



A knowledge product of the
International Seabed Authority's

See **H**er **E**xceed
GLOBAL MENTORING PROGRAMME

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Foreword



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The deep sea is a realm of extraordinary scientific discovery and profound responsibility. Even when access to this field was far from equal, women found ways to shape it: as oceanographers, engineers, mariners, expedition leaders and policymakers, they have helped chart the seabed, describe its ecosystems and build the governance frameworks through which humankind exercises its collective stewardship of the Area. Imagine, then, what they will accomplish when the path is fully open.

This is a matter that sits close to my heart. As an oceanographer, I spent many years at sea and understand how much is gained when women participate fully in ocean science. Evidence gathered through the International Seabed Authority's See Her Exceed (SHE) Global Mentoring Programme, supported by the Government of the Republic of France, confirms that logistical, safety, and social challenges continue to hinder women's participation in at-sea activities. Addressing these barriers is essential to enabling women to fully realise their potential in offshore professions.

The SHE Compact - A Voluntary Framework for the Safe, Inclusive and Equitable Participation of Women in At-Sea Activities – responds to this evidence. It puts forward seven key action areas addressed to the organisations that conduct, enable and govern at-sea activities. Partners work towards the action areas most relevant to their mandate, capacity and operational context, while the Secretariat supports implementation and facilitates best-practice exchange. The Compact is conceived as a durable instrument for continuous improvement, open to all and intended to serve the community of ocean professionals for as long as it is needed.

The mandate of the Authority under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea is to ensure that activities in the Area are carried out for the benefit of humankind as a whole. This mandate cannot be fulfilled while women remain underrepresented in the science that shapes our understanding of the deep sea, or while working conditions at sea are not safe and equitable for all. Equality of opportunity is a matter of principle, affirmed in the Charter of the United Nations and given expression in Sustainable Development Goal 5. It is equally a matter of quality. Inclusive teams produce stronger science, safer operations, greater innovation and more effective missions. Gender equality in ocean science is, quite simply, a prerequisite for science of the highest standard.

I therefore extend a standing invitation to all organisations engaged in offshore marine and maritime activities to join as Champions or implementing partners. Each organisation that does so strengthens a shared endeavour that will outlast any single programme, cohort or year.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'L. Reis de Carvalho'.

Mrs Leticia Reis de Carvalho
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Executive Summary

As a deliverable under the ISA Capacity Development Strategy, the SHE Compact establishes a voluntary framework for advancing gender equality in ocean-related sectors to increase the safe and inclusive participation of women in at-sea activities, including deep-sea expeditions, shipping, and other marine and maritime industries.

The Compact is based on an analysis of barriers to women's participation in at-sea activities undertaken by the pilot cohort of the ISA's See Her Exceed (SHE) Global Mentoring Programme (SHE Programme). The report was published in December 2025 and grounded in a mixed-methods research process^[1]. The methodology included in-depth interviews conducted by the SHE mentees with 12 marine professionals with extensive experience in offshore expeditions and an anonymous global survey that received 149 responses, generating both qualitative narratives and quantitative insights into the persistent and significant barriers women face when participating in offshore activities.

The research findings put forward four categories of barriers identified by respondents:

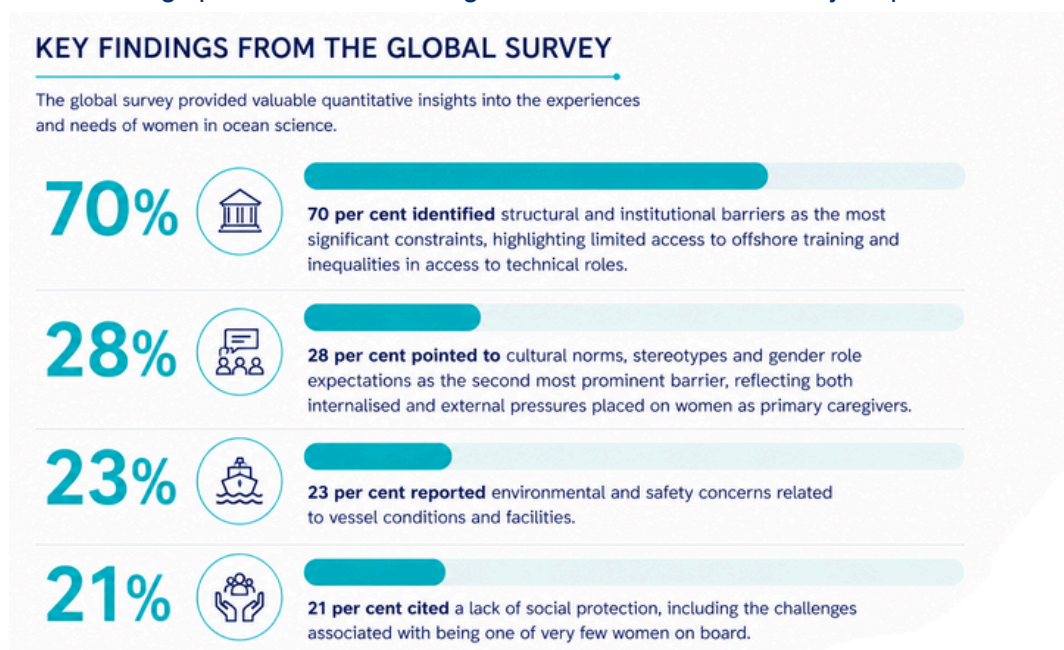


Figure 1. Summary of Key Findings from the Global Survey. The four most frequently identified barriers to women's participation in at-sea activities.

In addition, the survey and interviews identified facilitators for women's participation in at-sea activities. A strong majority of respondents (80 per cent) emphasised the importance of supportive institutional policies as a key enabler followed by access to training and mentorship programmes (76 per cent).

In summary, the research of the pilot cohort of the SHE Community confirmed the existence of structural and cultural barriers which may continue to limit women's participation, particularly for those from developing countries. These systemic issues not only hinder women's careers but also compromise the safety and inclusivity of offshore environments.

[1] SHE-Knowledge-Ouptut-1-Gender-Guidelines_Advancing-gender-equity-in-deep-sea-research-activities_addressing-the-barriers-to-womens-participation-in-at-sea-missions.pdf



Recognising the need for collective action, the SHE community decided to develop the SHE Gender Compact as the programme's third knowledge product. The Compact establishes a voluntary framework to address these barriers and promote safer, more equitable, and inclusive participation in at-sea activities.

To enhance the legitimacy of the SHE Compact and strengthen its foundation, a stakeholder consultation was undertaken from February to July 2026. Members of the Legal and Technical Commission, observers and contractors were invited to provide comments on the draft. A total of 810 responses were received, ranging from editorial suggestions to more substantive recommendations. A summary of the stakeholder consultation and the feedback received is available on the ISA webpage^[2]. The Secretariat reviewed the comments, and the revised draft was subjected to a final review by the SHE pilot cohort community. This iterative process resulted in the current version of the SHE Compact.

The SHE Compact is a living and dynamic document whose content will continue to evolve to ensure its accuracy and relevance through use and additional consultation. Regular stocktaking exercises and the publication of lessons learnt on a dedicated webpage of the Authority will help to ensure that the SHE Compact remains responsive to changing realities over time.

SHE Compact Action Areas

Informed by the findings of the pilot cohort of SHE and enriched by the stakeholder feedback received, this SHE Compact sets out seven evidence-based key action areas supported by examples of actionable strategies. These key action areas call on organisations engaged in offshore marine and maritime activities - including research institutions, universities, non-governmental organisations, civil society and environmental organisations, ISA contractors, and vessel operators - to advance equality and inclusion at sea.

