





## SOCIAL PROTECTION RESPONSES

### What is social protection and why is it relevant to ensure recovery from the impacts of COVID-19?

Social protection is a set of interventions whose objective is to reduce social, economic and environmental vulnerability; to alleviate extreme poverty while protecting and promoting livelihoods (FAO, 2017).

#### Box 1. What is social protection?

Social protection includes three broad components:

- **Social assistance:** non-contributory transfers, such as cash or food transfers, school feeding programmes, fee waivers and public works programmes. Globally, these represent the largest share of programmes and are usually tax-financed and can focus on a particular vulnerable group or include some degree of conditionality.
- **Social insurance:** contributory insurance programmes to mitigate the effects of shocks and protecting the uninsured against adverse personal circumstances, lifecycle hazards and livelihood risks. These programmes include accidents, health and life insurances.
- **Labour market interventions:** facilitates employment and promotes livelihoods, ensuring basic standards at work and extending labour rights, such as unemployment benefits and skills development programmes.

Source: Adapted from FAO social protection framework. *Promoting rural development for all* (FAO, 2016)

Social protection can help build the resilience of the poor and vulnerable by providing alternative sources of income and maximizing risk management throughout their lifecycle. When coupled with integrated and coherent fisheries policies and programmes, social protection is also an instrument to attain the sustainability of natural resources (FAO, 2019). Unfortunately, due to a lack of social protection programmes targeting the fisheries sector, the majority of small-scale fishers and fish-workers, although vulnerable, have the lowest levels of social protection coverage, which leaves them mostly unprotected against shocks and risks.

The majority of countries reacted swiftly to the effects of COVID-19 by prioritizing social protection measures as one of the key policy responses to deal with the immediate socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. In September 2020, over 1 000 social protection measures in 200 countries/territories have been planned and/or introduced to reduce the negative economic impacts of the pandemic, both in urban and rural areas (Gentilini *et. al*, 2020).

### Which specific social protection measures have governments adopted for fishers and fish-workers?

Several social protection measures have been introduced by governments worldwide to minimize the impact of COVID-19 on food security and poverty in the fisheries and aquaculture sector. Although measures have been implemented *ex novo* in many countries, several governments expanded existing schemes either by increasing the coverage, the benefit value, the duration of existing programmes and/or by introducing extraordinary payments or transfers. Measures to respond to the impact of the pandemic also resulted in a modification of entitlement rules and relaxation of requirements/conditionalities to facilitate access for many beneficiaries. Below is a description of some social protection measures in the fisheries and aquaculture sector:

**Temporary social assistance interventions** were the most common social protection interventions that governments gradually planned and/or implemented with the aim to support fishers, including small-scale fishers at the immediate onset of the pandemic. Among them, cash transfers were the most widely used interventions in the fisheries sector, following the same pattern of response observed in rural and urban areas (Gentilini *et al.*, 2020).

Most of the interventions adopted by governments targeting the fisheries sector varied from a monthly one-off payment scheme to unconditional cash transfer programmes of a duration of three months. This is the case in **Algeria, Egypt, Montenegro, Sri Lanka, Costa Rica, Chile and Brazil**. In Sri Lanka, beneficiaries were required to register for the Farmers and Fishers pension scheme. In Brazil and Egypt, on the other hand, fishers were covered, as the cash transfer scheme was extended to the whole informal market. Some countries also implemented cash-transfers with some sort of conditionality. In Chile, the government created a special solidarity fund (USD 199) targeting the most vulnerable artisanal fishers classified as such by the National Social Households registry. Those benefitting from the programmes were required to attend a virtual training on the fisheries legislation ("*Ley de Caletas*"). In **Jamaica**, 17 000 small-scale fishers who registered their boats and installed a mandatory GPS tracking system benefitted from cash-transfers (Northrop, *et al.* 2020). Countries like **South Africa** distributed over 10 000 food parcels through *the Small-Scale Fishers Relief Programme*, to distressed and licensed small-scale fishers identified by the Fisheries Department and stakeholder in the seafood industry (Government of South Africa, 2020) while in **Montenegro** a one-off payment was announced for 184 professional fishers with a valid license (Government of Montenegro, 2020). **India**, as described in the box 2, was one of the few countries where compensation payments were also provided to workers in the post-harvest sector.

