

# USVs Offer a Solution for Staffing Problems



A 12m unmanned surface vehicle (USV) recently set sail from the English coast to the Belgian port of Ostend. It was guided across the North Sea one of the busiest waterways in the world remote control and sailed through a wind farm as well. A few hours later, after traversing two busy shipping lanes, the vessel arrived safely at the port of call: a great achievement for the crew that steered the USV remotely from the control centre in England.

For seafarers who fear that far-reaching automation and other technological innovations will jeopardize their jobs, it should be reassuring that they can put their knowledge and experience to good use in a control centre where unmanned vessels are kept on course.

For them, it could in fact be a real advantage that they no longer have to stay aboard for weeks or even months, far removed from their family and social life. More and more jobs for seafarers are available ashore; companies that focus on the manufacture and operation of USVs are constantly looking for well-educated and experienced maritime 'crew members

But, let's be realistic. According to a new study, visions of fleets of remote-controlled vessels sailing the world's oceans may take much longer to become a reality than technology firms predict. Automation is unlikely to lead to widescale job losses among seafarers over the next 20 years, a two-year study undertaken by the World Maritime University has concluded. Although new technology will reduce global demand for seafarers by around 22% between now and 2040, there will also be further growth in seaborne activities. This means sustained demand for skilled and experienced seafarers. Despite high levels of automation, qualified human resources with the right skill sets will still be needed in the foreseeable future.

As Durk Haarsma, director of strategy & business development at Geomares stated in his editorial in the previous issue, the hydrographic world is facing a staffing problem. Enough youngsters are graduating in this field, but after a few years many of them opt for a job ashore. The deployment of unmanned vessels, which is still in its infancy, undoubtedly offers opportunities for hydrographic specialists who, although they love their profession, no longer want a long-term stay on board a ship. At Hydro International, we will continue to keep a close eye on these developments for you.

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