



OPINION

European Economic and Social Committee

The social challenges of greening maritime and inland waterway transport

The social challenges of greening maritime and inland waterway transport
(Own-initiative opinion)

TEN/745

Rapporteur: **Pierre Jean COULON**

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1. Conclusions and recommendations

- 1.1 The EESC reiterates its support for the conclusions and recommendations of the opinions on *FuelEU Maritime*¹ and *NAIADES III*².
 - 1.1.1 In these fields, 'close cooperation with all stakeholders in the maritime cluster and supply chain is necessary to ultimately reach this goal'.
 - 1.1.2 The same applies for the necessary 'interest in creating intermodal terminals', allowing for 'the development of inland waterway transport in cities, contributing to a better quality of life'.
- 1.2 The EESC believes that maritime and inland waterway transport greening must take into account the health and quality of life of those living in the vicinity of navigation channels and ports.
- 1.3 Consequently, the port authorities, local and regional authorities, and transport stakeholders must work together to rethink the links between cities, ports, and transport stakeholders.
- 1.4 The greening transition can only happen once adequate training aimed at employees has been put in place.
- 1.5 These recommendations are integral for the future enhancement of the blue economy.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The European Commission Communication on *NAIADES III*, published on 24 June 2021 on the modernisation of inland navigation in Europe, and the proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the use of renewable fuels in maritime transport, published on 14 July 2021 and known as *FuelEU Maritime*, are providing impetus to decarbonise these sectors.
- 2.2 The *NAIADES III* action plan aims to promote inland waterway transport through 35 points of action based on a simple observation made by Commissioner for Transport, Adina Vălean: 'As one of the most CO₂-efficient modes of transport available, inland waterways have the potential to play a central role in decarbonising our transport system'. However, our canals and rivers carry just 6% of EU freight, despite the EU inland waterway network spanning 41 000 kilometres.
- 2.3 The goals laid down in the communication are to shift more freight transport to European rivers and canals, and to facilitate the transition to zero-emission vessels by 2050.
- 2.4 The Commission therefore proposes a revision of the Combined Transport Directive of 1992³ – the only legal instrument in the EU which explicitly supports the shift from road freight to low-emission modes of transport (navigable inland waterways, maritime and rail transport), but whose

¹ [EESC opinion on *FuelEU Maritime*](#) (not yet published in the OJ).

² [EESC opinion on *NAIADES III*](#) (not yet published in the OJ).

³ Council Directive 92/106/EEC of 7 December 1992 on the establishment of common rules for certain types of combined transport of goods between Member States, [OJ L 368, 17.12.1992, p. 38](#).

effect has been hindered by inadequate transposition in the Member States. One main reason behind this deficient transposition stems from conflicting parts of the Mobility package of 2018, between the objective of achieving fair competition between road transport companies and employees in the internal market (by limiting cabotage to and from intermodal terminals), and the shift from modal to intermodal transport by lowering the cost.

- 2.5 The proposal for a regulation on maritime traffic is part of the political and legislative package Fit for 55, which aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 55% by 2030. It is primarily focused on reducing emissions, and requires transporters to declare the vessel types and fuels they use. It is therefore rather loose. This is due to the fact that, according to the European Commission, maritime transport in general is the root of only 10% of emissions linked to transport in the EU.
- 2.6 The EESC can only endorse the European Commission's policy of greening maritime and inland waterway transport.
- 2.7 It has done so in the recently adopted opinions on *FuelEU Maritime*⁴ and *NAIADES III*⁵. The EESC would also like to take this opportunity to present some reflections on the societal challenges posed by the greening of maritime and inland waterway transport, and draw civil society's attention to the fact that maritime and inland waterway transport greening also involves maritime spatial planning, to allow for transport to be adapted to climate change in the interest of a "blue economy"⁶.

3. **General comments**

- 3.1 This own-initiative opinion comprises two parts on different topics: the first essentially addresses the nature of inland waterway transport and ports, while the second covers social issues concerning maritime and inland waterway transport employees. The EESC stresses that maritime transport constitutes a sector-specific market, from local ferry transport servicing cities and archipelagos via rivers and short sea routes, to long-distance ferry, bulk carrier and container ship transport routes, as well as cruise ships.