**Financial support for assets and inputs** have also been put in place or expanded in the fisheries sector, mostly through fee-waivers and inputs subsidies (including baits, ice, fuel costs, fishing ropes, nets, etc.). For example, in **Antigua and Barbuda**, the government introduced a 20 percent reduction in electricity costs to the public and fuel costs to fishers for ninety days (Gentilini *et al.*, 2020). In **Saint Kitts and Nevis**, through the COVID-19 Relief Programme, 203 fishers were assisted by the federal government with approximately USD 3 million spent on fish trap wire, fishing line, hooks, rope and safety equipment (SKINS, 2020). In the **Seychelles**, the Fisheries Authority announced a reduction of prices for bait and ice — considered key inputs for the artisanal sector — to support the recovery from COVID-19 impacts (Government of Seychelles, 2020). A three-month rescue plan was put in place by the Seychelles to aid artisanal fisheries during the pandemic. This rescue plan contemplates a contribution of two thirds of the price of bait and half the price of ice. In addition, the government is assisting fish processors via loans from its Fisheries Development Fund (CFFA, 2020). In **Saint Vincent and the Grenadines**, the government announced the provision of USD 9 million in direct support to fisheries through subsidized inputs and the provision of fishing boats (small-fisher fleet expansion and fishing gears) (IMF, 2020). In **Mauritania**, the government bears all the taxes and royalties resulting from this activity for the rest of the year for the heads of families working in the traditional fishing sector (Gentilini *et al.*, 2020). In **Guinea** in June 2020, the government approved an import duty exemption on fishing equipment (IMF, 2020). In **Samoa**, duty concession on a list of agricultural tools and fishing equipment was included in the government response plan to the economic impacts of COVID-19 (IMF, 2020). Support to assets and inputs cost may risk to fail informal and smaller scale operators and if not counterbalanced by strong fisheries management system in place, it may increase pressure over fishery resources.

In **Colombia**, the National Aquaculture and Fisheries Authority (AUNAP), provided more than 52 000 juvenile fish for aquaculture purposes to 169 families in 7 indigenous communities in La Guajira under the framework to strengthen productive and social capacities of the region, especially in relation with food security and nutrition (Government of Colombia, 2020). In **Costa Rica**, oyster farms are being built to generate jobs for over 24 families in Isla Venado, Isla Chira and Costa Pajaros. The families involved have also received technical support from the National Institute of Learning (INA) and the Unit of Marine Biology of the National University (UNA) of Puntarenas as regards how to cultivate oysters and basic management tools.

### Box 2. Support to fishers and fish-workers in India

To respond to the economic consequences of the pandemic a number of States set up compensation measures to provide relief to fishers and fish workers. This was also the result of **pressure from civil society organizations**, after initially the *Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi* relief program excluded fishers (Vohra, 10 April 2020).

In **Andra Pradesh**, each of the 109,231 registered fishers in the state benefitted from financial assistance of USD 123. The State government also announced a one-off payment of USD 29 benefitting 6 000 migrant fish workers working in Gujarat and stuck due to restrictions on movement between States. In **Tamil Nadu**, a one-time financial aid of USD 12 was granted to 485 000 fishers and fish vendors who were members of the State Fishermen Welfare Board. In June and July 2020, the government of **Kerala** distributed to fishing families and ancillary or 'allied' workers registered fishers in the marine and inland subsectors a one-time family assistance of approx. USD 27 to compensate for the impacts of COVID-19. Allied workers employed in vending and processing were paid USD 13 on an individual basis. In September 2020, the Government further announced a relief package to support fishers that had lost their job during the lockdown. The support will be given to the families of fishers engaged in fishing activities, as well as to inland and coastal registered fishers (*New Indian Express*, 22 Sept 2020).

Several Indian States have in place a number of welfare programmes targeting fishers and sometimes their organizations. This is the case in Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, with programmes including accident/death insurance schemes; the saving cum-relief schemes and the old age pension scheme. The Kerala Fishermen's Welfare Fund Board (KFWFB) is an agency of the Fisheries Department that through its regional offices, is responsible for maintaining the list of fishers and the list of allied workers and, since 2018, also maintains a databank called the fisher folk family register (FFR).

