

Safety at Sea

Building a Good Working Environment
through Inclusive Leadership



Introduction

This brochure provides practical guidance and recommendations for fostering an inclusive work culture in the maritime industry. It emphasizes the close relationship between the work environment and safety on board, showing how a strong work environment contributes to safer operations at sea.

The brochure is relevant to all stakeholders in the maritime industry, but is particularly aimed at shipping companies and ship management, HR personnel, employee representatives, and those responsible for health, safety and environment (HSE). It provides an overview of the relevant legal framework, outlines the key characteristics of a good and safe working environment, and offers practical guidance on how management can work systematically and effectively to strengthen it. It also clarifies the responsibilities of shipping companies and ship management in this effort.

The brochure is part of the project “Safety for All – Measures for a Safer and More Inclusive Workplace at Sea, 2024”, carried out by SINTEF and the KUN Centre for Equality and Diversity.

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The illustrations in this brochure were created by Ingrid Bomann-Larsen.



Equality in the Maritime Sector - Safety for Work, and Safety at Work

Equality in the maritime sector is about creating a working culture in which everyone has equal opportunities to participate, develop their careers, and thrive.

It is also about fostering an environment where diversity is valued, and where the resources and skills of diverse teams are recognised as a strength.

The Gender Equality Strategy for the Maritime Sector, launched in 2023, underlines that equality is also about safety for work, and safety at work.

Employers and leaders in the maritime sector have an important social responsibility to create fair and inclusive workplaces. By promoting equality, they play a key role in making the sector more attractive and better equipped to recruit the skills and expertise it needs from the whole of society.

Efforts to promote equality are essential for ensuring a sustainable and competitive sector that is well prepared to meet future demands, challenges, and expectations.

Efforts to promote equality contribute to

- A healthy working environment and greater well-being
- Reduced sick leave
- Better access to qualified talent
- A stronger professional reputation
- Enhanced competitiveness

A Good Working Environment and Safety Go Hand in Hand

The report from the project “Safety for All – Measures for a Safer and More Inclusive Workplace at Sea” highlights the close connection between safety and the working environment.

When people feel safe at work, they are more likely to share important information, report instances of non-compliance, and raise ideas for improvement. In this way, day-to-day operations become safer and stronger.

Employees who feel safe help build a culture where respectful language and behaviour are the norm, people feel included, and individual differences are valued. When employees do not feel safe at work, both safety and the working environment can be undermined, increasing the risk of accidents, repetitive strain injuries, bullying, harassment, and discrimination.

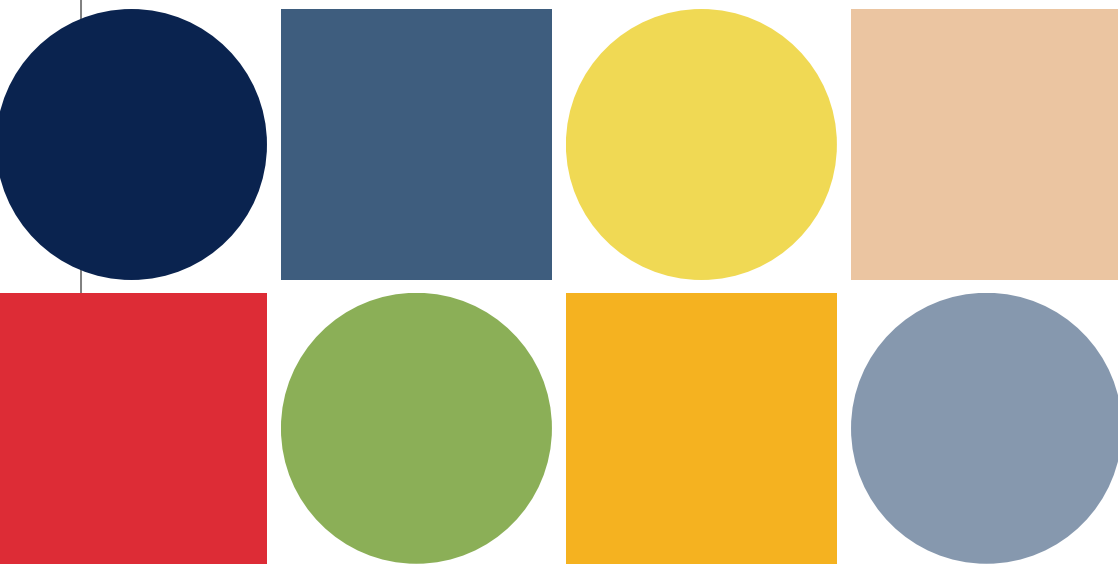


Ensuring safety at sea requires addressing three levels of safety:

Psychological safety - when crew members feel safe and included in the workplace, experience a sense of belonging, and can express opinions and concerns without fear of negative consequences.

