use of the emblem of the ILO is not permitted in connection with users' work.

Attribution – The work must be cited as follows: Seligson, D. *Women and aviation: Quality jobs, attraction and retention*. ILO Working Paper 117. Geneva: International Labour Office, 2024.

Translations – In case of a translation of this work, the following disclaimer must be added along with the attribution: *This translation was not created by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and should not be considered an official ILO translation. The ILO is not responsible for the content or accuracy of this translation.*

Adaptations – In case of an adaptation of this work, the following disclaimer must be added along with the attribution: *This is an adaptation of an original work by the International Labour Organization (ILO). Responsibility for the views and opinions expressed in the adaptation rests solely with the author or authors of the adaptation and are not endorsed by the ILO.*

This CC license does not apply to non-ILO copyright materials included in this publication. If the material is attributed to a third party, the user of such material is solely responsible for clearing the rights with the right holder.

Any dispute arising under this license that cannot be settled amicably shall be referred to arbitration in accordance with the Arbitration Rules of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL). The parties shall be bound by any arbitration award rendered as a result of such arbitration as the final adjudication of such a dispute.

All queries on rights and licensing should be addressed to the ILO Publishing Unit (Rights and Licensing), 1211 Geneva 22, Switzerland, or by email to rights@ilo.org.

ISBN 9789220407585 (print), ISBN 9789220314418 (web PDF), ISBN 9789220407592 (epub), ISBN 9789220407608 (mobi), ISBN 9789220407615 (html). ISSN 2708-3438 (print), ISSN 2708-3446 (digital)

<https://doi.org/10.54394/GYUN3488>

The designations employed in ILO publications, which are in conformity with United Nations practice, and the presentation of material therein do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the ILO concerning the legal status of any country, area or territory or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers.

The responsibility for opinions expressed in signed articles, studies and other contributions rests solely with their authors, and publication does not constitute an endorsement by the ILO of the opinions expressed in them.

Reference to names of firms and commercial products and processes does not imply their endorsement by the ILO, and any failure to mention a particular firm, commercial product or process is not a sign of disapproval.

Information on ILO publications and digital products can be found at: www.ilo.org/publns

ILO Working Papers summarize the results of ILO research in progress, and seek to stimulate discussion of a range of issues related to the world of work. Comments on this ILO Working Paper are welcome and can be sent to cruzross@ilo.org.

Authorization for publication: Mr Tariq Haq, Unit Head, MARITRANS Unit, SECTOR

ILO Working Papers can be found at: www.ilo.org/global/publications/working-papers

Suggested citation:

Seligson, D. 2024. *Women and aviation: Quality jobs, attraction and retention*, ILO Working Paper 117 (Geneva, ILO). <https://doi.org/10.54394/GYUN3488>

Preface

Progress for women in the world of work has been slow in a number of sectors, including in civil aviation, where there are clear gender gaps in a range of occupations. The rapid expansion of the sector provides an opportunity for a transformative and proactive agenda for gender equality. Yet, a series of challenges need to be addressed if the future of women in civil aviation is not to simply replicate the discriminatory patterns of the past. This working paper is a first step towards exploring some of these challenges and identifies opportunities for the future of decent and sustainable work in the aviation industry.

The paper is the result of an unprecedented combination of industry and worker inputs, and it has benefitted from information and data provided by the International Civil Aviation Organization. Governments, workers, employers and international organizations all have an important role to play in establishing, promoting and implementing policy choices that advance gender equality. These choices will depend on changing contexts, as gender equality is a constantly moving target.

The paper includes information on some of the current issues faced by women in civil aviation. Through a sectoral gender lens, it examines employment, women's career cycles and the main decent work opportunities and challenges in the sector. It also identifies ways of accelerating the achievement of gender equality. I hope that it will help to stimulate discussion on the promotion of diversity and the attraction and retention of women in this industry.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is the United Nations specialized agency devoted to advancing opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity. In 2019, the 108th Session of the International Labour Conference adopted, by an overwhelming majority, the new and ground-breaking Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) and its accompanying Violence and Harassment Recommendation, 2019 (No. 206). For the first time, violence and harassment in the world of work are covered by specific new international ILO labour standards.

The ILO's Sectoral Policies Department (SECTOR) promotes decent work by supporting the Organization's tripartite constituents – governments, employers and workers – in seizing opportunities and addressing challenges in 22 different economic and social sectors, including civil aviation. Working papers published by SECTOR aim to disseminate research on relevant and topical issues among policy-makers, administrators, social partners, civil society, the research community and the media. Their main objective is to contribute to an informed debate on how best to address sectoral issues within the overall agenda of full and productive employment and decent work for all, a goal embedded in the 2008 ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, the 2019 ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Alette van Leur

Director

Sectoral Policies Department

About the authors

David Seligson retired from the ILO, where he last served as the Head of the Manufacturing, Mining, and Energy Unit at the Sectoral Policies Department. Before that, he also was the ILO's Aviation Specialist and the Executive Secretary of the 2013 Global Dialogue Forum on the Effects of the Global Economic Crisis on the Civil Aviation Industry. Prior to joining the ILO, David worked in various capacities related to adult education, development cooperation, and trade unions in his home country, Finland, as well as in Geneva. He currently consults on a wide range of industrial and sectoral matters with Seligson Global Consulting.

Table of contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Preface | 01 |
| About the authors | 02 |
| <hr/> | |
| ► 1 Women and aviation | 07 |
| 1.1 First steps | 07 |
| 1.2 Current issues | 07 |
| <hr/> | |
| ► 2 Employment in civil aviation | 09 |
| 2.1 Forecasts and quantity | 09 |
| 2.2 Workforce profiles | 10 |
| 2.3 Employment arrangements | 11 |
| 2.4 Training and skills | 13 |
| 2.5 Wages and benefits | 14 |
| 2.6 Working time and work-life balance | 15 |
| <hr/> | |
| ► 3 Career cycle of women | 16 |
| 3.1 Career cycle components | 16 |
| 3.2 Attracting women to work in civil aviation | 17 |
| 3.3 Selection and retention | 18 |
| 3.4 Interruption, re-entry and personal development | 21 |
| 3.5 Image of civil aviation | 23 |
| <hr/> | |
| ► 4 Main decent work opportunities and challenges | 26 |
| 4.1 Rights at work: Freedom of association | 26 |
| 4.2 Equality and non-discrimination | 26 |
| 4.3 Occupational safety and health | 27 |
| 4.3.1 Violence and harassment | 27 |
| 4.3.2 Pregnancy and health-related issues | 29 |
| 4.4 Social security | 31 |
| 4.5 Migrant workers | 31 |
| <hr/> | |
| ► 5 Accelerating gender equality in civil aviation | 32 |
| 5.1 Sustainable development goals | 32 |
| 5.2 The ILO | 32 |
| 5.3 The ICAO | 33 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 5.4 Social partners | 35 |
| 5.4.1 Social dialogue | 35 |
| 5.4.2 Trade unions | 35 |
| 5.4.3 Employer and industry organizations | 36 |
| 5.4.4 Enterprises | 37 |

| | |
|----------------------|-----------|
| ► Conclusions | 38 |
|----------------------|-----------|

| | |
|-------------------------|-----------|
| Acknowledgements | 39 |
|-------------------------|-----------|

List of Figures

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Figure 1: Women's career cycle | 16 |
| Figure 2: Causes for the low attraction rate of women in civil aviation | 18 |
| Figure 3: Causes for the low selection rate of women in most civil aviation jobs | 20 |
| Figure 4: Causes of the low retention rate of women in civil aviation | 21 |
| Figure 5: Main causes of temporary or permanent interruptions in women's careers in civil aviation | 22 |
| Figure 6: Failure to realize the potential of women in civil aviation | 23 |

List of Boxes

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Box 1: Nurses as flight attendants | 11 |
| Box 2: Changing employment relations and practices | 12 |
| Box 3: Aircraft registration | 13 |
| Box 4: Amy Johnson Flying Initiative | 19 |
| Box 5: Career breaks by women pilots | 20 |
| Box 6: First woman captain in Japan | 23 |
| Box 7: Corporate image | 24 |
| Box 8: Definition of overweight in India | 27 |
| Box 9: An op-ed in the Washington Post | 28 |
| Box 10: First international standards on violence and harassment | 29 |
| Box 11: A pregnant pilot in Canada | 30 |
| Box 12: Global Aviation Gender Summit | 34 |
| Box 13: Dreams Soar | 34 |
| Box 14: The IATA 25by2025 campaign | 36 |
| Box 15: Airline branding: Levelling the playing field for women? | 37 |

► 1 Women and aviation

1.1 First steps

The first woman pilot, Elise Raymonde de Laroche, from France, obtained her license in 1910, only seven years after the Wright brothers' made their historic first flight.¹ Women pilots saw the need to network with each other, and in 1929 formed an organization that was to be open to any licensed women pilots. A total of 99 women pilots responded to the call and the organization, later taking the name of the "Ninety-Nines", was established. Amelia Earhart was elected its first President in 1931.²

During the Second World War, women pilots were recruited in the United States (the Women Airforce Service Pilots, or WASP) and the Soviet Union (588th Night Bomber Regiment), although in the United States they were limited to ferry flights, while in the Soviet Union women flew in combat roles. WASP pilots were only paid two-thirds of the wages received by men for work of equal value. Even though 90 per cent of the women pilots wished to stay in the military after the war, male pilots protested against military and veteran status for women. After the war, the WASP was deactivated, and women pilots had to seek other employment opportunities.³ It was not until 1973 that women were permitted to join the United States Navy as pilots and 1976 when they could once again join the United States Air Force. In 1973, a major airline recruited its first woman pilot (although Dan Air in the United Kingdom had already been recruiting women pilots since 1965).⁴ In 1995, the first woman astronaut piloted a space shuttle.⁵

During the Second World War, large numbers of women in the United States worked as air traffic controllers and aircraft communicators, replacing men who had joined the war effort. By late 1942, women accounted for around 40 per cent of trainee controllers. However, most of them had to leave their jobs after the war, as men returned to "reclaim" their old jobs.⁶ In Latin America, Amelia Lara Faría, the first woman air traffic controller, started work in 1962.⁷

1.2 Current issues

Civil aviation is often described as the business of freedom and the epitome of a global industry. Those who work in an aircraft often cross-national borders every single working day and airline crews can be composed of multiple nationalities. At the same time, the occupations in civil aviation remain very gender-segregated. Pilots are predominantly men, and the profession of pilot carries perceptions that are historically masculine.⁸ Mechanics are also overwhelmingly men, while the majority of cabin crew are women.

¹ International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and International Aviation Womens Association, n.d. [70 women inspiring generations of aviation professionals. women inspiring generations of aviation professionals.](#)

² Wilson, J., 2005. "Gender-based issues in aviation: Attitudes towards female pilots: A cross-cultural analysis", University of Pretoria.

³ Mutisya, M., 2010. "Women in aviation industry", Liberty University, Lynchburg.

⁴ Mills, A. J., 1998. "Cockpits, hangars, boys and galleys: Corporate masculinities and the development of British Airways", *Gender, Work and Organization*, 5(3), pp. 172-188.

⁵ Wilson, 2005. op. cit.

⁶ Federal Aviation Administration, 2019. "The first women controllers".

⁷ Griman, C. and S. Pérez, 2017. "¡Y era venezolana! Falleció la primera mujer controladora aérea de Latinoamérica", *The Digital Questioner*.

⁸ Kristovics, A. et al., 2006. "Gender issues on the flight-deck: An exploratory analysis", *International Journal of Applied Aviation Studies*, 6(1), pp. 99-119.

Gender gaps in the overall labour market have not narrowed over the past two decades. Some 70 per cent of women would prefer to be in paid work, but only 45 per cent actually are.⁹ A total of 1.3 billion women are engaged in employment, compared to 2.0 billion men. Mothers suffer from a triple penalty: their employment levels are below those of women without children, their wages are lower and their participation rates in managerial and leadership positions are low.¹⁰

Civil aviation was a highly regulated industry until 1978 when, following the lead of the United States, many countries started to deregulate the civil aviation market. This led to a reorganization of the industry, with new business models, a sustained fall in prices and the growth of passenger and freight traffic. Overall employment in civil aviation also increased, although in many cases the terms of employment deteriorated.¹¹

The global number of air passengers doubled between 2005 and 2017, from 1.97 to 3.98 billion.¹² The compound annual growth rate until 2037 is projected to be 3.5 per cent, which would result in a total of 8.2 billion passengers in 2037.¹³ However, the rate of growth will depend on further liberalization of the market and the availability of skilled labour.¹⁴ Other factors, such as climate change policies and sustained economic growth, will also have an impact.

The civil aviation industry is likely to need more pilots to achieve the projected growth rate¹⁵ (see Table 1). The fact that women are under-represented as pilots, as well as in maintenance, repair and overhaul, is largely a result of stereotyped views that women do not have the abilities needed to fly or repair an aircraft, and the lack of encouragement for women to choose careers in aviation.¹⁶

According to a World Bank study, 17 countries have laws in place that do not allow women to access the transport sector, including certain civil aviation occupations.¹⁷ For example, the Russian Federation has recently passed amendments to a law containing a government's list of 456 exclusively male jobs deemed harmful for women's health. Starting January 2021, women will be able to become pilots, metro conductors, truck drivers or railway drivers. But the amendment did not include a change for 100 jobs, including aircraft mechanic.¹⁸

It is now broadly recognized that gender diversity brings innovation and different skill sets to industry and the workplace. Research on the reasons for differences in gender representation in civil aviation occupations can help companies to develop recruitment strategies and working conditions that attract more women to the industry and implement training that develops more inclusive communication and leadership styles. Research can also contribute to eradicating attitudes and prejudices detrimental to gender equality.¹⁹

⁹ ILO, 2018. *Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work*, Geneva.

