

Important Considerations for Decent Work at Sea

Vessel Conditions and Safety at Sea

Conditions on vessels are particularly important because, for many workers, vessels provide accommodation, shelter, and food for months at a time. Several factors can positively or negatively influence fishing vessel conditions, including vessel safety regulations, characteristics of the vessel (e.g., age, condition, and maintenance), crew competency regarding safety and training, crew culture and policies, and fishery regulations. Regular assessment of these factors can identify hazards on board and help develop solutions for reducing risks and improving safety. Solutions may include targeted safety training programs, accident prevention programs, and changes in management approaches. Port controls, audits, and other inspections should verify that minimum requirements for safety at sea are met (i.e., the main principles of [the Work in Fishing Convention](#), [Cape Town Agreement](#), [Port State Measures Agreement \(PSMA\)](#), and the [Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Fishing Vessel Personnel \(STCW-F\)](#)).

Recruitment and Fair Employment

It's challenging to unearth labor recruiters, recruitment channels, and unethical recruitment practices, even on land. Compliance with national and international guidelines is difficult if a company uses third-party labor recruiters. At-sea workers have additional risks and challenges. The jurisdictional issues inherent to international labor migration and recruitment of workers increase for at-sea workers, with the potential for entirely different countries representing a workers' legal residence, vessel flag, vessel ownership, fishing region, port of departure, and port of return. To better understand and reduce recruitment risks, companies should use internal recruiters or hire [trusted](#) agencies.

Grievance, Worker Engagement, and Remediation

Workers and their unions or other representative organizations should be involved in all stages of design, training, implementation, and governance of decent work at sea projects. For fishers, real-time worker-driven monitoring at-sea is a fundamental feature of meaningful worker engagement. Workers should have access to trustworthy and confidential grievance mechanisms and receive timely remedy in situations where issues are identified. Read more: [ILRF Taking Stock](#).

Working Time

Best practices for maritime operations set maximum hours of work at 14 hours in any 24-hour period or 72 hours in a seven-day period. Additionally, seafarers are entitled to annual leave. As such, workers should not spend more than 11 months at sea without repatriation to their own country or a country

with which they have a substantial connection. Civil society organizations and some companies have set shorter limits to the maximum time spent at sea, with [Greenpeace advocating for three months](#) and [Thai Union committing to nine months](#).

Read more: [Maritime Labor Convention](#)

Repatriation

Fishing vessel workers may face particular challenges regarding repatriation. [Reporters have documented instances of fishers stranded on remote islands or foreign countries without legal protections, documentation, or the resources to return home](#). To protect workers, vessel owners should pay to repatriate or arrange repatriation when work agreements end or are terminated.

Data Collection and Verification

Improving vessel monitoring and transparency (e.g., public reporting of vessel lists and unique vessel identifiers) is an important step towards reducing illegal activities and increasing understanding of vessel activity at sea. Vessel monitoring is achieved through technology that broadcasts vessel location in real-time, while vessel transparency is achieved by the reporting of vessel data, such as ownership, specifications, and unique identification through International Maritime Organization (IMO) numbers. Increasing transparency and oversight can help companies in seafood supply chains to consider improvements to all vessels in their supply chains, not just the ones currently most visible. Read more: [2019 Open Water Guidance on Vessel Transparency for Seafood Companies](#).