



The  
Seafarers  
Happiness  
Index

# Seafarers Happiness Index

Quarter 4 2023



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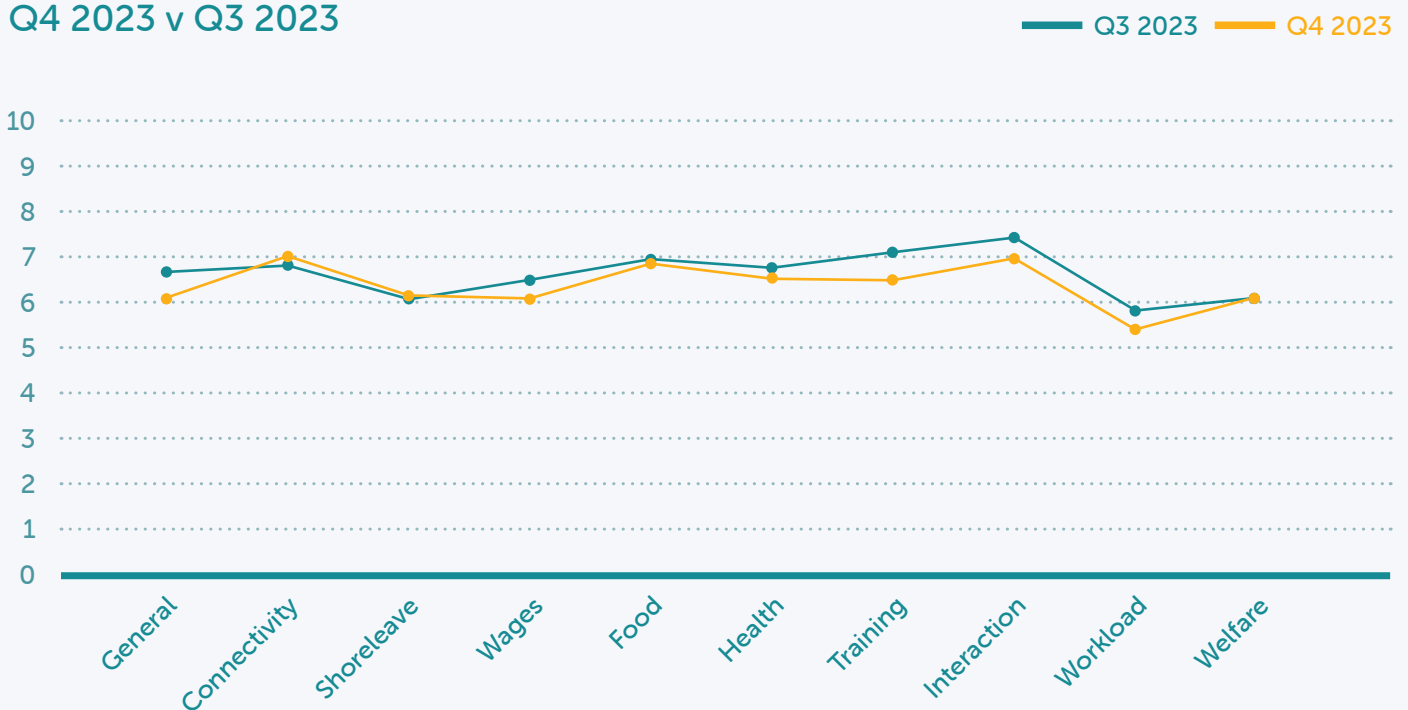
# Seafarers Happiness Index Quarter 4

The Seafarers Happiness Index (SHI) is a quarterly survey conducted by the Mission to Seafarers to gauge the sentiment of those working at sea. The survey asks global seafarers ten key questions about various aspects of their life and work.

This report highlights seafarer perspectives on some of the key factors impacting happiness. The most recent SHI report covers data from Quarter 4 2023. Once again, we saw yet another drop in overall happiness. This time down to 6.36/10 from 6.6 in Q3.

The fall in overall happiness reflects a decrease in sentiment across most question areas compared to Q3 2023, with connectivity being the only notable aspect that showed improvement.

## Q4 2023 v Q3 2023



A number of common issues emerged once more. We heard complaints as is the norm about lack of shore leave, inability to contact family and poor internet access.

When it comes to connectivity, there was frustration voiced when other vessels, especially in the same fleet, seemed to have better internet access. This is a cause of much annoyance.

Salaries also featured, with comments that wages are not keeping pace with inflation. There were also complaints about unpaid working hours, and lack of wage rises, suggesting that some companies are not properly compensating crews.

We also heard feedback on the risks faced by seafarers and the importance of warlike operations area payments. There is, however, likely to be a lag between the responses and the official designation of these areas. As such, Q1 2024 should reveal the true impact of these changes.

Rest hours were a feature of discussion, and there was frustration from seafarers who feel these are not being adhered to or respected – this is something which respondents feel shows that shore management is not focused on crew welfare.

Excessive workload, lack of support, too much paperwork and too many inspections were once again seen by seafarers as proof shore staff are not sufficiently concerned about overburdening them. Whether real or imagined, there is a sense of real resentment growing. Seafarers reported frustration as they do not feel that employers listen to complaints.

There were also interesting statements about the importance and significance of seafarers serving together on ships regularly. The impact of having crews who know each other sheds light on the positives of interaction.

