

# R T A



SENDİKADA BİRLİK, DENİZDE KARDEŞLİK

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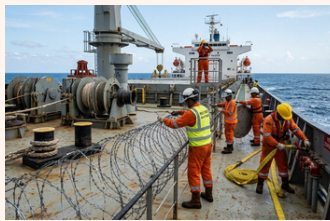
## SEAFARERS ARE NOT ALONE!

- Industrial Relations and Labour Structure in Maritime, Port and Warehouse Services
- The Objection Process in Sectoral Classification Determination Cases and the Impact of Prolonged Judicial Proceedings on Working Life
- Achievements, Bottlenecks and the Internship Crisis in Turkish Maritime Education



### LONG LIVE 1 MAY

May 1 Labour and Solidarity Day was celebrated in Edirne under the leadership of our Confederation, TÜRK-İS. Together with our President İrfan Mete, our Executive Board, the executive boards of our branches and our members, we took our place in the rally area.



### The Invisible Victims of Global Trade

In recent years, increasing geopolitical tensions and armed conflicts on a global scale have created multidimensional areas of risk that directly affect international maritime transport.



**Zinciri kır,  
sendikalı ol!**

### The Visa and Passport Deadlock Facing Seafarers

Maritime work is, by its very nature, a global profession carried out beyond national borders. For a seafarer, the world is a vast map made up of ports. However, in recent years, for Turkish seafarers, this map has been shrinking due to "bureaucratic barriers," despite advanced technologies and international certificates.

Today, the mobility of Turkish seafarers in international waters is restricted not only by storms, but also by piles of paperwork at visa and passport offices.

# FROM THE PRESIDENT İRFAN METE

PRESIDENT OF THE SEAFARERS' UNION OF TURKEY



Behind the wheels that keep the world turning lies labour. Millions of workers who produce, provide services, create value and ensure the continuity of social life in every sphere are shaping the future through their hard work. Yet today, labour is struggling to preserve the value it deserves in the face of the problems of working life. For this reason, strengthening solidarity, protecting our rights and defending the dignity of labour are more important than ever.

High inflation and deepening economic difficulties are making the living conditions of millions of people who depend on their labour increasingly difficult with each passing day. Wage increases often fall behind the rising cost of living, and workers are forced to struggle not only in their workplaces but also in their daily lives to make ends meet.

During this period, both in our country and in many parts of the world, we have witnessed workers' struggles to claim their rights. Workers from different sectors have resorted to strikes and various forms of action for better wages, safe working conditions and trade union rights. From Europe to America, from Asia to Latin America, the labour movement has continued to strongly voice its demand for justice in working life.

In our country, however, structural obstacles to trade union organisation unfortunately continue to exist. Chief among these are objections to union authorisation, which have been awaiting a solution for many years. Although workers organise in a trade union through their own free will, objections to authorisation that extend over lengthy judicial processes delay the exercise of the right to collective bargaining and weaken the will for trade union organisation. Yet trade union rights are among the fundamental elements of democratic societies, and it is of great importance that the process be accelerated and that obstacles be removed so that these rights can be exercised effectively.

We believe in the organised power of labour, and we know that the path to protecting and improving workers' rights lies through strong trade unions. With this understanding, we remain determined to defend the rights and interests of our members, to produce solutions to the problems of working life and to strengthen solidarity.

In the period ahead, we will continue our struggle to improve our economic and social rights, strengthen job security, remove the obstacles to trade union organisation and establish a fairer order in working life. Because we know that the stronger the voice of labour becomes, the fairer and more democratic working life will be.

On this occasion, I would like to thank all our members, workplace representatives and everyone who contributes to the struggle for labour, and I sincerely believe that our unity and solidarity will grow even stronger in the period ahead.

## Line of Business No. 16 in Türkiye: Industrial Relations and Labour Structure in Maritime, Port and Warehouse Services

Working life and the institutional basis of trade union organisation in Türkiye are founded on the line-of-business system, which is determined according to the operational and strategic weight of different sectors. Regulated under Law No. 6356 on Trade Unions and Collective Labour Agreements, Line of Business No. 16, titled “Maritime, Port, Storage and Warehousing,” constitutes one of the most critical links in the logistics and production chain at the heart of global trade. Considering that approximately 80 percent of goods traded worldwide are transported by sea, the strategic importance of this line of business in terms of economic and industrial relations becomes even clearer.

Line of Business No. 16 does not refer merely to a narrow sectoral field consisting only of seafarers working on board ships. On the contrary, it covers an integrated logistics chain that begins at sea, gains momentum in ports, continues through sorting and handling in storage facilities and bonded warehouses, and is completed through production and maintenance activities in shipyards. Alongside the technical and administrative personnel carrying out operations on commercial vessels, port workers who manage loading and unloading activities in port areas, workers in customs areas and bonded warehouses who ensure the continuity of the supply chain, and shipyard workers involved in shipbuilding and repair processes are the main complementary components of this line of business. Therefore, this field represents a holistic ecosystem that encompasses all operational extensions of maritime trade, both on land and at sea.



Due to the operational diversity it encompasses and the heavy industrial conditions it involves, this line of business is among the working areas where physical and psychosocial risk factors are most intensely experienced. While factors such as long voyages on ships, being away from family and isolation create a serious psychosocial burden on workers, the 24/7 shift system in port areas, where operations are carried out against time, and heavy industrial conditions such as working at height in shipyards make the risk of occupational accidents a constant reality. Similarly, in storage facilities and bonded warehouses, high-tempo working models driven by the pressure of just-in-time delivery create intense physical pressure on the workforce. These structural challenges make standardised and uncompromising occupational health and safety policies essential across the sector.

In such a high-risk strategic sector where there is no margin for error, the fundamental function of trade union organisation is not limited merely to wage bargaining; it directly ensures that job security and occupational health standards become permanent norms. Collective labour agreements serve as a vital monitoring mechanism in terms of bringing working hours within humane limits, securing overtime rights under legal protection, and ensuring the complete provision of technical safety equipment. Indeed, the fact that the Seafarers' Union has reached 7,000 members is a direct result of workers' search for institutional security and trade union solidarity in this dispersed and dynamic line of business.



As a result, the healthy functioning of this major economic mechanism formed by maritime transport, port operations, storage and shipyard activities is only possible when the labour dimension is organised under a strong, transparent and determined trade union structure. This balance is a critical necessity both for the protection of workers' rights and for the sustainability of Türkiye's global logistics vision.

In Türkiye, the logistics, port and shipyard sectors serve as the cornerstone of foreign trade, industry and the production chain. However, behind the unseen face of these sectors, the problems experienced by thousands of workers labouring under harsh working conditions draw attention. Across a wide range of workplaces extending from warehouses to ports, from shipyards to bonded storage facilities, workers struggle with low wages, job insecurity, occupational accidents and long working hours.

## **Problems Faced by Warehouse and Bonded Warehouse Workers**

### **1. Heavy and Intense Working Conditions**

Workers employed in warehouses and bonded warehouses often perform their duties under conditions involving heavy lifting, prolonged standing and an intense work pace. This may lead to musculoskeletal disorders and occupational diseases.

### **2. Low Wages and Problems Related to Social Rights**

In many enterprises within the sector, low wages and limited social rights stand out as significant problems.

### **3. Subcontracting and Job Insecurity**

The widespread use of subcontracting in warehouse and bonded warehouse services weakens workers' job security and makes trade union organisation more difficult.

