

Commodity Report: Fish (2026)

Fish are reportedly produced with forced labor (FL) and/or child labor (CL) in the following countries:¹

- Angola (FL, CL)
- Australia (FL)
- Bangladesh (FL, CL) (Processing, Dried Fish)
- Benin (FL, CL)
- Brazil (CL)
- Brunei (FL)
- Burma (FL, CL)
- Burundi (CL)
- Cabo Verde (CL)
- Cambodia (CL)
- Cameroon (FL)
- Chad (CL)
- Comoros (CL)
- Costa Rica (FL)
- Ecuador (FL, CL)
- El Salvador (CL) (Shellfish)
- China (FL)
- Fiji (FL)
- France (FL)
- Gabon (CL)
- Ghana (FL, CL) (esp. Tilapia)
- Guinea (CL)
- Haiti (CL)
- Indonesia (FL, CL)
- Ireland (FL)
- Jamaica (FL)
- Japan (FL)
- Kenya (CL)
- South Korea (FL)
- Laos (FL)
- Latvia (FL)
- Liberia (FL)
- Madagascar (CL)

¹ This list is based solely on findings from the [U.S. Department of State's 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report](#) and the [U.S. Department of Labor's 2024 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor and Forced Labor](#).

- Malawi (CL)
- Maldives (FL)
- Marshall Islands (FL)
- Mauritania (FL, CL)
- Mauritius (FL)
- Mexico (FL, CL)
- Micronesia (FL)
- Mozambique (CL)
- Namibia (FL, CL)
- The Netherlands (FL)
- New Zealand (FL)
- Nicaragua (CL) (Shellfish)
- Norway (FL)
- Pakistan (FL, CL)
- Palau (FL)
- Papua New Guinea (FL, CL)
- Paraguay (CL)
- Peru (FL, CL)
- The Philippines (FL, CL)
- Poland (FL)
- Portugal (FL) (Shellfish)
- Senegal (FL, CL)
- Seychelles (FL)
- Sierra Leone (FL, CL)
- Singapore (FL)
- Solomon Islands (FL, CL)
- Somalia (CL)
- South Africa (FL, CL)
- Spain (FL) (Deep sea fishing)
- Taiwan (FL)
- Tanzania (CL) (Nile Perch)
- Thailand (FL, CL)
- Timor-Leste (FL)
- Uganda (FL, CL)
- United Kingdom (FL, CL)
- Uruguay (FL)
- Vanuatu (FL)
- Vietnam (FL, CL)
- Yemen (CL)
- Zimbabwe (CL)

Top ten countries that export fish (fresh or chilled) worldwide:²

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Norway | 6. Canada |
| 2. Sweden | 7. Türkiye |
| 3. United Kingdom | 8. Greece |
| 4. Chile | 9. Spain |
| 5. Denmark | 10. Faroe Islands |

Where are fish reportedly produced with human trafficking, including forced labor, and/or child labor?

This is one of two closely related Commodity Reports focusing on different subsectors of the seafood industry; the other is [Shrimp](#). There are some natural overlaps in the research and reporting, including workplaces where a variety of seafood is processed. In comparison to shrimp fishing and farming, which are limited to specific shrimping vessels, shrimp farms, and the production of shrimp feed, this report aims to address broader scope of fishing vessels and fish processing. Findings of forced labor and child labor in the capture and processing of **crabs**, **clams**, and **squid** are also included in the scope of this report. Some findings presented in this report also appear in the [Fishing, Aquaculture, and Seafood Processing Sector Report](#), which provides a broader overview of the various forms that forced labor may take in the seafood sector, the structural causes, and the combination of factors that may bind workers to their jobs.

According to the U.S. Department of State's *2025 Trafficking in Persons Report*, forced labor or forced child labor is reported in the fishing/seafood sector in the following countries: Angola, Australia, Bangladesh, Benin, Brunei, Burma, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Cameroon, Chad, Comoros, Costa Rica, Ecuador, China, Fiji, France, Gabon, Guinea, Ghana, Haiti, Indonesia, Ireland, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, South Korea, Laos, Latvia, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Micronesia, Mozambique, Namibia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway,

² [International Trade Center. Trade Map](#). (ITC Calculations based on UNCOMTRADE Statistics).

Note: The country list is ordered by value exported.

Pakistan, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Solomon Islands, Spain, Taiwan, Tanzania, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Uganda, United Kingdom, Uruguay, Vanuatu, Vietnam, and Zimbabwe.³

The U.S. Department of Labor's 2024 *List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor* notes that fish/seafood products are produced with forced labor and child labor in Ghana and Indonesia; and in Bangladesh, forced labor and forced child labor are reported fish processing and dried fish production. The list notes forced labor in the production of fish products in Burma, China, Taiwan, and Thailand. Child labor is noted in Brazil, Cambodia, Kenya, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, Uganda, Vietnam, and Yemen. Among specific fish products, the report notes that child labor is involved in the production of Nile perch in Tanzania and shellfish in El Salvador and Nicaragua, while both forced and child labor is used in the production of Tilapia in Ghana.⁴ The 2024 *List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor* also notes the use of forced labor in squid production in China.⁵

The U.S. Department of State's 2025 *Trafficking in Persons Report* lists Australia, France, South Korea, Netherlands, the Philippines, Poland, Seychelles, Singapore, Spain, Taiwan, and the United Kingdom as Tier 1 countries. Angola, Bangladesh, Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Comoros, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Ghana, Guinea, Indonesia, Ireland, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Latvia, Madagascar, Malawi, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Micronesia, Mozambique, Namibia, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Palau, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay, and Vietnam are listed as Tier 2 countries. Brazil, Brunei, Cabo Verde, Fiji, Liberia, Maldives, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Vanuatu, and Zimbabwe are listed on the Tier 2 Watch List. Burma, Cambodia, Chad, China, Laos, Nicaragua, and Papua New Guinea are listed as Tier 3 countries. Haiti, Somalia, and Yemen are listed as Special Case countries.⁶

³ [U.S. Department of State. 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report. 2025.](#)

⁴ [U.S. Department of Labor. 2024 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor. 2024.](#)

⁵ [U.S. Department of Labor. 2024 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor. 2024.](#)

⁶ [For the 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report's tier ranking methodology, see "A Guide to the Tiers."](#)

Note: This includes workers in forced labor or found to be in conditions of forced labor in recent years, both in vessels leaving or docking in a country's ports or that are active in a country's territorial waters.

