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# Who's who in the world's cruiseship crews?



**The number of seafarers in the cruise industry is growing by leaps and bounds, but where do they come from and what are their lives like? Bin Wu of the Seafarers' International Research Centre describes recent research to find out**

The Queen Mary 2, which was launched in January 2004, brings a new meaning to the term "luxury". She took five years to build, cost more than US\$800 million and is the most expensive cruiseship in the world. With a gross tonnage of 150,000 gt, she can host 2,620 passengers (full capacity 3,090). Her large space ratio – 57.25 gt/person – makes her one of the roomiest vessels anywhere. Furthermore, with a total crew of 1,254, or one staff member per two guests, it is possible for her to provide intensive, high quality, and diverse services to her

customers.

The arrival of QM2 is the latest development within the world cruise industry. Today cruiseships get ever-larger, and the cruise industry is booming. Every year about 12 million passengers take their holiday aboard cruise vessels. Such an impressive development would have been impossible without the contribution of cruiseship workers.

Alongside the expansion of cruiseships, we have witnessed a rapid growth of world cruise seafarers: from fewer than 20,000 two decades ago to nearly 150,000 today, accounting for about 13 per cent of the total number of world seafarers. And, with many new cruiseships to be launched in 2005 and 2006, cruise lines and their support industries will need to recruit over 35,000 more seafarers.

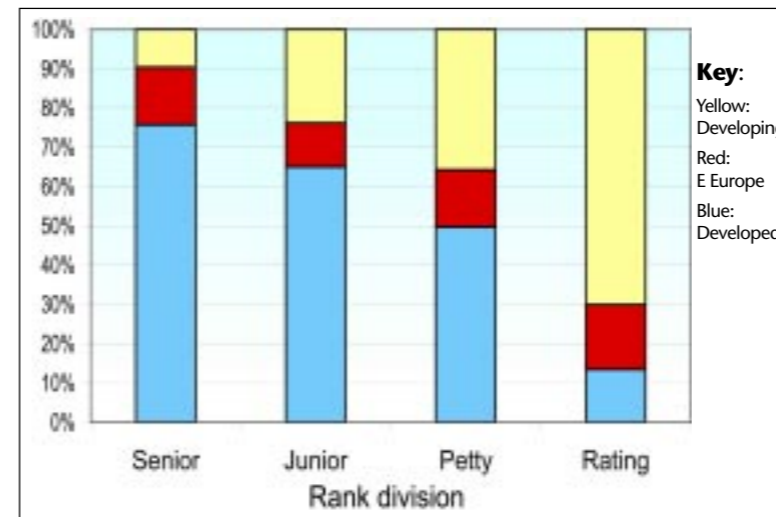
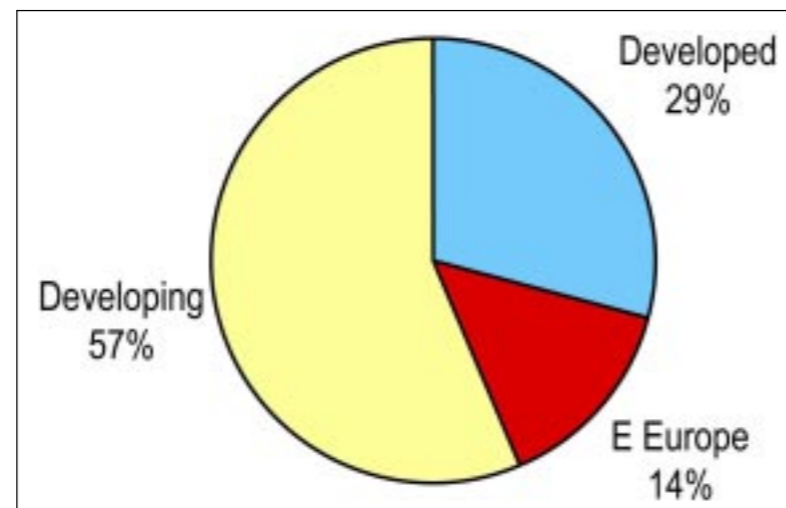
While luxury cruiseships have become increasingly attractive to the public and tourists, little is known about cruise seafarers. Who are they and where are they from? How are they distributed between departments, what ranks do

they hold and what regions do they come from? What are their working and living conditions like compared with their counterparts in the cargo sector? To answer these questions, the Seafarers' International Research Centre (SIRC) has conducted a labour market survey of the world cruise industry. By collecting and analysing crew information from major seaports in Europe in 2000, we have been able to draw a rough picture of this new

group of seafarers.

It seems that both cargo and cruise sectors are globalised industries. "United nations at sea" may be a good term to describe cruiseships as, with over 1,000 crew members, they could come from over 50 different countries worldwide. The majority of them, however, are from a few new seafarer-supplying countries in either the developing world or eastern Europe.

The Philippines is in the lead in supplying cruiseship



crews, accounting for 29 per cent of the world total. But, with cruiseship customers overwhelmingly coming from north America and western Europe, Italy, UK and Germany are also leading suppliers of cruiseship seafarers. As shown in the chart, left, developing countries contribute 57 per cent of world cruise seafarers, followed by developed countries, which contribute 29 per cent, and eastern Europe 14 per cent. The share of the

developed countries' contribution in the cruise sector is almost double the figure in the cargo sector.

Despite the global composition of cruiseship crews, the role each region or nationality play varies greatly, with an uneven distribution of job division and rank. For instance, seafarers from the developed countries are more likely to work for the guest services e.g. medicine, security, maintenance, and other

services like the casino, shop, and photography and beauty departments. This contrasts with the domination of the galley, bar and food departments by Asian and Latin American seafarers. Furthermore, seafarers from the developed world occupy three-quarters of senior ranks and over half of middle ranks. This is in contrast to over three-quarters of ratings positions being filled by seafarers from the developing world (see chart, near left).

An unusual feature of cruiseship crews is the number of women. The SIRC survey shows that about one-in-five cruiseship crew members are female, and in some ships the female participation is over a third. Female seafarers are usually concentrated in guest services, cabin, bar and food and other such departments, but there are a few in marine and galley departments. Furthermore, three-quarters of the women are from developed countries or eastern Europe, leaving just a few places for the developing world.

While cruise passengers enjoy their holidays on luxury

ships, cruiseship seafarers' lives are not always so cheerful. The job description may list many benefits, such as "to enjoy the sights, taste the foods, and meet the locals wherever your ship stops"; the reality is that these will largely depend upon the position you hold on board. What is certain, however, is that the job could entail 11-hour working days; living in cramped quarters, sharing a cabin with up to six people; and being banned from public places when off-duty. Life is particularly harsh for cleaners, laundry workers, dishwashers, and galley workers, who have longer working hours, lower pay, and both their work and accommodation are located in the lowest decks below the waterline. As a result, they have little chance of sunshine and fresh air each day.

For the majority of cruise seafarers who are from the developing world or eastern Europe, and who work at ratings level, the term "luxury" simply does not apply. Rather, "sweatship" may be a more suitable description for their situation.