

SEAFARERS' BULLETIN



INTERNATIONAL
TRANSPORT
WORKERS'
FEDERATION

SEAFARERS: SAY NO TO LASHING



English no. 39/2025

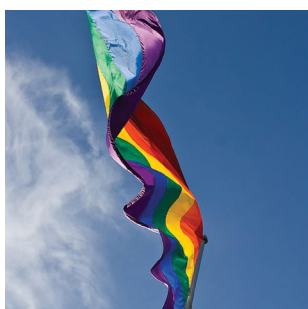
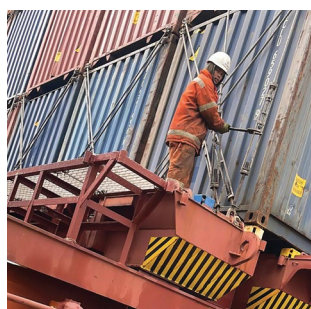
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GET HELP IF ACCUSED OF A CRIME

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YOUR
RIGHTS
PULLOUT
GUIDE**

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CONTRACTS
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The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) is an international trade union federation of transport trade unions, representing nearly 16.5 million transport workers from more than 700 affiliated unions in 153 countries, including nearly a million seafarers from 211 affiliated unions. It is organised in eight industrial sections: seafarers, fishers, inland navigation, dockers, railways, road transport, civil aviation and tourism services. It represents transport workers at world level and promotes their interests through global campaigning and solidarity. The ITF has 130 inspectors, contacts and network coordinators in more than 110 ports worldwide.

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Cover photo: Picture by seafarer, Eugene Jayme Baliguat



“Our inspectors work tirelessly to assist seafarers in trouble.”

Dear friends,

As we leave 2024 behind, it is distressing that seafarers continue to be affected by conflict. *Seafarers' bulletin* takes a look at the impact of Houthi attacks on merchant vessels in the Red Sea and reiterates the ITF's call for greater protections for seafarers. And we hear how the MTWTU in Ukraine is assisting its members and their families nearly three years after the Russian invasion.

Seafarers' and dockers' unions are united in trying to reduce injuries and deaths related to cargo handling. We explain why seafarers should never be asked to do this dangerous work, which requires specialist training and expertise that only dockers have. Read about the ITF's lashing campaign, and your right as a seafarer to say no to cargo handling.

We recorded yet another rise in abandonments in 2024. It is perhaps no surprise then that all but one of this issue's stories from the frontline – cases ITF inspectors have handled in 2024 – are accounts of seafarers being left high and dry when unscrupulous shipowners choose to ignore their responsibilities towards them. We are grateful to the chief engineer who opens up to us about the dreadful personal impact that Middle East Marine's behaviour has had on him and his family.

The growing risks of seafarers being criminalised without a shred of evidence against them are shown in two stories from Turkey. If this happens to you, we urge you to get information on your rights and advice from our criminalisation toolkit.

Our inspectors work tirelessly to assist seafarers in trouble. *Seafarers' bulletin* introduces the newest members of the team, showcases our team in Norway, and updates you on the activities of our FOC networks, which help seafarers in places where there are no ITF inspectors.

All the essential information you need about how to contact an ITF inspector and how they can help you, together with advice on contracts, your legal rights, and avoiding scams, is contained in the 12-page pullout section.

In solidarity,

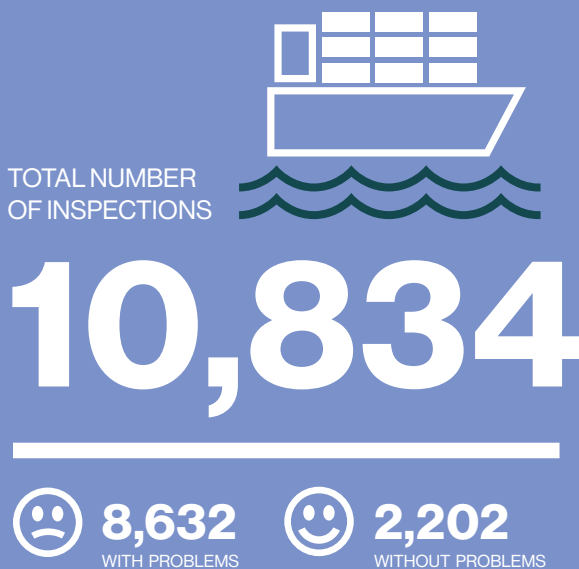
Stephen Cotton
ITF general secretary

The ITF FOC campaign in numbers

As at 31 December 2024

ITF INSPECTIONS

Total number of vessels inspected broken down into number without problems and number with problems.



TOP 5 PROBLEMS

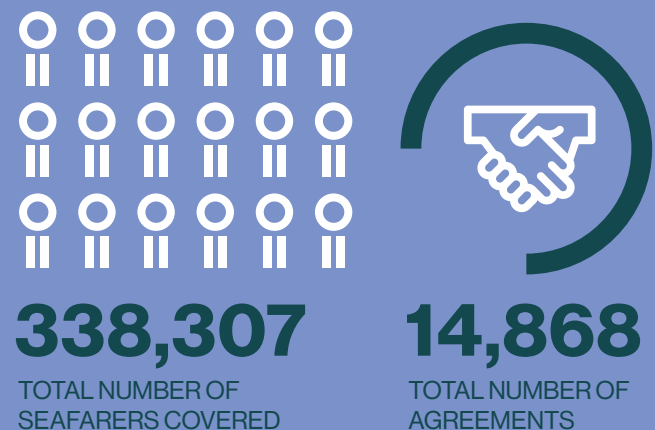
by type found during ITF inspections



TOTAL OWED WAGES RECOVERED



VESSELS AND SEAFARERS COVERED BY ITF AGREEMENTS





Seafarers: say no to lashing

You're a seafarer, tired after working long hours doing a physical, demanding job. You get asked to unload cargo, which is specialised dockers' work. Steve Biggs, senior assistant, ITF dockers' section, explains why you should say no

The practice of requiring seafarers to perform lashing and other additional tasks is on the rise.

Why does it matter?

Lashing and unlashings cargo are labour-intensive tasks that require specific skills to be performed safely. Dockworkers are specifically trained to carry out this work, and are equipped to handle it efficiently and safely. Seafarers are not, and should never be asked to handle cargo.

Seafarers are often seen performing this work alone, at further risk of injury, whereas dockworkers should always work in pairs. Also, local lashers and their employers always carry out a vessel safety inspection first to make sure the workplace is safe to work in.

Cargo handling and other additional work also leads to increased seafarer fatigue – with potentially severe consequences, including reduced alertness, slower reaction times, and a higher likelihood of accidents that endanger both crew and vessel.

In the last 20 years, 863 seafarers have died on board. In 2000, there were 18 fatalities and three serious injuries – in 2022 that number soared to 87 fatalities and 26 serious injuries. And still every year seafarers are killed or seriously injured carrying out lashing duties on board feeder vessels.

This is a concern for the whole maritime industry. On 1 January 2020, the ITF and the Joint Negotiating Group, which represents maritime employers, agreed the groundbreaking Non-Seafarers' Work Clause (NSWC).



This mandates that tasks like lashing and unlashings cargo should be performed by trained and qualified dockworkers, not by seafarers.

How has the industry responded?

Unifeeder, a leading European feeder and shortsea operator, has led the way in complying with the NSW by hiring local lashers. This commitment to crew wellbeing and safer working conditions on its vessels aligns with international safety standards, and sets a positive example for the rest of the industry.

However, legal challenges have made it difficult to bring the NSW into practice all over Europe. In Rotterdam, shipowners and charterers refused to order lashers at the port, despite being given over 12 months' notice of the clause's introduction by ITF-affiliated union FNV Havens (FNV).

When the FNV took Marlow Navigation to court over non-compliance, several other owners and charterers expressed support for the company. They argued that the clause was unworkable, and was against European Union (EU) freedoms and EU Competition Law. Their claims that using local lashers would create huge delays were proven wrong.

In 2022, the judge ruled in favour of the union and proclaimed that the NSW was valid. The judgement was immediately enforceable but an appeal by its opponents is pending.

One of them is BG Freight Line, which continues to put money over safety by continuing to assign lashing and unlashings duties to its seafarers instead of hiring local lashers. This threatens its operational safety and efficiency, so endangering seafarers and the environment.

Since the court judgement, other NSW non-compliant owners and charterers have been sued by Nautilus International and the FNV. They have settled out of court and are now ordering lashers.

The message to companies is clear. By adhering to the Non-Seafarers' Work Clause and hiring local dockworkers for tasks like lashing and unlashings, you can help create a safer, more efficient, and more sustainable maritime industry for all.

