

International Labour Office contribution to Part II of the report of the Secretary-General on Oceans and Law of the Sea pursuant to United Nations General Assembly resolution 74/19 of 10 December 2019, entitled “Oceans and the law of the sea”.

Contribution to Part II of the report regarding all other developments in the field of ocean affairs and the law of the sea within the scope of the activities of the Organization, including information on ILO’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the maritime context

I. General – The ILO, SDGs and how they relate to the ILO’s work: ensuring decent work for seafarers and fishers to secure a sustainable use of oceans

As the only tripartite U.N. agency, the ILO brings together governments, employers and workers of 187 member States, to set labour standards, develop policies and devise programmes promoting decent work for all women and men. Founded in 1919, the ILO has worked for 100 years to improve the conditions of seafarers and fishers, including through the adoption of Conventions and Recommendations specific to the shipping and fishing sectors. The widespread ratification and implementation of these sector-specific standards, and the realization of fundamental principles and rights at work for all working at sea, is critical to ensuring that the three pillars of ocean sustainability – economic, environmental *and* social – are respected.

Sustainable Development Goals

The two most relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from the 2030 Agenda for the ILO with respect to the oceans are SDG 8 – to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all - and SDG 14 – to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources.

The ILO has made voluntary commitments linked to SDG 14 at the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of SDG 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, and is following up on these commitments. In addition, the ILO has made commitments at the various Our Ocean Conferences, the most recent of which was held in Bali, Indonesia, in 2018.

The commitments from both conferences relate to the implementation of the key ILO maritime instruments which are the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended (MLC, 2006); the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188) and the Seafarers' Identity Documents Convention (Revised), 2003 (No. 185), as amended. In addition, the ILO made a commitment at the Our Ocean conference in 2018 to address forced labour and trafficking at sea, in particular in the fishing and fisheries sector.

As a member of UN-Oceans, the ILO has sought to raise awareness of labour issues in the maritime sector, and to promote ILO’s standards and other tools that address these matters, across the UN system. This has included efforts, with respect to indicator 14.c.1, to include key international labour standards for seafarers and fishers on the list of instruments in which States would have to report on their ratification or accession and implementation through legal frameworks.

Links to UNCLOS

A number of the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) are relevant to addressing the issues faced by seafarers and fishers. These include

Article 94, which, provides that “Every State shall effectively exercise its jurisdiction and control in administrative, technical and social matters over ships flying its flag”; Article 73, which provides that “Arrested vessels and their crews shall be promptly released upon the posting of reasonable bond or other security”, and that “Coastal State penalties for violations of fisheries laws and regulations in the exclusive economic zone may not include imprisonment, in the absence of agreements to the contrary by the States concerned, or any other form of corporal punishment”; Article 99, which prohibits the transport of slaves; and Article 292 concerning the prompt release of vessels and crews, which is also often cited with regard to unlawful arrest.

Both the ILO’s MLC, 2006 and the Work in Fishing Convention refer to UNCLOS in their preambles, recognizing that UNCLOS sets out the general legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out.

II. Shipping

Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended

The ILO has always given special consideration to the maritime sector. Since the 1920s, it has adopted many international labour standards specific to shipping, fishing, inland waterways and ports. The MLC, 2006 brought together nearly all of the instruments for seafarers in a single, comprehensive convention. The MLC, 2006 consolidated 37 existing ILO Conventions and related Recommendations. It establishes minimum conditions for decent work aboard a vessel addressing all aspects of work such as minimum age, medical fitness and training; recruitment and placement; and conditions of work including employment agreements, hours of rest, wages, leave, repatriation, manning; accommodation and food; medical care and occupational safety and health protection.

The 2014 amendments to the MLC, 2006, which relate to financial security of seafarers in cases of abandonment (Regulation 2.5) and contractual claims for compensation in the event of a seafarer’s death or long-term disability due to an operational injury, illness or hazard (Regulation 4.2), entered into force on 18 January 2017.

The 2016 amendments to the MLC, 2006 came into force on 8 January 2019. These amendments call upon States to take into account the latest version of the Guidance on eliminating shipboard harassment and bullying jointly published by the International Chamber of Shipping and the International Transport Workers’ Federation (Guideline B.4.3.1); and provided for the extension of the validity of the maritime labour certificate issued for ships in cases where the renewal inspection required by paragraph 2 of Standard A5.1.3 has been successfully completed, but where a new certificate cannot immediately be issued to that ship (Standard 5.1.3 and Appendix A5-II).

