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To cite this article: C Dragomir 2018 *J. Phys.: Conf. Ser.* **1122** 012036

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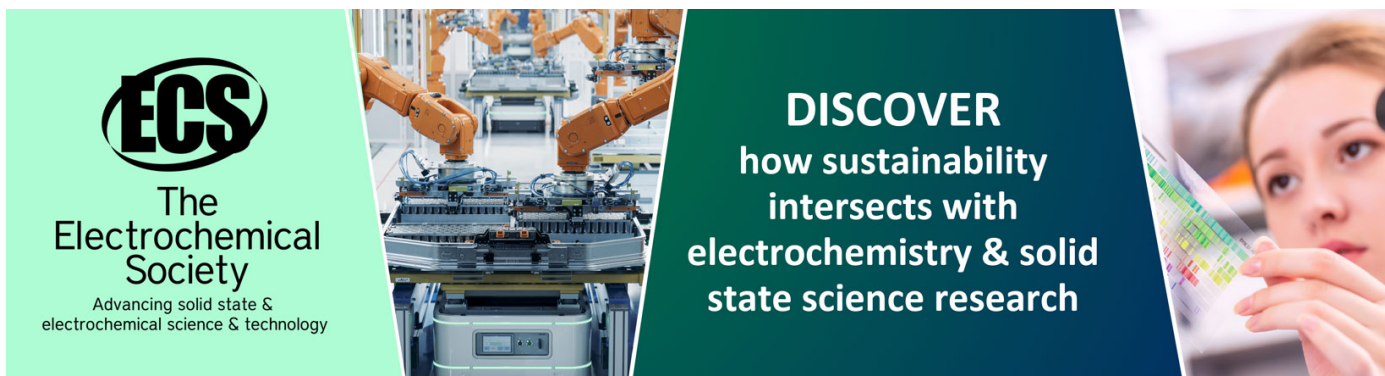
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# The role of Maritime Labour Convention in reducing maritime gender inequalities

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**Abstract.** The problem of gender equality in the maritime field represents a challenge for obtaining human progress, economic development, respect, multiculturalism awareness and recognition of human rights. In a specific area like the maritime sector, gender issues are often considered taboo subjects. This paper presents a part of the results of a holistic study developed in 2018 on the role of the Maritime Labor Convention (MLC) in solving maritime gender gap, through amendments of gender requirements designated for the maritime industry. Several suggestions of amendments are proposed to attract more females to seafarer jobs and to reduce disparities in employment in the sector. The research method consists in an online survey applied to 887 respondents, divided in 9 diverse categories of maritime stakeholders. The main conclusion shows that, among 6 gender requirements that should be amended to the MLC, the most important is related to implementing gender policies in shipping companies for non-discriminatory employment of female seafarers.

## 1. Introduction

Gender differences are on institutional and media agendas worldwide. In the case of the shipping sector, male-centered workplace culture and stereotypes influences women's choice to join or leave the industry.

According to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), gender equality is defined as "equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female" [1].

Few differences between male and female roles in the work place are defined by biology today. Historically, life at sea required physical strength making men better suited than women to work on a ship. The belief that seafaring is man's job reduced women's possibilities for entry to the maritime industry [2]. Today, technology has made other skills more important [3]. While a much more focus is placed on knowledge and assertiveness on board ship, seafaring jobs in the case of cargo vessels became more 'women-friendly'.

Maritime Labor Convention (MLC) is an international agreement, issued by the International Labor Organization, which establishes seafarers' rights to decent conditions of work. It was established in 2006 as the fourth pillar of international maritime law, next to other three international conventions essential for safe and secure shipping: the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea

(SOLAS)- an international maritime treaty setting minimum safety standards in the construction, equipment and operation of ships; the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW) containing minimum qualification standards for masters, officers and watch personnel on ships and the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, 1973 as modified by the Protocol of 1978 (MARPOL 73/78) - one of the most important international marine environmental conventions.