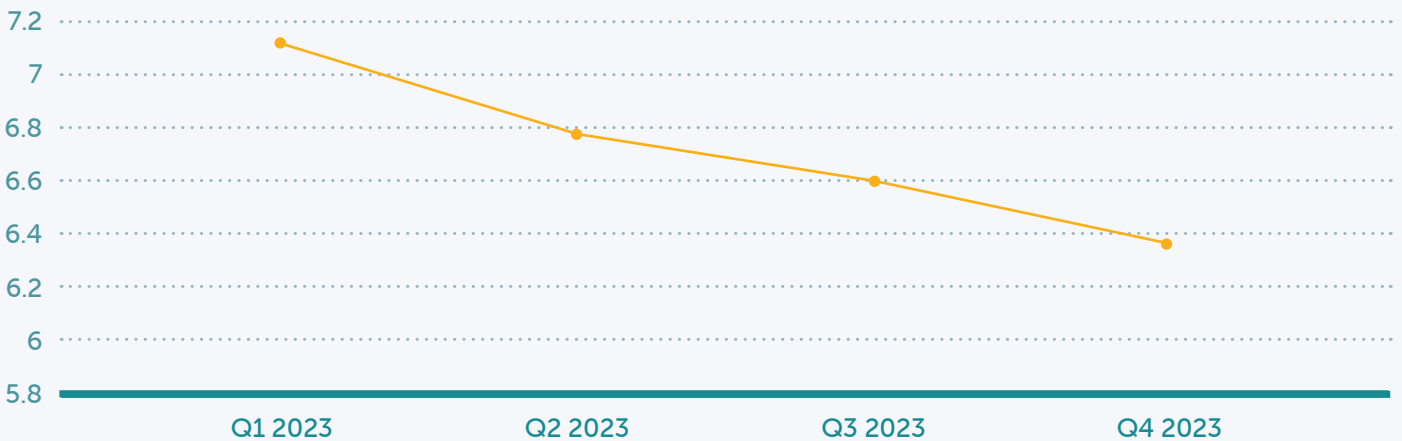
There were, however, negatives regarding recruitment as some were concerned about a lack of transparency when it comes to manning agents and contracts.

Whilst there were positive comments, the broader tone from the responses conveys frustration, overwork, and feeling undervalued by shore staff. Lack of basic respect and concern for crews appears to be a common grievance.

The general sentiment is one of feeling unappreciated and exploited, which understandably translates to markedly lower happiness rankings. This is a pattern we are unfortunately becoming accustomed to.

The Mission to Seafarers is committed to working with the shipping industry to address the challenges facing seafarers and to improve their welfare. We hope the SHI is an important tool in this work, and the Mission to Seafarers is grateful to all who have participated in the survey. Please keep sharing.

## Declining seafarer happiness in 2023



2023 has been the year of declining seafarer happiness.

Q1 2023 started with a relatively high average happiness rating of 7.12, indicating positive sentiment among seafarers at the beginning of the year. However, by Q2 2023, there was a decrease in average happiness to 6.77.

This downward trend continued into Q3 2023, where the average happiness rating further dropped to 6.6, and into Q4 2023 with happiness levels falling to 6.36.

This consistent decline in happiness over the course of the year could be indicative of various factors impacting seafarers' well-being, and highlights the need to address and improve working and living conditions within the maritime industry.

## How happy generally when at sea?

6.08/10 ↓ from 6.66/10

The sentiments expressed by seafarers about their general happiness levels vary, ranging from contentment and love for their job to dissatisfaction and concerns about their work environment.

Positive sentiments, such as feeling fulfilled and being happy about providing for their families, are prevalent among some seafarers, as they so often are. This is a fundamental pillar for crews – it is one that remains pivotal for those who see their job at sea as being the provider for their families.

Other positives included seafarers being appreciative of the international environment they work in – they see camaraderie with colleagues and the opportunities for travel as good benefits. Where sentiment was positive, they expressed satisfaction at being part of a good company that cares about them and feeling comfortable with crew on board.

However, numerous challenges and issues also emerged from the responses. Seafarers voiced concerns about excessive workloads, inadequate rest hours, and difficulties maintaining a work-life balance. They expressed feelings of being overworked, stressed and isolated. Issues with poor management, lack of respect, discriminatory practices, and abusive treatment from shipping companies and authorities were also highlighted.

Seafarers also spoke of frustration at limited communication with their families, the absence of shore leave, poor connectivity, and financial concerns due to delayed salaries or insufficient income during breaks. Furthermore, concerns about safety, criminalisation of seafarers, manning levels, excessive paperwork, and limited support systems both on board and ashore contributed to their overall dissatisfaction.

Additionally, environmental efforts, such as recycling on board being disregarded when disposing of waste ashore, rankled badly and affected morale, reflecting perceived disrespect towards their labours.

Feeling overworked, stressed, and generally feeling not cared for by shore management leads to problems and can impact mental health. Towards the end of the reporting period, there were also concerns raised about the security situation in the Red Sea and the knock-on effects of longer trips and uncertainty.



**With attacks on ships starting again I am very concerned and my family is scared. They see the news and do not know what it means for me.**

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

7/10 ↑ from 6.81/10

The experiences shared by seafarers regarding connectivity at sea offered a mixed picture, showing various challenges and positive aspects.

