

Ukraine to permit seafarers to join foreign-flagged ships

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Ukraine's Cabinet has agreed that Ukrainian seafarers – a group that contributes significantly to staffing levels of international shipping – can leave the country to work under contracts on vessels.

Before the beginning of the war with Russia, Ukrainian seafarers had generated some \$4bn annually to the country's economy. Ukraine ranks sixth in the world in terms of the number of employed seafarers.

However, all adult males became subject to call-up when Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24th this year.

Lobby groups, including ISM managers, argued that most of the seafarers had specific skills and abilities which were of little use ashore, even in times of war, but were extremely useful for Ukraine at sea.

The Cabinet announced the decision on August 27th and over the coming days will approve the final date from which Ukrainian seafarers will be able to leave on contracts, as well as providing fuller details of the arrangement.

Meanwhile, the silos in Ukraine remain stocked with millions of tons of produce from previous harvests. The Black Sea Grain Initiative, signed last month and implemented over the past few weeks, has begun to create some space, but much more grain from the old harvest remains on land, and needs to be shifted to make space for the new harvest.

Ukrainian infrastructure minister Oleksandr Kubrakov said that, as of Friday August 26th, 44 ships had left Ukrainian sea ports under the deal, carrying 1m tons of food to 15 countries worldwide. He wrote on Twitter that "we are ready to increase our volumes to 3m tons per month to prevent a global food shortage".

The volume of Ukrainian exports being moved by river up the Danube has also increased significantly is increasing fast. Over the weekend of August 27th and 28th there were 11 ships carrying 45,000 tons on Ukraine's section of the Danube. This was the largest convoy since Russia's full-scale invasion began.

Kubrakov said that “since March, we have managed to transport more than 4m tons of grain through the Danube ports; as of now, this is more than by all other modes of transport. The dynamics of the increase is significant. In March, our ports processed only 16,000 tons of agricultural products for export; in July, the figure was almost 1.4m tons”.