



The  
Seafarers  
Happiness  
Index

# Seafarers Happiness Index

Quarter 2 2021



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# Seafarers Happiness Index Quarter 2

The Seafarers Happiness Index (SHI) is the shipping industry's ongoing barometer of the key issues facing those at sea today. Seafarers are asked 10 key questions every quarter, sharing their views about specific issues affecting their life and work.

The second quarter of 2021 once more saw data generated against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, and with severe global and maritime industry issues again being brought to the fore.

We heard from crews all over the world, and we are grateful to every single one of them, not simply for assisting us with the survey, but for their efforts in keeping trade flowing in these most difficult circumstances. They do so with professionalism, care and resolve. However, we must also stress the frustration evidenced by many responses, and the growing demand for seafarers to be recognised as key or essential workers. These calls cannot and should not be ignored.

## Executive Summary

The average score across the 10 questions revealed happiness levels of seafarers for the second quarter of 2021 at 5.99/10, a steep and concerning drop from 6.46 in Quarter 1.

The data fell in every category, and there were clear indications that the ongoing issues relating to crew travel, uncertainty over leave, and an almost complete and universal ban on shore leave are taking a negative toll on seafarers.

Even areas that usually hold up well, such as social interaction on board, were struggling, and the responses received painted a picture of stress, fatigue and frustration. Indeed, there was a growing sense of weariness with the problems at sea, compounded by perceptions that ships are working harder than ever to deliver on the demands of trade. Seafarers spoke of feeling constant stress and pressure.

In addition, there appeared to be a growing sentiment that work demands are constantly rising, but without any benefits for crews. There was also feedback that management systems are no longer fit for purpose, as far as those who use them are concerned.

There was a negative tone to the responses and a sense that the basic essence of seafaring as a profession and vocation feels broken. One respondent reflected the general mood, stating, "We have broken sleep, broken systems, and people feeling broken too".

With such outpourings, it is perhaps hard to see the positives. However, there were comments from a number of seafarers who reported loving their jobs and feeling deeply proud of their work.

The impact of COVID-19 on workloads is still being felt, and seafarers are continuing to wrestle with hygiene demands and requirements. We also heard that the issues and demands of administrative work are once more rising, and there were many frustrations evident.

Some said that the demands of paperwork are even jeopardising the safety of vessels, as so much time is spent on administrative tasks. Others felt that their working days are inexorably being stretched, not just in time, but in what they are demanded to deliver.

Initially, it was felt that a lack of visits to vessels by shore staff was a positive, but this time around there were complaints that office staff are simply demanding information, and there are far too many emails from shore to ship. As one respondent stated, "The office, they want to know everything but they already have the information. So, we get asked many times for the same things. It is like a nightmare".



Seafarers raised concerns about the checks on working hours – port and flag states were criticised for not checking properly, while inspectors were accused of checking crew records, but not cross-referencing with ship logs.

There were also comments relating to physical issues on board, not just the impact of fatigue, but the long-term implications of physical needs. This was something which was explained in detail in some responses.

The written comments revealed signs of tension and frustration. Whether it be wages, food or health, the ravages of extended time being spent on board are taking their toll. There is boredom and irritation about many aspects of life at sea, which came across very clearly from the seafarers who shared their thoughts.

In previous Seafarers Happiness Index reports, it was possible to see a rising tide of optimism as crews thought that either the pandemic was receding, or that vaccinations would lift the pall of the crew change crisis. Sadly, the latest results reveal a growing negativity across all aspects of life on board. There is now pessimism where once there was hope, and unless some key fundamentals are addressed and sorted, it is hard to see how the mood can be lifted.

Seafarers want reassurance about freedom of movement. From the responses we received there was a strong sense that if people know when they are going home, then they can cope with most things thrown at them. If they do not know, if there is doubt, fear and uncertainty, then everything becomes a problem. The falling data is a sad reflection of this.

Seafarer  
Happiness

**5.99/10**  
in Q2 2021

↓ from

**6.46**

## How happy generally when at sea?

6.40 ↓ from 6.50

The level of general happiness of seafarers took a steep fall in Q2 2021, as was also evidenced in the overall happiness levels across all the questions. Given the challenges facing crews, this is perhaps not a surprise.

The comments received from seafarers for this question seemed to reflect a growing feeling of weariness and the sense that while on the one hand, life is very far from normal, with no shore leave and concerns about travel and crew changes, the pressures on shipping seem to be ramping up.

One seafarer stated, "It would be bad enough to be working for longer, but we seem to be working harder too". With the global supply chain stretched, there was a sense that seafarers are under pressure to constantly deliver.

We heard multiple reports from seafarers who feel that the way work is managed on board is simply no longer fit for purpose. "Our management systems do not seem to have evolved in years, but we have changed onboard", said one. There seems to be a growing resentment towards constantly rising demands that do not come with any benefits for crews.

As one stated, "The word to use is 'broken'. We have broken sleep, broken systems, and people feeling broken too". Another added, "Who can be happy with high stress, overtime, constant papers and regulations?".

It was also felt that the profession is increasingly difficult for new seafarers. "This is not a profession for freshers", ran one response. Indeed, we heard from cadets who were struggling to adapt. The fact that there is no shore leave seems to make it harder to feel a sense of pride or accomplishment in "seeing the world".

There were a host of negative sentiments, such as, "I feel like I'll go crazy, we are berthing in so many ports but there is no shore leave", and one seafarer answered every single question with the same line, "We are in a jail, it's mentally so hard".

With such outpourings, it is perhaps hard to see the positives. However, we heard from a number of seafarers who love their job and who are deeply proud of their profession and career. As we often hear from crew, much of this is based on the sense of being a provider for their family. This sentiment has been even more apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic. As one seafarer summed up, "The wages I send home keep my family alive, so I have to be happy with that".

In our latest interactions with crew, there appeared to be more focus on mental health and wellbeing, and a number shared their insights into the ways and means of coping with the unique demands of life at sea. There was advice on staying strong. It was felt that seafarers have to have a "strong belief in yourself, be ready to face various challenges of the job".

Meanwhile, another had an interesting view on the perception of 'time'. Their philosophical take was that "Being at sea is not just about making a living, but a whole different way of living. You sense time in a unique way and have to let it pass without thinking".



