

# Exotic Flowers Blooming in the Dark Women in the Lift Industry in Europe

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**Abstract.** Five years of professional life in the lift business in Germany brought up the plan to look into the idea of women in the lift industry in Europe. A questionnaire (see enclosure) and a direct mailing in the lift industry brought some answers and interviews. Dr. Gina Barney assisted representing views from the UK lift industry.

After six weeks of intensive research in the summer of 2016, the results are disappointing: Nearly none of the European Lift Associations, “Big 4” or SMEs are aware of the topic and its implications. Though, certainly, the few women in the industry feel that the topic is important for themselves and their career. It is also vital for the future of the lift industry taking into account the dramatically rising demand for qualified personnel.

This paper will focus on four relevant topics:

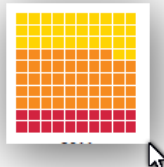
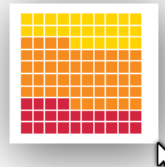
- Associations as a mirror of the lift industry
- Support from the “stronger” sex
- Women speaking for themselves
- Are women looking into a brighter future soon?

The public presentation will help the next generation of women stepping “out of the shade” as well.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Some statistics in table 1 give an impression of the female “force” in Europe, generally. More males are working than women, mostly in the higher ranking and better paid jobs.

**Table 1 Statistics about working women and men in the EU-27 [1]**

<i>Type</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Males</i>
Working persons 20-64 years	62 %	75 %
Qualification in %  Yellow – high Orange – medium Red - low		
MINT studies	14 % (USA: Engineering and technical jobs ca. 16 %)	39 %
Architecture and building industry	Ca. 37 %	
Mechanics	Ca. 5 % (Germany)	
Doctors	Ca. 48 % Germany	
Doctor's assistants	Over 99 % (Germany)	
Nurses	Ca. 86 % (Germany)	
Management	Ca. 34 %	Ca. 67 %
Secretaries	Ca. 71 % (Germany)	
Part-time jobs	32 %	9 %
Due to family duties	46 %	
Number of working years	31,6	37,3
Gender pay gap	Minus 16 %	
EU Parliament	35 % (2009)	

## 2 ASSOCIATIONS AS A MIRROR OF THE LIFT INDUSTRY

The data in table 2 derives from the websites of the European Lift Associations in summer 2016, though many give no names at all. Nearly no site is in the English language and some are even in Russian or Greek characters. The active persons comprise mainly honorary board members and technical committee chairs. Some paid staff are listed, too, mainly general managers or secretariats. If this is a sign for the activities in the member companies of the Associations women are more or less a “rounding error”. Though, if you look at the website of the French Association FA, strictly following a gender balance in its photos you might get another impression.

Through a direct mailing of the questionnaire to about 40 European Federation for Elevator Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (EFESME) and European Lift Association (ELA) member Associations the following information came in: Svein H. Kjærnet from HLF Heisleverandørenes landsforening (National Norwegian Lift Association) stated: “The Norwegian elevator industry is a man dominated business. It is about 1.3 % women among the educated installers.” He contacted the HR manager Marit Aune from KONE saying, “We do not treat women differently in KONE Norway, both genders are to be treated the same.”

**Table 2 Statistics derived from the websites of the members of  
ELA European Lift Association and  
EFESME European Federation for Elevator Small and Medium-sized Enterprises,  
both based in Belgium**

<i>Country</i>	<i>Association</i>	<i>Active Persons</i>	<i>Thereoff Females</i>
Germany	VDMA Fachverband Aufzüge und Fahrtreppen	9 honorary ? staff	0 women 1 woman
	VFA	8 honorary 5 staff	1 woman 4 women
	VMA	4 honorary	2 women
Italy	ANACAM	13 honorary	2 women ?
	AssoAscensori	13 honorary 3 staff	0 women 1 women
	Confartigianato Ascensoristi	4 honorary	1 woman
Poland	PALM	2 staff	1 woman
	SPBD	3 honorary ?	0 women
Portugal	ANIEER	9 honorary	0 women
Spain	FEPYMA	2 honorary 1 staff ?	0 woman 0 woman ?
Sweden	Swedish Ass. of Lifts & Escalators	8 honorary	1 woman
Switzerland	VSA	6 honorary 1 staff	0 women 1 woman
The Netherlands	VLR	2 staff	1 woman
Turkey	AYSAD	7 honorary	0 woman
<i>In total</i>		<i>101 persons</i>	<i>16 women = 16 %</i>

