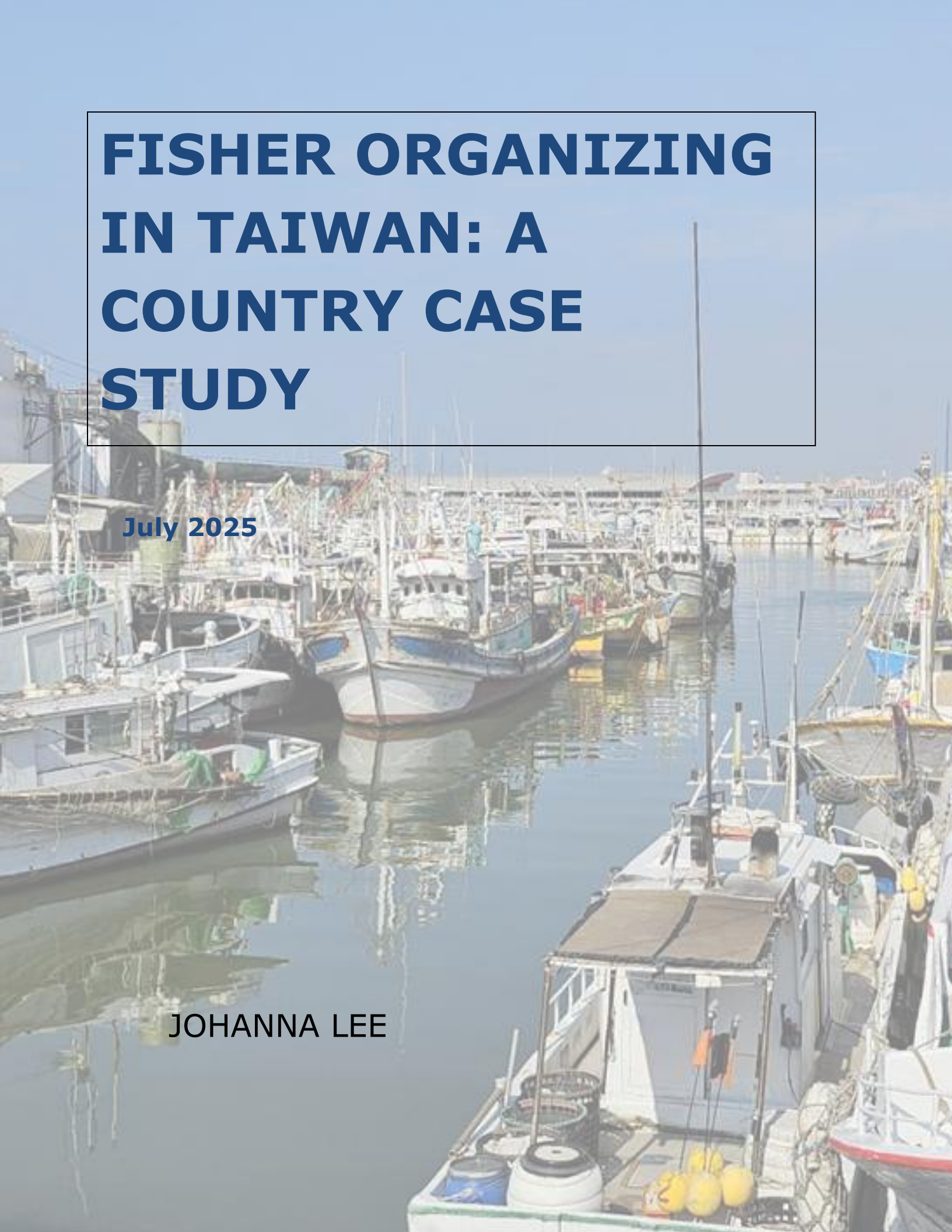


FISHER ORGANIZING IN TAIWAN: A COUNTRY CASE STUDY

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JOHANNA LEE





Purpose

This report is one in a series of six country case studies which take stock of fisher organizing in six different countries in the global south. The other case studies are of Ecuador, Ghana, Indonesia, Mexico, and Thailand. These case studies are produced by the Accountability Research Center in partnership with the Fisheries Governance Project's Enforcement and Victim Protection Working Group.

About the Accountability Research Center

The Accountability Research Center (ARC) is based in the School of International Service at American University. ARC bridges research and frontline perspectives to learn from ideas, institutions, and actors advancing strategies to improve transparency, participation, and accountability. For more, see www.accountabilityresearch.org.

