



INTERNATIONAL
MARITIME RESCUE
FEDERATION

THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN MARITIME SEARCH AND RESCUE

INCLUSION, ROLES, CHALLENGES, IMPROVEMENTS



A report on the
International Maritime Rescue Federation's
#WomenInSAR Survey,
October 2020 - January 2021



TRINITY HOUSE

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Photo: DGzRS, Per Kasch@SeverinWendeler



FOREWORD



Theresa Crossley

CEO, International Maritime Rescue Federation

In common with other parts of the maritime sector, women are greatly under-represented across maritime search and rescue (SAR), in both volunteer and paid positions.

The IMRF launched its #WomenInSAR initiative, to increase the representation of women in the sector and provide support for women and girls involved in maritime SAR. The results of this survey, the first of its kind, will help the IMRF to focus our efforts in improving awareness of, and access to, the opportunities available to women in maritime SAR.

We are very grateful to Trinity House, for their generous support for this initiative and for their wider commitment to closing the gender gap in the maritime sector as a whole.



Captain Ian McNaught

Deputy Master, Trinity House

As a charity dedicated to safeguarding shipping and seafarers, we at Trinity House have been providing education, support and welfare to the seafaring community for more than 500 years.

While many may know us for our efforts as a General Lighthouse Authority to make our seas safer for mariners, we are also a long-standing supporter of efforts to improve opportunities for women and girls in the maritime sector through our successful cadet scheme and the many initiatives and projects that benefit from grants from the Trinity House Maritime Charity.

'You cannot be what you cannot see.' I am pleased that we can stand alongside the IMRF and support the #WomenInSAR Initiative and elevate the profile of a project that seeks to raise awareness, break down barriers, realise potential and save lives.

Men and women working in maritime search and rescue save the lives of those in trouble at sea, providing a vital service; it is only right that women should be equally represented across all roles and we are proud to support this initiative.



THE IMRF

The International Maritime Rescue Federation (IMRF) is the international non-governmental organisation working to develop and improve maritime search and rescue (SAR) capacity around the world.

The IMRF brings together the world's maritime SAR organisations and has both voluntary and governmental organisations as members. As well as capacity building, the IMRF also has an advocacy role, providing an international voice for its members.

It is the only maritime SAR Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) with consultative status at the United Nations' International Maritime Organization (IMO).

For further details about the work of the IMRF, please visit www.international-maritime-rescue.org

#WOMENINSAR

IMRF launched its #WomenInSAR initiative at the World Maritime Rescue Congress in June 2019. The project aims

- to increase the representation of women in the maritime sector generally, in support of the IMO's Empowering Women in Maritime initiative; and
- to provide support for, and raise the profile of, women in the maritime SAR sector specifically.

Enquiries about the IMRF, its #WomenInSAR project, or the contents of this report should be addressed to Caroline Jupe, Head of Fundraising & Projects, International Maritime Rescue Federation, PO Box 1389, Enfield EN1 9GF, United Kingdom / c.jupe@imrf.org.uk

REPORT STRUCTURE

This document is an Executive Summary of the Full Report. Both parts of the report may be obtained from the IMRF website (www.international-maritime-rescue.org).

Of the questions in the survey upon which this report is based, 17 were for women only; eight were for both women and men to complete; and eight were for SAR organisations. This report follows the basic structure of the survey.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The IMRF launched its #WomenInSAR initiative at the World Maritime Rescue Congress in Vancouver in June 2019. The principal aim is to encourage more women and girls to take roles in maritime SAR, by providing support for, and raising the profile of, women in the maritime SAR sector. This supports both the “Empowering Women in Maritime” initiative of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal 5: “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”.

1.2 The #WomenInSAR Survey aimed to discover what people in all kinds of SAR roles think about gender balance and equality of opportunity across the maritime SAR sector and – crucially - what may be done to improve things. Specific objectives were to gather information on:

- how many women are working in the maritime SAR sector today;
- what kinds of roles they are working in;
- what barriers they face;
- what individuals and organisations think can be done to improve the situation; and
- to establish a comprehensive and accurate benchmark, enabling the IMRF to better focus its support and to measure the success of the #WomenInSAR initiative.

1.3 The main survey was launched on 15 October 2020, with a deadline of 19 January 2021 for submitting responses. The survey was open to all, although some of the questions were reserved only for those identifying as female. All responses were treated in strict confidence. No individuals or organisations are identified anywhere in this report.



Photo: RNLI



Photo: NIMASA

1.4 Interim analysis indicated that many individuals could not answer wider questions concerning the situation in their parent organisation as a whole and so a short additional survey was sent to IMRF member organisations in January 2021. The final deadline for this part of the survey was 4 February. Not all organisations providing maritime SAR facilities are IMRF members, and not all members were able to respond by the survey deadline. This means that one of the survey objectives - assessing how many women work in maritime SAR today - could not be fully met.

