



# Enhanced participation of women in European shipping Executive Summary

The opportunity to increase gender  
balance in the EU maritime sector

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# ACKNOWLEDEMENTS

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**T**his project, commissioned by the European Community Shipowners' Associations (ECSA), the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF) and funded by the European Union, reflects the necessity to adopt a creative approach, able to bring and include more women in the maritime industry, particularly within Europe. This research is focussed on 'Pillar two', contributing to an attractive, smart and sustainable working environment in the shipping sector – 'WESS'. Aiming firstly to address the issue of women seafarers being underrepresented in the industry. Secondly, we aim to identify the best practices companies can adopt in order to attract more women in the industry and offer equal opportunities.

The recommendations are underpinned by findings from robust and substantial research conducted through a literature review, an industry survey, expert interviews, a European country-wide audit and three round table discussions. The research element identified instances of best practice which should be applied more generally.

## **Measures to enhance recruitment and retention of women in the industry include:**

- Developing an awareness-raising campaign that increases knowledge of and dispels outdated and inaccurate perceptions of the industry.
- Highlighting the attractive career opportunities in shipping both at sea and ashore, where many openings exist for persons with seagoing qualifications and experience.
- Producing guidance to assist shipping companies and seafarers' organisations in promoting change and a corporate culture and behaviour that is conducive to the recruitment and retention of women.
- Promoting shipboard cultures that recognise the dignity of all crew members.
- Adopting specific measures to enhance recruitment and retention of women in the industry, such as ensuring the provision of female-friendly facilities on board ships and communicating about long-term career opportunities at sea and ashore.
- Emphasising and communicating to all how policies in the workplace, such as policies on work-life balance, as well as measures to prevent and eradicate bullying and harassment based on the joint industry guidelines and training apply to women.







The project was conducted throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and this has influenced not only the research practice, through availability of research participants, but also the responses provided to the questions raised. COVID-19 has significantly raised the impact of issues experienced at sea, such as uncertain crew changes, closed borders to seafarers, heightened job insecurities and it has also significantly changed the outlook for women's employment status in the global job market, reducing their opportunities and work/life balance.

Whilst many of the issues discussed in this research existed prior to the pandemic, they have been exacerbated by current circumstances and pressures experienced during this time. The pandemic will have implications for the maritime jobs market, particularly around attracting new seafarers, which needs to be considered and accommodated in any promotional strategy, particularly aimed at women or other minorities. Further emphasis is therefore placed on ensuring that promotion of maritime jobs for women is actively supported by ensuring that their well-being is catered for within the workplace.

Our recommendation is to agree to set a target of a minimum percentage of women in maritime management positions within 20 years. Once the baseline data is gathered, we will need to set percentages for interval years starting from 2026.

Recently in the maritime sector, there has been a strong drive towards increasing job information available to young people: the presumption being that it is a lack of understanding of the possible careers within the sector that is preventing the recruitment. From our research analysis, we found that the lack of career visibility forms only part of the barrier. For young people, especially young women, they are unable to visualise themselves within the maritime world, and by extension, the shipping industry within Europe. Therefore, a better approach may be to thoughtfully design the context in which young people seek career information and make decisions. This research suggests that supporting informed decisions depends more on the how and when of data provision than the 'what' of the information provided.

One of the quickest ways to implement change is to directly influence companies' diversity and inclusion behaviours, to move from words to action. What is clear from our research is that both the industry and the companies must shift the focus from presenting niceties to creating meaningful actions. Certain key quick wins have been identified in policies and company behaviours, as set out in section 7. We have set out five recommendations for immediate implementation. We have also provided signposts to helpful guides and best practices that are currently available on key subjects. However, we wish to stress that this must be a continuing piece of work to ensure it is as accurate and up-to-date as possible.

As our research shows, we must align all the efforts being made in this area. A key recommendation is that we all work towards achieving The International Chamber of Shipping Diversity Index objective (published November 2020) to significantly increase the number of women on board from 7.5% to 12% in the next three years, and to 25% in 20 years.

There was a clear message coming through, that was repeated throughout our focus groups and research - the sector needs to show that it is serious about diversity and inclusion. Whilst there are many ways this can be done ashore; it can be more difficult to get these messages across onboard. It is vital that the company takes





diversity seriously and that it will quickly act if there are any inappropriate behaviours. As part of our work, we have produced a free Diversity and Inclusion poster and a booklet, authored by Captain Ayşe Aslı Başak. These are available from <https://eumaritimewomen.org/> making it easy for companies to make this highly visual commitment onboard and onshore.

### Summary of key findings

The project's main findings, recommendations and best practices are summarised below.

