



Trade and food safety standards Trade in fisheries and aquaculture

The issue

The COVID-19 pandemic, unprecedented in modern times, caused major disruption in societies around the world and inflicted severe damage on the global economy. The seafood sector, along with the majority of industries, had to deal with a bleak demand outlook and an array of supply challenges.

Fish and fish products are a highly traded international commodity, with 221 states and territories having some fish trading activity. Fish products often cross multiple international borders during their journey from production to processing and on to the final consumer. Fish exports for human consumption, in value terms, are higher than the exports of all other animal proteins combined. Therefore, for many species frequently traded internationally, the impact of supply disruption shocks, including price volatility, is no longer confined to the country or region in which they occur. In addition, the steady increase share of developing countries in the international trade flows, with faster rates of growth compared to developed countries, has been a defining feature of global fish market development.

During the pandemic, with the effective shutdown of the restaurant industry, foodservice demand has evaporated, while retail sales have been marked by extreme volatility, as periods of panic buying are followed by sustained lulls. The associated effects on the international trade of fish and fish products have been notable with spillovers on pre-harvest, harvest and distribution. Demand for packaged and frozen products has spiked and online distributors reported increased interest as home-bound consumers explored retail alternatives. However, demand has been overall reduced, and prices have fallen for many species. Meanwhile, suppliers and processors are struggling with business closures all along the supply chain and many other logistical difficulties. Exporters must contend with closed or restricted borders and health inspection delays, in addition to facing safety requirements for their products not necessarily based on science and logistic challenges.

International trade of fish and fish products can continue to provide better income distribution between developed and developing countries, empowering small-scale producers and women and contributing to food security, reducing hunger, and social and economic development. However, in order to have all those positive corollaries pullulating, a strategic set of capacity building, technical assistance and strategic support must be continuously implemented to allow actors throughout the value-chain to fully and effectively explore international trade possibilities. The international trade flow of fish and fish products must continue uninterrupted, focusing on responsible fisheries including sustainability and legality of products, associated with the compliance with international trade requirements and a science-based approach towards trade measures, and promoting the basic information tools to assess and access international markets particularly in neighboring countries.

Budget

USD 1 million

Time frame

2021–2023

SDGs



Related FAO policy notes on COVID-19

- ▶ [FAO Fisheries Division dedicated COVID-19 resource page](#)
- ▶ [FAO GLOBEFISH COVID-19 dedicated page](#)



The action

- 1 Promote a sustainable participation in international trade of the private and public actors, by increasing their awareness of the framework applicable to the trade of fish and fish products.
 - Inform about international instruments or conventions governing directly or indirectly the trade of fish species, such as the agreements of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) [Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries](#), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and [regional fishery bodies or arrangements](#).
 - Support the primacy of a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable trading system, and trade measures based on science, with [open international borders](#) and preventing the establishment of unnecessary barriers to trade.
 - Support national authorities in enhancing or developing food safety management systems aligned with international standards.
 - Develop technical assistance to the private sector, national and regional institutions to better understand the global trade of fish and fish products, including their singularities and opportunities.
 - Advocate the importance of FAO instruments as important tools towards sustainable trade, focusing on sustainability throughout the value chains with the [FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries](#), and the preclusion of illegal fish and fish products to reach national and international markets with the [FAO Port State Measures Agreement](#) and the [FAO Guidance on Catch Documentation Schemes](#).
- 2 Strengthen capacities, including by the reduction of information asymmetries, to increase the competitiveness, to enhance or secure market access for fish and fish products.
 - Support the private sector and the government in better understanding the import requirements of fish and fish products of the major import markets, with a particular emphasis on food safety compliance.
 - Collaborate with the private sector to enhance the availability and transparency of information throughout the value chains, especially given the mutual benefits of associated aspects, including traceability, certification, and eco-labeling.
 - Disseminate [information](#) on fish and fish products to facilitate the assessment of new markets or improve access to existing markets, with a particular emphasis on regional trade and neighboring countries.
 - Support small-scale fishers to better integrate them in international flows, particularly with neighboring countries.

- Provide supporting tools to national governments for the reduction of [fish food loss and waste](#).
- Raise the awareness of international markets as a concrete option to national producers of fish and fish products, stressing its synergy with national markets, with positive corollaries for food security and nutrition.

Expected results

The planned actions will address immediate challenges brought by COVID-19 and structural issues affecting the trade of fish and fish products, allowing the consolidation of markets and the assessment of new market opportunities, particularly for developing countries and small-scale fishers.

More specifically, the actions will aim to achieve the following results:

- 1 Enhanced knowledge of international instruments by the main actors involved in fish value chains:
 - allow international compliance, with a specific focus on food safety, including capacity building actions (private sector and government);
 - create knowledge for the questioning of non-compliance of third countries;
 - reduction of the possibility of illegal fish and fish products reaching national and international markets.
- 2 Increased competitiveness and enhanced market access:
 - a constant flow of market information allowing analysis and opportunity assessments;
 - inclusion and expansion of the participation of small-scale fishers in international trade;
 - increased trade between neighboring countries within a regional context;
 - having more transparency in international trade, including information on products and sustainable trade;
 - reduce the risks of border rejections, and fish food waste and loss;
 - enhanced capacities of practitioners to access new markets.
- 3 Trade flow of fish and fish products with no unnecessary barriers to trade:
 - facilitate smooth export operations;
 - increased income to exporters, promoting food security and nutrition;
 - wider choice of products for consumers at competitive prices;
 - prevalence of science-based trade measures;
 - supply of products are kept close to normal, even in atypical market circumstances.



Partnerships

The actions will be performed with partnerships with global, regional and national institutions, such as:

Global

World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Customs Organization (WCO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), GLOBEFISH (FAO Project MTF/GLO/625/MUL), the FAO Regional Fishery Body Secretariats Network (RSN) and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), The Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative (GSSI), the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI)

Africa

In cooperation with units of the Fish Info Network INFOSAMAK and INFOPÊCHE, and the African Development Bank (AfDB)

Asia and the Pacific

In cooperation with the unit of the Fish Info Network INFOFISH, WorldFish (CGIAR Research Program on Fish Agri-food Systems), Shanghai Ocean University, Korean Maritime Institute, Pukyong National University, the University of Tokyo, China Aquatic Products Processing and Marketing Alliance (CAPPMA)

Europe

In cooperation with the unit of the Fish Info Network EUROFISH, Instituto Agronómico Mediterráneo de Zaragoza (CIHEAM-IAMZ), Nord University (Norway)

Latin America and the Caribbean

In cooperation with the unit of the Fish Info Network INFOPESCA

In addition to these preliminarily identified institutions, the actions will be performed in close cooperation with national governments, including ministries of fisheries, trade, agriculture, and related agencies, such as food safety, consumer protection and customs.



Regional and country focus

Although the actions are global in nature, a particular emphasis is foreseen on developing countries in Southeast Asia, Small Islands Developing States (SIDS), Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. No focus on any particular country is envisaged.

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