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Women in fisheries in the Mediterranean and Black Sea region: roles, challenges and opportunities



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Women in fisheries in the Mediterranean and Black Sea region: roles, challenges and opportunities

Eugenia Merayo

Valeriia Vakhitova

Anna Carlson

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Preparation of this document

This study was prepared by the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in collaboration with the FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Division, to shed light on the role of women in Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries. It attempts to quantify women's fisheries-related labour and highlights challenges and opportunities for women's engagement in the sector. The impetus for this work came from the GFCM Regional Plan of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, which calls for increased support towards engaging women fully and equitably in fisheries. However, given that women are active beyond just the small-scale sector and the difficulties of distinguishing between the contributions of women to small-scale and industrial fisheries, the scope of the study was enlarged to capture the full contribution of women along the entire fisheries value chain. The outcomes of this study aim to encourage reflection among experts and policymakers, including within the framework of the GFCM, towards improving data on the contributions of women to the sector and facilitating a more gender-equitable sector.

This publication begins with an introduction offering background information on the role of women in global and regional fisheries, which is further elaborated through a literature review presented in Chapter 1. Following an outline of the methodology at the start of Chapter 2, the quantitative methods used to estimate the engagement of women along the fisheries value chain in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea are detailed. Next, with a view to filling gaps in knowledge, Chapter 3 offers a qualitative analysis of the characteristics of women's roles and challenges, based on an in-depth literature review and key informant interviews conducted in five select countries. The publication concludes by providing recommendations and actionable suggestions in Chapter 4 to support policymakers in promoting the participation of women across the fishing sector.

The editing and publishing of this study was led by Matthew Kleiner (Publication Specialist), under the coordination of Ysé Bendjeddou (Publication Coordinator). The overall graphic design and layout of the publication was managed by Divya Venkatesh, and communication was handled by Clémentine Laurent. The publication was prepared under the overall supervision of Dominique Bourdenet (Knowledge Management Officer).

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Abstract

Women play active and varied roles throughout the fisheries value chain in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, including in pre-harvest activities like vessel and gear construction and maintenance, harvest activities both on board fishing vessels and from shore, and post-harvest activities such as sorting, cleaning, processing and marketing the catch, as well as in activities associated with running the fishing business, like bookkeeping. Women are also actively engaged across the region in fisheries research and fisheries administrations. Despite this high diversity of women's engagement in fisheries, their contributions are often not captured in official statistics, reinforcing the misconception that women do not play a role in the fisheries sector. One of the reasons behind women's contributions not being captured is that official data are rarely gender-disaggregated and generally do not cover employment along the entire value chain, instead including only onboard employment, where women may be in the minority. Furthermore, the characteristics of women's employment in fisheries, which is often part-time, informal or as family helpers instead of as recognized workers, presents additional challenges to accurate data collection.

Recognizing the importance of taking the roles, needs and experiences of women into account when addressing social, economic and environmental issues related to the fishing sector, this study aims to contribute to narrowing research gaps in the region regarding gender in fisheries, as well as supporting the commitments of Mediterranean and Black Sea countries to promoting gender equality. Using a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis, this publication attempts to quantify the contribution of women to fisheries-related employment and shed light on key challenges and opportunities for promoting gender equity in Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries. The findings presented estimate that women make up just under a third of all fishing-related jobs along the value chain; nevertheless, the results highlight that disparities in gender roles, financial inclusion, mobility, access to information and training, and engagement in decision-making pose challenges for the wider engagement of women in the sector. Actionable recommendations are provided to support policymakers in promoting gender equity in the fisheries sector.

Contents

Preparation of this document	iii
Abstract	iv
Acknowledgements	vii
Abbreviations	viii
Introduction	1
1. Overview of women in fisheries	4
1.1 Women in global fisheries	6
1.2 Women in Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries	8
2. Quantifying the role of women in the Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries sector	11
2.1 Methodology	12
2.2 Results: estimating the contribution of women to regional employment in fisheries	13
3. Identifying challenges and opportunities for women in the Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries sector	17
3.1 Methodology	18
3.1.1 Literature review	18
3.1.2 Key informant interviews	19
3.2 Results: roles, challenges and opportunities	20
3.2.1 Gender roles in fishing communities	20
3.2.2 Ownership of assets, access to finance and future investment	25
3.2.3 Mobility and transportation	28
3.2.4 Information and training	30
3.2.5 Decision-making and associations	33
4. Conclusions and recommendations	35
References	41

Figures and boxes

Figures

1. GFCM area of application, subregions and geographical subareas	8
2. Total gender-disaggregated employment by value chain stage in the GFCM area of application	14
3. Relative contributions to total employment by gender and value chain stage in small-scale and industrial fisheries in the GFCM area of application	14
4. Total gender-disaggregated fisheries-based employment and relative contributions to total fisheries-based employment by gender in GFCM subregions	15
5. Total fisheries-based women's employment and relative contributions to total fisheries-based women's employment by value chain stage in GFCM subregions	16

Boxes

1. Encouraging access to resources and investment in women's businesses: opportunities and good practices	27
2. Reducing barriers for women working in the fishing sector: opportunities and good practices	29
3. Gender-sensitive information dissemination and training: opportunities and good practices	32
4. Promoting women's engagement in decision-making: opportunities and good practices	34

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Abbreviations

AndMuPes	Asociación Andaluza de Mujeres del Sector Pesquero (Andalusian Association of Women in the Fishing Sector)	DCRF	Data Collection Reference Framework (GFCM)
ANMUPESCA	Asociación Nacional de Mujeres de la Pesca (National Association of Women in Fishing)	FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
AU-IBAR	African Union – Interafrican Bureau for Animal Resources	GFCM	General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean
AWFISHNET	African Women Fish Processors and Traders Network	ICSF	International Collective in Support of Fishworkers
CIHEAM	Centre International de Hautes Etudes Agronomiques Méditerranéennes (International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies)	IFC	International Finance Corporation
CPCs	contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties (GFCM)	SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
		SSF	small-scale fisheries
		UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
		WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

Introduction



In the Mediterranean and Black Sea region, the fishing sector represents a driver of local economic activity and a source of livelihoods for coastal communities. It also provides a valuable source of high-quality protein to support good nutrition, while contributing to the region's celebrated cultural and culinary heritage. Although the collective perception of this sector in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea is perhaps one of a male-dominated sector, the roles played by women should not be overlooked. It is important to note that fisheries-based livelihoods are not limited to fish-harvesting activities, but rather include the whole range of activities that bring a fish from sea to plate. These steps include the construction and repair of fishing vessels and gear, the harvesting of fish (including non-vessel-based harvesting, such as gleaning, which refers to foot-based fishing) and post-harvest work such as sorting, cleaning, processing and marketing of the catch, as well as bookkeeping and other administrative activities supporting the operation of fishing businesses. Women can be found in all these roles along the value chain. Furthermore, as Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries are in many cases characterized by family-run operations – particularly, but not limited to, small-scale fisheries (SSF) – female family members often provide essential support, even if not directly remunerated.

Despite the wide and varied roles of women in fisheries, their contributions can be underestimated in official statistics, partly because official data are often not gender-disaggregated nor cover employment along the whole value chain, instead including only onboard employment, where women may be underrepresented. The nature of women's employment in fisheries, which is often part-time, informal or as family helpers rather than as recognized workers, further complicates accurate data collection. In addition to limited quantitative data collection capturing the role of women in fisheries, there is also a lack of qualitative research on gender and fisheries in the region, resulting in limited knowledge of existing gender norms and on how access to resources and governance may differ for men and women.



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A lack of accurate information on the role of women in the sector risks relegating the issues faced by women in decision-making processes and when designing policies and programmes, leading to the potential marginalization of women or even inadvertent discrimination and the widening of existing gender inequalities. At the same time, a lack of consideration of women working in the sector can also result in their knowledge and experience being overlooked and not sufficiently profited from.

Recognizing the importance of considering the roles, needs and experiences of women when addressing social, economic and environmental issues, this study aims at contributing to narrowing research gaps in the region regarding gender in fisheries, as well as supporting the commitments of Mediterranean and Black Sea countries to promoting gender equality. It does so in the context of supporting international commitments such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”, which calls for gender-disaggregated data to monitor and evaluate progress towards this goal. Similarly, this study also responds to objectives within the internationally endorsed Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (FAO, 2015), which highlight the need to adopt gender-inclusive fisheries policies and practices.

This study also supports the objectives enshrined within regional commitments, such as the GFCM 2030 Strategy for sustainable fisheries and aquaculture in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, which includes gender as a cross-cutting theme and stresses, via Target 4 “Livelihoods: decent employment and engaged fishers towards profitable fisheries”, the need to support productive employment opportunities for men and women in the fisheries sector, including by shedding light on the role of women all along the fisheries value chain (FAO, 2021). Along these lines, this study also supports countries in meeting their obligations under the Malta MedFish4Ever Ministerial Declaration and the Sofia Ministerial Declaration, which call for improving working conditions and promoting

the role of women. It supports commitments made under the Ministerial Declaration on a Regional Plan of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea (FAO, 2023a), which calls on countries to i) support projects enabling women to undertake SSF activities; ii) secure equal participation of women in decision-making processes for policies directed towards SSF; and iii) encourage the development of better technologies appropriate to the work of women in SSF.

It is with these commitments in mind that this publication aims to fill gaps in knowledge and shed light on the role of women in fisheries, supporting policymakers and programme and project managers in fisheries public administrations, as well as other agencies, in addressing gender inequalities for the benefit of their fisheries policies and management plans. This study, recognizing that women’s roles and experiences vary across countries and regions, nevertheless aims to expand knowledge on the important contributions of women. Its main objectives are to:

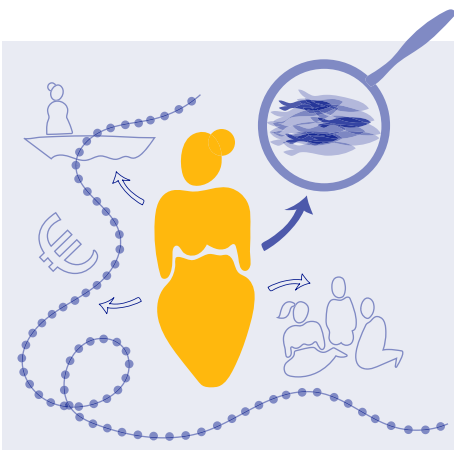
1. consolidate available information and produce clearer estimates quantifying women’s employment in the sector;
2. shed light on existing challenges and opportunities for women, including access to resources, mobility, information and training, and decision-making; and
3. provide actionable recommendations to support the visibility and participation of women in the sector.





1

Overview of women in fisheries



In the Mediterranean and Black Sea region and around the world, women are engaged in all stages of the fisheries value chain, but a lack of gender-disaggregated fisheries employment data, as well as a lack of data on unpaid or informal fisheries work, means that women's contributions to the economies of coastal communities remain largely underestimated and undervalued.

1.1 Women in global fisheries

Although literature on the role of women in fisheries is scarce, recent years have seen efforts made to raise awareness of women's participation in the fishing sector at the global level. However, these studies have predominantly focused on the role of women in small-scale fisheries (SSF), so gaps in knowledge remain of women's contributions to industrial fisheries or other fisheries-related work at the global level.

Harper *et al.* (2020), in their study titled "Valuing invisible catches: Estimating the global contribution by women to small-scale marine capture fisheries production", examined the participation of women in SSF globally, based on a compilation of catch and employment estimates, grey literature and interviews with fisheries and gender experts in 62 countries. According to the estimates produced, approximately 2.1 million women participate in the SSF sector globally, accounting for around 11 percent of total SSF employment. The global economic impact of women's activities in SSF was estimated at USD 14.8 billion per year, showing the extent to which these women make significant contributions to coastal economies, food security and the subsistence of their families. This study found that women generally catch fish onshore or in coastal waters, either on foot or using small vessels, and that most of their catches were destined for family consumption, although they also sell part of their catch (Harper *et al.*, 2020).

Another global study, *Illuminating Hidden Harvests: The contributions of small-scale fisheries to sustainable development*, conducted by FAO, Duke University and WorldFish (2023), also provided insight into the contributions of women to the fishing sector globally.

