



Crew Change Crisis Showing Signs of Improvement, But Variant Risks Uncertain, Neptune Indicator Shows



The number of seafarers working on board ships beyond their contracts' expiration reached the lowest level since May, but impacts of new variants paint an uncertain picture of what lies ahead, according to the Global Maritime Forum's Neptune Declaration Crew Change Indicator.

The crew change indicator, now at its lowest since it has been published, points to an improvement of the crew change crisis situation and a stably increasing vaccination rate. Nevertheless, new challenges may arise with the spread of the new Omicron variant.

The [Neptune Declaration Crew Change Indicator](#) (NDCCI) builds on aggregated data from 10 leading ship managers, including: Anglo-Eastern, Bernhard Schulte, Columbia Shipmanagement, Fleet Management (FLEET), OSM, Synergy Marine, Thome, V.Group, Wallem, and Wilhelmsen Ship Management, which collectively have about 90,000 seafarers currently onboard ships.

Improvements in seafarer vaccination rates, eased travel restrictions, and even regional decreasing infection rates are helping to improve the crisis, which at its peak saw some 400,000 seafarers working beyond their contracts or more than 11 months without relief.

The latest NDCCI shows that the percentage of seafarers working onboard vessels beyond the expiry of their contract has decreased to 4.7% from 7.1% in the last month, and the number of seafarers onboard vessels for over 11 months has also decreased to 0.7% from 1.0%. So far, these are the lowest numbers recorded by the NDCCI since it was first published in May.

The NDCCI also points to 8.5 point increase month-over-month in seafarer vaccinations, from 41% of seafarers in last month's report to 49.5% this month as seafarers are increasingly gaining access to vaccines.

Seafarer vaccinations still pose numerous challenges, however, with vaccine hesitancy still being reported and supply challenges persisting in certain geographies. Seafarer travel still remains challenging as there are issues with international travel vaccine recognition and approval, which has even led some seafarers to take repeated vaccinations, at an unknown health risk. Access to booster vaccines is also likely to become a new challenge in the months ahead, the latest report notes.

“We are encouraged by the Indicator's December numbers, that shine some hope that the holiday season this year will be better for seafarers,” says Kasper Sogaard, Managing Director, Head of Institutional Strategy and Development, Global Maritime Forum. “The spread of the new omicron variant could however lead to a reversal of these positive trends. It is important that governments treat seafarers as key workers and continue to allow crew changes, when the proper health protocols are respected.”

The [Neptune Declaration on Seafarer Wellbeing and Crew Change](#) has been signed by more than 850 organizations who recognize the shared responsibility to resolve the crew change crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic and outlines actions that need to be taken to resolve crisis.