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WELFARE SERVICES FOR SEAFARERS

Erol Kahveci

Abstract

This paper assesses the adequacy of welfare provision for seafarers, in port and on board vessels, by analysing primary data obtained through extensive research undertaken with both seafarers and shipping company key informants. The research utilised questionnaires and semi-structured in-depth interviews. The paper identifies ‘best practice’ and areas where improvements are needed in relation to welfare provision at sea. It recommends a number of wider policies and practices for the consideration of regulators, policy makers, shipping companies and ship management company personnel.

Introduction

The ILO 2006 Maritime Labour Convention is currently in its ratification phase. However, there is a general consensus in the industry that if, and when, the convention is ratified by sufficient administrations the conditions set by the Convention will establish comprehensive minimum requirements for almost all aspects of working conditions of seafarers. As far as welfare issues are concerned the convention covers access to shore-based welfare facilities and services; also onboard recreational facilities including reasonable access to ship-to-shore telephone communications and e-mail facilities. However, there are two questions here, firstly, what do we actually know about seafarers’ access to port based welfare services world-wide and secondly what do we know about the current state of recreational facilities and access to telecommunication facilities aboard merchant vessels? In this context the paper aims:

- To explore current seafarer access to shore based welfare facilities and services;
- To document the provision of recreational facilities and access to telecommunication facilities aboard merchant vessels;

- To critically assess the adequacy of welfare provision for seafarers from a seafarers' perspective.

In the following sections of this paper these main aims will be examined by the analysis of a recently completed SIRC research project funded by the ITF Seafarers' Trust which was started in April 2006 and finalised in March 2007 (see Kahveci 2007 for further details).

Research methods

The research was conducted in different locations combining various research methods (i.e. an extensive seafarers' questionnaire, semi-structured in-depth interviews with seafarers and key industry informants etc.) and these included:

- 86 questionnaires from shipowners and key ship management company informants.
- 52 semi-structured interviews with ship owners and ship management company informants in the UK, Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Norway, Hong Kong and Singapore.
- 3,792 questionnaires from seafarers (stratified sampling applied to the top 20 maritime labour supplying countries and the sample target is based on 1 per cent representation)
- 112 in-depth interviews with seafarers in their home societies in the Philippines, India, Russia, Ukraine, PRC, Turkey and the UK

Summary demographics

Table 1 below summarises the number and nationalities of the seafarer respondents to our survey. Of those included in the survey 53 per cent were employed on deck, 40 per cent in the engine room and seven per cent in the galley. Fifty-one per cent were

ratings. Of the rest 17 per cent were senior officers, 21 per cent junior officers, nine per cent petty officers and two per cent were cadets.

Table 1: The top 20 seafarer supplying countries and the number of seafarers who responded to the survey questionnaire

	Nationality	Frequency	Valid Percent	Proposed 1 per cent representation	Returned questionnaires
1	Philippines	132314	27.1	1323	1417
2	Russia	40871	8.4	409	379
3	Ukraine	40305	8.3	403	419
4	China	30855	6.3	309	164
5	India	23861	4.9	239	320
6	Indonesia	17761	3.6	178	147
7	Poland	17254	3.5	173	175
8	Turkey	15277	3.1	153	210
9	Greece	14216	2.9	142	101
10	Burma/ Myanmar	10830	2.2	108	62
11	Syria	10273	2.1	103	48
12	Romania	10081	2.1	101	80
13	Latvia	9552	2.0	96	49
14	Bulgaria	9502	1.9	95	70
15	Croatia	7893	1.6	79	21
16	Korea, South	5946	1.2	59	18
17	Egypt	5828	1.2	58	27
18	Netherlands	4387	0.9	44	33
19	Italy	4295	0.9	43	35
20	Taiwan	4265	0.9	43	17
	Total	415,566		4,158	3,792

Note: for frequency and valid per cent *SIRC Global Seafarer Labour Market Survey 2003*, used as a source.

Most seafarers were married (71 per cent), 28 per cent were single and only one per cent were divorced, separated or widowed. There were only 18 women respondents. The youngest seafarer was 18, the oldest 65 and the average age was 36. The years at sea varied from a couple of months to 49 years with an average of 14 years. The average lengths of contracts were five months for senior officers, seven months for junior officers and nine months for petty officers and ratings. When they responded to our survey questionnaire they were on average into their fiftieth month of current contracts at sea.

