



Brussels, 11-06-2020

To: Ministers for Health,  
Copied to: Ministers for Transport  
Commissioner for Health, Stella Kyriakidou  
Commissioner for Transport, Adina Valean  
Permanent Representations of the EU

**Subject: Crucial role of national health services in ensuring that crew changes are able to take place in EU ports.**

Dear Minister for Health

We, the European social partners for maritime transport, would like to draw the attention of Ministers for Health in all EU Member States to the importance of ensuring that seafarers are able to join and leave their ships with as few impediments as possible, in order to keep essential supplies moving and ensure the health, safety and welfare of seafarers. We would like to highlight in particular the crucial role of national health services in protecting the health of seafarers whilst in transit.

Seafarers are playing an essential role in maintaining the global flow of vital goods, fuel, medicines and medical supplies by ship. Unfortunately, many seafarers have been away from home for months, unable to leave their ships and return home because of travel restrictions. Meanwhile seafarers who have been rostered to replace them are being prevented from doing so by the absence of facilities for them to obtain visas to travel to the places where they are scheduled to join their ships – including in the Schengen area. These problems, if not addressed immediately, are likely to have severe consequences for the safety and physical and mental health of seafarers, in addition to the safety of ship operations and the functioning of global supply chains.

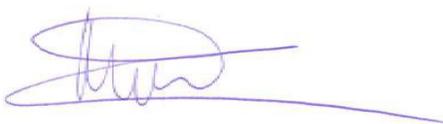
The International Maritime Organisation (IMO) was issuing circulars to its Member countries as early as January on precautions to be taken to minimize risks to seafarers, passengers and others on board ships. On 6 May it published recommended framework of protocols addressed to governments and shipping companies for ensuring safe ship crew changes and travel during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. These protocols take account of the need to protect seafarers from becoming infected with coronavirus (COVID-19), or infecting other persons, whilst in transit to and from their ships.

Meanwhile the European Commission has issued Guidelines on protection of health, repatriation and travel arrangements for seafarers, passengers and other persons on board ships on 8 April. It has recently held discussions with Member States to facilitate crew changes and repatriation, including finding practical solutions to granting of EU Schengen Visas to third country seafarers.

It is essential that Member States take responsibility for ensuring that crew changes, medical care and shore leave for seafarers happen in their ports, by implementing the aforementioned protocols and guidelines. We consider that Health Ministers have a central role to play, alongside Transport and Interior Ministers, in these efforts. We therefore call upon you to co-operate with other Government departments in your countries and throughout the Union as necessary to facilitate the movement of seafarers under conditions that safeguard their health and minimize the risks to them of Covid-19 infection.

We remain at your disposal for further questions or clarifications.

Yours sincerely,



Martin Dorsman  
Secretary General ECSA



Livia Spera  
Acting Secretary General ETF