

# PORT BASED WELFARE SERVICES FOR SEAFARERS

## Summary Report

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**The arguments and views expressed in this report are the author's and not necessarily those of either the ITF Seafarers' Trust or the Seafarers International Research Centre.**



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## Foreword

For many years the ITF Seafarers Trust has been providing funds for seafarers welfare. In 2006 the Trust celebrated 25 years of operation, £125 million spent on seafarers welfare in 91 different countries. These union based funds, set up under my predecessor Harold Lewis, have enabled seafarers to enjoy their time in port, through the local contacts of missions, unions and other welfare providers. The Seafarers Trust sees itself as part of a network of welfare provision for seafarers, and recognises the immense effort and resources put into this from many other organisations.

It has been an abiding concern that traditional port based welfare services (i.e. seafarers centres) reach only a small proportion of active seafarers. Historically, on average, Trust sponsored port based facilities reach two seafarers per ship calling in the port. The Trust has made efforts to improve welfare provision for as large a number of seafarers as possible by engaging in projects with a global reach, such as encouraging communication facilities on board ship (Crewcall), or through the freephone service of the International Seafarers Assistance Network (ISAN). This desire is fuelled by our desire to improve conditions of life for the 1.2 million seafarers in the world.

In response to feedback we have been receiving from unions and welfare agencies, grant making for the Trust has switched from funding for major building projects to an emphasis upon small, mobile work coupled with intensive ship visiting. While we recognise that every port is different, we recognise that welfare services in any one port need to be well coordinated, ideally within the port security zone, providing a basic range of services with a particular emphasis on transport and communication facilities. The welfare provisions of the new Maritime Labour Convention will also need to be implemented.

In February 2006 the Trustees of the ITF Seafarers Trust decided to commission research which will help the Trust to target grants more effectively. This report is the outcome of research carried out independently of existing welfare





networks, in the hope that it provides a true and representative picture of the current needs of working seafarers in a post-ISPS world.

We hope that everyone in the maritime welfare community will find this a useful tool in determining areas of greatest need.

**David Cockroft**

General Secretary of the ITF

Secretary to the Trust





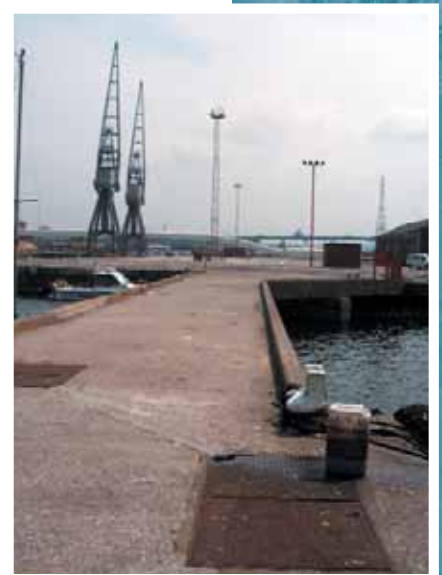
## Preface

This report is based on the findings of a research project funded by the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) Seafarers' Trust. The project was started in April 2006 and finalised in March 2007.

The report is organised by themes, with each section covering a different aspect of welfare services and facilities for seafarers, including: port based welfare services and the changes in them over the last 10 years; contacts with seafarers' welfare workers; usage of seafarer centres; usage of port based facilities; communication with family and friends whilst on board; shore-leave; alternative seafarer welfare provisions; on board welfare provisions; spiritual needs of seafarers; how seafarers welfare could be improved; and company policies on seafarers' welfare.

This is a summary report and it contains the main findings of the study. It provides simple descriptive statistics supported by first person accounts. The full research results are available on request from the ITF Seafarers' Trust.






Our main thanks are due to those who responded to our questionnaires. We are also indebted to the seafarers and shipping and ship management company representatives who gave their time to answer our semi-structured interview questions. In compliance with our promise and the wishes of some of them, they remain anonymous.






## Executive summary


### Port based welfare services and changes over the last 10 years

-  In comparison with another major survey carried out over 10 years ago in 1996 by the research agency MORI, the opinions of seafarers in relation to the most important port-based welfare services have changed.
-  As in the 1996 MORI Survey, port-based welfare services such as transport to shops and town, and international telephone facilities are very important for seafarers. In fact, over the 10 years, the importance of these services for seafarers has increased.
-  Other port based services which were not listed in the MORI survey, such as transport to a seafarers' centre, availability of cheap international phone cards and internet access are also regarded by seafarers as being important.
-  Availability of services like a port based medical clinic and personal counselling services have been regarded as more important in comparison to the 1996 MORI survey.
-  The most important changes occurred in relation to the need for a reading room/library; video/book exchange; organised sightseeing; meeting local people; sport facilities; money exchange; and onshore accommodation. In comparison with the 1996 survey the importance of these services for seafarers has declined considerably. This major shift reflects the changes in the maritime industry and basic priorities of seafarers with a limited time in port.

### Contact with seafarer welfare workers coming from seafarers' centres or missions

-  Seventy-two per cent of the seafarers said that they have not seen a seafarers' welfare worker aboard their ship during their current contract. Only six per cent said that they saw a ship visitor during the previous week; 13 per cent saw one during the previous month and 9 per cent over a month ago.



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- ⑨ Crew members from the galley have reported seeing seafarers' welfare workers more than any other department. Crew members working aboard short sea vessels and trading around Western Europe, Northern America and Japan are more likely to see a welfare worker.
  - ⑨ The majority of the seafarers said that it would be good to have contact with a seafarers' welfare worker. The main reasons for the importance of contact included obtaining information about the port and the local area; getting news updates from their home country; personal counselling and talking about spiritual and personal needs.
  - ⑨ Overall a low level of satisfaction has been reported in relation to seafarers' welfare workers and their services. Most seafarers expressed appreciation about receiving magazines and other materials but their expectations and welfare needs exceeded this sort of service.

### **Seafarer centres (buildings dedicated to seafarers' welfare in port or close to the port)**

- ⑨ According to 58 per cent of the seafarers it is important to have a seafarers' centre in the ports that they visit.
- ⑨ An ideal seafarer centre is described as being within the port area with free transport access. Free transport has particular importance for seafarers as many of them emphasised that it is dangerous to walk within the port areas (especially in container ports) and ports are increasingly divided into different terminals. Access on foot between them is getting increasingly difficult due to security and the ISPS Code.
- ⑨ Seafarer centres in UK ports and other parts of Western Europe and North America are regarded by seafarers as the best ones. The main reason for these seafarer centres being the best included easy access and free transport.
- ⑨ Further analyses of the best seafarer centres named by seafarers showed that these seafarer centres are ecumenical seafarer centres.
- ⑨ The worst seafarer centres named by seafarers were mainly located in the Black Sea region and Indian sub-continent. Reasons for these being the



worst ones included, not being safe, being far away and lack of any services.

- ④ In general, over the years seafarers have experienced a decline in the quality of services provided by the seafarer centres.
- ④ Seafarers are increasingly using commercial 'seafarer centres' such as shops or karaoke bars and other bars marketed by local entrepreneurs as seafarer centres.

### **About the facilities within the ports that seafarers visit (independent of any seafarer centre)**

- ④ When the seafarers were asked to name the ports with the best facilities they have visited during their current contracts, they mainly mentioned ports in Western Europe; North America; Australia and Japan as well as Hong Kong and Singapore. Reasons for facilities in these ports being the best were listed as: availability of phone boxes within the port area; free transport / shuttle bus; easy access to town centre; ease of communication with port workers for local information.
- ④ According to seafarers' responses the ports with the worst facilities are located in Africa, Eastern Europe; Latin America and the Indian Sub-Continent. The reasons given for facilities in these ports being thought poor were listed mainly as lack of services (i.e. transport, communication) safety, and the lack of local information. However, seafarers have also emphasised that these regions are economically poor and it would be unfair to expect too much.
- ④ During the in-depth interviews with seafarers, in relation to the ports that they visit, it became clear that many seafarers lacked basic information about the port facilities, including the port's proximity to residential areas or shops, and also information about the availability or location of services, including transport, telephone and internet.

## Communication with family and friends whilst on board

- ⑨ Seven out of 10 seafarers said that it was important for them to have access to e-mail in ports. However, only 16 per cent of the seafarers reported that they have access to on board e-mail facilities. This was as low as 3 per cent for the ratings.
- ⑨ All the vessels that seafarers worked on had e-mail facilities. However, it has been stated that it was mainly for official use. Where it was possible to use e-mail on board seafarers expressed dissatisfaction with the limited number and length of messages they could send and also the lack of privacy. Some seafarers said that they not only had to pay for the messages they sent from their ships, but also for incoming e-mails too.
- ⑨ The main means of communication for seafarers with family and friends was the satellite phone. This was followed by personal mobile phones (mainly text messages) when they were at sea and in range of a signal.
- ⑨ Only one out of 10 seafarers mentioned writing letters. Although this is the cheapest option available, many said that the limited time they had, and the length of time it took for letters to be sent and received, made letter writing less attractive.

## Shore leave

- ⑨ Seafarers overwhelmingly acknowledged that having shore leave is important for their physical and mental well-being.
- ⑨ According to the 1996 MORI survey, 57 per cent of seafarers were satisfied with their shore-leave. Today, on the contrary, 64 per cent of the seafarers were not able to have shore-leave for a considerable length of time.
- ⑨ Thirty-six per cent who had had shore leave said that their shore leave on average lasted around two hours. The majority of these seafarers were not able to go further than the nearest phone box.





- ⑨ The main reasons given for not having shore leave and preventing seafarers having access to shore based welfare facilities were: workload when the ship is in port; fast turnarounds; lack of information about the ports where their ships call; lack of transport; and restrictions by the port authorities which are related to the ISPS Code.

### Alternative seafarers' welfare provisions

- ⑨ When seafarers were asked whether they would like to have a welfare worker from a seafarer centre / mission to sail aboard their vessels from time to time over 70 per cent said yes.
- ⑨ Eighty-two per cent of seafarers also responded positively to the idea of having a mobile seafarer centre on wheels coming near to the gangway with facilities (i.e. e-mail, a small shop)

### On board welfare provisions

- ⑨ As the respondents worked for over 100 shipping and ship management companies their on board welfare provisions such as sports and recreational facilities varied considerably according to which company the respondent seafarers worked for.
- ⑨ One of the best reported company policies on welfare provisions included a monthly provision of \$150 welfare fund per ship. From this budget seafarers would decide what to buy (e.g. DVD's, sports equipment and musical instruments).
- ⑨ Worst cases of on board welfare provisions varied from very limited provision to 'pay for it yourself' - where seafarers involuntarily contributed shipboard welfare funds either from their overtime pay or extra earnings on board (such as earnings from cargo handling or cleaning of cargo holds).
- ⑨ The in-depth interviews and group discussions with seafarers also revealed their resourcefulness. They emphasised that they make drum kits from recycled





materials such as old paint tins or oil drums. Seafarers also gave examples of making their own board games.

