

# Visibilising gender dynamics in French fisheries

## *Obstacles and opportunities in Community Supported Fisheries*

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# Introduction and context

Fisheries are one of Europe's most challenging and dangerous employment sectors.<sup>1</sup> While they remain a central pillar of the European food system, the sector still relies on strikingly unequal and gendered labour relations. The work of capturing fish at sea has historically been masculinized, while the often unpaid work of managing accounts, repairs, sales and family care on land has been feminized.<sup>2</sup> Masculinization of work at sea has been amplified as the fishing fleet has industrialized.<sup>3</sup> This has also made it difficult for artisanal fishers to survive. Now, the sector faces a recruitment problem.<sup>4</sup> Fewer and fewer people want to work in fisheries. The lack of formalized female workers has led to attempts to visibilise women fishers<sup>5</sup> and to calls among our survey (further described below) respondents for outreach to women as a potential source of new energy and workers in the sector. This short report explores the context from which such attempts and calls have emerged. First, we describe the gender relations and invisibilised labour of women in European fisheries. Then, we look at how women have historically struggled for more equal rights in the sector and the key issues women still face today. Finally, we zoom in on the gender dynamics in French fisheries, paying attention to the ways they intersect with ecological concerns and different models of fishing (from industrial boats to community supported fisheries), to demonstrate that simply hiring more women will not solve the deep social and ecological issues confronting this sector.

In line with what some researchers have flagged as a lack of attention in the fisheries sector to 'women's own perspective on how they value their own roles and identities in fishing',<sup>6</sup> this report attempts to give voice to women in the fisheries sector. This is especially important since, 'although research on women in fishing has increasingly documented the multiple (re)productive roles that women in fishing practice around the world, comparatively little research has analysed what women's changed contributions to fishing mean to these women — and, associated with this, how gender relations and identities are renegotiated with, and (re)shaped by, changing roles and practices.'<sup>7</sup> Our work is based on empirical data gathered by Pleine Mer, a French non-profit organisation defending artisanal fisheries, during three years of fieldwork among French fishers in the process of mapping direct sales of seafood coming from French harbours. Three in depth semi-structured interviews with women currently working in fisheries

were also carried out, along with a survey about perceptions of gender dynamics in the sector to which 16 women and 16 men working in the sector or closely related industries responded. The survey offers a glimpse of some of the key issues in terms of gender relations in French fisheries today — from the perspective of both men and women. These varied perspectives compliment more in-depth interviews and ethnographic fieldwork listening to women and help visibilise and, 'attend to gendered power relations and the potential (co-)existence of processes of masculinization [in fishing]'.<sup>8</sup>

The main points highlighted in the following sections are: (i) a process of masculinization of work on fishing boats and (ii) feminization of work in the fishing sector on land — both of which contribute to unequal gender relations. The process of industrialization of the fishing fleet has only exacerbated this dynamic, celebrating a productivist



Photo 1: Pleine Mer

approach that seeks to maximise the quantity of fish caught, values male physical force, risk taking, heightened competition (among the industrial fishing fleet as well as with small-scale fishers) and extended periods at sea. This focus on quantity and efficiency has contributed to overfishing and undermines the ecological sustainability of European fisheries.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile women's work on land is invisibilised and taken for granted, despite the fact that much of the fishing business would collapse without it. As the dominant model of fishing is confronted with the challenge of recruiting new workers, the reality that something needs to change socially and ecologically if fishing is going to be sustained, has become increasingly clear. A different approach to work and to nature is needed and it is precisely those who have been historically devalued in the sector who are already illustrating potential ways forward. One such alternative has recently been framed as community supported fisheries. Community supported fisheries (CSF) put fishers in direct relation with consumers and offer a potential strategy for supporting fishers who aim to break with the dominant model and prioritise quality over quantity. In the meantime, what is less understood, is the fact that without women's work this strategy could not exist. This report looks at the French case where, women are the engine behind the commercialization of local artisanal fish. In the French fishing sector we find that:

- Labour on fishing boats has been masculinized while fishing work on land has been feminized. The majority of women work on land covering a wide range of productive and reproductive duties, but some women do work on boats, despite multiple barriers.

- There is a long history of women collectively organising in the fishing sector throughout Europe in an attempt to improve working conditions and the welfare of fishing families. The issues women face today are continuations of a struggle that has had wins and losses over the decades, but are certainly not new.

