



Seafarers Happiness Index

Quarter 2 / 2019



The
Seafarers
Happiness
Index

IN ASSOCIATION WITH



SHIPOWNERS

SECURITY FOR SMALL & SPECIALIST VESSELS

In association with the Shipowners' Club

The Shipowners' Club is a mutual insurance association which offers Protection & Indemnity (P&I), Legal Costs Cover and associated insurances to small and specialist vessel owners, operators and charterers around the world.

The Club is committed to promoting the positive health and wellbeing of the seafaring community and as part of this endeavour, is proud to support the Happiness Index.

Seafarers Happiness Index Quarter 2 2019

The shipping industry needs to know how seafarers feel about the challenges facing them at sea, so data from seafarers and dialogue with those at sea is incredibly important. The Seafarers Happiness Index (SHI) exists to provide an ongoing study into how people at sea feel about a range of key areas.

General happiness levels have slipped this quarter, and there have been a range of key issues which explain the dropping trend, and the growing dissatisfaction of crews. Once again, we received compelling and fascinating insights, as well as heartfelt pleas and frustrated opinions from the global fleet.

The Seafarers Happiness Index platform from the Mission to Seafarers is a vital tool in measuring how happy people are about the various elements of their working life, providing a picture of the real successes but also highlighting problems within seafaring, delivering opportunities to improve and develop.

The Index is made up of a standard set of ten questions and these cover key areas, such as mental and physical health, diet, rest, workload, connectivity, training, access to shore leave, as well as relationships at home and onboard. These are answered anonymously, and seafarers are encouraged to complete their answers during each trip.

By sharing their feelings on a scale of one to ten, and by providing some written insight, the Index gives a voice to seafarers and addresses the fundamentals of why people are happy to go to sea, or not as the case may be.

Every quarter, seafarers provide their input and insight – so we would encourage people at some point during each trip to sea to take just a few minutes to share their thoughts. The Seafarers Happiness Index can be completed at www.happyatsea.org

So please, whether you are a seafarer or whether you work with seafarers, we need to hear the real-life tales onboard ships today. We urge you to complete the Index during every trip to sea so we can build data and weave the stories of what is truly being experienced during life at sea.

