## Addressing the challenges and realizing the potential benefits of migration to better nutrition and food security in the Europe and Central Asia region

Despite considerable progress in reducing severe forms of poverty and the incidence of hunger across all the countries of the Europe and Central Asia region, poverty often remains endemic to populations in rural areas. Rural economies are characterized by limited non-farm employment opportunities, few income diversification sources as well as stagnant entrepreneurial activity, leading to ***outmigration from rural areas*** to other countries of the region.

At the same time, wealthier countries are experiencing ***an influx of migrants for outside the region***, with many of them hailing from a rural background.

Both external and internal migration flows can have a significant impact on poverty, food security, nutrition and the development of rural areas due to their demographic, economic and societal implications. Local agricultural production can suffer through the outmigration of farmers and those left behind need to face changes in the social fabric. In addition, migrants can also increase pressure on the existing food resources and social safety nets of their host countries.

These challenges posed by the migratory streams are however offset by their potential to increase the share of the workforce active in agriculture in the host countries, by the vast flow of remittances that migrants send back to their communities of origin, and by the money and skills brought back by returnees. The fact that remittances play an important role in many economies of the Europe and Central Asia region highlights the importance of this aspect.

One of the challenges faced by governments and international development agencies is to create an enabling environment in which migrants are encouraged to invest in the formal agricultural sector of their home countries while developing policies that respond to the changing demographic structure of those who remained active in the domestic food production.

This is of crucial importance towards the realization of the SDGs as by investing into agriculture, families of migrants or returnees will improve their diets (nutrition), increase their income and create jobs in the rural area, thus contributing to the rural development. As an overall impact, the local economy will receive additional contribution and countries can hence further improve the food security and nutrition of their citizens and continue the process towards the eradication of poverty.

With migration taking place in almost all parts of the worlds, different approaches have been developed, often geared specifically to the local context. Some of countries have already developed and introduced mechanisms to capture migrants’ remittances and helping migrants’ families to invest into small and medium enterprises active in agricultural sector and agribusinesses. While context specificity is important when designing measures, common challenges exist and local policies could benefit from a broader exchange.

We therefore invite you to share your views and experiences, both from your own countries and from abroad, on how the issue of migration and its impact on food security and nutrition has been handled and on what still needs to be done. We have prepared a few guiding questions for this consultation:

1) The establishment of a flow of remittances is among the immediate results of international migration and in some countries remittances can reach more than 30 percent of GDP. While these funds support families, remittances often do not enter the local economy and do not drive much needed investment, especially in agriculture. Moreover, the remittances tend to be used for acquiring imported products rather than local products. As a result, households’ food security and daily diets are affected.

* What could drive the motivation of migrants and their families to use remittances in a way conducive to the immediate household food security and at the same time benefit medium and long-term investment in agriculture and agribusiness?
* What systems and measures can governments implement to ensure a positive impact of remittances on food security and nutrition as well as long-term agricultural development? Could you share successful models? What are lessons learned from failed models?

2) Migration of a sizable percentage of male population can lead to profound social changes and to challenges when returnees have to be integrated into their communities of origin. This is especially true in the case of seasonal workers who come back during the agricultural off-season or those who are deported from their receiving country due to administrative violations.

* With the outmigration of male household members, women often bear the main responsibility for the production of food, which can increase their labour burden and threaten the balance between women’s productive, reproductive and community roles. What should be done by families, communities, local administrations, government and developing organisations to support women-headed households to improve nutrition and food security?
* What role can (seasonal) returnees play in the food system to make best use of their skills and avoid them to place additional stress on household food security?
* How can returnees who gained new skills be better integrated into economies?

3) Agriculture is perceived as a risky sector to engage in since returns are often delayed and dependent on exogenous factor such as weather and seasons.

* What kind of agricultural subsectors or agribusinesses could be potential targets for small and medium scale investments of migrants’ remittances in your country, thereby reducing rural poverty, the main driver for migration?

4) The Russian Federation is one of the top destination countries for international migration in the region of Europe and Central Asia.

* What are the consequences of this high level of migration for food security and agriculture in both, the countries of origin and destination?
* What are policy options for migration that are available or that should be introduced in the region?

The result of this online consultation will feed on-going FAO projects with ideas on how to attract migrants to invest their remittances into the agricultural sector and to improve their families’ nutrition, advocate sustainable modules with the governments for increased food security and help inform recommendations of the FAO regional plans in the future.

We hope that this topic captured your interest and look forward to a fruitful exchange of experience.

*Your FSN Forum Team*

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The online consultation is co-facilitated by experts from Italy, Moldova, Russia and Tajikistan.

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