### **4. Deficiencies in Occupational Health and Safety**

Although there are many risks such as forklift accidents, the risk of falling and heavy loading operations, occupational safety measures are observed to be insufficient in some enterprises.



## **Problems Faced by Port Workers**

### **1. Intense and Irregular Working Hours**

Since ports operate 24 hours a day, shift-based working systems are highly common. This situation may negatively affect workers' social lives and health.

### **2. High Risk of Occupational Accidents**

Due to crane operations, container handling and the movement of heavy loads, ports are working areas with a high risk of occupational accidents.

### **3. Workload and Staff Shortages**

Despite the increasing volume of trade, the lack of sufficient personnel in some ports causes existing workers to work under a heavier workload.

### **4. Obstacles to Trade Union Organisation**

In some enterprises, indirect or explicit pressure against trade union activities may be observed.

## Problems Faced by Shipyard Workers

### 1. Occupational Accidents and Safety Problems

Shipyards are known as one of the working areas in Türkiye where occupational accidents occur most frequently. Falls from height, explosions, fires and accidents involving heavy equipment are among the major risks.

### 2. Widespread Use of Subcontracting

The subcontracting system is highly common in shipyards. This situation may lead to wage differences, loss of rights and precarious employment.

### 3. Risk of Occupational Diseases

Due to welding work, painting operations and exposure to chemical substances, respiratory diseases and various occupational illnesses may occur.

### 4. Long and Intense Working Hours

In shipyards, long working hours and intense overtime may be observed, particularly depending on delivery deadlines.

## Common Problems

Warehouse, bonded warehouse, port and shipyard workers employed under Line of Business No. 16 also face many common problems:

- insufficient implementation of occupational health and safety standards
- subcontracting and precarious employment
- inadequate wages and social rights
- long and irregular working hours

obstacles to trade union organisation



**For Our Rights, For Our Future: Join TDS!**

# Line-of-Business Determination Disputes and the Impact of Prolonged Court Proceedings on Working Life

## Introduction

One of the most fundamental elements of working life is the accurate legal and practical determination of the “line of business” in which a workplace operates. In Türkiye, line-of-business determination, regulated under Law No. 6356 on Trade Unions and Collective Labour Agreements, directly shapes which trade union workers may join, the course of collective labour agreement processes and working conditions. However, the use of objection mechanisms against these determinations made by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, and the fact that the judicial phase may extend over several years, have turned into a chronic problem that undermines industrial peace and creates serious grievances, particularly for workers.

## Line-of-Business Determination and the Legal Objection Process

The line of business to which a workplace belongs is determined by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security according to the nature of the principal work carried out at that workplace, upon the application of the relevant trade unions, the employer or employers’ unions. The decision taken as a result of the Ministry’s examination is announced by being published in the Official Gazette. By safeguarding the right of objection, the legislator grants the parties concerned the right to file a lawsuit before the competent Labour Court for the annulment of the decision within fifteen days from the date of its publication.

During the judicial phase initiated upon objection, the court generally conducts an on-site inspection at the workplace and obtains reports from expert panels consisting of legal experts, financial advisors and sectoral specialists. Following the decision of the court of first instance, the file proceeds through the stages of appeal before the Regional Court of Justice and review before the Court of Cassation, which constitutes the ordinary course of the legal process.



## The Prolongation of Judicial Proceedings and Its Impact on Collective Labour Agreements

Although the law provides that line-of-business determination cases should be concluded swiftly through an expedited procedure, in judicial practice in Türkiye, these cases may last between two and four years, and at times even longer. The heavy workload of courts, mutual objections to expert reports, the preparation of supplementary reports, bad-faith objections by employers, the filing of cases before unauthorised courts and delays during appellate review are among the main reasons for the prolongation of the process.

The greatest crisis created by this legal dispute is that the filing of a line-of-business determination case directly suspends the authorisation determination procedures and the Collective Labour Agreement process at the workplace by being treated as a preliminary issue. A legal mechanism established for the pursuit of rights thus leads, as the process becomes prolonged, to the de facto suspension of those very rights.

# Grievances Experienced by Workers, Employers and Trade Unions

## 1. Losses Experienced by Workers

Due to the suspension of the Collective Labour Agreement process, workers are deprived of wage increases and social rights, which are their most basic expectations. During lawsuits that last for years, workers are forced to work with wages eroded by inflation and cannot see the concrete benefits of trade union organisation, which is a constitutional right. This situation deeply shakes the worker's sense of belonging, work motivation and trust in the system.



## 2. Damage to Trade Union Organisation

The main purpose of a trade union is to improve the rights of its members through collective labour agreements. However, during the lawsuit process, the trade union, whose hands are tied, does not suffer a loss of reputation in the eyes of workers because it cannot achieve any actual gain in the workplace. Long waiting periods lead workers to resign from the union or to lose their belief in organisation, thereby weakening the trade union movement.



## Conclusion

The delays experienced in line-of-business determination cases constitute one of the most striking examples in working life of the principle that "justice delayed is justice denied." The fact that the rights to unionisation and collective labour agreements, which are constitutional rights, become effectively unusable due to procedural delays is incompatible with the principle of the rule of law. In order to eliminate these grievances, it is essential to establish specialised special chambers within labour courts that will deal only with collective labour law disputes, to subject expert examinations to stricter time limits, to reject the employer's bad-faith objections that have no legal basis on procedural grounds, and to develop alternative legal formulas in the judicial procedure that will not completely lock the Collective Labour Agreement process.

## ON THE SHORES OF BLUE HORIZONS: ACHIEVEMENTS, BOTTLENECKS AND THE INTERNSHIP CRISIS IN TURKISH MARITIME EDUCATION

Turkiye is not merely a geography surrounded by seas on three sides, but a strategic power striving to combine its thousands of years of maritime heritage with modern educational norms. Today, Turkish maritime education advances across a wide spectrum, from high school level to doctoral level, in a structure fully compliant with the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the STCW Convention. However, although this structure may appear magnificent from the outside, internally it is struggling with storms created by structural problems such as “internship” and “employment planning.”

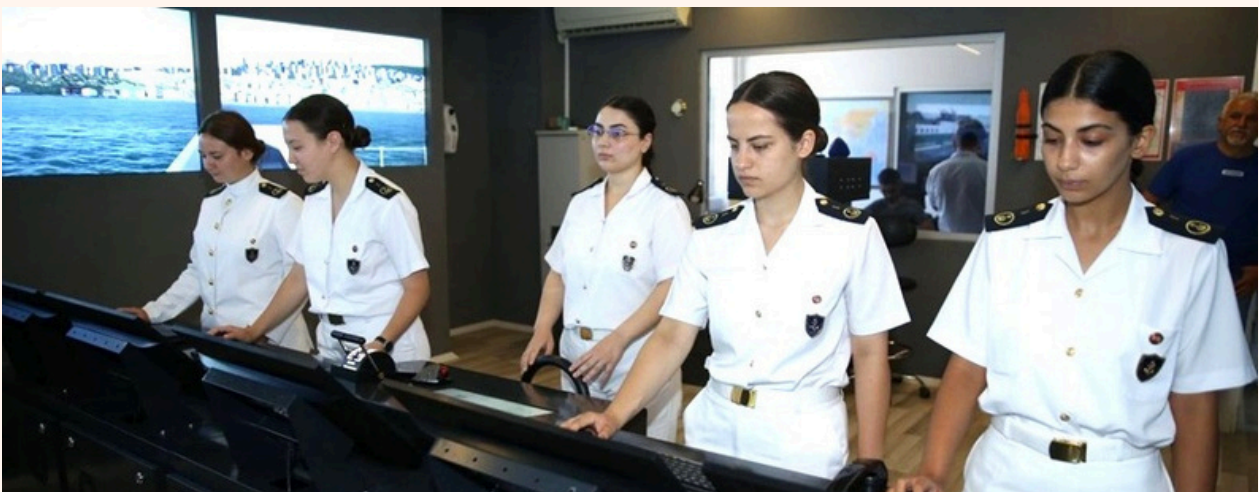


### **Our Educational Infrastructure: Where Do We Stand in Global Competition?**

Turkiye has proven its maturity by being included in the “White List” among the countries that train seafarers worldwide. Especially in the last twenty years, our maritime faculties have been equipped with high-tech bridge and engine room simulators.