**The word to use is 'broken'. We have broken sleep, broken systems, and people feeling broken too.**

# How happy with your workload?

6.00 ↓ from 6.39

Over the past year, we have heard much from seafarers about the impact of COVID-19 on their workloads. While there are still those wrestling with hygiene demands and requirements, it seems that as ever seafarers have stoically sucked up the pressures and are getting on with their jobs. However, the issues and demands of administrative work appear to be rising once more, and there were many frustrations evident. This perhaps explains the fairly steep drop in happiness for this question.

As one respondent stated, "Being a seafarer now is not about navigation and cargo operation, it is about papers. Safety of the vessel is jeopardised with such workload which we are not designed to do".

Another commented, "The company I am working with the working hours before COVID were 8-9 hours, but now in this situation, we are stretching around 11-12 hours". Many feel similar levels of confusion about why they are having to work longer and harder, but without any real explanation or sense of process or plan.

With many vessels reportedly no longer receiving visitors from the office, or certainly far less than they did, multiple respondents said that they are now getting bombarded with demands for information from the vessel. "Success used to be getting the job done, staying safe – now it seems that is not enough". The respondent added, "There is so much paperwork, so many people asking for so much. I feel this is worse now with emails in COVID times. It is easy to press a button and think a seafarer will jump to respond".

There was previously a sense that office management and executives ashore were trying to back away from putting too much pressure on ships, but now their demands for paperwork and data are causing major problems at sea.

One respondent stated, "The office, they want to know everything but they already have the information. So, we get asked many times for the same things. It is like a nightmare, and sometimes all you can do is smile and roll your eyes. Every day, same stupid emails".

Another added, "My job has changed so much in such a short time - even a few years ago as a junior officer, it was about hard work, but also visiting other countries, getting to see new cultures and ways of life. There was reward in the mix. Now, nothing. Just relentless demands. Things have to change!"

Where seafarers have pushed back, then there is concern that they are being replaced by new crews. "Not enough crew and now shipping companies are getting rid of crew members from Ireland/UK employing cheap labour crews working 6/9 months contracts with no leave pay and no days off. How can this be?". There was a sense of frustration and some confusion as to how the industry is being allowed to "get away with it".

There was also a sense of the role of Flag States, and of a need for them to drive positive change. One response read, "The overload and shortage of crew is for the maritime authority to stop, but they have no real solution. The inspections are poor and while they check hours control papers issued by "crew" they never cross-reference with the deck or engine daily logbook. So how can they know?"



**Success used to be getting the job done, staying safe - now it seems that is not enough.**

## How happy about the training you receive?

6.10 ↓ from 6.76

Training is an issue that has often divided those who respond to the Seafarers Happiness Index. Often the schism falls on generational divides, with younger seafarers enjoying the benefits of online or distance learning, while more senior crew miss the interactions with lecturers in a physical setting.

In this latest quarter, there seemed to be situations in which everyone was dissatisfied – the pressures of work are impacting ability or willingness to train, or even to be trained.

A steep drop in happiness levels was seen this time around, and the responses revealed uncertainty. Some felt unsure about when they would be trained and how. There was some confusion about revalidation as they were not going to be home in time to sort out administration demands. There was also a sense that the passion had gone from learning, as so many are just pressing on with the day-to-day pressures, with little or no time to think about their own improvement or that of others.

One master expressed frustration: “My officers are not teaching nor sharing their knowledge about working onboard, and I have to force them to interact”. There appears to be a sense of limbo about the situation. If experienced seafarers are not passing on knowledge, and if newcomers are not taking advantage of the expertise, then we reach something of an impasse.

There were also those who expressed frustration about differing standards of training and education: “My training is the best in the world however it is pointless as others get their tickets from lesser colleges and at a fraction of the cost. How can this be overcome?”

Meanwhile others felt that many courses were needless or unwarranted, and that there is a creeping growth in the list of things they need to be trained in, many of which they feel are “unnecessary”.



**My officers are not teaching nor sharing their knowledge about working onboard, and I have to force them to interact.**

# How happy about interaction with other crew on board?

6.80 ↓ from 7.24

When it came to onboard relationships, happiness levels continued to fall. This is a major concern, as the breakdown of relationships in what have always been relatively tight-knit shipboard communities will further erode other aspects of life at sea.

To see this drop in the data, and to read the reports from seafarers, it is clear that there are real problems and growing tensions at the heart of life and work on board.

Some tensions appear to revolve around the issue of multi-national crews – especially where there are seemingly differences in the culture surrounding issues such as safety. One commented, “Some deck crew do not think safety is for them, and we have to work harder to make up for them”. Another added, “Crew interaction died then shipping companies got into the race to the bottom with salaries. Plucking personnel if they are cheap. Begrudgingly employing higher standard crews when they don’t want something to blow up”.

There are also difficulties around language. “Getting more difficult with new crew with varying levels of English”, ran one response. The perennial issue of people withdrawing to their cabins was also raised by many respondents: “Everyone is confined to their cabins in the age on laptops”. There were also comments about facilities on board, and the issue of socialising.

As we have heard before, the design of vessels, equipment and furnishings are often not conducive to bringing people together. Rooms with sofas around the sides, but nothing to encourage people in are not fixing problems.

We also received very interesting responses from seafarers who have spent an extended time on board, unable to get ashore for rest and recreation. One message ran, “Tensions onboard are bad, I think we all miss intimacy with humans ashore”. This response was accompanied by some detailed explanations of what such “intimacy” would ideally consist of.

A 2001 research study by Georgia State University found that people who are involuntarily celibate are frequently afflicted with feelings of anger, frustration, self-doubt and even depression – all invariably linked to living without the physical intimacy they are seemingly craving. There has been much focus ashore during the pandemic on the effect of people not being able to hug and have physical contact with one another, and the problems also apply at sea. It would seem that we ignore this important, if uncomfortable, issue at our peril.

The pressures on those who have been kept in isolation, and away from what many would consider as human expectations, if not rights, are beginning to be acutely felt. At the core of this issue is the growing frustration about getting home and of acceptable, expected and predictable length of trips. With uncertainty, there comes stress, and this is felt through the entire crew on a vessel.

Sadly, the divisions are also being felt concerning COVID. “My country is doing well, and we have low transmissions, but I am treated badly because of crew on board from places with crazy high infections”, said one seafarer who felt that nationality was an aspect of the negative treatment they were experiencing in port.



