

Seafarers Happiness Index

Quarter 1 2026



The
Seafarers
Happiness
Index



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Seafarers Happiness Index Quarter 4

For over a decade, the Seafarers Happiness Index (SHI) has provided a measure of life at sea, capturing the lived experiences of seafarers across the global fleet. It remains one of the industry's most important barometers of sentiment, offering not just data, but insight into the realities behind the numbers, revealing a link to how seafarers feel, what they face, and where the pressures of their lives at sea truly lie.

The Q1 2026 report is based on responses and engagement from seafarers serving across vessel types, ranks, and regions. At first glance, the headline figure shows a modest decline in overall happiness to 7.18/10, down from 7.26 in Q4 2025. However, this headline figure only tells only part of the story.

This latest quarter reveals an industry at a critical inflection point, one which sharply reflects the stresses of wider external issues facing shipping. Beneath the relatively small numerical shifts lies a far more significant narrative, one shaped not only by ongoing operational and workforce challenges, but by the sudden and profound impact of geopolitical conflict.

The defining feature of Q1 2026 is a division into two distinct periods. In the early part of the quarter, seafarer sentiment was improving reasonably, suggesting a degree of stabilisation after the volatility of recent years. It was on track to report a positive increase, building on earlier quarters. Things seemed to be going reasonably well. However, the onset of conflict in the Persian Gulf, through Operation Epic Fury, triggered a rapid and marked deterioration in seafarer wellbeing. What had been a sense of recovery was abruptly reversed.

This report, therefore, does more than track changes in sentiment; it captures the speed and scale at which external events can reshape the seafaring experience. It highlights how deeply interconnected global shipping is with geopolitical realities, and how quickly those realities are felt onboard, and in families and communities back at home.

Alongside the impact of conflict, the findings reinforce persistent challenges. Workload pressures continue to intensify, shore leave remains constrained, wage growth lags behind expectations, and the balance between professional reward and personal sacrifice is increasingly questioned. At the same time, there are areas of progress, particularly in training and crew interaction, demonstrating that targeted efforts can deliver meaningful improvements. Any of these would be a source of frustration but then throw in the risk of being trapped on vessels or coming under attack, and it is easy to see why the satisfaction levels have fallen.

The Q1 2026 Seafarers Happiness Index ultimately presents a dual narrative: one of resilience and one of vulnerability. Seafarers continue to demonstrate professionalism and adaptability in the face of significant challenges. Yet the data also makes clear that this resilience has limits.

Understanding where those limits lie, and how close the industry is to reaching them, is essential. This report aims to provide that understanding, offering evidence to inform better decisions, stronger support systems, and a more sustainable future for those who live and work at sea.

Quarterly Comparison Overview

Quarter on Quarter

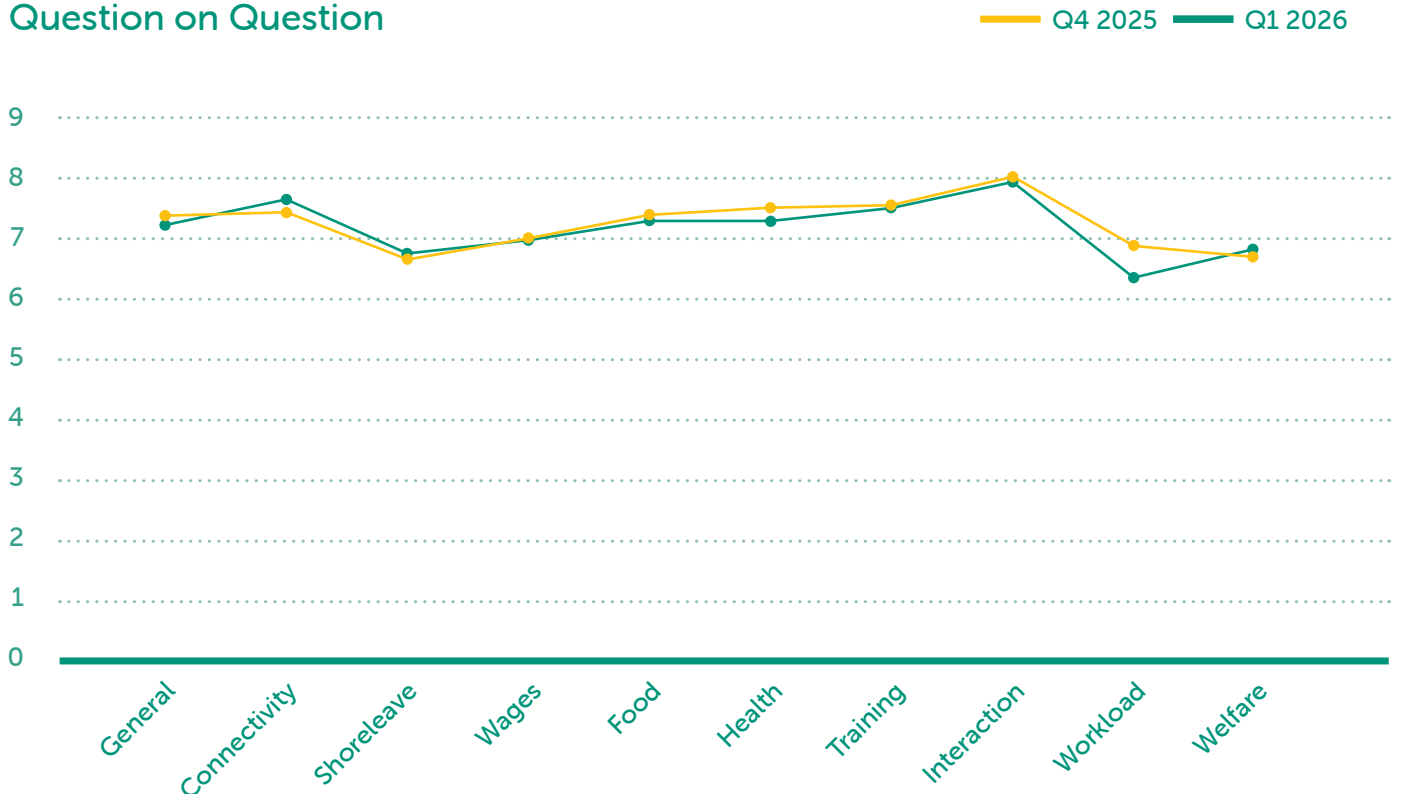


The overall happiness index declined from 7.26 in Q4 2025 to 7.18 in Q1 2026, representing a 1.1% decrease. While modest in absolute terms, this decline confirms the instability in seafarer satisfaction documented throughout 2025.

The drop accelerated dramatically in the latter stages of the reporting period, post Operation Epic Fury, as covered in a separate section of this report.

Question-by-Question Comparison

Question on Question



What Seafarers Are Telling Us

A Quarter of Decline

The Q1 2026 SHI data present a picture of declining satisfaction across key metrics. While the drop from 7.26 to 7.18 may appear marginal, it represents a reversal of the positive trajectory seen in late 2025 and confirms the fundamental instability in seafarer happiness. The numerical decline tells only part of the story; the qualitative responses reveal seafarers who are increasingly vocal about their frustrations.

One seafarer captures the prevailing sentiment: "There nothing exciting nowadays no shore leaves not paying enough land jobs has increased wages equally nowadays so it not worth to spend your life at sea." This reflects a growing awareness among seafarers that the traditional compensations for the sacrifices of sea life are eroding.

Another respondent interestingly notes the seasonal impacts as the reporting period featured winter in the north Atlantic: "Life at sea is tough! We face harsh weather, long hours, physical strain, and mental stress. Plus, being away from loved ones for months takes a toll. It's a challenging life." While such observations are not new, their frequency and intensity in Q1 2026 data suggests mounting pressure.

