

Seafarers Happiness Index

Quarter 4 2025



The
Seafarers
Happiness
Index



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Seafarers Happiness Index Quarter 4

For over a decade, the Seafarers Happiness Index (SHI) has served as the barometer of crew wellbeing within for the shipping industry. Through a consistent methodology and comprehensive surveying across the global fleet, the Index provides real life insights into the experiences of those living and working at sea.

2025 has proven to be a period of volatility in crew satisfaction. Following an encouraging upward trajectory during the first half of the year, the industry experienced a significant course correction. The Q3 data delivered a sobering reality check, but the year concluded with modest recovery. The Q4 2025 data showed an improvement to 7.26/10.

This report presents analysis of responses from seafarers participating in the Q4 Seafarers Happiness Index survey and a review of the year just gone. The findings reveal the balance and trade-offs between professional fulfilment and personal sacrifice. Stressing the contradiction of technological advancement amidst persistent human isolation, and the constant negotiation between economic necessity and quality of experience.

Seafarers face mounting pressures from multiple dimensions: operational demands, commercial realities, and the increasingly visible impacts of geopolitical instability on their working lives. This report seeks to understand not merely how seafarers rate their happiness, but why they feel as they do, and what these insights mean for the future of the maritime industry.

What Seafarers Are Telling Us

Seafarers Happiness Index: A Paradox of Progress and Pressure

While the Q4 2025 SHI feedback scores show an encouraging modest uptick, the written responses of seafarers tell a story of mounting pressures, eroding conditions, and deepening concerns.

This divergence suggests that seafarers retain remarkable resilience and the capacity to find satisfaction even as problems intensify. The numerical improvement may reflect marginal gains in areas like connectivity, but the qualitative responses reveal critical stress points.

Geopolitical Fears

Seafarers voiced profound anxiety about sanctions and murky legal landscapes. "We're just doing our jobs, but we don't know who's really behind the cargo," one officer explained. "You hear stories about ships being detained, crews being questioned, and suddenly your career is destroyed because someone up the chain was doing something illegal."

This fear of unwitting complicity in crimes they cannot see, or control, has become a concern and a heavy burden for seafarers.

Connectivity Contradiction

While new technology and billing models represent connectivity progress, they bring new challenges too. Seafarers spoke of the issue of partial contact, seeing family briefly over videocalls, and the sense of being present digitally but absent physically.

More contact has also made it more likely that families back home are emboldened to share domestic problems, which are proving tricky for seafarers, "I know all about the washing machine at home breaking. I liked it when I did not."

There is perhaps a need to better manage interactions, and for those at home to develop more empathy about what could be seen as oversharing or demanding of seafarers.

The same could also be said of management ashore. Seafarers increasingly feel as if they are seen as extensions of the office workforce, with one Chief Engineer stating: "Daily work on the ship ends and then daily work for the office begins. So many emails and meetings now as well as our ship!"

Shore Leave: A Vanishing Privilege

Lack of shore leave is not a new issue; it was once a practical solution that now appears to be ending. Shore leave and a chance to leave the ship was for centuries a staple and positive experience for seafarers. That is increasingly disappearing.

Respondents stress a range of troubling findings, but uppermost are concerns around operational and cultural barriers to shore leave. Officers prioritise work over welfare: "They tell you're not allowed to go ashore because we need to clean the cargo hold." There's a worrying disconnect, if you are on the ship, you are assumed to be available for work, perhaps enabling reduced manning levels.

Container ship crews face a particular irony, they visit many ports frequently and regularly yet see less of the world as industry optimises cargo efficiency over crew welfare.

The design and layouts of the most modern and cutting-edge container terminals have also come into criticism as not having considered the human dimension in their planning, operations or management.

Wages and Recognition

Seafarers are acutely aware of wage disparities between nationalities, companies, and sea versus shore work. This differential corrodes morale, it is one thing to accept lower wages as inevitable, another to know others doing identical work receive more.

There have been deeper concerns raised too, a feeling that when wages stagnate while company profits grow, the implicit message is that seafarers are not valued.

The Workload Crisis

Perhaps most concerning are findings about working hours, which are the ticking timebomb for safety. Complaints are specific: "We are overloaded with tasks. Limited number of crew on board with ever growing paper works." Rest hour regulations are not being properly observed.

Cadets report particularly troubling exploitation: contracts specify 40 hours weekly, but reality is 84+ hours. "No holiday on Saturday and Sunday, no rest in the afternoon, sometime no tea break. I am fed up here but cannot complain." This is not preparation, development or training, it is exploitation of cheap labour.

When it comes to workload, there are real concerns that ships have fallen into an intensification trap: vessels operate with smaller crews, faster turnarounds, increased regulations, and higher expectations, all while wages stagnate and conditions deteriorate. This is not sustainable.

Other Pressures

Training has become paperwork rather than practice, with requirements encroaching on leave time.

Food quality suffers from menu monotony and reliance on frozen provisions over fresh ingredients.

While concerns persist about fairness and transparency in promotions and policy enforcement, eroding trust in management systems continues to erode.

Responses suggest a generational shift too. Older seafarers may accept hardship as inevitable, even character building, but younger ones increasingly question why conditions cannot be better. They see shore-based workers enjoying better work-life balance, they compare wages across companies, they expect connectivity as a basic right rather than privilege.

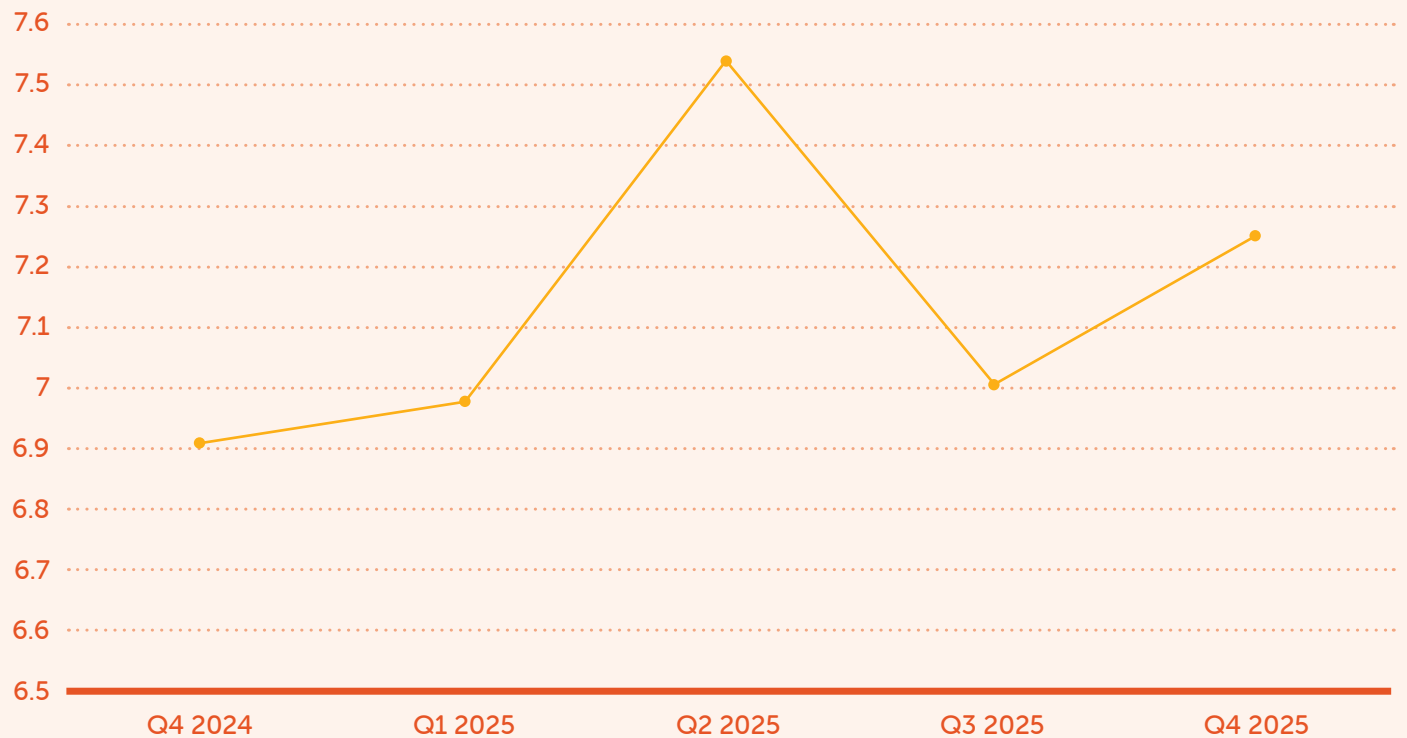
Understanding the Contradictions

The modest uptick in happiness scores, set against these stark realities, underscores seafarer resilience - their capacity to find satisfaction in professional pride, crew camaraderie, and small improvements like better connectivity.

Yet, this resilience should not be exploited. The fact that seafarers can endure poor conditions does not mean they should have to. The qualitative responses reveal that traditional compensations for seafaring, good wages, adventure, professional pride, are being eroded. What remains is sacrifice without adequate compensation, a bargain that increasingly feels unfair and threatens talent attraction and retention.

Looking Back Over 2025

A Year of Data



Key Insights from 2025: A Year of Unstable Happiness and Emerging Concerns

Throughout 2025, the Seafarers Happiness Index tracked a range of issues affecting those at sea. In a year characterised by unstable, unclear, and inconclusive happiness results, certain themes emerged.

Some concerns are perennial challenges that plague every report; others reached critical mass only when sufficient evidence accumulated to demand industry attention.

Port Treatment: The Shore-Side Scandal

One of the year's most damning revelations concerned the treatment seafarers receive in ports worldwide. Far from offering a haven and respite, ports have become sites of frustration and mistreatment.

