

Fish

Summary of Key Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors in Fish Production

- ✓ Undesirable and Hazardous Work
- ✓ Vulnerable Workforce
 - Child Labor
 - Migrant Labor
- ✓ Presence of Labor Intermediaries
- ✓ Associated Contextual Factors Contributing to TIP Vulnerability
 - Association with Environmental Degradation
 - Association with Organized Crime/Armed Conflict

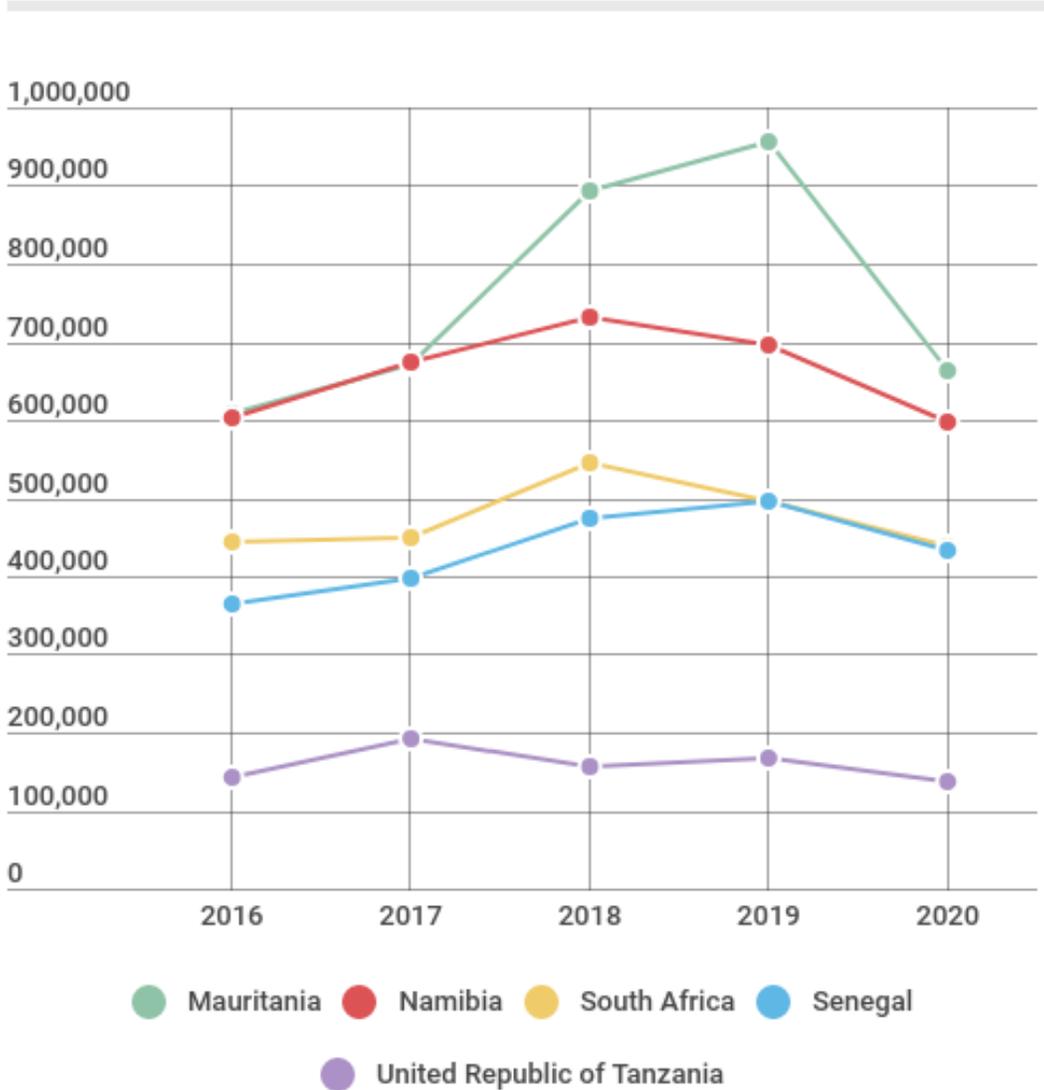
Overview of Fish Production in Sub-Saharan Africa

