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Regional Plan of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries (RPOA-SSF) Mid-term event

 6-7 July 2024

 Rome, Italy



Executive summary

This Regional Plan of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea ([RPOA-SSF](#)) mid-term event was held in Rome, Italy, on 6–7 July 2024, in the context of the [SSF Summit](#). The meeting was attended by 52 small-scale fishers, small-scale fisheries stakeholder organizations and non-governmental organizations from 15 Mediterranean and Black Sea countries, as well as the European Commission. As 2024 marked the half-way point in the ten-year RPOA-SSF, the meeting aimed to give voice to fishers and fish workers in evaluating advances in the implementation of the RPOA-SSF, assessing changing circumstances and shifting priorities, and providing guidance towards a more sustainable and resilient SSF sector by 2028. The meeting featured two sessions, focusing, respectively, on taking stock of progress in RPOA-SSF implementation and consolidating a common vision for the future of the RPOA-SSF, with the latter session also consisting of a roundtable dialogue with representatives of RPOA-SSF signatory countries and partner organizations. The participants adopted a series of conclusions and recommendations for the way forward with a strong emphasis on the urge to promote generational turnover and address the impacts of climate change, as well as on the need to consolidate a mechanism for the integration of inputs of small-scale fisheries stakeholders in the fisheries management advisory process at both the regional and national levels. The RPOA-SSF mid-term event was not a standalone occurrence; rather, it represented a pivotal step within an ongoing process, building on consultations with technical experts held during the GFCM Working Group on Small-Scale Fisheries in March 2024, and foreseen to be further enriched by decision-makers during the GFCM annual session in November 2024.

Background and objectives of the meeting

1. The mid-term event of the Regional Plan of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea ([RPOA-SSF](#)) was held in Rome, Italy, on 6–7 July 2024. The meeting was attended by 52 small-scale fishers, small-scale fisheries stakeholder organizations and non-governmental organizations from 15 Mediterranean and Black Sea countries, as well as the European Commission. The meeting was supported by members of the [Friends of SSF](#), particularly the WWF Mediterranean Marine Initiative (WWF MMI) and the Mediterranean Advisory Council (MEDAC). The meeting agenda is provided in Appendix 1 and the list of participants is provided in Appendix 2.
2. The GFCM recalled that the mid-term event was organized in the framework of the [SSF Summit 2024](#), following a successful first edition in 2022, and ahead of the thirty-sixth session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI), also offering the opportunity to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication ([SSF Guidelines](#)).
3. In line with the meeting objectives to evaluate advances made in the implementation of the RPOA-SSF on the occasion of its mid-term point, the participants reviewed the status of implementation of the RPOA-SSF, assessing changing circumstances and shifting priorities, and agreed on priority actions needed towards reaching the objectives of the RPOA-SSF by 2028.
4. The RPOA-SSF mid-term event was composed of two break-out sessions within the SSF Summit, providing a space to discuss key strategic priorities and objectives specific to the Mediterranean and the Black Sea region, while also offering participants the opportunity to participate in the plenary sessions of the SSF Summit.
5. While the first session was envisaged as an open discussion for fishers and fish workers from across the region to share their views on progress in the implementation of the RPOA-SSF, the second session aimed at consolidating the vision of the SSF sector by 2028 on future needs and priorities, providing the occasion for dialogue with representatives from the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries of the European Commission (DG MARE), Aquatic Resources Malta, WWF North Africa and other relevant partner organizations, in view of fostering collective engagement towards reaching full implementation of the RPOA-SSF.
6. It was underscored that the RPOA-SSF mid-term event was a crucial milestone in an ongoing process, building on consultations with stakeholders and GFCM technical expert in the context of the GFCM's Working Group on Small-Scale Fisheries (WGSSF, March 2024), which together were foreseen to support discussions by decision-makers during the GFCM annual session in November 2024. It was also foreseen that the outcomes of the meeting would help shape the future vision and commitments for the SSF sector following the MedFish4Ever and Sofia Declarations.

Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the discussions and exchanges during the RPOA-SSF mid-term event, the participants agreed on the conclusions and recommendations below.

Conclusions

1. Progress has been made in implementing the RPOA-SSF since its adoption, including by putting in place tools and resources to support implementation. In particular, **the establishment of the SSF Forum**, providing a platform for fishers from across the region to exchange and share experiences,

was highlighted as an important milestone. Nevertheless, there is a need to be more ambitious if the objectives of the RPOA-SSF are to be reached by 2028.

2. A critical issue across the region is the **lack of young people entering the SSF sector**, which acutely affects the future viability and sustainability of the sector. If action is not taken, there is a risk of the SSF sector disappearing in the near future.
3. The combined **impacts of climate change, non-indigenous species, pollution and overfishing** have created a critical situation for the SSF sector. Actions to address these overarching issues need to be accelerated.
4. In valorizing the **role of women** in the sector, women's organizations in fisheries are growing, yet the sector's policies and institutional frameworks still lag in adequately reflecting their contributions and engaging with women's organizations in effective ways.
5. Advances have been made in improving **data collection**, however there is a need to ensure that fishers who contribute to data collection receive feedback on the outcomes of these activities and analyses.
6. Some important advances have been made towards **integrating fishers' inputs into the management advisory process**. These advances need to be consolidated and strengthened.
7. **Funding support is needed**, particularly for the good functioning of SSF cooperatives and organizations and to address specific issues such as climate change adaptation.
8. Some advances have been made in terms of access to **social protection** programmes at the regional level; however, more attention is needed to ensure that social protection **benefits are meaningful** and effectively promote the resilience of small-scale fishers. The lack of social protection benefits is an important issue that prevents young people from joining the sector.

Recommendations towards reaching the objectives of the RPOA-SSF by 2028

1. Consolidate a mechanism for the integration of all fisheries actors' inputs (men and women) in the fisheries management advisory process, at both the regional and national levels
2. Ensure consolidation of fora for exchanging information, best practices and experiences at the local, national and regional levels (advisory committees, SSF Forum, etc.).
3. Take urgent action to promote generational turnover in the SSF sector, including by improving the image of the sector, reducing bureaucracy (e.g. access to fishing licenses or vessel ownership), facilitating appropriate and meaningful social protection benefits and promoting participatory management in advisory processes.
4. Take urgent action to mitigate and adapt to climate change impacts (including the increasing presence of non-indigenous species), by implementing innovative strategies and mechanisms (diversification of livelihoods, expanded market opportunities for NIS, reduced dependence on fossil fuels, etc.) and addressing funding needs to promote the resilience of SSF communities.
5. Address overfishing in the Mediterranean and Black Sea region: if there are no fish, there will be no fishers. To do so, strong enforcement and control needs to be coupled with management measures adopted.

6. Encourage robust participatory data collection initiatives by establishing consistent mechanisms for reporting back to fishers on data collection results, ultimately supporting improvements in the quality of data on SSF activities and the integration of fishers' local ecological knowledge (LEK).
7. Identify gaps in financing towards securing funding sources to enhance small-scale fisheries initiatives.
8. Promote the regular assessment of RPOA-SSF implementation by signatory countries against clear indicators.
9. Support synergies across ministries and fisheries organizations to ensure coherence in regulations, enhanced awareness of the RPOA-SSF and better communication with SSF stakeholders.

Agenda

Saturday 6 July (16.00-17.30)

1. Welcome, introduction and icebreakers
2. Looking back, from 2018 to today: group discussions
3. Reporting back and open discussion on progress in RPOA-SSF implementation
4. Key concluding messages

Sunday 7 July (9.00-12.30)

1. Welcome and introduction
2. Looking forward to 2028: the road towards the full implementation of the RPOA-SSF
3. Group discussions: reflecting on implementing the RPOA-SSF towards a sustainable and resilient SSF sector by 2028?
4. Roundtable dialogue: a common vision for the future of the RPOA-SSF
5. Wrap-up: key take-away messages for the collective implementation of the RPOA-SSF in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea

List of participants

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