**Tensions onboard are bad. I think we all miss intimacy with humans ashore.**

## How happy about access to shore leave?

4.90 ↓ from 5.25

This is the first time that the average happiness score for a question has dropped under 5 on the Index. This should be of the utmost concern – and seafarers used this question to comment not just on getting ashore, but on getting back home too. As such, it is not surprising that the data was so low.

For the past 18 months, the same barriers have existed and seafarers have been very unlikely to be allowed to get off the ship and relax away from the rigours of work. Shore leave has been a trying issue for many years, but finally, it seems COVID is the proverbial nail that is consigning the concept to history.

As one irate seafarer said, “Stop asking about shore leave, there is none. We are never allowed to leave the ship, and it is not possible to get away for even a couple of hours”.

Time and time again seafarers said they had been on board for three, five, eight, nine months, and in all that time they had never been away from the ship. That is very difficult to take, and perhaps those who work ashore or who have not been to sea, gloss over the impact it can have.

It means never having a break, never escaping the hum and noise of the ship, the small but constant vibrations, the smell of paint, food, fuel, the same voices, the same bulkheads, to never feel a sense of the normality of being on land, for months on end. It is really not surprising that we are seeing a mental health crisis unfolding at sea.

The issue of grabbing some time ashore to recuperate is one matter, the crew change crisis is another altogether. Over the past year, we have been surprised that the Happiness Index data held remarkably high. Now it seems, finally, we are reaching something of a tipping point, and a very negative one indeed.

The numbers are now beginning to tumble as seafarers lose faith and hope. The first and second COVID waves impacted hard, but after these passed there was a sense of some optimism that surely things cannot be that bad again.

For all the positive talk across the industry, the declarations, charters and determined speak, seafarers are not seeing words translated into actions. “Why is no one helping us get home?”, said one seafarer, adding, “I have been onboard for 1 year, and now I am told that it will be longer still until I can be relieved. What is going on and how can we fix this?”



**We are never allowed to leave the ship, and it is not possible to get away for even a couple of hours.**

## How happy about wages/salary?

5.70 ↓ from 6.50

It has been interesting to see the debate about wage levels in recent years. Perhaps surprisingly, there has always been a strong body of respondents stating they feel reasonably rewarded. They are perhaps driven by pride in their profession, and the fact the money earned is such an important part of the life of their family.

There is, unfortunately, a definite sense that this positivity has eroded over the past 18 months. The issues which have come to a head are those of wage rises, the debate about key worker status, and the fact that seafarers have been indispensable to the world economy during the pandemic.

With such an incredible focus on shipping, and with such seeming recognition of the importance of trade and supply chains, it is with utter shock that seafarers seem to have found themselves outside the public debate once more.

This appears to have prompted a far less accepting stance on wage levels, contractual terms, conditions and length of service in the latest set of responses. All now seem under pressure from a seafaring populace that feels slighted by the crew change problems, ignored, under-appreciated and seeking a new kind of relationship with employers.

There were many worrying responses too, not just about dissatisfaction with wage levels, but with companies (often seemingly manning agents) lying to crew, withholding pay, underpaying, and even threatening seafarers. Once again, this is to the backdrop of more work, longer hours, lengthening tours of duty, and an eroded sense of goodwill, while at best salaries remain the same.

Some respondents also raised concerns as to whether they will get paid, as rumours of ship sales and the looming dread of abandonment appear. One seafarer stated, "I hear my company has sold my ship, but nothing has been said and I am not allowed to travel home. What do I do if I am no longer paid?" The stress, fear, concern and confusion are palpable in the responses from seafarers.

It was also mentioned that failure to negotiate revised minimum wage levels for seafarers has left some simmering financial tension between crews and companies. With the current level of dissatisfaction and stress, there could well be trouble ahead.



**I hear my company has sold my ship, but nothing has been said and I am not allowed to travel home. What do I do if I am no longer paid?**

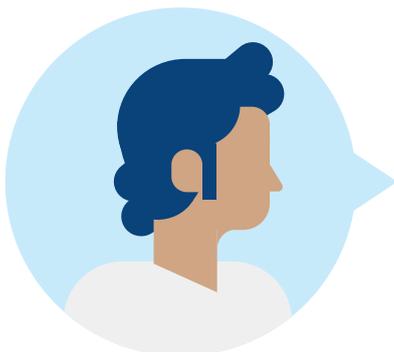
## How happy about the food on board?

6.60 ↓ from 6.73

As with many other aspects of life on board, the extended nature of some seafarer trips is taking a toll when it comes to diet and meals on board. The falling data and the responses received painted a picture of boredom setting in. Even seafarers who had enjoyed meals previously said they just want to get back home or ashore, and to the food they crave.

There were once more reports from fleets that have seen a modest raising of the food spend budget, and they reported a definite improvement. That said, when the months go on and on, it is all too easy to wish for a different fare than that on offer. It is not just the food itself, but the routine which is impacting some. One seafarer said, "Every week the same menu, it gets so boring. I want different things".

Over many previous reports, the issue of mixed nationality crews, and the unique cultural challenges of different foods and diets have been discussed. It seems there is still no solution in sight. Wherever a cook comes from, they are usually more adept or appreciative of a certain cuisine. We heard from Asian seafarers demanding more of their cuisine, and conversely, European crews wanting more of theirs. This is a balancing act that does not seem likely to deliver a balanced diet.



**Every week the same menu, it gets so boring. I want different things.**

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

5.90 ↓ from 6.73

This was another question that saw a significant fall in the happiness levels recorded by respondents. Some common themes emerged from the written feedback.

Uppermost in the sense of physical wellbeing was the impact of being on ships for a sustained period. Seafarers who said they had been motivated to stay relatively active during the earlier stages of their trip now said that after spending many months on board, they were feeling lethargic, apathetic and physically exhausted.

"I just want to go home, I cannot face anything else. I used to use the gym, but now feel so tired", was a response that seemed to best capture the words of many others. The impact of the uncertainty of when they will be relieved also seemed to be hitting seafarers hard.

Another factor was that of physical and mental tiredness resulting from crews being on board for far longer than many expected. As one commented, "I usually serve 3 months, now I am into my 6th. I feel exhausted by the work and always the same routine", while another said, "I am too tired from non-physical work to exercise regularly".

Reflecting again on food, some seafarers felt that they have put weight on owing to a fatty diet, or lack of fruit and vegetables. "We have so many fried meals, I am looking like a hamburger", scoffed one respondent.

