



By partnering with Stella Maris, you support seafarers around the world, and encourage them to seek help when crisis hits. Thank you so much.

To get help for seafarers:  
email [concerns@stellamarismail.org](mailto:concerns@stellamarismail.org)  
call +44 (0) 20 7901 1931

To find out more about Stella Maris, visit [apostleshipofthesea.org.uk](http://apostleshipofthesea.org.uk)

Apostleship of the Sea Registered charity in England and Wales number 1069833.  
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Life at Sea report 2019: *the tip of the iceberg*

Together, supporting seafarers | Together, we can do more.



In 2018/19 we responded to 80 crisis situations – almost double the previous year.

But for every case, there were up to 20 others where seafarers needed vital support<sup>1</sup>.

**We're dealing with the tip of the iceberg.**

Support from you today can change that.



L-R: Kitack Lim, International Maritime Organisation (IMO) Secretary General; Nusrat Ghani MP, UK Maritime Minister; Captain Estaban Pacha, Stella Maris Chair of Trustees; Martin Foley, Stella Maris UK National Director

## Life at Sea: *the tip of the iceberg*

Over the last year, we helped more seafarers and fishers in crisis than in the previous 12 months. Whether it was hospital visits, dealing with abandoned crews or helping resolve contract issues, we supported seafarers everywhere through some of the toughest times of their lives.

The fact that our crisis caseload increased shows we are making progress. The greater awareness and closer relationships of trust between Stella Maris, seafarers and shipping companies, means that more seafarers are getting vital support, when and where they need it.

### But it's still only *the tip of the iceberg*.

For every ship's crew in crisis supported by Stella Maris last year, we believe there were up to 20 crews who needed our help. Perhaps they were too scared to escalate a problem, or maybe they weren't aware of the support our chaplains provide.

There are two things we can do to reach even more seafarers in crisis with the help they need:

- 1) **We must work together.** By working with partners in the industry, including ship managers, owners, P&I clubs and flag states, we can act quickly and effectively to deal with issues. We've seen it over the past year; now we need to expand those partnerships.
- 2) **We must raise awareness of the support on offer.** Seafarers access the practical, emotional and pastoral care provided by Stella Maris when they have the confidence to seek help. **Together, we can raise the profile of the global Stella Maris network – and ensure seafarers see us as a dependable, trusted friend in times of crisis.**

Seafarers play a vital role in our global economy and their welfare must be at the heart of the shipping industry. This report shows the impact of working together, and the profound difference we can all make to improve the lives of seafarers and fishermen around the world.

*Martin Foley*

Martin Foley, National Director

<sup>1</sup>3.2% of vessels Stella Maris visit have issues that required our intervention. Based on the world's 53,000 registered commercial vessels, this would generate 1,696 cases requiring intervention.





## Hospitalisation and medical support

A ship is a dangerous industrial environment, and injuries sustained can be serious. In severe cases, where a seafarer is hospitalised in a foreign land, having a friendly face to visit and liaise with doctors and family at home can make all the difference.

In other cases, the medical crisis may be back in the seafarer's homeland – and they are unable to attend or help. These are the most stressful and difficult times a seafarer can face, and Stella Maris chaplains and volunteers provide vital support.

**Location:** Philippines

**Issue:** Help with crippling hospital bills

**Date:** July 2018

A seafarer, Bep, was proudly showing off pictures of his new baby triplets to our volunteer ship visitors – but later, he privately confided that medical bills were financially crippling the family. His wife was leaving hospital early to save on costs, they would have to borrow money, and he would need to extend his contract – and only visit home for a few weeks – to cover the bills.

The financial stresses were compounding Bep's anxiety; all the babies were receiving treatment and one was very ill. So our team stepped in. We gathered copies of hospital bills and asked a parish priest in the Philippines to visit the family and verify the facts. Before Bep's ship left port, our volunteers had accessed the Stella Maris welfare fund to settle the debt. Bep, his wife, and the wider crew, were overwhelmed – and our ship visitors Mary and Hugh were invited to be godparents to the three babies.



The family racked up medical bills totalling more than the seafarer's annual salary when these three were born. But, thanks to Stella Maris, they're doing well and seafarer Bep got home in good time to meet them.

