



The  
Seafarers  
Happiness  
Index

# Seafarers Happiness Index

Quarter 1 2022



IN ASSOCIATION WITH



Standard  
Club

**IDWAL**



# Seafarers Happiness Index Quarter 1

The Seafarers Happiness Index (SHI) is the shipping industry's ongoing barometer of the key issues facing those at sea today. Seafarers are asked 10 key questions every Quarter, sharing their views about specific issues affecting their life and work.

This latest report highlights not only the findings of the Q1 2022 data, but also provides a deep dive into the responses of seafarers and the issues which they have been facing during what has been a challenging and turbulent period. Throughout the year, we heard from crews all over the world, and we are grateful to every single one of them, not simply for assisting us with the survey, but for their efforts in keeping trade flowing in these most difficult circumstances.

Seafarers continue to work with dedication, professionalism, care and resolve. However, many are facing a time like never before, with a pandemic, a war and commercial decisions all impacting them. Once again, we heard calls for seafarers to be recognised as key or essential workers. These demands cannot and should not be ignored, and it is time that many maritime nations supported the people who make the industry work and global society function.

## Q1 2022 – The Combined Impact of Many Bad Things

We are hugely grateful, as ever, to the many seafarers who took the time to share their experiences with us. This generated vital data and written submissions which allow us to report back to the industry.

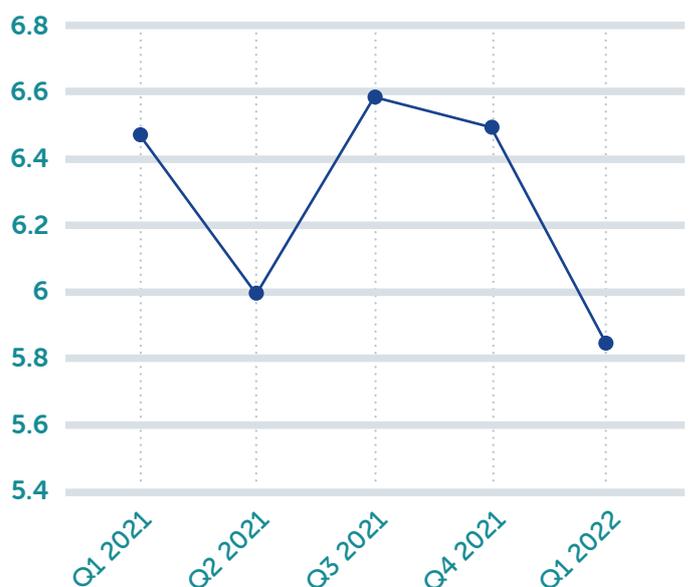
Crews from across the world took time to share their views, feelings, experiences, and comments about life at sea, providing incredibly powerful and important insight into key issues for seafarers today.

## Falling Happiness Levels

The overall average was 5.85, down from 6.41 in the previous Quarter. The latest Seafarers Happiness Index data reveals not only the lowest levels of satisfaction across 8 years of reporting, but it is also only the second time that happiness levels across all the question have fallen. This drop in happiness is against a backdrop of seafarers experiencing wave after wave of problems.

There has been a confluence of concerns, from COVID to conflict to contracts. It appears that Q1 2022 has seen a rising tide of concerns and issues, which have left morale and the mood on board at an all-time low.

## Happiness levels since start of 2021



# Realities Bite

Early in the Quarter, we heard from seafarers who were once more facing the realities of COVID-19. The Omicron variant was ripping through many countries, and seafarers were again in the firing line, unable to leave vessels, with travel plans ripped up, and in some instances, fearful of entering certain ports.

Then mid-Quarter, prompted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, we heard from seafarers who were concerned about their families and worried by tensions on board. Initially, there were hopes that relationships on ships with mixed nationality crews would not be too badly impacted. Indeed, there were many Russians and Ukrainians actively working together to try and ensure that relationships did not suffer, and that life on board could continue as "normally" as possible.

Alas, as the war has raged, and as news has reached vessels, that veneer of normality and continued camaraderie has been sorely tested, and in some cases destroyed. We heard some reports of Masters and Chief Officers unable to exchange work-related information or refusing to speak to each other. That has a very concerning implication not only for social cohesion on board, but safety too.

We heard reports of Russian and Ukrainian crews feeling increasingly unable to work together. Russians and Ukrainians make up about 15% of the global workforce, and there is also a knock-on effect for a far wider seagoing population. We heard of rising tensions between a range of nations, with written responses stating that seafarers from a host of nations, but particularly Poland, Romania and Bulgaria, were struggling to work with crews containing Russian seafarers.

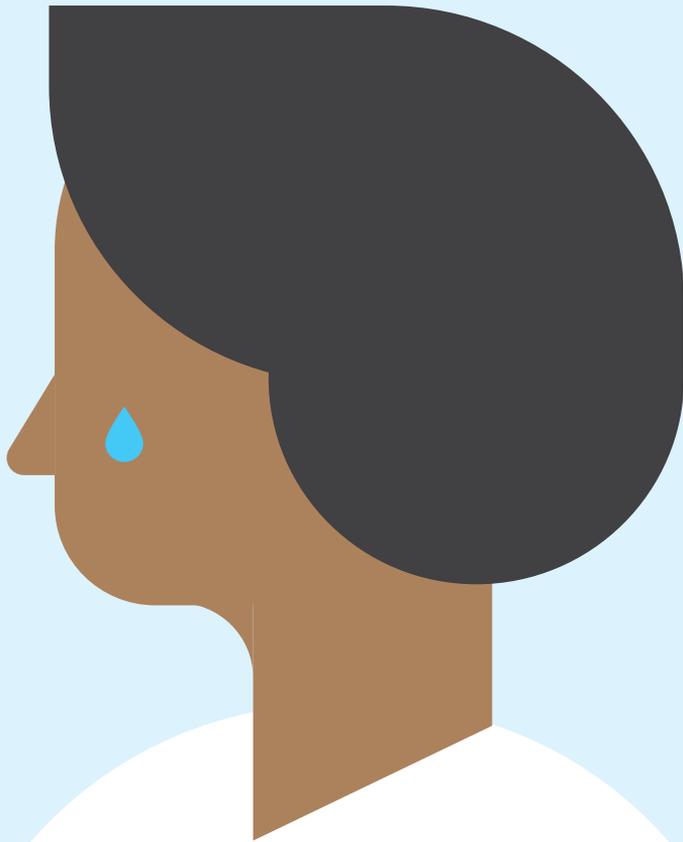
Disinformation appears to have exacerbated issues. Seafarers spoke of the difficulties as news or reports from the conflict reached their vessels. Though respondents did not explicitly state how it was reaching them, they did say that while online sources played a part, there was also talk of more traditional maritime communications being used, with concerns that VHF traffic was provoking negative reactions on vessels. It seems the conflict in Ukraine threatens to destroy the delicate social fabric on board many vessels.