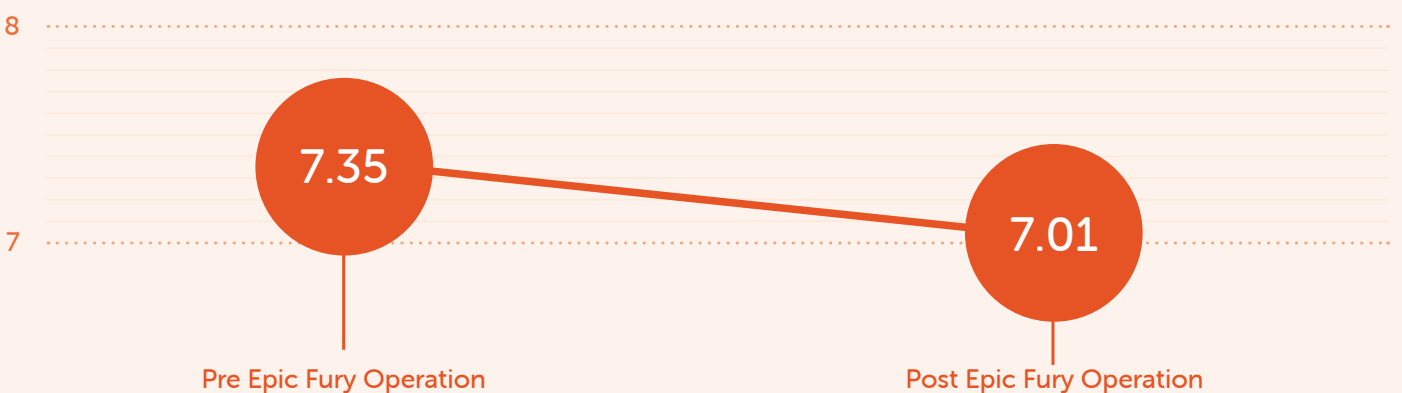
The Impact of Conflict: Operation Epic Fury

The Q1 2026 data reveals a critical finding that contextualises the overall decline in seafarer happiness. Analysis of responses shows a stark divide between data collected before and after the commencement of Operation Epic Fury in the Persian Gulf and the overarching cessation of transits via the Strait of Hormuz.

In just five weeks of the reporting period, the conflict fundamentally altered the experience of seafarers operating in one of the world's most vital shipping corridors. The drop in sentiment before the start of the war and after is quite staggering to see laid out. Even for those not in the impact zone, stress, fear and uncertainty becomes almost a new pandemic.

The data demonstrates that pre-conflict happiness scores were significantly higher across nearly all categories. Looking at Q1 2026 data, the overall happiness index for seafarers stood positively and was tracking up at 7.35/10 before the conflict began. Within five weeks of hostilities commencing, this figure had fallen to 7.01/10 - a decline of 0.34 points or 4.6%. So, within the wider quarterly aggregate of 7.18/10, we can see the impact of conflict.

Q1 2026: Pre and Post Epic Fury



This dramatic fall in such a short period represents an unusually rapid rate of decline, typically associated with such large-scale impact events. More significantly, this conflict-driven crisis explains much of the overall quarterly decline documented in this report.

Without conflict-related deterioration, the Q1 2026 data showed positivity, with continued recovery rather than decline. The Persian Gulf crisis has become the defining factor in this quarter's results.

Before and After: The Numbers

The comparative data reveals the severity of the impact:

- General Happiness fell from 7.42 to 7.06 (-0.36 points)
- Shore Leave collapsed from 7.10 to 6.48 (-0.62 points)
- Training scores dropped from 7.70 to 7.10 (-0.60 points)
- Interactions fell from 8.09 to 7.50 (-0.59 points)
- Workload Management deteriorated from 6.70 to 6.10 (-0.60 points)
- Welfare Facilities fell from 7.20 to 6.54 (-0.66 points)

The areas showing the largest declines, shore leave, welfare, and workload, directly reflect the operational realities of vessels trapped in a war zone. Crews cannot go ashore, support services are extremely limited, and the stress of working in a conflict zone has intensified workload pressures.

Connectivity and wages showed the smallest changes, declining by just 0.02 points each. This stability reflects that these factors are largely determined by wider policy issues rather than immediate circumstances, though the inability to communicate due to GNSS jamming and reported internet blocking tells a different story in the qualitative responses.

The breakdown of navigation and communications has added a terrifying dimension to the crisis. As one captain explains: "Since the war began, GNSS interference has occurred intermittently, but it has become much worse now."

Voices from the Gulf

The statistics tell only part of the story. The qualitative responses from seafarers trapped in the Persian Gulf reveal the human reality. Over 20,000 seafarers are estimated to be stranded on vessels in the region, caught in a conflict they had no part in creating.

One seafarer describes the daily reality: "I have seen Iranian drones and missiles flying at low altitude. I also hear the sound of fighter jets, but we can't identify which country they belong to." The fear is palpable: "What scares me the most is the thought of an intercepted drone or missile falling on us."

Another seafarer recounts: "Just this morning, two fighter jets passed close while we were still working. There's no specific hiding place on the ship for this, and we just had to run inside." Whether there was a risk of attack or not, one can easily sense the fear and the uncertainty which seafarers are experiencing.

The human cost extends beyond immediate physical danger. Families are cut off from their loved ones, with difficult communications, from both a technical and emotional perspective. One father describes the fear and pressure: "I have hidden this from my wife and daughter; I do not want them to know how we are feeling".

"What scares me the most is the thought of an intercepted drone or missile falling on us."

Supplies Running Low

As vessels remain stranded, unable to transit the Strait of Hormuz or access ports for resupply, basic necessities are becoming natural concerns. Seafarers report growing challenges around access to water and food, with some openly discussing rationing that would be unthinkable in normal operations.

"We don't have enough water on board right now. We got food a few days back," reports one seafarer. Another describes the deterioration: "Till yesterday we had proper drinking water and fresh water for washing. But now since drinking water is over, we have contacted the owner for the drinking water, and I hope they get it by today or tomorrow. Till then, we are boiling the water for drinking."

The contrast with normal operations is stark. Before the conflict, we had buffet meals and could get fresh food and water whenever we wanted. But now we only get one meal of four small pieces of meat and one bowl of fried vegetables daily. Our supplies will only last for a month."

Another seafarer adds: "It's already been two months since we got the provisions on board. We were due but now cannot" Another reports: "Our life is very worrying and humiliating here and we have very little fuel and food."

The psychological toll compounds physical deprivation. As one seafarer explains: "Nobody can be happy and relax in this situation. We keep ourselves busy in daily routine jobs. Drills, safety and lots of security training." A senior engineer notes: "I don't allow myself to become desperate because I am in charge of 20 other crew members." He has prepared a contingency exit plan: "I told my team how to run, where to jump from and what to carry if something happens. We prepare for the worst."

The supplies situation threatens to become critical. As vessel desalination equipment requires the ship to be sailing to operate effectively. Thus, anchored vessels cannot produce fresh water. One seafarer notes: "The ship can produce fresh water by desalinating seawater, but that becomes difficult if we are not sailing."

Frustration is Growing

Seafarers have become frustrated and concerned that so much of the debate seemingly ignores the human side of the equation. Indeed, for those in the area, the conflict has exposed a fundamental truth about maritime risk: vessels and cargo can be insured, but human lives cannot. As one seafarer observes: "Human life cannot be replaced by any insurance." Adding, "If any vessel is hit by a drone or a missile it is the sailors who pay the human cost, while cargo and ships can be covered by insurance."

There is also concern for crews about deciding to leave, where they can. The situation has created a form of de facto detention for many seafarers. Those who want to go home are concerned they may find themselves blacklisted by shipping companies, unable to find future employment. Yet remaining on board means facing daily danger with no clear end in sight. "I want very much to go home but am worried I may not get more work. So, I feel trapped and have to stay", said one respondent.

While there is a growing issue about reliefs being able to join ships. As/if the conflict drags on and more seafarers cannot be relieved it is expected that the psychological stress will inevitably rise. Many seafarers are already seeing parallels with the pandemic when they were trapped on board for months and months at a time, unable to leave the ship.

One seafarer stated, "We have learned nothing from COVID. This all feels the same. I cannot go home, and no one can come here."

There was also anger about the purported demand that seafarers should be more willing to pass through the Strait of Hormuz, with some politicians calling for them to show more bravery. One captain who spoke out captured the essence of the seafaring profession and the sacrifice it demands: "Guts is leaving your home and life to work and provide."

The conflict in the Persian Gulf has turned that sacrifice into something far more dangerous. Seafarers who signed up for the normal hardships of sea life now find themselves on the frontlines of a war zone, armed with nothing but their professionalism and their hope of returning home.

"If any vessel is hit by a drone or a missile it is the sailors who pay the human cost, while cargo and ships can be covered by insurance."

The Strategic Context

The conflict represents a fundamental challenge to the maritime industry's assumption that seafarers will continue to accept whatever conditions they face. As one seafarer observes: "This war will have long-term effects on the trade in the Persian Gulf."

