



Annual Report 2024/2025

Inland waterway transport
A huge potential sector



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European Barge Union

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Our Mission European Barge Union



EBU's mission is to contribute to the development of a sustainable and efficient Pan-European transport system via a larger share of inland waterway transport (IWT). IWT is pivotal to guarantee European mobility. European waterways offer free capacity to absorb much higher volumes of freight and passengers and thus to decarbonise the transport system.

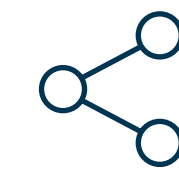
EBU's key objectives are:



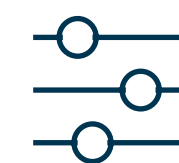
- to contribute to the development of the right policy and framework conditions to the benefit of Inland Waterway Transport



- to stimulate the market position of the sector



- to guarantee a well-maintained and resilient infrastructure without bottlenecks and missing links



- to increase the share of inland waterway freight and passenger transport on (Pan-) European waterways



- to promote inland waterway transport as the safest, sustainable and environmentally friendly mode of transport.

To achieve these goals EBU closely cooperates with the European institutions, the River & River Protection Commissions, the UNECE as well as national administrations and stakeholders.

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Preface

Inland waterway transport,
a huge potential



On December 1, 2024, the collegium of newly appointed Commissioners commenced its duties following formal approval from the European Parliament. The Commission promptly unveiled ambitious plans for a follow-up strategy to implement the EU Green Deal, which led to the earlier release of the Competitive Compass and the Clean Industrial Plan (CID) this year. These new strategies are designed to build upon the EU's efforts to transition to a sustainable economy, with a focus on enhancing the competitiveness of the European industry.

EBU, in collaboration with stakeholders, swiftly took the initiative to address the sector's needs in light of the announced strategies, by releasing its input to the development of the Sustainable Transport Investment Plan, the Waterborne/Maritime Industrial Strategy, and the Ports Strategy. Additionally, the European Commission released its long-anticipated Water Resilience Strategy, which represents a collective commitment to ensure that Europe evolves into a sustainable, resilient, smart, and competitive water economy while restoring and protecting the water cycle. During the first half of 2025, under the Polish presidency of the Council of the European Union, a Maritime Congress was organized, at which Member States adopted the Szczecin Declaration. This declaration called for the enhancement of global competitiveness and resilience within Europe's shipping, shipbuilding, and waterborne manufacturing sectors. The Polish Presidency also succeeded to successfully finalise the negotiations on the River Information Services (RIS) directive, while also the TRAN Committee of the European Parliament adopted the proposal; however, further negotiations on the Combined Transport Directive (CTD) had to be postponed. EBU seized the opportunity to articulate the sector's position during various conferences and targeted meetings with relevant Members of the European Parliament and Commission services. It also engaged in a high-level strategic dialogue with Commissioner for Sustainable Transport and Tourism, Apostolos Tzitzikostas, and Executive Vice-President Stéphane Séjour. In addition to its contributions to the aforementioned strategies and discussions, the EBU has maintained its focus on significant challenges of the sector based on its mission, which includes addressing infrastructure requirements, the energy transition and digitalisation, as well as enhancing its modal share and the attractiveness of the sector in the labour market. People remain central to our organization and its members, a fact that is evident in our strong relationship with the European Federation of Transport Workers and contributions to negotiations within various standard-setting and decision-making bodies. As we reflect on a demanding year, we anticipate the further development of the announced strategies in the near future and look forward to a close cooperation with all relevant institutions and stakeholders. The annual report presented here highlights several key priorities that our association has addressed during the reporting period, as well as the future agenda for Inland Waterway Transport (IWT). We hope you find it to be an inspiring read.

Matthieu Blanc, President



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Inland shipping and ports call for ambitious course for a sustainable, resilient, and competitive waterborne future

The European Union is embarking on a strategic transformation of its waterborne sector through the forthcoming EU Industrial Waterborne Strategy and EU Port Strategy, reaffirming its commitment to climate neutrality, industrial resilience, and technological leadership.

A Backbone of Europe's Industrial and Environmental Vitality

Inland Waterway Transport as part of the waterborne sector is a cornerstone of Europe's economy and sustainability goals. It brings together a diverse ecosystem of shipowners, ports, infrastructure and service providers, shipbuilders, classification societies, equipment manufacturers, research institutions, and more. **EBU together with stakeholders from the IWT and ports sector provided its in-depth contribution on the forthcoming strategies as their consultations open.**

Europe's rivers, canals, seas, and ports are more than transit routes—they are lifelines for the continent's industrial and ecological health. Nearly 50% of Europeans live near coastlines or major rivers, and major centres of production and consumption are concentrated along waterways.

Inland waterway transport (IWT) enables the safe, efficient, and low-emission movement of key goods—steel, chemicals, agri-products, alternative fuels, oversized cargo, and more—relieving pressure on congested land networks, while offering increased opportunities for sustainable tourism and

recreation. Disruptions to this network can ripple across downstream supply chains, impacting industry, water and food security alike. Inland ports, acting as multimodal hubs and industrial clusters, are expanding their role in the renewable energy eco-system and the circular economy.

Twin Transition at the Heart of Strategy

The EU Industrial Waterborne Strategy and EU Port Strategy are designed to accelerate the **green and digital transition** of the entire waterborne value chain and set a roadmap for innovation, investment, and resilience.

As input to these strategies, the IWT and ports sector highlights its vision around a number of key areas, and calls for the following policy actions:

1. **Fostering innovation** from early research to market deployment across the full value chain;
2. Creating a **pro-innovation regulatory framework** that ensures legal certainty and unlocks private and public investment;
3. Establishing a **stable, accessible funding system** tailored especially to the needs of SMEs.

Ports and Shipbuilding as Pillars of Sovereignty and Security

Ports are positioned as engines of industrial activity, green energy hubs, and logistical gateways that extend Europe's trade network. They also play a critical role in security and military mobility, hosting infrastructure and assets essential to Europe's strategic autonomy. Shipyards and equipment manufacturers are recognized as vital for the EU's capacity to build complex, high-tech vessels and equipment. Investments in these sectors will drive decarbonization, digitalization, and the broader sustainability and resilience agenda-while securing Europe's leadership in maritime innovation.



Putting People at the Core

These strategies not only aim to transform industry- they also place people at the centre. Addressing labour and skills shortages, promoting workforce upskilling, and supporting quality employment are pivotal to delivering on the sector's vision.

Contribution of the inland waterway transport (iwt) and ports sector report





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Creating a high-quality waterway network requires a predictable EU budget

The Inland Waterway Transport sector is strongly depending on a well functioning infrastructure to guarantee reliability in serving major industries and tourism across Europe. IWT plays a critical role in sustaining Europe's economic vitality and its climate and environmental goals.

It provides reliable and efficient transport solutions for heavy industries, consumer and pharmaceutical goods, urban deliveries, construction and more. A robust inland waterway ecosystem is essential to fostering industrial and commercial success, supporting and attracting industries critical to European prosperity and resilience. EBU therefore urges policymakers, industries, and citizens to recognise the unique value of inland waterway transport by granting sufficient support to the European waterways on which major industries and consumers are dependent.