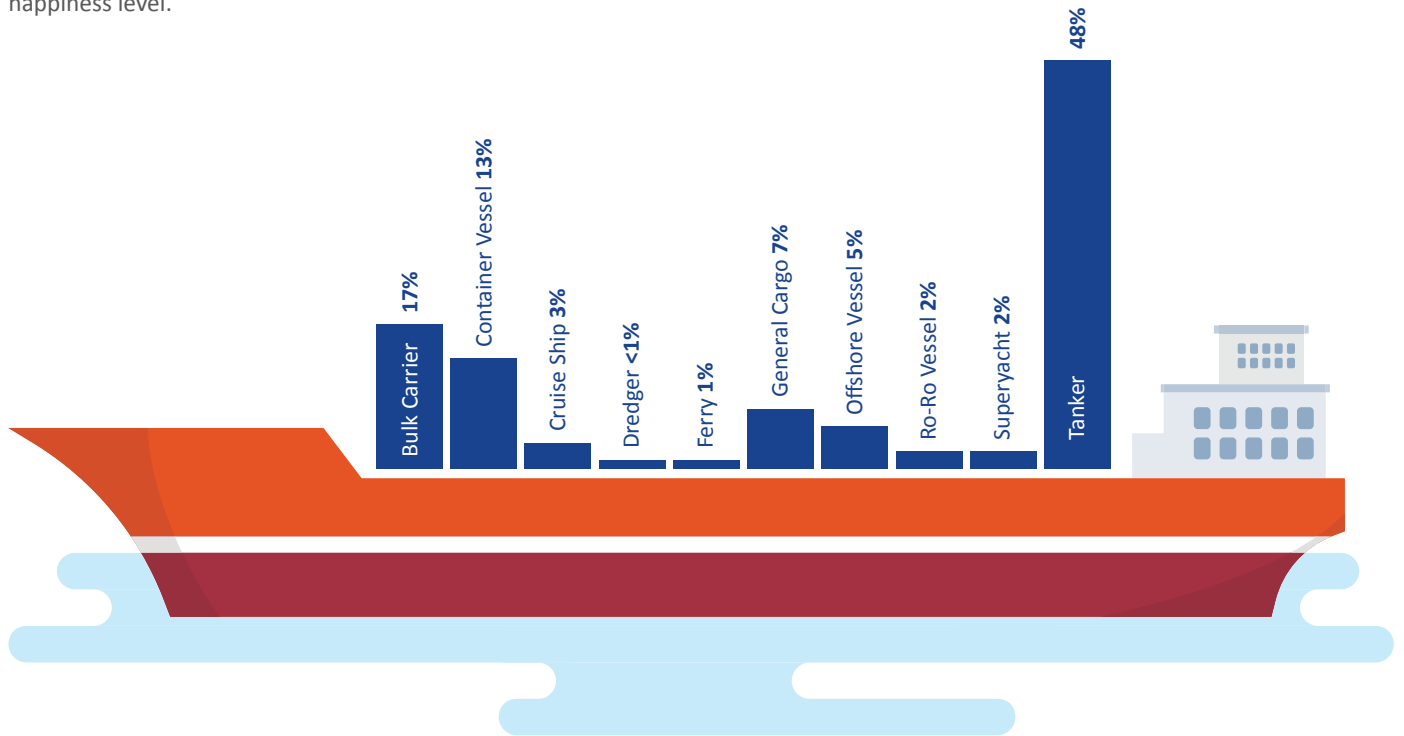
Executive Summary

Overall Seafarer Happiness is down to **6.27/10**...from **6.31**. Across our new website and survey function, as well as social media channels and by those visiting our seafarer centres globally, we were contacted by more than 2000 seafarers, with many sharing their views in addition to the data.

SHIP TYPE

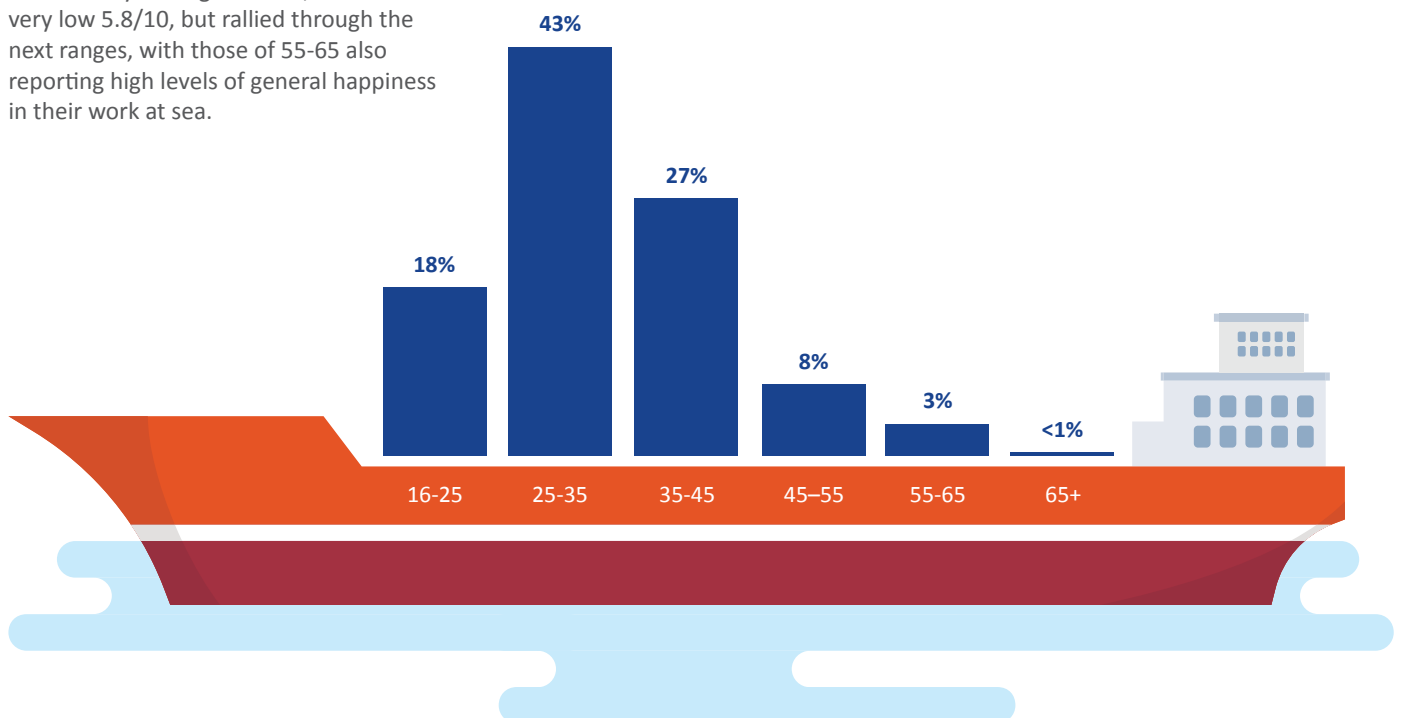
Seafarers on dredgers were the most satisfied according to the data, however, the percentage of respondents serving on this type of vessel was low – perhaps just a very happy ship! Elsewhere, ferry crews and those on cruise ships were reportedly the least satisfied, with an average of 5.3/10 on their general happiness level.

