



JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME
FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR THE NEAR EAST
Tenth Session

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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CODEX STRATEGIC PLAN 2014-2019
(INCLUDING STRATEGIC PLAN FOR CCNE 2014-2019)

(Prepared by the Codex Secretariat and the Regional Coordinator)

1. BACKGROUND

1.1. The Codex Alimentarius Commission at its thirty-sixth session (CAC36 in 2013) adopted the “Strategic Plan of the Codex Alimentarius Commission for 2014-2019” (the global Strategic Plan)¹ and implementation reports were presented annually at sessions of the Executive Committee of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CCEXEC) since 2015. The responsibility for implementing activities is shared between the Codex Secretariat, FAO and WHO, the Executive Committee, Chairs of CAC subsidiary bodies and CAC members.

1.2. During the last round of meetings of FAO/WHO Coordinating Committees (in the following RCCs) in 2016/17, three out of six RCCs decided to implement regional strategic plans in addition to the global Strategic Plan² and to report on progress at their subsequent meetings³. CCNE9 agreed to retain the plan, but with revised timelines and the agreement to establish a dedicated monitoring group⁴.

1.3. This paper provides an overview and status report on activities under the global Strategic Plan for which the Codex Secretariat relies on Member feedback. Furthermore, the paper addresses the recommendation of CAC40 that the Codex Secretariat work with the regional Coordinators in examining barriers to active participation in Electronic Working Groups (EWGs) and identifying possible solutions⁵.

1.4. The paper also presents developments in relation to the regional strategic plan of CCNE based on information received from the regional coordinator.

2. GLOBAL STRATEGIC PLAN ACTIVITIES REQUIRING MEMBER INFORMATION

2.1. The global Strategic Plan includes four goals, ten objectives, 32 activities and 61 indicators, many of which were deemed unmeasurable⁶. The Codex Secretariat has informed CCEXEC on several occasions that the collection of country specific information from Codex members with regards to certain strategic activities (e.g. networking, changes and robustness of national institutional arrangements, identification of priority committees) remains challenging⁷. Attempts to collect such information via surveys or an online platform embedded in the Codex website frequently resulted in low response rates and/or incomplete information.

2.2. While multiple data sources are used to monitor progress towards the global Strategic Plan, the focus of this paper is on information from members from the CCNE region and challenges in obtaining such information for certain areas of Codex work.

¹ <http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/publications/en/>

² These RCCs are: CCAFRICA, CCLAC and CCNE.

³ In January 2018, the meetings of the RCCs were postponed from the second half of 2018 to the second half of 2019 due to staff capacity constraints.

⁴ REP17/NE, para. 49

⁵ See REP17/CAC para. 116 and CX/NE 19/10/7

⁶ See e.g. CX/EXEC 18/75/3 para. 3.

⁷ See e.g. CX/EXEC 17/73/5 Rev.1 para 4 and CX/EXEC 18/75/3 para. 4.

Goal 1: Establish international food standards that address current and emerging food issues

2.3. The proactive identification of emerging issues and Member needs to ensure relevance of food standards (Objective 1.2) currently relies on the initiative of Members to flag a specific issue/need during meetings of CAC or a relevant subsidiary body. Neither the number of times a Member raises a specific issue nor the follow-up actions on an emerging issue identified by a Member are currently monitored in a systematic manner.

2.4. FAO and WHO encouraged countries to identify food safety/quality issues through a survey sent out prior to RCC meetings. The analysis of replies to the survey conducted in 2019 from Members of CCNE is presented in CX/NE 19/10/3.

Goal 2: Ensure the application of risk analysis principles in the development of Codex standards

2.5. In order to increase the scientific input from developing countries (objective 2.3), FAO/WHO provides support through several activities including trainings and workshops on food control and contamination monitoring in the CCNE region⁸. There is no long-term monitoring mechanism to assess the impact of such capacity building activities in developing countries and further efforts are needed to increase quantity and quality of scientific data from some parts of the CCNE region.

