

Global
Safety
Evidence
Centre

World Risk Poll 2024


Focus On:

Risk perceptions
and experiences
of ocean workers

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Summary

The findings of this report reveal a stark reality: ocean workers are on the front lines of climate change. Compared to the global workforce, they are not only more concerned about experiencing harm from climate change, but also face a heightened risk from severe weather events. These fears are not hypothetical – they are rooted in lived experience, with many ocean workers having already suffered harm from extreme weather and dangerous working conditions at sea.

But climate change is only part of the threat. Ocean workers also face elevated levels of workplace harm more broadly, due to the demanding, hazardous, and often isolated nature of their jobs. Despite this, they are less likely than other workers to report harm when it occurs – often due to fear of retaliation, lack of trust in reporting systems, or limited access to support. This silence makes already dangerous work even riskier.

This is a pivotal moment. Ocean workers are already bearing the brunt of climate change and unsafe working conditions, but they should not have to face these challenges alone. Their safety, dignity and wellbeing must matter.

That is why Lloyd's Register Foundation stands with ocean workers, and alongside employers, organisations and governments, to do the difficult but necessary work. Together, we can build safer systems, empower workers, and create a culture where every voice is heard and every life is valued.

The task ahead is not easy. But it is urgent. And with courage, collaboration and commitment, we can ensure this essential workforce is protected – not just today, but for generations to come.

Introduction

Lloyd's Register Foundation is a global charity with a mission to engineer a safer world. Through our long-standing relationship with Lloyd's Register, the Foundation has deep roots in the maritime sector, a vital part of the global economy. Ocean workers – those who work on or near the water – play a crucial role in sustaining the movement of goods, resources and energy around the world. Their work underpins everything from global trade to food security, and their safety is fundamental to the resilience and functioning of coastal and offshore industries.

This importance was recently acknowledged for a subset of ocean workers with changes to the International Labour Organization Maritime Labour Convention referencing seafarers as 'key workers'¹; a step that seeks to ensure that seafarers receive better protection, easier access to medical care and travel, and stronger support at all times.

Given this critical role, understanding the risks ocean workers face, and ensuring their protection, is central to the Foundation's mission. However, safeguarding these workers requires more than just physical safety measures; it demands a broader commitment to wellbeing.

The Foundation is exploring how innovation and technology can improve conditions for seafarers. Through the Safetytech Accelerator², a joint initiative with Lloyd's Register, we are investigating solutions such as AI-powered mobile applications that monitor seafarers' emotional wellbeing. By analysing speech and behavioural patterns, these tools can identify early signs of fatigue, stress or mental health concerns – enabling timely, proactive support.

To ground this work in evidence, the Foundation invests in global data and insight through its Global Safety Evidence Centre³. A cornerstone of this effort is the World Risk Poll⁴, the only global survey capturing people's perceptions and experiences of risk. In 2023, we introduced a new focus on employment sectors, allowing us to examine how risk is experienced differently depending on where and how people work. This provided a unique opportunity to explore the specific challenges faced by ocean workers – from climate-related threats to workplace harm and barriers to reporting.

In this Focus On report, we delve into these findings, shining a light on the lived experiences, concerns and unmet needs of ocean workers across the world.

