



2026 Diversity & Inclusion in the European Rail Supply Industry

The first structured attempt to document workforce diversity data
and best-practice initiatives across the European rail supply industry

Diversity & Inclusion in the European Rail Supply Industry

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Executive Summary

The European rail supply industry is at a pivotal moment, in which rapid technological transformation, an ageing workforce, skills shortages and intensifying competition for talent are reshaping the sector's priorities. The industry is rising to this challenge: major European rail supply companies are investing in structured, measurable approaches to attract, develop and retain the broadest possible pool of talent, and this report documents the effort.

This public report, produced by **UNIFE's Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Task Force**, is the first structured attempt to document workforce diversity data and best-practice initiatives, specifically across the European rail supply industry. It is intended as a living resource, a baseline to be enriched and updated in future cycles as the industry continues to grow.

The ambition of the European rail supply industry is to attract the very best talent: individuals assessed on their qualifications, skills, experience and potential. Achieving this requires recruitment and development processes that are genuinely open to the full breadth of talent available, regardless of gender, background or personal characteristics. The data and initiatives presented in this report are grounded in that ambition: they document where structural barriers currently limit access to that talent, and what companies are doing to remove them.

Diversity and inclusion were once treated as matters of corporate responsibility, and are now increasingly recognised as tools for widening the talent base, strengthening innovation and ensuring the long-term resilience of a sector that is central to Europe's decarbonisation and safety ambitions.

Workforce diversity data in terms of gender, age and nationality, as well as best practices, was collected from six major European rail supply companies: *Alstom*, *CAF*, *Hitachi Rail*, *Knorr-Bremse*, *Škoda Group* and *Wabtec Corporation*, covering their European rail operation with reference year 2025. Together, these companies employ approximately 96,200 people across Europe, representing a significant share of the sector's workforce.

The report serves a dual purpose. Externally, it seeks to provide the first evidence base specifically documenting workforce diversity in the European rail supply industry, with the aim of informing and strengthening UNIFE's advocacy towards EU institutions and policymakers on skills, talent and inclusion. Internally, it aims to equip UNIFE members and other companies in the sector with concrete tools and tested initiatives to strengthen diversity, offering both an evidence-based picture of where the industry currently stands and a compendium of practical approaches to draw inspiration from.

To the best of UNIFE's knowledge, no equivalent dataset exists for the European rail supply industry, making this report a first-of-its-kind baseline.

Key quantitative findings

Data collection aimed at measuring three dimensions of workforce diversity: (i) gender representation; (ii) age distribution; (iii) nationality. These were selected on the basis of availability and cross-company comparability.

- Gender: the weighted average share of women stands at 19.1%, below both the broader rail sector average of 23%¹ (including operators and infrastructure managers) and the manufacturing sector benchmark of 22.4%.² All six companies report figures within a narrow two-percentage-point band, suggesting that gender underrepresentation is structural and industry-wide rather than company-specific.
- Age: all six companies report a consistent generational imbalance, which reflects the European demographic curve,³ a dominant mid-career cohort aged 30-49, a substantial share of employees aged 50 and above (ranging from 22% to 36%), and a thin pipeline of employees under 29 (averaging 13-14%). At several companies, the 50+ cohort outnumbers the under-29 cohort by a ratio of more than three to one, with direct implications for knowledge continuity and succession planning.
- Nationality: Data was only partially available, with three out of six companies able to provide comparable figures. Given the non-uniform transposition of the General Data Protection Regulation into national law, nationality diversity cannot be measured adequately and comparably across the sector. There is therefore no industry-wide benchmark, which limits the ability to draw meaningful conclusions. Consequently, this dimension remains under monitored across the industry.
- Overall, the absence of standardised measurement frameworks limits the industry's ability to benchmark performance, track progress and design evidence-based interventions.

Key qualitative findings

Fifteen diversity and inclusion initiatives were collected through a structured template, organised across four thematic areas: (i) gender equality; (ii) disability and neurodiversity; (iii) mentorship and intergenerational knowledge transfer.

- Gender equality: initiatives span different stages of talent pipeline, from early STEM outreach targeting school-age girls to mentoring networks, leadership acceleration programmes and internal women's communities. Companies tend to combine structured individual development pathways with community-building mechanisms. Where outcome data is available, several programmes report meaningful promotion and retention rates alongside high participant satisfaction.
- Disability and neurodiversity: initiatives reflect three broad orientations: expanding areas to employment through adapted recruitment processes, retaining and supporting employees with disabilities already within the workforce and building internal awareness and cultural readiness. Several initiatives rely on external specialist partnerships, reflecting the limits of in-house expertise in this area.
- Mentorship and intergenerational knowledge transfer: initiatives range from structured knowledge mapping and succession planning tools to apprenticeship schemes, student pipeline programmes and formal mentoring frameworks. Investment in mentoring, whether

¹ L&R Social Research, *Women in Rail (WiR) Report 2025: Implementation of the European Social Partner Agreement on Women in Rail*. Prepared for CER and ETF. European Union, 2025.

² Eurostat, *Women in Science and Engineering in the EU Rise to 7.9 million in 2024*, 2026.

³ Atlas of Demography Team, "Will the Kids Be Alright? Generational Effects on Economic Outcomes in an Ageing Society," *Knowledge for Policy*, European Commission, last updated March 23, 2026,

oriented towards knowledge preservation, career development or leadership preparation, generates visible returns across multiple dimensions, even at a modest scale.

- Across all initiatives, diversity and inclusion are consistently framed not as a compliance obligation but as a response to concrete workforce challenges, talent shortages, succession risks and competition for specialised skills. This signals a meaningful shift towards treating inclusion as an operational priority.
- Many initiatives remain locally or nationally bounded. A small number of companies are beginning to scale successful approaches internationally, but this remains the exception rather than the rule.

Key recommendations

For policymakers at the EU and national level:

1. Develop rail supply-specific diversity and inclusion indicators that can be integrated into existing sustainability reporting initiatives, enabling consistent and comparable reporting across the sector without creating additional standalone requirements.
2. Establish a recurring, institutionalised data collection exercise on workforce diversity in the European rail supply industry, building on the baseline established by this report, as a joint effort by the European Commission and the European Union Agency for Railways. The absence of supply-sector specific data undermines the European Commission's ability to design targeted policy interventions, while ERA, as both a monitoring body and an employer operating within the same talent pool, has a direct institutional interest in addressing this gap.
3. Encourage Europe's Rail Joint Undertaking to explore how diversity and inclusion considerations could be further integrated into its research and innovation activities.
4. Develop EU-level guidance on disability and neurodiversity data collection in industrial workplaces, enabling employers to measure this dimension of inclusion in a legally compliant, privacy-respecting and standardised manner.
5. Ensure that EU funding instruments, such as successors of the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) + and Erasmus+, explicitly recognise and support D&I investment in industrial sectors such as rail supply, with accessible mechanisms for SMEs and dedicated calls that treat inclusion as a core objective alongside skills development.
6. Incorporate D&I performance as a rewarded criterion within the social aspects of public tenders, as part of the ongoing revision of EU public procurement directives, incentivising companies to invest in inclusion without establishing mandatory thresholds that could disadvantage those at earlier stages of their journey.
7. Recognise workforce ageing as a distinct Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) policy priority and develop targeted instruments to support it, including fiscal incentives for knowledge transfer schemes, flexible retirement frameworks, and common methodologies for mapping critical operational knowledge in technically specialised industries.

For rail supply companies:

1. Treat cultural change, through manager and employee-wide training, awareness campaigns and stigma reduction, as an integral component of every diversity and inclusion programme, not a secondary consideration.
2. Systematically evaluate proven initiatives for broader replication across sites, functions and geographies, building evaluation frameworks into programme design.

3. Address intergenerational knowledge transfer as a strategic organisational priority, investing in structured succession planning and knowledge documentation mechanisms before retirement transitions create gaps that cannot be easily filled.

The competitiveness and long-term success of the European railway supply industry depend on our ability to innovate, adapt and attract the very best talent. At the heart of this is our most valuable asset: our people. Building a diverse, inclusive and equitable workforce is not only a social responsibility but a business imperative. By strengthening our commitment to diversity and inclusion, we can foster innovation, enhance resilience and ensure our industry remains competitive in an increasingly global market. This report highlights the state of play, the progress made and the actions still required to create a sector where everyone can contribute, thrive and shape the future of rail. The report highlights that there is still a great need for action.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and rationale

Diversity and inclusion are increasingly recognised as strategic priorities for the rail supply industry, not only as matters of fairness or corporate responsibility, but as measurable drivers of competitiveness, innovation, resilience, and long-term financial performance. In a sector undergoing rapid transformation through decarbonisation, digitalisation, automation, and evolving passenger expectations, companies that fail to widen their talent base and leadership perspectives risk falling behind. For the rail supply industry, which includes rolling stock manufacturers, signalling firms, infrastructure contractors, engineering consultancies, component suppliers, and mobility technology providers, diversity across gender, age, ethnicity, and background is becoming a business necessity.

One of the most immediate reasons diversity matters is the industry's growing talent challenge. Across Belgium, Germany, France, the United Kingdom and many other markets, the rail sector faces an ageing workforce, shortages in engineering skills, and rising competition for digital talent. Historically, rail and heavy industry have drawn disproportionately from narrow demographic pools, often male, older, and technically specialised. That model is no longer sustainable. By actively recruiting women, younger professionals, internationally mobile workers, and underrepresented ethnic groups, rail suppliers significantly expand access to scarce skills in engineering, software, cybersecurity, AI, project delivery, procurement, and advanced manufacturing.

The scale and urgency of this skill challenge have been well documented. A European Commission study from 2019⁴ highlighted that the rail workforce is undergoing a significant demographic shift, with around one-third of employees expected to retire within the following decade. The study warned that shortages of skilled labour could become a critical bottleneck for maintaining the global competitiveness of the European rail supply industry, identifying skills development and access to talent as key strategic concerns.