1.5 However, there was a good response to the survey overall, with 1655 submissions received from individuals and organisations from 48 countries. Of

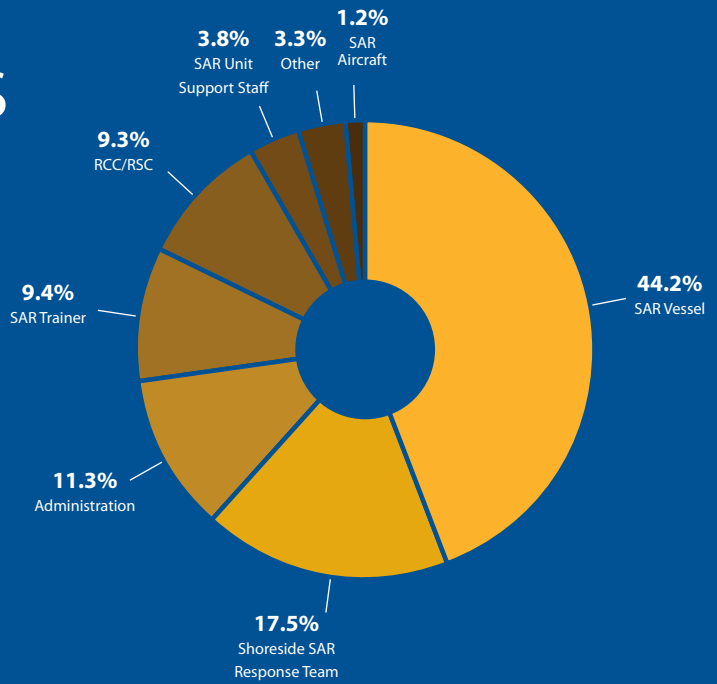
the individual responses, 85% came from Northern Europe. A further 8% came from North America. This does not fully reflect the geographical distribution of IMRF membership or of the global SAR community. While the survey results are undoubtedly useful, global conclusions cannot necessarily be extrapolated from the available data, although anecdotal evidence suggests that they might apply.

1.6 The information obtained from this survey should assist the IMRF, its members and SAR organisations generally to consider and address issues around the employment of women in SAR. A main driver of conducting the survey has been to aid SAR organisations' understanding and responses in this important area.

SURVEY RESPONDENTS

2.1 Of the 1637 individual responses, 721 were from women, 911 from men and five from people who do not identify as male or female. The survey did not attract much response from people not yet working in SAR or from people who have left.

2.2 The ratio of women to men taking part in the survey is not the same as the ratio of women to men in SAR. Although that ratio was not determined in this survey, it is thought to be much less.



"I enjoy showing other females, in a male dominated world, you can work in an amazing job and make a difference as well."

(Female SAR vessel crew member and trainer)

Photo: HRT



Photo: RS

QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY WOMEN ONLY

IF YOU ARE A WOMAN NOW WORKING / VOLUNTEERING IN SAR, WHAT MADE YOU JOIN IN THE FIRST PLACE?

- 3.1 The great majority of the answers given here had no apparent connection to gender. They could have been given by anyone in SAR, and they encompassed the usual motivations: a desire to help people in trouble; to 'give back' to the community; to use or develop maritime skills; a love for the sea; family or friendship connections; or simply that the respondent needed a job. Out of 515 responses to this question, only nine had any bearing on the gender issue.
- 3.2 These nine responses highlighted the importance of female role models and recruiting campaigns aimed at women, although the survey results overall do not indicate that these were decisive factors for many.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST POSITIVE PART OF YOUR EXPERIENCE?

- 4.1 Of 510 answers, 12 made references to gender. At less than 3% of the total, the sample is too small to enable generalisations, but the following points may be made:
- Some women did not feel that they have experienced gender discrimination;
 - Others were conscious that they were, to an extent, trail-blazing for their gender;
 - The presence of other women on the team was felt to provide support;
 - Acknowledgement by male colleagues of women's ability to do the work was welcomed - but men in SAR do not expect to need similar approval from women; and
 - Good, gender-neutral management was important: for example, the acceptance by managers of the principle that taking maternity leave should not affect a woman's career path.
- 4.2 97% of the respondents report the same SAR positives as men usually do: see page 11, 'What element of your role do you feel to be the most rewarding?'

WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST CHALLENGING ASPECT OF YOUR ROLE?

- 5.1 84 respondents (12%) gave answers that detailed or clearly indicated perceived gender-related discrimination as the greatest or among their greatest challenges. Other challenges mentioned were common to many SAR people and were unrelated to gender: dealing with cases that end in deaths (particularly of children); bad weather; lots to learn; time commitments; team 'politics'; management (either the difficulties of managing others or being managed badly); under-staffing and under-funding; lack of consistency in training or practice; and the weight of responsibility.
- 5.2 Male dominance remains a fact in many SAR teams. Reportedly, this can have a discriminatory effect in terms of facilities and equipment, regardless of whether discrimination is perceived at the interpersonal level.
- 5.3 Incidents of conscious and unconscious sexism were reported. Even when discrimination is not experienced within the team, it can occur in interactions with people outside the team. Some women felt that they needed to out-perform their male counterparts in order to be accepted as equals.

Photo: CCG, Jordan Wilson





Photo: Irish Coast Guard, Ballybunion

WHAT ELEMENT OF YOUR ROLE DO YOU FEEL TO BE THE MOST REWARDING?

- 6.1 There was a good deal of cross-over between responses to this and the earlier question 'What has been the most positive part of your experience?' A very large majority of the respondents prioritised helping people and saving lives, and the relief their actions generate. Many also highlighted the feeling of being part of a dedicated team. Personal satisfaction was also frequently mentioned, alongside learning new skills, training others, 'making a difference' and the camaraderie.
- 6.2 Just eleven respondents referred to gender-related issues here - and not all of these negatively. One respondent, for example, remarked on what she sees as a female capacity for empathy with survivors. Others noted the pride they felt in being female role models, or by proving themselves the equals of men in terms of their contribution to the team.