Personal safety - when crew members receive the training they need to carry out their tasks safely and reduce the risk of accidents. This also includes access to properly fitted equipment that meets safety requirements. Management prioritises safety, complies with working hours regulations, and provides working conditions that support good performance










Safety related to major accident prevention - when crew members are supported by preventive measures, clear procedures, and effective training that reduce the risk of major accidents and help protect people, the environment, and the vessel.



“The Most Important Thing on Board”

During the “Safety for All” project, several people working in the maritime industry were asked what safety means to them. Their responses show that safety at sea is understood as a combination of positive working relationships, well-established safety procedures, clear allocation of responsibilities, and the safe performance of work tasks.

Several interviewees described safety as the most important asset on board. In their understanding, safety includes, among other things:

-  Feeling safe to be who you are.
-  Making sure everyone on board feels welcome and included.
-  A safe working environment where colleagues support one another, especially in challenging situations.
-  Ensuring that work tasks are performed safely.
-  A crew trained and prepared to respond to emergencies.
-  Being prepared for the unexpected through clear procedures and defined responsibilities.
-  Ensuring the safety of passengers.
-  Being able to manage the risks involved in the job.
-  Having safety equipment that functions properly.

Among the key concerns raised by employees are the need to prevent bullying, harassment, and inappropriate language; to ensure that complaints are taken seriously; to provide work equipment better suited to different body types, and to strengthen support for working parents and employees during pregnancy.

Safety at Sea

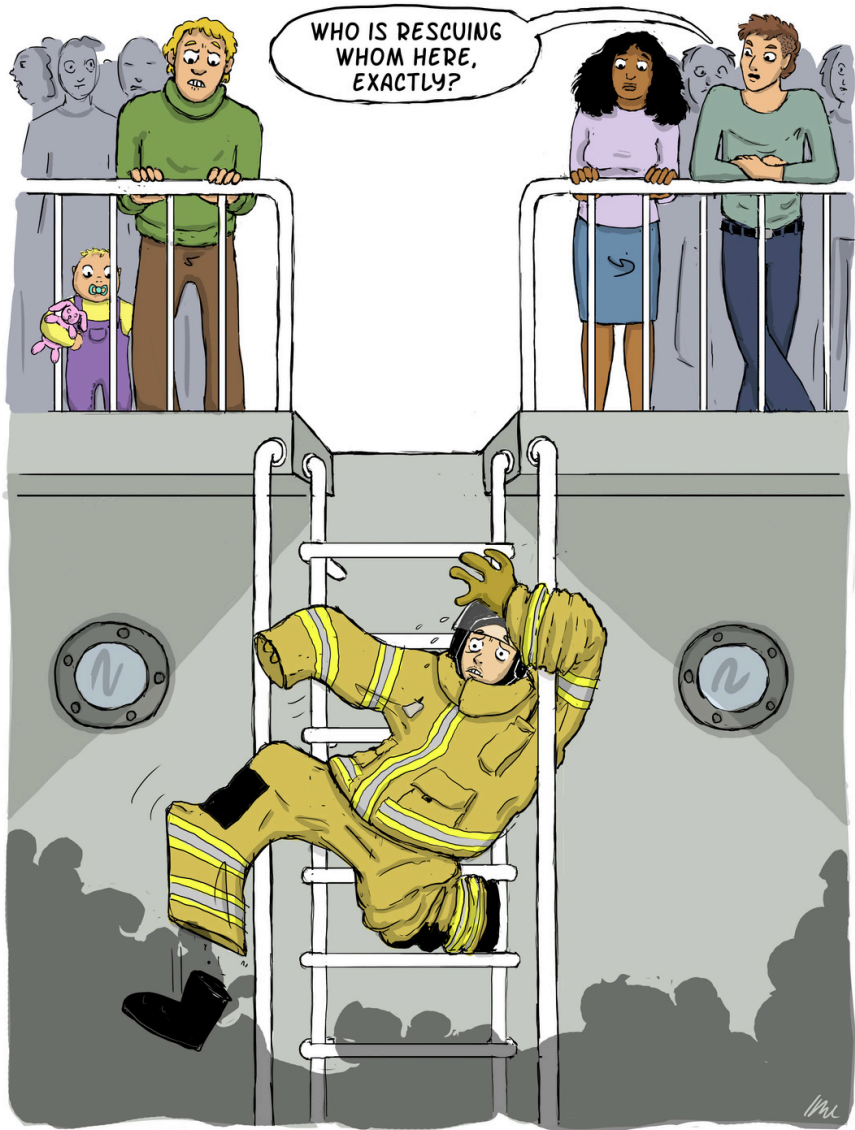
The project findings show a clear link between a good working environment and safety. A poor working environment can significantly undermine safety on board. Factors such as lack of support from management, poor communication, bullying, harassment, discrimination, and a high-conflict working environment can lead to increased stress, reduced attention to safety, and a higher risk of errors and accidents on board.

