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ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Uncertainty regarding application of new seafarer violence and harassment training to existing seafarers

Submitted by ICS

SUMMARY

Executive summary: In May 2024, MSC 108 adopted amendments to the STCW Code, to include training provisions for violence and harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying and sexual assault, as part of the minimum standards of competence in personal safety and social responsibilities (PSSR). This training is intended to be part of basic training for new seafarers, i.e. those entering the seafaring workforce on or after 1 January 2026. However, there seems to be uncertainty regarding whether the new training and certification requirements for new entrants should also be applied to existing seafarers and, therefore, enforceable through port State inspections. As outlined in this document, this uncertainty is having a considerable impact on shipping companies, maritime education and training institutes and seafarers themselves. Through this document, ICS proposes a potential way forward to address the growing concerns.

Strategic direction, if applicable: Not applicable

Output: Not applicable

Action to be taken: Paragraph 17

Related documents: Resolution MSC.560(108) and HTW 12/6/33

Background

1 Resolution MSC.560(108) adopted amendments to part A of the STCW Code. The amendments to section A-VI/1 and table A-VI/1-4 aim to address training in relation to violence and harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying and sexual assault, which is aimed at new entrant seafarers, issued with basic training certification, on or after 1 January 2026.

Mandatory minimum requirements for safety familiarization, basic training and instruction for all seafarers

2 Regulation VI/1 (Mandatory minimum requirements for safety familiarization, basic training and instruction for all seafarers) references section A-VI/1 (Mandatory minimum requirements for safety familiarization, basic training and instruction for all seafarers), which sets the competency standards for basic training for all seafarers.

3 Paragraph 2 of section A-VI/1 specifies that seafarers employed or engaged in any capacity on board ship on the business of that ship as part of the ship's complement with designated safety or pollution-prevention duties shall, before being assigned to any shipboard duties, receive appropriate approved basic training or instruction in:

- .1 personal survival techniques, as set out in table A-VI/1-1;
- .2 fire prevention and fire fighting, as set out in table A-VI/1-2;
- .3 elementary first aid, as set out in table A-VI/1-3; and
- .4 personal safety and social responsibilities, as set out in table A-VI/1-4.

4 The training specified in section A-VI/1, collectively referred to as "basic training", is completed by persons before taking up any shipboard duties, i.e. new entrants into the shipboard workforce.

5 Paragraph 3 of section A-VI/1 further specifies that seafarers qualified in accordance with basic training shall be required, every five years, to provide evidence of having maintained the required standard of competence to undertake the tasks, duties and responsibilities listed in column 1 of tables A-VI/1-1 and A-VI/1-2 (i.e. training to be refreshed every 5 years). However, under the STCW Convention and Code, training in personal safety and social responsibilities, as set out in table A-VI/1-4, is not required to be refreshed at all.

The applicability of resolution MSC.560(108)

6 For the purposes of this document, ICS notes the following:

- .1 **"New"** seafarers are those who will undertake basic training (i.e. training as per section A-VI/1, on or after 1 January 2026); and
- .2 **"Existing"** seafarers are persons who are not new seafarers.

7 Resolution MSC.560(108) details amendments to section A-VI/1, specifically to table A-VI/1-4 (Specification of minimum standard of competence in personal safety and social responsibilities). These are intended to be part of basic training for new seafarers only, i.e. those entering the seafaring workforce on or after 1 January 2026.

8 The taxonomy of the knowledge, understanding and proficiency (KUPs) in the amendments (i.e. "Basic knowledge", "Understand", "Respond" and "Ability"), or their iterations thereof, are only suitable for new entrants who are of a demographic consistent with young adults having minimal experience in workplace dynamics. The revised training specified in resolution MSC.560(108) is therefore unsuitable for existing seafarers.

Proposal for IMO to develop and adopt equivalent but tailored violence and harassment training for existing seafarers

9 Given their higher levels of experience, existing seafarers would benefit from a tailored training framework. Moreover, the taxonomy of the KUPs for possible tailored training applicable to existing seafarers should also be commensurate with their higher levels of experience, i.e. management, operational or support levels.

10 In this context, ICS notes that document HTW 12/6/33 (ICS), proposes draft amendments to chapters II and III of the STCW Code, aimed at incorporating awareness and prevention training for violence and harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying and sexual assault. More specifically, these proposed amendments relate to the function of "Controlling the operation of the ship and care for persons on board at the operational/management level".

11 With the Sub-Committee set to consider proposals related to development of violence and harassment training for existing seafarers, such as the above-mentioned ICS submission, during its upcoming 12th session (HTW 12), ICS is fully committed to working alongside IMO Member States and NGOs, to ensure that a suitable training framework for existing seafarers is developed expeditiously.

12 ICS believes that a "top-down" approach of developing strong onboard leadership and management skills is critical to addressing violence and harassment. This would provide clear direction and vision, ensure consistent implementation of policies and messaging, and enable enhanced control and accountability. Through the promotion of open dialogue, shipboard environments would be better equipped to target and eliminate violence and harassment on board.

Unintended consequences of extending the application of resolution MSC.560(108) to existing seafarers***Impact on maritime education and training institutes***

13 Through its global network of shipowners and operators, ICS has been made aware that some maritime educational and training institutes reportedly lack the capacity, or (in some cases) competency, to deliver the training that new seafarers will require. This is further compounded by the prospect of these requirements being extended to existing seafarers, due to the considerable administrative challenges for shipowners, seafarers and ship management crews, in addition to the potential reputational and financial repercussions for non-compliance.

Impact on seafarers

14 Increasing STCW training requirements risks having a cumulative impact on seafarers, as well as maritime education and training providers. ICS believes that, as part of the comprehensive STCW review process, training frameworks should be streamlined to ensure they are fit-for-purpose and tailored to the level of experience (as necessary), thus helping to reduce the effects of training-related burnout and improve crew retention.

Impact on inspections related to validity of basic training certification for existing seafarers

15 Shipping is a global industry which requires consistent and universal application and enforcement frameworks. ICS is concerned that this uncertainty regarding the enforcement of the application of new entrant violence and harassment training and certification requirements to existing seafarers is highly likely to lead to inconsistencies in enforcement when inspecting the validity of basic training certification for existing seafarers.

Proposal

16 With the above in mind, ICS suggests that the Sub-Committee recommends the Maritime Safety Committee (MSC) issue an IMO circular and public clarification, as appropriate, advising that the amendments to section A-VI/1 and table A-VI/1-4 concerning violence and harassment training are intended only for new seafarers who are due to undertake basic training on or after 1 January 2026.

Action requested of the Sub-Committee

17 The Sub-Committee is invited to consider the information provided, in particular the proposal in paragraph 16, and to take action, as appropriate.