- Looking back at the history of struggle and taking stock of the current moment three priority areas of work emerge:

- 1 Legal recognition and representation remain partial for many women, suggesting a need to continue lobbying for better regulation of labour in fisheries to remove gender inequalities.
- 2 A dominant masculinized and industrialized fishing model makes work on boats a hostile environment for many women. There is a need for a shift in gender norms and culture as well as more inclusive infrastructure on boats.
- 3 As we recognize the political importance of CSFs and direct sales as a means of redistributing wealth and power in fisheries, we must also recognise the central position of women in the commercialization of fish throughout Europe today. They hold strategic power and insight into necessary changes in fisheries. But in order to better enable their capacity to make change in the sector, greater attention and support (from policy, other workers in fisheries, as well as coastal communities and fish consumers) is needed to alleviate the multiple burdens that they carry on a daily basis in the productive and reproductive sphere.

## Women in fisheries – roles, activities and challenges

The often informal and/or unpaid nature of women's work in fisheries makes it challenging to get a clear picture of how many women are employed in the sector. Adding complexity is the fact that *employment* does not capture just how much *work* is actually being done by women in fishing families whose daily activities often include a mix of reproductive and productive tasks. Nonetheless some estimates give us a sense of general trends. 'In 2017 there were around 150 thousand people employed in the EU fishing fleet, equivalent to some 99 thousand FTEs. The majority of workers in the EU fishing fleet were male at 96%, 4% were female.'<sup>10</sup> However, most women in the EU fisheries sector don't work on boats. 'They represent

about a quarter of the aquaculture workforce and about half in the fish processing industry.'<sup>11</sup>

In light of the predominant role that women play in the land-based activities required to keep fishing families and businesses afloat, 'concepts like women as *the ground crew* or *shore crew*, *mothers at the helm*, and *the veiled crew* were developed.'<sup>12</sup> This gendered division of labour is problematic and warrants attention because, despite differences between fishing communities in the Global North and South, and from region to region, 'everywhere, women in fisheries have either fewer rights than men or completely lack formal rights and political attention.'<sup>13</sup>



Labour at sea has been masculinized and attributed value. Meanwhile, 'when men perform work defined as feminine, they talk about it as a humiliating experience. It is more common to find women doing jobs defined as men's jobs than the opposite.'<sup>14</sup> On one hand, predominantly men are employed on fishing boats, and on the other hand the logic behind what it means to be a good fisher is associated with traits typically attributed to masculine archetypes. '[S]uccessfully operating boats and gear at sea – displaying the qualities of being able to work with the sea to catch fish – is associated with symbolic capital development underpinning the, arguable masculine, identity of a "fisher[man]"'<sup>15</sup> As Morey describes of commercial fishermen in Alaska, 'the fishermen use the boats as a way in which to prove their masculinity by fighting against the elements and performing physically demanding jobs.'<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, work on land, though the vast majority of fishers depend on it to survive, has historically been feminized, trivialised, invisibilised, and unpaid. To make matters worse, across many different fishing cultures common superstitions hold that it is bad luck for fishers when women step onto the boat (in some cases, only if she is menstruating, in other cases it is said to bring a poor catch). In Verae's study of Flemish fisher wives, one interviewee explains the dynamic with her husband, 'I've never been on his boat. Sometimes, when we went out for a walk, I saw his vessel. But I stayed on the dock and I never got in his boat, because that could bring bad luck! I never even waved him out when his boat took off. No, never. Even that could bring bad luck.'<sup>17</sup>

Women who do work on boats in the EU tend to work on smaller vessels that fish close to shore, together with a male partner or spouse. This ensures that fishing trips are shorter and more compatible with the rest of the reproductive labour these women are often in charge of. Here, we see how the masculinization of fishing is actually an uneven process that varies across different models of fishing. Larger more industrialized boats, may be perceived as more productive, more powerful and more celebratory of masculine strength and bravery among the crew. While smaller boats catch fewer fish, and can be perceived as engaging in a less aggressive and more cautious kind of fishing that is more compatible with women's needs

and presumed capacities. Women's presence on boats in the EU has historically grown only when there is an abundance of employment opportunities and they are not seen as competing for men's jobs. There is plenty of evidence across geographical localities in the Global North of women being socially accepted as fishers when economic conditions are good. With changing conditions, however, men's position and right to the fishery is prioritised and women are squeezed out — highlighting how hierarchical gendered power relations in fishing largely remain unchanged in these contexts.'<sup>18</sup> Women face other barriers to working on boats as well. Most notably, maternity leave (when it does exist, as is now the case in France), remains partial or limited.<sup>19</sup> This forces many women to choose between working on boats and family.

