



Technical Meeting on Decent Work in the Railways Sector

Geneva, 1–5 September 2025

► Conclusions and recommendations on decent work in the railways sector ¹

Introduction

1. Since their emergence, the railways have reshaped the world and made a historic contribution in the pursuit of economic and social objectives from one country to another. Today the sector is a major employer in several countries, and rail services remain a cornerstone and an indispensable driver of economic transformation, job creation, competitiveness and social inclusion. The railways are relatively one of the most energy efficient and low-carbon transport modes, especially over long distances, for both freight and passengers, nationally and internationally. They are critical to developing sustainable value chains, energy transition policies, and ensuring passenger mobility to peripheral regions and economic hubs. They play a key role in facilitating trade and investment in many sectors, and enabling urban regeneration as well as rural development, and constitute the backbone of sustainable economic growth, in particular for landlocked countries.

Current and emerging issues that have most impacted the realization of decent work in the railways sector

2. Despite being an international and cross-border mode of transport in several countries, the railways sector's growth to a truly global mode of transport is impacted by the lack of a common governance framework providing regional and global coherence. Diverse national and regional approaches have resulted in separate frameworks in rail corridor development and regulation, with no comparable global standards as those existing for the aviation and maritime sectors. In certain regions, this has hampered cross-border and regional interoperability.
3. Due to their safety-critical nature and economic and strategic importance for international trade and movement, railways operate in a highly regulated environment. Countries have used various means of legislation, yet a tailored approach could be recommended for the needs and particularities of the sector, as rail systems differ widely in their ownership models and stages of development.

¹ In accordance with established procedures, the Conclusions and recommendations will be submitted to the 356th Session (March 2026) of the Governing Body of the ILO for its consideration.

4. The public sector plays a key role in regulating railways services which may be delivered under public and/or private operations, with various degrees of outsourcing and other forms of contracting and subcontracting. The segmentation between infrastructure and railways operations has led, in some regions, to the separation of responsibilities for the infrastructure, traffic management and rail services. Constraints in existing structures have led to the introduction of competition and blended finance in rail operations with varied results which reflects the diversity of the sector. The private sector is also a key driver of innovation, economic growth, job creation, and the transition towards sustainable and inclusive economies, allowing the railways to explore new options and opportunities in some countries. Public and private sectors, working together, can act as a catalyst for a more sustainable and inclusive future. This includes privatization or commercialization, which may involve fixed-term concessions or other forms of private sector participation. In many cases, it may have an impact on staffing levels, working conditions, collective bargaining frameworks, pay and salary structures and the availability of training opportunities. Therefore, effective social dialogue and coherent and balanced policies are essential to ensure operational efficiency, safeguard decent work and strengthen the long-term sustainability of the sector.
5. Railways are currently one of the safest forms of transport, and safety is non-negotiable for the sector. While rail services have slashed transport costs and travel times for its users, they should, above all, be safe for workers and users, efficient and affordable, and have adequate inspection levels to ensure they remain safe. Occupational safety and health (OSH) risks and hazards include not only accident risks, but also hazards such as fatigue, long shifts, noise and vibration, diesel exhaust, electrical hazards, physical and psychological risks, and violence and harassment. Hazards associated with the maintenance and operation of trains include physical, chemical, ergonomic and biological risks, extreme weather events, including heat stress, and confined spaces. The provision of safe, accessible and adequate sanitation facilities, adequate and appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) at no cost to the worker,² and uniforms, where required and depending on national contexts, is crucial, including gender-responsive measures to remove the barriers that prevent women from entering and remaining in the sector.
6. Railways systems are capital-intensive, and predictable, long-term and stable investments are critical to unlock their potential and for the railways to provide safe, productive and sustainable services. Yet, in some countries, public financing is insufficient to ensure decent work and successful growth, and to fully embrace innovation and to maintain infrastructure and rolling stock. Long-term economic and financial sustainability to revitalize the sector, including by using new mechanisms such as climate financing instruments, both for public and private rail services, can be a key driver to a just transition and advance decent work as a cornerstone of safe, inclusive and sustainable railways. Capacity-building and training including reskilling and upskilling efforts will require the cooperation of all stakeholders. This will modernize and improve the sector's reputation and support the acceleration of equality and inclusivity to

² Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155), Article 16: Employers shall be required to provide, where necessary, adequate protective clothing and protective equipment to prevent, so far as is reasonably practicable, risk of accidents or of adverse effects on health; Occupational Safety and Health Recommendation, 1981 (No. 164), para. 10: The obligations placed upon employers with a view to achieving the objective set forth in Article 16 of the Convention might include, as appropriate for different branches of economic activity and different types of work, the following: ... (e) to provide, without any cost to the worker, adequate personal protective clothing and equipment which are reasonably necessary when hazards cannot be otherwise prevented or controlled.

attract, train and retain a more diverse workforce including youth, older workers and, in particular, women, who remain under-represented in many railways occupations.