¹⁰ ILO, 2019. *A quantum leap for gender equality: For a better future of work for all*, Geneva.

¹¹ International Transport Forum, 2015. *Liberalisation of air transport: Summary: Policy insights and recommendations*, Paris, OECD/ITF; Harvey, G. and P. Turnbull, 2012. *The development of the low cost model in the European civil aviation industry*, European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF).

¹² The World Bank Group, n.d. *"Air transport, passengers carried"*.

¹³ IATA, 2018. *"IATA forecast predicts 8.2 billion air travellers in 2037"*, Press Release No. 62, 24 Oct.

¹⁴ International Transport Forum, 2015. op. cit.

¹⁵ The issue of pilot shortage has been contested and is considered by the European Cockpit Association as "a wrapper for a package of wishes to weaken regulation". See European Cockpit Association, 2018. *"Pilot shortage in Europe: Fact or fiction?"*, ECA discussion paper.

¹⁶ Houston, S., 2018. *"8 misconceptions about women and sexism in aviation"*, The balance careers.

¹⁷ The World Bank Group, 2020. *Women, business and the law: 2020*, Washington D.C.

¹⁸ Ecoeur, R. 2019. *"Après 75 ans d'interdiction, les femmes russes vont pouvoir conduire les métros"* [Russian women to drive metros after a ban of 75 years], Canal+.

¹⁹ Wilson, 2005. op.cit.

► 2 Employment in civil aviation

2.1 Forecasts and quantity

Air transport accounts for 3.5 per cent of the world's gross domestic product. It employs around 10 million people worldwide, and it is believed that every job in air transport creates six jobs in other industries. Of the 10 million employed in civil aviation, 2.7 million work for airlines (flight and cabin crew, ground services, check-in, training, maintenance, executives); 0.2 million work in air navigation services (air traffic controllers, executives); 0.5 million work for airport operators; 5.6 million are in other jobs at airports (retail, car rental, freight forwarders, customs, immigration); and 1.2 million are in civil aerospace (engineers and designers of civil aircraft, engines and components).²⁰ This data does not appear to be available in a form that is disaggregated by gender.

In the European Union in 2013, 1.4 million persons were employed in the air transport cluster, consisting of 0.4 million in air transport and 1 million in supporting activities. Employment fell slightly over the period 2000-13, despite strong growth in air traffic. Many airlines have outsourced non-core functions, particularly ground handling. Once outsourced, the workers concerned are no longer classified as being employed in air transport, but in "service activities incidental to air transportation".²¹ In the European Union, 40 per cent of those employed in air passenger transport were women, compared with 23 per cent in freight transport. Some 26 per cent of those employed in airport operation and handling were women.²² In the United States, 42.9 per cent of the 635,000 employed in air transport in 2018 were women.²³

The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) forecasts that air traffic will double by 2034. This means that in 2037, civil aviation will require approximately twice the number of pilots, air traffic controllers, maintenance technicians and cabin crew.

► Table 1: ICAO civil aviation personnel forecasts

| | 2017 total | 2037 total | 2037 new * |
|-------------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Pilots | 359 337 | 720 156 | 554 304 |
| Air traffic controllers | 85 829 | 161 647 | 106 800 |
| Maintenance technicians | 443 276 | 869 732 | 665 990 |
| Cabin crew | 565 163 | 1 185 548 | 923 179 |
| TOTAL | 1 453 605 | 2 937 083 | 2 250 273 |

Source: ICAO, Aviation personnel forecasts.

* The attrition rate for pilots, maintenance technicians and cabin crew is estimated to be 3 per cent, and 2 per cent for air traffic controllers.

²⁰ Air Transport Action Group, n.d. "Aviation: Benefits beyond borders".

²¹ Steer Davies Gleave, 2015. [Study on employment and working conditions in air transport and airports](#), DG Move, European Commission.

²² *ibid.*

²³ Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019. "Labour force statistics from the current population survey".

To address the demand for management personnel, training is being provided through a civil aviation management programme involving six universities for 120-240 graduates a year.²⁴ However, the European Cockpit Association (ECA) disputes the existence of current or future pilot shortages. The ECA estimates that 15 per cent of pilots in Europe are unemployed and emphasizes that many pilots do not take jobs with airlines after obtaining their licence because they find working conditions in other sectors more attractive. Many pilots are overworked and do not return to work after episodes of burn-out or parental leave. According to ECA, the suggestion that there is a shortage of pilots is actively propagated by airlines and flight schools to create pressure on pilot regulation and benefits and generate business for flight schools.²⁵

In the long term, automation and artificial intelligence will fundamentally change many jobs in the aviation industry. Some jobs will be shielded, but in many others, such as customer service and accounting and legal work, the use of new technologies could well require a smaller workforce.²⁶ It is difficult to predict the impact of new technologies on employment levels and the prospects for the civil aviation job market in 20 or 30 years.²⁷ Gender has often been ignored in discussions of technology, with many experts arguing that ‘technology is neutral’, and that it will do whatever it is designed to do.²⁸ Yet, some of the occupations in civil aviation that are most exposed to automation, such as airport check-in or automatic baggage handling,²⁹ are those where women are often over-represented.³⁰ In this respect, technological change may exacerbate existing gender inequality concerns.

2.2 Workforce profiles

Gender relationships in the civil aviation industry have remained relatively unchanged.³¹ The social arrangements in aircraft, “with men seated and women bending to serve”, have not varied significantly.³² When a small airline hired a woman pilot in 1934, the pilots’ union forced her to leave her job within a few months.³³ Although women were flying as military pilots during the Second World War, it was not until 1973 that major airlines began hiring women pilots.³⁴ In Australia, women were only permitted to work as pilots in 1979 following a lengthy court case that legitimized equal employment opportunity legislation.³⁵

Of the 130,000 airline pilots in the world in the early 2010s, around 4,000, or 3 per cent, were women, and of these only 450 were captains.³⁶ According to another source the number of women pilots in 2018 was 7,409, representing 5.2 per cent of the total number of pilots.³⁷ In the United States, 7.3 per cent of active airline pilots were women in 2018, an increase from 6.2 per cent in 2009. However, if students are excluded, the share fell from 5.4 to 5.2 per cent.³⁸ In the United Kingdom, 4.3 per cent of pilots were women in 2013, although the percentage was higher at 5.7

²⁴ ICAO, Next Generation of Aviation Professionals Global Summit: [Panel 3 The need for Organizations to prepare for, and adapt to, the career expectations of NGAP](#), 2017.

²⁵ European Cockpit Association, 2018. op. cit.

²⁶ IATA and School of International Futures, 2017. [Future of the airline industry 2035](#).

²⁷ European Transport Workers’ Federation, 2018. [“The ETF’s position on digitalisation and automation in shipping”](#).

²⁸ International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF), n.d. [“New technologies: The future of work for women?”](#).

²⁹ World Maritime University, 2019. [Transport 2040: Automation, technology, employment: The future of work](#).

³⁰ ITF, n.d. [“Challenges and opportunities in aviation”](#).

³¹ Baum, T., 2012. [“Working the skies: Changing representations of gendered work in the airline industry, 1930–2011”](#), *Tourism Management*, 33(5), pp. 1185–1194.

³² Veijola, S. and A. Valtonen, 2007. [“The body in tourism industry”](#), in Pritchard, A. et al. (eds.). 2007. *Tourism and gender: Embodiment, sensuality and experience*. Wallingford, CABI. pp.13–32.

³³ Wilson, 2005. op.cit.

³⁴ Hansen, J.S. and C.V. Oster (eds.), 1997. [Taking flight: Education and training for aviation careers](#), Washington DC, National Research Council.

³⁵ Mitchell, J., Kristovics, A. and L. Vermeulen, 2006. [“Gender issues in aviation: Pilot perceptions and employment relations”](#), *International Journal of Employment Studies*, 14(1), pp. 35–59.

³⁶ McCarthy, F., Budd, L. and S. Ison, 2015. [“Gender on the flightdeck: Experiences of women commercial airline pilots in the UK”](#), *Journal of Air Transport Management*, 47, pp. 32–38.

³⁷ ICAO, Global Aviation Gender Summit, 9 Aug. 2018, [Session 4: Cultural stereotypes](#).

³⁸ Federal Aviation Administration, 2018. [“U.S. Civil Airmen Statistics”](#).

per cent for British Airways.³⁹ In 2018, the highest shares of women pilots of major airlines were 7.4 per cent in United Airlines⁴⁰ and 13.9 per cent in IndiGo.⁴¹

The occupation of aircraft mechanic is even more male-dominated. In 2014, 2.5 per cent of certified aircraft mechanics in the United States were women. Moreover, the share of women aircraft mechanics in the United States did not significantly increase over the last two decades of the 20th century.⁴² The contrast is significant with flight attendants, of whom 80.9 per cent were women.⁴³

► Box 1: Nurses as flight attendants

Ellen Church was a licensed pilot and a nurse, but in the 1920s women were not allowed to pilot commercial aircraft. She therefore proposed that women nurses should serve food to passengers and at the same time project a sense of safety. Steven Stimpson, a manager at Boeing Air Transport, “liked the idea in particular because young stewardesses would be a great asset in marketing and help ticket sales.

Sources: Hanlon, M.L., 2017. “Sexual hostility a mile high”, *Hastings Women’s Law Journal*, 28(2), pp. 181-200.; Baum, T., 2012. “Working the skies: Changing representations of gendered work in the airline industry, 1930-2011”, *Tourism Management*, 33(5), pp. 1185-1194.

In the first decades of commercial aviation, cabin crew were mostly boys or small men (to save fuel). As the masculinity of cabin crew was based on organizational requirements, it was easy to replace male stewards with women.⁴⁴

Air traffic management is generally dominated by men, although to a lesser extent than pilots or mechanics. In Europe, at 52 per cent, Greece has the highest percentage of women air traffic controllers, followed by Sweden (39 per cent) and Spain (34 per cent).⁴⁵ In the United States, around 17 per cent of air traffic controllers were women in 2011.⁴⁶ Women air traffic controllers have recently been recruited in the United Arab Emirates⁴⁷ and Saudi Arabia⁴⁸ while in Fiji⁴⁹ and Canada (Montreal)⁵⁰ they constitute one quarter of the workforce. At the Sangster International Airport Tower, in Montego Bay Jamaica, the majority of air traffic controllers are women.⁵¹

2.3 Employment arrangements

For many decades, air travel was highly regulated. Jobs were relatively secure and terms of employment were good, with extensive collective bargaining and union recognition.⁵² The liberalization of air transport, new technologies and the emergence of low-cost carriers have resulted in efficiency gains and cheaper air travel. However, companies have outsourced many of their

³⁹ McCarthy, Budd and Ison, 2015. op. cit.

⁴⁰ ICAO, Global Aviation Gender Summit, 9 Aug. 2018, op. cit.

⁴¹ CAPA Center for Aviation, 2018. “Women airline pilots: a tiny percentage, and only growing slowly”, *News*.

⁴² Turney, M.A. et al., 2002. “National survey results: Retention of women in collegiate aviation”, *Journal of Air Transportation World Wide*, 7(1), pp. 69-92.

⁴³ Clark, P.J., Newcomer, J.M. and A.M. Jones, 2015. “Overcoming gender barriers in aircraft maintenance: Women’s perceptions in the United States”, *Collegiate Aviation Review*, 33(2), pp. 66-84.

⁴⁴ Mills, 1998, op. cit.

⁴⁵ Interview by the author with S.I. Elsbak (Chairperson, Task Force on Equality, Diversity and Ethics, IFATCA) on 8 July 2019.

⁴⁶ Pavel, S.R., 2012. “The evolution of the ATC selection and training process”, *Journal of Aviation/Aerospace Education & Research*, 21(2), pp. 31-58.

⁴⁷ Al Ramahi, N., 2018. “First’ female Emirati air traffic controller helping to modernise aviation industry”, *N UAE*, 4 Aug.

⁴⁸ Downes, S., 2018. “Saudi women can now train to become air traffic controllers”, *Emirates Woman*.

⁴⁹ Nasokia, W., 2019. “Theresa paves way for Fijian female air traffic controllers”, *Fiji Sun*, 1 March.

⁵⁰ Lowrie, M., 2018. “Not enough air traffic controllers are women, minorities, Nav Canada says”, *The Star*, 3 March.

⁵¹ Hodges, P.-G., 2018. “More women in the control tower”, *Jamaica Information Service*, 21 Aug.

⁵² Baum, 2012. op. cit.

in-house activities and have expanded self-service solutions. Outsourcing often results in lower wages, reduced benefits, lower union density and a deterioration in working conditions. An apparent 'race to the bottom' in terms of labour standards has also been characterized by a rise in self-employment, fixed-term work, zero hours contracts and pay-to-fly schemes.⁵³

In general, more women than men tend to be engaged in non-standard forms of employment. By far the main reason for women being over-represented in part-time work is their traditional role as carers, which involves devoting greater time to childcare, care for elderly parents and other dependants, as well as other domestic responsibilities.⁵⁴ Gender-responsive workplace measures and policies are not always present or extended to outsourced companies. One solution to overcoming this could be the inclusion in contracts between companies and subcontractors of terms addressing decent work and labour rights, and particularly gender equality.

