



HUMAN RIGHTS AT SEA



Human Rights at Sea Baseline Study

On the Awareness
and Application
of Human Rights
in Taiwan's Fishing
Industry

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Human Rights at Sea

BASELINE STUDY ON THE AWARENESS AND APPLICATION
OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN TAIWAN'S FISHING INDUSTRY

“The inhumane living environment is not only against basic human rights, but it can cause serious safety concerns in the case of poor environmental conditions at sea.”

FOREWORD

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”

As part of the ongoing baseline studies being undertaken by Human Rights at Sea to quantify and qualify the levels of understanding, education and application of human rights provisions and protections in the maritime sector of coastal States, the following study focuses on the Taiwanese fishing industry. Supported by Taiwanese civil society, welfare organisations and Government departments the study combines desk reviews with field research, legal and academic review to baseline the current situation in Taiwan with the aim of providing voluntary recommendations for State-level improvement within the sector. The study is itself baselined against the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the charity's founding principle that **'human rights apply at sea, as they do on land'**.

AUTHOR

Mina Chiang, Researcher, Human Rights at Sea, October 2019

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Taiwan Fisheries Agency

Yilan Migrant Fishermen Union

Presbyterian Church in Taiwan Seamen and Fishermen's Service Centre

Migrant Workers' Concern Desk (MWCD), Taipei Archdiocese

Mr. Shen Jui-chang

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The human rights situation in the global fishing industry has gained increasing attention in the past years through increasing reporting and public exposure of incidents of abuse towards and by fishers employed in crewing roles in coastal and deep water fishing fleets.

As a major stakeholder and a key supplier to global fish markets, the current focus on bettering fishers' human rights protections and provisions in Taiwan's fishing fleets should rightly be under transparent and close independent scrutiny in order to positively improve crew working conditions, as well as reinforcing the international reputation of the coastal and flag State.

Building on the existing publicly-available literature concerning human rights abuses and reported corporate misconduct¹ in Taiwan's fishing industry, this new human rights baseline study ("the study") aims to provide up-to-date information of key maritime-focused human rights issues in Taiwan in concert with Government input, provide review and analysis of the root causes of systemic problems and highlight the current initiatives for bringing about improvements within the fisheries sector.

Instead of focusing on particular human rights abuse and misconduct cases such as murders and extreme physical abuses towards and by crew, this study draws wider attention on the underlying and pervasive human rights issues within the industry including, but not limited to, the lack of onboard safety and sanitation facilities, confined and restricted living spaces, abusive work conditions, excessive and often unremunerated overtime, illegal deductions of salary at source and violence towards crew, all of which appear to have become the norm and not challenged.

In particular, this study provides evidence focusing on poor human rights conditions in the coastal fishing industry in Taiwan with concerning supporting visual evidence obtained first-hand through field research undertaken in August 2019.

While most of the existing English literature focuses on the distant water fisheries involving Taiwanese vessels on the high seas, basic and fundamental human rights conditions in the coastal and offshore fisheries have been comparatively neglected. This study therefore provides valuable facts highlighting degrading living conditions in the coastal and offshore fisheries which not only is inhumane, but clearly hazardous in terms of the lack of safe crew working conditions being suffered on a daily basis. The common-place incidents of human rights abuse in the industry discussed in this study demonstrates the urgent need for new and effective remedies not only for treating the symptoms, but also the root causes.

This study also discusses the problematic role of the recruitment agencies and the role of Taiwan's Fisheries Agency when it comes to running the Overseas Employment Scheme² beyond the normal labour protection law. It also reflects local and international non-government organisations (NGOs) campaigns³ in respect of direct recruitment (i.e. abolishing or minimising the role of recruitment agencies), and returning to responsibility of managing migrant fishers from the Taiwan Fisheries Agency to the Ministry of Labour (i.e. abolishing the Overseas Employment Scheme).

The study has captured the up-to-date high-level human rights initiatives in Taiwan in 2019, especially the engagement of the ILO Convention 188 'Working in Fishing Convention' by the Taiwanese Government coordinated by the Ministry of Labour and the Human Rights Protection Promotion Group of Executive Yuan.⁴

¹ Greenpeace, (2018). Taiwanese seafood giant linked to human rights violations - Greenpeace. Retrieved 8 October 2019, from <https://www.greenpeace.org/eastasia/press/releases/oceans/2018/Taiwanese-seafood-giant-linked-to-human-rights-violations---Greenpeace/>

² Ministry of Justice, (2019). Regulations on the Authorization and Management of Overseas Employment of Foreign Crew Members. Law and Regulation Database of Republic of China. Retrieved 8 October 2019, from <https://law.moj.gov.tw/ENG/LawClass/LawAll.aspx?pcode=M0050061>

³ The Reporter, (2018). Trading the fishermen with the world – how did Taiwan become the accomplice of human trafficking? Series one, the storm of human trafficking at sea. Retrieved 8 October 2019, from <https://www.twreporter.org/i/slave-fishermen-human-trafficking-gcs> "Allision Lee pointed out that the Overseas Employment is not feasible, and the responsible department the Fisheries Agency has no capacity to manage it. The recruitment of fishermen should be managed directly by the States, conducting the direct employment between States." Moreover, in one roundtable discussion hosted by Verité in August 2019 in Taipei, local NGOs have further discussed about the concept of direct employment.

⁴ The Executive Yuan is the Executive branch of the government of the Republic of China in Taiwan. Website: <https://english.ey.gov.tw/>

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photo © Mina Chiang

Photo: A senior NGO worker described that the condition of a vessel can loosely reflect labour conditions and crew treatment onboard. Many vessels visited were not maintained to acceptable existing and emerging international standards.

