

## United Airlines to diversify its pilot pool

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Dhaka: United Airlines has announced to train 5,000 pilots this decade, including hiring new applicants with no flying experience, and plans for half of them to be women or people of colour.

[United](#) will continue to draw pilots from traditional sources such as the military, however. Airline officials said they began accepting applicants for United's flight academy on April 6.

The subject of a pilot shortage — it is not universally accepted that one exists — was hotly discussed in the airline industry before the coronavirus pandemic hit, then receded as airlines around the world grounded planes and reduced their pilot ranks in response to the plunge in air travel.

Now travel is rebounding, although it still has not returned to 2019 levels. United faces a small shortage of pilots in the near term. Last week, United said it will hire about 300 pilots, many of whom had received conditional job offers before travel dwindled last year.

The shortage at United and other major carriers will grow more severe in coming years, as large numbers of airline pilots approach the mandatory US retirement age of 65.

It is expensive to learn to fly and gain the 1,500 hours of flight time required for United

States airline pilots — a commonly cited sum is USD 100,000. To attract applicants, United says it will offer USD 1.2 million in scholarship aid this year and more in the future, but most applicants will likely need to borrow against the promise that — if successful — in several years they will earn pilots' wages at United.

United said academy students will get a basic licence within two months and a more advanced licence within a year. They would gain experience flying for one of United's regional airline partners and could become a United co-pilot or first officer in five years.

United announced its plan in a well-choreographed publicity blitz that stressed the airline's hope that half the academy graduates will be women or minorities — groups that are vastly underrepresented in cockpits today. United said about 7 per cent of its pilots are women and 13 per cent are people of colour.

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