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SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR BLUE TRANSFORMATION

Executive Summary

This information paper provides a summary of recent FAO activities supporting the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, specifically on social protection in the sector. This includes: the design and delivery of tools and capacity-building, evidence generation and development of publications, the expansion of social protection at country level, work on the connections between social protection, decent work, occupational safety and health and child labour. A short description of planned future work is included.

Queries on the substantive content of this document may be addressed to:

Daniela Kalikoski

Fishery Industry Officer

daniela.kalikoski@fao.org

I. INTRODUCTION

1. FAO defines social protection as a *set of policies and programmes that addresses economic, environmental and social vulnerabilities to food insecurity and poverty by protecting and promoting livelihoods*.¹ This is based on three types of programmes: social assistance – non-contributory schemes providing cash and in-kind transfers and services to support and empower beneficiaries; social security – contributory programmes that support and protect people through life-cycle events (pregnancy, old age), and against potential impacts of livelihood risks (unemployment, illness) or shocks (e.g. natural disasters); and labour market interventions – measures aimed to improve workers' skills, increase employment opportunities, and provide livelihood support.

2. An estimated 55 percent of the world's population does not benefit from any form of social protection. In agriculture, a sector that sustains approximately one third of the world's workforce, a mere 20 percent of workers have access to some type of social protection.²

3. The 1995 FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (the Code) and the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) emphasize the importance of social protection for the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. Article 8.1.8 of the Code emphasizes that “States should, as appropriate, maintain records of fishers...” and Article 8.2.8 specifies that “Flag States should promote access to insurance coverage by owners and charterers of fishing vessels. The SSF Guidelines elaborate further, dedicating a full chapter to guide States in strengthening social protection, employment, and decent work. Paragraph 6.3 states that “States should promote social security protection for workers in small-scale fisheries. They should consider the characteristics of small-scale fisheries and apply security schemes to the entire value chain.” Paragraph 6.4. emphasizes that “States should support the development of and access to other services that are appropriate for small-scale fishing communities with regard to, for example, savings, credit and insurance schemes, with special emphasis on ensuring the access of women to such services.”

4. COFI has repeatedly highlighted the importance of social protection in the fisheries sector. Article 13 of the [2021 COFI Declaration for Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture](#) promotes and supports “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” welcoming the cooperation in this regard with other relevant international organizations, including International Labour Organization (ILO), and the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

5. FAO's [Blue Transformation – Roadmap 2022-2030](#) recognizes aquatic food systems' role as “drivers of employment, economic growth, social development and environmental recovery” and identifies through target F2 that “Equitable access to resources and services enhance the livelihoods of fishers” thus, setting as priority actions to “increase capacity and inclusive access to social protection, decent working conditions, and safety at sea of fishers and fish workers” as well as to “facilitate access of fishers and fish workers to financing and insurance services, knowledge and data to encourage responsible fishing practices and support equitable distribution of benefits from aquatic resources.” The Social Protection for Fisheries and Aquaculture Project (SocPro4Fish)³ funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) responds to these requests. The project aims to enhance institutional capacities for extending universal social protection, as well as supporting the

¹ FAO, 2017. *FAO Social Protection Framework: promoting rural development for all*. Rome. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/handle/20.500.14283/i7016en>

² Interim report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food to the 73rd Session of the General Assembly (A/73/164).

³ GCP/GLO/352/NOR – Component 4: Assist and enhance partner countries Institutional capacities to make available, implement and monitor social protection programmes (sectoral based and universal), including shock-responsive and gender sensitive social protection for fishers and fish-workers.

creation of sector-specific programmes with an emphasis on shock-responsiveness and gender sensitivity.

II. BUILDING AWARENESS AND CAPACITY THROUGH TRAINING, NEW ANALYTICAL TOOLS, AND PUBLICATIONS ON SOCIAL PROTECTION IN THE FISHERIES SECTOR

6. Since COFI 35, to improve awareness and support practical steps towards programme design and implementation for extending social protection coverage and adequacy for fishers, fish workers, and fish farmers, FAO has designed and delivered training, building the capacity of over 100 individuals from 50 countries, including government officials from different line ministries (e.g. Fisheries, Social Affairs, Labour, Finance, among others) and fisher representatives from across the globe.⁴ Notable initiatives include: to improve awareness and capacity, an advanced course on social protection, economic inclusion, food security, and nutrition, with a territorial focus in Paraguay⁵ where SocPro4Fish has been undertaking assessments of vulnerabilities and social protection coverage to the fisheries sector; to improve shock-responsiveness for fisherfolk, training and peer-to-peer knowledge exchanges to identify barriers and potential pathways on articulating social protection and early warning systems (EWS) with participants from African, Caribbean and Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS); and to build capacity for the design of contributory programmes, specifically social security in fisheries, a course module as part of the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM) advanced specialized course in sustainable development of coastal communities, hosted in 2023 and 2024 in Tricase, Italy.

