

# R T A



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## LIFE AT SEA: LABOR, LONGING, SOLITUDE

- Being a Woman in the Maritime Industry
- Technology Provides Comfort, What About Mental Health?
- Violations of Seafarers' Rights and Evaluation from the Perspective of International Law



### Seafarers' Mental Health and Working Conditions

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### Seafarers' Manifesto of Rights: Maritime Labour Convention

The Maritime Labour Convention (MLC 2006), adopted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 2006, is one of the most powerful responses to seafarers' global quest for rights.



### Pirate Attacks on Ships: Global Threat, Security at Sea and Effects on the Maritime Sector

The maritime sector has historically been the cornerstone of global trade and has evolved in parallel with human history. However, one of the biggest threats this sector faces is still piracy at sea. Piracy poses serious dangers not only to ship owners but also to the global economy. This problem, which continues to have an effect even in the 21st century, threatens not only developed countries but also developing countries. The increase in the number of pirate attacks, especially in certain regions, in recent years shows that urgent measures must be taken to ensure security in the maritime sector.

Tek başına değil,  
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# FROM THE PRESIDENT İRFAN METE

PRESIDENT OF THE SEAFARERS' UNION OF TURKEY



**Dear Maritime Workers, Dear Union Members and Readers,**

We are happy to meet you again in the new issue of this newsletter that we publish together. In this bulletin, which we publish twice a year as the Seafarers' Union, we try to make the realities of our sector visible and to make the voice of our labour heard. In this issue, we have discussed the invisible face of seafaring, the loneliness experienced on board ships, and the social and economic problems that this loneliness gives rise to.

While the sea means freedom and horizon for many, for us it often means separation, longing and uncertainty. It is not the fate of seafarers to be away from shore for months at a time, to live apart from their families and loved ones; this is a consequence of the making labour invisible. The loneliness of seafarers is not only physical but also emotional. In this loneliness, workers are often ignored, their problems unheard, their rights ignored.

It is not only the compass that guides a ship to its destination, it is the maritime worker who holds the compass and charts the course with his/her work. Every arrival at a port is the beginning of a farewell; every voyage increases the longing for the lives left behind. But this longing gains meaning with solidarity, with the union power we build together. It is an honour as well as a responsibility for us to be the voice of every maritime worker trying to exist in the midst of loneliness.

When we talk about loneliness in this issue, we are not only talking about individual feelings, but also about structural problems. We bring up the loss of rights experienced by seafarers in many areas, from access to social security to mental health support. Because loneliness is not just a feeling; sometimes it is legal, sometimes economic, sometimes a result of not being organized.

We know that we are stronger when we fight together. For this reason, both at the table and on the sight, we will continue to seek the rights of our esteemed members and make the voice of the worker louder.

We continue to move forward in solidarity, maintaining our hope.

# The Silent Burden of Seafaring: Mental Health and Suicide Risk

Seafarers, who transport more than 90% of global trade, are the unseen heroes of the global economy. However, months of loneliness at sea, physical exhaustion, social isolation, and uncertainty place an invisible burden on these heroes: psychological stress.

Life at sea involves numerous factors such as irregular shifts, the necessity to adapt to crew members from different cultures, being separated from family, limited social interaction, and communication gaps. Over time, these conditions can lead to sleep disorders, depression, anxiety disorders, anger outbursts, and most alarmingly, suicidal thoughts.

International studies show that approximately 28% of seafarers experience depression or anxiety, and one in five seafarers has considered suicide at some point in their lives. Between 1960 and 2009, 5.9% of seafarer deaths were directly linked to suicide.

According to a study by US-based Virtue Marine:

- **High stress: 38.2%**
- **Anxiety disorder: 22.7%**
- **Major depression: 20.7%**
- **Post-traumatic stress disorder: 18.4%**
- **Suicidal thoughts: 8.9%**



These data show that the issue of mental health in seafaring is now an urgent matter that cannot be ignored. Feelings such as “lack of belonging,” “feeling like a burden to others,” “mental pain,” and “helplessness” are frequently observed in individuals prone to suicide. However, maritime culture has normalized the suppression of emotions; the expectation to be “strong,” and the notion of coping alone.

