

## **Technical meeting on the future of work in aquaculture in the context of the rural economy**

**Geneva (hybrid), 13-17 December 2021**

### **► Conclusions on the future of work in aquaculture in the context of the rural economy<sup>1</sup>**

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The technical meeting on the future of work in aquaculture in the context of the rural economy

Having met from 13 to 17 December 2021,

Adopts the following conclusions:

### **Challenges to and opportunities for decent and sustainable work and key drivers of change**

- 1.** Aquaculture, which is regarded as a subsector of agriculture in some countries, defined as the cultivation of aquatic organisms in controlled aquatic environments, involving interventions in the rearing process to enhance production, is an important source of income and livelihoods, especially for many rural communities. It provides direct employment to more than 20 million people, with many more people employed along the supply chain. The sector's exponential growth in recent decades has significantly contributed to alleviating poverty in a number of developing countries, enabling millions of the rural poor to escape from social and economic exclusion. Enterprise development is important for aquaculture as it will contribute to job creation, empowerment of women and youth and livelihood diversification in the rural economy. The sector contributes significantly to feeding the world's growing population, while ensuring that no one is left behind. Harnessing this potential will require concerted efforts to achieve full, productive and freely chosen employment and decent work for all in aquaculture as part of resilient food systems. Sustainable development and growth of aquaculture can make an important contribution to reducing distress outmigration from rural areas.
- 2.** Despite its growing contribution to employment and decent work opportunities, food security and nutrition, and economic development, in many countries, aquaculture faces decent work deficits alongside other important social and environmental challenges.
- 3.** Despite recent progress, in some countries, the most vulnerable among aquaculture workers, especially those in the informal economy, as well as migrant, temporary,

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<sup>1</sup> In accordance with established procedures, these conclusions will be submitted to the 344th Session of the Governing Body of the ILO (March 2022) for its consideration.

seasonal, and sub-contracted workers may face barriers in effectively exercising their fundamental rights at work. Child labour remains a challenge in the aquaculture sector but more data is needed to support evidence based policies and strategies to effectively eliminate child labour. Some migrant workers and workers in the informal economy may be in situations of, or at risk of, forced labour. Women constitute a significant proportion of the aquaculture workforce, especially in processing, but they are underrepresented in positions requiring higher skills. The adequate regulation of national and international recruitment and the effective enforcement of rights at work, regardless of the employment relationship, are crucial for decent and sustainable work in the sector.

4. The aquaculture workforce is exposed to multiple OSH hazards with short- and long-term consequences. The hazards may vary significantly depending on the type and scale of operation. Underdeveloped OSH management systems and weaker regulatory frameworks and enforcement systems, particularly in informal and rural economies, exacerbate the challenge. In recent years, constituents in several leading aquaculture producing countries have taken important steps in establishing a stronger preventive culture and adequate legal frameworks on OSH. Further efforts are needed to ensure occupational safety and health for the aquaculture workforce.
5. The COVID-19 pandemic has exerted significant pressures on the agri-food industry, including aquaculture, both from the business and workers' sides. In addition to the tragic loss of life, the disruptions generated by the pandemic have led to increased unemployment, underemployment and inactivity; losses in labour and business income particularly for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. It has had a serious impact on the groups of workers that are often exposed to socio-economic vulnerability such as women and migrants. The lessons from the current crisis should catalyze reforms that contribute to transformation towards sustainable and resilient aquaculture sector and food systems at large.

## **The Future of Work in Aquaculture and a just transition to decent and sustainable work**

6. The globalization of the aquaculture sector has created entry points for women on commercial, non-family fish farms and along the supply chain. It has provided important employment opportunities in the production, processing and distribution of aquaculture products, and thereby offering real prospects for their economic and social empowerment. Despite this, in many countries, the sector continues to be characterized by gender-based inequalities and discrimination, with women disproportionately represented in work arrangements that are often informal, low-paid and without access to adequate social protection. Ensuring equal opportunities and treatment between women and men is critical to a sustainable future of the sector. This includes respecting the principle of equal remuneration for work of equal value, and promoting a work environment that is free from violence and harassment.
7. New technological solutions offer promising prospects to address many of the traditional and emerging issues facing the aquaculture sector, while improving productivity and environmental outcomes. They could also help create new sustainable enterprises and decent employment opportunities including by replacing laborious, repetitive, and dangerous tasks with automated processes. Effective policy responses will be needed to address potential negative impacts such as job losses, skills mismatches, skills polarization, wage inequality, and barriers faced by small-scale producers in adopting new technologies and practices. The digital divide hinders the small scale producers from

taking advantage of new technologies and practices. An enabling environment for digital transformation should be supported with right ICT infrastructure and digital literacy.