### Developed countries: which measures and programmes have been adopted?

A number of developed countries responded to the impacts of COVID-19 with economic stimulus programmes specific to the fisheries sector or that included a dedicated chapter for fisheries and aquaculture in broader programmes. The **United States of America**, under the Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, allocated USD 300 million for fisheries and aquaculture benefitting small-scale fishers affected by COVID-19 in Alaska, Washington, California, Oregon, Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, and Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). *Federally Recognized Tribes* in Alaska and on the west coast were also targeted under this programme. In **Guam**, the Department of Agriculture announced a USD 1 billion relief programme under the CARES act to compensate commercial fishers who have lost 35 percent or more of their revenue from January to June 2020. The **Australian Government**, under the COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund, is waiving USD 10.3 million across the final two instalments of levies for Commonwealth managed fisheries, reducing levies for the 2019–20 financial year by two thirds. This will support the cash flow of fishers during the outbreak and help them remain viable and able to return to full production when the outbreak subsides (Government of Australia, 2020). **Canada** launched the Fish Harvest Benefit and the Grant Programme. The Fish Harvester Benefit is an income support programme to cover up to 75 percent of income losses in 2020. Eligible beneficiaries include self-employed commercial fish harvesters, crew members, First Nations harvesters designated by their communities. In addition, the Fish Harvester Grant provided up to

USD 10 000 to self-employed fish harvesters with a valid 2020 commercial fishing licence. The Government of Canada also launched the Canada Seafood Stabilization Fund to support the fish and fish-processing sector. Support to business also included measures to increase storage capacity; improve health and safety of workers and fishing technologies (Government of Canada, 2020).

The **European Union** introduced some flexibility rules to its European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF). The EMFF is one of the European Union structural funds that co-finances projects in European member countries under different priority areas on the base of septennial plans. In March 2020, the European Union announced the possibility for member countries to use unspent funds and amend operational programmes more easily to introduce new measures to cope with the impacts of COVID-19 for fishers, fish farmers, producer organizations and associations of producer organizations for the storage of fishery and aquaculture products. In **Cyprus**, a compensation of USD 1 170 was announced in April for professional fishers using unspent EMFF (2014–2020) funds. In September 2020, the government had spent a total of USD 521 502 benefitting 251 applicants mostly from the small-scale fisheries sector (European Commission online, 2020a). In the same country, aquaculture farmers will receive USD 1.4 million approximately to compensate fixed costs for the March to December 2020 period. Additional EMFF support is available in **Bulgaria** to fisheries and aquaculture sectors, to compensate for economic losses from cessation of fishing activities. Over 100 fishers benefitted from this support, covering both smaller and bigger operators and keeping family businesses running and saving jobs. Furthermore, support is available for the purchase of goods, raw materials, and supplies related to the company's activities, along with storage and personnel costs (European Commission, 2020b). Additionally, the government allocated funds for the fisheries and aquaculture sector amounting to USD 9.5 million. In **Croatia**, fisheries and aquaculture sector received support due to the temporary cessation of fishing and aquaculture activities. Producer organizations and associations of producer organizations received support to store fishery and aquaculture products which increased the quantities eligible for storage of the products concerned (European Council, 2020). In **Italy** an emergency fund to protect agricultural supply chains in crisis, has been set up, with a budget of EUR 585 million for the year 2020, aimed at helping the agricultural, fishing and aquaculture sector businesses. Temporary unemployment compensation was also announced for additional 9 weeks for fish workers and workers in the agriculture sector (Government of Italy, 2020). In the **British Virgin Islands**, the Government announced a USD 2 million package, the Rapid Response Fishing and Farming Production Programme. This aimed at stimulating the local food production, whilst supporting fisherfolk and farmers (Government of Virgin Island, 2020). In **Scotland**, an aid package worth USD 7.8 million has been put in place benefitting Scottish-registered fishers with vessels up to 12 metres in length to assist the Scottish fisheries sector during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

## INVESTING IN SOCIAL PROTECTION TO RECOVER FROM COVID-19: ANALYSIS AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

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**COVID-19 showed the urgency to expand and strengthen social protection systems in the fisheries and aquaculture sector to respond to the negative impacts of the pandemic.**

- Across all sectors, including in the fisheries and aquaculture sector, social protection represented a key policy intervention to minimize the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on lives and livelihoods (FAO, 2020c).

