



How to be an ally:

A guide for maritime stakeholders

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The International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN) is an international not-for-profit maritime organisation which works to improve the lives of seafarers and their families with services, resources, strategies and advocacy. We support seafarers and their families around the world with our free helpline services (SeafarerHelp and YachtCrewHelp), educational resources, relief funds and humanitarian support. We also work to drive change within the maritime sector for better health and wellbeing amongst seafarers, using data from our helplines to identify areas of need and inform new projects and research.
www.iswan.org.uk



Equimundo: Center for Masculinities and Social Justice has worked internationally and in the US since 2011 to engage men and boys as allies in gender equality, promote healthy manhood and prevent violence. We bring evidence to action through innovative research which in turn informs our programs and advocacy work across the world in local communities.
www.equimundo.org

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Introduction

Allyship

AL-igh-ship (noun):

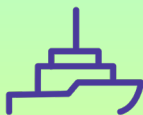
The quality or practice of helping or supporting other people who are part of a group that is treated badly or unfairly, although you are not yourself a member of this group.¹

One of the most important ways to practise allyship is just to listen.

Allyship means using your power, position, or privilege to uplift others.



ISWAN has produced a resource for seafarers on allyship to provide information and guidance on the actions that seafarers can take – both small and large – to directly support each other and promote fairness and equity at sea. This companion resource explores the steps that maritime stakeholders can take to foster a culture of allyship and thereby help to make the maritime sector a safe and inclusive space for all.



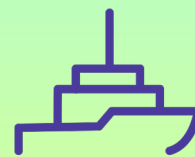
¹

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/allyship>

A sense of allyship is essential for all seafarers; however, one group for whom allyship can be particularly valuable is women seafarers who, especially on merchant vessels, regularly experience being the only woman on their vessel or team. More than any other group, women seafarers report experiencing harmful onboard behaviours including abuse, bullying, harassment, discrimination and violence (ABHDV) – including sexual violence. They are often treated as less knowledgeable or competent than they are, passed over or ignored for opportunities they have earned, and subjected to inappropriate remarks and attempts at humour that can leave them feeling excluded or uncomfortable.

When living and working at sea, where the personal and professional are closely intertwined and you are with your co-workers for weeks or months at a time, the damaging effect of those behaviours is magnified. And for men who are used to men-only crews, it can be challenging to understand or recognise that the experiences of women colleagues may be very different from their own.

This discussion of allyship among seafarers is an opportunity for the maritime sector to examine how allyship provides not just an interpersonal benefit but also a way to strengthen the sector as a whole. Many of the problems described above violate company policies, some also break the law, and all of them waste time, cost money and put the safe operation of the vessel at risk. Developing a culture of allyship where seafarers support each other and work together respectfully benefits every stakeholder in the maritime sector, and makes company policies more effective by ensuring that the culture on ships is aligned with those policies. Further, it strengthens the sector in many other areas, including the bottom line.



Benefits of a culture of allyship

You will find below some of the same information as the seafarers' guidance, as well as additional suggestions for how all stakeholders can promote allyship and create a safe, equitable and inclusive maritime sector. The benefits of a culture of allyship for the maritime sector are many and unambiguous. They include:

- ☞ **Healthy, safe and productive work environments.** Having trust and good communication with and between crew encourages safety, a strong team and meeting or exceeding performance goals.
- ☞ **A culture of allyship is a culture that is supportive.** Freely giving praise, feedback and even constructive and respectful criticism where appropriate creates a strong team that can learn from each other and grow together.
- ☞ **Diverse teams with different viewpoints are more effective teams.** When you are trying to solve difficult problems, having multiple perspectives and people willing to share those perspectives – and possible solutions – can mean the difference between success and failure.
- ☞ **Improved retention and recruitment.** Hundreds of men and women leave the maritime sector every year due to the ABHDV behaviours of some colleagues and the lack of support from others. Many more never even join the sector or stick to shore-based jobs. ABHDV and other harmful behaviours prevent vessels from having the best crew possible and lead to the loss of good seafarers.
- ☞ **Improved productivity.** Studies have shown that the productivity of all members of a team improves in the absence of violence and harassment at work. Simply put, if someone is engaged in ABHDV or other harmful behaviours they are not doing their own job and are hindering others from working as well. Other studies have examined the costs of macho displays in workplace contexts. They show that men's attempts to prove their masculinity – including through some ABHDV behaviours – interfere with the training of recruits, compromise the quality of decision-making, marginalise women workers and lead to civil and human rights violations.¹



