



ICOMIA

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF
MARINE INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS

Diversity Committee



Innovating Inclusion
Supporting Women in the Boating Industry

ICOMIA Diversity Committee

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Introduction by Melanie Symes, ICOMIA Diversity Committee Chair

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Front page image: Shanna Hayes, Apprentice boatbuilder at Abbey Boat Builder. ©Abbey Boat Builder

www.icomia.org



Introduction

The compelling findings of Sounding Trade Only's 2024 'Global Workforce Study' have made it impossible to ignore the need for DEI initiatives. And whilst this is irrefutably a time of profound disruption and economic uncertainty, it also provides an opportunity to bring in wide-ranging perspectives to inspire greater innovation, richer analysis and more inclusive decision making.

Women actively engage in both the boating industry and in recreational boating, yet their input seems often to be overlooked. Images even today still portray all-male representatives at regional meetings, on conference panels, and in international gatherings. A concise study carried out last year by the ICOMIA Diversity Committee revealed a stark reality; female CEO representation stood at a mere 1 in 50.

This compendium showcases individuals and initiatives that are identifying and challenging some of the obstacles faced by women in the boating industry. From exposing gender-based occupational segregation and pay gaps to creating support communities, visibility and tackling specific issues, these pages highlight inspiring efforts to driving positive change in gender equality.

Sincere thanks to all who took part, particularly those who gave up their time to kindly share their experiences and insights with the Committee.

Get involved; join the ICOMIA Diversity Committee!

Melanie Symes
ICOMIA Diversity Committee - Chair

Global Workforce Study

Integral to this collection is a proper commendation of Michele J. Goldsmith's pivotal work elevating women's visibility in the boating industry workplace.

Acknowledging the valued support received from dynamic women across the industry, Michele is renowned for having organised some 25 'Women in the Industry' gatherings at marine B2B events over the last four years, attracting hundreds of attendees to network, share stories and listen to successful female professionals. This is bolstered by highly successful Women's Summit workshops, and the popular 1+1 Mentoring Program which serves to both facilitate the career progression of newcomers and provide industry leaders with valuable insights concerning the needs and aspirations of those entering the profession.

The Soundings Trade Only 2024 Marine Industry Global Workplace Study was published almost exactly one year ago. Designed to examine the attraction, retention, and development of talent within the marine industry, the study

gathered insights from nearly 750 employees worldwide. Responses were segmented by women, all genders under the age of 45 (Gen Z and Millennials), and mature males. To provide broader context, the results were also benchmarked against comparable data from other industries.

The survey revealed a blend of encouraging data, opportunities for growth, and ongoing challenges. Good news that emerged from the study is that job satisfaction is notably higher than the global average. Cause for concern, however, is that women reported notably lower rates of job satisfaction than their male counterparts. This disparity is further compounded by a pronounced gender pay gap, particularly among employees with over 20 years tenure, aligning with the global average of an 18% gap*.

Many women also cited experiences of exclusion and unequal access to promotions and advancement opportunities.

** Top Gender Pay Gap Statistics – Forbes Advisor*

Global Workforce Study

Importantly, challenges were not exclusive to women. A considerable number of men also reported facing issues that underscored the critical role of leadership, transparency, and interpersonal dynamics in shaping workplace experiences.

Existing patterns of horizontal segregation can hinder how individuals progress in their careers and create barriers in terms of talent development. This can reflect common societal beliefs about which jobs are seen as ‘appropriate’ for different genders. Examples in the report show men “predominantly represented in sales, customer service, and product/project management roles and women found primarily in marketing/communications, administrative, and customer service roles being more likely than men to work in marketing, finance and human resources.”

Another pivotal insight points to a critical 10 to 15-year window, based on the average age of respondents, to cultivate

the next generation of industry leadership. This highlights the urgent need for proactive talent development and retention strategies.

The findings clearly show significant opportunity to foster a more inclusive, collaborative, and diverse industry culture, one that actively supports and nurtures the aspirations of women and ultimately strengthens the industry as a whole.

To access the report please contact Michele.Goldsmith@Firecrown.com.

Trade Only

THE 2024
MARINE INDUSTRY
GLOBAL WORKPLACE STUDY



Creating Career Pathways for Women

Victoria Low, CEO of The Magenta Project and previous Director of World Sailing Trust is driven by a passion to generate equal opportunities for women in sailing. By developing collaborations with industry, sport, academia and civil society, she is looking to grow productive pathways and opportunities to help women succeed in racing, STEM and leadership roles.

Her work in the 2019 'Women in Sailing Strategic Review', due to be repeated this year with new focus areas, shone a light on lower female participation rates, insufficient support structures for women and girls and common instances of gender discrimination. This report then gave rise to various subsequent studies such as the Gender Design Survey, which explored how women's clothing and safety equipment, designed principally for the male form was potentially dangerously unsuitable for some women.