Crews reported unwelcoming, even hostile environments, with access to shore leave denied, poor treatment from gate staff, and essential support systems failing when needed most.

The "port bus" problem exemplified the systemic neglect: transport that either fails to materialise or operates on schedules "more hopeful than reliable," leaving seafarers stranded and their precious shore leave wasted.

Adding insult to injury, ports often force crews to enter or exit through remote gates far from civilisation, sending a clear message about their perceived value.

Work/Rest Hours: The Regulatory Reckoning

A World Maritime University report exposed widespread non-compliance with hours of work regulations. The statistics were damning: seafarers reported working on average 74.9 hours per week. Alarming, 78.3% reported not having one full day off during their entire contract period, and 88.3% admitted to exceeding work/rest limits at least once monthly.

Only 31.6% of seafarers admitted to never adjusting their work/rest records, meaning two-thirds falsify documentation to appear compliant. This mirrors and sets the scene to the responses received in the SHI 2025 data.

Riding Squads: The Certification Bypass

Growing tensions emerged over the increasing use of “riding squads”, supposedly temporary contractors who arrive with open mandates and stay for extended periods, effectively substituting for properly certified crew.

According to ITF policy, legitimate riding squads should be limited to one month in any 12-month period. When teams stay for multiple voyages, there are suspicions that they are being used to bypass certification requirements, collective bargaining agreements, and Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) protections.

Seafarers reported: “These people just arrive, they work hard - sure, but where are our reliefs?” The practice threatens not only immediate safety but the future maritime workforce by eliminating entry-level positions and career advancement opportunities.

Navigation Skills: The Competence Crisis

In 2025 reports, senior officers increasingly expressed unease about junior colleagues’ fundamental navigational skills, particularly as GNSS jamming and spoofing threats intensify.

The concern centres on a generation of watchkeepers so dependent on technology they experience “complete loss of confidence” when systems fail or deceive. The phrase that captured the crisis: a reluctance to “even look out of the window.”

Officers report juniors who “stare at screens, decisions paralysed if they cannot compute what they are being fed.” This technical dependency creates a cascade of problems extending beyond navigation, when confidence in competence erodes, the entire social architecture of shipboard operations begins to fracture.

The Design Disconnect

A recurring theme emerged about technology and ship design: systems conceived without adequate seafarer consultation create disconnects in ability and understanding.

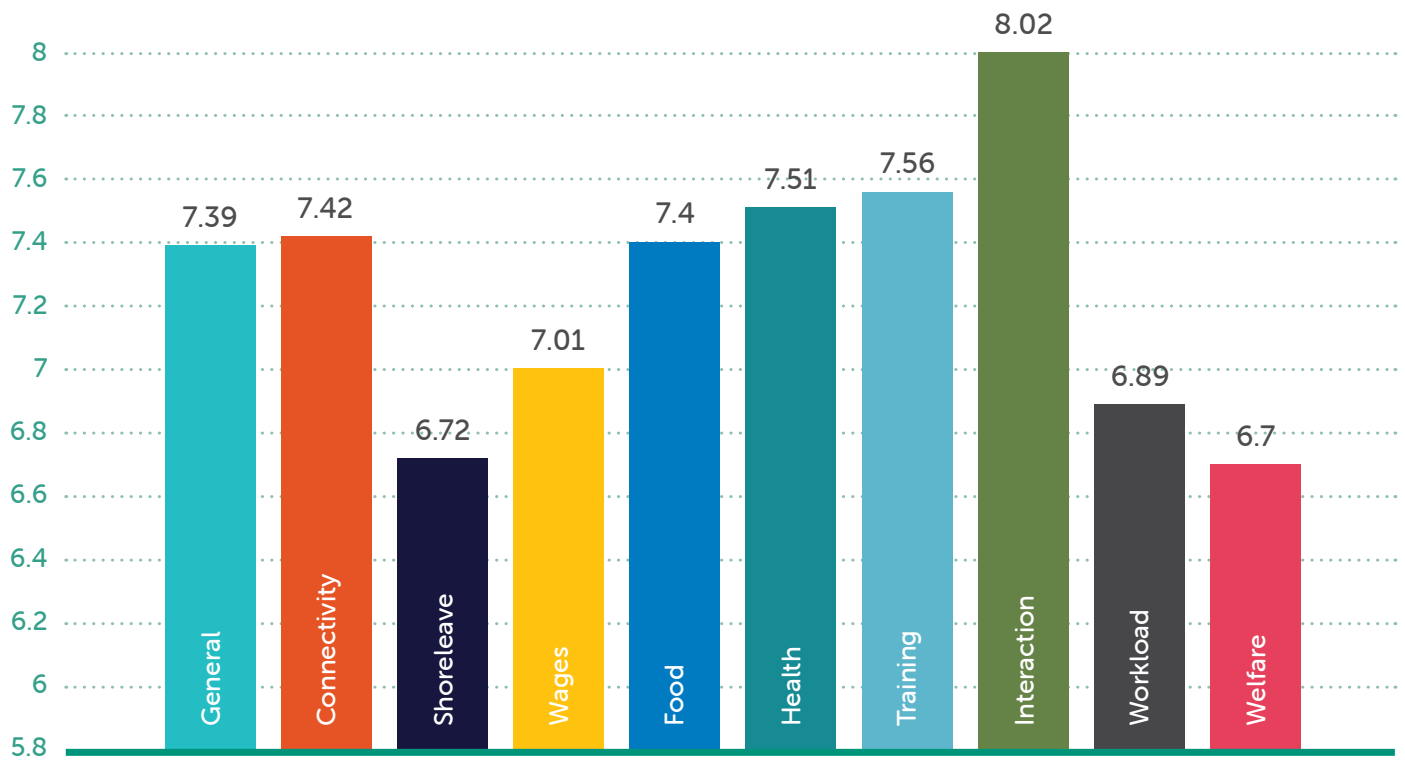
From performance to living conditions, ships are designed and built without sufficient user input, an approach that seems “utterly ridiculous.” From ergonomics to functionality, the industry can and must do better, and that requires experiential insights from those who actually sail.

A Year of Uncomfortable Truths

These findings from 2025 saw inflection points across multiple dimensions, safety, competence, welfare, and workforce sustainability. The unstable happiness scores reflect turmoil, as seafarers grapple with systemic failures that threaten wellbeing and their profession’s future.

With an aging workforce and recruitment difficulties, the industry must find ways to attract new generations while honouring traditions. The call in 2025 was clear: we must build pride back into the profession, create means for young people to see seafaring as a profession worthy of respect, reverence and admiration.

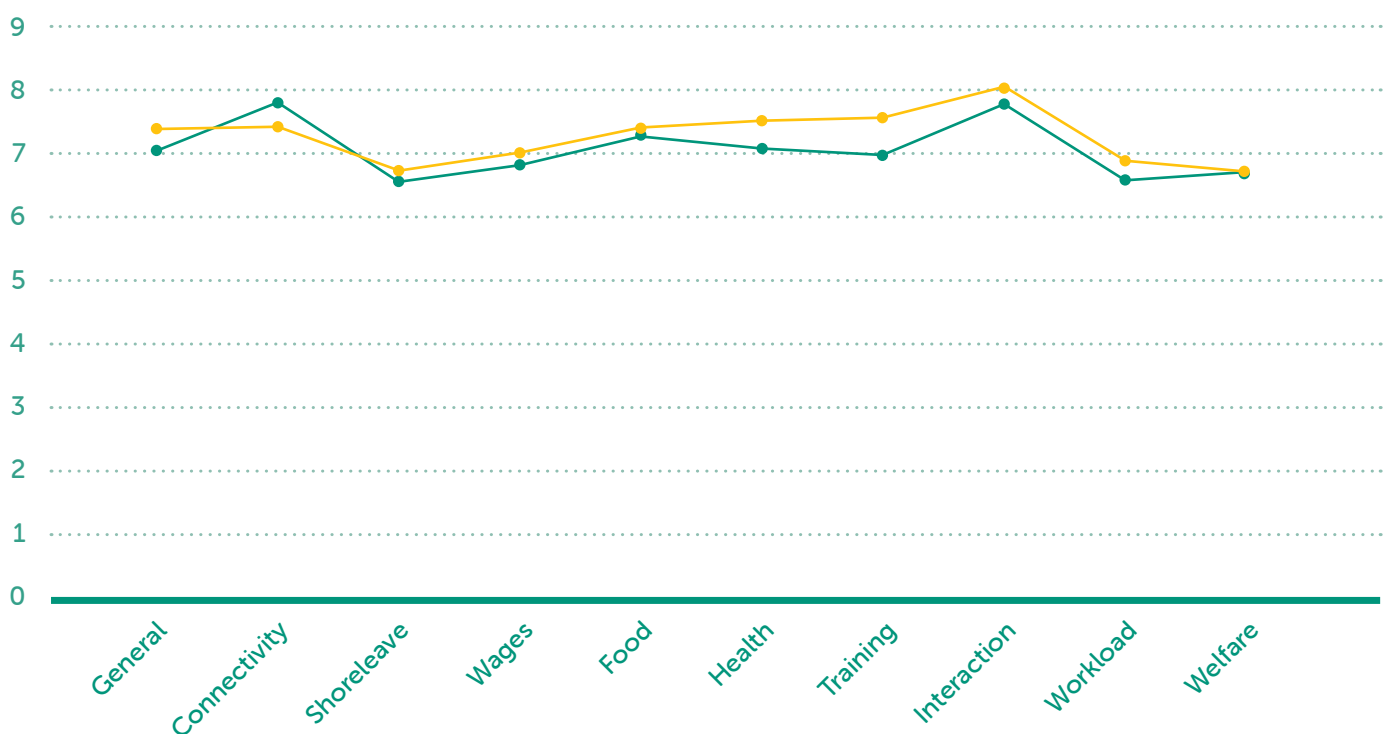
Q4 2025 Data



Happiness Data

Q3 2024 v Q2 2024

Q3 2025 Q4 2025



General Happiness

7.39 ↑ from 7.04

When seafarers speak of happiness, many express genuine satisfaction with their work, colleagues, and professional identity, yet simultaneously voice concerns about the conditions under which that work takes place.

