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Progress made by the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia on the main recommendations of the Forty-first Session of the ECA

Executive summary

The main technical theme of the forty-first Session of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA, the Commission) was “*Plant health in Europe and Central Asia*”. The Commission discussed issues relating to the protection of plants from pests in the region and provided recommendations in the following technical sub-areas:

- relevance of plant health for Europe and Central Asia
- plant pests in relation to climate change and variability, food security and biodiversity risks
- impacts of global trade and human mobility on plant health in Europe and Central Asia.

The Commission adopted a number of recommendations addressed to the Members and to FAO.

This document presents a brief update on the plant health-related activities and on results achieved relating to the recommendations for FAO, which could be grouped as follows:

- providing technical support for countries in the enhancement of their plant protection capacities, including alignment with international standards
- raising awareness on the importance of plant health for food security and economic development, including support for training programmes aiming at sharing knowledge on pest risk challenges and on ways to address them
- the need for the collection of more data on links between climate change and pest challenges
- supporting efforts taken by countries to enhance their international cooperation on plant health issues.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, FAO has been able to address to large extent the recommendations of the ECA Session, with the understanding that they do not expire after two years, but form a standing guidance on FAO's activities in the area of plant health in Europe and Central Asia. Impacts of the pandemic usually resulted in postponement of activities, not in their cancellation.

I. Background

1. The forty-first Session of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA) was held in Budapest, Hungary, on 1-2 October 2019. The main technical theme of the Session was “*Plant health in Europe and Central Asia*”.
2. At the Session, the Commission adopted a set of recommendations for Members of the region and for FAO.¹
3. In this context, FAO was requested to:
 - provide technical support for countries in the enhancement of their plant protection capacities, including alignment with international standards
 - raise awareness on the importance of plant health issues for food security and economic development, including support for training programmes aiming at sharing knowledge on pest risk challenges and on ways to address them
 - the need for the collection of more data on links between climate change and pest challenges
 - support efforts taken by countries to enhance their international cooperation on plant health issues.
4. The main objective of this document is to outline the key results of the activities undertaken by FAO related to the plant health-related recommendations of the forty-first Session of ECA. The support provided by FAO is aligned with the national priorities of the Members outlined in country programming documents, and fits into the implementation of the regional priorities established by the thirty-second Session of the Regional Conference for Europe (ERC).²
5. In section II, this document outlines the results related to plant health in the region, where each chapter corresponds to one group of the Commission's recommendations for FAO, as listed above. Section III refers to the impacts of COVID-19 on the delivery of technical support in the region by FAO.

¹ The Report of the Forty-first Session of the European Commission on Agriculture is available at <http://www.fao.org/3/nb770en/nb770en.pdf>

² The document of the Thirty-second Session of ERC “Results and Priorities for FAO in the Region” is available at <http://www.fao.org/3/nc229en/nc229en.pdf>

II. Results of the implementing activities in the area of plant health carried out by FAO in Europe and Central Asia

6. The FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) takes a holistic and a multi-sectoral approach in providing support to the countries in the region, responding to the Regional Priorities through the programmatic umbrella of the Regional Initiatives as endorsed by the thirty-first and thirty-second Sessions of the Regional Conference for Europe. Protection of plants from pests is an inherent part of plant production systems, irrespective of whether the intended use of the plants is for food or for other purposes, and relates as well to plants growing in the wild. Depending on the scope of individual programmes or projects, plant protection-related issues may be their stand-alone focus or part of a wider sectoral or multi-sectoral approach.

7. The categories of plants for which protection from pests is relevant include:

- plants produced for food for humans or for fodder for animals
- forestry plants
- plants cultivated for obtaining raw materials for industry processing, e.g. wood, oils or fibres
- plants grown for ornamental purposes (cut flowers, pot plants, plants in home gardens or public areas, trees in cities, parks, streets, tourist areas, or planted along roads or alleys)
- wild flora - part of natural ecosystems and biodiversity.

8. As plant protection is relevant for plants in cultivation and in the wild, grown by smallholders and in big farms for food or for other purposes, and for the protection of natural habitats, it may contribute to the comprehensive approach in a wide range of development activities that may be implemented under all Regional Initiatives, with focus on various aspects related to the agricultural development, e.g. food security, internal or international trade, farmers' livelihoods and economic development, food processing or natural resource management. Furthermore, plant protection supports achieving a number of SDGs, especially SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 8, SDG 12, SDG13, SDG 15 and SDG 17.

