



International  
Labour  
Organization

Maritime Labour Convention, 2006,  
as amended (MLC, 2006)

20th Anniversary

# ► Frequently Asked Questions



# **Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended (MLC, 2006)**

20th Anniversary

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Sixth edition, 2026  
([www.ilo.org/mlc](http://www.ilo.org/mlc))

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## Preface

This sixth edition of the ILO's Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 – Frequently Asked Questions has been prepared by the International Labour Office.

The Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, (MLC, 2006), was adopted by the 94th (Maritime) Session of the International Labour Conference (ILC) on 23 February 2006 through an overwhelming tripartite consensus. Governments, shipowners and seafarers came together to establish a comprehensive legal framework to regulate working and living conditions in one of the world's most international industries, creating a clear global baseline for decent work at sea. Twenty years later, the MLC, 2006 stands as a powerful example of social dialogue and multilateral cooperation in action.

The MLC, 2006 entered into force on 20 August 2013 and, as of 31 May 2026, has been ratified by 112 countries representing more than 96 per cent of the world gross tonnage of ships including the main labour-supplying countries of seafarers.

Since the last edition in 2019, seafarers and the shipping industry have faced a series of exceptional challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic, armed conflicts and geopolitical instability. These crises have tested the resilience of the maritime sector and have brought renewed attention to the essential role of seafarers in sustaining global trade and supply chains.

At the peak of the pandemic, while international trade by sea continued largely uninterrupted, 400,000 seafarers were stranded on board ships, unable to be repatriated or to take shore leave. Many had only limited contact with their families, and some were denied timely access to medical care ashore when it was urgently needed. Seafarers' lives, safety and well-being have also been seriously affected by conflicts and wars, including attacks on merchant vessels and situations in which thousands of seafarers have been trapped in conflict-affected areas. At the same time, the sector has witnessed a sharp increase in cases of abandonment, as well as growing concerns regarding the fair treatment, detention and criminalization of seafarers.

Against this background, the MLC, 2006 has continued to evolve through constructive social dialogue. Amendments to its Code were adopted in 2022 and 2025 to address some of the difficulties experienced by seafarers and the shipping industry. The current edition of the FAQ includes new questions on these amendments, as well as the role of the MLC, 2006 in the context of crises, conflicts and wars and the recognition of seafarers as key workers. It further refers to the elimination of violence and harassment on board, the right to social connectivity through internet access, the enhanced protection of seafarers in cases of abandonment and criminalization and specific issues related to the protection of women seafarers.

The 20th anniversary of the MLC, 2006 is both an occasion to celebrate the progress achieved and a renewed call for action towards fair and sustainable shipping – one that places seafarers' rights at the heart of maritime discussions. Looking at the future, the ILO remains committed to supporting governments, shipowners and seafarers to ensure that the MLC, 2006 delivers robust protection for the dignity and welfare of the 1.9 million seafarers worldwide.

Corinne Vargha  
Director  
International Labour Standards Department

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## How to use this FAQ

The Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 <sup>1</sup> was adopted at the 94th (Maritime) Session of the International Labour Conference (ILC) on 23 February 2006. It entered into force on 20 August 2013 and was amended in 2014, 2016, 2018, 2022 and 2025. <sup>2</sup> Its current title is The Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended (MLC, 2006). As of 31 May 2026, it has been ratified by 112 countries representing more than 96 per cent of the world gross tonnage of ships.

Since 2006, both interest and experience with the MLC, 2006 has grown. In 2012, in order to help promote greater ownership of the MLC, 2006 among constituents and to facilitate the understanding of the Convention, the International Labour Office prepared an online electronic database of answers to “Frequently Asked Questions” (FAQ), which was also prepared in the form of an ILO paper publication. It has been prepared in three languages (English, French, Spanish) in a form that is quickly searchable for readers viewing it in electronic format (either online or downloading it as a pdf document) on the ILO dedicated [website for the MLC, 2006](http://www.ilo.org/mlc) at [www.ilo.org/mlc](http://www.ilo.org/mlc). The current FAQ, dated 2026, is the sixth (revised) edition.

It is intended to be an easily accessible source of information that is regularly updated to help persons engaged in the study or application of the MLC, 2006 to find answers to questions they have about this innovative ILO Convention. When relevant, references to the comments of the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations have been added [see [A38](#)]. **It must be noted that the answers provided in the FAQ cannot in themselves be cited as authoritative legal opinions.** This is because, in the first place, the precise requirements of the Convention are those contained in the national laws or regulations or other measures adopted by each country to implement the MLC, 2006. No authoritative answer can, therefore, be given to any question without reference to the applicable national legal system. In the second place, the answers in the FAQ are intended to provide information in the form of brief explanations referring to the Convention and other reference materials rather than legal opinions as to the meaning of a requirement in the Convention or its application to an individual situation. Such opinions can be provided by the ILO to governments and shipowners’ and seafarers’ organizations, in particular, upon request and on the understanding that only the International Court of Justice is competent to give authoritative interpretations of international labour Conventions.

This FAQ is organized with questions and answers set out under three main section headings.

- **Section “A. General questions about the MLC, 2006” provides information on the ILO,** the history of the Convention and the ideas behind the Convention, as well as its current status.

<sup>1</sup> The text of the MLC, 2006 can be viewed (or downloaded in PDF form) in a number of languages on the ILO [MLC, 2006 website](http://www.ilo.org/mlc).

<sup>2</sup> The [2025 amendments](#) to the Code of the Convention are expected to enter into force on 23 December 2027.

- **Section “B. Questions about workers and ships covered by the MLC, 2006”** deals with questions of application and provisions, mainly in the Articles of the Convention, regarding definition and application, e.g. what is a ship and who is a seafarer?
- **Section “C. Questions relating to the Titles of the MLC, 2006”** sets out questions and answers relating to specific or more technical matters. It follows the order of the five Titles (Titles 1–5) of the MLC, 2006:

Title 1. Minimum requirements for seafarers to work on a ship

Title 2. Conditions of employment

Title 3. Accommodation, recreational facilities, food and catering

Title 4. Health protection, medical care, welfare and social security protection

Title 5. Compliance and enforcement

There are references in many of the questions and answers to other related questions and answers in the FAQ. For those reading the FAQ in electronic or online format these references are also electronically linked (hypertext) to the other questions in the FAQ or referenced documents on the ILO website.

## Other useful sources of information

For those seeking a more detailed understanding of the issues or context of a provision, it is important to also review the ILO’s official records and reports of the meetings leading to the adoption of Convention text. In addition, for each meeting over the five-year period 2001 to February 2006, detailed commentaries and other papers were prepared by the ILO or submitted by constituents. These may also be of assistance in understanding various provisions of the MLC, 2006 and the reasoning behind them. These documents are available on the ILO’s MLC, 2006 website ([Text and preparatory reports of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006](#)).

Subsequently, in 2008, two international tripartite meetings of experts were held in response to resolutions <sup>3</sup> adopted by the ILC when it adopted the Convention, regarding the need for more practical guidance in connection with ship inspection and certification. The resulting guidance, adopted in 2008 and updated in 2020, the [Guidelines for flag State inspections under the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended](#) and the [Guidelines for port State control officers carrying out inspections under the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended](#), while not legally binding instruments, are designed to be of practical assistance to governments in developing their national guidelines or policies, to implement, in particular the provision in Title 5 of the MLC, 2006 and also, to some degree, the provisions contained in Titles 1 to 4.

In 2011, a Joint ILO/IMO Meeting on Medical Fitness Examinations of Seafarers and Ships’ Medicine Chests revised the existing ILO/WHO Guidelines on the medical examinations of seafarers. The ILO/IMO [Guidelines on the medical examinations of seafarers](#) can be viewed or downloaded (as a pdf) on the ILO MLC, 2006 website. Other relevant

<sup>3</sup> See the ILO [MLC, 2006 website](#) under “MLC, 2006 implementation tools and publications”

ILO/IMO guidance are the *Guidelines on how to deal with seafarer abandonment cases* (adopted in 2022 at the First Meeting of the Joint ILO-IMO Tripartite Working Group to identify and address seafarers' issues and the human element), and the *Guidelines on fair treatment of seafarers detained in connection with alleged crimes* (adopted in 2024 at the Third meeting of the Joint ILO-IMO Tripartite Working Group to identify and address seafarers' issues and the human element). In September 2013 an international tripartite meeting of experts met to adopt *Guidelines on the training of ships' cooks*. In October 2014, an international tripartite meeting of experts met to adopt *Guidelines for implementing the occupational safety and health provisions of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006*.

In addition, the ILO has published guidance in several handbooks to assist with national implementation.

- *Handbook: Guidance on implementing the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 – Model National Provisions* [second impression (with modifications), 2014].
- *Handbook: Guidance on implementing the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 and Social Security for Seafarers* (2012).

The *Special Tripartite Committee* (STC) established under Article XIII of the MLC, 2006 held meetings in 2014, 2016, 2018, 2021, 2022 and 2025. It adopted five sets of amendments to the MLC, 2006, as well as resolutions that can provide guidance on the implementation of the Convention [see [A22](#)].

All of these resources are easily available on the ILO MLC, 2006 website at [www.ilo.org/mlc](http://www.ilo.org/mlc).

## A. General questions about the MLC, 2006

### A1. What is the MLC, 2006?

It is a comprehensive international labour Convention that was adopted by the International Labour Conference (ILC) of the ILO, under article 19 of its Constitution, at a maritime session in February 2006 in Geneva, Switzerland. It entered into force – that is, it became binding international law – on 20 August 2013. Its Code was amended in 2014, 2016, 2018, 2022 and 2025. The MLC, 2006 sets out seafarers' rights to decent conditions of work and helps to create conditions of fair competition for shipowners. It is intended to be globally applicable, easily understandable, readily updatable and uniformly enforced. The MLC, 2006 has been designed to become a global legal instrument that will be the “fourth pillar” of the international regulatory regime for quality shipping, complementing the key Conventions of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), such as the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, 1974, as amended (SOLAS), the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping, 1978, as amended (STCW), and the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, 73/78 (MARPOL). The MLC, 2006 contains a comprehensive set of global standards, based on those that are already found in the maritime labour instruments (Conventions and Recommendations) adopted by the ILO between 1920 and 1996. It brings all except four <sup>4</sup> of the existing maritime labour instruments (international labour standards) together in a single Convention that uses a new format, with some updating, where necessary, to reflect modern conditions and language. The Convention “consolidates” and revises the existing international law on all these matters.

Since there were many existing maritime Conventions, a question might be asked as to why a new Convention is needed. There were many different reasons for adopting the MLC, 2006.

On ships flying the flags of countries that do not exercise effective jurisdiction and control over them, as required by international law, seafarers often have to work under unacceptable conditions, to the detriment of their well-being, health and safety and the safety of the ships on which they work. Since seafarers' working lives are mainly spent outside the home country and their employers (shipowners) are also often not based in their home country, effective international standards are necessary for this sector. Of course these standards must also be implemented at a national level, particularly by governments that have a ship registry and authorize ships to fly their countries' flags (called “flag States”). This is already well recognized in connection with international standards ensuring the safety and security of ships and protecting the marine environment. It is also important to understand that there are many flag States and shipowners that take pride in providing the seafarers on their ships with decent conditions of work. These countries and shipowners

<sup>4</sup> The Seafarers' Identity Documents Convention (Revised), 2003, as amended, (No. 185), and the 1958 Convention that it revises (No. 108), the Seafarers' Pensions Convention, 1946 (No. 71), and the (outdated) Minimum Age (Trimmmers and Stokers) Convention, 1921 (No. 15) are not consolidated in the MLC, 2006. Convention No. 15 was subsequently abrogated by decision of the ILC at its 106th Session (2017).

face unfair competition in that they pay the price of being undercut by shipowners that have substandard ships and operations.

The decision by the ILO to move forward to create the MLC, 2006 was the result of a joint resolution in 2001 by the representatives of the international seafarers' and shipowners' organizations, later supported by governments. They pointed out that the shipping industry is "the world's first genuinely global industry", which "requires an international regulatory response of an appropriate kind – global standards applicable to the entire industry". The industry called on the ILO to develop "an instrument which brings together into a consolidated text as much of the existing body of ILO instruments as it proves possible to achieve" as a matter of priority "in order to improve the relevance of those standards to the needs of all the stakeholders of the maritime sector".

It was understood that the very large number of the existing maritime Conventions, many of which are very detailed, made it difficult for governments to ratify and to enforce all of the existing international labour standards. Many of the existing maritime labour Conventions were out of date and did not reflect contemporary working and living conditions on board ships. Many had low levels of ratification. In addition, there was a need to develop a more effective enforcement and compliance system that would help to eliminate substandard ships and that would work within the well-established international system for enforcement of the international standards for ship safety and security and environmental protection adopted in the framework of the IMO. The MLC, 2006 was designed to specifically address these concerns. More protection of seafarers will be achieved by the widespread ratification and effective national implementation of the MLC, 2006 by the vast majority of ILO Members active in the maritime sector.

## **A2. What are the two basic aims of the MLC, 2006?**

The basic aims of the MLC, 2006 are:

- to ensure comprehensive worldwide protection of the rights of seafarers (the Convention is sometimes called the seafarers' Bill of Rights); and
- to establish a level playing field for countries and shipowners committed to providing decent working and living conditions for seafarers, protecting them from unfair competition on the part of substandard ships.

## **A3. How will the MLC, 2006 protect more of the world's seafarers?**

In the first place, the MLC, 2006 was designed to achieve a much higher level of ratification than previous Conventions [see [A18](#)] and to also indirectly apply to all shipowners, and serve to protect seafarers working on ships operating under the flag of a country that has not ratified the Convention [see [A4](#)]. It also covers all persons working at sea (estimated at more than 1.9 million). Before the MLC, 2006, it had not been clear that all of these people, particularly, for example, those that work on board ships but are not directly involved in navigating or operating the ship, such as the many personnel that work on ships operating in the tourism and recreational sector, such as cruise ships or commercial yachts, would be considered seafarers [see [B1](#)].

The MLC, 2006 also aims to establish a continuous “compliance awareness” at every stage, from the national systems of protection up to the international system [see C5]. This starts with the individual seafarers, who – under the MLC, 2006 – have to be properly informed of their rights and of the remedies available in case of alleged non-compliance with the requirements of the Convention and whose right to make complaints, both on board ship and ashore, is recognized in the Convention. It continues with the shipowners. Those that own or operate ships of 500 gross tonnage (GT) and above, engaged in international voyages or voyages between foreign ports (ports located in a country other than the flag State of the ship), are required to develop and carry out plans for ensuring that the applicable national laws, regulations or other measures to implement the MLC, 2006 are actually being complied with. The masters of these ships are then responsible for carrying out the shipowners’ stated plans, and for keeping proper records to evidence implementation of the requirements of the Convention. As part of its updated responsibilities for the labour inspections for ships of 500 GT or above that are engaged in international voyages or voyages between foreign ports, the flag State (or a recognized organization on its behalf) reviews the shipowners’ plans and verifies and certifies that they are actually in place and being implemented. Ships are required to carry a Maritime Labour Certificate and a Declaration of Maritime Labour Compliance on board. Flag States are also expected to ensure that national laws and regulations implementing the Convention’s standards are respected on smaller ships, including those that do not go on international voyages that are not covered by the certification system. Flag States must carry out periodic quality assessments of the effectiveness of their national systems of compliance, and their reports to the ILO under article 22 of the ILO’s Constitution (see national report form) <sup>5</sup> will need to provide information on their inspection and certification systems, including on their methods of quality assessment. This general inspection system in the flag State is complemented by procedures to be followed in countries that are also or even primarily the source of the world’s supply of seafarers [see C5.3.a], which will similarly be reporting under article 22 of the ILO’s Constitution. The system is further reinforced by voluntary measures for inspections in foreign ports (called port State control (PSC)) [see C5.3.c].

#### **A4. What is meant by the concept of “no more favourable treatment”?**

Article V, paragraph 7 of the MLC, 2006 contains what is often called the “no more favourable treatment clause”. It seeks to ensure a “level playing field” under which the ships flying the flag of countries that have ratified the Convention will not be placed at a competitive disadvantage as compared with ships flying the flag of countries that have not ratified the MLC, 2006. Although it appears that Article V, paragraph 7, could conceivably apply in various situations, in practice it relates essentially to the context of port State control under Regulation 5.2.1, with respect to ships flying a foreign flag and calling at a port of a ratifying country [see C5.3.i].

#### **A5. What are the novel features in the MLC, 2006?**

There are several novel features in the MLC, 2006 as far as the ILO is concerned. The whole structure of the Convention differs from that of traditional ILO Conventions. It is

<sup>5</sup> See the ILO [MLC, 2006 website](#).

organized into three main parts: the Articles, placed at the beginning, set out the broad principles and obligations. They are followed by the more detailed Regulations and the Code of the MLC 2006, which has two parts: Part A (mandatory Standards) and Part B (non-mandatory Guidelines). The Regulations and the Code are organized in five Titles, which essentially cover the same subject matter [see A6] as the existing 36 maritime labour Conventions, one Protocol and associated Recommendations that had been adopted by the ILO between 1920 and 1996, updating them where necessary. There are a few new subjects, particularly in the area of occupational safety and health to meet contemporary concerns, such as the effects of noise and vibration on workers or other workplace risks, but in general the Convention aims at maintaining the core standards in the previous instruments at their present level, while leaving each country greater discretion in the formulation of its national laws establishing that level of protection. Amendments to the Code of the Convention [see A21] have regulated other subjects such as abandonment of seafarers, violence and harassment on board ships, the protection of seafarers' wages in cases of piracy and the right of seafarers to social connectivity. The provisions relating to flag State inspection, including the use of "recognized organizations" (ROs) builds upon the ILO Labour Inspection (Seafarers) Convention, 1996 (No. 178). The potential for inspections in foreign ports (port State control) [see C5.3.c] in Title 5 is based on existing maritime Conventions, in particular Convention No. 147 – the Merchant Shipping (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1976 – and the Conventions adopted by the IMO and the regional port State control agreements (PSC MOU).

However, the MLC, 2006 builds upon them to develop a more effective approach to these important issues, consistent with other international maritime Conventions that establish standards for quality shipping with respect to issues such as ship safety and security and protection of the marine environment. One of the most innovative aspects of the MLC, 2006 as far as ILO Conventions are concerned, is the certification of seafarers' living and working conditions on board ships.

## **A6. What are the subjects of the "Titles"?**

The Regulations of the MLC, 2006 and the Standards (Part A of the Code) and Guidelines (Part B of the Code) are integrated and organized into general areas of concern under five Titles:

Title 1. Minimum requirements for seafarers to work on a ship

Title 2. Conditions of employment

Title 3. Accommodation, recreational facilities, food and catering

Title 4. Health protection, medical care, welfare and social security protection

Title 5. Compliance and enforcement

## **A7. Does the MLC, 2006 directly apply to shipowners, ships and seafarers?**

The MLC, 2006 is an international legal instrument and does not, therefore, in principle, apply directly to shipowners, ships or seafarers. Instead, it relies on implementation by countries through their national laws or other measures [see A8]. The national law or other

measures would then apply to shipowners, seafarers and ships. The MLC, 2006 sets out the minimum standards that must be implemented by all countries that ratify it. These standards must be reflected in the national standards or requirements or other national implementing measures and are subject to the usual oversight role taken by the ILO's Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations under the ILO supervisory system <sup>6</sup> (a system established under the Constitution of the ILO) [see [A29](#)] and [see [A38](#)]

#### **A8. What measures must a country take to ensure that the MLC, 2006 is properly applied?**

Article IV, paragraph 5 of the MLC, 2006 provides that implementation of the seafarers' employment and social rights under the Convention may be achieved through national laws or regulations, through applicable collective bargaining agreements or through other measures or in practice, unless the Convention specifies otherwise by, for example, requiring countries to adopt national laws and regulations to implement certain provisions of the Convention.

Thus, each country is free to decide whether a particular MLC, 2006 provision should be contained in a law (such as a law adopted by a Parliament or a Congress) or in a regulation or other subsidiary legislation, such as administrative orders or official marine notices. Or a country may decide – in cases where the MLC, 2006 does not specifically require legislation – that certain matters could be dealt with better through other legal measures or through collective bargaining agreements. Or, perhaps, where an MLC, 2006 provision essentially relates to action to be taken by a government itself, through internal administrative instructions.

#### **A9. What is the Code of the MLC, 2006?**

The MLC, 2006 is organized into three main parts: the Articles, at the beginning of the Convention, set out the broad principles and obligations. The Articles are followed by the Regulations and the Code, which relate to the areas of seafarers' working and living conditions covered by the Convention and to inspection and compliance. The Regulations, which are written in very general terms, are complemented by the more detailed Code of the MLC, 2006. The Code has two parts: Part A (mandatory Standards) and Part B (non-mandatory Guidelines). The provisions in the Regulations and the Standards (Part A of the Code) and the Guidelines (Part B of the Code) have been vertically integrated in the Convention: in other words, they have been arranged and linked together according to their subject matter: thus each of the Titles in the MLC, 2006 [see [A6](#)] consists of various Regulations covering a particular aspect of the subject, each Regulation being followed first by the Part A Standards and then by the Part B Guidelines that relate to the same aspect. The numbering system in the Convention also reflects this structure. For example: **Title 1. Minimum requirements for seafarers to work on a ship** contains **Regulation 1.1 – Minimum Age**, and **Standard A1.1 – Minimum age** and **Guideline B1.1 – Minimum age**. **Title 2. Conditions of**

<sup>6</sup> Information about the ILO's supervisory system is available on the ILO website at [www.ilo.org/normes](http://www.ilo.org/normes) under the heading "[International Labour Standards](#)".

employment contains **Regulation 2.1 – Seafarers’ employment agreements**, **Standard A2.1 – Seafarers’ employment agreements** and **Guideline B2.1 – Seafarers’ employment agreements**.

## **A10. What is the difference between Articles, Regulations, Standards and Guidelines?**

All the provisions of the MLC, 2006 whatever their name, must be complied with by ratifying countries or, in the case of its Guidelines, be given due consideration by them when implementing the Convention [see [A12](#)]. The main difference between these provisions is that the Articles contain more general statements of principles, obligations and rights with the specific details set out in the Regulations and the Code. The Articles also contain provisions relating to the legal aspects of the operation and application of the Convention such as definitions, the status of Regulations and of Parts A and B of the Code, the procedure for amendments and entry into force and the establishment and operation of the Special Tripartite Committee under Article XIII [see [A22](#)]. The main difference between the Regulations and the Standards and Guidelines is that the Regulations are subject to a different amendment process and are normally worded in more general terms, with the details of implementation being set out in the Code (i.e., the Standards and the Guidelines).

## **A11. What is a “substantially equivalent” provision?**

The MLC, 2006 provides in Article VI, paragraphs 3 and 4, that in some circumstances a national provision implementing the rights and principles of the Convention in a manner different from that set out in Part A (Standards) of the Code will be considered as “substantially equivalent” if the Member concerned “satisfies itself” that the relevant legislation or other implementing measure “is conducive to the full achievement of the general object and purpose of the provision or provisions of Part A of the Code concerned” and “gives effect to the provision or provisions of Part A of the Code concerned”. The Member’s obligation is principally to “satisfy itself”, which nevertheless does not imply total autonomy, since it is incumbent on the authorities responsible for monitoring implementation at the national and international levels to determine not only whether the necessary procedure of “satisfying themselves” has been carried out, but also whether it has been carried out in good faith in such a way as to ensure that the objective of implementing the principles and rights set out in the Regulations is adequately achieved in some way other than that indicated in Part A of the Code. It is in this context that ratifying Members should assess their national provisions from the point of view of substantial equivalence, identifying the general object and purpose of the MLC, 2006 Code, Part A provision concerned (in accordance with paragraph 4(a) of Article VI) and determining whether or not the proposed national provision could, in good faith, be considered as giving effect to the Part A provision (as required by paragraph 4(b)). The Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations has underlined that the concept of substantial equivalence is not a matter for administrative discretion. Substantial equivalent measures should therefore be decided by a Member on a horizontal basis and not on an ad hoc basis, in response to a particular request from a shipowner. Any substantial equivalent measures that have been adopted must be stated in Part I of the Declaration of Maritime Labour Compliance that is carried on board ships that have been certified [see [C5.2.3.e](#)].

Substantial equivalence does not apply to the provisions on compliance and enforcement contained in Title 5 [see [C5.1.b](#)].

## **A12. What is the status of the Guidelines in Part B of the Code?**

Countries that ratify the MLC, 2006 must adopt national laws or take other measures to ensure that the principles and rights contained in the Regulations are implemented in the manner set out by the Standards set out in Part A of the Code (or in a substantially equivalent manner) [see [A11](#)]. When deciding on the details of their laws or other implementing measures [see [A8](#)], the ratifying countries must give due consideration to following the Guidelines set out in Part B of the Code. Provided that they have given this due consideration, ratifying countries may implement the mandatory provisions in a different way, more suited to their national circumstances. In this case, the government concerned may be asked to explain to the ILO supervisory bodies why it has decided not to follow the guidance in Part B of the Code.<sup>7</sup> Implementation of Part B of the Code is not verified by authorized officers during PSC inspection; however, it may be reviewed by the ILO's supervisory system<sup>8</sup> [see [A38](#)].

## **A13. What was the reason for having the Part B Guidelines?**

The special status given to Part B (the Guidelines) of the Code [see [A12](#)] is based on the idea of firmness on principles and rights combined with flexibility in the way those principles and rights are implemented. Without this innovation, the MLC, 2006 could never aspire to wide-scale ratification: many of the provisions of existing maritime labour Conventions, which relate to the method of implementing basic seafarers' rights (rather than to the content of those rights), were transferred to the non-mandatory Part B Guidelines of the Code as their placement in the mandatory Regulations and Part A (Standards) could have resulted in clear obstacles to ratification.

## **A14. What is the status of the ILO Guidelines for flag State inspections and the ILO Guidelines for port State control officers?**

The two sets of ILO Guidelines, initially adopted in 2008 and updated in 2020 – the *Guidelines for flag State inspections under the MLC, 2006, as amended*, and the *Guidelines for port State control officers carrying out inspections under the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended*,<sup>9</sup> provide authoritative guidance since they were prepared by international tripartite meetings of experts to assist countries to implement Title 5 of the MLC, 2006. But they do not have any special legal status. They should not be confused with the Guidelines found in Part B of the Code of the MLC, 2006, which must be given due consideration by ratifying countries [see [A12](#)].

International guidelines, as well as the related national flag State inspection and certification systems and national guidelines for flag State inspectors, are important aspects

<sup>7</sup> Information about the ILO's supervisory system is available on the ILO website at [www.ilo.org/normes](http://www.ilo.org/normes) under the heading "International Labour Standards".

<sup>8</sup> See for example the direct requests adopted by the Committee of Experts regarding [Croatia \(2021\)](#), and [Liberia \(2025\)](#).

<sup>9</sup> See the ILO [MLC, 2006 website](#).

of national implementation and essential to ensuring widespread harmonized implementation of the MLC, 2006.

### **A15. Does the MLC, 2006 require countries to comply with the ILO’s “fundamental Conventions”?**

The ILO’s Governing Body has identified ten international labour Conventions as “fundamental”, covering subjects that are considered as fundamental principles and rights at work: freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining; the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour; the effective abolition of child labour; the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation, and a safe and healthy working environment.<sup>10</sup> These Conventions are listed in the Preamble to the MLC, 2006.<sup>11</sup> Countries that ratify the MLC, 2006 are required, under Article III,<sup>12</sup> to satisfy themselves that the provisions of their national legislation respect those fundamental rights, in the context of the MLC, 2006. The national report to the ILO supervisory system requires Members to report on this matter. However, Article III does not directly require implementation of the provisions in these other ILO Conventions or that Members report, in connection with the MLC, 2006, to the ILO on the measures they have taken to give effect to the fundamental Conventions. This is because countries that have ratified the fundamental Conventions are already obliged to report to the ILO supervisory system on the measures that they have taken to give effect to their obligations under those Conventions in all the sectors of work, including the maritime sector. That being said, countries which have not ratified one or more of the fundamental Conventions will have to report to the ILO supervisory mechanisms indicating how they have satisfied themselves that the provisions of their national legislation respect the relevant fundamental rights, in the context of the MLC, 2006.

### **A16. How does the MLC, 2006 make it easier for countries to ratify it and to implement its requirements?**

Both the [Constitution](#) of the ILO and many ILO Conventions seek to take account of national circumstances and provide for some flexibility in the application of Conventions, with a view to gradually improving protection of workers, by taking into account the specific situation in some sectors and the diversity of national circumstances. Flexibility is usually based on principles of tripartism, transparency and accountability. When flexibility with

<sup>10</sup> In 2022, the [ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work](#) (1998) was amended to include a safe and healthy working environment in the ILO’s framework of fundamental principles and rights at work. For the purpose of introducing the resulting consequential amendments in the text of existing ILO Conventions, the [Safe and Healthy Working Environment \(Consequential Amendments\) Convention, 2023 \(No. 191\)](#) was adopted.

<sup>11</sup> [Convention No. 191](#) provides that the words “the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155)” and “the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187)” shall be added in chronological order in the third preambular paragraph of the MLC, 2006. Such amendments will be reflected in the text of the MLC, 2006 when Convention No. 191 is ratified by at least 30 Members with a total share in the world gross tonnage of ships of at least 33 per cent.

<sup>12</sup> [Convention No. 191](#) provides that the words “a safe and healthy working environment” shall be added as a new subparagraph (e) of Article III of the MLC, 2006. Such amendments will be reflected in the text of the MLC, 2006 when Convention No. 191 is ratified by at least 30 Members with a total share in the world gross tonnage of ships of at least 33 per cent.

respect to the implementation of a Convention is exercised by a government it usually involves consultation with the workers' and employers' organizations concerned, with any determinations that are made reported to the ILO by the government concerned. This is seen as a necessary and important approach to ensuring that all countries, irrespective of national circumstances, can engage with the international legal system and that international obligations are respected and implemented, to the extent possible, while also making efforts to improve conditions. This is particularly important for an international industry such as shipping. The MLC, 2006 generally follows this approach as well as also providing for additional flexibility, relevant to the sector, at a national level.

