Seafarers Happiness Index

Quarter 4 / 2020

The Seafarers Happiness Index

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Seafarers Happiness Index Quarter 4

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, giving them the opportunity to share their views on how they feel about specific issues affecting their life and work.

This final Quarter of 2020 saw answers and data generated against the backdrop of global COVID-19 issues, and once again there were responses from seafarers who were both awaiting leave or a return to work.

We heard from crews all over the world, with some glowing reports about the conduct of those ship owners who have invested in seafarer welfare, though tempered with concerns about workload, the erosion of freedoms, and concerns about treatment whilst in quarantine waiting to board vessels.

Executive Summary

The average SHI results revealed happiness levels of seafarers for the final Quarter of 2020 at 6.37/10, a marginal climb up from 6.35 in Quarter 3. The general happiness level dropped in our open question, but across an average of all the questions asked, we saw a very small rise.

To see an increase in such a worrying and problematic time as a pandemic is surprising, though it could suggest that positives are being found in the actions of some ship owners. Small scale solutions and investments are being made to such issues as connectivity, food and activities onboard. We have heard from ships that have benefited as owners have spent more, and these have translated into a big difference to life at sea.

Across the latest data and responses, it appeared that the realities and impact of COVID are waxing and waning. Seafarers see some signs of hope, but it seems these are all too quickly being dashed. It was saddening to read seafarers stating that their experiences at sea are currently the worst in decades. The "mess" of crew changes is impacting the industry and is being acutely felt at a personal level by seafarers and their families.

Some respondents reported feeling misunderstood, or that people ashore no longer appreciated the pressures of the job anymore. Sadly, there appeared to be a real sense of resignation and antipathy across the written responses received.

The issue of workload was once again particularly concerning. We heard that seafarers are losing faith in the rules and some claims that hours of work and rest are being fabricated to maintain compliance. To be faced with increased workloads during extended contracts is surely a recipe for real problems ahead. Speaking under the cover of anonymity, we heard from seafarers who feel scared for their jobs if they cannot complete tasks on time or if they speak out.

Another key issue was training and the push to get seafarers prepared for cyber rules which were set to arrive at the start of the year. Seafarers claimed the rush to train was not matched by investment elsewhere, and whilst the cyber awareness skills and training were good in theory, they were undermined by insecure systems and/or equipment.

Where there are usually positive reports about relationships onboard, this time there was a growing sense of cynicism and tiredness. Stress, uncertainty and pressures of work were affecting relationships and interactions negatively, and there was a sense that the atmosphere onboard was being tainted as crews focused on just getting through and going home.

We usually hear a range of views in relation to wages, some reporting that the money is good, others bemoaning their lot. This time the divide was between those who were simply relieved to be getting paid, versus those who felt that they were not being paid enough to compensate for having their freedoms eroded.

On to the positives, it was heartening to hear that some employers have stepped up and begun to make tangible differences to day-to-day experiences onboard. Whilst ship owners may not be able to get people home, they can take steps to improve the quality of life on ship. We received glowing reports from those seafarers whose employers had spent money to ensure better or cheaper internet access, companies who had raised the feeding rate, and those who had provided ships with new exercise or entertainment equipment. This made a big difference, and those seafarers who spoke of such efforts were far happier overall.

Small gestures mean a lot, especially in difficult circumstances. The companies which find the budget for new equipment, or who are able to improve the facilities onboard, gain a huge amount of respect from crew.

Unfortunately, we also heard negative reports about the treatment of seafarers who are travelling to countries to join ship. Where crew enter a period of pre-sign on quarantine, there were a number of complaints about the treatment afforded to them, the sense of being singled out and forced to endure substandard accommodation and facilities. Seafarers spoke of being forced to queue like “criminals”, and of being subjected to degrading, frightening and frustrating treatment.

Demographic Impacts

The responses for Quarter 4 were once again generally split between those who were unsure when they would be able to leave their vessels and those who were stuck at home unable to join theirs. This is placing immense pressure on them in different ways. We also heard from a new group, those who are begrudgingly turning their backs on the sea and actively seeking new opportunities. Thankfully, many are hopeful of remaining in the industry, but some felt that they had seen enough, and were seeking a complete career change.

It is a sad loss for the industry when good seafarers see no future in a profession that they have sacrificed so much for. It is to be hoped that if the crew change crisis abates, and as world trade increases, they may be attracted back into the fold.

How happy generally when at sea?

6.30 ↓ from 6.35

General happiness levels took a fall this time around, which was not surprising given the high-profile problems besetting the industry. Seafarers are riding an emotional rollercoaster. Signs of hope build before they are quickly dashed, and this was reflected in the written answers.

More downbeat responses were predominant towards the end of the Quarter. One respondent, capturing the prevailing mood told us, "No one seems happy at all at the moment, and how could they? I am stuck on my ship, it is the hardest time I have ever known, even after 30 years of seagoing". They added, "What is there to be happy about? We do not know when we'll be relieved, and even if and when we do, then we will be at home perhaps stuck with no work. This is all a mess".

One of the more pervasive responses was not that crew changes need to happen, but rather a growing sense that people do not appear to understand seafarers anymore. There were allusions to a worrying disconnect with even those in management positions ashore, and calls for more "reverse mentoring" to teach or remind managers ashore what life was like at sea.

"Either the people in the office ashore do not understand what we are going through, or they do not care? Or maybe a little of both", was one response which reflected this line of thinking. There were signs of a growing resentment between ship and shore, and this is potentially damaging for relationships. It also suggests that while there are campaigns by the International Maritime Organization (IMO), shipping bodies and some large owners and manager groups, the message does not seem to be getting through to seafarers.

The responses suggested that seafarers do not see the evidence of the industry rhetoric translating into actions. As one respondent stated, "Words are cheap, we need flights home".

Sadly, there appeared to be a real sense of resignation and of antipathy across the written responses received, of things being bad, of them likely to get worse, and a sense of hopelessness at their inability to shape any improvements. The sense of disillusionment and a lack of engagement are concerning signs, and it seems that a year of COVID has really taken its toll.

No one seems happy at all at the moment, and how could they? I am stuck on my ship, it is the hardest time I have ever known, even after 30 years of seagoing.

How happy with your workload?

