



Technical meeting on decent and sustainable work in the inland waterways sector

Geneva, 20–24 November 2023

► Conclusions and recommendations

The Technical meeting on decent and sustainable work in the inland waterways sector,
Having met in Geneva from 20–24 November 2023,
Adopts the following conclusions and recommendations:

Opportunities and challenges for advancing decent work in the inland waterways sector

1. The inland waterways (IWW) sector plays an important role for the transport of passengers and goods and for the sustainable social and economic development of many countries, especially landlocked countries. Inland water transport is an environmentally sustainable mode of transport and, being underexploited, presents great development potential. Inland water transport (IWT) workers are key workers and are essential for the safety and environmental sustainability of the sector, and therefore their conditions of work are important.
2. Due to the geographical and water environment characteristics of inland waterways, there are good possibilities for applying new technologies and green emission reduction technologies in the IWW sector. Investment in infrastructure and green technologies can support mitigation of adverse effects on climate change and facilitate a more efficient mode of transport. At the same time, the process of decarbonization could give rise to skills gaps and potential safety risks. In the meantime, the IWW sector is also confronted with rapid technological advances, which may make the sector more competitive, safe and attractive. On the other hand, technological innovation will require new or enhanced skills and may give rise to technostress.
3. Experiences from international labour Conventions can serve as an important source of inspiration for advancing decent work of IWT workers.
4. Vessels need to constitute a safe and healthy working environment with the goal of becoming accident and disease-free. Decent work challenges exist in some regions for example in the tug, bulk, breakbulk, container, tanker and passenger vessel subsectors and with respect to hospitality and entertainment personnel on passenger vessels. Challenges relate to education and training, occupational safety and health, working time, operational crewing levels,

recruitment process and employment practices, wages and other forms of remuneration, and social security.

5. A lack of effective transnational and national legal frameworks for the IWW sector, as well as differences in legislation along transnational waterways, can lead to unfair competition and hamper effective social dialogue in all its forms and at all levels including collective bargaining.
6. High informality in the sector is a structural issue that poses challenges in ensuring the application of labour law and the provision of social protection. Since informality in the sector still exists, transition to formality should be a priority. The COVID-19 pandemic had a particularly negative impact on workers and micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in the informal economy.
7. Social dialogue, based on respect of freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining for all IWT workers, can lead to tangible improvement of working conditions. Social partners, including at the sectoral level, can also leverage the opportunities and overcome challenges with respect to just transition and transition to the formal economy in the IWW sector. Social dialogue in all its forms and at all levels should be encouraged, in such a way that it respects collective bargaining and its outcomes.
8. The ability to attract and retain skilled workers in the IWW sector, especially youth and women, is crucial for the sustainability of the sector. Decent working and living conditions, social infrastructure, improving skill sets, adoption of technology, elimination of all forms of discrimination, and adequate remuneration, along with skill recognition, work-life balance and social connectivity, are key to improve the attractiveness of the sector.

What needs to be done to move towards decent work in the inland waterways sector

9. Considering all the different regional regulations and practices in place, and inspired from best practices, these conclusions and recommendations are aimed at improving the working conditions in the sector.
10. Effective regulations in the IWW sector for all workers are important in areas such as working and rest times, medical care, social protection, repatriation, wages, contracts, operational crewing levels, duration of service on board, minimum age, medical examination, recruitment, occupational safety and health, maternity protection and elimination of any form of violence and harassment. Enforcement, including through regular inspection of vessels and living and working conditions on board, is key to establish a level-playing field.
11. Harmonization of relevant regulations at the regional level and amongst the riparian states, to improve living and working conditions, should be encouraged. Generally applicable international labour standards should be effectively applied to the IWW sector via national laws, regulations, or other measures taking into account the specificities of the sector.
12. Measures to create an enabling environment for sustainable enterprises in the sector, especially for MSMEs, are essential, in order to increase productivity, create quality jobs and improve decent work opportunities. This should include support from governments and better access to finance, according to national circumstances.
13. The establishment or improvement of regulatory frameworks, policies and institutions is crucial for the realization of the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining in the sector, in particular with the goal, appropriate to national conditions, to encourage and promote the full development and utilization of machinery for voluntary negotiation between

employers or employers' organizations and workers' organizations with a view to the regulation of terms and conditions of employment by means of collective agreements.

