



# European Year of Rail - The European Alliance for Apprentices on track!

European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA), Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport (DG MOVE), the Austrian Federal Railways (ÖBB) and the Federal Ministry for Climate Protection, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology (BMK)

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The European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA), in collaboration with the Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport (DG MOVE), the Austrian Federal Railways (ÖBB) and the Federal Ministry for Climate Protection, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology (BMK), organised a high-level event to discuss the state of play of the railway sector, key challenges, and opportunities in relation to vocational education and training, and apprenticeships. The hybrid event, with sessions taking place in Vienna and livestreamed online, gathered over 80 participants on site and online. In the first few days following the event the recording had already received more than 100 views on YouTube. On the first day participants had the opportunity to attend a site visit organised by the host ÖBB, which was followed by a dinner reception. The event was organised in the context of the European Year of Rail 2021 and the European Year of Youth 2022.

## WELCOME SESSION

The event started with a welcome by the master of ceremonies **Ana Carrero**, Deputy Head of Unit at the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL) of the European Commission. In a video message, **Nicolas Schmit**, the European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, highlighted how apprenticeships bridge the objectives of the European Year of Rail and the European Year of Youth, enabling the railway sector to address skill shortages, whilst tackling youth unemployment. The Commissioner emphasised the important role the EAfA plays in mobilising apprenticeship opportunities and empowering young people to fully participate in the labour market and society. **Silvia Angelo**, Member of the Board of Management, ÖBB-Infrastruktur AG, emphasised the Austrian Railways' commitment to invest in green, digital and inclusive apprenticeships, which will translate into skilled employees who can drive forward a sustainable mobility transition.

## SETTING THE SCENE

**Manuela Geleng**, Director at DG EMPL, introduced the challenges and opportunities linked to the digital and green transitions, the issue of attractiveness of vocational education and training (VET), and to mobility and transnational cooperation. She encouraged the EAfA members to join the Pact for Skills and to commit to the up- and reskilling of the people of working age in the railway sector. **Kristian Schmidt**, Director at DG MOVE, highlighted the role of the rail sector as one of the cleanest modes of transport in the green transition. He stressed the importance of addressing the shortage of staff and skills in the sector, and praised the ÖBB training centre for the educational offer provided and the efforts towards gender equality.



*The railway sector is a major piece in the big puzzle of Europe's climate and neutrality aims under the Green Deal. By boosting apprenticeships, the rail industry will attract young people with the right skills, who will become fully qualified.*



**Nicolas Schmit**, European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights

**Sarah Bittner-Krautsack**, Interim Head of Mobility and Transport Technologies department at the BMK, argued that the rail sector can offer young people the meaningful jobs they long for in an international environment, but it needs to become more innovative and adapt to the transformation brought upon by digital technologies.

## EAFA NEW MEMBERS CEREMONY

**Kjerstin Torpmann-Hagen**, DG EMPL, provided a short update on the latest developments regarding the EAfA. She welcomed the representatives of eight railway sector organisations that have recently joined the Alliance, and presented them with an EAfA certificate.

## JUST TRANSITIONS: DIGITAL AND GREEN

The moderator of the first panel discussion, **Jörg Markowitsch**, from 3s, introduced the speakers and the topics for the discussion. **Dr. Bojan Jovanovski**, Senior Lecturer at the Institute of International Management at FH JOANNEUM, provided insights to the GreenoVET-Project and their vocational excellence centres (CoVEs), which aim to identify and teach the skills of the future in an innovative, inclusive and sustainable economy. **Carole Coune**, Secretary General of the Association of European Rail Rolling Stock lessors (AERRL), discussed the need for training in the field of maintenance, ensuring interoperable and safe European rail rolling stock. **Meryem Belhaj-Clot**, Deputy HR Director at the International union of railways (UIC), shared how the UIC helps the railway sector prepare for the future by investing in innovation and by developing educational and training programmes focused on the new skills needed.

