

Seafarers Happiness Index

Quarter 2 2026



The
Seafarers
Happiness
Index



IN ASSOCIATION WITH



Seafarers Happiness Index: Q2 2026

The Seafarers Happiness Index (SHI) serves as a vital barometer of global maritime sentiment, offering a crucial window into the human realities behind international trade. In the second quarter of 2026, the headline figure shows a significant decline in overall happiness to 6.87/10, down from 7.18/10 in the previous quarter.

This drop confirms that the recovery hoped for earlier in the year has failed to take hold. Unlike the first quarter, which suffered the sudden shock of war and concerns of immediate safety and security, the second quarter represents a transition from acute shock to chronic strain. The immediate impact of conflict has settled into a broader atmosphere that exacerbates existing, systemic issues. Consequently, the defining feature of this period is the continued erosion of crew morale.

While seafarers remain deeply resilient and professional, their strength is being steadily worn down by pressures that are increasingly becoming routine. Ironically, while war zones capture the headlines, it is the daily “norms”, such as limited shore leave, excessive workloads, and stagnant real-wage buying power, that eat away at crew well-being.

This reality underscores the 2026 Day of the Seafarer theme, “Carrying world trade. Carrying the risks.” Ships carry far more than cargo; onboard are the people who must carry the psychological load of geopolitical risk, relentless inspections, and commercial urgency, all too often achieved to public indifference.

The qualitative feedback from seafarers this quarter carries a profound message. Crews are asking for fundamental human necessities: enough rest to recover, connectivity to sustain family life, quality food, and adequate pay to justify their sacrifice. They want training that builds competence rather than bureaucratic burdens, alongside the basic respect of an industry that understands and values them.

Ultimately, the latest data shows that seafarer welfare is a constant operational, ethical, and strategic challenge. Maritime professionalism cannot be sustained under these current conditions without deliberate intervention.

Framing the Responses: Beyond the Numbers

The SHI provides the evidence needed to inform better decisions, build stronger support systems, and secure a sustainable future for those who live and work at sea. It serves as a real-time health check on the human side of global shipping. By combining long-term quantitative trends with direct, qualitative testimony, we identify emerging welfare issues, recognise good practice, and provide evidence to support industry-wide improvements.

We know that a voluntary, anonymous barometer captures what a data scientist might dismiss as “statistical noise”, but in the real world, that is a vital signal. It is a hook that demands engagement, sparks discussion, and forces the industry to look at the immediate reality facing seafarers.

A fractional uptick on a spreadsheet will never be an excuse to celebrate a fake improvement or soften our tone. Not while the reality on the margins shows seafarers facing profound burnout. We use numbers to start the conversation, but we use seafarers’ voices to tell the truth.

Consequently, while overall scores offer valuable baseline insights, they can also conceal severe operational problems affecting different crews, trades, or regions. The clearest picture emerges within the written comments, where seafarers describe the pressures, frustrations, and on occasions the successes behind the statistics.

Championing the Positives

Equally, we champion the positives. Our goal is to drive progress, and we never shy away from highlighting good practices, as we want all companies to learn from them. Pockets of strong positivity remain, with respondents praising cohesive crews and supportive employers. As one seafarer noted, “The working environment is positive and the crew morale is high,” while another highlighted professional, respectful, and collaborative crew.

For these seafarers, a rewarding environment makes all the difference. Top-tier companies stand out by respecting sign-off dates, ensuring timely reliefs, and offering merit-based promotions. Life onboard is further elevated by modern, well-maintained tonnage, a strong safety culture, solid shore support that keeps workloads manageable, and responsive, respectful crewing teams. These bright spots prove that happiness at sea is entirely achievable. Ultimately, the divide between a thriving ship and a declining one rests on tangible company choices, proving that when management values its people rather than merely extracting performance, excellence follows.

Contextualising the Data

As a voluntary, self-reported survey, the SHI naturally attracts those motivated to share their experiences, providing a vital outlet for frontline perspectives that might otherwise remain unheard. No survey can ever capture every single aspect of life at sea, and the inherent limitations of self-reported research are acknowledged. However, these limitations must never conceal uncomfortable findings. Listening to seafarers, understanding their experiences, and acting on consistent patterns remains essential to improving safety, wellbeing, and the long-term sustainability of the maritime profession.



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The working environment is positive and the crew morale is high."

Executive Summary: Anchored by Resilience, Tested by Reality

The Q2 2026 Seafarers Happiness Index report highlights a maritime workforce navigating two contrasting realities. On one hand, the global fleet continues to be powered by an extraordinary sense of professional pride, strong shipboard camaraderie, and pockets of genuine optimism where supportive companies are actively investing in their crews. On the other hand, the data exposes a deepening chasm between basic regulatory compliance and the human realities of life at sea, presenting critical moral and operational questions for the wider industry.

A central theme of this quarter is the “normalisation of disruption” Ongoing geopolitical tensions are no longer treating the industry to isolated, acute shocks; instead, the resulting systemic strains, such as prolonged rerouting, communication blackouts in high-risk zones, and supply anxieties, have quietly embedded themselves into the ordinary baseline conditions of global maritime life.

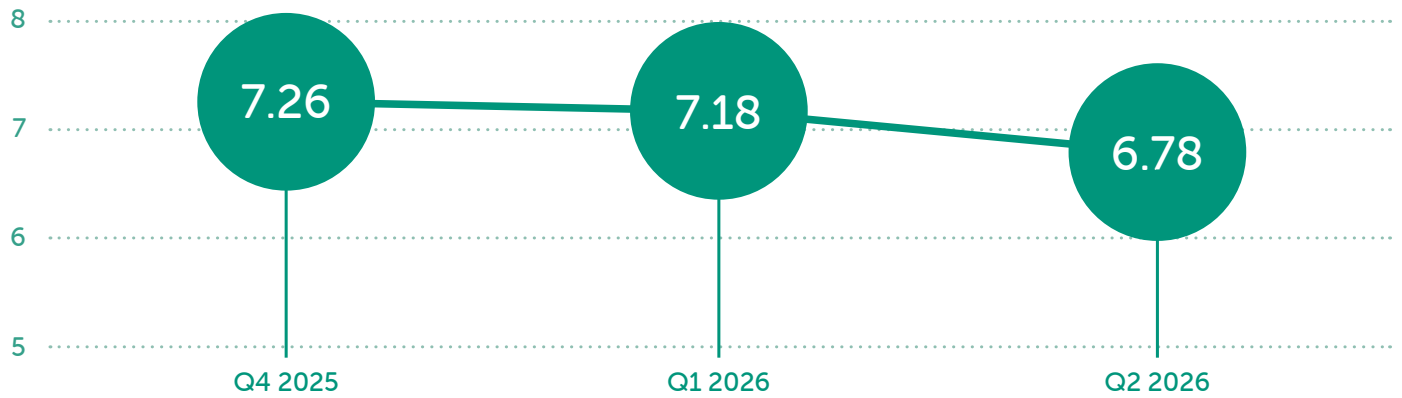
These external pressures have intensified long-standing structural challenges, particularly around workload management and fatigue, leading to a critical trust deficit where rest hours are too often treated as a mere paper exercise for authorities rather than a tool for genuine recovery.

Yet, the report fundamentally rejects a narrative of pure negativity. The brightest spots in the Q2 data prove that happiness at sea is entirely achievable. Seafarers consistently report that strong, respectful shipboard relationships and collaborative crew dynamics serve as their primary line of welfare support. Furthermore, where companies have committed to high-capacity connectivity, robust catering budgets, and proactive shore-based family support, morale remains high.

Ultimately, the divide between a thriving vessel and a declining one rests on these tangible corporate choices. This report serves as both a celebration of the enduring seafaring spirit and an urgent call to action. The maritime industry cannot afford to mistake human resilience for unlimited capacity. To protect the long-term sustainability and retention of its workforce, especially among vital younger crew members, the industry must move beyond box-ticking compliance and collectively choose to value its people over the paperwork.

