



# DIVERSITY IN

# AVIATION

**AN INDUSTRY REPORT**

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**Aircraft EXPO<sup>®</sup>**  
Interiors

# DIVERSITY IN AVIATION

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# INTRODUCTION

For a long time, the aviation and aircraft interiors industry has carried the reputation of being predominantly white and male. Despite the seismic breakthroughs of David Harris as the first African American pilot for a commercial airline in 1964, and Turi Widerøe as the first woman to achieve the same feat five years later, the industry has, at times, been at risk of falling behind.

Yet in recent years with increased commitments to diversity and inclusion, there has been a noticeable shift. In addition to progress in the representation of historically disadvantaged groups, airlines' and suppliers' diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) efforts have grown to encompass sexuality and disability, paving the way for an industry that is truly welcoming, and providing a platform in which equality is a reality, rather than a pipedream.

As the home of conversations that influence the industry of tomorrow, we have created this report to provide an overview of the state of play when it comes to diversity in aviation, the progress achieved so far, and what remains to be done. We start by highlighting the key frontiers on which diversity in aviation is being fought, evaluating the progress of each, before assessing the growing business case for diversity in aviation, and delving further into the work airlines are doing to address the issues.

We are extremely thankful to the influential industry representatives who took the time to share their first-hand experiences – your insights have been invaluable.



**Polly Magraw**

Event Director  
Aircraft Interiors Expo

*Polly Magraw*

# BARRIERS TO FLYING

## IMPROVING ACCESSIBILITY

It was in March of this year that paraplegic **British TV presenter, Sophie Morgan**, became the latest campaigner to draw attention to the aviation industry's shortcomings<sup>1</sup> when it comes to disability. The disability advocate was left stranded when her wheelchair was destroyed during a flight between Los Angeles and London, and in a video later released announcing her RightsonFlights campaign, she said people with disabilities "need to be able to have the confidence to trust air travel," and that the campaign is "asking for experiences to match those of non-disabled people."<sup>2</sup>

For a long time, air travel has been a stressful and daunting experience for those with disabilities, and one of the biggest challenges facing passengers is physical accessibility – from boarding and disembarking the aircraft to the ability to use onboard facilities in the cabin and maintaining dignity when flying.

According to a survey by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), more than half (56%) of passengers with a disability find flying and using airports difficult.<sup>3</sup> And while airlines are required to provide accessible facilities and services – the UK government's 2018 Inclusive Transport Strategy<sup>4</sup> and the U.S' FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018<sup>5</sup> both outline measures and provisions to improve the accessibility of flying – the industry has a long way to go.

But this isn't to say that progress isn't being made. In 2013, Airbus launched its Space-Flex wheelchair-accessible lavatories to improve in-flight experiences for those with disabilities.<sup>6</sup> LATAM Airlines fitted its aircraft with revolutionary lavatories which gave "more flexibility" and "maximised cabin revenue space", according to **José Maluf of LATAM**. In 2016, Easyjet became the first European airline to fit its Airbus A320 planes with Space-Flex v2,<sup>7</sup> the second variation of the PRM (Persons with Reduced Mobility) lavatory.



Both Cathay Pacific and Air France offer accessible toilets on their aircraft; the latter airline's long-haul fleet and some of its medium-haul aircraft include these facilities, while its single-aisle aircraft have a curtain installed to preserve privacy.<sup>8</sup> Air Canada's twin-aisle aircraft include fittings designed to be operable with one hand, including handles, locks, soap dispensers and flush control.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, Gatwick Airport in the UK was the first airport to introduce a Hidden Disability Lanyard designed to "increase support for passengers with autism, dementia, and other hidden disabilities."<sup>10</sup>

In a similar vein, airlines are also making strides towards neurodiversity, announcing new regulations and policies to make flying with neurodivergent conditions such as autism and ADHD easier. Particularly when living with autism, lack of structure, unknown surroundings, and unfamiliar sights that are associated with travelling can be stressful.

British Airways announced on World Autism Awareness Day that it would become the first airline to launch a visual guide to flying, designed to help ease the travel anxieties people may face. The manual takes passengers through the different parts of the journey, including the sights, sounds, and smells to expect, so they can prepare for their trip and feel at ease that they are in a safe place. Emirates, too, announced its collaboration with Dubai Airport to create an autism-friendly route to flying, including priority lanes for check-in, and streamlined passport control and boarding. While these may be just two airlines out of thousands, it is promising to see the industry taking steps in the right direction.