This opinion does not address all these sectors, but concerns the societal dimension linked to local and regional transport issues.

- 3.2 Greening maritime and inland waterway transport requires an integrated approach, as future transport infrastructure would also need to take into account concerns relating to the health of residents and workers in the vicinity.
- 3.3 In this own-initiative opinion on the societal challenges of maritime and inland waterway transport greening, the EESC considers it essential that the Commission make use of sound

⁴ [EESC opinion on *FuelEU Maritime*](#) (not yet published in the OJ).

⁵ [EESC opinion on *NAIADES III*](#) (yet to be published in the OJ).

⁶ EESC opinion on the *New approach for a sustainable blue economy in the EU*, rapporteur Simo Tiainen, [OJ C 517, 22.12.2021, p. 108](#); and EESC opinion on *Innovation in the Blue Economy*, rapporteur Séamus Boland, [OJ C 12, 15.1.2015, p. 93](#).

studies on the health repercussions of river and seaport activities. These studies should focus on analysing environmental management systems on a large scale, and contain recommendations for using river and sea ports while taking into account health-related concerns.

- 3.4 Maritime cabotage plays an essential role in economic, social and territorial cohesion, especially for islands. It supports a low-carbon policy, reduces the environmental impact, and promotes the principle of multimodality.
- 3.5 Improving air quality in ports and the effects it has on the health of local residents is a sensitive subject. The EESC considers it important to further develop power supply systems to the berths in inland and sea ports, as has been done in the Rotterdam port so that vessels, no matter their size, can cut their engines when they are docked, thus contributing toward preserving local resident and workers' health. This also includes cruise ships, which are often docked in central port areas.
- 3.6 Noise pollution produced by maritime port activities should not be ignored, as it pertains to both the quality of life of local residents and to the health of workers. The same applies to the residents of the hinterland area of navigable inland waterways. Improving the performance of inland waterway transport goes hand in hand with the socio-economic development of the hinterland; however, this development cannot come at the expense of the residents' quality of life, despite inland waterway transport creating less nuisance than road transport.
- 3.7 Greening maritime and inland waterway transport cannot be achieved without addressing concerns regarding personnel training, employment prospects, and the unequal treatment between men and women in these sectors, or without taking into account societal challenges related to the profound changes brought on by job digitalisation and automation.
- 3.8 Renewing the fleet is indispensable in order to reduce inland waterway transport's dependence on fossil fuels. This sector is primarily composed of small-scale skippers and SMEs who are currently suffering economic hardships, such as a loss of turnover of around EUR 2.7 billion, and a 70% reduction in passenger transport. Social acceptance of the necessary fleet renewal requires support from skippers, which can only be assured by gaining their trust through investments and long-term financial support.
- 3.9 The transition toward zero-emission inland waterway transport requires not only financial support for existing skippers, but also increased efforts to train present and future crew. Greening maritime and inland waterway transport also depends on the sector's capacity to manage the transformation of work and skills.

4. **Specific comments**

Ports

- 4.1 In maritime transport, the greening policy leads us to rethink the links between cities and ports. Development projects based on an all-oil economy, and worldwide super-containerisation in the second half of the 20th century led to ports leaving cities, which had become overcrowded, to

create industrial port areas in the outskirts. However, large port and urban projects require more or less unanimous acceptance, which means taking into account a complex list of parameters linked to public and individual interests. These civic and societal demands are relatively new in the long-standing relationship between a city and its port.