2. BACKGROUND

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- Taiwan has one of the largest distant water fishery industries in the world, with an export value around US\$2 billion⁵
- Science magazine⁶ points out that Taiwan accounts one-fifth of global fishing efforts - or 1,500,000 working hours - on the high seas in 2016.
- The 2014 U.S. Department of State states that Taiwan hires 160,000 fishermen worldwide in the distant water fisheries, while the official statistics from the Taiwanese government is 10 times smaller.⁷
- While Taiwan's EU IUU Yellow card has been lifted in June 2019, the IUU Fishing Index⁸ ranks Taiwan as the country of the second worst IUU practice in the world.

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"An Indonesia fisherman was even beat with fist by the employer right in the government office...He used to be an Imam, but suffered and starved in Taiwan!"

Allision Lee, Secretary-general of the Yilan Migrant Fishermen Union

2.1 The Infamous Human Rights Record of Taiwan's Fishing Industry

The concerning degree of human rights abuse and mistreatment onboard Taiwanese fishing owned and flagged vessels has been repeatedly publicly profiled over the past years including lack of safety equipment,⁹ excessive overtime,¹⁰ starvation, refusal of medical treatment, abandonment,¹¹ physical constraint and imprisonment, physical violence, human trafficking,¹² and murders.¹³

The 2016 Greenpeace report "Made in Taiwan: Government Failure and Illegal, Abusive and Criminal Fisheries" emphasises the illegal wrongdoings in Taiwan, including violence and appalling labour abuses, are not sporadic but "endemic and routine" and the global Taiwanese fishing fleet is "almost entirely out of control",¹⁴ with a provided testimony stating: "I heard of or saw about 30 seafarers die since I had worked at this place."¹⁵ Additionally, the Seafood Slavery Risk Tool 2018 report has ranked Taiwan's eight tuna species with "Critical risk" from human right abuse in the supply chains.¹⁶

The human rights abuses in Taiwan's fishing industry in many ways have reflected the basis of the ILO's forced labour definition,¹⁷ manifested by the published indicators as Table 1 demonstrates:

Table 1. Some ILO indicators of identifying forced labour in practice¹⁸ that are found in Taiwan's fishing industry

Indicators of Involuntariness	Indicators of Menace Penalty
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical confinement in the work location - in prison or in private detention Psychological compulsion, i.e. an order to work, backed up by a credible threat of a penalty for non-compliance Induced indebtedness (ie. by falsification of accounts, inflated prices, reduced value of goods or services produced, excessive interest charges) Deception or false promises about types and terms of work Withholding and non-payment of wages Retention of identity documents or other valuable personal possessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical violence against worker or family or close associates Sexual violence (Threat of) supernatural retaliation Imprisonment or other physical confinement Financial penalties Denunciation to authorities (ie. police, immigration) and deportation Dismissal from current employment Exclusion from community and social life Removal of rights or privileges Deprivation of food, shelter or other necessities Loss of social status

⁵ Sui, C. (2014). Exploitation in Taiwan's \$2bn fishing industry. BBC News. Retrieved 8 October 2019, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-27498048>

⁶ Kroodsma, D. A., Mayorga, J., Hochberg, T., Miller, N. A., Boerder, K., Ferretti, & Woods, P. (2018). Tracking the global footprint of fisheries. *Science*, 359(6378), 904-908.

⁷ U.S Department of State (2014) Trafficking in Persons Report 2014. Retrieved 8 October 2019, from <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/226849.pdf>

⁸ IUU Fishing Index. (2019). Retrieved 8 October 2019, from <http://iuufishingindex.net/ranking>

⁹ The 2011 UNODC report has described the lack of safety equipment "safety equipment such as radio, fire extinguishers, life boat or life jacket are old and sometimes unusable." UNODC. (2011). Transnational organized crime in the fishing industry. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Retrieved 8 October 2019, from https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/Issue_Paper_-_TOC_in_the_Fishing_Industry.pdf

¹⁰ Testimonies from the Greenpeace report "If we were retrieving fish, we would start at six in the evening and work until morning...I have experienced working straight for 29 hours." McKinnel, T., Lee, J. Y. C., & Salmon, D. (2016). Made in Taiwan: Government Failure and Illegal, Abusive and Criminal Fisheries. Greenpeace East Asia. Retrieved 8 October 2019, from <https://storage.googleapis.com/planet4-international-stateless/2016/04/1f3e47c1-taiwan-tuna-rpt-2016.pdf>

¹¹ Urbina, I. (2015). Tricked and Indebted on Land, Abused or Abandoned at Sea. The New York Times. Retrieved 27 August 2018, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/09/world/asia/philippines-fishing-ships-illegal-manning-agencies.html>

¹² McKinnel, T., Croft, S., & Lee, J. Y. C. (2018). Mystery at Sea: human suffering in Taiwan's distant water fishing fleet. Greenpeace East Asia. Retrieved 27 August 2018, from <https://interactives.stuff.co.nz/2018/05/caught/misery-at-sea.pdf>

¹³ Taiwan News. (2018). Taiwan fisheries agency issues report following horrifying death of Indonesian worker. Retrieved 26 August 2018, from <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3451217>

¹⁴ McKinnel, T., Lee, J. Y. C., & Salmon, D. (2016). Made in Taiwan: Government Failure and Illegal, Abusive and Criminal Fisheries. Greenpeace East Asia. Retrieved 8 October 2019, from <https://storage.googleapis.com/planet4-international-stateless/2016/04/1f3e47c1-taiwan-tuna-rpt-2016.pdf>

¹⁵ Page 21, testimony from CK*, Indonesian - 37 years old. *ibid.*

¹⁶ Seafood Slavery Risk Tool. (2018). Fisheries Profile Data Analysis – Taiwan. http://srrt.prod.s3.amazonaws.com/Fishery_Profile_Tuna_Swordfish_Taiwan_28-Feb-2018_FINAL_5FFnc71.pdf

¹⁷ ILO. (2012). ILO Indicators of Forced Labour. Retrieved 8 October 2019, from https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_203832.pdf

¹⁸ ILO. (2005). A Global Alliance against Forced Labor: Global Report under the Follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. Page 6. Retrieved 8 October 2019, from <https://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/ilc/ilc93/pdf/rep-i-b.pdf>

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2.2 The Trends and Trajectory of Fishermen Employment in Taiwan's fishing industry

When it comes to human rights situation in Taiwan's fishing industry, it is necessary to understand the crew background and employment history of the industry to understand the origin and context of the systemic problems being exposed in respect of both national and in particular migrant fishers.