**University Level:** Leading institutions such as ITU Maritime Faculty (YDO), Dokuz Eylül and Piri Reis export captains and engineers not only to Turkiye but also to global giants. Our quality of education is above European standards in theoretical and technical terms.

**High School Level:** Maritime Vocational and Technical Anatolian High Schools serve as the “kitchen” of the sector, introducing young people to discipline at an early age. However, the uncontrolled increase in the number of schools has created a gap between institutions in terms of instructor quality and laboratory facilities.



## 1. Maritime Faculties (Bachelor's Degree – 4 Years)

The number of faculties providing maritime education in Türkiye has increased with newly opened departments and investments made by foundation universities.

**Number of Faculties:** Across Türkiye, maritime-focused undergraduate education is provided at approximately 16 universities, including 11 state universities and 5 foundation universities.

**Prominent Departments:** Maritime Transportation and Management Engineering (Deck) and Marine Engineering Operations Engineering.

Certificates of Competency Granted:

**Ocean-Going Watchkeeping Officer:** Graduates of the Deck Department obtain this certificate of competency by taking the GASM (Seafarers' Examination Centre) exam after completing their internships. With this certificate, they begin their careers as fourth and third officers on ships of all tonnages worldwide.

**Ocean-Going Watchkeeping Engineer:** This applies to graduates of the Engine Department. It opens the way for them to work as fourth and third engineers on ships all over the world.

Process: After completing a certain period of sea service, seafarers become "Ocean-Going Chief Officer/Second Engineer" and eventually "Ocean-Going Master" or "Ocean-Going Chief Engineer" by passing the relevant examinations.

## 2. Maritime Vocational Schools (Associate Degree – 2 Years)

Maritime Vocational Schools aim to train competent officers at the operational level. Number of Vocational Schools: In Türkiye, approximately 19 universities have Maritime Transportation and Management (Deck) and Marine Engineering Operations programmes.

**Certificates of Competency Granted:**

Watchkeeping Officer (up to 3000 GT): Graduates of two-year schools may work as officers on ships below 3000 Gross Tons (GT) after completing their sea internships and successfully passing the examination.

Marine Engineer Officer (up to 3000 kW): **For graduates of the Engine Department**, this provides the authority to work on ships with engine power up to 3000 kW.

Restricted Certificates: Some schools and courses may also grant certificate authority for lower tonnage vessels, such as 500 GT, or for limited waters.



## The “Internship” Wall: The Point Where Education Remains Incomplete

The most critical component of maritime education is the 12-month open-sea internship during which the student personally experiences the sea and the ship. However, today this requirement has turned into an insurmountable wall for thousands of students.

**Academic Losses and Prolongation of Schooling:** A student who successfully completes all theoretical courses in a four-year faculty cannot gain the right to graduate if they cannot find a ship on which to complete their internship. Today, in our port cities, there are thousands of young people whose education has been extended by two, or even three years, simply because they could not complete their internship. This situation is not only an individual loss of time, but also a national loss, meaning that the country’s trained human resources remain idle.

**Quota Inflation:** The main reason for this crisis is that the quotas opened in higher education institutions are far above the sector’s capacity to accept interns. While the number of students reaching the graduation stage increases every year, the number of “cadet cabins” on ships remains fixed. The result is a relentless and often unfair competition in which thousands of candidates compete for a few hundred places.

**Opportunity Inequality and Social Problems:** When the process of finding an internship placement generally proceeds through personal references, young people who are qualified but have no connections are left out. In particular, the difficulties experienced by female students in finding internship placements due to the prejudiced attitudes of some shipowners are an ethical problem that the sector must solve.

### Solutions: How Can We Leave the Port?

In order to save maritime education from this deadlock, not only an academic approach but also a holistic state policy is necessary:

**National Training Ships:** Modern “Training Ships” should be built where students can complete at least 3- or 6-month internship periods collectively, under controlled conditions and academic supervision.

**Shipowner Incentives:** Serious incentives should be provided to companies employing interns in areas such as fuel, port taxes or SSI premiums, so that interns are seen not as a “burden” but as an “investment in the future.”

**Quota Planning:** The Council of Higher Education and the Directorate General of Maritime Affairs should work in coordination and dynamically revise faculty quotas according to the capacity of the merchant fleet.

### Final Word: The Future of Young People Should Not Be Left to the Waves

Turkiye’s ideal of becoming a maritime nation is measured not only by opening magnificent buildings, but also by being able to carry the young people who graduate from those buildings to the watches of ships. Every young person who has completed their education but waits on land because they cannot find an internship is a breach opened in our Blue Homeland vision. Sector stakeholders, academia and the state must join hands and break this “internship shackle.” Otherwise, even if we have the best simulators, we will face the risk of raising a generation disconnected from the real seas.



## THE INVISIBLE WALLS OF BLUE BORDERS: THE VISA AND PASSPORT DEADLOCK FACING SEAFARERS

Maritime work is, by its very nature, a global profession carried out beyond borders. For a seafarer, the world is a vast map made up of ports. However, in recent years, for Turkish seafarers, this map has been narrowing due to “bureaucratic barriers,” despite advanced technologies and international certificates. Today, the mobility of Turkish seafarers in international waters is restricted not only by storms, but also by piles of paperwork at visa and passport offices.

### **The Green Passport and Professional Status Debate**

One of the most fundamental demands voiced for years by the Turkish maritime community is the granting of the right to a special passport, known as the green passport, to seafarers with a certain level of seniority.

**Perception of Inequality:** The fact that the green passport right granted to exporters is withheld from seafarers who provide direct foreign currency inflow to the country and work in a strategic line of business leads to a serious loss of motivation in the sector.