Some, however, had positive stories: "The engine crew have made us wonderful sets of weights from spares. We can work out now, and it is making us feel better" – a great illustration of the ingenuity, dedication, and

sense of camaraderie which is still evident on some ships.

The clear message from many was that extended trip lengths are impacting their health, whether real or perceived. They feel tired, sick, fatigued, apathetic and in dire need of detox through life back ashore. Even a good ship is not designed for the extended periods that some crews are now in. It seems clear the mechanisms, systems, processes and realities of shipboard life are impossible to sustain, and many are now past that. As one commented, "After many months, my crew look like zombies, and this is an accident waiting to happen".

This is an important issue, and the zombification of a workforce has massive implications for safety and standards. This negative spiral is a process by which the lack of release, or things to look forward to, creates a toxic environment. Work at sea is in danger of becoming less meaningful as seafarers have lost the excitement of going home or ashore. The working culture at sea was about the positives which surrounded working on board, without these we are getting a "boreout" situation.

This is something which happens when a job lacks positive culture, when boredom pervades and when rewards are not readily apparent, obvious or sufficient, when work becomes monotonous and lacking in stimulus, especially safety critical tasks.



**The engine crew have made us wonderful sets of weights from spares. We can work out now, and it is making us feel better.**

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

6.40 ↓ from 6.91

The issue of connectivity has seen a climb in the data over recent reports. However, we appear to have reached a point of inflection, perhaps because companies which have invested or covered costs, or those which have improved communications, have all done so.

As such, it seems we are in a position of the law of diminishing returns, as other seafarers in the global fleet begin to feel even more frustrated reading the tales of their peers who are being better supported or catered for when it comes to online access.

There were two comments which summed up the situation: "Communication with home is absolutely key to everything", and, "Free internet is a must for all seafarers!".

The impact of poor connectivity is plain to see. "I am spending all my money to stay in touch with home, but what choice do I have?", ran one comment. Another said, "The time difference over months has been hard, but I am so happy to speak to my family", and "Being in touch with home is all that keeps me sane". A regular contributor wanted to hammer the message home once more of the frustration that the "International Space Station can send video back to earth, yet the shipping industry struggles with basic phone calls".

The message is once again crystal clear, as it has been over so many reports: seafarers want, need, crave and demand the levels of online access that those ashore are accustomed to. They want it free, or at least at cost. They want it to be fast enough to feel useful, and with enough data to feel unhindered.



**Communication with home is absolutely key to everything.**

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

5.10 ↓ from 5.55

The issue of welfare facilities ashore, whether seafarer centres or just access to some form of rest and recuperation, is a topic that causes much discussion. There was real frustration and exasperation evident across many of the responses received in this quarter.

The low numbers, and the anger expressed in some of the written responses, captured a real sense of annoyance, pain and growing impatience. Seafarers want to go home, but if they cannot travel, then they at least want to have some means of getting off the ship and enjoying some time away from the pressures of work.

As one commented, “Even if I get time off, I am still in the same cabin, the same people, sounds, smells and rhythm. I want to get away, just to feel different”. This is a key issue, the mental impact of so long spent in the same environment is creating huge spikes in negativity and tension.

It is very difficult to separate this question from the earlier one of shore leave, and seafarers often voice similar thoughts across the two. “I have not been ashore in 1.5 years”, ran one extreme and very troubling example. Another said the same, but they had been on for eight months.

There were many seafarers who felt constrained, confined and constantly stressed by not being able to get away from the ship. Usually, there is some consolation in the form of ship visits, as chaplains and ship visitors can bring small comforts – sweets and candies, magazines, books, washing gear and the like to the vessel. These gestures mean so much in dark times, but owing to COVID, even these are being impacted.

There was again appreciation voiced for the volunteers who work to make life better for crews in port. However, there was also a growing sense that there needs to be more formal and regulated access to shore leave, and hence facilities to make that possible. “We need centres inside ports, so we do not have to bother with travel or immigration. I just want somewhere to easily and cheaply go”, ran one comment.



**Even if I get time off, I am still in the same cabin, the same people, sounds, smells and rhythm. I want to get away, just to feel different.**

# Conclusions

The responses received for Quarter 2 of 2021 saw a fall in happiness across all 10 questions. There were clear indications that the ongoing issues relating to crew travel, uncertainty over leave and an almost complete and universal ban on shore leave are having a negative impact on seafarers. Even areas that usually hold up well, such as interactions on board, were struggling, and the responses received painted a picture of stress, fatigue and frustration.

There appeared to be a growing sense of weariness with the problems at sea, but also that ships are working harder than ever to deliver on the demands of trade. Seafarers reported feeling constant stress and pressure. As one commented, "It would be bad enough to be working for longer, but we seem to be working harder too".

In addition, there was resentment that demands on crews are constantly rising, but without any benefits for seafarers. It was even felt that management systems used are no longer fit for purpose, and there was talk of things feeling broken. "We have broken sleep, broken systems, and people feeling broken too", ran one comment, while another said, "Who can be happy with high stress, overtimes, constant papers and regulations?".

It was also felt that the profession is increasingly difficult for new seafarers. "This is not a profession for freshers", said one respondent. We received comments from cadets who were struggling to adapt, with the lack of shore leave making it harder to feel a sense of pride or accomplishment.

There were, however, some positives. A number of seafarers reported that they love their job and are deeply proud of their work, profession and career.

The impact of COVID-19, however, is still very much being felt, particularly when it comes to the issue of workload. We heard that the pressures of administrative work are once more rising, and some said that the demands of paperwork are even jeopardising the safety of vessels, as so much time is spent on administrative tasks. Others felt that their working days are inexorably being stretched, not just in time, but in what they are being asked to deliver.

There were also complaints that office staff are demanding information, and that there are too many emails from shore to ship. As one respondent stated,

"The office, they want to know everything but they already have the information. So, we get asked many times for the same things. It is like a nightmare".

Seafarers raised concerns about checks on working hours. Port and Flag States were criticised for not checking records properly, and inspectors were accused of not cross-referencing crew records with ship logs. How can they really know what has been going in, was the question many raised.

An interesting issue in this quarter's results was that of the physical impact of the shore leave problem. Seafarers reported a desire for "intimacy ashore" and were quite graphic in explaining what this means. There was a sense that such issues are resulting in tensions being played out on board, leading to anxiety, stress and frustration. Such issues can spark conflict, and while it may not feel like a problem that can be readily or easily addressed, it is a real and live issue.

