Migrant Maritime Workers and the Stella Maris Scalabrinian Catholic Network

by Center for Migration Studies

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1. Overview of the Maritime Sector

Introducing the Global Maritime Industry

The maritime sector is a vast and integral part of the global economy, employing tens of millions of people worldwide across transport and shipping, commercial fisheries, port operations, tourism, and other industries. Maritime crews vary in size depending on industry and vessel type, but they are generally composed of two categories of workers: the captain and other officers, and "ratings" or non-officer crew members. On transport vessels, these workers are referred to as "seafarers" and on fishing vessels, "fishers." Though both fishers and seafarers work at sea, their vessels and material conditions are governed by different regulatory requirements (detailed below); as such, this report refers to each population independently.

In the transport or shipping industry, approximately 1.9 million seafarers are employed worldwide across a fleet of over 100,000 merchant vessels.[1] These vessels–including oil tankers, bulk carriers, container ships, and general cargo vessels–are responsible for moving 80 percent of global trade,[2] transporting over 11 billion tons of cargo worldwide each year.[3]

Meanwhile, the global capture fisheries industry employs at least 33.6 million people across an estimated 4.9 million fishing vessels, with Asia accounting for both 77 percent of fishers and 71 percent of the world's total fishing fleet. The fishing industry is a lucrative business, producing 92.3 million tons (about 159 billion USD worth) of fish catch in 2022. While 90 percent of fishers are employed in small-scale fisheries, large-scale or commercial fisheries account for 60 percent of global catch production.[4] Common types of high seas fishing vessels include longliners (used to catch tuna), trawlers and seiners (which use nets to catch large quantities of various kinds of fish and shellfish), and jiggers (for catching squid).[5] These commercial vessels are often massive and physically demanding operations, requiring dozens of fishers onboard to work long hours in hazardous conditions. In addition, commercial fisheries frequently employ a network of refrigerated transport vessels ("reefers"), factory vessels for fish processing, and motherships to transfer catch, fuel, equipment,

[1] United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. (2025). *Review of maritime transport 2025: Staying the course in turbulent waters* (UNCTAD/RMT/2025). United Nations. https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/rmt2025_en.pdf

[2] *Shipping data: UNCTAD releases new seaborne trade statistics*. (2025, April 23). UNCTAD. https://unctad.org/news/shipping-data-unctad-releases-new-seaborne-trade-statistics

[3] *Data Insights: Maritime and other transport*. (n.d.). UNCTAD Data Hub. Retrieved March 13, 2026, from https://unctadstat.unctad.org/insights/theme/99

[4] FAO. 2024. *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2024—Blue Transformation in action.* Rome. https://doi.org/10.4060/cd0683en

[5] Thermes, S., van Anrooy, R., Gudmundsson, A., & Davy, D. 2023. *Classification and definition of fishing vessel types*. Second edition. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper, No. 267. Rome, FAO. https://doi.org/10.4060/cc7468en

crew, food, and other necessities between vessels. This practice of transshipment enables the fishing vessels (and the fishers on them) to remain at sea for months or even years, creating an environment with significant opportunities for labor and human rights abuses, as well as the laundering of illegal, unreported, or unregulated (IUU) fish catch into the seafood supply chain.[9]

National and International Dynamics

While all coastal countries are involved in the maritime sector, some play an outsized role in the shipping and fishing industries. The physical location of a given vessel is only one of several overlapping national classifications relevant to that ship's workers and institutional relationships. Importantly, a vessel's country of ownership is not always the same as its country of registration or "flag state," which holds primary jurisdiction over the vessel and its activities. The ability of shipowners to register vessels with a country of their choosing enables a practice of forum shopping known as "flags of convenience," where shipowners frequently register their vessels in states with looser regulatory frameworks.[10] Thus, while most of the global shipping fleet is owned by companies based in Greece, China, and Japan–accounting for over 40 percent of the total share of the world's shipping vessels–the top three flag states for shipping vessels are Liberia, Panama, and the Marshall Islands.[11] By comparison, the relative size and opacity of the global commercial fishing fleet, and the high prevalence of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing in the industry, make it far more difficult to track ownership and registration data for fishing vessels. Recent estimates suggest that major countries of ownership of commercial fishing vessels include Russia, China, Spain, South Korea, and the United States, while major flag states include Panama, Russia, Argentina, Belize, and Honduras.[12]

Case Study: the Overlapping Nationalities of One Shipping Vessel

Cape Coral is a tuna purse seiner currently sailing under the flag of Mauritius. The vessel is owned by Panama-based company Integral Fishing Services Inc., a subsidiary of Atlantic Tuna Corporation N.V., which is registered in Curaçao. Atlantic Tuna Corporation N.V. is owned by Netherlands-based Alalunga B.V., a subsidiary of parent company Albacora S.A. Headquartered in Spain, Albacora S.A. is one of the largest global tuna producers.[6, 7] Cape Coral primarily sails in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans along the coast of Africa, regularly docking in Port Victoria, Seychelles (roughly once per month on average).[8]

Parent Company: Albacora S.A. (Spain)
|
Holding Company: Alalunga B.V. (Netherlands)
|
Holding Company: Atlantic Tuna Corporation N.V. (Curaçao)
|
Registered Shipowner: Integral Fishing Services Inc. (Panama)
|
Vessel: Cape Coral, IMO # 9699050 (Flag: Mauritius)
|
Primary Port of Operations: Port Victoria (Seychelles)

[6] *CAPE CORAL - Fishing Vessel, IMO 9699050*. (n.d.). Marine Traffic. Retrieved March 19, 2026, from https://www.marinetraffic.org/ship-owner-manager-ism-data/CAPE-CORAL/9699050/645749000

[7] Froment, T., Le Manach, F., Campling, L., Skerritt, D. J., & Kinds, A. (2025). Hidden costs and propped-up profits: Unraveling the economics of Europe's purse-seine tuna fishing industry. *Npj Ocean Sustainability*, *4*(1), 69. https://doi.org/10.1038/s44183-025-00165-y

[8] *Cape Coral - Vessel profile*. (n.d.). Global Fishing Watch. Retrieved March 19, 2026, from https://globalfishingwatch.org/map

[9] Mosteiro Cabanelas, A. (ed.), Quelch, G. D., Von Kistowski, K., Young, M., Carrara, G., Rey Aneiros, A., Franquesa Artes, R., Asmundsson, S., Kuemlangan, B., & Camilleri, M. 2020. *Transshipment: A closer look - An in-depth study in support of the development of international guidelines*. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper No. 661. Rome, FAO. https://doi.org/10.4060/cb2339en