About Global Labor Justice

GLJ is a strategy hub that supports transnational collaboration among worker and migrant organizations to expand labor rights and new forms of bargaining on global value chains and international labor migration corridors.

About the Fisheries Governance Project

FGP is a funder-practitioner collaboration working together to build a shared understanding of issues and solutions at the intersection of improved fisheries governance and advancements in labor rights. They center their approach on international treaties, improved market action, and enforcement and victim protection.

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Cover photo

Yanpu Harbor, Xinyuan Township, Pingtung County, 2024. Photo Credit: Johanna Lee.

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Acronyms

ARC	Accountability Research Center
CCBSP	Convention on the Conservation and Management of Pollock Resources in the Central Bering Sea
CCSBT	Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna
CSO	Civil society organization
C 188	ILO Work in Fishing Convention No 188
EU	European Union
FA	Fisheries Agency
FGP	Fisheries Governance Project
FOC	Flag of convenience
FOSPI PMFU	Forum Silaturahmi Pelaut Indonesia-Pingtung County Migrant Fishermen Union
GLJ	Global Labor Justice
IATTC	Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission
ICCAT	International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas
ILO	International Labor Organization
ITF	International Transport Workers' Federation
IUU	Illegal, unregulated, unreported
KMFU	Keelung Migrant Fishers' Union
MOL	Ministry of Labor
NPFC	North Pacific Fisheries Commission
NT	New Taiwan dollar
PSMA	Port State Measures Agreement
RFMO	Regional Fisheries Management Organization
SIOFA	Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement
SPRFMO	South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
US CBP	US Customs and Border Protection
WCPFC	Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission
WRO	Withhold Release Order
YMFU	Yilan Migrant Fishermen Union

1. Executive Summary

Taiwan has a lucrative commercial fishing industry that relies predominantly on migrant labor from Southeast Asian countries. The industry is known to present a high risk of IUU fishing and labor abuses, including forced labor. This high risk largely stems from fisheries and labor laws that render migrant fishers more vulnerable to exploitation. In response, migrant fishers from Indonesia and the Philippines have been actively organizing to advocate for improved working and living conditions on vessels, despite the significant barriers they face in exercising their right to freedom of association in Taiwan. This report profiles three migrant fishers' unions in Taiwan and highlights the Wi-Fi NOW for Fishers' Rights campaign as a case study. Led by the Forum Silaturahmi Pelaut Indonesia (FOSPI), or the Indonesian Seafarers' Gathering Forum, the campaign aims to empower migrant fishers by calling for migrant crew's access to Wi-Fi and labor rights on board Taiwanese distant water fishing vessels.

2. Introduction

Taiwan has a multibillion-dollar seafood industry and the second largest distant water fishing fleet in the world. Despite the government's commitment and efforts to advance human rights, the industry has continued to make international headlines for illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing practices and labor exploitation of migrant crew (Office of the President 2024; Sainato 2024). This has spurred migrant fishers working on Taiwanese fishing vessels to organize and collectively advocate for improved working conditions on board.

3. Background Context

3.1 Taiwan's seafood sector

Taiwan's fisheries sector includes distant water fishing, offshore fishing, coastal fishing, inland fishing, marine aquaculture, and inland aquaculture. According to the Taiwan Fisheries Agency's latest annual report fishery statistics, Taiwan has a total of 21,646 vessels and its total fisheries production reached 894,863 metric tons in 2023, valued at NT\$ 90,524,543,000 (\$2.8 billion USD). In 2022, Taiwan exported 484,925 metric tons of these products, valued at \$1.5 billion USD, with the top destinations in order being Japan, Thailand, Hong Kong, and the United States (US) (Fisheries Agency 2023).

Box 1: Research Scope

This research is based on a qualitative desk review of official documents, academic literature, news articles, and civil society reports concerning labor conditions and regulatory frameworks in Taiwan's distant water fishing industry.

Of the total production, distant water fishing produced 435,258 metric tons, or nearly half (49%) of the production, which was valued at NT \$34,167,000,000 (\$1.1 billion USD). This included 177,032 metric tons of tuna caught by longline fishing vessels, 168,684 metric tons of tuna caught by purse seiners, 39,274 metric tons of squid caught by squid jiggers, and 50,267 metric tons of saury caught by torch light net fishing vessels (Fisheries Agency 2023).

