



**ALL ABOARD
ALLIANCE**
GLOBAL MARITIME FORUM

Employability in maritime

**Four key challenges
facing women seafarers**



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The views expressed in this report are those of the authors alone and not the views of the All Aboard Alliance or its member companies, or the Global Maritime Forum.

CREDITS

Data collection and analysis was conducted in collaboration with TURTLE.

Foreword

The All Aboard Alliance was established in 2022 to make the global maritime industry more diverse, equitable, and inclusive. One of the first collective actions of Alliance members was to establish the Diversity@Sea workstream, which had the dual purpose of addressing the gender imbalance at sea and exploring how to make seaborne careers more inclusive and attractive to all.

Industry leaders from 20 member companies agreed to work together in the Diversity@Sea workstream to learn how to improve working conditions onboard vessels, particularly for women, who are severely underrepresented at sea. By collectively interviewing 115 women seafarers, the involved companies worked together to produce the first Diversity@Sea report, **15 key pain points for women at sea**, which identified some of the most common challenges and systemic barriers that hinder gender equity at sea.

In early 2023, the Global Maritime Forum worked closely with the companies involved in Diversity@Sea, seafarers, NGOs, diversity experts, and academics to co-design ways in which to best address these 15 pain points. These measures were then implemented and tested on 12 different vessels between November 2023 and September 2024 as part of the Diversity@Sea pilot. The second Diversity@Sea report, **Improving Seafarer Well-being: Preliminary findings from the Diversity@Sea pilot**, shared some of the first learnings and recommendations from the pilot project. The final guidelines and recommendations are set to be published in the spring of 2025.

While some identified pain points were too complex and systemic to be adequately addressed in the Diversity@Sea pilot, such as the prevention and sanctioning of sexual misconduct and family support measures for mothers and fathers at sea, we are pleased to present the third Diversity@Sea publication, which takes a deep dive into the challenges women face in getting hired for seaborne positions and advancing their careers in the industry.

The All Aboard Alliance would like to thank TURTLE for co-designing the survey and distributing it to the seafarers registered on its recruitment platform. The 3,319 responses have generated valuable insight into the key employability challenges facing women seafarers.

Introduction

The global maritime industry is facing a critical shortage of seafarers, and the largely untapped potential of women offers an opportunity to help address this gap. Women comprise less than 2% of the global seafaring workforce, with significant barriers hindering their full participation and contribution to the sector. This report draws on data from a survey of over 3,300 seafarers, designed by the Global Maritime Forum in collaboration with TURTLE, an ethical maritime recruitment platform, to highlight the challenges women face in the industry.

Key challenges identified include gender and nationality discrimination, certification and qualification difficulties, systemic bias, and challenges in transitioning from sea-based to shore-based roles. Gender discrimination remains a significant issue, with 29% of women respondents identifying it as a major obstacle to employment in contrast to only 0.4% of men. Certification challenges also disproportionately affect women, particularly in developing countries where national qualifications may lack international recognition. Systemic bias and stereotypes often confine women to support and junior positions, exacerbating pay disparities and limiting career progression. Furthermore, career transitions to shore-based roles present additional difficulties for women, compounded by discrimination and family responsibilities.

By addressing these challenges, the maritime industry can tap into the talents of women seafarers and individuals from diverse nationalities, contributing to a more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable future. With the forecasted need for an additional 89,510 officers by 2026, breaking down these barriers is not only essential for achieving gender equity but also for ensuring the sector's long-term success.

Survey insights

Seafarer demographics and employment status

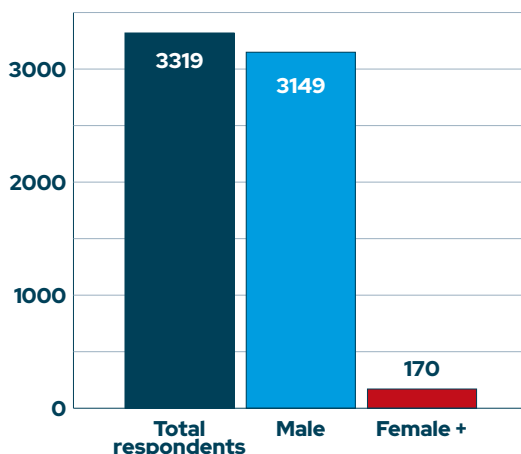
This report uses data collected in a survey entitled “Employability in the maritime industry” (hereafter “the survey”) designed by the Global Maritime Forum in collaboration with TURTLE, which currently has about 180,0000 seafarers registered on its platform.

The survey collected responses from 3,319 respondents across various nationalities and ranks, providing valuable insights into the gender and cultural diversity within the maritime industry. A significant gender imbalance was revealed, with 94.9% of respondents identifying as men and only 4.9% as women. This disparity mirrors the broader gender imbalance in the industry.

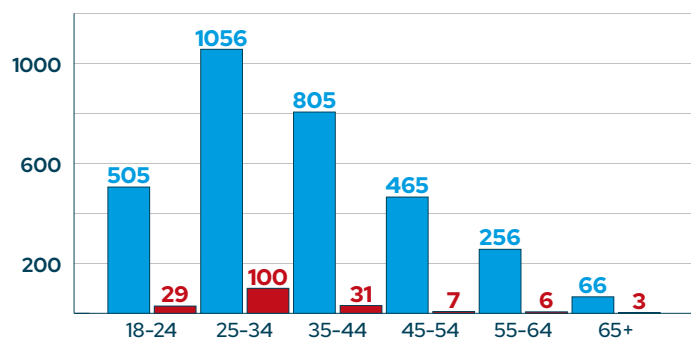
The survey respondents were notably diverse in nationality, with the most represented groups being Indian (26.5%), Nigerian (12%), and Filipino (9.9%). Among male respondents, the most common countries were India (28%), Nigeria (11%), and the Philippines (10%), while the leading nationalities among female respondents were Nigerian (25%), Filipino (13%), and South African (10%).

The respondents’ age distribution indicates a workforce primarily in the mid-career stage, with the largest age group being 25–34 years (34.7%), followed by 35–44 years (25.1%). The presence of older age groups within the data suggests career longevity, particularly for men, within the sector.

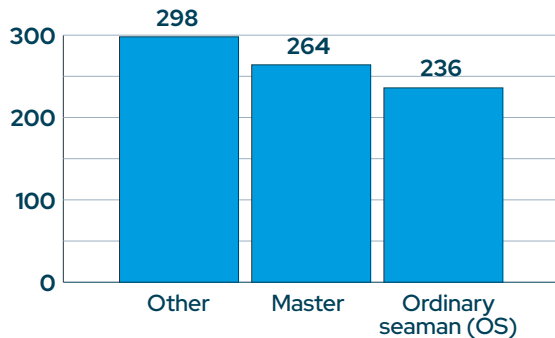
Survey respondent overview



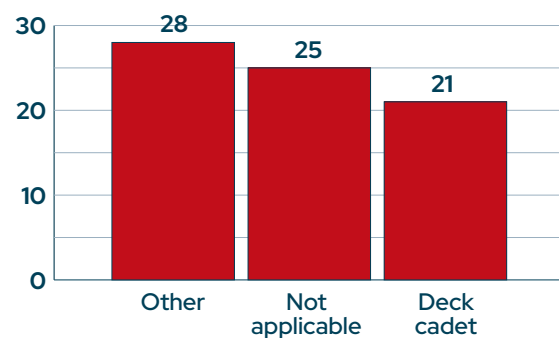
Age distribution



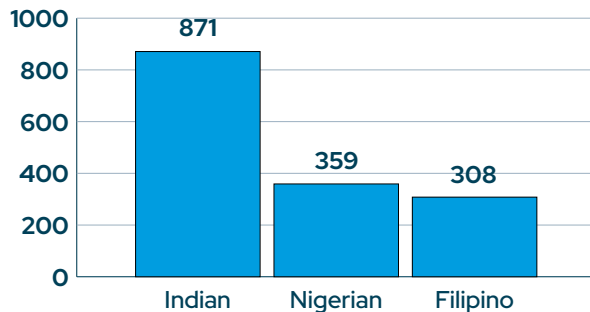
Top 3 ranks (Male)



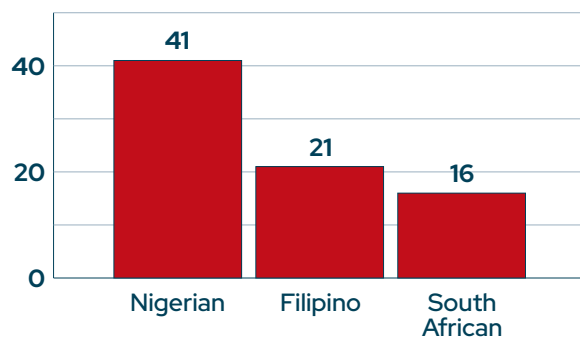
Top 3 ranks (Female+)



Top 3 nationalities (Male)



Top 3 nationalities (Female+)



Challenges in securing employment

Overall, 58% of men and 52% of women respondents reported being employed or having been employed recently, underlining the difficulties seafarers of different ranks and genders face in obtaining employment.