**Christopher Wood MBE, disability lobbyist and campaigner and Founder of Flying Disabled,** said there is "much evidence that air travel is way behind other forms of transport with accessibility and inclusion". He explains: "Our biggest hurdle remains the investment, and the willingness to adapt the cabin. Changing the cabin for greater accessibility is a broad spectrum, and I always feel that innovation could do more – this might be the trigger. But we do know that the rules of engagement in aviation are different. This is a pressurised cabin, flying at 500 miles per hour, 30,000 feet in the air. We have to consider everybody's safety, and that word – safety – is something we have not, and will not, deviate from."

**Carrie McEwan, Senior Human Factors Specialist at Teague** said the key change she envisions happening to the industry in the next 10 years will be seeing more momentum in this space.



*"Our biggest hurdle remains the investment, and the willingness to adapt the cabin."*

CHRISTOPHER WOOD MBE

"I'm excited to see some momentum in improving accessibility in aviation," she said. "I hope we can improve the journey for people with disabilities and limited mobility – from the moment they start planning a trip to their final destination [by] creating security screenings that maintain dignity, enabling wheelchairs on the airplane, and making lavatories accessible – there's a lot of work to do here [but] I'm excited to see this momentum."

In support of the work needed to create fully inclusive and accessible aviation for all passengers, AIX will continue its focus on accessibility in the cabin across both the show floor and through talks at **Passenger Experience Conference (PEC)**.

Regarding the first theme of the PEC programme, Delivering for the new generation passenger, Christopher Wood MBE, Founder of Flying Disabled, will host Revolutionising air travel for passengers with reduced mobility, amongst other talks from **Lift Aero Design, Collins Aerospace, Lufthansa Group** and more.

# FEMALE LEADERSHIP

## THE IMPORTANCE OF ROLE MODELS

Women remain significantly underrepresented in aviation, in both senior management positions as well as across all levels of the industry. According to the International Air Transport Association (IATA), a trade association representing some 3,000 airlines and 83% of total air traffic,<sup>11</sup> the proportion of women holding C-level roles in the industry is just 3%. A 2020 study found that women make up just 2.6% of mechanics, 19.7% of dispatchers, and 4.3% of flight engineers, while the number of female flight attendants sits at 79.2%.

The lack of female representation in commercial aviation is problematic as women, despite possessing swathes of talent and skill, do not benefit from the same opportunities as men, while the lack of female representation in leadership would suggest the existence of a glass ceiling – vertical discrimination preventing women from being promoted to top jobs in management.

Seeking to address this head-on, in 2019, IATA launched “25by2025”,<sup>12</sup> an initiative that aims to increase senior female representation by up to 25% by the year 2025. Currently, the number of airline signatories stands at 188, demonstrating that airlines are both willing to address and embrace change in the pursuit of gender parity.

Jane Hoskisson, Director, Talent, Learning, Engagement and Diversity, IATA, believes the success stems from the fact IATA “caught the zeitgeist of how people were feeling”, adding that it “found the sweet spot which didn’t alienate people but made people think, ‘I can do something practical.’”

Hoskisson traces the catalyst for 25By2025 back to IATA’s AGM, at the very first Diversity & Inclusion Awards, in which Christopher Luxem, CEO, Air New Zealand, challenged IATA to address the diversity imbalance. She notes that while the initiative focuses on gender, it serves as “a door opener for having conversations about lots of other issues about diversity and inclusion.”



JANE HOSKISSON, IATA



25by2025 has been an undisputable success. While signatories continue to rise, IATA estimates that in 2022 alone, at least five new women CEOs have been appointed, including new CEOs of KLM, El Al, Hahn Air, Pegasus Airlines, and Austrian Airlines, while the campaign counts 18 female CEOs in its signatories.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, Air Transat and Air New Zealand have achieved gender parity in the boardroom, while JetBlue has achieved 50% female representation at an executive level. And, for the second year running, the number of female chief executives across the top 100 airlines and groups doubled year on year,<sup>14</sup> however, it should be caveated that this rise is offset by reductions in other key C-suite roles.