**Location:** California, United States

**Issue:** Hospitalisation following infection

**Date:** December 2018

A week before Christmas, a ship's P&I Club contacted Stella Maris asking for assistance in California. A small cut while working led to seafarer being hospitalised with a flesh-eating infection, fighting for his life and needing several rounds of surgery. Our local chaplain, Fr Freddie Chua, visited the seafarer in hospital nearly every day for almost a month. He also visited his crew mates in the port to keep them up to date of his condition, and helped the seafarer contact his family in India. Fr Freddie also found a doctor in the hospital from the same town as the seafarer, which did much to lift his spirits over Christmas.

We helped in **15** emergency hospitalisation cases in 2018/19: we've helped with a number more, but these are the crisis cases



## Assault and bullying

Everyone has a right to work without suffering harassment and bullying. Among seafarers, this is even more important; their workplace is also their home. Harassment and bullying can be exacerbated by a ship's environment and isolation from family. It leads to de-motivated crews, poor teamwork, increased sickness and a deterioration of working conditions.

Guy Ryder, Director General of the International Labour Organisation, says, "Harassment and bullying on board ships can have serious consequences for the physical and emotional health of seafarers."

**Location:** South Africa

**Issue:** Assault and bullying

**Date:** October 2018

**6** cases of assault and bullying dealt with by Stella Maris in 2018/19

Our national director, Nicholas Barends, heard that two Tanzanians aboard a deep-sea fishing vessel had been assaulted by the First Mate. Nicholas went immediately to meet the pair, who confirmed the allegations and were backed up by a colleague. It was clear the seafarers were afraid of repercussions.

Nicholas organised and facilitated a meeting between the agent, the vessel owner, the First Mate and the two fishermen. As a result, the abused men were given \$2,000 in outstanding payment and compensation and were flown home by the ship's owner. Nicholas even provided the Tanzanians with suitcases (they only had plastic bags in which to carry their belongings home), and drove to the airport to see them off. The first mate was later dismissed.



"The First Mate admitted assaulting the seafarers but tried to say it was 'just a push now and then'. The seafarers were scared to speak out; the First Mate was a very powerful figure on the vessel. We helped the owner take full responsibility."

Nicholas Barends, Stella Maris national director in South Africa



## Death at sea

The ocean is the most dangerous workplace on the planet. Death rates at sea are higher than ashore and suicide rates are an increasing concern.

A seafarer's death is devastating for family and colleagues, and people often long for spiritual support and comfort. A priest blessing a ship or holding a memorial service for a lost seafarer can be an important part of the grieving process – and can help seafarers come to terms with what's happened.

**Locations:** Canada

**Issue:** Death of a cruise ship passenger

**Date:** September 2018

Following tragic reports of a cruise ship passenger being lost overboard, far out to sea, the ship's company requested that a Catholic priest visit the crew. We arranged for Deacon Dan Daley, our chaplain in Halifax, Canada, to visit with a priest at the next port.

The pair spent an hour talking with two crew members, including the last person to see the passenger only minutes before he went overboard. Dan also spoke to a seafarer who was among the first responders, and needed a listening ear as he talked through the distressing events of that day. Around 30 crew attended Mass on board.

Stella Maris supported grieving seafarers following **12** deaths at sea



*“The crew on board were more than thankful to have the chance to talk and pray. Thank you and your team, we highly appreciate all your efforts and service.”*

Email received from the cruise ship company, following the death of a passenger at sea.



## Piracy, slavery and human rights abuses

Few things can be more frightening at sea than armed gunmen boarding your vessel and threatening to take hostages. But piracy at sea is on the increase, and since 2014 there have been over 1,000 actual or attempted piracy attacks on shipping vessels.

Meanwhile, labour exploitation and modern slavery have been exposed in the fishing industry in recent years. The issue has been linked particularly to the industry in Thailand, but our chaplains have been involved in rare cases in UK waters – and we are always alert to the needs of the most vulnerable seafarers and fishermen.

