Moving at Different Speeds: Workforce Transition Beyond the Firm

Workforce transition in automotive is increasingly shaped by a mismatch of speeds. Companies are being pushed to make decisions quickly, as demand weakens, vehicle programmes are delayed, EV volumes remain uncertain and new profiles in software, electrification, cybersecurity and digital manufacturing become harder to find. Around them, however, many of the systems that should make transition possible still move slowly: labour law, public funding, curricula, employment services and regional policy.

This creates a difficult planning environment. Firms may know that some roles linked to older technologies will decline, but they cannot always see clearly which new activities will grow, where demand will return, or whether public programmes will still be available when they are ready to act. Several answers point to **labour rules and collective procedures that make redeployment slow**, especially where the system is designed to protect a specific job rather than the **worker's longer-term employability**. The contrast with more flexible models is important: the goal is not to make workers insecure, but to make it **easier to move them into new roles without treating every change of task as a crisis**.

Funding shows the same problem. EU, national and regional instruments are valuable, especially for university cooperation, PhDs, applied research and innovation projects, but **they often arrive through complex calls, narrow eligibility rules and reporting requirements that do not match operational time**. Some schemes are too focused on R&D or technologies far from market, while companies also need support for production reskilling, commercial digitalisation, sales and aftersales skills, and practical retraining. SMEs may be formally eligible but **lack the capacity to navigate bureaucracy**; larger firms may have the capacity but fall outside certain schemes. In one case, delayed funding feedback was linked to postponing critical onboarding by several months.

The missing layer is **a more practical regional infrastructure for mobility.** Schools and training providers need stronger general foundations, then short modules that can be updated as company needs change. Employment services need to understand what workers can actually do, **including transferable skills not visible on a CV**, and help them find realistic opportunities within their region or commuting range. Regional authorities should connect schools, firms and workers through labour-market intelligence, dual education, modular training, career guidance and stable funding, rather than leaving collaboration to isolated projects.

If support shifts too far toward short-term competitive calls, stronger regions may keep winning while weaker ones lose capacity. **Automotive transition depends on connected places: production sites, suppliers, schools, innovation hubs and local labour markets**. Workforce plans become fragile when each part moves on a different clock.

This brief draws on the TRIREME report [Skills for the Mobility Transition: An Industry Perspective](), based on structured interviews with 60 industry stakeholders across the automotive and mobility value chain in 2025.

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