

Russia



UK seafood industry exports from Russia 2018*		
Fish type	Value, £	Weight, tonnes
Cod	35,470,345	7,242
Haddock	13,753,492	3,276
Pollack	4,712,563	2,437
Other Fish	1,411,455	234
Prepared and Preserved Shrimps and Prawns	1,108,339	160
Salmon	73,150	20
Other Shellfish	4,520	0

*Source: Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC).

Introduction

This report is part of a series of country risk profiles that are designed to an understanding of the social risks associated with source countries that play a key role in the UK's seafood industry. Each report covers risks related to the production and processing of wild catch and aquaculture seafood products.

This report covers issues such as forced labour, working conditions, and impacts of the industry on local communities; and the mitigation efforts and regulatory frameworks put in place to address these issues.

This country risk profile has been compiled by Verisk Maplecroft on behalf of Seafish. Information on issues has been collated from publicly available sources, varying from international rankings and ratings, research by academics and other organisations, through to media articles. It has been prepared for general information only. You should not rely solely on its contents; always verify information from your own suppliers in your own supply chain. References for all information sources are provided.

Overview

The coastline of the Russian Federation is currently the fifth longest in the world after the coastlines of Canada, Norway, Indonesia and Greenland.¹ The Russian seafood industry, which is comprised of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) as well as access to 12 seas, landed 5.15 million tonnes of seafood in 2018, helping it become the fourth largest global exporter of seafood by volume.² Major seafood exports from Russia to the UK include cod, haddock and pollock.

Social Risks

A combination of a dilapidated fleet, and frequent indifference to the welfare and safety of crews substantially increases the risk of serious accidents in Russia's fishing industry. Russia's fishing fleet is primarily composed of boats built in the 1980s which do not conform to modern safety standards. The advanced age of many vessels also makes them of dubious reliability, increasing health and safety risks for crew.³ Several large vessels have sunk in the sea of Okhotsk over the past decade, resulting in large scale loss of life and ecological damage.

The government has incentivised fleet modernisation by providing additional "investment quotas" to the allowable catch of companies that build new ships at domestic shipyards. However, in the period 2013-16 only six new vessels were commissioned (out of a fleet of around 2,000), and just 33 new vessels are under construction.⁴ Russia's shipyards have also primarily been focused on military vessels and are still in the process of adapting to building modern fishing vessels. This means that an increase in the number and severity of accidents is highly likely as the rest of the fleet continues to deteriorate.

Oversight of occupational health and safety and other labour standards by state agencies is very weak. Particularly in more remote and sparsely populated regions – where Russia’s fishing industry is concentrated – inspection agencies are often poorly resourced and subject to minimal central oversight. This exacerbates the inherent difficulties in effectively monitoring labour conditions on ships that are often at sea for months at a time. This is in addition to the poor conditions on many outdated and ageing vessels.⁵

There are documented instances of forced labour being employed in Russia’s fishing industry, and the sector presents a high risk of modern slavery. Extensive corruption and weak governance facilitate trafficking and allows businesses exploiting forced labour to operate relatively freely in remote areas of the country. This includes the fishing industry, where there are documented cases of Ukrainian⁶ and Myanmar⁷ nationals being pressed into forced labour on Russian trawlers.

Modern slavery in Russia has generally arisen from the trafficking of migrants from poorer regions of Russia and neighbouring post-Soviet republics, and Asia. In addition to widespread official corruption, the concentration of fishing activities in remote coastal regions lowers the likelihood that anti-slavery laws will be effectively enforced, heightening the risk of modern slavery in fish sourced from Russia.⁸

The increased risk of forced labour and modern slavery on Russian vessels also exacerbates environmental and governance risks. Analysis of the fishing industry globally has shown a strong correlation between the use of forced labour and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, symptomatic of a lack of effective oversight.⁹

A combination of weak state capacity, geographical distance, and widespread corruption present substantial governance risks to the Russian fishing industry. Legally the Russian state owns all “aquatic biological resources” in its territorial waters. Commercial fishers must be licensed by the Federal Agency for Fishery (“Rosrybolovstvo”), which determines annual quotas. In 2004 the Rosrybolovstvo ceased auctioning quotas and began assigning them on a historical catch basis – effectively determining a company’s allowance based on the prior year’s catch, adjusted to account for current environmental conditions to prevent overfishing.

