



# Perspectives and Expectations of Filipino Seafarers on Essential Services and Support Needs Extended in Australian Ports

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## Abstract

This study considers welfare service provisions for visiting Filipino seafarers in terms of access, experiences, and expectations for such welfare provisions in Australian ports. As a significant portion of the global maritime workforce, visiting Filipino seafarers face a variety of obstacles in accessing effective welfare when in Australian ports. In a quest to comprehend such obstacles, this study aims to investigate significant welfare services that visiting Filipino seafarers need including transportation, SIM card registration, medical care and leisure, and assess the effectiveness of such welfare provisions in Australian ports. Utilizing quantitative approaches, the survey obtained information from a group of 100 experienced Filipino seafarers. Outcomes indicated that key services, including access to the internet, transportation, and subscription to a SIM card, are utilized regularly and rated high in value for use by the seafarers. Gaps, such as medical care, legal consultation, and availability of service, specifically during off-hour periods, have been identified as important concerns, according to the survey. Besides, more leisure and social activity options have been espoused in an effort to mitigate feelings of isolation and enhance mental well-being. The research identified systemic vulnerabilities in the welfare delivery system, such as the lack of awareness regarding accessible welfare services, fragmentation between service providers, and a lack of resources. It also identified the need for increased coordination between private, public, and volunteer sectors in a move to make welfare service delivery accessible and sustainable. The study recommends the enhancement of information dissemination about accessible welfare, extending medical and legal care, extending off-hour service, and providing additional social and leisure activity for seafarers. All these will serve towards a fuller realization of welfare needs of Philippine seafarers in Australian ports and provide actionable information for maritime welfare organizations, shipping companies, and government departments in supporting such a critical workforce.

**Keywords:** maritime welfare services, Filipino seafarers, Australian ports, welfare services, seafarer well-being



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## INTRODUCTION

The maritime industry stands out as the lifeblood of global trade, serving to transport goods and materials across landmasses. At the center of this very crucial industry are seafarers whose input into shipping enables these ships to operate competently. And, among the people employed in this area are the Filipinos who stand recognized as the backbone of global seafarers for competence, flexibility, and professionalism (Manalo et. al., 2015). The reality for these Filipino seafarers is that, in as much as their work is indispensable, they encounter many challenges when their ships arrive in some ports, like in Australia.

Availability of welfare services such as transportation, communication, medical, and social facilities in most cases has been inconsistent leaving the seafarers in an environment that does not always prioritize their needs or may not address their needs effectively.

Australian ports have relied on Missions to Seafarers (MtS) organizations and other welfare providers, like Stella Maris Australia, to facilitate the delivery of services that address the needs of seafarers when in port. Services include providing transport to and from local amenities, support and facilitation in efforts to register SIM cards, access to communication

facilities, basic health care, and activities of a spiritual or recreational nature. However, there is great variation in the quality and availability of these services between ports, often depending on the resources and funding available to each welfare organization. This variation has resulted in shortfalls in some service provision and raises questions regarding whether the expectations and needs of seafarers are being adequately met.

Review of literatures show that there are systemic problems that bedevil welfare providers in their attempts to meet seafarers' demands. For instance, Sampson et al. (as cited in Manalo et al., 2015) noted that seafarers' welfare services are "overstretched and under-resourced," with many organizations struggling to function effectively because of limited funding and heavy reliance on voluntary support. It also exacerbated challenges brought about by relying on the provision of free or charity welfare services by ports, shipping companies, and government entities that place undue pressure on these organizations to sustain their operations. The study Sampson et al (as cited in Manalo et al., 2015) called for a reevaluation of the Maritime Labor Convention of 2006 to provide stronger guide in funding welfare services, since at present, the current provisions of the mentioned Convention are seriously inadequate to offer enough support to seafarers in all ports around the world.

Adding to this discussion, Turgo et al. (2023) discussed the symbolic community of welfare providers at ports. Both strengths and weaknesses of their operations were discussed. The study indicates how welfare providers, through the efforts of port chaplains and volunteers, attempt to provide essential services ranging from transportation up to SIM card registration, free internet access, and remittance services. While these efforts are often well-intentioned and grounded in a shared interest in ensuring the well-being of seafarers, the community of welfare providers is nevertheless beset by divisions and fragmentations. Narratives of unity and discord in the research put a light on the challenges of welfare provision and the call for more

integrated approaches to the deliverables of seafarers' needs.

On the other hand, Shan and Zhang further press for the transformative partnership between the public and private to achieve maritime labor governance in a sustainable manner (Turgo et al., 2023). The authors note that acknowledging seafarers as key workers and devoting more resources to international seafarers' welfare facilities are among the essential issues for improving decent work conditions and protection of the rights of seafarers. The study also shows how effective collaboration between governmental and non-governmental organizations can respond to current challenges in the governance of maritime labor towards seafarers' well-being (Shan & Zhang, 2021). The perspective here is linked to the broader objectives of sustainable development and assurance of health, safety, and welfare for seafarers who are basic to global trade.