6.03 ↓ from 6.04

One area which saw a high response level was workload, and particularly the issue of rest. Respondents had many frustrations to vent in terms of the amount of work being done. Many seafarers claimed that the logs are flogged, the numbers fudged, and that there is a systematic failure evident.

It would seem, however, that despite many at sea knowing it, and many ashore suspecting it, that the problems are remaining hidden. “We cannot do all the things needed in the time available, so it all gets lost in paperwork covering up what really goes on. It is normal for us, and everyone knows what goes on. Port State Control never really checks, and never follows up on what we write, so the system keeps on. Until there is an accident!”

Whilst it was recognised and acknowledged that seafarers should speak out, unfortunately many fear for their jobs. It also appears that there is still very much a maritime culture of getting things done in the time, and if they do not, it is their responsibility. “Seafarers get things done, so if we do not, then it is our fault”, ran one response.

If failings are covered up, this only doubles down on problems surrounding not just the level of work and the time spent doing it, but also the recording of it. The evidence and feedback could be damaging the health of seafarers and the sustainability of what needs to be achieved to keep ships operating safely and efficiently.

This is all bad enough in normal times, one respondent said. However, with no opportunity to get away from the vessel, and with no confidence of when there may be reliefs reaching them, the impact of “incessant work reaches absolute breaking point”.

Multiple respondents said that they felt the system is broken and they cannot deal with the problems of extended time onboard. “Usually at the end of my contract I am exhausted, now I am still exhausted but am no closer to home”. Another added, “Workload is high, work hours high, stress levels even higher”.

One respondent noted how even time off was not helping, “Even when I get some time, I never wake up fresh and fully rested. The effects of this over a full trip really start to impact me”. Whilst another added, “Senior officers set the tone, and they are demanding more, always”.

Usually at the end of my contract I am exhausted, now I am still exhausted but am no closer to home.

How happy about the training you receive?

6.61 ↑ from 6.48

Training was once more, as witnessed in earlier reports, a divisive issue. Some receive great training and really embrace it, others nothing or poor quality, whilst some are responsible for their own and resent the cost and time. Once again, there is no one, single message which emerges.

As covered in previous 2020 reports, the impact of seafarers being unable to attend colleges is being felt and a number of respondents expressed concern about how they were going to progress their careers without getting back to college.

There were a number of negative trends identified in the latest responses, but so too some positives. Some felt that the investment made by companies was on the increase, and that this was having a positive impact onboard. As one stated, “We have been lucky, it seems that the company has invested and is now arranging every possible way to provide training for crew. Happy to perform the tasks, and learning while doing so”. Training can clearly make a real difference to the mindset of crew.

Where there were concerns, these tended to be specific in nature, with cyber security and mentoring both singled out. We noted there was a steep fall in deck cadet happiness, and in digging further it appeared many trainees were concerned about a lack of mentoring. As one commented, “Mentoring and training onboard have been stopped. Officers seem distracted or do not have enough time for us now”.

The entry into force of Resolution MSC.428(98) IMO rules on cyber security saw a seeming rush at the tail end of the year to get crews prepared. This would have been fine, however many respondents said the rush to train was not matched by investment elsewhere. One respondent summed up the sentiment stating, “There has been so much cyber awareness and training, but no change to the ancient equipment we are using”.

Mentoring and training onboard have been stopped. Officers seem distracted or do not have enough time for us now.

How happy about interaction with other crew on board? 7.25 ↑ from 7.24

There was a very small increase in regard to social interaction onboard. We received positive comments about the sense of unity onboard, and how seafarers are increasingly dependent upon each other in difficult times such as these.

Whilst it was good to see a rise in the happiness data, there were a number of notable comments from seafarers. One stated, "It is so hard to build good relationships onboard. People are stressed, tired and working hard". Another said, "It feels like an endless cycle of long hours, with nothing to look forward to. How can you be motivated when every day is just the same?"

Tiredness seems to be all around and is impacting not only the quality of life, but also interactions between crew. The atmosphere onboard is being negatively affected according to some respondents. One commented, "I do not see smiles or hear laughs, now there is just a look of getting through and coping".

Another seafarer felt that it was hard to maintain good relationships onboard as there are too few people to cover all the work: "I do not feel that we have enough people onboard, does not matter what any certificate says, it feels that we have to do so much more. Life onboard is work, getting ready for work, or recovering from work. There is nothing else".

Where there is such pressure, tensions can develop too. One respondent stated, "no one seems to be the same to each other as they used to be. It feels that people hate being here, and do not like each other."

From a group dynamic and social interaction perspective this is hugely significant. A number of industry initiatives have voiced that it is so important to focus on the social angle and cohesion onboard. However, to try and force interactions when there is stress, tiredness, and too little time can be a recipe for failure.

Busy people merely coping and purely focussing on getting home do not make good company or indeed ship mates. One commented, "All crew members are miserable, everyone hates it at sea", with another stressed that "camaraderie is a must for us to have an easy contract".

We were also reminded of the challenges of being isolated onboard. A female seafarer wrote of the difficulties she faces: "I wished there were more women onboard to talk too, as my colleagues do not understand what I go through daily".

I do not see smiles or hear laughs, now there is just a look of getting through and coping.

How happy about access to shore leave?

5.53 ↑ from 5.4

Shore leave was another question where seafarers really opened-up and shared what they were thinking. Whilst the data did rise, the comments received painted a very different picture. However, even though the vast majority of crew are not able to get ashore, we did hear from some who thought the current arrangements were a great improvement, as it meant fewer people visiting the ship.

One respondent stated, "shore leave is no more, but as no one can visit the ship it has meant that we can reduce watches and have some time for rest and recreation. Even onboard is better now". Conversely, we heard that the rise in remote inspections is making more work: "Inspections are even worse now. I spent hours wandering around the vessel to film spaces with a mobile phone, this felt like a waste of time".

Time and again, respondents stated that shore leave is banned, and in ports where it is allowed, senior officers do not encourage or even allow it. One commented on the pressures of being alongside: "I spend my time in port running around a lot – so I should maybe be glad of some exercise. It takes it out of you though, I am very exhausted by the time we get back to sea".

Another concern voiced was the rise in violence and theft against seafarers in some ports. As one stated, "Crime has been on the rise, and we were told that any shore leave would be unsafe".

