



SeafarerHelp

The lifeline for seafarers

Annual Review 2016



SeafarerHelp is part of the International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network. This review incorporates all the services provided by the SeafarerHelp team.



SeafarerHelp
The lifeline for seafarers

SeafarerHelp is a global, independent, free and confidential helpline for all seafarers and their families.

We are there every hour of the day, every day of the year for seafarers. They can call on us for emotional and practical support whenever they have a difficulty or face a problem – no matter how little or big it may be. We need your support to keep SeafarerHelp going so we can reach even more seafarers and their families. Every day we assist over 30 seafarers or their families. Help us to stay open 24 hours a day.

“I want to say that my problem has been completed and settled... from the bottom of my heart thank you so very much” – email from a seafarer, December 2016

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Contents

Fundraising.....	2
Chairman's foreword.....	4
The SeafarerHelp team and how we work.....	6
2016 Overview	8
Case study 1.....	10
The SeafarerHelp Service.....	11
Key 2016 Issues.....	13
Number of cases.....	15
Issues raised.....	18
Rank.....	19
Case study 2.....	22
Seafarer nationalities.....	24
Countries seafarers contacted us from.....	26
Flag states.....	26
Case study 3.....	28
Organisations we refer to.....	30
Methods of contact	31
Feedback from seafarers about SeafarerHelp	32
Conclusion.....	34





Chairman's foreword

by Per Gullestrup

Chairman: International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN)

It does not seem a year since I wrote

my last chairman's foreword which is an indication that time has flown because it has been a busy year for both the maritime industry and ISWAN SeafarerHelp. 2016 was an eventful year for the industry with the dry bulk sector having a particularly difficult time, while the tanker sector looked as if it would build on its 2015 improvements but faded and the container sector was noted for its cost-saving consolidations and new alliances. All of this was against a backdrop of weak global economic growth and ship owners looking hard at their costs. The situation was brought into sharp relief by the sudden and spectacular failure of the Hanjin Shipping Company.

All of this shows that once again it was a difficult year for the shipping industry which by definition means it was also a difficult year for many seafarers. The reality is that when the maritime industry needs to make cost savings, seafarers are often negatively affected. As a result the ISWAN SeafarerHelp helpline received more contacts, an increase of 37%, from seafarers asking for help during 2016. I must stress that there are many good shipping companies who treat their crews well, but unfortunately there are companies who still do not follow the spirit of the Maritime Labour Convention 2006 (MLC 2006) and it is

the seafarers from these companies that are most vulnerable and contact the SeafarerHelp team. As I reported in 2015 the ISWAN SeafarerHelp team played an important role in raising awareness about social isolation and mental health issues among seafarers. In 2016 we have continued in this vein and have seen our emotional support and counselling service develop and mature. The team have been trained by psychotherapists and counsellors and this emphasis on providing emotional support has changed the way they work. They are now finding that contacts take longer and that seafarers are coming back to share and talk about personal issues a number of times. We regard this as a positive acknowledgement that the service is valued by seafarers. In addition if we believe that a seafarer needs professional counselling we will arrange it with a counsellor from their own culture.

The team has also developed regionally in that we have ISWAN representatives in India and the Philippines as well as a social worker in Nigeria. They are all working in close liaison with the ISWAN SeafarerHelp team and their local knowledge has proved invaluable when dealing with complex cases in their region. Through these regional representatives we now have close links with the governments and maritime departments in both India and the Philippines which have proven extremely helpful.

ISWAN continues the work of the MPHRP and much effort was spent in supporting the families and 26 crew of the Naham 3. These seafarers were released by Somali pirates in October 2016 after four and a half years in captivity. During this time we have been supporting their families and we are now arranging medical, psychological, financial and training support for the released seafarers. Our objective is to bring them back to health and to help them gain employment so that they can support their families.

Our services are free to all seafarers and their families wherever they are in the world and these services are only available because of the continuing support of our funders, The TK Foundation, the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), Seafarers Trust, Seafarers UK, and Trinity House. I would therefore like to say a special thank you to them in recognition of their commitment to seafarers of all nationalities and faiths anywhere in the world.

I would also like to acknowledge the backing that ISWAN and SeafarerHelp have received over many years from our members and partners, which includes National Welfare Boards, Faith Organisations, Trade Associations and Trade Unions, as well as shipping and other companies. We firmly believe that only by working in partnership with all parts of the maritime industry can we effectively improve the welfare of seafarers around the world.

Once again it has been a very busy year but the ISWAN SeafarerHelp team has risen to the challenges and given help and support to seafarers in need. I am honoured to be the Chairman of ISWAN and am impressed with how the team and organisation has developed over the years. The ISWAN SeafarerHelp team works 24 hours per day, 365 days per year to provide a free, confidential, multi-lingual service and I would like to thank them for the compassion and commitment that they demonstrate. I am pleased to say that the SeafarerHelp team receives many positive comments from seafarers and their families and we have reproduced some of them using their own words in this review.

Looking forward to 2017 we do not really know what it holds for seafarers and the maritime industry but the global economic situation does not look as if it will improve greatly and I can only assume that the services of the ISWAN will continue to be in demand. If that is the case then the SeafarerHelp team will be there to help.



The SeafarerHelp team and how we work

SeafarerHelp is a free, confidential, multilingual helpline for seafarers and their families available 24 hours a day, 365 days per year. The SeafarerHelp team is here to help seafarers whatever their issue, wherever in the world they are. We are contacted by seafarers and their families about a range of issues every day. Problems include personal and family issues, non-payment of wages, bullying and harassment, issues with repatriation, general contractual disputes, requests for information and much more.

The SeafarerHelp team comprises 10 workers, each of whom speaks English and one or more other languages fluently. Between them they speak about 11 languages fluently, including most of those used by seafarers, such as Filipino, Hindi, Russian, Mandarin Chinese and Arabic. They can also communicate effectively in several other languages and dialects. The SeafarerHelp team work from the ISWAN offices which are in Croydon, south London in the United Kingdom.

"The SeafarerHelp service is confidential and free for seafarers and their families of any nationality or religion anywhere in the world."

The SeafarerHelp service can be contacted by seafarers and their families of any nationality or religion and we will try to assist them with any problem they may have. Over recent years our service has changed in that we now go out of our way to provide emotional support and counselling services where they are needed. In 2015 the SeafarerHelp team also took over some of the case work of the Maritime Piracy Humanitarian Response Programme (MPHRP) which is explained later in the review.

All the SeafarerHelp helpline services are available through a range of media, including telephone, email, Facebook, Live Chat, Skype, Twitter and SMS text. This year we have extended the ways in which we can be contacted by introducing a Russian language service through vk.com which is similar to Facebook. We are also investigating other

channels of communication such as WhatsApp to make it even easier for seafarers to contact us.

Over recent years the types of cases that the SeafarerHelp team are dealing with have become more and more complex. The team do not know if the next contact is going to be a simple request for information or a difficult case where seafarers have been injured or killed or if it will be assisting a seafarer and family who have been traumatised by piracy.

As the work of the team is so varied we put a great deal of effort into their training and in 2016 there were 95 training sessions for team members on a wide variety of subjects. By investing in the team, we ensure a high-quality service is provided to seafarers and their families.

We work with seafarers to try and resolve their problems and will only refer a case to another organisation with the seafarers' consent. We are aware that some seafarers are concerned that their employment prospects might be harmed if we refer them to a particular union, or they may be of a specific faith and will not want to be referred to a different faith group. For every situation, we do our best to balance the individual's needs and requirements to achieve a positive outcome for them.

The SeafarerHelp team deal with many of the problems themselves. However, where there are issues e.g. about breach of contract or where there is a need for someone to visit the seafarer, we refer those cases to our colleagues in specialist agencies that are in the port or country where the seafarer is located. In this way, we often work with others to help the seafarer receive the most appropriate support to meet their need.

The agencies that we work with are mostly specialists in the maritime sector and have shore-based personnel in ports around the world. This enables them to give valuable, direct, personal support to the seafarers. It is therefore not surprising that most of our referrals are to the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF), local unions and port welfare providers such as the Apostleship of the Sea, Mission to Seafarers, the Sailors' Society and the Deutsche Seemannsmission.

The team are proactive and flexible so where these maritime specialists do not have a presence in the country the seafarer is in, they will contact other organisations such as harbour or port authorities, medical service providers and embassies or consulates to obtain assistance for the seafarer.

“All the SeafarerHelp helpline services are available through a range of media, including telephone, email, Facebook, Live Chat, Skype, Twitter and SMS text.”

We are very happy to work in partnership with a wide range of organisations and we deeply appreciate the help that they provide to both seafarers and the SeafarerHelp team.

We keep a record of every contact that we receive: the first is called the initial contact and further contacts about the same case are logged individually as successive contacts. In this way, we can easily follow the history of each case as well as gather useful information on issues such as methods of communication, issues raised, nationality, location and other useful data. In this annual review, all figures relate to initial contacts, unless specifically stated otherwise.

Service enhancements

This year has seen some significant enhancements to the services that the SeafarerHelp team provides. We have improved and developed our emotional support service to seafarers and their families and will arrange formal counselling for seafarers where it is necessary. In addition, the team has taken on some of the case work of the MPHRP.

The SeafarerHelp team has always given emotional support to seafarers and their families but we recognised that this was an area that we needed to develop and improve. We therefore started to train the team in these skills in 2012 and over the years have developed the training so that we now have bespoke courses on counselling skills awareness and on how to effectively provide emotional support. We know that many of the seafarers who contact us need emotional support, however a small number require counselling from trained counsellors. We appreciate that owing to the different cultural

norms and understandings it is desirable for those who need counselling to be counselled by someone from their own culture in their own language. We have been arranging this, free of charge, since January 2016. There are potentially two stages to the counselling process: stage one is where the seafarer is on board and the counselling has to be done remotely. The second stage is where the seafarer requires face to face counselling which can be arranged when they reach home. During 2016 we provided counselling services to seafarers in cases where they were traumatised when unsuccessfully trying to save the life of a colleague, were subject to sexual abuse and where they were contemplating suicide.

As a result of their training the team is able to provide effective emotional support and counselling services as required. This is an important service enhancement for seafarers that the SeafarerHelp team will continue to champion on their behalf.

The SeafarerHelp team also has its own counsellor that they can talk to confidentially if they have had a difficult case and need to unload.