7. Energy transition policies and new technologies introduced in railway systems have reshaped the sector and opened doors for transformation, and continue to change the workforce needs of railways. The rapid technological changes that have marked rail operations in some countries include digitalization and automation, and the emerging impact of artificial intelligence. The introduction of new technologies requires effective capacity-building and training. Social dialogue can help mitigate any impacts that the introduction of new technologies may have on employment, including levels, working conditions and safety. The productive use of a workforce with increasing levels of technical skills requires training to boost safety and address skills gaps, while also enabling workers to benefit from these productivity gains. The challenges in attracting and retaining workers, which can impact adequate staffing levels, coupled with the increased demand for high-skilled workers to drive innovation, productivity and sustainability in the industry, will require harmonized procedures and recognition of competencies to: make rail jobs more dynamic, attract and retain talent, and support the upskilling and reskilling of workers.

What needs to be done to promote railways safety and sustainability policies

8. The effective implementation and application of ratified Conventions, as well as recommendations and fundamental principles and rights at work in national law and practice is crucial for ensuring rights at work in the railways sector. It will be critical to effectively promote policy coherence between technological change and climate action in the industry, and efforts to advance the respect, promotion and realization of the fundamental principles and rights at work, including non-discrimination, and promoting a safe and healthy working environment. Universal access to comprehensive, adequate and sustainable social protection systems must be strengthened to support all workers.
9. Ensuring equal opportunities and treatment is essential for the future of the industry. This includes respecting the principle of equal remuneration for work of equal value, eliminating barriers, in particular with regard to women, and young workers, persons with disabilities or migrant workers, advancing labour protection, adequate wage policies, including living wages,³ and promoting a work environment that is free from violence and harassment. The sector must approach all aspects of its attraction and retention efforts anchored in the principles of diversity, equality and inclusion, leaving no one behind.
10. A safe and healthy working environment is a fundamental right, and OSH is linked to operational safety. The realization of a safe and healthy working environment in rail transport should be a central and continuous responsibility of governments and employers' and workers' organizations, who have distinct but complementary responsibilities in that regard. Safety management systems (SMS) – that aim to make the sector safer without the fear of retaliation – could effectively ensure compliance with technical regulations and proactive measures. SMS should include policies, hazard identification and prevention, adequate monitoring and hazard control measures of OSH-related hazards and risks in the railways sector, including through joint OSH committees and independent accident investigation mechanisms. SMS and the promotion of a safety culture supported by grievance mechanisms – that aim to make the

³ With reference to the Conclusions of the ILO Meeting of Experts on wage policies, including living wages (Geneva, 19–23 February 2024).

sector safer without the fear of retaliation – could effectively ensure compliance with technical regulations and proactively address safety, violence, harassment and other incident and event reporting concerns. In particular, adequate staffing, predictable scheduling and science-based fatigue management systems would benefit from standardization and tailoring of hours of work and rest periods for rail workers.

