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The role of the International Labour Organisation in reducing maritime gender gap and motivating more female towards seafaring careers

C Dragomir, L Popa

Constanta Maritime University, Management in Transports Department,
Mircea cel Batran 104, code 900663, Constanta, Romania

E-mail: cristinadragomir.umc@gmail.com

Abstract. In the Maritime transport sector there is a large gender gap, considering that women are estimated to represent only 2% of the total number of seafarers across globe (ILO data, 2003). While there is a real demand of seafarers on the shipping market (BIMCO/ICS statistics), women seafarers represent untapped resource for the employment needs. This paper presents the partial outcome of a holistic research study on the actions needed to motivate female join maritime seafaring careers and reduce maritime gender gap. The aim of the study is to identify the perception of various maritime stakeholders on the capacity of institutions to develop actions for attracting more women towards seafaring careers. The results of the research are obtained through literature review on ILO programs, discussions/ interviews and online survey targeting the opinion of 823 maritime stakeholders: employers, other organizations in the maritime industry, female seafarers, male seafarers, female ex-seafarers, male ex-seafarers and other. The study emphasizes the role of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) for reducing the world maritime gender gap through amendments to legal instruments as the Maritime Labour Convention or other conventions.

1. Introduction

International Labor Organization (ILO) is the oldest United Nations agency and has the purpose to promote decent work. It has 187 Member States and headquarter of the Secretariat is located in Geneva, Switzerland. The organization was created in 1919 as part of the Treaty of Versailles that ended the First World War, to reflect the relation between universal peace and social justice. After Second World War ends, the ILO became the first specialized agency of the United Nations, in 1946. The Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work from 1998 creates a set of core labor standards, committing Member States to respect and promote principles and rights in four categories, whether or not they have ratified the relevant Conventions: freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, the elimination of forced or compulsory labor, the abolition of child labor and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.



The ILO sets international labor standards, promotes rights at work and encourages decent employment opportunities, the enhancement of social protection and the strengthening of dialogue between governments, employers' and workers' representatives on work-related issues.

According to the ILO, "hundreds of millions of people suffer from discrimination in the world of work. This not only violates a most basic human right, but has wider social and economic consequences. Discrimination stifles opportunities, wasting the human talent needed for economic progress, and accentuates social tensions and inequalities." [1]

In order to promote equality and respect for diversity in the world of work, the ILO has established the Gender, Equality and Diversity Branch (GED), part of the Conditions of Work and Equality Department of the International Labor Office. GED focus on "issues related to equal opportunities and treatment for all women and men in the world of work, and eliminating discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, indigenous identity and disability", by providing "policy advice, tools, guidance and technical assistance to constituents including with respect to promoting more inclusive workplaces, and ensuring that policies, programmes and institutions are gender-responsive. [2]

Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development places decent work for all at the heart of policies for sustainable and inclusive growth and development. In 2019, the ILO celebrates its 100th anniversary and reviews its seven Centenary Initiatives on: the future of work, end to poverty, women at work, the green initiative, the standards, the enterprises and the governance.

The Women at work centenary initiative addresses four main areas, identified through research and consultations: discrimination, including stereotypes that undermine access to decent work; low pay and the absence of equal pay; lack of recognition, unequal distribution and undervaluation of care work; violence and harassment.

2. Research questions

Over the years, empowerment and women's equality in the world of work has been reinforced by the ILO tripartite constituents: governments, and workers' and employers' organizations, through international labor standards, declarations and resolutions.

The research questions of this study, targeting seven groups of various stakeholders from the maritime industry, are the following:

- How do various maritime stakeholders, coming from the distinctive parts of the maritime sector, perceive the work of the ILO in the field of women equality and empowerment?
- How much are they aware on the effectiveness of the ILO actions for maritime gender equality?
- How much are necessary for reducing the maritime gender gap the actions developed by other institutions?

3. Research methods

For this study were used the following three research methods:

1. literature review on the actions and programs developed by the International Labour Organisation for empowerment of women and reducing gender employment inequalities;
2. Face to face discussions and interviews with representatives of the ILO State Members during the third meeting of the Special Tripartite Committee established by the Governing Body in accordance with Article XIII of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 that took place at the ILO in Geneva between 23-27 April 2018;
3. Online survey applied to 7 categories of maritime stakeholders.

While results of the survey are still under analysis, in this paper are published the part of the available results. Specifically, are presented and analyzed the results related to the following survey question:

“Women represent only 2 % of the total number of seafarers across globe (ILO statistics, 2003), while there is a demand of seafarers employees on the shipping market (BIMCO/ICS statistics). What actions do you think are necessary to attract more women towards seafaring careers?”

- a. Actions developed by employers of seafarers: owners, ship management companies, crewing companies and other companies that can employ more women seafarers to work on board ship
- b. Actions of employees (Seafarers and seafarer unions)
- c. Actions developed by other companies in the maritime sector that can employ women seafarers on shore, when women decide to stop working on board ship
- d. IMO (International Maritime Organization) through amendments to maritime conventions
- e. ILO (International Labor Organization) through amendments to Maritime Labor Convention and to other labor conventions
- f. UN (United Nations) through social campaigns, conferences or scholarships
- g. NGOs (non-governmental organizations) actions, e.g. through campaigns of awareness and women seafarer empowerment
- h. Provider companies connected directly or indirectly to the maritime sector, e.g. producing gender-customized work protective equipment, tools or technological equipments used to ease or optimize the work of female seafarers on board ships
- i. Universities and MET (Maritime Education and Training) institutions, by accepting women students to maritime studies and by developing courses on gender equality and non-discrimination in maritime domain
- j. Researchers e.g. by developing studies on gender in shipping to identify suitable solutions for current issues
- k. Mass-media and social media, e.g. by advertising seafarer women as role models for other seafarers “

The question had the following three possible answers for each of the points [a-k] and a respondent could choose only one answer: “Very necessary”, “Probably necessary” or “Not necessary”.