HAS BEING A WOMAN PRESENTED ANY ISSUES OR BARRIERS IN YOUR ORGANISATION?

- 7.1 The majority of women who answered this question said that they did not think that being a woman presented issues or barriers within their organisation. However, when asked in a later question to think about a range of possible barriers which women in general might face - 'Have you noticed any barriers that make it difficult for women to work in SAR in your organisation?' (see page 18) - a majority said that they had noticed barriers.
- 7.2 'Traditional' views about 'a woman's place' were reported among some older male colleagues - and also sometimes in younger ones. However, many respondents said that they did not think sexism was always deliberate.
- 7.3 Unsuitable facilities, equipment, working conditions etc were frequently cited, as were discriminatory language, behaviours and attitudes, even if not deliberate.
- 7.4 Many respondents emphasised that most male colleagues were supportive, and that the situation was getting better generally.

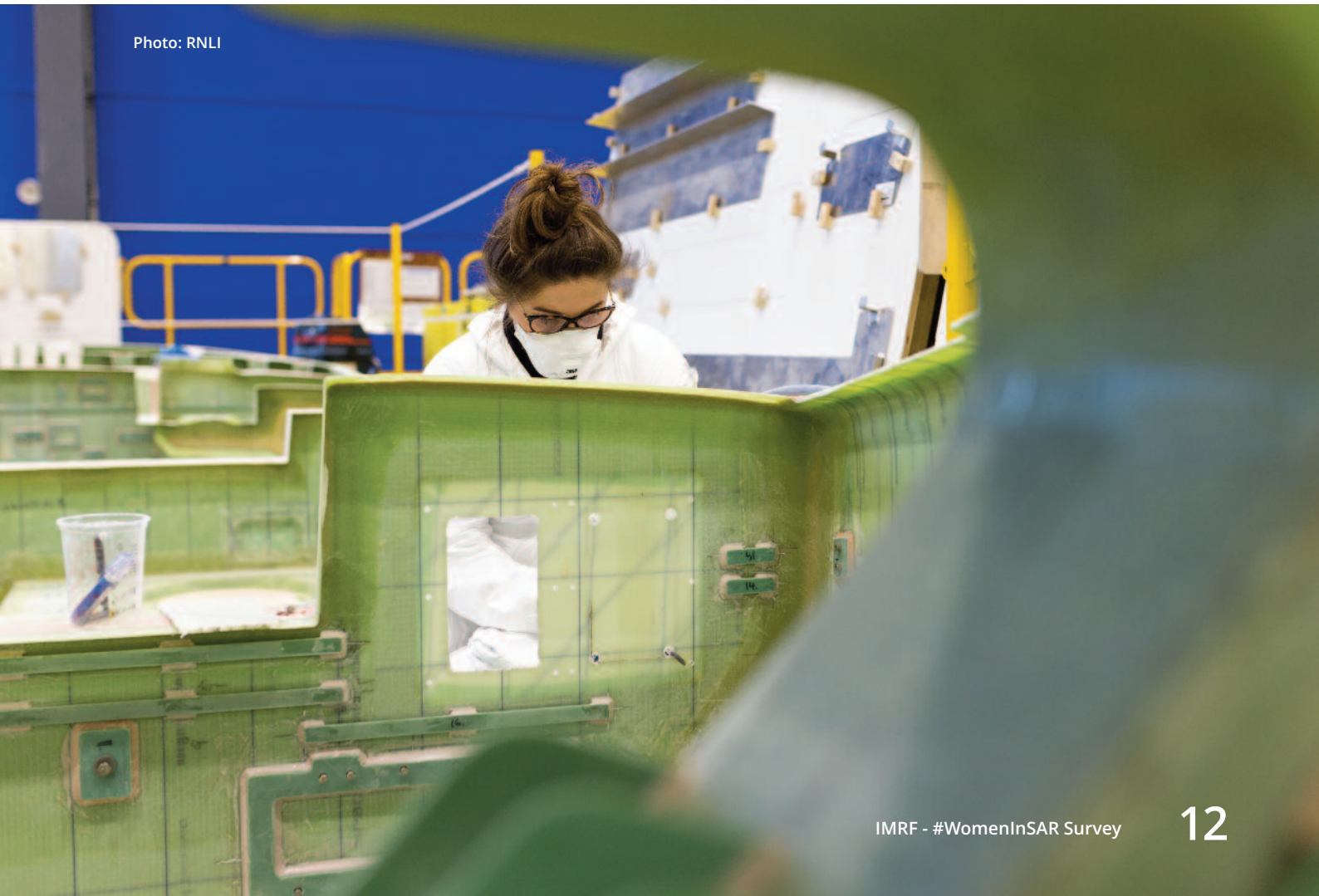
HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED ANY DISCRIMINATION? IF SO, HAS IT BEEN RESOLVED TO YOUR SATISFACTION?