Introduced in 2006 and effective since 2013, MLC (No. 186) is a “single, coherent instrument embodying as far as possible all up-to-date standards of existing international maritime labor Conventions and Recommendations, as well as the fundamental principles to be found in other international labor Conventions, in particular: the Forced Labor Convention, 1930 (No. 29); the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention, 1948 (No. 87); the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98); the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100); the Abolition of Forced Labor Convention, 1957 (No. 105); the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111); the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138); the Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention, 1999 (No. 182)”. [4]

Gendering shipping is a new emerging trend of benchmark in the maritime sector, based on obvious good examples of responsible social attitude on solving the gender issues within the industry. The concept of gendering shipping defines companies who communicate the voluntary implementation of gender policies in their organizational culture actively. Gendering shipping represents a supportive response of the maritime industry, long expected, to the empowering necessities of female seafarers' communities from the world shipping sector. Good cases of employment women in seafaring are already available in the media. This is either through the involvement of deserving shipping companies (e.g. Maersk), either through solid partnerships between MET institutions and private shipping companies (e.g. training partnership program between the Royal Caribbean Cruise and the Regional Maritime University from Ghana) or through examples of good governmental initiative. In such context is worth mentioning the case of Iceland, France and Germany that have recently proposed in 2018 and implemented some initiatives of encouraging gender equality on a 50% ratio in any employment in all sectors. Also a very good benchmark example of international institutional commitment to gender equality is the fact that all institutions and agencies of the United Nations make annual reports available for public with their employment gender ratio and their commitment to reach a 50% gender equality ratio in employment until 2030.

## **2. Research background and premises**

The background for the study presented in this paper was constructed on a part of the results of “Gender Equality and Cultural Awareness in Maritime Education and Training” (GECAMET) FY2017 IAMU research, developed between May 2017 and May 2018 as grant of the International Association of Maritime Universities and the Nippon Foundation.

GECAMET had the aim to improve the understanding of human factors in the maritime sector, considering gender equality and cultural awareness issues met in the shipping industry. The overall research objectives were to improve the understanding of human factors in the maritime sector, considering gender equality and cultural awareness issues; to evaluate the economic efficiency of shipping companies with mixed crews; to evaluate the effects of external requirements on ship management policies regarding modern human resource management, gender equality and cultural awareness and to evaluate holistically the role of maritime education and training in the complex relation human factors- shipping business environment – ship management policies. The international study had the role of advancing the research in the domain of maritime human resources and gender in shipping and made an accurate overview on the shipping market, considering the role of the human resources and gender in the maritime sector. The transnational dimension of the research came from the participation of 10 researchers from 9 countries and 5 continents (North America, Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia).

The complementary team of researchers from maritime education and training (MET) institutions of Australia, Canada, Ghana, Norway, Philippines, Romania, South Korea, Spain and Vietnam have analyzed and proposed measures for gender equal practice of maritime management of human resources. The overall research objectives in GECAMET were to improve the understanding of human factors in the maritime sector considering gender equality and cultural awareness issues; to evaluate the economic efficiency of shipping companies with mixed crews; to assess the effects of external requirements on ship management policies regarding modern human resource management, gender equality and cultural awareness and to assess holistically the role of maritime education and training in the complex relation human factors- shipping business environment – ship management policies. [3]

GECAMET results indicate large discrepancies in the situation of female seafarer around the world. In some countries, access of women to maritime education is still mostly restricted, but is important to mention there were made some efforts and is expectation to improve this situation in the nearest time (e.g. Saudi Arabia). In other countries, access to maritime education is partly permitted, but sponsorship, cadetship, training programs on board ship and employment are mostly denied to females, probably due to stereotyping of the shipping companies (e.g. China, Taiwan, Korea and Japan). And in most other countries, female can successfully pursue both seafaring education and careers (e.g. Australia, India, Philippines, Ghana, Canada, US and all the European countries having MET institutions) According to the GECAMET study, the main reason of shipping companies for not employing seafarer women is that female seafarers can get involved in sexual affairs with crew members and this affects the climate on board. [5]

### 3. Research objectives

In the study presented in this paper is analyzed how exactly the Maritime Labor Convention, a legal instrument issued by the International Labor Organization, can motivate more females join seafaring on board ship and several solutions are proposed. The aim of the study is to inquire the perception of various maritime stakeholders on the role of MLC in reducing the gender gap in the maritime sector. The objective of the research is to identify what gender requirements should be included in the Maritime Labor Convention, from the perspective of nine categories of maritime stakeholders.