The 2018 amendments to the MLC, 2006 relate to the continued validity of employment agreements and protection of seafarers’ wages and entitlements while they are held captive on or off a ship as a result of acts of piracy or armed robbery against ships. They are expected to enter into force on 26 December 2020.

As of 23 June 2020, the MLC, 2006 has been ratified by 97 States representing over 91% of world gross tonnage of merchant ships, with several other ratifications on the way.

In addition to promoting ratification and implementation of its Conventions, the ILO also supervises the application of international labour standards such as the MLC, 2006. This is done in accordance with the ILO's Constitution through the work of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations.

Further, the ILO's Maritime Labour Academy at the Training Centre in Turin continues to train inspectors, lawyers as well as governments, seafarers' and shipowners' organizations for a harmonious application of the MLC, 2006. The ILO also regularly provides technical assistance to member States and other relevant parties with respect to implementation and enforcement of the MLC, 2006.

More information can be accessed on the Maritime Labour Convention website:
<http://www.ilo.org/global/standards/maritime-labour-convention/lang--en/index.htm>

Follow up to the Third Meeting of the Special Tripartite Committee of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (MLC, 2006)

The third meeting of the Special Tripartite Committee (STC) established by the Governing Body in accordance with Article XIII of the MLC, 2006 was held at the ILO headquarters in Geneva from 23 to 27 April 2018. It adopted the 2018 amendments to the MLC, 2006 relating to the continued validity of seafarers' employment agreements and protection of seafarers' wages and entitlements during captivity as a result of acts of piracy or armed robbery against ships. It also adopted resolutions concerning seafarers' abandonment; decent work in inland navigation; the facilitation of shore leave and transit of seafarers; updating flag State inspection and port State control guidelines to reflect the 2014, 2016 and 2018 amendments to the Convention; and updating of the process for submitting proposals for amendments to the MLC, 2006. The meeting also adopted recommendations concerning the review of maritime-related instruments (instruments adopted prior to the MLC, 2006).

The amendments, resolutions and recommendations of the meeting can be accessed here:
https://www.ilo.org/global/standards/maritime-labour-convention/events/WCMS_550284/lang--en/index.htm

In early 2020, as a follow up to the [Resolution concerning amendments to the ILO flag State inspection and port State control guidelines to reflect amendments to the Code of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006](#), a STC subsidiary body, in the form of a correspondence group, commenced work to update the MLC, 2006 flag State inspection and port State control guidelines to reflect the 2014, 2016 and 2018 amendments. The outcome of this work, which is coordinated by the Officers of the STC, is planned to be completed and submitted to the Governing Body of ILO in March 2021 for authorization to publish the amended guidelines on the ILO website.

Seafarers' Identity Documents Convention (Revised), 2003 (No. 185)

The Seafarers' Identity Documents Convention (Revised), 2003, as amended (No. 185) guarantees the rights of seafarers to temporarily enter a country for the purposes of shore leave, transfer or transit. The Convention was adopted by the International Labour Conference in 2003 and amended by the same body in 2016. The latest amendments entered into force on 8 June 2017 and are aimed at aligning the technical requirements of the Convention with the latest standards adopted by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) with regards to the technology for seafarers' identity documents. It is expected that the issuance of the new seafarers' identity document, with technology similar to the one currently in use in electronic

passports, will strongly contribute to facilitating seafarers' access to shore leave, transfer and transit, whilst enhancing security in ports through the use of an internationally recognized document. The Convention has been ratified by 35 States as of 23 June 2020.

More information on the Convention can be accessed here:

http://www.ilo.org/global/standards/maritime-labour-convention/WCMS_557117/lang--en/index.htm

Subcommittee on Wages of Seafarers of the Joint Maritime Commission

This Subcommittee, composed of seafarers and shipowners representatives, meets every two to three years for the purpose of updating the basic pay or wages of able seafarers, as referred to in the Seafarers' Wages, Hours of Work and the Manning of Ships Recommendation, 1996 (No. 187) and the MLC, 2006. This subcommittee is special as it is the only permanent committee within the ILO that is bipartite (only the seafarers' and the shipowners' representatives take part in it), setting the minimum wage for any industry. At the meeting held in November 2018, it reached an agreement to increase the ILO minimum monthly basic wage figure for an able seafarer to US\$618 as of 1 July 2019, US\$625 as of 1 January 2020 and US\$641 as of 1 January 2021. The Subcommittee also agreed that the figures of US\$641 as well as US\$662 as of 1 June 2018 should be used as the basis for recalculation purposes. The next meeting is scheduled for April 2021.

