

Leadership Insights

Insights from the global leadership community

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Elpi Petraki, President of WISTA
International, talks shipping's progress
on diversity and the path forward





Progress for all

President of WISTA International and Chartering & Business Development Manager at ENEA Management, [Elpi Petraki](#) talks about the maritime industry's advances in diversity and the need for continued improvement.

Q As WISTA president for nearly two years, what progress have you made on your core goals, and what have been some of your biggest challenges and achievements so far?

A Diversity is now high on the agenda in the maritime industry and so our goal has been to make sure our voice is heard at every discussion in our industry. It's important to make sure that women are not left out of the conversation as the transformation towards digitalisation and decarbonisation continues.

One achievement is our Maritime Speakers Bureau. We have seen the way it has affected conferences as organisers have become more aware of it. Women are not just on panels about diversity anymore, women are on professional

panels talking on behalf of our businesses; we are helping women in shipping use their voice and evolve in their career.

Another important area of progress is the conversation on safe environments for seafarers and ending bullying and harassment. We are helping the industry to understand that whatever we do to create a safer environment for women aboard the vessel is good for everybody. We have a problem as an industry of attracting new talent, particularly at sea, so it is important to create an environment that is really safe so we can advertise that.

We face the challenge of diversity being so high on the agenda that people start to draw attention away from it, as if since there has been a lot of work and progress, we don't need to discuss

it anymore. This is not the case. We still see that women are underpaid, we still see that women are not moving so fast to the top positions, so something is still not working.

Q WISTA is celebrating 50 years in 2024. What do you hope the next 50 years will bring for the sector as a whole and specifically for women maritime workers?

A Empowering women more; I want to see an industry that makes women feel sure of themselves and the knowledge they have, a place where women are not afraid to ask for their rightful place and do not have to constantly prove themselves.

WISTA is present in 59 countries and conditions are not the same everywhere. In some locations the basics are in place, and we can focus on specific issues and targeted campaigns to build on our successes, in others we still have to work at a basic level. For me, WISTA will be a success once we have achieved our mission and goals globally.

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Q What barriers do women face on the pathway to leadership roles and what more should companies and organisations be doing to ensure talented women remain in the industry and can rise through the ranks?

A For an organisation, and as leaders, it takes effort to empower people and help them past their difficulties and insecurities. Sometimes this help can be giving women the freedom to travel, as we see companies that do not allow women the same travel opportunities as they allow men. Being in those international networking environments can be important places to observe, learn and demonstrate leadership qualities.

For myself, at WISTA, I try to involve as many people as I can. It would be easy for me or those immediately around me to always jump into important meetings and conversations, but I want to engage more and more people. It can take training, but just taking someone along with you to observe the environment is enough to start the journey.

At ENEA Management I try to give people freedom, ensure they are not afraid to speak up, and give them a chance. It's a tough environment with long work hours, but we help employees to learn over time. I'm

also trying to hire women for roles that are not historically taken by women, like technical positions. I want to see women break the barriers in technical management teams and as seafarers.

Q For decades the number of women working at sea has remained consistently low, at around the 2% mark, though higher onshore. What progress has been made to make shipping a more welcoming place?

A I've been in this industry for 26 years and I don't see many seafarers who are women, but much more than when I started, whether on deck or in the engine room. I see them being more welcomed by their peers, and I see people now considering pregnancy and working onboard vessels. We made big steps at Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) in 2021 with the first mention of working equipment for women. It took us some time, but now it's open to more improvement.

Initiatives in Northern Europe are also being joined by efforts in India to promote diversity in shipping at their academies, which I think is very important.

Two years ago, when I asked some female seafarers what would ease their life onboard, they said it would be better with more women. In ones and twos it is not easy, but the more we are, the more balanced the environment becomes.

Q What are the challenges you hear about from female seafarers that are leading them to leave roles at sea to go ashore?

A I think this is a misconception. Men are also leaving the seafaring community, especially in the younger generations, but because women make up such a small percentage, it gets noticed more when they leave. It's a common thing for men and women to leave the seafaring environment and we need to adapt to retain people.

To be attractive to younger people, connectivity is very important, they need to know what is happening outside the vessel. But then we need to help them to make a connection with the small environment and family of the vessel too. Of course food is a priority, entertainment is good, and maybe we as an industry need to fundamentally rethink our working models and adapt to shorter embarkation periods.

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Bunker stations will need to be diversified to ensure shipping can remain resilient when using future fuels. Credit: shutterstock

Alternative fuels revolution an opportunity to boost trade resilience

Maritime trade has had its adaptability tested in recent years and the challenge will continue as shipping attempts to slash its carbon emissions while maintaining global trade.

Shipping has kept trade flowing through the overlapping disruptions of COVID pandemic, drought in the Panama Canal, attacks on ships in the Red Sea, and a tightening sanctions regime against Russia. However, it also faces the overarching challenge of decarbonisation, which will run parallel to ongoing upheaval and be present for whatever the future holds.

Reducing the greenhouse gas emissions of shipping will require the use of alternative fuels which creates further challenges for the resilience of the maritime sector. The fuels are generally of lower energy density than traditional fuel oils; marine gas oil (MGO) has an energy density of around 37 GJ/m³ compared to methanol's 16 GJ/m³ and liquid ammonia's 13 GJ/m³. The use of lower density fuels could pose issues if ships are having to divert and take

longer routes, whether due to geopolitical conflict or other black swan events.

