



The human heart of sustainable shipping

Why seafarer wellbeing is the next strategic priority en route to net zero

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Foreword

Putting people at the heart of maritime progress

By Sandra Welch, CEO, Seafarers Hospital Society



Seafarers are at the heart of global trade — working tirelessly, often with little public recognition, to keep supply chains moving. They are not only vital to the smooth operation of international shipping but also central to the success of the industry's most ambitious goals around decarbonisation and digitalisation.

From the ongoing fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic to rising geopolitical tensions and increasingly complex decarbonisation mandates, the pressures on today's global seafarers are many and varied.

Feedback from crew members points to a marked reduction in shore leave, heightened anxiety while transiting through conflict zones, and increasing mental strain tied to the pace and expectations of decarbonisation. The rising criminalisation of seafarers and the broader issues of their dignity and fair treatment continue to make headlines and contribute to the strain on their mental wellbeing.

These realities impact morale, job satisfaction, and ultimately, the long-term retention of skilled maritime professionals.

A growing consensus for change

There is now a strong industry-wide consensus on the need to tackle these challenges. Seafarers are finally being officially recognised as key workers - and with that recognition comes a responsibility for employers to provide safe, supportive working environments that enable them not just to perform, but to thrive.

Encouragingly, many maritime stakeholders are already taking meaningful action. Efforts range from securing safe transit routes and advocating for safe passage to updating the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) 2006. This has strengthened requirements for seafarer repatriation, ensuring visa-free shore leave, as well as enhanced protections against bullying and

harassment. The ongoing review of the Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW) is likely to help to improve practical conditions at sea as well as to build resilience and promote wellbeing across the global maritime workforce by modernising training.

While very welcome, these measures must keep pace with the scale and speed of change. The industry's twin transitions, decarbonisation and digitalisation, require not only technological upgrades but also a renewed focus on people. Human factors, soft skills, and psychological safety are rightly moving higher up the agenda. At the same time, a persistent officer-level skills shortage means that the challenge is twofold: attracting next-generation talent while retaining the experienced professionals who are already navigating today's complexities.

Supporting seafarer health and wellbeing is therefore not just a moral imperative but a business-critical strategy. Careers at sea must be seen as viable, rewarding, and well-supported if the industry is to secure the workforce needed for a greener maritime future.

As the maritime sector evolves, we must all consider what it takes to ensure that seafarers can succeed, not just onboard, but throughout their careers and personal lives.

In 2024, SHS delivered over £412,000 in welfare grants, funded confidential mental health support, and distributed life-saving trauma kits and feminine hygiene products to seafarers in need, demonstrating that meaningful wellbeing support can be simple, scalable, and effective.

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Executive summary

Seafarers at the centre of sustainable shipping

As the maritime industry enters a period of rapid change, the wellbeing of its seafarers has emerged as a defining strategic issue. No longer is it a welfare concern but a core factor influencing safety, retention and progress toward net zero.

Seafarers today face unprecedented demands; they are expected to master new systems, navigate increasing regulatory complexity, and deliver on tighter schedules, often while managing their professional development and coping with the challenges of isolation or mental strain. Meanwhile, the sector continues to grapple with a global shortfall of officers and skilled crews, a challenge exacerbated by an ongoing severe lack of diversity at sea. As highlighted in the *IMO-WISTA Women in Maritime Survey 2024*, diversity and creating an attractive working environment to encourage new talent into the sector remain ongoing critical challenges.

The following SHS report, grounded in extensive work with UK seafarers, highlights their lived experiences from 2024 to 2025 and the systemic pressures that impact them. It outlines how decarbonisation, digitalisation, and geopolitical instability are reshaping not only the industry's direction but also the expectations placed on those working at sea. Seafarers are the driving force behind sustainable shipping.

Seafarers Hospital Society's (SHS) activities over the past year include more than £412,000 in welfare grants, many face-to-face seafarer engagements, and the distribution of life-saving equipment and hygiene products. These have demonstrated that support need not be complex to be impactful; instead, they are scalable examples of a culture of care in action.

This report examines three interconnected pressure points that seafarers face today.



Mental health and wellbeing

Long voyages, isolation, and high job demands are taking a cumulative toll on seafarers' mental health, often without access to timely or appropriate support. Addressing these challenges is essential for safety, resilience, and long-term retention.



Financial burden

Despite the critical nature of their work, many seafarers face unpredictable income, hidden costs, and inadequate shore-based support, which creates financial stress that undermines their wellbeing and job satisfaction.



Recruitment and retention

With a shrinking pipeline of skilled seafarers, especially from underrepresented groups, the industry must urgently modernise working conditions and career pathways to remain competitive and future-ready.

Supporting the health and wellbeing of all maritime workers

SHS' Recent progress

Financial Support

Nearly **£3 million** in small grants has been issued over the last five years through the small grants programme. In 2024, SHS awarded a total of £412,213 in grants, providing £183,989 in direct aid to individuals in need and £228,224 to like-minded organisations advancing seafarer welfare.



