



Caring for seafarers
around the world

the SEA

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Credit: Agwa

Enjoying fresh salad
in the galley

Eat well, work well

Pioneering at-sea fresh food initiatives satisfy more than hunger **By Felicity Landon**

Would you like fresh salad with that? Or maybe a handful of just-picked parsley? We're not in a restaurant or even making a quick trip to the supermarket here. We're talking about serving meals to seafarers in the middle of the ocean.

Something new is, quite literally, growing. Providing access to fresh greens on board is part of a wider picture in which good nutrition is being recognised as vital – not only for the happiness and welfare of seafarers, but as a safety issue too.

Among companies offering technology to grow produce on board is Agwa. Its remotely operated, AI-controlled compact growing units are installed on about 400 vessels to date, and the company predicts that installations will be in the thousands in a few years' time.

Agwa was targeting domestic customers when it introduced its system five years ago, said Maayan Castel, vice president of product. "Then we recognised this need of the maritime industry for fresh food and started selling the system for vessels."

The units are fitted with cameras and sensors to monitor nutrients, humidity, temperature and plant status and health; the system automatically injects nutrients and adjusts lighting, water, temperature or fans as required and instructions for when to harvest produce are delivered via an app.

"Currently we produce mainly greens and herbs – leaves for salad, parsley, cilantro, basil. The devices we are now working on will also be able to grow fruit such as strawberries and tomatoes," said Castel. "The feedback

from vessels is great – seafarers enjoy having variety on the menu. The other feedback is that there is a real impact on seafarers' physical and mental health. They can feel that someone is taking care of them and the emotional effect is huge.

"We tend to hear more about the welfare part, but it is also the nutritional value. When you give someone good food, it directly affects their focus and motivation; studies show the connection between healthy, fresh, nutritious food and people's ability to perform."

These units do not add to the onboard work, she emphasised. Because they are based on pre-seeded capsules and are fully automated once connected to water and Wi-Fi, seafarers do not find themselves taking on the care of plants at the end of a demanding shift.



AI monitored cabinets keep the produce fresh

Among those using the system are Synergy, Seaspan and Eastern Pacific Shipping (EPS). Arpit Jain, senior manager at Fleet Management Pte Ltd, said: “Agwa is not only a healthy organic option – it’s good for mental wellness. Many of the crew told me they spend some time after their watches near the Agwa pods; seeing the greenery and watching the plants grow gives them mental peace in the mid-ocean.”

Capt Deepak Joshi, master of the EPS’ Sunrise Ray, said: “The experience of being able to produce fresh greens for daily consumption has been an unreal one. It has given us the opportunity to provide the crew with a variety of fresh salads daily, breaking the monotony of having frozen food most of the time.”

Boost for effectiveness

At sea, where seafarers live and work in the same environment for extended periods, nutrition is not simply a welfare benefit but a fundamental component of maintaining a healthy, engaged and effective crew, said Kyriakos Hadjikyriakou, managing director at maritime catering specialist Oceanic. “Food is one of the few features of daily life on board that directly affects every seafarer, every single day. Good nutrition contributes to physical health, mental wellbeing, energy levels and

social cohesion. Equally, poor nutrition can contribute to fatigue, reduced concentration, increased health risks and lower morale,” he said. “Food plays a major role in morale and quality of life on board. A well-prepared meal can provide comfort, familiarity and a sense of normality during long periods away from family. Seafarers consistently describe food as one of the most important factors in their onboard experience.”

From a safety and performance perspective, nutrition directly affects physical and cognitive function, Hadjikyriakou added. “Healthy eating habits support sustained energy levels, concentration, alertness and overall fitness. These factors are particularly important in the shipping industry, where fatigue management, awareness and sound decision-making are critical to safe operations.”

Increasingly, more companies recognise the impact nutrition plays in morale, commitment, safe operations and retention, he added. “The shift has been gradual, but it gained momentum since Covid-19, when the entire industry realised the vulnerability and exposure of seafarers in a world that cannot function without them.”

Today’s seafarers are more health conscious than previous generations, said Hadjikyriakou with many being increasingly aware of the relationship

between diet, energy levels, weight management, fitness and long-term health. “However, awareness does not always translate into behaviour. Seafarers may still go for foods that are familiar, comforting or higher in sugar/salt/fat, particularly when they are feeling stressed or fatigued.”

The objective, he said, should not be to police people’s choices, but to create an environment where healthier options are attractive, accessible and enjoyable. “When nutritious meals are well prepared, varied and culturally appropriate, healthy eating becomes much easier to encourage.”

Core investment

Lorraine Hagar, senior loss prevention executive at The Swedish Club, said crew nutrition should be seen in the same context as investing in training, maintenance or safety management systems. “You won’t see nutrition appearing as a direct cause in an accident report – but nutrition influences many of the factors that increase risk, including fatigue. If you’re eating the wrong type of food, perhaps too many carbohydrates for example, then the body reacts differently and you may get easily tired.”

Poor nutrition can reduce concentration and impair decision-making and physical wellbeing, said Hagar. “The relationship between fatigue and safety performance is well established in the maritime sector, as we all know, with fatigue recognised as a significant contributor to operational errors and accidents at sea. A poorly nourished seafarer who is fatigued and struggling with energy fluctuations, is less equipped to perform safety-critical tasks effectively.”

In the Swedish Club’s ‘Check Your Pulse’ seafarer wellbeing initiative, nutrition is recognised as one of the key pillars supporting health, resilience and the performance of seafarers. “For us, from a loss prevention perspective, incidents rarely occur because of one single failure. More often, they result from a combination of human, operational and organisational factors,” said Hagar.

“The shipping industry has traditionally invested heavily in maintaining vessels, machinery, equipment. But we always say that the most important asset on board remains the crew. Good nutrition supports alertness and concentration, physical endurance and recovery from

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The Check Your Pulse modules are designed to reduce risk and promote reliable performance, which goes hand-in-hand with seafarer wellbeing, she explained. "Most importantly, they also reflect the commitment of an organisation to its people. The quality of food provided sends a clear message about how a company values its crew. Also, a positive onboard food culture improves the morale of the crew. For a multicultural crew, if a company provides different, nutritious food on board it can also encourage social interaction and strengthen the cohesion of the crew.

"Beyond that, it should also enhance retention and job satisfaction – which in turn means that you retain the expertise of your crew and spend less time training new people who are not used to the operations on board."