For male respondents, the ranks facing the most difficulty in securing jobs included engine cadets (64% unsuccessful applications), deck cadets (57%), and welders (56%). For women, the barriers were even more pronounced, with 100% of both able-bodied seamen and 4th officers and 75% of engine cadets failing to secure jobs. These findings call for urgent action to address the systemic issues that prevent seafarers, especially cadets, junior workers and women, from securing employment or placements onboard a ship.

Reasons for unemployment at sea

The survey explored why some seafarers are currently unemployed, including:

- Applying and not securing a job:** The primary reason for unemployment, based on the survey, is the inability to secure a job, bearing in mind that most seafarers are contract workers who are essentially unemployed when they are in between contracts. Among survey respondents, more than half of unemployed women (51%) and nearly half of the unemployed men (46%) are actively seeking employment but cannot find positions.

- **Seeking employment ashore:** A notable percentage of seafarers seek shore-based employment opportunities, with 19% of women and 11% of men actively looking for jobs ashore.
- **Family and personal responsibilities:** Family and personal responsibilities impact seafarer employment. Among the respondents, 8% of women cited children or family responsibilities as their reason for unemployment, compared to 7% of men who cited broader family responsibilities. This highlights the need for better support systems for all seafarers with families.
- **Other reasons:** A substantial number of seafarers fall under the 'Other' category, with 22% of women and 13% of men indicating unspecified reasons for unemployment. This points to the need for further investigation to uncover specific barriers they may encounter.
- **Certification issues:** Certification issues hinder seafarers' employability. About 4.5% of women and 6% of men are currently awaiting the renewal of their certificates, which is a mandatory requirement for employment. Delays in this process can severely limit their ability to secure jobs. Additionally, 2% of all seafarers have certificates that have become invalid, further preventing them from obtaining employment.
- **Other personal reasons:** Some 1.5% of women seafarers reported being pregnant, which temporarily affects their ability to work at sea.

Biggest challenges for women in seeking employment at sea

In an industry historically dominated by men, women seafarers face significant challenges that hinder their entry, retention, and progression. This report delves into the four most significant challenges faced by women seeking employment at sea and on shore. It provides a comprehensive understanding of the obstacles that impede their employability.

Gender discrimination

The most significant barrier perceived by women seafarers is gender discrimination. According to the survey, 29% of women reported gender discrimination as a substantial obstacle to securing employment at sea, compared to just 0.4% of male respondents. Women deck cadets, in particular, appear to experience the highest levels of perceived gender-based rejection, with 69% attributing their job rejections to gender bias, which they believe makes it difficult for them even to begin their careers in the maritime industry.