More information on the outcome of the meeting can be accessed here:
https://www.ilo.org/sector/activities/sectoral-meetings/WCMS_619085/lang--en/index.htm.

Database on reported incidents of abandonment of seafarers

The abandoned seafarers' database was established as a result of the meeting of the 2002 Joint IMO/ILO Ad Hoc Expert Working Group on Liability and Compensation regarding Claims for Death, Personal Injury and Abandonment of Seafarers (Joint Working Group), which expressed the need for a joint database. This database contains a regularly updated list of vessels that have been reported to the ILO as abandoned in various ports of the world by Governments or appropriate seafarers' and shipowners' organizations. The purpose of the database is to monitor the problem of abandoned seafarers in a transparent and informative manner.

The database includes all reported cases from 1 January 2004.

On 13 December 2019, there were 415 abandonment incidents listed in the database since it was established in 2004, concerning 5,297 seafarers. Of those incidents, 182 cases were resolved, 88 cases were disputed and 52 cases were inactive. There were still 82 unresolved cases. From 2011 to 2016, the number of cases per year ranged from 12 to 19.

In 2017 and 2018, the cases reported increased drastically. In 2017, there were 55 cases reported, 14 of which were resolved that year and 8 were resolved in 2018. In 2018, the total number of reported cases was 44 and of these, 16 cases had so far been resolved. In 2019, the total number of reported cases was 40, and of these 6 cases had so far been resolved as of 13 December 2019.

The 2014 amendments to the MLC, 2006 (see above) require that a financial security system be put in place so that shipowners ensure compensation to seafarers and their families in the event of abandonment, death or long-term disability due to an occupational injury, illness or

hazard. Mandatory certificates and other evidence will be required to be carried on board ships to establish that the financial security system is in place to protect the seafarers working on board. These new requirements will help prevent seafarers from being stranded in port for long periods when shipowners abandon their crews without paying their wages or repatriating them to their home countries.

In early 2020, the website for the abandonment database was updated to clarify how to report, who can report and why report cases. Furthermore, the sentence “If and when a case of abandonment is deemed to be related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the organization or Government reporting the case can include the relevant information in the “Circumstances” box of the PDF template” was added to attempt to capture the impact of the pandemic on abandonment cases.

The database can be found at:

<http://www.ilo.org/dyn/seafarers/seafarersbrowse.home>.

III. Fishing

The fisheries sector makes vital contributions to global food security and supports the livelihoods of millions of people worldwide. Seafood is a primary source of protein globally, especially in developing countries. Global fisheries are a limited and shared resource, the increasing global demand on these resources threatens sustainability and global food security. There is a need to promote sustainable fisheries to tackle overexploitation of precious resources and fighting illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. In 2016, an estimated 59.6 million people were engaged in capture fisheries and aquaculture. Of these, approximately 68 percent are engaged in capture fisheries and 32 percent are engaged in aquaculture.¹ Fishing remains one of the most dangerous occupations in the world.²

Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188) and Work in Fishing Recommendation, 2007 (No. 199)

The Work in Fishing Convention No.188 (2007), adopted by the International Labour Conference in 2007 revises and updates several earlier ILO fishing Conventions.

The objective of the Convention is to ensure that fishers have decent conditions of work on board fishing vessels with regard to minimum requirements for work on board, conditions of service, accommodation and food, occupational safety and health, medical care and social security. It sets out binding requirements to address the main issues concerning work on board fishing vessels, including minimum age, recruitment and placement, occupational safety and health and medical care at sea and ashore, manning, rest periods, crew list, written work agreements, and social security protection at the same level as other workers.

The widespread ratification and enforcement of the Convention is key to ensuring that there is effective protection for all the people who work in the sector. It is also key to addressing global concerns such as forced labour, human trafficking and the exploitation of migrant fishers. It provides for regulation that will help prevent unacceptable forms of work and open up effective complaint mechanisms upholding the ILO's commitment to ensuring decent working conditions for all fishers in the sector.

¹ <http://www.fao.org/state-of-fisheries-aquaculture/en/>;

² Ibid.

States that ratify and give effect to the Convention commit to exercising control over fishing vessels, through inspection, reporting, monitoring, complaint procedures, penalties and corrective measures, and may then also inspect foreign fishing vessels visiting their ports and take appropriate action.

The Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188) came into force on 16 November 2017. As of 23 June 2020, the Convention has been ratified by 18 States (Angola, Argentina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Congo, Denmark, Estonia, France, Lithuania, Morocco, Namibia, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Senegal, South Africa, Thailand and United Kingdom).

The ILO, with a view to promoting the ratification and implementation of the Convention, has been working directly with ILO member States, as well as through ILO projects, to assist States to undertake gap analyses and validation workshops on Convention No. 188.

A number of publications and tools have been developed to assist States to ratify and implement the Convention. These may be found at:

www.ilo.org/fishing, and the text of the Convention may be found at:

http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_COD E:C188

The working paper entitled “The flexibility clauses of the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188)” outlines the flexibility provisions of Convention No. 188 in order to clarify their scope to member States and constituents. It explains how flexibility may facilitate widespread acceptance of Convention No. 188 by permitting to adapt the level of protection afforded by the Convention to particular national practices and circumstances.

The working paper on the flexibility clauses of the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188) can be accessed at:

http://www.ilo.ch/sector/Resources/publications/WCMS_618563/lang--en/index.htm

Gap analysis of the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188)

A number of ILO member States have conducted a comparative or “gap” analysis of their laws, regulations and other measures in order to discern where changes are needed to bring them in line with the minimum standards set out in Convention No. 188. These gap analyses can and have helped in identifying lacunae in the protection of fishers and have led to changes in national law.

The Gap analysis guidance is available at:

https://www.ilo.org/sector/Resources/publications/WCMS_161223/lang--en/index.htm

The Joint FAO/ILO/IMO Ad Hoc Working Group on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing and Related Matters

The ILO is now a full member of the Joint FAO/ILO/IMO Ad Hoc Working Group on Illegal Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) Fishing and Related Matters, and participated in the fourth session of the Joint Working Group held in Torremolinos, Málaga, Spain, in October 2019. The ILO secretariat submitted paper JWG 4/8/1, “ILO, decent work in the fishing sector, and IUU fishing”, as well as contributed to joint FAO/ILO/IMO submissions. The Joint Working Group adopted “Recommendations” (see JWG 4/15), including “that FAO, ILO and IMO work

together on the proposals contained in document JWG 4/8/2, taking into account the discussions on this item, as well as the responsibilities of flag States under UNCLOS; the lessons learned from the ILO SEA Fisheries project and the SEA Forum for Fishers; and the outcome of the EU social partners' initiative to produce guidelines for decent recruitment, placement and posting of (migrant) fishers. JWG 4 recommended that the outcome of this joint work be submitted to JWG 5, as appropriate". The documents and Recommendations of the meeting are found on the [IMO website](#), under the site for documents of the IMO III Subcommittee, and will be submitted to the appropriate bodies of the three Organizations (there have been delays due to COVID-19).

The ILO continues to coordinate with IMO, FAO and other UN system specialized agencies on matters related to ensuring decent work for seafarers, fishers and others working in the maritime sectors. This includes participating in each other's meetings and events, and jointly promoting compliance with relevant international instruments. For example, the ILO continues the joint promotion of the Cape Town Agreement, STCW-F Convention, Convention No. 188 and the Port State Measures Agreement. This inter-agency cooperation helps encourage institutional cooperation at the national government level, which is necessary in the maritime sector. It may also be noted that all, or nearly all, regional port State control agreements include the MLC, 2006, in their list of "relevant instruments" for port State control.

ILO Project on Combatting Unacceptable Forms of Work in the Thai Fishing and Seafood Industry ("Ship to Shore Rights Project")

The ILO, in partnership with Thailand's Ministry of Labour and the Delegation of the European Union (EU) to Thailand, launched the project on "Combatting Unacceptable Forms of Work in the Thai Fishing and Seafood Industry" on 17 March 2016, in Bangkok (now referred to as the ILO "Ship to Shore Rights Project). The project is funded by the EU and the ILO and will terminate in 2020. The project has addressed four core objectives with special focus on Thailand's key fishing and seafood regions:

1. *Strengthen Policy*: strengthen the legal, policy and regulatory framework in the fishing and seafood sectors by raising labour standards and facilitating more legal migration into the seafood & fishing sectors;
2. *Enhance Government*: Enhance the capacity of Government officers to effectively identify and take action against forced labour and other labour rights abuses in the fishing & seafood processing sectors;
3. *Improve Compliance*: Improve compliance with the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (Core Labour Standards) in the seafood and fishing industries through the implementation of the Good Labour Practices; and
4. *Support Workers*: Increase capacity of unions and civil society organizations to support workers and victims of labour abuses including women and children.