Hagar also emphasised the need to educate and explain. "If you teach people about good nutrition and what type of food is going to help them stay more awake and healthier, I think they would feel valued and supported and would be more likely to be engaged and proactive. People may be used to how things have been done before – they might ask, why do we need to change, why do I need to have fresh produce? The mentality needs to change on board as well and that's going to be one of the challenges as seafarers can be very much in their routines."

Deeper connection

Hadjikyriakou reflected on the importance of good quality food and well-balanced meals "that touch the heart and soul and connect the seafarer with their culture or community".

A good healthy nutritious meal helps with the physical and mental health, but good food is also a time when people talk, he pointed out. Onshore, we go to a restaurant to enjoy nice food and talk, exchange ideas and share the experience. If the restaurant and food are poor, we would likely be eating quickly and not bothering to socialise.

It's the same with seafarers, he said, except that for those at sea, if the food is poor, with no variety and no attention to detail, they have to endure this every day for months at a time. "Then imagine you step into the mess and find a nicely presented buffet and see the care taken by the chief cook – it shows

appreciation of what you do, and your state of mind is different."

For seafarers, the food on board says a lot about owners and managers, he said. If they can see that effort has been made to deliver a pleasant and enjoyable experience, they are likely to feel more positive about who they are working for and more likely to want to stay with the vessel.

It's easy to imagine seafarers eating healthy food provided on board then returning home to their favourite, possibly unhealthy dishes. Oceanic goes beyond what's eaten on board, getting seafarers' families involved too. Seafarers' families are invited to the Oceanic training centre to learn about nutrition and alternative cooking methods and do some live cooking with the trainers.

"Through our dedicated health and wellbeing department, we promote healthy living through wellbeing initiatives, health promotion campaigns and challenges, educational resources and ongoing engagement with the vessels we serve on healthy eating practices," Hadjikyriakou said. "We also recognise the important role of training, particularly for galley crew, in supporting the preparation of nutritious, balanced and appealing meals.

"Our focus is on creating onboard environments where healthier choices are accessible, attractive and sustainable, while respecting the cultural diversity and personal preferences of seafarers. We believe that investing in nutrition is an investment

in the seafarers who keep global trade moving, supporting their wellbeing, resilience and ability to perform safely and effectively at sea."

Hager added: "A healthy crew is a healthy ship. Good food supports morale and crew engagement. These are the factors that directly contribute to safer operations and better overall vessel performance."

The final word goes to an anonymous officer, who wrote thanking Agwa for its support. "We are currently operating in a sensitive and high-awareness environment in the Gulf, where security considerations and operational pressure remain elevated," the officer wrote. "Despite this, the crew remains focused, professional and committed to maintaining safe and efficient operations on board.

"Your support through Agwa has had a very positive and tangible impact on board. The availability of fresh produce grown directly on the vessel is a significant improvement compared to traditional supply limitations at sea. It enhances not only the quality of nutrition but also contributes greatly to crew morale, daily routine and overall wellbeing. Having access to fresh, healthy food throughout the voyage makes a real difference, especially during extended periods away from ports.

"Beyond nutrition, the presence of Agwa on board brings a sense of normality and positivity to daily life, supporting both physical and mental wellbeing of the crew during challenging operations." 



Harvesting the leaves

Credit: Agwa

Trusted information

Introducing a portable digital identity that consolidates training, certification, sea-time, and compliance

By Peter Schellenberger

At its official launch at the shipping exhibition Posidonia in Greece, LEDGID – a tool to make verified professional identity, credentials and compliance records portable, auditable and reusable across the seafarer lifecycle – named The Mission to Seafarers as its official welfare partner.

The two organisations share a belief that the world's seafarers deserve more than the system they have inherited, and that there needs to be practical means to deliver something better.

For 170 years, the Mission has stood beside seafarers in every corner of the global shipping network. From its founding in 1856 to its work today across more than 200 ports in over 50 countries, the Flying Angel has become one of the most recognised symbols of welfare at sea. That global presence is the foundation on which the partnership is built.

Seafarers already know the Mission, its centres and its chaplains, and they know the support is genuine, confidential and free. What LEDGID adds is a way of turning everyday port visits, training opportunities and welfare touchpoints into moments where seafarers can also take ownership of their professional identity. A chaplain visiting a vessel in a busy port can introduce a seafarer to a system that protects their career history. A port centre offering Wi-Fi and a quiet seat can become the place where a seafarer first claims ownership of their professional record. The Mission's Happy at Sea app, already in the hands of thousands of seafarers worldwide, becomes a familiar gateway into the digital identity infrastructure shaping the future of maritime employment.

The value runs in both directions. For the Mission, the partnership extends its work of practical care into the digital sphere, equipping the seafarers it serves with tools that protect their livelihoods, not only their wellbeing. For LEDGID, it ensures the platform is shaped by the realities of life at sea rather than the assumptions of those who have never been there. For the seafarer at the centre of it all, it means the welfare organisation they already trust and the digital infrastructure they increasingly need are working together rather than in isolation.



Credit: Jefe King

Data bank

Anchored in a user-owned digital profile, LEDGID records verification as an auditable event and enables trust to be carried and shared, with consent, across employers, operators, vendors and other authorised stakeholders. Its doctrine is expressed in four words: neutral, trust, portability, reuse.

For seafarers, it is a portable digital identity that consolidates training, certification, sea-time, and compliance records with direct access to jobs globally. For employers and crew managers, LEDGID offers instant access to a global talent pool of verified seafarers with secure, portable digital profiles that eliminate guesswork, while for flag states and regulators, it offers access to fully digital Seaman's Books, giving real-time oversight of seafarer compliance, training, and certifications with fraud-proof credentials.

LEDGID was founded by three established figures in maritime technology and seafarer welfare. I am one of three co-founders and directors, as well as the founder of maritime consultancy Novamaxis and a recognised voice on connectivity, digitalisation and crew welfare across the global fleet. Henning Davies, co-founder and director, brings deep commercial experience from the maritime learning and operational

technology sector, having held senior leadership positions at Ocean Technologies Group, one of the industry's largest training and crewing software groups, serving more than a million seafarers worldwide. Ronald Spithout, co-founder and director, is the former president of Inmarsat Maritime, founder of MariDISC and a SMART4SEA Leadership Award winner, with more than three decades of experience driving digital transformation at sea.

The company is further guided by senior industry advisers, including David Price, vice president marine at Gulf Oil Marine and a qualified Master Mariner with more than four decades of maritime experience, and Deepak Shetty, former director general of shipping for the Government of India.

LEDGID's welfare partnership with the Mission will be activated through joint programmes across port centres and welfare touchpoints in the coming months, alongside continued integration work with the Happy at Sea app and ongoing collaboration on advocacy, research and seafarer engagement. Look out for further announcements on specific port activations, training programmes and joint initiatives which will follow throughout the year.  Peter Schellenberger is co-founder and director of LEDGID.