Working Environment Challenges

- conflicts (management/team)
- lack of collaboration
- lack of trust in management
- poor communication
- discrimination, bullying and/or harassment
- equipment that is not suitable for all users
- lack of effective reporting procedures
- high work pressure and workload
- inadequate safety training

Consequences for safety

- reduced motivation and attention
- reduced ability to respond in emergencies
- reduced focus on safety
- increased stress levels
- uncertainty
- increased fatigue and burnout
- failure to report safety risks
- misunderstandings that put safety at risk



A good, safe and inclusive working environment

A good and safe working environment is characterised by the absence of bullying, discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment, and other unacceptable behaviour. Employees are treated with respect, feel a sense of belonging, and are confident that they can report misconduct or other matters of concern without fear of negative consequences.

Management has overall responsibility for the working environment and safety. Both onboard and shore-based management have a significant influence on working conditions on board, including through financial and operational priorities, and by preventing and following up on misconduct or other matters of concern.

In addition, HR personnel and employee representatives play an important role in this work, which requires knowledge of relevant legislation and a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities.



Risk factors in the maritime sector

Risk factors are conditions or situations that increase the likelihood of negative outcomes, such as personal injury, accidents, or conflict. The maritime industry is characterised by working conditions that may increase the risk of undesirable incidents or unacceptable behaviour.

Such risk factors may include:

- High and sustained workloads
- Long working days
- Insecure employment and working conditions
- Shift and night work
- Blurred boundaries between work and private life (rotational work)
- A rough working culture
- Existing biases

Some groups in the workplace may be at greater risk of experiencing unwanted incidents or conditions that make working life more challenging, such as harassment and discrimination.

Groups that may be at particular risk include:

- New employees with limited maritime experience
- Temporary employees
- Apprentices and cadets
- Young employees, especially women
- Employees who belong to, or are perceived as belonging to, a minority group
- Employees who are in the minority - “the only one in a group” (for example, the only woman on board)
- Employees who work in isolation or in small teams (for example, on a fishing vessel with only two crew members)

Diversity and minority groups

Diversity refers to the fact that people are different, and that these differences should be recognised and valued on equal terms. In the workplace, this means fostering a culture that values differences among employees, so that diversity becomes a strength in both the way work is carried out and the working environment itself. It also relates to the composition of a group, whether within an organisation or a team. This may include different cultural, ethnic, social, and professional backgrounds, as well as different life experiences, skills, and perspectives.

A *minority* refers to a group that typically has less power and influence than the majority. Minority groups may even make up the numerical majority in a workplace, while still not having the same opportunities and rights at work. This may involve lower status, lower pay, and generally poorer terms and conditions of employment.

Minorities may face limited opportunities and a greater risk of marginalisation. This makes targeted efforts by management to promote inclusion and equality particularly important.

Although the maritime industry has traditionally been male-dominated, it is now changing. Today, women make up 21% of the workforce in the sector, with 89% working onshore and 11% at sea.

Equality and Diversity in the Maritime Industry and Maritime Education - A Mapping Study.
Report: Østlandsforskning Report Series No. 8, 2022



Laws and regulations

The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act requires employers to make active, targeted and systematic efforts to promote equality and prevent discrimination.