One respondent summed up the importance of getting ashore, calling shore leave "a form of temporary happiness. It's like a band-aid". Sadly, this metaphor continued to describe the return to ship: "When you go back to the ship it's like ripping the band-aid off".

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How happy about wages/salary?

6.48 ↑ from 6.45

Satisfaction over wages saw a small increase this Quarter, perhaps driven in part by the relief that some seafarers feel at having a steady income in this difficult time. A number of respondents made the point that they felt "lucky to have a job with any money coming in". Those still able to earn are extremely relieved to be doing so.

There were also comparisons made to conditions in the home countries of many respondents, and again seafarers who were earning felt very much better off. In tough times the concept of "better off" can become somewhat skewed.

Whilst there were many positive responses, where crew felt wage levels were good and expressed their gratitude to be earning, there were many more negative views. Once more there were responses from seafarers unable to work currently and who are beginning to feel intense financial pressures. "How can I carry on and provide for my family if I cannot go to sea?", ran one response which captured a prevailing mood.

Away from the impact of COVID and back to the equation of effort and reward, there appeared to be some signs of tensions creeping in. This correlated with the issue of workload, with those who reported low results and dissatisfaction at the level or work demanded of them were, unsurprisingly, also less happy when it came to wage levels.

This seemed most keenly felt in the junior officer ranks. The impact of "less manpower and much wage reduction for junior officers" was voiced, and there was a sense that the job market was flooded with certain ranks, thereby driving opportunities and wage levels down.

As has been reported before, the rising costs of living and taxation in certain nations has had a major impact. Whilst it has become the norm to hear from countries such as India and the Philippines in this regard, we also heard Canadian seafarers voicing very similar concerns. This is something to be monitored and assessed as to whether it is due to COVID related costs, or a widening of the wage gap between ship and shore.

We also received some extremely disgruntled comments. One comment ran, "money doesn't mean anything when we are losing our freedom". This was in response to the extended contracts that many crew are having to work, with no idea of when they will get back home.

Money doesn't mean anything when we are losing our freedom.

How happy about the food on board?

6.61 ↓ from 6.86

The issue of food onboard saw quite a steep drop in the figures and seemed indicative of a sense of monotony. This is hardly surprising given that crew have been on the same vessels for many months at a time, with limited or no access to alternatives.

"Even though the cook is good, we are eating very similar food all the time", ran one response. Again, this seemed to be reflected in the views of many. Another seafarer reported, "Same food, at the same time, on the same day, it is getting boring". It seems that every day is becoming Groundhog Day onboard.

Where the cooks really excel and try hard to make things better for their shipmates, then these efforts are very much appreciated. Unfortunately, we do not know who "Geoff the Cook" is, but those onboard his ship think he is doing an amazing job!

There was praise too for companies who had increased the feeding rate, to at least support seafarers who may be stuck onboard. As one respondent commented, "The company has given us a little more in the monthly budget, and that has meant much better quality of food".

Even though the cook is good, we are eating very similar food all the time.

How happy about your ability to keep fit and healthy on board? 6.68 ↑ from 6.64

The level of happiness rose when it came to the ability to keep fit and healthy onboard. This appears to be another area where some companies have invested in the wellbeing of their seafarers.

We heard from a number of crew who were pleased to report that their employers had bought new gym or entertainment equipment for them, in recognition for their efforts during trying times. “Our ship has received a new table tennis table, and we actually had a tournament throughout the weekend. It was real fun”.

Small gestures mean a lot, especially in difficult circumstances. The companies which are able to find the budget for some new equipment, or who are able to improve the facilities onboard, gain a huge amount of praise from their crew. It seems it is a very wise spend indeed and reflects very well on the employers.

Unfortunately, it is not the same everywhere and there are still seafarers who do not receive the attention, support or investment to make positive improvements to their time at sea. We heard from many seafarers who are simply too exhausted to think about their physical or mental wellbeing. “I am too tired with no energy to keep fit” was a common response.

Another respondent suggested that there is a need for companies to ensure better monitoring of time onboard: “Proper management of free time should be part of the way the ship is run.” They added, “If we are monitoring free time properly, it will show that we do not have enough time to sleep, to rest or to have recreation”. Without full transparency, it appears that issues can be ignored and no remedial action taken.

Our ship has received a new table tennis table, and we actually had a tournament throughout the weekend. It was real fun.

How happy about contact with family when at sea?

6.90 ↑ from 6.55

Connectivity always brings out vociferous responses from seafarers. Usually, these are negative, but this time around the data rose, and so too did the tone of responses.

Where usually responses are full of frustration at the lack of Wi-Fi or poor-quality at high cost, in this Quarter many respondents reported that their companies have stepped up and provided either a better or a cheaper service, or have given drastically improved free provisions to the vessel.

With many crew trapped on vessels and unsure when they will be relieved, this has made an enormous difference. It is heartening to see that seafarers are being listened to and their needs considered, something which is not always the case.

Quotes abound, such as, "The one good thing that has happened since COVID is that our company has now improved satellite Wi-Fi, and we are able to access it free or at good prices. This is so important to me and really has made a difference". This was a view repeated by many, and it is wonderful that many shipping companies have at least done something positive to make life better for seafarers. The companies may be struggling to get crew home, but they can bring home to the crew with good quality Wi-Fi. This is one hugely important benefit which COVID appears to have brought to ships.

Not all have been so lucky, however, and there were a number of seafarers who spoke of the misery, worry and concern about not being in touch with home. These were crew who were unsure how their families were coping, or who could only get in touch infrequently. These individuals are being doubly punished by COVID as they cannot sign off nor feel connected with their family and loved ones.

The one good thing that has happened since COVID is that our company has now improved satellite Wi-Fi, and we are able to access it free or at good prices. This is so important to me and really has made a difference.

How happy with welfare facilities when you are ashore? 5.31 ↓ from 5.48

As we have seen in responses to shore leave, it is increasingly difficult, if not impossible, for seafarers to get ashore. This naturally has a significant impact on the ability to make use of seafarer centres and facilities. Once again, seafarers spoke of their frustration at not being allowed to get ashore to pop into centres, and this was reflected in the downward trend in the data.

We also received negative responses from crew, such as, "I miss going to The Mission or any Seafarer's Club we would normally visit before this pandemic locked us down". Some were frustrated that facilities were beyond the port limits and felt that it would be much easier to access some form of facility inside the port. One respondent commented, "if we could just walk or even get internal bus it would make things so simple. Instead, we lose time and money because we have to exit the port and get to the centre. It is not far, but still feels hassle as outside of ISPS control zone".