Mental Health

Seafarer outreach to Togetherall **tripled** in 2024, indicating a rise in mental health challenges for crew.



Dental Checks

68 dental checks were conducted by DentAid in 2024, and **61** additional dental checks were conducted at events in **18** ports around the UK.



Essential Information

8,875 seafarers and their family members have reached out to the Seafarers Advice & Information Line (SAIL) to receive much-needed support with financial literacy, accessing benefits and/ or housing, information on pensions, and advice on relationships and family issues. In 2024, **1,015** individuals received support through this vital service.



Healthcare Outreach

2,119 individuals accessed sessions with healthy lifestyle advisors (HLAs) over the last five years, accessing information on physical and mental health, nutrition, and more. **244** health checks were conducted by HLAs in 2024, while **155** health checks were conducted at SHS events around the UK.



Saving Lives

200 defibrillator units were donated to UK ports and seafarer centres as part of SHS' ongoing defibrillator project, along with **250** first aid and trauma kits supplied to UK fishing vessels.



Women at Sea

1,000 discreetly packaged feminine hygiene kits were provided at The Port of Tilbury and London International Cruise Terminal as part of SHS' pilot feminine hygiene project.



Introduction

A just transition needs a supported workforce

The maritime sector is navigating a perfect storm of environmental mandates, geopolitical instability, digital transformation, and economic uncertainty. At the centre of this transition are seafarers, a workforce both indispensable and under increasing strain.

Crew wellbeing is often treated as secondary to operational targets, a common oversight that carries significant risk for ship operators. Skilled seafarers are already leaving the sector, training pipelines are uncertain, and safety incidents tied to fatigue and burnout are hitting the headlines.

In such uncertain conditions, it's understandable that shipping stakeholders, from ship operators and regulatory bodies to ship managers and crewing agencies, may adopt a cautious approach due to financial uncertainty. Concerns around profitability, regulatory clarity, and long-term viability can lead decision-makers to delay or avoid significant changes to working conditions onboard. The sector cannot have a just transition without a supported workforce, and while this approach may safeguard operational risk in the short term, it can also have unintentional long-term consequences for the very workforce the sector depends on.

The human impact of operational change

Operational caution, such as limiting shore leave for quicker turnarounds, may seem financially prudent. However, these decisions can adversely affect morale and crew retention, and if combined with fatigue, could also impact safety. Increasingly tight schedules and increased responsibilities onboard, particularly as new reporting requirements and new technologies and/or fuel systems are introduced, can contribute to stress, fatigue, and burnout. All of these compound the challenge of attracting and retaining skilled seafarers and can tarnish shipping's public image as a safe and viable career path.

Seafarers themselves are acutely aware of the pressures facing the industry, and they're also experiencing them firsthand. As shipping moves closer toward decarbonisation, seafarers are expected to learn new skills, adapt to new fuel types, and operate increasingly complex onboard systems. While many are willing and eager to upskill, questions remain about who will shoulder the cost and how accessible this training will be.



