



# YachtCrewHelp 2023 Annual Review





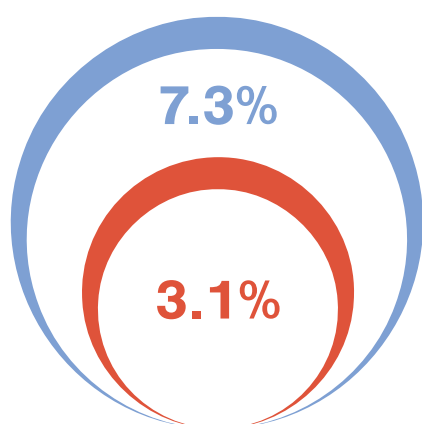
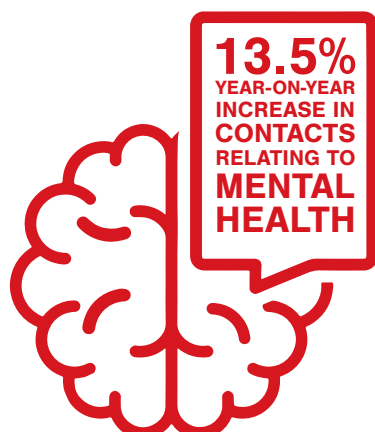
## *About YachtCrewHelp*

ISWAN launched its YachtCrewHelp service in November 2020, in response to the lack of accessible, specialised support available to crew working in the yachting industry. Building on ISWAN's expertise from operating SeafarerHelp, ISWAN's long-established helpline for the maritime sector, YachtCrewHelp is a free, confidential, multilingual helpline available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, providing emotional, wellbeing and practical support to yacht crew of any nationality.

YachtCrewHelp forms part of ISWAN's long-term Welfare of Yacht Crew project, which is seeking to increase understanding of the challenges faced by crew working in the industry and to develop effective solutions.

# YachtCrewHelp in 2023: headline figures

\*ABHDV – Abuse, bullying, harassment, discrimination and violence



THE PROPORTION OF  
ISSUES RELATING TO  
ABHDV\* WAS 2.4X HIGHER  
ON YACHTCREWHELP  
AS OPPOSED TO ISWAN'S  
SEAFARERHELP



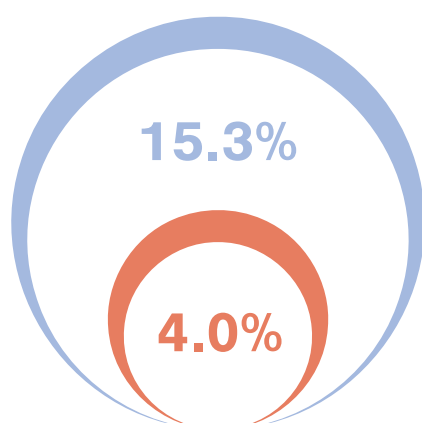
## ABHDV



ACCOUNTED FOR  
**14.2%**  
OF ISSUES RAISED  
BY WOMEN



ACCOUNTED FOR  
**2.7%**  
OF ISSUES RAISED  
BY MEN



THE PROPORTION OF ISSUES  
RELATING TO MENTAL HEALTH  
CONCERNS WAS 3.8x HIGHER  
ON YACHTCREWHELP  
AS OPPOSED TO ISWAN'S  
SEAFARERHELP



