

**INTERNATIONAL**

Paris MoU must detain ships where crew stuck onboard

**HEALTH AND SAFETY**

Work-related stress spikes during the pandemic

**EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

Study suggests Covid-19 a catalyst for change in training

**INDUSTRY**

Why do we still put up with flags of convenience?

# the global seafarer

Volume 5 | Number 1 | January 2021



## Pushed to the limit

A ticking time-bomb of fatigue onboard could prove catastrophic, with owners, flag states and port states complicit in malpractice around work and rest hours

# the global seafarer

Volume 5 | Number 1 | January 2021

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## Comment

A new year brings fresh opportunities for innovation, says Nautilus Federation director **Mark Dickinson**

**A**s we start the new year, it feels like there is a new hope in the air that was missing for much of 2020. The news of various Covid-19 vaccines is positive, and many countries have designated seafarers and other transportation workers as key workers – our goal now is to ensure they receive prompt access to rapid testing and vaccines to reflect that status.

Many countries are starting to incorporate testing in airports so that people can travel, and pressure from the UN, ILO, IMO, European Commission and stakeholder groups like the UN Global Compact is beginning to have an impact as the number of crew changes taking place increases.

Meanwhile, reports that some charterers continue to refuse voyage deviations to facilitate crew changes is unwelcome, and shows them up for going against public opinion – which clearly supports seafarers' rights to repatriation.

The impact of pressure from the Union should not be underestimated. We have worked tirelessly to ensure that maritime and shipping professionals are noticed, in the hope that our members can finally be recognised for the vital role they play in our globalised world.

Our Crew Change for Christmas campaign brought renewed attention to maritime and shipping professionals, with a large number of leading industry and political figures lending their voices to the call for seafarers, who have worked beyond their contracts, to be allowed home for the holiday season.

Thank you to those who added your voice to the many activities that took place. Our membership survey showed that over 90% of our members have been impacted by Covid-19. It is clear there will be long-term effects on the shipping industry including the likelihood of a future recruitment crisis. Rest assured that we will be raising these issues at the highest levels.

Now we must move forward, both as a Union and as a profession. Last year I spoke of the



**We have worked tirelessly to ensure that maritime and shipping professionals are noticed, in the hope that our members can finally be recognised for the vital role they play in our globalised world**



Union's 2030 Vision, adopted at the Nautilus General Meeting in 2019, being our blueprint for the future. The vision sees the many challenges we face as opportunities to keep our organisation at the cutting edge, responding to globalisation and automation challenges with new services and benefits for our members delivered through extended networks and based on partnership, cooperation and collaboration.

We have adapted and added even more ideas to our plans for modernising our membership offer. We remain focused on developing new ways of working, new ways of organising, new ways of campaigning, and new ways of servicing that demonstrate our continued relevance and commitment to members now and in the future.

Our use of technology has increased exponentially in the last twelve months, and the number of members able to join online meetings who would ordinarily have missed out shows that we need to incorporate these ways of engagement as permanent changes.

Our members have been able to contact us and interact with us much more, and shipping companies are much more alive to the need for good communications facilities onboard. There is work still to be done but the case is strong, and we now know technology can be utilised effectively.

We will be reaching out to our younger members in the coming months, to ensure their views for a Union they want to be a part of in the next 20 to 30 years are front and centre of our plans, as well as looking at new benefits or services which may bring more maritime and shipping professionals into membership.

We look to the new year with optimism and intend to build on the lessons we have learnt in 2020. We will work every day to ensure that our union, our members and the global maritime industry emerge stronger and fit for the future.

Happy New Year! Gelukkig nieuwjaar! Frohes neues Jahr!





## Protect seafarers in sea rescues

Nautilus has backed calls to protect seafarers during sea rescues following the Maersk Etienne incident.

Danish maritime officers' union Lederne Søfart general secretary Sune Blinkenberg said: 'Seafarers are neutral in the geopolitical landscape and must be protected from situations like this.'

On 4 August the Danish-flagged Maersk Etienne picked up 27 migrants in Tunisian waters, at the request of Maltese authorities. There followed a 38-day ordeal after multiple countries denied entry to the ship.

As well as looking after the migrants in inadequate conditions aboard the tanker, the crew had to save three who jumped overboard.

The migrants were finally put ashore in Pozzallo, Sicily.

'Seafarers are legally obliged to render assistance to persons in distress at sea. If they fail to meet these obligations, they can be prosecuted according to international law. The Maersk Etienne case leaves the shipmasters passing through the Mediterranean in a very tough situation,' Mr Blinkenberg said. **i**

## SRI calls for fair treatment of crew

Seafarers' Rights International (SRI) has called on the industry to ensure fair treatment for mariners, who are increasingly at risk during the Covid-19 pandemic and face criminalisation when accidents take place.

'If there ever was a time for fair treatment of seafarers, that time is now,' SRI chairman Brian Orrell said.

'Fair treatment of seafarers following casualties is based on international standards that must be followed even in very difficult times.'

Seafarers are under devastating pressure due to the global failure to treat them as key workers. They face exhaustion from extended contracts and are a greater safety risk. **i**



UN: Governments must designate seafarers as keyworkers

## UN pushes for immediate recognition of seafarers as keyworkers

The United Nations (UN) has piled the pressure on governments, particularly those signed up to the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC), to immediately recognise seafarers as keyworkers to resolve the coronavirus crew change crisis and enable safe maritime navigation.

The recognition is needed to 'avert a humanitarian disaster that will also affect the safety of shipping, the protection of the marine environment, the continuation of efficient trade and the recovery of the world economy,' a joint statement of UN agencies said.

It was signed by leaders of the UN labour, human rights, agriculture and trade, aviation and maritime entities, including the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

The rights of seafarers, as enshrined in the MLC, have 'not been fully respected by all governments, notably their rights to shore leave, annual leave, a maximum period of service onboard (11 months), repatriation, and access to medical care onboard and ashore', said the UN.

'Actions taken by many governments that limit or prevent ship operators from conducting crew

changes is the single most pressing maritime operational challenge to the safe and efficient movement of global trade.'

Recognition of the seafarers' essential service through their designation as keyworkers will encourage 'safe and unhindered embarkation and disembarkation from their ships'.

Authorities should also refrain from authorising any new extension of seafarers' employment agreements, in accordance with rest time enshrined in the MLC, 2006. That could mean 'facilitating the diversion of ships from their normal trading routes to ports where crew changes are permitted,' the UN said.

Governments should implement guidance by UN agencies and the maritime sector aimed at the safety and health of seafarers and the public.

The UN said that since the beginning of the crew change crisis, the International Transport Workers' Federation, International Chamber of Shipping, and other key national and international actors have made unprecedented collaborative efforts to 'creatively and tirelessly to address these issues'. **i**

## WHO recommends face coverings on cargo ships

Face coverings and pre-boarding screening are among measures recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) for cargo ship crew.

The use of fabric masks is recommended in all areas where interaction takes place if a physical distance of one metre cannot be maintained. Medical masks are recommended in all areas potentially contaminated by a suspected case.

'The use of a mask alone is not

sufficient to provide an adequate level of protection, and other measures, such as hand hygiene and physical distancing, should be applied,' WHO said.

'Seafarers who work in close contact environments are likely to facilitate transmission of Covid-19.'

The guidance makes a number of other key recommendations:

- shipowners are advised to develop a written contingency plan and risk analysis, focusing on contact between crew members,

as well as interactions between the crew and shore personnel

- pre-boarding screening for all persons to identify potential Covid-19 symptoms

- hand hygiene stations in prominent places around the ship
- increased levels of cleaning and disinfection for all surfaces identified as being 'high touch'

- training for crew members on a range of factors including hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette and social distancing **i**

**24/7 HELP FOR MEMBERS**  
Nautilus 24/7 helps Nautilus members in emergencies round the clock:  
**Skype (username nautilus-247)**

**UNION DUES**  
Podcast takes a look at what the annual TUC Congress can learn from changes forced upon it by the Covid-19 pandemic: [uniondues.podbean.com](http://uniondues.podbean.com)



FOR COVID-19 FAQ



# Detain ships to stop humanitarian crisis at sea, say maritime unions

An influential group of unions has called for ships to be detained in ports if seafarers have been onboard longer than international treaties allow.

Marking World Maritime Day on 24 September, the Nautilus Federation of 22 maritime unions said seafarers are being denied their human rights during the pandemic, with as many as 400,000 stuck at sea beyond the agreed 11-month maximum.

The failure of governments, industry and flag states to name seafarers as keyworkers and get them off ships and home to loved ones has led to a humanitarian crisis that can no longer be tolerated, the Federation said.

'This is a wholly predicted – yet avoidable – humanitarian crisis, and we call for action against governments who deny seafarers their fundamental rights,' Nautilus Federation director Mark Dickinson said.