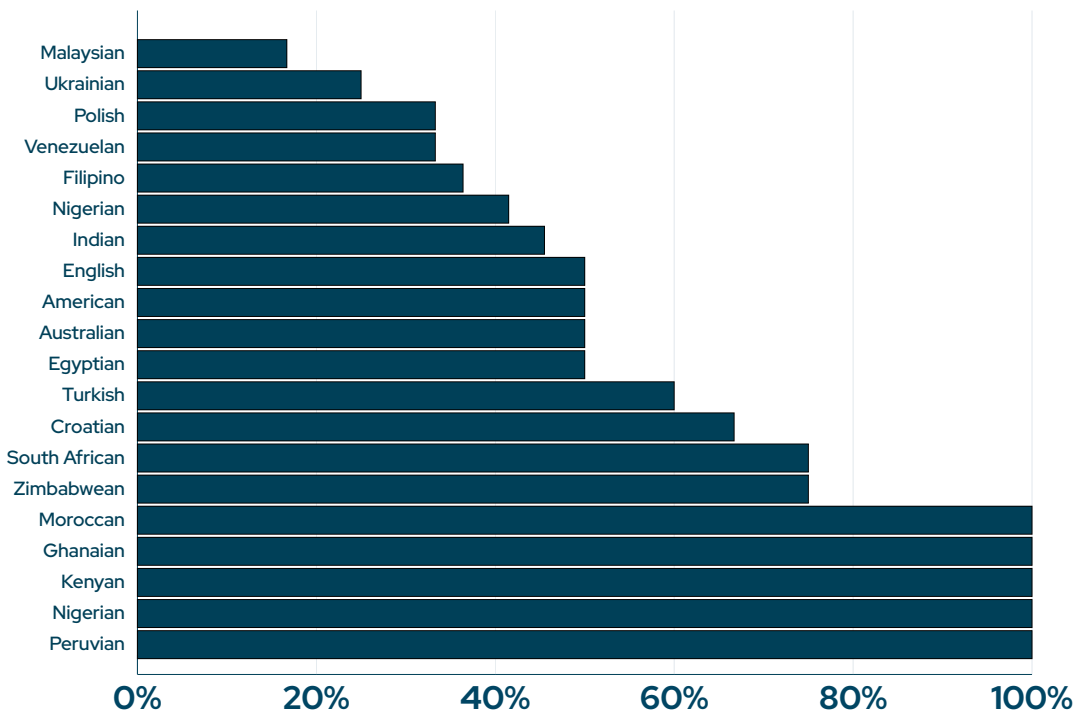
For some of the women already in employment, systemic gender bias significantly hinders their professional development, advancement, and overall job satisfaction. A study entitled “Understanding Women Seafarers Who Have Passed Through the Port City of Durban” by Mariam Seedat Khan et al. (2015) highlights the difficult choices faced by women in the maritime industry. Women often find themselves compelled to abandon their seafaring careers or accept low-paying, entry-level positions with limited prospects for advancement. This dilemma is particularly pronounced on vessels registered under flags of convenience (FOCs), which are ships flagged in countries other than those of their ownership to circumvent strict labour laws and wage regulations.

The study reveals that women are disproportionately employed on FOC vessels. Low pay and easier access to employment attract younger women, but few advance to officer roles compared to their male counterparts.

Nationality discrimination

Nationality discrimination adds another layer of difficulty, compounding the challenges women already face in a tough maritime job market. The chart below highlights the varying rejection rates among women seafarers from different nationalities.

Female+ applicants with no job by nationality (%)



This data can offer insights into potential disparities in job opportunities among seafarers from the Global South (comprising developing and least developed countries) compared to those from the Global North (comprising developed countries).

Global South: Most nationalities listed in the data are from the Global South, including countries like Nigeria, South Africa, India, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Ghana, and the Philippines. The percentages of women seafarers from these nations who applied but did not secure jobs are notably high, reflecting significant challenges in securing employment:

1. **Kenyan, Nigerian, Peruvian, Ghanaian, and Moroccan** seafarers face a **100%** rejection rate, meaning none of the respondents from these countries who applied for jobs at sea were successful.
2. **Zimbabwean and South African** seafarers have a high rejection rate of **75%**, indicating that three out of four applicants did not secure a job.
3. Seafarers from **Malaysia** appear to be an exception, however, with a reported rejection rate of just **16.7%**.

These figures suggest that both men and women from the Global South are experiencing significant barriers to employment, potentially reflecting underlying nationality-based discrimination or systemic challenges within the global maritime industry.

Global North: The data also includes women seafarers from the Global North, such as those from the United States, Australia, England, and Poland. While some of these countries have moderate rejection rates, there is a clear difference in the overall experience compared to seafarers from the Global South:

1. **Polish** seafarers have a **33.3%** rejection rate, which is still high but lower than that of many of their Global South counterparts.
2. **Ukrainian** seafarers have a **25%** rejection rate, suggesting relatively better employment outcomes.
3. However, **American, Australian, and English** women seafarers all experience a **50%** rejection rate, showing that even within the Global North, significant barriers exist for women seafarers.

The data suggests that nationality alone does not fully explain the disparities, and other factors such as gender, specific country reputations, or industry practices might be at play.

Overall, the data highlights the need for further examination of employment practices within the maritime industry to ensure that women seafarers from all nationalities, particularly those from the Global South, have equal opportunities for employment without facing undue discrimination.

Systemic bias

Despite ongoing efforts to promote gender diversity, women in the maritime sector continue to face significant systemic barriers.