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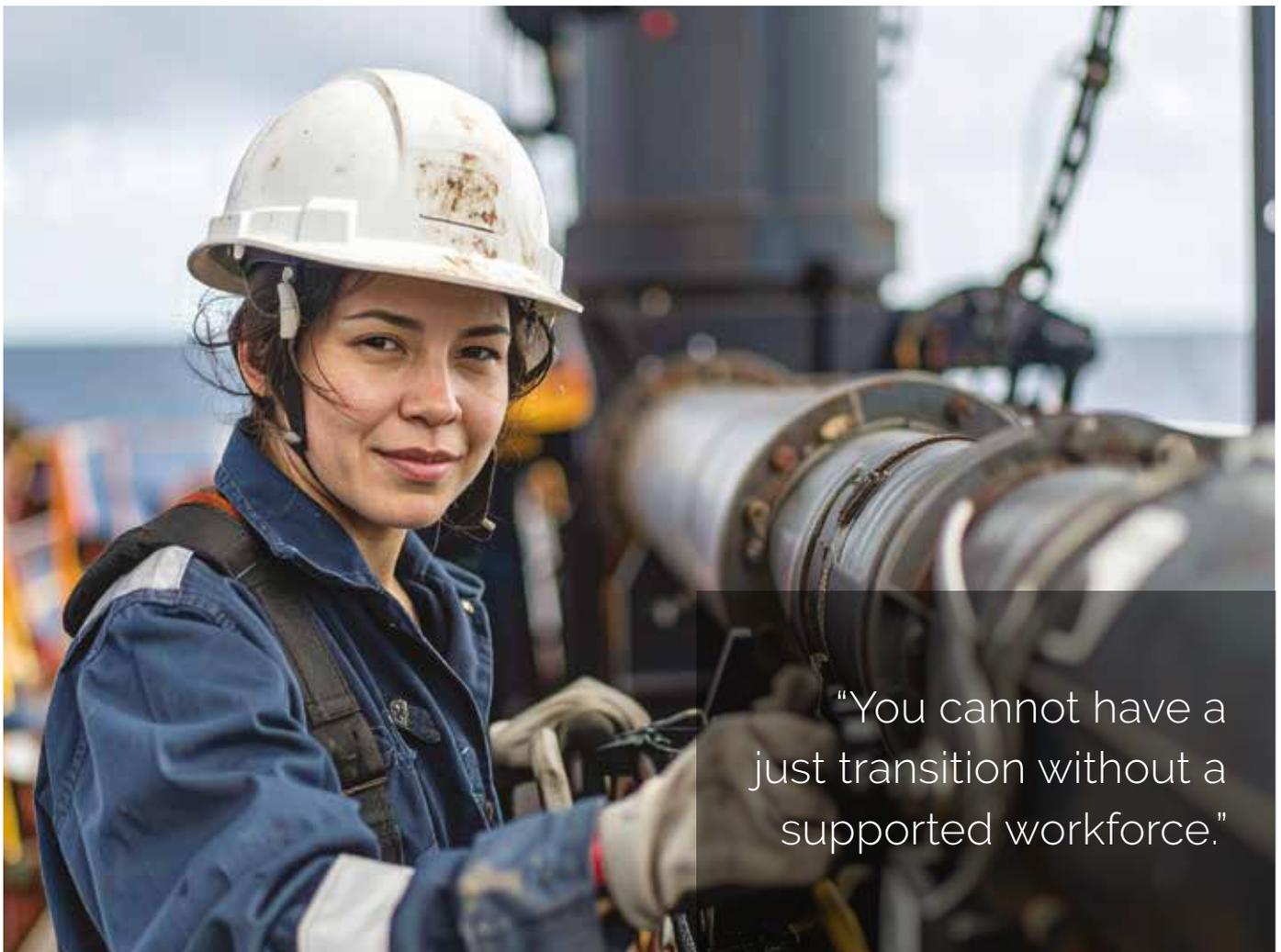
Seafarers under pressure

When faced with rapidly evolving operational expectations, limited clarity on training pathways, and regulatory inconsistencies exist across regions, it is no surprise that seafarers are reporting higher levels of anxiety. Concerns around criminalisation in the event of onboard incidents or being held liable for compliance issues are also on the rise, further exacerbating the issue.

The International Chamber of Shipping's Maritime Barometer Report 2024–2025 revealed a sector under significant external pressure, particularly from geopolitical instability, cyber risks, regulatory burdens, and crew shortages. The ripple effects are felt most acutely by seafarers, many of whom operate at the sharp edge of these global disruptions. The report calls for greater collaboration with governments and regulators, a clear regulatory framework, and targeted investment in crew welfare and training to ensure long-term sustainability.

That question of investment is a critical one. There can be no doubt that businesses are under pressure, from compliance costs to market fluctuations, and that investment in crew health and wellbeing may sometimes seem like a secondary priority. However, the value of retaining experienced crew is far more cost-effective than replacing them with new trainees. The institutional knowledge held by long-serving officers and ratings is invaluable, and once lost, it can be extremely difficult to replace.

SHS supports the maritime workforce through partnerships with ship operators, unions, and clinicians to identify low-cost, high-impact interventions, from health checks and advice services to training advocacy, enabling a just transition built on crew resilience.



“You cannot have a just transition without a supported workforce.”

Mental Health & Wellbeing

Resilience at sea: why mental health matters more than ever

Seafarers operate under intense pressure, navigating demanding schedules, long voyages, and isolation far from home. But today's operational environment is pushing their resilience to the limit. For ship managers and operators striving to stay competitive, compliant, and future-ready, seafarer mental wellbeing is no longer just a welfare concern - it's a core operational issue.

Mental health as a strategic priority

The Seafarers Happiness Index (SHI) for Q4 2024 clearly shows that companies that invest in crew wellbeing experience a tangible boost in morale, which directly supports recruitment, retention, and operational stability. Seafarers specifically cited employers who demonstrated understanding and support for their needs as key reasons for job satisfaction and improved morale. In today's competitive labour market, this translates into real value: reducing costly turnover, preserving institutional knowledge, and mitigating recruitment lag, especially at the officer level, where shortages are acute.

The 2024 amendment to the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC 2006), which mandates onboard internet access, is a regulatory milestone and also presents a business opportunity to strengthen retention and efficiency. Reliable connectivity enables the crew to stay in touch with loved ones, reducing stress and isolation and allows them to discreetly access mental health support, such as the online counselling platform Togetherall, funded by SHS, to provide safe, anonymous support for crew in need.

Operators offering internet access, supportive work environments, and strong onboard interpersonal relationships are likely to see improved morale and crew resilience. This improved morale also has the potential to translate into greater trust and improved operational safety over time. It's a low-cost, high-impact intervention that supports both human and operational resilience.