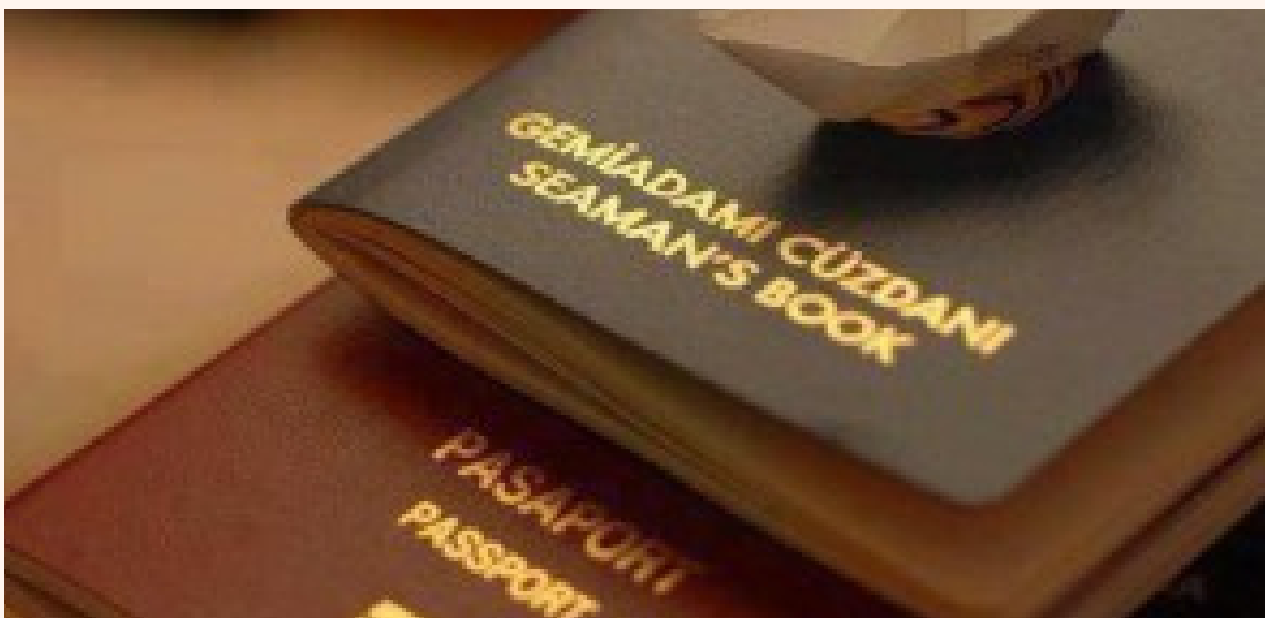
**Operational Obstacle:** The absence of the green passport puts Turkish seafarers at a disadvantage in urgent crew changes and directs shipowners towards foreign personnel who do not have visa problems.

### **The “Appointment” Crisis in Schengen and U.S. Visas**

Especially for personnel who will join or leave a ship in European and American ports, the visa process has turned into a complete “race against time.”

**Prolonged Appointment Periods:** The fact that consulates in the Schengen area give appointment dates months later causes personnel to miss their ship joining dates. This situation not only causes the worker to lose their job, but also exposes ships to the risk of being detained in ports due to personnel shortages through Port State Control inspections.

**Bureaucratic Distrust:** Although the seafarer’s book is an internationally valid identity document, it is not considered sufficient by many consulates; seafarers are asked to provide complex financial statements and hotel reservations just like tourists. Yet the seafarer’s home is the ship, and their route is already predetermined.





### **Difficulties Experienced During Transit Passages**

For a seafarer, a visa is not only a right of “entry” but also a right of “evacuation.” In the event of a health problem on board or a family emergency, it is of vital importance that the personnel can be sent home from the nearest port.

**Restricted Area of Movement:** Due to visa barriers, personnel cannot be evacuated by air in emergencies; ship personnel remain almost “imprisoned on board” in a country where they do not have a visa. This situation also contradicts the principles of fundamental human rights and maritime labour law (MLC).

### **Issues Awaiting Solutions: Diplomacy and Reform**

The following steps are not a luxury, but a necessity in order to preserve the competitiveness of Turkish seafarers in the global arena:

**Right to a Green Passport:** Granting green passports to seafarers who have completed a certain number of years of service, for example ocean-going officers, would eliminate 80 percent of bureaucratic obstacles.

**Seafarer Visa Facilitation / Crew Visa:** Through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, special “accelerated and simplified” visa appointment slots should be created for seafarers.

**Digital Integration:** The digital verifiability of seafarers’ books should be increased, and data sharing with foreign customs authorities should be strengthened in order to certify the reliability of Turkish seafarers.

Seafarers are Turkiye’s flag bearers at sea. Making them wait in passport queues and at the doors of visa offices slows down not only those individuals, but also the speed and reputation of Turkish maritime trade. The “Blue Homeland” must be protected not only through waters, but also through qualified personnel who can move freely in those waters and who have been freed from the shackles of visas.

# LONG LIVE 1 MAY

1 May Labour and Solidarity Day Celebrated in Edirne

1 May Labour and Solidarity Day was celebrated in Edirne under the leadership of our Confederation, TÜRK-İŞ. Together with our President İrfan Mete, our Executive Board, the executive boards of our branches and our members, we took our place in the rally area.



## We Were Also in the Squares in Izmir

In Izmir, thousands of workers came together at Gündoğdu Square to celebrate 1 May. Members of our union also entered the area by forming a cortege. The 1 May celebrations in İzmir ended with speeches and concerts.



## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TURKISH MERCHANT FLEET AND THE TREND TOWARDS FOREIGN FLAGS

The Turkish merchant fleet has shown significant growth in recent years in terms of the number of vessels and carrying capacity. A significant part of the fleet owned by Turkish shipowners operates registered under foreign registries. This situation emerges as a structural issue that needs to be carefully examined in terms of the development of Turkish maritime.

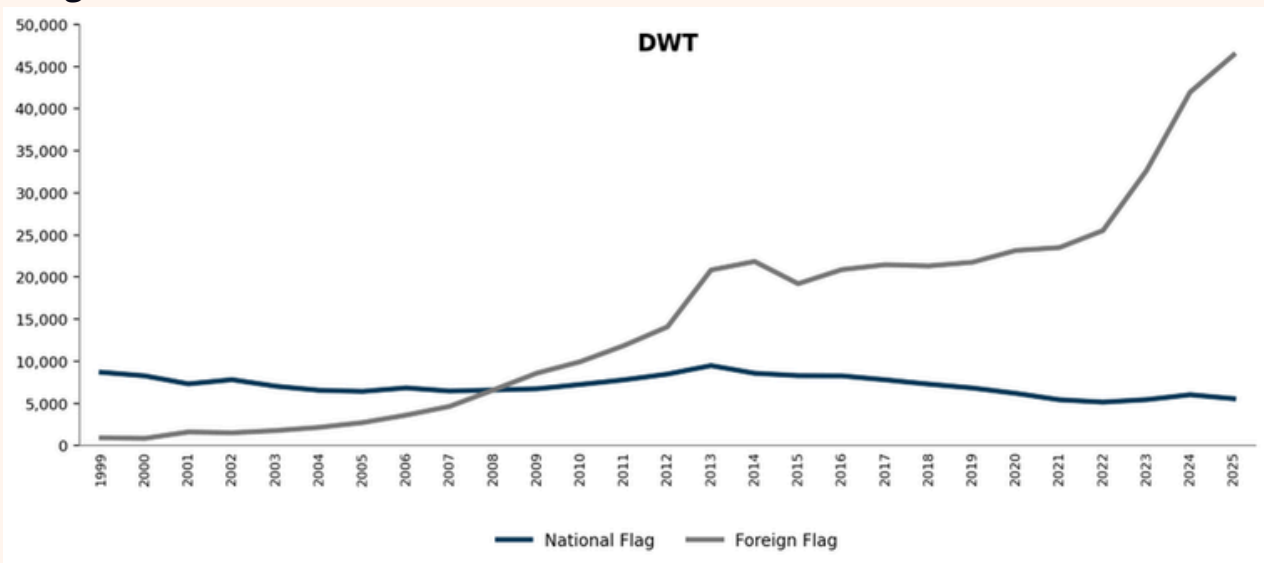
### Turkish and Foreign Flag Distribution of the Turkish Fleet:

Years	National Flag			Foreign Flag			Total Fleet		Annual DWT Change %
	Number	1,000 DWT	%	Number	1,000 DWT	%	Number	1,000 DWT	
1999	448	8,697	905	69	915	95	517	9,612	
2000	456	8,269	906	96	855	94	552	9,124	-51
2001	445	7,321	820	107	1,607	180	552	8,928	-21
2002	451	7,815	838	117	1,514	162	568	9,329	45
2003	432	7,045	799	147	1,772	201	579	8,817	-55
2004	408	6,556	752	163	2,159	248	571	8,715	-12
2005	420	6,427	702	237	2,725	298	657	9,152	50
2006	432	6,844	655	353	3,609	345	785	10,453	142
2007	446	6,464	582	424	4,65	418	870	11,114	63
2008	490	6,592	500	513	6,591	500	1,003	13,183	186
2009	520	6,736	439	636	8,592	561	1,156	15,328	163
2010	560	7,246	421	665	9,954	579	1,225	17,201	122
2011	547	7,797	397	672	11,863	603	1,219	19,66	143
2012	523	8,479	376	642	14,093	624	1,165	22,572	148
2013	627	9,488	313	842	20,838	687	1,469	30,326	344
2014	599	8,58	282	890	21,846	718	1,489	30,427	3
2015	564	8,297	302	834	19,209	698	1,398	27,507	-96
2016	551	8,272	284	984	20,879	716	1,535	29,151	60
2017	525	7,8	267	1,022	21,465	733	1,547	29,265	4
2018	483	7,288	255	1,028	21,323	745	1,511	28,611	-22
2019	457	6,831	239	1,027	21,758	761	1,484	28,589	-1
2020	410	6,194	211	1,074	23,157	789	1,484	29,352	27
2021	384	5,432	188	1,108	23,497	812	1,492	28,929	-14
2022	353	5,157	168	1,164	25,523	832	1,517	30,68	61
2023	345	5,447	143	1,352	32,649	857	1,697	38,096	242
2024	348	6,026	126	1,614	41,95	874	1,962	47,976	259
2025	343	5,564	107	1,749	46,38	893	2,092	51,943	83

As of 1999, when the Turkish International Ship Registry (TUGS) was established, the table above shows the year-by-year change in vessels registered under the Turkish ship registry and foreign-flagged vessels owned by Turkish shipowners. As can be seen in the table, while the national flag followed a fluctuating course in terms of the number of vessels until 2013, there was a steady increase under foreign flags. From 2013 onwards, while the number of vessels and total carrying capacity in the Turkish fleet decreased in the national registry, they increased with accelerating momentum in foreign registries. By 2025, the total capacity of the Turkish-owned merchant fleet had reached approximately 51.943 million deadweight tons. Approximately 89.3% of this operates under foreign flags, while only 10.7% carries the national flag.

At this point, it should be recalled that the data in the table relate to the date on which they were obtained. According to the latest fleet statistics published on the official website of the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, although the number of vessels of 1,000 GT and above flying the Turkish flag has reached 398 and the total carrying capacity has reached 6,373,080 deadweight tons, changes may be observed in current data due to the frequent occurrence of registry changes[1].

**Graph 25. Fleet Development of Turkish Shipowners under Turkish and Foreign Flags (1,000 GT and Above)**



As also reflected in the graph, it is observed that the gap between the number of vessels registered under the Turkish flag and the number of foreign-flagged vessels owned by Turkish shipowners has widened, and that although the Turkish fleet has grown, the preference for foreign flags has increased significantly



[1] <https://denizcilikistatistikleri.uab.gov.tr/filo-istatistikleri>. Erişim Tarihi: 20.05.2026