In the European Union, 6 to 8 per cent of those employed in air transport have fixed-term contracts. The same applies to airport operation and handling personnel. Approximately 16 per cent of workers in air transport work part time, with higher rates of part-time employment among women: in 2013, 34 per cent of women worked part time, compared with fewer than 10 per cent of men. In airport operation and handling, these figures were 23 and 7 per cent, respectively.⁵⁵

Other working arrangements, such as agency work, self-employment, posted workers and zero hours contracts, are also found in air transport in the European Union. Temporary work agencies may engage workers as self-employed contractors, and in such cases they are not covered by Directive 2008/104/EC on temporary agency work. The situation is further complicated by the mobile nature of air transport. For example, a worker may be employed by a temporary work agency in one Member State of the European Union, the user company may be located in a second Member State and the worker may be resident in a third country. In some cases, the applicable Directive is not the one on temporary agency work, but Directive 96/71/EC concerning the posting of workers in the framework of the provision of services.⁵⁶

Pilots are sometimes employed through elaborate schemes under which they form single person companies, which sell their services to temporary work agencies, which then resell those services to an airline. These types of arrangements have also attracted the attention of tax authorities.⁵⁷ Working as a self-employed contractor through a temporary work agency deprives workers of the protection of the Directive on temporary agency work and may also mean that workers are not covered by the national legislation protecting employees. Self-employment can often disguise a true employment relationship.⁵⁸

► Box 2: Changing employment relations and practices

The reform of the Chinese economy in the 1980s changed employment relations, as the prevailing system of open-ended employment gave way to fixed-term employment. This development was strengthened by the 1995 Labour Law. However, open-ended contracts were still widely in use in State-owned companies, including airlines. The demand for pilots was increasing in the 2000s, but the bargaining system did not allow the pilots to make use of the situation to demand higher wages in their company. In reaction, in 2006, over 100 pilots left their jobs to work for other companies. The 1995 Labour Law prohibits discrimination against workers on grounds of their sex, age, ethnicity or religious beliefs. These rules have been circumvented by hiring workers through agencies, known as labour dispatching companies in China. For example, flight attendants are overwhelmingly hired through agencies to avoid problems with age discrimination.

Source: Li, K., 2010. "Practice and problems: The fixed-term employment contract in China", *The Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training*, "Labour Policy on Fixed-term Employment Contracts", (8-9 March).

⁵³ International Transport Forum, 2015. op. cit.

⁵⁴ ILO, 2016. [Non-standard employment around the world: Understanding challenges, shaping prospects](#), Geneva.

⁵⁵ Steer Davies Gleave, 2015. op. cit.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ Alderman, L. and A. Tsang, 2017. "Jet pilot might not seem like a 'gig,' but at Ryanair, it is", *New York Times*, 16 Nov.

⁵⁸ Steer Davies Gleave, 2015. op. cit.

Outsourcing, or contracting functions to another independent organization, is increasingly common in air transport in the European Union. This is the case in particular in ground handling, security, cleaning and administration, although carriers also sometimes outsource flight and cabin crews.⁵⁹ Many airlines in the European Union operate from multiple bases, and the crew are often based in a country where they do not live. As a result, employees in the same company may be subject to different jurisdictions.⁶⁰

► **Box 3: Aircraft registration**

An airline operating from Norway acquired an Air Operator Certificate in Ireland, although the airline has no flights to or from Ireland. This was done to move from a regulatory regime in a country with strong trade union traditions to one with weaker rules in that respect, and to make use of the open skies agreement between the European Union and the United States, as Norway is not a member of the European Union, but Ireland is.

Source: Harvey, G. and P. Turnbull, 2012. The development of the low-cost model in the European civil aviation industry, European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF).

With the aim of lowering staff costs, some airlines hire crew from lower wage countries, often through temporary work agencies.⁶¹ Some airlines have also refused to recognize trade unions.⁶²

2.4 Training and skills

Most of the work in civil aviation requires specialized skills that have to be acquired through rigorous training. Pilot training can be expensive and, if not covered by the training schemes of major airlines, has to be funded by the student. In the United States, in the early 1990s, some 65 per cent of women pilot students with a medically certified license became 'unrestricted pilots', but two decades later this conversion rate was lower than 35 per cent.⁶³ Candidates for cabin crew jobs are also often required to take costly courses. For example, a major European low-cost airline has outsourced its cabin crew recruitment to four private employment agencies and a training course may cost up to EUR 3,000.⁶⁴ In other cases, airlines pay for training, and sometimes offer basic wages during the training period. In some cases, airlines require applicants to pass a test before they are officially hired, placing the burden of financing training on the jobseeker.

Stereotyped preconceptions of the capacities and expected behaviour of women and men still often influence the manner in which they acquire and use their skills, and their perceptions of their work. A study in Australia has shown that, although women performed better than men during training, both men and women recruits have negative perceptions of the proficiency of women pilots.⁶⁵ Training and crew resource management needs to take into account the manner in which human interaction affects crew performance as a basis for addressing gender-related differences.⁶⁶ Gender and diversity management can constitute an essential part of crew management training with a view to improving aviation safety and effective performance in mixed gender environments.⁶⁷

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ Juul, M., 2016. "Employment and working conditions in EU civil aviation", European Parliamentary Research Service, Briefing (April).

⁶¹ International Transport Forum, 2015. *op. cit.*; Steer Davies Gleave, 2015. *op. cit.*

⁶² Baum, 2012. *op. cit.*

⁶³ Goyer, M., 2020. "Five decades of American female pilots statistics: How did we do?", *Women of Aviation Worldwide Week*, 2-8 March.

⁶⁴ Turnbull, P., 2013. *Promoting the employment of women in the transport sector: Obstacles and policy options*, Working Paper No. 298, Sectoral Activities Department, ILO, Geneva.

⁶⁵ McCarthy, Budd and Ison, 2015. *op. cit.*

⁶⁶ Turney, M.A. and T.R. Chidester, 2004. *Tapping diverse talent in aviation: Culture, gender, and diversity*, London, Routledge.

⁶⁷ Wilson, 2005. *op. cit.*

The re-entry of women into the workforce, the upgrading of infrastructure and job changes resulting from the introduction of technology or automation can offer training opportunities for women of all ages and promote the retention of women in the sector. The development and implementation of training initiatives and programmes should include and benefit from the views of women workers as a means of achieving a better gender balance in training.

2.5 Wages and benefits

Legal provisions have been adopted in many countries establishing the requirement for equal pay for work of equal value. However, gender pay gaps are stubbornly persistent and remain around 18.8 per cent globally.⁶⁸ In order to close this gap additional measures, such as wage transparency, are being introduced.⁶⁹

Pilots usually earn considerably more than flight attendants. For example, in the United States, the median annual wage for airline pilots, co-pilots and flight engineers in 2018 was US\$140,340,⁷⁰ compared with a median wage for flight attendants of US\$56,000.⁷¹ In Europe, the average annual salaries of pilots ranged between EUR49,323 (co-pilots) and EUR89,928 (training captains) in 2013, while the average annual salaries of cabin crew ranged between EUR26,970 and EUR32,408 (training cabin crew). It should be noted that the wages of cabin crew fell by 14-15 per cent between 2005 and 2013.⁷²

Increasingly, pilots are required to contribute financially to the airline, or “pay to fly”, to gain flight experience. Pilots often accumulate debt due to the high tuition fees of flight schools, but may be willing to fly, even without pay, to build up experience and eventually obtain a well-paid job.⁷³

Occupational segregation has a clear impact on the gender pay gap in civil aviation, as pilots are overwhelmingly men and cabin crew are overwhelmingly women. For example, at British Airways, the reported median hourly pay for women was 10 per cent lower than men, in EasyJet it was 46 per cent lower and Ryanair’s median hourly rate for women was 72 per cent lower than that of men.⁷⁴ In many other occupations in civil aviation, the pay gap can be much narrower: for example, in the Federal Aviation Authority in the United States, women air traffic controllers and engineers earn 96-103 per cent and safety inspectors 86-102 per cent of the wages of men.⁷⁵

Many of the costs of air transport, such as fuel, landing charges and air navigation services, are beyond the direct control of airlines. Wage costs therefore come under pressure when airlines respond to variable demand over the business cycle or seasonal variations. Some former national airlines have established low-cost operators (for example Germanwings by Lufthansa) to reduce labour costs. British Airways has created a new workforce inside the main airline, with inferior terms of employment. Most low-cost airlines unbundle the different components of air travel, meaning that the passenger may pay separately for seating, baggage, food and drinks. As a result, a significant proportion of cabin crew earnings can be based on in-flight sales.⁷⁶ When women constitute the majority of cabin crew, they not only earn lower wages, but their pay is often less stable.

⁶⁸ The gender pay gap worldwide refers, in its simplest form, to the difference in average wages between all women and all men who are engaged in paid employment. ILO, 2018. [Global Wage Report 2018/2019: What lies behind gender pay gaps](#), Geneva.

⁶⁹ ILO, 2019. [A quantum leap for gender equality: For a better future of work for all](#), Geneva.

⁷⁰ Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019. *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, “Airline and commercial pilots”.

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² Steer Davies Gleave, 2015. *op. cit.*

⁷³ Juul, 2016. *op. cit.*

⁷⁴ Spero, J., 2018. “Aviation industry urged to attract more female pilots”, *Financial Times*, 7 Aug.

⁷⁵ Graham, T., 2018. “Gender data and the FAA”, ICAO, Global Aviation Gender Summit, Cape Town, 8-10 Aug.

⁷⁶ Harvey and Turnbull, 2012. *op. cit.*

2.6 Working time and work-life balance

Due to high seasonal fluctuations, some airlines, particularly low-cost carriers, make their staff work up to maximum duty time during the high season, and furlough them during the winter.⁷⁷ This is even truer for workers employed through temporary work agencies. Taking a summer holiday may be almost impossible for pilots working through an agency.⁷⁸

Pilots and cabin crew are often required to spend much time away from home, which can be more difficult for women who often undertake an unequal share of unpaid family care work and have other domestic commitments. A barrier for women in this situation may, for example, be a lack of flexibility in taking time off or choosing leave days. Moreover, the requirement to maintain a certain number of flying hours to retain certain qualifications can place women at a disadvantage if they need to restrict their flying time due to pregnancy, maternity leave and flexible phased returns.⁷⁹

Maintaining work-life balance is especially difficult for migrant workers. For example, they may find themselves isolated from the local community and have insufficient opportunities to spend time with their families and friends. Excessive monitoring of image management policies, or differences in local culture, may also jeopardize their job security and encroach on the personal life of migrant workers. The absence of work-life balance in the Gulf States, in particular, is reported to be a major cause of migrant workers leaving their jobs.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ Juul, 2016. *op. cit.*

⁷⁹ McCarthy, Budd and Ison, 2015. *op. cit.*

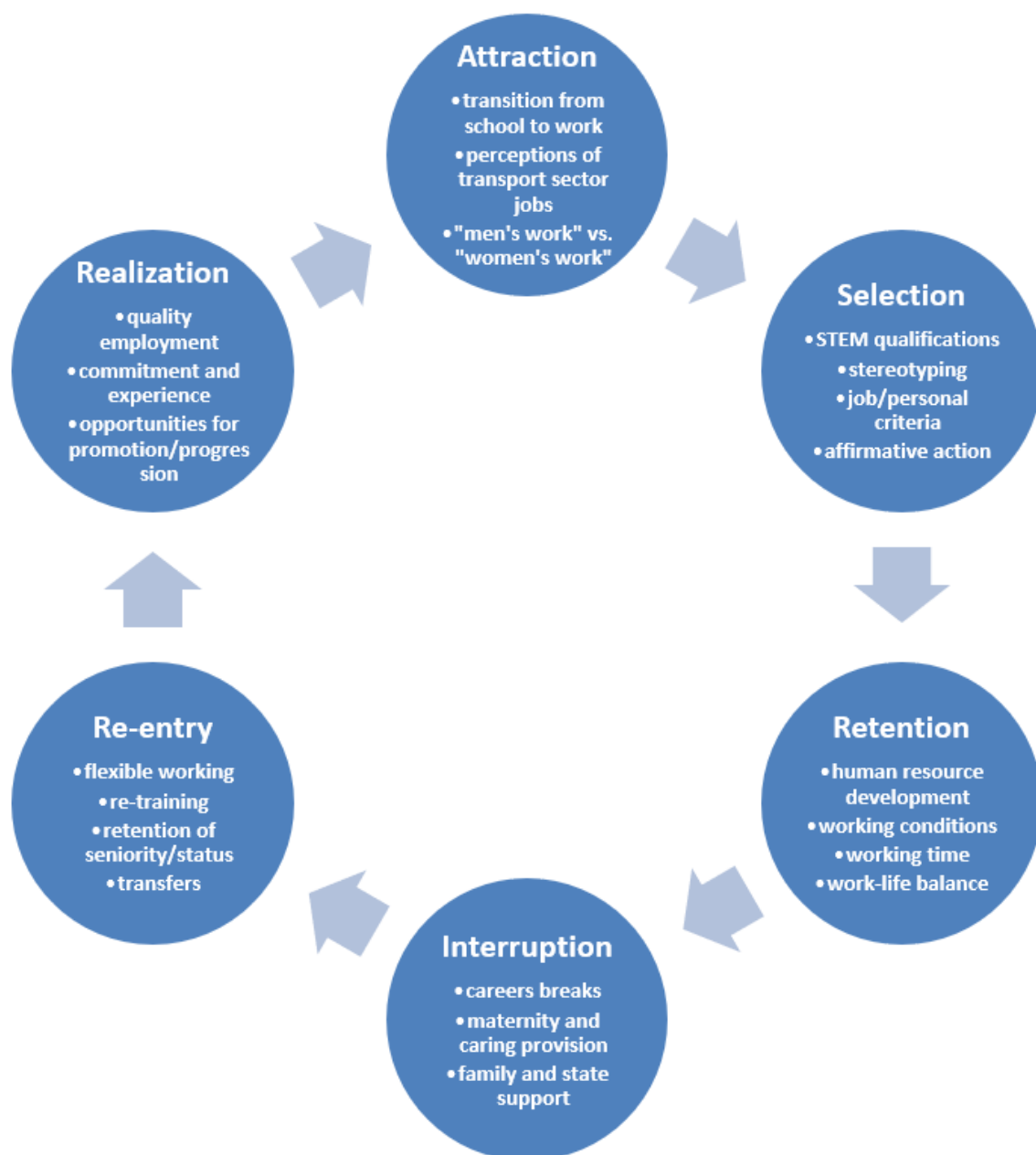
⁸⁰ Interview by the author with N. Belenguer (Campaign Coordinator, ITF) on 13 June 2019.