Crews on tankers, bulk carriers and container ships were all surprisingly well clustered around the 6.3 mark, very close to the average happiness level this quarter.



AGE RANGE

The youngest age range proved to be the happiest, with a very high 7.9/10 reported. The score plummeted dramatically amongst 25-35s, down to a very low 5.8/10, but rallied through the next ranges, with those of 55-65 also reporting high levels of general happiness in their work at sea.



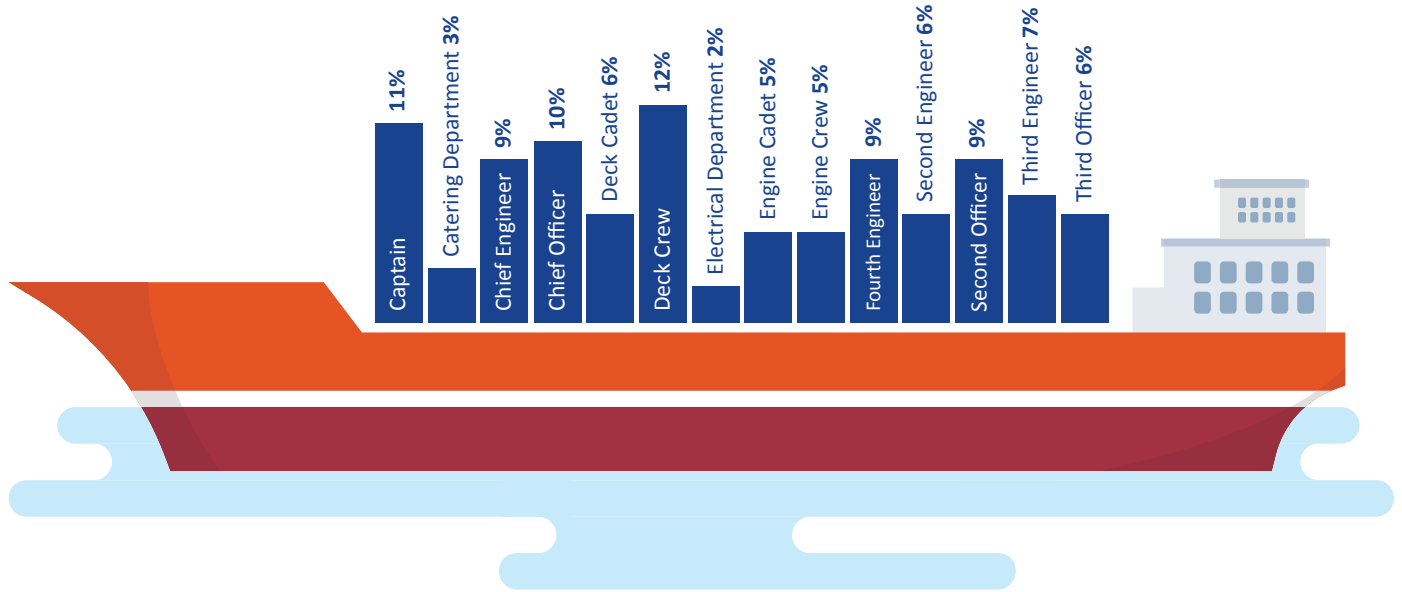
RANK

There was an incredibly diverse and almost equal spread of seafarers across all ranks and departments, which was fascinating to see. There was a fairly closely clustered array of scores across comparable ranks, for example Masters and Chiefs were similar at 6.17 and 6.47 respectively.

