

Side-reflections on a Survey on the impact of COVID-19 on the lives of seafarers

Since the declaration of the pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO), it is clear that the lives of seafarers, fishers and their families have been impacted significantly. With the crisis triggered by the COVID-19, hundreds of thousands of seafarers (especially those employed by the cruise industry) will be unemployed for months and months.

Commercial shipping did not stop and vessels continue to criss-cross the oceans moving essential goods. Many crew members had their contracts extended because borders were closed and until today it is difficult to organize crew changes. Many ports were locked down, everyone on board was prevented from coming ashore for fear of infections. Stella Maris chaplains and volunteers shifted to “virtual chaplaincy” and, where it was still possible, from ship visiting to “gangway visit”.

The cruise ship industry came to a complete stop. Several cruise ships with infected passengers and crews on board were refused entry into port. Passengers got priority and returned safely home, leaving thousands upon thousands of crew members stranded in vessels around the world, without flights to return home, but most of all with a bleak future for them and their families.

The whole fisheries sector has also been hugely hit by COVID-19 and the precarious conditions in which many fishers and their families are living was aggravated by the lack of daily income and of safety net provided by government institutions.

Being on the front line in ports, the chaplains and the volunteers of Stella Maris realized straightaway the immediate situation of emergency many seafarers and fishers are facing; without source of income and stranded in foreign nations and even in their own country.

However, the real impact of COVID-19 in the lives of seafarers and their needs will be clear in the next six months/one year. For this reason Stella Maris prepared a very short survey composed by 18 different questions. The survey was anonymous and done online. Links to the survey were distributed through the personal contacts of chaplains, volunteers and social media starting on Monday 4th May until Wednesday 13th May. The survey elicited 363 responses.

The survey does not pretend to provide scientific results, but in a simple way it gives us a snapshot into the problems and worries that seafarers and their families are facing now and in the future.

These data should guide Stella Maris and other welfare providers to prepare plans to respond to the real needs of the people of the sea.

In a way the survey has confirmed the perceptions that we as welfare providers could perceive by being in touch with them through our chaplains and volunteers.

- 1) The first set of questions aim to gather personal information to create a personal profile of the responding seafarer.
 - **Gender:** 97% were male and 3% female. In its own way it represents the global percentage of gender in the maritime industry.
 - **Nationality:** the majority of the answers comes from the Philippines (83.5%), India (5.2%) and the rest from others countries. The overwhelming majority of Filipino responses could be justified by the global percentage of Filipino seafarers (1/3 of 1.4 million) but also by the many personal contacts that our chaplains and volunteers have with them.
 - **Age:** the great majority of respondents was from the age bracket 35-44 years (34.2%) followed by the ones from 25-34 years (28.9%) then from 45-54 years (22.6%).
 - **Civil Status:** two third of them are married (62.8%) and the rest are single (34.2%).
 - **Number of Children:** 34.7% have no child, 20.7% have one child, 26.4% have two children, 14.3% have three children. These percentages are important because they will be reflected later on the expenses that have to sustain for the education of the children.
 - **Family members supported:** almost half of the respondent (48.2%) are supporting more than three persons, 19% three persons, 17.4% two persons and 7.2% one person. These data are nothing new for us chaplains and volunteers, we know from the confidences that we received from them that are the breadwinner for a rather extended family.

- 2) The second set of questions wanted to create the profile of the person as seafarer.
 - **How long have you been a seafarer?** The majority (24.2%) fell on the bracket 10-14 years followed immediately by the ones in 5-9 bracket (23.1%) making up almost half of the answers. The ones with less than 5 years of experience reach the 20.1% and finally the ones between 15-19 years (16.3%).
 - **What is your current rank?** The responses are covering the whole spectrum of the different seafarers' ranks, with equal distribution for Deck Officers and AB (13.8%), then Member Steward Department (12.9%) followed by the Member of Engine Crew, Cadet and Engine Officers just over 9%, and the Master with (6.3%).
 - **When was your last contract?** The answers are covering the period from October 2016 to May 2020. But if we want to consider only the last 9 months (the length of a contract) from October 2019 to May 2020 the valid responses are only one third (34%).
 - **On which ship did you last embark?** Even to this question the answers cover a variety of vessels, however the great majority (37.5%) were employed on board a Cargo ship, followed by tanker (24%) and Container ship (11.6%) and Cruise liner (9.9%).

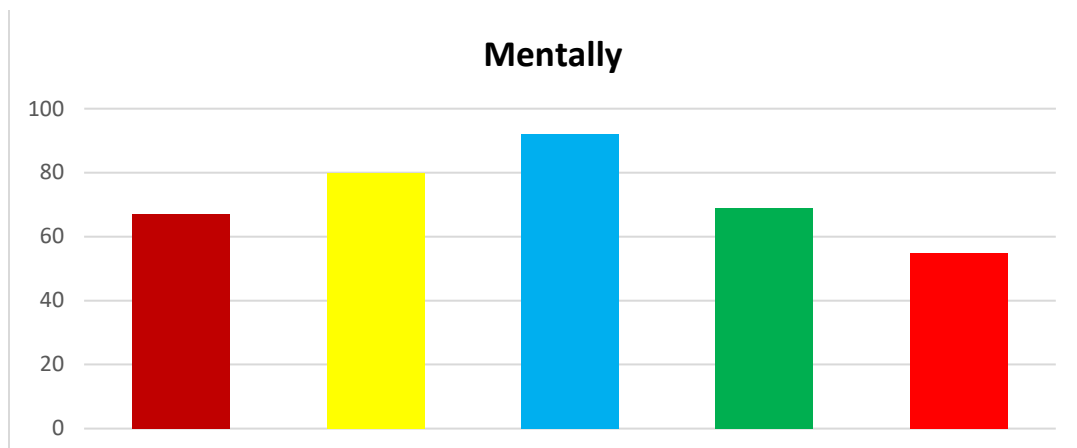
- 3) The third set of question tries to establish the actual situation of the seafarers:
 - **What is your current situation?** Almost half of the answers indicated that they are waiting for a new contract (42.4%), while 30.9% were about to be deployed but were grounded because of COVID-19, for 14.3% the contract was terminated because of COVID-19. Finally for 12.4% their contract was extended because of COVID-19, the reason could be that it is still very difficult to do a crew change because of lack of flights or ports that would allow it.

- **Where are you now:** only a small percentage of them are in hotel abroad waiting to return home (5.9%), 23,7% are at home while the great majority (67.9%) of them are in their country either in a hotel, dormitory, boarding house, etc. run by welfare provider (Stella Maris), agents.

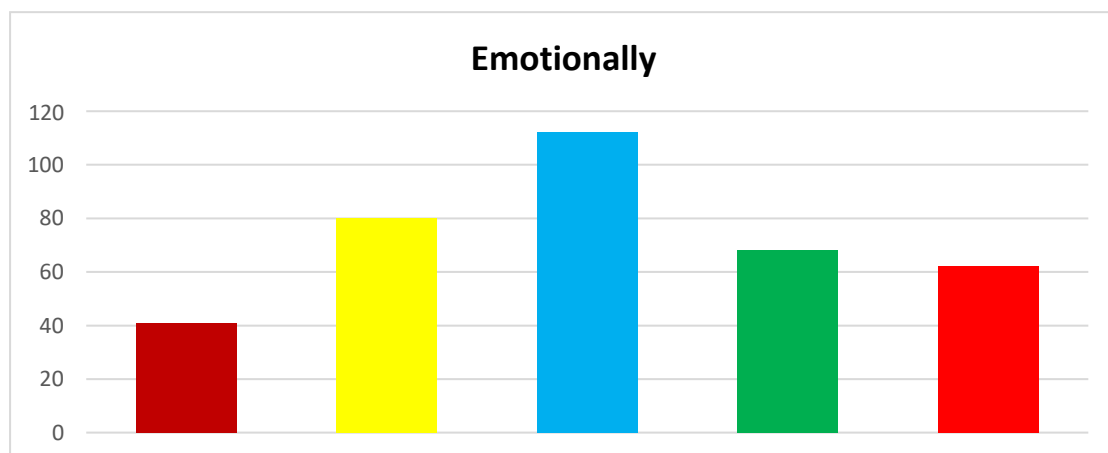
4) The fourth set of questions want to know how seriously COVID-19 impacted the life of the seafarers: Mentally, Emotionally, Physically, Psychologically and Financially.