In this context, diversity and inclusion are not peripheral considerations but essential tools: by broadening recruitment practices and fostering more open and inclusive workplace cultures, companies can access talent pools that have traditionally been overlooked or underutilised.

More recent evidence confirms that the challenges identified in the 2019 European Commission study remain relevant and acute. The 2024 NSAR Rail Workforce Survey highlights that skills shortages continue to represent a major issue for the sector in the United Kingdom, with significant workforce attrition expected in the coming years due to retirement and ongoing difficulties in attracting new talent. Crucially, the report also underlines that *"the workforce is still heavily male-dominated and lacking diversity, limiting access to talent"*⁵. This reinforces the argument that traditional recruitment patterns are constraining the sector's ability to respond to its skills needs. Similarly, a 2025 report by the International Labour Organisation confirms persistent labour shortages across rail occupations globally, driven by demographic shifts and the rapid evolution of technical skill requirements linked to digitalisation and automation⁶.

⁴ European Commission, Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs. *Study on the Competitiveness of the Rail Supply Industry*. Brussels: European Commission, 2019

⁵ National Skills Academy for Rail (NSAR), *Findings of the NSAR Rail Workforce Survey*, 2024.

⁶ International Labour Organization, *Realizing Decent Work in the Railways Sector: Report for the Technical Meeting on Decent Work in the Railways Sector*, 2025.

This is especially relevant because rail supply is no longer only about steel, mechanics, and infrastructure. Modern rail systems increasingly depend on data platforms, connected sensors, predictive maintenance, smart ticketing, energy optimisation, passenger analytics, and cybersecurity. These capabilities require talent often found outside traditional rail pipelines. Beyond talent attraction, diversity has a direct link to innovation and better decision-making. Complex industries perform better when teams bring varied perspectives to problem-solving. Homogeneous teams may share assumptions and miss risks; diverse teams are more likely to challenge conventional thinking, identify blind spots, and generate broader solutions. This matters in rail supply where projects are capital-intensive and safety-critical.

A global study by Boston Consulting Group found that companies with above-average management diversity generated 19% higher innovation revenue than companies with below-average diversity, suggesting that diverse leadership teams are better at converting ideas into commercial outcomes⁷. For rail suppliers competing on product differentiation, reliability, and next-generation mobility solutions, that advantage is highly relevant.

In companies with more than 10,000 employees, management diversity accounts for a larger amount of the variation in their ability to innovate than at companies with fewer than 10,00 employees. For instance, up to 41% of big companies' variation in innovation can be explained by diversity, including gender diversity.⁸ McKinsey's 2023 "Diversity Wins" Report found that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity on executive teams were 39% more likely to outperform on profitability.⁹

It is worth noting that this report is published at a moment when corporate approaches to diversity and inclusion are evolving unevenly across different contexts. The initiatives documented here reflect a considered commitment by the contributing companies to inclusion as a driver of competitiveness, talent and long-term workforce resilience: a commitment that this report seeks to support, strengthen and make visible.

1.2. Objectives of the report

This report serves a dual purpose:

- Internally, it aims to equip UNIFE members and other companies in the sector with concrete tools and tested initiatives to strengthen diversity across gender, age, and background, providing evidence-based insights into current levels of diversity, while offering a compendium of best practices spanning gender inclusivity, mentorship, intergenerational knowledge transfer and beyond.
- Externally, it seeks to showcase the European rail supply industry's commitment to diversity and inclusion towards EU institutions, stakeholders, and the wider public, thereby strengthening its voice in European skills and talent policy debates.

Throughout this report, UNIFE aims to establish a first baseline assessment of diversity and inclusion within the rail supply industry, inspire member and non-member companies through practical examples and create a living resource that can be updated and enriched in future cycles of the UNIFE Skills Strategy (e.g. with data and best practices from more UNIFE Members from various parts of the value chain). In doing so, UNIFE reaffirms its commitment to building a more open, inclusive, and forward-looking industry that reflects the values of innovation and sustainability.

⁷ Boston Consulting Group, *How Diverse Leadership Teams Boost Innovation*, 2018.

⁸ Boston Consulting Group and Technical University of Munich, *The Mix That Matters: Innovation Through Diversity*, 2017.

⁹ McKinsey & Company, *Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters*, 2020.

Furthermore, UNIFE also contributes to accomplishing its commitments under the Pact for Skills, which UNIFE signed in July 2025.¹⁰

¹⁰ The European Commission's [Pact for Skills](#) is an EU initiative that brings together companies, public authorities, trade unions, and training providers to develop concrete training partnerships, share investment in skills programmes, and set targets for upskilling and reskilling workers, with the aim of addressing labour and skills shortages.

2. Scope and methodology

2.1. Scope

This report covers two distinct types of content: quantitative workforce diversity data and qualitative best practice initiatives. Both were collected exclusively from six UNIFE member companies of the UNIFE Diversity & Inclusion Task Force: *Alstom*, *CAF*, *Hitachi Rail*, *Knorr-Bremse*, *Škoda Group* and *Wabtec Corporation*. The data cover the European rail activities of the contributing companies. Global workforce figures were explicitly excluded from the scope, as the report's objective is to provide a picture of diversity within the European Rail Supply Industry specifically. Where companies operate across multiple business divisions, only data and initiatives pertaining to their rail division were included.

2.2. Data collection (Section 3)

Data was self-reported by each company and submitted to UNIFE between February and May 2026, with 2025 as the reference year. No independent verification of the figures was carried out. The data collection aimed at measuring three dimensions of workforce diversity: gender representation, age distribution and nationality. These were selected on the basis of availability and cross-company comparability. Prior to data submission, UNIFE and the contributing companies agreed on a common set of calculation methods for each indicator to ensure consistency. All figures are expressed as a proportion of the total workforce headcount.

The dimension of disability and neurodiversity¹¹ was also explored during the scoping phase but was ultimately excluded on the grounds that it is not reliably measurable at the organisational level. Disability and neurodivergent statuses are frequently undeclared at the point of hiring, and many conditions remain invisible or undisclosed throughout a career due to stigma, lack of awareness or the absence of formal disclosure frameworks. The best practices section of this report documents initiatives in the disability and neurodiversity space, reflecting the growing attention companies are paying to this dimension of inclusion, even in the absence of reliable measurement frameworks.

The indicators used are defined as follows:

- **Gender representation:** the share of women as a proportion of the total workforce headcount. Data on gender representation at the leadership or management level was not collected, as internal definitions of leadership and management vary significantly across organisations, making meaningful cross-company comparison unfeasible.
- **Age distribution:** the share of employees across three age ranges: under 29, 30-49 and above 50 years old, as a proportion of total workforce headcount.
- **Nationality diversity:** the share of employees working outside their home country as a proportion of total workforce headcount. Seconded expatriates were excluded from this count. However, only

¹¹ Disability is understood as the result of dynamic interactions between health conditions and contextual factors, environmental and personal, that affect a person's functioning and participation in daily life (WHO, International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, Geneva: WHO, 2001). Neurodiversity refers to the natural variation in human neurological functioning (Singer, 1999), encompassing conditions such as autism, ADHD and dyslexia, and is understood in the workplace context as a dimension of human difference rather than a deficit (Doyle, 2020).

three out of six contributing companies were able to provide comparable data on this indicator, and no equivalent industry benchmark exists against which we can contextualise these figures. Given the limited number of data points and the absence of a reference framework, it was not possible to draw meaningful conclusions from the data available. Therefore, nationality diversity is not presented as a standalone section in this report, but it is flagged as a priority dimension for future data collection cycles and as a current research gap.

2.3. Best practices collection (Section 4)

Best practice initiatives were collected through a structured template. The template asked companies to provide information across five areas: company information, an overview of the initiative including its theme, start and end dates and current status, a description covering main objectives, key activities, target groups and links to broader company D&I strategy, outcomes and impact, including available KPIs and data, as well as expected follow-up and next steps.

Submissions were received on a voluntary basis and were not subject to independent verification. The initiatives presented in this report, therefore, solely reflect the information provided by the contributing companies. UNIFE has lightly edited submissions for clarity, consistency and length, without editing the content provided.

The initiatives are organised thematically across four categories:

- inclusive employer branding,
- gender equality,
- disability and neurodiversity, and
- mentorship and intergenerational knowledge transfer.

These categories mirror the themes that emerged from the submissions received, and are not the result of a predetermined taxonomy. They are not intended to be exhaustive of the full range of D&I activity across the sector.

3. State of diversity in the European Rail Supply Industry

The following sections present workforce diversity data collected from the six UNIFE member companies previously mentioned. Together, these companies employ approximately 96,200 people across their European rail operations, representing a significant share of the European rail supply industry's workforce in Europe. Data is presented across gender representation and age distribution, with nationality diversity not being able to be meaningfully measured. The following data should be read as an indicative baseline rather than a statistically representative picture of the sector as a whole.

3.1 Gender representation

Among the six participating companies, the share of women in the workforce ranges from 18% to 20% with individual figures clustered within a narrow band of approximately two percentage points. The weighted average across the six companies, calculated to reflect differences in company size, stands at 19.1%,

Contextualised against sector and industry benchmarks, the weighted average of 19.1% stands below both the broader rail sector average of 23%¹² and the manufacturing sector benchmark of 22.4% for women scientists and engineers recorded by Eurostat in 2024¹³. This gap reflects expectations: the rail supply industry is more heavily concentrated in technical and engineering functions than the rail sector as a whole, which also encompasses operations, customer-facing roles and administrative functions where female representation tends to be higher. The distance from the manufacturing benchmark suggests meaningful room for improvement.

