

Together in fiSHEries

A Mediterranean strategy for women's empowerment in fisheries

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This brief builds on the growing network of Women Together in fiSHEries, initiated in Split, Croatia, in April 2025, through the first-ever regional workshop dedicated to Mediterranean women working in fisheries. Bringing together around 40 women from eight Mediterranean countries, this landmark gathering laid the foundations for a regional network aimed at strengthening connections, amplifying women's voices and experiences, and advancing their recognition and participation in fisheries governance and the wider blue economy.

Taking stock of this initial momentum, the network continued to grow through the Women Together in fiSHEries workshop held in Tunisia in October 2026, which brought together more than 90 women from across the Mediterranean fisheries and blue economy sectors. This brief draws on the insights, experiences and recommendations shared during the workshop, reflecting the collective knowledge, priorities, challenges and aspirations of women working across the region.

Our special thanks go to all participants for generously sharing their knowledge, experiences, challenges and aspirations. This brief would not have been possible without their contributions. We would also like to warmly acknowledge the WWF team members who contributed to and supported this process: Kora Dvorski, Mariem Feki, Alessia Bacchi, Clémentine Laurent, Panagiota Stappa, Sissy Gkournelou, Beatriz Nieto Novoa, Ebrucan Kalecik, Marianna Balfour, Catherine Roberts, Stefania Campogianni, Mona Moeller, Rea Nepravishta, Jamel Jrijer, Mohamed Skhiri Gabbouj, Wassim Amdarous, Mehdi Aissi and Harrie Oostingh.

We are equally grateful to the facilitators, speakers, partners and institutional representatives who helped create an open and collaborative space for dialogue and exchange.

CREDITS

The contents and recommendations of this publication are WWF's sole responsibility.

Authors

Luca Eufemia, Claudia Campisano, Inés López Ercilla

Editing and design

Catherine Roberts

Front cover photo

Maha Ben Mahmoud (Tunisia) and Safae Oualla (Morocco) © Angela Gennaro

Recommended citation

Together in fiSHEries: a Mediterranean strategy for women's empowerment in fisheries. WWF Mediterranean Marine Initiative, 2026.

This publication is available on our website: ***wwfmmi.org***



© Ivana Vareško

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Women are central to the sustainability of Mediterranean fisheries and the resilience of coastal communities. Yet their work, knowledge and leadership remain insufficiently recognised, and their participation in decision making and access to economic opportunities continue to be constrained. Addressing these inequalities is essential to building a fisheries sector that is more inclusive, sustainable and prepared to respond to environmental and economic change.

The Women Together in fiSHEries workshop in Tunisia (October 2026) provided a space for women from across the Mediterranean to share their experiences, identify common challenges and define priorities for collective action. Discussions highlighted how gender inequalities intersect with wider pressures on the sector, including climate change, biodiversity loss, rising operating costs and changing market conditions. Participants described the effects of declining catches, extreme heat and power outages on fishing-related livelihoods, particularly on processing, storage and the ability to bring products to market.

The workshop also reaffirmed that women are not only affected by these challenges; they are important contributors to solutions. Their knowledge of marine resources, local ecosystems and food systems, together with their roles in processing, marketing, entrepreneurship and community organisation, can support adaptation and strengthen local resilience. Women-led initiatives in livelihood diversification, value addition and the circular economy offer opportunities to improve economic security while contributing to more sustainable coastal economies. Realising this potential requires greater access to finance, technologies, training and markets, alongside meaningful participation in fisheries management and governance.

The discussions highlighted the need to move beyond recognising women's contributions towards addressing the structural barriers that limit their economic autonomy, professional recognition and participation in decision-making. This brief identifies three shared priorities and four complementary areas for action, providing a framework for collaboration among women, organisations and institutions across the Mediterranean.