2.6. The participation of technical and scientific experts from developing countries in Codex committees as well as the participation of developing countries in networks are further indicators related to objective 2.3 that require individual information or validation of data by members.

Goal 3: Facilitate the effective participation of all Codex Members

2.7. Since 2014, the share of developing country⁹ delegations out of the total number of Codex Member delegations at all Codex meetings held in a calendar year remained stable at an average of 30 percent (see Appendix I). From the CCNE region all but one developing country attended physical meetings of CAC subsidiary bodies between January 2017 and September 2018¹⁰. However, 35 percent of Members from the CCNE region did not attend any physical meetings in the mentioned period.

2.8. As regards meetings of CAC, a decrease of participation on all levels can be observed as the total number of Codex Member delegations, the number of CCNE country delegations and the percentage of CCNE country delegations as share of the overall CCNE membership dropped in the period 2017-2019.

2.9. Under objective 3.1, Members, in particular developing country Members, shall be encouraged to develop sustainable national institutional arrangements in order to increase effective participation. The Codex Secretariat has created an online platform for information sharing on food safety control systems. In the CCNE region, approximately 60 percent of Members have shared information. Document CX/NE 19/10/5 addresses this matter in detail.

2.10. More information on barriers to physical participation, besides resource constraints, and the identification of activities that could potentially facilitate the participation of Codex Members from all parts of the CCNE region would be needed to achieve progress towards Goal 3.

Goal 4: Implement effective and efficient work management systems and practices

2.11. The 2017 regular review of Codex work management on EWGs¹¹ made a number of recommendations to increase work effectiveness and efficiency when working in EWGs. Appendix II contains information to serve as a basis for discussing how Members from the CCNE region can participate more actively in Codex work via EWGs. This discussion is particularly relevant given the absence of about one third of Members from the CCNE region in physical meetings of CAC subsidiary bodies.

2.12. On the Codex website, new regional web pages have been designed to promote specific Codex activities taking place locally. In the case of CCNE, there is good collaboration with FAO/WHO regional and sub-regional offices, however few news items have been received from Members in the region and the region is invited to share more local information to be promoted globally by the Codex Secretariat. Document CX/NE 19/10/11 addresses the matter in more detail.

⁸ See CX/CAC 19/42/16 for capacity building activities implemented since CAC41 (July 2018)

⁹ As of June 2019, 5 out of 17 Members from the CCNE region are classified as developing countries (i.e. lower middle income countries according to the World Bank list of economies).

¹⁰ The analysis excludes meetings of RCCs.

¹¹ CX/EXEC 17/73/3

3. STATUS OF REGIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN ACTIVITIES

3.1. Following the decision of CCNE9 to retain the regional strategic plan, but with revised timelines (see para.1.2), no information on the status of regional strategic plan activities was received by the Coordinator for Near East. Due to this lack of information it was not possible to assess any progress made with regards to the implementation of the regional strategic plan.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1. Codex Members share the responsibility for implementing the global Strategic Plan together with the Codex Secretariat, FAO and WHO. As activities that cannot be measured and monitored can also not be managed and improved, it is indispensable that members agree on suitable mechanism through which they regularly report to the Codex Secretariat on progress made.

4.2. While the development of regional strategic plans may set important signals of political commitment, the implementation of activities requires long-term dedication of resources and time by the regional coordinator and Members from the region. Progress made under the regional strategic plan for the Near East cannot be assessed by the regional Coordinator due to lack of comprehensive information from Members in the region. Therefore, monitoring and reporting under the global Strategic Plan becomes even more important. In this regard, increased engagement, communication, and collaboration between Members of the region, the regional coordinator and the Codex Secretariat is needed to achieve Codex's strategic goals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

4.3. CCNE is requested to:

- (i) Consider the relevance of adhering to the Global Strategic Plan 2020-2025;
- (ii) consider what progress has been made in the region with regards to the goals of the global Strategic Plan 2014-2019 and whether a separate plan is really needed to facilitate the implementation of activities related to regional priorities;
- (iii) agree on suitable mechanisms through which Members can communicate progress or obstacles in relation to the global Strategic Plan activities that require Member feedback (paras. 2.3-2.11) to inform the final status report for the period 2014-2019, which will be presented at CCEXEC79; and
- (iv) discuss how Members from the CCNE region can participate more effectively in EWGs (Appendix II).