7. To promote sharing of experiences and inform the design and evaluation of social protection programmes, including unemployment insurance, in countries, FAO and the Brazilian government, through the NORAD-funded SocPro4Fish Project, organized a South-South cooperation exchange workshop in 2023 in Brazil. Participants from Colombia, Tunisia, Paraguay, Peru, Chile, Cabo Verde, and key international institutions shared lessons and discussed practical steps to the implementation of social protection for fishers in their respective countries. Brazil shared its experience implementing an unemployment benefit for fishers during closed seasons, known as “*Seguro Defeso*”, for which a socioeconomic impact evaluation was recently carried out by FAO and IPC-IG (detailed below in item 14). A panel of fisher representatives also shared perspectives on barriers to access and co-development of an action plan to strengthen coverage and adequacy of social protection towards Blue Transformation.

8. As part of FAO’s ongoing, extensive collaboration with the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) on social protection for fisheries, the SocPro4Fish project developed a social protection section for the country profiles in GFCM-LEX, a fisheries legislation database for countries under the GFCM application area. The purpose of this is to raise awareness of the importance of expanding social protection programmes to the sector by showing the status and trends of existing programmes and identifying gaps and potential barriers to access. This feature has now become permanent and will be updated as country profiles are added to the new FAO Social Protection for Fisheries Database (SocPro4Fish database). In 2022 and 2023, FAO and the GFCM conducted trainings on social protection in Spain and Italy with the participation from Albania, Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Tanzania, Ghana, and Tunisia and through the GFCM-LEX project. In February 2024, FAO and the GFCM hosted a workshop: Extending social protection coverage to the fisheries and aquaculture sector: where we are at and how to move forward. The

⁴ Albania; Algeria; Antigua and Barbuda; Bahamas; Barbados; Belize; Brazil; Cabo Verde; Chile; Colombia; Comoros; Cook Islands; Cuba; Dominica; Dominican Republic; Egypt; Federated States of Micronesia; Fiji; Grenada; Guinea Bissau; Guyana; Haiti; Jamaica; Kiribati; Lebanon; Marshall Islands; Mauritius; Morocco; Nauru; Niue; Palau; Papua New Guinea; Paraguay; Peru; Samoa; São Tome & Principle; Seychelles; Solomon Islands; St. Kitts and Nevis; St. Lucia; St. Vincent and Grenadines; Suriname; Timor Leste; Tonga; Trinidad & Tobago; Tunisia; Turkey; Tuvalu; Vanuatu.

⁵ A collaboration with the Latin American Faculty of Social Science (FLACSO).

workshop, part of the GFCM Forum on Fisheries Science in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea (Fish Forum), aimed to evaluate the breadth and depth of existing social protection systems, and address common access barriers faced by fishers including legal, administrative, and financial obstacles. GFCM-LEX and SocPro4Fish databases, featuring profiles of Egypt and Albania were presented.

9. FAO developed the Framework for Analysis and Action⁶ and the Diagnostic tool⁷ to support coherence between social protection policies and programmes and fisheries management. Drawing from country experiences, these tools aim to assist countries in the development of coherent interventions, providing a method for mapping and understanding the alignment between social protection and fisheries management and associated policies within a given context.

10. FAO and the Bay of Bengal Programme – Intergovernmental Organization (BOBP-IGO) have jointly published a [Plan of action for enhanced safety, decent work and social protection in the fisheries sector of the Bay of Bengal Programme region \(BOBSAFE\)](#). This comprehensive plan addresses identified challenges and needs, such as formalizing labour contracts, and recommends specific actions to expand social protection for the sector, aligning with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), namely SDG 1.3; 5; 8 and 14.