'Maritime and shipping professionals, at sea and on inland waterways have had enough. We will continue to push for an international solution, together as Nautilus



▲ Nautilus Federation director Mark Dickinson

Federation affiliates and as affiliates of the International Transport Workers' Federation, so that the key workers of the world's seas and rivers are able to get to and from their vessels without delay.

'Should that international solution cause port states to detain growing numbers of

vessels until seafarers are repatriated, the industry and governments will need to prepare for the disruption this would cause to global supply chains.'

The unions drew attention to the inability for some of the world's largest flags to enforce the fundamental rights of seafarers during the Covid-19 pandemic. While many of these Flags of Convenience (FOCs) quickly ratified the Maritime Labour Convention 2006 (MLC), the 'ease and speed by which many flag states subsequently ignored the rights of seafarers is a stain on the entire maritime industry.'

'The major flag states have the ability to resolve the crew change crisis by refusing to allow seafarers on their ships to be denied their fundamental human rights. We call on all port states to assist the flag states by enforcing the provisions of the MLC and to detain ships that do not comply. Similar actions must also be taken for those people working onboard vessels sailing on inland waterways, many of whom are facing the same denial of human rights.' **i**

## Covid corner-cutting will lead to deaths, ITF warns

Seafarer safety is being jeopardised by the relaxation of maritime rules, the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) warned.

A new report by the ITF's Maritime Safety Committee – **Beyond the Limit: How Covid-19 corner-cutting places too much risk in the international shipping system** – found that if temporary short cuts adopted in the industry during Covid-19 continue, there will be a rise in shipping accidents and environmental disasters.

'Short cuts taken with the blessing of some flag states



▲ The ITF 'Beyond the Limit' report

have gone too far, for too long,' report co-author and chair of the Maritime Safety Committee Odd Rune Malterud said. 'Of greatest concern is that these short cuts risk becoming permanent.'

The practice of flag states 'rubber-stamping' crewing levels

without due regard to safety has become 'unacceptably dangerous' in recent months, as shipowners have 'pushed for lower and lower manning levels in the face of the crew change crisis,' Mr Malterud said. 'This corner-cutting increases pressure on seafarers, harming their mental and physical wellbeing. Reduced minimum manning intensifies stress and contributes to fatigue because it spreads the same workload across a smaller number of seafarers.'

The ITF noted the lack of familiarisation procedures taking

place for new sign-on crew due to reduced crewing, as well as premature promotion.

The 'creep' of work into the hours of rest was flagged up. 'It is inhumane and dangerous to human life and our marine environment to force seafarers to continue to work the maximum number of hours of work every day, seven days a week while taking only the bare minimum hours of rest provided,' the ITF said.

'We need to return to proper implementation and enforcement of these rules.' **i**

**COVID-SAFE CRUISING**  
Design changes and special crew training may be required for post-Covid cruising. Download the webinar: [bit.ly/3k0CHnp](http://bit.ly/3k0CHnp)

**CLIMATE NEUTRAL TRANSPORT**  
The European Transport Workers' Federation sets out its stall on green transport, fair investment and jobs: [bit.ly/ETFGreentransport](http://bit.ly/ETFGreentransport)

**CONFIDENTIAL HELP**  
ISWAN provides SeafarerHelp, a free, confidential helpline for seafarers and their families: [bit.ly/3k5QqJ5](http://bit.ly/3k5QqJ5)



▲ Nautilus Council member and Champion Graham Fisher addresses the webinar

### Webinar calls for end to mental health stigma in maritime

Participants at an online event were united in agreement about the need to break the long-standing stigma around mental health in maritime.

The webinar, hosted by the Mental Health in Maritime network as part of Maritime UK week, covered the causes of mental health issues, breaking the stigma and resilience.

Graham Fisher, a Nautilus Council member and host of The Shipping Exchange podcast, spoke movingly about his personal experiences, and discussed the industry action needed to bring us closer to achieving parity between physical and mental health.

Noting that the 'pandemic has put the spotlight on the problem', Mr Fisher argued that there is often a failure by many in the industry to recognise the issue. He highlighted the lack of research into mental health at sea, which he argued makes it more difficult to create a case for intervention and rejected financial justifications for failing to provide mental health support, saying: 'If your crew feel happy and secure, then they will be more productive, so cost should never be used as a reason not to provide support.'

DP World HR business partner Verity Doughty asked the panel and audience to reflect on what more they could do to assist colleagues with their mental health: 'You don't have to be a mental health first aider to help someone. Just asking if they are OK can be so powerful, even if all that they can manage to say is no.'

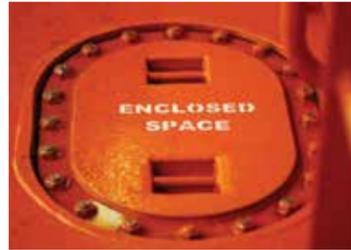
## Enclosed space training falling short, new report finds

Training programmes seeking to cut the continued high rate of casualties in enclosed spaces onboard ships are falling woefully short, accident investigators have warned.

Following an analysis of incidents on ships under its flag, the Marshall Islands register is being urged to secure improvements in the International Maritime Organization (IMO) rules governing enclosed space entry and rescue drills, ensuring that seafarers are taught that the best way to help is to raise the alarm and enable a rescue to be carried out in line with procedures.

'Lives continue to be lost at sea due to improper enclosed space entry and rescue,' the registry warns. 'To break this trend, decisive and immediate actions are needed by owners, managers, seafarers and other stakeholders.'

Last year, two seafarers died and two suffered serious injuries as a result of enclosed space



▲ Warning signs: report highlights a fundamental need for seafarers to better recognise what constitutes enclosed spaces on their ships Image: Danny Cornelissen

incidents on Marshall Islands-flagged ships. Investigations showed that, in most cases, the seafarers involved had taken part in drills required by the IMO SOLAS Convention, which shows that the training is failing to achieve its goal, the flag state said.

The report stresses the fundamental need for seafarers to recognise what constitutes enclosed spaces on their ships, and it calls for managers to ensure that seafarers undergo frequent training to identify them. Most enclosed space deaths involve 'inappropriate' rescue attempts made in haste and without the use of personal protective equipment.

'All crew members must be aware that the failure to follow enclosed space rescue procedures not only threatens their lives, it also reduces the chances of a successful rescue,' the report points out

### Don't ignore mental health impact of crew change crisis

The maritime industry needs to be 'dragged into the 21st century' to tackle mental health issues, argued Nautilus general secretary Mark Dickinson during Mersey Maritime's second annual 'maritime exchange' conference, sponsored by the Union.

The comments were made during a discussion on mental health and wellbeing. Speakers were in agreement about the devastating impact of the pandemic and crew change crisis, with Mr Dickinson raising the 'depression, loneliness and stress' that has been caused.



▲ Mark Dickinson on the panel

'Some seafarers have been away for 14, 15, 16 months and could be looking at their second Christmas onboard,' he said, 'and if that isn't bad enough, it's also the uncertainty of not knowing when the situation will be resolved'.

Mr Dickinson was also keen

to focus on underlying issues in the industry which have led to insecurity among seafarers, as well as calling for an end to the stigma around mental health.

Speaking after Mr Dickinson, Kays Medical chief executive Ben Ludzker was in agreement about the devastating impact of Covid-19, saying 'we can't underestimate the effect that this pandemic is having on us.'

However, he also expressed a hope that the additional focus brought by the pandemic could lead to future improvements in the way that mental health is dealt with.'

#### FREE RELATE COUNSELLING

Seafarers can get free relationship counselling either face to face, by webcam or telephone via Seafarers UK and SAIL: [bit.ly/3lIdQFB](https://bit.ly/3lIdQFB)

#### WHEREVER YOU ARE, SO ARE WE

Nautilus247 helpline is a free emergency service for all members, no matter where you are: [bit.ly/Nautilus247](https://bit.ly/Nautilus247)

## IMO: delays to crew change will jeopardise safe shipping

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) has warned that safe shipping will soon be in jeopardy if governments continue to ignore calls to allow crew changes via globally agreed protocols.

IMO secretary-general Kitack Lim made the fresh call for swift action to resolve the crew change crisis ahead of the 75th General Assembly of the United Nations and World Maritime Day. The statement is in line with months of action by unions on the issue.

'A humanitarian crisis is taking place at sea and urgent action is needed to protect seafarers' health and ensure the safety of shipping,' he said.

It is estimated that more than 300,000 seafarers and marine personnel are currently stranded at sea and unable to be repatriated despite the expiry of their contracts. A similar number have been unable to join ships due to Covid-19 restrictions on travel, embarkation and disembarkation in ports, quarantine measures, reductions in available flights, and limits on the issuing of visas and passports.

Some seafarers have now been onboard for more than 17 months, exceeding the 11-month limit in the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC). Many have been denied proper access to medical care and shore leave.

