



Seafarer mental health and geopolitics

The IUMI 2022 Policy Forum Workshop in Chicago focused on the war in Ukraine and its impact on marine and war risk insurance. At the workshop, Gard's global head of People claims, Lene-Camilla Nordlie, turned her attention to seafarers and the challenges they face, not just due to the current geopolitical situation, but also generally due to the stresses and strains of their occupation. She shares some of her comments in today's Insight.

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For policy year 2021, claims involving people made up 24% of the total number of claims handled in Gard across all the products we offer. The people claims group handles claims involving passengers, stowaways, other persons onboard or ashore and persons saved at sea but claims by seafarers make up the vast majority of our files. The COVID pandemic has made the last couple of years very difficult for seafarers and continues to be a challenge in some parts of the world. Now, the pandemic is overshadowed by the war in Ukraine which has had a direct toll on crew wellbeing and mental health. Both the Ukraine and Russia have strong seafaring traditions with approximately 100,000 Ukrainian seafarers and about 200,000 Russian seafarers sailing today sometimes on board the same ship.

Seafarer wellbeing negatively impacted by the geopolitical situation

Challenges to seafarer mental health and well-being include concerns for family and friends whilst away at sea and, in the case of the current situation in Ukraine, even whether there will be a home to return to. Some crew members wish to end contracts early while others wish to extend their time aboard. Access to medical treatment may be compromised and payment of wages and settlement of disability and death benefits is difficult due to sanctions with respect to Russian crew or crew resident in Russian occupied/annexed territories, and the displacement with respect to crew resident in Ukraine.

Thanks to the UN's Black Sea Grain Initiative, many of the blocked bulk ships have now sailed. This is good news for the seafarers and will lessen the looming global food shortages. According to the [UN Black Sea Gain Initiative Joint Coordination Centre](#), from inception in August to 22 September 144 ships carrying corn, sunflower seed, oil and meal, wheat and other agricultural products have left the ports of Chornomorsk, Odesa and Yuzhny/Pivdennyi. While this is good news for Marine insurance in that constructive total losses may be thus avoided, we must not forget or understate our obligations to the human rights and the physical and mental well-being of seafarers manning those ships.

*These comments are largely taken from the presentation by Lene-Camilla Nordlie on 22 September at the IUMI Annual Conference in Chicago. *