

REPORT

Meeting: **EFARO Webinar on social dimension of fisheries management**
Parties: **DG MARE, fisheries stakeholders, AC representatives, social scientists**
Date: **8 December 2023**
Location: **Teams**
Moderator: **Luc van Hoof, EFARO**
Rapporteur: **Tamara Talevska**

Introduction

There is an increasing need to raise awareness of the social dimension of fisheries. Fisheries undergo major structural changes, leading to important social consequences for both individual fishers as well as for the fishing communities. In a number of fishing communities and regions, the social importance of the fisheries sector outweighs its direct economic contribution. To this end, EFARO (the European Association of Fisheries and Aquaculture research Institutes) and MARE (interdisciplinary social science centre for Maritime Research) organised a webinar on the need for and use of socio-data for fisheries management.

DG MARE presentation on what the EU is currently doing in the field of social data [Joan Roussoulière-Azzam, Policy Officer DG MARE]

Substantial work is ongoing on the social dimension with the support of the STECF. The social dimension is the key dimension of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), but social considerations are hard to grasp and quantify. More scientific grounding is needed on aspects of social security, employment, safety, cultural contribution, mental health and so on.

Some data already exists; however the scope needs to be broadened. Currently, the policymakers are relying predominantly on employment data, but social dimension is much broader and it includes working condition, dangers and hardships, position of fishers, generational renewal, attractiveness, sector dependency, mobility, adaptability of fisher communities etc. In addition, the impact of management measures on local communities must be studied and better reflected in the decision-making.

DG MARE uses this data in informing policy decisions, with a view to enable the best possible trade-offs. More than just economic and biological data are needed for a fuller picture, and this is where social data comes in. Impact Assessment of management measures, preparation of legislative initiatives, and sea basin analyses will benefit from this new data stream.

The fishing sector already provides important data on economics and employment (age, gender, nationality, employment status). In addition, EUMOFA supplies data on market

supply, consumption, import/export, landings by species. These could be further improved with non-sectorial social statistics.

General (non-sectoral) social statistics are available through Eurostat on many [statistical themes](#) including Labor Force Survey, EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions) and [Social scoreboard](#). All data at a very aggregated level (NUTS 1 & 2), hence it is difficult to understand the reality of fishing communities. Under the Farm to Fork strategy, the EC is working on development of environmental, economic and social indicators. The final report expected at a later stage. European Maritime Safety Agency collects data about [marine casualties & incidents](#) (for vessels not fishers).

DG MARE is working with STECF to gather these additional data. Four Working Groups have been held so far (in 2019, 2020, 2022, 2023) and the next one is planned in the summer 2024.

Some of the current initiatives include:

National Fisheries Profiles: description of society, sectors, practices, structure of fleets, governance systems, trends, challenges, and opportunities for each country. Three have been developed so far, with 9 more to come by March 2024. All MS profiles are planned to be completed by the end of 2024. This will form the basis of a comprehensive analysis of the sector. There are currently ongoing discussions about publication issues while also ensuring transparency.

Social data: development of indicators to be included in data calls after consultation with stakeholders about priorities. Other methods to gather social data are being discussed (i.e. focus groups). But firstly, priorities need to be determined to get this data into the policymaking system.

Community profiles: these go hand in hand with national profiles. Work needs to be further aligned with ICES work and integrated into existing models and analyses, feeding into initial work done in 2019 and 2020. The important thing is also to set the right definitions, i.e. What is a community? Is it a spatial/geographical aspect, or a practice aspect?

Fishing opportunities allocation by MS: it will be important to understand how quota allocation systems work in different MS to identify novel practices. MS allocate quotas in different ways and this importantly affects the sector. Allocations should be more transparent to allow exchange between stakeholders and amongst MS.

Other projects:

Fishers of the Future Study: a foresight study on what future fishers will look like. This includes the current fisher profiles, trends, and future scenarios. The project will run in 2024.

Preparation of implementation of STCW-F (fishers safety training standards): this will require more knowledge about fishers training in the EU. Establishing a baseline will be important.

ICES WG Social: ICES work on social indicators and definition of a fishing community.

Other initiatives:

WWF LIF Tool: work on the assessment of socio-economic dimension

CAPFishMan: involves a tool to define and evaluate the cultural heritage of SSF in the European Atlantic area.