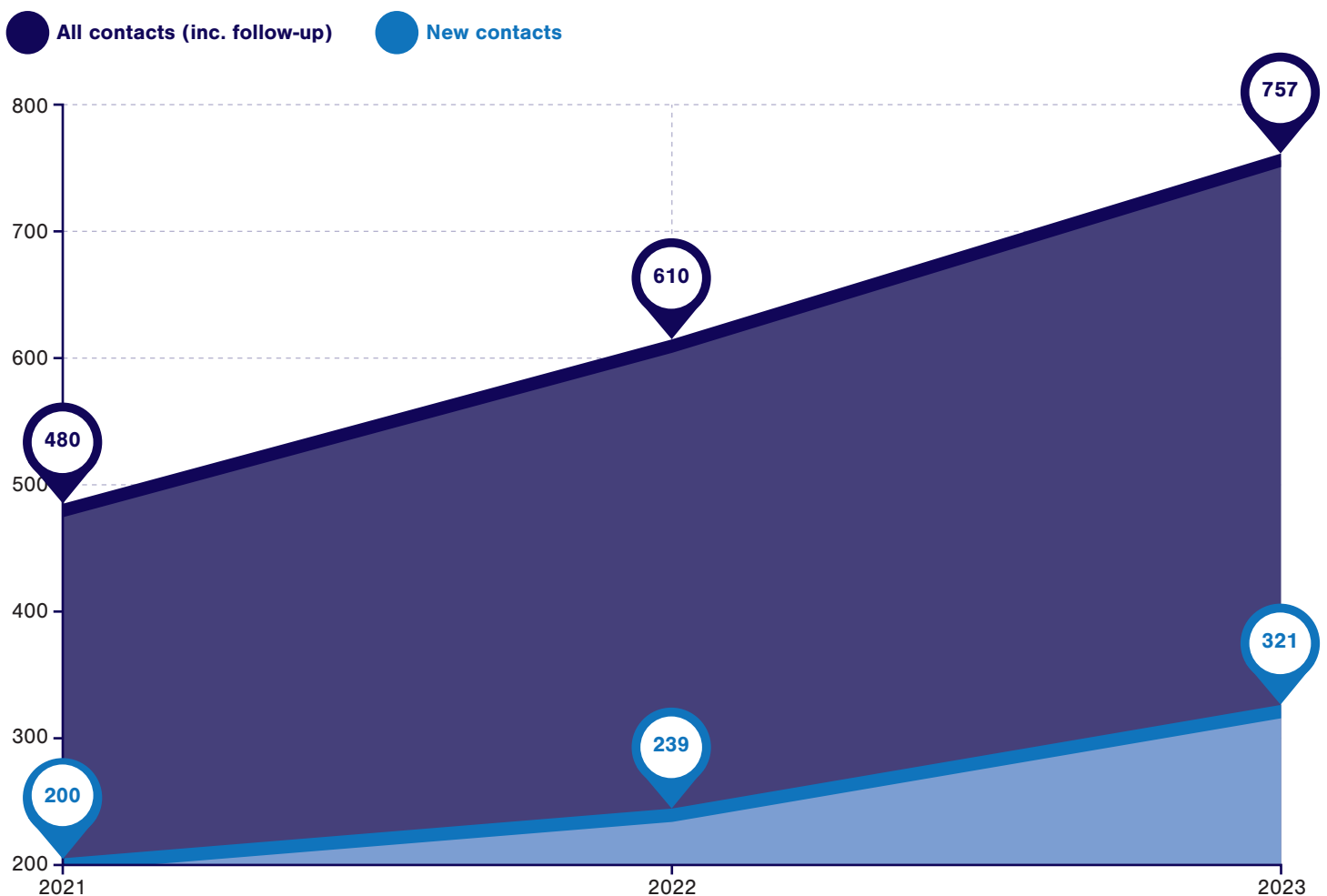
## Helpline usage

The volume of contacts to YachtCrewHelp continued to grow in 2023 as awareness of the helpline increased. The number of new contacts to the helpline increased by 34.3% on the 2022 level. The volume of new contacts was 60.5% higher than in 2021, the first full year of YachtCrewHelp's services. As is the case with all of ISWAN's helplines, YachtCrewHelp officers continue to provide support to crew members until their issue has been resolved. In 2023, 41.4% of all contacts to YachtCrewHelp had a follow-on contact, compared with 35.5% of contacts to SeafarerHelp, indicating the complex nature of many of the issues that yacht crew raise through the helpline. Including all follow-up contacts, the total number of helpline contacts in 2023 grew by 24.1% year-on-year (y-o-y) on the 2022 level.

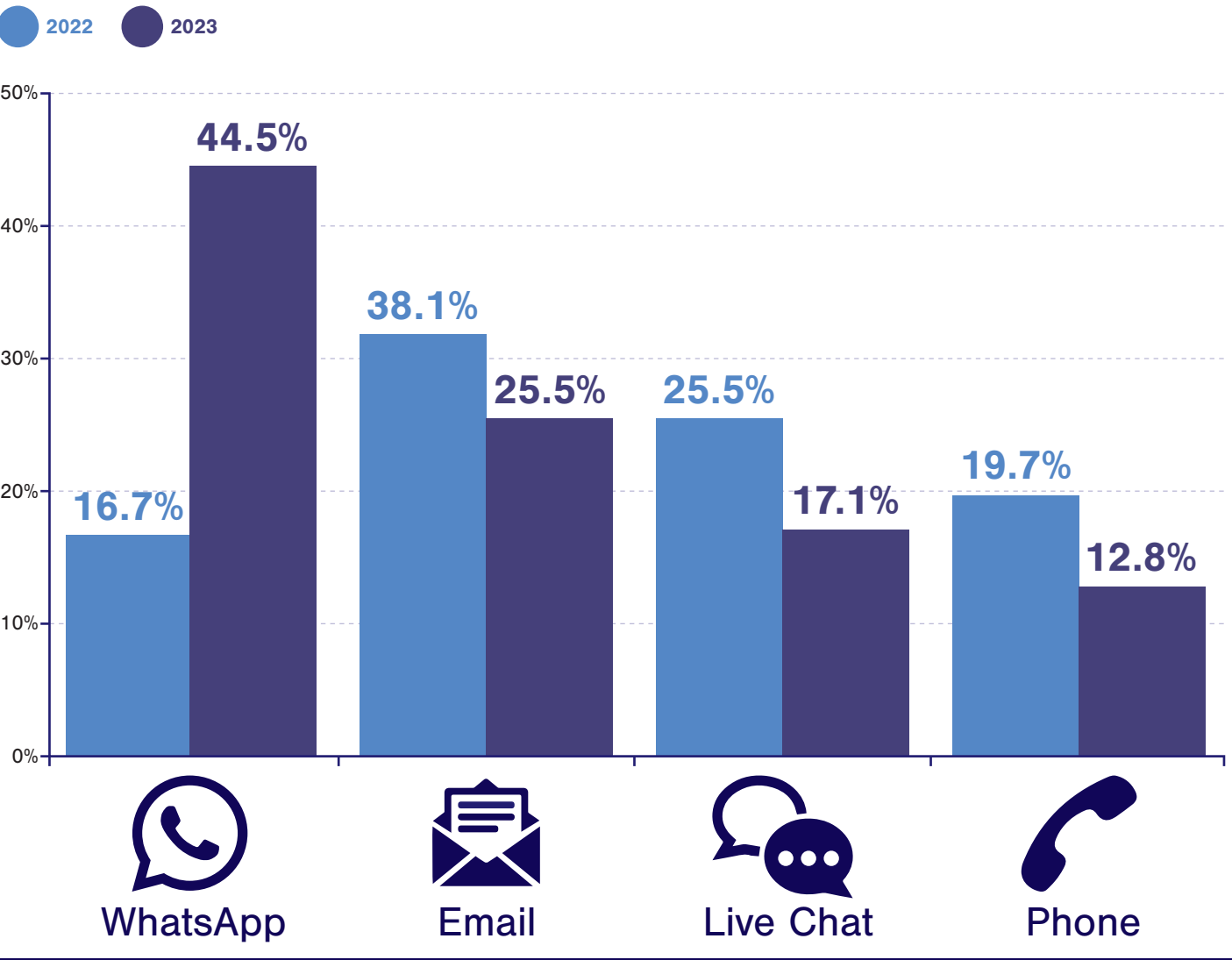
In 88.8% of cases, the helpline user was a crew member. During 2023, the helpline also supported the parents, partners and other family members of yacht crew.

WhatsApp accounted for just under 45% of new contacts to YachtCrewHelp in 2023. WhatsApp was added as a new communication method to the YachtCrewHelp service in October 2022 and quickly became the most utilised channel. As a result of the popularity of WhatsApp, the proportion of new contacts across other communication channels fell, although as in 2022, email remained more frequently utilised than live chat or telephone. Across all of our helplines, ISWAN continues to monitor how seafarers use technology and social media platforms, in order to identify potential new communication channels that meet their needs.