The Convention seeks to be "firm on rights and flexible on implementation". The MLC, 2006 sets out the basic rights of seafarers to decent work in firm statements, but leaves a large measure of flexibility to ratifying countries as to how they will implement these standards for decent work in their national laws.

The areas of flexibility in the MLC, 2006 include the following:

- unless specified otherwise in the Convention, national implementation may be achieved in a variety of different ways, and not necessarily through legislation [see [A8](#)];
- many of the mandatory technical requirements in previous maritime Conventions, which had created difficulties for some governments interested in ratifying, have been placed in Part B of the Code of the MLC, 2006 [see [A12](#)];
- in certain circumstances, implementation of the mandatory Standards in Part A of the Code (other than Title 5) may also be achieved through measures which are "substantially equivalent" [see [A11](#)];
- in certain circumstances, the application of details in the Code may be relaxed for some smaller ships – less than 200 GT that do not go on international voyages [see [B7](#)];
- while all ships covered by the Convention must be inspected for compliance with its requirements [see [C5.2.3.a](#)], flag State administrations are not required to certify ships less than 500 GT unless the shipowner concerned requests certification [see [C5.2.3.d](#)];
- the MLC, 2006 expressly recognizes that some flag States may make use of recognized organizations such as classification societies to carry out aspects of the ship inspection and certification system on their behalf [see [C5.2.1.b](#)];
- provisions affecting ship construction and equipment (Title 3) do not apply to ships constructed before the Convention comes into force for the flag State country concerned, unless it decides otherwise [see [C3.1.a](#)]. Smaller ships (less than 200 GT) may be exempted from specific accommodation requirements [see [C3.1.k](#)];
- provision is made (Article VII) for the situation of countries that may not have national organizations of shipowners or seafarers to consult when exercising flexibility under the MLC, 2006 [see [A22](#)];
- in connection with social security coverage under Regulation 4.5, provision is made for national circumstances to be taken into account and for bilateral, multilateral and other arrangements [see [C4.5.b](#)].

### **A17. When did the MLC, 2006 become applicable?**

The MLC, 2006 entered into force on 20 August 2013, 12 months after the date on which there were registered ratifications by at least 30 countries with a total share in the world gross tonnage of ships of at least 33 per cent. This requirement for initial entry into force is set out in Article VIII, paragraph 3 of the MLC, 2006. It meant that as of 20 August 2013 (when the requirements were met) the MLC, 2006 was binding as a matter of international law for those 30 countries. For any country that ratified after 20 August 2012, as set out in Article VIII, paragraph 4, the Convention enters into force for that country 12 months after the date the country's ratification is registered.

As of 31 May 2026, the MLC, 2006 has been ratified by 112 <sup>13</sup> countries, representing more than 96 per cent of the world gross tonnage of ships, with more ratifications expected in the future.

### **A18. Why is the MLC, 2006 likely to achieve the aim of near universal ratification?**

Aside from the already high number of ratifications, there are a number of indicators suggesting that near universal ratification will be achieved. One indicator is the unprecedented vote in favour of the Convention by the ILC in 2006. It was adopted by the ILC by a record vote of 314 in favour and none against (two countries (four votes) abstained for reasons unrelated to the substance of the Convention), after detailed review by over 1,000 participants drawn from 106 countries. This almost unprecedented level of support reflects the lengthy international tripartite consultation that took place between 2001 and 2006 and the unswerving support that had been shown by the governments and workers and employers who worked together since 2001 to develop the Convention text. The MLC, 2006 was designed to achieve near universal ratification because of its blend of firmness on rights and flexibility with respect to approaches to implementation of the more technical requirements and because of the advantages it gives to the ships of countries that ratify it. Finally, the ships of ratifying countries that provide decent working conditions for their seafarers have an advantage as they will be protected against unfair competition from substandard ships [see A4]. By benefiting from a system of certification they will, henceforth, avoid or reduce the likelihood of lengthy delays related to inspections in foreign ports. As of 31 May 2026, the MLC, 2006 has been ratified by 112 <sup>14</sup> countries representing more than 96 per cent of the world gross tonnage of ships [see A17].

### **A19. What will happen to the maritime labour Conventions adopted before 2006?**

The 36 Conventions and one Protocol revised by the MLC, 2006, have now been classified as outdated by the Governing Body and are closed to further ratification. Such Conventions have been gradually phased out as they are denounced following the entry into

<sup>13</sup> A list of countries that have ratified and the date of entry into force for each country, as well as other national information is available on the ILO [NORMLEX database](#).

<sup>14</sup> *idem*.

force of the MLC, 2006 for the country concerned. Until 2030, countries that do not ratify the MLC, 2006 will remain bound by the existing Conventions they have ratified and which are still in force. All those Conventions, except one, are expected to be abrogated by the International Labour Conference by 2030.<sup>15</sup> The entry into force of the MLC, 2006 does not affect the remaining three maritime Conventions that are not consolidated in the MLC, 2006 [see [A20](#)]. The ILO maritime Conventions dealing with fishing and with dockworkers are also not affected by the MLC, 2006. To find out which ILO Conventions a country has ratified, check the ILO [NORMLEX database](#).

## **A20. Which ILO Conventions are consolidated in the MLC, 2006?**

The 36 Conventions and one Protocol that are revised by and consolidated in the MLC, 2006 are listed in its Article X. This list consists of all the previous maritime Conventions for seafarers, adopted since 1920, except the Seafarers' Identity Documents Convention (Revised), 2003, as amended and the 1958 Convention that it revises ([No. 108](#)), as well as the Seafarers' Pensions Convention, 1946 ([No. 71](#)), and the (outdated) Minimum Age (Trimmers and Stokers) Convention, 1921 ([No. 15](#)).<sup>16</sup> The ILO Conventions dealing with fishing and with dockworkers are also not affected by the MLC, 2006.

## **A21. How can the MLC, 2006 be updated?**

The MLC, 2006 has two types of amendment procedures: one under Article XIV for the Convention as a whole, and one under Article XV for amendments only to the Code of the MLC, 2006. The procedure foreseen in Article XIV, which requires an express ratification of an amendment, is close to the existing ILO procedure for revising Conventions. The part of the Convention which may need updating from time to time, namely the Code [see [A9](#)] relating to the technical and detailed implementation of the basic obligations under the Convention, can be amended under an accelerated procedure ("tacit acceptance") provided for in Article XV. This procedure, which is based to a certain extent on a procedure already well established in another agency of the United Nations, the IMO, enables changes to the Code to come into effect, for all or almost all ratifying countries, within three to four years from when they are proposed. Proposals for amendments to the Code can be submitted by the seafarers' or the shipowners' groups or by at least five ratifying Members. Amendments are adopted by the Special Tripartite Committee of the MLC, 2006 and approved by at least two thirds of the delegates present at the following International Labour Conference. A ratifying Member will not be bound by an amendment to the Code entering into effect in accordance with Article XV of the Convention, if it expresses formal disagreement within a set period.<sup>17</sup> A ratifying Member may, without expressing formal disagreement, indicate

<sup>15</sup> As recommended by the [Special Tripartite Committee \(STC\)](#) of the MLC, 2006 during its meetings in 2018 and 2021, and as endorsed by the ILO Governing Body. The situation of Convention No. 147 will be reassessed at the sixth meeting of the STC. More information on the status of the maritime Conventions reviewed by the STC may be found on the ILO [NORMLEX database](#). See also the [reports](#) submitted to the 2020 session of the International Labour Conference.

<sup>16</sup> Convention No. 15 was abrogated by decision of the International Labour Conference at its 106th Session.

<sup>17</sup> The Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations adopted a [general observation in 2016](#), which provides further information on the entry into force of amendments to the Code of the MLC, 2006

within the agreed period that it will only be bound by an amendment after a subsequent express notification of its acceptance.

Five sets of amendments to the Code of the MLC, 2006 have been adopted so far. Amendments to the Code were adopted in 2014 to address the issues of abandonment of seafarers [see [C2.5.2.a](#)] and shipowners' liability for death or long-term disability of seafarers [see [C4.2.2.a](#)]. They entered into force on 18 January 2017. In 2016, amendments to the Code were adopted on the issues of elimination of shipboard harassment and bullying [see [C4.3.e](#)] and the extension of the validity of Maritime Labour Certificates in a very specific case. They entered into force on 8 January 2019. In 2018, amendments to the Code were adopted to address the issue of seafarers' wages and entitlement during captivity as a result of acts of piracy or armed robbery against ships [see [C2.2.d](#)]. They entered into force on 26 December 2020. In 2022, amendments to the Code were adopted to address, inter alia, the issues of the seafarers' right to information on the system of protection of recruitment and placement agencies to compensate seafarers for monetary loss required under Regulation 1.4; the prompt repatriation of abandoned seafarers, as well as of the body or ashes of seafarers who have died on board; the right of seafarers to social connectivity, the gratuity and quality of drinking water on board, the provision of medical care ashore to seafarers in need of immediate medical care and the creation of a global register of all deaths at sea. They entered into force on 23 December 2024. In 2025, amendments to the Code were adopted in relation, amongst others, to the protection of seafarers against violence and harassment on board, including sexual harassment, bullying and sexual assault; the designation of seafarers as key workers; the effective exercise of seafarers' right to shore leave, and the fair treatment of seafarers detained in connection with alleged crimes. The [2025 amendments](#) are expected to enter into force on 23 December 2027.

## A22. What is the Special Tripartite Committee?

Article XIII of the MLC, 2006 provides for the establishment of a [Special Tripartite Committee](#) (STC) by the ILO's Governing Body.<sup>18</sup> The mandate of this Committee is to "keep the working of this Convention under continuous review". Under the Convention the Committee consists of two representatives nominated by the government of each country that has ratified the Convention, and the representatives of shipowners and seafarers appointed by the Governing Body. The governments of countries which have not ratified the MLC, 2006 can participate in the meetings of the STC but do not have the right to vote. The Committee has an important role with respect to amendments to the Code [see [A9](#)]. If difficulties are identified in the working of the Convention, or if the Convention needs to be updated, the Special Tripartite Committee, in accordance with Article XV of the Convention, has the power to adopt amendments [see [A21](#)]. The Committee also plays an important consultative role under Article VII for countries that do not have shipowners' or seafarers' organizations to consult when implementing the MLC, 2006.

adopted under the simplified procedure of Article XV of the Convention. It provides information on the situation of States which have ratified the MLC, 2006 between the date of approval of an amendment and its entry into force.

<sup>18</sup> The ILO Governing Body adopted the [Standing Orders \(as amended in 2025\)](#), the procedural rules that apply to operation of this Committee.

### **A23. What is the status of the Preamble and the Explanatory note in the MLC, 2006?**

The [Preamble](#) to the MLC, 2006 like preambles in other international instruments provides information regarding the aspiration and intentions of the drafters of the Convention; however, the Preamble does not contain any binding legal obligations. The [Explanatory note to the Regulations and Code of the Maritime Labour Convention](#), which is placed after the Articles, is also not binding but is there, as its title suggests, to provide an explanation that will help countries to better understand the relationship between the differing parts of the Convention and the nature of the obligations under each part of the MLC, 2006.

### **A24. What is meant by the term “Member”?**

The MLC, 2006 like other ILO legal instruments uses the terms “Member” or “each Member” throughout the MLC, 2006. These terms are used by the ILO to refer to countries that are Members of the ILO. In the context of this Convention, a reference to “Member” or “Each Member” should be understood as referring to countries that have ratified the Convention, unless the Convention clearly refers to “any Member of the Organization” (as in paragraph 2 of Article XV, for example).

### **A25. Who is the competent authority?**

The MLC, 2006 defines the term “competent authority” in Article II, paragraph 1(a), as “the minister, government department or other authority having power to issue and enforce regulations, orders or other instructions having the force of law in respect of the subject matter of the provision concerned”. It is a term used to indicate the department(s) of a government with responsibility for implementing the MLC, 2006. Practices vary between countries and often more than one department or agency (e.g. labour or maritime or social security) is involved in implementing aspects of the MLC, 2006 in a country and are therefore the “competent authority” for the particular issue. Information about the national competent authority for countries that have ratified [see [A26](#)] the MLC, 2006 along with other national information can be found on the ILO NORMLEX database ([Information on implementation of MLC by country](#)).

### **A26. Where would I get a list of countries that have ratified the MLC, 2006?**

A list of countries that have ratified, and the date of entry into force for each country, as well as other national information is available on the ILO [NORMLEX](#) database. Other national information (click on the country name) for countries that have ratified is available on the ILO NORMLEX database ([Information on implementation of MLC by country](#)).

### **A27. Why are some countries listed on the ILO MLC, 2006 website as ratifying but the Convention is not in force for them?**

The Convention enters into force for each country 12 months after the date on which the country has registered ratification. Until then, the MLC, 2006 appears as ratified but not in force.

## **A28. Where can I get the contact information for the national competent authority responsible for the MLC, 2006?**

Information about the national competent authority [see A25] for countries that have ratified [see A26] the MLC, 2006 along with other national information can be found on the ILO NORMLEX database ([Information on implementation of MLC by country](#)).

## **A29. What is the role of the ILO in implementing the MLC, 2006?**

The ILO is an international organization that was created in 1919. It was the first specialized agency to be designated by the United Nations. Its Members are countries that have joined the Organization and its work is carried out through the International Labour Office. As an international organization, the ILO does not implement international law or directly regulate workers or employers (or shipowners, ships or seafarers) [see A7]. Its role is to facilitate the development of international standards and to promote and assist with implementation by its Members at the national level. Under the MLC, 2006 the Director-General of the ILO has some specific responsibilities related to the receipt and communication of information required by the Convention to be provided to ILO Members. The ILO also undertakes a review of its Members' national implementation of ratified Conventions through the usual oversight role taken by the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations under the ILO supervisory system <sup>19</sup> (a system established under the Constitution of the ILO). The outcome of the regular reviews undertaken by this Committee in relation to the MLC, 2006 is available in the ILO [NORMLEX database](#). In the most serious situations, such as certain cases of abandonment [see C2.5.2.b] or criminalization of seafarers, governments, seafarers' or shipowners' organizations might request the urgent intervention of the ILO Director-General. As a result, the ILO contacts the governments concerned and encourages them to adopt the necessary measures to solve the situation without delay [see A34].

## **A30. Is the MLC, 2006 relevant for owners or operators of ships registered in a country that has not ratified the MLC, 2006?**

The MLC, 2006 requirements do not directly apply to shipowners or to ships flying the flag of countries that have not ratified the Convention. However, Article V, paragraph 7 of the MLC, 2006 contains what is often called the "no more favourable treatment clause" [see A4]. It seeks to ensure a "level playing field" under which the ships flying the flag of countries that have ratified the Convention will not be placed at a competitive disadvantage as compared with ships flying the flag of countries that have not ratified the MLC, 2006. Although it appears that Article V, paragraph 7, could conceivably apply in various situations, in practice it relates essentially to the context of PSC under Regulation 5.2.1, with respect to ships flying a foreign flag and calling at a port of a ratifying country [see C5.3].

<sup>19</sup> Information about the ILO's supervisory system is available on the ILO website at: [www.ilo.org/normes](http://www.ilo.org/normes).

### **A31. Is the MLC, 2006 relevant to seafarers based in countries that have not ratified the MLC, 2006?**

With the global nature of the maritime industry and seafaring, many seafarers work on board ships flying the flag of a country other than country in which they ordinarily reside. The MLC, 2006 standards on board ships as implemented nationally would also apply to protect them. If seafarers are working on a ship that is flying the flag of a country that has not ratified the MLC, 2006 then under Article V, paragraph 7 of the MLC, 2006 the “no more favourable treatment clause” [see [A4](#)] would apply. It seeks to ensure a “level playing field” under which the ships flying the flag of countries that have ratified the Convention will not be placed at a competitive disadvantage as compared with ships flying the flag of countries that have not ratified the MLC, 2006. Although it appears that Article V, paragraph 7, could conceivably apply in various situations, in practice it relates essentially to the context of port State control under Regulation 5.2.1, with respect to ships flying a foreign flag and calling at a port of a ratifying country [see [C5.3](#)]. This means that working and living conditions on these ships may be subject to inspection by port States.

Under Regulation 1.4, paragraph 3, and Standard A1.4, paragraph 9 of the MLC, 2006 shipowners who use seafarer recruitment and placement services that are based in countries or territories in which the Convention does not apply must ensure, as far as practicable, that those services meet the requirements of Standard A1.4 [see [C1.4.f](#)] Useful guidance is provided in the section on Regulation 1.4 in Chapter 3 of the *Guidelines for flag State inspections under the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended*.

### **A32. Where can I get training on MLC, 2006 inspections?**

Training on the MLC, 2006 inspection is often available at the national level through either the competent authority or private organizations. The ILO, through its International Training Centre in Turin, Italy (ITCILO), also provides various training courses and workshops on the MLC, 2006 including training of trainers of maritime labour inspectors, legal implementation and other specialized workshops.

This programme of workshops and training activities is aimed at further strengthening the capacity of all interested parties in the promotion and application of the MLC, 2006. Information on the ITCILO maritime labour courses is available on the ILO MLC, 2006 website under “[Trainings activities on the MLC, 2006](#)”.<sup>20</sup>

### **A33. Can the ILO certify me to be an inspector for the MLC, 2006 for ports and/or flag States?**

No. The ILO provides some training and workshops through its International Training Centre in Turin with respect to the MLC, 2006 including certification of people that could be national or regional level trainers of inspectors on the MLC, 2006 [see [A32](#)]. However, the qualifications to be a national flag State inspector or a PSC inspector/authorized officer are

<sup>20</sup> See also: <https://www.itcilo.org/topics/maritime-labour>.

matters that are dealt with by ratifying countries. The competent authority for the MLC, 2006 in the relevant country should be contacted for this information [see [A25](#)] and [[A28](#)].

#### **A34. Can the ILO help me to recover unpaid wages or deal with other problems I am experiencing on board a ship?**

The ILO may provide some general information with respect to its Conventions, such as the MLC, 2006, including contact information for the flag State competent authority that would have responsibility to address these issues if the flag State has ratified the MLC, 2006 [see [A25](#) and [A28](#)]. However, as an international organization, the ILO does not implement international law or directly regulate workers or employers (or shipowners, ships or seafarers) [see [A7](#)]. In the most serious situations, such as certain cases of abandonment of seafarers [see [C2.5.2.b](#)] or criminalization of seafarers, seafarers' or shipowners' organizations might request the urgent intervention of the ILO Director-General. As a result, the ILO contacts the governments concerned and encourages them to adopt the necessary measures to solve the situation without delay. The ILO does not have the competence to deal with individual complaints.

#### **A35. Does the ILO have a database of national laws or regulations or other measures implementing the MLC, 2006?**

A list of countries that have ratified and the date of entry into force for each country is available on the ILO [NORMLEX database](#). Other national information including, when filed with the ILO, the relevant national legislation or other measures (for countries that have ratified) is available in the NORMLEX database ([Information on implementation of MLC by country](#)).

#### **A36. I believe that working and living conditions on board a ship are not good; can the ILO help me?**

The ILO, as an international organization, cannot directly respond to individual situations. However, it may be able to provide some general information with respect to ILO Conventions, such as the MLC, 2006, including contact information for the flag State's competent authority that would have responsibility to address these issues, if the flag State has ratified the MLC, 2006 [see [A25](#) and [A28](#)]. Workers' and employers' organizations (including seafarers' and shipowners' organizations) have also the right to submit observations – under article 23 of the ILO Constitution – or representations – under article 24 of the ILO Constitution – in cases of violations of the provisions of the MLC, 2006.

#### **A37. Why does the ILO say that it supervises the implementation of Conventions? What does that mean? Does it inspect ships?**

The ILO is an international organization that was created in 1919. It was the first specialized agency to be designated by the United Nations. Its Members are countries that have joined the Organization and its work is carried out through the International Labour Office. As an international organization, the ILO does not implement international law or directly regulate workers or employers (or shipowners, ships or seafarers) [see [A7](#)]. Its role

is to facilitate the development of international standards and to promote and assist with implementation by its Members at the national level. Under the MLC, 2006, the Director-General of the ILO does have some specific responsibilities related to the receipt and communication of information required by the Convention to be provided to Members. The ILO also undertakes a review of its Members' national implementation of ratified Conventions through the usual oversight role taken by the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations under the ILO supervisory system (a system established under the Constitution of the ILO). <sup>21</sup> The ILO does not conduct inspection of ships.

### **A38. What is the role of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR)?**

Once a country has ratified an ILO Convention, it is required to report regularly on the measures it has taken for its implementation. Concerning the MLC, 2006, governments have to provide reports every six years detailing the steps they have taken in law and in practice to apply the Convention. Reports on the application of Conventions may be requested at shorter intervals, and this has been the case for the MLC, 2006. Governments are required to submit copies of their reports to national representative employers' and workers' organizations. These organizations may comment on the government reports, or send comments directly to the ILO on the application of Conventions.

When examining the application of international labour standards, the Committee of Experts makes two kinds of comments: observations and direct requests. Observations contain comments on fundamental questions raised by the application of a particular Convention by a State. These observations are published in the annual report of the Committee of Experts. Direct requests relate to more technical questions or requests for further information. <sup>22</sup> The large majority of comments concerning the MLC, 2006 have so far been presented through direct requests.

### **A39. Does the MLC, 2006 include specific provisions for women seafarers?**

The MLC, 2006 applies to all seafarers without discrimination on any grounds and is intended to protect their rights and well-being. It is grounded in fundamental rights and principles, including the elimination of discrimination in employment and occupation (Article III). Amendments adopted in 2025 reinforce this principle by requiring that rights such as repatriation (Standard A2.5.1, paragraph 10) and shore leave (Standard A2.4.2, paragraph 2) be granted without discrimination on any grounds.

While the Convention is largely gender neutral, some provisions address issues which might be of interest for women seafarers. For example:

- Measures should be in place to ensure that seafarers ordinarily resident in the country that has ratified the Convention are entitled to maternity protection benefits no less favourable than those enjoyed by resident shore workers (Regulation 4.5, paragraph 3

<sup>21</sup> Information about the ILO's supervisory system is available on the ILO website at: [www.ilo.org/normes](http://www.ilo.org/normes).

<sup>22</sup> Information about the ILO's supervisory system is available on the ILO website at [www.ilo.org/normes](http://www.ilo.org/normes).

and Standard A4.5, paragraph 1). This obligation applies to Members which have specified maternity benefit as one of the branches for which social security protection is provided.

- For the purposes of calculating the entitlement to leave, absence from work for reasons of maternity should be counted as part of the period of service, and periods of incapacity for work resulting from maternity should not be counted as part of annual leave with pay (Guideline B2.4, paragraphs 2 and 4).
- Separate sleeping rooms and sanitary facilities shall be provided for men and women (Standard A3.1, paragraphs 9(b) and 11(a)).
- Appropriate and sufficient menstrual hygiene products and means of disposal should be available for seafarers (Guideline B3.1.10, paragraph 1(d), as amended in 2025).
- Reasonable precautions to prevent occupational accidents, injuries and diseases on board shall be in place, including the provision of all necessary appropriately-sized personal protective equipment (Standard A4.3, paragraph 1(b), and Guideline B4.3.1, paragraph 2(m), as amended in 2025) [see [C4.3.b](#)].
- Measures shall be in place to protect seafarers' health and safety, including measures to prevent and eliminate shipboard violence and harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying and sexual assault with due regard to the [Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 \(No. 190\)](#) (Standard A4.3, paragraphs 1 and 2, as amended in 2025) [see [A42](#) and [C4.3e](#) et seq.].
- Social connectivity, through internet access, shall be provided on board for the benefit of all seafarers (Standard A3.1, paragraph 17 and Guideline B3.1.11, paragraph 8, as amended in 2022). Such access should be provided so far as is reasonably practicable, with charges, if any, being reasonable in amount [See [C3.1.n](#)].

#### **A40. Does the MLC, 2006 address the problem of piracy?**

The MLC, 2006, in its initial version, did not directly address the serious problem of piracy. However, in April 2018, the Special Tripartite Committee established under the MLC, 2006 adopted amendments to the Code of the Convention to protect seafarers from some of the consequences of piracy. The new provisions, in force since 26 December 2020, aim at ensuring that seafarers held captive on or off the ship as a result of acts of piracy or armed robbery against ships will continue to receive their wages and entitlements during the whole period of captivity and until they are released and duly repatriated or, where the seafarer dies while in captivity, until the date of death as determined in accordance with applicable national laws or regulations.

#### **A41. Does the MLC, 2006 help abandoned seafarers?**

Originally, the MLC, 2006 did not directly address the serious problem of abandonment of seafarers, although some provisions such as those related to repatriation [see [C2.5.1.b](#)], would apply to help protect seafarers from some of the consequences of abandonment. However, in April 2014, the Special Tripartite Committee [see [A22](#)] established under the MLC, 2006 adopted amendments to the Code of the Convention [see [A21](#)] to more specifically address this problem. These amendments entered into force on 18 January 2017.

They contain a definition of abandonment and provide details about the obligation for ships to have in place an expeditious and effective financial security system to assist seafarers in the event of their abandonment [see [C2.5.2.c](#)]. Information about these amendments, including their current status in Member States is available on the ILO [NORMLEX](#) database [see [A50](#)].

#### **A42. Does the MLC, 2006 address the issue of shipboard violence and harassment?**

Yes, the MLC, 2006 was amended first in 2016 to include specific provisions related to the protection from shipboard harassment and bullying, taking into account the latest version of the [Guidance on eliminating shipboard harassment and bullying](#), jointly published by the International Chamber of Shipping and the International Transport Workers' Federation. It was further amended in 2025 to include broader provisions on the adoption of mandatory measures to prevent and eliminate shipboard violence and harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying and sexual assault, with due regard to the [Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 \(No. 190\)](#) (Standard A4.3, paragraphs 1 and 2, as amended in 2025) [see [C4.3.e](#) et seq.].

The MLC, 2006, as amended in 2025, requires the establishment, after consultation with shipowners' and seafarers' organizations, of safe, fair and effective reporting mechanisms and procedures for cases of violence and harassment. It adds the possibility to raise complaints directly with appropriate shoreside personnel and strengthens the protection against victimization by covering not only complainants but also victims, witnesses and whistle-blowers (Standard A5.1.5, paragraphs 2, 3 and 5, as amended in 2025). The amendments also refer to measures to prevent and address violence and harassment in recruitment and placement processes (Guideline B1.4.1, paragraph 2(l) as amended in 2025). The [2025 amendments](#) are expected to enter into force on 23 December 2027.

#### **A43. Does the MLC, 2006 address the issue of fair treatment of seafarers detained in foreign ports?**

Yes. Guideline B4.4.6 of the Convention [see [A12](#)] provides that seafarers who are detained in a foreign port should be dealt with promptly under due process of law and with appropriate consular protection. Measures should be taken to facilitate access to consuls of their State of nationality or State of residence, and effective cooperation between consuls and the local or national authorities. Whenever a seafarer is detained for any reason in the territory of a Member, the competent authority should, if the seafarer so requests, immediately inform the flag State and the State of nationality of the seafarer. The competent authority should promptly inform the seafarer of the right to make such a request and allow consular officers of these States immediate access to the seafarer and regular visits thereafter so long as the seafarer is detained. The State of nationality of the seafarer should promptly notify the seafarer's next of kin.

Paragraph 2 of Guideline B4.4.6, was amended in 2025 to specify that, in applying this provision, Members should take due account of the [ILO/IMO Guidelines on fair treatment of seafarers detained in connection with alleged crimes](#) [see [A21](#)].

In relation to investigations of marine casualties, a new Standard A5.1.6 was adopted in 2025 requesting Members to take due account of the above-mentioned ILO/IMO Guidelines as well as of the *ILO/IMO Guidelines on the fair treatment of seafarers in the event of a maritime accident*. Standard A5.1.6, paragraph 2 further requests Members to cooperate with concerned States in the application of such Guidelines. The [2025 amendments](#) are expected to enter into force on 23 December 2027.

The MLC, 2006 provisions and the ILO/IMO Guidelines do not aim at interfering with national criminal jurisdiction or procedures. Rather, they seek to ensure that, where seafarers are detained, investigations and proceedings are conducted in a fair, timely and transparent manner, with appropriate cooperation between concerned States and without unnecessary hardship to the seafarers involved [see also paragraph 14(c)]. In particular, the *Guidelines on fair treatment of seafarers detained in connection with alleged crimes* highlight that port or coastal States should ensure that when a seafarer is detained on suspicion of committing a crime, before any charge is made, due consideration must be given to the sufficiency of all evidence, and whether there are reasonable and objective grounds to suspect that the seafarer has committed a crime; and due consideration is given to the operational conditions and requirements of the maritime sector.

#### **A44. Does the MLC, 2006 apply in case of crisis, conflicts, wars or other emergencies?**

Yes. Referring to the impact that situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic,<sup>23</sup> the war in Ukraine<sup>24</sup> and the attacks against ships in the Red Sea<sup>25</sup> had on the protection of seafarers' rights as laid out in the MLC, 2006, the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations stressed that "[t]he Convention does not contain any provisions allowing for the temporary suspension of the implementation of its provisions, in case of crisis, health related or otherwise. To the contrary, it is precisely at times of crisis that the protective coverage of the MLC, 2006, assumes its full significance and needs to be most scrupulously applied. This is even more so as the Convention contains only minimum standards for the protection of seafarers' rights".

The Committee of Experts further stressed that "the MLC, 2006, is a comprehensive labour instrument for the maritime industry applicable to all ratifying countries, and not a compilation of labour regulations to be applied selectively, if and to the extent that circumstances so permit".

#### **A45. Should seafarers be considered as "key workers"?**

Yes. The [2025 amendments](#) to the MLC, 2006 introduce a new Guideline B2.5.2 encouraging Members to designate and recognize seafarers as key workers. This reflects

<sup>23</sup> [General observation](#) adopted in 2020 on matters arising from the application of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended, (MLC, 2006) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>24</sup> ILO, *Report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations*, ILC.111/III(A), 2023, para.75.