11. With the goal of promoting the inclusion of fisheries and aquaculture workers in national social protection systems, FAO and the Mesoamerican Committee for the Celebration of the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture jointly organized a [regional social protection forum](#) in 2022. Discussions centred on enhancing resilience against external impacts, identifying barriers, and proposing actionable strategies. The committee comprised fishing and aquaculture authorities from Central American Integration System (SICA) countries including the Central America Fisheries and Aquaculture Organization (OSPESCA), Mexico’s National Commission for Aquaculture and Fisheries (CONAPESCA), the Central American Confederation of Artisanal Fishers (CONFEPESCA), and others.

12. Under the NORAD-funded SocPro4Fish project, FAO and the University of the West Indies (UWI) co-developed and delivered an online learning course in 2022, building from the 2019 report [Addressing the Climate Change and Poverty Nexus: A Coordinated Approach in the Context of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement](#). Participants included 55 invited professionals from fisheries, climate, development and environmental conservation sectors in 13 Caribbean countries. A [live panel discussion](#) at the COP 27 Virtual Ocean Pavilion in November 2022 launched a self-paced [online](#) version of the course, receiving over 446 new registrations from 55 countries in the first three months of availability. Reflections and lessons from course alumni were shared in the August 2023 edition of [SAMUDRA Report](#).

13. Unemployment benefits targeted to fishers during closed seasons are one of the more widely known types of social protection programmes for the fisheries sector, yet they remain understudied, both in terms of implementation pathways, and long-term socio-economic impacts. FAO and the International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPC-IG) conducted the first [evaluation of an unemployment benefit in the fisheries sector](#).⁸ The cash benefit programme, known as Seguro-Defeso, combines social and environmental goals and is supporting fishers during closed fishing seasons (up to five months per year), seeking to ensure the conservation of exploited stocks while also securing the

⁶ FAO. 2022. *Strengthening coherence between social protection and fisheries policies – Framework for analysis and action*. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper No. 671/1. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc2411en>

⁷ FAO. 2022. *Strengthening coherence between social protection and fisheries policies – Diagnostic tool*. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper No. 671/2. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc2425en>

⁸ FAO and IPC-IG. 2023. “Socioeconomic impact evaluation of unemployment insurance for small-scale fishers in Brazil (Seguro-Defeso)”. Research Report, No. 78. Brasília. Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations and International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth. www.fao.org/social-protection/resources/resources-detail/en/c/1632363/

resilience of fishing communities. Results of the evaluation suggest benefits in multiple dimensions for beneficiary households, including higher rates of school enrollment, lower unemployment among young adults, housing improvements and reductions in labour force participation in the medium to long term. Methodologically, the study is innovative, demonstrating potential for use of administrative data in programme evaluation and supporting the case for interoperability of data registries so that beneficiary information can be updated and accessed more readily across public agencies. Findings also point to the value of reviewing the alignment and complementarity of social protection and fisheries management policies, as well as more broadly, coherence among agencies whose portfolios include responsibility for, or have the potential to impact, fishers and fisheries-based livelihoods (e.g. economic and rural development, poverty alleviation and social inclusion, education, health, and fisheries conservation and management).

14. FAO advocates for better Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) for fishers, considering factors like inequality, poverty, and climate change impacts on small-scale fisheries. On this theme, an FAO-led panel session at IFISH 6 emphasized social protection's role alongside OSH for resilient fisheries in climate change contexts. Panelists discussed global frameworks, social insurance, and the role of fisher organizations in improving OSH and access to social protection. It emphasized the role of social insurance in risk preparedness, and highlighted how social assistance, combined with improved practices, can act as supportive mechanisms to effectively reduce the incidence of injuries. Lastly, the transformative potential of fisher organizations in advancing OSH and social protection policies and practices was a key discussion point.

15. Co-organized by FAO and the Spanish Association of Wholesalers, Importers, Transformers and Exporters of Fishing and Aquaculture Products (CONXEMAR) since 2014, the annual Vigo Dialogue is an important benchmark event promoting decent working conditions within the fisheries and aquaculture sector. The 2023 Vigo Dialogue focused on how social protection can advance decent working conditions and facilitated an open discussion to foster feedback and input from multiple stakeholders.

16. FAO also works to bring forward fishers' perspectives on the many challenges faced to a broad global audience through multi-media, including podcasts and the [SocPro4Fish](#) website. The purpose is to highlight the importance of social protection in supporting fishers to address day-to-day concerns as well as in building the ability to plan and prepare for and protect against shocks and stressors. This is captured in stories shared by fishers in [Colombia](#), [Tunisia](#) and [Paraguay](#) as well as the podcasts⁹ "[Social protection, sustainability and fisheries](#)" and "[Colombia's Sea Women net a better deal](#)".