How seriously did COVID-19 impact your life?

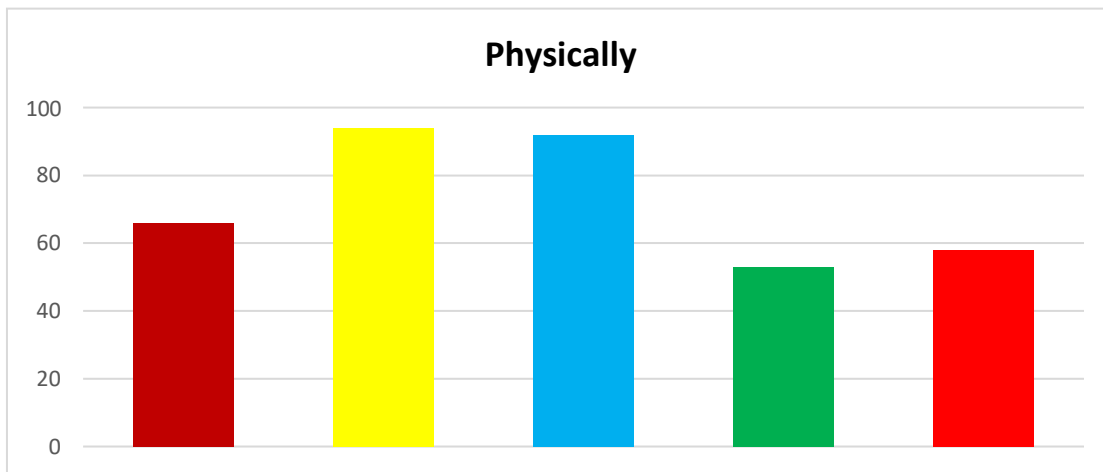
Five possible answers: (1) very little (2) little (3) quite a bit (4) a lot (5) very much



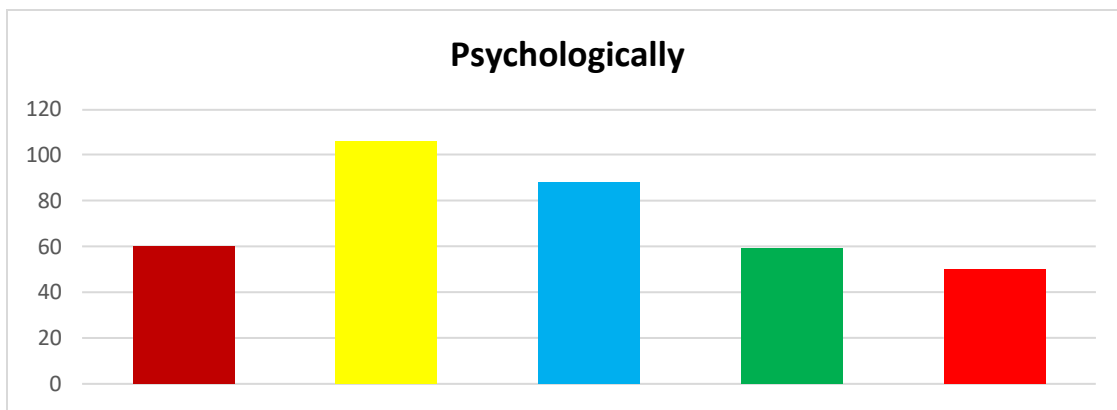
Mentally	Very little	Little	Quite a bit	A lot	Very much
Responses	67	80	92	69	55
Percentage	19%	22%	25%	19%	15%



Emotionally	Very little	Little	Quite a bit	A lot	Very much
Responses	41	80	112	68	62
Percentage	11%	22%	31%	19%	17%

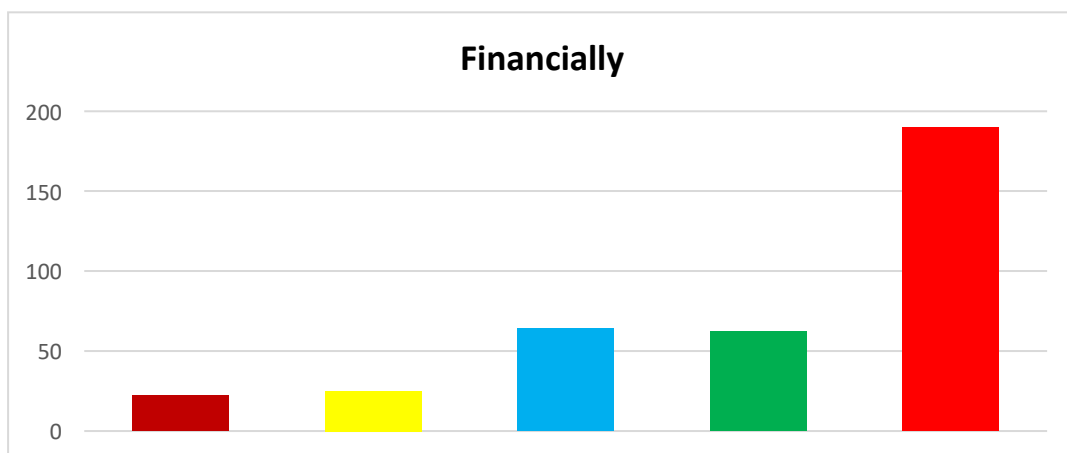


Physically	Very little	Little	Quite a bit	A lot	Very much
Responses	66	94	92	53	58
Percentage	18%	26%	25%	15%	16%



Psychologically	Very little	Little	Quite a bit	A lot	Very much
Responses	60	106	88	59	50
Percentage	17%	29%	24%	16%	14%

The answers to this question reveals that the majority of the seafarers were affected (Mentally, Emotionally, Physically and Psychologically), in the average between “Little” to “Quite a bit”. As a welfare provider we should not ignore these data and make sure that we interact with the seafarers to provide (through mass media and other instruments) support for their physical and mental wellbeing.



Financially	Very little	Little	Quite a bit	A lot	Very much
Responses	22	25	64	62	190
Percentage	10%	7%	18%	17%	52%

It is the response to the last question (Financially) that reveals where COVID-19 has hit deeply the lives of seafarers. It is on the financial aspect where welfare providers, with the assistance of different donors, should intervene, not only with emergency funds for their immediate needs but with livelihood projects to sustain them in the long run (six months/one year), while the maritime industry recovers.

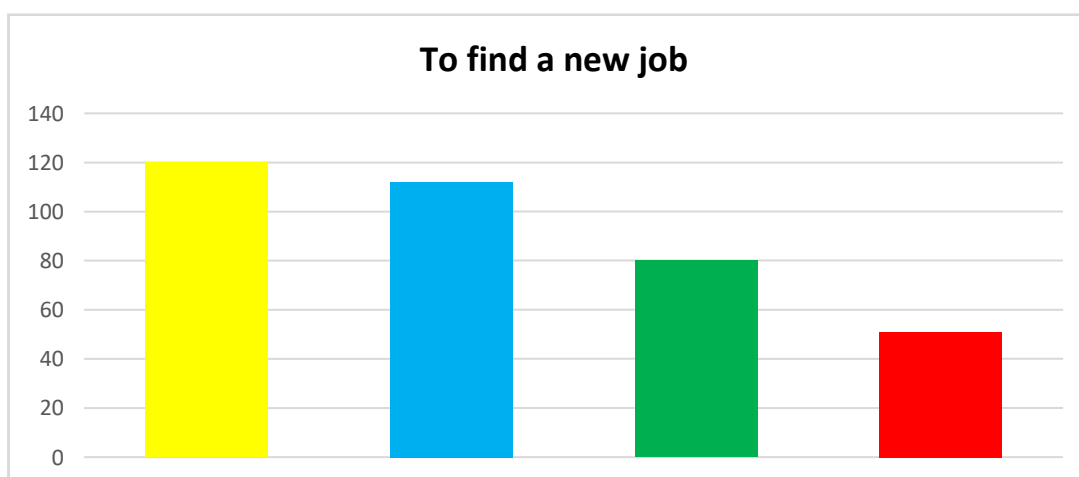
- 5) The fifth set of questions was aimed at discovering what are the relevant issues in the life of the seafarers for the next six months/one year.