<sup>25</sup> ILO, *Current Developments on Maritime Matters*, Extracts of the General Report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, 95th Session, 2024.

the essential role of seafarers in providing public goods and services to societies by ensuring the functioning of global supply chains. As a result of the recognition of seafarers as key workers, governments should take appropriate measures to facilitate the safe movement of seafarers when travelling in connection with their employment or work, including but not limited to access to shore leave, repatriation, crew changes and medical care ashore [see [C2.4.d](#), [C2.5.1.a](#) et seq. and [C.4.1](#)].

This recognition is intended to ensure that seafarers can move across borders and have access to the essential services and facilities they need, while respecting relevant public health and security requirements. This provision applies in all circumstances. Nonetheless, it is particularly important during emergencies such as pandemics, conflicts or wars [see [A44](#)]. <sup>26</sup> The [2025 amendments](#) are expected to enter into force on 23 December 2027.

#### **A46. Do I have the right to refuse sailing in war zones or high-risk areas?**

Yes. The Convention provides that seafarers should be entitled to repatriation in the event of a ship being bound for a war zone, as defined by national laws or regulations or seafarers' employment agreements, to which they do not consent to go (Standard A2.5.1, paragraph 1(b) and (c) and Guideline B2.5.1, paragraph 1(b), (iv)). In this regard, the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations referred to the Resolution adopted in July 2024 by the United Nations Human Rights Council on Promoting and protecting the enjoyment of human rights by seafarers. Among others, such Resolution "[u]rges shipping industry stakeholders to respect the right of seafarers to the opportunity to gain their living by work that they freely choose or accept, including decisions on whether to sail or continue sailing in high-risk areas, and that the realization of this right should not negatively affect a seafarer's employment competitiveness or future deployment". <sup>27</sup>

#### **A47. Does a country have to adopt national laws in order to ratify the MLC, 2006?**

The answer depends on the country's national legal system. The legal system in some countries requires that all legislation be in place before ratification, while other legal systems do not. The 12-month period between registered ratification and entry into force [see [A17](#)] is intended to allow countries to complete their measures for national implementation before the Convention enters into force for them [see [A8](#)].

<sup>26</sup> In 2025, the Special Tripartite Committee (STC) adopted the [Resolution on Recognizing Seafarers as Key Workers](#), which recalls relevant resolutions adopted by different UN bodies, notably during the COVID-19 pandemic, reiterates the numerous statements by UN system organizations on this issue and calls on ILO Members to effect the early implementation of Guideline B2.5.2. In addition, Article 7(5) of the [WHO Pandemic Agreement](#) adopted by the World Health Assembly on 20 May 2025 specifically requires governments, taking into account national circumstances, to take measures to develop and implement coordinated policies for the safety and protection of transport and supply chain workers, by facilitating the transit and transfer of seafarers and their access to medical care.

<sup>27</sup> ILO, [Current Developments on Maritime Matters](#), Extracts of the General Report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, 95th Session, 2024.

**A48. Where can I obtain a copy of the report form for the MLC, 2006 that each ratifying country has to make to the ILO?**

The national report form setting out national implementation [see [A8](#)] is required under article 22 of the ILO Constitution to be examined by the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, composed of independent jurists [see [A38](#)]

Each country that has ratified the MLC, 2006 will have to make this report to the International Labour Office within 12 months after the entry into force date for the country concerned. A copy of the national report form for the MLC, 2006 can be downloaded (in Word and pdf format) from the [MLC, 2006 website](#). The report form for the MLC, 2006 has been modified to take into account the amendments to the Code of the Convention that have entered into force. After its first report, each member State has to report at appropriate intervals. Representative workers’ and employers’ organizations (including seafarers’ and shipowners’ organizations) are entitled to receive a copy of the report and to submit observations on the implementation of the Convention.

**A49. How can a country ratify the MLC, 2006? What documents need to be filed?**

Each country will have its internal procedures for the official transmission of ratifications of international Conventions. Some countries choose to deposit the instrument of ratification in person, others submit by mail. The official instrument of ratification, signed by a person who may engage the responsibility of the Government at the international level, should be sent to the International Labour Office at 4 route des Morillons, CH 1211 Geneva 22, Switzerland.

This instrument should contain or enclose the information required under the Standard A4.5, paragraph 10 of the MLC, 2006 with respect to the social security obligations under the Convention [see [C4.5.b](#)]. A standard form for the declaration with respect to Standard A4.5, paragraph 10, information [see [C4.5.h](#)] is available on the [MLC, 2006 website](#). The declaration must also be signed by a person who may engage the responsibility of the Government at the international level.

**A50. Where can I find the amendments to the MLC, 2006 and what is their status? Do they already apply?**

The *Amendments to the Code of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006*, are available on the ILO [MLC, 2006 website](#) (click on the link of the Convention). As of 31 May 2026, five sets of amendments have been adopted:

|                                                     | Status   | End of formal disagreement period | Date of entry into force | Topics                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| <a href="#">Amendments of 2014 to the MLC, 2006</a> | In force | 18 July 2016                      | 18 Jan. 2017             | Financial security system to compensate seafarers in cases of |

|                                     | Status       | End of formal disagreement period | Date of entry into force | Topics                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                     |              |                                   |                          | abandonment, long-term disability and death.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Amendments of 2016 to the MLC, 2006 | In force     | 8 July 2018                       | 8 Jan. 2019              | Protection of the seafarers against shipboard harassment and bullying.<br>Extension of the validity of Maritime Labour Certificates in circumstances where ships have passed the relevant inspection but where a new certificate cannot immediately be issued and made available on board.                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Amendments of 2022 to the MLC, 2006 | In force     | 26 June 2020                      | 26 Dec. 2020             | Payment of the seafarers' wages and entitlements during their period of captivity in cases of piracy or armed robbery against ships.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Amendments of 2022 to the MLC, 2006 | In force     | 23 June 2024                      | 23 Dec. 2024             | Seafarers' right to information on the system of financial protection under Regulation 1.4, the facilitation of the prompt repatriation of abandoned seafarers as well as of the body or ashes of seafarers who have died on board, the right of seafarers to social connectivity (internet), the gratuity of drinking water on board, the prompt disembarkation of seafarers in need of immediate medical care, the creation of a Global register of all deaths at sea. |
| Amendments of 2025 to the MLC, 2006 | Not in force | 23 June 2027                      | 23 Dec. 2027             | Protection of seafarers against violence and harassment on board, designation of seafarers as key workers, strengthened right of seafarers to shore leave and facilitation of their movement for the purpose of repatriation, reference to the IMO/ILO Guidelines on the fair treatment of seafarers in the event of a maritime accident and to those on the fair treatment of seafarers detained in connection with alleged crimes.                                     |

Concerning the entry into force of the amendments to the Code of the MLC, 2006, a distinction must be drawn between three different situations:

|                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The MLC, 2006 is ratified before the approval of the amendment                                                  | <p>Article XV</p> <p>(7) An amendment approved by the Conference shall be deemed to have been accepted unless, by the end of the prescribed period [two years from the date of notification], formal expressions of disagreement have been received by the Director-General from more than 40 per cent of the Members which have ratified the Convention and which represent not less than 40 per cent of the gross tonnage of the ships of the Members which have ratified the Convention.</p> <p>(8) An amendment deemed to have been accepted shall come into force six months after the end of the prescribed period for all the ratifying Members except those which had formally expressed their disagreement in accordance with paragraph 7 of this Article, and have not withdrawn such disagreement in accordance with paragraph 11. However:</p> <p>(a) before the end of the prescribed period, any ratifying Member may give notice to the Director-General that it shall be bound by the amendment only after a subsequent express notification of its acceptance; and</p> <p>(b) before the date of entry into force of the amendment, any ratifying Member may give notice to the Director-General that it will not give effect to that amendment for a specified period.</p> <p>(11) A Member that has formally expressed disagreement with an amendment may withdraw its disagreement at any time. If notice of such withdrawal is received by the Director-General after the amendment has entered into force, the amendment shall enter into force for the Member six months after the date on which the notice was registered.</p> |
| The MLC, 2006 is ratified between the date of the approval of an amendment and the date of its entry into force | The government concerned may “accept the amendments by addressing a formal declaration to that effect to the Director-General”. <sup>28</sup> Until such declaration is received by the ILO, the country will not be bound by the amendments.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| The MLC, 2006 is ratified after the entry into force of an amendment                                            | <p>Article XV</p> <p>(12) After entry into force of an amendment, the Convention may only be ratified in its amended form.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

### **A51. The ILO website has an MLC, 2006 email address “MLC@ilo.org”. Who answers this email? Can I rely on any answer as a legal opinion?**

Responses to questions sent to the [MLC@ilo.org](mailto:MLC@ilo.org) email address are prepared by ILO maritime labour standard specialists. However, the ILO cannot comment on individual

<sup>28</sup> The Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations adopted a [general observation in 2016](#), which clarifies the situation of member States which have ratified the MLC, 2006 between the date of the approval of an amendment and the date of its entry into force. The issue was also discussed at the third meeting of the Special Tripartite Committee.

situations and only general information can be provided. Any answers that are provided through this email address cannot be considered as legal opinions or views of the ILO. Governments or employers' organizations or workers' organizations seeking legal opinions must write to the Director of the International Labour Standards Department, ILO. Such opinions can be provided by the ILO upon request and on the understanding that only the International Court of Justice is competent to give authoritative interpretations of international labour Conventions.

## **A52. What is the status of the answers in the FAQ? Can I rely on the answers as legal opinions?**

The FAQ is intended to be an easily accessible source of information that is regularly updated. The current FAQ, dated 2026, is the sixth (revised) edition. The FAQ is intended to help persons engaged in the study or application of the MLC, 2006 to find answers to questions they have about this innovative ILO Convention. **It must be noted that the answers provided in the FAQ cannot in themselves be cited as authoritative legal opinions.** This is because, in the first place, the precise requirements of the Convention are those contained in the national laws or regulations or other measures adopted by each country to implement the MLC, 2006. No authoritative answer can, therefore, be given to any question without reference to the applicable national legal system. In the second place, the answers in the FAQ are intended to provide information in the form of brief explanations referring to the Convention and other reference materials rather than legal opinions as to the meaning of a requirement in the Convention or its application to an individual situation. Such opinions can be provided by the ILO to governments and shipowners' and seafarers' organizations, in particular, upon request and on the understanding that only the International Court of Justice is competent to give authoritative interpretations of international labour Conventions.

## **B. Questions about the workers and the ships covered by the MLC, 2006**

### **B1. Who is protected by the MLC, 2006?**

The MLC, 2006 applies to "seafarers" as defined in its Article II, paragraph 1(f), that is, all persons who are employed or are engaged or work in any capacity on board a ship to which the Convention applies [see B4]. This definition includes not just the crew involved in navigating or operating the ship but also, for example, hotel personnel working on the ship. There could be cases where it is not clear whether a category of workers are to be regarded as "seafarers" covered by the Convention. Article II, paragraph 3, addresses this situation. In the event of doubt, the national competent authority [see A25] must make a determination on the question after consultation with the shipowners' and seafarers' organizations concerned [see B15]. In 2006, when it adopted the MLC, 2006, the International Labour Conference also adopted a *Resolution concerning information on occupational groups*

(see resolution VII of the 94th ILC MLC, 2006 resolutions)<sup>29</sup>, which provides international tripartite guidance on factors to consider in making determinations in these cases. Information about any national determinations that have been made must be communicated to the Director-General of the ILO. National information that has been communicated by ratifying countries is available in the in the ILO [NORMLEX database](#).

## **B2. Does the MLC, 2006 apply to entertainers and hotel service staff?**

Since the MLC, 2006 applies to “any person who is employed or engaged or works in any capacity on board a ship to which this Convention applies” [see [B1](#)], it covers all workers including cabin and cleaning personnel, bar staff, waiters, entertainers, singers, kitchen staff, casino personnel and aestheticians. This conclusion is applicable irrespective of whether the seafarers concerned have been recruited directly by a shipowner or are employed under a subcontracting arrangement. Nevertheless, there are certain categories of workers, who only board the ship briefly and who normally work on land, for example flag State or port State control inspectors, who clearly could not be considered as working on the ship concerned. In other cases, the situation may not be clear, for example when a performer has been engaged to work on a cruise ship for the whole of the cruise or to carry out ongoing ship maintenance or repair or other duties on a voyage. In such cases, a determination will be necessary under Article II, paragraph 3, mentioned in answer to the question [see [B1](#)]. On numerous occasions, the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations has given guidance to Member States on this issue.<sup>30</sup>

## **B3. Does the MLC, 2006 apply to cadets?**

The Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations has considered that obtaining on-board training for the purpose of becoming a seafarer by definition implies working on board and, as a result, no question of doubt can arise concerning the fact that cadets are to be regarded as seafarers for the purpose of the Convention, when working on board a ship covered by the MLC, 2006. It has also underlined that the protection afforded by the Convention is particularly important for the more vulnerable categories of persons, such as cadets.<sup>31</sup>

## **B4. What ships does the MLC, 2006 apply to?**

The MLC, 2006 defines a ship in Article II, paragraph (1)(i) as “a ship other than one which navigates exclusively in inland waters or waters within, or closely adjacent to, sheltered waters or areas where port regulations apply” [see [B6](#)]. The MLC, 2006 applies to all ships as so defined, whether publicly or privately owned, that are ordinarily engaged in commercial activities except (see Article II, paragraph 4):

- ships engaged in fishing or in similar pursuits;

<sup>29</sup> The resolutions are available under the heading “Text and preparatory reports of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006” on the [MLC website](#).

<sup>30</sup> See for example, the direct requests regarding [Belize](#) (2024), [Panama](#) (2024), [Saint Vincent and the Grenadines](#) (2024) and [Norway](#) (2023).

<sup>31</sup> See for example, the direct requests regarding the [Republic of Korea](#) (2025), [Liberia](#) (2025) and [Spain](#) (2025).

- ships of traditional build, such as dhows and junks;
- warships or naval auxiliaries.

The MLC, 2006 recognizes (Article II, paragraph 5) that there may be situations where there is doubt as to whether it applies to a ship or particular category of ships. In the event of doubt, the national competent authority [see [A25](#)] must make a determination on the question after consultation with the shipowners' and seafarers' organizations concerned. Information about any national determinations that have been made must be communicated to the Director-General of the ILO.<sup>32</sup>

## **B5. When is a ship considered to be “ordinarily engaged in commercial activities”?**

The MLC, 2006 does not have a definition of the phrase “ordinarily engaged in commercial activities”, used in Article II, paragraph 4 [see [B4](#)]. This would be a matter for good faith determination by the country concerned, and subject to the usual oversight role taken by the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations under the ILO supervisory system.<sup>33</sup>

## **B6. What are “sheltered waters”, etc.?**

The MLC, 2006 does not explicitly define the terms “closely adjacent to” or “sheltered waters” used in Article II, paragraph 1(i) [see [B4](#)]. It is impossible to determine this question on an international level for all countries, since this determination could, to a certain extent, depend upon the geographical or geological situations in each country. In principle, it would be for the competent authority of a country that has ratified the MLC, 2006 to determine, in good faith and on a tripartite basis, taking into account the objectives of the Convention and the physical features of the country, which areas could be considered as “sheltered waters” and what distance away from those waters could be considered as “closely adjacent to sheltered waters”. Any questions of doubt are to be resolved on the basis of consultation with the national social partners in accordance with paragraph 5 of Article II.

In 2011, the International Labour Office sought advice from relevant international organizations and members regarding the definition. The information summarized above is set out in a [letter](#) that is available on the ILO [MLC, 2006 website](#).

## **B7. Can a ratifying country make exemptions from certain provisions of the MLC, 2006?**

Exemptions are possible to a limited extent and only where they are expressly permitted by the Convention (most of the permitted exemptions are found in Title 3, on

<sup>32</sup> A list of countries that have ratified the Convention and the date of entry into force for each country as well as other national information such as national determinations is available in the ILO [NORMLEX database](#).

<sup>33</sup> Information about the ILO's supervisory system is available on the ILO website under the heading “[International Labour Standards](#)”.

accommodation). For ships that must be certified, this information must be set out in the ship's on-board MLC, 2006 documentation [see [B4](#)].

In addition, for ships less than 200 GT that do not go on international voyages, a country may (under Article II, paragraph 6) determine that it is not reasonable or practicable at the present time to apply "certain" details of the Code [see [A9](#)] and cover the subject matter of those provisions by different provisions under its national law. This determination must be made by the government in consultation with the shipowners' and seafarers' organizations concerned. Information about any national determinations that have been made must be communicated to the Director-General of the ILO. National information that has been communicated by ratifying countries is available in the ILO [NORMLEX database](#).

**B8. Is there a general tonnage limitation on the application of the MLC, 2006?**

There is no general tonnage limitation to the MLC, 2006. However, there is some flexibility which can be applied by a flag State regarding the application of particular requirements based on the gross tonnage of ships. For example, the requirement for certification (in addition to inspection) of working and living conditions on a ship is not mandatory for ships less than 500 GT that do not go on international voyages or voyage between foreign ports. In connection with the on-board accommodation requirements there is some flexibility based on the gross tonnage of the ships concerned. In addition, a determination can be made under Article II, paragraph 6 [see [B7](#)].

**B9. Are ships that do not go on international voyages covered by the MLC, 2006?**

The MLC, 2006 applies to all ships irrespective of their tonnage or the nature of their voyage other than ships which navigate exclusively in inland waters or waters within, or closely adjacent to, sheltered waters or areas where port regulations apply. However, there is some flexibility which can be applied by a flag State regarding the application of particular requirements based on the gross tonnage of ships and voyages. For example, the requirement for certification (in addition to inspection) of working and living conditions on a ship is not mandatory for ships less than 500 GT that do not go on international voyages or voyage between foreign ports. In addition, a determination can be made under Article II, paragraph 6 [see [B7](#)]. Ships or seafarers that do not go on international voyages are not required to comply with some of the requirements for English language versions of documents such as medical certificates under the MLC, 2006.

**B10. Are ships that exist at the time the MLC, 2006 is ratified by a country excluded?**

The MLC, 2006 applies to all ships covered by the Convention [see [B4](#)]. However, the technical requirements, of a structural nature, relating to accommodation in Title 3 may not apply to ships constructed prior to entry into force of the Convention for the country concerned [see [C3.1.a](#)].

**B11. Does the MLC, 2006 apply to smaller ships, such as ships below 200 GT?**

[see B8].

**B12. Does the MLC, 2006 apply to offshore resource extraction or similar vessels?**

The question whether the MLC, 2006 applies to offshore resource extraction or similar vessels (e.g., MODUs and dredgers) or vessels that are not self-propelled will depend on two factors: whether the vessel is considered “a ship” under the relevant national law and the location of its activities. The Convention leaves, to be decided by reference to the relevant national law or practice and court decisions, the more general question of whether, or the circumstances in which, a particular waterborne vessel would be considered “a ship”. If the vessel is considered a ship, it would then be necessary to see whether it should be a ship covered by the MLC, 2006. This would depend upon whether or not it “navigates exclusively in inland waters or waters within, or closely adjacent to sheltered waters, or areas where port regulations apply” [see B4].

**B13. Does the MLC, 2006 apply to yachts?**

Unless a yacht is of traditional build or does not come within the definition of a “ship” [see B4] or is not ordinarily engaged in commercial activities [see B5], it is covered by the MLC, 2006. In other words, in principle, yachts ordinarily engaged in commercial activities fall within the scope of application of the MLC, 2006.

**B14. Who is the shipowner under the MLC, 2006?**

The MLC, 2006 defines a shipowner as “the owner of the ship or another organization or person, such as the manager, agent or bareboat charterer, who has assumed the responsibility for the operation of the ship from the owner and who, on assuming such responsibility, has agreed to take over the duties and responsibilities imposed on shipowners in accordance with the Convention ...”. This definition applies even if any other organizations or persons fulfil certain of the duties or responsibilities on behalf of the shipowner. This comprehensive definition was adopted to reflect the idea that, irrespective of the particular commercial or other arrangements regarding a ship’s operations, there must be a single entity, “the shipowner”, that is responsible for seafarers’ living and working conditions. This idea is also reflected in the requirement that all seafarers’ employment agreements must be signed by the shipowner or a representative of the shipowner [see C2.1 and C2.1.e].

**B15. How can a national authority make a determination if there are no national organizations of shipowners or seafarers?**

There could be cases where it is not clear whether a category of workers are to be regarded as “seafarers” covered by the Convention [see B1] and also cases where it is not clear whether a particular ship or category of ships is to be covered by the Convention

[see B4]. There are also some provisions allowing exemptions or other flexibility in the application of the Convention [see B7]. In these cases, the national competent authority [see A25] must make a determination on the question after consultation with the shipowners' and seafarers' organizations concerned [see B7]. However, in some countries there may not yet be organizations that represent shipowners or seafarers. Article VII of the MLC, 2006 sets out a solution by providing for consultation with the Special Tripartite Committee (STC) established under Article XIII of the Convention [see A22]. In April 2014, this Committee held its first meeting where it adopted arrangements to allow countries to carry out this consultation. Information about these arrangements is available on the ILO MLC, 2006 website under the heading "[Special Tripartite Committee](#)".

## **C. Questions relating to the Titles of the MLC, 2006**

### **C1. Title 1. Minimum requirements for seafarers to work on a ship**

#### **C1.1. Minimum age**

##### **C1.1.a. If the national minimum age in a country is higher than 16, must it be reduced?**

Regulation 1.1, paragraph 2 of the MLC, 2006 sets 16 years as the current minimum age for a person to work as a seafarer. If a country has a higher age then it already meets and exceeds the minimum age and would not need to adjust its minimum age. Night work for seafarers under the age of 18 must be prohibited (with some possible exceptions). It should be noted that for some activities or positions (e.g., hazardous work or work as a ship's cook) the MLC, 2006 requires that seafarers be at least 18 years of age.

##### **C1.1.b. Who decides what work is likely to jeopardize the safety or health of seafarers under the age of 18?**

Under Standard A1.1, paragraph 4, the determination of work that is likely to jeopardize the safety or health of seafarers under the age of 18 is to be undertaken by the competent authority, after consultation with the shipowners' or seafarers' organizations concerned. The work determined to be hazardous is a matter that must be identified in national legislation or other measures, which must be in accordance with international standards. Guideline B4.3.10 of the MLC, 2006 provides guidance on safety and health education of young seafarers that would be relevant to this issue. The Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations considered that in the case of countries which referred to the list of hazardous work of general scope adopted in the framework of the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), a specific list needed to be adopted or the existing one adapted in order to take into account the particularities of the maritime sector.

**C1.1.c. Is there an international standard for determining the hours that constitute “night” or is this up to each country to decide?**

The determination of the hours that constitute “night” may vary between countries and would be defined in accordance with national law and practice. However, Standard A1.1, paragraph 2 of the MLC, 2006 provides some international parameters for determining the period to be considered as night for seafarers under 18: “It shall cover a period of at least nine hours starting no later than midnight and ending no earlier than 5 a.m”.

**C1.1.d. What is the situation of young persons aged 16 in a recognized maritime education or training programme?**

Under the MLC, 2006 a person below the minimum age of 16 cannot be a seafarer and cannot work on board ships. The MLC, 2006 recognizes that seafarers who are 16 years and older may be involved in a recognized training programme and makes allowance for their employment [see B3] and in particular for their training, for example, in connection with allowing some night work for young seafarers for training purposes in the circumstances provided for by the Convention [C1.1.e]. There are other allowances made in connection with the standards for on-board accommodation for cadets [see C3.1.e].

**C1.1.e. Can a seafarer under the age of 18 ever be expected to work at night?**

Standard A1.1, paragraph 2 of the MLC, 2006 requires that “night work” be prohibited for seafarers under the age of 18 [see C1.1.c]. However, there is some flexibility to allow an exception to this restriction where the seafarers training programme would be impaired or the specific nature of the duty or the recognized training programme requires seafarers to perform duties at night and the competent authority determines, after consultation with the shipowners’ and seafarers’ organizations concerned, that the work will not be detrimental to the health and well-being of young seafarers.

**C1.2. Medical certificate**

**C1.2.a. Will a medical examination under the IMO’s STCW Convention meet the MLC, 2006 requirements?**

Yes. Standard A1.2, paragraph 3 of the MLC, 2006 states that it is without prejudice to the International Maritime Organization (IMO) Convention, the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers, 1978, as amended (“STCW”). It also states that a medical certificate issued in accordance with the requirements of the STCW shall be accepted by the competent authority, for the purpose of Regulation 1.2. A medical certificate meeting the substance of those requirements, in the case of seafarers not covered by the STCW, shall similarly be accepted. Like the ILO, the IMO is a United Nations specialized agency. It often cooperates with the ILO on issues of shared concern in the maritime sector. In 2010, amendments known as the “Manila Amendments” to the STCW were adopted by the IMO. These amendments, which entered into force in 2012, contain wording intended to align the MLC, 2006 requirements and the IMO requirements for medical examinations and certificates for seafarers covered by the STCW Convention. This means that countries that are bound by the STCW Manila Amendments and implemented

them in their laws, will already to some extent have implemented the MLC, 2006 requirements.

In 2011, a Joint ILO/IMO Meeting on Medical Fitness Examinations of Seafarers and Ships' Medicine Chests revised the existing ILO/WHO Guidelines on the medical examinations of seafarers. The *ILO/IMO Guidelines on the medical examination of seafarers* can be viewed or downloaded on the ILO [MLC, 2006 website](#).

#### C1.2.b. What is the period of validity for a medical certificate?

The MLC, 2006 sets out maximum periods in Standard A1.2, paragraph 7, which states that, unless a shorter period is required by reason of the specific duties to be performed by the seafarer concerned or is required under the STCW, a medical certificate shall be valid for a maximum period of validity of two years unless the seafarer is under the age of 18, in which case the maximum period is one year. A certification of colour vision is valid for a maximum period of six years. As indicated these are maximums; a country could have shorter periods of validity.

#### C1.2.c. Can a seafarer ever work without a medical certificate?

The MLC, 2006 establishes a procedure (in Standard A1.2, paragraph 8) by which, in urgent cases, seafarers in possession of an expired medical certificate of recent date can be permitted to work for a limited period (no more than three months).

#### C1.2.d. What happens if a medical certificate expires during a voyage?

Under Standard A1.2, paragraph 9 of the MLC, 2006 a certificate that expires in the course of a voyage continues in force until the next port of call where the seafarer can obtain a medical certificate from a qualified medical practitioner, provided that the period of extension does not exceed three months.

#### C1.2.e. Who can issue a seafarers' medical certificate?

Under Standard A1.2, paragraph 4 of the MLC, 2006 medical certificates can be issued by a duly qualified medical practitioner or, in the case of a certificate solely concerning eyesight, by a person recognized by the competent authority [see [A25](#)] as qualified to issue such a certificate. Practitioners must enjoy full professional independence in exercising their medical judgement in undertaking medical examination procedures. The competent authority in the flag State should decide who is a duly qualified practitioner for this purpose. Practices may vary among countries. However, in most cases the competent authority will produce a list that includes medical practitioners located in other countries that it recognizes as duly qualified to provide a certificate for seafarers working on ships that fly its flag.

#### C1.2.f. Can a ship's doctor issue a medical certificate?

The question whether or not a ship's doctor can issue a medical certificate to seafarers on the ship concerned would need to be decided by the competent authority of the flag State [see [A25](#)] bearing in mind that, in accordance with Standard A1.2, paragraph 4, duly qualified medical practitioners must enjoy full professional independence in exercising their medical

judgement in undertaking medical examination procedures [see [C1.2.e](#)]. This requirement presumably would not be met if the ship's doctor is an employee of the shipowner.

**C1.2.g. Is a medical certificate issued in the seafarer's home country valid for work on a ship flying the flag of a different country?**

Under the MLC, 2006 a medical certificate is valid if it is issued by a duly qualified medical practitioner. However, the flag State of the ship concerned is responsible for deciding whether the signatory of the medical certificate is indeed duly qualified. Some flag States will recognize medical certificates issued elsewhere, but others may require an examination by a practitioner based in the flag State [see [C1.2.e](#)].

**C1.2.h. Is there a standard form for a medical certificate under the MLC, 2006?**

The MLC, 2006 does not require a standard or model form for medical certificates. However, it states in Standard A1.2, paragraph 6, what the duly qualified medical practitioner is to certify.

Standard A1.2, paragraph 10, also provides that for seafarers working on ships ordinarily engaged on international voyages, the certificate must as a minimum be provided in English.

Additional guidance is provided in the [ILO/IMO Guidelines on the medical examination of seafarers](#) [see [C1.2.i](#)].

**C1.2.i. Is there any international guidance regarding medical examinations?**

Guideline B1.2 of the MLC, 2006 advises that all persons concerned with the conduct of medical fitness examinations of seafarer candidates and serving seafarers should follow the *ILO/WHO Guidelines for Conducting Pre-sea and Periodic Medical Fitness Examinations for Seafarers*, including any subsequent versions, and any other applicable international guidelines published by the ILO, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) or the World Health Organization (WHO).

In 2011, a Joint ILO/IMO Meeting on Medical Fitness Examinations of Seafarers and Ships' Medicine Chests revised the existing *ILO/WHO Guidelines for Conducting Pre-sea and Periodic Medical Fitness Examinations for Seafarers*. The [ILO/IMO Guidelines on the medical examinations of seafarers](#) can be viewed or downloaded on the ILO MLC, 2006 website.

**C1.2.j. What happens if a medical certificate was issued before the MLC, 2006 entered into force? Does this mean a seafarer has to have another examination?**

The date of entry into force of the Convention for the country is not directly relevant to any certificates that may have been issued, such as a medical examination certificate. These certificates should be considered on their merits without regard to the fact they were issued prior to entry into force. However, if the medical examination does not meet the MLC, 2006 requirements then there may be a question, perhaps related more to whether a flag State

should recognize a non-compliant situation for the purpose of inspection and issuing a Maritime Labour Certificate [see [C1.3.g](#)].