Most Russian state agencies suffer from a culture of tolerance of pervasive corruption, and Rosrybolovstvo has not been an exception. This allows local officials to extract bribes from both commercial and recreational fishers almost with impunity. This includes allowing commercial fishers to engage in illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing). The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime assesses Russia as the fourth worst performer worldwide in preventing IUU fishing.¹⁰

Regulations and risk mitigation

Russia’s health and safety regulations for the seafood industry are slowly improving the safety of workers at sea, however, there is still much more work to be done. In 2012, the Russian Federation ratified the Maritime Labour Convention (MLO) set out by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). This was seen as a major step for providing decent working conditions for seafarers in a country that had a history of labour trafficking. However, Russia’s seafood industry is still regarded as a sector in which migrant workers are vulnerable to exploitation.

Russia’s first port welfare council promotes health and well-being of seafarers. The council was established in the port of Novorossiysk, Russia’s main Black Sea port, and aims to promote seafarer welfare around the world, in conjunction with objectives laid out by the MLO for seafarers to have sufficient access to shore-based facilities and services to secure their rights.¹¹

However, difficult to understand labour standards – including those relating to the seafood industry – are not adequately enforced due to entrenched corruption and the limited capacity of oversight agencies. The Russian regulatory system is designed to be somewhat opaque and a means of rewarding connected ‘insiders’ rather than promoting a level playing field. Labour legislation is enforced by the Federal Service for Labour and Employment, which is also responsible for conducting inspections. The agency, however, is ineffective as an inspector and is highly susceptible to corruption, often using its powers to issue fines or to extort bribes.

International conventions and rankings

The following tables indicate which international labour conventions Russia has ratified. The ratification of these conventions is a good indicator of a source country’s commitment to enforcing internationally accepted best practices in the seafood industry when combined with thorough national legislation and well-resourced enforcement mechanisms.

International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions	Ratification
Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise (No. 87)	Yes
Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining (No. 98)	Yes
Forced Labour (No. 29)	Yes
Abolition of Forced Labour (No. 105)	Yes
Equal Remuneration (No. 100)	Yes
Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) (No. 111)	Yes
Minimum Age (No. 138)	Yes
Worst Forms of Child Labour (No. 182)	Yes
Hours of Work (Industry) (No.1)	No
Weekly Rest (Industry) (No.14)	Yes
Protection of Wages (No. 95)	Yes
Minimum Wage Fixing (No.131)	No
Occupational Safety and Health (No. 155)	Yes
Occupational Health Services (No. 161)	No
Labour Inspection (No. 81)	Yes
Private Employment Agencies (No. 181)	No
Work in Fishing Convention (No. 188)	No
Maritime Labour Convention (No. 186)	Yes

United Nations (UN) Conventions	Ratification
Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children	Yes
Convention against Transnational Organized Crime	Yes
Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation and the Prostitution of Others	Yes
Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families	No
Convention to Suppress the Slave Trade and Slavery	Yes
Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery	Yes

Other Conventions	Ratification
FAO Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing	No

Rankings in global indices

US Department of State Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report

The TIP report is released annually by the US Department of State and offers a summary of the laws and enforcement efforts of various countries with respect to human trafficking. Specifically, it ranks countries based on a '3P paradigm' of prosecuting traffickers, protecting victims and preventing crime. Scoring on these elements is then collated to give each country a ranking. The rankings range from Tier 1 which indicates governments of countries that fully comply with the Trafficking Victims Prevention Act (TVPA) minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking to Tier 3 for the governments of countries that do not fully comply with the TVPA's minimum standards and are not making significant efforts to do so.