For many seafarers, having reliable internet access is crucial as it allows them to connect with their families. They expressed happiness when they can chat, have video calls, and stay updated about their loved ones' lives. Being away at sea, they value the opportunity to communicate regularly and feel closer to home, helping them stay connected despite the distance.

However, internet connectivity poses several issues. Some mentioned limited or unreliable connections, slow internet speeds, and expensive rates for data usage. This impacts their ability to communicate effectively, causing frustration and difficulties in staying in touch with their families.

Additionally, there were complaints about restrictive policies on internet usage and the high cost of onboard internet services, which hinder their ability to connect with their loved ones freely.

Whilst some praised the availability of internet on board, others highlighted the need for better connectivity and more affordable options. Having access to good-quality internet is seen as a significant factor in choosing a particular company or vessel.

There was also some tension evident as some crew members felt they had a harder time being in contact than others on board: "As an engineer, I can only get signal by sneaking from my work. Deck crew and on the bridge have it easier".



**Wi-Fi is not strong, my contract is too long.  
That feels all wrong.**

# How happy about access to shore leave?

6.14/10 ↑ from 6.06/10

The experiences shared by seafarers regarding shore leave range from contentment to frustration due to various factors impacting their ability to go ashore. If shore leave is granted, then we see contentment. Where it is blocked, then real frustration creeps in.

Seafarers talk of the mental strain caused by extended periods spent on board without the chance to go ashore. Restrictions imposed by some countries, terminal limitations, and the remaining legacy of pandemic-related constraints significantly affect morale.

For many, being away for months without the opportunity for a break or change of scenery negatively impacts their mental well-being, causing feelings of despair and isolation.

The experiences with shore leave are influenced by factors such as company policies – there were many reports that seafarers have not seen policies updated post-COVID. Port restrictions, vessel schedules short port stays, or limited access to transportation from terminals were seen as common concerns.

As we have heard before, there are also allegations that some unscrupulous ship agents are taking advantage of seafarers, which is a huge concern, and something which needs to be addressed.

There were also comments towards the end of the quarter about the impact of port security. Some seafarers were allegedly denied access to shore leave because of a supposed worsening security situation, and fears for their safety. It would be extremely concerning to have security replace COVID as a new excuse to deny seafarers some respite ashore.

Whilst the negatives received do outweigh positive experiences, where we do hear good feedback, it is from seafarers who appreciate the moments ashore, finding it a much-needed relief from the routine on board. Having the chance to explore, socialise, and engage in recreational activities during port stays provides a sense of rejuvenation and helps reduce work-related stress and homesickness.



**Some ship agents take advantage of the crew, asking for huge amounts of money so that the crew could avail access to shores.**

## How happy about wages/salary?

6.05/10 ↓ from 6.49/10

The sentiment amongst seafarers regarding wages showcases a mix of contentment and pride at providing for their families at home, through to concerns about stagnation and desires for better compensation.

Some seafarers expressed satisfaction with their current salaries, considering it fair and sufficient to support their families or maintain a decent living standard. The majority of written responses, however, complained about a lack of wage rises over extended periods.

They claimed that sometimes the stagnation in wage levels spans over a decade, whilst the workload and responsibilities continue to increase. This situation has led to a perceived imbalance, where the compensation doesn't match the effort and dedication put into the job.

Some seafarers raised issues about delayed salaries, especially in certain companies or regions, whilst hidden costs from manning agents were also flagged as a concern. Too many seafarers feel they are not even paid their full allotment. Unexpected fees or charges owing to "exchange rates" can creep into salaries, further eroding earnings.

The issue of inflation and living costs was mentioned, with seafarers emphasising the need for salary adjustments. There were also complaints about disparities between wages received compared to those ashore.

Whilst some acknowledge their salaries as competitive within the market rates, others believe that their pay does not adequately reflect the risks and responsibilities they shoulder while working on board, leaving them feeling undervalued and underpaid.

This issue was raised in relation to current security concerns. As one seafarer stated, "No one ashore would work for such low pay and have their lives put at risk every day."

The feedback reveals a desire for fair compensation that aligns with the demanding nature of their work, ensuring that their efforts and contributions are duly recognised and adequately remunerated.



**Indian shipping agencies often practice underpayment to the crew.**



## How happy about the food on board?

6.85/10 ↓ from 6.93/10

Experiences with food and provisions vary significantly and depend largely on the company's policies and the skills of the onboard cook. Whilst some expressed contentment in this Quarter with good quality and ample supplies of food, others reported challenges.

Seafarers are hugely appreciative of high-quality food, acknowledging the importance of good nourishment. Given the right circumstances, seafarers are only too happy to heap praise on skilled cooks and good catering crews.

However, there were notable concerns. Seafarers highlighted the rising costs of food globally, leading to limitations on quantities and variety of provisions on board. Budget constraints imposed by companies are also a recurring issue, impacting the quality and diversity of food supplies. Crews are alive to the spend on food and know when companies are cutting back.

Complaints about lack of fresh items, limited choices, and at times, inadequate nutritional value were evident. Additionally, dissatisfaction appears to arise from instances of inconsistent food quality, attributed to the varying skills of different cooks or budgetary constraints imposed by the company. The issue of provisions for different nationalities was mentioned, which can be divisive if some are felt to be more costly or better quality.

There were a host of observations around perceived cost-cutting over food quality, something it was stressed impacts crew satisfaction and health, whilst instances of cooks lacking culinary skills or understanding nutrition were once again noted.