### **C1.3. Training and qualifications**

#### **C1.3.a. Does the IMO's STCW certification meet the training requirements of the MLC, 2006?**

Yes. Under Regulation 1.3, paragraph 3 of the MLC, 2006 training and certification in accordance with the mandatory instruments adopted by the IMO must be considered as meeting the requirements of the MLC, 2006.

#### **C1.3.b. Does this training requirement apply to seafarers who are not covered by the STCW?**

Regulation 1.3, paragraph 2 of the MLC, 2006 provides that seafarers shall not be permitted to work on a ship unless they have successfully completed training for personal safety on board ship. This requirement applies to all seafarers, irrespective of their duties on board ship. The question of other training or qualifications for seafarers not covered by STCW requirements would depend on the relevant national requirements for the work the seafarer is to perform on board a ship. For example, a person hired as a nurse or doctor on a ship would be expected to meet any national standards for those positions. However, the competent authority of a Member will not be responsible for the training or evaluation of the person for that position, but simply for requiring shipowners to ensure that personnel meet relevant national standards. This concept is set out in paragraph 1 of Regulation 1.3. For catering personnel, including ships' cooks, the MLC, 2006 sets out some training requirements in Regulation 3.2 and the related Standards and Guidelines.

#### **C1.3.c. Are countries still bound by the Certification of Able Seamen Convention, 1946 (No. 74)?**

No, [Convention No. 74](#) was abrogated by the International Labour Conference in 2021 (see [A19](#)). Regulation 1.3, paragraph 4 of the MLC, 2006, provides that obligations under ILO Convention No. 74 are to be replaced once "mandatory provisions covering its subject matter have been adopted by the International Maritime Organization". Such provisions were adopted as part of the STCW 2010 "Manila Amendments".

#### **C1.3.d. Why are there no Code provisions under Regulation 1.3?**

In 2004, the Preparatory Technical Maritime Conference (PTMC) decided that Regulation 1.3 should not be followed by any indication that its provisions could be the subject of Standards or Guidelines. This was in response to a communication from the IMO regarding its willingness to take responsibility for the training and certification requirements for able seafarers, if these were transferred by the ILO. The PTMC agreed with this transfer, but also agreed with the view that it was necessary to include general provisions on training in the MLC, 2006 in view of the comprehensive nature of this consolidating Convention and to ensure that any personnel who may not be covered by the IMO STCW provisions are trained or otherwise qualified [see [C1.3.b](#)]. It should be noted that the transfer of seafarers'

training and certification responsibility to IMO does not include training of ships' cooks, a matter that remains with the ILO and is addressed in the Convention under Title 3.

#### C1.3.e. Must ships' cooks be trained?

The MLC, 2006 requires that ships' cooks be trained and qualified [see C3.2.c]. In September 2013 an international tripartite meeting of experts met to adopt *Guidelines on the training of ships' cooks*. These Guidelines are available on the ILO [MLC, 2006 website](#).

#### C1.3.f. What is personal safety training on board ship?

Is there a specific training programme?

Personal safety training refers to the basic training under the IMO's STCW Convention for all seafarers to ensure personal safety on board ship.

#### C1.3.g. Does entry into force of the MLC, 2006 for a country affect the validity of any certificates issued to seafarers (e.g. cooks' training or medical)?

The date of entry into force of the Convention for the country is not directly relevant to any certificates that may have been issued, such as ships' cooks' certificates, medical certificates or other training related certificates. These certificates should be considered on their merits without regard to the fact they were issued prior to entry into force. However, if a ships' cook's training or medical examination does not meet the MLC, 2006 requirements, then there may be a question, perhaps related more to whether a flag State should recognize a non-compliant situation for the purpose of inspection and issuing a Maritime Labour Certificate.

### C1.4. Recruitment and placement

#### C1.4.a. Must seafarer recruitment and placement services be established?

The MLC, 2006 does not require that public or private seafarer recruitment and placement services be established. However, under Article V, paragraph 5, Regulation 1.4, paragraph 2, and Regulation 5.3, paragraph 1, if such services are established in a country, they must be regulated in accordance with the MLC, 2006 requirements.

#### C1.4.b. What is a seafarer recruitment and placement service? What is a public or private sector service?

Article II, paragraph 1(h) of the MLC, 2006 defines a seafarer recruitment and placement service as "any person, company, institution, agency or other organization, in the public or the private sector, which is engaged in recruiting seafarers on behalf of shipowners or placing seafarers with shipowners". Under Standard A1.4, paragraph 2, the Convention's requirements relating to private seafarer recruitment and placement services apply where their primary purpose is the recruitment and placement of seafarers or where they recruit and place a significant number of seafarers. In the event of doubt as to whether the Convention applies to a private recruitment and placement service, the question is to be

determined by the competent authority in each country after consultation with the shipowners' and seafarers' organizations concerned.

As noted above, Article II, paragraph 1(h), defines the term "seafarer recruitment and placement services" with respect to both "public or private sector" and clarifies that the term applies to services that provide either recruitment or placement services or provide both services. However, this definition does not provide further information on the terms "private" or "public". A public service would be understood as a free service operated by the government, either a ministry or an agency, established to provide this service for seafarers and/or other workers (see Standard A1.4, paragraph 4). By contrast, a private service is operated as a commercial enterprise.

#### C1.4.c. Is a recruitment department operated by a shipowner considered a private recruitment and placement service?

If seafarers are recruited directly by a shipowner to work on ships flying the flag of a country that has ratified the MLC, 2006 then this situation *prima facie* does not fall within Regulation 1.4 and the related Code provisions. There may, however, be a situation where the nature of the relationship between a recruitment service and a shipowner is not clear. In those cases, the national competent authority should be consulted.

#### C1.4.d. Who has obligations under Regulation 1.4?

The majority of the obligations under Regulation 1.4 are placed upon the country in which seafarers' recruitment and placement services are located. However, there are also obligations placed on flag States (and shipowners) with respect to the use of seafarers' recruitment and placement and services, particularly if a shipowner uses a service based in a country that has not ratified the MLC, 2006. This is an issue that is subject to certification for ships that must be certified [see C5.2.3.d].

#### C1.4.e. What are the shipowners' responsibilities under Regulation 1.4?

Under the MLC, 2006 shipowners are not required to use seafarer recruitment and placement services and may directly recruit seafarers to work on their ships [see C1.4.c]. However, where shipowners use a private seafarer recruitment and placement service, they must take steps to ensure that the service is licensed or certified or regulated in accordance with the requirements under Regulation 1.4. This responsibility, which is subject to inspection and also certification, is particularly important where the recruitment and placement service is in a country that has not ratified the MLC, 2006 [see C1.4.f]. Useful guidance is provided in the section on Regulation 1.4 in Chapter 3 of the *Guidelines for flag State inspections under the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended*.

#### C1.4.f. What happens if seafarers are recruited from a country that has not ratified the MLC, 2006?

Under Regulation 1.4, paragraph 3, and Standard A1.4, paragraph 9 of the MLC, 2006 shipowners that use seafarer recruitment and placement services that are based in countries or territories in which the Convention does not apply must ensure, as far as

practicable, that those services meet the requirements of Standard A1.4. Useful guidance is provided in the section on Regulation 1.4 in Chapter 3 of the *Guidelines for flag State inspections under the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended*.

#### C1.4.g. Can recruitment and placement services charge seafarers fees?

Having regard to Standard A1.4, paragraph 5 of the MLC, 2006 no fees or other charges for seafarer recruitment or placement or for providing employment to seafarers may be borne directly or indirectly, in whole or in part, by the seafarer, other than the cost of the seafarer obtaining a national statutory medical certificate, the national seafarer's book and a passport or other similar personal travel documents, not including, however, the cost of visas, which must be borne by the shipowner.

#### C1.4.h. Who pays for documents that seafarers need to be able to travel to join ship? What about the cost of travel to obtain a visa?

In the light of Standard A1.4, paragraph 5 of the MLC, 2006 relating to fees or other charges in the context of recruitment and placement [see C1.4.g], in the absence of any relevant provision in the seafarer's employment agreement or applicable collective bargaining agreement, one would expect the seafarer to cover the cost of a passport or similar travel document, and the shipowner to pay the cost of any necessary visa. The Conventions relating to seafarers' identity documents (SIDs), Nos 108 and 185 (not consolidated in the MLC, 2006) [see A20] do not contain a provision requiring the shipowner to pay for the SIDs. The MLC, 2006 does not address the question of what would be included as part of the shipowner's obligation to cover the "cost of visas" and whether this would include travel costs seafarers may incur if they have to travel, perhaps to another country, to obtain a visa to allow them to join and/or voyage on board.

#### C1.4.i. What is the system of protection against monetary loss that is required of private seafarer recruitment and placement services?

Standard A1.4, paragraph 5(c)(vi) of the MLC, 2006 requires Members to ensure that any private seafarer recruitment and placement services that may be operating in their territory establish a system of protection, by way of insurance or an equivalent appropriate measure, to compensate seafarers for monetary loss that they may incur as a result of the failure of a recruitment and placement service or the relevant shipowner under the seafarers' employment agreement to meet its obligations to them.

The obligation on the ratifying country is not to provide this system of protection but rather, in the system that it adopts (pursuant to Standard A1.4, paragraph 2), to regulate these services through laws or regulations or other measures. The MLC, 2006 does not specify the form of this system, other than referring to insurance or an equivalent measure. While the term "monetary loss" is not defined in the Convention, it refers to financial loss suffered by the seafarer as a result of breaches of the seafarers' employment agreement.

The system of protection required under Standard A1.4 is different from, and must not be confused with, the financial security system for compensation in the event of abandonment and of death or long-term disability of seafarers introduced by the 2014

[amendments](#) to the Convention [see [C2.5.1.b](#) et seq.]. In practice, seafarers hired through a recruitment and placement agency must be covered by both systems.

**C1.4.j. Should seafarers be informed of their rights under the system of protection against monetary loss that recruitment and placement agencies must have in place?**

Yes. The Convention (Standard A1.4, paragraph 5(c)(vi)) was expressly amended in 2022 to provide that prior to, or in the process of engagement seafarers must be informed of their rights under the system of protection against monetary loss that recruitment and replacement agencies must have in place under Standard A1.4.<sup>34</sup> [see [C1.4.i](#)].

**C1.4.k. Must seafarer recruitment and services be certified for compliance with the MLC, 2006?**

The MLC, 2006 provides for various forms of national regulation, not necessarily certification, for private recruitment and placement services.

**C1.4.l. Will a certificate of MLC, 2006 compliance for a recruitment and placement service issued by a recognized organization meet the MLC, 2006 requirements?**

The MLC, 2006 provides for various forms of national regulation for private recruitment and placement services, such as certification. Certification may be of interest especially if the service is located in a country that has not ratified the MLC, 2006. The decision as to whether a particular certificate issued by a recognized organization is acceptable rests with the relevant competent authority of the flag State [see [A25](#)].

**C1.4.m. Does the MLC, 2006 prevent the employment of seafarers based in countries that have not ratified the MLC, 2006?**

No. The MLC, 2006 does not prevent employment of seafarers from countries that have not ratified the Convention. However, if seafarers are recruited through a seafarer recruitment and placement service located in a country that has not ratified the MLC, 2006 to work on board a ship that flies the flag of a country that has ratified the MLC, 2006 then the shipowner using that service must ensure, as far as practicable, that it meets the requirements of Standard A1.4. In order to have documentary evidence of compliance with this requirement, the shipowner may, for example, take account of information collected by the flag State, as well as any audits or certifications concerning the quality of services operating in countries that have not ratified the MLC, 2006 [see [C1.4.f](#) and [C1.4.l](#)].

<sup>34</sup> See the [2022 amendments](#) to the Code of the Convention.

**C1.4.n. Does an employment and recruitment service that occasionally places seafarers on board ship such as cruise ships have to comply with the MLC, 2006 requirements?**

Under Standard A1.4, paragraph 2, the Convention's requirements relating to private seafarer recruitment and placement services apply where the primary purpose is the recruitment and placement of seafarers or where they recruit and place a significant number of seafarers. In the event of doubt as to whether the Convention applies to a private recruitment and placement service, the question is to be determined by the competent authority in each country after consultation with the shipowners' and seafarers' organizations concerned [see [C1.4.b](#)].

**C1.4.o. Is a professional or other association or service that posts employment opportunities for its members a seafarers' recruitment and placement service under the MLC, 2006?**

Article II, paragraph 1(h) of the MLC, 2006 defines a seafarer recruitment and placement service as "any person, company, institution, agency or other organization, in the public or the private sector, which is engaged in recruiting seafarers on behalf of shipowners or placing seafarers with shipowners". If a service or association is not engaged in recruiting on behalf of shipowners or placing seafarers with shipowners then it is likely that it would not be considered a recruitment and placement service [see [C1.4.b](#)]. However, this is a matter for national laws and regulations.

**C1.4.p. When I was recruited to work on a ship, my employer was a manning agency and they signed my employment contract. Is that acceptable under the MLC, 2006?**

All seafarers must have a seafarers' employment agreement (SEA) signed by the shipowner or a representative of the shipowner and that clearly identifies the shipowner as a responsible party under the agreement even if others, such as a manning agency, may also have employment-related responsibilities [see [C2.1.e](#)]. Some countries have developed standard forms for the SEA that allow a shipowner and any other employer (like a manning agency) to sign as jointly responsible or as guarantor. In other words, even where a seafarer may be working for a manning agency, he or she would still need to have a SEA signed by the shipowner or representative of the shipowner addressing the matters set out in Standard A2.1, paragraph 4.

**C.1.4.q. Does the MLC, 2006 address the issue of violence and harassment in the context of seafarer recruitment and placement services?**

Yes. Under Guideline B1.4.1, as amended in 2025, Members should require seafarer recruitment and placement services to develop operational practices addressing, among others, measures to prevent and address violence and harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying and sexual assault, in recruitment and placement processes. The [2025 amendments](#) are expected to enter into force on 23 December 2027.

## **C2. Title 2. Conditions of employment**

### **C2.1. Seafarers' employment agreements**

#### **C2.1.a. What is a seafarers' employment agreement (SEA)?**

The MLC, 2006 defines a seafarers' employment agreement (SEA) in Article II, paragraph 1(g), as including both a contract of employment and articles of agreement. This is an inclusive definition that covers various legal systems and practices and formats. It specifically includes both a contract of employment and articles of agreement; but there could be other formats, as required under national law or practice. Regulation 2.1, paragraph 1, simply describes the SEA as "a clear written legally enforceable agreement" that must be "consistent with the standards set out in the Code". To the extent compatible with national law and practice, a SEA is understood to incorporate (by reference) any applicable collective bargaining agreement, as provided in Standard A2.1, paragraph 2. This means that, other than some specific elements such as the name of the seafarer, etc., a collective bargaining agreement could form all or part of a SEA. However, irrespective of the precise form of a SEA, a Member is required to adopt national laws and regulations specifying the matters to be included in the SEA. The list of these matters is set out in Standard A2.1, paragraph 4(a) to (j). Even where a seafarer may be working for a concessionaire that is operating on a ship, for example a seafarer with passenger service duties on a cruise ship, he or she would still need to have a SEA signed by the shipowner or representative of the shipowner addressing the matters set out in Standard A2.1, paragraph 4 [see [C1.4.p](#)].

#### **C2.1.b. Does the MLC, 2006 require seafarers to have a copy of the original signed seafarers' employment agreement (SEA) on board ship?**

Standard A2.1, paragraph 1(c) of the MLC, 2006 requires that the shipowner and the seafarer concerned each have a signed original of the seafarers' employment agreement, without specifying that this original should be "on board". Since Standard A2.1, paragraphs 1(d) and 2, only require a copy of the agreement and of any applicable collective bargaining agreement to be available on board, one would assume that no originals need be maintained on board unless the national law concerned specifies otherwise. Questions have arisen about whether in the context of international industry with shipowners and seafarer based in different countries, the signature of the shipowner or the shipowner's representative [see [C2.1.e](#)] must be an original signature or whether it could be an electronic signature. The question of acceptability of an electronic signature in the context of the SEA is one of the many details of general contract law (the appointment of a representative is another such question, for example) that are left by the Convention to be determined by the national law and practice of the flag State (or other law which the flag State recognizes as applying to the SEA).

#### **C2.1.c. Can a SEA be issued in an electronic form?**

Nothing in the MLC, 2006, as currently drafted, would prevent national administrations from authorizing the creation and storage of SEAs in electronic format. Nonetheless, the use

of electronic SEAs should not in any manner weaken the obligations under Standard A2.1, including the fact that the shipowner and seafarer concerned shall each have a signed original of the seafarers' employment agreement nor render more cumbersome the access of inspectors to such documents.

#### C2.1.d. How can a seafarers' employment agreement (SEA) incorporate a collective bargaining agreement?

Regulation 2.1, paragraph 3 of the MLC, 2006 states: "To the extent compatible with the Member's national law and practice, seafarers' employment agreements shall be understood to incorporate any applicable collective bargaining agreements". A SEA could in any event incorporate a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) by using wording to show that the parties to the SEA (the shipowner and the seafarer) intend that the whole of the CBA should, to the extent relevant to the seafarer, be considered as forming part of the SEA. The SEA concerned could even be a one-page document, containing individual identifying and other employment information specific to the seafarer, followed by a single provision stating that the parties agree that the terms and conditions of work shall be as set out in the identified CBA. A SEA of this kind would probably need to be accompanied by clear information (referred to in Standard A2.1, paragraph 1(d)), enabling each seafarer to find out what his or her rights are under the applicable CBA. The effect of Regulation 2.1, paragraph 3, quoted above, is that even if the SEA contains no clear statement incorporating an applicable CBA, it should be understood as incorporating that CBA if a linkage of this kind is compatible with the flag State's law and practice.

#### C2.1.e. Who must sign a seafarers' employment agreement (SEA)?

In accordance with Standard A2.1, paragraph 1(a) of the MLC, 2006 the SEA must be signed by both the seafarer and the shipowner or a representative of the shipowner<sup>35</sup>. Except in cases where the applicable national law considers that a particular person, such as the ship's master, has apparent authority to act on behalf of the shipowner any signatory other than a shipowner should produce a signed "power of attorney" or other document showing that he/she is authorized to represent the shipowner [see B14 and C2.1.f].

Questions have arisen about whether in the context of international industry with shipowners and seafarers based in different countries, the signature of the shipowner or the shipowner's representative must be an original signature or whether it could be an electronic signature. The question of acceptability of an electronic signature in the context of the SEA is one of the many details of general contract law (the appointment of a representative is another such question, for example) that are left by the Convention to be determined by the national law and practice of the flag State (or other law which the flag State recognizes as applying to the SEA) [see C2.1.b].

<sup>35</sup> In this regard, the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations recalled in various occasions the importance of the basic legal relationship that the Convention establishes between the seafarer and the person defined as "shipowner", whether or not the shipowner is considered to be the employer of the seafarer. See for example the direct requests adopted concerning [Nigeria](#) (2024), [Liberia](#) (2023) and [Bulgaria](#) (2023).

#### C2.1.f. Can the employer of a seafarer supplying a seafarer to the ship sign the seafarers' employment agreement (SEA) as the shipowner?

The term "shipowner" is defined comprehensively in Article II, paragraph 1(j) of the MLC, 2006 as "... the owner of the ship or another organization or person, such as the manager, agent or bareboat charterer, who has assumed the responsibility for the operation of the ship from the owner and who, on assuming such responsibility, has agreed to take over the duties and responsibilities imposed on shipowners in accordance with this Convention, regardless of whether any other organizations or persons fulfil certain of the duties or responsibilities on behalf of the shipowner" [see [B14](#)].

The intention of the drafters of the MLC, 2006 was that there could only be one person – namely, "the shipowner" – who assumes, vis-à-vis each seafarer, all the duties and responsibilities imposed by the Convention on the shipowner. While another person supplying a seafarer to the ship may have concluded an employment contract with that seafarer and be responsible for implementing that contract, including payment of wages, for example, the shipowner will still have the overall responsibility vis-à-vis the seafarer. Such an employer could therefore only sign the SEA as a representative of the shipowner (assuming that the employer has a signed power of attorney from the shipowner) or in addition to the shipowner [see [C2.1.i](#)].

#### C2.1.g. Do self-employed seafarers have to conclude a seafarers' employment agreement (SEA)?

Where seafarers are not employees (for example, if the seafarer is self-employed), they are not required to have a SEA, but – in accordance with Standard A2.1, paragraph 1(a) – there would need to be evidence of contractual or similar arrangements "providing them with decent working and living conditions on board" as required by the MLC, 2006.

#### C2.1.h. What is the record of employment for seafarers?

Standard A2.1, paragraph 1(e) of the MLC, 2006 requires seafarers to be given a document containing a record of their employment on board the ship. The MLC, 2006 does not define or have a specific model for this document, but it provides the following information: record of employment must not contain any statement as to the quality of the seafarers' work or as to their wages. The form of the document, the particulars to be recorded and the manner in which such particulars are to be entered, are to be determined by national law (Standard A2.1, paragraph 3) and should contain sufficient information, with a translation in English, to facilitate the acquisition of further work or to satisfy the sea-service requirements for upgrading or promotion. A seafarers' discharge book might satisfy the requirements of paragraph 1(e) of the Standard (Guideline B2.1.1).

#### C2.1.i. My employment agreement has a space for two signatures, one for the shipowner and one for an employer. Is this acceptable under the MLC, 2006?

The MLC, 2006 does not prohibit this practice and it is a matter for the flag State to consider. All seafarers must have a seafarers' employment agreement (SEA) that is signed by the shipowner or a representative of the shipowner and clearly identifies the shipowner

as a responsible party under the agreement even if others, such as a manning agency or other employer, may also have employment-related responsibilities [see [C2.1.f](#)]. Some countries have developed model forms for the SEA that allow a shipowner and any other employer to sign as jointly responsible or as guarantor.

**C2.1.j. Does the MLC, 2006 set a maximum limit on the length of an employment agreement? Can I have a SEA for a period longer than 12 months?**

The MLC, 2006 does not set a maximum period for a contract of employment. In fact Standard A2.1 envisages SEAs of an indefinite period. However, the duration of a SEA and the maximum period of continuous service on board are two different concepts. The interaction between the right of a seafarer to be repatriated after a maximum period of service on board (a period less than 12 months) under Standard A2.5.1 [see [C2.5.1.a](#)] and the obligation of the flag State under Regulation 2.4 and the Code to require that seafarers be given the minimum paid annual leave [see [C2.4.a](#)] establishes limitations on the period of continuous service on board a ship or ships, which should be, in principle, of 11 months. The specific limits will include questions such as whether the competent authority has decided in some specific cases to permit seafarers to forgo their minimum paid annual leave [see [C2.4.b](#)].

**C2.1.k. May a SEA without a fixed end date but specifying a period of flexible duration be considered in conformity with the MLC, 2006?**

Standard A2.1, paragraph 4(g) of the MLC, 2006 requires that SEAs must in all cases contain information about the termination of the agreement and the conditions thereof. Although the reference to a “definite period” or a “fixed date” naturally implies a specific calendar date, there is nothing in the Convention which would prevent, in principle, a fixed period specified in the SEA from being exceptionally shortened by, or extended for, another limited fixed period thus setting a new expiry date. The ITF collective bargaining agreement – a negotiated global reference for the maritime industry in seafarers’ employment matters – offers a practical example in this connection: it provides that a fixed contract period may, for reasons of operational convenience only, be extended or reduced by one month. It is clear, therefore, that whether terminated upon the expiry of the basic fixed period, or 30 days before or after the original end date, the SEA in question would still qualify as an “agreement made for a definite period [including] the date fixed for its expiry”, as required under Standard A2.1(4)(g)(ii) of the MLC, 2006.

**C2.1.l. Can I sign consecutive SEAs that cover a period longer than 12 months?**

Yes. However, the period of continuous service on board a ship or ships would still be subject to the applicable national requirements that seafarers be given minimum paid annual leave under Regulation 2.4 and the Code [see [C2.4.a](#)] and the right of a seafarer to be repatriated after a maximum period of service on board (a period less than 12 months) under Standard A2.5.1 [see [C2.5.1.a](#)]. While these are matters for national law and practice, including applicable collective agreements, the maximum period of continuous service on board is, in principle, of 11 months. [see [C2.1.j](#)].

### C2.1.m. Which national law should be reflected in the terms of a SEA: the law of the flag State or the law of the country where the SEA was signed or the law of a country identified in the SEA?

This is a complex question of international law and the legal practice of courts. The MLC, 2006 does not specifically address this issue; however, a flag State has international legal responsibility and also specific responsibility under the MLC, 2006 for the working and living conditions for seafarers on board its ships. This means that no matter where the SEA is signed or which laws are identified in the SEA as applicable, the flag State would still have a responsibility to ensure that the SEA meets its standards implementing the MLC, 2006.

### C2.1.n. Does the SEA expire when seafarers are held captive as a result of acts of piracy or armed robbery against ships?

Under the [2018 amendments](#) to the Code of the MLC, 2006, which entered into force on 26 December 2020, Standard A2.1, paragraph 7, states that the SEA shall continue to have effect while a seafarer is held captive on or off the ship as a result of acts of piracy or armed robbery against ships, regardless of whether the date fixed for its expiry has passed or either party has given notice to suspend or terminate it.

## C2.2. Wages

### C2.2.a. Does the MLC, 2006 set a minimum wage for seafarers?

Regulation 2.2 of the MLC, 2006 states that seafarers shall be paid in full in accordance with their employment agreements. The Convention does not establish a mandatory minimum wage for seafarers, but leaves this question to be dealt with under the national law of the flag State.

However, the MLC, 2006 includes the international procedure for establishing a minimum monthly basic pay or wage figure for able seafarers (see Guideline B2.2.4). This minimum wage is set periodically by the ILO Joint Maritime Commission (JMC).<sup>36</sup> Although this minimum wage relates only to able seafarers, in practice the wage level for other seafarers is extrapolated from the amount agreed in the JMC.

### C2.2.b. How frequently are seafarers to be paid?

The maximum interval at which seafarers receive their wages (to be set by the flag State or in an applicable collective agreement) and reflected in the SEA must be no longer than one month (Standard A2.2, paragraph 1).

<sup>36</sup> The Joint Maritime Commission (JMC) is a bipartite standing body that provides advice to the Governing Body on maritime questions including standard setting for the shipping industry. The JMC's activities include the updating of the minimum basic wage figure for able seafarers in accordance with [Guideline B2.2.4 of the MLC, 2006](#). The JMC's Subcommittee on Wages of Seafarers has been established to regularly update this wage figure. For more information on the meetings of the JMC see in the [ILO website](#). In April 2025, the JMC's Subcommittee on Wages of Seafarers agreed to an adjustment to be made to update the current ILO minimum basic wage for an able seafarer to US\$690 as of 1 January 2026, US\$704 as of 1 January 2027 and US\$715 as of 1 January 2028 (See the [Resolution concerning the ILO minimum monthly basic pay or wage for able seafarers](#)).

### C2.2.c. Can seafarers be charged for the cost of sending wages to family members (allotments)?

This is a matter for flag State implementation. Standard A2.2, paragraphs 3, 4 and 5, provides that seafarers must have a means to transmit all or part of their earnings to their families or dependents or legal beneficiaries; that allotments should be remitted in due time and directly to the person or persons nominated by the seafarers; and that any charge for this service must be reasonable in amount.

### C2.2.d. Should seafarers held captive as a result of acts of piracy or armed robbery against ships continue to be paid their wages?

Under the [2018 amendments](#) to the MLC, 2006, which entered into force on 26 December 2020, Standard A2.2, paragraph 7, states that where a seafarer is held captive on or off the ship as a result of acts of piracy or armed robbery against ships, wages and other entitlements under the seafarers' employment agreement, relevant collective bargaining agreement or applicable national laws, including the remittance of any allotments, shall continue to be paid during the entire period of captivity and until the seafarer is released and duly repatriated or, where the seafarer dies while in captivity, until the date of death as determined in accordance with applicable national laws or regulations.

The [2018 amendments](#) to the MLC, 2006 do not foresee any limitations to the protection of seafarers' wages and entitlements while seafarers are held captive other than their release and repatriation or eventual death. Other factors, like the fact that the seafarer reaches the age of retirement during the period of captivity or his/her eventual negligence leading to his/her capture, are not grounds to deprive seafarers of the protection provided under Standard A2.1 and Standard A2.2.

## C2.3. Hours of work and hours of rest

### C2.3.a. Must both hours of work and rest be regulated?

No. Regulation 2.3, paragraph 2, and Standard A2.3, paragraph 2 of the MLC, 2006 require each country to fix *either* a maximum number of hours of work which shall not be exceeded in a given period of time, *or* a minimum number of hours of rest which shall be provided in a given period of time [see [C2.3.b](#)]. It is up to the country to decide which of the two arrangements to choose [see [C2.3.d](#)]. Also, although not required to do so by the MLC, 2006, some countries, as a matter of national law, have chosen to apply *both* requirements. In this case, it has been noted that Standard A2.3, paragraph 2, should not be understood as giving shipowners or masters an option to choose between one or the other systems (hours of work or hours of rest).<sup>37</sup> It is also important to understand that these standards are a minimum and maximum only and that it is essential that the danger posed by fatigue be taken into account (see Standard A2.3, paragraph 4).

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, the direct request adopted by the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations in 2024 concerning [the Cook Islands](#).

### C2.3.b. What are the standards for minimum hours of rest and maximum hours of work?

Standard A2.3, paragraph 4 of the MLC, 2006 requires countries, in determining the national standards, to take account of the danger posed by the fatigue of seafarers, especially those whose duties involve navigational safety and the safe and secure operation of the ship. Standard A2.3, paragraphs 5 and 6, set out the basic parameters for these standards:

- (a) no more than 14 hours in any 24-hour period [see C2.3.c]; and 72 hours in any seven-day period; if the basis chosen by the country is maximum hours of work;
- (b) at least ten hours in any 24-hour period; and 77 hours in any seven-day period; if the basis chosen by the country is minimum hours of rest.

Hours of rest may be divided into no more than two periods, one of which must be at least six hours in length, and the interval between consecutive periods of rest must not exceed 14 hours.

