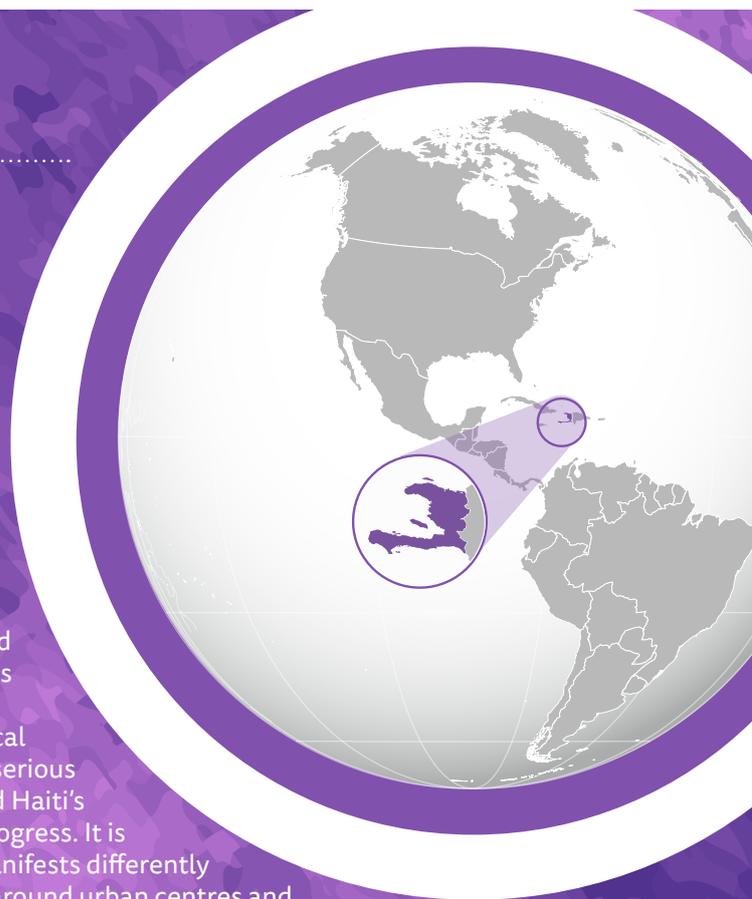


# The Republic of Haiti

Fisheries in Haiti are relatively underdeveloped, with women making critical yet often underappreciated contributions, predominantly as fish processors and traders ('*machanns*' and '*madan saras*'). Beyond these roles, women invest in fishing activities, assist with fishing trip preparations, build and maintain fishing equipment, innovate in food processing and storage, engage in shore-based harvesting, generate alternative income streams and increasingly contribute to fishers' associations.

Haiti is unique among Caribbean nations for having ministerial level government structures tasked with improving the status and rights of women, combined with a constitutional requirement that 30% of elected and appointed national positions be held by women. Grassroots organizations and women's rights activists have made substantial progress in advocating for gender equality. Nevertheless, female political participation remains limited and gender-based violence is a serious and persistent concern. Ongoing socio-political instability and Haiti's high vulnerability to natural disasters has further hindered progress. It is important to note that the deteriorating security situation manifests differently in urban and rural areas, with most challenges concentrated around urban centres and fishing communities located in mostly rural settings.

This fact sheet provides an overview of the role of seafood production in Haiti, with a focus on gender dimensions, highlighting opportunities to strengthen gender equity and women's empowerment in the sector and beyond. It is part of a series meant to offer development agency employees, government agencies, NGOs, funders, and researchers, with a snapshot of gender and fisheries to inform the planning and delivery of relevant activities these actors might be involved in or are in the process of developing.



## Fisheries production

### National data

Haiti's marine fisheries are predominantly artisanal, contributing over 82% of the country's total fish production,<sup>1</sup> though this may be an underestimate.

### Sea Around Us data

The Sea Around Us estimated total annual marine capture production for Haiti's fleets as follows:<sup>a</sup>

- ▶ Marine subsistence<sup>b</sup> (2019) – 7,587 tonnes
- ▶ Marine commercial<sup>c</sup> (2019) – 7 tonnes by the industrial sector, all caught within Haiti's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Local artisanal fleets accounted for 17,145 tonnes captured within Haiti waters.

Industrial fleets from Venezuela, Cuba and South Korea caught 163 tonnes, 149 tonnes, and 80 tonnes in Haiti's EEZ in 2019.

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## Fish consumption

Apparent fish consumption<sup>d</sup> was estimated at around 5 kg per capita per year (2021), over four times less than the global average.<sup>3</sup>

There are great disparities in fish consumption between Haitian households in coastal and inland areas. National production contributes only about one third of current local consumption needs. The remaining demand is met by imports<sup>4</sup> mainly as smoked herring from Canada and, more recently, canned sardines.

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## Economic contribution to GDP

In 2020, fishing was estimated to contribute 2% to GDP<sup>5</sup> down from 13.6% in the early 2000s.<sup>6</sup>

Most of the fish caught is consumed domestically, with limited processing and quality control available to add value to catches or provide income opportunities to processors along fisheries value chains.<sup>17</sup>

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## Employment contribution (all)

“2020 data show 45,907 fishers (98.96% of which were men) and 100,000 individuals directly employed in fisheries”

