

PORTS IN TRANSITION: BUILDING RESILIENT ECOSYSTEMS

Workforce transition learning lab notes

Theme	Social Cohesion, Skills and Quality Jobs	Round	1/1
Room	Room 9	Note-taker	Fulvio Esposito (IWTP)
Facilitator	Eva Burm (PoAB)	Date	17 September 2026
Experts <i>names and organisations as they should appear in print</i>	Arthur Cormier, UITP; Khalid Tachi, EICB		
Approx. headcount	13	Sector mix <i>port authorities, terminals, shippers, technology providers, public authorities, researchers</i>	port authorities, researchers, sector associations, shippers.

1. How the facilitator framed the prompt

Eva Burm opened with the question: "What if innovation causes half of today's jobs to disappear?" The prompt was explored through live polls on job creation, changing occupations, skills shortages, youth attraction and the risk of workers being left behind. It was not materially narrowed.

2. Quotes

Three to five per round. Mark clearly if a speaker asked not to be quoted or not to be named, and flag any wording you are unsure of so it can be checked.

Speaker	Organisation	Statement – as close to their own words as possible
Khalid Tachi	EICB	Prompt: How should innovation and autonomous navigation be introduced? "A stable policy framework and appropriate financial support are essential to the business case. LNG showed the risk for frontrunners: establishing the regulatory framework took years, but the policy direction had changed by the time it was in place."
Arthur Cormier	UITP	Prompt: What role can automation play in an ageing sector facing labour shortages? "Automation can help fill growing workforce gaps, while allowing the sector to adapt gradually to changing labour needs."
Khalid Tachi	EICB	Prompt: By 2030, the majority of port workers will still be able to do the job they are doing today. "Jobs will not necessarily disappear, but their nature will change, with workers increasingly taking on monitoring and supervisory responsibilities."

3. What participants said would actually change

- "The green transition will create more port jobs than it destroys": 11 agreed and 1 disagreed (12 responses). One participant argued that the overall number might remain stable, as some jobs would be created and others lost.
- "By 2030, the majority of port workers will still be able to do the job they are doing today": 5 agreed and 6 disagreed (11 responses).
- Participants expected job content to change, with more monitoring and supervisory tasks in increasingly automated operations.
- "The port sector already lacks the skills it needs for the transition": 12 agreed and 1 disagreed (13 responses).
- "Ports will fail to attract the young generation they need for the transition": 7 agreed and 5 disagreed (12 responses).
- "No port workers will be left behind": 2 agreed and 10 disagreed (12 responses). Manual, physical and middle-level occupations were identified as particularly exposed.
- Automation was presented mainly as a response to labour shortages rather than as a simple replacement for workers. Remaining roles would require retraining.

4. Preconditions named

- Innovation must address a genuine operational need and offer a credible business case.
- Automation should be introduced progressively, with human oversight and safety safeguards during the transition.
- Workers need timely upskilling and reskilling, supported by cooperation with training institutions and schools.
- Employers must improve the attractiveness and presentation of port and transport occupations, particularly for younger people.
- Regulatory pathways and public financial support need to be sufficiently predictable for organisations investing early in new technologies.
- The timing of investment matters: early adopters may carry high costs before technologies, regulation and markets mature.

5. Barriers raised

Type of barrier	What was raised, and by whom
Regulatory	Khalid Tachi described a slow regulatory pathway for LNG, followed by a policy shift that weakened its position as a transition fuel. With this he underlined the need for robust policy and financial framework from public institutions to support the transition.
Financial	The transition depends on a viable business case. Khalid Tachi noted that first movers can absorb heavy losses and referred to Dutch hydrogen vessel operators that had gone bankrupt. Public financial support and the timing of market entry were seen as important.
Governance and organisational	Effective workforce transition requires employers to coordinate with schools and training institutions. It also requires responsibility for upskilling, reskilling and sector attractiveness to be clearly assigned.
Data and digital	Automation changes work towards monitoring and supervision, creating new competence requirements. No specific data-governance barrier was raised in the notes.
Skills and labour	The Mentimeter poll showed strong, but not unanimous, agreement that the sector already lacks the skills needed for the transition: 12 agreed and 1 disagreed. Ageing workforces, shortages, difficulty attracting younger workers, and risks to manual and middle-level roles were recurring concerns. Jan Smallegange asked whether the gap concerns skills, knowledge or both, and which competences are missing.
Other	Safety was described as fundamental to automation. Worker acceptance is also a challenge: interviews with operators indicated that some value the act of sailing even while recognising crew shortages.

