

# Safeguarding the mental wellbeing of seafarers as they travel



## INTRODUCTION : ATPI MARINE & ENERGY

ATPI Marine & Energy is an international leader in providing travel to the energy and shipping sectors. Offering solutions tailored to offshore organisations, alongside 24/7 expertise and innovative technology, ATPI Marine & Energy operates with cost, efficiency and safety at the forefront of every travel strategy.

With an established presence and legacy within the marine and offshore sectors, ATPI Marine & Energy have supported organisations operating within these industries throughout the pandemic. In the midst of the upheaval and disruption caused by the outbreak of Covid-19, ATPI Marine & Energy supported multiple significant repatriation missions. This included an operation to transport 15,000 India-based seafarers to access worldwide connections and relieve others who had been at sea on extended contracts. To date ATPI has delivered over 254 charter operations on more than 35 different routes worldwide.



## INTRODUCTION : ISOS

International SOS provides best in class duty of care services to our clients via our 26 assistance centers, open 24/7/365. Our 5,200 medical staff, including mental health specialists, are at the disposal of our clients and are always available to troubleshoot their problems; from hospital referrals or prescription refills to evacuations and repatriations.

As a result of the imposed quarantines and travel restrictions enforced due to the outbreak of Covid-19 the need for mental health assistance has increased. International SOS recorded a three-fold increase in emotional support cases over the past 18 months. As the pandemic progresses and travel restrictions remain active, we expect this trend to continue, especially for remote and rotational workers like seafarers.

**Delivering what really matters™**



ATPI Marine & Energy has seen first hand just how complicated the travel experience has become for seafarers and we know that many offshore organisations are keen to support their seafarers as they continue to travel for essential work.

In this paper, together with International SOS, we will explain how the travel experience is linked to the wellbeing of seafarers, how that travel experience has been impacted by Covid-19 and the steps marine and offshore organisations can take to improve that experience for their travellers.

## 1. COVID-19 AND MENTAL HEALTH : INTERNATIONAL SOS

Throughout the pandemic, International SOS has provided insightful tips and conducted studies to encourage organisations to think about the mental health of their workforce.

*In this video*, Dr. Katie Geary points out that the volume of both reliable and unreliable information available in the news and on social media regarding Covid-19 can easily overwhelm employees. With this in mind, providing your workforce with a single trusted source of information can help alleviate some of these concerns and avoid stress and frustrations building within your workforce.

*Watch the full video, International SOS' top tips for mental health resilience, [here](#).*

Alongside this, *International SOS has also produced a study on remote rotational workers.*

The results showcase the need for a strong solution to mitigate the risks associated with mental health disorders.

Job insecurity and changes in reward packages are the top concerns among rotational workers, leading to 56% of the surveyed population feeling more stressed and anxious and 33% experiencing increased loneliness.

Questions surrounding the importance of family and work-life balance for rotational workers have revealed further potential negative impact on their mental health.

96% of the surveyed population were satisfied with the support they receive from families, however only 40% felt they had a good work-life balance. Once again this shows the need for a dedicated mental health programme for

seafarers to keep their work-life balance in place and allow continued contact with families and friends throughout quarantines and/or sickness.

## 2. WHY THE TRAVEL EXPERIENCE IS IMPORTANT TO THE WELLBEING OF SEAFARERS

Anyone who has travelled long-haul will be familiar with how physically and mentally demanding it can be, often disrupting sleep and inhibiting our usual cognitive functions for a few days. For seafarers and offshore workers, who are travelling to and from physically demanding jobs, these effects are commonplace.

Multiple sector studies have found compelling relationships between poor mental health amongst seafarers and factors such as poor HR practices, work-life balance, poor shipboard working conditions, high workload, lack of shore support, career progression and isolation from family and friends. The travel process is connected to many of these factors, as delayed, prolonged or fragmented travel has a significant impact on work-life balance, ability to deal with workload, access to support and extended separation from loved ones.



### The effects of Covid-19

The outbreak of Covid-19 has only served to put more pressure on seafarers and offshore workers as they travel to and from their jobs.