Climate change and ocean workers: escalating environmental risks

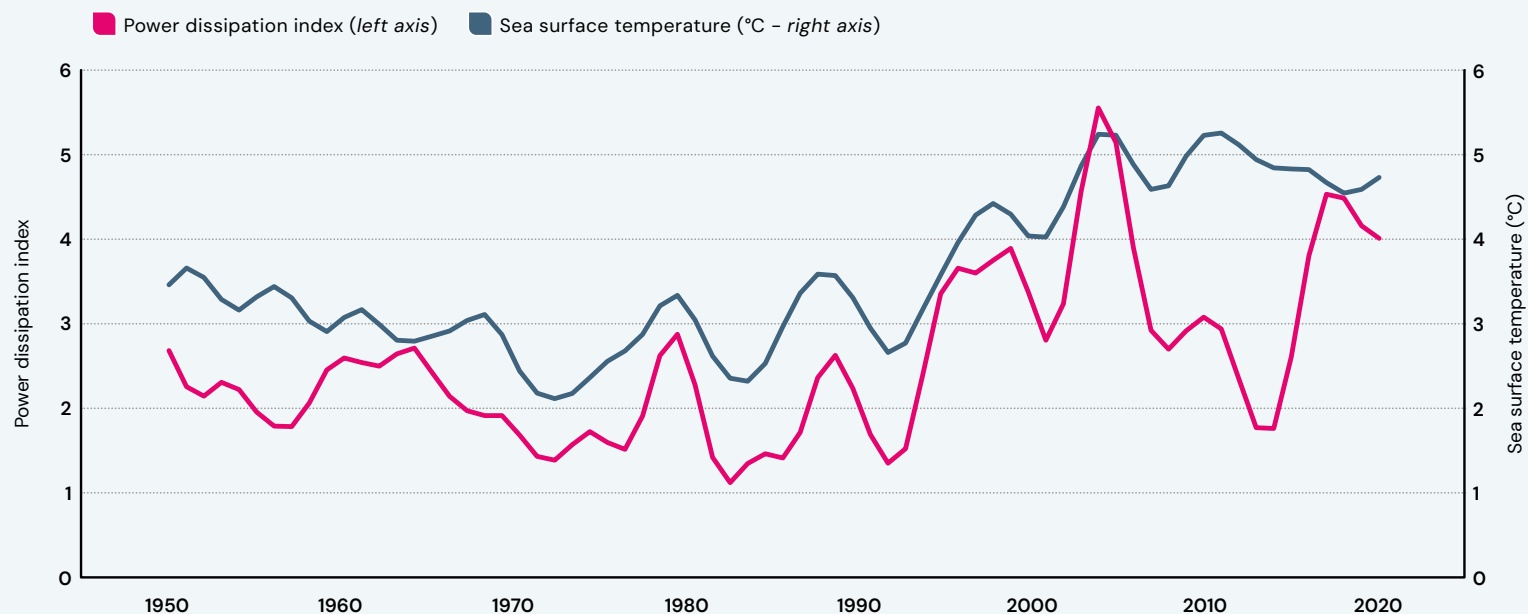
Climate change is undeniably reshaping our world, leading to more frequent, and more severe weather events. The 2024 Lloyd's Register Foundation World Risk Poll 'What the world worries about: global perceptions and experiences of risk and harm'⁶ report revealed that whilst a majority (72%) of people globally view climate change as a significant threat to the people of their country in the next 20 years, a smaller 6% perceive it as the greatest personal risk they face right now.

This discrepancy highlights the challenge of understanding climate change as something that affects our immediate surroundings. Its impacts often feel distant or abstract, with many struggling to connect the global-scale environmental shifts to their everyday lives. However, the reality is that the effects are already unfolding, and they are only set to intensify.

One of the key drivers of these changes is the warming of the planet via the greenhouse effect, with the oceans acting as a crucial buffer, absorbing much of the recent rise in global temperatures⁷. While this has helped moderate some of the immediate impacts, it also brings its own set of consequences. As the oceans warm, they provide the perfect conditions for increasingly powerful and destructive hurricanes. These storms, intensified by higher sea surface temperatures, have become more devastating, wreaking havoc on coastal communities, ecosystems, and those who work on or rely on the sea to support their living. The environmental toll of these more extreme weather events serves as a stark reminder of the urgency to address the climate crisis.

Rising ocean heat content fuels more intense storms

Oceans have absorbed the majority of excess heat from global warming, leading to increased ocean energy. This warming drives more severe tropical cyclones, intensifying the risk to ocean-based communities and workers.



World Risk Poll 2024 Focus On: The risks and experiences of ocean workers. Lloyd's Register Foundation, 2025.

doi.org/10.60743/xjn7-9x64

Callout and chart adapted from: Climate Change Indicators: Tropical Cyclone Activity. United States Environmental Protection Agency, Climate Change Indicators. <https://www.epa.gov/climate-indicators/>⁸

North Atlantic Tropical Cyclone Activity

Since 1878, an average of 6–7 hurricanes have formed annually in the North Atlantic, longitudinal data shows no clear change in frequency over time.

The Accumulated Cyclone Energy (ACE) Index indicates a noticeable rise in cyclone intensity over the past 30 years, with 8 of the 10 most active years since 1950 occurring after the mid-1990s.

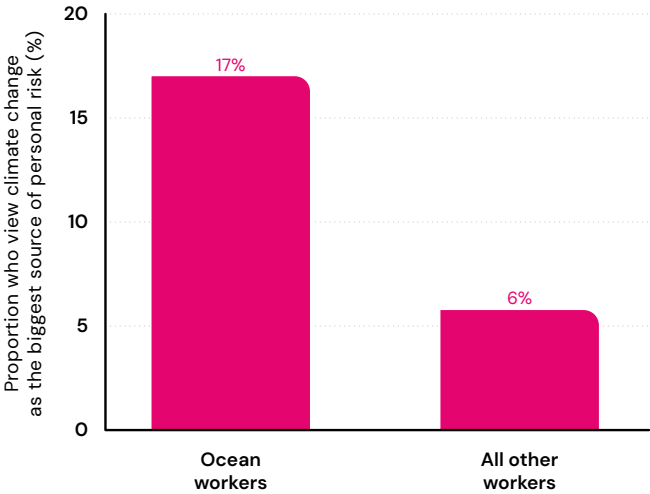
The Power Dissipation Index (PDI) shows fluctuating cyclone intensity through much of the 20th century, followed by a clear increase since 1995, mirroring ACE trends and corresponding with rising tropical North Atlantic sea surface temperatures (see adjacent).