## Spiritual needs of seafarers

- ⑨ Regardless of their religious affiliation seafarers emphasised that their spiritual welfare is just as important as their physical welfare.
- ⑨ Seafarers expressed a need for the presence of a person with religious authority coming on board from time to time to conduct a service/ceremony aboard their vessels.
- ⑨ Amongst the non-Christian seafarers, the port based welfare services of the Christian maritime ministries were regarded as very helpful in general, although a very few seafarers made reference to negative experiences (i.e. instances relating to “religious insensitivity” of the maritime ministry representative).

## Description of life at sea and how this could be improved

- ⑨ Many seafarers described their lives at sea, as ‘being in prison’, ‘isolated’ ‘lonely’ and as a ‘sacrifice’ to provide better living conditions and opportunities for their loved ones.
- ⑨ The seafarers strongly emphasised that their welfare at sea and ashore would improved by free transport services to shore based welfare facilities (communication, shopping, a place of worship); ship visits by welfare workers, information about the ports where they call, a balance between the application of the ISPS Code and their welfare needs, and access to on board e-mail facilities.

## Company policies on seafarers’ welfare

- ⑨ The analysis of company policies on seafarers’ welfare show parallels with the seafarers’ accounts of their experiences of on board welfare provisions. They are heavily influenced by the preferences and practices of the company and the captain. This has created very fragmented welfare



provision for seafarers at sea with a big gap between the top end of the industry and the bottom.

- ⑨ Some company representatives emphasised that due to the multicultural shipboard environment it is difficult to have uniform on board welfare policies and so they say that crew members must make their own arrangements..
- ⑨ Some companies have practices in place that oblige seafarers to subsidise their own on board welfare facilities.
- ⑨ Company policies on e-mail access for their crews varied considerably. Some said “e-mail communications on board is for business use only”. Others said e-mail access is “free for senior officers”, while still others said “it’s under the captains discretion who could use e-mail on board”, “we sell prepaid cards to seafarers to use for e-mail and other communication on board”. Only one shipping company representative said “in our fleet every crew member on board has a private e-mail account and unlimited access to send and receive e-mails.”
- ⑨ In general the companies have a narrow sense of seafarers’ welfare which mainly focuses on the provision of limited entertainment facilities and materials aboard their ships and nothing ashore. Only one company in the respondent group actively promotes shore leave opportunities for its crews by providing a free shuttle bus service in ports.
- ⑨ When the company representatives were asked what would most improve the welfare of seafarers, the voice from the industry was unanimous about the importance of shore leave for seafarers’ welfare. However, the negative impact of the ISPS Code on shore leave was mentioned frequently. Fast turnaround times, ship operation schedules and minimum crewing levels were also mentioned as having preventative impacts on shore leave.

## Aims and objectives

In the provision of welfare facilities and services for seafarers the international and national maritime employment regulators, policy makers, employers' organisations, trade unions and maritime ministries need to take into account the adequacy of these provisions from a seafarer perspective, including what sort of welfare facilities and services seafarers need and use.





One of the recommendations in the ILO 1970 (R138) Seafarers' Welfare at Sea and in Port was that there should be a survey of seafarers' need for welfare facilities. The ILO 1970 (R138) and 1987 (R173) also recommend that welfare services for seafarers should be reviewed frequently to ensure that they keep pace with changes in the needs of seafarers resulting from technical and operational developments in the shipping industry. However, to date, there has not been either a global survey or a comprehensive review of welfare needs of seafarers.

The ILO 2006 Maritime Labour Convention is currently in its ratification process. There is a general consensus in the industry that when the convention is ratified the conditions set by the convention would establish comprehensive minimum requirements for almost all aspects of working conditions of seafarers. As far as the welfare issues are concerned the convention covers access to shore-based welfare facilities and services; also on board recreational facilities including a reasonable access to ship-to-shore telephone communications and e-mail facilities. However, there are two questions here, first, what do we actually know about the seafarers' access to port based welfare services world-wide and second, what do we know about the current state of recreational facilities and access to telecommunication facilities aboard merchant vessels?

In this context, the report presented here aims to critically assess the adequacy of welfare provision for seafarers from a seafarers' perspective. Particular objectives are:

-  to document the use of port welfare services by seafarers;



-  to establish the most valued services that seafarer welfare organisations could provide;
-  to develop port based welfare work from the perspective of seafarers;
-  to document shipping and ship management company policies on seafarer welfare and their provisions;
-  to examine the efforts by ship owners and ship management companies in securing access to shore based welfare services for their crews.








## Research methods

The research was conducted in different locations combining various research methods include:

-  86 questionnaires from shipowners and key ship management company informants.
-  52 semi-structured interviews with ship owners and ship management company informants in Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Norway, Singapore, and the UK.
-  3792 questionnaires from seafarers from the top 20 maritime labour supplying countries.
-  112 in-depth interviews with seafarers in their home societies in China, India, the Philippines, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine, and the UK.

200 survey questionnaires were distributed to the shipping and ship management company representatives. These managers were chosen to represent the general industry characteristics, such as relating to their nationalities, the nationality of seafarers they employ, the size of their operations, the sector they are involved in and so on. The questionnaire covered the following main issues:

-  what are the company policies on seafarer welfare?
-  what welfare services do they provide and (if any) how are they prioritised?
-  do they have any budget allocated for these services?
-  in their opinion, what are the most important welfare services and facilities for seafarers and how are they met?
-  actions taken for access to shore based welfare services for their crew members





The management questionnaire response rate was 43 per cent (N=86). The number of returned questionnaires appears to be lower than the proposed number. However, in reality many regional offices sent the questionnaire to their central offices. Again due to the increasing number of mergers in ship management companies the questionnaires that were sent to different companies were also forwarded to the parent company. Therefore the number of questionnaires received reflects the responses of wider shipping and ship management companies. In order to complement this, the number of semi-structured interviews with shipping and ship management company informants has been increased to 52. These in-depth and semi-structured interviews were conducted with ship owners and ship management company informants in Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Norway, Singapore, and the UK.

Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Norway, Singapore, and the UK.

Seafarer survey questionnaires explore the following main issues:

- ④ seafarers' perspectives on port based welfare services
- ④ favourite ports / seafarer centres and reasons for the choice
- ④ opportunities for and frequencies of shore leave and activities during shore leave
- ④ do seafarers really need to visit seafarer centres; if not why; if yes, what would be the ideal seafarer centre?
- ④ means and frequency of communication with family and friends (i.e. letters, mobile phone, satellite phone, port phone and e-mail)
- ④ quantity and quality of contact with ship visitors (i.e. port chaplain and port welfare worker)
- ④ what sort of welfare services seafarers need
- ④ most valued services provided and why
- ④ views on the outreach welfare services and reasons



Stratified sampling (i.e. designing the sampling frame prior to selection to ensure that the sample proportion from any particular national equals their population proportion within the global seafarer labour market) was applied to the top 20 maritime labour supplying countries. The sample target is based on one per cent representation so, in total, a return of 4158 survey questionnaires were expected. The details of nationality distribution, the proposed and the actual returned number of survey questionnaires can be seen from Table 1.

The completed and returned survey questionnaires were monitored constantly to ensure that proportionate representation according to different ranks (i.e. senior officers, junior officers and ratings); departments (i.e. deck, engine and galley); and vessel types (i.e. general cargo, dry bulk and container) are secured.

The majority of the questionnaires were distributed aboard vessels in collaboration with the shipping and ship management companies, and ship agents. In addition, researchers distributed the questionnaires on board targeted vessels in the port of Bristol in the UK and Rotterdam in Holland. The questionnaire had a covering letter explaining the aims and objectives of the project and a statement, which assured the anonymity of the respondents, their vessels and companies. An international free postage envelope was provided with each questionnaire. After completion of questionnaires by seafarers the envelopes were posted directly to the researcher. In the cases of Bristol and Rotterdam, after establishing their schedules, liner and coastal vessels were visited again later to collect the completed questionnaires. The survey questionnaires were distributed when the seafarers were aboard their vessels (either in port or at sea) because if the surveys were distributed / conducted at seafarer centres the responses would not cover the seafarers who do not or could not visit the seafarer centres (due to lack of shore leave). As the questionnaires were sent / distributed on board vessels, in many cases the whole crew responded, including seafarers from countries other than the targeted top 20 seafarer supply countries (i.e. Capo Verde, Ghana, Portugal and Spain). Due to the robust nature of the original ratified sampling methods these questionnaires were not included in the final analysis.





**Table 1: The top 20 seafarer supplying countries and number of seafarers who responded to the survey questionnaire**

	Nationality	Frequency	Valid %	Proposed 1% representation	Returned questionnaires
1	Philippines	132314	27.1	1323	1417
2	Russia	40871	8.4	409	379
3	Ukraine	40305	8.3	403	419
4	China	30855	6.3	309	164
5	India	23861	4.9	239	320
6	Indonesia	17761	3.6	178	147
7	Poland	17254	3.5	173	175
8	Turkey	15277	3.1	153	210
9	Greece	14216	2.9	142	101
10	Burma/Myanmar	10830	2.2	108	62
11	Syria	10273	2.1	103	48
12	Romania	10081	2.1	101	80
13	Latvia	9552	2.0	96	49
14	Bulgaria	9502	1.9	95	70
15	Croatia	7893	1.6	79	21
16	Korea, South	5946	1.2	59	18
17	Egypt	5828	1.2	58	27
18	Netherlands	4387	0.9	44	33
19	Italy	4295	0.9	43	35
20	Taiwan	4265	0.9	43	17
	Total	415,566	85.1	4,158	3,792

**Note:** for frequency and valid per cent, the SIRC Global Seafarer Labour Market Survey 2003 was used as a source

Although the seafarer survey questionnaire was semi-structured and contained open ended questions, inevitably it provided rich quantitative data - mainly providing a general picture of seafarer welfare and subsequent statistics data. To complement these descriptive statistics 112 in-depth interviews were conducted with seafarers on their return to their home countries. These interviews were conducted in China (N=12), India (N=16), the Philippines (N=28), Russia (N=14), Turkey (N=21), Ukraine (N=13), and the UK (N=8). Different world regions, and cultures - including religions - and the size of seafarer populations are taken into

consideration in the selection of these countries. These interviews were tape-recorded. Seafarers' experiences with port based and on board welfare facilities were documented in detail. Seafarers were also encouraged to talk about their comparative experiences in different world regions including their homeports.

