

Re:fresh

BY MARINE BENEFITS

Global 2026 Edition

Building a sustainable maritime workforce
through health, recovery, safety, and retention



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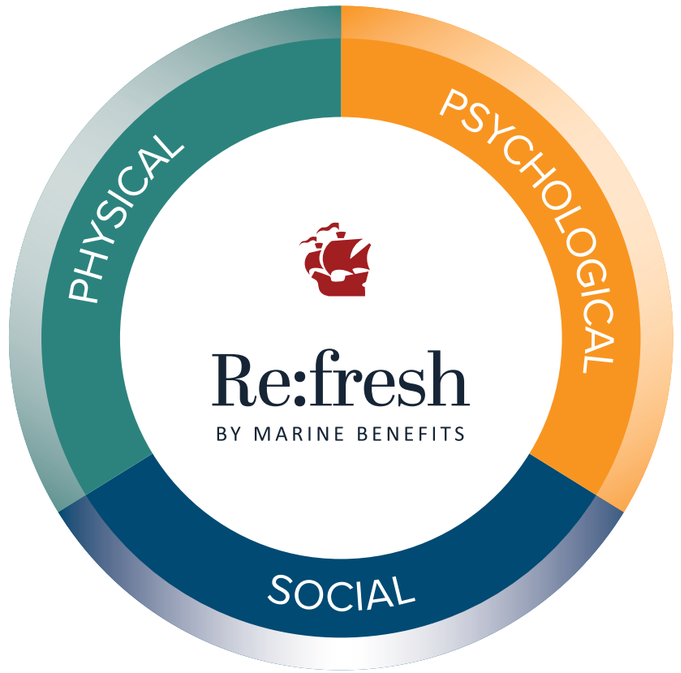

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Foreword

As we present the Re:fresh 2026 report, the maritime industry once again finds itself navigating challenging times. Geopolitical tensions, economic uncertainty, and continued disruptions to global trade are shaping the environment in which our industry operates. For seafarers, these developments are often felt most directly. Recent events affecting key maritime trade routes, including the Strait of Hormuz, serve as a reminder that those who keep global commerce moving are frequently exposed to pressures and risks far beyond their control.

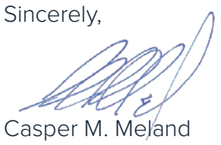
Against this backdrop, it is particularly encouraging to see a record number of shipowners, ship managers, and maritime employers choosing to participate in Re:fresh 2026. Such strong engagement is a positive sign of the increasing focus being placed on seafarers, their health, wellbeing, and their importance to the future of our industry. It reflects a shared recognition that people remain at the very heart of maritime operations and that investing in seafarers is both the right thing to do and a business necessity. At the same time, the demand for qualified seafarers continues to increase. As the global fleet expands and the average age of seafarers rises, competition for experienced maritime professionals is becoming more pronounced. The sum of these developments points to a simple but important reality: the seafarers we have today are among the most valuable resources our industry possesses. Their wellbeing is about far more than individual health. It is directly connected to safety at sea, operational performance, environmental protection, and the reliability of global maritime transport. Ensuring that seafarers remain healthy, motivated, and supported is therefore more important than ever. For an industry that depends on competence, resilience, and professionalism, caring for our people is fundamental to our collective success.

The purpose of Re:fresh has always been to provide facts that enable informed decisions. By listening to seafarers and sharing evidence-based insights, we hope to support constructive discussions and practical actions that strengthen the maritime workplace for current and future generations. Together, we can continue to make better decisions, create stronger organisations, and contribute to a safer and more sustainable maritime industry.

This year also provides a special opportunity to recognise an important milestone. On behalf of Marine Benefits, I would like to congratulate Dr. Rebecca Hayes Mejia on earning her PhD in Seafarers' Health. This achievement represents years of dedication, academic excellence, and a genuine passion for improving the lives of seafarers around the world. It is yet another example of the commitment behind Re:fresh and reflects a deep belief that knowledge and research can drive meaningful improvements for those working at sea. We hope that the maritime industry, and the thousands of seafarers it serves, will benefit from the valuable insights her work brings in the years ahead.

Finally, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to all participating shipowners, ship managers, and maritime employers who contributed to this study. Most importantly, I would like to thank the many thousands of seafarers who generously shared their time, experiences, perspectives, and concerns. Your willingness to contribute strengthens our collective understanding and helps drive positive change across the industry.
The challenges facing maritime transport are unlikely to diminish in the years ahead. Yet by working together, sharing knowledge, and placing seafarers at the centre of our decisions, we can ensure that the people who safely operate the world's fleet continue to thrive. The future of maritime transportation depends on it. Thank you for being part of this journey and for strengthening our shared commitment to the health, wellbeing, and future of seafarers worldwide.

Sincerely,



Casper M. Meland
Chief Executive Officer
Marine Benefits AS

Executive Summary

Re:fresh 2026 provides a comprehensive picture of seafarer health and wellbeing based on responses from more than 30,000 seafarers worldwide. The findings present a broadly positive outlook, with improvements in several key indicators compared with previous years, including lower stress levels, higher happiness, stronger psychological wellbeing, and more positive perceptions of health and onboard food. These results suggest that industry efforts to support crew wellbeing are making a meaningful difference. At the same time, wellbeing remains closely linked to wider operational and workforce challenges. Fatigue, sleep, and recovery continue to be critical concerns, while physical inactivity, overweight and obesity, and related long-term health risks remain widespread. Mental wellbeing is also influenced by workload, psychosocial demands, social support, communication with home, and onboard culture.

A key strength of Re:fresh 2026 is its combination of quantitative health data and qualitative analysis of seafarers' open-ended comments. This provides deeper insight into the experiences behind the numbers, highlighting themes such as workload, work-life balance, leadership, social connectedness, wellbeing support, and life at sea. The findings also amplify the perspectives of minority groups onboard, including female seafarers and individuals identifying as "other", emphasising the importance of inclusion, psychological safety, respectful treatment, and equal opportunities. Together, the findings reinforce a clear message for the maritime industry: supporting seafarer wellbeing is not only a welfare issue but a business critical requirement for safety, performance, retention, and workforce sustainability. Health outcomes are shaped not only by individual behaviours but also by the environments in which seafarers live and work. Respectful cultures, protection from bullying and harassment, effective communication, adequate rest and recovery, and access to support systems are essential components of a healthy and resilient workforce. For maritime organisations, sustainable improvements in wellbeing require more than standalone health initiatives. A holistic approach that addresses the underlying conditions influencing health, engagement, and performance is needed. Re:fresh 2026 provides an evidence base to guide these efforts and support informed decisions on where interventions and investments can have the greatest impact for both seafarers and the organisations that depend on them.

The average seafarer	Re:fresh 2026
Age	39
Gender	Male
Civil status (married)	72%
Children (% with children)	67%
Years at sea	9.6
Months onboard	3.4
Years with present employer	8.0
Health issues	31%
BMI	26.26
WHtR	56%
Smoking	22%
Happiness	5.17
Wellbeing (All well)	88%
ESI	73%
eNPS	18%
Lonely	9%
Bullied	5%
Fatigued	11%



Rebecca H. Mejia, PhD
Public Health Manager
Marine Benefits AS

“Thank you for providing this survey and for making our voices feel valued and important to life onboard. I firmly believe that gathering this feedback is a vital step towards driving positive changes and improvements for the future.”

Seafarer, Re:fresh 2026

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About Re:fresh 2026

Re:fresh 2026 is a wellbeing survey designed to provide evidence-based understanding of the factors that shape seafarers' health, wellbeing, safety, and engagement with their profession. Rather than examining individual issues in isolation, the survey takes an integrated approach, recognising that physical, psychological, and social conditions collectively influence life and work at sea.

The survey is informed by Labonté's health promotion model, which views wellbeing as the interaction between physical, emotional, and social aspects of life. This perspective recognises that health is shaped not only by individual choices, but also by the everyday conditions in which people live and work. For seafarers, these conditions include workload, recovery opportunities, onboard culture, social support, and the broader working environment.



Holistic model of health and wellbeing (Labonté, 1993)

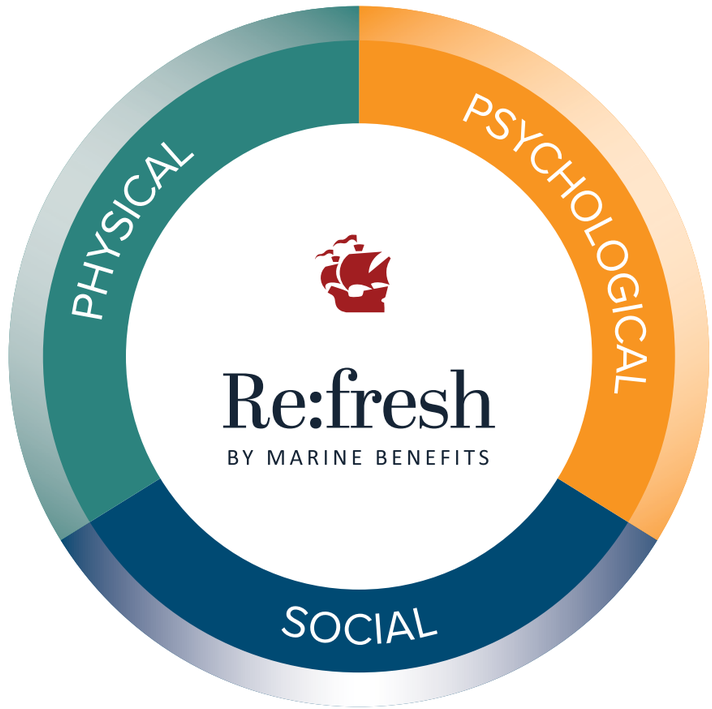
The survey explores topics that are central to workforce sustainability, including fatigue, sleep, physical health, mental wellbeing, onboard culture, social support, communication, and experiences of bullying and harassment. By bringing these themes together, Re:fresh 2026 helps identify key risks, protective factors, and opportunities for improvement across the seafarer experience.

The findings are based on responses from seafarers across a range of vessel types, ranks, age groups, nationalities, and career stages. Data were collected through an anonymous questionnaire using a combination of validated instruments and maritime specific questions designed to capture both health outcomes and conditions that influence them.

The results presented in this report should be interpreted as indicators of the experiences, perceptions, and wellbeing of participating seafarers. While individual results may vary between organisations, the findings provide valuable insights into broader trends, emerging risks, and priority areas for action across the maritime workforce.

In addition to this industry report, each participating company receives a tailored benchmarking report comparing results with both previous survey cycles and the wider maritime industry. This allows leaders to monitor change over time, measure the impact of interventions, and make informed decisions based on evidence and comparative performance.

This report is intended to support evidence-based decision-making. The findings provide leaders, managers, and other stakeholders with actionable insights that can help prioritise interventions, strengthen prevention efforts, and create healthier, safer, and more sustainable working environments at sea.



Why Re:fresh 2026 matters now

The maritime industry is facing a growing challenge: maintaining a safe, productive and sustainable workforce in an environment of increasing operational demands and competition for skilled seafarers. As workforce shortages, retention concerns, and performance pressures continue to grow, seafarer wellbeing has become a strategic business issue rather than merely a welfare consideration.

Evidence across the sector shows that fatigue, poor recovery, psychological strain, and declining workforce sustainability are interconnected risks that affect safety, performance, engagement and retention. The conditions under which seafarers work and live are increasingly recognised as critical drivers of organisational resilience and operational success.

Re:fresh 2026 provides insights into these challenges by examining the physical, psychological, and social factors that shape wellbeing at sea. The findings are intended to help organisations identify priority risks, focus resources where they will have the greatest impact, and support a healthier, safer, and more sustainable maritime workforce.

Ultimately, seafarer wellbeing is not only a health outcome, but also a strategic asset that underpins safety, resilience, and the future sustainability of the maritime industry.

> Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.
> – World Health Organization

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, we extend our sincere thanks to the thousands of seafarers who took time from their busy schedules to share their experiences through Re:fresh 2026. Your willingness to participate provides invaluable insight into the realities of life and work at sea and forms the foundation of this report.

We are equally grateful to the shipping and manning companies that participated in this year's edition. Thank you for your trust in Re:fresh and for your continued commitment to understanding and improving seafarer wellbeing. We are especially appreciative of the many organisations that have returned year after year, helping to build a stronger evidence base for the maritime industry and enabling meaningful benchmarking over time.

Re:fresh 2026 is the result of a true team effort. We are deeply grateful to the entire Marine Benefits team for their dedication to promoting the survey, engaging participating organisations, supporting data collection, and contributing in countless ways throughout the project. Special thanks go to Diana for her outstanding work in transforming complex data into meaningful insights; Maria and Cecilie for their close collaboration with participating companies and organisations; Ken for his creativity and design expertise in bringing the report to life; and Paul for providing the technical foundation that kept everything running smoothly, from survey links and system updates and the many essential IT tasks behind the scenes.

Finally, thank you to everyone who believes that a healthier, safer and more sustainable maritime industry begins with understanding and supporting the people who make global shipping possible. Their voices continue to guide the work of Re:fresh and inspire action across the sector.



"In my opinion, health and happiness are essential for every seafarer. Life at sea offers valuable experience, career opportunities, and personal growth, but it also comes with challenges such as workload and being away from family. Therefore, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, getting enough rest, exercising regularly, and supporting each other onboard are very important. A healthy and positive crew contributes to a safer, more efficient, and more enjoyable working environment."

Seafarer, Re:fresh 2026

About the participants

The demographic profile suggests that Re:fresh 2026 captures a broad cross-section of the global maritime workforce, with particularly strong representation from operational crew and mid-career seafarers. Respondents were predominantly male (97%), and most were aged 31-50 years (61%). The findings can therefore be considered highly representative of the groups most directly involved in day-to-day ship operations onboard.

The average seafarer is 39 years old, married, and has children. He has spent 9.6 years at sea, 8 years with his present employer, and has been onboard 3.37 months at the time when taking the survey. 42% reported having female seafarer colleagues working onboard.

Demographics

Study	Year	Survey period
Re:fresh	2026	June 1 to June 30
Re:fresh	2024	Feb 12 to Mar 8

- All responses under 20 pax should be viewed with caution.
- The sample sizes (n) will differ from section to section as some questions may have been skipped or the survey stopped early.

	At home	On board	Re:fresh 2026	%	Re:fresh 2024	%
Total participants	**10,690**	**20,230**	**30,920**	**100%**	**36,446**	**100%**
Respondents who completed the survey			**21,350**		**26,429**	
Male	10,263	19,597	29,860	97%	35,619	98%
Female	386	534	920	3%	765	2%
Others	41	99	140	0%	62	0%
18-24 years old	597	971	1,568	5%	2,091	6%
25-30 years old	1,988	3,962	5,950	19%	7,441	20%
31-40 years old	3,763	7,455	11,218	36%	13,008	36%
41-50 years old	2,585	4,991	7,576	25%	8,580	24%
51+ years old	1,757	2,851	4,608	15%	5,326	15%

Demographics by nationality

Nationality	At home	On board	Re:fresh 2026	%	Re:fresh 2024	%
Filipino	4,098	9,619	13,717	44%	14,241	39%
Indian	2,939	4,448	7,387	24%	10,591	29%
Ukrainian	473	909	1,382	4%	2,329	6%
Burmese	319	340	659	2%	1,204	3%
Russian	211	552	763	2%	880	2%
Romanian	274	370	644	2%	734	2%
Polish	181	241	422	1%	691	2%
Chinese	299	468	767	2%	612	2%
Malaysian	203	533	736	2%	462	1%
Sri Lankan	206	328	534	2%	227	1%
Others	1,487	2,422	3,909	13%	4,475	12%

Demographics by rank

Rank	At home	On board	Re:fresh 2026	%	Re:fresh 2024	%
Senior Officers	**2,284**	**4,480**	**6,764**	**23%**	**6,686**	**19%**
Master/Captain	784	1,821	2,605	9%	2,509	7%
Chief Engineer/Engine Manager	864	1,409	2,273	8%	2,269	7%
Chief Officer/Deck Manager	636	1,250	1,886	6%	1,908	5%
Junior Officers	**3,439**	**5,935**	**9,374**	**31%**	**11,086**	**32%**
Deck Officer/Deck Operations	1,172	2,369	3,541	12%	4,342	12%
Engine Officer/Engine Operations	1,802	2,702	4,504	15%	5,228	15%
Chief Cook/Catering Operations	465	864	1,329	4%	1,516	4%
Ratings	**3,193**	**7,234**	**10,427**	**35%**	**12,922**	**37%**
Deck Rating/Deck Support/Bosun	1,920	4,432	6,352	21%	7,411	21%
Engine Rating/Engine Support	932	2,057	2,989	10%	4,177	12%
Galley Staff/Catering Support	341	745	1,086	4%	1,334	4%
Others	**803**	**1,339**	**2,142**	**7%**	**2,421**	**7%**
Cadet	**515**	**791**	**1,306**	**4%**	**1,746**	**5%**

Demographics by vessel type

Vessel type	At home	On board	Re:fresh 2026	%	Re:fresh 2024	%
Bulk Carrier	1,858	4,330	6,188	21%	5,223	15%
Container Ships	1,600	3,208	4,808	16%	15,237	44%
Other vessel	547	1,265	1,812	6%	1,068	3%
Passenger - Cruise Ship	368	392	760	3%	490	1%
Product carrier	411	532	943	3%	867	2%
Speciality Ship Ro-Ro	435	782	1,217	4%	981	3%
Tankers - Chemical	1,123	1,868	2,991	10%	2,850	8%
Tanker - Crude oil	1,374	2,399	3,773	13%	3,238	9%
LNG/LPG	1,716	3,457	5,173	17%	3,310	10%
Others	540	1,081	1,621	5%	786	2%
Other Tankers	262	465	727	2%	739	2%

“Generally, crew will do their best to keep good physical health and maintain a sound mind. The highest number of times I have seen crew members breaking down mentally, and sometimes even physically, is when crew changes are delayed or cancelled, or when crew contracts are extended without explicit permission from the crew. Most crew service personnel do not seem to understand the importance of crew change for a crew member who has completed their contract. Looking forward to going home after many months on board is one of the most important moments for the crew, and when it gets cancelled, postponed or extended without crew acceptance, you can really see the mental and psychological effects manifest physically in the crew. So if there is one thing I will say affects health and wellbeing onboard, and which should be improved upon, it’s the assurance and stability of on-time crew change.”

