



The  
Seafarers  
Happiness  
Index

# Seafarers Happiness Index

Quarter 3 2022



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Club

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# Seafarers Happiness Index Quarter 3

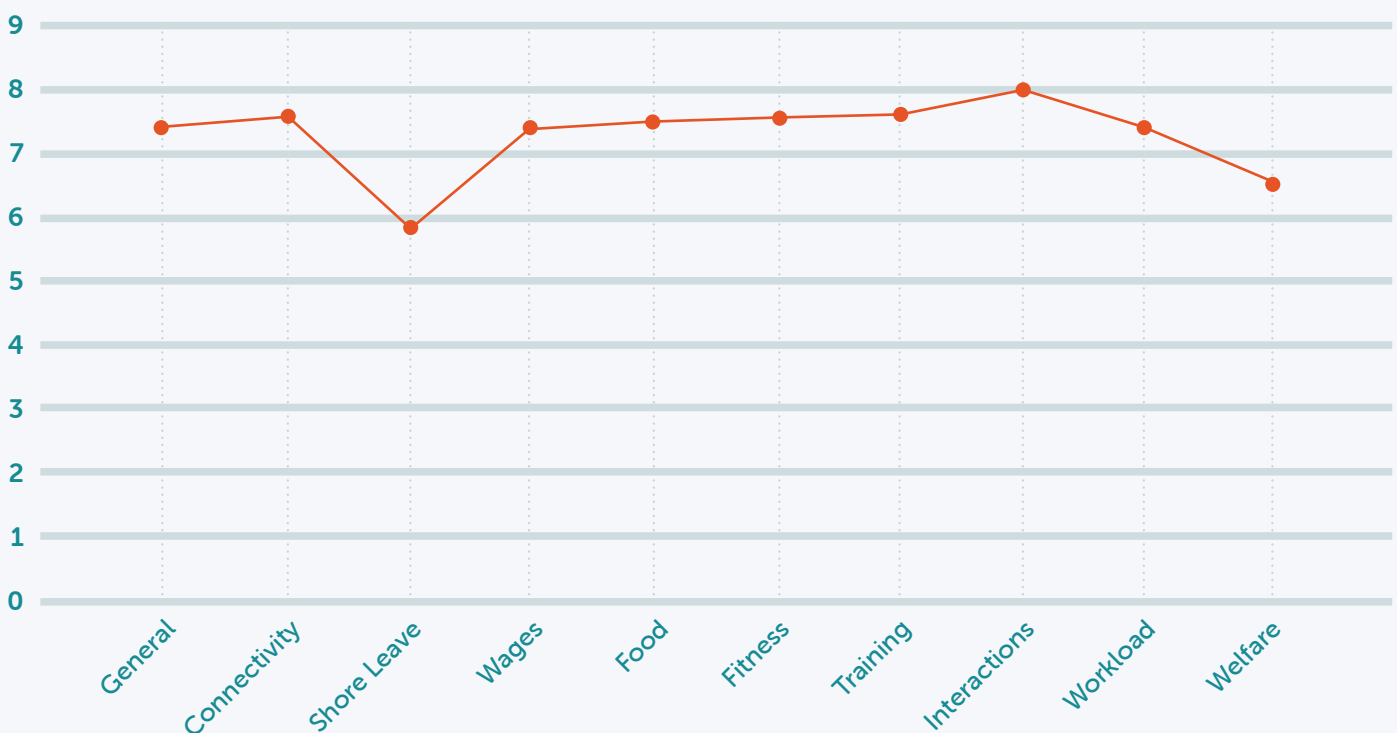
The Seafarers Happiness Index (SHI) is the shipping industry's ongoing barometer of the key issues facing those at sea today. Seafarers are asked 10 key questions every quarter, sharing their views about specific issues affecting their life and work.

This latest report highlights the findings of the Quarter 3 2022 data, showing increased happiness levels from the previous report. It also features a wider review of the various initiatives, changes and developments that are having a continued positive impact at sea.

In addition to the ongoing survey, the Mission to Seafarers' network of seafarer centres and social channels have afforded access and interactions with thousands of seafarers. This generates vital data and written submissions, providing an incredibly powerful and important insight into key issues for seafarers today.

Over the past couple of years, seafarers have faced challenges like never before, yet they continue to work with dedication, professionalism, care and resolve. We hope that by listening to their views and by developing data to support decision making and responses, we can facilitate the changes to make life better for seafarers. We are hugely grateful for the time and effort taken to share their experiences. We realise that there is a lot of demand on seafarers, and we value every response and insight.

## Q3 2022 – The Shore Leave Bounce

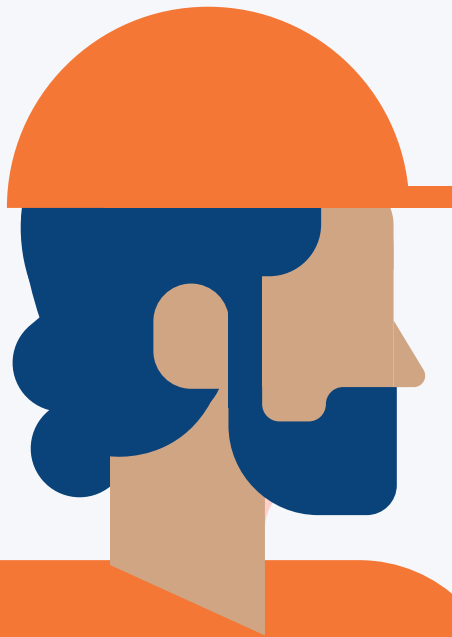


The overall Q3 2022 average was **7.3/10** up from **7.21** in Q2, which itself was a significant positive leap from **5.85** in the first Quarter of 2022.

It was hoped that the improvement seen in Quarter 2 was the beginning of the end of the COVID impacts and, thankfully, we are making real headway, as lessons learnt are being brought into effect to make life better at sea.

The most recent data shows important progress, though it should be noted that the overall rise rested very much on the large jump in sentiment relating to shore leave and access to welfare facilities. These macro aspects of life beyond the vessel accounted for the rise in overall positivity, as opposed to Quarter 2 where we saw the micro aspects of changes on board the vessel.

Perhaps of all the quotes we received, it was one about the importance of shore leave that best summed up the mood. One seafarer told us: "Crew should be entitled to shore leave regardless of the challenges of COVID19 restrictions. Human beings are part of nature, and to be called normal is to have access to our natural habitat. Being on the shore once in a while, seeing other people, experiencing normal activities like eating in a restaurant, crossing the street, walking along the shore, feeling the breeze of the shore winds, all are good refreshments for a seafarer that has been away for quite some time."



**// Management ashore makes a great impact on creating the quality of life on board. //**

This is a rather moving illustration of why seafarers value shore leave so much. It also feeds into the key takeaway from this quarter that seafarers feel slightly more optimistic about the macro issues, those beyond the vessel, and there is a sense that more seafarers are now able to access shore leave and take advantage of facilities, and that leave patterns are stabilising.

There are complexities though, and for some crews there are still restrictions in place; the rolling lockdowns across China show how vulnerable some nations still are to COVID. It is once again clear that any recovery is subject to rapid readjustment, and if shore leave and crew changes are impacted, so too is the happiness of seafarers.