Appendix I – Physical participation in Codex meetings

CCNE comprises 17 Codex Member Countries, which corresponds to 9 percent of the global Codex membership. The following figures provide information on participation broken down by different categories such as developing countries and Members from CCNE.

Figure 1: Number of country delegations and share of developing country delegations to all Codex meetings, 2014-2018¹²

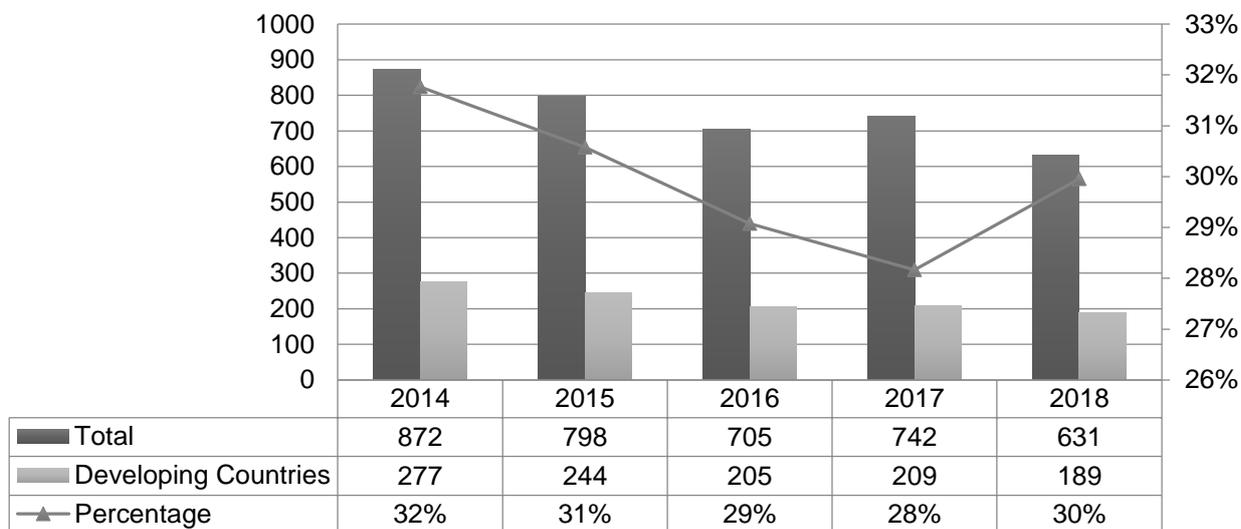
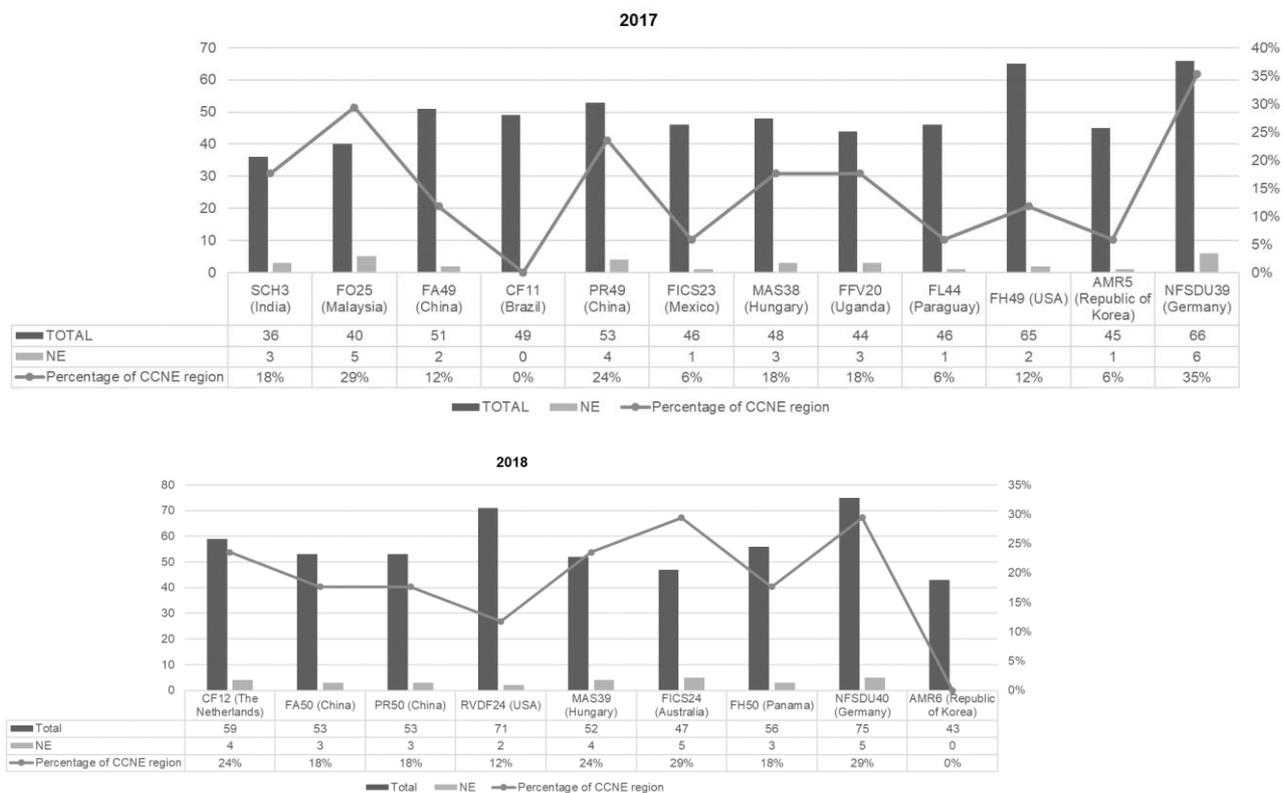