### National data

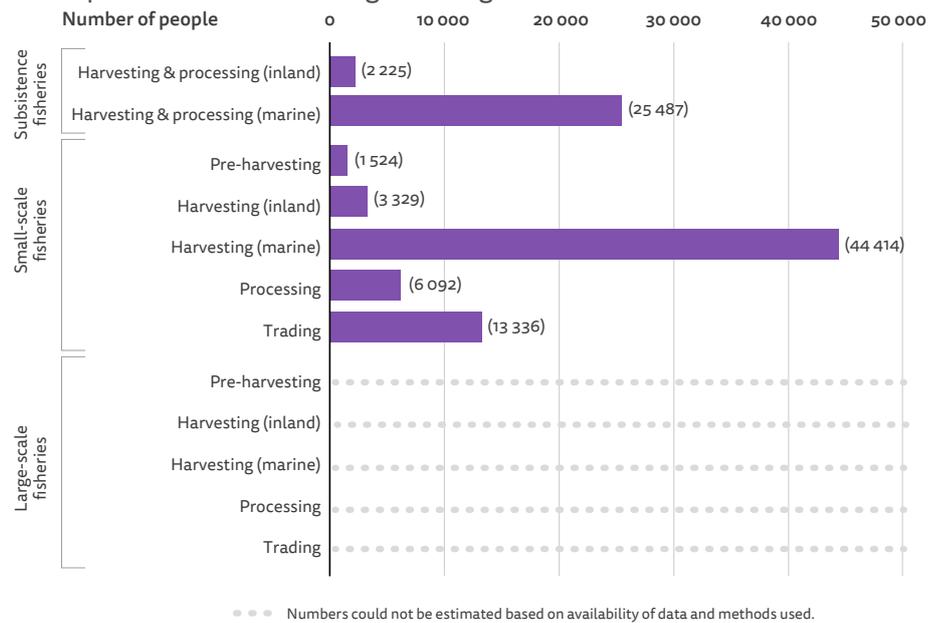
Estimates of active fishers in Haiti range from 52,000<sup>8</sup> to 65,000,<sup>9</sup> with around 115,000 Haitians employed in fishing and related industries.<sup>1</sup> Statistics from the Haitian authorities in the mid-2010s, indicated that 52,000 fishing families (or 21,000 working people) in more than 420 localities were involved in fishing, with around 60,000 additional people involved in processing and marketing fishery products.<sup>10</sup> The most recent census of fishing activities by the Haitian government published in 2020, recorded 45,907 fishers (98.96% of which were men) and 100,000 individuals directly employed in fisheries.<sup>5</sup> At time of writing, there were no official records or estimates of large-scale fisheries (LSF) though one or two privately-run large-scale fishing vessels were active in the past.<sup>11</sup>

There are approximately 28,000 active fishing boats in Haiti.<sup>9</sup> Fishers mostly rely on simple vessels, 51% of which are wooden boats made out of a dugout tree, locally referred to as *bwa fouye*.<sup>10</sup> Between 1,200<sup>8</sup> and 1,511<sup>5</sup> boats are estimated to have engines. In the past, between 3,000 and 5,000 fishers used modern industrial deep-sea equipment to supply the high-end urban market, supported by 1,600 buyers in fishing communities linked to around 100 urban-based purchasing agencies, supermarkets, and restaurants.<sup>8</sup> However, the current status of this fishery is unknown. Modern fishing equipment, such as Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) and fibre glass boats, was initially introduced by the private sector, and later maintained through NGO or international aid initiatives.<sup>11,14</sup> Access to this equipment is often facilitated through locally self-organised fishing associations,<sup>10</sup> but it's unclear whether such opportunities are equitably distributed along the coastline.

### Illuminating Hidden Harvests estimates

The Illuminating Hidden Harvests (IHH) Initiative<sup>e,12</sup> estimated that a total of 96,406 people<sup>f</sup> engage in the fisheries sector (2022), including pre-and post-harvest as well as subsistence fishing activities. Most individuals are involved in the marine small-scale fisheries (SSF)<sup>g</sup> sub-sector (see figure below). The IHH also estimates that a total of approximately 370,843 people depend, at least partly, on fisheries or subsistence fishing:<sup>h</sup> 267,370 in SSF, and 103,473 in subsistence fisheries.<sup>i</sup> Typically most of the fish

caught by SSF are destined for local market, with some reserved for household consumption. Many fishers and people who depend on fisheries sub-sectors adopt mixed livelihood strategies, combining fishing with other food production and income generating activities.



## Employment contribution (women)

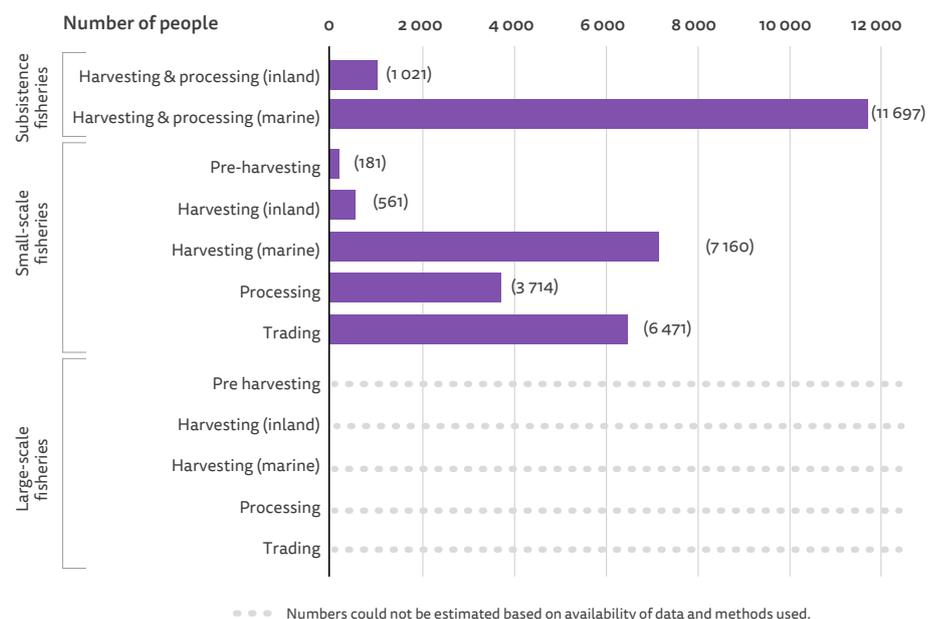
“Many women combine processing and selling, and like men in fisheries, engage in a wide range of income- and food-generating activities.”