III. EXPANDING SOCIAL PROTECTION AT COUNTRY LEVEL

17. During the inter-sessional period, FAO prioritized national-level initiatives aimed at expanding social protection programmes for fishers and fish farmers through the NORAD-funded SocPro4Fish Project¹⁰ in Colombia, Paraguay, and Tunisia, and the FVC-funded project focused on Small-scale Producers' Equitable Access to Resources, expected to start in 2024 in Cabo Verde and the Dominican Republic. The project conducted reviews of programme coverage and adequacy in 3 countries (Colombia, Paraguay and Tunisia), generating evidence for improvements. It focused on eliminating access barriers and guiding new social protection initiatives. Inter-institutional working groups in project countries played a crucial role in strengthening implementation and monitoring capacities. Their ongoing efforts promote economic inclusion, livelihood security, and resource conservation in fisheries and aquaculture.

⁹ Podcasts featured in the [socialprotection.org](#) online platform dedicated to sharing knowledge and information on social protection. This platform serves as a global hub for practitioners, policy makers, researchers and other stakeholders involved in social protection.

¹⁰ GCP/GLO/352/NOR

18. In Colombia, an extensive review of social protection system regulations identified coverage gaps in the fishing sector, such as of the pension system. These gaps were discussed and addressed in the Inter-institutional Group of Social Protection for Fisheries and Aquaculture (GIPRO). The GIPRO, established through the project at national and territorial levels, comprises 43 Colombian entities, including from public and private sectors, fisher organizations, NGOs, and academia. GIPRO operates under three lines of work: activity formalization, comprehensive risk management, and livelihood rehabilitation. This approach has enabled structured and participatory synergies, promoting solutions coherent with the sector, thanks to the collaboration of both private and public actors. GIPRO is mandated by the government to provide technical inputs for regulating the SEDEVEDA closed-season unemployment benefits programme. Notably, the project successfully mainstreamed the fishing and aquaculture sector into the National Commission for Health and Safety at Work (CNSST).¹¹ Additionally, a complementary data collection module was designed to gather socioeconomic and social protection information through the Colombian Fisheries Statistical Service (SEPEC) developed in coordination with the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority (AUNAP) and piloted at the district level. A guidance document was then developed, supporting future applications, and more broadly for enhancing interoperability and coordination with SEPEC and other fishery registries. The project also focused on enhancing fishers' and fish workers' access to labour markets through capacity-building initiatives, including collaboration with the National Learning Service Centre to improve access to public procurement processes, revolving funds, and temporary employment programmes. Additionally, FAO, la Misión de la Confederación Mesa Nacional de Pesca Artesanal de Colombia (COMENALPAC) and National Learning Service (SENA) jointly created a course on formalization, cooperative management, and administration, launched in April 2024. The course equips 57 Colombian organizations with skills in market dynamics, entrepreneurship, and alternative livelihoods.

19. In Paraguay, a socio-economic profile of fishers was developed using administrative data, to understand levels of fisher registration, contributions to pensions, and beneficiaries of existing social protection, identifying coverage gaps and access barriers. This analysis differentiated between two distinct groups: beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of the Programme of Assistance of Fishers in the National Territory during closed fishing seasons (PROAP). Among the evidence generated, it showed that only 57 percent of registered fishers in Paraguay were beneficiaries of the programme, and 97 percent of the beneficiaries of the programme did not contribute to the pension system, hinting to a gap in coverage. Additionally, FAO collaborated with the Paraguayan government to evaluate PROAP, identify implementation gaps, and enhance coverage. Paraguay's registry systems were examined, and a guidance document was created to facilitate interoperability between fisher registries and broader social registries which contributes to more complete and easier to update administrative data, informing on existing socio-economic conditions among fishers, adequacy of existing programmes and facilitating targeting for new programmes. Feasibility analyses explored alternative livelihoods during closed fishing seasons. Analysis of existing programmes demonstrated inadequate benefit amounts, limited human capacity to identify poor fishers, and inclusion errors, these results were shared with the Ministry of Social Development, informing future decisions and initiatives to support small-scale fishers. This may include proposals to adjust eligibility requirements so that fishers may receive more than one type of benefit concurrently, or adding additional programmes to address working conditions, gender inequality, and climate readiness.