Another area of the Index which saw rising sentiment, albeit a very small one, was that of interactions on board. This is usually a good barometer of the overall sense of life on board. When things are well, then it seems that most people feel that they can get along ok. When, however, there are stresses surrounding seafarers' jobs and lives, then tensions on board ensue. As such, it is pleasing and reassuring to see this holding well at a fairly-high level above 8/10, which was the highest response this quarter.

This positivity does come with a caveat, as, aside from these areas, we actually saw drops across half of the ten questions asked. It is clear that, despite an impressive jump in recent reports, there has not been a magic wand cast over shipping and suddenly life has become good. Indeed, despite the climb in sentiment, we heard once more of the same old issues, such as workload, stress, and the pervasive realities of life at sea.

Elsewhere in the survey we saw indications that Quarter 2 may have marked the zenith in some key individual issues. As a reflection of this, we saw a drop in the data around fundamentals such as wages, food, health, training and workload.

## Key Issues

Time and time again respondents stress the pivotal role that having good, cost-effective Wi-Fi access plays in mental health. Those that have the access they crave and who are able to use it as they desire are so much happier than those that don't. It is the same message that we hear from every Seafarers Happiness Index reporting period, connectivity matters and is absolutely vital to seafarers.

When it comes to wages, there is a sense of disconnect between the salary and sense of worth. There is a feeling that sacrifices are made, but that they are not sufficiently rewarded or recognised. The focus was not solely on financial incentives, though it was noted that inflationary pressures are impacting.

Food was another problem area and we received worrying responses about vessels repeatedly running low on food. There were also complaints about the standard of training of some catering crew, an issue which is likely to come to the fore after the tragic deaths of twelve seafarers from suspected food poisoning recently.

Parallel to this, in discussing health and fitness on board, two fundamentals were seen to be driving sentiment. One was the quality of catering on board, especially the provision of fresh and good food. The other was the time and mental state to make the effort to keep fit. Feeling tired and stressed was a barrier to exercising.

It is also a concern that on smaller ships it can be a problem to find the space for exercise, much less to have a gym or facilities. Given that there has been much emphasis in the Happiness Index data on the importance of the small investments made by companies to improve facilities and social provisions on board, it is saddening to see the problems remain.

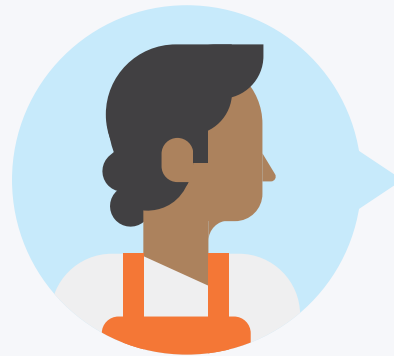
The issue and impact of a high workload remains a problem, and there is seemingly no separating the workload burden from the mental health and wellbeing of seafarers. The drop in sentiment evidenced this quarter highlights the problems that persist and the sense that crews feel over worked.

There were a number of issues raised by respondents, including frustrations about too much paperwork and problems coping with the level of administrative tasks. We heard in detail about the toll that these extended periods of heightened workload and stress take.

Seafarers spoke of their growing resentment that minimal allowable crewing levels mean there is simply not enough slack in the system for any let up. Seafarers feel a sense of relentless demand throughout their entire trip, and with little or no social engagement, it seems likely that many feel burnt out with the demands facing them.

Fast turnarounds, ports in quick succession, bad weather, cargo demands, maintenance and repairs can very quickly bring extra demands and requirements that leave the idealised manning models floundering. It is then only the dedication, hard work, commitment and

sacrifices of seafarers that keep the ships running safely, and that is a model with inherent flaws and weaknesses, which is bound to come unstuck in some way.



**“ Shipping companies expect too much output in too less time and on top of that they pile us up with paperwork. ”**

## Making Progress

During the worst of COVID, seafarer happiness experienced what we termed the “Yo-Yo” effect. This saw sentiment peak and trough in a cycle with COVID spikes and lockdowns and came crashing down with the Omicron variant fears of early 2022.

This was a huge concern. With record low levels of sentiment, it was clear that things had to change and, thankfully in Quarter 2 2022, there seemed to be a turning point. The pandemic showed signs of slowing and this appeared to be the catalyst for a significant jump in positivity amongst the respondents. So, last quarter we heard of positives that were a foundation of building upbeat sentiment. Seafarers were on board for less time, with between 1-3 months the norm, and there was a far more relaxed view about crew changes; a pattern that has very much continued in Quarter 3 2022.

Seafarers feel far more certain of being able to go home on time and this has fuelled much of the positivity; combined with some opening up of shore leave, there are finally more positives than negatives, and a reason to feel hopeful!



## Seafarer Mental Health

The question as to the impact of the COVID years on seafarers' mental health is an important one. During this period, the industry has introduced a range of initiatives, and the concepts of mental health, wellbeing and wellness have very much been at the fore of efforts to improve life at sea for seafarers.

From the data the Seafarers Happiness Index has generated, the good intentions and ideas of such initiatives have often been left wanting in the face of reality. No amount of mindfulness can counter the cold, hard reality of not knowing when one is going to get home after a long time spent at sea.

There is perhaps an irony here, in that we have seen investment and development focused on mental health at sea because we have been in unprecedented times, but the sheer scale and scope of a pandemic has made it difficult (perhaps even impossible) for the concepts and tools, even the language of wellness, to solve the problems faced during this time.

We saw peaks and troughs of emotion and hoped that the pandemic was over, only for spike after spike to strip away the hopes of seafarers. That has been an incredibly challenging backdrop to try and provide succour, reassurance and coping mechanisms for seafarers.

Across the reporting period, we have heard of numerous initiatives and indeed much investment made by companies. We have heard of improvements to equipment on board, to catering, to training, and even some wage increases. These do make a difference and can improve the mood on board. However, they cannot do so in isolation.

## Learning from Tough Times

That is perhaps the biggest lesson of these COVID times, that seafarers do not exist in a vacuum, that any initiatives need to be based on a realistic assessment of what is happening on board and what the status quo is external to that. If the world is open for movement, if seafarers can get ashore, if they know when they will pay-off and their families are safe and reassured too, then there is a far more fertile ground for mental health initiatives to take root.