However, there was a wide disparity between Chief Officers and Second Engineers. The Second Engineers scored very low indeed, marking just 5.5/10 on the Index. In general the deck department appears to be more satisfied than the engine department, whilst

catering staff are reportedly in a rather low state of happiness, marking just 5.77/10.

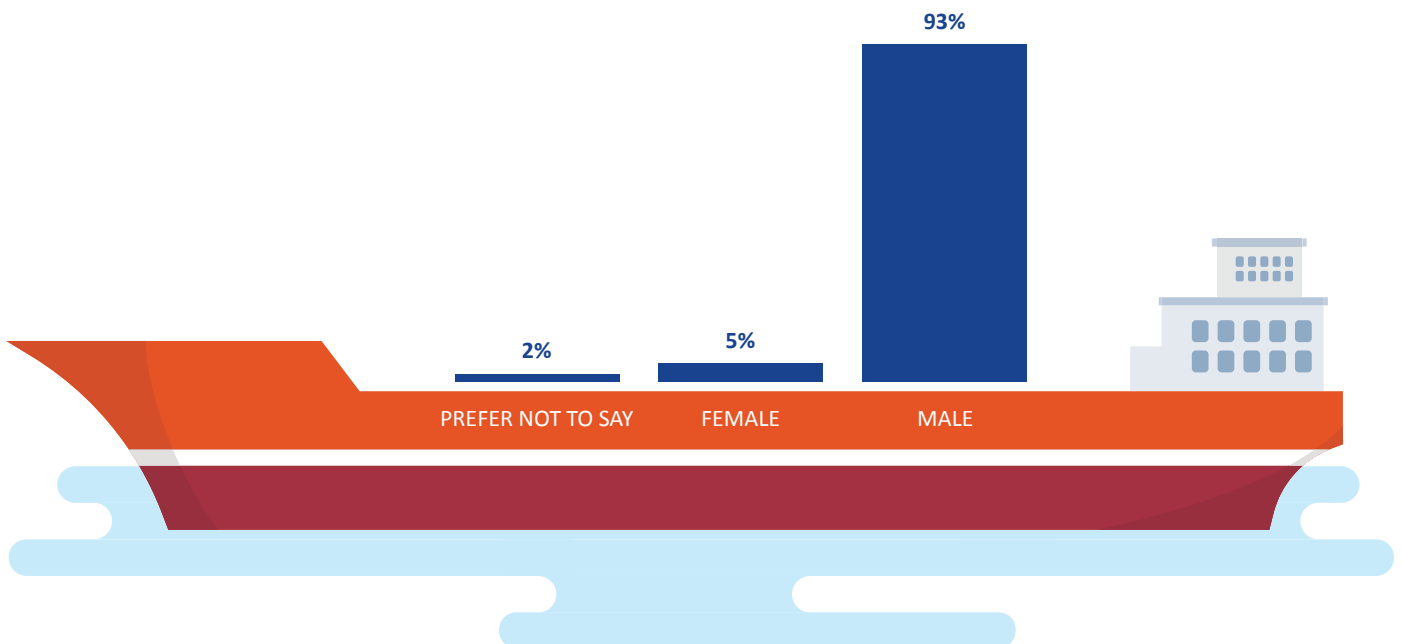
Perhaps the most telling figure, and one which is cause for great optimism, is the fact that cadets scored very highly indeed. The general happiness level for cadets was a staggering 8/10, the highest figure we have ever reached across the index. This tallies with the levels when it comes to age, and it is something which hopefully can be built on in the future.