- 4.2 Port authorities and municipalities can play on the same team or completely oppose each other when it comes to societal and environmental dimensions that can no longer be overlooked⁷. In port cities – where vessels, local residents, industries, businesses and tourist activities coexist – the quality of the environment and sources of nuisance have been factors in mobilising residents. For example, boats run their engines day and night, and air pollution has become a daily plague for local residents of numerous European ports.
- 4.3 Passenger-cargo vessels and ferries on numerous routes release gas and fine particles into the air. The noise from their engines is also an unbearable nuisance as it is constant and amplified at night.
- 4.4 The problem stems from the fact that only some of the reception berths at ports are equipped with an on-shore power supply. Consequently, certain vessels are forced to run their own generators.
- 4.5 Improving air quality in ports and the effects it has on the health of local residents is a sensitive subject. The community is becoming more and more vocal in its demands for preventative and corrective measures for air quality in the port surrounding areas – most notably on social media.
- 4.6 The same applies to noise pollution generated by port activities. In the EESC's view, greening maritime and inland waterway transport requires taking stock of and diagnosing environmental impacts of the ports, in particular in the areas between the city and the port. This preparatory step should be taken before adopting any measures, and would allow an intelligent environmental management of the city to port area, to which the development of inland waterway ports could contribute.
- 4.7 Indeed, maritime and inland waterway transport greening cannot go ahead without a prior assessment of the impact of the dispersion of gas emissions (even low-carbon), the vessels, the topographical profile of the port area, the population distribution in the areas of port activity influence, the existence of meteorological stations (as the weather influences whether gas in the air disperses or accumulates), and the sensors that measure pollution and noise levels.

Maritime sector employees

- 4.8 Employment and training for new jobs for seafarers is another major societal challenge that cannot be ignored. Despite the lack of available, precise and comparable data on seafarers, it is commonly accepted that the maritime sector suffers from a skills shortage, which makes it difficult to fill posts and retain seafarers.

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Daudet, B., and Alix, Y., 'Gouvernance des territoires ville-port: empreintes locales, concurrences régionales et enjeux globaux', *Organisations et Territoires*, 2012.

- 4.9 The lack of attractiveness of this occupational sector comes from, among other things, the fact that seafaring is no longer considered a great way to see the world. In fact, travel has become cheaper and easier. According to an independent study prepared for the European Commission, the sector is also perceived to be incompatible with a 'normal' social and family life, and offers poor working conditions and poor prospects for career progression, despite the Maritime Labour Convention of 2006 (MLC 2006), establishing minimum working and living standards for the world merchant fleet seafarers⁸.
- 4.10 Nevertheless, some data from a report by the European Community Shipowners' Associations shows that in certain parts of society, maritime navigation is seen as prestigious and respectable, most notably thanks to public information campaigns and study grants, among other things.

Representation of women in the field of transport

- 4.11 The number of women in the maritime transport sector is still relatively low and under-represented, with few expectations that this will improve over time. With the exception of certain Nordic countries and the Netherlands, women occupy posts of inferior status which offer lower pay than those of men.
- 4.12 The EESC is a stakeholder in the EU Platform for Change which aims to integrate and recognise women in all transport professions, including maritime and inland waterway transport. An online survey run by the European Transport Workers' Federation from 7 October to 29 November 2019 found that women make up only 22% of the transport industry's overall workforce⁹. This study reveals that numerous obstacles stemming from gender inequality and stereotypes persist in the sector. Maritime transport has always been a male-dominated industry, and the EESC believes that this must change in order to address the societal challenges that women face in this sector.
- 4.13 Greening the maritime transport sector could be the opportunity to do so. The EESC believes that the evolution of technology brought on by this greening should drive job creation in the maritime transport sector, and change perceptions of it in a way that would see traditional jobs at sea evolving towards high-added-value jobs on land, allowing for the recruitment of more women.
- 4.14 Duly qualified seafarers are essential in ensuring navigation that is both safe and respectful of the environment. The viability of this dynamic sector depends on the capacity to continue to attract a sufficient number of quality new arrivals and to retain experienced seafarers, including women and other under-represented groups.
- 4.15 The EESC believes that it is necessary to involve all stakeholders, including social partners, in order to find both significant and viable solutions in the field of maritime transport greening¹⁰.

⁸ Coffey, 'Study on social aspects within the maritime transport sector', *Consultores em Transportes Inovação e Sistemas*, Oxford Research and World Maritime University, Publications Office of the European Union, 2020.

