

# Seafarer Workforce Report

## Executive Summary

The global supply and demand for seafarers in 2026

The full report is available for purchase from [Witherbys.com](https://www.witherbys.com)



International  
Chamber of Shipping

Shaping the Future of Shipping

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info@witherbys.com

witherbys.com

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BIMCO is the world's largest international shipping association, with 2,100 members in 120 countries, representing two-thirds of the world fleet by DWT. Our global membership includes shipowners, operators, managers, brokers, and agents. BIMCO is a non-profit organisation.

## **International Chamber of Shipping (ICS)**



International  
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Shaping the Future of Shipping

The International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) is the global trade association representing national shipowners' associations from Asia, Africa, the Americas and Europe and more than 80% of the world merchant fleet. Established in 1921, ICS is concerned with all aspects of maritime affairs particularly maritime safety, environmental protection, maritime law and employment affairs. ICS enjoys consultative status with the UN International Maritime Organization (IMO) and International Labour Organization (ILO).

# Acknowledgements

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The Indian Maritime University (IMU) for studying our methodology and validating the approach as the best one possible given the challenges in getting the up-to-date numbers. This independent academic validation further reinforces the methodology used.

The Nautical Institute (NI) for providing valuable information about ship equipped with Dynamic Positioning (DP) systems, and qualifications, which authorise seafarers to operate ships equipped with DP systems.

The World Maritime University (WMU) for providing valuable information on seafarers, maritime education and training institutions across the African continent.

Finally, we wish to acknowledge Dalian Maritime University (DMU) for their valuable help in clarifying the number of Chinese seafarers and for facilitating our contacts with shipowners in China. Their expertise and strong professional networks have greatly strengthened the quality and reliability of this work.

# Executive Summary

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## Introduction

The Seafarer Workforce Report 2026 provides a comprehensive overview of the supply and demand balance for STCW-certified seafarers qualified to work on board the world merchant fleet. Seafarers are central to the safe and efficient operation of the global maritime transportation system. In an increasingly fragmented world, the essential role of the global seafarer workforce and charting its developments have never been more important.

Prepared jointly by BIMCO and ICS every five years, the report publishes estimates of:

- The balance between the global supply of qualified and competent seafarers available for service on ships trading internationally, and the industry's demand for seafarers to operate the world merchant fleet;
- The composition of the seafarer workforce that operate the world merchant fleet, including demographic information on nationality, rank/role, age profiles and gender; and
- The anticipated future growth of the world merchant fleet over the next five years and the potential implications for the global supply and demand of the seafarer workforce.



Courtesy of Zodiaco Maritime Limited

## Methodology

The Seafarer Workforce Report 2026 remains consistent with the established methodology from the previous BIMCO/ICS report, with refinements to the calculation and estimation methods to ensure a comprehensive assessment of workforce composition and the balance between supply and demand. Data collection from maritime administrations, shipping companies, MET institutions and company experts for this report has again been complemented by additional demographic datasets obtained from open registries' STCW certificate endorsement data and data available through European Maritime Safety Agency's (EMSA) STCW Information System.

## Estimated Global Seafarer Supply

**The global supply of seafarers in 2026 is estimated at 2,565,580 seafarers, of which 1,048,980 are officers and 1,516,600 are ratings.**

Since the 2021 report, the supply of STCW-certified seafarers available to the internationally trading world merchant fleet has increased, with both numbers of qualified officers and ratings continuing to grow. The number of STCW-certified officers is now estimated at 1,048,980, a percentage increase of about 22% since 2021. Meanwhile, the report estimates an 47% increase in the number of STCW-certified ratings since 2021.

According to estimates of national contributions to the current global supply of seafarers, the five countries reporting the largest numbers of seafarers in 2026 are shown below. Together, these five seafarer supply countries represent 56.25% of the global seafarer workforce supply.

### *Estimated five largest seafarer supply countries 2026*

	All Seafarers	Officers	Ratings
1	Philippines	203,179	256,968
2	India	140,718	171,218
3	China	110,893	199,107
4	Russian Federation	85,816	153,541
5	Indonesia	72,304	110,940

*Source: Country Questionnaire, 2026*

According to data collected from shipping companies, the five main nationalities of STCW-certified seafarers working within the world merchant fleet are shown below. This closely resembles the countries estimated to supply the largest proportion of the seafarer workforce.