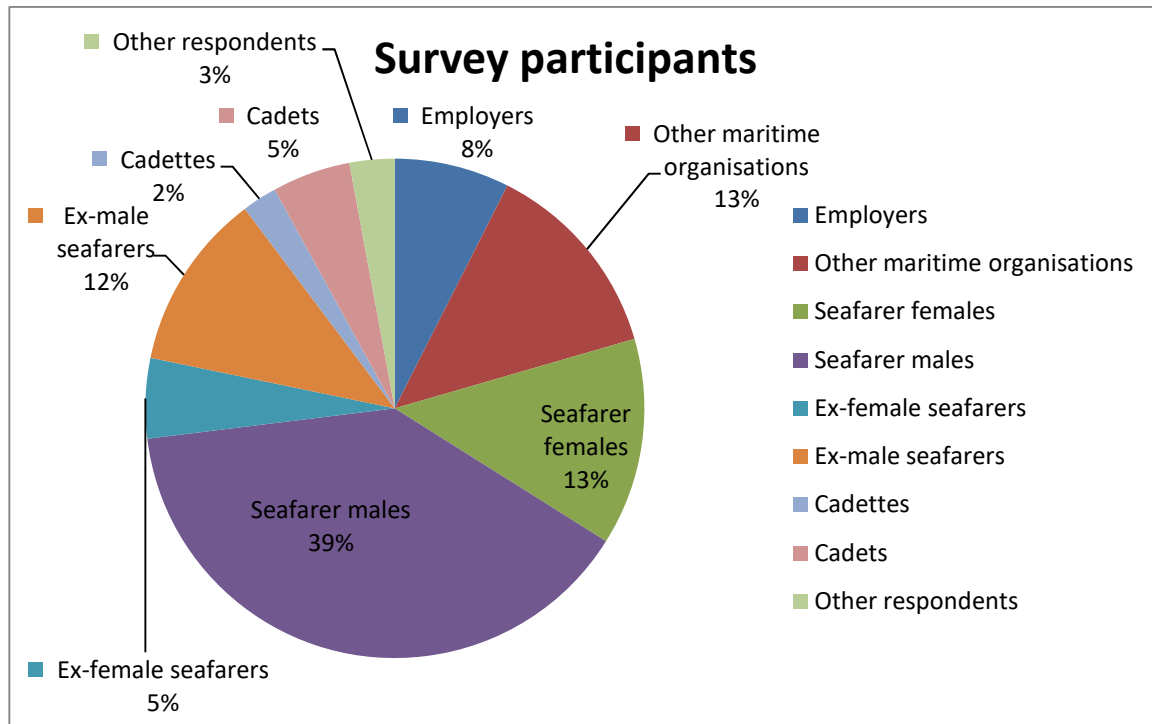
### 4. Methods used

The study has considered a holistic perspective on the maritime sector. A number of 887 online surveys were applied to 9 categories of maritime stakeholders: shipping companies- employers of seafarers, other maritime organizations not employing seafarers for voyages on board ship, seafarer females; seafarer males; ex-female seafarers, currently working on shore in the maritime sector; ex-male seafarers, currently working on shore in the maritime sector, female cadettes; male cadets and others.

As presented in Figure 1, the group of 887 respondents was made of:

- 66 employers of seafarers (owners or owners' associations, ship management companies, crewing, HR or manning personnel)
- 116 other organisations, not employing seafarers for voyages on board ship: unions, companies in the maritime sector, institutions, authorities, intergovernmental organisations, NGOs, universities or other organizations connected directly or indirectly to the transport sector
- 119 seafarer females;
- 347 seafarer males;
- 46 Ex-female seafarers, currently working on shore in the maritime sector (female having seafaring experience on board ship in the past);
- 102 Ex-male seafarers, currently working on shore in the maritime sector (male having seafaring experience on board ship in the past);
- 20 Cadettes (female MET student with any practice on board ship)
- 45 Cadets (male MET student with any practice on board ship)