Filipino seafarers are at the very center of the supply of skilled and competent labor found in the worldwide maritime workforce of which, they facilitate international trade and economic development in most countries worldwide. However, there is a commonplace where Filipino Seafarers have limited access to welfare services that aim to address needs peculiar to them when within Australian ports. For instance, the facilitation of transport is not consistently guaranteed, same with communication assistance and basic medical support. Hence, these leaves many of them without adequate services while onshore. While welfare organizations, such as Missions to Seafarers, and Stella Maris Australia have tried to ensure that these inequalities are at least bridged-and many other stakeholders-the service provision is generally constrained by issues of funding and resources and from a lack of coherent strategies among service providers. The existing literatures have indicated that systemic challenges have been evident within the ecosystem of seafarers' welfare. According to Sampson et al. (as cited in Manalo et al., 2015), there are overstretched and under-resourced welfare services, no appropriate

funding mechanisms, and thus too great a reliance on charitable contributions. Thus, Turgo et al. (2023) reveal the fractures in welfare provision – intrinsic tensions and partial availability of welfare services undermine supportive mechanisms to the fullest possible extent. Furthermore, Shan and Zhang (2021) indicate that better sustainability in the governance of maritime labor and the well-being of seafarers can be achieved through transformative partnerships between public and private stakeholders.

While these insights are essential in many ways, a huge gap still exists in understanding the needs and expectations of Filipino seafarers upon docking in Australian ports. Regrettably, without such an understanding, the services offered by welfare providers may do little or nothing to address the peculiar challenges that beset this category of servicepersons and limit their ability to respond to the needs of seafarers.

This study, therefore, tries to fill these gaps by investigating what necessary services and supports that should be accorded to Filipino seafarers during a visit to an Australian port. It specifically focuses on the investigation of the four most important areas: 1) welfare utilization services when docked in Australian ports; 2) satisfaction and order of importance of welfare services provided in Australia ports; 3) challenges faced in accessing welfare services in Australian ports; and, 4) unmet expectations on welfare services in Australian ports. Services sought include categories such as the facilitation of SIM card registration, transport from ship to shore, and basic medical or health services. Profiling was also done to elicit essential backgrounds of the respondents.

The Social Support Theory by Cohen and Wills offers a robust framework for the study within which to contextualize the role welfare services play in enabling seafarers to deal with stress and isolation at sea (Manalo, et al., 2015). In this theory, social support is an emotional, informational, and tangible resource vital in nurturing the mental health and well-being of a person engaged in a high-stress occupation like

seafaring. For Filipino seafarers who are usually away from home, and often confronted with a language and cultural barrier, such support becomes pivotal. The literature reveals that emotional support from chaplains, peers, and welfare organizations helps mitigate stress imposed by the long period of time away from family and country of origin on the Filipino seafarers (Cadge et al., 2023).

The Transformative Partnership Theory further enriches the study's framework, emphasizing that sustainability and effectiveness of welfare services are significantly developed through a partnership among different governmental bodies, shipping companies, non-governmental organizations, and voluntary welfare providers (Shan & Zhang, 2021). It is thus apparent that, given the specific needs of the seafarers, a more holistic system for supporting them must evolve through transformative partnerships. This theory helps explain how joint efforts overcome barriers, including funding challenges and fragmented services, for sustainable benefit to the seafarers, especially in crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, which evidenced the need for strong welfare networks (Shan & Zhang, 2021).

Furthermore, the Human Rights-Based Approach adds another layer to the above framework by understanding seafarers as being essential workers to whom all legal and social protections are afforded, irrespective of nationality. It is also coherent with the development in the literature of a solid legal framework with protection for the seafarer (Choi et al., 2024).

The present research will be vital in the quest to contribute towards informing MtS organizations, government agencies, and other maritime stakeholders in the delivery of timely and in-demand services for seafarers. It is also important that, by this study, seafarers' physical and mental health can be improved by having better working conditions; hence, this contributes toward realizing a more responsible maritime industry. This research will be based on the lived experiences of Filipino seafarers and the challenges faced by

welfare providers; as such, it addresses an important gap in the literature while simultaneously providing practical solutions to better the port welfare ecosystem.

## LITERATURES

**Welfare Organizations for Seafarers.** Australian seafarers face unique challenges, including stress and fatigue, due to industry reforms that have led to smaller crew sizes and increased technology (Parker et al., 1997). Furthermore, women seafarers face unique health and welfare issues, including joint pain, stress, and limited access to sanitary facilities (Stannard et al., 2015). Welfare organizations have played a critical role in supporting seafarers' needs, which they experience while at sea, such as isolation, stress, and strain of working. Organizations such as the Mission to Seafarers (MtS) and Stella Maris Australia have been at the forefront of these essential services. These agencies have provided a broad range of facilities that include recreational, counseling, medical, spiritual support, and communications with family.

For example, MtS has offered vital welfare facilities that are the visitation of ships, provision of mental and social services intended to reach a wide berth of seafarers all over the world. Such services become vital as they serve to ease the mental pressure most sailors face due to the fact that most of them often leave their families for a reasonably long period (Cadge et al., 2023).