Self-help for wellbeing

What to do before you're ready to ask for help

By Anoushka Ugar

I knew a seafarer once. He was not someone you'd expect to be struggling. When he was diagnosed with depression, he was told he couldn't return to sea.

I often think about the months before his diagnosis, when something was clearly wrong but he kept hoping it would pass. For many seafarers, a diagnosis is frightening. Fears about medical fitness, contracts, or the career you've worked hard to build can make silence feel safer.

A diagnosis doesn't create depression. It just gives it a name. This article is for that time before you're ready to ask for help.

Depression doesn't always look the way people expect. It isn't always crying or sadness. Sometimes it's losing interest in things you enjoy, constant exhaustion, trouble concentrating, sleeping too much or too little, or feeling numb. A good call from home or a decent day on board can lift your mood for a while. That doesn't mean you're not depressed. If these changes have lasted more than

two weeks and are making life harder, take them seriously. The following suggestions could help boost your wellbeing.

Physical exercise can help to keep depression at bay. When getting out of bed can feel like hard work, start small. Walk a few laps around the deck. Stretch. Do anything that gets you moving for 20-30 minutes most days. That's enough.

Depression tells you to wait for motivation, but recovery doesn't work that way. Movement comes first; motivation follows.

Bask in the positive power of light. Spend 10 minutes on deck within an hour of waking to help regulate sleep and mood, especially when yours is already off.

Also, try to stay connected on board. Depression has a way of pulling you away from other people but try not to disappear completely. Share a meal, have a conversation, offer a hand with a task. You don't have to explain what you're going through; just staying connected, even in small ways, makes hard days a little less lonely.

Pen to paper

Could writing be for you? Most people try journaling once, stare at a blank page, and give up. The problem isn't you. It's not knowing where to start. Why not try just noting what happened on alternate days, or that thought that kept returning, and one piece of evidence for or against it. On the other day write freely for 15 minutes. Then on day 7, take a break.

Mindfulness has strong evidence for preventing relapse. Sit, breathe, gently return your attention when it wanders. It's not about emptying the mind; it's about just coming back to the present. Give it two weeks before deciding if this is for you or not.

Everyone says sleep matters. But depression doesn't play fair with it. Staring at the ceiling for ten hours and still exhausted? Telling someone with depression to "sleep better" is like telling them to "just feel better". If you can't sleep, try following some of these suggestions: wake at the same time daily, go to your bunk for sleep only and leave it when you have been awake for 20 minutes, and skip alcohol before bed. If you are sleeping too much, cap your sleep at 8-9 hours with a fixed wake time, and add in morning exercises.

And a final word of advice: alcohol and depression feed each other. Alcohol is a depressant. It may ease distress for one evening, but over time it disrupts sleep, raises anxiety, and worsens symptoms. Don't watch how much you are drinking, watch why. Notice if it's to sleep, to feel less, or to get through the evening. That's where it stops helping and starts being the problem.

These strategies can help, but not enough for everyone. Get professional help if symptoms drag on, worsen, if daily life starts to suffer, or if thoughts of self-harm show up. Asking for help isn't failure, it's just the next step.

The seafarer I spoke about at the beginning just wanted to go back to work. What he needed was someone to tell him that depression is treatable, and that asking for help doesn't have to mean losing everything. This article is for anyone who needs to hear that. [S](#) Anoushka Ugar is a clinical psychology researcher and mental health writer, with postgraduate training in clinical psychology and a focus on mental health and wellbeing.



Physical exercise can help physical and mental wellbeing

Credit: Oleksiy Yeshtokyn

Swollen legs, silent risk

Why seafarers are being asked to speak up about DVT

By Kelly Gerakoudi

Ask most people ashore what Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) is, and you'll get a blank look. Ask a long-haul flyer, and they'll mention compression socks and getting up to stretch their legs. But ask a seafarer who has stood a full watch on their feet, or spent days confined to a bunk during a long transit to or from a vessel, and you may be closer to someone who has felt the warning signs without ever having a name for them.

That gap between a serious, potentially fatal condition and the everyday realities of life at sea is exactly what a new independent research project is setting out to close.

I'm leading the research, working alongside a top academic surgeon as co-author. The ambition of the research is refreshingly simple: ask seafarers directly about their experiences with swollen legs, leg pain, and DVT, and use those answers to understand a health risk that has, until now, gone largely unstudied in this workforce.

DVT occurs when a blood clot forms in a deep vein, most often in the leg. Left undetected, it can travel to the lungs and become life-threatening. The condition is well documented among long-haul travellers and hospital patients confined to bed, but seafarers face a distinct combination of risk factors that rarely make it into the clinical literature: prolonged immobility during watchkeeping, cramped living quarters, dehydration, long stretches of travel to embark or disembark from vessel, and the general physical toll of life on board. Despite all of this, hard data on how DVT actually affects seafarers is scarce.

That is the gap this research hopes to fill and why it needs seafarers themselves to take part. The project centres on a short, anonymous online questionnaire, open to all serving seafarers regardless of age, rank, or background. It asks about real, lived experience: has a crew member ever noticed leg swelling or pain that seemed unusual, been diagnosed with or treated for DVT, or wondered whether their working



Seafarers should not ignore persistent leg pain

Credit: Pavel Danilyuk

conditions played a part? There are no wrong answers. The value of the study lies precisely in capturing the range of what seafarers have actually experienced, not what medical textbooks assume they experience.

Prevention and diagnosis

Alongside the survey, the research is examining how telemedicine tools might help detect, manage, and prevent DVT at sea; a question with real practical weight for an industry where a doctor is rarely just down the corridor. If findings show that certain onboard conditions or routines correlate meaningfully with DVT risk, that opens the door to concrete company policy changes: better guidance on movement and hydration during long watches, revised health screening before and after long-haul travel to vessels, or telemedicine protocols that give crew and shore-based physicians a faster way to flag a problem before it becomes an emergency.

My motivation for the project traces back to the classroom. Many of my shipping management students arrive with no seafaring background at all. Some have never set foot on a vessel before I take them on ship visits as part of their studies. Helping future managers understand what

seafarers' working lives actually look like is central to producing shipping professionals who manage people, not just cargo and contracts.

The results will be written up for an international peer-reviewed academic journal and shared directly with shipping and seafarer welfare organisations, with the aim of feeding into future maritime health policy.

