Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on ‘How EU policies have impacted on the job opportunities, the training needs and the working conditions of transport workers’
(exploratory opinion at the request of the Commission)
(2011/C 248/04)

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On 17 November 2010, the European Commission decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 304 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, on

How EU policies have impacted on the job opportunities, the training needs and the working conditions of transport workers

(exploratory opinion).

The Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society, which was responsible for preparing the Committee’s work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 24 May 2011.

At its 472nd plenary session, held on 15 and 16 June 2011 (meeting of 15 June), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 150 votes to 2, with 8 abstentions.

The transport sector will face a number of challenges in the near future, such as scarcity of petrol resources and the possible increase in petrol prices, the need for progress in terms of energy efficiency, the requirement to contribute towards fighting climate change and the shift to a low carbon economy, as well as the aging of the population with its impact on availability of qualified personnel on the one hand and different mobility needs on the other hand. These developments are taken into account in the EESC opinion.

1. Recommendations and conclusions

1.1 The EESC points out that the transport sector, being an important source of employment which accounts for 4.4% of the total EU workforce, offers major employment potential for Europe in the future. It is also vital to the economic development of Europe, citizens’ mobility, social inclusion and for European social and economic cohesion.

1.2 The EESC recommends attracting women and young workers to employment opportunities in the transport sector with measures which improve employment quality across all modes of transport, working conditions, training and Lifelong Learning (LLL), career opportunities, occupational and occupational health and safety and which contribute to a better work-life-balance.

1.3 The EESC recommends that – with the support of the European Commission – all modes of transport take stock of existing training opportunities and analyse the need for training in the future at national, regional and company level. A focus on continuous training (LLL) is important.

1.4 The EESC is of the opinion that a sufficient supply of high-quality training in training institutes and/or in-house must be ensured, requiring cooperation between social partners, regions and training institutes in all transport modes. Cooperation between training centres at a European level is strongly recommended by the EESC. The EESC is of the opinion that the trainees should not bear the cost of any vocational training. This is particularly relevant for the objective of promoting a career in the transport sector.

1.5 The EESC recommends the introduction of EU legislation on certification and licensing of on-board personnel in trains and cabin crew in aircrafts as a means for ensuring quality employment, quality of services, safety and facilitating worker mobility across Europe.

1.6 The EESC considers Directive 2003/59/EC to be a positive example and asks the European Commission to consider further legislation on compulsory training and continuous training for other modes of transport.

1.7 In order to promote transport as a profession, the EESC recommends coordinated actions at national, regional and local level, which explain the transport sector and promote its various professions, for example in schools.

1.8 The EESC emphasises that success in attracting women to a profession in transport is highly dependent on incentives which will adapt the transport industry to the specific needs of female workers. It recommends that the transport sector and its various companies should develop policies that encourage women to work in the sector.
1.9 In view of demographic change and the ageing work force the EESC recommends that the sector and its companies should analyse the age structure of their personnel and their future employment needs in order to develop training, work organisation and measures for improving occupational health which are adapted to the needs of different age groups.

1.9.1 The EESC also recommends placing stronger emphasis on offering career opportunities to workers within the transport sector in order to make the sector attractive to young people.

1.9.2 The EESC recommends that the maritime sector should promote the move from rating positions to officer status.

1.9.3 The EESC recommends that the public transport sector should make greater efforts to offer career opportunities for bus drivers, such as team leader positions and traffic planning positions.

1.10 The EESC considers the personal safety of transport workers and passengers and the prevention of physical attacks and violence to be a major challenge and strongly recommends a zero tolerance policy against violence.

1.10.1 The EESC recommends the establishment of preventive measures in the field of infrastructure, such as sufficient, affordable and safe parking areas in road freight transport and good quality rail, metro, tram and bus stations. The EU should provide financial support for these infrastructure measures.

1.10.2 The EESC recommends employing sufficient numbers of properly qualified and trained personnel in stations and on board public transport as a preventive measure against violence.

1.10.3 The EESC recommends the establishment of a Road Safety Agency.

1.11 Taking into account Article 9 of the Lisbon Treaty and the Charter of Fundamental Social Rights, the European Commission should favour a social policy for transport. The EESC is of the opinion that further steps towards liberalisation, if any, should be proposed only after serious analysis of the social consequences of previous liberalisation steps, a meaningful social impact assessment and with an inbuilt guarantee that competition is not based on cheaper labour costs but on the quality of the services.