#### Headline survey findings

- Many people starting careers at sea do not spend their whole careers as a seafarer. 48 % of respondents who had worked at sea were not doing so anymore.
- People leaving a career at sea primarily did so for family reasons followed by wanting a change or new opportunity.
- Travel, closely preceded by financial, were the main reasons given for people choosing a career at sea; whilst challenge, interest and an exciting career were the main reasons for people choosing a shore-based maritime career.
- The primary area identified for improving or furthering a career at sea was welfare-based followed by further education and skills. Onshore, education and skills were identified as making the most difference, with welfare areas coming second.
- Best practice to increase gender diversity at sea and onshore was associated with equality-related areas such as equal treatment, gender blindness, job and pay equality. There was comparability evident between the sea and shore working environments, as well as the extent to which improvements in equality are required.
- Evidence shows that some women feel best practice includes not wanting their achievements to be over-embellished because they are women, or having to be exceptional; they want equal opportunities and treatment, with the focus being on their working performance, rather than their gender.

#### Headline interview findings

- Consensus was that ALL sectors in the maritime industry need input to improve gender representation, but in particular this should be focused on senior or leadership roles (sea and shore).
- The industry can prepare now to attract women into the future workforce where jobs will require specific technical skills and flexible working patterns in shore-based roles. This is seen as an area of opportunity for equality and one that needs immediate industry action.
- Publicly, little is known about the shipping industry, and it is under-estimated and undervalued. Promotion of the industry must include work on raising awareness of its many assets, starting early in primary schools to show children, especially girls, that this is an interesting and varied industry which they can be part of with a fulfilling career. The message should be made relevant and attractive to them, and shared using channels, technology and devices that younger people are familiar with and can relate to.
- There are generational differences towards gender discrimination and equality, with the younger population likely to be far more accepting of gender diversity within the workforce.
- The shipping industry is often referred to as outdated and old fashioned; in order to attract more diversity and younger people into the industry, its image must be modernised.





- More engagement with industry leaders is required to change how they work on recruitment and retention strategies and represent their companies to attract more women and diversity into the industry.
- Alongside work on increasing the numbers of women in maritime, efforts must be made to ensure that they will be entering a safe, supportive, and attractive working environment.

### Research Conclusions

The research conclusions have been developed to form the basis of the work underpinning the marketing campaign and policy areas of this report.

### Data gaps and collection

The research audit has shown that many aspects of women's participation in the maritime industry are missing at the country level data within Europe, Norway and the UK. It is fundamental to have a baseline of information that provides a benchmark to measure progress in this area over time and to indicate where resources should be mobilised to support change towards gender parity. Annual and consistent data collection about women in the industry, at a country level, is therefore recommended alongside an assessment of the progress or decline being made.

### Industry awareness and presenting a modern image

The public's lack of industry awareness is still an issue, with maritime and shipping often associated with negative events such as oil spills and ship sinkings. Promotion of the maritime industry should start early and target primary school children so that they can consider it as a career option when selecting their subjects. This is particularly relevant to encourage more girls to take STEM subjects. Maritime careers need to be presented and positioned to fit in with the expectations of a modern lifestyle. This would encourage young people to consider the range of exciting career options that the industry can offer. Promotion of the industry must highlight the vital, dynamic and far-reaching opportunities that careers in maritime can offer and build tools aimed at young people that advocate these advantages.

Industry should prepare now for the future maritime work force and ensure that women have a place within it.

All sectors among maritime have been identified as needing input to improve gender representation. Senior leadership is an area that women are poorly represented in; support and training are essential to redress this balance. More engagement with male industry leaders (male allies) will also be vital to this process.

### Key focus areas for the industry in addressing gender in the future maritime jobs market

- The future maritime workplace, in addition to seagoing roles, will be based around technology including remote monitoring and operation. This has significant potential to increase women's participation within the industry but work needs to be done to prepare for this.
- Shore-based remote monitoring and operating environments will offer more flexibility around working patterns which are considered attractive to women coming into the future maritime jobs market.
- Promotion of gender and equality is necessary to make a sustainable change in this direction.
- How should maritime education and training providers be responding to the future workforce requirement with respect to gender representation in maritime?
- The industry needs educators who are prepared and are capable of skilling the future maritime workforce.





- Maritime training and education should focus on offering a realistic picture of the shipping industry, especially, life at sea.
- Education materials need to be developed and delivered to prepare women for maritime roles and for men to help them accept women in maritime roles. The materials should include diversity inclusion and how to deal with harassment and bullying. Educational staff should also be trained to provide support for the educational materials.
- Leadership training is required to assist those in senior maritime positions (sea and shore) to promote understanding of gender equality and to be able to act decisively when necessary.
- Promote early awareness of the maritime industry by educating young children (around primary school age or younger) about maritime and shipping and what it has to offer them.