### New Zealand union steps up pressure for coronavirus testing

New Zealand maritime union the NZ Merchant Service Guild has stepped up pressure for mandatory coronavirus testing of international seafarers to strengthen border protections and enable shore leave, suggesting some vessels may need to 'cease working' for a period to ensure safety.

Following the New Zealand government's decision to test port workers but not international crew, the Nautilus Federation-affiliated union has asked Maritime New



▲ Lim: warned of humanitarian crisis at sea Image: IMO

'Seafarers cannot remain at sea indefinitely,' Mr Lim insisted. 'If the crew change crisis is not resolved soon, ships will no longer be able to operate safely pursuant to the Organization's regulations and guidelines, exacerbating the economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.'

United Nations secretary-general António Guterres added his voice to the call and urged all countries 'to recognise seafarers as key workers and provide assistance to ensure safe crew changeovers and repatriations'.

Progress has been made by many countries in allowing for crew changes, but the rate of progress is not keeping pace with the backlog of ships requiring crew changes.



▲ McAra: Testing is imperative Zealand (MNZ) to consider ways it and other agencies could allow shore leave for seafarers.

NZ Merchant Service Guild general secretary Helen McAra noted MNZ had 'explored the lawfulness of not testing international crew' but questioned what other research had been done in relation to shore leave, fatigue and safety.

'Testing is imperative to add a further layer of protection for port workers and to facilitate shore leave for international crew, many of whom are still trapped on their vessels,' she said.

## Rivercruise workers face Covid jobs crisis

Nautilus has put pressure on the European Commission and the Swiss Federal Council to protect rivercruise crew from discrimination and unprotected dismissals during Covid-19.

Covid-19 has caused a slump at European rivercruise companies and highlighted employment issues in the sector, according to the Union's Swiss national organiser Holger Schatz.

'A milestone inland waterways treaty signed between Nautilus and the Swiss River Advice Group has gone some way to protect inland waterway workers there, and some other companies have continued to pay wages above the statutory level,' he said. 'Others have dismissed employees even though [furlough] would have been possible. These companies have shied away from the administrative and financial burden at the expense of employees.'

'This is just as unacceptable as the many individual cases of undignified circumstances in connection with short-term dismissals we are aware of. For example, final salary accounts were often incorrect and leave was not included in redundancy calculations.'

Two further issues have been highlighted: a lack of social rights in the EU and Switzerland, leading to discrimination against eastern European employees, and a lack of protection against dismissal in Switzerland. 'In cases of unemployment, most eastern European employees receive only the low rate applicable in their home country, even though they also contributed to the western European unemployment insurance scheme.'

'Switzerland has been blacklisted by the ILO and urged to introduce legal improvements for dismissal protection. We support the efforts of the Swiss Federation of Trade Unions to correct this course.'

#### GET THE PICTURE

Follow the new Nautilus instagram account or DM/TAG us to see your photos featured: [www.instagram.com/nautilusint](https://www.instagram.com/nautilusint)

#### SOUNDING THE ALARM

Mark Dickinson spoke to the UK House of Commons Transport Select Committee about the crew change crisis: [bit.ly/35FPM1I](https://bit.ly/35FPM1I)



## In brief

### New strain of Covid-19 on cargo vessel

A vessel crewed by seafarers who may have been exposed to a novel strain of Covid-19 was kept at anchor off the Sunshine Coast, Australia, after a warning issued by New Zealand.

Two seafarers from the Sofrana Surville were airlifted to hospital after testing positive. It is believed that a New Zealand port worker who contracted Covid-19 may have caught it while working aboard the vessel.

'The marine electrical technician that caught Covid-19 in Auckland has a strain unknown in New Zealand,' said Mark Davis, executive officer at the Australian Maritime Officers' Union



The Sunshine Coast  
Image: Pniesen

(AMOU), an affiliate of the Nautilus Federation. 'The Queensland health authorities do not seem overly concerned about this, as the disease is bound to develop multiple strains.

'There is a concern that the port worker contracted the disease even though he was wearing PPE and taking precautions. Apparently, he should have been engaged to work aboard Sofrana Surville at a time closer to sailing when there would have been fewer crew members around.'

Both Queensland and Western Australia are tightening restrictions on international seafarers who arrive in the states, according to Martin Byrne, federal secretary of the Australian Institute of Marine and Power Engineers (AIMPE), a Nautilus Federation affiliate.

'Unfortunately some positive cases have been detected in seafarers flying into Australia to join a ship. This has cast doubt on the effectiveness of the pre-departure quarantine systems in labour supply countries.'

# Paris MoU must detain ships where crew stuck onboard

The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) and Nautilus are asking for authorities at ports under the Paris MoU, which covers western and southern Europe, to detain ships where crew have exceeded the maximum time they can work onboard.

ITF estimates that some 400,000 seafarers are trapped aboard their ships, many of whom have worked for well over the 11-month maximum period allowed under the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC), face increasing pressure and hardship.

The call follows a recent successful action in Australia, where ITF officials assisted the Australian Maritime Safety Authority in stopping a Japanese-owned car import vessel from leaving the Port of Melbourne. Several seafarers aboard had worked in excess of the 11-month MLC maximum and the 14-month Australian limit.

Commenting on the case, ITF Australia Coordinator Dean Summers said it was a 'wake up call' for the shipping industry: 'If you have over-contract seafarers – if you have crew who have done their time and are no longer willing or safe to operate your vessel – the ITF, our affiliates, and the Australian authorities will detain your ship until you right these wrongs,



A diagram of nations participating in Port State Control agreements. Paris MoU signatories are highlighted in dark blue. Image: Kristofferjaj

no matter the cost to you or your cargo owner.'

The crew change situation has been worsened by the failure of many authorities to recognise seafarers as key workers and the unwillingness of charterers, ship owners, manning agencies and other parties to put their legal obligations to mariners ahead of business concerns.

'Seafarers have gone above and beyond the call of duty. Many are suffering from serious fatigue and stress, which is no surprise when they have been away from home for more than a year in violation of their rights under the MLC,' Nautilus general secretary Mark Dickinson said.

'Repatriating crew is not a luxury, it is an obligation that ship owners and charterers need to respect. Authorities in Europe should follow the example of the Australian Maritime Safety Authority to ensure that they are doing so.'

## High risk areas extended off Gulf of Guinea and Somalia

High risk areas in the Gulf of Guinea and Indian Ocean have been extended in response to pirate attacks and kidnappings.

The new list of designated risk areas covered by the International Bargaining Forum (IBF) and International Maritime Employers' Contract (IMEC) collective bargaining agreements took effect on 1 November.

They cover a new extended

risk zone in the Gulf of Guinea between the Ivory Coast and the Congo/Angola border and a new extended risk zone into the Arabian Sea for the western part of the Indian Ocean. Coordinates have also been amended for the High Risk Area off Somalia's coast.

Seafarers now have new entitlements within these extended risk zones, varying

according to the zone.

These entitlements include bonuses for the duration of stay or transit, higher compensation, increased security requirements and Best Management Practice levels and extra bonuses and compensation payable in the event that their vessel comes under attack.

Existing high-risk areas remain in place.

### STOWAWAY SITUATION

Nautilus member Sam Belfitt shares her own experience with stowaways following the Nave Andromeda incident: [bit.ly/2lzOD1Z](https://bit.ly/2lzOD1Z)

### 'STILL AT SEA' WINNERS

Inspiring images from the winners of the Seafarers' Trust photography competition: [bit.ly/3lvgTky](https://bit.ly/3lvgTky)



# Flagging out debate simmers as Swiss deep-sea fleet struggles to stay afloat

Switzerland has announced a controversial decision to allow Swiss deepsea shipowners to flag out and register in flag of convenience (FOC) countries. The move is as strongly opposed by Nautilus International.

Commercial maritime shipping under the Swiss flag is operated by Swiss companies. The flag state authority is the Swiss Maritime Navigation Office (SMNO). The SMNO, based in Basel, also maintains the register of all Swiss ocean-going yachts and small boats.

Although it is landlocked, Switzerland has a seagoing fleet of about 20 vessels which is traditionally considered to be a vital plank in its defence planning. The ships are owned by Swiss private-sector firms and operated by Swiss shipping companies. In times of crisis the federal government can requisition these merchant ships for the country's economic needs.

Switzerland also enjoys freedom of navigation on the Rhine and its tributaries and thus duty-free access to the sea.

Switzerland will now allow flagging out when a company is threatened with ending up on a vessel blacklist. The flagging out means that the Swiss government guarantees granted to those ships will remain, but the government will still



A Swiss flagged bulk carrier vessel, the Navaire Moleson, in a Casablanca port  
Image: Wikimedia Commons

have requisition rights for the national interest.

While the Swiss flag is not on the Paris MOU blacklist, Nautilus Switzerland national organiser Holger Schatz said: 'The reputation of the Swiss flag has been tarnished over the past years. The Swiss flag has a bad reputation and is in danger of being blacklisted. This means that larger commercial companies can suffer from that and not receive orders.'