1.11.1 The EESC recommends, in the case of competitive tenders such as for airport ground handling services or all kinds of public transport services, guaranteeing employment security via a compulsory transfer of staff to new operators and safeguarding the level of working conditions and pay by maintaining the application of the collective agreement provisions that are in place where the service is delivered (1). In order to do this, the EESC recommends the introduction of a social clause.

1.11.2 Regarding the implementation of the Single European Sky, including Functional Airspace Blocks and SESAR, the EESC calls for the Member States to enter into meaningful consultation with the social partners and all other stakeholders in order to take balanced measures to achieve these goals while avoiding job losses.

1.12 The EESC is of the opinion that social legislation in transport must be effectively monitored, enforced and infringements effectively sanctioned by means of harmonised rules. The capacities of the relevant enforcement authorities must be strengthened and better coordination and cooperation is needed.

1.13 The EESC recommends introducing EU legislation for the regular checking of working and rest time for mobile railway workers engaged in cross-border transport services. The EESC underlines the need for better enforcement of the provisions of the posted workers’ directive in particular in the case of road transport cabotage.

1.14 The EESC recommends paying special attention to factors which promote a better work-life balance for mobile workers in the transport industry. Social legislation for the transport industry should be improved with regard to working time.

1.14.1 The EESC recommends introducing additional legislative measures on manning standards on board maritime and inland waterway vessels in order to guarantee quality and safety.

1.14.2 The EESC recommends a better and stricter use of State Aid Guidelines (SAG) schemes in the maritime sector, strengthening the link between the granting of public subsidies or tax exemptions and employment guarantees and training obligations.

1.14.3 The EESC is of the opinion that the EU institutions and the EASA should increase cooperation with stakeholders in achieving safety-oriented and science-based Flight Time Limit rules for air crew.

1.14.4 The EESC recommends sector-specific health and safety legislation for the different transport modes, since general EU health and safety legislation often does not take into account the special conditions in the transport sector.

1.14.5 The EESC is of the opinion that proper legislation is needed in order to avoid ‘flagging-out’ of work contracts.

(1) See also Recital 17 in combination with articles 4(5) and 4(6) in the EU’s Regulation (EC) No 1370/2007 on public passenger transport by road and rail.
1.15 The EESC strongly supports social dialogue. At European level, the various sectoral Social Dialogue Committees must play a more important role in assessing the social impact of Commission proposals at an early stage and make their own remarks and proposals for the various modes of transport.

1.15.1 The EESC recommends that the European Commission, via DG Move, should cooperate more effectively with the sectoral Social Dialogue Committees and takes the expertise of the social partners into consideration at the earliest stages.

1.16 The EESC is of the opinion that the European institutions and the European social partners do not have sufficient statistics and comparative analyses on employment and working conditions for the various modes of transport at their disposal. Therefore the EESC supports the establishment of a Social, Employment and Training Observatory in the transport sector, which should provide substantial information for a better assessment and ex-post evaluation of the social impact of transport policy measures, in order to support the European social partners in sectoral European social dialogue.

2. The transport sector is an important source of employment for the European Union.

2.1 From a quantitative point of view, employment in the transport market is substantial, accounting for some 9.2 million workers and 4.4% of the total EU work force in 2007. These figures include pipelines, travel agencies/tour operators and auxiliary transport services such as cargo handling, storage and warehousing.

2.2 The various modes of transport employ around 2.9 million workers in road freight transport, 1.9 million workers in road passenger transport, 864 000 on the railways, 43 400 on the inland waterways, 184 000 in sea shipping and 409 000 in aviation. Transport auxiliary services employ about 2.3 million workers (2).

2.3 Between 2004 and 2007 the total number of transport workers steadily increased from 8.6 to 9.2 million workers in the EU’s 27 Member States. The increase took place mainly in the road freight and passenger sectors and auxiliary services. Employment in the railway sector decreased sharply by 117 000 workers from 981 848 workers in 2004 to 864 000 in 2007 (3).

2.4 Transport employment in was severely affected by the economic crisis in 2008 and 2009, particularly in the freight sector.

2.5 Future employment trends in transport depend on a number of factors such as the development of trade and economic activities, an ageing population and people’s mobility patterns, technological developments, energy availability and prices, measures towards sustainable transport (modal shift, i.e. using public transport instead of a private car, avoiding transport) (4), alternative transport modes such as cycling (5).