We also again heard issues about access to drinking water. Some seafarers stated that water is hard to come by, or that they are charged what they see as unreasonable costs.



**Our Korean officers have different kind of provision which are quite expensive while ratings are just normal, but ours are not as good as all the money is spent.**

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

6.52/10 ↓ from 6.74/10

Seafarers emphasised the importance of health, fitness, and recreation on board vessels, but experiences vary widely due to vessel size, workloads, and available facilities. Those who reported back positively shared their appreciation for good gyms and fitness equipment on board, with comments that they consider such provisions crucial to maintaining their physical and mental health.

However, several challenges were highlighted. Some vessels lack adequate space for fitness activities, limiting the crew's ability to exercise, though the biggest issue appears to be workload.

The demanding nature of duties, long hours, and tight schedules make it challenging to find time for fitness routines or leisure activities. Moreover, there were instances of crew members expressing exhaustion or insufficient free time to prioritise health and fitness.

There were comments that rest times are occasionally compromised, impacting the ability to engage in recreational activities or exercise. Of all the responses which mentioned senior officers not wanting crew to be "wasting time in the gym", it seems that it is the Chief Engineers who lead these calls, perhaps not wanting energy to be exerted outside of the engine room?

Despite these challenges, there was some positive feedback, with crews expressing gratitude when vessels have well-equipped gyms and where they are encouraged and supported in maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Access to fitness equipment, recreational facilities, and opportunities for exercise is highly valued on such vessels.



**Rest times are not respected, especially by Chief Engineers. They want all work all the time so using the gym is not acceptable.**

# How happy about the training you receive?

6.5/10 ↓ from 7.1/10

This quarter's results suggest that seafarers hold very varied perspectives on the adequacy and quality of training. Whether on leave or during voyages, there appear to be strong differences in opinion.

Where we heard positives, seafarers commend their companies for a supportive approach, seeing access to training as a key part of their career enhancement and a real benefit.

Such positive responses highlight companies that focus on career progression, provide proper training aligned with the latest industry requirements, and offer updated courses on board and ashore.

The theme from these responses is one of encouragement, empowerment and appreciation for access to good training and supportive colleagues.

Conversely, however, concerns were raised about certain training elements. Issues include inexperienced trainers, insufficient time for proper training due to heavy workloads, training that feels like a tick-box task rather than comprehensive learning, and companies prioritising certifications over practical skill development.

There seems to be a mix of opinions regarding the volume of training provided, with some seafarers feeling overwhelmed by excessive or what they feel is "unnecessary training", whilst others expressed the need for more advanced and practical training, especially in automation, new fuels and electronics.

As we have heard before, there is growing dissatisfaction with the level of engagement over decarbonisation. It appears that seafarers want to feel part of this debate. There were even respondents who questioned whether a career at sea can be maintained if they are not given the right training to future-proof their skills.

Cost-related issues were also brought up, such as training charged to the crew or cutting corners in training budgets, impacting the quality and value.

The desire for more realistic, online, and efficient training methods is echoed across the feedback. Seafarers also want continuous, practical, and relevant skill-building that reflects the evolving nature of the maritime industry, rather than merely fulfilling certification requirements.



**Training is quite good but needs more advanced courses on automation, new fuels and electronics.**

# How happy about interaction with crew on board?

6.97/10 ↓ from 7.42/10

There were positive sentiments this quarter, with some respondents citing harmonious relationships and camaraderie, especially with those they have sailed with before.

Having a regular roster of seafarers is seen as a huge advantage. Seafarers spoke of the trust and respect which grows over time, not just on single trips. It was observed that senior officers spend more time training crew they know they are likely to sail with again. There appears to be a strong argument for crews to be kept together to help their bonds grow.

There were, however, contrasting views, with some mentioning a lack of rest time, fatigue, and isolation after work hours. Others had observed crew members spending time alone in their cabins, primarily engaging with gadgets or the internet.

Connectivity can affect interaction on board, with some crew members preferring going online over socialising in common areas. It seems there needs to be action taken to encourage crew to meet, mix and feel that there are better alternatives to being cabin-bound.

The responses show that seafarers see the importance of quality time spent with fellow crew members for better mental health and fostering good relationships, and there were comments on the need for more activities to enhance crew interaction. There is a real imperative to try and break the spell of isolation – to make great spaces that people want to spend time in and to rethink how events and social time are managed.

While many appreciate camaraderie with their colleagues, cultural differences, language barriers and occasional conflicts can all impact social dynamics. The benefits of multicultural crews are accepted, but there are challenges related to differing attitudes, beliefs, and cultural backgrounds.

The results indicate that issues of discrimination, racism, and “egoistic behaviours” exist on certain vessels. Moreover, the impact of company culture and crew rotation play a significant role in fostering positive relations on board.

Some responses made for difficult reading as seafarers opened their hearts about the difficulties and challenges they faced. There were numerous instances of toxic behaviour or individuals being discussed. The actions of such people can lead to discomfort and tension among crew members, and again this is an area which requires remedial action.



**The bosun has a behaviour or attitude problem. Why do the company and principals let this guy on board if he always shouting and always mad?**

## How happy with your workload?

5.41/10 ↓ from 5.81/10

We heard from many seafarers in this quarter who expressed concerns about their heavy workload and long working hours, often due to insufficient crew on board. The repeated message was that additional crew members would significantly ease the burden, enhance operational efficiency and help keep everyone safer and secure.