“We recommend elevator fitter as a very good job opportunity – also for females. We do exiting and different things every day!” Sunniva Utvik and Sofie Berntsen from KONE (see fig.1) are two out of only four female elevator fitters from a total of 800 in Norway. Their choice of profession was promoted by the Norwegian Elevator Union. They came into their service maintenance jobs after two years of school and two and a half years of internship in a company, followed by an examination. They do exactly the same work now as the ca. 200 male fitters in KONE Norway. Still, customers can be sceptical wondering whether the women are as capable as the men. The two women always have to prove themselves first. The same arises sometimes with new colleagues. Later on, everything is fine if they manage to gain their respect.

School girls are more interested in other topics for career choices. To attract more women, they have to see what they will be doing in a job. Also, their parents supported their choice of profession. They were proud and thought it a good idea for a safe future income. Sunniva Utvik has two younger children. They go to a full-day school. Her husband helps as well to look after them.



**Fig. 1 From the workbench of Sunniva Utvik and Sofie Berntsen in Norway ... (see also Fig. 2)**

### **3 SUPPORT FROM THE “STRONGER” SEX**

A direct mailing of the questionnaire to 205 male addressees led to three interviews:

“Get the best education you can!”, my parents said, “Then you are able to do what you want ... Don’t be afraid to be on your own!” Dr Gina (formerly George) Barney (see fig. 2) is a consultant in vertical transportation and knows the best and worst of both gender worlds. Being 81 years old, she often was the first female in a job or position. Nowadays, a rising number of women appear on the political horizon like Hillary Clinton, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the British Prime Minister Theresa May looking for other solutions to national and world problems rather than war. She attributes this to the different communication and management styles of women and men. Women have in her opinion, for example, a broader variety of tools to control a meeting.



**Fig. 2 (see also Fig. 1) ... to ballroom dancing with Dr Gina Barney in the United Kingdom**

The lift industry should not waste any talent by bringing in all people in all capacities whether full or part time. The work-life balance for women is still more difficult if they have children. The acceptance of male bosses and colleagues might help, as well as a contribution of a 50 % share of the fathers in child care. If the women take their timeout they can expect to come back into the same position that they left in the company on their return. They will sacrifice some seniority, but that's fair on the men, who soldiered on. It helps to find a suitable employer for this family period like a smaller company or a university, where you can bring your child to work or it matches school holidays. A household help is the minimum assistance required. These are things Gina discovered as a single parent.

If Gina Barney thinks hard she can come up with about 12 names of females in the lift world in the UK. Most of them are in the administration of companies, very few are outside in the field or in management. The younger generation does not bother about gender that much. The number of female students in engineering is rising. In management, she definitely sees no need for a quota. She would take simply the best, as she has done in her career. But to raise through the ranks women have to become more visible and she noticed they have to ask for pay raises.

“Don't be afraid of choosing technology as a job! There is now even a preference for women.” Annick Martin, CEO of Schindler Benelux, (see fig. 3) studied industrial engineering. One of her professors came to her to enquire whether she was sure about her choice being one of two ladies from about 20-25 men. She started her career with EDF, the French electricity supplier, for 15 years, then moved on for four years to the waste collection operation in Suez Environmental, until three years ago when she joined Schindler.