9. FAO continuously supports Members of the region in efforts to enhance their national capacities in the area of plant health and to achieve other plant protection-related goals. FAO activities concentrate on developing and implementing projects that address aspects relating to the protection of crops and forests from pests but also include organizing, co-organizing and participating in meetings relating to plant and forest health in the region, and the actions of the Forest Invasive Species Network for Europe and Central Asia (REUFIS), among other activities.

1) Technical support for countries to enhance the capacities of their plant protection systems

10. FAO has addressed the recommendations relating to the enhancement of phytosanitary capacities of countries through the implementation of development projects in the area of protection of plants from pests, including the protection of forests.

11. The extent, to which the projects related to protection of plants from pests varied and depended on the overall scope of the projects.

12. Some projects have been strictly plant protection-oriented, with the focus on the enhancement of national systems, such as phytosanitary systems (relating to obligations in international trade under

the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC)), systems for the sustainable use of pesticides, such as Integrated Pest Management (IPM) or systems for pesticide management (authorization, marketing, quality control). A separate category are projects on systems for the control of transboundary pests, such as locusts or wheat rusts.

13. Other projects had wider scopes and focused on the whole production systems for individual crops or categories of crops, where protection from plant pests was one of aspects necessary for the comprehensive approach to the subject of the project. Although important for all plant production systems, this is especially relevant for plants for planting - such as seeds, nursery stock or seed potatoes - which usually undergo official certification for their quality and freedom from pests or to horticultural crops (e.g. fruits or vegetables), which often require intensive protection from plant pests.

14. Regarding projects related to forest health in the region, the focus is on improving the resilience of forest ecosystems towards the introduction and spread of invasive species and native pest outbreaks and the implementation of phytosanitary systems in forest sector.

1.1. Enhancement of the capacities of national phytosanitary systems

15. Phytosanitary systems are often perceived by countries as an important tool supporting their development. Not only are these systems considered helpful for the increase of productivity in agriculture, but also for gaining access to export markets for locally produced plants or plant products, or for providing information on pest presence and distribution, as the basis for pest management programmes.

16. FAO has been supporting the enhancement of national phytosanitary systems in a number of programme countries of the region through development projects. Elements of the phytosanitary systems, in development of which the countries were most interested were surveillance, systems supporting pest free areas and the electronic phytosanitary certification.

17. Through a regional FAO Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP)³ project, FAO supported Armenia, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine in the enhancement of their phytosanitary capacities. Within the project, trainings were delivered on national surveillance systems, national phytosanitary certification systems and on detection and identification of selected pests in laboratories. Additionally, the phytosanitary system in Moldova was supported through the publication of a manual for inspectors on plant pest surveillance.

18. FAO has been working with Azerbaijan on the development of a project that would support the upgrade of the national plant pest surveillance system. There are a number of pests that are considered to be absent in Azerbaijan, but their statuses should be re-confirmed through a robust surveillance system. Once the information is collected and analysed, it may provide the basis for the establishment of pest free areas in Azerbaijan, which could significantly help in opening new export markets for plants or plant products.

19. A new development in phytosanitary systems gradually gaining interest in an increasing number of countries is the ePhyto Solution system.⁴ It is a global system for the issuance and international exchange of electronic phytosanitary certificates, developed under the auspices of the IPPC Secretariat. Within Europe and Central Asia, the system is used by the European Union and its Member States and

³ More information on FAO's Technical Cooperation Programme is available at <http://www.fao.org/technical-cooperation-programme/en/>

⁴ For more about the IPPC ePhyto Solution, visit <https://www.ephytoexchange.org/landing/>

by Uzbekistan. The system is tested by the United Kingdom, and Norway and Ukraine have been registered in the system as countries preparing to join the system. Ukraine's plans to join the ePhyto system may soon be supported by FAO within a new project, whose preparation has started recently. Apart from joining the ePhyto system, the project should support the establishment of pest free areas in the country.

1.2. Enhancement of national agricultural sectors, including plant protection aspects

20. FAO has been providing the following technical support to a number of Member countries, addressing their priority needs for improved plant production and management practices, with components on effective plant protection.