There were other tension points on board too, particularly in relation to mixed nationality crews. There were some indications of resentment along nationality lines, especially where crew feel they would be allowed to travel or go ashore if they were not on vessels with certain other nationalities.

Seafarers feel that shore leave is no longer a realistic aspect of life at sea. As one frustrated seafarer said, "Stop asking about shoreleave, there is none. We are never allowed to leave the ship, and it is not possible to get away for even a couple of hours".

There was also disquiet about the issue of wages, as crews feel they deserve something in recognition for their services in keeping global trade moving. There was also boredom and frustration about food, and apathy about exercise.



Seafarers in Seattle celebrate after receiving their COVID-19 vaccinations.

All the signs of a depressed, stressed, fed-up and frustrated workforce were evidenced in the responses. While the Seafarers Happiness Index has always sought some sense of balance, to find positives to counter the negatives, the latest set of responses make this exceptionally difficult. Across several years in compiling this data, there has never been such a sense of deep and entrenched sense of despair and anger.

There are many high-profile campaigns to get seafarers home, to get them travelling or welcomed to countries, to have crews vaccinated. However, for all the well-meaning efforts, there appears to be very little which is making life and the grinding, relentless day-to-day reality any better. In hearing the voices of those at sea, it is clear that we need to keep pressing hard for the diplomatic, legal and external actions which will bring longer-term positives. We cannot forget or ignore the fact that in the short term, the daily lives of seafarers are overwhelmingly miserable.

No amount of ships' horns sounded on specially designated days, flags waved, or well-meaning public relations stunts are making a difference to the way seafarers are having to exist every day. We heard of a sense of disconnection, being sick of meals, fed up with the gym, tired of the same company, and missing the physical intimacy which so many ashore so often take for granted. The message from seafarers is of the pressing need to make life better. We all believe that seafarers are

key workers and essential, but we need to start treating them so. If not, there is a sense that patience at sea is running out.

## Thank You

Thank you to all those seafarers who took the time to share their thoughts with us. We are extremely grateful. They told us the things which really frustrate and concern them, the things that make a positive difference, and offered some opportunities for improvement.

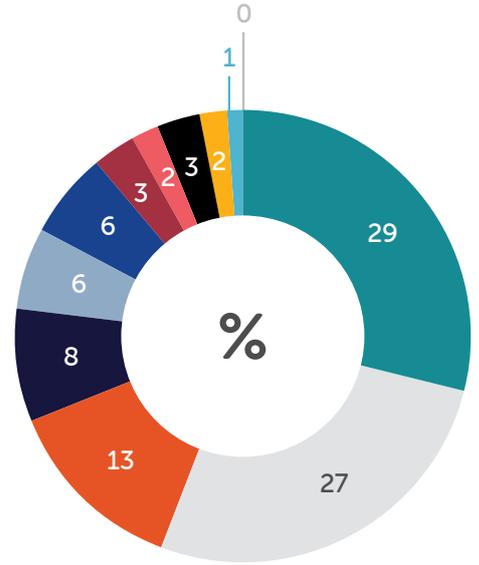
We always need more data, and to hear the stories of more seafarers...and for those who have already done so, to share again. So please visit [www.happyatsea.org](http://www.happyatsea.org) to find out more, and to complete the survey. We also want these reports to be spread as far and wide across shipping as possible, so please do share these findings.

We would like to thank our 2021 sponsors, maritime solutions company Wallem Group and specialist marine and energy insurer Standard Club. We must also thank the companies which have approached us about setting up bespoke happiness surveys for their own fleets so they can benchmark their own performance against the wider population of seafarers.

# Ship Type

Once again, the highest number of respondents served on tankers, but the returns from bulk carriers ran a very close second place this time. Container vessels were well represented too, but it was especially encouraging to see a further increase from cruise ships and offshore vessels. These have once more grown as the respective sectors have reawakened from the pandemic.

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



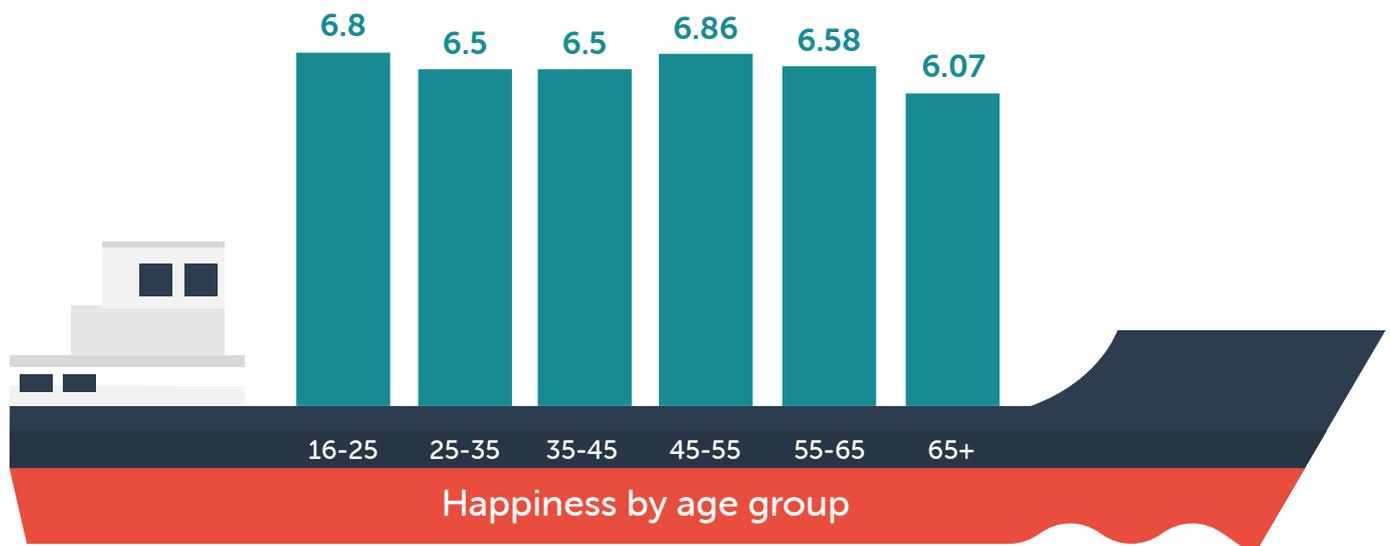
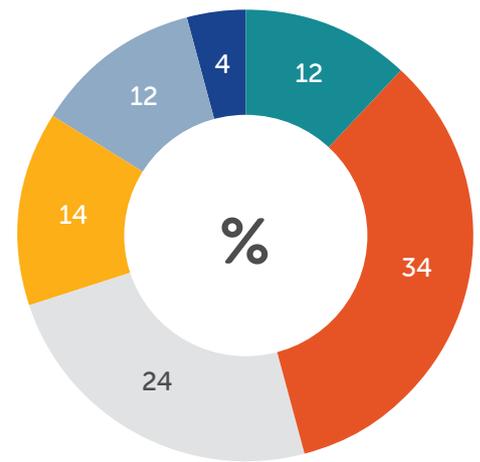
## Ship types and happiness

