



**Sustainable Food Systems for Healthy Diets in Europe and Central Asia**  
**A joint FAO/WHO Regional Symposium and initiative**  
**in collaboration of UNICEF and WFP**

**Dates: 4-5 December 2017**

**Venue : Budapest, Hungary**

**DRAFT CONCEPT NOTE**

**Background**

Achieving healthy diets, adequate nutrition, good health and wellbeing for all in a sustainable manner while managing responsibly natural resources are at the core of the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals. Economic growth and rising incomes have nearly eliminated hunger and undernutrition in Europe and Central Asia. However, rising urbanization, insufficient focus of food systems on the quality of the diet in terms of e.g. diversity and nutritional content, changes in lifestyles, modernization of the food environment and their effects on food availability and access have led to nutrition transition and changes in dietary patterns with more and more people in the region following unhealthy dietary patterns.

Malnutrition in various forms persist and co-exist in various proportions with noticeable differences between countries in the region. More than 55 percent of adults in Europe and Central Asia region are overweight or obese. At the same time, millions are anaemic, or suffer from iodine, zinc, or vitamin A and D deficiencies. The regional prevalence of iron deficiency anaemia is estimated at 20-40% and according to the global map of micronutrient deficiencies (zinc, iron, Vitamin A and iodine), still the magnitude of the problem in CIS and parts of CEE is at moderate level. The prevalence of stunting in children under age of five years ranges across the region from 1.1 to 26.7% and the prevalence of wasting from 0.2 to 10.0%.<sup>1</sup> Low quality diets is number one risk factor for non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and a main contributor to high DALY (Disability Adjusted Life Years) values in the region, especially in countries of Eastern Europe with rapid rise in income levels over the last two decades. Malnutrition in all its forms, and diet-related NCDs affect peoples' health, productivity, and development potential as well as pose high social and economic burdens on individuals, households and countries. Current food systems are increasingly challenged to provide all people with food that contribute to healthy diets <sup>2</sup>. Food

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<sup>1</sup> FAO. 2015. European Commission on Agriculture, Thirty-Ninth Session. *Addressing social and economic burden of malnutrition through nutrition-sensitive agricultural and food policies in the region of Europe*. Budapest, Hungary, 22 and 23 September 2015. (ECA/39/15/5). FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia. (<http://www.fao.org/3/a-mo398e.pdf>)

<sup>2</sup> Foresight report: Food systems and diets: facing the challenges of the 21st century. 2016, Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition (<http://glopan.org/sites/default/files/ForesightReport.pdf>)

systems need to be repositioned from just supplying food to sustainably providing high-quality diets for all, which are key to improving nutrition and preventing malnutrition in all its forms. The developmental, economic, social and public health impacts of malnutrition for a country are even more severe, lasting, and costly when malnutrition not only hits adults but also children. For instance, being overweight or obese during childhood increases the risk of being overweight or obese during adolescence or adulthood as well as increases future burden of NCDs.

The progress in achieving good health and nutrition outcomes for all groups of population, and specifically for the most vulnerable groups, is slower than the pace of economic development in the region. Countries with similar Gross National Income (GNI) per capita, are achieving significantly different results related to nutritional status of children and mothers. This shows that there are capacity gaps in the building blocks of a functional nutrition sector in the region. In most of the countries where nutrition agenda must be positioned higher in the national government policies, yet the whole nutrition area is not strongly represented, the national managers are not equipped with expertise and skills to lead for balanced nutrition, to influence the food and nutrition policies, and hence yet nutrition is not well positioned.

In November 2014, at the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2), Member States committed to eliminate malnutrition in all its forms and articulated a common vision for global action with the adoption of the Rome Declaration on Nutrition<sup>3</sup> and its Framework of Action (ICN2 FfA)<sup>4</sup>. The ICN2 highlighted a series of fundamental policies with high potential to address all types of malnutrition, such as raising the nutrition sensitivity of food systems and their sustainability (as a determinant of adequate food supply for healthy dietary intake), improving policy coherence and synergy across relevant sectors with impact on nutrition, as well as strengthening nutrition governance and accountability.

In September 2015, Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and placed high priority on addressing malnutrition by committing, under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 to “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture”.<sup>5</sup>

In April 2016, the UN General Assembly, through its Resolution 70/259<sup>6</sup>, reinforced the ICN2 call for action by endorsing the ICN2 outcomes and proclaiming 2016 to 2025 the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition<sup>7</sup>, providing a unique opportunity for governments, academia, civils

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<sup>3</sup> Rome Declaration on Nutrition: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-ml542e.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/a-mm215e.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Member States further committed, under targets 2.1 and 2.2, “By 2030, [to] end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round” and “By 2030, [to] end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving by 2025 the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons.”