The twin problems of COVID and conflict would already be enough to undermine and drive satisfaction levels down. However, the Quarter also had one other significant issue to throw up, that of employment rights and contractual issues.

We heard from seafarers who spoke of concerns about abandonment, as they were concerned as to whether wages would be paid. While other seafarers wrote of their anger and frustration about contracts being automatically extended even when they were desperate to return home.

All in all, Q1 2022 has seen so many issues combine and collide that it is no wonder there has been such a drop in the data. With falling happiness levels, we tend to find that seafarers open up and share more about their feelings, experiences and their impressions of what it is to be at sea today. We received one message which captured the tough reality felt by many.





“

Life at sea is getting increasingly depressing each day, not much being done about the seafarer's welfare the so-called key workers running the whole industry. Hectic work schedules, no social life, with so much technological advancement getting a basic internet connection is still a luxury for most seafarers when it's almost a basic necessity these days. The workload is getting increasingly high with minimum crews on board, rest hours are only complied with on paper, yet none of the authorities pay heed. Shipping has become a floating jail, where you're just expected to work endlessly like robots without questioning the work scenario. If money was not a concern, I don't see a single seafarer willing to come back to sea.

”

While the data gathered is about seafarers working at sea, we also received feedback from maritime professionals and executives working ashore. These were messages not only of support and solidarity with seafarers, but also concerns about the atmosphere inside shipping companies, owners, operators and managers ashore. They spoke of their own fatigue and stress, and of having to make difficult decisions to keep vessels running.

It is clear that issues at sea are not insulated from those ashore. Whatever happens on land can have massively problematic repercussions for crews. We have reached an extremely concerning juncture, where so many are suffering as they wrestle with problems, demands, stresses and the need to keep vessels working.

Reading the words of seafarers facing such difficulties and trying their best to cope highlights how important it is for the industry to hear what goes on, and to find answers. Answers are out there, and while they cannot fix the wider, bigger realities shaping the world, some companies do all they can to support their seafarers and make life better at sea.

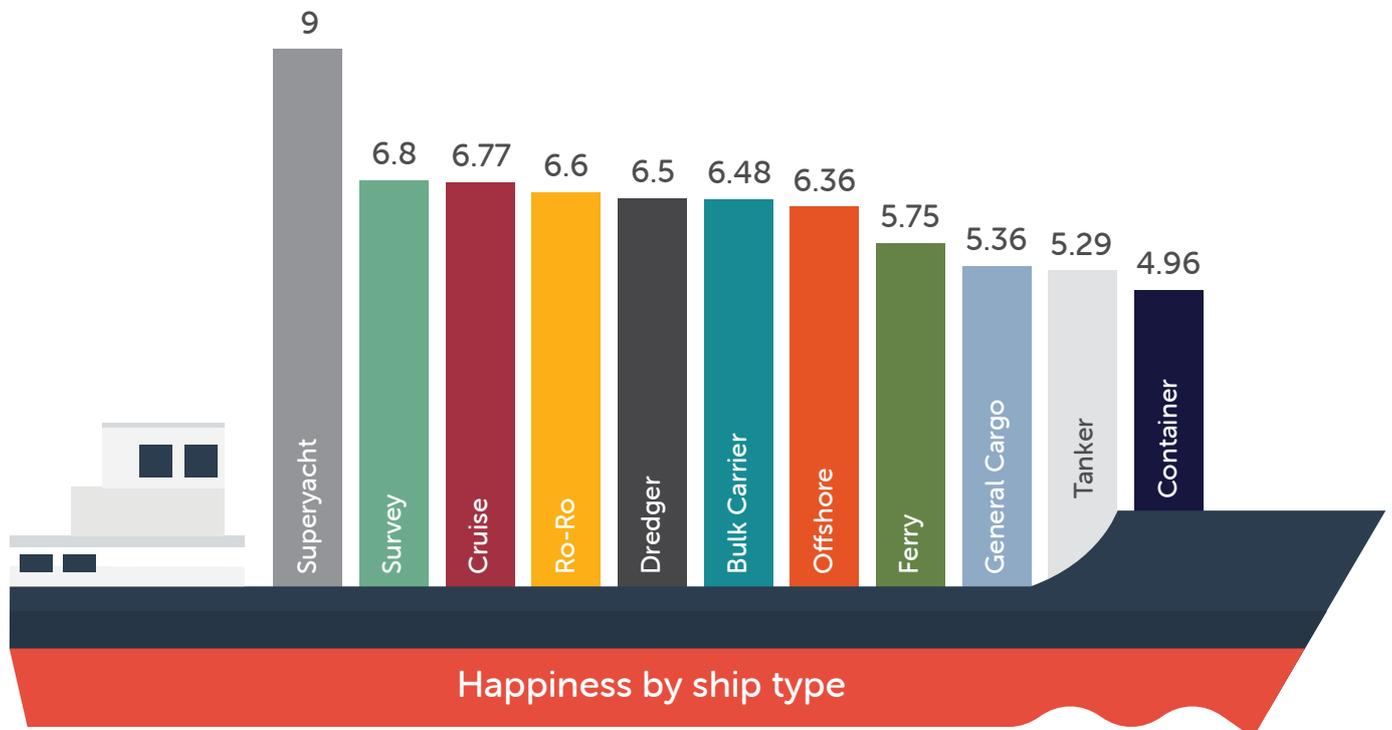
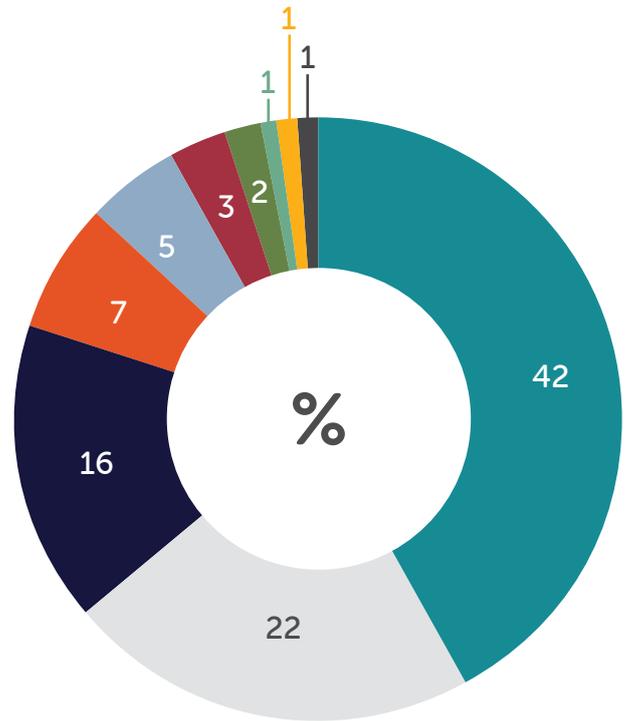
We heard from crews on some vessels who have been able to focus increasingly on welfare and wellbeing. These are vessels where investments have been made and on which life is as enjoyable, comfortable and engaging as it can be. Some have dedicated funds and management support for wellbeing events and activities, such as weekly gatherings, quizzes, karaoke, sports, TikTok video making, movie nights, and monthly barbecues.

