**SME consultation on the expected impact on the labour force of automation and digitalisation in transport**

**Introduction**

This consultation takes place to inform policy-making on the social dimension of the transition to automation and digitalisation[[1]](#footnote-1) in transport. The study will put forward measures policy and recommendations to **accompany the transition to automation and digitalisation for the labour force in the transport sector**.

Although the exact pace and scope of automation and digitalisation in transport is unclear (and estimates of how many jobs or tasks will become redundant in the future vary significantly) **companies should plan and be prepared to face the challenges ahead and to ensure a smooth transition**.

In order to manage the transformation, workers whose jobs are changing or may disappear due to automation and digitalisation must have every opportunity to acquire the skills and knowledge they need, to master new technology and to be supported during labour market transitions.

Since **many transport companies are SMEs**, this specific consultation aims at

* gathering information about the level of awareness and preparedness of SMEs in the transport sector and
* exploring their need for guidance and accompanying measures to smoothen the transition to automation and digitalisation for the labour force.

The **targeted SMEs** should operate in one or more transport domain: air; road, rail, maritime, ports, inland waterways, logistics, urban transport, passenger transport, freight transport. We are looking for the company’s general manager to respond.

The findings from this survey will feed into policy recommendations with the aim to develop an approach to manage the transition towards automation and digitalisation for the labour force in transport. It should be clearly indicated to whom these recommendations are addressed (policy-makers, social partners, education or training institutions, etc.), at what level they should be implemented (European Union, national, regional, sectoral, company, or a combination of different levels), which challenge they address, what it will take to achieve their objectives and which are the potential barriers for not achieving them. Possible actions at EU level should be assessed and prioritised in terms of added value/cost benefits.

The results of the study will support informed decision-making and action from the Commission.

**Background**

The transition towards automation and digitalisation will profoundly affect the transport sector, including its labour force. It will entail both opportunities and challenges for the labour force. Some low-skilled and middle-skilled jobs in transport will be at higher risk of being replaced because of automation[[2]](#footnote-2), but there is also a potential for improved working conditions and emergence of new jobs, which could lead to a greener and more gender balanced transport sector.

The Council, in its 2017 conclusions[[3]](#footnote-3) on the digitalisation of transport, emphasised the importance of wide societal dialogue on these issues. It called on the Commission to ‘assess the socio-economic and environmental impact of automation and digitalisation in the field of transport, taking into account the new skills needed in that sector, and, if necessary, to propose measures to address those impacts.’

The European Commission Communication of 2018 ‘On the road to automated mobility: An EU strategy for mobility of the future’ emphasised the importance of the Skills Agenda for Europe and supporting Member States in their efforts to provide a smooth labour market transition for affected workers in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights.[[4]](#footnote-4)

In November 2018, the Commission organised a participatory conference[[5]](#footnote-5) on the impact of automation in transport on the labour force, bringing together employers and workers from all modes of transport, experts/researchers as well as national and European institutions. The conference permitted to collect information on most important trends in automated transport and how they affect the labour force, complementing already existing information available through various studies and projects and identifying common challenges across modes and professions. The conference confirmed that stakeholders expect public authorities at all levels to take action to accompany the transition and that **special attention should be paid to SMEs.**

Examples of initiatives and measures aiming to ensure a smooth transition towards automation and digitalisation of the labour force include:

* Awareness and orientation: providing a level of situational awareness to members of the labour force to understand the changes ahead, what can be expected in the future, and how they could adjust to these changes.
* Re-skilling and upskilling training of existing personnel.
* Vocational and university education for new personnel through the development of new vocational studies addressing the need for skills and competences of the future labour force in transport.
* New business roles for the transport and education sector: the development of new business roles that enable the education sector and the transport chain to properly prepare the relevant human capital to the new circumstances.
* Adaptating EU minimum training requirements (for instance, certification of train drivers operating locomotives and trains, minimum level of training of seafarers).

To anticipate or manage change coming with automation and digitalisation, different initiatives and policy measures are already available. It must be analysed to what extent they address the needs and specific characteristics of the transport sector, and of **SMEs in particular**.

1. Automation refers to the substitution of human input by (digitally enabled) machines (<https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/observatories/eurwork/industrial-relations-dictionary/automation>). Digitalisation refers to the use of digital technologies. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Skills and competences development of future transportation professionals at all levels. Available at: <http://www.skillfulproject.eu/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/12/05/digitalisation-of-transport-council-conclusions/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0283> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://ec.europa.eu/transport/themes/social/automation_en> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)