Systemic bias often begins at the recruitment stage, where some maritime companies may favour male candidates due to stereotypes suggesting that men are better suited for the physically demanding nature of sea work. Nationality stereotypes can compound these biases. This bias is evident in hiring practices and job advertisements that inadequately target women and fail to address these broader prejudices.

Even women who excel academically in maritime education and training institutions often face difficulties securing employment. In some regions, these institutions do not admit women candidates at all, further limiting their opportunities and perpetuating the cycle of underrepresentation.

Career advancement remains a challenge in the maritime industry. The **2024 INTERTANKO Seafarers Survey** revealed that while 54% of women felt there were opportunities for advancement, 46% reported finding 'few' or 'none,' compared to 70% of men who believed such opportunities existed. Additionally, women reported lower satisfaction with their educational experiences. This suggests a need for maritime colleges to address the factors contributing to this dissatisfaction.

Finally, the practice of mandatory pregnancy testing during pre-employment medical exams, as highlighted in a 2019 **International Labour Organization (ILO) report**, remains a concern. In some countries, this practice is not prohibited by law, which can lead to discrimination against women in the hiring process.

Certification and qualification gaps in the maritime industry

A certificate of competency (CoC) is essential for seafarers in the global maritime industry. It verifies that a mariner has the knowledge and skills that meet the International Maritime Organization's (IMO) standards. Without a recognised CoC, seafarers are barred from working on internationally flagged ships, limiting their career opportunities and earning potential.

However, obtaining a CoC is particularly challenging for those from developing countries. In many cases, national and regional certifications are not globally recognised, creating barriers to international employment. For example, despite Nigeria being the largest ship-owning country in Africa, the CoC issued by the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency is not widely accepted internationally, severely limiting job prospects for Nigerian seafarers.

On the other hand, Ghana made progress in 2022 when its CoC gained recognition from the UK's Maritime Coastguard Agency, improving the employability of Ghanaians on international vessels. This difference in certification recognition highlights a key challenge in ensuring that all seafarers, regardless of their country of origin, have equal access to global job markets through internationally recognised certificates.

Cadet training berths and impact on certification and qualification

Practical sea time is essential for cadets and trainees to meet the standards set by the International Convention on the Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping for Seafarers of 1978. However, a significant shortage of training berths is preventing many aspiring seafarers from gaining this vital experience.

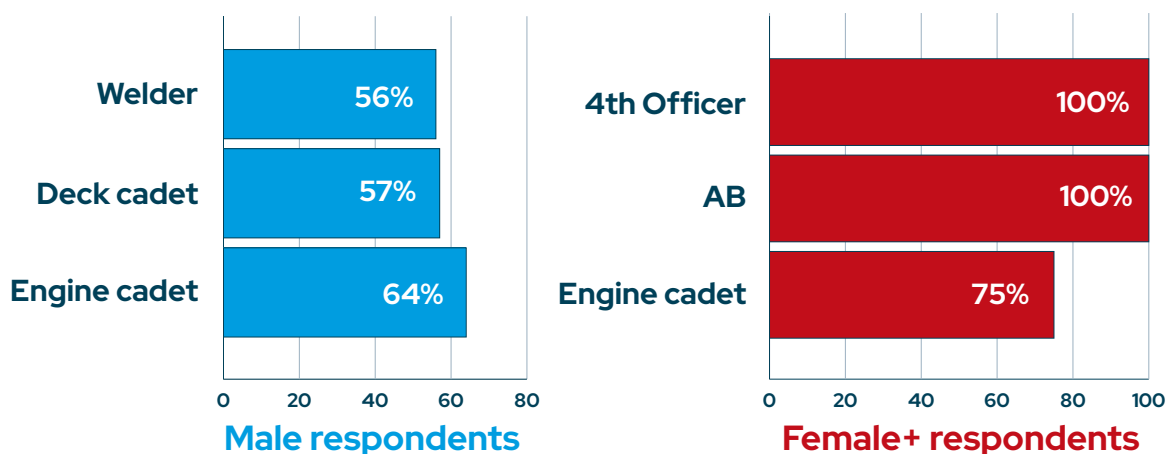
The survey shows that 64% of male engine cadets, 57% of male deck cadets, and 75% of female engine cadets experience rejection when applying for positions. This suggests that the maritime industry produces more cadets than available berths, leading to disillusionment and a higher risk of career attrition.

The higher rejection rates for women cadets could worsen gender disparities in the maritime sector and make it even more difficult for women to enter and advance their careers in the industry.