After China, Taiwan has the world's second largest distant water fishing fleet and is responsible for about 21% of the world's distant water fishing efforts (Chiang and Rogovin 2020; Yozell and Shaver 2019). Taiwan's fleet is composed of approximately 1,100 Taiwanese-flagged vessels, in addition to 200 Flag-of-Convenience (FOC) vessels, which are owned by a Taiwanese national but not flagged to Taiwan (FAO 2022; Fisheries Agency 2024). In reality, the actual number of FOC vessels in Taiwan's fleet is believed to be

Table 1 Taiwan Seafood Sector Overview

	Fisheries Production (in metric tons)	% of Total Production	Production Value (NT\$)	Production Value (USD)
Distant Water Fishing	435,258	48.6%	NT\$34,167,000,000	\$1.1 billion
Offshore Fishing	158,516	17.7%	NT\$13,452,382	\$430.5 million
Coastal Fishing	33,479	3.7%	NT\$4,931,367,000	\$157.8 million
Inland Fishing	170	0.002%	NT\$25,912,000	\$0.8 million
Marine Aquaculture	23,544	2.6%	NT\$6,496,603	\$207.9 million
Inland Aquaculture	243,897	27.3%	NT\$31,451,279	\$1.0 billion
TOTAL	894,863	100%	NT\$90,524,543,000	\$2.9 billion

Source: Fisheries Agency 2023

at least three times higher than the official number reported by the government (Chiang and Rogovin 2020). The lack of transparency of FOC vessels enables illegal practices, including IUU fishing and labor abuses (EJF 2020a; Chiang and Rogovin 2020).

Taiwan's commercial fishing industry is largely staffed by a migrant workforce from Southeast Asian countries, particularly Indonesia and the Philippines. As of the end of 2023, Taiwan hired about 20,800 migrants to

work in its distant water fishing fleet and about 12,300 migrants to work in its coastal and offshore fishing vessels (Wang and Yang 2024).

3.2 A high risk of IUU fishing and forced labor

Taiwan’s distant water fishing fleet presents a high risk of IUU fishing. In October 2015, the European Union (EU) Commission issued a “yellow card,” or an official warning, against Taiwan for failing to fulfill its duties under international law to combat IUU fishing (European Commission 2015). After the government enacted a series of structural reforms over a period of three and a half years in cooperation with the Commission, the Commission lifted the card (European Commission 2019). Nonetheless, the risk of IUU fishing persisted. The Taiwanese government acknowledged this risk, agreeing to serve as a priority flag state in the U.S. Interagency Working Group on IUU Fishing’s *National Five-Year Strategy for Combating Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing (2022-2026)* (U.S. Interagency Working Group on IUU Fishing 2022). In addition, the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) highlighted Taiwan, along with six other nations and entities (Angola, Grenada, Mexico, the People’s Republic of China, the Gambia, and Vanuatu), for IUU fishing in its 2023 biannual report to Congress (NOAA Fisheries, 2023).

Table 2: Taiwan Fishers by Migration Status

	Distant Water Fishing	Coastal and Offshore Fishing
Migrant workers	20,257 (62%)	12,062 (13%)
Taiwanese Workers (Full-time Crew)	12,555 (38%)	82,320 (87%)
Total	32,812	94,382

Source: Fisheries Agency 2023

Meanwhile, the migrant workforce employed on Taiwanese distant water fishing vessels are at high risk of forced labor. Several U.S. government agencies have acknowledged the high risk of forced labor in Taiwan’s distant water fishing fleet. For example, in 2019 and 2020, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) issued Withhold Release Orders (WROs) pursuant to the U.S. Tariff Act of 1930 against four Taiwanese-flagged vessels or Taiwanese FOC vessels, two of which remain active, as of November 2024: the *Tunago No. 61* (issued on February 6, 2019, and revoked on April 1, 2020), the *Yu Long No. 2* (issued on May 11, 2020, and revoked on August 14, 2024), the *Da Wang* (issued on August 8, 2020), and the *Lien Yi Hsing No. 12* (issued on December 31, 2020) (CBP 2024). In addition, the U.S.

Department of Labor (DOL) listed Taiwanese fish in its biannual List of Goods Produced with Child Labor or Forced Labor in 2020, 2022, and 2024 (DOL 2020; DOL 2022; DOL 2024). In August 2023, in its biannual report to Congress, NOAA also identified Taiwan, together with the People's Republic of China, for having forced labor in its fleet (NOAA Fisheries 2023).

Furthermore, the U.S. Department of State's *2024 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report* highlighted the risk of forced labor in Taiwan's distant water fishing fleet and the Taiwanese government's inadequate efforts to address this risk — a concern raised annually in the *TIP Report* since 2013 (DOS 2024).

