



EUROPEAN
TRANSPORT
WORKERS'
FEDERATION

Labour shortage in IWT

Policy Position Paper



Labour shortage in IWT

Addressing the sectors' attractiveness

A real migration is witnessed from Eastern Europe to West-Europe. It is a well known fact that the terms & conditions in the West are much more interesting than in the East (Danube region) and most nautical staff find a much better paid job in the West leaving the Danube area almost completely drained.

Terms and conditions for nautical staff have never been better. An experienced boatmaster can more or less ask for whatever terms and conditions, and will see his every wish granted.

The fact that the shortage now takes on such an important proportion is partially due to the cover up of 2 years of COVID hibernation. The River Cruise is flourishing again and newly builds are entering the sector, urgently needing crew.

We witness some serious developments, such as:

- The Netherlands offer short track training courses to refugees if they are willing to work in the sector;
- Germany issues visas/work permits to any 3rd country national wanting to work in the sector – the German visa opens the door to the entire EU market – and upon entry most entrants disappear in the bowels of Europe working as hotelstaff in the river cruise branche – and there is no further follow up, leaving these workers in limbo regarding their workers' rights.
- The call for remotely operated services and even long term fully automated navigation, stands in stark contrast to today's labour shortage. If the sector fails to provide a decent future for their human capital, the shortage will only deepen as no one is attracted to a sector that invests in deleting the human element completely.
- A European IWT sector that is governed by legal loopholes and deliberate corporate structures aimed at increasing profits at the detriment of workers' rights will not attract new and young people to the sector. It is high time the sector cleans up its act and provides for decent social rights, including social contributions based on where the crewmembers are working.
- We need a solid EU based, tamperfree legal framework (working time, crewing, professional qualifications, digital remote controlling capacity).

Upskilling – Life Long Learning Trajectory

First and foremost we would like to refer to the European pillar of social rights (The European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles | European Commission (europa.eu) that states in its first principle the following: “Education, training and life-long learning - Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market.

At the moment the European IWT sector faces a lot of challenges and many of these challenges have



specific interrelations and cross fertilisation influences.

Time and again the drastic staff shortages have been highlighted, both in the Rhine and Danube region. At the same time many pilot projects are being deployed testing new technologies including remote controlled navigating operations to fully automated vessels. All partners agree that the sector is changing and changing rapidly. Levels of automation have been defined and are again on the table for further analysis & refinement as they will directly impact the crew setting on board of the vessels.

With technology setting its own pace and the loud and clear call for more automated/integrated services all in the sector understand that this will impact employment. Automation and digitalisation might indeed amend partially the staff shortage that we mentioned earlier.

The main concern that needs careful monitoring and remedied is the overall attractiveness of the sector. A sector that openly embraces automation and digitalisation, remote operated navigation and fully automated vessels risks to generate the opposite reflex as those who are still working in the sector will fear job losses and new entrants might be discouraged by this enthusiasm in favour of machinery.

A full-fledged – high quality management of human centered skills and competencies is in our view the only way to ensure that crewmembers remain in the sector and that new, young workers enter this sector in full transition.

European sectoral covenant & consultant

The Flanders regional government has concluded a sectoral covenant with the Inland Waterway sector. Aim of a sectoral covenant is to ensure that all involved sectoral stakeholders work in a reinforcing manner to realise a common labourmarket policy in the sector. Through covenants existing initiatives are bundled and streamlined such as bridging education and training to the labourmarket, life long learning and diversity. All involved stakeholders use the covenant to make the sector more attractive also in the area of socially & legal certainty creation.

A sectoral consultant position has been created and defined who ensures the permanent liaison between stakeholders, social partners and authorities. This position is fully financed by the Flanders government as it is highly valued.

ETF believes that the same instrument and modus operandi would be beneficial for the sector at European level. A permanent body to permanently match offer and demand, both in quantity as in skills and competencies and to identify sudden skills mismatches of occurring skills voids would be the missing link for the sector to address its attractiveness.

The European Commission launches a lot of initiatives in the area of Vocational training, Life Long Learning and Apprentices. At the moment the European IWT sector is not fully aware of all these initiatives and misses out on a lot of opportunities. And if there is something that the sector cannot afford now, confronted with the multitude of changes and challenges, is to not properly connect to the future demands of a more sustainable, climate friendly mode in the overall chain. If IWT wants to be ready to accept a larger market share of increasing volumes in freight and passengers, it cannot miss linkages to other initiatives. So this needs to be addressed in a structural way and not depend on ad hoc short lived, well intended, initiatives.



| State aid for IWT

IWT is a very sustainable sector but still invests a lot of resources in upgrading its climate friendliness. Therefore it would be essential for the sector to benefit from a similar instrument as the Maritime State Aid guidelines in order to establish a level playing field, and an even greener IWT performance tomorrow.