The very narrow spread across companies is a significant finding. Despite differences in size, geography, product focus and corporate culture, all six companies report female workforce shares within a two percentage-point range. This convergence may testify to similar cultural characteristics across the rail supply industry, such as its engineer-intensive profile, historically male-dominated pipelines, and the persistent underrepresentation of women in technical STEM education pathways. This finding also reflects that the factors driving female underrepresentation in the industry operate at a structural or sectoral level rather than being company-specific.

3.2 Age distribution and generational balance

Age distribution data was provided by the same six companies that contributed gender data, covering the same European rail operations workforce. Companies reported headcount across three age bands: under 29, 30-49 and above 50. Across all six companies, the 30-49 age group constitutes the largest share of the workforce, ranging from 51% to 65.12%. This is consistent with the profile of a mature, technically specialised industry where careers tend to be long and mid-career professionals form the operational backbone of the organisation.

The more interesting picture emerges at the two ends of the age distribution. The share of employees aged 50 and above is substantial across all contributing companies, ranging from 36% to 22.26%. At

¹² See footnote 1, page 1.

¹³ See footnote 2, page 1.

the other end, the under-29 cohort is consistently thin, as figures range from 10.43% to 17%. These figures reveal a structural imbalance that is consistent across all six companies. In two out of the six companies, employees aged 50 and above outnumber those under 29 by a ratio of more than three to one. The pattern is uniform enough to say that it reflects a structural characteristic of the rail supply industry rather than particular circumstances of individual companies.

3.3 Key insights and trends

Altogether, the data collected from the contributing companies offer a coherent picture of workforce diversity in terms of age and gender within a segment of the European rail supply industry. The most consistent finding across both the gender and age dimensions is the relative homogeneity of the workforce, and the degree to which this homogeneity appears structural and at the sector level, rather than company-specific. All six companies report shares of female workers within a two-percentage-point band, with a weighted average of 19.1%, as well as a similar generational imbalance, with a substantial share of employees approaching retirement and a thin pipeline of younger entrants.

These two dimensions of homogeneity compound each other. A workforce that is both predominantly male and heavily weighted towards late career is one where the near-term talent challenge is particularly serious, demonstrating that the sector needs to attract more women and more young people simultaneously, at a time where a significant share of its most experienced employees is approaching retirement. In this view, the best practices focusing on gender equality and on structured intergenerational knowledge transfer appear particularly relevant to address the challenges revealed by the data.

While nationality diversity was explored, it could not be meaningfully assessed due to insufficient data availability. This demonstrates that nationality diversity is not yet systematically monitored across the sector, and such a gap is in itself significant, and companies are recommended to address it internally.

More broadly, the data presented above represents a first structured attempt to establish a common baseline for workforce diversity measurement across major European rail supply companies. Its value lies in providing the sector with a concrete reference point against which future progress can be measured. To the best of UNIFE's knowledge, no equivalent study focusing specifically on the European rail supply industry exists: existing diversity data for the railway sector, such as that published through the Women in Rail report,¹⁴ or the European Commission's Rail Market Monitoring Report,¹⁵ covers railway operators and infrastructure managers, without disaggregating data for the rail supply industry specifically. In this context, the data presented here carries meaning beyond its immediate findings: it makes the current state of gender representation and generational balance visible for the first time for the industry. It creates a reference point against which future progress can be measured. Building on this foundation, with broader participation, the picture can deepen over time.

¹⁴ See footnote 7.

¹⁵ European Commission, Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport, *9th Report on the Development of the Rail Market*. Brussels: European Commission, 2025.

4. Best practices from UNIFE Members

The following chapter presents a selection of diversity and inclusion initiatives implemented by the same six UNIFE member companies. Initiatives were collected through a structured template and cover four thematic areas: inclusive employer branding, gender equality, disability and neurodiversity, and mentorship and intergenerational knowledge transfer. The initiatives were selected on the basis of member company submissions and do not constitute an exhaustive mapping of D&I activity across the sector. They are presented as a compendium of concrete, tested approaches, a source of inspiration and practical reference for member and non-member companies, as well as a foundation that will be enriched as further initiatives are collected in future reporting cycles.

4.1 Inclusive Employer Branding

Alongside direct engagement programmes such as apprenticeships, student partnerships and technology camps, the initiative presented in this chapter sought to influence how the rail sector is perceived by broader external audiences through employer branding strategies. Rather than targeting specific groups through structured activities, this approach aims to shape the image of the company and the sector more broadly, with diversity and inclusion as a central element of their positioning. The initiative below offers an example of this approach, which is distinct from, and complementary to, the programmatic initiatives documented above.

Hitachi Rail – People Stories Campaign

As part of a broader employer branding and global diversity strategy aimed at showcasing experiences, backgrounds and career pathways present across the company, to strengthen employer attractiveness, Hitachi Rail launched its *“People Stories Campaign”* in 2023. The initiative uses authentic employee storytelling to strengthen emotional engagement with internal and external audiences while positioning the rail sector as a more inclusive, people-centred industry. Experiences are highlighted across gender, age, nationality, career background and professional pathways.

Stories are published through corporate websites and social media channels and aligned with key diversity-related moments such as International Women’s Day and Black History Month. Hitachi Rail seeks to challenge traditional perceptions of careers in rail and increase the visibility of underrepresented profiles within the sector.

One example is the story of Jennifer Hathcock, Plant Manager at Hitachi Rail’s Batesburg factory in South Carolina, whose testimony was featured during Women’s History Month. In her interview, Hathcock reflected on the importance of inclusivity, leadership development, and the role of male allies in advancing gender equity within traditionally male-dominated industrial environments. She described how one of her most significant professional achievements has been to identify and develop leaders from “otherwise overlooked or underrepresented populations,” helping employees progress into supervisory and management positions with long-term impacts on both career opportunities and quality of life. Her testimony also highlighted the importance of representation and mentorship. Hathcock explained that early in her career, she had been denied a plant manager role because of her

gender, before later encountering a female plant manager who became a mentor and role model, helping her build the pathway toward leadership herself.

By sharing these stories, Hitachi Rail promotes diversity externally while creating internal role models capable of inspiring future generations of employees and leaders. According to Hitachi Rail, the initiative has contributed to improved employer brand perception and increased engagement among female candidates on recruitment platforms. Since the campaign's launch, the company's Glassdoor Diversity & Inclusion rating increased from 3.3 in 2022 to 4.0 in 2026, showing a perception change of the company among employees. Furthermore, the launch of this initiative is reportedly linked to a rise in the percentage of female applicants, which increased from 12% in 2021 to 22% in 2022, when the initiative was implemented.

Findings from the initiative indicate that diversity-oriented employer branding may contribute positively to candidate engagement and external perceptions of organisational inclusivity, particularly among younger and underrepresented groups.

Concluding observations

- The People Stories Campaign offers an example of how diversity considerations can be embedded into external communications and employer branding.
- The available data points, namely a Glassdoor D&I rating increase from 3.3 to 4.0 between 2022 and 2026, and a reported rise in female applicants from 12% to 22%, suggest a positive trajectory.
- As the only initiative of this kind collected for this report, it is not possible to draw broader conclusions about the role of inclusive employer branding in the rail supply industry.
- However, the initiative represents a dimension of diversity and inclusion practice that sits outside the scope of the other chapters.

4.2 Gender Equality

Historically, the rail-supply industry has had a predominantly male workforce, particularly in technical, engineering and operational functions. Given current skills shortages, as well as competition for talent that continues to intensify across Europe, improving gender diversity has become an increasingly important priority for many companies within the sector. Beyond equity considerations, several UNIFE members highlighted the importance of gender inclusion as a driver of innovation, talent attraction and long-term workforce sustainability.

The initiatives collected in this chapter demonstrate a growing shift from awareness-based approaches towards more structured and measurable programmes aimed at supporting women throughout different stages of the talent pipeline. These range from early STEM outreach activities targeting school-age girls to mentoring networks, leadership acceleration programmes, and internal women's communities designed to strengthen confidence and professional development.

Together, these initiatives illustrate how companies within the rail supply industry are approaching gender equality as more than only a diversity objective, and also as a talent priority.

Alstom – Women's Career Gym

Alstom launched the “*Women's Career Gym*” programme in 2023 as a structured career-acceleration initiative aimed at supporting women's progression in a traditionally male-dominated industry. The programme targets women at senior professional and team manager level, and especially those seeking greater career clarity and confidence before entering formal leadership pathways.

Delivered annually between November and February, the initiative consists of a 12-session group coaching journey combining reflective career exercises, peer-to-peer learning, career mapping, networking activities, personal branding, interview preparation and resilience training. The programme also places strong emphasis on creating a psychologically safe environment and fostering long-term peer support networks among participants.

Since its launch, 80 women have completed the programme, with 50 additional participants enrolled in the current cycle. Reported outcomes include increased confidence, stronger professional visibility, improved career clarity and renewed motivation following major life events or organisational transitions. Quantitative indicators also suggest a strong programme impact: participant satisfaction reached 4.8 out of 5, the retention rate among participants stood at 100%, and 46% of participants (37 out of 80) obtained promotions between February 2024 and February 2026. The programme additionally received the Regional Gold Award in the People & People Culture category at the Alstom Excellence Awards 2024-2025.

Hitachi Rail – DevelopHER & DevelopHER Connections

Hitachi Rail launched the “*DevelopHER & DevelopHER Connections*” programme in Spain in 2023, as part of its broader ambitious strategy to strengthen gender equality and women's leadership development within the rail sector. The initiative was specifically designed to address structural and behavioural barriers frequently encountered by women in traditionally male-dominated industries,

including lack of visibility, self-limiting beliefs, limited access to informal networks and reduced leadership exposure. The programme combines professional development, experiential learning, coaching and peer networking to support women at key stages of career progression and strengthen their readiness for leadership and decision-making roles.