Recognizing that data were generally scarcer for the SSF sector as compared to industrial fisheries, this study focused on estimating the characteristics and contributions of SSF around the world, including estimating the participation of women in the SSF sector. It was highlighted that SSF represent almost 90 percent of global fisheries employment, underlining the importance of SSF for coastal communities around the world. Furthermore, *Illuminating Hidden Harvests* estimated that approximately 44.7 million women around the globe – representing 39.6 percent of the total active SSF workforce – participate along the value chain or in subsistence activities.

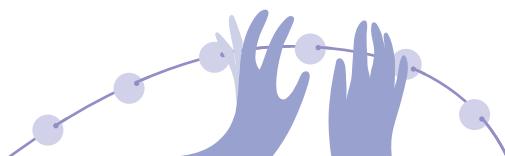
Further evaluation of the different stages of the SSF value chain revealed important insight into the role of women in fisheries. *Illuminating Hidden Harvests* estimated that women represent 15.4 percent of total employment in the pre-harvest sector, which includes fishing gear manufacturing and repair, bait and ice provisioning, and boat building. In the harvesting sector, women were estimated to account for 18.7 percent of total employment, including both vessel based and non-vessel-based activities. In the harvesting sector, women's presence is particularly important in coastal fisheries, where they use limited or no fishing equipment and dominate activities such as gleaning or gathering invertebrates in coastal and inland habitats, often using either just their hands or nets, lines and traps. The post-harvest sector, which includes fish processing and selling, is where women's activities are most concentrated, as they represent almost half (49.8 percent) of total employment (FAO, Duke University and WorldFish, 2023).

Available literature at the global level highlights that women's contributions to fisheries often remain "invisible", especially when they work



in family businesses, for example, by doing paperwork, repairing nets or marketing and processing fish at a small scale (Harper *et al.*, 2020; FAO, Duke University and WorldFish, 2023). These studies reveal that this work is generally unpaid and/or informal and rarely considered as professional work, instead falling under the domestic responsibilities of women. However, these roles are essential for the survival of coastal fishing enterprises and thus make important contributions to local communities and local economies. As most official statistics focus on formal employment in the marine harvesting sector rather than

coastal fishing or informal work along the value chain, most of women's contributions are excluded from official fisheries data collection and analysis at the global level. Consequently, official catch and employment figures are generally underestimated, together with the sector's social and environmental impacts.

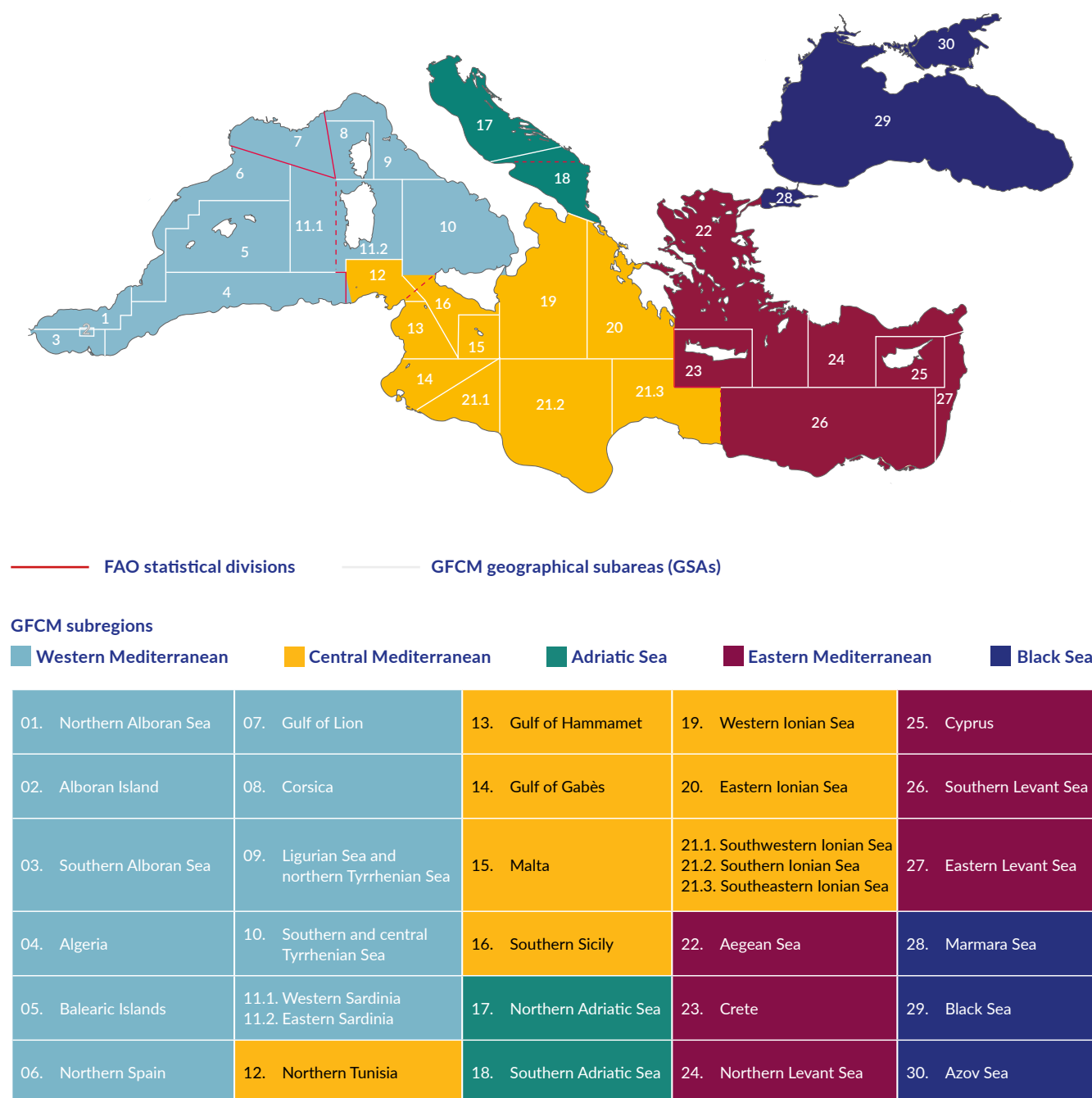


1.2 Women in Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries

In the Mediterranean and Black Sea region, responsibility for compiling employment data at the regional level lies with the GFCM, which is the regional fisheries management organization responsible for the marine waters of the

Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Its area of application is divided into five subregions – the western, central and eastern Mediterranean, the Adriatic Sea and the Black Sea – which are further divided into 30 geographical subareas (Figure 1).

Figure 1. GFCM area of application, subregions and geographical subareas



Source: United Nations Geospatial. 2020. Map geodata [shapefiles]. New York, USA, United Nations, modified by the author.

The GFCM has the authority to adopt binding recommendations for fisheries conservation and management in the region. To support decision-making, its Scientific Advisory Committee on Fisheries regularly reviews data submitted by contracting parties and cooperating non-contracting parties (CPCs) in order to formulate scientific, social and economic advice. The Data Collection Reference Framework (DCRF) is the tool by which all fisheries-related data, including employment data, are collected and transmitted by CPCs, as required by relevant GFCM recommendations (GFCM, 2018).

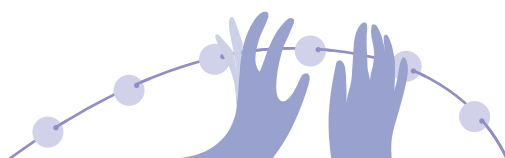
Official data submitted by CPCs are reported biennially in the GFCM flagship publication, *The State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries*, and generally reflect global trends. In *The State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries*, the contribution of fisheries (both industrial and SSF) to livelihoods is estimated. The most recent edition (FAO, 2023b) highlights that, of the approximately 84 242 vessels operating in the region, 68 100 (82 percent) are in SSF. Work on board these vessels total approximately 183 000 jobs, of which 111 000 (61 percent) are estimated to be in SSF. As for revenue, fisheries in the Mediterranean and Black Sea region are estimated to generate USD 3 billion annually, of which USD 768 million (26 percent) are generated by SSF (FAO, 2023b). These figures likely underestimate the real size of the sector, as they do not include the contributions of shore-based fishing activities, fisheries-based work along the value chain nor non-remunerated work of collaborating family members. They nonetheless point to the crucial role of fisheries in the economies of coastal communities throughout the region. From these figures, it is also clear that the majority of Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries-based livelihoods are dependent on small-scale, multi-species, multi-gear fisheries that are highly seasonal and often family-run operations using small boats and artisanal gear in coastal waters.

However, official GFCM data on the contribution of regional fisheries to livelihoods are limited in their ability to illuminate the role of women in the sector. Employment data submitted by CPCs via the DCRF are not gender-disaggregated and only quantify

onboard jobs. As such, understanding of the pre- and post-harvest fisheries sectors, as well as shore-based fishing activities and the labour of non-remunerated collaborating family members is limited across the region. Some information may exist through national-level studies, but this information is not standardized at a regional level, and it therefore remains challenging to produce estimates from different sources. For example, national data on fisheries employment may be provided as an aggregated figure including, in addition to marine and coastal fisheries, inland and aquaculture data, which are then difficult to differentiate.

A regional study by the European Commission, titled *Study of the role of women in fisheries in the Mediterranean and Black Sea* (European Commission, 2019), attempted to enhance the understanding of women's roles in the fishing sector (industrial and SSF). It covered ten European Union Member States from the Mediterranean and Black Sea region: Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Romania, Slovenia and Spain. This study highlighted the roles of many women working in family businesses in fisheries, noting that they are not generally granted legal status nor recognized as formal workers, so they do not receive a salary nor have access to social security. Their contributions are seen as part of their domestic responsibilities. At the European Union level, the granting of the legal status of "assisting spouses" in 2010 gave fishers' wives legal recognition and allowed them to access social benefits. However, the degree to which this initiative has been implemented in practice varies.

This study also found that men and women perform different roles in the sector. In countries such as Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Romania and Slovenia, women are engaged in net cleaning and repairing, sometimes informally as fishers' wives and other times formally employed in industrial-scale fisheries. They also work in administrative tasks, such as accounting, and in marketing. In Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Romania and Spain, women are registered as boat owners, although they are not necessarily involved in any fishing activities on board. Even when working as crew members on fishing vessels, their tasks



tend to be focused on cleaning and cooking for the other crew members. Women are widely involved in selling fish, whether in local and retail markets or in wholesale fish markets. Women were found to be involved in fish processing, although the level varied from country to country. Finally, the high number of women working in research and public policy in the fisheries sector, as well as in national and regional agencies, was highlighted, although it was noted that managerial roles were often held by men. This study produced recommendations for enhancing the visibility and recognition of

women's roles in fisheries, helping women to access the fisheries sector labour market and increasing women's social inclusion. These included recommendations, among others, for promoting gender-disaggregated data collection, supporting revisions to the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund to mainstream gender equality, supporting women's organizations, supporting gender-sensitive policies and combatting stereotypes through greater visibility of women in communications on fisheries (European Commission, 2019).



2

Quantifying the role of women in the Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries sector



Women occupy about one in three fisheries-related jobs across the region's small-scale and industrial fisheries sectors, with notable variations in their participation depending on value chain stage and subregion.

2.1 Methodology

Despite a number of studies aiming to illuminate the role of women in fisheries, important gaps remain in quantifying their role at the regional level in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, as existing studies only focus on certain portions of the fishing sector, e.g. only small-scale fisheries (SSF), or on select countries, e.g. only European Union Member States. Therefore, a more comprehensive estimate of the contribution of women along the whole marine fisheries value chain in the Mediterranean and Black Sea region, covering the pre-harvest, harvest (both industrial fisheries and SSF) and post-harvest sectors, is lacking. In order to consolidate available information and produce this comprehensive estimate, an analysis of existing data from multiple sources was carried out.

Official GFCM employment figures, as reported in *The State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries 2023 – Special Edition* (FAO, 2023b), were used as the basis for the estimates produced in this publication, as they were considered to be the most accurate and reliable, covering employment in marine fisheries (industrial and SSF) in most CPCs. These data stem from official data submissions from CPCs via the DCRF online platform and are derived from national socioeconomic surveys. These data distinguish between small-scale and industrial fisheries, as well as facilitate the aggregation of data at different spatial scales (regional, subregional, national, geographic subarea, etc.).