- 8.1 In a report dealing with gender discrimination, it is important to note that half the women who responded to the survey said that they had not experienced any.
- 8.2 Conversely, over half those who had reported discrimination said that it had not been resolved - although it should be noted that in quite a few cases the individual had not initiated any action at all, either formally or informally.
- 8.3 Inappropriate humour and unwanted 'flirting' were frequently mentioned as examples of discrimination that had a negative effect.
- 8.4 Discrimination can be conscious or unconscious. The worst cases of individual discrimination reported in the survey were conscious, but examples of unconscious discrimination included issues around the provision of appropriate personal kit, equipment, facilities, working conditions and the language used in training manuals etc. Sidelineing women or underuse of their abilities and, in some cases, their loss to the SAR services were also reported.



Photo: CRS

Photo: RNLI





"If men can do it, and do it safely, there is not so much to worry about for me."

(Female SAR vessel crew member)

Photo: RS

HAVE YOU FACED ANY RESISTANCE FROM FRIENDS OR FAMILY NOT WANTING YOU TO WORK IN MARITIME SAR, AND, IF SO, HOW HAVE YOU HANDLED IT?

- 9.1 On the basis of the responses to this survey, women did not feel that they were being held back from SAR by concerns expressed by family or friends.
- 9.2 Personal safety appeared to be the chief concern.

DO YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE MORE IN MARITIME SAR THAN YOU HAVE ALREADY? DO YOU HAVE A CAREER GOAL IN MIND?

- 10.1 Three-quarters of those women who replied to the question 'Do you want to achieve more in SAR?' said that they did. However, many could not see obvious ways of doing so, usually because they had either already achieved the most senior positions available to them, or because they felt that there were no real opportunities for them as volunteers beyond team leadership.
- 10.2 None of the respondents mentioned gender as a factor limiting their ambition.



Photo: PARA

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO WOMEN THINKING OF GETTING INVOLVED IN THE MARITIME SAR SECTOR?

- 11.1 None of the 474 respondents advised against getting involved in SAR. However, many noted that SAR work is not for everyone. There are challenges of all kinds and these need to be considered by anyone thinking of joining in.
- 11.2 For women, obtaining the advice of other women with experience was recommended, especially if considering joining a team mostly composed of men. Having a female 'buddy' or mentor when in post was also recommended.



Photo: NIMASA

"Do it! Every individual, whether male or female, brings their own strengths to the team. A good team is made up of a variety of talents."

(Female SAR vessel commander)



Photo: CITRO

IF YOU NO LONGER WORK IN SAR, WHY DID YOU LEAVE?

- 12.1 Only 52 women answered this question (7%), including four who had not yet left but intended to. This low return indicates that the survey did not reach many women who have left the SAR profession. If so, this may have had a significant effect on the survey outcomes, particularly with regards to women who have left because they were dissatisfied with their working conditions or treatment. Given many of the responses to other questions, it may be reasonable to suppose that gender issues were a factor in many cases. However, the survey provides no specific data to support this.
- 12.2 With that caveat in mind, 46% of those answering this question cited only positive reasons for leaving - a change in personal circumstances or looking for new challenges. The remainder gave a mix of positive and negative reasons, or only negative ones - the work was too challenging, they were subject to negative comment or actions, or they felt unable to progress.



Photo: Irish Coast Guard, Ballybunion

IF YOU DO NOT YET WORK IN SAR, WHAT ATTRACTS YOU TO THE WORK?

13.1 The number of responses received here is too low to produce useful conclusions, and the answers add nothing new to the details on motivation discussed in responses to earlier questions.

DO YOU HAVE ANY CONCERNS ABOUT WORKING IN SAR?

14.1 70% of respondents did not answer this question. This may mean that many of these women did not have any particular concerns, or it may be that they felt that they had already answered the question under another heading.

14.2 Specific concerns that were raised here were wide-ranging in nature. Safety, equipment, training, temperament, and the effects on health - especially mental health - and family life were the main items.

Photo: Canadian Coast Guard



Size does matter! Everything from life jackets and dry suits to the height of the driver's seat is made for someone much bigger than me."

(Female SAR vessel commander)

Photo: CGNZ Auckland Air Patrol



ARE THERE OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN TO PROGRESS IN YOUR ORGANISATION? IF YES, HOW DOES YOUR ORGANISATION SUPPORT THIS?

- 15.1 Nearly a quarter of the female respondents were unsure about the possibility of progression, or didn't think it existed. This may indicate a communications problem, given that all the SAR organisations responding to the additional survey, who were asked the same question, said that those opportunities do exist.
- 15.2 The options of 'training' and 'equality of opportunity' scored reasonably well with individual respondents as examples of organisational support. 'Positive action' such as gender quotas was not supported by everyone, regardless of gender. 'Flexible working' and the usually associated 'work/life balance' did not score highly either.
- 15.3 Not all the SAR organisations who completed the additional organisational survey ticked the 'training' and 'equality of opportunity' options.

Photo: RNLI





Photo: Canadian Coast Guard

QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY WOMEN AND MEN

DOES YOUR ORGANISATION HAVE DIFFICULTY RECRUITING SUFFICIENT STAFF? IF YES, DO YOU THINK WOMEN ARE A RESOURCE THAT IS NOT USED SUFFICIENTLY TO HELP OVERCOME THIS DIFFICULTY?

- 16.1 Female and male responses on these questions were in broad agreement. Many emphasised that recruitment opportunities are open to all. Roughly half the individual respondents reported recruitment difficulties in general, and roughly half of these considered women to be an under-used resource.
- 16.2 Better focussed advertising was recommended as a means of overcoming perceptions that 'SAR is for men' - particularly in front line response teams. Some respondents think that some women undervalue the contribution they might make.
- 16.3 Some respondents note that marine qualifications and experience are recruitment pre-requisites in their organisations, which has a knock-on effect on male / female balance due to the continuing imbalances in the marine industries as a whole. Some organisations overcome this problem with in-house training.