¹ Tackling Sexual Harassment in the World of Work. Women's Empowerment Principles Guidance Note, Principle 3. Anna Falth, Carla Kraft, Diana Rusu and Inkeri von Hase. UN Women. p. 5. Unmasking Manly Men, Robin J. Ely and Debra Meyerson, HBR (July–August 2008) <https://hbr.org/2008/07/unmasking-manly-men> How Masculinity Contests Undermine Organizations, and What to Do About It. Jennifer L. Berdahl, Peter Glick, and Marianne Cooper. Harvard Business Review. November 02, 2018. <https://hbr.org/2018/11/how-masculinity-contests-undermine-organizations-and-what-to-do-about-it>

What to do:

Maritime stakeholders

- ☞ First and foremost, ensure that women in your organisation are treated like the professionals they are. Assume that they have the same skills and abilities as anyone of their rank or qualifications. Do not assume that women cannot or will not do certain work tasks. Ensure that your women employees feel welcomed and a part of the team, as you do with men employees.
- ☞ Sector leaders must set positive examples through words and actions and always uphold professional standards. Do not engage in or tolerate abuse, bullying, harassment, discrimination or violence (ABHDV) of any kind. Challenge, and do not participate in, banter, gossip, or rumours that cross a line and are unkind, harmful or exclusionary.
- ☞ Make it clear to all staff, especially supervisors, that all forms of workplace discrimination are unacceptable. Tasks should be assigned, and performance evaluated, based on clear, relevant criteria and quality of work, not on sex or gender. On-the-job training on board should be made available to everyone who needs it, both men and women.
- ☞ Every vessel owner and management company should have clear policies prohibiting ABHDV, including sexual violence. Those policies should be clearly and regularly communicated to all officers, crew and shore-based personnel, and they should be encouraged and supported not just to follow them but to report violations, just as they would any other safety or security violation.



- ☞ In addition to the policies themselves, it must be straightforward to report violations and the company must follow up and enforce the policies. Reporting mechanisms must be used as tools to solve problems and correct mistakes, not to punish those who report.
- ☞ Incorporate positive allyship culture into your performance standards for vessel leadership. Captains, senior officers and heads of department are responsible for setting the tone and culture of the vessel and ensuring that all regulations are followed correctly. They should receive support and funding to increase social interaction and group cohesion on vessels, and training on how to avoid and prevent prejudice, discrimination and unconscious bias. Their competency in these areas should factor into progression decisions.
- ☞ Invite comments, feedback and suggestions from your officers and crews, and interpret them with an open mind. Receive them not as criticism but as an additional source of information to help your vessels and your company run as smoothly as possible.

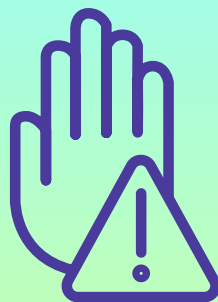


Prevention is better than cure

There is a saying in English, with versions in other cultures, that “prevention is better than cure,” meaning that taking small steps to prevent a problem is more effective and beneficial than investing much larger amounts of resource in addressing issues after they have occurred.

Men’s allyship is one form of prevention that has the potential to make life at sea safer for all seafarers which, in turn, improves numerous aspects of the vessel’s performance. As an article in the Harvard Business Review concludes: “By creating conditions that focus people on the real requirements of the job, rather than on stereotypical images believed to equate with competence, organisations can free employees to do their best work.”²

At a time when the sector faces a growing recruitment and retention crisis, fostering a culture of allyship is a proactive step that maritime stakeholders can take to ensure that seafarers feel respected, valued and have the motivation to continue their careers at sea.



² Berdahl et al, ibid

Further support

If you would like to talk to someone about any of the issues raised in this guidance, you can contact one of ISWAN's free, confidential, multilingual helplines – these are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and provide emotional, wellbeing and practical support:

SeafarerHelp

for seafarers and their families of any nationality:

www.iswan.org.uk/seafarerhelp

YachtCrewHelp

for yacht crew and their families of any nationality:

www.iswan.org.uk/yachtcrewhelp

ISWAN's Social Interaction Matters (SIM) Project

This is a long-term ISWAN initiative working to improve the health, safety and wellbeing of seafarers worldwide through the promotion of increased quality social interaction and rest time on board. Quality social interaction makes for stronger, more cohesive teams and increases opportunities to demonstrate allyship. You can find guidance on how to improve social interaction on your vessel here. More information about the SIM Project can be found at:

www.iswan.org.uk/our-work/social-interaction-matters-project/

For a list of other available support, visit the campaign website:

<https://www.iswan.org.uk/our-work/safe-at-sea-campaign>





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