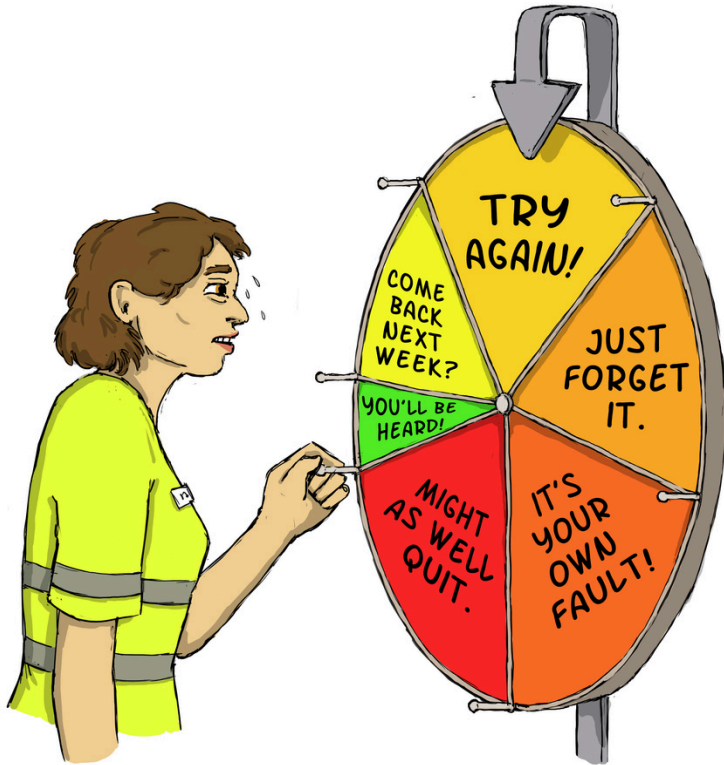
The Act prohibits discrimination on the following grounds:

- gender
- pregnancy
- parental leave in connection with childbirth or adoption
- care responsibilities
- ethnicity
- religion or beliefs
- disability
- sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression
- age

The Ship Labour Act aims to ensure safe employment conditions and equal treatment in working life at sea, while allowing for individual accommodation for each employee and contributing to an inclusive working life. The Act is intended to ensure a working environment that provides the basis for a health-promoting and meaningful work situation, full protection against physical and psychological harm, and a standard of welfare that is at all times in line with technological and social developments in society.

The Ship Safety and Security Act aims to safeguard life, health, property and the environment by promoting a high level of ship safety and safety management. This includes preventing pollution from ships, ensuring a good working environment and safe working conditions on board, and providing appropriate public supervision.

SPIN THE WHISTLEBLOWING WHEEL!



Whistleblowing and the handling of workplace concerns

Duty to act - when management becomes aware of a matter of concern in the working environment, they are considered to have been notified, regardless of whether they learn about it through an official whistleblowing channel or not. Once management has been made aware of the matter, they have a duty to investigate it further and, where necessary, implement measures to stop the harmful conduct and prevent it from happening again.

Three key points for the proper investigation and handling of a whistleblowing report are:

Impartiality - the people responsible for handling a report must not be closely connected to any of the parties involved in the case, and must be able to act neutrally.

Confidentiality - only those who are necessary for handling the report should be involved. Every effort should be made to keep this circle as limited as possible and to prevent rumours and leaks. Maintaining confidentiality in this way is crucial to ensuring that future whistleblowers feel safe raising concerns.

Efficiency - reports must be dealt with promptly and efficiently. Such cases can be demanding for those involved, and management must ensure that the process does not place any additional strain on the parties concerned or on the working environment.

In addition to *the duty to act* when a report is made, management has a fundamental responsibility to prevent harmful and unlawful incidents through risk-based preventive efforts. Assessing the organisation's risk profile for harassment and sexual harassment should be part of its health, safety and environment work.

Reporting procedures should be available in writing, and everyone should know where to find them and how to raise a concern. Good procedures should explain clearly what usually happens after a report is made, and outline the rights and responsibilities of all parties throughout the process. Proper handling also means ensuring that the person who raises the concern is supported and kept informed about the next steps.

Protection against retaliation - reporting a concern must not result in negative consequences. Examples of retaliation may include exclusion, humiliation, loss of responsibilities or tasks, being given additional work, suspension, or dismissal.