Looking ahead, the workshop's outcomes contribute to wider efforts to advance gender equality and inclusive climate action. They resonate with the UNFCCC's Belém Gender Action Plan (2026–2034) [1], particularly its priorities on strengthening knowledge and evidence, promoting women's meaningful participation, and integrating gender equality into climate implementation, finance and monitoring. They also reflect discussions at the Santa Marta Conference on Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels [2], which highlighted the importance of ensuring that transitions are just, equitable and shaped by affected communities. In this context, the Women Together in fiSHEries network can help translate these broader commitments into action for Mediterranean fisheries by connecting women's knowledge and experiences with research, advocacy and policy processes, and promoting their leadership in climate adaptation, fisheries governance and coastal resilience. This is essential to ensuring that women are not only recognised in the future of Mediterranean fisheries but actively contribute to shaping it.

INTRODUCTION

Women in fisheries: the Mediterranean context

Across the Mediterranean, women play a critical role in the social and economic fabric of coastal communities and contribute to their resilience. Their work extends throughout fisheries and aquaculture value chains, from harvesting and processing to marketing, as well as into management, entrepreneurship, community leadership, the preservation of cultural heritage and environmental stewardship.

Despite the breadth of their contribution, women remain underrepresented in official statistics. The 2024 FAO–GFCM study estimates that women account for 28% of fisheries-related employment in the Mediterranean and Black Sea region. It also highlights significant differences across the value chain: women represent 38% of employment in post-harvest activities, 16% in pre-harvest activities and 10% in harvesting. These percentages refer to women's share of employment within each stage, rather than the distribution of women workers across the different stages. The study notes that these figures are likely to underestimate women's actual contribution, particularly in small-scale fisheries, where family-based, informal and unpaid work is often not captured in official data. [3]

The wider picture also includes aquaculture. According to the GFCM's State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries 2025, women account for 29% of all jobs across the fisheries and aquaculture value chain in the region. While the figures differ in scope, both underline the significant contribution women make to aquatic food systems and the need for better data to recognise their work. [4]

The challenge

Despite their importance, women's work often remains invisible and undervalued. Across the region, they continue to face barriers to professional recognition, decent working conditions, social protection, finance, training and market access. Their representation in fisheries organisations and decision-making structures also remains limited, restricting their ability to influence policies and decisions that affect their livelihoods and communities.

These challenges are increasingly interconnected with climate change and environmental degradation. Changes in marine ecosystems, declining catches, extreme weather and rising temperatures affect fisheries-dependent livelihoods and the activities that sustain local value chains. Women working in processing, storage and marketing can be particularly exposed to disruptions in infrastructure, refrigeration and market access. At the same time, women's knowledge, skills and local networks are valuable assets for adaptation, livelihood diversification and the resilience of coastal communities. Recognising and supporting their roles is therefore an important part of more inclusive and effective climate and fisheries action. [5]

Different shores. Shared realities. New connections.

Building on the first regional Women Together in fiSHEries gathering held in Split, Croatia, in April 2025, WWF Mediterranean Marine Initiative and WWF North Africa convened a three-day regional workshop in Gammarth, near Tunis, from 5 to 7 October 2026. The gathering brought together more than 90 women from Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Italy, Spain, Croatia, Greece, France and Türkiye, alongside institutional and political representatives from the fisheries and blue economy sectors. Participants included women fishers, seafood processors, cooperative members, researchers, entrepreneurs and community leaders. [6]

Held under the theme "Women's voices, women's knowledge, our future", the workshop aimed to provide a space for women to share their experiences and explore the challenges, conditions and opportunities shaping their work. Through exchanges, group discussions and a field visit, participants identified common concerns, shared existing initiatives and developed recommendations to strengthen women's recognition, economic empowerment, leadership and participation in fisheries governance.

The workshop also sought to reinforce connections among women across the Mediterranean and lay the foundations for continued regional collaboration through the Women Together in fisHERies network. This brief brings together the experiences, priorities and recommendations emerging from the discussions, setting out areas for action by WWF, partners, institutions and other stakeholders.