The simple act of travelling has become more complicated due to longer waits at airports, social distancing, border restrictions and processing and the requirement for testing and quarantine, all of which have ramifications for seafarers and offshore workers who are keen to return home or meet a connecting flight.



Alongside this, there is more uncertainty around travel than ever before. The prospect of unexpected quarantine can weigh heavily on the minds of seafarers and offshore workers, as this would mean even more time away from home. Ever-changing travel restrictions and quickly enforced border closures can also significantly disrupt seafarers' journey to and from work, whether this results in a longer, less-direct journey or the need for repatriation. All of these unknown factors can contribute to feelings of anxiety for offshore workers.

### Looking to the future

Thanks to wider discussions about the impact of Covid-19 on the mental health of the public in general, conversation surrounding the wellbeing of seafarers and offshore workers has also increased. This is important, as not only does it raise the expectations of workers themselves, but it also sets a precedent for organisations within the industry regarding how they protect the mental wellbeing of their employees.

Although there is still a stigma surrounding the discussion of mental health within the marine and offshore sectors, it's only through continuing to highlight these issues that we can help to

achieve meaningful change for those working in the marine and offshore sectors.

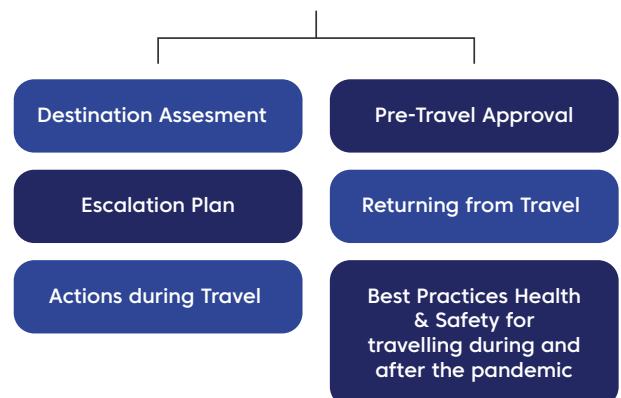
## 3. POLICIES AND PROCESSES TO HELP IMPROVE THE TRAVEL EXPERIENCE FOR SEAFARERS

Although the nature of the Covid-19 pandemic means the world is likely to have to deal with spikes in cases from country to country for the foreseeable future, there are steps that marine and offshore organisations can take in order to support their seafarers through a time of such uncertainty.

Together International SOS and ATP Marine & Energy can review your organisation's travel policies and processes in order to provide you with a tailored list of recommendations of how best to support your team. This could include a thorough run-through of your workforce's current mental health resilience. Based on the observations of a medical professional and mental health expert, we can deliver insightful and life-changing recommendations for your



#### Travel Support, Security and Duty of Care



teams to support them while travelling.

**Here are some processes and policies that your organisation can implement in order to help improve the overall travel experience of seafarers right now:**

#### **Examine pre-trip information made available to travellers**

Supporting travellers can begin before a trip has even begun, particularly at a time when the travel process can change quickly from one trip to the next. Providing crew with guidance on what to expect at airports or hotels, the restrictions that have been implemented at their destination and any other health and safety guidelines, such as mask wearing and social distancing, can help to ease anxieties about the unknown. This can be done most effectively by working with a health and security specialist, such as International SOS.

#### **Issue travellers with guidance on the safest ways to travel**

Whether in the form of internal guides or links to external websites, it's a good idea to share health and safety tips with travellers prior to their trip. Although most travellers are now aware of the need to wear face masks and use hand sanitiser, reminding them of other steps to take, such as travelling with their own cutlery and wiping down luggage and surfaces, can help them to feel more in control when travelling. International SOS can provide guidance on the most up-to-date health and safety measures recommended per country, giving seafarers information that is most relevant to their journey

#### **Review how you are sharing travel information and guidelines with crew**

Although providing crew with external links to government websites regarding travel restrictions and protocols is a good idea in theory, it's important to consider how accessible this is for them. It's worth reviewing whether these resources are available in a range of languages and assessing how easily they can be accessed when travellers are mid-journey with limited connectivity.