Switzerland is a signatory to the Maritime Labour Convention which entered into force there in 2017. The Swiss government has a collective agreement of employment (CAE) concluded on 5 December 2016, between the Swiss Shipowners Association and Nautilus International. It indicated to the International Labour Organization at the time that this agreement is binding upon all Swiss shipowners.

## Green light for inland waterways investment

Swiss Social Democrat politician and historian Eva Herzog has secured top level government support for more investment in the country's inland navigation infrastructure, which promotes the Rhine as an ecologically sustainable transport industry.

The Member of the Bundesrat raised a successful motion to the Swiss Federal Council which is set

to now create a 'proof of concept' encompassing the promotion of commercial goods transport and investment.

The motion came after a planned multi-million Euro German investment in inland waterway transport on the Rhine.

The Federal Council serves as the collective head of state and government of Switzerland.

Nautilus national organiser in Switzerland Holger Schatz said: 'The Swiss government has long been called upon to invest far more than the planned construction of a new gateway port 'Basin 3' in Basel.

'The motion by Ms Herzog, a member of the Basel Council of States, is set to get things moving now.'

### VIRTUAL SHIPPING

Watch this video of a Maersk containership as it sails from the US to Europe and back again: [youtube.com/watch?v=DOLgXOzcyTo](https://youtube.com/watch?v=DOLgXOzcyTo)

### SAVED BY SEAFARERS

Travel journalist Eva zu Beck hitches a ride on a cargo ship from Yemen to UAE during the pandemic: [youtube.com/watch?v=fCaCQC34HjU](https://youtube.com/watch?v=fCaCQC34HjU)

## Singapore unions contribute to Covid-19 response

The Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore has introduced enhanced measures to facilitate crew changes and further secure safe port operations during Covid-19.

The measures have been supported by Nautilus Federation affiliates Singapore Maritime Officers' Union (SMOU) and the Singapore Organisation of Seamen (SOS).

Seafarers due to on-sign in Singapore and who have stayed in specific low-risk countries or regions will either no longer be required to observe stay-home isolation periods in that country or region, or only serve a shorter isolation of seven days prior to departure for Singapore. Seafarers from other countries and regions must continue the



Ms Mary Liew, general secretary of SMOU, (red polo shirt), and Mr Kam Soon Huat, president of SOS, (light blue long sleeved shirt) with stakeholders at the signing ceremony. Image: Singapore Maritime Officers' Union

14-day isolation period.

Shipowners, managers and agents are required to ensure that Covid-19 tests are carried out at a government-approved or ISO 15189-accredited testing facility prior to the seafarer's departure for Singapore.

A crew facilitation centre has been established onboard the Port Authority of Singapore's existing floating accommodation. It will house crew for up to 48 hours where ship and flight schedules are not aligned.

Off-signers will head directly from vessels to Changi airport, or stay in quarantine at existing holding facilities. A US \$1 million fund has been created to work on concrete solutions for safe crew changes.

Port Marine Circulars on the measures are at [bit.ly/33tdYRK](https://bit.ly/33tdYRK).

# Safety and welfare concerns raised by 'SecretCaptain' Twitter account

Anonymous blogger has seen a powerful response to his tweets on the crew change crisis

**A** tanker captain posting anonymously on Twitter has revealed concerns about the welfare of his crew in a series of emotional posts about the crew change crisis. The posts, which were made on 23 October and 2 November 2020, drew a significant amount of attention from seafarers and the wider maritime industry.

The 'SecretCaptain', who has previously blogged for Nautilus, found that many of his crew were significantly over their contract time when he joined his vessel, with some onboard for eleven months.

He explained that he had been 'fighting with ever changing rules & regs from the company and authorities to get one crew member home', but could not secure the repatriation of



a further 16 members of the crew.

He said that he 'had plans in place and now those plans are failing because company cannot find new crew members to join ship', and added 'nobody wants to come back onboard because they don't know when they will get home again'.

The mental health impact of the ongoing situation was raised in the posts, with the captain stating: 'I feel physically sick when grown adults cry in my cabin because they want to go home,' and arguing that 'the mental health impact of this will be with the industry for years to come'.

The captain also worried about the enhanced risk of accidents caused by the exhausted crew. He said: 'I worry about accidents because they are not focused on what they are doing.'

Twitter users from across the world have sent messages of support to the captain and his crew, with more than 60 replies and comments being made. The posts have received 184 'retweets' and 245 'likes', meaning that they will have been viewed by thousands of people. [i](#)



FOR COVID-19 FAQ

# Put seafarers on priority list for Covid-19 vaccine

With seafarers recognised as key workers and critical to supply chains they should be added to the list of frontline workers so that they could continue to do their jobs, Nautilus general secretary Mark Dickinson said.

'It seems obvious that seafarers, among many others on the frontline, must not be overlooked, and must be factored into any national deployment strategy for the prioritisation vaccines and testing,' he said.

'I recognise that there others that need these protections but I am asking those drawing up the deployment plans take into account our members have kept trade moving in the pandemic, kept shelves stocked with foods



Seafarers are frontline workers who should be protected from Covid

and medicines, often at great personal expense, through long months stuck at sea unable to see family and friends.'

In its communication to the European Parliament and the European Council on Preparedness for Covid-19 vaccination strategies and vaccine deployment the European Commission identified priority groups for

the initial phases of vaccine deployment which included transportation workers.

The UK's Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation said the first phase of rolling out a vaccine would focus on NHS and care home workers, people over 50 who are at most risk, and adults with a health condition that puts them at greater risk of dying from Covid-19. [i](#)

## In brief

**Covid blacklisting blasted**  
The International Transport Workers' Federation and employers' Joint Negotiating Group (JNG) have called on the maritime industry to ensure that seafarers are given their rights during the Covid-19 crisis and are not blacklisted for speaking out against unfair treatment.

ITF general secretary Stephen Cotton said: 'Seafarers have a real fear that if they speak up or stand up that their careers could be over.'

'Fear of blacklisting prevents them from enforcing their rights.'

International Maritime Employers' Council chairman Captain Belal Ahmed, who signed the letter on behalf of the JNG, said: 'It is important that seafarers are not disadvantaged for merely standing up for themselves when they have completed their contracts and are mentally and physically not ready to continue to work safely.'

## Congress crew plea

Nautilus has signed a letter calling on the US Congress to solve crew change problems, after seafarers were prevented from leaving their ships to fly home – even when permitted under US regulations.

American unions leading the effort include the International Organization of Masters, Mates, and Pilots and the Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association, both of which are affiliates of the Nautilus Federation.

Although crews with the requisite paperwork are exempt from Covid-19 border restrictions following a presidential proclamation in May, some have been prevented from crew changes altogether.

Customs and Border Patrol officials have required that seafarers be constantly guarded or that their ship remain in port until the crew members' flights home have taken off. [i](#)



## Maritime community rallies round online

**ISWAN**  
@iswan\_org  
Hello @TheSecretCapt, thank you for sharing your story. We hope SeafarerHelp has provided some comfort and support for you and your crew during this incredibly difficult time. We will be here for you all whenever you need us.

**Penny Thomas**  
@Pennythomas1  
Thinking of you @TheSecretCapt and all #seafarers stuck in the #crewchange crisis

**ned molloy**  
@NedMolloy  
Ignoring the mental health of oil tanker captains is a seriously bad idea #CrewChangeCrisis #Seafarers

**Charlie H**  
@charlieH1978  
A sad reminder of the plight of seafarers, an industry that was struggling to get people prior to the pandemic has been let down at every level!

**alex mcintosh**  
@alexmcintosh84  
Where do we start remembering about the human cost of the new normal. This is not normal they did not agree to it. Technically they are working from 'home' but they have homes with loved ones they miss. #stoptreatingthemlikecommodities #seafarershave rights #givethemtheirlivesback

**Tom Duncan**  
@Capn\_Tom  
Really feel for you. I retired and left my last ship in May, there were crew stuck on board for 10 months even then, many still on board, some on blood pressure medication struggling to source supply, it's been a disgrace the way seafarers have been treated

**Aaron Saunders**  
@deckchairblog  
The entire maritime industry – not just cruise – is dealing with the difficult task of crew changes despite assurances from various countries that they will facilitate this. More needs to be done to help seafarers during this pandemic

**Ross Cleland**  
@rosso1y  
It's really important to remember that your Health products, your household Energy, your Lemons and your Petrol (Spells HELP) all arrive by seafarers. Yet, 99% of us can't see the horrendous exploitation of our seafarers when buying said goods. #HELP

**Sanjay Dighe**  
@dighesj  
The ignored victims of this pandemic. Having a daughter who worked on a ship I really feel these crew and their families. The fact that most ships operate under flags of convenience makes it impossible to take effective legal action

**Adam Lewis**  
@adamrlewis1987  
These people have literally kept the world running these last 12 months... food on the shelves, fuel in your car, toys for your kids...and this is how they are treated!!!