This was particularly noticeable when it came to discussions about security in the latter part of the reporting period. Seafarers reported that their vessels were suddenly operating at heightened levels of vigilance and this was having a serious impact on workload.

During previous periods of heightened security risk, extra crew have been placed on board to manage certain operational security aspects. This has not yet seemingly been the case, and so existing crewing levels are having to make an extra effort to secure vessels or monitor risks and movements during navigation.

There were reports from crew members who feel overwhelmed by work, with one stating "It's beyond imagination" or beyond what they can manage. They highlight the challenges of handling multiple tasks, including tasks that may not be part of their primary responsibilities, leading to fatigue and stress.

Some mentioned pressure from head office or shoreside to meet increasing regulations and paperwork, contributing to a "never-ending workload".

Whilst some expressed contentment with their workload, even these seafarers state that they are often operating at their maximum comfortable capacity and believe that any further increases would be too much to handle.

The impact of regulations, inspections, and documentation is notable, leading to increased responsibilities and demanding working conditions. Whilst some report workload as moderate or normal, there is a consensus that it is gradually increasing, particularly with additional paperwork and compliance requirements.



**Overloaded. More and more crew should have done - no additional payment and no additional crew despite so much more to do.**

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

**6.06/10 No Change from Q3**

The feedback from seafarers regarding access to welfare facilities ashore was mixed this quarter. Some expressed satisfaction and gratitude for the available facilities, such as seafarer centres or recreation facilities, describing them as good, supportive, and easily accessible. They appreciate the support received, and certain ports, especially in the UK, Canada and Japan were singled out for praise.

A significant number, however, expressed dissatisfaction and mentioned a lack of welfare facilities, especially in certain regions or ports, describing them as non-existent or limited.

Seafarers also highlighted issues related to corruption and terminal restrictions which are limiting their access to facilities. It was stated that seafarers are often seen as merely a source of money for unscrupulous operators, whether rogue agents or officials, or lining the pockets of security guards and local taxi firms. The sense is one of frustration and annoyance.

Overall, it seems that wherever access is good then seafarers are hugely appreciative and enjoy their time visiting the welfare facilities available. They are thankful for the support received and the welcome they are given. Unfortunately, this is not always the case.



**I'm happy because we can use different recreation facilities and easily accessible to us during time ashore.**

# Q4 2023 Conclusion

The diverse set of responses from seafarers highlights the complex nature of life at sea. Whilst some find fulfilment in their maritime careers, the majority face mounting challenges that are eroding happiness levels to concerning lows.

Fundamentally, seafarers feel overburdened, undervalued, and disconnected. Workloads continue to intensify due to staff shortages and growing administrative burdens.

According to seafarers, too many shipping companies appear disconnected from shipboard realities. We heard from frustrated crews who believe that such companies are prioritising regulations, paperwork, and profits over crew welfare.

Access to connectivity and respite provided by better internet, occasional shore leave and improved recreational spaces could alleviate isolation and boost morale.

However, time and time again, we hear of restrictive company policies, port limitations, and cost barriers making it harder for seafarers to get what they need out of life at sea.

It was stated in this quarter's responses that training requires an overhaul. Seafarers called for a greater focus on engagement, practical skills, and career development rather than box-ticking compliance. Respondents would also like to see a genuine focus on future needs, with training on automation and decarbonisation through future fuels.

We heard the view that wage levels unfairly stagnate, yet all the while risks escalate in piracy and terrorism-prone areas, and the need for seafarers to have the skills, experience and knowledge to deal with complex new technologies increases.

