

MARITIME INSIGHT

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FAO – their role in international fishing safety standards



The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is a specialised agency of the United Nations and is an independent international organisation funded by both voluntary and assessed contributions, working in over 130 countries worldwide. Recently, CHIRP Maritime has engaged with this agency with a view to promoting their work alongside that of CHIRP Maritime. To that end, a link to our website now exists on the FAO website.

Commercial fishing remains one of the world's most dangerous occupations. The FAO revised its global estimate of the number of fatalities in fisheries in 2019 to 32,000. The basis for this revision was the increase in the number of fishers worldwide from around 30 million in 2000 to 40 million in 2016.

The number of fatalities in fisheries in 2019 was estimated at 32,000

The 1999 ILO established rate of 80 fatalities per 100,000/year of active fishers was maintained for this new estimate. It should be noted that the revised FAO global estimate is likely an underestimation. Reports from the few developed countries that collect fisheries accident data commonly show rates of more than 100 fatalities per 100,000 active fishers. In fact, in some industrial fishing fleets, accident and fatality rates have recently been on the rise. Furthermore, there

is anecdotal evidence that in developing countries with small-scale fishing fleets the fatality rates among fishers are significantly higher.

25 years of FAO'S Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries

Adopted 25 years ago by the International Conference on Responsible Fishing, the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (<http://www.fao.org/tempref/docrep/fao/005/v9878e/v9878e00.pdf>) remains the reference for national and international efforts to ensure sustainable fisheries and aquaculture.

The Code sets out principles and international standards of behaviour for responsible practices with a view to ensuring the effective conservation, management and development of living aquatic resources in harmony with the environment.

Its success can also be measured by the number of languages it has been translated into – 27 to date – making it one of the Organisation's most translated publications.

The FAO Directorate General is a depository for a number of conventions, agreements and treaties that relate to food and agriculture (<http://www.fao.org/treaties/en/>). These include, for instance, the 2009 Port State Measures Agreement (<http://www.fao.org/port-state-measures/en/>) and the 1993 FAO Compliance Agreement (<http://www.fao.org/iuu-fishing/international-framework/fao-compliance-agreement/en/>), which both aim to contribute to responsible fisheries and marine resource conservation. They also work to assist member countries to develop and implement these agreements, standards and guidelines.

In addition, FAO have built an extensive legislative database (<http://www.fao.org/faolex/en/>) to give users quick access to national laws, regulations and policies on food, agriculture and natural resource management. They also provide information papers on the subject of safety at sea and decent working conditions in fisheries and aquaculture.



Figure 1 – Fishing crew life jacket practice in Yemen (photo courtesy of Khalid Zanoqi)

The FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries is explicit in relation to the principle of “safety” in Article 6.17, where it is emphasized that “States should ensure that fishing facilities and equipment as well as all fisheries activities allow for safe, healthy and fair working and living conditions and meet internationally agreed standards adopted by relevant international organizations”. Article 8.1.5 expands on the principle of safety, requesting states “to ensure that health and safety standards are adopted for everyone in fishing operations and that such standards should not be less than the minimum requirements of relevant international agreements on conditions of work and service”. Moreover, Article 8.4.1 requests that “States should ensure that fishing is conducted with due regard to the safety of human life”.

COFI (Committee on Fisheries – a subsidiary body of the FAO Council) has repeatedly highlighted the importance of safety at sea in the fisheries sector and welcomed the cooperation in this regard between the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the FAO. At their recent (1-5 February 2021) 34th session, COFI members issued a Declaration for Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture (<http://www.fao.org/3/ne472en/ne472en.pdf>) in which the Members agreed to “Promote the attainment of safe, healthy and fair working conditions for all in the sector, support efforts to prevent and halt forced labour, facilitate access to social protection programmes for fishers and aquaculture producers and their communities, support measures to improve safety at sea, and work towards enhancing the standards of living for all in the sector, in cooperation with other relevant international organisations, including the International Labour Organization and the International Maritime Organization”.