This complexity reflects a capacity to hold multiple truths at once. One seafarer captures this eloquently: "I love being at sea" while also noting "sometimes I have felt very seasick." Loving it but dealing with it is the message.

Another writes: "I'm happy because I'm earning money to support my family" while acknowledging the personal cost and sacrifice: "Being away from family and having a restriction on how much I can call them because of Wi-Fi limits." These reflect the seafarer's lot, a life that simultaneously fulfils and depletes.

Positive responses emphasise professional pride, financial security, and the unique privileges of maritime life. Seafarers speak of "clean air, peace and positive vibe," of working "together with different types of people and feeling like family." One captain from writes with pride: "I did not find this job, the job found me... which makes me proud and happy."

Yet negative responses reveal the flip side: "Bad leadership from top management. No crew welfare. No shore leave for months. Isolated environment. Long tenure. Weather exposure and low quality of rest."

Seafarers also voiced fears about being caught in geopolitical storms. The shadow of sanctions has cast anxiety over crews who find themselves navigating a murky legal landscape they can barely see. "We're just doing our jobs, but we don't know who's really behind the cargo," one officer explained. "You hear stories about ships being detained, crews being questioned, and suddenly your career is destroyed because someone up the chain was doing something illegal."

Another added: "I worry every time we approach a port, will we be arrested? We're at sea for months, cut off from information, and meanwhile the ownership or charterers might have changed three times without us even knowing."



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**I did not find this job, the job found me...
which makes me proud and happy."**

Connectivity

7.42 ↓ from 7.81

Connectivity: The Revolution That Wasn't Quite

Despite a drop this quarter, the advent of enhanced shipboard internet and the connectivity it offers, represents perhaps the most significant change in seafarer welfare in decades. Responses were enthusiastic and appreciative: "Connectivity has improved over the years which enables us to talk and connect with our families more often."

This has fundamentally altered the experience of being at sea. Where previous generations endured or expected communication challenges, today's seafarers increasingly can talk to home daily and witness personal milestones via video call. One captures the significance: "I can contact anytime my family because of the free Wi-Fi on board."

Yet this revolution remains incomplete, perhaps explaining the drop in sentiment. Connectivity exists but is still often insufficient in the eyes of seafarers. "Limited internet on board. No time for family calls," writes one seafarer. Another notes: "The 6gb that company gives us is not sufficient for 1 month." Economic constraints add complexity, companies provide enough connectivity to claim they support welfare, but not enough to genuinely meet emotional needs.

There seems a particular cruelty in enhanced, yet still partial, connectivity. To see and hear one's family but only briefly, to be present digitally but absent physically, may be harder than the old isolation. "I now don't like to be without my family even 1 min," one seafarer writes.

The revolution has also created new pressures. Families now share every domestic problem: "It is good to speak to home, but now I hear so many problems. I know all about the washing machine at home breaking. I liked it when I did not."

While management ashore increasingly treats seafarers as office staff extensions. One Chief Engineer stated: "Work on the ship ends and then work for the office begins. So many emails and meetings now. No time for me or the ship!"

Even when connectivity is adequate, time becomes a limiting factor. "Too busy with operations," several note. True connectivity requires not just technology but protected time for personal life, time not consumed by relentless operational demands.



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I now don't like to be without my family even for one minute."

Shore Leave

6.72 ↑ from 6.56

Shore Leave: The Vanishing Privilege

Unfortunately, despite a rise in sentiment, shore leave represents a privilege seemingly in retreat. Responses paint a disturbing picture of seafarers increasingly confined to vessels, unable to set foot on land despite being in port. "No or very limited shore-leave opportunities," writes one. Another notes: "No shore leave for months." A third: "I went 2 times" in eight months at sea.

The reasons are multiple and systemic. Port regulations restrict access: "In China, it's difficult due to short time and strict regulations." Terminal locations are impractical: "Terminals are far away from cities." Economic barriers exist: "Boat and taxi charges for shore leave is too expensive". There was even a mocking irony as seafarers find themselves increasingly charged, "I think port makes more from taxis than ships".

Most troubling are operational and cultural barriers. Multiple seafarers report officers prioritising work over welfare: "Officer only thinking about job and work." Another writes: "They tell you're not allowed to go ashore because we need to clean the cargo hold."

There's a worrying disconnect between downtime and shore leave. The assumption seems to be that if you're on the ship, you are available for work, which has perhaps enabled companies to reduce manning levels. There are calls to see port time differently, embracing opportunities for downtime whether on board or ashore.

Shore leave is not luxury but a necessity. Seafarers describe it as essential: "to refresh my mind and eyes," "to unwind and relax." Beyond rest, it provides connection to the wider world and small pleasures: "Enjoy outside food and shopping," "drinking coffee in Orchard Road in Singapore."

These represent something profound: the ability to exercise agency, to be a person rather than merely a crew member.

Container ship crews voiced their challenges. "Due to container vessel schedules, our shore leave availability is severely limited." Container ships operate on tight schedules with rapid turnarounds. A cruel irony emerges they visit many ports, yet crews feel they see less of the world.

The industry appears to have optimised for cargo efficiency at the expense of crew welfare. Seafarers were critical of some modern terminals, "The new berths are very hard to access from ashore, did they not think of seafarers?"



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The new berths are very hard to access from ashore, did they not think of seafarers?"

Wages

7.01 ↑ from 6.81

Mind The Inflation Gap

Responses on wages reveal a workforce acutely aware of economic realities. While some express satisfaction, as reflected in a rise in the data, stating: "Good salary," "Fair enough to sustain our daily life", many articulate a more complex reality: wages once adequate are being eroded by inflation and stagnant pay scales.

The most common complaint is explicit: "There is no increase in salary despite inflation globally." Another notes: "Salary in maritime industry does not come up in the last 10-15 years while the living costs jumped up." Yet another: "There is no indexing of salary in company."

While some complaints focus on wanting higher pay, there is also a sense that these responses reflect a recognition of fundamental economic injustice. Seafarers work as hard as ever, taking on more responsibilities as crew sizes shrink, yet real purchasing power declines. One captures the frustration: "Wages could be more comparing to the life we have given to this."

Seafarers are increasingly aware of wage disparities between nationalities, companies, and sea versus shore. "We get less wages as compared to other nationality," writes one. Another observes: "Compare other shipping company, wages are slightly lower."

This awareness corrodes morale. It is one thing to accept lower wages as inevitable; another to know others doing identical work receive more. Traditional justifications, nationality, experience, and company policy are losing legitimacy in an increasingly transparent global labour market.

Comparison with shore-based work is equally troubling: "I feel there are many other positions available with higher pay. For sacrificing half of our life for a paycheck, wages overall should be higher."

Underlying wage discussions is a deeper question: What is our work worth? When wages stagnate while company profits grow, when shore staff receive increases while sea staff do not, the implicit answer is felt to be that seafarers are not valued.

One articulates directly: "The wages of a seafarer is not enough for the skills and dedication." These are not unreasonable demands, but merely assertions of basic economic justice and desire for recognition as skilled professionals deserving fair compensation.



Salary in maritime industry does not come up in the last 10-15 years while the living costs jumped up."

Food Quality 7.4 ↑ from 7.29

Health and Exercise 7.51 ↑ from 7.09

The Cultural Complexity

Food aboard ship is never merely about nutrition; it is also about culture, comfort, identity, and one of the few pleasures available in a confined environment. Responses reveal the complexity of feeding multinational crews with diverse dietary preferences and health concerns. Some express satisfaction: "Good food," "Delicious," "Cooks are trained." Though, it is obviously hard to please everyone. One captain writes diplomatically: "Curry is not my preferred food, but as the only one from Europe, this is ok. When my crew is happy, this is most important." The challenges are significant. Several note the curse of "menu monotony": "Repeatedly eating similar foods," "All frozen food, eating makes me bored and fat too."

Health Concerns

Health issues emerge repeatedly: "oily foods always," "The meals prepared are often saturated with grease, and rarely are there any healthy options available." One notes: "Lack of fresh food, fruits and vegetables. Excessive quantities of salt, sugar and oil." Another observes: "Unhealthy lifestyle because of the bad food and lack of time to have proper exercise."

This reveals a systemic issue, it appears some companies are cutting food budgets or failing to increase them with inflation, resulting in lower quality provisions, more processed foods, and less variety. Long-term health consequences for seafarers appear unconsidered in cost calculations.

The Cook Variable

Multiple responses highlight the cook's critical role: "it depends on chief/cook," "Chief cooks varies too much in terms of training." This variability creates inequity—seafarers on one vessel enjoy excellent food while others endure poor quality, despite working for the same company.

The challenge of satisfying diverse cultural preferences is clear: "different country people working so we can't expect own country food," "the food menu should have a variety to align with the appetite of everyone on board."

The solution lies not in finding cooks who please everyone - an impossible standard -but in providing varied menus, respecting dietary restrictions, and ensuring no crew members feel consistently marginalised by food choices.



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All frozen food, eating makes me bored and fat too."

Training and Development

7.56 ↑ from 6.99

Training: The Paper Tiger

Responses on training reveal a troubling pattern: training is often perceived as more about bureaucratic compliance than genuine skill development. While many express satisfactions, and there were many positives, such as "Good training," "The training that company provides is excellent", significant numbers of respondents articulate deeper concerns.

The most common complaint is that training has become paperwork rather than practice: "Most of training is only on paper," "All the training conducted here is based on paperwork; nothing is implemented on board," "Too many drills and training on board leading to quantity instead of quality."