These trends align with global findings from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change⁹, which reports increased cyclone intensity over the past 40 years. However, evolving observation methods complicate long-term assessments of storm frequency and intensity.

When we focus specifically on ocean workers, the perception of climate change as a personal risk rises significantly. In this group, 17% view climate change as the greatest risk to their personal safety, 11 percentage points higher than the rest of the global workforce.

Ocean workers more likely to view climate change as a risk to their personal safety

17% of ocean workers identify climate change as the greatest personal safety risk they face—almost triple the response of other workers (6%). This indicates ocean workers are significantly more likely to view climate change as a direct and immediate threat.

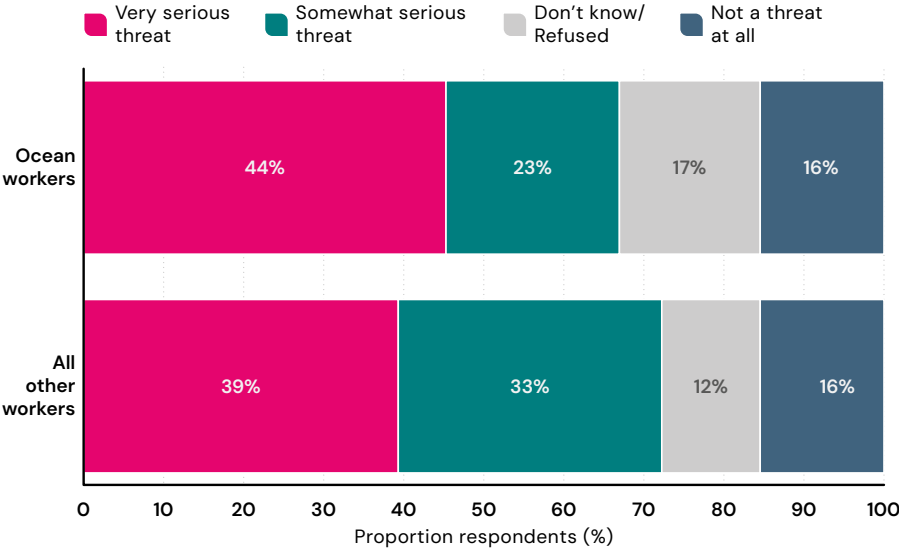


World Risk Poll 2024 Focus On: The risks and experiences of ocean workers. Lloyd's Register Foundation, 2025.
doi.org/10.60743/xjn7-9x64
Poll question: What is the greatest source of risk to YOUR SAFETY in daily life.

Interestingly, this heightened personal concern among ocean workers does not fully translate to a broader national perspective. When asked about the risk climate change poses to people in their country, 66% of ocean workers saw it as a 'somewhat' or 'very' serious threat, compared to 74% for other workers. This may suggest that their concern is shaped more by direct personal experience rather than a wider perception of national-level risk, highlighting how immediate exposure to climate impacts influences individual worries. Additionally many ocean workers, especially ship-borne workers, may worry less about the effects of climate change on their country as they spend relatively little time resident there.

Ocean workers more likely to view climate change as a very serious threat, but have a lower level of overall concern

While 72% of people globally believe climate change will pose a threat to people in their country over the next 20 years, only 66% of ocean workers agree—suggesting their concern is more rooted in personal experience than national outlook.

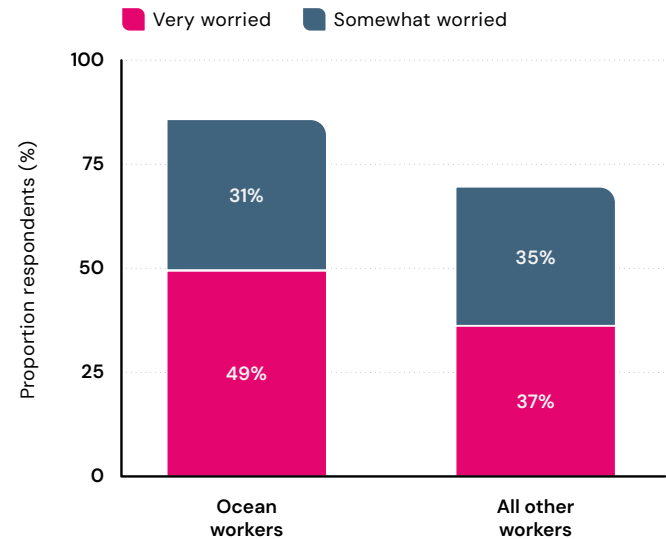


World Risk Poll 2024 Focus On: The risks and experiences of ocean workers. Lloyd's Register Foundation, 2025.
doi.org/10.60743/xjn7-9x64
Poll question: Do you think climate change is a threat to the people in your country in the next 20 years?