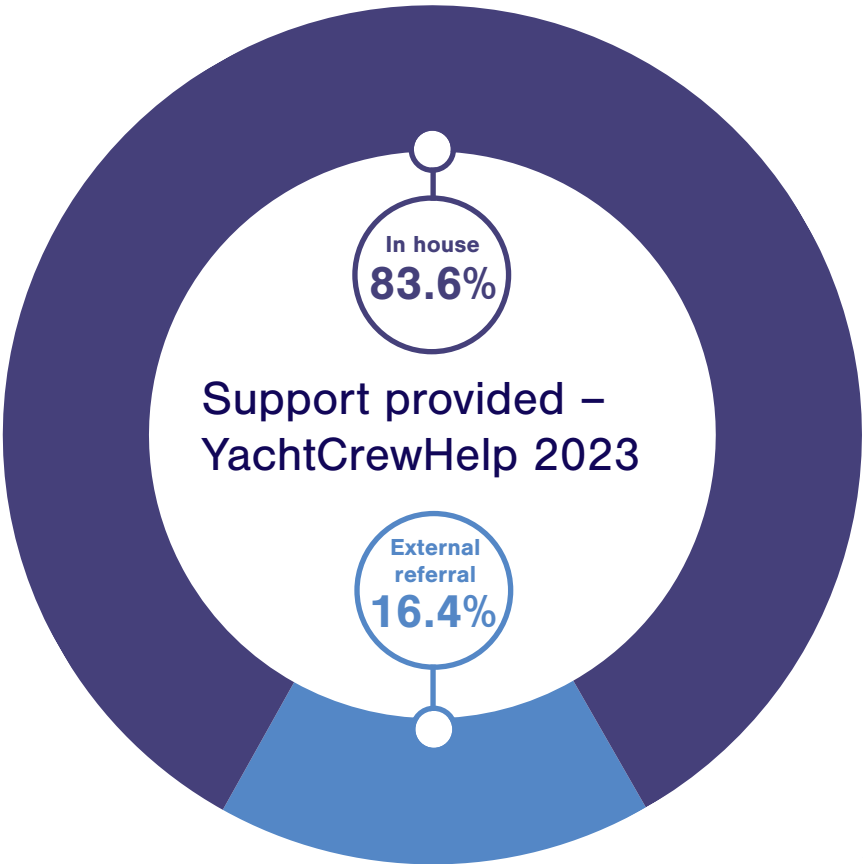
### YachtCrewHelp – Call volume, 2021-2023



# Communication channels, new contacts



As with all of ISWAN’s helplines, the success of YachtCrewHelp relies on working in close partnership with other industry stakeholders to provide the most effective support to crew members. In 2023, ISWAN’s helpline officers referred just over 16% of crew contacting the helpline to external agencies, including the Professional Yachting Association (PYA) and Nautilus International.



# Demographics of helpline users

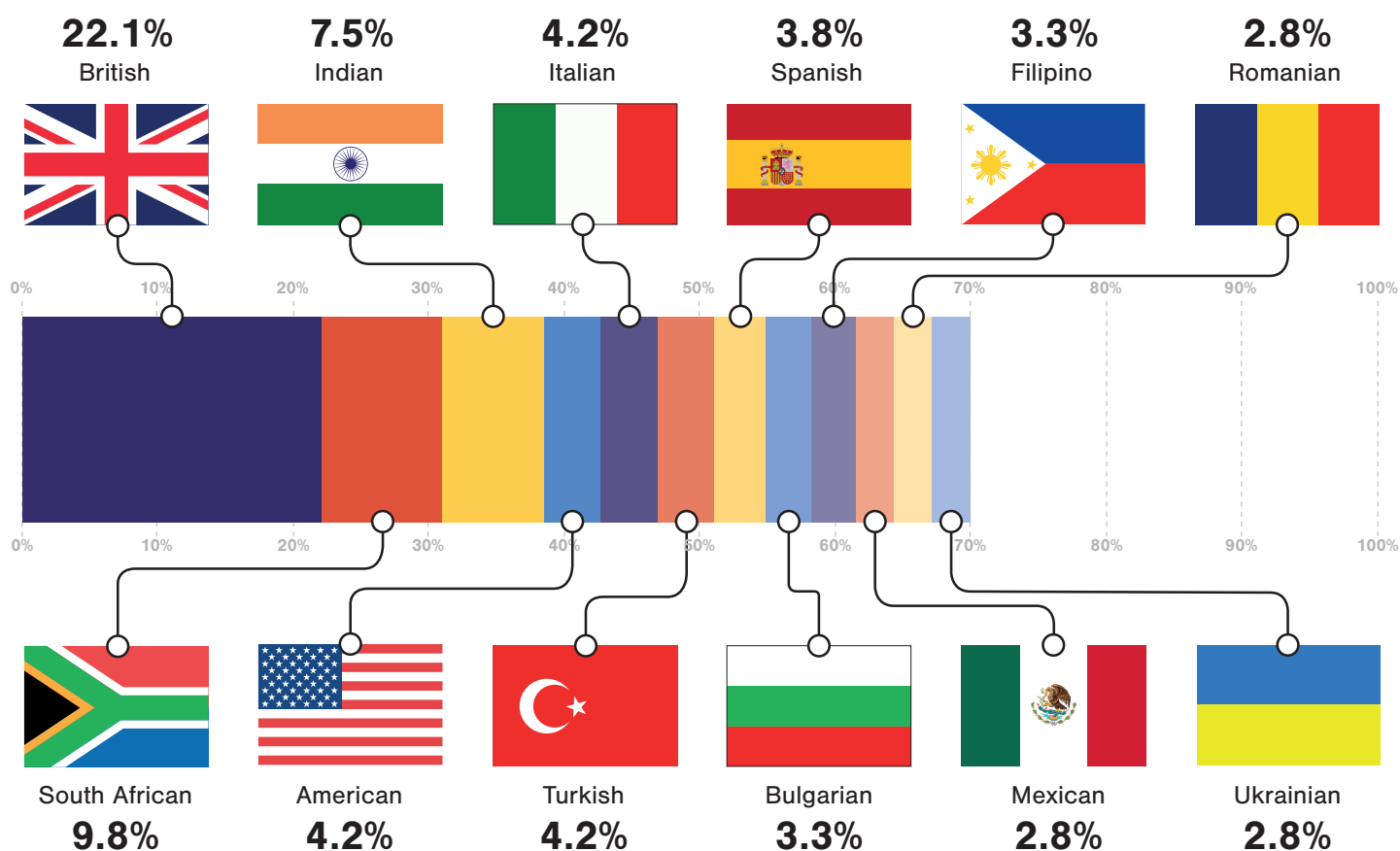
## Nationality

Crew members of 46 different nationalities contacted YachtCrewHelp in 2023, up from 42 the previous year. Where the nationality of helpline users was known, crew from the UK, South Africa and India accounted for the highest proportion of helpline users by

nationality, as was the case in 2022. As is the case with all of ISWAN's helplines, many crew members prefer not to provide personal information and, in 2023, the nationality of 38.8% of people contacting YachtCrewHelp was unknown.