**200+**  
pirate attacks or attempted attacks in 2018<sup>2</sup>

Guns used in more than **50** attacks in 2018

**83**  
crew members kidnapped in 2018



*“Piracy is terrifying for seafarers. Our experience shows that swift intervention is essential to minimise the impact of a pirate attack, so crews can return to work with confidence.”*

Deacon Dileep Athaide, Stella Maris chaplain, Vancouver

**Location:** South Africa and Taiwan

**Issue:** Human rights abuses

**Date:** July 2018

In June 2018, South Africa national director Nicholas Barends arrived at his office to discover a letter on his desk. In it, a crew of desperate seafarers detailed the appalling conditions on their fishing vessel. Water was leaking in, there were no life jackets on board, fresh water was scarce and they had skin conditions from washing in seawater. The crew were terrified about setting sail but feared repercussions from speaking out.

Nicholas immediately went to visit the ship, saw the problems for himself and contacted the port state control. But when he returned the following day, the ship had sailed. Stella Maris' crisis team in London took swift action and called ahead to their team in Taiwan to ensure the fishing boat was visited as soon as it docked. The vessel was detained under the new ILO fishing convention – the first detention of its kind – and the crew were paid outstanding wages and repatriated.

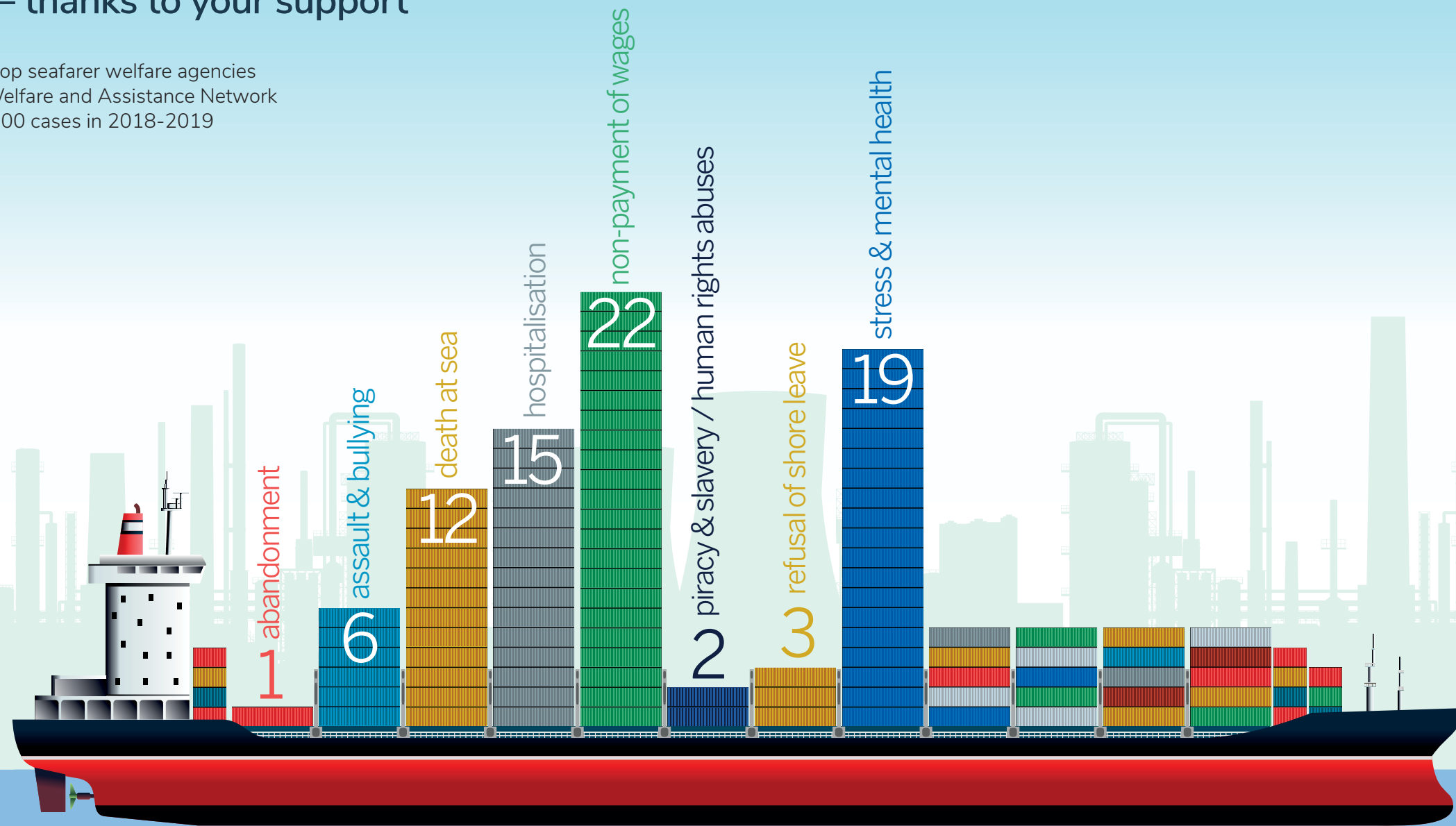
*“Without our intervention, these frightened and unpaid fishermen could still be working in slave-like conditions.”*