The 2024 Seafarers Survey by INTERTANKO further emphasises the challenge of securing the required sea time. While 51% of respondents found it easy or very easy to secure sea time, 49% did not. Women and seafarers from the Philippines, Russia, and Ukraine, in particular, indicated that gaining sea time remains a significant hurdle.

As noted by the 2019 ILO report, a key factor contributing to the shortage of training berths is the design and operational priorities of many ships. To maximise cargo space and minimise port fees, ships are often built with limited accommodation for cadets and trainees, further reducing the availability of onboard experience necessary for certification.

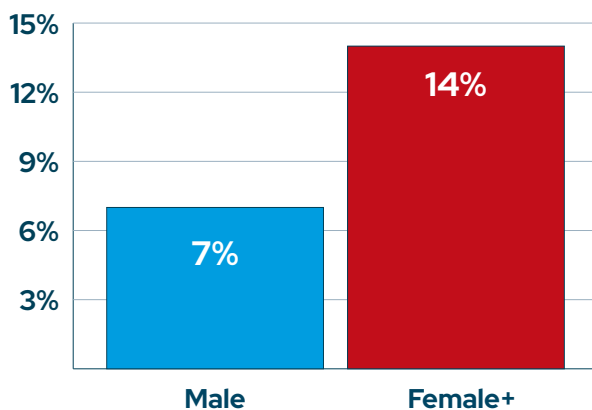
Top 3 ranks seafarers were rejected for



Career transition difficulties

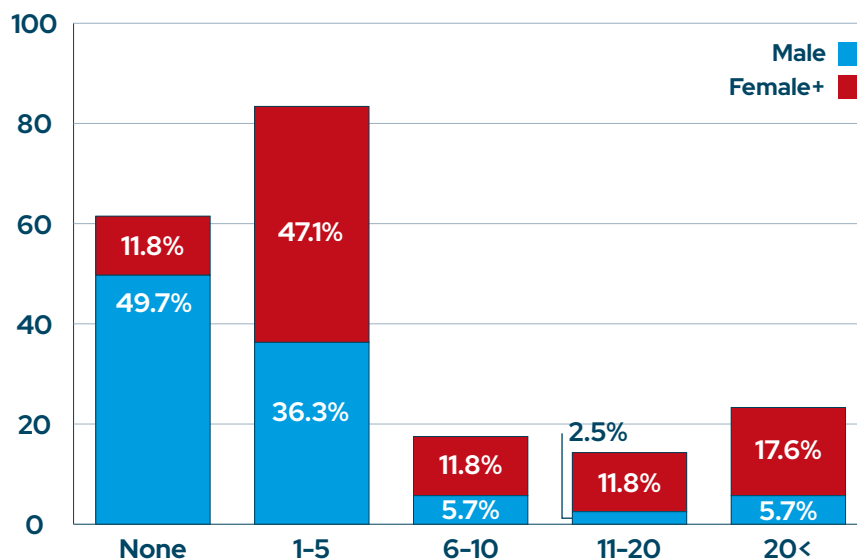
The data from the survey reveals that a higher percentage of women seafarers (14%) are seeking jobs ashore compared to their male counterparts (7%). Additionally, 17.5% of women, compared to 14.7% of men, expressed a preference for shore-based positions. These figures may reflect women’s challenges when transitioning to onshore roles. While more women appear to be seeking shore-based opportunities, the survey indicates that most seafarers, regardless of gender, prefer to remain at sea even when offered a job with similar conditions ashore.