The maritime industry's importance is further emphasized by the Catholic Church's commitment to seafarers. Stella Maris, which was established in 1920, is the largest international ship-visiting network, working with seafarers in 353 ports in 57 countries (McKinney et al., 2024). The organization through its chaplains and volunteers, helps meet the multifaceted needs of seafarers, ranging from loneliness and family separation to spiritual care. According to the study, Stella Maris has grown to adapt to the needs of the seafaring industry in development, offering practical assistance on site along with concerns

of exploitation and modern slavery within the sector. Exploited seafarers have come to use Stella Maris as a means to cling onto, with representation through the organization providing legal advice and acting for the rights of the seafarers (McKinney et al., 2024).

The operating philosophies of both MtS and Stella Maris have found their roots in Catholic social doctrine, with its emphasis on dignity for the worker and concerns about the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable populations (Choi et al., 2024). This fact ensures that seafarers have a host of different programs and services offered by MtS and Stella Maris, respectively, aimed at serving seafarers both spiritually and practically. Such work goes beyond immediate welfare needs, with many of these agencies also campaigning for more fundamental changes in the treatment of seafarers and their work, particularly where seafarers are being subjected to forms of slavery or other modern-day exploitation. As Cadge et al. (2023) express it, the efforts at community and care built by welfare organizations like MtS and Stella Maris embody a wider moral and spiritual responsibility toward seafarers.

**Welfare Services for Seafarers.** Welfare services are significant for seafarers in terms of helping them to maintain their well-being, as the nature of the work itself is really demanding and mostly encompasses long separation from family and friends. Filipino seafarers compose a big percentage of the international maritime workforce and depend highly on such services. These welfare services are mainly accessed through the port-based welfare facilities and include internet services, counseling services, recreational facilities, and religious services among others (Shan & Zhang, 2021). Most of the seafarers suffer isolation, which is both social and emotional since they spend a protracted period at sea, hence making the welfare services essential. As Sampson et al. (2022) indicate, high-speed internet, mental health counseling, and opportunities for social interaction are all basic services that are important in maintaining the mental health of seafarers, especially during long port stays. Other key components of welfare provision

include port chaplains who offer practical and spiritual support to give seafarers a sense of community and belonging (Cadge et al., 2023). Filipino seafarers are no exception, appreciating very much being contacted by chaplains offering any number of supports, from something as basic as transportation and phone cards to more emotional or spiritual support, which is very relevant in a culture like the Filipino one.

Welfare services also include initiatives oriented towards improving health among seafarers, facilities for access to healthcare, support for mental disorders, and response to emergencies. Long voyages usually expose seafarers to physical stress and psychological complications. International frameworks such as the MLC of 2006 have supported such welfare services by charging governments and port authorities with the responsibility of ensuring that seafarers have access to appropriate welfare facilities (Shan and Zhang, 2021). However, the effectiveness of such services is compromised by the availability and accessibility of the facilities as well as the willingness of the different stakeholders to provide the relevant resources.

**Challenges in Welfare Provision.** Despite the importance of seafarers' welfare services, there are some challenges that hinder their delivery. While the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) 2006 provides a regulatory framework, studies indicated gaps between its requirements and implementation in practice. One of the major problems involves financial sustainability for port-based welfare services, given their very inconsistent and insufficient funding from governments and port authorities themselves (Shan & Zhang, 2021).

In many countries, the removal of this government support has marked the closure of some critical welfare facilities. For instance, Sampson, et al. (2022) found that charities and volunteers have a crucial role in providing welfare services to seafarers, including free essentials, medical assistance, and social support, which seafarers highly value as safe havens in foreign ports. Despite the MLC

ensuring non-discriminatory access to welfare services, financial challenges have led to significant cuts in voluntary welfare provisions. Post-MLC, expectations for shipping companies and ports to contribute more to welfare funding have largely been unmet due to the voluntary nature of port-levies. While some UK ports have demonstrated good practices, global reliance on charities remains high, as seen in New Zealand, where maritime welfare is primarily funded by the charitable sector. The COVID-19 pandemic further emphasized the importance of port-based welfare services, with chaplains playing a vital role in assisting seafarers. It also accelerated a shift towards online welfare support, as organizations adapted to pandemic restrictions and increasing demand for virtual assistance.

The restructuring of the global shipping industry has created challenges for port-based welfare services (PBWS), particularly in China, where rapid economic transformation has led to reduced state funding for international seafarers' clubs (Zhao et al., 2021), resulting in staff reductions and outsourced services. While some seafarers benefit from available welfare provisions, many experience service gaps, a lack of information, and overcharging, highlighting a significant mismatch between their needs and actual support. Despite this, the Chinese shipping industry and trade unions strongly support the implementation of Regulation 4.4 of the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC 2006), though local and provincial officials primarily see PBWS as the responsibility of trade unions. Institutional stakeholders believe clearer government directives are necessary to ensure the effective implementation of seafarer welfare services in Chinese ports.