Captain loses job after raising safe manning concerns

A Ukrainian captain lost his job after pleading for more crew to meet safe manning minimum levels when the seafarers had to handle cargo on board a BG Freight vessel. Matthew Parsonage, ITF inspector, North-West England and North Wales, reports

A seafarer alerted the ITF in the Netherlands in August 2024 that the crew of the BG Green feeder vessel was doing the lashing and unlashings on board – the work of non-seafarers – as it called at ports in the Netherlands, Belgium, the UK and Ireland. They weren't even being paid for it, as it was outside of their contract.

The ITF informed BG Freight Line that the vessel did not have an ITF Agreement (which contains the NSWC), which the dockers' union in Rotterdam requires for all FOC vessels calling at the port.

I visited the Madeira-flagged BG Green when it reached Liverpool. Captain Harulya Volodymyr showed me the documentation, which revealed a catalogue of issues.

The vessel was sailing with one less deck crew than the minimum required in its safe manning document. All four deck crew had worked more than 343 hours the previous month, breaching the MLC maximum of 14 hours work in a 24-hour period 16 times. The port calls were at different times of day, and in Rotterdam alone the vessel had moved 14 times in four days. And the charterer had specified in the charter party document that the crew would handle cargo as 'servants of the charterer' – for no pay.

Captain Volodymyr said he had pleaded with the company for more deck crew and an extra deck officer. On 30 August, he was given his orders to leave the vessel in what was a sacking in all but name, as he was in the last month of his contract.

Madeira's response to our concerns was to lower the safe manning requirement from five deck crew to four, so that the problem was solved on paper. When challenged, the flag provided emails showing that the company had requested the lower level, to be in line with its other vessels. This may be illegal, as the safe manning document should be based on the specific operations of a specific vessel.

The ITF in Zeebrugge and Rotterdam ramped up the pressure by coordinating action by the dockers in both ports and the ship's crew, who were due to depart. The crew refused to carry out cargo operations until they were paid, despite fearing that it would affect their future job prospects. It worked. The seafarers were paid, and disembarked on 13 September.

By November 2024, the vessel had employed an extra deck officer and deck rating but as it still had no ITF agreement, the situation could occur again.

Captain Volodymyr knew that standing up for his crew was risky. "I believe that every job should be paid for with dignity...The crew is my family, regardless of nationality. Of course, such a situation may affect my future employment...But I do not go against my conscience."

Fortunately, a few days later the captain joined a new ship. ■



Asked to handle cargo? Just say no

You have the right to refuse lashing and other unsafe work if it puts you in danger.

Vessels covered by an ITF-approved collective agreement must comply with the 'non-seafarers' work clause':

- This states that crew shall not be required or induced to carry out cargo handling. Ordering you to handle cargo violates the agreement.
- It acknowledges that cargo handling is specialised and potentially dangerous work that should be done by trained dockers. It stipulates that shipowners must use trained dockers to do this work wherever they are available. It further stipulates that if dockers are unavailable, seafarers can only handle cargo if they agree to do it, are trained for it, and are specifically paid for it.

Check if your vessel is covered by an ITF agreement – use the Look Up section on the ITF Seafarers' website (www.itfseafarers.org), or download the free ITF Seafarers' app.

If your vessel is covered and you are asked to handle cargo, just say no.

If your shipowner still insists that you do the work, contact the ITF Seafarers' Support team at seafsupport@itf.org.uk

Protect yourself as abandonments hit record high

Cases of abandonment continue to soar. *Seafarers' bulletin* shares the facts, and offers advice on how to protect yourself against being abandoned



Indian seafarers are most abandoned

Indian crew are the most abandoned nationality for a second year running. In 2024, 899 Indian seafarers were stranded on ships – up from 401 in 2023.

A total of 312 vessels and 3,133 seafarers were abandoned in 2024, a new high to shame the maritime industry. The previous record was in 2023, when 132 vessels and 1,676 seafarers were abandoned.

All 312 were reported by the ITF to the International Labour Organization (ILO)/International Maritime Organization (IMO) database on reported incidents of abandonment, which is actively engaging with shipowners to address the issue, and working for greater protections for seafarers at the ILO and IMO.



Of the 312 vessels abandoned in 2024, 82% were flying under Flags of Convenience (FOC).

How to protect yourself

If you are abandoned, the ITF or one of our affiliated unions will do all we can to assist you. But there are crucial ways you can protect yourself against being abandoned.

Try to avoid the risk in the first place. Before you sign anything, check all the available information you can about a vessel. Use websites that show the position and destination details of vessels. And use the ILO database, which lists all abandoned vessels: <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/seafarers/seafarersbrowse.home>. (Search by IMO number in case the vessel name has changed.)

Be vigilant on board. The non-payment of wages for weeks is a warning sign that an employer may be about to abandon the vessel and crew. The Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) requires that seafarers are paid at least monthly, so if you go more than a month without being paid in full, this is a breach of the MLC.

Act swiftly. If you think you are in danger of abandonment, DO NOT WAIT to make your complaint or you may lose out financially. Contact your shipowner – if they do not respond, contact the insurance company. The insurance will cover you for up to four months' outstanding wages and entitlements in line with your employment agreement or CBA, as well as reasonable expenses (eg for repatriation, accommodation, essential supplies) from the moment of abandonment to when you get home.

Speak out. If the owner or insurer don't help, reach out to the ITF – you can speak to us completely confidentially. But remember - we have no power to help you if you do not contact us in the first place. Email us at abandonment@itf.org.uk.

Keep up to date about protections for abandoned seafarers contained in amendments to the MLC – download the free app of MLC Frequently Asked Questions at <https://faqmlc.ilo.org/>

Abandonment in 2024 – the facts

IN 2024:

312 ABANDONMENTS
WERE REPORTED

UP BY 180 (136%) ON 2023



312 abandonments reported,
The ITF reported all **312** of these

Owed wages from the **312 cases**
is more than **USD20.1 million**

We have so far recovered more than
USD10.4 million from just
126 of these vessels

3,133 seafarers on abandoned vessels
complained to the ITF

Of these, **899** were Indian crew,
making them the most abandoned nationality



THE FLAGS WITH THE MOST ABANDONMENTS

Panama	43	St Kitts & Nevis	09	Comoros	29
Palau	37	Unknown	20	Tanzania	30
Cameroon	20	Bahrain	16	Togo	09

SEAFARERS ABANDONMENT STATISTICS 2024



3,133

Number of
seafarers abandoned

Are you abandoned?

- Are you owed two or more months' wages?
- Are you no longer receiving sufficient or regular food, water and fuel?
- Are you over contract and your owner is ignoring your request for repatriation?

If you are suffering any of these, you may be abandoned.
For free, confidential assistance, email us at
abandonment@itf.org.uk

These pages feature a handful of the cases ITF inspectors handled in 2024

Injured seafarer receives record compensation

More than five years after a life-changing accident, a courageous South Korean seafarer has won a record compensation payment in Australia. **Matt Purcell**, ITF Australia assistant coordinator, was among those who supported him from the start

Newly-appointed 3rd engineer Sang Guk Lee was working in the engine room of the ANL Gippsland at VICT Terminals in Melbourne, Australia on 12 March 2019 when a seven-tonne engine block fell on his feet. He lost all his toes and had to undergo surgery and rehabilitation.

The ITF immediately provided him with moral and practical support, along with our volunteer base in Melbourne and the Maritime Union of Australia.

In September that year, port state authority AMSA produced a damning report citing the vessel for breaches of safety conduct. It issued a prohibition notice under the Australian Navigation Act, stating the vessel was using uncertified equipment without the proper risk analysis, which most likely led to the accident.

Fortunately for Sang Guk, he was able to access medical services for the nearly six years until mediation began, in June 2024, because at the time of his injury the ANL Gippsland was covered by an ITF/International Bargaining Forum (IBF) All Japan Seamen's Union (JSU) Total Crew Cost agreement, which provided unlimited medical cover for a seafarer injured in a foreign port.



Record pay out: Seafarer Sang Guk Lee and his family

We decided to fight his case under Australian Maritime Law. We worked closely with the Australian maritime lawyers who acted for Sang Guk, who operate on a no win/no fee basis, and the lawyers for the Japan P and I Club during the mediation process.

In September 2024 the two parties reached a settlement. Sang Guk received the largest compensation payment ever made to a seafarer, regardless of nationality, under Australian law (the amount cannot be disclosed for legal reasons), and was able to go home.

Sang Guk Lee is restarting his life in South Korea. We commend his great courage in dealing with his injury and facing the daunting task of rebuilding his confidence and ability to cope. He will need every dollar of his compensation to live as normally as possible. ■



“...a seven-tonne engine block fell on his feet. He lost all his toes and had to undergo surgery and rehabilitation”



Abandoned: the seafarers were running out of food

Legal battle continues to recover unpaid wages

The ITF is resorting to court action to force the sale of a vessel to recover over USD63,000 owed to two abandoned seafarers, reports **Andreas Husa**, ITF inspector in Bergen, Norway

A seafarer on board a cargo vessel in Norway was owed 16 months' wages. That was the alert I received on 15 October 2024 from my colleague, Paul Falzon, ITF inspector in Malta. The next day I flew to Molde to inspect the Tanzania-flagged Torvind.