The SHE Compact provides a practical foundation enabling organisations to take concrete, measurable steps towards fostering safer, fairer, and more inclusive environments that enable all individuals, both women and men, to thrive in offshore work. Its seven key action areas address the following interconnected areas:

- Policy and Institutional Actions;
- Safety and Infrastructure;
- Career Progression and Leadership;
- Education, Training, and Capacity Building;
- Health and Well-being;
- Best practices and lessons learnt;
- Cross-Sectoral Learning.

By becoming an implementing partner to this Compact on a voluntary basis and for a duration determined by each partner, organisations indicate their intention to work towards implementing at least two of the seven key action areas outlined below, in a manner appropriate to their mandate, capacity, and operational context.

^[2] [Summary Stakeholder Consultations, July 2026](#)



SHE | GENDER COMPACT

*A Voluntary Framework for the Safe, Inclusive and Equitable Participation of Women
in At-Sea Activities*

III.1 Compact Preamble

[3]

The legitimacy of the SHE Programme, and thus of the Compact, rests on a pre-existing foundation: the voluntary commitment made by the International Seabed Authority at the 2017 United Nations Ocean Conference to promote the empowerment of women. This commitment has been translated into the sixth research priority of the Authority's Action Plan for Marine Scientific Research in support of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development and the fourth key result area of the ISA's Capacity Development Strategy, adopted by the Assembly in 2020 and 2022, respectively.

These institutional frameworks are grounded in the global commitment to gender equality enshrined in Sustainable Development Goal 5, and in particular Target 5.5, which calls for women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

Specifically, the Compact contributes to the delivery of output 4e of the ISA's Capacity Development Strategy and outlines the principles that stakeholders can commit to implementing to foster a safe, inclusive, and empowering environment for women at sea. The SHE Compact is grounded in the principle of equality and is not intended to confer preferential treatment to any individual or group.

Deliberately, the primary beneficiaries of the SHE Compact are women. This reflects the evidence base underpinning its development, which specifically examined women's experiences in at-sea activities. This also accords with the Authority's longstanding institutional commitments to advancing women's leadership in deep-sea-related activities.

[3] [ISBA/26/A/4](#), [ISBA/26/A/17](#), [ISBA/27/A/5](#), [ISBA/27/A/11](#)

[4] [#OceanAction15467](#)

[5] [ISBA/27/A/5 para:34](#)

III.2 Our Shared Vision

We envision a safe, inclusive, and equitable offshore sector where everyone, and women in particular, can fully participate, thrive, and lead. Through this Compact, we aim to make a concerted effort to dismantle systemic barriers, advance gender equality and foster accountability through transparent, measurable and time-bound actions.



Figure 2. Shared Vision. A shared commitment to creating safe, inclusive and equitable at-sea environments where women can participate, thrive and lead.



III.3 Stakeholders and Modalities of Support

The Compact is open to:

- Marine Scientific and Research Institutions and Ocean Science Centres
- Vessel Owners, Operators and Shipping Companies
- Contractors and Private-Sector Partners
- Universities and Technical Agencies
- Multilateral and Intergovernmental Organisations
- Member States and Sponsoring States
- Non-Governmental and Civil Society Organisations, including Environmental NGOs
- Other Marine and Maritime Industries and Stakeholders

Organisations may engage with the Compact in two main ways.

Champions advocate for the objectives of the SHE Compact and contribute to a structured process of dialogue aimed at broadly advancing gender inclusion in offshore environments. This modality is open to a wide range of stakeholders – including those operating at the policy, coordination, or advocacy level – that may contribute through awareness-raising, capacity-building, knowledge-sharing, and support to the broader visibility and uptake of the SHE Compact. Champions open doors to potential implementing partners and facilitate dialogue with the ISA Secretariat by designating a focal point.