The Participation Study, carried out in 2021, surveyed predominantly recreational sailors across the world, attracting over 2000 respondents. The results identified a long-held belief,

that the sailing demographic comprised a majority of white men over the age of 45.

This finding was then followed by startling insights revealing a colossal pay gap in elite racing. This evidence underscores the urgent need for reform to create a welcoming environment for women in boating and to align with upcoming EU mandates for gender-balanced boards.

Victoria's role in The Magenta Project is permitting her to build on a successful infrastructure that supports female participations from access level via clinics, to position opportunities in carefully selected internships whilst benefitting from support throughout their placement.

The annual Magenta Mentoring programme, that began five years ago, and has seen some 200 women through the programme, produced numerous success stories and been involved in supporting over 250 careers across the industry.

Creating Career Pathways for Women

An impressive group of over 100 mentors support some 35 mentees a year to succeed in both the sport of sailing and the wider marine industry. Sailors such as Pamela Lee and Cole Brauer are graduates of the mentoring programme, which places equal emphasis on shore-based career paths in STEM, communications and management.

With a keen understanding for the sustainability of empowerment dynamics, The Magenta Project, operating on a shoestring budget and powered by volunteers, offers a highly inspiring roadmap for how to both create professional and career development routes, and how to bring industry together to support them.

“For the past ten years The Magenta Project has been striving to achieve greater inclusion within the marine industry.

Now in our tenth year, we have a new ‘supercharged’ board, a successful mentoring programme and five different pathway streams across performance sailing and the marine industry.

However, to make real, impactful and lasting change we need greater collaboration across the industry, and with 3% of women working as international seafarers*, it feels like we have only just got started.”

For more information, explore www.themagentaproject.org

*International Maritime Organization 2021 Report



Women in Boatbuilding

Women in Boatbuilding (WIBB) is a community interest company, which champions diversity, equity and inclusion for people working in hands-on roles in boatbuilding and related marine trades, leading to a sustainable industry for all.

Historically, boatbuilding and related trades have - and continue to be - very male-dominated. Exact data is not currently available but it is estimated that just 2-5% of people working hands-on are women. They are often labouring in challenging, isolated environments, with PPE and tools not designed for them. Unsurprisingly, retention for women has been an issue. Without senior female figures on the yard floor and the support of teaching in colleges, women in the field have suffered from a lack of role models.

Women in Boatbuilding is providing a solution for the industry. Founded in 2023 in the UK, by Belinda Joslin, WIBB is a volunteer organisation with four directors and a growing cohort of community members around the world. WIBB core community activity and presence remains on Instagram, with 3619 followers, plus 294 subscribers on YouTube.

Core activity:

- Sharing stories of women to raise the profile of women in the industry, creating role models for other women to be inspired.
- Organise in-person and online socials.
- Attend events to highlight the work of women in the industry, and speak about the need for and benefits of a diverse and inclusive workforce.
- Support companies and colleges, helping them to re-balance gender diversity.



Women in Boatbuilding

Colin Henwood - Boatbuilder and Chair of the Wooden Boatbuilders Trade Association

"The impact that the Women in Boatbuilding organisation is making is revolutionary. Their dynamic approach to encouraging and championing women and non-binary people to become involved in boatbuilding is working. Already the 10-month professional boatbuilding course at the Boat Building Academy in Lyme Regis has enrolled more women than men as a direct result of the empowering work of WIBB and the trend looks set to continue. The old guard of male wooden boatbuilders has been enlightened and energised to change perceptions by the small but effective team at WIBB. The lean and cost-effective campaign actioned by WIBB is bearing fruit with real world results, there are more women working in the industry, more women training and many more women looking at ways to become boatbuilders. An acorn of an idea has been planted and is growing rapidly. I would encourage anyone in a position to assist WIBB to become generously involved."

Links and contacts

www.womeninboatbuilding.com

<https://www.instagram.com/womeninboatbuilding/>

www.youtube.com/@womeninboatbuilding

YouTube - WIBB Presents

Episode 1. The British Boat Builders 2023 Tour <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lehZJettlOO>

Episode 2. The British Boat Builders 2023 Tour <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fbQTJz-7ZCc>

Episode 3. The British Boat Builders 2023 Tour <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0453EPqIQwA>

The Italian Boatbuilders https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_Ecpz8yu4



Gail McGarva BEM, Abbey Molyneux & Obloma Oji.
Past and present WIBB Directors ©Kathy Mansfield



Abbey Molyneux
©Abbey Boat Builder

Engaging Everyone: The Gender Factor

The language we use shapes our perceptions, and within what even today remains a male-dominated industry, outdated terms can inadvertently exclude half the potential audience.