How relevant are the following issues for you in the next six months/one year?

Four possible answers: (1) Not much relevant (2) Relevant (3) Very relevant (4) Urgent



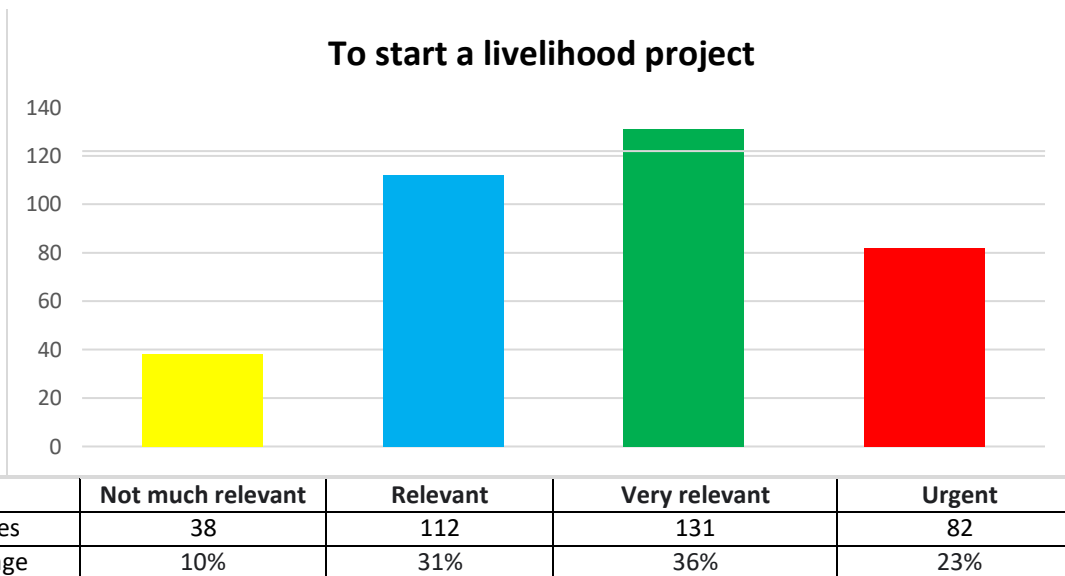
	Not much relevant	Relevant	Very relevant	Urgent
Responses	30	69	112	152
Percentage	8%	19%	31%	42%



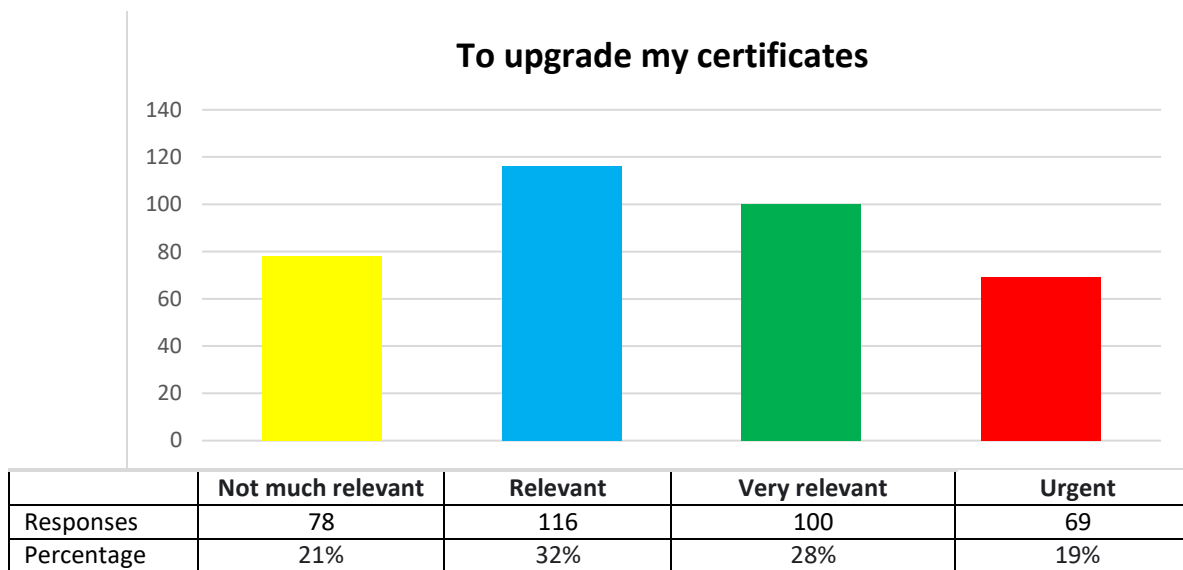
	Not much relevant	Relevant	Very relevant	Urgent
Responses	120	112	80	51
Percentage	33%	31%	22%	14%

It appears clear that for the majority of the respondents the most urgent need is to get a new contract and go back to work and they are not contemplating the idea of looking for a new job. This may be explained by the fact that the majority of them have invested so much to become a seafarers and have been in this profession only between 5 to

15 years.



Only 10% of the responses regarding starting a livelihood project consider it “*Not much relevant*”. This is a field that Stella Maris in cooperation with the principal donors could explore in providing “seed money” to start a small business to support the family of the seafarers while it is waiting to return on board and guarantee a minimum and stable income to be used for the ordinary running expenses and in emergencies.



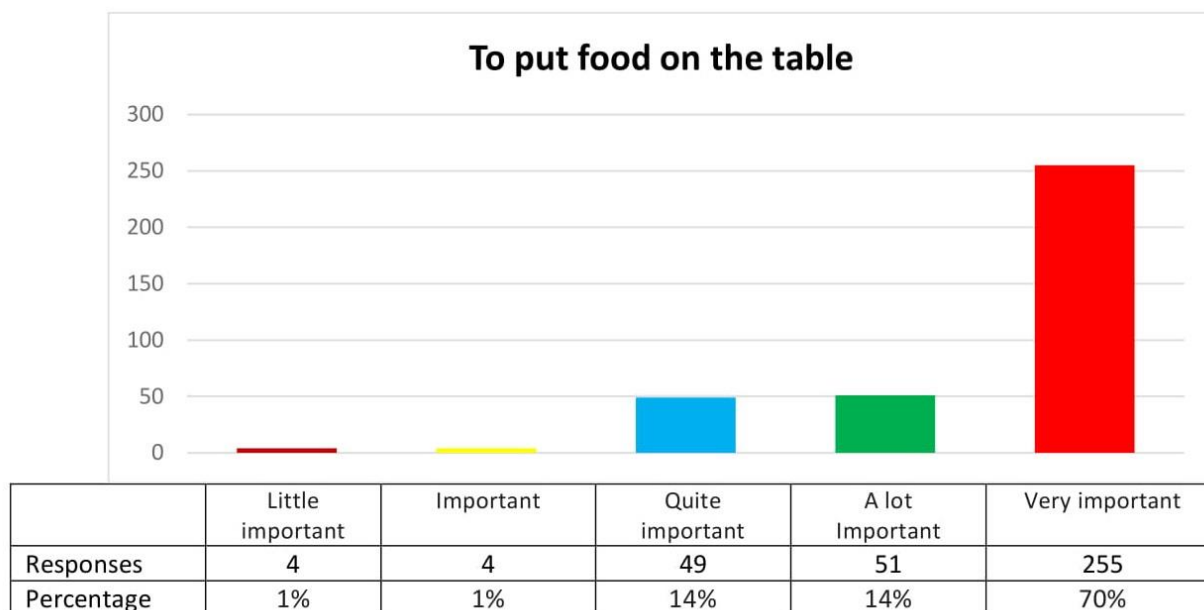
At the moment it appears that the issue of upgrading their certificates is not a priority first because many Port Authorities have extended the validity of the Certificates, for a couple of months or until the end of the situation of emergency created by COVID-19. The problem of money could emerge when later they will need to renew it and will have to pay for it.