20. In Tunisia, a socio-economic characterization of artisanal fishers, combining existing and new primary data, informed an economic feasibility study evaluating scenarios for extending specific benefits to workers in the small-scale fishing sector. Findings showed low rates of awareness and compliance with existing contributory schemes, 47 percent of fishers are not aware of the benefits, and 68 percent do not pay contributions on an ongoing basis. An inter-institutional technical committee, established by the Tunisian government will guide further development of the social protection agenda for the fisheries sector, including chairing the discussion for a reform in the system. Possible paths

¹¹ CNSST is an operational body of the Colombian Ministry of Labour that holds responsibility for policy and guidelines regarding the General System of Occupational Risks.

include: maintaining the current structure of fisheries regimes, with modifications to meet the needs of fishers, including streamlining mandatory catch reporting procedures and improving benefits; a three-part check on contributions to enable validation of rights for mobile workers with multiple employers; flexible contributions to accommodate fishers fluctuating incomes; and development of a mobile, points-based scheme, to better address the needs of fishers, who may frequently switch boats and sectors.

21. In Malawi, under the Boosting Livelihoods Resilience, Response and Recovery from COVID-19 challenges in Southern and East Africa project, FAO supported expanding social protection coverage to informal fishers by facilitating village savings and loans groups (VSLs) and training for representatives of communities, local government, and community-based organizations. VSLs promote economic inclusion through microcredit and savings opportunities for those excluded from formal financial services due to low income, lack of assets or lack of necessary documentation. This initiative enables informal fishing workers to access vital financial services and social protection. ILO and FAO also assessed the feasibility of expanding social protection to the fisheries sector and developed recommendations for government engagement.

22. In the Philippines, FAO worked with the Provincial Government of Catanduanes, the Department of Agriculture (DA) and its attached agency the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) to support disaster recovery and contribute to long-term socio-economic progress in typhoon prone communities, by [testing anticipatory action and delivering urgent assistance through the social protection system](#), with a focus on economic inclusion in the fisheries sector. Anticipatory action is a humanitarian strategy involving making use of risk analysis and forecasting to trigger the delivery of multipurpose cash transfers before a crisis such as a hurricane, typhoon or flood. This is a relatively new approach, and field-level simulation exercises can be used to test deployment systems and ensure they are working, prior to an actual disaster. In addition to setting up a multi-channel fund disbursement system with partners, the project carried out a live simulation, with real disbursement of cash-based anticipatory action, to test system functionality. This practical exercise improved risk awareness and coordination, and response from recipient farmers and fisherfolk was very positive. This initiative was part of the project Transforming the face of agriculture: promoting socio-economic inclusion in the Philippines (2019–2023).

IV. FUTURE WORK

23. Aligned with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the 2021 COFI Declaration and the Blue Transformation roadmap, FAO will continue its work towards building governments' institutional capacity to strengthen social protection for small-scale fishers, recognizing its essential role in reducing vulnerability, and promoting Blue Transformation including small-scale producers' equitable access to resources. This includes investing in knowledge and capacity-building tools to empower stakeholders at various levels, as well as developing frameworks for identifying and assessing socio-economic and environmental dimensions associated with social protection for fisheries, particularly focusing on mechanisms to support fishers during closed seasons or protected areas and characterizing and mitigating the socio-economic impacts of fisheries management measures.

24. FAO, subject to availability of funds, will continue its work towards a comprehensive strategy that will highlight how to advance the coverage and adequacy of social protection for fisheries and aquaculture, and will include supporting cohesion with fisheries management and mainstreaming climate adaptation and gender sensitivity.

25. FAO will intensify efforts in data collection and analysis, specifically targeting information on coverage and adequacy of existing social assistance, insurance, and active labour market programmes in meeting the needs of people, households and communities engaged in fisheries and aquaculture. This ongoing work, leveraging platforms such as the SocPro4Fish database, GFCM-LEX, and SSF-

LEX, will contribute to the expansion of the global evidence base, which will help illuminate coverage gaps and identify opportunities to improve social protection for all fishers.

26. FAO will also promote innovative partnerships, such as public-private collaborations, communities of practice at various levels and facilitating South-South and triangular cooperation to share knowledge and best practices.