

Recent developments and human resource needs in transport and logistics in the Western Mediterranean

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Professions in the logistics chain in Western Mediterranean countries went through very difficult times during the Covid-19 crisis. The consequences of Covid-19 were evident from broken global value chains, reduced traffic and the closure of several global production plants, ports and airports. However, essential flows by sea and road were maintained in an uncertain and risk-ridden environment.

And yet, right after lockdown was lifted, the structural vulnerability of various professions in the logistics value chain became evident: bankruptcy of small road hauliers, changes in attitudes towards the professions of lorry driver, seafarer and logistics operator, and structural shortages of lorry drivers, logistics operators and seafarers in the countries on the northern shore of the Mediterranean. Can these structural problems be solved with labour from the southern shore of the Mediterranean? If so, how?

It must be emphasized that the solution to the current human resources crisis in logistics transport must naturally respect environmental requirements, while at the same time mastering new technologies such as automation, digitalization and artificial intelligence.

The situation of professions in the logistics chain on both shores of the Western Mediterranean

Maritime transport

Social conditions of seafarers during Covid-19

Seafarers were trapped aboard isolated boats and separated from family and friends. Every month, 200,000 seafarers are rotated to ensure safe and sustainable working standards. However, 400,000 seafarers were blocked on board ships for bureaucratic reasons, thus threatening the collapse of vital supply chains. Other seafarers could not be employed because they were unable to embark. The International Maritime Organization (IMO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Federation of National Associations of Ship Brokers and Agents (FONASBA) and other entities tried to persuade member states to find solutions for these thousands of seafarers of various nationalities (e.g. Philippine, Chinese, nationals of Central and Eastern European countries).

Social situation of seafarers in Europe

Despite the crisis, the weight of the maritime sector continues to be important in the EU. The ILO Maritime Labour Convention of 2006 (MLC 2006) mainly sets the standards at international level. It complements the regulatory framework on maritime safety adopted by the IMO through the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watch Keeping for Seafarers (STCW) and the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL). The MLC was transposed into European legislation, in particular by Council Directive 2009/13/EC, and entered in force on 20 August 2013. It establishes a minimum set of standards that paves the way to better protection for seafarers in terms of living and working conditions, fair employment and social protection (e.g. social security, pensions).

However, current maritime transport policy favours economic agents, especially at social level. We should remember that 40% of the world fleet is owned by European shipowners. However, only 40% of their employees come from member states. Shipowners rely mostly on seafarers from outside the European Union.

It is common for seafarers to be employed by third countries at a lower rate, even on board ships flying the flag of an EU member state. The European maritime labour market is also characterized by the ageing of its national professionals. Nevertheless, the countries on the northern shore of the Mediterranean continue to offer high-level training in a number of maritime training institutes and schools. In addition, the EU member states remain committed to the concept of a “strategic fleet”.

The challenge involves striking a balance between the necessary competitiveness and the need to create more skilled and highly skilled jobs for European seafarers. The European Commission announced in 2018 the launch of the Skillsea Project, which started in 2019 and will run for a period of four years, as part of a consortium of 27 organizations from 16 European countries. The aim of this project is to unify the various stakeholders of the European maritime industry in order to monitor the structural changes the industry is going through. This project consists of six work packages (WP), the first of which are on identifying qualification needs (WP 1) and preparing education and training for the future (WP 2).

Seafarers on the southern shore of the Mediterranean

In the countries on the southern shore, the problems are different for many socioeconomic reasons, including the decline of fleets in the Maghreb countries. Indeed, the number of seafarers is limited due to the discontinuation or decline of national fleets. Traditional training institutes are blocked by the lack

of training ships to recruit young cadets on board national fleets. Cadets entering the labour market are forced to embark on ships under flags of convenience.