### *Five main nationalities of STCW-certified seafarers as indicated by shipping companies 2026*

	All Seafarers	Officers	Ratings
1	Filipino	Filipino	Filipino
2	Ukrainian	Ukrainian	Indian
3	Indian	Indian	Ukrainian
4	Romanian	Romanian	Polish
5	Polish	Dutch/Greek/Russian	Brazilian/Indonesian

*Source: Company Questionnaire, 2026*

## Seafarer Workforce Demographic Data

This report continues to incorporate the reporting of the demographic composition of the global seafarer workforce, which was established as an essential component for measuring the workforce in the 2021 report. The inclusion of demographic data in this report provides a decade-long retrospective on how the demographics of seafarers are changing. This comprehensive measurement of demographic trends in the global workforce from 2015 to 2025 offers industry and policymakers a look into the sector’s macro-level trends and ensure that their recruitment and employment policies are future focused and incorporate the full diversity within the sector.

## Seafarer Workforce Gender Diversity

This report finds that the increase in supply of female seafarers is concentrated among officer positions. Only one administration reported a decline in the number of female seafarers, this decrease seen in deck ratings, which is a positive indication. A majority of respondents reported that the number of female ratings has stayed about the same.

## Seafarer Workforce Age Profiles

Following the 2021 report methodology, the 2026 report obtained additional datasets from open registries, which provides demographic information on CoCs endorsed by their flag administrations for selected nationalities. Compared with estimates from 2021, the average age of officers serving at management level has slightly decreased while the average age of operational level officers and support level ratings has coalesced around 31–40 years.

### *Average age profiles of seafarers at management, operational and support levels*

	Management Level (officers)	Operational Level (officers)	Support Level (ratings)
≤20 years	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%
21–30 years	3.7%	34.7%	21.0%
31–40 years	37.7%	43.4%	38.5%
41–50 years	32.4%	14.2%	25.0%
51–60 years	19.6%	6.0%	13.2%
≥61 years	6.4%	1.3%	2.2%

*Source: Demographic datasets obtained from open registries on CoC endorsements, 2026*

## Estimated Global Seafarer Demand

Using information from the Sea-web™ database, this report defines the world merchant fleet as comprising 85,148 ships, a percentage increase of 14% since the 2021 report.

**The global demand for STCW-certified seafarers in 2026 is estimated to stand at 2,547,790. There is a demand for approximately 1,088,080 officers and 1,459,710 ratings.**

Since the 2021 report, demand for STCW-certified seafarers has increased by 35%, representing a significant increase from the previous two reports in 2021 and 2015. The demand for officers has increased by 23.1% and the demand for ratings has increased by 46.3% compared to 2021 levels.

### *Estimated global demand for STCW-certified seafarers*

	2015	2021	2026
Officers	790,500	883,780	1,088,080
Ratings	754,500	997,540	1,459,710
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,545,000</b>	<b>1,881,320</b>	<b>2,547,790</b>

*Source: Company Questionnaire, 2026*

The three industry segments responsible for the largest percentages of the world merchant fleet demand for STCW-certified officers are general cargo ships (21.4%), bulk carriers (18.9%) and cruise ships (14.0%). While these segments also indicated the largest demand for ratings, the highest observed demand for ratings were cruise ships (22.5%), bulk carriers (18.4%) and general cargo ships (18.0%).

## Training, Recruitment and Retention

Levels and quality of available training, coupled with trends in recruitment and seafarer retention, are vital in influencing the supply-demand balance of the global seafarer workforce.

This report finds that the number of officer cadets has increased since the 2021 report, further building on the increase of officer trainees observed from 2015 to 2021. The ratio of officer cadets to qualified officers in 2026 is now 1:3.8, up from both 1:4.8 in 2021 and 1:7.6 in 2015.

When recruiting STCW-certified officers, companies reported the highest level of difficulty in hiring engineering officers and deck officers, while noting that it is easier to recruit ratings to work both on the deck and in the engine room.

Additionally, this report also finds that it is becoming easier to find officer cadet berths, building on a trend of increased berth availability first reported in the 2015 report. However, compared to officer cadets, it is even easier for rating trainees to obtain a berth, with almost two-thirds of respondents reporting that it is *easy* or *very easy* to find a berth for rating trainees.