Gathering region-specific data on forced labor in ocean fishing is difficult because many fishing vessels travel in international waters and have crews from multiple countries. In many instances, the country of vessel ownership, the port state, the vessel's flag state, the coastal state, and the nationality of the workers on board will all be different. For example, in 2024, the U.S. Department of State reported that workers from Southeast Asian countries boarded primarily China- and Taiwan-flagged fishing vessels at ports located in Fiji and worked on those vessels in Fiji's territorial waters.⁷

What does human trafficking and/or child labor in fish production look like?

This section includes countries with publicly available research and reporting on forced labor and child labor, in addition to the countries listed in the above-mentioned government reports.

The U.S. Department of State has noted that, in general, labor abuses related to fishing are related to illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, which poses a serious risk to both the fisher communities and the ocean ecosystems.⁸

Verité and the International Labour Organization (ILO) have identified several contributing factors to forced labor in fishing. Employment in the fishing sector is highly dependent on the local context, the size of the vessel, and the type of fishing undertaken. Fishers employed on larger boats may have relatively formal employment agreements with the captain of the vessel or fleet ownership, but contracts are rare. Workers may be recruited through formal or informal labor recruiters, to whom they owe debt for their job placement.

In the Southeast Asian fishing industry, 2022 reporting found that workers from Indonesia and the Philippines were highly represented in cases of workers trapped in exploitation at sea, where they faced physical abuse and were forced to work up to 20 hours per day with few breaks. Workers often face deception during the recruitment process, did not have formal work contracts, owed debt to employers or recruiters, were underpaid, and lived in poor conditions.⁹

⁷ [U.S. Department of State. 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Fiji. 2024.](#)

⁸ [U.S. Department of State. U.S. Efforts to Combat Illegal Fishing and Associated Labor Abuses. December 13, 2024.](#)

⁹ [Plan International SAFE Seas Project. Protecting Fishers from Labor Exploitation on Fishing Vessels: Impact Report. December 2022.](#)

According to a Verité study, 89.5 percent of Filipino fishers interviewed in **Taiwan** “reported paying excessive amounts in recruitment-related fees and expenses to either manning agencies in the Philippines, labor brokers in Taiwan, and/or in some cases other intermediaries.”¹⁰ These fees are higher than the legal recruiting fee limit of both Taiwan and the Philippines. This study found that the average level of illegally charged fees and expenses levied by the manning agency in the Philippines was USD 2,140. Fifteen of the 16 manning agencies named by interviewed workers advertised a “no placement fee” policy.¹¹

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s *2023 Report to Congress on Improving International Fisheries Management* stated that seafood from Taiwan is produced with forced labor. The report highlighted concerns within distant water fishing (DWF) fleets, where fishers work 18 to 22 hours per day and experience hunger and dehydration. Fishers also reportedly do not receive their promised wages.¹²

Often, workers recruited through labor brokers will have no advanced knowledge of their actual employer. In Verité’s study, none of the interviewed Filipino workers were given a clear explanation of the basic employment terms or conditions. After signing, most workers were not provided a copy of the contract.¹³ Many workers also reported signing supplemental agreement or addendums to the contract; some were written in Mandarin, with no translation provided. Others were instructed to sign blank documents, with no explanation. Many interviewed workers also stated that labor brokers or boat captains controlled their passports, Seafarer’s Identification, and Record Book until the contracts were completed.¹⁴

¹⁰ [Verité. Recruitment and Employment Experiences of Filipino Migrant Fishers in Taiwan’s Tuna Fishing Sector: An Exploratory Study. October 2021.](#)

¹¹ [Verité. Recruitment and Employment Experiences of Filipino Migrant Fishers in Taiwan’s Tuna Fishing Sector: An Exploratory Study. October 2021.](#)

¹² [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. 2023 Report to Congress: Improving International Fisheries Management. August 2023.](#)

¹³ [Verité. Recruitment and Employment Experiences of Filipino Migrant Fishers in Taiwan’s Tuna Fishing Sector: An Exploratory Study. October 2021.](#)

¹⁴ [Verité. Recruitment and Employment Experiences of Filipino Migrant Fishers in Taiwan’s Tuna Fishing Sector: An Exploratory Study. October 2021.](#)

Verité’s study reported that Filipino fishers in Taiwan were subject to forced savings. In these cases, up to 80 percent of a worker’s salary was sent to a designated “allottee” in the Philippines, who is typically a family member.¹⁵ Neither the worker nor the allottee can access or withdraw these funds until the contract is finished, even in case of emergency. Workers reported that this added pressure to maintain their employment, even in abusive situations, as they feared that leaving the job would prevent their families from receiving the full savings.¹⁶

In-kind loans, cash loans, and cash advances can also contribute to creating debt among workers in the fishing industry. Workers often receive in-kind loans (such as rice or medicine) from financiers, which are sometimes priced at inflated rates. Verité’s 2019 research on the handline tuna fishing sector in the **Philippines** found that some boat owners provide fishers with cash loans at interest rates as high as 20 percent.

As boat operators and fishers are typically not paid until after fish are weighed, valued, and sold—a process that can take anywhere from three days to one month—they often request cash advances from boat owners while they wait, which are later deducted from their pay. Handline fishers interviewed by Verité in the Philippines tuna sector stated that their main concern is the pricing of fish, which is controlled by graders and buyers. Especially in cases when the costs of fuel and supplies are high, the expedition may not turn a profit from the price of the fish, and the fishers ultimately could have a negative balance after the cash advances and/or loans are deducted. Then, fishers often have to request another cash advance and join the next fishing trip in order to pay down their debt.¹⁷

Aside from the risks of indebtedness, rates of physical and verbal abuse are high on fishing vessels. Crews are generally overseen by a skipper (boat captain). The skipper’s financial stake in the profit of a voyage is one of several factors that are known to contribute to abusive management practices, including actual or threatened physical abuse (hitting, violence with weapons, denial of rest), verbal

¹⁵ [Verité. *Recruitment and Employment Experiences of Filipino Migrant Fishers in Taiwan’s Tuna Fishing Sector: An Exploratory Study*. October 2021.](#)

¹⁶ [Verité. *Recruitment and Employment Experiences of Filipino Migrant Fishers in Taiwan’s Tuna Fishing Sector: An Exploratory Study*. October 2021.](#)

¹⁷ [Verité. *Research and Hiring Practices in the Philippine Tuna Handline Fishing Sector*. September 2020.](#)

abuse (yelling, threats), and other forms of intimidation.¹⁸ In extreme cases, fishers have reportedly been murdered, which is often covered up as suicide.¹⁹

