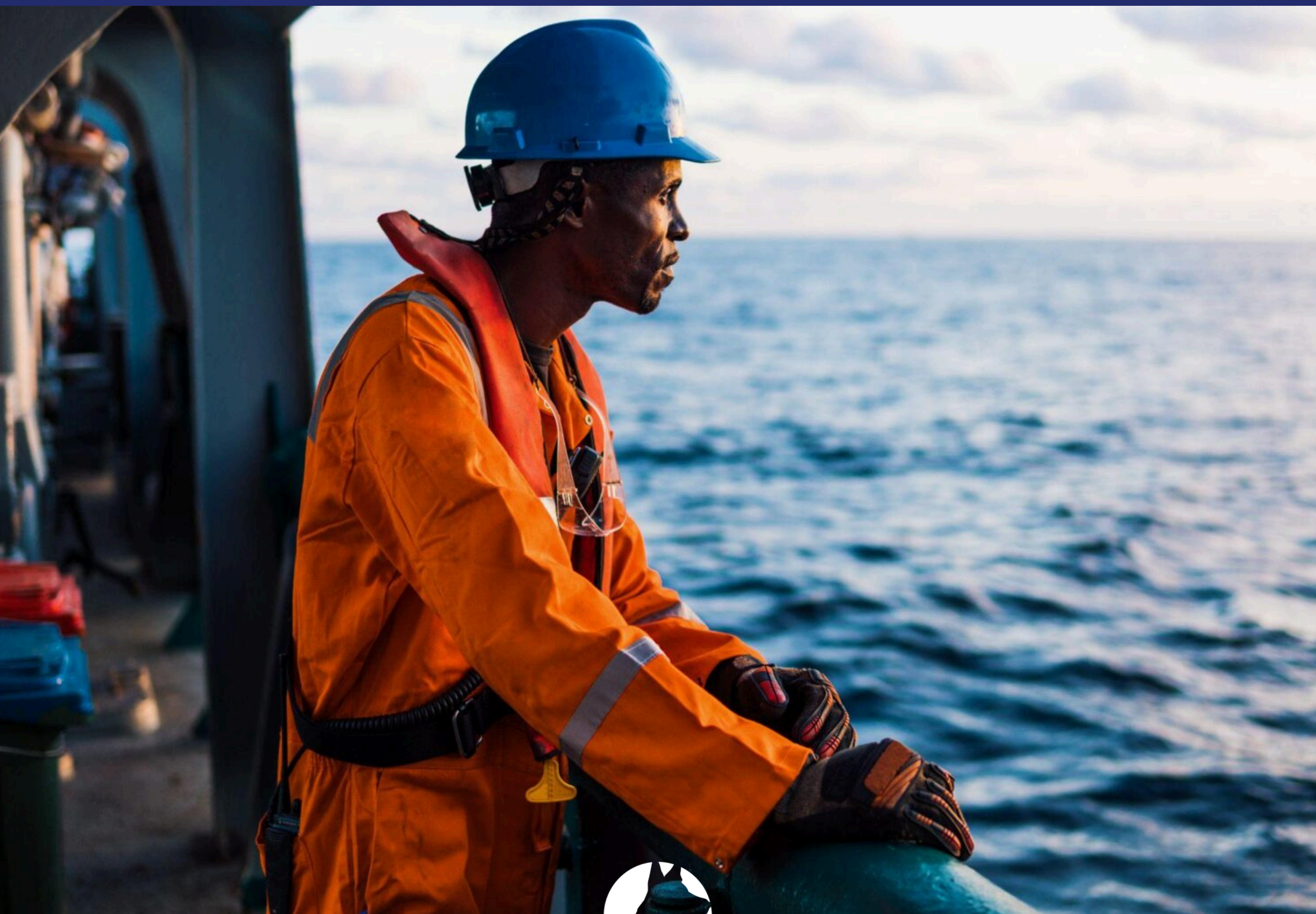


# The human factor

REPORT 001

Risk analysis data on maritime workers and the drug-related risks on vessels.



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

On the security crisis in the maritime sector and the risks associated with the human factor.

Brazil is at the center of a maritime route increasingly pressured by the global cocaine market. The World Drug Report published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) indicates that the expansion of consumption and illicit markets continues to grow and, in the case of cocaine, has reached record production levels in recent years.

Official data explains why Brazilian ports have become a preferred target: inspection failures, limited checks and inspections, and negligence by shipowners and port operators in strengthening the security of their operations. In addition, shipping routes from Brazil serve as a gateway for exporting cocaine to major international markets in Europe, Asia, and Africa.

Therefore, vessels, containers, and custody chains have increasingly become contested “infrastructure” used by criminal networks for illicit exports. In this context, the most common pattern is the contamination of containers and legitimate cargo.

### The human factor

Among all the variables within the complex scenario of international drug trafficking through ports, this report aims to provide an overview of the human factor that connects all fronts, with a focus on port and maritime workers, such as seafarers.

In the following pages, you will find relevant data and insights on how and why some of our most essential workers have been coerced by trafficking networks. This report aims to guide and help shipowners and all those who can be affected, directly or not, by the security crisis our maritime institutions are facing.

# 1. The risks of the human factor

## Maritime workers and the criminal coercion in ports

The human factor we are referring to consists primarily of maritime and port workers. These workers are essential to the functioning of logistics chains, yet they are targeted by criminal groups seeking to compromise cargo and ships by smuggling drugs, guns, or explosives on board. Criminal agents use techniques ranging from bribery to threats against the safety of port workers or their families to establish connections in ports worldwide. Financial difficulties, emotional and social isolation offshore, and precarious working conditions are some of the reasons why port workers may accept offers from drug traffickers.