## What Should Be Done?

- Awareness training on mental health should be increased on ships
- Accessible psychological support hotlines should be established
- Psychological support should be provided in ports or during ship visits
- Shift systems should be adapted to human psychology
- Social support networks and union counselling services should be strengthened

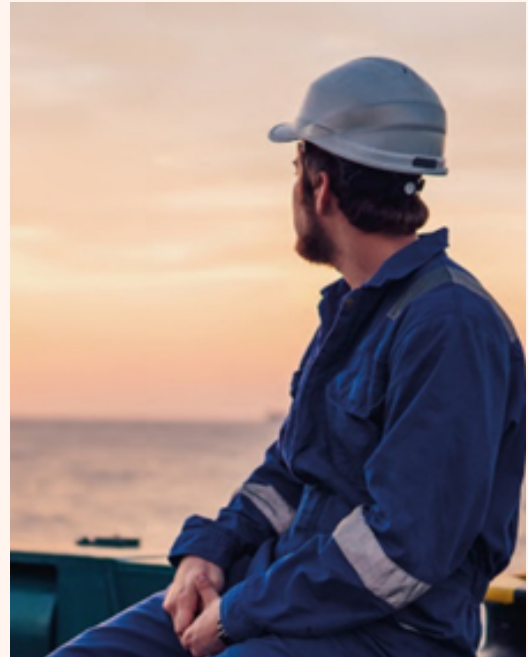
It should not be forgotten that a healthy seafarer is not only physically but also mentally resilient. A maritime sector that prioritizes the value of human life and labour should not remain silent on this issue.

# Seafarers' Mental Health and Working Conditions: Problems, Findings and Suggestions for Solution

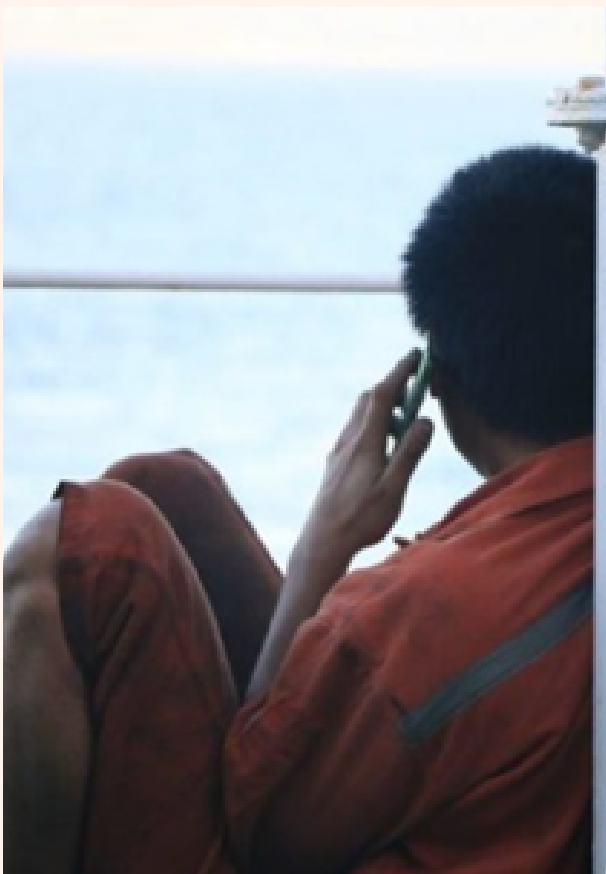
The maritime sector in addition to being one of the cornerstones of the global economy it is a challenging field that has serious physical and psychological effects on its employees. Months-long sea voyages can isolate seafarers from their families, loved ones, and social life, leading to a deep sense of loneliness.

This separation not only weakens social bonds but also brings with it intense stress, anxiety, and feelings of exhaustion. Limited connections to land-based life, a routine filled with uncertainty, and a demanding work pace constantly test sailors' resilience. Irregular working hours, sleep deprivation, and shift work systems gradually take a toll on both mental and physical health.

Under these conditions, the internal struggles experienced by seafarers often remain invisible. Yet long voyages leave not only their bodies but also their emotions behind at sea. Over time, they may feel that their connection to the world has weakened or even been severed.



## Mental Health Issues among Seafarers and Their Causes



Seafaring is a demanding profession that requires high levels of physical and mental resilience. Research has shown that long working hours, irregular sleep patterns, and constant vigilance have serious effects on seafarers' mental health. In particular, psychological disorders such as depression, exhaustion, and anxiety are commonly observed among seafarers who spend extended periods at sea.

One of the greatest challenges is being separated from family for extended periods. Limited communication during months-long assignments makes it difficult to meet emotional support needs. Additionally, threats such as adverse weather conditions, workplace accidents, and piracy create constant stress for seafarers.

## Research and Key Findings

The lives of professionals in this field are shaped by long periods spent at sea, constantly changing weather conditions, separation from families, and various safety risks. However, the challenges and advantages of working at sea are directly related not only to professional skills but also to personal motivation, lifestyle, and resilience. A recent survey revealed the challenges faced by male and female seafarers in the industry, the aspects they enjoy, and their sources of motivation, providing important data on the social and individual impacts of seafaring.