Workers also face other forced labor risks deriving from deception about the nature of the work during the recruitment process. According to interviews conducted by Verité with handline crewmembers in the Philippines, some vessel owners avoided specifying the type and conditions of work involved, by what system they would be paid, or the length or destination of the voyage. Most of the fishers reported that they often fished in Indonesian waters. These fishers are legally restricted from fishing in Indonesian waters, a fact few of the fishers were aware of.²⁰

Thai Seafood²¹

Research in the seafood sector has consistently identified the exploitation of vulnerable migrant workers from neighboring countries such as Burma and Cambodia.²² The U.S. Department of State's *2025 Trafficking in Persons Report* notes an increase of informal and illegal recruitment networks that recruit migrants onto fishing vessels coinciding with increased Burmese migration to Thailand due to ongoing armed conflict.²³

According to the report, vessel owners, brokers, and senior vessel crew subject migrant workers from Burma, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Indonesia, as well as Thai workers, to forced labor on Thai and foreign-owned fishing boats. Migrant workers must often pay fees to labor agents, and face deception and debt-based coercion during the recruitment process. Fishing vessel owners also reportedly confiscate the

¹⁸ Daniels, Alfonso et al. "Dark Webs: Uncovering Those Behind Forced Labour on Commercial Fishing Fleets." *Financial Transparency Coalition*, 2024.

¹⁹ FreedomUnited. *S.O.S at sea: forced labor, abuse, and murder in global fishing industry*. March 13, 2024.

²⁰ Verité. *Research and Hiring Practices in the Philippine Tuna Handline Fishing Sector*. September 2020.

²¹ Content in the following two Thai-specific sections is also included in the Shrimp Commodity Report due to overlapping fishing and processing practices.

²² Stringer, Christina, et al. "Modern slavery and the governance of labor exploitation in the Thai fishing industry." *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 371. 15 October 2022.

²³ U.S. Department of State. *2025 Trafficking in Persons Report*. 2025.

identity documents of the fishermen.²⁴ Combined with unpaid wages and debt, migrant workers are often blocked from quitting and returning home.

Workers on fishing vessels are paid as infrequently as once per year, work as many as 20 hours per day without a weekly rest day, and have limited access to adequate food, potable water, or medical supplies. Some boat captains also reportedly use physical violence against fishermen, and in some cases drug them, to make them work longer.²⁵

A 2024 report from the U.S. Department of Labor further describes debt-based coercion among fishers in Thailand, especially affecting migrant workers from Cambodia and Burma, including vessels that capture trash fish for fishmeal. Many fishers interviewed during the research obtained their jobs on Thai vessels through informal brokers or labor agents in their home countries who charged recruitment or “service” fees that workers could rarely afford upfront.²⁶ Many took out loans from the same brokers or from local lenders to cover these costs, entering Thailand already indebted. Once workers were placed on boats, their debts were often transferred to vessel owners or captains, who manipulated repayment terms and added deductions for food, equipment, or small advances. The result was a cycle of debt bondage in which workers’ earnings were too low to cover expenses, leaving them dependent on employers and unable to leave. Many fishers continued working for fear of losing wages or being deported before repaying debts. In one case documented in the study, a small personal loan of THB 1,000 grew seventy-fold over three years due to interest charged by a supervisor.²⁷

Following intense media and government scrutiny in 2014 and threats of a ban on Thai seafood imports by the European Union, the Thai government enacted regulations intended to formally register migrant workers, provide health care, require employment contracts, extend the minimum wage to fishers, and instate other worker protections including mandatory rest.²⁸ While some employment conditions have

²⁴ [U.S. Department of State. 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report. 2025.](#)

²⁵ [U.S. Department of State. 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report. 2025.](#)

²⁶ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of International Labor Affairs, Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking. [Supply Chain Study: Thailand Fishing Industry. September 2024.](#)

²⁷ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of International Labor Affairs, Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking. [Supply Chain Study: Thailand Fishing Industry. September 2024.](#)

²⁸ Clark, Timothy, et al. [“Global labor value chains, commodification, and the socioecological structure of severe exploitation. A case study of the Thai seafood sector” *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 49\(3\): 652–676. 2022.](#)

improved and reported worker-paid fees have reduced over the last decade, many fishers continue to face labor abuses, including deceptive recruitment practices, exploitive payment schemes, and cycles of debt as described above.

Reporting in 2019 found that fishers still were not receiving the minimum wage, and interviews with fishers indicated continued coercive practices resulting in forced labor as well as physical abuse against migrant workers.²⁹ Fishers surveyed continued to owe debts to employers for recruitment and migration costs and reported wage withholding, although the amount of fees paid had decreased since the 2017 survey. Only just over half of the surveyed fishers recalled signing a work contract. The prevalence of forced labor indicators was most common among Cambodian fishers.³⁰

In small processing facilities that in some cases include trash fish processing, wage theft and exploitive piece-rate systems were reported. Employers violated minimum wage laws, did not pay all hours worked, or avoided providing benefits. While legal, piece-rate pay is reportedly set unfairly low, and workers struggle to earn a living wage.³¹

Thai Fish Processing

Research by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the European Union noted four types of workplaces in its research of recruitment and work conditions of migrant workers in lower tiers of seafood processing in Thailand:

- SME factories, small enterprises with less than 200 workers, which process fish and peel shrimp;
- Pier-based operations that commonly conduct work adjacent to fishing vessels in ports, including sorting and freezing the catch;

²⁹ Clark, Timothy, et al. [“Global labor value chains, commodification, and the socioecological structure of severe exploitation. A case study of the Thai seafood sector” *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 49\(3\): 652–676. 2022.](#)

³⁰ International Labour Organization. [Endline research findings on fishers and seafood workers in Thailand. 2020.](#)

³¹ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of International Labor Affairs, Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking. [Supply Chain Study: Thailand Fishing Industry. September 2024.](#)

- Processing garages located near fishing piers where workers clean, boil, salt, skin, or dry seafood; and
- Homebased workplaces, where workers receive work from distributors, an SME factory, or a processing garage employer when there is excess seafood to process.³²

Surveyed workers were migrants from Cambodia and Burma. Across these workplaces, the majority of the workforce for land-based seafood processing were female. Work activities included the sorting, beheading, grading, gutting, unloading/loading, filleting, cleaning, and salting of fish; peeling and deveining shrimp; cleaning and drying squid; removing crab meat from the shell; and freezing or cooking all types of seafood.

Over half of the migrant workers surveyed by IOM went into debt to pay for migration costs, and half had used an informal labor intermediary to arrange transportation to Thailand.