In addition, numerous environmental, human rights, and labor rights civil society organizations (CSOs) in Taiwan and around the world, including members of the Human Rights for Migrant Fishers Coalition and the Seafood Working Group, have documented the prevalence of labor abuses on Taiwanese distant water fishing vessels (Greenpeace 2016; EJF 2018a; EJF 2018b; Greenpeace 2018; Greenpeace 2019; Chiang and Rogovin 2020; EJF 2020a; Greenpeace 2022; SWG 2022; SWG 2023). These reports illustrate the prevalence of the International Labour Organization (ILO) indicators of forced labor in Taiwan's distant water fishing fleet: retention of identity documents, deception, restriction of movement, isolation, withholding of wages, debt bondage, excessive overtime, abusive working and living conditions, abuse of vulnerability, intimidation and threats, and physical violence (ILO, 2012). Examples include retention of passports and seaman's books by the captain or recruitment agency; lack of access to communication at sea during months' long fishing trips; debt bondage resulting from exorbitant recruitment fees and related costs, as well as on-board debt for supplemental food and supplies; the non-payment of wages for a prolonged period, in violation of the employment contract terms; extremely long work hours, sometimes even up to 20 hours per day, resulting in chronic sleep deprivation; requirement to continue working despite illness, injury, or inclement weather; lack of access to personal protective equipment or adequate and timely medical care, leading to serious injuries, permanent disabilities, or even death; denial of access to adequately and timely medical care; threats of early termination and deportation; and verbal abuse and physical violence by captains

3.3 Fisheries and labor laws and policies

3.3.1 Domestication of international conventions

Because Taiwan is not a member state of the United Nations, it is unable to ratify international conventions. Nonetheless, the Taiwanese government has voluntarily committed to domesticate and enforce international

conventions (NHRC 2020). For example, Taiwan committed to domesticating the Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (PSMA) in 2016, the year that the agreement went into effect (Executive Yuan 2016). In addition, in its Action Plan for Fisheries and Human Rights (adopted in May 2022 and amended in July 2023), the government committed to domesticating the ILO Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188) (“C188”) and has developed draft legislation to implement the convention (Fisheries Agency 2022b). The government has not yet expressed a commitment to domesticate the Cape Town Agreement, likely because it has not yet entered force after being established in 2012.

3.3.2 Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs)

In addition to voluntarily committing to domesticate international conventions “Taiwan-style,” Taiwan also participates in its own way – as a “fishing entity” rather than as a state party – in regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs), whose purpose is to manage and conserve fish stocks (Hsu and Southernland 2015). RFMOs have also

increasingly begun to include labor standards in their jurisdiction, such as the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), the North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC), and the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (SPRFMO) (WCPFC 2024; NOAA 2024; Carver 2024).



Fish auction in Donggang Township. Credit Johanna Lee

Taiwan is a member of four out of five tuna RFMOs, including the WCPFC, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC), and the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT) (Hsu and Southernland 2015). In addition, Taiwan is a member of four RFMOs based on geography, including the NPFC, the SPRFMO, the Convention on the Conservation and Management of Pollock Resources in the Central Bering Sea (CCBSP), and Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement (SIOFA) (ibid.). Taiwan has joined these RFMOs as a fishing entity and there

are diverging views as to whether this technical difference significantly impacts Taiwan's ability to participate in RFMOs (Moore 2019; Yozell and Shaver 2019).

3.3.3 The Act to Govern Investment in the Operation of Foreign Flag Fishing Vessels

Besides participation in RFMOs, Taiwan also aims to conserve marine fisheries resources through the Act to Govern Investment in the Operation of Foreign Flag Fishing Vessels, which regulates Taiwanese owners of FOC vessels. In December 2022, the government amended the law by enacting the Regulations on the Approval of Investment in or the Operation of Foreign Flag Fishing Vessels to also regulate labor standards of crew on board FOC vessels (Fisheries Agency, 2022b). However, the government has not successfully monitored and publicized all Taiwanese FOC vessels on its website, allowing many vessels to operate in anonymity and avoid liability for illegal practices, such as IUU fishing and labor rights violations (Wong 2023).