However, after decades of delays in modernising waterway infrastructure and the increasing impact of climate change, the reliability of inland waterway services is at risk. Inland waterways are multifunctional public assets that deliver European public goods. As such, they offer a natural advantage and a quick win for society and public spendings - we must invest now for the future. Waterway authorities, shipowners and inland ports have joined forces to provide an overview of bottle-necks in the European waterway infrastructure. The backlog in modernisation and the shortage of investment and human resources to upgrade navigable waterways undermines Europe's agility in competitiveness and climate action.

This calls for proactive action to address the current shortcomings and to prepare the network for the future. With small investments effective results can be realised, so we can remain a reliable partner to our clients. Inland waterway carriers are dependent on future-proof and resilient waterways in Europe', statement by EBU's President Matthieu Blanc.

It is important to note that creating a well-functioning transport network goes beyond addressing mega-projects. The Connecting Europe Facility is currently the best tool to realise the TEN-T and ensure that European industries continue to have a strong logistical backbone upon which to rely for the coming century. CEF continuation under new MFF to guarantee proper infrastructure funding. The EBU applauds the recently released draft of the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) with a dedicated CEF instrument and increased budget for infrastructure. A higher budget and the European coordination of infrastructure across Europe is more than ever crucial. It is the only guarantee for safeguarding the smooth functioning of the EU internal market, promoting

Europe’s competitiveness and cohesion, and bolstering its resilience and military preparedness, as stated by a coalition of Europe’s transport sector and related stakeholders.

Investing in rivers to keep Europe moving

EU co-funding to complete trans-European transport network (TEN-T)

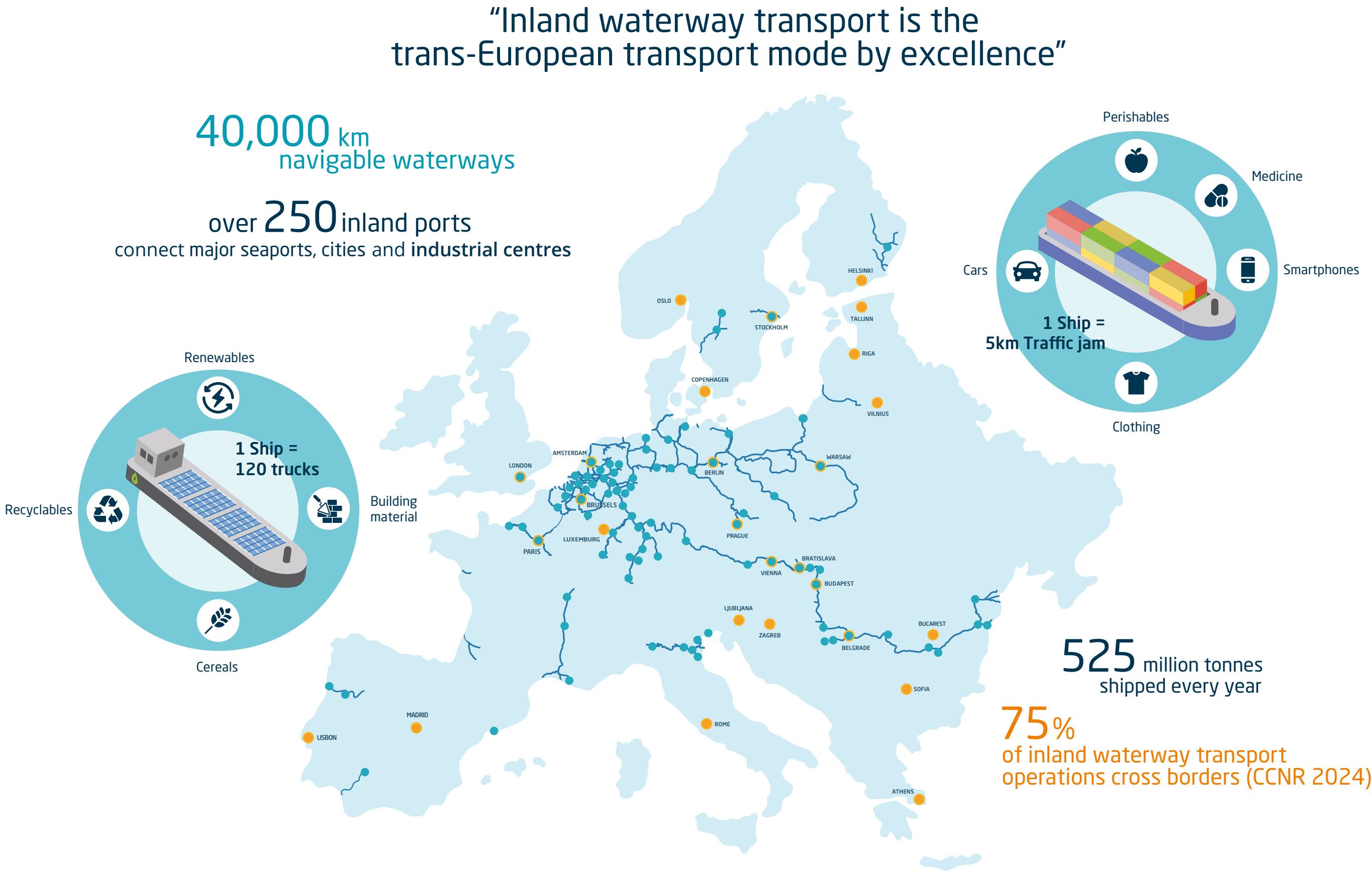
- It is a well-established EU policy in the Treaty to promote the interconnection and interoperability of national networks as well as access to such networks to achieve open and competitive markets.
- The completion of the TEN-T network as laid down in the regulation requires a robust and dedicated budget line managed centrally by the EU.

A network approach of connecting infrastructure instead of a patchwork of mega projects.

- Limiting EU co-funding to isolated mega projects would be counter-productive to the aims outlined in the Treaty and the TEN-T Regulation.
- Solving bottlenecks within national borders that affect crossborder connectivity is essential to well-functioning multimodal transport corridors.
- This is especially true for inland waterways which are trans-European by excellence, since 75% of operations are crossing borders. Unlike other transport modes, there are no alternative routes, so one single bottleneck produces a negative ripple effect in the entire corridor.
- Waterway projects go beyond transport and deliver a major contribution to climate resilience of transport and other activities along waterways.

Towards real simplification and reduction of administrative barriers.

- The absence of a transboundary perspective has historically rendered national plans insufficient in implementing trans-European policies, while this is essential to complete the TEN-T network. Moreover, national administrative capacity is increasingly stretched.
- The centrally managed Connecting Europe Facility works well. It can be improved to provide both predictability and flexibility. We need a funding instrument based on similar principles to continue in the next EU budget for the completion of the TEN-T network and appropriate co-funding to make the inland waterway network bottleneck-free and climate resilient.



Why IWT is indispensable to Europe





Energy Transition Needs and Innovation in the IWT sector

Recognized as a highly competitive, energy-efficient, safe, and sustainable alternative to other transport modes, inland waterway transport helps alleviate congestion on overloaded road and rail networks for both goods and passengers. Europe's new industrial future and circular economy depend heavily on IWT as carrier of the building blocks of the EU economy, including renewable fuels. Increasing cargo volumes on inland waterways can make a significant contribution to achieving the European Green Deal policy objectives.