HAVE YOU NOTICED ANY BARRIERS THAT MAKE IT DIFFICULT FOR WOMEN TO WORK IN SAR IN YOUR ORGANISATION?

- 17.1 65% of women who answered this question thought there were barriers to women's employment in their organisation - although it is important to note that 35% did not. The comparable figures for male respondents were 53% and 47%. Overall, of those who said that they had not noticed barriers, 64% were men. We may conclude that it is easier to notice a barrier if you are the one facing it.
- 17.2 Having female role models was thought significant by both women and men. Concerns about physical strength and, especially, the potential dangers in SAR work were thought more important overall by the female respondents than by the male. Long hours, being on call, and emotional resilience scored lower but were also more important issues for the women respondents than for the men.
- 17.3 SAR jobs being portrayed as being for men; resistance from existing male staff; and women not knowing that these jobs were there for them to apply for were considered important factors by both male and female respondents. Responses from men and women were also roughly the same

in giving progressively lower scores to concerns about tough working conditions, the need for prior experience or qualifications, and men and women working together.

17.4 Concerns about family life, and childcare in particular, were raised by both women and men when asked to identify factors in addition to those the survey suggested.

17.5 The lack of adequate toilet, sanitary, showering and changing facilities, and the failure to provide personal protective equipment appropriate for women, or to consider women sufficiently when designing equipment, were again mentioned as matters of concern.

17.6 Self-confidence among some women, or a lack of it, was also identified as an issue.



Photo: CGNZ Nelson



"Culture and norms are not sufficiently inclusive."

(Male SAR vessel commander)

Photo: Canadian Coast Guard

HAS YOUR ORGANISATION TAKEN ANY STEPS TO ENCOURAGE WOMEN TO APPLY?

- 18.1 Almost half the individual respondents who answered this question were unsure of what tactics their organisations employ to encourage female recruitment, or did not think any specific action was taken. 55% of women took this view. Many individuals also advocated gender-blindness in this respect.
- 18.2 Childcare was a problem for many and little provision for it was reported.
- 18.3 Providing reassurance about working in SAR, as well as mentoring and other in-post support schemes are much easier to arrange, but scored poorly in the individual survey. Not all potential recruits felt that they would receive all the training that they needed. There is evidence from this survey that this was a particular concern for women.
- 18.4 Many respondents would have liked to see more attention given to diversity and equality education. The importance of inclusivity in internal and external communications, including social media; advertisements; public relations material; and outreach programmes and events was also made clear.

HAS YOUR ORGANISATION TAKEN ANY STEPS TO RETAIN FEMALE MEMBERS OF STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS?

- 19.1 Over 60% of the individual respondents who answered this question were unsure of what tactics their organisation employed to encourage women to remain in post, or did not think any specific action was taken. 66% of women took this view. Many individuals again advocated gender neutrality here and noted that retention was a problem across the board.
- 19.2 Many respondents again highlighted problems with gear and facilities, and the inflexibility of some working patterns.
- 19.3 Fewer than a quarter of the female respondents reported having access to mentoring and other in-post support schemes and less than a fifth of the organisations in the additional survey report providing them. Yet the importance of this sort of support was highlighted many times in the survey responses.

"We are changing our recruitment campaigns to be more female orientated."

(Female SAR trainer)