One knock-on effect of a lack of women, not just in senior leadership positions, but in the industry more widely, is the lack of role models for women. One of three key conclusions in a 2019 report by the University of Westminster was that a lack of support and role models were one of the main causes of female underrepresentation in the aviation industry,<sup>15</sup> while a 2015 poll carried out by British Airways found that 63% of women were put off a career as a professional airlines pilot when they were growing up for reasons including a lack of visible role models and being told it was a man's job.<sup>16</sup>

As Hoskisson adds: "Education is a big barrier to entry. If somebody had told me aged nine I could design the interiors of aircraft – I would have thought about that as a job because I loved design! I had no visibility of that being a possible career choice for me."

The progress being made in the industry, and greater visibility of female leaders at the top and in wider roles is helping to knock down the barrier to gender parity, by not only producing more inspirational female leaders but instigating culture change. As **easyJet CEO Carolyn McCall** said in an interview conducted by IATA for its '100 Years of Commercial Flight' campaign, more senior female leadership is necessary as "these are the women who will be able to adapt the culture of companies to ensure more women stay in the workplace."<sup>17</sup>





## CASE STUDY

### CATHAY PACIFIC

Cathay Pacific is represented by more than 70 different nationalities, and is a melting pot of different generations, religious beliefs, gender and sexual identities. One of the key objectives driving its diversity and inclusion strategy is to “create a safe environment where different experiences, opinions and backgrounds”, which “results in a welcoming workplace where everyone shares in the success.”<sup>18</sup>

Vivian Lo, GM Customer Experience and Design at Cathay Pacific agrees with her company’s ethos. She says “if you look at a lot of the companies or parts of society that have better gender or racial balance, they tend to do a lot better because they bring in different opinions. They allow for a much better assessment of each kind of issue.

“Different people have different natural orientations: some are impatient, some are much more analytical, some are better with the bigger picture, some more patient, while some are better at communications or people skills.”

In 2018, to strive towards its pledge to create an inclusive environment that celebrates people for who they are, the airline launched Fly With Pride, a social network and support system which aims to foster a culture of support, awareness, acceptance and celebration of the LGBT+ community. It also provides “training on what it means to be an ally” and “aims to improve organisational culture, influence company policy and encourage leadership commitment.”<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, as part of its efforts to improve gender equality, Cathay Pacific is a signatory to IATA’s 25by2025 programme. To increase the number of women in senior positions to at least 25% by 2025, it has pledged, among other initiatives, to include diversity objectives within the ‘hire to retire’ process flow to reduce bias and ensure equal opportunity, build dashboards to measure and track such progress, and leverage the Gender Equity Network to support talent pipeline development.<sup>20</sup> In 2018, it also set up a Gender Equity Network “to address and raise awareness of the challenges faced by our female colleagues.”



# SOCIAL CHANGE

## ENCOURAGING INCLUSIVITY

When it comes to assessing the state of diversity in aviation (and by proxy, aircraft interiors) through a racial lens, there is no truer statement than, 'If you can't see it, you can't be it.'

This was the conclusion a panel of experts from Airbus, Atkins, Rolls-Royce and attendees came to when they sat down to discuss ways at improving the representation of ethnic minorities in aerospace.<sup>21</sup> While it was at a U.S conference last year, it is a consensus felt by many young people across the world. Take the UK Government's aviation and maritime careers: young people's perceptions research report as an example, which found two-fifths (41%) of young people feel negatively influenced by a lack of diversity in the sector, with this proportion increasing further among Black / Black British ethnic groups to 67%.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, when picturing people working in aviation, many said it is of 'middle-aged, white, male pilots.'

So it wouldn't be entirely unreasonable to attribute the racial disparity seen across the sector to its current representation, particularly with, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2021,<sup>23</sup> just 3.9% of aircraft pilots and flight engineers recorded as Black or African American, 1.5% Asian, and 6.1% Hispanic/Latino. UK statistics aren't dissimilar, with just 7% of pilots coming from BAME backgrounds and 4% recorded as women.<sup>24</sup> And McKinsey and Co.'s Diversity in Leadership: the next frontier for future air mobility study in 2021 assessed more than 60 leading companies in the future air mobility space, finding just 13% of all its leaders racially diverse.