Quarterly Comparison Overview

Quarter on Quarter



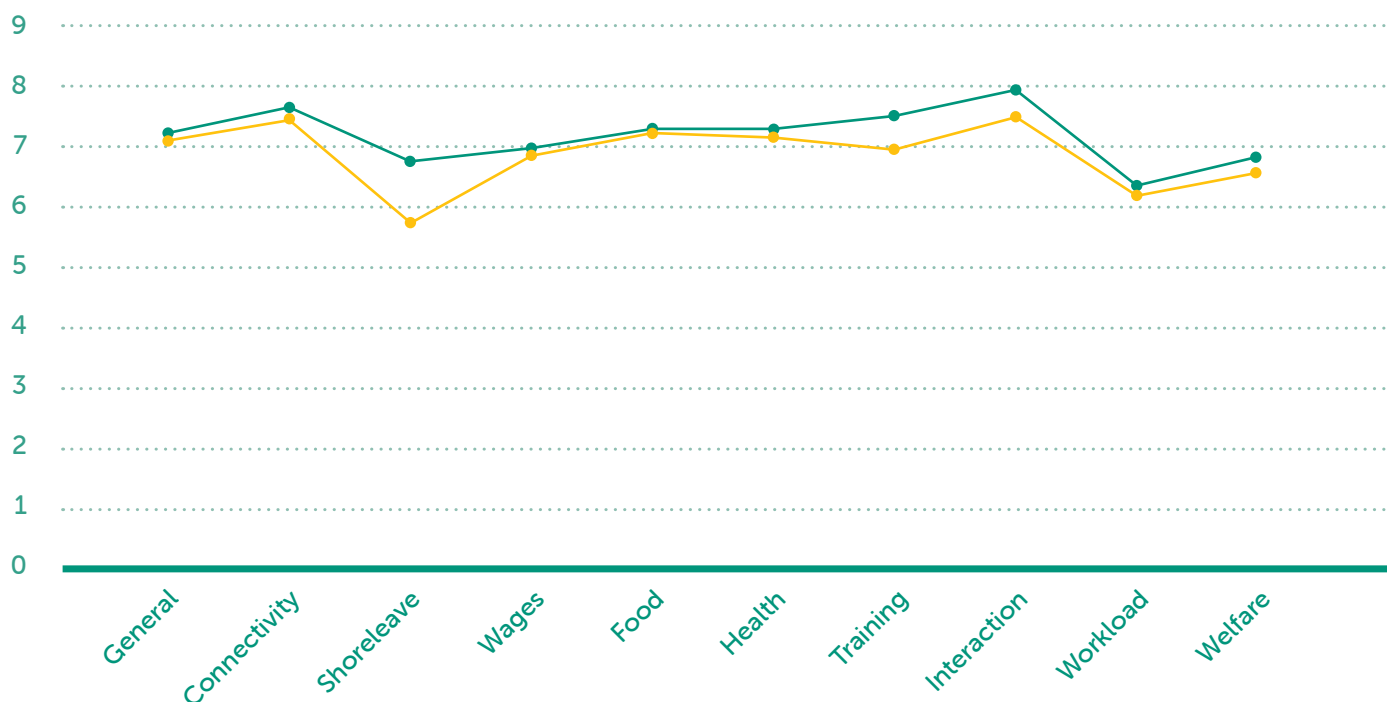
The overall happiness index declined to 6.87 in Q2 2026 from 7.18 in Q1 2026. The movement is significant as Q1 had already shown that seafarer wellbeing was vulnerable to geopolitical shocks.

Q2 now shows that the underlying structural issues remain unresolved, and that once confidence is damaged it does not easily rebound.

Question-by-Question Comparison

Question on Question

— Q1 2026 — Q2 2026



The strongest categories in Q2 were Interactions at 7.49/10 and Connectivity at 7.46/10. These scores show that seafarers continue to find strength in crew relationships and in the ability to remain connected with family and loved ones. Food Quality at 7.21/10 and Health and Exercise at 7.14/10 also remained above the overall average, though the qualitative comments reveal wide variation between vessels.

The lowest categories were Shore leave at 5.72/10, Workload Management at 6.20/10, and Welfare Facilities Ashore at 6.56/10. These are not new concerns, but Q2 gives them renewed force.

Shore leave in particular has fallen and demands attention. We should not see shore leave as a marginal benefit, occasional luxury or privilege. Seafarers repeatedly describe it as essential to restoration, mental health, dignity and the feeling of being human rather than merely operational labour.

Compared with Q1, the most important story is the weakness of the fundamentals. Q1 had already identified workload, shore leave and welfare as pressure points. Q2 confirms that these concerns have deepened in the experience of many respondents.

The fact that Interactions and Connectivity remain comparatively strong is encouraging, but it also reveals something important: seafarers are often creating their own resilience through shipboard relationships and contact with home, while the systems around them are not always doing enough to reduce the pressures they face.

What Seafarers Are Telling Us

The Q2 2026 data reveals a continuing erosion of satisfaction across key areas of maritime life. As the overall score fell from 7.18 to 6.87, seafarers are increasingly questioning the core bargain of their profession: whether the income and career identity are worth the intense work, restricted movement, and emotional sacrifice away from family.

This comparative advantage is slipping. One respondent noted, "Young crew are leaving the industry because there are no advantages remaining compared with a shore job." Another framed it in economic terms: "The same money you can make ashore, but with social security included." This shifting dynamic intensifies the industry's recruitment and retention challenges.

It is not merely a complaint about pay, but a fundamental question of total value, security, and dignity. When the package no longer feels proportionate to the sacrifice, retention collapses. Seafaring is still valued, but its comparative advantage is being challenged. If shore-based work becomes more attractive, safer, better protected and socially easier, then the industry's recruitment and retention challenge becomes far more serious.

Yet, pockets of strong positivity remain. Some respondents described cohesive crews and supportive companies, with one stating, "The working environment is positive and the crew morale is high." Another praised their crewmates as professional, respectful, and collaborative.

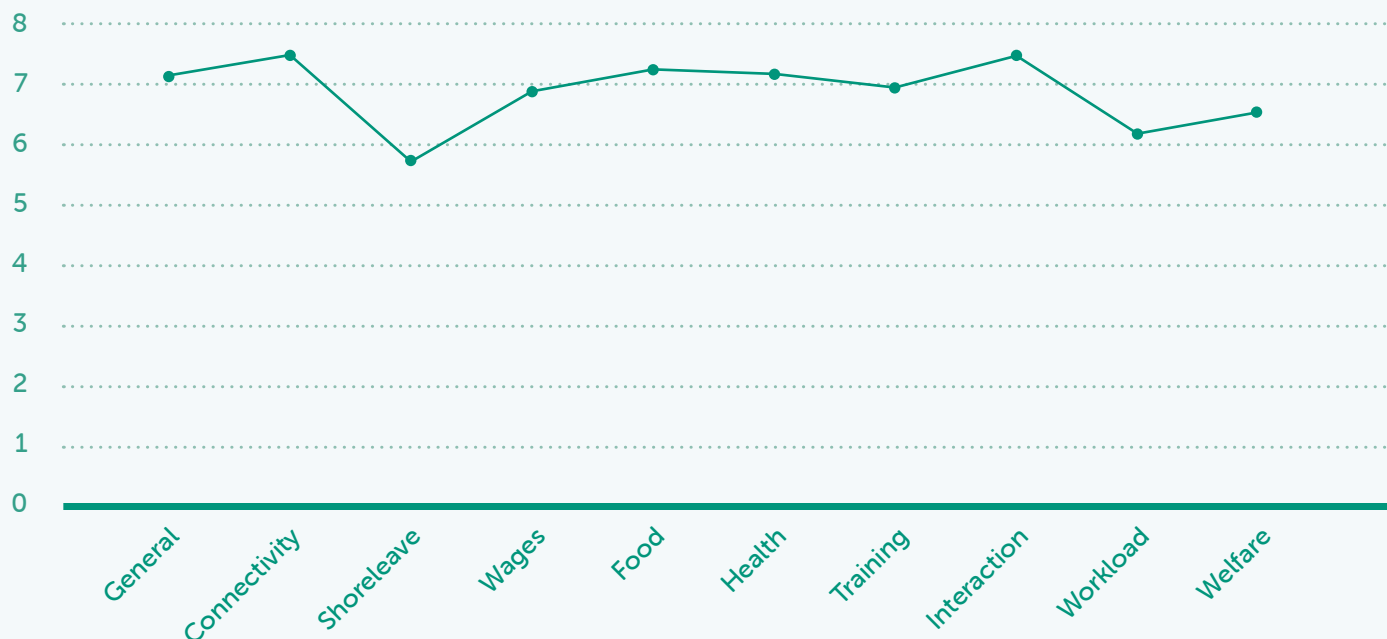
For seafarers, a supportive and professionally rewarding environment makes all the difference at sea. Top-tier companies stand out by actively respecting sign-off dates and ensures relievers arrive on time, while offering genuine promotion opportunities backed by merit-based appraisals.

Life onboard is further elevated by modern, well-maintained tonnage operating under a strong safety culture. Backed by solid shore support and proactive planned maintenance that keeps the daily workload sane, crew members can rely on a responsive HR and crewing desk that genuinely treats seafarers with the respect they deserve.

These brighter spots prove that happiness at sea is achievable. The divide between a thriving ship and a declining one ultimately rests on tangible company choices: the quality of leadership, adequate manning, reliable internet, access to shore leave, and whether a company values its people rather than merely extracting performance.

A System of Trust and Welfare

Q2 2026



The Q2 2026 results once again raise a central moral and operational question as to how we can move collectively above basic regulatory compliance. A vessel can be technically compliant and legally staffed yet remain emotionally exhausting and isolating if extreme workloads, fatigue, and poor leadership prevent seafarers from experiencing true well-being.

Welfare must be approached as an interconnected system rather than a checklist of isolated benefits. Elements like connectivity, shore leave, fair wages, training, and workloads do not operate in a vacuum; they actively reinforce or undermine one another.

For instance, good internet access is useless if exhaustion leaves no time to call home. Shore leave supports mental health, but it remains purely theoretical if brief port stays or rigid permissions block crews from stepping ashore. Even training, meant to build competence, becomes a burdensome box-ticking exercise when poorly timed.