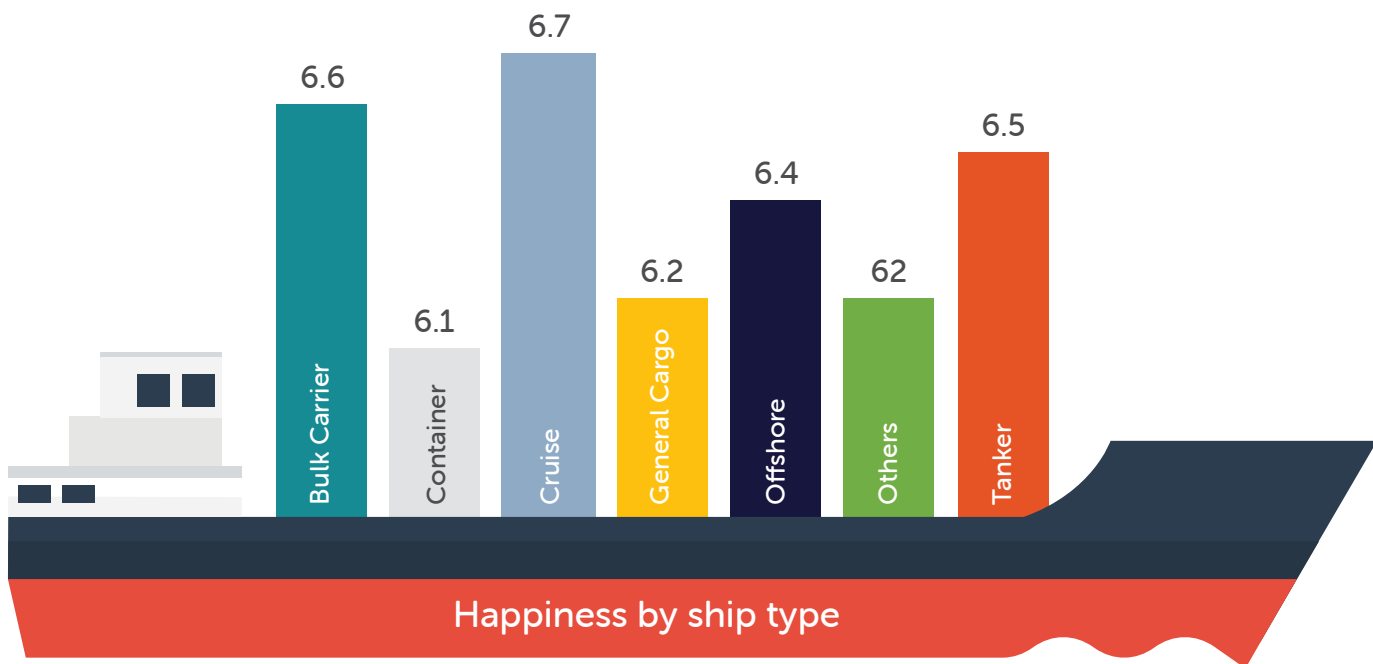
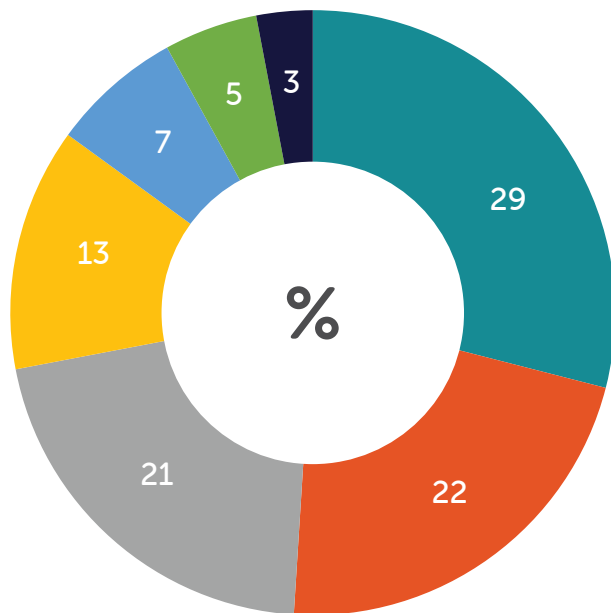
As is so often voiced, the most recent results show once again that manning levels are consistently felt to be too low, further elevating pressures on fatigued crews. This is even more acutely felt when seafarers are faced with security issues and have to deal with extended watch patterns or longer trips.

Where there is good news, it is once more about the positivity felt around camaraderie between crew members. However, companies are being asked to facilitate greater social engagement to counter the allure of cabin isolation. We heard how the more trips seafarers work together, the more positive effects of interactions are magnified. The impact on seafarers who regularly sail together should not be overlooked.

The fact that Q4 2023, once again, saw a fall in positivity means that the messages are not yet getting through, and we are failing to make the changes to improve life at sea. This is hugely concerning, not least because there is a serious seafarer shortage looming. It is also important to remember that the companies who do best by their people will do best for their business too.

# Ship Type

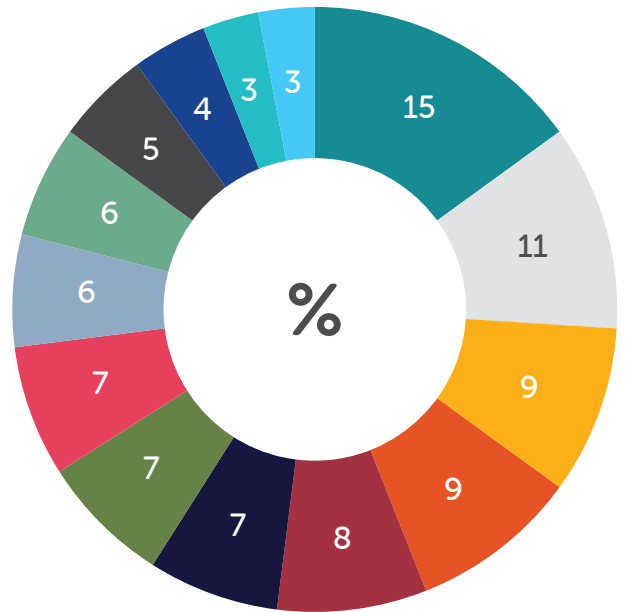
- Bulk Carrier
- Container
- Cruise
- General Cargo
- Offshore
- Others
- Tanker