The programme is delivered annually through a structured development journey combining five in-person sessions, self-assessment tools, individual coaching, and personalised action plans. Across the sessions, participants work on leadership presence, communication, influence, confidence-building, difficult conversations, while benefitting from mentoring opportunities with senior role models. Since the third edition, the initiative has incorporated the “DevelopHER Connections” network, aimed at maintaining long-term peer support and strengthening internal women’s communities. The primary target of the initiative is high-potential women professionals and mid-career employees looking to strengthen leadership capabilities, visibility and career progression.

According to *Hitachi Rail*, the programme has already demonstrated strong engagement and retention outcomes. Since the date of its launch, 34 women have completed the programme, attendance rates exceeded 95% and participation in individual coaching sessions reached 100%. Participant satisfaction scored reached 4.5 out of 5, while 15% of participants obtained promotions following their participation in the programme. The retention rate among high-potential women participants reached 92%, suggesting a positive impact on career continuity. In terms of qualitative indicators, it has been reported that the programme has contributed to increased self-awareness, confidence and proactive career ownership among participants.

Knorr-Bremse – Girls’ Technology Camp

Knorr-Bremse has been supporting the “Girls’ Technology Camp” initiative for 25 years, it is organised in cooperation with “Technik-Zukunft in Bayern” within the *Bildungswerk der Bayerischen Wirtschaft e.V.*, and funded by the Bavarian employers’ association for the metalworking and electrical industries (“*Bayerischer Unternehmensverband Metall und Elektro*”) together with the Bavarian State Ministry for Economic Affairs, Regional Development and Energy. This long-standing programme aims to increase early exposure to engineering and technology careers among young girls while strengthening the long-term female talent pipeline within industrial sectors such as rail. The initiative is open to girls from across Bavaria and is not limited to children of *Knorr-Bremse* employees.

The programme combines technical learning with practical experience, career orientation and social engagement through a multi-day camp hosted annually in Munich. Participants receive insights into different technical professions, take part in hands-on activities in training workshops, and attend professional career orientation sessions designed to improve understanding of STEM-related career opportunities. The camp also includes a shared residential experience in a youth hostel and concludes with participant presentations delivered to parents and project partners.

Over the past 25 years, the initiative has involved approximately 450 participants and has maintained stable participation levels over the last 14 years, indicating sustained interest and continued attractiveness among young girls considering technical education pathways. According to *Knorr-Bremse*, the programme has contributed to increased visibility of technical professions among girls, strengthened employer branding, while creating connections with participants’ families.

The company also reports that the initiative has contributed indirectly to later engagement with Knorr-Bremse through internships, working student positions and apprenticeships, helping support future recruitment pipelines. Although the programme does not yet track long-term employment or career progression data, it demonstrates a long-standing approach to early STEM outreach and gender inclusion within the sector. The initiative is planned to continue in future years.

Knorr-Bremse – Women@KB

Knorr-Bremse launched the “Women@KB” initiative in Munich in 2022, and it was originally established by female employees at the company’s headquarters. Since then, it expanded internationally through the creation of additional local women’s networks.

Women@KB combines networking, mentoring and professional development activities designed to support women throughout their career progression and help address structural barriers frequently encountered in traditionally male-dominated sectors. One central component of the initiative is a mentoring scheme in which female employees in permanent positions can participate as mentees and receive guidance, coaching and career support from experienced mentors, both male and female, over a defined period of time. In parallel, the programme offers seminars and development sessions focused on strengthening leadership capabilities, with the objective of helping participants overcome barriers commonly associated with the “glass ceiling.”

Since its launch, the initiative has expanded significantly and now includes eight local Women@KB networks connected through an international community platform, demonstrating increasing organisational reach and high interest from employees. The recent launch of the fourth mentoring cycle further indicated continued engagement and demand for the programme among employees. Although quantitative indicators such as promotion or retention rates are not currently available, *Knorr-Bremse* reports that the network has contributed to stronger internal connectivity, greater visibility of women within the organisation, and the creation of supportive professional communities across locations. The programme is expected to continue through recurring and newly developed activities implemented on an ongoing basis.

Škoda Group – EqualitA Seal of Approval

Škoda Group has developed a structured approach to gender equality and women's advancement within its Austrian operations, recognised externally through the EqualitA seal of approval, awarded by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs, Energy and Tourism. The seal recognises companies that actively promote women, ensure gender equality and support women's career visibility and progression. Škoda Group Austria received the seal for the second consecutive time in 2026, each award covering a three-year period, reflecting a sustained rather than one-off commitment to gender inclusion.

The programme is underpinned by an internal equality guideline embedded within the company's Integrated Management System, which provides a formal framework for diversity promotion and women's advancement. A central component is a structured compensation system based on clearly defined salary groups tied to qualifications, responsibilities and experience, ensuring that

remuneration is determined by merit rather than personal characteristics. The company also operates a policy of enabling management roles to be performed on a part-time basis, allowing employees with caring responsibilities, who remain predominantly women, to pursue leadership careers without requiring full-time availability. This commitment is reflected in practice: one of the company's team leaders currently works part-time as a fully integrated member of the management team.

To support women in technical professions specifically, Škoda Group Austria actively encourages female employees to participate in networking events for women engineers within the railway industry, and offers dedicated training and development opportunities designed to strengthen technical expertise, leadership skills and career prospects. A dedicated women's advancement officer works closely with management to address equality and diversity issues and to drive further progress in this area.

The company also invests in early pipeline development: Škoda Group Austria participates in school job fairs with a deliberate focus on encouraging young women to apply, resulting in a female trainee for the second consecutive year in 2026. The company is currently training its fourth female apprentice in a row, demonstrating a consistent commitment to building a more gender-balanced talent pipeline from the earliest stages of career entry.

In terms of measurable outcomes, the repeated award of the EqualitA seal following a standardised analysis and assessment process provides external validation of the programme's quality and continuity. The practical examples of part-time leadership and consecutive female apprenticeships offer concrete indicators of a workplace culture that is actively working to translate its equality commitments into operational reality.

Concluding observations

- Member companies tend to combine structured development pathways, coaching, mentoring and leadership training, with community-building mechanisms such as internal women's networks and peer support groups, treating both individual development and collective belonging as necessary components of gender inclusion work.
- Programmes operate as multi-layered ecosystems rather than isolated interventions, designed to support women at different stages of their career journey, from early STEM outreach targeting school-age girls to senior leadership acceleration.
- Where quantitative data is available, it points in a positive direction: promotion rates, retention rates and satisfaction scores are reported across several initiatives, reflecting an outcome orientation that goes beyond purely qualitative assessment.
- Metrics vary in scope and rigour across programmes, which limits direct comparison.
- Taken together, these examples offer a concrete illustration of the range of approaches being deployed, as well as a foundation on which to build.

4.3 Disability & Neurodiversity

Disability and neurodiversity represent an area of growing focus within the rail supply industry's inclusion agenda. Historically, workplace inclusion efforts in corporate Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) agendas have centred primarily on gender and ethnicity, with disability and neurodiversity receiving comparatively less structured attention.¹⁶ The initiatives presented in this chapter suggest an emerging effort within the rail supply industry to address this gap, as companies move beyond legal compliance towards more proactive and integrated approaches, encompassing inclusive recruitment, workplace adaptation, awareness-building and long-term support. Neurodiversity in particular is emerging as a distinct area of interest, with some companies beginning to recognise the specific cognitive strengths that neurodivergent talent can bring to technically demanding roles.

Hitachi Rail – High Speed Talent: Diversity for Inclusion

Hitachi Rail launched the “High Speed Talent: Diversity for Inclusion” initiative in 2023, as a long-term disability and accessibility programme aimed at strengthening inclusive hiring practices and ensure the inclusion of disability across the talent lifecycle. Initially implemented in Italy, the initiative was designed as a scalable framework, able to be replicated to other countries, depending on local contexts. The objective of the programme is to establish a structured strategy focused on equitable access to employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

The initiative is built around five integrated pillars combining technology, leadership training, inclusive recruitment processes, advocacy, and external recognition. A crucial component is the deployment of the ALLIBO digital recruitment platform, specifically designed to support applications from protected categories and reduce structural barriers in recruitment processes. The programme also includes dedicated training on inclusive hiring for hiring managers, the development of an inclusive Talent Acquisition Toolkit and the creation of a Disability Ambassador role to promote accessibility and representation during employer branding and recruitment events. Additional accessibility measures include real-time sign language interpretation during Career Days and inclusion-focused outreach activities.

The initiative has already generated measurable outcomes. According to *Hitachi Rail*, approximately 90 applications from protected categories were received via the ALLIBO platform, which resulted in 40 hires completed through Disability Inclusion programmes. The company reports a compliance rate of 8.5% regarding the employment of protected categories within the Italian workforce, demonstrating alignment with national obligations. In addition, the programme received external recognition through the “Leader in Diversity and Inclusion 2025” award, licensed by *Statista* and *Il Sole 24 Ore*.

The programme reportedly contributed to increased awareness and accountability among hiring managers, stronger inclusive leadership behaviours and more transparent and equitable recruitment processes.

¹⁶ Tiffany Payton Jameson, *Neurodiversity & Disability Inclusion*, *ORMS Today*, INFORMS, 2022.

Alstom – Neurodiversity at Work

Alstom launched the “*Neurodiversity at Work*” initiative in Italy in November 2023 as part of its broader Diversity, Equity and Inclusion strategy aimed at promoting neurodivergent accessibility and inclusive hiring practices within the rail sector. The ambitious programme seeks to open a path towards recognising neurodiversity as a strategic asset capable of expanding access to highly specialised skills and cognitive strengths, while also address current limited awareness and existing biases around neurodivergence and autism.