As one of the most globalised, international industries to exist, it is paramount that its entire workforce is representative of it, and to achieve so, work needs to be done from the top down - from the boardroom and C-suite. Creating equal opportunities, nurturing inclusive environments and recruitment policies, and breaking down unconscious biases are tangible steps that need to be taken.



But this isn't to say the industry is stagnant, in fact, it is arguably making progress faster than many others. In February of this year, which marked Black History Month, an all-Black crew operated a British Airways flight for the first time in the airline's history.<sup>25</sup> A spokesperson<sup>26</sup> of the airline said: "We've got more work to do, and, as part of our BA Better World strategy we're creating inclusion and diversity programmes and building partnerships with groups like Fantasy Wings to help break down barriers and ensure underrepresented groups can access the exciting opportunities available within the aviation industry."

Moreover, looking back to 30 years ago, in 1992 Mae Jemison became the very first Black woman to go to space as a member of the Space Shuttle Endeavor. Rewind to the mid-1900s, when Cornelius Coffey (pictured) became the first African American aviator to have both a pilot and mechanic's license, before going on to be the first aviation school founder.<sup>27</sup>

As the industry looks ahead to improving diversity, equity and inclusion across the workforce, this year's Aircraft Interiors Expo will include a host of talks, speaking sessions, and Q&As focussed on improving diversity and inclusivity and futureproofing the sector as a viable, welcoming one of which anyone can have a career in.



PICTURED: CORNELIUS COFFEY



## CASE STUDY

### UNITED AIRLINES

United Airlines' Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I) policy is part of the company's commitment "to create a more diverse, equitable and inclusive workplace and world."<sup>28</sup> The company has sought to redress inequality across the board through a series of flagship initiatives. In the Spring of 2021, the company launched the United Aviate Academy, a rigorous, year-long training program to train 5,000 pilots by 2030, and for at least half of those students to be women or people of colour. In its inaugural class of 30 students, this was exceeded, with 80% of students being women or people of colour.

United also partnered with Choose Chicago, the official sales and marketing organisation responsible for promoting Chicago as a global visitor and meetings destination, to fund the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Apprenticeship Program at Choose Chicago. The program, fully funded by United, will offer one candidate 600 hours of work experience, including exposure at United Airlines on its competitive pilot program.<sup>29</sup>

In addition, it has planned to boost racial and gender equity in the profession, including offering \$2.4 million in scholarships in association with organisations such as the Organization of Black Aerospace Professionals and Latino Pilots Association.<sup>30</sup>

While historically, employers have collected demographic data on their employees, it is not common for those employees to ever get sight of it. Recognising that greater transparency and sharing demographic data can encourage employee dialogue about DE&I efforts, United has committed to retaining and growing the diversity of its workforce demographic data. At the beginning of 2021, the airline shared its U.S. workforce demographic data, while each business unit established a DEI strategy tailored to its needs.<sup>31</sup> Although recognising that work remains to be done, United Airlines' 2021 annual report revealed its accomplishment of near-perfect pay equity, as well as growth in the representation of women and underrepresented racial and ethnic groups.

When it comes to enhancing an inclusive culture, United has also rolled out a comprehensive Listening Session strategy and toolkit for leaders to connect with their team, launched its first annual self-ID campaigns, and signed its first collective bargaining agreement with gender-neutral language. Additionally, in 2019, it rolled out a range of accessibility features on its seatback IFE systems, accommodating any level of vision, and providing support for customers with hearing and mobility issues.<sup>32</sup>

# CHAMPIONING INDIVIDUALITY

## EXPRESSING ONESELF IN THE CABIN

In 2019, Air New Zealand became the first airline to allow all staff, including cabin crew and pilots, to have Tā Moko – a traditional form of Māori tattooing – and non-offensive tattoos. Air New Zealand Chief Executive Officer Christopher Luxon said the company wanted to embrace diversity and allow employees "to express individuality or cultural heritage."<sup>33</sup>