In August 2015, the MPHRP was incorporated into ISWAN under a new Programme Manager. This brought to the team additional resources in the shape of the MPHRP Regional Representatives in India and the Philippines as well as a Social Worker in Nigeria who is funded by Seafarers UK. Throughout 2016 the role of these overseas team members was broadened to include acting as a resource that the SeafarerHelp team could draw on when dealing with cases in those countries. At the same time the SeafarerHelp team also started to take on some of the MPHRP work, particularly using their language skills to contact the families of seafarers affected by piracy. MPHRP is now fully integrated into ISWAN and is working closely with the SeafarerHelp team. The local knowledge and presence provided by our MPHRP colleagues has proven to be a great asset to the SeafarerHelp team when dealing with complex cases in those countries. Furthermore both Regional Representatives have been able to forge extremely useful relationships with government ministers and agencies in their respective countries.

2016 Overview

In 2016 the SeafarerHelp team:

- Dealt with 3,073 new cases, involving 11,228 seafarers and their families. In addition, we received a further 4,548 successive contacts.
- Dealt with 4,073 different issues raised by seafarers.
- Helped seafarers of 99 different nationalities making contact from 122 different countries.
- Provided assistance free of charge 24 hours per day, 365 days per year, to seafarers and their families in their own language as required.

Caseload review

- Compared to 2015 there was a 37% increase in the number of new cases and an increase of 15% in the number of seafarers assisted.
- On average 8.4 new cases and 12.5 successive contacts for existing cases were handled by the SeafarerHelp team every day.
- The average number of seafarers involved in each case was 3.7.
- Female seafarers accounted for 3.8% of those who contacted SeafarerHelp, where gender was known.
- The most common reasons for seafarers contacting us were: seeking employment, wages not being paid, requesting information, problems over repatriation, health problems and contract problems.
- The contacts we received came from 122 countries, including 28 in the Commonwealth.
- Seafarers from 20 European Union countries contacted the team during the year.
- Of the 99 nationalities assisted, the largest numbers of seafarers were Filipinos, followed by Indians, Ukrainians and Russians.
- We were contacted by seafarers of 31 different Commonwealth nationalities – the largest number were Indian, followed by British, Nigerian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan.
- Many cases we received involved more than one issue and so had to be referred to more than one organisation. While we dealt with most contacts in-house we also referred cases to recruitment organisations, the ITF Co-ordinators/Inspectors, the ITF Seafarer Support team, the Apostleship of the Sea, the Philippines Overseas Employment Administration and the Mission to Seafarers.



Case Study 1

Supporting the families of a lost crew

In January 2016, a ship sailing under the Philippine flag left South Korea for the Philippines; however, the ship never completed its journey as the vessel and its crew were all lost in a storm.

Behind this tragic story are seven families facing not just the loss of their loved ones, but also the pressure of losing their main breadwinners when they had medical expenses, education fees and living costs to meet.

Of the families affected, one lost two members (a father and son) and another family's only child was lost. All of the families were struggling to not only come to terms with their grief but also to try and exist with no income.

"We were eventually able to get the best possible outcome for the families."

They were all in urgent need of emotional and financial support; however, they were not receiving help from anyone because of complications over the contract arrangements of the deceased seafarers. In addition since the ship and crew had disappeared without trace the normal Government agencies were not responsive to approaches from the families.

When ISWAN was alerted to the plight of the families its SeafarerHelp team and Regional Representative in the Philippines worked together to provide urgent financial assistance through the Seafarers Emergency Fund (SEF). Our Regional Representative also began pursuing long term support for all the families. ISWAN contacted eight organisations in total, with the initial objective being to recover the wages owed to the seafarers and to get appropriate compensation. ISWAN's Regional Representative managed to get the issue raised at a high level within the Government which eventually led to the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) and the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) providing financial assistance for psychological support, education and living costs.

Our Regional Representative provided long term emotional support and assistance to the deceased seafarer's family members. It was a very difficult case which took many months but, given the tragic situation, we were eventually able to get the best possible outcome for the families.

ISWAN will continue to monitor the illegal recruitment of seafarers and raise awareness among seafarers about the importance of verifying that manning agencies in the Philippines and other countries have valid licences and are on the Governments' approved list.



The SeafarerHelp Service

Promoting SeafarerHelp

Once again throughout 2016 we continued to make good use of social media. By the end of the year the SeafarerHelp Facebook page had over 353,000 followers. In addition, we launched a service for Russian speakers on vk.com in the latter part of the year and this attracted 1,784 friends and followers. We also continued to distribute our SeafarerHelp posters and cards together with other ISWAN publications. As a result, there was another significant increase in the number of seafarers contacting SeafarerHelp during the year.

Maritime Piracy Humanitarian Response Programme (MPHRP)

Under the auspices of ISWAN, MPHRP has worked to deliver on the needs of seafarers who have suffered from the effects of piracy. This is with particular regard to the 26 crew of the Naham 3 who were held in captivity by Somali pirates for four and half years. They were only released in October 2016 but since they were taken the MPHRP has been supporting the families both financially and emotionally. Now that the survivors have been released, ISWAN and the SeafarerHelp team are providing financial support for their physical and mental health needs. In addition we are providing financial support so that they can either update their certificates or re-train so that they can earn an income to look after their families.

ISWAN through the MPHRP has continued to provide an important personal service to those affected by piracy and once again this has taken on greater relevance with the renewed attacks off Somalia. The MPHRP featured in a number of media outlets in 2016, strongly delivering a message about the human effects of piracy and the impact attacks have on the lives of seafarers and their families.

The Funding Challenge

Funding is a challenge for all charitable organisations. There is a parallel need to deliver on charitable aims, and the requirements of funders, to the backdrop of researching and developing revenue streams to secure, evolve and grow the organisation's offering. In 2016 efforts to diversify the SeafarerHelp funding continued. There is a need to be less reliant on grants, and so we

continue to explore opportunities to generate income through our subsidiary company, Seafarers' Welfare Assistance Network Ltd (SWAN Ltd). SWAN Ltd currently provides 24 hours per day, 365 days per year helplines for the ITF and the Nautilus International trade union, arrangements which continue to be effective and successful. This is a route to enhanced revenue which we are keen to explore and we have been in contact with other organisations who might be interested in services we can offer.

"ISWAN through the MPHRP has continued to provide an important personal service to those affected by piracy."

Training

As in previous years, SeafarerHelp is investing in the quality of the services it provides, which means a constant eye to develop, train and support the team. We have continued to develop our training programmes and this year we have again arranged a wide range of courses with a particular focus on giving emotional support and counselling skills awareness. The significant investment in training is reflected in the professionalism and care with which the team handles cases and the positive responses we get from seafarers. This focus on providing emotional support has changed the way we work. We are finding that cases are taking longer to deal with and that there are more successive contacts which we take to mean that seafarers are finding it easier to open up about personal issues.

Flow of Contacts

There is no real discernible pattern to the contacts that come to us although though we do note a drop in call numbers at the weekend and in the evenings. It seems seafarers could be tailoring their contacts to UK business hours, despite the fact we receive contacts from all over the world. This is intriguing because we always stress that we are available 24 hours per day, 365 days per year. It makes us wonder if there is some other way that we can try to get the message across.

Data on Issues Raised by Seafarers

SeafarerHelp is often the first port of call for seafarers when they need help. This means the ISWAN SeafarerHelp helpline is uniquely placed when it comes to gathering contemporary data and for spotting trends when it comes to issues affecting seafarers, the maritime profession and life at sea. Day to day contact with seafarers means that our dialogue is about the things that matter, and which affect them. It is not just about the conversations and questions that arise, our data shows how seafarers are communicating, their different nationalities, vessel types and the issues that they raise with us. It also highlights concerns which may be of interest to flag states and P&I clubs too.

“This is intriguing because we always stress that we are available 24 hours per day, 365 days per year.”

Nothing in a seafarers’ life happens in a vacuum, so every change can have implications to the most fundamental aspects of life at sea. Mental health issues can affect safety, concerns about security may preface a spike in piracy. The list goes on, and by providing seafarers with an outlet and a means to talk, we are giving them relief from the pressures which can build. It is incumbent on us to not just fix the ills of individuals, but we must ensure that the data, the statistics and even the anecdotal evidence is understood and used to set the agenda and narratives within the shipping industry.

That is another reason why SeafarerHelp is so important – our team has its finger on the pulse of seafaring and it is vital that the issues seafarers raise are promulgated and acted upon. Our dialogue with seafarers has led to a better understanding of a range of key issues. We highlighted the shift on internet

usage, and the fact that young seafarers are increasingly led by connectivity. We have led the way in disseminating seafarer views on health and wellbeing, as well as fitness and obesity. From safety to fatigue, career development to abandonments, we hear the problems first hand. We will continue to develop and improve our data collection so that our services, and those of others, can be even more effectively attuned to seafarers’ changing needs.

Seafarers Emergency Fund (SEF)

The ISWAN SeafarerHelp team also plays a role in the SEF which is a fund to assist seafarers and their families who are involved in “sudden or unforeseen crises”.

Applications to the SEF have to be made on behalf of a seafarer or their family by an applying organisation which can be a welfare organisation or a trade union. Not all grants are approved but grants can be a minimum of USD250 or up to a maximum of USD5,000. The process for approving grants is that those applications that meet the criteria are considered by a panel of SEF advisors and as long as three agree then the grant is approved. Once an application is finalised and submitted to the advisors a decision is taken usually within two days. Payment is then arranged as quickly as possible. The funds are sent to the applying organisation which has to purchase the goods and services on behalf of the seafarer. The applying organisation also has to provide a report on how the funds have been expended. No monies from the fund can be given directly to the seafarer. In 2016 there were 25 applications to the SEF of which 14 were approved and grants totalling approximately USD54,000 were made.

The SEF is a very useful fund for seafarers and their families and details of how to apply and the grant terms can be found on the ISWAN website at:

www.seafarerswelfare.org

“Thank you very much for your assistance. It’s comforting to know that there are people like you who work to help families who are in this kind of situation. We appreciate it a lot.”

Comment from seafarer

Key 2016 Issues

It's Good to Talk

The SeafarerHelp helpline is a resource for the wider maritime industry, and it is incredibly positive to see such significant year on year growth. Both the number of contacts and seafarers assisted have shown huge percentage increases and we are proud to be here as more and more seafarers and their families turn to us for support.

Family Support

The majority of contacts to SeafarerHelp are from seafarers; however we also receive many from their families. It is an important part of our role to be able to assist and support them too. There are many different kinds of queries that the family members ask; sometimes it is because they have lost contact, or they want support or information. Other times, they report that their seafaring relatives are living in bad conditions on board, the seafarers not reporting it themselves for fear of blacklisting.