The programme combines awareness campaigns, targeted recruitment, specialised training and long-term onboarding support. Since the beginning, dedicated webinars and awareness sessions have been delivered to People Managers, Hiring Managers, HR teams across the organisation. A key component of the initiative is the partnership with Specialisterne, an international organisation specialising in the recruitment, training, and job coaching of neurodivergent talent. Through the “Alstom – Specialisterne Academy”, participants receive technical and transversal skills training, including ICT fundamentals, software testing, programming, project management stress management, communication, combining theoretical teaching with on-the-job experience.

The initiative already generated measurable outcomes. *Alstom* identified 15 job roles suitable for neurodivergent talent and completed its first four hires in June 2024. 11 additional hires are planned through the 6-12 month Academy pathway launched in May 2025, bringing the total number of filled or planned positions to 15. The programme currently involves six Italian sites: Bari, Bologna, Florence, Nola, Rome and Savigliano.

Although the initiative is still in an early implementation phase and long-term retention data are not yet available, *Alstom* reports strong qualitative outcomes, including increased awareness of neurodiversity, reduced stereotypes and improved communication practices. The initiative also fostered significant cross-functional collaboration between HR teams, trainers and managers, contributing to the creation of new internal support networks as well as the “Specialisterne Academy Community”.

CAF – Disability & Inclusion Programme

CAF has been implementing the “Disability & Inclusion Programme” at its Reichshoffen site in France since 2021, as part of its broader and impactful people management strategy. The programme is built around two pillars: ensuring equal opportunities throughout the employee lifecycle, as well as promoting an accessible and inclusive work environment. It addresses disability inclusion across recruitment, onboarding, day-to-day management and internal culture simultaneously.

Key components include the organisation of two Disability Awareness Weeks per year in May and November, systematic inclusion of new hires in awareness sessions, dedicated training for managers on inclusive leadership and disability best practices, and close collaboration with occupational health services to support employees through the Recognised Disabled Worker status (RQTH) process: the French official recognition of disabled worker. Informational materials including guides on the RQTH process are made available to all employees, and an inclusive company leaflet is distributed to every external candidate attending an on-site interview.

The programme has generated measurable outcomes. The disability employment rate at the Reichshoffen site currently stands at 8.38%, and the rate of RQTH declarations has increased from 6.7% in 2021 to 9.27% in 2025, a trajectory that CAF attributes to a growing culture of trust and reduced stigma around disability disclosure. 90% of managers have been trained in inclusion practices to date, with 100% coverage among the programme's next steps. According to CAF, the initiative has contributed to a significant improvement in inclusive culture, increased openness in communication between employees and managers, and greater understanding of disability across the organization.

Wabtec Corporation – Disability Action Programme

Wabtec Corporation implemented a structured Disability Action Programme at its Tours site in France, aimed at strengthening workplace accessibility, disability inclusion, employee retention, and awareness across the organisation. The initiative combines practical workplace adaptation with recruitment activities, employee activities and supported employment partnerships. The Tours site employs approximately 800 employees, including around 40 employees with declared disabilities, representing approximately 5% of the site's workforce.

A central component of the initiative is *Wabtec Corporation's* partnership with AMIPI (Association for Material and Intellectual Support for Persons with Disabilities), a French organisation specialising in supported employment and inclusion for people with cognitive disabilities. Through its collaboration, *Wabtec Corporation* established a dedicated workshop hosted at AMIPI and integrated three AMIPI employees directly into warehouse operations at the Tours site.

The initiative also emphasises job retention and workplace accessibility. Indeed, in cooperation with CAP EMPLOI, a French organisation supporting the employment of people with disabilities, *Wabtec Corporation* implemented support measures for two employees with significant disabilities, including workstation adaptations and home adjustment. More generally, adaptation measures were also introduced across the site, including ergonomic equipment and height-adjustable desks.

In addition, the programme includes recruitment and awareness-raising activities aimed at strengthening disability inclusion culture within the organisation. *Wabtec Corporation* participates in disability-focused job fairs and organises dedicated workshops during Safety Days, including virtual-reality simulations and impairment-awareness scenarios designed to increase employee understanding of disability-related challenges. The initiative is further supported by an active Disability Committee and community engagement activities linked to disability-related associations.

Concluding observations

- Initiatives in this chapter reflect three broad orientations: expanding access to employment through adapted recruitment processes; retaining and supporting employees with disabilities already within the workforce; and building internal awareness and cultural readiness to work inclusively.
- Cultural change emerges as a prerequisite for the first two. In certain cases, awareness-building and stigma reduction are outcomes in their own right, preceding and enabling progress on employment and retention figures.
- External partnerships, with specialist recruitment platforms, supported employment organisations and training providers, are present across several initiatives, reflecting a recognition that inclusive practice in this area often requires expertise that companies do not yet hold internally.
- The examples collected here represent a starting point, and further initiatives gathered in future cycles will allow for a richer picture of how the sector is approaching disability and neurodiversity inclusion.

4.4 Mentorship and Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer

Mentoring and intergenerational knowledge transfer are closely interconnected dimensions of workforce development, and both have become increasingly relevant in the rail supply industry. On the one hand, the sector faces a concrete and well-documented demographic challenge: an ageing workforce approaching retirement and increasing difficulties in finding qualified engineers and technical experts across European Member States.¹⁷ As experienced employees depart, in technically demanding industries such as rail, the core challenge lies in documenting and transferring valuable experience and knowledge before it is lost through retirement or transitions.¹⁸ On the other hand, structured mentoring offers one of the most direct mechanisms available to companies seeking to bridge generational gaps and accelerate the development of younger talent, while preserving knowledge. The initiatives presented in this chapter reflect both dimensions: some focus specifically on the structured transfer of critical expertise from experienced employees to successors, while others deploy mentoring more broadly as a tool for career development and leadership upskilling.

CAF – Social Learning Programme

CAF launched its “Social Learning Programme” in 2021, as a structured professional development initiative aimed at accelerating the growth of high-performing employees and managers while fostering intergenerational knowledge exchange and inclusive leadership. The programme is delivered in a one-to-one format, which distinguishes it from traditional group training, and it is based on continuous interaction and practical application of learning in the everyday work context. Three modalities are available: job shadowing, coaching and mentoring.

A central feature of the programme is the matching process, which analyses a range of professional and personal variables to ensure a productive connection between participants. Cross-functional, intergenerational and diverse pairings are encouraged when possible, with the aim of broadening perspectives and promoting inclusive behaviours. Participants are also required to undertake a prior reflection on the areas they wish to develop before the process begins.

Since its launch, the programme has involved 497 participants across the three modalities: 339 through coaching, 119 through job shadowing and 39 through mentoring. Qualitative outcomes reported by CAF include accelerated soft skills development, strengthened cross-functional collaboration, enhanced mutual understanding between generations and functions, and a more cohesive organisational culture. The programme is ongoing, and CAF plans to expand participation among diverse talent groups.

Škoda Group – Škoda Start Programme

Škoda Group established the “Škoda Start Programme” as a long-term talent development initiative aimed at supporting university students at the beginning of their careers, while strengthening the

¹⁷ Consilvio, Di Febraro, Sacco, *On Tackling Skill Shortage in the Rail Sector: The STAFFER ERASMUS+ project*. In: McNally, Carroll, Martinez-Pastor, Ghosh, Efthymiou, Valantasis-Kanellos, (eds) *Transport Transitions: Advancing Sustainable and Inclusive Mobility*. TRAconference 2024. Lecture Notes in Mobility. Springer, 2025.

¹⁸ Katirae, Nadia, et al, *A Roadmap for Managing an Ageing Workforce in the Manufacturing Sector: An Italian Case Study*, PMC — National Library of Medicine, 2024.

company's future recruitment pipeline for qualified employees. The programme is implemented on a recurring basis every academic year, and it focuses on establishing early relationships with students during their studies, in order to facilitate their transition into full-time employment within the company. The initiative aims to integrate students in the company before graduation, so as to reduce the onboarding and adaptation period once participants start their permanent roles.

The programme combines mentoring, practical experience and intergenerational knowledge transfer. Participants are introduced to the company through production tours, departmental presentations, internal lectures and collaboration opportunities with company experts. Students are also allowed to work on their university projects or on their master's theses in cooperation with *Škoda Group* specialists. Participants receive merit-based scholarships.

The programme currently includes 17 university students. In terms of employment outcomes, 6 students were hired following graduation in 2025, with a further 6 planned hires anticipated in 2026. *Škoda Group* reports that development goals have been achieved, with line managers providing positive feedback, highlighting participants' rapid adaptation and smooth transition into standard employment upon graduation. According to the company, the initiative has also contributed positively to employer attractiveness and brand perception among students. In the "Top Employer 2026" student survey, *Škoda Group* ranked second in the Automotive and Technology Industry category. The programme is expected to continue running in future academic years.

Škoda Group – Škoda Start Programme Junior

Škoda Group also operates the "Škoda Start Programme Junior", a complementary initiative targeting students from technical high schools and vocational schools, launched in the 2024/2025 school year as a two-year initiative. The programme is designed to strengthen early technical skills development while creating a direct pathway towards future employment within the company. The initiative is implemented on a recurring school-year basis, and it combines vocational education, practical training and mentoring.

The programme is organised into three stages. The first consists of theoretical training delivered at the company's training centre, followed by practical on-the-job training in *Škoda Group* facilities, where students get hands-on manufacturing and technical experience. The final stage involves the competition of a formal graduation examination at a technical high school or vocational institution. Throughout the programme, students are supported through merit-based scholarships and collaboration with experienced professionals, which contributes to early integration within the company environment. The initiative currently involves 39 students.

As the programme was only launched in the 2024/2025 school year, and the first cohort is expected to complete their final examinations in June 2026, no post-graduation hires have taken place yet, and employment conversion outcomes will become available in subsequent reporting cycles.