[10] Couper, A. D., Smith, H. D., & Ciceri, B. (2015). *Fishers and Plunderers: Theft, Slavery and Violence at Sea*. Pluto Press. https://www.cser.it/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Fishers-and-Plunderers-4.pdf

[11] United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. (2025). *Review of maritime transport 2025: Staying the course in turbulent waters* (UNCTAD/RMT/2025). United Nations. https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/rmt2025_en.pdf

[12] Kinds, A., Relano, V., & Villasante, S. (2025). *Beyond the Flag State Paradigm: Reconstructing the World's Large-Scale Fishing Fleet through Corporate Ownership Analysis*. Oceana. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15476309

Maritime Regulatory Frameworks

United Nations agencies like the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the International Labor Organization (ILO) establish and monitor minimum regulatory standards regarding maritime safety and working conditions. The global shipping industry is governed by the so-called "four pillars" of international maritime law. These four conventions, negotiated by IMO and ILO member states throughout the 20th century and into the 21st century, are as follows:

- **International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS):** Initially enacted following the sinking of the *Titanic*, the version used currently was signed in 1974 and enacted in 1980. SOLAS establishes minimum standards for safe construction and operation of maritime vessels.[13]

- **International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW):** Signed in 1978 and enacted in 1984, STCW establishes minimum training requirements for officers on large seagoing vessels.[14]

- **International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL 73/78):** Signed in 1973, amended in 1978 to incorporate additional requirements for oil tankers following high-profile spills, and enacted in 1983, MARPOL establishes requirements to prevent maritime pollution from both accidents and routine operation.[15]

- **Maritime Labour Convention (MLC):** Signed in 2006 and enacted in 2013, the MLC consolidates dozens of previous conventions into one set of standards for vessels involved in global shipping.[16]

The four pillars, in particular the MLC, are seen as "innovative and successful."[17] However, the MLC explicitly excludes fishers from its definition of seafarers, meaning its protections do not apply to workers in the global fishing industry. Instead, fishers are covered by a separate ILO convention, the Work in Fishing Convention (C188).[18] Drafted in 2007 and enacted in 2017, C188 aims to establish minimum requirements for employment, work, and safety in fishing. However, unlike MLC (ratified by 97 countries representing the vast majority of global shipping by tonnage), C188 has only been ratified by 25 countries,[19] leaving all fishers vulnerable. One reason for C188's limited take-up is bureaucratic, as three different UN organizations include global fishing in their scope of oversight. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) manages fishing from a food security perspective, the IMO from a technical angle concerning ship safety, and the ILO from the perspective of protecting workers.[14]

[13] *International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), 1974*. (1980). https://www.imo.org/en/about/conventions/pages/international-convention-for-the-safety-of-life-at-sea-(solas),-1974.aspx

[14] *International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers, 1978*. (1984). International Maritime Organization. Retrieved March 13, 2026, from https://www.imo.org/en/ourwork/humanelement/pages/stcw-convention.aspx

[15] *International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL)*. (1983). https://www.imo.org/en/about/conventions/pages/international-convention-for-the-prevention-of-pollution-from-ships-(marpol).aspx

[16] Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (2013). https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:91:0::NO:91:P91_ILO_CODE:C186:NO

[17] Guelker, D. (2023). Fishers and seafarers in international law – Really so different? *Marine Policy*, *148*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2022.105473

[18] *ILO Work in Fishing Convention No.188 (2007) to enter into force*. (2016). International Labour Organization. https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/ilo-work-fishing-convention-no188-2007-enter-force

[19] *Ratifications of C188—Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188)*. (n.d.). Retrieved March 4, 2026, from https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=1000:11300:0::NO:11300:P11300_INSTRUMENT_ID:312333

Despite these frameworks, the maritime sector, by nature and design, is a sector where even "successful" regulations are difficult to enforce. This system leaves vulnerable fisher and seafarer populations at substantial risk of forced labor and exploitation, dangerous working conditions, and other human rights abuses.

Migrant Maritime Workers

Men and boys from rural regions in developing countries are frequently targeted for recruitment as migrant fishers and seafarers on commercial vessels. Specifically, those from Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines are commonly recruited to work on Thai, Chinese, Taiwanese, Korean, or Japanese fishing vessels.[7, 20] The seafarer workforce is similarly dominated by Asian countries, with major populations coming from the Philippines, Indonesia, China, India, and Russia. Outside of Asia, Ukraine is another common source of migrant labor in both the fishing and shipping industries.[7, 21] While some shipowners engage legitimate employment agencies to recruit migrant workers, many fishers and seafarers find the work through informal social networks or are targeted by labor brokers or organized traffickers. Migrants are often required to pay recruitment fees and related costs, forcing many to take on loans or repay debts through wage deductions or debt bondage.[22] Dubious contracting practices are a major issue in the recruitment process. Many workers are lured with verbal promises of decent wages, safe working conditions, and fixed contract periods that are not stipulated in writing. Where written agreements do exist, they may contain unfair clauses or terms and conditions that are subject to change, or recruits may be required to sign blank pages with contract terms to be filled out later. Language barriers and lack of education can prevent recruits from understanding what they are being asked to sign.[7]

Once onboard a vessel, fishers and seafarers face extraordinarily hazardous working conditions, including:

- Long hours of physically demanding labor
- High risk of injury and death
- Exposure to extreme weather conditions
- Poor diet
- Lack of access to medical care
- Prolonged isolation

Many suffer from high rates of fatigue and poor mental and physical health outcomes. They also face significant risks of forced labor or slavery, exploitation, and other abuses. Wage theft, confiscation of identity documents, and debt bondage are common complaints.[23] Fishers especially may be subjected to physical violence, threats, harassment and sexual abuse, particularly in situations where they can be kept out at sea for months or years with little to no access to the outside world. Additionally, states with conflicting maritime claims regularly use fishers as pawns in their boundary disputes, such as in the South China Sea, where one state's authorities may arrest and detain the fishers onboard a rival-owned vessel fishing in disputed territory.[7] Another concern for both fishers and seafarers is abandonment at foreign ports, often without their identity documents, payment of outstanding wages, or financial resources to return home, leaving them at risk of arrest or extortion by port and immigration authorities or further exploitation. This can occur in cases where the crew member is sick or