Despite the "4Ds" classification underscoring the known working conditions reflecting the 'Distance', 'Danger,' 'Difficulty' and 'Dirty' nature of the role, employment as fishermen used to be a lucrative business in the previous decades. However, in the 1980s following fish stock decline¹⁹ commercial profits shrank and the industry started to seek cheaper labour to undertake the same if not increased levels of dangerous work at sea to keep crew costs down and profits up. In relation to the modern development of Taiwanese society, few Taiwanese citizens would prioritize being a fisherman as being a professionally attractive job and therefore numbers entering the industry appear to be in sharp decline.

The Taiwanese fishing industry has experienced roughly three waves of labour power changes from the indigenous Taiwanese, to Chinese, and then to Southeast Asian dominance. Up to the 1980s, fishermen who worked on Taiwanese vessels were predominantly vulnerable indigenous Taiwanese.²⁰ When the indigenous Taiwanese became economically better off, the destitute Chinese from Southern China came to work in the Taiwanese fishing industry. In 1990s the number of Chinese fishermen in Taiwan reached 30,000 but in the 2000s due to "lack of protection of rights for the Chinese fishermen", the Chinese government restricted allowing Chinese fishermen to work in Taiwanese fishing industry.²¹ After the Chinese society developed away from poverty and the welfare and protection of Chinese fishermen in Taiwan improved dramatically due to constant dialogue between the two governments, Southeast Asian fishermen became the dominate labour power in Taiwan's fishing industry. Take the Coastal and offshore fisheries for example. In 2005 there were 9000 more Chinese fishermen and 1000 fishermen from other foreign nationalities, however in 2014, there were only 1500 Chinese fishermen, while other foreign nationalities increased to 9000.²²

Currently, despite senior crew such as Captains and Chief Engineers predominantly being of Taiwanese nationality, at its core the multi-billion dollar Taiwanese fishing industry still primarily consist of foreign fishermen from Southeast Asian countries who receive less human rights oversight and protections compared with native Taiwanese workers.

This trend in the increased use of cheaper foreign labour implies an ominous trajectory with disparities of wages, rights and protections between the crew and their employers increasing. With the current composition of a high percentage of illiterate, deprived and vulnerable workers who do not speak either Mandarin or English, combined with the isolated and invisible environment away from the land the human rights situation in terms of the protections, accountability and imposition of effective remedies for abuses at sea is currently fragile in the industry.

3. COASTAL AND OFFSHORE FISHERY



- By July 2019, there are 12,233 foreign fishermen employed under Taiwan's domestic employment scheme, mostly working in the coastal and offshore fishery. Among them, 73.9% are Indonesian, 13.9% are Filipino, and 11.9% are Vietnamese.²³
- Burning human rights issues in the sector include: a) abusive living condition, b) lack of safety and sanitation facilities, c) abusive requirements from the management team.

¹⁹ "After 1980s, the tuna longline fishing in Taiwan had a hard time because of the lack of labor and the shortage of offshore catches." See Chen, H. (2006). Location Analysis of Taiwan's Fishing Landing Base in Bali, Indonesia. *Journal of Geographical Research* No.45, November 2006. Retrieved 8 October 2019, from http://www.geo.ntnu.edu.tw/files/paper/208_e0518cbb.pdf, and FA. (n.d.) Chapter Three: Legend of Fisheries, Four main fisheries industries: 1945-2011 (第三篇 漁業傳奇 四大漁業篇: 1945-2011年) Retrieved 8 October 2019, from <https://www.fa.gov.tw/upload/168/2013020812470776611.pdf>

²⁰ Chien, C. (2017). Selling life afar - the sorrow of Indigenous (賣命在遠方 - 原住民灌漿工悲歌). *Mirror Media*. Retrieved 8 October 2019, from <https://www.mirrormedia.mg/story/20170310pol005/>

²¹ See Chiang Y. (2016a). Taiwan and Indonesia collude to exploit the tens of thousands of fishermen (台印聯手剝削萬名漁工) *The Reporter*. Retrieved 8 October 2019, from <https://www.twreporter.org/a/far-sea-fishing-indonesia-agency>

²² Chang, H. (2017). Ships and shores: The image of the last generation Chinese fishermen (船與岸: 最後一代中國大陸漁工縮影). *The Reporter*. Retrieved 8 October 2019, from <https://www.twreporter.org/a/china-migrant-fisherman>

²³ Official statistics from the Taiwanese Fisheries Agency. <https://www.fa.gov.tw/>

²⁴ Coincidentally, the author visited a port on a typhoon (hurricane) day and witnessed fishermen living in the fishing vessels despite the strong and heavy rain.

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Photo: The only two entrances to the kitchen and the accommodation of this longline tuna vessel are next to the stairs.



Photo: The entrance is tiny and hard to cross - risky for emergency.



Photo: The kitchen is right next to the entrance.



Photo: The height of the dormitory is extremely low. The air smells of petrol as the engine room is immediately adjacent. No toilet or shower facilities are provided in this vessel.



Photo: Behind the man is the room for the fisherman. The size of the entire room is about 60 cm (width) by 170cm (length). This is the dormitory for 5 - 6 crew, except the Captain.