A near-term transition to zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in inland waterway transport is within reach through the widespread adoption of Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO).

HVO as renewable drop-in fuel enables full decarbonisation and can be used immediately in existing and modern internal combustion engines to replace fossil diesel. Moreover, HVO is fully compatible with the current refuelling infrastructure. However, the shift is currently hindered by the inability to pass on the considerably higher price of HVO to customers, leading to competitive disadvantages compared to fossil fuel users.

In order to capitalise on the benefits and opportunities presented by HVO in the short term, it is essential to prioritise support for an annual supply of 1.6 million tons HVO for IWT at competitive pricing with diesel.

This should be backed by a stable EU regulatory framework and coordinated efforts of EU Member States. This approach would deliver a viable business case to barge operators and represent a major step

forward in the decarbonisation of IWT, aligning with the EU Green Deal and supporting the objectives of a modal shift.

Advancing the development of alternative zero-emission technologies

Creating dependency on HVO as sole energy carrier brings risks terms of the availability (competition from other modes and sectors) and the price levels. Other fuelling solutions shall therefore be developed further in parallel to mitigate risks and to be resilient. Beyond drop-in fuels, other clean solutions must be explored and further developed with a focus on long-term sustainability and higher innovation:

- Battery-electric propulsion could be cost-competitive with HVO for container shuttle services, where battery containers can be swapped at existing container terminals. Electric propulsion is also an important and viable alternative for passenger vessels, ferries and pushers.
- Methanol and hydrogen projects are currently in development, though these require new refuelling infrastructure and further technological advancements.

Regulation and funding as key drivers for further development of alternatives beyond drop-in fuels

As seen with the transition to double-hull tanker vessels, regulation has historically been the main driver of transformation in the inland waterway sector. To successfully achieve decarbonization through implementation of alternatives beyond drop-in fuels, the current market failures must be urgently addressed through:

1. A **predictable and pro-innovation regulatory** framework that provides legal certainty and levels the playing field for EU energy suppliers, shipyards, the waterborne technology sector, and vessel owners.
2. A **goal-based and technology-neutral approach**, ensuring investment security while driving demand for renewable energy and expanding the renewable energy supply network for inland vessels.
3. **Funding and support for technological advancements beyond drop-in solutions**, making other renewable energy solutions more efficient and cost-effective over time.

By implementing clear regulations and fostering innovation, the current deadlock can be broken – allowing the inland waterway sector to decarbonize effectively while securing long-term investment in clean technologies.

Promising examples of zero-emission innovations

In the PLATINA4Action report D4.1 different zero-emission initiatives for the inland waterway transport sector have been identified and assessed. The following can be mentioned which outline the technical opportunities seen in the market today:

- Zero Emission Services (ZES) concerning swappable battery containers
- KOTUG E-pusher concerning modular zero-emission pusher
- Waterbus concerning battery electric passenger vessels
- Hydrogen Fuel cell applications
- ZULU X-barge concerning modular zero-emission vessels
- HVO & clean combustion solutions (Euro VI, Stage NRE <560kw limits)
- SFK Electric Ferries concerning battery electric ferry
- Energy efficient navigation for hybrid drivetrain (Ecobin)
- Mannheim coupled convoy with clean hybrid drivetrain (Euro VI, Stage NRE <560kw limits)

Sustainable Transport Investment Plan

¹ The report includes illustrations and systematic assessments presenting their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as well as the key success and fail factors. The report can be [downloaded here](#) from the PLATINA4Action website





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Digitalisation as a major enabler to reach the modal shift and sustainability goals of the IWT sector

IWT and ports are making significant progress in the field of digitalisation. They are at the forefront of the digitalisation wave, from waterway information services being implemented across borders to remotely operated infrastructure and vessels already in service.

Smart Shipping is the whole cluster of connected and automated vessels, infrastructure, smart data and smart administration in full development that will enhance interoperability, reduce administrative burdens and facilitate the transition towards smart, automated navigation, helping the sector cope with labour shortages and boosting overall safety and efficiency. Implementation of synchro-modality and the physical internet will support the handling of increased freight and passenger volumes, helping to boost IWT's share by 25% by 2030 and 50% by 2050.

To contribute to the increased digitalisation in the sector, the EBU has been engaged in various initiatives during the reporting period.

DTLF

In the 3rd quarter of 2024, the third mandate for the Digital Transport and Logistics Forum (DTLF) has started. The EBU application for membership to this new mandate has been assigned for the next five years. The discussions surrounding the electronic Freight Transport Information (eFTI) continued after a period of standstill. However due to delays in the current process, especially in the technical area, the initial timeline for adoption has been amended by the European Commission to meet with the actual state of play. Due to this delay, the obligatory implementation of eFTI has been postponed to 2027.

EBU will continue to contribute to the works of the various subgroups in order to stimulate a swift implementation to the benefit of the IWT sector which is awaiting a smooth and paper free transfer of documents towards the authorities.

RIS - an important tool for efficient IWT

The Council and Parliament have reached a political consensus regarding an update to the 2005 directive concerning river information services. This consensus represents a significant advancement towards improved implementation and utilization of river information services (RIS), facilitating a more effective exchange of information among authorities, inland water transport operators, and skippers.

Initiated in 2005, the RIS-directive establishes a framework for the implementation and utilization of harmonised, interoperable, and open RIS, emphasizing safety, efficiency, and environmental sustainability in inland waterway transport (IWT) within the EU. Nearly two decades later, a proposal for amending the current Directive has been put forward.

The European Boating Union (EBU) has seized this opportunity to express their views on the proposed amendment in relation to the existing Directive 2005/44/EC.

