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support of seafarers' dignity

SHORE LEAVE SURVEY 2026

Identifying problems—and ways to improve. [German Seafarers' Mission e.V.](#)



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“The right to shore leave has been recognized since ancient times and is still enshrined today in international agreements such as the Maritime Labour Convention and the FAL Convention.”

FOREWORD

For seafarers, shore leave is much more than just free time—it is a central component of fair living and working conditions. This survey highlights where shore leave is possible, why it is prevented, and how seafarers make use of it. Our aim is to paint a current picture, bring problems to light, and identify areas for improvement.

The German Seafarers’ Mission has been committed to supporting seafarers for 140 years and, together with its staff, reaches over 120,000 of them annually in 17 German ports and at 15 international locations. They listen and hear.

As a member of the International Christian Maritime Association (ICMA), the German Seafarers’ Mission is part of a global network of hundreds of Seafarers’ Missions and seafarers’ centers that support seafarers across denominational lines around the globe.

This highlights just how important shore leave is—and the strain that arises when it is denied. The reasons why seafarers cannot go ashore are varied: in some ports, it is the government or authorities; in others, private terminals. Often, it is also due to a lack of or

expensive transportation options, ports stays are too short, or simply ports being too remote.

Yet shore leave has been a recognized right of seafarers since ancient times and is now enshrined in international agreements such as the Maritime Labour Convention and the FAL-Convention.

It is of great importance for physical, mental, and emotional health, for stable supply chains, and for the observance of human rights and sustainability standards. Anyone who wants to secure global trade must respect the rights of those who make it possible.

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to this survey, especially Anita Haehnel and Jörn Hille, as well as the many full-time and volunteer participants who worked on this project worldwide. A special thank you goes to the seafarers who took part!

Matthias Ristau
Secretary General of the German Seafarers’ Mission

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Why this survey?

For seafarers, shore leave is much more than just free time. It offers relaxation, social interaction, contact with the outside world, and often the chance to run everyday errands, use free Wi-Fi, or play pool. At the same time, the experience the German Seafarers' Mission shows that shore leave is difficult or only partially possible in many places around the world. Against this backdrop, we conducted an international survey in March 2026 at 16 ports, involving over 1,300 seafarers.

Of these, 1,199 data sets from individuals covered by the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) were included in the analysis. The aim was to highlight the opportunities and limitations of shore leave from the seafarers' perspective. The results clearly show: While shore leave is generally possible in many cases, in practice it is often short, logistically difficult, or fraught with obstacles.



Key Findings

1. Shore leave is generally possible – but often only to a limited extent

Most seafarers surveyed stated that shore leave is generally possible at their current port. At the same time, the results show that the actual use of shore leave is frequently limited by structural obstacles. Short layovers, safety regulations, heavy workloads, and a lack of transportation options makes it difficult for many seafarers to enjoy a relaxing shore leave.

2. Main reasons for denied shore leave

Problems with shore leave are rarely isolated incidents. Rather, they result from a combination of administrative, organizational, and operational factors. Modern port structures—with long distances within terminals—and strict security regulations make it difficult to access shore leave in many places.

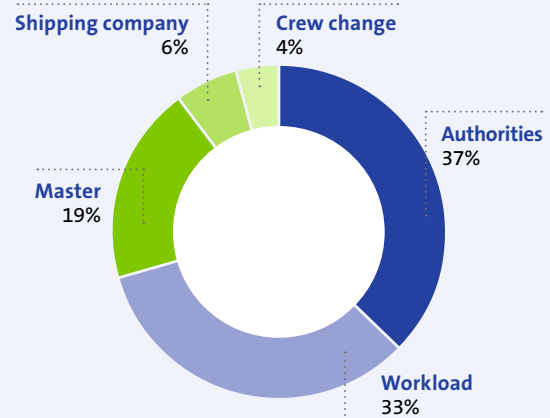
3. Many sailors rarely have shore leave, or only for very short periods

The timing of their last shore leave also paints a troubling picture: It is particularly striking that a significant proportion of seafarers have not been ashore for several weeks or months. At the same time, many seafarers reported that short stays often offer little opportunity for rest, as a large portion of the time is spent traveling, going through security checks, or running necessary errands. The survey also shows that shore leave is often only possible for a few hours. Most seafarers reported shore leave lasting between one and four hours. Longer periods of rest ashore remained the exception.

Shore leave is available to **89%** of seafarers!



REASONS FOR DENIAL OF SHORE LEAVE IN CURRENT PORT (excluding N/A, yes; n = 67)



>> p. 21 & 24

MEDIAN TIME OF LAST SHORE LEAVE



MEDIAN DURATION OF SHORE LEAVE



>> p. 22-23

4. Shore leave is social participation and a sense of normalcy

The results clearly show that time ashore goes far beyond mere leisure. For many seafarers, it means contact with the outside world, a break from their daily work routine, and the opportunity to form social relationships outside their own crew.

The high importance placed on seafarers' clubs in particular underscores their vital social and supportive role in international ports.

» p. 25

5. Seafarers have clear suggestions for improvements

40% of the seafarers surveyed described very clearly what measures could improve shore leave. Better transportation options between port facilities and urban areas were mentioned particularly frequently. Many seafarers cited long distances, a lack of shuttle services, or high costs as major obstacles.

At the same time, the results show that many problems appear solvable. Improvements in transportation, time management, and social infrastructure could already have a noticeable impact on seafarers' rest and well-being.

» pp. 33-34

Conclusion

Shore leave is an important component of decent working conditions in international shipping. Although shore leave generally appears to be frequently possible, practical and structural barriers in many places prevent actual rest.

Seafarers perceive their situation in very nuanced ways and have concrete ideas about how their shore leave could be improved. At the same time, they are often barely recognized in the public consciousness as the people who sustain global supply chains.

With this survey, the German Seafarers' Mission hopes to raise greater awareness of seafarers' perspectives and further promote dialogue on fair working conditions, rest, and social participation on the regional and international levels.

TOP 5

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

(excluding N/A, 'everything is fine/no suggestions', 'other'; n = 404)

33%

Transportation & shuttle



21%

Time management & port stay



19%

Seafarers' club & hospitality

Facilities & infrastructure

14%



Personal well-being

12%





INTRODUCTION

In its daily work, the German Seafarers' Mission regularly encounters seafarers for whom shore leave is limited or impossible. This highlights how little the public is aware of the living and working conditions of the approximately 1.8 million seafarers worldwide—a phenomenon known as 'sea blindness'. Although approximately 90% of global trade is transported by sea, the people behind the global supply chains often remain invisible. Seafarers live at their workplace for months and have only limited opportunities for rest, social interaction, or physical distance from their daily work routine.

Against this backdrop, the German Seafarers' Mission conducted an international survey on shore leave at 16 locations in March 2026. Over a 14-day period, a total of approximately 1,300 seafarers were surveyed in Germany and international ports. The aim of the survey was an up-to-date picture of the actual opportunities, limitations, and significance of shore leave from the seafarers' own perspective. It was important to us to recognize seafarers as experts on their own living and working conditions and to highlight their specific suggestions for improvement.

The surveys were conducted by full-time and volunteer staff of the German Seafarers' Mission and took place on board ships and in seafarers' clubs and other facilities for seafarers. The survey was conducted in English language using paper questionnaires.

We placed particular emphasis on confidentiality and anonymity. Participation was voluntary, and no personal data was collected. Many seafarers are reluctant to discuss stress or problems on board,

especially if they fear negative consequences for their employment. A trusting environment was therefore a key prerequisite for conducting the survey.

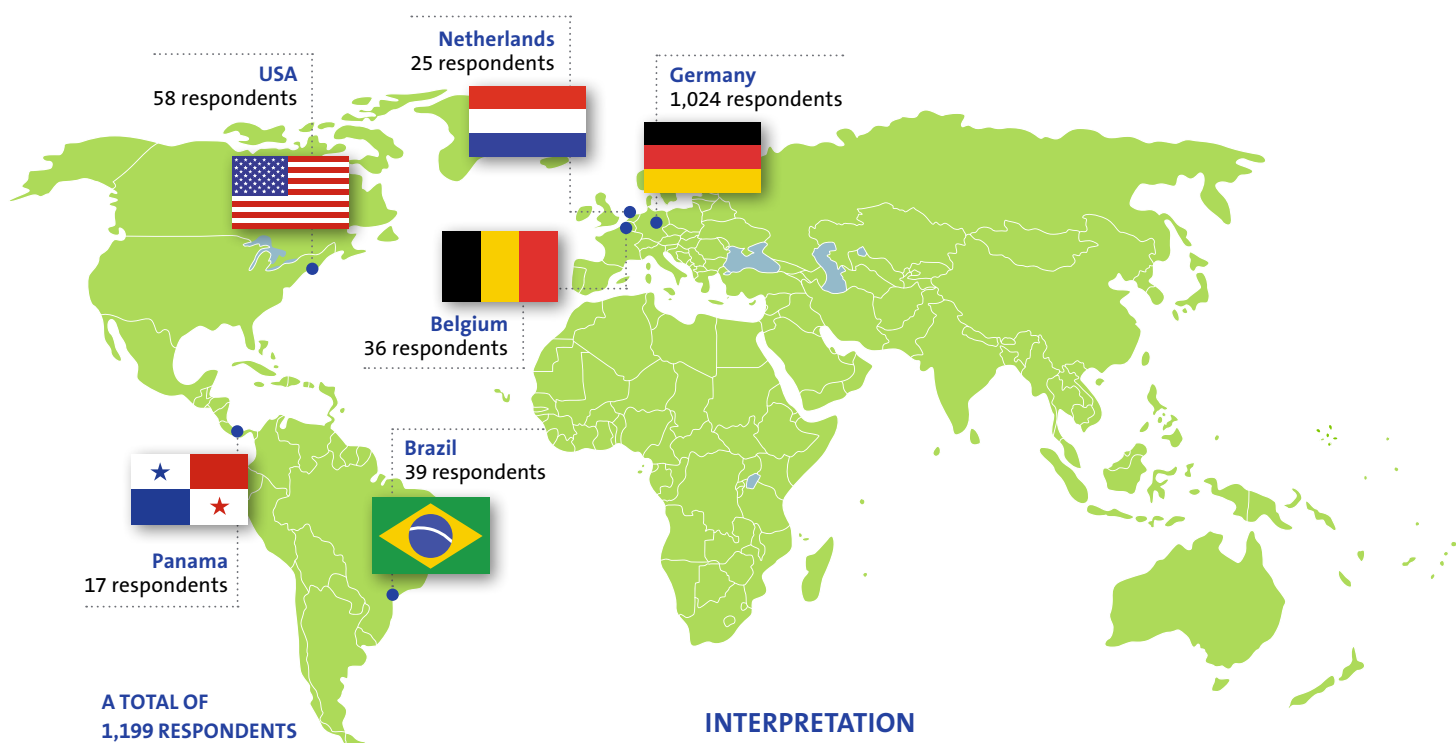
When evaluating and categorizing the data, particularly in the secondary analysis, practical classifications were deliberately chosen. For example, a distinction was made between shore leaves lasting less than or more than four hours, as well as between shorter and longer periods without shore leave. The goal was to evaluate the results not solely statistically, but as closely as possible to the actual living and working conditions of seafarers.