The value of supportive employers

The 2024 World Maritime University report on work/rest hours, with over 6,000 verified global responses, revealed troubling patterns. Some 88.3% of respondents admitted to exceeding working time limits at least once a month, while only 10.4% of respondents had a full day off weekly. Some 28.1% of respondents reported resting for less than 10 hours each day, in breach of MLC standards, while 64.3% admitted to altering their work/rest records, a common occurrence in life at sea.

These findings highlight a serious potential risk and are not only concerning for crew welfare but also indicate a heightened operational risk. Fatigue impacts decision-making, response rates, situational awareness, and communication, putting the seafarer, as well as the vessel and its cargo, at risk. With 93.4% of respondents agreeing that fatigue is the most common safety-related issue onboard, this indicates significant concerns about the long-term impact on mental health and wellbeing, as well as physical health.

93.4%

**SEAFARERS AGREE:
FATIGUE IS THE TOP THREAT
TO SAFETY AT SEA**

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Fatigue, overwork and safety risks

Seafarers operating in high-risk or conflict-affected areas face elevated psychological strain, impacting not only their mental health but also their family networks. While some companies have rerouted vessels for safety, others continue traditional routes to maintain schedules. Regardless of strategy, the mental toll on the crew is significant and should not be overlooked.

Longer transits and extended contracts, particularly in dangerous or geopolitically tense waters, create conditions ripe for significant stress. Yet industry infrastructure for trauma support remains limited. For operators, this is an emerging duty-of-care issue that demands action. Failure to proactively support the crew in these situations could result in long-term attrition and reputational damage.

In parallel, the growing administrative burden placed on seafarers is compounding the problem. While shipowners and operators have flagged this as a business risk, highlighted in the ICS Maritime Barometer Report, crew members are on the frontlines of these pressures. Contrary to assumptions that

digitalisation reduces workload, seafarers often report increased paperwork, mounting inspection requirements, and fragmented compliance regimes that eat into rest hours and erode morale.

Digitalisation is not just a stressor for seafarers. New opportunities around virtual training options, fatigue monitoring systems, wearable tech, AI-based predictive maintenance that reduces crew load, all present new benefits.

The Seafarer Happiness Index (SHI) 2024 report found that maintaining a healthy work-life balance was increasingly difficult, with administrative overload a major contributing factor. This was echoed by research from the International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN), which found that over half (53.8%) of 400 verified respondents said adapting to new technologies and regulatory regimes had negatively impacted their workload. As operational demands and regulatory expectations continue to rise, so too must the mental health and resilience support available to the workforce. Without this, the industry risks alienating the very people needed to deliver sustainable progress.



"Fatigue is the most common safety-related issue onboard."

World Maritime University, 2024

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The financial-mental health connection

It's clear that the industry is not meeting the financial needs of seafarers and that financial wellbeing directly influences mental health. The evidence is clear in the number and amount of awards granted. For instance, in 2024, the Seafarers' Charity awarded £2.6m through 64 grants to 48 organisations supporting seafarers and their families in need.

Stagnant wages and hidden costs are already impacting seafarer happiness, and the looming expectation to self-fund future upskilling may further heighten anxiety. If not addressed, this could drive experienced personnel toward lower-standard operators or work in less risk-averse conditions, or out of the industry entirely.

Shipowners and managers should treat financial transparency and fair compensation as strategic levers for stability. Proactive communication about training plans, subsidies, or phased support can help seafarers plan, stay motivated, and commit to a long-term maritime career.

The Seafarers Hospital Society has worked closely with operators, crew, unions, and industry leaders to identify practical, business-aligned interventions that improve crew health and mental wellbeing. Many of these solutions, such as the availability of anonymous health counselling, data

gathering, and benchmarking for ship managers to track seafarer health, are not only achievable but also cost-effective.

The challenges facing the sector are not short-term. As the industry moves toward 2050 and Net Zero, the mental resilience of seafarers will define the strength of supply chains and the ability to achieve decarbonisation and digitalisation goals.

- SHS funds Togetherall, a 24/7 anonymous online mental health support platform, giving seafarers safe access to counselling. In 2024, seafarer outreach tripled, underscoring the growing need, and impact, of trusted mental health support.
- SHS provides benchmarking tools for ship managers to track crew wellbeing and fatigue-related risk, helping improve working conditions and safety outcomes in line with the 2024 Maritime Labour Convention updates.
- SHS developed a video series of 'Preventative exercises', which are freely available to seafarers of all nationalities working in UK waters, to promote physical wellbeing and injury prevention onboard.

Togetherall - Seafarers accessing service



Financial Considerations

The hidden costs of progress for seafarers

The complex interplay of decarbonisation efforts, along with safety issues and geopolitical volatility, is having major financial implications for seafarers. As the industry moves towards greener fuels and energy-efficient technologies, seafarers require additional training and certification. They must also update their STCW certifications, which require refresher training.