The impact on recruitment and retention may be profound. When seafarers see colleagues killed, when they experience being trapped in war zones with inadequate support, when they feel that their lives are considered expendable by the industry that employs them, the calculation changes. The sacrifice that was once accepted as part of the profession becomes a risk too great to bear.

The data from Q1 2026 demonstrates that in weeks, the conflict has a measurable impact on seafarer happiness. If the situation continues, the effects will ripple through the industry for years to come. The resilience of seafarers is remarkable, but it has limits. The Persian Gulf crisis tests those as never before.

More Normative Insights

Connectivity: Progress with Complications

Connectivity scores fell from 7.81 in Q4 2025 to 7.65 in Q1 2026, a decline of 0.16 points. While this remains one of the higher-scoring categories, the drop is significant given the industry's continued investment in shipboard internet capabilities.

Seafarers appreciate the improvements: "I have been sailing since 2002 when there were no means of contact at all compare to now where we have 24/7 internet which seriously make me feel glad and happy and let me concentrate on my job." The advent of new technologies has transformed shipboard connectivity for many vessels.

However, the connectivity revolution brings new complications. As one seafarer explains: "Because working on the ship has very tight working hours, so we need to choose call with family or sleep, and also the different time zone, and the price of internet at sea make it worse." The availability of connectivity does not guarantee the time to use it, and economic barriers persist.

The human management of connectivity continues families now share every domestic problem, and seafarers find themselves drawn into household crises they cannot resolve. One respondent notes: "It's a big relief for us! Talking to family reminds us of home and loved ones, reducing loneliness and stress. It's a mood booster, giving us energy to keep going and keep dreaming for them." Yet this same connection can become a source of anxiety when seafarers feel helpless to assist with problems at home. Or in times of conflict, when they do not have the words to calm or soothe concerned relatives.

Shore Leave: A Persistent Problem

Shore leave scores improved marginally from 6.56 to 6.78, an increase of 0.22 points. However, this remains one of the lowest-scoring categories, and the improvement should not be overstated. Shore leave remains a privilege in retreat, with seafarers increasingly confined to vessels even when in port.

As one respondent observes: "After Covid things have changed and now the company is putting too much pressure on them. In each port one or the other office workers keep coming which makes shore leave

impossible." The presence of shore-based personnel conducting inspections, audits, and meetings consumes time that might otherwise be available for crew welfare.

The fundamental challenge remains: operational pressures take precedence over crew welfare. Seafarers describe being denied shore leave for cargo operations, cleaning, or preparation for inspections. The assumption that if crew are aboard, they are available for work, continues to erode this traditional benefit of seafaring life.

The geographic disparity in shore leave access is striking. Container vessel crews face particular challenges: "Due to container vessel schedules, our shore leave availability is severely limited".

Wages: Marginal Improvement, Persistent Concerns

Wages scores improved from 6.81 to 6.98, an increase of 0.17 points. However, this modest improvement masks deeper concerns about wage stagnation and the erosion of real purchasing power through inflation.

Seafarers express ambivalence about their compensation: "I am partly happy because not everybody has a chance to have this kind of amount given to you every month, partly sad as of course you missed the opportunity of being with your loved ones celebrating their life's events." The trade-off between income and absence remains central to seafarer satisfaction.

The wage stagnation issue is explicit: "Wage rate is average, this in my opinion is a general situation across cargo ships globally and this hasn't changed in 10years nor looking like it's going to change in another 10years." While company profits have grown and shore-based salaries have increased, seafarer wages have remained largely static.

The awareness of wage disparities continues to corrode morale. Seafarers compare notes across nationalities, companies, and sea versus shore work. The traditional justifications for differential treatment are losing legitimacy in an increasingly transparent global labour market. When wages stagnate while company profits grow, the implicit message is that seafarers are not valued proportionally to their contribution. This is a view which is increasingly voiced.

Training and Development: Notable Improvement

Training and development showed the most significant improvement, rising from 6.99 to 7.52, an increase of 0.53 points. This represents the largest gain across all categories and suggests that industry investment in training may be yielding results.

Seafarers recognise the value of quality training: "All training is mandatory before accessing the vessel. I understand and follow rules, safety policy to keep myself and colleague work safely." The emphasis on safety culture and professional development appears to be resonating.

However, concerns persist about the nature of training: "I basically pay for all of that so.." reflects the burden of training costs falling on seafarers themselves. The tension between compliance-focused paperwork and genuine skill development remains. Training that prioritises box-checking over capability-building continues to frustrate those seeking real professional growth.

The encroachment of training requirements on leave time also remains problematic. Seafarers already sacrifice months away from home; mandating additional leave for training centres represents a further erosion of personal time. Companies need to balance training requirements with crew welfare, conducting more training aboard ship or providing online options that do not require travel.

Interactions: Crew Cohesion

Interactions scores improved from 7.68 to 7.93, an increase of 0.25 points. This category remains the highest-scoring in the Index, reflecting the importance of crew cohesion in managing the challenges of sea life.

Seafarers value positive working relationships: "It's a small world we live in. Getting along must be well maintained otherwise it is not an environment for us to dwell in. Friendships start on every acquaintance." The multicultural nature of modern crews, while occasionally challenging, also provides opportunities for learning and growth.

Leadership plays a critical role in shaping crew dynamics. Good leadership creates positive environments where crew members feel valued and heard. Conversely, poor leadership creates toxic environments that compound the inherent stresses of sea life. Companies need to pay more attention to the leadership qualities of those promoted to command positions, recognising that technical competence alone is insufficient.

The importance of social time should not be underestimated. On vessels where work eclipses social life entirely, crews work, eat, sleep, and work again with little time for the interactions that make confined living bearable. Protecting time for crew recreation and social activities is not a luxury but a necessity for mental health and crew cohesion.

Workload: The Deepest Decline

Perhaps the most concerning finding in Q1 2026 is the sharp decline in workload management scores, falling from 6.59 to 6.36, a drop of 0.23 points. This represents the largest decline across all categories and confirms that workload pressures are intensifying. Seafarers are explicit about the problem: "Workload is a big issue! We often work long hours, sometimes 12-14 hours a day, 7 days a week. Fatigue is real, and it affects safety and mental health." Another notes: "Overworked, MLC requirements can never be followed especially on paperwork. In my 4 years sea time experience, nobody cares as long as the job gets done."

The workload crisis reflects the industry's intensification trap: reduced crew sizes, faster port turnarounds, more regulations, and higher expectations, all while wages stagnate. One seafarer describes the situation: "There's no problem with my workload but sometimes even if I am sleep someone will call me and will assign a work or I'm already out from my duty someone will ask me to still do."

The rest-hour fiction persists. Seafarers continue to report that records are adjusted to show compliance while actual working hours far exceed regulatory limits. This creates a dangerous situation where fatigue-related incidents become increasingly likely while the documentation suggests everything is in order.

General Happiness 7.22 ↓ from 7.39

The decline in general happiness reflects the cumulative weight of challenges documented throughout this report. Seafarers express genuine satisfaction with aspects of their work while simultaneously voicing concerns about the conditions under which that work takes place.

One seafarer captures this duality: "I love doing my job it is what sustains my needs and my family's. I can go to places, interact with various people, experience diverse culture and buy the things that I love." Yet another notes: "There is no stimulation for growth. Feels like stuck in a loop."

The positive responses emphasise professional pride, financial security, and the unique privileges of maritime life. Negative responses reveal isolation, poor leadership, lack of shore leave, and the strain of extended separation from family. The decline in this foundational metric suggests that the balance between fulfilment and sacrifice is shifting unfavourably.



Anxiety grows. Seafaring doesn't pay well anymore given the risks of shipping industry. There's war in many places, drugs being secretly loaded onboard ships, dangers when doing shore leave, and ships that skip safety procedures to satisfy the company."

Connectivity 7.65 ↓ from 7.81

The decline in connectivity scores, despite continued industry investment, reflects the complexity of the connectivity revolution. Seafarers appreciate improved internet access but encounter new challenges: insufficient data allowances, time constraints, and the psychological burden of being digitally present but physically absent.

Connectivity on many vessels has been transformed positively in recent years, but the technology is not universally available. Where connectivity remains limited or expensive, seafarers feel increasingly disadvantaged compared to peers on better-equipped vessels. The expectation of constant connectivity has shifted from luxury to necessity, and vessels that fail to meet this expectation see it reflected in crew satisfaction.



It's a big relief for us! Talking to family reminds us of home and loved ones, reducing loneliness and stress. It's a mood booster, giving us energy to keep going and keep dreaming for them."