Implementing partners indicate their intention to work towards implementing at least two of the seven key action areas outlined below, as appropriate to their respective roles and capacities and for as long as they choose to participate. Flexibility is essential in this voluntary initiative. This modality is particularly relevant for organisations with operational responsibility for at-sea or offshore working environments which are best placed to deliver tangible improvements in onboard practices, working environments, and safety standards. The intent is to reflect on best practices and lessons learnt regularly through the Community of Practice described in Section IV. Recognising that implementing partners may be at different stages of maturity, implementation will follow a continuous-improvement approach. Becoming an implementing partner under this Compact is entirely voluntary and does not create any legal or institutional obligations. Implementing partners may choose to withdraw from the Compact at any time.

Organisations whose mandates and operations span both advocacy and implementation may engage as both Champions and Implementing partners, reflecting the full scope of their contribution to the Compact's objectives. Organisations become Champions or Implementing partners of the SHE Compact through a letter of endorsement signed by senior leadership and designate a focal point for outreach and communication. The designated focal points of the Champions and Implementing partners will form part of the SHE Compact Community of Practice.

III.4 Guiding Principles

- **Equal Opportunities** – Ensuring equal access to at-sea roles, leadership, and decision-making opportunities regardless of gender. As mentioned above, this is consistent with Sustainable Development Goal 5, Target 5.5, which calls for ensuring women's full and effective participation consistent with Sustainable Development Goal 5, particularly Target 5.5.
- **Representation and Visibility** – Active promotion of women in scientific, technical, and operational leadership roles.
- **Inclusive Workplace Policies** – Family-friendly and flexible arrangements that enable women to undertake and sustain long-term offshore assignments.
- **Mentorship and Career Support** – Structured mentoring and advancement pathways tailored to women's needs.
- **Safety and Dignity** – Recognition of gender-specific safety needs throughout the expedition lifecycle, a zero-tolerance approach to misconduct onboard, and respect for physical, psychological, and operational safety, which are paramount.
- **Institutional Accountability** – Transparent reporting, measurable outcomes, and corrective action where gaps are identified.
- **Collaboration and Learning** – Sharing good practices across sectors and countries to build a culture of collective responsibility.



Figure 3. The SHE Gender Compact is guided by seven interconnected principles that provide the foundation for advancing safe, inclusive and equitable participation of women in at-sea activities.



7 Seven Key Action Areas

Towards Safe, Inclusive and Equitable Participation of Women in At-Sea Activities



1 Strengthen Leadership and Accountability in Gender Mainstreaming



2 Promote Flexible and Inclusive Policies that Enable Sustained Participation in At-Sea Activities.



3 Integrate Gender-Responsive Operational Management



4 Create Safe and Inclusive Work Environments



5 Provide Mentorship and Professional Development



6 Enhance Data Transparency and Monitoring



7 Foster Cross-Sectoral Collaboration



Key Action Area 1



Strengthen Leadership and Accountability in Gender Mainstreaming

- Appoint a senior-level individual responsible for supporting Compact actions and liaising with the ISA Secretariat, as the coordinating body.
- Develop a gender equity plan aligned with institutional strategy.
- Review progress regularly and share outcomes with internal and external stakeholders.

Key Action Area 2



Promote Flexible and Inclusive Policies that Enable Sustained Participation in At-Sea Activities

- Support the development and implementation of family-friendly workplace policies that provide flexible work arrangements, accommodate family and caregiving responsibilities, and support employee well-being to enable women to undertake and sustain long-term offshore assignments.
- Introduce or strengthen parental, family, and caregiving leave policies that support employees before and after offshore assignments.
- Periodically review any workplace policies with a view to identifying measures to address the challenges that disproportionately affect women participating in long-term offshore assignments.

- Set and work towards measurable and time-bound targets for gender-balanced expedition planning while ensuring that qualifications and competence remain the primary selection criteria.
- Consider adopting vessel-readiness protocols that provide safe and, where possible, private sleeping accommodation, gender-appropriate sanitation facilities, and personal protective equipment (PPE) and safety gear in a range of sizes suitable for all personnel.
- Integrate pre-departure training on inclusive behaviour and respectful conduct, covering all onboard personnel including vessel crew, technical staff, and support personnel, not only scientific expedition participants.