11. National governments and railway undertakings should prioritize the preservation, modernization and utilization of railways systems. The sector's structures and ownership have evolved according to national and regional particularities. Adequate policy, legislative and regulatory frameworks are needed to promote an enabling environment for sustainable public and private enterprises in the sector, including micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, to increase productivity and decent job creation, taking into account the ILO Conclusions concerning the promotion of sustainable enterprises (2007), in the appropriate national and regional context. Such policy, legislative and regulatory frameworks should ensure the advancement of rights at work, in particular the fundamental principles and rights at work, and the access to universal, comprehensive, adequate and sustainable social protection. Structural constraints to competitiveness should be examined and assessed to formulate policies that are effective, well-suited to their purpose, not unduly burdensome, and that promote financing and maintenance regimes built for the long-term. Capital investment, predictable, multi-year and stable public funding, or conditions that attract private investment, should lead to results in terms of modernization, profitability and increased productivity, in conformity with national requirements, while generating jobs with decent working conditions with the highest standards of safety and health.
12. Sustainable procurement practices promote the realization of public services obligations. Adequate coordination mechanisms are also required to ensure coherent policies including enforcement and inspection, in the context where functions may be decentralized or outsourced.
13. Investments in technological, safety and green innovation would have multiplier effects on employment in the railways sector. The ILO [*Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all*](#) (Guidelines for a just transition) provide the central reference for policymaking and a basis for action. Investments in innovation, including digitalization and automation, based on a human-centred approach, can enhance operational efficiency and improve safety, while respecting applicable legislation on workers' privacy and data protection, and at the same time contribute to improvements in OSH as well as the promotion of decent work overall. In addition, rail investments that hold significant potential for generating decent, green and inclusive jobs should be prioritized in order to advance just transitions and provide opportunities for meaningful tripartite dialogue.
14. Effective tripartite social dialogue, at all levels, and across sectors and borders, where applicable, based on the respect of freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, as enshrined in the [*ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up*](#), adopted in 1998 and amended in 2022, has a pivotal role in shaping and effectively implementing policies and legislation that promote decent work and support a just transition in the industry that leaves no one behind.
15. The accelerating speed of technological and environmental transitions in the railways sector makes it necessary to give particular attention to diversity and inclusion, as well as to the initial and further training of railway workers in order to address skills gaps. Skills development and lifelong learning strategies, including quality apprenticeships, developed by governments and employers' and workers' organizations, are key to enable enterprises and workers to better

respond to the evolving technological, climate and structural change requirements of the sector. Effective skills certification and international recognition of diplomas and prior learning can support cross-border workers and interoperability among countries and regions. The allocation of adequate financial resources for skills development can also support and guarantee access to training for all workers, particularly women, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, migrant workers and those in vulnerable situations.

16. New technologies introduced in railway systems continue to have a transformative effect, including with regard to human resources and staffing needs. Social dialogue can enable social partners to shape the way technology is introduced and create space for a human-centred transition, fostering a more skilled and engaged workforce capable of driving innovation and growth within the sector. The productive use of a workforce with increasing levels of technical skills requires training to boost safety and address skills gaps, while also ensuring that workers are able to benefit from these productivity gains. Measures should be taken to minimize the adverse effects which these changes might have on employment and working conditions. In addition, training necessary to facilitate the transferability of the workers concerned to other jobs should be provided.

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

17. Governments have the duty to adopt, implement and effectively enforce national laws and regulations to ensure that fundamental principles and rights at work, as set out in the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998) as amended in 2022, and ratified international labour Conventions are applied to all workers in the railways sector, taking into account their obligations under the ILO Constitution. They should also promote responsible procurement to advance environmental sustainability and decent work, in line with relevant international labour standards.
18. All enterprises have a responsibility to respect human and labour rights including the fundamental principles and rights at work, throughout their operations, 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 (MNE Declaration), as amended in 2022.
19. In addition, governments, in cooperation with employers' and workers' organizations, where appropriate, should:
 - (a) ensure that all workers enjoy decent working conditions, taking into account the respect for the fundamental principles and rights at work, and ratified international labour standards;
 - (b) actively promote and advance freedom of association and inclusive and effective social dialogue, including collective bargaining, at all levels to forge social consensus for policies and measures for smooth and just transitions;
 - (c) promote equality of opportunity for all workers, ensuring equal pay for work of equal value, and work-life balance, including to address gender gaps through maternity protection, parental leave and gender-responsive measures;
 - (d) promote a safe and healthy working environment and the development of effective and standardized OSH management systems and a safety culture, including through

enforceable and predictable hours of work and rest periods, and taking into consideration safety-critical rail workers;

