

Brussels, 24 October 2024

Rail Skills Shortages Conference Recommends ‘Rail Erasmus’ and New Education Programmes to Empower Young Europeans in the Rail Sector

Empowering young people to undertake a ‘Railway Erasmus’ in other European countries and organising dedicated national rail curriculums across Europe, are some of the many recommendations outlined by the [Skill Training Alliance For the Future European Rail System \(STAFFER\)](#) project in its landmark report into preparing for future sector staffing needs whilst ending rail skills shortages.

STAFFER delivered, after four years of intense and fruitful collaboration, its findings today during its Final Conference in Brussels including a long-term Strategy and Action Plan and policy recommendations to decision-makers. The EU-level Blueprint for sectoral cooperation, funded by the ERASMUS+ programme and led by the University of Genoa, brought together 31 partners and 17 associated partners from academics, trainers, railway undertakings and suppliers to end skill shortages in rail.

Creating and funding a ‘Railway Erasmus’ to give students undertaking railway-related studies, apprenticeships or internships in companies an experience to develop both as employees and people is one of the flagship proposals. This measure has the potential, if successful, to act as a world-leading model to solve skill shortages and give young people the best possible chance to grow and succeed in their professional lives.

As many industries and education providers are encountering difficulties in teaching young people the technical and soft skills required to succeed at work, the report recommends that companies apply the ‘70-20-10 continuous learning principle’ (70% learning on the job, 20% learning from others, 10% training).

These recommendations outline the need to connect young people with on-the-job training opportunities in different environments across Europe, where their place of education or employment could transfer them to other program participants, creating a formalised network of skill transfers across the European rail sector.

Dedicated national rail curriculums in universities and technical colleges – where the railway sector partners with existing education providers to assist in creating new institutions that deliver courses and degrees in the rail field – were also outlined as vital to ensure future workers for the sector.

These programmes would be targeted at job seekers who have just graduated from secondary or higher education, as well as other individuals who would like to change jobs or move into the sector. These programmes, co-run with rail sector stakeholders, could be funded through ERASMUS+ or the European Social Fund.

The recommendations also outline the challenging demographics of the rail sector – an ageing workforce (40-45% of workers are 50+ years old), with an ‘outdated’ public image impacting how the sector recruits. The report states that the sector is perceived as ‘old-fashioned and male-dominated’, which ‘could deter potential workers from choosing a career in the rail sector.’

The report further advises businesses to create policies and initiatives (like the [STAFFER Mentoring Programme](#)) that facilitate the integration of women, immigrants, and other underrepresented groups into

the railway workforce in order to foster diversity and increase the number of women employed (currently only about 20%).

At the final conference, STAFFER partners called on policymakers, education providers, railway undertakings and suppliers to swiftly start implementing the changes outlined by the draft policy recommendations, which are available [here](#).

▶ The STAFFER Final Report is available to download [here](#).

Quotes attributable to STAFFER Coordinator and Full Professor of Transportation Engineering at the University of Genoa Angela Di Febbraro

“Today, STAFFER’s final conference has highlighted the significant contribution to addressing the skills and workforce challenges in the European rail sector provided by our project.

I hope that the STAFFER rail skills strategy and policy recommendations are implemented through a coordinated effort from the EU, national governments, and the rail sector, based on suitable funding.”

Quotes attributable to UNIFE Director General Enno Wiebe

“Thanks to STAFFER, we have the ability to trial an educational pathway, which if successful, can provide the rail sector and supply industry the blueprint to give young people the best chance to feel confident, learn skills and succeed professionally.”

“Achieving the clean and digital transition hinges on an available workforce to manage the expected increasing demand in rail – which only accounts for 0.4% of Europe’s transport emissions. Implementing the changes that project partners propose through the policy recommendations is vital, and I urge all stakeholders to consider them in full.”

Quotes attributable to CER Executive Director Alberto Mazzola

“This much-needed partnership has been instrumental in addressing the issue of critical skills shortages in the railway sector, which is facing both an ageing workforce and evolving skill requirements due to digital transformation. Digitalisation and digital enablers offer great opportunities, such as enhanced efficiency and safety through advanced data analytics, automation, and smart infrastructure. However, new skills, upskilling, and reskilling are required to keep the sector competitive and provide quality jobs. STAFFER is showing us the way.”

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The Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER) brings together railway undertakings, their national associations as well as infrastructure managers and vehicle leasing companies. The membership is made up of long-established bodies, new entrants and both private and public enterprises, representing 78% of the rail network length, 81% of the rail freight business and about 94% of rail passenger operations in EU, EFTA and EU accession countries. CER represents the interests of its members towards EU policy makers and transport stakeholders, advocating rail as the backbone of a competitive and sustainable transport system in Europe. For more information, visit www.cer.be or follow [@CER_railways](#) on X or [LinkedIn](#).

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UNIFE represents the European Rail Supply Industry in Brussels since 1992. The association gathers more than 120 of Europe's leading large and medium-sized rail supply companies active in the design, manufacture, maintenance and refurbishment of rail transport systems, subsystems and related equipment. UNIFE also brings together 12 national rail industry associations of European countries. For more information, visit www.unife.org or follow us on [X](#) and [LinkedIn](#).