What sort of seafarers do we want?

Commission, we are discussing the problems of the seafaring profession under the umbrella of four main areas: the image of the shipping industry; sustainability of the maritime professions; conditions; and performance influences factors. In the first area – the image of the shipping industry – the group has been studying how much the bad image of the industry is impinging on recruitment, and the crucial issue of criminalisation of seafarers which is not only unfair, but may also pass the wrong message to potential candidates.

The second area – sustainability of the maritime skills base – covers recruitment, retention, training and the professional way of life of personnel to the maritime transport and training, the systems implemented by the different countries are not exactly the same. It is therefore important to reflect on the future and avoid a repetition of errors. In the present context two questions cannot be avoided: what do we want the seafaring profession to be, and what kind of people do we want the seafaring profession to attract? It is in this context we have been looking at watchkeeping performance, such as fatigue, and the need to attract good quality seafarers requires the shipping industry to have an open mind and a forward-looking mentality. (Photo: SIRC library)

The need to attract good quality seafarers requires the shipping industry to have an open mind and a forward-looking mentality. (Photo: SIRC library)

The final area – performance appropriate measures to the professional needs to attract good quality seafarers, and this requires an open mind towards forward-looking mentality on the part of the industry. It is crucial to highlight the positive aspects of the profession and to make sure that the negative areas of the profession are considered, facilitating also the promotion of good employment practices already in place in some shipping companies. These can take the form of crew and their families, email and internet access, etc. The fact that a group intends to provide answers that SIRC is working within the European Commission’s Maritime Transport Co-ordination Platform, leading a group of experts in human resources and maritime education and training, together with contributions from shipping companies, private institutions in Europe, and with funding from anywhere in the world, with a great number coming from the south-east Asia. They have little time to spend ashore, and tend to work in different lengths of contracts, according to their nationalities. At the present time it is also clear that, despite the amendment of the STCW convention, the seafaring profession has not been made easily available to the majority of the population. In this respect, voyages in port, short distances from city centres and a considerable number of crew members enabled a better knowledge of the world. This was particularly so for those seafarers who came from countries which, for political reasons, were more closed to the world, as was the case in my native Portugal.

However, economic development in the West, stagnation, open registers, logistic concepts such as “just in time” and reduced crew have all added to a drastic change in the nature of the profession. They have also affected recruitment to the industry. Today, there is an identified shortage of seafarers, mariners and officers, crews are multi-national and employed from anywhere in the world, with a much greater number coming from south-east Asia. They have little time to spend ashore, and tend to work in different lengths of contracts, according to their nationalities. At the present time it is also clear that, despite the amendment of the STCW convention, the seafaring profession has not been made easily available to the majority of the population. In this respect, voyages in port, short distances from city centres and a considerable number of crew members enabled a better knowledge of the world. This was particularly so for those seafarers who came from countries which, for political reasons, were more closed to the world, as was the case in my native Portugal.

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