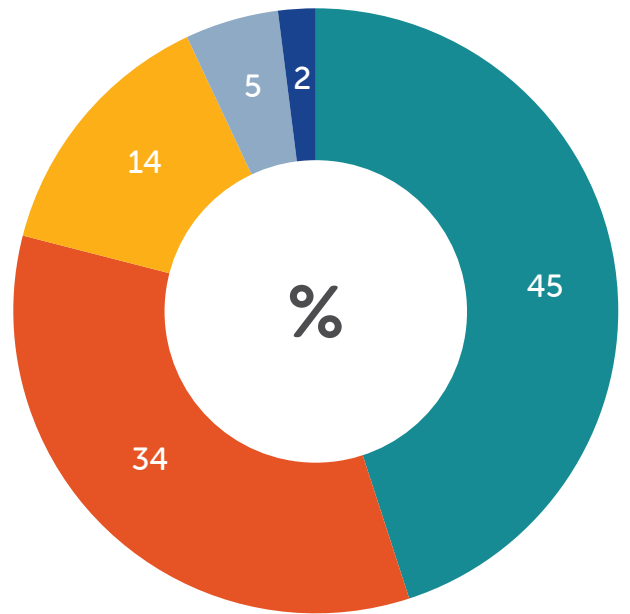
# Rank

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



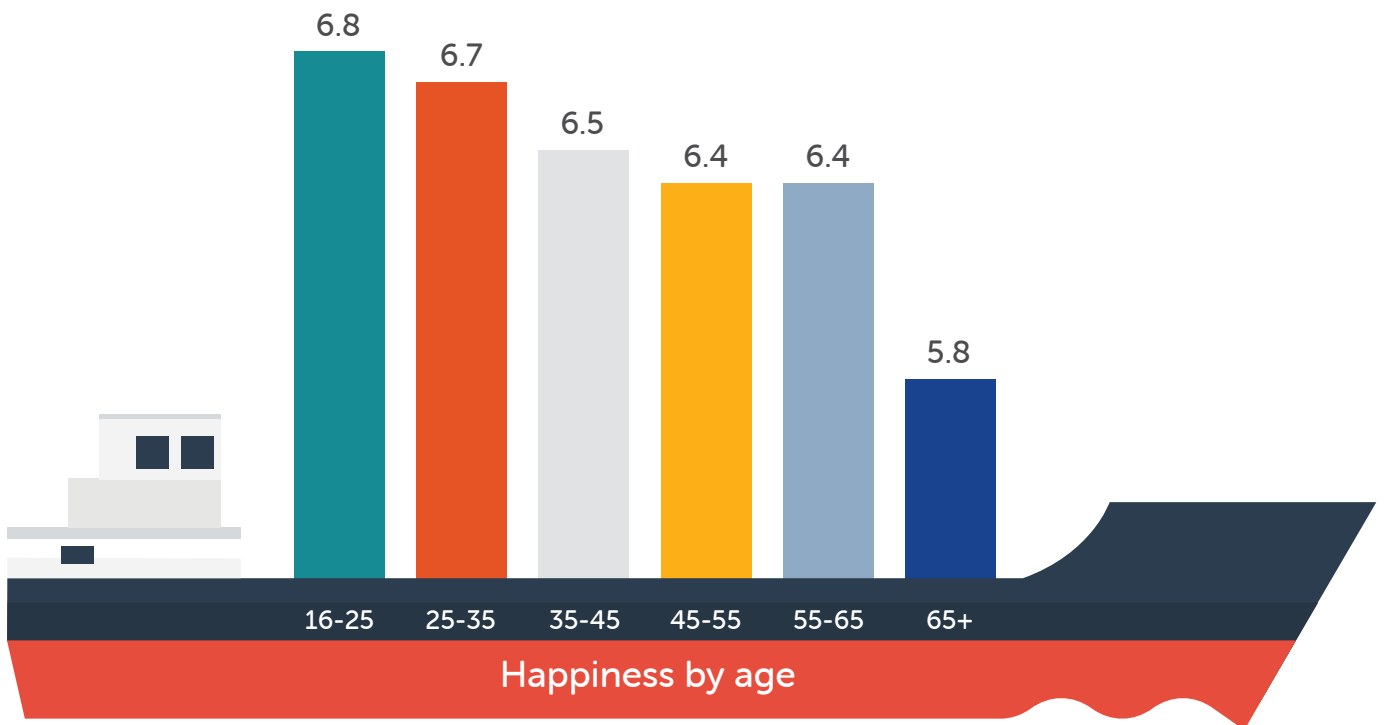
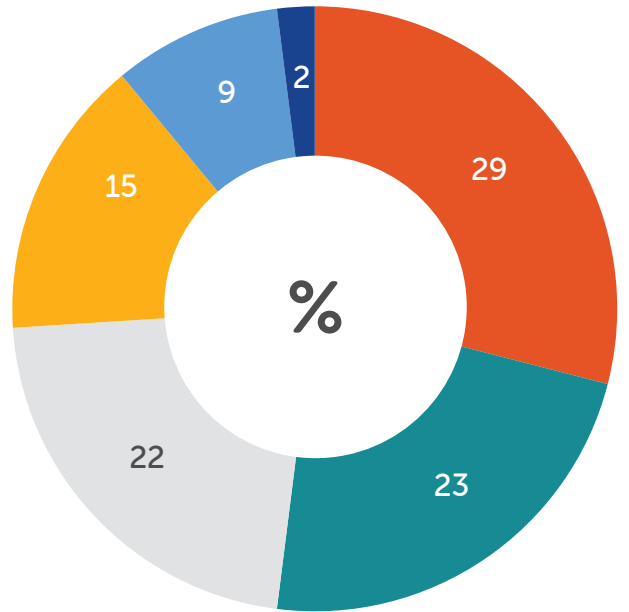
# Trip Length