There is a vital psychological dimension to this crisis. Seafarers need to know that their personal sacrifices are understood and valued. When crew members report that companies place “business first before people” or that rest hours are recorded “just for authorities and filing,” they are describing a dangerous breakdown in trust. This erosion of trust is not just a welfare failure; it is a direct threat to safety and retention.

Conversely, positive reports of supportive crews, reliable communication, and fair treatment prove that happiness at sea is manageable and within reach. This report should be read not merely as a warning, but as a practical guide for companies, masters, and regulators to intervene and rebuild a sustainable working environment.

General Happiness

7.11 ↓ from 7.22

Resilience Under Pressure

A score of 7.11 sits slightly above the overall respondent mean, suggesting that many seafarers continue to express a baseline level of satisfaction despite serious concerns in specific areas.

The comments show why. For some, happiness comes from supportive crews, fair pay, family provision, pride in work and a positive onboard atmosphere. One respondent said: "I am heard, my company looks after the crew." Another described the vessel as "one of the happiest ships to work on", with a positive working environment and high morale.

Yet general happiness is fragile. Many seafarers appear to be holding two realities at once. They can be proud of their work and tired of the system. They can value their fellow crew and question the industry. They can appreciate internet and still feel trapped by workload. They can accept sacrifice but resent feeling undervalued.

This complexity defines Q2 2026. The seafaring spirit remains strong, but it is being tested. The industry should not mistake resilience for unlimited capacity. Seafarers can endure much, but endurance is not the same as wellbeing.



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I am heard, my company looks after the crew."

Connectivity

7.46 ↓ from 7.65

High Scores and High Stakes

Connectivity recorded the second-highest category score in the Q2 2026 Index, marking it as a clear success story in seafarer welfare. Reliable, free/cheap internet has transformed life at sea, acting as an emotional lifeline that reduces isolation and makes long contracts bearable. As one seafarer shared, "I'm super happy because of the free internet. It makes it easier to stay connected."

However, this progress has raised expectations and shifted the baseline of what is acceptable. Minimal data limits, such as 1 or 2 GB allowances, sluggish speeds, and restricted video calls become a major source of frustration where the levels of service do not meet expectation. Seafarers increasingly view high-capacity, unlimited internet not as a luxury, but as a fundamental right linked directly to well-being and dignity.

This digital bridge has also introduced a complex emotional challenge: managing family anxieties in real-time. With instant access to global news, shore-based families frequently watch severe weather or geopolitical threats unfold before the crew can brief them.

Seafarers must then undertake the exhausting emotional labour of de-escalating family fears right before high-stress duties. One seafarer noted, "I spend hours trying to convince my wife we are safe, which takes a massive toll on me." Furthermore, when communication is severed for operational security, the sudden silence triggers panic ashore. Seafarers in high-risk areas are facing blackouts and bans on using personal devices, and this is having an impact.

Consequently, respondents are calling for structured, shore-based support. Rather than leaving crews to handle this emotional fallout alone, seafarers want companies to establish centralised channels or family liaison officers to proactively reassure next-of-kin during transits through volatile regions.

Ultimately, connectivity is a triumph with a warning attached. Companies that invest in high-capacity bandwidth and robust family support structures will see measurable returns in morale, retention, and trust. Those providing only minimal data while leaving crews to navigate the emotional weight of a connected world will face a profound new welfare pressure.



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"I'm super happy because of the free internet. It makes it easier to stay connected"

Shore Leave

5.72 ↓ from 6.78

A Downward Spiral

Recording the lowest score in the Q2 2026 Index by a significant margin, shore leave fell to a critical **5.72/10**. The data confirms that stepping ashore is no longer a dependable right; instead, it is routinely restricted, rushed, or sacrificed entirely to operational demands.

Seafarers reported that intense schedules, short port stays, strict immigration barriers, and terminal restrictions make shore leave nearly impossible. As one respondent summarised: "Access to shore leave is impossible since port calls are always hectic."

Shore leave is not a luxury; it is a vital psychological restoration mechanism. It allows seafarers to escape the confined shipboard environment, regain autonomy, access welfare services, and reconnect with society. When shore leave disappears, the vessel transforms from a workplace into a place of confinement.

Compounding this issue is shore leave's "evil twin", fatigue. Relentless work schedules leave no time to step ashore, and the inability to leave the ship deepens the exhaustion of relentless work. This creates a frustrating downward spiral. When conditions are worsened by tighter schedules, constant inspections, or thinning crew numbers, the increased strain saps energy and undermines resilience.

The Q2 score is a stark warning. If seafarers cannot reliably leave their vessels, every other onboard welfare measure must work harder, but nothing can fully replace the psychological value of stepping ashore. Without meaningful systemic changes, the risks to both crew welfare and operational safety remain profound.



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Access to shore leave is impossible since port calls are always hectic."

Wages

6.86 ↓ from 6.91

Real Value, Fairness and the Bargain of Seafaring

Wages recorded 6.86/10 in Q2. This is below the overall average and reflects continuing concern about whether pay adequately compensates seafarers for the demands of their work. Some respondents were positive, describing their salary as good or fair. However, many comments raised concerns about inflation, stagnation and comparison with shore-based employment.

The most powerful comments are not simply about wanting more money. They are about perceived fairness. "Because the same money you can make ashore, but with social security included," wrote one respondent. Another said: "Salary is stuck in year 2000s range. If there's an increase its always below 50\$ which cannot suffice to inflation and the rising cost of everything we buy and need." A further response argued: "I believe we deserve salary raise more than they are giving considering how much inflation made cost of living higher and harder."

These comments reveal the changing psychology of seafaring employment. Pay is being judged not only against historical maritime wages, but against the total life package available ashore. Seafarers are comparing income, security, family time, social protection, risk exposure and future prospects. If the advantage of going to sea narrows, then recruitment and retention become harder.

The Q2 responses suggest that many seafarers still feel pressure from the cost of living and from the perceived imbalance between sacrifice and reward. Wages are therefore not just a contractual issue; they are a signal of respect and value. If seafarers believe their pay no longer reflects the risks, skills and absences involved, dissatisfaction will deepen.



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I believe we deserve salary raise more than they are giving considering how much inflation made cost of living higher and harder."

Food Quality

7.21 ↓ from 7.31

Morale, Budgets, and Supply Vulnerabilities

Food quality stands out as one of the stronger categories in Q2 2026. Positive feedback praising competent cooks and delicious meals underscores that food at sea is far more than mere nutrition; it represents routine, comfort, and care. A good meal after a gruelling watch can instantly lift a crew's spirits, shaping the emotional rhythm of the entire vessel.

However, the score masks significant disparities. Negative comments highlight issues with cheap supplies, unprofessional cooks, and squeezed catering budgets that fail to reflect rising inflation. As one cook noted, unadjusted budgets make it increasingly difficult to meet basic crew requests, leaving seafarers feeling the sting of corporate cost-cutting on daily allowances.

Compounding these budget constraints is a growing anxiety over precarious inventory management. With global shipping vulnerable to sudden rerouting and delays, seafarers report that the traditional buffer of emergency food reserves has worn dangerously thin. The looming fear of running out of provisions during prolonged periods at anchor or unexpected voyage extensions subject crews to intense stress, leaving them acutely aware that a single logistical hurdle could force immediate meal rationing.

Ultimately, food serves as a direct indicator of organisational care. While the category remains relatively strong, it remains a volatile flashpoint; crews quickly notice when safety margins on basic necessities are compromised for the sake of the bottom line.

Health and Exercise

7.14 ↓ from 7.30

Facilities Exist, But Time and Routine Are Missing

Health and Exercise recorded 7.14/10, above the overall average. Many seafarers reported access to gyms or exercise equipment, and some described walking, gym use and upgraded welfare facilities as big positives. This suggests that physical wellbeing has become more visible within onboard welfare provision.

However, the comments also show a recurring gap between having facilities and being able to use them. Seafarers repeatedly described limited time, fatigue, changing schedules, unexpected events and lack of routine. One respondent wrote: "The frequent change of schedule and unexpected events on board, it is very hard to develop a routine doing exercise or going to the gym." Another said: "Because of our workload and limited time and space onboard we can't exercise well." Others stated simply: "No time for gym and exercise."

This distinction is important. A gym is valuable, but it does not solve fatigue. Equipment is helpful, but it does not create time. A welfare room does not restore a seafarer whose rest hours are repeatedly disrupted. Health at sea requires more than facilities; it requires operational planning that protects rest, routine and recovery.

The category is also connected with mental health. Exercise, sleep, food, family contact and shore leave form a linked system of resilience. When one element weakens, the others must carry more load. The Q2 data suggests that many seafarers are trying to remain healthy within schedules that do not always make health easy.

Training and Development

6.97 ↓ from 7.52

Useful When Meaningful, Resented When Not

At **6.97/10**, the training and development category reveals a deep frustration with “compliance theatre.” While seafarers value genuine competency building, mind-numbing training formalities often function as mere box-ticking exercises that drain vital rest hours. Training must build operational capacity, not simply consume it.