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)'s "Words Matter - Supporting gender equality through language and communication" guide champions gender-inclusive language, recognising that gender-biased terms can perpetuate inequality. By continuing to employ exclusively male language for seafaring roles, we risk reinforcing limiting gender stereotypes. Is this the impression we wish to leave on today's youth regarding the marine industry?

Diego Yriarte is a nautical journalist with 35 years' experience who is currently Editorial Director of the Spanish Náutica y Yates magazine. For the past decade, he has made a conscious effort to use gender-neutral terms, challenging traditional nautical language in an effort to promote inclusivity. In languages with grammatical gender systems (the majority of European languages, for example), a traditionally male industry has had an even more pronounced impact on language.

In Spanish, the gender for the owner is male: “*el patrón/armador*” as is the skipper: “*el timonel/el patrón*”. Another equally gender-biased label is the (male) owner's cabin (*la cabina del armador*). To avoid these, he generally refers to the main cabin (*la cabina principal*); “the person who steers” and “the person who owns the boat”, which, while significantly more respectful, can tend to rack up the wordcount.

Gender-neutral alternatives increasingly seen in print include ‘helm’ instead of ‘helmsman’, ‘fisher’ instead of ‘fisherman’, ‘seafarer’ instead of ‘seaman’ and ‘person overboard’ instead of ‘man overboard’.

Engaging Everyone The Gender Factor

Portraying people in the marine industry is a recognised problem, where highly sexualised images of women are still sometimes shown to sell yachts and machinery. Females are also rarely depicted as skippers on board, but more often in supporting roles such as partners or crew. Conversely, Diego recounts seeing examples of images of women used where manufacturers seek to convey the idea of accessible or user-friendly marine equipment, such as a winch or particularly light-weight electric outboard engine. Interpret this as you will.

In Spanish the 'speaker' at a conference has a male gender ('el ponente') and true to form, it is very rare to see gender-parity or even a majority of women speakers on an industry conference panel, outside specific events dedicated to promoting female inclusion. It is surely time for a conscious shift towards gender-neutral language and inclusive imagery and away from outdated norms. This choice is not just about fairness, it's about building a stronger, more inclusive boating industry.



Diego Yriarte

Spanish guidelines on using more respectful language can be found here:

- https://www.inmujeres.gob.es/servRecursos/formacion/GuiasLengNoSexista/docs/Guiaslenguajenosexista_.pdf
- <https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/words-matter-supporting-gender-equality-through-language-and-communication.pdf>

Women in Nautica

Ana Čalić has been surrounded by the boating industry from a young age. Her mother, Nevenka Čalić, founded Navela, distribution leader in boating engines and equipment for the Eastern-Adriatic, in 1992.

Ana is a known face in recent years on the boat show circuit, having spoken at Boot Dusseldorf, METSTRIDE and others. She is passionate about diversity and has founded winDS Solutions, an agency offering event marketing together with diversity and sustainability branding.

In October 2024, mother and daughter launched the first Women in Nautica conference, attracting some 150 delegates. They opted not to focus specifically on barriers being faced by women in the industry, but more to celebrate positive personal and professional experiences of various female industry leaders, through topics such as sustainability, risk management and the energy transition.

Panelists included Italian Giulia Polli, a business developer who has lived on her own in 3 different continents and is now leading an all-male technical team in the Middle East for the ZF Group, and Croatian Tihana Tadinac, who started her career as a female skipper, built her way up through different shipyards and is now area sales manager for Hanse Yachts.

“Women in my community have come up against instances of women not being taken seriously, feeling discouraged, and doubting both their capabilities and the value of their work” describes Čalić. “With the Women in Nautica conference, we wanted to offer the opportunity for people to network, meet interesting individuals and feel inspired by some of the excellent stories out there.”

Women in Nautica

At only 28 years old, Ana Čalić represents Gen Z, a youth segment of considerable importance to future of the boating industry. She relates some of the advantages that digital natives bring to the workplace: *“We have access to many different tools and as a cohort, are good at co-using them. Our networks are available at a touch of a button via Instagram, LinkedIn or WhatsApp, meaning that we can be agile and find solutions quickly. Messaging is often shared across various platforms, transmitted widely to diverse audiences.”*

She strongly believes that women today have a distinct advantage compared with previous generations, and as such, are good ambassadors for inclusivity. Drawing on the supportive values and cultures surrounding women today, she believes today's women are well positioned to be strong ambassadors for inclusivity: *“There’s been a cultural shift. Perspectives about women’s opportunities and potential are different than before. Younger women have had the advantage of growing up with more empowerment tools and guidance. Perhaps before, it was more common for women to feel left out and have less of a voice; today however women are more prepared to recognise their worth, their knowledge and the value of their experience.”*

To learn more, tune into the WIN Podcast, available on [Spotify](#) and [Youtube](#).