I found only two seafarers on board, both Syrian refugees. The chief engineer had worked on and off since November 2022 and had only been paid USD10,000 cash in hand in all that time. The AB-cook had been on board for two months and had not been paid at all. I calculated that the total owed wages were USD63,479.

The power supply had been cut off, as the owner had not paid the yard for electricity nor the rent for the jetty. The crew had been using diesel to run the generator but that was running low. Winter was fast approaching.

I immediately contacted the owner, Idris Shipping Ltd, and said they had to pay the crew's wages, as the situation amounted to slave labour and was illegal in Norway.

The owner promised to pay within couple of days. Nothing happened. I informed the P&I insurance company, flag state, local port state, and the border police. No help was forthcoming, and the P&I did not even answer my emails or phone calls. We started the process to register the ship as abandoned in the International Labour Organization system.

Meanwhile, the seafarers were running out of food, and I was a 10-hour drive away. The local Red Cross in Molde immediately responded to my request for help and took a food supply on board.

The Norway border police told me that they planned to deport the chief engineer because the shipowner had not signed his work permit documentation. They said this might deny him access to the Schengen Area (29 European countries that have eliminated border controls between them) for a specific period. After 10 days of discussing how to get both men home instead, the ITF stepped in and agreed to pay for their repatriation. On 2 November they flew back to Malta and Egypt.

Our local lawyer in Norway started legal proceedings and on 8 November the court approved the vessel's arrest. On 14 November we officially sued the owner for the owed wages, giving him the option to pay or negotiate. By the end of 2024, there had been no response. We hope to get a court order to sell the ship, so that the men can receive their rightful wages from the proceeds. ■

Flag denies abandoned seafarers are crew

The ITF helped an abandoned crew to disembark but several months later, two seafarers are still owed wages because the shipowner denies they were crew. **Carlos Sandoval**, ITF inspector Panama, continues to chase the money

The ITF was contacted by the ship's owner in late March 2024, when the Togo-flagged *Serenity I* cargo ship was docked alongside North Abaco in the Bahamas. He said that conditions on board for the three crew were critical. Food and drinking water were scarce, and fresh water for basic hygiene needs and cooking was running out.

I alerted the Bahamas Maritime Authority, which inspected the vessel and verified the harsh conditions on board, with more than two months' owed wages, poor living conditions, and a lack of electricity at night. As these conditions were in clear violation of the MLC, I reported the vessel as abandoned to the International Labour Organization.



Seafarers on the *Serenity I* faced a critical situation

The shipowner – Marie Elsie Joseph, a Haitian based in Miami and dedicated to real estate – was repeatedly asked to pay the crew. The Panama Maritime Authority contacted her on behalf of the Panamanian crew member, and eventually she paid him the full USD4,200 he was owed, and he was repatriated on 9 May.

The remaining two men on board needed practical help while we pursued their wages. Arrangements were made with the local Baptist Anglican Church in Marsh

Middle East Marine drives seafarer into debt and despair

Sandra Bernal, ITF FOC network coordinator, Asia Pacific, highlights the terrible plight of an Indian chief engineer, just one of the eight cases involving some 65 seafarers working on tugs owned by Middle East Marine LLC that she handled in 2024

When it comes to dealing with Middle East Marine LLC (MEM) – described by the ITF as the worst serial abandoner of seafarers – it's like a revolving door. You help one crew recover their wages and go home. A

replacement crew boards, and two months later, it's just the same situation.

Vihaab (not his real name) is chief engineer on the Palau-flagged *Navimar 3* operating in the Bay of Bengal. On board for two years, he has not been paid for 14 months, despite weekly promises by MEM since December 2023 that he would be paid by the end of the week and could then go home.

His wife and daughter are dependent on his wages. In desperation, he pledged all his gold jewellery to take out bank loans to support his family and pay his daughter's education fees, expecting to repay them once he was paid.

But at the end of December 2024, MEM had still not paid him. He told the ITF in a WhatsApp message that month of the devastating impact this has had. "My loans went overdue and I have been a defaulter



The two seafarers from Nicaragua and Honduras with Rev. Paulette Cartwright

Harbour, Abaco, to visit the vessel to provide water, food and spiritual support. Leaders of the International Longshoremen's Association (ITF-affiliated dockers union) in the Bahamas also provided water, fresh food and vegetables.

After our efforts to communicate with the flag state failed, the IMO wrote to the Togo High Commission in London in May 2024. In its response in July, the High Commission said that the vessel was not valid for

navigation and had been decommissioned in 2020. It claimed that the three crew on board had been appointed by the owner to 'watch over the vessel', but 'are not considered to be crew members, since the vessel is decommissioned and no crew has been reported to the authorities for the purpose of issuing endorsement certificates'.

These claims were false.

The three seafarers had not been employed as guards. They provided their Seafarer Employment Agreements, which designated them as 2nd Engineer, AB, and Oiler. Therefore, they were crew and should be treated with all the rights of any abandoned seafarer.

The Serenity I had not been decommissioned. In 2023, it was in Taiwan before arriving in Florida, and in August it was ordered to leave the United States and was towed to the Bahamas, where it remains.

In June, the Nicaraguan AB disembarked by his own means to take up a job offer but in December 2024 he was still owed the equivalent to four months' salary (USD5,240). The Honduran 2nd engineer was paid USD3,000, and flew back home on 4 July – but he is still owed USD12,300 by the shipowner. ■

towards loan repayment and my jewels had been auctioned by the bank. I have pleaded with MEM sending all loan details as requested by them to verify but they betrayed me. Working sincerely and dedicated I have lost my properties and dragged back to 20 years instead of getting paid for which I had been working hard."

Vihaab had sent a formal, written request for sign-off at the end of March 2024 but heard nothing. He chased a response. At the start of May, he was forwarded a voice message from MEM managing director Captain Anil Thomas to the ship's technical manager: "It is per my understanding when I was in Bangladesh the moment we take off the chief engineer we literally lose control of the vessel, so we really need to think who's going to replace him and have somebody as good as him because that man apparently is like a God-given gift to us, that's what I understand, and I think many times you even told me so..."

Despite remaining stuck on board, Vihaab feared asking for help in case it jeopardised the estimated USD50,000 dollars that MEM owed him. But when he saw the other six Indian crew members get paid in full and repatriated on 9 November after contacting the ITF, he reached out to us. We are vigorously trying to help him.

The Indian crew was replaced with seafarers from Myanmar, who had no interest in Vihaab's ordeal. He stopped working for three days so that the new master would put pressure on MEM management to resolve his case. ■



"I am hoping that one day my issue gets resolved as I couldn't go home bare handedly as already nothing is left."



Seafarer thanks ITF for freedom from 12-year ordeal

The Al Maha was Abdul Nasser Saleh's home for 4,000 days

Abdul Nasser Saleh is still trying to rebuild his life six months on from reaching home after 4,000 days stuck on board, he told **Mohammed Arrachedi**, ITF FOC network coordinator for the Arab World and Iran, in December 2024

Abdul Saleh Nasser was owed over USD178,000 in wages and had not been paid for nine years, when he disembarked the Al Maha in April 2024. He thought he would never see a cent from owner Abalkhail Marine Navigation but he had been given his life back.

However, with ITF support, on 14 April Nasser received an agreed amount of his outstanding wages as part of a settlement acceptable to him and the ITF.

Nasser had started work as an engineer on the Al Maha in September 2012. He was tricked and cajoled by the owners into remaining at his post while other crew members came and went. He was treated like a slave.

"I fought relentlessly to obtain my rights... there were a lot of threats and suffering. And that can't be compared to my stress and my family's. Imagine the absence of

the family's breadwinner, who cannot provide them with moral nor physical support."

When the ship entered Jeddah port in June 2022, the ITF urged the Saudi Arabian maritime authorities to act. It took nearly two more years before he was finally free. Tanzania totally failed to uphold its duty as a flag state.

Nasser hopes to go to sea again soon. Meanwhile, he is catching up on what he missed out on, and sorting out his life. Addressing me and the whole ITF he said, "I swear that my life was a hell... but Thanks God...if it was not you I would be dead and would have not seen my children". ■



"I felt like I could run home to Egypt from Saudi Arabia. That I didn't need to take a plane because I was so happy."