For a project like this, participation is everything. If you're a serving seafarer, a few minutes with the questionnaire could help shape how the industry looks after your health, and the health of everyone who comes after you: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc2uoDpdRn7iwm-tPqAm3Jp8Qy3fjurq5SmPtBW1hiohdPMRJw/viewform>. 

Kelly Gerakoudi DBA is assistant professor of shipping management at Deree, The American College of Greece. She is the author of *Introduction to Shipping: A Modern Guide to the Maritime Industry* and series editor of *Routledge Practical Handbooks in Shipping Management*. In addition, she hosts *The Greek Shipping Podcast* and *ShipTalk Vodcast*, engaging industry leaders and promoting dialogue between academia and the global maritime community. YouTube: @KellyGerakoudi

Driving out illegal fees

Unlawful recruitment fees continue to burden seafarers despite existing protections

By Francesca Fairbairn

Illegal recruitment fees remain a widespread problem in the maritime industry, leaving many seafarers facing significant financial hardship and raising concerns about worker welfare, recruitment practices and onboard safety. Despite international rules prohibiting most employment-related charges, recent research suggests the practice remains common across the global shipping workforce.

Under the ILO's Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) 2006, seafarers should not be required to pay for securing employment, with limited exceptions such as obtaining a passport, seafarer's book or national medical certificate. However, joint research conducted by the Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB) and TURTLE found that 31% of surveyed seafarers had been asked to pay recruitment-related fees, and nearly three-quarters of those approached ultimately paid them.

The charges reportedly take many forms, including payments to secure employment, as well as costs linked to travel, accommodation, uniforms and personal protective equipment. In some cases, seafarers reported paying more than \$10,000 to obtain a single position. Lower-ranked crew members were found to be less likely than officers to refuse such demands.

The research also highlighted a lack of reporting. According to the findings, 80% of affected seafarers did not report the incident, often because they were unaware the practice was illegal, did not know where to raise concerns, or believed reporting would not lead to change.

Beyond the financial impact, the study pointed to wider welfare implications. Among respondents who had paid fees, 73% reported negative mental health effects, including anxiety, depression and sleep disturbances, raising concerns about the potential implications for wellbeing and safety at sea.

Identify and eliminate

Against this backdrop, IHRB and TURTLE have launched a new online toolkit intended to help maritime employers identify and eliminate illegal

recruitment fees within their operations and supply chains. The resource provides guidance on due diligence processes and outlines which costs employers are required to bear under the MLC framework.

While primarily aimed at employers, the toolkit also includes information for seafarers on recognising potentially unlawful charges and routes for reporting concerns. It directs workers towards unions, employers, flag and port state authorities, and organisations including the ITF, Mission to Seafarers and ISWAN's SeafarerHelp service.

This toolkit forms part of a broader industry effort involving organisations including Mission to Seafarers, ITF, ISWAN and the Maritime Anti-Corruption Network, which are undertaking related initiatives focused on awareness, recruitment practices and government engagement.

Isabelle Rickmers, CEO and founder of TURTLE, frames the issue as a threat to the industry's own talent pipeline: "You cannot solve a talent shortage with an industry that charges people to enter it. Illegal recruitment fees do more than break the law, they poison the very entry point our industry most needs to protect."

No worker should face the scourge of recruitment fees. Yet these fees are putting a heavy burden on the seafarers who transport our goods and keep 90% of the world's trade running. Seafarers deserve better, and the TURTLE tool is here to help. The toolkit was produced with TURTLE and the Rafto Foundation, with funding from The Seafarers' Charity, the TK Foundation, the ITF Seafarers' Trust and the Swiss government. <https://responsible-maritime-recruitment.ihrb.org/>. Francesca Fairbairn is shipping lead at IHRB. The resource can be found at <https://responsible-maritime-recruitment.ihrb.org/>.



Seafarers should never pay to secure employment

Wellbeing in its broadest terms

How a seafarer feels is often a combination of on board and shoreside factors

**By Sandra Welch and
Capt Kuba Szymanski**

Tensions in the Middle East have thrust the shipping industry into the global news cycle, sadly framed through the lens of conflict and violence. While periods of geopolitical instability inevitably create uncertainty for seafarers and their families, it is important to recognise that the experience of those working at sea is often more nuanced than it is sometimes portrayed.

It should be noted that the situation in the Gulf and Strait of Hormuz presents very real challenges, chiefly for operators and seafarers in the region, and Gulf nations such as Bahrain, Qatar and Iran. However, despite this regional insecurity, the international shipping industry continues to display its remarkable resilience and an adeptness at finding workarounds when faced with operational challenges, be they geopolitical crises, natural disasters or accidents at sea.

This is also true of seafarers, who are highly skilled and resilient professionals, accustomed to operating in complex and demanding environments, as was evident with the rapid resumption of crew changes on vessels in the Gulf and seafarers returning to work following the resumption of flights a few short weeks after the outbreak of the conflict. This is not, of course, to dispel the very real threat of harm, distress, injury or loss of life merchant seafarers face in conflict afflicted parts of the globe, or the troubling reality that crews continue to find themselves in waters made dangerous by factors and actors far beyond their control.

Faced with emerging and escalating threats, it is absolutely fundamental that as an industry we strive to ensure seafarers have access to safe working conditions, be they at sea or in port. The extraordinary efforts of the IMO's secretary general, Arsenio Domingo, to this end should be applauded, and serve as an example to the rest of the sector

as to what can be achieved through international collaboration and co-operation.

Return to normality

Beyond the headlines, we must also address the common misconception among non-seafarers that time at sea is viewed negatively among mariners, or as a period of isolation and loneliness. Seafarers often view things differently, often viewing time at sea as a return to normality where they can carry out their duties free of pressures and constraints. Less considered are the stresses and anxieties that often arise from the wider pressures that sit around maritime life, such as financial security, family welfare, access to services, career progression and uncertainty beyond an individual's immediate control.

At the Seafarers Hospital Society (SHS), we have supported the health and welfare of seafarers and their families for more than 200 years. Our experience shows that wellbeing is shaped by a combination of on board and shoreside factors. Economic pressures, concerns about loved ones at home, injury, illness, mental health challenges and difficulties accessing timely support can all have a significant impact on an individual's welfare, wherever they are located.

Our response is therefore twofold: to provide practical, accessible support for individuals while also working with partners across the maritime sector to address the systemic challenges that affect seafarers' health and welfare.

One of the key areas where SHS has strengthened support is mental health and wellbeing. We fund free access to Togetherall, a confidential online mental health platform available to eligible seafarers and their families. The service provides 24/7 peer support moderated by mental health professionals, alongside self-help resources and access to counselling. This recognises that seafarers may seek support in different ways and at different times, whether they are at sea, in port or at home.