GENDER BALANCE

Over 93% of respondents were male, which does tie in with the overall gender disparity in the industry. However, it is still disappointing not to hear from more women at sea. Those women who did share their verdicts were only marginally less happy than their male counterparts. Despite a number

of negative experiences which were stated, women marked an average happiness of 6.2/10, whilst males were 6.3. In a continuing trend, those who preferred not to say which gender were the happiest at 6.5/10.



How happy generally when at sea? -

6.21 ↑ from 6.03

There were a number of respondents who felt frustrated about the focus of those working ashore. They also questioned the approach of focusing on “wellness at sea”. There were concerns that fixating on seafarers’ ability to cope with the bad aspects of the job is not enough; we should be fixing the problems not how we deal with them. One likened wellness to a “sticking plaster on a broken heart”.

It was also claimed that as seafarer abandonments are making headlines, the whole mechanism for making life better for seafarers is struggling to cope with an industry in which bad owners can still get away with terrible behaviour towards crews.

Seafarers spoke of the impact of smaller crew numbers and questioned whether this was the single biggest barrier to wellness or happiness onboard. One respondent stated that “No one talked of wellness, as crews were built on positive social interaction”. Having wellness as a bolt on, an added cost, is something which is also proving a frustration to many crews, as they do not want mandatory wellness training, they simply want employers who don’t push every single rule and regulation to its breaking point.

WORKLOAD / TRAINING / INTERACTION WITH CREW / ACCESS TO SHORE LEAVE

How happy with your work load? -

5.73 ↓ from 5.99

This question has seen another big fall and seems to tumble every quarter. There is no getting away from the sense that excessive paperwork is something of immense frustration to crews. A number of seafarers also said that new technical solutions and the need for paperwork are leading to a duplication of effort.

There was criticism of the hours of rest too, as the data which is logged is often falsified. More than that, even where seafarers can step away from duties, there is no guarantee that they are actually “rested”. The same routines, the variable quality of cooks and provisions, lost sleep as the ship is rolling, or the pressures of port visits – time in a log does not always reflect the reality.

Another issue was that of interaction with office staff. Seafarers saw themselves increasingly as “adjunct to the office desk”. Indeed, office staff seemingly hardly even think of crews as remote, they are simply seen as a resource to be used when needed, regardless of time differences or watch patterns.

One quote ran, “the office dumps more work on the ship that they should be doing. Often seafarers are seen as robotic resources and not human beings”. Another stated, “The office is used to getting what they want and are often demanding”.

This is incredible concerning, and with seafarers complaining of not enough crew onboard to perform all duties, regardless of safe manning certificates, then the stress and spike in workloads is becoming unsustainable. There is also concern over seafarer’s ability to “switch off” on leave, and a number said that their manning departments were chasing them about going back to sea almost as soon as they got home.

How happy about the training you receive? -

6.53 ↓ from 6.63

The issue of training saw a fall this time round. There were concerns raised about the way in which training has become something of a tick box. There were disparaging comments about the approaches taken. One respondent sarcastically stated, “No one on our vessels will die in a confined space. We made them all watch a twenty-year-old video about it. Job done; box ticked.”

The tick box mentality is one which caused concern for a number of Seafarers Happiness Index respondents. The pressure is to simply complete training, not so much on actually learning and improving performance.

There were also frustrations about the changing perceptions from offices ashore. Seafarers claim that their companies often run in cycles, “One minute the company is pro-training, the next it’s all about saving money at all costs and training stops!”. There is an irony that seafarers are meant to be focused on safety culture, but there is a perception that this is actually hung on cost rather than keeping crews safe.

Again, as we have heard in many surveys before, seafarers resent the time that training takes when it begins to impact their leave and time that they want to be spending at home. There are also issues of cost when crews have to spend money on their own training.

How happy about interaction with other crew on board? - 6.85 ↓ from 6.95

This question has usually been something of an oasis of positivity within the Index. Whilst most other issues have seen dramatic falls, satisfaction with levels of interaction with other crew has usually held strong. However, this time round there is a fairly substantial fall and some of the reasons come loud and clear from the seafarers who responded.

Isolation was a word that was repeatedly used to capture the sense of how seafarers feel. There are crew who feel remote, out of touch and very lonely indeed. The only succour is often internet access and there are of course some who claim that retreating to cabins only helps perpetuate the problem.