Photo: HRT





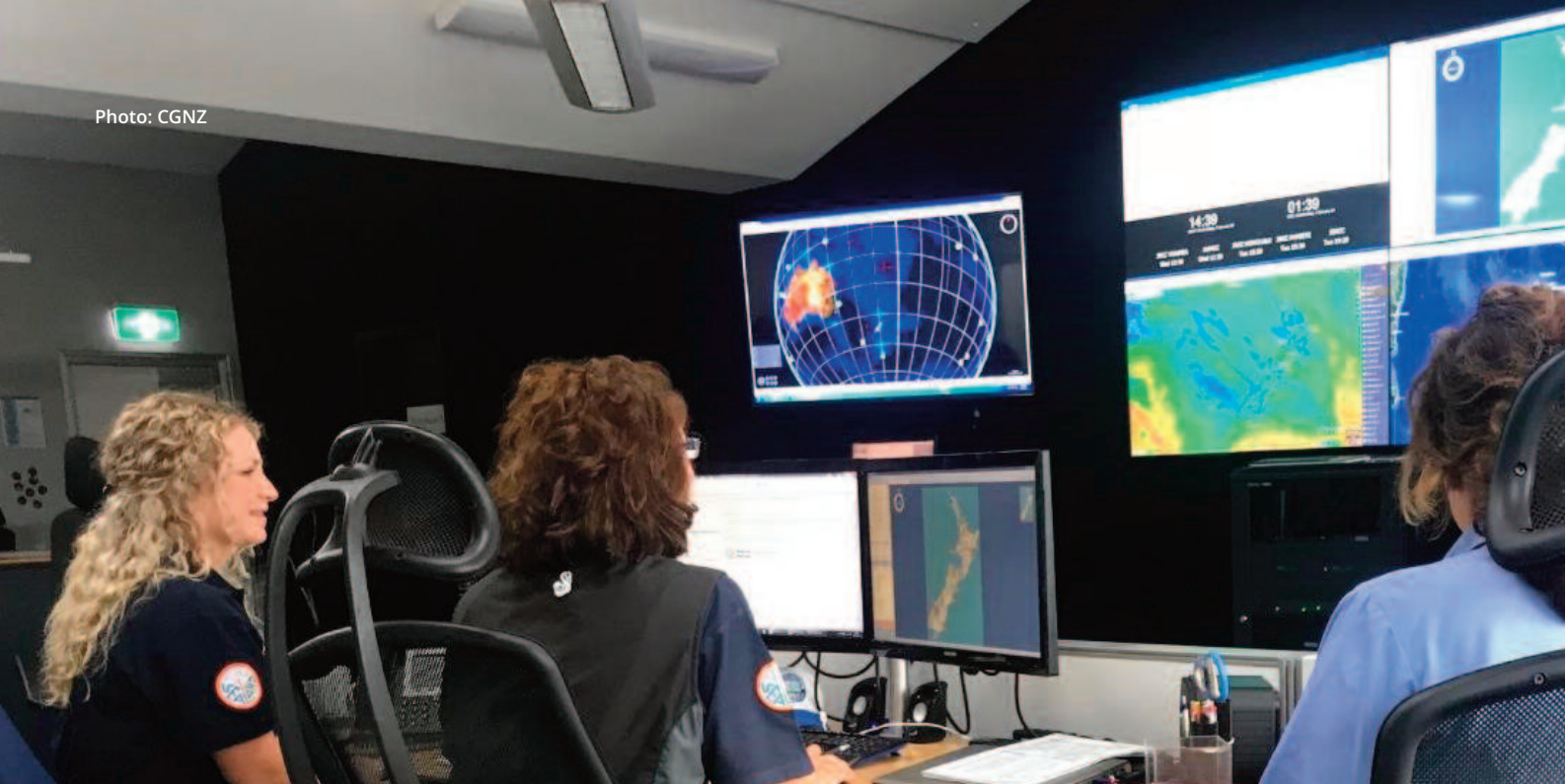
Photo: RS

"In the past, 90% of the time we were using only half of our talent. Think about what would happen if we used all the talent for 100% of the time. It's like having one hand behind your back..."

Warren Buffett, US financier and investment expert

WHAT DO YOU THINK WOULD ENCOURAGE MORE WOMEN TO BE PART OF THE MARITIME SAR SECTOR, AS PAID STAFF OR AS VOLUNTEERS?

- 20.1 Recruitment drives that focussed on women, or which emphasised male/female equality in SAR, were regarded as the most important steps that could be taken to encourage more women into the SAR sector.
- 20.2 There was significantly more female support for mentoring and other in-post support schemes; flexible and equal working conditions; childcare support; comprehensive training; and reassurance about what working in SAR is like.
- 20.3 Several respondents, both female and male, emphasised that they supported gender neutrality in recruitment. As one respondent put it: "We don't need men or women. We need Crew".
- 20.4 Additional actions suggested included more use of female role models in advertising; trial periods; team-building events; including female employees when visiting schools etc; providing equipment that fits; seeking Investor in Diversity status; having designated inclusion officers at regional level; and dealing robustly with misogynistic behaviour.



DISCUSSION

- 21.1 The great majority of women involved in SAR reported having the same motivations, positives, challenges and rewards as their male counterparts. However, a significant minority - more than one in nine - listed aspects of gender discrimination among their greatest challenges.
- 21.2 Male dominance remains a fact in many SAR teams. This can have an indirect discriminatory effect in terms of facilities and equipment provided, regardless of whether discrimination is perceived at the inter-personal level. As one respondent noted, "We need to adapt a world of men designed by men for men." Recruiting women requires concomitant action on providing suitable facilities, equipment, working conditions etc. This is an issue for senior management at the highest level.
- 21.3 Sexism still occurs, either within the team, or in interactions with people outside of the team. It is not universal, but was reported often enough to be a significant concern. It was more commonly - but not exclusively - reported among older men. Some women felt that they needed to out-perform their male counterparts in order to be accepted as equals. Self-confidence, or a lack of it, was identified as an issue. Confidence is not boosted by having to overcome additional barriers.
- 21.4 Sexism and discrimination can be conscious or unconscious. The worst cases of individual discrimination reported in the survey are conscious, but no-one should underestimate the damage done by unconscious discrimination, including issues around the provision of appropriate personal equipment, facilities, working conditions, and the language used in training manuals etc. The survey indicates that there are still too many examples of conscious and unconscious discrimination, which result in the sidelining or underuse of women's abilities and, in some cases, their loss to the SAR services - a serious waste of resources as well as a moral wrong.
- 21.5 It would be useful to know more about why people leave the SAR services, whatever their gender. It would also be useful to know more about what would attract more people into the SAR services, women in particular. As one respondent noted, "We haven't fully addressed why someone doesn't want to work or volunteer" in SAR.
- 21.6 A large proportion of women respondents felt that they, or other women, had been discriminated against because of their gender. It is clear that there are still improvements to be made. Although many respondents emphasised that the situation is generally getting better, this momentum needs to be maintained and, ideally, increased. The number of gender discrimination cases reported in response to this survey that apparently remain unresolved, either at an individual or organisational level, is disappointing.