- 6) The sixth set of questions would like to know the importance for the seafarer and their family of some regular expenses.

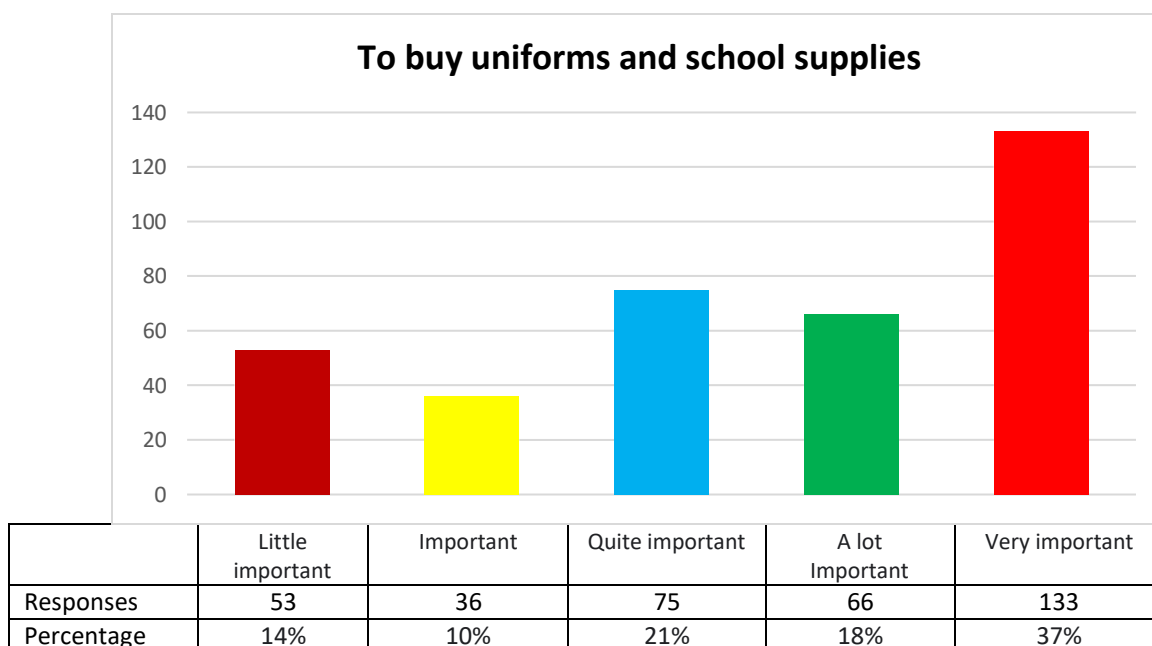
Please rate the importance to you and your family

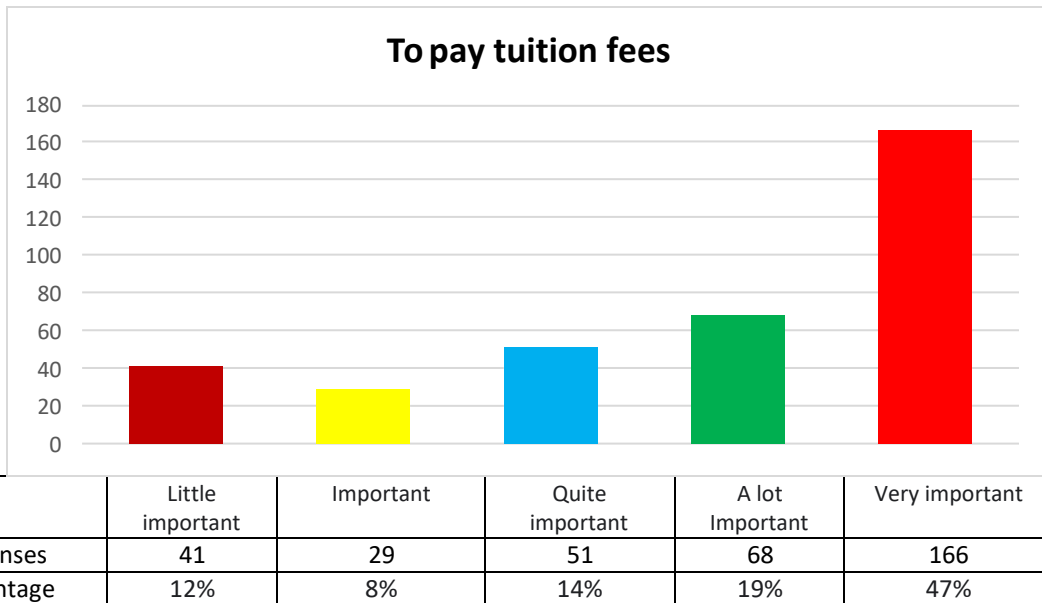
Five possible answers: (1) Little important (2) Important (3) Quite important (4) A lot important (5) Very important

The responses to the whole set of questions is considered *“Very important”* and it is in line with one of the previous questions that was identifying that the main impact in the life of the seafarers was financial.