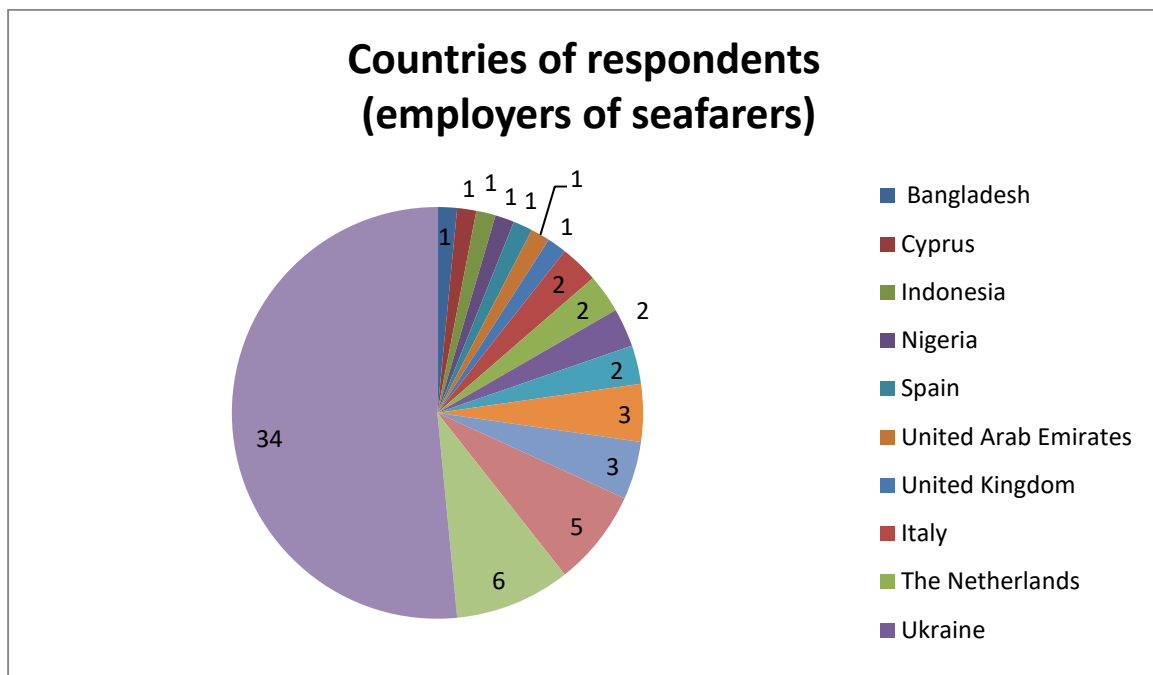
- 26 Other respondents



**Figure 1.** Maritime stakeholders -participants to the online survey (September 2018 data)

The structure of the survey participants at the study corresponds to the expected structure of the maritime stakeholders on the market. There are less seafarers employing companies compared to the number of companies or organizations in the sector that do not employ seafarers for voyages on board ship. The number of seafarers obviously exceeds the number of the employing companies. The number of male seafarers respondents exceeds by nearly 3 times the number of female respondents, although significant efforts were made to find as many female seafarer respondents to the study as possible. Similarly, the number of male cadets exceeds by 2 times the number of female cadettes, suggesting the evident discrepancy of today and tomorrow between the proportion of male and female seafarers on the market. The same situation is met when comparing the number of male ex-seafarers and female ex-seafarers: in the case of males, the number is double compared to ex female seafarers. At a first glance, such proportions confirm the evident inequality between the number of male and female employees in the maritime sector. Such observations highlight the necessity to take measures to reduce the gender gap in the sector.

In the case of the employers of seafarers: owners or owners' associations, ship management companies, crewing, HR or manning personnel, the respondents were located in diverse countries from five continents: Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe and Northern America (Figure 2). An interesting observation is that near half of the respondents refused to provide the location country of their company; however they have proceed in completing the survey and their answers were valid.



**Figure 2.** Countries of respondents for the first category of maritime stakeholders (employers)

The participation of respondents that were not assimilated to such 8 categories was recorded in the ninth section (Others).

The survey consisted in 10 questions, most of them specific for each of the categories of maritime stakeholders.

In this paper are presented the results obtained through centralizing the survey answers to one common question addressed to all categories of respondents. The question was multiple choices type, having 6 answer choices. The respondent could choose either one, either more variants of answers or none.

The question analyzed in the present study is formulated as it follows: “Maritime Labor Convention (MLC) is an international agreement issued by ILO which establishes seafarers' rights to decent conditions of work. What gender requirements do you believe should be included in the Maritime Labor Convention? (Check all that apply):

The possible choices for answers are:

- a) Gender separate spaces for toilets and showers should be available on board all vessels
- b) Gender customized work protection equipment should be available on board vessel for seafarer women
- c) Sanitary bins should be available on board vessel for disposal of feminine hygiene products
- d) Feminine hygiene products should be available in bonded stores on board ship and in ports
- e) Private and hygienic disposal method for feminine sanitary products should be available on board vessels
- f) Company policies on Gender Equality should be implemented and communicated by the employers of seafarers”

## 5. Results

In Table 1 below are the centralized results of the study, containing the six options that were checked by the respondents (first column from the left), the number of respondents that have chosen a specific option and, in brackets the percentage of respondents that have selected the specific option, calculated out of the total number of respondents, per category of maritime stakeholder (9 categories).