We have also expanded access to professional counselling through specialist partnerships via Therapy Centre Services, enabling seafarers to receive timely and confidential support when they need it. Early access can

Anxieties for seafarers can arise from the wider pressures that sit around maritime life



Seafarers can view time at sea as a return to normality

Credit: Atmadeep Das



make a substantial difference in helping individuals manage stress, anxiety, bereavement or other personal challenges before they become more serious concerns.

Wellbeing, however, extends beyond mental health. Physical health remains a major priority. Working at sea can be physically demanding, with injuries and musculoskeletal conditions common across many parts of the maritime industry. SHS supports working seafarers through initiatives such as fast-track physiotherapy, helping them access treatment more quickly and reducing the risk of longer-term health problems that could affect both their livelihoods and quality of life.

Financial resilience is another critical factor. Prolonged periods ashore due to unexpected illness, family crises, disability or bereavement can place enormous pressure on seafarers and their dependants, with many simply unable to earn money and provide for their loved ones, as opposed to time spent at sea where they are able to earn a living. Through our grants programmes, SHS helps individuals and families facing hardship by assisting with essential costs and unforeseen expenses. By addressing

these practical concerns, we can often alleviate some of the underlying stress that affects overall wellbeing.

Advice and guidance

Alongside these direct services, SHS supports the Seafarers' Advice and Information Line (SAIL), which provides expert advice and guidance on welfare, benefits, debt, housing, employment matters and other issues affecting seafarers, fishers, Royal Navy personnel and their families. Access to trusted information is often as important as financial assistance in helping people navigate difficult circumstances.

In this context, health key performance indicators (KPIs) have an important role to play. In times of crisis, health KPIs need to do more than measure routine activity or compliance. They should help organisations understand whether their systems, people and resources are sufficiently prepared; whether responses are timely and coordinated; and whether learning takes place after an incident. For maritime health and wellbeing, this means moving towards practical, crisis-sensitive measures that capture preparedness, escalation, communication, resilience, recovery and continuous improvement.

This approach aligns with the Seafarers Hospital Society's Best Practice KPI framework, which uses staged, measurable indicators to help maritime organisations track regulatory compliance, assess the impact of their policies on seafarer health and welfare, and progressively embed health and wellbeing into their culture of care. The purpose is not to create punitive measures, but to provide practical evidence that supports better decision-making, safer onboard care and stronger support before, during and after a crisis.

Ultimately, our goal is not simply to respond to crises, but to help build a maritime sector in which health, welfare and wellbeing are recognised as essential components of operational safety and sustainability.

Seafarers keep global trade moving and play a vital role in the world's economy. Ensuring they have access to effective health services, welfare support, mental health resources and practical assistance is not only the right thing to do, it is fundamental to maintaining a safe, skilled and resilient maritime workforce for the future.  Sandra Welch is the CEO and Capt Kuba Szymanski is the chair of Seafarers Hospital Society.

Drug burden

Bridging the gap between guidance and reality when narcotics are found on board

By Leyla Pearson

For any seafarer, the discovery of illegal narcotics on board a vessel is a deeply serious and frightening situation. Even where crew have no knowledge of, or involvement in, criminal activity, the consequences can be life changing. Seafarers can find themselves detained in a foreign country, separated from their families, facing legal systems they do not understand, and treated as suspects simply because they were serving on the ship.

This is one of the most difficult human rights challenges facing our industry. Criminal networks exploit global shipping routes, vessels and ports, often without the knowledge of those working on board. Yet, too often, innocent seafarers bear the consequences.

The 2025 IMO/ILO Guidelines on the Fair Treatment of Seafarers Detained in Connection with Alleged Crimes can assist in such cases. The guidelines were developed to ensure appropriate legal process for seafarers and reinforce existing fundamental principles: that seafarers should be

treated fairly and with dignity; that they are presumed innocent unless proven guilty; that detention should not be arbitrary or longer than necessary; and that due process must be followed.

However, there remains a troubling gap between State-agreed guidance and what happens in reality.

We continue to see cases where seafarers are detained for long periods while investigations unfold. Some are held without adequate interpretation or translation. Others struggle to access consular support or legal advice. Many are left unable to work, unable to return home, missing critical family milestones and experiencing severe deterioration in their physical and mental health.

To every seafarer reading this: it is important to know that your rights matter. If narcotics are discovered on board, you should not be treated as guilty just because of your rank, nationality, or presence on the vessel. Any investigation should be evidence-based. Authorities should consider the realities of life at sea: that seafarers operate across multiple jurisdictions, often with limited control over what happens in ports and terminals or during cargo operations.

That does not mean States should ignore drug trafficking. Far from it. Port and coastal States have legitimate security responsibilities, and the guidelines do not seek to amend national laws and procedures. The maritime industry must continue to support efforts to prevent and investigate criminal activity, but enforcement must not come at the cost of justice for innocent crew.

Reach out

If you are affected by such an incident, it is vital that you ask for support as early as possible. The master, shipowner, flag State, your union, welfare organisations and your consulate may all have roles to play. You should seek clear information about why you are being questioned or detained, request interpretation if needed, and ensure that legal advice is made available. You should also make sure your family is kept informed through the appropriate channels.

For shipowners and industry stakeholders, prevention is essential. Strong security procedures, crew awareness, port risk assessments and co-operation with relevant authorities all help reduce the risk of vessels being exploited. The International Chamber of Shipping's Drug Trafficking and Drug Abuse On Board Ship (2025-2026 Edition) provides comprehensive guidance on preventive measures, regional cooperation frameworks and fair treatment principles, helping companies and crews better understand both the risks and the support available when incidents occur. But prevention alone is not enough. When narcotics are discovered on board, we must also ensure that seafarers receive the assistance they need to navigate what are often complex criminal processes.

The guidelines provide a clear roadmap. They call for co-operation between port States, flag States, coastal States, States of nationality, and shipowners and also provide guidance for seafarers. They recognise that once a seafarer is no longer required for an investigation, they should be allowed to re-embark or be repatriated without undue delay. Where appropriate, options such as financial security should be considered to allow repatriation while proceedings continue.

The challenge now is implementation. It is not enough for maritime authorities to support fair treatment in principle if police, prosecutors and courts are unaware of the guidance in practice. Greater awareness is needed across whole government administrations, not just within transport ministries.

Seafarers are essential workers. Global trade depends on their professionalism, resilience and courage. If we want to attract and retain the next generation, they must know that they will be treated fairly and that their fundamental rights will be respected when things go wrong.

