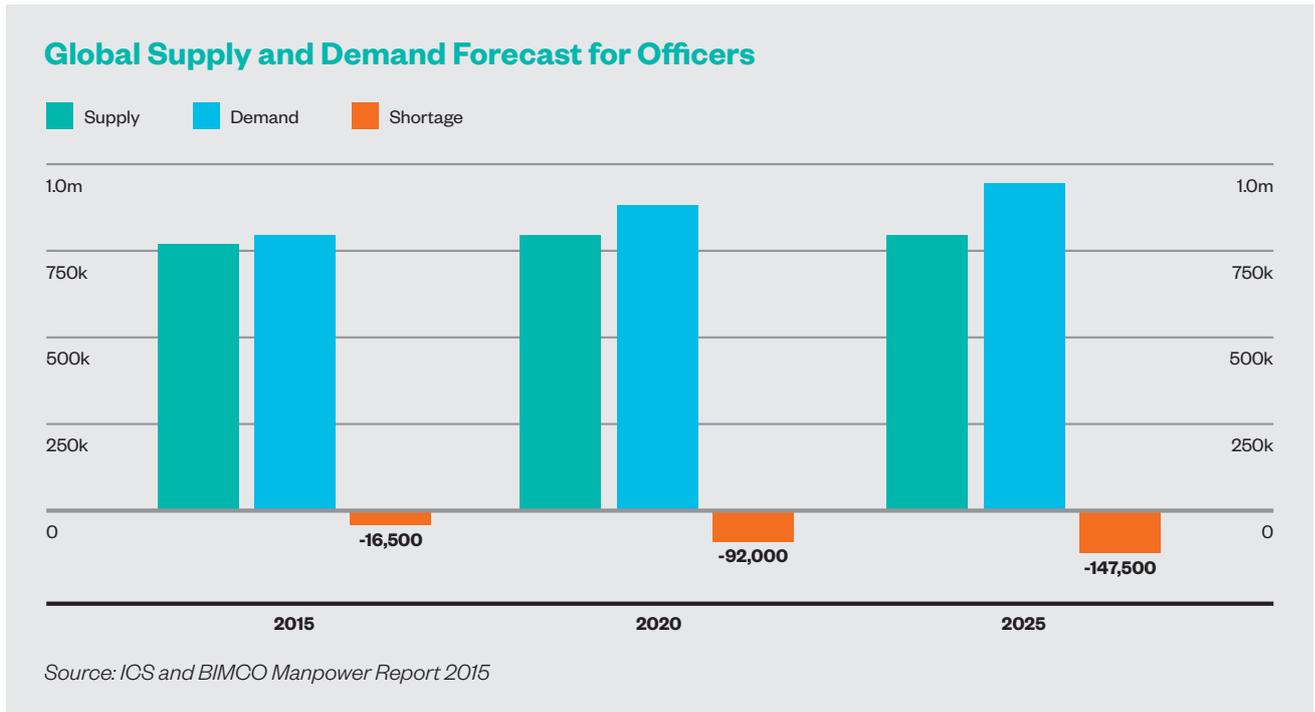




Key Issues

Seafarers and Digital Disruption



In October 2018, ICS released a new study conducted on its behalf by the Hamburg School of Business Administration regarding the potential effects of autonomous ships on the role of seafarers and the global shipping industry. The study included an in-depth assessment of risk and opportunities provided by digitalisation in global logistics chains, as well as automation in ship operations.

In light of growing media interest and the diversity of expert opinion on the subject, the study sought to separate fact from fiction. A two-year IMO regulatory scoping exercise for Maritime Autonomous Surface Ships (MASS) is now well underway within the Maritime Safety Committee to determine how existing IMO instruments can be leveraged to ensure that autonomous ships are safe, secure, and environmentally sound. This is a complex task, expected to impact several areas under IMO's purview. While it is recognised that clear opportunities might arise for the shipping industry which might not exist today, much more work must be done, particularly on the regulatory side, to address concerns about the impact of MASS on seafarers employed worldwide. With over 1.6 million seafarers currently estimated to serve on merchant ships trading internationally, the impact of MASS on seafarers requires thorough consideration going forward.

Encouragingly, the study indicates that there will be no shortage of jobs for seafarers, especially officers, in the next two decades. While the size of crews may evolve in response to technological changes on board, there may also be considerable additional jobs ashore which require seafaring experience.

The findings of the study suggest that the role of personnel on board and ashore will need to be redefined both operationally and legally. Reviewing and understanding how these roles may evolve is also identified in the study as an important aspect to assess and address the impact of autonomous ships on the role of seafarers.