In SMEs, the majority of migrant workers did not have an employment contract and instead had a verbal agreement with the employer equating to “no work, no pay.” One out of five surveyed workers at processing garages or homebased workplaces had no written or verbal agreement.³³

Within seafood processing operations, workers in Thailand have increasingly faced forced overtime due to increasing demand for shelf-stable seafood, according to the U.S. Department of State’s *2025 Trafficking in Persons Report*. Additionally, employers in seafood processing often deduct from workers’ wages for documentation fees, advances, and other charges. Employers also withhold workers’ bank cards, which denies their access to earnings.³⁴ Workers in both homebased workplaces and processing garages reported that their personal documents are withheld, and in some cases, employers told them they would not return the documents until debt is repaid.³⁵

³² International Organization for Migration (IOM). [In the Shadow of the Ships: Migrant workers in the lower tiers of Thailand’s seafood processing sector. 2023.](#)

³³ International Organization for Migration (IOM). [In the Shadow of the Ships: Migrant workers in the lower tiers of Thailand’s seafood processing sector. 2023.](#)

³⁴ [U.S. Department of State. 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report. 2025.](#)

³⁵ International Organization for Migration (IOM). [In the Shadow of the Ships: Migrant workers in the lower tiers of Thailand’s seafood processing sector. 2023.](#)

Unsafe working conditions have also been found in processing facilities.³⁶ Occupational hazards reported include severe injuries from slipping on wet floors, injuries from heavy lifting, and rashes from prolonged contact with ice used to keep seafood fresh. Workers are also reported to faint from the poor air quality. Half of workers surveyed by the IOM reported not receiving any safety training. Workers reported buying their own personal protective equipment (PPE) and other equipment at high costs, including gloves, knives, socks, boots, and overalls, some of which need to be replaced as frequently as three times per month.³⁷

The U.S. Department of State's *2025 Trafficking in Persons Report* states that migrant workers from Egypt, Ghana, and the Philippines are vulnerable to forced labor on fishing vessels in **Ireland**.³⁸

A 2023 study published by Bristol University found that fishers from Indonesia, the Philippines, Ghana, and Ethiopia were subject to the risk of forced labor in Ireland, especially when undocumented (illegal). Irish fishing vessels typically target species including the Atlantic mackerel, blue whiting, and shrimp. Worker testimonies describe hours far beyond the 39-hour workweek stipulated in the migrant workers' contracts, unpaid wages, racial discrimination and mistreatment of migrant workers on fishing vessels, and abuse of migrant workers who relied on their employer for legal status.³⁹

Previous studies in Ireland also confirm labor rights violations, including trafficking. A 2021 study by the National University of Ireland Maynooth described persisting labor issues including "very long working hours with insufficient breaks," wages below minimum wage, deceptive contracts, lack of safety, a wide range of injuries, and racism and other forms of discrimination.⁴⁰ Workers reported injuries, or witnessing injuries, including broken bones and loss of fingers.

³⁶ [U.S. Department of State. 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report. 2025.](#)

³⁷ International Organization for Migration (IOM). [In the Shadow of the Ships: Migrant workers in the lower tiers of Thailand's seafood processing sector. 2023.](#)

³⁸ [U.S. Department of State. 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report. 2025.](#)

³⁹ Marschke, Melissa, and Peter Vandergeest. (2023). "[Migrant workers in Irish fisheries: exploring the contradictions through the lens of racial capitalism.](#)" *Global Social Challenges Journal*, 2(2), 146-167.

⁴⁰ [Murphy, Clíodhna, David M. Doyle, and Stephanie Thompson. "Experiences of Non-EEA Migrant Workers in the Irish Fishing Industry: Working Conditions, Immigration Status and Enforcement." October 2021.](#)

Health & Safety Hazards in Fishing

The FISH Safety Foundation estimated that over 100,000 fishers die each year, globally.⁴¹ While fishing is considered inherently hazardous, the study found that many deaths were preventable as they occurred due to fishing on boats without safety equipment, radio communications devices, or working hours limits. A decline in fish stocks due to poor fisheries management can lead fishers desperate for income to work on IUU fishing vessels with hazardous conditions and lack of equipment, which remain at sea for longer periods of time to turn a profit.⁴²

The ILO identifies fishing as a highly hazardous sector due to rough weather, exposure to sun and salt water without protective clothing, slippery/moving work surfaces, regular use of sharp tools, inadequate sleeping quarters, inadequate sanitation, and lack of fresh food and water. In addition, the work itself is highly labor-intensive. 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.⁴³

Chinese fishing vessels are considered some of the most dangerous. A 2023 study on the experiences of fishers in **Fiji's** distant water fishing (DWF) industry described the precarious working conditions on vessels, which are oftentimes owned by East Asian countries such as **China, Taiwan, and South Korea**. The vessel owners commonly seek to reduce costs by outsourcing labor recruitment to third-party agents in countries like Fiji. Fishing activities on these fleets are particularly hazardous due to poor safety standards, and fishers typically are not offered sufficient resources to properly treat their injuries. For instance, a Fijian fisher reported that after he was slashed by a shark, he did not receive proper medical attention. Another fisher reported that they are often required to transfer fish between vessels without adequate safety precautions, a process made more dangerous by the presence of sharks attracted by leaking fish blood.⁴⁴

⁴¹ [The Pew Charitable Trusts. *More Than 100,000 Fishing-Related Deaths Occur Each Year, Study Finds*. Nov 2022.](#)

⁴² [The Pew Charitable Trusts. *More Than 100,000 Fishing-Related Deaths Occur Each Year, Study Finds*. Nov 2022.](#)

⁴³ [Verité. *Research and Hiring Practices in the Philippine Tuna Handline Fishing Sector*. Sept 2020.](#)

⁴⁴ [Yea, Sallie, and Christina Stringer. *The Informalisation of Precarious Work in Fishing Crew: Experiences of Fijian Fishers on Distant Water Vessels*. June 12, 2023.](#)

Food scarcity, lack of rest, and withholding of wages were also commonly reported in Fiji fishing, as well as retribution (including termination) against workers who complain.⁴⁵ Fiji's ability to require stricter labor standards on Chinese vessels is reportedly compromised in part by the large number of Chinese investment projects in the country.⁴⁶

The U.S. Department of Labor's *2024 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor* also reported that forced labor is widely used in China's distant-water fishing fleet, capturing squid.⁴⁷ Fishers typically spend one to three years at sea with limited communication with the outside world, and are at high risk of exploitation by their employers. Squid crews reportedly experience conditions of inadequate nutrition and potable water; excessive work hours; violence and intimidation; debt bondage; and severe penalties for early contract termination.⁴⁸

An Outlaw Ocean Project investigation into forced labor on Chinese fishing ships and in seafood processing described Indonesian fishers trapped on a squid ship, where they are subjected to physical abuse, hazardous conditions, and prevented from going home.⁴⁹

China has steadily grown its deep-water fishing fleet in recent years. In 2023, it reported owning an estimated 2,700 distant water vessels and owning or operating terminals in 95 foreign ports; according to the Outlaw Ocean Project, satellite imaging indicated a total closer to 6,500 vessels.⁵⁰ Given that these vessels can stay at sea for over a year at a time, inspections are difficult to undertake.⁵¹ The largest portion of this distant-water seafood catch is squid.

