News 28 Apr, 2020

EU Charting Crew Changes

The European Commission has issued guidelines aimed at helping to repatriate seafarers caught on ships amid the COVID-19 crisis.

European Commission

The guidelines are calling on the EU member states to create a network of ports where crew changes can take place.

The prolonged stay of seafarers on board ships has created several issues since the start of the COVID-19 outbreak, not only for repatriation of seafarers but also the expiry of items such as STCW and medical certificates.

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Commissioner for Transport Adina Vălean of the EU Commission stated: *"The guidelines adopted today (April 8th) include sanitary advice, recommendations for crew changes, disembarking, and repatriation for seafarers and passengers. I am asking the Member States to designate ports where fast-track crew changes take place and recall that cruise operators have a responsibility to their customers and employees to bring everyone safely home*".

For non-EU nationals who need visas to disembark within the EU and who could not apply for them due to the current situation, member states have been advised to grant these at the border so that they may be quickly repatriated.

Furthermore, the commission said that cruise operators should take overall responsibility for arranging the repatriation of passengers and crews from their cruise ships, including from non-EU ports.

The commission also added: "*The commission calls on flag states to help the operators identify the appropriate ports for disembarkation and support them in arranging disembarkation and repatriation of their customers and crew. If individuals on board are known to be infected with the coronavirus, the vessels should be directed to a port in close proximity where hospitals have sufficient capacity".*

Ships have already been mandated to provide a declaration of health of all crew members on board before entering a port and many port authorities have also introduced quarantines for ships coming from high risk areas.

However, in light of reports that seafarers lacked necessary protective equipment in order to be able to safely perform their duties, the Commission has urged stakeholders to provide their crews with personal protective equipment and for seafarers to have access to adequate medical care if in need.

In line with the guidelines, in cases where all members of a crew are healthy and if their previous port call took place more than 14 days ago, they should not be quarantined when repatriated.

This announcement on 8th April follows a similar one issued by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) and International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF). Seafarers Union Nautilus also backed support for the IMOs recommendations expressed in their recent letter to Member States.

See also:

Covid-19: Guidance on extending STCW Certificates

Covid-19: Guidance on extending West's enhanced PEME Certificates

Further information can be obtained from the Loss Prevention Department and the Club's COVID-19 webpage.

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