Shore Leave 6.78 ↑ from 6.56

The modest improvement in shore leave scores should not obscure the fundamental challenge: shore leave remains one of the lowest-scoring categories, and access continues to be constrained by operational pressures, port regulations, and terminal design.

The improvement may reflect seasonal factors or specific vessels with better practices rather than industry-wide change. Seafarers continue to describe shore leave as essential for mental health and wellbeing, yet increasingly difficult to access. One seafarer visiting a Mission to Seafarers centre stated, "A ship can be repaired in dry dock, but a sailor is restored on shore."



Hectic work schedule, sleeping hours are to be sacrificed for a quick shore access. Many countries discourage or do not allow shore leaves. Also, very few hours are allowed by onboard captain to go out, that time is often not even enough for a round trip."

Wages 6.98 ↑ from 6.81

The improvement in wage scores reflects satisfaction with the absolute level of income rather than its trajectory. Seafarers recognise that maritime employment provides income they could not easily match ashore, particularly in developing economies. However, this satisfaction is tempered by awareness of wage stagnation and the erosion of purchasing power through inflation.

The disparity between seafarer wages and shore-based alternatives in developed economies continues to drive recruitment challenges. When sacrificing half of one's life for a pay cheque, seafarers increasingly question whether the trade-off remains worthwhile.



No increase last year because I'm at the top of the wage bracket. People with less experience are catching up to me through no fault of my own. As a senior officer, I should be making but money than a 3 stripe engineer or deck officer."

Food Quality 7.31 ↑ from 7.29

Health and Exercise 7.30 ↑ from 7.09

Food quality and health scores remained relatively stable, with marginal improvements. These categories reflect the importance of fundamentals: nutrition, exercise opportunities, and health support. The variability in food quality depending on the cook remains a significant factor, creating inequity between vessels.

Health concerns emerge repeatedly in responses: oily foods, lack of fresh provisions, and insufficient time for exercise. The connection between food quality, exercise opportunity, and long-term health outcomes for seafarers deserves continued attention.

Towards the end of the quarter there were growing concerns about the impact of availability and access to food and water. A trend which needs to be monitored if conflict persists.

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Gym, swimming pools and other hobbies are on paper. No one maintains, company spends millions on commercial activities but they don't spend properly on seafarer health."

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Food onboard is a big deal! It's a comfort thing, and good meals boost morale. Plus, decent food is crucial for health and energy especially for us. Chief cook is extremely performing and sharing his skills in making a mouth watering foods."

Training and Development 7.52 ↑ from 6.99

The significant improvement in training scores represents a positive development. Industry investment in training appears to be yielding results, with seafarers recognising the value of professional development opportunities. However, the distinction between genuine skill-building and compliance paperwork remains important. Training that makes seafarers better at their jobs is valued; training that merely checks boxes is resented.



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They will give you training in your working hours. Sometimes in your break time... It means you need to adjust, take it or leave it. It means you don't have a choice."

Interactions 7.93 ↑ from 7.68

The improvement in interaction scores reflects the resilience of crew cohesion. Despite operational pressures, seafarers continue to build positive working relationships aboard ship. This social dimension of sea life remains a source of satisfaction and a buffer against other challenges. The quality of leadership in facilitating positive interactions cannot be overstated.



2nd engineer put fist in my face and threatened to hit me. Chief engineer tried to give me an unfair disciplinary. Captain kicked me off ship when he found out I was autistic."

Workload Management 6.36 ↑ from 6.59

The decline in workload management scores is the most concerning finding in Q1 2026. Seafarers describe unsustainable working patterns, inadequate rest, and pressure to exceed regulatory limits. The workload crisis reflects the industry's intensification trap and requires urgent attention.

The falsification of rest-hour records persists, creating a dangerous disconnect between documented compliance and operational reality. When fatigue-related incidents occur, the documentation will suggest everything was in order, raising serious questions about regulatory effectiveness.



They are cutting manpower more and more now days so if you reduce men power and run your ship on minimum safe manning model for example 100 m ship have same crew as 400m ships, so who is going work for one less crew?"

Welfare Facilities Ashore 6.82 ↑ from 6.68

The modest improvement in welfare facilities scores reflects the variable availability of seafarer support services globally. While some ports offer excellent welfare facilities, and are rightly celebrated, others provide little or nothing.

The disparity between ports in developed and developing nations remains pronounced, with seafarers in many regions having nowhere to go for support, rest, or recreation ashore. This is a source of much frustration for crews.



Not all port have seaman's club and I miss them. It can be scary to go ashore especially in some countries. Here people are trying to rob us with everything. From transportation fees, food costing even information of where to go. They charge us."

Q1 2026 Demographics

The Q1 2026 Seafarers Happiness Index, highlights a workforce concentrated in prime working ages, with the 25–35 group the largest - and notably the least satisfied. Younger seafarers remain optimistic, but satisfaction appears to dip with experience, raising concerns about long-term retention.

Rank reveals a clear “burden of command.” Cadets and crew report solid happiness, while senior officers (especially Captains) show the lowest scores, reflecting rising responsibility without equivalent support.

The industry remains overwhelmingly male, with very low female representation. While women report slightly higher satisfaction, the sample is too small for firm conclusions, reinforcing the need to improve diversity and inclusion.

Regionally, satisfaction is highest in developing labour-supplying regions such as South-East Asia, and lowest in wealthier nations, where shore-based alternatives are more attractive. This underscores a structural dependency that may not hold as global economies evolve.

Operational context matters. Vessel type significantly affects wellbeing: Ro-Ro and bulk carriers score highest, while tankers, offshore, and ferries lag due to workload, operational pressure, and limited shore leave.

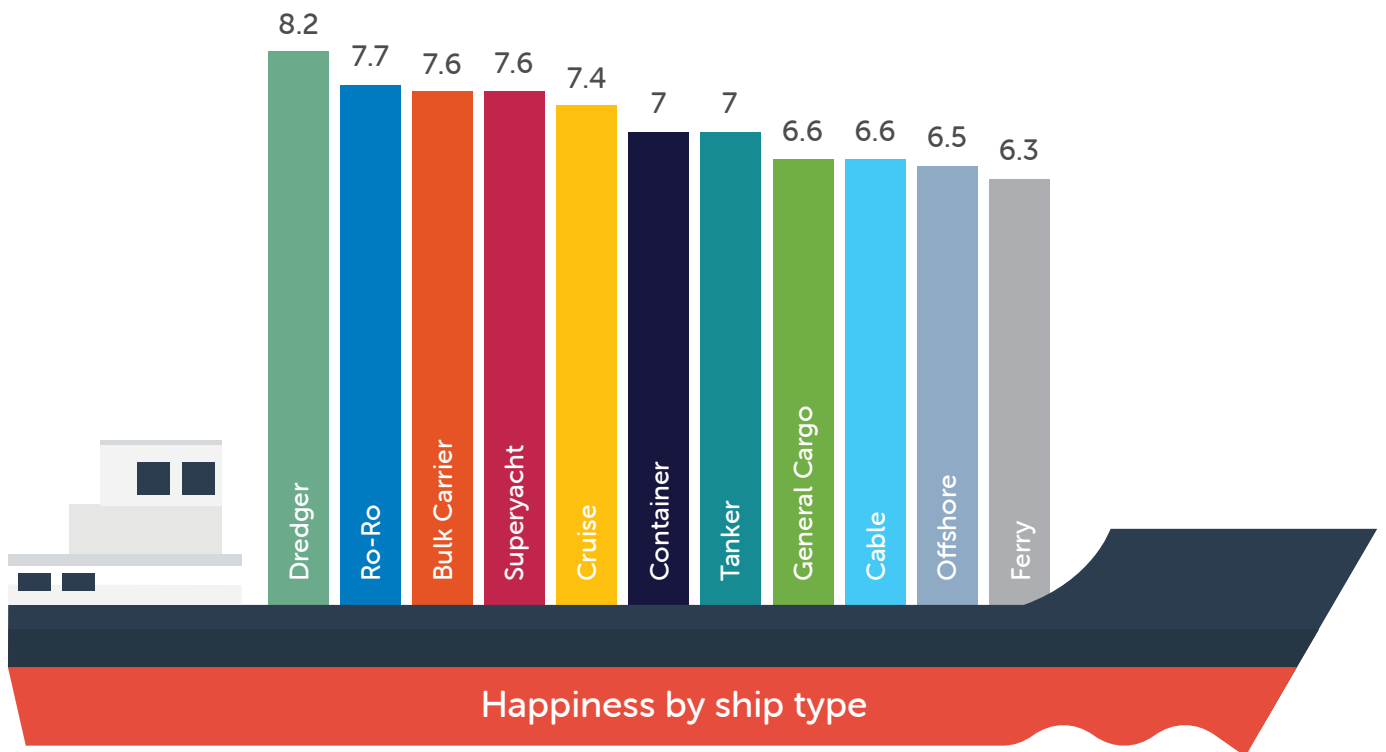
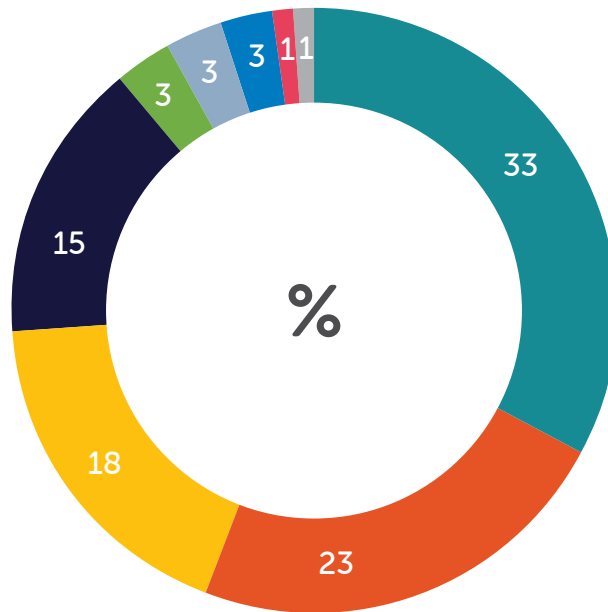
Vessel age has limited impact compared to management and onboard culture, though mid-life ships (11–20 years) show slightly lower satisfaction, possibly due to maintenance challenges.