A major stressor is the poorly supported rollout of new technology. Companies frequently install unfamiliar systems with expectations of immediate operation, leaving officers to self-teach via dense documentation while maintaining regular duties. This creates a stark disconnect between formal certification and actual confidence. Overwhelming day-one familiarisation, coupled with a culture of silence where seafarers hide uncertainty to avoid looking incompetent, masks dangerous knowledge gaps. As one respondent noted, “We know the procedures, but it feels like crossing fingers when things get complicated.”

Equally alarming is the profound gap between standard ISPS Code compliance and the modern reality of asymmetric warfare. Security training still focuses heavily on port access control and paperwork, leaving crews unequipped for drone swarms, ballistic missiles, or water-borne IEDs. One seafarer summarised the absurdity: “We train to check ID, which seems lame when we are facing missiles and drones.”

Compounding this anxiety is the industry’s reliance on text-heavy circulars. When new risks emerge, shore management often defaults to a hands-off, “read this and get on with it” approach. To prevent crews from feeling psychologically abandoned, the industry must urgently evolve training to incorporate practical survival and defensive protocols, such as blast mitigation and citadel tactics. backed by clear, active support from ashore



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We know the procedures, but it feels like crossing fingers when things get complicated.”

Interactions

7.49 ↓ from 7.93

Crew Cohesion Remains the Strongest Protection

Interactions recorded 7.49/10, the highest Q2 category. This is one of the most encouraging findings in the report. It shows that despite external pressures; seafarers continue to draw strength from one another. Good crews, respectful communication and supportive shipboard cultures remain essential protective factors.

The positive comments are striking. "All crew members are professional, respectful, and dedicated to their work," wrote one respondent. "Everyone performs their duties responsibly and works well together, creating a positive and efficient working environment." Another said: "I'm super happy to be with these people. They make me feel welcome, supported, and appreciated." Others praised friendly crews, camaraderie and open communication.

This matters because the shipboard community is often the first line of welfare support. Before formal systems were accessed, seafarers relied on colleagues, officers, cooks, ratings, engineers, cadets and captains to create the emotional climate of the vessel. When the climate is good, pressure becomes more manageable. When it is poor, every difficulty becomes heavier.

The negative comments remind us that this strength is not universal. Some respondents described bullying, disrespect, nationality-based degradation, toxic senior officers, fighting and lack of trust. These comments show that crew cohesion cannot be assumed. It must be cultivated through leadership, anti-harassment policies, fair treatment, cultural awareness and meaningful accountability.

The high score for Interactions should therefore be celebrated, but also protected. Crew cohesion is not a substitute for proper welfare systems. It is a precious asset that can be damaged by fatigue, poor leadership and excessive workload.



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Everyone performs their duties responsibly and works well together, creating a positive and efficient working environment."

Workload Management

6.20 ↓ from 6.36

The Strain Beneath the Surface

At **6.20/10**, workload management is the second-lowest category in Q2 2026. This is a critical finding, as workload acts as a structural lynchpin that directly dictates a seafarer's access to rest, shore leave, training, and mental resilience.

Feedback from the fleet is uncomfortably direct, with one respondent summarising it as: "Lot of workload, little time of rest." Crews describe a relentless cycle of 6-on/6-off watchkeeping, rapid port turnarounds, heavy paperwork, and constant inspections.

Crucially, the data reveals a profound mistrust in safety guardrails, with respondents openly stating that rest logs are treated as a mere paper exercise. As one seafarer put it: "Rest hours are just for authorities and filing."

This systemic depletion is driven by a dual strain: the physical exhaustion of maintaining aging vessels alongside the cognitive overload of adopting complex new technology. On older ships, routine maintenance multiplies, forcing stretched crews into a "firefighting" approach. This defers critical upkeep into an insurmountable backlog that must be tackled when the ship is alongside, decimating any chance for recovery. One respondent explained, "The Chief and Superintendent want work done... shore leave and downtime cannot compete."

Ultimately, workload is where commercial demands become human pressure. Shorter port calls, expanding compliance, and thinning crew numbers mean that the operational burden has outstripped human capacity. Chronically exhausted crews cannot benefit from better internet or onboard welfare initiatives. This score serves as a stark warning that workload management must be treated as a core safety priority and a matter of basic human sustainability.



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The Chief and Superintendent want work done... shore leave and downtime cannot compete."

Welfare Facilities Ashore

6.56 ↓ from 6.82

Awareness, Access and Trust

At 6.56, Welfare Facilities Ashore is the third lowest score in Q2. This reflects a combination of limited shore leave, uneven awareness of available facilities, restricted port access and, in some cases, disappointment with welfare support.

Some respondents were positive, describing accommodating shore facilities and personnel who made crews feel welcome. But others were unaware of facilities or doubtful about their usefulness. One respondent wrote: "I am not aware of many facilities that are there for seafarers."

This category should be read alongside the external evidence on declining shore access. If seafarers are spending less time ashore, if port calls are shorter, and if centre visits have declined, then welfare facilities can only help if they are visible, reachable and trusted. The issue is not simply whether facilities exist. It is whether seafarers can access them in the narrow windows available.

The industry should therefore think about port welfare as a last-mile problem. Information must reach the vessel. Transport must be realistic. Permissions must be practical. Digital contact with welfare organisations need to complement physical centres. Port welfare is adapting to the fact that many seafarers now have little time, limited movement and significant fatigue.

Q2 2026 Demographics

Satisfaction diverges across key demographics, highlighting critical pressure points for retention and welfare.

Key Takeaways

- **The Gender Gap:** While male seafarers (84.1% of respondents) report a stable happiness score of 7.13, female satisfaction (12.1% of respondents) lags drastically at 6.06, signalling urgent needs for safer, more inclusive onboard cultures.
- **Vessel Pressure Points:** Specialised sectors like Dredgers and Survey Vessels lead morale (7.53), while mainstream Tankers (6.97) and Bulk Carriers (7.31) remain steady. However, Container Ships (18% of the fleet) score a low 5.85.

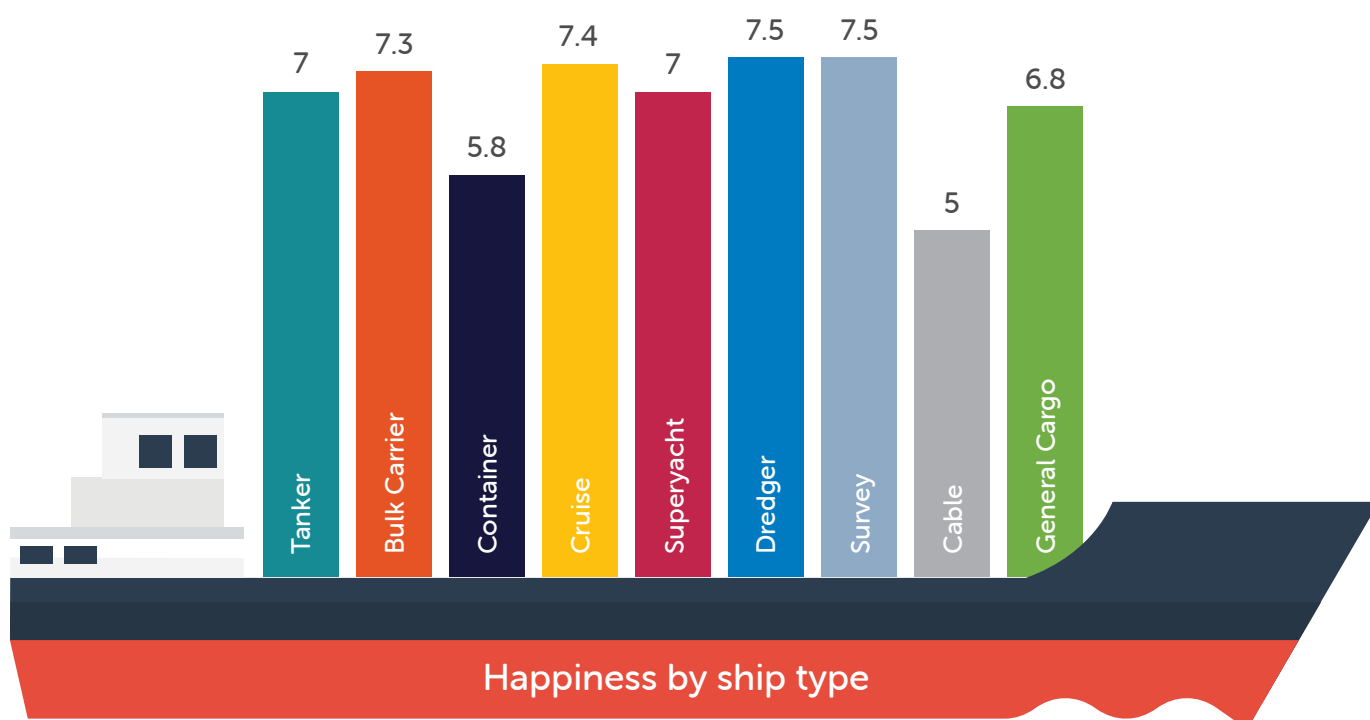
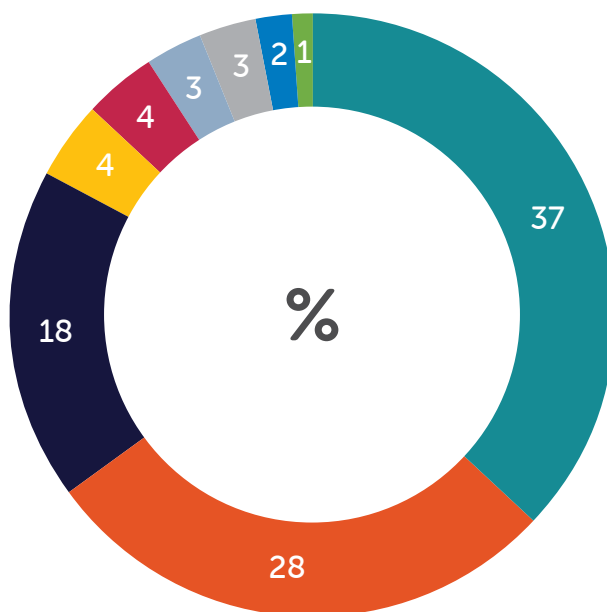
Perhaps surprisingly Cable Ships bottom out at 5.05, maybe driven by intense operational demands given issues around cable security and the demands of repair schedules.