## Summary demographics

Table 1 above summarised the number and nationalities of the seafarer respondents to our survey. Of those included in the survey 53 per cent were employed on deck, 40 per cent in the engine room and 7 per cent in the galley. Fifty-one per cent were ratings. Of the rest 17 per cent were senior officers, 21 per cent junior officers, 9 per cent petty officers and 2 per cent were cadets.

Most seafarers were married (71 per cent), 28 per cent were single and only 1 per cent were divorced, separated or widowed. There were only 18 women respondents. The youngest seafarer was 18, the oldest 65 and the average age was 36. The years at sea varied from a couple of months to 49 years with an average of 14 years. The average lengths of contracts were 5 months for senior officers, 7 months for junior officers and 9 months for petty officers and ratings. When they responded to our survey questionnaire they were on average into their fifth month of current contracts at sea.

We estimated that seafarers responded to our survey from circa 400 ships. These ships were either owned or managed by circa 100 companies. Twenty-eight per cent of seafarers worked aboard bulk carriers, 19 per cent on general cargo, 18 per cent on tankers (including oil, chemical and gas); 11 per cent on container, 4 on Ro-Ro (including car carriers) and the remaining 20 per cent aboard different type of vessels (including unknown). The voyage cycle of the vessels where the seafarer respondents sailed showed variations: just over 28 per cent of the vessels were involved in short sea trade; 20 per cent in deep sea crossing and intense port calls; 17 per cent were also involved in deep sea crossing but with a few port calls; another 15 per cent were involved in regional trades (i.e. Mediterranean, Black Sea and Baltic Sea); 11 per cent said the trade pattern of their ships were changeable. The remaining 9 per cent said that their ships sailed world-wide





without making any specific reference to the nature of their ship's voyage cycle.

The majority of the eighty-six shipping company survey respondents were ex-seafarers (n=75), having served as senior deck and engine room officers. Only 11 of them had no previous sea based careers. The biggest company in our survey owned/managed well over 200 ships and the smallest had only 3. Their position in the company also varied from senior managers (owner, president and vice-president, n=8) to managers (crewing, communication, operation etc., n=53) to lower line management (such as superintendent, n=25).





## Main findings of the research

The main findings of the research are summarised in 11 thematic areas. These include: port based welfare services and changes in them over the last 10 years; contacts with seafarers' welfare workers; usage of seafarer centres; usage of port based facilities; communication with family and friends whilst on board; shore-leave; alternative seafarer welfare provisions; on board welfare provisions; spiritual needs of seafarers; how seafarer welfare could be improved; and company policies on seafarer welfare.

### **Important port based welfare services for seafarers and changes over 10 years**

As can be seen from Table 2 seafarers were asked to rank the importance of 15 selected port based welfare services (i.e. "important"; "neither/nor"; "not important"). In order to document changes over the last 10 years this question was adopted from the ITF/MORI 1996 Seafarers Living Conditions Survey. However, the 1996 Survey did not include port based welfare services such as transport to seafarers centre, availability of cheap phone cards (which did not exist in 1996) and internet access (which was in its infancy in 1996). These items were included in the 2006 Survey.

As can be seen from the table 2, over the last 10 years the opinions of seafarers in relation to the most important port-based welfare services have changed. As in the 1996 MORI Survey, port-based welfare services such as transport to shops and town, and international telephone facilities are very important for seafarers. In fact over the 10 years the importance of these services for seafarers has increased.

The other port based services, which were not listed in the MORI survey, such as transport to a seafarers' centre; availability of cheap international phone cards; and Internet access are also regarded by seafarers as being important.

Availability of services like a port based medical clinic and personal counselling services have been regarded as more important in comparison to the 1996 MORI survey.



The most important changes occurred in relation to the need for a reading room/library; video/book exchange; organised sightseeing; meeting local people; sport facilities; money exchange; and onshore accommodation. Compared to the 1996 survey the importance of these services for seafarers has declined considerably. This major shift reflects the changes in the maritime industry and basic priorities of seafarers with a limited time in port

**Table 2: How important each port based welfare service is for seafarers (percentage of seafarers who said it was important)**

Services	ITF/MORI 1996	ITF ST/SIRC 2006	Change over 10 years
Transport to shops/town	70	85	+15
International phone	79	81	+2
Transport to seafarers centre	N/A	72	N/A
Cheap phone cards	N/A	71	N/A
Internet access	N/A	68	N/A
Personal counselling services	45	57	+12
Place of worship	48	53	+5
Port based medical clinic	70	44	-26
Reading room/library	50	17	-33
Video/book exchange	64	15	-49
Organised sightseeing	48	13	-35
Meeting local people	53	10	-43
Sports facilities	51	10	-41
Money exchange	66	9	-57
Onshore accommodation	44	9	-35

### Contact with seafarer welfare workers coming from seafarers' centres or missions

When seafarers were asked “when did you last see a seafarers’ welfare worker (from a seafarer centre or mission) aboard your vessel during your current contract”, 72 per cent of the seafarers said that they have not seen any seafarers’ welfare worker aboard their ship during their current contract. Only six per cent said that they saw a ship visitor during the previous week; 13 per cent saw one during the previous month and nine per cent over a month ago. A Filipino deck cadet who had just finished a one year contract aboard a car carrier that sailed



between the Far East, Europe and US said that a seafarers' welfare worker once conducted mass on board at Inchon. A seafarer who was into the fifth month of his current contract aboard a container vessel said that he had seen one visitor in Le Havre. Another said he worked in a cruise ship and no visitors were allowed. Another responded along the same lines: "My ship is a tanker. They are very strict about visitors, you have to have an appointment or permission from our captain to visit" he said. "When we are in Europe, in some ports we have some contacts, but usually on tankers visitors are not allowed, so there is no chance. I think on their part they need some strategy to contact us" said the other.

Here are some typical first person accounts to highlight the seafarers' responses.

*"I've been on board this ship for 6 months. We've been to many ports in Brazil, Japan, United States, China, Taiwan and no one from the missions has come to visit us."*

*"I saw one only once, when we were at Anchor in Alaska. There is some sort of Missionary, they come on board and found us, the crew, and brought the church to us and they sold us Bibles."*

*"Only people we see on board are people from the company. Apart from that we get many port officials in Australia and stevedores in Japan. We don't get any other visitors."*

*"Only people we get on board are traders in Africa. No one comes from seafarer missions"*

Crew members from the galley or on the duty of gangway watch have reported seeing seafarers' welfare workers more than other crew members had. Crew members working aboard short sea vessels and trading around Western Europe, Northern America and Japan are more likely to see a welfare worker.

*"On this ship fortunately I have talked to the port chaplain but only for a short while because I was keeping a gangway watch so I accompanied him to the chief mate's office. He asked me how I slept here and even that was very important for me. I am always with my officers and my colleagues on ship. It is nice to hear another person talking to you like the chaplain."*

The majority of the seafarers said that it would be good to have contact with a seafarers' welfare worker. The reasons for the





importance of contact included obtaining information about the port and the local area and getting news updates. However, above all, sharing their spiritual and personal needs with welfare workers was emphasised by many:

*“It is very important to us that someone comes on board the ship concerned about our welfare, asking how we are or selling phone cards, or bringing newspapers. Especially newspapers so we can learn what is happening around the world. They can also help us to forget about our stress.”*

*“We go around in the Caribbean and America. In the Caribbean we have no chance to go ashore and in America we are very busy. We need people to visit us to relieve our isolation. Somebody coming to visit us and asking “How are you? How’s your life here? Are things OK?”, would be a sign of relief to us. We complete a round trip in 21 days and we have no time to go out, just work, and then take a rest. After that you’ve to start again in another port. We are in port for only four hours. You need a taxi to go out and come back again quickly. We need someone to come and visit us.”*

*“In my case it is very important for me and other people on board to have a visitor from missions. Because they can help, they can really help us a lot! We can talk about our spiritual and personal needs. I would feel comfortable to talk to them. They can share my emptiness, because I’m far away from my family.”*

As we have seen, compared to the 1996 MORI Survey the availability of port based counselling services for seafarers has become more important. “Seafarers generally need counselling. Not every sailor but the Filipino Seafarers. It is a part of our spiritual life” said a Filipino seafarer. In fact, his view on counselling for seafarers is shared by many. Seafarers’ perception of counselling varied from the “need to talk to someone” to the need for help to cope with traumatic events, such as piracy, death on board, or losing a family member while at sea. A seafarer working aboard a product tanker documented how his ship was attacked by pirates with machine guns and grenades off the coast of West Africa. Another seafarer gave an example of how they stored the body of a deceased colleague in the ship’s cold store room during a two-week deep-sea passage. In both cases seafarers said that they would have appreciated it if they had someone to talk to about their traumatic experiences at their next port of calls.

Overall a low level of satisfaction has been reported in relation to seafarers’ welfare workers and their services. Most seafarers, however, expressed

appreciation about receiving magazines and other materials. As the above first person accounts demonstrate, seafarers' expectations and welfare needs exceeded this sort of service and personal contact is very important to them.

## Seafarer centres (buildings dedicated to seafarer welfare at or close to the port)

When the seafarers were asked "do you think it is important to have seafarer centres in ports that you visit" six out of 10 seafarers said that it was important to have a seafarers' centre in the ports that they visit. Here are some first person accounts to demonstrate why seafarers thought it was important:

*"First thing I look for in port is phone cards and phone boxes. For sure you can always get them in seafarer centres."*

*"You get free second hand clothing in seafarer centres; you can select whatever you like."*

*"I've been to ports with seafarer centres but never been in one yet. I've been wanting to go there. It would be good to meet other seafarers and relieve your stress."*

*"Seafarer centres are good for seafarers, especially the ones in the US. They give free Internet access. I like going to seafarer centres to leave my stress on board."*

*"You can always find someone to talk to in seafarer centres. There is a priest."*

*"In seafarer centres you can talk to people freely. It is alright to talk to people there because they would understand you. You can find like minded people there."*

*"It is important to have a seafarer centre in ports; besides anything else you can have facilities for a phone call. You will also have the chance of meeting other people from other ships."*

*"You can pray in seafarer centres, there is a chaplain there."*



During the group interviews with seafarers an option was provided to seafarers in the form of imagining that they had the time and free transport waiting near the



gangway and they could choose to either go to a seafarer centre or to a shopping centre. One seafarer said “when I don’t have money I prefer to go to a seafarer centre but when I have money I prefer to go to a shopping centre”. Another said, “I prefer both, because there are things which are not present in a shopping centre but present in the seafarer centre and visa versa”. However, given the two options, the majority of seafarers preferred to go to the shopping centre. Here are some of their reasons:

*“Because there are always things I want to buy which are not in the seafarer centre.”*

*“There are factors to be considered, distance of course and also the length of shore-leave. Given the same situation to be honest I prefer going to the shopping mall. It is an opportunity for visiting other places, maybe once in a life time.”*

*“You can’t find everything in a seafarer centre but you can get everything a seafarer centre could offer in the shopping centre and more.”*

*“Most of the seafarer centres are like small shops but why to settle for the small one when you could see a better one.”*

An ideal seafarer centre is described by seafarers as being within the port area with free transport access. Free transport has particular importance for seafarers as many of them emphasised that it is dangerous to walk within the port areas (especially in container ports) and ports are increasingly divided into different terminals. Access on foot between them is getting increasingly difficult due to security and the ISPS Code.