► 3 Career cycle of women

3.1 Career cycle components

Numerous factors influence the choice by women to seek a career in civil aviation, to enter and stay in the industry. These push and pull factors are illustrated in the following figure.

► Figure 1: Women's career cycle



Source: Turnbull, P., 2013. *Promoting the employment of women in the transport sector: Obstacles and policy options*, Working Paper No. 298, Sectoral Activities Department, ILO, Geneva.

3.2 Attracting women to work in civil aviation

Women and men may be attracted to working in civil aviation for numerous reasons. They may have been exposed to the industry in their family or local community, or may have received career advice at school. Or they may have been influenced by the glamorous image of aviation. However, young girls are often not encouraged, or are even discouraged, from making civil aviation a career choice on the basis of mistaken assumptions that many of the jobs involved are not for women, or because of preconceptions that girls would not be interested in such jobs. For similar reasons, girls have tended to study fewer science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects, which limits their opportunities in many aviation occupations.⁸¹

Women may also harbour doubts that they do not meet the physical requirements to fly an aircraft. However, the incorporation of computers and “fly-by-wire” technologies has removed the perceived need to ‘physically’ fly aircraft. Pilots now focus more on managing aircraft systems.⁸² Accidents and incidents in air transport undergo very thorough scrutiny to identify the causes, and studies show that there are no differences in accident rates between men and women pilots. Furthermore, there seems to be no difference in health and safety training between men and women.⁸³

Occupations relating to the repair and overhaul of aircraft are even more dominated by men than flying them. However, this was not always the case. In 1943, during the Second World war, 65 per cent of the workforce in the aircraft industry in the United States were women. Despite showing that they could perform their jobs as well as men, most of these women did not stay in their jobs after the war. A recent study has shown that being married or having a child did not have a significant impact on decisions to enter or remain in a career as an aircraft maintenance technician. Issues that mattered more were career appropriateness, safety at work, social acceptance, advancement opportunities and perceptions of physical limitations.⁸⁴

The following figure illustrates the causes of the low attraction rate of women in civil aviation.

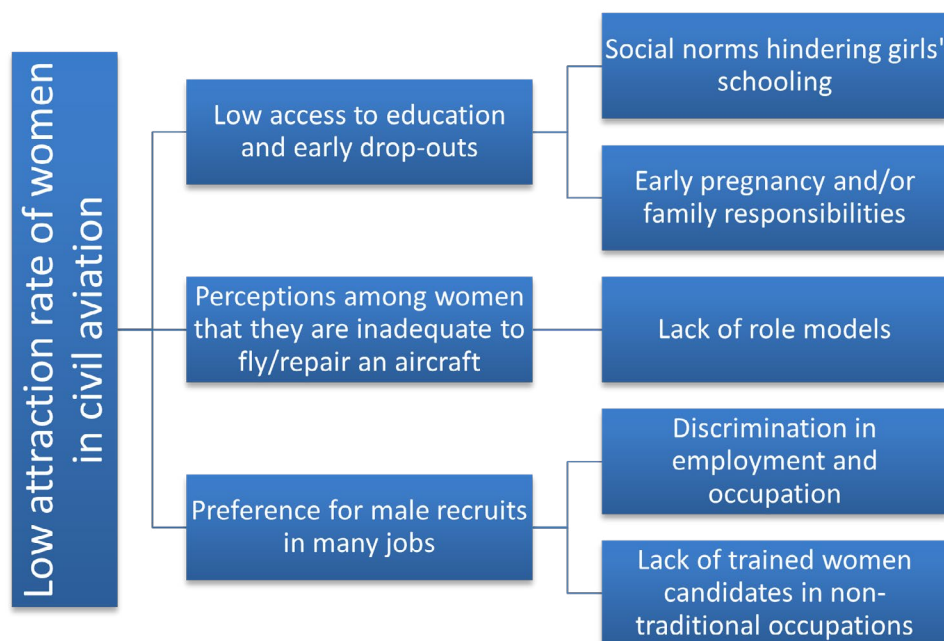
⁸¹ Turnbull, 2013. op. cit.

⁸² Mitchell, Kristovics and Vermeulen, 2006. op. cit.

⁸³ Mutisya, 2010. op. cit.; Steer Davies Gleave, 2015. op. cit.

⁸⁴ Clark, Newcomer and Jones, 2015. op. cit.

► Figure 2: Causes for the low attraction rate of women in civil aviation



Source: adapted from Turnbull, 2013. op. cit.

Pilot training is very costly. And in some cases a lack of funding for flight training is an additional barrier preventing women from choosing a career as a pilot.⁸⁵ A study initiated by the United States Congress in the 1990s recommended the establishment of financial assistance programmes to help applicants for positions as pilots to meet the cost of flight and transitional training, with industry taking the lead in their development.⁸⁶ In addition, the lack of role models and social support from organizations, flight instructors and family, as well as stereotyping, are among the main obstacles encountered by women during flight training, which often result in them quitting.⁸⁷

Air traffic controllers require special skills and the European Organisation for the Safety of Air Navigation (EUROCONTROL) has developed a specific test, the First European Air Traffic Controller Selection Test (FEAST), which is used by 50 organizations in 40 countries to recruit and select air traffic controllers.⁸⁸ However, the test has been criticized for favouring young men with extensive experience of computer games, and certain countries are considering dropping FEAST.⁸⁹

3.3 Selection and retention

Decisions on the recruitment of personnel tend to be influenced by wider societal attitudes and public and private policies. Most separations occur in the first months of employment, which means that the initial experience is critical and an environment that is hostile to women is likely

⁸⁵ McCarthy, Budd and Ison, 2015. op. cit.

⁸⁶ Hansen and Oster, 1997. op. cit.

⁸⁷ Germain, M.L., Ronan Herzog, M.J. and P.R. Hamilton, 2011. "Women employed in male-dominated industries: Lessons learned from female aircraft pilots, pilots-in-training, and mixed-gender flight instructors", *Human Resource Development International*, 15(4), pp. 435-453.

⁸⁸ EUROCONTROL, 2018. "FEAST celebrates 50th user organization", 18 Oct.

⁸⁹ Interview by the author with S.I. Elsbak (Chairperson, Task Force on Equality, Diversity and Ethics, IFATCA) on 8 July 2019.

to drive them away from an occupation or industry. The long-term retention of women workers depends on how they are treated by their employer and co-workers. Women often have to interrupt their work when their care responsibilities increase. These temporary interruptions may change their career path, or even curtail a career in aviation.⁹⁰ Family responsibilities, which are often unequally distributed between women and men, often undermine women's careers.

► **Box 4: Amy Johnson Flying Initiative**

EasyJet launched the Amy Johnson Flying Initiative in October 2015 with the aim of doubling the number of women new entrant pilots from 6 to 12 per cent over a period of two years. The 12 per cent target was reached during the first year and the company has set a new goal of 20 per cent for 2020. The airline is underwriting the loans of six of the new women recruits.

Sources: Choat, I., 2017. "Why airlines need more female pilots to take to the skies", *The Guardian*, 8 March. ; EasyJet, n.d. "Amy Johnson Initiative: [We want to help encourage more females to train as pilots](#)", *EasyJet careers*.

Women working in civil aviation face various different types of barriers. In some countries, the law restricts the working time of women by forbidding night work and excluding women from many types of 24/7 operations. Other barriers may be gender-specific, including stereotypes that define some jobs as being more suitable for men and others for women. In other cases, women may be required to disclose their marital status, the number of children they have, or they may be forced to take a pregnancy test. Other barriers may be described as gender-intensified, when they affect both men and women, but women much more than men. Examples include inadequate provision for childcare or working arrangements that are not family-friendly.⁹¹

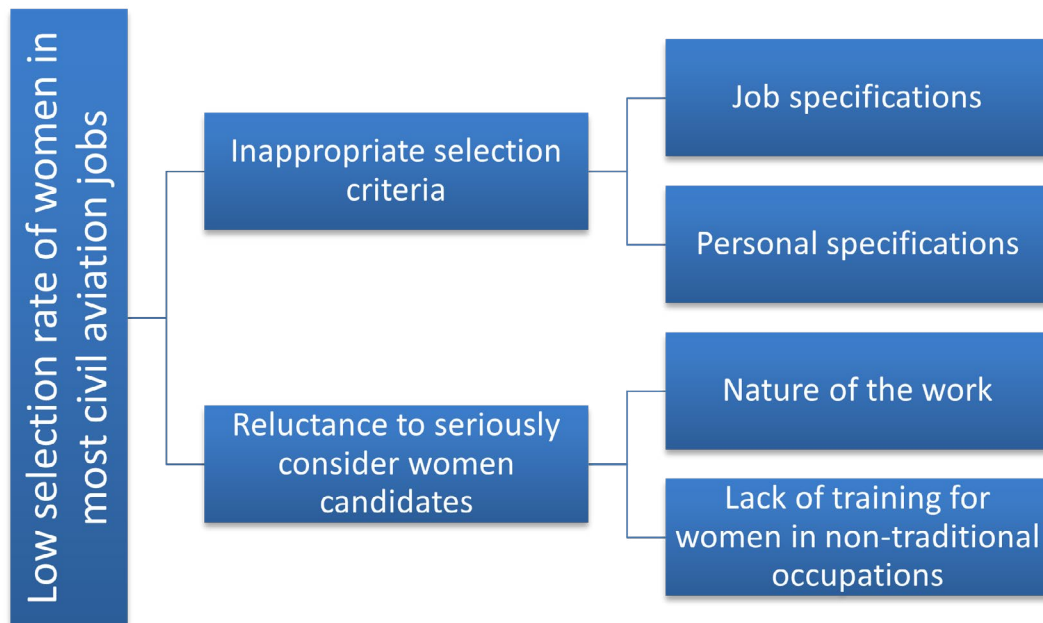
Flying was initially associated with a masculine identity and, in some cases, this was formalized through strict rules. For example, the International Commission for Air Navigation (ICAN), the forerunner of ICAO, banned the employment of women as flight crew in the mid 1920s and, for a certain period, all the pilots and 75 per cent of the ground personnel of British Airways had to be members of the Royal Air Force, the Reserve or the Auxiliary Air Force.⁹²

The following figure illustrates the causes for the low selection rate of women in civil aviation.

⁹⁰ Turnbull, 2013. op. cit.

⁹¹ Turnbull, 2013. op. cit.

⁹² *ibid.*

► **Figure 3: Causes for the low selection rate of women in most civil aviation jobs**

Source: Adapted from Turnbull, 2013. op. cit.

Many issues contribute to the poor retention rate of women in civil aviation, including wage disparities and unequal access to premium wage rates, sexual discrimination and sexual harassment, hazardous working conditions, insufficient attention to health and well-being and limited training opportunities. Moreover, 24/7 operations, extended hours and shift-work make it difficult to reconcile work and family commitments.⁹³ While some workers may be able to adapt quickly to working in civil aviation, others may need more time. But it is clear that role models for women and/or encouragement may improve their retention rate.⁹⁴ It also needs to be considered that problems in recruiting and retaining women pilots can constrain the growth of civil aviation through the failure to make full use of the potential of women.⁹⁵

► **Box 5: Career breaks by women pilots**

“Too many women pilots are forced to quit their roles as airline pilots when the struggles of raising a young family and flying become too much. One of the female first officers has recently quit the airline as she was denied a career break on numerous occasions. The company simply gave the reason that there was no business case to support her career break application. She has a young family and her husband is also a commercial pilot. Having access to a career break would really help with female pilot retention. There are very few female pilots who have had their own family. Most of them delay maternity in order to get their command upgrade first until it is too late or just do not have a family at all.”

Note: Written correspondence by the author with S. Currás Barrios (Professional & Government Affairs Officer, IFALPA) on 31 May 2019.