However, official GFCM employment data are not gender-disaggregated, nor do they provide information for the pre-harvest and post-harvest sectors. To attempt to identify available, official and gender-disaggregated data quantifying employment along the value chain, a thorough literature review of publicly

available fisheries and environmental ministry databases, United Nations agency reports (e.g. United Nations Development Programme, UN Women) and published scientific and technical papers was conducted. However, besides in select cases, the limited information available was often outdated and did not include the value chain component of fisheries-based employment. This literature review underscored the lack of available data on women's employment in fisheries in this region.

Ultimately, the dataset of the *Illuminating Hidden Harvests* study (FAO, Duke University and WorldFish, 2023), obtained from the study authors, was deemed to be the most complete source of information on women's employment along the fisheries value chain. Although the findings published in the study focused primarily on the SSF sector, the dataset produced for this study included estimates of gender-disaggregated employment data for all fisheries (industrial and SSF) along the value chain. The study produced these estimates through the application of a common global methodology that relied on a variety of approaches, including case studies and responses to ad hoc questionnaires completed by FAO Members, as well as an analysis of available global, regional and national datasets. In the case of the 24 Mediterranean and Black Sea countries included in the *Illuminating Hidden Harvests* dataset, eight countries' data (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Egypt, Greece, Italy, Morocco and Tunisia) were drawn from labour or household surveys, while the rest were based on a weighted regression analysis. The dataset, however, aggregates inland and marine fisheries together for the post harvest sector.

Considering that the *Illuminating Hidden Harvests* data consisted of estimates also including inland fisheries, whereas GFCM employment data, as reported in *The State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries*, were based on official statistics, the analysis presented in this publication

relies on the official figures from *The State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries 2023 – Special Edition* as its foundation (FAO, 2023b). To produce the estimates discussed in Section 2.2 "Results: estimating the contribution of women to regional employment in fisheries", the *Illuminating Hidden Harvests* dataset was first revised to remove employment data from inland fisheries. Next, the percentages of women working in the SSF and industrial harvest sectors, according to the dataset, were calculated. These percentages were then applied to *The State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries* SSF and industrial employment figures, respectively, to estimate gender-disaggregated harvest employment for these sectors. Finally, these data were combined with gender-disaggregated *Illuminating Hidden Harvests* data on pre-harvest and post-harvest employment to arrive at the total estimates discussed in Section 2.2. For select CPCs without data available from *The State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries*, *Illuminating Hidden Harvests* estimates were used.

While helpful for shedding light on a notoriously data-poor issue, this approach does have its limitations. First, the information presented consists of estimates, which should ultimately be validated through data collection in the field. Second, the official employment figures from *The State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries* – which form the basis of this analysis – only account for employment on board vessels from the harvest sector and are not gender-disaggregated. It is important to remember that harvesting activities in fisheries are not only limited to onboard activities, but also include the harvesting of marine living resources by hand and on foot (gleaning, foot-based fishing, shellfish collecting, etc.) or other shore-based fishing using gear (nets, hooks, etc.). The *Illuminating Hidden Harvests* study underlines that these non-vessel-based fishing activities are essential to many livelihoods, especially in rural areas and may involve some or all members of the household (FAO, Duke University and WorldFish, 2023). Consequently, as this report builds its analysis from the onboard harvest employment data submitted by CPCs, the figures produced likely still underestimate the true magnitude of fisheries-based employment and, in particular, the contributions of women.

2.2 Results: estimating the contribution of women to regional employment in fisheries

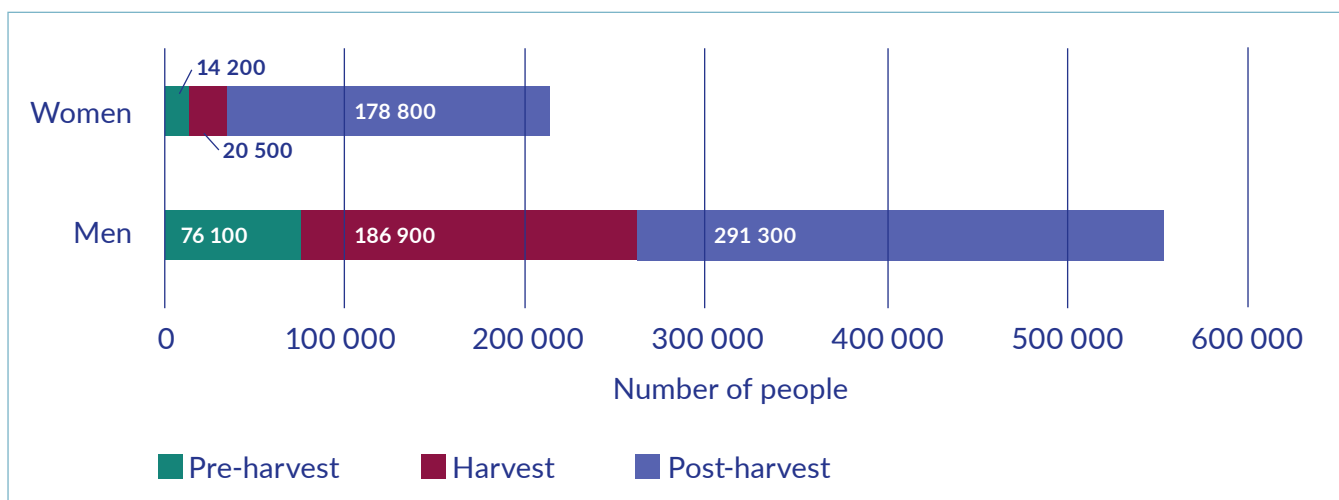
Based on the analysis conducted for this publication, when considering full- and part-time employment in the pre-harvest, harvest and post-harvest sectors, it is estimated that approximately 768 000 people are employed along the fisheries value chain (including both SSF and industrial fisheries), of which 213 500 (28 percent) are estimated to be women (Figures 2 and 3).

The pre-harvest sector is estimated to employ 90 300 people in the region (12 percent of total fisheries employment), of which 14 200 are women (16 percent of pre-harvest employment); the harvest sector is estimated to employ 207 400 people (27 percent of total fisheries employment), of which approximately 20 500 (10 percent of harvest sector employment) are women; and the post-harvest sector is estimated to employ 470 100 people (61 percent of total fisheries employment), of which approximately 178 800 are women (38 percent of post-harvest employment). It is notable that women's employment is by far most concentrated in the post-harvest sector, which includes carrying out work to sort and clean the catch, and process and market fish.



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Figure 2. Total gender-disaggregated employment by value chain stage in the GFCM area of application

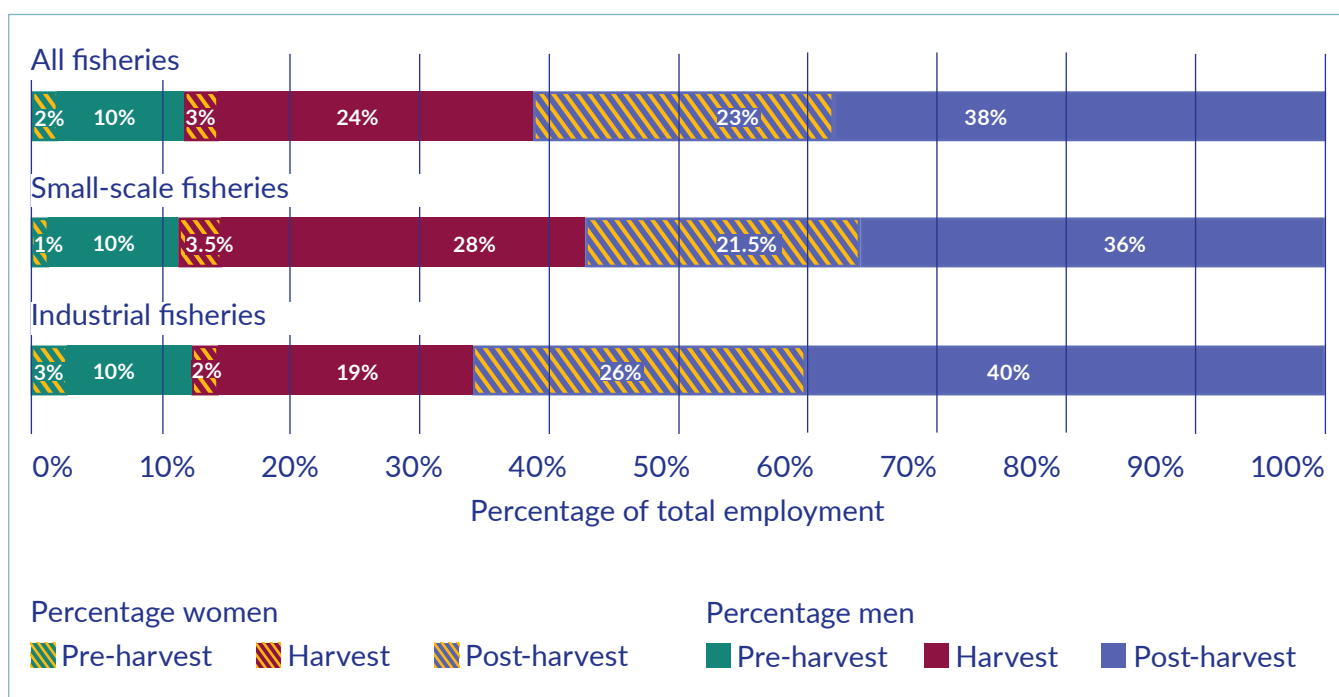


Sources: Personal communications; FAO. 2023. *The State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries 2023 – Special edition*. General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc8888en>

Further examination of the participation in fisheries by small-scale and industrial fishing segments also provides valuable insight. With respect to SSF, women are estimated to represent 26 percent of employment along the value chain (108 000 women), whereas women are estimated to occupy a slightly larger share of employment throughout the

industrial fisheries value chain, accounting for 30 percent of employment (105 500 women). Although, according to these estimates, women’s employment in fisheries is greater in the industrial segment, this figure likely ignores an important part of women’s employment in the small-scale sector, especially in non-vessel-based jobs, given the lack of systematized data collection on this type of employment.

Figure 3. Relative contributions to total employment by gender and value chain stage in small-scale and industrial fisheries in the GFCM area of application

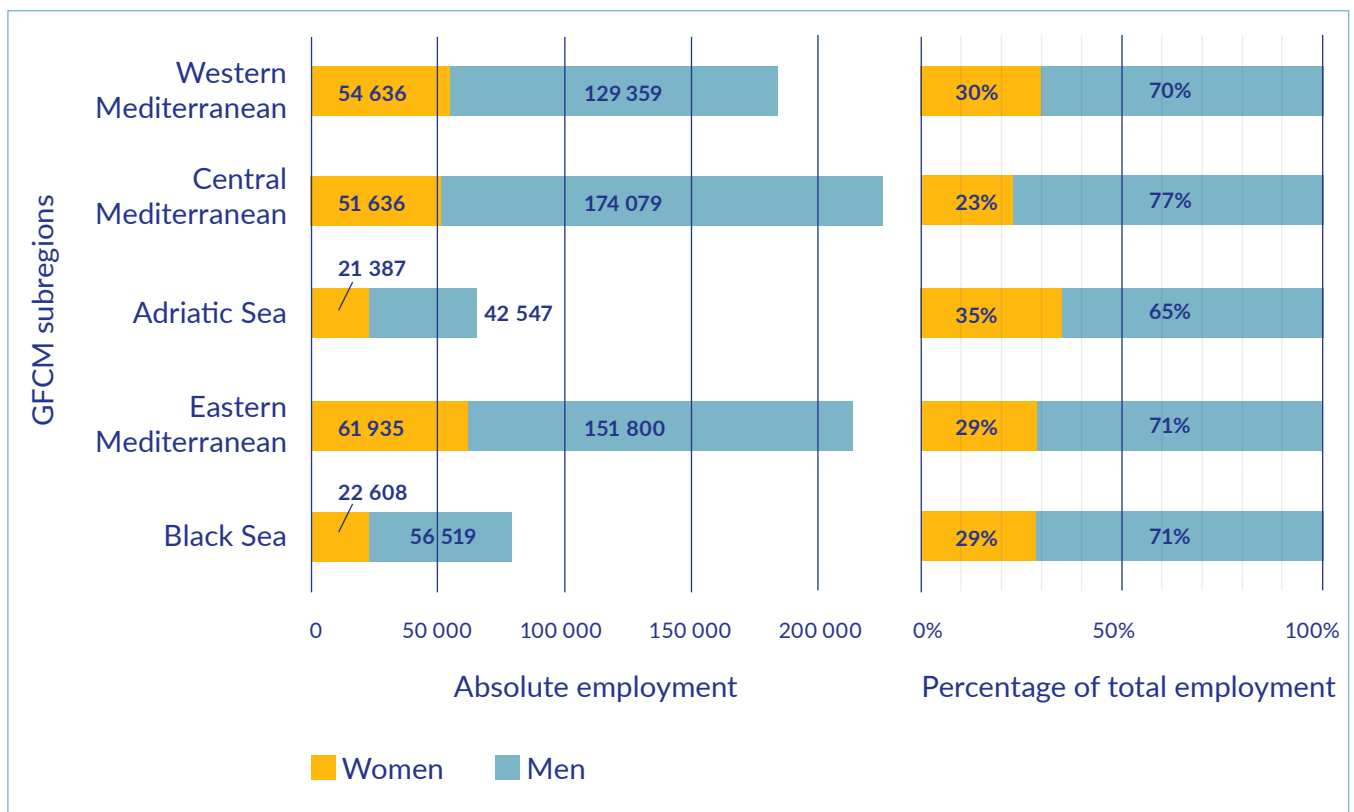


Sources: Personal communications; FAO. 2023. *The State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries 2023 – Special edition*. General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc8888en>