Relatives of abandoned seafarers also contact us, concerned about the conditions their loved ones are suffering in and wanting us to help in securing their safe repatriation and outstanding wages. While all these issues are tough to deal with, perhaps the most distressing are when we receive calls from the relatives of seafarers who have died on board. In such cases they usually want help to either repatriate a body or they want to understand the circumstances of the death. Being able to support the families of seafarers is an important component of caring for those at sea.

Changing Face of Seafarer Connectivity

SeafarerHelp is on the frontline of the changing face of maritime communications, and of the way in which seafarers connect with the world beyond their vessel. Our data shows how the methods of communication are evolving, and highlights the needs of the current and next generations of seafarers. Whereas the telephone was for many years the preferred means of communication, this has now changed. Seafarers are increasingly using mobile devices over the internet to contact SeafarerHelp, which means that we need to keep up with them and the ways in which they wish to communicate with us.

When deliberating on issues such as mobile applications (apps), we of course need to be certain about the impact before we look to invest in developing them. There are many challenges when it comes to providing new systems such as bandwidth considerations and storage on mobile devices. We have been informed that seafarers are extremely concerned about giving up the storage necessary for an app. There is also an issue of connectivity and internet access. The future will rightly see change and an evolution in the way seafarers contact us and we need to ensure that we are able to engage in the ways that they want.

Driving Industry Progress.

Whenever a seafarer or their family reaches out to SeafarerHelp they are understandably only interested in their own issue and we focus on their needs. However that is only part of the story because with the data from all the different contacts we receive we can see trends and issues of concern for the wider industry. Knowing what seafarers are experiencing and understanding the threats to their wellbeing is paramount in making progress and driving positive change. Ultimately our data helps attune industry services to the needs of seafarers – issues such as mental health, post-piracy support and the needs of abandoned crews have been highlighted across our contacts and we have been able to support change in the shipping industry. Data drives decisions, and we are proud that SeafarerHelp exists to not only support seafarers but the maritime industry as well.

Supporting Others

It is clear from our contacts with seafarers that much needs to be done to improve the provision of mental health support for crews. However it is a common situation to find that a seafarer does not want to admit such problems to their employer because they are frightened of having their contract terminated or not being able to find another job.

The SeafarerHelp team has received training in giving emotional support and counselling skills awareness. We feel that these skills our team has would be of great benefit to shipping companies, P&I Clubs and others in the maritime industry as well as the seafarers themselves. It is important to acknowledge that

seafarers are usually reluctant to admit any form of mental health issue to their employer. However they are more likely to talk to a third party, especially if it gives a guarantee of confidentiality and a non-judgemental listening ear. We believe that the SeafarerHelp team can play an important part in providing such services to seafarers and the maritime industry as a whole.

Seafarer Abandonment

The issue of owners abandoning their responsibilities, and their vessels, leaving crews to sit on ships as water, food and fuel run out, is well known to the industry. Thankfully there are signs that improvements are likely; the fact that amendments to the MLC mean that insurers and flag states will be involved in repatriating crews is positive. However, there are still problems and these are regularly reported to SeafarerHelp. Indeed, often we are one of the first agencies to be notified of such problems and once again this puts us in a unique position. At the present time ISWAN SeafarerHelp is supporting the crews of a number of vessels in various locations around the world through a variety of ways including: the Seafarers Emergency Fund to provide food, water and repatriation, and the team providing emotional support to the seafarers directly.

There is a need to ensure that we are able to leverage that insight, and ensure that while seafarer anonymity, safety and welfare remains paramount, we can inform the industry response and support the data collection and reporting functions which already exist. This is something SeafarerHelp could do, and we can bring our data into the intelligence mix, something that would help other agencies and ultimately seafarers too.

Search for Employment

As the 2016 data shows, 18.07% of seafarers who contacted us were seeking assistance on the issue of employment. How we deal with such enquiries depends on the nationality of the seafarer, some of the time we recommend seafarers to go to approved government agencies. However, where this does not apply, we have recently put together information for specific nationalities as to the best ways of looking for work. We want to help the individual seafarers but it is not easy given the current situation in the maritime industry.

A further issue is that although crewing agencies might be approved by their governments some of them are making charges to find seafarers work. Such charges are illegal and where it is reported we do raise it with the appropriate government so that they can take action against the agency; however it is still a problem.

The number of seafarers coming to us seeking employment is an issue of concern and we are looking again at other ways to assist them.

Flag State Relations

The 2016 data, as has become the pattern, appears to follow the expected trend of the bigger the flag, the more contacts from seafarers. This is as one would anticipate. There are the occasional anomalies; Malta for instance does tend to figure in more reports than the size of its registry would suggest. However, it remains that SeafarerHelp is keen to improve and refine our outreach and liaison with flag states. We have a good relationship with the Liberian Marine Administration which has proven to be extremely useful for both parties and we will seek to enter into similar mutually beneficial relationships with other flag states.

Mental Health Concerns

The issue of mental health is still an incredibly important one. Despite the slew of initiatives and the many improvements to services we are aware that seafarers are often reluctant to raise issues about mental health. There is stigma attached, whether real or imagined, and there needs to be more research into how talking about your mental health can be considered as normal as talking about your physical health.

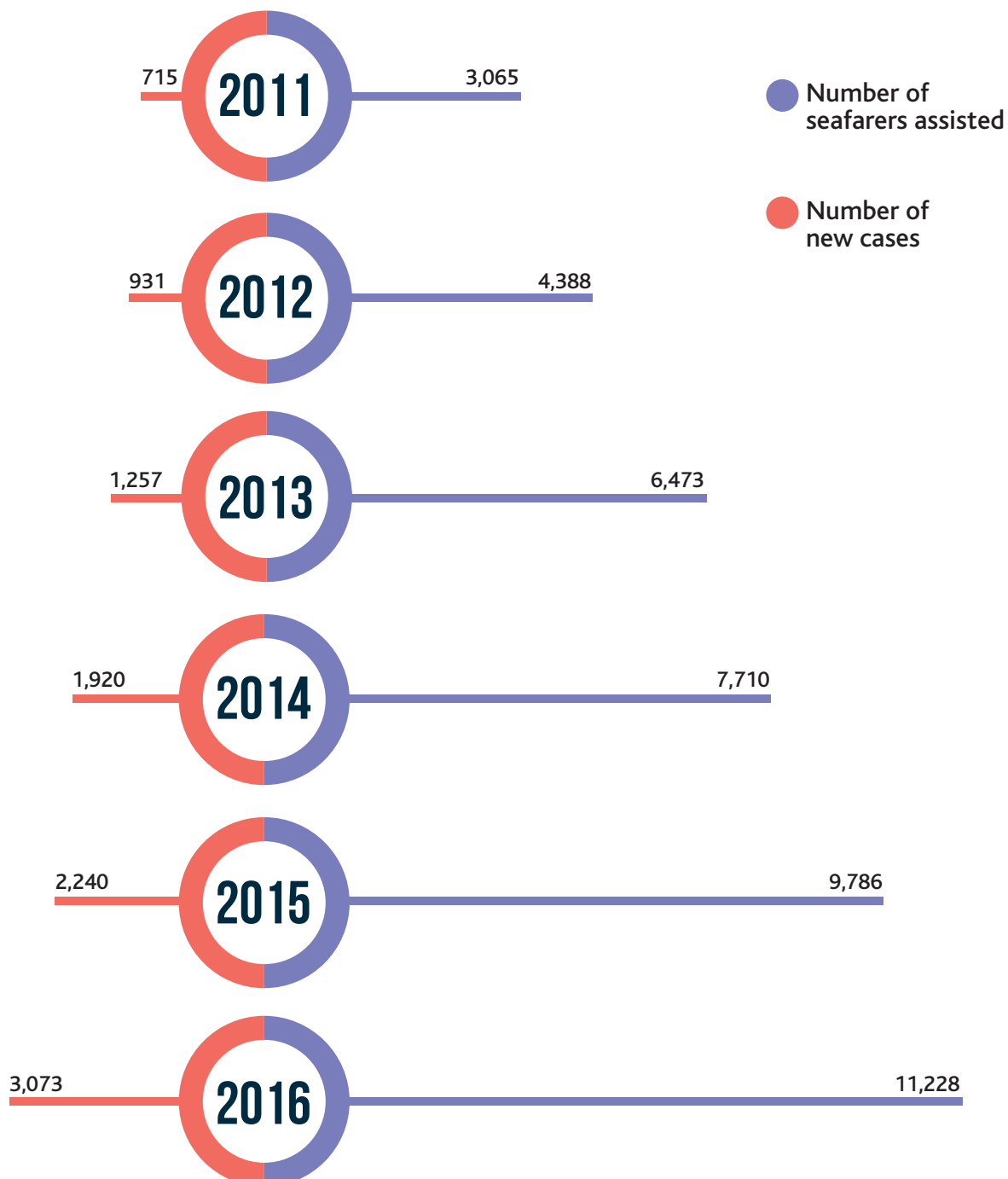
Much of the industry now seems to be aware that helping seafarers with such issues can only be a good thing in that a seafarer with a mental health problem, e.g. depression, anxiety or suicidal thoughts, is probably not going to be working to the required standards and so is potentially a risk to the crew and the ship. However at present there is no industry-wide method of addressing it. ISWAN SeafarerHelp has been very active in producing self-help information for seafarers in how to approach such issues and through its helpline is ready to support seafarers who want to talk about such problems. We are also talking to a number of organisations about providing such services specifically for their seafarers.

Number of cases

The number of new cases dealt with by the SeafarerHelp team in 2016 was 3,073 and involved a total of 11,228 seafarers. As has become the trend, these figures show a steady growth in the number of new cases and large increase in the number of seafarers

assisted. This latter figure is discussed in more detail in the trend section below. Once again, as Chart 1 below shows there has been a sustained high level of growth in both the number of cases and the number of seafarers we have assisted over the last five years.

Chart 1
Trends in issues raised



Trends since 2011

From Chart 1 it is clear to see that there has been a large increase of 366.32% in the number of contacts coming to the SeafarerHelp team since 2011, with a corresponding increase of 429.80% in the number of seafarers assisted over the same period. Since 2011 we have helped over 42,000 seafarers with all manner of queries, concerns and questions. There are a number of reasons for these significant increases:

1. The word continues to spread in the seafaring community about the services we provide, that we are not judgemental and that we go out of our way to give support and assistance. We have a good reputation with seafarers, and that means that more and more each year are prepared to contact us.