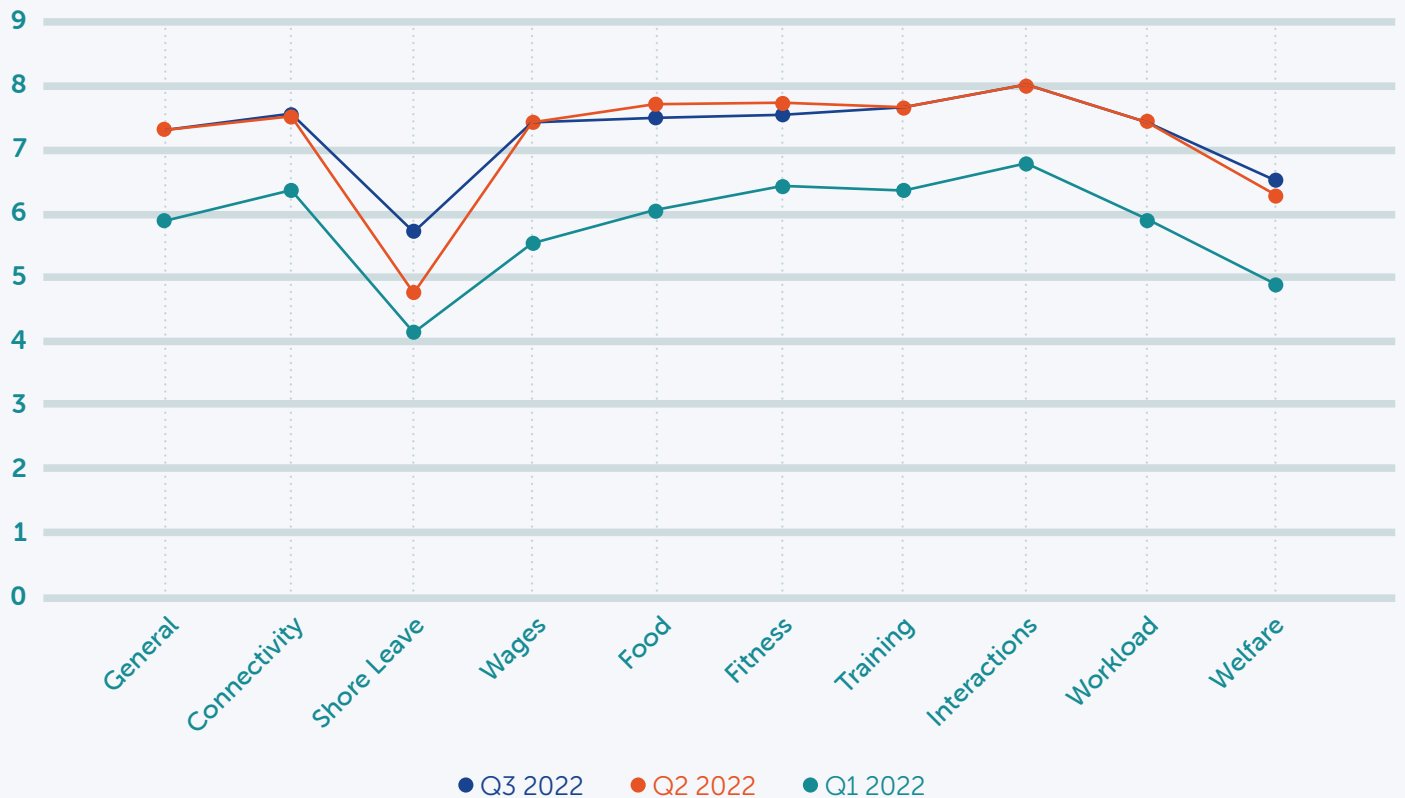
That is not to say that in troubled times we should not act - on the contrary - without the efforts made by so many, then it seems likely that the sentiment would have been even more negative. Knowing that people ashore care and think of the experiences of those at sea is important to seafarers and there were many responses in which this was explicitly stated.

Even in the dark times, the empathy and efforts from those ashore, in industry and wider society are most gratefully noted. It remains, however, that we cannot expect miracles. The equation needs to balance, and where there are dreadful pressures on crews, when there are fears about getting home, when they feel trapped, worried about their families, and working incessantly month after month, then it should be no surprise that even the most well-founded, considered and intentioned of efforts would struggle to deliver results.

The rise in the latest quarter shows the efforts to make seafaring better are welcomed, recognised and important. They may not fix every problem but, without them, it is indeed possible for challenging times to be even worse.

As we can see in the following graph, there has been real progress made in 2022, and it seems now that we have to appreciate and understand what we are doing right, what is improving the mood at sea, and we need to make it work for all.

## 2022 Improvements

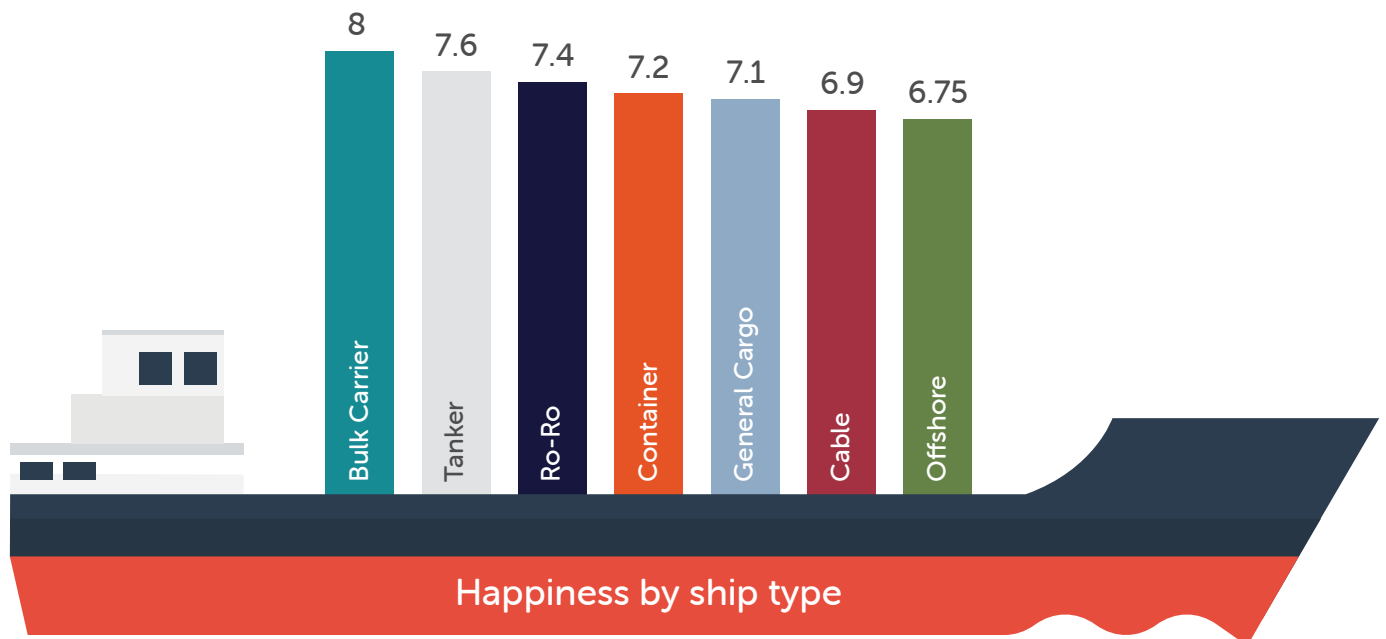
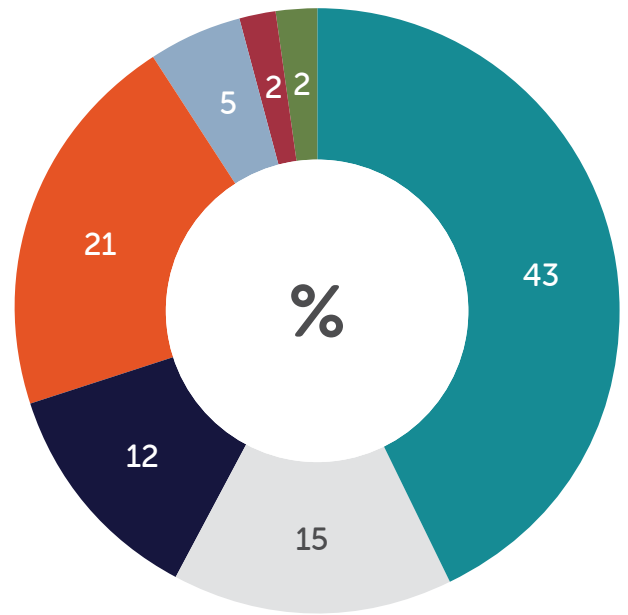


The message from the Quarter 3 2022 data is that we need to double down on the good things going on; we have started with some impetus and we can really go for it, we can really build a life, role, career and time at sea that is positive, rewarding, safe, stable and secure. We do this by listening, by caring and by getting a sense of what delivers and how.

