



I am committed to ensuring that our work on diversity and equality is at the heart of all we do

Maritime Minister Robert Courts, May 2021

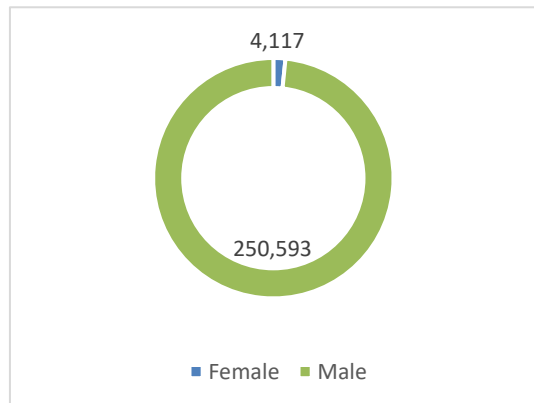
It is often said (eg [here](#)) that only 2% of seafarers are female. That figure both significantly undercounts the number of women serving at sea, at least in the UK, and misses important distinctions between different groups which we need to understand if we are to take more effective action to address the diversity imbalance.

This Briefing explains the more complex reality behind the headline figures.

This chart from the European Maritime Safety Agency, showing for 2017 the “gender distribution of masters and officers available to serve on board EU Member State flagged vessels”, is typical of the way that the percentage of female seafarers is normally presented:

4,117 female officers are a little under 2% of the EU total – 1.6% in fact.

The data here only covers officers, however, and only “certificated” officers (ie those in the deck, engine, and electro-technical room departments), so both ratings and “non-certificated” officers, who are primarily in hospitality roles, are excluded. And the data is at a very high level, so there is no detail by rank.



The [Department for Transport’s Annual Seafarer Statistics](#) give us much more to go on for the UK shipping industry, with useful detail in the supporting Excel tables.

In Table [SFR 0202](#) DfT uses data from the Maritime and Coastguard Agency on the number of live Certificates of Competence and Certificates of Equivalent Competence to provide a breakdown by deck and engine room, and by key grades within both.

There is a notably higher proportion of women on the deck side (5%) than in the engine room (1%), with a big drop between Chief Mate and Master (7% down to 2%) – though all the percentages are still very small indeed:

NB: to avoid distracting detail we have simplified DfT’s tables. In their [Technical Note](#) DfT statisticians caution that “the statistics can fluctuate from year to year and therefore should be treated with caution”.

Table 1: Distribution of women with valid certificates by department and grade

| | | Total | % Female |
|---------------|--------------------------------|--------------|-----------|
| Deck | Master | 2,910 | 2% |
| | Chief Mate | 1,130 | 7% |
| | OOW Deck | 3,065 | 7% |
| | All deck officers (CoC) | 7,100 | 5% |
| Engine | Chief Engineer | 1,800 | 1% |
| | Second Engineer | 1,200 | 1% |
| | OOW Engineering | 2,835 | 2% |
| | Electro-Technical Officer | 330 | 2% |
| | All engineers (CoC) | 6,165 | 1% |

DfT's Table [SFR 0302](#) takes a different set of data, drawn from the UK Chamber of Shipping's annual survey of members, which covers *those actually serving at sea* rather than those simply holding valid certificates. This data set also includes non-certificated officers and ratings who work in hospitality roles.

This shows much bigger percentages for women: they are **45%** of catering and hotel officers, and **39%** of catering and hotel ratings. Put it all together and female seafarers serving at sea are around 17% of the total – nearer 1 in 6 of all seafarers, than 1 in 50.

| Table 2: Distribution of women serving at sea, by department | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| Type | Department | % Female | Total |
| Certificated officers | Deck | 5% | 2,150 |
| | Engine | 2% | 1,535 |
| | All certificated officers | 4% | 3,690 |
| Uncertificated officers | Catering/Hotel/Other | 45% | 590 |
| Ratings | Deck | 2% | 1,915 |
| | Engine | 1% | 290 |
| | Catering/Hotel/Other | 39% | 3,130 |
| | Ratings | 23% | 5,400 |
| | | 17% | 9,940 |

In a ranked table the range of percentages looks like this:

| Table 3: Female percentage by category, of those serving at sea: | | 2020 | 2019 | 2018 |
|---|----------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Uncertificated officers | Catering/Hotel/Other | 45% | 41% | 42% |
| Ratings | Catering/Hotel/Other | 39% | 47% | 45% |
| All categories | | 17% | 16% | 21% |
| Certificated officers | Deck | 5% | 4% | 5% |
| Certificated officers | Engine | 2% | 1% | 2% |
| Ratings | Deck | 2% | 2% | 2% |
| Ratings | Engine | 1% | 1% | 1% |