Fishers interviewed in the Outlaw Ocean Project investigation reported that many of the crew were held against their will and had their documents confiscated. Fishers were reportedly subjected to violence if

⁴⁵ [Human Rights at Sea, *Fisheries Abuses and Related Deaths at Sea in the Pacific Region*. December 1, 2017. Batista, Natasha, and Katelyn Masket, Trudie Grattan, Nahla Achi, The Outlaw Ocean Report: Forced Labor in Fisheries, September 2020.](#)

⁴⁶ [Francisco Blaha, personal communication, May 7, 2020, cited in The Outlaw Ocean Report: Forced Labor in Fisheries \(Natasha Batista, and Katelyn Masket, Trudie Grattan, Nahla Achi, 2020\).](#)

⁴⁷ [U.S. Department of Labor. 2024 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor. 2024.](#)

⁴⁸ [U.S. Department of Labor. 2024 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor. 2024.](#)

⁴⁹ [Urbina, Ian et al. "How Uyghur Forced Labor Makes Seafood That Ends Up in School Lunches." *Politico*, 21 Nov 2023.](#)

⁵⁰ [Urbina, Ian. "The Crimes Behind the Seafood You Eat." *The New Yorker*, 9 Oct 2023.](#)

⁵¹ [Urbina, Ian. "The Crimes Behind the Seafood You Eat." *The New Yorker*, 9 Oct 2023.](#)

they asked to go home, or if they made work mistakes. They did not receive proper medical treatment when they got sick or were injured. Beriberi, a disease stemming from a vitamin B1 deficiency, was reportedly common, with some deaths reported.⁵² Some vessel captains operating illegally in restricted locations did not transfer sick fishers to other vessels to avoid sharing their location.⁵³

In unregulated waters off South America, the Chinese squid-fishing industry also employs Filipino and Indonesian forced laborers, who are compelled to work shifts up to 20 hours.⁵⁴ According to the Environmental Justice Foundation's (EJF) 2025 *Trapped at Sea* report, interviews conducted with crew members revealed that 63 percent of Chinese vessels are linked to physical violence, such as hitting, punching, kicking, and strangulation; retention of identity documents; wage deductions; unclear contracts; debt bondage; abusive working conditions, and deception in recruitment.⁵⁵ Physical abuse was also reported on about 30 percent of **Taiwanese** vessels and 16 percent of **South Korean** vessels sampled in the study. These fishing activities often occurred beyond the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of Argentina, making it difficult for governments to provide legal oversight and regulatory enforcement.⁵⁶

State-Imposed Forced Labor

The EJF report has documented extensive evidence of **North Korean** forced labor aboard Chinese tuna longlining fishing vessels operating in the Indian Ocean. The North Korean fishers are subjected to state-imposed forced labor, which is distinct in the seafood sector with coercion organized or enabled at the state level rather than emerging solely from private recruitment or vessel practices. These systems often involve formal labor-deployment programs, politically driven labor-export arrangements, or state-imposed constraints on workers' movement, communication, or earnings.

⁵² [Urbina, Ian. "The Crimes Behind the Seafood You Eat." *The New Yorker*, 9 Oct 2023.](#)

⁵³ [Urbina, Ian. "The Crimes Behind the Seafood You Eat." *The New Yorker*, 9 Oct 2023.](#)

⁵⁴ [Northrop, Katrina. "Labor, environmental abuses detailed in China's vast squid harvests." *The Washington Post*, 17 September 2025.](#)

⁵⁵ [Environmental Justice Foundation. *Bright Lights, Dim Prospects: The urgent need to address unregulated squid fishing in the Southwest Atlantic to avert a looming environmental crisis*. 17 September 2025.](#)

⁵⁶ [Northrop, Katrina. "Labor, environmental abuses detailed in China's vast squid harvests." *The Washington Post*, 17 September 2025.](#)

Interviews with Indonesian and Filipino crew members revealed that North Koreans were working on at least a dozen Chinese-flagged vessels, in direct violation of UN sanctions prohibiting the export of North Korean labor. Crew testimonies and video evidence describe North Korean workers living under severe restrictions, being denied communication, freedom of movement, or contact with authorities and enduring extreme fatigue, injury, and isolation.⁵⁷ These workers reportedly spent years at sea without returning to land, routinely transferred between vessels to avoid detection by port authorities.⁵⁸ Captains and vessel owners allegedly concealed their presence during port calls, suggesting deliberate evasion of international law.⁵⁹ The investigation also found that several of the implicated vessels were listed as authorized exporters to the European Union and the United Kingdom, indicating possible entry of seafood caught with forced labor into major consumer markets.⁶⁰

In addition to the forced labor that occurs on these vessels, North Korean workers are reportedly forced to work in seafood plants in **China**.⁶¹

A 2024 New Yorker article described how thousands of primarily female North Koreans work in seafood-processing plants in Chinese cities such as Dandong and Dalian, peeling shrimp, packaging fish, and processing other forms of seafood, including squid.⁶² They live under constant surveillance by North Korean minders, confined to locked dormitories, and work shifts of up to 16 hours in silence and exhaustion. Nearly all of their wages are confiscated by handlers and funneled to the North Korean government, in direct violation of international sanctions. Workers who resist face beatings, sexual violence, and threats of execution. There is evidence that seafood products from these facilities are exported to global supply chains.⁶³

⁵⁷ Environmental Justice Foundation. *Trapped at Sea: Exposing North Korean Forced Labour on China's Indian Ocean Tuna Fleet*. London: Environmental Justice Foundation, 2025. [North-Korean-labour-Chinese-vessels-briefing-2025.pdf](#)

⁵⁸ Environmental Justice Foundation. *Trapped at Sea: Exposing North Korean Forced Labour on China's Indian Ocean Tuna Fleet*. London: Environmental Justice Foundation, 2025. [North-Korean-labour-Chinese-vessels-briefing-2025.pdf](#)

⁵⁹ Environmental Justice Foundation. *Trapped at Sea: Exposing North Korean Forced Labour on China's Indian Ocean Tuna Fleet*. London: Environmental Justice Foundation, 2025. [North-Korean-labour-Chinese-vessels-briefing-2025.pdf](#)

⁶⁰ Environmental Justice Foundation. *Trapped at Sea: Exposing North Korean Forced Labour on China's Indian Ocean Tuna Fleet*. London: Environmental Justice Foundation, 2025. [North-Korean-labour-Chinese-vessels-briefing-2025.pdf](#)

⁶¹ Urbina, Ian. "The Crimes Behind the Seafood You Eat." *The New Yorker*, 9 Oct 2023.