Through this analysis, important subregional differences also emerge. For example, while the central Mediterranean has the second-highest total onboard employment of all subregions (FAO, 2023b), it has the highest total employment along the fisheries value chain. Nevertheless, the central Mediterranean trails the eastern Mediterranean and western Mediterranean in terms of the absolute number of women employed in fisheries, and it is, overall, the subregion with the lowest percentage of women employed. On the other hand, although the Adriatic Sea is the subregion with the lowest total employment in fisheries, it is the subregion with the highest percentage of fisheries-based jobs occupied by women (35 percent) (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Total gender-disaggregated fisheries-based employment and relative contributions to total fisheries-based employment by gender in GFCM subregions

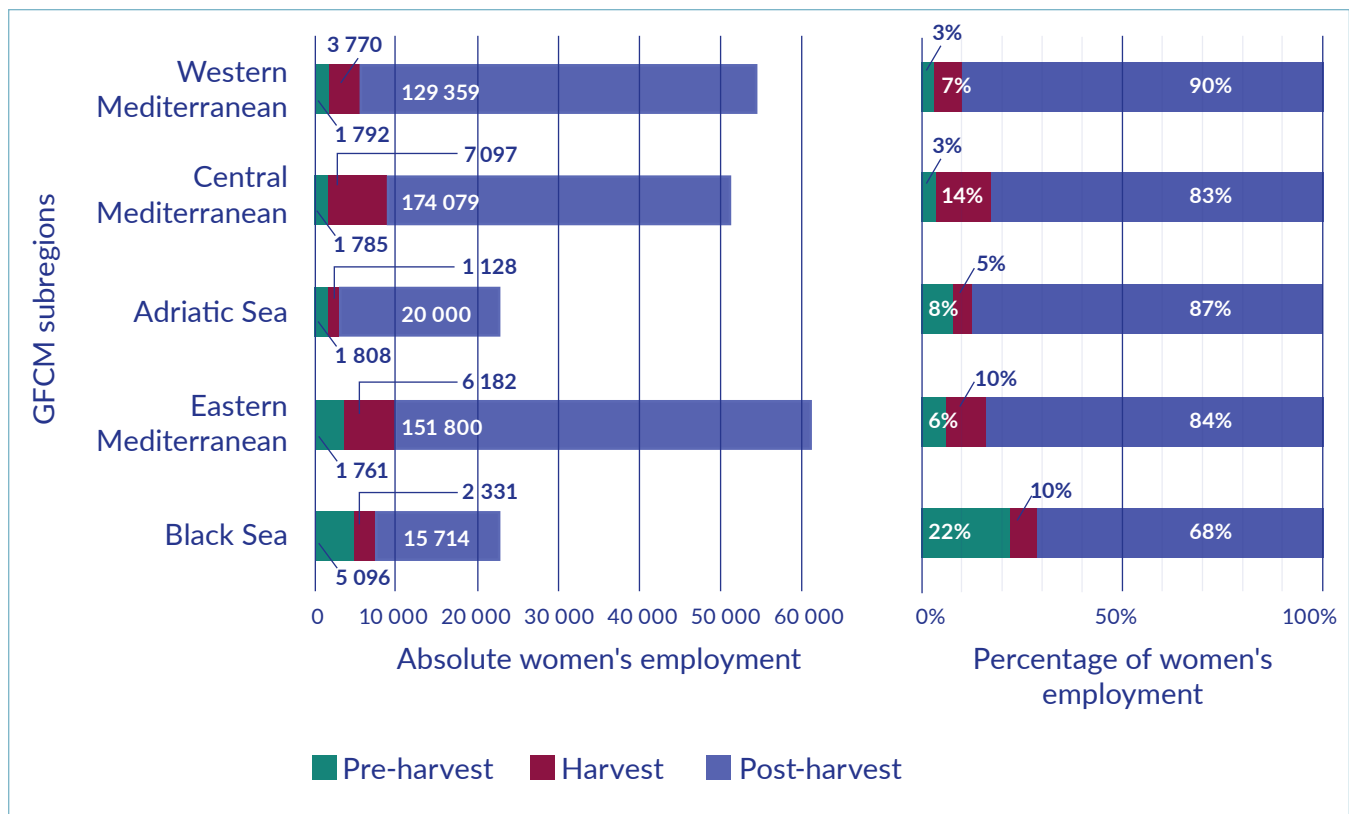


Sources: Personal communications; FAO, 2023. *The State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries 2023 – Special edition*. General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc8888en>

An analysis of how women’s employment is distributed across the different stages of the value chain reveals further important differences among the different subregions (Figure 5). While the general trends of women being most active in the post-harvest sector hold true across the subregions, some

interesting distinctions emerge. Compared with other subregions, the Black Sea sees women more active in the pre-harvest sector, while in the central Mediterranean women are relatively more active in the harvesting sector. The western Mediterranean is the subregion with the highest proportion of women working in the post-harvest sector.

Figure 5. Total fisheries-based women’s employment and relative contributions to total fisheries-based women’s employment by value chain stage in GFCM subregions



Sources: Personal communications; FAO. 2023. *The State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries 2023 – Special edition*. General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc8888en>



3

Identifying challenges
and opportunities
for women in the
Mediterranean and
Black Sea fisheries
sector



Women face obstacles to their full and equal participation in fisheries due to barriers to owning assets and accessing finances and information, as well as limitations on their mobility, but promising initiatives promoting their engagement throughout the region serve as good practice examples.

3.1 Methodology

In order to complement the quantitative estimates of the role of women in the fisheries sector at the regional level, as well as to shed light on existing challenges and opportunities for women in the sector, additional qualitative evidence was gathered via a literature review and a series of key informant interviews. This work allowed for an in-depth analysis of the social and economic challenges faced by women in fisheries communities and for the identification of conclusions and recommendations. This qualitative analysis focused primarily on five countries, each representing one of the GFCM subregions, namely Albania (Adriatic Sea), Algeria (western Mediterranean), Egypt (eastern Mediterranean), Georgia (Black Sea) and Tunisia (central Mediterranean). These countries were selected based on the preliminary analysis of available information on women in fisheries in the GFCM area of application, as discussed in Section 2.2 “Results: estimating the contribution of women to regional employment in fisheries”. The selected countries were identified as those with limited published information on this topic and thus best positioned to potentially benefit from additional research on women’s participation in fisheries and to fill gaps in overall regional understanding.

It is important to keep in mind the heterogeneity of women’s roles and experiences across – and within – countries. While attempts were made through this chapter to offer a wide perspective and cover a range of topics that are likely of interest for women in the sector in this region, factors such as social norms and customs, socioeconomic contexts and even the characteristics of the fishery resources in each area make gender issues highly contextual. Therefore, although efforts have been made to generalize results where possible, insights are also provided

into individual countries. Another factor to consider is the changing nature of gender roles over time. While this publication attempts to rely on only the most recent studies, it is not always possible due to the limited availability of documented research on this topic. Therefore, while the overall picture has remained unchanged, as corroborated by interviews with key stakeholders, some of the particular challenges highlighted in the literature may have evolved in recent years.

3.1.1 Literature review

An in-depth literature review, focusing on the five selected countries, aimed to identify any existing studies on gender and fisheries to better understand the roles and experiences of women in the sector. Due to the scarcity of published materials on this matter in the area, the literature search was extended to gender studies on rural communities, although they tended to focus on the agricultural sector. A combination of journal articles, official reports and grey literature was considered. A snowball method was used to identify any further relevant literature, while discarding studies outside the scope of this publication, such as those addressing aquaculture. Attempts were made to focus on recent studies (i.e. published within the last five years), although on some occasions older studies were included due to their relevance and the overall scarcity of available studies. The country-by-country gender analysis was approached considering five broad topics that emerge regularly in gender literature: access and control over resources (including land, finance and credit, information, and mobility); gender roles; time use and practices; decision-making power; and gender beliefs and stereotypes.

Efforts were also made to uncover examples of successful past or current initiatives in the region addressing one or more of the identified challenges for women in fisheries, in order to highlight the opportunities that lie behind those challenges. Such examples were identified via the literature review (of all countries, not just the five selected for in-depth study), as well as follow-up discussions with stakeholders in the region, who provided further details on these projects.

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3.1.2 Key informant interviews

Following an exhaustive literature review, a series of key informant interviews were conducted to capture experiences and anecdotes providing additional insight into the main findings emerging from the literature review. A total of 24 people were interviewed (16 female, 8 male) over the course of 18 interviews (15 of these interviews were with a single person, two interviews were with two people together, and one interview was a group interview). The interviews took place during the months of June and July 2023 and were carried out online via Zoom. They covered a wide range of stakeholders and different profiles of interviewees from the five selected countries in the region, including fishers and representatives of women's fisheries associations (8 interviewees), fisheries managers from government administrations (5 interviewees), academics and researchers (6 interviewees), and gender experts and advisors from relevant international organizations with experience in the sector and in the region (5 interviewees).

Key informants were selected via several pathways, including by speaking with relevant gender experts among GFCM and FAO focal points in the selected countries. Fishers and fisher organizations that had previously engaged with the GFCM in relevant conferences were also identified, including those having participated in sessions of the Small-Scale Fishers' Forum, an initiative stemming from the GFCM Regional Plan of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries in the



Mediterranean and the Black Sea that seeks to provide opportunities for the region's small-scale fishers and fish workers to come together, share good practices and learn from one another (FAO, 2023a). Gender advisors and researchers specializing in women in fisheries, as identified through the literature review, were also contacted for their input. Based on information received during these interviews, additional key informants were identified and a snowball sample of people with relevant expertise in the sector was produced.

Each interview lasted approximately one hour and followed a semi-structured format, using the following set of guiding topics to prompt reflection from the interviewees:

- women's participation in the fishery (roles along the value chain and characteristics of their employment, their personal and socioeconomic profiles, etc);
- types of challenges women face in the sector – for example, when accessing resources or in engaging in decision-making;
- existence of women's fishery organizations in the country (if any);
- any past or current initiatives that aim to support women in fisheries in the region; and
- views on needed support for women in fisheries.



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Interviews were recorded and later transcribed. The transcripts were then broken down into single statements and coded according to common themes in order to facilitate the qualitative analysis presented in Section 3.2 “Results: roles, challenges and opportunities”, as well as the recommendations provided in Chapter 4.

This key informant interview approach has the benefit of generating additional insight into the main messages that emerged from the literature review by capturing anecdotes and first-hand experiences of the interviewees and contributing to the analysis with context and nuance. Nonetheless, the heterogeneity of women's roles in the sector and the variety of cultural contexts covered by this study, coupled with the limited number of interviews conducted, results in shortcomings as far as producing data that can be fully extrapolated to all women working in the sector.

