



# The maritime labour market

Article

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## The seafaring profession

Shipping is the logistical backbone of global trade and economy. From huge cargo ships loaded with goods and raw materials to installing wind farms at sea. Ninety per cent of everything comes by sea and yet, as a relatively small country, the Netherlands plays a prominent role in this. To pilot those ships safely from port to port, as a shipowner you need seafarers who, as professionals, do not shy away from challenges. After reading this article, you will know a little more about the world of seafarers.

To keep the shipping industry running, you need skilled crews on board ships and knowledgeable personnel to manage shipping from shore. The Dutch maritime sector offers many employment opportunities. So too in seafaring at shipping companies' offices and on board their ships. Increasing trade volumes and an ever larger and more varied world fleet ensure a continuous demand for qualified seafarers. At the same time, more and more new and smart on-board systems are placing higher demands on seafarers' knowledge and skills. Before telling more about the seafaring profession, we first share some key figures about seafarers on the fleet of seagoing vessels flying the Dutch flag.



## Just Start Sailing

One notable aspect is the need for more women in the industry. Although the number of seafarers residing in the Netherlands is steady, it remains relatively small. In fact, there are not enough Dutch seafarers to crew all Dutch-flagged ships. Nevertheless, having Dutch seafarers is vital to the Dutch shipping industry, as the knowledge and experience gained at sea are invaluable to shore-based organizations. For this reason, Dutch shipping companies prioritize encouraging

young people to consider maritime careers. One approach is by offering short sailing experiences for young people.

The KVNR facilitates this through the *GaTochVaren! (JustStartSailing!)* program, which provides young people seriously considering a maritime education the chance to experience life at sea for 3 to 14 days. This allows them to make a well-informed decision about their studies and future career paths.

## Training and qualifications

To pursue a career at sea, aspiring seafarers must first complete maritime training at a recognized nautical college. In the Netherlands, this training is available through six recognized MBO institutions and four recognized HBO institutions. The International Maritime Organization (IMO)  , through the STCW  Convention, sets international training standards, but industry needs heavily influence the direction of maritime education. Regular consultations between the maritime sector and educational institutions ensure that programs stay up-to-date and align with the skills required on today's innovative ships. As a result, courses and qualifications in shipping place high demands on students. Additionally, because seafaring is an inherently global profession, it is essential to standardize seafarers' knowledge and skills worldwide to meet strict international regulations and ensure safety at sea.

After completing maritime training, graduates can often transition quickly into work, frequently starting with the shipping company where they completed their apprenticeship. Once on board, they gain experience and develop further knowledge and skills, gradually progressing through the ranks. Compared to other fields in the Netherlands, maritime careers offer high employability. According to studies, the Maritime Officer program in the Netherlands ranks among the top in terms of job opportunities and salary potential.

What about earnings at sea? Given the diversity of roles on board, along with varying ranks, qualifications, and education levels, salaries can vary widely. Additionally, because seafaring is an international profession, the cost of living in a seafarer's home country also influences pay. Compensation is often adjusted to provide fair remuneration relative to local living expenses, ensuring that seafarers are paid equitably across different regions.

## How is the crew composed?

Although the Netherlands has a long-standing seafaring tradition, working in Dutch maritime shipping today is synonymous with working in an international environment. It is now uncommon to find a Dutch ship staffed entirely by Dutch crew members, which reflects the global nature of the industry. Seafarers working on Dutch ships come from a wide variety of countries, as highlighted in the overview below.

## Maritime trends contribute to crew requirements

The shipping industry is one of continuous innovation, a necessity, as ships, while timeless, must keep pace with modern demands. This calls for constant advancements in efficiency, safety, and sustainability. A key focus is making the sector more sustainable, with an ambitious target of achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Reaching this goal requires a shift to cleaner energy sources, each with unique properties that demand specialized knowledge and skills from crews to handle them safely.

Beyond sustainability, other trends are reshaping the role of seafarers, particularly the digitalization and automation of maritime operations. As more processes rely on digitally integrated and automated systems, new challenges also emerge, particularly in cybersecurity. Building awareness of cybersecurity threats is the first step, followed by equipping seafarers with the skills to both prevent cyberattacks and respond effectively if an incident occurs on board.

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#### Minimum Wage

The modernization of the Minimum Wage and Minimum Holiday Allowance Act (WML) should provide clarity for both the industry and seafarers. Social partners need to resume discussions on this, with consideration for the international nature of seafaring.