## Nationality of helpline users – 2023

(Excluding cases where nationality is unknown)



## Understanding the demographics of yacht crew

One of the goals of ISWAN's Welfare of Yacht Crew project is to gain a more accurate picture of the make-up of crew working in yachting. Having more precise demographic data about nationality, age and gender identity, for example, would enable ISWAN and others working to improve

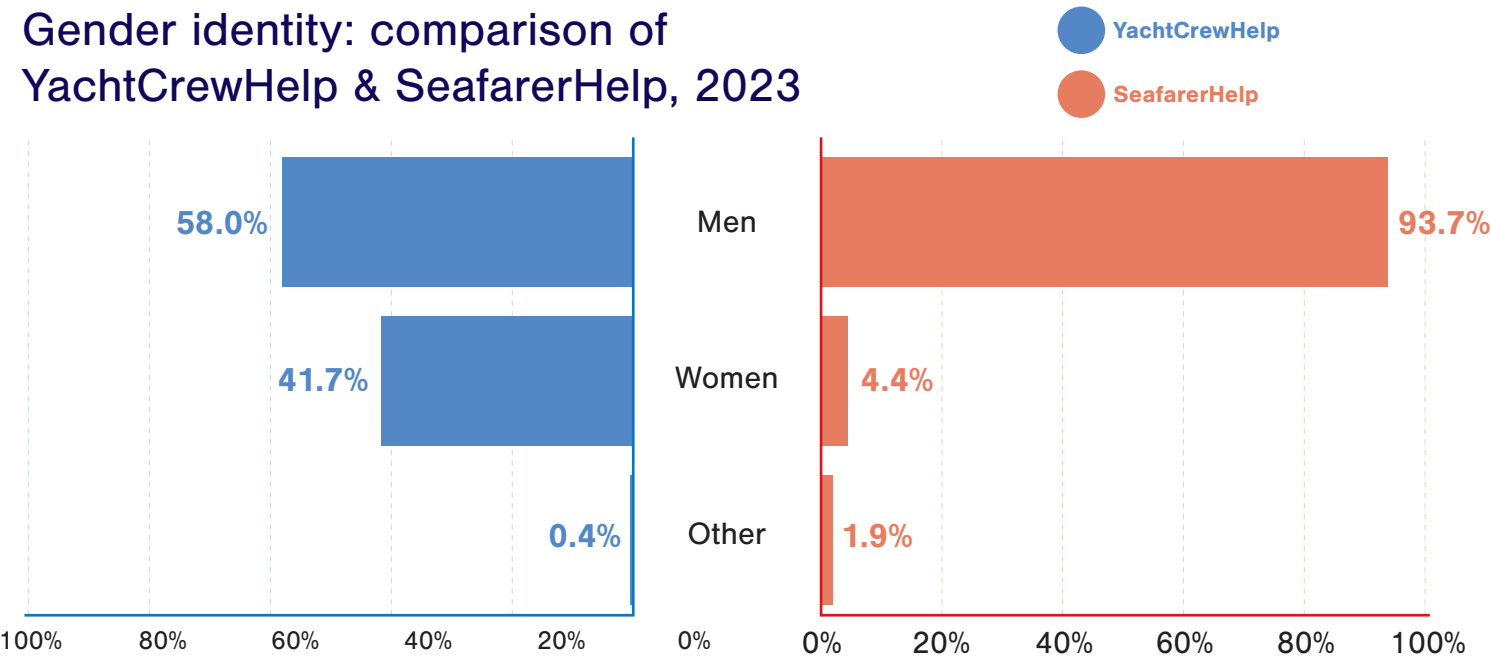
welfare standards in the industry to develop more inclusive and representative projects and services. If you are interested in supporting this initiative or may be able to contribute data, please get in touch at [iswan@iswan.org.uk](mailto:iswan@iswan.org.uk).

# Gender identity

In 2023, 41.7% of those contacting YachtCrewHelp identified as women and 58.0% as men, where the gender identity of the helpline user was known. In 14.0% of cases, the gender identity of the helpline user was unknown. In contrast, only 4.4% of those contacting SeafarerHelp, ISWAN's helpline for the wider maritime sector,

identified as women, where gender identity was known. This striking difference between the gender identity of crew contacting YachtCrewHelp and SeafarerHelp emphasises the very different demographic profile of those working in the yachting industry, as opposed to merchant shipping.

## Gender identity: comparison of YachtCrewHelp & SeafarerHelp, 2023

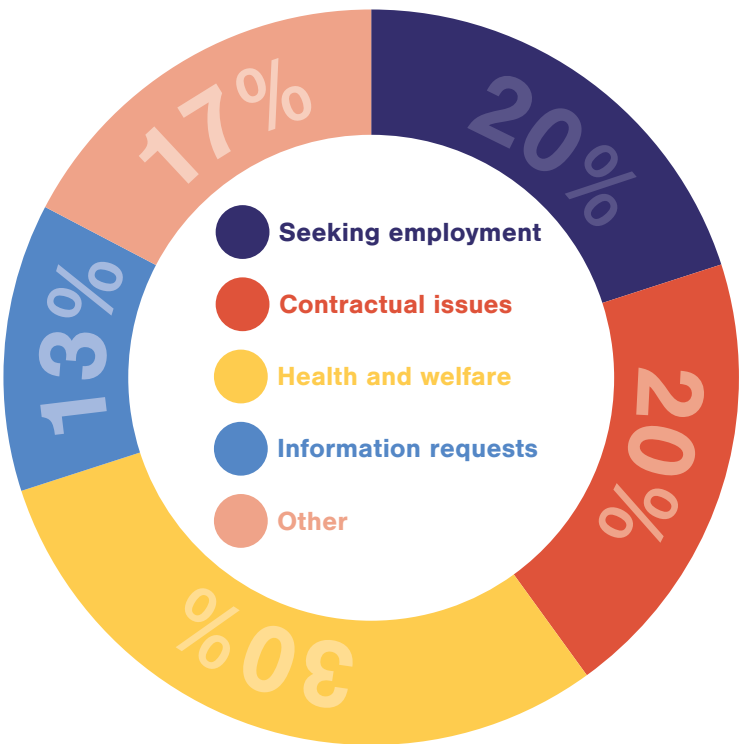


# Issues raised

In 2023, queries relating to health and welfare collectively accounted for 30% of 385 issues that were raised to YachtCrewHelp over the course of the year. Enquiries relating to seeking employment in the industry made up 20% of issues raised, as did contacts relating to contractual issues.