On land, women in the fisheries sector perform many administrative and sales roles, including managing accounts, bills, customer service, social media, licenses and quotas, cleaning and preparing fish for sale, setting up, working, and breaking down the market stall, repairing nets and other maintenance, among other things. As one fisher woman describes, in addition to direct sales,

*the days when I don't open, then it's all about the accounts, the errands for the boat, going to buy belts because I'm going to have to change the engine belt, the oils, the diesel filters, order propeller anodes, you know, getting on top of all those things, making an appointment for taking the boat out, arranging stuff, not to mention radio tours, dry runs, the boating license... it's extremely... you see people from outside have the impression that it's all very very simple, as if you take your boat, you go fishing, you come back and that's it. But it is very complicated!*<sup>20</sup>

This woman works with her husband and earns a fixed wage, but some women doing these activities are not seen as carrying out formal work, so tasks are often unpaid and managed amid a host of other reproductive labour, meaning that 'administrative tasks are conducted from home and often become indistinguishable from general housekeeping.'<sup>21</sup>

# History of women organising in the European fisheries sector

The essential yet devalued nature of women's work in fisheries has, not surprisingly, motivated women fishers and fisher wives to fight back. First generation women's organisations in European fisheries are sparsely documented. Notable cases include Norway and Ireland, where as early as 1946 women organised to demand public support for their self-managed systems of support and greater well-being for families of fishermen, especially for widows and families of fishers lost to the dangers of the profession.<sup>22</sup> Frangoudes et. al document how the 1990s saw a second wave of fisher women's organisations emerge throughout Europe to address more diverse needs and issues.<sup>23</sup> An important focus for many of them was to professionalize and formalize historically informal labour in the fisheries sector. From the women managing the business accounts and sales on land in France to the shellfish collectors in Galicia, they sought to gain access to social security, maternity leave and similar social rights. In Galicia, women shellfish collectors (*mariscadoras*) mobilised and successfully formalized the overwhelmingly female workforce.

This inspired women who repaired nets to organise in a similar way. The *mariscadoras*, by obtaining professional status, not only established their own organisations, but also began to take part in the management of *cofradías* and actively participated in sustainable management of shellfish stocks.<sup>24</sup>

'During this period [the 1990s] fish prices in France were low and family income was considerably reduced. The women rallied together for the survival of their families and their communities, meeting with the authorities to advocate their cause and organising numerous public events. They distributed free fish to the public to attract attention, collected donations, organised the distribution of food packages to help fishers' families who had been without any income for months.'<sup>25</sup> The European Commission regulation already granted legal status to the contributions of farmers' spouses, so this precedent in agriculture was used to lobby for the same to be applied to fisheries. 'In 1997, the Fisheries Act No. 97-1051



Photo 2: Celine Diais

attributed to fishers' wives the legal status of collaborative spouses. To qualify for the collaborating spouse status [CSS], fishers' wives must be married and play a genuine role in the company. The status entitles holders to: the right to a personal retirement plan; financial compensation for replacing women during maternity leave; the right to training; the right to represent the company in professional elections to local fisheries organisations as long the husband delegates his power to her.<sup>26</sup> This represents a significant victory for women in the French fisheries sector, which, despite massive effort, women in other European countries have not been able to achieve. 'Dutch wives of fishermen (VinVis) also claimed legal status without success. Later the Italian and Greek women's organisations also requested access to CSS but until now their national authorities have not replied positively to their demands.'<sup>27</sup> While important, the collaborative spouse position does not resolve all of the gendered inequalities permeating work in fisheries and it remains limited in terms of the rights and stability it offers to women (see more below).

Another important consequence of these efforts was the formation of women's organisations. In France: 'These initiatives resulted in the establishment of various women's organisations at a local level and eventually these formed two national federations: *Fédération des Femmes et Familles de Marins du Milieu Maritime* (3FM, Federation of Seafarer's Wives and Families) in 1998, based in the south-west part of Atlantic coast; and the *Fédération Interrégionale des Femmes du Littoral* (FIFEL, Interregional Federation of Women of Littoral) in 1998, based in Brittany, Normandy and the Mediterranean Sea. These two federations merged into one national federation in 2003 and established the 2FM (*Femmes et Familles de Marins du Milieu Maritime*, Seafarer's Wives and Families).<sup>28</sup>