- (e) prevent and address vandalism, trespassing, traumatic incidents, stress, violence and harassment at work, and provide adequate support to workers affected by traumatic incidents, as well as make provision for decent and clean sanitation and rest facilities, clean drinking water, adequate and properly fitted gender-responsive PPE, at no cost to the worker, and uniforms, where required and depending on national contexts, for all workers;
- (f) provide for adequate and coherent policy, legal and regulatory frameworks for investment opportunities aligned with sustainable procurement practices;
- (g) cooperate to develop policies that enable modal shifts and complementarity, and just transitions;
- (h) establish an enabling environment for sustainable enterprises, both public and private, that enables them to grow, innovate, and advance decent work;
- (i) strengthen labour administration, including through well-resourced and qualified labour inspectorates, as labour inspection is a fundamental element to ensure compliance and support the continuous safety and improvement of the sector;
- (j) encourage a human-centred approach to the adoption of emerging technologies while ensuring that the benefits resulting from modernization and innovation be shared among all concerned, including workers;
- (k) cooperate to address skills gaps in the industry through the provision of financing for modernized training and quality apprenticeship programmes, skills development and lifelong learning opportunities, encompassing reskilling and upskilling;
- (l) share best practices, including effective measures to advance decent work, at a sectoral and cross-border level for the development and modernization of the rail sector, keeping in mind regional priorities and the variety of structure and ownership models;
- (m) facilitate the international recognition of certificates and previous experience, to facilitate labour migration through fair recruitment;
- (n) expand and enhance cooperation and collaboration with multilateral financial institutions, and with relevant railway authorities and safety agencies so that, in developing and undertaking their transport-related activities, the social and labour dimensions of transport are fully taken into account; and
- (o) provide universal access to comprehensive, adequate and sustainable social protection systems, including social protection floors, that can reduce vulnerability to life-cycle risks, emerging needs and global risks, and strengthen resilience to facilitate just transitions.

20. Employers' and workers' organizations should, as appropriate to their spheres of responsibility:

- (a) promote a safe and healthy working environment for all rail workers;
- (b) promote a positive safety culture to make the industry safer without the fear of retaliation;
- (c) collaborate to develop and implement just transition strategies and plans at the sectoral level through social dialogue including collective bargaining, and institutionalized and effective workplace cooperation, in line with national legislation, and taking the ILO Guidelines for a just transition into account; and

- (d) raise awareness and share information, as well as provide training to their members about advancing just transitions in the industry, and the fundamental principles and rights at work, in particular OSH.

21. The Office should:

- (a) promote the ratification and effective implementation of international labour standards, ILO declarations, instruments and tools relevant to the industry, and strengthen the capacity of constituents to respect, promote and realize the fundamental principles and rights at work;
- (b) strengthen the capacity of constituents to engage in effective social dialogue to promote decent work;
- (c) provide technical support to constituents, as appropriate, including in cooperation with the International Training Centre of the ILO in Turin, regional training centres, and through subregional meetings and workshops;
- (d) develop and strengthen partnerships to promote policy coherence and “Deliver as One” throughout the United Nations System, and other inter-agency and regional bodies, and initiatives, including the UN Decade of Sustainable Transport;
- (e) collect good practices and undertake research on:
 - (i) creating a more inclusive and diverse workforce by attracting youth, women, migrants and workers with disabilities, to address labour shortages and promote the renewal of the workforce; and
 - (ii) the impact of technology and digitalization, including artificial intelligence, on decent job creation, economic growth, productivity, employment levels and working conditions in the sector;
- (f) based on common standards and models to advance a safe and healthy working environment in the railways sector, collect best practices and research on OSH to convene, when appropriate, a meeting of experts to develop guidelines or a code of practice that can support the social aspects of cross-border and regional interoperability, and
- (g) design and implement development cooperation projects taking into account the diverse circumstances and priorities of its Member States, in line with Decent Work Country Programmes.

Appendix

Non-exhaustive list of ILO declarations, instruments, guidance and tools, and other international instruments to promote decent work in the railways sector

International labour standards

Fundamental Conventions (and related Recommendations)

- Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), its Protocol of 2014, 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 (No. 100), and Recommendation (No. 90), 1951
- Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105)
- Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111) and Recommendation (No. 111), 1958
- Minimum Age Convention (No. 138) and Recommendation (No. 146), 1973
- Occupational Safety and Health Convention (No. 155) and Recommendation (No. 164), 1981
- Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182) and Recommendation (No. 190), 1999
- Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention (No. 187), and Recommendation (No. 197), 2006

Governance Conventions (and related Recommendations)

- Labour Inspection Convention (No. 81) and Recommendation (No. 81), 1947
- Employment Policy Convention (No. 122) and Recommendation (No. 122), 1964, and the Employment Policy (Supplementary Provisions) Recommendation, 1984 (No. 169)
- 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)