Road cargo transport

Situation in the countries on the northern shore of the Mediterranean

In terms of road transport, despite European Commission regulations and intervention, Covid-19 has had a major impact on a vulnerable sector and highlighted the shortcomings of European road transport policy. Social dumping destabilizes the road transport market: European companies use loopholes in European regulations to set up subsidiaries in Central European countries and employ drivers from these countries for European traffic outside their countries of origin under working conditions that do not even respect minimum legal requirements. The 2020 Mobility Package certainly aims to bring some order to this socially unregulated European area. It remains to be seen where the human resources will come from to enforce this new regulation against social dumping. This social inconsistency in European road transport and the recent attempt at regulation conceal a structural element: the shortage of drivers (ageing population).

Road cargo transport is a sector that has difficulty recruiting staff. The profession now has a bad image, is no longer attractive in terms of wages, working conditions or job security. In addition, many professionals have left the sector due to Covid-19.

According to the International Road Transport Union (IRU), “400,000 new drivers are needed to ensure operations of the transport system and goods supply in the European area” (Perrodou, 2021). The road transport sector is therefore suffering from a structural recruitment crisis that is expected to become worse in the future due to an unfavourable age pyramid.

Situation in the countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean

The Maghreb countries suffer from a shortage of qualified and experienced professional drivers. A transition phase is currently under way, designed to possibly cover these needs, but there is still the issue of training (insufficient number of training hours and lack of practical classes). There is definitely a lack of well-trained drivers. Many available drivers are not hired because of their inability to perform the tasks of professional drivers (e.g. vehicle management, safeguarding goods, customer relations). Transport companies hesitate to hire them for fear of entrusting an expensive truck to incompetent drivers, not to mention the issue of road safety. At present, a career as a professional driver does not seem very attractive and the only professionals on the market demand very high salaries. Most qualified drivers do not have a stable contract and move from one haulier to another, which leads to uncontrolled

increases in wage costs. Despite this, thousands of young people looking for employment are tempted by this profession. Many of them have received theoretical training to pass the test to obtain a licence to drive a heavy goods vehicle (HGV), but have not been trained on the ground by the profession or training institutes.

Logistics professions

It should be noted that a large proportion of the resources and means in the supply chain is concentrated on time-consuming tasks with little added value. Warehouse and retail jobs are often very physical (carrying loads, long distances) and particularly prone to musculoskeletal disorders. These positions have increased considerably with digitalization and the steady rise in the number of references, distribution channels and formats. The application of technology (mainly automation) can compensate for staff shortages. Therefore, those involved in heavy and repetitive logistical tasks are partially or fully exempted from these tasks and can be reassigned to development, maintenance or even piloting activities. Technology enables migration from a traditional, manual organization to a mechanized, robotic one. This makes it necessary to recruit new profiles on a par with these innovations. Employees should also receive regular training in these rapidly evolving technologies. As is often the case, the hard part is not the technology. It's ensuring that the organization is able to adapt to change. Despite these innovations, there are still labour shortages on the northern shore of the Mediterranean.

Generational change and the search for skilled, mobile personnel

The generational change in the labour market and transport-logistics companies is evident and irreversible. In an ageing society like Europe, which wants to stay dynamic, the focus is on the problems of hiring young workers, as well as employee retention and the production skills of relatively older workers. This requirement is naturally reinforced by the demographic ageing of the working population (workers over 50).

The professions of driver, logistics operator and seafarer must therefore be able to attract as many young people as possible, despite their limitations. However, for true generational change to take place in these professions, structural measures must be adopted that lead to better working conditions and a better quality of life for the parties involved. New technologies could certainly encourage some young Europeans to choose these professions, provided that the social environment is favourable. However, Europe's demographic structure will make it necessary to rely on young people from the southern shore of the Mediterranean.



The transport-logistics sector requires relatively young profiles physically prepared for these demanding professions and able to quickly assimilate new technologies. Unfortunately, ageing is structural in the countries on the northern shore of the Mediterranean. The demographic structure of the two shores of the Mediterranean clearly shows that ageing on the northern shore will be offset by the youth of the southern shore. Using these human resources in the south could make it unnecessary to hire drivers from countries as far away as India.