[20] Harkins, B., Lindgren, D., & Ratnawulan, D. (2026). *Towards fair seas: Recruitment and working conditions for migrant workers in the fishing and seafood processing sectors in South-East Asia* ([1st ed.]). International Labour Organization. https://doi.org/10.54394/MJBL0660

[21] United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. (2025). *Review of maritime transport 2025: Staying the course in turbulent waters* (UNCTAD/RMT/2025). United Nations. https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/rmt2025_en.pdf

[22] Harkins, B., Lindgren, D., & Ratnawulan, D. (2026). *Towards fair seas: Recruitment and working conditions for migrant workers in the fishing and seafood processing sectors in South-East Asia* ([1st ed.]). International Labour Organization. https://doi.org/10.54394/MJBL0660

[23] Harkins, B., Lindgren, D., & Ratnawulan, D. (2026). *Towards fair seas: Recruitment and working conditions for migrant workers in the fishing and seafood processing sectors in South-East Asia* ([1st ed.]). International Labour Organization. https://doi.org/10.54394/MJBL0660

injured or their employment contract expired, or the vessel itself is abandoned by the ship owner.[7, 24]

Other Key Actors in the Maritime Sector

In addition to the shipowning companies and crew members, other key actors in the maritime sector include third-party employment agencies and unlicensed brokers that recruit fishers and seafarers on the shipowners' behalf, often through dubious contracting, debt bondage, and other trafficking schemes.[7] A 2024 study conducted by the Institute for Human Rights and Business found that nearly one-third of seafarers have been charged recruitment fees by a crewing or manning agent in exchange for a job on a shipping vessel, despite such fees being illegal under the MLC.[25] Recruitment fees and other exploitative practices of employment agencies and brokers in the maritime sector are major areas of concern, as they increase the likelihood of experiencing forced labor conditions, particularly in the fishing industry.[26, 27] Exploitation of maritime workers by crewing or manning agents is so pervasive that the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) maintains a recruitment agent directory red-listing agencies to avoid.[28]

Trade unions play an important role in representing and advocating for the labor rights of fishers and seafarers. The ITF, a global federation of trade unions representing seafarers, fishers, and other port workers, is particularly active in policy advocacy at national, regional, and global levels to improve wages and working conditions and to create and enforce protections against forced labor and exploitation of migrant maritime workers. The ITF also represents maritime workers in labor disputes and investigating reports of abuse. The ITF currently includes 212 affiliated unions operating across 106 countries representing seafarers and 91 affiliated unions across 59 countries that represent fishers.[29, 30]

There are also port authorities responsible for inspecting the catches, cargo, logbooks, and documentation of crew members of vessels that enter their jurisdictions.[7] A port authority is authorized by national, state, and municipal laws and regulations to manage and regulate activities within the seaport under its domain. Traditionally, seaports and port authorities are publicly owned, usually by the state or municipality, although there is a growing trend toward privatization. While a port authority may perform some operational functions in the seaport, the most common type of management model positions them as landlords of the port zone and surrounding areas, leasing terminals and infrastructure to private companies. These companies then carry out port operations while assuming monitoring and enforcement responsibilities. Increasingly, port authorities also act as managers of the broader port cluster or ecosystem, facilitating investments in and development of port infrastructure, and improving coordination and cooperation among the various stakeholders involved in port operations. This includes managing relationships

[24] United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. (2025). *Review of maritime transport 2025: Staying the course in turbulent waters* (UNCTAD/RMT/2025). United Nations. https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/rmt2025_en.pdf

[25] Institute for Human Rights and Business & TURTLE. (2024). *Seafarers and Illegal Recruitment Fees: 2024 Insights*. https://ihrb-org.files.svdcdn.com/production/assets/uploads/briefings/Seafarers-and-illegal-recruitment-fees-2024-insights.pdf?dm=1727281634

[26] ILO. (2024). *Global study on recruitment fees and related costs* (second edition). International Labour Organization. https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/Global_report_master_combinated_web.pdf

[27] Harkins, B., Lindgren, D., & Ratnawulan, D. (2026). *Towards fair seas: Recruitment and working conditions for migrant workers in the fishing and seafood processing sectors in South-East Asia* ([1st ed.]). International Labour Organization. https://doi.org/10.54394/MJBL0660

[28] International Transport Workers' Federation. (n.d.). *Recruitment Agent Directory*. ITF ShipBeSure. Retrieved March 17, 2026, from https://www.itfshipbesure.org/recruitment-agent-directory

[29] *Seafarers*. (n.d.). International Transport Workers' Federation. Retrieved March 17, 2026, from https://www.itfglobal.org/en/sector/seafarers

[30] *Fisheries*. (n.d.). International Transport Workers' Federation. Retrieved March 17, 2026, from https://www.itfglobal.org/en/sector/fisheries

between service providers like customs and coast guards, shipping companies, employees, trade unions, government institutions, and civil society organizations.[31]

Photo credit: Fr. Hendrikus Arianto Ukat

2. Introducing Stella Maris

In response to the challenges faced by maritime workers worldwide, the Catholic Church began to establish port ministries to provide spiritual and material aid and comfort to seafarers and fishers in the late 19th century. These centers were established in response to local need and opportunity, typically supported by parishes and dioceses in maritime regions. One of the key early Catholic maritime centers was established as "the Apostleship of the Sea" in Glasgow, Scotland, in response to the needs of the United Kingdom's large merchant fleet.[32] This ministry provided lodging, recreation, and spiritual support for seafarers while in port, institutionalizing a model that other Catholic maritime centers would continue to follow throughout the 20th century.

In 2010, the Congregation of the Missionaries of St. Charles–commonly known as the Scalabrinians[33]–consolidated the handful of maritime centers already under their jurisdiction into a new organization: the Stella Maris Scalabrinian Catholic Network. The Scalabrinian congregation was founded with a mission of service to migrants and refugees around the globe. As such, the needs of seafarers and fishers, as described in the section above, fit neatly into the Scalabrinian mission. Under the coordination of their administrative umbrella organization, the Scalabrini International Migration Network (SIMN),[34] the Scalabrinian maritime ministry adopted the name *Stella Maris* in reference to Pope John Paul II's 1997 apostolic letter defining and establishing pastoral assistance for maritime workers.[35] New Scalabrinian Stella Maris centers followed, serving not only fishers and seafarers but also other port workers, along with maritime workers' spouses, children, and other family members.