3. Characteristics of employment in the transport sector: low attractiveness - a problem for the future

3.1 The transport sector does not enjoy a spotless reputation as an employment sector and jobs in it are considered rather unattractive. Sector analyses undertaken by the European Working Conditions Surveys 2000 and 2005 of the European Foundation for the Improvement on Working and Living Conditions both confirmed that the transport sector belongs to the least favourable sectors with regard to indicators on working conditions.

3.2 Indicators which were evaluated as less favourable in the 3rd Survey 2000 were ambient conditions, ergonomics, non-standard working hours, long working hours, high job demands, no job control, unskilled work, low task flexibility, discrimination.

3.3 Indicators in the 4th Survey 2005: (only land transport) were working hours, non-standard working hours, balance between working hours and family/social commitments, job control, skilled work, violence, stress, musculoskeletal problems (6).

3.4 The majority of work in the transport sector involves mobility (drivers, pilots, on-board crew of the various sectors) or concerns jobs directly linked to traffic such as traffic control. ‘Drivers and mobile plant operators represent the largest share of employees in the EU (45% in 2006)’ (7). The regular and often very long absences from home, in addition to regular shift work, operate to the detriment of workers’ increasing demands for a better work-life-balance. Additionally, pay is low in most of these professions and occupations.

3.4.1 The EESC considers that we cannot be satisfied with uncomfortable rest periods. On the contrary, we must endeavour to ensure, in all cases, that satisfactory conditions for rest are met for the staff of all transport modes.

3.5 The sector is largely male-dominated and amongst the sectors with the highest gender segregation employing only 21.1% women (82.2% male workers in land transport). Research has shown that increasing female employment often results in an improvement of working conditions for both genders.

(2) DG Move Statistical pocketbook 2010.
(7) See footnote 2.
3.6 Transport is with reason considered a dangerous activity. Operational and occupational safety are closely linked, in particular for drivers. Fatal accidents are also an issue for maintenance workers (e.g. track maintenance in the rail sector), train-shunting and accidents on-board vessels. Furthermore, there is a problem of violence and physical attack (the stealing of cargo in road transport, physical attacks on public passenger transport on the roads and by rail, and even piracy in the maritime transport sector).

3.7 The demographic pattern in transport is worrying. The average age of workers in transport is high. Many will retire within the coming 10 to 20 years. Only 17.5% of the workforce is in the 15 to 29 age group and 57.5% of the workforce in the sector aged 30 to 49 (2006) (8).

3.8 Many sectors already report serious labour shortages, in particular for mobile jobs. In view of the ageing population in Europe and competition among sectors and companies to attract (young) workers, this will cause serious problems for the transport sector in the future. Attractiveness must be increased by providing attractive training provision, career opportunities within the same sector and the improvement of working conditions. The transport sector must aim to meet the needs of young workers and women for a better work-life balance. Women could be better integrated into the transport sector through affirmative action, which requires at least new sanitary infrastructure, dressing rooms and accommodation and a more reasonable assessment of continuous working time, stress and fatigue in relation to each transport mode.

4. Qualification and training needs – but also career opportunities

4.1 Employees with medium-level qualifications account for the highest share in the transport and logistics sector. Across the EU, they represent 58%. Low-qualified workers represent 28% of workers across the EU as a whole. In the new Member States, the qualification level is higher with 81% of transport workers in possession of medium-level qualifications and only 7% with low qualifications. 14% of all EU employees in the transport and logistics sector have higher qualifications (2006). ‘However, looking at the changes from 2000 to 2006, it can be seen that the qualification requirements are rising across the sector. The share of people with low qualifications has declined in every occupation’ (9).

4.2 Technological developments and the increased use of ICT in all sectors of transport require higher education and more continuous training. Lifelong learning is of little relevance to most employees in the transport professions with medium and low levels of education. A more customer-orientated approach requires skills that were previously not part of basic training in the more technically oriented transport professions. Operational and occupational safety and ‘eco-driving’, for example, require continuous training.

4.3 The demographic development and the disadvantageous age structure in the transport sector require – besides new concepts for work organisation – more investment in adapted continuous training for the ageing work force. In particular, the job of driver is an occupation which often cannot be continued until retirement age because of occupational health problems.

4.4 Attractive training provision and better career opportunities within the sector and/or companies are important ways of attracting young people into the transport sector. For example, the move from rating positions to officer status must be promoted in the maritime sector. Bus drivers in local public transport should have better opportunities for moving to traffic planning or team leader positions. Training must be considered as an investment in the future.