Figure 2: Number of total country delegations, number of CCNE country delegations and percentage of CCNE delegations as a share of the total CCNE membership at meetings of CAC subsidiary bodies 2017, 2018 and January–September 2019



¹² As of June 2019, 5 out of 17 Members from the CCNE region are classified as developing countries (i.e. lower middle income countries according to the World Bank list of economies).

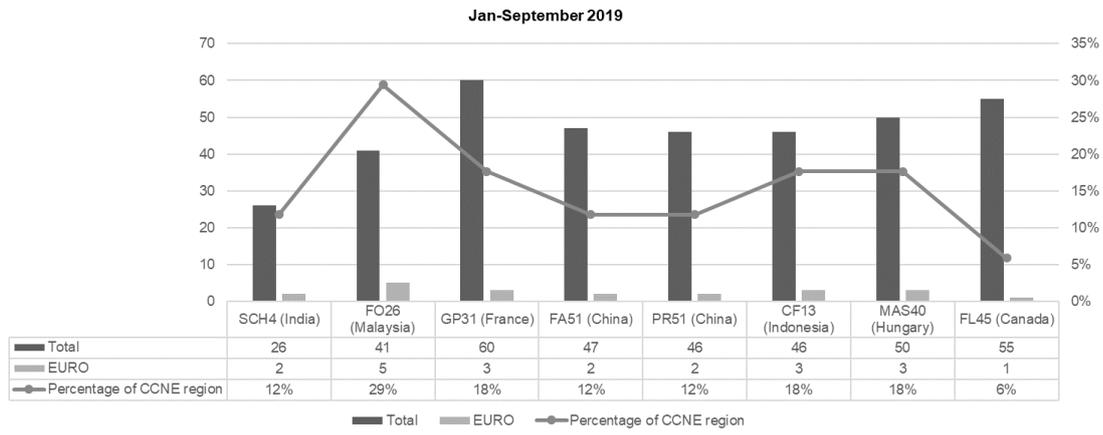
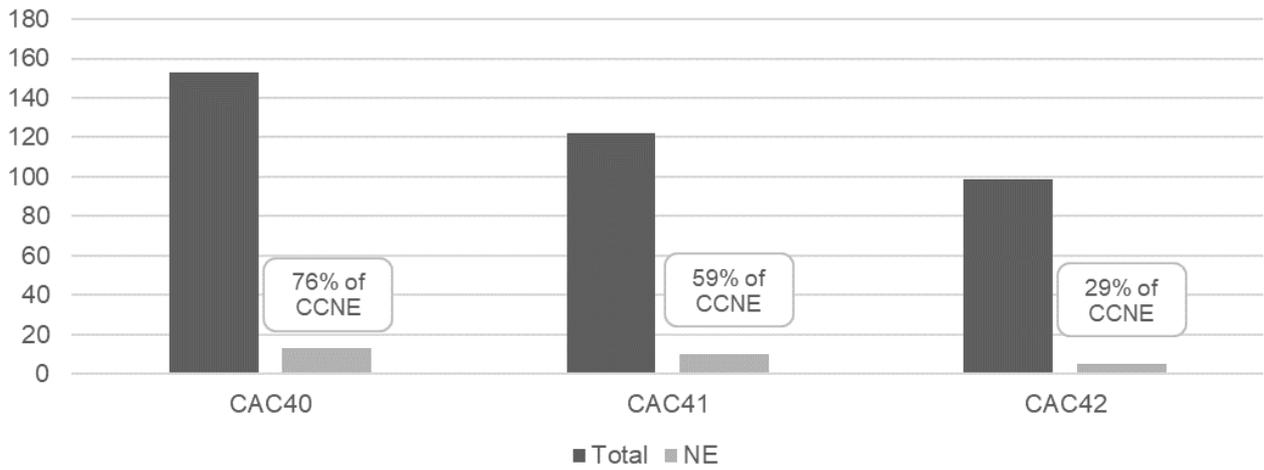


Figure 3: Total number of country delegations, number of CCNE delegations and percentage of CCNE delegations as a share of the total CCNE membership at meetings of CAC40 (2017), CAC41 (2018) and CAC42 (2019).



Appendix II – Electronic Working Groups (EWGs)

Purpose of an EWG

EWGs are online working groups established on an *ad hoc* basis to accomplish a specific task of a subsidiary body of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) between its physical sessions rather than during a physical meeting of a CAC subsidiary body.

EWGs are also envisaged as a means of achieving greater involvement of all Members and more active participation of developing countries in the work of CAC.

When to establish an EWG

EWGs should only be established where there is consensus in the Committee to do so and where other strategies to accomplish a specific task have been considered by the Committee and deemed unsuitable. Actively contributing to EWGs may have significant human-resources and cost implications for a Member, in particular for those with broad interest in Codex work. It is therefore preferable to establish EWGs selectively, primarily for items in the Step procedure, rather than for discussion papers, which can be developed more efficiently by one or more Members/Observers.

2017 EWG review findings related to participation

The 2017 review of Codex work management practices looked into several aspects of the functioning of Codex EWGs based on a sample of 41. With regards to participation, the review made several findings of which four are highlighted for the Committee's attention in the table below.