This highlights a broader problem in maritime safety culture: the proliferation of documentation requirements that projects compliance without necessarily improving actual safety. Seafarers' complete endless online modules, sign off on drills, and maintain training records, but the training itself may be perfunctory, repetitive, or disconnected from shipboard realities.

The Onshore Burden

Training requirements are also encroaching on leave time: "Some trainings maybe need to be online so that we do not need to go to Manila as it is expensive and reduces time for family," "during vacation period too much inhouse training so cannot do good vacation."

This is particularly problematic. Seafarers already sacrifice time away from home; requiring them to spend additional leave time in training centres represents further erosion of personal time. Companies need to better balance training requirements with crew welfare, perhaps conducting more training aboard ship or providing online options that do not require travel.

The Quality Question

When training is done well, it is valued: "I gain a lot of education and knowledge that is appropriate," "It's good that can receive some good training about new technology and skills."

The distinction seems to be between training that genuinely develops skills and training that merely checks compliance boxes. Seafarers appreciate learning opportunities that make them better at their jobs and prepare them for advancement. They resent training that is repetitive, irrelevant, or obviously designed to protect the company from liability rather than them from harm.



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Interactions

8.02 ↑ from 7.68

Interactions: The Floating Community

Responses on crew interactions highlight the complex social nature of being at sea; confined multicultural communities working together under demanding conditions, often for months at a time, pose an obvious challenge. The success or failure of these interactions profoundly affects seafarer happiness.

Many responses were positive, and as is often the case, interactions scored particularly well: "We have a good team on board with a positive work culture," "Everyone is nice and friendly," "We have built a really positive working environment on board where everyone is able to voice opinions openly."

These positives are not automatic, they require effort, leadership, and cultural sensitivity. One captain noted: "On a daily basis I interact with my crew, encourage and appreciate their hard work, also guidance, support, always available." Another observes: "We have a good bonding off work like karaoke."

The Leadership Factor

Multiple responses highlight leadership's critical role in shaping crew dynamics. Good leadership creates positive environments: "If management people are good and mentally stable, then everything goes smooth. All crew will be happy." Conversely, poor leadership creates toxic environments: "Bad leadership from top management," "Bad top management can lead to bad environment on board."

Companies need to pay more attention to leadership qualities of those promoted to command. Technical competence is necessary but insufficient; masters and chief engineers must also possess emotional intelligence, cultural sensitivity, and genuine concern for crew welfare.

The Isolation Problem

Some responses reveal troubling patterns: social isolation even within the crew. "There's no crew gathering to interact each other or they just intentionally give job order on weekend," writes one. Another notes: "Too much workload, and less recreational activity."

On some vessels, work eclipses social life entirely. Crews work, eat, sleep, and work again with little time for social interactions that make confined living bearable. Companies need to protect time for crew recreation and social activities, recognising these are not luxuries but necessities for mental health and crew cohesion.



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There's no crew gathering to interact with each other or they just intentionally give job order on weekend."

Workload Management

6.89 ↑ from 6.59

Workload: The Overload Reality

Responses on workload reveal a workforce under increasing pressure. While some report manageable levels, many paint a darker picture of excessive demands, inadequate rest, and unsustainable work patterns.

Complaints are specific and serious: "We are overloaded with tasks. Limited number of crew on board with ever growing paper works," "There are days whereby workload is too much to handle and rest hour is not compensated," "during frequent port stays, it is so hectic as have to prepare for PSC, audits and inspections."

One articulates it clearly: "The workload has increased over the years and will definitely continue to gradually increase over time with the implementation of more regulations."

The Crew Size Problem

Ships operate with smaller crews while workload increases. This results from decades of cost-cutting. Work hasn't decreased; if anything, it has increased with new regulations and complex systems. Remaining crew members are stretched thin, working longer hours, struggling to maintain operations and their own wellbeing.

The Paperwork Plague

Administrative burden is recurring: "Paperwork and some forms are redundant. There are instances where I would fill up the same data on 2 or 3 forms," "Despite advancement in technology, the amount of paperwork seems to keep on increasing."

The industry needs to streamline documentation, eliminate redundancies, and leverage technology rather than simply adding digital forms to paper ones.

The Rest Hour Fiction

Multiple responses indicate rest hour regulations are not being properly observed or recorded: "They edited the rest hour," "rest hour is not compensated," "6 on - 6 off duty / rest hours are not practicable."

Cadets report particularly troubling conditions. One stated, "While contracts specify 40 hours weekly, reality is 84+ hours". Another, "No holiday on Saturday and Sunday no rest in the afternoon, sometime no tea break. I am fed up here but cannot complain."

This is not merely complaint about long hours; it is highlighting exploitation. A cadet working 84+ hours weekly is not being developed, prepared or trained, they are being used as cheap labour.



Despite advancement in technology, the amount of paperwork seems to keep on increasing."

Tell Us More: The Systemic Critique

When given the opportunity to share more, seafarers raise issues that fall outside of our standard ten questions. These answers revealed deep concerns about systemic problems in their employment and experiences.

Several raise issues of fairness and transparency: "Promotions should be fair. All Company rules should be implemented on board," "The gap between reality vs Company Policies should be reduced."

These comments point to lack of trust in management systems. Seafarers perceive that policies exist on paper but are not uniformly enforced - that promotions aren't merit-based, that grievances aren't handled fairly. This erosion of trust undermines morale and creates cynicism about company commitments to crew welfare.

Cross-Cutting

The Recognition Deficit

Internet access continues to emerge as a predominant concern. Seafarers emphasise that connectivity is essential for maintaining family relationships and mental health. One respondent noted that "for me as a seafarer communication is important, good internet onboard is very important."

The feedback reveals that while some vessels have improved connectivity, significant disparities remain. Seafarers on vessels with good internet report far higher satisfaction and better ability to cope with the challenges of life at sea.

Across all categories, a common theme emerges: seafarers feel undervalued and unrecognised. This sentiment is reflected in stagnant wages, inadequate shore leave, insufficient internet data, poor food budgets, detached management, and excessive workload. Each issue might be manageable in isolation, but collectively they send a clear message - that seafarers are not truly valued.

This has human consequences. When people feel their work is not appreciated, motivation declines, cynicism increases, and the sense of purpose that once sustained them through hardship begins to erode.

The Intensification Trap

The industry has fallen into an intensification trap: ships operate with smaller crews, faster port turnarounds, more regulations, and higher expectations - all while wages stagnate and conditions deteriorate. This is not sustainable. The responses reveal a workforce under strain, managing for now but approaching breaking point.

The Generational Shift

Responses suggest a clear generational shift in expectations. Older seafarers may accept hardship as inevitable - perhaps even character building - while younger ones increasingly question why conditions cannot be better. They see shore-based workers enjoying better work-life balance; they compare wages across companies; they expect connectivity as a basic right rather than privilege.

The Resilience Factor

Despite all challenges, what emerges most strongly is resilience. Seafarers continue to work, adapt, find satisfaction where they can, maintain professionalism under difficult conditions. This resilience is admirable but should not be exploited. The fact that seafarers can endure poor conditions does not mean they should have to.

Q4 2025 Demographics

Vessel Types

General cargo vessels (8.39) top the happiness rankings while offshore vessels languish at the bottom (4.94). The offshore vessel levels are a real concern.

Those working on offshore vessels, particularly in the challenging environment of drillships, reported that a **heavy workload** was the norm. They described shifts exceeding 12 hours with relentless demands. This gruelling schedule often leaves little room for rest or recovery, contributing to physical exhaustion and mental fatigue.

Compounding these challenges is the frustration surrounding **salary concerns**. Many offshore workers feel their pay does not reflect the intensity and risks associated with their roles. **Taxation**, particularly for certain nationalities like Danish seafarers, was a key contributor to their dissatisfaction.

Container vessels (7.62) confirm a shore leave irony, that rapid port turnarounds mean crews see the world but seldom visit it.

A Generational Crisis

In the latest results, happiness increases with age, peaking at 45-55 (8.0), while the youngest cohort (16-25) scores lowest (7.08). The industry is losing the engagement battle with its future workforce before careers even begin. These seafarers are feeling disillusioned at a worryingly early phase of their careers.

The senior contentment likely reflects survivor bias: those unhappy left years earlier. Either way, when your youngest workers are your most dissatisfied, we are facing a recruitment and retention catastrophe.

Geographic Disparities

Western Europe (6.85) and North America (6.62) score well below developing regions (7.75). This reflects comparative economics: maritime wages feel transformative in developing nations but inadequate in wealthy ones where shore-based careers offer better work-life balance without sacrifice.

Africa's lowest score (6.25) would suggest the need for more thorough investigation into potential discrimination or systemic disadvantages experienced.

The Command Burden

The myth that advancement brings happiness explodes in this data. Engine crew (8.11) and junior engineers score highest. Captains (7.08) and especially Chief Officers (6.25) record among the lowest satisfaction.

Command brings ultimate responsibility, intense scrutiny, longest effective hours, and profound isolation. The Chief Officer's particularly low score reveals a position with maximum responsibility but minimum authority, blamed when things go wrong, rarely recognised when they go right.

Time's Toll

Short contracts (1-3 months: 8.12) maintain high satisfaction; those over 12 months plummet to 7.09. Time away from home, regardless of conditions, exacts cumulative psychological toll. Yet companies push longer contracts to reduce costs, prioritising operational efficiency over human wellbeing in ways that ultimately undermine both.

The Vessel Age Mystery

The newest vessels (0-2 years: 7.67) are not at the top of the rankings, 3-5-year-old ships (7.75) are - perhaps reflecting that new vessels experience teething problems while mid-age ships offer reliability with modern amenities and have bedded in.

Most troubling: 6-10-year-old vessels (7.3) score lowest—worse than ships over 20 years old (7.5). This suggests a "maintenance valley" where vessels develop problems, but companies have not perhaps yet accepted higher maintenance costs.