As of 2026, the Stella Maris Scalabrinian Catholic Network–henceforth referred to as Stella Maris–consists of 18 centers operating in 15 countries across 5 continents. Currently, Stella Maris centers are located in:

- *Argentina (Buenos Aires)*
- *Brazil (Rio de Janeiro & Santos)*
- *Chile (Arica)*
- *Dominican Republic (Puerto de Haina)*
- *Guatemala (Puerto Barrios)*
- *Indonesia (Batam)*
- *Italy (Ravenna)*
- *Japan (Tokyo)*
- *Panama (Puerto de Balboa)*
- *Philippines (Manila)*
- *Spain (Algeciras & Cadiz)*

[31] Notteboom, T., Pallis, A. A., & Rodrigue, J.-P. (2022). *Port Economics, Management and Policy*. (First edition.). Routledge.

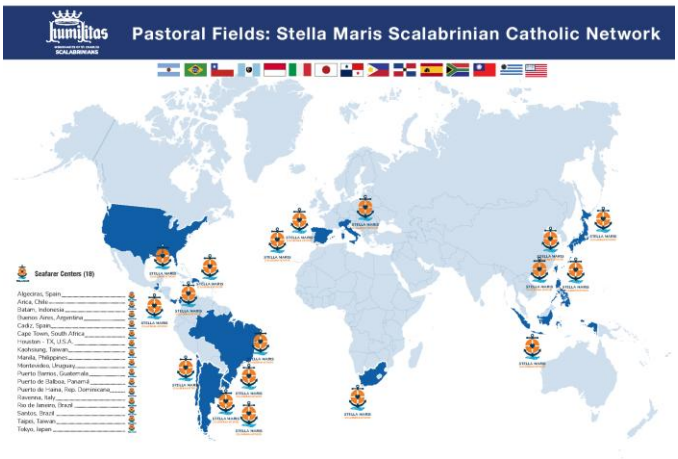
[32] *Our History*. (n.d.). Retrieved March 4, 2026, from https://stellamaris.org.uk/our-history/

[33] *Scalabrinians: Who Are We?* (n.d.). Retrieved March 4, 2026, from https://www.scalabrinians.org/#about_us

[34] *SIMN: History*. (n.d.). Retrieved March 4, 2026, from https://simn-global.org/history/

[35] John Paul II. (1997). *Stella Maris: On the Maritime Apostolate*. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_jp-ii_motu-proprio_17031999_stella-maris.html

- *South Africa (Cape Town)*
- *Taiwan (Kaohsiung & Taipei)*
- *United States (Houston)*
- *Uruguay (Montevideo)*



Source: Scalabrini International Migration Network

The Stella Maris centers display significant institutional variance. Each center is led by an ordained member of the Scalabrinian order, appointed by Scalabrinian leadership to a specific chaplaincy. All centers share a common mission: to provide spiritual, material, and organizational support to fishers, seafarers, and port workers connected to their home port. Otherwise, no two centers are alike. Some have existed for over 100 years, while others are brand new. Some maintain standalone facilities, whereas others operate out of local parishes or other Scalabrinian institutions. Some centers exist within local port facilities, while others are located outside the port at distances near and far. The government, administrative support, and infrastructure of local communities creates different levels of access, convenience, and connection to fishers and seafarers. Training for center chaplains is not standardized, and centers also differ in staffing, funding, and engagement with external partners. Each center is a unique product of different mixes of motivations, community dynamics, and resources. To better understand the Stella Maris Scalabrinian Catholic Network's impact, we must first understand the diversity of the centers themselves, as well as the chaplains who lead them.

To that end, researchers from the Center for Migration Studies (CMS), in coordination with SIMN leadership, conducted in-depth subject matter expert interviews with the Scalabrinian priests leading each center as chaplain and director. Interviews were conducted from fall 2024 through winter 2026, during a period of expansion and institutionalization within Stella Maris. The following section presents key characteristics and activities for each center.

Photo credit: Fr. Hendrikus Arianto Ukat

3. Key Activities

The following section outlines key characteristics of each Stella Maris center. These include the primary population served, the main nationalities represented in that population, and the center's primary activities in service to its key population. It also describes each center's physical and operational features, including access to a dedicated building or physical space, access to port facilities, and staffing beyond the chaplain. Finally, the section identifies each center's key partners in conducting its maritime mission, as well as the primary challenges it faces.

Arica, Chile

Primary Population Served: Truck drivers bringing goods to and from port facilities, occasionally families of truck drivers
Demographics of Population Served: Bolivia, Peru
Primary Activities: Parking lot visits, workshops (first aid, workplace safety), celebration of Mass, hospital visits, purchasing medicine
Physical Facilities? No
Center Staff: 3 total: chaplain/director, additional priest, and lay coordinator
Port Access? No
Key Partnerships: None currently; Attempting to build relationship with port authorities, Arica-based association of traditional fishers
Key Challenges: Biggest challenge is lack of access to port facilities (connected to lack of working relationship with the private company that runs the port); Only able to visit 5 of 6 truck lots

Buenos Aires, Argentina

Primary Population Served: Seafarers in 3 separate ports (Buenos Aires, Rosario, and Bahia Blanca)
Demographics of Population Served: Argentina
Primary Activities: Once building is complete: daily ship visits; seafarer transportation to town; rest, recreation, and religious service at center; Currently: building connections with local maritime institutions (detailed below)
Physical Facilities? Yes (As of the interview date, the building was closed for renovations)
Center Staff: 2 (shared with 2 other Scalabrinian groups that share the building)
Port Access? Yes (but lacks transportation for regular ship visits)
Key Partnerships: Labor unions, navy school, maritime chaplaincies from other religious groups; local police
Key Challenges: Lack of available facilities (during renovations); Lack of transportation to port

Cape Town, South Africa

Primary Population Served: Seafarers, Fishers
Demographics of Population Served: Seafarers: primarily Philippines, India, Russia, and Ukraine; Fishers: primarily Philippines, Indonesia, Myanmar (Burma), Sri Lanka, and Madagascar
Primary Activities: Ship visits; monthly medical missions; provision of food/water, Provision of warm clothing; Transportation to medical/dental appointments, transportation to town; onsite recreation, celebration of mass, English classes, Know Your Rights workshops
Physical Facilities? Yes
Center Staff: Currently 5 volunteers (fluctuates based on volunteer availability)
Port Access? Yes (Center is located in port)
Key Partnerships: ILO, other Catholic maritime organizations (Mission to Seafarers)
Key Challenges: Insufficient funding; inconsistent staffing; reliance on chaplain for all activities; lack of language access