Where we heard praise and positivity, it was for the welfare agencies and organisations who have made it possible for vessels to receive support, often in the form of care packages, calling cards and shopping for crew. Seafarers were incredibly grateful and appreciative of the sentiment and the effort. "We received parcels of washing gear and chocolate, which brightened our days, thank you", said one respondent.

A new area of concern was that of quarantine and particularly the treatment of seafarers arriving in countries ahead of sign-on. We received troubling reports from seafarers who felt that the treatment and accommodation they received were not good enough. "We were made to queue up and felt like criminals, then taken to a facility more like a prison camp than a hotel", commented one. The experiences appear to be both frightening and frustrating, and seafarers feel they are being treated unfairly.

We were made to queue up and felt like criminals, then taken to a facility more like a prison camp than a hotel.

Conclusion

The average happiness score rose once more this time around. Given the negative backdrop of world events, this was again something of a surprise, though the increase was a small one. The average SHI results showed happiness levels of seafarers at 6.37/10, up from 6.35 in Quarter 3.

The main driver of this slight rise in satisfaction appears to be the owners who have been taking action to address the needs of their crews. This is not always about being able to get seafarers home or out to ships. Rather the positives come in small steps – it is the happiness which comes when owners invest in better or cheaper connectivity for their fleet, it is providing better food and more choice, or it is the provision of new gym or entertainment equipment.

These areas saw climbs in happiness because seafarers felt valued, appreciated and understood. Time and time again the responses were about the gratitude when employers do the small things which make a difference. Of course, seafarers want to get home, but they understand that often it is not within the ship owners control. They can, however, make life more enjoyable at sea, and it was encouraging to see the impact where this has been happening. Whilst shipping companies are right to bemoan and rail against the current international system which is trapping their employees, they can at least do something to make life better. New ideas, investment and encouragement can do so much to ease the burdens in this awful time.

There were also expressions of thanks to the ship visitors. These are the individuals who, even though they cannot get onboard or welcome crew to their centres, are still working to get care packages and support to the ships. In these dark times, the efforts of welfare organisations and volunteers have been a real shining light.

There were negatives as well. Seafarers opened up about a number of potential issues which are very much a cause for concern. The impact of the crew change crisis is being acutely felt, and some senior officers said this was the worst situation they have known in decades in the industry. The effect on morale and on the mental health and wellbeing of crew was evident.

Workload is still a difficult area and demands seem to be increasing. Seafarers reported incessant work and of being exhausted and at breaking point. This is very concerning, and there are real fears too for the impact on safety. Accidents are much more likely to happen when seafarers are tired, fatigued and stressed.

It was also saddening to hear the impact that the current situation is having on shipboard life. Seafarers reported that boredom is really beginning to take hold. They are sick of their food, fed up with each other and just want to get home. With nothing to look forward too, it is perhaps unsurprising that so many seafarers wrote to share their negative views.

In line with previous trends, the issue of shore leave saw a decline in happiness levels. Seafarers no longer appear to expect or even want to get time ashore, and time alongside is not one of relaxation or let-up in pressure. Now with the rise of remote inspections, seafarers bemoaned the fact that they now have to wander around the vessel with mobile phones to shoot videos or take photos. Once more it seems the promise of technology means more work for crews, not less.

Again in relation to technology, many seafarers had experienced an increase in cyber security awareness and training. Whilst this is positive and needed with new IMO rules having entered into force, sadly many seafarers reported that the training was not likely to deliver, as the equipment on board was not always fit for purpose.

A key aspect of any seafarer's life is money, and the issue of wages came to the fore once more. Whilst there was a sense of relief for those who are still getting paid, and a growing sense of worry for those who are not, there was also a rising sentiment that the money is not worth the sacrifice in freedom. Being trapped at sea, not knowing

when contracts will end or when reliefs will arrive is having a major impact on seafarers, and it seems the normal pay packets are no substitute for the end of a voyage and the chance to go home.

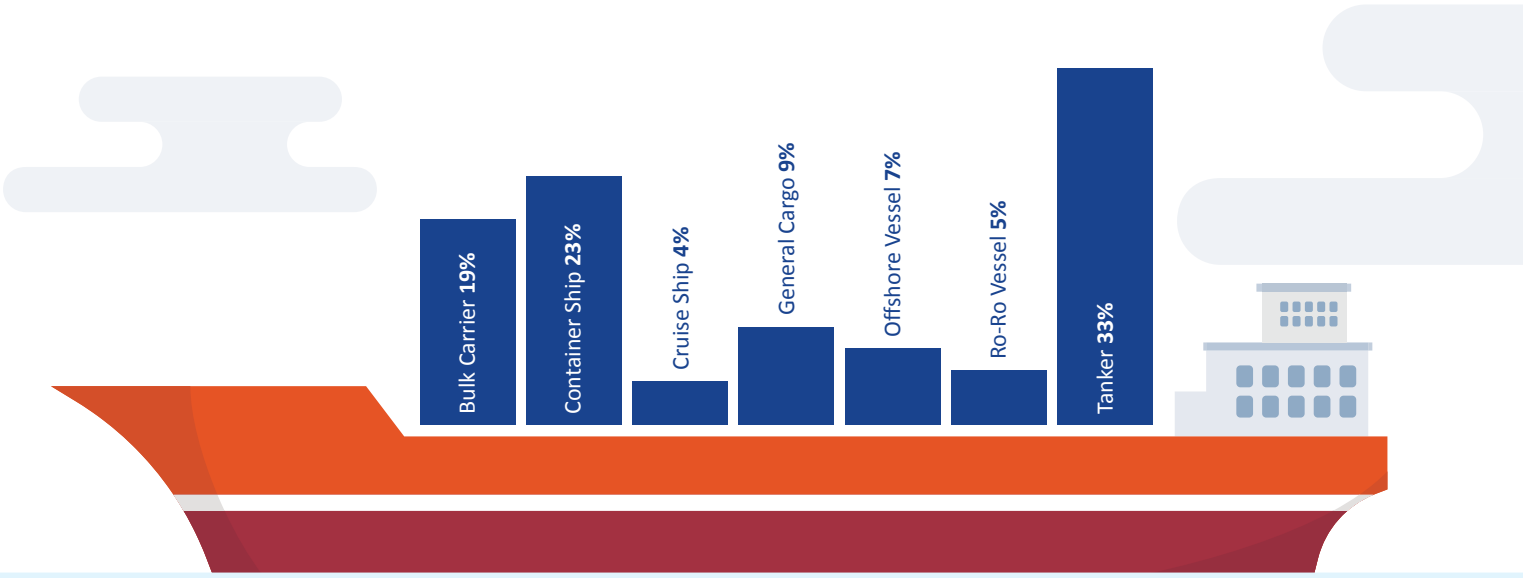
Thank you to all those seafarers who took the time to share their thoughts with us. We are extremely grateful. They told us the things which really frustrate and concern them, the things that make a positive difference, and offered some opportunities for improvement.