3.1 Abusive Living Conditions

Most of the Taiwanese coastal fishing vessels are designed to be at sea only for a few days with the shorter distances between fishing grounds and coastal ports making the vessels comparatively smaller in size than for the distant water fishing vessels. This manifests in shockingly confined accommodation and living spaces for crew on existing vessels. To squeeze in an entire crew in such confined spaces creates an environment that is inevitably filthy with poor hygiene conditions. The inhumane living environment is not only against basic human rights, but it can cause serious safety concerns in the case of poor environmental conditions at sea. **If such a vessel faced a serious emergency at sea the crew may well face life-threatening challenges to be able to escape from such confined spaces.**

Moreover, even though coastal and offshore fishing vessels return to the port regularly, over 90% of foreign fishermen live in the vessels without having accommodation ashore. The reason is debatable and while some argue that it is the money saving strategy of migrant fishermen, some stakeholders have pointed that vessel owners often demand that fishermen must 'guard the vessel' and sleep in the boat.²⁴

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photo © Mina Chiang

Photo: Because of the confined and poor living conditions onboard, fishermen sometimes choose to stay on deck using a hammock or sleep outside on the deck.



photo © Mina Chiang



photo © Fr. Thiet John



photo © Mina Chiang

Photos (left to right) 1. Inside the cabin there is no private space provided, personal items such as clothes are scattered. Each cupboard space can be inhabited by a single crew member. **2.** The entrance to the living accommodation can be viewed behind the heel of the crew member **3.** The image depicts a two-member crew room each with an electric fan for ventilation. The lower space is used as storage room, but in other vessels viewed can also serve as individual sleeping areas. The space is otherwise used as the kitchen and the food consumption area.

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Photos: A toilet plus shower room on two vessels.

3.2 Lack of Safety and Sanitation Facilities

“Because of no toilet available onboard, there are cases of fishermen fall in the sea when they put themselves on the edge of the boats.”

*Fr. Thiet John, Migrant Workers' Concern Desk (MWCD), Taipei Archdiocese.*²⁵

Personal safety devices such as life jackets are not easily found on the vessels inspected and if there are available some of the fishermen describe that they may be forbidden to use them by the Captain. Many vessels do not have a toilet or shower room meaning that fishermen have to deal with their personal needs as able to. In the cases that toilet and shower rooms are available, the sanitation and upkeep conditions are still far from satisfactory. Those spaces are small and invariably unsanitary.

3.3 Abusive Working Conditions²⁶

The reported abusive working conditions range from forced overtime, deliberate starvation, to intentionally failing to rescue fishermen who fall overboard. There were reported cases of fishermen describing being forced to stand and stay up for the entire night without sitting and being forbidden from having access to food. There were reported cases of fishermen complaining of low quality and unhealthy meals such as instant noodles being served for long periods. In one fatal case highlighted, a fisherman fell overboard and drowned while the victim's brother, who worked on the same vessel, described that the Captain ordered them to continue fishing instead of attempting to rescue the victim.²⁷

Unlike the distant water fishing fleets that have significant commercial and financial investment with supporting company structures, coastal fishing vessels are often owned by smaller fishing operators and individuals under flag State control. This means the Captain can be also be the owner, but which is less likely to be found in the distant water fisheries, and means the management style and safety culture may vary widely.

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4. THE DISTANT WATER FISHING INDUSTRY

“(This is) hell on earth.”

An interviewed fisherman murmured.



- By August 2019, FA's official statistics states 23,000 foreign fishermen are employed under Taiwan's Overseas Employment Scheme and the majority is from Indonesia.²⁸
- The minimum wage in Taiwan is US\$770 for both Taiwanese and migrant workers in all occupation, while the minimum wage for fishermen under the Overseas Employment Scheme is US\$450, the only exception among all industries.
- Burning human rights issues including: excessive overtime, illegal deduction of salary, abuse and violence.

Fishermen in the distant water fishing industry suffer from systematic discrimination from the Overseas Employment Scheme (See Table 2 in section 5.1) due to the disparity of minimum wage and legal protections comparing with the all other occupations in Taiwan. Besides the low salaries, fishermen also experience difficulties in obtaining medical treatment both onboard the vessels and in port for current policy and regulation reasons, as fishermen in the distant water fleets are not protected by the Taiwanese Labour Standards Act. The Taiwan Migrant Worker Human Rights' Protection Alliance has therefore been advocating for the abolishment of the Overseas Employment Scheme to normalise fishermen's employment management to be protected by the Labour Standards Act.²⁹

4.1 Excessive Overtime

Overtime has almost become a normalized practice in the industry.³⁰ There is existing literature describing the forced labour and excessive overtime in Taiwan's distant water fishing industry³¹, and this study and field research revealed examples of a longline fishing vessels' daily schedule of operation from first-hand testimony.

Besides sleeping, there is almost no resting time for the fishermen due to constant deck work while sleeping periods can often be in the afternoons instead of at night. For example, vessels may choose to set lines³² before dawn meaning fishermen have to prepare the bait before 4 am with minimum rest before retrieval of the lines then commencing the cycle. The sleeping time for fishermen was reported as ranging from 4 - 6 hours breaking down into several short periods throughout the day and on an irregular basis.

Constant overtime and lack of sleep makes the vessel operation environment hazardous. Injuries from machine operations, knife work, or issues with ropes are common. Moreover, it was reported that fishermen are often not allowed to rest and recover after sustaining injuries, but instead are made to continue to work while being in constant contact with sea water, poor sanitary conditions, while consuming unhealthy food and failing to receive proper medical care thereby worsening and delaying recovery from their wounds.

²⁵ Interviewed on the 22nd August in Taipei.

²⁶ Requirements may often come from the vessel management team, meaning those who hold higher position and power, including captains and chief engineers.

²⁷ Interview with the Migrant Workers' Concern Desk (MWCD), Taipei Archdiocese.

²⁸ Official statistics from the Taiwanese Fisheries Agency. <https://www.fa.gov.tw/>

²⁹ Greenpeace. (2018). Eradicating the abuses of migrant fishermen; abolishing the Overseas Employment Scheme (杜絕外籍漁工受虐事件，廢除境外聘僱). Retrieved 18 August 2018, from <https://www.greenpeace.org/archive-taiwan/zh/press/releases/oceans/2018/NGOs-Joint-Statement/>

³⁰ At the beginning of one private interview with two Indonesian fishermen, fishermen described that the condition in that ship is great and they are satisfied with everything. When the author continued asking them about the daily working hours, they revealed 17 hours a day, which even surprised the translator. As they described and calculated the detailed working schedule, the aggregate work hour was more than 17 hours, but the two fishermen did not consider it as an abusive working condition.