2. Social media continues to be a growth area for SeafarerHelp and provides an ever stronger link between us, those who work at sea and their families. We are continuing to promote the SeafarerHelp service through a range of methods, but particularly through Facebook which allows us to target our contacts to seafarers of specific nationalities. This year we also started to promote SeafarerHelp on vk.com, a Russian social media site, to specifically communicate with Ukrainian and Russian seafarers.

3. Over the past couple of years this social media boom has led to a significant increase in contacts, however there is some element of diminishing returns and we do not expect such high increases in future years. Having said that we continued to work hard in 2016 to identify the best ways to reach seafarers.

4. Shipping has been through an incredibly tough time and 2016 was a horrid year for some sectors. This meant that ever more seafarers were in need of support, help and reassurance. The offshore sector was particularly hard hit, and there have been layoffs across the board. Towards the latter part of the year there was a lot of talk of mergers, acquisitions and alliances between shipping companies and as the industry has realigned itself, that has inevitably caused concerns for an increasing number of seafarers.

5. Amendments to the Maritime Labour Convention 2006 (MLC) relating to the issues of abandonment, repatriation and payment of wages have seemingly had an impact on our case numbers. Seafarers are more aware that they have rights and are more prepared to come to us for help.

The top three reasons for seafarers contacting SeafarerHelp in 2016 have changed a little from 2015. This year there were more requests for help on employment, while failure to pay wages and a wide range of "other" issues and requests for information climbed to the top of our contacts chart while problems over repatriation dropped to fifth place.

The most frequent contact was from those seeking employment. This could well be a reflection of the destabilised labour market, and shows a degree of concern from seafarers. This accounted for 18.07% of all enquiries.

Failure to pay wages was second and accounted for 16% of all cases and has held remarkably steady against 2015, a fact which seems to reflect the sustained poor state of the market, and the evidence suggests that some ship owners are perhaps wrestling with cash flow problems.

The third most common form of contacts are allocated to the “other” category. Unfortunately this category is a “catch all” and very broad. It includes a wide range of issues such as where further information was awaited from the seafarer, where problems were raised that were not included in any other category as well as a number of other situations. Since it is such a broad category its value is limited and as a result it will be broken down into more meaningful constituent parts for next year. Requests for information were the fourth most frequent question and once again this is a very broad category which covers enquiries about training, seafarer centres and what services are available and from whom. Once again because it is so broad it will be split into smaller more meaningful elements for next year.

“The most frequent contact was from those seeking employment.”

Problems over repatriation show a marginal decrease down to 9.99% in 2016 against 10.5% in 2015. This could well be an indication that provisions within the MLC are beginning to be felt, and that seafarers are having their repatriation costs covered.

“Your involvement really helps me as because of your team I got out from that hell.”

Comment from seafarer

Other reasons

Welfare and emergency provisions are on the rise with an increase in number to 2.1% from 1.5% in 2015. This category is where the SeafarerHelp team have been advised that the crew need basic provisions such as food and water and is usually used where they and the ship have been abandoned. The increase, although small in percentage terms, is considerable numerically from 44 (2015) to 85 (2016) and is a reflection of the difficult year the maritime industry has experienced.

Cases of abuse or bullying decreased to 2.7% from a previous high of 3.8%.

Problems with living conditions on board saw a significant decrease, which is probably an indication of the positive effects of the MLC 2006 together with older ships being scrapped because of the poor economic environment. These reduced to 1.9% from 3%.

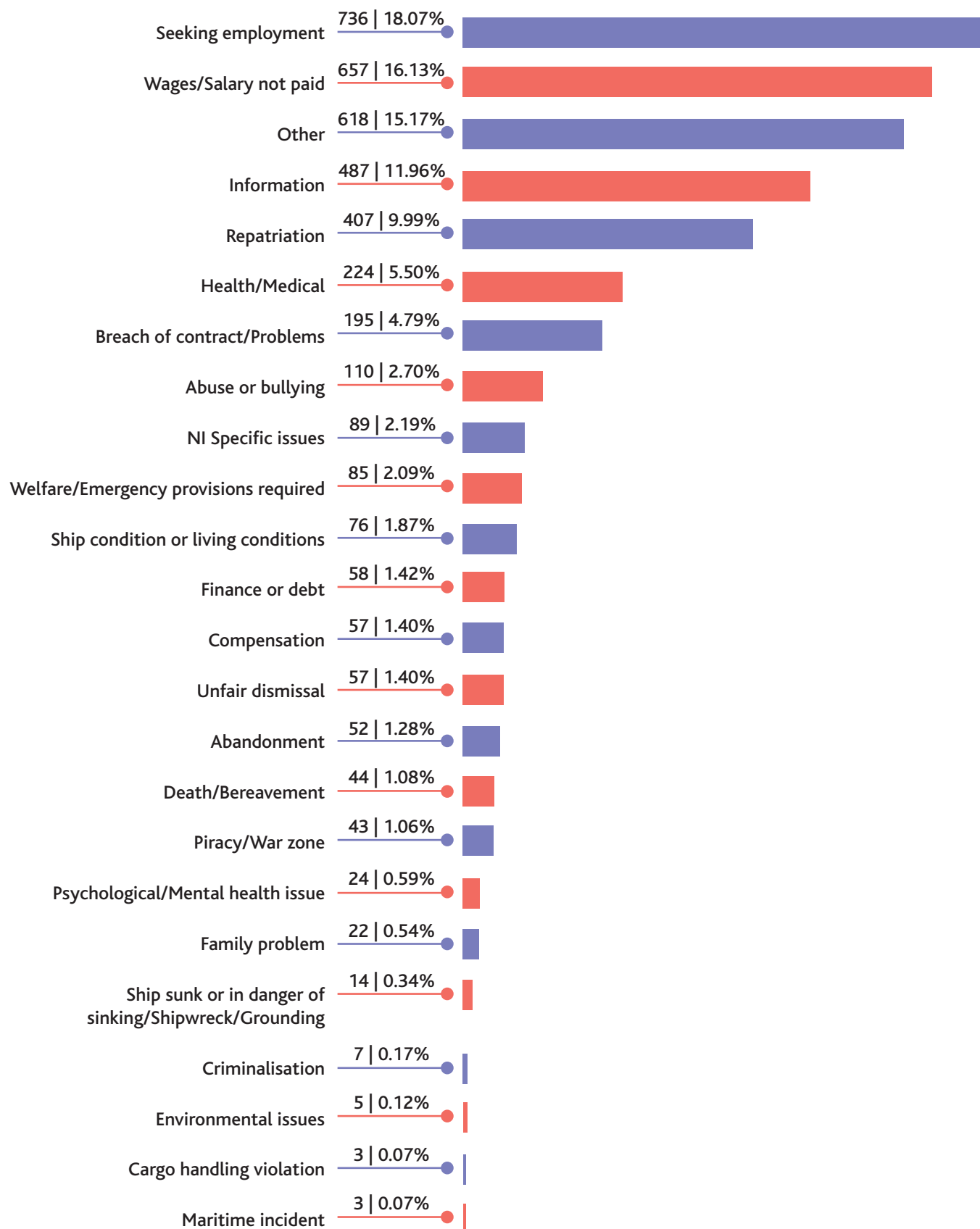
Abandonment of ships and crews saw a concerning spike, up from 0.9% in 2015 to 1.28% in 2016. This is an area of real cause for concern because it puts seafarers in extremely difficult situations that they have no control over and it is through no fault of their own. The actual figures are an increase to 52 (2016) from 25 (2015).

Contacts relating to piracy also show an increase to 1.06%; however much of this will be because the SeafarerHelp team has been involved in supporting the crew of the Naham 3. There has been some new piracy activity off Somalia and there are issues in the Gulf of Guinea which we will continue to closely monitor through our MPHRP role.

Although some percentage points in our data may rise by small amounts they can be cause for concern. While it is pleasing to possibly see the growing influence of the MLC 2006 when it comes to living conditions and abuse, there are problems emerging elsewhere such as abandonment. The welfare of seafarers is of paramount importance, and any upward trend in contacts concerning failures in this regard do need to be highlighted.