In the UK, women have been at the forefront of promoting local fish economies. 'In the UK, women also formed groups at a local level in response to fisheries crises, which affected the stability of the fishing community's income. These organisations were formed initially in the Shetland

Islands, in Scotland, and in Northern Ireland. One such organisation, Moray Makes Waves (MMW), is a group composed of wives of local fishermen formed in January 2003 to support the Scottish fishing industry during what many regarded as the worst ever crisis the industry had ever endured. MMW's aim was to raise public awareness of the abundance of high-quality seafood by Scottish vessels in Scotland and to encourage consumers to purchase Scottish-caught seafood.'<sup>29</sup>

Regional networks also emerged during this period. 'At the European Union level, national and local women's organisations built the AKTEA network in 2006. Its objectives are [...] the defense of the fisheries industry and communities. AKTEA achieved some of its objectives through lobbying the European institutions, such as the modification of the EU directive 86/613 establishing the collaborative spouse status by the directive 2010/41/ EU recognising unpaid contribution, and their entrance to the advisory councils of fisheries at regional seas. This is perhaps one of the most important political victories and gives hopes for others.'<sup>30</sup>

Sustaining the collective efforts that boomed in the 1990s has been a continuing challenge. Given the lack of public support for fisherwomen's organisations, the financing for any expenditures has typically come from the women themselves. 'Thus, the democratic functioning of the organisation is challenged because women having this financial capacity represent the larger boats and they hold the power within the organisation, whereas women of small-scale fisheries and crew have less financial capacity and can become marginalised.'<sup>31</sup> In addition to money, another limitation is the time this sort of voluntary activism requires. Between the domestic work and their work in the fishing business, many women simply do not have enough hours in the day to attend additional meetings and follow political processes. 'In some cases husbands do not accept the involvement of their wives in organisations and in the public arena and, in some instances, ask them to stop their participation in women's groups.'<sup>32</sup>



# Recognition and representation: an ongoing struggle

To take stock of the situation for women working in the French fisheries sector, Pleine Mer has been gathering empirical data, while inviting women to voice their perspectives and to hear from men about how they understand gender dynamics in the sector. This section offers a brief overview of some of the key issues which emerged from this process.

At first glance, the responses suggest a high level of interest in greater recognition of women's work. Of the 32 survey respondents only two men and one woman suggested that they were not interested in seeing change. Thirteen women said yes or absolutely, often using exclamation points, while nine men responded in the affirmative. Five men and two women did not answer the question. One main theme that emerged was the idea that there is a need to hire more women and this could help address the recruitment challenges that are widespread in French fisheries. Thirteen women said they would or already do hire women. One specified that she would hire only for a land-based position and two did not respond. All but one of the men said they would hire women. Digging a little deeper, however, some of the remaining barriers and challenges women face in fisheries become evident. Notably, there was a significant difference in the length of responses from women and men in the survey. The men gave short answers, often suggesting that things seemed fine. In contrast, the majority of the women went to great

lengths to describe issues they struggle with, clearly identifying multiple aspects of the sector that weigh on them in their daily lives. The differing length of these responses hint that simply hiring more women is not enough to remedy the structural inequalities in the fishing sector.

Though important advances have been made to formally recognise women's work, the legal status many women have still does not capture all that they do. Seven of the women described their legal status as one that does not reflect the actual work they do, or which they feel burdened by. Nine women said that their actual work and their legal status coincided. Meanwhile, all of the men who answered this question (12) described their work and their legal status as the same — with the exception of those who have retired. These results suggest a limited capacity of public institutions to accurately read and recognise women's work in fisheries. At the same time, recognition is not enough. Women also expressed dissatisfaction with the jobs that they do. When asked what their ideal job in the sector would be, seven women replied that they already have the job they would like to be doing, while seven suggested that they would prefer a different position, and two did not reply to the question. Not only does this show how women feel invisibilised, it demonstrates they also feel a lack of opportunities to shape their professional trajectories in the ways that they want.



Photo 3: Julie Bourges

# The masculinization of fisheries

After generations of deeply gendered divisions of labour, many women suggest that working on boats is not an environment that appeals to them. Some of this has to do with outright sexist discrimination and behaviour that they have endured and witnessed, something which requires enormous amounts of energy to deal with in a daily work environment. Seven women said they had experienced some form of sexist discrimination, eight said they had not and one did not answer. The types of discrimination ranged from sexist comments and behaviour, to unjustified refusal to hire or let them on board, to exclusion from the family business. Ten men said they had not experienced or witnessed discrimination, and one suggested that women even receive a certain kind of empathy in the sector. Three said they witnessed cases of discrimination and three did not answer.