- **The Mid-Career Slump:** Happiness follows a U-shaped curve. The youngest (16–25) and oldest (55–65) cohorts are the happiest (7.24 and 7.66). Meanwhile, mid-career professionals aged 35–55 (38.6% of the workforce) report the lowest morale, squeezed by heavy onboard duties and family responsibilities ashore.

- **Regional Disparities:** South East Asia dominates the workforce (53.3%) with a healthy 7.28 score. In contrast, Eastern Europe (6.05) and the Middle East (4.94) show severe satisfaction deficits, likely tied to regional and geopolitical stressors.
- **The Burden of Command:** Technical, electrical, and catering departments enjoy high job satisfaction (ranging from 8.09 to 8.65). Conversely, Captains (6.08) and Chief Engineers (6.31) score remarkably low, reflecting the crushing administrative and regulatory burdens placed on senior leadership.
- **Contract Durations:** Around the 3–6 month onboard appears to be a “sweet spot” for morale (8.01). Happiness drops significantly during early time periods onboard (1–3 months at 6.59), perhaps as seafarers adjust, and then decays predictably on long-term deployments over 12 months (6.48).

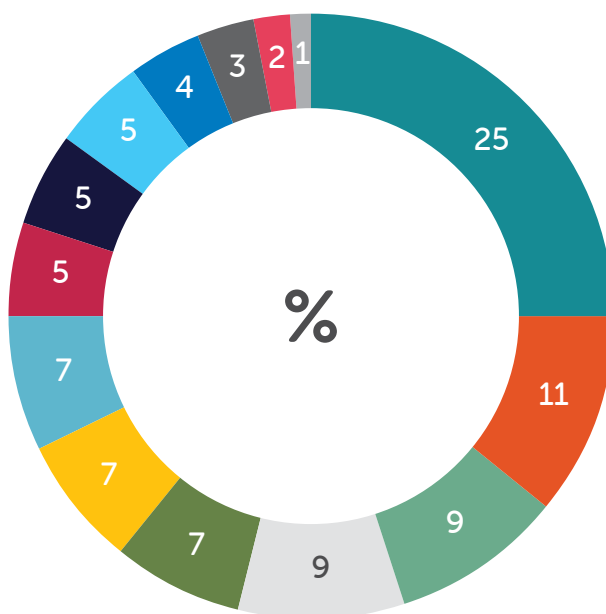
Ship Type

- Tanker
- Bulk Carrier
- Container
- Cruise
- Superyacht
- Dredger
- Survey
- Cable
- General Cargo



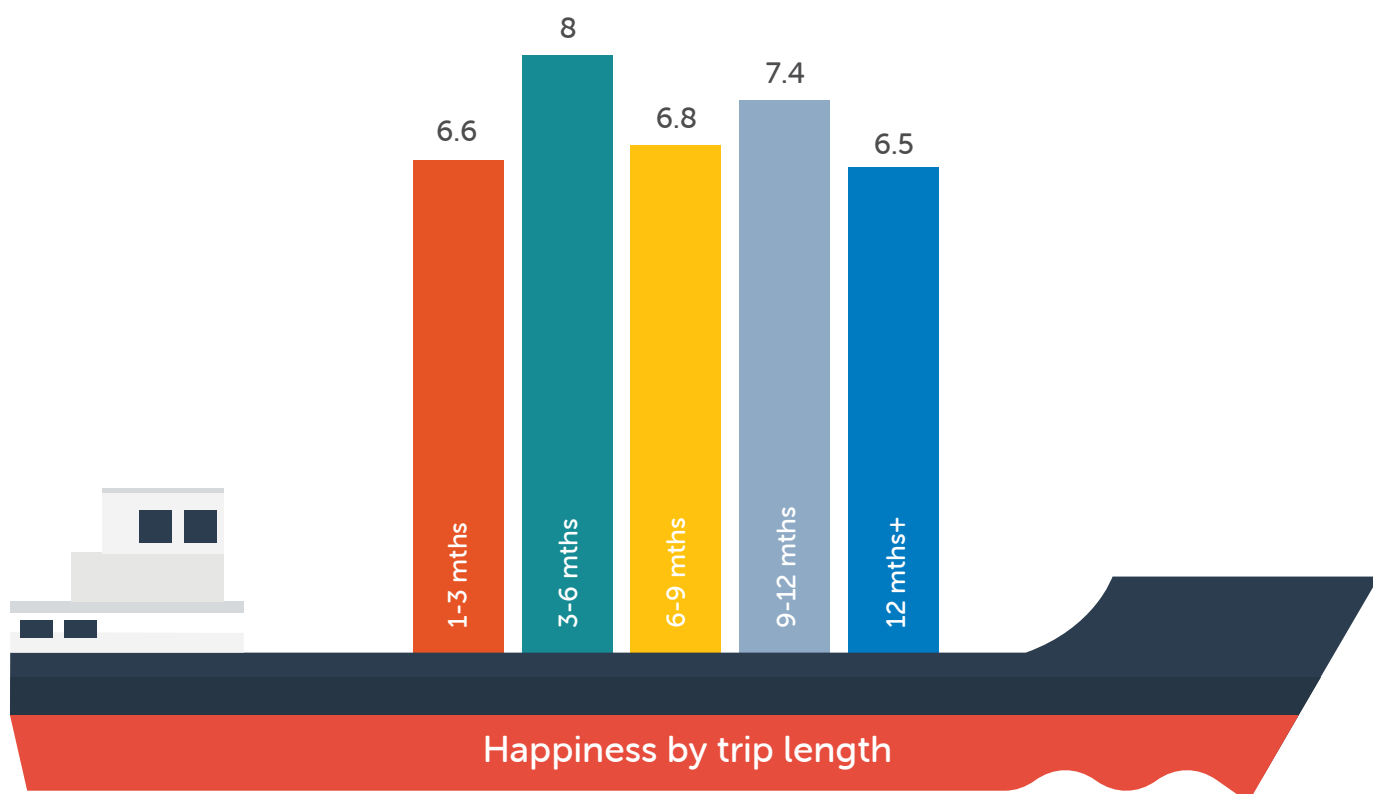
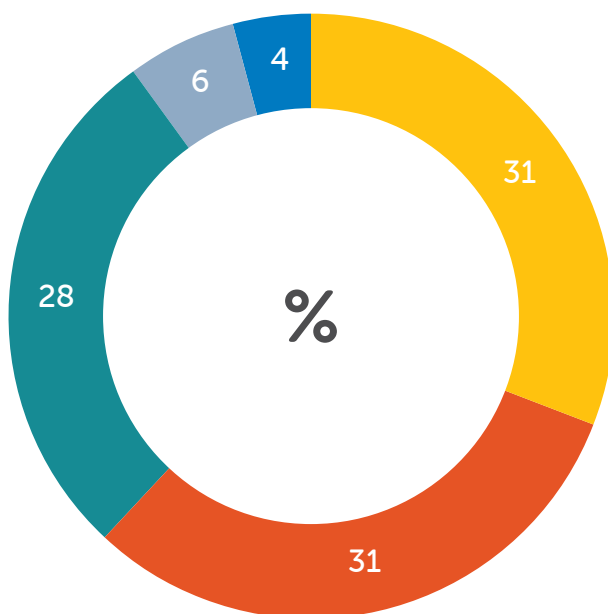
Rank