5. Working conditions – mobile workers in transport are mobile

5.1 A major problem in transport, arising with the establishment of the Internal Transport Market and the deregulation of the transport sectors, is the – by definition – high mobility of mobile workers, which facilitates delocalisation of transport jobs and social dumping practices to a higher degree than in other sectors. Insufficient attention was paid to social legislation, accompanying social measures and measures to safeguard and avoid social dumping practices.

5.2 Freedom of establishment and open transport markets are often used in inland waterways, road transport or the maritime sector for instance, to establish companies in EU countries with lower labour costs, lower social security contributions and/or tax advantages without offering services in these countries. They exploit social and wage differences between countries for competitive advantage. This results in difficulties in tracing work contracts, ensuring social security schemes, and controlling and enforcing health and safety rules. In order to avoid social dumping it is necessary to ensure that the host country principle is applied, which means the application of the social conditions of the country in which the service is carried out.

5.3 The discussion on sustainable transport and the internalisation of external (environmental) costs puts the question of a fair price for transport on the agenda. A fair price for transport should also include, however, a fair price for quality employment in the sector. This is essential for:

— Quality services

— Safety

— Attractiveness of the transport sector.
5.4 A fair social price for quality employment in transport should be ensured via regulatory measures and social dialogue.

5.5 Passengers in public passenger transport and private passenger transport also demand quality services, safe journeys and protection from aggression and violence.

6. Activities of the Commission in the social field of transport

6.1 In the 2006 Communication 'Keep Europe moving', the Commission formulates the following as one of the objectives of the Community's transport policy: 'In the social area, the EU policy promotes employment quality improvement and better qualifications for European transport workers'.

6.2 The evaluation study on the performance of the Common Transport Policy (11), in particular Task 1.6 'Social aspects' gives a list of Commission legislative initiatives and policy documents in the social field of transport. They are partly based on negotiations and initiatives of the European social partners. However, the report states that an assessment is difficult because of lack of data or because the measures have only been recently introduced and are thus not yet effective.

6.3 We may conclude that:

6.3.1 The Commission's impact assessment studies give high priority to economic evaluation and are underdeveloped as regards the social impact assessment of Community initiatives. It is difficult to reverse the situation after changes have been implemented.

6.3.2 The Commission should carefully analyse the social consequences of its proposals in advance and propose accompanying social measures when making proposals on further liberalisation of the transport market.

6.3.3 Reliable European data and information about the transport labour market and the actual working conditions in the different transport sectors are lacking; the NACE statistical information on employment is too general for a proper analysis of the different sectors; the few comparative studies on certain sector aspects date quickly; a social observatory in transport is needed, which should have systematic access to data from labour inspectorates in the Member States.

6.3.4 There is still a need for further legislative initiatives in order to tackle existing problems. Close cooperation with the different European Sectoral Social Dialogues is essential and the Commission should in any case evaluate and use the expertise resulting from the social dialogue and involve the social partners at an early stage.

7. Employment opportunities, training needs and working conditions – The different transport sectors

7.1 Road transport sector

7.1.1 The sector is experiencing increasing difficulties in recruiting drivers. This is the biggest challenge facing the road transport sector. One cannot ignore that fact that this is the result of the conditions within which drivers and industry have to operate. From the drivers' perspective, high work pressure, unfriendly working hours and below-average remuneration make road transport a sector with a poor social record. On the other hand, operators – particularly the small and medium-sized enterprises – must cope in an environment dominated by fierce intra-sector competition, to which one has to add the impact of external factors such as the economic crisis and high fuel prices.

7.1.2 Directive 2003/59/EC introduces compulsory initial and continuous training for professional drivers. The Directive came into force in September 2009 for passenger transport and for freight transport in September 2010. The objective is not only improved road safety but also the enhancement of the quality of the profession. This is a good example of a regulatory measure that will have a further positive impact on the status of the driver ultimately helping to make the profession more attractive, especially as substantial technological progress in this sector requires highly skilled professional drivers. However, all now depends on the Member States' implementation of the directive. The challenge consists in establishing sufficient, high-quality training provision, a quality training curriculum and the funding of initial and continuous training. With regard to the latter, practices have emerged whereby costs of the initial and/or continuous training are imposed on the driver, which will only render, in the mid-term, recruitment problems in the sector more severe.