Škoda Group – "Dads" for apprentices

Škoda Group implemented the "Dads" for Apprentices initiative as an intergenerational knowledge transfer programme aimed at supporting apprentices during their vocational training while

strengthening the company's future employee pipeline. This impactful initiative is conducted on a recurring school-year basis and it focuses on transferring practical expertise and technical know-how from experienced employees to apprentices specialising in rail vehicle maintenance and repair.

As part of the programme, apprentices from vocational schools and technical high schools are paired with selected experienced employees who act as mentors throughout the training process. The mentors supervise day-to-day practical learning and ensure that apprentices acquire competencies and operational skills that are required for professions such as electromechanics, mechanics and plumbing within the rail sector.

The programme also serves as an important talent attraction and retention mechanism, as, by fostering close collaboration between apprentices and experienced employees, *Škoda Group* strengthens early employee engagement and facilitates smoother transitions into permanent employment after graduation. According to the company, the programme has already contributed to the ongoing recruitment of graduates who completed their apprenticeship training within the company environment.

The initiative currently reports 9 new hires originating from the programme, with 12 additional apprentices currently progressing through the training route. These figures demonstrate the programme's contribution to workforce renewal and succession planning, particularly in technical occupations where specialised expertise and practical experience are important for the rail supply industry. *Škoda Group* plans to continue the initiative in future school years.

Wabtec Corporation – Deepsmart Programme

Wabtec Corporation launched its “Deepsmart Programme” as a pilot initiative focused on intergenerational knowledge transfer and succession planning, particularly in the context of ageing and workforce and retirement transitions. The programme was designed to support managers and HR teams in identifying, documenting, and transferring critical operational expertise in order to minimise executional risks linked to employee departures and strengthen long-term organisational continuity. The initiative targets multi-generational teams, and it aims to preserve strategic know-how while supporting the development of younger generations entering the workforce.

The programme follows a structured multi-stage process supported by an external third-party specialist. The first stage consists of in-depth interviews with experienced employees to identify and document their technical skills and operational expertise. This is followed by a collaborative review process involving managers to assess the criticality of skills, identify potential succession risks, and evaluate available internal backup capacity. Based on these findings, tailored action plans are developed to address knowledge gaps, organisational risks and alignment with business priorities. In parallel, knowledge transfer activities between experienced employees and future successors are organised.

Although currently in a pilot phase, the programme has already produced measurable outcomes. *Wabtec Corporation* reports that 40 expert and non-expert groups have participated in the initiative to date. Survey feedback also indicates strong perceived value among participants: 70% of experts and managers considered the skills mapping process valuable or very valuable, while 72% stated they

would not have been able to successfully identify and transfer critical knowledge without the support provided through the programme. 75% of participants declared they would recommend the programme. In addition, participants highlighted the benefits of structured discussions, improved alignment across teams and clearer visibility over succession and retirement-related risks. *Wabtec Corporation* plans to finalise the pilot phase and progressively expand the initiative through a broader internal tutoring and knowledge transfer programme.

Wabtec Corporation – Mentoring Programme

Wabtec Corporation implemented its Mentoring Programme as an ongoing initiative aimed at strengthening employee growth, inclusion and collaboration across the company. The programme is conducted annually between June and March and is based on the creation of formal mentor-mentee relationships. It was designed to address challenges linked to limited access to personalised guidance, reduced cross-department visibility and the absence of structured career development pathways.

The programme is structured around a multi-stage mentoring process where HR Business Partners and company leaders identify motivated mentees and experienced mentors, after which a dedicated committee evaluates development needs and mentor expertise to create mentoring pairings. Then, participants engage in monthly growth meetings over a four-month period, focusing on career development, communication skills, leadership growth and professional networking. The initiative includes two streams: one specifically targeted to women and another open to all employees.

According to *Wabtec Corporation*, the programme has generated positive outcomes for both mentees and mentors. Participants reported increased clarity regarding career goals, improved confidence, stronger communication skills, broader organisational understanding and greater exposure to senior leadership. Mentors also benefitted from the programme as their professional networks expanded, and had the opportunity to learn the challenges faced by younger employees. Reportedly, the initiative contributed to stronger collaboration and connections across teams and functions.

The programme currently includes 25 mentor–mentee pairs, with participants completing an average of five to six mentoring sessions during the cycle. *Wabtec Corporation* reports that 62% of participants achieved the development goals established at the start of the programme, while 86% of participants recommended the initiative following the competition. *Wabtec Corporation* plans to continue the initiative in future programme cycles.

Škoda Group – Leadership Development Academy

The “Leadership Development Academy” initiative was launched in January 2024 as a structured leadership and mentoring programme aimed at strengthening leadership capabilities, improve team management quality, and support sustainable talent pipeline development. The initiative ran through December 2025, and it focused mainly on developing young professionals and newly appointed managers.

The programme combines leadership assessments, mentoring and external management training. Participants undergo Development Centre assessments, psychodiagnostics profiling, and the creation of Individual Development Plans tailored to their leadership development needs. A central component

of the initiative is a 12-month one-to-one mentoring scheme pairing participants with selected senior directors across different company locations. Mentoring sessions are held monthly and designed to directly expose participants to senior management perspectives.

The initiative involved 12 participants, including three newly appointed managers and one emerging talent participant transitioning towards leadership responsibilities. According to the company, the programme has already contributed to the creation of a peer platform for line managers, the development of an internal management knowledge base, as well as stronger professional connections between senior leadership and operational managers.

The programme has led to a tangible increase in the participation of the younger generation, suggesting that the initiative is increasingly reaching and engaging younger talent within the organisation. This suggests that the initiative may be contributing positively to the attraction and integration of younger talent into the organisation's leadership. Participant satisfaction was strong, with an average rating of 4.8 out of 5 on the statement "I would recommend this training to a colleague". In terms of career mobility, the programme contributed to role changes for 20% of participants, showing its impact on internal mobility and career progression beyond leadership skill-building. The mentoring component of the programme will continue beyond the current cycle, particularly for newly appointed managers and employees identified for future leadership roles.

Concluding observations

- Mentoring and intergenerational knowledge transfer, while conceptually distinct, frequently overlap in practice, and the initiatives collected here reflect both dimensions.
- Some programmes approach the challenge from a risk-management perspective, systematically identifying and documenting critical expertise before it is lost through retirement or workforce transitions.
- Others concentrate on the entry point of the talent pipeline, building early relationships with students and apprentices and facilitating their gradual integration through structured mentoring and practical experience.
- A further set of initiatives deploys formal mentor-mentee relationships as tools for career development, internal mobility and leadership preparation, extending the logic of knowledge transfer into broader professional development.
- One initiative combines job shadowing, coaching and mentoring within a single framework, representing a more integrated approach to social and organisational learning.
- Where outcome data is available, it points in an encouraging direction: some programmes report strong perceived value among participants and solid recommendation rates; others have already generated direct hires or meaningful levels of participant satisfaction and career mobility.
- Taken together, these examples demonstrate that structured investment in mentoring can generate visible returns across multiple dimensions, and the picture will become richer as further initiatives and longer-term outcome data are gathered over time.

4.5 Cross-cutting trends

Across the initiatives documented in this section, several cross-cutting observations emerge that are worth highlighting, even if the evidence base remains limited in scope.

Gender-focused leadership initiatives tend to demonstrate more developed measurement frameworks than initiatives in other areas, with companies more consistently reporting quantitative indicators such as promotion rates, retention figures and participant satisfaction scores. Initiatives focused on mentoring, pipeline development, or disability inclusion are generally at an earlier stage in this respect, with outcome data that is partial, only qualitative, or not yet available. This difference likely reflects the longer history of gender diversity as a corporate priority rather than any inherent difference in programme quality, but it does limit comparability across chapters.

Across the initiatives collected, D&I is consistently framed not only as a compliance obligation, but as a response to concrete workforce challenges, such as talent shortages, succession risks, gaps and competition for specialised skills. This framing positions inclusion as operationally relevant, rather than peripheral, and suggests that the business case for D&I is increasingly internalised within the sector.

Several initiatives, particularly in the disability and neurodiversity space, depend heavily on collaboration with specialist organisations. Hitachi Rail partnered with the ALLIBO digital recruitment platform to support applications from protected categories; Alstom built its neurodiversity recruitment pathway in partnership with Specialisterne, an international organisation specialising in the recruitment and job coaching of neurodivergent talent; and *Wabtec Corporation's* disability programme at its Tours site was developed in collaboration with AMIPI and CAP EMPLOI, two French organisations specialising in supported employment for people with disabilities. This pattern suggests that companies recognise the limits of in-house expertise in this area and that progress is likely to remain dependent on collaboration.

A recurring characteristic across several initiatives is their localised or nationally bounded implementation. A number of programmes documented in this report operate at a single site or within a specific national context, often shaped by local regulatory frameworks, cultural considerations or the initiative of a motivated team in a particular location. While this is a natural and often necessary starting point, it raises a question about the extent to which successful approaches are being systematically evaluated for broader rollout. Some companies show early signs of movement in this direction: *Knorr-Bremse's* Women@KB expanded from its original Munich base to eight international networks, and Hitachi Rail's disability programme was explicitly designed as a scalable framework replicable across different country contexts. These examples suggest that scaling is possible, but they remain exceptions within the broader set of initiatives collected. Developing the organisational will to move from local experimentation to company-wide implementation would represent a meaningful step forward.

A further observation that is cross-cutting for multiple chapters is the consistent attention paid to internal culture and awareness alongside structural programme design. Across initiatives in gender equality, disability and mentoring, companies have invested in training hiring managers, delivering awareness webinars, running workshops and creating psychologically safe spaces for participants.