The increased number of safety incidents onboard has also necessitated continuous investment in training. However, while some employers offer support, many seafarers bear the financial burden of upskilling alone. As Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), Arsenio Dominguez said in an interview with the ICS, "...we should not expect seafarers to pay for it [training]. The more training we offer, the better the deliverables are, the more the quality of service improves."

Investing in safety should not be considered optional, but rather embraced as a long-term risk management strategy.

Balancing safety with costs

For ship owners, retrofitting vessels and building new ones, while ensuring compliance with regulations, demands significant capital investment. To offset costs, some may consider significantly reducing crew welfare programmes or training. However, a well-trained, well-supported workforce is essential for safe and efficient operations and employers must not fail in their duty of care. Strategic workforce planning and retraining are essential to retain and attract skilled professionals.

Another aspect is reducing the crew's workload by increasing staffing levels, ensuring that the minimum manning hours are not considered as the maximum and appropriate levels are maintained, together with fair employment conditions in contracts. As revealed over the past couple of years in the

Danica Crew Managers survey, post-COVID seafarers are seeing an increase in workload due to decarbonisation requirements and other regulatory obligations and a decrease in salary due to greater crew availability and accessibility, which was restricted during COVID.

"Many seafarers bear the financial burden of upskilling alone"

High-stress environments

Shipping companies are increasingly grappling with heightened safety risks, spiralling insurance premiums, and operational pressures that ripple through their workforce. Vessels operating in high-risk areas often require specialised insurance, adding to the financial burden on employers. But who bears the cost of this risk? If seafarers are expected to meet ever-stricter safety and performance standards, then shipping companies must also ensure they are properly supported physically, mentally, and financially.

Compounding these pressures are volatile geopolitical and economic conditions. Shifting trade routes, extended periods at sea, unpredictable freight rates and contract uncertainties are all contributing to an unstable financial environment for seafarers. These pressures are more than just operational; they are deeply personal. Wage delays, reduced working hours, contract gaps, and job insecurity directly impact seafarers' livelihoods and their ability to provide for their families.

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The human cost of instability

The financial instability of a seafaring career, particularly in times of global disruption, can place significant stress on individuals and households. The Seafarers Hospital Society has seen firsthand how such pressures affect the lives of maritime workers. Through its small grant programme, SHS has distributed around £3 million over the past five years to help seafarers and their families cover essential short-term living costs. This support includes help with utility bills, clothing, emergency accommodation, respite care, and recovery from illness or injury. The spikes in grant giving: £632,054 in 2019 and £614,544 in 2023 reflect the growing needs in years marked by crisis and economic instability.

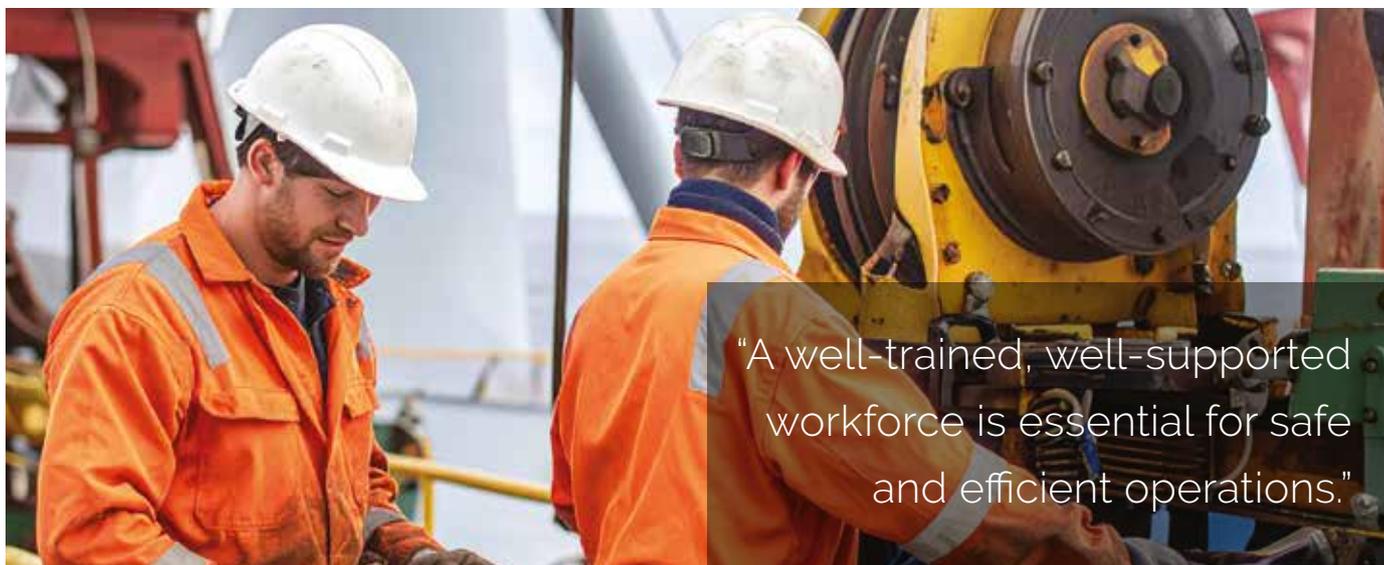
Other charities across the sector, such as The Seafarers' Charity, Sailors' Society, and Mission to Seafarers, are also stepping in to provide hardship grants, pastoral care, and emergency welfare support. Meanwhile, the Seafarers Advice & Information Line (SAIL), backed by SHS and others, delivers free, confidential advice on debt, housing and benefits to around 1,775 seafarers each year.