⁶² Urbina, Ian. "Inside North Korea's Forced-Labor Program in China." *The New Yorker*, February 25, 2024.

⁶³ Urbina, Ian. "Inside North Korea's Forced-Labor Program in China." *The New Yorker*, February 25, 2024.

According to a 2023 Committee for Human Rights in North Korea (HRNK) testimony before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC), at least 450 North Korean workers were contracted by the North Korean government to work in China's seafood processing factories under conditions of forced labor. These workers processed a wide range of seafood including clams and crabs. Interviews conducted by HRNK revealed widespread exposure to health and safety hazards, insufficient medical care, and severe physical and mental exhaustion. Workers reported often being required to work more than 12 hours a day if production targets were not met, and having their wages withheld by the North Korean government until they returned home to prevent defection.⁶⁴

China has also forced Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities to work in the seafood processing industry, including squid. In the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), state-sponsored labor transfer and labor surplus programs are widely used in a variety of industries. The Outlaw Ocean Project investigation found that thousands of Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities have been sent to work in seafood processing plants.⁶⁵

According to the U.S. Department of Labor's 2024 *List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor*, more than 1,000 Uyghurs and members of other persecuted ethnic minority groups from Xinjiang (in addition to workers from North Korea) have been transferred to squid processing facilities in Shandong Province since 2020. These squid processing factories often engage in coercive recruitment practices while limiting workers' movement and communication, placing them under constant surveillance.⁶⁶

Reporting in 2023 by the Outlaw Ocean Project found that USD 50 million worth of salmon sourced from production plants using Uyghur forced labor was supplied for consumption in U.S. government-funded soup kitchens and programs for the elderly.⁶⁷ Additionally, USD 20 million worth of pollock produced with forced labor was supplied to the National School Lunch Program, and USD 140 million worth of cod, salmon, and halibut was delivered to U.S. military bases abroad.⁶⁸ In 2025, an Inspector General report

⁶⁴ [Scarlatoiu, Greg. "From Bait to Plate: How Forced Labor in China Taints America's Seafood Supply Chain," testimony before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, October 24, 2023.](#)

⁶⁵ [Urbina, Ian. "The Crimes Behind the Seafood You Eat." *The New Yorker*, 9 Oct 2023.](#)

⁶⁶ [U.S. Department of Labor. 2024 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor. 2024.](#)

⁶⁷ [Urbina, Ian et al. "How Uyghur Forced Labor Makes Seafood That Ends Up in School Lunches." *Politico*, 21 Nov 2023.](#)

⁶⁸ [Urbina, Ian et al. "How Uyghur Forced Labor Makes Seafood That Ends Up in School Lunches." *Politico*, 21 Nov 2023.](#)

auditing the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) to prevent the procurement of prohibited seafood products concluded that USD 641,791 of seafood purchases for U.S. military bases (out of over USD 119 million total over a three year period) were purchased via third parties.⁶⁹ Seafood procurements outside of the prime vendor model had inadequate oversight of contractor compliance with Federal procurement rules, which require that seafood is sourced from U.S. suppliers and prohibit seafood made with forced labor in foreign countries. The audit recommended DOD provide clearer guidance to purchasing officers to ensure greater adherence to the rules.⁷⁰

Child Labor in Seafood

Child labor is present throughout the fishing sector, including diving for fish. Due to the highly hazardous nature of fishing work in general, it is often considered a worst form of child labor.⁷¹

According to the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF), a 2019 study on illegal fishing and child labor in **Vietnam's** fishing fleet found that 17 percent of the 41 surveyed vessels had a child on board, with the youngest being 11 years old. These vessels range from 10 to 26 meters in length, and were mainly equipped to catch squid, trash fish, and sea cucumbers. Due to the depletion of Vietnam's fishery, the vessels carried out IUU fishing on longer voyages to find fish. The children most commonly worked on their family members' fishing vessels, or found work by approaching vessel owners, and many did not attend school.⁷²

Children, some as young as four years old, have been found in conditions of forced labor connected to fishing taking place on and around Lake Volta in **Ghana**.⁷³ According to Free the Slaves, traffickers promised these children they would learn a technique to generate income for their families; in reality,

⁶⁹ [U.S. Department of Defense. *Audit of the DoD's Policies and Procedures to Prevent the Procurement of Prohibited Seafood Products* \(Report No. DODIG-2025-161\). 17 Sep 2025.](#)

⁷⁰ [U.S. Department of Defense. *Audit of the DoD's Policies and Procedures to Prevent the Procurement of Prohibited Seafood Products* \(Report No. DODIG-2025-161\). 17 Sep 2025.](#)

⁷¹ [Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. *Eliminating child labour in fisheries and aquaculture — Promoting decent work and sustainable fish value chains.*](#)

[International Labor Organization \(ILO\). *Caught at Sea: Forced Labour and Trafficking in Fisheries.* 2013.](#)

⁷² [Environmental Justice Foundation. *Caught in the net: Illegal fishing and child labour in Vietnam's fishing fleet.* 2019.](#)

⁷³ [U.S. Department of State. *2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Ghana.* 2025.](#)

they were enslaved and forced to dive underwater to untangle nets from dead trees, which resulted in many children drowning.⁷⁴ A 2022 International Justice Mission study estimated that about 37.7 percent of children in communities surrounding Lake Volta are likely victims of trafficking, while another 45.1 percent are believed to be involved in exploitative child labor. Among the likely victims of child trafficking, 58 percent reported extreme fatigue and 55 percent indicated extreme stomach aches.⁷⁵