We estimated that seafarers responded to our survey from circa 400 ships. Twenty-eight per cent of seafarers worked aboard bulk carriers, 19 per cent on general cargo, 18 per cent on tankers (including oil, chemical and gas), 11 per cent on containers, four per cent on Ro-Ro (including car carriers) and the remaining 20 per cent aboard different type of vessels (including unknown). The voyage cycle of the vessels where the seafarer respondents sailed showed variations. Just over 28 per cent of the vessels were involved in short sea trades, 20 per cent were involved in deep sea crossings with intense port calls, 17 per cent were involved in deep sea crossing with few port calls; another 15 per cent were involved in regional trades (i.e. Mediterranean, Black Sea, Baltic Sea etc.), 11 per cent said the trade patterns of their ships were changeable. The remaining nine per cent said that their ships sailed world-wide without making any specific reference to the nature of their ships' voyage cycle.

The majority of the eighty-six shipping company survey respondents were ex-seafarers (n=75), having served as senior deck and engine room officers. Only 11 of them had no previous sea-based career. The biggest company in our survey owned/managed well over 200 ships and the smallest had only 3. Their position in the company also varied from senior managers (owner, president and vice-president, n=8) to managers (crewing, communication, operation etc., n=53) to lower line management (superintendent etc., n=25).

Access to shore-based welfare facilities and services – shore leave

It is a simple fact that in order to have access to shore-based welfare facilities and services seafarers need to have adequate shore-leave. Seafarers overwhelmingly acknowledged that having shore leave was important for their physical and mental well-being. They also made frequent reference to the importance of 'seeing different faces and places', having a break from the stressful shipboard environment and work pressure. They explained that it was time for them to contact their families as shore leave provided them opportunities to use cheaper telecommunication facilities. Here are some first person accounts to highlight this:

“Shore leave is important because it is the only way for letting our stress out. We are like prisoners onboard. We need to interact with other people and see different faces and places.”

“For me it is important to have shore leave, even once in a while just for a few hours. This is the worry free time from all those traumas in the engine room and all those problems on the ship. And being relieved from home sickness or sea sickness.”

“It is very important because when we have a shore pass; it’s the only time that we can forget our problems on the ship. Then it’s also the time we can call our family. It is the time that no-one will tell you to do this or do that. No boss when you go out. It is my favourite time; my favourite part of seafaring.”

“When I have a shore leave I can release my boredom. It’s another environment and I can refresh myself.”

One seafarer said that his ship had just been in dry dock in China for 17 days and he had gone out every evening. However, his case was atypical. When seafarers were asked how many times they had shore leave during the last eight weeks, as can be seen from Table 2, 64 percent of the respondents said they had not had any shore leave during the last eight weeks. However, for some the lack of shore leave went well beyond the previous eight weeks:

“My last five contracts, including the current one have been on LNG tankers. Our route is only between the Middle East – Qatar and Japan – Bay of Tokyo. It takes fifteen days between the two ports. We stay in port 18 hours in both ends. In Qatar, it is impossible to have shore leave. In Japan we are always busy with engine work or gangway watch. So over the last 50 months at sea I’ve never had shore leave. Once we had this emergency dry dock, for two days in Jabel Ali and even then we were within the port compound, we didn’t go outside.”

Some other seafarers provided more typical examples of shore leave:

“I have not had any shore leave during my current contract at all. We are very busy in ports. Only port we stay over night is in Japan which is our main loading port, but at night we are like prisoners onboard. They close all the port gates. Although you are sometimes off duty at night you cannot go out. This happened to me twice already during my current contract.”

“Our ship trades between Korea and Europe. Ulsan is our loading port and we stay in port over night while loading cars. Every time we stop in Ulsan I have shore leave which is every other month. So I have one shore leave every eight weeks.”

Thirty-six per cent who had been able to take shore leave during the same period said that their shore leave on average lasted around two hours. Voyage cycles of the ships that seafarers sailed aboard could be seen to have had an impact on their shore leave opportunities; as the majority of seafarers who had taken shore leave during the previous eight weeks worked aboard short-sea trade vessels.

Table 2: Number of shore leaves during the last 8 weeks

	Percentage
None (N=2160)	64
Once (N=270)	8
Twice (N=371)	11
Three times (N=169)	5
Four times (N=201)	6
Five Times and more (N=204)	6

N= 3375

There was a further question for seafarers who had taken shore leave asking whether they spent it within the port area or went beyond the port gates. In response, fifty-three per cent (N=604) of seafarers said that they spent their shore leave within the port area.