## GENDER EQUALITY IN APPRENTICESHIPS IN THE RAIL SECTOR

The second session, moderated by **Vicki Donlevy**, Ecorys, explored different perspectives on the attractiveness of apprenticeships and occupations in the railway sector for women and girls. The session was kicked off by **Jedde Hollewijn**, Policy Officer for Railways, European Transport Workers' Federation Representative (ETF), who provided figures on the gender disbalance and demographic change in the sector. She explained how the Women in Rail agreement and the ETF aim to make the sector more attractive for women and young people. **Heather Waugh**, shared her experience as the first female freight train driver in Scotland. She encouraged to make the strive for gender equality a personal matter and to create workplaces that are truly inclusive so that the entire sector may reap the benefits that come with gender balanced workforces. **Katrien Joye**, Internship Coordinator at the Belgian railway company for passenger transport (SNCB), shared the key actions undertaken to increase the number of women at SNCB in all departments, including employer brand campaigns, ensuring diversity and inclusion in all phases of recruitment, and addressing third-party sexual harassment. **Ursula Bazant**, Head of Department for Education & Training at ÖBB, shared how the ÖBB manages to attract girls in apprenticeships, which currently stands at 20%. Among the measures presented, she highlighted the importance of female trainers, institutionalising diversity, setting clear goals and ensuring representation in campaigns and recruiting.



*Especially for the young girls it is important to come to our training sites, to have a look and to talk with the young women who are already there about the job.*

**Ursula Bazant**, ÖBB

## MOBILITY AND TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION

The third session was moderated by **Leonardo Dongiovanni**, Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport (DG MOVE) of the European Commission. He opened the session by highlighting the win-win-win effect of apprenticeship mobility for apprentices, hosting and sending companies. **Eckhard Voss**, Senior Advisor and Management Partner at wmp consulting, introduced the STAFFER blueprint project and shared first results regarding skills needs and trends, challenges and needs in cross-border mobility in the rail sector. **Ignacio Ferrer**, XABEC Vocational Training Centre, presented insights from mobility Erasmus+ projects and the positive impact of transnational cooperation between companies and VET colleges. **Olivia Janisch**, Member of the

Works Council and the Supervisory Board of the ÖBB-Holding AG, Vice-Chair of Austrian Transport Workers Union (vida) stressed the crucial role of social partners at European and national level for ensuring quality standards in the rail sector.

## ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS

In the afternoon, three parallel round table discussions were organised in line with the main event themes. During the discussion on the **Just transitions: Digital and Green**, attendees considered the existing obstacles, such as the fast-paced technical evolution, lack of equipment and software, and a lack of common vision on apprenticeships. Sectoral exchanges on skill development, network building and innovative teaching methods were identified as good practises. To meet future skill demands and to avoid social inequalities, the participants recommended strengthening the role of VET teachers, developing a qualification system of green and digital skills, and promoting social dialogue and intersectoral cooperation. The challenges to **gender equality in apprenticeships in the rail sector** that emerged during the discussion include the fear of discrimination and sexual harassment, a lack of adequate equipment and facilities, gender-coded language and the gender pay gap. To overcome these challenges actions should be targeted at breaking gender stereotypes, engaging female role models, providing targeted career support for female apprentices and employees, and ensuring the participation of women in the decision-making processes. Meanwhile, the **mobility and transnational cooperation** session discussed the challenges that the lack of standardisation of apprenticeship schemes, administrative burdens and language barriers pose to apprenticeship mobility. The participants agreed that there are clear benefits to mobility and transnational cooperation, but that strong networks and commitments, a simpler procedure and integrational support for students during the time abroad are needed.



Simon Hawthorn, EAN

*What can we do as an industry to support sustainability and how can you bring your apprentices in on this? Because I guarantee you there are many apprentices who are fundamentally for building a much better society.*



### THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE APPRENTICE

During this session moderated by **Ben Kinross**, Coordinator, European Apprentices Network (EAN), apprentices from the rail sector across Europe had the opportunity to share their views and voice their concerns. **Ferre Vandenberghe** praised the learning opportunities and his positive experience as an apprentice with SNCB. As a train driver in Italy, **Laura Pantone** from EAN, argued for the need to ensure a just transition for occupations affected by automation and to resolve liability issues related to

driving automated trains. **Lorenzi Franzoni**, from UIC, highlighted that young professionals have sustainability as one of their core values and stressed the need to offer them quality training programmes to harvest their full potential. **Simon Hawthorn**, from EAN, suggested introducing a platform to share best practises and learning experiences across countries. He also suggested to improve the recognition of education and training across borders, and scale up the commitment of the rail sector in decarbonizing the economy. **Haïet Ben Akremi Ritchie**, Work-study and Vocational Training Officer at the French national railways (SNCF), argued for boosting apprenticeship mobility between companies and training centres by reducing administrative procedures and creating new initiatives at the EU level. **Uliana Musakina**, SAKKI ry, concluded the session by reiterating the importance of breaking gender stereotypes, using inclusive language and creating inclusive workplaces.

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#YearofEuropeanYouth

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