

[Shipping industry warns of trade logjam as crews remain stranded; ? Travel curbs hit 400,000 sailors ? Restaffing vessels impeded ? Sterling urges UK action](#)

Financial Times (London, England)

June 8, 2020 Monday, Edition 1, National Edition

Copyright 2020 The Financial Times Limited All Rights Reserved



FINANCIAL
TIMES

Section: FEATURES; Pg. 1

Length: 468 words

Byline: PEGGY HOLLINGER; ROBERT WRIGHT; MICHAEL POOLER

Body

The international shipping industry has warned of a threat to global trade from a mounting crisis on board the world's merchant vessels, with up to 400,000 crew stranded at sea or at home by global travel restrictions in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

One German-owned tanker last week refused to sail unless replacement crew could be brought in, said industry executives and union representatives, amid concern over rising fatigue and safety.

The fear is that others will follow after June 16, when emergency extensions to the labour agreements governing seafarers' contracts expire. Many crew have worked several months beyond their contracts, prompting ship owners, unions and captains to sound the alarm.

"It's a ticking time bomb," said Guy Platten, secretary-general of the International Chamber of Shipping, representing ship owners and operators. "The longer this issue goes on the greater risk to the supply chain."

Maritime transport is the engine of globalisation, with around 80 per cent of world trade by volume carried on vessels such as container ships, fuel tankers and dry bulk carriers, according to the UN Conference on Trade and Development.

However, the smooth operation of the freight trade is being hindered by travel restrictions that bar crew from disembarking to return home or from travelling to a port where their ship is waiting for a crew change.

Many seafarers are also struggling to obtain entry or exit visas, while the widespread suspension of commercial air travel has increased the difficulties in moving crew around. Those affected make up more than a fifth of the 1.8m seafarers who crew the world's 96,000 commercial vessels.

Shipping industry warns of trade logjam as crews remain stranded; ? Travel curbs hit 400,000 sailors ?
Restaffing vessels impeded ? Sterling urges UK action

Last month the International Maritime Organisation published a 12-step protocol for safe crew changes. But governments have been slow to implement it and the number of crew stranded at sea was rising weekly, Mr Platten said.

Under maritime rules, a seafarer is allowed to spend only 11 months at sea. But some have now been at sea for up to 15 months, said Jim Scorer, secretary-general of the shipmasters' federation, IFSMA. "Some of these people are dangerously tired," he said. The industry wants governments around the world to create "safe corridors" that would allow free movement of seafarers. These include designating seafarers as "key workers" who can travel without restrictions when leaving or joining a vessel, and creating safe areas in airports for their transit.

Although the UK has given seafarers key worker status, the industry has called on Jeffrey Sterling, former chairman of shipping line P&O, to raise their concerns with Boris Johnson.

Not only was this a pressing humanitarian issue, Lord Sterling said, but the smooth operation of the global merchant fleet was a crucial factor in the recovery of world economy.

Big Read page 19

Graphic

About 80 per cent of the world's trade volume is carried on vessels such as container ships, tankers and dry bulk carriers

Load-Date: June 7, 2020