Seafarer centres in the UK ports and other parts of Western Europe and North America are regarded by seafarers as the best ones. The main reasons given for these seafarer centres being the best included easy access and free transport. Further analyses of the best seafarer centres named by seafarers showed that these seafarer centres are ecumenical seafarer centres.

The worst seafarer centres named by seafarers were mainly located in the Black Sea region and Indian sub-continent. Reasons for these being the worst ones included, not being safe, being far away and lacking any services.

In general, seafarers over the years have experienced a decline in the quality of services provided by the seafarer centres. This point is particularly made by seafarers with longer sea experience. Special reference was made to the 1990s.



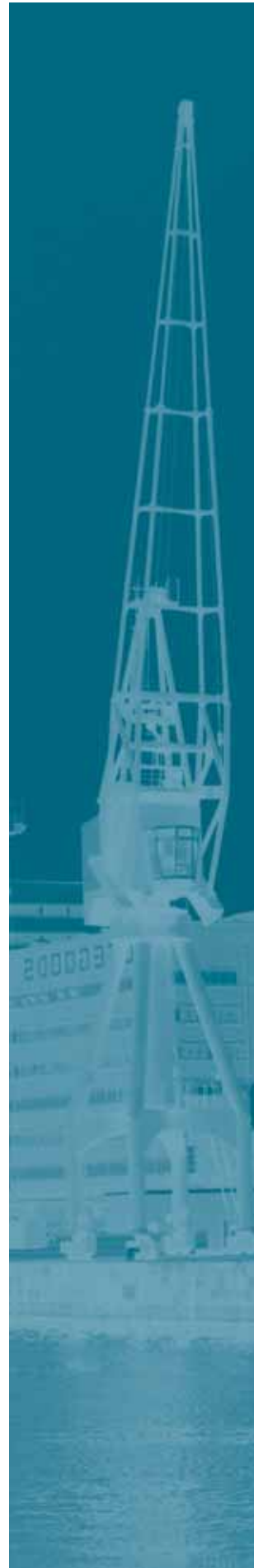
One seafarer said, “I’ve been calling in Australian ports since the mid 1990s. It used to be much better. We used to get people coming on board and offering free transport to the seafarer centre”. The other dimension of the declining service was related to the globalisation and the expansion of world trade in regions where there are no port based welfare facilities at all.

Seafarers were asked whether they visit seafarer centres that are owned privately by individuals (i.e. seafarers’ centres which are not operated by maritime ministries and seafarer unions). Although this particular question had a low response rate (53 per cent) five out of 10 seafarers responded positively. Further analysis of the seafarers who responded positively (“yes, frequently”, “yes, sometimes”, or “yes, rarely”) shows that seven out of 10 of these seafarers sail around China, West Africa and Latin America. These seafarers are increasingly using commercial ‘seafarer centres’ such as shops or karaoke bars and other bars marketed by local entrepreneurs as ‘seafarer centres’. The shop owners (through a middle man) provide free private shuttle minibus services between the port areas and their shops. In fact, during the seafarers interviews in the Philippines particular references were made to ‘Gloria’s Place’ in Rotterdam. It is said that seafarers could call for a free shuttle bus to be collected from the port gate and brought back on demand. The place is described as being in two sections, combining a shop and a Karaoke bar. This highlights the importance of free transport for the seafarers.

### **About the facilities within the ports that seafarers visit (independent of any seafarer centre)**

As we have seen earlier the seafarers who responded to the questionnaire show an even distribution of world regions as far as the trade route of their current vessels are concerned.

When the seafarers were asked to name the ports with the best facilities they have visited during their current contract, they mainly mentioned ports in Western Europe, North America, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Australia (in descending order). Reasons for facilities in these ports being the best were listed as: availability of phone boxes within the port area; free transport / shuttle bus; easy access to towns and easy communication with port workers to ask for information. Here are some first person accounts to highlight these points:





*"I've been at sea now more than 20 years. As far as the welfare facilities are concerned, despite their recent security obsession, the best ports are in the US. They are very accommodating. You can make a free phone call to a seafarer centre at any time."*

*"For me it is Alaska, it is very close to the city and the port is in the middle of everything. Everything is within a walking distance."*

*"Australian ports are the best. The people are very accommodating and friendly. You can ask for information."*

*"Felixstowe is the best. You can make free phone calls for a shuttle bus."*

*"I like the port in Bristol. There are many phone boxes."*

According to seafarers' responses the ports with the worst facilities are located in Africa, the Black Sea Region, Latin America, the Indian Sub-Continent and China. Reasons for facilities in these ports being thought poor were listed mainly as a lack of safety, services (i.e. transport, communication, safety) and local information. However, seafarers have also emphasised that these regions are economically poor and it would be unfair to expect too much.

*"China is the worst. You cannot communicate with anyone. There is no information about the facilities and they are in the middle of nowhere. It takes about 2 hours to go to the nearest city."*

*"Ports in the Black Sea region are generally the worst. There is no information. You don't know who to ask."*

*"Ports in West Africa are the worst. It is not safe to go ashore. There are no telephone facilities."*

*"It is very easy to say, the worst ports are located in poor countries, like in Africa. I don't want to go there. They don't have any welfare facilities in their ports but how could they provide it for visitors since they don't have it for themselves."*

It should be emphasised that many of the ports regarded as having the worst facilities are located in the areas where the ITF Seafarers' Trust, in close partnership with the International Committee on Seafarers' Welfare, has since 1999 started regional development programmes. The regional development programmes cover the Commonwealth of Independent States and Baltic States;



Indian Ocean & South East Africa; West Africa; North and Central Latin America; and South East Asia. Through the programmes these regions saw a substantial investment in seafarer welfare. These monies were for capital projects - buildings, IT and communication equipment, mini buses and so on. The long-term impact of these investments in seafarer welfare still remains to be seen. It needs to be emphasised that in many of the ports, which seafarers mentioned as being equipped with the best welfare structures, the developments of these services for seafarers goes back to the mid nineteenth century.

During the in-depth interviews with seafarers, in relation to the ports that they visit, it became clear that many seafarers lacked information about the port facilities, including the location of the port in proximity to residential areas or shops and also information about the availability or location of services, including transport and communication. When they were asked how they get information about the facilities and welfare services in the port area, references were made to pilots coming on board, the ship's agent and port workers:

*"We ask stevedores for any information about where the nearest phone box is, where the nearest bus stop is, what the shopping hours are. We get this information from stevedores."*

*"We only get information in leaflets in a very few ports like in Vancouver or some other ports in the United States but for the rest of the world it is just by word of mouth."*

*"I get information sometimes from stevedores; sometimes from the ship's agent but sometimes the other crew members on board have been there before so they tell us."*

Some rely on local entrepreneurs for information and service:

*"In Rotterdam, there were local Filipinos that provide services and cars. They provided free transport on the basis that you shop in their shops and bought drinks."*

*"There are Filipinos at a certain port, they have a service vehicle, and they will be fetching us at the port, then they will tour us to malls and places. They are like our local guides. And there are those that will just charge us with that service and those that will not charge us but then we have to go to their bar and buy drinks."*





However, some shipping companies have better arrangements in terms of providing local information to their employees when their ships are in foreign ports. Here are some examples:

*“We get all the information from the agent three or four days before the arrival, we have this fax - with the map, the shopping centre, the police, the taxi stand, bus schedule and everything. The captain places it in the engine control room and in the recreation rooms.”*

*“Our company provides free shuttle bus in ports; we just tell the driver what we need”*

### Communication with family and friends whilst at sea

Seven out of ten seafarers said that it was important for them to have access to e-mail in ports. However, as can be seen from Table 3, only 16 per cent of the seafarers reported that they have access to on board e-mail facilities.

**Table 3: Seafarer’s access to e-mail facilities on board the vessel**

	Percentage
No access (N=2972)	84
Yes (N=555)	16

N=3527

A further data analysis suggests that senior officers are considerably more likely to have access to on board e-mail facilities. Forty per cent of the senior officers have access to e-mail on board compared to three per cent of ratings. All the vessels that seafarers worked on had e-mail facilities. However, it has been stated that it was mainly for official use. Where it was possible to use e-mail on board seafarers expressed dissatisfaction with the limited number and length of messages they could send and also the lack of privacy. Some seafarers said the access to e-mail on board is influenced with the attitude of the master. Some other seafarers said that they not only had to pay for the messages they sent from their ships, but also for incoming e-mails too. These different conditions of access to e-mail demonstrated in Table 4. Here are also some first person accounts from seafarers to highlight these different conditions:

*“We have e-mail on board the vessel but it is at the discretion of the master. Sometimes he lets the junior officer use it but sometimes not. Sometime he lets the crew use it and*



*sometimes that's also limited but there is no problem for senior officers."*

*"There is e-mail on board but we have a limit of 3 e-mails a week but all depends on the captain. There are some captains you can send emails, as many as you want but then the size of the message that you will be sending is restricted - not more than A4 size or not longer than 100 words. The attachments like pictures or other documents are not allowed. The privacy is not assured either."*

*"Our captain is quite good. He allows us to send 4 e-mails a week."*

*"Our first captain said we could only have 2 emails per week. However, the new captain said that we could only send 3 emails a week, but only at weekends - Saturday or Sunday."*

*"We can use e-mail on board but it is very expensive. You have to buy a \$20 Internet card, very expensive."*

*"We have e-mail access on board but it is very expensive. I pay minimum of \$1 for each mail I send or receive. The price goes up by bytes. Each card cost \$25 and I use 3 cards a month. I can send about 10 e-mails per card. I also receive some."*

*"Only communication I use is via satellite phone which is very expensive. We have an e-mail on board but it is for the ship's business only even as a Chief Officer I don't have an access to it for personal use."*

*"We are not allowed to use the e-mail. It's only for the business communication."*

**Table 4: Conditions of access to e-mail aboard**

	Percentage
Limited number of e-mails that can be sent (N=482)	87
There is no privacy (N=429)	77
I can send but I cannot receive (N=391)	70
I have to pay for the service (N=103)	19
Other (i.e. the conditions could change with the master) (N=53)	10
Every crew member has a private address (N=34)	6

N=555

**Note:** more than one response is possible (for example, a seafarer could send a limited number of e-mails, has no privacy, also has to pay for the service).