³¹ For example, see testimonies "I was forced to work almost 24 hours a day and never got paid my full salary. I was often whipped by my captain when I was sick and could not work or worked slowly" from Sui, C. (2014). Exploitation in Taiwan's \$2bn fishing industry. BBC. Retrieved 18 August 2018, from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-27498048>

³² For context, unlike recreational fishing, in the industrial operation, both set line and retrieval line take hours to complete.

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4.2 Illegal Deductions of Salary

Illegal deductions of salary was the single dominant complaint from the fishermen interviewed, as their opportunity for better financial earnings for themselves to pass to their families is the fundamental reason for fishermen to go to work on a foreign-flagged vessels. The complaints extended to the reality that the promised wages were not being realised once in employment and away at sea.

While illegal deductions happen in both the coastal and distant water fleets, it is reported as being particularly severe in the latter as the promised salaries are much lower than for coastal crews. The deductions occur for seemingly legitimate reasons including for 'service fees', or 'debt of the recruitment fee' but with falsified promises or reasons. In many cases, migrant fishermen suffer from six months or longer periods of illegal deductions for payments to the recruitment agencies as they recover recruitment fees.

During the field research on a Taiwanese-owned vessel two fishermen described that they were promised US\$300 a month to sign on, but to date had only received US\$50 a month. While either amount would be illegal under the Taiwanese Fishing Regulation³³ (minimum wage for overseas recruitment is US\$450) local NGOs and authorities were not able to deal with the situation at flag State level as the vessel was registered under the Japanese Flag and despite noting that Japan is listed under the Paris MoU as low risk³⁴.



Flag of Convenience

The Flag of Convenience practice is probably by far the most challenging loophole in improving human rights in the industry as it is beyond the control of a single State.³⁵ While globally, many fishing vessels are invested and owned by the Taiwanese owners, the vessels can be easily registered under other Flag State such as Panama, Vanuatu, Seychelles for less strict fishing regulations, or for accessing a particular fishing ground. However, while the Taiwanese Fisheries Agency is able to tackle the human rights condition on the Taiwanese vessels, there are currently no legal instruments for it to deal with foreign vessels under Flags of Convenience.

4.3 Abuse and Violence

As distant water fisheries fleets are characterised as working between several months to years at sea without returning to home ports, the extended periods of extreme isolation are a key factor for the genesis of abuse and violence towards and between crew members. The onboard tensions and subsequent abuse can occur between the vessel management team and the crew, but also between crew members especially from different nationalities. Verbal abuse and physical abuse are reported as being the norm. There are also cases of murders at sea triggered by the prevalence of long-standing abuse,³⁶ though some cases are concluded as being caused by undiagnosed and untreated mental health issues of individual crew members who then have no access to specific health care support while at sea, but in the cases highlighted it was not clear if there were pre-existing mental health issues. Local NGOs have started to raise awareness of the mental health of the fishermen.

5. KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Building on existing literature of the poor human rights record of Taiwan's fishing industry, this study brings attention to the poor support structure of national human rights protections and remedies in the Taiwanese fishing industry. Besides stakeholders such as the fishermen and vessel owners, there are two other key entities that influence the sector dynamics when it comes to effective systemic change, namely the Taiwanese Fisheries Agency and the recruitment agencies.

³³ See Article 6, Regulations on the Authorization and Management of Overseas Employment of Foreign Crew Members. Ministry of Justice. (2019). Regulations on the Authorization and Management of Overseas Employment of Foreign Crew Members. Law and Regulation Database of Republic of China. Retrieved 8 October 2019, from <https://law.moj.gov.tw/ENG/LawClass/LawAll.aspx?pcode=M0050061>

³⁴ Paris MOU on Port State Control. (2019). Flags meeting low risk criteria. Retrieved 8 October 2019, from <https://www.parismou.org/inspections-risk/ship-risk-profile/flags-meeting-low-risk-criteria>

³⁵ Gianni, M., & Simpson, W. (2005). The Changing Nature of High Seas Fishing: how flags of convenience provide cover for illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Retrieved 8 October 2019, from <http://assets.wwf.org.uk/downloads/flagsofconvenience.pdf>

³⁶ NPOst. TW (2018) Murders at sea of vessel "Heshun Cai No. 237", how many times can we still bear for this? (「和順才 237 號」海上喋血案，我們還能承受幾次?) Retrieved 8 October 2019, from <https://npost.tw/archives/48398>

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“Despite the regulation change, human rights improvement is limited.”

5.1 The Role of Taiwan's Fisheries Agency

Positively, the Government of Taiwan has started to both address and highlight the issues of poor living and working conditions at sea and in 2019 successfully managed to have Taiwan's EU IUU Yellow card rescinded. However, as the Yellow card is primarily a policy instrument for environmental impacts that requires constant oversight and implementation of recommendations, local NGO workers stated that **“Despite the regulation change, human rights improvement is limited.”**

Moreover, from the publicly available list of individuals and companies fined due to misconduct in fisheries,³⁷ there is a trend that abuses linked to environmental impacts (ie. overfishing above the permitted quota, unloading fish in ports without permission, or failing to report the catch correctly) received more severe sanctions than misconduct regarding human and labour rights abuses (i.e. illegally hiring of foreign fishermen and failure to pay the minimum wage). The difference can be as high as ten times.

For example, on 18th June 2019, a tuna longline vessel was fined for NT\$250,000 (around US\$8,169) for employing 12 migrant workers without work permits,³⁸ and on 19th February, a tuna longline vessel was fined NT\$2 million (around US\$65,359) for unloading fish without permits. Meantime, the Global Slavery Index hence ranks Taiwan's Government Response Rating (to modern slavery) as CCC,³⁹ showing a clear gap for the Taiwanese Government to both address and improve against.