### National data

Recent research suggests that between 20,000<sup>8</sup> and 32,200<sup>1</sup> women work informally processing and selling fish, supporting the livelihoods of over 416,000 people.<sup>1</sup> Many women combine processing and selling, and like men in fisheries, engage in a wide range of income- and food-generating activities.

### Illuminating Hidden Harvests estimates

The IHH Initiative<sup>12</sup> estimated that a total of 30,805 women are active in fisheries (2022), with the SSF sector providing the greatest source of livelihoods for women (see figure below). They account for 46% of the total number of people engaged in both marine and inland subsistence fisheries.



Women play an outsized role in the processing of fish from SSF, representing 61% of individuals active in this fisheries subsector. They represent 49% of those engaged in SSF trading activities.

Historically, households in Haiti have relied on agriculture, with the fishing industry remaining small.<sup>16</sup> Fishers are often men,<sup>5,10</sup> who supply fish for two distinct supply chains: a traditional one serving domestic and popular markets, and a modern one catering to urban, formal economy consumers.<sup>17</sup> The traditional chain is represented by the '*machann*' – a fish trader, almost always a woman – who purchases, processes, and sells fish. The '*machann*' purchase fish by volume rather than by weight and process it – gutting, scrubbing with lime or sour oranges, heavily salting and then drying the fish on wooden racks in the sun.<sup>17</sup> The '*machann*' may produce other value-added products such as fish balls.<sup>j</sup> Once processed, the fish is either sold by the same woman processor or passed to a '*madan sara*,<sup>17</sup> another type of female trader, who will then accumulate fish until she has enough for it to be worth transporting to market in villages, provincial cities, or Port-au-Prince. Transport is done on foot, by donkey, boat or public transport. '*Madan sara*' (see also the '*Social Considerations*' section below) play a key role as the country's primary accumulator, transporter, and redistributor of agricultural products, small animals, crafts, and fish.<sup>11,17</sup> Their capacity to adapt around infrastructure failures (e.g., road closures due to political, social, and/or climatic instability) make them key contributors to food security, ensuring access to fish beyond the coast.<sup>10</sup> Women in fisheries are also often credited with being more efficient investors than male fishers who are often indebted.<sup>18</sup> Through the provision of loans these women play an important role in the economic viability of the fishery, for example by supporting fishing households during bad weather.<sup>17,19</sup> This strategy does not necessarily generate income, but ensures a continuous supply of fish products that are used by the fisher to pay off their debts. Some women also own fishing equipment, renting it to fishers in exchange for a share of the catch.<sup>20</sup> Trust between fishers and traders is often reinforced by family ties.<sup>10</sup>

**“Women in fisheries are also often credited with being more efficient investors than male fishers who are often indebted.”**

Boat-based fishing is nearly entirely conducted by men, but women also catch some species accessible from shore (e.g., turtles, octopus).<sup>10</sup> The availability of these species varies along the coast, leading to geographic differences in women's involvement in catching or collecting marine organisms.<sup>k</sup> Another exception is the commercial eel fishery, which developed in Haiti around 2012.<sup>20,21</sup> This shore-based fishery is conducted at night, using head torches and mosquito nets adapted into traps.<sup>21</sup> Men, women, and families fish for glass eels, with the catch primarily destined for export.<sup>22,23</sup> Income from eel fishing can be unstable and low, but it has drawn in a high number of participants.<sup>22,23</sup> This trend has been attributed to shifting perceptions of fishing as a more respectable livelihood (partly influenced by high initial earnings from FADs), and declining inland soil fertility, which has resulted in more people migrating to the coast to fish in search of income.<sup>l</sup>

**“Overall, women make key contributions to the fisheries sector in Haiti, though these contributions are often marginalised.”**

Overall, women make key contributions to the fisheries sector in Haiti, though these contributions are often marginalised.<sup>10</sup> In addition to processing, trading and investing in fishing activities, women also help prepare for fishing trips, build FADs,<sup>m</sup> innovate in food processing and storage, generate alternative sources of income,<sup>10</sup> and increasingly contribute to fishers' associations, all while managing household and caregiving responsibilities.<sup>10</sup> Recognising and supporting these diverse contributions is crucial for transforming Haiti's fisheries.<sup>10</sup>

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## Social considerations

“Gender dynamics are deeply influenced by a strong urban-rural divide that emerged following post-independence agricultural re-organisation.”