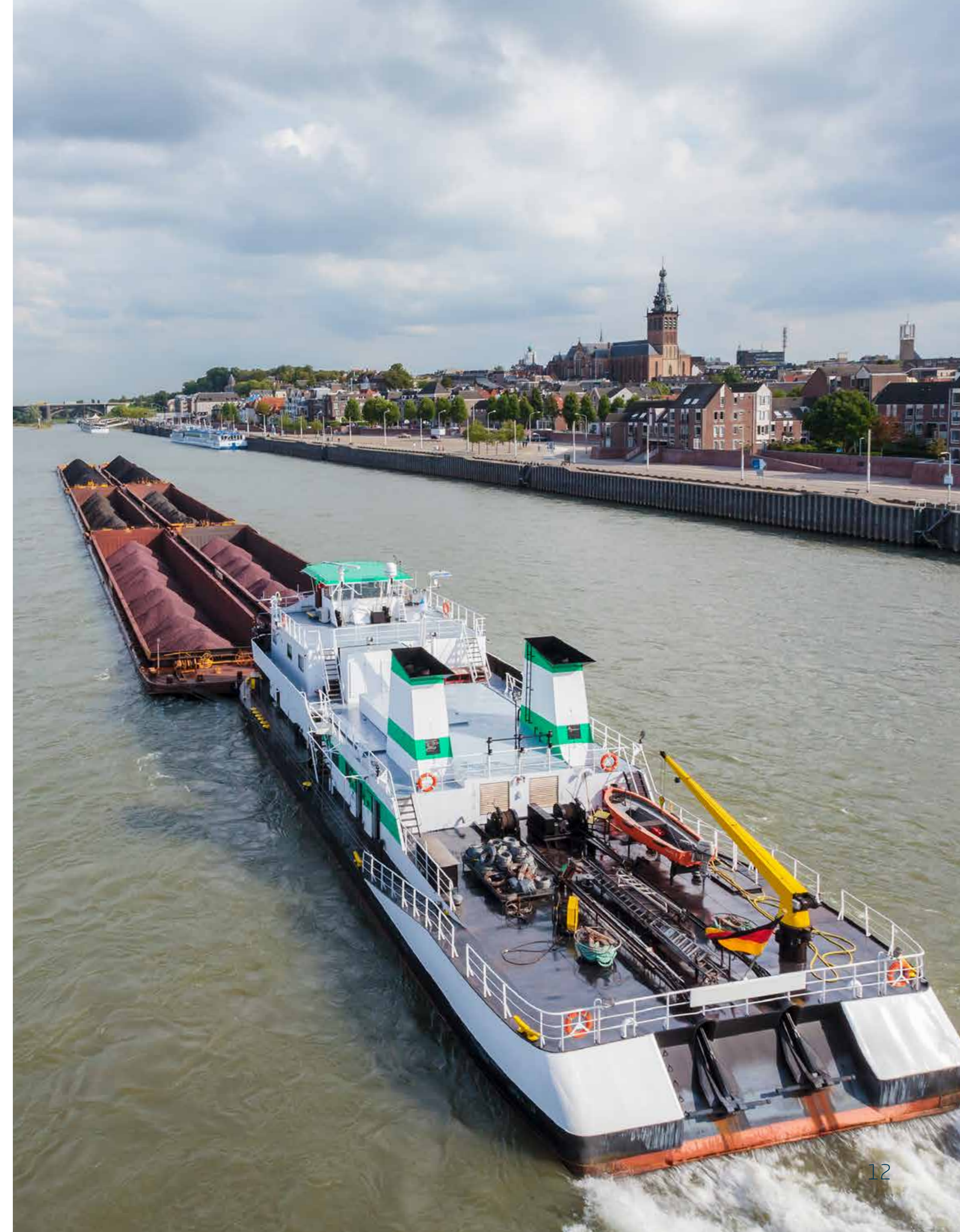
There is a pressing need for the comprehensive implementation of RIS across all Member States within a specified timeframe, which also encompasses all European waterways suitable for navigable IWT, including all inland and seaports situated along these waterways. Furthermore, it is essential to consider how RIS should be integrated into the platform-driven evolution of transport and logistics.

Digitalisation Vision of Inland Waterway Transport

In 2023, the NAIADES 3 Expert Group published its vision on digitalisation of. Consequently, the European Commission opened a call for tender to assist the EC/ DG-MOVE in the future implementation of this vision in the sector. Given the huge importance of this topic to the sector, the IWT Platform decided to join a consortium of renowned project partners to submit a bid to this tender which at the release of this report has been awarded as the winning bid.

Digitalisation is a major horizontal enabler in the transition to a competitive, sustainable and resilient IWT and port sector. The aim of digitalisation is to improve efficiency, enhance customer experience, provide new opportunities, enable automation, drive innovation and result in a more agile and competitive organisation. It is thus an indispensable tool in making multimodality less complex, more economically viable and easier to use. Enhanced data flows enable a higher degree of automation and autonomy, from remote control from shore to automated and autonomous systems and operations.

Vessels of the future will be designed to facilitate continuous updating and upgrading with digital technologies throughout their lifecycle. Digitalisation will not only improve nautical operations, safety and the energy efficiency of IWT, but will also improve asset management, logistics and mobility flows. In addition, it is beneficial for identifying vulnerabilities, achieving cybersecurity, and anticipating slow-onset changes such as those caused by climate change. It also helps to withstand extreme events such as pandemics, natural disasters, and sabotage, among others, while improving the robustness of systems and networks.





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People are at the core in the developments of the labour market and social agenda

We are determined to put people first as we develop and deploy innovation and modernise the labour market by creating attractive job and career opportunities, modernising crewing regulations and professional qualifications, creating and supporting skills development to meet the needs of a rapidly evolving, technology-driven sector.

In 2020, approximately 41,923 people were employed on board of inland vessels across Europe, with 44% in passenger transport and 56% in freight transport.

The sector since long is facing a shortage of qualified personnel, prompting efforts to attract young people and lateral entrants.

Digitalisation and automation will enhance the sector's attractiveness and efficiency, offering new job opportunities and career prospects.

To address the labour shortage and prepare the workforce for the green and digital transformation, updating legislation, supporting lateral entry into the profession and providing targeted funding for training are essential steps. Efforts are being made at various levels to attract new entrants, particularly from adjacent sectors like maritime professionals transitioning to inland navigation. Current qualification frameworks are too rigid to allow for lateral entry into the profession, limiting the pool of potential workers. In 2022, Regulation (EU) 2017/2397, aimed at harmonizing professional qualifications and improving labour mobility, came into force. While it introduced flexible educational pathways for sector

transitions, it has unintentionally created more entry barriers. It is essential to urgently adjust the EU Professional Qualifications Directive and modernise European crewing standards. Equally important are funding mechanisms to support training in areas such as alternative fuel operations and digital vessel management. The EBU has been strongly involved and contributed to the below policy areas which are critical to the development of the sector in coping with the challenges above.

E-Tools and Crewing Regulations

Discussions concerning a European crewing regulation are closely linked to the development of digital tools (e-tools). The creation of a tamper proof digital system for the registration of both personnel and vessels opens the door to a more flexible crewing regime. The current framework, which relies heavily on paper-based documentation, poses significant challenges for control and enforcement. By transitioning to digital systems, administrative burdens on board can be reduced, while oversight and compliance processes become faster and more efficient. However, a key condition for the successful implementation of e-tools is that the system must not become more complex,

time-consuming, or costly. Operators and vessel owners should benefit from this transition. In collaboration with other CESNI working groups, particular attention is being paid to the legal frameworks surrounding data protection and privacy. It is essential to continue emphasizing that the inland navigation sector does not oppose digitalization or automation. However, it firmly resists the possibility of remote enforcement without explicit consent.

After its consultation the European is currently reviewing the feedback and expected to present its proposal for a harmonized European crewing regime. Importantly, the development of e-tools is not being questioned. The sector has clearly expressed a willingness to embrace digital registration, provided that certain preconditions are met.