Rating: Tier 3

The Government of Russia does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking.¹²

Global Slavery Index

The 2018 Global Slavery Index measures the extent of modern slavery country by country, and the steps governments are taking to respond to this issue, to objectively measure progress toward ending modern slavery.

There are two rankings:

1. Rankings of countries by prevalence of the population in modern slavery. Rankings range from 1 to 167 - with 1 the worst and 167 the best, in terms of the prevalence of slavery.
2. Rank of countries in terms of government response to the issue. This is an indication of how governments are tackling modern slavery.

For prevalence Russia ranks: 64/167 (where a ranking of 1 indicates highest risk).

The Global Slavery Index rates Russia as high risk for the prevalence of modern slavery in its seafood industry.¹³

In terms of government response Russia ranks CC. This indicates the government has a limited response to modern slavery, with largely basic victim support services, a limited criminal justice framework, limited coordination or collaboration mechanism, and few protections for those vulnerable to modern slavery. There may be evidence that some government policies and practices facilitate slavery. Services are largely provided by international organisations (IOs)/ NGOs with limited government funding or in-kind support.

EU Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing Carding Process/Watch List

Under the IUU Regulation, non-EU countries identified as having inadequate measures in place to prevent and deter this activity may be issued with a formal warning (yellow card) to improve. If they fail to do so, they face having their fish banned from the EU market (red card) among other measures.

Russia is not on the EU IUU watch list.

Endnotes

- 1 Worldatlas, Undated, Countries with the longest coastline, Available at <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/countries-with-the-most-coastline.html>
- 2 Russia Business Today, 15 May 2019, Russia Plans Massive Leap in Fishing, Aquaculture Industry by 2024, Available at <https://russiabusiness.today/agriculture/russia-plans-massive-leap-in-fishing-aquaculture-industry-by-2024/>
- 3 Flanders State of the Art, June 2017, Fishery Sector Overview 2017: Russian and North-West Region, Available at https://www.flandersinvestmentandtrade.com/export/sites/trade/files/market_studies/2017-Russia-Fish-sector-Overview.pdf
- 4 SeafoodSource, 15 June 2018, Russia using aggressive incentives to renew its fleet, Available at <https://www.seafood-source.com/features/russia-using-aggressive-incentives-to-renew-its-fleet>
- 5 The Barents Observer, 26 October 2015, "Terrible Conditions Onboard", Available at <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/2015/10/terrible-conditions-onboard>
- 6 International Organisation for Migration (IOM), 2012, The exploitation of Ukrainian seafarers and fishers, Available at https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/trafficked_at_sea_web.pdf
- 7 Myanmar Times, 7 April 2015, Trawler tragedy lifts veil on illegal recruitment, Available at <https://www.mmtimes.com/national-news/13967-trawler-tragedy-lifts-veil-on-illegal-recruitment.html>
- 8 Nature, 7 November 2018, Modern slavery and the race to fish, Available at <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-018-07118-9>
- 9 Nature, 7 November 2018, Modern slavery and the race to fish, Available at https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-018-07118-9#Sec2_AS_ABOVE
- 10 Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 7 February 2019, IUU Fishing Index. Available at <https://globalinitiative.net/iuu-fishing-index/>
- 11 Nautilus International, 18 October 2018, Warm welcome for Merchant Navy seafarers in Russia, Available at <https://www.nautilusint.org/en/news-insight/telegraph/warm-welcome-for-merchant-seafarers-in-russian-port/>
- 12 United States Department of State, June 2019, 2019 Trafficking in Persons Report: New Zealand. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-trafficking-in-persons-report-2/russia/>
- 13 The Global Slavery Index, 2018, Findings – Importing Risk – Fishing. Available at: <https://www.globalslaveryindex.org/2018/findings/importing-risk/fishing/>

For further information see the **Seafish ethics in Seafood** web page.
Available at: <https://www.seafish.org/article/ethics-in-seafood>