Beyond these overt offenses, women also described a number of ways in which a highly masculinized culture and physical infrastructure contribute to the sense that they do not belong at sea. Many women mention the physical requirements of fishing, which women are not as prepared to do as men. First, it is important to note

the incredible diversity of bodies across the gender spectrum which does not fit into an easy binary construct that assumes women are not as strong as men. That said, the frequency with which this comment came up perhaps reflects the fact that a work culture has developed together with the industrialization of French fisheries and the celebration of the type of exertion, competition and physical strength typically associated with a masculine archetype seeking quantity over quality. This masculinization of fishing culture contributes to a structural logic that entraps both men and women and which deemphasises the importance of a precise, skillful, slow and interconnected approach to fishing in the ocean.

This logic is then further consolidated by the way that physical infrastructure is built and how boats are prepared for the crew. When boats have a toilet, it is often poorly maintained. Disposal of menstrual products is not taken into consideration, and sometimes it is assumed that the crew will simply urinate over the side of the boat. The sleeping cabins on fishing boats are mixed. In an environment where gender relations are equal and sexual aggression is not a problem, gender neutral bathrooms



Photo 4: Pleine Mer

and sleeping quarters are not inherently problematic. However, in an environment where it is common to hear that by merely being there, women are ‘tempting’ their male crew-mates, a lack of private space free from sexual harassment makes working at sea particularly unsafe for women. Some boat owners refuse to hire women, claiming that it ‘causes’ sexual aggression problems that they do not want to deal with. The average boat in the French fleet is 29 years old, so many were built during a time when the crews were entirely male and thinking through women’s needs aboard was simply not a priority. In contrast, some women fishers in France have been building boats that are totally different (even if they fish with their husbands). These boats are catamarans which provide more space to work, and ensure that the work is less painful. In particular, the additional space makes it is easier to lift things.

Women with children are confronted with additional challenges when working on boats. As one survey respondent said bluntly, ‘maternity is not compatible with working in the fisheries sector.’ Maternity leave in France covers six weeks before the due date and 10 weeks after. And due to the nature of fishing, some women working on boats need to take leave when they are three months pregnant or remain on leave for longer than 10 weeks. As one fisher woman who works with her husband on their artisanal boat explained, after delivering her child via caesarean section, she couldn’t lift the weight required when working on the boat. At the same time, her maternity leave did not cover her long enough to allow a full recovery before returning to work. She and her husband managed to squeeze through the difficult period, but for others, limited maternity leave effectively makes pregnancy and working on boats incompatible.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the limitations caused by a masculinized approach to fishing, the French coast is rife with examples of fisher women demonstrating that a different way is possible. ‘[Women] are often a little in the shadows, [some] are on the boats, but there are many who do all the work on the side and... and it’s a lot of work.’<sup>34</sup> There are few but important examples of women in leadership positions — ‘women represent 3.3 per cent of the owners’ population and 2.5 per cent of other crew in Brittany fisheries’<sup>35</sup> — but de-masculinizing fisheries is also about encouraging a different style of fishing, one that prioritises quality over quantity, and a precise and respectful relationship with the marine environment. Plus, ‘the length of fishing trips is an important variable in determining women’s contribution. When a boat-owner is not at sea he often contributes to administrative tasks, thereby freeing his wife from some obligations. When fishing trips are long, women take full charge of family life and enterprise management.’<sup>36</sup> In this way, it becomes clear how artisanal and small-scale fishers whose selective gear ensures high quality fish and less ecologically destructive fishing, caught closer to the coast for shorter periods of time, can be allies in the struggle for more equal gender relations in fisheries. Of course, artisanal fishers are susceptible to reproducing gender inequalities as well, and some large industrial boats have more modernized infrastructure with individual toilets and sleeping cabins. Without a doubt, there is still a lot of work to be done throughout the entire fisheries sector to ensure more equal gender relations. At the same time, the logic and structure of small-scale fishing is typically less hostile for women seeking to work on boats, and more ecologically sustainable, but still relies all too much on the overwork and low pay of women on land.