### C2.3.c. What is meant by “any 24-hour period”?

Standard A2.3, paragraph 5(b) of the MLC, 2006 provides that hours of rest must not be less than ten hours “in any 24-hour period”. Thus, any 24-hour period – starting at any moment during a day – must comprise at least ten hours of rest. In other words, the “any 24-hour period” must be understood as “rolling” period of 24 hours starting at the beginning, at the end, or during any period of rest or of work. As a result, working-time arrangements must ensure that seafarers receive a minimum of ten hours of rest during a period of 24 hours starting for example at 8 p.m. but also during the period of 24 hours starting at 9 p.m., and then 10 p.m., 11 p.m., midnight on the next day, etc.

### C2.3.d. Does the choice between hours of work and hours of rest lead to any different result in practice?

Paragraph 5(a)(i), of Standard A2.3 of the MLC, 2006 sets a maximum limit on work of 14 hours in any 24-hour period, which results in **ten** hours of rest ( $24-14=10$ ). This corresponds to the minimum **ten** hours of rest required by paragraph 5(b)(i) of the Standard. However, paragraph 5(a)(ii), which sets a maximum limit on work of 72 hours in any seven day period, results in **96** ( $7 \times 24 - 72 = 96$ ) hours of rest, whereas the minimum hours of rest in any seven-day period required by paragraph 5(b)(ii) of the Standard is only **77**.<sup>38</sup> In 2025, the [Special Tripartite Committee](#) of the MLC, 2006 (STC) adopted a [Resolution concerning the convening of a meeting on the subject of hours work and hours rest of the Joint ILO-IMO Tripartite Working Group to identify and address Seafarers’ Issues and the Human Element on hours of work and hours of rest](#). Such Group is expected to review the

<sup>38</sup> The provisions in paragraphs 5(a) and 5(b) of Standard A2.3 are not new, but reproduce the text of the [Seafarers’ Hours of Work and the Manning of Ships Convention, 1996 \(No. 180\)](#). During the preparation of the MLC, 2006 it was recalled that agreement on the various requirements in Convention No. 180 had been achieved only after protracted discussions, and it was decided that it would not be in the interest of the constituents to reopen the negotiations on any provisions agreed in 1996. Convention No. 180 has been withdrawn by the International Labour Conference in 2021.

relevant provisions of the MLC, 2006, and of the STCW Convention regarding work and rest hours.

#### C2.3.e. Are there any exceptions to the hours of rest or work standards?

Standard A2.3, paragraph 13 of the MLC, 2006 allows flag States to have national laws or regulations or a procedure for the competent authority to authorize or register collective agreements permitting exceptions to the limits on maximum hours of work or minimum hours of rest referred to in paragraphs 5 and 6 of the Standard [see C2.3.b]. These exceptions must therefore be provided for in a registered or authorized collective agreement. They must also follow the limits set out in Standard A2.3 “as far as possible”.

#### C2.3.f. How does Regulation 2.3 relate to the IMO’s STCW requirements?

Like the ILO, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations and often cooperates with the ILO on issues of shared concern in the maritime sector. In 2010, amendments known as the “Manila Amendments” to the STCW were adopted by the IMO. These amendments, which entered into force in 2012, contain wording intended to align the MLC, 2006 requirements for seafarers covered by the STCW Convention. The wording in both the MLC, 2006 and the STCW on minimum hours of rest is very similar, except for the provisions in each regarding possible exceptions [see C2.3.e]. Flag States that ratify the MLC, 2006 and are also bound by the 2010 STCW Amendments, could approve arrangements in this connection, which would be consistent with the requirements of both Conventions. Concretely, in order to comply with Standard A2.3, paragraph 13 of the MLC, 2006, any exception to the minimum hours of rest could only be adopted through a collective bargaining agreement duly registered by the competent authorities.

#### C2.3.g. Do the minimum hours of rest/maximum hours of work requirements apply to ships’ masters?

Ships’ masters are seafarers and, as such, the requirements in Regulation 2.3 and Standard A2.3 also apply to them.

#### C2.3.h. Do the hours of rest or work standards still apply in an emergency?

Standard A2.3, paragraph 14 of the MLC, 2006 safeguards the right of the master of a ship to require a seafarer to perform any hours of work necessary for the immediate safety of the ship, persons on board or cargo, or for the purpose of giving assistance to other ships or persons in distress at sea. It allows the master to suspend the schedule of hours of work or hours of rest and require a seafarer to perform any hours of work necessary until the normal situation has been restored. As soon as practicable after the normal situation has been restored, the master must ensure that any seafarers who have performed work in a scheduled rest period are provided with an adequate period of rest.

### C2.3.i. What is a short break? Does a meal break count as rest?

Standard A2.3, paragraph 1(b), defines hours of rest as meaning “time outside hours of work; this term does not include short breaks”. There is no definition of a “short break” and this is a matter left to the flag State’s national law or practice or any applicable collective agreement. However, any break from work would be a “short break” if it is not conducive to the seafarer having a rest. This could include, for example, breaks such as a meal break.

## C2.4. Entitlement to leave

### C2.4.a. What is a seafarer’s minimum entitlement to paid leave?

Under Standard A2.4, paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 of the MLC, 2006 the flag State must adopt laws and regulations determining the minimum standards for annual leave with pay for seafarers working on ships that fly its flag. The minimum entitlement must, in general, be calculated on the basis of a minimum of 2.5 calendar days per month of employment, to be determined by the competent authority or through the “appropriate machinery” in each country. Regardless of the duration of the employment agreement [see C2.1.j], a seafarer is entitled to a minimum of 30 days of paid annual leave after 11 months of continuous service on board. For shorter periods of service, the corresponding number of days should be calculated on a pro rata basis. Justified absences from work are not to be considered as annual leave. Except in specific cases provided for by the competent authority, any agreement to forgo this minimum annual leave with pay, must be prohibited [see C2.4.b]. This is because of concerns about preventing fatigue for seafarers.

### C2.4.b. Can a seafarer agree to be paid instead of actually taking paid annual leave? Can a seafarer agree to forgo annual leave?

Standard A2.4, paragraph 3 of the MLC, 2006 states that any agreement to forgo the minimum annual leave with pay prescribed in the Standard, except in cases provided for by the competent authority, must be prohibited [see C2.4.a]. While noting that the Convention is silent about the nature and scope of permissible exceptions, the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations has indicated that this provision needs to be understood in a restrictive manner. In contrast, to read in this Standard a broad authorization to forgo annual leave for cash compensation or otherwise, would defeat the purpose of Regulation 2.4, which is to ensure that seafarers enjoy a period of leave every year for the benefit of their health and well-being, which is also intrinsically linked with ship safety and security [see C2.4.c]. The objective of Regulation 2.4 is evidently to prevent fatigue, vessel unseaworthiness and all risks related thereto.

### C2.4.c. Does the requirement for paid annual leave mean that seafarers cannot be on board for more than 11 months at a time?

In principle, yes. From the combined reading of Standard A2.4, paragraphs 2 and 3, and Guideline B.2.4.3, paragraph 2, on annual leave and Standard A2.5.1, paragraph 2(b), regarding the entitlement to repatriation in a period of less than 12 months [see C2.5.1.a and C2.5.1.g], the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and

Recommendations has inferred that the maximum continuous period of shipboard service without leave is, in principle, 11 months [see [C2.4.b](#) and [C2.1.j](#)].<sup>39</sup>

Concerning annual leave, Standard 2.4 explicitly states that any agreement to forgo the minimum annual leave with pay, except in cases provided for by the competent authority, shall be prohibited. As a general rule, therefore, any agreement by which seafarers would be paid an amount of money in lieu of annual leave would not be in conformity with the Convention. This prohibition is aimed at guaranteeing the effective realization of the purpose of Regulation 2.4, which is to ensure that seafarers enjoy a period of annual leave for the benefit of their health and well-being and also intrinsically linked with ship safety and security. The objective is not only to encourage seafarers to take annual leave but also to prevent fatigue, vessel unseaworthiness and all risks related thereto. However, Standard A2.4, paragraph 3 of the MLC, 2006, does not lay down an absolute prohibition as exceptions may be authorized by the competent authority. While the Convention is silent about the nature and scope of permissible exceptions, the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations has considered that this provision needs to be read restrictively in order not to defeat the purpose of Regulation 2.4.<sup>40</sup>

With respect to repatriation, the situation is slightly different. In accordance with Regulation 2.5, paragraph 1, seafarers have a right to repatriation. However, they may decide for various reasons not to exercise this entitlement when it arises.

#### C2.4.d. Do seafarers have a right to shore leave?

Yes. This basic right of seafarers is enshrined in Regulation 2.4, paragraph 2 of the MLC, 2006, which provides that seafarers shall be granted shore leave to benefit their health and well-being. It is also linked to Regulation 4.4 of the MLC, 2006 requiring Members to ensure that shore-based welfare facilities, where they exist, are easily accessible [see [C4.4.b](#)].

The [2025 amendments](#) to the MLC, 2006 introduced a new Standard A2.4.2, which specifies the content of the right to shore leave, including the relevant responsibilities of shipowners. According to this provision, Members shall ensure that seafarers are allowed ashore by public authorities, while the ship on which they arrive is in a port in its jurisdiction, provided that the relevant formalities have been fulfilled and the public authorities have no reason to refuse permission for reasons of public health, public safety and security or public order. Shore leave must be granted to seafarers in a manner which excludes discrimination on any grounds and irrespective of the ship's flag. No seafarer shall be required to hold a visa or special permit for the purpose of shore leave. The new Standard requires the relevant public authorities to communicate the reasons for any denial of shore leave to the seafarer concerned and the master, and to provide such reasons in writing upon request.

<sup>39</sup> See the Committee of Experts' [General Observation on matters arising from the application of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended \(MLC, 2006\) during the COVID-19 pandemic](#) and the [2019 General Report](#) of the Committee of Experts (pp. 30–31). See also, for example, the direct requests adopted by the Committee of Experts in 2024 concerning the [Bahamas](#), [Saint Vincent and the Grenadines](#) and [Slovakia](#), in 2023 concerning [Belize](#), and in 2022 concerning [New Zealand](#).

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, the direct requests adopted by the Committee of Experts in 2025 concerning [Indonesia](#), in 2024 concerning [Mongolia](#), and in 2022 concerning [Brazil](#) and the [Marshall Islands](#).

In addition, according to the new provisions, each Member shall require shipowners to allow seafarers serving on ships that fly its flag to take shore leave to benefit their health and well-being, consistent with the operational requirements of their positions. Shipowners shall allow shore leave to seafarers when off duty, upon the ship's arrival in port, except when leaving the ship is prohibited or restricted by relevant authorities of the port State, or due to safety or operational reasons (Standard A2.4.2, paragraphs 5 and 6). The [2025 amendments](#) are expected to enter into force on 23 December 2027.

The importance of granting efficient access to shore facilities and shore leave for the well-being of seafarers is also recognized under ILO Conventions Nos 108 and 185 on seafarers' identity documents and other relevant international instruments <sup>41</sup> [see [C2.4.e](#) and [C4.4.f](#)].

#### C2.4.e. Do seafarers require a visa or other permit for the purpose of shore leave?

The MLC, 2006, as amended in 2025, explicitly provides that no seafarer shall be required to hold a visa or special permit for the purpose of shore leave (Standard A2.4.2, paragraph 3). This provision is in line with Standard 3.47 of the Annex to the Facilitation of International Marine Traffic, 1965, as amended (FAL). Standard A2.4.2, paragraph 7, specifies that shore leave granted in accordance with the provisions of the FAL Convention shall be considered as meeting the requirements of the MLC, 2006. <sup>42</sup> The [2025 amendments](#) are expected to enter into force on 23 December 2027.

#### C2.4.f. Who is responsible for providing shore leave?

The [2025 amendments](#) to the MLC, 2006 allocate specific responsibilities to both Member States and shipowners in relation to shore leave. Under Standard A2.4.2, Members must ensure that seafarers are allowed ashore by the public authorities [[C2.4.d](#)], and require shipowners to grant seafarers shore leave to benefit their health and well-being, consistent with the operational requirements of their positions. Shipowners shall grant shore leave to seafarers who are off duty, upon the ship's arrival in port, except when leaving the ship is prohibited or restricted by relevant authorities of the port State, or due to safety or operational reasons. New Guideline B2.4.5 adds that Members should cooperate with shipowners' and seafarers' organizations and other relevant stakeholders in port to establish procedures on board ships and in ports to facilitate shore leave for seafarers. They should also ensure that personnel in their ports and terminals are provided with appropriate information and training on seafarers' rights, including the right to shore leave.

<sup>41</sup> In particular Standards 3.44 and 3.44bis of the Annex to the FAL Convention, 1965 and the IMO Assembly Resolution No. 1090 on "Fair treatment of crew members in respect of shore leave and access to shore-side facilities".

<sup>42</sup> In this regard, at its fifth meeting, the STC adopted a [resolution](#) proposing the adoption of amendments to the FAL Convention in order to reflect the 2025 amendments to the MLC, 2006 concerning shore leave, thereby reinforcing coherence between the two instruments.

## C2.5. Repatriation

### C2.5.1.a. What is the entitlement to repatriation?

Regulation 2.5, paragraph 1 of the MLC, 2006 provides for the basic right of seafarers to repatriation at no cost to themselves [see [C2.5.1.b](#)]. The parameters for repatriation, including, in particular that the period before an entitlement arises must be “less than 12 months”, are set out in Standard A2.5.1 [see [C2.5.1.g](#)]. In 2025, the MLC, 2006 was amended to specify that the costs to be borne by the shipowner for repatriation include at least the following: (a) passage to the destination selected for repatriation; (b) accommodation and food from the moment the seafarers leave the ship until they reach the repatriation destination; (c) transportation of up to 30 kg of the seafarer’s personal luggage to the repatriation destination; and (d) medical treatment when necessary until the seafarers are medically fit to travel to the repatriation destination (Standard A2.5.1, new paragraph 3). Other specific entitlements are a matter for flag State implementation through provisions in its laws and regulations or other measures or collective bargaining agreements, with many of the precise details being recommended in Guideline B2.5.1 [see [A12](#)]. The [2025 amendments](#) are expected to enter into force on 23 December 2027.

### C2.5.1.b. What will ensure that repatriation occurs and that costs are paid?

Regulation 2.5, paragraph 2 of the MLC, 2006 provides that a flag State must require ships that fly its flag to provide financial security to ensure that seafarers are duly repatriated in accordance with the Code [see [C2.5.2.a](#)]. Standard A2.5.1, paragraph 7 requires Members to facilitate the repatriation of seafarers serving on ships which call at its ports or pass through its territorial or internal waters, as well as their replacement on board. Paragraph 10, added to Standard A2.5.1 in 2025, prescribes that repatriation shall be facilitated in a manner which excludes discrimination on any grounds and irrespective of the flag State of the ship on which they are employed, engaged or work. The [2025 amendments](#) are expected to enter into force on 23 December 2027.

### C2.5.1.c. What costs are to be covered by a shipowner when a seafarer is repatriated?

Standard A2.5.1, paragraph 2(c) of the MLC, 2006 requires flag States to prescribe the precise entitlements to be accorded by shipowners for repatriation, including those relating to the destinations of repatriation, the mode of transport, the items of expense to be covered and other arrangements to be made by shipowners. In 2025, the MLC, 2006 was amended to specify that the relevant costs to be borne by the shipowner for repatriation include at least the following: (a) passage to the destination selected for repatriation; (b) accommodation and food from the moment the seafarers leave the ship until they reach the repatriation destination; (c) transportation of up to 30 kg of the seafarer’s personal luggage to the repatriation destination; and (d) medical treatment when necessary until the seafarers are medically fit to travel to the repatriation destination (Standard A2.5.1, new paragraph 3). In addition, Governments should give due consideration [see [A12](#)] to Guideline B2.5.1, paragraph 3, as amended in 2025, which provides that the costs to be borne by the shipowner for repatriation should also include pay and allowances from the moment

the seafarers leave the ship until they reach the repatriation destination, if provided for by national laws or regulations or collective agreements. The [2025 amendments](#) are expected to enter into force on 23 December 2027.

#### C2.5.1.d. Can a seafarer be charged for repatriation costs?

Standard A2.5.1, paragraph 3 of the MLC, 2006 <sup>43</sup> prohibits shipowners from requiring that seafarers make an advance payment towards the cost of repatriation at the beginning of their employment, and also from recovering the cost of repatriation from the seafarers' wages or other entitlements except where the seafarer has been found, in accordance with national laws or regulations or other measures or applicable collective bargaining agreements, to be in serious default of the seafarer's employment obligations. This situation does not release the shipowner from the obligation to pay for the repatriation in the first instance.

#### C2.5.1.e. Some airlines are charging for luggage above a minimum weight. What is the situation for seafarers under the MLC, 2006?

Under the MLC, 2006, as amended in 2025, Members shall require shipowners to bear the cost of transportation of up to 30 kg of the seafarer's personal luggage to the repatriation destination (Standard A2.5.1, new paragraph 3(c)) [[C2.5.1.c](#)]. The [2025 amendments](#) are expected to enter into force on 23 December 2027.

#### C2.5.1.f. Does the MLC, 2006 address the situation of seafarers that are abandoned?

Before the entry into force of the 2014 amendments, on 18 January 2017, the MLC, 2006 did not directly address the serious problem of abandonment of seafarers, although some provisions, such as those related to repatriation, would apply to help protect seafarers from some of the consequences of abandonment [see [A41](#)]. In April 2014, the Special Tripartite Committee [see [A22](#)] established under the MLC, 2006 adopted amendments to the Code of the MLC, 2006 [see [A21](#)] to more specifically address the problem of abandonment of seafarers [see [C2.5.2.a](#)].

#### C2.5.1.g. Can a seafarer decide not to exercise a right to be repatriated when that entitlement arises?

Standard A2.5.1, paragraph 2(b) of the MLC, 2006 requires each flag State to prescribe, through laws and regulations or other measures or collective bargaining agreements, a number of matters including "the maximum duration of service periods on board following which a seafarer is entitled to repatriation – such periods to be less than 12 months". A seafarer could, however, choose not to exercise this entitlement when it arises (unless the flag State law prohibited such a choice being made) [see [C2.1.i](#)]. At the same time, the flag State also has to take account of its obligation under Regulation 2.4 and the Code to require that seafarers are given at least the minimum period (2.5 calendar days per month of service) of paid annual leave [see [C2.4.a](#) and [C2.4.c](#)].

<sup>43</sup> This paragraph has been renumbered as paragraph 4 by the 2025 amendments to the Convention.

#### C2.5.1.h. Can the shipowner decide not to offer repatriation when the entitlement arises?

Any decision of the shipowner refusing the right to repatriation when this entitlement arises would be contrary to Regulation 2.5 of the MLC, 2006. In addition, it could result in the seafarer exceeding the default 11 month maximum continuous period without taking leave, and would therefore be contrary to Regulation 2.4 of the MLC, 2006.

#### C2.5.2.a. What is the form of the financial security system for the event of an abandonment?

The 2014 amendments to the MLC, 2006 introduced Standard A2.5.2 establishing, in implementation of Regulation 2.5, paragraph 2, requirements to ensure the provision of an expeditious and effective financial security system to assist seafarers in the event of their abandonment. Each member State shall ensure that a financial security system is in place for ships flying its flag which provides direct access, sufficient coverage and expedited financial assistance to abandoned seafarers. The financial security system may be in the form of a social security scheme or insurance or a national fund or other similar arrangements. Its form shall be determined by the Member after consultation with the shipowners' and seafarers' organizations concerned.

#### C2.5.2.b. When are seafarers considered "abandoned"?

According to Standard A2.5.2, paragraph 2 of the MLC, 2006, a seafarer shall be deemed to have been abandoned where, in violation of the requirements of the Convention or the terms of the seafarers' employment agreement, the shipowner: (a) fails to cover the cost of the seafarer's repatriation; or (b) has left the seafarer without the necessary maintenance and support; or (c) has otherwise unilaterally severed their ties with the seafarer including failure to pay contractual wages for a period of at least two months. Necessary maintenance and support of seafarers shall include: adequate food, accommodation, drinking water supplies, essential fuel for survival on board the ship and necessary medical care (Standard A2.5.1, paragraph 5).

#### C2.5.2.c. Are all ships covered by the MLC, 2006 concerned by a financial security system in the event of their abandonment?

Yes, a financial security system in the event of an abandonment shall be in place for all "ships", within the meaning of the MLC, 2006 [see B4].

#### C2.5.2.d. What is the content of the assistance provided by the financial security system in the event of abandonment?

The assistance provided should be sufficient to cover: (a) outstanding wages and other entitlements due from the shipowner to the seafarer under their employment agreement, the relevant collective bargaining agreement or the national law of the flag State, limited to four months of any such outstanding wages and four months of any such outstanding entitlements; (b) all expenses reasonably incurred by the seafarer, including the cost of repatriation; and (c) the essential needs of the seafarer including such items as: adequate

food, clothing where necessary, accommodation, drinking water supplies, essential fuel for survival on board the ship, necessary medical care and any other reasonable costs or charges from the act or omission constituting the abandonment until the seafarer's arrival at home. The cost of repatriation must cover travel by appropriate and expeditious means, normally by air, and include provision for food and accommodation of the seafarer from the time of leaving the ship until arrival at the seafarer's home, necessary medical care, passage and transport of personal effects and any other reasonable costs or charges arising from the abandonment.

#### C2.5.2.e. How do seafarers know that they are covered by a financial security system in the event of their abandonment?

Standard A2.5.2, paragraph 6, provides that ships that are required to carry a Maritime Labour Certificate and a declaration of maritime labour compliance [see [C5.2.3.d](#)], shall carry on board a certificate or other documentary evidence of financial security issued by the financial security provider [see [Appendix A2-I of the Convention](#), which details the information that shall be included in the certificate or other documentary evidence]. A copy shall be posted in a conspicuous place on board where it is available to the seafarers. Where more than one financial security provider provides cover, the document provided by each provider shall be carried on board. Under Standard A2.5.2, paragraph 11, the financial security shall not cease before the end of the period of validity of the financial security unless the financial security provider has given prior notification of at least 30 days to the competent authority of the flag State.

#### C2.5.2.f. Does it matter if the abandonment takes place in the territory of the country that has not ratified the Convention?

The place of the abandonment does not have an impact on the availability of the protection. The financial security provider, which can be a Protection & Indemnity Club (P&I) insurance, shall provide the agreed assistance wherever the abandonment takes place, even if it occurs in the territory of a State that has not ratified the Convention or is not bound by the 2014 amendments.

#### C2.5.2.g. Is this financial security system exclusive of any other action that the seafarer may take to obtain compensation?

Standard A2.5.2, paragraph 14, provides that this financial security system is not intended to be exclusive or to prejudice any other rights, claims or remedies that may also be available to compensate seafarers who are abandoned.

#### C2.5.2.h. What is the role of Member States in the case of abandonment of seafarers?

The MLC, 2006, does not contain detailed requirements in this regard. However, according to Standard A2.5.1, paragraphs 7 and 8, each Member shall facilitate the repatriation of seafarers serving on ships which call at its ports or pass through its territorial or internal waters, as well as their replacement on board. In particular, a Member shall not

refuse the right of repatriation to any seafarer because of the financial circumstances of a shipowner or because of the shipowner's inability or unwillingness to replace a seafarer.

In 2022, a new paragraph 9 was added to Standard A2.5.1 providing that Members shall facilitate the prompt repatriation of seafarers, including when they are deemed abandoned. Port States, flag States and labour-supplying States shall cooperate to ensure that seafarers engaged on a ship to replace seafarers who have been abandoned in their territory, or on a ship flying their flag, shall be accorded their rights and entitlements under this Convention.

The *ILO/IMO Guidelines on how to deal with seafarer abandonment cases*, adopted in 2022, provide concrete guidance to port States, flag States and States of which seafarers are nationals on how to design and implement policies and measures for the resolution of cases of abandonment of seafarers.

## **C2.6. Seafarer compensation for the ship's loss or foundering**

### **C2.6.a. Who is to pay compensation to seafarers on a ship's loss or foundering?**

Under Regulation 2.6, paragraph 1, seafarers are entitled to adequate compensation paid by the shipowner in the case of injury, loss or unemployment arising from the ship's loss or foundering.

### **C2.6.b. Guideline B2.6, paragraph 1, indicates that compensation for ship's loss or foundering may be limited to two months' wages. Does this mean it can be less than two months wages?**

The Guideline simply means that the indemnity against unemployment resulting from a ship's foundering or loss could be restricted by national law or an applicable collective agreement to two months' wages, but not to any shorter period (unless the seafarer finds other employment).

## **C2.7. Manning levels**

### **C2.7.a. Does the MLC, 2006 establish a minimum manning level for ships?**

The MLC, 2006 does not set a specific number of seafarers who must be working on board a ship as this is a matter that the competent authority in the flag State would need to decide for a ship or category of ships. However, it sets out some parameters that must be followed when deciding on the manning levels for ships. Standard A2.7 requires every ship to be manned by a crew that is adequate, in terms of size and qualifications, to ensure the safety and security of the ship and its personnel, under all operating conditions, in accordance with the minimum safe manning document or an equivalent issued by the competent authority, and to comply with the standards of the MLC, 2006. In particular, when determining manning levels, the competent authority [see [A25](#)] must take into account all the requirements within Regulation 3.2 and Standard A3.2 concerning food and catering. In other words, the required number of cooks and catering staff will have to be included in the minimum safe manning document or equivalent issued by the competent authority.

**C2.7.b. Is the manning level required by the MLC, 2006 the same as the manning required in a ship's "safe manning document" (SMD)?**

The answer would depend on the factors a flag State has taken into consideration when establishing the SMD levels. If the factors set out in Standard A2.7 – a crew that is adequate, in terms of size and qualifications, to ensure the safety and security of the ship and its personnel, under all operating conditions, in accordance with the minimum safe manning document or an equivalent issued by the competent authority, and to comply with the standards of the Convention – including among others the right to shore leave and the need to take account of all the requirements within Regulation 3.2 and Standard A3.2 concerning food and catering [see [C2.7.a](#)], were considered in establishing the SMD, then it may be the same.

**C2.7.c. Does Regulation 2.7 on manning level apply to all ships covered by the MLC, 2006?**

Yes. Regulation 2.7 applies to all ships that fly the flag of a ratifying State, regardless of tonnage.

**C2.8. Career and skill development and opportunities for seafarers' employment**

**C2.8.a. Who has an obligation under Regulation 2.8?**

The obligations under Regulation 2.8 and the related Code are directed to governments with seafarers domiciled in their territory. Specifically Regulation 2.8, paragraph 1, requires countries to have national policies to promote employment in the maritime sector and to encourage career and skill development and greater employment opportunities for seafarers domiciled in their territory.

**C3. Title 3. Accommodation, recreational facilities, food and catering**

**C3.1. Accommodation and recreational facilities**

**C3.1.a. Do the accommodation requirements of Title 3 apply to existing ships?**

Regulation 3.1, paragraph 2 of the MLC, 2006 provides that the requirements in the Code that relate to ship construction and equipment apply only to ships constructed on or after the date when the MLC, 2006 comes into force for the flag State. For ships constructed before the entry into force for the flag State, the requirements relating to ship construction and equipment that are set out in the [Accommodation of Crews Convention \(Revised\), 1949 \(No. 92\)](#), and the [Accommodation of Crews \(Supplementary Provisions\) Convention, 1970 \(No. 133\)](#), apply to the extent that they were already applicable, under the law or practice of the Member concerned. While Conventions Nos 92 and 133 are expected to be abrogated by the International Labour Conference in 2030, this will not affect the continued

application of the standards they contain to ships constructed before the entry into force of the MLC, 2006, for the country concerned, to the extent that they were already applicable.<sup>44</sup>

One or both of those Conventions may have become applicable through ratification by the country concerned. Or their substance may have become applicable through the country's ratification of the [Merchant Shipping \(Minimum Standards\) Convention, 1976 \(No. 147\)](#), and/or the [1996 Protocol to Convention No. 147](#).<sup>45</sup> Even if a country has not ratified any of these Conventions, all ships, regardless of the date of construction, must comply with the basic requirement in Regulation 3.1, paragraph 1, that they "provide and maintain decent accommodations and recreational facilities for seafarers working or living on board, or both, consistent with promoting the seafarers' health and well-being" in accordance with the ships' national legislation. All other requirements in the MLC, 2006 as implemented nationally, including those in Standard A3.1 that are not related to construction and equipment, will apply to ships constructed before the MLC, 2006 entered into force for the flag State.

#### C3.1.b. Can sleeping rooms be located below a ship's load line?

Under Standard A3.1, paragraph 6(c) and (d) of the MLC, 2006 in ships other than passenger ships and special purpose ships [see [C3.1.c](#)], sleeping rooms must be situated above the load line amidships or aft, except that in exceptional cases, where the size, type or intended service of the ship renders any other location impracticable, sleeping rooms may be located in the fore part of the ship, but in no case forward of the collision bulkhead. In passenger ships and special purpose ships the competent authority [see [A25](#)] may, on condition that satisfactory arrangements are made for lighting and ventilation, permit the location of sleeping rooms below the load line, but in no case can they be located immediately beneath working alleyways.

#### C3.1.c. What are "special purpose ships"?

Special purpose ships are training or other ships constructed in compliance with the IMO [Code of Safety for Special Purpose Ships, 2008](#) (SPS Code), and subsequent versions.

#### C3.1.d. Must seafarers always be given individual sleeping rooms?

Under Standard A3.1, paragraph 9(a) of the MLC, 2006 in ships other than passenger ships, an individual sleeping room must be provided for each seafarer; but, in the case of ships of less than 3,000 GT or special purpose ships [[C3.1.c](#)], exemptions from this requirement may be granted by the competent authority [see [A25](#)] after consultation with the shipowners' and seafarers' organizations concerned. Separate sleeping rooms shall be provided for men and for women under Standard A3.1, paragraph 9(b).

<sup>44</sup> For further information on the status of ILO instruments, see the [NORMLEX](#) database.

