

ICFF Weekly *Connect*



By *Ingrid du Buisson, CEO – ICFF*



Welcome to **ICFF Weekly Connect** - your go-to source for the latest industry updates, insights, and opportunities within the customs and freight forwarding profession. Each week, we'll bring you relevant news, upcoming events, professional development highlights, and expert perspectives designed to keep you informed, connected, and ahead in a rapidly evolving industry.

Freight Forwarding & Customs Skills required to address challenges in 2026

An ICFF Perspective

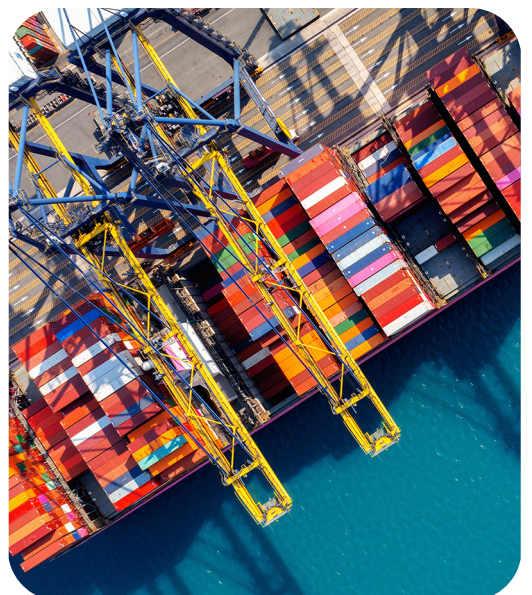
By: **Ingrid Du Buisson**

Chief Executive Officer – ICFF

It appears that globally we have started the new year with great uncertainty and anxiety, entering another era of international trade disruptions. It is within this context, that the ICFF encourages all Freight Forwarding organizations to implement a well-structured learning and development strategy, to identify and understand the level of skills and capacity available within their respective organizations' vs the identified business risks.

Understanding your individual employee's capacity has never been more critical than the present moment, and as the recognised Professional Body in this sector we have an established framework of industry professional and competency standards that are geared to assist and provide support to employees and organizations. We are mandated to provide support and a national network for Freight Forwarding & Customs organizations to develop skills and professionalize this sector, meeting global standards.

Given the current geopolitical occurrences abroad, one cannot help but be concerned about the impact this will have on our sector and our economy. In 2026, freight forwarding and customs compliance are already being dominated by tightened regulations, digital documentation mandates, real-time audits, and geopolitical trade fragmentation. Forwarders face challenges in maintaining accuracy across multiple jurisdictions, integrating environmental and data governance rules, and avoiding costly penalties for even minor errors.



Here are some critical challenges that we have identified, it is the ICFF's mandate to facilitate the readiness and required capacity of our employees in this sector to address these challenges efficiently and effectively. At the same time, we have already put the wheels in motion to develop *Continuous Professional Development (CPD)* programs with our network of ICFF endorsed Training Providers to address this need.

- **Geopolitical uncertainty:** Sanctions and shifting alliances mean compliance rules can change overnight, as we've seen in the current occurrences in Venezuela and the broader South American region, and the uncertainty in the North Atlantic region on Greenland and Denmark's involvement could well have an impact on various shipping routes and shipping lines. The continuous conflict in Ukraine is still ongoing and the list goes on.
- **Regulatory complexity:** Governments worldwide are tightening customs and trade rules to enforce sanctions, protect revenue, and control emissions.
- **Fragmented trade policies:** Different regions (Asia, Europe, Middle East) are implementing stricter and divergent compliance requirements, making cross-border operations more difficult.
- **Operational readiness:** Compliance now affects routing, carrier selection, documentation timing, and even customer communication.
- **Network reliance:** Freight forwarding networks are evolving into compliance "safety nets," helping smaller forwarders manage multi-country obligations.
- **Digital documentation:** Mandatory e-docs, blockchain-based customs filings, and automated security checks are becoming standard.
- **Real-time audits:** Authorities increasingly demand instant access to shipment data, leaving no room for paperwork delays.

The above challenges are associated with risks, however, if employees are properly trained and capacitated, these risks can be minimised. We reiterate that the learning and development portfolio within any organization deserves a seat at the board room table, it is an important component of a business' strategy and can no longer be ignored. The risks listed are not limited to these:

- **Zero tolerance for errors:** Even minor mistakes in customs filings can trigger penalties or shipment delays and creates cost implications.
- **Technology investment pressure:** Forwarders must invest in compliance tech or risk exclusion from global supply chains.
- **Geopolitical uncertainty:** Sanctions and shifting alliances mean compliance rules can change overnight. This can already be seen across the globe as new geopolitical disruptions have occurred already in 2026.
- **Skills and Capacity shortages:** Current research undertaken by the ICFF across the industry have identified and verified a list of critical skills that require development to address the challenges discussed:

1. International Shipping Procedures
2. Trade Finance and documentation
3. Customs Documentation and Compliance
4. Customs Regulations and updates
5. Incoterms and Trade Agreements
6. Freight Management Systems
7. Forwarding Control (Logistics Control)
8. Data and Supply Chain Analytics
9. Freight Cost Optimization
10. Dangerous Goods Regulations
11. Client Relationship (Customer Service)
12. Insurance and Risk controller
13. Cargo and Warehouse Controller
14. Sales with Regulatory structure
15. Management and Leadership



The ICFF has been working closely with SAAFF, SAEPA and industry Training Providers to ensure that this sector's skills requirements are being developed and provided to meet global standards. The ICFF network to support industry is available.

Contact us for more information or schedule a call on:
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