We always need more data, and to hear the stories of more seafarers…and for those who have already done so, to share again. So please visit **www.happyatsea.org** to find out more, and to complete the survey. We also want these reports to be spread as far and wide across shipping as possible, so please do share these findings.

We would like to thank our 2020 sponsors, leading P&I insurer the Shipowners' Club and maritime solutions company Wallem Group, and we must also thank the companies which have approached us about setting up bespoke happiness surveys for their own fleets so they can benchmark their own performance against the wider population of seafarers.

Ship Type

Once again, the highest number of respondents served on tankers with container ships, coming in second. We also saw a large increase from offshore vessels. It is to be hoped that there has been a reinvigoration in this sector, one which had seen many vessels decommissioned and jobs lost. There was again a fall in cruise interaction, which most likely reflects the perilous situation that the sector finds itself in.

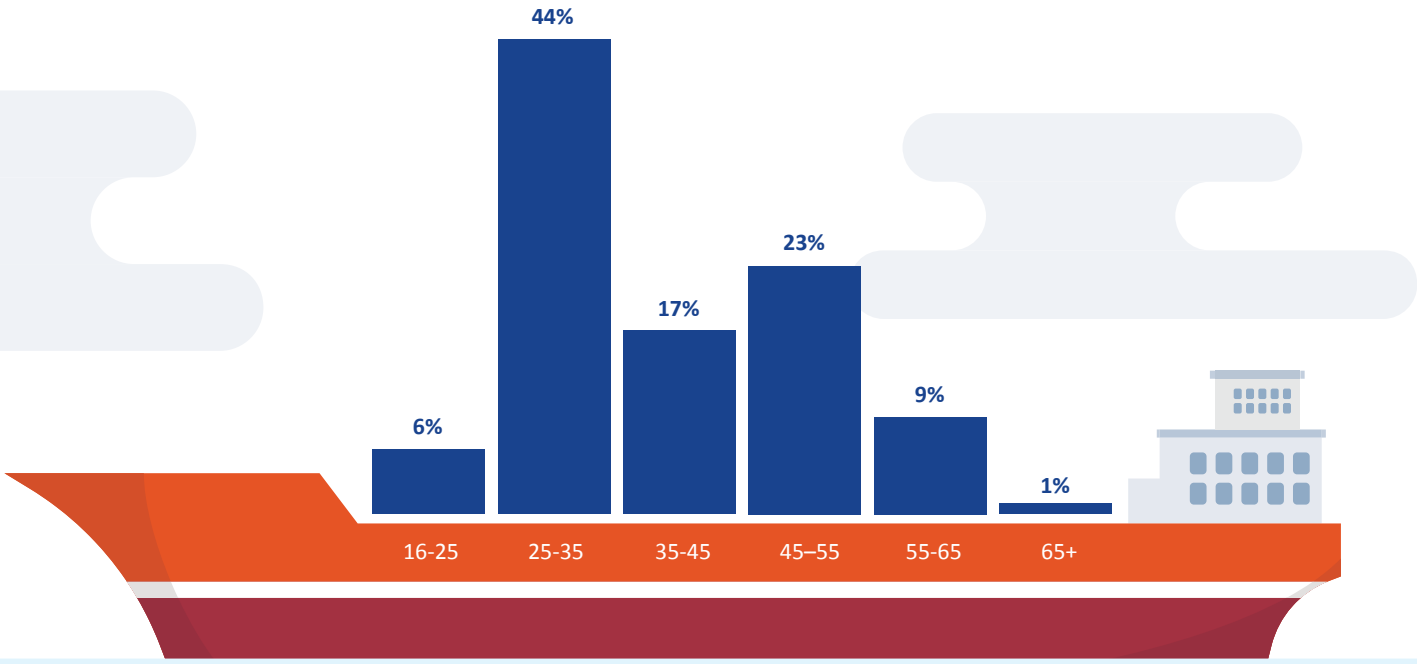


Ship types and happiness

Of the vessel types which bore the highest numbers of respondents, bulk carriers came in top for overall happiness, something which has not always been the case, though container ships were a close second. Tanker levels dipped, and it was pleasing to note both a higher return in responses from offshore crews and that they were feeling generally happier.

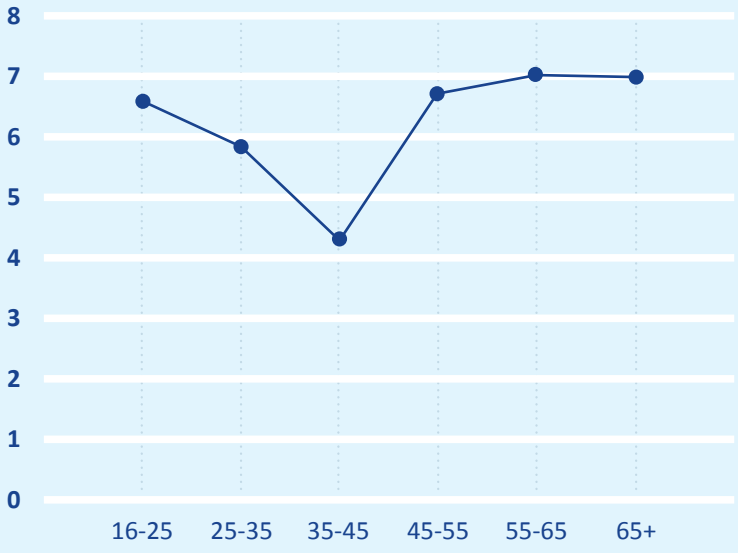
Age Range

Once again, the 25-35 age range was the best represented, making up 44% of all responses. Their responses were fairly consistent and ran close to average across the Index.