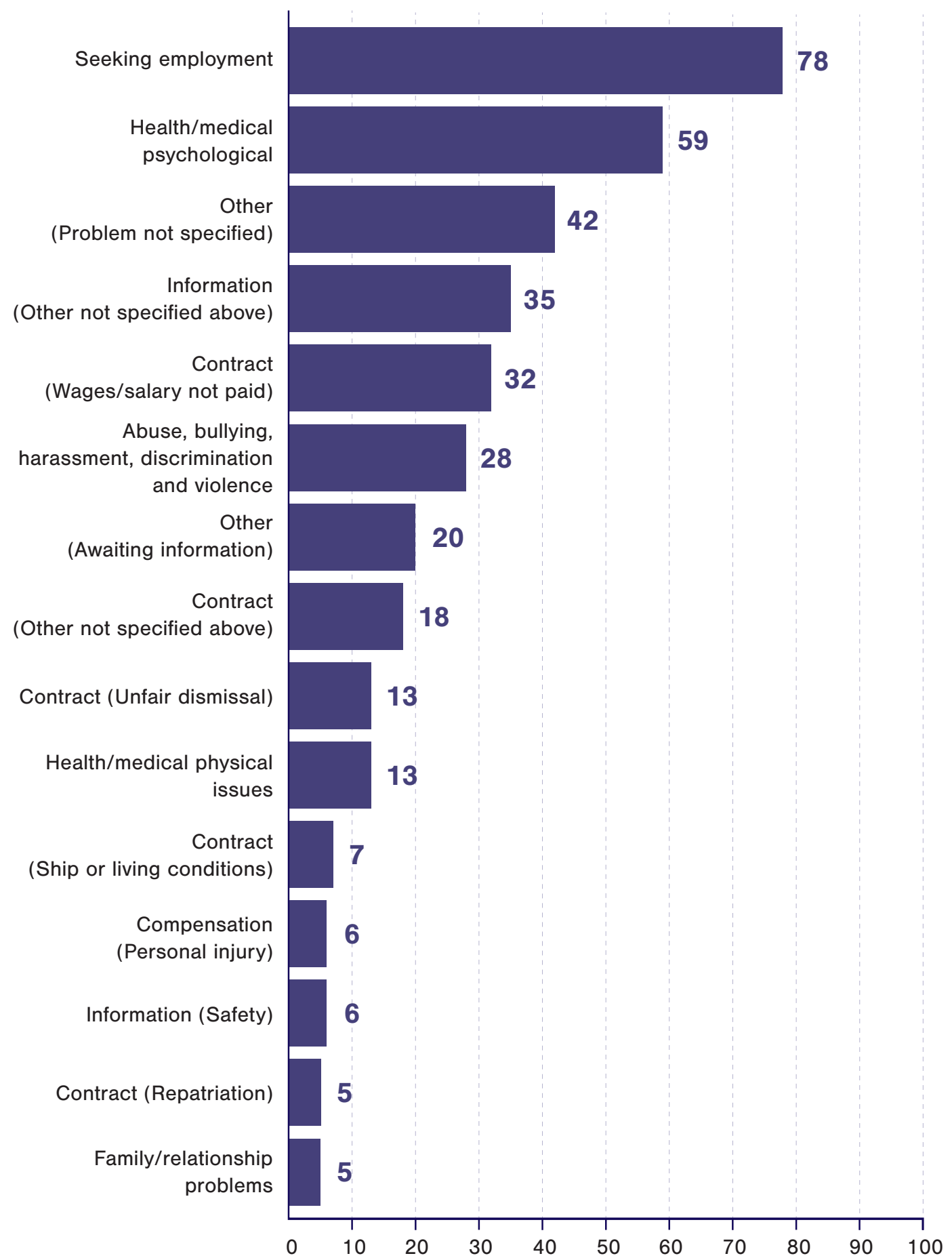
In terms of single issues raised, seeking employment was the most frequent reason for contacting YachtCrewHelp, accounting for just over 20% of issues raised.<sup>1</sup> Contacts relating to employment-seeking grew by 116.7% on the 2022 level. Mental health concerns comprised 15.3% of issues, up by 13.5% y-o-y.

## Overview of issues raised – YachtCrewHelp, 2023



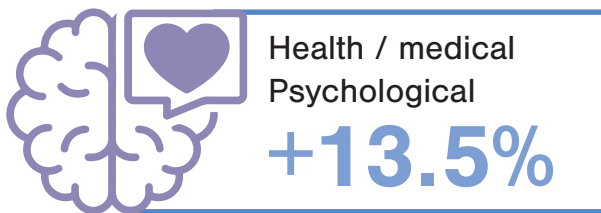
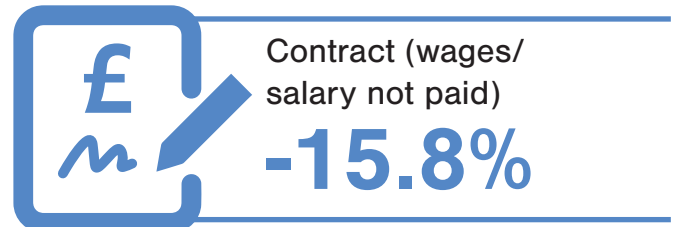
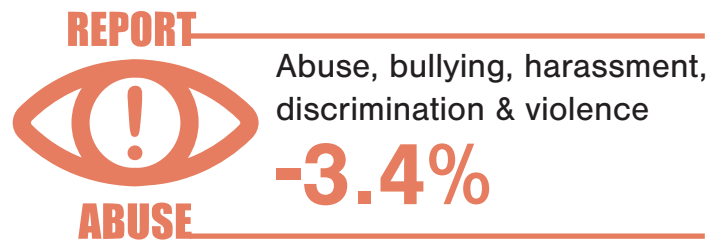
1. The number of issues raised differs from total call volume, as some crew members raise more than one issue in a single contact.