21. FAO has supported the strengthening of the national capacities in the Republic of Moldova in berry production (strawberries and raspberries), through the establishment of demonstration fields, including integrated management of major pests and diseases affecting berry fruits. It involved training of master trainers and farmer field schools and development of technical manual and extension materials for future trainings.

22. In Armenia, FAO has been providing technical support through a pilot demonstration and trainings on good agricultural technologies and practices, including integrated pest management.

23. Through a project in Georgia within the ENPARD III programme, FAO has been supporting the country's agricultural sector. The project aims at strengthening the national capacity to improve the provision of extension services to small farmers in order to increase their competitiveness. The project focuses on the development and implementation of identified demonstration plots, presenting improved practices and innovative technologies and approaches, including integrated pest management for tomatoes, cucumbers and potatoes.

24. FAO has aimed to develop the capacities of farmers, foresters, rural households and national experts in Abkhazia on appropriate methods and approaches in integrated management of pests in crops and forests, through a dedicated project. Major key outputs have included; (1) improved extension service through the establishment of a working group for plant protection and forest health; (2) development of a forest health strategy for the prevention and management of invasive species and the management of pests and diseases; (3) strengthening of the capacities of farmers through the establishment of farmer field schools, and pilot demonstrations for farmers' trainings on IPM for major crops and pests; and 4) the enhancement of capacities for the implementation of IPM programmes for major forest tree pests.

25. FAO supports the improvement of national capacities in North Macedonia to promote climate resilience in the agricultural sector. One of the outputs focuses on improved climate-smart agriculture innovative technologies and practices demonstrated in field plots for farmers' trainings including pest and diseases management practices based on weather and climate parameters.

26. In Uzbekistan, FAO supports the enhancement of rice production and management. The main objective of the project is to strengthen national capacities in integrated rice production and management to increase productivity. It will include integrated rice crop and pest management techniques demonstrated and validated with farmers' participation.

27. In Georgia, FAO will support the capacity of the Ministry of Environmental Protection for effective extension. Pilot demonstrations of innovative production, management, postharvest and processing for training of master trainers and farmer field schools will be established to provide technical

knowledge and skills on sustainable agriculture production and management practices including, i.a. integrated pest management.

28. FAO supports integrated natural resources management in drought-prone and salt-affected agricultural production landscapes through a regional project being implemented in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF). The project aims at scaling up sustainable and climate-smart agricultural management practices, such as conservation agriculture or IPM, and supports the diversification of crops for providing the necessary adaptability and resilience to drought and soil salinity.

29. FAO has been working on strengthening the resilience of pine forests to bark beetle outbreaks in Belarus and Ukraine, aiming at supporting the establishment of national forest health systems and procedures to respond to pest outbreaks and associated tree dieback, revising national surveillance and monitoring systems to develop functional early warning systems, improving the resilience of forest stands in relation to forest health and enhanced drought mitigation, and strengthening national capacities on communication and regional coordination in relation to forest health issues.

30. FAO has been supporting Azerbaijan in the establishment of a national system for the production of pest-free seed potatoes. As potato is a host plant for many pests, relevant requirements for pest freedom must be formulated and sampling and laboratory testing should be conducted at all steps of production, allowing for meeting the requirements and for the certification of the produce as pest-free seed potatoes.

31. Georgia, with the support of FAO, has been implementing a project for the enhancement of its nursery production system. The key components related to plant health are the establishment of a repository of pest-free source material maintained in conditions preventing infestations and the drafting of relevant regulations on the registration of nurseries and official controls and certification of nursery material in Georgia, similar to the European Union's CAC (*Conformitas Agraria Communitatis*) category.⁵ Furthermore, in order to provide guarantees for freedom from pests of the nursery material, Georgia is planning to introduce a system of labelling, analogous to the EU's plant passport system.⁶

32. In order to create favourable conditions for increases in the export of food products of plant origin and to exploit better the existing potential of the country in plant production, Tajikistan has been interested in enhancing its national phytosanitary food safety and phytosanitary systems. The products that are going to be supported through the enhanced phytosanitary system should be fruits (fresh or dried) and vegetables, with a view to enhancing their exports.