The aim of the question was to identify the perception of the maritime stakeholders on the capacity and utility of institutions, organisations and different entities to develop actions to attract more women towards seafaring careers.

4. Results and discussion

During face to face discussions and interviews with representatives of the ILO State Members during the third meeting of the Special Tripartite Committee established by the Governing Body in accordance with Article XIII of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 that took place at the ILO in Geneva between 23-27 April 2018, there were identified the following concrete steps needed for amending MLC with requirements necessary for seafarer women work, awareness and empowerment. Also, were identified concrete and effective steps and solutions for the possible updating of Maritime Labour Convention with gender requirements needed urgently by women seafarers. So far, related to gender, the Convention contains only limited paragraphs dedicated for establishing minimum working conditions for female seafarers. The initiative of updating MLC with requirements of gender policies, if (when) considered, will really make a difference in the shipping sector and will improve very much the condition of seafarer women.

Following are presented the results on the perception of the intergovernmental external requirements, namely the Maritime Labor Convention (MLC), on actions to attract more females to seafaring careers. related to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) through amendments to Maritime Labour Convention and to other labour conventions analysis. Statistics were obtained through the online survey tools applied to a diverse group of 887 respondents from the maritime industry. In Table 1 below are presented the statistics of the following replies: “Very necessary”, “Probably necessary” or “Not necessary” for the question “*Women represent only 2 % of the total number of seafarers across globe (ILO statistics, 2003), while there is a demand of seafarers employees on the shipping market (BIMCO/ICS statistics). What actions do you think are necessary to attract more*

women towards seafaring careers? (..) [Actions of] ILO (International Labor Organization) through amendments to Maritime Labor Convention and to other labor conventions”

In Table 1 the replies were divided by 7 categories of respondents, stakeholders of the maritime sector.

Table 1. Centralized replies

Replies	Type of Respondents							Total
	1. Employers	2. Other Organizations	3. Female seafarer	4. Male seafarer	5. Ex-seafarer female	6. Ex-seafarer male	7. Other	
Very necessary	30	57	82	125	16 (34.78%)	38	19	367 (44.59%)
Probably necessary	16	34	24	102	20 (43.47%)	31	3	230 (27.94%)
Not necessary	12	16	11	83	9	29	2	162 (19.68%)
N.A. (no replies recorded)	8	9	2	38	1	4	2	64 (7.77%)
Total respondents/ category	66 (8.01%)	116 (14.09%)	119 (14.45%)	348 (42.28%)	46 (5.58%)	102 (12.39%)	26 (3.15%)	823 (100%)

A total number of 823 persons have participated to the study by replying the above question, coming from the employers and employees side: 8% employers of seafarers, 14% other organisations from the maritime industry (unions, companies in the maritime sector not employing seafarers for voyages on board ship, institutions, authorities, intergovernmental organizations, NGOs, universities or other organizations connected directly or indirectly to the transport sector); 14.45% female seafarers, nearly 3 more male seafarers than female seafarers (42.28 %), suggesting the gender gap in the maritime sector, though efforts have been made to invite as many female seafarers as possible to the survey; former seafarers currently working on shore, both females (5.58%) and males (12.39%) and other participants (3.15%).

Results indicate that most participants to the survey (367 persons, representing 44.59% of the total number of respondents) consider the actions of the ILO, through amendments to MLC or to other conventions, as being necessary to attract more women towards seafaring careers for reducing maritime gender gap. A number of 230 respondents, representing 27.94% consider ILO actions as probably necessary and a smaller size of 19.68 % of respondents consider ILO actions as not being necessary for attracting more female to seafaring careers.

An interesting observation is that a larger share of ex-seafarer female (43.47%) is considering that the ILO actions for attracting female seafarers are probably necessary, compared to a smaller share of respondents (34.78%), from the same category, for which such actions are deemed very necessary. Such statistics should be further analyzed for a larger number of ex-seafarer female respondents.

Further analysis will continue the comparison between statistics on respondents' perception related to the ILO actions for attracting more females to seafarer careers and those related to actions developed by other institutions and entities: employers of seafarers, by other companies in the maritime sector, the IMO (International Maritime Organization), the UN (United Nations), NGOs, provider companies connected directly or indirectly to the maritime sector, universities and MET, researchers and mass-media and social media.

5. Conclusions

The overall research objectives were to improve the understanding of human factors in the maritime sector, considering gender equality issues.

Though there are encouraging signs that the number of women in maritime professions is increasing, overall, shipping remains a male-dominated industry.

The International Labor Organizations, through its programs, departments and directions, develop actions for reducing overall gender gap in the world of employment. Yet, further concrete actions should be designed to reduce gender gap specifically in the maritime sector. Women seafarers represent untapped resource for the sector employment needs, but employers are still reluctant in hiring female for seafaring jobs on board cargo ships.

References

- [1] <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/equality-and-discrimination/lang--en/index.htm>
- [2] <https://www.ilo.org/gender/lang--en/index.htm>