Protecting seafarers in conflict areas

Working in areas of conflict and supporting families living in war zones takes a terrible toll on seafarers. *Seafarers' bulletin* takes a look at Ukraine and the Red Sea



Supporting Ukraine's seafarers and their families

Oleg Grygoriuk, chairman of the Marine Transport Workers' Trade Union of Ukraine (MTWTU) describes how his union is assisting seafarers and their families nearly three years on from the Russian invasion of his country in February 2022

The vast majority of Ukrainian seafarers currently live outside Ukraine, and cannot return to their homeland, so it is difficult to provide the support they need. However, we are making efforts to organise them, maintain daily communication through social media, and host networking events, seminars and roundtables

in other countries. This year we held meetings with Ukrainian seafarers in Romania and Varna. With the help of the ITF Seafarers' Trust, we plan to do two more in early 2025.

Seafarers and their families face significant challenges, including the extra expense of renting accommodation outside Ukraine. The war has caused a lot of tension and stress. Seafarers worry about the safety of the many relatives and friends who remain in Ukraine.

We offer mental health support to seafarers and their families through online consultations with specialists. We are also running a project dedicated to teenagers' mental health, with a partner company. This involves in-depth research into the young people's mental challenges and needs, and finding ways to address them, with the support of their parents. Advising parents on how to deal with teenagers is also an important element.

We provide financial assistance to many of our members. One particularly memorable case occurred during the recent Russian missile attack on Odesa. A seafarer's apartment was severely damaged, with all the windows and interior doors blown out. We gave him money, and help to purchase a bed, a mattress, and other essential items. We are providing a heater, so that he can stay warm during winter, in his apartment or elsewhere.

We couldn't do any of this alone. The ITF and ETF (European Transport Workers' Federation) Solidarity Fund collects humanitarian aid and funding to support Ukrainian maritime workers and union members. I am chair of the fund's advisory board, and we have provided vital assistance, including tonnes of food

and hygiene sets, heaters and generators, and other electric appliances, to help our members survive blackouts and maintain basic living conditions.

The ITF Seafarers' Trust Emergency Fund has provided financial assistance to our members who are forced to remain outside Ukraine.

We also welcome the ITF's support for initiatives to strengthen the representation and resilience of our transport workers. It also backs calls on the Ukrainian government to recognise transport workers as key workers, to exempt them from conscription, and to exclude them from the current border crossing restrictions. ■

Seafarers need protection in Red Sea

Seafarers' lives continue to be put at risk as their vessels transit the Red Sea, warns Steve Yandell, ITF assistant coordinator, seafarers and inland navigation. Here he calls on shipping companies to do more to protect their crews while efforts to reach a permanent ceasefire in Gaza continue

Few would have expected that the turmoil caused by Houthi attacks on Israeli-linked international shipping in the Red Sea would be continuing over one year later.

The Iran-backed Houthis of Yemen have always been adamant that their attacks will continue until Israel's invasion of the Gaza Strip ends. That's why in February 2024 the ITF added its voice to demands for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza [at the time of publication a ceasefire had very recently been agreed].

But until that happens, there remains a simple and immediate solution to protect seafarers from this conflict: stop ships transiting the Red Sea.

There were more than 300 attacks on ships by the Houthis between November 2023 and the end of December 2024, with two vessels sunk and one seized. But what is left largely unrecognised is the daily trauma faced by the many seafarers – and their families back home – who still embark on perilous journeys through

the Red Sea, fearful that they will not return home to their loved ones unharmed.

The international response has included a mixture of resolutions and statements, including those from the UN, NATO and EU states; US and UK attacks on Houthi soil in Yemen; the levying of sanctions; and the launch of the more than 20-country strong 'Operation Prosperity' maritime coalition, led by the US. But the attacks on Red Sea shipping continue.

Since the start of this crisis, the ITF has worked tirelessly to protect seafarers. Notably, the 'Warlike Operations Area' in the Red Sea was expanded in April 2024 as a direct result of our demand made via the International Bargaining Forum (a group that brings together shipowners and unions to negotiate collective bargaining agreements).

This means that any seafarer covered by an ITF agreement – nearly 360,000 seafarers worldwide on flag of convenience ships – have the contractual right to refuse to sail in the Area, alongside the right to request repatriation at the shipowner's expense. Similar policies have since been adopted by governments including the Philippines, the world's largest supplier of seafarers, and India.

But while this gives many seafarers a means to avoid the Red Sea, many have little choice but to work, in order to send money back home to their families.

The ITF message is clear: shipping companies must demonstrate their commitment to their seafarers by



diverting their ships, and flag states must instruct companies to do so.

Where merchant ships continue to transit, governments must both strengthen naval forces protecting them and do much more to coordinate their efforts to protect seafarers. Flag of convenience states must not rely solely on US, UK, or European navies for protection.

The bottom line is this: delivery windows are not worth seafarers' lives, and civilian seafarers must not be put in the line of fire by transiting the Red Sea. ■



“What is left largely unrecognised is the daily trauma faced by the many seafarers – and their families back home – who still embark on perilous journeys through the Red Sea, fearful that they will not return home to their loved ones unharmed.”



The ITF's Mohamed Arrachedi with the crew of the Captain Tarek in Mumbai

The human cost of Red Sea conflict

In 2024, the human cost includes three seafarers killed aboard the True Confidence in March, and one killed on the Tutor in June

At the end of 2024, 25 crew from the Bahamas-flagged Galaxy Leader were still being held hostage in Yemen after their cargo ship was hijacked by a Houthi-operated helicopter in November 2023. Fortunately, they were released in January 2025.

In July 2024, 16 seafarers from Syria and India were abandoned in Hodeidah, Yemen, and a further eight from India were trapped on board the Comoros-flagged Captain Tarek when the port was being hit by Israeli airstrikes. The seafarers were traumatised by witnessing the attacks, totally ignored by the owners, and were not paid their wages.

The ITF team in Yemen was in contact with the crew. It had already supported eight of the Syrian seafarers to disembark and find refuge in a hotel, and secured their repatriation on 9 August from Aden to Beirut, Lebanon. The ITF then received a request from five of the remaining eight crew members, and evacuated them from Hodeida to Aden on 13 September, where they stayed in a hotel until their repatriation to Mumbai on 21 September. The other three seafarers refused to approach us for the assistance we also offered them. ■



Change ahead requires support for workers

Meet **Christine Behle**, deputy chairwoman of ver.di in Germany. *Seafarers' bulletin* asked her to share her experience of trade unionism and thoughts on the future of maritime

After leaving school, I started an apprenticeship in the civil service and joined ver.di. I immediately got involved with the trainees and became a youth and trainee representative.

With ver.di's support, I attended many seminars and enjoyed working with other young trade unionists. I was elected to its youth committee, became chairwoman of the local youth union group, and later at national level, and in 1995 ver.di employed me as youth secretary.

I supported ver.di members in local companies and later managed the North Rhine-Westphalia regional transport sector. In 2011, I was elected to ver.di's national board, with responsibility for transport. I have been deputy ver.di chairwoman since 2019.

Stronger together

Ver.di has over 1.9 million members across different transport sectors. This breadth benefits our members in many ways. Our members in the ports work closely with those in the port authorities, which ensures mutual understanding and helps solve problems. Our strategies for improving maritime working conditions are a model for our members at airports.

In ver.di's major collective bargaining dispute in 2023, employees at the airports, waterways, port authorities, municipal ports, state motorways, railways and local public transport took part in our infrastructure strike day. Germany came to a standstill. We won the highest pay settlement since ver.di was founded.

Winning for port workers

A major issue for our port workers is automation. At most German terminals, our colleagues still sit in the gantry crane cabins, while in other countries automated cranes control loading and unloading. Most jobs will change massively, many will be lost. We can't stop this, so we must work on creating prospects for dock workers, particularly through training, for other positions in port.

Our pool system – whereby dockers work under the same working and income conditions as in the port companies – is increasingly under attack. We will fight to maintain it, even if automation causes port labour to shrink.

In 2024, we adopted our port manifesto, to address agreed common priorities for port workers throughout Germany.

The future

We need more women in the industry. Working conditions must improve significantly, which primarily involves tackling sexualised violence, hygiene conditions and working hours.

And we need to support all workers so they don't lose out as shipping becomes greener. Change may lead to the loss of jobs, so we need a binding exclusion of redundancies to give employees security. But employees will also need additional qualifications – and these must be ensured by employers and be at their expense. ■

Helping seafarers cope with stress at sea

Learning to cope with the stresses of life at sea is at the heart of new ITF training programmes being rolled out in partnership with governments and maritime academies, reports **Dr Syed Asif Altaf**, ITF global wellbeing programme coordinator

In response to the significant rise in seafarers, particularly cadets, suffering from mental ill health, the ITF has developed a wellbeing and stress management module for incorporation into the curricula of maritime academies in major seafarer supply countries.