The Gender Crisis

Female seafarers (7.09) report lower happiness than males (7.45), but figures for non-binary individuals are alarming. Those selecting "other" record 5.5, profound unhappiness suggesting experiences of discrimination or hostility making seafaring nearly unbearable.

This pattern, happiness declining as gender identity moves from cisgender male norms, reveals systemic cultural problems demanding urgent attention.

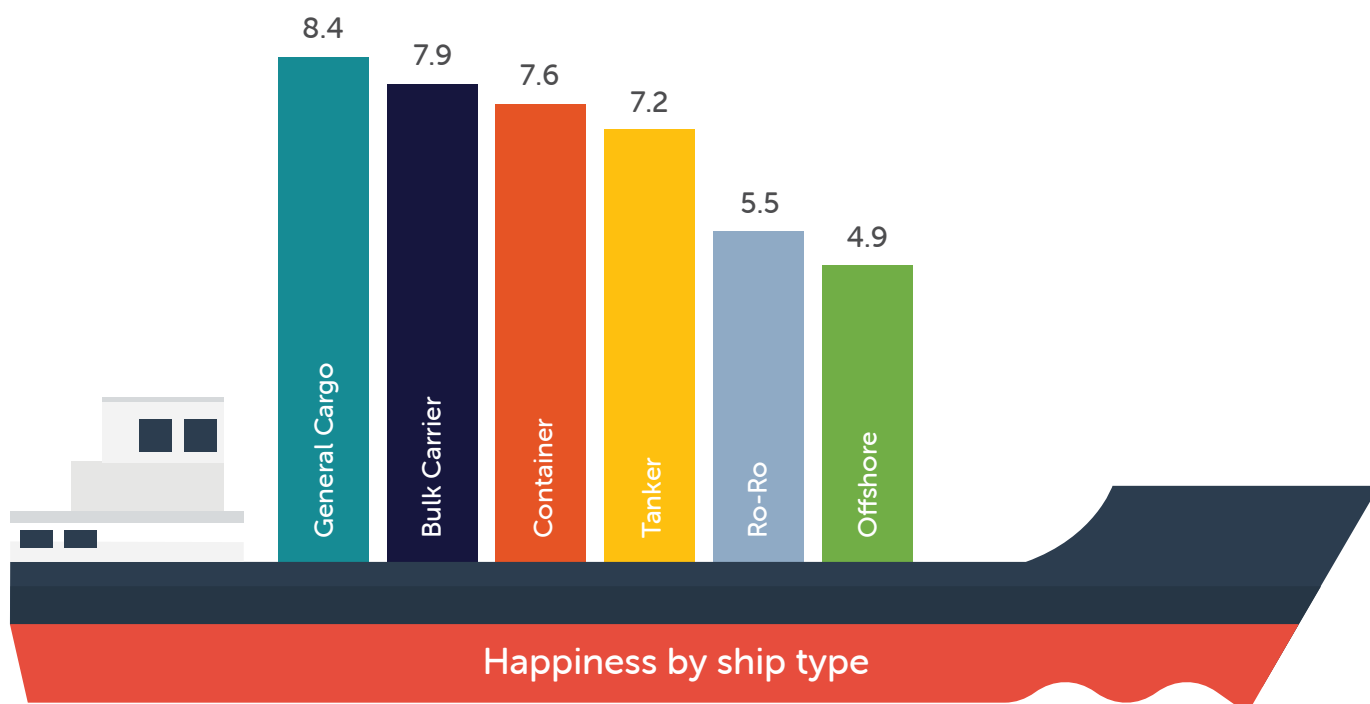
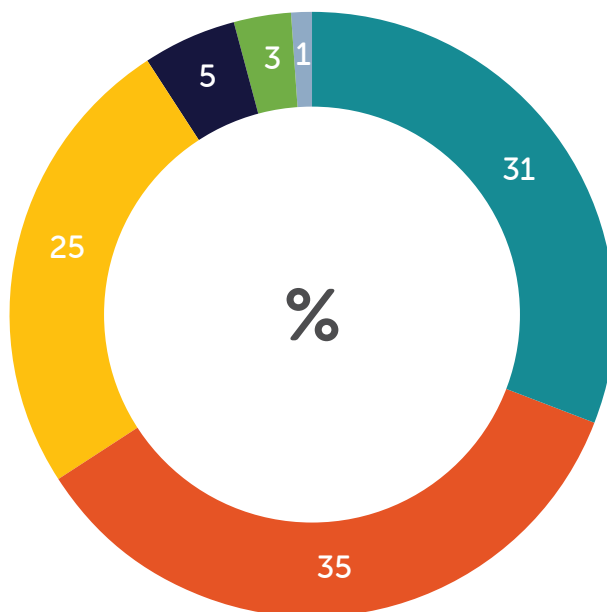
The Uncomfortable Truth

This data reveals an industry optimised for a narrow profile: older, male, from developing regions, working on less specialised vessels on short contracts. Those who deviate, young people, women, non-binary individuals, those from developed nations, more senior officers on complex vessels or long contracts, experience significantly diminished satisfaction.

An industry where the young are unhappy, where women and non-binary individuals struggle, where rank brings misery, and where extended time creates unbearable conditions cannot sustain itself. These numbers are a concern.

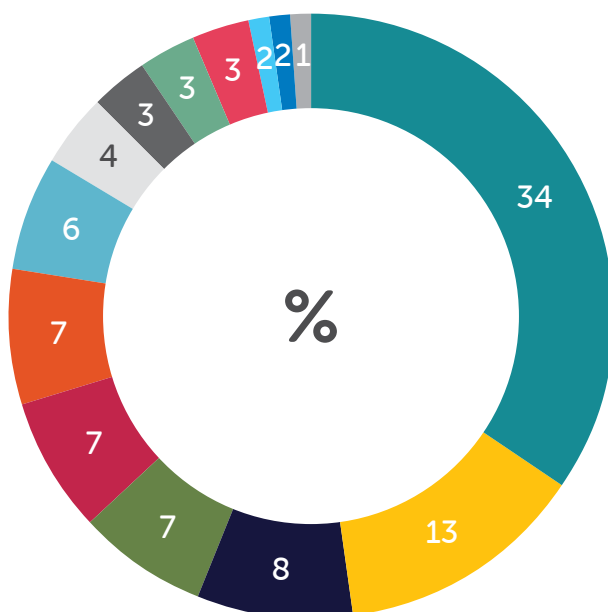
Ship Type

- General Cargo
- Container
- Tanker
- Bulk Carrier
- Offshore
- Ro-Ro



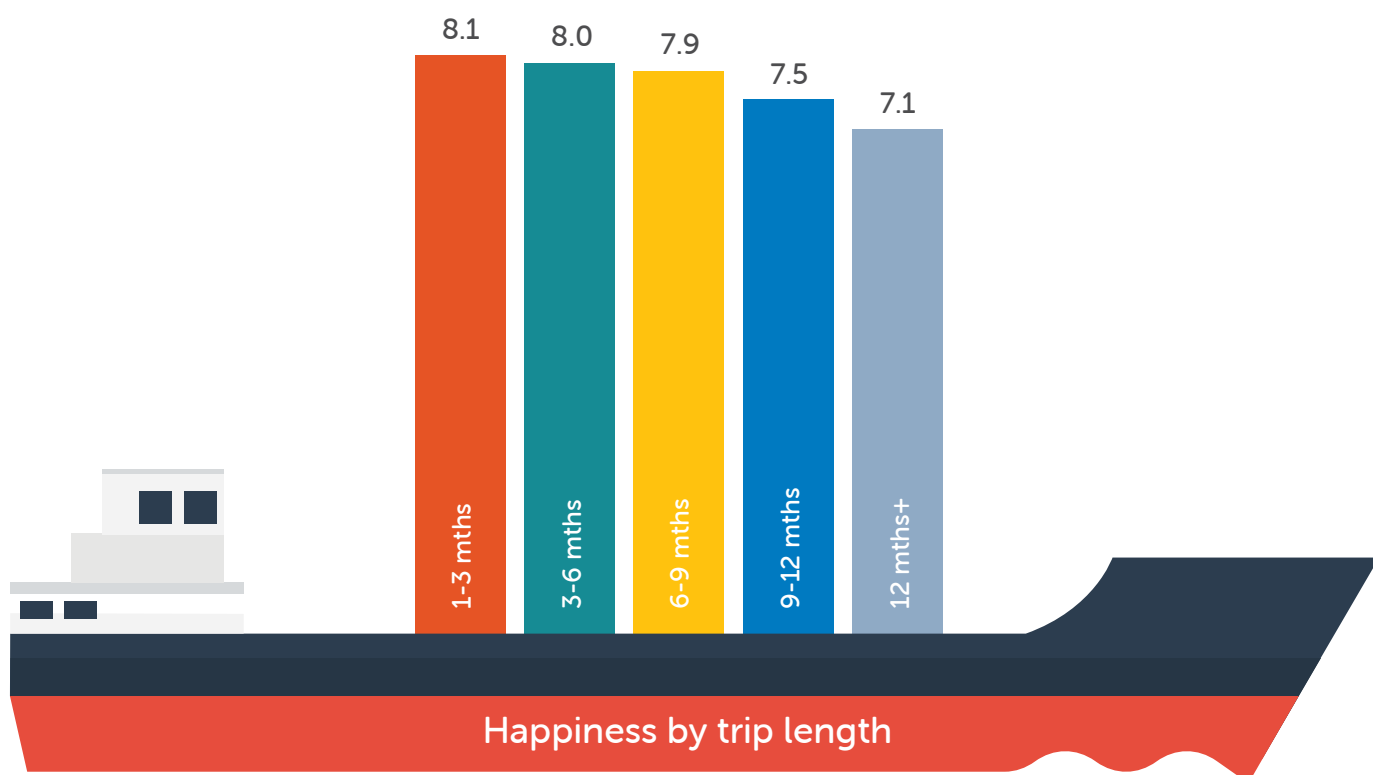
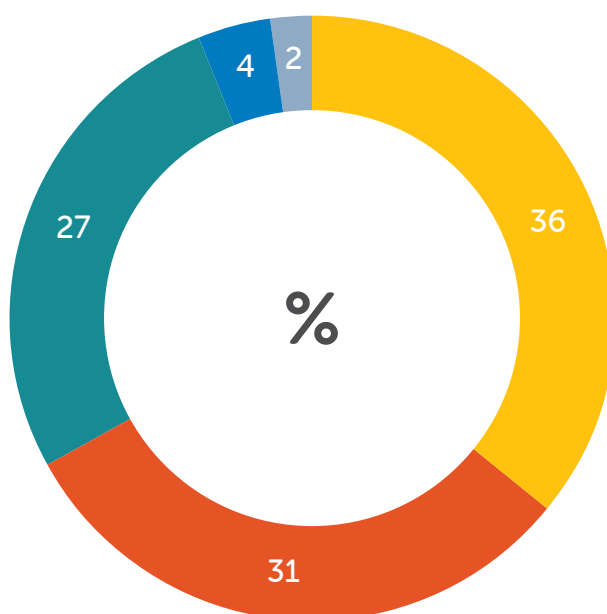
Rank