Seafarer, Re:fresh 2026

Physical

Sleep/Rest
Smoking
Diet
Exercise
BMI
WHtR
Diabetes risk
Health issues
Medicine intake
Repatriation



Physical health and everyday health risks



This section examines key indicators of physical health and lifestyle-related risk factors among participating seafarers. Within the holistic wellbeing model, physical wellbeing is unique in that it can be assessed through both objective and self-reported measures.

Re:fresh evaluates a range of lifestyle behaviours and health risk factors that influence overall health, wellbeing, fitness for work, and long-term health outcomes. Lifestyle factors include sleep, diet, physical activity, smoking and alcohol consumption, while health risks encompass conditions such as diabetes risk, overweight and obesity, and other existing medical conditions. These factors are closely interconnected, with unhealthy lifestyle behaviours increasing the risk of developing non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, and chronic respiratory illnesses. As NCDs account for the majority of premature deaths worldwide, understanding and addressing these risk factors is essential for promoting health and wellbeing among seafarers.

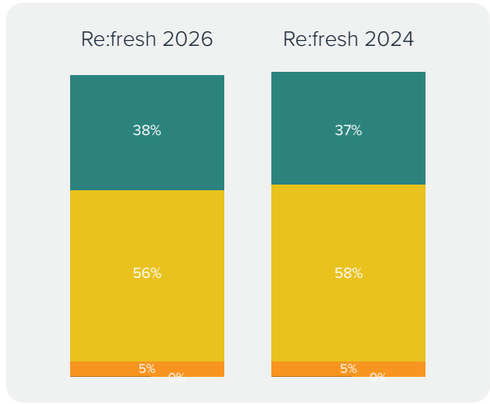
The findings presented in this section cover self-rated health, sleep, smoking, diet, alcohol consumption, physical activity, diabetes risk, existing health conditions, and repatriation due to illness or injury. Together, these indicators provide a broad picture of the factors that support or undermine health at sea and highlight areas where preventive action may have the greatest impact.

Self-rated health

Self-rated health is one of the most widely used indicators of overall health and wellbeing. Although based on a simple personal assessment, it has been shown to be a strong predictor of future health outcomes, work ability, and quality of life. It captures not only the presence of illness, but also how individuals perceive their physical, mental, and social wellbeing.

The findings presented in this section provide an overview of how participating seafarers rate their overall health and offer a valuable starting point for understanding broader patterns of wellbeing across the maritime workforce.

How would you rate your health in general?



Re:fresh 2026 N = 30,920
Re:fresh 2024 N = 36,446

Excellent Good Fair Poor

Findings

Overall: Self-rated health remained high and stable between 2024 and 2026, with most seafarers reporting good or excellent health.

Age: Health perceptions varied by age, with younger seafarers more likely to rate their health as excellent than older seafarers (46% vs. 30%). This pattern is consistent with broader research showing that health perceptions tend to decline with age as health challenges accumulate. However, self-rated health reflects more than physical illness alone. Previous research among seafarers has shown that self-rated health is influenced by physical health, psychological wellbeing, stress, sleep quality, loneliness, and lifestyle factors, making it a valuable indicator of overall wellbeing.

Rank: Similar differences were observed across ranks, with ratings generally higher among Cadets, Ratings and Junior Officers than among Senior Officers.

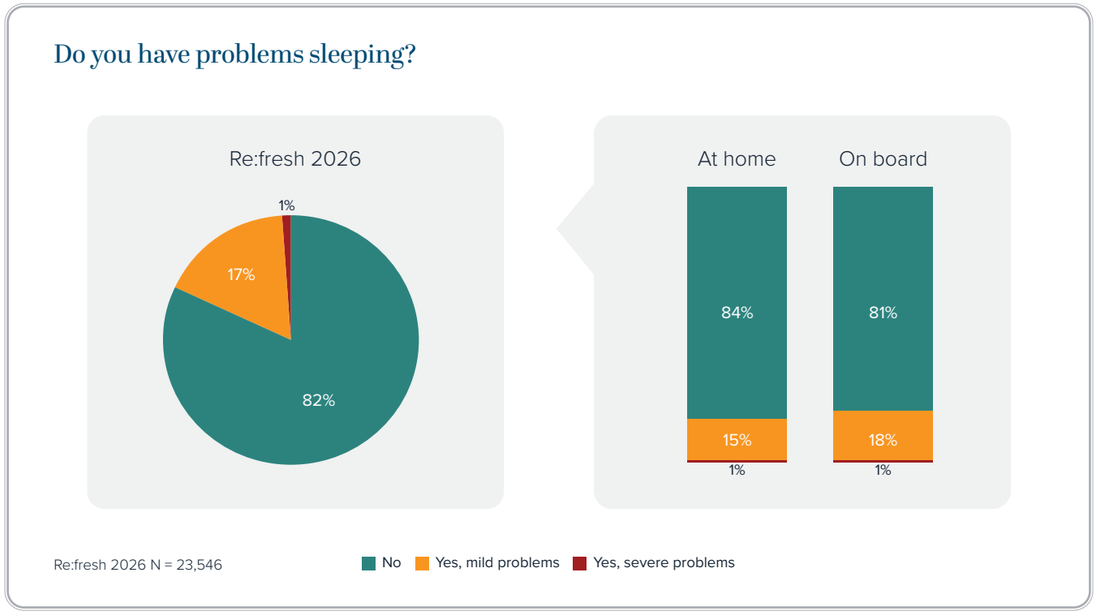
Nationality: Variation was also evident by nationality, where Filipino, Indian and Malaysian crew reported predominantly excellent or good health (between 39% and 44%), compared to Chinese, Russian, Burmese, and Ukrainian whose rating ranged between 17% to 22%.

Source: Hayes-Mejia, R. (2026). Navigating Health at Sea: Work Stress and Lifestyle as Drivers of Seafarers' Wellbeing and Self-Rated Health. Doctoral Thesis, Lund University, Sweden.

Sleep

Sleep plays a vital role in our health and is essential for the body to function properly. A range of important physiological processes take place during sleep, including energy conservation, emotional regulation, stress management, and cognitive functions such as memory and learning.

While sleep requirements vary from one person to another, most adults need approximately seven to eight hours of sleep per night. Not getting enough sleep can make us feel tired, unfocused, and irritable. Sleep difficulties are associated with reduced cognitive and intellectual functioning, and chronic sleep problems may increase the risk of developing both mental and physical health conditions, such as a weakened immune system, weight gain, high blood pressure and heart disease.



Findings

Overall: Most seafarers reported no sleep problems, although 17% experienced mild difficulties and 1% had severe problems. Sleep difficulties were slightly more common onboard than at home.

Rank: Results were generally similar across rank groups. Cadets reported the most sleep problems (23%), followed by Junior Officers (21%), while Ratings had the lowest rate (14%).

> "Sleep deprivation is unavoidable in this profession."
>
> *Seafarer, Re:fresh 2026*

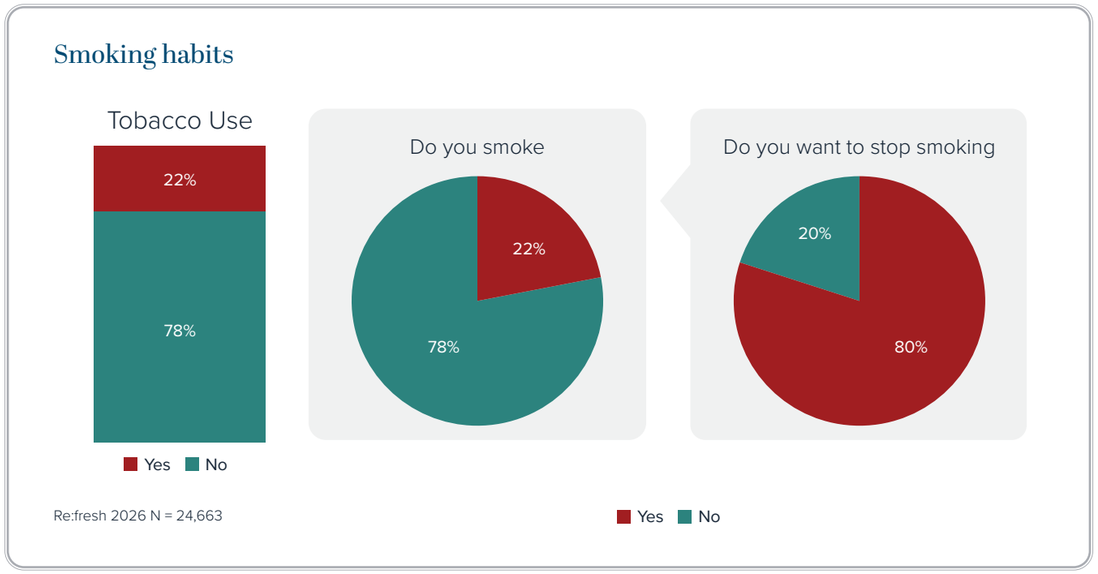
Maintaining a consistent sleep schedule can improve sleep quality and contribute to better overall health and wellbeing.

Source: Helse Norge, www.helsenorge.no/sovnproblemer/, Store Medisinske Leksikon, https://sml.snl.no/s%C3%B8vn#-Les_mer_i_Store_norske_leksikon, Helsedirektoratet, www.helsedirektoratet.no/forebygging-diagnose-og-behandling/forebygging-og-levevaner/sovn/sovn-og-sovnvansker

Smoking

The tobacco epidemic remains a major global health threat, responsible for more than 8 million deaths annually and a heavy burden of disease, disability, and long-term suffering. Tobacco contains thousands of chemicals and is harmful in all its forms. Cigarette smoking, which is the most common use of tobacco, has a damaging effect on almost every organ system in the body. The key health consequences of smoking are:

- **Cardiovascular risks:** high blood pressure, heart disease, and stroke.
- **Lung damage:** chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, emphysema, and chronic bronchitis.
- **Cancer:** smoking accounts for 90% of lung cancer deaths and raises the risk of other cancers.
- **Reduced lifespan:** smoking is a leading preventable cause of death and is linked to several other diseases.
- **Infectious diseases:** smoking increases the risk of infections such as tuberculosis and pneumonia.



Findings

Overall: In 2026, 22% of respondents reported that they smoked. Among smokers, 80% wanted to stop, highlighting the importance of accessible smoking-cessation support for seafarers.

Rank: Smoking rates were generally similar across rank groups, although Junior Officers reported the highest rate (24%). Rates were lower among other personnel, with Cadets reporting the lowest level (19%).

Age: Smoking was most common among seafarers aged 31–40 (25%), while rates were slightly lower and broadly similar across the younger age groups. Smoking became less common among older seafarers, with the lowest rate reported among those aged 51 and above (18%).

Nationality: Smoking rates varied considerably by nationality. Malaysian and Indonesian seafarers had the highest rates, both at 43%, followed by Ukrainian seafarers at 34% and Romanian seafarers at 33%. Filipino and Indian seafarers had the lowest rates, both at 19%.

Your body starts healing within minutes of quitting and over time, your risk of heart disease, stroke, and cancer is dramatically reduced.

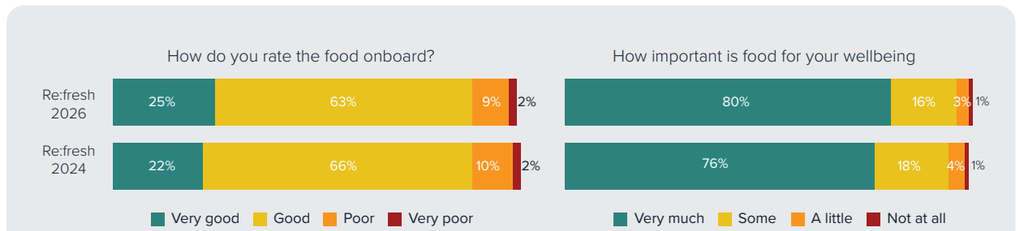
Source: World Health Organization, www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/tobacco, www.who.int/europe/news-room/fact-sheets/item/effects-of-tobacco-on-health

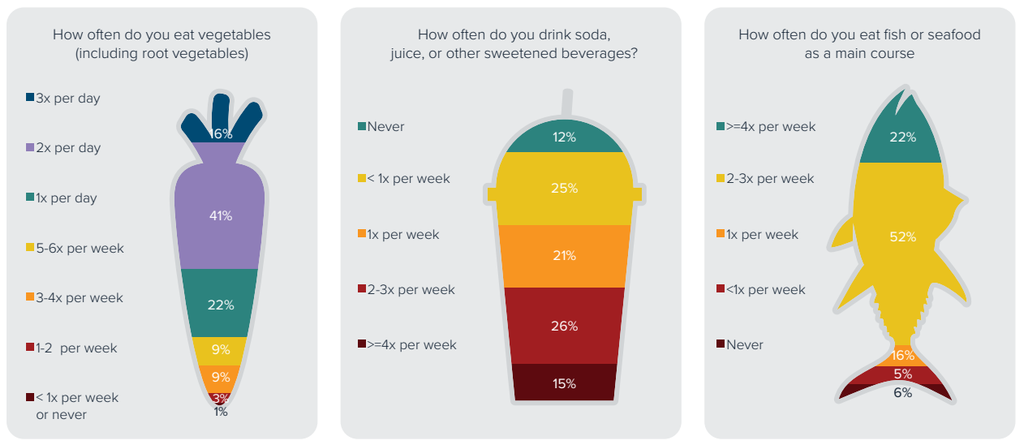
Diet

A balanced and varied diet plays a crucial role in promoting overall health and wellbeing. Consuming a healthy diet protects against malnutrition and helps prevent various chronic noncommunicable diseases such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and cancer.

Some general guiding principles for a healthy diet are to eat at least 400 g of fruits and vegetables each day, limit the intake of sugar (<5% of total energy intake) and fat, and keep track of salt/sodium intake to below 5g/day.

Diet habits





Re:fresh 2026 N = 24,972

Findings

Overall: Most seafarers viewed the food onboard positively, with 25% rating it as very good and 64% as good, broadly unchanged from 2024. Food was also closely linked to wellbeing, with 80% saying it was very important. Daily vegetable intake was reported by 79% of seafarers, while 12% reported no consumption of sweetened beverages and 80% consumed fish or seafood as a main course at least once per week.

The WHO recommends that we eat 400–500 g of fruits and vegetables everyday (excluding potatoes, sweet potatoes, cassava, and other starchy roots).

Source: World Health Organization, www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/healthy-diet

Alcohol

Although alcohol is commonly consumed across the world, excessive drinking can negatively impact both physical and mental wellbeing. Alcohol use is a major risk factor for a range of non-communicable diseases, including liver disease, heart disease, and cancer. It is also linked to several mental health and behavioural disorders, such as depression, anxiety, and alcohol use disorders.

Alcohol habits while at home



Alcohol	Re:fresh 2026	Re:fresh 2024
Moderate risk	27%	26%
High risk	0%	1%



Re:fresh 2026 N = 16,103
Re:fresh 2024 N = 22,237

Findings

Overall: Alcohol use was generally low to moderate. 34% reported that they never drank, while 80% of those who drank typically consumed one or two drinks. Overall, 72% were classified as low risk, 27% as moderate risk, and less than 1% as high risk, broadly unchanged from 2024. Only 24% were allowed to purchase alcohol onboard. Among relevant respondents, 46% wanted to stop drinking, but just 22% had received help or advice.

Rank: Risk levels were similar across rank groups. Ratings had the highest moderate risk at 31%, while high risk drinking was 1% or less across all groups.

Having a moderate risk score means that the alcohol consumption patterns may pose some health risks. Some general recommendations are:

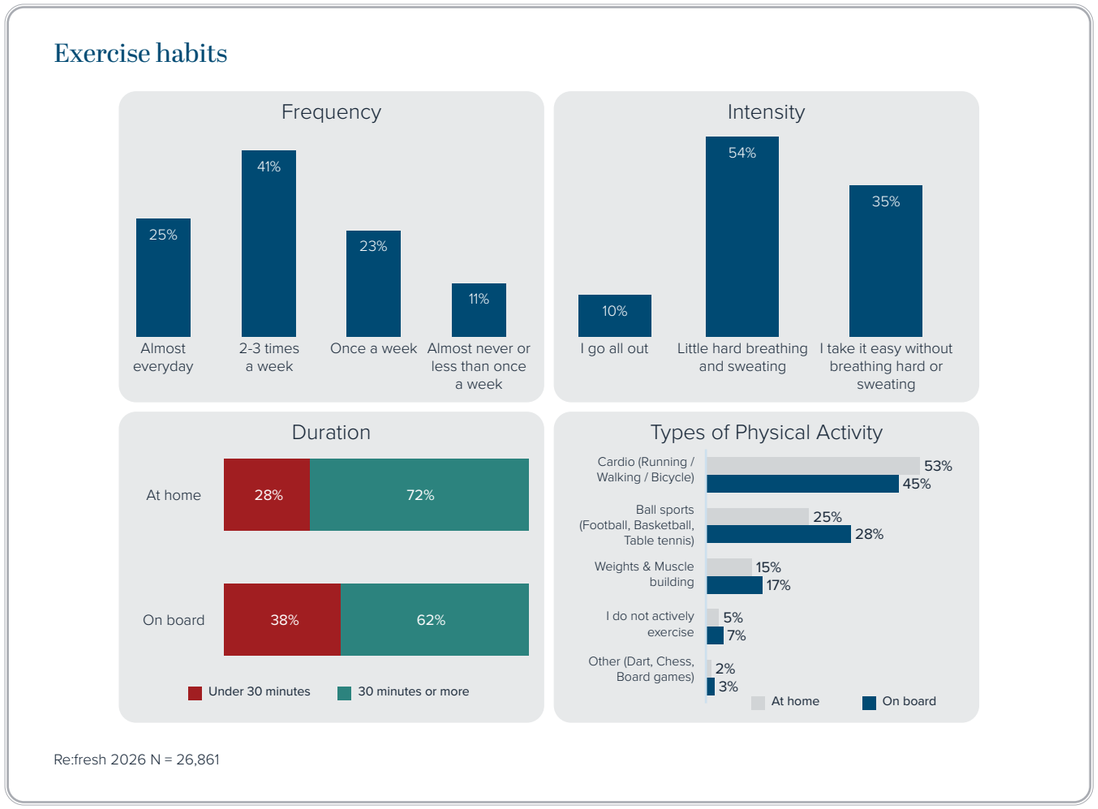
- Provide information about the risks and encourage self-awareness
- Reduce consumption
- Seek advice from a healthcare provider or counsellor
- Regular routine health check-ups monitor liver function, blood pressure and wellbeing.

Source: Babor, T. F., Higgins-Biddle, J. C., Saunders, J. B., & Monteiro, M. G. (2001). AUDIT: The Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test: Guidelines for Use in Primary Care (2nd ed.). World Health Organization.