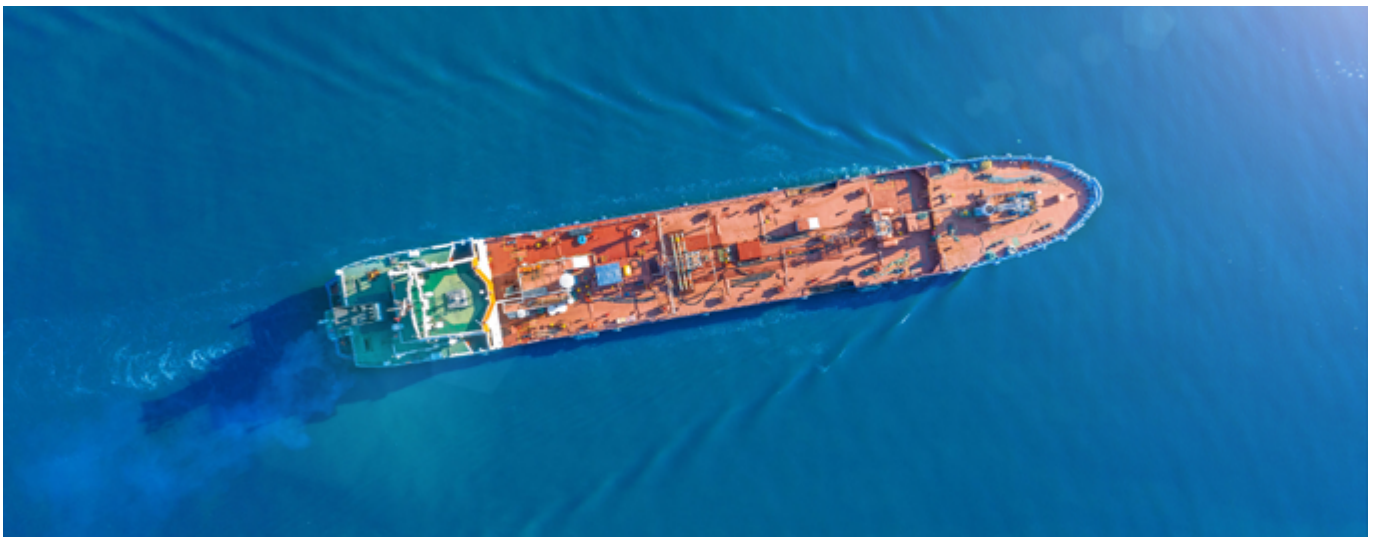
#### **Aim for all travel communications to be relevant and targeted**

The amount of information and news available throughout the pandemic has been the cause of much anxiety. Taking the time to ensure that any travel guidelines and communications that you share with your travellers are relevant to their journeys or roles can help to ease feelings of overwhelm. It will also bring more clarity to what is still an uncertain time for many.

**More insights  
from  
ATPI Marine &  
Energy**

#### **Ensure travellers have access to 24/7 support**

Many travellers are, understandably, concerned about getting 'stranded' while travelling and not being able to return home due to changing travel restrictions. Giving your crew and travellers 24/7 access to travel and safety specialists, as well as explaining how to use the service, can make them feel more confident and less distracted by the prospect of being impacted by quickly enforced restrictions. For example, using International SOS' Assistance App would mean travellers are able to access the latest health and security advice, as well as contact an





expert with one click if they require support while travelling.

### **Encourage travellers and crew to share their post-Covid travel experiences**

Encouraging your team to share their experiences of travelling during the pandemic, whether that's for business or for leisure, is a great way of ensuring that no one feels alone in their concern or worry. Creating a communication channel or email thread where travellers can share the things they forgot to take, the things they took that they didn't need, as well as which information sources and news outlets they found the most useful to check while travelling, is a useful way of pooling knowledge.