This heightened concern among ocean workers extends to severe weather events, where their experiences and worries are notably greater than those of the general workforce. A striking 80% of ocean workers express concern about experiencing serious harm from severe weather events, compared to 72% amongst the rest of the workforce. This gap is even more pronounced when looking at the intensity of concern – 49% of ocean workers report being very worried, compared to just 37% of other workers.

Ocean workers more worried about experiencing harm from severe weather events

80% of ocean workers are worried about being seriously harmed by severe weather—higher than the 72% among other workers. Nearly half (49%) of ocean workers say they are very worried, compared to just 37% globally.



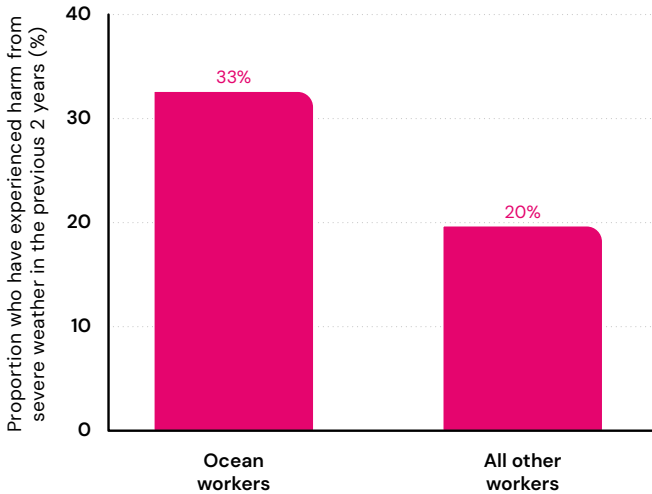
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Poll question: How worried are you that severe weather events could cause you serious harm?

These fears are not unfounded, as their actual experiences reflect the heightened risk they face. One third (33%) of ocean workers report having already experienced serious harm from severe weather events, significantly higher than the 20% reported by other workers.

Ocean workers more likely to have experienced harm from severe weather events

33% of ocean workers report having personally experienced serious harm from severe weather in the last two years—compared to only 20% of other workers. This reflects their heightened direct exposure to climate-related risks.



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Poll question: Have you personally experienced harm from severe weather events in the previous 2 years?

This alignment between concern and lived experience underscores the unique vulnerability of those who work on or near water. Unlike many in the general workforce, ocean workers face direct exposure to the increasing intensity of severe weather events, from powerful storms to unpredictable ocean conditions. Their heightened concern is not just theoretical – it reflects real, lived experiences of harm and disruption. As climate change continues to drive more extreme weather, the risks they face will only grow, reinforcing the urgent need for targeted adaptation strategies, stronger protections, and policies that acknowledge the disproportionate impact on those whose livelihoods depend on the ocean.

To start addressing some of these issues the Foundation is supporting several research projects to better understand how climate change is directly impacting ocean workers. For example, as part of our research fellowship programme with the University of the Arctic, the Foundation is funding research on the impact of climate change on sea ice⁹, and how to manage the risks these changes create for maritime navigation in the region¹⁰.

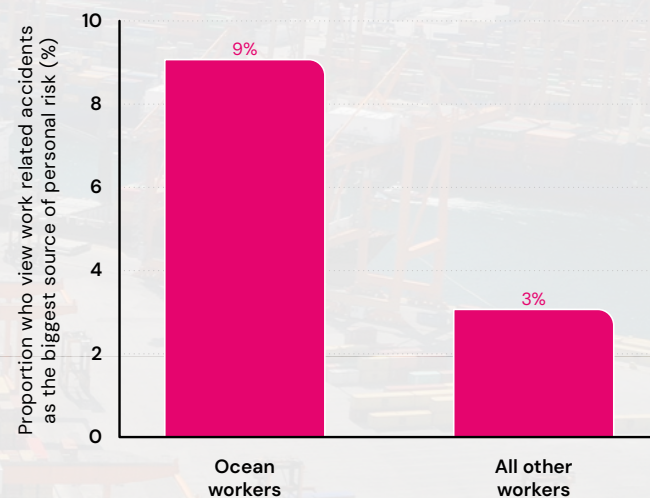
The cost of work at sea: exposure to harm without adequate support

Beyond the broader risks posed by climate change and extreme weather, ocean workers also face a unique set of safety and wellbeing challenges in their day-to-day working lives. The Foundation's 'Insight Report on Safety in the Fishing Industry'¹¹ highlights many of these pressures for a sub-sector of ocean workers. Those who spend extended periods offshore often contend with long hours in physically demanding roles, typically within confined and isolated environments¹². The lines between work and recreation are frequently blurred, with limited opportunity for rest or personal space. This lack of separation, compounded by restricted contact with family and friends back home, can have a significant impact on both physical safety and mental resilience¹³. Working on or near the water, under such conditions, adds a further layer of complexity to managing risk and ensuring safe practice¹⁴.