14. Skills gaps should be monitored and anticipated, and curricula updated and tailored to the needs of the sector. Skill development for IWT workers should recognize the commonalities with seafarers, including their training and service record books, while reflecting the complexities of inland navigation. Education and training programmes should be gender-responsive and inclusive for vulnerable groups, including migrant workers. Cross-border recognition of skills and harmonization of qualifications are key to foster safety and labour mobility.
15. A just transition in the IWW sector calls for effective policy measures and investments to address training, reskilling, upskilling and lifelong learning needs triggered by alternative fuels and new technologies. Enterprises, especially MSMEs, including in the informal economy, will need financial support or other adequate resources to ensure a just transition and harness the fullest potential of technological progress. Effective social dialogue and cooperation among governments, industry, workers, and academia ensures a safe, equitable and human-centred approach to a just transition towards a decarbonized IWW sector.
16. Transition to the formal economy should be promoted, including through provision of incentives for the formalization of MSMEs in the informal IWW sector, and ensuring that workers' and employers' organizations are involved in related social dialogue processes.
17. Efforts to progressively build and maintain universal, comprehensive, sustainable, and adequate social protection systems should be underpinned by social dialogue and be inclusive of all workers and enterprises in the IWW sector.
18. Better data and statistics, such as on types of vessels and categories of workers, are needed for evidence-based policy solutions to address the root causes for decent work challenges in the IWW sector, considering the diversity among countries and regions. The conclusions and recommendations can be implemented while data is collected.

Recommendations for future action by the International Labour Organization and its Members

19. Governments, employers' and workers' organizations, as appropriate to their spheres of responsibility, should:
 - (a) Adopt, review, implement and enforce national and transnational laws and regulations, with due regard to the specific characteristics of the sector, to ensure that fundamental principles and rights at work and ratified international labour Conventions protect and are effectively applied to all workers in the IWW sector;
 - (b) endeavour to provide universal access to comprehensive, sustainable and adequate social protection systems for workers in the IWW sector, regardless of nationality, and make arrangements with a view to securing their access to social protection through effective coordination of social security systems, including by way of concluding bilateral or multilateral social security agreements;
 - (c) facilitate progressive transition to formality, including provision of incentives for the formalization of MSMEs, developing skills policies that support lifelong learning and recognize prior learning, and establishment of social protection floors where they do not exist and extension of social security coverage;

- (d) strengthen systems of inspection of labour conditions on board IWW vessels, including through adequate resources, qualified inspectors and harmonization of inspections amongst riparian states;
- (e) promote the creation, attraction and retention of decent jobs in the IWW sector, through tripartite regional dialogue to establish measures that facilitate access to the industry, including safe and equal employment opportunities for youth and women;
- (f) engage in effective social dialogue in all its forms and at all levels including collective bargaining, including at sectoral and cross-border levels, to advance decent work in the IWW sector;
- (g) collect and report sectoral employment data and administrative statistics on the IWW sector, including where possible the digital registration of all workers, labour force surveys and records of occupational accidents and diseases;
- (h) regularly evaluate current and future skills needs for IWT workers and employers, address skill gaps through design, review or implementation of training, reskilling, upskilling and lifelong learning strategies and provide appropriate support on all levels for skill development initiatives, vocational training and apprenticeships;
- (i) collaborate on cross-border recognition of skills and create a system for the harmonization of training and certification requirements;
- (j) foster a just transition in the sector, including by providing for adequate policy and regulatory frameworks, funding, and supporting sustainable investment;
- (k) engage with relevant regional stakeholders, including river commissions, to promote decent work in the IWW sector;
- (l) take steps towards the ratification of the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) and ensure its effective implementation in the sector;
- (m) promote economic growth and create an enabling environment for sustainable enterprises, especially MSMEs, in order to generate decent work, productive employment and improved living standards for all; and
- (n) take appropriate steps to ensure that enterprises in the IWW sector respect human and labour rights in the recruitment and employment process, in line with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy, and to comply with national law wherever they operate.