7.1.3 The road transport sector benefits from its own social legislation. The chief problem is the failure to enforce working, driving and rest time regulations, although legislation has been improved and more checks are carried out. The same is true for the application of the posted workers' directive for road transport workers engaged in cabotage services.

7.1.4 EU road transport legislation is to apply without exceptions throughout the sector, ensuring a level playing field for fair competition, road safety and occupational health and safety.

7.1.5 For EU policy makers to undertake measures that lead to true sustainability in the sector – incentives for operators to invest in new fleets and technology; better capacity in Member States to enforce road transport legislation; measures to make the profession of driver highly skilled, which will automatically lead to improving the image of the profession.
7.1.6 Improvement of road infrastructure, in particular the provision of safe and affordable parking areas and rest facilities; part of the revenues obtained from the 'Eurovignette' could be used to improve the quality of parking areas and rest facilities – this would benefit both business (safety of cargo) and professional drivers.

7.1.7 The establishment of a European Road Safety Agency with the task of safeguarding the above needs and requirements (12).

7.2 Urban public transport

7.2.1 In the EU about 1 million workers are employed in urban public transport (UITP figures). Depending on policies to promote collective transport in agglomerations, cities and rural areas employment opportunities are potentially high.

7.2.2 However, local public transport is also facing recruitment problems and public transport is confronted with the problem of an ageing work force. The majority of public transport workers are drivers. Good working conditions, a better work-life balance and career opportunities are elements which will attract women and young people to the sector.

7.2.3 The ‘drivers’ training directive’ 2003/59/EC applies to public transport by bus.

7.2.4 Besides financing, a major challenge for public transport is providing good quality services. The relation between quality at work (good working conditions) and quality of services is the subject of the sectoral European Social Dialogue.

7.2.5 Additionally, violence and aggression constitute a serious problem in public passenger transport. A policy based on zero tolerance against violence protects passengers and workers and helps to make public transport more attractive.

7.3 Railway sector

7.3.1 The railway sector is undergoing continuous restructuring with productivity increases and employment reduction: e.g. sales personnel in train stations, on-board personnel in regional passenger transport, reduction in the use of labour-intensive single wagons, with less labour-intensive complete trains being used in freight transport instead. New technologies like ERTMS or automatic shunting systems are labour rationalisation technologies, which mainly affect traffic control personnel or shunting professions. Unlike the current trend, promoting single wagon load transport allows a credible environmental alternative to road and generates employment (13).

7.3.2 New market entrants in the rail freight business concentrate on full train services with low labour intensity, while investment in the development of new infrastructure and the improvement of existing networks will create jobs in maintenance and support services for this new infrastructure.

7.3.3 In this case, job opportunities due to increased rail transport/modal shift will not only benefit drivers. However, the rail sector is also facing recruitment problems at the level of higher education (engineers) and companies face a disadvantageous demographic structure.

7.3.4 Training needs:

— Increased cross-border traffic requires increased training in national safety regulations and in language skills for both, drivers and on-board personnel.

— A high level of safety and high quality services must be ensured by the certification of on-board personnel.

— The introduction of new technologies like ERTMS changes the profile of drivers and traffic control personnel increasing the need for IT training.

— The tendency to multi-skilling in the rail freight sector requires the definition of new professions and appropriate training courses.

— The restructuring of the sector goes hand in hand with a multitude of actors and of new interfaces. More personnel will be needed at the administrative managerial level. The progressive ageing of the existing rail personnel and increasing recruitment problems require adequate training and lifelong learning programmes for different age groups of employees to be developed.

7.3.5 Working conditions:

— The continual pressure for productivity increases and cost-cutting within the sector is resulting in a decline in working conditions and a two-tier work force. With the opening of markets and increased cross-border services, the monitoring and enforcement of working, driving and rest times as well as of drivers’ qualification levels is necessary.

7.4 Inland waterway transport (IWT)

7.4.1 IWT is considered as an environmentally-friendly mode of transport whose potential is as yet under-used. However, water levels are currently dropping on major rivers, which is a major challenge for the sector. New vessel concepts are being researched as well as new delivery systems (floating stocks).
7.4.2 There is a serious labour shortage in IWT (both on the Rhine and Danube) in both freight and passenger transport. The younger generation is not interested in the sector because of the unfavourable work/family life balance, long working hours and unattractive working conditions (in particular the long periods away from home). A real legislative/regulatory framework is lacking resulting in delocalisation to countries which exploit fiscal differences between countries and less favourable social and wage conditions for competitive advantages, e.g. within EU, to Malta and Cyprus.