Understanding how these workers experience harm at work is crucial in addressing their specific needs and ensuring better protections. This concern is deeply felt, with 9% of ocean workers identifying workplace harm as the greatest risk to their daily safety – three times higher than the 3% reported by the rest of the global workforce.

Ocean workers more likely to view work related accidents as their greatest source of daily risk

9% of ocean workers say workplace harm is the greatest risk to their safety—three times higher than the 3% for other workers. This suggests ocean work is strongly associated with perceived physical danger.



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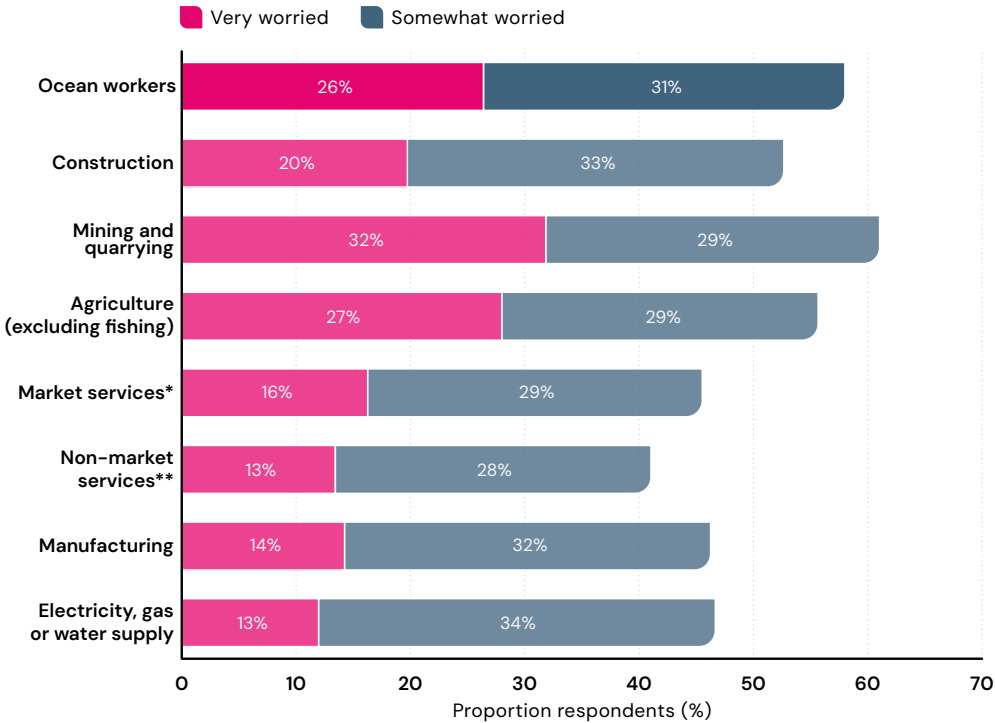
Poll question: What is the greatest source of risk to YOUR SAFETY in daily life.

Ocean workers report a heightened level of concern about experiencing harm from the work they do, reflecting the demanding and often hazardous nature of their jobs. Over half (56%) express worry about workplace harm, compared to 51% other workers. This gap is even more pronounced when looking at those who are very worried – 26% of ocean workers report high levels of concern, compared to just 19% of other workers.

As a sector, maritime workers are the second most concerned about experiencing harm at work, behind only those who work in the mining and quarrying industry.

Ocean workers have very high levels of concern about experiencing workplace harm

56% of ocean workers are worried about being harmed by their work—higher than the 51% reported by other workers. Ocean workers are also more likely to be very worried compared to other workers (26% vs 19%).



World Risk Poll 2024 Focus On: The risks and experiences of ocean workers. Lloyd's Register Foundation, 2025. doi.org/10.60743/xjn7-9x64

Poll question: How worried are you that the work you do could cause you serious harm?

