

A photograph of a building with a sign that says "SEAMEN'S CENTRE". The building has a large window and a logo on the wall. In the foreground, there are some blue and red benches.

The right to shore leave

Article

28 July 2025

#Crewing

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Seafarers have a global right to shore leave. This is laid down in the regulations of the [Maritime Labour Convention](#) (MLC) and it has been recognized and confirmed by governments, international trade unions, and employer organizations that access to shore is essential for the welfare and health of seafarers. Seafarers often stay on board their ships for extended periods where they live, work, and reside.

The right to **shore leave** + generally consists of two parts. Seafarers have the right to leave ashore, and seafarers have the right to access facilities and services ashore for their health and welfare. This includes, for example, access to a seaman's center. These rights apply regardless of nationality, race, color, gender, religion, political opinion, or the flag under which the ship sails.

Access to the shore is sometimes practically just a single step from the ship. Yet, accessibility is often hindered in practice. In its July 2025 research, the Port of Amsterdam rightly points out the shared responsibility of the chain in the port to facilitate shore leave, including port authorities, shipowners, terminals, and agents.

An aerial photograph of a port. A large container ship is docked on the left, with many colorful containers stacked on its deck. To the right, there are many more containers stacked on the ground, and a large parking lot with many cars.

Read the full report! (Dutch)

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The KVNR has surveyed its members' experiences with shore leave in the Netherlands. It shows that shipowners acknowledge the right and importance of shore leave. When operational reasons restrict leave, these usually relate to safety requirements or schedules. Sometimes the time in port is too short, the ship is too far from facilities, or the costs for transport to shore are too high.

A frequently mentioned obstacle is strict security rules at terminals, particularly the ISPS code (International Ship and Port Facility Security Code). This international code aims to ensure maritime security and prevent crime. While important, ISPS is sometimes applied too rigidly in practice, hindering shore leave.

The KVNR continues to highlight the importance of shore leave to all involved parties. We also notice in conversations that there is room for interpretation within the ISPS code. However, parties must be willing to think in terms of possibilities instead of limitations.

The ISPS code need not itself hinder access to the shore. It is essential that authorities and port companies recognize the importance of shore leave and actively act on it. Clear procedures and communication are crucial.

If it is clear in advance how seafarers can leave the terminal or port area, and if there are any costs and which safety regulations must be complied with, both shipowners and crew can better prepare for shore leave. Security in the port is crucial. The right to shore leave is as well. These two interests do not oppose each other but can coexist excellently.

Regulations in the MLC

Regulation 2.4 – Right to leave



Objective: Ensure that seafarers receive appropriate leave

1. Each Member requires that seafarers employed on ships flying its flag are granted annual leave with pay under appropriate conditions, in accordance with the provisions of the Code.
2. Seafarers shall be granted shore leave for their health and welfare as far as compatible with their duties on the ship.

Regulation 4.4 – Access to shore-based welfare facilities



Objective: Ensure that seafarers working on board a ship have access to shore-based facilities and

services for their health and welfare

1. Each Member shall ensure that shore-based welfare facilities, if available, are easily accessible. Each Member shall also promote the development of such welfare facilities, as mentioned in the Code, in designated ports to provide seafarers on ships in its ports access to suitable welfare facilities and services.

2. The responsibilities of each Member concerning shore facilities, such as

The results of the research in the port of Amsterdam are known. The KVNR closely follows the actions arising from this research. Accessible shore requires perseverance. The KVNR remains in dialogue to make the shore more accessible.

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