- Captain
- Catering Department
- Chief Engineer
- Chief Officer
- Deck Cadet
- Deck Crew
- Electrical Department
- Engine Cadet
- Engine Crew
- Fourth Engineer
- Second Engineer
- Second Officer
- Third Engineer
- Third Officer



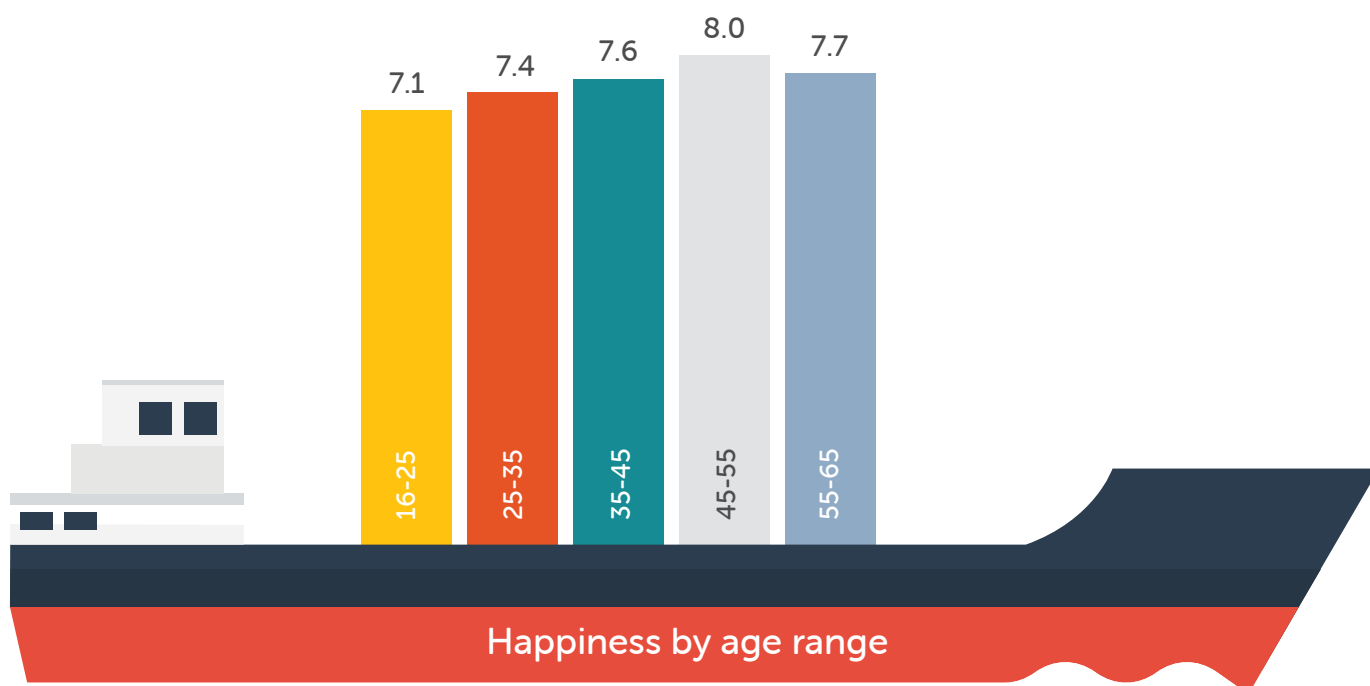
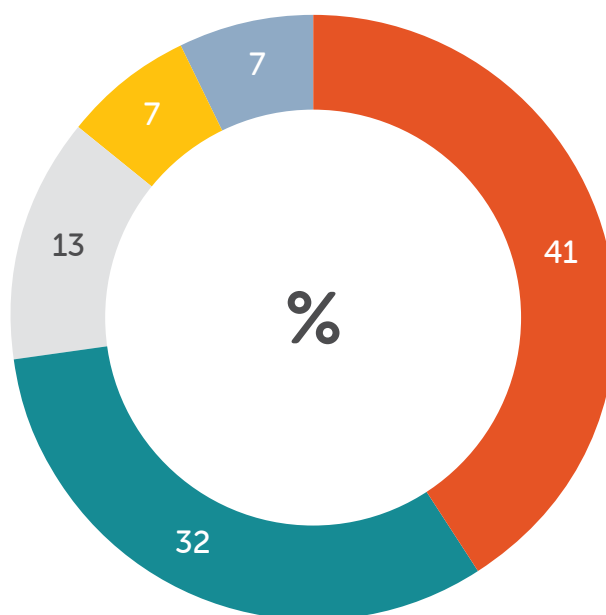
Trip Length

- 1-3 months
- 3-6 months
- 6-9 months
- 9-12 months
- Over 12 months



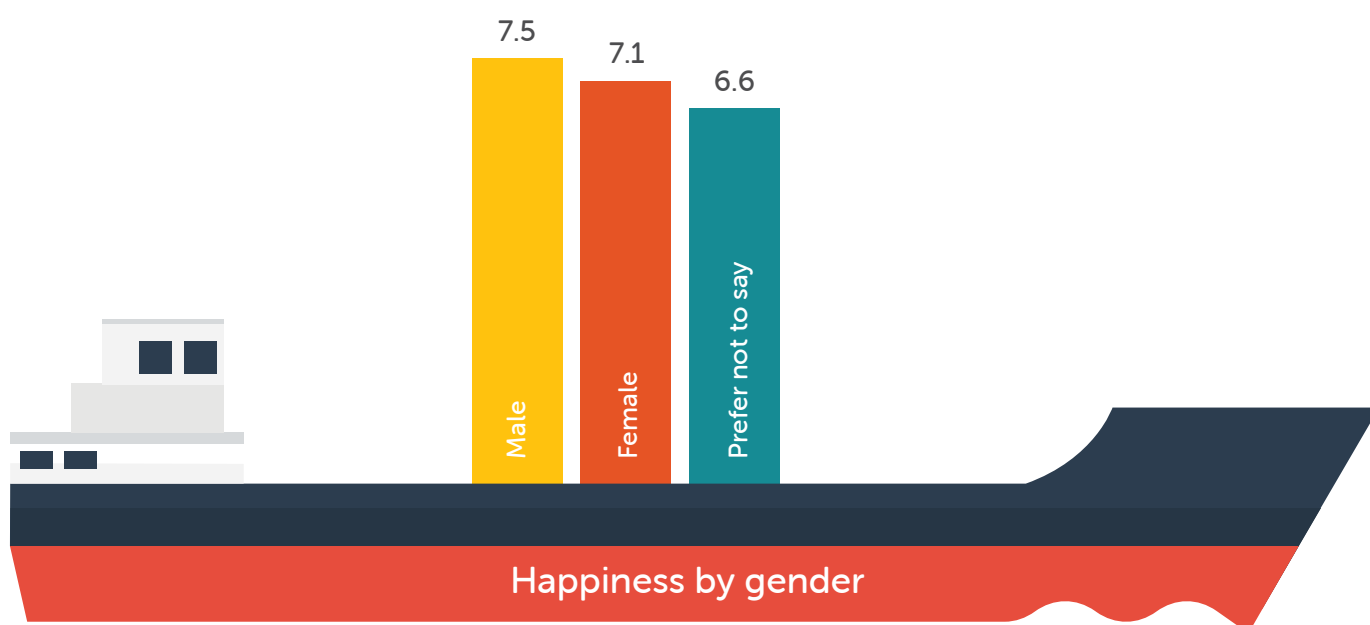
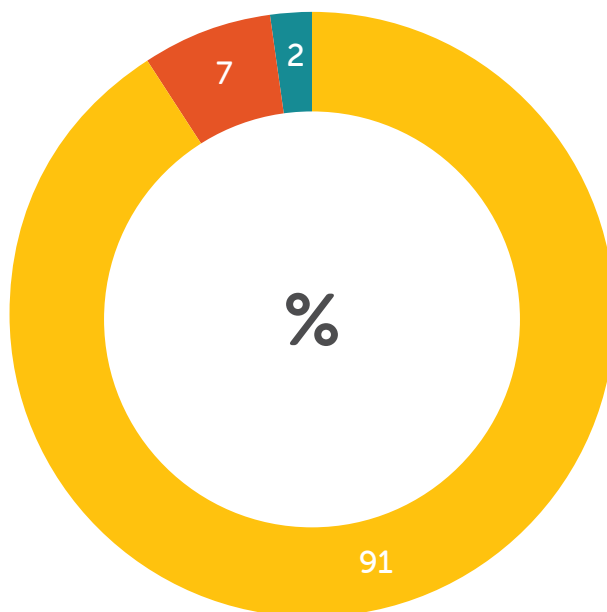
Age Range