On 10 March 2020, the project published [Endline research findings on fishers and seafood workers in Thailand](#), which is a follow-up survey from the ILO's baseline research on fishers and seafood workers in Thailand, conducted in 2017. Using similar research methodology and data collection tools, the endline research compares development, measures progress, and captures the changes to the working conditions as well as identifies the needs and challenges for the next phase of reforms in the Thai fishing and seafood processing industry.

This project has contributed to the ratification by Thailand of Convention No. 188 in January 2019, and awareness has been raised about the Convention in the entire Southeast Asian region. The project also contributed to the ratification by Thailand of the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29). A extension is planned, reaching additional ASEAN States.

ILO SEA Fisheries Project (Strengthened Coordination to Combat Trafficking in Fisheries in South East Asia)

This project, funded by the United States, aims to reduce human trafficking in the fishing sector by strengthening coordination and increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of existing national and regional level anti-trafficking efforts in South East Asia. It complements the Ship to Shore Rights Project, which works closely with partners including the Thai Government, employers' organizations, workers' organizations and buyers towards the prevention and reduction of unacceptable forms of work in the Thai fishing and seafood processing sectors. The ILO SEA Fisheries Project ends in 2020.

For more information, see:

<https://seafisheriesproject.org/events/>

Most recently, the project held an Online Working Group Meeting on COVID-19, which is reported on the abovementioned website but may also be seen at: [Southeast Asian Forum for Fishers strengthen efforts to better protect migrant fishers](#).

Project on Strengthening the Identification of Fishers in Forced Labour (FUNDAMENTALS Project)

The project, funded by the United States Department of Labour (US DOL) and planned for 2020, will help to strengthen the identification of workers in forced labour on fishing vessels. This global project will improve and augment the identification of forced labour in the fishing industry by piloting a unique multi-layered approach involving research, indicators, guidelines and capacity-building. The project has three strategic objectives: a. improve understanding of obstacles to victim identification and how they can be overcome; b. develop tools for addressing obstacles to victim identification; and c. build capacity for victim identification through training on the application of the identification tools.

In order to understand the obstacles to victim identification and how they can be overcome, the following research will be undertaken:

- a desk review of extant research and mapping/analysis of extant resources relating to the identification of fishers;
- conducting field-based research among returned fishers;
- developing ethical guidelines for field-based research and an information booklet for fisher victims of forced labour;
- conduct interviews with frontline responders and other concerned actors;
- develop a research report on the identification of forced labour in the fishing industry.

Tools aimed at addressing obstacles to victim identification will be developed. For this, the project proposes to develop:

- operational indicators for detecting forced labour cases in the fishing industry; and
- a handbook on victim identification and referral in the fishing industry.

Finally, capacity-building for forced labour victim identification and referral in the fishing industry (see c.) would be undertaken via a pilot training workshop for frontline responders.

More information on the work of the ILO in Fisheries in general, see:

<http://www.ilo.ch/global/industries-and-sectors/shipping-ports-fisheries-inland-waterways/fisheries/lang--en/index.htm>

IV. Ports

Portworker Development Programme

The Portworker Development Programme in Bulk Terminals (PDP II) has been developed with the long-term global goal of ensuring the safety, health, welfare and vocational training of port workers and assisting countries in establishing and/or improving their port training capability.

The main focus of PDP II is on occupational safety & health and environment issues. The training materials target port workers employed in bulk terminals handling major dry bulk cargoes, including iron ore, coal, bulk fertilizer grain and bauxite/alumina. 70 per cent of port workers engaged in handling dry bulk cargoes belong to job categories considered by terminal operators as unskilled - there is a need to increase the knowledge, skills and attitude of port workers.

The ultimate beneficiaries of the Program are the over 300,000 workers that work at more than 1,500 terminals worldwide and often do not have access to adequate training opportunities.

More information is available on the website:

http://www.ilo.ch/sector/Resources/training-materials/WCMS_549818/lang--en/index.htm

V. ILO, COVID-19 and the maritime sectors

The world of work is being profoundly affected by the global virus pandemic. In addition to the threat to public health, the economic and social disruption threatens the long-term livelihoods and wellbeing of millions. The ILO and its constituents – Governments, workers and employers – will play a crucial role in combating the outbreak, ensuring the safety of individuals and the sustainability of businesses and jobs.