The guidance exists. The principles are clear. Now they must be applied consistently, fairly and urgently – for every seafarer, everywhere. 🌐

Leyla Pearson is senior manager for legal at the International Chamber of Shipping.

Seafarers don't always know what is being loaded onto their ship



Credit: Simon R. Minshall



Credit: Simon R. Minshall

The role of the ship's cook has changed dramatically over the years

Fair fare for seafarers

Food is a vital component for a happy ship

By Michael Grey

If an army marches on its stomach, a commercial ship's efficiency and general wellbeing depends a great deal on what goes on in the galley. And it is a challenging job, satisfying the diverse tastes of an international crew, which has become thoroughly normalised in recent years. Good cooks, you might think, are heroic figures, turning out three meals a day 24/7, for people who work around the clock and probably have little time to leisurely savour the gastronomy, but will appreciate what is on their plates.

They also have an important role in keeping their fellow crew members healthy, although they may become weary of endless advice from ashore about calorie-counting and their responsibility for preventing overweight seafarers. It is upon their skill and subtle menu-engineering that those prone to eating what is not good for them can be persuaded to change their bad habits. And that is not easy. I remember the chief cook on a big freight ferry talking about the sheer struggle he had to persuade the road-haulier passengers that there was a better way of treating one's body than filling it full of fat and carbohydrates. But that was exactly what the

passengers wanted, and if there were not chips with everything (other than pudding), they would complain.

The role of the cook has changed markedly over the years. Tales of the long era of sail, heavy on accounts of scurvy and other food-related diseases, picture the cook as somebody who was forced to do a job that nobody wanted. Invariably the cook was somebody too old or disabled to go aloft and was expected to produce something vaguely edible from the disgusting raw materials provided by a parsimonious owner, and which would decay without refrigeration as the voyage ground on. Joseph Conrad is an excellent guide to sailing ship cookery, if further information is needed.

Moving with the times

The arrival of steamships saw some improvement, and the regulation of ships' provisions, although there remained many owners who regarded these as an imposition and grudgingly provided only the bare statutory minimum, lest the crew ate the voyage profits. Eventually, more enlightened times arrived, along with better trained catering staff, and regulatory oversight from port state control, just to ensure short cuts were

not being taken. There remains, as there always has been, a minority of ship operators who are unconcerned with the welfare of the seafarers they employ.

Modern times have seen the size of ships' crews reduced substantially, and the number of people available to cook has also sharply reduced. A giant ship with a crew of twenty may typically have a single cook to cater for them, which means there will be little respite for this hard-worked individual, who invariably has to plan the menu in addition to cooking it.

Can this trend continue, with all the talk about AI and further automation? A cautionary tale comes from the 1980s and a scheme for a series of hugely advanced "ships of the future", packed with advanced equipment and run by a minuscule crew of highly qualified seafarers. Which of these scientifically inclined seafarers would do the cooking? An initiative came from the airlines, and a plan to provide the ship with pre-cooked food, which could be extracted from a microwave at the touch of a button. Fortunately, somebody who was regrettably familiar with airline food vetoed the idea, at an early stage. A properly qualified cook was duly appointed to each ship. 

People and purpose

WSM's Håkon Lenz explains why the human element will remain at the heart of shipping

By Carly Fields

For Håkon Lenz, president and CEO of Wilhelmsen Ship Management (WSM), the future of shipping will be shaped by technology, automation and artificial intelligence. Yet despite rapid technological change, he remains convinced that competent seafarers will continue to be the industry's most important asset.

Having risen from a technical background as a naval architect to lead one of the world's largest ship management companies, Lenz brings an engineer's perspective to an industry wrestling with recruitment challenges, skills shortages and evolving workforce expectations.

According to Lenz, that technical foundation has proven invaluable in understanding what life at sea demands and how employers can better support the people who keep vessels operating safely and efficiently.

"As an engineer, you are trained to think in a structured way," he says to *The Sea*. "In my case, with years of operational experience in addition to my educational background, it makes it easier to understand seafarers' needs and what creates positive working conditions."

That understanding, he argues, underpins WSM's approach to attracting and retaining talent. Rather than competing solely on pay, the company focuses on creating long-term



Håkon Lenz

career opportunities and a supportive employment culture.

"We strive to be an excellent employer where you are treated well, can grow, and can stay throughout your career," Lenz says.

Skills search

The challenge of retaining talent has become increasingly important as the maritime industry debates concerns around global crewing shortages. While many industry stakeholders highlight recruitment pressures, Lenz offers a more measured assessment.

"Despite the sentiment being around shortages, we always have a healthy crew recruitment pipeline," he says.

However, he notes that the issue is less about finding people and more about ensuring access to suitably skilled and qualified personnel. WSM's decision to establish an office in Kenya reflects that strategy.

"The competence remains a key necessity, which is why we opened our office in Kenya," he explains. "You cannot simply pay your way out of this; it is about finding good people, and we do."

Importantly, Lenz says WSM has not yet encountered situations where it has been unable to crew a vessel.

One area where the industry continues to face significant challenges is gender diversity, particularly when it comes to encouraging more women to build long-term careers at sea. For Lenz, the largest obstacle is not recruitment but retention.

"I believe the biggest challenge is finding good solutions for when a woman in seafaring wants to start a family," he says.

To address this issue, WSM is testing pathways that allow female seafarers to transition into shore-based roles during key stages of their family lives. While not a perfect solution, Lenz believes it offers a practical way of retaining valuable maritime experience within the organisation.

"We are currently testing transitioning from being a seafarer to having office work," he says. "That can help, but it is not always easy, especially if you want to return to sea once the children are a little older."

The company has also established a dedicated committee focused on tackling these challenges and identifying opportunities to make careers at sea more accessible.

"There are ways to ensure that everyone who wants to work at sea can do so," Lenz says. "For now, onshore work is often the best solution."

Seafarer retention

The wider question of career attractiveness remains central to shipping's future, especially as seafarers contend with geopolitical tensions, piracy risks, welfare concerns and the ongoing problem of vessel abandonment in some parts of the world.



Culture has become a major focus for ship managers

For Lenz, the answer lies in employers focusing relentlessly on safety, wellbeing and professional development.

“It is about being a good employer and making sure the safety of our crew is always our main priority,” he says.

He points to the importance of comprehensive training, clear career progression opportunities, fair remuneration and supportive working environments.

“It is about training, career paths, proper wages paid on time, safe and positive working environments, looking after mental wellbeing, and reducing risk to ensure that working with us remains attractive and rewarding,” he explains.