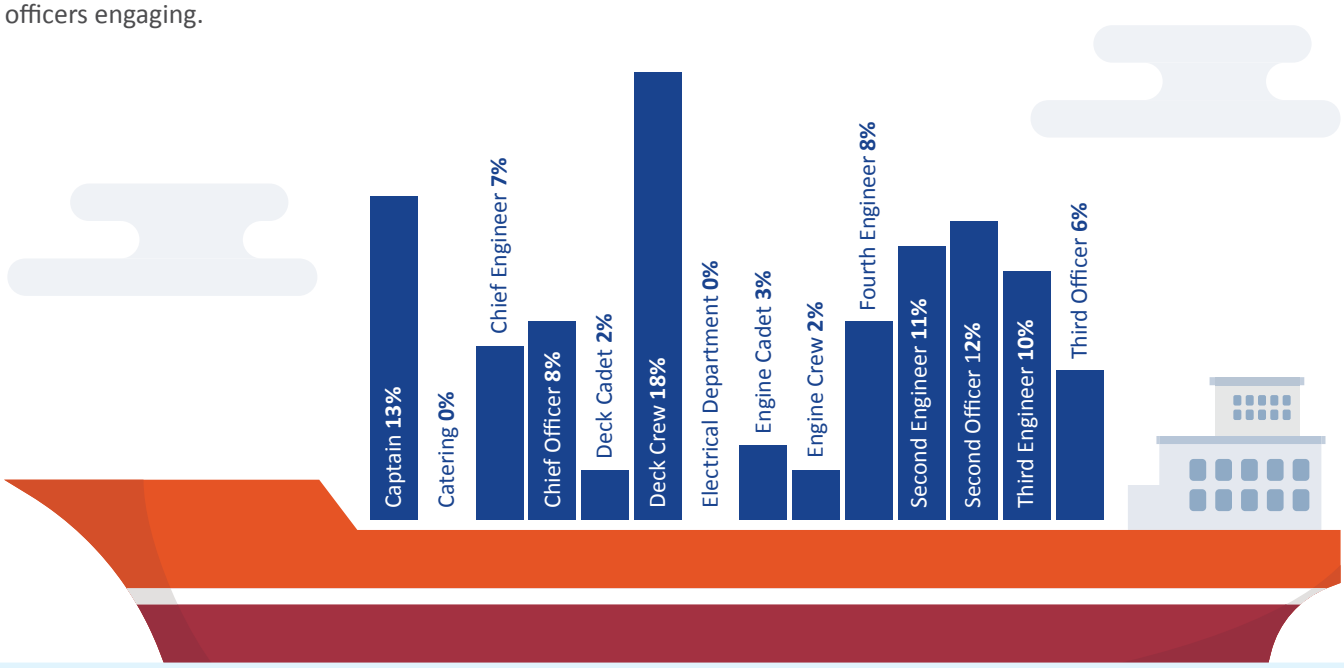
Ages and happiness

There was a far smoother distribution of happiness levels across the age ranges in this Quarter. Where in the past we have seen a drop in the 35-45 age range, this time they performed better and held up well against the more senior age ranges, who reported an average score of 7. The lower happiness levels of the younger age groups are a potential concern when it comes to recruitment and retention issues, particularly as the industry seeks to rebuild its employability reputation in the year ahead.



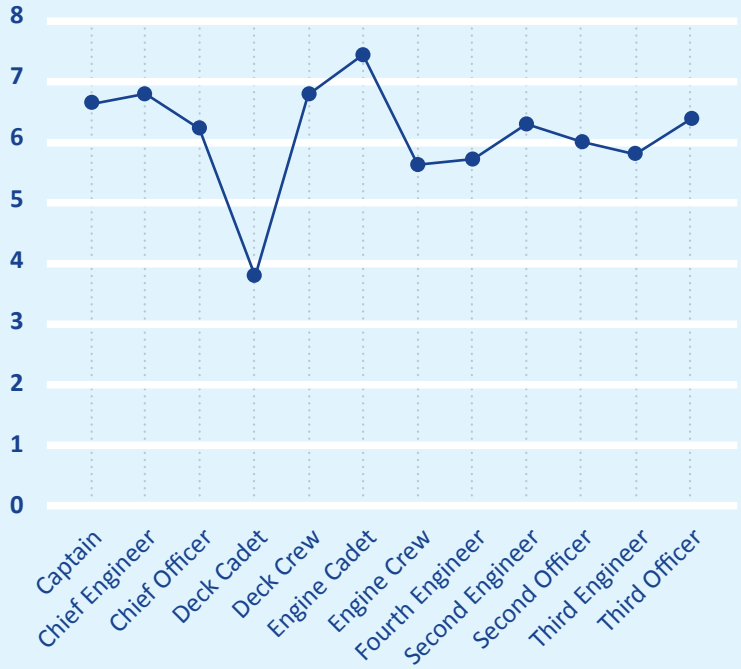
Rank

We received our usual wide spread of seafarers across all ranks and departments. Deck crews were collectively the best represented once more with 18% of the total responses, though we did see a rise in the number of deck officers engaging.