The typical trafficking mechanism in this region is a contractual agreement between the children's parents and a recruiter, who is often a fisher, usually for a multiple year period.⁷⁶ According to media reporting, most of the children come to the lake from hundreds of miles away after being "sold" to human traffickers by parents in extreme poverty, who typically receive USD 80 for a child.⁷⁷ In many cases, both the parents and children lack awareness of the actual conditions of work prior to the child's arrival at the worksite. Recent studies have found that girls are recruited as well as boys.⁷⁸ Children are reportedly controlled by physical violence, verbal abuse and threats of violence, withholding of adequate food, restriction of communicative and physical freedom, as well as denial of medical care.⁷⁹

In Burma, child labor is found in fishing and seafood processing. In Mon State, the International Labour Organization found that children reportedly migrate from the Ayeyarwady and Bago Regions with their families to work seasonally in the fishing sector. One girl, aged 12, reported in an interview that she

⁷⁴ [Joha Braimah, "Children Free from Slavery in Ghana," Free the Slaves, 3 July 2023.](#)

⁷⁵ [Beck, Audrey N., Sheldon X. Zhang, Kyle Vincent, and Jonathan Addie, *Child Labor and Trafficking in the Lake Volta Area*, International Justice Mission, 2023.](#)

⁷⁶ [Coorlim, Leif. "Child slaves risk their lives on Ghana's Lake Volta." *CNN*, February 2019.](#)

⁷⁷ [Coorlim, Leif. "Child slaves risk their lives on Ghana's Lake Volta." *CNN*, February 2019.](#)

[CBS News. "CBS News meets kids caught in the net of modern slavery." *CBS News*, 12 October 2021.](#)

⁷⁸ [Beck, Audrey N., Sheldon X. Zhang, Kyle Vincent, and Jonathan Addie, *Child Labor and Trafficking in the Lake Volta Area*, International Justice Mission, 2023.](#)

⁷⁹ [Beck, Audrey N., Sheldon X. Zhang, Kyle Vincent, and Jonathan Addie, *Child Labor and Trafficking in the Lake Volta Area*, International Justice Mission, 2023.](#)

[U.S. Department of State, *2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Ghana*, 2025.](#)

worked in fish paste production with her family members and after fourth grade would have to leave school to work full time.⁸⁰

Children are engaged in forced labor at dry fish processing units in **Bangladesh**. Children between the ages of five to 17 work as bonded laborers, forced to work up to 12 hours per day placing fish on bamboo racks to dry. The majority of the children are girls. The children cannot leave the job, as they must pay back wage advances given to their parents and debt accrued over time. Employers at the dry fish processing units state that children are hired permanently and seasonally, depending on agreements with their parents. There are no safety measures in place to prevent exposure to harmful chemicals and smoke in the units.⁸¹

Fish Supply Chain:

The seafood sector is characterized by complex supply chains. Fish and shellfish are either harvested in open waters or raised via aquaculture in ponds, tanks, or bounded coastal waters. Some wild-caught fish are transported from the catching vessel to the market by a transshipment vessel. After harvesting, fish are sold via auction, broker, or market system and then packed and transported to processing facilities or wholesalers. Fish may be sold as fillets, other fresh products, or processed into consumer goods such as canned, frozen, or smoked products. Some fish may pass through multiple levels of processing, while others, including certain kinds of shellfish, are transported live. Wholesalers receive processed products and more minimally processed fresh fish from both foreign and domestic sources. Then, they distribute the products to retailers and restaurants, where they are purchased by consumers.⁸²

⁸⁰ [International Labour Organization, *Trends in child labour in Myanmar 2021-24: A study of Mon, Kayin, Kayah and Shan States, 2024*.](#)

[International Labour Organization, *Combating child labour in Myanmar: A course for Workers' Organizations, 2018*.](#)

⁸¹ [Bonded labour at dry fish units robbing children of their youth | The Business Standard](#). 23 Jan 2020.

⁸² [Verité. *Fish. Supply Chain Traceability Matrix*.](#)

How consumers are linked to human trafficking and/or child labor in fishing:

Top ten countries that import fish (fresh or chilled):⁸³

- | | |
|------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Sweden | 6. Spain |
| 2. United States | 7. Denmark |
| 3. France | 8. China |
| 4. Poland | 9. Netherlands |
| 5. Italy | 10. United Kingdom |

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reported that trade volume of fisheries and aquaculture products reached 68 million tons, valued at USD 190 billion, in 2022.⁸⁴

The FAO reports that “fish accounts for 17 percent of the global population’s intake of animal protein” and an estimated “one in ten people rely on fisheries and aquaculture for their livelihoods.”⁸⁵ Americans in 2021 consumed 20.5 pounds per capita of seafood, with 80 percent of seafood in the U.S. being imported.⁸⁶

⁸³ [International Trade Center. Trade Map.](#) (ITC Calculations based on UNCOMTRADE Statistics).

Note: The country list is ordered by value imported.

⁸⁴ [Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. No. 52 The importance of international trade for fisheries and aquaculture products. 2023.](#)

⁸⁵ [Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Eliminating child labour in fisheries and aquaculture — Promoting decent work and sustainable fish value chains.](#)

⁸⁶ [White, Cliff. “US seafood trade deficit hit USD 20.3 billion in 2023.” *SeafoodSource*, 12 Feb 2024.](#)

Examples of what governments, corporations, and others are doing:

In 2019, Thailand ratified the International Labour Organization’s Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188) which officially came into force in 2020. The convention outlines binding requirements concerning fishing vessel-based work; requirements cover occupational safety and health, medical care and rest periods, and labor rights such as written work agreements and social security protection.⁸⁷ An additional law introduced in 2019 added "forced labor or service" as an offence in Thailand’s anti-human trafficking law, penalizing perpetrators with up to four years of prison and/or a fine of THB 400,000.⁸⁸ Shortly after in 2021, a dozen Thai industry associations signed pacts as part of a government initiative pledging to eradicate forced labor and child labor from their supply chains by publicizing their human rights policies, putting complaint mechanisms into place, and undergoing audits.⁸⁹

In October 2025, the Thai parliament passed amendments to the 2015 Fisheries Acts, which, if approved by the Constitutional Court and submitted for royal endorsement, would significantly weaken penalties for IUU fishing and potentially reverse progress made to mitigate forced labor.⁹⁰