Links and contacts.

www.womeninnautica.com

women@innautica.com

www.winds.solutions

ac@winds.solutions



Ana & Nevenka Čalić

Gender Equality Strategies

The EMFAF-funded WINBLUE project, whose team kindly ran a free workshop this year for boating industry members on creating a Gender Equality Plan, makes a strong case for adopting gender equality strategies in the blue economy. In describing the project's rationale, they quote the European Institute for Gender Equality's calculations that “by 2050, improving gender equality would lead to an increase in the EU's GDP per capita by 6.1% to 9.6%, which amounts to €1.95 to €3.15 trillion.”

They detail advantages in terms of employment and higher productivity, asserting that across the board, “the EU can only reach its full potential if it uses all of its talent and diversity.” Naturally, however, this calls on overcoming existing barriers. Showcasing a wide variety of gender equality good practices, they conclude by identifying strategies that “can deliver tangible results or, at least, inspire change and openness towards Gender Equality.”

Effective Gender Equality Policies and Work-Life Policies

Here, WINBLUE clarifies that to be successful, these policies need to include “a high degree of details, with measurable objectives, a precise roadmap and a list of actions, and include quantifiable KPIs and Milestones”. Addressing a need for more flexibility in terms of a work-life balance, etc., can lead to creating a “working environment where the workload can be more bearable, and workers can deal better with work and family duties. Workers can be more satisfied, motivated, more loyal to the company”, leading to “a positive impact on productivity and the company's image.”

Gender & Diversity Representatives

Requiring a company culture that is ready to respond to change at all levels, this position represents “the interests of women, but also for LGBTQ+ people, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and any other under-represented group”. Supporting this role can help “develop a sense of belonging and the contributions from different points of view, bring innovative ideas and create new opportunities.”

Gender Equality Strategies

Awareness campaigns and trainings

These practices can help foster a cultural shift towards inclusivity and community within companies. By raising awareness of unconscious biases and promoting dialogue, such initiatives can reduce instances of discrimination, break down gender stereotypes, and encourage diverse perspectives, driving creativity and innovation.

Information events to highlight career opportunities

This section focuses on recruitment and dismantling societal biases and obstacles that prevent women from accessing a wide range of jobs in the blue economy. Efforts can include presenting diverse career paths and sharing female success stories, with the aim of inspiring more women to pursue opportunities in traditionally male-dominated fields, ultimately creating a more balanced workforce.

Women's Networks and Managements Models

Benefits of these are set out as follows:

- Expanding women's professional connections.
- Providing platforms for amplifying their voices and increasing leadership opportunities.
- Fostering a sense of community for skill-sharing and capacity building.
- Advocating for gender-responsive policies.

For more information and resources visit <https://winblue-project.eu/>

Special thanks to Rebecca Zammit from [AcrossLimits](#) for her help and collaboration.



Global Women's Walk

An industry collaboration between Soundings Trade Only, Metstrade, British Marine, and Marine Industry News, the recently launched 5km Global Women's Walk initiative offers a visible, unified representation of support for women in the maritime industry.

The event is timed to coincide with International Day for Women in Maritime (18th May) organised by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), marking a symbolic acknowledgment of the growing presence and impact of women in the marine and maritime industry. Its inclusive and accessible format permits participants around the world to engage in a way that suits their individual circumstances and preferences.

Beyond fostering community amongst women in the industry, the Walk's purpose is amplified by its support for the charity RoomtoRead.org, an organisation focused on literacy and girls' education.



Global Women's Walk

Michele Goldsmith's rationale behind the Walk stems from her recognition of surmounting difficulties affecting the industry.

"In the midst of the current global tensions, pressures, and uncertainty, I wanted to create something simple yet meaningful — a way to unite as a global community to support and celebrate the women making a difference in our industry. This event is designed to uplift, inspire connection, and remind us of our shared humanity and collective passion for the marine industry. The ripple effect of the walk will extend even further through our support of Room to Read and their powerful mission to advance education, literacy, and gender equality for children around the world. Grateful thanks to our event partners — Soundings Trade Only, Metstrade, British Marine, and Marine Industry News — for their leadership and support, and to everyone who is walking or has generously contributed to Room to Read."

Inspiring moments from the Global Walk will be featured in Soundings Trade Only and Marine Industry News, as well as on the jumbo screen at the Women in the Marine Industry International Event at Metstrade on November 19, 2025.

- To find out more, visit www.tradeonlytoday.com/global-womens-walk-2025.



Michelle J. Goldsmith

ICOMIA Diversity Committee

Thank You

The ICOMIA Diversity Committee, established in 2024, includes leaders and representatives from boating associations and federations worldwide. It is currently chaired by Melanie Symes, manager of TransEurope Marinas.

If you would like to find out more about the ICOMIA Diversity Committee please contact info@icomia.com in the first instance.

Alternatively visit our website at www.icomia.org.



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