### COMPANY POLICIES

These must include:

- Anti-harassment and bullying
- Flexible working
- Corporate diversity and inclusion policies
- Ensure suitable on-board accommodation and requirements for women seafarers

### REGULATORY

- STCW Basic Training to have a greater emphasis on diversity, culture and gender training.
- HELM – increase and enhance the diversity, culture and gender training to be a substantial part of the training.
- Gender neutral complaints' procedures and role of the DPA 88 DRAFT.

### BEST PRACTICE

- Language –overly masculine language associated with the maritime sector
- Code of Behaviour
- Corporate diversity and inclusion
- Flexible working patterns
- Ensure suitable on-board accommodation and requirements for women seafarers
- Family friendly policies and practices
- Maternal and Paternal policies
- Childcare policy
- Loss and miscarriage
- Care for family member
- Breastfeeding
- Remote working
- Lone woman general best practice
- Include in Health and safety policy requirements the provision of ergonomically-suitable PPE that meets the needs of all seafarers
- Menstrual health and hygiene support (a trending subject that is going to become a key company issue in the coming years)







## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Recommendation One

To achieve the goal of increasing the number of women in maritime roles and at sea, we need to initiate change where it can happen almost immediately. Our key recommendation is that we look at sharing best practices and encourage companies to implement these policies without waiting for legalisation to force them into action. If we effect change downwards to the IMO, we will be able to make significant gains whilst the legislation comes into place, smoothing its path as the majority will already been implementing it. To enable this, a central point is needed. The EU Maritime website can be expanded to become this central point. Otherwise, a dedicated area on ECSA and ETF websites can be developed for this purpose. This will contain best practices, sample policies, guidelines and links to other useful information, gender neutral vacancy adverts etc.

### Recommendation Two

Without the ability to monitor the effectiveness of all initiatives across the industry, we must be able to at least benchmark achievements. The International Chamber of Shipping Diversity Index (published November 2020) has issued a set of objectives to significantly increase the number of women on board from 7.5% to 12% in the next three years, and to 25% in 20 years. This report recommends that everyone should be working to achieve the goals that have already been agreed and set, rather than trying to set up others and reducing the impact of these agreed goals.

### Recommendation Three

Our recommendation is to agree to set a target of a minimum percentage of women in maritime management positions within 20 years. Once the baseline data is gathered, we will need to set percentages for interval years starting from 2026.

### Recommendation Four

Include in companies' health and safety policy requirements for the provision of ergonomically suitable PPE that meets the needs of all employees.

### Recommendation Five

All vessels should stock feminine hygiene products and have proper procedures for their disposal in an easy way.

### Recommendation Six

It is recommended that ECSA and ETF promote the poster and encourage them to download, use and share them widely.

### Additionally

The role of social dialogue and collective bargaining is crucial in promoting the role of women in the maritime industry, in supporting life-long learning, work-life balance, and tackling the gender pay gap for instance. Strengthening social dialogue at all levels is essential in promoting gender diversity and equality, fighting gender stereotypes and gender discrimination.





## CONCLUSIONS

There is increasing support for and understanding of the many benefits that gender diversity and equity brings to the workplace. Over the last few decades this has been gaining international momentum. More specifically, the value of gender equity is also increasingly being recognised in traditionally male dominated industries such as maritime shipping. This change is not only desired, but also necessary in order to address key issues such as recruitment and retention and ensure that shipping is prepared for the future and help it modernise effectively. The maritime workplace must be open and attractive to one hundred percent of the active workforce and improve on the small numbers of women and other minority groups that are currently employed within the industry.

Barriers such as lack of industry and shipping career visibility need to be effectively addressed and measures taken to provide thoughtful and timely communication regarding these. Young people need to be able to visualise themselves within the maritime industry and by extension, the European shipping industry. The workplace needs to be carefully considered and made an attractive and safe place for women to work; this of-course, would have benefits for everyone working in maritime.

Collective industry action is required to support these changes, utilising current best practice, and evaluating progress year on year to build on the initial advances that have been made. We need the maritime industry to be accountable and take positive steps to make these important changes.

This research provides actionable guidance and recommendations to facilitate the promotion of women within maritime in Europe and to make progress in delivering equitable solutions that will be of benefit to all working within the industry. Now is exactly the right time to take action in ensuring that gender and diversity are considered and accommodated consistently throughout the industry. Additionally, the visibility and communication of the industry's gender diversity profile needs to be maintained. Sustained action is required and must be supported by all sectors of maritime. These actions must have substance and the research and marketing tools provided by this project, informed by industry, and supported by the EU, ECSA and the ETF, take positive steps towards achieving this.