3.3.4 The Regulations on the Authorization and Management of Overseas Employment of Foreign Crew Members

The Fisheries Agency under Taiwan's Ministry of Agriculture oversees the distant water fishing industry. Unlike Taiwanese fishers or migrant fishers in coastal or offshore fishing, the Taiwanese government considers migrant fishers working in Taiwan's distant water fishing sector as being employed overseas and thereby excludes them from the Labour Standards Act, the main labor law in Taiwan, which is administered by the Ministry of Labor. Instead, they are governed by the Regulations on the Authorization and Management of Overseas Employment of Foreign Crew Members (hereinafter "Regulations"), which is administered by the Fisheries Agency under the Ministry of Agriculture. These regulations grant migrant fishers working in distant water fishing fewer labor protections than the Labor Standards Act, such as a lower minimum wage (\$550 USD instead of NT\$ 27,470, or \$882 USD), looser limits on working hours, and weaker insurance and labor inspection policies (Chiang and Rogovin 2020). Moreover, unlike the MOL, the FA does not have the legal authority to carry out labor inspections, as it remains excluded from the Labor Inspection Act. This weakens the enforceability of labor inspections of Taiwan's distant water fishing fleet and practically bars migrant fishers from enforcing their labor rights. Consequently, migrant fishers in distant water fishing remain more vulnerable than other fishers to labor exploitation.

The Regulations also permit distant water fishing vessels to stay at sea for up to 10 months without visiting a port. During these lengthy trips, nearly all migrant fishers are denied access to Wi-Fi on board vessels, even if the

vessel is equipped with satellite Wi-Fi technology and the captain and officers have access. As a result, migrant fishers are unable to contact anyone — whether family members and friends, union representatives, advocates, or government agencies — for help for months, even in dire situations, including instances where a captain refuses to return to shore after a fisher has suffered severe injury or illness. This allows labor abuses, including cases of forced labor, to go undetected for months, sometimes up to a year or more. It also impacts migrant fishers' ability to exercise their freedom of association — an issue described further below.

Meanwhile, even though the Regulations prohibit the charging of recruitment fees and related costs by Taiwanese recruitment agencies under Article 13(2)(3), Taiwanese recruitment agencies, on behalf of Indonesian recruitment agencies, continue to facilitate monthly deductions from workers' salaries over several months for them to pay recruitment fees and related costs charged by Indonesian recruitment agencies. The costs for workers' passports, seaman's book, medical exams and tests, training certificates, and administrative fees, are passed onto workers, in violation of Principle 7 of the ILO's *General principles and operational guidelines for fair recruitment* permit (ILO, 2019). According to a survey conducted by Global Labor Justice in 2023, migrant fishers reported being charged an average of \$817 USD in recruitment fees and related costs, or approximately one and a half months' wages. Debt arising from these recruitment fees and related costs inhibits migrant fishers' ability to speak out about abuses by their employer.

3.3.5 A tied visa regime

Migrant fishers' precarious legal status heightens their vulnerability to exploitation. Taiwan has a tied visa regime for migrant workers, in which migrant fishers are recruited as temporary workers and obtain visas that are contingent on their employment (Chiang and Rogovin 2020; SWG 2022; Lee and Gill 2023). This means that if a vessel owner terminates a fisher's contract — for example, as a reprisal for complaining about conditions on board vessels — then the fisher will be immediately deported upon arrival at port. The current system also bars migrant fishers from changing employers and transferring vessels once hired (SWG 2023). Instead, typically, fishers who seek to change vessels must terminate their contract, return to their home country, and undergo the recruitment process again, including repaying recruitment fees. Due to these policies, migrant fishers remain dependent on their employer for both their job and their legal status, creating an extremely unbalanced power dynamic between vessel owners and migrant crew. Consequently, migrant fishers who find themselves

working under exploitative conditions but fear being terminated and deported are coerced into obeying their captains and remaining silent.

3.3.6 Migrant fishers' union rights

In 2010, the Taiwanese government amended the Labor Union Act to permit migrant workers to form and lead their own unions — a law that went into effect in May 2011 (Taiwan Today 2011). This reform provided migrant fishers in Taiwan's fisheries sector with the opportunity to establish their own unions, filling a gap left by the absence of Taiwanese-led unions in this sector. Yet, while migrant fishers in Taiwan have enjoyed the legal right to organize for more than a decade, they have continued to face significant barriers to exercising their right to freedom of association.

The legal requirements to form a union have proven challenging to meet. For example, the residency requirement of members to form professional unions has created hurdles for migrant fishers seeking to organize (Kao 2021a). In addition, migrant fishers face practical barriers to exercising their union rights. The challenge is extremely high in distant water fishing, where migrant fishers stay at sea for months at a time — legally up to 10 months — and typically do not have access to Wi-Fi during this time period. The right to freedom of association includes the unions' right to access the workplace, no matter how geographically remote or isolated; yet lack of Wi-Fi access makes it extremely difficult for migrant fishers in distant water fishing to join and stay involved in a union (Lee and Gill 2023). Meanwhile, coastal and offshore migrant fishers also face challenges to organizing due to their irregular work schedules. Despite coming back to port frequently, their unpredictable schedules and infrequency of days off make it difficult to convene union meetings.