In-depth interviews with seafarers revealed that when they had an opportunity for shore leave their main priority was to make a phone call to their families and friends and their shore leave did not extend beyond a phone box either in the port area or seafarers' centre. Seafarers who got beyond the port gate stated that the main motivation for this was either to go shopping for their basic needs or again to use communication facilities which are not in the immediate port area.

The main reasons given for not having shore leave and for lack of access to shore-based welfare facilities were workload when ships were in port; fast turnarounds; lack of information about ports where ships called; lack of transport; and restrictions, imposed by port authorities, related to the ISPS Code. According to the 1996 MORI survey, 57 per cent of seafarers were satisfied with their shore-leave. Today, on the contrary, 64 per cent of the seafarers were not able to have shore-leave for a considerable length of time.

The limited access to shore based welfare facilities and services due to lack of adequate shore leave had an impact on the ranking of important port based welfare services for seafarers. In seafarers' opinions the importance of using traditional port based services such as organised sightseeing, video/book exchange and reading rooms have declined. The next section of the paper demonstrates this change over the last 10 years. The MORI 1996 *Seafarers' Living Conditions Survey* serves as a very useful comparison point to document these changes.

Important port based welfare services for seafarers and changes over 10 years

Seafarers were asked to rank the importance of 15 selected port based welfare services (as "important"; "neither/nor"; "not important"). In order to document changes over

the last 10 years this question was adopted from the MORI 1996 *Seafarers' Living Conditions Survey*. However, the 1996 Survey did not include port based welfare services such as transport to seafarers centres; availability of cheap phone cards which did not exist in 1996, and internet access which was in its infancy in 1996. These items were included in the 2006 Survey.

Table 3: How important each port based welfare service is for seafarers (Percentage of seafarers who said it was important)

Services	MORI 1996	SIRC 2006	Change over 10 years
Transport to shops/town	70	85	+15
International phone	79	81	+2
Transport to seafarers' centre	N/A	72	N/A
Cheap phone cards	N/A	70	N/A
Internet access	N/A	68	N/A
Personal counselling services	45	57	+12
Place of worship	48	53	+5
Port based medical clinic	70	44	-26
Reading room/library	50	17	-33
Video/book exchange	64	15	-49
Organised sightseeing	48	13	-35
Meeting local people	53	10	-43
Sports facilities	51	10	-41
Money exchange	66	9	-57
On shore accommodation	44	9	-35

As can be seen from the table, over the last 10 years the opinions of seafarers in relation to the most important port-based welfare services have changed. As in the 1996 MORI Survey, port-based welfare services such as transport to shops and town, and international telephone facilities are very important for seafarers. In fact over the 10 years the importance of these services for seafarers has increased slightly.

The other port based services which were not listed in the MORI survey, such as transport to a seafarers' centre; availability of cheap international phone cards; and internet access are also regarded by seafarers as being important.

Availability of services like a port based medical clinic and personal counselling services have been regarded as more important in comparison to the 1996 MORI survey.

The most important changes occurred, however, in relation to the need for a reading room/library; video/book exchange; organised sightseeing; meeting local people; sport facilities; money exchange; and on shore accommodation. In comparison with the 1996 survey, the importance of these services for seafarers has declined considerably.

This major shift reflects changes in the maritime industry and the basic priorities of seafarers faced with limited time in port. In fact, when seafarers were asked what would improve their lives at sea their emphasis focused on the shipboard welfare. They frequently mentioned a desire for people from shore based welfare agencies to visit their ships or for companies to expand their onboard welfare facilities and services. In other words in the context of seafarers having very limited opportunities to have access to shore based welfare facilities and services, the provision of adequate shipboard welfare facilities are very important for seafarers' physical and mental well-being. The next section of this paper focuses on the current state of the onboard welfare provisions for seafarers.

Onboard welfare provisions

As the respondents worked for circa 100 shipping and ship management companies their onboard welfare provisions such as sports and recreational facilities varied considerably according to the different companies they worked for. One of the most frequently reported company policies for welfare provision included a monthly provision of approximately \$100-150 contributed to the welfare fund of each ship in the fleet. From this budget seafarers would decide what to buy (i.e. DVD's, sports equipment, musical instruments etc.). The worst cases of onboard welfare provision varied from very limited provision to 'pay for it yourself' - where seafarers contributed to shipboard welfare funds either from their overtime pay or extra earning

onboard (such as earnings from cargo handling or cleaning of cargo holds). Here are some first person accounts to demonstrate these alternative approaches:

“Our facilities for entertainment are good. We have complete DVDs; it’s pirated but better than nothing. Our yearly budget is for entertainment, exercise equipment and games etc. and it is \$1,200 per annum.”