- 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



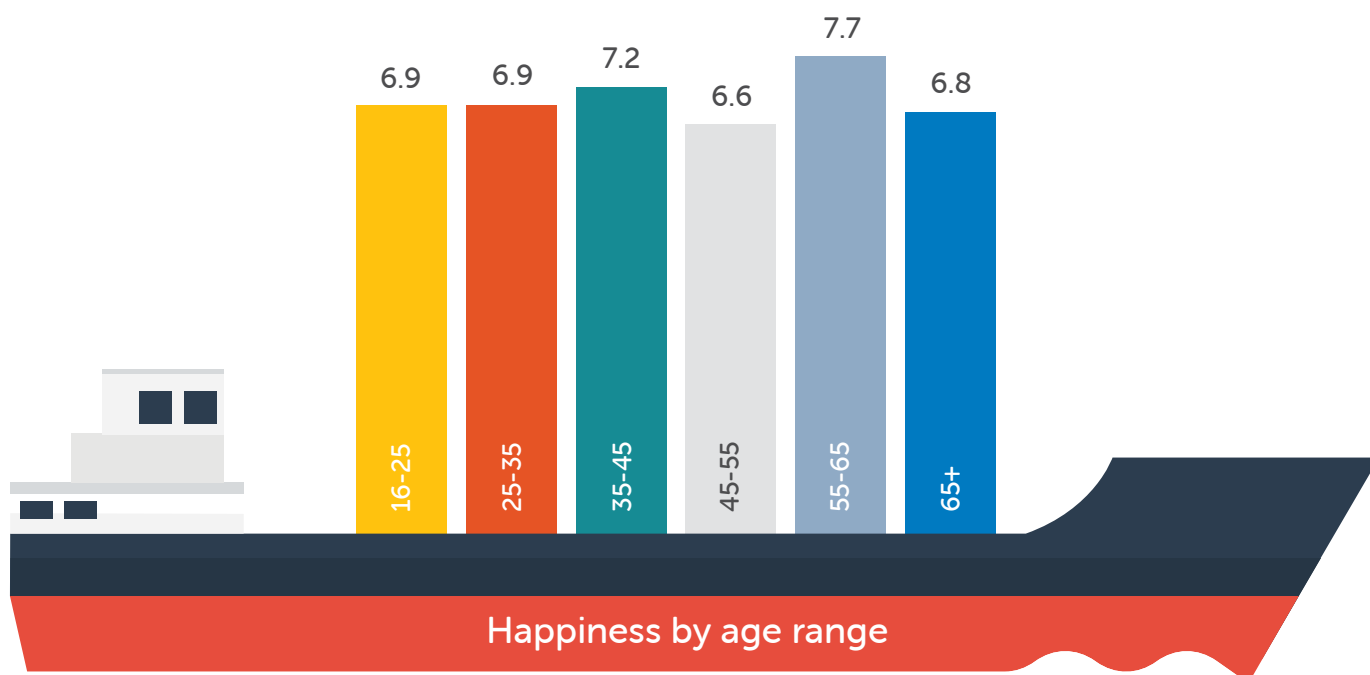
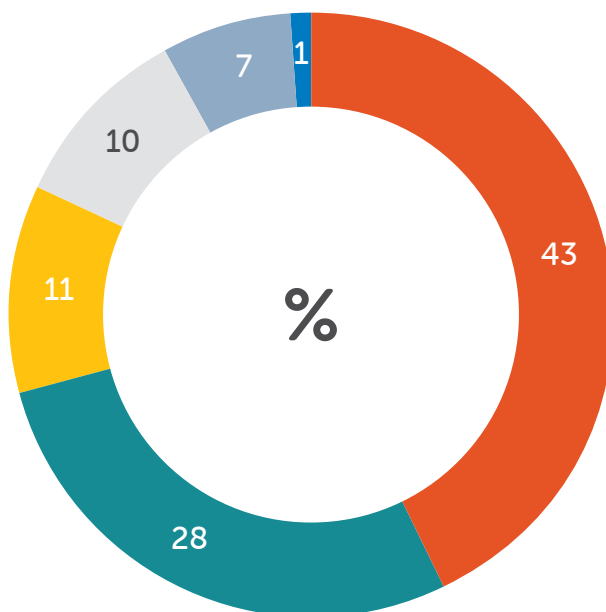
Trip Length

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



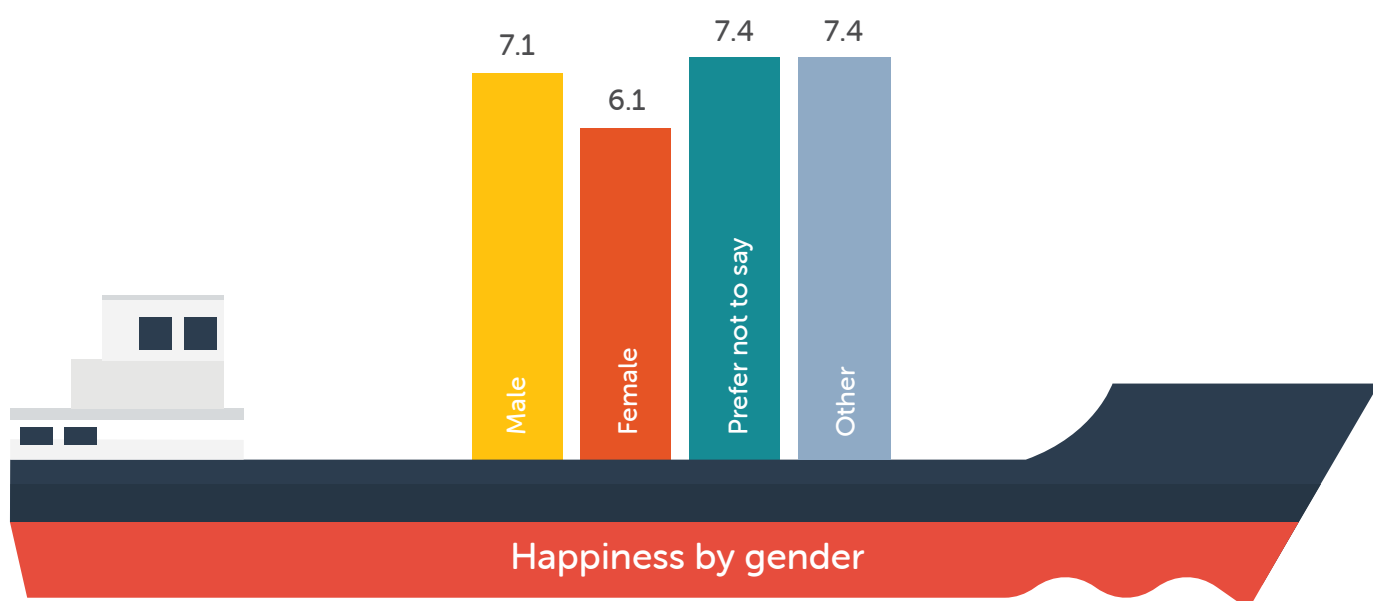
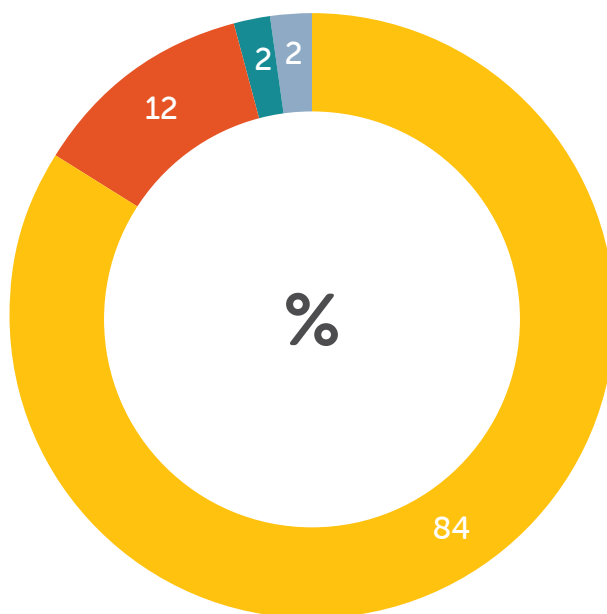
Age Range