Trade

The top exporters of fish, crustaceans, and mollusks from sub-Saharan Africa in 2020 were Mauritania, Namibia, South Africa, Senegal, and the United Republic of Tanzania.¹



Top Exporters of Fish and Molluscs (Value USD/Thousands)



The top importers of fish and aquatic resources from sub-Saharan Africa in 2020 were Spain, France, Cote d'Ivoire, Italy, and Japan.²

Features of Production and Supply Chain



Artisanal and industrial marine fishing, as well as inland fishing and aquaculture, are present in sub-Saharan Africa.³ South and West Africa are home to fish processing industries to support the industrial fishing sectors.⁴ Most fish and seafood products exported from Africa are frozen and minimally processed, although there has been some growth in the seafood processing sector, primarily driven by investment from Chinese companies. Mauritius, which already has a thriving manufacturing sector, has at least 20 fish meal factories, 50 percent of which are reportedly Chinese-owned.⁵

In West Africa alone, the marine fisheries sector contributes an estimated 10-30 percent of GDP for countries including Mauritania, Senegal, Guinea-Bissau and Sierra Leone. An estimated six to seven million people in West Africa are employed in artisanal fisheries and aquaculture (capture fishing, fish farming, fish trading, processing, transport, sale of products and associated or related jobs).⁶ Men are generally more involved in the capture (fishing) or raising fish (fish farming), while women dominate the post-harvest procedures such as fish trading, processing, transport, distribution and retail sale of fish.⁷ Fish protein provides over half of nutritional protein requirements for a sizeable percentage of the population.⁸ An estimated one in three people in West Africa eat fish on a daily basis, and fish remains one of the main sources of animal protein, minerals, and vitamins upon which millions depend.⁹

West Africa is home to bio-diverse and high value species including shrimp, grouper, anchovies, mackerel, and shad, as well as migratory tuna in deep water.¹⁰ A variety of fish are caught in Lake Volta in Ghana, including catfish, carp and Nile perch.¹¹ There are also significant tuna fisheries in the South Indian Ocean in East African off-shore waters. Nile perch is the primary fish traded from inland fishing on Lake Victoria in East Africa. However, much of the fish exported to U.S. and Europe from West Africa is bycatch or so-called trashfish that is ultimately used for animal feed.¹² Mauritania is a prominent producer of fish meal and fish oil, much of which is exported to feed fish farms and livestock in China and Europe. Alongside Mauritania, Senegal and Gambia also have an increasing number of fish meal and fish oil factories which NGOs have raised concerns about fish meal and fish oil contributing to food insecurity and disrupted livelihoods.¹³

In the industrial fisheries sector, which is predominantly for export, vessels are both local and foreign based. Types of industrial vessels include trawlers, purse-seiners, shrimpers, and pole and line tuna boats. Foreign industrial vessels from Japan, South Korea, Russia, Spain, France, Italy and China are all active, with China being the largest foreign fleet operating in the region.¹⁴

The introduction of foreign fishing vessels is having a large impact on West African fish stocks, depriving regional governments of over two billion dollars in revenue. A GreenPeace study of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing in the region found serious ongoing governance issues of West African fisheries, including a lack of transparency in fishing access agreements with foreign fishing companies; a lack of alignment in national legislation; inadequate implementation of policies; and weak monitoring and surveillance systems.¹⁵



While West Africa is home to communities extremely reliant on fisheries, it also has long been considered a hotspot for overfishing and IUU fishing. From 2015 to 2019, most IUU fishing offences by Chinese-owned vessels occurred in West Africa within exclusive economic zones (EEZs). Of which, the highest number of offences in West Africa were identified for Ghana, followed by Sierra Leone and Mauritania.¹⁶

A lack of sufficient onshore processing sites is a problem pervasive for all of the top exporters of seafood in sub-Saharan Africa. For example, only a third of fish caught in Senegalese waters is processed domestically. The supply of fish available for domestic processing has declined with the introduction of foreign owned fishing vessels in Senegal's waters.¹⁷