While welfare providers appear unified in their goal of assisting seafarers, the community is complex and sometimes fractured due to diverse backgrounds and organizational affiliations. Research indicates that current welfare provisions may not fully meet seafarers' needs, and there are calls for strengthening MLC guidelines on funding (Sampson et al., 2022). The shipping industry's stakeholders are

working to meet MLC standards, but gaps remain, necessitating further action from policymakers to improve seafarers' well-being.

**Gaps in Literature.** Although there is a fair amount of literature available globally that deals with seafarer welfare, the available gap in research has placed particular emphasis on the specific needs and experiences of Filipino seafarers at Australian ports. The current literature tends to generally concentrate on broader aspects that have impinged on the ordinary seafarers, including questions of mental health, funding for operations, as well as needing bigger partnerships, while less have so far been dedicated specifically to questions that relate to the cultural and social expectations that burden Filipino seafarers within an Australian maritime port context (Shan & Zhang, 2021; Choi et al., 2024).

Filipino seafarers are among the largest and most diverse populations of seafarers working globally, with possible needs and expectations from welfare services that vary from those from other countries. Their needs in particular have to be known for upgrading relevance and effectiveness of welfare services in Australian ports. Indeed, Sampson et al. (2022) highlighted that when providing welfare service provisions for seafarers, such services need to be culturally contextualized as mechanisms which may prove effective in one particular context may be far less effective in another. Surprisingly little research has been carried out regarding the facilitation of welfare provision specific to the needs of Filipino seafarers, who are at an even higher risk owing to the added impediments of a language barrier, social isolation, and other cultural factors.

This literature gap therefore brings into focus the importance of the present study, which attempts to address such needs by investigating expectations and experiences of Filipino seafarers in relation to welfare services at Australian ports. In this regard, the research will focus on this particular demographic to add to the broader understanding of seafarer welfare and underline the potential for service delivery improvement in a manner that can

meet the particular cultural and social characteristics of Filipino seafarers.

## METHODS

**Research Design.** The study made use of a quantitative approach to determine the kinds of welfare services available for seafarers visiting Australian ports. A structured survey was designed to capture the usage, satisfaction, and perceptions regarding the services made available for them. The questionnaire employed both Likert-scale and multiple-choice questions capable of measuring the frequency of utilization, the level of satisfaction, and perceived importance of the services. By focusing on tenure, the online survey described how experience might influence the perceived understanding and reliance on welfare services by seafarers. A statistical analysis was done to establish trends and identification of strengths and areas of development for these welfare services.

**Population and Sampling.** The study targeted seafarers who are working at sea today, with samples chosen from a broad range of seafarers at several career levels and different lengths of service. To be eligible, respondents must be able to identify themselves as seafarers with experience in their practice, irrespective of length of service. This broad criterion produced a sample that mirrors diversity within the seafaring workforce; yet it also allowed exploration into how years at sea can affect a seafarer's welfare needs and experiences.

In order to secure exhaustive and dependable data, 100 seafarers were selected as sample size. Previous research in similar settings confirms that a sample of 100 will generally reach statistical power and give a representative cross-section of the population. A sample of this size also gave a  $\pm 5$  percent margin of error at the 95% confidence level, which is generally acceptable in survey-based research. Secondly, within the resource and time constraints of empirical investigations, a sample of 100 was feasible without any avoidable bias and thus represented a balanced approach to covering things comprehensively.



Stratified random sampling was used to ensure that the number of seafarers sampled was balanced in terms of their tenure in the industry. A random sample of seafarers were selected to take part in the survey with an appropriate small number set aside as a subsample. This minimized the selection bias and made sure that a wide range of viewpoints is covered.

**Instrumentation.** Structured survey forms were the primary instrument for collecting data. The survey included a mix of Likert scale and multiple-choice questions to assess seamen's experiences, satisfaction and needs concerning welfare services at Australian ports. Questions encompassed topics such as service usage, the effectivity of welfare programs from the people's point of view, and the importance of these services in affecting seafarers' overall well-being. The quantitative data was analyzed statistically which helped the researcher to make a clear judgement on the trends and patterns related to welfare service provision.

**Data Gathering Procedure.** The survey was conducted electronically using Google Forms and SurveyMonkey due to its wide accessibility and the collection of data is quick. Participants were allowed to complete the survey within a stipulated time, and reminder emails were sent out to ensure higher response rates. Follow-up interviews with a small sample of survey respondents were done to probe a little deeper over certain aspects of their experiences and opinions on welfare services. However, core data was obtained through the answers of the participants to the survey questionnaires in order to create a comprehensive database with valid points.

**Data Analysis.** Data analysis was done using SPSS and Excel. Descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions, means, and percentages, summarized the responses from the survey questions.

**Ethical Considerations.** Ethical considerations were upheld in respect to the protection of respondents' rights. First, the researcher acquired informed consent from the participants, with an assurance that their rights,

such as the right to know the purpose, participate voluntarily, and withdraw at any point in time without any consequence, were guaranteed. The study also guaranteed confidentiality for all participants' identities; therefore, data collection did not reveal participants' identities for privacy. Additionally, all data collected was stored in a secured premise with restricted access only by the researcher.