Table 1: 2017 work management review findings on EWG participation

Finding 4 Participant registration rates	The participant registration rates in EWGs established by General Subject Committees were higher than those of Commodity Committee EWGs as regards both Members and observers. The average registration rate of developing countries was low and not representative of the membership of the Commission. Co-hosted EWGs did not show significantly higher registration rates of developing countries (i.e. less than 2 %) than EWGs that were led by only one Member. The official language did also not appear to have any significant impact on participant registration rates.
Finding 5 Management of participant registrations	Members and observers frequently register late to EWGs. The great majority of EWG hosts however allowed them to join after expiry of the registration deadline without applying specific criteria in making this decision.
Finding 6 Participants' motivation	While most participants signed up to an EWG to provide technical input in the development process of a standard (guideline, code of practice etc.), a small group of participants (under 10 percent) stated that their main motivation was to stay informed on behalf of their country/organization, learn about or monitor Codex activities.
Finding 8 Inclusiveness	The majority (over 60%) of EWGs were very much or at least somewhat dependent on a small number of active participants meaning that comments were often received by far fewer EWG members than those that signed up to participate. Half of the participants that provided feedback felt that their contributions were adequately reflected in the final report of the respective EWG they participated in.

Statistics on EWG registrations

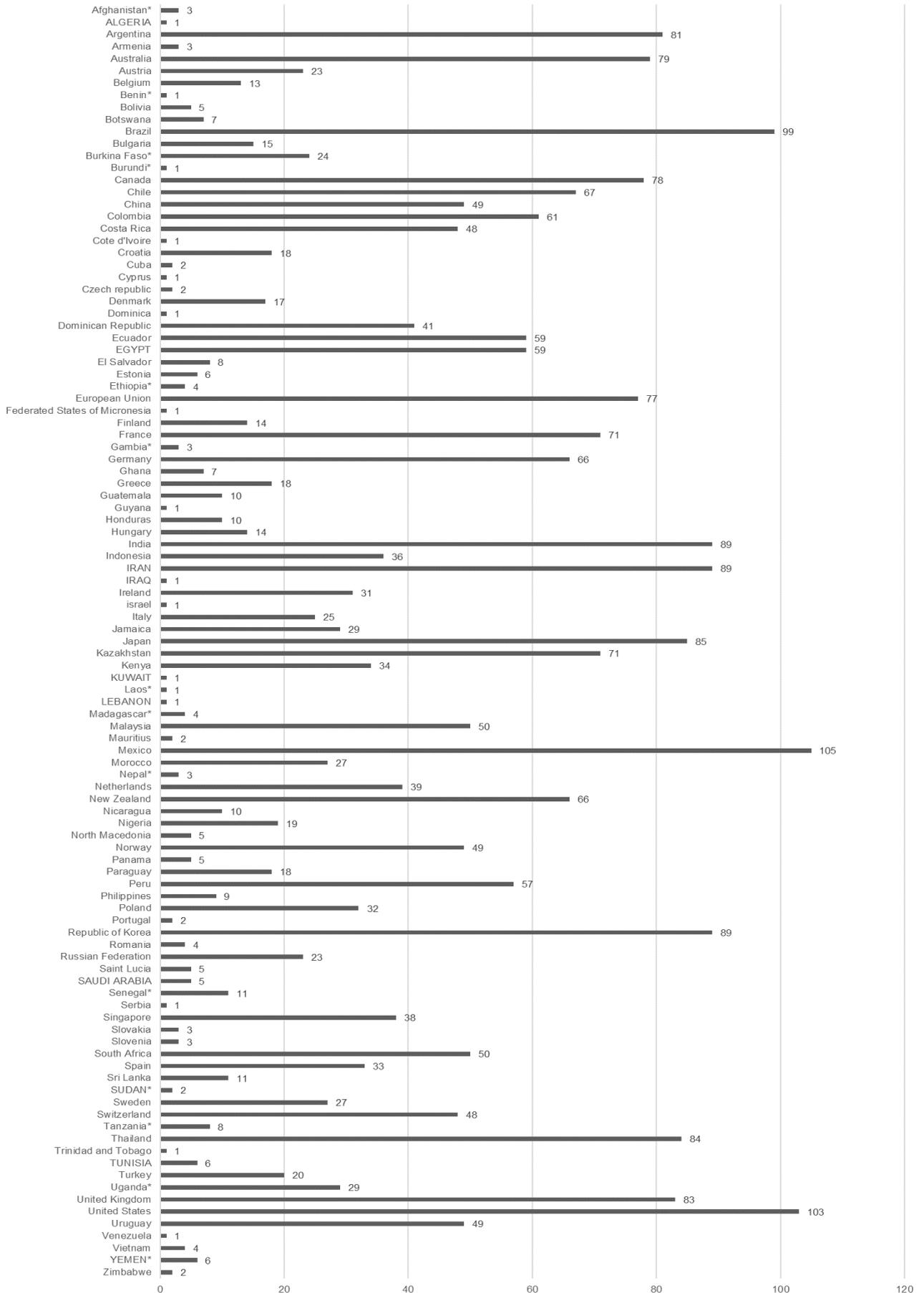
The management of and reporting on EWGs is the responsibility of the chairperson. The participation in EWGs has so far not been monitored by the Codex Secretariat. However, since 2017, data for more and more EWGs is becoming available as around 80 percent of CAC subsidiary bodies use the online discussion forum for their electronic group work between sessions.