# Mix of hope and despair as crew change crisis lingers

The Seafarers Happiness Index for July-September 2020 has revealed an average increase in happiness levels from 6.18 to 6.35 compared to the previous quarter, though there are signs that optimism is diminishing.

The positive overall result masks significant fluctuations between July and September. Early responses were quite positive, driven by rising hopes about the re-opening of national borders and a solution to the crew change crisis.

This optimism was lost as the second wave of infections dashed the hopes of many seafarers for a return home or a return to work.

There have been welcome reports of crew pulling together in the face of exceptional challenges. Worryingly, though, there are also reports of a rise in conflict onboard, as the social bonds between crewmates come under pressure. Some of this pressure seems related to the need on some vessels to wear face masks and carry out social distancing, which contributes to feelings of isolation.



The report is produced by welfare charity Mission to Seafarers

The survey also reveals the growing impact on the welfare of seafarers who cannot join vessels and are facing severe financial consequences as a result. These seafarers report having nowhere to turn and a sense of being the forgotten victims of the crisis. [i](#)

To read the latest report, go to: [bit.ly/3pmImqZ](https://bit.ly/3pmImqZ)



# CATALYST FOR CHANGE

A new study suggests that the Covid-19 crisis is turning out to be a powerful driver of change in seafarer training, and is paving the way for the introduction of innovative flexible and remote learning systems. **Andrew Linington** reports

**T**he gap between face-to-face teaching and internet-based e-learning was already closing before the pandemic began. Now the use of tech in teaching is set to increase substantially as a result of 'the increased acceptance – and need to – conduct business remotely, online', according to the third global Maritime Training Insights Database (MarTID) survey. Published by the World Maritime University, Marine Learning Systems and New Wave Media, the report also warns that feedback from seafarers paints a relatively bleak picture of their training experiences and outcomes and shows the significant scale of opportunity for improvement.

In the foreword to the report, Nautical Institute chief executive

officer Captain John Lloyd notes that adoption rates for new training solutions have proved high, and that this trend has also helped to deliver significant savings in associated travel and accommodation costs – both for seafarers and employers.

'In this context, robust and secure assessments are a prerequisite and so too is approval by the relevant flag administration,' he said. 'It is a credit to the decision-makers on many administrations that they have quickly adopted alternative solutions to training and assessment. Such flexibility has helped keep our seafarers in date for their qualifications and up-to-date with recent innovations.'

Even before the pandemic struck, the MarTID researchers found that there had been a 16% reduction in face-to-face training

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**Seafarers are increasingly having to self-fund their training – with 43% having to pay for their own training and 17% spending 10%-20% of their income on training**

over the previous year – and that 23% of seafarers, shipping companies and training institutions expected to use less of it in the coming year.

Although classroom training continues to be the most common training method, the survey found that use of e-learning and simulation is growing rapidly, and operators plan to increase their use of technology to manage crew training, competency and assessment.

They also plan to make more use of video-based e-learning, simulation, coaching and mentoring in the coming 12 months.

Some 56% of training institutions had increased the use of internet-based e-learning in the past year, and 69% expected this to increase further in the year ahead.

Almost two-thirds of ship operators had increased their training budgets over the previous year, with two-thirds spending between 2% and 10% of their operating budget on training.

However, seafarers are increasingly having to self-fund their training – with 43% having to pay for their own training and 17% spending between 10%-20% of their income on training.

Nearly half the seafarers surveyed said their personal expenditure on training has increased over the past five years and almost 60% believe it will increase even more over the coming 12 months.

As well as STCW-related courses, seafarers are most commonly having to spend their own money on certificates of competency, qualification upgrades, refresher

training, revalidation, medical, safety and life-saving, and advanced and specialised courses.

Researchers also found that seafarers did not, in general, view the training they receive favourably – whether in the context of shipping companies or in maritime education and training institutions. Barely half consider that the training quality standards are high.

The report warns that this finding is worrying and should be addressed by all stakeholders.

'It is one thing to have systems in place and quality certification that purport to show optimal training levels. It is quite another to have these systems work such that the recipients of the training are competent and deem themselves as such, thus boosting their confidence to take appropriate actions in high-risk situations.'

Vessel operators said the top four factors determining their training commitments were the desire to reduce accidents, to comply with regulatory requirements, to manage crew competency and to increase commercial efficiency and effectiveness.

Operators are concerned about the increasing age profile of their officers and the long-term loss of knowledge and experience.

However, the majority of seafarers feel that their employers do not assess how the training they receive affects their performance. Although 50% of operators and 79% of training institutions follow externally defined standards for training quality, there is 'room for improvement in quality assurance of learner assessments, in particular with reference to alignment of intended learning outcomes, learning activities and learner assessments in the context of vessel operators'.

A relatively low percentage of seafarers feel that their feedback is



▲  
Engineering simulator at Warsash maritime training centre, Solent University

considered by employers when offering suggestions for improved training and only a small percentage feel that their instructors make an effort to provide feedback on their training progress. More than three-quarters of the seafarers taking part in the survey said that their employers do not assess the impact of training on their work performance.

Seafarers said they most frequently received training related to safety, ship operations and environmental protection, and least frequently had training on crew welfare and health.

Asked what additional training they would most like to have, more than 18% of seafarers cited simulator training, followed by ship handling and practical on-the-job training.

Other areas of additional training that seafarers would welcome include accident investigation, cross-vessel operation, training on different equipment, emergency preparedness, ship automation and

electronics, mental health, and transferring skills and knowledge shore-side.

More than 40% of seafarers said they did not receive mentoring or coaching, and between 45% to 50% report high or medium amounts of simulation or e-learning in their training.

The research was completed at the end of May 2020, just when the full impact of Covid-19 was being felt globally. MarTID said the full impact of the pandemic upon seafarer training will be assessed in the next survey.

'Seafarers continue to serve the global community as facilitators of a key link in the global logistics chain, particularly when the challenging events of the Covid-19 pandemic are considered,' World Maritime University president Dr Cleopatra Doumbia-Henry said. 'Their competence, development, knowledge, skill retention and their transfer to actual work settings are as critical as ever. Training needs to be kept in focus.' ①

**69%**  
expected e-learning to increase further in the year ahead



▲  
Top: the rise of online learning Image: Getty images

Above: front cover of the MarTID report

**56%**  
of training institutions had increased the use of internet-based e-learning in the past year



## SHIPPING'S INCONVENIENT TRUTHS

During the coronavirus pandemic, the true nature of the ship registration business and the predominant practice of registering vessels in flags of convenience has been starkly revealed, as they surrendered any semblance of upholding seafarers rights or supporting crew denied repatriation, access to medical care or welfare support ashore. We must learn a lesson from this, says Nautilus general secretary **Mark Dickinson**. Never again can we allow the fundamental rights of seafarers to be swept aside by substandard ship registers and impotent flag states that corrode the governance of the shipping industry

**T**he shipping industry's chickens came home to roost this year with (allegedly) one sneeze in a wet market in Wuhan, China.

For decades, much of the industry has been operating in the shadows. Invisibility for many operators was the key: stay out of sight and they would be left alone, except when tax breaks and subsidies were on offer. Then they come out of the shadows.

Shipowners register vessels under flags of convenience (FOCs) for limited liability, light touch and flexible regulation, accessible politicians and low or no taxes.

When the pandemic hit, who did shipowners turn to? Did they hot foot it to Panama City, Monrovia or Majuro? No; when they are in trouble, they beat on the doors of their home country demanding

bailouts, state subsidies and diplomatic interventions.

But the shipping industry's obsession with secrecy and invisibility has left seafarers brutally exposed. Most of shipping is now registered in flag states known as flags of convenience. These were shown to be powerless when transportation hubs and port states locked down. With no one enforcing their rights under international law – including the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) – seafarers have been denied repatriation at the expiry of their contracts. They have been denied medical care ashore, even for non Covid-related illnesses such as strokes, broken bones, tumours and dental care. Deceased seafarers have been kept in the ship's cold storage alongside food because port authorities refused to allow

▲ **Broken link:** The Japan-owned MOL Triumph container ship is flagged in the Marshall Islands  
Image: Danny Cornelissen

their bodies to be repatriated for burial.

The inconvenient truth about the global shipping industry and its response to Covid-19 was highlighted by Hugo de Stoop, head of tanker operator Euronav, who said: 'At the heart of the problem is the way we have built this industry in the past. We have tried to live in the shadows, tried to be discreet, tried to be forgotten. Nobody wanted to pay tax, nobody or be heavily regulated. We have chosen tiny jurisdictions like Panama, Bahamas, Marshall Islands.'

### Post-FOCs

Never again can we allow international conventions setting out the fundamental rights of seafarers to be swept aside with such seeming impunity. We can blame the countries that locked out the industry and its seafarers, but that would be to miss the point.