33. Another country in which plant health systems are supported by FAO is Uzbekistan. The country is interested in the implementation of the provisions of the IPPC and international standards for phytosanitary measures (ISPMs) for the enhancement of its plant protection systems to prevent the introductions of pests, enhance food security and to stimulate plant exports. One of the major crops, for which Uzbekistan is looking for progress, is potato. FAO provides support for upgrading the national system for the production of seed potatoes and improving the production of ware potatoes, with protection from pests being one of the key factors contributing to increasing yields and preventing crop losses.

⁵ Information on the CAC category is available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:31992L0034&from=EN>

⁶ Information on EU plant passport system is available at https://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/plant_health_biosecurity/trade_eu_en

1.3. Pest and pesticide management systems

34. FAO supports the disposal of POP (persistent organic pollutants) pesticides and strengthening capacities to manage sustainably pesticides and related waste materials in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkey. In order to prevent the accumulation of obsolete agro-chemicals, FAO promotes sustainable and ecosystem-based intensification of crop production, within the GEF-funded and FAO-managed project. The project has the following objectives: reducing threats from POPs and other obsolete pesticides to public health and the environment; strengthening legal and institutional framework for proper pesticide management across their full life-cycle; and reducing the use of pesticides through the introduction of alternative plant production and protection approaches.

35. Under a regional TCP project, FAO has supported the development of manuals on integrated pest management for North Macedonia and for Ukraine.

1.4. Support for the management of transboundary pests

36. Project development efforts were initiated on prevention and management of emerging plant health challenges in the region. Among the most common plant health problem across the region are rust diseases of wheat. For their effective management, international collaboration and continuous surveillance are essential due to the diseases' transboundary nature and frequent changes in population composition resulting from mutations. In this respect, a project has been developed with support from the FAO–Turkey Partnership Programme to facilitate collaboration among seven countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Within the project, designed for five years, support will be provided for international collaboration, surveillance, capacity building, development of resistant varieties and farmer trainings.

37. Additionally, a TCP project has been formulated to address the challenge of a new strain of banana Fusarium wilt disease (Fusarium Tropical race 4) detected on the southern coast of Turkey. The disease is threatening banana productions worldwide. The project will support the development of a national strategy and the conduct of surveillance, awareness raising and capacity development to prevent the spread of the disease and its potential impact on production and livelihoods.

38. FAO is involved in the preparation of a new project for Tajikistan that will support the development of the agricultural sector in the country. One of the components focuses on the enhancement of the national systems for locust control and plant protection, including biological pest control.

1.5. Plant health-related projects in forestry

39. FAO provides support to strengthening the sustainable and multipurpose forest management in order to improve rural livelihoods and address climate change in Kosovo.⁷ The project aims at intensifying the detection, quantification and forecasting of forest pest-related incidents and preventing their reoccurrence and expansion in the future by means of controls and suppression. Frequent coordination and information sharing across the borders of Kosovo will be established.

⁷ All references to Kosovo should be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)

40. Under Regional Initiative 3, a survey on chestnut blight was conducted in 2020 in Albania, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia and North Macedonia to characterize local populations of the chestnut blight pathogen and to identify hypovirus strains to be used in the region for its control.

2) Raising awareness on the importance of plant health issues for food security and economic development

41. In Europe and Central Asia, every year there are a number of meetings dedicated to various aspects of agricultural development, including meetings that focus on plant protection. The end of 2019 and all of 2020 were expected to be special due to the proclamation of 2020 by the General Assembly of the United Nations as the International Year of Plant Health (IYPH).

42. A number of countries had planned organizing plant health-related events within the framework of IYPH. Unfortunately, the beginning of 2020 brought with it the COVID-19 pandemic and, in response to the threat, governments imposed restrictions on interpersonal contacts, including travel and the organization of meetings, thus making the events impossible. Additionally, FAO decided to suspend the missions of its officers in order to prevent their exposure to the risk of infection.

43. The restrictions impacted many high-level phytosanitary meetings, resulting in cancellation of the fifteenth Session of the Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (CPM-15, 2020) and the Global Plant Health Conference – one of the main events of IYPH, originally planned to take place in Helsinki, Finland, in October 2020.