Issues raised

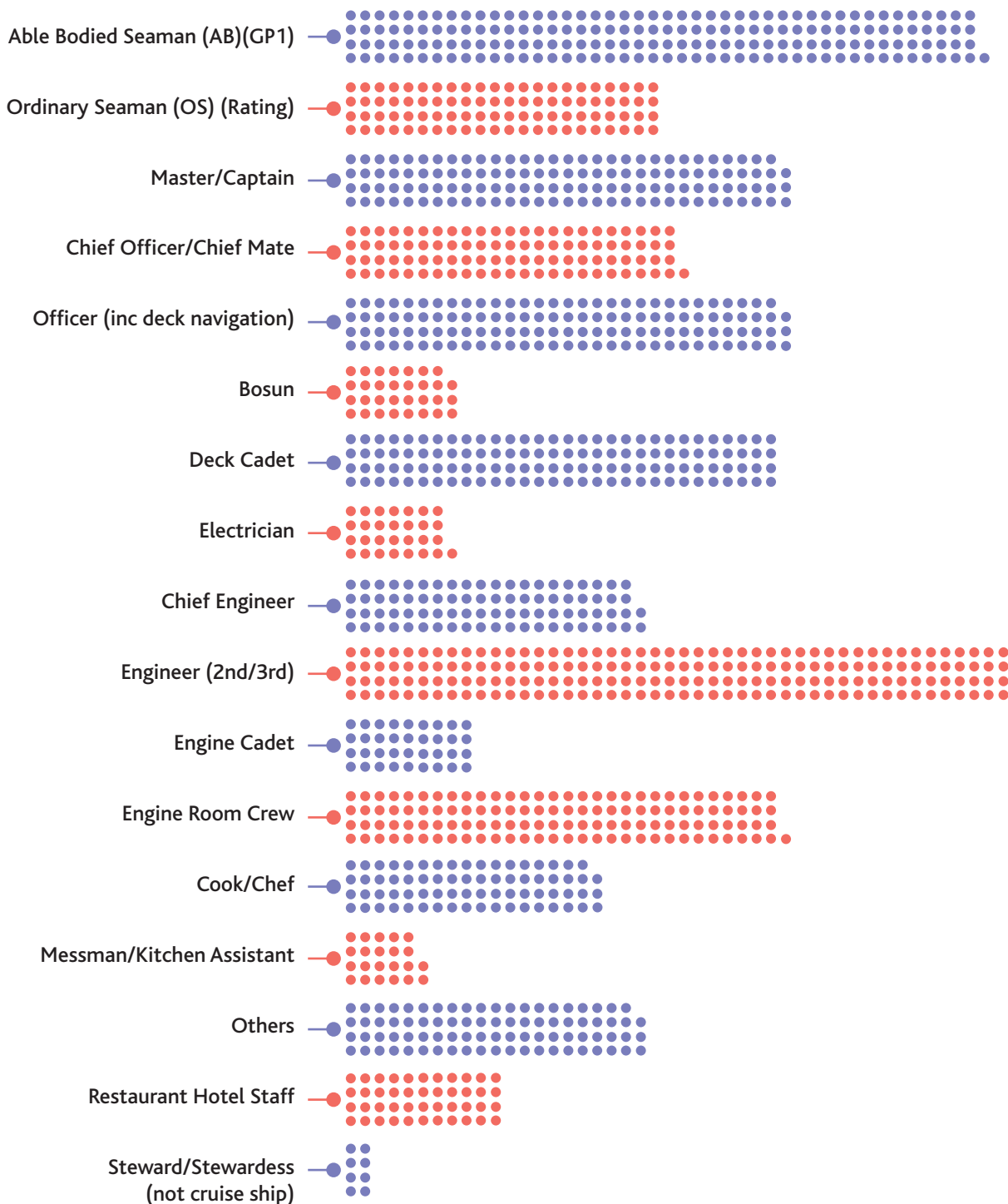
Chart 2
Issues raised 2016



Rank

SeafarerHelp continues to offer support for seafarers of all ranks. Again, the 2016 data shows that the helpline is used by an extremely wide spread of those at sea from cadets to ships' masters, deck officers, galley and particularly engine room officers and crew.

Chart 3
Rank



Trends since 2011

The trends in problems raised since 2011 are shown in detail in Chart 4.

Over time some of the SeafarerHelp categories have changed so it is not possible to directly compare every category year against year. However, that said the changes are progressive and we can still get a sense of the evolution of issues and problem areas for seafarers.

“The number of seafarers seeking employment has increased significantly in the last 3 years.”

Since 2011 what we can see is that there are clear themes and these cluster around the various aspects of what it means to be a seafarer. The number of seafarers seeking employment has increased significantly in the last three years and is a direct indication of the current economic situation in the maritime industry. Wages not being paid remains steady as the main specific problem encountered by seafarers and it is again a reflection of the difficult times the industry is going through. Repatriation remains a significant issue but along with contract problems it is shown as reducing. This may mean that seafarers would rather not raise issues about their contract, even though there are problems with it, so that they can at least hold on to their job.

Over the past 6 years' of data we have been able to watch the peaks and troughs of seafarer concerns as they have turned to us for help and support. SeafarerHelp has been that lifeline, that voice of compassion, reason and care in a complex and challenging environment.

Seafarers are vulnerable to change – they are hit when shipping struggles, and when there are signs of any upturn, they have to fight for opportunities as the markets improve. There are also pressures to remain certificated, and to professionally develop. There are also the real emotional and practical challenges of caring for family and loved ones who are far away.

In a life of disconnection and uncertainty, SeafarerHelp has been there for thousands of seafarers, answering the questions which matter to them, and giving support which makes the difference.

Another issue which has seen a rise over the past years is that of mental health for seafarers. The shipping industry has begun to recognise the problems of social isolation, the debilitating effects of stress, depression and fatigue and how this affects the operational abilities of the crew. However whilst some enlightened organisations are working to support crews, there is still a stigma attached to admitting such problems. This strongly suggests that while the various industry initiatives are a step in the right direction, and that dialogue has begun, there is a real sense that seafarers are reluctant to openly talk or to identify themselves for fear of risking their employment. In 2016 such contacts increased from 0.14% to 0.59% but that is not the full picture because the definition used was narrow and did not include those for whom we provided emotional support because of mental health issues.

“On the behalf of all the crew..... we would like to say Thank you from the bottom of our heart for all the prompt assistance and support during our hard times here...We are finally can go home with half of our wages but it is okay than nothing.”

Comment from seafarer

Chart 4
Trends in issues raised

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Seeking Employment	0.00	5.10	3.60	14.60	14.72	18.07
Wages salary not paid	26.00	24.70	28.50	15.14	16.02	16.13
Other	7.00	3.30	12.50	11.49	9.57	15.17
Information	13.00	15.10	15.00	17.13	17.12	11.96
Repatriation	15.00	18.20	14.50	9.10	10.49	9.99
Health Medical	5.00	4.30	5.00	5.76	4.54	5.50
Contract problems	11.50	9.50	6.60	10.99	8.47	4.79
Abuse or Bullying	5.00	3.60	3.30	2.69	3.76	2.70
Contract helpline specific issues	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.65	2.36	2.19
Welfare Emergency provisions	0.00	0.90	1.00	1.27	1.50	2.09
Ship or Living conditions	5.00	4.40	2.10	2.46	3.07	1.87
Finance or debt	0.00	1.10	1.00	1.31	1.02	1.42
Compensation/Personal Injury	0.00	2.00	1.50	2.23	1.33	1.40
Unfair Dismissal	0.00	1.90	1.20	2.11	1.95	1.40
Abandonment	0.00	0.70	1.00	0.61	0.85	1.28
Death Bereavement	0.00	0.60	0.90	0.61	0.79	1.08
Piracy/War zone	2.00	1.00	1.20	0.46	0.85	1.06
Psychological/mental health issues	0.00	0.00	0.10	0.23	0.14	0.59
Family problems	9.50	3.60	0.20	0.58	0.55	0.54
Ship sunk	0.00	0.10	0.10	0.19	0.34	0.34
Criminalisation	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.19	0.17	0.17
Environmental issue	0.00	0.40	0.30	0.08	0.20	0.12
Cargo Handling Violations	0.00	0.00	0.40	0.12	0.17	0.07

Note i) Where it states 0.00 that category did not exist that year.

Note ii) There are small rounding up variances for 2011 and 2012.

Case Study 2

SeafarerHelp assists Filipina seafarer sexually harassed on cruise ship

A female seafarer contacted the SeafarerHelp team about sexual harassment. She was working as cabin crew on a cruise ship.

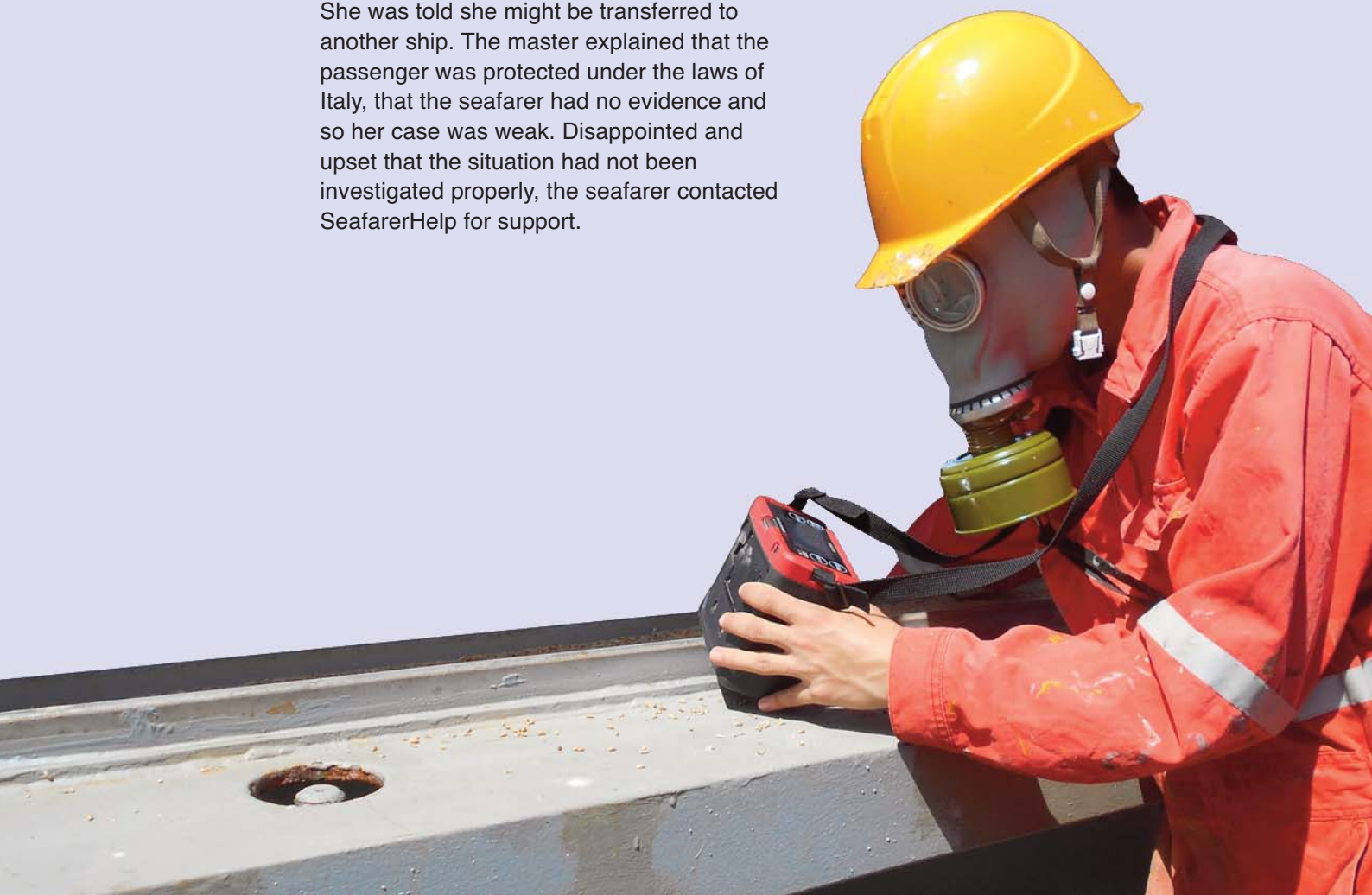
A passenger asked her to check a problem in the bathroom in his cabin and to provide additional toiletries. While she was in the bathroom looking for the problem, the passenger came in holding his genitals. The distressed seafarer pushed the passenger out of the way and ran out of the cabin.

“ISWAN SeafarerHelp works on a global basis and we actively seek partners from all around the world to help us in our work to support seafarers.”