With this survey, the German Seafarers' Mission hopes to constructively contribute to the current debate on shore leave, working conditions, and the well-being of seafarers. The results are intended to raise greater awareness of seafarers' perspectives and further promote dialogue between ports, shipping companies, authorities, trade unions, and social organizations on regional and international levels.



Seafarers during the survey at a seafarers' club

Participating stations of the German Seafarers' Mission



INTERPRETATION

A total of 16 stations of the German Seafarers' Mission participated in the voluntary survey. The majority of completed questionnaires came from HH-Harburg (40%), followed by Bremerhaven (14%) and Brunsbüttel (9%). Other German, European, and international locations are represented with smaller proportions. Overall, the data show a broad geographic distribution alongside a clear concentration on individual locations.

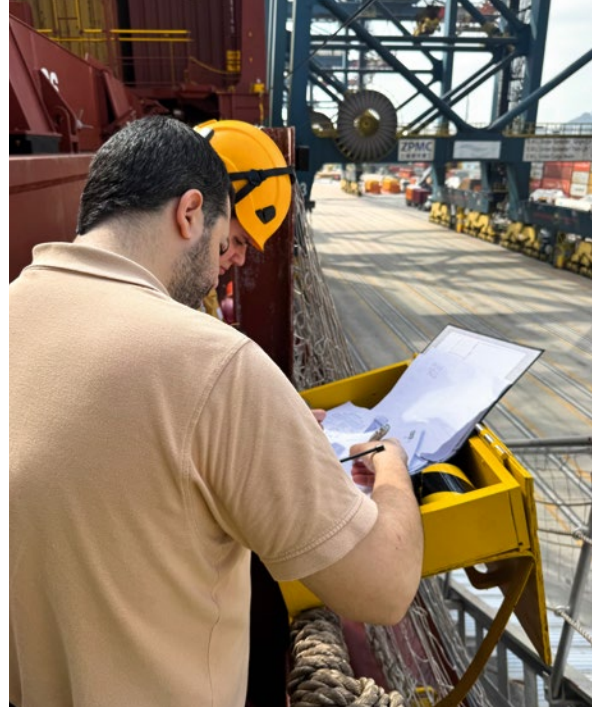
STATIONS (in %)

Germany	
Bremerhaven	14
Brunsbüttel	9
Cuxhaven	3
Emden	6
HH-Altona	1
HH-Harburg	40
HH-Seafarers Lounge	6
Lübeck	2
Rostock	3
Sassnitz	1
Stade	3
Netherlands	
Amsterdam	2
Belgium	
Antwerp	3
North & South America	
New York	5
Panama	1
Santos/Brazil	3

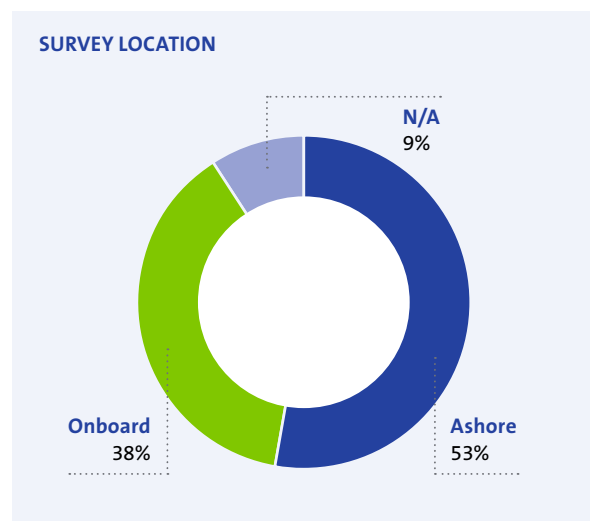
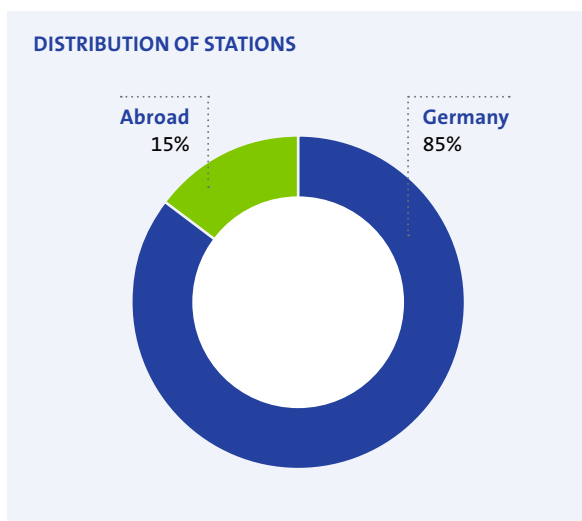
PARTICIPATING STATIONS IN GERMANY



Seafarers onboard during the survey



Distribution of stations and survey location



INTERPRETATION

Distribution of Stations

Local geographical conditions and the type of cargo a vessel is carrying play a major role in determining the feasibility of interviewing seafarers.

The nominal proportions of domestic stations (n=1,024) are proportional to the size of each station in terms of the number of full-time and volunteer staff on site. In addition, the number of port calls also influences the number of interviews conducted at a given location.

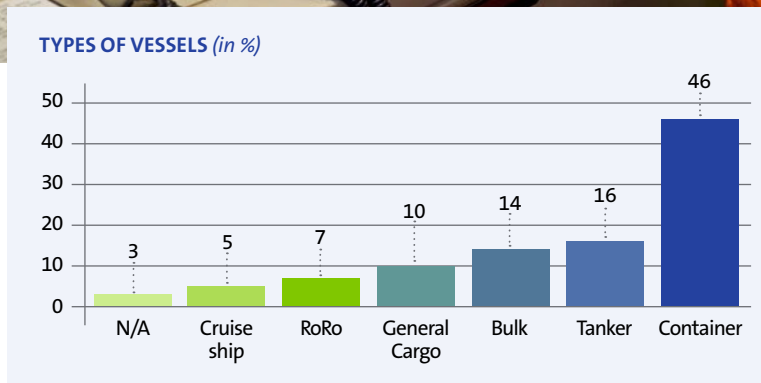
At the stations abroad (n=175), interviews were frequently conducted by a full-time staff member as part of their regular duties. Furthermore, gaining access to seafarers and their vessels is significantly more challenging compared to the domestic context. Overall, with over 90%, a clear Eurocentric bias in the results can be expected.

Survey location

The surveys were conducted as part of the activities of full-time or volunteer staff on behalf of the German Seafarers' Mission, both at the stations or seafarers' clubs themselves and during ship visits while a vessel was docked within the local station's area of operation. The higher number of surveys conducted on land (n=635) compared to those on board (n=457) is because not all stations have the personnel to conduct ship visits or that local conditions do not permit such visits. This information was missing from 107 questionnaires.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Types of vessels



INTERPRETATION

At the time of the survey, the majority of the seafarers surveyed were working on container vessel (n=550), tanker (n=187), or bulk carriers (n=165), while a smaller proportion were on general cargo vessels (n=116), cruise ships (n=64), or RoRo (n=86). 31 seafarers did not provide this information. The high number of container vessels is due to the significant

participation of the Bremerhaven and Hamburg-Harburg stations, where the seafarer's clubs are located nearby the container terminals. The small number of seafarers from cruise ships surveyed is primarily explained by the seasonally low number of port calls during the survey period.

Flags of vessels

TOP 10

OF THE 39 FLAGS LISTED



INTERPRETATION

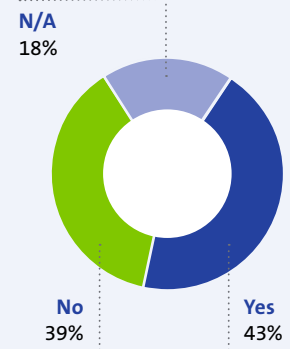
Vessel flags

Since the working conditions of seafarers in global shipping industry depend largely on the country in which a vessel is registered, determining the flag under which seafarers are currently working is of particular interest. A total of 39 different vessel flags were recorded; 211 seafarers did not provide information on their vessel flag. The Liberian flag was recorded most frequently (n=197), followed by Portugal (n=89) and Panama (n=88). Next, Malta (n=72), Denmark (n=61), and Germany (n=60) are closely grouped, followed by Italy (n=56), Cyprus (n=53), Poland (n=45), and the Marshall Islands (n=44). The remaining 29 flags are grouped in the 'Other' category with a total of 223 mentions. The comparatively high proportion of EU flags on an international scale can be explained by the fact that the survey was conducted primarily in Europe.

FLAGS OF VESSELS (in %)

Liberia	16
Portugal	7
Panama	7
Malta	6
Denmark	5
Germany	5
Italy	5
Cyprus	4
Poland	4
Marshall Islands	4
Other	19
N/A	18

FLAG OF CONVENIENCE?

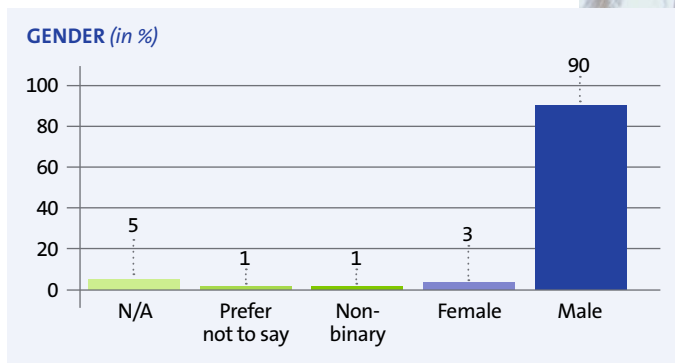
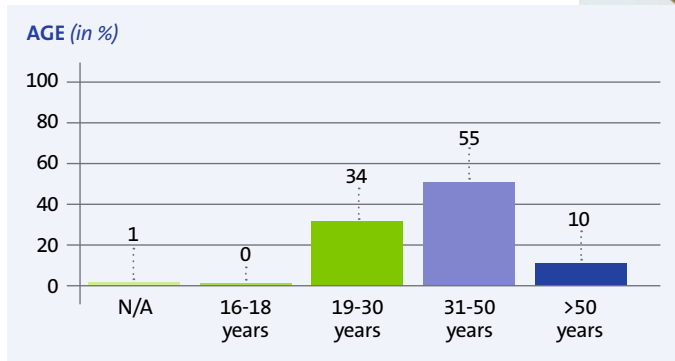


Proportion of Flags of Convenience (FoC)