These efforts, while critical, are reactive. To build long-term resilience, systemic change is required. SHS' maritime-specific Key Performance Indicator (KPIs) toolkit offers a proactive approach. It helps shipping companies integrate health and wellbeing metrics into management systems, monitor regulatory compliance and benchmark progress - ultimately improving the quality of life for crew members at sea.

Workplace injuries also remain a major risk, with long-term consequences for a seafarer's health and career. Preventative care is essential, and the industry must do more to ensure incidents of injury are reduced to an absolute minimum.

Addressing these complex challenges demands coordinated action. Governments, industry, unions, shipping companies, and charities must continue working together, not only to meet the urgent needs of today's seafarers but to secure a more stable, supportive future for those who dedicate their lives to life at sea.

- Through its Small Grants Programme, SHS has issued nearly £3 million since 2019 to help seafarers and their families with urgent needs, from emergency accommodation and utility bills to recovery from illness or injury.
- The Seafarers Advice & Information Line (SAIL) supported 1,775 individuals in 2024, providing expert guidance on debt, housing, benefits, and financial literacy, a critical support line for many.
- SHS developed a series of free 'Preventative Exercises' videos with a physiotherapist to promote seafarer physical health and reduce injury risk, helping maritime workers stay healthy and fit for duty. The exercises are designed with the needs of seafarers in mind, and can be done onboard or at home

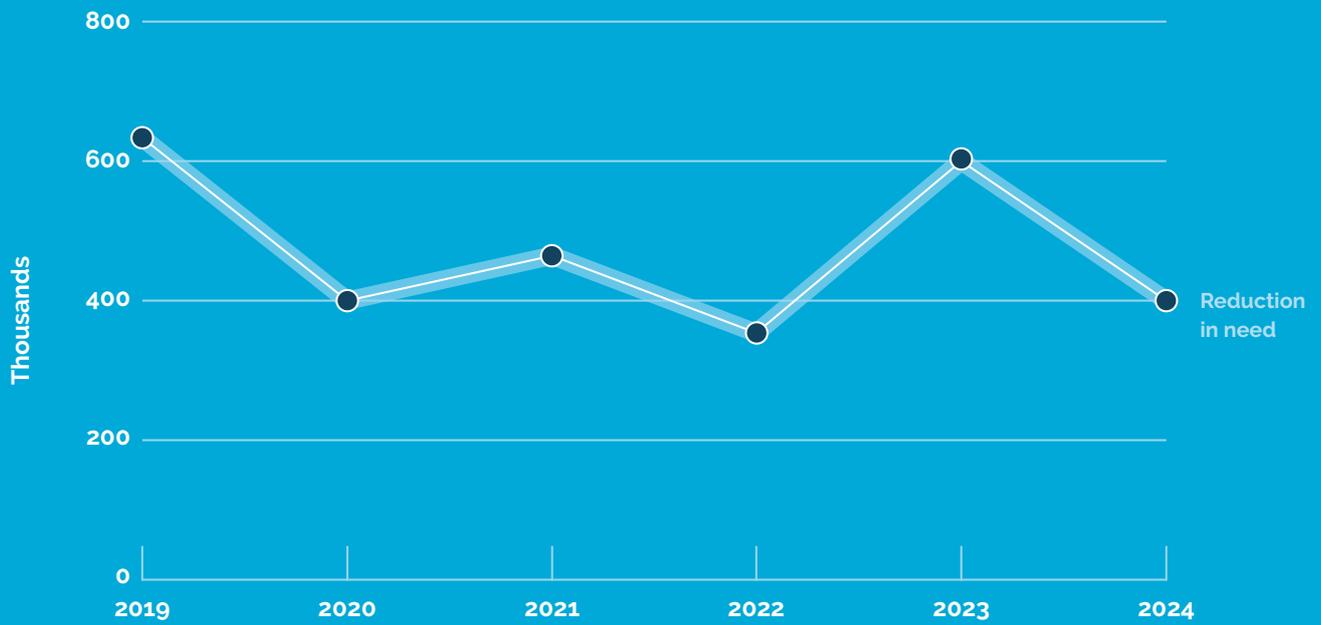


"A well-trained, well-supported workforce is essential for safe and efficient operations."