Social norms and attitudes towards women in Haiti are complex and shaped by cultural, regional, and historical factors.<sup>24</sup> Understanding gender in Haiti requires awareness of these diverse influences and the evolving ways in which gender is enacted in Haiti today (see section on ‘*Women’s rights and political empowerment*’). Gender dynamics, like many other aspects of Haitian culture, are deeply influenced by a strong urban-rural divide that emerged following post-independence agricultural re-organisation.<sup>25,26</sup> Haitian women, especially in rural areas, have traditionally been central to economic activities, as they form the majority of street vendors and are key contributors to agricultural supply chains.<sup>27</sup> However, urbanization and economic changes are altering these traditional roles, with women facing significant inequality and being disproportionately affected by gender-based violence (GBV).<sup>28</sup>

In rural parts of Haiti, where many fishing communities are situated, women’s status is closely tied to household roles captured by the saying ‘*men build the house but women own it*’.<sup>27</sup> Women’s power partly stems from their position as mothers, with children contributing to household functioning. It is not uncommon for paternity to be attributed to multiple fathers, a practice around which many customs have evolved.<sup>27</sup> These customs help both women and men form partnerships essential for establishing a successful household. Once secured in a household, women often have control over agricultural production and produce sales,<sup>27</sup> but notably not assets like land.<sup>29</sup> Common forms of spousal union (sometimes known as ‘*plaçage*’) however lack legal recognition, perpetuating unequal opportunities and power dynamics that advantage men.<sup>30</sup> Whilst polygamy is practiced, with men bearing the financial responsibility for maintaining multiple households,<sup>31</sup> virginity remains a significant social expectation<sup>29</sup> compounding the trauma and silencing of survivors of rape and GBV (see also the section on ‘*Women’s rights and political empowerment*’).

“Women traders play an important economic role by moving goods, providing loans, and connecting rural and urban markets”

Women traders (‘*madan saras*’ and ‘*machanns*’) play an important economic role by moving goods, providing loans to other traders and producers, and connecting rural and urban markets.<sup>32</sup> Yet, their work is undervalued, often poorly paid,<sup>30</sup> and risky. ‘*Madan sara*’, for example, are vulnerable to exploitation when traveling through gang-controlled areas to buy and sell goods.<sup>33</sup> This risk has escalated with the recent increase in gang-based violence (see “*Women’s rights and political empowerment*”).

Women in Haiti face significant barriers to healthcare, with more than 82% citing lack of money for treatment, distance to healthcare services, fear of visiting a health centre alone, or lack of permission to seek care as key obstacles.<sup>30</sup>

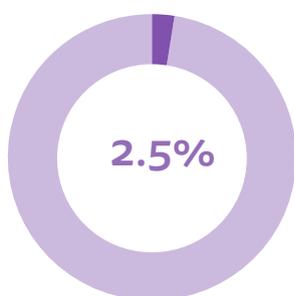
Urbanisation may be contributing to a further shift in gender norms, as men can access formal employment opportunities in urban settings more readily than women.<sup>27</sup> Between 2010 and 2020, men’s labour force participation was higher (73%) than women’s participation (64%), with a larger gender gap in urban (67% of men vs 58% of women) than in rural areas (78% of men vs. 70% of women).<sup>34</sup> Women, however, tend to have higher educational attainment at earlier stages of education (58% of girls complete primary school compared to 49% of boys), though this advantage narrows out at later stages (16% of girls finish upper secondary education, compared to 17% of boys; data from between 2013 and 2022).<sup>34</sup>

## Women's rights and political empowerment

Grassroots organizations and women's rights activists in Haiti have driven progress towards gender equality, leading to some institutional improvements. However, challenges remain. Social and gender norms, political structures, and historical factors continue to create disparities for women in political participation, economic opportunities, and personal autonomy.

### Political participation

Women in Haiti have had the right to vote and run for office since 1950, with the first woman elected to parliament in 1961.<sup>35</sup> The Constitution of 1985 extended the right to vote to all citizens and, as a result of the mobilization of women's organizations, the Constitution of 1987 formally recognized gender equality. Based on amendments in 2012, the Constitution now assures in its Preamble "a representation in the instances of power and of decision making which must conform to the equality of the sexes and to equity of gender."<sup>35</sup> Articles 17.1 and 31.1.1 introduced a 30% quota for women in all elected and appointed national positions, including the civil service and political parties,<sup>36,37</sup> though attempts to implement the 30% quota in electoral mechanisms have been met with resistance by the House of Deputies.<sup>30</sup>



Percentage of women in the Chamber of Deputies in March 2017.

Recent political instability means that the terms of the last elected officials ended in 2023, and they have not been replaced.<sup>38,39</sup> At time of writing, there was no information available on the make-up of the Chamber of Deputies<sup>35</sup> nor the Senate.<sup>40</sup> The last electoral process for the Chamber of Deputies (March 2017) resulted in three women elected out of 118 members (2.5% of the Chamber).<sup>35</sup> Following the last elections for the partial renewal of the Senate (March 2017), there were 28 senators, including one woman and two senatorial seats unfilled (3.6% of the Senate).

Women in Haiti face multiple obstacles to political participation including educational gaps, economic hardship, and entrenched party practices that hinder women's political progression.<sup>41</sup> Once elected, women candidates often face gender bias and discriminatory attitudes from male colleagues.<sup>24,41</sup> Haiti has had one female provisional President (Ertha Pascal-Trouillot, March 1990-February 1991)<sup>42</sup> and one female Prime Minister, Michèle Pierre-Louis (September 2008-October 2009). Pierre-Louis' selection offered hope that women would gain access to power, though her appointment kept power within the urban elite.<sup>16</sup> In late 2021, Nelly Boyer Verpile was appointed Secretary General to the Senate.<sup>40</sup> Haiti's political history means that many associate politics with violence, which has also been targeted at female activists and political candidates.<sup>24</sup>

### Gender equality action

The Government of Haiti has taken steps to address gender inequality, including establishing the Ministry for Women's Status and Rights (MCFDF) to lead national efforts.<sup>30,43</sup> In contrast to other Caribbean countries therefore, Haiti has high-level machineries for the advancement of women.<sup>n,44</sup> Since 2005, gender focal points have been implemented across ministries, gender sensitive budgeting was introduced in 2008, and in 2013 a gender equality office was established in the National Assembly to review legislation through a gender lens and support women's political participation.<sup>30,43</sup> The State also adopted a *Gender Equality Policy (EHF)* in 2014 and a related *National Plan (2014-2020)*. The EHF explicitly affirms the principle of non-discrimination as a guiding rule and a prerequisite for the right to equal opportunities and equal pay.<sup>30</sup> However, a 2014 report to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against