396 seafarers participated in the survey conducted by the Seafarers' Union of Türkiye (Türkiye Denizcilik Sendikası). It was found that 72% of the participants were male and 28% were female, confirming the male-dominated structure of the sector. The vast majority of participants were between the ages of 26 and 35, representing the active workforce of the sector. Additionally, 60% of participants were married, while 40% were single, indicating that a significant portion of seafarers have family responsibilities.

### **According to the survey results:**

When asked about the greatest challenges they face while working at sea, the most significant challenges cited were long working hours, shift work, and heavy workloads.

Specifically:

- Married women rated this issue at an average of 1.5.
- Single women in the 25–34 age group averaged around 2.
- Men generally averaged between 2.4 and 2.6.

These data reveal that structural challenges in the job (long shifts, heavy workload) are a greater problem for female seafarers. While men may experience this situation more widely, they may perceive it as less severe.

Physical fatigue ranks second. Specifically:

- Among young single men, this average rises to 3.2—meaning it is considered a relatively minor issue.
- Among married women, the average is 2.25, and among single women, it is 2.2.

This situation may suggest that women and older seafarers take physical strain more seriously, while young men are still more resilient physically.

Weather conditions and sea conditions come in third place. Difficult sea conditions were also mentioned as a problem by many people, but they were ranked lower in terms of priority:

- Women: 2.6
- Most men: 2.6–2.7

Since weather conditions are a constant factor in the nature of the maritime profession, some employees may view them as a “normal challenge.” However, they remain a significant source of stress for inexperienced or more vulnerable groups (women, newcomers).

## According to responses to the question “What are the most challenging aspects of life at sea?”

The most pressing issue among the challenges encountered in maritime life is communication gaps, with an average score of 1.8, and this issue affects single women aged 25–34 the most. Second on the list is psychological stress, which is a significant problem for male sailors in particular, with an average score of 2.1 points. The third most challenging issue is mobbing and an unsafe working environment, which is seen as a more serious problem by single women, with an average score of 2.2 points.

When asked why many seafarers leave this profession, participants largely cited safety risks, with an average score of 2.3–2.5 points for violence and harassment on board. This situation particularly affects women and young single men. The survey results show that married women in this group encounter this problem less frequently.

The second most significant risk is health issues. This is seen as a more pressing issue, especially by women, particularly married women. For men, it is perceived as a moderate risk.

The third most significant risk is maritime accidents. Both women and men view this as a moderate threat. Men are observed to be slightly more sensitive to this issue.



At the bottom of the list is piracy. Single women in particular have paid little attention to this risk (average 3.8), while men in some age groups take it more seriously, but on average it is seen as the least problematic issue.

These data show that social and psychological safety issues experienced on board ships are more decisive than physical dangers in seafarers' decisions to leave their profession.

Among the reasons for enjoying working at sea, good pay is a strong motivating factor, especially for married women. The unique working environment is viewed more positively by men. Women, however, are more distant from this environment; environmental and social challenges may influence this approach.

The sense of independence and freedom is similarly positively received by both men and young women. However, women may experience this feeling alongside secondary emotions such as insecurity and loneliness.

In general, women emphasize concrete benefits such as travel and salary, while men place greater importance on the unique nature and systematic structure of the work. For women, this profession can mean both freedom and struggle.



Sharing with teammates is also most important to married women. Social support is decisive for women, while it remains at a moderate level for men. Sports are used as a tool to increase motivation, especially among young men. Activities such as reading books and watching movies provide stronger moral support for women during times spent alone.

**The greatest safety risks encountered while working at sea are listed as follows:**

**Maritime Accidents:** Young single women (aged 18–24) perceive this risk at the highest level, while men also express serious concern. Risk perception decreases with age and experience. **Health Issues:** This creates a moderate level of safety concern for both women and men. Difficulties in accessing emergency medical care increase this risk.

**Shipboard Violence and Harassment:** Women are highly sensitive to this issue, while men have lower levels of concern.

**Piracy:** Young single women perceive this risk as a significant threat. Among men, risk perception varies depending on the region.

The difficulties and safety risks encountered while working at sea are perceived differently depending on gender and age. Long working hours, shift systems, and heavy workloads are more of a problem for female seafarers, while men may experience these difficulties more commonly but feel them less intensely. Physical fatigue is considered a more serious problem for women and older seafarers, while young men are more resilient in this regard. Weather conditions and sea conditions are considered more common challenges. Psychological stress, communication gaps, and social issues such as violence on board pose a serious threat to women. In terms of safety risks, onboard violence and harassment, health issues, and maritime accidents are among the most significant concerns, while pirate attacks are generally considered a low risk. These data indicate that social and psychological safety issues, rather than physical dangers, are more influential in seafarers' decisions to leave the profession. Women mostly associate working at sea with benefits such as freedom, independence, and salary, while men place more importance on the nature of the work and its systematic structure. These different perspectives diversify the motivations and challenges of working at sea.