The seafarers did not expect that the

response of the leading flag states would be such an abject surrender or demonstration of their impotence. The seafarers were left brutally exposed and forced into staying at sea. This is unacceptable, tantamount to forced labour, and the reasons why this occurred need to be understood and corrected.

The institutions of global regulation are essentially robust. But they are not enough. They must be bolstered. We need to weed out the self-interested. A frank and open appraisal of the governance and structures of the shipping industry and the corrosive effect of flags of convenience is necessary now more than at any time in our recent history. In history we may have the answer. In 1986, under the auspices of UNCTAD, a convention that would have outlawed flags of convenience was adopted. It has however failed to gain enough ratifications to enter into force and languishes on a dusty shelf at the United Nations. Perhaps it is time to revisit this convention?

Whatever the answer is, we need to start with the enforcement of a genuine link between flag and shipowner and ensure that flag states effectively exercise jurisdiction and control over their ships. It is a matter of life and death for the world's seafarers.

National flag shipping has suffered greatly, firstly from the growth of FOCs, and then as traditional maritime countries fought back by deregulating – establishing 'lighter touch' international or second registers and ultimately deregulating their national flags. The spiral downwards and the resulting insanity are all on show, as evidenced by recent incidents involving the Panama-flagged Wakashio and Gulf Livestock I, and the Moldova-flagged Rhosus.

### Race to the top

The working conditions of seafarers need to improve. International regulation must become a race to the top, not a continuation of the race to the bottom. This is both for the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) to address but needs the support of their member governments for substantive progress to be made. In the IMO, the corrosive influence of the flag of convenience states needs to be addressed.

It is another inconvenient truth, but international conventions represent the minimum acceptable standards, and all too

often the maximum that all IMO and ILO member states can accept.

That doesn't have to be the case. For example, building on the model of the IMO STCW Convention, the MLC was conceived as a living document, a journey not a destination, capable of being amended to keep it up to date.

We need a genuine commitment from all parties to deliver continuous improvement in seafarers' working conditions and support the race to the top for all international regulations. Only then will we have some sanity in the industry, improve health and safety and the bolster the protection of the environment, to say nothing of enhancing the attractiveness of shipping as a career.

We need the IMO and ILO to address crewing levels, and by doing so call time on fatigue and the long hours culture which sees many seafarers working over 90 hours per week. The debate about technology and automation needs to be human-centred – not 'How do we replace seafarers?' but 'How do we use technology to enhance their working and living conditions?'

### National priorities

Nations and society need to relearn and understand the importance of shipping and seafarers to the global economy. The economic case is solid, and the UK and Netherlands are two examples showing that investing in your shipping industry is a win-win for the national economy and beyond.

The alternative, being reliant on others for all your shipping needs, is strategic suicide and must be avoided. Maritime resilience is crucial to any country that relies on shipping for imports and exports.

The UK and Dutch experience of laissez faire government policy saw national fleets shrink massively, and the numbers of seafarers being trained plummeted to almost nothing. Now we have Tonnage Tax systems and financial support for maritime training, plus social insurance and income tax benefits for employers and seafarers. These examples of state intervention are good, but such positive measures require constant attention – they can never be 'job done' they need to be kept fresh. It is crucial to ensure they continue to deliver in the national interest.

Direct intervention by governments is essential. Either by regulating the conditions upon which shipowners can enter the market

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**We need to start with the enforcement of a genuine link between flag and shipowner. Shipping is not immune from society's demand for sustainability**

(sometimes referred to as cabotage) or by providing fiscal support. These interventions are not mutually exclusive, but they must be strictly focused on goals in the national interest.

### Fighting for fairness

Shipowners must ask themselves whether their governance, their flag and crew strategies are defensible set against the increasing desire of societies for sustainability, transparency, fairness, decency and for the environment to be protected.

Hiding in tax havens, avoiding scrutiny, supporting deregulatory approaches; none of this is aligned with the demands of today's society and our young people.

Environmental, social and governance (ESG) criteria are now mainstream in investment decisions. Investment funds such as Fidelity and global shippers such as Unilever and Danone amongst many others are asking questions about the way the maritime industry is run. The crew change crisis has triggered this, but it was coming anyway, and there is a hugely significant conversation going on about the lack of transparency and accountability in this industry.

There are also international tax reforms coming into play which have the potential to shift shipowners away from registering their ships in offshore tax havens which represents an opportunity for bona fide flag states to rebuild.

Young people won't work for companies that don't meet their aspirations for sustainability. Increasingly, I will wager, they won't vote for politicians who support the perpetuation of this broken system.

This year feels like a turning point in many ways, including a significant moment in history and a chance to reclaim lost ground. Let's not waste it. **!**

More about FOCs on page 16 →

## Broken link

Flags of convenience (FOCs) are by their very existence an abrogation of the requirements of Articles 91 (Nationality of Ships) and Article 94 (Duties of Flag States) of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. This convention requires a genuine link between the flag and the owner of the vessel, in order for the flag state to effectively exercise jurisdiction and control over ships flying its flag.

According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the top three ship registers in 2020 are:  
Panama – 333m DWT  
Marshall Islands – 246m DWT  
Liberia – 243m DWT

These three registers alone make up 40% of the world fleet and are all considered by the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) to be FOCs. Of the top 35 leading flags identified by UNCTAD over 950 million DWT is registered in just nine FOCs registers representing 48% of the total world fleet. [t](#)

Pilot boat  
Image: Danny Cornelissen



**'The shipping industry's obsession with secrecy and invisibility has left seafarers brutally exposed'**

## Campaigning for change

Since 1948, the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) has campaigned on behalf of all the major maritime trade unions to end the flags of convenience (FOC) system – its political objective being to require a genuine link in accordance with UNCLOS.

The ITF campaign has always had an industrial goal: imposing internationally agreed working conditions on the global shipping industry to protect seafarers and enhance their lives. Remarkably, with solidarity from the world's dockworker unions, that influence now extends to securing collective bargaining agreements on over 11,000 FOC vessels. It also influences minimum conditions on many national flag vessels too.

This campaign has also delivered the only example of an international forum – the International Bargaining Forum – where ship managers and shipowners represented on the Joint Negotiating Group meet and negotiate with the ITF to agree wages and working conditions codified in an International Framework Collective Bargaining Agreement.

Ultimately, the ITF's campaign work on behalf of the world's seafarers also delivered the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (as amended). This is often referred to as the 'Seafarers' bill of rights' and is a set of minimum standards covering all aspects of the employment of seafarers. It has been ratified by 97 countries representing 91% of the world fleet. [t](#)

Read the full report, including recommendations for concerned seafarers, at [bit.ly/3noA9HP](https://bit.ly/3noA9HP)

# MIND THE GAP

The International Transport Workers' Federation has released survey results covering Covid-19 health protection measures onboard ship, revealing a significant gap between companies and seafarers. **Rob Coston** reports

**A** new International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) report into health protection measures on board ships in response to Covid-19 contains several worrying statistics, but one stands out.

Some 94% of companies say that they have provided training on shipboard plans and procedures to deal with Covid-19 – for example through posters, training videos or information sheets – yet nearly a third of seafarers surveyed still say that they have not received any instruction.

This is a dangerous oversight. Even if a company has put helpful procedures in place, there is no guarantee they will be properly followed without adequate training. The ITF has urged companies to improve their communications and encouraged seafarers to request the information and protection they deserve.

### About the survey

The health protection report contains data collected in two separate surveys, one of international seafarers conducted by the ITF and another by the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS), which surveyed its member companies. Note that the seafarers may not be serving with vessels covered by the ICS survey, which may explain some of the discrepancy between the figures.

In creating the report the ITF was keen to see if there was any improvement from the first few



months of the pandemic.

'We'd hoped to see some kind of understanding from the seafarers of what is happening with Covid and that their company had put things in place to protect them, because in the early days of the pandemic there was a sense that they were not aware,' said ITF assistant section secretary, seafarers, fisheries and inland navigation Fabrizio Barcellona.

'I think the situation has dramatically improved, but there are still some areas that need to be worked on. We believe that companies now have policies in place, but these aren't necessarily being communicated to seafarers.' →

▲  
**Nautilus Champions in PPE during the pandemic**  
Image: supplied by Champions on Instagram



**'Safety is the responsibility of both company and seafarer. If the policy is perfect but not implemented correctly it's not a good policy'**

### What should seafarers expect?

While Covid-19 is a new threat, the World Health Organisation International Health Regulations 2015 and the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) create clear responsibilities for health protection that still apply during this pandemic situation.

Under the MLC, 'every seafarer has the right to a safe and secure workplace that complies with safety standards and to health protection, medical care, welfare measures and other forms of social protection'.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) this would include the provision of alcohol-based handrub and personal protective equipment as well as access to prompt and adequate medical care while working on board, access to care on shore when in need of immediate treatment, and 24 hour free medical advice by radio or satellite communication.