Other practical barriers to freedom of association include language barriers among the crew where more than one nationality is represented, in addition to financial difficulties in sustaining a union where workers are unable to pay union dues when they receive low wages and are often in debt. Another serious hindrance to the ability of migrant fishers to exercise their union rights is the risk of reprisal for union activity due to inadequate protections against retaliatory termination, deportation, and blacklisting of workers who raise complaints.

3.3.7 Action Plan for Fisheries and Human Rights

In response to criticism of its fisheries and labor laws and policies, the Taiwanese government has committed to making various legal and policy reforms in its four-year Action Plan for Fisheries and Human Rights (2022-2025), which was originally enacted in May 2022 and amended in July 2023 (Fisheries Agency 2022b). Key revisions include establishing a review

mechanism on the minimum wage for foreign crew members employed overseas (i.e. migrant workers in distant water fishing); funding for the installation of Wi-Fi or satellite phone on board vessels to provide migrant fishers with access to communication facilities; increased funding for the purchase and maintenance of life jackets; and additional funding in 2024 and 2025 for the private sector to hold migrant fishers rights' advocacy events (TECRO 2024). However, advocates, including members of the Seafood Working Group, have criticized the shortcomings of the Action Plan, in addition to its inadequate implementation (SWG, 2024).

4. Organizing Efforts

Over the past decade, migrant workers in Taiwan's fisheries sector have started to organize, working to build collective power to demand better working conditions. Three main migrant fisher organizations operate in Taiwan: the Yilan Migrant Fishermen Union and the Keelung Migrant Fishermen Union in the north, and the Forum Silaturahmi Pelaut Indonesia (FOSPI), which has established the Pingtung County Migrant Fishermen Union, in the south.ⁱ

4.1 The Yilan Migrant Fishermen Union (YMFU)

The first migrant fishers' union formed in May 2013 (Kwak and Wang 2022). Based in Nanfangao in Yilan County, Yilan Migrant Fishermen Union (YMFU) represents 106 coastal migrant fishers and is an affiliate of the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) (Kwak and Wang 2022). Initially mainly composed of migrant workers from the Philippines, the membership now predominantly consists of migrant workers from Indonesia. Lee Li Hua (whose English name is Allison Lee), a Taiwanese woman, is the co-founder and Secretary General of YMFU. YMFU has been involved in various activities, such as distributing masks to fishers during the COVID-19 pandemic; launching a series of conferences in Taiwan to promote human rights education; collecting annual donations for warm winter clothing; engaging in government advocacy efforts, such as demanding more personal protective equipment for fishers (e.g. life vests for fishers), a ban on FOC vessels, and closure of the overseas employment category loophole leading to exclusion of some migrant fishers from labor protections; and documenting cases of exploitation of migrant fishers, some of which are reported on YMFU's Facebook page (Lin 2020). The YMFU, together with several non-governmental organizations, released photographs and videos supporting the case of Supriyanto, an Indonesian migrant fisher who died while working on a Taiwanese distant water fishing vessel, and successfully persuaded the local prosecutor's office to reopen an investigation into Supriyanto's death (Kao 2021a; Wang 2016). Afterwards, the YMFU and other labor and social movement organizations (Serve the People

Association, Taiwan International Workers' Association, Environmental Justice Foundation, Taiwan Association for Human Rights, Greenpeace Taiwan, Rerum Novarum Center, and Stella Maris) formed the Human Rights for Migrant Fishers Coalition, which urged the Taiwanese government to address labor rights and human rights violations in addition to IUU fishing (Kao 2021a). YMFU has faced numerous challenges in its advocacy efforts, including defamation lawsuits brought by employers and labor brokers and incidents of anonymous harassment against Lee.

4.2 The Keelung Migrant Fishermen Union (KMFU)

The second migrant fishers' union formed in February 2021. Registered in Keelung County, Taiwan, the Keelung Migrant Fishermen Union (KMFU) is also a member of the Human Rights for Migrant Fishers Coalition. The union's membership and leadership are entirely composed of Indonesian migrants, representing more than 100 coastal migrant fishers from Indonesia working at Zheng-bin, Badouzi, and Changtanli Harbors (Kao 2021a; Kao 2021b). The Secretary-General is an Indonesian woman named Mei-Hua Lee who moved to Taiwan nearly two decades ago through Taiwan's guest worker program and operates an Indonesian restaurant near the Keelung Cruise Ship Terminal. The restaurant serves as the union's headquarters. Lee helped form the union after a group of Indonesian migrant fishers asked Lee, who is fluent in Mandarin Chinese, in May 2019 to help them organize a union. The process took a couple years due to challenges in meeting the legal requirements for a professional union under the Labor Union Act, which included residency restrictions (Humanity Research Consultancy 2021). KMFU has been involved in a project to teach students at a local high school about Indonesian culture and society, in addition to the working conditions in the fishing industry (Kao 2021a; Kao 2021b). The union aims to negotiate with employers for better working conditions and to assist migrant fishers with labor disputes (Humanity Research Consultancy 2021).