**Table 1.** Results of the study

<b>Gender requirement that should be included in the MLC</b>	<b>1. Employers (Out of 66 respondents)</b>	<b>2. Other organizations (Out of 116 respondents)</b>	<b>3. Seafarer female (Out of 119 respondents)</b>	<b>4. Seafarer male (Out of 347 respondents)</b>	<b>5. Ex-female seafarer (Out of 46 respondents)</b>	<b>6. Ex-male seafarer (Out of 106 respondents)</b>	<b>7. Female Cadete (Out of 20 respondents)</b>	<b>8. Male Cadet (Out of 45 respondents)</b>	<b>9. Other (Out of 26 respondents)</b>	<b>Total Respondents at the study</b> 887
Gender customized work protection equipment	36 (54%)	80 (69%)	75 (63%)	192 (55%)	23 (50%)	59 (55%)	11 (55%)	18 (40%)	17 (65%)	511 (57.6%)
Gender separate spaces for toilets and showers on board ship	34 (51%)	77 (66%)	73 (61%)	168 (48%)	31 (67%)	70 (66%)	10 (50%)	26 (57%)	19 (73%)	508 (57.2%)
Sanitary bins for hygiene products	38 (57%)	80 (69%)	68 (57%)	184 (53%)	24 (52%)	70 (66%)	11 (55%)	22 (49%)	13 (50%)	510 (57.4%)
Feminine hygiene products available on board ship and in ports	41 (62%)	82 (70%)	69 (58%)	204 (58%)	23 (50%)	73 (69%)	10 (50%)	25 (55%)	18 (69%)	545 (61.4%)
Disposal method for feminine sanitary products	33 (50%)	80 (69%)	76 (64%)	196 (56%)	30 (65%)	72 (68%)	10 (50%)	25 (55%)	17 (65%)	539 (60.7%)
Company policies on Gender Equality	50 (75%)	102 (88%)	102 (85%)	244 (70%)	38 (82%)	80 (75%)	13 (65%)	31 (69%)	18 (69%)	678 (76%)

Among the six gender requirements that can improve the work activity of female seafarers in on board ship, if included as amendments to the MLC, the most favourite option was the last one, “Company policies on Gender Equality should be implemented and communicated by the employers of seafarers”, which was selected by 678 respondents out of 887 total participants at the study, representing 76% of the total respondents. It is interesting to find that a large share of male seafarers (255 respondents, representing 70% of the total number of male respondents) have selected such option. Gender policies should promote equal employment of both male and female on board cargo ships, considering the advanced technology of today ships that promotes easy ship manoeuvring, without the need of physical force.

In the opinion of 57.2% of total respondents, the least selected option was the one related to gender separate spaces for toilets and showers on board ship, probably because the new ships, especially cruise vessels, already have such facilities on board.

## 6. Conclusions

The study indicate that, though there are encouraging signs the number of women in maritime professions is increasing, overall, shipping remains a male-dominated industry. This fact was confirmed by the structure of participants to the survey, even if efforts were made by the principal investigator to invite as many female seafarers respondents to the study as possible.

At the study have participated diverse maritime stakeholders: seafarer employing companies and other maritime companies from the worldwide maritime industry, seafarers, ex-seafarers and maritime students (cadets).

The main conclusion of the study is that the Maritime Labor Convention should be updated with gender requirements, in order to be able to reduce the gender gap in the maritime sector, by attracting more female to seafaring jobs on board ships. Such desiderate is possible by updating the Convention with the following requirements: gender customized work protection equipment on board ships (in many cases, female workers have large, heavy or uncomfortable protection equipments, e.g. harnesses); separate spaces for toilets and showers on board ship (in old ships such facilities do not exist); sanitary bins for the disposal of hygiene products; female seafarers should have access to buy feminine hygiene products that should be available on board ship and in ports stores; on board ship there should be a specific disposal method for feminine sanitary products and, the most selected requirement, employing company should create and implement policies on Gender Equality, related to equal chances of employment for female seafarers.

There has been made tremendous efforts to gain awareness on the key role of female seafarers in a sector traditionally ruled by gender bias and gender stereotypes. Positive results became more visible with each inspiring female seafarer leader encouraged by their employing companies to become role models for the next and actual generations of women seafarers. In such context is suitable to use the term “gendering shipping” to reflect the new emerging trend of benchmarking in the transports sector. Gendering shipping is the contemporary trend of benchmarking maritime companies that assign a social responsible attitude in building a gender equal organizational culture both on board ships and inside the shipping company on shore. The trend represents a supportive response of the seafaring industry, long expected, to the empowering necessities of female seafarers’ communities from the world shipping sector.

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