In another study, a survey was conducted to identify the psychosocial problems faced by seafarers. A total of 735 seafarers participated in this study, and three main problem areas were identified:

**1. Mental Health Issues:** It has been determined that 65% of seafarers experience chronic fatigue and sleep problems, while 40% show signs of depression.

**2. Family and Social Life Issues:** 58% of participants reported that their family life was negatively affected due to long working hours. 47% stated that being unable to witness their children's upbringing in person created a psychological burden.

**3. Workplace Issues:** Irregular working hours, heavy workloads, and lack of social interaction on board were identified as the main factors affecting employee motivation.

The research results highlight the importance of seafarers' mental health not only for themselves but also for the safety of ship operations. Distracted attention, fatigue, and stress can seriously threaten work efficiency and safety on board.



## Recommendations for Solution and Policies to be Implemented

To overcome these issues, steps must be taken at both the individual and organizational levels:

- **Psychosocial Support Programs:** Companies should provide psychological counseling services and stress management training for seafarers.
- **Strengthening Communication Infrastructure:** Internet access should be made more accessible to enable seafarers to communicate more effectively with their families.
- **Regulating Contract Durations:** Long contracts and extended working hours under shift systems severely exhaust seafarers. Therefore, shortening contract terms can enable seafarers to work more efficiently and healthily.
- **Increasing Social Interaction Areas:** Creating social areas on ships can reduce seafarers' feelings of isolation.
- **Rest and Shore Leave:** Seafarers should be given sufficient rest time after long voyages.

# Being a Woman in the Maritime Industry

Despite being a vital industry that carries approximately 90% of global trade, the maritime industry still has very limited representation of women. Although the number of female seafarers has increased in recent years, gender inequality remains a significant problem in the industry. In order for women to have a greater presence in the maritime sector, it is not only necessary to increase their numbers but also to address the challenges they face in the sector.

One of the biggest challenges faced by female seafarers is gender discrimination and prejudice. Women encounter more obstacles than their male colleagues in recruitment and promotion processes. In a study, 29% of female participants cited gender discrimination as a significant barrier to employment, compared to only 0.4% of men.

Female seafarers also have to contend with social isolation and feelings of loneliness. The low number of women working on ships limits their social circles and creates a psychologically challenging environment. In a male-dominated work environment, women who feel they have to prove themselves more often encounter situations of exclusion and isolation. This situation can lead to serious psychological health problems, especially during long voyages.



One of the most common risks faced by female seafarers is harassment and security threats. Female seafarers may be subjected to sexual harassment and abuse on board ships. Such incidents can reduce women's desire to remain in the profession and further decrease the representation of women in the sector. Measures must be taken to ensure the safety of women on ships, and stricter policies must be implemented to address harassment incidents. Applications such as security cameras, emergency complaint hotlines, and awareness training can help prevent this issue.



Awareness and training programs are of great importance in overcoming these problems. Training programs should be organized to raise awareness about gender equality in the maritime sector and reduce the difficulties faced by women. At the same time, international and national policies should be established to protect the rights of female seafarers and prevent gender discrimination.

Overcoming the challenges faced by female seafarers in the sector requires not only individual but also industrial efforts. Ensuring gender equality is not only important for guaranteeing women's rights but also critical for the sustainability and development of the maritime sector.

# Young Seafarers

The challenges faced by trainees and young seafarers on board ships are often overlooked within the dynamics of the sector but have serious consequences. Young seafarers face harsh conditions such as low wages, long working hours, and psychological pressure at the beginning of their careers.

Forty-five percent of interns report that their wages are insufficient to meet their living standards. However, it is not just low wages that are a problem; insufficient rest periods, irregular shifts, and poor working conditions are also among the main complaints. One of the most dangerous aspects of this heavy burden is the occurrence of mobbing cases resulting from the abuse of hierarchy. Young people, especially those on their first voyage, are overburdened due to their inexperience, social exclusion, and experience a serious sense of loneliness. According to research, 60% of trainees state that the workload on the ship leads to physical and psychological exhaustion.



Social isolation on board has a significant impact on the mental health of young interns; 32% say that feelings of loneliness have a negative effect on their psychological well-being. For young female seafarers, the situation is even more complicated; sexual harassment, mistreatment, and safety concerns can undermine their hopes for the profession.

Certification systems that do not comply with international standards also hinder young people's career paths. Twenty-five percent of female and male trainees say that the lack of international validity of their certificates makes it difficult for them to find work.

All stakeholders in the sector have a major role to play in changing this situation. More humane working conditions, effective supervision, psychological support services, and better wage policies should be provided for interns. Maritime schools should update their curricula to reflect the realities of life on board ships and prepare young people for the challenges they will face.