However, this is not how seafarers see it. They do not see being online as the issue, they see the problem as a lack of people, a lack of time and work pressures. There is so little wriggle room with crewing levels that there is not sufficient space or time for social bonds to develop. This makes it incredibly hard, if not impossible to really interact well.

The team mentality and approach which has made seafaring a profession of camaraderie, support and even enjoyment has been decimated and eroded. Seafarers are simply emotionally limping through their contracts to get back home. They do not expect the friendships of old, they do not anticipate enjoyment, and that further exacerbates the retreat into isolation and loneliness.

There were also reports of increased tension onboard, even violence and aggression. Female respondents said they were sexually harassed, assaulted, and had to deal with a general level of disrespect due to gender, whilst other seafarers spoke of the aggression of senior officers. It seems there is a tinder box of tensions on many vessels, and it does not take much to ignite the problems. Crews said that enough is enough, and that cuts to manning levels have reached ridiculous levels; it is time to equate wellness with numbers onboard. Having more people onboard releases some work pressure and would provide enormous relief for crews.

How happy about access to shore leave? - 5.97 ↓ from 6.16

“Shore leave is dead. Never will it be seen again”. That was the stark assessment of one respondent, and with so many issues surrounding the seemingly simple notion of leaving a ship for a short break, it is perhaps hard to argue with them.

Hectic port stays and ramped up duties mean that many seafarers feel they cannot go ashore. There are so many inspections to be completed, as well as audits, maintenance and all manner of visitors to satisfy, as well as the small matter of cargo work. This means that not only are some senior officers loathe to grant time off, but many seafarers simply feel they cannot be bothered with the hassle.

The shore leave Catch22 seems to be that if there is enough time during a port stay to leave the ship, then invariably it will be difficult to get from the ship to the gates, and perhaps even more so to actual downtowns. Civilisation and ships are not good bedfellows with so many terminals remote from towns and cities.

WAGES / FOOD / FIT AND HEALTHY / CONTACT WITH FAMILY

How happy about wages/salary? -

6.23 ↓ from 6.30

Salaries are often a thorny issue, and once more there were seafarers who were frustrated that wage levels seem to be stagnating. Many also feel a sense of real time financial loss as taxes rise or exchange rates fluctuate. All in all, these are tough financial times to be a seafarer.

“Day by day the salary of junior officers is decreasing”, it was stated. Meanwhile there are also concerns about cuts to overtime hours. It seems that, according to a number of responses, companies are cost cutting and the budget for overtime is an early cut to be made.

For the majority of past Seafarers Happiness Index reports there was a sense of begrudging acceptance of wage levels. However, this time round it felt somewhat different. There were a number who stated that they felt the tough life of a seafarer needs to be better compensated, points which were made in very robust language indeed.

Then too was the fact that the nationals of one country point the finger at those of others, or whole regions. There were a number of respondents who felt that wages were all too often driven down by the willingness of some nationalities to accept lower wages. Unfortunately, the global nature and the freedom with which owners can access crews means that this has always been the way.

Again, there was mention of the issue of non-payment of wages and the fact that this is all too common. There were crew who had experienced delays and faced real frustrations whilst their families suffered privations at home. There were also a number who were fretting over ever receiving their pay. “Is it right in the 21st Century for seafarers to worry about being paid?”, one asked – and of course the answer is no. However, the mechanisms for safeguarding crews often seem to fail when stressed, and there is a need to ensure that seafarers get paid, get home and are looked after.

How happy about the food on board? -

6.34 ↓ from 6.47

Food goes down the hatch, and the Seafarers Happiness Index scores for vittles keep going down too. There is a definite pattern to these returns, as the quality of ingredients meet the skill of the cook in making mealtimes for seafarers either great or awful.

With poor ingredients, bad menu planning and poor-quality cooks, there is only ever one outcome, and that is very unhappy seafarers who bemoan the food, and who also consistently mark other questions down too. Bad food, and suddenly every aspect of onboard life is seen negatively too.