8. Progressive transition to formality should aim to reduce decent work deficits while taking into consideration the interests of the many workers and economic units in the informal economy and preventing informalization in the sector. Policies and programmes should focus on the creation and supporting sustainable enterprises and decent jobs in the sector that ensure rights at work and access to universal, comprehensive, adequate and sustainable social protection.
9. Recognizing the universal right to education, investments in life-long learning and diversified skills development to promote decent work opportunities will enable the workforce and the employers to better respond to the changing requirements of the sector, including those related to technological advancements and sustainable natural resource use. Improving environmental sustainability of aquaculture, including through improved infrastructure, water and waste management and the creation of green jobs, will be key to the sector's long-term economic sustainability and to food security.
10. Social dialogue, based on respect of freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, has a crucial role in designing policies to promote social justice. It is a means to achieve social and economic progress. Social dialogue and tripartism are essential for democracy and good governance.

## Recommendations for future action by the International Labour Organization and Members

11. Governments, in cooperation with workers' and employers' organizations, should:
  - a) engage in effective social dialogue to promote decent and sustainable work for all in aquaculture and the rural economy;
  - b) promote the creation, attraction and retention of decent and sustainable jobs and harness the fullest potential of all technological progress and digitalization to create decent jobs and sustainable enterprises in the sector;
  - c) promote gender equality and women's voice and empowerment;
  - d) facilitate inclusive transition to formality, prevention of informalization, and a just transition to environmentally sustainable economies and societies;
  - e) ensure adequate working conditions and safety and health at work and access to universal, comprehensive, adequate and sustainable social protection to all aquaculture workers, regardless of the nature of their employment status or working arrangements;
  - f) increase investments in lifelong learning, skills development, and technical and vocational education and training that ensure decent and sustainable work in aquaculture;
  - g) support the role of the private sector as a principal source of economic growth and job creation by promoting an enabling environment for entrepreneurship and sustainable enterprises including through investments and innovation, in particular for micro, small and medium sized enterprises, as well as cooperatives and the social

and solidarity economy, in order to generate decent work, productive employment and improved living standards for all;

h) promote policies to eradicate child labour in the aquaculture sector.

**12.** Governments have the duty to adopt, implement and effectively enforce national laws and regulations and ensure that fundamental principles and rights at work and ratified international labour Conventions are applied to all workers in the aquaculture sector, taking into account their obligations under other international labour standards. They should strengthen labour administration and labour inspection systems to ensure full compliance including through adequate financial resources, duly qualified inspectors, proper equipment and training, and robust recruitment procedures. All enterprises should respect human and labour rights in their supply chains consistent with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy.

**13.** The Office based on its mandate reinvigorated by the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work should:

- a) promote the ratification and effective implementation of international labour standards relevant to aquaculture and strengthen the capacity of constituents to respect, promote and realize the fundamental principles and rights at work;
- b) strengthen its support for the design and implementation of recovery strategies of governments and employers' and workers' organizations to support them in their efforts to achieve a human-centred recovery that is sustainable, inclusive and resilient to the COVID-19 pandemic and future crises;
- c) build the capacity of constituents through relevant means of action to develop strategies and engage in effective social dialogue to facilitate a transition to formality, prevent informalization, and enable a just transition to a sustainable future of work;
- d) collect good practices and data and develop research on the transition to formality, skills acquisition, productivity, women's empowerment and just transition to full, productive and freely chosen employment and decent work for all, with a view to promoting sustainable aquaculture;
- e) conduct research on the existing practices on labour inspection in aquaculture and support building the capacities of labour inspectorates;
- f) conduct research on existing and emerging OSH risks with a view to guiding future action including the elaboration of a Code of Practice on OSH in aquaculture
- g) strengthen the capacity of employers' and workers' organizations to effectively participate in the design and implementation of literacy, lifelong learning and skills development programmes, with gender-responsive methodologies to forecast future skills needs in the labour market, including for technological change, just transition and the sharing of good practices on professionalization, upskilling and reskilling;
- h) design and implement development cooperation projects to advance decent and sustainable work and capacity development in aquaculture, taking into account the diverse circumstances, needs, priorities and levels of development of its Member States;
- i) reinforce its cooperation with relevant multilateral organisations, particularly FAO, and regional organizations to promote decent and sustainable work in aquaculture

aimed at mobilizing a strong and coherent global response in support of human-centred recovery, long-term development and growth of the sector that are inclusive, sustainable and resilient.