The main means of communication for seafarers with family and friends was the satellite phone. This was followed by personal mobile phones (mainly text messages) when they were at sea. However, this is not a straightforward matter either:

*"It is OK when the ship is in Hamburg or Felixstowe where you have phone boxes in the port area but in many other ports there are no phone boxes. Before the ISPS some vendors used to come in ports with mobile phones and charged a dollar per minute but nowadays you cannot see them. They are not allowed to come in ports. Communication with families is very difficult for us especially for the ports in which we are only staying for a couple of hours. Sometimes three hours, four hours, so we need telephone boxes, which are close to the ship. We don't have time to go out."*

*"As long as I communicate with my family everything is alright for me. My company now is upgrading our satellite system which will be the cheapest Inmarsat rate for off peak hours - costs about 1 dollar and 10 cents per minute. Sometimes I use telephone in ports as long as there is a phone card and telephone box in port that is the most important thing for me. The problem though, in some ports, there is no public telephone. That is a problem. Because you know now that access to the port is very strict already you cannot just walk out to find a public telephone."*

*"We have 15 port calls in 48 days but I can only contact my family while my ship is in Felixstowe. That is my only outlet because there you have the phone box within the port area. Even third officer is not allowed to use the ships' e-mail and satellite phone is very expensive."*

*"I use my mobile phone for communication. I have a roaming sim card. From here I can sent SMS. In the US, I can use the telephone box but in other ports my mobile phone is the only option, it's more expensive."*

*"I prefer calling through the satellite phone, or the smartlink but it only works in the Asia vicinity, so out of Asia I prefer sending emails."*

*"For me I prefer using the smartlink because through that I can hear the voices of my family. One card, which is 300 pesos, it is more or less 23 minutes use. It is much cheaper than the satellite phone but you can use it only in Asia."*

*"We are not allowed to use the ships e-mail. It is for official use only and then the ship's satellite phone is very costly. So that's why we have, in the Philippines, this smart*



*telephone, it's a wireless telephone, but only covered in Asia. It is much cheaper than the ship's satellite phone. Before this captain we had 3 units on board and we put one of them on the bridge where you always get a good signal. Every time we got a signal we made phone calls. It uses a pre paid card. I think the new captain got angry with us maybe we were using the phone in the bridge. One day he showed us this memorandum from the company head office in Japan, which banned the use of smart phone. So we complied because that is the captain's order. We hide one of the phones and shipped only two of them back to the Philippines. Now we bring the phone out only at night. We bring the satellite dish out of our cabin during night time, we have some look out. All the senior officers are, Japanese. They spend their time in the recreation room at night. We know that at night they would not walk outside on the deck."*

Only one out of 10 seafarers mentioned writing letters. Although this is the cheapest option available, many said that the limited time they had, and the length of time it took for letters to be sent and received, made letter writing less attractive:

*"I prefer satellite calling. It's easier calling. I don't prefer writing because it has no assurance of reaching the address. Because there are agents and they just ignore our letters. They just set it aside."*

*"It takes months to send and receive letters - by the time I get it, it is already history."*

## Shore-leave

All the seafarers without any exception acknowledged that having shore-leave was important for their physical and mental well-being. As they pointed out:

*"Shore leave is important because it is the only way for letting our stress out. We are like prisoners on board. We need to interact with other people and see different faces and places."*

*"For me it's important, very much important to have shore leave even once in a while, so that if this is a way in which will be worry free - meaning we'll just give ourselves the time to enjoy and just forgetting all those traumas in the engine room and all those problems on the ship. Even just for a few hours. And being relieved from home sickness or sea sickness."*





*"It is important to have, once in a while, a shore pass. Because in that manner we are relieving our stress which is caused by the machinery and the engine. This is also one way of communicating our families and friends."*

*"For me it's very important because when we have a shore pass, it's only the time that we can forget our problems on the ship. Then it's also the time we can call our family. It's the time that no-one will tell you to do this or do that. No boss when you go out. It is my favourite time; my favourite part of seafaring."*

*"It's another environment and I can refresh myself. When I have a shore leave I can release my boredom."*

One seafarer said that his ship had just been in dry dock in China for 17 days and he had gone out every evening. However, his case was unusual. When seafarers were asked how many times they had shore leave during the last eight weeks, as can be seen from Table 5, sixty-four percent of the respondents said they had not had any shore leave.

*"I have not had any shore leave during my current contract at all. We are very busy in ports. Only port we stay overnight is in Japan which is our main loading port, but at night we are like prisoners on board. They close all the port gates. Although you are sometimes off duty at night you cannot go out. This happened to me twice already during my current contract."*

*"Our ship trades between Korea and Europe. Ulsan is our loading port and we stay in port overnight while loading cars. Every time we stop in Ulsan I have shore leave which is every other month. So I have one shore leave every eight weeks."*

**Table 5: Number of shore leaves during the last 8 weeks**

	Percentage
None (N=2160)	64
Once (N=270)	8
Twice (N=371)	11
Three times (N=169)	5
Four times (N=201)	6
Five Times and more (N=204)	6

N=3375



Thirty-six per cent (N=1215) who had had shore leave during the same period said that their shore leave on average lasted around two hours. Although 1215 seafarers said they had a shore leave during the previous eight week only 1140 of them answered the question whether they spent their shore leave within the port area or went beyond the port gates. Fifty-three per cent (N=604) of these seafarers spent their shore leave within the port area. In-depth interviews with seafarers revealed that when they have an opportunity for shore leave their main priority is to make a phone call to their families and friends and their shore leave did not extend beyond a phone box either in the port area or seafarers centre. Seafarers who get beyond the port gate stated that the main motivations for this were to either go shopping for their basic needs or again to use communication facilities which are not in the immediate port area. For some, despite an attempt to go out for shore-leave, the lack of transport was the main reason preventing them doing so. Here are some first person accounts to highlight these:

*"When I get shore leave I prioritise calling home. After that I don't get time to do anything else, I just stroll around and go to the ship."*

*"I guess I am very unlucky with our trade route, we tend not to stay overnight in ports. It is OK when we are in Europe; there are phone boxes in ports. We just ask for permission from the officer on duty to go ashore to make a call but it is very difficult in other ports we could not go out anywhere without transport."*

*"I've been out only once during this contract. I went out with my companion. We went ashore, only the two of us. Then we asked the security personnel from the port where could we go for two hours. Then they just said there will be a service vehicle just at the gates. We went there but there was none, so we just went for a stroll. For like two hours we've been walking and just going nowhere. We saw just nothing. Only just walked and walked and then walked back to the ship."*

*"We had shore leave and went to the port gate. The security at the gates said that shuttle will be coming but for almost an hour we've been waiting but no shuttle bus came. Then we decided to go back to the ship. Because they said the gates will be closed at 10 and it was already nine. So we decided to go back."*





The main reasons given for not having shore leave and preventing seafarers having access to shore based welfare facilities were workload when the ship is in port, fast turnarounds, lack of information about the ports where their ships call, lack of transport, and restrictions by the port authorities which are related to the ISPS Code. According to the 1996 MORI survey, 57 per cent of seafarers were satisfied with their shore-leave. Today, on the contrary, 64 per cent of the seafarers were not able to have shore-leave for a considerable length of time. Perhaps an oiler's account highlights the situation for many:

*"My last five contracts, including the current one have been on LNG tankers. Our route is only between the Middle East - Qatar and Japan - Bay of Tokyo. It takes fifteen days between the two ports. We stay in port 18 hours in both ends. In Qatar, it is impossible to have shore leave. In Japan we are always busy with engine work or gangway watch. So over the last 50 months at sea I've never had shore leave. Once we had this emergency dry dock, for two days in Jabel Ali and even then we were within the port compound, we didn't go outside."*

### Alternative seafarer welfare provisions

In the seafarers survey questionnaire seafarers' views on two alternative welfare provisions were explored, namely sailing welfare workers and mobile seafarer centres. Seafarers were asked whether they would like to have a welfare worker from a seafarer centre / mission to sail aboard their vessels from time to time. As can be seen from Table 6, over 70 per cent said yes. They also explained their reasons for this:

*"I believe that it's important because we still need some emotional support from outside sources and maybe they can be of help. Maybe they can give us, show us, something that might help us in our emotional needs."*

*"Spiritually yes, because one year on board is really a very long time and we haven't gone to church and it's important for us, it's quite important for us."*

*"It's very important, spiritually speaking, it's very important because we are at sea for a long period of time. We have also spiritual needs."*

*"It is important to have an outsider on the ship. We could share our problems with him. He could help to solve our problems. This is only in my own point of view. I don't know about the others but in my case it would help a lot to have someone to talk to."*

**Table 6: Seafarers' responses to alternative welfare provisions.**

	Percentage (saying "yes")
Sailing welfare worker (N=3450)	71 (N=2449)
Mobile seafarer centre (N=3261)	82 (N=2674)

As can be seen from Table 6, eight out of 10 seafarers had also responded positively to the idea of having a mobile seafarer centre on wheels coming near to the gangway with facilities (i.e. e-mail; telephone and a small shop)

*"Telephone is very important. In some ports there are no telephone boxes. That is a problem. Access outside the port area is also very strict since the ISPS. You walk a long way to go out, to find a public telephone. Not every crew member could go to the seaman's centre. It is also very good for the seaman's centre that their service could embrace everybody on board rather than the few."*

*"That happens in China, because every time we arrive in port, always the Chinese businessmen, they come to the gangway with their vehicles bring DVD players, mobile phones, and the phone cards - everything you can buy. And we're happy, really happy, because when they came on board, we can buy, we can call our family. That is, actually, that was the only port that we were waiting for, because we don't have a lot of time to go out."*

*"This is an excellent idea. Especially for those ports where they don't have time to go out. I remember in Belgium and Antwerp, the city looks very nice from a distance but how can we go in? We know that there is a seaman's centre but no one come to visit us. We would go out but where? City is terrifying. No one comes to help us. They are always standing by in their own place. So I think it is a good idea that they bring their seaman's centre to us."*

