

# Woman Seafarer:

## Challenges & Difficulties of a career at sea



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**T**he usage of “seafarer” as a politically correct word can partly be attributed to the actions of the United Nations (UN) in promoting gender equality. Women have been taking part in industries that once solely belonged to men, the maritime industry included. The last decades, women entered gradually to the maritime industry, initially at shore positions and lately on board.

Seafarer’s profession, like many other professions, is male dominated and demanding. For that reason, there are quite some challenges for women, who decide to follow it, especially for the pioneers. Women currently represent a small percentage of seafarers but they are a growing phenomenon in the industry.

Seafarer’s profession gives plenty of opportunities to young people to grow, to gain experience and knowledge, to specialize professional skills, offers high earnings and professional satisfaction to those who decide to follow a career in the maritime field. Like every profession there are many challenges

and difficulties for both men and women.

One of the challenges is the problem of acceptance, as every new person, on board a ship, has to earn the respect of others. Especially, when a woman seafarer enters a male dominated field, needs to prove herself, she can be often pushed to prove her worth and even feel left out or ignored from her colleagues. Women need to prove their competence against men on board, while many jobs and operations require physical strength and requests from them to come out of their comfort zone. Loneliness is another challenge, maybe a little bit more for women because it is not always easy to find a person to share feelings and thoughts. Another challenge is prejudice and stereotyping of some people in the field, mainly men, who have a common belief that women have no business on board. Moreover, there are cases where women have to face bullying and harassment on board, these incidents must be reported to the responsible parties in order to take appropriate actions. Other difficulties and challenges on board for a seafarer is long contracts, long

time away from home, which is even more challenging for a woman, who has family and children back home. The lack of basics for women on board, like overalls and protective equipment in female's size, it is also a common example.

A woman who decides to become a seafarer should be ready for the difficulties, she needs to handle on board. Of course, it is not possible to be 100% ready, as this is not possible to any profession. The strength and the courage are two important allies for a seafarer, especially a woman who aims to establish a career at sea. A seafarer needs to be prepared mentally, physically and emotionally before choosing the particular profession. The most important condition of all, is to love the sea in order to make it happen.

Most of the challenges and difficulties are similar for women and men seafarer on board a vessel. The difference is that women who choose to become seafarers need to struggle for their professional survival and development, for that reason these women are truly admirable and they deserve everyone's respect.

We realize that there are professions where discrimination still exists and more efforts are needed in order to break some barriers. At the same time many positive steps have been taken in our field, where male seafarers and shipmates now accept women on board, and do not see a woman seafarer as something odd. Of course, many things still need to change and regulations need to be updated and modernized in order male and female personnel on board vessels to work equally.

For every person, no matter the profession, it is important to realize that the only limits in our lives are those that we set ourselves. Seafarer's need to be always prepared for the difficulties that they will face, but do not forget that difficulties accompany every kind of job. Seafarers need to build their resilience, remain calm and report any problem to

We would like to express our special appreciation and our thanks to Mrs. PETRAKI Elpi, Chartering, Operations & Business Development Manager, ENEA MANAGEMENT INC and President of WISTA Hellas Organization, for her significant contribution to this article with important information and feedback she has provided about women seafarers.

WISTA HELLAS (Women in Shipping and Trading Association) is a non-profit organization established in Greece in 1993 for women at management level in the maritime, trade and logistics sectors. Their vision is diversity and inclusiveness in their fields of work. More information you can find in their websites <https://wistahellas.gr/about-wista/> and <https://wistainternational.com/>

the responsible parties. Every profession has positive and negative aspects. The secret lies on how much you want to succeed something and how you will respond to all these challenges.

Shipping society and companies must take some actions in order to change the mindset of people about the woman seafarer, Mrs. Petraki Elpi, President of WISTA Hellas organization, stated the following: "First of all, WISTA does not consider women as different due to gender alone. We believe that both women and men are equally useful for the world and society. We don't stand on the issue of gender equality per se, but we consider this an important issue within a general framework of ensuring equal opportunities and treatment for all crew members and professionals, as we believe that this is the only way to guarantee viable growth, a stronger economy and a prosperous society. We also work for the acceptance of diversity in every profession and society.

"We demand equal opportunities and treatment for all, as well as equal pay, and we believe that professional advancement is a matter of qualifications and capability, and not gender.

"This, of course, requires a change in attitude by the men and women in positions of responsibility; and this

change in attitude begins from the education system of each country. Only then will we have remarkable professionals in all our companies, and not only in maritime-related companies. "

Euronav is one of the first companies supporting the role of woman seafarer. The diversity is a norm on board Euronav fleet. As company, we empower our fleet with multinational crew, female and male seafarers without discrimination, giving same opportunities to all no matter the gender, the nationality and/or the religion.

Euronav congratulates and encourages the efforts of all women seafarers and stands next to each one of them by all means.