Contract length shows no simple answer. Shorter appears better at first glance. Though longer contracts can work for some with potential increasing earnings, as quicker hitches can lead to instability. The key issue is the cumulative strain of time away from home.

Satisfaction varies widely across demographics. The key risks are clear, mid-career drop-off, senior officer burnout, lack of diversity, and over-reliance on developing labour markets. The data points to a need for more targeted, flexible, and human-centred approaches to sustain the maritime workforce.

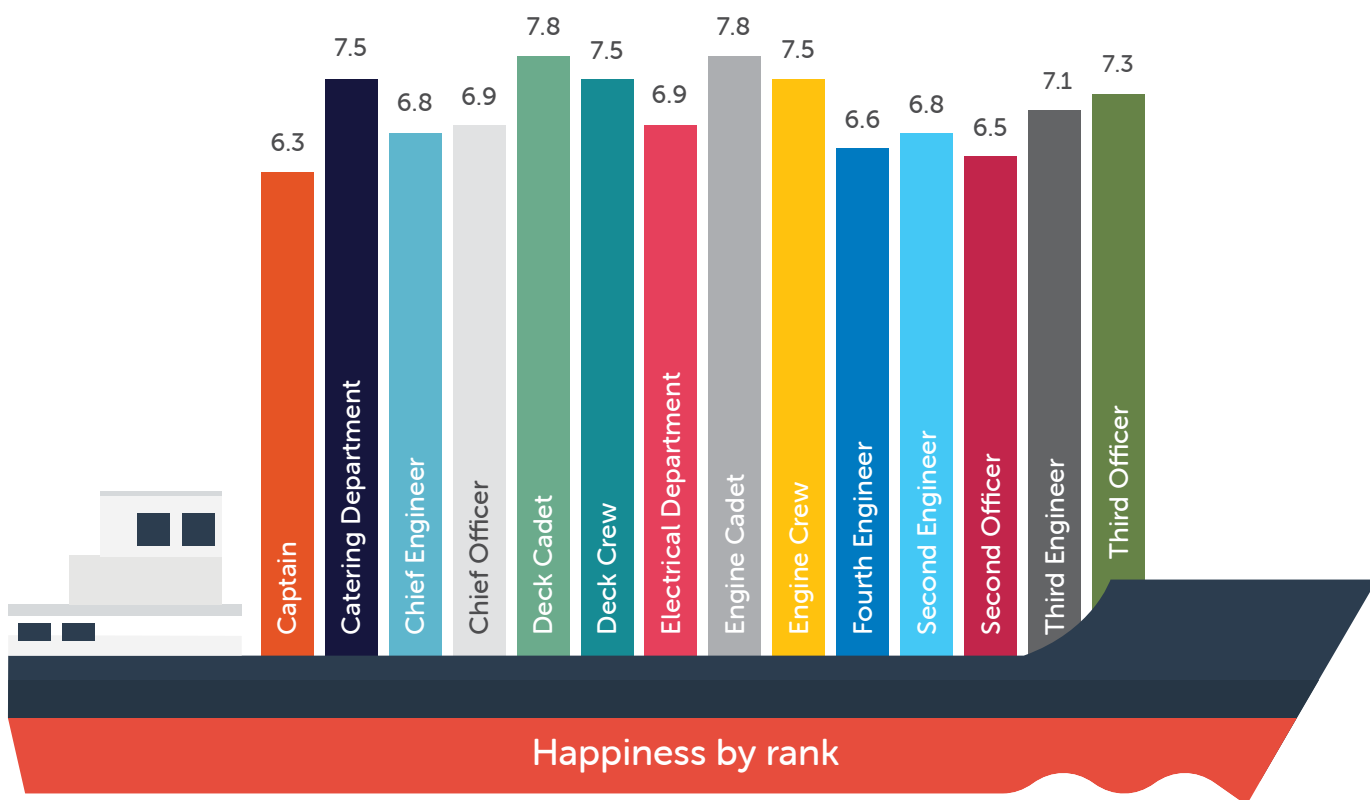
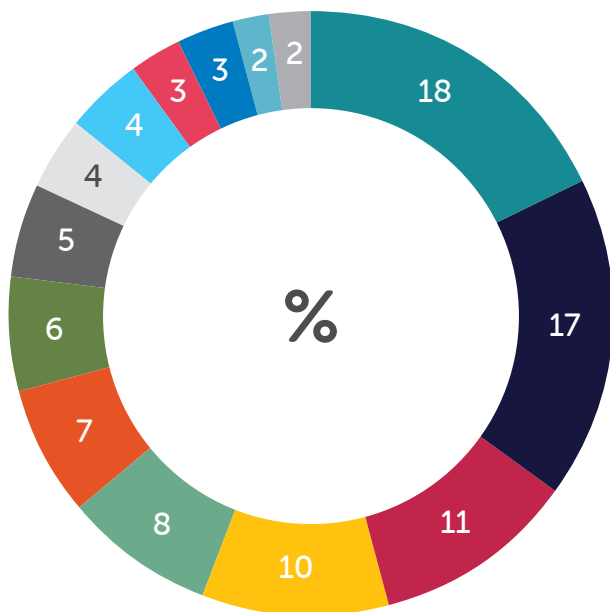
Ship Type

- Tanker
- Bulk Carrier
- Cruise
- Container
- General Cargo
- Offshore
- Ro-Ro
- Superyacht
- Ferry