In undertaking this piece of work, it is clear there is willingness from industry stakeholders to take positive steps to ensure that women are better catered for within shipping. This report should therefore form the platform on which subsequent phases of work are built to increase the momentum gathered over the last decade or so in shipping.

### Impact of COVID-19 on the research

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been felt throughout the duration of this project and has affected the data collection phases and the information being provided. Whilst many of the issues discussed in this research existed prior to the pandemic, they have been exacerbated by current circumstances and pressures experienced during this time. The pandemic will have long-term implications for the maritime jobs market, particularly around attracting new seafarers. This needs to be considered and accommodated





in any promotional strategy, particularly aimed at women or other minorities. Further emphasis is therefore placed on having the promotion of maritime jobs for women actively supported by ensuring that their well-being is catered for within the workplace.

### **Data gaps and collection**

The research audit has shown that country level data about many aspects of women's participation in the maritime industry within Europe, Norway and the UK is missing. It is fundamental to have a baseline of information that provides a benchmark to measure progress in this area over time and to indicate where resources should be mobilised to support change towards gender parity. Annual and consistent data collection about women in the industry, at a country level, is therefore recommended alongside an assessment of the progress or decline recorded.

### **Industry awareness and presenting a modern image**

The public's lack of industry awareness is still an issue, with maritime and shipping often associated with negative events such as oil spills and ship sinkings. The maritime business should be promoted from a young age, focusing on elementary school pupils so that they can consider it as a career option when choosing their subjects. This is particularly relevant to encourage more girls into taking STEM subjects. The research showed a tendency for the industry to be perceived as 'old fashioned', 'traditional' and 'non-progressive'. Maritime careers need to be presented and positioned to fit in with the expectations of a modern lifestyle. This would encourage young people to consider the range of exciting career options that the industry can offer.

### **Industry should prepare now for the future maritime work force and ensure that women have a place within it**

All sectors of maritime have been identified as requiring input to improve gender representation. Senior leadership is an area where women are poorly represented; support and training are essential to redress this balance. More engagement with male industry leaders (male allies) will also be vital to this process.

## **8.2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Recommendation One - Centralization of Information**

To achieve the goal of increasing the number of women in maritime roles and at sea, we need to initiate change where it can happen almost immediately.

Our key recommendation is that we look at sharing best practices and encourage companies to implement these policies without waiting for legalisation to force them into action. If we effect change downwards to the IMO, we will be able to make significant gains whilst the legislation comes into place, smoothing its path as the majority will already be implementing it.

To enable this, a central point is needed. The EU Maritime website can be expanded to become this central point. Otherwise, a dedicated area on ECSA and ETF websites can be developed for this purpose. This will contain best practices, sample policies, guidelines and links to other useful information, such as gender neutral vacancy adverts etc.





### **Recommendation Two - Setting Up Targets**

Without the ability to monitor the effectiveness of all initiatives across the industry, we must be able to at least benchmark achievements. The International Chamber of Shipping Diversity Index (published November 2020) has issued a set of objectives to significantly increase the number of women on board from 7.5% to 12% in the next three years, and to 25% in 20 years.

This report recommends that everyone should be working to achieve the goals that have already been agreed and set, instead of trying to set others up and reduce the impact of these agreed goals.

### **Recommendation Three - Increase Percentage of Women in the Industry**

In order to identify and see significant change in our sector, we need to study maritime jobs on land. Whilst it is generally accepted that the gender-split across the sector are on the whole not that bad, this is being masked by the inclusion of 'general' business positions - i.e., reception, HR, finance - which are typically held by females. As the sector-specific roles show, the figures are much lower at the junior management level and above, with the board and non-executive levels being extremely low.

Our recommendation is to agree to set a target of at least 40% of women in maritime management positions within 20 years. Once the baseline data is gathered, we will need to set percentages for interval years starting from 2026.

To begin to address this, our recommendation is to create a European-wide survey of sector-specific roles on gender balance. The results will serve as a baseline for a European Gender Diversity Index which will be conducted and refreshed every two years.

### **Recommendations for policy changes**

- STCW Basic Training to have a greater emphasis on diversity, culture and gender training.
- HELM – increase and enhance the diversity, culture and gender training to be a substantial part of the training with action plans and accountability. The DPA should undertake HELM training as well.
- Complaint's procedures and role of the DPA – the DPA should be legally accountable to take the appropriate actions in formal complaints of sexual harassment, bullying and discrimination.





**<https://eumaritimewomen.org/>**

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<https://wessproject.eu/>**

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