Exercise

Regular physical activity plays a crucial role in the prevention and management of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), including cardiovascular disease, hypertension, stroke, diabetes, and several types of cancer. Furthermore, it contributes to maintaining a healthy body weight and is associated with improved mental health, enhanced quality of life, and overall wellbeing.

The recommendation from WHO (World Health Organization) is that all adults should undertake regular physical activity. Current physical guidelines recommend that every adult should either do at least 150 to 300 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity, or 75 to 150 minutes of vigorous aerobic intensity activity or an equivalent combination throughout the week.



Re:fresh 2026 N = 26,861

Findings

Overall: Exercise levels remained stable compared with 2024, with 66% of seafarers exercising at least two to three times per week. Seafarers were more active at home than onboard: 73% exercised at least two to three times per week at home, compared with 62% onboard, and sessions lasting 30 minutes or more were also more common at home (72% versus 62%). Cardio was the most common activity both at home (53%) and onboard (45%), followed by ball sports and strength training. The main barriers to exercise were lack of time (44%), limited access to facilities (24%), and tiredness (16%). Lack of time and tiredness were more common barriers onboard, while access to facilities was a greater challenge at home.

Rank: Exercise patterns were generally similar across rank groups, although Senior Officers were the most active and Cadets were the most likely to exercise at maximum intensity.

Source: World Health Organization, www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/physical-activity, https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/faa83413-d89e-4be9-bb01-b24671aef7ca/content

"I maintain my health through regular exercise and proper diet. Despite the demanding nature of work at sea, I find the experience fulfilling. Staying mentally strong and maintaining work-life balance are key to wellbeing onboard."

"Ensuring opportunities for exercise onboard is important. While seafarers are onboard to work and rest according to their schedules, companies could consider allocating two or three days each month for the entire crew to participate in exercise activities during working hours rather than on rest days. I believe this would have a positive impact on both the physical health and mental wellbeing of seafarers."

Seafarers, Re:fresh 2026

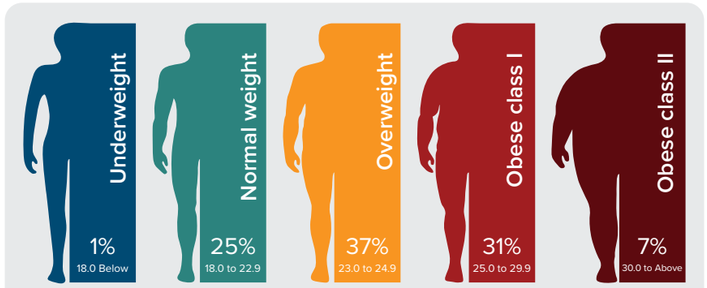
Body Mass Index

Over the past few decades, obesity has increased dramatically worldwide and is now recognised as a major global health crisis. More than one billion people are living with obesity, and its prevalence continues to rise in nearly every country. Overweight and obesity are characterised by abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that presents a risk to health. In clinical and population-based research, body mass index (BMI) is commonly used to classify overweight and obesity, with values of 25 kg/m^2 or higher indicating overweight and 30 kg/m^2 or higher indicating obesity.

Although BMI is a widely used tool, it has some limitations. It is based solely on height and weight and does not account for factors such as muscle and bone mass. As a result, individuals with a high level of muscularity may be classified as overweight despite having a healthy body composition. Additionally, BMI does not account for ethnic differences in body composition. Therefore, the association between BMI and health risk may vary between populations. Asian populations, for instance, are at increased risk of type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease at lower BMI levels than those defined as overweight by the WHO criteria.

BMI breakdown

BMI	Re:fresh 2026	Re:fresh 2024
Average	26.26	26.12



Re:fresh 2026 N = 26,858
Re:fresh 2024 N = 31,662

Findings

Overall: BMI results showed a slight shift towards higher weight categories compared with 2024, with combined obesity increasing from 32% in 2024 to 38% in 2026.

Rank: Ratings had the highest combined obesity level (44%), followed by others (38%), junior officers (37%) and senior officers (32%). Cadets had the lowest level (20%) and the highest proportion at normal weight (47%). At individual rank level, chief cooks reported the highest obesity levels (54%), followed by galley staff (47%) and deck ratings (45%).

BMI reference table

Classification	BMI Caucasian	BMI Asian	Health risk
Underweight	< 18.5	< 18.5	Low
Normal weight	18.5 - 24.9	18.5 - 22.9	Average
Overweight	≥ 25.0	≥ 23.0	Mildly Increased
Pre-obese	25.0 - 29.9	23.0 - 24.9	
Obese	> 30.0	> 25.0	
Class I	30.0 - 34.9	25.0 - 29.9	Moderate
Class II	35.0 - 39.0	> 30.0	High
Class III	≥ 40.0	≥ 35.0	Very High

Age: BMI increased steadily with age. Combined obesity rose from 18% among those aged 18–24 to 32% for ages 25–30, 38% for ages 31–40, 43% for ages 41–50, and 42% among those aged 51 and above.

Nationality: BMI results varied across nationalities. Filipino seafarers reported the highest combined obesity levels (59%), followed by Malaysian (57%) and Burmese seafarers (48%). Indian seafarers had the lowest obesity level (8%), although over half (51%) were classified as overweight.

Source: World Health Organization, www.who.int/health-topics/obesity#tab=tab_3, www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/obesity-and-overweight

Waist-to-height-ratio (WHtR)

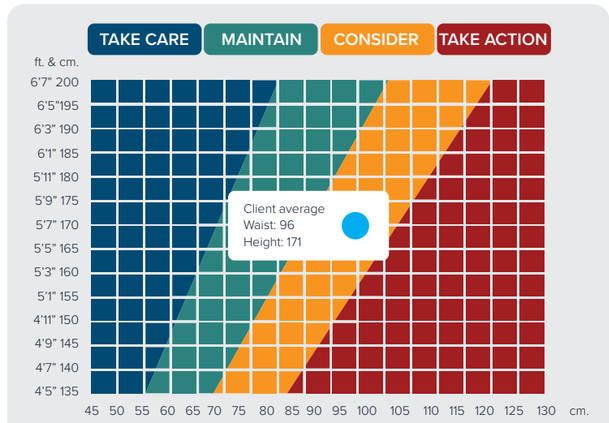
Waist-to-height ratio (WHtR) is used to assess the risk of overweight and obesity by taking both waist circumference and height into account.

Unlike BMI, which does not differentiate between body fat and muscle mass, WHtR provides a more accurate indication of obesity-related health risks. By comparing waist circumference with height, WHtR assesses central fat accumulation, which is more strongly associated with adverse health outcomes than fat stored in other areas of the body. A key advantage of WHtR is its applicability across age, sex, and ethnic groups. Waist circumference is recommended to be below 50% of height. Elevated WHtR values indicate a higher risk of obesity-related diseases such as diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular diseases.

WHtR

WHtR	Re:fresh 2026	Re:fresh 2024
Average	56%	56%

HEALTHY 29% | OVERWEIGHT 43% | OBESE 28%



Re:fresh 2026 N = 26,859
Re:fresh 2024 N = 31,666

Findings

Overall: Waist-to-height ratio results were broadly stable compared with 2024. In 2026, 29% were classified as healthy, 43% as overweight, and 28% as obese. This means 71% had a waist-to-height ratio above the healthy range, compared with 69% in 2024.

Rank: Results were similar across most rank groups, with 71–72% of Senior Officers, Junior Officers, Ratings, and Others classified as overweight or obese. Cadets had the lowest combined proportion at 63%. At individual-rank level, Chief Cooks recorded the highest obesity rate at 38%, followed by Master/Captains at 35% and Chief Engineers at 33%.

Age: Waist-to-height risk generally increased with age. The proportion classified as obese was 24% among those aged 25–30, rising to 27% among ages 31–40, 30% among ages 41–50, and 31% among those aged 51 and above.

Nationality: Waist-to-height results varied across nationality groups. Chinese seafarers had the highest combined overweight-to-obese proportion at 82%, followed by Indonesian seafarers at 80%, Ukrainian seafarers at 76%, and Russian seafarers at 75%. Indian and Romanian seafarers had the lowest combined proportions, both at approximately 67%.

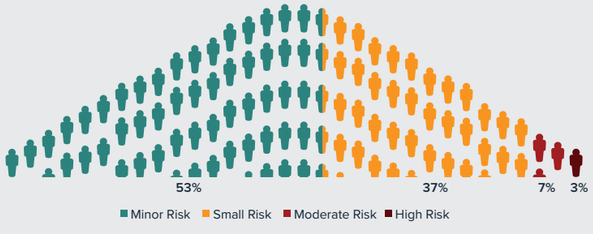
Calculate your waist-to-height-ratio: WHtR = waist circumference / height. As a rule of thumb: Keep your waist circumference to less than half of your height. Elevated WHtR values indicate a higher risk of obesity-related diseases.

Diabetes risk

Diabetes is a metabolic disorder characterised by high blood sugar levels. In addition to being a disease, it also serves as a major risk factor for several other non-communicable diseases (NCDs), such as cardiovascular diseases. The main cause is either insufficient insulin production (type 1) by the pancreas or ineffective use of insulin (type 2) by the body. Insulin is essential for life, helping glucose move from the bloodstream into the body's cells, where it is used for energy. It also plays a key role in the regulation of blood sugar levels. When blood sugar levels rise, the pancreas releases insulin to help restore balance. Type 2 diabetes, which accounts for most cases, develops more gradually, and is strongly associated with lifestyle-related risk factors such as excess weight and physical inactivity. Common symptoms may include frequent urination, increased thirst, sudden weight loss, itching around the genitals, slow healing of wounds or cuts, and blurred vision.

Diabetes risk

Risk	Re:fresh 2026	Re:fresh 2024
Minor	53%	55%
Small	37%	36%
Moderate	7%	6%
High	3%	3%



Risk points: 0-26

• Below 7	Minor risk (1 in 100)	
• 7-11	Small risk (1 in 25)	Keep an eye on your weight and consider increasing physical activity.
• 12-14	Moderate (1 in 6)	Make sure to discuss your risk of developing diabetes with your doctor at the next visit.
• 15-26	High to very high risk (1 in 3)	Make a visit to the doctor to check your blood sugar levels as soon as possible.

Re:fresh 2026 N = 24,942

Findings

Overall: The 2026 results were largely stable compared with 2024. Most seafarers were assessed as having a minor (53%) or small risk (37%) of developing type 2 diabetes within 10 years, while 7% had moderate risk and 3% had high risk.

Rank: Senior Officers stood out with the highest combined moderate-to-high risk at 18%, followed by Junior Officers at 10%, Others at 8%, Ratings at 5%, and Cadets at 3%.

Age: Diabetes risk increased substantially with age. Combined moderate-to-high risk was approximately 3% among those aged 18–24, 4% among those aged 25–30, 7% among those aged 31–40, 12% among those aged 41–50, and 24% among those aged 51+.

Nationality: Differences were also seen across nationality groups. Malaysian seafarers had the highest combined moderate-to-high risk at 16%. Burmese, Romanian, and Polish seafarers each recorded approximately 12%, while Chinese seafarers had one of the lowest levels at 4%.

Diabetes type 2 is largely preventable through lifestyle changes:

- Maintain a healthy body weight
- Eat more vegetables, whole grains, and fruits, and avoid ultra-processed foods
- Regular exercise
- Avoid smoking

Source: Svenska Diabetesförbundet, www.diabetes.se/, World Health Organization, www.who.int/health-topics/diabetes#tab=tab_1

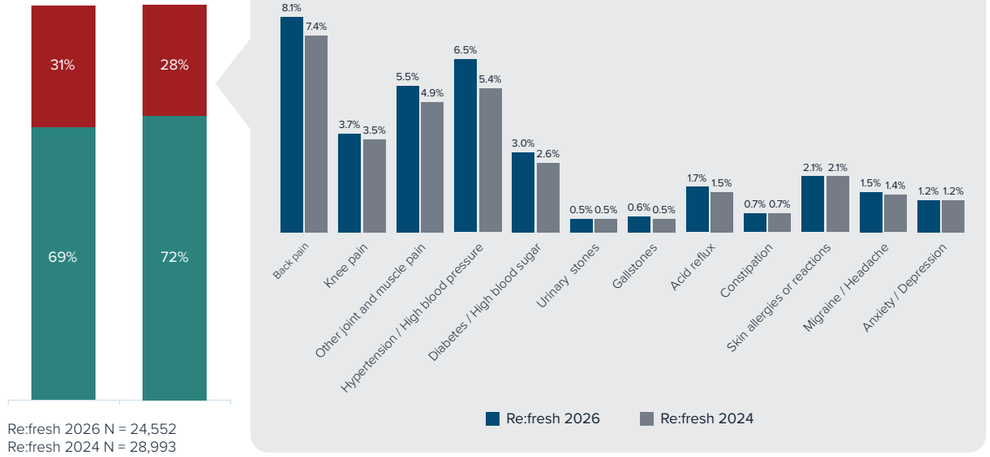
Health issues

According to Marine Benefits claims data, high blood pressure, diabetes, and musculoskeletal health issues are among the most common reasons why seafarers seek medical care.

Blood pressure is the force that moves blood through the body. When this pressure remains too high over time, it can damage the blood vessels and increase the risk of serious conditions such as heart attack, stroke, and kidney disease. The risk of developing high blood pressure increases with age and is also influenced by lifestyle factors such as physical inactivity, drinking more than moderate amounts of alcohol, smoking, and an unhealthy diet. Most people do not experience any noticeable symptoms of high blood pressure, which is why it is often referred to as "the silent killer". The WHO estimates that four in five people with high blood pressure do not receive adequate treatment. If hypertension were properly managed, many deaths could be avoided.

Because seafarers often perform physically demanding work, their musculoskeletal health may be particularly vulnerable. Health issues like back pain, joint problems and repetitive strain injuries are common among seafarers. Maintaining muscle strength is especially important with age, as muscle mass naturally declines over time. From around the age of 30, adults may lose an estimated 3–5% of muscle mass per decade. Reduced muscle strength can increase the risk of falls, fractures, and functional decline. Regular strength training can help counteract age-related muscle loss and support mobility, independence, and overall physical health.

Self-reported health issues



Re:fresh 2026 N = 24,552
Re:fresh 2024 N = 28,993

Findings

Overall: The proportion of seafarers reporting at least one health issue increased significantly between 2024 and 2026, rising from 28% to 31% of respondents. The most reported health concerns were back pain (8.1%), high blood pressure (6.5%), high cholesterol (5.5%), and joint pain (3.5%).

Nationality: Among the three largest nationality groups, 30% of Filipino seafarers reported at least one health issue, compared with 22% of Indian seafarers and 34% of Ukrainian seafarers. Musculoskeletal complaints and cardiovascular risk factors were the most common health concerns across all three nationalities, highlighting priority areas for targeted health promotion and prevention efforts.

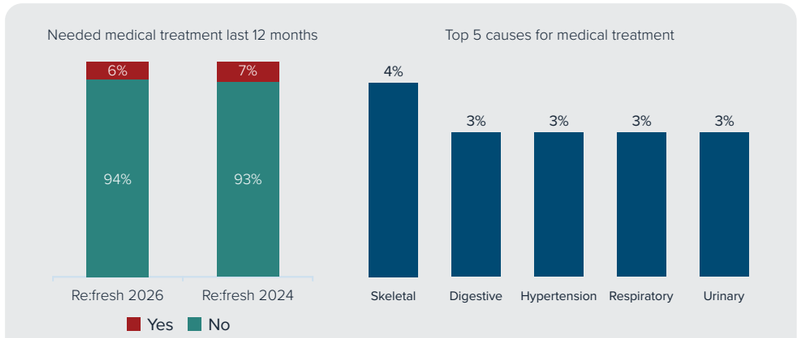
Source: Helse Norge, www.helsenorge.no/sykdom/hjerte-og-kar/hoyt-blodtrykk

Medicine intake

While the previous section highlights the health conditions commonly reported among seafarers, medicine intake provides an additional indication of how these conditions are being managed in everyday life.

Medicine use may reflect the treatment of diagnosed conditions, management of symptoms, or prevention of future health complications. In the maritime setting, understanding patterns of medicine intake is particularly important because access to medical advice and pharmacy services may be limited during voyages, while some medicines can affect alertness, coordination, and fitness for duty. The findings in this section provide insight into the proportion of seafarers using medication and support a broader understanding of health needs, continuity of care, and safe medicine management onboard.

Health problem



Re:fresh 2026 N = 24,453
Re:fresh 2024 N = 28,895

Findings

Overall: Most seafarers reported limited healthcare needs, with only a small proportion requiring medical treatment or taking medication (6%). Musculoskeletal conditions (4%) remained the leading reason for treatment, while hypertension medication (9%) was the most commonly used prescription drug, highlighting the continued importance of cardiovascular and physical health prevention efforts.

Rank: Medication use varied by rank group. Senior Officers reported the highest medication use (23%), followed by Others (17%), while Cadets reported the lowest use (4%), likely reflecting differences in age and underlying health conditions.

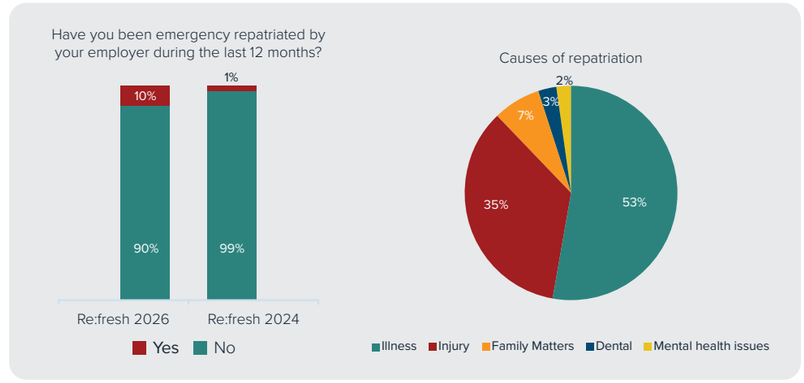
Remember that regular health check-ups and early intervention play a crucial role in maintaining seafarers' health and wellbeing. As we get older, we lose muscle mass. After the age of 30, it is estimated that you lose 3-5% of your muscle mass per decade. Weak muscles increase the risk of falls and fractures. Therefore, it is important to maintain strength to counteract the natural age-related muscle loss.