- 16-25
- 25-35
- 35-45
- 45-55
- 55-65



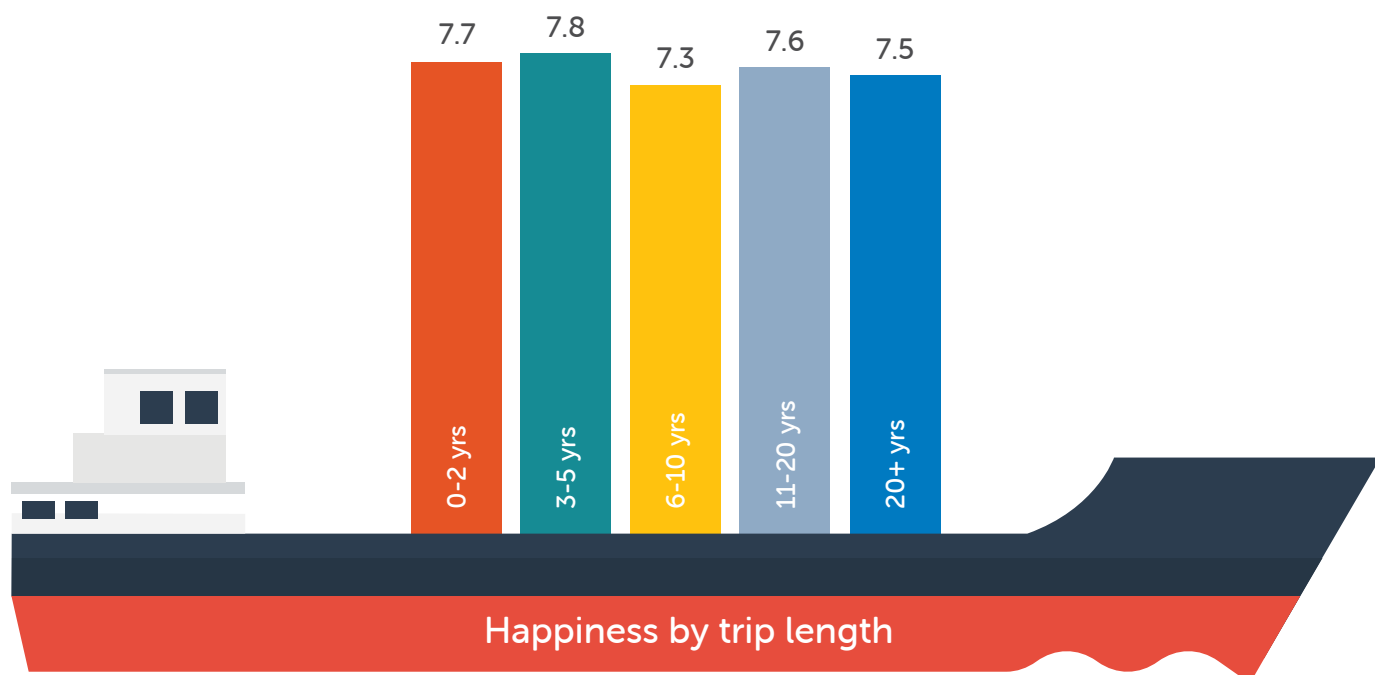
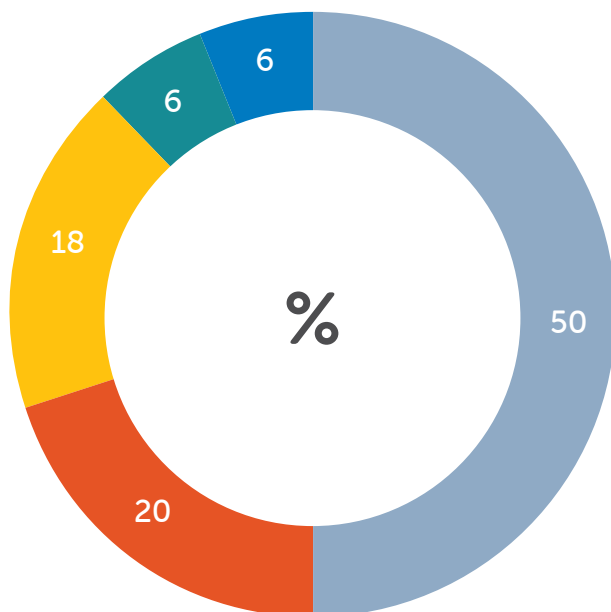
Gender

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

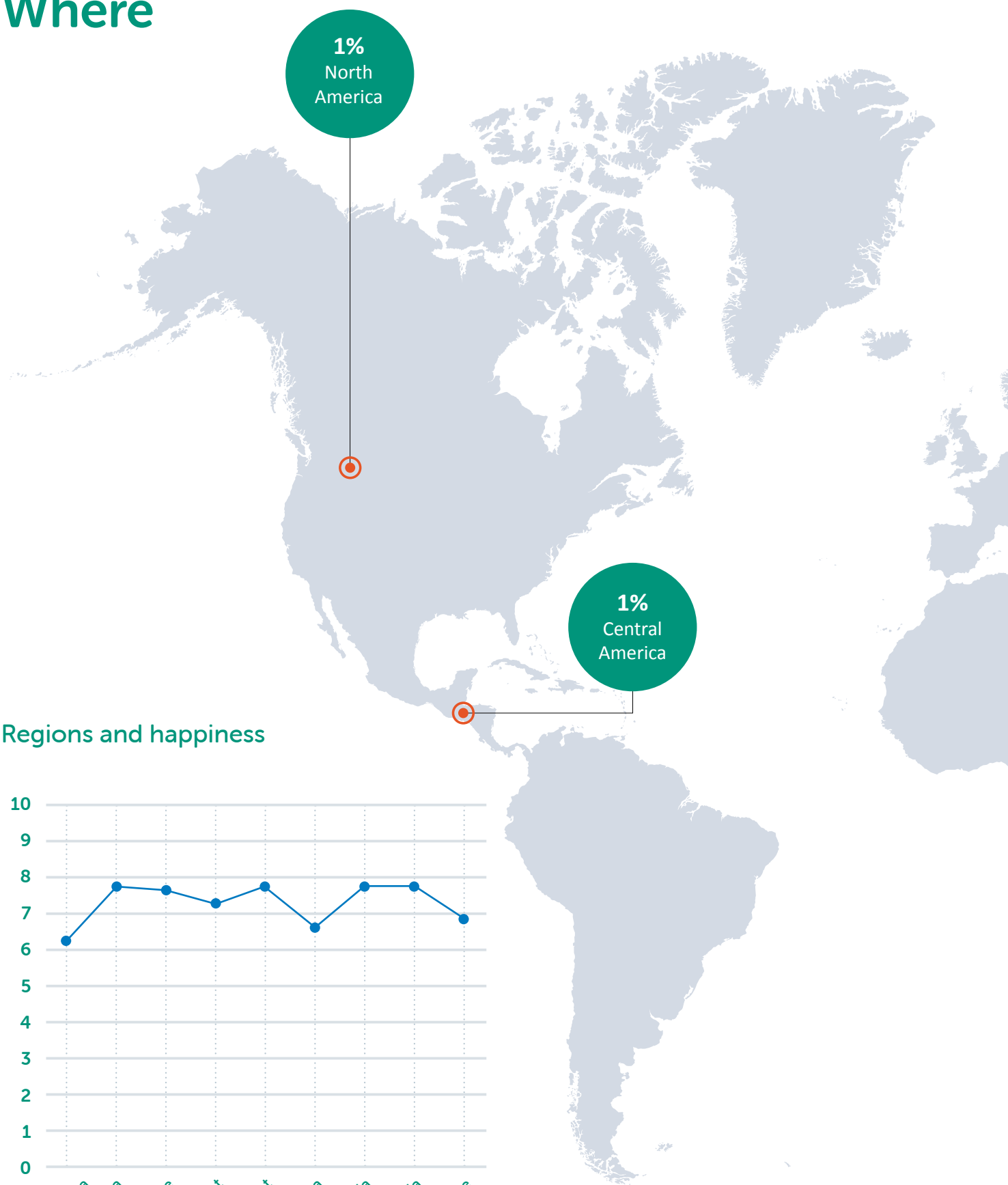


Age of Vessel

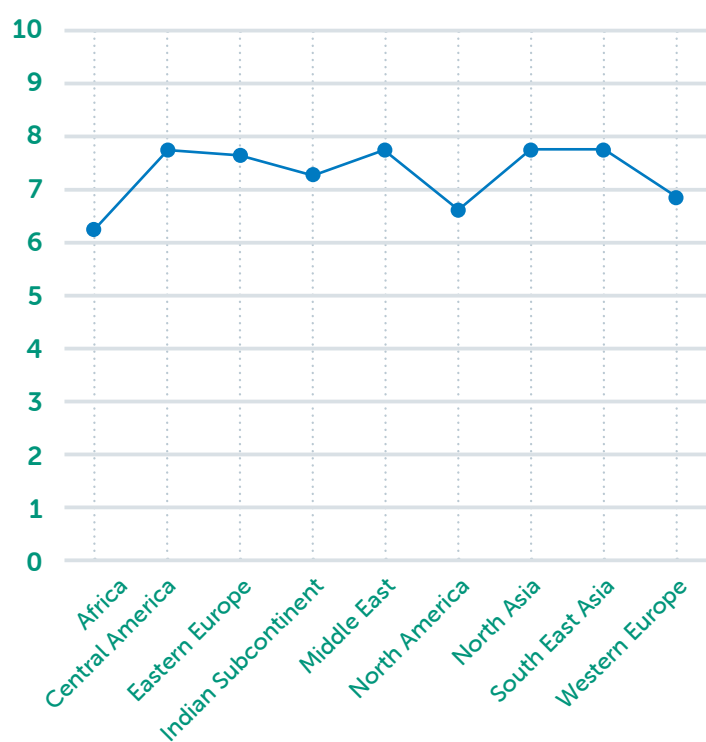
- 0-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-20 years
- 20+ years