“We have so many facilities onboard. We have a whole basketball court, swimming pool, gymnasium; we have also table tennis, darts, chess and other table games and complete set of musical instruments and lots of movies, CDs and, DVDs. ... Five dollars deduction from every crew member’s salary monthly and the welfare committee decides how to spend it - if there is something to be bought or something to be paid. In addition once a year – every December the company allocates also \$1,000 for the purchase of equipment. For example last December we have purchased a play station and a DVD player. The captain also cuts some funds from our overtime pay for the purchase of movies.”

“When we lash containers we get paid one dollar per container, every month 10 per cent of the lashing money goes to the ship’s welfare fund.”

“My ship is a passenger luxury liner. We have a library equipped with all the CDs and DVDs but it’s very hard to compare it with the passengers, because we rent them for one dollar a day. We can also borrow a book but need to put a \$20 deposit.”

It needs to be emphasised that as far as seafarers are concerned their financial contribution to ‘ship welfare funds’ is involuntary. “They never ask if we want to pay or not” said one seafarer and “we can’t say no, this is a company rule” said another. The system that allows deductions from seafarers’ payments for the purchase of on board entertainment equipment creates suspicion and disagreement. One seafarer said “we pay money for the ship’s welfare fund but don’t get anything back”. A rating said “officers buy what they want not what we [ratings] want”.

Seven out of 10 seafarers said that it was important for them to have access to e-mail at sea. However, only 16 per cent of the seafarers reported that they had access to onboard e-mail facilities. There are differences when senior officers and ratings are compared. Their access to on board e-mail facilities for private use was 40 and three per cent respectively. All the vessels that seafarers worked on had e-mail facilities. However, it was generally stated that this was mainly for official use. Where it was possible to use e-mail on board seafarers expressed dissatisfaction with the limitations placed on the number and length of messages they could send and also the lack of privacy associated with email communication. Some seafarers said that they not only had to pay for the messages they sent from their ships, but also for incoming e-mails too.

“We have e-mail onboard the vessel but it is at the discretion of the master. Some times he lets the junior officer use it but some times not. Some times he lets the crew use it and some times that’s also limited but there is no problem for senior officers.”

“Our captain is quite good. He allows us to send 4 e-mails a week.”

“Our first captain said we could only send 2 emails a week. However, the new captain said that we could send 3 emails a week, but only at weekends - Saturday or Sunday.”

“We can use e-mail onboard but you have to buy a 20 dollar internet card, it is very expensive. I pay minimum of \$1 for each mail I send or receive. The price goes up by bytes. Each card cost \$25 and I use 3 cards a month. I can send about 10 e-mails per card. I also receive some.”

“Only communication I use is via satellite phone which is very expensive. We have an e-mail onboard but it is for the ship’s business only even as a Chief Officer I don’t have an access to it for personal use.”

“We are not allowed to use the e-mail. It’s only for the business communication.”

As some of the seafarers' accounts illustrated above suggest the shipping companies that they worked for had no clear policies on shipboard e-mail access for them and captains' discretion played an important role. This policy has potential to create a further division amongst the crew members on board ships.

The main means of communication for seafarers with family and friends whilst at sea was the satellite phone. This was followed by personal mobile phones (mainly text messages) when they were in range of a signal. Only one in 10 seafarers mentioned writing letters. Although this is the cheapest option available, many said that the limited time they had, and the length of time it took for letters to be sent and received, made letter writing less attractive.

Company policies on seafarers' welfare

The questionnaire analysis and the in-depth interviews with ship owners and ship management company representatives revealed that onboard seafarers' welfare provisions were heavily influenced by company preferences and practices. This creates a very fragmented welfare provision for seafarers at sea with a big gap between the 'top' end of the industry and the 'bottom'.

“In our fleet the onboard welfare facilities vary. Some clients are more concerned with crew welfare than others. We have to give them a free hand to some extent and we only step in when there are problems. We employ 3,000 seafarers and have had no welfare related complaints so far this year.”

“We have a vested interest in looking after seafarers' welfare because quite frankly, happy seafarers are far more productive. It's far nicer to manage happy people, so why not make them happy if you can and still be relatively competitive.”

The analysis of company policies on seafarers' welfare shows parallels with seafarers' accounts of their experiences of onboard welfare provisions which were reported earlier. As we have also seen, some companies aim to provide welfare services for

seafarers which are directly or indirectly subsidised by seafarers themselves. Here are some examples to demonstrate this.

