

Illegal seafarer recruitment fees average \$1,800



The charging of recruitment fees to seafarers is forbidden under the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) but the practice is still widespread.

[Marcus Hand](#) | Nov 22, 2023

Under the MLC there is the employer pays principle, however, a presentation by Ben Bailey, Director of Programme for Mission to Seafarers, and Alexander Held, Head of Commercial for TURTLE, at Seatrade Maritime Crew Connect Global 2023 revealed the extent to which the problem remains.

Held explained that TURTLE had surveyed over 5,000 seafarers and found that 40% said they had experienced corruption related to recruitment or while working onboard ship, and of those 40% some 70% said that it related to experiences during the recruitment process.

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“That was mainly related to recruitment fees requested by manning agencies to get the job. And some also gave us as an example where they had paid money in advance for fake job offers,” he told delegates.

Over 50% of these cases happened in the last three years and in the majority of cases – 70% - they were not reported by the seafarers.

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The Mission to Seafarers also carried out a survey into the issue with John Moore’s University in Liverpool and this found that recruitment fees charged ranged from \$100 through to \$7,500, with an average of around \$1,800 that seafarers and their families were having to pay. Bailey said the Mission to Seafarers survey showed that around 10% of the seafarers charged fees were still in debt as a result of compound interest.

An Indian seafarer said they had been told pay or otherwise their application would end up at the bottom of the pile, while others said once they had submitted their certificates they were forced to pay a fee to get them back.

In case of seafarer abandonment in the Middle East earlier this year the crew had been charged a \$2,000 recruitment fee, which they had taken out a loan for from a credit bureau recommended by the owner. The credit bureau continued to apply pressure on the families to pay up even though they knew the ship had been abandoned including sending around bailiffs.

“I think the ITF has been doing great work to raise the issue over the years. And certainly, we’ve even seen some governments take steps to ban illegal agents, and certainly crack down where they possibly can. But it does seem that there remains a small undercurrent that is affecting seafarers,” Bailey said.