



Social Conditions in Bus and Coach Transport in Europe

ETF POLICY DEMANDS

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The Covid-19 pandemic brought the bus and coach sector to a halt. During the first lockdown, the level of operations was reduced to zero, and over the past two years recovery was extremely slow. Meanwhile, a significant number of bus and coach drivers found jobs elsewhere. As the sector is slowly picking up, the ETF considers the time is right to explore what it needs to become more attractive and better placed to recall and retain skilled drivers.

Commissioned by the ETF, the study on “Social Conditions in Bus and Coach Transport in Europe” points at the following major barriers to the sectors’ attractiveness:

- 1. Low wage levels / Bus and coach drivers are compelled to work long hours to make a living. Work-related tasks are often not registered as working time thus drivers are paid for fewer hours than what they actually work**
- 2. Poor work-life balance / Long work schedules and long periods away from home - the latter particularly in occasional international operations - are disruptive for family and social life, and fail to correspond to modern-day lifestyle and expectations**
- 3. Unpredictable shifts and poor work organisation / Irregular and unpredictable working schedules, late announcement on shifts have a negative impact on drivers’ private, social and family life, and on duration and quality of rest**

The study further points

- At the pervasiveness of social dumping due to unfair business practices. Our study reveals that trade unions across Europe witness a weak application of rules, lack of enforcement, low number of controls and sanctions.
- That in spite of financial and emergency aid packages and measures adopted by European countries, employment in the sector declined during the Covid-19 pandemic. Short time subsidies were not sufficient to cover the income loss faced by workers, as they merely covered the basic wage. The loss of additional income on which many drivers depended made many of them leave their jobs and the sector, further exacerbating the driver shortage.
- That new business models settle in but in no benefit for the sector. The ETF research show that as fair employment of personnel is costly, operators turn to non-traditional employment models, including bogus self-employment, platform and temporary agency work. This undesirably adds flexibility and insecurity to the sector.
- At the lack of infrastructure such as sanitary facilities, rest rooms and accommodation. This keeps women and young people away from the profession. The bus and coach driver population is ageing rapidly, meanwhile.

Undoubtedly, there is no future bus and coach activity across Europe without bus and coach drivers.

And to attract drivers back to the sector one clearly needs

- Stronger legislation to counterbalance the industry’s predisposition to cost-cutting and full labour flexibility
- Strong and broad coverage of collective labour agreements, as a guarantee for better levels of pay, working conditions, and access to benefits; as a means to complement existing legal provisions and to close legal gaps. A good CBA coverage will ensure a better level playing field in road passenger transport, prevent social dumping and foster fair competition.

Mindful of the above

The ETF thus calls for the European Commission

- To place at the core of all future policy initiatives on bus and coach the ETF studies on “Driver Fatigue in European Road Transport” and on “Social Conditions in Bus and Coach Transport in Europe”
- To include commercial road passenger transport in all its future road safety policies, and to closely monitor the safety record of the sector with the view to adjust rules to improve the safety of drivers, passengers, road users
- To refrain from revising the driving and rest time rules for bus and coach
- To refrain from extending the 12-day derogation to other types of bus and coach operations
- To adopt rules to properly enforce and control the single-operation principle relating to the existing 12-day derogation
- To adopt rules for the full enforcement of the working and driving time limits, in what concerns the mix between out-of-scope and in-scope activities
- To eliminate the possibility for split breaks and split rest periods from the current driving and rest time rules at EU level

The ETF calls for the Member States

- To invest in enforcement and controls capacities as the only means to restore a law-compliance culture in the bus and coach sector
- To provide a sound national legal base for a board collective bargaining coverage in the sector

The ETF takes the opportunity to reiterate its call for the industry (bus and coach operators)

- to ensure that the CJEU ruling of 14 May 2019 in case C-55/18 on the recording and documentation of working time is implemented throughout the entire sector
- to ensure that time spent on all work-related tasks (not just the driving), as well as on travel to and from the vehicle, is recorded and documented as working time
- to organise the work schedules in a reasonable, realistic and transparent way; to avoid or limit night driving, unpredictable work and stress; and to comply with all the provisions of the rules on driving times and rest periods
- to meet their health and safety obligations, to start with by providing measures that improve the work-life balance of their drivers and by guaranteeing adequate rest facilities, including accommodation in case of long-distance journeys
- to conclude collective labour agreements at sector and company levels

Last but not least, the ETF calls for the European Labour Authority to launch an annual frame of action for bus and coach. This sector deserves particular attention, better information relating to rights and obligations, more cross-border controls, and constructive exchanges between policy-makers, social partners and control authorities to make it a better place for our workers!

The study was based on research conducted in eleven EU Member States (Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, the Netherlands, Spain, and Slovakia).

The methodology of the study consisted of an extensive literature analysis, interviews with trade union representatives in the surveyed countries and debates in three cross-national workshops conducted in 2021.



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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The ETF represents over 5 million transport workers from transport unions across Europe in 38 countries.