In addition, seafarers working with young people must adhere strictly to the following principles:

1. Supervise and guide them,
2. Protect them from mistreatment,
3. Listen and intervene early,
4. Remember your own first voyage,
5. Demonstrate compassionate leadership,
6. Support them and their families.

# Seafarers' Manifesto of Rights: Maritime Labour Convention

The Maritime Labour Convention (MLC 2006), adopted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 2006, is one of the most powerful responses to seafarers' global quest for rights. For seafarers who work on ships for months, struggling in difficult conditions away from their families, this convention is a turning point in bringing the right to live and work humanely to the level of international law.

The MLC 2006 brings together 68 previously separate ILO conventions, providing a modern, applicable framework that directly touches the lives of seafarers. The convention, which entered into force on 20 August 2013, has been adopted by many countries and has become a fundamental document that sets minimum human rights standards in the international maritime sector.

The starting point of the agreement is quite clear: Seafarers working on ships were sometimes faced with unpaid wages, poor living conditions, inadequate health services and uncertain employment relationships. The MLC aimed to provide permanent solutions to these problems with its articles that were binding for each flag state.



Within the scope of the MLC; it became mandatory for every seafarer to have a written employment contract, regular payment of wages, access to health services and provision of safe and healthy living spaces.

The protection of these rights in practice was ensured through port state controls. In this way, a fair competition environment was created not only among seafarers but also among all companies operating in the sector.

The Special Tripartite Committee of the MLC 2006, which met in Geneva on 7–11 April 2025, agreed on important amendments that will further strengthen the convention. In light of the challenges of the post-pandemic period, the following topics stood out: provisions to prevent violence and harassment on board, recognition of the status of “key worker” and its support with rights such as port access and emergency services, strengthening the right to disembarkation, facilitating personnel changes, providing instant access to medical information and health monitoring systems for ship crews, and integrating the ILO-IMO guide on the right to a fair trial.

These amendments are expected to be approved by the International Labour Conference in June 2025 and enter into force in December 2027



The MLC 2006 is not a “final agreement” but a system of rights that lives according to evolving conditions. The dignified work of seafarers is essential not only for individuals but also for the sustainability of the global maritime sector. Because protecting the labour of seafarers means protecting the future.

# Technology Provides Comfort, What About Mental Health?

While the maritime sector modernizes ship life with technological developments, especially internet access allows seafarers to communicate with their families and not be disconnected from the outside world. Although these conveniences provide positive effects in terms of morale, they also bring unexpected psychological and social problems.



Academic studies conducted in recent years have shown that the widespread use of the internet on ships has some negative consequences. The increasing "nomophobia" among seafarers, or the fear of being without a phone, manifests itself not only psychologically but also with physical symptoms such as headaches, sleep disorders and chronic fatigue. As dependency on technology increases, stress levels also reach dangerous levels.

Constant hours spent in front of screens cause distraction and disrupted sleep patterns. As social interaction decreases on board, individuals turn to digital environments instead of physical ones, deepening isolation. In the long run, this triggers mental health problems such as anxiety and depression.

The individual communication opportunities provided by the internet lead to traditional team bonds to weaken. Conversations in common areas decrease, and the culture of solidarity is damaged. However, team spirit plays a vital role as operational success at sea.



For seafarers who could not go ashore during the pandemic, the internet was the only window. However, limited access or low-quality services weakened the effect of this support and increased the feeling of loneliness.

The comfort of life provided by the internet on board is undeniable; however, excessive and uncontrolled use threatens the mental health of seafarers. Therefore, balance is essential. Digital detox programs, psychological support services, social events and awareness training are gaining importance as a solution.

The maritime sector should integrate technology with a human-centered approach and develop sustainable policies that consider the mental health of seafarers against the risks brought by digitalization.

# Coming from you

*HOW DOES BEING AWAY FROM HOME FOR A LONG TIME AFFECT YOUR PERSONAL LIFE?*

- 1- "Life on a ship makes our relationships with our family on land, especially our bond with our children, difficult. When we are with our family, the disruption of the order we have established with our children becomes a foreign situation for us."
- 2- "Moral motivation is at its lowest; being away from everything and everyone makes people lonely."
- 3- "Being disconnected from social life, the process of getting used to it when you return home... It is very difficult sometimes. The more you are away from your social circle, the more difficult it becomes to communicate with people."
- 4- "Working on a ship, sleeping at work and waking up at work, makes a person feel like a robot. They become numb and social ties gradually weaken."
- 5- "Being away from our loved ones and family affects our psychology a lot. Not being able to be with our family on special and important days, or in an emergency, is a difficult situation."
- 6- "The sadness I feel from missing the moments I would have spent with my children is getting deeper."
- 7- "Imagine coming home and your child looking at you like 'who was that?' Being away from home for a long time weakens our bond with our family."