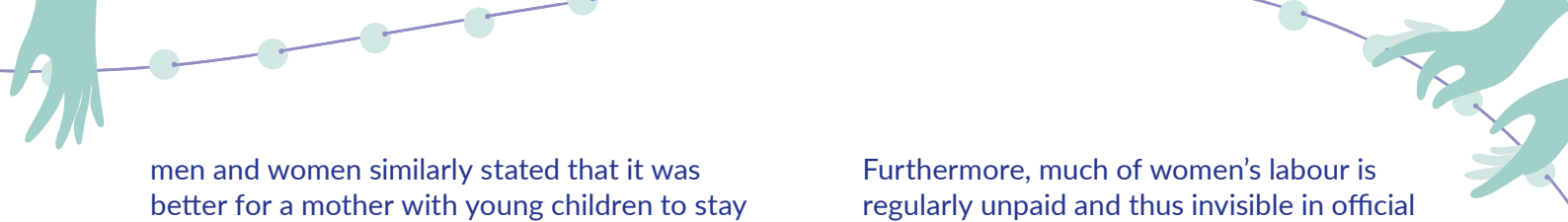
3.2 Results: roles, challenges and opportunities

The findings presented in this section represent a mix of common messages emerging from the literature review and the key informant interviews. Examples of opportunities and good practices for reducing the barriers women face in accessing resources and participating fully in fisheries are highlighted in Boxes 1 through 4.

3.2.1 Gender roles in fishing communities

Gender roles at the household and community level

Across the five countries analysed (Albania, Algeria, Egypt, Georgia and Tunisia), traditional gender roles prevailed, with women commonly seen as responsible for household and domestic tasks (e.g. cooking, cleaning, taking care of children) while men were generally focused on responsibilities outside of the household to generate monetary income. At the household level, men were found to be primarily involved in fixing household items, paying utility bills and buying food, especially in rural areas, and they were (with exceptions) typically found to be less involved in domestic work (USAID, 2019). Social norms and tradition play a role in assigning the responsibility for child-rearing, housekeeping and care work primarily to women, while men are seen as providers and responsible for major financial decisions. In Georgia, a study showed that a majority of men believe that family care is the main responsibility of women, a belief shared by a minority (less than 40 percent) of women (UNDP, 2020). Nevertheless, both



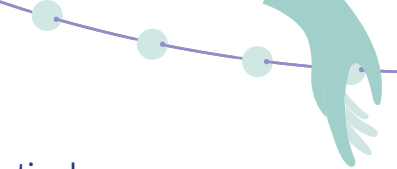
men and women similarly stated that it was better for a mother with young children to stay at home and, according to this study, a wide majority of both men and women believed that a man's duty was to provide financially for the family. In Egypt, women are also culturally perceived as primarily responsible for the household and childcare (OECD, 2018). Interestingly, there are significant generational gaps in these perceptions, as older people hold more traditional views around gender roles (UNDP, 2020). The aging demographics of rural populations – following the migration of younger people to other areas or abroad in search of better economic opportunities – and the fact that fisheries-dependent communities are often located in rural areas mean that fishing communities may typically hold more traditional views on gender roles.

Strong social and cultural norms may also discourage women from seeking work outside the home. According to a 2019 survey, only 7 percent of Egyptians accepted that the wife, were she to be offered a job with a higher salary, may work while her husband instead takes care of the home and children (NCW, 2020). In another survey focused on women's economic participation, 92 percent of respondents believed that dedication to their family was the real measure of success for women, with a similar proportion noting that a working mother should leave her job should it conflict with her family obligations (Osman, 2019). The belief that children suffer by having a working mother is shared by almost 80 percent of men and 70 percent of women in Tunisia (WVS, 2020). Furthermore, men were also less likely than women to identify having a job as the best way to achieve women's independence (UNDP, 2020).

When women do work outside the home, they commonly experience a double burden of domestic and productive work, a dynamic that emerged regularly in all five countries analysed. In addition to the work they may perform in income-generating activities, such as fish harvesting or processing, women were nevertheless regularly still responsible for household tasks, including taking care of children and other family members.

Furthermore, much of women's labour is regularly unpaid and thus invisible in official employment statistics. This is, of course, true for household labour (cooking, cleaning, caring for family members) that is not remunerated, but it can also hold true for women's work in the fishing sector, where women are at times not recognized as legitimate or formal actors (Interviewee 4, Albania). Women's work in fisheries is often considered as family help and therefore not remunerated (Interviewee 4, Albania; Interviewee 15, Georgia; Interviewee 21, Tunisia). Even if the woman spends most of her day working – waking early and getting involved in fisheries activities – in addition to her domestic responsibilities, she is generally not considered as an actual worker (Interviewee 22, Tunisia). Despite this informal status, women working in fisheries still face tough working conditions (Interviewee 15, Georgia). While a fisher's wife can work mending the nets, cleaning the fish or helping her husband preparing the boat, she is not often considered as someone who owns or runs the family business (Interviewee 4, Albania).

The discrepancy between women and men in terms of unpaid labour is well documented in literature. In Georgia, women spend almost five times more time on unpaid work than men – 3.4 hours per day in comparison to 0.7 hours per day for men (UN Women Georgia, 2022a). Similarly, in Egypt, women spend more time than men performing household activities (5.0 hours versus 1.7 hours per day, respectively) and caring for family members (2.3 hours versus 1.8 hours, respectively). According to an Egyptian labour market panel survey, women spend an average of 27 hours per week on unpaid care work and domestic responsibilities, in comparison to the mere one hour spent by men (FAO, 2022a). In Tunisia, that unequal distribution of tasks means that women spend between a third and a half of their 24-hour day – 8 to 12 hours – on unpaid work, compared to 45 minutes spent by men (USAID, 2022). Women in the countries analysed reported that their share of household tasks does not change when they start working in formal employment, leading to an increase in their overall workload (GIZ, 2016; UN Women Georgia, 2022a). In Albania, the amount of time women reported



spending daily on work, including both paid and unpaid, is greater than that of men, with women spending 7 hours on work in comparison to the 5 hours spent by men (INSTAT, UNFPA and UN Women, 2011). This imbalance is due to women being responsible for the majority of unpaid work associated with domestic and family care and the fact that this burden does not decrease when they engage in paid work. Statistics from Egypt show that employed married women spend almost the same amount of time doing domestic work as those not employed (World Bank, 2018). In Albania, employed women spend about 4 hours on unpaid work in comparison to less than 1 hour for employed men.

Furthermore, the time women spend on domestic work is partly conditioned by the availability of infrastructure – particularly by the need to collect water or fuel for the household – and by the availability of domestic appliances (FAO, 2018, 2022c; Geostat, 2019; UN Women and UNDP, 2016). As a result, the time needed for unpaid domestic work may be particularly exacerbated in rural communities – including fishing communities – where infrastructure may be more limited (INSTAT, UNFPA and UN Women, 2011).

Similarly, the extra burden of unpaid labour on women further restricts the amount of time they can dedicate to other activities, such as participating in training or educational opportunities (see Section 3.2.4 “Information and training”), engaging in fisheries cooperatives, investing in new businesses and other income-generating activities, or simply participating in social and leisure activities that are important for their quality of life (Co-PLAN, 2021). A study in Egypt concluded that women’s burden of family responsibilities limits the size and profitability of their businesses and, consequently, their bargaining power (FAO, 2022a). Therefore, women have less available time than men to spend on training and education, other income-generating activities, and engaging in community or project activities (See Section 3.2.4).

Despite these statistics on the discrepancy in unpaid labour, a study in Georgia documented that the general public perception was that women enjoyed more free time during the day than men, due to the tendency not to

take into consideration domestic chores nor the contributions of women to family businesses (FAO, 2018). Such perceptions pose challenges when trying to effectively combat gender inequalities and support women’s empowerment (FAO, 2016).

Gender and fishing activities along the value chain

As outlined in Section 2.2 “Results: estimating the contribution of women to regional employment in fisheries”, women play a variety of roles along the fisheries value chain, from the pre-harvest stage through the harvest and post-harvest stages. They are also present in increasing numbers in fisheries administrations, agencies, and research institutes. From the interviews with stakeholders and the limited existing literature on the roles of women in these countries, a wide variation was observed in terms of women’s roles across countries, and even within countries. This variation is due to differences in economic context and available opportunities, as well as in the characteristics of the fisheries themselves and social and cultural norms.

Despite an estimated approximately 28 percent of workers along the fisheries value chain being women (see Section 2.2), in the countries analysed fishing is nevertheless traditionally seen as a masculine sector. It is recognized as a physically difficult and, at times, dangerous job and therefore considered unattractive to women (Interviewees 6 and 7, Algeria; Interviewee 9, Egypt). In some cases, there may even be a cultural perception, including at the institutional level, that fisheries is not an appropriate sector for women to work in (Interviewees 3 and 4, Albania). The idea that fisheries is a male sector, despite the extent and importance of women’s work along the value chain, contributes to the invisibility of women’s roles (Interviewee 1, Albania).

This perception of fisheries as a masculine sector can pose challenges for women working in the sector. As reported by several interviewees, being a woman fisher can be made more difficult by the impacts of the prejudices and mentality of others in their communities (Interviewee 1, Albania). In Egypt, where women are increasingly participating in fishing trips, e.g. as officers, crew or researchers



on board fishing vessels, there are challenges to families and communities understanding and accepting the nature of their work and their roles in the sector (Interviewees 11 and 15, Egypt). On occasion, women who decide to embark on board vessels face resistance from male fishers, who find it difficult to have women on board (Interviewees 10 and 13, Egypt), as many times male crewmembers may reject that a woman plays a role and is part of the crew (Interviewee 13, Egypt). Women working on technical aspects of fisheries, such as trainers on fishing techniques (e.g. fishing equipment) may have their competence questioned by the male fishers who attend these trainings (Interviewee 22, Tunisia). Other women, like those involved in fieldwork or surveys with male fishers in the fishing sector, find it hard to feel valued, as male fishers may also feel more at ease working with men (Interviewee 19, Tunisia). This is particularly the case for younger women, who may feel as though their opinions and professional experience are not valued by men, with consequent impacts on their daily work (Interviewee 2, Albania).

Despite these challenges, women can be found – to varying degrees – at all stages of the fisheries value chain in all countries analysed. In the pre-harvest stages, women are estimated to account for 16 percent of total employment and they play an important role when it comes to net and other fishing gear construction

and repair, although the extent of this work varies across countries. In Tunisia, many women work from their home in the design and reassembly of fishing nets (Interviewees 17 and 22, Tunisia). This activity is also widely performed by women in Algeria and Egypt (Interviewee 6, Algeria; Interviewees 9 and 10, Egypt). In Albania, while this work constituted a specialized women's job decades ago in the context of a state-run enterprise under communism, nowadays very few women do it within the private sector, and it is mostly the male fishers who repair their nets themselves (Interviewees 3 and 5, Albania). Similarly, in Georgia, while some women perform net mending from home, it is not very prevalent and men are mainly in charge of this work (Interviewee 15, Georgia).

Though it is not so common for women to work on board fishing boats in the countries analysed, the data in Section 2.2 show that there are nevertheless a notable number of women (10 percent of harvesting sector employment) working on board vessels in the Mediterranean and Black Sea region. For example, in some areas of Albania, women may be driven to fish in small boats in marine waters, with or without their husbands, out of necessity in the absence of alternative income opportunities (Interviewees 1 and 5, Albania). In Algeria and Georgia, while uncommon, there are still women who work as fishers (Interviewee 8, Algeria; Interviewee 15, Georgia). In Egypt, despite men mostly doing the fishing and women not traditionally going to sea, there are cases in which women go fishing on the coast out of economic necessity and with limited equipment, for example, to catch crabs (Interviewee 9, Egypt). In some regions of Tunisia, there are women who perform coastal fishing, from the shore (e.g. as gleaners or clam collectors) or on boats, sometimes with their husbands and other times on their own (Interviewees 19, 21 and 22, Tunisia). There are also examples of women taking over for their husbands to perform vessel-based fishing activities in case their husbands fall ill or are no longer able to fish. In these cases, the man may do other fishing-related activities, such as repairing nets, while the woman goes out to the sea (Interviewee 22, Tunisia).