WHAT CONNECTS US

Shared goals and vision for women in fisheries

While legal frameworks, fisheries systems, blue economy sectors and cultural settings differ substantially across Mediterranean countries, women in the region share common goals and visions:

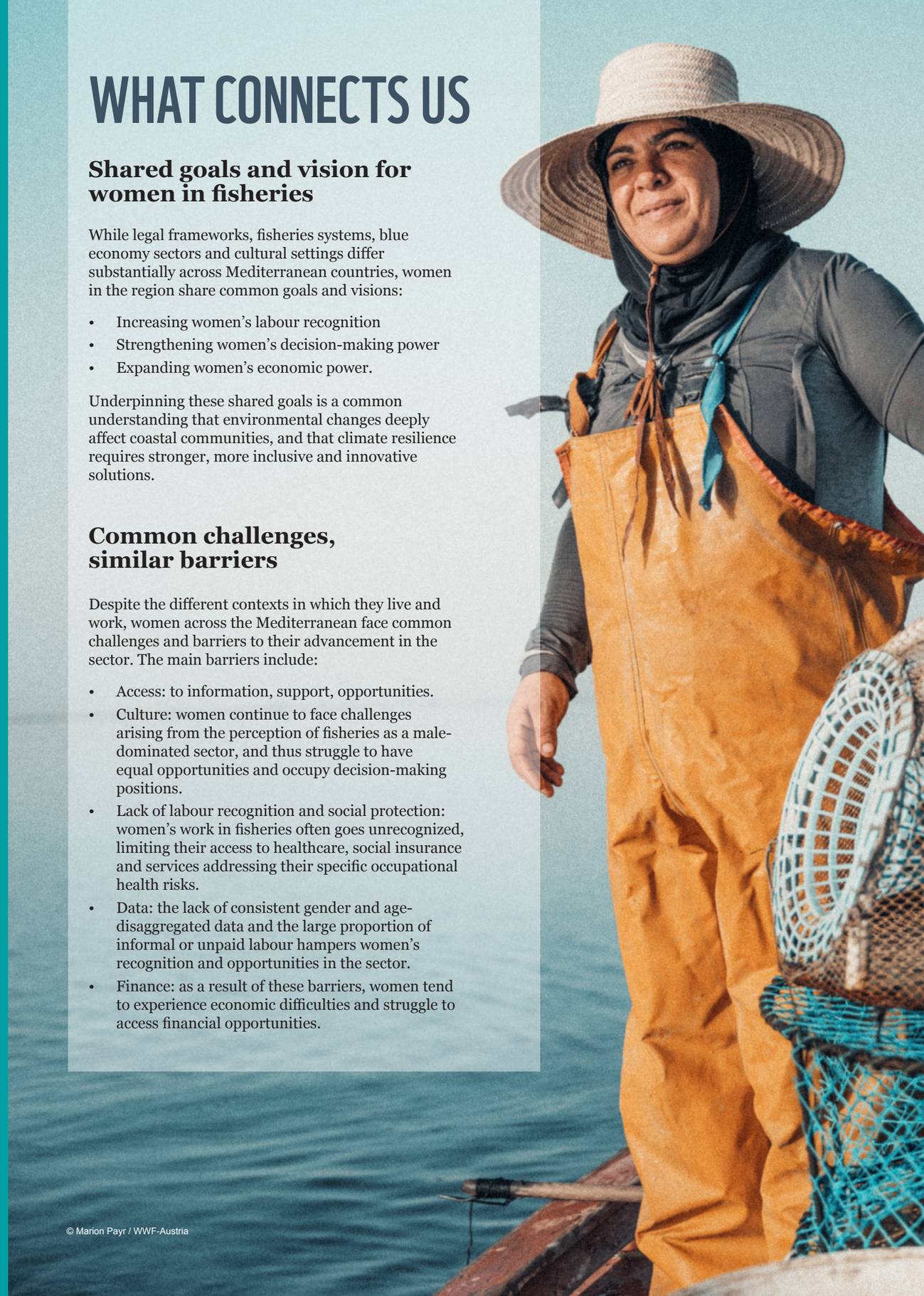
- Increasing women's labour recognition
- Strengthening women's decision-making power
- Expanding women's economic power.

Underpinning these shared goals is a common understanding that environmental changes deeply affect coastal communities, and that climate resilience requires stronger, more inclusive and innovative solutions.