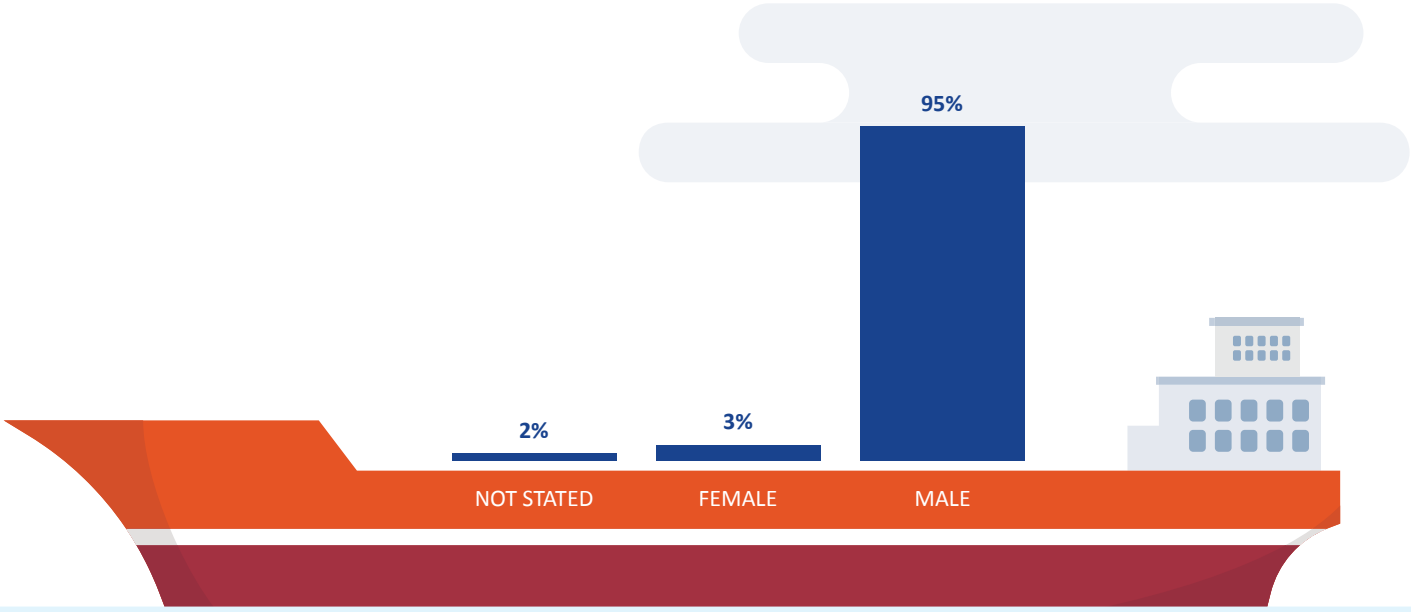
Ranks and happiness

There was a worrying trend in responses responses from deck cadets. Comments reflected an increase in pressure and less attention on training and mentorship onboard. In contrast to previous reports, engineering crew out-performed deck, whilst officers were marginally happier than those in crew ranks.



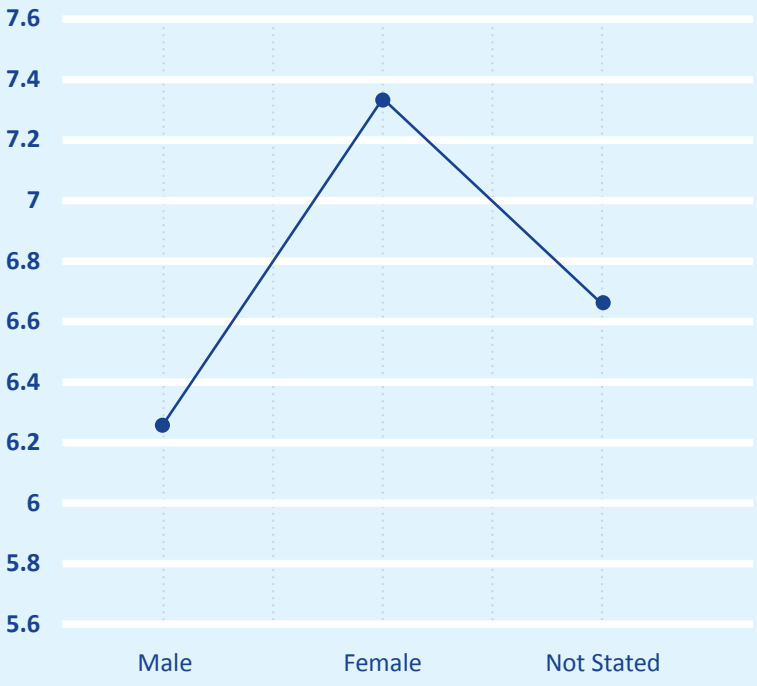
Gender Balance

The number of female seafarers completing the Seafarers Happiness Index remains very low at 3%, but broadly keeps pace with the female seafaring population.



Gender and happiness

This Quarter's results saw females far outstripping men in terms of happiness. They have rocketed to be over a full point higher than the levels for their male counterparts. Notably, there were fewer comments about bullying and harassment this time around.