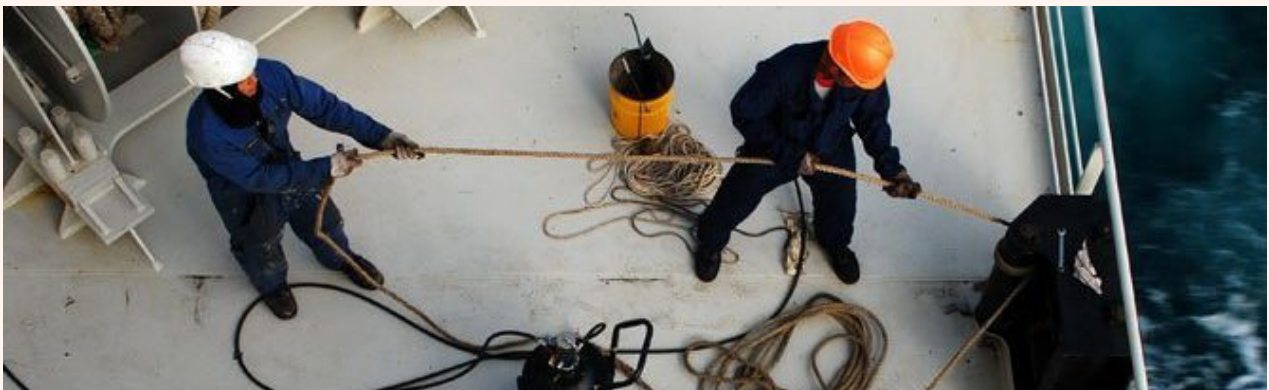
*DO YOU HAVE ANY INTERESTING MEMORIES DURING YOUR CAREER? IF SO, CAN YOU SHARE THEM?*

1- "There was a fire on a ship in the ocean, it was winter and the weather was very difficult. It took us exactly 4 hours to put out the fire."

2- "We docked at a village in Liberia, Africa. There was not even a port; a small dock was smaller than the ship and they had even tied the ropes to the trees. We loaded logs from there. The houses were full of holes and the people were in misery. A young man asked for my dirty T-shirt. I said, 'Wait, I'll go inside and get you a new one.' But he said, 'Maybe you'll go, maybe you won't come back,' and said, 'Give me this one.' I gave him a clean T-shirt, underwear, shorts, sweatpants and shoes. Then my friends on the ship collected a sack of clothes and shoes and gave them to the people there. The next day, they brought us at least ten kilos of fresh fish and fruit, I will never forget that."

3- "There is a memory that I will never forget in my professional life. This incident taught me how futile fights, ambitions and heartbreaks are. I was working on a cruise ship. The death of a person we took from Türkiye to Italy as a passenger due to a heart attack on the last day of the trip had a great impact. We had to take that person on the ship as manifest cargo. This experience taught me very well how fragile and precious life is."

4- "We were in danger of sinking on one voyage. We waited for a long time to be saved in lifeboats. Thanks to the rescue assistance of another ship, all the personnel survived. As we expected, our ship unfortunately sank in the waters within a few hours."



*HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE YOUR GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT IN YOUR MARITIME CAREER?*

1. So far, my greatest achievement has been safely delivering my crew and ship and being able to step off the vessel with peace of mind.

2. Since I started my career at a very young age, I've worked in every rank. I consider my current role as a ship captain at my present company to be my greatest achievement.

3. I'm happy because I do something meaningful for myself, my family, and my country.

4. Rescuing migrants in need in the Mediterranean and taking them aboard perhaps helping them survive that day and reunite with their families was a great achievement.

5. Despite facing many obstacles, the fact that I still have passion for my profession is, in my opinion, a major achievement.

6. Serving as the first female captain in the company I work for is my greatest accomplishment.

7. As a woman in a male-dominated field, despite the heavy pressure we face onboard, being able to carry out every duty properly is my greatest achievement.

# Long Live May 1st!



May 1st Labor and Solidarity Day was celebrated in Kartal under the leadership of our confederation TÜRK-İŞ. We took our place in the meeting area with our President İrfan Mete, our general executive board, the executive boards of our branches and our members.



## We were in the area in Izmir

Thousands of workers in Izmir gathered in Gündoğdu Square to celebrate May 1st. Members of our union also formed a cortege and entered the square. May Day celebrations in Izmir ended with speeches and concerts.



## **We attended the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC, 2006) Special Tripartite Committee meeting held by the ILO in Geneva**



President İrfan Mete and Advisor to the President Fahriye Tuğba Şener attended the 5th Meeting of the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC, 2006) Special Tripartite Committee held by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Geneva on 7-11 April 2025.

