

Encouraging Women in Shipping

There has been a high-profile campaign in the United Kingdom to encourage more women to work in the maritime industry. The #WomeninMaritime drive has sought to highlight women already in the industry and has told their stories.

This, it is hoped, will serve as inspiration for others to join the industry. There has been a pledge for companies and organisations to sign up to, and this has been developed into a charter. The concept is to ensure that every company is encouraged to attract, recruit and retain women.

<https://www.maritimeuk.org/programmes/women-maritime/women-maritime-matrix/>

While this is an excellent initiative and is hopefully one that will help to inform efforts around other nations, there is the slightly problematic fact that this is focused on the wider "maritime industry" – and so there is still an issue in ensuring women see careers onboard ship as career options.

Sadly, this remains an issue. Women seafarers are still a disappointingly small minority of the seafaring population. So, what can be done to change that fact?

WORLD MARITIME DAY 2019

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) is acting to try and help. As such, "Empowering Women in the Maritime Community" has been selected as the World Maritime Day theme for 2019.

This will provide an opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of gender equality, in line with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and to highlight the important contribution of women all over the world to the maritime sector.

While shipping has historically been a male dominated industry, IMO has been making a concerted effort to help the industry move forward and help women achieve a representation that is in keeping with twenty-first century expectations. This work has been focused through IMO's gender and capacity building programme, which is now in its thirtieth year.

The IMO has worked within the United Nations structure to develop a global programme known as the Integration of Women in the Maritime Sector. This was carried out over several phases and established an institutional framework to incorporate a gender dimension into IMO's policies and procedures, with resolutions adopted to ensure access to maritime training and employment opportunities for women in the maritime sector.

It is clear that empowering women fuels thriving economies across the world, spurs growth and development, and benefits all of us working in the global maritime

Our sponsors:



community. The selection of the theme, "Empowering Women in the Maritime Community" will ensure a renewed focus on the IMO women in maritime programme, and on achieving the goals of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 5, throughout 2019.

FEMALE SEAFARER HAPPINESS

The Seafarers Happiness Index has featured responses from female at sea. According to the report from the Mission to Seafarers, respondents emphasised the importance of connectivity and spoke of the reassurance of feeling a link to family and friends at home. They stated that this eased loneliness, isolation and also better equipped them to deal with the pressures of being often the only female onboard.

The happiest female seafarers were those who felt a part of the team onboard and were integrated into a sense of community. So, it seems that good relationships with fellow crew, allied with a sense of being able to contact those at home, these are the foundations which really mean a lot to female seafarers. Food was another key issue – and female seafarers seemed to be more attuned to the need for a healthy diet.

Sadly, it appears that sexual harassment and gender bullying are a real and present problems for female seafarers. These have obviously a devastating effect on moral, happiness and job satisfaction.

While there are differences, the real issues of building a positive career and time at sea are the same for women as they are for men. Regardless of gender, the building blocks of happiness remain the same and a strong community, with good food, connectivity, access to shoreleave, activities and a sense of professional development are all vitally important.

Underpinning this is the obvious and vital need to ensure that harassment, bullying or singling out of people is stopped, as a matter of urgency. However, there is still so much more that can be done to make seafaring more attractive to women.

MAKE SEAFARING ATTRACTIVE

What are the steps that shipping can take to make women see a career at sea as attractive and something they would contemplate and see themselves excelling at? Here are some possible areas which need developing:

1. **Promoting Female Careers:** It is vitally important that campaigns promote the fact that women are welcome and wanted at sea. Career advice should be highlighting the real benefits of the job to both males and females.
2. **A Female Perspective:** Shipping has historically been a male dominated industry, and fact that cannot be changed. Now though we need to stress

Our sponsors:



female role models and tell the success stories of women at sea. Is it perhaps time we did away with the term “manning” for instance?

3. **Stated support:** There are concerns that women at sea will not get the support they need to develop their careers and lives. There are issues such as child bearing that need to be discussed and steps taken to reassure women that they do not have to choose a seagoing career or family life. The system should be robust enough to cater for the needs of women, and to help them attain as much as their male counterparts.
4. **Equal Recruiting Policies:** Aspiring female seafarers should be attracted and then encouraged. There should be policies in place to ensure that gender is not an issue or barrier to recruitment. Obviously, many countries have legislation in place to ensure this, but there are criticisms that in practice women are sometimes overlooked or discouraged. This should not be the case. Companies should look to lead and develop initiatives to aim for balanced representation of women in the maritime industry and give them equal opportunities.
5. **Social Acceptance:** Many women are deterred from shipping as a career because of the long stay at sea. There needs to be a campaign to help ease their concerns, but also to stress the positives. In a number of seafarer providing nations it is often seen that social pressures and traditional social responsibilities can be barriers against women going to sea.

We at ISWAN would very much like to hear your thoughts on how women can be better encouraged and supported to be seafarers. Please bring your contributions to Helsinki and be ready to share them.

Our sponsors:

