

# Flag-state misuse hampering seafarer abandonment cases, warns ITF

Several cases of flag being withdrawn in live abandonment cases, trade body tells IMO

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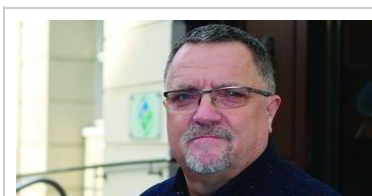
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7 February 2025 13:25 GMT    *UPDATED 7 February 2025 14:00 GMT*

By [Sandra Boga](#) in **London**

Several flag states are impeding attempts to resolve abandonment cases, according to the International Transport Workers’ Federation.

The issue over flag states was revealed in the latest seafarer abandonment findings supplied by the ITF to the International Maritime Organization.



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“The ITF has seen several cases in which the flag of a vessel has been withdrawn during the processing of an abandonment case. This practice must be stopped,” it said.

The ITF’s *Fair Treatment of Seafarers* report

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outlined that the flag state should be expected to play a crucial role in the resolution of any abandonment.

“Withdrawing the flag before the case is considered resolved leaves the crew without vital support,” it added.

The flag states in question have not been revealed by the ITF.

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The report indicated that, in some instances, changes of flag also occurred when a live abandonment was in progress, something that should equally not be acceptable, it added.

The ITF’s figures also showed that out of its total abandonment figures (312 vessels in 2024), “alarmingly” 20 cases were reported on vessels on which there was no flag, or a flag could not be identified.

This was more than double the number of such cases compared with the previous year.

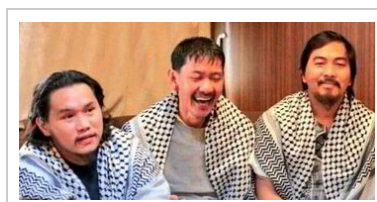
ITF global inspectorate coordinator Steve Trowsdale told TradeWinds how this type of action hinders the federation in trying to resolve abandonment cases.

“You are trying to assist the seafarers and ask them ‘What flag are you under?’ And they say, ‘We don’t know. We have no flag’. Or you ask them to give us copies of the insurance documents on board to hear ‘we don’t have insurance’ ... yes, it makes it difficult.

“In some cases, you’ve got a combination of a flag state that doesn’t want to respond and doesn’t want to act and doesn’t want to stand up to its responsibilities,” he added.

The ITF also found that two vessels were also flying false flags, one of Sao Tome and Principe, and one of Guyana.

“Cases were reported on 45 different flags, again the most ever and reinforcing the widespread nature of the issue,” the report added.



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As previously reported, the ITF found that 90% of

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abandoned vessels in 2024 were sailing under a flag of convenience, with Panama remaining the flag with the most abandonments.

“Panama is the largest register in the world, so percentage-wise, they’re always going to get a fair amount of abandonment. You can’t stop

that,” Trowsdale said, adding that perhaps more attention should be paid to smaller flag states.



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“If you look at Palau, for instance, they’ve got just over 300 [vessels] on their register. We recorded 37 [abandonments], so over 10% of their register are abandoned ships. And Palau is a small island in the Pacific with no maritime industry. The register is not run from Palau either.”

Trowsdale said:

“We believe the FOC system is about a genuine link. We believe that if you’re a German ship, you should register your ship on the German flag, not register under Panama or any of these. If you’re a Greek ship owner, you should do the same thing.”

The IMO recently commented on the [United Nation’s figures on abandonment](#), stating that they were “alarming”. (Copyright)