The growth in demand for both ratings and officers is likely being driven by the expansion of the global merchant fleet. As the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions eased since 2021, the demand for ratings in particular reported a sharp increase as the sector returned to pre-COVID-19 levels. Overall, the recruitment outlook over the last five years has produced K-shaped results as the shortage of officers has widened with demand while the surplus of ratings has also increased, tempering ratings demand.

## Estimated Supply and Demand Balance 2026

**The current supply-demand situation for the global seafarer workforce is estimated at a shortage of 39,100 officers and a surplus of 56,890 ratings.**

### *Supply and demand balance estimation 2015–2026<sup>1</sup>*

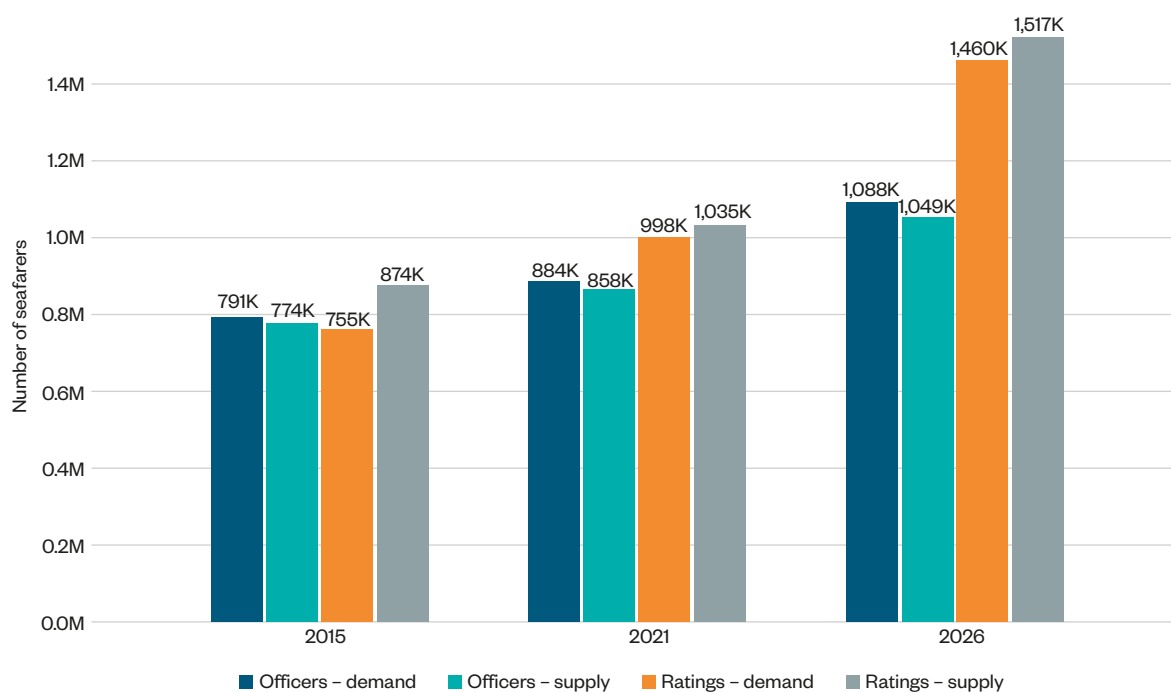
Seafarers		2015	2021	2026
Supply	Officers – supply	774,000	857,540	1,048,980
	Ratings – supply	873,500	1,035,180	1,516,600
	Total – supply	1,647,500	1,892,720	2,565,580
Demand	Officers – demand	790,500	883,780	1,088,080
	Ratings – demand	754,500	997,540	1,459,710
	Total – demand	1,545,000	1,881,320	2,547,790
Balance	<b>Officers (shortage)</b>	<b>-16,500</b>	<b>-26,240</b>	<b>-39,100</b>
	<b>Ratings (surplus)</b>	<b>119,000</b>	<b>37,640</b>	<b>56,890</b>

*Source: Seafarer Workforce Report Country Questionnaires 2026 and 2021, Manpower Report 2015*

The estimates provided in the 2026 report suggest that the current global supply of STCW-certified seafarers is approximately 2,565,580, of which around 1,048,980 are officers and 1,516,600 are ratings; the current global demand for seafarers is estimated at 2,547,790, with industry requiring 1,088,080 officers and 1,459,710 ratings for the world merchant fleet.