The seafarer reported the incident to the officers on board. However, she was not happy with the way her case was handled. She was told she might be transferred to another ship. The master explained that the passenger was protected under the laws of Italy, that the seafarer had no evidence and so her case was weak. Disappointed and upset that the situation had not been investigated properly, the seafarer contacted SeafarerHelp for support.

The SeafarerHelp team gave her emotional support and arranged counselling for her from a trained counsellor of her own nationality. The seafarer's husband also worked on board and both of them were thinking of giving up their jobs because they did not feel that the situation had been addressed properly by the company.

The SeafarerHelp team have kept in contact with the seafarer and both she and her husband are now working on a different ship. Although the SeafarerHelp team was not able to change the way the company had dealt with the incident, the seafarer and her husband were very grateful that the team was there to provide support and for the counselling that was provided.



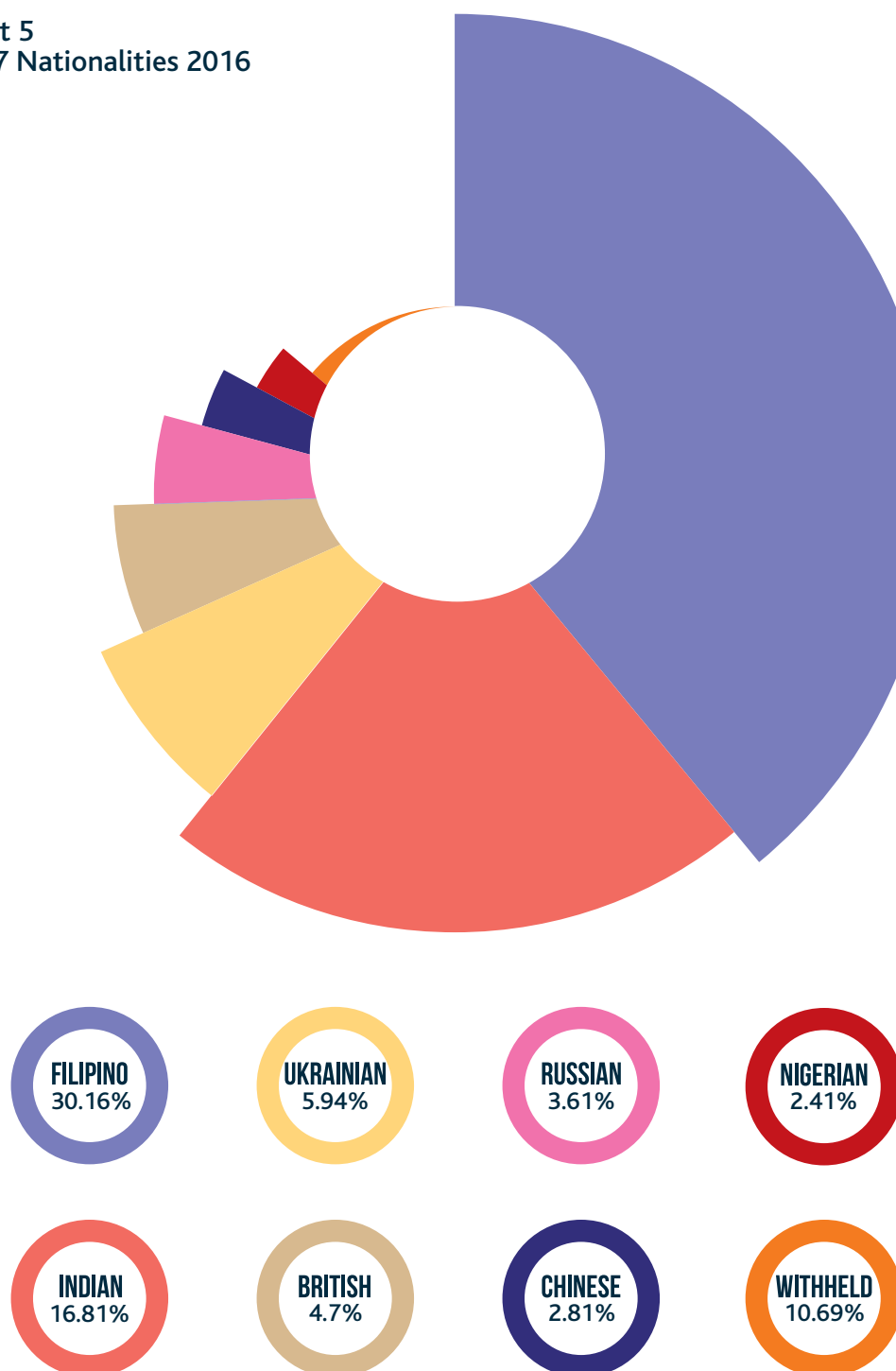


Seafarer nationalities

The number of different nationalities that we assisted in 2016 increased from 86 in 2015 to 99 in 2016. This once again highlights the fact that SeafarerHelp has an incredible reach across the world; it also stresses the international diversity of seafarers. In 2016 the team assisted seafarers from 31

Commonwealth countries and 20 European Union countries. Chart 5 records the main nationalities assisted in 2016. It also shows that 10.7% of seafarers withheld their nationality which we presume is because they are concerned about being identified, though this number has been dropping.

Chart 5
Top 7 Nationalities 2016

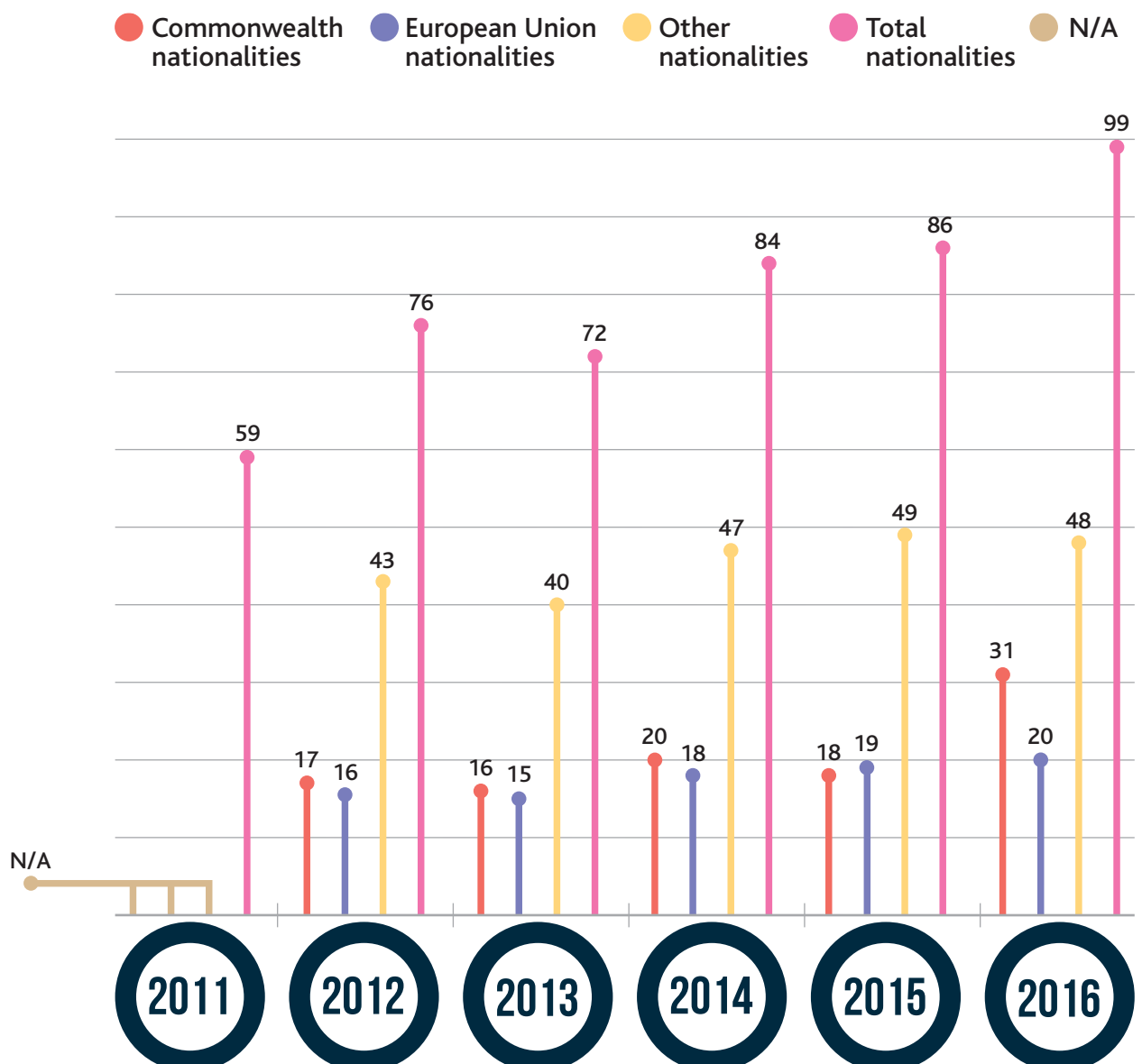


Trends since 2011

In the early years of our data, from 2011 to 2013, the highest number of seafarers who contacted the team was Filipino, followed by Ukrainian, Indian and Russian. We were surprised to see a change in 2014 when Indian seafarers overtook those from the Ukraine. While there has been a positive promotion within the Indian seafaring community, the fall in Ukrainian contacts could possibly relate to the annexation of that nation.

In 2016, we saw an increase in the number of Filipino seafarers contacting us, back up to more usual 30% levels after it had dropped to 25.9% in 2015. Indian and Filipino seafarers account for almost half of contacts at 46.97%. The number of Indian contacts has continued to rise, up from 12% in 2014, and 16.1% in 2015 to its current level of 16.8%. SeafarerHelp has been promoting the service in India through Facebook and with assistance from our Regional Representative in Delhi who deals with both our MPHRP and SeafarerHelp work in India and Asia.

Chart 6
Nationalities assisted



Countries seafarers contacted us from

In 2016 the team received contacts from 122 different countries, of which 28 were Commonwealth and 21 were from European Union Countries.

Flag States

In 2016 the SeafarerHelp team dealt with ships that were registered in 73 different countries; this is a consistent figure and showed a nominal rise year on year. The six most frequently encountered registries are shown in Chart 7, together with the number of cases that relate to them and their relative position (in terms of their size in the world fleet table, according to the UNCTAD Review of Marine Transport 2016.)