Seafarers looking for jobs ashore



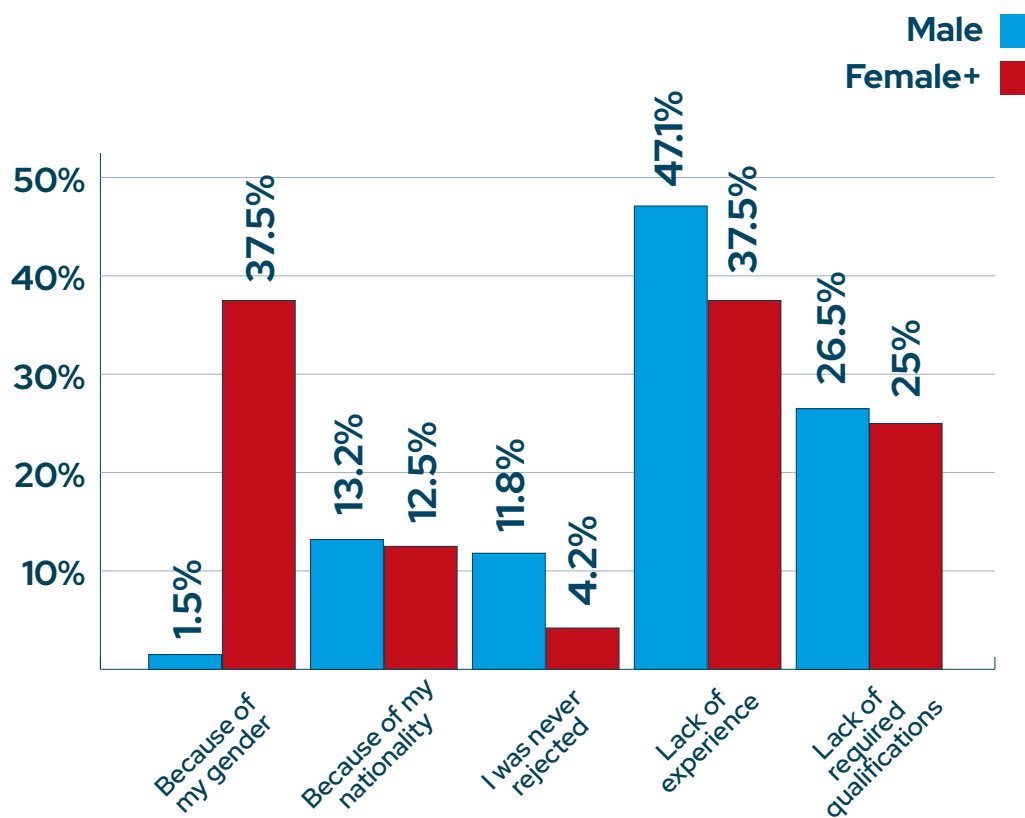
The survey data shows a significant disparity in rejection rates between male and female seafarers when applying for shore-based jobs. Approximately 50% of men reported experiencing no rejections, compared to only 12% of women.

Application rejections for those looking for a job ashore



The survey data also provides insights into the specific reasons perceived by men and women survey respondents for being rejected when applying for jobs ashore. Perceived gender discrimination emerges as a significant barrier for female seafarers, with 37.5% citing it as a reason for rejection, compared to just 1.5% of male seafarers. Similarly, nationality-based rejections affect both genders, indicating that this is an issue across the industry.

Assumed reasons for rejection when applying for a job ashore

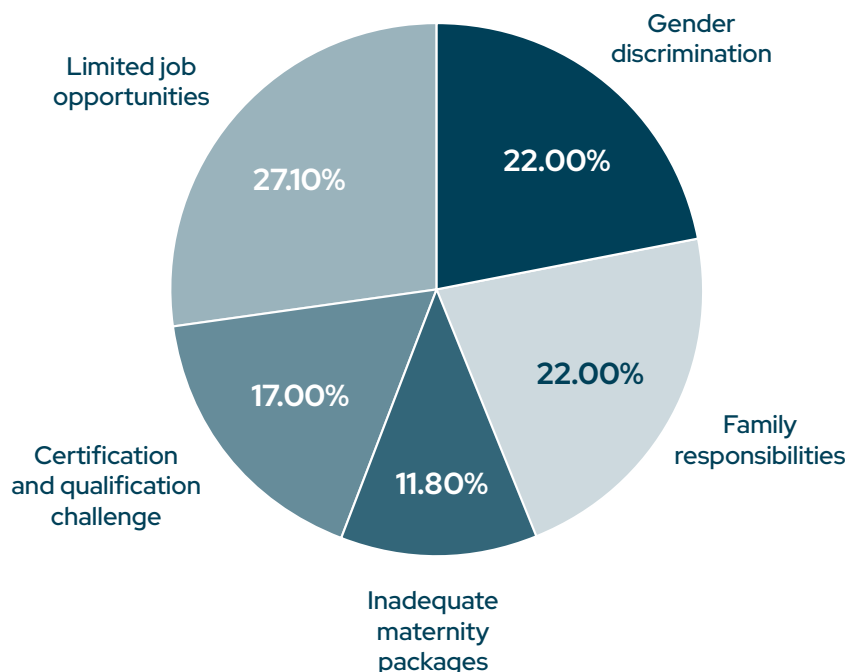


Key challenges for women seafarers seeking to transition to shore-based roles

The survey identifies several key challenges that women seafarers encounter when seeking to transition to shore-based roles:

1. **Limited job opportunities (27.1%):** More than a quarter of women seafarers identify limited job opportunities as their most significant challenge. Many women struggle to find available positions despite their desire to move ashore, possibly due to a general scarcity of jobs or biases in the hiring process.
2. **Gender discrimination (22.0%):** More than one in five women report gender discrimination as a major obstacle to securing shore-based roles. This reflects the ongoing gender-related challenges within the maritime industry.
3. **Certification and qualification challenges (16.3%):** Some women seafarers struggle with certification and qualification issues. This could mean they either lack the necessary certifications for shore-based roles or their existing qualifications are undervalued or not recognised in the shore-based job market.
4. **Inadequate maternity packages (11.8%):** Inadequate maternity support is a relatively minor but important concern. The lack of sufficient maternity benefits can deter women from pursuing or maintaining shore-based employment, especially in roles that may not offer the same flexibility or benefits as seafaring positions.

Biggest challenges for females+ looking for a job ashore



Conclusion

Towards a more inclusive and supportive maritime industry

The global maritime industry is at a crucial point, facing a shortage of seafarers while not fully utilising the potential of a more diverse talent pool, particularly women, who comprise less than 2% of the workforce. This report outlines the significant barriers that women face in seeking maritime employment, such as:

1. **Gender and nationality discrimination:** Gender discrimination remains a key concern in the maritime industry, with 29% of women identifying it as a significant obstacle in their career, in contrast to only 0.4% of men. Although the survey indicates a relatively small disparity in current employment rates between men and women, many women perceive discrimination as a substantial barrier to their hiring, career progression, and job security. Nationality discrimination compounds these difficulties. This intersection of gender and nationality biases presents unique and significant challenges for women seafarers in securing and advancing their careers.
2. **Certification and qualification challenges:** Obtaining and maintaining certificates of competency, which are essential for working on internationally flagged ships, poses hurdles for 16% of women respondents. In developing countries, national certifications often lack international recognition, severely restricting career opportunities at sea. This issue highlights the need to ensure that all seafarers, regardless of nationality, have equal access to global job markets.
3. **Systemic bias:** A recent [study from the American Journal of Industrial and Business Management \(AJIBM\)](#) showed how gender stereotypes impact women's ability to progress within maritime roles. Despite their dedication and qualifications, women are still too often relegated to support and junior positions. Other challenges described in the AJIBM study included the 45 percent pay gap between men and women, discrimination, abuse, harassment, and inability to enter management positions.
4. **Challenges in career transitions:** Transitioning from sea-based to shore-based roles can be particularly difficult for women seafarers. Women are more likely to seek shore-based opportunities than their male counterparts, but barriers such as discrimination and family responsibilities often complicate these career transitions. These challenges can limit women's ability to secure stable and rewarding employment ashore.

Addressing these issues is critical to the sustainability and growth of the maritime sector. By removing these barriers, the industry can access a valuable, underrepresented talent pool and move toward a more inclusive, diverse, and resilient future.

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[The Status of Women within the Maritime Sector \(scirp.org\)](https://scirp.org)



ALL ABOARD ALLIANCE

GLOBAL MARITIME FORUM

About the All Aboard Alliance

The All Aboard Alliance sets out to significantly improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in the maritime industry. The Alliance's member companies are united by a collaborative drive to create a sustainable, forward-looking, and innovative sector that treats its current and future employees with dignity and respect and appeals to the next generation of talent. The Global Maritime Forum brings together senior leaders from across the Alliance to drive progress and facilitate collaboration among member companies.



GLOBAL MARITIME FORUM

About the Global Maritime Forum

The Global Maritime Forum is an international not-for-profit organisation committed to shaping the future of global seaborne trade. It works by bringing together visionary leaders and experts who, through collaboration and collective action, strive to increase sustainable long-term economic development and human well-being.

Established in 2017, the Global Maritime Forum is funded through a combination of grants and partner contributions. It operates independently of any outside influence and does not support individual technologies or companies. Most of its roughly 45-person staff is based in the organisation's headquarters in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Learn more about the Global Maritime Forum and our work on human sustainability at www.globalmaritimeforum.org

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Chevron Shipping Company
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