## On board welfare provisions

As the respondents worked for over 100 shipping and ship management companies their on board welfare provisions such as sports and recreational facilities etc. varied considerably according to the different companies the respondent seafarers worked for. As we shall see in some details later, only one company within our respondent group provided a free e-mail account for each seafarer. Again only one other shipping company provided free transport on



request to their seafarers when their ships were in port. One of the best reported company policies on welfare provisions included a monthly provision of \$150 welfare fund per ship. From this budget seafarers would decide what to buy (i.e. DVD's, sports equipment and musical instruments). The worst cases of on board welfare provisions varied from very limited provision to 'pay for it yourself' - where seafarers contributed shipboard welfare funds either from their overtime pay or extra earnings on board (such as earnings from cargo handling or cleaning of cargo holds). Here are some first person accounts to demonstrate these:

*"Our facilities for entertainment are good. We have complete DVDs; it's pirated but better than nothing. Our yearly budget is for entertainment, exercise equipment and games etc. and it is \$1,200 per annum."*



*"We have so many facilities on board. We even have a welfare committee. We have a whole basketball court, swimming pool, gymnasium; we have also table tennis, darts, chess and other table games and complete set of musical instruments and lots of movies, CDs, DVDs and tapes. The welfare committee is composed of selected crew members. It is in charge of the welfare fund. Five dollars deduction from every crew member's salary monthly and the welfare committee decides how to spend it - if there is something to be bought or something to be paid. In addition once a year - every December the company allocates also \$1,000 for the purchase of equipment. For example last December we have purchased a playstation and a DVD player. The captain also cuts some funds from our overtime pay for the purchase of movies."*

*"When we lash containers we get paid one dollar per container, every month 10 per cent of the lashing money goes to the ship's welfare fund."*

*"My ship is a passenger luxury liner. We have a library equipped with all the CDs and DVDs but it's very hard to compare it with the passengers, because we rent them for one dollar a day. We can also borrow a book but need to put a \$20 deposit."*

It needs to be emphasised that as far as seafarers are concerned their financial contribution to 'ship welfare funds' is involuntary. "They never ask if we want to pay or not" said one seafarer and "we can't say no, this is a company rule" said another. The system that allows making deduction from seafarers' payments for the purchase of on board entertainment facilities creates suspicion and

disagreement. One seafarer said “we pay money for the ship’s welfare fund but don’t get anything back.” A rating said “officers buy what they want not what we want.”

The in-depth interviews and group discussions with seafarers also revealed the resourcefulness of seafarers. They emphasised that they make drum kits from recycled materials such as old paint tins or oil drums. As reported by other studies previously (Kahveci, Lane and Sampson 2002; Sampson 2000) during the interviews seafarers also gave examples of making their own board games, such as drawing a ‘horse race’ on the deck, playing nail football (consist of passing the coin between nails secured on a piece of wood resembling a football pitch) or playing backgammon with soft drink lids.

## Spiritual needs

Especially during the in-depth interviews with seafarers it became clear that regardless of their religious affiliations, seafarers recognised that their spiritual welfare is just as important as their physical welfare. Some seafarers, especially the Filipinos, placed a greater emphasis on someone coming from outside to assist their religious needs:

*“It is very important for me that my religious needs are met at sea. A priest should be able to come on board to conduct mass.”*

*“It is very important for me to pray. I do it in my cabin but if possible, we can suggest that it’s good to have someone coming from outside to provide this sort of service.”*

*“On Sundays, probably not every Sunday, we watch religious service videotapes in our recreational room together with other crew. It would be much better if someone could come from outside. It would be also good to talk to a priest who could guide and comfort us.”*

*“It is a challenge but most seafarers need spiritual support, especially when you are feeling homesick hearing the words of God helps. Also the presence of a ministry on board is important as it would create harmony.”*





*"It is very important to have spiritual support. We get port chaplains in some Christian countries but in the majority of the countries we don't get it."*

*"It is very important that our spiritual needs are met. We need these things because it's very lonely here."*

Others also made reference to spiritual needs but for them it was more of a private affair:

*"I brought a small booklet with me aboard, the Daily Gospel and every night before I go to sleep, I re-read that part for that particular day."*

*"In my case I connect to Allah through my personal prayers."*

*"I just do it myself alone in my cabin. I do my prayers and I brought with me, Bibles and religious reading materials."*

*"I have a Bible with me, read one chapter every night in my cabin."*

*"I pray all the time - before my duty and after my duty, before I go to sleep and after I wake up. I also pray for the safety of all the crew on board."*

*"I always pray in my cabin. Praying is very important for me. It is very dangerous in the ship and there is always typhoon."*

*"I always pray and give thanks to Allah the almighty."*

As part of the survey questionnaire we also asked seafarers what their religions were. Table 7 shows the distribution of their responses. As can be seen from Table 7 the majority of our respondents were Roman Catholic (36 per cent) followed by Orthodox (i.e. Greek, Russian, Ukrainian), Muslim (11 per cent); no religious affiliation and atheist (10 per cent), Hindu (5 per cent), and other religions such as Buddhists, Sikhs and Anglicans (5 per cent). However, 3 per cent of the respondents said that they were just Christians without making any reference to their denominations. Overall the majority of our respondents are Christians (over 60 per cent). In comparison to the world religions Christians are over represented in our sample whereas Muslim and Hindus are under represented. Their share within the world religions is 22, 20 and 13 per cent respectively. However, this is a reflection of the current seafarer supplying countries and their religious cultures. The major labour supply countries to the



seafarer labour market such as the Philippines, Russia, Ukraine, Poland and Greece have predominantly Christian cultural backgrounds.

**Table 7: Religions of seafarers**

Religions (as stated by seafarers)	Percentage
Roman Catholic (n=1353)	36
Orthodox (n=882)	23
Islam (n=425)	11
No affiliation, atheist (n=384)	10
Hindu (n=173)	5
Other religions (n=170)	5
Christian (n=125)	3
No answer (n=280)	7

N=3792

The other important element of spirituality at sea is that most of the port based welfare services are provided by the Christian maritime organisations (such as the Mission to Seafarers; Apostleship of the Sea; and the German Seamen's Mission) and as we have seen above we also had Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh and non-religious seafarers as well as seafarers with different belief systems (atheists, Confucianism). However, it needs to be emphasised that amongst the non-Christian seafarer respondents in our survey and interviews, the services of the Christian maritime ministries were regarded as helpful in general. "Although I am a Muslim I very much appreciate the help of Christian port chaplains. They are not there to convert us but to help." said one. Another said "I don't think it really matters for them whether we are Christian or not. They are always ready to help. You can ask for any help." However, occasionally seafarers made a reference to negative experiences:

*"In Ramadan, a papaz [Chaplain] came on board and he gave us some gift-wrapped parcels. We opened them but there was a Bible in it and some other reading materials about Christianity. We didn't say anything but as soon as he left we threw all the parcels away. Some crew members who were fasting became very anxious and thought that their fast was broken before the iftar. I think what the papaz did was a bit insensitive".*



## Description of life at sea and how this could be improved

Many seafarers described their lives at sea, as 'being in prison', 'isolated' 'lonely' and as a 'sacrifice' to provide better living conditions and opportunities for their loved ones:

*"The seafarers' life is just good for the money"*

*"For me, there is really a need for me to be a seafarer, our family isn't poor anymore, we need this money to provide our basic wants and needs but being a seafarer is like living in an abnormal world, because of course every day you meet the same faces, the same boring faces. For example, you can't share your problems with your superiors or other work colleagues. If you're not close to any other person so it's - for example, if your officers are, don't have that nice attitude, it's like hell living in that ship. In general it's very hard to be a seafarer. Very far from our loved ones and our families and our friends".*

*"Well, being a seafarer is very, very, very hard. It is like living in prison, you don't see the world for free. My chance of having a shore pass is very small. We are exposed to different pressures, homesickness, very far from home and very far from our loved ones. There is lots of pressure on us. We are working on, with extremities - you saw the working at 50 degrees Celsius, then during winter working below 20 degrees Celsius. And also, pressure on working with other people whom you are not certain of their attitudes, or you don't know them very well. It's a lonely life"*

*"It is a lonely life, say, it's like, when you get ill and there's no-one there to take care of you. It's very hard feeling. You look for the care. That's something that is negative about seafaring, there's no-one to take care of you when you're at sea."*

*"Well a seafarer's life is, I think, first you have to be emotionally ready to be away from your family and then, to me I consider it a very important factor because you're going to start this, there's a very big percentage of marriage being broken or go separate ways because of the distance. Especially on seafarers, they always go on a one-year contract."*

*"I've no complaints about my salary but at sea my spiritual needs are not met, I am spiritually hungry."*

*"A seafarers' life is a very sad and isolated life."*

*"Oh, you want me to describe seafarer's life. It's horrible and full of sacrifice. Only comfort I get when I compare myself financially with the people in the Philippines."*



*"It's very, very hurtful for us to be apart from the family. Then to handle the situation, we have different culture on the ship. So, it forces us to make us a lot of adjustments."*

The seafarers strongly emphasised that they believed that free transport services to shore based welfare facilities (i.e. communication, shopping, counselling and a place of worship), ship visits by welfare workers, information about the ports where they call, a balance between the application of the ISPS Code and their welfare needs, and access to on board e-mail facilities would improve their welfare at sea and ashore:

*"A mobile seafarers centre and internet access and phone boxes would improve our lives at sea."*

*"For me one good thing for improving our welfare on board is, because we can't go ashore most of the time because of the time schedule I suggest that instead of all those people waiting for us to go to them why not them coming on board?"*

*"For me, speaking about what would improve our lives and welfare needs, we are provided with our basic physical needs on board. But what I can just say is what we lack very much is our spiritual needs. Therefore I can suggest that, at certain ports, there could be someone who might come on board and maybe just conduct a mass or give a little talk regarding our spiritual needs. And whom we can communicate with, just have conversation. I guess that will help a lot."*



*"Very little things could improve our lives at sea maybe just having a low-cost communication to our family. Because it's still, you cannot buy that happiness when you hear the voices of your family members."*

*"I suggest that the seafarer centre should have free internet access and all the seafarer centres."*

*"I think what's really very important for us when we are at sea, is really communication with the family. That is primary. They should - I know they always run a business, like for our ship, they're the ones selling the phone cards, and they're the ones selling the Internet cards. So shipping companies must lower it down for the crew. We are already serving them right? Why do they have to make profit? For us, I consider it part of our*



*privilege to have an open communication with our families. And why do they have to make profit out of it? We're already serving them."*

*"Free transportation when we are in port, we can't go anywhere without transport."*

*"Transport even for a while we don't expect to have it in every port. It is very helpful for us to have it form time to time."*

*"Transport and communication is very important."*

*"Communication is very important. In ports we cannot find a telephone box. Nobody can make phone call. So, access to the internet is also important."*

*"Somebody that we can talk to, that we can relate to, about our needs. Somebody could come and visit us."*