20. The Office should:

- (a) promote the ratification of international labour Conventions and the effective implementation of the international labour standards and other ILO instruments relevant to the IWW sector (see Appendix);
- (b) strengthen the capacity of its tripartite constituents in the sector, including in collaboration with the ILO International Training Centre (ITC-ILO), on:
 - (i) fundamental principles and rights at work;
 - (ii) social protection;
 - (iii) social dialogue to advance decent work, facilitate transition to formality and achieve just transition; and

- (iv) designing policies to promote more sustainable enterprises grounded in the Decent Work Agenda.
- (c) support constituents in assessing skills needs and in designing and implementing skills, reskilling, apprenticeships and lifelong learning schemes in the sector, in collaboration with ITC-ILO, Inter-American Centre for Knowledge Development in Vocational Training (CINTERFOR) and Education in Inland Navigation (EDINNA) network, and in consultation with UN bodies and agencies;
- (d) regularly collect reliable data, gather statistics, including from river commissions, and conduct research on employment trends, as well as support governments' efforts to collect data on the IWW sector;
- (e) maintain periodic tripartite dialogue on the IWW sector to progress the conclusions and recommendations reached at the meeting and provide direction;
- (f) develop and strengthen partnerships with river commissions and regional economic commissions, involving the social partners, to foster policy coherence; and organize tripartite forums to promote cooperation among riparian States in the regions, with a view to advancing decent work in the IWW sector;
- (g) establish, in consultation with the constituents and regional offices, a clear roadmap and timetable for regional follow-up and ask the sectoral advisory bodies to consider convening a follow-up meeting; and
- (h) provide technical assistance to constituents to implement sectoral policies and initiatives on formalization, just transition and use of technology to advance decent work in the IWW sector.

► Appendix

Non-exhaustive reference list of ILO standards, declarations and guidance, and other international instruments relevant to the inland waterways sector

International labour standards

Fundamental Conventions (and related Recommendations)

- Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), its 2014 Protocol, the Forced Labour (Indirect Compulsion) Recommendation, 1930 (No. 35), and the Forced Labour (Supplementary Measures) Recommendation, 2014 (No. 203)
- Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87)
- Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98)
- Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), and the Equal Remuneration Recommendation, 1951 (No. 90)
- Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105)
- Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), and the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Recommendation, 1958 (No. 111)
- Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), and the Minimum Age Recommendation, 1973 (No. 146)
- Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155), and the Occupational Safety and Health Recommendation, 1981 (No. 164)
- Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Recommendation, 1999 (No. 190)
- Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187), and the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Recommendation, 2006 (No. 197)

Governance Conventions (and related Recommendations)

- Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81), and the Labour Inspection Recommendation, 1947 (No. 81), and the Labour Inspection (Mining and Transport) Recommendation, 1947 (No. 82)
- Employment Policy Convention, 1964 (No. 122), the Employment Policy Recommendation, 1964 (No. 122), and the Employment Policy (Supplementary Provisions) Recommendation, 1984 (No. 169)
- Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969 (No. 129), and the Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Recommendation, 1969 (No. 133)
- Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No. 144), and the Tripartite Consultation (Activities of the International Labour Organisation) Recommendation, 1976 (No. 152)

Technical Conventions (and related Recommendations)