Common challenges, similar barriers

Despite the different contexts in which they live and work, women across the Mediterranean face common challenges and barriers to their advancement in the sector. The main barriers include:

- Access: to information, support, opportunities.
- Culture: women continue to face challenges arising from the perception of fisheries as a male-dominated sector, and thus struggle to have equal opportunities and occupy decision-making positions.
- Lack of labour recognition and social protection: women's work in fisheries often goes unrecognized, limiting their access to healthcare, social insurance and services addressing their specific occupational health risks.
- Data: the lack of consistent gender and age-disaggregated data and the large proportion of informal or unpaid labour hampers women's recognition and opportunities in the sector.
- Finance: as a result of these barriers, women tend to experience economic difficulties and struggle to access financial opportunities.



© Marion Payr / WWF-Austria

MULTIPLE VOICES, A SHARED CALL TO ACTION

WHAT WE CAN DO: THREE KEY PRIORITIES

1 UNLOCK OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN FISHERIES

Improving access to information, training, funding and markets through women-led capacity-building and peer-to-peer learning, empowering women as knowledge creators and knowledge-sharers

2 SHARE DECISION-MAKING POWER

Ensure legal recognition, fair rights, social protection and meaningful representation

3 INCREASE GENDER- AND AGE-DISAGGREGATED DATA COLLECTION

Promoting participatory data collection methods and databases, alongside training for data collectors on gender and youth inclusion.



© Carlo Gianferro / WWF Mediterranean

HOW WE CAN DO IT: FOUR KEY ACTIONS

1 STRENGTHEN NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND GLOBAL NETWORKS OF WOMEN IN FISHERIES

Building strong connections among women working across fisheries and the wider blue economy is essential to strengthening their visibility, influence and collective voice. National, regional and global networks provide platforms for women to exchange knowledge and experiences, access opportunities, build partnerships and support one another's professional development, strengthening women's leadership, amplifying their contributions and enabling them to play a more active role in shaping fisheries policies and decision-making processes.

Key objectives of these networks include:

- Facilitating peer-to-peer learning and exchange among women in fisheries and the wider blue economy.
- Increasing the visibility of successful women-led initiatives and experiences across the Mediterranean and beyond.
- Promoting mentorship between experienced women leaders and younger generations, sharing opportunities and resources, including market access, funding, training and policy developments.
- Strengthening collective representation and advocacy, enabling women to contribute to and influence policies.
- Building strategic alliances with cooperatives, fisheries institutions, academia, civil society organisations, and other sector stakeholders committed to advancing gender equality and youth inclusion.

Digital and in-person spaces can complement one another in sustaining these networks. Digital platforms can serve as their backbone and public interface, hosting member profiles, case studies, research outputs, data, training materials and discussion forums. National and regional social media groups can facilitate regular communication and day-to-day exchanges. These online spaces can be complemented by regional gatherings, thematic webinars and exchange visits, helping to build trust, strengthen connections and ensure the networks remain active and sustainable over time. Beyond facilitating exchange and mutual support, the Women Together in fiSHEries network can serve as an enabling platform for advancing all four areas of action. By connecting women and women-led initiatives across countries, it can facilitate access to opportunities and resources, strengthen collective advocacy, promote knowledge-sharing and build partnerships with relevant institutions and organisations. WWF will continue to act as a catalyst and a supporting partner in this process.



The second Women Together in fiSHEries workshop. Gammarth, Tunisia, October 2026. © WWF North Africa



A networking event at the first Women Together in fiSHEries workshop Split, Croatia, April 2025. © Maja Prgomet / WWF Adria



Women fishers in Türkiye © Women in Fisheries Society

CASE STUDY

CROATIA | ADRIATIC PEARLS

A milestone for women's representation in fisheries governance

The establishment of Jadranske perle (Adriatic Pearls), Croatia's first association of women in fisheries, marks an important step towards more inclusive and gender-responsive fisheries governance.

Inspired and supported by the momentum generated through the Women Together in fiSHEries network, 8 women from various Croatian fisheries communities came together to establish a formal national association. Through a collaborative process, they created the association's statute, providing a legal and organizational framework for collective action.

