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Working Party on Inland Water Transport

Working Party on the Standardization of Technical and Safety Requirements in Inland Navigation

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Mutual recognition of boatmasters' certificates and professional requirements in inland navigation: First meeting of the International Expert Group

Executive Summary of the International Labour Office (ILO) study on Living and working conditions in inland navigation in Europe

Note by the secretariat

The secretariat reproduces hereafter the Executive Summary of the International Labour Organization (ILO) study on Living and working conditions in inland navigation in Europe, transmitted by ILO.

The study can be found at the following address:
www.ilo.org/sector/Resources/publications/WCMS_234892/lang--en/index.htm

Executive Summary of the International Labour Office (ILO) study on Living and working conditions in inland navigation in Europe

Since the advent of free trade, markets have converged more than ever. Countries trade with one another by all available means: air, land, sea, river and canals. The topography of Europe has undergone so many changes that, at any given time, there are tens of thousands of freight trains, trucks and vessels bringing goods in and out of countries. Inland waterway transport (IWT) is transportation by means of inland waterways. It is one of the cheapest and most environmentally friendly types available. The European Union Commission has recognized its untapped potential and actively encouraged many initiatives to promote it as an important source of cargo transportation. However, IWT would not exist without human capital invested. Depending on the economic situation, labour supply can be balanced with demand. Working vessels cross borders on a daily basis, meaning that workers, businesses and operators of these vessels are subjected to different countries' laws.

Today, not much is known about the general living and working conditions of IWT workers. This report attempts to fill the gaps by providing an overview of the various aspects of the IWT sector, including rules pertaining to "Minimum requirements", "Working hours" and "Social security". Chapter 1 introduces the IWT sector in Europe. It covers topics such as developments in the sector, personnel, social dialogue and the hierarchy of the various regulatory frameworks featured in this report.

Chapter 2 explores the "Minimum requirements" for workers wishing to enter the sector. Here, differentiation is made between requirements for boatmasters and ordinary crew members. While the minimum age for a boatmaster to enter the IWT workforce is 21, anyone above the age of 16, with the necessary aptitude and training, can become an ordinary crew member. Good hearing and eyesight are two of the most important faculties for boatmasters and their crew members, therefore, pre-employment and routine checks are required. When it comes to training and certification of crew members across Europe, there are slight differences. Training and certification are now being harmonized through such initiatives as the Standards of Training and Certification in Inland Navigation (STCIN) introduced by the IWT educational network, Education in Inland Navigation (EDINNA).

Chapter 3 looks at the various "Conditions of service" in the IWT sector. It deals with the economic and social aspects of working in inland navigation. Compared to the "Minimum requirements", there is less harmonization when it comes to "Employment agreements" and "Wages" because countries are left to ascertain the rights and obligations between worker and employer and commensurate wages. Therefore, there still exists a grey area when it comes to whether IWT crews across Europe have the same rights. The mandatory rest time of a crew member is dependent on the vessel's type of operating mode. On average, a crew member should work a total of 48 hours a week with a mandatory amount of uninterrupted rest time in between. However, many workers in the so-called 2:1 system (2 weeks on, 1 week off) work a much higher number of hours.

Chapter 4 looks into the "Safety, health and well-being" of workers working and living on board an inland waterway vessel. Accident rates in this sector remain low, although serious accidents, like drowning or trauma to the head from falling off barges, are not excluded. However, because vessels sail close to land, there are neither elaborate rules on the provision of medical care nor the requirement for a medically certified person to be present on board. When comparing legal frameworks for this study, it was discovered that the rules pertaining to the sizes, dimensions and fittings of the crew members' living quarters were much harmonized, mainly because they came from the same source.

Chapters 5 and 6 deal with very specific aspects of the IWT sector: “Social security” and the “Enforcement” of the various frameworks. Social security has always been a hot topic among trade unions. In the IWT sector, this is no exception. The only extended administrative body of a River Commission to have dealt with this issue is the Administrative Centre for Social Security for Rhine Boatmen, based in the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine (CCNR) Secretariat. Along with a general European Union (EU) Regulation on social security, they provide the basis for harmonization in this field. As regards enforcement, various bodies are still working together to develop a joint document to further enhance the harmonization of police rules. These deal mostly with the technical and safety aspects of the vessel as opposed to the working and living conditions of its crew members.

In conclusion, while there is much effort and investment injected into the harmonization of technicalities pertaining to crew member qualifications, training, working time and the size of the galleys and accommodation quarters, very little is given to the more economic or social realms. Much more could be done to improve the working and living conditions of workers in the IWT sector, but without binding regulations in place, little can be done. However, pressure from the trade unions has the potential to pave the way for better conditions.