With the right financial backing and the support of leadership, there can be more focus on quality of life. There is much to be learned from those who care, and who invest in ways to make seafarers' lives and experiences better.

We cannot fix all the issues, but by listening we can empathise and understand their impact. We can also, as an industry, learn from the positives. We can hear what some companies and crews are doing to make life better, to raise smiles and spirits, and we can encourage all to try and find their path to seafarers' happiness.

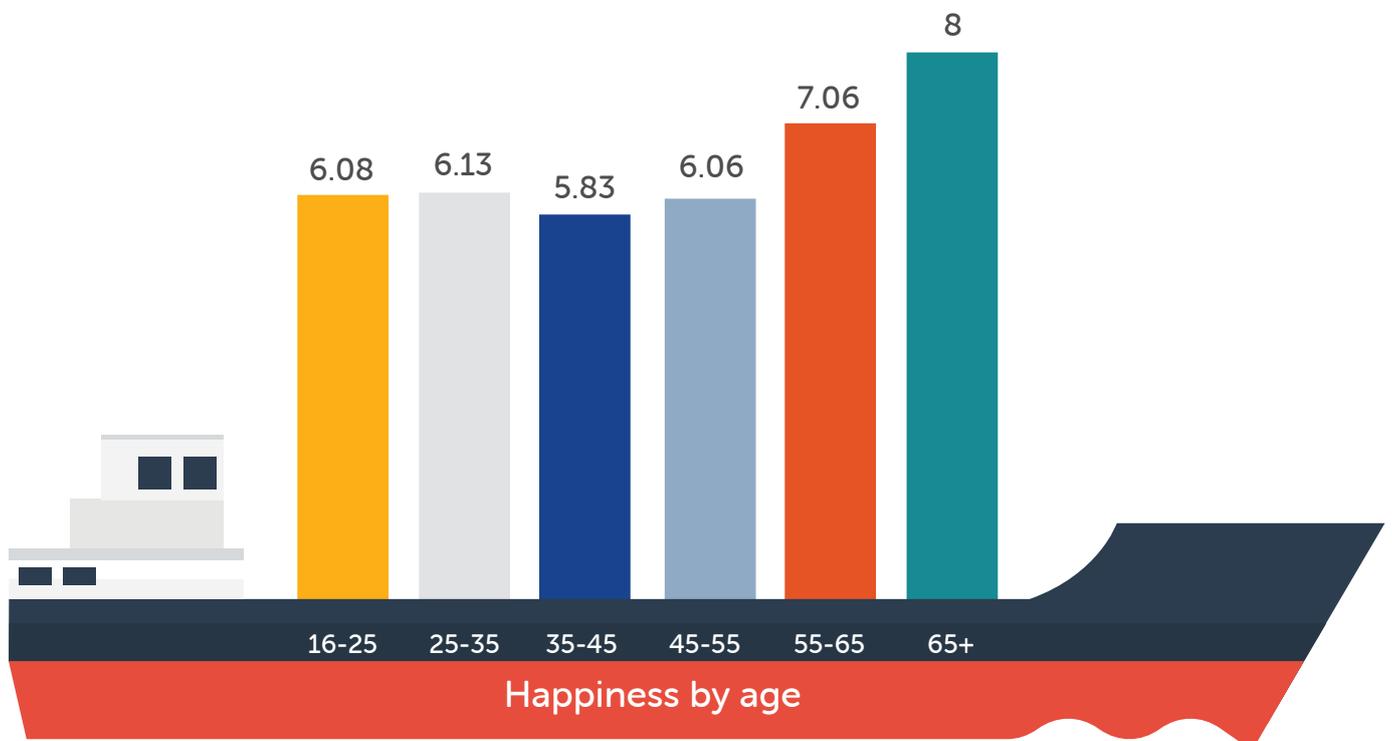
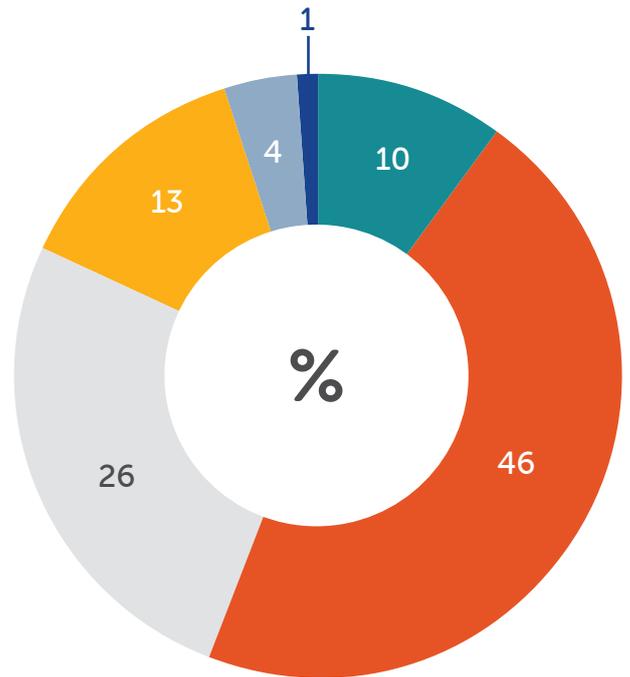
# Ship Type