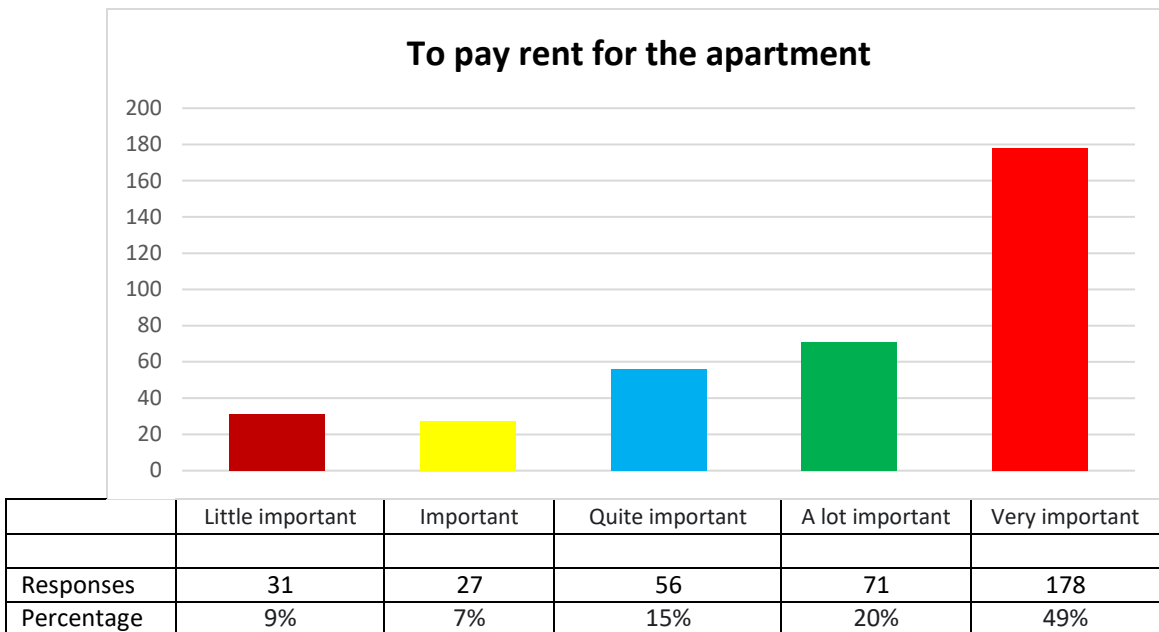


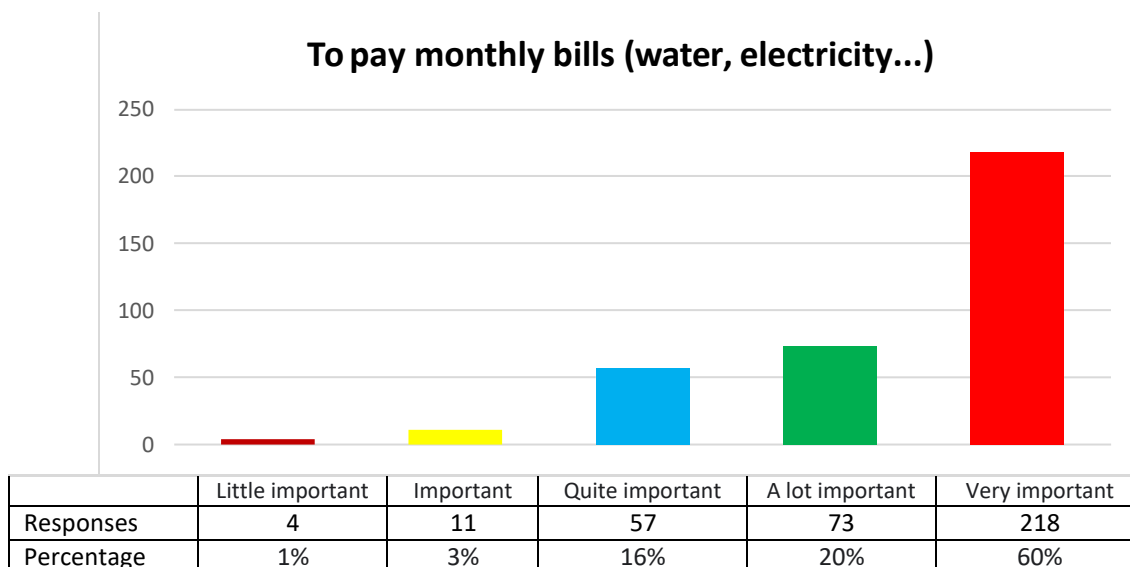
To provide daily food for their extended family members is the most pressing need. It will be even more pressing in the next few months when the emergency relief goods provided now by governments and charities will stop and even the little saving set aside for the rainy days disappear and seafarers will be waiting to be called for a new contract.



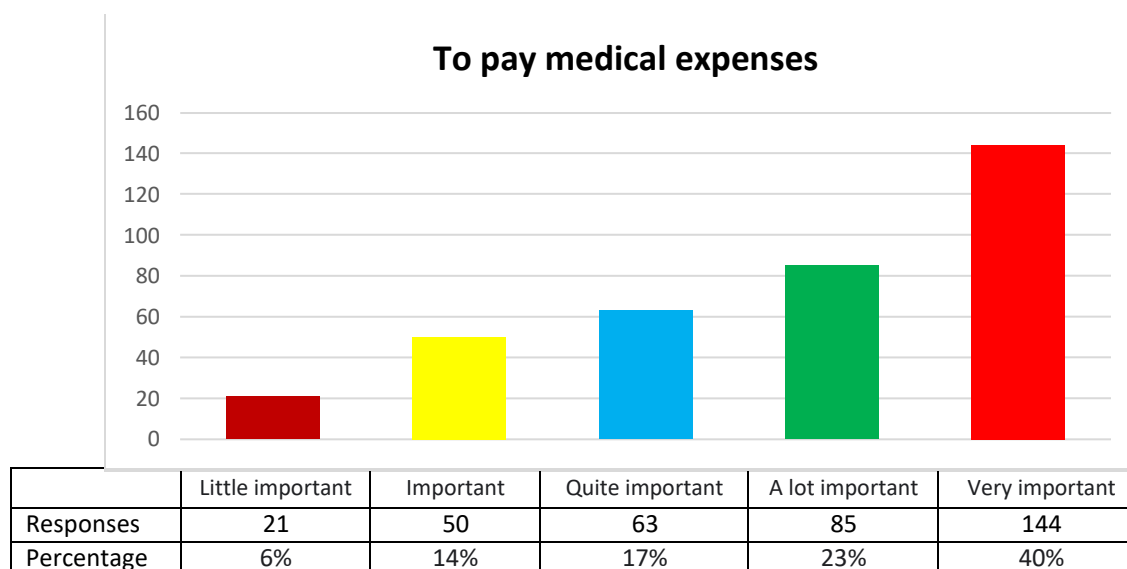


Instruction is an extremely important aspect of the life of many seafarers, who after being helped by the whole family to study and start their career, now have to work and help their brothers and sisters to have an education. To buy uniforms, school supplies, and the payment of tuition fees is an issue that will show its urgency in a few months' time (August) when the school will resume.

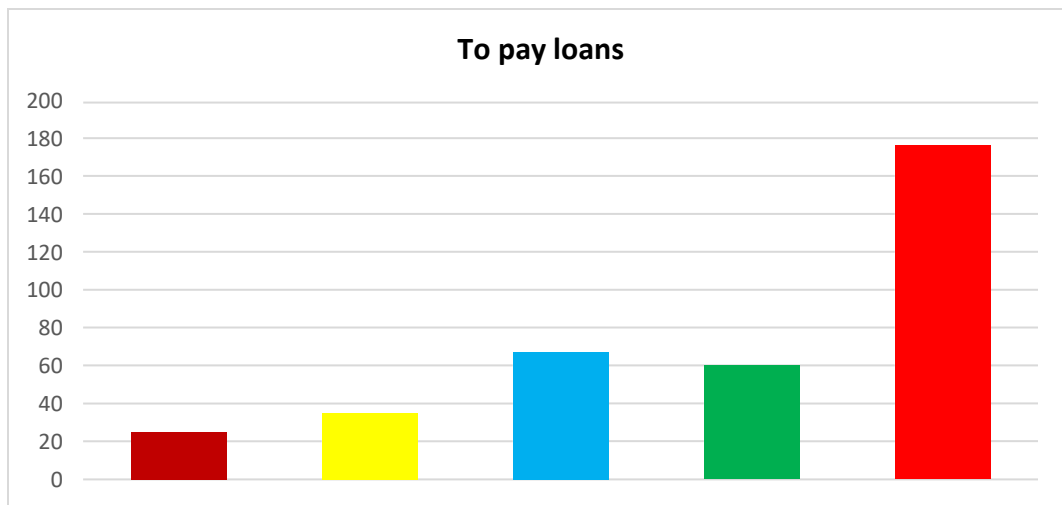




The monthly payment of all the above mentioned expenses are “*Very important*” for the seafarers because it guarantees a normal and regular life to their family. If they cannot afford to pay it after a few months, they will be evicted. The alternative is to return to the Province where their parents might live, but since they are already used to the city life, they might choose to live in a “squatter area” enlarging the number of people living at the margin of the society.



The medical expenses are not a regular monthly expenditure, but nonetheless they should be considered because in most of the countries that we are considering there is no National Medical Insurance, while medicines and hospitals are rather expensive.



	Little important	Important	Quite important	A lot important	Very important
Responses	25	35	67	60	176
Percentage	7%	10%	18%	17%	40%

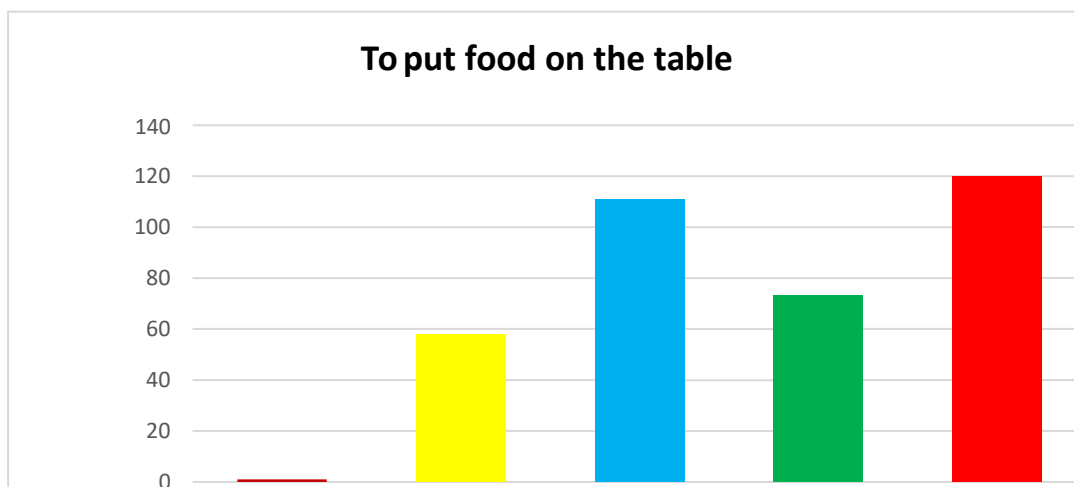
Many respondents consider the payments of loans “*Very important*” because most probably after starting their career in the maritime world they felt enough secure to buy an apartment/house or a car by taking out loans from a bank or a specialized company. Since they were working, they didn’t have problems to pay the monthly amortization bill. Now that they are not working they cannot pay regularly, and the next few months the risk is that the bank or the lending company will repossess their apartment/house or car, it doesn’t matter how much they have already paid.

It is necessary that the welfare providers with the donors research and study the best way to assist the seafarers in continuing to pay monthly their loans or their dreams to provide a better future for their loved ones, will be gone forever.

7) The seventh set of questions was aimed at finding out how much is the monthly cost of the following

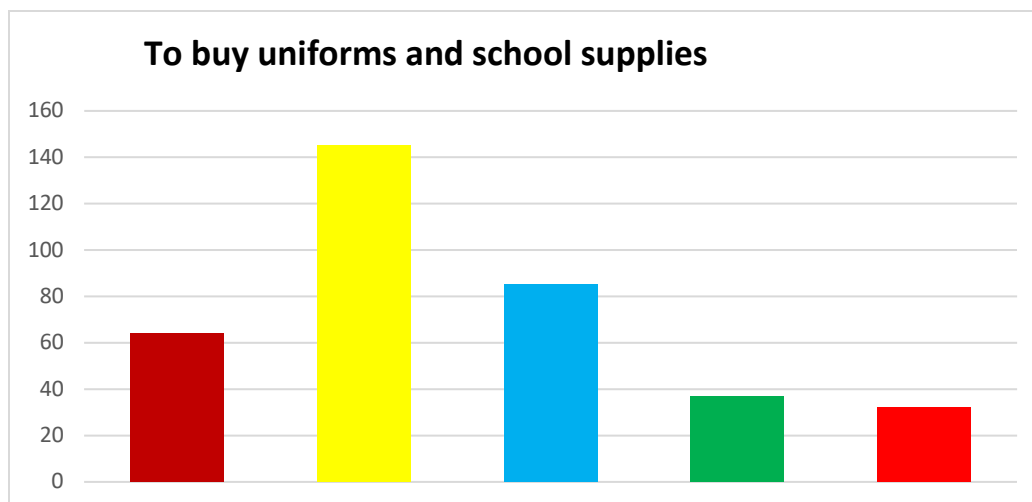
What are your usual monthly costs for the following?

Five possible answers: (1) \$ 0 (2) \$ 100 (3) \$ 200 (4) \$ 300 (5) \$ 400



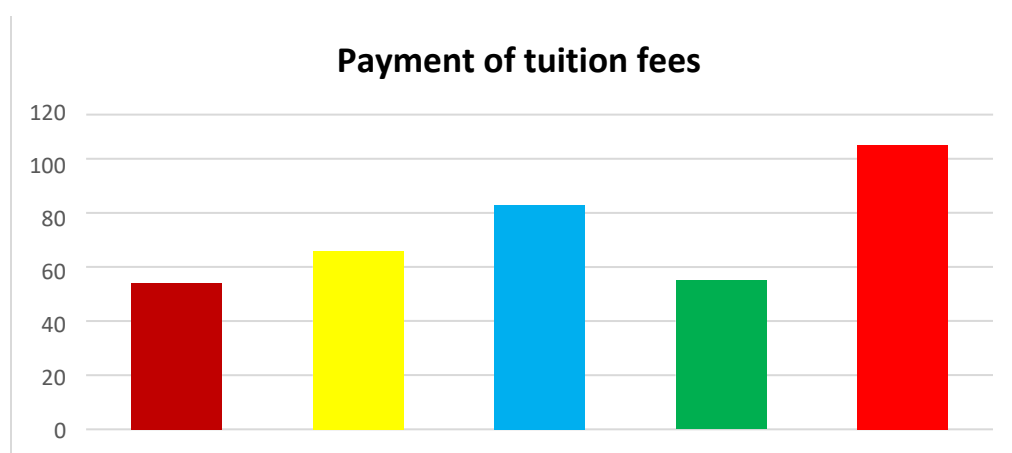
Amount	\$0	\$ 100	\$ 200	\$ 300	\$ 400
Responses	1	58	111	73	120
Percentage	0%	16%	31%	20%	33%

The cost of putting food on the table for the majority of seafarers varies between US\$ 200 to US\$ 400 according to the number of people forming the extended family.



Amount	\$0	\$100	\$200	\$300	\$400
Responses	64	145	85	37	32
Percentage	18%	40%	23%	10%	9%

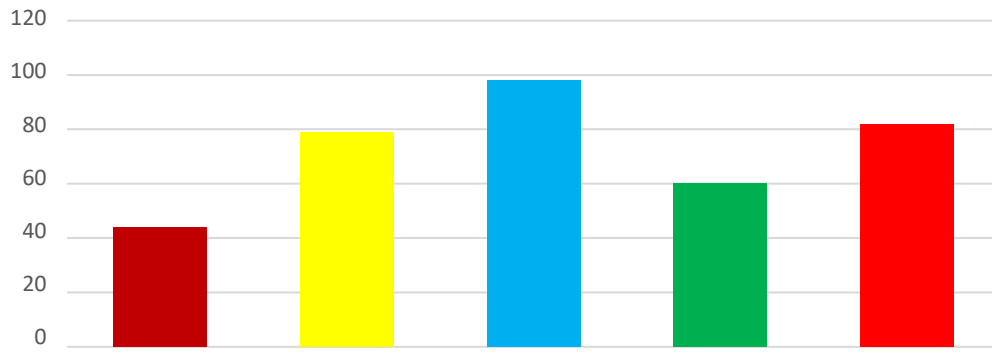
Uniforms and school supplies appear not to be very expensive ranging between US\$ 100 to US\$ 200. This is one of the expenses where Stella Maris and the funding agencies could easily provide assistance by buying school supplies in bulk and then distributing these.



Amount	\$0	\$100	\$200	\$300	\$400
Responses	54	66	83	55	105
Percentage	15%	18%	23%	15%	29%

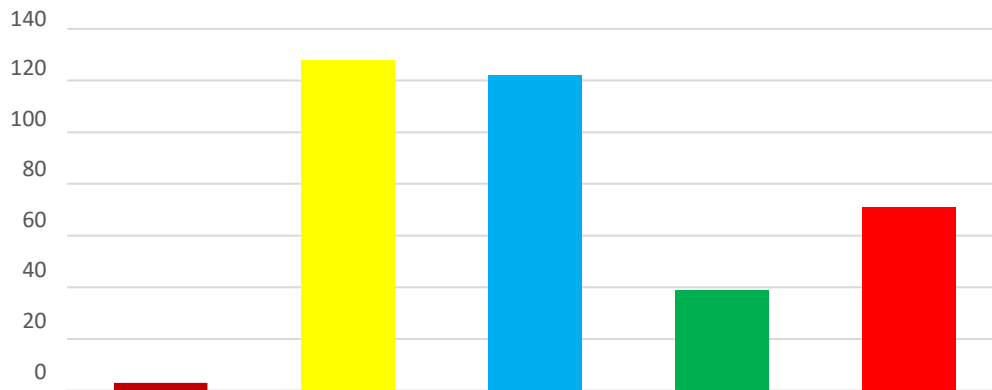
For almost 30% of the respondents the cost of the tuition fees is around US\$ 400, because they generally send their children to private schools, where education is better. If they remain unemployed the seafarers could have to send their children to government schools. In cooperation with the different Maritime Schools, it should be considered providing scholarship to some of the maritime students.