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/259](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/259)

<sup>7</sup> The UN Decade of Action on Nutrition is implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) in collaboration with World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), using

society and other stakeholders to work together for the coming ten years toward eradication and prevention of all forms of malnutrition in their countries, including by promoting improvements in diet quality through sustainable and resilient food systems.

As a result of these recent major political processes, many countries in the region have positioned nutrition high on the political agenda and confirmed their commitments to address malnutrition in all its forms, and have undertaken efforts to work throughout the food system initiating actions to promote better diets. They are currently engaged in national processes to translate policy options and strategies informed by the ICN2 FfA into concrete, nationally determined commitments for action, programmes on nutrition that are applicable to the countries' context and needs, in line with the World Health Assembly and SDGs targets, as well as with national and regional priorities.

Addressing the root causes of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition requires that a number of elements be in place, namely: political commitment; common understanding of problems and solutions; appropriate governance mechanisms and proper coordination; alignment of policies, programmes and investments; leveraging food and agricultural systems for better nutrition; addressing the gender gap. A major constraint towards a more comprehensive food system approach is often lack of awareness and to certain degree hard evidence about the actual and potential impacts of policy and programmatic action that crosses traditional sectoral boundaries and addresses issues in a joined-up manner. To support current efforts to promote better understanding and application in practice of food system perspective the European and Central Asian region, the Regional Symposium "Sustainable food systems for healthy diets and improved nutrition" will provide a platform for multi-sectoral consultation, exchange of knowledge, views, practical solutions, good experiences and lessons learned from the implementation of policy options and strategies to improve the nutritional status and health of all groups of population, efficient learning capacity of children and overall harmonious their development through nutrition-sensitive food systems, social protection, including school food and nutrition programmes and healthy food environments. It will provide opportunities to discuss the regional dimension, specificity and challenges of malnutrition, challenges and opportunities for food systems to become sustainable and ensure healthy diets for all, including most vulnerable, available options that each food system element can bring to address dietary gaps and opportunities for multi-sectoral alignment and coherence, actions to leverage for sustainability.

This forum will also leverage the opportunity to establish a ***Regional Nutrition Partnership Platform***, which will be aiming at applying continuously coherent across sectors policies and strategies to strengthen the capacity of the building blocks of the nutrition sector in the region.

The symposium will focus on discussing ways to address the multiple challenges of all forms of malnutrition and identifying opportunities to address them in a multi-sectorally integrated

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coordination mechanisms such as the UN Standing Committee on Nutrition (UNSCN) and multi-stakeholder platforms such as the Committee on World Food Security (CFS).

manner through **four thematic areas** that would contribute to achieving healthy, diversified and balanced diets:

- **Food supply (Nutrition-sensitive agriculture and food systems):** policies, programmes, good practices and initiatives throughout the food system to ensure the availability, access and affordability of varied, safe and healthy diets; food environment, policies for rural and urban sustainable food systems, their interconnections and drivers that shape agricultural production, post-harvest/food loss and waste, mitigation and adaptation to climate change;
- **Food demand and food environment:** Policies, practices and initiatives to promote and ensure awareness of food and nutrition, informed choices and demand of diverse, safe and nutritious food and healthy diets, sustainable consumption considering the environmental impact and climate change mitigation policies;
- **Improving nutrition of vulnerable groups:** Policies, programmes, initiatives, practices to promote an enabling environment for sustainable nutrition-sensitive food systems for healthy diets and improved nutrition of various food insecurity and nutrition-vulnerable groups of population;
- **Governance, leadership and accountability for nutrition:** Policies, practices and initiatives to strengthen the leadership capacities in food and nutrition, including the competencies in nutrition policies and programmes in middle- and high level managers and application of systematic evidence generation for nutrition-enhancing budget allocation and investments.

Within the planned thematic areas initiatives will be prioritized to be showcased aiming to:

1. **Illustrate good practices of policy implementation** related to the integration of nutrition objectives into agriculture, sustainable value chains, sustainable schemes of social protection, education, trade, waste reduction, and promoting sustainable food systems and healthy diets;
2. **Highlight practices** for ensuring policy coherence, coordination and collaboration between sectors for healthy diets and improved nutrition;
3. **Share experience** of countries' programmes and UN agencies' support on strengthening school food and nutrition programmes and nutrition of other vulnerable groups;
4. **Consult and agree on strategic partnerships for improved nutrition governance** in Europe and Central Asia, for strengthening national capacities in food system approach for improving nutrition in a collaborative inter-sectoral manner, increase policy dialogue and promote enabling environment for implementation of coherent and coordinated nutrition-sensitive policies and programs.