<sup>45</sup> Convention No. 147 has been considered outdated by the Governing Body upon recommendation of the Special Tripartite Committee (STC) in 2021. Its possible abrogation will be discussed by the STC at its sixth meeting. Protocol of 1996 to the Merchant Shipping (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1976, has been withdrawn by decision of the International Labour Conference at its 111th Session (2023).

### C3.1.e. Does the MLC, 2006 require that cadets have a single cabin?

This situation and terminology may vary between countries. The following answer assumes that the term “cadet” refers to a young person enrolled in a training programme to obtain specific qualifications, which may require work experience on board. The MLC, 2006 does not directly address the question of accommodation for cadets as distinct from other seafarers. The general rule, and the possibility for exemptions, referred to in answering [see C3.1.d] would therefore apply.

### C3.1.f. Must seafarers have sleeping rooms on board ships engaged on day trips?

Standard A3.1, paragraph 9 of the MLC, 2006 sets out the requirements where “sleeping accommodation on board ships is required”. If a ship is not engaged in voyages where seafarers would need to sleep on board the ship, then sleeping rooms would not be required.

### C3.1.g. Must each seafarer be provided with private sanitary facilities?

Standard A3.1, paragraph 11 of the MLC, 2006 requires ships to have a sufficient number of sanitary facilities (with a minimum of one toilet, one wash basin and one tub or shower), with separate facilities being provided for men and women. Each seafarer is to be given convenient access to them. The Convention does not require private sanitary facilities for each seafarer, but, as recommended in Guideline B3.1.5, paragraph 2 [see A12], where the size of the ship, the activity in which it is to be engaged and its layout make it reasonable and practicable, sleeping rooms should be planned and equipped with a private bathroom, including a toilet, so as to provide reasonable comfort for the occupants and to facilitate tidiness.

### C3.1.h. Must menstrual hygiene products be available for seafarers on board?

Under the 2025 amendments to the MLC, 2006, appropriate and sufficient menstrual hygiene products and means of disposal should be available for seafarers (Guideline B3.1.10, new paragraph 1 (d). These amendments are expected to enter into force on 23 December 2027.

### C3.1.i. Can the floor area of adjacent private or semi-private sanitary facilities be considered for purposes of calculating the minimum floor area in sleeping rooms?

Standard A3.1 of the MLC, 2006 sets out detailed requirements as to the minimum floor area of sleeping rooms but does not specify how these areas are to be measured. However, it provides guidance (in Guideline B3.1.5, paragraph 6) that space occupied by berths and lockers, chests of drawers and seats should be included in the measurement of the floor area, but not small or irregularly shaped spaces “which do not add effectively to the space available for free movement and cannot be used for installing furniture”. Since an adjacent partitioned sanitary facility would not add effectively to the space available for free movement, etc., it could be concluded that the existence of private or personal sanitary facilities would probably have no impact on the measurement of minimum sleeping

room floor areas under Standard A3.1, paragraph 9, although they may be relevant to a question of substantial equivalence [see [A11](#)].

Could less space be provided in sleeping accommodation in return for greater comfort? This question has been raised in the context of certain categories of ships with limited space for seafarers' sleeping rooms. It raises the concept of "substantial equivalence" addressed in Article VI, paragraphs 3 and 4 of the MLC, 2006 [see [A11](#)]. Any solution to compensate for less floor area in sleeping accommodation would need to be "conducive to the full achievement of the general object and purpose" of the requirements relating to floor space to "give effect to" the provision or provisions concerned (Article VI, paragraph 4). Such a solution might reasonably consist of extra space such as a big, more comfortable day room to be shared by adjoining sleeping rooms; or the definition in Article VI, paragraph 4, might possibly justify a solution providing extra comfort related to sleeping room accommodation, such as the provision of en suite sanitary facilities. The question has even been raised as to whether extra comfort in general, unrelated to floor area, could be considered in the evaluation of a substantially equivalent solution, such as the grant to the seafarers concerned of extra free time ashore.

It is in this context that ratifying Members should assess their national provisions from the point of view of substantial equivalence, identifying the general object and purpose of the provision concerned in Part A of the Code (in accordance with Article VI, paragraph 4(a)) and determining whether or not the proposed national provision could, in good faith, be considered as giving effect to the provision (as required by Article VI, paragraph 4(b)).

#### **C3.1.j. Why are frequent inspections of ship accommodation required and who is to carry them out?**

Under Standard A3.1, paragraph 18 of the MLC, 2006 frequent inspections are to be carried out on board ships, by or under the authority of the master, to ensure that seafarer accommodation is clean, decently habitable and maintained in a good state of repair. The results of each such inspection must be recorded and be available for review. These inspections are a key part of ensuring ongoing compliance between flag State inspections. The related procedures are likely to be part of a shipowner's plans, as set out under Part II of the ship's Declaration of Maritime Labour Compliance [see [C5.2.3.f](#)].

#### **C3.1.k. Is there any flexibility provided with respect to the requirements for accommodation and recreational facilities?**

The MLC, 2006 contains a significant level of technical guidance with respect to national implementation of the standards for on-board accommodation and recreational facilities. These provisions, which are directed to flag States, apply to all ships covered by the Convention. However, there also are some exceptions and flexibility based on factors such as gross tonnage levels as well as specific adjustments for some categories of ships such as passenger ships or special purpose ships [see [C3.1.c](#)], as well as the possibility for smaller ships (less than 200 GT), to be exempted from certain requirements as set out in Standard A3.1, paragraph 20, after consultation with the shipowners' and seafarers' organizations concerned [see [B15](#)].

**C3.1.l. The MLC, 2006 requires adequate lighting. Are there any standards for lighting?**

This is a matter for national standards, many of which are now available online. However, the MLC, 2006 also provides guidance in Guideline B3.1.4. regarding a method to assess the adequacy of measures.

**C3.1.m. Standard A3.1 refers to issues such as noise level or exposure to ambient factors, which are related to occupational safety and health. Are there any standards or other guidance on these matters?**

In addition to the recommendations in Guideline B3.1 and the provisions in Standard A4.3 and Guideline B4.3, in October 2014 an international tripartite meeting of experts met to adopt *Guidelines for implementing the occupational safety and health provisions of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006*.<sup>46</sup>

**C3.1.n. Do seafarers have a right to social connectivity through internet access under the MLC, 2006?**

Yes. The [2022 amendments](#) to the Convention introduced the right of seafarers to social connectivity through internet access on board. The relevant provisions were adopted as a “package” which combined the recognition of the right to social connectivity as one of the services that must be provided on board for the benefit of all seafarers (Standard A3.1, paragraph 17) with two paragraphs in the Guidelines highlighting the responsibilities of shipowners and port States. As a result, in implementing the right to social connectivity, shipowners should, so far as is reasonably practicable, provide seafarers on board their ships with internet access, with charges, if any, being reasonable in amount (Guideline B3.1.11, paragraph 8). In addition, port States should, so far as is reasonably practicable, provide seafarers on board ships in their ports and at their associated anchorages with Internet access, with charges, if any, being reasonable in amount (Guideline B4.4.2, paragraph 5).

When submitting the relevant [proposal for amendment](#), the Seafarers’ group referred to the expected positive social impact of enhanced internet access on board. This included, on the one hand, improved well-being for seafarers who would be able to interact with families and friends when needed and receive emotional and practical support during difficult situations, and, on the other hand, practical benefits for companies which would be able to provide consistent training for seafarers throughout the fleet as well as direct communication with them in relation to the company’s policies or other essential information.

**C3.1.o. Must internet access be provided free of charge for seafarers under the MLC, 2006?**

While recognizing a right to social connectivity for seafarers on board, the Convention does not establish an absolute right to free or unlimited internet access. Internet access for

<sup>46</sup> See the ILO MLC, 2006 website under the heading “MLC, 2006 implementation tools and publications.”

social connectivity should, in principle, be provided free of charge. If seafarers are charged for that service, the price should be reasonable in amount. The relevant provisions are contained in Standard A3.1, paragraph 17 and in the non-mandatory part of the Code (Guideline B3.1.11, paragraph 8 and Guideline B4.4.2, paragraph 5), which provide that shipowners and concerned port States should ensure access to the internet so far as is reasonably practicable, with charges, if any, being reasonable in amount [see [C4.4.d](#)].

### **C3.1.p. Who is expected to provide Internet access to seafarers, and how is this assessed in practice?**

Under the Convention, shipowners should provide access to the internet on board ships (Standard A3.1, paragraph 17 and Guideline B3.1.11, paragraph 8), while concerned port States should provide seafarers on board ships in their ports and at their associated anchorages with internet access (Guideline B4.4.2, paragraph 5) [see [C4.4.d](#)]. In assessing compliance, due account should be taken of whether access is provided “so far as is reasonably practicable,” including any technical or operational constraints, and whether charges imposed on seafarers, if any, are “reasonable in amount”.

## **C3.2. Food and catering**

### **C3.2.a. Is there a minimum standard for the food and drinking water served to seafarers on board ships?**

National laws or other measures would address the detail of what is required on board a ship. The MLC, 2006 provides some minimum standards for the food and drinking water on board ship under Regulation 3.2. These standards cover the quantity, nutritional value, quality and variety of food and drinking water supplies, having regard to the number of seafarers on board, their religious requirements and cultural practices as they pertain to food, and the duration and nature of the voyage (Standard A3.2, paragraph 2(a)). In addition, the organization and equipment of the catering department shall be such as to permit the provision to the seafarers of adequate, varied, balanced and nutritious meals prepared and served in hygienic conditions (Standard A3.2, paragraph 2(b), as amended in 2022 <sup>47</sup>). In addition, following the 2022 amendment to Standard A3.2, paragraph 7, in accordance with the ongoing compliance procedures under Title 5, the competent authority shall require that frequent documented inspections be carried out on board ships, by or under the authority of the master, with respect to supplies of food and drinking water in relation to their quantity, nutritional value, quality and variety.

### **C3.2.b. Can seafarers be charged for food and drinking water on board ship?**

Standard A3.2, paragraph 2(a), as amended in 2022, provides that food and drinking water supplies shall be provided free of charge during the period of engagement.

<sup>47</sup> See the [2022 amendments](#) to the Code of the Convention.

### C3.2.c. Must ships' cooks be certified?

The MLC, 2006 does not require that ships' cooks be certified. However, the Guidelines under B3.2 suggest that certification may be the expected approach. This would be a matter for national law. However, ships' cooks, including non-fully qualified cook, must not be under 18 years of age and, in accordance with Regulation 3.2, paragraph 3, must be trained, qualified and found competent for the position in accordance with requirements set out in the laws and regulations of the country concerned. In 2013 an international meeting adopted the *Guidelines on the training of ships' cooks*. All of these guidelines are easily available on the [MLC, 2006 website](#).

### C3.2.d. Must all ships have a full-time ships' cook?

Standard A3.2 does not require full-time cooks. The size of the ship and the number of meals being served per day are the factors determining whether cooks are full-time or part-time. However, the requirement for training and qualifications applies to both full-time and part-time cooks.

### C3.2.e. Does the MLC, 2006 set any standards for the quality of drinking water on board?

With respect to specific standards for potable (drinking) water, the MLC, 2006 leaves this matter to be addressed through flag State implementation [see [A7](#)]. However, the *Guidelines on the training of ships' cooks*, adopted in 2013, contain suggestions regarding acceptable standards.<sup>48</sup>

### C3.2.f. What happens if a ships' cook training certificate was issued before the MLC, 2006 entered into force? Does this mean a ship's cook has to have a new certificate?

The date of entry into force of the Convention for the country is not directly relevant to any certificates that may have been issued, such as ships' cooks' certificates. These certificates should be considered on their merits without regard to the fact they were issued prior to entry into force. However, if a ships' cook's training does not meet the MLC, 2006 requirements then there may be a question, perhaps related more to whether a flag State should recognize a non-compliant situation for the purpose of inspection and issuing a Maritime Labour Certificate [see [C1.3.g](#)].

<sup>48</sup> See also the 2022 WHO guidelines on potable water standards, which are available at: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240045064>.

## **C4. Title 4. Health protection, medical care, welfare and social security protection**

### **C4.1. Medical care on board ship and ashore**

#### **C4.1.a. What kinds of treatment would be considered as medical care?**

In connection with the health protection and medical care that shipowners are required to provide, in principle free of charge, to seafarers working on board their ships, Regulation 4.1 of the MLC, 2006 does not identify any particular treatment – other than “essential dental care” – as this would be a matter for national laws or regulations. Flag States are required to ensure the application to seafarers of any general national provisions on occupational health protection and medical care relevant to their duties, as well as the application of special provisions specific to work on board ship; the health protection and medical care must be as comparable as possible to that which is generally available to workers ashore, including prompt access to the necessary medicines, medical equipment and facilities for diagnosis and treatment and to medical information and expertise; it must include measures of a preventive character such as health promotion and health education programmes. Seafarers have the right to visit a qualified medical doctor or dentist without delay in ports of call, where practicable. A ratifying State is also required to give access to its facilities to seafarers in need of immediate medical care who are on board ships within its territory.

#### **C4.1.b. What are the rights of seafarers in need of immediate medical care ashore?**

Under Regulation 4.1 of the MLC, 2006, each Member must ensure that seafarers on board ships in its territory who are in need of immediate medical care are given access to the Member’s medical facilities on shore. In 2022, taking into account the difficulties faced by seafarers to get access to medical care ashore during the COVID-19 pandemic, a new paragraph 5 was added to Standard A4.1 to reinforce this right. The new provision requires Members to ensure the prompt disembarkation of seafarers from ships in its territory where such care is required and facilitate access to medical facilities ashore for the provision of appropriate treatment.

#### **C4.1.c. What is meant by “immediate medical care” ashore?**

Guideline B4.1.3, paragraph 5, was amended in 2022 to provide clear guidance to member States following numerous cases of denial of access to medical care ashore during the COVID-19 pandemic. It provides for a non-exhaustive list of cases in which seafarers should be considered to be in need of immediate medical care which includes: (a) any serious injury or disease; (b) any injury or disease which might lead to temporary or permanent disability; (c) any communicable disease which poses a risk of transmission to other members of the crew; (d) any injury involving broken bones, severe bleeding, broken or inflamed teeth or severe burns; (e) severe pain which cannot be managed on board ship, taking account of the operational pattern of the ship, the availability of suitable analgesics and the health impacts of taking these for an extended period; (f) suicide risk; and (g) a tele-medical advisory service recommending treatment.

#### C4.1.d What are the Members' obligations when a seafarer dies during a voyage?

Under Standard A4.1, as amended in 2022, where a seafarer has died during a ship's voyage, the Member in whose territory the death has occurred, or, where the death has occurred on the high seas, the Member into whose territorial waters the ship next enters, shall facilitate the repatriation of the body or ashes by the shipowner, in accordance with the wishes of the seafarer or their next of kin, as appropriate (Standard A4.1, paragraph 6). This obligation reinforces the overall framework of the Convention relating to medical care, shipowners' liability and repatriation.

#### C4.1.e. Must every ship have a ship's doctor on board?

Under Standard A4.1, paragraphs 4(b) and (c) of the MLC, 2006 ships carrying 100 or more "persons" (i.e., who will not necessarily all be seafarers) and ordinarily engaged on international voyages of more than three days' duration must carry a qualified medical doctor. National laws or regulations must also specify which other ships are required to carry a medical doctor, taking into account, inter alia, such factors as the duration, nature and conditions of the voyage and the number of seafarers on board. Ships which do not carry a medical doctor must have either at least one seafarer on board who is in charge of medical care and administering medicine as part of their regular duties or at least one seafarer on board competent to provide medical first aid; such persons must have satisfactorily completed training in medical care that meets the requirements of the IMO's International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers, 1978, as amended ("STCW").

#### C4.1.f. What should a medical chest contain?

Standard A4.1, paragraph 4(a) of the MLC, 2006 requires all ships to carry a medicine chest, medical equipment and a medical guide, the specifics of which shall be prescribed and subject to regular inspection by the competent authority; the national requirements must take into account the type of ship, the number of persons on board and the nature, destination and duration of voyages and relevant national and international recommended medical standards. As far as the content of the medical chest and many other related matters are concerned, Guideline B4.1, paragraph 4 [see A12], refers to relevant international recommendations, including the latest edition of the *International Medical Guide for Ships*.<sup>49</sup> This provision was amended in 2025 to include a reference to the *International Medical Guide for Seafarers and Fishers*.<sup>50</sup> The 2025 amendments are expected to enter into force on 23 December 2027.

<sup>49</sup> WHO, *Quantification Addendum: International Medical Guide for Ships*, 2007. Available at: <https://iris.who.int/items/ad0b59ae-daf9-44a5-b161-e78dfdcc9490>.

<sup>50</sup> The International Medical Guide for Seafarers and Fishers is an onboard medical manual produced by the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) in collaboration with the ITF and the International Maritime Health Association (IMHA).

#### C4.1.g. Is there a standard ships' medical guide?

The MLC, 2006 does not provide for a standard medical guide. A country may develop a national medical guide, to fulfil the requirement under Standard A4.1, paragraph 4(a), and the recommendation in Guideline B4.1, paragraph 4 [see A12]; there is also a need to take account of relevant international recommendations, including the latest edition of the *International Medical Guide for Ships*. This provision was amended in 2025 to include a reference to the *International Medical Guide for Seafarers and Fishers*.<sup>51</sup> The 2025 amendments are expected to enter into force on 23 December 2027.

#### C4.1.h. Does the MLC, 2006 contain a model form for the standard medical report form to be used on board ships?

There is no model in the MLC, 2006 for the standard medical report form, which countries must adopt in accordance with Standard A4.1, paragraph 2, for use by the ships' masters and relevant onshore and on-board medical personnel. The purpose of the form is explained in Guideline B4.1.2, paragraph 1, namely to facilitate the exchange of medical and related information concerning individual seafarers between ship and shore in cases of illness or injury.

While no particular form is required under the MLC, 2006, the third edition of the *International Medical Guide for Ships*,<sup>52</sup> published in 2007 by the World Health Organization (WHO) on behalf of the WHO, ILO and IMO, contains a form for this purpose in Annex A.

#### C4.1.i. Guideline B4.1.1, paragraph 2 of the MLC, 2006 refers to the Document for Guidance, 1985 – An international maritime training guide. Where can I get copy as it seems to be out of print?

The IMO is no longer distributing this guidance as the STCW has been revised. An English language version of this publication can be downloaded freely on the ILO's dedicated MLC, 2006 website at: <http://www.ilo.org/mlc>.<sup>53</sup>

### C4.2. Shipowners' liability

#### C4.2.1.a. What is shipowners' liability?

Regulation 4.2 and the Code requires flag States to ensure that all seafarers employed on their ships have material assistance and support from the shipowner with respect to the financial consequences of sickness, injury or death occurring while they are serving under a seafarers' employment agreement or arising from the employment under such agreement. These financial consequences include loss of wages and also medical and

<sup>51</sup> The International Medical Guide for Seafarers and Fishers is an onboard medical manual produced by the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) in collaboration with the ITF and the International Maritime Health Association (IMHA).

<sup>52</sup> Available at: <https://iris.who.int/items/ad0b59ae-daf9-44a5-b161-e78dfdcc9490>.

<sup>53</sup> Document available at the link [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---normes/documents/genericdocument/wcms\\_217687.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---normes/documents/genericdocument/wcms_217687.pdf).

other costs. These provisions complement the protection set out in Regulation 4.1 regarding medical care on board ship and ashore and the long-term protection under Regulation 4.5 regarding social security. Standard A4.2.1, paragraph 1(b), provides that each member State shall adopt laws and regulations requiring that shipowners of ships that fly its flag to provide financial security to assure compensation in the event of the death or long-term disability of seafarers due to an occupational injury, illness or hazard, as set out in national law, the seafarers' employment agreement or collective agreement. The 2014 amendments to the Code added new provisions and a new standard under Regulation 4.2 (Standard A4.2.2 on the treatment of contractual claims), which details this mechanism [see [C4.2.2.b](#)].

#### C4.2.1.b. When does shipowners' liability begin and end?

The liability of shipowners under Regulation 4.2 and the Code is: (a) for sickness and injury occurring between the date when the seafarers commence their duty and the date upon which they are deemed duly repatriated; and (b) for sickness or injury that arises from the seafarers' employment between the dates referred to under (a). The liability for defraying the expenses of medical care, and for boarding and lodging (in cases seafarers that are away from home), for this sickness and injury and the related loss of wages may be limited to a period, not less than 16 weeks, under national laws or regulations [see [C4.2.1.d](#) and [C4.2.1.f](#)].

#### C4.2.1.c. What costs are included under shipowners' liability?

Regulation 4.2, paragraph 1 of the MLC, 2006 sets out the general principle that seafarers have a right to material assistance and support from the shipowner with respect to the financial consequences of sickness, injury or death occurring while they are serving under a seafarers' employment agreement or arising from their employment under such agreement. The question of what are considered financial consequences is a matter for national laws and regulations. Standard A4.2.1, paragraphs 1 to 4 and 7 of the MLC, 2006 requires the following costs to be covered as a minimum:

- the expense of medical care, including medical treatment and the supply of medicines and therapeutic appliances, and also board and lodging for seafarers while away from home, until the sick or injured seafarer has recovered or until the sickness or incapacity has been declared of a permanent character [see [C4.2.1.d](#)]; where sickness or injury results in incapacity for work, full wages as long as the sick or injured seafarers remain on board or until the seafarers have been repatriated; and wages in whole or in part, as prescribed by national laws or regulations or as provided for in collective agreements, from the time when the seafarers are repatriated or landed until their recovery or, if earlier, until they are entitled to cash benefits under the legislation of the country concerned;
- financial security to assure compensation in the event of the death or long-term disability of seafarers due to an occupational injury, illness or hazard, as set out in national law, the seafarers' employment agreement or a collective agreement;
- the cost of burial services in the case of death on board or ashore during the period of engagement;

- the cost of safeguarding the property of seafarers left on board by sick, injured or deceased seafarers.

#### C4.2.1.d. Are there any limits on shipowners' liability?

Under Standard A4.2, national laws or regulations may limit the liability of the shipowner to defray the expense of medical care and board and lodging, as well as the liability to pay wages in full or in part [see C4.2.1.c] to a period which must not be less than 16 weeks from the day of the injury or the commencement of the sickness [see C4.2.1.f].

#### C4.2.1.e. Does the MLC, 2006 specify a particular form for the financial security that shipowners are to provide?

Before the entry into force of the 2014 amendments, on 18 January 2017, no particular form was prescribed for the financial security to assure compensation in the event of the death or long-term disability of seafarers due to an occupational injury, illness or hazard. The form of the financial security is now detailed under Standard A4.2.1, paragraphs 8 to 14, and under Standard A4.2.2.

#### C4.2.1.f. Are there any exceptions to shipowner liability?

Under Standard A4.2.1 paragraph 5, national laws or regulations may exclude the shipowner from liability in respect of:

- injury incurred otherwise than in the service of the ship;
- injury or sickness due to the wilful misconduct of the sick, injured or deceased seafarer; and
- sickness or infirmity intentionally concealed when the engagement is entered into.

Standard A4.2.1, paragraph 6, allows national laws or regulations to also exempt the shipowner from liability to defray the expense of medical care and board and lodging and burial expenses insofar as such liability is assumed by the public authorities. Guideline B4.2.1, paragraph 2, recognizes that national laws or regulations may provide that a shipowner ceases to be liable to bear the costs of a sick or injured seafarer from the time at which that seafarer can claim medical benefits under a scheme of compulsory sickness insurance, compulsory accident insurance or workers' compensation for accidents.

#### C4.2.1.g. To what extent are shipowners liable if seafarers on their ships are covered by a state (public) system of compensation in the case of sickness or injury?

Standard A4.2.1, paragraph 6 of the MLC, 2006 allows national laws or regulations to also exempt the shipowner from liability to defray the expense of medical care and board and lodging and burial expenses insofar as such liability is assumed by the public authorities. Guideline B4.2.1, paragraph 2, recognizes that national laws or regulations may provide that a shipowner ceases to be liable to bear the costs of a sick or injured seafarer from the time at which that seafarer can claim medical benefits under a scheme of compulsory sickness insurance, compulsory accident insurance or workers' compensation for accidents [see C4.2.1.f].

#### C4.2.2.a. What is the financial security to provide compensation for death and long-term disability?

Standard A4.2.2, paragraph 2, incorporated through the 2014 amendments to the Code of the MLC, 2006,<sup>54</sup> provides that the system of financial security may be in the form of a social security scheme or insurance or fund or other similar arrangements. Its form shall be determined by the Member after consultation with the shipowners' and seafarers' organizations concerned. While the large majority of countries is currently having recourse to private insurances, some countries have in place a system based on a social security scheme.

#### C4.2.2.b. What does the financial security to provide compensation for death and long-term disability cover?

Standard A4.2.1, paragraph 8, incorporated through the 2014 amendments to the Code of the MLC, 2006, details the minimum requirements that must be met by the system of financial security to assure compensation for contractual claims. The term "contractual claim" means any claim which relates to death or long-term disability of seafarers due to an occupational injury, illness or hazard as set out in national law, the seafarers' employment agreement or collective agreement.

The minimum requirements to respect are:

- (a) the contractual compensation, where set out in the seafarer's employment agreement shall be paid in full and without delay;
- (b) there shall be no pressure to accept a payment less than the contractual amount;
- (c) where the nature of the long-term disability of a seafarer makes it difficult to assess the full compensation to which the seafarer may be entitled, an interim payment or payments shall be made to the seafarer so as to avoid undue hardship;
- (d) the seafarer shall receive payment without prejudice to other legal rights, but such payment may be offset by the shipowner against any damages resulting from any other claim made by the seafarer against the shipowner and arising from the same incident; and
- (e) the claim for contractual compensation may be brought directly by the seafarer concerned, or their next of kin, or a representative of the seafarer or designated beneficiary.

#### C4.2.2.c. Are all ships covered by the MLC, 2006 concerned by the financial security system to provide compensation for death and long-term disability

Yes, a financial security to provide compensation for death and long-term disability shall be in place for all "ships" within the meaning of the MLC, 2006 [see B4].

<sup>54</sup> Amendments of 2014 to the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, approved by the Conference at its 103rd Session, Geneva, 11 June 2014, are available at: [www.ilo.org/mlc](http://www.ilo.org/mlc).

#### C4.2.2.d. How do seafarers know that they are covered by a financial security system which provides compensation for death and long-term disability?

The Convention provides that all ships are required to carry on board a certificate or other documentary evidence of financial security issued by the financial security provider [see [Appendix A4-I of the Convention](#), which details the requested information that shall be included in the certificate or the other documentary evidence]. A copy shall be posted in a conspicuous place on board where it is available to the seafarers. Where more than one financial security provider provides cover, the document provided by each provider shall be carried on board. National laws and regulations shall ensure that seafarers receive prior notification if a shipowner's financial security is to be cancelled or terminated. In addition, the financial security shall not cease before the end of the period of validity of the financial security unless the financial security provider has given prior notification of at least 30 days to the competent authority of the flag State.

### C4.3. Health and safety protection and accident prevention

#### C4.3.a. Who has responsibility for establishing the on-board health and safety protection and accident prevention under Regulation 4.3?

The primary obligations under Regulation 4.3, paragraphs 1, 2 and 3, regarding what is usually called marine or maritime occupational safety and health (MOSH), are directed to the flag State. A significant level of technical details and guidance on the subject is set out in Standard A4.3 and Guideline B4.3. These provisions are also linked to those under Standard A3.1 regarding accommodation and recreational facilities on board ship. Standard A4.3 specifies the areas in which occupational safety and health policies and programmes are to be adopted, effectively implemented and promoted on ships and which are also to be the subject of legal standards covering occupational safety and health protection and accident prevention. Such policies and programmes and legal standards may already exist for ships in the country concerned or that country may have global policies and programmes covering these subjects, which will need to be supplemented or adapted so as also to cover conditions on board ship. Standard A4.3 and Guideline B4.3 for the most part set out technical details that would need to be developed, based on international and industry guidance and tripartite consultation, and implemented by the competent authority [see [A25](#)] after consultation with the shipowners' and seafarers' organizations concerned. ILO guidance is available, such as the [code of practice on accident prevention on board ship at sea and in port](#), 1996 and the [code of practice on ambient factors in the workplace](#), 2001. Importantly in October 2014 an international tripartite meeting of experts met to adopt [Guidelines for implementing the occupational safety and health provisions of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006](#).

#### C4.3.b. Does the MLC, 2006 address the suitability and sizing of personal protective equipment (PPE) on board ships?

Standard A4.3, paragraph 1(b), was amended in 2022 to specify that reasonable precautions to prevent occupational accidents, injuries and diseases include the provision of all necessary "appropriately-sized" personal protective equipment (PPE). This reflects the

importance of providing protective equipment that can be worn safely and effectively by seafarers with different body frames. Ill-fitting PPE may reduce protection and, in some circumstances, contribute to an increased risks hazard, including when working near rotating machinery or in confined or enclosed spaces. This specific additional requirement responds to concerns identified in the maritime sector regarding access to suitable PPE for all seafarers, including women, and supports the objective of promoting a safe and inclusive working environment on board ships. In this context, Guideline B4.3.1, paragraph 2(m) was also amended in 2025 to reflect the same wording. The [2025 amendments](#) are expected to enter into force on 23 December 2027.

The specific arrangements for providing, storing and maintaining PPE, including the range of sizes to be made available on board, are to be determined through national laws or regulations or other measures implementing Regulation 4.3 of the Convention.

#### C4.3.c. When must a ship's safety committee be established?

A ship's safety committee is to be established when there are five or more seafarers on board the ship concerned (Standard A4.3, paragraph 2(d)).

#### C4.3.d. Where can I find guidance on the international standards for occupational safety and health?

The MLC, 2006 mentions a number of guidelines on occupational safety and health that should be considered and are relevant.

In October 2014 an international tripartite meeting of experts met to adopt [Guidelines for implementing the occupational safety and health provisions of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006](#).

In addition, many countries have developed laws and regulations on this matter and their texts may be useful.