A closer look at the total number (n=1,199) reveals that, with n=520, most of the flags surveyed can be classified as flags of convenience (FoC) according to the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF). The German flag was not classified as a FoC due to its ambiguous classification in relation to the 'Internationale Seeschiffahrtsregister' (ISR). Combined with the high proportion of EU flags, this results in a high number of flags not classified as FoCs (n=468) by international standards.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Age and gender



INTERPRETATION

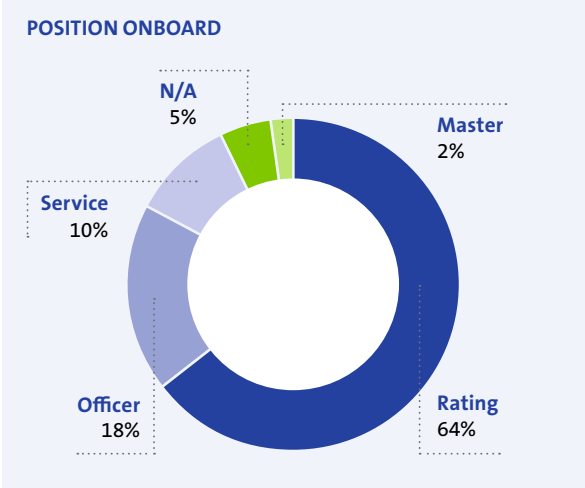
Age

The age distribution of the respondents shows that the largest group, with $n=657$, falls into the 31- to 50-year-old age category. This is followed by the 19- to 30-year-old group with $n=408$. People over 50 are represented by $n=117$, while the youngest age group, 16 to 18 years old, is barely significant with $n=3$. No data is available for 14 of the seafarers surveyed. We assume that the number of seafarers entering the maritime industry later in life is low and that professional experience increases with age. Overall, the age distribution observed, corresponds to what we experience in our work.

Gender

Regarding gender, there is a clear predominance of male respondents ($n=1,078$). Women are represented by $n=42$, and $n=6$ of the respondents identify as non-binary or did not wish to provide information. 67 seafarers did not provide information on their gender. These results should be viewed in the context that merchant shipping is predominantly male, whereas cruise shipping employs more female seafarers.

Position and department on board



INTERPRETATION

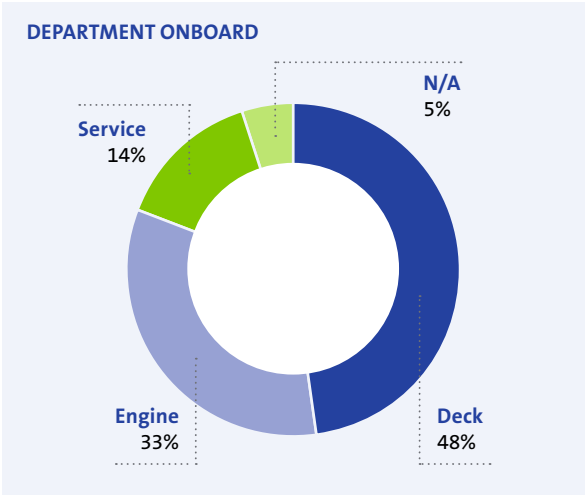
We felt it was appropriate to break down the data by rank and department on board, as working conditions can vary significantly. It should also be noted that the service sector on cruise ships consists primarily of seafarers whose duties involve caring for and entertaining cruise passengers.

Position on board

The distribution of positions on board shows that, with n=770, most respondents belong to rating. This is followed by officers (n=220) and the service sector (n=125). As expected, masters are represented only in small numbers (n=28). No data is available for 56 of the seafarers surveyed. Overall, the high number of cases in the rating sector suggests that the results are significantly influenced by non-management positions.

Department on board

In terms of department affiliation, the deck department also dominates with n=575, followed by the engine room with n=396. The service department is significantly less represented with n=167, while n=5 was categorized as unknown. Data is missing for n=56. The distribution shows that the data primarily reflects the perspectives of seafarers from the deck and engine departments.



Seafarers at work

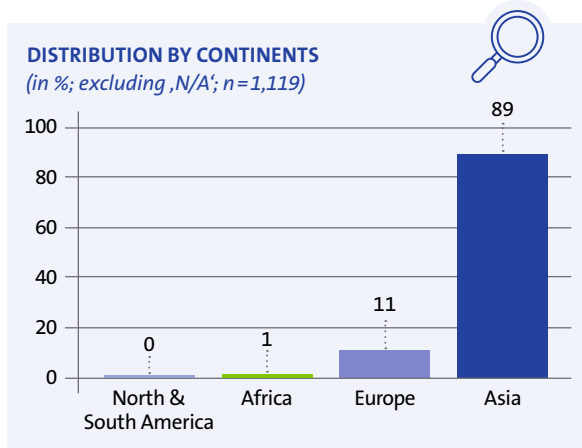
Nationality



INTERPRETATION

Nationality

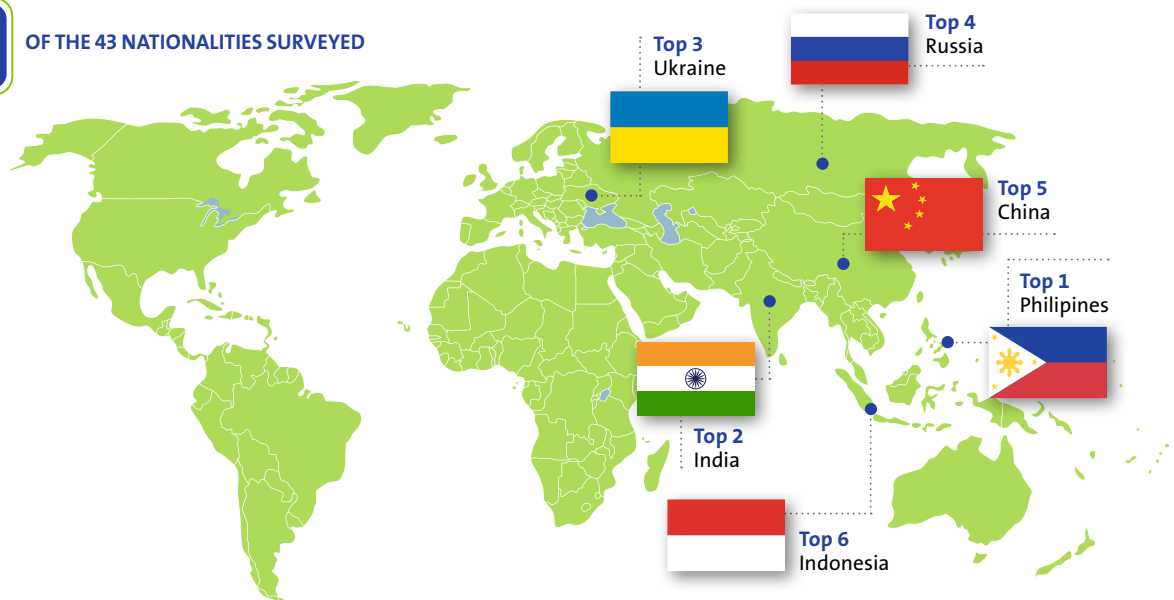
An analysis of nationalities reveals a clear dominance of certain countries of origin. With n=662, Filipino nationals represent by far the largest group. They are followed by India (n=189) and Ukraine (n=54). Other nationalities represented include Russia (n=28), China (n=25), and Indonesia (n=24). In addition, 137 respondents are distributed across 37 other nationalities, while no information is available for 80 seafarers. Overall, this indicates a strong concentration on a few key countries of origin, particularly the Philippines. This is likely due primarily to the European context of the survey and the associated preferred recruitment regions of the crewing agencies.



Nationality by continent

A breakdown by continent (excluding missing data, n=1,119) further illustrates this distribution: With n=970, many respondents come from Asia. Europe is significantly less represented with n=128, while the Americas (n=5) and Africa (n=16) play only a marginal role. The results thus clearly indicate that the sample is primarily composed of seafarers from Asia.

TOP 6 OF THE 43 NATIONALITIES SURVEYED





An engineer
at work

**SPOT
LIGHT**

Seafarers from Asia: The significance and challenges of labor migration

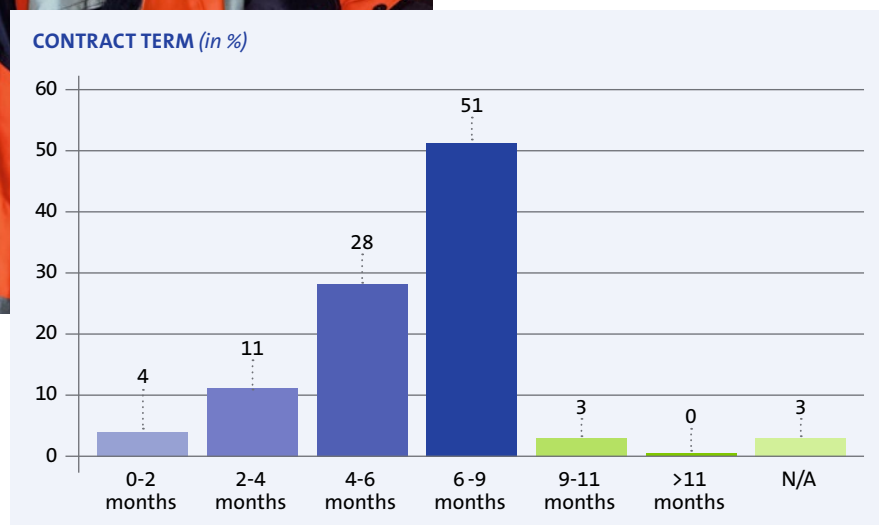
By Anita Haehnel, Project 'Fair übers Meer – For Fair Living and Working Conditions at Sea'

Most seafarers today come from Asia, primarily from the Philippines, India, or China. Asia is thus the most important recruitment region for the global shipping industry. There are financial and economic reasons for this: In many countries there, seafaring is an established career path and offers people an income and opportunities for advancement. For many seafarers, working on board is closely linked to financial responsibility for their families.

In many countries of origin, politeness, reserve, and a strong focus on harmony shape interpersonal interactions. This can also influence communication on board: statements like 'everything's okay' are not always to be taken literally, but may also reflect politeness, conformity, or a desire not to address problems openly.

Labor migration is indispensable to the shipping industry. The global movement of goods only functions because shipping companies can access labor from different regions. Without this form of migration, today's shipping industry would be nearly impossible to maintain in terms of staffing. The social costs, however, are high: separation from family, precarious working conditions, lack of shore leave, and difficult enforcement of their rights place a heavy burden on many seafarers. Labor migration is therefore not only an economic factor but also a social and human rights issue. The shipping industry relies on a mobile workforce—and at the same time bears responsibility for ensuring that these workers can labor under fair and dignified conditions.