### 1.1 Criminal Triad of Action Against Individuals

#### Exploitation of vulnerabilities

Prior to making contact, criminals identify and exploit the seafarer's weaknesses, such as addictions, debts, health conditions, etc.

#### Intimidation through direct or implied threats

This is a coercive method that turns an 'invitation' into something the individual feels unable to refuse

#### Incentive through money, benefits, protection, favors

It generally serves to keep the person cooperating and, often, trapped within the criminal acts.



## 2. CLASSIC TRIAD OF CORRUPTION

Why are seafarers so prone to bribery and criminal coercion?

### 2.1 OPORTUNITY

- Access to areas of the ship that are of interest to criminals.
- Lack of cross-checking creates gaps on monitoring them
- Ports with weak oversight and random inspections
- Low integration between authorities
- Lack of rigorous record-keeping of who enters and leaves the vessel.
- Loading/unloading operations in the early morning with reduced staff
- "Dead zones" of surveillance on certain decks or outdoor areas.
- Crew member who fills out checklists, manifests, or cargo records on their own
- Possibility of omitting or "adjusting" information without immediate detection

### 2.2 MOTIVATION

#### Economic

- Low wages and wage stagnation
- Wage disparities between nationalities and companies
- Land debt
- Feeling of too much effort for little financial reward
- Opportunity to make money fast

#### Labor and operational

- Excessive workload and fatigue
- Long periods offshore
- Social and family isolation due to work
- Constant tiredness and exhaustion
- Exposure to stagnant labor laws

#### Institutional failures

- Lack of trust in management
- Lack of training and development
- Distant relationship with superiors
- Absence of clear policies for reporting crimes



## Emotional and social

- Family vulnerabilities such as illness or financial problems
- Loneliness due to long periods at sea
- Feeling of "help" or solidarity coming from criminals
- Psychological exhaustion
- Threats to family members in the country of origin
- An attraction to feelings of power and "being respected" in certain places

## 2.3 RACIONALIZATION

- Creation of internal justifications that convince them it's ok to do it
- Belief that what they are doing is not so wrong compared to the already fragile environment in which they operate
- Minimizing risk and damage
- Victimization followed by compensation
- Normalization through a negative culture surrounding the ports
- Transfer of responsibility to third parties
- Emotional arguments

## 2.4 OTHER RISK POINTS

- Lack of knowledge of maritime regulations and legal provisions
- Facilitating access for third parties in controlled areas
- Third part companies also operating in ports and on ships
- Weak or corrupt leadership can facilitate criminal infiltration
- Lack of attention to movements that compromise cargo
- Difficulty in detecting risk scenarios or suspicious behavior



### 3. SECURITY PROTOCOLS AS SOLUTIONS

The complex scenario presented in this report highlights human vulnerabilities that are exploited as opportunities by crime. In order to mitigate these risks, security processes and protocols capable of addressing these situations are of utmost urgency at port operations throughout Brazil.

#### DECK SECURITY + K9 INSPECTIONS

Our track record with K9 inspections makes **DBK9** your safest and most reliable partner in major Brazilian ports. In our Deck Security service, we operate in the port of anchorage with a team (man + dog) conducting constant patrols as security agents, but with the added benefit of having a dog always available to detect suspicious activity or hidden narcotics.

In addition, this operation includes integrated video monitoring — a cutting-edge solution that raises the bar for onboard and port security. Our security personnel are equipped with advanced body cameras, ensuring live streaming and continuous monitoring of all shipboard operations.

Under our security protocols, risks associated with the human factor become more predictable and easier to contain by professionals who have the necessary technique and experience to deal with these situations.



## 4. GENERAL DATA SOURCES



### SEAFARERS HAPPINESS INDEX

The Seafarers Happiness Index (SHI) is a quarterly index of well-being for seafarers, created in 2015 by The Mission to Seafarers organization to measure and track the satisfaction level of those who work on board ships. It functions as a "thermometer" of life at sea.



### 2026 EUROPOL REPORT

This report explores how criminal networks are employing maritime cocaine trafficking methods that either circumvent commercial ports as entry points into Europe or rely on concealment techniques designed to undermine the effectiveness of visual inspections, scanners and detection.



### INVESTIGATIVE REPORT: Human factor

The article on the UOL portal emphasizes that the "human factor" is seen by authorities as the greatest vulnerability of the port system. It also points to the increase in seizures in containers and the trend of expanding maritime trafficking, in addition to mapping the route originating mainly in the Andean countries.



### INVESTIGATIVE REPORT: Cargueiros do Pó

This special report by Metr opoles investigates how international cocaine trafficking uses maritime transport to move drugs from the Brazilian coast to ports in Europe and Africa), highlighting the role of maritime workers and divers recruited to fix or hide shipments in strategic points on vessels.



### INVESTIGATIVE REPORT: Portos Infiltrados

A series of video reports produced by Rede Record's journalism team about criminal activity in ports, their adaptations and expansions in Brazilian ports. It features segments focused on the port of Santos, the largest port complex in Latin America, and also the main criminal groups currently in action.



### NEWS PORTAL SEGURAN A PORTU RIA EM FOCO

A Brazilian portal for monitoring and curating news about port security, with weekly data on seizures, drug hiding places, ports where they occurred, vulnerabilities, advances, and challenges in Brazilian and international port security. It also brings information about who, among port workers and maritime workers, was involved in the seizures.



### POWDER FOREST REPORT

The report and investigative piece by The Intercept Brazil highlight the link between cocaine trafficking and threats to the Amazon, indigenous peoples, and international criminal factions. It emphasizes the role of religious groups as agents of coercion and recruitment of individuals for crime.





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**ANALYSIS REPORT**  
**2026**

