



Plenary 2: Is the workforce ready for the future of mobility?

The transport labour market has been exposed to unprecedented shocks due to Covid-19, with some sectors hit particularly hard by the crisis. Umberto de Pretto set out the difficult situation that the road transport sector faces, with estimated revenue losses for the road freight industry of USD 643 billion in 2020, and 5% to 10% of freight transport companies going out of business. Diego Diaz, SNCF, remarked that the Covid-crisis teaches us humility and wondered if railways will ever see the same level of ridership as before, considering the changes in work habits, with much greater reliance on remote working.

The coronavirus pandemic has also put immense pressure on transportation workers globally, including public transport employees who have been frontline staff. Many people now realise the scale of their dependence on global supply chains and the transport workers that make them run smoothly. The Covid-19 crisis has confronted the transport workforce with health and safety risks, unemployment and uncertainty about the future of their workplace. One of the groups particularly hard hit were young workers. Baker Khundakji of the International Transport Workers Federation mentioned that one out of ten young workers lost their jobs in the first months of the pandemic and 77% of the youth workforce is now in informal employment.

Stephen Cotton, Secretary General of the International Transport Workers Federation remarked that the Covid-crisis has exposed an economic model based too much on cost reductions and too little on safety; he suggests that this “race to the bottom” on costs needs to be re-examined. Chiara Corazza, Women’s Forum for the Economy and Society, stressed the need for new transport models and stated that the inclusion of more women in conception, design and leadership of transport could help to achieve a better result. Hartmut Mangold, Saxony’s State Ministry for Economic Affairs, Labour and Transport, agreed that Covid-19 has put focus on problems in transport and is in favour of tougher EU standards on working conditions. He looked to technology to help, for example through digital brokerage of rest hours. Automation could also be used to help achieve more ergonomic working environments.

Many occupations in the transport sector will feel the unfolding transformation of innovation in transport. Some occupations will become obsolete, but many new fields will open up as new technologies and services develop. The key will be facilitating smooth transitions and mitigating negative impacts. Jason Taylor reported on a study that he led for APEC on the matter, and recommended three main avenues for mitigating adverse impacts: a skills strategy in line with new occupations, updating of regulations and enhancing of social safety nets.

Stephen Cotton stressed the importance of collaboration between stakeholders, a point reiterated by Umberto de Pretto. Both speakers pointed to challenges related to waiting time at border crossings. Hartmut Mangold agreed that we need border control regulation for the 21st century, not from the 19th century.

Chiara Corazza remarked that a long-term vision on transport is needed and that diversity is essential to make such a vision work; she pointed out that only 20% of the transport workforce is female, with even less in leadership positions. Inclusiveness in transport is not only related to hiring practices but also to the pipeline of women in science and technology. Diego Diaz confirmed this as while women account for 23% of the workforce of SNCF, only 7% are employed in technical jobs.