



Seafarers at the core of shipping's future

Today, 30 September 2021, we join with IMO and the global maritime community to commemorate the annual World Maritime Day, with a focus on this year's theme: "Seafarers: At the core of shipping's future".

Published 30 September 2021

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The 2021 theme was chosen by the IMO as part of a year of action for seafarers, who play a vital role as key workers for global supply chains but are facing unprecedented hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Seafarers have had to prolong their service on board much beyond their contractual periods, have been prevented from going home and lived with concern for their loved ones at home who, apart to missing their presence and support at home, can also be affected by the pandemic itself. Added to this comes enduring prolonged quarantine periods related to crew changes. In far too many cases seafarers have been denied access to necessary and sometimes urgent medical care ashore, whether Covid-related or not and sadly, some states have repeatedly refused to allow deceased seafarers to come ashore for repatriation. This tragic situation only compounds the sorrow and hardship suffered by next-of-kin at home and crew members on board. This treatment of seafarers, working to keep the world turning, is not just lacking in dignity; but may be in contravention of international law.

[In their joint statement](#) issued on 17 September, the Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the Director-General of the International Labour Organization (ILO) once again urges Governments to recognize the strategic importance of the maritime sector and, in line with UN General Assembly [resolution A/75/17](#) adopted on 1 December 2020, to designate seafarers as key workers and to treat them as such by providing access to medical care including vaccination.

Only 60 countries have designated seafarers as key workers, yet many nonetheless maintain restrictions on access to medical care ashore including access to vaccinations. Information received by the IMO and the ILO indicates that only 24 countries have implemented seafarer vaccination programmes, or have signaled their intent to do so, in designated ports within their jurisdictions. Norway, Denmark, and Singapore are among the most recent countries announcing the facilitation of vaccination of foreign seafarers. Although there is no official global registry of information about the availability of vaccines for foreign seafarers, the IMO/ILO joint statement refers to the [list maintained by the ICMA](#). This information is also posted by [NAMMA](#). We would add that shipowners, ship managers and charterers should cooperate to facilitate vaccination in those ports as this is essential to safeguard the health of seafarers who have continued to serve aboard ships in international trade many times at great personal cost. An [IG PandI Vaccination FAQs.pdf](#) has been prepared by the International Group of P&I Clubs. Conditions change quickly and when seeking information about practice in a particular port, we suggest contacting the local ship agent.

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