Alstom's neurodiversity programme included dedicated sessions for People Managers and HR teams before any hiring took place; *Wabtec Corporation's* disability programme incorporates virtual reality simulations to build employee empathy; *Hitachi Rail's* inclusive hiring initiative created a Disability Ambassador role specifically to embed accessibility into everyday employer branding; and *CAF's* Disability and Inclusion Programme offers perhaps the most tangible indicator of cultural impact, with RQTH declarations rising from 6.7% to 9.27% between 2021 and 2025. This pattern suggests a shared recognition that structural interventions are unlikely to deliver long-lasting results without accompanying cultural change.

Altogether, the initiatives collected in this report demonstrate a genuine appetite for structured and measurable approaches to diversity and inclusion within the rail supply industry. They offer a meaningful starting point, as well as a source of practical inspiration for member companies seeking to develop or strengthen their approaches.

5. UNIFE's role in advancing skills and inclusion

5.1 The Diversity & Inclusion Task Force

The UNIFE Diversity & Inclusion Task Force represents a strategic evolution of the former UNIFE Gender Equity Advisory Group. In March 2025, UNIFE made the decision to broaden the scope of this working group to address diversity in a more comprehensive and inclusive manner. This shift reflects a growing recognition that, while gender equity remains central, it is only one dimension of a broader diversity landscape that shapes experiences in the workplace and across the rail supply sector.

This expanded mandate acknowledges that discrimination does not occur in isolation. Gender intersects with other identity factors, such as ethnicity, disability, and age, creating layered and often compounded barriers for individuals. By adopting an intersectional approach, the Task Force aims to better understand and address these overlapping challenges, ensuring that inclusion efforts are more effective and reflective of real-world experiences.

The decision to extend the group's focus was formally approved in July 2025. Since then, the Task Force has convened five meetings and has increasingly served as a collaborative platform for knowledge exchange. It enables members to share best practices, learn from one another, and develop coordinated strategies to foster a more inclusive industry.

A key driver behind this initiative is the rail sector's urgent need for talent. Expanding the focus of diversity and inclusion efforts is seen as essential to attracting, developing, and retaining a broader and more diverse workforce. By engaging individuals from different ethnic backgrounds, age groups, and abilities, the sector can tap into new perspectives and skill sets, ultimately strengthening innovation and competitiveness.

Importantly, while the Task Force's scope has widened, gender equity remains at its core. However, it is now addressed within a broader framework that recognises how multiple identities interact to shape opportunity and access. This more holistic approach allows UNIFE to act at a greater scale and impact, aligning inclusion efforts with the evolving needs of the workforce and the industry.

To date, the primary deliverable of the Task Force has been the development of the UNIFE Diversity & Inclusion in the Industry Report. This report reflects the group's collective insights and serves as a foundation for ongoing action toward a more inclusive, skilled, and future-ready rail sector.

5.2 Engagement in European initiatives

UNIFE actively engages in a wide range of European-level initiatives that reinforce the rail supply industry's commitment to diversity, inclusion, and skills development. Through these activities, UNIFE and its members contribute to shaping policy discussions, sharing best practices, and positioning the sector as a key actor in promoting inclusive workplaces and enhancing company performance, attractiveness, and public perception.

A central pillar of this engagement has been UNIFE's involvement in EU-funded skills and workforce development projects. Notably, UNIFE participated in the **STAFFER project**, a four-year initiative funded under the Erasmus+ programme that ran from 2020 to 2024 and was led by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC). The project, implemented under the supervision of the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency

(EACEA), aimed to identify current and future skills gaps in the rail sector and develop strategies to address them.

Beyond its core skills agenda, STAFFER also incorporated a strong diversity dimension. It supported initiatives such as a cross-border mentoring programme for female engineers, bringing together participants from railway suppliers, operators, infrastructure managers, and academic institutions, and conducted early assessments on improving the attractiveness of rail professions, including train driving, for women. These efforts highlighted the importance of fostering a more inclusive and diverse talent pipeline in addressing the sector's long-term workforce challenges.

Building on the outcomes of STAFFER, UNIFE is now involved in the **Single European Railway Area of Skills Alliance (SERAS)** as a member of its Advisory Board. SERAS represents the next step in developing a sustainable and integrated European ecosystem for railway skills. As an Erasmus+ project, it aims to ensure a resilient, highly skilled, and mobile workforce across the EU by defining common competencies and strengthening cooperation among stakeholders. The project officially launched in January 2026, with partners meeting at the University of Genoa to initiate work on a large-scale partnership under the Pact for Skills framework. While primarily focused on skills, SERAS is expected to continue integrating diversity considerations, building on the foundations laid by STAFFER.

In parallel, UNIFE contributes to broader, cross-sectoral initiatives promoting gender equality in transport. As a signatory of the **European Commission's Women in Transport – EU Platform for Change**, UNIFE supports efforts to increase women's participation and equal opportunities across the transport sector. The Platform serves as a forum for dialogue, collaboration, and the exchange of best practices among its members. UNIFE has played an active role in this initiative, including contributing to the European Commission's 2025 publication *[“25 Recommendations to Attract, Recruit and Retain Women in the Transport Sector.”](#)* These recommendations provide concrete guidance to improve gender balance and enhance the sector's attractiveness to female talent.

Another important initiative is the **Women in Rail Award**, which recognises outstanding contributions to gender diversity and inclusion within the railway sector. Organised jointly by key European stakeholders, including the European Commission, the European Union Agency for Railways (ERA), Europe's Rail Joint Undertaking (EU-Rail), CER, EIM, ALE, and UNIFE, the award highlights individuals, teams, and organisations that serve as role models in advancing women's participation in rail. The 2026 edition, to be held during InnoTrans in Berlin, features four categories: Women Empowerment and Leadership, Research & Innovation in Rail, Next Generation in Rail, and Women in Rail Operations. By celebrating excellence and visibility, the award helps inspire cultural change and encourages greater inclusion across the industry.

Furthermore, in July 2025, UNIFE joined the **EU Pact for Skills**, one of the flagship initiatives of the European Skills Agenda. Through this membership, UNIFE gains access to a European network of stakeholders committed to upskilling and reskilling the workforce. The Pact provides a platform for collaboration, knowledge sharing, and the scaling-up of skills-related commitments, reinforcing UNIFE's role in addressing both skills shortages and inclusion challenges in the rail sector.

6. Recommendations and way forward

The data and best practices presented in this report discuss a sector that is increasingly prioritising diversity and inclusion, but that still remains in the early stages of a long-term structural transition. The weighted average of 19.1% women across the contributing companies, the persistent generational imbalance between the ageing workforce and a thin pipeline of younger entrants, as well as the uneven maturity of D&I measurement frameworks, especially when it comes to nationality diversity, suggest that isolated initiatives are not sufficient on their own. What is needed is a more coordinated effort, at the company, industry and policy level, to embed diversity and inclusion as a standing, sustained, operational priority. The following recommendations are addressed to two distinct audiences: policymakers at the EU and national levels and companies across the rail supply industry.

6.1 Recommendations for policymakers

6.1.1. **Support the development of standardised D&I measurement framework for the rail supply industry**

One of the most consistent limitations identified across both the data and best practices collected for this report is the absence of standardised, comparable diversity metrics across the rail supply industry. Two gaps are particularly consequential. On gender, all six contributing companies could report the overall share of women in their workforce, but not the leadership-level data in a comparable form, because each organisation defines leadership differently, making it impossible to assess where in the pipeline the gender gap is most acute. On nationality, only three companies could provide comparable figures, and several do not collect this data at all, meaning the gap is structural.

Closing these gaps requires action at two levels. At the institutional level, the European Commission, working with ERA and in dialogue with UNIFE and relevant social partners, should establish a standardised minimum set of workforce diversity indicators for the rail supply industry, and accompanied by clear definitions and guidance applicable across companies of different sizes. At the company level, rail supply companies should commit to reporting against the developed framework, engage actively in the consultation processes that shape it, and align internal data collection practices.

6.1.2. **Institutionalise sector-level data collection on workforce diversity in the rail supply industry**

This report represents the first structured attempt to collect comparable workforce diversity data across major European rail supply companies. Its value lies precisely in establishing a baseline, making the current state of gender representation and generational balance visible for the first time at this level of specificity. However, a voluntary, association-led data collection exercise, has structural limitations.

The data collected for this report also provides a substantive argument for why the rail supply industry warrants dedicated monitoring, rather than being treated as an undifferentiated part of a broader sector data collection. The weighted average share of women across the six contributing companies stands at 19.1%, which is below both the broader rail sector average of 23%, which covers operators

and infrastructure managers, and the manufacturing sector benchmark of 22.4% for women scientists and engineers. The rail supply industry is, fundamentally, a manufacturing industry, one that designs, produces and delivers complex industrial systems and components. Its workforce diversity challenges are those of an industrial employer: shaped by manufacturing pipelines, engineering occupations and production environments that have historically drawn from narrow demographic pools. Grouping rail supply companies together with operators and infrastructure managers in sector-level data collections obscures these industrial dynamics and risks, producing a picture that is insufficiently specific.

While the limited sample size prevents definitive conclusions, the gap identified here is consistent with this expectation, and dedicated monitoring would likely reveal a more distinct picture than broader sector-level data currently shows.

The European Commission, mandating ERA, which will also act in dialogue with UNIFE, should consider establishing a recurring, institutionalised data collection exercise on workforce diversity, specifically covering the European rail supply industry. This could be integrated into the existing Rail Market Monitoring Survey framework, which already collects employment and demographic data for the broader rail sector, by extending its scope. Alternatively, it could take the form of a periodic survey coordinated by ERA or a designated body, building methodologically on the indicators and definitions tested in this report.