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



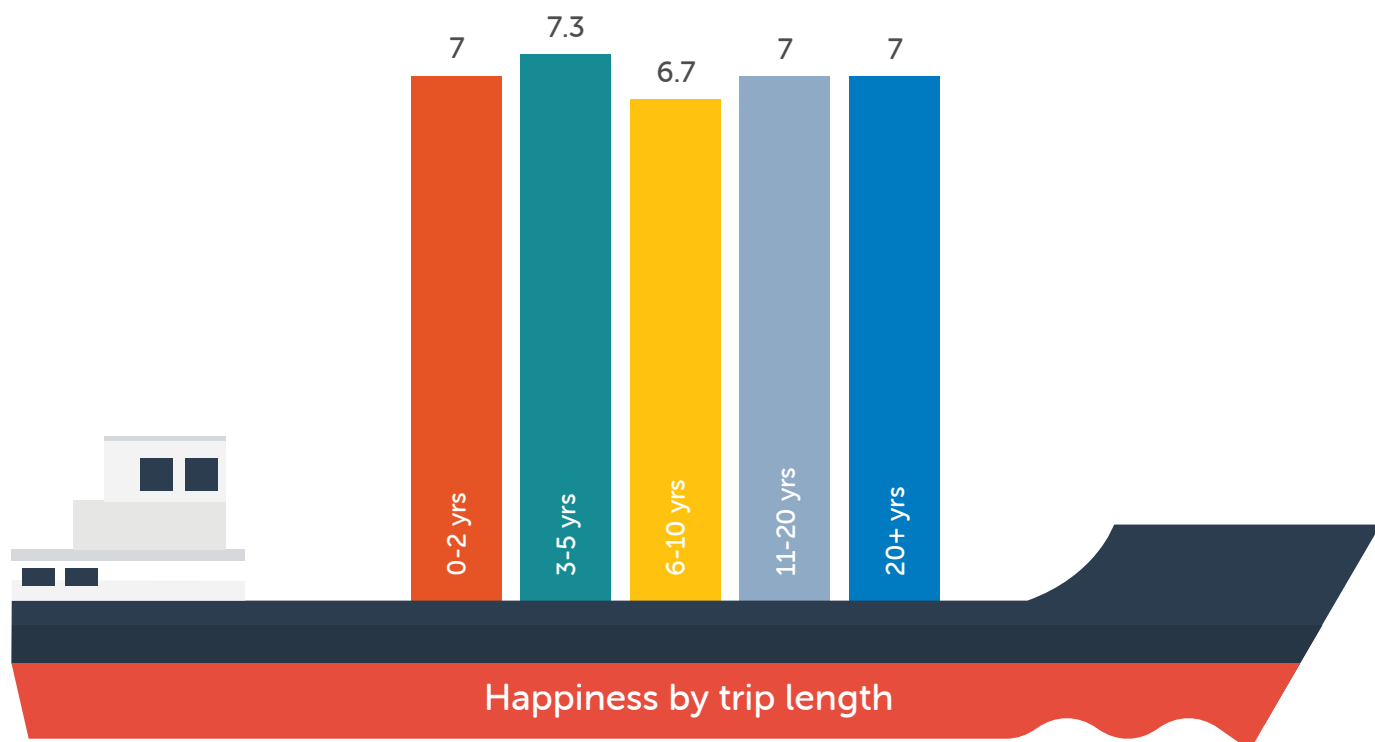
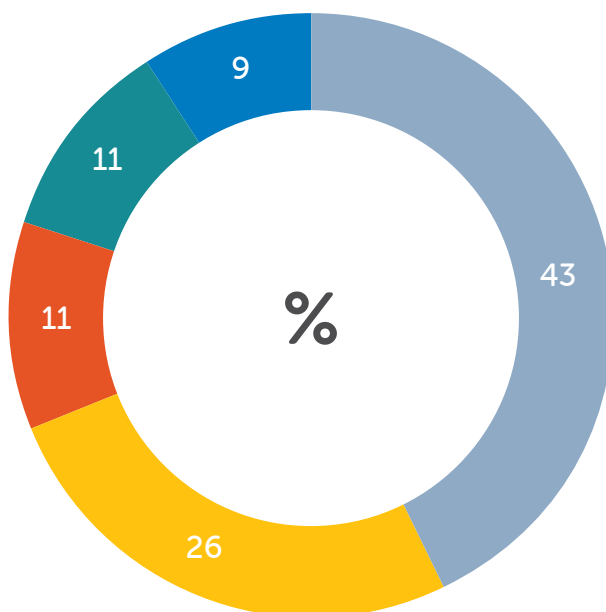
Gender

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say
- Other



Age of Vessel

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



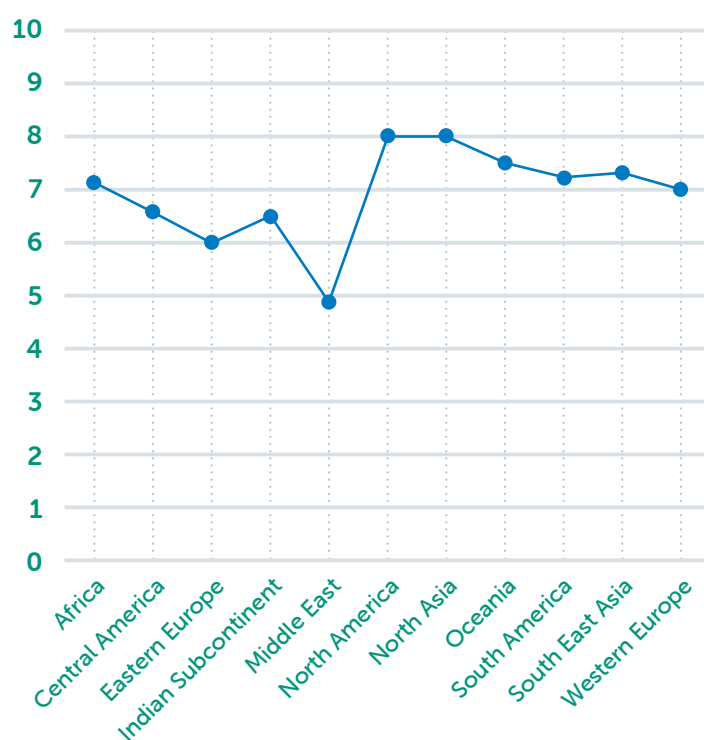
Where

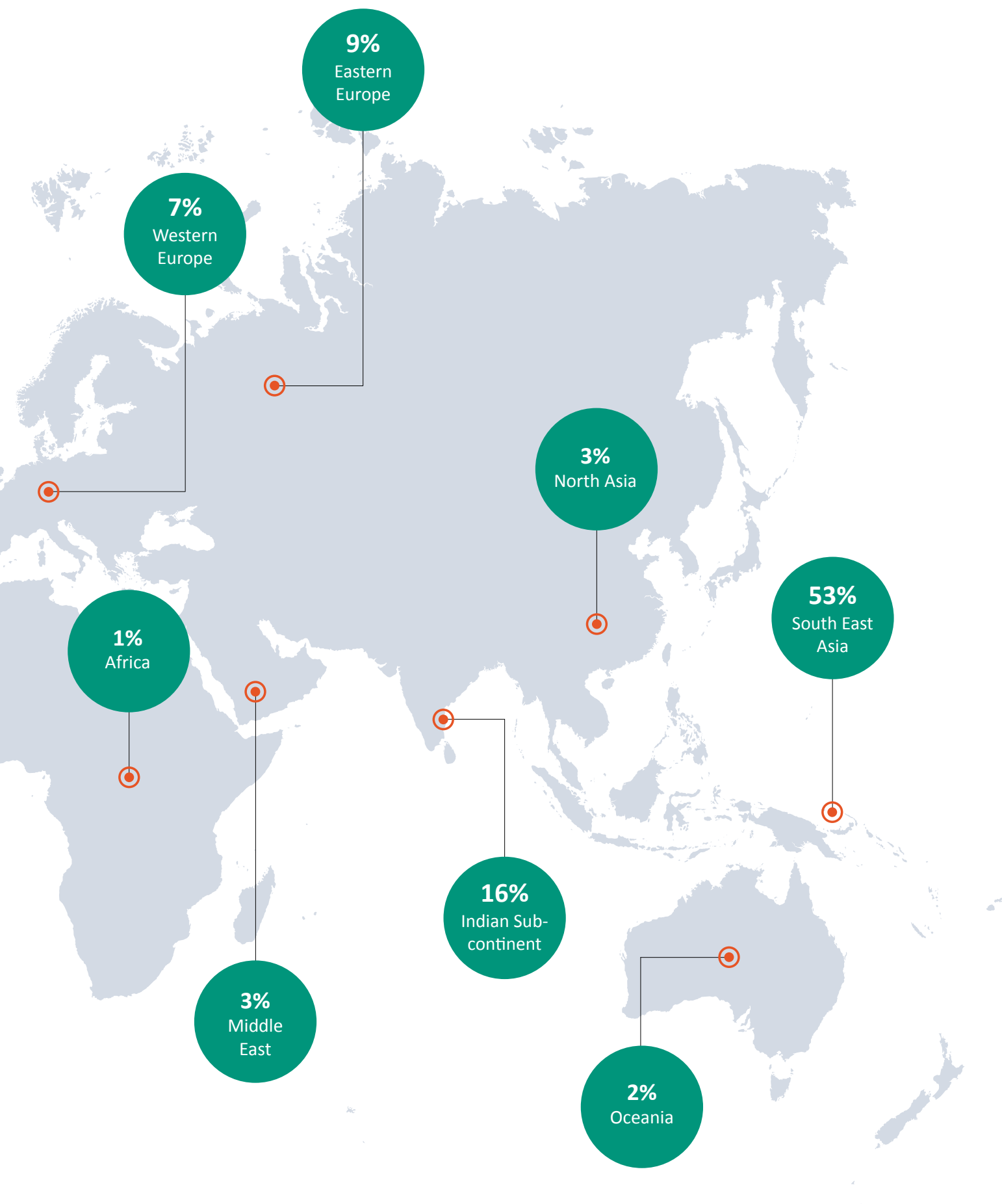
1%
North
America

1%
Central
America

4%
South
America

Regions and happiness





Conclusion

The Q2 2026 results confront the maritime industry with a profound moral and operational crisis: the dangerous chasm between regulatory compliance and human reality. A vessel can be technically compliant, legally staffed, and fully certified, yet remain an environment of profound isolation and emotional exhaustion. When extreme workloads, chronic fatigue, and detached leadership define the daily experience, compliance becomes a hollow metric.