### **Recap and share the measures taken regarding quarantine**

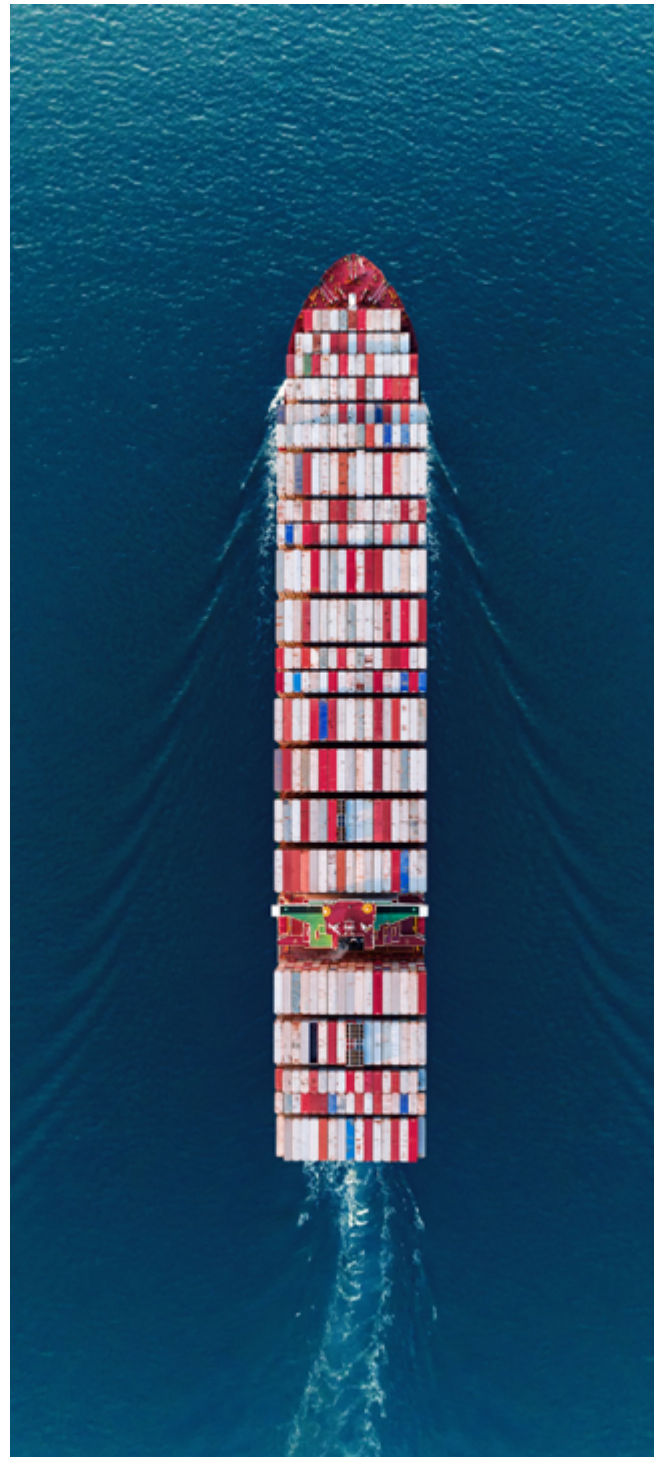
The idea of having to quarantine away from their family, or possibly in a foreign country, is a worry for travellers and so it's helpful to share the plan your organisation has in place for this. Clearly explaining how travellers will be supported if they have to quarantine while travelling could provide some much needed reassurance.

### **Explore the feasibility of using charter flights**

Over the last year many offshore organisations have implemented the use of private charters in order to safely transport crew to and from locations with strict restrictions and border closures. Talk to your TMC about how they could assist in providing this service while also taking steps to limit the cost of a charter.

### **Catch up with travellers and crew after their trip**

Implementing a process in which travellers have the opportunity to talk about a trip once they are home will give your organisation greater understanding of how travel is impacting employees. This conversation will give travellers a chance to share how they found travelling and what had changed since they last took a trip, as well as how well supported they felt. An international health and security expert, such as International SOS, and your TMC will be able to provide advice on what to include in these discussions and how to turn any information shared into meaningful action.



**Click here** to find out more about how working with ATP Marine & Energy can build a better travel experience for your offshore workers.