Dr Syed Asif Altaf trains the trainers

Expansion of training to Black Sea countries

Twenty-three faculty members from 10 maritime universities across seven Black Sea countries – Albania, Bulgaria, Georgia, Montenegro, Romania, Turkey and Ukraine – are now ready to prepare their students for the challenges of a maritime career, thanks to training led by the ITF in October 2024.

The ITF is now collaborating with the Istanbul Technical University, Odesa Maritime academy, World Maritime University, ARKAS Logistics, and ORKA Informatics to develop a proposal to the European Commission for SEA-WELL, a vocational education and training project delivered through a tailored online education and training portal. It will empower seafarers to protect their mental health, and guide shipping companies and maritime healthcare providers.



Trainers in Indonesia learn about stress management

Groundbreaking agreement with Indonesia

In a world-first, the Indonesian government has made mental health mandatory in the curriculum for all the country's maritime academies. This follows the signing of a groundbreaking agreement with the ITF in March 2024, and is hugely significant because Indonesia is one of the world's top five providers of seafarers.

The agreement established cooperation to train trainers in mental health management for seafarers, which is being delivered through a new course, 'Mental Health and Stress: Understanding, Early Management and Coping'.

During 2024, the ITF and its affiliate the Indonesian Seafarers' Union (Kesatuan Pelaut Indonesia – KPI) ran six train the trainer (TOT) sessions at Indonesian maritime academies, enabling 200 instructors, lecturers and government officials to better understand the stresses faced by seafarers.

KPI general secretary I Dewa Nyoman Budiasa said, "We know cadets and young seafarers are the most at risk from the dangers of stress, and studies show that suicides are highest in those groups. So...we wanted to begin with those most vulnerable so that they can have long careers as happy and healthy seafarers."

The agreement has also led to other breakthroughs in Indonesia, including moves to introduce similar modules in training academies for other transport sectors; and the development of a separate mental health and stress management programme for seafarers and offshore workers at state oil company Pertamina. ■

We hope to see this ITF/government partnership replicated in other countries.

Woman at the helm

Captain Laura Pinasco

Seafarers' bulletin is pleased to introduce **Laura Pinasco** from Italy who, during her illustrious 27-year maritime career, has captained both LNG and cargo vessels

Why did you choose maritime?

I chose nautical school primarily because of the subjects offered, such as astronomy and meteorology. With no family in the maritime industry, I was uncertain about which career path to follow. It wasn't until I was 20 — on a four-month contract with no salary — and stood on the bridge for the first time as the ship departed from port, that I felt like I was beginning a new life. Since then I have never stopped, although in recent years I have prioritised being a SIRE inspector of oil, chemical and gas vessels. My ambition is to stay ahead of the latest developments in the decarbonisation and sustainability of shipping.

What have your experiences taught you?

My main background is on gas carriers, but I have always been interested in and involved with dry cargo. I began my career on cargo ships, and it felt natural to continue. I learn a great deal, and find satisfaction in pursuing the career I chose for myself, despite the challenges it presents.

There have been unpleasant situations. I believe it's important to recognise that a woman can never feel completely safe from certain toxic dynamics that can arise in unbalanced environments. There have certainly been more moments when I felt like an outsider on board rather than a member of the crew. However, this experience has allowed me to pay closer attention to the human aspect of our work. It's not solely about gender; there are often fragile individuals on board for various reasons—such as their age, language barriers, or professional challenges. I strive to support them and ensure they are not humiliated or mistreated.



Would you recommend a maritime career to other women?

The answer is yes because the maritime sector is vast, dynamic and full of opportunities. I would advise my two nieces to pursue university courses to broaden their options, in addition to gaining navigation experience. I would suggest they consider the cruise sector, as it seems to be an area where human resources play a crucial role in preventing and addressing potential injustices and abuses.

Unfortunately, many women are discouraged from pursuing technical roles because they fear failure and judgment. We can learn everything—even from our mistakes—just as men do.

Sadly, many shipping companies struggle to address issues of inclusion and equality with genuine integrity. Instead, they often produce well-written but hollow policies that lack true commitment. I find this lack of courage very disappointing. ■

- Find out more about SIRE at www.ocimf.org/programmes/sire-2-0
- Visit the Women at Sea page of the new ITF Seafarers website at www.itfseafarers.org/en/issues/women-at-sea

LGBTQI+ seafarers' voices heard at the IMO

Breakthroughs in the empowerment of women seafarers are slowly bringing about positive change for LGBTQI+ and other underrepresented groups in the maritime industry, says **Jihyeon Gina Kim**, the ITF's International Maritime Organization liaison assistant

Finding openly gay seafarers onboard ships is still quite rare because of the fear of discrimination and loss of jobs. There needs to be a cultural shift to change this.

There have been significant advances in empowering women seafarers, thanks to the efforts of the ITF, its affiliated maritime unions, and others. We now have the IMO International Day for Women in Maritime, celebrated every year on 18 May since 2021. And in 2024, the first IMO Gender Equality Award was granted. These advancements are also opening up doors for increased diversity and inclusiveness in maritime.

From 2026, all maritime authorities and companies must ensure that seafarers have practical training in how to prevent and respond to violence and harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying and sexual assault.

However, the industry still has a long way to go to achieve true cultural change.

Within the ITF, the women's and youth sections have strongly promoted LGBTQI+ transport workers' safety issues, and are driving cultural change across the organisation globally to develop effective strategies to address these needs.

The adoption of the ITF resolution on LGBT+ rights in 2018 means that the ITF and its partner federation, the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF), have been able to specifically focus on LGBTQI+ workers' rights, and to support affiliated unions' work in this area. This was the first time that we as a global family made explicit our support for all transport workers, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

The ITF's most significant advocacy effort on LGBTQI+ seafarers' issues came in 2023, when we co-sponsored a submission to the IMO. This called for multilateral efforts to strengthen the inclusion and equal treatment of LGBT+ seafarers.

In 2024, the IMO heard LGBTQI+ seafarers' voices through the ITF, highlighting that:

- Solidarity is crucial for underrepresented seafarers.
- Change requires long term commitment from everyone in the industry.
- We need positive, meaningful action when someone is discriminated against, not just words.

Participants agreed that LGBTQI+ seafarers should be part of all work to:

- improve public awareness of seafarers and the shipping industry.
- mitigate against the impact of the introduction of new technologies.
- retain a competent seafaring workforce.
- offer equal opportunities to all maritime workers.

In June 2025, the IMO will make a historic decision to introduce a specific topic for underrepresented groups. This should be a milestone for cultural change in the maritime industry. ■

Be alert to risk of criminalisation

When there is a maritime accident, or a pollution infringement, seafarers are often scapegoated. And where illicit cargo is found on board, a lack of evidence may be no protection against imprisonment. **Kenan Dinç**, ITF inspector in Turkey, shares two alarming cases of seafarers criminalised over drug finds and sets out your right to fair treatment

30-year prison sentence

A Croatian captain and a Finnish chief mate have been sentenced to prison in Turkey for an outrageous 30 years. Their only hope of justice is that a higher court will find in their favour

When drugs were found aboard the Phoenician M while it was docked in the port of Ereğli, Turkey, in October 2023, captain Marko Bekavac and chief mate Ali Albokhari were immediately remanded in prison, along with eight other crew members – some of whom had no cargo loading responsibilities.

Drugs had been found aboard the ship in Colombia but no charges were brought. The captain informed the owner, and says he asked for additional security before loading, but the company did not respond. The crew only learnt of the ship's destination in Turkey three days in advance, and no crew fingerprints were found on any of the bags containing the drugs.

It took nearly a year until the case was heard in court, during which time the ITF visited the men, and USD300 each to cover their needs in prison was deposited into the individual bank account opened for seafarers by the prison directorate.



On 20 September 2024, the captain and chief mate were found guilty, and handed their terrible sentence. All charges against the other men were dismissed for lack of evidence. The company, İskenderun Ship Management, immediately stopped paying the men's families the basic wage, and ceased responding to ITF calls.

A month later, Bekavac and Albokhari received the judge's justification for the sentence. It showed that they were punished solely because of their responsibilities, and there was no clear evidence against them:

'... If narcotics had been found in Colombia, as experienced captains, they should have foreseen the possibility that the rest of the narcotics might also be on the ship and ensured that necessary measures were taken; without the knowledge of the captains, goods cannot be loaded onto or unloaded from the ship; captains are obliged to act prudently and ensure the necessary security everywhere on the ship, and at the same time both accused are directly responsible for the loading and unloading of the ship.'



Your right to fair treatment

The IMO and International Labour Organization (ILO) Guidelines on the Fair Treatment of Seafarers in the event of a maritime accident were adopted on 1 July 2006. Unfortunately, many countries do not follow them.