Identified challenges:

- Granularity and compatibility with other data sets (even in employment data);
- Collection of data (through national authorities, surveys, interviews/focus groups);
- Social science capacity building – in STECF and national administrations working on fisheries;
- Integration into existing bio-economic models into policy decisions;
- To what sectors do we want to compare? “Only in contrasting different sectors can the particularities of the fishing sector be identified” STECF 19-03 (i.e. other maritime sectors, food providers, other professions where risk is high)

[What are ICES, STECF and RCG ECON doing with social data \[Marloes Kraan, MARE\]](#)

There is a notable rise of social data in applied marine research in the EU and the work is accelerating. Social dimension was a priority for Sinkevicius' Commission. There is increasing attention to social data in policymaking.

The Commission has been asking scientific community to further develop social indicators to be used in the analysis of socio-economic reports. For this, DG MARE relies on ICES and STECF, but also on applied marine labs and institutes. Currently, not many social scientists' work is applied. There is a need for more qualitative social scientists.

[MARE Centre](#) is one of those institutions with a network of marine social scientists. Every two years a conference for social scientists is organised in Amsterdam entitled 'The People and the Sea. In addition, there is a journal publishing social research. Policy days will also be organised to allow for better application of this research into policy.

ICES started this work in 2018 with WG on Marine Systems, a strategic initiative for Human Dimension. WGSOCIAL and WGECON placed further attention to the human dimension. In 2023, ICES Human Dimension steering group was established with Nathalie Steins as the Chair. However, there are still challenges with funding and data.

Rooflike approach for social analysis was proposed to streamline the efforts to support the development of social methodologies and analyses among those involved. Social issues need to be addressed due to several acute pressures and challenges, such as lack of marine space, high fuel prices, problems with generational renewal and so on.

Historically, fishing was seen as a damaging activity exerting high pressure on ecosystem. But social sciences now recognise that fishing also importantly impacts the fishing communities and the society as a whole, so there is a positive aspect to it in terms of culture, economy, jobs, identity. This needs to be addressed by the policymakers.

An example was provided from the USA on the mapping of fishing communities with lots of social indicators. The EU should follow this example. To do this, it is important to define what is a fishing community. My mapping it out, it becomes tangible. Ecosystem overviews from ICES are one step towards this objective, applying the pipeline procedure for a systematic approach to all ICES regions. ICES Integrated Ecosystem Assessments provide the ecosystem overviews, including the social dimension.

Defining the fishing communities is challenging, as community can be place-based community, temporally-based community (fishing villages that are not active fishing communities anymore, but people still identify with it), community of practice etc. As such, community is a multidimensional concept and work needs to be done to provide a firm definition.

Next steps on social data are to: improve, connect, expand. Going forward, the issue of SSF needs to be solved, as VMS data does not reflect the SSF. There is the need to contextualise them through national profiles.

Mapping out communities is one thing, but looking at historical perspective is something else. In-depth qualitative analysis through time is needed to this end.

ICES WGSOCIAL and FAO are currently working on a global review of social indicators used across sea basins with view to improve consideration of socioeconomic indicators in fisheries management.

In the EU, 65% of indicators are covered, but not across all categories. Only economic, research, governance are currently covered, while there is a significant gap in indicators on objective and subjective well-being.

STECF/RCGECON are collecting social variables, currently mainly demographic. Discussions are ongoing on how to improve existing data, how to report on these data, how to solve compatibility with annual economic report data (AER) etc.

In 2022, STECF worked on the first list of potential indicators: social justice, social capital, working conditions, participation, fishers' behavior, reliance/dependence, resilience and vulnerability. Currently proposed is a scoping exercise with policymakers and advisory bodies (including ACs) to determine what questions need to be answered. In this sense, the National Profiles are a good first step to be able to contextualise social indicators by understanding the different setting in the EU.

Next step will be community profiles, but only initial work has been done so far. There is a "need for speed and need for doing it properly". Marine social aspects are changing rapidly. As an example, more than 50 Dutch vessels had been scrapped in the past years. There are several other pressures, shrinking space, MPAs, Green Deal, management measures and all

this has social implications. There is a need time for academic discussion, in-depth understanding, perhaps even ethnographic fieldwork on social dimension of fisheries.

Questions & Answers

The NSAC commented: “There is at the same time both, lots of capacity and expertise in the Advisory Councils, but also not (human resources are limited), so it would be very helpful if the Commission was more targeted in their requests for data and knowledge. Right now we are floating in a sea of possibilities and different ACs are focusing on different aspects and deliver different advice. A more harmonised approach through targeted requests would be beneficial to know how to direct and mobilize ourselves more efficiently.”

There was a question on how the social indicators are being used in allocating fishing opportunities. The principle of relative stability is a concept nobody wants to touch upon, creating a Catch 22 problem for MS allocating fishing opportunities.