Towards a smart circular migration policy supported by innovative vocational training

For smart circular migration

The International Organization for Migration defines circular migration as “A form of migration in which people repeatedly move back and forth between two or more countries.” (IOM, 2019). However, implementation of this circular migration approach is currently severely limited by the development of a discourse that places the struggle against irregular migration at the heart of EU migration policies. However, there are a number of programmes and initiatives to encourage both regional and national labour migration. Firstly, at regional level, the European Blue Card scheme is a harmonized, fast-track procedure for obtaining a residence permit valid throughout the European Union by any non-European professional who accepts a highly qualified post in an EU member state (except Denmark and Ireland). At the same time, some EU countries have set up national mechanisms to encourage labour migration from the Balkans and Southern Mediterranean countries. In this context, the concept of circular migration is of interest, as it reconciles economic imperatives and public concerns about migration policy.

This Euro-Mediterranean movement is not defined in terms of time and can take the form of seasonal migrations (of less than one year) or longer stays in a country. However, circular migration is by definition temporary migration and involves migrants returning to their country of origin.

A number of improvements could be made to circular migration schemes to make them more attractive to all stakeholders. Longer periods of residence and/or repeated migration of the same person should be permitted so that road hauliers, maritime carriers and logistics service providers can retain their temporary workers for an extended period of time. This would help these employers recoup the cost of recruiting and training foreign workers, while providing greater security and stability for migrants.

Cooperation in the area of skills validation will need to be strengthened. Mobility in the Mediterranean basin is, in fact, currently held back by the lack of regional frameworks for skills recognition, which would allow workers in the logistics transport sector to join different labour markets and employers to

benefit from a larger pool of potential candidates. Bilateral agreements on mutual recognition of qualifications could therefore be another starting point for further harmonization of national qualification frameworks in the supply chain. Interconnected migration and training policies will encourage young people from the southern shore of the Mediterranean to participate in mobility initiatives between the countries on both sides of the Mediterranean and, in general, more effective mobility of workers within the entire area.

Innovative training: project for the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean training network in logistics transport

Circular migration in transport and logistics requires a carefully selected, well-trained labour pool. A common training policy would be thus indispensable. The studies and work carried out by the Centre for Transport Studies for the Western Mediterranean (CETMO); the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM); the European Commission (EC) and the European Investment Bank (EIB) should be taken into account in order to create innovative training that corresponds to highly evolving areas.

It would be necessary to define the circular migration policy specific to the logistics transport sector in order to identify training needs. This training policy should be consistent with all EU projects, such as Skillsea, LogisMed-TA, and the ILO Guiding Principles (guidelines) on promoting decent work and road safety in the road transport sector. Finally, the creation of an institution to manage these formations appears to be essential.

For example, a good idea would be the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean training centre for transport and logistics in a country that is advanced in this field and has a variety of vocational training centres and institutes specializing in all logistics and transport activities. The need for professional trainers could be considered in light of the needs identified on the northern shore of the Mediterranean. Validation of diplomas, certificates, etc., would be similar to the method used in Europe. This centre could work as a network. Although the issue of networks is complex, it could be clarified by specifying the role of the centre.

There are many anticipated network effects on training. The creation of a Euro-Mediterranean transport and logistics training centre, around which other specialized training units would be set up, would require a suitable organization with a light, flexible structure. This structure could benefit from Europe's irrefutable contribution in terms of teaching methods, equipment and trainers.

Conclusion

This project may seem utopian to some, but it forms part of the desire to build a Euro-Mediterranean area of peace where human capital is the basis for peace. The needs in terms of human resource of the northern shore of the Mediterranean logistics chain can potentially be met by the countries on the southern shore. Mobilizing them calls for a smart, circular migration policy based on innovative training that includes digitalization, automation and artificial intelligence.

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