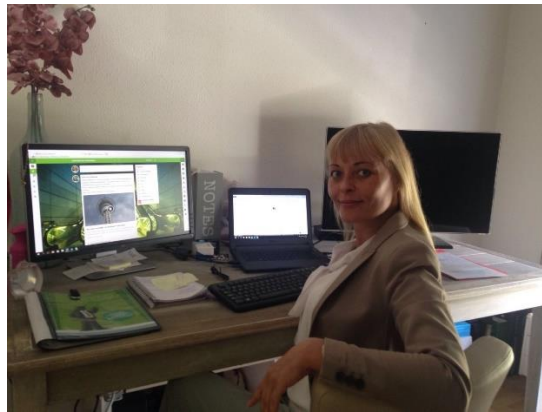
**Fig. 3 Annick Martin managing in Benelux Belgium - The Netherlands – Luxemburg**

She learned that a lift is a complex technical product with a long lifespan. So far, she has had no problems being a female boss. Of course, there are always some remarks that “she moves in an unusual environment”. She has her answers prepared and ready. It took her nearly one year to gain the know-how on the products and to win the confidence and respect of the organization. In the Benelux lift industry, women make up only about 12 % of the workforce.

Annick Martin is married. After her first child, she took a short break of 3 months but after the second, she took only 3 to 4 weeks. Her children then went to a crèche. When her children went to day school, she was not always available and sometimes felt guilty about that. The constant challenge is finding the right balance between work and family and then being a role model for your children.

In summer 2016, Brenda Borgman (see fig. 4) was employed since six months as the first female account manager with the Liftinstituut in Amsterdam/The Netherlands. In the meantime, she changed company.

She studied economics. She could be very convincing because she came into the job against 80 other applicants. In her spare time, she deals with her two children. In The Netherlands they have full-time school. In urgent cases her ex-husband helps with the children.



**Fig. 4 Brenda Borgman from The Netherlands working at her computer**

To the many male customers mostly in small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) she was very welcome: “Finally a woman!”. Sometimes they reacted “funny” or nervous on the first contact. In the “Big 4” (short version for the international companies Kone, Otis, Schindler and thyssenkrupp), women seemed to be mostly in office jobs. She met no female manager or technician there. She would have liked to see also more female CEOs paving the way for other females in their companies. “If we knew the reasons why there are so few we could act ...” she said.

#### **4 SPEAKING FOR THEMSELVES**

A direct mailing of the questionnaire to 22 women led to the following interview and some answers:

“Do not focus only on kids! Keep in touch with your job as much time as possible!” said Anja Blain (see fig. 5), since 1999 General Manager of Blain Hydraulics in Germany, who is running the company alone since the death of her husband. Professionally, she is an industrial business manager, studied languages and works closely with a good team of engineers. Her former job experience helps her a lot nowadays in her business when it comes to motivate staff or talk to customers all around the world. In the company, she has another 13 women, some are in the assembly lines but mostly they are in the administration. There is a good working relationship amongst the women in her business.





**Fig. 5 Anja Blain leading her company in Germany**

Being a woman working in the man's world is not difficult. On the contrary, she sometimes has a women's bonus. She even got a special discount from an Italian supplier on the interlift in Augsburg, Germany. She assumes it was due to her being female. The men tend also to overlook her lapses e.g. losing her thread in a public presentation on a trade fair in Mumbai, India. She just smiled and everybody smiled back, totally relaxed. So, it would be a pity if younger women would lose their womanliness only relying on their technical or management skills.

Anja Blain sees Germany at the political forefront of the women's movement. What helps are things like Kitas (Kindergarten for kids below the school age) and Elternzeit (paid time-off for both parents). She herself returned to her job the same day she was released from hospital after giving birth. She raised her two sons mostly with the help of a nanny since Kitas were not available 20 years ago. In the last years, the percentage of fathers driving children to school, involving themselves in the homework or going to sport events with the kids is steadily rising.

Marja-Liisa Siikonen Ph.D from KONE in Finland who is in charge of KONE People Flow Planning sent in some answers as well. She is already 32 years with KONE and since 2013 in her current role as director. In Finland, they recommend to have a certain percentage of women on the board of companies. She sees it as an advantage of women in the "steel" industry to bring in diversity and soft values. Therefore, she strongly advises not to look at the gender when filling up positions in the organization.