- Bulk Carrier
- Tanker
- Container
- Offshore
- General Cargo
- Cruise
- Ferry
- Survey
- Ro-Ro
- Dredger



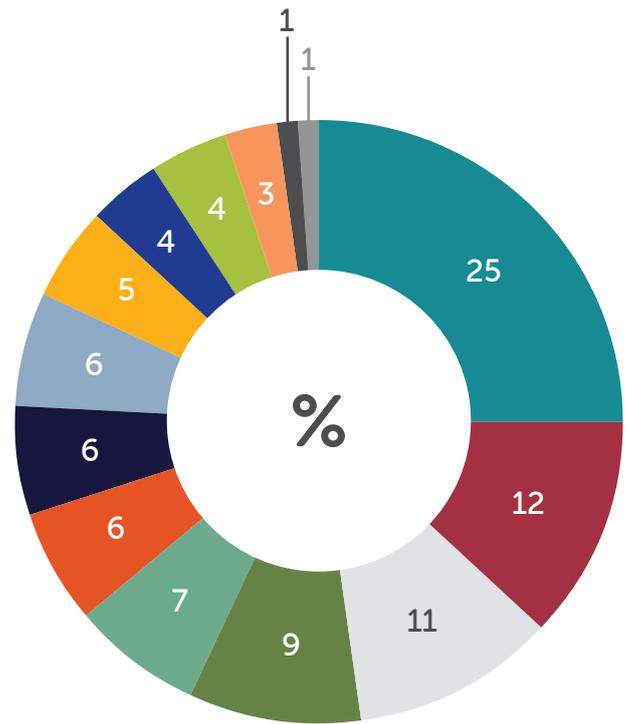
# Age Range

- 16-25
- 25-35
- 35-45
- 45-55
- 55-65
- 65+



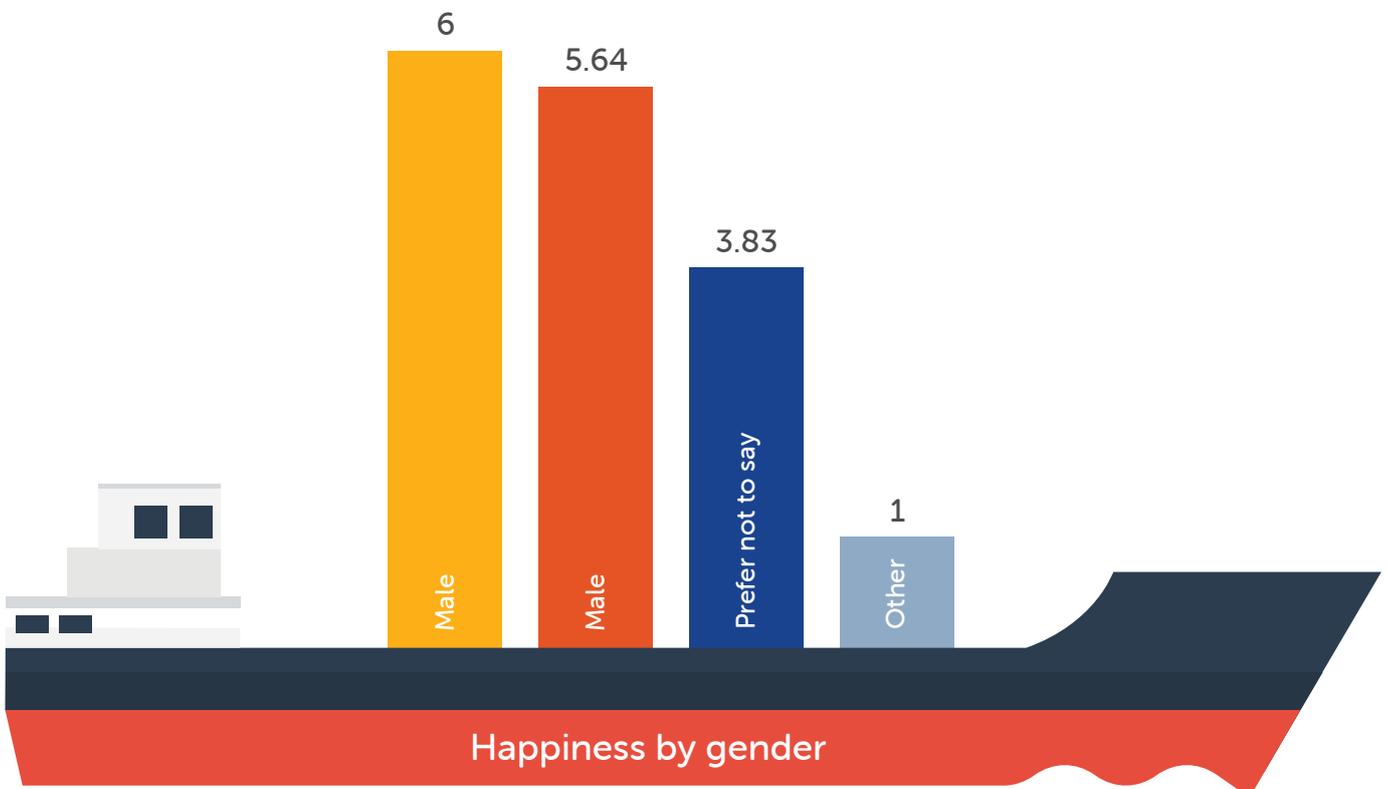
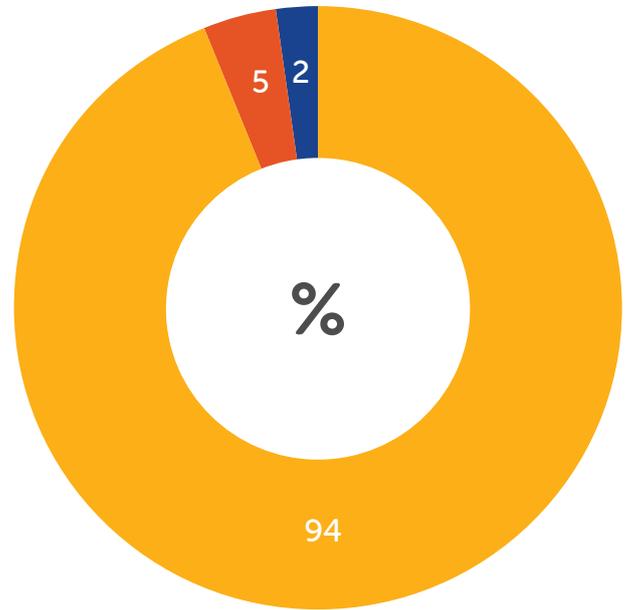
# Ranks