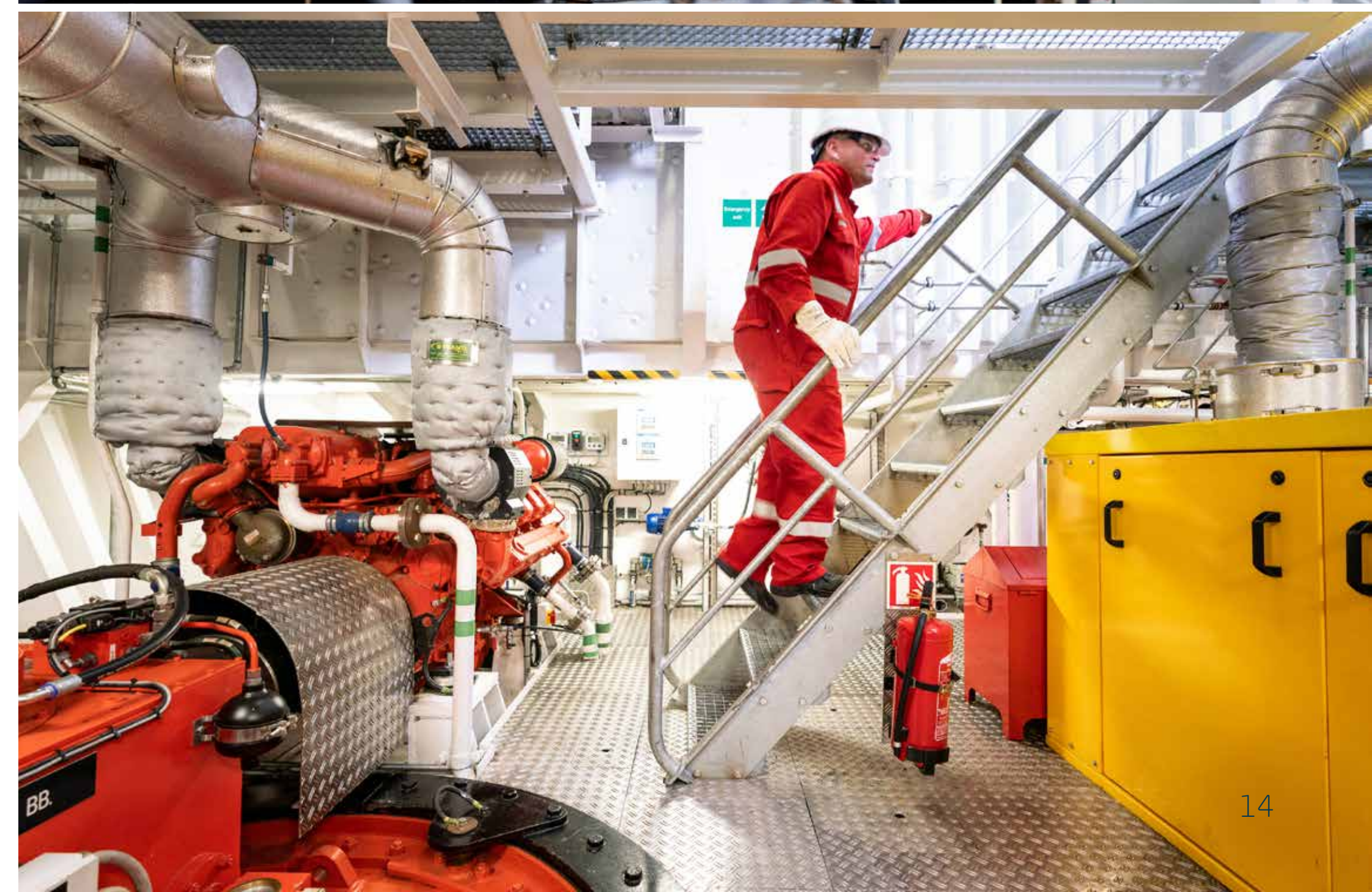
Professional Qualifications

During consultations on the implementation of the Professional Qualifications Directive, it has become clear that various Member States interpret key provisions differently. Through the discussion of these discrepancies, workable solutions have been identified. These solutions are being documented in a reference guide to support consistent application. This guide will play an important role during the upcoming evaluation of the Directive in 2028.

There are regular calls for an earlier evaluation, in order to enable amendments that could contribute to alleviating the sector's persistent staffing shortages.

Labour Market

Labour shortages remain a critical concern and are unlikely to be resolved in the short term. Efforts to attract young people to the sector, as well as to encourage career changers from other industries, are ongoing at both national and international levels. Proposals to allow earlier deployment of newly qualified professionals are still under discussion. In parallel, mutual recognition agreements—such as the equivalence of Basic Training in maritime and inland navigation—are being developed to improve mobility and workforce availability across sectors.



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River cruises, daytrip passenger vessels and ferries play a vital role in shaping a more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient european tourism model.



By promoting managed tourism along rivers and canals, we not only reduce pressure on overburdened urban infrastructure and road networks, but also revitalize rural and peri-urban economies—bringing tourism to lesser-known regions in a responsible and culturally enriching way. This mode of transport supports multimodal connectivity, enhances regional cohesion, and enables slower, experience-based tourism that respects environmental limits while enriching Europe’s heritage routes.

Inland passenger transport—particularly the dynamic growth of river cruise tourism—is at a critical cross-roads. As demand for experiential, slow, and culturally rich travel continues to rise, so too does the need to align this sector with the EU’s sustainability and climate goals. With growing demand for eco-conscious tourism, inland passenger vessels present a low-emission, high-impact opportunity for regional development. Whether it’s luxury multi-day river cruises or agile daytrip boats catering to local excursions, this sector is poised for growth—fuelled by clean propulsion technologies, rising interest in experiential travel, and revitalization of historic waterways. The inland passenger sector is committed to play its part in achieving the European Green Deal and Fit for 55 objectives. With clear regulatory guidance, targeted funding, and cross-border collaboration, we can ensure that the growth of river cruise tourism supports-not hinders-Europe’s transition to climate-neutral and sustainable tourism.

Waste Management and Environmental Compliance

Effective waste management is a cornerstone of sustainable operations. River cruise vessels currently generate approximately **14 kg of waste per person**

per day, inclusive of wastewater. Thanks to onboard treatment systems, **solid waste volumes are reduced to 1.2-2.5 kg per person per day**, aligning with household benchmarks in Western Europe.

To strengthen environmental performance, policies should:

- Promote circular economy principles on board and in ports;
- Support initiatives to reduce **food waste**, **single-use plastics**, and **microplastic pollution**.

Passengers are increasingly receptive to sustainability messaging, and cruise operators are actively involving guests in waste reduction and recycling initiatives. In the CDNI Convention, the Convention on the collection, deposit and reception of waste generated during navigation on the Rhine and other Inland Waterways, rules are set for collection and discharging of waste, including waste water. This applied already for vessels with more than 50 passengers, but is, as per 1 January 2025 for passenger vessels with more than 12 passengers. In most countries the infrastructure to arrange this is in place. However, in The Netherlands there is a lack of reception facilities.

In collaboration with the ministry and other industry organisations, the number of discharging points at crucial locations will be expanded.