The role of the Taiwanese Fisheries Agency in the current government structure is worth reviewing. While all labourers should be managed under the Minister of Labour, the Fisheries Agency is the only exception amongst the Taiwanese Government departments that manages labourers in the fisheries industry.

The Agency is in charge of the Overseas Employment Scheme⁴⁰, a controversial practice that minimises Taiwan's labour protection responsibility and maximises workers vulnerability while the recruitment agencies service the private Taiwanese vessel owners to source cheap Southeast Asian labour. The Overseas Employment Scheme therefore arguably encourages the distant water fishing fleets to employ migrant fishermen outside the normal Labour Law protections and also notably did not regulate minimum wage prior to 2016 (Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of the two systems for fishermen in different sectors

	Fishermen of coastal and offshore fisheries (Land-based)	Fishermen of distant water fishery (Sea-based)
Competent authority	Ministry of Labour	Fisheries Agency
Applicable laws and regulations	Employment Service Act Labour Standards Act	Acts for Distant Water Fisheries
Insurance	Standard Labour Insurance Taiwan National Health Insurance	Private accident, medical and life insurance (life insurance should not less than NT\$ 1 million, approximately US\$32,300)
Minimum wage	Around US\$770/month (Regulated by the Labour Standards Act)	US\$450/month (effective on Jan 2017)

International and local Taiwanese NGOs advocating for better human rights standards in the fishing industry have been strongly pushing for abolishing the Agency's scope of responsibility in managing labour recruitment, with the argument being that it should be the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and therefore subject to existing State labour rights protections.

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5.2 Recruitment Agencies

While recruitment agencies ('middlemen' or 'brokers') usually tend to be associated only with the initial recruitment process; in the Taiwanese fishing industry middlemen are key stakeholders who are involved throughout the entire period of the employment contract and which may run for between several months to years. They are responsible for dealing with crew pay, deductions and logistical issues. The 'middlemen' hold the personal data, run the contracts and therefore hold the power over the fishermen.

During the field research, there were reported and numerous cases of middlemen misusing their power and abusing fishermen in different ways. Most frequently these involved money disputes, including the indebtedment of fishermen through charging unreasonable recruitment fees, delays in wage payments, or illegal deductions of the salary.

Take the distant water fisheries for example, as fishermen work for months or years at sea, on average it was reported that they will only take US\$50 per month from their salaries for personal expenses on the vessel leaving the recruitment agency to send the remainder directly back to their families, giving chances for Taiwanese or local agencies to embezzle the money.⁴¹

More worryingly, the middlemen received payment from both the employers and the fishermen they are meant to treat both equitably, though in reality middlemen were found to mostly ally their interest and position with the employer. For example, when foreign fishermen suffer from occupational injuries, middlemen were reported as tending to immediately send the fishermen home from Taiwan without demanding compensation from the employers therefore ending their contracts of employment. Under such circumstances the problem is removed from their books with no requirement to follow up with injured fishermen, leaving them in positions of potential destitution dependent on the severity of the injury.

The practice of middlemen in the Taiwanese fishing industry fits the ILO Indicators of Involuntariness:

- Recruitment linked to debt
- Deception about the nature of the work; deceptive recruitment
- Induced or inflated indebtedness

And the ILO Indicators of Menace of Penalty:

- Confiscation of identity papers or travel documents
- Withholding of wages
- Withholding of assets (cash or other)

Reflecting on the human rights problems caused by the brokerage system, Taiwanese NGOs are strongly advocating for direct employment and the abolishment of the middlemen's role.⁴²

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6. CURRENT INITIATIVES

“The implementation of ILO Convention 188 is currently being carried by the Ministry of Labour and the Human Rights Protection Promotion Group of Executive Yuan.”

6.1 NGO Actions

In Taiwan when comparing the number of civil society organisations focusing on non-maritime related labour rights issues, the number of organisations concentrating on fishermen's human rights protections appears comparatively small. However, seven international and local NGOs have been leading this agenda, through the Taiwan Migrant Worker Human Rights' Protection Alliance,⁴³ namely:

- Presbyterian Church in Taiwan Seamen and Fishermen's Service Centre
- Taiwan Association of Human Rights, Serve the People Association
- Taiwan International Workers Association
- Yilan Migrant Fishermen Union
- Environmental Justice Foundation
- Greenpeace
- Serve the People Association, Taoyuan

Those involved have carried most of the work through initiating sector improvement including:

- Empowerment events (to understand laws and regulations to deal with potential abuses)
- Training on basic human rights
- Sheltering of victims
- Supplies delivery (personal and professional items for day-to-day living and work)
- Festival activities
- Ship visiting activities
- Provision of recreation areas
- Campaigning the rights of fishermen to the authority and the public

The focus of these improvement activities on behalf of fishermen tend, however, to be focused for the coastal fleets and not for the distant water fishing fleets due to the nature that the DWF fishermen rarely return to shore.

³⁷ FA. (2018). List of disciplined illegal cases based on the Act for Distant Water Fisheries (遠洋漁業條例違規分名單), Combating the IUU fishing (打擊IUU漁業). Fisheries Agency. Retrieved 8 October 2019, from <https://www.fa.gov.tw/cht/PolicyIUU/content.aspx?id=9&chk=8db63778-3976-47f0-97c4-052aba6fc627¶m=pn%3d1>

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Other countries ranked as CCC include: Haiti, Barbados, Nepal, Jordan, Malaysia, Lesotho, etc. Global Slavery Index. (2018). Global Findings. Retrieved 8 October 2019, from <https://www.globallslaveryindex.org/2018/findings/global-findings/>

⁴⁰ Ministry of Justice. (2019). Regulations on the Authorization and Management of Overseas Employment of Foreign Crew Members. Law and Regulation Database of Republic of China. Retrieved 8 October 2019, from <https://law.moj.gov.tw/ENG/LawClass/LawAll.aspx?pcode=M0050061>

⁴¹ Interview with Presbyterian Church in Taiwan Seamen and Fishermen's Service Centre.