Jonathan Heard, Stella Maris, London

<sup>2</sup>ICC International Maritime Bureau Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships report, Jan-Dec 2018

## Last year, we helped more seafarers in crisis than ever before – thanks to your support

Stella Maris listed as one of the top seafarer welfare agencies by the International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN), helping in more than 100 cases in 2018-2019



**2,500**  
ships visited in  
Britain alone

**78%**  
increase in crisis  
response from  
2017/18 to 2018/19

**60%**  
of our crisis caseload was referred  
to Stella Maris by responsible  
shipowners and insurers – thank you!





## Abandonment

There's been a dramatic rise in the number of reported cases of abandoned vessels over recent years. The last two years have seen over 100 ship abandonments, compared to fewer than 80 abandonments in the previous five years<sup>3</sup>.

Ship abandonment can leave seafarers in a desperate situation. They may be adrift at sea or stranded in a foreign land with no supplies, no wages, no fuel and scant means of communication. Many have no idea when they will get home – and the uncertainty causes stress and anxiety.

**Location:** Alabama, United States

**Issue:** Abandonment

**Date:** December 2017-July 2018

In December 2017 we were alerted to an abandoned ship in Mobile, Alabama. The ship had been there for over a year, and seven Mexican crew were on board. Our chaplain, Deacon John Archer, stepped in to arrange food donations until money was provided by the ship owner. John then visited weekly to drive seafarers to the shops, church and even to a local Mardi Gras parade.

We helped three seafarers return home in January 2018, liaised with the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) to pursue payment of outstanding wages and supported the three cadets stuck on board.

13

crew abandonment cases just in the first quarter of 2019<sup>4</sup>

1

abandoned crew supported by Stella Maris chaplains



*“Chaplains are the arm around the shoulder, the friendly face on the hospital ward, the ones making endless phone calls when seafarers need help. During my time at sea I have seen first-hand the difference that chaplains and ship visitors make every day.”*

Captain Esteban Pacha, Stella Maris Chair of Trustees

<sup>3</sup>International Maritime Organisation and International Labour Organisation statistics

<sup>4</sup>International Maritime Organisation and International Labour Organisation



## Stress and mental health problems

Seafarers are among the most resilient professionals in the world. They work in an industrialised, physically-demanding environment, face extreme weather and cope with the emotional pressures of being isolated and away from home. In this stressful context, small things can really matter.

That's where our regular, consistent, everyday ship visiting pays off – by identifying and dealing with seemingly trivial issues that can cause significant stress to seafarers. Seafarers often raise concerns with chaplains which they would never escalate officially, so we can work with companies to deal with problems promptly. In this way, we help companies help their crews.

**Location:** Tilbury, UK

**Issue:** Coping with stress; how little things make a big difference

**Date:** December 2018

A broken dishwasher may seem trivial in the operation of a large shipping vessel, but for a crew at sea for many months it can make all the difference. Chaplain Wojciech Holub visited a ship in Tilbury docks, and found an over-tired cook and a crew who'd had enough of waiting for meals. The crew had reported the broken dishwasher to the company five times, but no action had been taken. Wojciech raised the issue with our London office, who contacted the P&I club. Within a few weeks, a new dishwasher was delivered to the ship.