Seafarers with Covid-19 are entitled to paid sick leave/benefits when they are unable to work. This also applies to quarantine periods on board or ashore, whether the seafarer is ill, exposed to Covid-19 or simply kept apart as a precaution (unless local authorities bear the cost).

### The reality

Many of the companies surveyed by the ICS seem to have put adequate measures in place. For example, the vast majority have proper procedures for disinfection, for dealing with visitors and wearing face masks.

There are still areas that need work though – for example, while governments around the world have put enormous emphasis on social distancing and 'bubbles' to prevent people mixing with those from outside their group, 45% of seafarers say their company does not require segregation or distancing of seafarers who join their ship and 35% do not think that their ship has procedures in place to restrict or limit the number of visitors (some 9% of companies admit that they don't have a procedure at all).

And as pointed out, the worrying fact is that many seafarers are unsure that their employers are living up to their responsibilities. The statistics below reflect the findings of the full report, which shows a clear gap between the protection that ICS companies say they are delivering and the protection that seafarers from a range of companies receive.

- 93% of companies say they have specific plans and procedures to protect the health of seafarers and the safety of ships during the pandemic. Almost all these companies claim to have

## KNOWLEDGE AND TRAINING

Has the company provided general information to seafarers on Covid-19 and standard protection/control advice?



Has the company provided training on Covid-19 training and procedures?



Does your company have specific plans and procedures related to Covid-19?



The ICS survey was completed by 83 companies operating 1,775 ships, including container vessels, passenger ships, bulk carriers, tankers and others

## COPING WITH COVID

Does the company require social distancing of seafarers joining the ship?



Are there plans for segregation or social distancing of seafarers who recently joined a ship?



Company



Seafarers

## PPE

Is there extra PPE available for visitors?



Does the company require seafarers stationed on the gangway to wear PPE?



Has the company procured additional medicines and equipment for its ships and facilities?



## CREWING

Is there a contingency plan if an on-signing seafarer does not pass any testing protocols?\*



Has your company cancelled shore leave even where local authorities would allow seafarers to go ashore?



Has the company had any seafarers denied access to medical care ashore?



\* Company only question

included arrangements to isolate, look after and request external medical help for seafarers who show symptoms, as well as arrangements for disinfection and cleaning to control transmission of the virus. However, 32% of the seafarers who must put these plans into action say they are not aware that a plan even exists

- 92% of seafarers say that they have received general Covid-19 information but only 70% have been given training or instruction
- 91% of companies say that they have special instructions on PPE for visitors, and that it is now available onboard ship, yet 27% of seafarers say that there are no arrangements and 40% say no PPE equipment is available for visitors

Additionally, there are serious worries about MLC violations relating to shore leave and denial of access to medical care ashore, with 32% of companies saying that a seafarer had been refused care due to coronavirus restrictions at port. Under the MLC, all seafarers are to be granted shore leave to benefit their health and wellbeing, and they should also have access to port-based welfare services. While Covid-19 outbreaks might sometimes restrict this, companies must continue to respect their obligations and ensure seafarers receive the treatment and time ashore they are entitled to whenever possible.

### Improving the situation

ITF finishes its report with a list of recommendations for both companies and seafarers.

Companies are urged to ensure Covid-19 plans and procedures are communicated effectively, and that ships and seafarers receive the equipment to put them in place.

Seafarers have a responsibility to follow the plans and procedures, but also to request additional information or clarification where it is needed.

There are additional, detailed recommendations laid out in the report, which can be accessed via [bit.ly/3noA9HP](https://bit.ly/3noA9HP).

Mr Barcellona is clear: 'Safety is the responsibility of both company and seafarer. If the policy is perfect but not communicated and implemented correctly it's not a good policy.' With better communication, planning and provision from companies, and greater engagement from seafarers, the Covid-19 situation onboard ships can continue to improve. 

The ITF survey was completed by **538** seafarers

# Work related stress spikes for seafarers during pandemic

New research finds that seafarers are bearing the brunt of work-related stress during the pandemic, with a rise in insomnia and depression

**T**he Covid-19 crisis has created excessive levels of work-related stress among seafarers that requires urgent remedial action to be taken by owners and managers, a new study has warned.

Research undertaken by medical experts in Italy, Spain and Denmark has revealed that 60% of seafarers believe that their health

has not been properly protected at work in the pandemic and more than half feel unsafe doing their job.

The study, published in the latest edition of the International Maritime Health journal, claims to be one of the first scientific assessments of the impact of the pandemic on the wellbeing of seafarers.

While the Covid threat 'mainly

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**54% of ratings and 52% of the officers did not feel safe doing their job in relation to the epidemic**

affects the population on land, seafarers are expected to feel very safe in ships', the report notes.

However, the preliminary results of the study indicate that seafarers have a 'considerable sense of concern' for their health.

Researchers found that 30% of seafarers were suffering insomnia to the point of being concerned and more than one-quarter were unhappy and depressed. Around three-quarters of seafarers said the pandemic had affected the way in which they perceived their health and wellbeing.

The results show the need for companies to alleviate the risks posed by increased levels of work-related stress caused by the Covid crisis. Employers should use a combination of person-focused and organisation-focused prevention to tackle the problems.

Work-related stress among seafarers is well known, and the researchers established the study to investigate how the pandemic is affecting the physical and mental wellbeing of seafarers, to analyse the ways in which additional stress is serving as a risk factor, and to gauge the effectiveness of the measures being taken to support ships' crews during the crisis.

### Early reaction

The findings are based on feedback from seafarers serving on containerships visiting the Italian port of Trieste over a four-month period during the early stages of the pandemic. Just over half the seafarers were from Asian countries, 28% from Russia and eastern Europe, and 17% from European countries.

Overall, the feedback suggested more than half the seafarers had no significant wellbeing problems, but almost 40% were 'starting problems' and 1.3% had serious problems.

The survey showed that 47% of the seafarers were less happy than usual and 40% had been less able

**47%**  
**of seafarers were less happy than usual**

than usual to carve out free time for themselves. Almost one-third were less able to resolve problems than normal, and 25% less able than usual to concentrate on what they were doing.

Engineering personnel and seafarers from Russia and Asia had the highest levels of problems.

The researchers also sought to investigate the level of satisfaction among seafarers regarding the Covid-related measures implemented in ships and ports, as well as their subjective perceptions of risk and safety.

Almost two-thirds of the ratings and 55% of the officers did not consider that everything had been done to ensure their health at work during the pandemic. A further 54% of ratings and 52% of the officers did not feel safe doing their job during the epidemic.

### Careful evaluation

The importance of careful evaluation of work-related stress is demonstrated by other studies of psychological problems, depression and suicide risk, the report warns. However, the difficulty of detecting and measuring psychological problems that can be exacerbated by work-related stress – particularly among those working at sea.

For comparison, the report points to another study of 350 seafarers in international shipping which showed that higher levels of resilience, longer seafaring experience and greater work support were significantly associated with lower levels of self-reported stress, but caution that more research is needed to objectively measure stress levels.

A combination of the significant number of seafarers showing signs of 'starting problems' and the fact that more than half did not feel happy with the precautions adopted by the shipping company

in response to Covid 'indicates an urgent need to establish a care-taking programme for the seafarers on the personal level and the organisational level in the companies'.

A preventive programme would be as effective for those seafarers showing higher levels of personal resilience to stress factors during the pandemic as those showing signs of stress.

A combination of person-focused and organisation-focused approaches appears to be the most promising way of helping seafarers. 'On the personal level, guidelines of prevention for the crew onboard and the crew exchange, with test of infection before embarkation of new crew is recommended,' the report states.

Seafarers should be given 'extensive communication' during the pandemic, including the possibility to disembark their ships, flights home, and their economic situation.

Seafarers should have unlimited internet access to keep in touch with home and to get tele-medical advice. They should also have a chance of being tested onboard before disembarking their ship.

'In some cases, individual crisis consultations with the company psychologist and occupational doctor may be useful, but for the population at large there is no good evidence that programmes with individual consultations have any effect on the longer perspective.'

While the primary aim of the study was to evaluate the wellbeing of seafarers during the Covid-19 pandemic, it could also form the basis for permanent monitoring of seafarers' health and wellbeing from an international perspective. Such research could serve as the scientific evidence base to assess the effects on seafarers flowing from the implementation of the Maritime Labour Convention. 



# THE 'POINTLESS PAPER EXERCISE' FAILING TO PROTECT LIVES

An explosive new study from World Maritime University has found widespread malpractices in the recording of work and rest hours, with a culture of adjustment – both on and off ship – normalising fatigue among seafarers that could lead to serious casualties, loss of life and environmental damage. **Ben Powell** reports

**T**here are widespread malpractices in the recording of work and rest hours in shipping, caused by insufficient safe manning levels, according to a shocking new report by World Maritime University. The researchers found that over 85% of the non-seafarer participants were aware of deliberate recording malpractices.