River cruising

In 2024 the number of passengers on European rivers increased again (+14%) The majority of the passengers is from Canada/USA (41%), where most of the European passengers are from the DACH countries (37%). Most important river is still Danube & tributaries followed by Rhine & tributaries, French rivers and Douro. In 2024 new ships were introduced , bringing this to a sailing total of 358. For 2025 more new ships are expected. For the last years the sector has grown on all rivers in Europe (Figure 1)

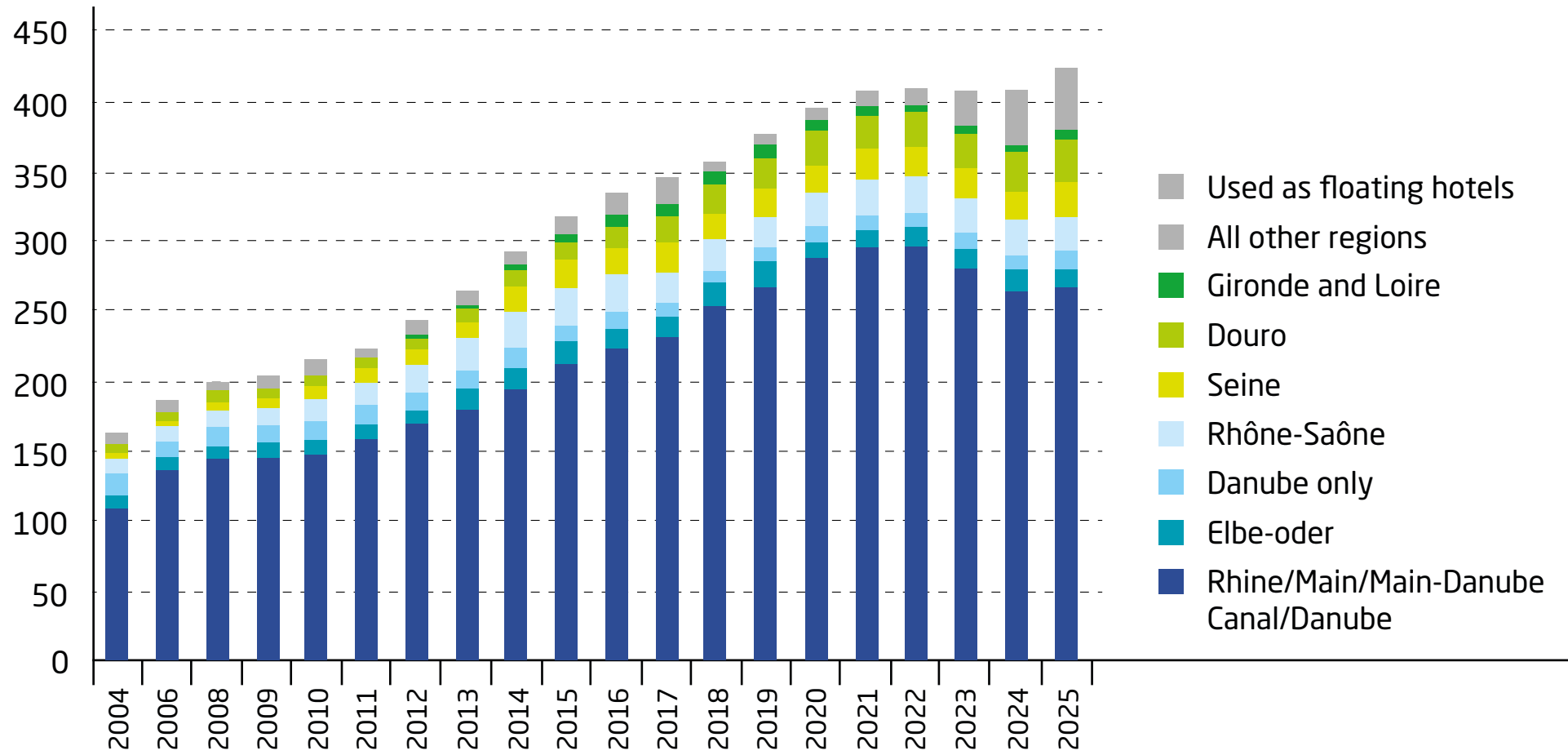
- In 2024:
- 14.066 crewmembers worked on board river cruise vessels
 - 1.385.800 passengers travelled on European waterways
 - Most passengers - 571.000 passengers – came from North America, followed by 506.000 passengers from Germany, Austria and Switzerland

Day trip sailing

This sector is also witnessing a significant rise in the number of tourists. This trend is evident in both standard passenger traffic and more upscale cruises, which may offer thematic experiences or improved catering services. The urgency to implement greener technologies is increasing, especially in urban regions where the demand for electric propulsion is swiftly escalating. Nevertheless, conflicting regulations pose challenges for operators, particularly in situations where the necessary infrastructure is absent, preventing vessels from recharging. Entrepreneurs are becoming increasingly apprehensive about escalating operational expenses, including port fees and taxes.

Additionally, mooring spots in city centers are gradually vanishing, and vessels are encountering more stringent regulations, especially concerning noise emissions. Passenger vessels are also being utilized more often during major events, with day trip vessels particularly well-situated to take advantage of this trend. These services not only facilitate the transportation of visitors to and from events but also provide alternative methods to engage with the event itself. A notable instance is the utilization of the River Seine during the Olympic Games in Paris. Passenger vessels were instrumental in logistics both prior to and following the Games, and particularly during the opening ceremony. The global audience observed the variety of vessels navigating the Seine, which not only transported the athletes but also carried the Olympic flame.

Figure 1: Number of River Cruise Vessels in the EU by Region of operation (2004-2025)*



Source: A. Hader. The River Cruise Fleet Handbook (may 2025)



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Events and Meetings



Modal shift potential of IWT Central at seminar organised by the Université Gustave Eiffel and AFIT France in Paris

On 18 December the Université Gustave Eiffel together with AFIT organized a seminar in Paris to discuss the relevant drivers to develop waterways transport, by combining the points of view of the different players in the logistics chains. EBU was invited to participate in a round table together with CINEA, the French Ministry, AUTF French shippers' association, VNF and the Antwerp University and to voice its view on the developments in the sector, in particular with regard to infrastructure, energy transition and the human factor.

EBU pointed to the huge modal shift potential of the sector in particular in view of the realization of the Seine Escaut project, co-financed by CEF as part of the TEN-T network, connecting the city of Paris to the dense waterway network in Belgium and the Netherlands.



High level meetings with EC/DG Move and CCNR

Meeting With Director Waterborne and New Head Of Unit IWT & Ports DG MOVE

On 16 January 2025 the IWT and ports organisations had a courtesy meeting with the new Head of Unit IWT & Ports at DG MOVE, Torsten Klimke, together with the Director Waterborne, Fotini Ioannidou.

Meeting with Secretary General CCNR and team

On 24 February, EBU and the IWT Platform were invited to a dialogue with the Secretary General and her team for a high level exchange on the priorities of the sector related to CCNR's activities. EBU took the opportunity to inform the EC and CCNR officials about EBU's priorities and challenges in 2025 in relation to the various policy objectives. The meetings will be continued on regular basis.

11th Maritime Congress organized by the Polish Presidency

In the framework of the 11th Maritime Congress organized by the Polish Presidency of the EU Council on 15 and 16 June, the participating member adopted the so called Szczecin Declaration calling for enhanced global competitiveness and resilience of Europe's shipping, shipbuilding and maritime manufacturing sector and the EU Industrial Maritime Strategy and is considered an important reference document for the upcoming EU waterborne policy.

EBU's Secretary General took the floor in the plenary session and the IWT session to present the sector's input to the "Waterborn Industrial and Ports strategies".



EBU Voices Inland Waterway Priorities at High Level EU Waterborne & Ports Strategy Dialogue with Commissioners

On the 1st of July, the Commissioner for Transport and Sustainable Tourism, Apostolos TZITZIKOSTAS, along with Executive Vice-President Stéphane SÉJOURNÉ, initiated a high-level Strategic Dialogue regarding the EU Industrial Maritime/Waterborne & Ports Strategy. During this occasion, EBU's President Matthieu Blanc emphasized the vital importance of inland waterway transport (IWT) as the most sustainable mode of transport in Europe, which possesses significant untapped potential for modal shift and contributes to the development of sustainable tourism along its splendid river network.