Duration of current contracts



INTERPRETATION

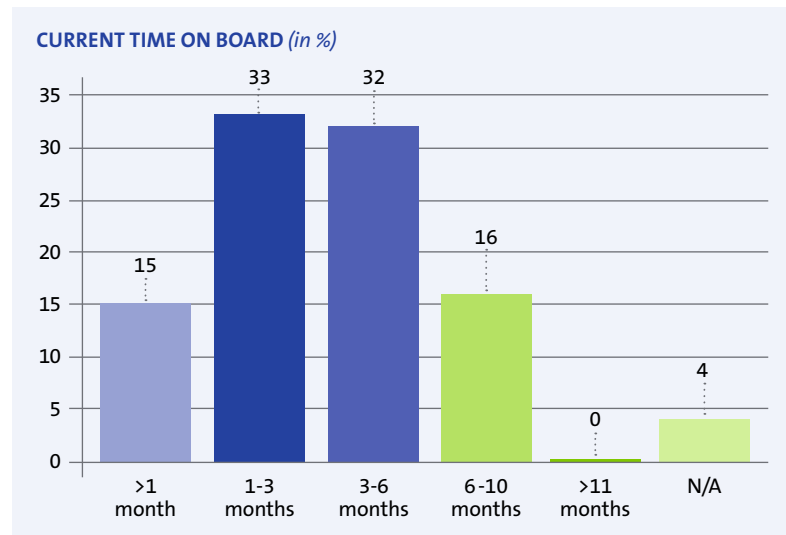
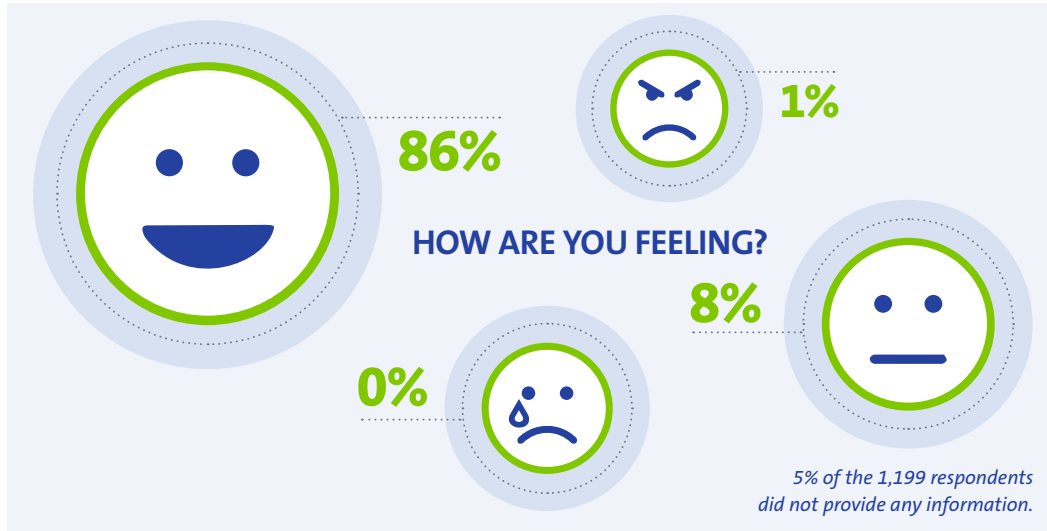
Current contract duration

With $n=690$, the category of contract durations ranging from 6 to 9 months represents the largest group. This is followed by durations of 4 to 6 months, with $n=333$. Shorter contracts are significantly less common: $n=132$ were recorded for durations of 2 to 4 months, and only $n=51$ for 0 to 2 months. Longer contract durations of 9 to 11 months ($n=37$) and more than 11 months ($n=4$), on the other hand, play only a minor role. No information on contract duration was available for 32 seafarers.

The distribution of current contract durations shows a clear concentration on medium to long deployment periods: approximately 74% of the seafarers surveyed are on contracts ranging from 6 months up to the legally permissible maximum of 11 months and 30 days. This points to a structural problem in the maritime labor market, where long contract durations remain the norm.

Feedback from seafarers indicates that assignments lasting more than five to six months are frequently associated with significant psychological, emotional, and physical strain. Many respondents report that, over the course of these long assignments, they are merely 'functioning' and are no longer able to perform their work with the same concentration and efficiency as at the beginning. In addition, many seafarers work for months without regular days off or periods of vacation or rest. The combination of constant work pressure and prolonged separation from family and social circles further exacerbates the strain and represents a work situation hardly comparable in Europe.

Well-being and current time on board



INTERPRETATION

Current time on board

The distribution of current time on board shows that most respondents are in the early to mid-stage of their time on board. The largest groups consist of individuals with a time on board of 1 to 3 months (n = 391) and 3 to 6 months (n = 387). Thus, most of the sample comprises individuals who have been on board for a maximum of six months.

A smaller group has a very short time on board of no more than one month (n = 174), while those with a longer time on board of 6 to 10 months account for n = 194.

Extremely long periods on board, however, play no big role in this sample, as only n = 3 reported having been on board for 11 months or longer. In addition, no data was available for 50 seafarers. The results suggest that the sample consists predominantly of individuals who are still in an early phase of their time at sea. This could indicate that experiences, stressors, or adjustment processes are primarily captured from the perspective of individuals with shorter to medium periods at sea, while long-term experiences are only represented to a limited extent.

Shore leave: More than just a break from work

By Pastor Amelito Bag-o (Staff Member of the Ecumenical Service of the North Church and Port Chaplain for Seafarer Support at the Port of Hamburg)

As a port chaplain, I have come to realize how important shore leave is for seafarers. Life aboard a ship often follows a monotonous daily routine—shuttling between the cabin, the workplace, and the mess hall. After long weeks or months at sea, this routine can gradually begin to feel like imprisonment. Going ashore is therefore more than just a break from work; it is a moment of freedom, renewal, and dignity.

The pressure on board can become overwhelming due to long working hours, homesickness, exhaustion, and isolation from family and society. Going ashore allows them to take a deep breath, find peace, and reconnect with life outside the ship. It also helps them detach their thoughts and feelings, even if only for a short time, from the onboard routine. This brief change of scenery can refresh their minds and give them new strength before they return to their duties. Even a simple walk, a heartfelt conversation, attending a worship service, or a peaceful moment ashore can remind them that they are valued not only as workers but also as people created in the image of God.

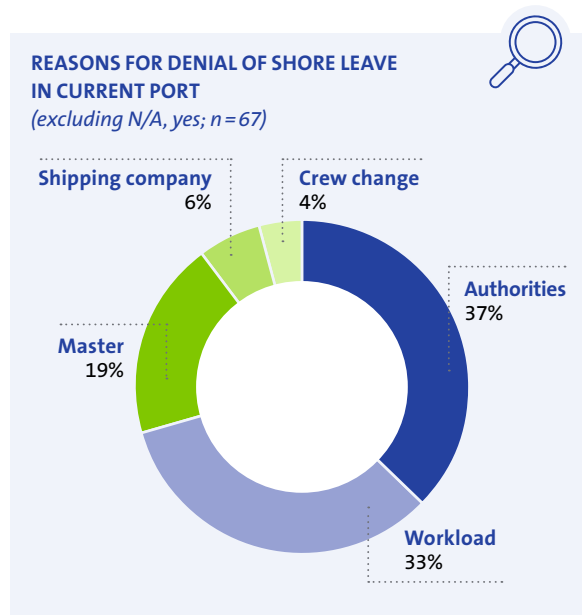
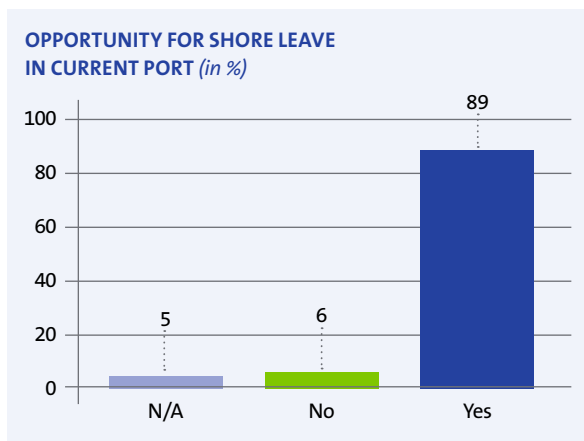
Although many seafarers want to have shore leave, limited port calls and a tight schedule often prevent them from going ashore. As a chaplain, I try to meet them where they are by offering my presence, a listening ear, prayers, and practical support. Going ashore is not a privilege, but a recognition of the dignity, humanity, and well-being of seafarers.

**SPOT
LIGHT**



Pastor Amelito Bag-o (left) during his pastoral work onboard and at the seafarers' club Duckdalben in the port of Hamburg

Shore leave in current port



INTERPRETATION

Opportunity to go ashore at the current port

The results show that, in principle, most respondents could go ashore at their current port. In total, n = 1,075 people stated that going ashore was possible, while only n = 67 reported having no opportunity to do so. No information was available for 57 seafarers.

The data suggests that shore leave is generally permitted and that restrictions affect only a small proportion of respondents. At the same time, the number of people without the possibility of shore leave indicates that structural or organizational obstacles may still exist.

Reasons for the current denial of shore leave

A closer examination of the reasons for denying shore leave shows that regulatory requirements (n = 25) were cited most frequently. The workload on board is also of significant importance, cited as a cause by 22 seafarers. Decisions by the master were mentioned by n = 13, while shipping company regulations (n = 4) and crew changes (n = 3) played only a minor role. The results suggest that restrictions on shore leave are primarily attributable to administrative, safety-related, and organizational conditions. In our experience, the application of the ISPS Code or

local safety regulations, long distances within port facilities, limited accessibility of terminals, and a lack of knowledge of local conditions play a significant role in this regard.

In principle, work organization on board should be structured in such a way as to enable seafarers to go ashore. Restrictions must not be used as a means of discipline or indirect sanctions. Even if such cases may occur only sporadically, the data indicates that seafarers' rights to freedom, recreation, and participation are not always guaranteed.

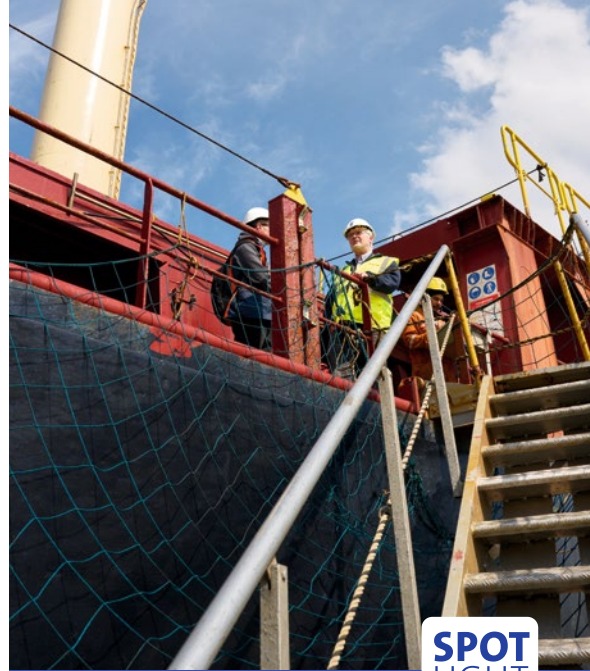
**SPOT
LIGHT**

"The only issues are workload, shift schedules, and other time-consuming procedures onboard, which sometimes prevent seafarers from going ashore."