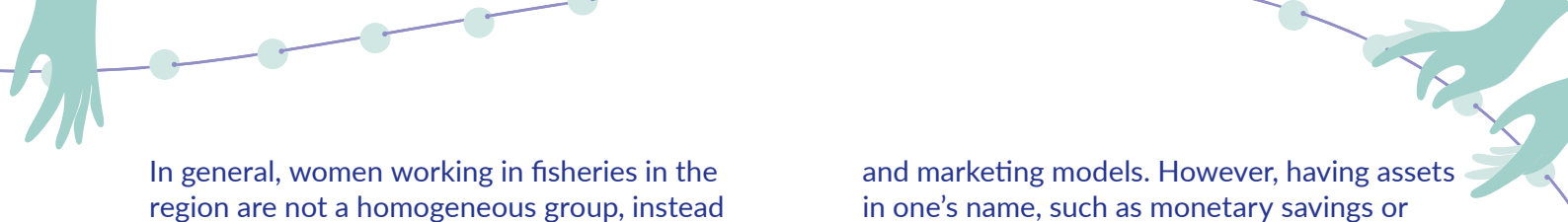
Finally, in the post-harvest stages of the fisheries value chain, where the presence and contribution of women is highest (38 percent of total post-harvest employment; see Section 2.2), women are generally involved in sorting the fish when it arrives on shore, cleaning it, processing it (if relevant) and selling it. In Albania, fishers' wives sell the fresh fish along the coast, many times to tourists and food establishments, while keeping part of the catch for their family's subsistence (Interviewee 5, Albania). They may sell the fish in markets, as well as door-to-door or on the roadside (Interviewee 2, Albania). In Georgia, women are also experienced in the marketing of fish, despite a general lack of storage facilities (Interviewee 15, Georgia). Many times, women have their own businesses in the market, where they may also get help from their family, such as from children (Interviewee 16, Georgia). Similarly, in Tunisia and Egypt, most fish traders are women (Interviewees 9 and 10, Egypt; Interviewee 19, Tunisia). On the contrary, in Algeria, it is mostly men who sell the fish (Interviewees 6 and 7, Algeria). Indeed, as highlighted in the relevant literature, although women may access small local markets, gender stereotypes can lead to a perception of larger wholesale markets and auction halls as being a man's domain (FAO, 2016).

An important employment generator for women in the post-harvest sector is fish processing. In Albania, those cleaning, preparing and manipulating the fish are women, as well as those doing administrative tasks in the factories. However, the managers are predominantly men (Interviewee 3, Albania). Women are generally picked up every day by bus from distant locations to go and work in the factories (Interviewee 5, Albania). In Algeria, women are employed particularly in the processing of anchovies, in small or family enterprises, together with their fathers and husbands. They prepare the anchovies and preserve them in salt to be sold later in the year (Interviewee 6, Algeria). There are also women who work in the processing of frozen fish products, mainly destined for export to the European Union (Interviewee 7, Algeria). Also in Tunisia, women commonly work as manual workers in the processing of tuna and sardines (Interviewees 17 and 19, Tunisia). In Egypt, fish factories number very few and are mainly for exports. Men are much more numerous than women there, as they are considered to have

the required technical capacity (Interviewee 9, Egypt). Fish processing is not very common in Georgia; however, when it happens, it is women who work these activities (Interviewee 15, Georgia).

In addition to the work of women along the fisheries value chain, there is also an increasing number of women working in fisheries at the administrative level, although the picture is uneven across countries and across managerial levels. In Algeria, there are some women working in the fisheries administration as engineers or technicians, although they are not so present at agencies such as the Chamber of Fisheries (Interviewees 7 and 8, Algeria). Some women are graduating from fisheries education programmes as fisheries lieutenants or captains (Interviewee 8, Algeria). In Egypt, there are also women working in the fishing sector administration, with some holding leadership positions (Interviewee 11, Egypt).

Similarly, many women work in fisheries-related research and fisheries monitoring roles. In Tunisia, in recent years, more and more women are taking on prominent positions as regional managers and fisheries wardens, or at research institutes (Interviewees 20 and 22, Tunisia). For example, an important number of women from Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia work as observers on board for the monitoring of fishing activities (Interviewee 8, Algeria). In Egypt, many researchers working on fisheries and marine issues are women (Interviewee 10, Egypt). There are many women graduates in the sector, and it is considered as a new niche for women to develop their own products and projects, given their knowledge of fish technologies (Interviewee 9, Egypt). On the other hand, the persisting notion of fisheries as a male domain may discourage the engagement of women in the sector (Interviewee 16, Georgia), while existing gender roles may also determine the tasks women and men perform. This dynamic holds true for Albania, where, for example, in fisheries and nature conservation organizations, men tend to be more involved in field work and external meetings, while women work mostly in the office doing paperwork (Interviewee 2, Albania).



In general, women working in fisheries in the region are not a homogeneous group, instead covering a variety of age groups and education profiles. For example, while most women working in fish markets in Georgia are older (over 50 years old) and have worked in the market for many years, there are also younger women who work there (Interviewees 15 and 16, Georgia). In Tunisia, a whole range of profiles can be found in fisheries-related jobs: from the elderly to university graduates to the illiterate (Interviewees 17 and 22, Tunisia). In Algeria, two different profiles of women can be distinguished in the processing sector: those with university diplomas, who have studied fish processing and transformation, and daily manual workers in the factories, who often have not attended university (Interviewee 6, Algeria). In Egypt, this distinction between university graduates working in the fisheries sector and those without a diploma is also apparent. While the former are more likely to work with specialized companies, the latter tend to end up in the sector out of necessity (Interviewee 9, Egypt).

Generally, women who work in fisheries harvesting, preparing nets or processing fish have other occupations due to the seasonal nature of fishing and the need to complement the family income. For example, they may engage in animal production, such as raising poultry, create artisanal crafts or work in agriculture (Interviewee 3, Albania; Interviewees 17, 19 and 22, Tunisia; Interviewee 8, Algeria). Sometimes, however, women resort to fishing due to poverty and in the absence of alternative occupations, therefore making it their sole economic activity (Interviewee 5, Albania).

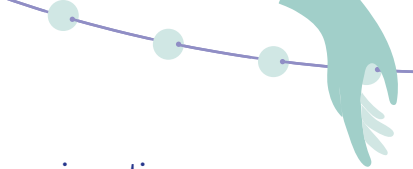
3.2.2 Ownership of assets, access to finance and future investment

Access to financial resources is crucial for facilitating future investment in fisheries-related work, in order to, for example, invest in new gear or vessel repairs, purchase freezers or packaging materials, acquire a fishing license, fishing vessel or vehicle for transporting catch, undertake certain education or training courses, or invest in new business

and marketing models. However, having assets in one's name, such as monetary savings or ownership of land, buildings or other property, such as fishing vessels, is typically a prerequisite for accessing financial instruments like loans, lines of credit or, at times, even opening a bank account. While financial inclusion is a common issue for both men and women in rural fishing households (Pomeroy *et al.*, 2020), in general in the countries studied, assets are most commonly under the name and control of men, making access to financial instruments particularly challenging for women.

Property ownership is a common requirement from bank and credit institutions in order for them to provide finance, as reported in Albania, where many, if not most, women are unable to borrow because they cannot provide collateral (FAO, 2016; Interviewee 1, Albania). In Georgia, men own over 70 percent of agricultural land (Geostat, 2023b), and this figure reaches over 90 percent in Tunisia and Egypt (FAO, 2024). In Albania, 14 percent of women own land, alone or jointly, half the proportion that men own (INSTAT, IPH and ICF, 2018). Owning a house is also rare for women, as reported in Egypt, where only 5 percent of ever-married adult women own a house (Ministry of Health and Population, El-Zanaty and Associates and ICF International, 2015). Even in cases where land may be de facto owned by an entire family (husband and wife together), it is not uncommon for it to be legally registered under only the name of the man, who, as head of the household, enjoys the rights and decision-making power over that land (FAO, 2016).

Even though the legislative framework affecting property ownership is gender-neutral in all countries analysed, customary practices can be biased towards men. In some cases, women's access to property and land may be constrained by various cultural practices, in particular those relating to inheritance, which may encourage women to renounce their inheritance or transfer it to male relatives (DAI, 2020; FAO, 2016; Fletschner and Kenny, 2011; NDI, 2017; UNDP, 2013). There are also many examples of how, even when property is in a woman's name, men still retain control of its use and fruits, particularly in rural areas where the dissemination of information on women's



rights may be more limited (USAID, 2022; CEDAW, 2013). For example, in the fishing sector in Albania, women may be registered as boat owners as a means of accessing social security and obtaining a pension, but men can retain control over decision-making related to the use of the boat, acting as de facto owners (Interviewee 3, Albania). Similarly, in Tunisia, while many boats are owned by women, men tend to retain the decision-making power over the assets, putting the boat in the wife's name for economic reasons or to bypass subsidies regulations, rather than transferring actual ownership (Interviewee 22, Tunisia). While it is rare for women to own fishing boats in Algeria, they may do so if inherited from their parents (Interviewee 6, Algeria), or as widows in Egypt, although it is not common for these women to go out fishing on boats (Interviewee 10, Egypt).

There are also sociocultural factors that limit women's access to financial services. Women's access to finance seems to be affected by the gender bias of financial providers (Nasr, 2012), and banks may request stricter collateral requirements from women than from men. In Tunisia and Egypt, banks and financial institutions have been reported to view women as higher-risk borrowers (IFC, 2018; World Bank, 2018), and in Egypt, the loan rejection rate is higher among women than men (World Bank, 2018). In a regional study carried out by the International Finance Corporation, Algerian women business owners mentioned feeling discriminated against when accessing financial institutions and feeling unwelcome in the banking environment (World Bank, 2013). In Egypt, financial institutions often do not consider women as active economic agents, and they may be unable to obtain information on financial services that could be of relevance (Fletschner and Kenny, 2011). Also, as reported in Tunisia, the banking system has a lack of gender-disaggregated data on specific women's financial needs (IFC, 2018). The level of use of banking and financial instruments differs by country. Although only half of women and men in Georgia have a bank account (World Bank, 2016), there is no gender gap in account holdings. On the other hand, in Egypt, under 10 percent of women have an account, compared to 20 percent of men (American University in Cairo, 2020).

Access to financial resources, or investing in oneself or one's business in any way, also requires a certain level of financial savings. While low rates of savings are common in fisheries-dependent households (men and women alike), women are nevertheless further challenged in this respect due to lower levels of labour force participation in some of the countries analysed and typically lower wages when they do participate in the labour force. In Egypt, only 15 percent of the labour force consists of women (CAPMAS, 2020), and men earn about 3.8 times more than women on average (World Economic Forum, 2020). In Georgia, a gender pay gap persists in the fisheries sector, with women estimated to earn less than half of what men earn (Interviewee 15, Georgia). In Tunisia, under 20 percent of rural women have their own sources of income, compared with 60 percent of men (Ferrerias Carreras *et al.*, 2021).

Limited financial inclusion for women translates into fewer opportunities for future investment and growth. Women therefore may struggle to start a new business or expand their existing one, acquire fishing equipment or pay for training. These issues affect a wide range of women, from women working in the fish markets to women fisheries graduates, who may face hurdles proving to banks that they can reimburse loans and may therefore be refused credit (Interviewee 9, Egypt). On some occasions, women such as fish market sellers report that even though they could obtain credit to expand their business, the high interest rates they are offered prove unaffordable for them (Interviewee 16, Georgia). Limited possibilities for women to invest in equipment and machinery for fish storage, preservation and processing may directly affect women's working conditions. In small-scale processing in Georgia, for example, women do mostly manual work, as they lack equipment (Interviewee 15, Georgia), and their working conditions are further compromised due to a lack of heating during winter in the fish markets and exposure to low temperatures (Interviewee 16, Georgia). In Egyptian wholesale markets, limited possibilities for women to invest in equipment (e.g. ice boxes) and transportation (e.g. to move products or change markets) results in lower price-negotiating power, as they cannot store fish left at the end of the day and must therefore accept lower prices (Interviewee 9, Egypt).



Box 1. Encouraging access to resources and investment in women's businesses: opportunities and good practices

Several projects in the GFCM area of application focus on developing women's entrepreneurship and outreach for funding. These initiatives can help women improve their and their families' economic conditions by facilitating the launch or expansion of their businesses, access to new markets, improved welfare and working conditions and increased negotiating power when dealing with fish suppliers or buyers.

The African Union – Interafrican Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR) network has conducted workshops in Egypt, specifically in the Mirya and Sayoum and Kafr al-Sheikh and Suez provinces, for women that work with fish (AU-IBAR, 2016). The project aids women in building their own small-scale fisheries companies, registering the companies (which is challenging due to limited access to official state registration) and filing their tax payments. As a part of this AU-IBAR initiative, a collaboration between the African Women Fish Processors and Traders Network (AWFISHNET) and the World Fish Organization hosts professional trainings teaching women how to apply for grants, manage their start-ups and businesses, apply for a trademark and create branding for their products, and access larger national markets.

