

## Why GAO Did This Study

The aviation industry has raised questions about whether the demand for commercial airline pilots and aircraft mechanics may exceed supply in the future. Industry’s demand for pilots and mechanics is driven by a number of factors. These include projected demand for air travel and the number of aircraft that airlines expect to use to fulfill that demand, as well as anticipated workforce attrition and retirements.

The FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018 includes a provision for GAO to study the aviation and aerospace workforce of the future, including the current and future supply of individuals in the workforce. This report examines the supply of and demand for 1) commercial airline pilots and 2) aircraft mechanics; and examines 3) actions the aviation industry and FAA have taken to address workforce supply concerns, among other objectives.

GAO reviewed government and industry labor supply, employment, and wage data for 2017 through 2022 using the most recent data available at the time of the analyses; and several government and private sector aviation forecasts. GAO reviewed relevant federal laws and regulations and FAA documentation including rulemaking documents. GAO interviewed officials from FAA and representatives from a non-generalizable sample of 25 aviation industry stakeholders. These included airlines, collegiate flight schools, aviation maintenance schools, repair stations, labor unions, aviation consultants and academics, and industry associations.

View [GAO-23-105571](#). For more information, contact Heather Krause at (202) 512-2834 or [krauseh@gao.gov](mailto:krauseh@gao.gov).

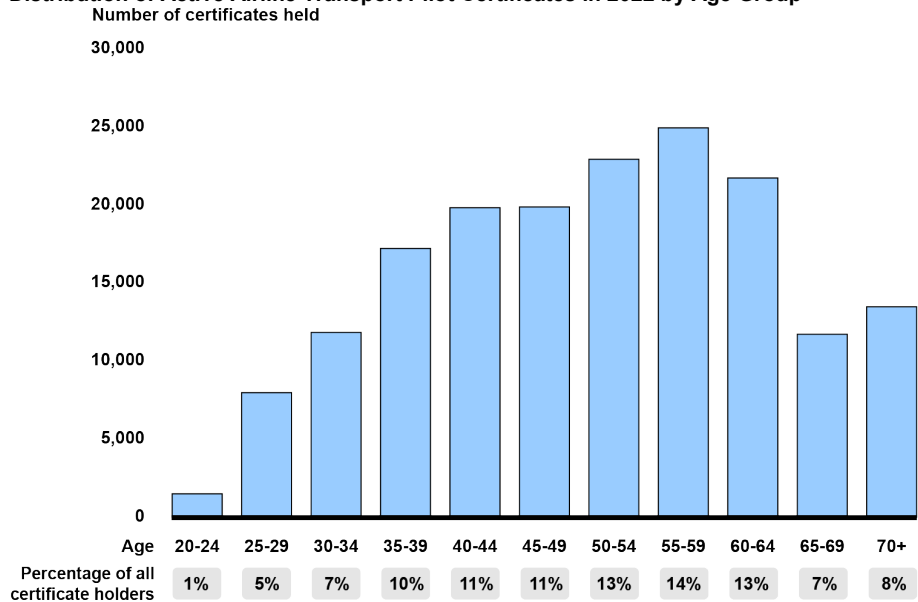
## AVIATION WORKFORCE

### Current and Future Availability of Airline Pilots and Aircraft Mechanics

#### What GAO Found

Current pilot supply—as measured by the number of individuals qualified to be U.S. passenger airline pilots—grew from 2017 through 2022. Enrollments in pilot training schools also increased in recent years. Based on the Federal Aviation Administration’s (FAA) forecasts and pilot certification data, the number of these pilots under the current mandatory retirement age of 65 may increase over the next 20 years. However, the extent to which projected supply would exceed or fall short of industry’s demand for pilots is unknown given uncertainties surrounding future demand. Publicly available data on hiring, employment, and wages indicate strong current demand for pilots. Meeting that demand has been particularly difficult for regional airlines—which generally serve smaller communities—and has, according to them, affected their operations.

**Distribution of Active Airline Transport Pilot Certificates in 2022 by Age Group**



Source: GAO analysis of Federal Aviation Administration information. | GAO-23-105571

Note: Pilots age 65 and over are no longer eligible for employment with scheduled U.S. passenger airlines, but could work as pilots or instructors elsewhere.

The number of people newly certificated by FAA to be aircraft mechanics grew from 2017 through 2022. Less is known about how many mechanics enter or exit the aviation industry each year and the extent of demand for aircraft mechanics. Nevertheless, aviation businesses GAO interviewed reported challenges maintaining sufficient numbers of mechanics.

Aviation industry stakeholders have taken steps to address workforce supply concerns. Airlines and repair stations are increasing pay for pilots and mechanics. For example, several regional airlines raised pay substantially in 2022. Airlines are also creating flight schools. FAA is undertaking efforts to support industry workforce development, including awarding grants to attract young people to aviation careers.