Inland waterway transport (IWT) facilitates the safe, efficient, and low-emission transportation of essential goods—such as steel, chemicals, agricultural products, alternative fuels, oversized cargo, and more—thereby alleviating congestion on land networks while providing enhanced opportunities for sustainable tourism and recreation. Any disruptions to this network can have far-reaching effects on downstream supply chains, affecting industry, as well as water and food security. These strategies not only aim to transform industry they also place people at the centre. Addressing labour and skills shortages, promoting workforce upskilling, and supporting quality employment are pivotal to delivering on the sector's vision.

"Inland waterway transport is a cornerstone of Europe's logistics network. It connects ports with the hinterland, supports industrial resilience, and contributes to climate neutrality and energy transition goals. By doing so, it is a key contributor to the EU policies, in particular the Clean Industrial Deal and its objectives" Matthieu Blanc in his statement emphasized.





European Barge Union The association

Inland waterway transport
A huge potential sector



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EBU members

 Austria



**Berufsgruppe Schifffahrt /
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1040 Wien
<https://wko.at/schifffahrt>

The 'Berufsgruppe Schifffahrt' is the legal representation of more than 450 members with a total fleet of some 100 vessels. It is located in Vienna and part of the Austrian Chamber of Commerce. The members represent all market segments of inland navigation. Its aim is to keep and improve the market and competitive position of the Austrian inland navigation industry. Moreover it is aimed at integrating inland navigation into modern logistic chains and to accelerate the intermodal development of the Austrian ports.

Berufsgruppe Schifffahrt/Wirtschaftskammer Österreich is a founding member of the European Barge Union.

 Belgium



**Unie der Continentale Vaart
V.Z.W.**

Axeldreef 9
B-9810 Nazareth
www.ucv-vzw.be

UCV is an association of Shipowners (companies) and Freight Forwarders, in charge of the interests of the members in all matters of inland waterway transport, representing the members in Belgium and Europe at all levels.

UCV is also a representative association of employers recognized by the Belgian government. UCV is a founding member of the European Barge Union.

 France



Entreprises fluviales de France

8, rue Saint Florentin
D-75001 Paris
www.entreprises-fluviales.fr

Entreprises Fluviales de France (E2F), ex-CNBA & CAF, is the professional representation of the French inland navigation enterprises as well as the sectors that are linked with the inland navigation industry, in the following way:

- Inland shipping companies, single barge owners and some fleets for the sector of industrial transport. They are also active internationally.
- Enterprises of the Inland Waterway Tourism sector who offer tours and cruises with overnight stay to French and foreign passengers in all the regions of France on rivers or lakes with a great range of possibilities. E2F is a founding member of the European Barge Union.



EBU members

 Germany



**Bundesverband der Deutschen
Binnenschiffahrt e.V. (BDB)**

Dammstraße 26
D-47119 Duisburg
www.binnenschiff.de

The German Association of Inland Navigation, founded in 1974, is a national professional organisation representing the majority of the German inland navigation fleet. It was formed by the merger of regional associations. BDB is headquartered in Duisburg, (a few steps from) Europe's most important inland port. In addition, a permanent representation is located in Berlin which enables an active substantial exchange on national infrastructure and industrial policy with the ministries and other stakeholders. BDB's members come from all market segments of cargo and passenger shipping. BDB is the sole national organisation that represents both shipping companies and owner operators. BDB's objective is to strengthen the competitive position of inland barge operators and to represent their interests. For this reason the association pursues activities on national and international level. It actively supports issues of the industry in various fields such as infrastructure, fiscal and legal policy or nautical and technical conditions of vessel operation. BDB is a founding member of the European Barge Union.

 Luxembourg



**A sectorial association hosted by FEDIL.
The Voice of Luxembourg's Industry.**

7, rue Alcide de Gasperi
Luxembourg-Kirchberg
www.fedil.lu/en/sectoral-associations/

FEDIL Barging is a sectorial association hosted by FEDIL – The Voice of Luxembourg's Industry, a multi-sectoral business federation representing the industry, construction and business services sectors which's main objective is to defend the professional interests of its members and analyse all economic, social and industrial issues relating thereto

 Netherlands



**Koninklijke Binnenvaart Nederland
(KBN)**

Scheepmakerij 330
3331 MC Zwijndrecht
www.binnenvaart.nl

Koninklijke Binnenvaart Nederland (KBN), Royal Inland Waterway Transport Netherlands, is the trade association for inland shipping in the Netherlands with a significant European impact. KBN is the obvious voice on behalf of the industry and for its members for all governments and other organizations. KBN committed to the various membership groups and to the sector in general.

Royal Inland Waterway Transport Netherlands is active in the fields of sustainability, greening, Modal Shift, digitalization and safety. There is also a lot of attention for infrastructure, nautical and technical files, and there is also a lot of focus on employers' interests and the labor market. KBN not only works for, but also together with its members, stakeholders and governments on future-proof inland shipping. As the trade association of and for inland shipping with this wide constituency, this work is carried out expeditiously.



EBU members

Switzerland



Schweizerische Vereinigung für Schifffahrt und Hafenwirtschaft (SVS)

Westquaistrasse 2
4057 Basel
www.svs-ch.ch

The Swiss Association of inland navigation and ports (SVS) represents the interests of the inland navigation industry and its stakeholders towards authorities and other associations. The association is a member of various national and international organisations and holds the secretariat of the 'Inland Navigation' parliamentary group. By the end of 2023 SVS counted some 162 members in the categories individual members (67), companies (84) as well as authorities, associations and organisations (11). The SVS is directed by a Board consisting of fourteen members. The director is responsible for the daily business. SVS is a founding member of the European Barge Union.

Romania



Romanian Association of Inland Ship Owners and Port Operators (AAOPFR)

St. Albatrosului 2,
RO-800029 Galati

Founded in April 1993, the 'Romanian Association of Inland Ship Owners and Port Operators' represents almost 90% of the Romanian inland navigation fleet capacity and 90% of the Romanian inland port operators. The original name was 'Romanian Association of Inland Ship Owners', but the membership was extended to include port operators, shipping companies, brokers, insurance companies etc that are acting in the Romanian inland navigation field. AAOPFR has its head office in Galati, the biggest inland port in Romania, hosting the largest inland navigation fleet. The members of the Board of Directors are usually elected in such a manner that a large area of Romanian inland navigation waterways and ports (Galati, Braila, Constanta, Drobeta-Turnu Severin etc) is covered. The main objective of the association is to promote, nationally and internationally, the interest of their members. AAOPFR has been an observer member of EBU since 2007 and in 2008 applied for full membership.



Corresponding Members



IG RiverCruise

Nauenstraße 63A, Postfach,
CH-4002 Basel
www.igrivercruise.com

The IG RiverCruise was founded in 2000 as an interest group of the European-based river cruise lines. With 22 member cruise lines and more than 200 river cruise vessels, the IG RiverCruise represents more than two-thirds of the market share.