Key Action Area 4



Create Safe and Inclusive Work Environments

- Create and maintain confidential, accessible channels for addressing misconduct, with explicit non-retaliation protections.
- Where appropriate, designate accessible focal points both on board vessels and onshore to provide guidance, and facilitate appropriate follow-up.
- Provide accessible mental health and psychosocial support, including remote or virtual services where appropriate, to personnel undertaking offshore assignments, particularly during extended periods of isolation at sea.
- Establish zero-tolerance policies on harassment and bullying on board, with mechanisms in place for immediate response to any incidents.



Key Action Area 5



Provide Mentorship and Professional Development

- Implement or support mentorship programmes for early-career women in marine and maritime sectors, including offshore deep-sea expeditions.
- Create leadership development pathways for women to become chief scientists, principal investigators, or mission planners.
- Offer coaching and career guidance to support retention and promotion.



Key Action Area 6



Enhance Data Transparency and Monitoring

- Collect and report gender-disaggregated data on participation, leadership, outputs, and professional categories.
- Conduct periodic reviews of promotion and recruitment practices using a gender lens.
- Where applicable, conduct gender pay audits and take action to close any identified gaps.

Key Action Area 7



Foster Cross-Sectoral Collaboration

- Engage with stakeholders across other sectors, including offshore energy, shipping, and academia, to exchange knowledge, share experiences and build on established good practices.
- Support national and international initiatives that promote gender equality in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and ocean science.



IV. Registry, Best Practices and Lessons Learnt

The ISA Secretariat will serve as the coordinating body for the SHE Compact and is responsible for maintaining a register of the implementing partners and Champions, facilitating regular knowledge exchange, convening an annual review, and sustaining oversight of the SHE Compact over time.

A progress report synthesising best practices and lessons learnt will be prepared annually by the Secretariat. Progress and collective achievements under the SHE Compact will be reflected through a dashboard maintained on the ISA website, promoting transparency, knowledge sharing, and continuous improvement.



V. Community of Practice and Sustainability

As part of its co-creation approach, the SHE Compact establishes a Community of Practice led by the ISA Secretariat to support its implementation and continuous improvement. Initially, the Community of Practice will connect the designated focal points of Champions and Implementing Partners and, over time, is expected to evolve into a broader network of professionals working to advance safe, inclusive, and equitable participation in at-sea activities.

The Community of Practice will engage in the following activities:

- Develop an implementation roadmap with measurable, time-bound actions for each of the key action areas;
- Convene regular peer-learning exchanges and webinars to share experience across implementing partners;
- Pursue long-term partnerships to strengthen technical support and broaden participation.



VI. Communications, Visibility and Learning

Communications are central to building awareness of the Compact and demonstrating its impact.

The ISA Secretariat will:

- Explore resourcing options to support the long-term sustainability of Compact implementation.
- Develop case studies highlighting the progress and lessons learnt of the Compact's Implementing Partners.
- Profile women leaders and role models in offshore work and operations to inspire wider participation.
- Use the annual progress report and public dashboard as the basis for external communications and visibility materials.
- Undertake joint awareness-raising activities with other international and national partners and intergovernmental organisations, including UN Women, to expand the Compact's reach across the offshore sector.
- Undertake communications and outreach activities to mark International Deep Seabed Day.



VII. Glossary of Abbreviations

ISA

International Seabed Authority – The autonomous international organisation established under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to organise, regulate and control activities in the Area. The ISA Secretariat coordinates the SHE Compact and administers the See Her Exceed Global Mentoring Programme.

NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation

PPE

Personal Protective Equipment – Safety gear that, under the Compact's action areas, should be available in a range of sizes suitable for all personnel undertaking at-sea activities.

SDG

Sustainable Development Goal – One of the 17 global goals adopted by United Nations Member States in 2015. The SHE Compact is grounded in SDG 5 (Gender Equality), particularly Target 5.5.