Thanks to the seafarers who share their thoughts with us, and who take the time to explore the reasons underpinning their own experiences. This enables us to continue to develop the right responses and make a profession worthy of the fantastic people who operate ships, who make the industry work, and whose efforts deliver trade and prosperity globally.

# Ship Type

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

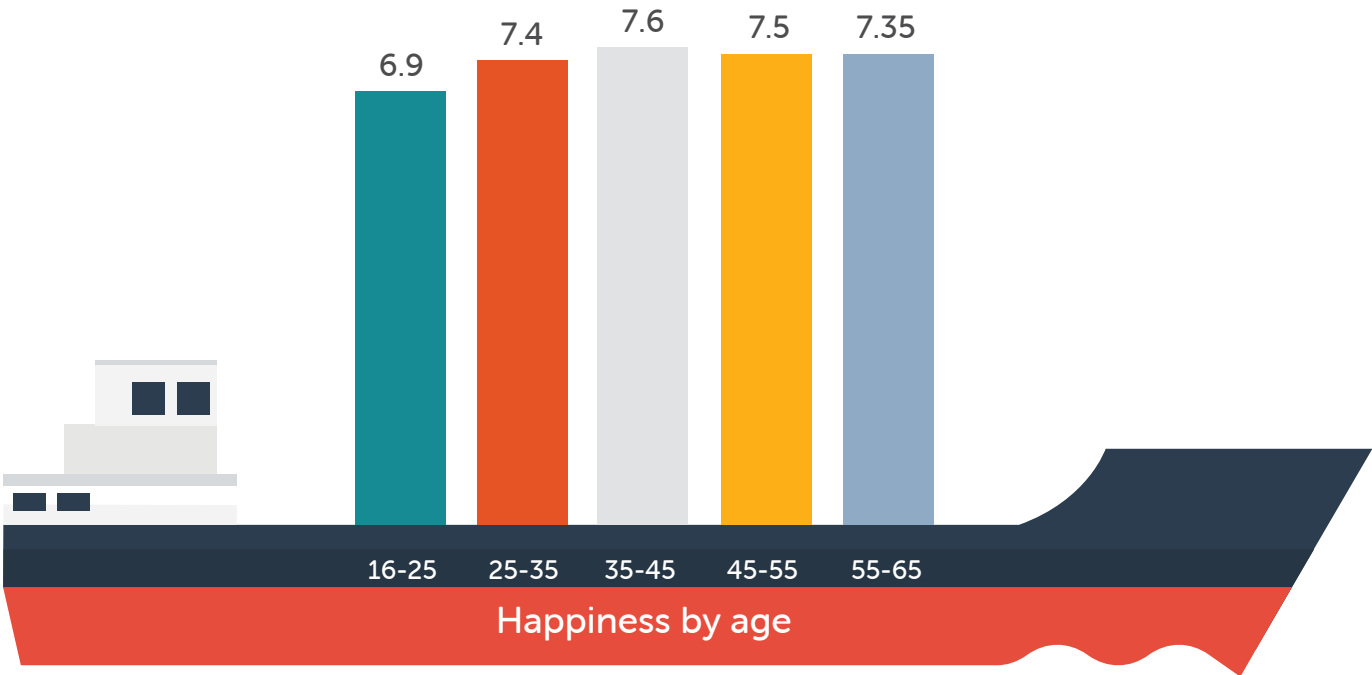
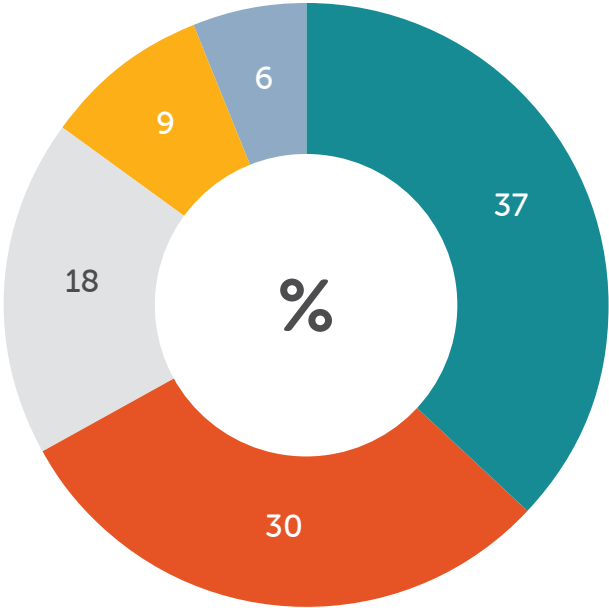