Why it matters:

- From visibility to representation: the association provides women with a formal platform to organize, voice their concerns, advocate for their interests and engage directly with fisheries decisionmakers.
- Recognizing women's contributions: the association challenges traditional gender stereotypes and brings greater recognition to women's often invisible but essential roles across the fisheries value chain.
- Strengthening women's leadership: the association creates opportunities for women to participate more actively in fisheries governance and represent their communities at national, Mediterranean and global levels.
- Connecting local and regional action: its emergence demonstrates how the Women Together in fiSHEries network can inspire and enable national-level organization, solidarity and collective advocacy.

© Marion Payr / WWF-Austria

2 IMPROVE DATA AND KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

One of the most pressing priorities is the need for reliable, comprehensive and integrated data on women's contributions to fisheries and the blue economy sector. Limited evidence often translates into limited recognition, which in turn constrains policy support, investment and access to opportunities. The lack of gender and age-disaggregated data remains a major barrier to making women's substantial economic and social contributions across fisheries value chains visible in official statistics, policy frameworks, funding schemes and fisheries management decisions.

Addressing this gap requires going beyond data collection towards empowering women to actively participate in generating, interpreting, managing and using knowledge. Women should be trained and supported to collect and analyse local socio-economic and environmental data, helping to strengthen local capacities, ownership and participation in knowledge production. This could contribute to the development of community-based data collection and monitoring mechanisms that better reflect local realities and women's experiences.

To support this process, collaboration should be fostered among research institutions, universities, fisheries organizations and women's networks, promoting inclusive, multidisciplinary and participatory research methods and approaches, including citizen science. Women in fisheries and the blue economy sector should be involved throughout the research process: from identifying research priorities and defining questions to designing methodologies, collecting and analysing data, interpreting findings and identifying areas for further investigation. This would help ensure that research responds to their needs and experiences, while recognizing their knowledge and expertise as valuable contributions to evidence generation. Existing data and new research findings could be brought together and made accessible through the proposed network and its digital platform, alongside case studies, policy briefs, training resources, practical tools and examples of good practice. In this way, knowledge production would become a shared resource to support stronger advocacy, more informed policies and better-targeted investments.

3 ENHANCE POLICY ENGAGEMENT AND ADVOCACY

Moving beyond visibility towards structural change requires addressing the legal, institutional and governance barriers that continue to limit women's full participation in fisheries and the wider blue economy. Existing legal and administrative frameworks often fail to recognize women's contributions, restrict their access to professional licences, social protection, health insurance and fair remuneration, and limit their participation in decision-making processes.

Empowerment cannot rely solely on training and economic support. It must also be underpinned by enabling policies, inclusive governance systems and legal frameworks that recognize women's contributions and rights, while strengthening their representation and influence across the sector.

A regional advocacy agenda could focus on the following priorities:

Promote formal recognition of women fishers

Many women contribute significantly to fishing households, fisheries businesses and activities across the value chain, yet their work often remains formally unrecognized. Advocacy efforts should promote the legal and professional recognition of women's roles across fisheries, ensuring equal access to associated rights and entitlements, including formal employment status, social protection, health insurance, professional licences and fair remuneration.

Strengthen women's participation in governance and decision making

Moving beyond symbolic inclusion requires creating meaningful opportunities for women to participate in and influence decision-making processes. Advocacy should engage relevant institutions, representative bodies, advisory committees, co-management structures, local organizations and cooperatives to strengthen women's representation and leadership, ensuring their participation not only as observers but as active contributors and decisionmakers.

Transform public narratives and challenge stereotypes

Persistent cultural and social stereotypes continue to undermine the recognition of women's roles and contributions in fisheries. A regional advocacy coalition could help challenge these perceptions through coordinated awareness-raising initiatives that highlight women as fishers, entrepreneurs, innovators, community leaders and environmental stewards. Anchoring these efforts in the network would help bring local experiences and voices into national and regional policy discussions, strengthening the link between grassroots realities and policy change.

4 EXPAND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES AND ACCESS TO FINANCE

Economic empowerment is both a priority and an essential condition for broader social and political empowerment. Across the Mediterranean, women in fisheries continue to face significant barriers to economic autonomy, including limited access to finance and investment opportunities, weak market access and limited control over economic resources. Many contribute substantially to fisheries enterprises and activities across the value chain without receiving direct remuneration or formal recognition of their work. This often limits their ability to access credit, financial services, productive assets, equipment, infrastructure and markets, constraining the development and growth of their economic activities.