SHE

See Her Exceed – The International Seabed Authority's Global Mentoring Programme, under whose auspices the research underpinning the SHE Compact was conducted and which convenes the Compact's pilot cohort community.

STEM

Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

UN

United Nations

UNCLOS

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea - The international treaty establishing the legal framework for activities in the world's oceans and seas, including the establishment of the International Seabed Authority.

WIDSR

Women in Deep-Sea Research - An International Seabed Authority capacity development initiative referenced in the Compact's supporting materials.





VIII. Key Terms

The Area - The international seabed and ocean floor beyond the limits of national jurisdiction. Under UNCLOS, activities in the Area must benefit humankind, a mandate the Foreword identifies as unfulfilled while women remain underrepresented in the science that shapes it.

At-Sea Activities - Professional, scientific or operational activities conducted aboard a vessel, including deep-sea expeditions, shipping and other offshore marine and maritime work. The term is used interchangeably with offshore activities throughout the Compact.

Champions - An organisation that advocates for the objectives of the SHE Compact through awareness raising, capacity building, knowledge sharing and support for its visibility and uptake, without necessarily holding operational responsibility for at-sea environments.

Implementing Partner - An organisation that indicates its intention to work towards implementing at least two of the Compact's seven key action areas, in a manner appropriate to its mandate, capacity and operational context. Becoming an Implementing Partner is voluntary and creates no legal or institutional obligation.

Focal Point – The representative designated by a Champions or Implementing Partner to lead outreach and communication with the ISA Secretariat and to represent the organisation within the Community of Practice.

Community of Practice – The network led by the ISA Secretariat that connects the focal points of Champions and Implementing Partners to support peer learning, exchange of best practices and continuous improvement under the Compact.

Gender Mainstreaming – The systematic integration of gender considerations into leadership, accountability and institutional decision-making. This is the focus of the Compact's first key action area (Action Area 1).

Gender Equity Plan - A strategy aligned with an organisation's institutional priorities that sets out measurable actions for advancing gender equity, as called for under Action Area 1.

Gender-Disaggregated Data – Data on participation, leadership, outputs and professional categories collected and reported separately by gender, enabling analysis of disparities. This is called for under Action Area 6.

Gender Pay Audit - A review of remuneration data to identify and address gender-based pay gaps, where applicable, as encouraged under Action Area 6.

Zero-Tolerance Approach – A policy prohibiting harassment, bullying and misconduct onboard without exception, supported by mechanisms for the immediate reporting of and response to incidents. This is reflected in the Guiding Principles and Action Area 4.

Pre-Departure Training - Training delivered before an offshore assignment on inclusive behaviour and respectful conduct for all onboard personnel, including vessel crew, technical staff, support personnel and scientific expedition participants. This is called for under Action Area 3.





Psychosocial Support – Accessible mental health and emotional wellbeing support, including remote or virtual services, provided to personnel during offshore assignments, particularly during extended periods of isolation at sea. This is promoted under Action Area 4.