From the station of the German Seafarers' Mission in Amsterdam

FOCUS ON SHORE LEAVE

Date of last shore leave on current vessel



“Finally some peace and quiet,’ said R. during his visit to Seafarers’ Club, ‘no hustle and bustle, no noise from the engines.’ He is on his fifth voyage as third officer, and this shore leave marks only his second time ashore since then.”

From the station of the German Seafarers’ Mission in Stade

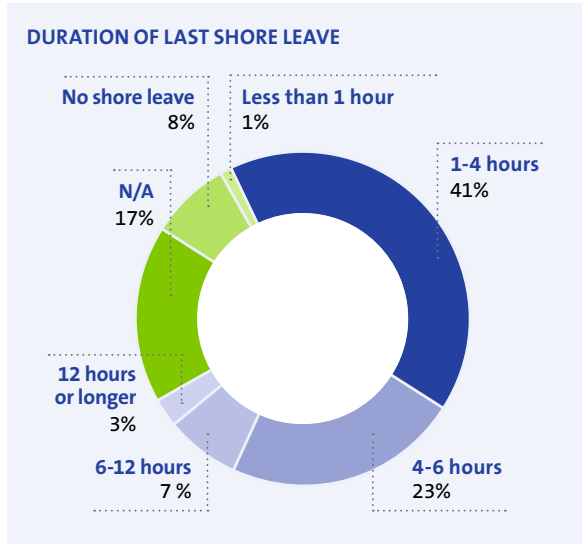
INTERPRETATION

When was your last shore leave on your current vessel?

The results show that most respondents went ashore relatively recently. A total of n = 657 reported having gone ashore within the last month. Another n = 139 reported that their last shore leave was one to two months ago. In contrast, n = 51 stated that they had not had shore leave for two to three months, while n = 53 had not been able to take shore leave for four months or longer. No data was available for 173 seafarers. It is also notable that n = 126 stated they had not yet gone ashore.

In conjunction with the short to medium contract duration, this suggests that these seafarers have only recently been on board and have therefore not yet gone ashore. The median of 1 indicates that, for the majority of respondents, their last shore leave took place within the last month. Nevertheless, 20% of the seafarers surveyed had not been ashore for over 4 weeks, and this is a problem, as the importance of shore leave for seafarers should not be underestimated!

Duration of last shore leave on current vessel



INTERPRETATION

How long was your last shore leave?

The results show that the majority of respondents had a short duration of shore leave. The most common duration reported was 1 to 4 hours (n=494), followed by 4 to 6 hours (n=270). Longer shore leave periods of 6 to 12 hours were reported by n=80, while only n=38 stated that they had been ashore for 12 hours or longer. In addition, n=99 stated that they had not (yet) had any shore leave, and n=17 reported a duration of less than one hour. No data was available for n=201.

The median of 4 hours indicates that the duration of shore leave for the respondents lies in the middle of the distribution at four hours. The results suggest that shore leave is predominantly possible only for very limited periods and is often restricted to a few hours. Longer periods of rest ashore are therefore rather the exception. Our experience is that short shore leave, due to long distances and waiting times, often offers little recreational value and primarily serves to manage necessary daily and communication tasks, while genuine leisure time, social participation, or experiencing the local environment are only possible to a limited extent for many seafarers.



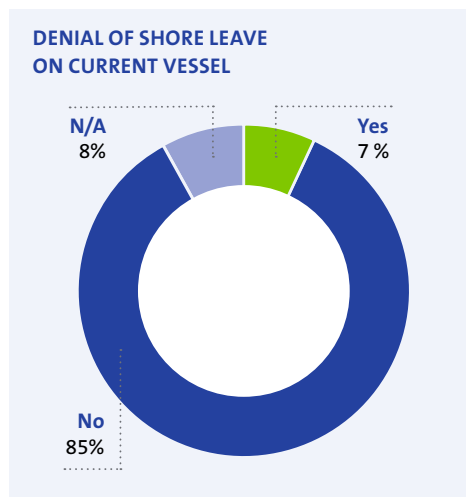
SPOT LIGHT

“When shore leave is possible, it often falls through because of how slow the gate is. For example, if seafarers have five hours of free time but end up spending two hours waiting at the gate, get stuck in traffic on the way there and back, and are under pressure to be back on board on time.”

From the station of the German Seafarers’ Mission in Panama



Denial of shore leave on current vessel



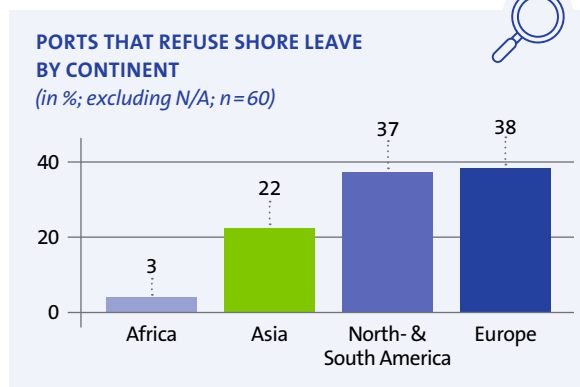
INTERPRETATION

Denial of shore leave

Many respondents did not experience any denial of shore leave on their current voyage (n=1,014). Nevertheless, 84 seafarers reported being denied shore leave, while no information was available for n=101.

Reasons for denial of shore leave

The most common reason cited for the denial was regulatory requirements (n=36), followed by decisions made by the master (n=23). Other causes



included requirements from the shipping company (n=10), a heavy workload on board (n=10), and other reasons (n=5). The results illustrate that refusals to grant shore leave are influenced by both external administrative factors and internal operational decisions.

SPOT LIGHT

“There are several petrochemical terminals in Antwerp where certain security regulations make it difficult for seafarers to leave the terminal. We are working with the port security service and the ITF to find a solution”

From the station of the German Seafarers’ Mission in Antwerp

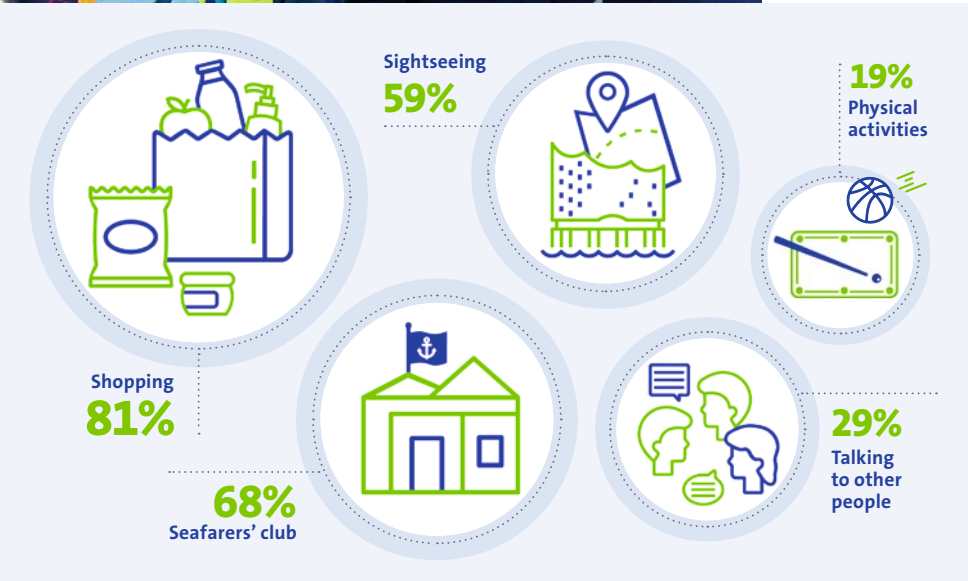
In which ports were shore leaves refused?

Only n=60 respondents answered the question regarding the specific ports where shore leave was denied, so the results are of limited significance. The analysis by continent shows that denials of shore leave were reported particularly in Europe (n=23) and the Americas (n=22), followed by Asia (n=13). Few cases were reported in Africa (n=2). The results suggest that restrictions on shore leave are not a regionally limited phenomenon, but can occur in various areas and, in our experience, also depend on the shipping route being taken.

Preferences for going ashore



Seafarers with GSM employees on shore leave



INTERPRETATION

Preferences during shore leave

Shore leave is primarily used for everyday and social activities. Shopping was the most frequently cited activity (n=971), followed by visiting a seafarers' club (n=812) and sightseeing (n=709). In addition, n=351 stated that they use shore leave to talk to people outside their own crew. Physical activities or sports were mentioned by n=224.

The results illustrate that shore leave serves not only as a form of recreation for many seafarers but also represents an important opportunity to run

daily errands, buy souvenirs for friends and family, maintain social contacts outside the vessel, and gain a temporary break from the work environment on board. In particular, the high importance attributed to seafarers' clubs indicates that these facilities continue to fulfill a central social and supportive role for seafarers. Other activities mentioned, such as eating and drinking (n=12), walking and exercise (n=7), or other activities (n=14), were cited only sporadically and can be interpreted only to a limited extent due to the small number of cases.



GSM employees on a trip with seafarers in Santos, Brazil



Between vessel and city: Experiencing shore leave in Santos

We at the German Seafarers' Mission in Santos (Brazil) often see just how varied shore leave can be here. Because the port is right next to the city, the distances are fortunately short, and seafarers can plan their time ashore however they like. However, a lot depends on the ships' port calls.

We often hear how grateful the seafarers are for our work: "Without the seafarers' mission, shore leave here wouldn't be so easy and well-organized." It's impressive how quickly you can get from the vessel directly into the city, to the beach, or to the mall. Everything is easily accessible and straightforward. When time allows, we take trips to tourist spots, such Emissário Submarino at the end of the beach with its impressive view. Seafarers can often relax well there. Many tell us how much they appreciate this short time away from the vessel and how important such moments are for their motivation. At the same time, we also see challenges: Many have hardly any time ashore or don't get permission at all. That makes our visits on board even more important.

FOCUS ON SHORE LEAVE

Duration of last shore leave by vessel type



SHORE LEAVE DURATION BY VESSEL TYPE					
	No shore leave	<4 hours	>4 hours	N/A	Total
Container	51	232	184	83	550
Tanker	28	68	56	35	187
Bulk	6	63	68	28	165
General Cargo	5	54	34	23	116
Cruise ship	7	42	31	6	86
RoRo	0	39	9	16	64
N/A	2	13	6	10	31
Total	99	511	388	201	1,199

INTERPRETATION

Vessel type and duration of shore leave

There appear to be significant differences between vessel types regarding the duration of the most recent shore leave. On container vessels, the group with shore leave lasting 0 to 4 hours represented the largest category (n=232); however, n=184 also reported shore leave lasting more than four hours. With n=51, container vessels also recorded the highest number of people who had not (yet) gone ashore.