Important amendments were adopted at the meeting to improve the working and living conditions of seafarers. The following are prominent among them:

- Shore Leave:** Seafarers are granted the right to go ashore without requiring a visa or special permission when their ships dock at the port, except for reasons such as public health, security or public order.
- Repatriation:** Seafarers will be sent back to their countries without discrimination, regardless of the flag of the ship they work on.
- Key Worker Status:** Seafarers will be recognized as "key workers" and this status will provide conveniences such as travel, shore leave, repatriation and medical care.
- Flag State Responsibilities:** Flag states will ensure that seafarers' rights are protected in investigations related to maritime accidents, taking into account the fair treatment guidelines of the IMO and ILO.

These changes constitute an important step in strengthening the rights of seafarers and improving their working conditions

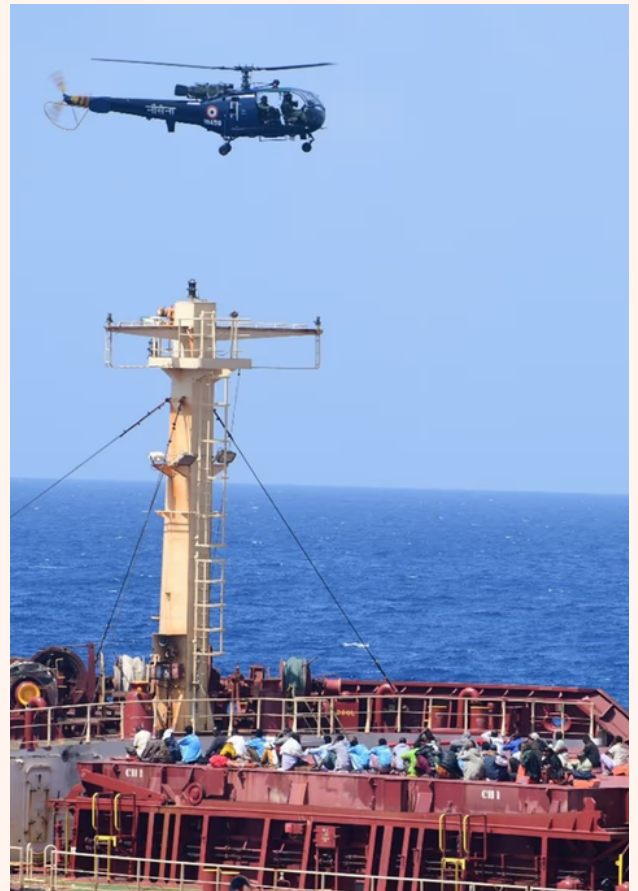
# Pirate Attacks on Ships: Global Threat, Security at Sea and Effects on the Maritime Sector

The maritime sector has historically been the cornerstone of global trade and has evolved in parallel with human history. However, one of the biggest threats this sector faces is still piracy at sea. Piracy poses serious dangers not only to ship owners but also to the global economy. This problem, which continues to have an effect even in the 21st century, threatens not only developed countries but also developing countries. The increase in the number of pirate attacks, especially in certain regions, in recent years shows that urgent measures must be taken to ensure security in the maritime sector.

## Definition and Global Dimension of Piracy

Piracy refers to illegal attacks on commercial vessels at sea. These attacks can take various forms, such as forcibly seizing ships, kidnapping crews, stealing valuable cargo, or hijacking ships for ransom. Piracy not only threatens the safety of ships, but also disrupts the flow of global trade and causes major economic losses for shipping companies.

According to annual reports published by the International Maritime Bureau (IMB), piracy activities are concentrated in certain regions. These regions include the coasts of Somalia, the Gulf of Guinea (West Africa), Southeast Asia, and the Caribbean. Piracy poses a major threat to maritime transportation, which is the backbone of world trade. The increase in such incidents in 2023 and 2024 rings alarm bells for global shipping.



## Major Pirate Attacks in 2023 and 2024

2023 has been recorded as a year in which pirate attacks increased in the world's seas. Research and reports conducted in 2023 revealed that there were 120 cases of piracy and armed robbery worldwide. These attacks were generally concentrated on certain routes and raised serious questions about ship security measures.

On December 14, 2023, Somali pirates seized the Maltese-flagged ship MV Ruen in the Indian Ocean. This attack was the first successful attack by Somali pirates since 2017 and shows that piracy is increasing again off the coast of Somalia. Piracy activities in Somalia peaked in the 2010s and then decreased with the measures taken. However, the increase in these activities again in 2023 revealed that the security problem in the region has not yet been solved and that Somalia needs international assistance in this area.

- Pirate attacks continued in 2024. In January 2024, Somali pirates hijacked fishing boats belonging to Sri Lanka and Iran. However, the ships were released after the attack. This incident revealed the magnitude of the dangers facing the maritime sector and the threats posed by regional instability to ship security.