- Countries with consolidated social protection systems have shown to be more adaptive in responding to COVID-19.
- Most developed countries implemented broader economic stimulus programmes in the fisheries and aquaculture sector while countries with weaker social protection systems and with large employment informality, high rates of job loss, and without any access to income support, have been covered less by such measures.
- The majority of social protection measures implemented by governments were temporary cash and in-kind transfers followed by input subsidies (fuel) programmes.
- According to the evidence available (FAO, 2015), cash transfers in the agriculture sector demonstrate that not only a country's context matters, but also the timing of delivery, the amount of the cash transfer and the inclusion of beneficiary populations into social programmes
- Further evidence is needed to estimate whether cash-transfers size and the delivery mechanisms adopted by countries to alleviate the economic impacts of COVID-19 and limit negative coping strategies were efficient.
- Social protection programmes should be designed with a gender-sensitive approach in mind from the design into implementation and evaluation phases because they can affect female empowerment and gender dynamics.
- The International Labour Organization's (ILO) 2012 Social Protection Floors Recommendation (No.202) sets out guidelines for states to provide basic income security and health care for all and highlights the need to extend provision to those working informally. The associated Social Protection Floor Initiative (SPF) calls for states to honor their obligations under international human rights law, to extend to social protection provision, a commitment reiterated under the SDGs and the ILO Work in Fishing Convention of 2007 (No. 188) which came into force in 2017.

**Social Protection schemes are not only a basic human right - they also help to improve the adaptive capacity of households to shocks and lessen negative coping strategies** including, for instance, engaging in overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, use of destructive practices, removing children from school, taking out high-interest loans, selling productive assets and others.

- Social protection can be a key element in creating a virtuous cycle of formalization, improved welfare, improved fisheries management and improved profitability in the sector (FAO, 2019).
- Because social protection triggers economic inclusion, fishers, fish-workers and fish-farmers that have access to it may have the right incentives and means to shift livelihoods strategies, facilitating transition from subsistence to long-term planning and productive investments.
- Eligibility criteria for cash-transfers such as having a valid fishing license or being registered into the social security system may exclude the poor and vulnerable and those who depend on informal employment including migrant workers, crew members, gleaners and vendors (principally women) in the fisheries and aquaculture sector when fisheries registries are not complete and do not include those involved in the pre- and post-harvest fish chain.
- Collective action may play a pivotal role in advocating for adequate coverage of fishers, including fisher-women vendors and processors in national social protection systems (Box 2).

**Social protection systems that are shock-responsive and that adequately cover fishers, fish-workers and fish-farmers represent an important pillar for risk management and social-economic development.**

- The frequency and severity of shocks (including climate-related) are increasing worldwide. Therefore, government actions should strengthen the sector's response capacity to address both present and future crises, such as the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of climate change. Fishery-dependent communities are not only dealing with the consequences of COVID-19, but also with the impacts of several other shocks, such as climate, environmental and economic shocks (Box 3).
- Governments should consider implementing medium and long term social protection schemes that go beyond the expansion of cash-based social assistance programmes by (i) designing public works programmes with the aim to support restoration and conservation of aquatic and natural resources; (ii) expanding government purchase of seafood for institutional markets such as for school meals; and (iii) exploring the design and piloting of Cash plus programmes that couple cash-transfers with a package of capacity building and job creation; (iv) extending social insurance coverage to rural workers.
- Evidence has shown that expanding government purchase of seafood for institutional use in prisons, hospitals, school feeding programmes, and for food distribution (e.g. in-kind social protection programmes) can provide an alternative market to small-scale fisheries' products and reduce market risks and uncertainties that they may face during crises and beyond.
- Social protection programmes represent a good incentive to maintain the food system's functioning and to avoid further spread of poverty and hunger through the fish value chain.

**Policy coordination and coherence between a range of line ministries at national level are required for successful social protection programmes and for securing sustainable small-scale fisheries**

- Countries should include social protection schemes in fisheries and aquaculture development strategies to increase efficiency, promote complementary incentives and stimulate virtuous circles of formalization, valorization, food security and reduced impoverishment.
- Countries should strengthen existing social and fishers' and fish-workers' registries and encourage interoperability between them (FAO, 2020b).
- The absence of updated socio-economic and disaggregated data by gender of small-scale fisheries may create barriers to design and implement comprehensive social protection interventions. Additionally, the data-poor situation faced by the sector contributes to its informality status, which results in leaving a large proportion of small-scale fishers and fish workers with no access to social guarantees and adequate support in face of shocks, such as the one presented by the COVID-19 crisis.
- Countries should implement systematic gender-disaggregated socio-economic data collection on small-scale fishers to understand their: (i) socio-economic characteristics, (ii) barriers of access to social protection, (iii) risks and vulnerabilities, (iv) linkages to the conservation and overexploitation of natural resources and degradation of habitats/ecosystem.
- Countries may expand the coverage of social protection in the fisheries and aquaculture sector by removing inclusion barriers (e.g. allowing flexible contributory payments options that adapt to unpredictable income situations; implementing non-contributory benefits that allow the expansion coverage to those who cannot pay).

