

All Aboard

15 July 2026

One Planet Shipping Case Study #4

Introduction

Shipping is expanding fast! Over the last four decades, maritime transport has grown by close to 250%. By 2023, the global merchant fleet numbered more than 100,000 vessels, with a combined capacity of 2.2 billion deadweight tonnes (DWT) and the fleet keeps growing.¹ Yet the continued expansion of shipping also increases pressures on the climate and ocean health. By enabling ever-growing volumes of global production and trade, the sector is deeply connected to patterns of consumption and resource use that drive climate change and biodiversity loss, on land and at sea alike.

A new course for maritime transport is urgently needed. One Planet Shipping, a Seas At Risk initiative steering the sector toward a more sustainable future, situates shipping firmly within planetary boundaries. It makes the case that sustainable shipping can support fair consumption, secure ports, responsible trade, and a just transition. Four guiding themes anchor this vision: Wind First, Reimagining Trade, All Aboard, and Homeward Bound.

For each theme, the case studies pair two complementary examples to bring the One Planet Shipping vision to life. The first looks at a recent event that disrupted global shipping, triggering serious financial, ecological, or social fallout, and exposes the problem at its root. The second presents a workable solution to that problem, challenging existing models and showing what sustainable shipping can look like under the One Planet Shipping framework.

Summary

The Global Peace seafarer abandonment describes how, in 2025, 19 crew members were left stranded off the coast of the UAE after their shipowner disappeared. Trapped on board for up to 15 months without pay, fuel or a clear way home, their case is not unique: 2025 was the worst year on record for seafarer abandonment worldwide.

Support exists: *The Mission to Seafarers* shows how maritime welfare charities step in where shipowners and governments fail. Through its global network, the charity provides emergency food, fuel and financial aid to abandoned crews. Yet charity alone cannot fix the governance failure. Preventing abandonment requires greater transparency over vessel ownership, effective enforcements, and clear accountability for those responsible for seafarers' welfare.

Seas At Risk
Mundo-Madou
Rue de la Charité 22
1210 Brussels



@seasatrisk



@SeasAtRisk_ngo



@seasatrisk



@seasatrisk.bsky.social



Seas At Risk gratefully acknowledges EU funding support. The content of this policy brief is the sole responsibility of Seas At Risk. It should not be regarded as reflecting the position of the funder.

The Global Peace seafarer abandonment

Global Peace

The Global Peace is a 100-meter long and 6100 DWT heavy oil products tanker, built in 2010 and owned by the UAE-based company Glory International. As part of the shadow fleet - a network of tankers that work outside conventional shipping oversight, often to avoid sanctions and regulatory scrutiny - the vessel currently carries no recognised flag, lacks insurance, and is known to have used contracts that reference fictitious agreements, leaving seafarers with very limited recourse when an owner disappears.²

In February 2025, the Global Peace was abandoned by its owners after having anchored off the coast of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in the Persian Gulf, leaving its 19 crew members with nationalities from India, Bangladesh and Ukraine trapped onboard.³ In April 2025, the vessel was sanctioned by the US Treasury, and in August 2025, the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) formally filed the ship as abandoned, calling on the shipowner and UAE maritime authorities to urgently intervene.

The consequences

Many of the seafarers had spent as long as 15 months aboard, well beyond the maximum contract length of 11 months permitted under the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC). For several crew members, contracts had expired more than five months earlier. In September, the crew reported in a desperate social media post they had run out of fuel and electricity, and were using wood to cook the little food they had left.⁴

In November 2025, after nine months of isolation, financial uncertainty, psychological stress and limited contact with their families, a repatriation mission was finally set up. The 19 crew members safely returned home and owed wages were eventually paid.

Abandonment on the rise

Sadly, the Global Peace case is far from isolated. According to the ITF, 2025 was the worst year on record for seafarer abandonment: 6,223 seafarers were abandoned across 410 ships. This means a 32% increase compared to 2024, marking the fourth consecutive year in which the number of abandoned seafarers has reached a new record high.⁵ Together, these seafarers were owed \$25.8 million in unpaid wages. Indian seafarers were the worst affected nationality, followed by Filipino and Syrian crews.