Air New Zealand's progressive decision, and increased importance on individuality and personal expression, has helped to usher in sweeping policy changes by airlines, who have started to update uniform policies that many have lambasted as archaic and outdated as conversations about identity evolve. It has also emboldened discriminated groups to speak up against perceived injustices of this kind. For example, last year, flight attendants at Spain's Iberia Airline launched a petition over their employer's compulsory high heel rules, with women expected to wear high heels in airports and while boarding.<sup>34</sup>

In 2022, Virgin Atlantic followed Air New Zealand's example, becoming the first UK airline carrier to allow cabin crew to display their tattoos.<sup>35</sup> Until then, visible tattoos had been banned, with the airlines only hiring staff who concealed any body art underneath their uniform. According to Estelle Hollingsworth, Virgin Atlantic's Chief People Officer, this policy had been reversed "in line with our focus on inclusion and championing individuality", adding "many people use tattoos to express their unique identities and our customer-facing and uniformed colleagues should not be excluded from doing so if they choose."

Although facial and neck tattoos remain banned, as well as those deemed culturally inappropriate or that contain any reference to nudity, violence, drugs or alcohol, the policy represents a wider shift in the attitude of airlines towards inclusivity, and Hollingsworth's comments on the increased importance of allowing staff to express themselves freely is no longer confined to the fringes.



In 2021, JetBlue opened its hair and makeup policy to be “gender-inclusive”, while Alaska Airlines and Virgin Atlantic introduced new guidance which encouraged all flight crew to wear whichever uniform they preferred, irrespective of gender. The airlines also introduced badges that indicated the pronouns of their flight attendants to passengers.<sup>36</sup>

Progress continued in 2023 when British Airways unveiled its new uniforms for the first time since 2004. Despite keeping separate uniforms for men and women, the airline announced that male crew members could wear makeup, jewellery, and handbags, with the airline encouraging staff to “be bold, be proud, be yourself”.<sup>37</sup> Female aircrew can also choose to wear trousers, with KLM and Bangkok Airways<sup>38</sup> mirroring this trend.

Among the airlines setting the pace of change, Virgin Atlantic put diversity and individuality at the heart of its marketing campaign in 2022, championing the LGBTQ community, and encouraging audiences to “see the world differently.”

Speaking about the campaign, Virgin Atlantic’s CEO, **Shai Weiss**, said “At the core of our business is the understanding that every one of our people can be themselves at work and that they belong. They truly are the thing that sets us apart and the reason customers choose to fly with us. We know that the touchpoints that matter most and the experiences that differentiate Virgin Atlantic, are driven by our people and that’s why it was so important they’re at the heart of this campaign.”<sup>39</sup>

Yet despite the irrevocable evidence that airlines are becoming more inclusive when it comes to uniforms and personal expression, researchers from the University of Surrey concluded in their 2022 study<sup>40</sup> that female flight attendants are still pressurised to ‘look the part’, suggesting that while strides are being made, there is more work to be done before airline employees are truly free to express themselves to the fullest degree.



*"Many people use tattoos to express their unique identities and our customer-facing and uniformed colleagues should not be excluded from doing so if they choose."*

ESTELLE HOLLINGSWORTH, VIRGIN ATLANTIC



## CASE STUDY

### VIRGIN ATLANTIC

When it comes to DE&I, Virgin Atlantic's strategy is underpinned by its 'Be Yourself' manifesto. The company has pledged to cultivate "an environment that values and respects each individual's unique identity and inspires pride in being part of the Virgin Atlantic family."<sup>41</sup> The company has four active belonging networks for disability, women, LGBTQ+, and ethnic diversity – all employee-led – which is consulted widely on all kinds of policies, from uniforms and self-expression, to ways of working and recruitment processes.

In 2019, Virgin made the decision to offer cabin crew the choice of wearing make-up, as well as flat or heeled shoes.<sup>42</sup> By September 2022, the airline had updated its gender identity policy, removing the requirement for its people to wear gendered uniform options; all employees are permitted to wear either a red skirt or burgundy trousers. It also introduced optional pronoun badges, enabling passport holders with gender-neutral markers to use their preferred pronouns, along with mandatory inclusivity training for staff and training in collaboration with tourism and hotel partners.<sup>43</sup>

According to **Anthony Woodman, VP – Flying Club & CRM, Virgin Atlantic Airways Ltd.**, it is about "ensuring our colleagues feel confident and empowered to bring their full selves to work". Yet, in addition to being intrinsic to Virgin's core values and purpose, according to Woodman, there is a strong business case "to be able to access the widest possible pools of talent and customers".