Selling access to fisheries is a source of income for African governments, although some foreign vessels operate illegally.¹⁸ A hybrid model of "joint ventures" is also present. In this model foreign companies work with a local company to gain access to the coastal state's vessel flag, thus allowing them increased access and/or looser restrictions on catch.¹⁹

South Africa is an outlier in the African fish processing industry. Most fish processing occurs on the west and south-west coasts of the country, where abalone, crayfish, whitefish, and canning and fishmeal are processed.²⁰ Companies must have an invitation from the government and a specific permit in order to onshore fish processing in South Africa.²¹ Most companies that catch seafood also process it onshore, and have developed cold storage and distribution systems. There are 40 wholesale distributors of domestically processed seafood in South Africa.²² Namibia also has large scale processing, and foreign fishing ventures are required to process fish in Namibia. Ninety percent of fish processed in Namibia is exported.²³

Key Documented Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors in Fish Production

According to the U.S. Department of State's *2020 List of Goods Produced by Child or Forced Labor*, child or forced labor is reported in the fishing/seafood sector in the following sub-Saharan African countries: Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda.²⁴ In addition to those listed, the U.S. Department of State's *2021 Trafficking in Persons Report* also notes that traffickers force adults and children to work in the fishing/seafood industry in South Africa, Senegal, Mauritania, Angola, Gabon, Cameroon, and Sierra Leone.²⁵

Undesirable and Hazardous Work

The International Labour Organization (ILO) identifies fishing as a highly hazardous sector. Fishers routinely face hazards and dangerous conditions of work including rough weather, exposure to sun and salt water without protective clothing, slippery/moving work surfaces, regular use of knives/other sharp objects, inadequate sleeping quarters, inadequate sanitation, and lack of fresh food/water. In addition, the work itself is highly labor intensive. When setting



nets or hauling a catch, workers may be required to work around the clock for days without breaks. Workers report high degrees of fatigue, which further increases the risk of accidents. In informal fishing, children are involved in diving for fish and may dive without any protective gear, putting them at high risk for injury or death. Fish processing, which can take place on board larger vessels or in port cities, carries its own risks. For example, workers who pack fish on ice often report frost bite symptoms in fingers. Few workers are provided adequate health and safety gear. When injuries and illness do occur, medical care is rarely provided. Due to the highly hazardous nature of the work, fishing is generally considered a worst form of child labor.²⁶ Capture fisheries, in particular, have one of the highest occupational fatality rates in the world.²⁷

ILO reports that forced labor and human trafficking in the fisheries sector is a severe problem, especially for migrant workers.²⁸ Workers aboard fishing vessels are inherently isolated, particularly on larger vessels that can stay at sea for extended periods of time, leaving workers with limited means of escape or avenues to report abuse. Fishing operations take place across national and maritime boundaries, leaving workers under the legal jurisdiction of the country in which the vessel is flagged. In cases where the vessel is using a flag of convenience, workers have severely limited legal protection.²⁹

Vulnerable Workforce

Child Labor

Fish/seafood products are produced with child labor in Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda.

The most well documented case study of child labor in African fisheries is that of the Lake Volta region in Ghana. According to the U.S. Department of State, children working in or around the lake are “victims of forced labor, not allowed to attend school, given inadequate housing and clothing, and controlled by fishermen through intimidation, violence, and limited access to food.”³⁰ Boys as young as five years old are trafficked into working in hazardous positions such as deep diving; while girls perform work on shore including cooking, cleaning fish, and preparing fish for market. A survey of communities in the Volta and Central Regions revealed that traffickers subjected children from nearly one-third of the 1,621 surveyed households into forced labor, primarily in inland fishing and domestic work. Organized traffickers facilitate child trafficking in the fishing industry in Ghana and other West African countries.³¹

