

A SHORTAGE OF QUALIFIED INLAND NAVIGATION PERSONNEL: HOW CAN WE MAKE THE SECTOR MORE ATTRACTIVE?

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The European inland navigation sector is facing a significant labour shortage. This shortage could jeopardise the ambitious goals of modal shift in favour of this mode of transport. With this in mind, the CCNR organised a workshop reflecting on the labour market and its appeal. The workshop was held in Strasbourg and online on Thursday, 14 March 2024. It brought together the Member States of the CCNR, other European states, the European Commission, international organisations concerned with inland navigation and industry (social partners and training establishments). The aim was to take stock of the current situation, drawing on statistical data and the measures implemented in Europe. As part of the active discussion, participants were also invited to consider new ideas to counter the shortage of qualified personnel.



Working in partnership with the European Commission, the CCNR is currently finalising its second report on the labour market. The main trends highlighted include the aging work force, the migration of workers (from East to West) and the shortage of personnel. With regard to freight transport, the employment situation has remained relatively stable from 2008 to 2021. However, the increasing age of personnel means that we need to redouble our efforts to make inland navigation more attractive. For passenger transport, the Covid health crisis has had a visible impact on the work force. For example, in Germany numbers dropped by around 1800 between 2019 and 2020. Nevertheless, the sector is proving resilient, with increased recruitment in 2021 and 2022, reflecting the gradual recovery in activity.

In order to meet the considerable need for personnel, large-scale campaigns have taken place in CCNR Member States in recent years. The financial aspect can be a motivating factor, for example through funding programmes for apprenticeships and ongoing training. The online information platforms (such as [Ahoi Captain](#), [Acteurs du fleuve](#), [Wereld van de binnenvaart](#), [Are you waterproof](#), etc.), together with dedicated mobile applications (Wilbi), make it possible to reach a wide audience. There are also regular information sessions, discovery days for inland navigation, and open days organised by industry or schools. In addition, there are other communication projects backing up these varied initiatives, such as videos, virtual reality headsets, teaching materials suitable for all ages, and interactive quizzes. Finally, some Member States have set up working groups and strategies to allow ongoing reflection on the employment problem.



These initiatives are supported by all those involved in inland navigation, including ministries, professional associations, training institutes, inland navigation companies as well as social partners (such as trade unions). They are aimed at a very wide audience: children, young students, their parents, people undergoing retraining and the general public.

ABOUT THE CCNR

The Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine (CCNR) is an international organisation that exercises an essential regulatory role in the navigation of the Rhine. It is active in the technical, legal, economic and environmental fields. In all its areas of action, its work is guided by the efficiency of transport on the Rhine, safety, social considerations, and respect for the environment. Many of the CCNR's activities now reach beyond the Rhine and are directly concerned with European navigable waterways more generally. The CCNR works closely with the European Commission as well as with the other river commissions and international organisations.



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In parallel, the European IWT Platform presented its international initiative “Branding and Recruitment”. Its aim is to identify short, medium and long term solutions to the shortage of inland navigation personnel. The main tasks are to evaluate the actions put in place in the EU and at national level, to analyse the factors behind the shortage and to set up a dedicated recruitment campaign.



These initiatives, together with those of other European states, are available on the [CCNR website](#). The wide range of possible actions may serve as a source of inspiration for all European states and stakeholders involved in navigation.

Despite the various actions put in place, the problems linked to employment in inland navigation are very real. All actors agree on the urgent need to tackle this difficult area. Recruitment strategies need to target both young people embarking on their initial training and also those undergoing retraining, with a wide and varied range of profiles (maritime sector, unemployed, people from all of Europe - including from countries without inland waterways).



In addition to ensuring the sector is attractive, it is also essential to foster ‘loyalty’ among onboard personnel. Interesting career plans, with clearly defined opportunities and developments, good working conditions and a good work-life balance will benefit recruitment. Remuneration, particularly at managerial level, is a key asset in the inland navigation sector. In terms of training, the continuous improvement of school curricula and adopting modern teaching techniques are avenues to be developed. The use of training vessels and/or simulators for practical examinations is a real asset for future students. Finally, legislators have an important role to play in devising modern, simplified regulations that meet the needs of the sector. For some young people, a shorter training course would make the profession more attractive, particularly at operational level. Recognising navigation times accrued outside school (for example for the children of boatmen) would also be beneficial for the sector. Other aspects, such as the development of crossovers between the maritime and inland waterways sectors, or the harmonisation of internship agreements at European level, are other possible suggestions.

In this context, the advantages and disadvantages of remote operation were also discussed. While automation is not the definitive solution to the problem of the labour shortage, it is nevertheless an important subject, in particular with regard to the challenge posed by the modal shift. However, it is important to remain vigilant in order to ensure that new technologies do not make the jobs on board our vessels less attractive.



These constructive exchanges will allow Member States, the IWT Platform and other participants to give renewed impetus to their national policies and measures aimed at stimulating recruitment. To respond to this major challenge facing inland navigation, the CCNR invites all stakeholders to continue these discussions and actions in order to make the sector an attractive place to work. In the near future, it will publish a detailed report on the conclusions reached at the workshop and the next steps. In the meantime, please feel free to share your ideas, comments, difficulties and suggestions for improvements in a constructive way, using the email address: ccnr@ccr-zkr.org.



USEFUL LINKS

- [Mannheim Declaration \(2018\) and progress report \(2023\)](#)
- [Regulations for Rhine navigation personnel \(RPN\)](#)
- [Economic market observation reports](#)
- [Initiatives implemented in CCNR Member States and other European countries](#)
- [“Branding and recruitment initiative” of the IWT Platform](#)



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