As in other Index reports, this time saw the usual issues of cultural sensitivity. Seafarers of a range of nations claimed that cooks are simply not capable of making the food which means so much to them. Obviously, vessels are increasingly multicultural, but it seems that time and time again that cooks are either not trained, aware or resourced to prepare the food which seafarers want.

Even where the quality of ingredients seems adequate, and where there are no nationality issues, all too often cooks seem to take shortcuts. “There is still a prevalence to quick, easy unhealthy food. I cannot be lazy navigating the ship, why should the cook be allowed to be?”, was one response. Others spoke of companies who still run a separate crew and officers’ mess, with good food for one and poor quality for the other, thereby stoking resentment.

How happy about your ability to keep fit and healthy on board? - 6.45 ↑ from 6.29

There was a surprising rise in the figures for this question, as this is usually one that has tracked a downward trajectory. The comments this time round, however, do capture many of the frustrations that have been voiced before. There are many ships that only have minimal or no gym equipment, while there are those ships which do, but the work load is so heavy that seafarers feel they don't have the time to use them.

It seems that there are few responses from seafarers who have good gym facilities and time to make use of them, and that is a shame, especially as those who do manage to exercise tend to track higher happiness figures across the board. Clearly exercise, and the ability to keep fit and healthy onboard have a very positive effect.

There were also responses which talked about exercise and health within the context of the current wellness debate. They stated that it was good to hear people talking about what seafarers need to improve mental and physical health, but they were concerned that the emphasis is on individual crews, rather than on the owners, operators and managers to ensure it. It would be hugely troubling, and indeed counterproductive, to have a series of mandatory measures which punish seafarers and create a set of onerous demands on those who suffer the ill effects of failings elsewhere.

How happy about contact with family when at sea? - 6.88 ↑ from 6.79

There was a positive result here, as the issue of connectivity seems to have improved. This is hopefully to do with the ever-increasing number of deep-sea vessels which now have internet onboard. Something which many respondents stated, "is a big help".

On ships without access, or where there are draconian usage restrictions, then the happiness of these seafarers is affected. Lack of facilities, expensive or slow connections make life incredibly frustrating for crew, and they voice their disdain for companies who do not provide what they want in fairly strong terms.

Time and time again, seafarers stated that "communications with loved ones is essential, even if it is only for a couple of minutes a day". The message is clear and it is being told loudly – seafarers want to be connected to home, they want access to online services and nothing else will do. The industry is being told, and those companies who do not respond, who do not boost their offering to seafarers, who keep internet allowance small, or provide "rubbish speeds which make calls very difficult", the recruitment and retention could well be issues in the future.

WELFARE FACILITIES

How happy with welfare facilities when you are ashore? - 5.50 ↓ from 5.53

It is disappointing to note a falling figure here, and the fact that seafarers are not as happy with welfare facilities ashore as they would hopefully be. As with anything though, statistics do not always tell the whole story.

Indeed, many seafarers who scored low on this question, were expressing their frustrations at not actually getting the shore leave to visit centres. Those who did speak about the centres they had visited tended to paint a very positive picture of their experiences. There was a special shout out for the Mission team in Rotterdam who were praised for the “very friendly and hospitable” welcome they gave to a group of seafarers.

As with so many things, the experience does vary and crew did say that there was a mix of standards from port to port and nation to nation, though generally the welfare facilities were felt to be good. There was also thanks to the centres which had begun to innovate and provide some forms of access in smaller ports, where perhaps there was little or no provision before. Even unmanned satellite centres or hubs can provide some small comfort and respite for crews who might otherwise simply have to stay onboard.

One demand that was repeated in responses was for improved internet access in centres and the facilities to make calls or to communicate quietly, privately and in comfort. Seafarers may be turning away from some of the traditional services provided by centres, but they still have needs which can be catered for. Cheap, fast online access in an appropriate environment is what seafarers want.

The Mission to Seafarers is working hard to address the issues, whether that involves ensuring there is sufficient access to centres or working to ensure that seafarers can access shore leave. We, of course, also continue to visit vessels and meet with crews every day all over the world. In the past few months, as is often the case, the Mission teams around the world have stepped in to provide spiritual and practical support for seafarers in distress or danger.