*Market services: e.g., trade, transportation, hotel/accommodation, restaurant work, food sales, retail, business and admin

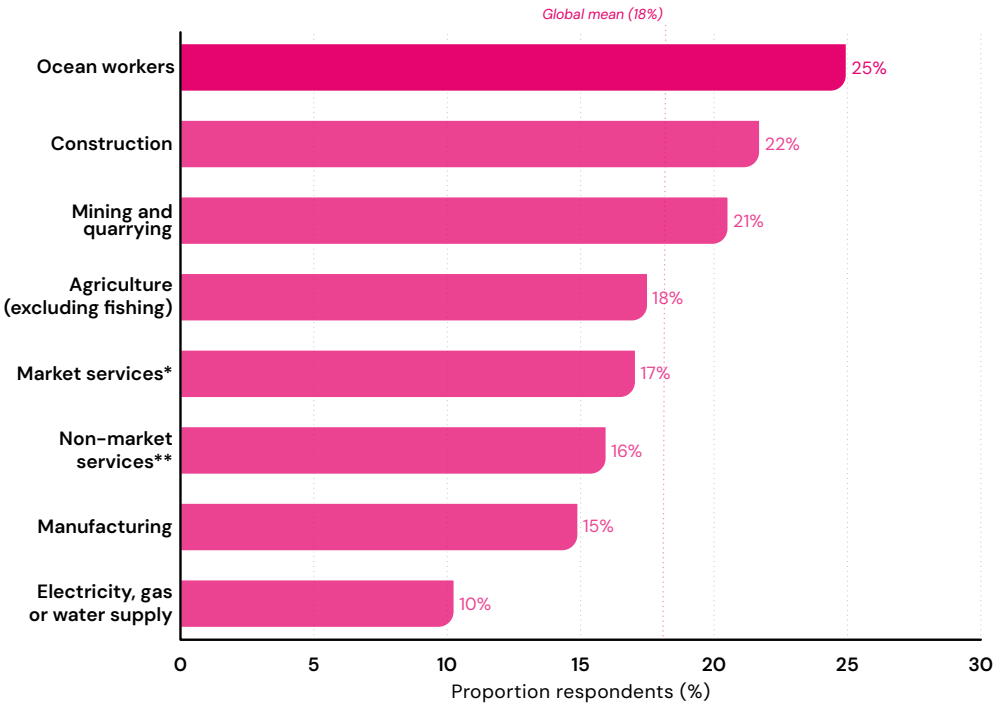
**Non-market services: e.g., education, health, social services, public administration, government, military, security service

This heightened concern among ocean workers is reinforced by their actual experiences of harm in the workplace. A quarter (25%) of ocean workers report having experienced harm from their work, compared to 18% of other workers – the highest level recorded among any sector polled.

Given this high level of concern and experience of harm, organisations like the International Maritime Organization (IMO) have a vital role to play in protecting ocean workers. The IMO's ongoing work – such as the recent outcomes from the Human Element, Training and Watchkeeping sub-committee – aims to ensure training and safety standards keep pace with emerging risks and technologies, including digital navigation and alternative fuels.

Ocean workers have the highest personal experience of workplace harm compared with other sectors

One in four ocean workers (25%) report experiencing harm from their work in the past two years—compared to 18% of other workers, making it the highest of any employment sector surveyed.



World Risk Poll 2024 Focus On: The risks and experiences of ocean workers. Lloyd's Register Foundation, 2025. doi.org/10.60743/xjn7-9x64

Poll question: Have you personally experienced harm from the work you do in the previous 2 years?

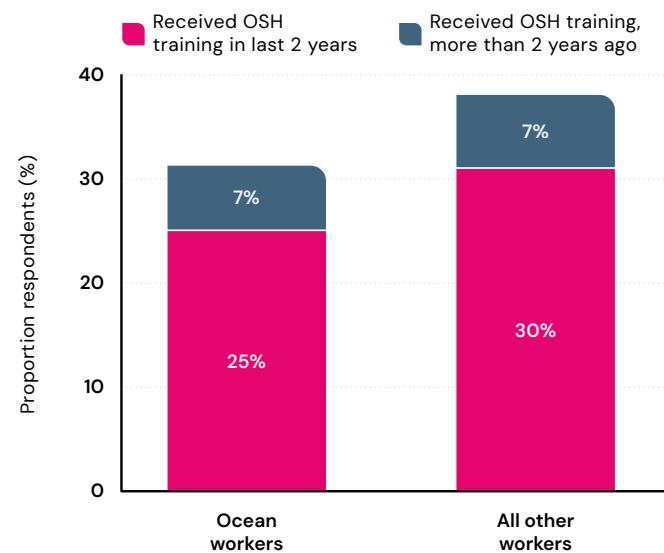
*Market services: e.g., trade, transportation, hotel/accommodation, restaurant work, food sales, retail, business and admin

**Non-market services: e.g., education, health, social services, public administration, government, military, security service

Given this risk environment, occupational safety and health (OSH) training is a key tool to protect workers. Efforts to improve workplace safety are moving in the right direction, but there is still much more to do – especially for those facing the greatest risks, such as ocean workers, who are actually less likely to have received such training. Only 32% report having ever received OSH training in their role, compared to 38% of other workers. Just a quarter (25%) of ocean workers have received OSH training in the past two years. This gap raises concerns about whether ocean workers are being adequately equipped with the knowledge and resources needed to navigate the hazards of their work, highlighting the need for greater investment in safety training and workplace protections.