The following statistics concern EWG registrations/ sign-up rates only and are derived from the Secretariat-managed online discussion forum. The data covers 107 EWGs established between January 2017 and June 2019, excluding EWGs established by RCCs and CCEXEC, and has a 3 percent margin of error.

Figure 1 shows which Codex Members have registered in EWGs on the Codex discussion forum and the number of EWGs they are registered in. Least Developed Countries (LDCs) are marked with an asterisk.

In total, 10 of the 17 Members from CCNE (i.e. 59%) are part of the list. Iran and Egypt show the highest rates of registration (between 59 and 89). Four out of the five low and lower middle income countries (including three quarters of the least developed countries in the region) signed up to EWGs (between 1 and 6) established between January 2017 and June 2019 and working on the online discussion forum.

Figure 1: Codex Members registered in EWGs and number of EWGs they are registered in (CCNE IN CAPS)



* Least Developed Countries as of December 2018 (Source: UN Committee for Development Policy)

Figure 2: Percentage of Codex Members registered in EWGs and breakdown of registered Members by region

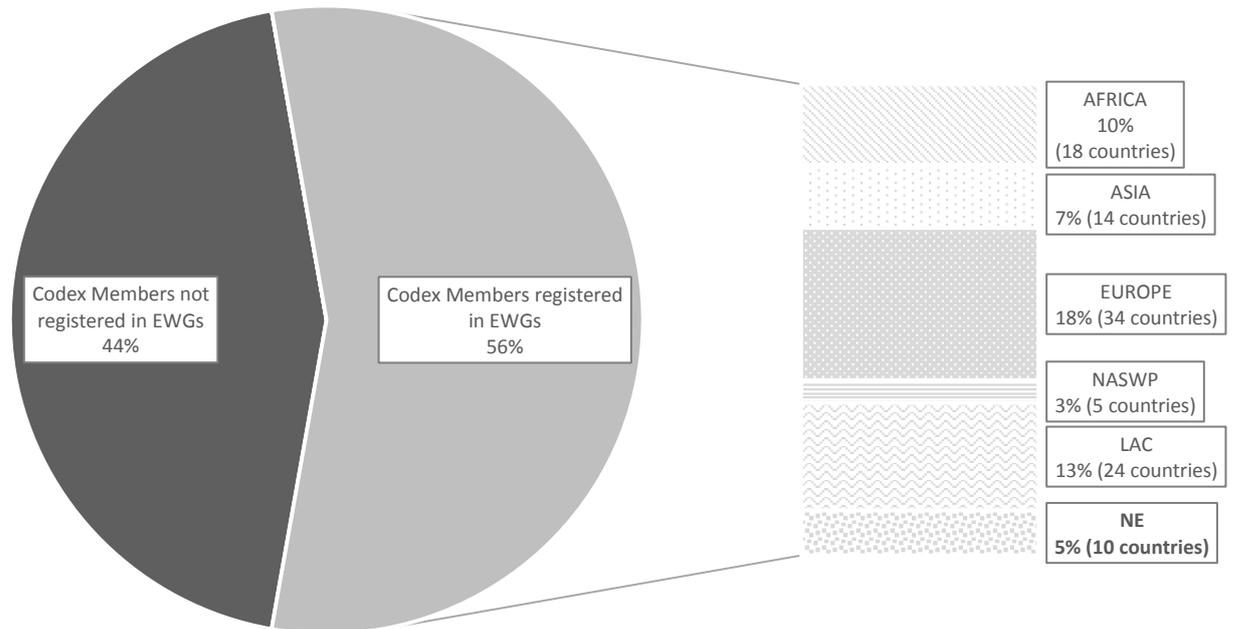


Figure 3: Number of EWGs by CAC subsidiary body, number of EWGs with CCNE registrants and average number of registrants from CCNE

