



Türk Armatörler Birliği

Canada Creates New Visa Procedures to Facilitate Crew Changes Port of Vancouver (file phoo)

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Canada is joining the list of nations responding to the growing calls to address the challenges in completing crew changes due to the restrictions designed to stop the spread of the coronavirus. A broad collation of shipping organizations, maritime associations, ship owners, and labor are all calling for action to address the growing humanitarian crisis for seafarers.

In an email, Luc Brisebois, Associate Director General, Marine Safety and Security for Transport Canada announced new procedures for entry visas to permit crew changes. Saying, "Please find below the newly revised procedures to obtain entry visas for foreign seafarers in order to allow for crew changes," Transport Canada highlighted a two-step process that it believes will both speed and ease the barriers to completing crew transfers in Canadian ports.

The procedure for entry visas requires all crew members to apply online to obtain temporary resident visas (TRVs) in order to enter Canada. Once they have applied, they are instructed to email Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) at a dedicated email address explaining they are members of a crew and asking to be exempt from COVID-19 travel restrictions.

According to Transport Canada, seafarers need to indicate that their travel is essential (non-discretionary purpose). After applying for their visa on the website, crew members will receive a notification (either via their IRCC Secure Account or email) confirming that their application is approved, refused, or requesting more information so that IRCC can make a decision. A dedicated email address is also being provided to respond to questions from seafarers.

Canada will not be requiring quarantines for crew members.

In taking these actions, Canada joins other governments in taking action to ease the process of undertaking crew changes. The Hong Kong Shipowners' Association (HKSOA) announced yesterday it had been successful in working with the local authorities to relax restrictions for unrestricted crew transfers.

Many countries, however, are yet to respond to the growing calls to address the restrictions and to create policies to facilitate crew changes. The International Labour Organization (ILO) highlighted that it believes that "150,000 to 200,000 seafarers trapped on board ships around the world because of measures to contain the COVID-19 virus."

Canada's action to ease the visa process is very similar to an appeal sent last week to the European Union ministers of home affairs and ministers of transportation in advance of EU meetings of the Transportation Council and the Home Affairs Council.

Representatives of the European Community Shipowners' Association, the European Transportation Workers' Federation, Cruise Lines International Association, and World Shipping Council called for an



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effort to ease the visa process in the Schengen region of Europe. Pointing out the current difficulties in obtaining visas, they estimated that over the next two months between 100,000 and 120,000 seafarers from third world countries will require Schengen visas so they can travel to relieve crew on vessels in EU ports.

Canada's efforts to ease its visa process is seen as a positive step to addressing the challenges of crew changes in North America. Shipowners and operators are hopeful that similar actions will soon be enacted in Europe and other parts of the world to better facilitate crew changes and relieve the burden on seafarers, many of whom have had their contracts extended during the current global public health crisis.