#### C4.3.e. Do occupational safety and health standards include protection from violence and harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying and sexual assault on board?

Yes, the MLC, 2006 was amended in 2016 to include specific provisions related to the protection from shipboard harassment and bullying and in 2025 to include broader provisions on the prevention and elimination of shipboard violence and harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying, and sexual assault.

Standard A4.3, as amended in 2025, require Member States to adopt measures addressing the prevention and elimination, including through prohibition in law, of shipboard violence and harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying, and sexual assault, with due regard to the [Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 \(No. 190\)](#).<sup>55</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Under Article 1 of Convention No. 190, the term "violence and harassment" in the world of work refers to a range of unacceptable behaviours and practices, or threats thereof, whether a single occurrence or repeated, that aim at, result

Members shall adopt relevant legislation to: (i) define those terms in accordance with Convention No. 190; (ii) require shipowners to adopt and implement relevant policies and measures to prevent and address shipboard violence and harassment; (iii) require seafarers and other concerned persons to comply with the applicable policies and measures.; and iv) establish, after consultation, safe, fair and effective reporting mechanisms and procedures for cases of violence and harassment (Standard A4.3 new paragraphs (e), (f), (g) and (h)).

In addition, the issue of shipboard violence and harassment should be taken into account in the risk evaluations conducted by shipowners and in investigations undertaken by the competent authority into the causes and circumstances of all occupational accidents and occupational injuries and diseases resulting in loss of life or serious personal injury, and such other cases as may be specified in national laws or regulations (Guidelines B4.3.1 and B.4.3.6, as amended).

Member States should cooperate during investigations into incidents of shipboard violence and harassment, as well as in the area of assistance, programmes and research pertaining to preventing and addressing those issues (Guidelines B4.3.6 and B4.3.11, as amended). The [2025 amendments](#) are expected to enter into force on 23 December 2027.

#### **C4.3.f. How and to whom can seafarers report cases of violence and harassment on board?**

In 2025, Standard A5.1.5 was amended to reinforce the safeguards applicable to on-board complaints, including where the complaint concerns violence and harassment [see [C5.2.5.a](#) et seq.]. It is recalled that, while on-board complaint procedures shall seek to resolve complaints at the lowest level possible, in all cases seafarers have the right to complain directly to the master and, where they consider it necessary, to appropriate shoreside personnel or to appropriate external authorities (Standard A5.1.5, paragraph 2, as amended).

Seafarers also have the right to be accompanied or represented during the complaint procedure, to receive impartial advice, and to benefit from safeguards ensuring the confidentiality of the complaint and protection against victimization for filing a complaint. The definition of the term “victimization” was amended in 2025 to cover any adverse action taken by any person with respect not only to the complainants but also the victims, witnesses and whistle-blowers (Standard A5.1.5, paragraphs 3 and 5).

In addition, Standard A4.3, paragraph 2(h), as amended in 2025, explicitly require the establishment, after consultation with shipowners’ and seafarers’ organizations, of safe, fair and effective reporting mechanisms and procedures for cases of violence and harassment [see [C4.3.e](#)]. Those mechanisms and procedures will be regulated by the applicable national provisions. The [2025 amendments](#) are expected to enter into force on 23 December 2027.

in, or are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm, and includes gender-based violence and harassment.

**C4.3.g. What guidance should be taken into account in relation to shipboard violence and harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying and sexual assault?**

Guideline B4.3, as amended in 2025, requires Member States to take account of the of the [Violence and Harassment Recommendation, 2019 \(No. 206\)](#) and latest version of the [Guidance on eliminating shipboard harassment and bullying](#) jointly published by the International Chamber of Shipping and the International Transport Workers Federation, when adopting laws, regulations or guidelines to safeguard occupational safety and health on board ship. The [2025 amendments](#) are expected to enter into force on 23 December 2027.

**C4.3.h. Does the MLC, 2006 establish reporting obligations to the ILO regarding deaths of seafarers?**

Yes, following the painful lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, including the lack of reliable statistics on the number of seafarers' deaths, Standard A4.3, paragraph 5, was amended in 2022 to require that all deaths of seafarers employed, engaged or working on board ships are adequately investigated and recorded. The relevant information shall also be reported on an annual basis to the ILO Director-General to be published in a global register. The fatality data should include, but not be limited to, information on the type (classification) of death, ship type and gross tonnage, the location of the fatality (at sea, in port or at anchorage), and the seafarer's sex, age, occupational position and department. The data should be submitted in the format and using the classification specified by the International Labour Office (Guideline B4.3.5, paragraphs 4 and 5).

To support the implementation of this new reporting requirement, the ILO developed a [brief questionnaire](#) and conducted an experimental data collection in 2024, marking the first global attempt to establish a standardized database on seafarer deaths by cause of fatality. The list of responding countries, along with details on coverage and comparability of data, is available in the ILO's [Global register of fatalities at sea: Experimental data collection – Report](#). Future reports will be published on the [ILO MLC, 2006 website](#).

**C4.4. Access to shore-based welfare facilities**

**C4.4.a. Why are shore-based seafarers' welfare facilities required under the MLC, 2006?**

The purpose of including a requirement for shore-based welfare facilities is to help ensure that seafarers working on board a ship have access to shore-based facilities and services to secure their health and well-being. These facilities, which are located in or near ports, are important way to provide seafarers, who may be on extended voyages at sea, with access to health and welfare services in a foreign country, as well as a social environment. This obligation and concern for seafarers' well-being complements the obligation under Regulation 2.4, paragraph 2, that flag States must require that shipowners grant seafarers' shore leave in order to benefit the seafarers' health and well-being [see [C.2.4.d](#)].

#### C4.4.b. What is the obligation on a port State regarding shore-based welfare services?

Under Regulation 4.4, countries must ensure that shore-based welfare facilities, where they exist on their territory, are easily accessible to all seafarers, irrespective of nationality, race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion or social origin and irrespective of the flag State of the ship on which they are employed or engaged or work. They must also promote the development of welfare facilities in appropriate ports of their country and determine, after consultation with the shipowners' and seafarers' organizations concerned, which ports are to be regarded as appropriate. They must encourage the establishment of welfare boards to regularly review welfare facilities and services to ensure that they are appropriate in the light of changes in the needs of seafarers resulting from technical, operational and other developments in the shipping industry.

#### C4.4.c. What kinds of services should be provided in welfare facilities?

Guideline B4.4.2, paragraph 3 of the MLC, 2006 [see [A12](#)] gives a non-exhaustive list of the following kinds of services:

- (a) meeting and recreation rooms as required;
- (b) facilities for sports and outdoor facilities, including competitions;
- (c) educational facilities; and
- (d) where appropriate, facilities for religious observances and for personal counselling.

#### C4.4.d. Do seafarers have the right to internet access while in port?

Yes, pursuant to the 2022 amendments to the Convention, port States should, so far as is reasonably practicable, provide seafarers on board ships in their ports and associated anchorages with internet access (Guideline B4.4.2, paragraph 5). The service should, in principle, be provided to seafarers free of charge. If seafarers are charged for that service, the price should be reasonable in amount. The Convention does not define the term "reasonable in amount", which is to be determined at the national level [see [C3.1.o](#)].

#### C4.4.e. Who must pay for welfare facilities?

The provisions in Regulation 4.4 and Standard A4.4 do not require that the port State take responsibility for financing or operating such services. Guideline B4.4.2, paragraphs 1 and 2 of the MLC, 2006 [see [A12](#)] states that welfare facilities and services should be provided, in accordance with national conditions and practice, by one or more of the following:

- (a) public authorities;
- (b) shipowners' and seafarers' organizations concerned under collective agreements or other agreed arrangements; and
- (c) voluntary organizations.

Under Guideline B4.4.4, financial support for port welfare facilities should be made available through one or more of the following:

- (a) grants from public funds;
- (b) levies or other special dues from shipping sources;
- (c) voluntary contributions from shipowners, seafarers, or their organizations; and
- (d) voluntary contributions from other sources.

**C4.4.f. Does the MLC, 2006 require that seafarers be allowed ashore to access welfare facilities?**

Regulation 2.4 of the MLC, 2006 establishes the principle that seafarers shall be granted shore leave to benefit their health and well-being and consistent with the operational requirements of their positions [see [C.2.4.d](#)]. The fundamental importance of shore leave to seafarers' well-being is recognized under Regulation 4.4 of the MLC, 2006, as well as in the IMO Convention on the Facilitation of International Maritime Traffic, 1965, as amended (FAL Convention), and the ILO Conventions Nos 108 and 185 on seafarers' identity documents. Although the grant of shore leave may not always be possible in view of the operational needs of the ship concerned or for security reasons, requests for shore leave to access welfare facilities should not be unreasonably refused [see [C.2.4.d](#)].

**C4.5. Social security**

**C4.5.a. What is social security and social protection?**

The notion of social security as it is commonly used within the ILO covers all measures providing benefits, whether in cash or in kind, to secure protection, inter alia, from lack of or insufficient work-related income caused by sickness, disability, maternity, employment injury, unemployment, old age, or death of a family member; lack of access or unaffordable access to healthcare; insufficient family support, particularly for children and adult dependants; general poverty and social exclusion. Social security schemes can be of a contributory (social insurance) or non-contributory nature.

Social protection is referred to as the set of public measures that a society provides for its members to protect them against economic and social distress that would be caused by the absence or a substantial reduction of income from work as a result of various contingencies (sickness, maternity, employment injury, unemployment, invalidity, old age, and death of the breadwinner); the provision of health care; and the provision of benefits for families with children. This concept of social protection is also reflected in the various ILO standards. By definition, social protection is broader and more inclusive than social security since it incorporates non-statutory or private measures for providing social security, but still encompasses traditional social security measures such as social assistance, social insurance and universal social security benefits. It may be noted that there are significant differences among societies and institutions around the world of how they define and approach social protection.

To help governments with implementing this responsibility in 2012 the ILO published a *Handbook: Guidance on implementing the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 and Social Security for Seafarers* (2012).

#### C4.5.b. What does the MLC, 2006 require for social security?

The MLC, 2006 requires that all seafarers be provided with social protection. This covers a number of complementary requirements including prevention-based approaches in connection with occupational safety and health, medical examinations, hours of work and rest and catering. Social protection is mainly addressed in Title 4 with respect to Medical care (Regulation 4.1); Shipowners' liability (Regulation 4.2) and Social security (Regulation 4.5). Regulation 4.5 and the related Standard A4.5 reflect an approach that recognizes the wide range of national systems and schemes and differing areas of coverage with respect to the provision of social security. Under Standard A4.5, paragraphs 1, 2 and 3, a ratifying country is required to "take steps according to its national circumstances" to provide the complementary social security protection, in at least three branches [see C4.5.c] to all seafarers ordinarily resident in its territory. The resulting protection must be no less favourable than that enjoyed by shore workers resident in its territory. If a country's social security system for seafarers at least meets these two basic conditions, the country is in a position to ratify the MLC, 2006 as far as its obligation to provide social security to seafarers is concerned. Flexibility is provided to facilitate the fulfilment of this obligation [see C4.5.f].

Although the aim of Regulation 4.5 is that all seafarers, whatever their nationality or residence and whatever the flags of the ships they work on, should be protected by comprehensive social security protection, the undertaking under the MLC, 2006 of each ratifying country is not to provide such comprehensive coverage outright, but rather to progress towards it: "to take steps, according to its national circumstances ... to achieve progressively comprehensive social security protection for seafarers".

#### C4.5.c. What is meant by "branches of social security"?

Branches of social security refer to various types of benefits classified in relation to the contingency which they seek to address and for the support of which they are provided. These social security branches in the MLC, 2006 correspond to the nine classical branches of social security laid down and defined in the [Social Security \(Minimum Standards\) Convention, 1952 \(No. 102\)](#), which should be referred to for guidance on the components and protection required under the respective branches. These nine branches are:

- medical care;
- sickness benefit;
- unemployment benefit;
- old-age benefit;
- employment injury benefit;
- family benefit;
- maternity benefit;
- invalidity benefit;
- survivors' benefit.

#### C4.5.d. What is meant by complementary social security protection?

In the MLC, 2006 many of the areas of social protection are addressed through what can be described as complementary requirements for shipowners, flag States and States of residence, which, together, aim at providing comprehensive social security protection for seafarers. Short-term protection is ensured by: (1) the obligation for flag States which ratify the MLC, 2006 to provide medical care on board, while any ratifying State must give access to its facilities to seafarers in need of immediate medical care who are on board ships within its territory (Regulation 4.1) [see C4.1]; (2) at the same time, shipowners are required to provide protection (often through insurance systems) against sickness, injury or death occurring in conjunction with employment to the seafarers working on their ships, irrespective of the seafarers' nationality or place of residence (Regulation 4.2) [see C4.2].

This shorter term protection is intended to be complemented by or combined with the longer-term protection required in Regulation 4.5 in at least three branches at the time of ratification. The branches of medical care, sickness benefit and employment injury benefit are recommended in this regard in Guideline B4.5, paragraph 1, because they directly complement the existing responsibilities of shipowners under Regulations 4.1 and 4.2.

#### C4.5.e. What should a country that has already a national social security system in place verify prior to ratifying the MLC, 2006?

For countries that already have an established national social security system covering workers including seafarers "ordinarily resident" in the country concerned and their dependants, then it is likely that very few or possibly no adjustments would be required in order to ratify the MLC, 2006. The only concern would be to specify which of the nine branches are covered and to seek to move to cover all nine branches, if these are not yet covered (Standard A4.5, paragraph 10 and Regulation 4.5, paragraph 2, respectively). If a country has a social security system but it does not yet cover seafarers who are ordinarily resident, then the existing protection would need to be extended to seafarers and their dependants, at a level at least equal to the protection enjoyed by shore workers (Regulation 4.5, paragraph 3). If these seafarers are working outside the country, on board ships which fly the flag of other States, then the countries concerned should cooperate, through multilateral and bilateral agreements or other arrangements, to provide for, and ensure, the maintenance of social security rights which have been acquired or in course of acquisition (Standard A4.5, paragraphs 3 and 8). Administrative arrangements should be also made with shipowners and flag States concerned to ensure coverage and the due payment and collection of contributions, where applicable [see C4.5.f].

#### C4.5.f. What are the different ways that social security can be provided under the MLC, 2006?

The MLC, 2006 offers a high degree of flexibility to ratifying States with regard to the choice of means through which they can fulfil their obligation of providing social security to seafarers. Flexibility is provided for in that this obligation can be met:

- through various bilateral and multilateral agreements or contribution-based systems (Standard A4.5, paragraph 3);

- through the additional flexibility that is provided as to the manner in which the country ensures protection. For example, Standard A4.5, paragraph 7, recognizes that it could be provided in laws or regulations or in private schemes or in collective bargaining agreements or in a combination of these. Furthermore, if a contributory scheme is chosen, it would seem reasonable (having regard to Guideline B4.5, paragraph 7) for the country of residence to expect the flag States concerned to require that shipowners under their respective flags make the relevant contributions.

#### **C4.5.g. Where can I obtain information about the social security protection that is provided by each country that has ratified the MLC, 2006?**

A list of countries that have ratified the Convention, the date of entry into force for each country, as well as information on the branches for which social security protection is provided for seafarers (click on the country name) is available on the ILO [NORMLEX database](#).

#### **C4.5.h. Is there a form for submitting the information related to the social security branches covered by a country that ratifies the MLC, 2006?**

The instrument of ratification of the MLC, 2006 should contain or enclose the information required under Standard A4.5, paragraph 10 of the MLC, 2006, with respect to the social security obligations under the Convention [see [C4.5.b](#)]. There is a (“model declaration”) that can be filed to meet this MLC, 2006 obligation by ratifying countries [see [A49](#)]. It is available on the MLC, 2006 website at [www.ilo.org/mlc](http://www.ilo.org/mlc) under the heading “Monitoring and implementation tools”.

### **C5. Title 5. Compliance and enforcement**

#### **C5.1.a. What is the relationship between Title 5 and other provisions in the MLC, 2006?**

As stated in paragraph 1, in the introductory provisions to Title 5:

The Regulations in this Title specify each Member’s responsibility to fully implement and enforce the principles and rights set out in the Articles of this Convention as well as the particular obligations provided for under its Titles 1, 2, 3 and 4.

#### **C5.1.b Does the concept of substantial equivalence apply to Title 5?**

As indicated in introductory paragraphs 2 and 3 of Title 5, the requirements of this Title cannot be implemented through substantially equivalent provisions [see [A11](#)].

### **C5.2. Flag State responsibilities**

#### **C5.2.1.a. What is a flag State?**

The term “flag State” refers to the country where a ship is registered and/or the country whose flag the ship is flying. Ships can, and often do, move from one

country/registry/flag to another during the course of their operating lives. Under international law the flag State is the government that has authority and responsibility for regulating ships and the conditions on board ships that fly its flag, no matter where they travel in the world. This is indicated in the Preamble to the MLC, 2006 which states:

Recalling that Article 94 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982, establishes the duties and obligations of a flag State with regard to, inter alia, labour conditions, crewing and social matters on ships that fly its flag.

Article 94 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982, provides in paragraph 1, that “Every State shall effectively exercise its jurisdiction and control in administrative, technical and social matters over ships flying its flag.” The specific responsibilities of flag States regarding inspection and, in some cases, also certification, that a ship and its operations, including conditions for workers on ships (seafarers), meet agreed-upon international standards are set out in the many international maritime Conventions adopted by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the ILO.

#### C5.2.1.b. Can a flag State delegate its responsibilities?

In accordance with Regulation 5.1.1, paragraph 3 of the MLC, 2006 a country may, where appropriate, authorize public institutions or other organizations (including those of another country) which it recognizes as competent and independent to carry out inspections or to issue certificates or to do both. In all cases, the delegating country remains fully responsible for the inspection and certification of the working and living conditions of the seafarers concerned on ships that fly its flag. In the MLC, 2006 the organizations to which flag State tasks can be delegated are called “recognized organizations” (ROs).

#### C5.2.1.c. Is there a model for a flag State inspection and certification system?

Regulation 5.1.1, paragraph 2 of the MLC, 2006 requires flag States to establish an effective system for the inspection and certification of maritime labour conditions ensuring that the working and living conditions for seafarers on ships that fly its flag meet, and continue to meet, the standards in this Convention. No model is prescribed for such a system, which, under Standard A5.1.1, must have clear objectives and standards covering the administration of the inspection and certification systems, as well as adequate overall procedures for the country’s assessment of the extent to which those objectives and standards are being attained. In accordance with Regulation 5.1.1, paragraph 5, information about the inspection and certification system, including the method used for assessing its effectiveness, must be included in the ILO Member’s reports to the ILO under article 22 of the Constitution [see [A38](#) and [A48](#)].

#### C5.2.2.a. What is a recognized organization (RO)?

In the MLC, 2006 the organizations to which flag State tasks related to inspection and/ or certification of ships can be delegated are called “recognized organizations” (ROs) [see [C5.2.1.b](#)]. Regulation 5.1.2 and the Code establish the requirements regarding the process for delegation/authorization of ROs. In many countries the organizations that are authorized as ROs are ship classification societies that are also responsible for ship surveys including statutory certification of ships under IMO Conventions.

### C5.2.2.b. How is a recognized organization (RO) for a flag State authorized?

Standard A5.1.2, paragraphs 1 and 2 of the MLC, 2006 sets out requirements for flag States that may wish to appoint public institutions or other organizations to carry out inspections required by the MLC, 2006 in accordance with normal practice. An up-to-date list of any authorizations (and the scope of the authorization) for ROs [see [C5.2.2.c](#)] must be provided to the International Labour Office for publication (Standard A5.1.2, paragraph 4). This information as well as other national information (click on the country name) is available in the [NORMLEX database](#).

### C5.2.2.c. What tasks can a recognized organization (RO) carry out?

The tasks of each RO depend upon the tasks which the flag State concerned has delegated to it within the scope of those that an RO is permitted by the MLC, 2006 to carry out. Under Regulation 5.1.2, paragraph 1 of the MLC, 2006 a RO may only be authorized by a flag State to carry out tasks that are expressly mentioned in the Code of Title 5 [see [A9](#)] as tasks that can be carried out by an RO. In this respect, the Code uses wording such as “by the competent authority, or by a recognized organization duly authorized for this purpose”.

Most of the tasks related to flag State inspection and certification under the MLC, 2006 can be undertaken by an RO. When an RO is appointed, the flag State (or its competent authority) needs to specify the scope of the RO’s role with respect to verification of national requirements. Although the attention of an RO carrying out a flag State inspection might be drawn to a possible deficiency on a ship by seafarers and reported to the flag State, the investigation of complaints that are made to the flag State regarding its ships (Standard A5.1.4, paragraph 5) or the enforcement of the national requirements implementing the MLC, 2006 should be dealt with by the competent authority in each flag State [see [A25](#)]. Information as to the role of ROs and the scope of their authority should also be made available to seafarers in the event that they have a complaint.

### C5.2.3.a. Must all ships be inspected?

All ships covered by the MLC, 2006 [see [B4](#)], are subject to inspection for all the requirements of the Convention (Regulation 5.1.4, paragraph 1). For ships that will be certified the provisions of Regulation 5.1.3 and Standard A5.1.3 will also apply. The inspection standards are the national requirements implementing the MLC, 2006.

### C5.2.3.b. What is the list of 16 areas to be certified?

Standard A5.1.3, paragraph 1, provides inter alia, that:

A list of matters that must be inspected and found to meet national laws and regulations or other measures implementing the requirements of this Convention regarding the working and living conditions of seafarers on ships before a maritime labour certificate can be issued, is found in Appendix A5-I.

The list in Appendix A5-I contains 16 areas, following the entry into force of the 2014 amendments to the Code of the MLC, 2006, which added the last two:

- minimum age;

- medical certification;
- qualifications of seafarers;
- seafarers' employment agreements;
- use of any licensed or certified or regulated private recruitment and placement service;
- hours of work or rest;
- manning levels for the ship;
- accommodation;
- on-board recreational facilities;
- food and catering;
- health and safety and accident prevention;
- on-board medical care;
- on-board complaint procedures;
- payment of wages;
- financial security for repatriation;
- financial security relating to shipowners' liability.

A resolution adopted during the first meeting of the Special Tripartite Committee [see [A22](#)] has recommended transitional measures relating to the entry into force of the amendments. According to these transitional measures, Member States are requested, including in the exercise of port State control, to recognize Maritime Labour Certificates and declarations of maritime labour compliance, while they are still valid in accordance with the Convention, until the first renewal inspection following entry into force of the amendments [see [A50](#)].

#### **C5.2.3.c. Do the requirements in the MLC, 2006 that are not in the list of 16 areas in Appendix A5-I have to be inspected?**

Yes. All ships covered by the MLC, 2006 [see [B4](#)] are subject to inspection for all the requirements of the Convention (Regulation 5.1.4, paragraph 1), including all the documentation that shall be carried on board.

For ships that will be certified, the provisions of Regulation 5.1.3 and Standard A5.1.3 will also apply. The inspection standards are the national requirements implementing the MLC, 2006. The relevant national provisions implementing the requirements of the MLC, 2006 in the 16 areas [see [C5.2.3.b](#)] that must be certified for some ships will be referenced in Part I of the DMLC [see [C5.2.3.e](#)] that is to be prepared by the competent authority [see [A25](#)].

#### C5.2.3.d. Must all ships be certified under Regulation 5.1.3?

Under Regulation 5.1.3, certification is mandatory for ships of:

- 500 GT or over, engaged in international voyages; and
- 500 GT or over, flying the flag of a Member and operating from a port, or between ports, in another country.

For the purpose of this Regulation, “international voyage” means a voyage from a country to a port outside such a country.

Certification would not, therefore, be mandatory for a ship under 500 GT, even if engaged in international voyages or for a ship of 500 GT or more if it flies the flag of the flag State concerned and is not engaged in international voyages. Regulation 5.1.3, paragraph 2, allows a shipowner whose ship does not fall under the mandatory certification provisions to request that the ship be certified after the inspection.

#### C5.2.3.e. How detailed should Part I of the Declaration of Maritime Labour Compliance (DMLC) be?

The main requirements for Part I of the DMLC are set out in Standard A5.1.3, paragraphs 9 and 10 of the MLC, 2006. They can be summarized as follows:

It must be drawn up by the competent authority [see [A25](#)] in the form corresponding to the model in Appendix A5-II. It must:

- (i) identify the list of matters to be inspected in accordance with the MLC, 2006 (i.e., the 16 areas listed in Appendix A5-I) [see [C5.2.3.b](#)];
- (ii) identify, in each of those areas, the national requirements embodying the relevant provisions of the Convention by providing a reference to the relevant national legal provisions as well as, to the extent necessary, concise information on the main content of the national requirements;
- (iii) refer to ship-type specific requirements under national legislation;
- (iv) record any substantially equivalent provisions [see [A11](#)]; and
- (v) clearly indicate any exemption granted by the competent authority as provided in Title 3.

Questions have been asked as to how detailed should be the statement on the national requirements which is to be provided under item (ii) above “to the extent necessary”. Guidance is provided in Guideline B5.1.3, paragraph 1, as follows:

... Where national legislation precisely follows the requirements stated in this Convention, a reference may be all that is necessary. Where a provision of the Convention is implemented through substantial equivalence as provided under Article VI, paragraph 3, this provision should be identified and a concise explanation should be provided.

However, when preparing Part I of the DMLC, it is important to keep in mind the additional guidance and statement of the purpose of the DMLC, as explained in Guideline B5.1.3, paragraph 4:

The declaration of maritime labour compliance, should, above all, be drafted in clear terms designed to help all persons concerned, such as flag State inspectors, authorized officers in port States and seafarers, to check that the requirements are being properly implemented.

A [general observation adopted in 2015](#) by the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations has noted that “in many cases a reference will not provide enough information on national requirements where they relate to matters for which the Convention envisages some differences in national practices. Similarly, the Committee noted that many of the examples of an approved DMLC, Part II (a document which is intended to identify the measures adopted by shipowners to implement the national requirements), also often contain only references to other documents. Unless all of these referenced documents are carried on board ship and are easily accessible to all concerned, it would be difficult for port State control officers or seafarers to understand what the national requirements are on these matters. In these cases, the DMLC, Part I, does not appear to fulfil the purpose for which it, along with the DMLC, Part II, is required under the Convention, which is to help all persons concerned, such as flag State inspectors, authorized officers in port States and seafarers, to check that the national requirements on the [16] listed matters are being properly implemented on board ship.”. The example of a DMLC, Parts I and II, given in Appendix B5-I to the MLC, 2006 may also be helpful.

Although Part I of the model DMLC does not require the following information, in light of the importance and purpose of the DMLC, it may be advisable to also include information about determinations with respect to who is considered to be a seafarer [see [B1](#)] and the definition of night [see [C1.1.c](#)] and of hazardous work [see [C1.1.b](#)] if seafarers on board are below the age of 18. This would be done to avoid uncertainty during inspections.

#### **C5.2.3.f. What should be contained in Part II of the Declaration of Maritime Labour Compliance (DMLC)?**

In accordance with paragraph 10(b) of Standard A5.1.3, Part II of the DMLC, which is to be drawn up by the shipowner and certified by the competent authority or a duly authorized RO, must identify the measures adopted to ensure ongoing compliance, between inspections, with the national requirements, stated in Part I of the DMLC, and the measures proposed to ensure that there is continuous improvement. Detailed guidance on the details that should be provided in Part II of the DMLC, are provided in Guideline B5.1.3, paragraphs 2 and 3.

When preparing Part II of the DMLC, it is important to keep in mind the additional guidance and statement of the purpose of the DMLC, as explained in Guideline B5.1.3, paragraph 4:

The declaration of maritime labour compliance, should, above all, be drafted in clear terms designed to help all persons concerned, such as flag State inspectors,

authorized officers in port States and seafarers, to check that the requirements are being properly implemented.

An example of Parts I and II of a DMLC, given in Appendix B5-I to the MLC, 2006, may also be helpful.

#### **C5.2.3.g. Can a recognized organization (RO) be authorized to issue a Declaration of Maritime Labour Compliance (DMLC)?**

Part I of a DMCL is to be “drawn up by the competent authority” (Standard A5.1.3, paragraph 10(a)) [see [A25](#)]; this means that the person signing it must have been directly empowered to do so by the competent authority. It will then be “issued under the authority of” the competent authority (see the model form in Appendix A5-II of the MLC, 2006). Under Standard A5.1.3, paragraph 1, an RO may, if authorized, issue a Maritime Labour Certificate (MLC), which would include the attached DMLC, consisting of Part I signed on behalf of the competent authority, and Part II, which can be certified by an RO (Standard A5.1.3, paragraph 10) [see [C5.2.2.c](#)].

If an RO has been duly authorized by the flag State’s competent authority to complete and issue the Maritime Labour Certificate, an RO could also be authorized to issue Part I of the DMLC to be attached to the Certificate.

#### **C5.2.3.h. Must the original Maritime Labour Certificate and the Declaration of Maritime Labour Compliance (DMLC) be carried on board a ship?**

Standard A5.1.3, paragraph 12 of the MLC, 2006 provides that: “A current valid Maritime Labour Certificate and Declaration of Maritime Labour Compliance ... shall be carried on the ship and a copy shall be posted in a conspicuous place on board where it is available to the seafarers. A copy shall be made available in accordance with national laws and regulations, upon request, to seafarers ...”.

The reference to both a “current valid Maritime Labour Certificate and Declaration of Maritime Labour Compliance”, which must be kept on board (with an English translation), and the copy which must be posted in a conspicuous place, indicates that both the original and a copy of the Certificate and DMLC are required on board ship.

#### **C5.2.3.i. Can a Maritime Labour Certificate and a Declaration of Maritime Labour Compliance be issued in electronic form?**

Nothing in the MLC, 2006 prevents the issuance of electronic Maritime Labour Certificates and Declarations of Maritime Labour Compliance, as long as print-outs of such electronic documents are placed in a conspicuous place on board, in accordance with Standard A5.1.3. Nonetheless, the use of electronic certificates should not in any manner weaken the obligations of State parties to the MLC, 2006 or shipowners with regard to ship certification and render more cumbersome the issuance, access or use of ship certificates by the individuals concerned. As the use of electronic record and certifying systems is likely to be generalized in the foreseeable future, the guidance and standards developed by the IMO should be taken into account.