Lenz also acknowledges that standards vary significantly across the maritime sector.

“Our industry needs strong industry practices with sound and attractive conditions,” he says. “Sadly, this is not always the case out there in the global maritime industry given the very unfortunate stories we know exist.”

Alongside welfare and retention, culture has become another major focus for ship managers. WSM has publicly adopted a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and harassment, but Lenz stresses that policies alone are insufficient.

“We take every single whistleblower case seriously,” he says. “We follow up, investigate them all.”

The company regularly discusses these issues at officers’ conferences, during town halls and vessel visits, and through internal communication channels.

“The policy is one thing but taking action and using everyday-language and examples to improve behaviour is our key action point,” Lenz says.

Training is another area where WSM has invested heavily, particularly through digital learning tools. The company’s WLearn micro-learning platform has attracted significant attention across the maritime sector as operators seek more flexible approaches to skills development.

Lenz says that the platform’s growth has exceeded earlier expectations.

“WLearn has actually seen over 350,000 sessions completed so far,” he says. “We are naturally very excited about this development.”

The success of the programme reflects changing attitudes toward training delivery, with shorter, on-demand learning modules becoming increasingly popular among seafarers.

Håkon takes a walk with a seafarer



Credit: WSM

“Micro-learning and short programmes are here to stay. No doubt,” Lenz says. “New knowledge and experience can be distributed more efficiently in this user-friendly format.”

However, he rejects suggestions that digital learning will entirely replace traditional classroom instruction.

Highlighting developments such as virtual bridge training, Lenz argues that technology can significantly enhance learning outcomes while still preserving the value of human interaction.

“We will need both micro and classroom training going forward, they complement each other,” he says.

Automation realities

The same philosophy shapes his views on automation. Despite increasing investment in autonomous technologies and remote operations, Lenz believes the pace of change is often overstated, particularly in deep-sea shipping.

“By 2030, we believe the effects of automation will mainly be seen in short-sea shipping,” he says.

Even in sectors where automation advances most rapidly, he expects people to remain firmly involved in vessel operations, with some responsibilities shifting ashore to remote-control centres rather than disappearing altogether.

“For deep-sea shipping, we see automation continuously being introduced to make the seafarer more efficient but not replace competent and experienced crew,” Lenz says.

Artificial Intelligence forms a key part of that evolution. While public discussion often focuses on transformational disruption, Lenz takes a more practical view of AI’s role in maritime operations.

“AI is excellent for troubleshooting, finding regulations, and helping people work faster within existing workflows,” he says. “It can make work both quicker and more accurate.”

Ultimately, however, Lenz remains convinced that shipping’s future will continue to depend on highly skilled people. Technological advances may reshape how work is performed, but they will not eliminate the need for professional judgement, experience and competence at sea.

“There will always be a need for competent seafarers,” he says. “You are the spine of the maritime industry and the backbone of global trade.”

He notes that vessels being delivered today are expected to operate for decades and are being designed with crews firmly in mind.

“Deep-sea vessels especially are designed with people on board in mind, using technology as supplements to competence and experience,” Lenz says.

As shipping enters an era of rapid technological transformation, he believes the profession itself is becoming more interesting rather than less relevant.

“Equipment and technology are becoming more advanced. In this profession, it’s about staying updated and making sure we are all on top of change,” he says. “We believe this is an exciting profession going forward.”

For seafarers navigating that future, Lenz ends with a simple message that cuts through discussions of technology, automation and industry change. “Please continue to take care of each other,” he says. “Create good working environments. For yourself and for each other.” 

theSea Leisure Page

There are many health benefits to spending down-time solving puzzles. Lower stress levels, better memory, uplifted mood, improved problem-solving abilities, and better work performance are just some of them.

Sudoku

The aim of Sudoku is to fill in the empty cells so that each column, row and 3x3 region contain the numbers 1 to 9 exactly once. Find the answers to both puzzles in the next issue.

MEDIUM LEVEL

6								9
	5			3	6	1		
	8	2						
	1			8		3		
5								4
		6		4			2	
						7	4	
			8	3	2			6
7								2

TRICKY LEVEL

						4	1	
5		6	7		9		2	8
				6	2			
		7	5	8				
				9				
				4	1	2		
			1	3				
2	3		6		4	9		5
8	6							

Credit: www.sudokuoftheday.com

MEDIUM LEVEL solution (June 2026)

5	4	2	6	8	3	7	1	9
6	1	7	2	9	4	8	5	3
3	9	8	5	7	1	2	6	4
7	8	5	4	3	9	1	2	6
1	3	6	7	2	5	9	4	8
9	2	4	8	1	6	3	7	5
2	5	1	3	6	8	4	9	7
8	6	9	1	4	7	5	3	2
4	7	3	9	5	2	6	8	1

TRICKY LEVEL solution (June 2026)

8	5	3	7	1	9	2	4	6
6	7	9	3	4	2	5	8	1
2	4	1	8	6	5	3	9	7
3	6	7	1	9	4	8	2	5
5	9	8	2	7	3	6	1	4
4	1	2	6	5	8	7	3	9
1	2	5	9	8	6	4	7	3
7	3	6	4	2	1	9	5	8
9	8	4	5	3	7	1	6	2

Jumble

Can you correctly unscramble these anagrams to form four words? If so, send your answers by email to thesea@missiontoseafarers.org by September 30, 2026. All correct answers will be entered into a draw for a chance to win a US\$50 Amazon gift card. Please include your answers, name, the vessel you are working on, your nationality and finish this sentence: "I like The Mission to Seafarers because..."

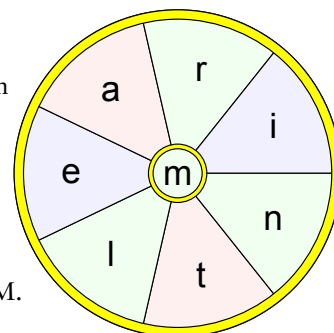
1. Allgey 2. Intoturin 3. Koco 4. Tide

June 2026 issue solutions:

1. Deckhand 2. Equality 3. Superintendent 4. Leave

Word wheel

This word wheel is made from an 8-letter word. Try and find that word, then make as many words of three letters or more as you can from these letters. You can only use each letter once, and each word must include the letter M.