- Deck Crew
- Second Officer
- Third Officer
- Catering Department
- Captain
- Engine Crew
- Third Engineer
- Chief Officer
- Electrical Department
- Deck Cadet
- Chief Engineer
- Second Engineer
- Engine Cadet
- Fourth Engineer



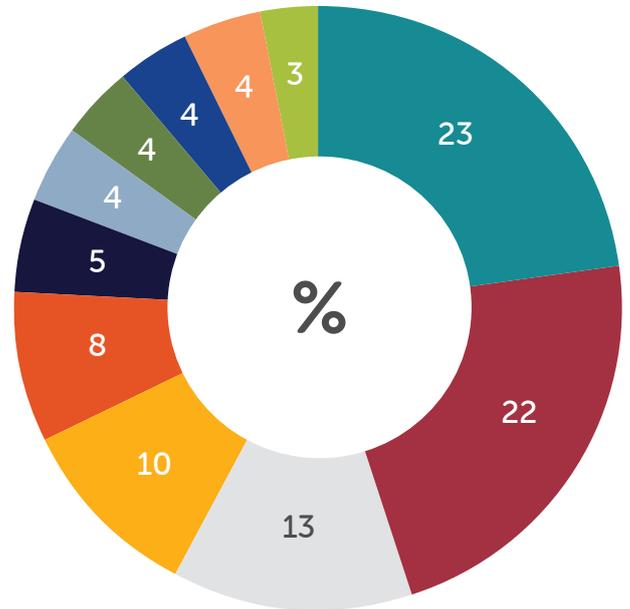
# Gender

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say
- Other



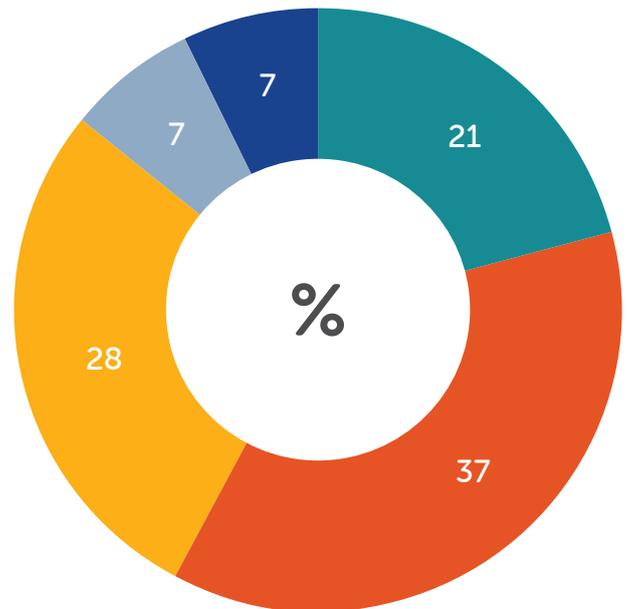
# Flag State

- Liberia
- Marshall Islands
- Hong Kong (China)
- Panama
- United States of America
- Japan
- Singapore
- Malta
- Bahamas
- China
- United Kingdom



# Trip Length

- 1-3 months
- 3-6 months
- 6-9 months
- 9-12 months
- Over 12 months



## How happy generally when at sea?

5.92 ↓ from 6.56

We received a range of responses relating to and explaining the sense of satisfaction, or otherwise, when it came to the issue of general happiness.

There were positive responses, and where seafarers felt happiest, they spoke of enjoying their job and the importance of having good relationships with others on board. By contrast, there were also many written responses featuring comments about the less positive aspects of life at sea.

We received comments about the lack of internet access, and not being able to receive crew emails. This is an area of life on board which continues to negatively impact those affected, and one which will be explored in more detail in Question 2.

When it came to other problem areas, we received a range of responses. These clustered around manning issues, with some relating to "toxic relationships", and the issue of tensions on board between some nationalities – something which will be seen further in Question 8.

Some likened their time on ship to getting used to a completely new life, which felt akin to "space adaptation syndrome", as they adjusted to the disorienting effects, and a life "turned upside down". Others felt that with "very little happiness and very low salary" all they could do was try to make the best of a challenging situation.

The issue of contract extensions was repeatedly mentioned, and this was a cause of much frustration. As one seafarer stated, "Not happy when even after completing my contract I am told to sign extension for 2 months without any crew change plan. When I ask why 2 months, I am told the extension is only for immigration /inspection purposes!!!" The seafarer added, "Now I don't know when I will actually sign off...!!!"

The potential impacts on mental health are obvious. These are seafarers who want to go home and who are being effectively forced to remain on board. This is a recipe for disaster.

While we heard from very few female seafarers, it was powerful to hear of the struggles that one individual felt. She stated, "I have a difficult path ahead and due to the limited number of female sailors in my country, I have to fight with all this and keep myself happy".



**No shore leave, no increment of wages, extension of contract due to pandemic restrictions.**

## How happy about contact with family when at sea?

6.39 ↓ from 6.92

As mentioned in the previous question, the issue of connectivity and contact with families and loved ones at home is something that shapes the happiness of seafarers massively.

Some were positive, and one message stated: "If internet sim card is affordable, it's easy to have communication with our family and Wi-Fi signal of the ship is strong". This is a common message from the Index, that vessels with good, cost-effective internet provision have the happiest crews by far.