This continued rise in reported abandonment cases demonstrates an ongoing failure of governance within global shipping. The combination of opaque ownership, weak flag state oversight and absent financial protection illustrates how gaps in shipping governance can leave seafarers with very limited resource. Weak enforcement of labour standards allows shipowners to avoid responsibility, accountability, and even basic human obligations. Addressing this issue requires greater transparency over vessel ownership, effective enforcement of existing requirements, and clear accountability for the responsible companies and states.



The crew onboard Global Peace seeking help to go home. (© ITF)

#1 The State of Shipping and Oceans (2023), Seas At Risk

#2 ITF Warns Abandoned Tanker Crew is Caught in Sanctions on Illicit Oil Trade (2025), The Maritime Executive

#3 UAE must act now to end shocking abandonment of seafarers on sanctioned ship (2025), ITF Seafarers

#4 Global Peace crew now out of fuel, left in dark, burning wood to cook (2025), Sagar Sandesh

#5 Seafarer abandonment crisis: thousands left behind in shipping's worst year on record (2026), ITF Seafarers

The Mission to Seafarers

The charity

One Planet Shipping calls for a just transition for people working in the shipping industry, reducing inequality while increasing wellbeing.⁶ Founded in 1856, Mission to Seafarers is a maritime welfare charity that provides a vital safety net when those protections fail.

The charity is present in over 200 ports across 50 countries, where it offers practical, emotional and spiritual support to merchant crews of all nationalities and belief. It does that through ship visits, drop-in centers, and a range of welfare and emergency response services.⁷ Among the many challenges Mission to Seafarers responds to, ship abandonment stands out as extremely damaging to seafarer's wellbeing, and one the charity had increasingly confronted in recent years.⁸

Emergency welfare aid

Under the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC), a seafarer is considered abandoned when the employer fails to cover the cost of their repatriation, or has left the seafarer without the necessary support and care, or has failed to pay contractual wages for at least two months. When it goes wrong, Mission to Seafarers is often among the first responders: they provide emergency financial support for food, water, fuel and other essentials, all while working with port authorities, shipping companies, flag states and the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) to mediate disputes and secure repatriation.

In 2023 alone, Mission to Seafarers responded to 1,759 justice and welfare cases worldwide, part of more than 43,000 ship visits reaching over 300,000 seafarers that year.

The wider safety net

Mission to Seafarers is one of several organisations stepping in where the system fails. While the International Seafarer's Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN) runs helplines and crisis funds, Stella Maris operates the world's largest ship-visiting network across 353 ports, and the ITF's own inspectorate can recover unpaid wages and mediate abandonment cases directly.⁹ Together, this patchwork of charities and unions has become the de facto emergency response system for a crisis the shipping industry keeps failing to prevent.

Their work is invaluable, but it treats the symptoms, not the cause. Since 2017, MLC rules have required shipowners to carry compulsory financial security to cover abandonment, yet enforcement remains weak: nearly a fifth of reported cases in recent years involved ships with no guarantee in place at all.¹⁰ Every new abandonment case reinforces the same lesson: charities should not have to serve as the last line of defense against failures the shipping industry itself should prevent. Ending abandonment requires real transparency over who owns and controls a vessel, consistent enforcement of financial security rules, and flag and port states willing to hold shipowners to account.



Canadian seafarers posing with the Mission for Seafarers-flag. (© The Mission to Seafarers Canada)

#6 One Planet Shipping - Navigating the waves of climate change and overconsumption (2024), Seas At Risk

#7 Our Impact (2025), The Mission to Seafarers

#8 Ship Abandonment (2020), The Mission to Seafarers

#9 The Top Maritime Welfare Organizations for Crew Members (2024), Ship Universe

#10 ILO: 310 cases of seafarer abandonment in 2024 (2025), SAFETY4SEA