Several incidences indicate that Tanzanian fishermen work on fishing vessels with indicators of human trafficking. With respect to child labor, traffickers subject children to forced labor on fishing vessels operating in Tanzanian and international waters.³² The U.S. Department of State reports that the South African government did not “comprehensively monitor or investigate forced child labor or the labor trafficking of adults in the agricultural, mining, construction, and fishing sectors” in 2020.³³ In Namibia, traffickers may subject children from less affluent neighboring countries to forced labor in the fishing sector.³⁴



Previous reports indicate the risk of child labor on fishing vessels in Lake Victoria—a lake shared between Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya. Nile Perch from Lake Victoria, including waters in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, are exported to European and Asian markets.³⁵ In one study, children working on Lake Victoria reported widespread abuse and harassment, as well as withholding of wages.³⁶ The presence of labor recruiters and deceptive recruitment practices have also been documented.³⁷

Migrant Labor

The high numbers of foreign fishing vessels operating in African waters has been well documented, but data on the demographics of crew members is harder to come by. Anecdotally, it appears that in many cases, both workers from the vessel's port-of-origin country, as well as local workers from African nations, may be present. For example, Senegalese workers were documented to be working alongside Chinese workers on a Chinese trawler off the coast of Senegal.³⁸ While salaries are reportedly relatively high, the lack of oversight into conditions on these vessels, particularly when they are operating illegally, may leave both local and foreign workers vulnerable to abuse.

In 2010, the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) documented South Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, Indonesian and Sierra Leonean workers experiencing indicators of forced labor on board a Korean flagged ship operating off of Sierra Leone. Sierra Leonean workers reported that they were not given contracts and were not paid in cash, but instead were compensated in bycatch that they could sell in markets. They reported that any expression of grievances could result in termination and even abandonment.³⁹

In a 2022 report, EJF documented continuous instances of IUU fishing and human rights abuses associated with Chinese-owned fishing vessels operating in West Africa, particularly Ghana, where vessels employ the “use of forced, bonded and slave labor and trafficked crew, alongside the widespread abuse of migrant crewmembers.”⁴⁰ For instance, EJF uncovered that crew members on board a Chinese-owned trawler operating in Ghanaian waters had witnessed or been a victim of physical abuse, subjected to deplorable living conditions as well as poor quality food and drink, and were working without written contracts.

Presence of Labor Intermediaries

The ILO categorizes West African countries as “Source States” for recruitment and transit of migrant fishers.⁴¹ Labor recruiters, or “brokers”, recruit and supply workers to fishing boat owners, piers, processing facilities and other employers, both in Africa and abroad. Migrant workers often rely on brokers due to several reasons, some being complex bureaucracy, language barriers, or lack of local contacts to access the job market of a foreign country. Brokers have been documented using deceptive recruitment methods to hire African workers for work on commercial fishing vessels as well as foreign workers on fishing vessels operating in



African waters; brokers can charge high fees, lie about wage and working conditions, withhold identity documents, or retain part or all of the worker's salary.⁴² In 2014, a crew of Cambodian fishermen were trafficked by a Cambodian labor recruitment agency to work on a fishing vessel off the coast of South Africa.⁴³

In 2013, there was widespread media coverage of a Chinese-owned commercial vessel, MV Leader, which exploited Namibian, Indonesian, and Chinese workers in Namibian waters.⁴⁴ Media articles noted that workers on MV Leader had been recruited via "labour hire."⁴⁵ Namibian policies to prevent IUU fishing require foreign companies to pay high fees to obtain fishing rights. While these policies have been heralded as successful in Namibia, some analysts have suggested that these fees may incentivize companies to seek savings through low cost or exploited labor.⁴⁶ Although recruitment mechanisms for Chinese workers on foreign vessels have not been well documented, given the proliferation of Chinese vessels operating both legally and illegally in African waters,⁴⁷ these anecdotal reports suggest the potential of more widespread vulnerability.