Repatriation

Ensuring timely repatriation of seafarers following illness, injury, mental health concerns, family emergencies, or urgent dental conditions is an important aspect of maritime operations. Effective repatriation enables access to necessary medical care, specialist treatment, personal support, and family assistance while safeguarding the wellbeing of affected crew members. The process requires careful coordination among onboard personnel, medical providers, manning agencies, and transportation services to facilitate safe, timely, and dignified return to the seafarer's home country.

While repatriation is essential for protecting crew health and welfare, it can also be a significant operational and financial challenge. Costs may include medical treatment, travel arrangements, accommodation, administrative coordination, and the deployment of replacement crew. In addition, repatriation can lead to disruptions in vessel operations, increased workload for remaining crew members, and the time and resources required to recruit, mobilise, and familiarise replacement personnel. Consequently, reducing preventable health issues and supporting crew wellbeing are not only important from a humanitarian perspective but can also help minimise operational disruption and associated costs.

Frequency and causes



Re:fresh 2026 N = 1,485
Re:fresh 2024 N = 28,862

Findings

Overall: Among seafarers who reported a health issue (n = 1,485), 10% had been emergency repatriated by their employer during the previous 12 months, while 90% had not experienced repatriation. Illness and injury accounted for nearly 90% of all repatriations, highlighting the significant operational and personal impact of serious health events at sea.

Direct comparison with 2024 is not appropriate due to differences in the populations analysed, but the findings highlight that serious physical health events remain the primary drivers of emergency repatriation. The 2024 repatriation rate of 1.4% was calculated using the entire survey population (n = 28,862), regardless of whether respondents had reported health issues.

> "My left leg is suffering sciatic nerve pain. I am afraid to tell my captain because I don't want to go home."

Seafarer, Re:fresh 2026

Physical: Key findings and recommendations

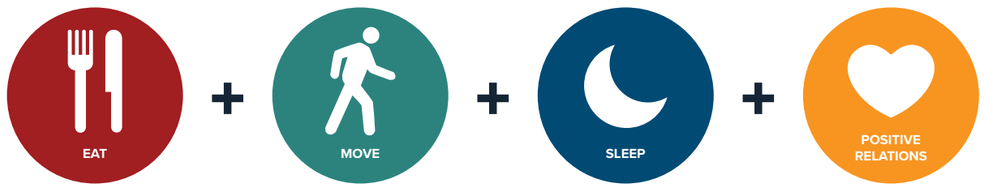
Overall, seafarers reported good health and generally positive lifestyle behaviours in 2026, with most indicators remaining stable compared with 2024. Self-rated health remained high, sleep problems were uncommon, alcohol use was generally low risk, and exercise levels were maintained. Most seafarers also viewed onboard food positively.

However, several priority areas emerged. Obesity rose from 32% to 38%, and 71% of seafarers had a waist-to-height ratio above the healthy range. In addition, 22% of seafarers are smokers. Health issues increased from 28% to 31%, with musculoskeletal complaints and cardiovascular risk factors being the most common concerns. Health risks generally increased with age and were higher among some rank and nationality groups.

Continued focus on prevention and healthy ageing will be important to maintain health, work ability, and career longevity. Recommendations are presented at individual, organisational, and industry levels to support coordinated action across the maritime sector.

Recommendations

Individual level	Organisational level	Industry level
Adopt healthy lifestyle habits, including regular exercise, balanced nutrition, adequate sleep, and tobacco cessation.	Strengthen health promotion initiatives focused on smoking cessation, physical activity, nutrition, weight management, and sleep.	Promote healthy ageing and chronic disease prevention as strategic workforce priorities.
Participate in health screenings and seek support for managing cardiovascular and metabolic health risks.	Improve access to exercise opportunities and targeted support for higher-risk groups.	Strengthen industry collaboration on health standards, prevention initiatives, and health benchmarking.
	Expand screening and early intervention programmes for musculoskeletal and cardiovascular health.	Invest in ongoing health surveillance to support evidence-based decision-making and a sustainable maritime workforce.



Psychological

Happiness
Wellbeing
Stress
Distress



Psychological



Psychological health is a critical component of overall wellbeing, influencing how individuals cope with daily demands, maintain relationships, and perform at work. In the maritime environment, factors such as workload, isolation, time away from family, and limited opportunities for recovery can affect mental wellbeing and contribute to stress and psychological distress.

This section examines key indicators of psychological health, including happiness, stress, wellbeing, and psychological distress, to provide insight into the emotional and mental wellbeing of seafarers. The findings highlight both strengths and challenges and support a shift from reactive coping towards proactive prevention and wellbeing promotion.

“Good health and wellbeing are essential for safe and efficient work at sea. Seafarers should have access to proper medical care, mental health support, adequate rest, healthy food, and reliable communication with their families. A supportive working environment improves both safety and job satisfaction.”

Seafarer, Re:fresh 2026

Happiness

Happiness is a subjective measure of how individuals evaluate their overall lives, reflecting feelings of contentment, fulfilment, and positive functioning. It extends beyond temporary emotions or moods and encompasses a broader sense of psychological wellbeing. While happy individuals are not immune to challenges, stress, or adversity, they often demonstrate greater optimism and resilience when facing difficult situations. Because happiness is inherently personal, the most meaningful assessment comes from an individual's own perception of their life and wellbeing.

Happiness was assessed using the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS), a validated four-item measure that captures an individual's overall sense of happiness. Respondents are scored on a scale from 1 to 7, with higher scores indication of greater levels of subjective happiness.

SHS

Subjective Happiness Scale

	Re:fresh 2026	Re:fresh 2024
Happiness	5.17	5.01

Re:fresh 2026 N = 23,504
Re:fresh 2024 N = 28,049



Findings

Overall: Happiness improved in 2026 compared with 2024 and remained generally high across the seafaring workforce. However, happiness was higher at home than onboard and declined with longer time spent at sea, highlighting the importance of monitoring contract length, recovery time, and onboard conditions as part of broader wellbeing efforts.

Rank: Happiness scores were relatively stable across rank groups. Senior Officers reported an overall score of 5.23, Junior Officers 5.14, Ratings 5.16, Others 5.18, and Cadets 5.15. At individual rank level, Master/Captains reported the highest happiness score (5.32), followed by Chief Engineers (5.22) and Chief Cooks (5.19).

Age: Happiness tended to increase slightly with age. The youngest group, aged 18-24 years, had an overall score of 5.16, while those aged 51+ years reported the highest score at 5.23.

Nationality: Among the largest nationality groups, Indian seafarers reported the highest happiness score (5.29), followed by Romanian seafarers (5.28), while the Burmese, Chinese and Ukrainian reported the lower levels of happiness (4.73, 4.85, and 4.97 respectively).

Some practical ways to increase happiness are:

- Reflect on things you are grateful for
- Connect with others
- Exercise
- Meditation, prayer, or being present in the moment
- Find a hobby
- Be kind to others
- Learn something new
- Sleep
- Limit social media
- Laugh and have fun

Source: Lyubomirsky, S., & Lepper, H. (1999). A measure of subjective happiness: Preliminary reliability and construct validation. Social Indicators Research, 46, 137-155. The original publication is available at www.springerlink.com.

Stress

Stress is a natural psychological and physiological response to situations that are perceived as challenging, demanding, or difficult to manage. While short-term stress can be beneficial, helping individuals stay alert, focused, and responsive to challenges, prolonged or excessive stress can negatively affect both mental and physical health. Common consequences include fatigue, irritability, sleep disturbances, difficulty concentrating, and reduced wellbeing. Understanding stress levels is particularly important in the maritime environment, where operational demands, workload, and time away from home can contribute to ongoing pressure.

Stress was assessed using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), a widely used measure of the degree to which individuals perceive their lives as unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloaded. The scale consists of questions about thoughts and feelings rated on a 5-point scale, with higher scores indicating greater perceived stress. A score of 20 or above is generally considered indicative of high perceived stress.

PSS

Perceived Stress Scale

	Re:fresh 2026	Re:fresh 2024
Stress level	14.1	15.6

Re:fresh 2026 N = 23,042
Re:fresh 2024 N = 27,732

Findings

Overall: Stress levels improved significantly between 2024 and 2026, with fewer seafarers reporting high stress and more reporting no stress. However, stress remained higher onboard than at home and increased progressively with longer time spent at sea.

Rank: Stress levels varied across rank groups. 16% of Senior Officers were highly stressed, 11% among Junior Officers, and 20% among Cadets. At individual rank level, the highest proportions of highly stressed seafarers were seen among Galley Staff/Catering Support (23%), Others (18%), Cadets (20%), and Engine Ratings (18%).

Age: Stress was seen to decrease with age. 19% highly stressed among 18-24-year-olds compared to 11% among those +51 years.

Nationality: Stress levels differed between nationality groups. Particularly Indonesian (25%), Malaysian (23%), and Burmese seafarers (22%), reported the highest levels of stress.

Source: Cohen, S. and Williamson, G. Perceived Stress in a Probability Sample of the United States. Spacapan, S. and Oskamp, S. (Eds.) The Social Psychology of Health. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1988.

Wellbeing

Wellbeing reflects an individual's overall psychological functioning and their ability to effectively manage the challenges they encounter in everyday life. Each person has a unique balance point, shaped by the resources available to them, such as psychological resilience, social support, physical health, and a sense of purpose. When these resources are sufficient to meet life demands, individuals are more likely to experience positive wellbeing. However, when challenges consistently exceed available coping resources, wellbeing can decline, increasing the risk of poor mental health outcomes, including depression.

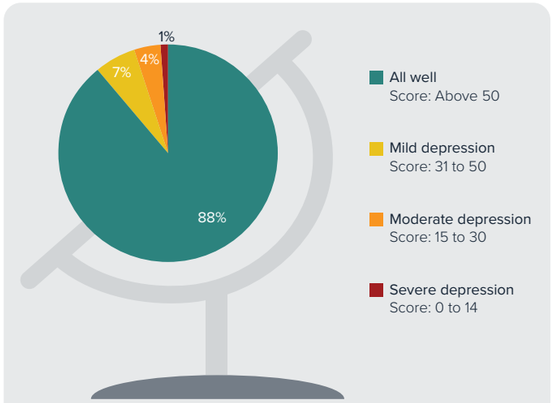
Wellbeing was assessed using the WHO-5 Wellbeing Index, a widely used measure of subjective psychological wellbeing. The scale consists of five simple questions and generates a score ranging from 0 to 100, where higher scores indicate better wellbeing, and lower scores might suggest reduced wellbeing and a need for further assessment.

WHO-5

Wellbeing Index

	Re:fresh 2026	Re:fresh 2024
All well	88%	87%
At risk	12%	13%

Re:fresh 2026 N = 23,708
Re:fresh 2024 N = 28,206



Findings

Overall: Wellbeing among seafarers remained high in 2026, with 88% classified as "all well" and a slight improvement compared with 2024. Wellbeing was consistently higher at home than onboard, highlighting the positive impact of time away from work and vessel demands.

Rank: Differences across rank groups were relatively small, with most groups reporting high levels of wellbeing. At individual rank level, Master/Captains reported the highest wellbeing (92% all well), whereas Cadets (85%), Deck Officers (84%), and Engine Officers (84%) reported comparatively lower wellbeing.

Age: Wellbeing generally increased with age. Younger seafarers reported a higher prevalence of depressive symptoms, while wellbeing improved steadily among older age groups (51+ years-olds), from 83.7% among the 18-24-year-olds to 91.9% among those aged 51 years and above.

Nationality: Substantial differences were observed between nationalities. Among the largest nationality groups, Filipino seafarers reported the highest wellbeing (92%), while Ukrainian seafarers reported the lowest wellbeing (79%) and with the highest proportion at risk of depression.

Source: Topp CW, Østergaard SD, Søndergaard S, Bech P. The WHO-5 Well-Being Index: a systematic review of the literature. Psychother Psychosom. 2015;84(3):167-76.

"My health and wellbeing at sea are greatly affected by long working hours, fatigue, and stress. A healthier work environment should promote adequate rest, work-life balance, mutual respect, and open communication. Companies should also take concerns about harassment, bullying, and mental wellbeing seriously to ensure that all seafarers feel safe, valued, and supported onboard."

"It's fun, but I am quite anxious and sad because I have kids. I want to take care of my kids because money can't buy time that has already passed"

"Mental health is the most important to me. In my opinion unnecessary pressure from the management onboard affects the mental health of a seafarer."

Seafarers, Re:fresh 2026

Psychological distress

Psychological distress refers to a state of emotional suffering that may arise when individuals feel overwhelmed by life's challenges or perceive that their coping resources are insufficient to meet current demands. It can manifest through symptoms such as anxiety, low mood, fatigue, physical complaints, social withdrawal, difficulties managing emotions, and changes in sleep or eating patterns. While occasional distress is a normal response to adversity, persistent psychological distress can negatively affect wellbeing, functioning, safety, and quality of life. Understanding levels of distress is therefore important for identifying individuals who may benefit from additional support and early intervention.

Psychological distress was assessed using the 12-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12), a widely used screening tool designed to detect short-term changes in mental health and psychological functioning. The GHQ-12 measures symptoms related to anxiety, depression, social dysfunction, and loss of confidence over the past few weeks. Participants rate their experiences using a Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater psychological distress and poorer mental wellbeing.

GHQ-12

General Health Questionnaire

	Re:fresh 2026
Mild distress	14%
Severe distress	0%

Re:fresh 2026 N = 23,860



Findings

Overall: Psychological distress affected 14% of seafarers in 2026, with distress levels higher onboard (15%) than at home (12%), suggesting that the onboard environment may contribute to increased psychological distress.

Rank: Distress levels varied across rank groups with 8% Senior Officers distressed, 12% Junior Officers, 18% Ratings, and 15% Cadets. At individual rank level the highest prevalence of distress was observed among Galley Staff (21%), Deck Officers and Engine Ratings (18% respectively). The lowest levels of distress were reported by Masters/Captains (6%).

Age: Psychological distress decreased progressively with age. The highest levels of distress were reported among younger seafarers, with 16% of those aged 18-24 years and 15% of those aged 25-30 years experiencing distress. This decreased to 14% among those aged 31-40 years, 13% among those aged 41-50 years, and 11% among seafarers aged 51 years and older.

Nationality: Distress levels varied considerably between nationality groups. Among the three largest nationality groups, Ukrainian seafarers reported the highest prevalence of distress (20%), compared with 14% among Filipino seafarers and 11% among Indian seafarers. Higher levels of distress were also reported among Indonesian (22%), Malaysian (20%), and Russian seafarers (20%), while Romanian seafarers reported the lowest prevalence (6%).

Source: Golderberg, D., & Williams, P. (1988). A user's guide to the General Health Questionnaire. Windsor, UK: NFER-Nelson.

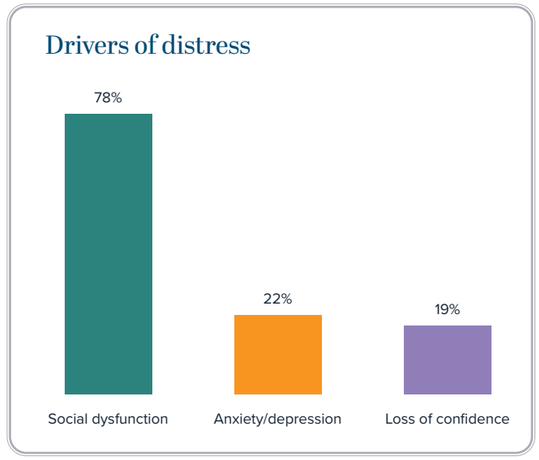
Dimensions of distress and main contributors

The GHQ-12 assesses psychological distress across three underlying dimensions: social dysfunction, anxiety/depression, and loss of confidence. Among seafarers experiencing distress in Re:fresh 2026 (n = 3,302), social dysfunction was by far the dominant driver, affecting 78% of distressed respondents, followed by anxiety/depression (22%) and loss of confidence (19%).

Social Dysfunction: Social dysfunction does not primarily refer to social relationships, but rather difficulties with everyday functioning. It reflects challenges with concentration, decision-making, feeling useful, coping with routine demands, and maintaining productivity. For seafarers, high social dysfunction scores may indicate fatigue-related performance difficulties, reduced work engagement, cognitive overload, or operational pressures that make everyday tasks feel harder to manage. Distressed seafarers are generally still functioning and performing their duties, but many are finding it increasingly difficult to cope with day-to-day demands and maintain normal functioning.

Anxiety and Depression: The second most common driver was anxiety and depression, reflecting emotional distress such as worry, stress, strain, low mood, and difficulties coping with challenges. Potential contributors may include workload pressures, long periods away from home, family concerns, financial worries, uncertainty, and sleep disruption. A substantial proportion of distressed seafarers are experiencing ongoing stress, worry, emotional exhaustion, or low mood that may affect their wellbeing and ability to recover from daily demands.

Loss of Confidence: Loss of confidence was reported by nearly one in five distressed seafarers. This dimension reflects reduced self-belief, feelings of worthlessness, and diminished confidence in one's ability to cope with challenges. It is often associated with more severe psychological strain because it affects an individual's core sense of competence and self-worth. Some seafarers are not only experiencing stress but are beginning to doubt their ability to manage challenges effectively, highlighting the need for timely support and intervention.



Although only 14% of seafarers were classified as experiencing distress, the findings suggest that distress is driven primarily by difficulties coping with everyday demands and maintaining normal functioning, rather than severe emotional symptoms alone. Anxiety, depression, and reduced self-confidence were also important contributors. These findings indicate that interventions aimed at reducing workload pressures, improving recovery opportunities, strengthening coping resources, and supporting day-to-day functioning may have the greatest potential impact on seafarer mental wellbeing.

Psychological: Key findings and recommendations

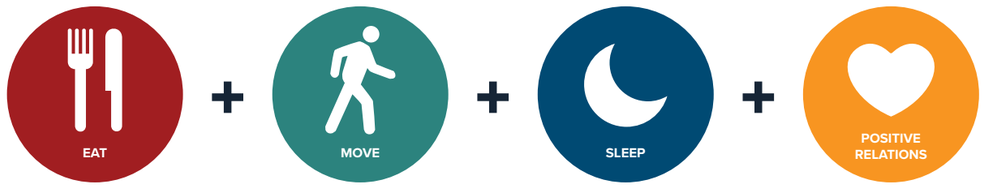
Overall, psychological health improved between 2024 and 2026. Happiness increased, stress levels declined, and wellbeing remained high, with 88% of seafarers classified as “all well”. However, wellbeing was consistently better at home than onboard, while both stress and psychological distress increased with longer periods at sea.