As a non-governmental organization it meanwhile is established as the voice for the European river cruise industry, representing common interests for the river cruise industry and matters of its members towards third parties. Duties and responsibilities of the IG River-Cruise are maintaining contact with organizations, institutions, umbrella associations and regulatory bodies engaged in the river cruise industry. Lobbying at European and national levels as well as spreading operational information are other tasks. Above all, developing and promoting the image of the river cruise industry as one of the fastest growing sectors of tourism is another main target. On a better use of the short distance traffic on sea including the river-sea shipping. The ERSTU Danube Section has a strong focus on the Danube area.



Dutch Association of Dredgers and Hydraulic Engineers (DADH)

Sir Winston Churchilllaan 299A
2288 DC Rijswijk
www.waterbouwers.nl

The Vereniging van Waterbouwers is the Dutch association that represents dredging contractors Association of Dredging Constructors (DADC). Our 100 members engage themselves with all aspects of the dredging industry e.g. the construction & maintenance of waterways and ports, bank protection works, coastal defences, land reclamation and dredging.

With the execution of these activities sustainability and safety are highly valued. The dredging projects are carried out by a large and diverse (inland) fleet of (work) vessels, crafts and floating equipment. The DADH is proud to promote and look after the interests of this industry that has been globally renowned for its expertise for centuries. An international sector with a rich history and an valuable future for society. The dredging industry acts at the spectrum of both contracting and shipping. This makes the sector unique with a proactive mentality and a passion for expertise and also with big social awareness for water safety, water management and maritime infrastructure. DADH is also a member of EuDA and CEDA.



Zeeland Maritime Services

Oostelijke Kanaalweg 20
4424 NC Wemeldinge
www.zmsbv.com

ZMS builds inland ships with its own unique working and vision.

Each individual design is based on our modular programme. Based on a standardised (flexibly deployable) casco, a one hundred per cent custom-made barge is created by joint agreement. This provides the skipper/owner two major advantages from day one: a short delivery time and an attractive price. The basis for sustainable performance.

Energy consumption and emissions

Keeping a new generation of inland vessels operational requires more. That is exactly where ZMS seeks and finds the competitive edge: innovation. Not only in terms of technical facilities, but also in terms of embedding current and future standards for energy consumption and emissions. This explains at once why our vessels already comply with the strict CCNR 5 environmental standard.



Corresponding Members



Fédération Belge d'Organisateurs de Transports Fluviaux

Brouwersvliet 33 Bus 1
2000 Antwerpen
www.bftb-fbotf.be

The BFTB-FBOTF is the sole Professional Union of transport organizers (freight forwarders and brokers) in inland navigation recognized by the Belgian National and Regional Authorities.

Its aim is to :

- defend the professional interests of her Members in general,
- study and promote all economical and social questions concerning inland navigation in general and the activities of the transport organizers in particular,
- intervene with regional, national and international authorities.

The BFTB-FBOTF was founded in march 1955.



KOTUG

Wilhelminakade 318
3072 AR Rotterdam, Netherlands
www.kotug.com

We are KOTUG. The leading international towage and maritime company. Driven by our passion 'Ahead in Maritime Excellence', we empower our clients and stakeholders with the complete portfolio. From designing, building, chartering and operating vessels to training people and providing innovative consultancy services on a worldwide scale.

With roots going back as far as 1911, KOTUG is a family-owned company and trusted voice and partner of leading companies within the Maritime Industry. We take an innovation-led, sustainable approach to help our clients invent their future. For the inland water transportation industry KOTUG combines a range of modular and scalable electric pusher tugs, the E-Pusher™ Series, powered by swappable energy containers with its smart AI-driven dispatch and route planning application OptiPort.

With zero-emission logistic solution, KOTUG aims to support the worldwide energy transition and the modal shift from road transport to waterways while meeting the growing demand for electric-powered vessels.



ATENA (Associazione Italiana di Tecnica Navale)

Via Montallegro 1
16145 Genova
www.atenanazionale.org

ATENA brings together 700 professionals from the national naval world: engineers, professors, researchers, shipowners, and insurance personnel. Since 1948, its members have provided expert professional contributions in the field of ship design, construction, and management, with a particular focus on transport safety and marine environmental protection. The Association intends to continue providing these contributions by encouraging opportunities for meeting and deepening knowledge. Starting from 1974, it has organized the NAV, the most important Italian international scientific conference in the naval field, every three years.



EBU Structure

EBU-Officials

- President, Matthieu Blanc
- Vice-President, Martin Staats
- Secretary General, Theresia Hacksteiner

Executive Committee

- President, Matthieu Blanc, Entreprises Fluviales de France (E2F), CFT Compagnie Fluviale de transport, SOGESTRAN group, Le Havre
- Vice-President, Martin Staats, Bundesverband der Deutschen Binnenschifffahrt e.V., Duisburg, MSG eG, Würzburg
- Leonard Cotiga, AAOPF, Galati
- Dr. Ph. Grulois, Unie der Continentale Vaart, Gent
- Maira van Helvoirt, Koninklijke Binnenvaart Nederland, Zwijndrecht
- Didier Leandri, Entreprises Fluviales de France (E2F), Paris
- Simon Oberbeck, SVS, Basel
- Jens Schwanen, Bundesverband der Deutschen Binnenschifffahrt e.V., Duisburg

Board of Management

Austria

- Norbert Baumann, Berufsgruppe Schifffahrt, Wien , Danu Transport GmbH
- Dipl. Ing. Wolfgang Mosser, Berufsgruppe Schifffahrt, Wien, Brandner Wasserbau. GmbH, Wallsee
- Mag. Paul Blachnik, Berufsgruppe Schifffahrt, Wien (alternate member)

Belgium

- Dr. Philippe Grulois (President), Unie der Continentale Vaart, Gent
- Louis Sachs, Unie der Continentale Vaart, Gent

France

- Didier Leandri, Entreprises Fluviales de France (E2F), Paris
- Matthieu Blanc, (President) Entreprises Fluviales de France (E2F), CFT Compagnie Fluviale de transport, SOGESTRAN group, Le Havre
- Francois Boriot, Entreprises Fluviales de France (E2F), Paris (alternate member)

Germany

- Jens Schwanen, Bundesverband der Deutschen Binnenschifffahrt e.V., Duisburg
- Dr. Gunther Jaegers, Bundesverband der Deutschen Binnenschifffahrt e.V., Duisburg, Jaegers Shipping GmbH, Duisburg (until April 2025)
- M. Staats (Vice-President), Bundesverband der Deutschen Binnenschifffahrt e.V., Duisburg, MSG eG, Würzburg (alternate member)

Luxembourg

- Philippe Heck, FEDIL - The Voice of Luxembourg's Industry
- Patrick Willemsen, Chemgas Luxembourg

Netherlands

- Ad Koppejan, Koninklijke Binnenvaart Nederland, Zwijndrecht
- Maira van Helvoirt, Koninklijke Binnenvaart Nederland, Zwijndrecht
- Heiko Evink, Eurokor Barging BV (alternate member)

Romania

- Leonard Cotiga, AAOPF, Galati
- Serban Cucu, AAOPF, Galati

Switzerland

- Simon Oberbeck, SVS Basel
- Daniel Buchmüller, SVS, Basel



ebu
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barge union

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