

FAO Office in Budapest and the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development co-hosting a specialized conference dedicated to women's role in rural development, with a focus on migration

The Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), jointly with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Hungary (MOARD) is organizing a specialized conference in Budapest from 29 June to 1 July, 2009, bringing together up to 50 experts from over 30 countries in the region, as well as representatives of UN agencies and international organizations, such as the United Nations Development Programme, the International Labour Organization and the International Organization for Migration.

This event constitutes a very important episode in the ever-growing set of resources on Gender and development elaborated by the United Nations and other relevant organizations. The role of women in today's society; be it rural or urban, is duly attracting more and more attention today, as the challenges they face are en par with the potential they possess. The subject of out migrations and their impacts on rural communities is emerging as a key regional and rural development issues. But is not only the impact of labour leaving rural areas that is important; a second, no less important issue is better management of remittances sent by migrants home. These issues will be addressed by the forthcoming Session of the FAO Working Party on Women and the Family in Rural Development in Budapest.

FAO's Working Party on Women and the Family in Rural Development

FAO's Working Party on Women and the Family in Rural Development, the Organization's specialized entity headlining the above Meeting, whose Secretariat is hosted by the Regional FAO Office in Budapest, has been striving to advance the agenda of gender-focused rural development in the European, Central Eastern European (CEE) and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries since its inception in 1965, through its regular sessions and thematic Expert Meetings.

This entity has flourished into an active forum for Ministries, NGOs, Research Institutes and Universities as well as United Nations partners to network and

exchange valuable experiences and practices in gender-focused rural development, playing an important role as a dynamic knowledge network.

Migration: a double edged-sword?

Outmigration from rural areas has become a striking phenomenon worldwide, with large scale movements and particularly strong impacts in Central and Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and the Central Asia countries. The negative impacts of out migration from rural areas feature often in media through pictures of depopulated villages, rural families incomplete, stories of shortages of qualified labour in agriculture.

Migration can, however, be also instrumental in moving people out of poverty and can lead to outstanding gains through the remittances spent on investing in the future of the next generation or “those left at home”, but it can also carry a series of dangerous risks by generating extreme dependence on these remittances and eventually leading to the abandonment of agriculture resulting in aggravated poverty.

The Meeting in Budapest will endeavour to review the multi-faceted impacts and challenges of migrations from the points of view of a host of countries and experts from all corners of Europe and Central Asia and come up with viable and sustainable solutions that can be applied to the very different circumstances faced by these countries, whether as hosts to migrants or as their countries of origin. Case studies from participating countries will present the experience of rural development projects that have, on one hand, helped to improved standards of living in rural areas, on the other, have assisted migrants and the families to better use and manage money earned abroad.

The overarching goal of this meeting is to assist affected Governments, through the technical expertise of FAO and other specialized institutions, in elaborating rural development policies that are effective in sustaining and revitalizing rural areas, often impacted by heavy out-migration, and consequently reducing rural poverty, with a special attention devoted to women and the need to mainstream gender considerations into the polices and programmes proposed.

The outcomes of this event are expected to subscribe to the dynamically emerging discipline of Gender and Women’s Issues with an eye on rural development and the diverse challenges faced by this vast and truly heterogeneous region, ranging from Spain to Kazakhstan.