

Türkiye at the Forefront of Maritime Digitalisation: Redefining Crew Welfare

For decades, seafaring life was defined by isolation. Today, the maritime industry is undergoing a profound transformation. As digitalisation advances across every sector, crew welfare evolves as well. IEC Telecom, an international satellite service provider, shares market insights and explains how to best adapt to new digital trends.

Türkiye's Strategic Position

Türkiye stands as the 11th largest merchant fleet worldwide, with over 65,000 active seafarers and more than 140,000 maritime professionals contributing to global shipping. This scale places the country in a unique position. On one hand, it benefits from a strong maritime tradition and talent pool. On the other, it faces the same workforce pressures as the global industry.

Globally, the maritime sector faces a looming officer shortfall of nearly 90,000 by 2026. This shortage will naturally be felt in Türkiye as well, given its significant role in global trade. Retaining skilled personnel is becoming a strategic imperative, and crew welfare lies at the centre of this challenge. For Turkish shipping companies, investment in welfare technologies is no longer an optional upgrade but a necessity to safeguard competitiveness.

A New Era of Connectivity

The rollout of low-Earth orbit (LEO) satellite networks, led by Starlink, is changing the rules of engagement. High speeds and low latency digitalise vessel operations but also enable a different level of crew welfare on board. Video calls with family, online education, and access to entertainment platforms reduce isolation and improve morale.

Yet with these opportunities come new challenges. Unlimited usage risks exhausting bandwidth, driving up costs, and compromising cybersecurity. To maximise the benefits of the new generation of networks, control is essential. This is where solutions such as the **Starlink Maritime Portfolio** by IEC Telecom play a key role, enabling advanced network management,



enhanced cybersecurity, and a suite of value-added services tailored for life at sea.

Voucher Systems: A Balanced Approach Shipowners in Türkiye and elsewhere must reconcile two competing forces: the crew's demand for high-speed, unrestricted access and the operator's duty to manage costs and secure ship operations. Voucher systems, introduced by IEC Telecom, offer a balanced solution.

From a corporate social responsibility perspective, shipowners can provide each crew member with a defined allowance of data—measured in gigabytes, time, or speed—ensuring fair access across the team. This allocation supports mental health and wellbeing, reinforcing a company's commitment to crew welfare.

At the same time, the model allows sea-

farers to exercise personal choice. If they wish to extend their usage, extra credits can be purchased directly from the captain or the ICT manager. This structure gives crews the freedom to browse on their own terms while ensuring shipowners retain oversight of bandwidth and budget. "Today's seafarers expect more than just connectivity; they expect fairness and flexibility," says **Ahmet Aybar, Managing Director of IEC Telecom Türkiye**. "By offering welfare packages as part of their CSR and allowing crews to top up if they wish, shipping companies can meet both human and operational needs. Voucher systems, supported by Starlink, are a practical response to one of the most pressing challenges of maritime digitalisation."

Looking Ahead

Connectivity is moving from the margins to the centre of maritime strategy, with crew welfare seen less as a "benefit" and more as a cornerstone of efficient operations.

For Türkiye, addressing this transformation is both an opportunity and a necessity. By embracing solutions that combine advanced connectivity through Starlink with intelligent access management such as voucher systems by IEC Telecom, the Turkish maritime sector can set a benchmark for welfare standards across the wider region.