When vessels do not have such connectivity, then seafarer responses were unsurprisingly frustrated. A large number of comments stated, "no internet", though perhaps the issue was best summed up by one respondent who stated, "not having Wi-Fi is the biggest challenge on board and the voyages we take are long voyages which means we only talk to our loved ones after two months. Sometimes when we reach port you find that sim cards are expensive".

A host of similar responses were received, and there were concerns about broken equipment, slow connections, weak signals and expensive rates.

## How happy about access to shore leave?

4.14 ↓ from 4.63

The issue of shore leave has been hugely, perhaps fundamentally, impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. For this reason, the responses are usually the lowest across the data set.

It is no surprise, therefore, to see this issue once again perform so poorly. Time and time again, respondents stated "no shore leave", "port restrictions", "no access", and variations of a very similar theme.

While this is a seemingly universal issue for seafarers at the moment, it is important to assess what impact this has. One respondent captured the mood well, stating, "due to covid-19 restrictions of different port of calls nowadays, seafarers have no access to shore leave which makes us very unhappy. We cannot unwind or release work pressures within the ships"



**Not having Wi-Fi is the biggest challenge on board and the voyages we take are long voyages which means we only talk to our loved ones after two months.**

## How happy about wages/salary?

5.59 ↓ from 6.29

The issue of wages often raises a very diverse set of responses. Some feel that they are paid sufficiently, and indeed are grateful to be in employment. Those who felt positive said the wages were good and they were paid on time, and as expected.

Others feel frustrated about the perceived drop in living standards that they are experiencing. This is especially prevalent currently as the cost of living rises rapidly across many nations.

Seafarers tend to feel this acutely, and often believe that they should be receiving salary increases. Indeed, repeated responses stated it was too long since their last pay rise.

While we only received a couple of responses about potential abandonment, it seems that there could be problems ahead. One respondent said, "I feel lied to, no payment received but they keep saying soon. How long is soon?"

## How happy about the food on board?

6.05 ↓ from 6.66

Food and meals on board any vessel are a focal point around which the working day, and indeed entire trips are built. This means that there is great importance placed not only on the food itself but the dining experience.

For many respondents, the food was well-received. There were many comments which simply said "good food". There was praise where Chief Cooks were delivering nutritious and tasty meals. "Chief Cook is the best", was one comment. Another stated, "Very yummy always new dishes".

Seafarers who enjoy their food are usually far happier across the board than those who do not. So, getting this right can have massive implications for satisfaction and the atmosphere on board.

Where there were issues, they seemed to relate either to the budget for the food, the standard of training of the catering crew, or the focus on providing the wrong food types – such as salty or fried foods too often.

There were concerns that the budget has not been increased in line with the inflation of stores costs. This issue was raised repeatedly, with feeding rates of around \$8 mentioned. With the rising cost of ingredients and goods globally it seems that many companies will need to revisit these rates and upwardly adjust even to just maintain current standards. Meanwhile, differentials for nationalities were also a cause of discontent.



**Chief Cook is good but the budget of food on board is small compared to other companies.**

## How happy about your ability to keep fit and healthy on board?

6.45 ↓ from 6.78

Parallel to the issue of good nutrition and a healthy diet is that of fitness and exercise. This is a hugely important part of life at sea, perhaps even more so these days as shore leave is so unlikely. It is in the gym or out on deck that seafarers have a chance to put some of their daily stresses behind them – that is if they have the time and space to do so.

There were many positive responses to this question, and it is apparent on some vessels that there are excellent provisions for exercise. Respondents commented along the lines of, “Very good gym equipment on board” and “I always find time to keep physically fit and healthy on board”.

It is noticeable that the seafarers who have access and time to exercise show an increased level of happiness across a wide range of questions. It is clear that the impact of keeping fit and active is not just physical; there are major mental health and well-being advantages too.

## How happy about the training you receive?

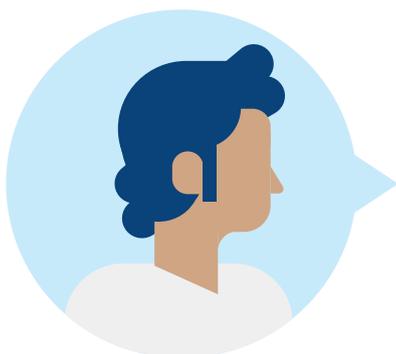
6.3 ↓ from 7.21

We received varied responses relating to training. Some were extremely positive and said how good the training they receive is. They were enthusiastic and grateful, stating how helpful it is to refresh knowledge and receive additional information. A sense of training and being “good” and “informative” came from many responses.

It was very encouraging to read of the difference that it makes to the safety on board, and one response stated, “Drills and training on board are very good that makes us competent and safe. Quick response to emergencies”.

However, as is to be expected, there were some contrary views too. Concerns were voiced that some areas need additional provision, especially on vessels with no dedicated electrician. Some of the most junior members of the crew felt that they were sent off to perform menial tasks instead of being able to observe operations. There was also concern from some that computer-based training tasks had to be completed on rest days.

Some questioned the levels of training needed, as they feel overwhelmed and have doubts as to how important some of the courses are. Cost was also an issue, especially when the burden is carried by the individual seafarer.



**I work 12 hours a day, so finding the time and motivation to exercise after a long day is hard. However, the ship has a decent gym so that's helpful.**

## How happy about interaction with other crew on board?

6.82 ↓ from 7.42

As stated in relation to food and the impact of current shore leave restrictions, we are seeing more emphasis placed on interactions on board. Are people getting along? Is there a social life, activities, a sense of camaraderie and enjoyment, or are there issues? Increasingly we have seen that interactions are more important than ever, but alas it seems that relationships are difficult on board.

For those seafarers who experience positive interactions, there were many comments about having “good friends”, and that there were “good relationships and cooperation”. This is perhaps well-captured by the old maritime adage, “Happy master, happy crew”.

That said there were some areas of concern, especially from people who felt going back to their cabins meant that social cohesion was suffering. There were negative statements received about not having enough to do as a team on board.

As covered in our special feature for this edition of the SHI, there are even more serious issues currently at play. There are real concerns about the impact of geopolitics on Russian and Ukrainian seafarers in particular.

We received very angry and distressed responses about the difficulties of mixed nationality crews and crews with differing viewpoints. Where senior members of the shipboard team were unwilling to communicate, there were grave concerns not just for interactions, but for the entire safety of vessels.