### C5.2.3.j. What is the period of validity of a Maritime Labour Certificate?

Standard A5.1.3 sets out, in paragraph 1, a maximum period of validity of five years (subject to paragraph 3) for the Maritime Labour Certificate. Since this is a maximum, the flag State's law could provide for a shorter period of validity or give the competent authority or duly authorized RO to issue a certificate for a shorter period. This might be a useful approach in order to prevent a large number of certificates from expiring during the same period or to align the period of validity under the MLC, 2006 with that of certificates issued under IMO Conventions.

The validity of the Maritime Labour Certificate shall be subject to an intermediate inspection, in most of the cases between the second and third anniversary dates of the certificate, by the competent authority, or by an RO duly authorized for this purpose, to ensure continuing compliance with the national requirements implementing this Convention (Standard A5.1.3, paragraph 2). The certificate shall be endorsed following satisfactory intermediate inspection.

The 2016 amendments to the Code of the MLC, 2006, allow for an extension of the validity of Maritime Labour Certificates for a further period not exceeding five months from the expiry date of the existing certificate in circumstances where ships have passed the renewal inspection but where a new certificate cannot immediately be issued and made available on board (Standard A5.1.3, paragraph 4).

### C5.2.3.k. When can an Interim Maritime Labour Certificate be issued?

A flag State need not issue interim certificates, but if it chooses to do so, Standard A5.1.3, paragraphs 5 to 7, sets out the situations when this would be allowed, namely:

- (a) to new ships on delivery;
- (b) when a ship changes flag; or
- (c) when a shipowner assumes responsibility for the operation of a ship which is new to that shipowner.

An Interim Maritime Labour Certificate may be issued once to a ship [see [C5.2.3.m](#)] for a period not exceeding six months by the competent authority or a recognized organization duly authorized for this purpose. A model form for an Interim Maritime Labour Certificate is contained in Appendix A5-II to the MLC, 2006. An interim Maritime Labour Certificate may only be issued following verification that:

- (a) the ship has been inspected, as far as reasonable and practicable, in the 16 areas [see [C5.2.3.b](#)];
- (b) the shipowner has demonstrated to the competent authority or RO that the ship has adequate procedures to comply with the Convention;
- (c) the master is familiar with the requirements of the Convention and the responsibilities for implementation; and

- (d) relevant information has been submitted to the competent authority or RO to produce a Declaration of Maritime Labour Compliance.

#### **C5.2.3.l. Must an interim Maritime Labour Certificate have a Declaration of Maritime Labour Compliance attached to it?**

Under paragraph 8, of Standard A5.1.3, a Declaration of Maritime Labour Compliance (DMLC) need not be issued for the period of validity of the interim certificate.

#### **C5.2.3.m. Can an Interim Maritime Labour Certificate be renewed?**

Under paragraphs 6 and 8, of Standard A5.1.3, an Interim Maritime Labour Certificate may be issued for a period not exceeding six months. No further interim certificate may be issued following the initial six months.

#### **C5.2.3.n. When would a Maritime Labour Certificate cease to be valid?**

Standard A5.1.3, paragraph 14, sets out the situations when a Maritime Labour Certificate would cease to be valid, namely:

- (a) if the relevant inspections are not completed within the periods prescribed by the MLC, 2006;
- (b) if the certificate is not endorsed following an intermediate inspection;
- (c) when a ship changes flag;
- (d) when a shipowner ceases to assume the responsibility for the operation of a ship; and
- (e) when substantial changes have been made to the structure or equipment covered in Title 3 of the MLC, 2006.

#### **C5.2.3.o. Can a Maritime Labour Certificate be withdrawn?**

Under Standard A5.1.3, paragraphs 16 and 17, a Maritime Labour Certificate must be withdrawn if there is evidence that the ship concerned does not comply with the requirements of this Convention and any required corrective action has not been taken [see [C5.2.3.n](#)].

#### **C5.2.3.p. Does a change of the RO affect the validity of already issued certificates?**

Regulation 5.1.1, paragraph 3, provides that:

3. In establishing an effective system for the inspection and certification of maritime labour conditions, a Member may, where appropriate, authorize public institutions or other organizations (including those of another Member, if the latter agrees) which it recognizes as competent and independent to carry out inspections or to issue certificates or to do both. In all cases, the Member shall remain fully responsible for the inspection and certification of the working and living conditions of the seafarers concerned on ships that fly its flag.

Since the flag State remains fully responsible for the inspection and certification irrespective of the delegation [see [C5.2.1.b](#)] a change of RO would not affect the validity of already issued certificates.

#### C5.2.3.q. Can a country that has not ratified the MLC, 2006 issue a Maritime Labour Certificate?

No. Only a country that has ratified the MLC, 2006 can issue a valid Maritime Labour Certificate to ships flying its flag. Some countries that have not ratified the MLC, 2006 are issuing certificates of voluntary compliance. These are not documents addressed by the MLC, 2006.

#### C5.2.3.r. If a Maritime Labour Certificate expires during a voyage, can it be extended for a limited period?

Although the MLC, 2006 follows the ship inspection and certification system in the IMO Conventions on many matters, it did not have the same provision regarding the extension of an expired certificate. This means that shipowners will need to consider voyage planning in connection with the timing of renewal inspections. However, the 2016 amendments to the Code of the MLC, 2006, which entered into force on 8 January 2019, allow for an extension of the validity of Maritime Labour Certificates in one very specific case. According to Standard A5.1.3, paragraph 4, where, after a renewal inspection completed prior to the expiry of a Maritime Labour Certificate, the ship is found to continue to meet national laws and regulations or other measures implementing the requirements of the Convention, but a new certificate cannot immediately be issued to and made available on board that ship, the competent authority, or the recognized organization duly authorized for this purpose, may extend the validity of the certificate for a further period not exceeding five months from the expiry date of the existing certificate, and endorse the certificate accordingly. The new certificate shall be valid for a period not exceeding five years starting from the date provided for in Standard A5.1.3, paragraph 3.

#### C5.2.4.a. Are there any model guidelines for flag State inspectors?

Standard A5.1.4, paragraph 7 of the MLC, 2006 requires inspectors to be issued with clear guidelines as to the tasks to be performed and be provided with proper credentials.

The *Guidelines for flag State inspections under the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended* are aimed at assisting countries to implement Title 5 of the MLC, 2006. They were initially adopted in 2008 and updated in 2020 in response to a resolution adopted by the International Labour Conference at the same time as the MLC, 2006. The resolution explained that the success of the Convention will depend, among others, upon the uniform and harmonized implementation of flag State responsibilities in accordance with its relevant provisions, and that given the global nature of the shipping industry, it is important for flag State inspectors to receive proper guidelines for the performance of their duties. In 2018, the Special Tripartite Committee established under the MLC, 2006 [see [A22](#)] decided to establish a subsidiary body in charge of updating, on a regular basis, the ILO Guidelines in order to reflect the amendments to the Code of the MLC, 2006.

Each country may have its own practices relating to flag State inspection. The international guidelines are designed to be of practical assistance to governments in drafting their own national guidelines.

#### C5.2.4.b. Can a flag State inspector prevent a ship from sailing?

Standard A5.1.4, paragraph 7, provides that inspectors, issued with clear guidelines as to the tasks to be performed and provided with proper credentials, shall be empowered:

- (a) to board a ship that flies the flag of the country concerned;
- (b) to carry out any examination, test or inquiry which they may consider necessary in order to satisfy themselves that the standards are being strictly observed; and
- (c) to require that any deficiency is remedied and, where they have grounds to believe that deficiencies constitute a serious breach of the requirements of the Convention (including seafarers' rights), or represent a significant danger to seafarers' safety, health or security, to prohibit a ship from leaving port until necessary actions are taken.

#### C5.2.5.a. What is an on-board complaints procedure?

Ships are required, by Regulation 5.1.5, paragraph 1, to have on-board procedures for the fair, effective and expeditious handling of seafarer complaints alleging breaches of the requirements of this Convention (including seafarers' rights). The requirement relating to these procedures is one of the matters in the 16 areas that must be inspected and certified [see C5.2.3.b].

#### C5.2.5.b. Who is responsible for developing the on-board complaint procedures?

The obligation (under Standard A5.1.5, paragraph 2 of the MLC, 2006) is on countries to adopt laws or regulations to ensure that appropriate on-board complaint procedures are in place. Guideline B5.1.5, paragraph 1, recommends [see A12], subject to any relevant provisions of an applicable collective agreement, that a model for those procedures should be developed by the competent authority [see A25] in close consultation with shipowners' and seafarers' organizations. This procedure aims to resolve complaints on board, or at the level of the shipping company and it is to be distinguished from other complaint procedures provided for by the MLC, 2006, which are directly addressed to and examined by the competent authority (see for example Standards A1.4 paragraph 7; A5.1.4, paragraph 5; A5.2.1, paragraph 1(d); A5.2.2; Guideline B2.7).

#### C5.2.5.c. Are there any models for on-board complaint procedures?

The MLC, 2006 does not contain a model, but sets out some basic principles in Regulation 5.1.5 and Standard A5.1.5. These principles include the aim to resolve complaints at the lowest possible level, but to allow a right to appeal directly to the master or appropriate external authorities, as well as the right for the seafarer to be accompanied or represented, and to receive impartial advice, and safeguards against victimization for filing complaints.

Standard A5.1.5 was amended in 2025 to specify that, in all cases, seafarers shall also have the right to complain directly, where they consider it necessary, to appropriate shoreside personnel. The 2025 amendments also provide that the term “victimization” covers any adverse action taken by any person not only with respect to complainants but also the victims, witnesses and whistle-blowers. Due regard shall be given to situations where a complaint is manifestly vexatious or maliciously made. Appropriate steps shall be taken, at all stages, to safeguard the confidentiality of complaints made by seafarers. Guideline B5.1.5 [see [A12](#)] contains additional detailed elements that should be included in the development of the on-board procedures. The [2025 amendments](#) are expected to enter into force on 23 December 2027.

**C5.2.5.d. Where would seafarers get a copy of a ship’s on-board complaints procedure?**

Seafarers must be provided with a copy of the on-board complaint procedures applicable on their ship in addition to a copy of their seafarers’ employment agreement (SEA) (Standard A5.1.5, paragraph 4) [see [C2.1.b](#)].

**C5.2.5.e. Must seafarers always use the ship’s on-board complaints procedure?**

Although on-board complaint procedures must seek to resolve complaints at the lowest level possible, seafarers have a right to complain directly to the master and, where they consider it necessary, to appropriate shoreside personnel and external authorities (Standard A5.1.5, paragraph 2, as amended in 2025) [see [C5.2.5.c](#)]. The [2025 amendments](#) are expected to enter into force on 23 December 2027.

**C5.2.5.f. Can seafarers complain directly to the flag State competent authority or an inspector instead of using the on-board complaint procedure?**

[see [C5.2.5.e](#)].

**C5.2.5.g. How can seafarers find the address of the competent authority to which complaints may be made in the flag State or State of their residence?**

Information about the national competent authority [see [A25](#)] for countries that have ratified [see [A26](#)] the MLC, 2006 along with other national information can be found on ILO [NORMLEX](#) database (click on the country name). The competent authority should be able to provide the information regarding complaints.

**C5.2.6. In the case of a marine casualty, must an official inquiry be held?**

Regulation 5.1.6, paragraph 1 of the MLC, 2006 provides that each Member must hold an official inquiry into any serious marine casualty, leading to injury or loss of life, that involves a ship that flies its flag.

Standard A5.1.6, adopted in 2025, provides that Members are required, when carrying out such inquiries, to take due account of the principles established by the *IMO Code of the International Standards and Recommended Practices for a Safety Investigation into a Marine Casualty or Marine Incident*, as well as the recommendations of the *ILO/IMO Guidelines on the*

*Fair Treatment of Seafarers in the event of a maritime accident* and the *ILO/IMO Guidelines on fair treatment of seafarers detained in connection with alleged crimes*. Without prejudice to national legislation, Members shall also cooperate, as far as practicable, with other concerned States to assist in the application of these Guidelines [see [A43](#)]. The [2025 amendments](#) are expected to enter into force on 23 December 2027.

### **C5.3. Port State responsibilities**

#### **C5.3.a. What is a port State?**

This is the term used to describe the authority under international law for a country to exercise regulatory control with respect to foreign ships that come into its port. Mainly this takes the form of inspecting the ship and conditions on board the ship (often called “port State control”). It can be regarded as a form of international cooperation under Article I, paragraph 2 of the MLC, 2006 whereby the port State role supports the efforts of flag States by inspecting ships to ensure that they remain compliant between inspections by the flag State. This important role is also referred to in Article V, paragraphs 4 and 7 of the MLC, 2006. A country can be and often is, simultaneously a flag State, for purposes of regulating the ships that fly its flag, and a port State with respect to ships of other countries.

#### **C5.3.b. What is the purpose of a port State inspection?**

The purpose of the inspection by an authorized officer (a PSCO) of a foreign ship coming into port is to check whether it is in compliance with the requirements of the Convention (including seafarers’ rights).

#### **C5.3.c. What is port State control (PSC)?**

The term “port State control” (PSC) arises from arrangements among countries in a region to work together and cooperate with respect to carrying out port State control (inspections) to ensure that ships flying the flags of other countries coming into their ports meet international standards. As noted on the website of the earliest of these regional arrangements:

... the Paris MOU, is an administrative agreement between the maritime authorities of twenty-four European countries and Canada. In 1978 the “Hague Memorandum” between a number of maritime authorities in Western Europe was developed. It dealt mainly with enforcement of shipboard living and working conditions, as required by ILO Convention No. 147. However, just as the Memorandum was about to come into effect, in March 1978, a massive oil spill occurred off the coast of Brittany (France), as a result of the grounding of the supertanker “Amoco Cadiz”. This incident caused a strong political and public outcry in Europe for far more stringent regulations with regard to the safety of shipping. This pressure resulted in a more comprehensive memorandum which covered:

- safety of life at sea;
- prevention of pollution by ships;
- living and working conditions on board ships.

Subsequently, a new Memorandum of Understanding on Port State Control was signed in January 1982 by fourteen European countries at a Ministerial Conference held in Paris, France. It entered into operation on 1 July 1982. Since that date, the Paris Memorandum has been amended several times to accommodate new safety and marine environment requirements stemming from the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and requirements related to working and living conditions of seafarers.

The organization expanded to twenty-seven member States over the past years.<sup>56</sup>

As noted by the IMO:<sup>57</sup>

These inspections were originally intended to be a back up to flag State implementation, but experience has shown that they can be extremely effective, especially if organized on a regional basis. A ship going to a port in one country will normally visit other countries in the region before embarking on its return voyage and it is to everybody's advantage if inspections can be closely coordinated. This ensures that as many ships as possible are inspected but at the same time prevents ships being delayed by unnecessary inspections. The primary responsibility for ships' standards rests with the flag State – but port State control provides a “safety net” to catch substandard ships. IMO has encouraged the establishment of regional port State control organizations and agreements on port State control – Memoranda of Understanding or MOUs – have been signed covering all of the world's oceans: Europe and the north Atlantic (Paris MOU); Asia and the Pacific (Tokyo MOU); Latin America (Acuerdo de Viña del Mar); Caribbean (Caribbean MOU); West and Central Africa (Abuja MOU); the Black Sea region (Black Sea MOU); the Mediterranean (Mediterranean MOU); the Indian Ocean (Indian Ocean MOU); and the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC MoU (Riyadh MoU)).

In a general observation, adopted in 2014, the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendation<sup>58</sup> “noted with interest the recent public report issued by the secretariat of a regional port State control Memorandum of Understanding, with respect to the number of inspections of ships, by port State control officers, for compliance with the requirements of the MLC, 2006. That report included a list of deficiencies that had been identified on board ships, as well as reporting a significant number of detentions of ships for MLC, 2006 – related matters in this first year following entry into force of the Convention. The Committee notes that this shipboard-level system, involving both flag State inspections and inspections of foreign ships entering ports of ratifying Members, is important and supports, on an ongoing basis, and in a concrete manner, the cyclical national-level examination of the application of Conventions under the ILO's supervisory system.”.

#### C5.3.d. Is a port State required to inspect all foreign ships?

Regulation 5.2.1, paragraph 1, provides that every foreign ship calling, in the normal course of its business or for operational reasons, in the port of an ILO Member may be the subject of inspection in accordance with paragraph 4, of Article V of the MLC, 2006 for the purpose of reviewing compliance with the requirements of the Convention (including seafarers' rights) relating to the working and living conditions of seafarers on the ship.

<sup>56</sup> To be found at: <https://www.parismou.org/about-us/history>.

<sup>57</sup> To be found at: <https://www.imo.org/en/OurWork/MSAS/Pages/PortStateControl.aspx>.

<sup>58</sup> To be found at: [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/fr/f?p=1000:13100:0::NO::P13100\\_COMMENT\\_ID,P13100\\_LANG\\_CODE:3236210,en:NO](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/fr/f?p=1000:13100:0::NO::P13100_COMMENT_ID,P13100_LANG_CODE:3236210,en:NO).

As indicated by the word “may”, the inspection of foreign ships is discretionary rather than mandatory under the MLC, 2006.

### C5.3.e. Who is an “authorized officer” for port State control?

The MLC, 2006 does not define the term “authorized officer”; so this would be a matter for national implementation.

The tripartite experts’ meeting in September 2008 adopted guidelines for port State control inspections under the MLC, 2006, which have been revised in 2020 (*Guidelines for port State control officers carrying out inspections under the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended*)<sup>59</sup> to assist port State control officers to carry out inspections of foreign ships coming into their ports [see A14 and C5.3.f]. They provide the following tripartite guidance:

#### 2.2. Port State control officers

30. Port State control inspection under the MLC, 2006 is to be carried out by “authorized” officers (Regulation 5.2.1, paragraph 3). As mentioned earlier, the term “port State control officer (PSCO)” is adopted in these Guidelines. This means that persons must be authorized, by the competent authority in the port State to carry out these inspections and should carry official identification that can be shown to ships’ masters and to seafarers.

31. PSCOs should also be given sufficient power under relevant national laws or regulations to carry out their responsibilities under the MLC, 2006 in the event that a port State authority decides to inspect a foreign ship.

32. The MLC, 2006 does not set out specific requirements with respect to PSCOs, but port State control is to be carried out in accordance with the MLC, 2006 and “... other applicable international arrangements governing port State control inspections” (Regulation 5.2.1, paragraph 3). This means that existing requirements and international guidance with respect to qualifications and training required for persons functioning as a PSCO would be generally relevant.<sup>60</sup>

### C5.3.f. Is there guidance or a model for a port State inspection and monitoring system and to provide guidance to authorized officers?

The *Guidelines for port State control officers carrying out inspections under the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended*, were initially adopted in 2008 and revised in 2020 to assist port State control officers to carry out inspections of foreign ships coming into their ports [see C5.3.e]. The need to develop international guidelines and related national guidance for port State control officers had, in fact, been foreseen in the MLC, 2006 itself. The Convention begins, in Article I, by requiring that: “Members shall cooperate with each other for the purpose of ensuring the effective implementation and enforcement of the Convention.” More specifically Regulation 5.2.1, paragraph 3, provides that “Inspections in a port shall be carried out by authorized officers in accordance with the provisions of the

<sup>59</sup> Available on the ILO [MLC, 2006 website](#).

<sup>60</sup> See: IMO resolution A.787(19), section 2.5; Annex 7 of the Paris MOU, and the Code of good practice for port State control officers, adopted in the framework of the IMO (MSC MEPC.4/Circ.2). The provisions of the MLC, 2006 relating to flag State inspectors may also be useful for port State authorities to consider (Standard A5.1.4, paragraphs 2, 3, 6, 7, 10, 11 and 12).

Code and other applicable international arrangements governing port State control inspections in the Member". Standard A5.2.1, paragraph 7, provides that "Each Member shall ensure that its authorized officers are given guidance, of the kind indicated in Part B of the Code, as to the kinds of circumstances justifying detention of a ship under paragraph 6 of this Standard". Finally, Guideline B.5.2.1, paragraph 3, provides that "Members should cooperate with each other to the maximum extent possible in the adoption of internationally agreed guidelines on inspection policies, especially those relating to the circumstances warranting the detention of a ship". Developing guidelines for port State control officers is an important response to the call for "internationally agreed guidelines", insofar as the implementation of the MLC, 2006 is concerned. However, a harmonized approach to port State control is an ongoing process that includes cooperation among countries and coordination of maritime inspection under several maritime Conventions, not just the MLC, 2006 but also, particularly, the relevant IMO Conventions. In 2018, the Special Tripartite Committee (STC) established under the MLC, 2006 [see [A22](#)] decided to establish a subsidiary body in charge of updating the ILO Guidelines in order to reflect the amendments to the Code of the MLC, 2006. Updated guidelines should be published in the future.

### C5.3.g. What is to be inspected during port State control?

The purpose of the inspection by PSCOs is to determine whether a ship is in compliance with the requirements of the Convention (including seafarers' rights) (Article IV, paragraph 5). These requirements are laid down in the Articles and Regulations and in Part A (Standards) of the Code of the MLC, 2006 relating to the working and living conditions of seafarers on the ship (Regulation 5.2.1, paragraphs 1 and 3). Part B (Guidelines) of the Code of the MLC, 2006 is not subject to inspection by port State control. Port State control inspections are, in principle, concerned with the 16 areas [see [C5.2.3.b](#)] of working and living conditions on the ship (Standard A5.2.1, paragraph 2) that are listed in Title 5, Appendix A5-III of the MLC, 2006 and are to be certified by flag States as being in compliance with the related requirements of the Convention. However, the PSCO may also take action in the case of non-compliance with any other requirement of the Convention relating to working and living conditions (Regulation 5.2.1, paragraph 1).

The details for the implementation of the MLC, 2006 requirements are to be prescribed, in accordance with the Convention, in the national laws or regulations, collective agreements or other measures in the flag State concerned. On ships carrying a Maritime Labour Certificate, a summary of the relevant national standards adopted to implement the MLC, 2006 in the 16 areas referred to will be set out in Part I of the DMLC attached to the certificate. These 16 areas of flag State certification (listed in Appendix A5-I to the MLC, 2006) are the same as the 16 areas that are in principle to be covered by a port State control inspection (listed in Appendix A5-III). As indicated below, the Maritime Labour Certificate and the DMLC should be the starting point in the inspection process as they constitute prima facie evidence that the ship is in compliance with the requirements of the MLC, 2006 (including seafarers' rights).

PSCOs may also be entrusted with handling and investigating complaints made by seafarers on ships visiting their ports. If complaint handling is not part of their functions, they should be able to direct seafarers to the competent official for handling complaints or to receive complaints for transmittal to the competent official.

### C5.3.h. If a ship's Maritime Labour Certificate and Declaration of Maritime Labour Compliance appear to be in order can there be any further inspection?

In accordance with Regulation 5.2.1, paragraph 2, and Standard A5.2.1, paragraph 1 of the MLC, 2006 the Maritime Labour Certificate and the Declaration of Maritime Labour Compliance must be accepted as prima facie evidence of compliance with the requirements of the Convention. Accordingly, the inspection in ports must be limited to a review of the certificate and declaration except in the following four cases:

- (a) the required documents are not produced or maintained or are falsely maintained or the documents produced do not contain the information required by the Convention or are otherwise invalid; or
- (b) there are clear grounds for believing that the working and living conditions on the ship do not conform to the requirements of the Convention; or
- (c) there are reasonable grounds to believe that the ship has changed flag for the purpose of avoiding compliance with the Convention; or
- (d) there is a complaint alleging that specific working and living conditions on the ship do not conform to the requirements of this Convention.

In any of those cases a more detailed inspection may be carried out to ascertain the working and living conditions on board the ship. Such inspection must in any case be carried out where the working and living conditions believed or alleged to be defective could constitute a clear hazard to the safety, health or security of seafarers or where the authorized officer has grounds to believe that any deficiencies constitute a serious breach of the requirements of this Convention (including seafarers' rights) [see [C5.3.j](#)].

### C5.3.i. When may the foreign ships of non-ratifying countries be inspected in a port State?

Since countries that have not ratified the MLC, 2006 cannot, by definition, produce a Maritime Labour Certificate and Declaration of Maritime Labour Compliance issued under the Convention, they can always be the subject of a port State control inspection, especially in the light of the obligation on ratifying countries to ensure no more favourable treatment to ships of non-ratifying countries [see [A4](#)].

### C5.3.j. What if there is a complaint about a matter that is not on the list of 16 areas to be certified?

Standard 5.2.1, paragraph 1, authorizes a more detailed inspection to be carried out if there is a complaint alleging that specific working and living conditions on the ship "do not conform to the requirements of this Convention". An inspection may therefore be carried out where the alleged non-conformity relates to any requirement of the MLC, 2006 and thus not necessarily a requirement coming within the 16 areas of certification and port State control.

### C5.3.k. Who can make a complaint under Standard A5.2.1?

Standard A5.2.1, paragraph 3, provides that a “complaint” means information submitted by a seafarer, a professional body, an association, a trade union or, generally, any person with an interest in the safety of the ship, including an interest in safety or health hazards to seafarers on board.

### C5.3.l. When can a ship be detained by an authorized port State officer?

Standard A5.2.1, paragraphs 6 and 8, provide that “the authorized officer shall take steps to ensure that the ship shall not proceed to sea” where a ship is found not to conform to the requirements of this Convention and:

- (a) the conditions on board are clearly hazardous to the safety, health or security of seafarers; or
- (b) the non-conformity constitutes a serious or repeated breach of the requirements of this Convention (including seafarers’ rights).

This detention in port must continue until the above non-conformities have been rectified, or until the authorized officer has accepted a plan of action to rectify them and is satisfied that the plan will be implemented in an expeditious manner.

However, when implementing their responsibilities under Standard A5.2.1, all possible efforts must be made to avoid a ship being unduly detained or delayed (see Standard A5.2.1, paragraph 8).

### C5.3.m. What are the onshore complaint handling procedures?

Under Regulation 5.2.2 of the MLC, 2006 a complaint by a seafarer alleging a breach of the requirements of the MLC, 2006 (including seafarers’ rights) may be made to an authorized officer in the port at which the seafarer’s ship has called in accordance with Standard A5.2.2. Appropriate steps must be taken to safeguard the confidentiality of these complaints (Standard A5.2.2, paragraph 7) and the receipt of the complaint should be recorded by the authorized officer and, in the event that matters are not resolved at the ship-board level, and it is not a matter for a more detailed inspection by a PSCO then the flag State’s competent authority must be contacted for advice and a corrective plan of action. In cases where there is no reply from the flag State and the matter is not resolved, then the port State is required to send a copy to the ILO Director-General and to the appropriate shipowners’ and seafarer’s organizations in the port.

### C5.3.n. Who has to develop onshore complaint handling procedures?

Regulation 5.2.2, paragraph 1, provides that each Member must ensure that seafarers on ships calling at a port in the Member’s territory who allege a breach of the requirements of the Convention (including seafarers’ rights) have the right to report such a complaint in order to facilitate a prompt and practical means of redress. The Member in this context would be the port State.

#### C5.3.o. Who can make an onshore complaint?

Standard A5.2.2, paragraph 1, allows an onshore complaint to be made “by a seafarer alleging a breach of the requirements of this Convention (including seafarers’ rights)”. Presumably, such a complaint could be made by the seafarer through a representative.

#### C5.3.p. Who is an authorized officer for purposes of onshore complaint handling?

The MLC, 2006 does not address this question. It could be a port State control officer (PSCO) or another authorized officer.

#### C5.3.q. Are complaints confidential?

Standard A5.2.2, paragraph 7, requires appropriate steps to be taken to safeguard the confidentiality of complaints made by seafarers.

#### C5.3.r. Should a ship flying the flag of a member State holding an expired Maritime Labour Certificate (MLC) or interim MLC or not having on board an MLC or DMLC or interim MLC be recorded as a deficiency in a PSC report?

Under the MLC, 2006, the failure of a ship of a ratifying country to have a valid MLC on board could be understood as a breach of flag State law implementing the MLC, 2006. The consequence under the MLC, 2006 in the context of port State control is that failure to have a valid certificate could result in a more detailed inspection during port State control. However, it may be that under a regional PSC Memorandum failure to have on board a valid certificate is considered a deficiency.

### C5.4. Labour-supplying responsibilities

#### C5.4.a. What are labour-supplying responsibilities?

Regulation 5.3 establishes obligations with respect to the enforcement of what are called the “labour-supplying responsibilities” of States as set out in Titles 1 to 4 of the MLC, 2006. It also implements Article V, paragraphs 1 and 5. These responsibilities include the regulation of seafarer recruitment and placement services and the provision of social security. The provisions under Regulation 5.3 and the Code do not specify the form of legal implementation and, to a large extent, effective implementation of the obligation in relevant provisions in Titles 1 to 4 would constitute implementation of this obligation, at least with respect to Regulation 4.5. The main requirements are that:

- the country must establish an effective inspection and monitoring system for enforcing its labour-supplying responsibilities, particularly those regarding the recruitment and placement of seafarers;
- the country must also implement social responsibilities for seafarers that are its nationals or residents or are otherwise domiciled in its territory; and
- the country must report on its system for enforcing these obligations in its article 22 report under the ILO Constitution [see [A48](#)].

**Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended (MLC, 2006)  
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**

Sixth Edition, 2026

In order to help promote greater ownership of the MLC, 2006, among ILO constituents and also to facilitate the understanding of the Convention, the International Labour Office has prepared this publication of answers to “Frequently Asked Questions” (FAQ).

The current edition of the FAQ includes new questions on the 2022 and 2025 Amendments to the Code of the Convention. It further refers to the role of the MLC, 2006 in the context of crises, conflicts and wars and the recognition of seafarers as key workers; the elimination of violence and harassment on board; the right to social connectivity through internet access; the enhanced protection of seafarers in cases of abandonment and criminalization and issues related to women seafarers.

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