Women (CEDAW) acknowledges that the “affirmation of the principle of equality does not suffice to eradicate inequalities in practice or to change the social perception of male superiority” (p.8).<sup>30</sup> The report also highlights the important role women and feminist organisations have played in advocating for equality, promoting Haiti’s international commitments, defending the role of the Ministry for the Status of Women and Women’s Rights when its mission has been questioned by elected representatives,<sup>30</sup> and supporting international humanitarian and aid efforts.<sup>45</sup> The report to CEDAW highlights “noticeable but slow and fragile development” (p.21) in combatting gender discrimination and stereotypes,<sup>30</sup> though recent events may warrant an updated assessment.

Haiti has also incorporated gender equality and women's rights into national policies, including poverty reduction and long-term development strategies, though implementing legislation is lacking.<sup>43</sup> In education, the country has updated learning materials to promote gender equality and introduced affirmative action measures to boost female participation in higher education.<sup>43</sup>

“Large-scale climate related shocks and stresses, earthquakes, and ongoing political instability have considerably hindered government efforts to tackle gender inequality in Haiti.”

Large-scale climate related shocks and stresses associated with extreme weather events, earthquakes, and ongoing political instability have considerably hindered government efforts to tackle gender inequality in Haiti<sup>30</sup> (see also the section on ‘*Threats and drivers of change in fisheries*'). This includes the 2010 earthquake which destroyed the buildings of the Ministry for the Status of Women and Women’s Rights and claimed the lives of many key women’s rights advocates.<sup>30</sup> Political turmoil following President Jovenel Moïse’s assassination in July 2021, and escalating gang violence have also contributed to a deeply disrupted governance system.<sup>38,39</sup> At time of writing, the transitional government, had faced criticism for perpetuating the historic exclusion of women from political processes and their discrimination.<sup>46</sup> In response, over 120 Haitian women's rights groups and international organisations have signed a *Policy Framework for an Effective and Equitable Transition*, calling for at least one-third of all transition appointments, including half of ministerial roles, to be filled by women, with all candidates screened for their knowledge and commitment to advancing women's rights. This is to ensure that those shaping the transition are truly dedicated to protecting gender equality.<sup>46</sup>

### Gender-based violence

The ongoing instability has reportedly led to a dramatic increase in GBV (physical, psychological and sexual), with long term impacts on survivor’s physical and mental health.<sup>47</sup> Preliminary data indicate a 42% rise in GBV between 2022 and 2023,<sup>33</sup> with a further 40% increase estimated between March and May of 2024 alone.<sup>48</sup> Internal displacement compounds women’s vulnerability and further increases their exposure to physical and sexual violence.<sup>30,49</sup> Comprehensive data however remains difficult to access.<sup>33</sup> Women, who often serve as primary breadwinners in Haitian households, face heightened risks as they navigate gang-controlled areas selling goods and other necessities in their communities.<sup>33</sup> Gangs reportedly use sexual violence and systematic rape as a means of intimidation, territorial control and domination.<sup>33</sup> Some women who fall pregnant by rape have reported ostracism from their families and communities.<sup>33</sup> While rape was criminalised in 2005 and made punishable by 10 years of forced labour,<sup>30,33</sup> the penal code still criminalises all forms of abortion, mandating penalties for medical practitioners and women involved.<sup>50</sup> Though there are plans to legalise abortion this was unilaterally decreed by then President Moïse without legislative approval and has yet to be executed.<sup>50,51</sup> This reform faced

widespread criticism as an abuse of power, with even supporters of the change expressing concern that it could jeopardize legitimate progress in advancing abortion rights.<sup>51</sup>

GBV was a concern even before the recent instability. Data from 2013-2020 shows that 28% of girls aged 15–19 experienced intimate partner violence in the previous 12 months,<sup>34</sup> while surveys from 2015-2021, indicate concerning levels of acceptance for domestic violence among both adolescent girls and boys.<sup>34</sup> The practice of 'restavèk' - where families from low-income backgrounds and/or rural areas will send their children to stay with family/friends in cities to receive an education - can also expose minors to sexual violence. In the majority of cases, children end up at risk of physical, sexual and emotional violence, in a situation akin to slavery. One in ten children in Haiti are living in 'restavèk' and 60% of those are girls.<sup>52,53</sup> To address GBV, Haiti adopted a second *National Plan to Combat Violence against Women (2017–2027)*,<sup>30,44</sup> developed with intersectoral collaboration among government, civil society, UN organisations and international agencies as part of the National Dialogue on Violence Against Women.<sup>30</sup>

### Geographic differences

Between 2014 and 2023, urban population growth averaged 3%<sup>54</sup> and as of 2023, 60% of the Haitian population lived in urban areas.<sup>55</sup> Urbanisation has concentrated economic, social, cultural and political activity in cities like Port-au-Prince, and thus narratives around Haiti's current instability are often concentrated on these urban centres. However, and without detracting from the seriousness of these events, expert co-authors on this fact sheet warn of an overly simplified narrative of this crisis. In conversations with co-authors in December 2024, Haitian women involved in fisheries in rural areas reported feeling safe and supported in their communities; that women are involved in community and political decision-making; and that they do not see differences in the obstacles facing men and women in their communities.<sup>o</sup> There is historical precedence for differentiated impacts of political instability for women in rural and urban areas,<sup>29</sup> and these accounts highlight the diversity of local experiences and underscore the need for tailored approaches that consider rural gender dynamics, coastal community challenges, and the adaptation strategies women and communities use to sustain livelihoods. Finally, whilst recurrent failures of state<sup>p</sup> have occurred since Haiti's independence, the country's governance challenges cannot be fully understood without acknowledging its colonial and neo-colonial history. A deeper exploration of these processes is however outside the scope of this fact sheet.