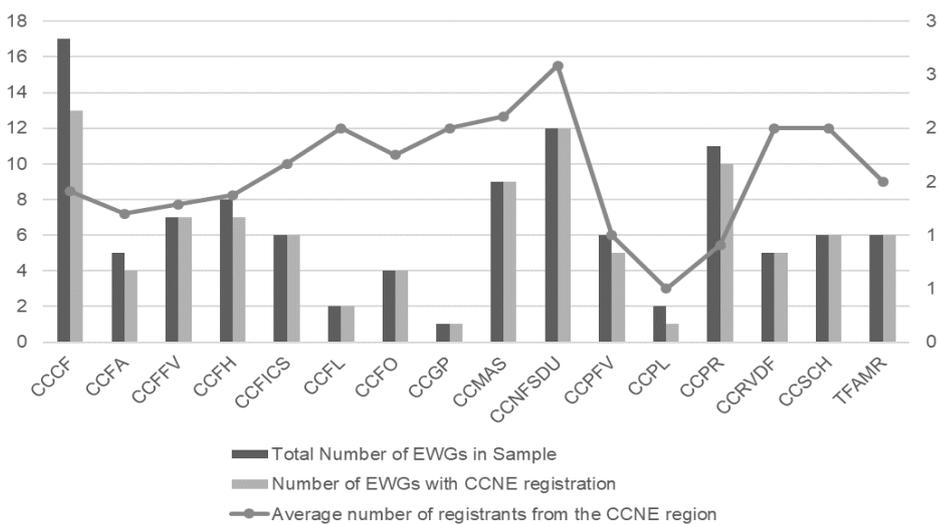


Figure 2 shows that 56% of Codex members (105 out of 189) are signed up to EWGs on the online discussion forum. In that group, Members from the CCNE region make up 5% (i.e. 10 out of the 17 Members, i.e. 59% on a regional level).

Figure 3 shows that on average between 1 and 3 Members from CCNE are registered for EWGs on the Codex online discussion forum. The CAC subsidiary body with the highest average of CCNE registrants is CCNFSDU which is also in line with physical attendance as presented in Appendix I.

Questions for discussion

Based on the information and statistical data presented in Appendix II, CCNE is invited to consider the following questions for discussion:

1. What are your criteria for selecting EWGs?
2. What is your strategy for monitoring which EWGs are established by CAC or its subsidiary bodies? How do you monitor new developments in EWGs you signed up to?
3. In which cases were you not able to participate in an EWG on a priority subject for your country? Why was this?
4. How are you organized internally for participating in an EWG (e.g. work flow, authorization, collaboration)?
5. How successful do you think your participation in EWGs is, and why?
6. Which actions do you think are needed to enhance your participation in EWGs on priority subjects for your country?