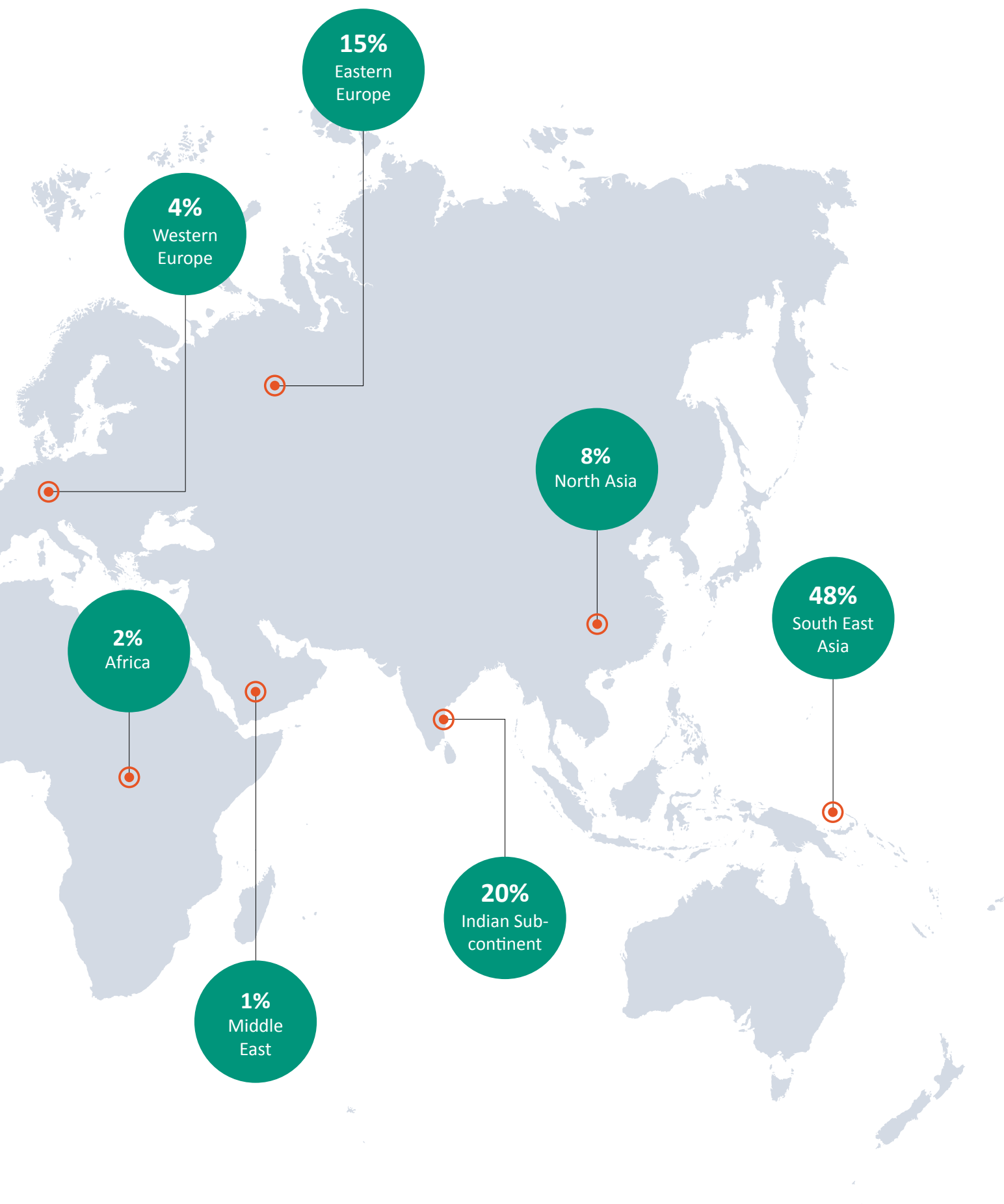


Where



Regions and happiness





Conclusion: A Complex Quarter in a Topsy Turvy Year

The modest uptick in Q4 2025 happiness score to 7.26/10 masks a more complex reality: while seafarers demonstrate remarkable resilience and capacity to find satisfaction in their work, the underlying pressures and systemic challenges continue to mount. This resilience should not be mistaken for contentment, nor should it become justification for maintaining inadequate conditions.

The Convergence of Challenges

The 2025 data and responses reveal a convergence of interconnected challenges. Wages struggle to keep pace with inflation. Shore leave becomes increasingly difficult to access as operational intensity increases. Connectivity improves but brings new expectations of constant availability. Training focuses heavily on compliance documentation. Work/rest hour recording raises concerns about accuracy. Crew sizes continue to shrink while workloads expand. Food budgets face pressure. Leadership quality varies significantly. Trust in management systems shows signs of erosion. While each issue individually might be manageable, collectively they create a pattern that seafarers interpret as undervaluation. Too many responses suggest that crews feel they are being asked to deliver more with less, while their professional skills and personal sacrifices receive insufficient recognition.

The Demographics of Concern

The demographic data reveals important patterns about who experiences the greatest challenges. The youngest seafarers, those representing the industry's future, report the lowest happiness levels. Women and non-binary individuals continue to face difficulties. Senior officers find that advancement brings significant responsibility without commensurate support. Seafarers from developed nations increasingly compare maritime conditions unfavourably with shore-based alternatives. One of the most significant findings concerns the evolving expectations of seafarers across generations. Older seafarers, shaped by different contexts, may more readily accept certain conditions as inherent to the profession. Younger seafarers increasingly question this narrative. They compare conditions across industries, expect connectivity as standard, and ask why maritime careers should require sacrifices that other professions have largely eliminated.

This represents both opportunity and threat. The industry faces a choice: adapt to meet changing expectations, or risk losing talented individuals to careers offering comparable compensation with better work-life integration.

An industry that struggles to engage its youth, support diversity, reward advancement appropriately, and compete with shore-based careers faces significant long-term sustainability challenges.

The Intensification Question

Parts of the industry appear caught in an intensification cycle. Ships operate with reduced crew complements, with the expectation that technology and efficiency can compensate. Port stays are increasingly compressed to maximise cargo throughput, often at the expense of adequate recovery time for crews. Training sometimes emphasises documentation over practical skill development. Food budgets come under pressure, despite nutrition being fundamental to crew performance and wellbeing.

These approaches may appear cost-effective in the short term, but they carry accumulating risks: fatigue-related incidents, gaps in practical competence, recruitment and retention challenges as career alternatives become more attractive, and long-term physical and mental health impacts from sustained operational pressure.

The evidence that many seafarers adjust work/rest records to achieve compliance suggests a disconnect between regulatory requirements and operational realities. When the system incentivises inaccurate reporting, both the regulations and the underlying operational model warrant re-examination.

The 2025 Snapshot

Throughout 2025, the Seafarers Happiness Index documented significant concerns:

- Inconsistent treatment of seafarers in ports
- Doubts about work/rest hour compliance
- Health risks at sea, including the findings that illness and disease remain leading causes of seafarer fatalities
- Concerns about “riding squads” potentially circumventing certification requirements
- Erosion of fundamental navigation skills
- Anxiety about exposure to sanctions
- Fears of being caught in geopolitical situations beyond crew control.

These extend beyond welfare concerns to operational considerations. An industry functions optimally when its workforce is properly rested, adequately trained, well-nourished, professionally valued, and confident in their working conditions.

Resilience and Its Limits

The resilience of seafarers remains extraordinary. Despite the challenges documented throughout this report and across 2025, they continue to work professionally, adapt to circumstances, and find satisfaction where possible. One seafarer captured this spirit: “Try to be happy and always positive mindset.”

This resilience has enabled the maritime industry to function through various pressures and transitions. However, resilience has limits, and it should not be treated as infinite. The fact that seafarers demonstrate the capacity to manage difficult conditions should not become the baseline expectation. Professional capability to endure challenges does not eliminate the need for appropriate support and conditions.

Looking Forward

The modest happiness score of 7.26/10 in Q4 2025 represents both the resilience of seafarers and the cumulative weight of their concerns. The findings suggest that while seafarers remain committed to their profession, the terms of engagement are being questioned more actively than perhaps ever before. Whether this leads to constructive evolution or more serious challenges will depend on how the industry responds to the concerns its workforce has clearly articulated. The message remains clear, unhappiness is unsustainable.

Thank you

We extend our sincere thanks to the seafarers who take the time to share their experiences and perspectives through the Seafarers Happiness Index survey, our social channels, and ongoing conversations. These first-hand accounts from those working at sea are indispensable. They provide a vital view of life on board, ground our analysis in lived reality, and help identify where policy, practice, and support must evolve if the industry is to improve.

We are equally grateful to the shipping companies and shore-based management teams that actively encourage and enable crew participation. By making space for honest feedback, they demonstrate leadership and a genuine commitment to improvement. We urge more organisations to follow this example, recognising that meaningful progress begins with listening carefully to those most affected by industry decisions.

Looking ahead, we need more seafarers, and that means valuing, retaining, and supporting those already at sea. One of the simplest and most effective ways to do this is to ensure their voices are heard. We therefore encourage all seafarers to complete the survey and all employers, unions, and industry bodies to actively promote participation. Every additional response strengthens the evidence base and sharpens our ability to advocate for change.

The future of shipping depends on collective effort. By placing seafarer happiness and well-being at the centre of our priorities, we not only address immediate challenges but also help build a more resilient, attractive, and sustainable maritime sector for those who will choose to go to sea tomorrow.

To complete the survey, visit:

www.seafarershappinessindex.org



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