“...the country's governance challenges cannot be fully understood without acknowledging its colonial and neo-colonial history.”

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### Key frameworks promoting gender equality and their ratification status<sup>q</sup>

- ✓ Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) ratified by parliamentary decree in 1981.<sup>56</sup> Haiti submitted its combined eighth and ninth periodic reports in 2014 and has made no submission since.
- ✗ Haiti has not signed on to CEDAW's Optional Protocol.
- ✓ Beijing Platform for Action adopted in 1995.<sup>44</sup>
- ✓ Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women, known as the Convention of Belém do Pará, acceded to in 1997 (but not signed).<sup>57</sup>

## Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI)

Higher SIGI values indicate higher inequality and range from 0 for no discrimination to 100 for very high discrimination.

Year	Total aggregated index value (Category) <sup>58</sup>	Discrimination in the family	Restricted physical integrity	Restricted access to productive & financial resources	Restricted civil liberties
2014	14.66	56.13	50.1	20.48	35.39
2019	39.9	37.6	37.3	22	59.1
2023	46.4	49.8	37.8	34	61.7

## Gender Inequality Index (GII)

GII value is on a scale from 0 to 1, with 0 being 0% inequality, indicating women fare equally in comparison to men and 1 being 100% inequality, indicating women fare poorly in comparison to men. "Fare equally" or "poorly" compared to men, refers to women's relative standing in health, political representation, education, and economic participation.

Value (2022)<sup>59</sup>

**0.621**

Rank (2022)

**158**

(out of 166 countries)

## Gender in fisheries governance<sup>r</sup>

"Four fisheries governance documents were reviewed, and two are inclusive of women and gender."

Four fisheries governance documents<sup>s</sup> were reviewed, and two are inclusive of women and gender. Both documents touch on the need for equitable distribution of benefits from the sector, and address fisheries together with environmental management and human development.

The **National Program for the Development of Maritime Fishing in Haiti (2010-2014)** focuses on fisheries as a vector of growth and poverty reduction, with specific concern for benefitting women and youth.

The **Environmental and Social Management Plan - Modernization Program of the Fisheries Sector (2015)**, acknowledges that fishing activities are shared between women and men. Women largely engage in post-harvest activities of processing and sales, men engage in the catching of fish, and both roles are recognized for their importance in the overall value chain. The plan notes that women who dry, sell, and transport fish were included as key informants in stakeholder interviews, and goes on to state that sectoral decision-making must be decentralized and integrate fishermen and women into the process. In line with this, it emphasizes that women should hold at least 30% representation at all levels of governance. Women experience their own set of challenges in marketing fish, including illiteracy, lack of information on fish availability, and lack of access to credit. There is often underrepresentation of women and youth in training programs, and it is noted that attention should be given to adapt to the specific needs of these groups (i.e., integrating their concerns in the design of fisheries development projects and information dissemination strategies). Measures to support women and youth include increasing income generating opportunities, access to credit, and training in post-harvest activities (e.g., preservation, transportation, and marketing).

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## Threats and drivers of change in fisheries

“Fishing represents a last resort for many Haitians...”

Several key threats to and drivers of change in Haiti’s coastal ecosystems and encouraging examples of how these may be addressed are outlined below. Threats and drivers of change to fisheries may have specific gender dimensions associated with them making gender integration necessary in efforts to improve adaptation and foster resilience in the face of change.

Fishing represents a last resort for many Haitians, so that the number of fishers rises as poverty and unemployment increase.<sup>60</sup> Between 1990 and 2000, the number of fishers increased by a factor of 2.5, whilst between 1976 and 2005, catch per unit effort declined by 60%,<sup>61</sup> signalling **high levels of over-exploitation**. Only 32% of fisheries are thought to be fished sustainably.<sup>61</sup> Most demersal resources on the continental shelf are fully or over exploited because of their accessibility and open-access management,<sup>60,61</sup> and a lack of equipment and expertise to exploit offshore resources<sup>10</sup> (see below). As catches become less reliable, fishers use less selective gears to increase the volume of landed catch.<sup>10</sup> The status of the eel fishery, while not fully assessed, is likely at risk of over-exploitation due to high levels of illegal, unregulated and unreported catch.<sup>62</sup> Despite legislation in place to protect fishery resources, limited monitoring and enforcement capacity hinders effective management.<sup>60,61</sup> **Illegal transboundary fishing** from neighbouring countries also poses challenges, though these are comparable to those faced by other nations in the region.<sup>60</sup>

**Climate change poses a significant threat to Haiti's marine ecosystems and fisheries** through changes in oceanic conditions and a decline in habitat suitability.<sup>61</sup> The risk to marine species from climate change is considered moderate, and moderate to high when combined with fishing pressure.<sup>61</sup> Projections indicate 5% to 15% decline in maximum catch potential<sup>4</sup> between 2030 and 2039, with greater losses expected under high greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>61</sup>

“Haiti has been working to develop its industrial fisheries to exploit offshore resources and alleviate pressure on over-exploited nearshore resources...”