## Distribution of the World Merchant Fleet by Country and Registry:

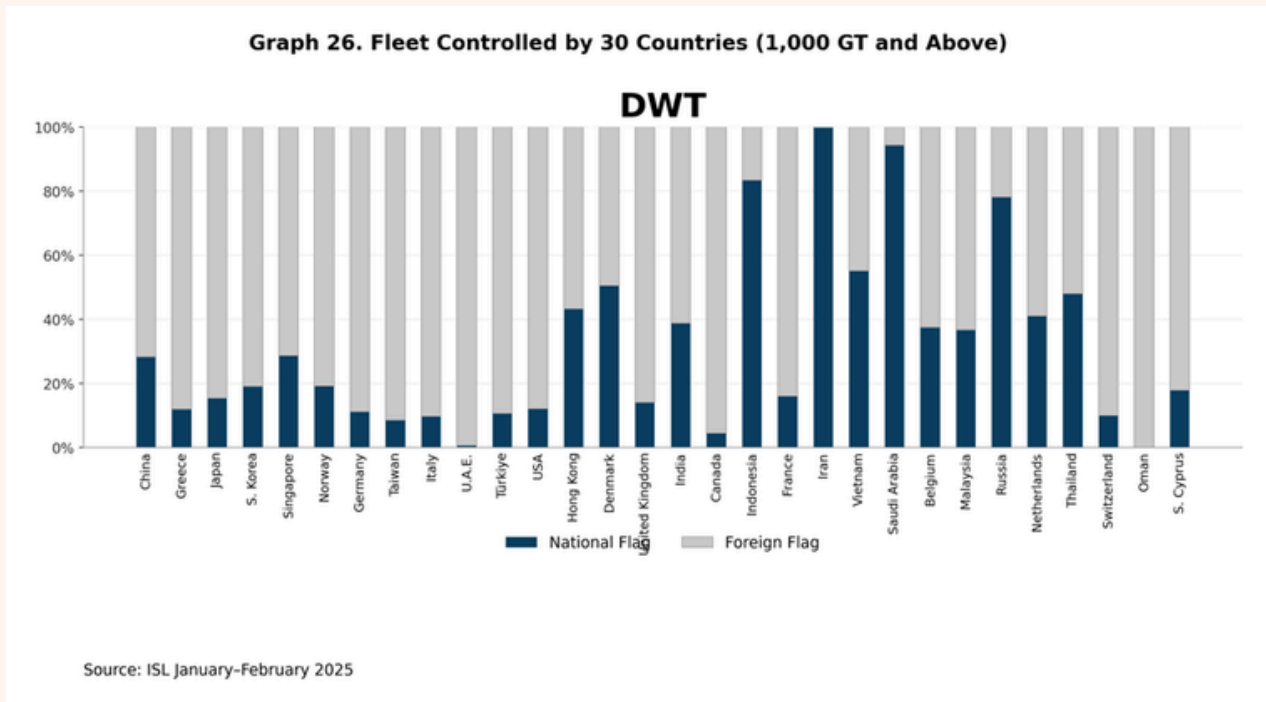
Country of Control		National Flag				Foreign Flag				Total Fleet				Foreign Flag DWT %
No.	Country	Vessels	1,000 DWT	1,000 TEU	Age	Vessels	1,000 DWT	1,000 TEU	Age	Vessels	1,000 DWT	1,000 TEU	Age	
1	China	5,876	125,001	1,348	13.0	4,394	314,821	4,378	13.5	10,270	439,822	5,726	13.2	71.6
2	Greece	569	51,361	40	17.5	4,749	375,094	2,047	13.7	5,318	426,455	2,087	14.1	88.0
3	Japan	903	39,875	323	13.2	3,460	217,359	2,315	9.0	4,363	257,234	2,638	9.8	84.5
4	S. Korea	753	19,393	645	18.3	911	82,407	661	12.0	1,664	101,800	1,306	14.9	80.9
5	Singapore	696	25,118	458	11.5	937	62,453	811	14.6	1,633	87,571	1,269	13.3	71.3
6	Norway	677	15,540	84	17.8	968	64,896	450	15.3	1,645	80,436	534	16.3	80.7
7	Germany	138	8,028	712	19.9	1,944	63,559	2,720	14.9	2,082	71,587	3,431	15.2	88.8
8	Taiwan	122	5,604	226	15.8	912	59,579	1,903	12.0	1,034	65,184	2,130	12.4	91.4
9	Italy	352	5,972	66	22.2	946	54,944	3,271	16.3	1,298	60,916	3,337	17.9	90.2
10	U.A.E.	49	387	6	15.4	1,075	51,670	283	19.6	1,124	52,057	290	19.4	99.3
11	Türkiye	343	5,564	71	23.9	1,749	46,380	265	21.9	2,092	51,943	335	22.2	89.3
12	United States	222	6,107	99	24.6	829	44,507	116	16.5	1,051	50,614	215	18.2	87.9
13	Hong Kong	346	20,523	21	13.6	574	26,918	70	19.6	920	47,441	91	17.3	56.7
14	Denmark	339	21,807	1,356	15.7	404	21,250	1,186	16.2	743	43,057	2,542	16.0	49.4
15	United Kingdom	154	5,891	183	16.0	660	35,794	994	14.4	814	41,684	1,176	14.7	85.9
16	India	691	15,375	15	17.2	350	24,256	10	17.5	1,041	39,632	25	17.3	61.2
17	Canada	133	1,662	5	24.4	422	35,421	1,971	12.4	555	37,083	1,975	15.3	95.5
18	Indonesia	2,237	26,251	173	26.0	169	5,185	75	17.5	2,406	31,437	248	25.4	16.5
19	France	118	4,374	328	14.6	354	22,791	1,836	12.9	472	27,165	2,163	13.4	83.9
20	Iran	209	18,377	154	23.5	7	17		28.0	216	18,394	154	23.6	0.1
21	Vietnam	804	10,028	52	17.5	263	6,124	13	19.6	1,067	18,151	65	18.0	44.8
22	Saudi Arabia	129	16,913	11	13.7	24	1,005	0	15.1	153	17,919	12	14.0	5.6
23	Belgium	59	5,706	9	9.7	100	9,512	19	12.9	159	15,218	28	11.7	62.5
24	Malaysia	203	5,442	42	19.3	159	9,380	3	16.5	362	14,823	45	18.0	63.3
25	Russia	1,289	10,617	140	31.2	156	2,953	19	28.6	1,445	13,570	159	30.9	21.8
26	Netherlands	523	4,642	183	15.7	334	6,651	53	16.8	857	11,292	236	16.1	58.9
27	Thailand	296	3,878	48	28.2	92	4,183	95	17.3	388	8,061	143	25.6	51.9
28	Switzerland	12	767		10.4	123	6,892	6	14.9	135	7,659	6	14.5	90.0
29	Oman	3	1		11.9	62	7,322	10	14.3	65	7,323	10	14.2	100.0
30	S. Cyprus	50	1,285	7	17.8	161	5,866	29	18.0	211	7,150	36	18.0	82.0
	30 Countries Total	18,295	481,489	6,804	18.0	27,288	1,671,188	25,608	14.5	45,583	2,152,677	32,412	15.9	77.6
	Other	2,509	34,866	202	24.7	2,738	81,354	396	23.0	5,247	116,220	597	23.8	70
	Subtotal	20,804	516,355	7,005	18.8	30,026	1,752,543	26,004	15.3	50,830	2,268,897	33,009	16.7	77.2
	Unknown									1,289	50,430	199	24.4	
	World Total									52,119	2,319,328	33,208	16.9	

According to the table, 70.84% of the world merchant fleet is controlled by the top 10 countries, and a large share of these fleets is registered under foreign flags.

In the ranking of the flags under which the world merchant fleet is registered, Liberia, Panama and the Marshall Islands rank in the top three, respectively, with a total DWT share of 46.5%[1]. These countries are referred to as “flags of convenience” due to low tax burdens, flexible crewing regulations and low operational costs.

[1] Source: Based on data from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Clarksons Research and UNCTADstat.

Turkiye ranks 11th with a total merchant fleet of 2,098 vessels and a carrying capacity of 51.943 million deadweight tons. Turkiye also follows the general trend among countries towards flags of convenience, with a foreign-flag ratio of 89.3%.



Although the data at the beginning of 2025 are as shown above, Minister of Transport and Infrastructure Abdulkadir Uraloğlu stated in his parliamentary speech last December that 2025 had gone down in history as a “golden year” for Turkish maritime, and announced that the Turkish Merchant Fleet had risen to the top 10 in the world ranking with 2,203 vessels and a capacity of 53.1 million deadweight tons.

In general terms, although the development shown by the Turkish fleet over the years is promising in terms of our sectoral potential, the fact that this development has shifted towards foreign flags and has progressed mainly through this channel is an issue that needs to be examined.

### **Reasons Why Turkish Shipowners Prefer Foreign Flags:**

This tendency is mostly directed towards the registries of countries referred to as “flags of convenience.” Flag of convenience countries generally have registries that adopt an open registry system and provide tax-related, operational and legal conveniences. The flags of countries such as Liberia, Panama, the Marshall Islands and Malta are among the leading flags of convenience. The transport-related conveniences granted in the open registries of these countries are considered more advantageous compared to the Turkish flag.

- Tax reductions and other compulsory expenses are either not applied locally or are applied at very low rates.
- Since there is no requirement for the crew to be nationals of the flag state, the shipowner has the freedom to employ cheap labour from the global labour market.
- Revenues from international cargoes are higher than those from cabotage cargoes.
- Sellers located abroad prefer foreign-flagged vessels.

## **Turkiye's Transition to an International Open Registry**

As explained above, flag of convenience countries around the world are preferred by shipowners thanks to the advantages they provide. In Türkiye, in order to prevent shipowners from shifting to foreign flags and to compete with open registries, a second registry called the "Turkish International Ship Registry (TUGS)" was established in addition to the National Ship Registry (MGS). In the second registry (TUGS), advantages similar to those provided by flag of convenience country registries were envisaged, and it was aimed to prevent vessels owned by citizens from shifting to flag of convenience states due to the heavy requirements of national ship registries, thereby ensuring the establishment of a "genuine link" between the ship and the flag state.



### **In this regard, some of the advantages envisaged under TUGS are as follows[1]:**

- Tax Exemption: Earnings obtained from the operation of vessels registered in TUGS are exempt from income and corporate tax.
- Wages paid to personnel working on vessels registered in TUGS are exempt from income tax and funds.
- All purchase, sale, mortgage, registration, credit, ship lease, time charter and freight contracts of ships and yachts registered or to be registered in TUGS are exempt from stamp duty and fees.
- Flexibility in Employing Foreign Personnel: The Turkish International Ship Registry, similar to flag of convenience countries, provides more flexible opportunities for the employment of foreign personnel compared to the National Registry. Regardless of the shipowner/operator, the condition that the captain must be a Turkish citizen has been introduced. If the operator is foreign, no Turkish citizenship ratio is required for personnel other than the captain, whereas if the shipowner is Turkish, 51% of the personnel must be Turkish citizens.
- Cabotage Right: Registered vessels have the right to fly the Turkish flag and carry out transportation in Turkish territorial waters.