Another example is the Gemaisa project (2018–2021), which was dedicated to supporting women clam collectors in the Tunisian governorate of Mednine and sought to improve women's participation and agency within the clam-collecting value chain via a multidimensional approach that addressed socioeconomic and institutional barriers (Gemaisa, 2021). As a part of the initiative, a five-day course on fundraising and project and action plan development was held, along with other training sessions that fostered women's integration in rural development and the sustainable use of resources. The Gemaisa project was administered by the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM) Bari, in partnership with the Tunisian Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources and Fisheries.

The “Women of the Thriving Kerkennah Islands” project, funded by the Tunisian Cooperation for the Development of Emerging Countries and carried out by the Kraten Association for the Sustainable Development of Culture and Leisure in Tunisia, is another initiative encouraging women's participation in fisheries. During the training sessions offered by the programme, women have been taught to obtain fishing permits, access their social security and advocate for their businesses. In addition to the support this project provides to women entrepreneurs in fisheries, it also aims to sustain the cultural legacy and ancestral know-how of the fishing community.

Sources:

AU-IBAR (African Union – Interafrican Bureau for Animal Resources). 2016. Press Releases - Workshop on Women's Rights and the Fisheries Reforms in Africa and Celebration of International Woman Day. In: *African Union – Interafrican Bureau for Animal Resources*. Nairobi. [Cited 12 February 2024]. <https://www.au-ibar.org/node/244>

Gemaisa. 2021. Closing workshop of the Tunisian pilot initiative – Médenine, Tunisia. In: *Gemaisa*. [Cited 12 February 2024]. <https://www.gemaisa.net/closing-workshop-of-the-tunisian-pilot-initiative-medenine-tunisia/>

3.2.3 Mobility and transportation


This section explores women's access to means of transportation, which is important not only for market access, but also for accessing employment opportunities, healthcare and social services, and education and training opportunities, as well as for participating in community events and fisheries organizations (FAO, 2022c; USAID, 2022). In the five countries analysed (Albania, Algeria, Egypt, Georgia and Tunisia), women tend to face greater barriers than men in terms of mobility and access to transportation.

In these countries, women tend to have limited access to private means of transportation. For example, in rural areas of Albania, men are almost exclusively the users and owners of cars (UN Women and UNDP, 2016), as well as in Georgia, where over 80 percent of vehicle owners are male (Geostat, 2023a). Furthermore, the hiring of private transport (driver services and taxis) may be prohibitively expensive. This lack of access to private means of transport makes women more likely than men to rely on public transportation (FAO, 2018). However, transportation services may be limited, unreliable, or even dangerous (USAID, 2022). Women may also face a risk of harassment while using public transportation. According to a study in Georgia, almost a third of women have experienced some form of sexual harassment in public transport (UN Women Georgia, 2022b). In Egypt, women report frequent experiences of sexual harassment, as well as other types of violence, such as theft or pushing and shoving, when using public transportation (Constant *et al.*, 2020; World Bank, 2018). Considering the reliability and safety issues associated with public transportation, women may choose to also forego this option, instead choosing to restrict their movement to local areas where they can walk or depend on family members or other acquaintances for transportation.

Social norms may also act as limiting factors, hindering the mobility of women. Although not always the case, there are times where a woman may need permission from her husband or family prior to travelling within Albania or abroad (FAO, 2016). Women's mobility can also be constrained by having to rely on husbands, brothers or sons to accompany them during night commutes or when travelling from one city to another (World Bank, 2018). In Algeria, women travelling alone may be stigmatized, particularly in rural areas (Marzouki, 2010). In rural areas of Tunisia, anecdotal evidence suggests that families may prohibit women from leaving home after dark to attend meetings or events (USAID, 2022). This restriction represents an important challenge for women working in the fishing industry, as harvesting activity often occurs during night-time hours, and it is common for market workers to start work well before sunrise.



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A lack of transportation options is compounded by another issue that may hinder women's mobility: a lack of available or affordable childcare options, which prevents women from leaving their home, as they cannot leave children unattended. This is a common issue throughout the countries analysed. For example, in Tunisia, a lack of childcare options is a common reason for new mothers to drop out of employment or decline to enter the workforce at all (Moghadam, 2018). In Albania, childcare facilities are generally absent from rural areas, increasing women's domestic workloads and limiting their participation in the labour market (FAO, 2016). In Egypt, formal childcare is often expensive and available options are limited, making it difficult to balance childcare with full-time working hours (World Bank, 2018).

The barriers to women's mobility result in a more limited labour force participation, as well as additional challenges when women do participate in the labour force. For example, the lack of access to transportation may push women to become overreliant on a limited number of intermediaries operating in their area in order to sell their products.

This dynamic can result in lower price-negotiating power. In Tunisia, women participating in the clam harvesting sector need to travel long distances from their homes to harvesting sites and generally depend on intermediaries to travel there. As a result, they are required to use these intermediaries to sell their catch and must therefore accept lower prices than they could receive from a more competitive market (Gueye, ed, 2016). Similarly, in Egypt, limited access to transportation hinders women's participation in fish markets, as they cannot afford vehicles equipped to transfer fish – many times, taxis or other private vehicles refuse to carry fish products – so they have to rely on public transportation for long-distance trips between their villages and the wholesale markets, and between wholesale and retail markets, many times carrying heavy ice boxes with fish (Interviewee 9, Egypt). This further burden in terms of time and energy adds to already demanding workloads (Interviewee 19, Tunisia; see also Section 3.2.1 “Gender roles in fishing communities”).

Box 2. Reducing barriers for women working in the fishing sector: opportunities and good practices

Supporting the participation of women in the sector requires considering and addressing the obstacles they face, including limited mobility. Providing transportation options or reducing mobility barriers can facilitate their engagement and improve their working conditions. An example initiative comes from a collaboration between the project “Appui à la l'amélioration de la qualité et la valorisation des produits de pêche au gouvernorat de Médenine”, aimed at improving the quality and valorization of fisheries products in the governorate of Médenine, and the Regional initiative to support sustainable economic development (IRADA). This European Union-funded partnership has organized for the Tunisian Al Baraka agricultural and fishing development group in Boughrara Lagoon to receive and host an ice factory unit, as well as insulated tanks (IRADA, 2022). With the ice factory unit located within the development group, close to the fish landing sites, mobility barriers are reduced, and women are better enabled to market their catches.

Source:

IRADA (Initiative régionale d'appui au développement économique durable [Regional initiative to support sustainable economic development]). 2022. Réunion de suivi du Projet Collaboratif «AQUAVALP». In: *Initiative Régionale d'Appui au Développement Économique Durable – IRADA*. Tunis. [Cited 12 February 2024] <https://irada.com.tn/blog/2022/09/reunion-de-suivi-du-projet-collaboratif-%E2%80%89aquavalp%E2%80%89/>

3.2.4 Information and training

Dissemination of information, including via educational and training opportunities, is crucial for promoting opportunities for women within the fisheries sector. Training can provide opportunities for improving knowledge or honing skills, and it can also be an important catalyst for innovation and facilitate access to financial resources or social security. However, standard practices for sharing information or organizing trainings may, for various reasons, limit the engagement or participation of women. Mobility and time constraints, as outlined in previous sections, can also be compounded by other factors, such as gender norms, unsuitable channels of communication or a lack of support systems.

The time and location of meetings and trainings are important factors to consider in order to ensure the solid participation of women (FAO, 2016). Participation of women in training can be hindered by a number of factors, including the additional burden of domestic unpaid work limiting the time women have available to dedicate to training (see Section 3.2.1 “Gender roles in fishing communities”), the challenges women face in accessing financial resources necessary to invest in training courses (see Section 3.2.2 “Ownership of assets, access to finance and future investment”), and the mobility issues that may limit women’s ability to travel to attend trainings (see Section 3.2.3 “Mobility and transportation”). Furthermore, although not unique to women, people working in the fishing sector work irregular hours, due in part to the seasonality of the work. There may be times of the year, such as during the high fishing season or certain days of the week (e.g. when the fish market is running), when no spare time is available for training. Organizing trainings or meetings close to where women live and during low seasons, as well as providing transportation to and from the training locations, would support higher levels of women’s participation (Interviewee 9, Egypt; Interviewees 17 and 19, Tunisia). Such considerations of women’s needs are essential, particularly in cases where participation in training is required. For example, in Tunisia, holding a fishing professional card is an important benefit, allowing the holder to access social protection and credit. However, obtaining this card requires following a training schedule.

To avoid creating additional disadvantages for women – such as increased difficulties of obtaining finance to buy fishing gear or other equipment – it is crucial to ensure that these required trainings are organized in a gender-sensitive way limiting participation barriers for women (Interviewee 17, Tunisia).

Similarly, gender and cultural norms may impede women’s participation in trainings and workshops. In particular, when performing tasks outside societally attributed gender roles, such as learning how to manage equipment and machinery or negotiating with market providers, women may suffer from a lack of confidence in their abilities (FAO, 2016). Furthermore, when the trainers are men, or if the training is mainly attended by men, women may be more reluctant to join or participate actively. As reported in a study from Albania (FAO, 2016), it is mostly men who engage in the trainings and meetings and who have access to technology as family representatives and decision-makers. Improvements have been seen in recent years, with women becoming more frequent trainers of fishers in countries such as Egypt or Tunisia (Interviewee 9, Egypt; Interviewee 21, Tunisia).

An additional barrier to more robust participation of women in knowledge-sharing and training exercises has to do with the dissemination of information, including notifications about trainings being held. Especially in rural areas where many fishery communities are located, men generally have higher access to technology and information than women. For example, mobile phone ownership is typically greater among men than women (USAID, 2022). Consequently, men may receive information about trainings, projects or other opportunities before this information reaches women, thus acting as a kind of information gatekeeper. It is sometimes unclear how much of that information is passed on to women, impacting their access to information and decision-making power (Interviewee 1, Albania). Furthermore, men may have more established relationships with representatives from national fisheries administrations and research institutes, in part because the parts of the sector where men more commonly work (e.g. on board vessels) are also where greater interaction takes place in terms of



data collection activities (Interviewee 19, Tunisia). Women, on the other hand, report facing challenges to accessing administrative personnel (e.g. to have their booklets signed to get social security) or fishing trainings, because they are more typically involved in fishing-related activities not subject to data collection (shore-based fishing, fish marketing and processing, etc.) and do not have the same level of interactions with these key officials (Interviewee 19, Tunisia).

Equitable participation of women and men in training is important, but equally important is the capacity to apply the knowledge gained during these trainings, which may

be more difficult for women due to a lack of economic opportunities (Interviewee 7, Algeria). Furthermore, as discussed in Section 3.2.2, access to financial resources (e.g. loans for new gear or new business activities) is, in many cases, essential for capitalizing on the knowledge gained from trainings but may be more difficult for women (Interviewee 17, Tunisia). Offering incentives to participate in training, such as providing equipment like fish nets or fish processing tools or financial resources, raises the likelihood of women attending and applying the knowledge gained (Interviewee 2, Albania; Interviewee 19, Tunisia).

Box 3. Gender-sensitive information dissemination and training: opportunities and good practices

Training that considers the needs and situations of women and incentivizes their attendance and active participation – while providing the adequate equipment to apply the knowledge in their lives – can offer opportunities for women to make their businesses more profitable or diversify their livelihoods, increasing their economic and social welfare. Some project examples are provided below.

The African Women Fish Processors and Traders Network (AWFISHNET), in collaboration with the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), regularly organizes workshops and trainings for women, where a combination of icing, spicing and other preserving practices are discussed. Egyptian representatives of AWFISHNET have organized trainings on transforming fish into value-added products such as fish burgers, fish sausages, fish pasta, fish nuggets and fish balls (Kasozi, 2020).

The Ghannouch fishing cooperative, in cooperation with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) North Africa office, has developed activities dedicated to women in order to improve the livelihoods of local communities near the Gulf of Gabès in Tunisia (WWF, 2022). This area has been particularly affected by the proliferation of non-indigenous blue crab species, which has considerably reduced catches of native species. The WWF North Africa office and the Ghannouch fishing cooperative organized a series of training courses for women on how to develop specific traps for blue crabs and add value to seafood through its transformation into commercial products. Advocacy initiatives to obtain recognition of the role of women in fishing-related jobs have been developed and are now being replicated in other regions of Tunisia through exchange visits with other cooperatives (e.g. Tabarka and Ghar El Melh in the northern part of Tunisia). Chefs have also developed recipes, in coordination with fisher's wives, accompanied by tasting sessions.