⁹ <https://www.etf-europe.org/make-transport-fit-for-women-to-work-in-etf-sounds-alarm-over-industrys-growing-gender-divide/>

¹⁰ <https://www.ecsa.eu/index.php/etf-ecsa-declaration-enhanced-participation-women-european-shipping>

Seafarers

- 4.16 Nevertheless, vessel automation could consequently lead to the reduction of crew and equipment, lowering the demand for seafarers and increasing the workload and responsibilities of existing personnel at the same time. Society is unlikely to accept prospective lay-offs and re-classing.
- 4.17 Additionally, digitalisation and automation are likely to improve working conditions for crew members who are highly qualified and skilled in IT and electrical engineering. Digitalisation and automation could also reduce the administrative burden, often cited as a source of fatigue for crew members, and allow the development of quasi-autonomous operating systems, which would have a considerable impact in terms of working hours and the attractiveness of seafaring.
- 4.18 Digitalisation and automation involved in maritime transport greening will profoundly change the sector. This is not envisaged in the short-term, as shipowners are not yet fully prepared. Instead, these new technologies will be adapted to existing vessels. The cost involved in renewing the fleet also plays a role in this reluctance.
- 4.19 Another risk that cannot be ignored is the risk that changing skills needs could be detrimental to employment by excluding certain sailors, or by not correctly training prospective sailors. This poses a sizeable challenge to naval training schools, which is only addressed by those with close ties to the maritime industry, in order to adapt to the needs of the latter.
- 4.20 Moreover, continued training of seafarers is indispensable in keeping their skills up to date and facilitating the transition between sea-based and land-based jobs which would probably result from maritime transport greening. This aspect is essential for generating positive effects on society as a whole.
- 4.21 To have more skilled personnel implies an increase in operating costs, and a risk of social dumping to the detriment of less skilled personnel and of unfair competition in the labour market, which highlights the need to protect European sailor jobs. In this regard, see the 2018 study *Seafarers and digital disruption*¹¹. European sailors appear to be decreasing in number, while their average age is increasing, leading one to question whether they can compete with non-European seafarers. This is an entirely separate issue, but this own-initiative opinion wishes to raise it nonetheless.
- 4.22 Social partners therefore play an essential role in ensuring that labour standards are respected and even raised in maritime transport. Nonetheless, collective bargaining could be jeopardised by the disparity in labour rights applicable on board, and complicated by the enforcement of labour rights in cross-border areas, and a lack of communication, cooperation and coordination between the various authorities in charge of labour conditions.

¹¹ <https://www.ics-shipping.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/ics-study-on-seafarers-and-digital-disruption.pdf>.

Inland waterway transport

- 4.23 A number of these considerations regarding maritime transport employees could occasionally be extrapolated to inland waterway transport, except that the labour market in inland navigation is mostly comprised of independent and ageing operators due to a combination of social, economic and cultural factors¹². Ageing has also been a noted problem within the group of employees, as young people favour land-based jobs with regular working hours and the possibility to spend the weekends at home. This factor is highly relevant, for example in Western Europe, where around 80% of inland waterway freight companies are independent owner-operators, whose working hours cannot be restricted to a regular schedule. This leads to a labour shortage in inland navigation – a concern for both the passenger and freight inland navigation market, which can, in particular, be observed for qualified personnel at management level and qualified boatmasters in the liquid cargo segment.
- 4.24 The EESC notes that this shortage can also be attributed to technical factors, such as crew member jobs becoming increasingly more technical, and inland waterway transport companies seeking technical worker profiles, which are difficult to find.
- 4.25 Increasing the attractiveness of the sector for the younger generation involves adopting fundamental measures, in particular measures of a socio-cultural and societal nature, such as developing cooperatives to better align with economic necessities (efficiency, profitability, high workload) with social, cultural and societal aspects (private and social life, family, etc.).
- 4.26 Lastly, the EESC notes that the effects of the COVID-19 crisis that have already been felt will be quantifiable in the coming years, and all the more so as the inland waterway navigation labour market continues to change due to greening the sector.

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Christa SCHWENG

The President of the European Economic and Social Committee

¹² Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine, *Thematic report on the European inland navigation sector labour market*, February 2021.