Kaohsiung, Taiwan

Primary Population Served: Fishers, migrant land-based workers (e.g., housekeepers, home health aides); The center is not currently serving seafarers because of difficulty accessing the port
Demographics of Population Served: ~60% Indonesia, ~20% Philippines, remainder from Vietnam and Myanmar (Burma); most fishers are Muslim, land-based workers more of a mix religiously (the majority of Indonesian fishers are Muslim, the majority of Filipino fishers are Catholic, and Vietnamese fishers are typically a mix of Buddhists and Catholics)
Primary Activities: Shelter for fishers and land-based workers; ship visits; help with paperwork/case support for labor violations, trafficking, and immigration cases; wellness education for workers; labor rights advocacy
Physical Facilities? Yes
Center Staff: 3 full-time staff, 2 part-time staff

Port Access? Center is 30 min drive from port; fishing port free to enter, but not doing seafarer ship visits currently because of difficulty accessing that port (told by port admins they have to apply for access to ships before arrival, but hard because they don't know shipping schedule)
Key Partnerships: NGOs and fishers union in Taiwan on advocacy campaigns; communicates with ITF but limited capacity to help on issues for political reasons (China)
Key Challenges: Lack of access to commercial port (due to a close relationship between government agencies and shipping companies); lack of funding (for center maintenance and staff salaries); difficulty training and retaining good staff (who are often poached by government agencies that can offer better pay)

Manila, Philippines

Primary Population Served: Seafarers, fishers, and their families
Demographics of Population Served: nearly all from the Philippines
Primary Activities: Shelter; WIFI/internet access; hospital visits; pastoral care; Know-your-rights education; participating in pre-departure training sessions for seafarers; counseling/support group for families; advocacy with legislators and government offices; regular meetings with ship company directors/admins and captains
Physical Facilities? Yes, 3 centers
Center Staff: 14 paid staff and some volunteers
Port Access? No (access to port restricted post-COVID)
Key Partnerships: Philippines Migrant Rights Watch and other NGOs; seafarers union; other faith-based orgs (Sailor Society, Mission to Seafarers)
Key Challenges: No port access prevents ship visits; limited funding for programs

Montevideo, Uruguay

Primary Population Served: Seafarers, fishers; plans to expand to serve truck drivers
Demographics of Population Served: Seafarers: Philippines, India, Pakistan, Turkiye, Russia, Taiwan; Fishers: Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam, Myanmar, Peru, Senegal (also China and South Korea–usually officers)
Primary Activities: Ship visits; hospital visits; family communication/support; pastoral care for those who are Catholic, accompaniment for non-Catholics; internet access and recreational activities at Stella Maris center (does not offer overnight residence); cultural celebrations; provision of clothes and food; advocacy with government and port officials
Physical Facilities? Yes, one in city center ~20min walk from port
Center Staff: 1 paid staff member (secretary), 3-4 volunteers
Port Access? Yes, but there is a long process to get administrative approval from port authority to enter; there is also a separate, privately owned port they cannot access
Key Partnerships: International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF)
Key Challenges: Language barriers; transportation between the Stella Maris center and port and within port (very large, ~1hr walk from main gate to ships); advocacy with government and ship companies

Puerto Barrios, Guatemala

Primary Population Served: Seafarers
Demographics of Population Served: ~60% Philippines; ~20% India; remainder from Russia, Croatia, China, Greece, Honduras, and Guatemala
Primary Activities: Ship visits; pastoral care and religious celebrations; WIFI access, Chapel/Mass, place to rest, recreation
Physical Facilities? Yes (new center in parish hall 200 meters from port)
Center Staff: Chaplain only
Port Access? Yes, but authorization from both port authorities and shipping companies are required (as

well as additional authorization from ship captains to access vessels)
Key Partnerships: The center has a good relationship with port and military authorities; collaboration with port workers and truck drivers; contacts with ITF (seeking future alliances with local unions and international maritime organizations)
Key Challenges: Local parish lacks familiarity with Stella Maris ministry and needs of seafarers; negotiating access to port and ships; need for multidisciplinary team (e.g., doctors, psychologists); need for transportation service for seafarers

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Primary Population Served: Seafarers (sometimes also conduct religious celebrations with port workers and port authorities)
Demographics of Population Served: most from Philippines, India, Ukraine, Russia, China, Italy, Poland, South Africa
Primary Activities: Ship visits; pastoral care and accompaniment; advocacy and engagement with port authorities; regular interactions with captains and officers
Physical Facilities? Yes
Center Staff: 2 paid (1 social assistant, 1 other ship visitor), 3 volunteers (center cleaning and maintenance)
Port Access? Yes but limited (strict rules to follow; cannot access separate private terminal)
Key Partnerships: International Christian Maritime Association, Policia Federal, Receita Federal, port administration and authorities of terminals, OGMO Rio de Janeiro (port management company)
Key Challenges: Funding; lack of dedicated staff and volunteers; lack of support from local government; limited access to ships; language barriers

Ravenna, Italy

Primary Population Served: Seafarers
Demographics of Population Served: Wide range of nationalities, with a significant presence of Asian, Eastern European, and Latin American seafarers
Primary Activities: Ship visits; accompaniment and spiritual/cultural support and guidance; support for communication with families; basic needs provision; religious celebrations; advocacy and raising awareness in collaboration with other partners and stakeholders
Physical Facilities? Yes
Center Staff: 13 volunteers
Port Access? Yes
Key Partnerships:: Local institutions; trade unions; public agencies; maritime organizations; various Christian churches
Key Challenges: Increasing public awareness; ensuring consistent access to ports; limited staffing; improving coordination with institutions; strengthening relationships with port authorities and industry stakeholders

Santos, Brazil

Primary Population Served: Seafarers
Demographics of Population Served: Predominantly China, Philippines, Ukraine, and India
Primary Activities: Ship visits; free transportation; city tours; pastoral care; recreation at Stella Maris centers; advocacy
Physical Facilities? Yes, 2 centers: 1 in port of Santos, 1 ~35 miles away in port of Cubatao
Center Staff: 6 staff
Port Access? Yes
Key Partnerships: ICMA; national and international advocacy groups; port authorities; ITF; some maritime agencies; government representatives
Key Challenges: Public awareness of mission and programming to meet seafarers' needs; lack of resources to support personnel and programs; maritime agencies requiring written authorization for ship visits