Haiti has been working to develop its **industrial fisheries** to exploit offshore resources and alleviate pressure on over-exploited nearshore resources, though the current status of these efforts is unclear.<sup>10</sup> This sector largely relies on international aid, primarily channelled through newly formed fishers’ associations to improve infrastructure (e.g., ice, functioning transport networks).<sup>17,60</sup> However, inadequate wider infrastructure, weak monitoring systems, and political instability have led to a **lack of policies, institutional support, and resources** necessary for the effective management and sustainable development of fisheries and preservation of fisheries products.<sup>7</sup> Poor fish processing and quality control systems, combined with reliance on traditional methods like sun drying and smoking, contribute to significant post-harvest losses. Most fishing boats lack ice or refrigeration, further compromising seafood quality.<sup>7</sup> In 2003, the United States suspended seafood imports from Haiti due to concerns raised by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) about the unsustainable harvesting of queen conch (*Aliger/Eubatus/Strombus gigas*) in Haiti, as well as health concerns related to seafood quality.<sup>61</sup>

Fishers are also concerned about the increased **difficulty of finding terrestrial plants** essential for fishing. Interviews with fishers identified 23 different plants used for nine different fishing-related purposes.<sup>10</sup> However, with less than 1% of its original primary forests remaining, Haiti is experiencing a mass extinction of its terrestrial biodiversity.<sup>63</sup>

Women fish traders rely on selling fish outside of fishing communities, such as in rural markets, regional cities and the capital Port-au-Prince, with their income heavily dependent on the **state of wider infrastructure**, including roads, and transportation systems. Political instability and **unsafe transit conditions** threaten their livelihoods and economic stability (see “*Women’s rights and political empowerment*”). The expansion of modern fishing techniques has also introduced male-dominated trading roles, potentially conflicting with the traditional roles of female traders.<sup>17</sup>

“80% of households in Haiti, across both wealthier and lower-income groups, reported being unprepared for disasters.”

Fishing households, like many others across Haiti, are also exposed to **multiple environmental hazards**, including floods, storms, epidemics, droughts, earthquakes, landslides and heatwaves.<sup>64,65</sup> These are exacerbated by existing socio-political vulnerabilities<sup>65,66</sup> and climate change.<sup>64</sup> Despite these risks, a 2021 survey found that over 80% of households in Haiti, across both wealthier and lower-income groups, reported being unprepared for disasters,<sup>65</sup> with female-headed and lower-income households identified as particularly vulnerable.<sup>65</sup>

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## Gender in ODA allocation for fisheries<sup>u</sup>

Between 2012 and 2022, Haiti received a total of USD 3,83 million in fisheries Official Development Assistance (ODA),<sup>v</sup> none of which was allocated to gender equality focused projects (i.e., tagged with gender markers 1 or 2).<sup>w,67</sup>

Fisheries aid to Haiti represents 4% of fisheries aid to the Central American and Caribbean subregion. Over the time period investigated, all fisheries aid to Haiti was disbursed between 2012 and 2017, with no aid allocated to fisheries after 2017.<sup>67</sup>

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## Examples of programmes or initiatives aiming to advance gender equality in fisheries

In 2022, the UN’s International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Government of Haiti signed a financing agreement to implement the **Inclusive Blue Economy Project (I-BE)**. Focusing on the Three Bay Protected Area in the north east of Haiti, the project aims to strengthen institutional capacity to improve the management of protected areas and support livelihood diversification initiatives, including promoting sustainable fishing practices. The project places specific emphasis on women who represented 47% of members of fishing associations in the project intervention area, surveyed during the project baseline study.<sup>x,68,69</sup>

Between 2016 and 2022, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the Haitian government implemented the **Artisanal Fisheries Development Program**. Through co-financing – rather than grants – the program aims to strengthen the legal framework and institutional management of the fisheries sector at both national and local level; improve the quality of public infrastructure to connect fishers with markets; increase artisanal fisheries productivity and reduce economic losses, while protecting marine resources. Acknowledging that the 2018-2019 phase of the project focused on men, the following phase intended to partner with women’s associations and target post-harvest processing and commercialization activities.<sup>70</sup> Reported benefits to women include: greater availability of fisheries products to develop their businesses; participation in business management and trade training; greater participation in decision-making processes through fishing associations; involvement (as all fishing association members) in the co-financing strategy; benefits from fisheries improvement initiatives (e.g., insulated fish storage containers); and the

opportunities for knowledge exchange between the South and Grande-Anse departments, resulting in increased adoption of salt preservation techniques.<sup>71</sup> A second phase of this program was developed in 2023 to be extended to the North and Northeast of the country, while continuing to consolidate the first phase's achievements.

Between 2021 and 2023, the Enforced Integrated Frame (EIF) program of the World Trade Organization (WTO) funded a **project to strengthen the productivity and commercial capacities of marine fisheries and sea salt sectors**, which included some gender capacity building. It was implemented by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MCI) in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Rural Development (MARNDR) and the Bureau of Mine and Energy (BME), focussing on part of the Artibonite and the Northwest departments coastlines. Some gender relevant outcomes included the installation of fish processing and preservation plants and training provided to 343 beneficiaries, 19% of whom were women. Female beneficiaries of the project improved their financial autonomy contributing to reducing gender inequalities. Overall, women represented 51% of the 138,618 direct and indirect beneficiaries of the project and benefitted from 37% of the 2,349 direct jobs created.<sup>72</sup>

In early 2024, Peace Winds America partnered with APEDESUD (Association des Pêcheurs de la Deuxième Section de Saint-Jean du Sud) to **support the livelihoods of 70 fishermen and women in the south of Haiti**. The year long project focuses on improving seafood processing capabilities, diversifying products from the Association, and transporting more fresh seafood to markets throughout the area, in addition to providing training to Association members.<sup>73</sup>

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Top left: Transporting a sailfish to market (credit: Francklin Barbier, Haiti Ocean Project); Top right: Women processing fish (credit: Samson Jean Marie, French National Research Institute for Sustainable Development & Espacedev Unit); Bottom: Eel fishing at night in Petite Riviere de Nippes (credit: Haiti Ocean Project).