⁹³ *ibid.*

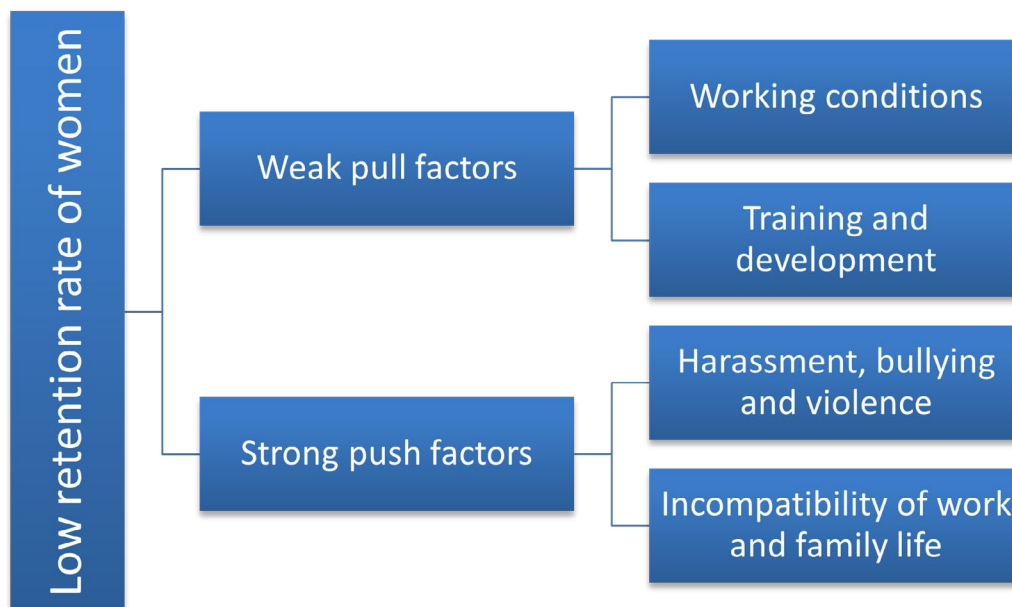
⁹⁴ Turney, 2002. op. cit.

⁹⁵ McCarthy, Budd and Ison, 2015. op. cit.

Similarly, a hostile work environment caused by harassment and violence can be a strong factor in pushing women out of the aviation sector. A study undertaken at a large international airline employing a significant number of women pilots showed that the first women pilots experienced harassment from male colleagues, which had long-term implications for them. They were not able to change the culture and instead had to conform to masculine values and practices. The study also showed that women pilots encounter problems due to sexist behaviour and to their minority position, leading to isolation, stereotyping and performance pressure.⁹⁶ Another study in the United States showed that 80 per cent of the women pilots who responded had found it difficult to work as a pilot because of resistance from men who resented women entering ‘their’ profession.⁹⁷

The following figure illustrates the causes of the poor retention rate of women in civil aviation.

► **Figure 4: Causes of the low retention rate of women in civil aviation**



Source: Adapted from Turnbull, 2013. op. cit.

3.4 Interruption, re-entry and personal development

In light of the large share of care work that women still carry out, a woman working in civil aviation may need to go through several interruptions and re-entries to her job, which is likely to have a significant impact on her career progression. Interruptions commonly occur when workers take on family responsibilities, for example after childbirth or adoption. Interruptions can also arise from employment arrangements. For example, cabin crew are often recruited for a fixed-term contract for two or three years, particularly if they are hired through an agency. A major Asian airline only offers women cabin crew five-year contracts, but requires a minimum of six years of experience to become a supervisor. Agency workers in aviation are more likely to remain at lower levels in the organization and are less likely to make pension contributions.

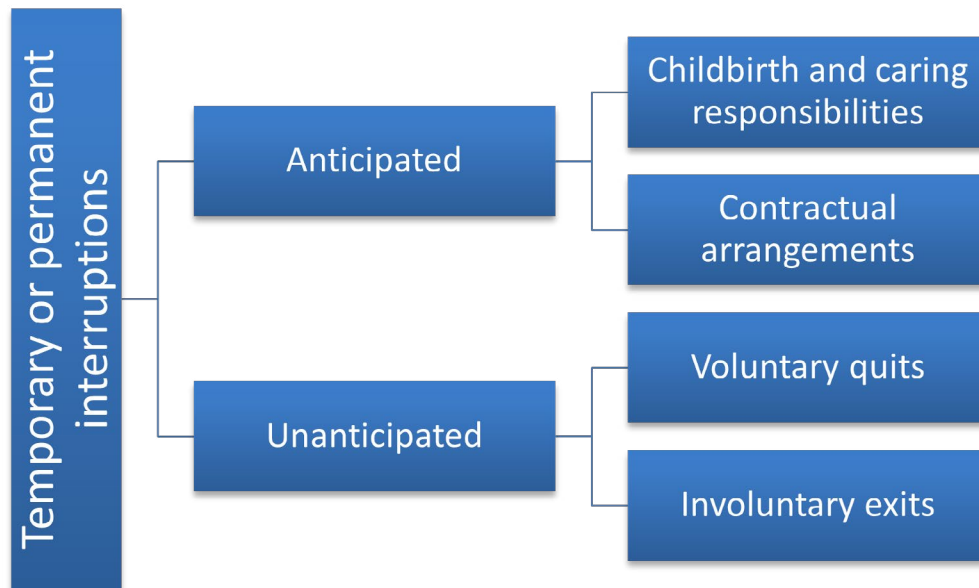
⁹⁶ Davey, C.L. and M.J. Davidson, 2000. "The right of passage? The experiences of female pilots in commercial aviation", *Feminism & Psychology*, 10(2), pp. 195-225.

⁹⁷ McCarthy, Budd and Ison, 2015. op. cit.

Many of the same reasons why women interrupt their careers in civil aviation reduce the likelihood of them re-entering the industry.⁹⁸

The following figure illustrates the main causes of interruptions in women's careers in civil aviation.

► **Figure 5: Main causes of temporary or permanent interruptions in women's careers in civil aviation**



Source: Adapted from Turnbull, 2013. op. cit.

In a recent survey, 49 per cent of women respondents cited the lack of opportunities for advancement as a critical inhibitor.⁹⁹ The potential of women in civil aviation often remains untapped. Their careers may never progress because they are confined to roles traditionally deemed suitable for women, and they may have more limited training and career opportunities than men. For example, there is no career route from cabin crew to higher paid flight crew jobs, and it is extremely rare for cabin crew members to become pilots.¹⁰⁰

According to an ILO report, women with equal skills and qualifications may face greater difficulties than men in reaching top management positions and may also be perceived as not providing such effective leadership as men.¹⁰¹ The best practices compiled by the study include extensive information, a probabilistic model of barriers and opportunities for more inclusive leadership and ways for businesses to leverage gender diversity.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Turnbull, 2013. op. cit.

⁹⁹ Korn Ferry, 2019. [Soaring through the glass ceiling: Taking the global aviation and aerospace industry to new heights through diversity and inclusion](#).

¹⁰⁰ Turnbull, 2013. op. cit.

¹⁰¹ ILO, 2019. [Women in business and management: The business case for change](#), Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP), Geneva.

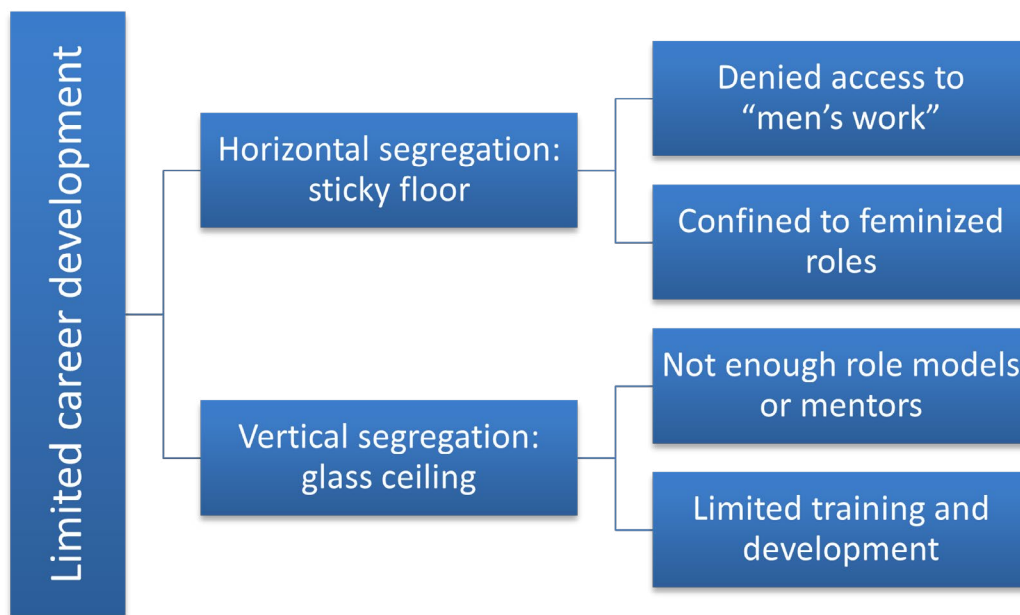
¹⁰² *ibid.*

► **Box 6: First woman captain in Japan**

Ari Fuji wanted to become a pilot, but she was not tall enough to be admitted to a flight school in Japan. She obtained her pilot's licence in the United States and was hired by a Japanese airline as a trainee in 1999. She married a year after becoming a co-pilot. Ms Fuji continued her career and became a captain in 2010. In addition to working as a captain, she is also an instructor and believes that she has acted as a role model in Japan.

Source: Sit, J. and Y. Wakatsuki, 2019. "Meet Japan's first female commercial airline captain", *CNN travel*, 7 May.

The following figure illustrates the reasons why the potential of women is often not realized in civil aviation.

► **Figure 6: Failure to realize the potential of women in civil aviation**

Source: Adapted from Turnbull, 2013. op. cit.

3.5 Image of civil aviation

The first decades of commercial aviation, from the 1920s to the 1960s, are sometimes referred to as the golden days of flight. Flying was glamorous, both for the elite, who could afford to fly, and for those providing services for them. As air travel transformed into mass transit, new business models changed the work environment and the employment relationship as the industry underwent substantial change.¹⁰³ Pilots were not seen so much as heroes, but as experienced flyers, with male qualities. The position of flight attendant was defined as women's work, and some airlines restricted jobs as business class flight attendants to women.¹⁰⁴

The safety role of cabin crew has historically been undervalued, and a number of airlines still choose to place emphasis on the so-called 'female service', 'sexy and athletic' or 'aerial bar' components of the job.¹⁰⁵ Flight attendants are often perceived as objectified or sexualized marketing icons. The use of women flight attendants as (sexual) objects in advertising peaked in the early 1970s.

¹⁰³ Baum, 2012. op. cit.

¹⁰⁴ Turnbull, 2013. op. cit.

¹⁰⁵ In 1995, the ITF launched its first campaign highlighting the safety role of cabin crew at the ICAO 31st General Assembly. See ITF, 1995. *ITF News*. No. 9.

In 1973, an organization entitled Stewardesses for Women's Rights was formed in the United States to fight sexism and promote the role of flight attendants as experienced professionals.¹⁰⁶

An airline in Asia has for decades used young flight attendants to attract customers, resulting in sexual molestation cases that have ended up in court.¹⁰⁷ Another airline in Asia had young flight attendants wearing bikinis for their inaugural flights to beach locations and published calendars with the same flight attendants wearing bikinis.¹⁰⁸ In Europe, an airline ran an advertisement featuring a model clad as a schoolgirl, with the headline "hottest back to school fares". The United Kingdom Advertising Standards Authority considered the advertisement irresponsible, as it appeared to link teenage girls with sexually provocative behaviour.¹⁰⁹

► Box 7: Corporate image

Cabin crew and pilots represent the professionalism and dedication associated with the corporate image, branding and reputation of many airlines. For this reason, companies may have strict image policies and dress codes for their workers. These may range from certain types of behaviour to uniforms (sometimes designed by elite designers), tights, shoes, the visibility of tattoos, or particular colours for nail polish, make-up and lipstick. Cabin crew sometimes spend a significant amount of money and time preparing for each flight (for example, 90 minutes). Yet, many companies only start calculating their wages when the aircraft takes off.

Weight bias or the excessive monitoring of image policies may lead to discrimination and give rise to body image and low self-esteem challenges for workers, particularly women. In some recruitment events, skin complexion is 'everything' and a worker's acne or other skin conditions may pose a challenge in 'representing' their professionalism. In others, cabin crew hopefuls may undergo cosmetic surgery procedures to feel that they have a chance of being interviewed. For example, in the Republic of Korea, special 'flight attendant' plastic surgery packages exist, including forehead moulding, eyelid surgery, a raised nose bridge, a V-line face shape and smoother skin.

Source: Premack, R., 2019. "[Flight attendants in South Korea reveal why plastic surgery is becoming the norm to get a job](#)", *Business Insider*, 12 Aug.

Airline uniforms may seek to portray an objectified vision of flight attendants or ground staff. Uniforms, although linked to corporate image and reputation, can in some cases be too tight or the fabric may be inadequate, affecting the worker's ability to help passengers. Requirements may also differ for men and women, especially with regard to make-up, skirts,¹¹⁰ high heels and body hair (for legs and face).¹¹¹ A recent survey has also shown how entrenched the belief is that high heels are mandatory for a woman's professional attire at most customer-facing firms in Japan, including airlines.¹¹²

Very few women are in leadership positions in civil aviation and the industry is grappling with slow change.¹¹³ The image of the industry as being dominated by men is further reinforced

¹⁰⁶ Lessor, R., 1984. "[Social movements, the occupational arena and changes in career consciousness: The case of women flight attendants](#)", *Journal of Occupational Behaviour*, 5(1), pp. 37-51.