# Most frequently raised issues, YachtCrewHelp, 2023





## Key year-on-year changes (% change year on year)



## Key themes and trends

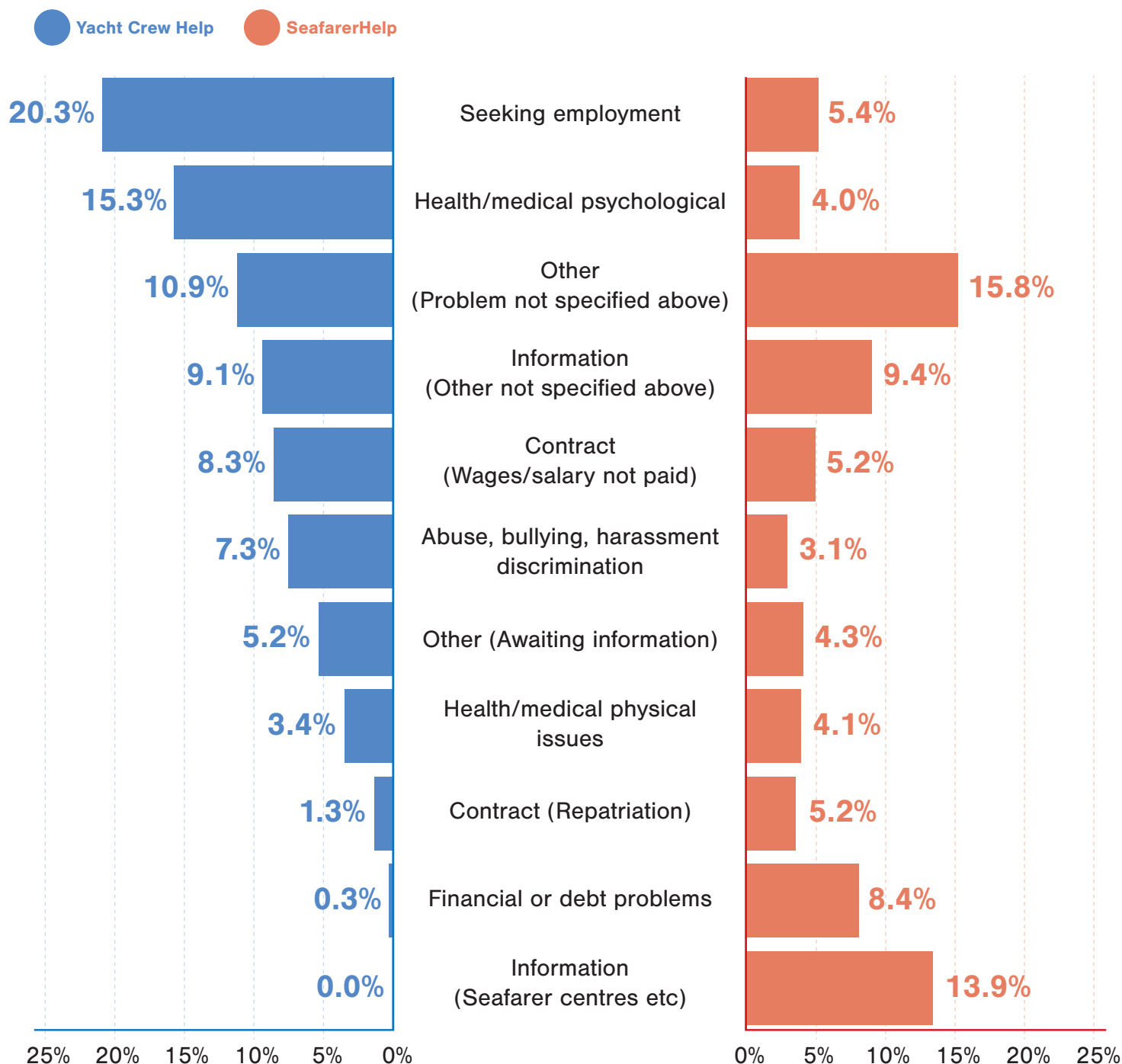
### *Higher reported incidences of ABHDV and mental health issues*

Data from YachtCrewHelp indicates that the welfare issues that yacht crew face are distinct from seafarers working in other maritime industries, in particular merchant shipping.

Despite a slight fall on the 2022 level, the proportion of contacts relating to incidences of abuse, bullying, harassment, discrimination and violence (ABHDV) remained much higher to YachtCrewHelp than to SeafarerHelp, ISWAN's helpline for

the wider maritime sector. In 2023, 7.3% of issues raised to YachtCrewHelp related to ABHDV, more than double the level received via SeafarerHelp (3.1% of all issues). The contrast in the level of contacts relating to mental health concerns was even more pronounced: contacts to YachtCrewHelp comprised 15.3% of all issues raised, almost four times higher than for SeafarerHelp (4.0% of all issues raised).

## Comparison of YachtCrewHelp and SeafarerHelp – Key issues raised 2023



There are likely to be a number of factors that contribute to this disparity. The often less well-defined boundaries between professional and personal lives, along with pronounced power hierarchies and the propensity for the culture onboard yachts to be highly determined by individual owners or captains, could contribute to creating environments in which experiences of abuse can occur. Furthermore, ISWAN's

data consistently finds that experiencing a form of abuse is a leading factor in mental health difficulties among seafarers across all of our helplines. The relative lack of HR structures, support services and union coverage available to yacht crew compared to merchant shipping could be a further factor in the higher proportion of contacts relating to mental health concerns and ABHDV.

## *ABHDV at sea: A helpline case study*

A crew member sought support from YachtCrewHelp in relation to verbal abuse from a senior officer. The senior officer would at times be complementary towards them but would suddenly switch, becoming angry, verbally abusive and attacking their work. He also threatened to give them a bad reference, so they were afraid to leave their job. The situation was having a negative impact on the crew member's mental health and self-esteem. We provided them with emotional support, resources and signposts to unions. As a result, they were able to develop a plan to leave the damaging environment.

In response to the specific challenges facing yacht crew and the lack of support available to them, ISWAN has been working in collaboration with other industry stakeholders over the past year as part of the Changing Tack on Yacht Crew Welfare working group, which seeks to identify ways to shift the culture towards improved welfare and mental health.



## *Changing Tack on Yacht Crew Welfare*

The Changing Tack Working Group (CTWG) is a group of industry leaders who are passionate about improving crew welfare. In 2023, The Seafarers' Charity, UK Sailing Academy (UKSA), Nautilus International and ISWAN formed the CTWG to identify and address key issues impacting the welfare of crew working in the superyacht industry. Following two large roundtable events in 2023, the group have produced several recommendations to increase the wellbeing of crew and create a more diverse and happy industry. The group's priority now is to work hand-in-hand with key industry stakeholders to develop new initiatives and services which deliver on these recommendations for a more sustainable yachting industry. To help accelerate the delivery of these priorities, the CTWG and ISWAN are looking to recruit a dedicated Project Manager. If you are interested in funding this role or for further information about the initiatives and plans of CTWG, contact [iswan@iswan.org.uk](mailto:iswan@iswan.org.uk).