## Sustainability and the strategic potential of women’s work on land

As Frangoudes and Kermones remind us, ‘The masculine image of the industry conceals the reality of an occupation which, by removing men to sea, makes them peculiarly dependent on the work of women ashore. And this dependence gives women not only more responsibility, but also the possibility of more power, both in the home and in the community.’<sup>37</sup> Indeed, in addition to changing the culture at sea, as the rich history of women’s organising in European fisheries indicates, many of the important transformations in the sector have come from where most

of the women are — on land. Given the overexploited state of many fish stocks, the FAO suggests that ‘economic growth in wild fisheries will come not from catching more fish, but from reducing post-harvest loss of fish and increasing product quality and value through improved processing techniques. Women dominate these parts of the fisheries value chain, so their roles and perspectives will influence the underlying economics that drive either the sustainability or overexploitation of fishery resources.’<sup>38</sup>



Direct sales have been identified as an important strategy for supporting fishers who aim to prioritise quality over quantity.<sup>39</sup> By cutting out the intermediaries, fishers can obtain a higher price and ensure a stable income, high quality fish sold close to where it was captured, without massively inflating prices to consumers. However, what is less well understood in discussions about direct sales and CSF is the fact that without women's work this strategy would not exist. Women are the engine behind the commercialisation of local artisanal fish throughout France. Looking closer, we see that despite the political importance of their work, these women are not sufficiently supported as they juggle more productive and reproductive tasks than there are hours in the day.

Commercialisation does not occur in a vacuum. The context in which sales take place have a huge impact of women's lived experiences in the sector. For some, the time requirements to manage all of the logistics are still barely feasible.

**My husband arrives in the harbour at 5 pm and I help him to land the fish. I usually sell some of the catch near to the boat. The rest I put it in the van and go home where I store it in the fridge. The next morning, at 6.30 am I put the fish back in the van and return to the market. At 7.30 I am in my stall. I usually stay there until 1.30 or 2 pm. Then I go home, clean the van and finally I do the books. I bring the checks and the money to the bank and then it is time to go back to the harbour and wait for the arrival of the boat. I barely have time to eat lunch!**<sup>40</sup>

Depending on where fishing takes place, direct sales can be very seasonal. The nature of tourism in coastal areas means direct sales in areas with a high percentage of vacation homes and fluctuating populations are very seasonal. A fisherwoman explains this in her case: 'I have consistent direct sales on the island during the summer (July and August), the Easter holidays too (well, except for this year... ruined! [due to COVID]). Let's say from Easter to the end of August I do direct sales on the island. And in [name of town] on Friday afternoon I sell shellfish, all year.'<sup>41</sup>

Another interviewee who works with her husband on the boat and alone managing the direct sales on her own describes the work as follows:

**No, but it's true that it's a difficult job, very specialised for many things and... here I am, I need to learn, I need to sell, unlike my husband, I need to have contact with the customer, I love it, even if it's tiring, loading the 20kg bins for transport to the cold storage and everything, to see the customer who comes back, who asks questions about how it was fished, and to be able to answer them! And to have the customer who comes back saying that in fact he has never eaten such a good sea bass.**<sup>42</sup>

She goes on to explain that, in addition to sales, she typically works on the boat when they fish inside the bay, but not when they go farther out. 'You need a special license that we have, when you fish in the bay you put down your net, you leave it for half an hour, it takes a lot less time, I'm more in this category, if you like, because...that's because... two children.'<sup>43</sup> In other words, the compatibility of fishing and family care, requires a mode of fishing that ensures the parents' safety, limited hours away and business stability. Though it is still not easy, she finds these goals are more realistic in the artisanal, coastal fishing, and direct sales she does with her husband. However, it is clear in the words of these women engaged in direct sales and CSF, that the stability of the business and the family can still end up taking priority over their own labour rights and needs.

The public infrastructure and regulation also significantly impact women's experience with direct sales.

**[W]e land, store the fish, we weigh it, we sell it, but we are governed by public maritime rules, if tomorrow I open a direct sale on the opposite sidewalk which is in the private domain and the regulations will be completely different, I will no longer be on [public property]. Our fish is sold excluding tax, no VAT. An advantage. In my stand, I can only sell what I catch, it's strictly forbidden to sell even the fish of the friend next door. I can only sell the fish that comes from our boat.**<sup>44</sup>

Here we can appreciate just how much public policy shapes the experience of selling fish. Providing tax incentives and market infrastructure near the harbour is a key part of creating a supportive environment for women in direct sales in fisheries.