**Location:** Southampton, UK

**Issue:** Coping with stress; illness in the family

**Date:** September 2019

When Southampton port chaplain, Fr John Lavers, visited a ship he was warmly greeted by the chef who remembered him from a previous visit. But the chef shared the news that his wife had become seriously ill and it was unlikely she would live past Christmas. The chef talked with Fr John for a long time about his fears and concerns for the future; it was clear he valued having someone to confide in. Finally, Fr John offered to say Mass for the chef and his family – a gesture which meant a great deal to this devout and faithful seafarer.



*“By being truly present in the lives of seafarers, in the good times and the bad times, they know they can confide and place their trust in us. Many see us as a beacon of light and hope because they know we will follow through on our promises.”*

Fr John Lavers, Southern Ports Regional Port Chaplain



### Non-payment of wages

When a seafarer's wages are delayed or withheld, it has a devastating impact on the whole family. Children may not be able to attend school, medical care may stop for family members and the seafarer is placed under enormous stress. This is why non-payment of wages remains the number one concern for seafarers we meet.

In these cases, the global Stella Maris network means we can support crews from port to port, and track progress from our London office until the issue is resolved.

**Location:** UK, Spain, Gibraltar, Germany

**Issue:** Non-payment of wages

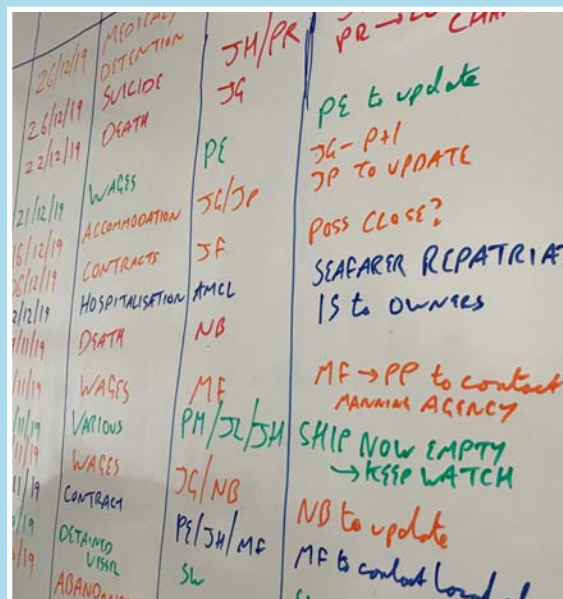
**Date:** July 2018

When seafarers are not being paid, the persistence and perseverance of our global network of chaplains makes a difference. Early in 2018, a routine visit to a container ship in Teesport flagged up concerns for chaplain Peter Barrigan. He alerted chaplains in Spain and Gibraltar – the ship's next two stops – and after four months supporting the crew, they were finally paid in full.

But, shortly afterwards, salaries dried up again. This time, it had a devastating impact on the men's families in the Philippines. "We have not received our payment for August. Our families are really in need right now, we were devastated by typhoon in September," said one seafarer. Chaplains in Immingham, Germany, Gibraltar and Hartlepool were mobilised – and eventually, payment was made and the case was closed.

22

non-payment of wages or contract issues resolved by Stella Maris in 2018/19



Our London office co-ordinates Stella Maris' global crisis response. From this base, we track vessels with issues around the world and alert chaplains in up-coming ports to visit the ships and ensure crews are supported.

To get help for seafarers, email [concerns@stellamarismail.org](mailto:concerns@stellamarismail.org) or call +44 (0) 20 7901 1931.



### Refusal of shore leave

International law protects seafarers' rights to shore leave – but we know from experience that this vital break is still being denied to many seafarers. Time away from the vessel and industrialised work environment is essential for seafarers' mental health and wellbeing. But quick turn-around times in ports puts pressure on this quality time.

**Location:** UK

**Issue:** Refusal of shore leave

**Date:** April 2019

We received reports that on a vessel of 29 seafarers of different nationalities only some were able to leave the ship and visit nearby towns, while crew of other nationalities had to remain on board. Chaplains were able to confirm this following subsequent visits at various UK ports. Stella Maris is collating evidence and approaching shipping industry associations to resolve the issue.



"It never, ever stops. You might pause for several hours but your engine never stops. You eat and the engine runs. You sleep, read, dream, shower and the engine runs. All the time, you are moving, shuddering, rolling. It lasts for months and it makes you feel a little crazy."

Valeriy, ship's captain who's worked at sea for more than 30 years