7.4.3 These problems are being addressed via social dialogue and at EU-level through several initiatives:

— PLATINA = action platform of NAIADES — several work packages address bottlenecks in the industry;

— jobs and skills = EU work package to make the sector more attractive;

— EDINNA (Education Inland Navigation) = a European platform for all educational training centres has been established;

— work is ongoing on EU harmonised job profiles (skipper and sailor) – this will be the formal basis for unified minimum training standards in EU IWT;

— work is ongoing on STCIN = European standards on training and certification in Inland Navigation.

7.4.4 The CCNR (Central Commission for Navigation on the Rhine) functions as the knowledge centre for IWT in Europe and, in cooperation with the European Commission, is harmonising the boatmasters’ certificate via the mutual recognition system. The CCNR is commissioned by the EC to research and publish six-monthly market observations which include social and economic data so that reliable information is available. In cooperation with the CCNR a unique identification system is being researched and developed: not only will it show workers’ identity, but it will also monitor/map working/resting and free time and education/training/certification.

7.5 Aviation sector

7.5.1 Aviation is an essential service to the EU economy and its continuance is core to supporting social cohesion and regional development. The competitiveness of the European air transport industry internationally can be strengthened by using all the advantages conferred by the European Social Model. Companies shall ensure the proper application of Community and national social legislation as well as collective agreements in order to protect employment and avoid social dumping. Special efforts to undertake social dialogue at company and national level shall be undertaken to find solutions to tackle current civil aviation challenges.

7.5.2 To deliver safety, security, efficiency and service quality, in a spirit of public service obligations, an atmosphere of trust, responsibility and cooperation between employers and employees at the appropriate level(s) is needed. The core objective should be to set up a socially and ecologically sustainable civil aviation industry.

7.5.3 The Economic and Social Committee wishes to take into consideration the implementation of the Single European Sky, including Functional Airspace Blocks and SESAR, in which the human factor and the social dialogue are paramount to the success of the sector. The Member States should enter into meaningful consultation with the social partners and all other stakeholders in order to take balanced measures to achieve these goals and avoid job losses (14).

7.5.4 All civil aviation employees, and especially the ground handling workers, must be treated as favourably as other European employees. This is not currently the case: where there are calls for tenders, employees must, in all cases, benefit from the protection of transfer rights, for example.

7.5.5 The EU must support measures which recognise and validate qualifications in the sector. All players should act together, including through negotiations, and invest in vocational training and qualification. In a phased approach, and through agreements, the best standards of training at European level can be achieved, allowing more specific rules to be set up at all other levels and further work on the validation of vocational training and the involvement of other related parties (European institutions, national authorities, etc).

7.5.6 Finally, in the light of the above, it is also crucial that air safety remains the most important priority in guiding European legislative action. As regards the latter, the EU Institutions and the EASA should consult stakeholders in order to achieve safety-oriented and science-based Flight Time Limitations and Rest Requirements for air crew that successfully mitigate fatigue due to long working hours, changing shift patterns and time zone transitions. Fatigue is a threat to aviation safety because it results in reduced alertness and performance. Fatigue is a normal response to many conditions common to flight operations because of sleep loss, shift work, and long duty cycles.

7.6 Maritime transport sector

7.6.1 The major challenge in the maritime transport sector is the long-term decline in the employment of European seafarers with the associated loss of European maritime know-how. Flags of convenience (FOCs) and low-cost crews from developing...(14) OJ C 182, 4.8.2009, p. 50.
countries are still being used. International trade by European-owned and controlled vessels is dominated by an almost entirely non-domiciled crew, particularly for ratings. The EESC Conference on the ‘Attractiveness of maritime professions’ (11 March 2010) addressed all the reasons why maritime professions are unattractive, highlighted the need to upgrade maritime education and promoted EU action in this respect.

7.6.2 The maritime transport sector is also characterised by an ageing workforce. The retention of officers beyond the age of retirement is mainly caused by the current shortage of officers and companies’ unwillingness to promote from ratings’ positions to officers’ level.