[1] Turkish International Ship Registry Law No. 4490



TUGS, which is also referred to as the second registry in our country, has certain positive effects on the maritime sector in addition to increasing the competitiveness of the Turkish merchant fleet through tax incentives, lowering ship operating costs and introducing flexibility in personnel employment. Registration procedures carried out in TUGS are public and legally secure property rights. Therefore, the ship demonstrates a genuine link between the shipowner/operator and the flag state. In this way, the social security rights of those working on vessels registered in TUGS are guaranteed, and unregistered employment is prevented. The ability of seafarers to be employed with insurance also makes significant contributions to equality of opportunity in terms of benefiting from trade union rights.

Despite these, no stable development has been observed in the second registry since its establishment; on the contrary, an increasingly accelerating decline is observed in the number of vessels registered in the registry.

As a result, the Turkish merchant fleet has gained significant growth momentum in recent years and has risen to higher ranks in the world ranking. However, the fact that this growth has largely taken place through foreign-flagged vessels continues to be an issue that needs to be addressed in terms of Turkey's maritime policies. Increasing the international competitiveness of the Turkish flag, reducing costs, facilitating access to finance and bringing maritime legislation into line with global market conditions are of critical importance for strengthening the national fleet. In this regard, the development of the incentive mechanisms envisaged under TUGS and increasing the attractiveness of the Turkish flag are seen as a necessity for the sustainable growth of Turkish maritime in the long term.



# The Invisible Victims of Global Trade

In recent years, increasing geopolitical tensions and armed conflicts on a global scale have created multidimensional areas of risk that directly affect international maritime transport. In particular, the transformation of strategic maritime chokepoints such as the Red Sea, the Black Sea and the Persian Gulf into conflict zones has made seafarers' working conditions vulnerable not only economically, but also physically and psychologically. This process is moving maritime work away from being a "commercial activity" in the classical sense and bringing it increasingly closer to the category of a "high-risk working area."



**UNITED NATIONS AND AFFILIATED ORGANIZATIONS:  
THE PROTECTION OF SEAFARERS COMES FIRST**

The United Nations and affiliated organizations clearly emphasize that seafarers must be protected in war and conflict zones.

**IMO** INTERNATIONAL MARITIME ORGANIZATION

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) states that seafarers are 'key workers' and emphasizes that their rights to safe passage must be protected.

**ILO** INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION

The International Labour Organization (ILO) draws attention to the deterioration of seafarers' working conditions and calls on states and employers to assume responsibility.

In assessments carried out within the UN framework, the situation faced by seafarers in war and conflict zones is defined as follows:

**“ Although seafarers are a critical workforce that ensures the continuity of global trade, they are among the least protected and most vulnerable groups during times of crisis. ”**

**RIGHT TO SAFE PASSAGE**  
Seafarers' right to travel and work safely must be protected.

**KEY WORKERS**  
Seafarers are indispensable to the continuity of the global supply chain.

**SUPPORT DURING CRISIS**  
States should cooperate for the welfare, evacuation and repatriation of seafarers.

**LABOUR RIGHTS AND HUMAN DIGNITY**  
Decent working conditions and rights must be guaranteed under all circumstances.

**INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY**  
All stakeholders must assume responsibility for the protection of seafarers.

**The protection of seafarers is not only the responsibility of one occupational group, but a shared responsibility of global trade, economies and humanity.**

## The Impact of War Conditions on Seafarers

### 1. Physical and Safety Risks

- Risks of missile, drone, or mine attacks
- Seizure or direct attacks on vessels
- Being stranded at sea due to port closures
- Difficulties in evacuation and repatriation
- Risk of injury and disability
- Risk of death

### 2. Psychological Effects

- Working under constant threat
- Fear of death
- Anxiety and trauma
- Burnout syndrome
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Long-term isolation

### 3. Professional and Economic Impacts

- Extended employment contracts
- Failure to carry out crew changes
- Loss of wages and employment rights
- Delayed salary payments
- Inadequate food supplies and medical support
- Pressure to work in high-risk areas
- Declining workforce motivation
- Increased workload and longer watchkeeping hours
- Route changes in maritime transportation

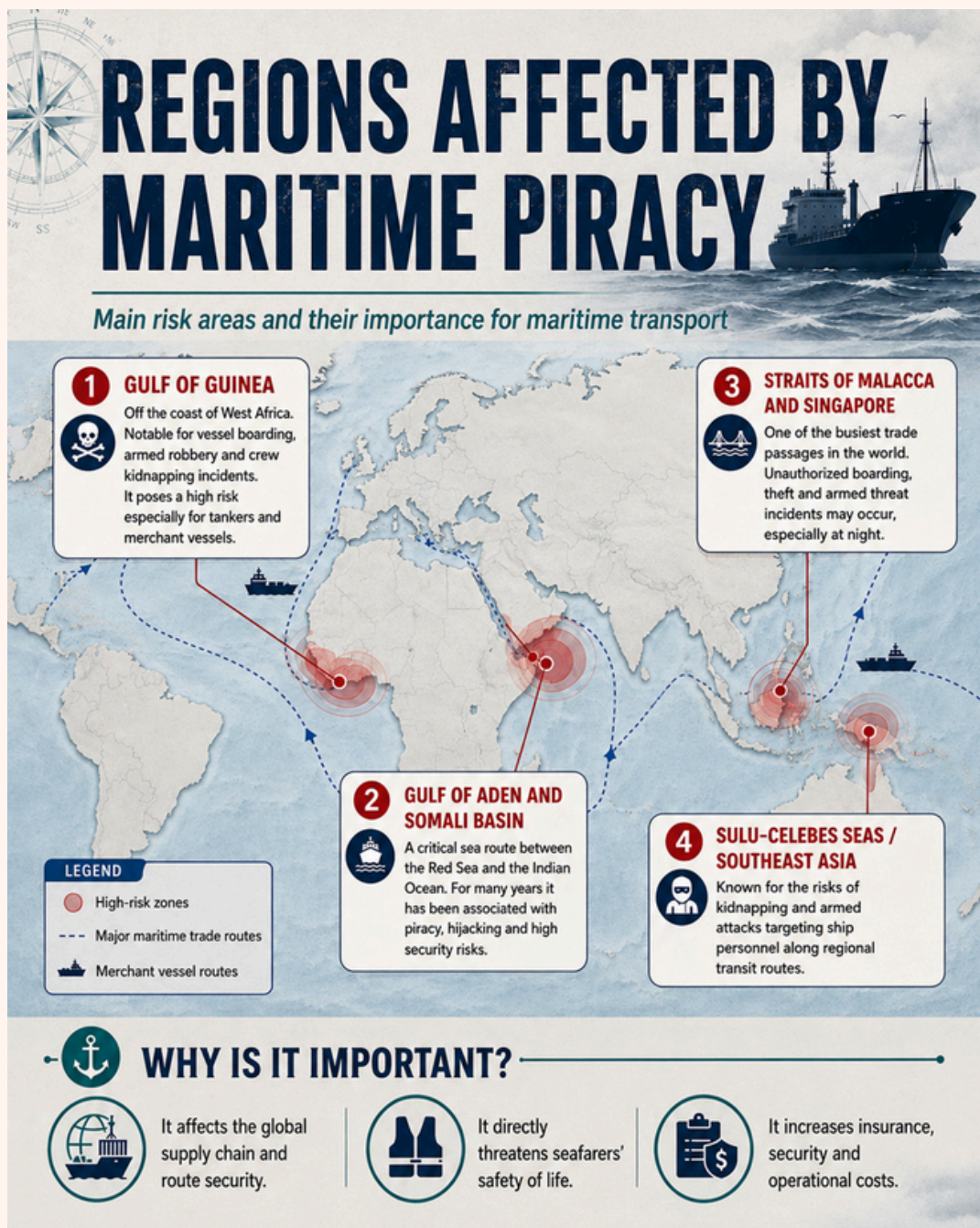
### 4. Social and Humanitarian Consequences