Key differences were observed across demographic groups. Younger seafarers, Cadets, and some nationality groups reported lower wellbeing, higher stress, and greater psychological distress. Psychological distress affected 14% of seafarers overall and was more common onboard than at home. Among those experiencing distress, difficulties with everyday functioning, concentration, coping, and productivity (social dysfunction) were the most common challenges, followed by anxiety/depression and loss of confidence.

Despite these concerns, the findings suggest a psychologically resilient workforce overall. Continued efforts to reduce stressors, strengthen coping resources, and support vulnerable groups may help further improve wellbeing and maintain a healthy, sustainable maritime workforce.

Recommendations

Individual level	Organisational level	Industry level
Encourage practices that support psychological wellbeing, including recovery, sleep, physical activity, social connection, and stress management.	Monitor and address workplace factors linked to stress, fatigue, and reduced day-to-day functioning.	Continue promoting psychological wellbeing as a core component of safety, performance, and workforce sustainability.
Improve awareness of mental health resources and encourage early help-seeking when difficulties arise.	Strengthen wellbeing programmes, peer support initiatives, and access to mental health services.	Strengthen industry collaboration on mental health standards, education, and best practices.
Build resilience and coping skills, particularly among younger and less experienced seafarers.	Provide targeted support for higher-risk groups, including younger seafarers, Cadets, and crews reporting elevated stress or distress.	Invest in ongoing monitoring of psychoso-cial risks and wellbeing trends to support evidence-based interventions and healthy careers at sea.
	Review contract lengths, workload, and opportunities for recovery both onboard and ashore.	



Social

Social aspects
Leisure time
Screen time & social media
Worries
Psychological safety
Flow
ESI
eNPS



Social health and workplace experiences

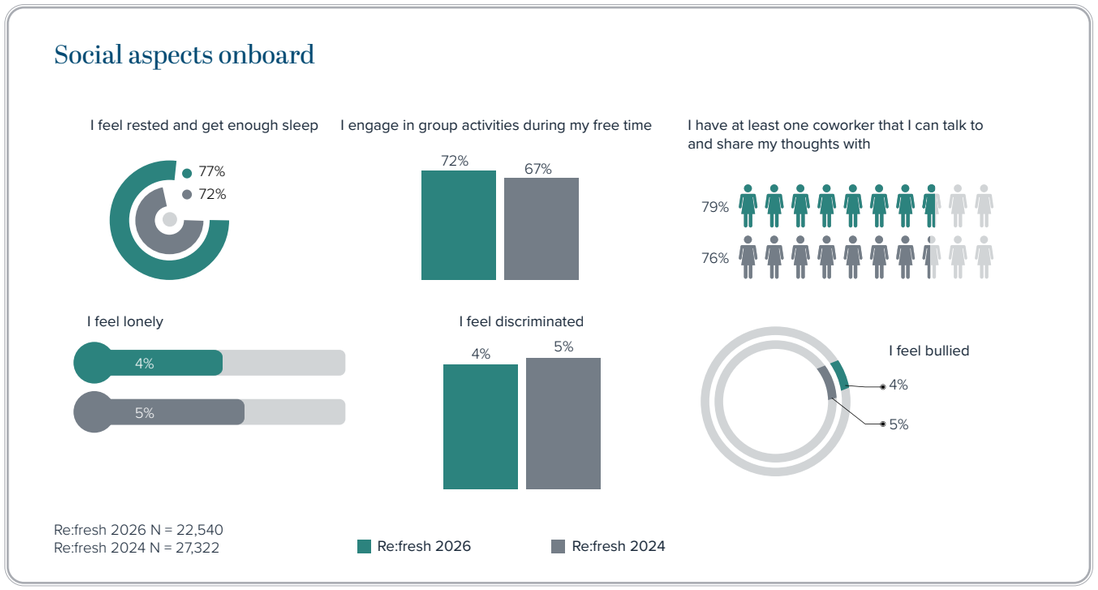


Social wellbeing plays a vital role in overall health, resilience, and job satisfaction. In the maritime environment, prolonged periods at sea, multicultural crews, and separation from family can influence social connections and quality of life. A positive onboard culture, characterised by trust, inclusion, support, and psychological safety, helps foster wellbeing, engagement, and safe working practices.

This section explores key aspects of social wellbeing, including worries, leisure time, social interactions, psychological safety, screen time and social media use, flow, employee satisfaction, and employee advocacy. Together, these indicators provide insight into the quality of the onboard social environment and its impact on both individual wellbeing and organisational performance.

Social aspects onboard

Social relationships are fundamental to health, wellbeing, and resilience. Humans are inherently social beings, and no one is immune to the effects of loneliness or social isolation. For seafarers, who often spend extended periods away from family and familiar support networks, positive onboard relationships can play a particularly important role. Strong social connections, a sense of belonging, and having someone to talk to can help individuals cope more effectively with workplace challenges and stressors, contributing to both wellbeing and performance at sea.



Findings

Overall: Social aspects onboard improved slightly across all measured areas compared with 2024. Most notably, participation in group activities during free time increased by 5%, while the proportion of seafarers reporting that they have at least one colleague they can talk to and share their thoughts with increased by 3%. Reports of loneliness, discrimination, and bullying also declined slightly. While the changes are modest, they represent positive progress in areas closely linked to social wellbeing and onboard culture, highlighting the importance of maintaining focus on these areas going forward.

Rank: Cadets reported the highest levels of loneliness (12.3%) and fatigue (15.8%), while senior officers were the least likely to participate in group activities during their free time (62.9%). In contrast, ratings reported the highest participation in group activities (79.4%).

Age: Overall, younger seafarers reported less positive social outcomes than older age groups. Seafarers aged 25-30 reported the highest levels of fatigue (16.9%) and were the least likely to feel rested (72.9%). Those aged 18-24 reported the highest levels of bullying (6.4%), discrimination (5.9%) and loneliness (11.6%). However, younger seafarers also reported higher participation in group activities and were more likely to have at least one colleague they could talk to and share their thoughts with.

Leisure time

Leisure time is an important part of life at sea, providing opportunities for relaxation, recovery, social interaction, and personal enjoyment. How seafarers choose to spend their free time can influence their wellbeing, resilience, and overall quality of life. This section explores a range of leisure activities, including physical exercise, spending time with colleagues, online communication with family and friends, social media use, relaxation, reading, watching television or movies, and engaging in personal hobbies. Understanding these preferences provides insight into how seafarers unwind, maintain social connections, and support their wellbeing while onboard.

Leisure time

	Re:fresh 2026	Re:fresh 2024
Exercise/ Physical activity	1	1
Spend time with peers/colleagues	2	3
Online/chatting/social media/surf internet	3	2
Relax (reading, watching movie/tv)	4	4
Hobby	5	5

Re:fresh 2026 N = 25,149
Re:fresh 2024 N = 27,152

Findings

Overall: Seafarers prioritise physical activity and social interaction during their leisure time onboard. These activities play an important role in supporting morale, wellbeing and a sense of community at sea. Notably, spending time with colleagues has become more prominent since 2024, moving ahead of digital engagement in the rankings, suggesting an increased value placed on interpersonal connections onboard.

Rank: Senior officers appear to prioritise physical activity and relaxation over spending time with colleagues. While ratings and cadets also spend time exercising, they place greater value on social interaction than both senior and junior officers. The lower ranking among senior officers could reflect a more formal or hierarchical relationship structure, where social boundaries may be more pronounced compared to other rankings.

> “My health at sea is always fatigued, but I can manage by doing my hobby”
>
> *Seafarer, Re:fresh 2026*

Screen time & social media

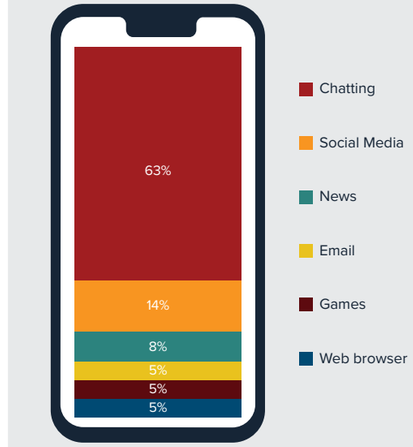
Digital technologies have become an integral part of modern life, shaping how people communicate, access information, and spend their leisure time. For seafarers, screen-based activities and social media can provide an important means of staying connected with family and friends, reducing feelings of isolation, and accessing entertainment while at sea. However, excessive screen time may also have unintended consequences, including reduced face-to-face interaction, disrupted sleep, lower productivity, and increased exposure to social comparison, misinformation, and psychological stress.

This section explores patterns of screen time and social media use among seafarers and their potential implications for wellbeing, social connectedness, and overall quality of life.

Platform used and time spent online

Screen time

	Re:fresh 2026	Re:fresh 2024
Screen time	3 hrs 9 mins	3 hrs 0 mins



Re:fresh 2026 N = 24,740
Re:fresh 2024 N = 29,458

Findings

Overall: The distribution of time spent online remains similar to 2024, with nearly half of seafarers (46%) spending 2 to 3 hours per day on their phones. Messaging, social media and keeping up with the news are the most common online activities. This suggests that mobile devices are typically used to help seafarers stay connected with family and friends, access information, and maintain a sense of connection to life ashore while at sea.

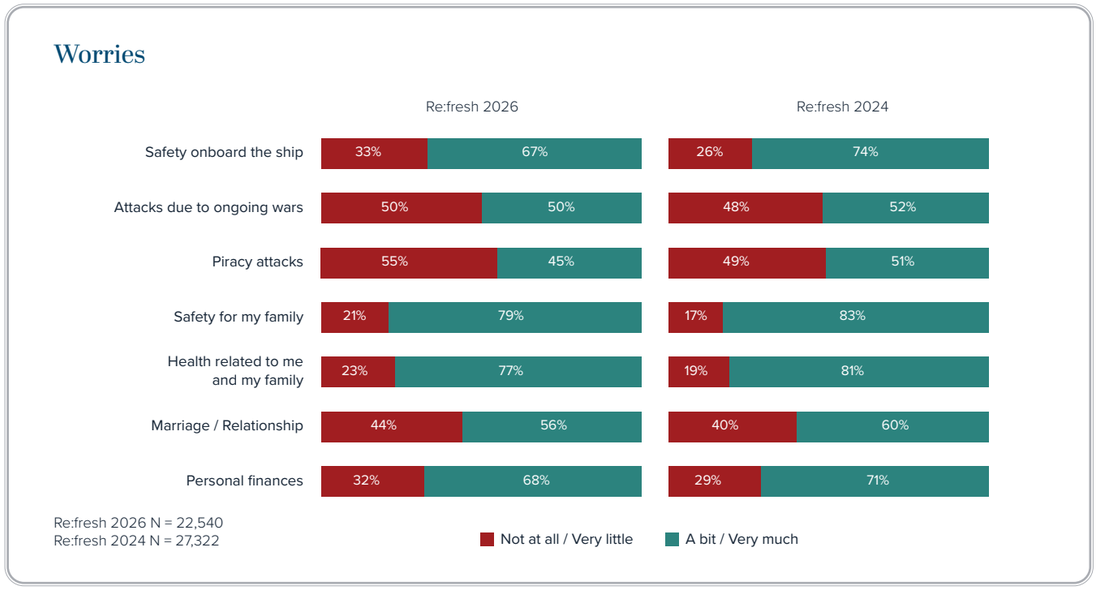
Rank: Cadets have the highest screen time with around 3.77 hours of screen time, while senior officers have the lowest with 2.85 hours.

Negative impact of social media:

- Hinders in-person interactions
- Can lead to unproductive use of time
- Linked to mental health issues like depression and anxiety
- Exposure to risks and false information
- Alters behaviours and brain development
- FOMO: Fear of missing out
- Unhealthy sleep patterns
- Unrealistic expectations
- Cyberbullying
- General addiction

Worries

Seafarers face a range of concerns that can affect their wellbeing, both onboard and at home. These worries may relate to personal health, family safety, financial security, relationships, fatigue, and occupational risks such as piracy, geopolitical conflicts, and safety at sea. Understanding these concerns is important, as persistent worry can contribute to stress, reduced wellbeing, and impaired performance. The following results highlight the issues that seafarers are most concerned about and provide insight into the challenges they navigate both professionally and personally.



Findings

Overall: Personal life issues appear to weigh more heavily on seafarers than operational risks. Family safety (79%) and the health of seafarers and their families (77%) remain the issues that seafarers worry about most often. However, while safety onboard the ship was among the three most frequently reported worries in 2024, personal finances ranked slightly higher this year at 68%, making it the third most reported source of worry.

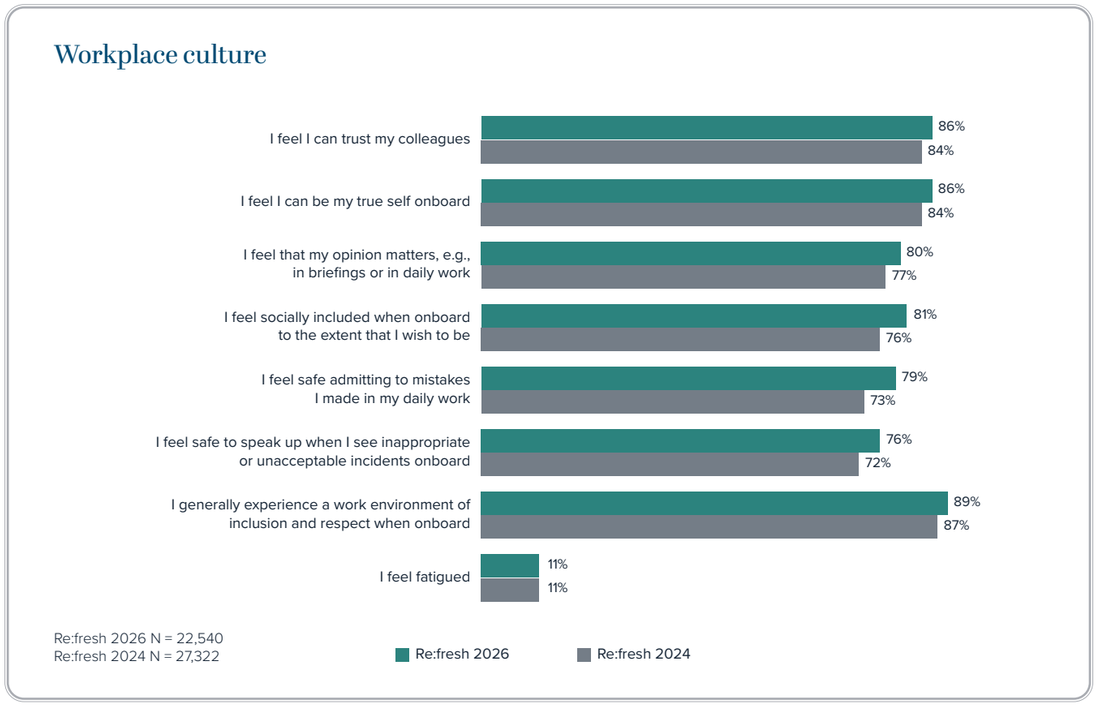
Rank: Responses were broadly consistent across ranks. The largest variation was seen for marriage and relationship issues, with ratings reporting the highest proportion frequently worrying about this issue (61%), compared with cadets, who reported the lowest proportion (48%). Ratings were also the most likely to report worrying about personal finances (71%).

Age: There was little variation across age groups. However, worries about personal finances and marriage and relationship issues were more common among younger seafarers. Those aged 25-30 reported the highest proportion frequently worrying about personal finances (74%) and marriage and relationship issues (62%) compared with other age groups.

Psychological safety

Psychological safety refers to an environment where individuals feel comfortable speaking up, asking questions, sharing concerns, and admitting mistakes without fear of blame, embarrassment, or negative consequences. In the maritime industry, where teamwork, communication, and trust are essential, psychological safety is critical to both wellbeing and operational safety.

This section explores key elements of psychological safety, and the results provide insight into whether seafarers feel supported and empowered to contribute openly, helping to strengthen wellbeing, collaboration, and safety onboard.



Findings

Overall: Social aspects onboard have remained stable or improved since 2024, with the strongest gains in feeling safe admitting mistakes (79%), feeling socially included (81%), and feeling safe speaking up about inappropriate or unacceptable incidents (76%). These findings suggest a positive shift in psychological safety and inclusion onboard, with more seafarers feeling comfortable contributing, learning from mistakes, and raising concerns when needed.

Rank: Despite these improvements, 28% of cadets still report they do not feel their opinions matter in their daily work and 30% of ratings report not feeling safe speaking up about inappropriate or unacceptable incidents onboard. These findings suggest that psychological safety and inclusion may vary by rank.

Flow

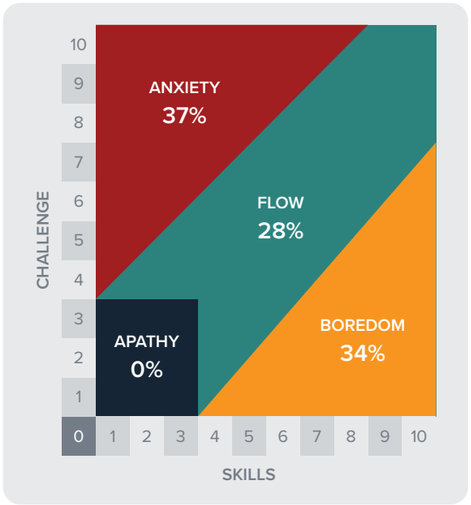
In positive psychology, flow – often referred to as being in the zone, is a mental state in which a person is fully immersed in an activity, experiencing deep concentration, energy, and enjoyment. When individuals are in a state of flow, they become completely absorbed in what they are doing, often losing track of time and performing at their best. People who often experience flow tend to be more motivated, engaged, and satisfied with their work. They often feel a greater sense of purpose, control, and accomplishment which can contribute to improved wellbeing, resilience, and overall health. Creating opportunities for flow can therefore support both individual wellbeing and organisational performance.

FLOW

The balance between skills and challenges

	Re:fresh 2026	Re:fresh 2024
Flow	28%	26%
Anxiety	37%	39%
Boredom	34%	34%
Apathy	0%	1%

Re:fresh 2026 N = 22,353
Re:fresh 2024 N = 27,170



Findings

Overall: Flow improved slightly in 2026, but fewer than one-third of seafarers reported being fully engaged in their work. However, a larger proportion continued to report boredom (34%) or anxiety (37%), indicating that many seafarers still experience either insufficient stimulation or excessive demands in their work environment. A small minority reported apathy (<1%).