Woodman notes that when they relaxed tattoo restrictions for frontline colleagues, job searches increased by 500%, while the recent 'See the World Differently' brand campaign "drove brand power growth that placed Virgin Atlantic within the top 1% of companies last year".

Many would argue Virgin Atlantic has blazed a trail when it comes to the implementation of bold inclusivity policies, but Woodman insists they are not stopping here, and that there's still a long way to go. "We know that over 40% of young people are put off a career within aviation because of a lack of diversity and visible role models. That same number increases to two-thirds for those from an ethnically diverse background. It's not surprising, as representation matters, and we still have too few visible senior role models.

"The biggest challenge that this creates from my perspective is that it risks slowing us down. It takes time for careers to develop, so for diversity to percolate through to the C-level or the captain's seat in the flight deck will be a gradual change. And therefore in the meantime, we need to do more to raise awareness of the industry and career paths within aviation, as well as the fact that it's changing – which is why initiatives aimed at the next generation, such as our Passport to Change programme, are so critical."

# THE BUSINESS CASE

## DIVERSITY IN AVIATION

Casual readers of the Royal Aeronautical Society's (RAeS) and University of the West of England's (UWE Bristol) study of gender diversity and discrimination amongst pilots in the airline industry, published last year, could be forgiven for thinking they've stumbled on a document from the 1980s.

The 135-page report<sup>44</sup> surveyed more than 700 airline pilots worldwide, at the same time gathering some 750 personal testimonials. The findings make for sober reading: women comprise just 5.6% of the global pilot workforce. Of the women that have made it into the industry, 42% report being treated differently at work and 30% say they have been discriminated against due to their gender.

The report points to the role of greater diversity and inclusivity in helping to boost customer engagement, marketplace reputation, talent acquisition, innovation, and ultimately, profitability. It also cites the World Economic Forum's doom scenario that if positive action to address the imbalance isn't prioritised, it will take 99.9 years to achieve gender parity.<sup>45</sup>

Certainly, the case for gender parity is a strong one. Multiple, credible studies and real-world examples make a strong case for more women in traditionally male-dominated roles, whether or not those roles are in aviation.

A 2020 report from McKinsey & Company, *Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters*<sup>46</sup> highlights that the relationship between diversity on executive teams and the likelihood of financial outperformance has strengthened over time.

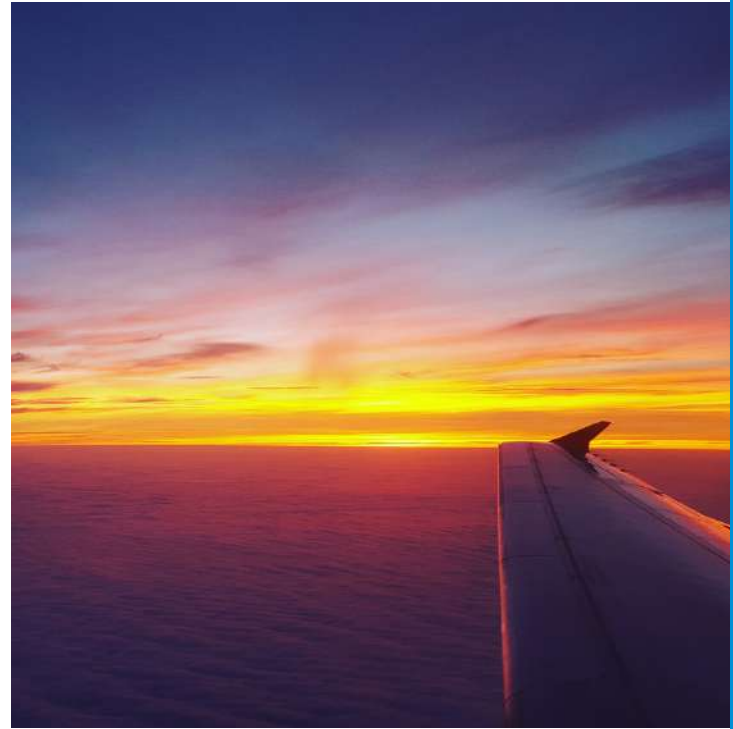


McKinsey's 2019 analysis found that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity on executive teams were 25% more likely to score above-average profitability than companies in the fourth quartile—up from 21% in 2017 and 15% in 2014. It also stresses that the higher the representation the higher the likelihood of outperformance. "Companies with more than 30% women executives were more likely to outperform companies where this percentage ranged from 10 to 30, and in turn, these companies were more likely to outperform those with even fewer women executives, or none at all," it says.