## **5 LOOKING INTO A BRIGHTER FUTURE SOON?**

Matthias Horx, founder and owner of the ZukunftsInstitut dealing with megatrends in Germany, explained in his lecture on the 10th German Planner Day of Daikin, May 2014 in Germany, about the "Female Shift", and the influence of the changing role model of women in the working environment. Due to the skills shortage, this is extremely relevant in the cooling and air-conditioning industry which nowadays is still dominated by men – as is the lift industry in Europe.

As one of the first companies in the industry, Schindler makes an effort on diversity. The company has set up a diversity committee of eight women and six men reporting directly to the global head of



Corporate Human Resources to attract more women into technical and management jobs. This approach seems to be a good way to solve the problem of the shortage of skilled personnel in the sector. At the same time, it gives some hope to women that more companies are becoming aware of the importance of this topic for the lift business in Europe in the future.

Thanks to the American journal Elevator World who planned to publish the results of the study in autumn 2016, but, it was suspended due to lack of available space.

Thanks also to the women speaking their minds freely in the interviews. They are helping the next generation of women stepping “out of the shade” as well.

### **BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS**

The authoress was the Managing Director of VFA-Interlift e.V. in Hamburg, Germany.

She studied Mechanical Engineering at Ruhr-University in Bochum, Germany, and, immediately after graduation, worked as an energy consultant for ERPAG Lugano, Switzerland. Prior to joining VFA-Interlift, Stricker-Berghoff worked for VDI, the Association of German Engineers in Düsseldorf, Germany, as Secretary for Building Services and was in charge of the VDI-Guideline department. She also served one term as Director General for the Chamber of Commerce in Lübeck, Germany. Since 2005 she is working as a coach and consultant for management and marketing in her own engineering office ProEconomy in Lübeck-Travemünde, Germany, mainly for energy and building services companies.

Her “hobby” is women in engineering and management. So, she is a Member of the Board of VDI The Association of German Engineers – fib Women in Engineering, the VDI delegate in the DF National Council of German Women’s Organizations and the VDI delegate in the Council of Women’s Organizations of the German State Schleswig-Holstein.

### **LITERATURE REFERENCES**

[1] DESTATIS, Frauen und Männer auf dem Arbeitsmarkt Deutschland und Europa, Oct. 2012

## 8 Appendix

**Questionnaire**  
**"Women in the European Elevator Business"**

I am writing an article for the U.S. magazine Elevator World in September 2016, hopefully with some fresh and unique data. Therefore, I would be grateful if you could personally answer a few questions until **Tuesday 16 August** by just typing in your answer and sending it back by mail to me. Please feel free to pass this questionnaire on to other women in the elevator business in Europe.

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1. About you
  - 1.1. What profession did you train or study?
  - 1.2. How long have you been you working at all? In the elevator business? In your company? In your job?
  - 1.3. What type of company are you working in? e.g. producer of elevators/components, maintenance ...
  - 1.4. What is your job in the company? e.g. management/owner, project manager, sales person ...
  - 1.5. Do you want to share some personal experience on your work in the elevator business?  
 What about a humorous or annoying story that happened to you?
2. Some statistics
  - 2.1. Do you have any figures on women in the elevator business in the EU, your home country and/or your own company?
  - 2.2. Do you have any figures about women in engineering and/or management in the elevator business in the EU, your home country and/or in your own company?
3. Political views
  - 3.1. What do you see generally as the advantages and disadvantages of women in the elevator business?
  - 3.2. What is done already to raise the percentage of women mainly in technical and management jobs in the EU, your home country and/or your own company?
  - 3.3. What should be done to raise the percentage of women mainly in technical and management jobs in the EU, your home country and/or your own company?
4. Contact data  
 If you would like to be interviewed by phone please give me your contact data including name, company, country, phone number and mail address.

I guarantee that I will use all answers only personally and anonymously for this article or similar publications or lectures. I will not pass them on to anybody else at any time. Your name, photo or company name will only be mentioned after a phone interview which will be individually legitimated before publication, too.

Thank you for your kind support of the project by contributing any information you may have!

Undine Stricker-Berghoff