The seafaring spirit remains remarkably resilient, but the industry must not mistake endurance for well-being. Today's crew members are deeply proud of their profession, but this quarter highlights a troubling shift: the normalisation of disruption.

While acute crises trigger immediate industry reactions, normalised disruption quietly embeds hardship into the ordinary conditions of life at sea. Beyond the immediate dangers of active conflict zones like the Red Sea, Black Sea, and Strait of Hormuz—where crews face dwindling supplies, unpaid wages, and direct physical threats—the consequences ripple across the entire global fleet. Rerouting, prolonged delays, heightened inspections, and mounting fatigue are no longer treated as exceptions; they have become the baseline.

In the Q2 feedback, this pressure manifests as a quiet, reluctant sense of resignation. Seafarers are actively re-evaluating the fundamental value proposition of their careers, weighing perceptions of stagnant financial rewards against compounding risks and indefinite family separations. When crew members report that companies place “business first before people” or that rest logs are treated as a mere paper exercise, written “just for authorities and filing”, it signals a critical breakdown in trust.

This erosion of trust is not merely a welfare failure; it is a direct threat to operational safety and retention. Young crew, in particular, are leaving the industry, finding no remaining advantages at sea when compared to a shore job. It is a fundamental question of total value, security, and dignity.

The Fractured Onboard Reality: Technology, Food, and Fatigue

The divide between a thriving ship and a declining one ultimately rests on tangible company choices. Where positive pockets of strong crew cohesion and high morale exist, they are being undermined by operational cost-cutting and poorly managed rollouts of new technology:

- **The Digital Double-Edged Sword:** High-capacity, unlimited internet is no longer a luxury; it is a fundamental right linked to dignity. Minimal data limits (1 or 2 GB allowances) and sluggish speeds are major sources of frustration. Furthermore, instant connectivity has introduced intense emotional labour, as seafarers must manage family anxieties regarding global news in real-time. The sudden communication blackouts required for operational security in high-risk zones only amplify panic ashore.
- **The Shore Leave Deficit:** Shore leave is no longer a dependable right; it is routinely sacrificed to compressed schedules and thinning crew numbers. Its “evil twin,” fatigue, ensures that even when stepping ashore is permitted, relentless work schedules leave no energy to do so. Onboard facilities like gyms and welfare rooms are helpful, but they do not create time or restore a crew member whose rest hours are repeatedly disrupted.
- **Eroding Standards in Catering and Safety:** Squeezed catering budgets fail to reflect inflation, leaving cooks unable to meet basic requests and forcing crews to feel the sting of corporate cost-cutting on their plates. Compounding this is a precarious inventory management crisis, where emergency food reserves have worn dangerously thin due to sudden rerouting.

- **The Box-Ticking Burden:** Training formalities frequently function as mind-numbing, box-ticking exercises that drain vital rest hours rather than building competence. Crews are left to self-teach complex new technology via dense documentation while maintaining regular duties. Most alarmingly, a profound gap exists between standard ISPS Code compliance and the modern reality of asymmetric warfare. Training to check IDs feels absurdly obsolete to crews facing drone swarms, ballistic missiles, and water-borne IEDs.

A Call to Action: Choosing to Value People

The comparatively high scores for onboard interactions prove that seafarers continue to draw immense strength from one another, acting as each other's first line of welfare support. However, crew cohesion is a precious asset that cannot substitute for structural corporate responsibility.

If seafarers are spending less time ashore, if port calls are shorter, and if access to shore-based welfare infrastructure is restricted by narrow operational windows, then the burden of care shifts entirely to the company.

The industry must urgently implement structured, shore-based support systems, such as centralized family liaison channels to proactively reassure next-of-kin during volatile transits. More broadly, leadership must address workload as the structural lynchpin dictating rest, safety, and retention. The industry cannot extract performance indefinitely without investing in the people who deliver it. The choice between a thriving global fleet and a collapsing workforce rests entirely on whether companies choose to value their people above the paperwork.

Collaborating for Impact: The SHI and Idwal Partnership

Crew Welfare in Context: Insights from Idwal

Idwal is a global provider of independent vessel inspections, condition data and inspection intelligence, with surveyors attending 15 vessels every day, everywhere around the world.

The relationship between the physical condition of a vessel and the experience of those living and working on board is complex; however, higher operational standards and seafarer wellbeing should not be viewed in isolation.

By considering the qualitative findings of the Seafarers Happiness Index (SHI) alongside insights from Idwal's physical onboard inspections, we can begin to explore how seafarer welfare and vessel condition may intersect.

To explore this relationship more fully, the industry needs to consider the lived experience of seafarers alongside observations of physical onboard conditions. Greater transparency and a broader range of insights can help support genuine operational and social progress across the global fleet.

Bringing Together Complementary Perspectives

By finding ways to cross-reference subjective crew feedback with objective physical ship condition scores, the industry has a unique opportunity to eliminate welfare blind spots. For too long, seafarer voices have been the missing component when reviewing design, condition, and operational efficiency.

An aligned approach aims to address that barrier, offering a more transparent, unvarnished view of how the shipboard environment influences crew wellbeing, crew retention and operational safety.

Informing Capital and Operational Interventions

Companies can look to these distinct layers of insight to develop a broader understanding of the factors affecting life and work at sea. Whether exploring the challenges faced by older vessels or identifying specific ship types experiencing infrastructure deficits, this approach allows social impact investments to become more precise, measurable, and effective.

The value of vessel data is often demonstrated through better-informed decisions and the prevention of avoidable incidents, including port State control detentions, unplanned downtime and off-hire days. Considering human experience alongside technical realities can help operators take a more rounded approach to risk, vessel condition and crew welfare.

Encouraging Social Excellence

Operators that actively work to improve onboard environments and address social compliance are likely to strengthen their ability to recruit and retain skilled seafarers. Over time, better conditions for crews can also support safer, more resilient and more effective vessel operations.

Through this collaboration, the SHI and Idwal will continue to explore how their respective insights can contribute to a fuller understanding of seafarer welfare and the physical environments in which crews live and work.

These are distinct sources of insight and are not intended to provide a direct vessel-by-vessel comparison. Considered alongside one another, however, they can help place seafarers' experiences within a broader understanding of the environments in which they live and work.

Look out for Idwal insights on crew conditions in upcoming editions of the SHI Report!

www.idwalmarine.com

Bridging Ship and Shore: Introducing the Shorebased Happiness Index

The maritime industry does not operate in a vacuum; it is a single, deeply interconnected ecosystem composed of those at sea and those on shore. For over a decade, the Seafarers Happiness Index (SHI) has served as the industry's trusted barometer for crew welfare. However, to truly understand the operational realities of global trade and humanise maritime leadership, we must examine the full picture.

To achieve this, The Mission to Seafarers has officially launched the Shorebased Happiness Index (ShoreHI). Running parallel to the traditional crew survey, this new initiative is now live and actively gathering data.

Why We Need Across-the-Board Participation

To build a truly comprehensive view of the maritime world of work, we need shorebased professionals across every single sector to participate. We are calling for input from all connected shore roles, including:

- Ship ownership, management, and technical crewing
- Port and terminal operations, logistics, and supply chain management
- Maritime law, marine insurance (including P&I Clubs), and ship broking
- Classification societies, flag State administrations, and regulatory bodies
- Maritime technology, finance, and specialised corporate functions
- Training centres and universities

We also aim to capture the views of former seafarers who are now working ashore. Understanding their transition and current wellbeing is vital to unlocking insights into industry retention and the transfer of operational expertise from ship to shore.

Contextualising the Industry and Building Empathy

The primary objective of the ShoreHI is to actively amplify the links across the industry. By utilising a parallel 10-question framework that mirrors the SHI, the index tracks core pillars like workload, technology, environment, and work-life balance. This shared structure allows the industry to:

- **Signpost What is Right and Wrong:** Data will pinpoint exactly where shore staff are thriving and where systemic bottlenecks or frustrations are occurring.

- **Establish a Common Language of Welfare:** When both ship and shore reflect on their workplace satisfaction using a synchronised metrics system, breaking down traditional silos.
- **Foster Reciprocal Empathy:** Shore staff who evaluate their own workplace challenges naturally develop a deeper, more authentic capacity to understand the parallel, isolated struggles faced by crews at sea. This empathy directly influences more supportive crewing, procurement, and operational decisions.

One index measures seafarer happiness. Two indices transform an industry. By understanding both sides of the maritime equation, we eliminate the "us versus them" dynamic and build a safer, more unified global maritime culture.

We invite all shore-based colleagues to take part in this quarterly anonymous survey to help paint the full, true picture of our industry. Have your say today: shorebasedhappinessindex.org

THANK YOU

Thank you to every seafarer who took the time to share their experiences, scores and comments for Q2 2026. Your voices remain the heart of the Seafarers Happiness Index.

Thank you also to the organisations, welfare bodies, charities, companies, unions, researchers and industry partners who continue to support seafarers and work to improve life at sea. The value of this report lies not only in measuring happiness, but in helping the industry understand what can, should and must change. Learning from things which are going well and guarding against those which are not.

Report by Steven Jones

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