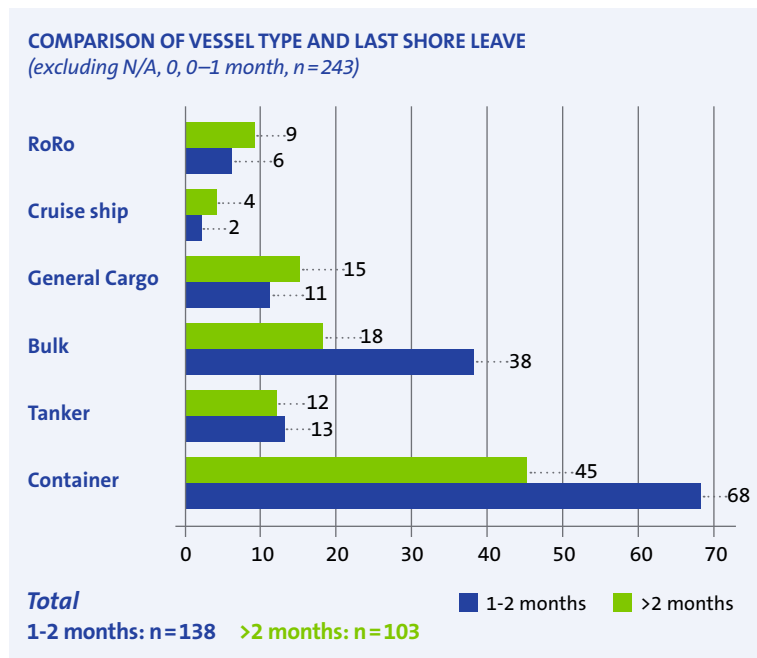
On bulk carriers, longer shore leave periods of more than four hours (n=68) outnumbered shorter stays of 0 to 4 hours (n=63). Similar distributions were observed on tankers and general cargo vessels, although shorter shore leave was more common on

these vessels. On cruise ships, short shore leaves of up to four hours also predominated (n=42), while longer stays were mentioned less frequently (n=31).

The situation on RoRo vessels is striking here, predominantly short shore leave of up to four hours was reported (n=39), while longer shore leave of more than four hours was comparatively rare (n=9). Overall, the results suggest that the type and duration of shore leave are significantly influenced by the vessel type and the associated operational procedures, port times, and work requirements. On vessel types with short port stay, longer periods of rest ashore appear to be only possible to a limited extent.

FOCUS ON SHORE LEAVE

Date of last shore leave by vessel type



INTERPRETATION

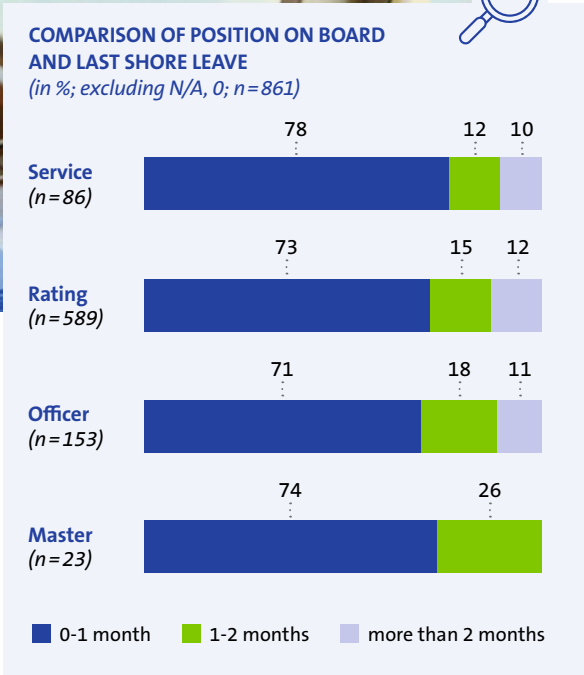
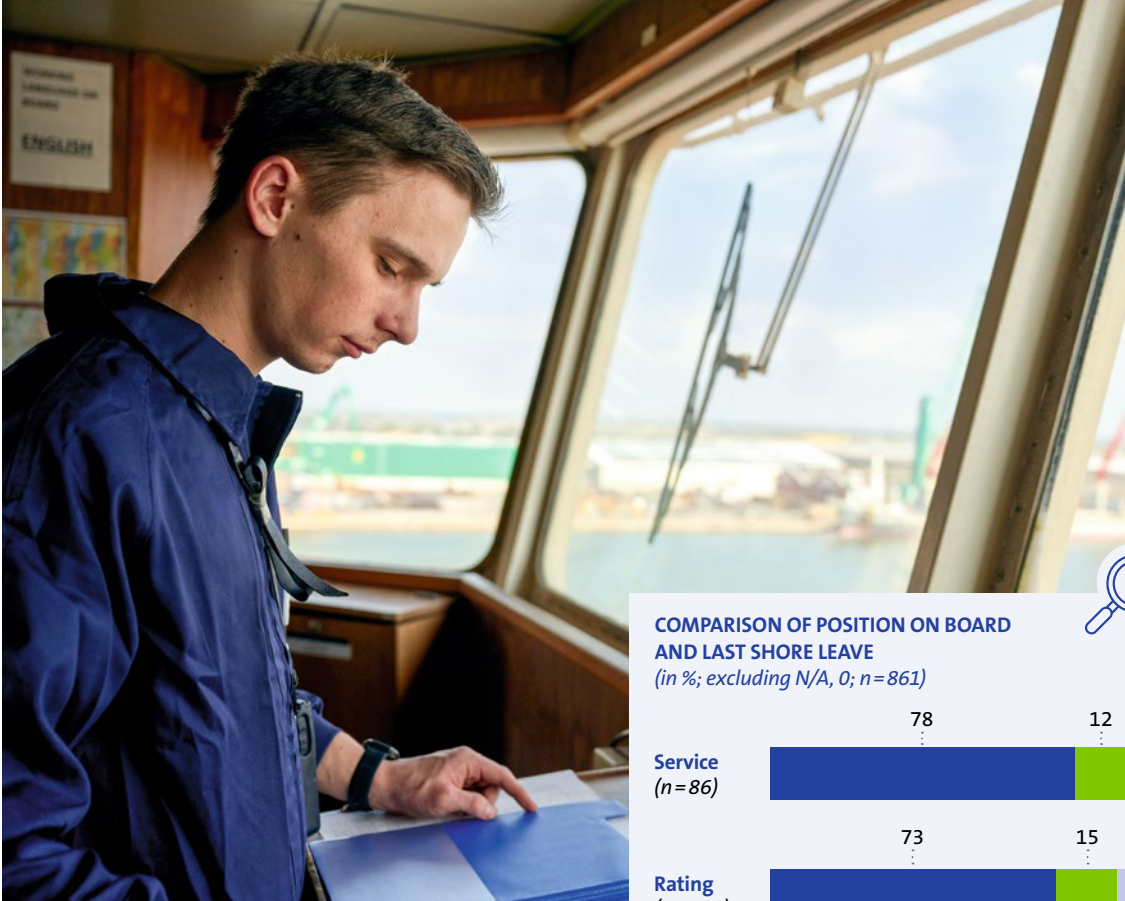
Last shore leave by vessel type

For most vessel types, shore leave took place within the last month. In particular, n=290 people on container vessels reported having shore leave within the past four weeks, followed by bulk carriers (n=90) and tankers (n=98). At the same time, container vessels also recorded the highest number of people (n=63) who had not (yet) gone ashore.

Longer periods without going ashore—exceeding two months—were reported particularly on container vessels (n=45), bulk carriers (n=18), and general

cargo vessels (n=15). On cruise ships, however, all respondents reported having gone ashore within the last few months, with the majority having been ashore within the last month (n=39). The results suggest that the timing of the last shore leave is significantly influenced by the respective vessel type and its operational profile. Longer periods without shore leave appear to occur more frequently, particularly on vessel types with short port calls and a high workload.

Date of last shore leave by position on board



INTERPRETATION

Last shore leave by position on board

In all positions on board, the most recent shore leave occurred predominantly within the past month. This was particularly evident among rating, of whom n=429 reported shore leave within the last four weeks. Recent shore leave was also the norm among officers (n = 109) and service staff (n = 75).

However, differences were observed between the positions on board. Proportionally, masters and service staff most frequently went ashore within 0 to 1 month, while rating members and officers more often reported longer periods without going ashore. Among rating, there was both the highest proportion of shore leave within the past month and a high proportion of individuals who had gone more than two months without shore leave. Longer

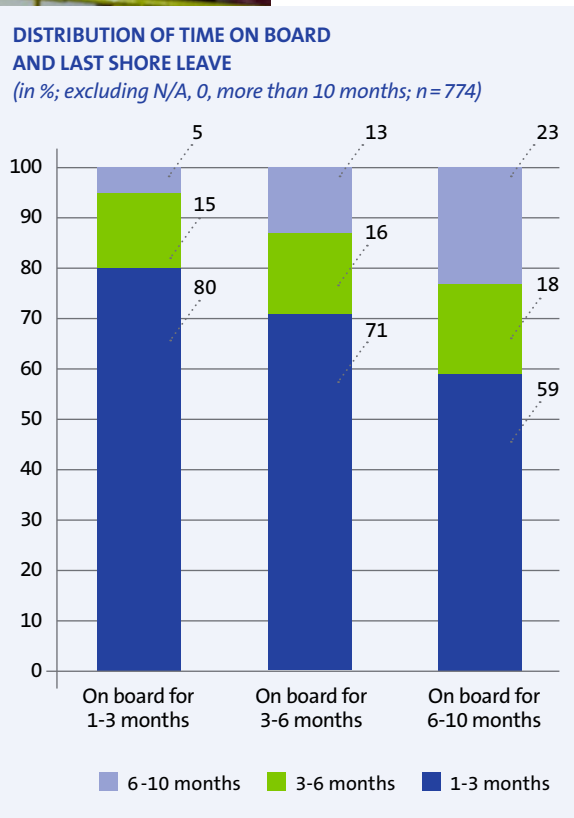
periods without shore leave were reported particularly by rating members (n=70), followed by officers (n=17) and service staff (n=10). In addition, 76 ratings and 39 officers reported that they had not yet had any shore leave on their current ship. No master reported a period of more than two months without shore leave. Overall, the results point to rank-specific differences.