Addressing these barriers requires a combination of targeted measures to strengthen women's economic autonomy and participation in fisheries. Key areas of work could include developing gender and youth-responsive financial mechanisms and improving access to credit and investment; strengthening women's cooperatives and collective business initiatives to enhance their bargaining power and market position; facilitating access to new and existing markets and value chains; and providing tailored training and support in entrepreneurship, business management, marketing and financial literacy. Opportunities to diversify income and develop value-added activities within fisheries and related sectors should also be explored, building on women's existing skills, knowledge and entrepreneurial initiatives. Attention should also be given to opportunities that strengthen women's resilience to climate and environmental change, including livelihood diversification, sustainable value-added activities, resource-efficient technologies and improved infrastructure for processing, storage and marketing.

Economic empowerment should therefore be understood as more than income generation. It is a means of strengthening women's independence, recognition and decision-making power, while reinforcing the objectives of the previous actions. Greater economic autonomy can also enable women to participate more actively in fisheries governance, collective organizations and advocacy processes, contributing to more inclusive and equitable fisheries communities.



The second Women Together in fiSHEries workshop. Gammarth, Tunisia, October 2026. © WWF North Africa

CONCLUSION: FROM INVISIBILITY TO COLLECTIVE POWER

Women across Mediterranean fisheries and the wider blue economy share common challenges, but also knowledge, skills and aspirations that can drive positive change. The Women Together in fiSHEries network has demonstrated the value of connecting women across the region and building a shared vision for a more inclusive and sustainable sector. The priorities and four areas of action outlined in this brief provide a common framework to move forward, strengthening networks, advancing recognition and representation, improving knowledge and data, and expanding economic opportunities.

CALL TO ACTION: TURNING SHARED PRIORITIES INTO PROGRESS

Governments, regional institutions, fisheries organisations, research institutions, civil society and funding partners are invited to support this agenda and engage with the growing Women Together in fiSHEries network. This means:

- creating opportunities for women's meaningful participation in decision-making
- investing in women-led initiatives and improving access to resources and knowledge
- supporting stronger connections and collaboration across the Mediterranean.

WWF will continue to act as a catalyst and supporting partner in this process, helping the network grow and women's voices reach further. Recognising and empowering women is not only a matter of equality, but a fundamental part of building sustainable fisheries and resilient coastal communities across the Mediterranean.

References

1 UNFCCC (2025). Belém Gender Action Plan 2026–2034. Decision 7/CP.30, adopted at COP30. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

2 Governments of Colombia and the Netherlands (2026). International Conference on Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels: Santa Marta Conference – Final Outcome Report. First Conference on Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels, Santa Marta, Colombia.

3 FAO and GFCM (2024). Women in Fisheries in the Mediterranean and Black Sea Region: Roles, Challenges and Opportunities. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome.

4 FAO and GFCM (2025). The State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries 2025 (SoMFi 2025). Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome.

5 WWF Coastal Communities Initiative (n.d.). Women and Food Security. Available at: https://coastalcommunityledconservation.org/what-we-do/woman-and-food-security/ (accessed 2 October 2026).

6 WWF Mediterranean Marine Initiative and WWF North Africa (2026). Facilitation Report – Women Together in Fisheries. Gammarth, Tunisia, 5–7 October 2026. Internal workshop report.



The first-ever regional workshop dedicated to Mediterranean women working in fisheries.
Split, Croatia, April 2025. © Maja Prgomet / WWF Adria



The second Women Together in fiSHEries workshop.
Gammarth, Tunisia, October 2026. © WWF North Africa

The Mediterranean Marine Initiative (MMI) brings together WWF offices and programmes from across the region in a concerted, coordinated effort to bring the Mediterranean Sea back to health.

together possible™ wwfmmi.org

© 2026
WWF® and ©1986 Panda Symbol are owned by WWF. All rights reserved.

For contact details and further information, please visit our international website at wwf.panda.org