- Inability to return home for months
- Some crew members may be abandoned in ports
- Restrictions on leaving a country due to legal investigations

# Regions Where Maritime Piracy Occurs and Its Effects on Seafarers

Piracy and armed robbery at sea are serious maritime security issues that affect not only ship security, but also directly seafarers' right to life, mental health and working conditions. According to the IMO, "piracy" refers to unlawful acts of violence, detention or depredation committed on the high seas for private ends, while "armed robbery" against ships mostly covers similar attacks occurring within a state's internal waters, archipelagic waters or territorial waters. This distinction is legally important; however, from the perspective of seafarers, the result is often the same: risk to life, kidnapping, injury, psychological trauma and disruption of working order.

Data from 2025 show that piracy and armed robbery at sea have not been completely eliminated. According to the ICC International Maritime Bureau, 137 incidents against ships were recorded in 2025; this figure was 116 in 2024 and 120 in 2023. According to the same report, 121 vessels were boarded, 4 vessels were hijacked, 2 incidents of firing upon vessels and 10 attempted attacks were reported in 2025.



Piracy incidents affect seafarers at three levels: physical safety, psychological health and working order. Armed attacks, forced boarding of the vessel, being taken hostage or kidnapping create a direct threat to life. In particular, watchkeeping personnel working in areas such as the engine room, deck, stern and anchorage areas may be the first people to encounter attackers.

# THE EFFECTS OF PIRACY ON SEAFARERS

*Crew safety, psychological burden and operational consequences*

**1 RISK TO SAFETY OF LIFE**




Armed attack, injury, hostage-taking and the danger of forced boarding create a direct physical risk for seafarers.

**2 PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS**



Constant threat perception, fear, stress, post-traumatic symptoms and prolonged anxiety may negatively affect the crew's mental health.

**3 IMPACT ON WORKING CONDITIONS**



Additional security procedures, alarm watches, working in enclosed areas and route changes increase the daily workload.

**4 FAMILY AND SOCIAL LIFE**



The risk of kidnapping or attack leaves not only the seafarer but also the family waiting at home in uncertainty and anxiety.

**5 ECONOMIC AND PROFESSIONAL CONSEQUENCES**




Delays, insurance costs, claims for hazard compensation and pressure to work on risky routes create consequences across the sector.

**MAIN CONSEQUENCES FOR SEAFARERS**

-  Security concerns increase
-  Fatigue and loss of concentration may occur
-  A need for long-term psychological support may arise
-  Route and watch arrangements may change

**WHY IS A HUMAN-CENTRED APPROACH NECESSARY?**



Piracy is not only a security issue; it is also a matter of labour, human rights and decent working conditions.

**PEOPLE COME FIRST, SAFETY FOLLOWS**  
 Safe seas, healthy crews and sustainable shipping are only possible through human-centred policies.







## WMU Report 'Charting the distinct rights of sea workers in European waters – A focus on decent working time'

On 21 May, a major new report on “Charting the Distinct Rights of Sea Workers in European Waters: A Focus on Decent Working Time”, was released by the World Maritime University (WMU) commissioned by the European Transport Workers’ Federation (ETF) and the International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF).



**Nikolaos Koletsis**  
ETF Senior Policy Officer  
for Maritime Transport

The study is primarily driven by the differential treatment of sea workers compared with land-based workers, which has resulted in their exclusion from several EU directives and in working and living conditions that fall below general labour standards. The report highlights major gaps between the labour protections afforded to sea workers and those enjoyed by land-based workers across Europe.



The findings of the report, were presented by the WMU researchers:

- Dr Raphael Baumler, and
- Dr Maria Carrera Arce

The report confirmed once again that seafarers continue to work in conditions that simply would not be acceptable in most other land-based sectors.

The report reveals that current maritime governance favors commercial and operational interests over occupational safety, health, and decent work standards, with the researchers concluding that chronic overwork threatens both seafarers’ well-being and maritime safety.

Normalisation of excessive working limits and the “Minimum hours of rest” standards apply for those at sea. The existing legislative framework allows sea workers to work up to 91-hours per week.

Exposure to long working hours ( $\geq 55$  hours/week) causes large attributable burdens of ischemic heart disease and stroke, but the research finds an average of 74.9 hours / week, far beyond what ILO considers as decent working time and far beyond the global average of 43 hours/week for worldwide land based workers.

- 53.3% of sea workers work more than 72 hours/week (very very long hours)
- 11.7% more than 91 hours/week (beyond compliance)

Maritime workers do not have working time provisions about night work limitation contrary to other workers.

A fatigue criteria analysis shows that no regulation addresses all eight fatigue-related criteria for transport workers:

- Land workers addresses 3 criteria (including time of day)
- Aviation, road and rail address 6 criteria (including time of day)
- Inland waterways addresses 2 criteria (limitations related to night work and short breaks)
- Shipping and fishing address 0 criteria

Long working hours, insufficient rest and disrupted sleep directly impact concentration, decision-making, situational awareness and increase risks of human error and risks for crews, vessels, cargo, passengers and the marine environment.

At the same time, there is very worrying evidence that long hours, insufficient rest, and disrupted sleep patterns are linked to a range of serious health problems, including cardiovascular issues like heart disease and potentially heart attacks.

Beyond fatigue and working time, the study highlights the important gaps in the protection of sea workers within the EU labour framework, showing that seafarers remain excluded from several horizontal EU labour instruments, creating uncertainty and weaker protections compared with land-based workers.

The study also highlights the need for a critical reassessment of how jurisdiction and applicable law are determined for sea workers. In private employment disputes, the jurisdiction of the Flag State is no longer fit for purpose.

ETF strongly believes that the coming discussions at the ILO IMO Joint tripartite WG represent a critical opportunity for needed regulatory reforms, including the MLC and STCW regimes in rest/work hours.

This process must lead to meaningful reforms. The current framework governing working and rest hours under the MLC and STCW conventions must be reviewed in light of modern scientific evidence on fatigue, sleep, and human performance.

Such engagement is essential to ensure that future regulatory developments effectively strengthen the protection of seafarers' health, safety and working conditions.

The EU could and should take a leadership role in supporting and promoting stronger international protections for sea workers.

Also ensuring that the European Pillar of Social Rights applies meaningfully to seafarers and fishers is of fundamental importance.

A sustainable maritime sector requires that sustainability, competitiveness and labour standards advance together.

You can find the WMU Report 'Charting the distinct rights of sea workers in European waters – A focus on decent working time', here:

<https://www.etf-europe.org/resource/charting-the-distinct-rights-of-sea-workers-in-european-waters/>