**Toxic relationships, everybody seems to have issues with each other.**

## How happy with your workload?

5.92 ↓ from 6.3

Workload is a vitally important part of the shipboard life. As with issues such as wages and training, we often receive a very diverse set of results to this question, and this has once again been the case.

Some feel things are ok, and that the workload is to be expected, while others raise concerns and point out areas of operation where perceived shortfalls in manning may be a problem.

There is also the perennial shipboard issue of paperwork and administrative tasks. This is an industry-wide issue, and it is to be hoped that leading companies can find better ways of dealing with such demands on their people.

We received some concerns about the level of requests for information from shore executives, especially when information was demanded without much consideration for where a vessel was, or what it was doing. There were also concerns that the Master is becoming more of an "office worker". That is a source of much discontent. There were also concerns that "decarbonisation" measures have increased workload, but there were no details on how or why – perhaps this is an area to monitor for future developments.

It seems to be an increasing trend that vessels are sailing without a fourth engineer. This means that the usual maintenance schedules are harder to follow, and if there are any problems or mechanical issues, then everything is made even more challenging.



**Too much. Master is being turned into an office worker and not for the safety of the ship.**

## How happy with welfare facilities when you are ashore?

4.92 ↓ from 5.39

With shore leave proving so difficult to access it is no surprise that the question of welfare provisions ashore is equally problematic. Response after response read, "no shore leave", "cannot access", "have not been ashore". Even where seafarers have been able to get ashore, unfortunately some centres have been closed due to national restrictions.

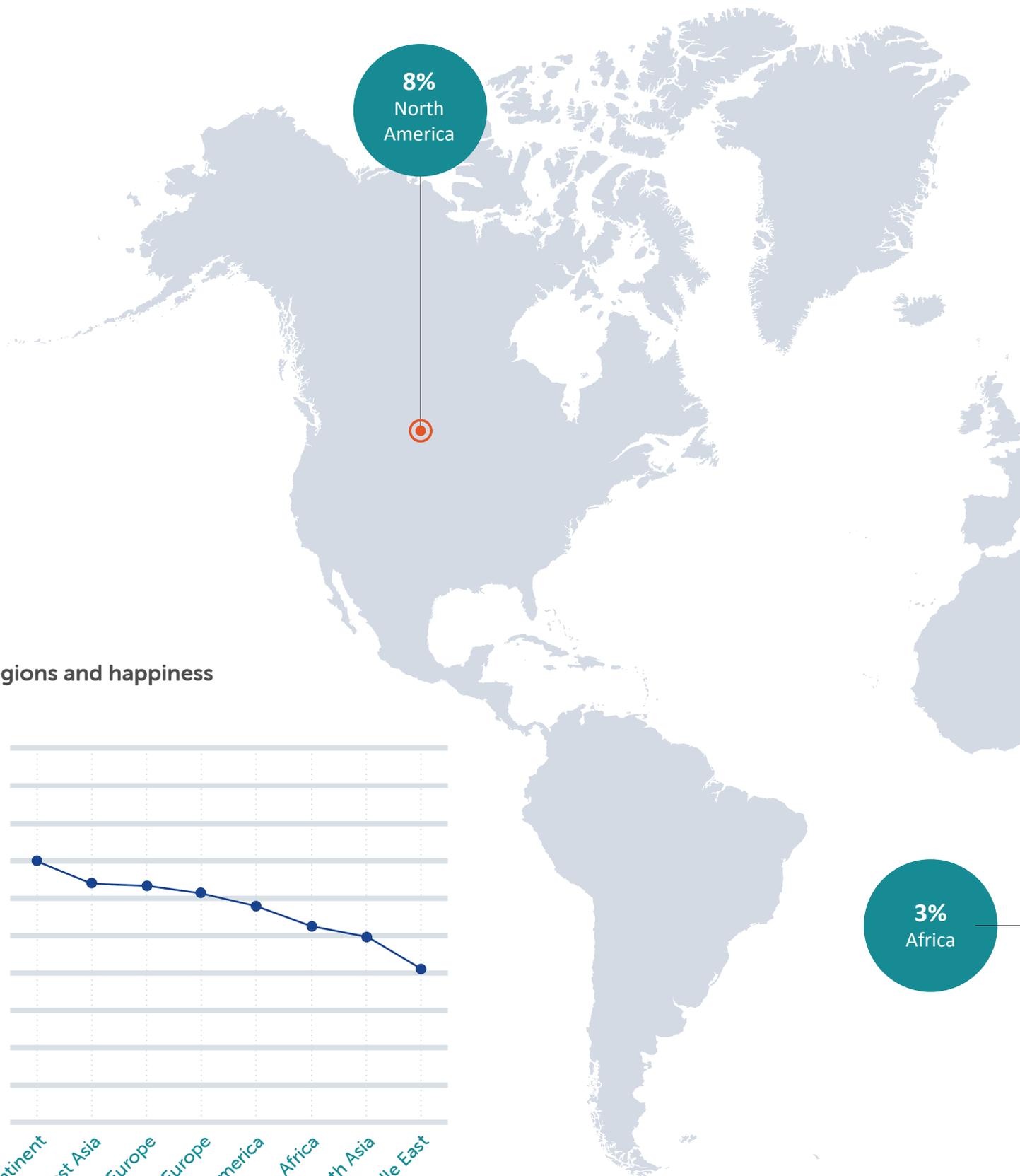
For those who were able to get ashore and use facilities, then they were grateful and said how good they were. What did come across from this question was the changing nature of what seafarers want to do, and how they need support in accessing this.

For instance, respondents stated their very simple desire to have an occasional trip to a local shopping mall when they arrive in a port, adding that to do so, they want good, safe, reliable, secure, cheap transport. Transport is available through port-based welfare organisations such as The Mission to Seafarers, but current port restrictions mean that many seafarers are being denied such basic services when in port.