7.6.3 A project carried out in the framework of the European Social Dialogue proved however, that the problem is not a shortage of young European trainees ready to enter a career at sea but rather a shortage of job opportunities and training positions onboard. There is a clear need to create an environment which facilitates the recruitment and training of European seafarers and the progression from rating to officer. This could be encouraged through a better and stricter use of State Aid Guidelines (SAG) schemes, in particular by strengthening the link between the granting of public subsidies or tax exemptions and both employment guarantees and training obligations.

7.6.4 Shipowners are shifting business away from Europe and investing more and more in training centres and maritime academies in third countries, especially in the Far East. There is a need to develop a network of Training and Education Institutes in Europe in order to create maritime education systems that both reflect and adapt to new emerging skills needs. As regards this latter aspect in particular, there is a strong case for looking into more flexible and blended modes of learning for both initial education and Lifelong Learning. The education system and the labour market should respond to the need for a more flexible career path (transition from sea to land or the other way-round), including management, business and commercial modules of education and training on top of sector-specific skills.

7.6.5 As regards working conditions, problems arise from the casualisation of jobs, the increasing use of manning agencies and the lack of a direct or only a remote employment relationship with the shipping companies. Often, working and living conditions onboard are poor and accommodation on board inadequate, especially for women and cadets, and communication facilities are lacking. Furthermore, inadequate manning levels increase fatigue and put the safe operation of vessels at risk. The problem of piracy and criminalisation of seafarers have contributed to a deterioration in the image of the industry and the willingness to consider a career at sea.

7.6.6 In relation to sea connections between the European mainland and the islands, and between islands, the EESC believes that public service obligations should be strengthened in order to promote economic, social and territorial cohesion, while ensuring that the regulation of State aid does not jeopardise the provision of services of general economic interest.

7.6.7 Some urgent and pending initiatives would be:

— to assess the feasibility of a new Community initiative, covering intra-EU trade in the form of a revamped legislative proposal on manning conditions;

— to assess the feasibility of revising SAG by closing loopholes in order to ensure that EU taxpayers’ money is primarily spent on supporting the employment of EU seafarers, their employment, training and inclusion in all social legislation from which they are currently excluded;

— ratification of the ILO MLC 2006 and enforcement via effective Port State Control;

— a uniform and consistent EU methodology for collecting data on seafarers’ employment.

7.7 Port sector

7.7.1 As in other transport sectors, port employment analyses also suffer from a lack of statistics and quantitative data. Recognising this problem, DG MOVE has recently commissioned a study on port employment. However this may not be sufficient to fill the gap in a systematic way, and both Eurostat and the Member States should be invited to contribute to this exercise. The definition of what a port worker is, is a key problem. Historically, a port worker was a stevedore – loading and unloading cargoes using his physical strength – but containerisation and technological improvements resulted in a diversification of port work which makes a definition more difficult. This is complicated further by the fact that more and more logistics workers operate within the port area but often work in vastly varying conditions. The EESC considers an imposed liberalisation of port services to be unacceptable.

7.7.2 Training needs: training provisions and requirements for port workers vary across Europe, with some countries having developed extensive training systems and others which offer very poor training. Most major companies have developed their own training schemes and most of the big ports have their own training centres. However, small companies and small ports suffer from a lack of adequate training with negative consequences for safety. A major challenge for training in ports is the need to adapt existing schemes to rapid technological change and even to anticipate them.
7.7.3 Creating a common framework for training (identifying elements and modules that should be present in each training programme and allowing countries with less effective schemes to improve their training programmes) should be considered. In general, more training is needed to improve the competitiveness of EU ports and to make EU ports safer workplaces. Another factor is the link between training and better jobs: port workers are professional workers and training provisions should be designed in such a way as to ensure a professional path and allow workers to accumulate multiple skills. Port training should be managed jointly by the social partners and public authorities, as is the case in many ports already.

7.7.4 Working conditions: safety is still a major issue in ports, particularly with regard to containers. Accident reporting needs to be improved, and to include better data on accidents and more details (causes, places, etc.). Accident reporting should be standardised across Europe (a common definition of what an accident is should be agreed, etc.).

7.7.5 The failure to enforce occupational Health & Safety legislation is a further issue. There is currently no specific EU legislation on Health & Safety in ports, and the general framework directive applies. The need to table sector-specific regulation in this area should be carefully assessed. Furthermore, improving working conditions in ports must be implemented via improved social dialogue at local, national and European level. In the particular context of industrial changes (e.g. port privatisation), this dialogue should result in negotiated solutions aimed at preventing any adverse consequences with regard to working conditions.


The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Staffan NILSSON