Happiness by ship type



# Age Range

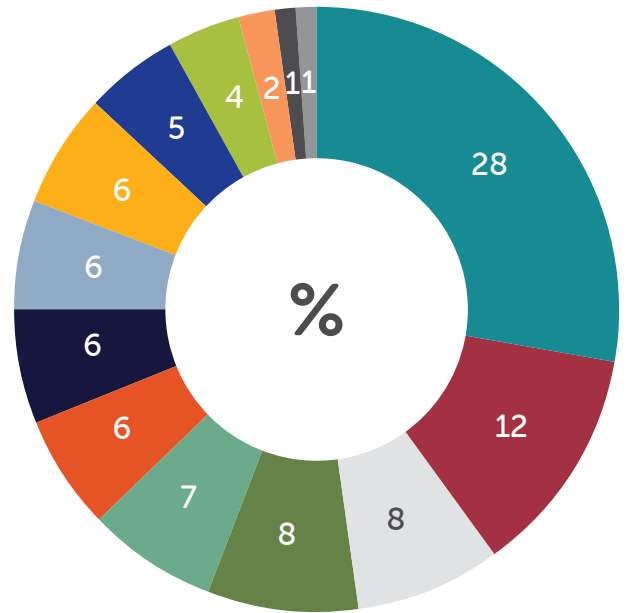
- 16-25
- 25-35
- 35-45
- 45-55
- 55-65



Happiness by age

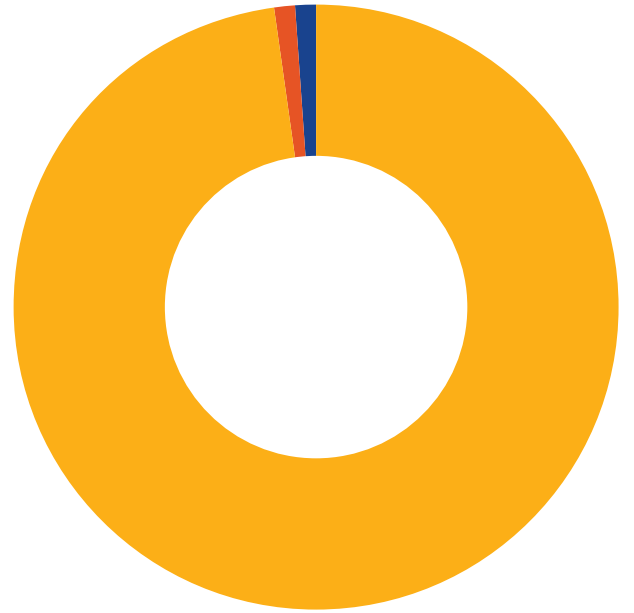
# Ranks

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



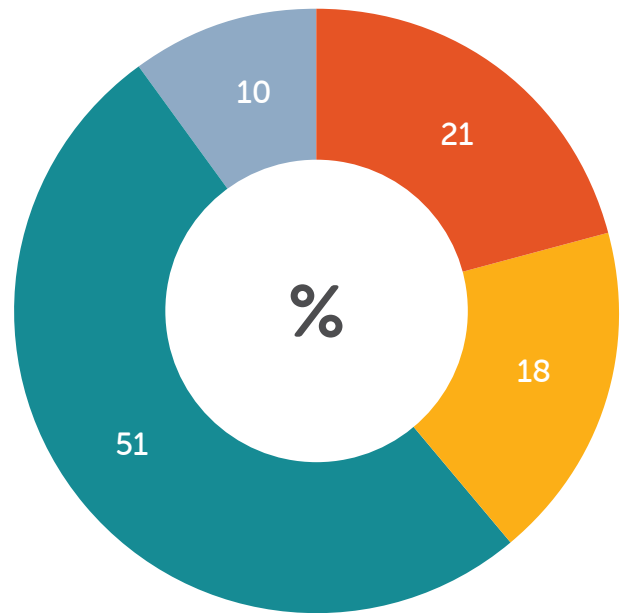
# Gender

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say



# Trip Length

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



# Q3 2022 Responses

## Stability leads to sense of progress

While the seafarers' happiness data has risen over the past quarter, and with talk of positive measures making a real difference to life at sea, there are many issues which persist.

Although we did see occasional recoveries in 2021, overall, the direction of travel was downward. Happiness was eroded but is now showing signs of recovery. Though enthusiasm should be tempered with the view that if new COVID spikes stymie progress, or if other problems such as monkeypox raise their problematic heads, then this recovery will likely be very short-lived indeed.

This latest data shows there are burgeoning signs of better things ahead. However, optimism should be tempered by how delicate any recovery is. These gains can so easily be lost and as such, we should not and cannot rest on our laurels for a moment, as the written responses from seafarers show us.

Now though, we should be able to recognise progress, to shout about the good things which have happened and celebrate them. It has taken time, effort, investment and a will to challenge and overcome. There is a sense that the industry has indeed collectively risen to the cause, and we are sensing action not just talk about improving life for seafarers.

The Seafarers Happiness Index is a barometer of sentiment, a means of delivering intersubjectivity to a complex and ultimately very individual concept and context. That sees us quick to cheer or bemoan the big picture, but of course, each seafarer is the sum of their own experiences. Even with an overall rise in the data, some are still going through tough times.

There is still much to be done, and despite data-driven positivity, seafarers still speak to us about their concerns and the problems they faced. We cannot overlook, ignore or gloss over these just for ease of narrative. Far from it. The extended feedback, whether good, bad or ugly is the actual power underpinning our data.

It is to that caveat, that we have to explore the existing and real barriers that all too many seafarers experience in their time at sea. In the written seafarer responses, we tend to hear from those who are most likely to be angered or frustrated. Indeed, often the narratives do not always reflect the overarching data. However, these insights give a wonderful opportunity to better understand what is happening on board. A chance, perhaps, to see the problems that may be coming over the horizon in the months ahead.

### Results

1. **How happy generally when at sea? 7.3** up from 7.27
2. **How happy about contact with family when at sea? 7.56** up from 7.44
3. **How happy about access to shore leave? 5.87** up from 4.8
4. **How happy about wages/salary? 7.42** down from 7.49
5. **How happy about the food on board? 7.53** down from 7.81
6. **How happy about your ability to keep fit and healthy on board? 7.61** down from 7.84
7. **How happy about the training you receive? 7.74** down from 7.79
8. **How happy about interaction with other crew on board? 8.08** up from 8.07
9. **How happy with your workload? 7.38** down from 7.4
10. **How happy with welfare facilities when you are ashore? 6.57** up from 6.2

## How happy generally when at sea?

7.3 ↑ from 7.27

There has not been a magic wand cast over shipping and suddenly life has become good. Yes, we did hear more of the things that make people happier at sea, a positive social life on board, good people to share time with, and equipment to make life a bit more pleasant. That said, just because the data shows positive indications, it remains that there are many problems that still need to be addressed. There are the same old issues, such as workload, stresses, concerns about shore leave, but these are so prevalent they are almost like background noise. These are the realities of life at sea, and while we need to work hard to make things as good as they can be, it has been the uncertainty and problems of the pandemic that were the final straws that broke the spirit, willingness, positivity and resilience of seafarers. With improvements to these overarching issues of getting home or getting back to work, then we can return to the more mundane problems - which is something of a relief.

We heard from seafarers who are feeling slightly more optimistic about the future. They sense that while things still hang in the balance, they are more confident about going home on time, that they are more in control of their contracts and that they feel they can be more open with their families. "I can be honest now when I speak with home, I had to lie and say I would be home when I knew I would not. Now it feels better", said one seafarer. This is an issue which perhaps is understated, the sheer stress that crews have suffered not simply because they were unsure of the impact of COVID on them, but the uncertainty of how to manage their relationships. "My crew changes have been on time, and it is a big relief", added another respondent.

Concerns remain though, and there is cause to now build on the positive momentum. Issues such as medical insurance and protection for seafarers when they are not in employment is something that warrants action in some nations, and this is something that seafarers clearly would like to see.



**Happiness doesn't just depend on a single person. It depends on the bond that the whole crew has made.**

## How happy about contact with family when at sea?

7.56 ↑ from 7.44

To the matter of connectivity, we receive many generic statements about the importance of internet and calls. We hear how happy it makes seafarers to feel connected to hear from home, and to share in life beyond the vessel. Time and time again respondents stress the difference that having good, cost-effective Wi-Fi access makes and the positive impact it has on their mental health. Those that have the access they crave, and who are able to use it as they desire, are so much happier than those that don't. It is the same message that we hear from every Seafarers Happiness Index reporting period, connectivity matters and is absolutely vital to seafarers.

Those who claim Wi-Fi access diminishes social cohesion on board need to know that it doesn't. "I feel so much happier when I have spoken to home, life on board feels so much better", this is the kind of message we constantly receive. With the access they demand, then seafarers feel able to face their lives on board, without it then there are problems.

Even to the backdrop of rising positivity, we heard again the problems that face seafarers who have to deal with expensive, poor quality and slow connections. This is hugely frustrating for crews. "I get 30Mb per day - which is almost over as soon as I login" - the reality remains that technology is advancing rapidly while the access, bandwidth, allotment and quality of shipboard crew connections are not. There seems to be a constant disconnect (literally and figuratively) when it comes to seafarer online access.

"I hope Elon Musk reads your survey, he can make a lot of business here"...and perhaps that is the key, the technological leaps have been stymied with costs and access issues, if the new Starlink constellation can see an end to these problems, then the happiness of seafarers will ramp up even higher.