Management has a particular responsibility to handle reports in a professional manner. Ignoring a report may have serious consequences, both for the individual concerned and for the organisation.

How to create a good working environment?

Working effectively to promote a good working environment requires a comprehensive and systematic approach in which both management and employees play an active role. Management nevertheless holds the overall responsibility for making this work a priority and creating the conditions for good cooperation. This includes integrating efforts to promote a good working environment into daily operations and ensuring that the necessary time and resources are allocated.

Leaders shape the working environment through their actions and decisions. By leading by example, they help build a workplace culture based on respect, trust, and positive values.

- I am familiar with the relevant legislation and with the procedures for handling unwanted incidents.
- We have established effective reporting procedures and provide employees with training on where and how to raise concerns. We also have a clear process for handling reports and ensuring that those who raise concerns are properly supported.
- We have mapped our current situation and identified the risks we need to be particularly aware of in our preventive efforts.
- I know how employees perceive the working environment and am aware of our strengths and weaknesses.
- Based on our assessment, we have implemented measures to ensure and improve a good and inclusive working environment.
- We work actively to build a strong workplace culture. We share a common understanding of the kind of workplace we want and the values that should guide us. We are also committed to continuous follow-up and improvement.

Key terms and definitions

Discrimination

Discrimination is unjustified unequal treatment based on one or more protected characteristics. This means that a person is treated less favourably than others in a comparable situation, without objective justification, because of a protected characteristic. For example, a crew member may be passed over for promotion because she is pregnant, or an employee may be prevented from wearing religious headwear on board.

Prejudice

Prejudice refers to negative attitudes or preconceived ideas about a person, often related to their group affiliation, identity, background, or personal characteristics. Stereotypical and prejudiced comments may appear harmless to those who make them, but they can be deeply distressing for the person receiving them, whether expressed directly or indirectly. Such comments can make individuals feel devalued and excluded, undermine their sense of security, and have negative effects on their health (rasismeveileder.no).

Hate speech

Hate speech means threatening or ridiculing someone, or promoting hatred toward them, on the basis of skin colour, national or ethnic origin, religion or belief, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or disability. The use of symbols is also considered a form of expression. Hate speech is punishable under Section 185 of the Norwegian Penal Code (rasismeveileder.no).

Microaggressions

Microaggressions are subtle actions, comments, or incidents that may be offensive or demeaning to a person because they belong to a particular group, such as a gender, sexual orientation, or ethnicity (rasismeveileder.no).

Bullying

Bullying is a form of harassment characterized by a repeated pattern of behavior. Workplace bullying occurs when a person is repeatedly subjected, over time, to negative actions by one or more individuals in a way that makes it difficult for them to defend themselves. Bullying may be direct and visible, such as teasing or ridicule, or indirect and more subtle, such as social exclusion or being excluded from important information. The actions may be directed at the person as an individual or at their work situation.

There is often a power imbalance between the parties, which may further reduce the person's ability to respond. Bullying is a serious workplace issue that can result in both psychological and physical health problems for the person affected and can also undermine well-being and productivity in the workplace.

Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is unwanted sexual attention that has the purpose or effect of being offensive, intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or distressing to the recipient. It may take physical, verbal, or non-verbal forms and vary in severity. Whether the attention is unwanted is determined by the person subjected to it.

Racism

Racism occurs when negative characteristics are ascribed to a person, or when a person is treated differently, because of their ethnicity, skin colour, or cultural or religious background. It can be expressed through thoughts, language, and actions, consciously or unconsciously, and often involves the belief that one group is superior to others.

Harassment

There is a general prohibition of harassment at sea under ILO Convention No. 190, as implemented through the Ship Labour Act and the Ship Safety and Security Act. This includes harassment directed at personal characteristics, such as appearance or personality, or at work-related circumstances, for example professional devaluation or the allocation of tasks.

Under the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act, harassment on the basis of a protected characteristic is prohibited. Harassment refers to acts, omissions, or expressions that have the purpose or effect of being offensive, intimidating, hostile, degrading, or humiliating. It may take place directly through words and actions or more indirectly, for example through the withholding of important information.

Harassment may occur either as isolated incidents or as repeated conduct, but it must reach a certain level of seriousness to be considered harassment.

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å laste ned og lese
brosjyren på norsk



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