# Looking to the future

This short brief began with the idea that European fisheries are facing a recruitment problem and that increasing recognition and representation of women in the sector might be a way to address this problem. However, by tuning into the perspectives of women in the sector it becomes evident that the particular legal, cultural and infrastructural logic of the dominant model of fishing inhibits and/or makes women's participation more burdensome. This industrial and masculinized model also has a negative impact on the marine environment. In short, the patriarchal exploitation of women and patriarchal-capitalist exploitation of nature/marine ecosystems go hand in hand. Incidentally, this masculinized form of fishing is not the only approach, and artisanal and small-scale fishers emerge as important *potential* allies in the struggle for more equal gender relations in the sector, which would at the same time opt for more ecologically sustainable fishing practices. We use the word *potential* to emphasise the fact that this is not a given. Respect for the work women do in artisanal fishing and CSF along with deliberate attention to and deconstruction of deeply embedded gender norms is necessary among men and women throughout the fisheries sector and related public policies.

Looking to the future, the question then shifts. Whereas we began by asking: How can we increase the number of

women in formal employment in fisheries? We can now see the importance of considering: How can the fisheries sector become a place that is less hostile to women and less gendered in the division of labour?

This reframing highlights the importance of how training and education is structured and what model of fishing is taught. Historically, much of the knowledge needed to work in fishing was passed down within the family. '[M]y husband's mother has been doing this... And it was her who taught me everything, she gave me my fish education, taught me to recognise all the fish, empty them, bring up the nets, see if they are beautiful, not beautiful... notice the gills, everything!'<sup>45</sup> However, in order to move away from the idea that women work in fisheries because they feel a sense of family duty or obligation and towards a model where women can access the jobs that they want and feel motivated to do so, training and education outside of the family unit is essential. This allows newcomers with no family history in fishing to enter the sector. Incidentally one of the themes that emerged in the survey was the need to make educational centres and fisheries training programs more welcoming and accessible to women. Those spaces become places to build awareness and change norms among men and women entering the sector.