## How happy about wages/salary?

7.42 ↓ from 7.49

Despite the overarching positive mood in the overall Seafarers Happiness Index, wages were one of the areas which suffered this Quarter. That said, what we also sensed was a shift not so much in sentiment about pay, but about the value of the job itself. "The wages are ok, but is that enough anymore?" ran one quote. Another added, "The salary is the only reason why I keep doing this job, though I used to be passionate and tell everybody it's the best job ever, but this is part of the past now".

This is a potentially concerning trend, the fact that there is a sense of disconnect between the salary and sense of worth. "Shipping companies have made more in a couple of years than in decades, we get nothing more", was the kind of sentiment which we heard repeated. There is a feeling that sacrifices are not sufficiently rewarded, not just financially but in the wider scope of all that can be done - which is even harder when inflation and rising costs eat away at earnings.

While there was an increase in the figures, there was a worrying sense of apathy emerging. There wasn't the anger we have heard before, most respondents said the money was ok - though of course everyone would want more. What remains is a sense that seagoing is not rewarding enough across a range of issues. Seafarers know the hardships, discomfort and risks they face, and if they do not feel that they are rewarded, recompensed or taken into account, then there could be an exodus as the "mental pressure and work load exact a high price" on those at sea.



**Everyday more and more jobs and new regulations to follow but seafarers have not been compensated for the amount of work load.//**

## How happy about access to shore leave?

5.87 ↑ from 4.8

While the rest of the Seafarers Happiness Index areas of focus have seen quite impressive growth over the past two Quarters, it has remained that the issue of shore leave has been slightly more problematic. While we are now seeing improvements, the rate of positivity remains far below that of other issues, as 5.87/10 is still a worryingly low figure.

"Most countries are still restricted to us", said one respondent. Other quotes we received ran, "Shore leave still prohibited", "I cannot get ashore, and haven't been able to for three years", "I pay for a shore pass, plus taxi and so it is not a cheap deal", "The Captain does not want us to go, so we don't".

There are complexities to the issue, as one might expect. For some crews it is about the places they are calling into. There are still restrictions in place in some regions, and the rolling lockdowns across China show how vulnerable some nations still are to COVID. For others it is a matter of workload, they do not have the time or energy to get ashore, or their senior officers will not

countenance shore leave - which always seems rather shocking and a shame. Cost can also be a problem, and the attraction and lure of shore can lose its lustre when expensive travel or passes are factored in.

Elsewhere, there are also concerns that seafarers are treated like lesser people. Where others are allowed access or entry, this can all too often be denied to crews. Once again, it seems clear that seafarers are being treated differently, and that is incredibly frustrating and insulting. "We can see tourists sunbathing but are not even allowed off the ship to go to the shops", was a quote that seems to capture the different treatment meted out to crews.

While the issue can be considered as a nice to have, it should be remembered that this will have a massive potential knock-on impact on retention. As stated by one respondent, "I will not do another contract if we do not start getting shore leave. I've been working 6-6 for the last five months no break no nice food no time to relax do some shopping absolutely nothing."



**At present, the company requests us to not go ashore, still even now.**



## How happy about the food on board?

7.53 ↓ from 7.81

As we have seen before in the Seafarers Happiness Index, when everything else is improving then the food takes on a lesser significance. Seafarers are more relaxed about their meals when they feel that life is getting better, and that they are only having to put up with things for so long, but feel that they will get home soon.

That said, despite the overall rise in the happiness data, there were some worrying responses, with some claiming that their vessels are repeatedly running low on food. "3 days in a row now noodles for breakfast, because we are running low on supply, this is the second time this happen in just a span of 2.5 months that we are running low on provisions. Why?", said one seafarer. "Food is poor, but what can I do?", said another.

We did have some usual and common complaints, especially when it comes to the different nationalities on board. Asian crews struggling to adapt to a European menu, and vice versa. There were multiple complaints and suggestions of corruption on board vessels. "Our Captain and cook make big money, and take a cut of providing lesser food", while another said, "Chandlers claim certain foods and charge, but then low quality cuts and brands delivered".

The health elements were also covered, with complaints that food was not good for the crew. "Basically every effort you can make to eat healthily when ashore is ruined by the time you're on board", was a repeated theme.



**Food quality is poor, we always eat the same things, no change, no vegetables, it is not good for our health.**

## How happy about your ability to keep fit and healthy on board?

7.61 ↓ from 7.84

The issue of health and fitness on board is driven by two fundamentals. One is the quality of catering on board, and the provision of fresh and good food. The other is the time and mental state to make the effort to keep fit. One response we received seemed to capture this, "Fit and healthy? I'm so lonely and depressed all I do is eat, eat, eat. I have a terrible lifestyle here". Those who have the time to exercise enjoy doing so and take the benefit of doing so, "I enjoy the time of day when I can go to the gym, do some exercise and then feel relaxed afterwards", said one seafarer who clearly got a doubly positive impact. The prospect of going to the gym was something to be looked forward to, and then the results were of a sense of good wellbeing.

It is clear that on smaller ships it can be a problem to find the space for exercise, much less to have a gym or facilities. "On our small dive support vessel there is no space, but we make a workshop into a gym - it is not like the real thing", was a response which perhaps best summed up the challenges and the ways in which seafarers overcome them.

Despite the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) stating that sports and exercise equipment should be considered, there are still multiple respondents stating that this is not happening on their vessel. "No gym on board", "Small room supposed to be a gym, but only some old weights nothing else", are just two of the comments received and we had many more similar ones. One respondent felt that the lack of explicit instruction was an issue as all companies do not consider the issue of equal importance, "Even in the MLC nothing is really said about what kind of equipment should be installed on board, so it will all depend on the willingness of the people in the office who have no idea of what's our life on board".

Given that there has been much emphasis in the Happiness Index data on the importance of the small investments made by companies, and the fact that they can deliver large benefit on board, it is saddening to see that this remains a problem.

## How happy about the training you receive?

7.74 ↓ from 7.79

The question of training drew comparatively few comments from seafarers, though there was a small dip in the data. The main frustrations voiced were from those who only received the most basic of courses, with only compulsory STCW issues covered. "I just get the most basic training, it does not inspire or make me better", was a statement which captures the dispiriting nature of such a situation. There was the perennial issue of training eating into leave time, and there were a number of seafarers who felt that this should change. One respondent voiced experience of peers in other companies, "My friends who work for other shipping lines when they train for a week in college, they receive one week in leave back. This is how it should be".

There was concern that some training is irrelevant, and this is doubly problematic as it takes away valuable time for either better quality training or time to relax. "So much of what we learn is not useful or important, I wish the company would make things better and more suited to our needs", added one seafarer.

Where seafarers were more satisfied, they were grateful to receive "extra knowledge" and especially when the company paid for it. As one seafarer stated, "Our company funds our training, and it is very well received by all".

## How happy about interaction with other crew on board?

8.08 ↑ from 8.07

An area of life on board which climbed in Quarter 2, and which has this quarter seen a very small rise, is that of interactions on board. This is usually a good barometer of the overall sense of life on board. When things are well, then it seems that most people feel that they can get along ok. When, however, there are stresses surrounding seafarer's jobs and lives, then tensions on board ensue. As such, it is pleasing and reassuring to see this holding well at a fairly high level. Relationships on board are fundamental to the life of a seafarer; if they feel part of a team and have good friendships, then this insulates and protects from some of the less positive aspects of seagoing.