¹⁰⁷ Baum, 2012. op. cit.

¹⁰⁸ coloredunicorn, n.d. "[Vietnam's bikini airlines set to create country's first female billionaire](#)", in *EliteReaders*.

¹⁰⁹ Harvey and Turnbull, 2012. op. cit.

¹¹⁰ Topham, G. 2016. "[Female British Airways cabin crew win the right to wear trousers](#)", *The Guardian*, 5 Feb.

¹¹¹ Openheim, M. 2019. "[Shameful and dangerous: Airlines condemned for forcing female staff to wear lipstick, high heels and no body hair](#)", *Independent*, 26 July.

¹¹² See also the #KuToo hashtag/movement. Kyodo News. 2019. "[Women still required to wear heels at most customer-facing firms in Japan, survey shows](#)", *The Japan Times*, 27 Aug.

¹¹³ Whitley, A. et al. 2018. "[There aren't many female executives: The airline industry has even fewer](#)", *Bloomberg*, 12 Aug.

when looking at gender balance in what some consider to be ‘very challenging’ aviation jobs, including board rooms and chief executive, operative and financial positions in aviation companies. But slow progress is being achieved. For example, a number of international organizations are headed by women, including ICAO, Airports Council International (ACI) and the World Travel and Tourism Council. The International Air Transport Association (IATA) has introduced executive training offers and other initiatives especially targeting women, as the gender gap is still prevalent in senior management, where women account for approximately 4 per cent of positions.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ IATA. n.d. “Executive leadership program for women in aviation”.

► 4 Main decent work opportunities and challenges

4.1 Rights at work: Freedom of association

The [Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 \(No. 87\)](#), and the [Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 \(No. 98\)](#), are two of the ILO's eight fundamental Conventions, and their principles are also covered by the [ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work 1998](#). In adopting the 1998 Declaration, ILO member States recognized that they have an obligation, arising from the very fact of membership in the Organization, to respect, to promote and to realize certain basic values and principles, including freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining.¹¹⁵

There have been various cases of violations of freedom of association in civil aviation, particularly by low-cost airlines. Southwest Airlines in the United States is commonly regarded as the original low-cost airline and it maintained good relations with trade unions. However, many of the newer low-cost airlines have been reluctant to recognize trade unions and support social partnership.¹¹⁶ For example, when one low-cost airline largely changed its fleet, it informed pilots who were to be retrained that the company would not refund the training costs if it was “compelled to engage in collective bargaining with any pilot association or trade union within 5 years of commencement of your conversion training.” The company charged some pilots for bullying after they encouraged other pilots not to sign the contract. The pilots won the case.¹¹⁷ In other instances, freedom of association may be available to nationally recruited or local staff, but not to migrant workers.

Air transport agreements, which regulate aviation rights between States, may include clauses that provide leverage for trade unions. For example, the so-called Open Skies Agreement between the European Union and the United States includes a reference to labour rights in Article 17 bis: “The Parties recognise the importance of the social dimension of the Agreement and the benefits that arise when open markets are accompanied by high labour standards. The opportunities created by the Agreement are not intended to undermine labour standards or the labour-related rights and principles contained in the Parties respective laws.”¹¹⁸

4.2 Equality and non-discrimination

Laws adopted in many countries prohibit women from working at night or from entering a specific occupation, thereby deviating from the principle of equal treatment and non-discrimination. These restrictions have widened the gender gap in employment, and removing them could increase women's participation in employment.¹¹⁹ At its 98th Session in 2009, the International Labour Conference emphasized the importance of including women in social dialogue as a crucial step in eliminating discrimination based on gender. Institutionalized social dialogue on gender issues has been effective in improving gender equality.¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ ILO, 2019. *Rules of the game: An introduction to the standards-related work of the International Labour Organization*, Centenary edition, Geneva.

¹¹⁶ Harvey and Turnbull, 2012. op. cit.

¹¹⁷ ibid.

¹¹⁸ European Union, 2010. [EUR-Lex Decision 2010/465/EU](#).

¹¹⁹ International Labour Office, 2019. *A quantum leap for gender equality: For a better future of work for all*, op. cit.

¹²⁰ Turnbull, 2013. op. cit., p. 1.

Civil aviation is naturally covered by the non-discriminatory provisions set out in national law. Airlines in the United States previously had strict rules for age and marriage that applied only to women flight attendants. The 1965 Civil Rights Act led to flight attendants questioning the legality of these rules and arguing that airline policies of different standards for women and men violated their rights under the law. The airlines responded that youth and being unmarried were bona fide occupational qualifications, as passengers preferred attractive young women. The flight attendants won their case in court in 1968, and by 1971 union contracts were changed to end the discriminatory rules.¹²¹ However, in some countries, physical appearance, age, marriage and pregnancy may still have negative consequences for the job security of women aviation workers, based on company policies or practices.

► **Box 8: Definition of overweight in India**

In 2014, the Government of India issued medical requirements for cabin crew. The requirements included a table of Body Mass Indexes (BMI) for men and women, under which cabin crew with weight above normal range would be examined, investigated and, in the worst case, declared unfit. For men, the normal BMI range was 18-25, overweight 25-29.9 and obese 30 and above, while for women the ranges were 18-22, 22-27 and 27 and above.

Source: Office of Director General in Civil Aviation, 2014. Civil Aviation Requirements Section 7. Flight Crew Standards, Training and Licensing, Series C, Part II, Issue I, 5 May 2014.

In the Russian Federation, two women flight attendants sued their employer, a Russian airline, for discrimination. They alleged that the company had taken them off lucrative long-haul flights because of their size. The court ordered the company to pay compensation and damages to the two women.¹²²

Aircraft cockpit design could be more inclusive to accommodate men and women with different physical characteristics and morphologies. For example, some individuals may experience difficulty in reaching controls and operating certain aircraft effectively. Cockpit design could be more inclusive with a view to accommodating a diversity of pilots, including women.¹²³

4.3 Occupational safety and health

This section does not attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of occupational safety and health issues in civil aviation. It focuses on selected issues relating to work on board aircraft.¹²⁴

4.3.1 Violence and harassment

Violence and harassment in the world of work have received a high level of attention recently, especially in light of certain global protests and campaigns. However, only 130 countries have laws that prohibit sexual harassment in employment.¹²⁵ These legislative gaps are remedied in part by the policies included in numerous collective agreements and those adopted by individual enterprises for the elimination of sexual harassment.

¹²¹ Lessor, 1984. op. cit.

¹²² Amos, H., 2017. "Russian women win partial victory in Aeroflot gender discrimination case", *The Guardian*, 7 Sept.

¹²³ Mutisya, 2010. op. cit.; Wilson, 2005. op.cit.

¹²⁴ Women ground staff may experience other issues, including a lack of decent welfare and sanitation facilities at some airports, and issues relating to manual handling and musculoskeletal disorders for baggage handlers.

¹²⁵ ILO, 2019. *A quantum leap for gender equality: For a better future of work for all*, op. cit.

Violence against transport workers is one of the most important factors limiting the attraction of transport jobs for women and the retention of women employed in the transport sector.¹²⁶ Civil aviation workers, both in ground and cabin services, work in contact with the public and may encounter violence and harassment, which is most frequently committed by passengers, but can also originate from co-workers or supervisors. Violence may be physical, psychological or sexual, ranging from a hostile environment to verbal insults, bullying and physical aggression. Some occupations are particularly at risk, such as ground personnel dealing with frustrated customers and cabin crew having to cope with air rage¹²⁷ or passengers under the influence of alcohol.¹²⁸

A survey of women transport workers in Europe carried out by the European Transport Workers' Federation reveals that almost two out of three respondents have recently experienced violence and harassment at work. Six out of ten respondents did not report their experience because they did not believe that the cases were treated effectively.¹²⁹ This is how one flight attendant described her story: "When a passenger touches me inappropriately, I might wonder if it's worth having authorities meet the flight? (...) It's easy to brush this off when you think you'll never see the person again. If I worked in an office with the same people every day, I might be more inclined to handle things differently."¹³⁰

A survey by the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA shows that 68 per cent of flight attendants have experienced sexual harassment, which in 18 per cent of cases entailed "physical harassment" (for example, inappropriate touching, indecent acts or physical aggression).¹³¹ In another survey of flight attendants in Hong Kong, 27 per cent responded they had been sexually harassed during the past year, in 59 per cent of cases by customers.¹³² In 2018, an Australian survey found that non-standard forms of employment further exacerbate the under-reporting of violence and harassment incidents.¹³³

► **Box 9: An op-ed in the Washington Post**

Sara Nelson, International President of the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, AFL-CIO, wrote that "Flight Attendants, about 80 per cent women, are ongoing victims of sexual harassment and sexual assault. Not that long ago, the industry marketed the objectification of 'stewardesses', a job only available to young, single, perfectly polished women who until 1993 were required to step on a weight scale. Our union was formed to give women a voice and to beat back discrimination and misogyny faced on the job. We defined our careers at the bargaining table, in the courts and on Capitol Hill. We taught the country to leave the word 'stewardess' in the history books. But the industry never disavowed the marketing schemes featuring short skirts, hot pants and ads that had young women saying things like 'I'm Cheryl, fly me.' Even today, we are called pet names, patted on the rear when a passenger wants our attention, cornered in the back galley and asked about our 'hottest' layover, and subjected to incidents not fit for print. Like the rest of our society, flight attendants have never had reason to believe that reports of the sexual harassment we experience on the job would be taken seriously, rather than dismissed or retaliated against."

Source: Nelson, S., 2017. "The one best idea for ending sexual harassment", *Washington Post*.

¹²⁶ Turnbull, 2013. op. cit.

¹²⁷ Agence France Presse in Seoul, "Nut rage: Korean Air boss apologises as daughters resign", *The Guardian*, 22 April.

¹²⁸ Turnbull, 2013. op. cit.

¹²⁹ Pillinger, J., 2017. *Violence against women at work in transport: Summary report of findings from a survey by ETF*, Brussels, European Transport Workers' Federation.

¹³⁰ Wynarczyk, N., 2016. "It was really disgusting: What sexual harassment looks like at 30000 feet", *VICE*, 3 June.

¹³¹ Garcia, M., 2019. "Inflight sexual harassment incidents demand better response", *Runwaygirl network*, 15 Jan.

¹³² Hanlon, 2017. op. cit.

¹³³ McMahon, L., 2018. "TWU report reveals shocking sexual harassment against Australia's cabin crew", *news.com.au* 9 Oct.

Why is sexual harassment, particularly among the overwhelmingly female cabin crew, so widespread in civil aviation? One reason may well be due to the way in which airlines, after the Second World War, started to emphasize the physical appearance of flight attendants. Airlines imposed restrictions on age and weight, and marriage meant the end of a flight attendant's career. The images that airlines used in their marketing were often suggestive and sexually charged. These practices contributed to the sexually hostile cabin environment.¹³⁴ A major low-cost airline published a calendar in 2013 showing women cabin crew in bikinis. After the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) complained to the company, the CEO of the company commented: "We note the ITF's objection to the calendar. Rest assured this has encouraged us to produce an even bigger and better calendar for next year."¹³⁵

Sexual harassment that takes place at the airport is covered by the laws and regulations of the country of the airport. The situation is not so clear concerning sexual harassment on board an aircraft. The ICAO [Convention on Offences and Certain Other Acts Committed on Board Aircraft 1963](#) (the Tokyo Convention) applies to offences committed in an aircraft when it is not under the jurisdiction of any State. The [Montreal Protocol](#), including major amendments to the Convention, was adopted in 2014. The Protocol entered into force on 1 January 2020, as 22 instruments of ratification or accession have been deposited.¹³⁶ The Protocol is expected to bring more certainty to the legal aspects of the behaviour of unruly passengers. However, there are strong arguments for separating the issues of violence and harassment, particularly sexual harassment, from action to prevent unruly behaviour by passengers, and for addressing sexual harassment in a separate international ICAO instrument,¹³⁷ or other sectoral guidelines or tools.

► **Box 10: First international standards on violence and harassment**

In 2019, the 108th Session of the International Labour Conference adopted, by an overwhelming majority, the new and ground-breaking [Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 \(No. 190\)](#). For the first time, violence and harassment in the world of work are covered by specific new international ILO labour standards. The Conference also adopted the accompanying [Violence and Harassment Recommendation, 2019 \(No. 206\)](#). The Convention will come into force twelve months after it has been ratified by two member States. The instruments contain the first internationally recognized definitions of violence and harassment in the world of work.

Source: Olney, S., "[ILO Convention on violence and harassment: Five key questions](#)", Geneva, ILO.

4.3.2 Pregnancy and health-related issues

Pregnancy is not an illness, but is accompanied by physiological changes that may affect a pilot's performance.¹³⁸ Flying may also present a risk to the foetus, particularly during the first three months. ICAO has adopted provisions respecting pregnancy and flying, which are used as a basis for developing national regulations.¹³⁹ However, the regulations adopted vary considerably from one country to another.¹⁴⁰ While pregnancy may limit the flying time of women working in civil aviation, retention measures and rules could help to ensure that the interruption of flying time is the least harmful possible to a pilot's career.

¹³⁴ Hanlon, 2017. op. cit.

¹³⁵ Wynczyk, 2016. op. cit.

¹³⁶ International Civil Aviation Organization, n.d. [Montreal Protocol: date of deposit of instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession](#).