4.3 The Forum Silaturahmi Pelaut Indonesian - Pingtung Migrant Fishers Union (FOSPI-PMFU)

The Forum Silaturahmi Pelaut Indonesia (FOSPI) — translated to the Indonesian Seafarers' Gathering Forum in English — is a community organization composed of 13 regional hometown associations representing approximately 2,300 migrant fishers from Indonesia. Based in Donggang, Pingtung County, FOSPI was first founded in 2006 to organize social and cultural activities for fishers and to provide a temporary shelter near the port for fishers in need. It became a bridge between fishers and local authorities, CSOs, and recruitment agencies, and successfully advocated to have the An-

Nur Mosque built near Donggang Port, which was inaugurated in February 2018.

In January 2022, FOSPI leaders formally registered the Pingtung County Migrant Fishers Union (PMFU), making it the first migrant fishers' union representing migrant workers in distant water fishing in Taiwan. FOSPI-PMFU has worked to advocate for mandatory Wi-Fi access for migrant crew on board Taiwanese distant water fishing vessels in a campaign called the Wi-Fi NOW for Fishers' Rights at Sea campaign. Details of the campaign are discussed in the subsection below.

Like the other unions, FOSPI-PMFU has also faced organizing challenges. It has had to address repeated employer interference with its independence since its registration, in addition to intimidation of its members for speaking out about conditions on

Taiwanese vessels at public events. Nonetheless, FOSPI-PMFU has continued to boldly engage in advocacy efforts to improve working conditions for its members and seeks to strengthen the union and expand union membership.



FOSPI-PMFU's 18th anniversary celebration. Credit Johanna Lee

5. Case Study: The Wi-Fi NOW for Fishers' Rights at Sea Campaign

FOSPI-PMFU, along with several human rights and labor rights NGOs based in Taiwan, the United States, and the United Kingdom — the Taiwan Association for Human Rights Global Labor Justice, Stella Maris, Kaohsiung, Serve the People Association, Humanity Research Consultancy — officially

launched the Wi-Fi NOW for Fishers' Right at Sea campaign (hereinafter "the Wi-Fi Campaign") in February 2023. The Wi-Fi Campaign formed after a survey of migrant fishers in Taiwan and Indonesia conducted in 2022 revealed that the most needed policy change to improve conditions on board Taiwanese distant water fishing industry is the provision of Wi-Fi on vessels. If fishers had access to Wi-Fi at sea, then they could communicate with their families and friends, which is critical to fishers' emotional and mental well-being. Access to Wi-Fi would also allow fishers to monitor and verify whether or not their wages are paid into bank accounts or transmitted to their families, preventing the problem of withheld wages for months while they are at sea. In addition, access to Wi-Fi would enable migrant fishers to practically exercise their freedom of association by having the ability to contact their union representatives and engage in union activities, including the reporting of grievances and participation in negotiations necessary to have grievances remediated in real time. Migrant fishers could also contact other advocates or government agencies to report labor abuses. Ultimately, crew access to Wi-Fi at sea would help shine a light on conditions on board vessels, which would help rebalance power between workers and their employer and allow fishers to advocate for improved conditions at the workplace.

The Wi-Fi Campaign calls on the Taiwanese government to mandate Wi-Fi on board Taiwanese distant water fishing vessels, in accordance with five criteria to guarantee that Wi-Fi is accessible consistent with labor rights:

1. The Wi-Fi regulation must be mandatory, instead of voluntary and include penalties for non-compliance;
2. Vessel owners must commit to respecting fishers' fundamental labor rights;
3. Guidelines on reasonable access to Wi-Fi must be developed to ensure that the Wi-Fi is free and accessible for all fishers;
4. A conflict resolution process must be developed on board the vessel, which is co-designed and co-enforced with the fishers' union, and will allow complaints to be remedied in real time;
5. Enforcement should be strengthened through interagency action.