Those who commented positively said, "As a team we all feel bonded and work well together", "These are my friends not just colleagues", and "Good relationships, people help each other, and it makes for a better trip".

Sadly, it was not all good news. There are a range of issues which emerged, and it will be interesting to see whether things hold as steady and high in the next quarter. One of the areas of concern related to the different departments on board, which is a problem we have not really heard for some time. It is not uncommon to hear the catering staff vilified - fairly or unfairly, however, we heard reports of simmering tensions between deck and engine crews.

On more than one occasion seafarers shared their concerns. "There are problems with people not working well - and some officers do not support the others outside of their department", though there were no specifics, it is understood that the nature of day work versus watchkeeping could be an issue. "We have to hold bridge watches and sleep when we can, but in the night some people who workdays feel they can make noise", which is a worrying indication of the problems of people having to work and live together in close confinement.

Elsewhere there are still problems of people retreating to their cabins - and it was stressed that the solution to this is to have more events on board. "The ship is dead at night, and we should have movies and games to have people enjoy life more", said one. Another interestingly summed the mood up, "Like would it kill to have a party even once a month?".



**Happy because all crew are friendly.  
It makes such a difference.**

## How happy with your workload?

7.38 ↓ from 7.4

There is no separating the workload burden from the mental health and wellbeing of seafarers. The drop in sentiment evidenced this quarter highlights the problems which persist, and the sense that crews feel over worked. There were a number of issues raised by respondents, ranging from frustrations to fears. There was a range of comments which we hear often, that of too much paperwork and problems coping with the level of administrative tasks. This time we heard more issues about the toll that these extended periods of heightened work and stress take. "I am working every day, sometimes more than 12 hours. Port State come on, but they do not ask about the work we do they just look at paperwork", said one.

There is a sense of growing resentment in line with the issue of wages, with seafarers feeling that their efforts too often go unrewarded, and that with minimal allowable crewing levels there is simply not enough slack in the system for any let up. Seafarers feel a sense of relentless demand throughout their entire trip, and with little or no social engagement, it seems likely that many feel burnt out with the demands facing them. As one seafarer stated, "Shipping companies expect too much output in too little time, and on top of that they pile us up with paperwork". While another added, "Too many demands from work but with no appreciation".

It is not just the mental and wellbeing toll, worrying though that is, we also heard of concerning safety issues. With one comment stating, "As second officer there is not always enough time for preparation new voyage". This is hugely concerning, and it runs contrary to everything which the industry is meant to hold so dear. Unfortunately, despite the legislation, regulations and standards which are meant to shape the ways in which people and vessels are managed, it becomes increasingly clear that too many ships are being run with too few people. Yes, they may comply with the Minimum Safe Manning requirements, but these often assume an almost perfect state and do not take sufficient account of the real-world factors which can heap huge pressures on seafarers.

Fast turnarounds, ports in quick succession, bad weather, cargo demands, maintenance and repairs, all can very quickly bring extra demands and requirements which leave the idealised perfect world manning models floundering. It is then only the dedication, hard work, commitment and sacrifices of seafarers which keep the ships running safely. That is a model with inherent flaws and weaknesses, and which is bound to come unstuck in some way - either through accidents, or through the withdrawal of labour as seafarers choose different companies, or careers. As an illustration of the problems, one seafarer stated, "Every trip when we come to Europe, we have so many port calls in a few days. We work 6 on-6 off and I feel so tired".



**12 hours a day seven days a week plus can get called out 4 hours a day in my rest period. It is tough work.**

## How happy with welfare facilities when you are ashore?

6.57 ↑ from 6.2

The rise in sentiment this quarter has been lifted by the issue of shore leave and access to welfare. We heard that there is some access for seafarers to get ashore, and this has meant that they are once again able to make more use of the welfare centres and facilities in or near ports. These centres exist to provide crews with the rest, recreation, welcome and access to supplies they need, and seafarers are often extremely grateful when they visit. As stated, "Thank you to the seafarer centre staff, our first time in the port made so much better by being able to enjoy some time off the ship".

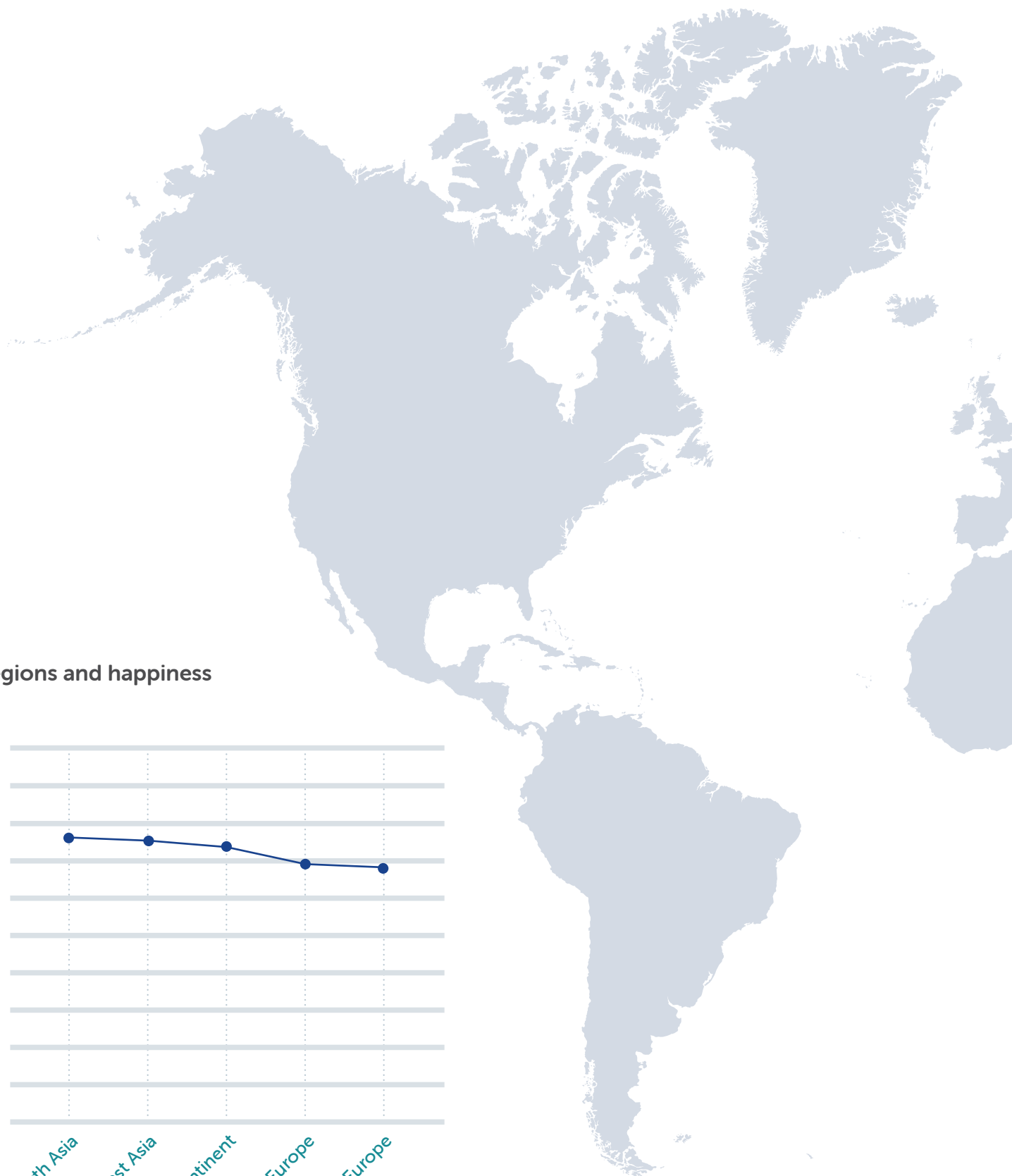
That is not to say all is perfect, and of course much work is needed in making sure seafarers can access the facilities they crave. Indeed, there are ongoing efforts to grow the network and always to ensure that the centres are fit for purpose, providing seafarers with the things they need to make a difference. We heard from crews who want seafarers' centres to evolve, with comments such as "I want the seafarer centre to have a super market, so I can visit close to the ship".