Equally, McKinsey's report also points to the gains to be made by ensuring ethnic diversity in business. Its research found a 36% higher likelihood of outperformance on EBIT margin for the top quartile companies with ethnic and cultural diversity on executive teams.

And its Delivering Through Diversity report<sup>47</sup> reiterates key ways that inclusion and diversity can contribute to a company's performance and help drive value creation through the diversity of thought and experience.

- Talent acquisition: More diverse organisations have broader talent pools from which to source capability to compete in this changing world.
- Improved quality of decision making: Published research from academia, corporations, and other organisations supports that diverse and inclusive groups make better quality decisions, often faster, and in a more fact-based manner, with less cognitive bias or group thought.
- Increased innovation and customer insight: Research supports that diverse and inclusive teams tend to be more creative and innovative than homogenous groups. Because they bring different experiences, perspectives, and approaches to bear on solving complex, non-routine problems. Diverse teams are also better able to target and distinctively serve diverse customer markets, such as women, ethnic minorities, and LGBTQ+ communities.
- Increased employee satisfaction: McKinsey says I&D management improves employee satisfaction and also reduces conflict between groups, improving collaboration and loyalty to create an environment that is more attractive to high performers.
- Improved global image and license to operate: "Even before the current climate raised the stakes on I&D, companies that were leaders in this space benefitted from an enhanced reputation extending beyond their employees to their customers, supply chain, local communities, and wider society," says McKinsey.



*"An ethnically diverse workforce allows for multifaceted skills and experience, a better understanding of customer needs, broadening creativity and problem-solving."*

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

The World Economic Forum's Prioritising Racial and Ethnic Equity in Business 2023<sup>48</sup> report also highlights the economic benefits of accelerating racial and ethnic equity in business, saying: "An ethnically diverse workforce allows for multifaceted skills and experience, a better understanding of customer needs, broadening creativity and problem-solving. In contrast, racial and ethnic inequity creates barriers limiting productivity, creativity and innovation, leading to negative economic consequences."

Despite the unequivocal evidence in favour of every spectrum of diversity and inclusion, the aviation industry has some way to go.

According to statistics,<sup>49</sup> 85.3% of US airline pilots and flight engineers are white, while the 2022 report from the Women in Aviation Advisory Board indicated that women make up fewer than 20% of the US workforce in most aviation occupations. Of nine careers in the field, only one - flight attendants, has a preponderance of women. Encouragingly, the moral need for, and potential benefits of, making aviation more diverse are not lost on the industry.



Later this year the Global Aviation Gender Summit 2023<sup>50</sup>, will take place in Madrid, Spain. The first Summit, in 2018, launched “with the objective to discuss the challenges faced by women in aviation, and the barriers to attract, retain and promote women within the aviation workforce”. This year, industry stakeholders will be challenged to “dismantle the barriers that women and girls face in order to change the makeup of the aviation workforce” and to take a “see how it could work, not why it doesn’t” approach to the issue.

**Emily Stephens, of Virgin Atlantic**, sums up the industry imperative for bringing about change. “I think the business case for creating a truly diverse workforce is clear; bringing together people from different backgrounds showcases a variety of perspectives and ultimately leads to better business decisions. However, to really reap those benefits, organisations need to invest heavily in their people.

“Feeling included takes more than just feeling respected. It’s about influencing how things are done, having your input considered, having your contribution recognised and being rewarded with opportunities in the future.”

So, alongside a strong moral case for DE&I sits a compelling business one. Whether it is increasing the pool of talent, the quality of decision-making or employee satisfaction, all the evidence points to the importance of a diverse workforce in when it comes to increasing revenue.



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