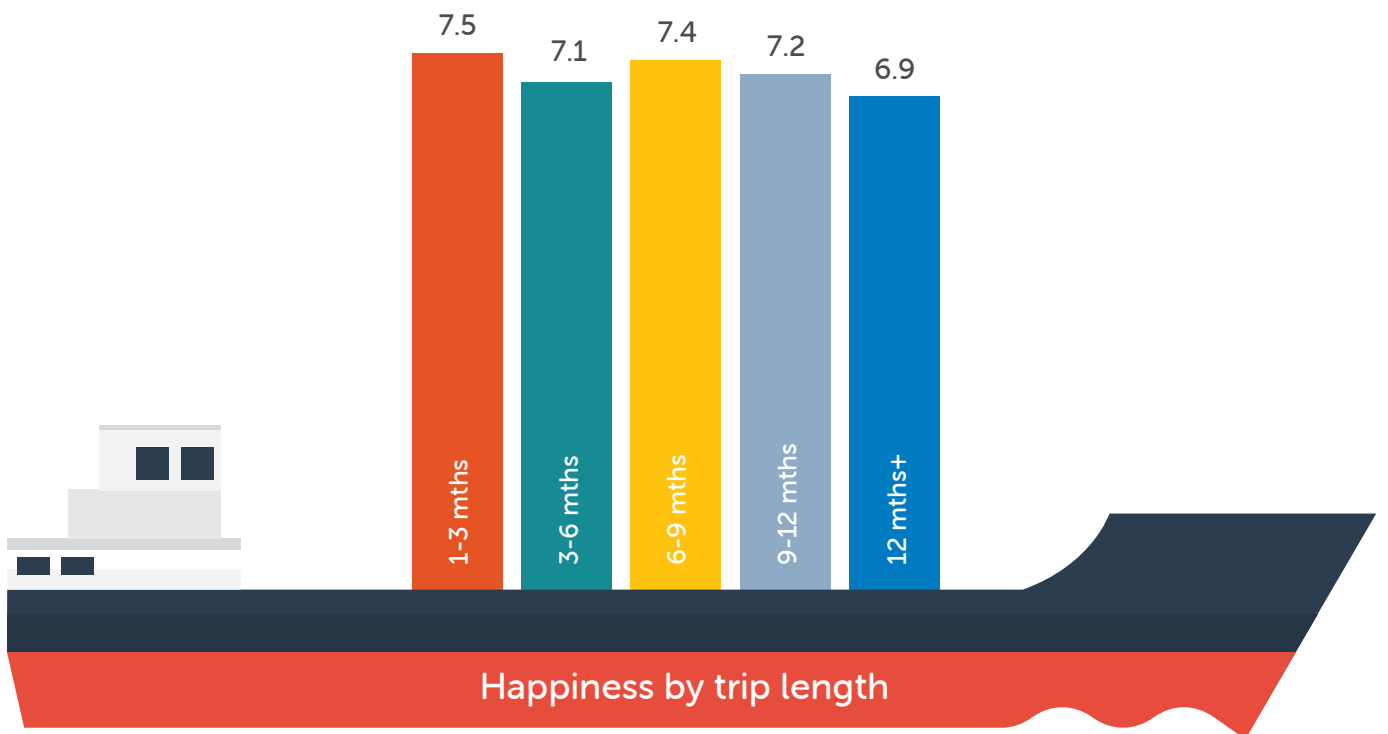
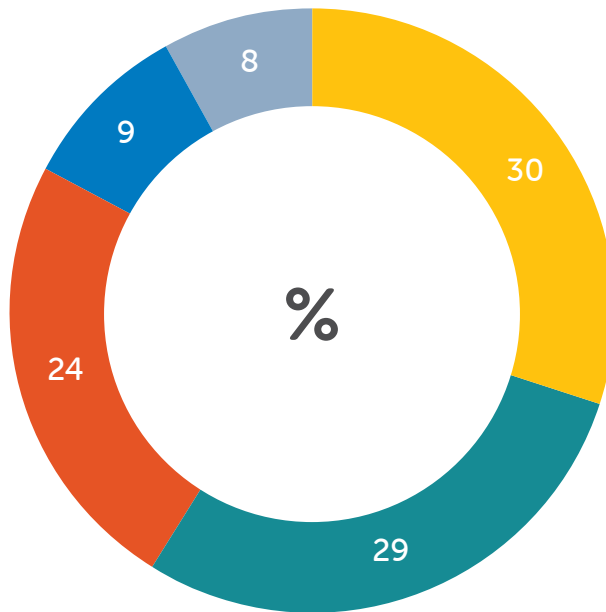
Rank

- 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



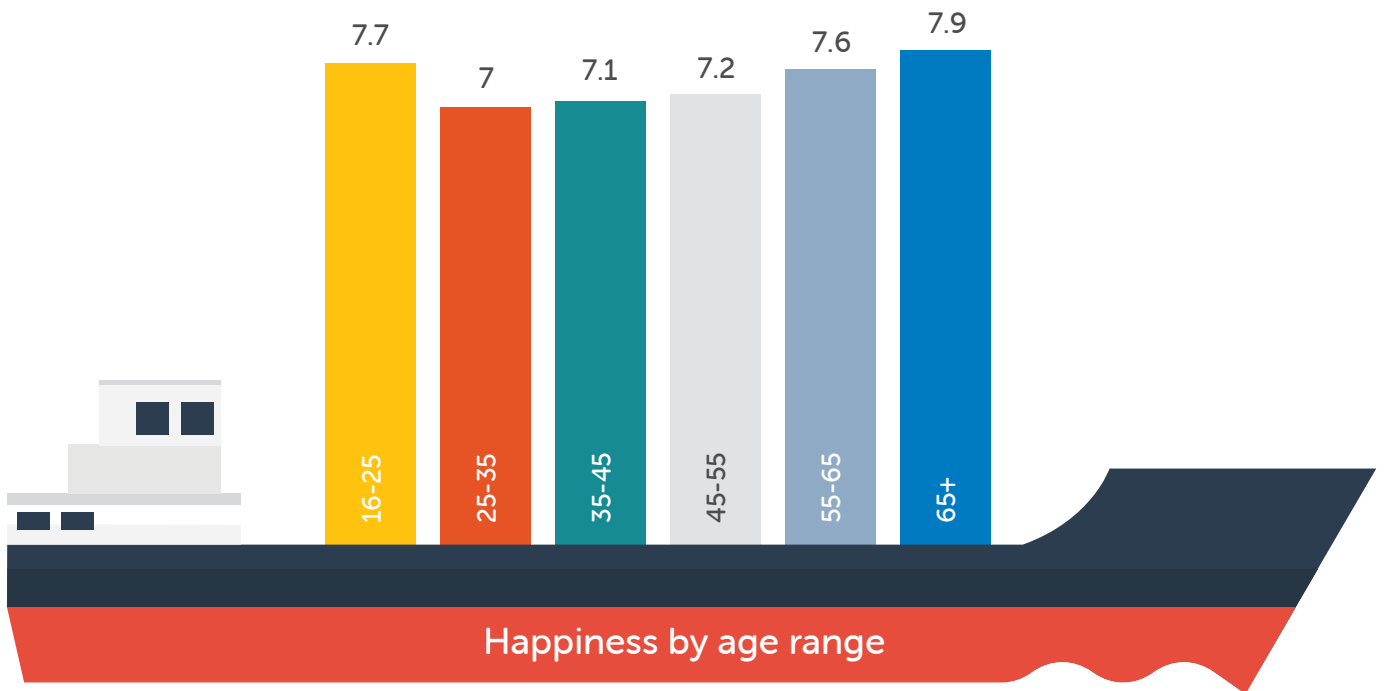
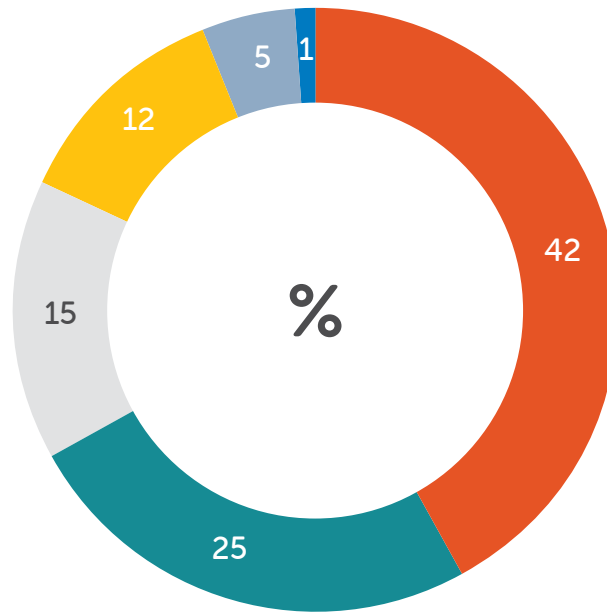
Trip Length

