



OBSERVER: EU Space, Inclusion and Diversity

EU DIVERSITY MONTH

United in Diversity



Space endeavours require innovation, and innovation thrives on diversity. Studies show that employees who feel that their organisation supports diversity, report an increase in their ability to innovate — up to [83%](#). Diverse teams challenge assumptions, break down barriers, and uncover solutions that may have eluded a more homogeneous group. Whether the task is to design spacecraft, build hardware, or interpret satellite data, diversity fosters creativity and resilience - two key characteristics required from teams working in the space sector.

As May is the [European Diversity Month](#) across the EU, this week's Observer looks at diversity and inclusion in the space sector: how the sector has improved and what's still needed to make it truly diverse and inclusive.

EU DIVERSITY MONTH

United in Diversity



Every May since 2020, the European Union celebrates European Diversity Month to promote efforts in building equal and inclusive environments for the benefit of all. Credit: European Commission

Equal opportunities, diversity, and inclusion in the EU space industry

The space industry, along with the defence and aerospace sectors, faces significant challenges in promoting diversity and inclusion, according to an [industry-wide survey](#) on equality, diversity, and inclusion (ED&I) in the EU in 2022. Both employees and employers in the sector responded to the survey.

According to the results, gender equality remains a pressing issue, with women consistently under-represented in senior management positions. 'There are usually more women than men in administrative and clerical positions. There are gender roles that are still perpetuated within the workforce,' said Vera Pinto, Equality Coordinator at DG DEFIS.

The survey underlines the prevalence of gender and age discrimination, with a staggering 73% of female workers reporting instances of discrimination compared to 32% of their male counterparts. To understand the causes of discriminatory behaviour in the workplace, the survey explored certain sensitive areas. For example, respondents who had experienced an act of discrimination in the two years prior to the survey were asked to identify the individual who had treated them unfairly - almost half of all acts of discrimination were attributed to managers.

Despite these findings, a significant proportion of employers do not have effective systems in place to deal with discrimination and almost half (48.6%) do not have comprehensive ED&I plans or strategies. In addition, most employees who report discrimination perceive little to no change in their working environment after filing a report, highlighting a critical gap in accountability and remedial action. Addressing these systemic issues is critical to fostering a more inclusive space industry and ensuring equal opportunities and representation for all individuals, regardless of gender, age, or background.

The survey also looked at people with disabilities and how the sector is working to integrate them into the workforce. According to the findings, people with disabilities also face significant barriers. Almost half (47%) of people with disabilities employed in the sector expressed dissatisfaction with their companies' efforts to meet their needs.

On the business side, recruiting people with disabilities also appears to be a challenge, with only a minority of employers (10.4%) employing people with disabilities. One way to improve this could be to develop recruitment processes that allow candidates with disabilities to transparently express early in the recruitment process the reasonable accommodations they need, thereby ensuring equity during the recruitment process.

'The majority of people think that reasonable accommodation is screens and chairs, but actually reasonable accommodation can be much more than that,' adds Pinto.

Check our ED&I study in the space, defence and aeronautics sectors



OF EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES ARE DISSATISFIED WITH THEIR COMPANIES' ACCOMMODATIONS



#EUSpace #EUDefenceIndustry #EqualitySurvey

47% of people with disabilities expressed their dissatisfaction with their companies' accommodation of their needs. Credit: European Commission

Making Europe's space ecosystem more inclusive and welcoming

As well as being the right thing to strive for and boosting innovation efforts, diverse teams also make for more profitable companies. [Studies](#) have shown a direct link between diversity and financial performance. Specifically, companies with more diverse teams, either in terms of gender or racial and ethnic diversity, are more likely to have financial returns above their national industry averages. 'Companies with more diverse teams are more innovative, more financially successful and better able to understand the needs of the diverse marketplace and diverse customers,' adds Pinto.

For all these reasons, efforts must be made to make the EU space sector more welcoming to people from all backgrounds. To address the diversity and inclusion gap within the space sector and beyond, initiatives such as the [European Diversity Charters](#) play an important role.

These charters provide a framework for organisations to make a public commitment to promote diversity and inclusion, and to foster cooperation and knowledge sharing among signatories. By signing the charters and participating in their activities, companies and institutions commit to creating and maintaining an inclusive working environment for their employees, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, age, disability and sexual orientation. The increasing number of space companies signing up to these charters reflects a growing recognition of the importance of diversity and inclusion within the industry. 'In 2020, we had one space company sign the charter and now we have more than 20,' adds Pinto.

Making a difference

In addition, within the EU Space Programme, other actions can help make the sector more welcoming to users from all walks of life. For example, the [Copernicus Marine Service](#) (CMEMS)

makes its data products accessible to colour-blind users. In its marine data visualisation tool [MyOcean Viewer](#) — a free tool that displays ocean data in 4 dimensions (longitude, latitude, depth and over time) — users can select colour maps that are adapted to the needs of colourblind viewers.

In the realm of making a difference directly to citizens using space technologies, advances in Earth Observation (EO) and Global Navigation Satellite Systems (GNSS) also provide new opportunities to promote inclusion and accessibility. For example, applications based on GNSS functionalities have been developed to help visually impaired people navigate safely and autonomously, such as [BlindSquare](#) and [Lazarillo Accessible Navigation](#).

Some members of the EO community are also proactively working to raise the profile of women researchers and engineers in the field. By organising webinars, meetings, and publishing online content, groups such as [Women in Copernicus](#) and [Sisters of SAR](#) are amplifying the voices of women and underrepresented communities, promoting them, and showcasing their work in EO.

While there's still a long way to go, raising awareness of equality, diversity and inclusion issues is an important first step to making a real difference in the space sector. Striving for diversity and inclusion in the EU space sector is not just about meeting quotas or ticking boxes - it is about fostering an environment in which everyone, regardless of gender, age, disability or background, feels valued and empowered to contribute.