Monthly rent for the apartment



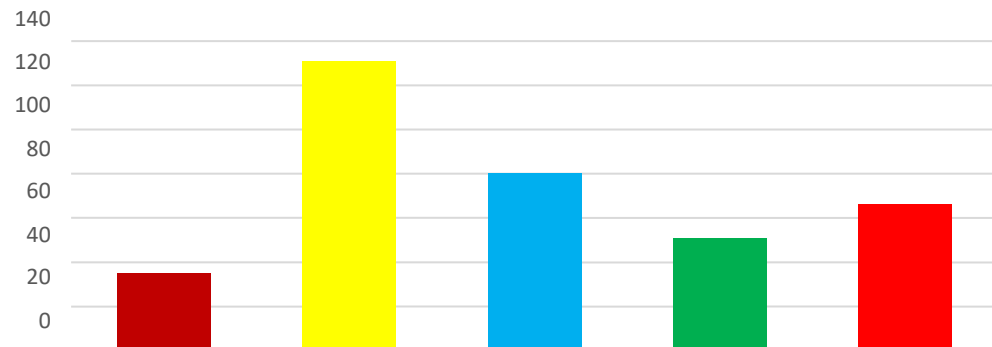
Amount	\$0	\$100	\$200	\$300	\$400
Responses	44	79	98	60	82
Percentage	12%	22%	27%	16%	23%

Monthly bills (water, electricity...)

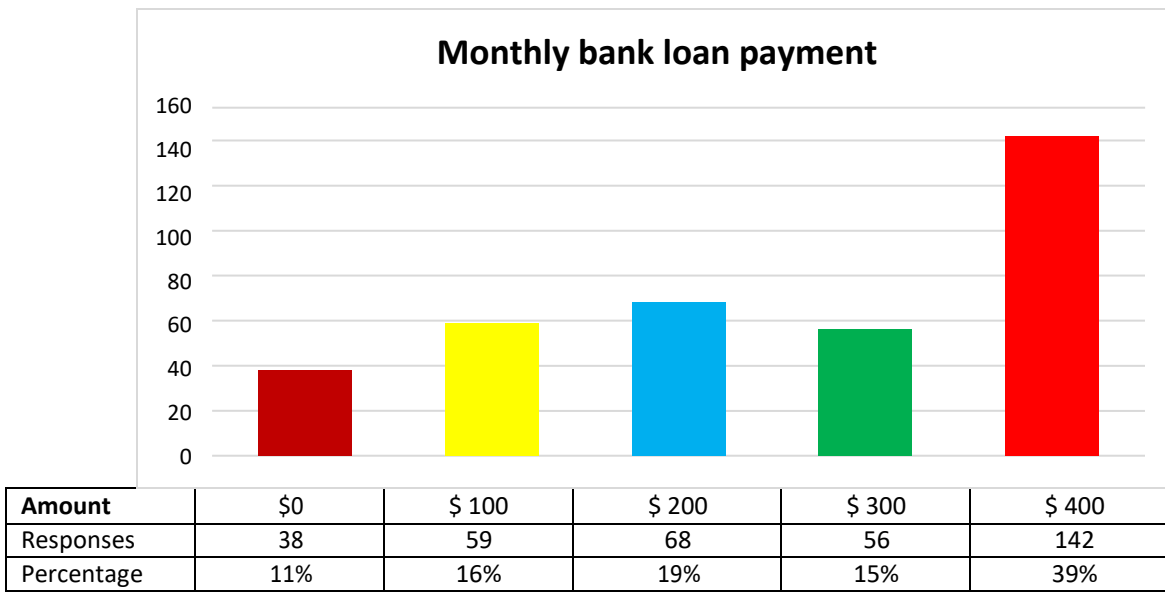


Amount	\$0	\$100	\$200	\$300	\$400
Responses	3	128	122	39	71
Percentage	1%	35%	34%	11%	19%

Monthly medical expenses



Amount	\$0	\$100	\$200	\$300	\$400
Responses	35	131	80	51	66
Percentage	10%	36%	22%	14%	18%

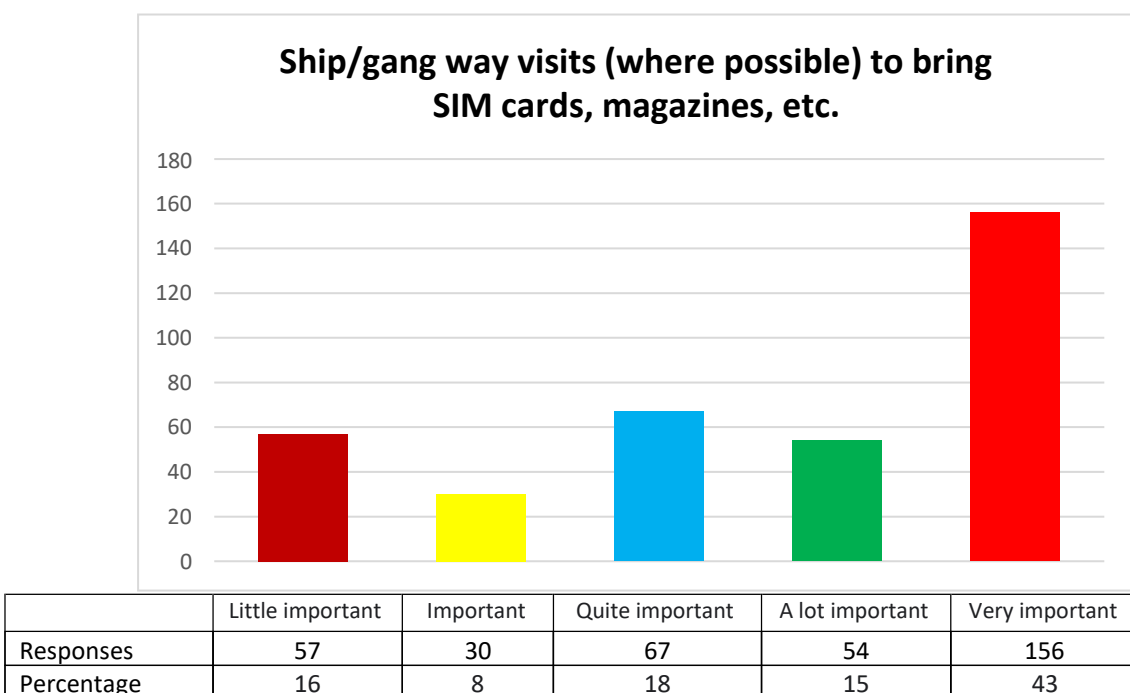


A good 40% are having a monthly loan payment of US\$ 400 that is in line with the investment done to buy an apartment/house or a car. The main issue is that many of the seafarers have just paid only between two to five years of a 10/15 year loan and unless they return to work or find an alternative source of income, they will lose everything.

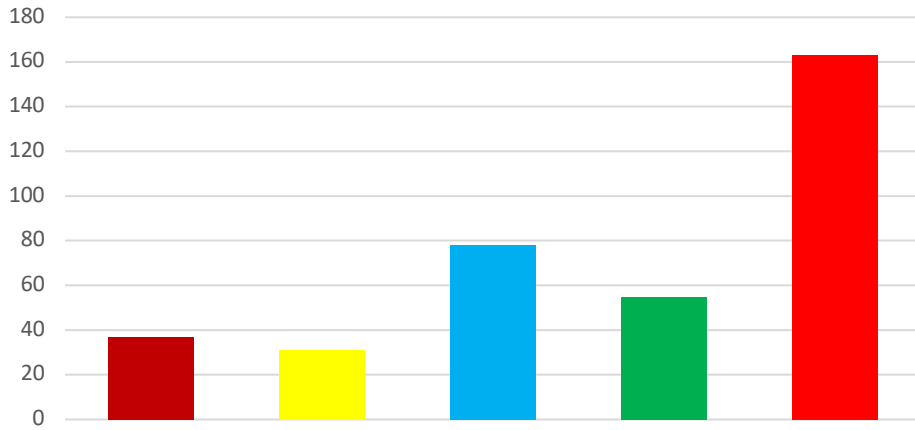
8) The eight set of questions deals directly on what kind of assistance Stella Maris Network can provide to the seafarers.

How can Stella Maris (Apostleship of the Sea) help you at this time while you are in port?