21.7 It is for managers at all levels to challenge and address the use of discriminatory language, behaviours and attitudes, whether this is conscious or unconscious. This is a matter that should be consistently reinforced across organisations. The IMRF is not aware of any evidence that women should be precluded from certain SAR tasks on either physical or psychological capability grounds. Different individuals may be suited for different tasks - but not because of their gender identification. This is one of the main reasons why we have teams.

21.8 It is also for managers to ensure that institutional discrimination is avoided by ensuring the provision of equipment and facilities suitable for all their staff, female or male, paid or volunteer.

21.9 Inappropriate humour and unwanted 'flirting' can reportedly be problematic. 'Banter' can feel like bullying if not reciprocated: a joke only works if the hearer finds it funny. Similarly, unwanted sexual approaches can become harassment. Managers at all levels in an organisation, from the Board downwards, are responsible for clearly setting and proactively upholding behaviour standards, and many survey responses commended the effectiveness of such a management approach.

21.10 Most men who responded wanted to see equality of treatment and opportunity for female colleagues, and many women emphasised that most of their male colleagues are supportive. This support from men is encouraging, because equality can only be achieved if everyone supports the action required.

21.11 Few female respondents reported that family or friends' concerns about their SAR work were a major issue - but women who have been dissuaded from becoming involved in SAR by such concerns are unlikely to have seen the survey.



Photo: Canadian Coast Guard

Photo: DGzRS, Steven Keller





21.12 Specific concerns raised by SAR women were wide-ranging in nature. Safety, equipment, training, temperament, and the effects on health - especially mental health - and family life were the main issues raised. SAR organisations may wish to conduct research locally and address concerns revealed, especially if facing recruitment problems. Emphasising the importance of a good, reliable team and good, supportive management; thorough training, good equipment and best practice in mitigating personal risk are all recommended - as is ensuring that these things are actually provided!

21.13 Most female respondents want to achieve more in SAR. This is a resource of ambition that any well-run organisation should wish to tap into. However, it is important to distinguish here between ambition and opportunity, bearing in mind the number of female respondents who reported that they believed they had been held back or denied opportunities because of their gender.

21.14 Promoting an organisational culture that positively encourages individual progress is clearly to be welcomed. For such a culture to thrive, it needs to be genuinely supported at all levels of management and within individual teams. It should extend to every part of the organisation. The example of supportive network groups mentioned by one organisation is a good one. However, it is interesting that not all the SAR organisations ticked the 'training' and 'equality of opportunity' options when discussing providing opportunities for women to progress in the additional survey. Further research would be useful here.

21.15 Concerns about family life, and childcare in particular, were raised by both women and men when asked to identify factors that may be barriers to women's employment in SAR. As these related to the 'long hours' and 'on call' categories suggested in the survey, which respondents may have selected when thinking about childcare concerns, it is reasonable to conclude that this is a significant issue - one which can be exacerbated by inflexible working patterns.



Photo: HRT

21.16 Both women and men often emphasised that recruitment opportunities are open to all - but this does not explain why a number of SAR organisations have apparently faced a particular challenge recruiting more women. If, as some respondents think, some women undervalue the contribution they might make, this could be a campaign focus.

21.17 Additional actions suggested when considering how to encourage more women to become involved in maritime SAR included more use of female role models in advertising; trial periods; team-building events; including female employees when visiting schools etc; providing equipment that fits; seeking Investor in Diversity status; having designated inclusion officers at regional level; and dealing robustly with misogynistic behaviour.

21.18 The number of those reporting the availability of mentoring and other in-post support schemes was disappointing. The importance of this sort of support was highlighted many times in the survey responses. They are important for all staff, volunteer and paid, and particularly for new entrants. SAR organisations should consider what more they could do. Similarly, all potential recruits should be able to feel that they will receive all the training that they need. There is evidence in this survey that this is a particular concern for women.

21.19 Attention should also be given to diversity and equality education for existing staff; and the importance of inclusivity in internal and external communications, including social media, advertisements, public relations material, and outreach programmes and events cannot be over-emphasised.

21.20 As societal norms shift more in favour of equality, adjustments may need to be made to assist male employees as well: flexible working and training arrangements to accommodate childcare responsibilities, for example. This will, in turn, help women.

21.21 Addressing diversity issues effectively requires the support of senior managers at the highest level. If men are in a majority in senior management teams, will they give these issues the attention that many women think they should? Senior management teams need to remain alert to the danger of self-replicating, only recruiting or promoting those who look, think or behave like them.

21.22 Finally, many respondents, both female and male, emphasised that they supported gender neutrality in recruitment and employment. It is important to note that resistance to affirmative action is not the same as defending a discriminatory status quo. Discrimination of all kinds should be addressed and, while this was a survey focussing specifically on women in SAR, other diversity issues are equally important.



Photo: RCMSAR



Photo: Canadian Coast Guard

CONCLUSIONS

- 22.1 The five objectives set for this survey were to gather information on:
- (1) how many women are working in the maritime SAR sector today;
 - (2) what kinds of roles they are working in;
 - (3) what barriers they face;
 - (4) what individuals and organisations think can be done to improve the situation; and
 - (5) to establish a comprehensive and accurate benchmark, enabling the IMRF to better focus its support and to measure the success of the #WomenInSAR initiative.
- 22.2 Objective (1) was not fully met by this survey, because ultimately the number and distribution of responses received was insufficient for that purpose. It would require a more complete global survey of SAR organisations.
- 22.3 However, the other survey objectives were met. A great deal of useful material was gathered on objectives (3) and (4) in particular, and this material should assist the IMRF, its members and SAR organisations in general, to identify further targeted work in this area. The main conclusions drawn from a preliminary analysis of the survey responses are set out below against these two objective headings, following some general conclusions.