¹³⁷ Hanlon, 2017. op. cit.

¹³⁸ IFALPA, 2018. "[Pregnancy and flying](#)", Human Performance Briefing Leaflet, 5 Dec.

¹³⁹ ICAO. Convention on International Civil Aviation. Annex 1. Provisions 6.3.2.22, 6.3.2.22.1 and 6.3.2.23.

¹⁴⁰ IFALPA, 2018. op. cit.

For example, before 1995, pregnancy was a reason for expulsion from a United States academy, unless the pregnant woman underwent an abortion within a month. The policy was changed to allow for leave of absence, without woman having to reapply for admission after their leave.¹⁴¹

► **Box 11: A pregnant pilot in Canada**

A pilot in Canada was forced to take unpaid leave of absence in 1979 when she was pregnant with her first child. She protested and convinced the Government to change the regulations to allow pregnant pilots to fly under medical supervision. Some years later she flew into her sixth month of pregnancy.

Source: ICAO and IAWA, n.d. 70 Women Inspiring Generations of Aviation Professionals.

In the early days of civil aviation, accidents were a major health risk. In contrast, as flying has become safer, the cumulative effects of exposure to physical and chemical hazards has become an increasing concern. Cabin crew are known to suffer from more frequent upper respiratory infections than people working in ground jobs. Air quality and the inhalation of cabin air pollutants is believed to lead to compromised pulmonary function. Dry cabin air and insufficient time to drink or urinate may cause recurrent bladder infections among women cabin crew.¹⁴²

Exposure to radiation is a recognized health hazard. Both passengers and crew are exposed to low-level radiation. For passengers, the average dose from cosmic radiation is only 11 per cent of their total annual exposure to radiation from all natural sources,¹⁴³ but for cabin crew the hazard is considerably greater. Poor air quality and radiation exposure can be harmful for pregnant women, and even cause miscarriages. Radiation has been suggested as a likely cause of fertility problems among flight attendants.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, in addition to cosmic radiation, they may be exposed to radioactive cargo.¹⁴⁵

A gender-responsive approach to health and safety needs to accommodate a range of health issues, including breastfeeding, the menopause and menstruation. For example, special consideration and accommodations are needed for breastfeeding or pumping breaks. Flexible rostering for pregnant and nursing workers, as well as for the primary carers of small children, is also possible and is being implemented by some airlines.¹⁴⁶

A lack of women's toilets and sanitary facilities is also one of the most significant factors discouraging women from entering and staying in decent transport jobs. Inadequate or a complete lack of sanitation facilities takes away a workers' dignity, and can cause a range of health problems, including serious life-long issues. A lack of separate facilities for women sends a clear message about how they are considered in the industry, and increases the risk of violence. A woman aircraft marshaller from Brazil reported that: "One day when I was using the men's toilet, as there was no separate toilet for women, a colleague opened the door from the outside. Many colleagues had access to the keys to the toilets."¹⁴⁷

¹⁴¹ Mutisya, 2010. op. cit.

¹⁴² Lessor, 1984. op. cit.

¹⁴³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015. "[Radiation from air travel](#)", *Radiation and Your Health*.

¹⁴⁴ Mutisya, 2010. op. cit.

¹⁴⁵ Lessor, 1984. op. cit.

¹⁴⁶ Interview by A. Cruz Ross with H. Castillo-Chavarri (Chairperson, Professional & Government Affairs, IFALPA) on 5 September 2019.

¹⁴⁷ ITF. 2019. [Toilet rights are human rights! Transport Workers' Sanitation Charter](#).

4.4 Social security

For several decades, a job as a flight attendant was not considered to constitute a career. Flight attendants in the United States had to resign at the latest at the age of 32, and women were only expected to work as flight attendants until they married and had a family.¹⁴⁸

Now, most companies that recruit nationally have a pension plan in place. However, migrant and expatriate workers may not be in a comparable situation. Social security laws, including maternity protection, may not cover migrant, part-time or agency civil aviation workers. Airlines with high numbers of migrant workers, and with high turnover rates (with workers only remaining for between three and five years), do not generally include a pension plan in their work contract.¹⁴⁹

4.5 Migrant workers

Many of the decent work deficits described in this chapter are aggravated in countries with a large number of migrant workers. The civil aviation industry in some countries is very large in relation to the national population. For example, the combined populations of the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, some 12 million, is around 0.16 per cent of the world population,¹⁵⁰ while the three major airlines in those two countries account for 6-7 per cent of the total world revenue passenger kilometres.¹⁵¹ These airlines therefore need to recruit staff from abroad. Almost 90 per cent of the approximately 20,000 employees of Qatar Airways are migrant workers. As around 80 per cent of the cabin crew are women, this means that there are thousands of young women from countries such as Indonesia, India and Romania who work and live in Qatar.¹⁵² This may give rise to a series of challenges, as a particular ethnicity, clan or religious background may be favoured in mixed-ethnic working environments. For women, the intersection of all these different sources of discrimination can have even more harmful effects.

In 2015, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the ITF filed a representation¹⁵³ at the ILO claiming that women working in Qatar Airways suffered direct and indirect discrimination and that the Government of Qatar was not therefore giving effect to the [Discrimination \(Employment and Occupation\) Convention, 1958 \(No. 111\)](#). The alleged discriminatory practices included the right of the airline to terminate employment in the event of pregnancy, restrictions on marriage and overall control of the private lives of women employees.¹⁵⁴ The Government of Qatar is now committed to establishing joint committees in companies, with representation of employers and workers.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁸ Lessor, 1984. op. cit.

¹⁴⁹ Interview by the author with N. Belenguer (Campaign Coordinator, ITF) on 13 June 2019.

¹⁵⁰ World Population Review, 2019. [2019 World Population by Country](#).

¹⁵¹ Flightglobal, n.d. *World Airline Rankings 2018*.

¹⁵² The representation procedure is governed by articles 24 and 25 of the ILO Constitution, under which an industrial association of employers or of workers can make a representation to the ILO against any member State which, in its view, "has failed to secure in any respect the effective observance within its jurisdiction of any Convention to which it is a party".

¹⁵³ Interview by the author with N. Belenguer (Campaign Coordinator, ITF) on 13 June 2019.

¹⁵⁴ ILO, 2015. "Report of the Director-General Ninth Supplementary Report: Report of the Committee set up to examine the representation alleging non-observance by Qatar of the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), made under article 24 of the ILO Constitution by the International Trade Union Confederation and the International Transport Workers' Federation", Governing Body, 324th Session, Geneva, 13 June (GB.324/INS/7/9). See also Wynarczyk, 2016. op. cit.; and Hanlon, 2017. op. cit.

¹⁵⁵ Interview by the author with N. Belenguer (Campaign Coordinator, ITF) on 13 June 2019.

► 5 Accelerating gender equality in civil aviation

5.1 Sustainable development goals

Of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), four are particularly relevant for women at work:

- SDG 4 on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all;
- SDG 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls;
- SDG 8 on promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all; and
- SDG 10 on reducing inequalities within and among countries.

The 2030 Agenda recognizes that gender equality is not only a goal in itself, but a prerequisite for progress across all 17 SDGs. Achieving these goals requires good gender-disaggregated data.¹⁵⁶ SDG targets that are especially relevant for civil aviation include: 5.1 - End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere; 5.2 - Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation; and 5.5 - Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

5.2 The ILO

The ILO began by adopting a protectionist approach to women's rights, for example through Conventions such as the [Maternity Protection Convention, 1919 \(No. 3\)](#), and the [Underground Work \(Women\) Convention, 1935 \(No. 45\)](#). Gender justice became the approach in the 1950s with the adoption of the [Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 \(No. 100\)](#), and the [Discrimination \(Employment and Occupation\) Convention, 1958 \(No. 111\)](#).¹⁵⁷ The requirement for gender equality is based on two grounds: the rights-based equity rationale and the economic efficiency rationale. The first addresses discrimination against women in working life as a matter of human rights and justice, while the second emphasizes that women at work are instrumental in achieving economic growth and reducing poverty. The economic empowerment of women has a domino effect and a strong indirect positive impact on child nutrition, health and education, and it contributes to reducing infant mortality rates and the use of child labour.¹⁵⁸

Conventions Nos 100 and 111 are two of the ILO's eight fundamental Conventions. Convention No. 111 requires the elimination of all discrimination and the adoption of proactive measures to address the underlying causes of inequalities. These Conventions, together with the [Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 \(No. 183\)](#), the [Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 \(No. 156\)](#), the [Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 \(No. 189\)](#), and the [Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 \(No.190\)](#), are key tools in promoting equality, the effective protection of maternity and the employment of women and the reduction of gender gaps in the world of work.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ ILO, 2019. *A quantum leap for gender equality: For a better future of work for all*, op. cit.

¹⁵⁷ ILO, 2019. *A quantum leap for gender equality: For a better future of work for all*, op. cit.

¹⁵⁸ Turnbull, 2013. op. cit.

¹⁵⁹ ILO, 2019. *A quantum leap for gender equality: For a better future of work for all*, op. cit.

A Code of practice on workplace violence in services sectors and measures to combat this phenomenon was developed by the ILO in 2003.¹⁶⁰

The [Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 \(No. 190\)](#), and the [Violence and Harassment Recommendation, 2019 \(No. 206\)](#), are based on the adoption of an inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach. The Preamble of the Convention acknowledges that “gender-based violence and harassment disproportionately affects women and girls”, and recognizes that “an inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach, which tackles underlying causes and risk factors, including gender stereotypes, multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, and unequal gender-based power relations, is essential to ending violence and harassment in the world of work.” The Convention is not limited to the workplace, but also applies to employer-provided accommodation and commuting to and from work. It recognizes that violence and harassment may involve third parties. It applies to all sectors and its coverage includes interns, volunteers and jobseekers in the formal and informal economies. In taking measures to prevent violence and harassment in the world of work, Members are required to identify, “in consultation with the employers’ and workers’ organizations concerned (...) the sectors or occupations and work arrangements in which workers (...) are more exposed to violence and harassment” (Article 8). Members must also “ensure easy access to appropriate and effective remedies and safe, fair and effective reporting and dispute resolution mechanisms and procedures” (Article 10).

The Convention is supplemented by Recommendation No. 206, which refers to “sectors or occupations and work arrangements in which exposure to violence and harassment may be more likely, such as night work, work in isolation, health, hospitality, social services, emergency services, domestic work, transport, education or entertainment” (Paragraph 9), and emphasizes the need to “protect migrant workers, particularly women migrant workers” (Paragraph 10). With regard to data, the Recommendation calls on Members to “make efforts to collect and publish statistics on violence and harassment in the world of work disaggregated by sex, form of violence and harassment, and sector of economic activity” (Paragraph 22).

5.3 The ICAO

The ICAO Assembly adopted a resolution on gender equality in 2016. [Resolution A39-30](#), referring to the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#)¹⁶¹ and the Global Leader’s Meeting on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: A Commitment to Action, held in 2015, urges “States (...) to work cooperatively with ICAO by sharing best practices and working in partnership with ICAO on programmes and projects aimed at increasing the pool of women in the aviation sector and encouraging women to further develop their aviation careers”. The resolution instructs the Secretary General to establish an ICAO Gender Equality Programme by mid-2017 and to report to the ICAO Council annually.¹⁶² Since the adoption of the resolution, ICAO has announced the adoption of the Air Transport Gender Equality Initiative. The Initiative will include the establishment of air transport gender indicators through the collection of workforce statistics in collaboration with the ILO and UNESCO. The Initiative also aims to collaborate in programmes and activities to promote gender equality and the advancement of talented women within the global aviation community. By providing statistics and forecasting, the Initiative is designed to assist States to identify gaps in personnel planning, training and gender inequality.¹⁶³ ICAO has also made special efforts to increase the pool of women candidates for its own professional and higher-level posts.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ ILO, 2003. [Code of practice on workplace violence in services sectors and measures to combat this phenomenon](#), Geneva (MEVSW/2003/11).

¹⁶¹ For further information, see: [The Beijing Platform for Action: inspiration then and now](#).

¹⁶² ICAO, 2016. [Resolutions adopted at the 39th session of the Assembly provisional edition](#). Assembly, 39th Session (Montreal, 27 Sept.-6 Oct.).

¹⁶³ ICAO, n.d. [“The Air Transport Gender Equality Initiative”](#).

¹⁶⁴ ICAO, 2017. [“Annual Report 2017”](#), Human Resources Policy.

► **Box 12: Global Aviation Gender Summit**

In August 2018, ICAO, in collaboration with UNESCO, organized the Global Aviation Gender Summit. The Summit adopted a Road Map for Enhancing Gender Equality in Aviation, which identifies four strategic action points to be considered by States and industry stakeholders:

1. Policy and Action Plan: develop policy and action plans on government legislation and organizational policies and advocate and demonstrate commitment from the top.
2. Barriers and enablers: eliminate or mitigate biases and stereotypes in order to increase the talent pool of women; prepare women for senior manager positions through training; foster coaching and mentoring with a gender lens; and share best practices.
3. Data: global gender disaggregated data to be collected, analysed and shared, and used for the implementation of gender equality.
4. Partnerships: forge partnerships with UN Women (HeForShe campaign, [UN System Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women](#)), UNESCO (on education and STEM) and with industry (scholarships and internships).

The second Global Aviation Gender Summit will take place in Spain in 2020.

