

Global shipping community updates Maritime Labour Convention to reflect lessons of pandemic

- Governments, ship owners, and unions agree to a record number of Maritime Labor Convention amendments in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and crew change crisis.
- New regulations improve access to onshore medical care, strengthen PPE requirements, and ensure access to communications to be able to contact loved ones.

Geneva, Switzerland, 16 May 2022: The UN International Labour Organization (ILO) tripartite of shipowners, governments, and transport workers unions have agreed to new measures to strengthen the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC), based on lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the ILO meeting that took place between May 2 – 13 in Geneva, Switzerland, delegates agreed to implement amendments on: bolstering legal requirements for seafarers to be able to access medical care ashore; strengthening health and safety PPE policies on board ships to protect against accidents; and to further facilitate seafarers' communication with their loved ones ashore.

[A new ILO report](#) published in advance of the negotiations highlighted governments' failure to comply with critical provisions of the MLC during the pandemic, resulting in preventable deaths, and an enormous toll on seafarers' mental health. At the height of the pandemic, 400,000 seafarers were affected by the crew change crisis, unable to return to shore or access ships due to draconian travel restrictions.

The International Chamber of Shipping is the longstanding ILO representative of the global maritime employers' group.

The negotiations occurred against the backdrop of the current seafarer crisis in Ukrainian ports and the Sea of Azov. Governments reiterated their support for the ILO [resolution](#) calling for the swift and safe disembarkation and repatriation of the 500 remaining trapped seafarers. They called for the prompt delivery of critical supplies, such as food, water, and medicines to these key global workers caught in the conflict zone.

In advance of the meeting, ICS also [published a report](#) outlining the impact of COVID-19 on shipping, seafarers and maritime labour markets, and recommendations to mitigate future crises.

Max Johns, Spokesperson for the Shipowner Group at the ILO meeting, commented:

“These were very intense negotiations, but we are extremely pleased that all sides of this global tripartite structure ultimately agreed on new policies that are fit for purpose, and which put into practice some of the practical lessons that must be learned from COVID-19.”

Natalie Shaw, ICS Director of Employment Affairs, added:

“Though this is a great starting point, further reforms at a global level are necessary to ensure that the shipping community is better prepared and coordinated to address future shocks, including and beyond a pandemic.”

“We are pleased with the success of these negotiations, but now we must map out what more can be done.”

“ICS will work to ensure that the improved cooperation between states, ship owners, and workers remains, for the betterment of the whole maritime sector and the movement of global trade.”

Ms. Corinne Vargha, Director of the International Labour Standards Department of the ILO, remarked:

“We welcome the adoption of these amendments which are a testimony to the added value of tripartism and international social dialogue. The outcomes of this meeting will in effect reinforce the relevance and impact of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (as amended). The ILO will continue working with governments, seafarers and shipowners to tackle challenges as they emerge and ensure a full and harmonious implementation of the Convention.”

-Ends-

Notes for editors

Further details on ILO procedure:

The new measures adopted by the UN ILO are expected to be rubberstamped at the 110th Session of the ILO International Labour Conference, in Geneva (27 May-11 June 2022). They are then expected to enter into effect two years later, in 2024.

ILO is the only tripartite UN agency, bringing together national governments, employers and trade unions from around the world, giving them an equal voice to ensure that the views of these ‘social partners’ are closely reflected in labour standards and in shaping policies and programmes promoting decent work for all, through the ILO Maritime Labour Convention.

As the longstanding Secretariat of the global maritime employers’ group at the UN ILO, ICS coordinates shipowners representation and positions during the MLC Special Tripartite Committee (STC), involving shipowners, seafarers’ unions and governments.

The global shipowner group is expected to meet with national governments and union representatives again in April 2025, at the next round of the MLC Special Tripartite Committee (STC).

About ICS:

The International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) is the principal international trade association for merchant shipowners and operators, representing all sectors and trades and over 80% of the world merchant fleet.

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