- On May 29, 2024, a general cargo ship was attacked off the Coast of Bioko Island in Equatorial Guinea. Pirates took control of the ship, took the crew hostage, and kidnapped two crew members. This incident showed that pirate attacks continue in the Gulf of Guinea region in West Africa and that seafarers in the region are still under great threat.



- On May 17, 2024, a tanker was attacked off the coast of Nova Sintra Island in Cape Verde. This attack shows that piracy in the Red Sea and West Africa still poses a threat and poses a great risk to international ship security.

- In November 2024, Houthi rebels in Yemen attacked a ship in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait in the Red Sea and took the crew hostage. This attack is an example of the major threats to maritime security posed by political turmoil in the region.

## **Türkiye's Role in the Region and the Combat**

Turkey has become an important actor in combating piracy, especially off the coast of Somalia. In July 2024, the Turkish Naval Forces took command of a naval task force combating piracy off the coast of Somalia. This shows that Turkey's international role in maritime security has been strengthened and that it has taken an important step towards protecting shipping in the region. In addition, in January 2024, the Turkish Grand National Assembly decided to extend the Turkish Naval Forces' mandate in the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea for another year.

These statistics show that piracy is particularly concentrated in certain sea lanes and that the threats to seafarers are growing. Such attacks are more common in areas such as off the coast of Somalia, the Gulf of Guinea and Southeast Asia, and pose a great risk to seafarers.



## **International Efforts to Combat Piracy**

International maritime organizations and states have taken various measures to combat piracy and developed a number of strategies to prevent piracy. The International Maritime Bureau (IMB) publishes annual reports to ensure global maritime security and tracks where piracy is concentrated. According to IMB data, 120 piracy and armed robbery incidents were recorded worldwide as of 2023. Of these incidents, 105 involved boarding ships directly, nine involved attacks, four were hijacked, and two were fired upon. In 2024, 116 piracy and armed robbery incidents occurred, 94 involved boarding ships, 13 involved attacks, six involved hijackings, and three involved shooting.

# Ship Abandonment: Violations of Seafarers' Rights and Evaluation from the Perspective of International Law

Ship abandonment, a phenomenon that has become increasingly common in world shipping in recent years and has serious consequences in terms of human rights violations, is a multidimensional problem that directly concerns not only maritime workers, but also flag states, port authorities and insurance companies. In this article, the definition of ship abandonment, its causes, regulations in international law and the victimization of seafarers in the light of the data of the last five years will be discussed.

## What is Ship Abandonment?

According to the definition developed by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the International Labor Organization (ILO), a ship is considered "abandoned" when the employer fails to fulfill its responsibilities on the ship and crew. In this context

- The seafarer has not received his wages for at least 2 months, or
- Failure of the shipowner to pay for the seafarer's return to the country of residence, or
- Failure to provide food, water, fuel or medical support on board is considered abandonment.



## Ship Abandonment Data in the Last Five Years

According to International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) and IMO data:

- 85 cases of abandonment were reported in 2020. More than 1,300 seafarers were suffered in these cases.
- In 2021, cases increased, with 95 abandonments reported.
- In 2022, 119 ships were abandoned.
- In 2023, a total of 1,676 seafarers suffered in 132 cases.
- 2024 was the worst year on record so far. 312 ships were abandoned and 3,133 seafarers suffered. This means a 136% increase compared to the previous year.

It is clear from the data that ship abandonment is no longer an exceptional case, but a systemic crisis.

## Seafarers' Legal Rights and International Legislation

The most fundamental protection instrument is the Maritime Labor Convention 2006 (MLC 2006). According to this convention;

Every ship owner must provide financial security. This security covers the seafarer's wages, shore leave costs and return tickets.

Port states are obliged to inspect the ship's compliance with the MLC.

In cases of abandonment, ITF representatives step in and handle the process with insurance companies.

However, in practice, the protection of seafarers is hampered by the failure of some flag states to fulfil their inspection obligations, inadequacy of insurance policies, and the complexity of contractor-subcontractor relations.



### **Victimization and Human Rights Dimension Seafarers on abandoned ships are often left behind:**

- Have not been paid for months,
- Cannot come ashore in ports,
- Lack access to basic food, water and medical services,
- Have difficulty communicating with their families.

This is a clear violation of the rights under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and MLC 2006.

### **Conclusion and Evaluation**

Ship abandonment is not only an issue of labor law but also a threat to the right of maritime workers to live in decent conditions. Strengthening the inspection and assurance mechanisms stipulated by international law, increasing the effectiveness of organizations such as ITF, and clarifying the responsibility of the flag state in particular are essential for the solution of this problem.

Turkey should pursue a more effective policy to protect maritime workers, both in its national legislation and internationally; increase ship inspections in ports, improve cooperation with trade unions and ensure that victims of abandonment have easy access to legal support mechanisms.