Rank: Flow levels varied across rank groups. The highest levels of flow were reported among Ratings (35%), while Senior Officers (24%), Junior Officers (25%), and Cadets (21%) reported lower levels. Anxiety remained common across all rank groups, suggesting that achieving the balance between challenge and capability remains difficult for many crews regardless of role.

Age: Flow generally increased with age. Only 20% of seafarers aged 18-24 years reported being in flow, compared with 28-30% among those aged 25-50 years and 33% among those aged 51 years and older. Younger seafarers also reported higher levels of anxiety, whereas older seafarers were more likely to experience engagement and mastery in their work.

Nationality: Substantial differences were observed between nationalities. Filipino seafarers reported the highest flow levels (38%), compared with Indian seafarers (23%), Ukrainian (18%), Russian, Chinese and Polish at 14% respectively, and Burmese at 12%. Burmese seafarers reported the highest levels of anxiety (48%), while Romanian and Russian reported the highest levels of boredom at 50% respectively.

"Workload is too high. Zero recreation and relaxing time on board. Just work and sleep.."

"Recreation funds should be given to games likes darts, chess, table tennis, table football and singing tournaments, not just for food and alcohol as usual at parties."

"As a seafarer, I have found that feeling included and respected onboard contributes greatly to overall wellbeing. Good leadership, open communication, and a culture where crew members look out for one another help create a healthier working environment."

"In my opinion, seafarers' wellbeing is often discussed, but in reality, there is very little time to truly focus on it due to the demanding workload onboard."

Seafarers, Re:fresh 2026

Employee Satisfaction Index (ESI)

Employee satisfaction reflects how positively individuals feel about their work, work environment, and overall employment experience. Research suggests that satisfied employees are generally more engaged, productive, and committed to organisational goals. They are also more likely to contribute to innovative ideas, demonstrate initiative, and support the long-term success of the organisation.

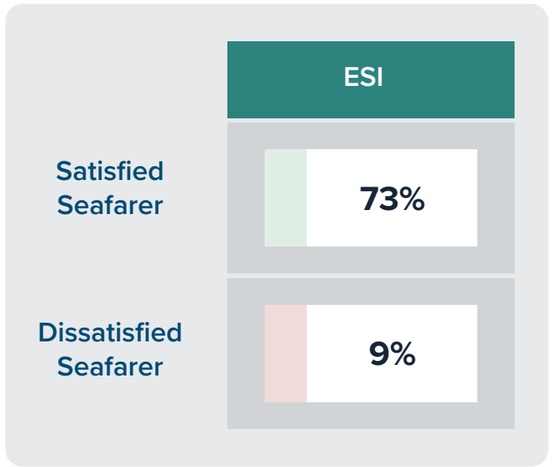
The Employee Satisfaction Index (ESI) provides an overall measure of workplace satisfaction by assessing employees' current level of satisfaction, how well their work experience meets expectations, and how closely it aligns with their ideal workplace. Understanding employee satisfaction can help organisations identify strengths, address areas for improvement, and foster a more engaged and motivated workforce.

ESI

Employee Satisfaction Index

ESI	Re:fresh 2026	Re:fresh 2024
Satisfied	73%	70%
Dissatisfied	9%	10%

Re:fresh 2026 N = 22,353
Re:fresh 2024 N = 27,170



Findings

Overall: The Employee Satisfaction Index (ESI) remained positive in Re:fresh 2026, indicating generally high levels of engagement and satisfaction among seafarers. However, satisfaction levels varied across demographic groups and declined with extended periods onboard.

Rank: ESI was generally high across ranks, but some variation was observed: Chief Cooks reported the highest ESI scores (83%), followed by Galley staff (79%) and Deck Ratings (79%). Chief Officers and Deck Officers reported the lowest score at 66% respectively.

Age: Employee satisfaction generally increased with age. Younger seafarers reported lower engagement and a greater proportion of ambivalent or dysfunctional responses (ESI 69%), while older seafarers were more likely to be classified as engaged (77-80%).

Nationality: Employee satisfaction varied between nationality groups. Higher engagement levels were generally observed among some Asian nationality groups, while lower scores were observed among several Eastern European groups. These findings suggest differences in how workplace demands, expectations, and organisational support are experienced across nationality groups.

Employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS)

The Employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS) is a simple but widely used measure of employee loyalty and workplace advocacy. Adapted from the customer-focused Net Promoter Score (NPS), eNPS assesses how likely employees are to recommend their organisation as a place to work for friends, family, or colleagues.

As an indicator of employee engagement and overall workplace experience, eNPS offers valuable insight into how employees perceive their organisation. Higher scores are generally associated with greater satisfaction, commitment, and retention, while lower scores may highlight opportunities to improve employee experience and organisational culture.

eNPS

Employee Net Promoter Score

	Re:fresh 2026	Re:fresh 2024
eNPS	18% or 7.7	12% or 7.6
Promoters	40%	36%
Passive	38%	39%
Detractors	22%	24%

Re:fresh 2026 N = 22,353
Re:fresh 2024 N = 27,170



Findings

Overall: The eNPS improved in 2026, with the overall score increasing from 12% to 18%. Seafarers were more likely to recommend their employer when at home than onboard. Extended time onboard was associated with lower employee loyalty and advocacy, highlighting the potential impact of prolonged contracts on engagement and retention.

Rank: Advocacy was generally strongest among Ratings (21%), Senior Officers (21%), Master/Captains (29%), and Chief Cooks (32%). Lower scores were observed among Cadets (12%), Deck Officers (7%), and Engine Officers (13%).

Nationality: Indian and Indonesian seafarers reported the highest levels of employee advocacy, with eNPS scores of 25% and 27%, respectively, indicating a strong willingness to recommend their employer. In contrast, Chinese, Malaysian, Burmese, and Polish seafarers reported negative eNPS scores ranging from -12% to -13%, suggesting a higher proportion of detractors than promoters. These findings highlight notable differences in employee experience across nationality groups and point to opportunities for targeted retention and engagement initiatives.

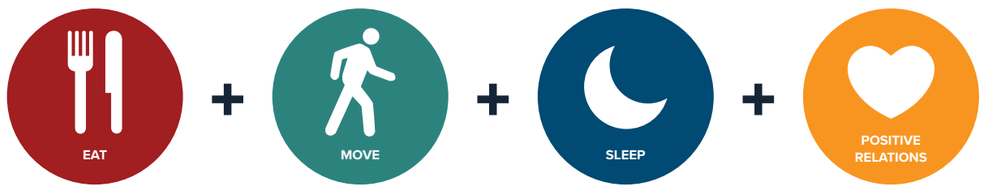
Social: Key findings and recommendations

Overall, social wellbeing onboard has improved slightly since 2024. Seafarers report stronger peer connections, greater participation in group activities, and higher levels of psychological safety. In particular, 86% trust their colleagues, 81% feel socially included, and 80% feel their opinions matter—all improvements compared with 2024. Leisure patterns also point to stronger onboard connections: spending time with colleagues has become more prominent and now ranks ahead of online activities, suggesting that seafarers increasingly value face-to-face interaction during their free time.

However, notable differences remain across age groups and ranks. Younger seafarers, particularly cadets, reported higher levels of loneliness and fatigue and were less likely to feel that their opinions matter. While some variation is expected within the hierarchical structures typically found onboard, these findings suggest that the onboard experience is not uniform across all seafarers. Continued focus on inclusion and psychological safety may help create a more consistent onboard experience across all age groups and ranks.

Recommendations

Individual level	Organisational level	Industry level
Encourage participation in social and group activities on board.	Foster an inclusive onboard culture where all crew members feel respected, valued, and heard.	Promote psychological safety and social wellbeing as core components of crew welfare and retention.
Promote peer support and mentoring for all seafarers, especially for younger seafarers and ranks.	Strengthen onboarding and mentoring programmes.	Share industry best practices for improving inclusion, peer connection, and onboard culture.
Build confidence and communication skills that help seafarers feel comfortable speaking up and sharing concerns.	Regularly monitor psychological safety, social inclusion, loneliness, and fatigue through surveys and feedback mechanisms.	Continue industry-wide monitoring of social wellbeing indicators to identify trends and emerging risks.
Provide education on recognising and managing loneliness, stress, and fatigue.	Provide training for leaders on inclusive leadership, communication, and creating psychologically safe environments.	Encourage collaboration between shipowners, managers, and welfare organisations to address social isolation at sea.



Bullying and Harassment



Bullying

The maritime sector, like any other industry, faces the challenge of preventing bullying and harassment. Workplace bullying can take many forms, including verbal abuse, exclusion, unfair criticism, cyberbullying, and the unfair distribution of work. These behaviours can negatively impact both individual wellbeing and the onboard work environment.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), one in five workers have experienced violence or harassment at work. For seafarers, the risk can be heightened by the unique nature of life at sea, including isolated working conditions and hierarchical structures that may contribute to power imbalances.

Recognising these risks, the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC, 2006) requires shipowners and flag States to promote a safe working environment and increasingly emphasises the need to address violence, bullying, and harassment through onboard safety management systems. As a result, preventing bullying and harassment has become a key focus for the maritime industry, with organisations such as the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) providing guidance and industry principles to support safer and more respectful workplaces at sea.

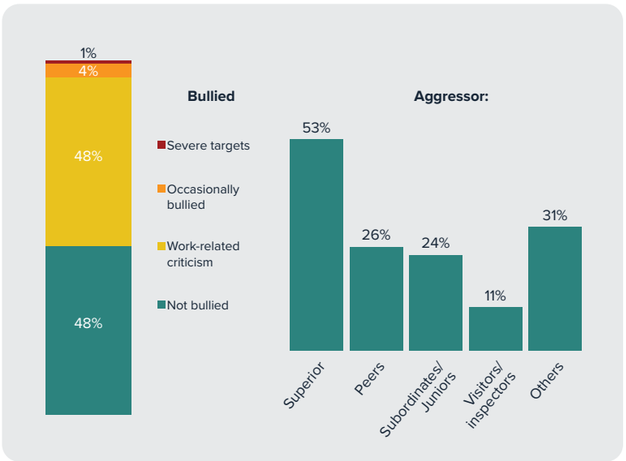
SNAQ

Short Negative Acts Questionnaire

	Re:fresh 2026	Re:fresh 2024
Bullied	5%	6%
Work-related criticism	48%	51%
Not bullied	48%	42%

Work-related criticism: *receiving critical feedback, being kept out of the information loop, being assigned impossible tasks, being undermined, negative comments related to work or performance, being intentionally excluded from work-related activities.*

Re:fresh 2026 N = 21,782
Re:fresh 2024 N = 26,617



Findings

Overall: There was a small but significant decline in bullying between Re:fresh 2024 and Re:fresh 2026, from 6% to 5% of respondents. Work-related criticism decreased from 51% to 48%, while the proportion reporting no bullying-related experiences increased from 42% to 48%, suggesting a broader improvement in the psychosocial work environment.

Rank: Bullying was reported across all rank groups, but prevalence varied considerably. At individual rank level, the highest prevalence was observed among Cadets/Trainees (12%) and Deck Officers/Deck Operations (8%), while Master/Captains (1%), Chief Engineers (1%), and Chief Cooks/Catering Operations (3%) reported the lowest levels.

Age: A clear age gradient was observed, with bullying being more common among younger seafarers than the older more experienced crew. 9% of 18-24-year-olds, 4% of 25–30-year-olds, 2% of 31–50-year-olds, and 1% among those 51+ years old, were reportedly bullied.

Nationality: Bullying prevalence varied between nationality groups. While differences were relatively small, bullying appeared more prevalent among Chinese (12%), Malaysian (7%), and Burmese (7%), compared to Filipino, Ukrainian, and Indonesian seafarers, 3.5% respectively.

The potential impact of bullying on mental wellbeing, engagement, teamwork, and safety is substantial. Preventing bullying and fostering a respectful, psychologically safe onboard culture can contribute not only to improved wellbeing, but also to stronger retention, higher engagement, better performance, and enhanced operational safety.

> “I have also seen people bullying, shouting, insulting, and disrespecting others, while still remaining in their positions. This kind of behaviour creates pressure, insecurity, loss of confidence, and can even lead to mistakes or accidents on board.”
>
> *Seafarer, Re:fresh 2026*

Work-related criticism: receiving critical feedback, being kept out of the information loop, being assigned impossible tasks, being undermined, negative comments related to work or performance, being intentionally excluded from work-related activities. The maritime industry must actively fight harassment and bullying, ensuring the safety and dignity of seafarers. By adhering to these principles, we can create a more respectful and supportive work environment at sea.

ICS – Industry principles:

- Define harassment and bullying
- Clear policies
- Training and awareness
- Reporting mechanisms
- Support systems
- Foster a positive work culture onboard

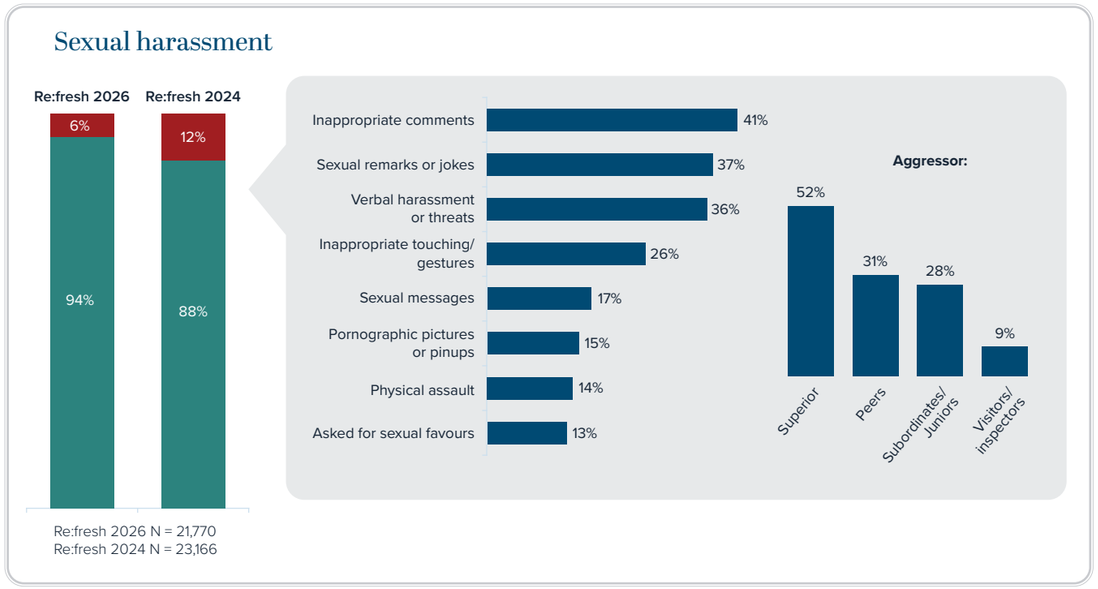
Source: Notelaers, G., Van der Heijden, B., Hoel, H., & Einarsen, S. (2018). Measuring bullying at work with the short-negative acts questionnaire: identification of targets and criterion validity. Work & Stress, 33(1), 58-75

Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment in the workplace is a serious issue that can negatively impact employees' physical and psychological health, damage organisational culture, and constitute a violation of human rights. In the maritime industry, where seafarers live and work in close quarters for extended periods and depend on one another for safety, trust, and teamwork, the effects can be particularly harmful.

Sexual harassment can take many forms, including inappropriate comments about a person's body or appearance, unwelcome physical contact, sexual jokes or remarks, pressure for sexual favours, displaying sexually explicit material, or using sexual language to intimidate or humiliate others. Regardless of its form, sexual harassment creates an unsafe and disrespectful environment that can affect not only the individual concerned but also crew cohesion, wellbeing, and overall safety onboard.

Recognising the seriousness of this issue, the maritime industry has introduced stronger requirements and guidance aimed at preventing and addressing sexual harassment onboard. These measures support safer, more respectful, and inclusive working environments for seafarers.



Findings

Overall: Re:fresh 2026 shows a substantial improvement in reported experiences of sexual harassment compared with 2024. The proportion of seafarers reporting sexual harassment decreased from 12% to 6%, representing a 50% relative reduction. Given the large sample sizes, this change is highly statistically significant and suggests meaningful progress in creating safer and more respectful workplaces at sea. However, despite this improvement, 1 in 16 seafarers still report experiencing sexual harassment, highlighting the need for continued prevention efforts, effective reporting mechanisms, and leadership accountability. While reported experiences of sexual harassment have declined, there was a slight increase in the proportion of seafarers who considered reporting an incident but ultimately chose not to.

Rank: While the majority in every rank group did not report sexual harassment, cadets and others had the highest reported rates (12% and 8% respectively), suggesting that those newer to the profession or in less defined roles may be more vulnerable. Inappropriate comments and sexual jokes are the most frequently reported forms of harassment across all ranks. More severe behaviours such as physical assault or being asked for sexual favours are less common but still present.

"As a female seafarer who has experienced harassment onboard, I can confidently say that the company never fell short in supporting us or neglected the welfare of its female crew members. The company took our concerns seriously, provided the support we needed, and made us feel heard and protected. I am truly grateful for the way the company stood by us during difficult times and for fostering a workplace where women can feel safe, respected, and valued."

"There are many sexist comments, but it's quite complicated to deal with the environment when the manager takes them as a joke or protects the people who make them."

Seafarers, Re:fresh 2026

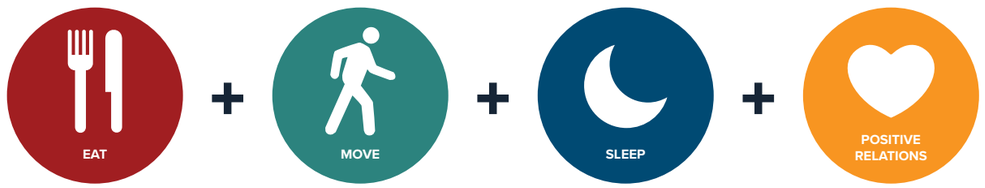
Bullying & Harassment: Key findings and recommendations

Seafarers reported a decline in bullying and sexual harassment between 2024 and 2026, indicating progress toward a safer and more respectful onboard environment. The proportion of seafarers reporting bullying decreased from 6% to 5%, while reports of sexual harassment halved from 12% to 6%. Work-related criticism also declined, and a greater proportion of respondents reported experiencing none of the bullying-related behaviours measured. Increased industry focus on bullying, harassment, and psychological safety in recent years may have contributed to these positive changes.

However, despite this encouraging progress, bullying and harassment remain more prevalent among younger and less senior seafarers, particularly cadets and trainees. This highlights the need for continued awareness, prevention efforts, and targeted support to ensure all seafarers can work in a safe and respectful environment.