Taipei, Taiwan

Primary Population Served: Fishers (also other migrants–factory workers, caregivers–Stella Maris operations folded within the Migrant Workers Concern Desk)
Demographics of Population Served: Fishers primarily from Indonesia; also Philippines, Vietnam, China, and other Southeast Asian countries
Primary Activities: Ship visits; Mass with Catholic fishers, organization of other activities for non-Catholics; spiritual accompaniment; distribution of food, clothing, and toiletries donations; organization of health, wellness, and now-Your-Rights seminars for fishers; recreation and social activities; medical missions and hospital visits; visits to undocumented migrants in prisons and detention centers; advocacy with unions and government agencies; help with labor rights cases (including reporting, applications, police station visits, and court hearings)
Physical Facilities? No (planning to open one in 2026/2027)
Center Staff: 1 staff (who runs a caregiver training program for Filipino migrants) plus some volunteers who support both fishers and caregivers
Port Access? Yes for fishers (ports are open to public), staff visit most of the 30 ports in Taipei, closest one is 15-20km from office; no access to seafarer ports
Key Partnerships: Unions; Other NGOs (for advocacy campaigns)
Key Challenges: Funding; language barriers; transportation and distance to ports; lack of access to seafarer ports; lack of physical facility for fishers to visit

Tokyo, Japan

Primary Population Served: Seafarers
Demographics of Population Served: China, Philippines, India, Myanmar (Burma), Ukraine, Russia, Indonesia, and some African countries
Primary Activities: Monthly ship visits
Physical Facilities? No (operates under office of Caritas-Tokyo)
Center Staff: Volunteers (supporting ship visits)
Port Access? Yes
Key Partnerships: Occasional collaboration among Stella Maris center directors
Key Challenges: Limited operations (only ship visits) due to lack of standalone infrastructure

In addition to the centers described in detail above, the Stella Maris Scalabrinian Network recently announced the establishment of six new centers, located in Algeciras and Cadiz (Spain), Batam (Indonesia), Houston (United States), Puerto de Balboa (Panama), and Puerto de Haina (Dominican Republic). These centers significantly expand the network's operations in key locations. Before their creation, there was only one Stella Maris Center in the entire region of North America, Central America, and the Caribbean; there are now four. Similarly, the number of Stella Maris centers in Europe has increased threefold. Finally, Stella Maris established a key presence in Indonesia, a country home to many of the maritime workers served in other ports by longer-established Stella Maris centers. The six new centers are still in the process of securing physical facilities, making local connections, receiving required permissions, and establishing operations. However, nearly all have begun conducting ship visits, providing spiritual support and counseling for maritime workers passing through their ports while simultaneously conducting the political, logistical, and financial work necessary to fully establish the center.

Photo credit: Fr. Hendrikus Arianto Ukat

4. Strengths of the Stella Maris Model of Maritime Chaplaincy

As outlined above, Stella Maris centers provide a remarkable range of services in support of seafarers, fishers, and those connected to maritime work–all the more so in the context of limited resources and significant systemic hurdles. Despite this, Stella Maris serves thousands annually, with records indicating nearly 70,000 workers and family members served on nearly 3,000 ships in 2024 alone.[36] This ability to meaningfully serve maritime workers in challenging contexts reflects strengths inherent to the Stella Maris model, as well as the tireless work of its chaplains.

Flexibility to Provide Locally Relevant Services

Stella Maris benefits from a model that encourages flexibility and adaptability in its service delivery. As a network, it operates across highly varied contexts, with the level of access to port facilities and vessels serving as the primary factor shaping program design. Stella Maris Arica is the most extreme example of the need to adapt, with access to port/ship facilities completely closed off. Pivoting to programming supporting port workers who operate outside of the port–that is, truck drivers–is a thoughtful alternative that demonstrates the Stella Maris model's ability to identify unmet needs and develop programming accordingly.

However, Arica is not the only center that has adapted its activities in response to local realities. Centers in Manila, Ravenna, Rio de Janeiro, and Santos experience limited, inconsistent, or no access to either port facilities or the vessels themselves. Additionally, Stella Maris chaplains in Buenos Aires, Montevideo, and Taipei are permitted port access, but lack the transportation arrangements to easily travel between center facilities and the port. On the other hand, centers in Buenos Aires, Taipei, and Taiwan either lack full-time facilities or had to suspend onsite operations while their building was under renovation. In each case, chaplains have adapted, meeting with maritime workers wherever possible and conducting networking and advocacy activities when in-person support services were not possible. For other centers (Buenos Aires, Santos), chaplains hit the road, incorporating visits to multiple port facilities into their daily routines. Stella Maris Taipei's chaplain regularly visits nearly 30 fishing ports, bringing medical care, workshops, counseling, spiritual accompaniment, and regular donations of food and clothing to migrant fishers. Fr. Paulo Prigol, chaplain of Stella Maris Manila, spoke of his approach, maintaining the attitude that the person in front of you is the person you need to take care of. This ethos is embodied by each of the Stella Maris chaplains, enabling responsive program design and service delivery.

Dedication to Mission

The Stella Maris network's ability to adapt, of course, requires leadership with a high level of engagement and commitment. Maritime chaplaincy is tiring work, with systemic barriers creating adverse situations for both chaplains and the maritime workers they serve. In interviews, chaplains reported similar experiences, recounting ignored messages, delayed or denied permits, exclusion from meetings, and restricted access. Even after gaining access to the relevant space–a ship's mess room, a port administrator's office, or a shipping company's conference room–chaplains are frequently out of alignment with the objectives of those in positions of authority. Shipping companies are profit-motivated organizations, and activities perceived to threaten shareholder value are considered with reluctance. Port administrators, meanwhile, oversee large, dynamic, logistically complex environments, and look to limit the number of moving pieces. And, most of

[36] *Annual Report 2024: Serving the Seafarers, Fishers, and Port Workers of the World with Compassion and Solidarity*. (2025). Stella Maris Scalabrinian Catholic Network. https://simn-global.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/StellaMaris-report-2024.pdf?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAAR1Sn6-6mh00ADaomYdoe5VUCu_W08HR6Atn-gT0rbKGUZfTAeoNyw0GnlY_aem_m41CHW018xcTNvj8rh-NwQ

all, life at sea is inherently isolating for those who live it. Achieving any meaningful impact requires tireless effort, described by one chaplain as early mornings, late nights, and great distance traveled. Another chaplain described the constant need to take initiative, thinking creatively about how to meet maritime worker needs. Without this attitude from those called to the priesthood and selected for maritime chaplaincy, Stella Maris would be far less effective.