The ITF and its affiliated trade unions participated in an ILO/IMO meeting in November 2024 to agree new guidelines on the fair treatment of seafarers detained in connection with alleged crimes. These guidelines are now subject to formal approval in March 2025 by both the ILO and the IMO. The ITF will then work with affiliates to encourage their implementation by member states.

The ITF has updated its criminalisation toolkit to cover crimes as well as maritime accidents. It sets out your rights and provides advice.

If you are at risk of being criminalised, download the ITF toolkit at:

<https://www.itfseafarers.org/en/resources/criminalisation>

Lawyers appointed by the ship's P&I continue to represent the seafarers, and the captain's family in Croatia received donations to help him hire a private lawyer to represent him. The ITF has taken the court's decision to the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO).

In early January 2025, the men were devastated to learn that the court of appeal approved the 30-year sentences. Their lawyers will appeal against this decision to a higher appeals court. Meanwhile, we are following the legal process closely through the seafarers' lawyers and are in contact with their families.

Detained in Adana City for over one year with no charges

Narcotics police reportedly found packages of cocaine on board the Liberia-flagged Berge Torre when it arrived off the coast of Yumurtalik, Turkey, on 12 November 2023, after sailing from Colombia.

All 25 crew members were initially suspected of bunker smuggling but only 15 were referred to the Chief Public Prosecutor's Office for investigation. The prosecutor requested the arrest of five of them, and the imposition of a travel ban on the master and deck cadet.

When the case was heard at a criminal court in November 2023, the judge dismissed the arrest requests but banned four of the Indian seafarers from leaving the city – chief officer Ravi Singh, third officer Madhav Sharma and ABs Tandel Mohanbhai and Ambrose Machado – and instructed them to report weekly to the police station. The other 11 seafarers returned home.

One year on, the four seafarers remain stuck in Adana, despite the lack of any direct evidence against them. They are staying in a hotel, and management company Anglo-Eastern Ship Management Company is covering their expenses and paying their basic wages. We visit them regularly, and have ensured that they have telephone and internet access so that they can stay in contact with their families. The ITF continues to call for the process to be speeded up. ■

Spot the recruitment scams

Recruitment scams take many forms, but there are some obvious signs that something is off, and we're here to help you spot them, says **Steve Trowsdale**, ITF inspectorate coordinator

The ITF receives hundreds of reports of scams each year and of seafarers who have fallen victim to a scam. The scammers pose as recruitment agents or HR managers and use increasingly sophisticated ways to make the jobs they advertise look real. They use email addresses and fake websites that look and feel like the real thing and, increasingly, use direct contact methods like WhatsApp, Viber and LinkedIn.

Take a look at these job adverts to see what to look out for.

MEDRO SHIPPING COMPANY IS A SCAM

IF YOU RECEIVE A JOB OFFER FROM MEDRO SHIPPING COMPANY BASED IN THE UK, IT IS A SCAM.

ITFSEAFARERS.ORG ITFSHIPBESURE.ORG

ANTAL SHIPPING IS A SCAM

IF YOU RECEIVE A JOB OFFER FROM ANTAL SHIPPING LTD BASED IN THE UK, IT IS A SCAM.

ITFSEAFARERS.ORG ITFSHIPBESURE.ORG

CRETE SHIPPINGS IS A SCAM

IF YOU RECEIVE A JOB OFFER FROM CRETE SHIPPINGS BASED IN THE UK, IT IS A SCAM.

ITFSEAFARERS.ORG ITFSHIPBESURE.ORG



The web of deceit

When we discover a fake website, we get it closed down. The problem is, the same scammers simply start a new one, or several with slightly different names.

Read more about how to avoid recruitment scammers on page 12 of the pullout section.

If you're looking for a job, always:

- Look at the regularly updated Scam Alerts page on www.itfshipbesure.org to see the names of individuals and companies to avoid, as well as fake email addresses and websites you should stay clear of.
- Look out for the use of box numbers and false addresses.
- Google the company name and 'scam', 'fraud' or 'warning'.
- If you identify a scam, a fake email address, or a fake website – or you simply want our advice – please contact us in confidence via email at jobscam@itf.org.uk

Record number of flags of convenience

Seafarers' bulletin shares developments in the ITF's Flags of Convenience campaign in 2024

Gabon and Eswatini added to FOC list

The ITF added two ship registries to its longstanding list of FOCs on 22 May 2022 – Gabon and Eswatini (formerly Swaziland).

Eswatini is a landlocked state and not a member of the International Maritime Organization. Both countries are strongly associated with the growing 'dark fleets' transporting sanctioned oil – Gabon saw a 675% increase in its registry in the two years since international sanctions came into effect following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

With the removal of Tonga from the list at the same time, there are now a record 43 FOCs. See the full list of FOCs at www.itfseafarers.org

The FOC system allows companies to register ships in low regulation countries to hide ownership, reduce tax obligations, employ cheap labour or skirt safety standards – with profound implications for seafarers working on those vessels. Flag registers should not be allowed to operate as businesses using lower standards than traditional national registers.

Some 50 percent of the world fleet is registered in FOC states. The top three contributors – Panama, Liberia, and the Marshall Islands – alone account for over 40 percent of the international fleet.

The UK Government now has a list of people, entities and ships that are designated or specified under regulations made under the UK's Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018, and why. Find the sanctions list at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-uk-sanctions-list>

New ITF policy on minimum conditions for seafarers

At its Congress in Marrakech, Morocco, in October 2024, the ITF adopted the Marrakech Policy, which sets out the minimum conditions the ITF and its affiliated unions will accept on FOC merchant ships. It replaces the Mexico City Policy, adopted in 2010, to reflect the shifting reality faced by seafarers since then.

The Marrakech Policy forms the governing framework for the ITF's FOC campaign. It incorporates the new understanding of the critical importance of global supply chains that emerged out of the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the central role for shipping and seafarers in combatting climate change through a just transition.

It will form the baseline for the ITF's Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBA), which set the wages and working conditions for crews on FOC vessels, irrespective of nationality.

The Marrakech Policy also deepens cooperation between ITF-affiliated unions, especially those from ship-owning and labour-providing countries, creating a more united front in the fight for better conditions.

Download the Marrakech Policy at <https://www.itfglobal.org/en/resources/marrakech-policy>

ITF inspectors here for you

If you're having a problem on board, you can call on ITF inspectors and contacts for help. Seafarers' bulletin introduces the 12 inspectors recruited in 2024, who bring their experience and passion to champion seafarers' rights and support those in need. Read on for an update on the ITF's regional networks of union contacts, and to meet the team of ITF inspectors in Norway

Meet the newest inspectors



Ramesh Babu Reddipalle (Visakhapatnam, India – NUSI) began his career in 2001 as a deck rating on oil and LPG tankers. He has spent the last 10 years as a bosun, and a union organiser.



Elinor Cheason (Bristol, UK – Nautilus International) worked on cruise vessels before returning to university to complete a master's degree. She then worked in the trade union movement in the UK for several years.



Marko Komeri (Helsinki, Finland – Finnish Seafarers' Union) has nearly 20 years' sailing experience as a fitter/mechanic. He has worked mostly on passenger ships.



Christelle Grison (Marseilles, France – Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail, CFDT) worked in arts and event planning before switching to a maritime career over 15 years ago. She has been active in her union for five years. Her most recent qualification on board is as an AB Yachtsman Offshore.



Sören Wichmann (Hamburg, Germany – ver.di) is a social worker who has supported seafarers for over 10 years in the Deutsche Seemannsmission. In the seafarers' mission, he has worked in all areas, including crisis intervention, ship and hospital visits, and leading a seafarers' club.



Christian Bengtsson (South Sweden – Seko) has worked for the Service and Communication Union in different roles for the last 15 years, focusing on improving health and safety, defending members' rights and ensuring that they are covered by collective bargaining agreements.



Jeppe Eriksen

(Aarhus, Denmark – 3F) comes from a family of shop stewards and union employees, and has been a union activist since the age of 15. He was a dockworker in the port of Aarhus for 15 years, before he began working for 3F in 2022.



Selahattin Polat

(Istanbul, Turkey – Marine Employees' Solidarity Association, DAD-DER) began his career as a 3rd engine officer and gained experience across various vessels before joining his union's inspectorate department, supporting and assisting seafarers.



Mehmet Emre Avcı

(Istanbul, Turkey – Liman-Is) started his career as a deck officer after graduating from a maritime faculty. He worked on bulk carriers, and qualified to become a chief officer. Most recently, he worked as a tugboat captain.



Stylianos Petronios

(Piraeus, Greece – Panhellenic Seamen's Federation, PNO) is a master mariner with 20 years' experience as a deck officer and captain on cargo, tanker and passenger vessels. Since becoming port captain in 2015, he has worked as a certified maritime instructor-assessor and developed training programmes for ratings and officers.