FOCUS ON SHORE LEAVE

Time on board and date of last shore leave



TIME ON BOARD AND DATE OF LAST SHORE LEAVE						
	0	<1 month	1-2 months	>2 months	N/A	Total
<1 month	43	80	7	8	36	174
1-3 months	59	231	44	15	42	391
3-6 months	17	232	52	41	45	387
6-10 months	3	94	28	37	32	194
>10 months	0	1	2	0	0	3
N/A	4	19	6	3	18	50
Total	126	657	139	104	173	1,199



INTERPRETATION

Time on board and date of last shore leave

There appears to be a correlation between the length of time spent on board and the date of the last shore leave. Seafarers who had been on board for 1 to 3 months (n=231) and 3 to 6 months (n=232) were most likely to report having gone ashore within the last month. Seafarers with very short time on board were more likely to report not having gone ashore yet, which is likely due to the short time since they embarked.

At the same time, individuals with longer periods at sea—specifically those who had been at sea for more than two months—reported going ashore less frequently. This applies primarily to seafarers who had been at sea for 3 to 6 months (n=41) and 6 to 10

months (n=37). The fact that seafarers can go ashore less and less frequently as their time at sea progresses represents a serious problem. The increasing exhaustion or fatigue reported by many seafarers appears to be accompanied by a lack of motivation and a diminishing ability to go ashore at all. This is particularly critical, as shore leave is described by most seafarers as essential for their physical, psychological, mental, emotional, and social well-being.

Time on board and duration of shore leave



TIME ON BOARD AND DURATION OF LAST SHORE LEAVE

	0	<4 hours	>4 hours	N/A	Total
<1 month	39	65	35	35	174
1-3 months	46	157	118	70	391
3-6 months	10	178	148	51	387
6-10 months	2	91	71	30	194
>10 months	0	1	1	1	3
N/A	2	19	15	14	50
Total	99	511	388	201	1,199

INTERPRETATION

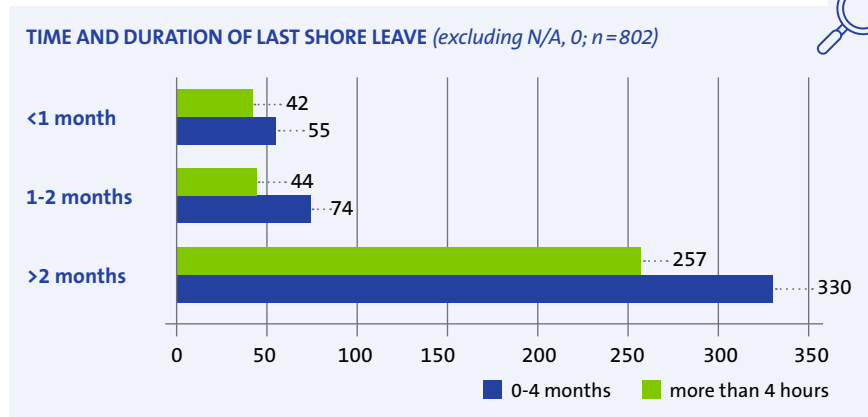
Time on board and duration of last shore leave

Regarding the duration of the last shore leave, differences emerge based on time on board. Seafarers who had been on board for 1 to 3 months (n=118) and 3 to 6 months (n=148) frequently reported shore leaves lasting more than four hours. At the same time, shorter shore leaves of up to four hours were more common overall, particularly among those with shorter periods on board.

It is also noteworthy that seafarers with less than one month on board often had not (yet) had a shore leave (n=39). As time on board increases, the likeli-

hood of longer shore leaves appears to rise slightly, although even during longer stays on board, short shore leaves predominate. Overall, the results illustrate that both the timing and duration of shore leave are closely related to the time spent on board thus far, and that longer periods of rest are not equally guaranteed for all seafarers. Our experiences shows that shore leave lasting less than four hours offers little opportunity for rest and must be significantly longer, especially during longer stays on board.

Last shore leave and duration of shore leave



INTERPRETATION

Time and duration of last shore leave

There is a clear correlation between the timing of the last shore leave and its duration. Individuals who had shore leave within the last month predominantly reported shore leaves lasting between 0 and 4 hours (n=330) or more than four hours (n=257). Even among seafarers whose last shore leave was one to two months ago, shorter shore leaves of up to four hours were the most common (n=74), while n=44 reported longer stays of more than four hours. At the same time, it is evident that even for shore leave that occurred more than two months ago, the majority reported short stays of no more than four hours (n=55), while only n=42 reported longer shore leave of more than four hours.

The data suggest that, overall, shore leave is often limited in duration, and longer periods of rest tend to be less common. Particularly among seafarers whose last shore leave occurred some time ago, a pattern of infrequent and, at the same time, short shore leaves appear to emerge. This may indicate limited opportunities for rest and leisure and, in our experience, can be detrimental to health and concentration—and thus, not least, poses a problem for occupational safety on board.

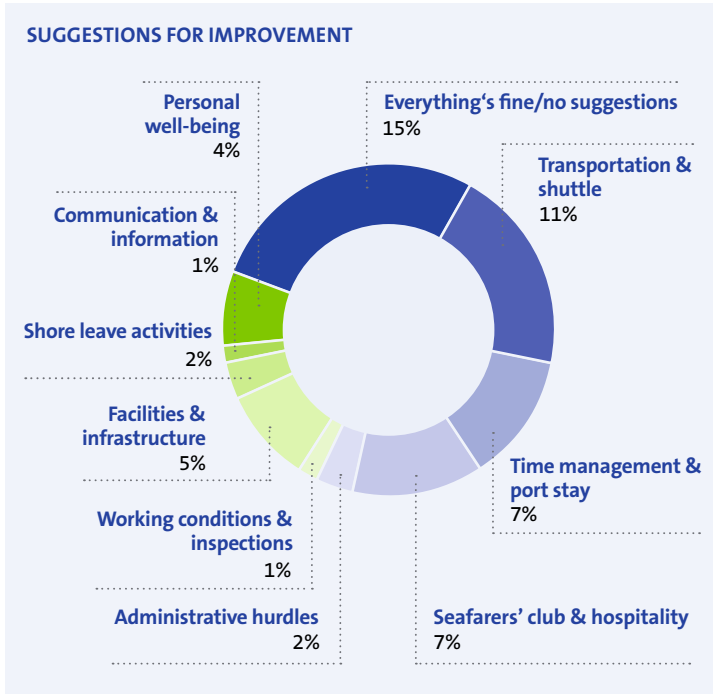
Focus on shore leave— Summary

Shore leave is generally possible for many seafarers and usually takes place within the past four weeks. Nevertheless, 84 seafarers reported being denied shore leave; the main reasons were regulatory requirements, workload, and decisions by master or shipping company. Shore leave was often brief: most visits lasted only 1 to 4 hours, with longer periods of rest remaining the exception. Many seafarers used shore leave primarily for shopping, socializing, and visiting seafarer’s clubs. Differences were observed depending on vessel type, position on board and time on board. Lower-ranking crew members and seafarers with longer periods on board reported restricted or no shore leave more frequently.

Overall, the results suggest that limited opportunities for shore leave could have negative effects on seafarers’ rest, health, and ability to work, and that these are not merely isolated cases but point to structural and organizational shortcomings. These correlations will be examined in greater depth in the following chapter by considering possible approaches for improvement from the perspective of those with the most practical experience, the seafarers themselves.

IMPROVING SHORE LEAVE

Suggestions for improving shore leave



55% of respondents answered this question.



SPOT LIGHT

“Shore leave is limited, since the rural area here always requires public transportation. All activities are centered around our club.”

From the station of the German Seafarers' Mission in Sassnitz

INTERPRETATION

Suggestions for improvement from seafarers

The seafarers' suggestions for improvement focus primarily on practical and organizational aspects of shore leave. Improvements around transportation and shuttles were mentioned most frequently (n=135). Time management and port lay times (n=85) were also frequently discussed, as was the importance of seafarers' clubs and hospitality services (n=78). Other suggestions concerned provisions and infrastructure in the ports (n=56) as well as aspects of personal well-being (n=50).

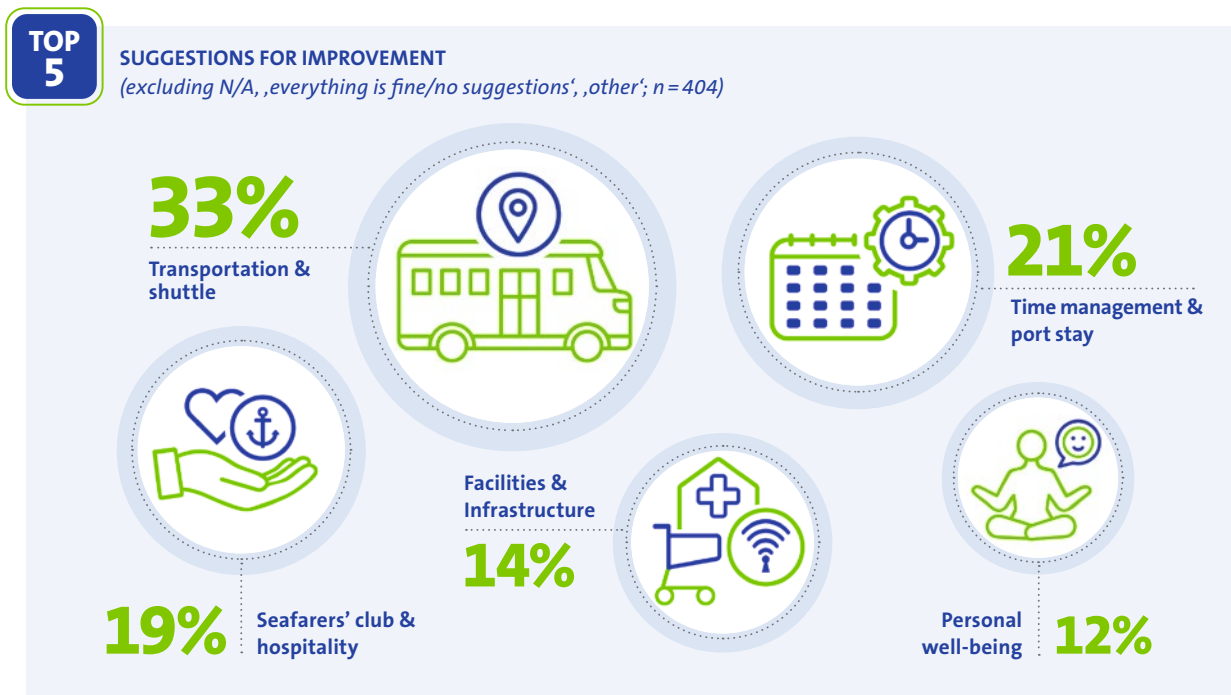
Administrative hurdles (n=23), shore leave activities (n=18), communication and information (n=17), and working conditions and inspections (n=12) were

mentioned less frequently. At the same time, n=181 stated that they had no suggestions for improvement or that they found the current situation satisfactory. No information was available for n=544.