Culturally Competent Care

Dedication is not the only quality that Stella Maris chaplains bring to their centers. As detailed above, the fishers and seafarers served by each center represent a diverse range of nationalities. However, certain patterns emerge: a significant number of migrant fishers and seafarers come from the Philippines and Indonesia. In the Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America, many also hail from either the country the center is located in (Buenos Aires, Puerto Barrios) or from other Spanish-speaking countries in the region.

In recognition of this trend, many Stella Maris chaplains are themselves from countries represented among the maritime workers they serve. In particular, most chaplains are from either the Philippines or Indonesia. Each island nation is home to a wide variety of languages, but each one has a primary lingua franca. By assigning chaplains capable of speaking Filipino or Indonesian to centers serving maritime workers from those countries, Stella Maris increases the likelihood that chaplains will understand the challenges workers face and how to best respond. Language alignment is also true for most of the centers in Latin America. Given that fishers and seafarers are frequently away from home for many months at a time, hearing a familiar language or accent is a meaningful treatment for the loneliness and isolation cited as one of the main issues in maritime work.

Affiliation with the Catholic Church

In interviews, Stella Maris chaplains reported that their identity as part of the Catholic Church is a benefit in building relationships in the service of maritime workers. For a relatively lesser-known program like Stella Maris, the ability to introduce oneself as a Catholic priest representing a Catholic organization creates an instant understanding of motivation and planned activities. Maritime workers–especially those who are themselves Catholic–know that Stella Maris is there to help them. Similarly, the communities that are home to Stella Maris centers know that they are there to serve those in need. When a government official or port administrator is also Catholic, this shared identify can provide a natural point of connection, facilitating access to ports and enabling other activities in service of the Stella Maris mission.

At the same time, Stella Maris chaplains are clear that their mission is to serve all maritime workers. Significant populations of seafarers and fishers are from non-majority Catholic countries, including Indonesia, China, India, and Vietnam. For non-Catholic maritime workers, Stella Maris chaplains do not push religious observance but instead focus on meeting material, psychological, and logistical needs. This approach also lends well to Stella Maris chaplains building connections with other maritime service organizations, be they ecumenical partnerships (like the ICMA), institutions rooted in other Christian denominations (like the Anglican-founded Mission to Seafarers), or local or international NGOs and labor unions.

5. Challenges Faced

The Stella Maris network operates in a challenging environment. As described in Section 1, the global maritime sector is a jurisdictional maze, with vessel ownership, vessel registration, worker citizenship, port location, and waters traveled or fished all factors affecting the rights of seafarers and fishers. The companies that own and operate maritime vessels (and, in some cases, the ports they dock in) are large, powerful, and well-resourced, as are the agencies that recruit and contract workers on their behalf. Maritime work, by its nature, separates workers from home and the institutions, networks, and communities that sustain and protect them.

These dynamics give rise to challenges specific to the context of maritime chaplaincy. Some are direct effects of external actions, whereas others are products of network-wide decisions attempting to align limited resources with unlimited systemic needs.

Access to Ports and Ships

The greatest challenge faced by the Stella Maris network is the inability of its chaplains, staff, and volunteers to regularly access port facilities or shipping vessels. The most extreme example of this challenge is in Arica, where the lack of port access means a complete inability to connect with fishers and seafarers, causing the center located there to shift its focus to other port workers. However, Arica is not the only center facing access challenges. Of the centers with operations detailed in Section 3, 75 percent list inconsistent or no access as one of their biggest operational barriers. The limitations described by chaplains in interviews fit into three categories:

- **Irregular access.** In Puerto Barrio, Rio de Janeiro, Ravenna, and Santos, Stella Maris staff are technically granted access to ports and ships, but must apply for authorization for each separate visit. This creates an administrative burden for center staff. In an extreme example, one chaplain (Stella Maris Kaohsiung) described a scenario where he was told to apply for access to a ship before its arrival, but could not obtain its arrival schedule.

- **Logistically difficult access.** For other centers (Buenos Aires, Montevideo), the ability to regularly access port facilities is limited due to transportation constraints. In Montevideo, for instance, it takes roughly one hour to walk from the port entrance to the areas where ships dock. Without funding to purchase a car for the center, the chaplain is forced to limit his port visits to days with limited to no other responsibilities, effectively limiting his direct interactions with maritime workers to those with the ability to undertake the same journey to the Stella Maris center.

- **Complete lack of access.** Stella Maris centers in Arica, Kaohsiung, Manila, and Taipei are unable to access port facilities. In Kaohsiung and Taipei, this limitation is not crippling, as there are multiple ports nearby. However, it does mean that port and ship visits are limited to fishers, as the commercial ports utilized by shipping vessels prevent access. In Manila, the inability to access the port and ships forces all interaction with fishers and seafarers to take place at the center, again requiring a journey across town for those who wish to visit. Finally, in Arica, the combination of no port access and no physical facility means no interaction between center staff and the fishers and seafarers they hope to serve.

In some of these cases, port access was not always restricted. In Manila, for instance, Stella Maris staff were previously able to enter port facilities to conduct ship visits until new security protocols were created at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. With COVID-era closures still in place, Stella Maris operations in Manila unfortunately remain restricted.

Resource Limitations

In recognition of the significant needs of the population they serve, nearly all Stella Maris chaplains mentioned resource limitations as a challenge facing their center. Stella Maris centers receive baseline operational funding from the Scalabrini International Migration Network (SIMN), as well as from local Scalabrinian congregations. Beyond that, each center is independently responsible for securing additional funding. Several centers, including Montevideo and Algeciras, receive support from national governments. Others, including Puerto Barrios, Rio de Janeiro, and Santos, receive funding grants from the ITF for specific projects. Similarly, some centers have independently secured grants from private foundations (such as Montevideo, with a grant from the

TK Foundation to support facility maintenance) or NGOs (such as Kaohsiung, with a grant from Humanity United in support of fisher empowerment, education, and wellness initiatives). In Cape Town, the Stella Maris building was provided through an ILO pilot program. Each of these arrangements, however, is location-specific, and relies on the individual chaplains to identify, apply for, and administer all funding terms. Finally, several of the centers that offer overnight stays to maritime workers charge for room and board. The nightly rate is small (for example, maritime workers pay $2 per night to stay overnight in Manila), but does support some center operations. Other centers, like Cape Town, opt to forego charging for goods or services, seeing it as not aligned with a mission of service.