The goal is to fulfill the five criteria in the context of an enforceable supply chain agreement that involves FOSPI-PMFU, Taiwanese vessel owners, and well-known international brands or retailers that source seafood from Taiwan. This agreement would be legally binding and put workers at the center of the solution. In the agreement, vessel owners would commit to providing Wi-Fi in accordance with the five key criteria. Meanwhile, the buyer at the top of the supply chain would commit to using their supply

chain leverage to ensure implementation, such as by committing to source from vessels that provide fishers with access to Wi-Fi.

In order to win Wi-Fi on Taiwanese distant water fishing vessels, FOSPI-PMFU, along with its campaign partners, have been engaging in a multi-directional campaign strategy, applying pressure not only on stakeholders in Taiwan, but also engaging in advocacy efforts in the sending country, Indonesia, as well as in key markets that consume the most Taiwanese seafood: the United States, Japan, and the European Union. FOSPI-PMFU has engaged a wide range of stakeholders, meeting federal and municipal government agencies and officials, vessel owners and associations, brands and retailers, unions, and CSOs including migrant workers' organizations, environmental organizations, faith-based organizations, and digital rights organizations.

The aim has been to build pressure on the Taiwanese government by intervening in key spaces. For example, FOSPI-PMFU and its campaign partners have carried out advocacy at the Seafood Expo North America in Boston and the Global Seafood Expo in Barcelona (Kool 2024; GLJ 2024b). In addition, they have advocated for migrant fishers' rights, the freedom of association, and migrant fishers' access to Wi-Fi on distant water fishing vessels to be included in the U.S.-Taiwan Initiative on 21st Century Trade (USTR 2024). FOSPI-PMFU members' experiences have also been highlighted in the Seafood Working Group's submission to the U.S. Department of State for its 2024 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report on Taiwan (SWG 2024). Furthermore, FOSPI-PMFU has joined the Coalition for the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Fishers in Taiwanese Fishing Vessels — a coalition of seven labor unions in Indonesia and Taiwan, including FOSPI-PMFU, and twelve CSOs globally — in order to influence the negotiations on a bilateral labor migration agreement between Indonesia and Taiwan on migrant fishers' rights, including demands relating to fundamental labor rights and decent work, freedom of association, anti-retaliation, Wi-Fi, collective bargaining agreements, fair pay, grievance handling, and the employer pays principle with regards to recruitment fees and related costs (GLJ 2024a). Meanwhile, FOSPI-PMFU has also advocated for an increase in the legal minimum wage for migrant fishers in distant water fishing, which amounts to less than two-thirds of the national minimum wage under the Labor Standards Act (SWG 2024).

Since the launch of the Wi-Fi Campaign, international organizations have been coalescing around the recognition of the need for mandatory crew access to Wi-Fi on fishing vessels. This can be seen in the ILO's recent handbook on identifying forced labor in the commercial fishing industry, which specifies lack of access to Wi-Fi as presenting a risk of forced labor; a

report by the Global Seafood Alliance, which recommends Wi-Fi on vessels for any fishing trips exceeding 24 hours; the USTR's proposed text for the U.S.-Taiwan Initiative on 21st Century Trade; and a pilot project by Conservation International to install Wi-Fi, alongside electronic monitoring, on three Taiwanese fishing vessels (ILO 2023; GSA 2024; USTR 2024). These developments illustrate momentum growing around FOSPI-PMFU's demand for Wi-Fi access on vessels and the promise of their organizing efforts, with the collaboration of Taiwanese and international allies, despite challenges to their union activities.

6. Conclusion

In the face of significant barriers to exercising their right to freedom of association, migrant fishers working on Taiwanese fishing vessels have persisted in striving to organize and collectively advocate for improved conditions at their workplace. The Wi-Fi NOW for Fishers' Rights at Sea Campaign led by FOSPI-PMFU, the only union in Taiwan representing migrant fishers in distant water fishing, provides an example of the importance and possibility of worker organizing in a sector known to have serious risks of forced labor and other forms of labor exploitation and extremely low rates of unionization globally. The increasing recognition and momentum surrounding the campaign offers a promising picture for the future of migrant workers organizing in the fishing sector in Taiwan and around the world.

ⁱ The three registered unions are professional unions (also known as "craft unions"), which represent workers with the same professional skills working in the same region (e.g. city or county). In comparison, corporate unions represent workers working at the same factory or workplace, while trade unions (also known as "industrial unions") are organized by workers in the same industry. These different types of unions have distinct legal requirements, including thresholds for forming a union, membership criteria (such as geographic restrictions), requirements for collective bargaining negotiations, and insurance coverage for members.

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