

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

The Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) is a leading alliance of companies, trade unions and NGOs that promotes respect for workers' rights around the globe. Our approach to doing business responsibly in complex global supply chains is closely based on the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which set out the Protect, Respect and Remedy framework. States should protect human rights; businesses should respect those rights; and both should work to provide remedy when rights are violated.

Context

Currently there are 200,000 seafarers who have completed their contracts but due to the COVID-19 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.

International maritime protocols

We welcome and support the IMO protocols that aims to protect seafarers during the pandemic which will keep the air and sea logistics networks open and functioning. As countries start to recover and reopen industry the workers moving freight by sea play a vital role in the economic recovery.

Both the International Maritime Organisation, the International Labour Organisation and the International Transport Workers' federation (ITF) 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)

Action on remedy and redress

To prevent this growing humanitarian and economic crises, we are working with ETI members to support the call from the IMO, ILO and the ITF to cascade the Protocols to all supplier and logistic networks in their supply chain. We also ask that local industry associations and business networks in

producing or sourcing countries call on their governments and associated authorities to implement to Protocols for seafarers.

Resources

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

[ETI briefing note: Seafarers and movement of goods](#)