

Office of Rail Transport

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New report on rail freight and alternative modes of transport in Europe

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In Poland the share of rail freight was 22% in 2021, which ranks 14th out of 27 European countries. The remainder of freight is handled by road vehicles (78%). Rail transport share is the biggest in Lithuania (62.5% share) and the smallest in Ireland (0.6%). The Office of Rail Transport published a new report, which shows rail freight services in comparison with alternative modes of land transport in Europe.

Our latest report "Rail and alternative modes of transport in Europe" presents the analysis of Eurostat and our own data for 23 European countries on the transport performance, as well as the share of different transport modes: rail, road and inland waterway. The data shows, i.a., that in 2022 rail operators reached only 17% of the land and inland waterway transport performance. For the road transport, the figure was over 78%. For inland waterways it was less than 5%. In 27 EU countries rail was used to the greatest extent for freight transport in Lithuania (62.5% share), Latvia (53.4% share) and Estonia (40.1% share). In 2021 road transport in these countries accounted respectively for 37.5%, 46.6% and 59.9% of freight transport by land and inland waterway transport modes. In comparison, road transport's share of freight transport in Ireland is 99.4%, Greece 97.1% and Spain 95.7%. Rail in these countries accounts for a share of 0.6%, 2.9% and 4.3% respectively.

According to the European Commission, transport emissions are to be reduced by 90% by 2050. This ambitious plan has the potential to reverse the proportion of land transport modes in Europe. The challenge is a big one, as rail's share of the sector varies widely across Europe, as presented in our publication.

As required by the European Green Deal, significant environmental benefits can be achieved by developing the rail freight market. Although rail, like no other mode of transport, fits into the strategy for sustainable and intelligent mobility, the 'green initiatives' undertaken over the last few years have not resulted in a significant modal shift. Freight transport in the EU is still dominated by road transport, which accounts for almost 77% of greenhouse gas emissions in

transport^[1], while rail only accounts for less than 0.4%.

Our new study also shows Swiss, Austrian or Spanish transport policies to further increase the use of rail (and thus achieve climate goals). One of the most interesting examples is the new waste law in Austria. According to this regulation, from 1 January 2023 low-emission transport, including rail transport, is required for moving waste weighing more than 10 tonnes and transported over a minimum distance of 300 km. This minimum distance is to be reduced to 100 km in 2026.

Since the launch of the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy in December 2020 and taking into account actions taken so far, there are still many national regulations and technical barriers to rail competitiveness. A significant problem is the insufficient development of infrastructure. Paradoxically, the significant increase in rail traffic brings with it capacity challenges, which affect the quality and reliability of rail services. This in turn makes planning difficult and rises costs.

The [publication is available](#) on our website in the [Studies](#) section.

^[1] – [Statistical Pocketbook](#) 2022 EU Transport in Figures,