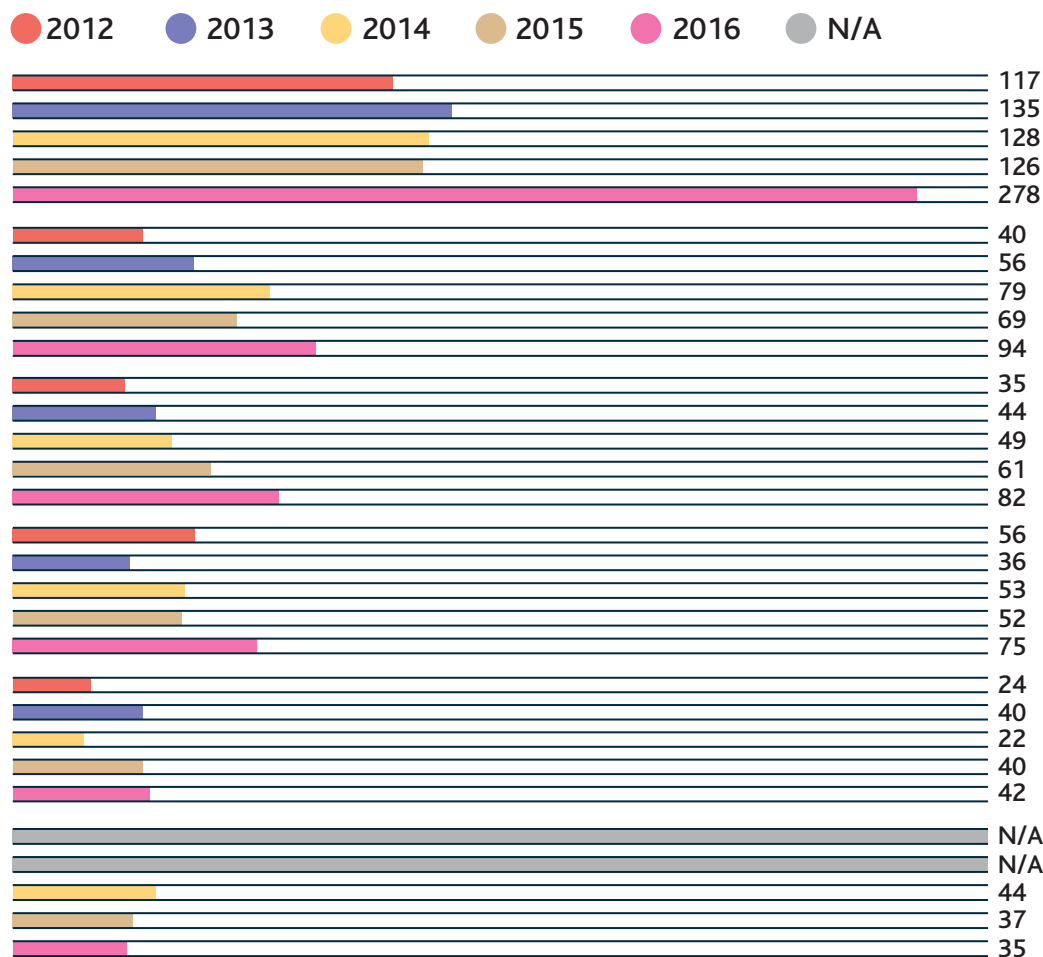
Trends since 2011

Chart 7 shows that the trend for flag states since 2012 is mostly as would be expected with the largest registries occupying most of the top seven slots. Panama, Marshall Islands

and Liberia dominate the percentages of contacts, and this reflects the number of vessels registered to fly these flags. The flag state which bucks the trend is Malta which features in more of our cases than one would expect given the size of their registry. A similar situation exists for the Bahamas although they may have an explanation given the number of cruise ships registered and the vast scale of crewing compared to other vessels.

SeafarerHelp wishes to engage more with the various maritime administrations to build a more complete picture of how our data sits alongside theirs, and to develop a more evolved mechanism of flag state responses to seafarer concerns and issues.

Chart 7
Top six reported Flag states 2016



Note Registry size according to UNCTAD 2016

Note N/A = Not in the top six

Organisations we refer cases to

At SeafarerHelp we take a pragmatic approach to dealing with the issues, concerns and problems which can beset seafarers. If we cannot assist a seafarer ourselves then we refer them to other organisations that are better positioned to help. Since most of the 4,073 issues raised with us in 2016 came from seafarers who were in countries other than the United Kingdom, that usually means we refer them to organisations that are based in the country the seafarer is in or comes from. That way the seafarer can be given direct personal help and assistance. The trends in Chart 8 show how our referrals have changed over the years.

“ISWAN SeafarerHelp works on a global basis and we actively seek partners from all around the world to help us in our work to support seafarers.”

In 2016 the SeafarerHelp team was able to address in-house almost a quarter of all the issues raised. It is noticeable that since 2012 the number of cases dealt with in-house has increased significantly as a result of the investment we have made in training. Where we feel it is not appropriate to deal with a case in-house we refer them to an ever-widening network of organisations around the world.

There has been a very large increase in the number of seafarers coming to SeafarerHelp seeking employment. In the past we have usually referred them to the government-approved agencies in their country or given general advice. However, since there are so many cases we are now developing more detailed information for how they might seek employment in specific countries.

We continue to work closely with the Apostleship of the Sea, Mission to Seafarers, trade unions and other maritime organisations around the world. They have a local presence in the countries that the seafarers are located in and their knowledge and skills are drawn on to provide important services directly to the seafarers.

An area that has seen particular growth is the referral to embassies, consulates and government agencies which has increased from 0.8% in 2015 to 4.33% in 2016. The reason for this large increase is that we are dealing with more casework ourselves; this is particularly so in India and the Philippines where our regional representatives have developed close links with Government agencies.

Two final areas that have also increased are our referrals to the Seafarers Emergency Fund and the MPHRP. The SEF is a fund administered by ISWAN and internal referrals to it increased from 0.3% to 0.8%. The second relates to the MPHRP which ISWAN took over in 2015. Throughout 2016 aspects of the work of MPHRP were integrated into the SeafarerHelp team and the release of the seafarers from the Naham 3 led to a large amount of work for the team to support them and their families.

ISWAN SeafarerHelp works on a global basis and we actively seek partners from all around the world to help us in our work to support seafarers.

“May God will bless you in everything and guide you always.”

Comment from seafarer

Case Study 3

SeafarerHelp supports seafarer with suicidal thoughts

“The SeafarerHelp team happily provides long term emotional support to seafarers who are experiencing personal difficulties.”

An Indian seafarer who ‘felt like committing suicide’ contacted SeafarerHelp for help with his personal problems. He had been feeling lonely throughout the four months that he had been on his vessel, and did not want to burden his family by sharing these emotions with them. He did not feel comfortable discussing his concerns with his colleagues either, for fear of being reported and sent home by his company.

The seafarer explained: ‘Everyone has problems. My inner self used to tell me that disclosing it to everyone would not make it right or return happiness.’

Providing emotional support is part of SeafarerHelp’s service and since the team is multi-lingual this was given to the seafarer in his own language enabling him to express himself fully. The team reassured him about the confidentiality of the exchange and the non-judgemental nature of the service, which prompted him to open up about the things that had been bothering him.

The seafarer had first experienced homesickness when he had to leave home at an early age to study at an all-boys boarding school, away from his family. Growing up in an exclusively male environment, he felt that his lack of exposure left him unprepared for relationships with the opposite sex. After joining a vessel, the seafarer later had two difficult and unsuccessful relationships after which he found himself developing suicidal thoughts. The seafarer shared his worries on how the combination of his past experiences continued to affect him.

The SeafarerHelp team acknowledged the seafarer’s courage to admit his suicidal thoughts. The team reviewed the self-care strategies already being used by the seafarer and offered help in finding a professional who could provide specialist assistance. With his consent, the SeafarerHelp team located a Mumbai-based professional counsellor and organised counselling sessions for him while he was at sea.

The seafarer ultimately chose not to take the free counselling sessions, but over the next six months, the SeafarerHelp team kept in contact with him to check on his progress. He said that he appreciated how the team continued to follow-up on how he was feeling and the fact that he was given continued support. He said that knowing that the SeafarerHelp service was there helped to ease his burden and he was very grateful.

“Providing emotional support is part of SeafarerHelp’s service and since the team is multi-lingual this was given to the seafarer in his own language enabling him to express himself fully.”

As this story is written, the seafarer is at home on vacation. He has confirmed that he is doing very well and is addressing his issues. He told us that he is now channelling his energies into taking courses and preparing for his career advancement exams.

The SeafarerHelp team happily provides long term emotional support to seafarers who are experiencing personal difficulties.



Organisations we refer to

Chart 8
Main organisations referred to

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
SeafarerHelp in house	11	13.7	23.0	31.6	21.1	23.10
Employment organisations	0	0.0	0.0	10.1	14.5	21.21
Other	6.7	3.8	5.1	7.5	13.7	17.26
ITF Coordinator/Inspector	23	20.3	15.1	21.3	22.1	12.55
ITF Seafarers Support Team	10	11.3	16.7	10.8	10.4	9.52
Embassies/Consulates /Govt Agencies	1	0.0	0.6	0.7	0.8	4.33
Apostleship of the Sea	5	1.3	3.9	8.0	7.9	3.71
Mission to Seafarers	5	2.8	4.9	4.4	4.1	2.64
Other maritime agencies*	2.5	2.4	4.3	2.3	3.4	1.91
MPHRP	0	0	0.1	0.3	0.1	1.24
Unions	1.75	1.3	0.3	1.4	0.8	0.90
Seafarers Emergency Fund	0	0	0.3	0.6	0.3	0.81
SAIL	*	*	*	0.3	0.3	0.32
Sailors Society	*	*	*	0.5	0.3	0.19
CHIRP (Confidential Hazardous Incident Reporting Programme)	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R	0.13
No first referral	32	43	25.6	0.0	0.0	0.0

* Included in Other maritime agencies

N/R Not recorded

"Thank you sir. Thank you so much for helping us. We are truly glad that through seafarerhelp.org we could speak broadly about our problems onboard. It eases our mental stress."

