



International  
Labour  
Organization



# ► Sustainable supply chains to build forward better

Advancing decent work in five global supply chains of key importance to the European Union for a fair, resilient, and sustainable COVID-19 crisis recovery



## FISHERIES IN NAMIBIA FOR THE EUROPEAN MARKET

### About the EC-ILO cooperation

The European Union (EU) Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) has partnered with the International Labour Organization (ILO) for a joint intervention that uses global supply chains as an entry point for advancing decent work.

Over two years, the ILO and its Decent Work Teams and Country Offices will support governments, employers' and workers' organizations and other stakeholders in five countries and in further tiers of the supply chains, with new knowledge, tools, guidance, policy advice, technical assistance and training to address decent work challenges and opportunities in five sectors: coffee, electronics, fisheries, rubber gloves and textiles.

The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the need for resilient and sustainable global supply chains. Decent work – employment creation along with social protection, respect for rights at work, and access to social dialogue – is essential for inclusive growth and eliminating poverty.

This Action will support the EU's commitment to responsible global leadership, to the Sustainable Development Goals, and to promoting international labour standards.

### The industry at a glance

Global fish production reached 179 million tonnes in 2018 (€339 billion), of which 156 million tonnes were used for human consumption, and of which 82 million tonnes (€211 billion) came from aquaculture production.

In 2018, fish exports were estimated at 37.6 per cent of total production and valued at €139 billion. In that year, an estimated 59.5 million people globally were engaged in the primary sector of fisheries (39 million) and aquaculture (20.5 million).

Thirty-five per cent of the global fish harvest is either lost or wasted.



Climate change and overfishing are increasingly challenging issues for the industry.

### The EU and Namibia

In 2019, fish and fishery products made up over 30 per cent of EU imports from Namibia, worth €345 million, thus making Namibia one of the biggest African fish exporters to the EU. Some Namibian fish species, such as hake, are particularly popular in EU countries. Spain and Italy remain the two leading European markets, but some products are also exported to France and Portugal.

Namibia, the South African Development Community and the European Union have concluded the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) to strengthen trade between the parties, primarily through exports and an increased market reach.

The fisheries industry in Namibia comprises industrialized marine capture fisheries, recreational fisheries, inland capture fisheries, mariculture and freshwater aquaculture. The industry is one of the largest contributors to the country's gross domestic product (3.8 per cent in 2012). It constitutes about 15 per cent of all exports, and is the second largest source of foreign exchange in the country (€568 million). Over 90 per cent of total unprocessed and manufactured fish products are exported.

The aquaculture sub-sector is gaining importance with a production estimated at 472.48 tonnes in 2018, which is equivalent to around €1.26 million.

About 16,300 workers, of which 60 per cent work at sea and 40 per cent onshore, are directly employed in fishing and fish-processing activities and logistics.

Community-based cooperatives and private, small-scale fish farms dominate freshwater fisheries, while the more capital-intensive marine fisheries are mainly run by private export-oriented enterprises.

## Structure of the supply chain

The fisheries value chain covers the full range of activities required to bring fish or fishery products to final consumers passing through the different phases of catching, handling, processing and delivery. Throughout the value chain to the end consumer, food quality is the driving force of the industry where the fish is handled responsibly from on board the fishing vessel to the processing units on shore or at sea. The bulk of the harvested fish is exported fresh, frozen, or chilled.

In the aquaculture subsector, fresh-water fisheries is primarily geared for the local market for employment and food security reasons; and marine-based fisheries is capital intensive, dominated by oyster production, and geared for the export market.

There has furthermore been little movement toward the local production of value products (e.g. ready-made fish meals, fish fingers). Such products are instead imported, especially from South Africa.

## Decent work challenges and opportunities

The fisheries industry in Namibia is faced with several decent work challenges. These include occupational safety and health, a lack of skills development, especially for vessel skippers and engineers, and a lack of harmonization of national qualifications with international standards, which contribute to low wages.

There have been reports of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, as well as child trafficking and forced labour, on some vessels using Namibian ports. The workforce is stratified by race and gender. Women play a crucial role throughout the fish value chain. However, they often work in the most poorly paid and less protected jobs.

Furthermore, they face major challenges because of gender-based discrimination, disproportionate involvement in unpaid work, and unequal access to education, healthcare, property, and financial and other services.

In 2018, Namibia ratified the ILO Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188), and is committed to addressing key issues such as minimum age for work on a fishing vessel, medical standards, work agreements, occupational safety and health, and social security.

Foreign-owned companies hold a significant share of the fishing market. Smaller Namibian companies generally have limited financial and technical resources to invest in new skills, improved working conditions, and higher productivity. The 'Namibianisation' of the fishing industry refers to affirmative action that favours Namibian-owned firms. There is a unique opportunity for local market development and income generation in the fisheries industry by addressing decent work challenges and promoting employment creation.



Workers weighing a fish.

## COVID-19 and the fisheries in Namibia

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the global fish supply chain and has negatively affected the safety and well-being of fishers, including their ability to leave ships. Recent estimates suggest that total trade value in 2020 has contracted by about 2 per cent in both quantity and value compared with 2019.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has offered 60 per cent of the country's fish products, normally reserved for a state-owned company, to the highest bidder. This decision has been taken in order to raise funds for equipment and medicines to control and prevent the virus.

## Key constituents and stakeholders

The Action will work with different stakeholders in the EU, in Namibia and along the supply chain. Key Namibian stakeholders are the: Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment Creation, Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resource, Namibia Employers' Federation, National Union of Namibian Workers and Trade Union Congress of Namibia.

Using global supply chains as an entry point to advance decent work, the Action will also work with other key stakeholders in the fisheries industry in Namibia and across all sectors of its economy and with stakeholders in lower tiers, upstream and downstream, including in the EU.

### Contact details

**International Labour Organization**  
4, Route des Morillons  
CH-1211 Geneva 22  
Switzerland

**Sectoral Policies Department**  
E: [sector@ilo.org](mailto:sector@ilo.org)