- Social protection can be an important fisheries management tool to protect livelihoods and promote conservation of natural resources such as the case of unemployment benefits paid to fishers and fish-workers during fishing closures that aim to protect and rebuild the over-exploitation of fish species.

### Box 3. Facing multiple shocks in times of COVID-19: the case of Mauritian fishers

On 28 March, the Government of Mauritius imposed strict confinement measures including a curfew in the country to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Many businesses, including coastal tourism, shut down their operations. Fishers unable to fish and unable to sell their products were left in dire conditions. According to estimates from the Fédération des Pêcheurs Artisans de l'Océan Indien (FPAOI) there are over 3 000 people depending on fisheries in Mauritius. Of those, only around 1 800 are registered as professional small-scale fishers and categorized in lagoon and off-lagoon fishing.

Under a special fund set-up in response to COVID-19, the Government provided specific support to all registered professional fishers in the country (around 1934). They were paid a daily sum of USD 10 excluding Saturdays and Sundays from 20 March to 31 May 2020. The cash transfer size is based on the Bad Weather Allowance Programme disbursement. The programme compensates professional fishers, operating off-lagoon, for days not worked during the year because of bad weather conditions. In August, fishers in the island were further affected by the oil spill caused by the grounding of the bulk carrier, "The Wakashio". The Government quickly declared a restricted zone for fishing, and swimming in a large portion of the Eastern Coastal Reef.

The Government further announced an increase of 100 percent in the budget of the Bad Weather Allowance Programme and the disbursement of USD 250 to each fisher for the month of July 2020 (Government of Mauritius, 20 August 2020). In-kind transfer was also provided to around 400 fishers (Government of Mauritius, 27 August 2020).

Mauritius has a strong social protection system in place, including free universal health care and access to education. Specific support to fishers is also provided by the Fishermen Welfare Fund established in 2000 under the Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping. The Fund assists and promotes welfare of fishers and their families through a number of schemes including scholarship award scheme for children of fishers; sickness allowance; funeral grants and maternity allowance for female fishers.

### FAO's added value

The **Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)** supports governments and stakeholders in identifying the needs of fishers, fish-farmers and fish-workers in the context of COVID-19 and advocates for the expansion of social protection programmes to effectively reach these groups — notably women — to promote linkages between social protection and fisheries and aquaculture sectors.

FAO is currently strengthening its work and capacity to help governments and other stakeholders collect systematic gender-disaggregated socio-economic data on small-scale fishers and properly design inclusive and sustainable social protection interventions, including those who work in the informal economy by supporting coordination and interaction with relevant line ministries to increase the coverage of social protection in the fisheries and aquaculture sector (SDGs 1.3 and 1.5) and to support a coherent and coordinated approach to fisheries policies. To this end, FAO supports governments in adopting the *Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries (SSF Guidelines)*, which call for social and economic development of small-scale fishing communities. FAO also supports governments in adopting the *Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries* which sets international standards of behaviour for responsible practices with a view to ensuring the effective conservation, management and development of living aquatic resources, with due respect for the ecosystem and biodiversity.

FAO's work on social protection helps countries achieve food security, improved nutrition and poverty reduction. It also helps rural households better manage risks, reconcile socio-economic development with natural resources management, enhance human capital to improve productivity and employability, thus stimulating local economic development with positive feedbacks on fisheries governance.

FAO's key contribution is to build the economic and environmental case for the expansion of social protection programmes. The economic case focuses on highlighting the role of social protection not only as a social policy tool, but also as a strategic investment to enhance the economic and productive potential of the poor. The environmental case focuses on showing social protection as an innovative tool to simultaneously support poverty reduction and ensure compliance with natural resources management strategies. Social protection provides income support to individuals against the risk of job loss, and in the case of fisheries, encourage compliance with seasonal fishing restriction measures which are a common measure in sustainable natural resource management.

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