Five possible answers: (1) Little important (2) Important (3) Quite important (4) A lot important (5) Very important

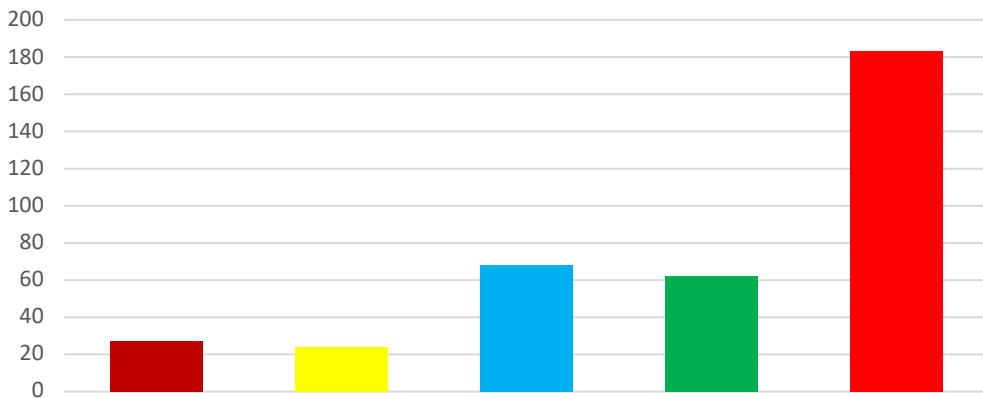


Provide pastoral support via social media (mass on streaming, counselling, chatting...)



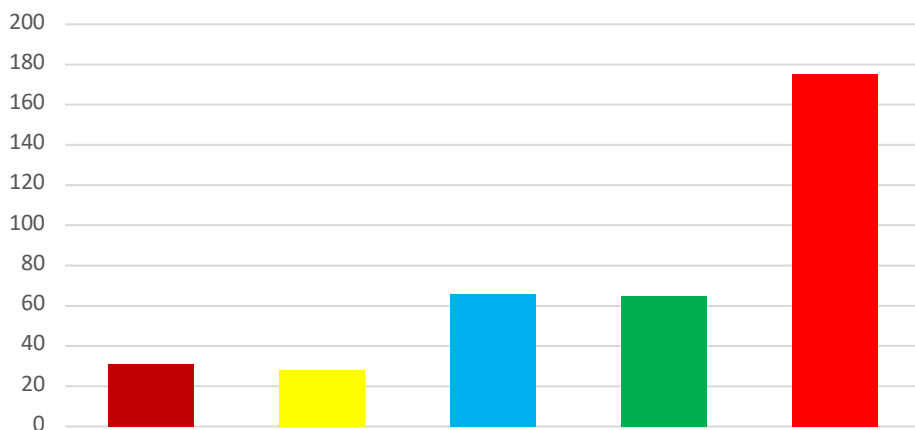
	Little important	Important	Quite important	A lot important	Very important
Responses	37	31	78	55	163
Percentage	10	9	21	15	45

Provide information on the COVID-19



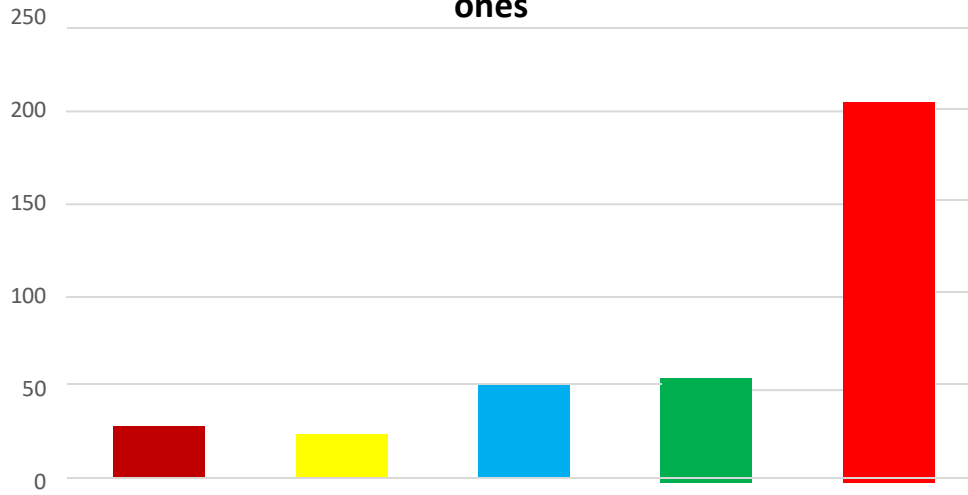
	Little important	Important	Quite important	A lot important	Very important
Responses	27	24	68	62	183
Percentage	7	7	19	17	50

Provide Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) (masks, gloves, sanitizer for hands, etc.)



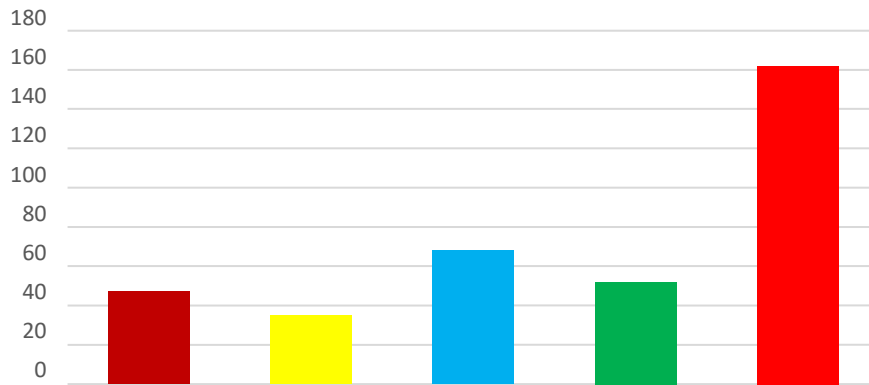
	Little important	Important	Quite important	A lot important	Very important
Responses	31	28	66	65	174
Percentage	8	8	18	18	48

Wi-Fi provision to communicate with your loved ones



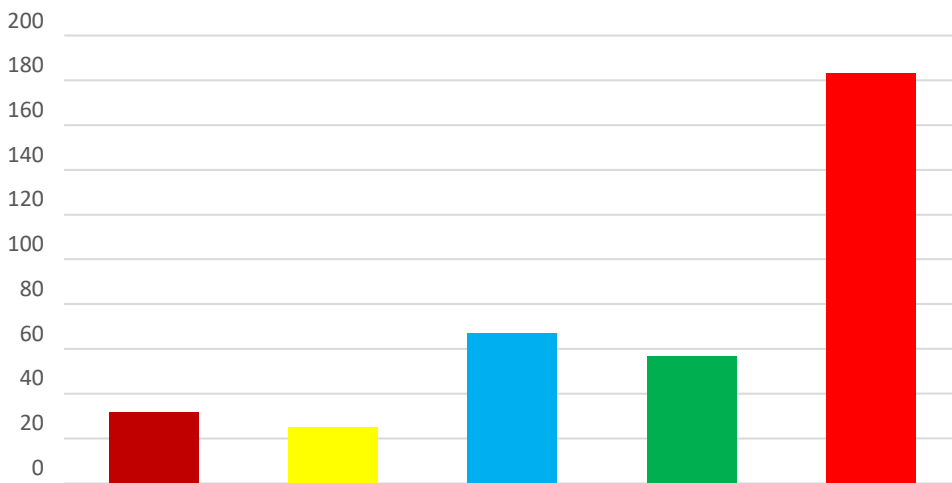
	Little important	Important	Quite important	A lot important	Very important
Responses	22	23	53	56	205
Percentage	8	6	15	15	56

Transport home



	Little important	Important	Quite important	A lot important	Very important
Responses	47	35	68	52	162
Percentage	13	10	19	14	44

Financial support



	Little important	Important	Quite important	A lot important	Very important
Responses	32	25	67	57	183
Percentage	9	7	18	16	50

The answers to the question in which way the Stella Maris Network could help the seafarers, do not leave any doubt. The majority of the responses is "*Very important*", the seafarers are sending a clear message for our chaplains and volunteers.

We must be PRESENT to the seafarers and, where it is possible, even on board.

Prepared by:

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18th May 2020