Ocean workers less likely to have received OSH training in their role

32% of ocean workers received OSH training in their current role, compared to 38% of other workers. Just 25% have received OSH training in the last two years, suggesting a training gap in a high-risk sector.

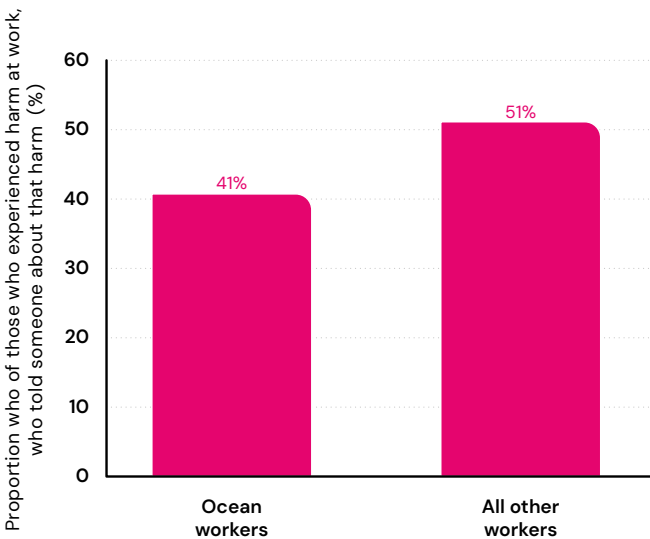


World Risk Poll 2024 Focus On: The risks and experiences of ocean workers. Lloyd's Register Foundation, 2025. doi.org/10.60743/xjn7-9x64
Poll question: Have you received OSH training in your current role

When it comes to reporting workplace harm, ocean workers are also less likely to speak up about their experiences. Only 41% of ocean workers who have experienced harm at work reported the incident to someone, compared to 51% of other workers.

Ocean workers are less likely to tell someone about their experience of workplace harm

Only 41% of ocean workers who experienced harm reported the incident, compared to 51% of other workers. This suggests underreporting is more prevalent in maritime contexts—perhaps due to fear of retaliation, isolation, or lack of reporting infrastructure.



World Risk Poll 2024 Focus On: The risks and experiences of ocean workers. Lloyd's Register Foundation, 2025. doi.org/10.60743/xjn7-9x64
Poll question: For those who have experienced harm at work, did you tell someone about that harm?

This discrepancy suggests potential barriers to reporting, such as fear of repercussions¹⁵, lack of trust in reporting mechanisms¹⁶, or uncertainty about how to seek support¹⁷, which apply to all sectors may be more entrenched amongst ocean workers. These challenges may be even more pronounced for seafarers and offshore workers who are away from home for extended periods. In such situations, individuals may feel particularly beholden to their employers, with concerns that speaking up could jeopardise their position, future contracts, or standing within close-knit crews¹⁸. The physical and emotional distance from home can further discourage individuals from raising concerns, especially when access to external support is limited¹⁹.

Addressing these barriers and encouraging a culture of reporting is vital to improving safety and ensuring ocean workers receive the care and protection they need. One initiative supporting this aim is the Confidential Human Factors Incident Reporting Programme (CHIRP), which the Foundation has backed since 2013²⁰. CHIRP offers a trusted, independent channel for ocean workers to report safety concerns confidentially and without fear of reprisal. By focusing on human factors – such as fatigue, communication issues, or procedural gaps – CHIRP helps identify the root causes of harm. Lessons from these reports are anonymised and shared across the sector, supporting a culture of learning and continuous improvement in maritime safety.

Ocean workers face unique and significant challenges when it comes to workplace safety. Beyond the broader risks posed by climate change and severe weather, these workers contend with a variety of hazards inherent to their jobs, from extreme weather conditions to physically demanding tasks in dangerous environments. Their concerns about harm are greater than those of the general workforce, and these worries are not abstract but grounded in real, lived experiences. This underscores the urgent need for more robust, evidence-led safety measures and protections tailored to the specific risks they face. The Foundation's Global Safety Evidence Centre is actively exploring these issues, generating insights to inform policy and practice. Improving safety for ocean workers is a long-term strategic priority for the Foundation, reflecting its commitment to addressing the needs of high-risk, often overlooked sectors.

