



European Shipowners | ECSA position paper on Enhancing the Attractiveness of the Seafaring Profession

European Shipowners | ECSA calls on the EU to:

- Invest in upskilling and reskilling to prepare seafarers for the green and digital transition, thereby making careers in the sector more attractive through development pathways and high-quality career opportunities and enhancing employability.
- Simplify administrative burdens in both maritime education and the career, including streamlined recognition of training and certification across Member States, to support career mobility and access.
- Maintain support for safe, modern, inclusive and diverse working environments across the sector.
- Strengthen EU-level awareness outreach campaigns to improve the visibility and appeal of seafaring careers, both at sea and ashore, among young people.

1. Introduction

This paper aims to contribute to the upcoming EU Maritime Industrial Strategy (MIS). It reflects European Shipowners | ECSA's commitment to supporting a people-centred green and digital transition, while safeguarding the competitiveness of European shipping.

European Shipowners believe that **enhancing the attractiveness of the seafaring profession must be a key priority and objective**. Seafarers play a crucial role in the global economy, facilitating international trade, and connecting nations across the seas. They are the backbone of the maritime transport industry. To keep the sector resilient, innovative, and future proof, it is vital to promote maritime careers and retain skilled professionals. At the same time, the sector faces an immense challenge: preparing its workforce for the transition to new fuels and digital technologies. Shipping is undergoing an existential transformation linked to green and digital technology. Future clean fuel technologies, such as



hydrogen, ammonia, batteries, and biofuels, will require new skills, education, and operational training for seafarers. Technologically advanced ships will also require new digital skills. Green and digital technologies are developing fast. The immediate need for reskilling and upskilling seafarers is therefore a priority for the shipping industry. The shift to low- and zero-carbon fuels will fundamentally change onboard operations and safety procedures. This will require new competencies and extensive training at all levels.

By mid-2030, an estimated **800,000 seafarers worldwide** will need to be **up- and reskilled** to safely handle new fuels and technologies. As stated in the Draghi report, in Europe alone, a significant share of the 250,000 seafarers must be trained in the coming decade. This will require targeted training to meet the demands of the green and digital transition.

This transformation not only demands urgent investment in skills but also presents an **opportunity** to make the profession more attractive by offering future-proof skillsets, supporting diversity, dispelling outdated and inaccurate negative perceptions and creating awareness about the critical role of seafarers in Europe's prosperity, resilience and sustainability.

2. What is the Industry currently doing to enhance attractiveness?

Across Europe, a variety of ongoing initiatives aim to enhance the sector's appeal:

- **Upskilling and Reskilling:** European shipowners, jointly with the unions and training institutions from across the EU, are running programmes aiming to align with digitalisation and green transition demands (e.g. [European Maritime Skills Forum](#)). Modern training tools, such as virtual reality learning environments and programmes, are making maritime career pathways more accessible. The outcome of projects such as [SkillSea](#), have contributed to the development of modern curricula that incorporate green and digital skills, helping future-proof maritime education, but also the careers of (future) seafarers.
- **Improved working life:** European shipowners continuously invest in leadership development, onboard training, and more inclusive workplace cultures. Strengthening leadership practices is essential for fostering diversity and tackling issues such as bullying and harassment.
- **Awareness campaigns:** From [World Careers](#) in Denmark to Finland's [Ship Happens](#) and [Cyprus's](#) and [Greece's Adopt a Ship](#), social media outreach, influencer collaborations, and school visits are helping connect with and create awareness among the next generation. Awareness campaigns are critical when it comes to making the seafarer profession more well-known and attractive.



At the European level, the maritime Social Partners, European Shipowners|ECSA and ETF, have partnered with stakeholders to run projects such as [SkillSea](#) and [WESS](#). The SkillSea project focused on identifying current and future skill needs within the maritime sector, while the WESS project examined the impact of digitalisation on seafarers and promoted greater participation of women in maritime careers. Another recent initiative is [Seafarers Go Digital](#), launched jointly by European Shipowners | ECSA and ETF. It aims to equip seafarers with the digital skills required in today's evolving maritime workplace, focusing on areas such as e-certification, connectivity, automation, and cybersecurity. Supporting digital readiness contributes to both operational safety and the attractiveness of maritime careers.