The research confirms the outcome of earlier studies, and what many in the industry already knew; that the altering of records is commonplace and there has been a failure by all stakeholders – seafarers, companies, flag and port states – to address the issue.

The implications are stark, with researchers warning 'The inability to enforce existing rules may seriously affect seafarers' health,

▲ Extreme fatigue can lead to seafarers dropping off at work. Image: Getty images

safety and cognitive performance. Consequently, decision making impaired by fatigue may lead to serious accidents and large-scale environmental damage.'

The report, titled **Evaluating the implementation of the current maritime regulatory framework on rest and work hours**, took a detailed look into the implementation of the regulatory and administrative framework. It

made use of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with a wide range of stakeholders, including seafarers and port state control officers, as well as representatives from shipowners' organisations, industry organisations, maritime non-governmental organisations, and casualty investigators.

## Unbridgeable gap

All stakeholders including shipowner representatives were in agreement that the continuing persistence of 'unrealistic' crewing levels was forcing seafarers to work unsustainable hours, and worryingly, the findings indicate that the principles listed in the International Maritime Organization (IMO) resolution for establishing minimum safe manning are not adhered to 'in most instances'. The report argues that it is this unbridgeable gap between workload and the number of personnel that is the key driver of violations and recording malpractices.

The desire for cost savings on the part of shipowners, increased competition among flag states for tonnage and 'regulatory inflation' on seafarers were found to be the causes of this divide, which has been allowed to grow by a lack of effective international regulation. This pressure, which is exacerbated during peak workload conditions, leads to violations of work/rest hour requirements being both commonplace and unavoidable.

The commonplace nature of the violations has led to what is described as a 'culture of adjustment', whereby work hours are either under-reported by seafarers, or work/rest hour records are manipulated later for compliance purposes. The regularity of breaches was summed up by one seafarer, who said: 'After six hours' cargo watch,

I have to get the passage plan ready before the ship sailing. So this is extra time and I cannot record every time. I have to indicate that extra time as rest hours otherwise there will be a violation.'

The report found that the practice of recording hours was seen by many onboard as a time consuming and often pointless paper exercise, which would simply be manipulated to give the impression of compliance in order to avoid creating additional issues or work.

## Structural incentives

The functionality of the software used by many companies was found to incentivise seafarers to adjust their work/rest hours to ensure conformity with regulations, with one of the seafarers saying: 'Software indicates the violations. When we try to put the actual hours for example during bunkering, then it will show RED.' This live warning influenced seafarers to change their answers based upon false entries to eliminate the appearance of violations.

Occasions where records were correctly produced, and non-compliance was clearly indicated were often followed by pressure from shipowners, who demanded to know the reasons for the breaches and even questioned the capability of the crew in managing the vessel. Records would therefore be adjusted in order to avoid pressure or difficult questions, for what were systemic issues.

Some of the participants referred to even stronger incentives within the software to hide violations, with an industry organisation representative stating that: 'Some of the tools they [seafarers] use to report these things won't allow them to actually report the truth. So, if you had a 12-hour shift and you say, "Well actually I worked 13 hours", it comes out with an error message. So, everything is geared towards upholding this lie.'

A special government organisation concurred with this worrying picture, reporting awareness of some software which will not allow the user to save and close the application unless it complies.

Even if the hours are correctly entered by the crew, some respondents reported cases of shore-based management monitoring and independently adjusting records to ensure on-paper compliance. Management onboard and onshore were also frequently found to either directly or indirectly send signals to encourage the misrepresentation of work and rest hours, with one participant stating: 'Company will never say it officially through mail or not even on the phone. They will say, "Please try to finish your paperwork so that we don't have any deficiency or observation." This indirectly means that company wants you to adjust your rest hours record in order to show compliance.'

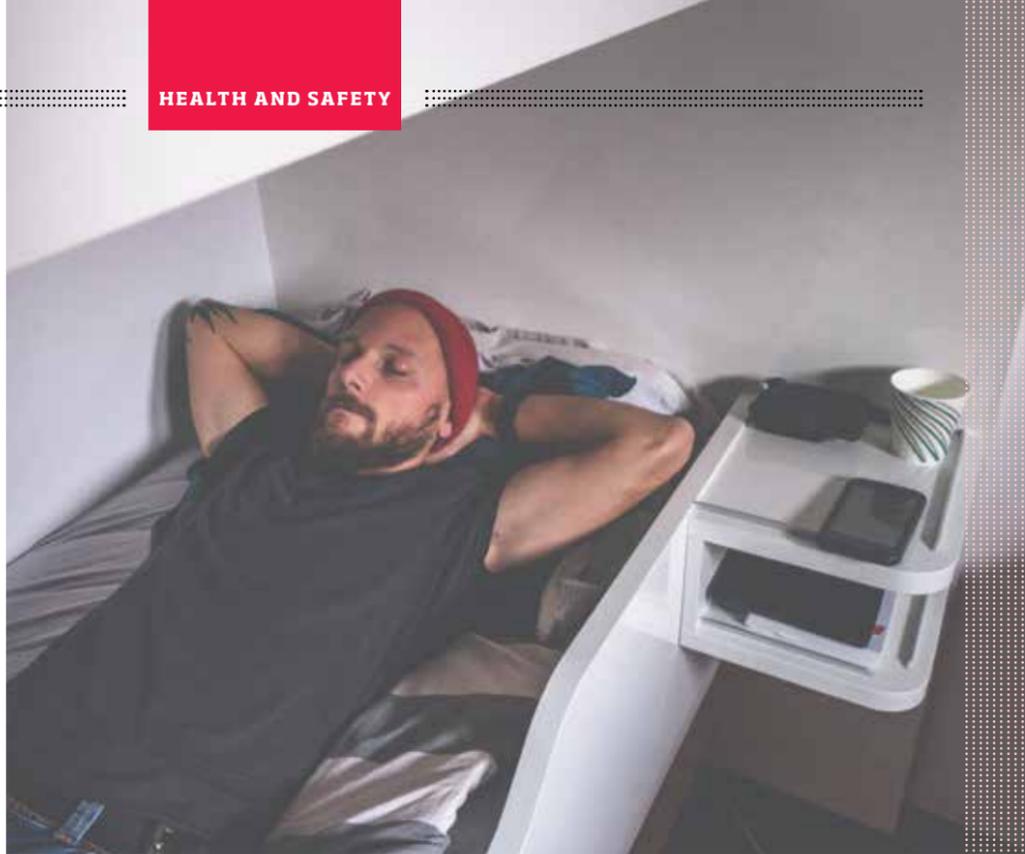
The intractable issue is that the only real solution in almost all →



**'The altering of records is commonplace, and there has been a failure by all stakeholders – seafarers, companies, flag and port states – to address the issue'**



**'The accuracy of records is secondary at best, and at worst, completely pointless. All forms of accurate recordkeeping with respect to rest hours are thereby discredited'**



cases would be to provide more crew, but that is rarely seen as an option by shipping companies and there is a clear disincentive for flag states to act.

'In such a context,' argues the report, 'the accuracy of records are secondary at best, and at worst, completely pointless. All forms of accurate recordkeeping with respect to rest hours are thereby discredited.'

However, the report did find that other forms of record keeping, particularly the official logbook, were viewed very differently and consequently were much less likely to suffer similar issues.

It was not only the manipulation of work and rest records that was found to be impacted by external pressures, but also the ability of port state control officers (PSCO) to verify the accuracy of the records. Guidelines state: 'Where the PSCO having come onboard finds that the documentation is valid and complete, the inspection would come to an end at that point unless there are clear grounds for believing that the working and living conditions on the ship do not conform.'

▲ **Tired seafarers are often under pressure to misreport their rest hours**  
Image: Getty images

Because of time pressures and the consequences of detaining a ship without enough grounds, the priorities in PSCO inspections remain hardware and not issues relating to labour. These priorities, the report argues, are 'in stark contrast to the data confirming that the human element contributes to most casualties'.

### Recommendations

Given the scale of the problem and its causes, the recommendations of the report are wide-ranging and focus on the steps that need to be taken at each step the in the process, but ultimately it is safe manning levels that are at the core of the issue.

The report therefore recommends that: 'Maritime administrations should seek to collaborate on developing a stringent, objective, and research-based model for determining safe manning, allowing full compliance at all times and in all operational conditions.'

Alongside this central recommendation, the report also calls for measures including:

- Flag states and port state control should be trained to recognise the importance of the human element and the detrimental impacts of insufficient rest on ship safety
- Seafarers and shore managers should be trained in understanding the importance of providing and maintaining accurate records
- Regulators and trade unions should encourage seafarers to report violations and adjustments using the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) 2006 complaints procedures
- Tailor-made tools and training for better detection of violations and recording malpractice should be developed
- National PSC organisations and regional memoranda of understanding should initiate concentrated inspection campaigns focusing on work/rest hour regulations. 

# the global seafarer

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