Despite these significant risks, ocean workers are not always receiving the training and support necessary to mitigate them. Many report having received insufficient occupational safety and health training, leaving them vulnerable in high-risk situations. Additionally, when harm does occur, ocean workers are less likely to report it, suggesting that barriers such as fear of retaliation or lack of trust in reporting mechanisms may prevent them from seeking the support they need. Addressing these gaps is critical to ensuring that ocean workers are adequately prepared, supported, and protected in their roles. As climate change continues to amplify the risks they face, prioritizing the health and safety of ocean workers must be a fundamental focus.



Conclusion

Our findings make one thing clear: ocean workers are already experiencing the effects of climate change. Compared to the rest of the global workforce, they express greater concern about the risks of climate-related harm, particularly from severe weather events. These concerns are not hypothetical – they stem from real and recurring experiences of extreme conditions at sea. Yet, what makes this even more striking is that ocean workers, who are typically reluctant to report harm they experience in their working lives, are speaking up about climate change. Their willingness to voice these concerns underscores the urgency and severity of the risks they face.

This heightened exposure puts their safety, livelihoods, and communities at risk. Unlike many industries where climate threats are still perceived as future risks, ocean workers operate in environments where rising temperatures, stronger storms, and unpredictable weather patterns are daily realities. These conditions not only endanger lives but also disrupt critical industries like fisheries, shipping, and offshore energy which power the global economy.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) recognises climate change as a growing and serious threat to workers' health and safety. In its report *'Ensuring safety and health at work in a changing climate'*²¹, the ILO outlines how rising temperatures, extreme weather and environmental disruption are creating new risks across all sectors. Our report builds on this by focusing on ocean workers, who are particularly exposed to these hazards yet often left out of broader occupational safety and health (OSH) discussions.

Intensifying storms, unpredictable sea conditions and changes in marine ecosystems are making ocean work increasingly dangerous. Despite this, many ocean workers still lack access to appropriate and timely OSH training that reflects these emerging challenges. The problem is made worse by a widespread reluctance to report injuries or unsafe conditions, often due to fear of repercussions or mistrust in reporting systems. Without better training and stronger mechanisms for reporting and prevention, safety risks will continue to go unaddressed until serious harm occurs.

Ocean workers are already navigating the frontlines of climate change, facing increasing risks with limited support. Their firsthand experiences serve as a warning: climate change is not a distant threat – it is happening now. If we fail to listen and respond, the consequences will extend far beyond the ocean, affecting coastal communities, food security, and the entire global economy.

Calls to action

- Recognise ocean workers as a frontline group in the climate crisis, and ensure that national and international climate adaptation policies include specific provisions for their safety and wellbeing.
- Increase public and industry awareness of the risks ocean workers face due to climate change, encouraging broader support for protective policies.
- Invest in evidence-based policy and practice through initiatives like the Global Safety Evidence Centre to improve resilience and safety in maritime industries.
- Prioritise targeted OSH training for ocean workers, especially in high-risk roles and sectors most affected by climate change. Ensure that training is viewed as a continuous process, rather than a one-off event.
- Develop and enforce stronger safety standards tailored to the unique challenges of working on or near the water, including protections against severe weather and isolation-related stress.
- Expand access to confidential, independent reporting mechanisms like CHIRP, ensuring that all ocean workers can report safety concerns without fear of negative consequences.
- Strengthen mental health support and wellbeing services for offshore and remote maritime workers dealing with isolation, fatigue, and emotional strain.
- Promote cross-sector collaboration between governments, industry leaders, unions, and NGOs to address climate-driven risks and build long-term resilience in ocean-dependent industries.

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Additional information

About the Lloyd's Register Foundation Global Safety Evidence Centre

The Lloyd's Register Foundation Global Safety Evidence Centre is a hub for anyone who needs to know 'what works' to make people safer. The Centre collates, creates and communicates the best available safety evidence from the Foundation, our partners and other sources on both the nature and scale of global safety challenges, and what works to address them. It works with partners to identify and fill gaps in the evidence, and to use the evidence for action.

To find out more about the Global Safety Evidence Centre, visit gsec.lrfoundation.org.uk

About Lloyd's Register Foundation

Lloyd's Register Foundation is an independent global safety charity that supports research, innovation, and education to make the world a safer place. Its mission is to use the best evidence and insight, such as the World Risk Poll, to help the global community focus on tackling the world's most pressing safety and risk challenges.

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About Gallup

Gallup delivers analytics and advice to help leaders and organisations solve their most pressing problems. Combining more than 80 years of experience with its global reach, Gallup knows more about the attitudes and behaviours of employees, customers, students and citizens than any other organisation in the world.

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