<sup>1</sup> The estimates for 2021 and 2026 are not directly comparable to the 2015 report or any prior due to changes in data collection methodology and definitions used in the scope of the report.

### Supply and demand balance estimations 2015–2026



Source: Manpower Report 2015; Seafarer Workforce Reports 2021 and 2026

## Estimated Future Supply and Demand for Seafarers

The report presents a baseline forecast for the future supply and demand balance, based on an average increase in the world fleet as a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of % over the next five years.

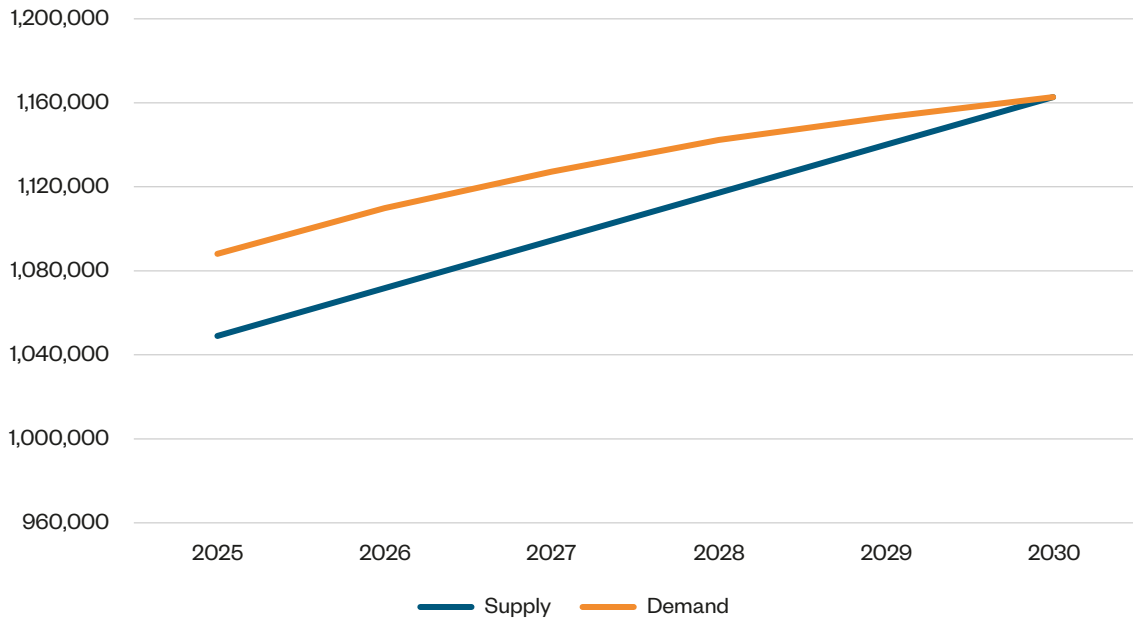
### Baseline forecast for the future demand for seafarers (2030)

	Officers	Ratings
Demand in 2030	1,162,716	1,558,973
Annual supply growth needed	22,747	8,475
Average annual % increase needed	2.0%	0.5%

Source: Seafarer Workforce Report 2026

The baseline forecast for the future demand estimates that, to meet the predicted demand for officers in 2030, an additional 22,747 officers would be needed to join the workforce each year. This is roughly a 2% increase in the number of officers every year. The report also provides a 'high' world fleet growth and 'low' world fleet growth estimate of future demand for officers and ratings in 2030, which are shown in the following figure and included in the report's detailed analysis.

*Estimated future demand for officers and supply required to meet 2030 demand (baseline scenario)*



The 2026 report indicates, in line with previous reports, that the seafarer workforce is currently experiencing a shortfall of officers and a surplus in ratings.

## Recommendations

As the predicted demand for officers will require continued high intakes of STCW-certified officers, it is essential that:

- Maritime education and training and careers at sea are promoted with information on transitioning to shore-based roles; and
- Levels of seafarer recruitment and retention are regularly and closely monitored by maritime administrations to inform the industry and policymakers of the global supply and demand situation of the seafarer workforce.