## Endnotes

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- a Marine fisheries statistics are derived from catch reconstruction under the Sea Around Us - <http://www.seaaroundus.org/data/#/eez>. The approach utilized builds on national statistics and accounts for discards as well as sectoral catch data that often is not included in official datasets (e.g., artisanal or recreational catches). The Sea Around Us data is also utilized here as a consistent frame of reference for and to facilitate comparison across the set of countries for which fact sheets were developed as part of this project. Sea Around Us data are distinguished according to the following categories: large-scale (i.e., industrial) and small-scale (i.e., artisanal, subsistence and recreational) fisheries catches. Recreational catches were not considered here.
- b "Marine subsistence" is used by the Sea Around Us to refer to the amount of annual marine capture production landed by the subsistence sector. This consists of fisheries conducted by women and/or non-commercial fishers for consumption by one's family, and where applicable, the fraction of the commercial catch that is given to crew or the community (mainly from small-scale fisheries).<sup>2</sup>
- c "Marine commercial" is used by the Sea Around Us to refer to the amount of annual marine capture production landed by commercial fisheries. These are fisheries whose landed catch is sold commercially (as opposed to being consumed and/or given away to the crew) and encompass both the industrial (large-scale) and artisanal (small-scale) sectors.<sup>2</sup>
- d The term "apparent" refers to the average food available for consumption, which for several reasons (for example, waste at the household level), is not equal to average food intake or average food consumption. The amount is calculated as production + imports - exports - non-food uses, +/- stocks variations and divided by number of people partaking of it.<sup>3</sup>
- e The Illuminating Hidden Harvests estimates are utilized here as a consistent frame of reference for and to facilitate comparison across the set of countries for which fact sheets were developed as part of this project (visit <https://oceanrisk.earth/> to access all the fact sheets).
- f Estimates calculated based on labour force surveys and Income Expenditure Surveys as part of the Illuminating Hidden Harvests (IHH) project.
- g Small Scale Fisheries (SSF) are distinguished from Large Scale Fisheries (LSF) according to a characterisation matrix that distinguishes between fisheries according to gear use, vessel characteristics, fishing operations, types of storage and preservation of catch, employment/labour, and use of catch. The characterisation matrix allows for a standardised approach to classify and characterize fisheries at the global and regional level, allowing for high levels of variation between fisheries. SSF generally includes low-technology, low-capital, labour-intensive fishing practices. Often, the term artisanal is used to refer to small-scale fisheries. In the context of the IHH work, the term "small-scale fisheries" refers to the whole value chain of pre-harvest, harvesting and post-harvest activities, including subsistence fisheries and excluding recreational fisheries.<sup>15</sup>
- h Subsistence fisheries activities, also referred to as "working for own consumption", are defined by the IHH as activities that individuals of any sex and age carried out at least once over the last 12 months in order to produce and process fish for their own final use, with no transaction occurring in the marketplace. By definition, they are considered here as small-scale fisheries (Table 2.1.; in reference 13).<sup>13</sup>
- i According to IHH estimates, 472,985 people belong to a household where at least one person engages in fisheries or in subsistence fishing.
- j Details provided by locally based co-authors.
- k Details provided by locally based co-authors.
- l Details provided by locally based co-authors.
- m For this fact sheet, two women from the coastal community of Anse à Veau shared their experiences as women in fisheries with coordinators from the Haiti Ocean Project (December 2024).
- n "High level machineries for the advancement of women" refers to work for the advancement of women that has ministerial status, or whose head has ministerial rank and participates fully in cabinet meetings.<sup>44</sup>
- o For this fact sheet, two women from the coastal community of Anse à Veau shared their experiences as women in fisheries with coordinators from the Haiti Ocean Project (December 2024).
- p The Haitian Creole expression 'Leta demisyon' captures these failures and refers to issues associated with the state not protecting the population, or where people cannot count on the state.
- q Visit <https://oceanrisk.earth/> to read summaries of key conventions/policies as well as additional information about key indicators.
- r Visit <https://oceanrisk.earth/> to read summaries of key conventions/policies as well as additional information about key indicators.
- s Sourced from the databases FAO LEX, ECO LEX, and SSF LEX. Fisheries governance documents include fisheries policies, laws, acts, plans, strategies, and regulations. A database of all reviewed governance documents can be found here: [10.5281/zenodo.15098510](https://zenodo.org/record/15098510)
- t Maximum catch potential, which can also be thought of as equivalent to Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY), is defined as the maximum exploitable catch of a species assuming that geographic range and selectivity of fisheries remain unchanged from the baseline at time of study (year 2000).<sup>61</sup>
- u Visit <https://oceanrisk.earth/> to read summaries of key conventions/policies as well as additional information about key indicators.
- v Different from OECD standard methods, this is measured in disbursements from DAC countries (including EU Institutions) to recipient countries. This captures the amount of money given, as opposed to the amount of money committed. Original data was downloaded on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2024.
- w Gender markers are qualitative statistical tools to record development activities that target gender equality as a policy objective. Please consult the metadata and indices factsheet on our website (<https://oceanrisk.earth/>) for further details.
- x Due to the deterioration of Haiti's socio-political and security situation over the past five years, the I-BE project, as many others, has been affected by delays in decision-making processes. At time of writing, this project had not moved beyond the baseline study

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