



31 March 2020

European Social Partners for Inland Waterways Transport launch urgent COVID-19 recommendations

European Social Partners for Inland Waterways Transport (EBU/ESO/ETF) note the immense challenge the COVID-19 pandemic poses to the sector. As one of the essential sectors, it has to remain in safe operational mode throughout Europe. Safety under the present circumstances gets a deeper meaning; besides the safe sailing, safe working on board is paramount.

The socio-economic impact on both companies and their employees is huge. Social Partners launch this urgent call to the European Commission, National Governments of all European navigating countries, to all local bodies and authorities and to the employers and employees themselves to take into account our joint requests and recommendations.

European Travel Attestation: Inland Waterways transport (IWT) travels throughout Europe. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many national measures have been issued and all those working in IWT have to deal with these measures when crossing borders. We request all European National Authorities to kindly accept a European Travel attestation, like the CCNR model for work related travel of IWT crew, in order to guarantee swift border crossings. A lot of crewmembers have been away from home for quite some time and a smooth change of crew must be guaranteed at all times. We urge National Authorities to inform their services in a clear and prompt manner.

Continuity for companies and crewmembers: Many European countries issue national economic measures in support of their industries and employees. As European Social Partners we would like to underline that striving for balance is essential. Measures have to support the continuity of the shipping companies, but also have to ensure income security for all crewmembers too, both for freight and passenger transport, as well as for both nautical and hotel staff. We deem it of the utmost importance that crewmembers have security in these difficult times. This is the only fair guarantee for well trained and qualified crewmembers to remain available for the IWT sector once the crisis is over and to solidify knowledge and competencies within their own sector.

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European Working Time Directive: The European Working Time Directive for Inland Waterways offers plenty of flexibility for the organisation of both working, as well as navigation time. In the European Working Time Directive, the daily resting/recovery period is essential. Only sufficiently rested crewmembers can sail safely. Work and home life alternates constantly in IWT and under the present circumstances crew changes can be difficult and burdensome.

Meanwhile, employers and owner-operators can adjust by adapting sailing times to create additional rest. In times of lowering freight demands, this can be the right thing to do.

Only in specific cases of force majeure - and this only on a voluntary basis, can the European Social Partners request National Authorities and Control bodies not to sanction possible infractions. Each employer who wants to use this exception, has to notify of this before the end of the 31st working day of the crewmembers' concerned, to the European Social Partners, so that they can inform the respective national organisations. This exceptional situation is valid between 1 April and 30 June 2020 and will under no circumstances be tacitly renewed.

Local organisations/authorities are requested:

- To keep terminals, ports and transshipment places open and accessible for safe crew changes.
- Berths: The freight demand in IWT is lowering. More vessels will stop navigating in the coming weeks. These vessels need a safe berth and the possibility to use this for a longer period. We request that these vessels are not refused as in many cases crewmembers' workplaces are also their home.
Levies: In ports and berthing locations, local levies are in place. As European Social Partners we would appreciate that should the lay-off period be prolonged, IWT barges would be exempted from these levies at least for the duration of the national lockdown period.
- Servicing of locks: Inland Waterways Transport can only be guaranteed safe passage if the servicing of locks can be guaranteed.

Employers: Employers are responsible for good and safe working conditions. In these times we expect employers to take extra safety measures. Especially for the transport of crews from and to the vessel, preferably through individual transport and the disinfection of cars, mini-buses etc.... The crew change has to be organised with minimal physical contact between the different crews. They also have to provide practical utensils such as disinfecting soap.

Crewmembers: Crewmembers are co-responsible for safety on board. Crewmembers are requested to limit physical contact with third parties as much as possible. They respect national measures issued.

Any crewmember with a cold/influenza or symptoms thereof, or with a family member with fever, should not board the vessel, but call in sick. When changing the crew, if a crewmember on board has similar such symptoms, we expect the entire crew to be put in home quarantine whilst avoiding physical contact with family and relatives.

We wish you all a safe and healthy journey!

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