44. Similarly, the workshop on emerging plant pests and diseases in the context of IYPH, which was to be organized in Turkey jointly by REU and the FAO Sub-regional Office for Central Asia in Ankara (SEC), had to be postponed. Despite the pandemic, SEC organized a virtual stand at the International Online Seed Fair, organized by the Turkish Seed Industries Association.⁸ Moreover, in collaboration with FAO, the Turkish Post Office has released a post stamp dedicated to IYPH.⁹

45. Nevertheless, a number of plant health-related meetings did take place in the region, with FAO involvement in some of them.

46. In November 2019 in Moscow, Russian Federation, the Eurasian Economic Commission organized a regional seminar to discuss the draft ISPM relating to the authorization of entities to carry out the tasks of national plant protection organizations, and on electronic phytosanitary certificates (the IPPC ePhyto Solution system).

47. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020 the work of the IPPC on the development of ISPMs continued, with related meetings held online. Within the standard-setting process, REU, the IPPC Secretariat and the European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organization co-organized the 2020 IPPC Regional Workshop for Europe and Central Asia. The workshop focused on the review of draft ISPMs submitted for the IPPC consultations and provided an opportunity for countries to get better acquainted with the IPPC procedures for standard setting and with other IPPC-related issues. Apart from FAO's involvement in the organization of the workshop itself, prior to the workshop, REU organized an additional regional meeting to support countries' preparations of for the workshop. Furthermore, after the workshop, REU organized another meeting, this one dedicated to providing detailed guidance for countries on the procedures for the upcoming IPPC Call for Topics: Standards and Implementation (2021).

⁸ For more information, see <https://www.turktedonlineseedfair.com/>

⁹ For more information, see <https://www.ptt.gov.tr/Lists/EmisyonProgramlari/Attachments/25/2020%20EMİSYON%20PROGRAMI.pdf>

48. The next IPPC Regional Workshop for Europe and Central Asia has been planned for 6–8 September 2021, in an online modality. Traditionally, REU co-organizes the workshop.

49. In February 2021, in cooperation with the FAO Plant Production and Protection Division (NSP) and with the Secretariat of the IPPC, REU organized a webinar on plant pest surveillance, with the participation of experts from several countries in Central Asia along with Turkey, North Macedonia and Australia. During the webinar, the chairperson of the IYPH International Steering Committee presented an update on IYPH-related activities, while national experts presented their experience, successes and challenges relating to the organization of national surveillance systems.

50. In June 2021 in Armenia, FAO organized an online plant health webinar within the framework of IYPH. The organization of the webinar was coordinated by the FAO Country Office in Armenia. The agenda of the webinar included information relating to IYPH, as well as other plant health-related topics relevant for Armenia.

51. In order to find out more about the perspectives of the implementation of electronic phytosanitary certificates in FAO Programme countries of Europe and Central Asia, REU developed a questionnaire, and distributed it among the countries with a request for filling in and sending back. Several countries responded, which provided partial information about the approaches of countries towards the ePhyto system, as well as on barriers in joining the system.

52. During its development, the questionnaire was consulted with the IPPC Secretariat, which created an opportunity to contact the ePhyto Industry Advisory Group (IAG)¹⁰ supporting the IPPC Secretariat's work on the ePhyto system, and with the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation (GATF),¹¹ which provided technical support to countries around the world interested in joining the system. These contacts have led to the organization of a regional workshop on ePhyto.

53. In June 2021 – in cooperation with the IPPC Secretariat, IAG and GATF, – REU organized a regional webinar dedicated to providing countries in the region with exhaustive information on the IPPC ePhyto Solution and on available options for obtaining technical support in joining the system. Presentations at the webinar were delivered by the organizers and by experts from the European Union, Uganda and Uzbekistan. Another regional webinar was organized in November 2020 on protecting oak trees for future generations in Europe and Central Asia. The webinar focused on oak pests and IPM.

54. Under a regional TCP project, FAO supported the development of manuals on integrated pest management for North Macedonia^{12 13} and for Ukraine.¹⁴ Another IPM manual for Ukraine is planned to be developed under a new project, which should cover plant diseases, and be complementary to the first one, which covered insect pests.