- **Social Dialogue:** The EU provides a strong framework for social dialogue, which enables effective cooperation between European Shipowners|ECSA and the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF). This well-functioning partnership has led to improvements in working and living conditions for seafarers, particularly through Social Partners' Agreements on the incorporation of standards under the MLC in the EU legislation.
- **Educational and training collaboration:** There is strong collaboration between the maritime industry and educational institutions in several Member States. For instance, in Greece and Cyprus, next to supporting initiatives as ***Adopt a Ship***, the industry works closely with educators through activities like school presentations by maritime companies, helping to raise early awareness of the seafaring profession among primary and secondary school students. In Denmark, [Det Maritime Praktikkontor](#) (The Maritime Internship Office's marketplace) facilitates internships for students in maritime training, enabling them to gain the practical experience needed to enter the profession successfully. In the Netherlands, the initiatives [GaTochVaren!](#) (JustGoSailing!) and [GaTochErvaren!](#) (JustGoExperiencing!) offer programmes that give students of all ages the opportunity to experience what a maritime career has to offer. With GaTochErvaren!, primary school children can participate in a maritime experience, such as a ship launching or a visit on board a ship. GaTochVaren! allows students aged sixteen and older to spend time on board a ship and experience life at sea. Finland offers leadership training programmes for seafarers, such as ***LOBAS***, while innovative approaches like virtual reality learning environments and short-track education programmes provide flexible and modern learning opportunities. At the EU level, further collaboration could help scale up such best practices across Member States.



3. What should be done in the future to enhance attractiveness?

Across Europe, many efforts are already underway to make maritime careers more visible and attractive, but more coordinated and concerted action is needed. The sector is committed to continue awareness campaigns at both the national and the European level, and we call on policymakers to support and strengthen these efforts. Together, we can ensure that seafaring remains a viable and attractive career for future generations.

This means reaching out to young people in new ways, promoting modern and inclusive working environments and removing unnecessary barriers. By working in partnership, we can raise the profile of maritime professions and secure a skilled, motivated workforce for the years to come.

To achieve this, future efforts should:

- **Invest in upskilling and reskilling:**

- The shift to clean fuels and digitalisation means that 800,000 seafarers will need reskilling or upskilling by the mid-2030s with 250,000 of them in Europe alone. The green and digital transition is reshaping labour market demands, requiring a new generation of skills, including both technical and soft skills. It is therefore essential to support education and training programmes that are closely aligned with these evolving needs. By equipping students with green and digital competencies, European education and training providers can position themselves as global leaders in sustainable maritime education.

This not only may ensure that seafarers have future-proof skills but also creates better-quality jobs, improved working conditions, and diverse career pathways, both at sea and ashore, making maritime careers more attractive for current and future generations.

- Maritime students should be enabled to take part in EU mobility programmes like Erasmus+ without study delays or sea-time complications and recognition of certificates and credits across borders should be promoted. This would make maritime education more attractive by reducing disparities with other fields of study and offering students equal opportunities for mobility and career development.
- Structural cooperation should be strengthened through platforms such as the European Maritime Skills Forum to facilitate close alignment between education, industry, and authorities. This will create a more connected and responsive education system, helping students transition smoothly into the workforce.
- The integration of maritime themes should be supported into general education to raise awareness from an early age and increase the visibility of maritime careers.



- **Cut the red tape: Simplify to attract and retain seafarers:**
 - Over the past decades, the seafaring profession has faced a growing administrative burden (e.g. completion of port and pre-arrival documents), often with overlapping reporting obligations across Member States. Simplifying and harmonising these procedures, through digital tools and streamlined frameworks, would reduce frustration and make maritime careers more attractive for both current and future seafarers.
 - A supportive regulatory environment must also avoid counterproductive or overlapping rules. New regulations, including those that influence the daily work of seafarers, should be fit for purpose, ensuring they support rather than hinder the sector's competitiveness and attractiveness in a global labour market. This is vital for safeguarding current jobs and encouraging both new and experienced talent to join or remain in the profession.
- **European-level campaigns to promote diversity and inclusion should be organised** to promote gender equality and inclusive onboard environments, supported by company policies, leadership training, and anti-bullying and harassment campaigns.
- **Awareness about seafaring careers should be raised** - Too few young people are aware that a career at sea is a real and rewarding option. Despite the maritime sector's vital role in Europe's economy, supply chains, and resilience, the visibility of seafaring as a profession remains low. Raising awareness about the diverse opportunities that maritime careers offer, through education, outreach campaigns, and better storytelling, is essential to attract the next generation of seafarers.
- **Global ratification and implementation of ILO and IMO standards is necessary.** Encouraging the widespread ratification and effective implementation of international standards (ILO/IMO) across the globe is essential to promote fair working conditions and ensure a level playing field in global shipping. The EU plays a leading role by setting a strong example and supporting global efforts to uphold these standards. This not only strengthens trust in the maritime profession and demonstrates that seafarers are valued and protected worldwide but also contributes to fair competition and reinforces the global competitiveness of European shipping.

European Shipowners firmly support that the attractiveness of the seafaring profession is key to ensuring a resilient, competitive, and future-proof European shipping sector. Addressing this challenge requires a commitment by policymakers to safeguard the sector's global competitiveness. The offer of multiple, modern and inclusive career paths as well as increased visibility of the seafaring profession will ultimately attract younger generations to pursue careers at sea. The upcoming



European Industrial Maritime Strategy presents a timely opportunity to put forward these priorities.

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