## RESULTS

Table 1  
*Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents According to Profile*

Profile	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	96	96%
Female	4	4%
Total	100	100%
<b>Vessel Type</b>		
Bulk carrier	73	73%
Container ship	15	15%
Tanker	12	12%
Total	100	100%
<b>Position</b>		
Support	35	35%
Operational	33	33%
Management	32	32%
Total	100	100%
<b>Years of Experience</b>		
6-10 years	35	35%
1-5 years	30	30%
11-15 years	35	35%
Total	100	100%
<b>Age Group</b>		
25-34 years old	58	58%
35-44 years old	35	35%
45-54 years old	7	7%
Total	100	100%

The demographic distribution of the respondents indicates that the majority of Filipino seafarers surveyed belong to the 25-34 age group (58%), followed by 35-44 years old (35%). A significant proportion of the

participants (96%) were male, which is consistent with global trends in the seafaring industry, where the workforce remains predominantly male. The representation across different professional levels shows that 35% of the respondents were in support roles, 33% in operational roles, and 32% in management roles. This distribution ensures that perspectives from different ranks within the maritime hierarchy are considered.

In terms of experience, the highest proportion (35%) had between 6-10 years at sea, while 30% had 1-5 years. The most common vessel type was bulk carriers (73%), followed by container ships (12%). These figures align with industry patterns, where bulk carriers form a large segment of global maritime transport. The strong presence of experienced seafarers suggests that the survey captured responses from individuals well-versed in maritime welfare services.

Table 2  
*Frequency Distribution of Welfare Services Utilization*

Welfare Service Used	Frequency
Internet Access	80
SIM card registration	76
Transport (ship to shore)	73
Food and drink services	79
Basic medical services	74
Legal assistance	69
Currency exchange	78

Filipino seafarers consistently relied on welfare services that supported their communication, transportation, and healthcare needs, reflecting global trends in maritime welfare provisions. The most availed services included internet access (80 responses), SIM card subscription (76 responses), and sea-shore transportation (73 responses), highlighting the necessity of connectivity and mobility for seafarers' well-being. These findings align with Sampson et al. (2022), who emphasized that high-speed internet, mental health counseling, and social interaction opportunities are crucial for reducing isolation and stress among maritime workers. Additionally, food and drinks (79 responses) and general medical services (74 responses) were frequently accessed, demonstrating the importance of nutritional

support and healthcare during port stops. Shan and Zhang (2021) similarly found that port-based welfare facilities play a vital role in addressing seafarers' physical and psychological challenges, reinforcing the significance of readily available medical and nutritional assistance.

However, some welfare services were less utilized, including legal assistance (69 responses) and currency exchange (78 responses). The lower demand for legal services may stem from a lack of awareness or limited availability, which can discourage seafarers from seeking assistance even when needed. McKinney et al. (2024) highlighted that organizations like Stella Maris provide critical legal support for seafarers facing exploitation, suggesting that gaps in awareness and access may hinder workers from securing their rights. Additionally, while financial services such as currency exchange were available, their relatively lower utilization may indicate that seafarers rely on alternative financial management methods or experience barriers in accessing these services. These findings suggest the need for enhanced outreach and coordination among welfare providers to ensure seafarers are fully informed about and able to access essential services, particularly legal aid and financial support.

Table 3  
*Mean Distribution of Satisfaction and Importance of Welfare Services*

Welfare Services	Satisfaction Mean	Importance Mean
Internet access	4.31	4.51
Transport (ship to shore)	4.29	4.49
SIM card registration	4.25	4.50
Basic medical services	4.09	4.51
Legal assistance	4.13	4.40
Currency exchange	4.02	4.35

Satisfaction ratings for services such as access to the internet (M=4.31), transport services (M=4.29), and SIM card registration (M=4.25) show that these essential provisions align well with the expectations of Philippine seafarers. These services, which are vital in addressing the challenges of isolation and maintaining communication while at sea, reflect the



priorities outlined by welfare organizations such as the Mission to Seafarers (MtS) and Stella Maris. These organizations have long recognized the importance of connectivity and transportation in easing the mental and social pressures faced by seafarers (Cadge et al., 2023). As Filipino seafarers comprise a large portion of the global maritime workforce, services that facilitate communication and mobility play a significant role in sustaining their well-being while at sea (Shan & Zhang, 2021). High satisfaction ratings in these areas suggest that these services are effectively meeting seafarers' needs, reaffirming the findings of previous studies that emphasize the necessity of maintaining access to basic welfare services like internet and transport for maritime workers (Parker et al., 1997).

However, the gap between the importance and satisfaction ratings for medical care highlights a critical area of concern. While medical care is highly valued ( $M=4.51$ ), its satisfaction rating ( $M=4.09$ ) suggests that it does not fully meet the specific needs of seafarers, particularly in terms of accessibility and quality. This finding is in line with global concerns regarding the adequacy of medical provisions for seafarers, who often face physical and mental health challenges due to prolonged time at sea (Stannard et al., 2015; Shan & Zhang, 2021). Welfare organizations have been pivotal in addressing these gaps, offering a broad range of services, from medical assistance to psychological support, through partnerships with port chaplains and NGOs (McKinney et al., 2024).