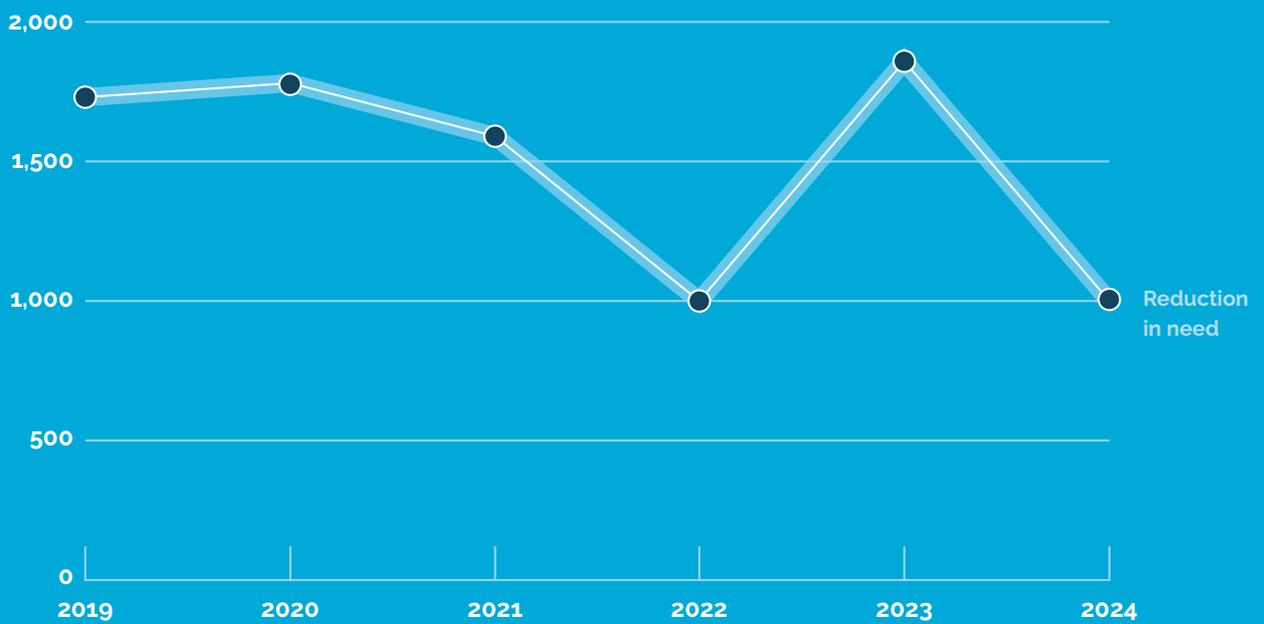
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Financial support grants



SAIL - Seafarers helped



Recruitment and retention

Securing the crews of the future through skills, diversity and support



The maritime industry faces the critical challenge of attracting, training, and retaining a steady stream of qualified seafarers. Geopolitical tensions, decarbonisation, expansion of supply chains, and the need for gender parity demand a proactive and holistic approach to maintain and grow a strong maritime workforce.

The IMO-WISTA Women in Maritime Survey 2024 highlighted that progress on gender equality is struggling in places. It found that while the number of women working in maritime globally has grown by 14% since 2021, their overall share of the workforce has dropped to just under 19%, down from 26%. The situation is even more stark at sea, where women make up just 1% of the total seafarer population.

The impact of geopolitics

Geopolitical conflict and uncertainty create unpredictable trading routes, impacting crew changes, contract security and seafarer safety. The maritime community must work collaboratively to ensure their safety and wellbeing by providing clear communication and robust support systems.

Many medical professionals are unfamiliar with the unique health requirements and risks associated with working at sea, and there is often a communication gap between seafarers and their families and UK healthcare professionals.

The urgent drive for decarbonisation presents both a challenge and an opportunity for shipping companies. Transitioning to greener technologies and new fuels requires significant investment in new vessels and training programmes to equip seafarers with the skills and knowledge to operate these advanced systems. This also presents an opportunity to attract a new generation of tech-savvy individuals to the maritime sector and a safe, inclusive, and supportive workplace is the best recruitment tool.

As seen in the recent review and revisions to the STCW Convention, there is a clear focus on the training needed to meet the demands of new fuels and technologies and the development and finalisation of training provisions on the prevention of bullying and harassment in the maritime sector.

At the Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) 83, held in April 2025, major decisions included approving draft mid-term greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction measures (fuel intensity rules for ships of more than 5,000 GT), updating the Ship Energy Efficiency Management Plan (SEEMP) guidelines, enhancing carbon-intensity reduction 'Z-factor' targets for 2027–2030, and formalising the IMO's Net-Zero Framework with mandatory emissions limits and pricing. New environmental obligations now extend to fuel reporting, onboard carbon capture development, washwater discharge, ballast water controls, and in-water hull cleaning standards.