⁴² Greenpeace. (2018). Eradicating the abuses of migrant fishermen; abolishing the Overseas Employment Scheme (杜絕外籍漁工受虐事件，廢除境外聘僱). Retrieved 18 August 2018, from <https://www.greenpeace.org/archive-taiwan/zh/press/releases/oceans/2018/NGOs-Joint-Statement/>

⁴³ EJF. (2019). Only word but no actions for preventing human trafficking, migrant fishermen continues to be abused (人口販運防制光說不做，外籍漁工繼續受剝削). Retrieved 18 August 2018, <https://ejf.org/news-media/2019/人口販運防制光說不做-外籍漁工繼續受剝削>

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6.2 State Actions

The Taiwanese Government has demonstrated their determination to improve the sector through the regulation change. Out of the ten measurements⁴⁴ EJF set for the States, the Taiwanese authority has successfully achieved seven outperforming other Asian countries. The measurements include “publishing information about arrests and sanctions imposed on individuals and companies for IUU fishing activities, human trafficking and other related crimes” and “publishing up-to-date lists of fishing licenses and authorization, as well as vessel registries”. Taiwanese authorities have also now started to directly engage with the potential implementation of the ILO 188 Working in Fishing Convention.

Most recently and notably while the human rights situation in the fishing industry is far from satisfactory, there are promising development activities through application of new of State regulations being implemented by the Government, including:

- In June 2019, the Fisheries Agency has applied the ILO C188 Work in Fishing Convention 2007 standards for Taiwanese vessel building regulations to improve fishermen’s living and working conditions.⁴⁵ Not only do the new vessels need to be built accordingly, the Regulation also incentivises vessel owners by allowing extra tonnage in the vessel construction to include better living conditions to replace older and unsuitable vessels. The Regulation will come into force in June 2020;⁴⁶
- The process of comprehensively adopting ILO C188 into domestic law is currently being coordinated by the Ministry of Labour and the Human Rights Protection Promotion Group of Executive Yuan⁴⁷ The fact that C188 is discussed in Taiwan in the high level beyond the Fisheries Agency demonstrates the determination of the Taiwanese government to reform the sector.
- By August 2019, the Fisheries Agency had interviewed (by questionnaire) 1,338 fishermen from the overseas employment scheme in both Taiwanese and foreign ports. There were four cases involving fishing vessels that were sent to the District Persecutors’ Office for review because of alleged human trafficking cases.⁴⁸

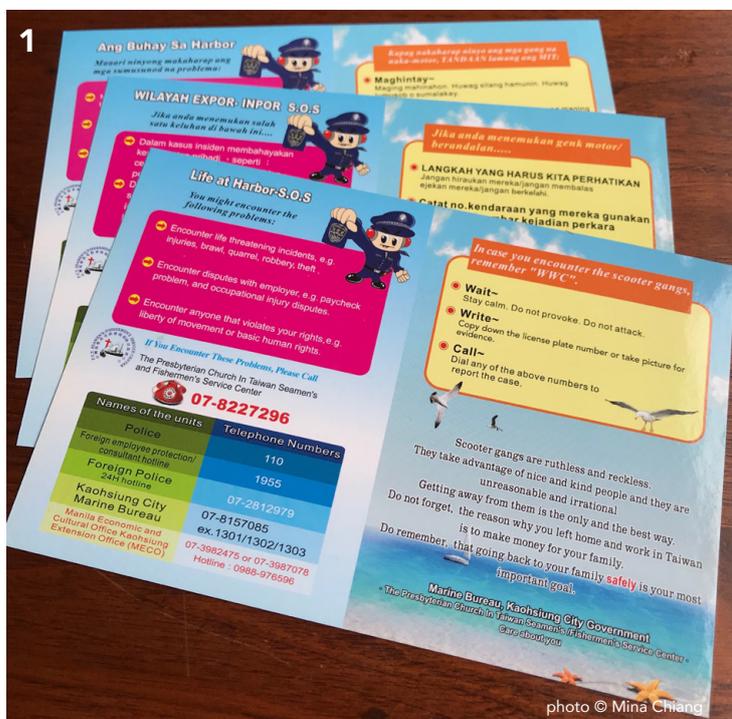


Photo 1. Information cards issued by the Marine Bureau, Kaohsiung City Government and the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan Seamen and Fishermen’s Service Centre These are in three language versions with information for hot-lines to complain or seek protection.

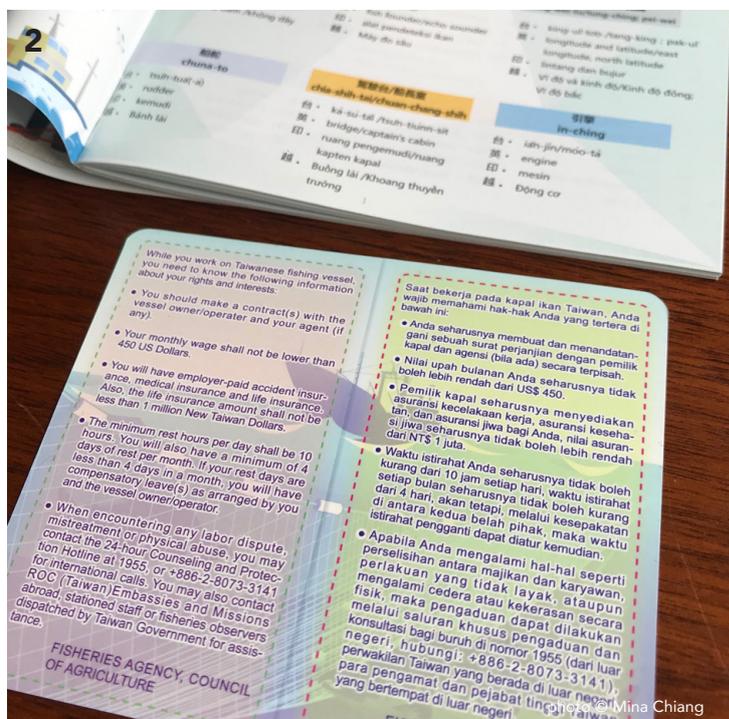


Photo 2. The working-on-fishing-vessel-language and the information card issued by the Fisheries Agency. The book provides guidance for working on fishing vessels in five languages and the card provides rights information, including stating the minimum wage US\$450, minimum insurance amounts, maximum daily working hours and the labour complaint hotline 1955.