Overall, it can be assumed that many of the perceived problems lie not only in basic access to shore leave but in its practical implementation. Transportation options, available time slots, and supportive social infrastructure appear to be decisive factors in whether seafarers can actually perceive shore leave as restorative and meaningful.

IMPROVING SHORE LEAVE

The TOP 5 suggestions for improvement



More than **40%** of the respondents answered the question.



INTERPRETATION

The TOP 5 suggestions for improvement

Of the 1,199 seafarers surveyed, n=474 made specific suggestions for improving shore leave. This means that a significant portion of the respondents actively contributed ideas for improvement, while no usable information was available for n=725.

Improvements in transportation and shuttle services were mentioned most frequently (n=135). This points to a well-known problem: security regulations such as the ISPS Code, measures to combat crime and smuggling, and long distances within modern port facilities make access to shore leave difficult in many places. However, experience from ports such as Hamburg and Bremerhaven shows that practical solutions are possible through effective cooperation between authorities, terminals, shipping companies, and seafarers' missions. Shuttle services and a good understanding of local port structures appear to be crucial in this regard.

Other frequently mentioned topics were time management and port stay (n=85). The responses make it clear that short ports stay, and heavy workloads can significantly limit shore leave—without sufficient time, shore leave is impossible. References to seafarers' clubs and hospitality services were also significant (n=78). In addition, respondents cited facilities and infrastructure (n=56) as well as aspects of personal well-being (n=50) as relevant areas for improvement.

Overall, it can be said that seafarers would primarily like to see improvements in specific practical conditions so that they can make meaningful and restorative use of shore leave.

Suggestions for improving shore leave by position on board



SUGGESTIONS BY POSITION ON BOARD						
	Master	Rating	Officer	Service	N/A	Total
Transportation & shuttle	3	91	28	11	2	135
Time management & port stay	0	43	30	5	7	85
Seafarer's club & hospitality	0	59	11	7	1	78
Administrative hurdles	1	12	9	1	0	23
Working conditions & inspections	1	4	7	0	0	12
Facilities & infrastructure	1	38	9	7	1	56
Activities on shore	0	15	3	0	0	18
Communication & information	0	11	4	1	1	17
Personal well-being	1	39	5	3	2	50
Everything's fine/no suggestions	6	111	33	21	10	181
N/A	15	347	81	69	32	544
Total	28	770	220	125	56	1,199

INTERPRETATION

Comparison of suggestions by position on board

There appear to be significant differences between the positions on board regarding suggestions for improving shore leave. As expected, most suggestions come from ratings, which also constitute the largest group of respondents. Improvements in the areas of transportation and shuttles were mentioned particularly frequently (n=91), followed by seafarers' club and hospitality offerings (n=59), time management and port stay (n=43), and personal well-being (n=39). Facilities and infrastructure also play an important role for ratings (n=38).

Officers also frequently mentioned transportation and shuttles (n=28) as well as time management and port stay (n=30). In addition, administrative hurdles (n=9), facilities and infrastructure (n=9), and working conditions and inspections (n=7) were mentioned with relatively high frequency.

In the service sector, transportation issues (n=11) as well as seafarers' club and supply-related topics (n=7 each) were the focus. It is striking that masters, overall, made only a few suggestions for improvement and relatively frequently stated that they saw no need for change (n=6).

Overall, the results make it clear that practical conditions such as transportation options, available time slots, and social infrastructure are perceived across all ranks as central requirements for a functional and restful shore leave.

SPOT LIGHT

“The agencies have a monopoly on shore passes here, since they apply for shore leave on behalf of the seafarers. In return, they often charge fees that can now amount to as much as 300 U.S. dollars. The seafarers would like to go ashore, but they don't want to pay the high fees—partly so as not to support the system ('next time, they will charge even more').”

From the station of the German Seafarers' Mission in Panama



OUTLOOK

A french breakfast for a tanker crew on International Seafarers' Day 2024

For seafarers, shore leave is more than just a recreational opportunity. It is an important component of decent working conditions and crucial for rest, health, and social participation; since ancient times, it has been a fundamental right for people who work at sea.

This survey of over a thousand seafarers has shown that shore leave is generally available on a frequent basis. At the same time, it highlights how severely its actual use is restricted by short port calls, heavy workloads, safety regulations, or a lack of transportation options.

Modern port infrastructure in particular—with long distances and tight schedules—makes it difficult for many seafarers to even go ashore in a meaningful way. Often, there is little time left for rest, socializing, or simple everyday errands. The seafarers' statements make it clear that such restricted shore leave not only takes a toll on personal well-being and health but can also have long-term effects on motivation, concentration, and safety on board.



*Seafarers during the survey
at a seafarers' club*



METHODOLOGY

Survey and dataset

The data for this analysis were collected through a standardized written survey administered during face-to-face interviews conducted over a 14-day period at 16 locations of the German Seafarers' Mission worldwide. A total of 1,309 questionnaires were completed. After digitization using OCR software, including manual visual inspection and a multi-step data cleaning process—a final dataset (n=1,199) remained, which served as the basis for further analysis. Incomplete or unevaluable cases were excluded according to established criteria to ensure data quality.

Data cleaning and exclusion criteria

As part of the data cleaning process, questionnaires with a response rate of less than 70% were not included in the analysis. In a subsequent step, cases were removed that, due to the type of vessel, did not fall within the scope of the MLC, 2006, including research vessels and specialized vessels for offshore installations.

Analysis method

The analysis was initially conducted unidimensional at the level of individual questions to illustrate key distributions and trends. Subsequently, selected variables were compared with one another to reveal potential correlations and group-specific differences. In this second step, some categories were grouped together to clarify distributions along the described criteria. The analysis of open-ended responses was supplemented by categorizing them into standardized codes.

Limitations of the analysis

The interpretation of the results considers the existing data structure as well as possible limitations, such as missing information, small sample sizes in individual subgroups, or the subjectivity of individual assessments. Furthermore, it is important to note the limited international scope of the available data. Since only 9% of the questionnaires were collected in non-European countries, the results are eurocentric in nature.

GLOSSARY

6/6 SHIFT

A shift system used in the maritime industry consisting of six hours of work followed by six hours of rest. It is now found only on smaller vessels, but can disrupt sleep patterns, recovery, and health.

CREWING AGENCIES

Also known as manning agencies. They place seafarers with shipping companies and handle, among other things, contracts, visas, medical examinations, and crew changes

FAL CONVENTION

An international convention of the IMO aimed at simplifying and standardizing formal procedures in international maritime transport to make port calls more efficient.

FLAG STATE

The country under whose flag a ship is registered. It is responsible for ensuring compliance with legal, safety-related, and labor law regulations.

FLAGS OF CONVENIENCE (FoC)

The registration of a vessel in countries with particularly favorable tax, labor law, or regulatory conditions, is often used to reduce costs.

ISPS Code

The International Ship and Port Facility Security Code is an international set of security regulations established by the IMO to ensure maritime security. It specifies security measures for vessels, port facilities, and shipping companies, and mandates that access for seafarers must be guaranteed.

ITF

The International Transport Workers' Federation is a global trade union federation that advocates for the rights and working conditions of seafarers.

MLC, 2006

The ILO's Maritime Labor Convention establishes international minimum standards for seafarers' working and living conditions and is considered the 'bill of rights for Seafarers'.

RoRo

Roll-on/Roll-off vessels transport vehicles and rolling cargo that can be driven directly onto the vessel. This shortens loading times and simplifies port operations.

SEA BLINDNESS

Referring to the low level of public and political awareness of maritime issues, as well as the importance of maritime shipping and the work of seafarers.

SHORE PASS

An official permit allowing seafarers to go ashore for a limited time during a port call. In some countries, this involves additional fees.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Survey 2026_DSM



SHORE LEAVE FOR SEAFARERS

CONDUCTING THE SURVEY: ONBOARD | ASHORE

We are employees and volunteers of the German Seamen's Mission, committed to protecting the dignity of seafarers. In our work, we often find that many do not have the chance to go ashore. We want to support you and help you exercise your legal rights. The information you provide is voluntary, anonymous, and used for scientific purposes; only results without personal data are published. Each of you is important to us. You are experts in your field – please support us.

1. Type of your vessel?	<input type="checkbox"/> Container Ship <input type="checkbox"/> Tanker <input type="checkbox"/> Bulk Cargo <input type="checkbox"/> Cruise Ship <input type="checkbox"/> General Cargo Other: _____
2. Under which flag does the ship you work on sail?	
3. How old are you?	<input type="checkbox"/> 16 – 18 <input type="checkbox"/> 31 – 50 <input type="checkbox"/> 19 – 30 <input type="checkbox"/> > 50
4. What is your gender?	<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Non-binary <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> prefer not to say
5. What is your rank?	
6. What is your nationality?	
7. How long is your contract in total?	_____ months
8. How long are you on board now?	_____ months
9. How are you feeling?	
10. Is there a possibility of shore leave in current port?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes No, because of instructions/ requirements of: <input type="checkbox"/> Master <input type="checkbox"/> Shipping company <input type="checkbox"/> Authorities Other: _____
11. When was your last shore leave on this vessel?	_____ months ago
12. How long was this last shore leave?	_____ hours
13. Was there any shore leave on this vessel that you were denied?	<input type="checkbox"/> No Yes, because of instructions/ requirements of: <input type="checkbox"/> Master <input type="checkbox"/> Shipping company <input type="checkbox"/> Authorities Other: _____
14. Please only answer if your answer to question 13 was yes: Which are ports, where shore leave was denied?	
15. What do you prefer to do on shore leave? (multiple entries possible)	<input type="checkbox"/> Shopping <input type="checkbox"/> Sightseeing <input type="checkbox"/> Physical activities like sports <input type="checkbox"/> Talking to other people <input type="checkbox"/> Seafarers club Other: _____
16. What could be done to improve shore leave?	

Thank you very much for responding to the survey. Keep safe & all the best!

WHAT COULD BE DONE TO IMPROVE SHORE LEAVE?

Selected responses from the seafarers surveyed

- ” Free car service in every port =).
- ” Hopefully, other countries will not asked for fees for shore pass.
- ” Nothing more, your service is already at best.
- ” Time management on job order so that everyone will have a chance to go shore.
- ” Keep support for shore leave.
- ” I’m very satisfied with the seamen center.
- ” Early notice from ship, updated contact details.
- ” More bus or taxi for crew because sometimes nothing.
☺ Danke =)
- ” Access phones and the internet to contact family.
- ” Frequent visits to the ship by Seamans Mission.
- ” Longer ports stays, more personnel onboard.
- ” Very much appreciated for the free service.
- ” There should be database available online to seafarers to check whether shore leave available to particular ports (mostly asian ports). Because master sometimes says ‘No shore leave’ and we have no option to verify that.
- ” Good communication.
- ” Put the port close to the beach ☺.
- ” 1. Take off 6on/6off please. It is exhausting.
2. Reduce shore pass costs.
3. Provide free shuttle service (don’t make shore leaves into business).