



MAKE FISHING FAIR

Youth Summit

A declaration supporting youth to
secure generational renewal in the
small scale fisheries sector



On 12 and 13 October 2026, one year after the 2025 Make Fishing Fair Forum, more than 20 young people from fishing communities gathered at the Make Fishing Fair Youth Summit, convened by the Low Impact Fishers of Europe (LIFE) and Blue Ventures.

The delegation comprised small-scale fishers, shellfish gatherers, fish-workers, researchers, students and coastal youth under 40 from across European sea basins, including representatives from Croatia, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom.

Introduction

Europe's fishing future depends on us, young people, and on our commitment to the sector. Yet for many of us, that future is increasingly uncertain. A chronic lack of fish in inshore coastal waters, restricted access to resources and markets, increasing competition for marine space, structural entry barriers and other difficulties are making the sector unviable and pushing us out of the profession. We witness how our families and fellow small-scale fishers have fished in a low impact way for generations, providing coastal communities with an enduring socio-economic lifeline. It is deeply frustrating to know that, despite our passion, dynamism, and readiness to innovate, this lifeline may be cut, denying us the opportunity to continue this ancestral way of life.

We refuse to let these barriers define our future. We want to safeguard our essential role in coastal communities: sustaining local food supplies and economies, maintaining maritime heritage while embracing innovation, and pioneering low-impact practices for a sustainable future. We are raising our voices to demand immediate policy action that guarantees fair, long-term opportunities for fisheries, secures decent livelihoods for youth and new entrants, and safeguards the future of small-scale fisheries and coastal economies.

The future of small-scale fishing cannot be decided without us, the people who will live that future.

Launch of the Low Impact Fishers of Europe Youth Network

On 12 October 2026, at the Make Fishing Fair Youth Summit, we launched the Low Impact Fishers of Europe (LIFE) Youth Network to unite young fishers and fishing community members to connect, organise and shape the future of small-scale fisheries, ensuring that the next generation has a real voice in decisions shaping our seas, livelihoods and coastal communities, rather than simply inheriting decisions made by previous generations.

We now call on European institutions to empower young people by supporting their organisations, strengthening youth participation and ensuring that young voices are meaningfully, formally and permanently embedded in fisheries governance and EU high-level decision-making processes.

A Core Demand: A Binding EU Plan of Action for SSF within the Ocean Act

We, young small-scale fishers, fish-workers, coastal community representatives and other young people committed to the future of small-scale fisheries, endorse the “Make Fishing Fair Roadmap” and call upon the European institutions and Member States to establish a Plan of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries in Europe. This Plan must incorporate the principles of the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on Small-Scale Fisheries (SSF Guidelines), and establish a clear, differentiated policy and management approach that distinguishes between small-scale fisheries and large-scale industrial operations. The plan must be made legally binding within the framework of the upcoming EU Ocean Act.

Concrete Youth-Focused Calls and Policy Actions

1. Restore the seas we depend on

- Restore ecosystem functionality: Without fish, there is no future, and the poor status of stocks is a crisis affecting every sea basin. We need to restore fish stocks and ecosystems functionality. This requires co-managed Marine Protected Areas, restoration plans and effective fisheries management based on an ecosystem-based approach and increasing connections between fishers and scientists. Policy decisions must combine robust and improved science, taking into account all factors affecting fish stocks, with fishers' experiential and traditional ecological knowledge.
- Apply adaptive co-management across all coastal areas: Guarantee small-scale fishers shared authority over decision-making processes, guided by inclusiveness, transparency, accountability and equity in European coastal waters.
- Build climate-resilient communities: Co-design climate adaptation and emergency response plans to buffer against environmental and economic shocks. Support climate-adaptive fisheries management tailored to small-scale needs, adapting the allocation of fishing opportunities to changes in the ecosystem, managing risks from emerging toxic species, and valorising invasive species.

2. Lift structural entry barriers and guarantee access

- Guarantee access rights for young fishers: Guarantee young fishers direct, preferential and ring-fenced access to fishing opportunities, licences and traditional fishing grounds for young fishers and new entrants, with preferential access for SSF within the 12 nautical mile zone. Member States must ensure fair allocation of fishing opportunities based on social, economic and environmental criteria, avoiding reliance on historical track records.
- Guarantee access to sectoral support through a dedicated SSF fund and retained EMFAF definition: Establish ring-fenced financial support for facilitating generational renewal and youth engagement in fisheries, energy transition, sustainable practices, market access and fisher-led innovation, including training and lower capital investment barriers for young and new low-impact fishers. Support and replicate viable collective ownership schemes. Current attempts to replace the SSF definition are misguided and counterproductive. They are impractical and could create major loopholes, potentially dismantling support for those who need it most and undermining generation renewal.
- Reduce bureaucratic barriers to enter the profession: Streamline the process for building fishing businesses and accessing funding through one-stop online portals and dedicated national support services, with trained officials to provide

guidance and speed up processes, while removing barriers that prevent fishers and maritime workers from entering and succeeding in the profession, and from diversifying their income. Build the capacity of SSF organisations through training, reduced administrative burdens and funding to create dedicated SSF Producer Organisations, while recognising and supporting existing organisations.

3. Strengthen skills, mentorship and youth networks

- Provide timely, funded and suitable training, including structured mentoring & apprenticeships: Increase the availability and range of timely, funded learning programmes, including providing online options. Establish formal mentoring and apprenticeship schemes to provide technical guidance and administrative support for young and new entrants to the SSF profession. Safety and training requirements must be tailored strictly to the type of fishery, fishing gear, vessel size, and authorised operating distance.
- Create pathways for young people supporting small-scale fisheries: Establish funded internships, traineeships, and early-career opportunities for students and professionals in fisheries-related fields.

4. Improve working conditions, social protection and gender equity

- Strive for gender equity in fisheries: Generational renewal depends on gender justice. Empower young women to enter the profession, foster leadership, and amplify women's organizations to build collective strength. Supported by gender-disaggregated research, we can ensure the next generation of women thrives both at sea and in coastal communities.
- Equal social rights for all fishers and fishworkers: Guarantee secure, simplified access to education, safety at sea, social security, occupational health protection, including improved support for sick leave, maternity/paternity leave and unemployment during fishing closures and other cases of "force majeure". Policies must explicitly address the current lack of social protection for self-employed, support share fishermen and women performing unpaid roles and the lack of retirement reduction coefficients in some countries.
- A Just Energy Transition as a social enabler: Use the energy transition as an engine to drive social and environmental improvements, to improve safety, lower fossil fuel reliance, improve working conditions and attract youth to small-scale low-impact fishing. Yet, energy transition investments alone will not achieve generational renewal unless embedded within a comprehensive Plan of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries.

Conclusion

Securing a viable future for coastal communities requires a fundamental principle: decisions about the future of small-scale fisheries must be co-designed by the next generation of stewards. By embedding a binding SSF Plan of Action into the Ocean Act and guaranteeing young fishers a permanent voice in high-level governance, decision-makers can turn words of support generation renewal into concrete action. The future is now—and young fishers are ready to shape it.



MAKE FISHING FAIR

blue ventures
beyond conservation



The Make Fishing Fair Campaign is a partnership between
the Low Impact Fishers of Europe and Blue Ventures