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7. CONCLUSIONS

While Taiwan may well pride itself as the progressive front line State for protecting human rights in Asia,⁴⁹ the human rights situation in Taiwan's fishing industry only recently appears to be starting to improve when compared to international human rights standards and other State's fishing policies⁵⁰ protecting working conditions and fundamental rights of fishermen. Publicly available reports and investigations in Taiwan suggest that the deterioration of human rights in the fishing sector has been ongoing for decades until it gained civil society NGO and media attention post 2010. In parallel, there is the effect of the emerging international trend of transparent reporting driven by the likes of the 2011 UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and civil society actions which may apply globally. The primary reason for this deterioration appears to be the uneven power dynamic between the four main stakeholders: the increasingly vulnerable foreign (migrant) fishermen, Government authority that is strong in regulation but still weak in implementation, manipulative manpower agencies, and the affluent and powerful (often foreign owned) fishing companies including large vessel owners.

As demonstrated in this Baseline Study, the de facto human rights situation in Taiwan's fishing industry remains challenging in many respects related to the interactions and often competing agendas of the four main stakeholders. Nevertheless, the current and positive Government engagement demonstrates a raising determination on protecting human rights in the sector.



⁴⁴ E.J.F. (2018). Out of the shadows: improving transparency in global fisheries to stop illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Page 4. E.J.F.

⁴⁵ Council of Agriculture, Executive Yuan. (2019). Regulations for the Issuance of Building Permit and Fishing License of Fishing Vessel. Law and Regulations Retrieving system. Retrieved 8 October 2019, from <https://law.coa.gov.tw/gjrsnewsout/EngLawContent.aspx?id=363>

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ In several publicly-accessible meeting minutes of the Human Rights Protection Promotion Group, the discussion of ILO C188 is on the agenda and being discussed, although still in its early stage debating on which department should be in charge of the implementation. Retrieved 8 October 2019, from <http://www.humanrights.moj.gov.tw/cp-502-31644-463ac-200.html>

⁴⁸ Statistics gathered from the written brief from the Fisheries Agency.

⁴⁹ Taiwan is the first country in Asia that legalise same-sex marriage and the Asia-Pacific branch of Federation of Intl human rights museum alliance. See BBC. (2019). Taiwan gay marriage: Parliament legalises same-sex unions. Retrieved 8 October 2019, from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-48305708>, and DeAeth, D. (2019). Asia-Pacific branch of human rights museum alliance launched in Taipei. Taiwan News. Retrieved 8 October 2019, from <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3771304>

⁵⁰ European States such as The Netherlands, Spain and the UK.

⁵¹ There are also cases that villagers who never worked at sea being brought from mountainous area directly to Taiwan and suffered from severe sea sick, as well as fishermen who do not know how to swim. In the recent cases of murdering at sea in the Wen Peng fishing vessel, several Indonesian fishermen were killed and was described by the NGO workers as "they don't know how to swim". We Peng case: Everington, K. (2019). Filipino indicted for murder after eight die on Taiwanese fishing boat. Taiwan News. <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3744935>

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8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for the Taiwanese Fishing Authority:

1. Strengthen international collaboration and learn from other countries' experience to accelerate the process of extending human rights protections at sea.
2. Strengthen implementation of the existing laws, policies and instruments in respect of human rights protections for national and migrant fishermen in the maritime sector.
3. Abolish the Overseas Employment Scheme and ensure that all migrant fishermen, whatever their State origin, are protected by Taiwanese Labour Law when employed in maritime roles.
4. Return labour and recruitment agency management responsibilities from the Fisheries Agencies to the Ministry of Labour.
5. Safeguard and provide necessary training for migrant fishermen prior to work⁵¹
6. Embed the philosophy and State-led narrative of 'human rights at sea' in the national agenda.



photo © Mina Chiang

Who We Are

BACKGROUND

Human Rights at Sea was established in April 2014. It was founded as an initiative to explore issues of maritime human rights development, review associated policies and legislation, and to undertake independent investigation of abuses at sea. It rapidly grew beyond all expectations and for reasons of governance it became a registered charity under the UK Charity Commission in 2015.

Today, the charity is an established, regulated and independent registered non-profit organisation based on the south coast of the United Kingdom. It undertakes **R**esearch, **E**ducation, **A**dvocacy and **L**obbying specifically for human rights issues in the maritime environment, including contributing to support for the human element that underpins the global maritime and fishing industries.

The charity works internationally with all individuals, commercial and maritime community organisations that have similar objectives as ourselves, including all the principal maritime welfare organisations.

OUR MISSION

To explicitly raise awareness, implementation and accountability of human rights provisions throughout the maritime environment, especially where they are currently absent, ignored or being abused.



STAY IN CONTACT



We welcome any questions, comments or suggestions. Please send your feedback to:
Human Rights at Sea, VBS Langstone Technology Park, Langstone Road, Havant. PO9 1SA. UK



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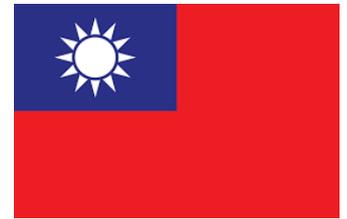
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World Map: Taiwan



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Human Rights at Sea Baseline Study

On the Awareness and Application of Human Rights in Taiwan's Fishing Industry

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