Where

The happiest seafarers were from Oceania which totalled an impressive average of 7.6/10. Although the best represented, the Indian Subcontinent did not perform so well, with a below general score of 6.24/10. South East Asian seafarers were around the same mark with 6.2.



-
- Indian Subcontinent **31%**
 - Western Europe **20%**
 - Eastern Europe **19%**
 - South East Asia **17%**
 - Africa **3%**
 - North America **3%**
 - North Asia **2%**
 - South America **2%**
 - Central America **1%**
 - Oceania **1%**
 - Middle East **0%**



Conclusion

Overall Seafarer Happiness has slipped this quarter, down to 6.27/10...from 6.31. We received compelling and fascinating insights, as well as heartfelt pleas and frustrated opinions from the global fleet. Through our website and online survey, social media channels and those visiting our seafarer centres globally, we were contacted by more than 2000 seafarers.

According to the latest data, seafarers on dredgers were the most satisfied but statistically made up a very small sample. Ferry crews and those on cruise ships were reportedly the least satisfied, whilst crews on tankers, bulk carriers and container ships were all surprisingly well clustered around the average happiness level of the report.

Younger seafarers tended to be the happiest, with those in the 25-35 age range the least satisfied. There was an incredibly diverse spread of ranks and departments, and Second Engineers tended to be the lowest scoring, whilst in general the deck department appears to be more satisfied than the engine department, and meanwhile catering staff are reportedly in a rather low state of happiness. There was also great cause for optimism in the report, as cadets scored very highly indeed, a staggering 8/10, the highest figure we have ever reached across the Index.

The majority of seafarer respondents were from the Indian Subcontinent, with South East Asia the next best representation. However, neither of these groups performed particularly well when it came to happiness. The happiest seafarers were from Oceania, closely followed by those from North Asia.

Over 93% of respondents were male, and whilst only a small percentage of returns, those women who did share their verdicts on their happiness at sea were only marginally less satisfied than their male counterparts. However, it was troubling to once again hear reports of aggression, violence and bullying against female seafarers.

There are many issues which leap out of the Seafarers Happiness Index reports, and this time round there were three key themes that emerged. These surrounded wages, shore leave, and work load problems.

Seafarers were keen to voice their frustrations about delayed payment of wages, a problem which seems to be on the rise according to the crews who spoke to us. There is also a growing sense of concern about seafarer abandonment, as crews are feeling vulnerable, as well as frustrated that this problem seemingly will not go away.

One of the issues which continually gets raised negatively by seafarers is the difficulty of spending time ashore from the vessel. It was perhaps more neatly summed up in this report by one seafarer who said, "Shore leave is dead...". It seems the concept of time off is being eroded, and pressures onboard, costs and hassle mean that not only is it getting harder to escape the ship, but seafarers see the costs outweighing the benefits. It seems not only sad that we have arrived at this point; there are also serious mental health implications which are of concern.

The erosion of shore leave does not stand in a vacuum, and where seafarers are battling to maintain positive mental health, it seems incumbent on us all to explore the issue of shore leave more deeply. How have we reached a point where costs, hassle, logistics, manning and the need for rest over recreation have eroded what was one of the primary attractions of seafaring, that of seeing the world? People need a break from their work environment, and so seafarers need to feel able to take time out too.

The other concern which was voiced repeatedly was frustration and concern about seafarers having to deal with office staff ashore. There is a growing sense that crews are merely an extension of the office, and that seafarers are there to answer queries or even do work for shore staff whenever they are asked.

All too often seafarers reported being pulled into office work ashore, regardless of time zones and watch patterns. Many spoke of a seeming ignorance ashore as to what work onboard is like, or a lack of empathy. There were calls for office workers to better understand seafarer wellness issues, and to ensure that there is some consideration given when placing demands on those onboard.

As ever we must thank those seafarers who have taken the time to share their views with us. It is so important that they do, as we can then try and find solutions which can make life at sea better.

We urgently need more data, and to hear the stories of more seafarers...and for those who have already done so, to share again. We are building new online capabilities and applications to process the data to make sure the voices at sea are heard. Please visit www.happyatsea.org to find out more and to complete the survey. We also want to get these reports spread far and wide across shipping, so please do pass this on.

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



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