Recommendations

Individual level	Organisational level	Industry level
Increase awareness of what constitutes bullying, harassment, and inappropriate behaviour.	Maintain clear zero-tolerance policies for bullying and harassment.	Promote industry-wide campaigns and awareness initiatives on bullying, harassment, and respectful behaviour.
Encourage seafarers to speak up, seek support, and use reporting channels when concerns arise.	Provide practical prevention and bystander intervention training for all crew members.	Embed bullying and harassment prevention into maritime education, training, and leadership development programmes.
Improve understanding of rights, responsibilities, and available support resources.	Ensure confidential reporting mechanisms and accessible support for affected seafarers.	Continue industry-wide monitoring of social wellbeing indicators to identify trends and emerging risks.
Communicate clearly to all seafarers how to report bullying and harassment.	Hold leaders and senior officers accountable for responding consistently and protecting individuals from retaliation.	Share best practices and lessons learned across companies to strengthen prevention efforts.



Female Seafarers

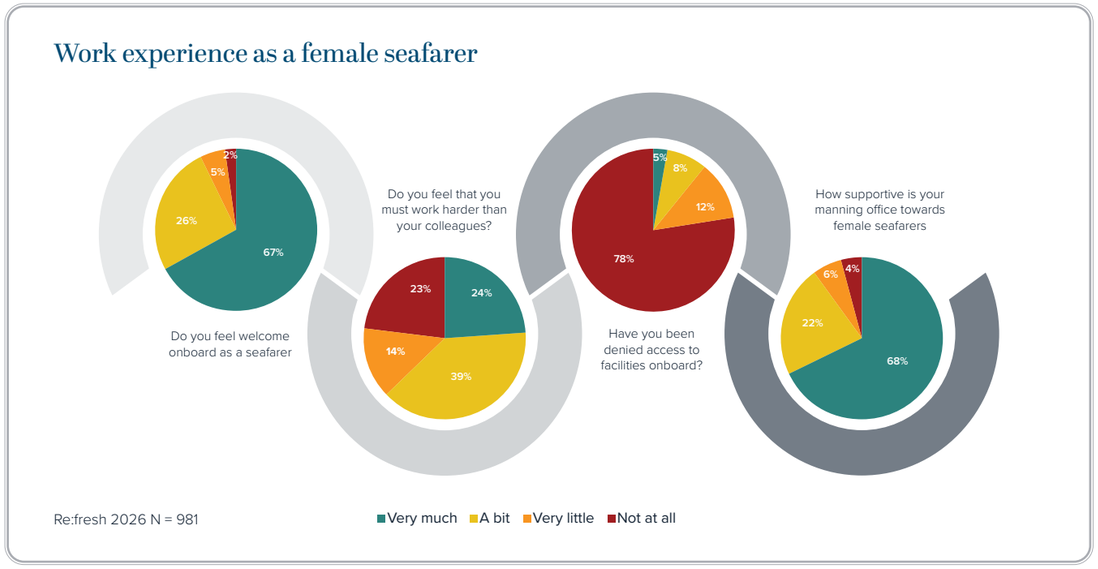


Female Seafarers

Seafaring has historically been a male-dominated industry, with women comprising around 1–2% of the global seafaring workforce. Despite their low representation, there is a growing number of highly motivated and skilled women pursuing careers at sea.

While challenges remain, the conversation around gender diversity, inclusion, and the safety of women at sea has gained momentum in recent years. This has led to a greater industry focus on creating safer and more supportive working environments for female seafarers.

This section explores the areas that need to be addressed to attract and retain more female seafarers. Drawing on feedback and experiences shared directly by women at sea, it highlights opportunities to implement tailored policies and foster a more inclusive culture where female seafarers feel empowered to thrive.



Findings

Overall: 67% of female seafarers (or those identifying as other) report feeling welcome onboard, while 69% find their manning office supportive. These results are broadly consistent with 2024, suggesting that experiences have remained relatively stable over the past two years.

At the same time, some respondents continue to face challenges. Nearly one in four (24%) report feeling they must work harder than their colleagues, indicating that perceptions of unequal expectations remain present for some seafarers. A smaller proportion (3%) report being denied access to onboard facilities, although any such reports highlight the importance of maintaining an inclusive onboard environment.

Just over half of respondents (58%) report that their company has a policy specifically supporting female seafarers, while 12% say no such policy exists and 30% are unsure. Among those aware of company policies, the most reported measures relate to safety and welfare, providing a harassment-free workplace, promoting workforce diversity, and setting minimum female representation onboard. The high proportion of respondents who are unsure whether such policies exist suggests that awareness may be as important as policy development itself, highlighting an opportunity for companies to communicate existing support measures more effectively.

Employing more female seafarers and needed changes

We asked female seafarers to share their experiences of working in a traditionally male-dominated industry and asked both female and male seafarers what the maritime sector can do to attract, retain, and support more women at sea. The quotes below reflect the voices and lived experiences of female seafarers, alongside suggestions from both women and men on how the industry can become more inclusive and supportive. Together, these perspectives provide valuable insight into the challenges, opportunities, and practical actions that can help improve gender diversity and support the long-term success of women in maritime careers.

Quotes from Seafarers, 2026

"As a female cadet sailing for the first time, my health and wellbeing on board have been very good. The officers and crew are very supportive, respectful, and they always prioritize my safety and comfort. Working at sea is a new and challenging experience for me, but I feel safe and happy because the environment is very welcoming. I am grateful for this opportunity to learn and gain valuable experience for my future career."

"Sharing bathroom facilities with a male coworker is unacceptable..."

"Fellow crew members sometimes doubt my suggestions and input, even when they are correct. They often seek additional verification simply because the answer is coming from a woman. I find this discouraging, but to avoid unnecessary arguments, I often choose to overlook it and move on. Male crew members also sometimes speak negatively about female colleagues they have worked with on previous vessels. On a positive note, I do receive support and assistance from colleagues when carrying out my duties when needed."

"I have felt very welcome in the industry. However, some colleagues, particularly older seafarers, are not always comfortable with having women onboard, as their mindsets have not yet fully adapted. This can sometimes lead to misunderstandings, inappropriate behaviour, or harassment. On the positive side, attitudes are gradually changing. As more women join the industry, acceptance is increasing and people are becoming more accustomed to working alongside female seafarers."

"For now no harassment. But it's absurd that women have to pay for pads and tampons, sometimes costing significantly more in a ship's slop chest than the market price. Many companies already have so-called pink boxes where menstrual products are always readily available. Carrying painkillers is also a problem, as it takes a long time to report to the second officer. Companies should consider having their own painkillers in the cabin for such occasions."

"Hiring female seafarers is positive when companies support their health, safety, and wellbeing. Life at sea can be demanding and isolating, so success depends on creating a respectful environment where all crew members have equal opportunities, proper support, and the resources they need to thrive."

"Working in a male-dominated industry often means having to constantly prove your worth, while navigating both the challenges of the job and the attitudes of those who may underestimate you. However, it also builds resilience, confidence, and a strong sense of pride in what you can achieve."

"It can be uncomfortable to share laundry facilities between men and women. Bringing sufficient menstrual products on board used to be very challenging. These days, the company has started to provide them on board, but in the past we had to bring everything ourselves...."

"As a female seafarer working in a traditionally male dominated industry, my experience has been both challenging and rewarding. There have been moments when I had to work harder to prove my capabilities, earn trust, and demonstrate that I could perform the same duties and responsibilities as my male colleagues. At times, I encountered stereotypes, doubts, or assumptions about what women can and cannot do at sea. However, I have also been fortunate to work with supportive officers and crew members who judged me based on my performance, professionalism, and attitude rather than my gender. These positive experiences helped build my confidence, skills, and resilience..."

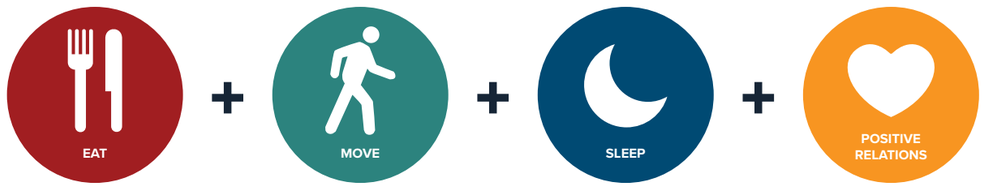
Female seafarers: Key findings and recommendations

Female representation among Re:fresh respondents increased from 2% in 2024 to 3% in 2026, providing a broader evidence base on women's experiences at sea. Among the 920 female respondents, 67% felt welcome onboard and 69% considered their manning office supportive, broadly consistent with 2024. At the same time, 24% reported feeling they had to work harder than their colleagues, and 3% reported being denied access to onboard facilities, indicating that barriers to inclusion still exist for some women working at sea.

The results suggest that while many female seafarers have positive experiences, there is still room for improvement in creating a more inclusive and equitable working environment. Although 58% of respondents said their company had policies supporting female seafarers, 30% were unsure whether such policies existed. This highlights the need not only for continued efforts to strengthen inclusion and equal opportunities onboard, but also for clearer communication of the support, policies, and resources already available to female crew members.

Recommendations

Individual level	Organisational level	Industry level
Encourage seafarers to provide feedback on employment conditions and retention drivers.	Establish and communicate clear policies supporting female seafarers, including inclusion, equal opportunities, and harassment prevention.	Promote maritime careers to women through industry-wide attraction and awareness initiatives.
Support women in planning long-term maritime careers through training, mentoring, and professional development.	Create mentoring, sponsorship, and career development programmes to support progression and retention of women at sea.	Continue monitoring female seafarer experiences and sharing best practices across the industry.
Promote awareness of reporting channels, support services, and company policies related to inclusion, discrimination, and harassment.	Ensure access to appropriate facilities, accommodation, PPE, and menstrual health products onboard.	Embed gender inclusion into maritime education, leadership development, and industry guidance.
	Foster an inclusive culture through leadership training, awareness programmes, and zero-tolerance approaches to bullying, discrimination, and harassment.	Develop industry-wide standards and recommendations to support the safety, wellbeing, and retention of female seafarers.



Seafaring career and retention issues



Seafaring career and retention issues

The maritime industry is facing growing pressure to attract, develop, and retain seafarers. Recent BIMCO findings indicate that demand for skilled seafarers is increasing, particularly among officers, making workforce sustainability a strategic priority for the industry. As competition for talent grows, understanding the factors that influence career satisfaction, retention, and intention to leave has become increasingly important.

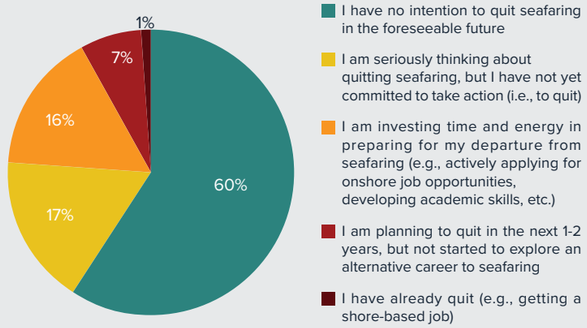
This section examines career motivations, retention challenges, and opportunities to strengthen the long term attractiveness of seafaring as a profession. The findings provide insights into what is needed to support a healthy, engaged, and sustainable maritime workforce for the future.

Seafaring career and retention issues

Planning to leave in	Re:fresh 2026	Re:fresh 2024
2-5 years	20%	19%
5-10 years	31%	29%
More than 10 years	49%	51%

Re:fresh 2026 N = 18,185
Re:fresh 2024 N = 21,651

Concerning your seafaring career, choose the one that best fits your current state:



Findings

Overall: Retention intentions among seafarers remained relatively stable between Re:fresh 2024 and Re:fresh 2026. Approximately half of respondents in both surveys reported plans to remain in the industry for more than ten years (51% in 2024 versus 49% in 2026), indicating continued long-term commitment to a seafaring career. However, there was a small increase in the proportion planning to leave within 2-5 years (19% to 20%) and within 5-10 years (29% to 31%). While these changes are modest, they suggest a gradual shift away from the longest-term retention horizon towards shorter career plans. This may indicate growing uncertainty regarding long-term careers at sea and highlights the importance of continued efforts to address factors known to influence retention, including workload, wellbeing, career development opportunities, and work-life balance.

Rank: Differences across rank groups were evident. Cadets reported the lowest proportion of seafarers considering leaving the industry (19%), while Ratings (44%) and Junior Officers (41%) reported the highest.

Age: Intentions to leave the industry varied by age. Seafarers aged 18-24 reported the lowest proportion considering leaving the industry (23%), while those aged 31-40 reported the highest (44%). Interestingly, the highest intention to leave was not found among older seafarers approaching retirement, but among those in the middle stages of their careers.

"The biggest improvements would be reliable internet access, comprehensive health insurance for seafarers and their families, and timely crew relief. These changes would significantly improve wellbeing, morale, and long-term retention."

"One thing I have observed recently in [company] is that many promising and capable employees are leaving due to delays in the promotion process. Timely recognition and promotion of deserving internal candidates would not only improve retention but also help preserve valuable experience, operational knowledge, and loyalty within the organisation."

Seafarers, Re:fresh 2026

Retention: Key findings and recommendations

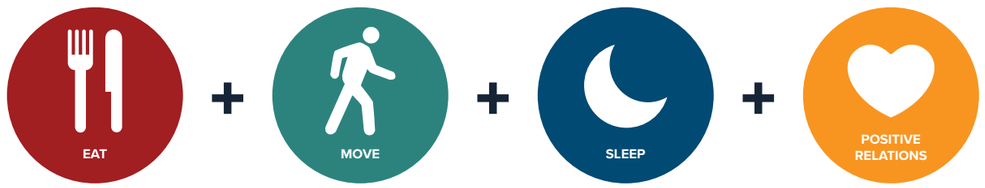
Seafarers' career intentions remained relatively stable between 2024 and 2026, with around half planning to stay in the industry for more than ten years. However, there was a slight shift towards shorter career horizons, highlighting the need for continued efforts to attract and retain seafarers.

To better understand how retention can be improved, it is important to examine both the factors influencing decisions to leave and the areas where seafarers feel companies could do more. The factors most strongly influencing consideration of leaving the industry were salary and remuneration, contract stability, and safety practices and culture onboard. Similarly, seafarers identified salary, bonus and allowance schemes, internet access, contract types and duration, health insurance, and training opportunities as key areas for improvement.

While competitive pay remains essential, the findings suggest it is no longer enough on its own. Seafarers are increasingly looking at the overall employment experience, including job security, wellbeing, healthcare access, connectivity, and development opportunities. For example, health insurance stood out as a particularly important benefit, with 52% saying it would influence their choice of employer very much and a further 28% saying it would influence them quite a lot. Together, these findings highlight that retention depends not only on what seafarers earn, but also on how well companies support their health, wellbeing, and long-term career needs.

Recommendations

Individual level	Organisational level	Industry level
Encourage seafarers to provide feedback on employment conditions and retention drivers.	Provide competitive salaries, bonus schemes, and secure contract arrangements.	Promote seafaring as a sustainable long-term career through industry-wide attraction and retention initiatives.
Support seafarers in planning long-term career pathways within the maritime sector.	Create clear career progression pathways, training opportunities, and professional development programmes.	Continue monitoring retention trends and sharing best practices across the industry.
Encourage seafarers to actively engage in training and career development opportunities.	Listen to seafarers' feedback regarding accommodation, food, recreational facilities, opportunities for shore leave, and rotation schedules.	Establish industry-wide standards for seafarer welfare, working conditions, and quality of life.
		Strengthen policies addressing the long-term wellbeing, work-life balance, and career sustainability of seafarers.



Analysis

Key findings
Voices from the sea



Key findings

Re:fresh 2026 demonstrates that seafarers remain a largely healthy, resilient, and engaged workforce, with high levels of self-rated health, wellbeing, and job satisfaction. Compared with 2024, several indicators improved, including happiness, wellbeing, and stress, while many health outcomes remained stable.

At the same time, the findings highlight important challenges that may affect both long-term health and workforce sustainability. Smoking and obesity increased, health risks generally rose with age, and wellbeing remained consistently lower onboard than at home. Psychological distress, fatigue, loneliness, and workplace stress continue to affect a proportion of seafarers, while notable differences were observed across age groups, ranks, and nationalities.

The results also reinforce that health and wellbeing are shaped by more than individual lifestyle behaviours. Social connectedness, psychological safety, workplace culture, trust, and perceptions of organisational support were strongly associated with wellbeing, engagement, loyalty, and retention. Seafarers reporting positive workplace experiences generally reported better health, higher wellbeing, stronger loyalty to their employer, and greater intention to remain in the maritime industry.

Overall, Re:fresh 2026 highlights the importance of taking a holistic approach to seafarer wellbeing, recognising that physical health, psychological health, social wellbeing, workplace experience, and retention are closely interconnected.

While the survey findings presented in this chapter highlight key trends across health, wellbeing, safety, and retention, they do not fully capture the experiences behind the numbers. The following Voices of the Sea analysis explores seafarers' own perspectives and provides additional context to the quantitative results.

Key findings by domain

Physical	Psychological	Social
31% have health issues, mainly due to back pain, hypertension, other joint and muscle pains and high blood sugar. Diabetes: 10% at risk.	Happiness: 5.17	Flow: 28% in flow, 37% anxious, and 34% bored. eNPS: 18% ESI: 73%
Overweight and obesity: 74% are either overweight or obese and at risk of ill health due to excess weight and a large belly.	Stress: 14.1	Top three worries: 1. Safety for family 2. Health 3. Personal finances
Diet: between 15-20% consume too much sweetened beverages or don't eat enough vegetables.	Wellbeing: 88% all well, 7% mildly depressed, 4% moderately depressed, and 1% severely depressed.	Retention issues: 60% have no intention to quit, 17% are seriously thinking of leaving, and 16% are investing time and energy in preparing for their departure from seafaring.
Smoking: 22% Sleep: 18% have problems sleeping Alcohol: 27% moderate risk	Distress: 86% without distress, 14% mild distress, with social dysfunction as the main driver of distress	Bullying and harassment: 5% are bullied, 6% sexually harassed.
Exercise: about 35% need to increase their exercise in terms of frequency, intensity and duration.		Social: 9% feel lonely, 4% discriminated.

Voices from the Sea

Seafarers' health, wellbeing and experiences of inclusion

The survey contained two open-ended questions. The first invited seafarers to share their thoughts about their health, wellbeing and life at sea. It received 15,003 responses, of which 13,139 (87.6%) contained substantive comments after entries such as "N/A", "none" and "no comment" were excluded. The second question invited respondents to describe their experiences as female seafarers or members of another minority group in a traditionally male-dominated environment. It received 587 responses, of which 540 (92.0%) were substantive.