The Symposium sessions and materials will provide updates on the prevalence and magnitude of malnutrition across countries in Europe and Central Asia region, an overview on policies of food and agriculture, health and education sectors, and country experiences in addressing all forms of malnutrition with focus on food insecurity and nutrition-vulnerable groups. There will be a discussion of the current policies and strategies in place for sustainable food value chains (production/processing/distribution, /retails/ consumption), relationship between the food

environment and dietary quality, programmes and actions on improving nutrition, as well as the roles and responsibilities of public authorities from various sectors, civil society, private sector and individuals at local, national and regional level in promoting and protecting healthy diets and lifestyles and ensuring accountability of all stakeholders.

### Objective

- **Support** countries to operationalize the ICN2 FfA to contribute ultimately to achievements of the World Health Assembly and SDGs targets, as well as to national and regional priorities;
- **Engage** into the process launched by ICN2, the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition and the FAO/WHO International Symposium on Food Systems for Healthy Diets and Improved Nutrition<sup>8</sup>;
- **Leverage** the potential of food systems for healthy diets and improved nutrition in a multi-sectorial collaborative and coherent manner.

### Expected outcomes

- **Increased awareness** on international processes relevant for achieving high quality diets and improved nutrition, their linkages with 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and SDGs, and contributions of various sectors;
- **Increased understanding** of high potential role of sustainable food systems for healthy diets and improved nutrition and of systemic changes necessary to promote;
- **Enhanced policy coherence and collaboration** between line sectors (agriculture, health, education, social protection, finance) to work throughout the food system for initiating actions to promote better diets and address malnutrition in all its forms in line with ICN2 outcome documents and Work Programme of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition;
- **Shared knowledge, experiences, good practices** in food policy development and strengthened policy capacity of national experts to formulate efficient inter-sectorally based programmes for sustainable school food and nutrition and targeting other nutrition-vulnerable groups;
- **Agreed strategic priority areas or action, practical entry points, and policy recommendations** for FAO Regional Conference-2018 and Round Table of Ministers, and inform the governing bodies of other UN Agencies on practical entry points for a regional roadmap with concerted core policy and programmatic action conducive to sustainable and nutrition-sensitive food system for healthy diets and improved nutrition in Europe and Central Asia.
- **Established a Regional Nutrition Partnership Platform** with sub-regional clusters to strengthen the governance and enhance technical and operational capacities in food and nutrition across sectors in the developing countries in the region.

### Methodology and symposium's format

- Keynote lectures on the symposium's four thematic areas

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.fao.org/about/meetings/sustainable-food-systems-nutrition-symposium/en/>

- Plenary sessions, parallel sessions and panels of experts by thematic areas and by sectors
- Compendium of country factsheets with data related to food security and nutrition
- Collection of good practices on food security and nutrition policy implementation through an e-consultation
- Posters with documented good practices for experience capitalization in leveraging the potential of food systems for healthy diets and improved nutrition and innovations in food and nutrition
- Market place with guides, toolkits, methodological support for countries

### **Participants**

The Symposium is envisaged as a whole- region event with about 200-250 participants, including representatives from governments/line ministries, experts in nutrition, health, agriculture, social protection, parliamentarians, academics, private sector, non-governmental organizations, cooperatives, civil society.

### ***Support for participation in Symposium***

It is expected the EU countries participate on a self-funded bases. The participation from developing economies will be supported jointly by organizer UN agencies.

### ***Resources***

**FAO guides to support country policies and programmes in nutrition-sensitive agriculture and food systems**

<http://www.fao.org/nutrition/policies-programmes/toolkit/en/>

**Work programme of the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016-2025)**

<http://www.who.int/nutrition/decade-of-action/workprogramme-doa2016to2025-en.pdf?ua=1>

**Europe and Central Asia: Regional Overview of Food Insecurity 2016**

<http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/6f5a5547-a7b4-43fc-a0fd-5ab06cfcf717/>

**More information:**

<http://www.fao.org/about/meetings/sustainable-food-systems-nutrition-symposium/en/>

<http://www.fao.org/about/meetings/sustainable-food-systems-nutrition-symposium/regional-symposia/en/>