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



Age Range

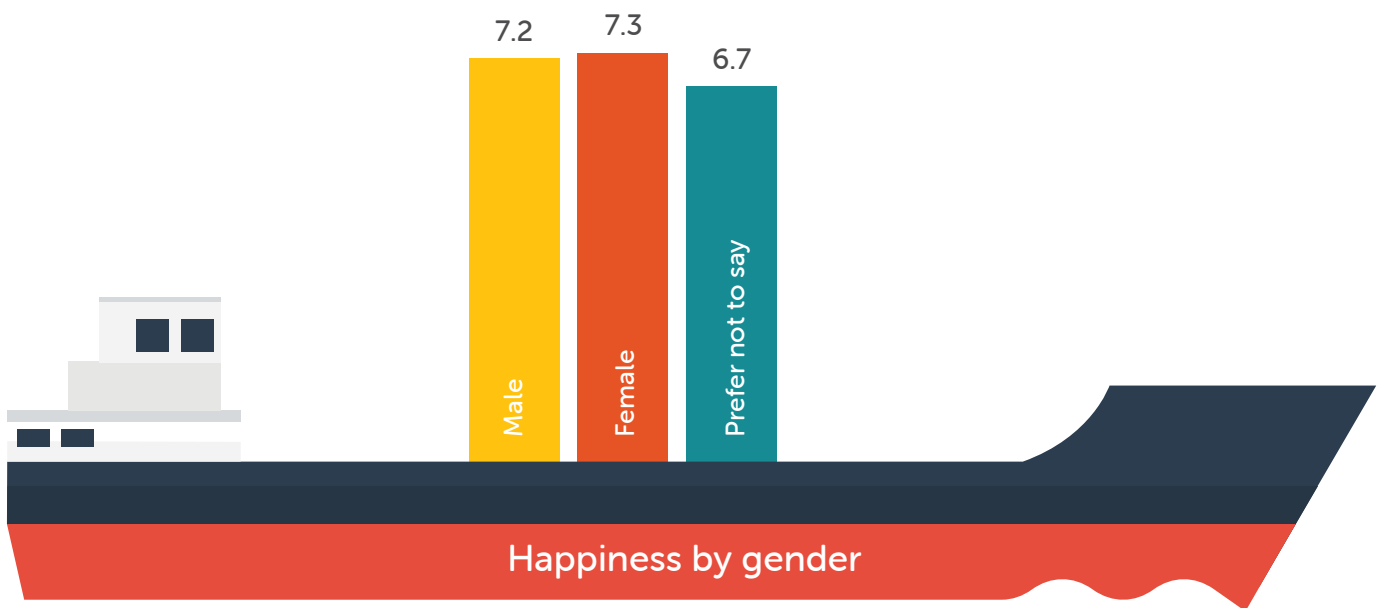
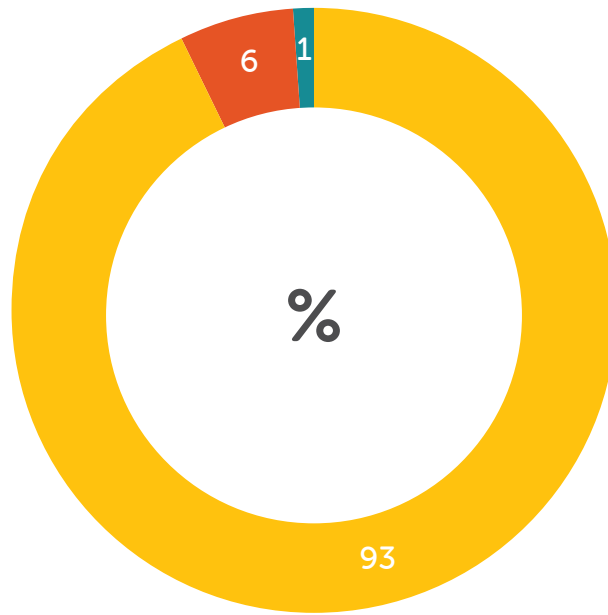
- 16-25
- 25-35
- 35-45
- 45-55
- 55-65
- 65+



Happiness by age range

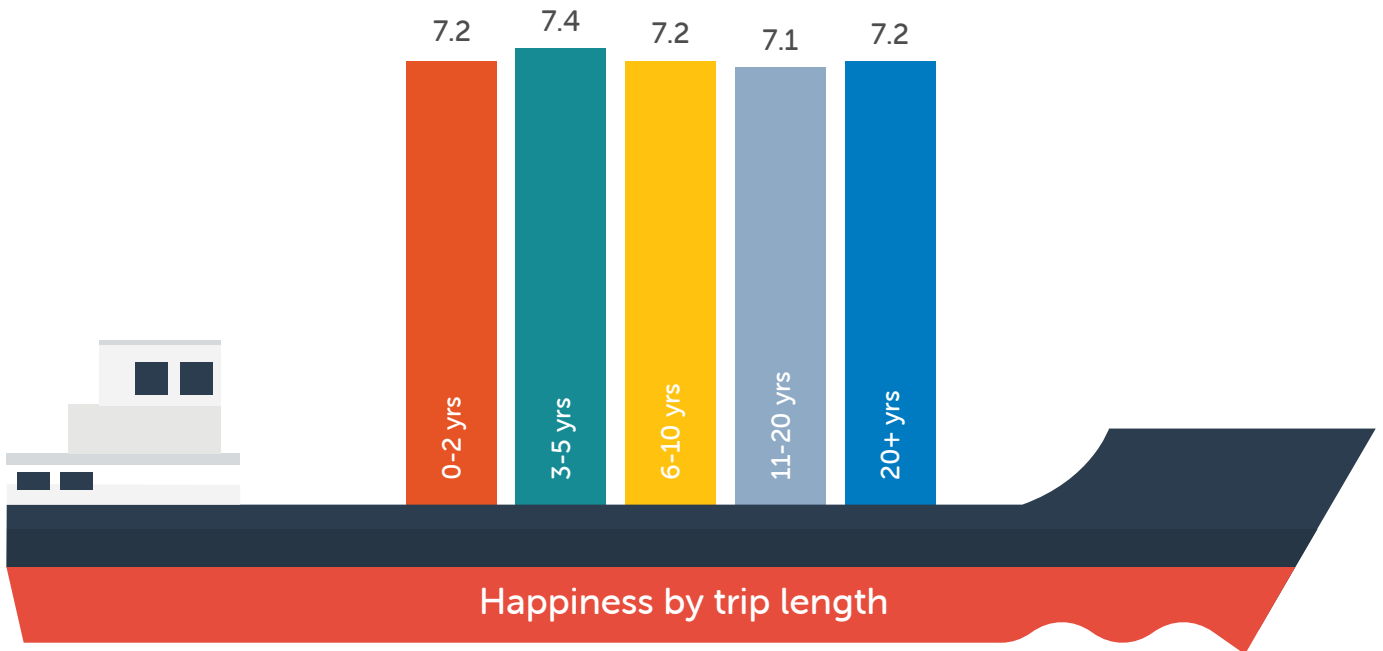
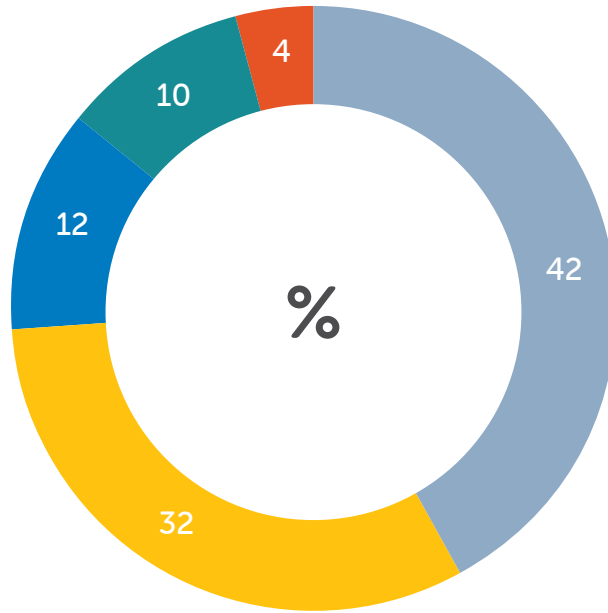
Gender

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say



Age of Vessel

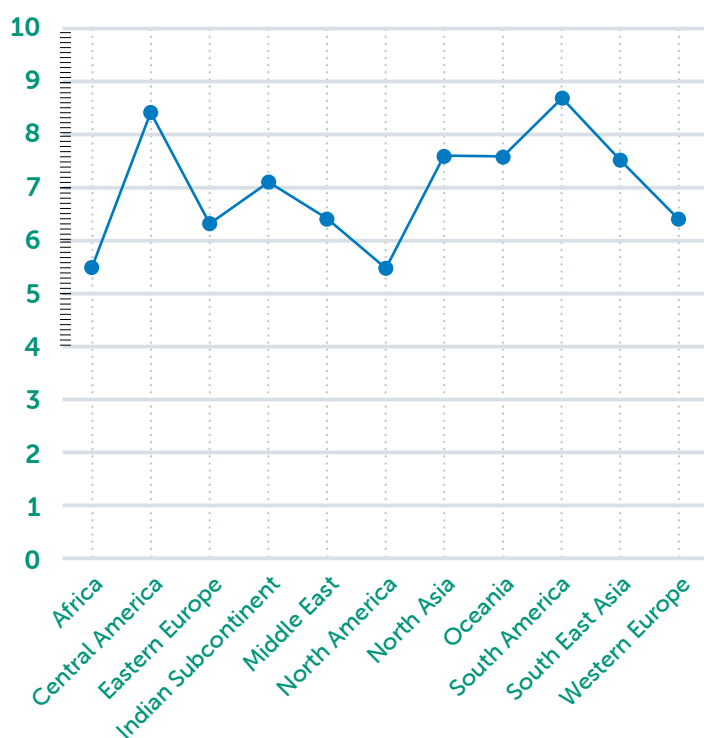
- 0-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-20 years
- 20+ years