“We have shipbased welfare funds. The money is collected in these funds through supernumeries onboard. For example, if a senior officer sails with his wife he contributes to the welfare fund US \$3.50 every day that his wife stays onboard. We have no restrictions on ranks to sail with a family member and sometimes if the space permits a crew member could be joined by his wife and children together but they must contribute to the shipboard welfare fund. The money accumulated in this fund can only be used for the crew entertainment onboard. They could purchase sports equipment or DVD’s and so on.”

“These days many crew members have their own laptops, DVD players and other equipment in their own cabins and they all have different taste. In some parts of the worlds where our ships trade our crew could buy music CDs or DVD movies very cheaply.”

This “different taste” has also been emphasised by another manager:

“Our company recruits crews from seven different countries through local crewing agencies. All these seafarers have different tastes. We have common understanding with the crewing agencies that they send DVDs in Tagalog or Hindi with a joining crew regularly. This is part of their service.”

However, it must be emphasised that encouraging seafarers to subsidise their own recreational facilities on the basis of different tastes could create some problems for a cohesive social life on board vessels. Seafarers spending their time alone in their cabins watching DVDs on their computer monitor, or different nationalities arranging their recreation according to their “different taste” aboard the same vessels, could have some serious consequences for the safe running of the ship as well as physical and social well being of seafarers. These sort of company policies for seafarers’ recreation limit social interaction between crew members and deepen the social isolation of seafarers.

As emphasised earlier, onboard recreation provision for seafarers differs enormously from one shipping or ship management company to another. This pattern persists when monthly crew welfare and recreation budget allowances are considered. As the table below demonstrates when company representatives were asked about their average monthly welfare budget per ship, over 50 per cent indicated that they do not have any regular monthly budget allowances. “We don’t have a particular budget but we supply movies and entertainment systems and all that on board” said one manager and “we spend some months over a thousand dollars on stereo systems or TVs but not much in the next. It all depends on demand” said another. Similar points were echoed by other managers. Some ship management company representatives emphasised that although they have no particular welfare budget allowance as such their ship operating budget covers items related to crew welfare.

However, 26 per cent of company representatives said that their companies have a monthly on board welfare budget allowance per ship of between US\$100 and \$150, and another 18 per cent of under \$100. Table 4 below, also demonstrates the extent of ‘contributions’ made by seafarers to shipboard recreational welfare funds. Altogether 28 per cent of our respondent group have practices in place to this end.

When the best budget allowance per ship is considered the amount of money per capita is fairly low and in real terms it is insufficient to maintain most facilities and/or equipment let alone improve the current low level of onboard provision.

Table 4: Monthly company budget for ship-board seafarer recreational facilities (per ship)

	Percentage
No regular budget but facilities are provided on demand (N=16)	20
No specific budget but provisions included in the ship operation budget (N=13)	16
No regular budget but company provisions coexist with (involuntary) contribution from seafarers (N=12)	15
Regular budget over \$100 and provision on demand (N=12)	15
Regular budget between \$100 and \$150 and further (involuntary) contribution from seafarers (N=9)	11
Regular budget under \$100 and further (involuntary) contribution from seafarers (N=7)	9
Regular budget under \$100 (N=7)	9
Other (i.e. supernumeraries contributing to onboard welfare fund) (N=3)	4

N= 79

One of the striking outcomes of the survey and interviews is that in general companies have a narrow sense of seafarers' welfare which mainly focuses on the provision of limited leisure and entertainment facilities, such as TV monitors, DVD players and DVDs, music systems and so on. During interviews and focus group discussions with seafarers, they emphasised that sometimes ships they sail on have recreation facilities such as gymnasium rooms, swimming pools, saunas, bars, reading rooms and libraries. However, increasing numbers of vessels are built without such facilities as emphasis is increasingly placed upon cost and cargo space, as opposed to crew welfare.