Sources:

Kasozi, N. 2020. *Adding value to fish: Lovin Kobusingye is not just a successful woman entrepreneur in Uganda but an influential voice in shaping pan-African fisheries policies.* Yemaya Newsletter, Issue 61. <https://www.icsf.net/yemaya/profile-33/>

WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature). 2022. *Together for Med. 2017-2022 Impact Report.* https://www.togetherforthemed.org/img/structure/setting_20.pdf

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3.2.5 Decision-making and associations

The engagement of women in leadership positions is a crucial metric for understanding their level of participation in decision-making. In the countries analysed (Albania, Algeria, Egypt, Georgia and Tunisia), the participation of women in household decisions, as well as in the community in general and in the fisheries sector, is limited due to a combination of gender stereotypes and social customs, gender roles and limited access to finance and assets. In fisheries communities, decision-making power seems to be highly dictated by the gender division of labour. In addition to mobility, access to technology and finance are some of the factors behind the vulnerable position of women in decision-making (Interviewee 1, Albania). Sometimes, women do not feel motivated to take up leadership or decision-making roles because it means extra work for them on top of their heavy workloads full of domestic and income-earning activities (Interviewee 1, Albania).

Traditional gender roles may impact women's confidence and deter them from engaging in activities outside their traditional gender domain, such as public meetings or community decision-making. As reported in Albania, women in rural areas are rarely involved in political and public life, while social norms lead to men being the primary decision-makers within households (Co-PLAN, 2021). Similarly, in Tunisia, anecdotal evidence suggests that women are typically not encouraged by their families and the community to participate in public life. As a consequence of the burden of domestic work, as well as social norms, women also report difficulties in engaging in politics, especially with regard to leadership positions (OECD, 2019). In another survey, half of male and female participants opposed women being in high political positions (Ministry of Health and Population, El-Zanaty and Associates and ICF International, 2015). A study in Georgia found that over two-thirds of men and women believe that women were not as good at decision-making as men (CRRRC, 2024). In addition, around 40 percent of both men and women think that men are better business leaders, and a similar proportion believe that

politics is a man's domain rather than a woman's (UNDP, 2020).

These same perceptions of women in leadership roles hold true in the fisheries sector, where there is also resistance from men to accepting women taking on decision-making positions or being business leaders or the president of an association (Interviewee 18, Tunisia). While increasing numbers of women hold positions in fisheries ministries, agencies and fish research centres in the countries analysed and their presence in managerial positions is growing (Interviewee 22, Tunisia; Interviewee 6, Algeria), women are generally not decision-makers nor well-recognized as technical specialists (Interviewee 4, Albania; Interviewee 18, Tunisia). In fish processing factories, even in cases where women account for the majority of the manual workforce, men still dominate managerial positions (Interviewee 19, Tunisia; Interviewee 3, Albania). In fishing associations, men are usually the ones playing the leading roles, managing the finances and organizing assemblies.

With men in charge of decision-making comes the risk that they may bias decisions in favour of their own interests above those of women. Therefore, establishing women's organizations is a way for women to defend their own interests (Interviewee 18, Tunisia). There may also be administrative advantages (e.g. tax benefits) for women to establish their own organizations (Interviewee 6, Algeria), and additional support could be provided to members, for example, towards obtaining a pension (Interviewee 9, Egypt). In the countries included in this analysis, women who work in fisheries are generally not well organized (Interviewees 3 and 5, Albania; Interviewee 7, Algeria; Interviewee 16, Georgia). In Tunisia, there are some organizations for women working in fisheries, though their presence is more important in agricultural groups (Interviewee 22, Tunisia). As explained in detail in Section 3.2.1 "Gender roles in fishing communities", one of the most important obstacles to women participating in fisheries associations is time constraints due to domestic responsibilities (Interviewee 1, Albania; Interviewee 18, Tunisia).

Box 4. Promoting women's engagement in decision-making: opportunities and good practices

Though there are not strong women's fishing cooperatives active everywhere throughout the region, good examples exist of initiatives that bring women together, making possible their participation in decision-making at the fisheries and community levels.

In 2019, a fisherwomen society was established in Türkiye to advocate for gender equality and women's access to decision-making in the fisheries sector. Among its members are women who work in marine and inland conservation and fisheries, including fishers, academics, political science experts and environmental specialists. Its goals include protecting the sustainability of the ecosystems, providing training and education, supporting women's roles in the fisheries sector and giving a voice to women to take part in decision-making. Recently, the fisherwomen society was successful in the foundation of a fisherwomen commission within Türkiye's biggest fisher cooperative union, SÜR-KOOP, which in the past did not accept female members. It is currently preparing a long-term programme to support women's capacity-building in the sector (WWF, 2019).

Similarly, in Spain, the Andalusian Association of Women in the Fishing Sector (AndMuPes) was established in 2018. Its network encompasses nearly 250 women from across all major fishing sectors: capture fisheries, marketing, processing, administration, management and academic research. The project encourages women's participation in decision-making bodies of the fisheries sector and community leadership. This non-profit organization is represented at the state level as a part of the National Association of Women in Fishing (ANMUPESCA) and the Network of Women in the Fishing Sector.

Another initiative aimed at increasing women's leadership in marine resources management was led by the Regional Administration of Protected Areas in the Vlora region in the national marine park of Karaburun-Sazan, Albania (SPA/RAC, 2021). The park hosts a wealth of endangered species and marine biota, including Neptune grass (*Posidonia oceanica*) meadows, red coral (*Corallium rubrum*) and *Cystoseira amentacea*, that are prioritized for protection by the European Union Habitats Directive (European Council, 1992). Engaged in leadership, management and monitoring of the marine park, local women had an opportunity to communicate with fishers about the value of marine biodiversity as well as develop a management plan. These examples highlight the benefits that women's engagement in marine resources management can have towards improving the sustainability of fisheries.

Sources:

European Council. 1992. Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora. *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 206/7. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/1992/43/oj>

SPA/RAC (Specially Protected Areas Regional Activity Centre). 2021. *Sheroes of sustainability in the Mediterranean: Winning hearts and minds in the National Marine Park of Karaburun-Sazan*. In: *Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas – SPA/RAC*. Tunis. [Cited 12 February 2024]. <https://rac-spa.org/node/2019>

WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature). 2019. *Empowering women in marine communities to mitigate the impacts of climate change. Policy brief – September 2019*. Gland, Switzerland. https://wwf.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/wwf_genderequalityandfisheriespolicybrief.pdf

4

Conclusions and recommendations



Women in Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries are a heterogeneous group with varied needs, experiences, challenges and opportunities depending on socioeconomic context, the characteristics of the fisheries in which they engage, and social norms, which can vary significantly even within the same country. A common challenge, however, remains consistent across geographical boundaries and different studies on this topic: fisheries are still widely considered a male activity, and recognition of women's important contributions are often undervalued. This bias persists despite women occupying close to one-third of fisheries-based employment along the value chain in the region (see Section 2.2 "Results: estimating the contribution of women to regional employment in fisheries").

While acknowledging the specific social and economic contexts of each country and region and the diversity of realities that make it unfeasible to refer to any solution as a solution for all, this study provides a list of actionable items foreseen to support policymakers in supporting women in fisheries across the region. These actions require varying degrees of political commitment and financial resources, ranging from low to medium, and are seen as necessary steps towards improving the working conditions of women in fisheries, as well as their visibility and recognition and the overall sustainability and social and economic prosperity of fishing communities in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. The following pages include a non-exhaustive list of recommended next steps.



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Improve data

“If you don't have evidence, you don't know that the problem is there. If you are not counted, you are invisible.”

[Interviewee 1, Albania]

Accurate data capturing the role of women allow for the consideration of women in the development of evidence-based policies that address both the environmental and socioeconomic challenges of the sector. These data also facilitate the development of gendered socioeconomic indicators, essential for the monitoring and evaluation of progress towards gender equity. This process may entail the use of new surveys or the expansion of existing surveys (such as via household or fisheries sector-specific surveys).

Actions:

- Facilitate the collection of gender-disaggregated data, particularly for fisheries-based employment along the value chain, as well as other socioeconomic indicators.
- Provide an option for CPCs to submit gender-disaggregated data via the DCRF, when available.
- Ensure that data are collected for all fishing activities (including non-vessel-based fishing where women may be most active) and that they capture fisheries-based employment in the pre- and post-harvest sectors.



Promote gender-sensitive projects and trainings

“The fishing sector is dominated by men, especially on the technical side. They question my competence as a trainer and as a person in this field. They look and say: ‘Does she really know what she is saying?’”

[Interviewee 22, Tunisia]

Ensuring that women’s roles and perspectives are taken into account and that projects and trainings do not amplify existing gender inequalities, requires concerted action.

Actions:

- Ensure that a gender analysis or assessment is carried out in the initial phase of any policy, project or initiative in the sector.
- Identify key female stakeholders for participation or engagement.
- Facilitate women’s access to trainings and project meetings by making sure that their limitations in terms of time and mobility are considered when designing schedules and choosing locations – for example, by accommodating the training dates to their availability and providing transportation to the training venue – and ensure that a welcoming atmosphere makes women feel comfortable about actively participating, e.g. through providing female trainers.

Support women's organizations

“To find solutions for the problems in the sector we need men and men need women, because we have different knowledge and practices that complement each other.”

[Interviewee 16, Georgia]

Women’s organizations are crucial for amplifying the voices of women and making sure that their needs are considered in decision-making.

Actions:

- Support the creation and sustainability of women’s organizations in the fisheries sector.
- Recognize women’s organizations as valued actors and ensure that they are invited to engage in relevant consultations and sectorial meetings.
- Build bridges between fisheries administrations and the women working in the fisheries sector, ensuring that channels of communication are established so that women are informed of relevant information, projects, opportunities and decisions.



Remove barriers and inequalities

“The main challenge is cultural. It’s men asking: ‘Why are you here? This activity is for men.’ Once they realize that they have the experience, but I have the knowledge because of my studies, they respect me.”

[Interviewee 13, Egypt]

Concerted actions are needed to address specific challenges faced by women in the fisheries sector. Adequate financial resources and support should be earmarked for addressing these inequalities.

Actions:

- Provide training to women on topics such as fish-processing technologies, access to new markets (including technological/online resources for fish marketing), and setting up a business (including support throughout the various stages of the process).
- Facilitate access to finances for women and work with financial services providers to support the financial inclusion of women in the fisheries sector.
- Provide or facilitate access to relevant equipment for storing, processing and marketing fish (e.g. ice boxes).
- Improve access to social protection programmes for women working in the fisheries sector, including by enhancing coordination with relevant social ministries and ensuring that social registries capture and recognize women working in the sector.

Raise awareness

“It is taking time for the people, our families, to understand the nature of our work and the risks and difficulties we face. Awareness needs to be raised. We are very passionate about our work, we are interested in continuing to progress and achieve stability, and in our right to exist in the sector.”

[Interviewee 15, Egypt]

To better value the role of women in fisheries, including by highlighting opportunities that gender equity can bring to fisheries communities, there is a need to combat the perception of fisheries as a man’s domain.

Action:

- Raise awareness of women’s contributions to the sector by enhancing the visibility of women in communications materials and other knowledge products on the sector.



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Women play active roles throughout the fisheries value chain in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, including participating in pre-harvest activities like vessel and gear construction and maintenance, harvest activities both on board fishing vessels and from shore, and post-harvest activities such as sorting, cleaning, processing and marketing the catch, as well as in activities associated with running the fishing business, such as bookkeeping. Furthermore, women are actively engaged throughout the region in fisheries research and fisheries administrations. Despite the wide and varied roles played by women in fisheries, their contributions to the sector are often not captured in official statistics and can therefore go unrecognized, reinforcing existing gender inequalities and potentially leading to inadvertent discrimination. At the same time, a lack of consideration of women working in the sector can also mean that their knowledge and experience is overlooked and not sufficiently profited from. Recognizing the importance of taking the roles, needs and experiences of women into account when addressing social, economic and environmental issues related to the fishing sector, this study aims at narrowing research gaps in the region regarding gender and fisheries, as well as supporting the commitments of Mediterranean and Black Sea countries to promoting gender equality.