The Tanzanian government reports that brokers sometimes enter communities to recruit and transport victims into trafficking situations involving forced labor in fishing.⁴⁸ The U.S. Department of State also reports that Ghana has a presence of informal recruitment agencies that facilitate recruitment through informal channels.⁴⁹

Contextual Factors Contributing to Trafficking in Persons Vulnerability

Association with Environmental Degradation

The FAO reports that as of 2020 most fish stocks in West Africa "are already being fished beyond their sustainable biological and economic limits."⁵⁰ The destruction of fish stock in Senegal by foreign vessels is causing a surge in irregular migration to Europe, including Spain, according to the U.S. Department state, where these migrants are vulnerable to trafficking.⁵¹

IUU fishing is a well-documented issue in African marine fisheries. A 2015 Greenpeace report estimated that approximately 40 percent of the catch in West Africa is unreported, and about 50 percent of fishery resources are overfished.⁵² In 2017, Greenpeace undertook joint surveillance operations in the EEZs of Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Senegal – an excursion that inspected 37 vessels and identified 17 vessels thought to be operating in contravention of relevant fishing regulations.⁵³ From 2015 to 2019, most IUU fishing offences by Chinese-owned vessels occurred in West Africa within EEZs, according to a 2022 EJF report. The highest number of offences in West Africa were identified for Ghana, followed by Sierra Leone and Mauritania.⁵⁴ Along with West Africa, Greenpeace highlights IUU activities also occur in the Indian Ocean.

The propensity of IUU fishing in West Africa and in the Indian Ocean contributes to environmental degradation since IUU fishers disregard conservation and management



measures and don't report their catch, thereby undermining national and regional efforts to manage fisheries sustainably.⁵⁵ Greenpeace notes that “ IUU fishing can lead to the collapse of local fisheries, with small-scale fisheries in developing countries proving particularly vulnerable—threatening livelihoods and exacerbating poverty and food insecurity.”⁵⁶

Transshipment and the use of reefers is central to many illegal fishing practices, allowing fishing vessels to remain at sea for long periods of time and without port state oversight. An estimated 16 percent of West African fish exports are harvested by vessels that use transshipment, according to a 2016 report by Overseas Development Institute (ODI).⁵⁷ EJF documents the devastating impacts of intensive trawling, overcapacity, IUU fishing, overfishing, and other interlinked stressors such as climate change on coastal communities in West Africa. These pressures on West African fisheries are “driving deficiencies, lost livelihoods, and poverty...creating a cycle of exacerbated poverty and human suffering, as well as further ecological degradation.”⁵⁸

Association with Organized Crime/Armed Conflict

IUU fishing has been linked to other forms of organized crime. IUU fishing vessels have also been associated with drug trafficking, human trafficking, arms trafficking, child labor, forced labor, and tax evasion. The lack of regulatory infrastructure in the West African fishing industry allows IUU fishing and associated risks to thrive with little interference.⁴⁴ In an INTERPOL security operation, Kenyan law enforcement rescued 121 men, women, and children that were trafficked on vessels in Lake Victoria in 2021.⁵⁹ Criminal networks also utilize the proceeds from illegal commercial fishing to finance other illicit activities.

International fishing shipments have also provided a convenient channel for illegal drug trafficking schemes. An increased demand for cocaine in Europe has driven Latin American drug smugglers to utilize West Africa as a port of exit for the drug. The United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported in 2011 that “mother ships” transport cocaine from Latin America to West Africa, where the drug is placed on inconspicuous local fishing vessels. These ships are generally manned by an African crew, but carry a Latin American “controller” on board. The vessels then transport cocaine to Europe.⁶⁰ This trend in cocaine smuggling continues, as evidenced by UNODC's 2021 report highlighting the increasing amount of cocaine seizures in West Africa.⁶¹

IUU fishing in Somalia has been reported to be a source of income for the terrorist group al-Shabab, and pirates sometimes associated with the terrorist organization have turned to providing security for illegal foreign vessels to generate income, often firing on unprotected Somali fishermen who are seen as competition.⁶² While Somalia used to be a hotspot for piracy and armed robbery, incidents have subsided and the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) reports “Somali piracy remains under control.” However, the IMB reports that piracy and armed robbery attacks have risen sharply in West Africa off the Gulf of Guinea. In 2020, IMB



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