The objective would be to move from a voluntary baseline to a systematic, comparable and regularly updated picture of workforce diversity across the sector, one that can better inform policy, benchmark company performance and track progress over time. The European Union Agency for Railways (ERA) works to improve the safety and interoperability of the European railway system, thereby contributing to its competitiveness. It is assumed that ERA has a direct stake in the long-term sustainability of the sector's workforce, and stands to benefit from it becoming more diverse. This applies to the European institutions and agencies too; diversifying their own talent base is part of the same challenge, and tracking the challenges is the first step. Overall, broadening the talent base and addressing gender underrepresentation are conditions for maintaining a skilled and resilient industry.

6.1.3. Encourage Diversity and Inclusion as a dimension of rail research and innovation

Europe's Rail Joint Undertaking (EU-Rail) is the EU's primary vehicle for funding research and innovation in the rail sector under Horizon Europe, with a mandate to accelerate the development of innovative technologies and operational solutions that support the Single European Railway Area. Its programmes shape the technological trajectory of the sector and its workforce skills requirements, which determine what competencies will be needed and which parts of the industry will require the most significant talent investment.

Research and innovation projects that draw on diverse teams and perspectives, across gender, age and background, are better positioned to generate the broad thinking required in the industry. A sector that makes the most of the full range of talent available to it is likely to produce richer, more innovative outcomes.

UNIFE therefore encourages EU-Rail and its potential successor to explore how diversity and inclusion considerations could be further reflected in its research and innovation activities, through a broader

orientation that values diverse participation and recognises inclusion as a contributing factor to research quality. This could include fostering dialogue on inclusive research practices within its community, supporting the visibility of underrepresented groups within the rail innovation ecosystem, and considering workforce diversity as a relevant dimension of its broader agenda where appropriate.

6.1.4. Develop EU-level guidance on disability and neurodiversity data collection in industrial workplaces

One of the most clearly documented gaps in this report is the absence of comparable data on disability and neurodiversity across the rail supply industry. This gap does not reflect a lack of interest among companies, as several of the initiatives documented in this report demonstrate a genuine and growing commitment to disability inclusion, but rather the absence of practical, legally compliant and standardised frameworks for collecting this data.

This is a structural challenge, as disability and neurodivergent status are frequently undeclared at the point of hiring and usually remain undisclosed throughout an employee's career, due to stigma, lack of awareness, fear of professional consequences, or simply the absence of a trusted mechanism for voluntary disclosure. Data protection legislation adds further complexity. The result is that companies wishing to measure their disability inclusion performance have no reliable way to do so, and the sector as a whole cannot track progress on a dimension of diversity that is both legally significant and central to inclusion.

The European Commission's Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, in coordination with the European Disability forum and relevant industrial stakeholders, should develop practical EU-level guidance for employers in industrial sectors on how to approach disability and neurodiversity data collection in a manner that is legally compliant with GDPR and national data protection frameworks, respects the voluntary nature of disclosures, while producing data that is sufficiently standardised to allow for meaningful comparison both over time and across companies.

6.1.5. Ensure existing EU funding instruments are accessible and targeted for diversity and industrial sectors

EU funding instruments, including the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and Erasmus+, already provide a broad framework for investing in inclusion, skills and workforce development. However, these instruments operate largely through national managing authorities, with no guarantee that rail supply companies, particularly SMEs, can access them for D&I-specific purposes. The risk is that available funding remains insufficiently targeted to address the specific inclusion challenges of a technically specialised industrial sector.

The European Commission and national managing authorities should therefore ensure that ESF+ and Erasmus+ programmes explicitly recognise D&I investment in industrial sectors, including rail supply, as an eligible and prioritised use of funds. In practice, this could mean dedicated calls for proposals addressing gender inclusion, disability accessibility and intergenerational knowledge transfer in manufacturing and engineering-intensive industries, as well as simplified access mechanisms for SMEs that lack the administrative capacity to navigate complex application processes.

The SERAS project, launched in January 2026 under Erasmus+ with UNIFE as an Advisory Board member, already integrates diversity considerations alongside skills development, and provides a model for how EU-funded initiatives can pursue both agendas simultaneously. Future calls should be built explicitly on this approach, treating D&I not as a secondary dimension of workforce development, but as a core objective on its own.

6.1.6. Integrate D&I criteria into public procurement frameworks

The rail supply industry operates predominantly in a public procurement environment. As the vast majority of its customers are publicly funded, it gives public authorities significant leverage to incentivise D&I practices through procurement criteria, at both the EU and national levels. The European Commission and national contracting authorities should consider explicitly recognising D&I performance as a voluntary but formally acknowledged scoring criterion within the most economically advantageous tender (MEAT) framework, rewarding companies that demonstrate structured and measurable approaches to inclusion without establishing mandatory thresholds that could disadvantage companies at earlier stages of their inclusion journey. In the context of the rail supply industry, such recognition would create a meaningful and proportionate incentive for companies to invest in D&I practices, while remaining consistent with the broader objective of moving away from purely price-based award criteria towards a more qualitative and comprehensive assessment of tender value.

6.1.7. Develop age diversity as a distinct policy priority

Workforce ageing and the associated risks of knowledge loss and succession gaps are well documented at sector level, but have not yet been translated into specific policy instruments for the rail supply industry. The age distribution data presented in this report, with 50+ cohorts significantly outweighing under-29 cohorts across all contributing companies, reinforces the urgency of this challenge.

Policymakers at the EU and national levels should recognise workforce ageing as a distinct dimension of D&I policy, separate from gender and ethnicity, and develop targeted instruments to support active ageing strategies, intergenerational knowledge transfer programmes, and the phased transition of experienced employees towards retirement. This could include fiscal incentives for companies that invest in structured mentoring and knowledge transfer schemes, regulatory frameworks that facilitate flexible retirement pathways, as well as the development of common methodologies for mapping and documenting critical operational knowledge in technically specialised industries.

6.2 Recommendations for the industry

6.2.1 Integrate cultural change as a core concept of diversity and inclusion programmes

Structural interventions, such as inclusive recruitment processes, mentoring schemes, leadership acceleration programmes, and adapted workstations, are necessary components of any meaningful diversity and inclusion strategy. A consistent pattern across the best practices document in this report, however, is that companies do not treat structural measures in isolation. Alongside programme design, companies have invested deliberately in manager training, awareness campaigns, stigma reduction and the creation of psychologically safe environments.

This consistent pairing suggests that practitioners within the sector treat cultural change not as a peripheral complement to structural work, but as an integral component of it. The qualitative outcomes reported across initiatives, such as increased confidence, reduced bias and greater openness in communication between employees and managers, appear to reflect this combined investment.

Rail supply companies are therefore encouraged to embed cultural change as a design principle from the outset of any D&I initiative, rather than introducing it as an afterthought once structural elements are in place. This means ensuring that the launch of any new programme is accompanied by parallel investment in awareness-building among managers and teams, internal communication that normalises diverse participation.

The importance of this dimension is perhaps most visible in the disability and neurodiversity space, where the willingness of employees to disclose a disability or neurodivergent condition is itself a measure of organisational trust. CAF's Disability & Inclusion Programme offers a concrete illustration: the steady increase in RQTH declarations from 6.7% in 2021 to 9.27% in 2025 suggests that consistent investment in awareness can itself become a measurable outcome that precedes and enables progress on employment and retention figures. These examples do not allow for generalisation across the sector, but they do illustrate what a long-term, culturally oriented approach can contribute when maintained consistently over several years.

6.2.2 Systematise the evaluation and replication of proven initiatives

Several initiatives documented in this report were designed explicitly as scalable frameworks: *Hitachi Rail's* disability programme, for instance, was built from the outset for replication across different country contexts. *Knorr-Bremse's* Women@KB network, has organically expanded from a single headquarters to eight international locations. These examples demonstrate that scaling is possible and that the investment required to replicate a proven initiative is significantly lower than the one required to design a new one from scratch.

Companies should therefore build systematic evaluation into their D&I programmes from the outset, assessing not only whether a programme works, but whether and how it could be extended to other sites, functions or countries. Industry associations, including UNIFE and its national associated member associations, can play an active role in facilitating the cross-company sharing of programme designs, evaluation frameworks and implementation lessons.

6.2.3 Address intergenerational knowledge transfer as a strategic organisational priority

The age distribution data presented in this report, with 50+ cohorts significantly outweighing under-29 cohorts across all six contributing companies, confirms that workforce ageing is not a future concern but a present operational reality. The loss of technical expertise accumulated over decades in highly specialised roles represents a concrete risk to productivity and continuity, particularly in the rail supply industry, where safety-critical knowledge is often difficult to document.

Companies should treat intergenerational knowledge transfer as a strategic priority rather than an HR programme. This means identifying critical knowledge holders proactively, mapping succession risks

systematically, while investing in structured transfer mechanisms, whether through formal mentoring, job shadowing, apprenticeship pathways, or a dedicated knowledge documentation process. This should be taken care of well before retirement transitions create gaps that cannot be easily filled.

6.3 A shared responsibility

The recommendations set out in this chapter reflect a shared responsibility between companies and policymakers. Neither can deliver the structural change the sector needs alone. Companies hold the operational levers, through hiring practices, workplace culture, and leadership commitment, but operate within a regulatory, educational and financial environment that policymakers shape. Policymakers can create incentives, set standards and fund initiatives.

What this report demonstrates, most of all, is that the foundation for this shared effort exists. Major European rail supply companies are investing in diversity and inclusion, designing programmes and building networks. The data presented here, although partial, make the current state of gender representation and generational balance visible for the first time at this level of specificity, and identify where gaps are present and where policy intervention is most needed.

This report is a reflection of where the industry stands, and an honest starting point from which to move forward. The Pact for Skills, which UNIFE joined in July 2025, provides an existing framework through which many of the commitments outlined in this report can be pushed, connecting the rail supply industry to a broader European network of stakeholders committed to upskilling, reskilling and inclusive workforce development.

The task ahead consists of building on this foundation systematically. Future cycles of this report will tell us whether the sector is moving in the right direction and with the right level of shared commitment.



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