These enhanced regulations significantly reshape crew requirements and recruitment strategies. Seafarers must be proficient in advanced environmental management systems, operating fuel monitoring and reporting protocols, implementing the updated SEEMP, and maintaining compliance with biofouling and ballast water management controls. Recruitment will favour candidates with certification and training in these areas. Shore-based and onboard training programmes will need to be expanded to cover new IMO protocols, and training providers and training documentation must align with MEPC resolutions.

“A safe, inclusive, and supportive workplace is the best recruitment tool.”

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Familiarity with Data Collection Systems (DCS) reporting rules and carbon intensity monitoring may become standard requirements for certification or qualification in many flag states. Candidates lacking these competencies could face reduced job opportunities, especially on bigger, regulated vessels. Shipowners and crewing agencies may prioritise candidates already competent in sustainability compliance, necessitating a shift in recruitment ads, selection criteria, and skills assessments.

By integrating these environmental competencies into recruitment strategies, maritime employers ensure crews are equipped to manage new operational responsibilities, sustain compliance across inspection regimes, and enhance competitiveness in a decarbonising regulatory landscape.

While the expansion of global supply chains reflects economic growth, this also adds pressure on seafarers. Longer voyages, faster turnaround times, and complex logistical demands can contribute to fatigue and stress. Prioritising seafarer wellbeing through improved working conditions, ensuring adequate manning levels, fair wages and robust rest regimes is crucial for both retention and attracting new talent.

The realities of life at sea

Addressing the gender imbalance in maritime is not just a matter of fairness; it is a business imperative. Creating a truly inclusive environment where women feel welcomed, respected, and empowered is essential to attract this important pool of talent. This requires a concerted effort to tackle unconscious bias and provide mentorship and career development opportunities.

While maritime stakeholders often discuss challenges women face, such as harassment (including sexual harassment), bullying, and discrimination, the more subtle hurdles of a lack of access to menstrual hygiene products and the significant impact on a female seafarer's ability to perform her duties tend to go unacknowledged.

- To improve health outcomes and communication, SHS created a **Seafarer Health Consultation Guide** to help bridge the gap between UK clinicians and maritime professionals, ensuring seafarers receive care that meets their unique needs.
- SHS partnered with the TK Foundation to launch a pilot feminine hygiene initiative, discreetly distributing approximately 1,000 kits to women seafarers, a practical, dignity-first solution that supports inclusion and performance at sea.
- SHS' KPI Toolkit helps operators track crew wellbeing, integrate welfare into management systems, and implement a measurable culture of care, a strategic tool for improving retention and reputation.

ONLY
1%

OF THE GLOBAL SEAFARER
WORKFORCE IS FEMALE

IMO-WISTA SURVEY 2024



Conclusion

A culture of care: the human foundation of sustainable shipping

As the maritime industry accelerates towards its decarbonisation and digitalisation goals, the need for a resilient, well-supported workforce has never been clearer. Seafarers are navigating increasingly complex operational demands, including new fuel systems, digital technologies, and global instability, all while facing ongoing pressures on their mental, financial and physical wellbeing.

The evidence presented in this report is clear and compelling. Investing in seafarer health, safety, and wellbeing is not just a moral duty, but a strategic necessity. From mental health services to fair financial support, effective recruitment to inclusive retention strategies, every aspect of crew welfare underpins the industry's long-term sustainability and ability to meet IMO targets for 2030 and 2050.

Investing in the future workforce

The financial burdens borne by seafarers, from training costs to wage insecurity, are unsustainable. These should not fall on individuals but be addressed through systemic investment and coordinated action. Similarly, mental health challenges are increasing, fuelled by intense workloads, fatigue and isolation. Initiatives such as SHS' work with Togetherall and the Seafarers Advice & Information Line (SAIL) have provided crucial support, but further industry-wide action is needed to reduce stigma, increase access, and protect psychological safety at sea.

The industry must also act decisively on recruitment and retention. This includes creating career pathways that attract and retain skilled professionals, especially women and other underrepresented groups, and ensuring seafarers are trained and equipped for the evolving demands of sustainable shipping. Diversity must be more than a target; it must be embedded into every part of maritime life, from policy to practice.

Progress is happening

SHS alone delivered more than £412,000 in grants in 2024, distributed approximately 1,000 feminine hygiene kits, and supported more than 8,800 seafarers and their families through SAIL. These achievements demonstrate what is possible when commitment meets action.

But isolated efforts are not enough. Real change requires shared responsibility. SHS now calls on shipowners, operators, regulators, training providers and charities to deepen collaboration and champion a culture of care, where seafarers' health, dignity and wellbeing are treated as integral to operational success.

The future of sustainable shipping depends on people. To reach net zero, we must put the human element at the centre of maritime progress, ensuring that every seafarer has the support to not only do their job but to thrive.



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Seafarers Hospital Society

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Seafarers Hospital Society registered charity number 231724