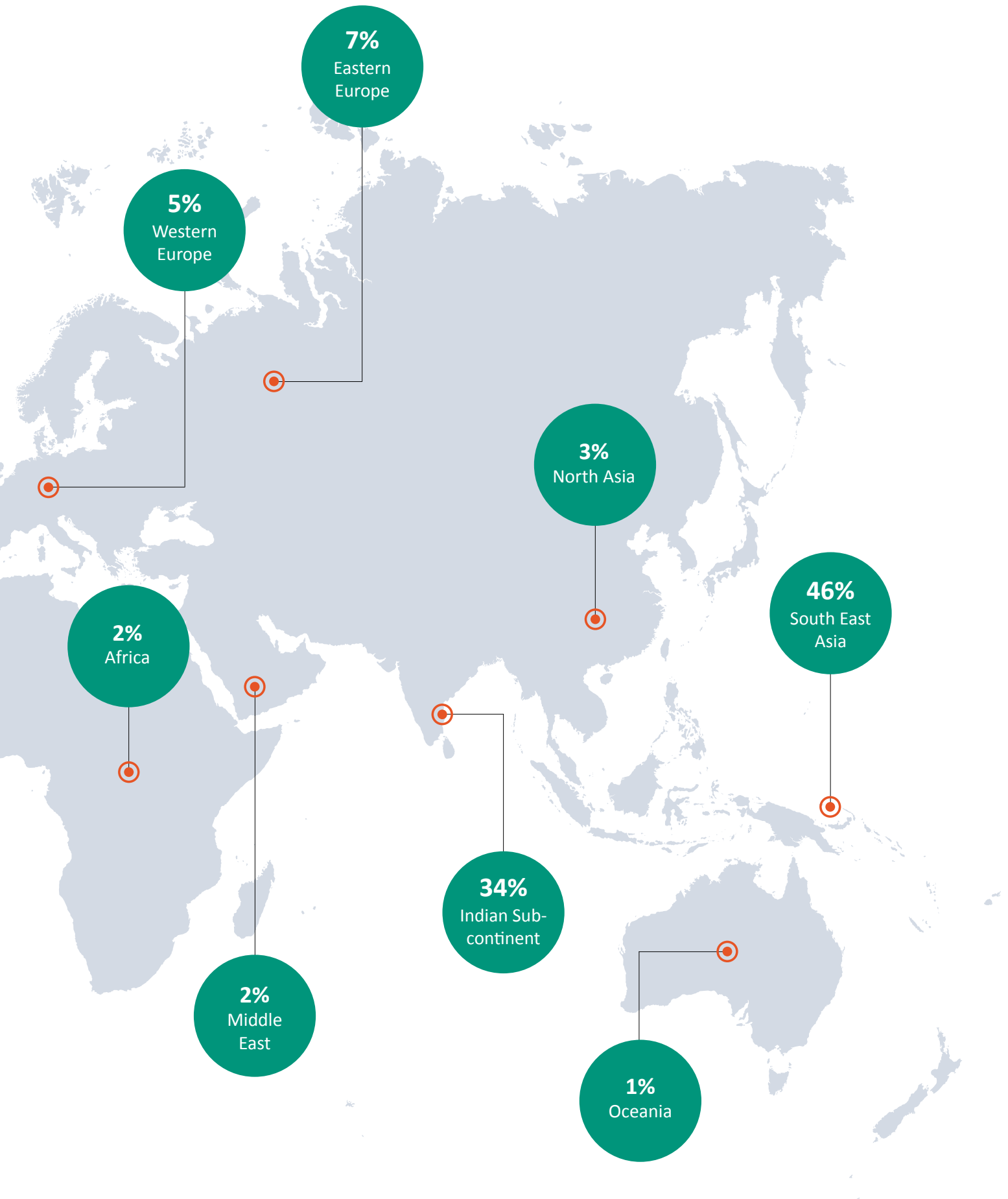


Where



Regions and happiness





Conclusion: A Quarter of Two Halves

Q1 2026 is not merely a period of marginal decline, but a stark demonstration of how quickly seafarer sentiment can be reshaped by external events. Beneath the headline figure of 7.18/10 lies a far more revealing narrative: this was a quarter of two halves—before and after the onset of conflict.

In the opening weeks, the data pointed towards cautious recovery. Sentiment was strengthening, with overall happiness tracking at 7.35/10 and improvements emerging across several key indicators. There was evidence that, despite persistent structural challenges, the industry retained the capacity to stabilise and rebuild seafarer confidence.

The commencement of Operation Epic Fury fundamentally altered that trajectory. Within just weeks, seafarer happiness fell sharply. This was a rapid sentiment shock. The scale and speed of the decline underline a critical truth: seafarer wellbeing is not insulated from global instability - it is highly sensitive to it.

Importantly, the impact of conflict extends far beyond those directly exposed to physical danger. While the experiences of seafarers in the Persian Gulf are acute and immediate, the data shows a wider sentiment contagion across the global workforce. Fear, uncertainty, and perceived risk do not remain geographically contained. They travel through crews, companies, and communities, shaping perceptions of safety, fairness, and the value of each life at sea.

In this sense, conflict acts as both a catalyst and a magnifier. It intensifies existing pressures - workload, fatigue, limited shore leave - and reframes them through a harsher lens. Challenges that were previously tolerated become harder to justify. Sacrifices that were once accepted begin to feel disproportionate. The psychological contract between seafarer and industry is tested, and in some cases, begins to fracture.

The concept of a "sentiment shock" is therefore central to understanding Q1 2026. The data suggests that seafarer happiness is not only driven by onboard conditions, but also by the broader geopolitical environment in which shipping operates. When that environment becomes unstable, the effects ripple rapidly and widely.

This has profound implications. First, it highlights the fragility of recovery. Gains in seafarer satisfaction can be quickly reversed by external crises, particularly when underlying structural issues remain unresolved. Second, it underscores the need to view seafarer wellbeing through a systemic lens, one that accounts for both operational conditions and global risk exposure. Third, it raises fundamental questions about resilience: not just of seafarers, but of the systems designed to support them.

Ultimately, Q1 2026 reinforces a simple but critical point. Seafarers do not operate at the margins of global events; they are on the frontlines. When conflict emerges, its impact is not confined to trade flows or freight rates; it is felt in the lived experience, morale, and future intentions of the people who keep global shipping moving.

If the industry is to sustain its workforce, it must recognise and respond to this reality. Because while ships can reroute and cargoes can be delayed, the human response to sustained uncertainty and risk is far less flexible, and far more consequential.

Thank you

We extend our sincere thanks to the seafarers who take the time to share their experiences and perspectives through the Seafarers Happiness Index survey. These first-hand accounts from those working at sea are indispensable. They provide a vital view of life on board, ground our analysis in lived reality, and help identify where policy, practice, and support must evolve.

There is a particular focus - and a deep gratitude - to those who are currently experiencing the fears, stresses and even deprivations of conflict. These brave, resourceful, committed and professional seafarers are doing their best to cope, hearing their words, experiences and the impact of war on them should serve as an important part of building the support and solutions they need.

We are equally grateful to the shipping companies and shore-based management teams that actively encourage and enable crew participation. By making space for honest feedback, they demonstrate leadership and a genuine commitment to improvement.

Looking ahead, we need more seafarers, and that means recognising, valuing, retaining, and supporting those already at sea. One of the simplest and most effective ways to do this is to ensure their voices are heard. We therefore encourage all seafarers to complete the survey and all employers, unions, and industry bodies to actively promote participation.

The future of shipping depends on collective effort. By placing seafarer happiness and well-being at the centre of our priorities, we not only address immediate challenges but also help build a more resilient, attractive, and sustainable maritime sector for those who choose to go to sea tomorrow.

To complete the survey, visit:

www.seafarershappinessindex.org



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