Out of the vessels with the highest numbers of respondents, bulk carriers moderately led the way, but the responses from offshore and cruise vessels contained doubly good news. Not only was the number of seafarers up, but so too the happiness levels recorded, with an impressive 7.5 out of 10 for cruise ship respondents, perhaps reflecting a sense of relief at the prospect of bouncing back and getting sailing once more.

## Age Range

Once again, the 25-35 age range was the best represented, making up 31% of all responses. We saw a large growth in the number of 35-45 and 45-55-year-olds engaging with us. This is good news as it reflects a better spread of views and feedback from the seafaring population.

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

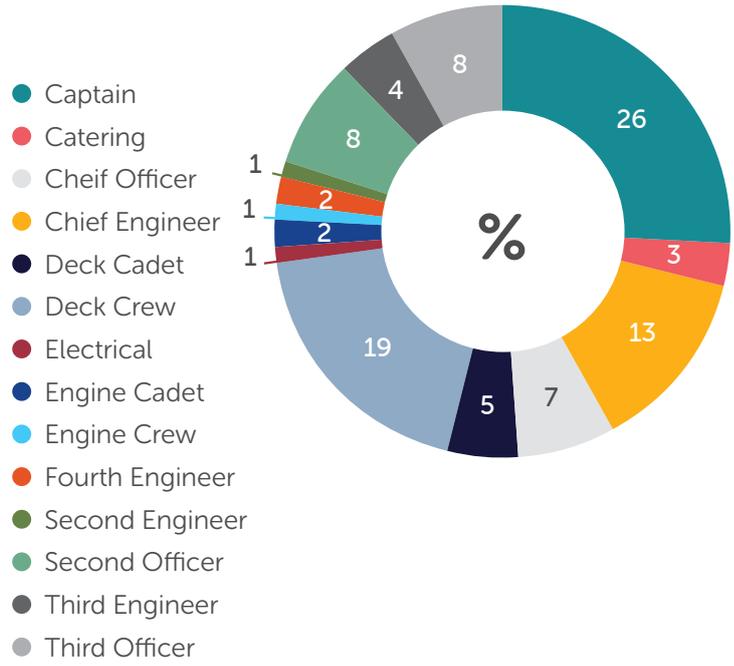


## Age range and happiness

There was little variation in happiness levels across the age groups. The 45-55 year-olds managed to scrape to the top with an average happiness score of 6.86.

# Rank

We received our usual wide spread of seafarers across all ranks, though the higher numbers came from deck ranks. It was pleasing to note that we received more responses from engine officers and crew than we have for some time.



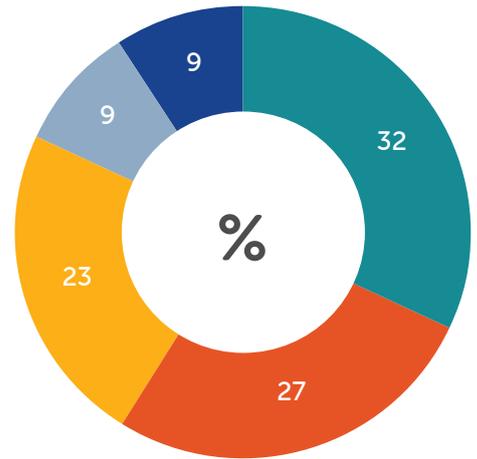
## Rank and happiness

The data trends across ranks held fairly steady across the more highly represented groups, with Third Officers seemingly the happiest currently.

# Trip Length

A new data category for the Seafarers Happiness Index is the length of time crews have served onboard. Given the crew change crisis, it was encouraging to see that the largest proportion had been on board less than 6 months. However, it was very troubling to note that 9% of respondents had been on board for more than 12 months.

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



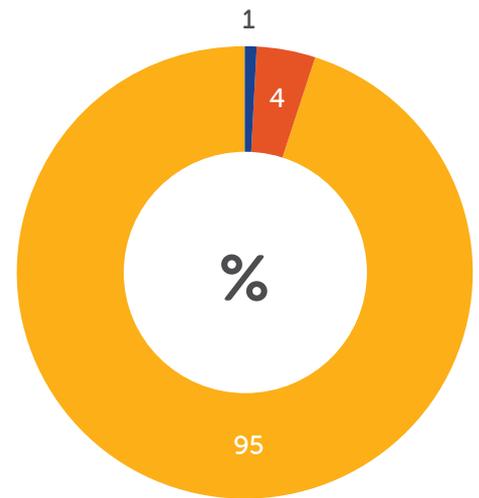
## Trip length and happiness

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the less time spent on board the happier the crews. We saw a steady falling away in levels as the time at sea racked up, revealing the impact of keeping people at sea far beyond contracted or legal time limits. It was interesting to note that those who preferred not to discuss the time served recorded the highest happiness levels. There was no indication in the written responses as to why this would be.

## Gender

As experienced in previous reports, the number of female seafarers completing the Seafarers Happiness Index remains low, though the numbers held steady at around 4%. It is again disappointing but does at least keep pace with the overall female seafaring population.

- Other
- Female
- Male



## SeaCode - giving female seafarers a voice

With a low percentage of responses from female seafarers, we felt it important to ensure that we still heard their views and experiences. Thankfully the team at SeaCode were able to assist. [SeaCode.org](https://seacode.org) enables maritime professionals to share their stories – both positive and negative – and, by doing so, can offer support and raise awareness to drive change.

