

COVID-19 briefing

3 June 2020

Seafarers and movement of goods

This briefing note is both a call for support for seafarers stranded at sea and outlines the growing humanitarian and economic crises in the maritime industry.

Context

90% of global trade is moved by maritime transport and G20 Governments, at their emergency meeting in March 2020, committed to minimizing disruptions to trade and global supply chains, and have identified the need to prioritize keeping air and sea logistics networks open and functioning efficiently.

The industry is dependent on 2 million seafarers operating the merchant ships. Contractual arrangements in line with maritime regulation requires seafarers and crew to change vessels every month. As a result of COVID-19 and various lockdown restrictions and border closures, the crew changes have not happened. The logistics networks will risk suffering interruptions and seafarers health is put at risk if replacement ship crews are unavailable for duty due to the lack of available flights and other restrictions affecting the travel and movement of ship crews.

The International Maritime Organisation has called for a set of protocols and recommendations to Member States about measures to facilitate ship crew changes in seaports during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Shipping companies and airlines are cooperating to meet this priority by ensuring that reliable operations are able to continue throughout the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

What exactly is the problem?

Currently there are 200,000 seafarers who have completed their contracts but due to the pandemic are prevented from returning home. They are having to extend their service on board ships after many months at sea, unable to be replaced after long tours of duty or be repatriated via aircraft to their home countries.

Apart from the need for shipping companies to comply with international regulations and contractual obligations, service periods on board ships cannot be extended indefinitely due to the dangerous impacts this has for the well-being of ship crew and, most importantly, safe ship operations. If not addressed the impact will likely be interrupted logistics operations.

International remedy and redress for seafarers

Both the International Maritime Organisation and the Internal Labour Organisation are supporting the maritime industry protocols with a call for governments to act on them. The protocol covers:

- Protocols for joining a ship (From a seafarer's place of ordinary residence in one country via aircraft to join a ship in a seaport in another country), and
- Protocols for leaving a ship and repatriation (From a ship in a seaport in one country via aircraft to a seafarer's place of ordinary residence in another country)

What you can do

- 1) Support a letter from ETI to the UN General Secretary highlighting the reliance of ETI Company members on a stable and functional supply chain that adheres to the UN Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights.
- 2) Participate in a joint ITF and ETI briefing webinar
- 3) Commit to cascading the maritime protocols to suppliers and freight operators in sourcing or production countries.
- 4) Call on country industry associations and supplier networks to advocate with local authorities to implement the industry protocols.
- 5) Include the logistics industry in your supply chain due diligence mapping
- 6) Join the ETI Podio logistics page for additional information, feedback and questions

Resources

[Letters from ETI, IMO & ITF in support of this action](#)

[ETI statement on the International Maritime Organisation \(IMO\) protocols for treatment of seafarers during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)