55. Under a project for Armenia on food safety risk analysis, which has also had a plant pests-related component, selected IYPH advocacy materials have been translated into the Armenian language. The translated publications were “*Activity book – Healthy plants, healthy planet*”¹⁵ and “*International Year*

¹⁰ Information about the ePhyto Industry Advisory Group is available at <https://www.ippc.int/en/ephyto/ephyto-industry-advisory-group/>

¹¹ The website of the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation is <https://www.tradefacilitation.org/>

¹² The manual in Macedonian is available at <http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb0814mk>

¹³ The manual in Albanian is available at <http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb0814sq>

¹⁴ The manual for Ukraine is available at <http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb3909en>

¹⁵ The publication is available in English at <http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/ca9327en> and in Armenian at <http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/ca9327hy>

of Plant Health 2020 - Protecting plants, protecting life".¹⁶ The publications were printed in 2 000 copies for distribution in schools and during meetings. Moreover, a promotional video on IYPH was produced in Armenia, with the work on the video supported by FAO Armenia.

56. Under the 2020–2021 work plan of the Forest Invasive Species Network for Europe and Central Asia (REUFIS)¹⁷, a regional assessment of the status of forest invasive species (FIS) in Europe and Central Asia was carried out in 2020 to address the information gap on FIS in the region and to provide an overview of their status, and on other major factors threatening forest ecosystems.

57. In July 2020, REUFIS – jointly with other regional FIS networks from Asia, Africa and Near East – organized a global webinar on forest pests titled “Forest Invasive Species: the next global pandemic?”.

3) Collection of more data on links between climate change and pest challenges

58. This recommendation was addressed by FAO globally, in the context of the International Year of Plant Health. FAO has supported the development and publishing of the “*Scientific review of the impact of climate change on plant pests. A global challenge to prevent and mitigate plant-pest risks in agriculture, forestry and ecosystems*”.¹⁸ The publication is available through the FAO website.

4) Supporting efforts taken by countries to enhance their international cooperation on plant health

59. FAO fully recognizes the importance and supports cooperation between countries in all programming areas, including plant health. The period covered by this report has not been conducive, however, for the development of international cooperation, because usually it required international travels, physical meetings and face-to-face discussions. These are the very items that became impossible under the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions.

60. Considering the COVID situation, FAO has continued to facilitate international contacts between countries and conduct international meetings using the online modality. Thanks to the use of online communicators, international cooperation, discussions and information exchange could continue. Moreover, in a number of cases, this modality has enabled FAO to invite experts from other continents to participate in regional plant health-related meetings, e.g. from Australia or Uganda.

¹⁶ The publication is available in English at <http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/ca6992en> and in Armenian at <http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/ca6992hy>

¹⁷ The REUFIS website is located at REUFIS website: <http://www.reufis.org/>

¹⁸ The publication is available at <http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb4769en>

III. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of development activities in the region

61. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 and related restrictions in movements and meetings of people had numerous implications on the economy across the globe, including agriculture. It also had some impact on the delivery of activities implemented in the region by FAO and its partners under the development projects.

62. Where possible, REU adopted a flexible approach to the delivery of project activities to provide maximum support to recipient countries, despite the pandemic. The pandemic greatly affected activities that required international travels and face-to-face meetings – missions of FAO officers or consultants, trainings and workshops, or study tours. Activities conducted within a single country usually were affected less, with the extent of the impacts dependent on the situation within the respective country. The difficulty in conducting activities does not mean that they immediately were cancelled. FAO undertook various approaches to deliver the planned activities. Meetings of project teams and some of the trainings were conducted online, using web-based communicators. Other activities, such as more practical trainings that should be conducted on-site or in a laboratory, etc., were postponed, hoping for the improvement of the situation. The development of publications, guidance materials, draft legislation acts or other documents could continue despite the pandemic. Where necessary for the delivery of project activities and where possible, the durations of projects were extended, within the existing formal limits, relating especially to specific biennia. In cases, where activities could not be carried out face-to-face due to restrictions and could not be carried out online for technical reasons, some might have had to be cancelled. All efforts have been taken, however, to deliver as many activities as possible and to minimize the cancellations. According to rough estimates of REU officers involved in the implementation of plant health-related projects in the region, the estimated share of activities cancelled due to the pandemic is below 5 percent. However, as many projects are ongoing, this estimate cannot be considered final. It is hoped that the improvement of the COVID-19 situation in the region will allow for full implementation of all planned activities.