- Hours of Work (Industry) Convention, 1919 (No. 1)
- Labour Clauses (Public Contracts) Convention (No. 94) and Recommendation (No. 84), 1949
- Migration for Employment Convention (Revised) (No. 97) and Recommendation (No. 86), 1949
- Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102)
- Final Articles Revision Convention, 1961 (No. 116)
- Social Policy (Basic Aims and Standards) Convention, 1962 (No. 117)

- Employment Injury Benefits Convention, 1964 [Schedule I amended in 1980] (No. 121), and the Employment Injury Benefits Recommendation, 1964 (No. 121)
- Maximum Weight Convention (No. 127) and Recommendation (No. 128), 1967
- Minimum Wage Fixing Convention (No. 131) and Recommendation (No. 135), 1970
- Holidays with Pay Convention (Revised), 1970 (No. 132), and the Holidays with Pay Recommendation, 1936 (No. 47)
- Workers' Representatives Convention (No. 135) and Recommendation (No. 143), 1971
- Labour Administration Convention (No. 150) and Recommendation (No. 158), 1978
- Human Resources Development Convention, 1975 (No. 142), and the Human Resources Development Recommendation, 2004 (No. 195)
- Paid Educational Leave Convention (No. 140) and Recommendation (No. 148), 1974
- Occupational Cancer Convention (No. 139) and Recommendation (No. 147), 1974
- Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143)
- Working Environment (Air Pollution, Noise and Vibration) Convention (No. 148) and Recommendation (No. 156), 1977
- Labour Relations (Public Service) Convention, 1978 (No. 151) and Recommendation (No. 159), 1978
- Collective Bargaining Convention (No. 154) and Recommendation (No. 163), 1981
- Protocol of 2002 to the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (recording and notification of occupational accidents and diseases)
- Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention (No. 156) and Recommendation (No. 165), 1981
- Termination of Employment Convention (No. 158) and Recommendation (No. 166), 1982
- Labour Statistics Convention (No. 160) and Recommendation (No. 170), 1985
- Occupational Health Services Convention (No. 161) and Recommendation (No. 171), 1985
- Employment Promotion and Protection against Unemployment Convention (No. 168) and Recommendation (No. 176), 1988
- Safety and Health in Construction Convention (No. 167) and Recommendation (No. 175), 1988
- Night Work Convention (No. 171) and Recommendation (No. 178), 1990
- Private Employment Agencies Convention (No. 181) and Recommendation (No. 188), 1997
- Maternity Protection Convention (No. 183) and Recommendation (No. 191), 2000
- Violence and Harassment Convention (No. 190) and Recommendation (No. 206), 2019

Technical recommendations

- Job Creation in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Recommendation, 1998 (No. 189)
- List of Occupational Diseases Recommendation, 2002 (No. 194)
- Employment Relationship Recommendation, 2006 (No. 198)
- Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202)
- Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204)
- Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2017 (No. 205)
- 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, sixth edition, 2022
- Resolution concerning the third recurrent discussion on fundamental principles and rights at work, 2024
- Resolution concerning a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all, 2023
- Resolution concerning the second recurrent discussion on labour protection, 2023
- Resolution concerning the second recurrent discussion on social protection (social security), 2021
- Resolution concerning skills and lifelong learning, 2021
- Resolution concerning decent work in global supply chains, 2016
- Resolution concerning small and medium-sized enterprises and decent and productive employment creation, 2015
- Conclusions of the ILO Meeting of experts on wage policies, including living wages, 2024
- Conclusions concerning the promotion of sustainable enterprises, 2007
- Conclusions concerning the consequences for management and personnel of the restructuring of railways, 1994

ILO guidance and tools

- *Technical guidelines on biological hazards in the working environment*, 2023
- *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
- IMO/ILO/UNECE code of practice for packing of cargo transport units, 2014
- ILO code of practice on safety and health in the use of machinery, 2013
- ILO code of practice on safety in the use of chemicals at work, 2013
- *Guidelines on occupational safety and health management systems: ILO-OSH 2001*, 2001
- ILO code of practice on the protection of workers' personal data, 1997

Non-tripartite sectoral capacity-building tools

- ILO manual on social dialogue in the railways sector, 2015
- *On the right track – A training toolkit on HIV/AIDS for the railway sector*, 2010

Other international instruments and processes

- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) [Paris Agreement](#), 2015
- UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, 2011