- j) update the *Guidance on addressing child labour in fisheries and aquaculture* (2011) in order to improve the understanding of the nature, scope, causes, contributing factors and consequences of child labour in aquaculture followed by capacity building activities at all appropriate levels.

## Annex

### Non-exhaustive list of ILO declarations, instruments and tools relevant to aquaculture

#### Declarations:

- Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work (2019)
- Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (2017)
- Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization (2008)
- Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998)

#### International Labour Standards:

##### *Fundamental Conventions*

- Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) and Protocol of 2014
- Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87)
- Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98)
- Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100)
- Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105)
- Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111)
- Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138)
- Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182)

##### *Governance Conventions*

- Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81)
- Employment Policy Recommendation, 1964 (No. 122)
- Employment Policy (Supplementary Provisions) Recommendation, 1984 (No. 169)
- Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969 (No. 129)
- Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No. 144)

##### *Technical conventions and recommendations*

- Right of Association (Agriculture) Convention, 1921 (No. 11)
- Social Insurance (Agriculture) Recommendation, 1921 (No. 17)
- Minimum Wage-Fixing Machinery Convention, 1928 (No. 26)
- Labour Inspection Recommendation, 1947 (No. 81)
- Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97)
- Protection of Wages Convention, 1949 (No. 95)

- Protection of Wages Recommendation, 1949 (No. 85)
- Minimum Wage Fixing Machinery (Agriculture) Convention, 1951 (No. 99)
- Minimum Wage-Fixing Machinery (Agriculture) Recommendation, 1951 (No. 89)
- Plantations Convention, 1958 (No. 110)
- Plantations Recommendation, 1958 (No. 110)
- Employment Policy Recommendation, 1964 (No. 122)
- Employment Policy Recommendation, 1964 (No. 169)
- Tenants and Share-croppers Recommendation, 1968 (No. 132)
- Minimum Wage Fixing Convention, 1970 (No. 131)
- Minimum Wage Fixing Recommendation, 1970 (No. 135)
- Rural Workers' Organisations Convention, 1975 (No. 141)
- Rural Workers' Organisations Recommendation, 1975 (No. 149)
- Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143)
- Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155)
- Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156)
- Occupational Safety and Health Recommendation, 1981 (No. 164)
- Occupational Health Services Convention, 1985 (No. 161)
- Occupational Health Services Recommendation, 1985 (No. 171)
- Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169)<sup>2</sup>
- Chemicals Convention, 1990 (No. 170)
- Protocol of 1995 to the Labour Inspection Convention, 1947
- Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 (No. 181)
- Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183)
- Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention, 2001 (No. 184)
- Safety and Health in Agriculture Recommendation, 2001 (No. 192)
- List of Occupational Diseases Recommendation, 2002 (No. 194)
- Human Resources Development Recommendation, 2004 (No. 195)
- Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187)
- Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Recommendation, 2006 (No. 197)
- Employment Relationship Recommendation, 2006 (No. 198)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The inclusion of this international labour standard in this annex was not supported by the employers' group in the technical meeting on the future of work in aquaculture in the context of the rural economy.

<sup>3</sup> The inclusion of this international labour standard in this annex was not supported by the employers' group in the technical meeting on the future of work in aquaculture in the context of the rural economy.

- Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202)
- Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204)
- Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190)
- Violence and Harassment Recommendation, 2019 (No. 206)

**Other ILO tools:**

- Safety and Health in Agriculture. Code of practice (2011)
- Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all (2015)
- General principles and operational guidelines for fair recruitment (2016)
- WASH@Work: a Self-Training Handbook (2016)

**Other international regulation:**

- UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007)
- Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (2011)
- UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and other People Working in Rural Areas (2018)