*"I think access to ship's email, would help us a lot. In the middle of the ocean, we can communicate with loved ones at home, but we don't have it at the moment. It is only for official use."*

*"For me, it's communication. I need to know how my family back at home is, that's what I worry about, because I'm far away. There's no news coming."*

*"I guess I admire the services given in Felixstowe. That the seaman's club is always roaming around the ship, looking for seafarers to go out and have fun in their club. Because, in my case, that is my only way of reducing my stress. Because after my watch, I can always call the seaman's club service. They are there to pick you up, to take to the seaman's club, and to give you fun. If you want to buy something, everything is at hand there. Not like some other ports. Why can't we have more ports like that? Most of the ports we visit they are very, very far away from the city, city area. There is nothing."*

*"I believe it would be much better if there is a service vehicle from our ship to take us to places, to a seaman's centre or shopping centre. In my case, I miss out a lot because I can't go out in ports without this sort of help."*

*"Very basic information about the ports we visit would be a great help."*



## Company policies on seafarers' welfare

The analyses of the company policies on seafarers' welfare show parallels with the seafarers' accounts on their experiences about the on board welfare provisions, which was reported earlier. Questionnaire surveys and in-depth interviews with ship owners and ship management company representatives reveal that, on board seafarer welfare provisions are heavily influenced by the company preferences and practices. This creates a very fragmented welfare provision for seafarers at sea with a big gap between the top end of the industry and the bottom. As the first person account below from a ship management company representative shows, there are different policies according to different client preferences even within the same fleet:

*"In our fleet the on board welfare facilities vary. Some clients are more concerned with crew welfare than others. We have to give them a free hand to some extent and we only step in when there are problems. We employ 3,000 seafarers and have had no welfare related complaints so far this year."*

In contrast to the view above there are companies which consider crew welfare as a win win situation because looking after welfare is beneficial to both crew and the company:

*"We have a vested interest in looking after seafarers' welfare because quite frankly, happy seafarers are far more productive. It's far nicer to manage happy people, so why not make them happy if you can and still be relatively competitive."*

The general impression gathered through the interviews and surveys is that there is a fine balance between the cost of welfare provisions and profit. Traditionally, shipping companies managed their vessels in-house. This pattern still persists in a few companies. However, third party ship management became the global pattern from the mid-1970s onwards. There is a general consensus in the industry that "third party outsourcing of vessels will continue to increase." As stated by the industry representatives this is "primarily because of increased vessel running costs, together with continual updating of health, safety, environmental and quality regulations and the increased time spent by back office staff, all reducing profits" (Lloyd's List 2007). In this context of profit culture, as we have also seen in the previous sections, some companies aim to provide welfare services for seafarers which are directly or indirectly subsidised by seafarers themselves. As put by one of the crewing managers whose company operates over 200 vessels:



*"We have shipbased welfare funds. The money is collected in these funds through supernumeraries on board. For example, if a senior officer sails with his wife he contributes to the welfare fund US \$3.50 every day that his wife stays on board. We have no restrictions on ranks to sail with a family member and sometimes if the space permits a crew member could be joined by his wife and children together but they must contribute to the shipboard welfare fund. The money accumulated in this fund can only be used for the crew entertainment on board. They could purchase sports equipment or DVD's and so on."*

Another crewing manager said:

*"These days many crew members have their own laptops, DVD players and other equipment in their own cabins and they all have different taste. In some parts of the worlds where our ships trade our crew could buy music CDs or DVD movies very cheaply."*

This "different taste" has also been emphasised by another manager:

*"Our company recruits crews from seven different countries through local crewing agencies. All these seafarers have different tastes. We have common understanding with the crewing agencies that they send DVDs in Tagalog or Hindi with a joining crew regularly. This is part of their service."*

All the companies who responded to our survey said that they provide welfare services to their crews free of charge. However, as Table 8 demonstrates, when they were asked about their average monthly welfare budget over fifty per cent said they do not have any regular monthly budget allowances. "We don't have a particular budget but we supply movies and entertainment systems and all that on board" said one manager and "we spent some months over a thousand dollars on stereo systems or TV's but not much in the next. It all depends on demand" said the other. Similar points were echoed by many. Some ship management company representatives emphasised that they have no particular welfare budget allowance as such but cover the items related to crew welfare within their ship operating budget. For example, one senior representative from one of the biggest shipmanagement companies said that in their ship operating budget the crew welfare expenses were allocated within the crew payroll. Again, as Table 8 demonstrates, one third of the companies that responded to our survey rely on involuntary contributions from their crews in the provision of on board welfare facilities.



Twenty six percent of the company representatives who said that their companies have a monthly on board welfare budget allowance per ship between US \$100 and \$150. Here is a typical example:

*“Our budget is \$150 a month per ship. The main bulk of the money goes to DVDs. We also subscribe some magazines for the crew. In addition if we are visiting a ship, especially with the Filipino crew, we usually take on a couple of guitars and pile of strings and other bits and pieces. All our ships have entertainment facilities and other stuff. We supply all those.”*

**Table 8: Monthly company budget on ship-board seafarer recreational facilities**

	Percentage
No regular budget but facilities are provided on demand (N=16)	20
No specific budget but provisions included in the ship operation budget (N=13)	16
No regular budget but company provision co-exist with (involuntary) contribution from seafarers (N=12)	15
Regular budget between \$100 and \$150 and further provision on demand (N=12)	15
Regular budget between \$100 and \$150 and further (involuntary) contribution from seafarers (N=9)	11
Regular budget under \$100 and further (involuntary) contributions from seafarers (N=7)	9
Regular budget under \$100 (N=7)	9
Other (N=3)	4

N=79

**Note:** Some companies provided annual figures and these were divided by 12 to calculate their monthly budget.

One of the striking outcomes of the survey and interviews is that in general the companies have a narrow sense of seafarer welfare which mainly focuses on the provision of limited leisure and entertainment facilities, such as TV monitors, DVD players and DVD's, music systems and so on.

As we have seen, communication with their families and friends is very



important for seafarers and their welfare. This is also recognised by many managers in the industry:

*“The main problem with seafarers’ lives is the stress of being in a confined space. Usually silly arguments blow up beyond all logic. I suppose a part of it is isolation from families and people’s temper run out. In this context communication with families is the key issue for seafarers’ welfare.”*

The shipping and ship management company representatives emphasised the importance of information exchange between their vessels and offices for the day



to day running of their vessels and subsequent need for data exchange via high speed e-mail communication. In this respect all the responding companies stated that they had e-mail communications aboard their vessels. As we have seen, from the seafarers point of view it is important to use e-mail on board to improve communication with family and friends at home. As emphasised by Davies and Parfett “it enables them to remain part of the family and take part in its day to day activities even when away at sea. E-mail exchanges have a permanency which is not possible from telephone calls” (1998:4). The company policies on e-mail access for their crews varied considerably. As some said “e-mail communications on board is for business use only” others said e-mail access is “free for senior officers”, some others said “it’s under the captains discretion who could use e-mail on board”, some others said

“we sell prepaid cards to seafarers to use e-mail and other communication on board” and only one shipping company representative said “in our fleet every crew member on board has a private e-mail account and unlimited access to send and receive e-mails”. Here are some first person accounts to highlight different company policies in providing e-mail communication for their crews.

A communications manager of a shipping company which owns over 150 vessels said:

*“In all our ships we have one server and six computers. One is up on the bridge, one for master, one for chief officer, one for chief engineer, one in the engine room and one common computer for junior officers. These computers can be used for paperwork also for direct communication. The crew could send e-mails free of charge from the common computer*



*but it is controlled by the captain. So he can tell the crew whether they are allowed to send e-mails or they can just use it for paperwork. As far as the company is concerned we have no objection for the crew to send e-mails through the ships communication system. However, we don't let crew access the internet which could cost over, lets say \$3 per megabyte but for e-mails we don't use the internet protocol, we use specially built e-mails off the satellite communication. As far as the cost is concerned, in this system it doesn't really matter whether you send one e-mail or ten. We have a protocol that sends small packages and has short timeouts. Normally the satellite is 36,000 km out then it takes time to go up and down to it but we have special software that takes care of this long distance delay, we can have very high usage on this e-mail system. In other words we would not go bankrupt if all the crew uses the internet but we leave the judgement to the captain. Because whenever the captain dials for business all the outgoing e-mails in the system can also be sent at the same time."*

A shipmanagement company senior officer that manages over 70 ships said:

*"Using e-mail on board costs money, you are using satellite. The reason is because it's a long distance, we cannot use very advanced modulation, so it will always require bandwidth going up to the satellite. And then the owner of the satellite needs to get the money back for the investment. We cannot afford to provide e-mail for the crew free of charge."*

Another major shipping and third party ship management company representatives said:

*"I think there's been a step backwards recently with this move to giving seafarers not unlimited but very easy access to e-mails at sea, and I'll tell you the reason why and if you've been at sea you'll know; in our days if there was a problem at home you got a telex through the company, "mother ill in hospital please get off", and that's very disturbing, but all the other bitty news you got, your girlfriend's left you and your wife's run off with the gardener or whatever, you got in port when you got your mail, and then if there was a problem it was right, you pay off now. But until that time you got the mail you were efficient and you didn't have a problem, you were happy, you were happy in your ignorance, then the mail came and then something could be done straight away. With this tendency now, this communications, letting the ratings email home and all this, you're going to get so much tittle tattle that's going on that you are actually going to make, I believe, arguably, and I know people argue, that there will be more problems with unhappiness on board with people. ... I mean the wife will phone up, "my daughter's got a temperature, oh my God", he'll be going on watch thinking "my daughter's got a*



*temperature". They'll be trying to keep the guys informed about what's going on at home but then the guys going to worry about what's going on at home. I honestly think that I would not encourage all this free email and cheap communications on board ships because I actually think it's going to be counterproductive."*

A similar view was echoed by another senior ship management company representative that operates over 100 ships:

*"I'm certainly not going to be promoting these Inmarsat dedicated e-mail terminals. One of our clients is promoting the use of these terminals and I'll be very interested to see how it works out, but I actually think it's going to create more unhappiness. It's fine to have the ability to communicate when you need to, and if you get a message from your family that's worthy of a telex, your father's died that kind of thing, ok, but there's a level that .. And unfortunately with email you start coming down to the very simple things that are going to upset people. You don't even need email now; mobile phones now can be used in lots of areas, in port or within 10 miles of the land."*

Another senior manager emphasised that although they have restricted private e-mail communication aboard their vessels, this would change:

*"There's no point in telling someone that hasn't got a computer that they can send e-mail. I see a lot of people coming through the office here trying to sell me this thing about having computer-based training, and on their leave they can click into the Web and all of that, but the actual fact is half the Indonesians and half the Filipinos don't have a telephone at home, let alone Internet and a modem, these kind of things. Whereas probably all of a Scandinavian crew have it. So I think you have a bit of a difference there. However, in our ships we are planning to introduce e-mail access for the crew. It's coming. We are networking our ships with computers, slowly, and we are putting one in the ship's office for crew's use, so it will come. It's just a question of time. But in the actual main communication system, we obviously restrict the use of private e-mails, because if we get someone that hacks the whole thing, ruins the computer, wipes out all the operating files, we're stuck."*

When the industry representatives were asked what would most improve the welfare of seafarers, the voice from the industry was unanimous about the importance of shore leave for seafarers' welfare. However, the negative impact of the ISPS Code on shore leave was mentioned frequently. Again fast turnaround times, ship operation schedules and minimum crewing levels were also mentioned



as having preventative impacts on shore leave. When companies were asked about policies on ensuring shore leave for their crews the responses once again centred around similar concerns, and here is a first person account to serve as an example:

*“Trying to secure shore leave for crew members is impractical from a commercial point of view. I was on a ship recently and the crew had not been able to have shore leave for the period of time they were on board, and that’s the life. I personally think going ashore is very important but no shore leave is allowed because of the minimum manning of the ship.”*

However, only one company within our respondents has managed effectively to secure shore-leave for their crews despite their vessels having fast turnarounds and busy schedules. Here is one of their managers speaking about the company policy:

*“With a very few exceptions we have free shuttle services for our seafarers in every port that our ships operate, even if there is only one seafarer who could have shore leave in that particular port. The service operates on demand and makes a couple of rounds if necessary to accommodate crew members who are on duty. Of course this costs money but we see this as an investment and we have very good return in our investment. We can see the outcome of this service although it is difficult to measure it. We have a very high retention rate, our crew is loyal to us, they are happy and healthy.”*

There is a striking polarisation in company policies concerning provision of welfare services for their crews. The company above could be considered as having good welfare provisions for its seafarers but what a manager from another company said below, highlights the inconsistencies across the industry:

*“To be quite frank in the current environment in shipping seafarers’ welfare suffers a lot but I honestly don’t believe there’s going to be a problem of running ships because of this. The world population is so large that there’s always going to be enough people that want to go sea to run ships.”*





## Conclusions

It is widely accepted in the shipping industry that due to the changes in relation to globalisation and competition and also in relation to fast turnarounds, reduced crewing sizes (resulting in work intensification and lack of mutual support on board), restriction of shore leave and the new port development away from easy access to shorebased facilities (i.e. transport, communication, shopping and leisure) the welfare needs of seafarers are greater than they used to be. Prolonged isolation from their families and friends and limited opportunities to communicate with them have also had an effect.

The comparison between the results of the ITF/MORI 1996 survey and the current survey shows that over the last 10 years, seafarers have become more confined to their vessels. As we have seen, port based welfare services that require a longer period of time ashore such as the need for a reading room/library; organised sightseeing; meeting local people; sports facilities and onshore accommodation are not seen as important as they were 10 years ago. Instead, cheap communication facilities near to their vessels; mobile seafarers centres coming near to the gangway and ship visits from seafarer welfare workers have become more important to them. These changes reflect the basic priorities of seafarers with a limited time in port and this should not be interpreted as seafarers not needing the port based welfare facilities and services anymore. Simply, the majority of the seafarers do not have the time to use them regularly.



In theory, no matter how reduced the turnaround time is, there is still a possibility for seafarers to have some shore leave to access shore based welfare facilities and have wider contact with life beyond the ship. However, as we have seen it is very difficult in practical terms. The difference between being in port and at sea is increasingly indiscernible for seafarers. In fact, the analyses of ships voyage cycles suggest that, overall, on average ships spent only 20 per cent of their operation time in ports and 80 per cent at sea (Kahveci 1999; Kahveci and Nichols 2006). In other words, seafarers spent a substantial amount of their time confined to their vessels. In this context it is not surprising that when they described their lives at sea



seafarers made references to “being in prison”. However a review of the UK Prison Service information books for prisoners demonstrate that the provision of leisure, recreation, religious service and communication (facilities are better in UK prisons than it is on many of the ships that our respondents worked aboard.

As we have seen, some shipping and ship management companies provide better welfare services for their seafarers than others and there is a polarisation in the industry as far as the company policies on welfare provisions for their seafarers are concerned. However in general, only a few companies would be considered as having the best practices for welfare provisions for their crews.

We have also seen that seafarers who participated in our research strongly emphasised that they believed that free transport services to shore based welfare facilities (i.e. communication, shopping, counselling, a place of worship), ship visits by welfare workers, information about the ports where they call, a balance between the application of the ISPS Code and their welfare needs, and access to on board e-mail facilities would improve their welfare at sea and ashore.











## Recommendations

The study documented the major shift in the opinions of seafarers in relation to the most important port-based welfare services over the last decade and also the most valued services that could improve the current state of seafarers' welfare.

A number of policies and practices could be successfully introduced or developed by the international and national maritime employment regulators and policy makers, employers' organisations, international or national trade unions and seafarer welfare agencies. Among these, the following proposals could be adopted to improve the existing welfare services and facilities for seafarers. As documented by the research, some of these recommendations are already in practice, however they should be more widespread across the industry.

### Company policies

-  The shipping and ship management companies should have policies in place making sure that their seafarers have shore leave on a regular basis.
-  The companies should instruct their agents to provide necessary information about welfare and other facilities (including communication and transport) for their crews in ports.
-  The companies should have clear policies in place which permit seafarers aboard their ships access to telecommunication facilities (including e-mail and satellite phones) and this access should not be solely at the discretion of captains.
-  When accessing on board telecommunication facilities, the privacy of seafarers should be assured. Thus facilities should be placed in areas where seafarers can have privacy including each seafarer having a designated on board e-mail address.
-  The companies should develop a holistic approach to seafarers' welfare beyond just addressing limited entertainment facilities aboard their vessels.
-  The company practices where seafarers finance on board welfare facilities





through wage cuts or other form of financial contribution should be abandoned. Companies should allocate sufficient budget for wide ranging on board welfare provision.

- ⑨ Shipping companies should acknowledge the importance of port seafarer welfare workers (including union representatives) for their crews and their on board visits should be encouraged in ports and facilitated under ISPS arrangements.
- ⑨ The companies and seafarer welfare agencies should explore the availability of cheaper on board telecommunication facilities for seafarers.
- ⑨ There is a need for a further collaboration between the shipping companies and seafarer welfare agencies to develop outreach welfare services for seafarers (such as sailing welfare worker / chaplain for a certain period aboard merchant vessels).
- ⑨ There is a need to explore the provision of free shuttle bus facilities provided by the companies for their seafarers when their ships are in port.

### **Seafarer welfare workers from seafarer centres or missions visiting ships**

- ⑨ Seafarer welfare agencies should balance the regional inequalities on ship visiting which is currently poor in the developing world regions.
- ⑨ There should be more ship visits by seafarer welfare workers coming from seafarer centres or missions.
- ⑨ Maritime missions and other seafarer welfare organisations need to address the low level of satisfaction with their ship visitors.
- ⑨ Ship visitors from welfare agencies should spend longer times aboard during their visits and try to have contact with as many seafarers as possible.
- ⑨ Where the number of ship visitors and resources are





limited strategic ship visits should be developed, such as taking into account ship turnaround time and voyage cycle. For example, given the situation that if a ship visitor needs to choose between two ships: the ship with a quicker turnaround and involved in deep sea passage could be prioritised over the vessel with longer turnaround times and regular port calls.

- ④ Information and guidance to deal with challenges (i.e. fast turnarounds, how to visit ships, interacting with multicultural / multifaith) should be given to seafarer welfare workers visiting ships.
- ④ Seafarer welfare workers need to be well equipped in providing personal counselling and addressing spiritual and personal needs as well as providing newspapers, magazines, telephone cards and local information.

### Seafarer centres

- ④ Seafarer centres have to be made to work by putting extra effort into bringing seafarers to the centres and developing structures to make this possible.
- ④ When planning to build a new seafarer centre its location should be considered within the port area permitting easy access for visiting seafarers.
- ④ Existing seafarer centres which face port operations that have extended geographically over time should consider providing satellite centres with basic communication and transport facilities near to the new port terminals.
- ④ Where necessary, mobile seafarer centres with communication facilities and basic consumables for sale should be available for seafarers.
- ④ Seafarer centres should prioritise free transport and cheap communication facilities and free internet access.
- ④ Seafarer centres should have at least telephone facilities outside the building for the use of seafarers out of their opening hours.



- ⑨ Seafarer centres which are operated by seafarer welfare agencies must distinguish themselves from commercial seafarer centres which are marketed by local entrepreneurs.
- ⑨ Seafarer centres should publicise their existence and services to seafarers.
- ⑨ Seafarer centres should provide a toll free contact phone along the cargo terminals and various other areas in the port where seafarers could call for assistance or request a service.

## Ports

- ⑨ The development of seafarer welfare facilities and services in ports where these facilities are non-existent or poorly developed should be prioritised.
- ⑨ Different maritime ministries and other welfare agencies working in the same ports should combine their resources and work in collaboration.
- ⑨ There should be more public telephones in the port areas.
- ⑨ Seafarer telephone cards should be available in every port with competitive prices.
- ⑨ The negative impact of the ISPS Code on seafarer access to shore based welfare facilities and also on the access of shore based welfare workers to ships should be eliminated.
- ⑨ Port based welfare services such as a reading room/library, video/book exchange, sport facilities and onshore accommodation which are regarded by seafarers with less interest, need to be reviewed.
- ⑨ In addition to existing port directories produced by The International Christian Maritime Associations (ICMA) and The International Committee on Seafarers' Welfare (ICSW), there should be a further information leaflet available for every port produced and distributed locally.
- ⑨ The port information leaflet should contain an area map where transport, communication, local amenities (such as seafarer centre; shops; place of





worship) are clearly marked and further useful information provided (such as brief area information and important telephone numbers). There are already good practices in this respect, for example, Venice - Marghera port map produced by the Stella Maris Friends Venice could serve as a useful example ([http://www.stellamarisfriends.org/12\\_usefulinformation.php](http://www.stellamarisfriends.org/12_usefulinformation.php)). The UK Merchant Navy Welfare Board has produced other good examples. (<http://www.mnwb.org/>).

- ① This information leaflet should be available to visiting seafarers from the local maritime ministries, ships agents and the port authority (including pilots and office at the port gate) in hard copy and where available on their web sites as a downloadable electronic version.

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