The ILO main website (www.ilo.org) provides information on this substantial work. The following highlights several of the actions taken as of 12 June 2020, by the ILO itself but also in collaboration with other UN agencies, in response to the pandemic. This situation continues to evolve on a daily basis:

- [ICAO-ILO-IMO Joint Statement](#) (22 May 2020) on designation of seafarers, marine personnel, fishing vessel personnel, offshore energy sector personnel, aviation personnel, air cargo supply chain personnel, and service provider personnel at airports and ports as key workers, and on facilitation of crew changes in ports and airports in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic
- The [Statement of the Officers of the STC on the coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](#) (published 31 March 2020), and prepared by the Officers of the Special Tripartite Committee of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (or MLC, 2006) covers many of the issues stemming from the pandemic, including that seafarers should be officially recognized as key workers and should be granted exemptions from any travel restrictions and special considerations to enable them to join and leave their ships and return home without impediment, while complying with good practice in infection control.

- The [Information note on maritime labour issues and coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) (published 7 April 2020) responds to requests to the Office for guidance on how best to address the complexities of the current crisis in light of the provisions of the MLC, 2006, by referring to that Convention, the work of the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR), the STC Officers Statement, and, when relevant, the recommendations published by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Both the ICS and the ITF have been active since the beginning of this crisis to support seafarers and shipowners worldwide and provide advice to their members.
- The ILO's [Sectoral impact, responses and recommendations](#), in particular the ILO Sectoral Brief [COVID-19 and maritime shipping & fishing](#) (published 20 April 2020), provide an overview on the impact of COVID-19, responses by constituents and partners, and ILO tools and responses in specific sectors. In the maritime shipping & fishing brief, reference is made not only to the STC Officers' statement but also to the ICS and ITF Joint open letter to United Nations agencies from the global maritime transport industry, which emphasized the vital importance for all governments of keeping maritime trade moving by continuing to allow commercial ships access to ports worldwide and facilitating the movement and rapid changeover of ships' crews, and made an urgent call for this to be added to the agenda of appropriate high-level meetings, and for national authorities to engage immediately with national shipowners' associations and seafarers' unions.
- In the [Joint Statement on medical certificates of seafarers, ship sanitation certificates and medical care of seafarers in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic](#) (22 April 2020), the ILO worked closely with IMO and WHO to draw attention to a number of issues related to medical fitness and care of seafarers, including their right, under the MLC, 2006, to have access to medical care ashore, as well as issues related to ship sanitation. These joint statements make use of the respective strengths and contacts of different UN agencies to reach ministries and agencies responsible for maritime safety, labour and health, including public health. The three Organizations have also worked together to produce IMO circular letters (published on the IMO website) related to these topics, as well as personal protective equipment of seafarers, and are collaborating on new WHO guidance for seafarers specific to the many health-related issues for the maritime sector in the context of COVID-19.
- At the request of the ICS and the ITF, the Office has also addressed letters to more than 60 countries that have ratified the MLC, 2006, with a request to adopt without delay all measures within reach to ensure that seafarers on board cruise ships can be repatriated.

The ILO has also produced news items on its public website that draw attention to the situation faced by seafarers and to the relevant provisions of ILO instruments, particularly the MLC, 2006. This include:

- [Treat seafarers with “dignity and respect” during COVID-19 crisis](#) (published 31 March 2020), in which the ILO Director-General asked governments to ensure that, in these challenging times, seafarers are adequately protected from the COVID-19 pandemic, have access to medical care, and can travel to and from their ships, as necessary, in order to continue to play their crucial role, and

- [Seafarers and fishers: Providing vital services during the COVID-19 pandemic](#) (published 30 April 2020), in which the ILO again called on governments to adopt without delay all possible measures to facilitate crew changes and the repatriation of seafarers and fishers, while taking steps to minimize the risk of contagion. The protection of seafarers' and fishers' safety and health must remain a priority during the pandemic.

The above only refers to ILO actions specific to the maritime sector. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all workers, and the ILO's [COVID-19 and the world of work](#) website sets out the ILO's broader efforts to address this global crisis. This includes the issue of an assessment and a range of policy options to mitigate the impact of the crisis and facilitate a strong and rapid recovery.