- Medical Examination of Young Persons (Industry) Convention, 1946 (No. 77), and the Medical Examination of Young Persons Recommendation, 1946 (No. 79)
- Labour Clauses (Public Contracts) Convention, 1949 (No. 94), and the Labour Clauses (Public Contracts) Recommendation, 1949 (No. 84)
- Protection of Wages Convention, 1949 (No. 95), and the Protection of Wages Recommendation, 1949 (No. 85)
- Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97), and the Migration for Employment Recommendation (Revised), 1949 (No. 86)
- Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102)
- Equality of Treatment (Social Security) Convention, 1962 (No. 118)
- Employment Injury Benefits Convention, 1964 [Schedule I amended in 1980] (No. 121), and the Employment Injury Benefits Recommendation, 1964 (No. 121)
- Medical Care and Sickness Benefits Convention, 1969 (No. 130), and the Medical Care and Sickness Benefits Recommendation, 1969 (No. 134)
- Minimum Wage Fixing Convention, 1970 (No. 131), and the Minimum Wage Fixing Recommendation, 1970 (No. 135)
- Workers' Representatives Convention, 1971 (No. 135), and the Workers' Representatives Recommendation, 1971 (No. 143)
- Paid Educational Leave Convention, 1974 (No. 140), and the Paid Educational Leave Recommendation, 1974 (No. 148)
- Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143), and the Migrant Workers Recommendation, 1975 (No. 151)
- Human Resources Development Convention, 1975 (No. 142), and the Human Resources Development Recommendation, 2004 (No. 195)
- Working Environment (Air Pollution, Noise and Vibration) Convention, 1977 (No. 148), and the Working Environment (Air Pollution, Noise and Vibration) Recommendation, 1977 (No. 156)
- Labour Relations (Public Service) Convention, 1978 (No. 151), and the Labour Relations (Public Service) Recommendation, 1978 (No. 159)
- Collective Bargaining Convention, 1981 (No. 154), and the Collective Bargaining Recommendation, 1981 (No. 163)
- Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156), and the Workers with Family Responsibilities Recommendation, 1981 (No. 165)
- Maintenance of Social Security Rights Convention, 1982 (No. 157), and the Maintenance of Social Security Rights Recommendation, 1983 (No. 167)
- Termination of Employment Convention, 1982 (No. 158), and the Termination of Employment Recommendation, 1982 (No. 166)

- Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) Convention, 1983 (No. 159), and the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) Recommendation, 1983 (No. 168)
- Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169)
- Labour Statistics Convention, 1985 (No.160), and the Labour Statistics Recommendation, 1985 (No. 170)
- Chemicals Convention, 1990 (No. 170), and the Chemicals Recommendation, 1990 (No. 177)
- Occupational Health Services Convention, 1985 (No. 161), and the Occupational Health Services Recommendation, 1985 (No. 171)
- Protection of Workers' Claims (Employer's Insolvency) Convention, 1992 (No. 173), and the Protection of Workers' Claims (Employer's Insolvency) Recommendation, 1992 (No. 180)
- Part-Time Work Convention, 1994 (No. 175), and the Part-Time Work Recommendation, 1994 (No. 182)
- Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 (No. 181), and the Private Employment Agencies Recommendation, 1997 (No. 188)
- Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183), and the Maternity Protection Recommendation, 2000 (No. 191)
- Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), and the Violence and Harassment Recommendation, 2019 (No. 206)

Technical Recommendations

- Hours of Work (Inland Navigation) Recommendation, 1920 (No. 8)
- Voluntary Conciliation and Arbitration Recommendation, 1951 (No. 92)
- Co-operation at the Level of the Undertaking Recommendation, 1952 (No. 94)
- Communications within the Undertaking Recommendation, 1967 (No. 129)
- Examination of Grievances Recommendation, 1967 (No. 130)
- Employment Promotion and Protection against Unemployment Recommendation, 1988 (No. 176)
- Job Creation in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Recommendation, 1998 (No. 189)
- Promotion of Cooperatives Recommendation, 2002 (No. 193)
- List of Occupational Diseases Recommendation, 2002 (No. 194)
- Employment Relationship Recommendation, 2006 (No. 198)
- HIV and AIDS Recommendation, 2010 (No. 200)
- Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202)
- Forced Labour (Supplementary Measures) Recommendation, 2014 (No. 203)
- Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204)
- Quality Apprenticeships Recommendation, 2023 (No. 208)

Conclusions, declarations and resolutions

- [ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up](#), 1998, as amended in 2022
- [ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization](#), 2008, as amended in 2022
- [ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work](#), 2019
- [Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy](#), 2017, as amended in 2022
- [Resolution concerning a global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient](#), 2021
- [Resolution concerning small and medium-sized enterprises and decent and productive employment creation](#), 2015
- [Conclusions concerning the promotion of sustainable enterprises](#), 2007
- [Resolution concerning skills and lifelong learning](#), 2021
- [Resolution on recovering from the crisis: A Global Jobs Pact](#), 2009, as amended in 2022
- [Resolution concerning a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all](#), 2023

ILO guidance

- [Guidelines on general principles of labour inspection](#), 2022
- [General principles and operational guidelines for fair recruitment and Definition of recruitment fees and related costs](#), 2019
- [Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all](#), 2015
- [Protection of workers' personal data: An ILO code of practice](#), 1997

Other international instrument

- United Nations, [Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#), 2011