
New medical guidelines for fishers

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European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF) and Europêche have published new [Guidelines](#) on the medical examinations of fishers, paving the way for the harmonisation of standards for health and fitness checks across Europe and worldwide.

Sea fishing is a remote profession and therefore deprived from immediate medical assistance at a level shore-based people can rely on. In relation with the relevant safety challenges performing their work at sea, it's important that fishers on board fishing vessels are qualified and fit for their duties. This reality is well recognised by international and European legislation¹ which require fishers to hold a valid medical certificate issued in accordance with their provisions.

In practice, however, despite the obligation for fishers to hold a medical certificate, there are no specific international guidelines for the medical examination of fishers, in stark contrast with merchant seafarers.

“In the making of international medical guidelines for the examination of seafarers, fishers were shockingly excluded. While certain countries apply guidelines for seafarers to fishers, those guidelines haven't been designed with that goal in mind, and they don't completely fit specificities of sea fishing”, said Ment van der Zwan, Europêche Spokesperson in European social dialogue.

European social partners, the ETF and Europêche, have been working together with the International Maritime Health Association (IMHA) on closing this gap in international occupational health and have now published guidelines for fishers and their specific working environment.

“In such a physically-demanding job, the existence of specific guidelines for medical examination of workers is a must. We hope that these new guidelines will be used as a tool by doctors performing medical examinations to have a clear understanding of the unique aspects of fishing, as their professional judgement is critical to the health and safety of fishers. Competent authorities should also harmonise the criteria used for the medical checks of fishers and thereafter mutually recognise certificates of medical fitness. The increasing internationalisation of fishing makes such harmonisation even more important.” underlined Juan Manuel Trujillo, ETF Fisheries Section Chair.

The ETF and Europêche will continue to promote the harmonisation of standards for the medical examinations of fishers at European and International level. Using harmonised approaches and carrying out systematic monitoring programs will be vital in improving fishers' health and safety.

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¹ ILO Work in Fishing Convention C188, the EU Council Directive 2017/159 and STCW-F.

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