Commission representative responded that one of the strands of work of STECF is article 17 on the allocation of fishing opportunities in MS. The MS have to use a transparent and objective criteria including environmental, economic and social data (not the same as indicators!). First, more work needs to be done on transparency, that is why national profiles are important. Historical catches are considered a social way to allocate FO. One of the things that the EC will do is a vademecum/guidebook on the allocation of FO according to Art 17. STECF will look to see whether there are any interesting practices to be exchanged. Countries do different things in terms of allocation at different times, and this should be compared. Management does not only mean quotas, there are many other ways to manage fisheries (fishing effort, MPAs etc.). Social indicators are needed for these decisions. Whenever there is a legislative proposal, there has to be an impact assessment conducted to identify and account for these impacts. That is also where we want to see the social data integrated.

Comments were made about the relative stability and their lack of application in the UK negotiations. Historic trends in fishing communities must be looked into. There was no real review of the social implications of the CFP in 2013 and no direct evaluation of how the policy affects coastal communities dependent on marine resources. Some traditional methods are deemed destructive, even though they have been conducted for hundreds of years and have a cultural value.

A question was raised on how DG MARE intends to implement STECW-F. The Commission responded that establishing a baseline is the first step. The work on STECW-F is complex with only 10 countries ratifying it so far. We need to see how to speed this up.

The Commission will do further consulting on the priorities on social indicators, and plans to conduct formal consultations procedures with ACs, stakeholders, NGOs, social partners. The WG will identify priorities, and kick-start the collection of data, linking all the different work together. There is currently a discussion on whether to expand the current data call or have a separate social data call on social aspects. This will depend on the indicators to be included.

An issue was raised about the fact that historic basis of EU fishing industry was family-owned vessels, but this has now commercialised, with effects from lots of different regulations needing to be taken into account. There are some positive sides to it: safety standards improved, management of vessels improved, regulations are effective, but efforts to comply with them are enormous. On the economic side, fish prices at retailers today are much lower than they were 30 years ago, as margins used to be much larger. There is a downward pressure on single-vessel owners, with companies being established to achieve economies of scale. There's an increasing rate of fish imported from outside of the EU at lower environmental and social standards, which puts increasing pressure on EU fishers.

It was noted that it is important to structurally monitor social changes in the fleets, so as to make it easier to take it into account in policy decisions. Better understanding is needed on how the fishing companies are changing over time, and what consequences this brings. Having a one big owner of vessels that never fishes himself is a completely different community than in the past having a fishing community of smaller owners, and this should be looked into.

The EU research agenda and policy priorities (DG MARE, MS), data needs etc. need to be identified. We need to be smart and pragmatic, and do it gradually. It is crucial to allocate who is best to do the specific task, rather than engaging all stakeholders at the same time.

Understandable language and communication must be developed to address the end-users (fishers), to reflect their realities and to ensure their compliance. ACs are important for bringing the information to fishing communities.

It was also noted that ICES needs to include more social scientists in ACOM and SCICOM. All dynamics that happen at seabasin level must be better understood and for this different networks are needed. ESSFIN network was mentioned with publications accessible here: <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/cre/publications/other/essfin/>

It was mentioned that data collection is funded through EMFAF, and the next opportunity for funding on social indicators will only be 2027. Calls are budgeted, so you it is not possible to just add another indicator. It would be useful to have specific case on application of 1 or 2 social indicators in policy decisions and start working from such a practical case on EU-wide scale, rather than trying to address everything at the same time.

Audience also noted that SSF is currently not shown in data sets even though they make the majority of the EU fishing fleet. Though in the national profiles, this is as specific as possible, including recreational and SSF. So the attention on SSF is there, but there is a methodological issue on how to collect better data. A book on description of SSF in Europe was mentioned, accessible here: <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-37371-9>

In the past, people were a bit scared of social scientists because they thought they were representing the industry's interests. This has changed now, with more and more social academic work being undertaken.

ICES is working on demonstration cases for a gradual approach. For example, in 2024 advice on socio-economic impacts of OWF is planned.

One comment was raised along the lines of: “There are 60.000 fishers in Europe, how many other sectors employ this number of people and requiring social policy to protect these communities? On the EU level are many professional groups struggling with survival. Why should there be a community policy on fishing communities specifically?” A response was provided that in the case of many countries fishing is not only a profession, but a way of life. Therefore, these policies are not only protecting a profession but also European identity and culture. One side of the coin is the development of social policies to protect communities but there is also a need to get a better picture of who we are managing. Understanding these communities will ensure better compliance with the rules, as fishers are also participating in the management of natural resources.