Nonetheless, challenges such as inadequate funding, limited healthcare resources, and the high demand for services suggest that further efforts are needed to improve the delivery of healthcare to seafarers, particularly in remote or underfunded regions (Zhao et al., 2021). Strengthening international frameworks, such as the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) 2006, and enhancing collaboration between public and private sectors could help bridge these gaps in service delivery (Choi et al., 2024).

The challenges faced by Filipino seafarers (Table 4), such as lack of awareness (29 responses) about available services, limited-service availability (23 responses), long waiting times (19 responses), and language barriers (15 responses), are significant barriers to accessing crucial welfare support.

Table 4  
*Frequency Distribution of Challenges Encountered Welfare Services*

Challenge	Frequency
Lack of awareness about available services	29
Limited-service availability	23
Long waiting times	19
Language barriers	15

The high count of respondents who are unaware of available services highlights the need for improved communication strategies to ensure seafarers are informed about their rights and access to welfare resources. This issue is consistent with findings from Shan and Zhang (2021), who argue that inadequate communication and a lack of awareness are persistent problems in welfare service provision for seafarers. Furthermore, the limited availability of services, particularly during out-of-work hours, has been identified as a critical challenge, as it reduces opportunities for seafarers to utilize welfare facilities when in port. The timing of welfare service accessibility is especially crucial, as seafarers often face time constraints during their short port stays (Cadge et al., 2023), which aligns with the challenges outlined in this study. The problem of service availability, compounded by long waiting times and language barriers, exacerbates the difficulties seafarers face when accessing welfare support. Research indicates that these barriers are not unique to Filipino seafarers but are widespread across the global maritime workforce (Stannard et al., 2015). Language and cultural differences can further complicate the provision of effective services, leading to misunderstandings and inefficiencies in service delivery (Shan & Zhang, 2021). Welfare organizations such as MtS and Stella Maris have worked to address these issues by employing bilingual staff and expanding their outreach efforts, including mobile welfare services (Cadge et al., 2023).

However, the variability in service availability across different ports remains a significant challenge, as demonstrated by Sampson et al. (2022), who highlight the importance of continuous and consistent service delivery to mitigate the isolation and stress experienced by seafarers. Enhancing coordination between maritime organizations, shipping companies, and port authorities is essential to improve service accessibility and reduce the barriers faced by seafarers.

Table 5  
*Frequency Distribution of Unmet Expectations on Welfare Services*

Unmet Expectations	Frequency
Easier SIM card access	10
More flexible transportation	12
24/7 medical assistance	15
More social and recreational activities	10
Improved legal support	8

The unmet expectations expressed by seafarers regarding connectivity, transport, healthcare, and legal support highlight significant gaps in the services currently available in Australian ports. The demand for 24/7 medical assistance (15 responses) reflects the pressing need for accessible and continuous healthcare for seafarers, a challenge that has been documented globally. Seafarers, particularly those on long voyages, face numerous health risks due to the isolated nature of their work and limited access to medical care while at sea (Lopez, 2021; Shan & Zhang, 2021). The call for round-the-clock medical services underscores the importance of providing timely healthcare interventions to address both emergency and routine medical needs. Welfare organizations like MtS and Stella Maris have emphasized the significance of accessible medical care in maintaining the physical and mental well-being of seafarers (McKinney et al., 2024), further supporting the demand for enhanced healthcare services in Australian ports.

Additionally, the requests for more flexible transport options (12 responses) and improved SIM card registration processes (10 responses) signal that existing logistical services fall short

of seafarers' expectations, particularly in terms of ease and efficiency. Transport services have long been a key focus for welfare organizations, as they help alleviate the challenges seafarers face when navigating unfamiliar port environments (Sampson et al., 2022). Inadequate or rigid transport options not only create logistical challenges but also contribute to the stress and isolation seafarers experience during their port stays. Similarly, the demand for streamlined SIM card registration processes points to the difficulty seafarers encounter in maintaining communication with family and loved ones while at sea. As Cadge et al. (2023) have noted, effective communication is essential for seafarers' mental health, highlighting the need for more efficient systems to address these concerns. These unmet expectations suggest that improvements in these areas are necessary to ensure that seafarers' basic needs are met, both in terms of healthcare and logistical support.

## DISCUSSION

The study sheds light on the welfare provisions provided to Filipino seafarers in Australian ports, focusing on their usage, satisfaction levels, and the challenges they face in accessing services. The demographic breakdown of respondents—primarily male, aged 25 to 34, with substantial sea service experience—aligns with global trends in the maritime industry, where Filipino seafarers make up a significant portion of the international workforce. This group, with its high sea exposure, heavily relies on welfare services to maintain both their physical and mental well-being while away from home.

The high usage rates of internet access (80 responses), SIM card registration (76 responses), and shore-to-ship transportation (73 responses) highlight the importance of communication and mobility services in ensuring that seafarers stay connected and can navigate ports efficiently. These services address the isolation and logistical challenges often faced by seafarers during in-port stays, underscoring their vital role in improving the overall quality of life for these workers.