6. Concrete examples

- Automated metro systems were cited as evidence that automation has existed for years without simply eliminating all jobs.
- Arthur Cormier referred to an estimated 10% shortage of bus drivers and future needs of around 40,000 drivers in Germany and 50,000 in France. These figures should be checked against the original source before publication.
- A mixed operating model was suggested in which drivers operate services during the day and automated services run at night.
- Jan Smallegange referred to an experience involving the Port of Duisburg: the same role was advertised with two different descriptions, and the version presented as an IT job received more applications.
- KBN interviews with inland navigation operators reportedly found reluctance towards autonomous navigation because operators enjoy sailing, alongside recognition that crew shortages require solutions.
- Khalid Tachi used the example of LNG regulation and the later change in its policy treatment as an example of uncertainty for early movers.
- Dutch hydrogen vessel operators were cited as an example of frontrunners facing financial failure.
- Eva Burm referred to World Economic Forum, OECD and UK research on job creation, job quality and the sector's ability to attract younger people. Full references were not captured.
- The EU ETS and ETSII were mentioned as policy drivers. Their precise relevance to the examples discussed should be checked before inclusion in external outputs.

7. Explicit asks of the EU or of national regulators

- No explicit request to the EU or national regulators was recorded.
- An implied need emerged for stable, coherent and sufficiently timely regulation so that early investments are not undermined by subsequent policy changes.
- The discussion also implied a need for targeted public financial support for first movers and for training and reskilling during the transition.

8. Disagreements

- Job creation: 11 agreed and 1 disagreed that the green transition will create more port jobs than it destroys (12 responses). The dissenting participant said gains and losses could balance out.
- Continuity of current jobs: 5 agreed and 6 disagreed that, by 2030, the majority of port workers will still be able to do their current job (11 responses).
- Attracting younger workers: 7 agreed and 5 disagreed that ports will fail to attract the young generation needed for the transition (12 responses). Khalid Tachi suggested that new types of work and improved conditions could make the sector more attractive.
- Leaving workers behind: 2 agreed and 10 disagreed that no port workers will be left behind (12 responses). Manual, physical and middle-level jobs were all mentioned as potentially exposed.

9. Questions the facilitator or experts could not resolve

- Does the identified gap concern practical skills, formal knowledge or both, and which specific competences are missing?
- Which occupations and worker groups are most exposed to displacement, and which are most likely to move into supervisory roles?
- How quickly can automation move from human-supervised systems to operations requiring fewer people without compromising safety?
- How can regulation and financial support protect first movers without encouraging investment in technologies that may later lose policy support?
- Can changes in job design and presentation substantially improve recruitment among younger people?

10. Room dynamics

The atmosphere was interactive and discussions open. Live polls made both consensus and disagreement visible, and participants then discussed their organisations' readiness in groups of three or four. The clearest convergence concerned the existing skills gap and the likelihood that some workers will be left behind. Views were more divided on net job creation, continuity of current roles and the sector's ability to attract younger workers.

11. Comparison with the other round

Only one round provided.

12. Priority points for each output

Completed at the end of the session, so that the people writing up the material do not have to make this judgement for you.

For the EU position paper – policy and regulatory implications, EU-level asks, barriers recurring across ports, points of convergence

- Skills and labour shortages are already present and may accelerate automation, but deployment must be linked to training and worker transition.
- Regulatory predictability matters: long approval periods and changing policy signals can expose early movers to significant financial risk.
- A credible business case and well-timed public support are necessary for uptake, particularly for first movers.
- Safety and human oversight should remain central during progressive automation.

- Strong agreement: 12 of 13 respondents agreed that the port sector already lacks the skills needed for the transition.
- rebranding the same Port of Duisburg vacancy as an IT role reportedly attracted more applications. Context and framing matters.
- Participant experience: operators interviewed by KBN reportedly valued sailing but also recognised that crew shortages require new solutions.
- 11 of 12 respondents expected the green transition to create more port jobs than it destroys, while 10 of 12 disagreed that no port workers would be left behind.