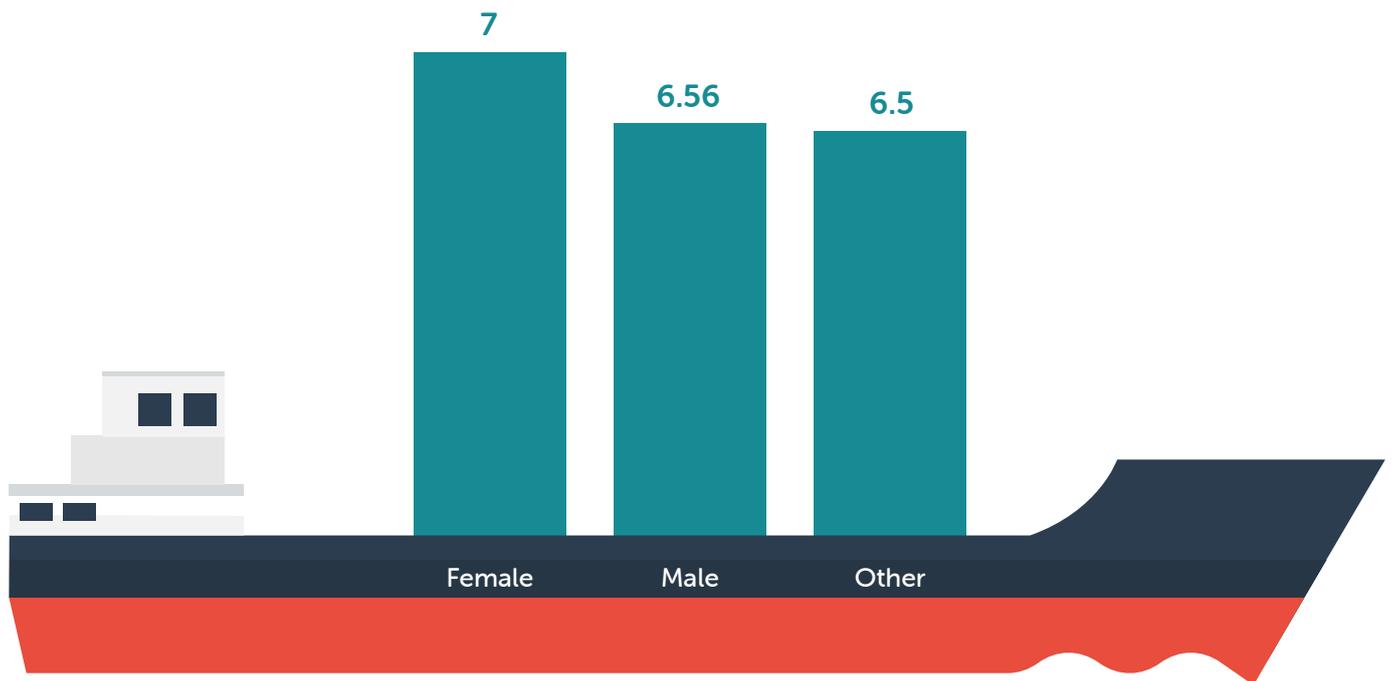
According to the experiences shared with SeaCode, women at sea still face challenges. A lot of these experiences confirm what we sadly already know: that women continue to face abuse, harassment and inappropriate behaviour. However, some experiences reveal that we still have a lot to learn about the nuances of the female seafarer experience. For example, one story tells about the theft of underwear which left the author feeling a sense of “annoyance” that “you can’t just be relaxed with it as you would at home.”

In addition, female seafarers report finding it challenging being in the minority on ships. They report being treated differently to their male colleagues, which can be lonely and isolating

especially if there are no other women to share their experiences with on board. Seacode offers them the chance to share some of their stories which demonstrates that they are not alone.

Thankfully, it is not all negative and there are many messages from those who love being in shipping and working onboard.

SeaCode is an anonymous platform for people to share issues they have faced. It raises awareness about serious matters like sexual assault, harassment and bullying, as well as everyday issues such as mental wellbeing, loneliness and poor work conditions. They also share positive stories and lessons. We appreciate the team sharing the voices of female seafarers to ensure the Seafarers Happiness Index report reflects their reality and can serve as a means of improving life at sea for all genders.