Sources: ICAO, 2018. “[Global Aviation Gender Summit Highlights](#)” (Cape Town, 8-10 Aug.); *La Moncloa*, 2019. “[Spain will host second edition of Global Aviation Gender Summit in 2020](#)”, 26 Sept.

With a view to addressing the anticipated shortage of skilled aviation professionals, ICAO launched the Next Generation of Aviation Professionals (NGAP) initiative in 2009, which has since been elevated to an ICAO Programme.¹⁶⁵ ICAO’s aim is remove barriers to women’s participation and advance their professional development in aviation, which will require awareness-raising and proactive outreach to attract and retain girls and women.¹⁶⁶ In collaboration with the International Aviation Womens Association (IAWA), ICAO offers an annual aviation scholarship for one professional woman in this field. Selected candidates increase their professional experience in aviation by working on and contributing to specific aspects of the ICAO work programme at the international level for a period of nine months.

► **Box 13: Dreams Soar**

ICAO has supported a project, Dreams Soar, through which the first ever Afghan-American female pilot, Shaesta Waiz, has been conducting an around-the-world flight to encourage more young women to become pilots.

For further information, see: [Dreams Soar](#).

Together with UNESCO, ICAO organizes workshops for young women to encourage them to consider STEM careers, in particular in engineering. These *Think Pink Hardhat* events are conducted globally.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ ICAO, n.d. “[NGAP Programme](#)”.

¹⁶⁶ ICAO, n.d. “[Women in aviation](#)”.

¹⁶⁷ ICAO, n.d. “[UNESCO ‘Think Pink Hardhat’ event a hit with students at ICAO NGAP Global Summit event](#)”, News release.

5.4 Social partners

5.4.1 Social dialogue

Social dialogue strengthens democracy and good governance, and ensures social justice. It can build trust between parties, prevent or resolve conflicts and reduce uncertainty. Social dialogue can play a crucial role in fostering a productive, more equal and competitive aviation industry. Promoting social dialogue is a fundamental part of the ILO's mission and can be instrumental in improving the situation of women in civil aviation.

There are different levels of social dialogue, with sectoral social dialogue of particular relevance for civil aviation. However, the increasingly complicated structures of civil aviation companies, the fragmentation of unions and new regulations are some of the factors that can have an impact on the identity and representativeness of sectoral social partners.

The European Union established a Civil Aviation Social Dialogue Committee in 2000, which covers air crew, air traffic management and ground handling. It is composed of three workers' organizations and six employers' organizations and discusses such issues as working time, health and safety and training. It has adopted numerous opinions, statements and tools.¹⁶⁸ The Committee is currently focusing on combating violence at work, especially violence against women and third-party violence.¹⁶⁹

Following the liberalization of the civil aviation industry, legislation was adopted in France requiring the social partners to negotiate agreements within two years. As a result, Air France negotiated four collective agreements, as well as specific agreements on particular topics, including gender equality.¹⁷⁰

Unions and industry associations with a low membership of women and even lower representation of women in their leadership are less likely to prioritize women's issues. Women-based groups or committees have sometimes achieved success through a two-stage process: women's issues are more likely to be included in collective bargaining and, as a result, unions and associations can win support for policies to resolve such issues as gender-intensified barriers, which can benefit the entire membership.¹⁷¹

5.4.2 Trade unions

Men outnumber women in trade unions, both in their membership and in leadership positions. For example, the women's membership rate in the ITUC is on average 42 per cent, but there are only 28 per cent of women in its highest decision-making bodies.¹⁷² The ITF has one woman among its nine principal office-holders (the President, General Secretary and Vice-Presidents), who occupies a seat reserved for women. Of the 11 section or department chairs, two (women and youth) are women.¹⁷³ Among the 61 members of the ITF Executive Board, 12 are women.

The ITF work programme for women focuses on two priority themes: ending gender-based occupational segregation and building trade union power to end violence against women transport workers. As part of its work on ending violence against women transport workers, the ITF has developed a specific programme, the ITF Women's Advocate Programme to provide a workplace response to gender-based violence. The ITF has worked with transport unions in 11 countries

¹⁶⁸ Steer Davies Gleave, 2015. op. cit.; Juul, 2016. op. cit.

¹⁶⁹ European Commission, n.d. Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion, "[Sectoral social dialogue: Civil aviation](#)".

¹⁷⁰ Jorens, Y., et al., 2015. [Atypical forms of employment in the aviation sector](#), European Social Dialogue, European Commission.

¹⁷¹ Turnbull, 2013. op. cit.

¹⁷² ILO, 2019. *A quantum leap for gender equality: For a better future of work for all*, op. cit.

¹⁷³ ITF, 2018. "[Executive Board](#)".

to develop the programme, which is based on the model originally established by the trade union Unifor in Canada.¹⁷⁴ Women's advocates are trained union activists who work with allies to address the root causes of gender-based violence and provide support to women survivors to help them remain in employment in the transport industry by providing information, support and advocacy. Furthermore, the ITF is calling for safe access to decent sanitation facilities to raise health and safety standards globally for transport workers.¹⁷⁵

The International Federation of Air Line Pilots' Associations (IFALPA) emphasizes the importance of ICAO [Resolution A39-30](#). It is committed to updating all its documents in gender-inclusive language and recommends all its member associations to do the same.¹⁷⁶

The International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers' Associations (IFATCA) has set up an Equality, Diversity and Ethics Task Force to draft an equality and diversity plan for the organization. This plan will be discussed at the IFATCA Conference to be held in Singapore in March 2020.¹⁷⁷

5.4.3 Employer and industry organizations

Women are under-represented in employers' organizations. The majority of employers' organizations have fewer than 10 per cent of women on their boards of directors, and only 8 per cent of them have a gender-balanced board.¹⁷⁸ The trade association for airlines, IATA has one woman among the 30 members of its Board of Governors.¹⁷⁹

► Box 14: The IATA 25by2025 campaign

In September 2019, IATA launched an industry-wide campaign aimed at changing key diversity and inclusion metrics across the industry by 25 per cent, or up to a minimum of 25 per cent, by 2025. The initiative includes targets for IATA's own governance processes. Airlines which voluntarily commit to this initiative will see their progress shared annually at the IATA World Air Transport Summit.

IATA will establish a forum to share best practices and ideas for airlines to use and implement. 25by2025 sets specific goals for IATA member airlines, including increasing to 25 per cent the number of women in senior positions and under-represented jobs, such as pilots and operations. It calls for transparency by inviting airlines to report key diversity metrics annually. Of its 219 member airlines, 59 had joined the programme by November 2019.

Source: IATA, 2019. "[Improving gender balance by 2025](#)".

IATA makes annual awards for diversity and inclusion. Of the three awards, one goes to a woman holding a senior position within the industry who serves as a role model, one to a woman under 30 who has started to develop her career and thought leadership in the industry, and one to an airline that has changed its diversity through its action on diversity and inclusion.¹⁸⁰ However, gender issues are relatively new at IATA, which has prepared a report on best practices for publication in 2019.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁴ ITF, n.d. "[Women's Advocacy](#)".

¹⁷⁵ Interview by the author with G. Mocho Rodríguez (Civil Aviation and Tourism Services Section Secretary, ITF) on 21 May 2019.

¹⁷⁶ IFALPA, 2019. "[Gender neutral language](#)", Position, 7 March.

¹⁷⁷ Interview by the author with S.I. Elsbak (Chairperson, Task Force on Equality, Diversity and Ethics, IFATCA) on 8 July 2019.

¹⁷⁸ ILO, 2019. *A quantum leap for gender equality: For a better future of work for all*, op. cit.

¹⁷⁹ IATA, 2020. "[Board of Governors](#)", 23 Jan.

¹⁸⁰ IATA, n.d. "2019 IATA Diversity and Inclusion Awards: Terms and conditions".

¹⁸¹ Interview by the author with J. Hoskisson (Director, Learning & Development, IATA) on 1 May 2019.

The ACI advances the collective interests of, and acts as the voice of the world's airports and the communities they serve. The organization has been led by Director General Angela Gittens since 2008. Most of ACI's diversity efforts focus on financing professional development and support, including an alliance with the IAWA through funding reserved for women in the context of the ACI Airport Operations Diploma Programme and the Airport Executive Leadership Programme.¹⁸²

5.4.4 Enterprises

Many companies are endeavouring to attract women to careers in civil aviation, promote diversity and prevent and address harassment. For example, Airbus supports programmes aimed at attracting women to work in aviation and GE Aviation has an action programme, "Cultivate", designed to develop and retain women engineers in aviation. Some airlines, including British Airways, Virgin Atlantic and EasyJet, are promoting diversity among their workforce with the aim of achieving gender equality. Alaska Airlines runs a programme, "Forum for Engaging Men, Advancing Women", in which leaders discuss how men can support and advance women in the workplace.¹⁸³ Many industry leaders have spoken out against inflight sexual harassment and airlines have even banned passengers in cases of sexual harassment of flight attendants.¹⁸⁴ Many airlines have policies to combat harassment and discrimination, but these policies are often not implemented uniformly. Victims of harassment often refrain from complaining out of fear or because taking the case to court is difficult and can be expensive.¹⁸⁵

► Box 15: Airline branding: Levelling the playing field for women?

The achievement of a level playing field for women and men in civil aviation has been distorted by the responsiveness of some customers to business branding that emphasizes "thin and perfect women". This is likely to stem from assumptions of entitlement by passengers based on a stereotyped view of the objectified and sexualized status of women in society. Corporate branding of links between physical appearance and submissiveness is detrimental to the advancement of diversity and women in the world of civil aviation. The situation is sometimes further exacerbated by the lax enforcement of airline policies on unruly passengers and on violence and sexual harassment.

Airline branding could perhaps be used as a driving force for the achievement of a level playing field for women, which would be better aligned with the customer base in the sector. Many airlines already draw attention to their action to promote and value equality, qualifications, training and experience over appearance. For example, the inclusion in on-board brochures of images of a diverse and gender balanced workforce would be appealing and responsive to airline customers.

¹⁸² ACI, 2014. "ACI and the International Aviation Womens Association sign affiliation agreement: Areas of cooperation include education, training and enhanced job search capabilities", ACI Media Release, 23 Sept.

¹⁸³ Air Transport Action Group, n.d. "Aviation: Benefits beyond borders"; Choat, 2017. op. cit.

¹⁸⁴ Garcia, 2019. op. cit.

¹⁸⁵ Hanlon, 2017. op. cit.

► Conclusions

It is clear that there is ample room for improvement in the civil aviation industry to make it more equal, less discriminatory and more attractive and accessible to women. There is not only a need to redress the gender pay gap, but also the occupational segregation of women within the industry. Measures need to be adopted for this purpose prior to and during education and training to improve the access of women to the sector. It is also clear that many steps are already being taken in this respect. Over the past decade, many airlines have introduced equality and diversity programmes that are accelerating gender equality in the sector. It is useful in this regard to take stock of the good practices already introduced by industry champions, as the IATA 25by2025 initiative is doing.

The seven primary drivers for transformation identified by the United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment offer a clear framework in this regard:

- Tackling adverse norms and promoting positive role models
- Ensuring legal protection and reforming discriminatory laws and regulations
- Recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid work and care
- Building assets – Digital, financial and property
- Changing business culture and practice
- Improving public sector practices in employment and procurement
- Strengthening visibility, collective voice and representation¹⁸⁶

It is also important to measure progress in achieving gender equality. Policies on pay transparency, including requirements for reporting and protecting the right of workers to share information, can shed light on gender-based pay differences and facilitate redress. Experience has shown that affirmative action plays an essential role in combating gender inequality.¹⁸⁷

The increased participation of women in civil aviation and the elimination of all forms of discrimination will require active contributions from all stakeholders: Governments, international organizations, and particularly the ILO and ICAO, employer and industry organizations, workers' organizations and enterprises.

¹⁸⁶ UN Women, n.d. “Seven drivers and recommendations”, UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment.

¹⁸⁷ ILO, 2019. [Work for a brighter future: Global Commission on the Future of Work](#), Geneva.

Acknowledgements

This paper was prepared by David Seligson of Seligson Global Consulting, with technical contributions from the International Air Transport Association (Tim Colehan and Jane Hoskisson), the International Civil Aviation Organization (Sainarayan Ananthanarayan, Thilly De Bodt and Glenda Newton), the International Federation of Air Line Pilots' Associations (Sebastián Currás Barrios), the International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers' Associations (Sverre Ivar Elsbak, Christopher Gilgen and Helena Sjöström) and the International Transport Workers' Federation (Nuria Belenguer, Claire Clarke and Gabriel Mocho Rodríguez).

This work also benefitted from valuable inputs and comments from the Gender, Equality and Diversity & ILOAIDS Branch (Shauna Olney, Emanuela Pozzan and Irini Proios Torras) and the Sectoral Policies Department (Alejandra Cruz Ross, Alette van Leur and Brandt Wagner). Mark Johnson edited the final version of this paper. Ivón García provided valuable administrative and layout support. The views and opinions expressed herein are those of the author and do not reflect those of the International Labour Organization.

► Advancing social justice, promoting decent work

The International Labour Organization is the United Nations agency for the world of work. We bring together governments, employers and workers to improve the working lives of all people, driving a human-centred approach to the future of work through employment creation, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue.

Contact details

Sectoral Policies Department (SECTOR)

International Labour Organization
Route des Morillons 4
1211 Geneva 22
Switzerland
T +41 22 799 7501
sector@ilo.org
www.ilo.org/sector



I S B N 9789220407585



9 789220 407585