Despite the satisfaction ratings for connectivity services being relatively high, with internet access (M=4.31), transport (M=4.29), and SIM card registration (M=4.25) ranking at the top, other areas of welfare provision, particularly medical care, show significant gaps. While medical services ranked high in importance (M=4.51), the relatively low satisfaction rating (M=4.09) suggests that although seafarers have access to medical care, it does not always meet their needs. This disparity between importance and satisfaction underscores a critical area for improvement, as healthcare is a fundamental component of seafarers' well-being, especially considering the physical and mental stressors of their profession. The lack of satisfaction with medical services may be linked to issues such as limited access to healthcare during off-hours, long waiting times, or inadequate facilities, which require urgent attention from both maritime industry stakeholders and welfare providers.

The study also reveals several barriers preventing seafarers from fully benefiting from welfare provisions. A lack of awareness about available services (29 responses) was the most common challenge, followed by limited-service availability (23 responses), long waiting times (19 responses), and language barriers (15 responses). These obstacles prevent seafarers from accessing services when they are most needed, thus diminishing the effectiveness of the welfare programs in place. These findings echo previous studies, such as those by Shan and Zhang (2021), who emphasized that a lack of awareness and service limitations are significant hurdles to effective welfare delivery. The results suggest that communication strategies need to be improved, particularly in ensuring that seafarers are well-informed about their rights and the services available to them, and that these services are made accessible during their often-limited time in port.

In addition to awareness and accessibility issues, respondents highlighted several unmet expectations regarding the welfare services provided in Australian ports. The demand for 24/7 medical assistance (15 responses) points

to a clear need for round-the-clock healthcare support to address the medical challenges faced by seafarers at all times, particularly during extended in-port stays. Furthermore, seafarers expressed a desire for more flexible transport options (12 responses) and improvements to SIM card registration processes (10 responses). These requests reflect the fact that while existing services partially address seafarers' logistical needs, they do not fully meet the expectations of a workforce that often faces unpredictable schedules and limited access to resources. This aligns with the findings of welfare organizations like MtS and Stella Maris, which have long emphasized the importance of adaptive welfare services that can cater to the diverse and evolving needs of seafarers in different ports (Cadage et al., 2023; McKinney et al., 2024).

The findings from this study are consistent with broader trends in seafarer welfare, as identified in the research of Sampson et al. (2022) and Shan and Zhang (2021), which stress the need for a more holistic approach to welfare provision. While services such as internet access and transportation are essential, the gaps in medical care, legal support, and the availability of services outside of office hours suggest that the current welfare system needs to be more comprehensive and responsive. The study emphasizes that awareness campaigns and improvements in service availability, such as extended hours for healthcare and legal support, could bridge the gap between seafarers' expectations and the reality of the services they currently receive. Furthermore, it is crucial to strengthen collaboration between port authorities, shipping companies, and welfare organizations to ensure that seafarers receive the support they need in a timely and accessible manner.

This study highlights the critical role of welfare provisions in supporting Filipino seafarers in Australian ports, revealing both strengths and areas for improvement. While services related to connectivity and transportation are well-utilized and generally satisfactory, significant gaps in medical care, legal support, and service accessibility persist. Barriers such as a lack of

awareness, limited-service availability, and long waiting times hinder seafarers' full access to welfare provisions, underscoring the need for improved communication strategies and service expansion. The study aligns with previous research, emphasizing the importance of a comprehensive, responsive welfare system that meets the evolving needs of seafarers. To bridge the gap between seafarers' expectations and the services they receive, it is imperative to enhance service availability, extend operating hours, and foster stronger collaboration between maritime stakeholders. Addressing these issues will ensure that Filipino seafarers in Australian ports receive the support necessary for their health, safety, and well-being.

**Recommendations.** With this, the following are recommended:

1. **Improving Awareness and Communication.** One of the most important concerns in such a study is a lack of awareness about accessible welfare programs. Most seafarers have an incomplete understanding of accessible programs, and, as a result, cannot utilize welfare programs' full potential. In an endeavor to mitigate such, welfare agencies have to introduce electronic information platforms, such as websites and mobile phone applications, with real-time information about accessible programs, timelines, and locations. Welfare agencies have to make such platforms accessible in numerous languages in an attempt to bridge language gaps between seafarers.

Shipping companies can also contribute towards raising awareness through pre-shore orientation of seafarers about welfare services. This will make seafarers aware of where to access important services when docking. Besides, printed materials, such as multilingual brochures and posters, can be installed in ships and at terminals in terminals to make all seafarers, both with and without access to technology, well-aware of key information. All these will go towards Oldenburg and Jensen (2019)'s argument that welfare services must

effectively be communicated in order for them to be utilized. Efficient improvement in communications will go a long way in enhancing access to key welfare services for seafarers.