Welfare facilities are changing, they are adapting to the ways in which seafarers work and access the support we need. It is wonderful to have feedback, and we value the thoughts and impressions that seafarers share with us.

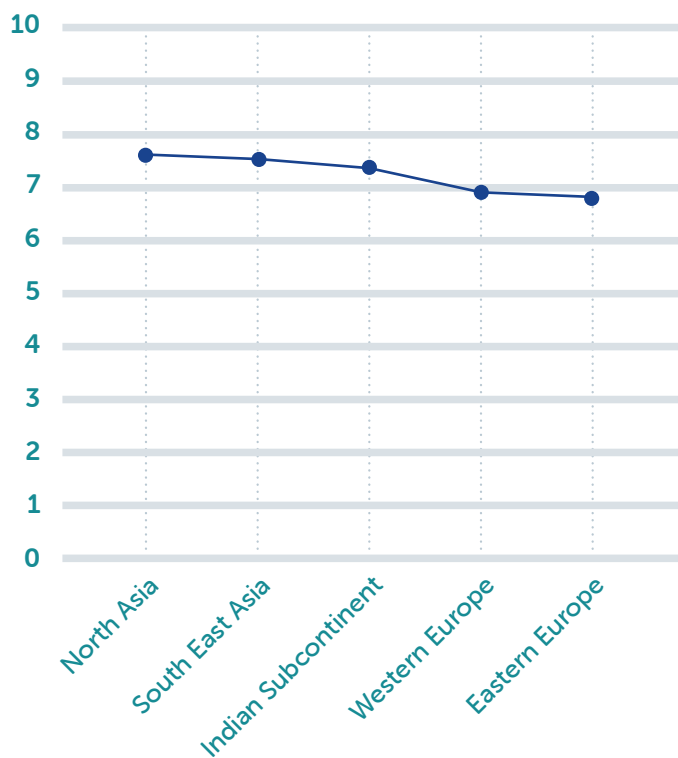


**The seafarer centre is so welcoming and great to see nice people there.**

# Where



Regions and happiness





# Conclusions

The latest Quarter 3 2022 Seafarers Happiness Index data reveals a rise in optimism, with an overall average of 7.3/10, up marginally from 7.21 in the previous quarter - which itself had reflected a high point over previous reporting periods.

The most recent data shows important positive progress, though it should be noted that the overall rise rested very much on the large jump in sentiment relating to shore leave and access to welfare facilities.

The key takeaway from this quarter is that seafarers feel slightly more optimistic about the macro issues, those beyond the vessel. There is a sense that more seafarers are able to access shore leave and take advantage of facilities, and that leave patterns are stabilising.

We were pleased to hear from seafarers who are making more use of the welfare centres and facilities in or near ports. These centres exist to provide crews with the rest, recreation, welcome and access to supplies they need, and seafarers are often extremely grateful when they visit. The responses were also a chance to understand how their needs and demands for welfare facilities are changing, and in doing so it is clear that the provision is adapting to the ways in which seafarers work and access the support.

## Complex Picture

There are complexities though, and for some crews there are still restrictions in place, and the rolling lockdowns across China show how vulnerable some nations still are to COVID. It is once again clear that any recovery is subject to rapid readjustment.

Another area of the Index which saw rising sentiment, albeit a very small one, was that of interactions on board. This is usually a good barometer of the overall sense of life on board. When things are well, then it seems that most people feel that they can get along ok. When, however, there are stresses surrounding seafarer's jobs and lives, then tensions on board ensue. As such, it is pleasing and reassuring to see this holding well at a fairly high level.

Aside from these areas, we actually saw drops across half the ten questions asked. It is clear that despite an impressive jump in recent reports there has not been a magic wand cast over shipping and suddenly life has become good. Indeed, despite the climb in sentiment, we heard once more of the same old issues, such as

workload, stress, and the pervasive realities of life at sea.

## Past High Water?

Elsewhere in the survey we actually saw signs that we may have already reached the zenith in Quarter 2. We saw a drop in the data around some key fundamentals, with a small but widening concern about a range of issues, such as wages, food, health, training and workload.

Concerns remain and there is cause to now build on the positive momentum. Issues such as medical insurance and protection for seafarers when they are not in employment is something that warrants action in some nations, and this is something that seafarers clearly would like to see.

## Key Issues

Time and time again respondents stress the absolutely pivotal role in their mental health that having good, cost-effective Wi-Fi access makes. Connectivity matters and is absolutely vital to seafarers.

There is a sense of disconnect between seafarers' salary and sense of worth. There is a feeling that sacrifices are made, but that they are not sufficiently rewarded not just financially, but in the wider scope of all that can be done. This hits even harder when inflation and rising costs eat away at earnings.

Food was another problem area, with worrying responses claiming that vessels are repeatedly running low on food and that some catering crew lacked training - an issue which is likely to come to the fore after the recent tragic death of twelve seafarers from suspected food poisoning.

The issue of health and fitness on board came to the fore with two fundamentals driving sentiment; one is the quality of catering on board, and the provision of fresh and good food; the other is the time and mental state to make the effort to keep fit.



It is also a concern that on smaller ships it can be a problem to find the space for exercise, much less to have a gym or facilities. Given that there has been much emphasis in the Happiness Index data on the importance of the small investments made by companies to improve facilities and social provisions on board it is saddening to see the problems remain. The impact of a high workload remains a problem, and there appears to be no separating of the workload burden from the mental health and wellbeing of seafarers. The drop in sentiment highlights the problems which persist.

There were a number of issues raised by respondents, including frustrations about too much paperwork and problems coping with the level of administrative tasks. We heard in detail about the toll that these extended periods of heightened work and stress take.

Seafarers spoke of their growing resentment that minimal allowable crewing levels mean there is simply not enough slack in the system for any let up. Fast turnarounds, ports in quick succession, bad weather, cargo demands, maintenance and repairs, all can very quickly bring extra demands, leaving the idealised perfect world manning models floundering.

It is then only the dedication, hard work, commitment and sacrifices of seafarers which keep the ships running safely. That is a model with inherent flaws and weaknesses, and which is bound to come unstuck in some way.

## Thank You

As always, we are grateful to seafarers for sharing their experiences, which build understanding about what life is really like at sea today. With this knowledge, it is to be hoped we can drive positive change and continued improvements. Thank you for reading and being part of the effort to make seafarer happiness the foundation of shipping.

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