Where they do remain it was reported that these spaces are often not utilised for the purposes they were built for. It emerged during interviews with seafarers that the spaces may be left empty, turned into store rooms or locked up permanently. One manager making reference to one of his multi purpose ships which was built in the early 1990s in Finland said "that ship has so much empty, unused spaces. Life onboard changed a lot since that ship was built". He implied that the ship was built originally by a Scandinavian company employing Scandinavian crew and his company employs seafarers from the Philippines, India and Indonesia and that crews from these countries do not 'need' a reading room, sauna or a gym. It was evident

from the findings of the research that assumptions are being made about what crew require on board and what they do not based upon stereotypes and seeming prejudice. Crews themselves are likely to feel unable to resist practices such as never filling up the swimming pool or turning over gymnasia for storage space given the precarious nature of their employment, and in any case a gymnasium full of obsolete unmaintained equipment may eventually fall into 'voluntary' disuse. If companies are not prepared to equip and properly maintain reading rooms, gyms, saunas, swimming pools and so forth, as a matter of priority, then inevitably seafarers will end up not making use of them.

In fact, newly built vessels are often based on the optimisation of available space for cargo and sometimes for daily work which results in smaller crew quarters. In general it seems that the provision of onboard welfare facilities for seafarers is going in the wrong direction. Given the shortage of qualified seafarers and problems with seafarer retention in the industry, this is not a good impression to give future recruits, and the industry needs to address the provision and maintenance of shipboard welfare facilities for seafarers. In fact, at a time where concerns are being expressed about seafarers' health onboard, recreational facilities such as swimming pools, gyms, separate recreation and mess rooms could improve social interaction on board contributing to an improvement in both physical and mental wellbeing. Similar views in relation to the importance of recreational facilities on board are also expressed elsewhere (Du Rietz and Ljunggren 2001; Sampson 2000: 2006).

To finalise the paper on a positive note, some companies have managed effectively to secure shore-leave for their crews despite their vessels having fast turnarounds and busy schedules and some others provide unlimited e-mail access to their seafarers:

“With a very few exceptions we have free shuttle services for our seafarers in every port that our ships operate, even if there is only one seafarer who could have shore leave in that particular port. The service operates on demand and makes a couple of rounds if necessary to accommodate crew members who are on duty. Of course this costs money but we see this as an investment and we have very good return in our investment. We can see the outcome of this service

although it is difficult to measure it. We have a very high retention rate, our crew is loyal to us, they are happy and healthy.”

“In our fleet every crew member onboard has a private e-mail account and unlimited access to send and receive e-mails.”

Conclusions

It is widely accepted in the shipping industry that due to changes in relation to globalisation and competition and also in relation to fast turnarounds, reduced crew sizes, restriction of shore leave, and new port developments away from easy access to shore-based facilities, the welfare needs of seafarers are greater than they used to be. Prolonged isolation from families and friends and limited opportunities to communicate with them make this need even greater.

The comparison between the results of the ITF/MORI 1996 and the current survey shows that over the last 10 years, seafarers' lives have become increasingly confined to their vessels. As we have seen, port-based welfare services, access to which requires a longer period of time ashore (reading room/library; organised sightseeing; meeting local people; sport facilities and on shore accommodation) are not seen as important as they were 10 years ago. These changes reflect the basic priorities of seafarers with a limited time in port and are not because seafarers do not desire or require these services anymore. They simply do not have time to use them and prioritise their most pressing needs in the face of limited time.

As we have seen, some shipping and ship management companies provide better welfare services for their seafarers than others and there is a polarisation in the industry as far as company policies on welfare provisions for their seafarers are concerned. However, amongst our company respondents only a few could be considered as implementing 'best practice' in relation to crew welfare provision.

The ILO Maritime Labour Convention has the capacity to improve seafarers' welfare ashore and at sea. There is also optimism in the industry that by 2011 ratification by

30 countries will be achieved representing a total share of at least 33 per cent of world gross tonnage - the requirement in order to bring the convention into force.

Meanwhile a number of policies and practices could be successfully introduced or developed by international and national maritime employment regulators, policy makers and shipping and ship management companies. The following proposals could be adopted to improve the existing welfare services and facilities for seafarers.

Shipping and ship management companies should consider:

- Having policies in place making sure that their seafarers have shore leave on a regular basis.
- Exploring the provision of free shuttle bus facilities provided by the companies for their seafarers when their ships are in port.
- Instructing their agents to provide necessary information about welfare and other facilities (including communication and transport) for their crews in ports.
- Having clear policies in place which permit seafarers aboard their ships access to telecommunication facilities (not at the discretion of captains).
- Developing a holistic approach to seafarers' welfare beyond just addressing Limited entertainment facilities aboard their vessels.
- Allocating a sufficient budget for wide ranging onboard welfare provision.
- Exploring the availability of cheaper onboard telecommunication facilities for seafarers.

It needs to be emphasised that, as documented in this paper, some of these recommendations are already in practice; however it would be beneficial if they were more widespread across the industry.

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