## *Gender-specific challenges facing women yacht crew*

Research consistently shows that ABHDV is a systemic issue that affects seafarers of all gender identities and across all maritime industries.<sup>2</sup> However, across all of ISWAN's helplines, the issue of ABHDV at sea is highly gendered, with women proportionately more likely to seek support from ISWAN having experienced a form of abuse. Although it is possible that experiences of ABHDV amongst men seafarers are underreported, there is also a substantial evidence base indicating that women seafarers are disproportionately impacted by experiences of abuse.<sup>3</sup>

The much higher representation of women in yachting than is the case for merchant shipping is, therefore, likely to be a further factor in the higher incidence of experiences of ABHDV among yacht crew. In the case of YachtCrewHelp, in 2023, women were more than five times as likely to report an experience of abuse, with ABHDV accounting for 14.2% of issues raised by women, as opposed to 2.7% of issues raised by men. Women were also more likely than men to report experiencing mental health challenges, although the differential is much smaller.

## *Safe And Inclusive Future for All (SAIFA) Seafarers: Rethinking safety in the maritime industry*

ISWAN's Safe And Inclusive Future for All (SAIFA) Seafarers Project is a long-term initiative which is seeking to redefine understandings of 'safety' in a maritime context by addressing personal safety issues which affect seafarers worldwide. Often personal safety in maritime is considered only from a physical standpoint, but an environment can only be truly safe for all if it is also psychologically safe, diverse, inclusive and equitable.

As part of the SAIFA project, ISWAN is launching a new, cross-sector awareness campaign centred around the personal safety of women seafarers and the importance of men's allyship. The campaign, which is funded by The Seafarers' Charity and the UK P&I Club,

aims to raise awareness of the challenges faced by women seafarers and educate on the importance of allyship in creating a safer and more inclusive environment for all

The campaign, titled 'Safe at sea... it takes all of us!', will draw directly on the voices, experiences and needs of seafarers and has been developed in collaboration with key stakeholders from across merchant shipping, superyachts and cruise. It will aim to educate seafarers about how to become better allies, increase awareness of existing support services, and advocate for long-term structural and behavioral change.

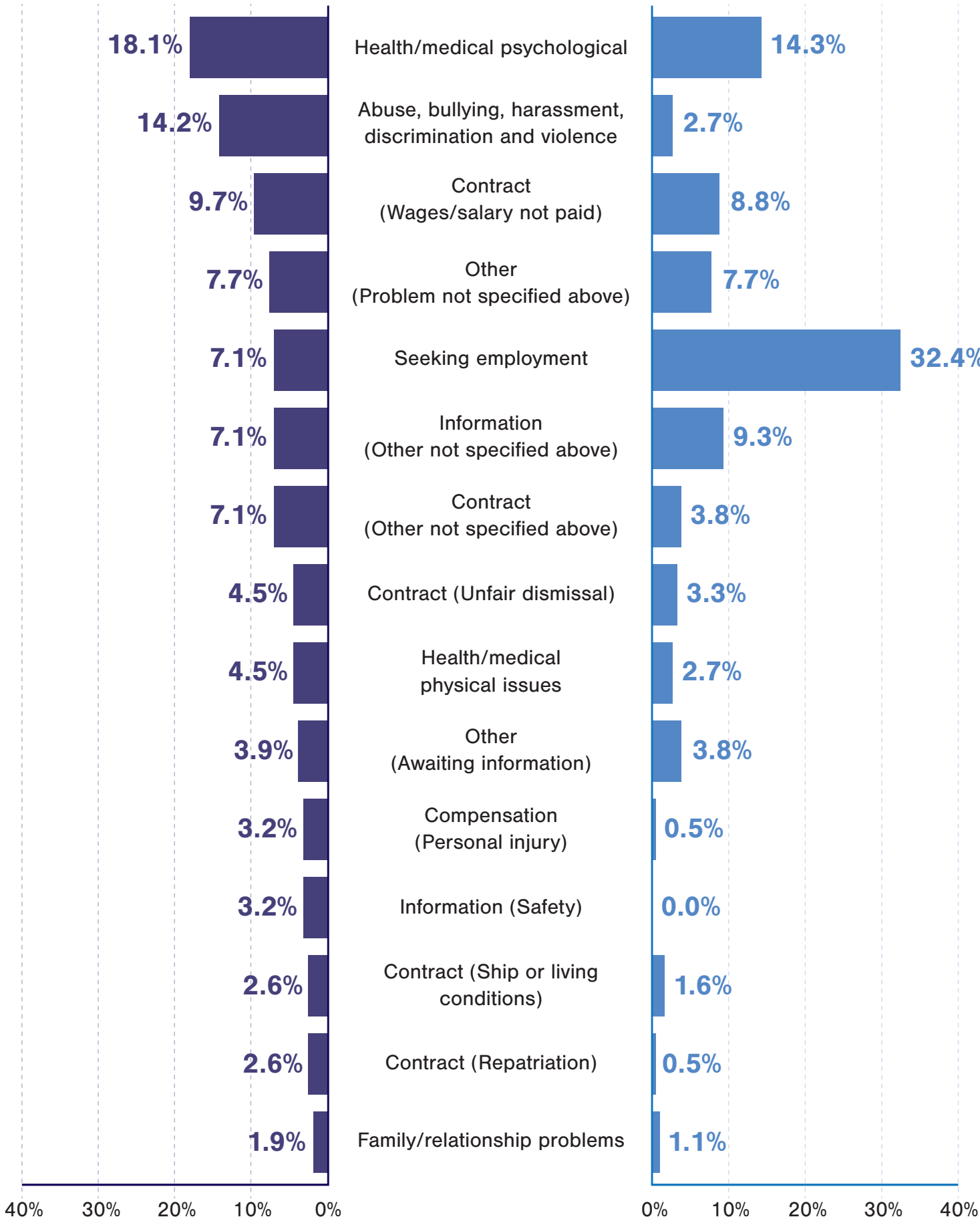
If you are interested in contributing your story to the campaign, helping with its dissemination, or to find out more, please contact [iswan@iswan.org.uk](mailto:iswan@iswan.org.uk)

2. For example, a recent survey by the Seafarers' International Union (SIU) of Canada found that 46% of all seafarers and 69% of all women seafarers in the Canadian maritime industry have experienced harassment or bullying at some point in their career as a seafarer.

3. Recent studies including the Global Maritime Forum's 15 Key Pain Points for Women at Sea (2023), the Seafarers' International Research Centre (SIRC)'s Port-Based Welfare Needs of Women Seafarers (2023) and the Mission to Seafarers' Women Seafarers Report (2022) all explore the gender-specific challenges facing women at sea, including higher rates of ABHDV.