Even with current standard fuels, owners are presently facing refuelling concerns. Due to the ongoing security threats in the Red Sea, some shipowners are rerouting their vessels via the Cape of Good Hope. However, the longer transit means vessels need to carry more fuel, refuel at African ports, or call at busy bunkering ports such as Rotterdam or Singapore.

Fuel infrastructure needs

As well as the vessel design choices necessary to balance cargo space needs and fuel tank sizes against vessel range and bunkering frequency, the availability and therefore reliability of alternative fuel supplies relies on future infrastructure development.

Jan-Olaf Probst, Business Director – Container Ships at DNV told ICS *Leadership Insights* within the container sector, ships are being designed with larger fuel tanks to maintain their operational range, rather than opting for more frequent refuelling.

Large container ships are designed so that they can refuel once during one loop of their route, while smaller boxships and feeders may target a range of two full loops before refuelling.

Probst said that the 7,000 mile deviation around the Cape of Good Hope to avoid the Red Sea on the Asia – Europe trades affected vessels burning heavy fuel oil and LNG alike, and would have operational impacts for methanol vessels. “No one has designed their vessel to operate over this number of nautical miles,” he said.

For the container trades, the development of bunkering infrastructure for alternative fuels like methanol and LNG looks promising as their regular trading patterns create

better investment cases for shoreside development. Sectors like dry bulk, with less regular routes and more remote port destinations, may face more challenges, said Probst.

Diversification for resilience

Jan Hoffmann, Head, Trade Logistics at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) told ICS *Leadership Insights* that the operational impacts of fuels with lower energy density could prove detrimental for distant destinations like Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the Pacific.

“More vulnerable economies will definitely need support to avoid being disconnected from future shipping networks. They will need to invest in smart and sustainable ports, including as providers of alternative fuels,” said Hoffman.

Supporting such nations through technical and financial assistance will also lead to a more resilient shipping network in the long

term, he continued. The increased need for regional bunkering centres creates development opportunities, and countries previously locked out of the bunkering value chain due to a lack of fossil fuel reserves could produce green fuels using renewable energy.

“Diversification will be key. Ports and ship-owners will both need to reduce dependence on single fuels or single providers of fuels. A dense network of bunker stations will be important for the sector’s resilience,” said Hoffman.

Current regulatory developments at the International Maritime Organization (IMO) will heavily influence the demand signals sent to both the shipping industry and the producers and distributors of future fuels. Member states are working on the detailed regulations to bring the emissions reduction targets and checkpoints of the 2023 IMO GHG Strategy into reality, with a deadline for adoption in spring 2025. [Read this article online.](#)

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Jan Hoffman, Head of Trade Logistics at UNCTAD

Lower energy density fuels could prove detrimental to remote destinations such as Suva, Fiji.
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ICS in Action

A round-up of ICS news and activities over the last month

Joint industry open letter to United Nations Secretary General António Guterres

A joint industry open letter has been sent to the United Nations Secretary General – His Excellency António Guterres – following the seizure of the MSC Aries on Saturday 13 April.

16 maritime industry associations and social partners (ASA, BIMCO, CLIA, ECSA, INTER-CARGO, INTERMANAGER, INTERTANKO, IAPH, ICS, IFSMA, IMCA, IMEC, IPTA, ITF, FONASBA and WSC) co-signed the open letter urgently calling for all member states to be formally reminded of their responsibilities under international law, and ask for every effort possible be brought to bear to release the seafarers and protect the safe transit of ships. Read the open letter [here](#).

ICS Chairman meets with G7 Transport Ministers

The Chairman of the International Chamber of Shipping, Emanuele Grimaldi, [attended the working session](#) of the G7 Transport Ministers in the morning of Saturday 13 April 2024, in Milan.

Mr Grimaldi briefed the G7 Transport Ministers, who were meeting to discuss the importance of maritime connectivity, on the sector's security concerns and highlighted the significance of free trade for the global economy and the industry's green transition.

Following the meeting Mr Grimaldi said: "It is an honour to have participated in this meeting and to work with the G7 Transport

Ministers on the key challenges our sector faces. Our industry is global, and we must work collaboratively and transparently to ensure that it remains resilient and robust. It is fair to say we are living in challenging times, with many Black Swan events and times of conflict testing us but together we can meet these [challenges head on](#)."

ICS Publications releases fifth edition of 'Shipping and the Environment: A Guide to Environmental Compliance'

ICS Publications has launched the fifth edition of 'Shipping and the Environment: A Guide to Environmental Compliance'. This latest edition offers comprehensive updates and expanded insights into the intricate relationship between shipping operations and environmental protection.

The fifth edition is a definitive guide, providing a holistic introduction to companies and crew members navigating this complex subject matter. Recognising the need for accessibility, this edition is designed to be a user-friendly resource for individuals with varying levels of familiarity with MARPOL regulations and the environmental impact of day-to-day shipping.

The fifth edition promises to be an invaluable resource for companies, crew members, training institutions, administrations, and policy-makers alike. By consolidating key environmental requirements and factors into one authoritative publication, ICS aims to foster greater awareness, understanding, and action towards sustainable shipping practices. Find out more [here](#).

ICS is the principal international trade association for merchant shipowners and operators, representing all sectors and trades and over 80% of the world merchant fleet.

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Upcoming events

On the 13 June, ICS will be convening CEOs and maritime leaders from across the supply chain to the annual [Shaping the Future of Shipping Summit](#) in Montreal. Prior to this in May, ICS representatives will be attending various events including [Innovation Zero 2024](#), [Scandinavian Maritime Fair](#), UNCTAD's [Global Supply Chain Forum](#) and [Reuters Events Industrial Decarbonisation Europe 2024](#).