Photo 5: Anne-Sophie Susperregui

# Endnotes

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- 7 Gustavsson, 36.
- 8 Gustavsson, 38.
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- 12 Katia Frangoudes and Siri Gerrard, 'Gender Perspective in Fisheries: Examples from the South and the North', in *Transdisciplinarity for Small-Scale Fisheries Governance: Analysis and Practice*, ed. Ratana Chuenpagdee and Svein Jenstoft, MARE Publication Series (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 121, doi:10.1007/978-3-319-94938-3\_7.
- 13 Frangoudes and Gerrard, 119.
- 14 Gustavsson, 'Women's Changing Productive Practices, Gender Relations and Identities in Fishing through a Critical Feminisation Perspective', 40.
- 15 Gustavsson, 40.
- 16 Cruz Morey, 'The Off Season: Masculinities, Rurality, and Family Ties in Alaska Commercial Fishing' (Senior Theses, Linfield University, 2017), 24.
- 17 Katrien Vervaele, 'Flemish Fishermen's Wives: Their Lives and Roles in Fisheries', in *Social Issues in Sustainable Fisheries Management*, MARE Publication Series (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2014), 205, doi:10.1007/978-94-007-7911-2\_12.
- 18 Gustavsson, 'Women's Changing Productive Practices, Gender Relations and Identities in Fishing through a Critical Feminisation Perspective', 41.
- 19 Interview 1 by Charlene Jouanneau, telephone, June 2020.
- 20 Interview 2 by Charlene Jouanneau, telephone, June 2020. Original quote: "les jours où j'ouvre pas là c'est à fond sur la compta, sur les courses pour le bateau, aller acheter des courroies parce qu'il va falloir changer la courroie du moteur, les huiles, les filtres à gasoil, commander des anodes d'hélice, tu vois me mettre sur tout ça, prendre rendez-vous pour la sortie du bateau, organiser des trucs, sans parler des visites radio, des visites à sec, du permis de navigation, de... c'est extrêmement... tu vois les gens de l'extérieur j'ai l'impression qu'ils trouvent ça très très simple, limite tu prends ton bateau, tu vas pêcher, tu reviens. Mais c'est très compliqué!"
- 21 Katia Frangoudes and Enora Keromnes, 'Women in Artisanal Fisheries in Brittany, France', *Development* 51, no. 2 (2008): 268.
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- 23 Frangoudes, Pascual-Fernández, and Marugán-Pintos, 'Women's Organisations in Fisheries and Aquaculture in Europe'.
- 24 Frangoudes, Pascual-Fernández, and Marugán-Pintos, 224.
- 25 Frangoudes, Pascual-Fernández, and Marugán-Pintos, 218.
- 26 Frangoudes and Keromnes, 'Women in Artisanal Fisheries in Brittany, France', 268–269.
- 27 Frangoudes, Pascual-Fernández, and Marugán-Pintos, 'Women's Organisations in Fisheries and Aquaculture in Europe', 222.
- 28 Frangoudes, Pascual-Fernández, and Marugán-Pintos, 218.
- 29 Frangoudes, Pascual-Fernández, and Marugán-Pintos, 218.
- 30 Frangoudes and Gerrard, 'Gender Perspective in Fisheries', 133–135.
- 31 Frangoudes, Pascual-Fernández, and Marugán-Pintos, 'Women's Organisations in Fisheries and Aquaculture in Europe', 227.
- 32 Frangoudes, Pascual-Fernández, and Marugán-Pintos, 227.
- 33 Interview 1 by Charlene Jouanneau, telephone, June 2020.
- 34 Interview 3 by Charlene Jouanneau, telephone, June 2020. Original quote: "On est souvent un peu dans l'ombre, y'a des femmes qui sont sur les bateaux mais y'en a beaucoup qui font tout le travail à côté et... et c'est du boulot."
- 35 Frangoudes and Keromnes, 'Women in Artisanal Fisheries in Brittany, France', 266.
- 36 Frangoudes and Keromnes, 267.
- 37 Zhao, Tyzack, and Anderson, 'Women's Organisations in Fisheries and Aquaculture in Europe', 234.
- 38 Jackeline Siles et al., 'Advancing Gender in the Environment: Gender in Fisheries - A Sea of Opportunities' (Washington, USA: USAID and IUCN, 2019), 32.
- 39 See: <https://associationpleinemer.com/>
- 40 Frangoudes and Keromnes, 'Women in Artisanal Fisheries in Brittany, France', 268.
- 41 Interview 3. Original quote: "j'assure la vente directe alors sur l'île pendant l'été (juillet et août), les vacances de Pâques aussi (bon exceptionnellement cette année... raté [due to COVID]). On va dire de Pâques à fin août j'assures la vente directe sur l'île. Et sur [nom de ville] le vendredi après-midi la vente de crustacés. Toute l'année."
- 42 Interview 2. Original quote: "mais voilà c'est vrai que c'est un métier difficile, très pointu pour beaucoup de choses et... voilà moi j'ai besoin d'apprendre, j'ai besoin de vendre, j'ai besoin d'avoir un contact avec le client moi, contrairement à mon mari, moi j'adore, mm si c'est fatigant, les bacs de 20kg à transporter dans la chambre froide et tout, de voir le client qui revient, qui pose des questions, ça a été pêché comment, et de pouvoir leur répondre ! Et d'avoir le client qui revient en disant qu'en fait il a jamais mangé un bar aussi bon."
- 43 Interview 2. Original quote: "Il faut une licence spéciale que nous avons, quand tu pêche dans le bassin tu poses ton filet, tu le laisses une demi heure, ça prends bcp moins de temps, moi je suis plus dans cette catégorie là si tu veux, parce que voilà parce que deux enfants."
- 44 Interview 2. Original quote: "on débarque, stocke le poisson, on le pèse, on le vend, mais on est régit par les règles maritimes, si demain j'ouvre une vente en direct sur le trottoir d'en face je serai là sur du domaine privé et la réglementation sera complètement différente, je ne serai plus sur du DPM. Notre poisson on le vend HT, pas de TVA. Avantage. Dans mon local, je ne peux vendre que ce que je pêche, strictement interdit de vendre ne serait-ce que le poisson du copain d'à côté. Je ne dois vendre que le poisson qui sort de notre bateau."
- 45 Interview 2. Original quote: "la mère de mon mari elle fait ça depuis... Et c'est elle qui m'a tout appris quoi, elle m'a fait mon éducation au poisson, reconnaître tous les poissons, les vider, lever les filets, voir si ils sont beaux, pas beaux... les ouies, tout quoi !"





Photo 6: Romuald Defoulny



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Pleine Mer is an organization which fights for more social and environmental justice in the fishing sector and on the coast. Pleine Mer brings together fish eaters, fishermen, scientists, activists who are collectively committed to more sustainable fishing, socially and environmentally speaking. The organization promotes direct sales and community supported fisheries through digital tools, in order to support local fishing and fight against overfishing. Pleine Mer members also organize events and campaigns to alert people to the dangers of industrial fishing.

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