## Gender and happiness

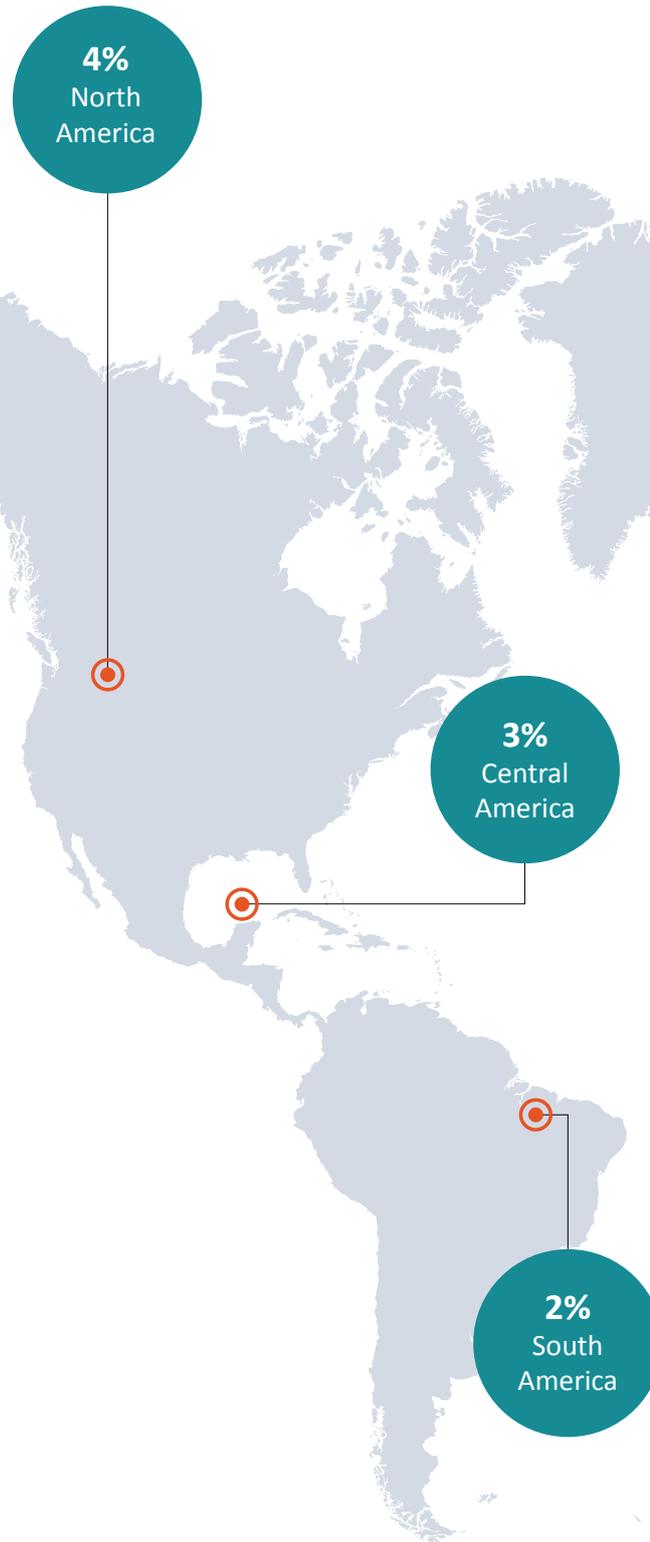
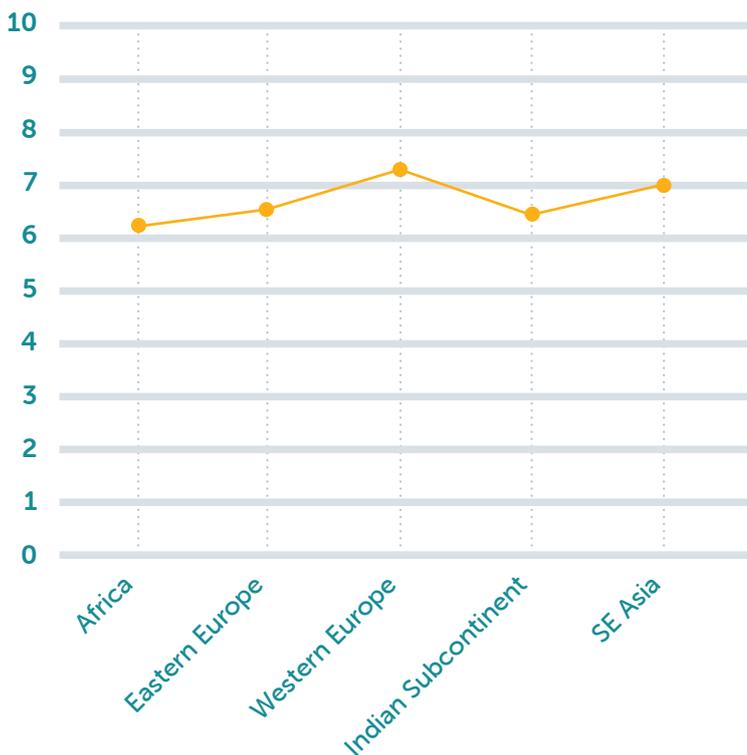
While the response levels from female seafarers were low, it was pleasing to note that the general happiness levels of those who did respond were higher than those of their male counterparts.

# Where

This time South East Asian seafarers held off the Indian subcontinent as the largest cohort of respondents. This again is a positive reflection of our ongoing efforts to engage with seafarer supply nations such as The Philippines, through our physical presence and also social media.

## Regions and happiness

Looking at the average happiness scores for the better represented groups, the happiest seafarers by far were from Western Europe, recording a reassuring and positive score of 7.23/10. The indications were perhaps that many were on short sea trades, and as such were rather more insulated from the ravages of the crew change crisis than other nationalities.





# The Mission to Seafarers

## Emergency support for seafarer families in India

The catastrophic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in India has left many facing unemployment and thousands of families struggling to meet the cost of basic necessities. Seeing a need for urgent help, The Mission to Seafarers team embarked on an emergency feeding programme to help seafarer and fisher families affected by the pandemic in the port city of Tuticorin.

“During the first wave of the pandemic, numerous seafarer and fishermen families in the coastal villages of Tuticorin were devastated by the sudden imposition of lockdown which resulted in unemployment issues and escalation of prices,” recalls Revd Isaac Franklin, port chaplain, “We thought that the only way the Mission can be of any help to them is by providing food”.

In 2020, a programme supported by Seafarers UK and The Mission to Seafarers’ Samaritan Fund provided vital food packages and PPE to some 1,688 families in the province. Working with local authorities and parish priests, Revd Franklin and a team of volunteers gave out parcels containing essential commodities including oil, rice, dhal, vegetables and hand sanitizers.

The programme is now being repeated to support those affected by the second wave of the pandemic. Thanks to funding from the Seafarers International Relief Fund, over 1,900 families will receive relief packages.

Among those helped in this second phase has been Mrs F, whose husband, Derrick, tragically died after contracting COVID-19 in June 2021. The family had already faced financial difficulties after Derrick had been diagnosed with kidney failure in 2019 and they had been unable to receive any medical support from the company. As Revd Franklin recalls, “She shared with us the tough times the family has gone through and was full of gratitude for all the support rendered by our Mission to her family. She thankfully received the relief materials along with the infrared thermometer which she said will be a great support not only for her family but also for her neighbours affected by the pandemic.”

As a result of the food programme, MtS, known locally as the Flying Angel Club, has become a household name in the area. As Revd Franklin commented, “Our initiative to feed them and provide PPE at this time of crisis very much impressed the maritime communities in Tuticorin, and so our Mission has become well known among them”. In the longer term, MtS plans to develop a community driven family support network, providing welfare and wellbeing to the families of seafarers.



# What makes your crew happy at sea?

The Mission to Seafarers is now able to run bespoke Happiness Surveys for your crew, so you can benchmark your quality of care against the international survey.

If you're interested in finding out more, contact [ben.bailey@missiontoseafarers.org](mailto:ben.bailey@missiontoseafarers.org)

[www.happyatsea.org](http://www.happyatsea.org)



## The Mission to Seafarers

St Michael Paternoster Royal  
College Hill  
London  
United Kingdom  
EC4R 2RL

Tel: +44(0)20 7248 5202

Fax: +44(0)20 7246 4761

Email: [HappinessIndex@missiontoseafarers.org](mailto:HappinessIndex@missiontoseafarers.org)

[www.missiontoseafarers.org](http://www.missiontoseafarers.org)



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