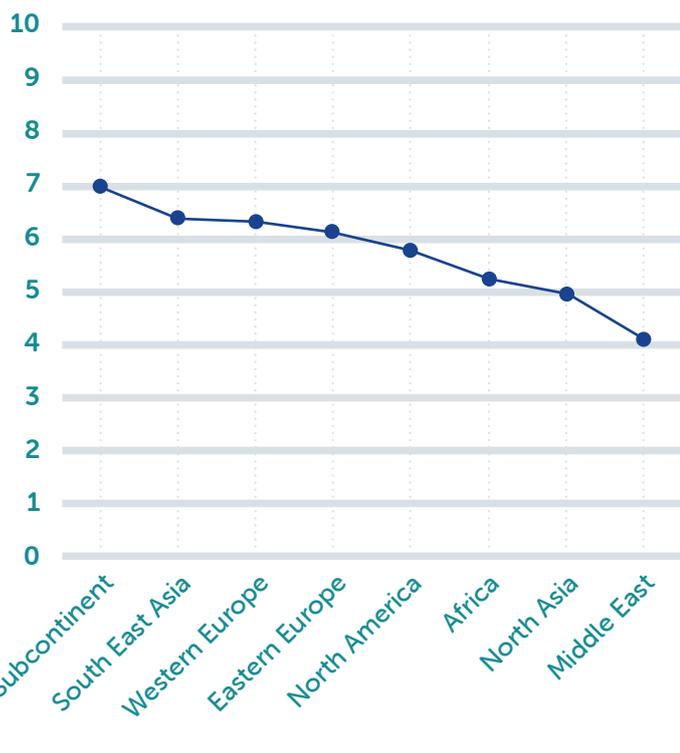


**Time has changed the things we do when ashore. These days we only want to go shopping in malls, and ease of transport or access to transport in/out of the port is very very much needed.**

# Where



Regions and happiness



3%  
Africa



# Conclusion

With Q1 2022 providing the lowest happiness rankings yet across the Seafarers Happiness Index reporting periods, it is clear that the combined effect of many issues is being borne by seafarers.

The average index result of 5.85/10 represents a significant fall on the previous period, and signals another period of falling sentiment.

In reading the responses from seafarers, it is clear that many of the issues which have long been problematic remain so, while new problems have also arisen.

The perennial problems of shore leave, connectivity, food and exercise all saw drops in happiness. These then combined with outside influences, such as COVID-19, deteriorating relationships on board, and a worrying rise in potential abandonments to make for a toxic cocktail which has impacted seafarers hard.

Another concerning trend was that of junior watchkeeping ranks seemingly being removed or replaced by non-ticketed crew. This means more work for the officers who remain, and this in turn often results in fatigue and frustration.

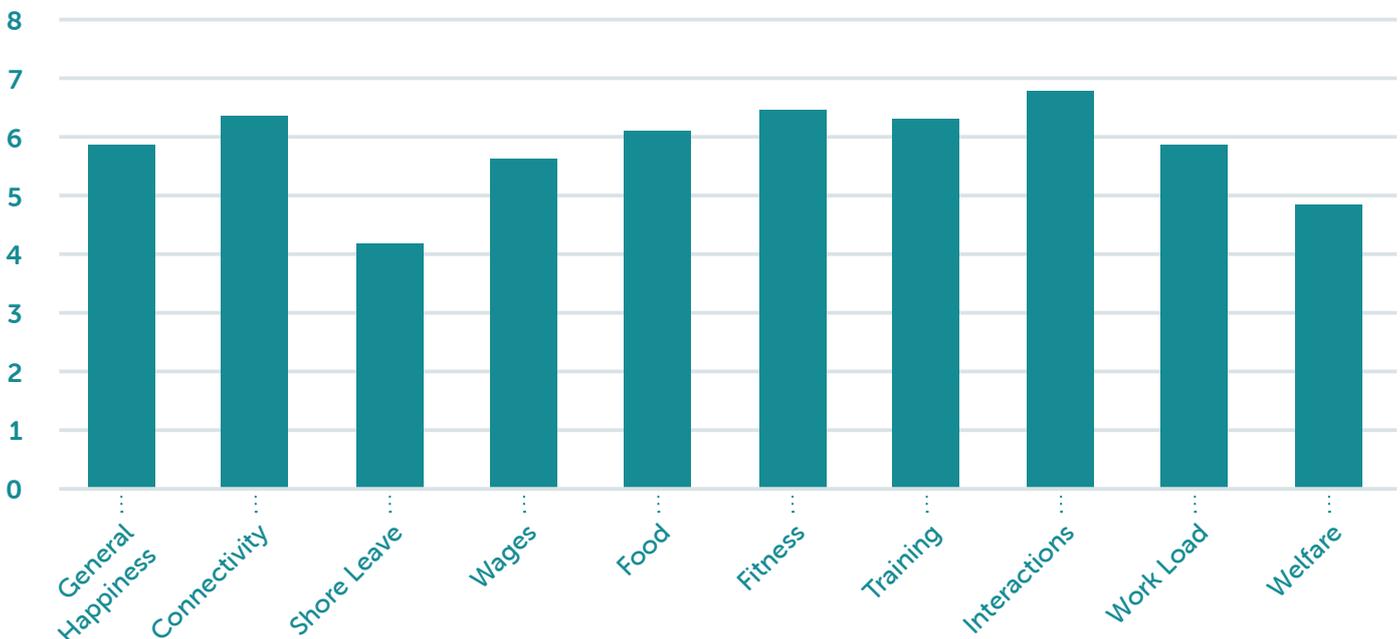
We did, however, hear from crew on vessels which are seeking to make life at sea as pleasant and enjoyable as possible. There is much to be learned from these companies and ships – and there is a clear correlation between good connectivity, high quality food, time for rest, recuperation and recreation, and the happiness levels of those on board.

## Thank you

Thank you to all those seafarers who took the time to share their thoughts with us. We always need more data, and to hear the stories of more seafarers, and for those who have already done so, to share again. So please visit [www.happyatsea.org](http://www.happyatsea.org) to complete the survey.

We would like to thank our 2022 sponsors, specialist marine and energy insurer Standard Club and global leader in vessel inspections, benchmarking and analysis Idwal. We must also thank the companies which have approached us about setting up bespoke happiness surveys for their own fleets so they can benchmark their own performance against the wider population of seafarers.

## Q1 2022 Results



# What makes your crew happy at sea?

The Mission to Seafarers is now able to run bespoke Happiness Surveys for your crew, so you can benchmark your quality of care against the international survey.

If you're interested in finding out more, contact [ben.bailey@missiontoseafarers.org](mailto:ben.bailey@missiontoseafarers.org)

[www.happyatsea.org](http://www.happyatsea.org)



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   The Mission to Seafarers

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