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



# Age Range

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

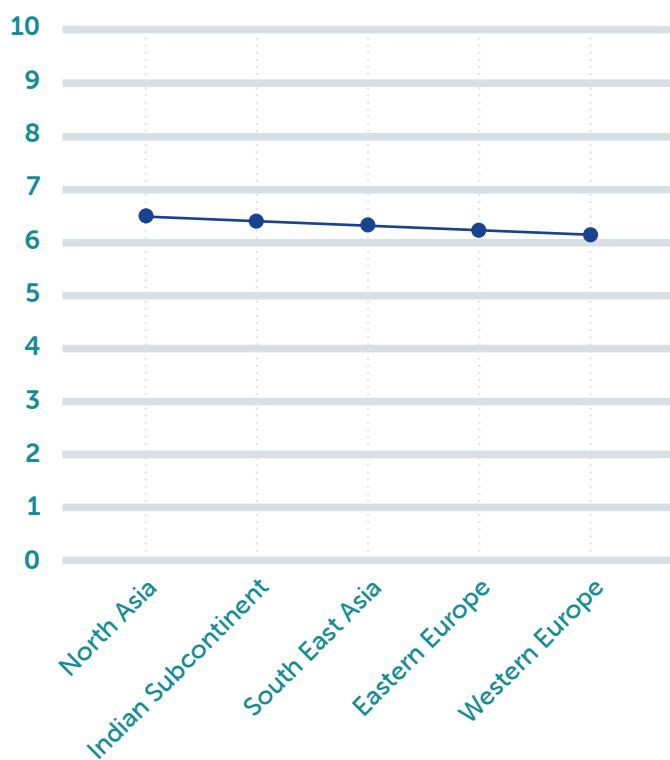


Happiness by age

# Where



Regions and happiness





# Reflecting on a Difficult Year

**2023 marked a concerning downward slide in seafarer sentiment, with happiness levels sinking to multi-year lows. After the already difficult pandemic period, this sustained decline signals growing discontentment among maritime crews worldwide.**

The year began optimistically, with a brief surge in morale following the easing of COVID disruptions. This hope quickly faded, however, and was replaced by reemerging and unresolved frustrations. Across all four quarters, recurring pain points dragged scores lower, despite marginal improvements in limited areas.

At the core, it appears that seafarers continue to feel overburdened, underappreciated, and disconnected. Punishing workloads persist, as crewing shortages and administrative burdens multiply while salaries stagnate. Vital connections to family and access to recreation remain constrained by what are seen as restrictive company policies, unreliable connectivity, and inadequate port welfare facilities.

This prevalent trend of declining satisfaction was further compounded in 2023 by attempts to extend seafarers' contract durations. Coping with prolonged periods on board becomes increasingly arduous. Such moves also highlight the disparity between companies providing health and wellness programmes for seafarers and those who wish to power on regardless.

This has been a year with the bright potential of Starlink. There is still a hope that "always on" connectivity will revolutionise the seagoing experience. However, there are concerns too, not least where seafarers are increasingly seen as some kind of extension to the office team. We heard from crews being dragged into online meetings, regardless of their working patterns.

Financial concerns, including rising living costs, limited room for financial growth, and challenges hindering career progression, continue to trouble seafarers. Whilst on board, inadequate meals, insufficient entertainment options, and limited shared spaces impede positive interactions among crew members, affecting job satisfaction and overall well-being. Workload, fatigue, and bureaucratic hurdles further impede progress, whilst the lack of access to gym facilities and insufficient focus on physical well-being hit hard.

The difficult reality of 2023 is that as the world emerged from the pandemic, restoring pre-COVID conditions proved elusive. Extended contracts and diminished employment terms became the distressing new norm. Difficulties with wages, benefits, and cost pressures have compounded frustrations.

There have been clear calls for shore management to develop and demonstrate greater empathy, engagement, and urgency in addressing these cascading problems.

Seafarers demand action on shore leave, connectivity, training, diversity, recreation, and mental health support. They want to see their profession transformed into a more sustainable, equitable, and fulfilling one – a career that they feel in control of, and where all they feel valued.

Sadly, downward spirals are hard to reverse, but the future sustainability of maritime trade rests on empowering happier lives at sea. So, 2024 needs to be a year of more positives, otherwise this terrible sinking sentiment looks set to continue.

## THANK YOU

The long-term sustainability of the entire maritime industry depends on restoring seafarer happiness and so we express our gratitude to the seafarers who have generously shared their experiences and thoughts with us. Their insights are incredibly valuable and play a crucial role in deepening our understanding and addressing the challenges they face. We hold immense respect for the pivotal role seafarers hold in sustaining the maritime industry and facilitating global trade and prosperity.

Our appreciation also extends to the shipping companies and shore managers who have encouraged their seafarers to participate and provide feedback. We encourage more seafarers to step forward and share their experiences, as their contributions are fundamental in driving positive changes within the industry. Shipowners or operators, we kindly ask for your support in encouraging your crews to participate in the survey. The more comprehensive our data collection, the better equipped we are to implement meaningful improvements.

Let us continue our collaborative efforts to support seafarers by actively listening to their voices, learning from their experiences, and striving to create a profession that wholeheartedly acknowledges their significance and unwavering dedication in the face of such widespread and varied challenges.

We would also like to thank our 2023 sponsors: leading marine insurer, NorthStandard, and global leader in vessel inspections, Idwal, as well as the support of leading satellite service provider, Inmarsat.



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The future  
sustainability of  
maritime trade rests  
on empowering  
happier lives at sea.

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