2. **Enhancing Access to Medical and Legal Services.** Medical services received a high importance rating from respondents but relatively lower satisfaction scores, indicating gaps in healthcare provision for seafarers in Australian ports. Furthermore, legal assistance was underutilized, suggesting that many seafarers may either be unaware of these services or face barriers in accessing them. To address these issues, ports should establish 24/7 medical facilities specifically catering to seafarers. Ensuring that healthcare services are available at all hours will provide seafarers with necessary medical support, regardless of their docking schedules. Though Telehealth facilities were open these gaps show that improvements along with creating new facilities can bridge this gap and could sufficiently help the seafarers in their overall wellness. One significant recommendation from the respondent is to add emotional support to the medical services to cater their emotional needs as well.

Shipping companies and welfare agencies have a role to collaborate in offering telemedicine service, through which medical consultation can be received remotely when in a medical state of need. Healthcare will become accessible, especially for medical cases that cannot receive medical care off ships. In addition, legal service delivery must be boosted through having specific individuals at welfare centers to serve in cases of employment grievances, contractual concerns, and salary discrepancies. All these propositions confirm McKinney et al (2024)'s conclusion that many seafarers face legal and financial hardships but lack proper care. Healthcare and legal service improvement will make welfare for Filipino seafarers in Australian ports even better.

3. **Extending Welfare Service Hours and Improving Transport.** Another significant barrier identified in this study is the limited availability of welfare services outside regular office hours. Many seafarers have unpredictable docking schedules, making it difficult for them to access services that operate during fixed hours. To address this, welfare centers should offer extended operating hours or, where feasible, 24/7 service availability. This will ensure that seafarers can access essential services regardless of their arrival time at the port.

Furthermore, transport service needs to be upgraded in a way that takes care of seafarers' mobility needs. There should be an at-port, on-demand shuttle service moving seafarers between ships and shore and to welfare centres, medical centres, and malls for shopping. Welfare providers have to coordinate with shipping companies in developing a coordinated network of transport in harmony with seafarers' working routines. All these propositions resonate with Turgo et al.'s (2023) argument that effective transportation options have a profound impact in improving welfare experiences for seafarers when in a port. Greater availability and efficiency in transport and service will make welfare for seafarers convenient and efficient.

4. **Strengthening Public-Private Partnerships.** A more coordinated collaboration between shipping companies, welfare organizations, and government agencies is required in order to have well-funded and sustainable welfare services. Government agencies must assign specific funding for welfare programs for seafarers in a manner that will not allow financial shortages to restrict service quality. Welfare programs must have financial contribution from shipping companies, who stand to gain most from seafarers' work, to make sure that crew members receive proper care when in port.

Additionally, welfare agencies will have to work closely with maritime stakeholders in developing a harmonized welfare system

that will have uniformity in all Australian ports. In concurrence with Shan and Zhang (2021), whose position is that public-private collaborations are important in effective welfare governance in the maritime industry, such collaboration will make welfare governance in the maritime industry even more coordinated and effective for seafarers.

5. **Providing relevant recreational and social activities.** In spite of the need for leisure or recreational activity, many ports do not have adequate service for seafarers. In a survey for this study, a significant percentage of those who responded cited a lack of adequate leisure activity during shore leave. That such a deficit in service exists is particularly troubling in light of the beneficial impact such activity can have on general seafarers' well-being. As Turgo et al. (2023) observe, a lack of coordinated and available leisure service at ports exacerbates isolation for seafarers. Results in this study, along with existing literature, validate a need for improvement in providing seafarers with engaging and participatory activity when visiting a port.

A significant number of seafarers recommended a focus on creating recreational and social activities centered on them, that they can enjoy and benefit from despite their extreme workload and activities in-work. One notable comment is the creation of seasonal activities during special holidays like Christmas and New year, and also a sports festival that they can join and experience. Seafarers, especially Philippine seafarers, often face cultural disconnection when working aboard ships with multinational crew compositions. Social and cultural events can become a much-needed outlet for seafarers in maintaining contact with their cultural heritage and enhancing cross-cultural awareness with crewmates. Social events in the form of Filipino-themed social events, cultural events, or even friendly sports leagues could go a long way in enhancing their shore leave activity.



According to McKinney, et al. (2024), welfare workers and chaplains have an important role in organizing events for seafarers in a bid to reverse feelings of loneliness and isolation. Welfare groups can collaborate with port authorities in organizing such leisure or cultural events, specifically during holidays when feelings of isolation can become heightened for seafarers.

**Future Research Directions.** While this work generates significant information regarding welfare for seafarers in Australian ports, future studies can explore new avenues in a quest to make maritime welfare policies even better. Welfare service delivery in a range of countries can, through comparative analysis, expose best practice for use in Australian ports. Welfare requirements for seafarers through longitudinal studies will generate a deeper analysis of welfare service development over a timeframe and its response to new emerging concerns.

Another area for future inquiry is studying electronic alternatives, such as web platforms and mobile programs, for improving access to welfare provisions. Looking at technology and its contribution to service improvement could reveal new and exciting alternatives for overcoming present barriers. All these avenues of inquiry will work towards a fuller and more efficient welfare model for the global maritime workforce.

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