Some Stella Maris centers also receive in-kind resources, including donations of warm clothing, toiletries, food, drinking water, and medical supplies. These local contributions help meet center needs, but often fail to do so completely. For example, the chaplain of Stella Maris Cape Town spoke of a greater need for winter jackets than his budget could meet.

On the other side of the ledger, Stella Maris center expenses can be considerable, falling into the following categories:

- **Facilities.** For centers with one or more physical spaces, facilities are a significant expenditure. Operating costs alone, including cleaning and utilities, requires money, with Stella Maris Manila estimating monthly maintenance costs of $17,000 to keep the doors of its three centers open. When building repairs or improvements are needed, chaplains must decide whether to wait until new funding can be obtained, cut operating costs, or go without. Each option impacts the center's ability to meet maritime workers' needs.

- **Transportation.** Purchasing, fueling, and maintaining a car for the center is another major cost. Some chaplains are able to do without, with public transit meeting their need for travel between center facility, port, and other appointments. Others, however, described the hours spent in transit or on foot as time that they wish they could use otherwise. Even the Cape Town center, with its location inside the port boundaries, has a car that it uses to take maritime workers to appointments, recreational opportunities, and to purchase needed supplies. As described above, other centers operate in multiple port locations, with transportation to and between ports a vital operational consideration.

- **Staffing.** Most centers employ paid staff in addition to the chaplain. Those with one or more buildings to operate require staff to run, especially if they offer food or overnight stays. Others utilize paid staff to support center logistics, coordinating activities, or managing appointments. Still others contribute to operations, visiting ships and conducting workshops. Most centers also rely on volunteers; however, chaplains described inconsistent scheduling and availability as a drawback.

- **Operations.** Stella Maris centers incur a range of additional operational costs depending on their activities. Many centers purchase goods for distribution to seafarers and fishers, including food, clothing, and basic supplies. Others cover the costs of medical or dental care for maritime workers. Over 40 percent of centers conduct workshops and seminars on vital topics including rights at sea, reporting processes, and mental health. Finally, each Stella Maris center is a religious institution, and as such, regularly holds celebrations of major holidays–both Christian (e.g., Christmas and Easter) and secular (such as independence day celebrations for countries represented in port).

Nearly every chaplain knows what they would do with more funding. Some would improve their center's physical infrastructure, either through building

purchase/repair or through obtaining a car. Others would hire staff to expand and enrich their programming. One center chaplain (Puerto Barrios) described a desire to expand his ability to provide physical and mental health care by building a team including a psychologist and a medical doctor. Yet more would ramp up their ability to provide needed goods and supplies.

Difficulty in Building Relationships

As described in the sections above, Stella Maris centers do not operate in a vacuum. As a service organization, they must be able to meet with the people they hope to serve, which requires either access to ports and ships or venues for interaction outside of the port. As an advocacy organization, they need to maintain connections with some combination of port authorities, government officials, shipping companies, labor unions, and humanitarian organizations. As a religious organization, they operate within the context of the Scalabrinian congregation and the broader Catholic Church, as well as within other ecumenical networks and organizations.

Each of the relationships described above requires time, care, and attention to maintain. Many of the institutions involved operate under motivations in conflict with Stella Maris's mission. Still others may share common cause but compete for the same limited resources or pursue specific advocacy objectives that do not align with Stella Maris. A relationship breakdown can completely change a center's ability to operate, as seen in Arica. Even short of such disruptions, chaplains in Stella Maris centers including Kaohsiung, Montevideo, Ravenna, Rio de Janeiro, and Santos identify institutional relationships as a key challenge.

Chaplain Transition

Stella Maris centers are uniquely reliant on the activity, relationships, and strategic vision of their chaplains. As outlined in Section 4, this strengthens the center and the overall network in many ways. However, the structural model under which most centers currently operate can be an issue when a chaplain departs. Without overlapping management, center operations can cease, and local relationships it relied on for funding, advocacy, and operational support can go quiet. When a new chaplain is appointed, they then have to restart center activities from scratch. Doing so gives them the freedom to create programs meeting their preferences and requirements, but it also means that start-up costs (in time, logistics, energy, and funding) must be borne anew.

In relying on the previous chaplain's personal connections and relationships with other local institutions, new chaplains have to create new connections and build new bridges upon their appointment. The chaplain of Stella Maris Buenos Aires described this process, detailing the three months it took him to acquire permission to enter the port, the contacts he had to rebuild, and the shutdown in operations the center experienced before his appointment.

Language Variety

As noted in Section 3, Stella Maris chaplains described encounters with fishers and seafarers from 21 different countries across five continents. Many of these countries (including India and China) are linguistically diverse, making it impossible for any one Stella Maris chaplain to be fluent in all the languages spoken by the maritime workers they serve. While many are bi- or trilingual, often speaking English in addition to their native tongue, language gaps remain.

Effective counseling, accompaniment, and legal support—key Stella Maris activities—often depend on shared language. The topics addressed are sensitive, requiring a high degree of comfort in order to share. In legal cases, labor rights violations, or liaising with medical professionals, precision of language is critical, with real-world consequences when understanding is incomplete. Over half of the chaplains interviewed described language barriers as a major issue, with some noting disparities in the level of access and support they can provide to fishers with whom they share a common tongue compared to those with whom communication is more limited.

Difficulty Reporting Labor Violations

The international regulatory frameworks described above define conditions of abuse and labor violations, as well as procedures for reporting, adjudicating, and compensating such violations. However, Stella Maris chaplains describe a far more complex real-world dynamic. In some cases, chaplains are aware of maritime labor violations, but the fisher or seafarer affected chooses not to report them. Describing the process of advising a fisher weighing the benefits of reporting a violation with the fear of face retaliation, one chaplain felt helpless, stating that he "cannot guarantee that they will be ok."

In other cases, even when a maritime worker is willing to report a violation, the specifics of the violation may prevent further response. Cases of forced labor, in particular, are hard to prove without specific indicators–proof of salary withholding, physical abuse, or unsafe conditions–leaving a gray area in which a violation may have occurred but not in a manner serious enough to warrant an official investigation.

One additional element preventing further reporting and investigation of maritime labor abuse is the aforementioned limited ratification of the Work in Fishing Convention (C188). A number of Stella Maris chaplains are involved in local and national political advocacy, including with ITF and other unions, where strengthening legal protections for maritime workers remain a central priority.

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The Center for Migration Studies of New York (CMS) is a think tank and an educational institute devoted to the study of international migration, to the promotion of understanding between immigrants and receiving communities, and to public policies that safeguard the dignity and rights of migrants, refugees, and newcomers.

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