Together, the questions generated 13,679 substantive response fields. These figures represent answers to two separate questions rather than unique respondents. The minority-experience findings are also based on a considerably smaller respondent group and should therefore be interpreted separately. The findings identify recurring experiences and priority areas; they do not establish prevalence among all seafarers or prove causal relationships.

Main wellbeing themes

The wellbeing responses present a broadly positive picture. Approximately 8,342 substantive comments contained positive health or satisfaction language. However, 1,968 comments referred to at least one concern, such as fatigue, family separation, employment conditions, safety or inadequate support. Positive and negative experiences sometimes appeared together in the same response. The results should therefore not be interpreted as a simple satisfaction score. Instead, they identify the conditions that most strongly influence whether seafarers experience life at sea as healthy and sustainable.

Wellbeing theme	Mentions	Responses
Pay, benefits, and career	1,480	11.3%
Food, exercise, and recreation	1,211	9.2%
Stress, fatigue, and rest	1,143	8.7%
Safety, respect and workplace culture	907	6.9%
Internet and communication	514	3.9%
Family separation and loneliness	414	3.2%

Pay, benefits, and career progression

Pay, benefits, and career development formed the largest wellbeing theme, with 1,480 mentions. The responses demonstrate that this issue extends beyond salary alone. The most common concerns related to pay levels and the need for salaries to keep pace with inflation, living costs and market rates. Respondents also raised medical insurance, including requests for coverage that extends

"Thank you for providing this survey and for making our voices feel valued and important to life onboard. I firmly believe that gathering this feedback is a vital step toward driving positive changes and improvements for the future."

"My health and wellbeing are good during vacation or at sea."

Main wellbeing themes

"Life at sea is challenging, but I maintain my health and wellbeing by managing stress, staying active and keeping a positive mindset."

Main wellbeing themes

"Company must provide health insurance for all the crew, not only to the highest-ranking officers."

Pay Benefits and career progression

"Career progression is important to me."

Pay Benefits and career progression

to family members and continues during periods ashore. Career progression was another important concern. Some seafarers described slow or unclear promotion processes and a feeling of remaining at the same rank despite their qualifications and experience. Others requested clearer career pathways, training opportunities and support in moving from cadet or junior positions into established roles. Respondents also mentioned reliable salary payments, overtime and night-work allowances, bonuses, contract security, deployment waiting times and pension provision. Although pensions were mentioned less frequently, the comments were often strongly expressed, particularly by long-serving seafarers concerned about reaching retirement without adequate financial security. Overall, respondents are asking for a coherent employment proposition combining competitive and regularly reviewed salaries, dependable payment, family medical coverage, transparent promotion routes, retirement provision and predictable contracts and deployment.

Food, exercise, and recreation

Food, exercise, and recreation appeared in 1,211 comments. Respondents frequently connected their physical and mental wellbeing with the practical conditions available onboard. Food related comments concerned quality, variety, nutritional value, catering standards, and access to fresh fruit and vegetables. Exercise and recreation comments focused on gyms, sports equipment, organised activities and suitable spaces in which crew members can relax and interact socially. These facilities are not regarded merely as optional amenities. They influence physical fitness, morale, social cohesion and the ability to manage stress during lengthy contracts. Minimum welfare standards should therefore address both nutrition and meaningful opportunities for exercise and recreation.

Stress, fatigue, and rest

Stress, fatigue, and rest were mentioned in 1,143 comments, making this one of the clearest operational concerns. Respondents described heavy workloads, long or irregular hours, insufficient rest, disrupted sleep and exhaustion during busy port schedules. Some explicitly connected fatigue with deteriorating health, lower alertness and an increased risk of accidents. The comments indicate that fatigue should not be treated solely as an individual wellbeing or resilience issue. It is also a matter of work design, staffing and operational safety. Formal compliance with recorded rest hours may not fully reflect respondents' actual workload or quality of recovery. Organisations should therefore consider operational intensity, staffing levels, work schedules and genuine opportunities for uninterrupted rest.

Safety, respect, and workplace culture

Safety, respect, and workplace culture appeared in 907 comments. Positive experiences were frequently linked to supportive senior officers, harmonious crew relationships, teamwork and a strong safety culture. Negative experiences included pressure from senior personnel, inadequate respect, excessive procedures, unsafe practices and environments in which crew members did not feel heard. These comments demonstrate that leadership behaviour strongly influences wellbeing. Similar working conditions can be experienced very differently depending on whether officers and supervisors create trust, fairness and psychological safety.

"I have worked at sea for about 26 years and plan to retire soon. Please consider some gratuity for retiring seafarers to support their retirement life."

Pay Benefits and career progression

"Employers should improve recreational facilities onboard. Budget for food should be improved."

Food exercise and recreation

"Sleep deprivation everyday very high workload."

Stress fatigue and rest

"Over-fatigue and lack of rest onboard due to port stays and working hours."

Stress fatigue and rest

"Life at sea offers financial independence and adventure; however, it also brings extreme isolation and physical fatigue."

Stress fatigue and rest

Internet and communication

Internet and communication appeared in 514 comments under the principal thematic coding. A broader review identified 607 connectivity-related responses. Of these, 413 linked internet access with family communication and emotional wellbeing, while 366 requested improvements. Availability or reliability problems appeared in 143 comments, and 123 referred to costs, quotas or insufficient data allowances. Many respondents appreciated having internet onboard but felt its value was reduced by unreliable service, high charges or restrictive limits. Connectivity was principally described as a wellbeing lifeline that reduces isolation and enables regular contact with family. It is also increasingly necessary for company surveys, training and administrative tasks. The main requirement is therefore not simply internet availability, but reliable, affordable and sufficiently generous access.

Family separation and loneliness

Family separation and loneliness were explicitly identified in 414 responses, although their influence also appeared within the communication and mental-health themes. Extended periods away from partners, children and wider family networks can result in homesickness, sadness and isolation. Respondents described regular family communication, supportive colleagues and onboard social activities as important protective factors. Contract length, relief planning, connectivity and mental-health support should consequently be considered together rather than treated as separate welfare issues.

Female and minority experiences

The minority-experience responses reveal a dual reality. Many respondents described respectful, professional and supportive working environments. At the same time, others reported unequal scrutiny, isolation, gender-based assumptions and serious boundary violations.

Theme	Mentions	Responses
Support, respect, and inclusion	254	47.0%
Providing capability or experience bias	124	23.0%
Harassment and boundary violations	55	10.2%
Facilities and policy needs	35	6.5%
Isolation or being the only woman onboard	27	5.0%

"Life at sea is very good if there is a harmonious relationship on board."

Safety, respect and workplace culture

"It's fine as long as there is internet for communication with my family."

Internet and communication

"Life at sea is hard and lonely, but for the sake of family we endure the challenges."

Family separation and loneliness

As a cadet, I feel very lonely and isolated here.

Family separation and loneliness

"Being apart from family is hard, but having workmates who are happy to talk and treat you like family helps."

Family separation and loneliness

Support, respect, and inclusion

Support, respect and inclusion was the largest theme, appearing in 254 of the 540 substantive responses. Respondents described being welcomed, treated fairly, supported by colleagues and judged according to their professional competence rather than gender. Positive experiences were often associated with good teamwork, mentoring, supportive senior officers, clear company policies and prompt action when a problem was reported. These comments demonstrate that inclusive onboard cultures already exist and provide useful examples of effective practice.

Bias and the need to prove capability

Despite these positive experiences, 124 comments referred to gender bias or pressure to prove capability. Women described having towork harder to gain trust, being judged more quickly for mistakes, receiving fewer opportunities or being assumed to be less capable, particularly in physically demanding or senior positions. Some respondents ultimately achieved acceptance, but only after demonstrating exceptional performance.

This suggests an unequal standard: competence may eventually be recognised, but women can first be required to overcome assumptions that male colleagues do not face. Equal access to tasks, training, responsibility and promotion should therefore be actively monitored rather than assumed.

Harassment and boundaries

Harassment and boundary concerns appeared in 55 comments. The reported experiences ranged from unwanted attention, intrusive messages, rumours and sexualised remarks to threats, unwanted physical contact and fear for personal safety. Although this theme was less frequent than positive inclusion or gender bias, the severity of some accounts makes it a safeguarding priority. Organisations should provide confidential, trusted and accessible reporting channels, clear escalation procedures, protection against retaliation and trauma informed support.

Facilities, policies and isolation

Thirty-five comments identified facility or policy needs. These included paid maternity provisions, sanitary products, female appropriate protective equipment and coveralls, suitable bathroom and accommodation arrangements, and clear reporting procedures. A further 27 responses explicitly mentioned isolation or being the only woman onboard. Being the only woman onboard can reduce access to informal support, complicate social participation and increase vulnerability to rumours or unwanted attention. Greater representation, mentoring and access to trusted contacts outside the vessel could help reduce these pressures.

> "Onboard everyone has been professional, and I feel confident the senior officers would support me if I faced issues onboard."
>
> Support, respect and inclusion

> You have to work twice as hard just to prove yourself that you are capable.
>
> Bias and the need to prove capability

> "Unwanted touch, inappropriate comments, but also support and welcoming space, it depends on a person."
>
> Harassment and personal boundaries

> "We need a new design for coveralls that is more female-friendly."
>
> Facilities, policies and isolation

> "I was the only female seafarer on my last two contracts. It is really stressful being alone."
>
> Stress fatigue and rest

Voices from the Sea: Key findings and recommendations

The open-ended responses present a broadly positive but nuanced picture of life at sea. Most substantive wellbeing comments express positive health or satisfaction, while almost half of the minority experience responses describe support, respect and inclusion. Seafarers particularly value supportive colleagues and leaders, good teamwork, opportunities to stay healthy, and reliable contact with family.

While many seafarers report positive experiences, the comments also point to persistent challenges and barriers that warrant continued attention. The strongest concerns relate to pay, benefits and career progression; stress, fatigue and insufficient recovery; leadership and workplace culture; food, exercise and recreation; connectivity and family separation; and unequal or unsafe experiences among female and minority seafarers. Overall, the findings show that sustainable wellbeing at sea depends not only on individual resilience, but on fair employment conditions, safe work design, inclusive leadership and consistent welfare and safeguarding standards.

Five emerging priorities

- Improve retention through competitive pay, benefits, and career opportunities.
- Reduce fatigue by addressing workload, staffing levels, and recovery time.
- Enhance onboard wellbeing through better welfare, nutrition, exercise, and connectivity.
- Support female and minority seafarers through inclusive leadership, equal opportunities, and safe working environments.
- Strengthen safeguarding systems to prevent and respond to harassment, discrimination, and misconduct

"Working at sea provides good career opportunities, but maintaining good mental health, safety, fair workload, timely crew changes, and strong support from both onboard and shore management are essential for long-term wellbeing and retention of seafarers."

Seafarer, Re:fresh 2026

Recommendations

“I believe our company has always been proactive in improving life onboard. They work to provide what is beneficial for the crew and continue to look for ways to do better. This survey is proof of that, showing a genuine interest in understanding how they can go beyond what most companies offer and further improve the wellbeing of their crews.”

Seafarer, Re:fresh 2026

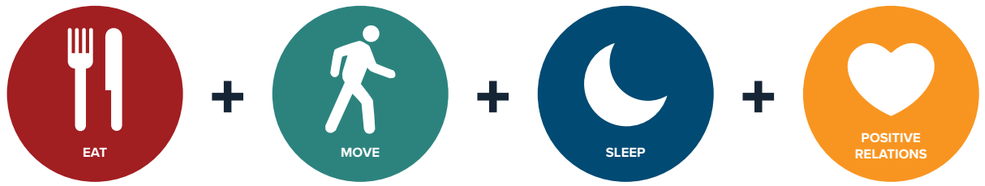


Recommendations

By taking a holistic approach, Re:fresh 2026 provides insight into the interconnected factors shaping the health and wellbeing of international seafarers across the global supply chain. The findings show a largely healthy, resilient, and engaged workforce, with high self-rated health, wellbeing, job satisfaction, and loyalty. At the same time, rising obesity and smoking rates, together with persistent stress, fatigue, loneliness, psychological distress, and differences across age groups, ranks, and nationalities, highlight clear priorities for action.

The findings from Re:fresh 2026 support existing research suggesting that positive health behaviours, including sufficient sleep, regular exercise, balanced nutrition, healthy weight management, and avoiding tobacco use, contribute to better physical and psychological health. Although these associations were not formally analysed within the current study, the observed patterns are consistent with findings reported in the wider scientific literature. Social and socioeconomic conditions are equally important: loneliness, bullying, and low support undermine wellbeing, while trust, inclusion, psychological safety, social connection, and positive workplace experiences strengthen happiness, job satisfaction, productivity, loyalty, and retention. Fatigue and stress are also closely linked to lower wellbeing, negative employee Net Promoter Scores, and intentions to leave seafaring.

These findings provide a basis for targeted action in areas requiring improvement and can empower seafarers to take a proactive and confident role in their own health. They also underline the importance of the workplace: seafarers spend extended periods onboard, where work can provide income, purpose, belonging, social connection, and support, but may also expose them to stress, loneliness, fatigue, and unhealthy routines. The chapter-level recommendations translate these findings into practical actions at individual, organisational, and industry levels. Their impact will depend on coordinated implementation, continued monitoring, and the use of future Re:fresh results to assess progress, refine interventions, and support healthier and more sustainable careers at sea.



Health at the workplace

Risk factors

- Isolation and alienation
- Peer rejection
- Poor social circumstance
- Poor nutrition
- Work stress
- Unemployment (or the risk of)
- Discrimination
- Insomnia
- Loneliness
- Medical illness/ cardiovascular disease
- Poor work skills and habits

Protective factors

- Empowerment
- Positive interpersonal interactions
- Social participation
- Social support
- Ability to cope with stress
- Exercise
- Feelings of security
- Feelings of mastery and control
- Problem-solving skills
- Self-esteem
- Social and conflict management skills
- Social support from family and friends

Going forward

Creating a robust health promotion programme in the maritime industry is essential to ensure the wellbeing of all personnel. This section outlines a strategic approach to enhance health and wellness on board, focusing on key areas for improvement and actionable steps to achieve meaningful change.

1. **Focus on a maximum of 2–3 areas to improve:** Prioritise specific health concerns that have the most significant impact on crew members' wellbeing.
2. **Identify what you want to achieve, and why this is important:** Clearly define the goals of the programme, such as reducing stress or improving physical fitness, and explain the importance of these objectives.
3. **How will you achieve the change at both the organisational and individual level?:** Develop strategies that address both systemic changes within the organisation and individual behaviours.
4. **Put health and wellbeing firmly on the agenda and allocate resources:** Ensure that health and wellness are prioritised in company policies and allocate necessary resources for programme implementation.
5. **Involve key people at all levels:** Engage stakeholders from all levels of the organisation to foster a culture of health and wellness.
6. **Create a health and wellness team:** Form a dedicated team to oversee the programme and ensure its success.
7. **Appoint a wellness officer onboard each vessel:** Designate a wellness officer on each vessel to monitor and support health initiatives.
8. **Set a policy:** Establish clear policies that support and sustain your planned health promotion efforts. It will help your organisation to create a structured, supportive and sustainable environment that promotes the health and wellbeing of all employees. It will ensure consistency, accountability, integration, assist in securing resources, compliance with MLC 2006, as well as boosting the company image.
9. **Assessment:** Conduct regular surveys to monitor the wellbeing of seafarers and identify areas for improvement.
10. **Feedback:** Establish channels for seafarers to provide feedback on health promotion initiatives and where they can suggest improvements.

By following these steps, the maritime industry can create a healthier, more productive environment for all its workers. Below are examples of action points to address the main findings of each element.

Physical	Psychological	Social
Sleep Ensure that sleep and rest hours are scheduled and implemented. Educate seafarers on the importance of good sleep hygiene and provide resources to improve sleep quality, e.g., blackout curtains, earplugs, and relaxation.	**Stress Management** Assess the workload, routines and communication onboard, and make necessary changes. Provide workshops on stress management techniques, such as mindfulness meditation, and time management.	**Bullying** Implement strict anti-bullying policies and provide training on recognising and addressing bullying behaviour.
Exercise Offer onboard fitness facilities, organise group exercise sessions, and provide time and incentives for regular physical activity.	**Mental Health Support** Offer access to mental health professionals and create a supportive environment where seafarers feel comfortable seeking help.	**Loneliness** Create opportunities for social interaction and support, such as peer support groups and social events.
Diet Organise healthy eating campaigns, ensure access to nutritious meals and snacks on board, and provide education on maintaining a balanced diet.	**Psychological Safety** Train leaders and crew members on creating a psychologically safe environment where everyone feels comfortable expressing themselves.	**Trust-Building Activities** Organise team-building exercises and workshops to foster trust and collaboration among crew members.
		Inclusive Practices Promote inclusivity through diversity training and by celebrating different cultures and backgrounds on board.

Who we are

Marine Benefits is dedicated to the health and wellbeing of seafarers and their families, providing more than 230,000 members with access to quality healthcare worldwide. Through tailored health insurance solutions, we provide healthcare coverage for seafarers while at home and for their families year-round, giving crews greater peace of mind.

Located in Bergen, Norway's shipping capital – our history is rooted in the shipping industry, where our head office services our customers with tailored health insurance solutions and our global service centre in Manila is there to assist crew when they need it.

In 2026, Marine Benefits celebrates its 20th anniversary, marking two decades of supporting the health, wellbeing, and security of seafarers and their families. As a wholly owned subsidiary of The Norwegian Hull Club, we combine deep maritime expertise with long-term stability and a strong commitment to the maritime community.

We understand the unique challenges of life at sea, where time away from home and concern for loved ones can place significant pressure on crew members. By helping protect both seafarers and their families, we contribute to healthier crews, stronger retention, safer operations, and a more sustainable maritime industry.

"I am very thankful for Marine Benefits and the support it provides to my family and child. It gives me peace of mind knowing that my loved ones are protected and can access healthcare when needed, even when I am away from home."

Seafarer, Re:fresh 2026

MARINE BENEFITS

200,000 PEOPLE
2006 20 2026
YEARS
HEALTHY AT HOME, HEALTHY AT SEA

Thank you!

Thank you to all the seafarers who took the time to participate in this survey and share their experiences, to the shipping companies that supported the initiative and continue to prioritise crew wellbeing, and to everyone who has taken the time to read this report. Together, you are helping drive positive change towards a healthier, safer, and more sustainable maritime industry.





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