

## Sustainable working environments are essential for a sustainable maritime future

On 24 September, the maritime community celebrates World Maritime Day. This year, it comes in a particularly critical moment, with all the maritime sectors dealing with an ongoing global pandemic. As sustainability is at the heart of this year's World Day, we would like to take this opportunity to highlight how maritime workers' futures are inextricably tied with the future of the planet.

Most notably, the issue of crew changes has been dominating global maritime news for months now. The inability of governments to coordinate measures that would allow seafarers to return home or access their place of work has resulted in hundreds of thousands of workers stranded on ships around the world, forced to continue working. Effects on individual seafarers' mental health are severe and should be a reason enough to take action and bring them home immediately. In addition to issues caused on a personal level, however, the crew change crisis is endangering the safety of entire crews and even the environment, as is being currently investigated in the latest cases of oil spills. The lack of maritime stakeholders who would take responsibility for the safety of the crew and the environment partly stems from the common use of flags of convenience. The system of registering vessels with countries that lack regulations protecting workers and the environment ends up protecting polluters and exploiters. If we are serious about creating a genuinely sustainable future of transport, systemic change that addresses this dangerous practice is critical.

While seafarers have been recognised by many during the pandemic as key workers in the global supply chain, port workers are often overlooked in these discussions. Considering that without port workers, goods wouldn't reach the shore, this is a significant omission. We cannot forget the fact that port infrastructure and workers themselves are highly susceptible to the effects of climate change, and refusing to protect them can result in a catastrophe. While around 80% of global trade is handled by ports, 55% of it passes through ports which have a high risk of at least one type of climate-related event, such as storms and wildfires. And if there's one thing we've learned from climate change so far, it's that such events will be ever more common and less predictable. Ports are potentially sensitive to weather-related disruptions (including wind, heat, cold, and fog), and so are dock workers. The more and more frequent extreme weather events are putting the infrastructure and supply chains at risk, but workers running them are not protected either. Adequate funding must be provided to climate-proof ports, as well as ensure safety for dockers. They need to be trained to perform port operations safely - no matter what the future brings.

The connection between environmental and social sustainability is strikingly clear when it comes to fisheries as well. There is a widespread issue of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing that puts marine ecosystems in danger. It supports overfishing practices and is often done by fishers that work without any labour protections and without respecting safety measures. While IUU is hardly a new problem, the current pandemic has not made the situation better. Some of the measures aimed at limiting this practice, such as inspections and controls, have even been highly limited during this time, enabling the unsustainable practices to continue. This should serve as a reminder that IUU continues to

be a huge issue in the fisheries sector and that addressing it paves the way to a sustainable future.

We call on the EU to learn from the lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate crisis, take this opportunity and lead by example. The EU should be the leading force in working towards true sustainability, in promoting high social and environmental standards, and reaching the Sustainable Development Goals. The smart and sustainable mobility strategy is a great opportunity opening up for the European Union to make effective change.

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