Rajkumar Paringadi

(New Mangalore, India – National Union of Seafarers of India, NUSI) has over 25 years' experience as a petty officer (fitter) in the engine room and deckside. He has served on NUSI's youth committee, working as an organiser, and acting as an ITF contact.



Konstantinos Tsikalakis

(Piraeus, Greece – Pan-Hellenic Seamen's Federation) has worked onboard as an engineer and in a major shipping company. He has completed numerous global ship repair missions, and holds degrees in mechanical engineering and an MSC in Engineering Management.

No inspector where you are? Get in touch with the ITF network

If you're in a port or country where there is no ITF inspector, help is on hand. The ITF's FOC networks consist of contacts – individuals nominated by their ITF affiliated unions and based in their offices – who ensure that shipowners are complying with their obligations to provide decent pay and onboard working and living conditions. They work on a voluntary basis, and will do all they can to assist you. Here's a snapshot of their latest activities.



Latin America/Caribbean

As part of our work to strengthen the network, we held a training seminar for new contacts in July in Panama City. The seminar was based on instructing the contacts on how to deal with possible problems of seafarers in their ports. This meeting was carried out by colleagues Steve Trowsdale, ITF inspectorate coordinator, and Mohamed Arrachedi (Arab World and Iran).

Contact the FOC network coordinator (Latin America/Caribbean):

Adan Suarez (Uruguay)

Email suarez_adan@itf.org.uk

(Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Peru, St Lucia, Suriname, Trinidad & Tobago, and Venezuela)



Arab World and Iran

We continue to strengthen our network by providing enhanced training and education to our team. We are particularly stressing the importance of raising the seafarers' awareness in the region of union values.

As part of this work, we and the ITF maritime affiliated unions organised a two-day union awareness seminar for Egyptian seafarers in November in Alexandria. This was followed by another two-day workshop in Cairo for ITF network members in the Arab World, where we reviewed team capacities, discussed maritime developments, and shared our experiences of how best to support Egyptian seafarers and all seafarers calling Egyptian ports.

Contact the FOC network coordinator (Arab World and Iran):

Mohamed Arrachedi (Spain)

Email: arrachedi_mohamed@itf.org.uk

(Contacts in Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Oman, Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen. We also offer assistance in UAE, Qatar, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia)



Africa

In 2024, the expansion of the Africa FOC network is paying rewards. The Cameroon government invited the network coordinator to talk at its first national workshop on the MLC 2006 and seafarers' rights, and to train port state control inspectors on its application for 17 Abuja MoU countries. The government has now announced that it will ratify the MLC 2006 in 2025. This has also strengthened our relationship with the AMoU.

Of the 10 abandonment cases we handled this year, we recovered owed wages of more than USD550,000 and repatriated over 80 crew members.

Contact the FOC network coordinator (Africa):

Lucien Razafindraibe (Kenya)

Email: razafindraibe_lucien@itf.org.uk

(Contacts in Benin, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry, Liberia, Mauritius, Sierra Leone, South Africa, and Togo)



Asia Pacific

In 2024, our network has continued to play a pivotal role in addressing the pressing challenges faced by seafarers. This year has seen a worrying rise in abandonment cases, including in our region.

Our dedicated contacts have demonstrated exceptional commitment and resilience, working closely with me to safeguard the rights and welfare of seafarers. Whether ensuring access to essential provisions, or offering moral support, their tireless efforts have been instrumental in delivering meaningful change.

We are introducing new training programmes for our network contacts in 2025. These aim to strengthen their expertise and equip them with the tools needed to navigate the increasingly complex landscape of maritime welfare. Together, we remain steadfast in our mission to confront challenges and secure a brighter, more secure future for seafarers across the Asia-Pacific region.

Contact the FOC network coordinator (Asia Pacific):

Sandra Bernal (Australia)

Email: bernal_sandra@itf.org.uk

(Contacts in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Maldives, Solomon Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam)

Meet the ITF inspectors in Norway



Angelica Gjestrum, (Oslo, Norway – Norwegian Seafarers' Union, NSU) was a trade union officer and welcomed the opportunity to join the ITF inspectorate in 2003 as inspector for East Norway. Her knowledge of the Russian language was a big advantage in understanding the problems of East-European crew members, and her degree in international management helped a lot in strategic planning of actions against vessels without ITF agreements. She has been the Norwegian ITF coordinator since 2010, leading a team of wonderful colleagues in Larvik, Bergen and Tromsø.



Andreas Husa (Bergen, Norway – NSU) started his career at sea aboard a fishing vessel and finished it at one of Scandinavia's biggest tugboat companies. He has been an active union member throughout. He became an ITF inspector in August 2021, and working for seafarers locally and internationally has become a big part of his life. And he enjoys every day at work.



Yngve Lorentsen (Tromsø, Norway – NSU) was a deck officer for 10 years. In 2014, he was appointed as ITF inspector for North Norway, and is proud to be a member of the Norwegian ITF inspectorate.



Truls Vik Steder (Larvik, Norway – NSU) enjoyed a long career at sea before he joined the ITF inspectorate in 2003 as inspector in Bergen, Norway. He finds his work focusing on helping and supporting seafarers very interesting and fulfilling.

Upskilling seafarers for maritime green transition

Seafarers face big changes in the way they work and the jobs they do, as the maritime industry navigates towards a zero-carbon future. Work is underway to ensure you have the skills to work safely, reports **Kulsoom Jafri**, ITF lead campaigner, seafarers and inland navigation

The shipping industry is to reach net zero emissions by 'close to' 2050, with interim targets to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by up to 30% by 2030, and up to 80% by 2040.

These targets are set out in the Revised GHG Strategy adopted by governments at the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in July 2023. The measures to implement the strategy will be agreed in 2025, and implemented in 2027.

To meet this challenge, shipping is tasked with using at least 5% zero emission fuels, and ideally 10%, in the global fleet by 2030.

The strategy also envisions a 'just and equitable transition', including the need to upskill and support seafarers, who are central to achieving a zero-carbon future for maritime.

At our Congress in October 2024, the ITF agreed that our work on seafarer safety, particularly in the handling of potentially dangerous new fuels, must take centre place when we collaborate with industry and international organisations. We will argue for industry regulation to hold states and shipowners to account, and promote greater awareness among seafarers of their rights.



We will develop this work through the Maritime Just Transition Task Force (MJTTF), which was set up at COP 26 in 2021 and brings together the ITF, the International Chamber of Shipping, the United Nations Global Compact, the International Labour Organization and the IMO.

Training in new skills

At Crew Connect in November 2024, the MJTTF launched the report of its Baseline Training Framework for Seafarers in Decarbonization project to begin providing the skills that an estimated 800,000 seafarers will need to acquire.

The report was informed by 12 MJTTF workshops in 2024 to explore how seafarers could safely use ammonia, methanol and hydrogen as marine fuels, particularly as each fuel presents unique challenges and hazards.

It outlines the pressing need for a comprehensive review and overhaul of seafarer training, to fully prepare seafarers to safely operate vessels powered by alternative fuels and manage new onboard technologies.

The project will develop the training materials necessary for seafarers to safely use the new fuels, and will draft new competency standards for the Seafarers' Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW) Code. ■

Read the MJTTF Considerations of Training Aspects for Seafarers report at Considerations of Training Aspects for Seafarers www.itfglobal.org/training-considerations



Leading brand agrees to protect human rights in supply chain

Leading fashion retailer New Look has joined forces with the ITF to ensure the company protects transport workers' human and labour rights throughout its supply chain, reports **Kulsoom Jafri**, ITF lead campaigner for seafarers and inland navigation

Partnerships like this groundbreaking agreement, signed by New Look and the ITF in August 2024, are desperately needed to bridge the global gaps in protecting rights in supply chains that legislation is currently either unable or failing to fill.

The agreement will ensure environmental and social sustainability, and good governance, in New Look's directly operated and subcontracted transport operations, which are substantial. The company sources from 19 countries, with over 80% coming from five countries. It ships from 52 ports out of 27 countries, mainly transporting its products to the UK and Ireland by sea and road.

New Look said that the agreement would help the company 'remain vigilant and diligent in our commitment to uphold human rights, be aware of vulnerable workers and make sure there is no modern slavery or human trafficking in any part of our operations'.

Under the agreement:

- New Look will advance freedom of association for its supply chain transport workers. A key element of this will be ensuring the ITF's affiliate trade unions have the right to organise and enter the premises of the company's supply chain logistics providers.
- New Look will provide for or cooperate in remediation for harms transport workers suffer, when appropriate, through collective bargaining with the ITF or its affiliated trade unions in the affected region.
- The ITF and its trade unions will carry out appropriate training for New Look and its suppliers.

New Look also commits to respecting all internationally recognised human rights as standards for its supply chain transport and logistics operations. It is one of 50 business and investors to call for a new UK human rights due diligence (HRDD) law.

This follows an ITF agreement signed with TFG (owner of leading retail brands) in March 2023. The ITF wants to build on these achievements to pursue supply chain agreements with other retailers and brands. ■

Read the ITF's Maritime Human Rights and Due Diligence Guidance which underpins these agreements at www.itfglobal.org/hrdd

Fatigued seafarers sinking under weight of flawed regulations and weak implementation

Seafarers are overworked and underprotected, thanks to the failure of regulations and implementation to deliver on promises to address fatigue. **Captain (Dr) Bikram S Bhatia** has been researching work/rest hours regulations under a three-year project with World Maritime University, funded by the ITF Seafarers' Trust

Flawed regulations

When the International Maritime Organization's STCW 1978 and the International Labour Organization's Convention 180 introduced regulations on working time, they were heralded to protect seafarers from fatigue and overwork. However, the standards – allowing a workweek of up to 91 or 98 hours – are glaringly at odds with the 48-hour workweek ashore.

How did this happen despite overwhelming evidence provided by the International Labour Organization (ILO) that working beyond 50 hours per week undermines workers' health and safety, and working time above 48 hours per week does not meet decent work criteria?

It isn't just an oversight: it reflects a systemic disregard for maritime labour. Seafarers should be entitled to the same basic labour protections as others to safeguard their health and safety.

Broken implementation

My report comprises a massive body of evidence drawn from 6,304 seafarers, 55 port state control (PSC) officers, and 16,551 PSC inspections. It reveals a stark gap between policy and practice.

- 64.3% of seafarers admitted to falsifying work/rest records.
- PSC officers found it difficult to detect violations.
- While PSC officers reported compliance as high as 99.3%, seafarers estimated compliance between 11.7% and 16.1%.

The reasons for this gap are:

- Suppressed reporting: 66.7% of seafarers had their reports questioned by companies, and 49.1% were instructed to falsify records. Underused feedback mechanisms: falsified records hindered the escalation of non-compliance to flag States, preventing the review or withdrawal of manning certificates. Skewed reporting: the high compliance rates reported by PSC officers give a misleading impression of successful implementation.
- Ignored warnings: policymakers have ignored two decades of research on record falsification.

Time for a new course

We need to set fair standards, which align seafarers' work hours with global labour benchmarks.

And among the steps needed to fix implementation failures are:

- Creating a safe environment for reporting violations.
- Strengthening PSC enforcement capacities.
- Strengthening flag States' accountability in overseeing non-compliance and determining manning levels.

The ILO's proposed MLC 2006 amendment, set for discussion in April 2025, offers an opportunity for policymakers and industry leaders to initiate meaningful reforms. The maritime industry must rise to this challenge, ensuring those powering the global economy aren't sinking under broken promises. ■

- The full report is available at https://commons.wmu.se/phd_dissertations/35/.
- Further publications 'A Culture of Adjustment' and 'Quantifying an Inconvenient Truth' can be found at <https://www.seafarerstrust.org/publications>



Campaign for publicly-owned ferries takes to New Zealand streets

ITF-affiliated trade unions from around the world joined the Maritime Union of New Zealand's demonstration in the streets of the capital as part of its high-profile campaign to demand new, publicly-owned Interislander ferries. **Steve Yandell**, ITF assistant coordinator, seafarers and inland navigation, explains

The Interislander is the primary carrier of freight and non-aviation passengers between the North and South islands. Run since the 1960s by state-owned KiwiRail, it was due to be replaced by two large, rail-enabled ferries under a fixed price contract with Hyundai Mipo Dockyard.

However, in February 2024, the new National Party government cancelled the contract, citing spiralling costs. The Maritime Union of New Zealand (MUNZ) estimates that the cancellation itself will cost NZ\$500 million (over USD294 million), adding to the same amount already spent.

The MUNZ fears that the government is considering splitting the ferry service from KiwiRail in order to purchase two smaller, non-rail-enabled ferries – alongside privatising or part-privatising the service. It believes that this would form an attempt to de-unionise the service and significantly reduce transport workers' terms and conditions.

The MUNZ is demanding that the government replace the ageing fleet of ferries with a new generation of publicly-owned, rail-enabled ferries.

Addressing the demonstrators outside the Parliament building, ITF Ferry Taskforce Chair Ronny Øksnes decried the vested interests, like foreign hedge funds, that could make decisions on ferries based on private profit instead of public need.

"Ferries are more crucial than ever – we need ferries to bring goods, we need ferries to bring medicines, and we need a way for people to travel. People can't all afford to fly between the North and South Island, they need a reasonable, affordable way to travel."

ITF maritime policy adviser Sadie Saunders added that transport infrastructure is a long-term investment that ensures good jobs and efficient supply chains. "These are projects that should be measured across decades and in the context of the whole economy."

Among the unions showing solidarity with the MUNZ at the demonstration were the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), the Norwegian Seafarers' Union (NSU), the Associated Philippine Seafarers' Union (APSU), the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU – USA, Canada), the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA – USA), and the All Japan Dockworkers' Union (ZenKowan).

The MUNZ campaign has achieved significant media coverage and wide traction on social media, as well as generating huge political debate.

The New Zealand government made an announcement on 11 December which seems to confirm their intention to proceed with non-rail enabled ferries but provided little detail. Unions are disappointed by the lack of clarity provided, so they are continuing to campaign for rail-enabled ferries. ■

Exploitation of migrant fishers in Scotland exposed

Allegations of human trafficking and modern-day slavery within Scotland's fishing industry hit the headlines in the UK in August 2024, following a three-year BBC investigation. **Chris Williams**, ITF fisheries section coordinator, was interviewed in the resulting documentary, *Slavery at Sea*, and tells us more

The allegations involve TN Trawlers and its associated firms. *Slavery at Sea* reveals how migrant workers, mainly from the Philippines, Ghana, India, and Sri Lanka, have faced severe exploitation aboard UK fishing vessels.

TN Trawlers has been in the spotlight before. The Home Office, the UK government body responsible for immigration and security, recognised 35 employees of either TN Trawlers or its related companies as victims of modern slavery between 2012 and 2020. Despite two criminal investigations into TN Group, there have been no charges or prosecutions related to human trafficking or slavery.

The ITF, the ITF Seafarers' Trust and maritime charity Stella Maris have supported many exploited workers, and the ITF has pushed for more urgency in prosecuting such cases. Yet the pace of justice remains slow, and the UK government has failed to change the transit visa policy loophole which allows this exploitation.

Transit visas are intended to allow seafarers from other countries to board ships in UK ports that then depart into international waters. But fishing vessel owners

have misused them in employing migrants, by taking them fishing into international waters to fulfil the transit requirements but then bringing them back to a UK port to live on board the fishing vessel.

Fishing vessel owners can control migrants by threatening to claim they have absconded from the vessel, in which case, they would have no immigration status ('leave to remain') and could be removed or deported from the UK as illegal immigrants.

We need a fishing-specific work permit for non-EU fishers, to give migrant workers the same rights and protections as any other worker employed in the UK.

The ITF has supported a group of fishers who recently won a legal claim against the Home Office, an acknowledgement that this loophole fails to protect their human rights. However, the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) for Human Trafficking – the national framework for identifying and referring victims of modern slavery and ensuring they receive the appropriate support – needs urgent reform.

The fear of losing current or future work deters many fishers from reporting abuse, so the scale of exploitation among the approximately 2,000 foreign workers in UK waters remains largely hidden.

The BBC's revelations have brought calls for swift action from human and labour rights advocates, who demand accountability, structural reform, and comprehensive protections for vulnerable foreign workers in the UK fishing industry. ■

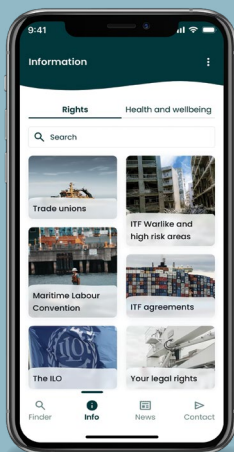


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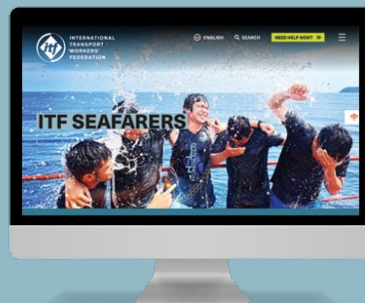


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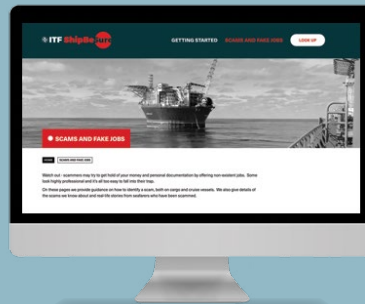


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