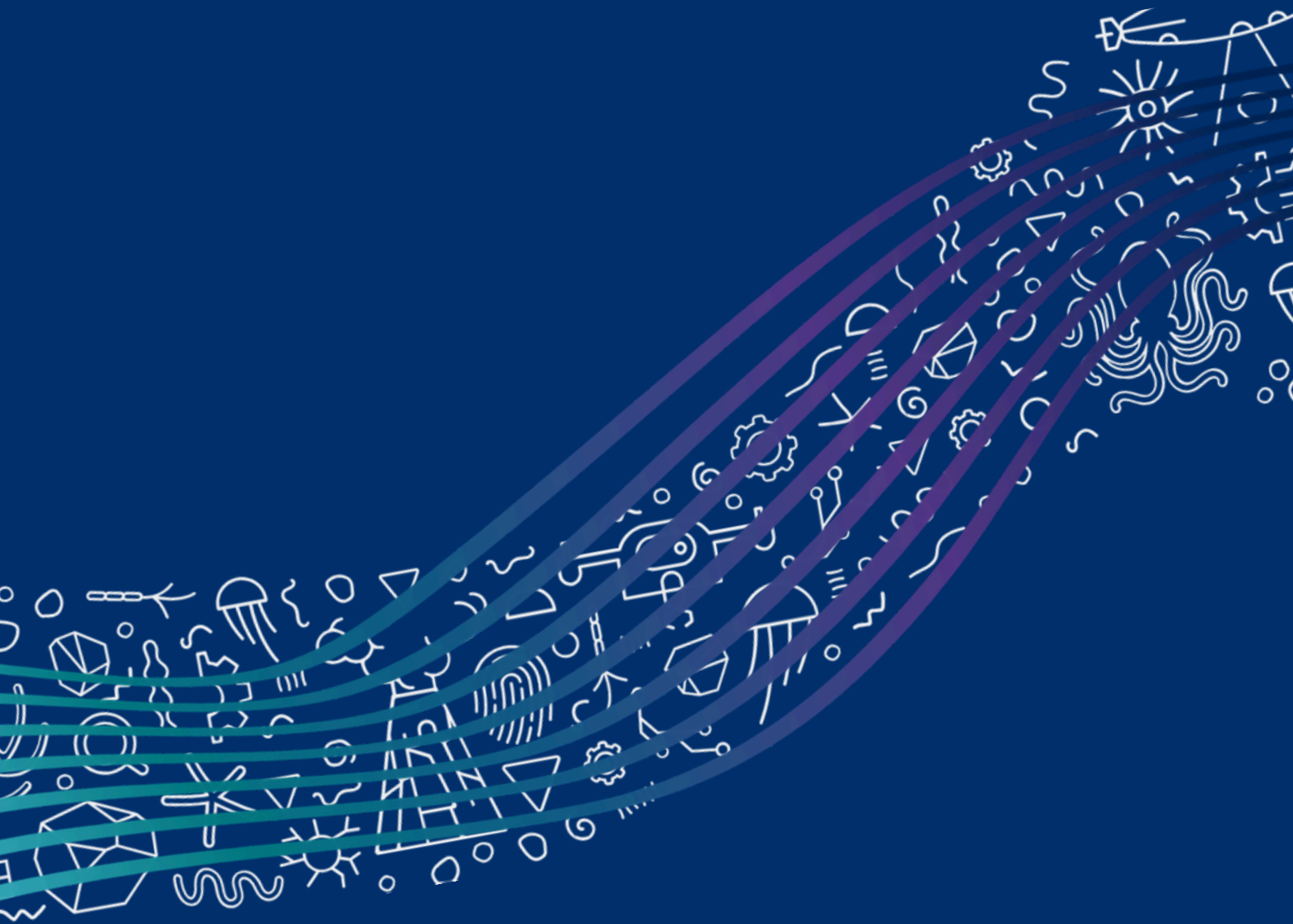
Principal Investigator – The lead scientist responsible for a research expedition or project. Advancing women into principal investigator, chief scientist and mission planner roles is a key objective of Action Area 5.

Vessel-Readiness Protocols – Measures to prepare a vessel for gender-balanced expeditions, including safe and, where possible, private accommodation and sanitation facilities, together with personal protective equipment available in a range of appropriate sizes. This is called for under Action Area 3.

Secretariat – The ISA Secretariat, which serves as the coordinating body for the SHE Compact by maintaining the register of Champions and Implementing Partners, facilitating knowledge exchange, convening the annual review and providing ongoing oversight (Section III.6).

International Deep Seabed Day – An annual observance on November 1 to build awareness for the work of the International Seabed Authority through thematic advocacy and literacy for the stewardship of the deep seabed. Outreach activities are led by the ISA Secretariat in collaboration with governments and observers as well as civil society, academic institutions and the general public (Section III.8).





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