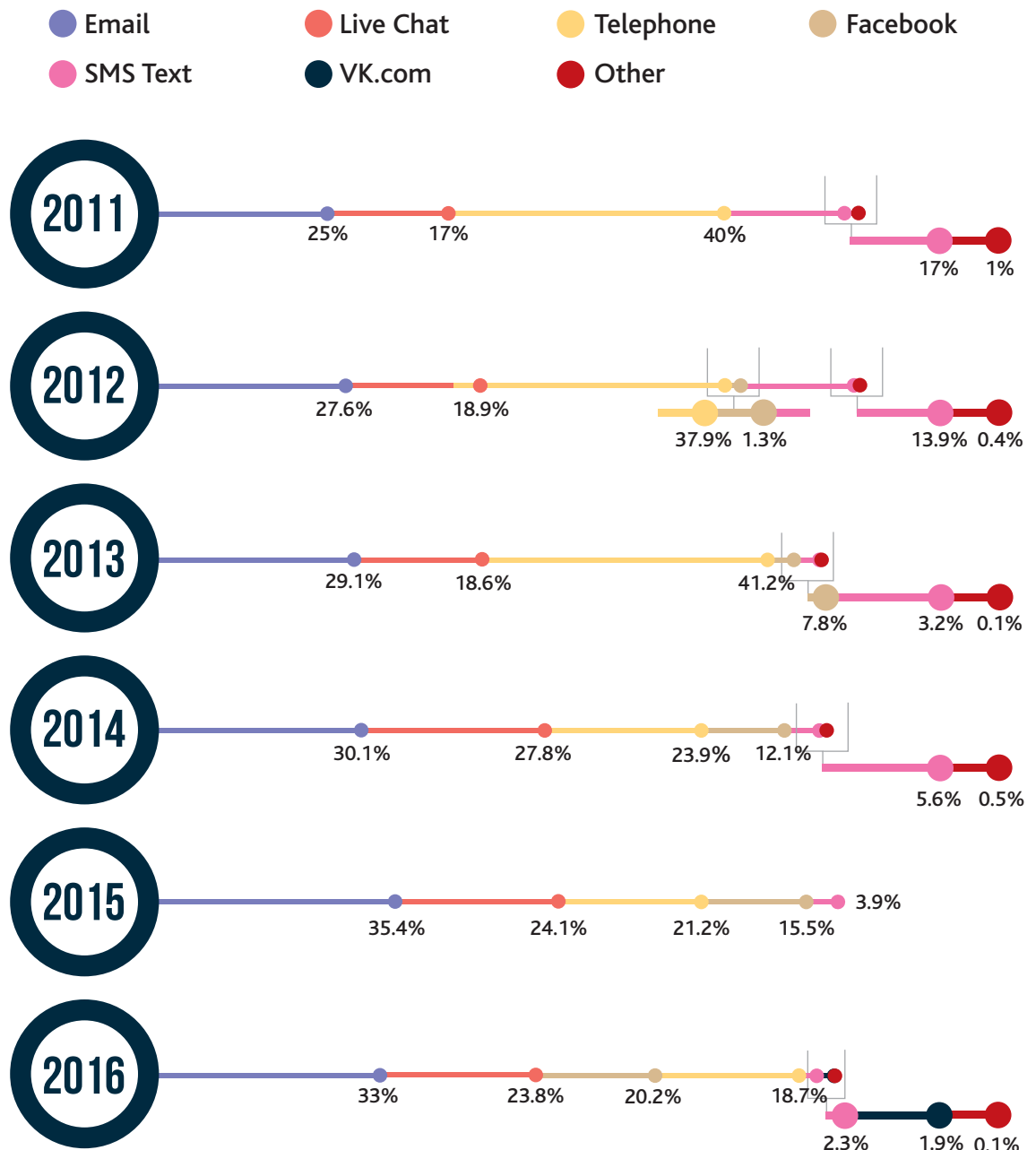
Comment from seafarer

Methods of contact

The year-on-year growth in the number of seafarers contacting SeafarerHelp rests not only on the fact that we have been more proactive in our promotion and outreach, but also on making it ever easier and cheaper for seafarers to do so. Removing the barriers for seafarers to contact us is vital and we work hard to make it as easy as possible for them. The 2016 data shows yet another rise in the number of seafarers contacting us, and we believe that part of this relates to the fact that there are more options and different channels

that they can use to get in touch with us. These include by telephone on international toll-free lines, email, Live Chat, Skype, Facebook, SMS text and Twitter. It is interesting to note that over 78% of all contacts now come via the internet and that only 18% of contacts are by telephone. This probably reflects the fact that internet services on board and in port are continuing to improve but also that they are free of charge.

Chart 9
Initial contact method



Trends since 2011

Since 2011 the initial methods of contact have changed dramatically. There has been a change since 2013, the last year in which the telephone was the leading source of contact. Since then, and continuing in 2016, email is the preferred method of contact. This seems to be holding steady at around the 30% mark. This year saw the rise of Facebook as a method of contact, and for the first time this outstripped the level of telephone contacts. The telephone is now the fourth most popular at 18.71%. Electronic contacts are the rising trend, which mirrors the growth in connectivity on board and the fact that many international SIM cards make getting online often more cost-effective than telephoning.

Feedback from seafarers about SeafarerHelp

So that we can get direct feedback from seafarers about our SeafarerHelp service and use that information to continuously improve the service, we introduced a short customer feedback survey in 2014. The survey is sent when the case is closed and the questions concentrate on what they thought of the service, what we did well, what we need to improve on and what effect the service had on them.

Of those surveyed 77% said that the SeafarerHelp service was either excellent or good and 82% said that they would recommend the service to other seafarers if they had a problem.

There are many positive comments from seafarers about the service that we provide and some have been included in this review. Seafarers like the fact that we are here 24 hours a day, 365 days per year, that we respond quickly and that once we pick up a case we carry on with it as long as the seafarer wants. What also comes out very strongly is that seafarers often feel that they are struggling with problems on their own which makes them feel stressed and depressed. However once they contact the SeafarerHelp team many say that they feel their burden is lifted because we are listening to them and they do not feel alone. This is a great justification for the emotional support service that we introduced a few years ago and we are pleased to be making a positive contribution to the mental health of seafarers. From seafarers' comments in response to our survey and on Facebook it remains very clear that they value highly the service that we provide at ISWAN SeafarerHelp.

In closing the management at ISWAN would like to thank and acknowledge the SeafarerHelp team because without their commitment, skill and dedication the service would not be what it is today.

"Thankyou seafarer help team you are doing excelent job. I can't able to explain how much my tension released from your help."

Comment from seafarer



SeafarerHelp

The lifeline for seafarers

Feeling low?

We are here to listen.

Our helpline is:

- Free
- Confidential
- Multi-lingual
- Available 24 hours a day, 365 days per year.



Find us on:



Contact us:

Send SMS messages to:

+44 7624 818 405

Email us:

help@seafarerhelp.org

Live Chat at:

www.seafarerhelp.org

Toll Free:

00 800 7323 2737

Request call back:

+44 (0)207 323 2737

Find us online at:

www.seafarerhelp.org

Skype us at:

info-seafarerhelp.org

WhatsApp*:

+44 (0)7909 470 732

*Available Monday - Friday, 08:00 - 18:00
UK time only

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Conclusion

2016 was another challenging year for shipping. The industry was wrestling with a number of problems – there were concerns of over-capacity which hit freight rates, and severe uncertainty across many markets. The year saw an incredible drop in oil prices, which meant the offshore sector was badly affected by axed projects and the need to slash costs. Seafarers suffered, and jobs were lost.

“Once again, we saw an increase in the use of internet based systems such as email, Live Chat and Facebook to contact us. This now accounts for 76.9% of all initial contacts.”

“Memorable” is the word that Lloyd’s List chose to describe the year, perhaps unsurprisingly given that some major shipping companies went bankrupt leaving its crews, customers and the logistics chain in disarray. Meanwhile the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) warned of a change in trading patterns with “unusual trends” in international trade statistics. This was borne out by the fact that the level of idle vessels was arguably the fastest-growing part of the global containership fleet.

We believe that the economic situation along with our social media campaigns boosted the level of interaction with SeafarerHelp. In these times of uncertainty seafarers have turned to SeafarerHelp for support as they were trying to deal with pressures caused by volatility across their profession.

Once again, we saw an increase in the use of internet-based systems such as email, Live Chat and Facebook to contact us. This now accounts for 76.9% of all initial contacts. 2016 saw the level of telephone contacts slide once more, and this is now below 20%. There is a strong assumption based on the figures that the trend to use internet systems will increase as connectivity to ships at sea and in port improves, and as the cost barriers to access erode. There has been a further cementing of the nationalities of seafarers contacting us,

and The Philippines and India now account for very nearly half of all contacts. We will continue to work hard to ensure that the growing labour markets, such as those for Russian and Chinese seafarers, are well served and we will continue to develop and improve our marketing to the international community of seafarers.

The challenges which ISWAN and the SeafarerHelp team have been at the forefront of highlighting are continuing to grow. The issues of social isolation and mental health continue to be key concerns, as do welfare issues and the problems of bullying and abuse. We are also concerned about the growing threat posed by piracy and robbery at sea as well as the abandonment of seafarers. The SeafarerHelp team deals with the concerns of seafarers and the problems and challenges they face. This means the data we generate is a bellwether for the changes which are over the horizon for shipping. Despite the tightening of the MLC legislation there are still many problems and concerns and action needed to head them off.

“Our team is continually improving and evolving.”

There is a positive side to the contacts we have with seafarers – there is a clear hunger for information. Many seafarers are clearly on the hunt for new opportunities, they want the latest training and are eager to excel. For that reason, SeafarerHelp is proud to assist so many seafarers, but we recognise the need to do more and explore the mechanisms which can deliver tangible results. The challenge is to continue to mirror the efforts of seafarers to reach out, and to be able to provide the actual answers seafarers need. Our team is continually improving and evolving. The growth in contacts and the sheer volume of seafarers who come to us and rely on our help is testament to the dedication of the team who tirelessly work to support them. It is also a reflection of the funding which enables us to continue this vital work, and as we embark on efforts to generate new revenue streams we remain grateful to those who make the SeafarerHelp helpline a reality.





SeafarerHelp

The lifeline for seafarers

Contact us

If you would like more information about ISWAN, the SeafarerHelp service or the Seafarers Emergency Fund (SEF) please contact us directly or check our websites. Details are given below.

Similarly, if you would like to know more about the range of services we provide, please feel free to talk to us using the contact details below.

SeafarerHelp telephone: **+44 (0) 207 323 2737**

SeafarerHelp email: **help@seafarerhelp.org**

ISWAN office telephone: **+44 (0) 300 012 4279**

ISWAN email: **iswan@iswan.org.uk**

ISWAN and SEF: **www.seafarerswelfare.org**

SeafarerHelp: **www.seafarerhelp.org**



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Our sponsors

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