General conclusions

- 22.4 There was a good response to the survey in terms of numbers of individual responses, but 90% of the responses came from northern Europe and North America. We should therefore be cautious about generalising more widely.
- 22.5 For the great majority of women respondents, the reasons for becoming involved in SAR and the most rewarding parts of their SAR experience are the same as those usually cited by men. However, issues related to gender discrimination were reportedly seen as being among the most challenging aspects of their work for a significant minority of women.
- 22.6 Many respondents emphasised that most male colleagues are supportive, and that things are generally getting better.
- 22.7 Many respondents, both female and male, do not support affirmative action. They argue for gender-blindness in recruitment processes and gender neutrality in the workplace.

General

- 22.8 Male dominance remains a fact in many SAR teams and this can have an indirect discriminatory effect, for example in terms of the facilities and equipment provided. The survey responses indicate that a disappointing level of gender discrimination still exists in some quarters.
- 22.9 Some women felt that they needed to out-perform their male counterparts in order to be accepted as equals.
- 22.10 Gender discrimination can result in a sidelining or under-use of women's capabilities, their frustration and, in some cases, their loss to the SAR services.
- 22.11 A perception of SAR jobs as being more suitable for men; resistance from existing male staff; women not knowing that these jobs are there for them; and concerns about family life, childcare in particular, were considered important barriers by both male and female respondents.
- 22.12 A lack of adequate toilet, sanitary, showering and changing facilities, and a failure to provide personal protective equipment appropriate for women, or to consider women sufficiently when designing equipment, were reported by a significant number of respondents.

Improvements

- 22.13 Recruiting women required concomitant action on providing suitable facilities and equipment and equitable working conditions.
- 22.14 Mentoring and other in-post support schemes such as 'buddying' were widely thought to be beneficial. Having female role models was thought significant by both women and men.
- 22.15 Equality of opportunity and flexibility of work patterns were cited as important to both recruitment and retention, particularly of women.
- 22.16 All potential recruits should be able to feel that they would receive all the training that they need. There was evidence from this survey that this is a particular concern for women.
- 22.17 Inclusivity in internal and external communications, advertisements, public relations material, and outreach programmes and events was very important to overcoming perceptions that 'SAR is for men' or any tendency in women to under-value the contribution they might make.
- 22.18 Recruitment drives that focus on women or which emphasised male/female equality in SAR were regarded as the most important steps that could be taken to encourage more women into the SAR sector.
- 22.19 Attention should be given to diversity and equality education for all staff.



Photo: SSRS



RECOMMENDATIONS

SAR organisations

- 23.1 SAR organisations are recommended to consider the barriers and improvements listed among the conclusions above. More information to support these conclusions may be found in the Full Report.
- 23.2 It is for managers at all levels in the organisation (including the Board) to address discriminatory language, behaviours and attitudes, and to set clear expectations for expected behaviour. From the responses to this survey, it would appear that this is a matter that deserves greater and more urgent attention.
- 23.3 Recruitment of more women is not sufficient in itself. Some survey responses highlighted poor equipment, facilities, working conditions, and even the language used in training materials, as matters requiring review. Any identified shortfalls then need to be addressed.
- 23.4 Promoting an organisational culture that positively encourages individual progress is clearly a positive step. For such a culture to thrive, it needs to be genuinely supported at all levels of management (including at Board level), as well as within individual teams. It should extend to every part of the organization and it should be gender-blind.

- 23.5 If not already in place, mentoring and other in-post support schemes are highly recommended. A senior manager (or Board member) should be assigned to champion this work.
- 23.6 Targetted surveys could help with analysis of the local barriers to recruitment of more female personnel into SAR roles. To find out what is discouraging potential applicants?



Photo: VISAR



Photo: Irish Coast Guard, Drogheda

- 23.7 It is good practice to survey staff - voluntary as well as paid - who leave the organisation, to determine their reasons for leaving. Many organisations do this routinely, but it is also important to act on any negative issues this research reveals.
- 23.8 To aid benchmarking, underpin policy decisions and facilitate improvements, it is recommended that all relevant information on diversity in employment, voluntary as well as paid, should be centrally maintained and regularly reviewed.



Photo: Irish Coast Guard, Ballybunion

The IMRF

- 23.9 It is recommended that the results of this survey should be shared with the IMO, in support of their own 'Women in Maritime' programme.
- 23.10 The IMRF should also consider further research into what their SAR organisation members do to recruit and, especially, to retain staff - including female staff. The provision of good working conditions, equality in SAR roles, and training and promotion opportunities are important for the recruitment and retention of both volunteers and paid personnel.
- 23.11 As usual the IMRF should share reported experience and good practice among its members and with the wider SAR community.
- 23.12 The IMRF should seek to establish a mentoring scheme for women in maritime SAR.
- 23.13 The IMRF should develop resources, to assist SAR organisations to improve the recruitment and retention of women, both as volunteers and paid personnel.



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