# Key issues raised by gender – YachtCrewHelp, 2023

Female Male





## *Psychological safety at sea: Helpline case studies*

A crew member contacted YachtCrewHelp in the immediate aftermath of being sexually assaulted by a senior officer. The crew member was seeking support to cope with the shock and emotional impact of the assault and also to help her to decide whether to report the assault to the police. She was concerned that she may have provoked the assault in some way. We provided her with emotional support and access to weekly counselling sessions, as well as signposting to other organisations who could provide assistance as regards legal options. We continued to support her with the ongoing impact of the assault on her physical and emotional health after she left the yacht and returned to her home country.

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A former crew member contacted YachtCrewHelp in relation to an experience a number of years ago of sexual assault onboard a yacht. She lost her job as a result and was offered a financial settlement not to report the assault. She told us that other crew members covered up the assault due to fear of speaking out. The assault had continued to have very significant, long-term impacts on her mental health. She was also experiencing financial hardship as she felt unable to continue working in the industry and was devastated at the loss of her career in yachting. She sought assistance from YachtCrewHelp to understand how she could seek redress for the assault and begin to build a new life away from yachting. We provided her with emotional support and resources, as well as signposting to organisations who may be able to assist her.

## *Need for clearer routes into employment*

In 2023, the most significant statistical change in issues raised to YachtCrewHelp was the steep increase in the number of people seeking support to secure employment in the industry, which more than doubled on the level seen in 2022.

Providing clear information for prospective yacht crew to support them to find safe routes into the industry was one of ISWAN's key initiatives in 2023. As a result of operating the YachtCrewHelp service, ISWAN became aware of a lack of guidance and

support related to safe job-seeking, particularly for 'green crew' seeking their first role in the industry and for those in voluntary/ "nautical hitchhiking"<sup>4</sup> roles, who can be particularly vulnerable to exploitative or potentially dangerous working environments. In response, we worked in partnership with other stakeholders in the yachting industry to develop guidance to assist prospective crew members to identify potentially risky situations and to make informed and empowered choices.

4. Voluntary crew, sometimes called 'nautical hitchhikers', usually join smaller boats, which may be owned and captained by the same person, in exchange for experience-gaining or passage. Such individuals are not always looking to transition to a professional role, rather they form part of a distinct community.



## Safer routes into yachting: A helpline case study

The mother of a woman seeking her first employment on a yacht contacted YachtCrewHelp to seek advice about the legitimacy and safety of an offer of work. Her daughter had been contacted on social media by someone claiming to be the owner of a yacht and had been offered a job on a yacht setting sail from a different continent. Very scarce information was available online about the owner, the yacht or the recruitment agency and the woman had been asked to pay her own fare to reach the point of departure. The mother was seeking advice about how to verify whether the offer of work was legitimate and safe. We provided information about safe routes into a career in yachting, as well as signposts to organisations that can assist with identifying fraudulent recruitment practices.

## Personal safety precautions for job-seeking yacht crew

In 2023, the number of people seeking support from YachtCrewHelp to find employment within the industry more than doubled, indicating the need for improved guidance and signposting for prospective crew. Alongside this, we saw an increase in calls from crew who had experienced ABHDV on board, often after finding their role through unregulated channels such as social media, crewing websites, or dock walking.

In response, ISWAN worked with expert partners from across the yachting industry to produce a resource to guide and support all crew to have a positive job-hunting experience. The resource, which launched in September 2023, aims to empower crew by providing the guidance and tools necessary to make informed, aware, boundaried and safe decisions about their next role.



This resource is for all crew, whether in paid employment or voluntary work, and no matter what gender identity, nationality or level of experience within the yachting industry.

The free resource is available to download on ISWAN's website [here](#).

## ***Contractual issues fall, but concerns remain***

In 2023, the proportion of calls relating to contractual issues fell to 19.7% of all issues raised, down from 25.4% in 2022. Although contacts relating to the condition of the vessel increased by 16.7% y-o-y, there were decreases in the number of crew members contacting YachtCrewHelp in relation to unpaid wages (down by 15.8% y-o-y) and unfair dismissal (down by 27.8% y-o-y). This could potentially relate to the increasing number of yacht crew who are members of trade unions, as organisations such as Nautilus International continue to grow their offer to yacht crew.

ISWAN's helpline officers do, however, continue to support yacht crew with the often substantial impacts on their health and wellbeing of difficulties with their employment and working conditions.

### ***The mental health impacts of contractual issues: Helpline case studies***

A crew member contacted YachtCrewHelp after resigning from her role as a stewardess having experienced mistreatment and poor working and living conditions. She intentionally disembarked, but the management company was unwilling to support her with repatriation arrangements. When they did, they deducted the costs from her unpaid wages. We provided her with support to access the appropriate legal advice to resolve her situation.

A captain sought support from YachtCrewHelp as he felt bullied by the yacht owners in relation to the yacht's finances and running costs. The situation was having a severe impact on his mental health and wellbeing, particularly as financial issues began to negatively impact conditions for his crew. We provided emotional support as well as signposting to unions.

## ***Improving the welfare of crew – the year ahead***

YachtCrewHelp forms part of ISWAN's long-term Welfare of Yacht Crew project. Welfare of Yacht Crew draws directly on helpline insights to identify and address key issues affecting the health, safety and wellbeing of crew. The project has an active steering group comprised of individuals and organisations from across the industry who are passionate about crew welfare and supporting ISWAN's work. Although awareness of the YachtCrewHelp helpline has increased steadily over the last three years, there is still much to be done to ensure crew around the world have the

helpline details and know where to find support if they need it. Throughout 2024, the ISWAN team will continue to prioritise raising awareness of the YachtCrewHelp service, increasing ISWAN's profile as a respected voice on crew welfare, and developing collaborative workstreams centred around key personal safety issues being faced by crew.

If you have any comments about this report or if you are interested in getting involved with or helping to promote ISWAN's work to improve crew welfare in the yachting industry, please get in touch at [iswan@iswan.org.uk](mailto:iswan@iswan.org.uk)





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@iswan\_org



facebook.com/iswan.org

Tel +44 (0)300 012 4279

Email [iswan@iswan.org.uk](mailto:iswan@iswan.org.uk)

[www.iswan.org.uk](http://www.iswan.org.uk)

International Seafarers' Welfare  
and Assistance Network  
Suffolk House  
George Street  
Croydon  
CR0 1PE