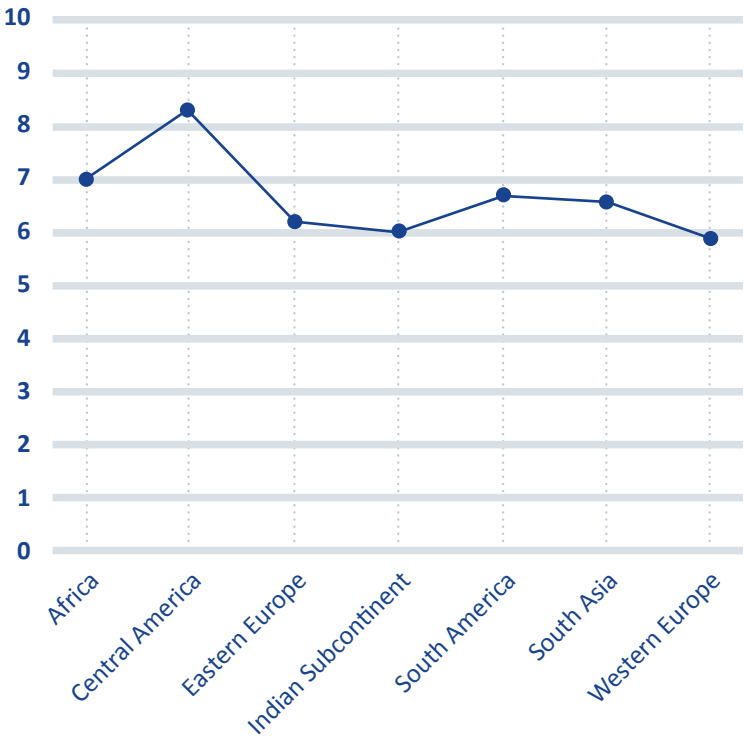


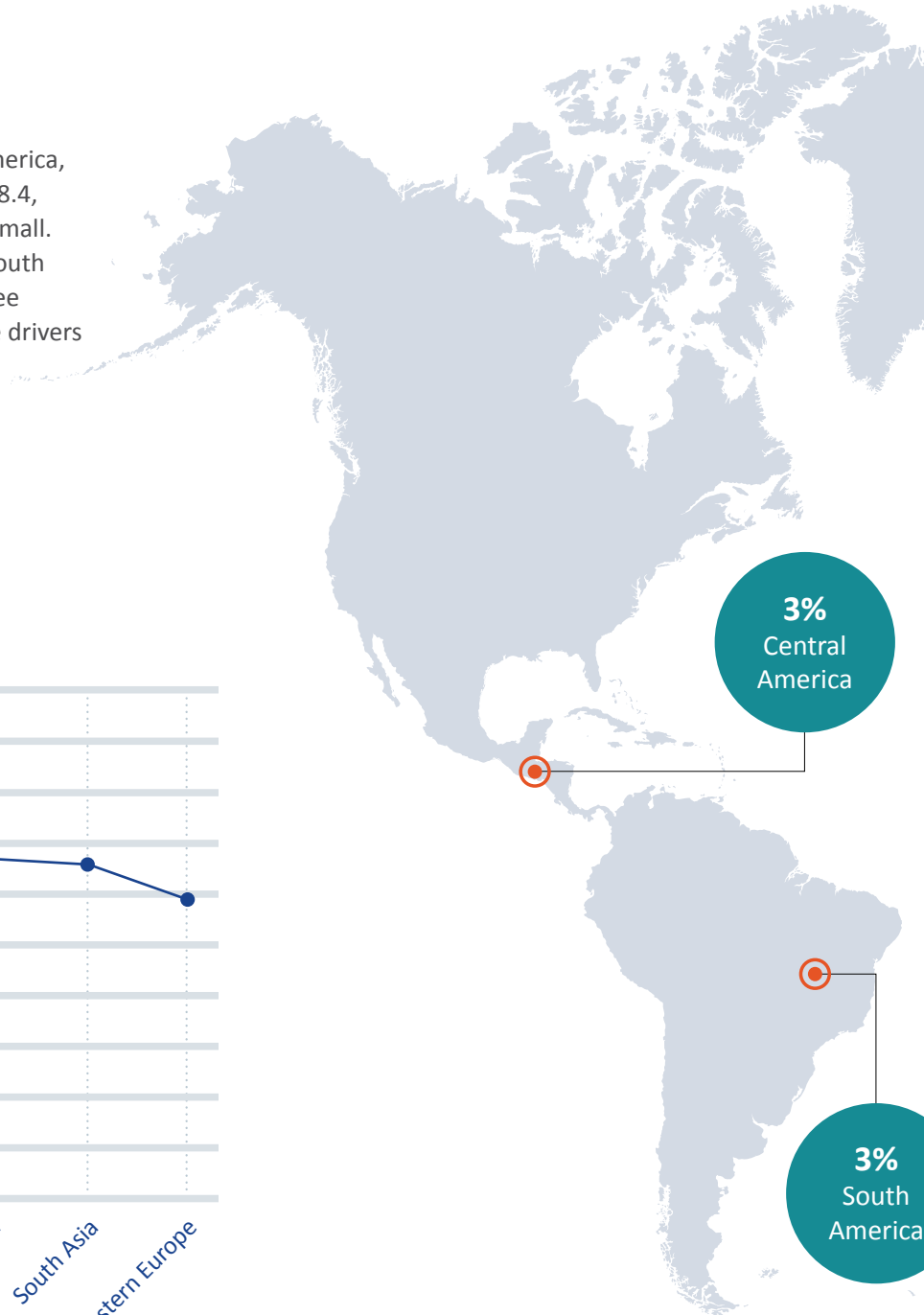
Where

Seafarers from the Indian Subcontinent continue once again to dominate the Index, making up 37% of the total respondents. There was a rise in the number of South East Asian seafarers this time, which is a positive reflection of our ongoing efforts to engage with seafarer centres such as the Philippines.

Regions and happiness

The happiest seafarers were from Central America, recording the highest score we have seen of 8.4, however response numbers were relatively small. Elsewhere we saw drops across Indian and South East Asian crews. This will be monitored to see whether a trend develops, and if so what the drivers might be.





12%
Western Europe
10%
Eastern Europe
31%
South East Asia
4%
Africa
37%
Indian Sub-continent

The Mission to Seafarers – Bringing festive cheer to those stranded at sea

Despite the challenges they face in visiting crew, the Mission to Seafarers teams across the world went the extra mile this year to ensure that men and women working at sea received Christmas presents. Thanks to support from the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), thousands of gifts were distributed to crew throughout December and January. In Hong Kong alone, 8,500 gifts for seafarers were packaged up and distributed to vessels in port over Christmas and New Year.

Even in normal times, this is a mammoth job for local teams, as they frantically work to purchase, pack and hand out the gifts containing hats, chocolates and other goodies. COVID-19 social distancing measures and other restrictions created added pressures, with parcels left at the bottom of gangways for crew to come down to collect. Some teams even found other ways to bring festive cheer – in Bangkok, as well as delivering presents, local teams stopped to sing Christmas carols to those onboard.

The Christmas gifts took on a special poignancy this year and this was clear in reactions from crew. As Mark Classen, port chaplain in Richards Bay commented, "The joy on the faces of the seafarers, who received these beautiful gifts, is indescribable. Some were even shocked to the point that they were standing speechless, only giving a half-hearted nod, in disbelief that someone in a foreign country is actually thinking of them."

Meanwhile, in the Philippines, the Family Network team delivered meals to over 300 seafarers currently staying in dormitories awaiting sign on for new contracts or to return home to their families. The meals and food parcels were a simple way to help them celebrate Christmas together at this challenging time away from their loved ones.

With an estimated 400,000 seafarers currently stranded on ships beyond the end of their original contract, according to figures from the IMO, these small gestures of festive goodwill and thanks are vital. As Penny Philips, chair of MtS Falmouth, where they ensured that all seafarers in port received a gift for Christmas, summed up: "In this year of all years, it is so important for us to thank seafarers for all they have done for us, whether it is by bringing PPE, the vaccine or the food and goods we have needed throughout the year, as well as the food and presents we have this Christmas."

What makes your crew happy at sea?

The Mission to Seafarers is now able to run bespoke Happiness Surveys for your crew, so you can benchmark your quality of care against the international survey.

If you're interested in finding out more, contact **ben.bailey@missiontoseafarers.org**

www.happyatsea.org

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