FAO activities on safety at sea in the fisheries sector

The FAO has developed capacity building programmes and materials on safety at sea for small-scale fishers. These activities are carried out jointly with government counterparts and include emergency preparation, outboard engine repair and maintenance, safety risk management, boat handling and basic marine traffic rules, as well as emergency first aid and communications.

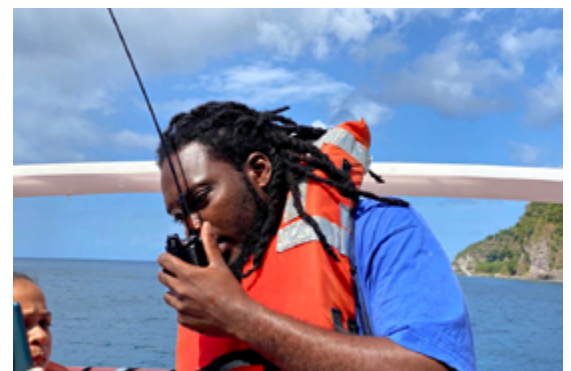


Figure 2 – Radio communication training of fishers in Dominica (Caribbean) (photo courtesy of Iris Monnereau)

Nearly 600 fishers in the Caribbean received specific Information and Communication Technology (ICT) training, supported by the FAO, in 2019/2020, focusing on the three ICT devices that are most important to safety at sea for small-scale fishers: the VHF radio, the Global Positioning System (GPS) and cell phones. FAO trained small-scale fishers through performing drills on the radio, GPS and cell phone in a classroom environment, as well as at sea. In the Pacific islands of Tokelau, the FAO Safety at Sea for Small-scale Fishers programme in 2019 included the provision of appropriate safety gear, training on the use of gear and safety education at schools. It also included training on engine repair and maintenance.



Figure 3 – Outboard motor repair training of small-scale fishers in Tokelau (photo courtesy of Jessica Sanders)

The FAO also has a Bay of Bengal programme and has published a practical manual on “Safety at sea for small-scale fishers”, containing comic-book style illustrations. This manual is available online in English (<http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/ca5772en>), French, Spanish, Chinese, Portuguese, Tamil and Sinhala. It is distributed through various projects and partners in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. Other language versions and regionalized versions of the manual are under preparation.

Decent work in fisheries

Since 2018 FAO and the Apostleship of the Sea, in cooperation with the IMO and the ILO, facilitated a series of regional technical seminars on the linkages between vessels’ safety, working conditions and

illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. The seminars took place in Asia (Manila, March 2018), in the South-West Indian Ocean (Seychelles, May 2019) and in West Africa (Accra, October 2019). Other regions are expected to be covered in 2020.

At the regional level, FAO published in 2019 the outcome of a regional study conducted with the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) in five countries (Albania, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia). The study reviewed available social protection programmes and access of small-scale fishers to these programmes. The review found several success stories as well as areas of improvement and recommended practical measures to be taken by national authorities as over 90 percent of the world’s fishing vessels are small-scale vessels which are not covered by the IMO instruments. FAO aims to expand the capacity-building efforts to other regions, provided funding from resource partners becomes available, and the FAO “Safety-for-fishermen” website will be modernized.

Fisheries accident and fatality reporting has been on the agenda of the international community for the last four decades, particularly within IMO, ILO and FAO. However, up to today most countries lack an effective reporting, investigation and analysis system. The IMO Cape Town Agreement and ILO Convention No.188 both stress the need for states to report and investigate fishing accidents but are either applicable to large-scale (>24m) fishing vessels only, or limited in scope by the low number of ratifying states. FAO proposes to collaborate with governments and other stakeholders to achieve the necessary progress on this topic.

The FAO started collaborating in 2020 with IMO, PEW Charitable Trust, Lloyds Register Foundation and the FISH Safety Foundation on the development of global accident and fatality reporting and data management systems for the fisheries sector. Other stakeholders are welcome to join in this endeavour, which will hopefully result in one or more voluntary and formal accident and fatality reporting systems for the sector in the near future.

**With thanks to Raymon VanAnrooy (NFIO)
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ILO, IMO and FAO instruments, improving safety at sea and working conditions, and reducing accidents and fatalities in capture fisheries and aquaculture

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