Answer for June 2026 issue: 50 possible words, eight-letter word was *Pipework*

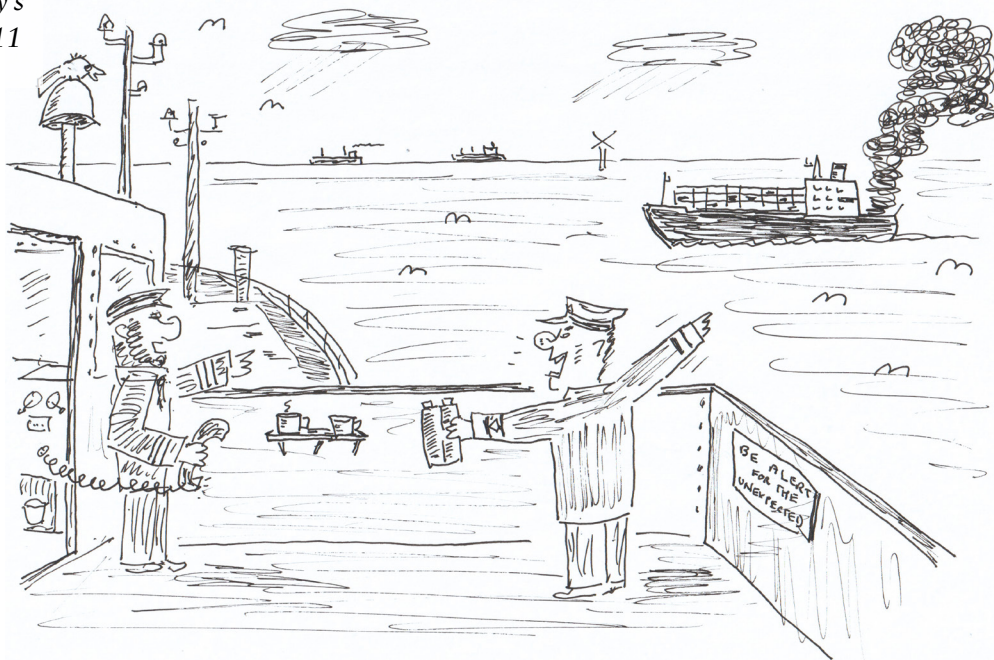
Flag code

Can you tell us what words these flags are communicating? Answer in the next issue.

Answer for June 2026 issue: *Crewing*



See Michael Grey's feature on page 11



"He says it's the cook's night off and they are having a barbeque!"

Help for seafarers around the world

Are you one of the 1.89 million people around the world working at sea, or a loved one of someone who is?

The Mission to Seafarers is a great source of support for anyone working in the industry, and we've been helping people like you since the 19th century.

We work in over 200 ports in 50 countries and are available 365 days a year. We can provide help and support, no matter your nationality, gender or faith. Our network of chaplains, staff and volunteers can help with any problem – whether it's emotional, practical or spiritual help that you need.



Our services include:

- **Ship visits** – we carry out approximately 43,000 ship visits a year, welcoming crews to ports, providing access to communication facilities and offering assistance and advice on mental health and wellbeing.
- **Transport** – Our teams can arrange free transportation to the local town, shopping mall, doctor, dentist or a place of worship.
- **Seafarers' Centres** – We operate over 120 Flying Angel centres around the world, offering visiting seafarers a safe space to relax between voyages, purchase supplies, seek support for any problems they might have and stay in touch with their families.
- **Emergency support** – Our teams are trained in pastoral support, mental health first aid and critical incident stress counselling. We can also provide advocacy support.
- **Family networks** – We operate these networks in the Philippines and India where seafarers' families can meet, share information and access support.

Our mission is to care for the shipping industry's most important asset: its people.

To find out where we work, visit www.missiontoseafarers.org/our-ports. Here you can find information about all our centres, including contact details, facilities and opening times or download our free Happy at Sea app.



CREW HELP CONTACTS

SeafarerHelp

Free, confidential, multilingual helpline for seafarers and their families available 24 hours a day, 365 days per year, provided by ISWAN.

Direct dial: +44 20 7323 2737

Email: help@seafarerhelp.org

WeCare

Our WeCare e-learning programme gives seafarers access to mental health advice and wellbeing resources on board and on shore. For more information contact your local Seafarer Centre, www.missiontoseafarers.org/our-ports.

CrewHelp

The Mission to Seafarers can provide help and support if you have a welfare or justice issue. Please get in touch with us at crewhelp@mtsmail.org

Get in touch!

Have you got news or views that you'd like to share with *The Sea*? Please get in touch with the Editor, Carly Fields at thesea@missiontoseafarers.org

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Decoding the industry

Why greater transparency can help protect and promote seafarers **By Peter Rouch**

Every profession has its jargon – words and phrases that make perfect sense to people on the inside but can be confusing for everyone else. I remember my first experiences in the maritime world. It often felt as though everyone else understood the abbreviations and names while I struggled to keep up. Learning to “speak maritime” took time.

The language is only one part of a much bigger challenge. Shipping is a complex industry. The way vessels are owned, the rules that govern cargo, and even the process for seafarers finding work can be difficult to understand. For many seafarers, important information around recruitment is hard to find, making it much harder to make good decisions or know which companies can really be trusted.

I have heard it said that “transparency fosters goodness – bad things are more likely to take place behind closed doors”. Many seafarers know the feeling of becoming almost invisible once they board a plane or join a ship, almost as if they have gone behind a closed door. Life at sea can feel distant from the rest of the world, and when problems arise it can seem as though no one knows or can help.

That is why for some time The Mission to Seafarers has been arguing for the development of a secure, widely available digital system for seafarers. Such a platform could help seafarers present their qualifications directly to employers, reducing dependence on unfair or even illegal recruitment practices. It could also allow seafarers to record and safely share their experiences, protecting their identity while helping to build a clearer picture of life at sea. Greater transparency could shine a light on things that are too often hidden.

That is why the LEDGID system featured in this issue (*Trusted information* – Page 4) is so interesting. The Mission has no commercial interest in it. What engages us is its potential to connect the different parts of a seafarer’s journey – from recruitment agency to vessel, from port to port, and from one point of contact with the Mission to another.

A tool of this kind could make a real difference to the transparency of life at sea – putting more information and more control into the hands of seafarers. How far that journey goes will depend, in part, on the support and involvement of seafarers themselves.

Of course, transparency is not always comfortable. In our own lives, perhaps there are things of which we are not especially proud. But transparency also creates the opportunity to change, to turn, to build a better life for ourselves as well as a stronger, fairer, and more trustworthy maritime industry. 📧

The Ven Dr Peter Rouch is the secretary general of The Mission to Seafarers.



Seafarers need trusted information to make better decisions

PRAYER FOR
SEAFARERS

*Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
by your Holy Spirit make clean the thoughts of our hearts,
that we may truly know you and truly love you,
through Christ our Lord.
Amen*

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