The *FAIR Fish (Fostering Accountability in Recruitment for Fishery Workers)* project began in 2019, implemented by Plan International and funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, to reduce forced labor in the recruitment of workers in Thailand’s seafood processing sector. The project educated “employers, recruiters, and workers about responsible employment and human rights through advocacy, training programs, and a mobile application on workers’ rights.”⁹¹ To meet its goals, the project worked to improve company-led approaches to address forced labor and human trafficking in recruitment of workers, improve third party recruiters’ compliance with recruitment procedures, and promote responsible recruitment among private sector actors. As of 2026, the project continues to offer a free

⁸⁷ [International Labour Association. *Thailand ratifies Work in Fishing Convention*. 30 Jan 2019.](#)

⁸⁸ Chandran, Rina. ["Thailand ramps up fight against forced labor with stricter law." Reuters, 8 April 2019. U.S. Department of State. *2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Thailand*. 2025.](#)

⁸⁹ Wongsamuth, Nanchanok. ["Thailand enlists industry groups in slavery blacklist effort." Reuters, 29 Mar 2021.](#)

⁹⁰ Dao, Toan. ["Thai Parliament passes controversial amendments to Fisheries Law." Seafood Source, 16 October 2025.](#)
Board, Jack. ["A new era of slaves': Thailand's plan to loosen fisheries laws renews fears of illegal fishing, forced labour." CNA News, 15 April 2024.](#)

⁹¹ [FAIR Fish: Reducing Exploitation in the Seafood Processing Sector | Plan International USA](#). 1 Mar 2024.

online course for recruiters and employers in the seafood processing industry to comply with international labor standards.⁹²

The U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) issued a Withhold Release Order (WRO) in August 2021 against the Hangton No. 112, a Fijian flagged and owned fishing vessel.⁹³ At least three of the 11 indicators of forced labor, as defined by the ILO,⁹⁴ were identified by CBP during its investigation: withholding of wages, debt bondage, and retention of identity documents. As a result of these findings, any tuna or other seafood harvested by the vessel will be detained and prevented from entering the U.S. market.⁹⁵

The CBP also issued a WRO in May 2021 against Dalian Ocean Fishing Co. Ltd. after an investigation identified the presence of all 11 indicators in its distant-water fishing operations.⁹⁶ Similarly, upon identification of several forced labor indicators, WROs were issued in 2020 against distant-water fishing vessels including the Lien Yi Hsing No. 12, the Da Wang, and the Yu Long No. 2 in 2020.⁹⁷

The European Union is currently funding a project, titled *Ship to Shore Rights in South-East Asia – Safe migration for decent work in the blue economy*, to promote safe labor migration and decent work for a sustainable fish and seafood supply chain. The project covers both primary production (fishing and aquaculture) and post-harvest processing. Launched in January 2025 and set to run until the end of 2028, it aims to build on the previous Ship to Shore Thailand project (2016 to 2020) by continuing to advance cooperation and policy frameworks in the region on safe labor migration and decent work in

⁹² [Plan International. The FAIR Fish Project.](#)

⁹³ [U.S. Customs and Border Protection. "CBP issues Withhold Release Order on Seafood Harvested with Forced Labor by the Hangton No. 112." 4 Aug 2021.](#)

⁹⁴ [International Labour Organization. ILO indicators of forced labour. 2012.](#)

⁹⁵ [U.S. Customs and Border Protection. "CBP issues Withhold Release Order on Seafood Harvested with Forced Labor by the Hangton No. 112." 4 Aug 2021.](#)

⁹⁶ [U.S. Customs and Border Protection. "CBP issues Withhold Release Order on Chinese fishing fleet." 28 May 2021.](#)

⁹⁷ [U.S. Customs and Border Protection. "CBP issues Withhold Release Order on Seafood Harvested with Forced Labor by the Hangton No. 112." 4 Aug 2021.](#)

the industry. The project previously engaged with Cambodia, Burma, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand, and will expand to Malaysia.⁹⁸

The Seafood Task Force, a non-profit U.S. trade association launched in 2014, works to improve and expand seafood supply chain oversight, improve worker recruitment practices in the seafood supply chain, and assist governments with combatting IUU fishing, among other focuses.⁹⁹ As of 2026, there are 68 members of the task force, including Costco, Starkist, Intertek, MARS Petcare, the Global Seafood Alliance, and Nestle PURINA.¹⁰⁰

The Seafood Import Monitoring Program, established by the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), has implemented reporting and recordkeeping requirements for the import of 1,100 seafood species to combat IUU-caught and/or misrepresented seafood from entering U.S. commerce.¹⁰¹ These species are categorized into 13 groups: abalone, Atlantic cod, blue crab, dolphinfish, grouper, king crab, Pacific cod, red snapper, sea cucumber, sharks, shrimp, swordfish, and tuna. NOAA uses the International Trade Data System to trace these species to the point of harvest or production to verify whether they were lawfully harvested or produced. Their website also offers compliance and audit guides for the program, among other resources for seafood producers.¹⁰²

On February 28, 2024, the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) hosted over 100 organizations at the *Seafood Labor Summit* to discuss the progress of the 15-month Collaborative Accelerator for Lawful Maritime Conditions in Seafood (CALM-CS). This accelerator focused on five goals:

- “identifying best practices for industry accountability and due diligence for decent working conditions throughout the seafood supply chain,

⁹⁸ [Ship to Shore Rights South-East Asia: Safe migration for decent work in the blue economy | International Labour Organization.](#)

⁹⁹ [Seafood Task Force. “Progress.”](#)

¹⁰⁰ [Seafood Task Force. “What?”](#)

¹⁰¹ [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. *Seafood Import Monitoring Program.*](#)

¹⁰² [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. *Seafood Import Monitoring Program.*](#)

- exploring novel sources of information, and enhancing means to share and analyze that information, to better identify illegal and unsafe labor practices in fisheries,
- reducing vulnerabilities of at risk populations to labor abuses in the seafood supply chain,
- exploring potential tools to enhance safety and labor conditions aboard U.S. vessels
- supporting collaboration mechanisms across workers, governments, industry, and civil society to support workers within the seafood industry.”¹⁰³

How can I learn more?

[Watch a series of videos by the EJP on flags of convenience and pirate fishing.](#)

[Read the Outlaw Ocean Project’s investigation of forced labor on Chinese fishing vessels.](#)

[Read a Verité report on recruitment and hiring practices in the tuna handline fishing sector in the Philippines.](#)

[Read a Human Rights Watch report on abuses in the Thai fishing sector.](#)

¹⁰³ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. [Collaborative Accelerator for Lawful Maritime Conditions in Seafood](#). National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. [NOAA Fisheries Gathers Experts to Combat Forced Labor in the Seafood Sector. 1 Mar 2024.](#)