



Europe and Central Asia Gender Newsletter

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Regional consultation on a Zero Draft of the Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment in the Context of Food Security and Nutrition

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP) have collaborated with the Secretariat of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) to organize a regional consultation for Europe and Central Asia that focuses on the provision of inputs and perspectives for the preparation of the **Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment in the Context of Food Security and Nutrition (VG on GEWE)**. This was the second of six regional consultations organized by the CFS between September and November 2021 globally. Held online on 27 and 28 September 2021, the event brought together more than 80 participants from 20 countries, representing governments, civil society organizations, the private sector, agricultural research organizations, UN bodies and other international institutions. The main objective was to review and provide feedback on the Zero Draft of the Guidelines, align them with regional and national priorities, and foster ownership among the CFS stakeholders.

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Regional highlights:

- Consultation on the development of the CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment in the Context of Food Security and Nutrition
- Snapshot of the International Day of Rural Women celebrations in the region
- Conference on women's land ownership and control in the Western Balkans

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As the Zero Draft states, gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment are essential to the realization of human rights, including the right to adequate food, but also to ensuring that food systems are economically, socially and environmentally sustainable. Therefore, the Voluntary Guidelines have been developed to assist governments, development partners and other actors in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda, in particular SDGs 2 and 5.

"Hunger and malnutrition rates are growing globally, disproportionately affecting women and girls," says Tanja Gren, Permanent Representative of Finland to FAO, WFP and IFAD. "Thus, urgent action is needed to counter challenges, gaps and barriers hindering progress in achieving gender equality and the full realization of women's and girls' rights in the context of food security and nutrition."

"The Guidelines will provide specific policy guidance based on good practices and lessons learned on gender mainstreaming, gender transformative interventions, and innovative solutions to support a more coherent and comprehensive approach," adds Tomas Duncan Jurado, Permanent Representative of Panama to the Rome-based agencies.

The Zero Draft document focuses on nine key areas where change is needed the most: women in policy- and decision-making; elimination of violence and discrimination against women; access to education, knowledge and information services; the economic empowerment of women in the context of sustainable food systems; access to natural and productive resources; access to labour markets and decent work; reduction and redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work; the ability to choose healthy diets and good nutrition; and social protection, and food and nutrition assistance.

Participants of the regional consultation for Europe and Central Asia selected the following themes as the most relevant priorities for the region: elimination of violence and discrimination against women for improved food security and nutrition; access to education, capacity building, training, knowledge and information services; and access to and control over natural and productive resources. The comments and suggestions received during discussions will inform the preparation of the next versions of the Guidelines to be presented to the CFS Plenary for adoption in October 2022.

Partners come together to celebrate eight years of collaboration in the Western Balkans on gender equality in land ownership and control

A collaboration between FAO, GIZ and IUNL has contributed significantly to gender equality in land ownership and control in the Western Balkans. These three organizations

have joined forces to build upon each other's expertise and to work closely with national stakeholders, including ministries, notaries, registration offices and statistics offices. Partnerships like this one are a key delivery mechanism of the Sustainable Development Goals to achieve tangible results. This partnership was built from the ground up, by listening to stakeholder concerns and tailoring the activities, tools and support to the needs of these actors in order to deliver long-lasting solutions and impact.

In particular, this initiative has facilitated country reporting and monitoring under SDG indicator 5.a.2 on gender equality in land ownership and control and has contributed to the achievement of SDG target 5.a by working with national authorities. By applying FAO's Legal Assessment Tool (LAT) for gender-equitable land tenure, the team identified some of the legal and technical impediments to women's tenure security and brought to light some implementation challenges. To overcome these challenges, a number of tools were developed, including "Guidelines on strengthening gender equality in notarial practices – South-East Europe" which have been translated into all local languages and adapted nationally to capture the specificities of the legal frameworks in the Western Balkans region. In addition, "Guidelines on strengthening gender equality in land registration – South-East Europe" were published to help registration offices safeguard the land rights of women. Training of 170 notaries was delivered in collaboration with the national Notary Chambers to introduce the guidelines for notaries and promote their adoption. This training revealed a stark contrast between the situation of clients in urban areas, who are far more aware of their rights and obligations and of the legal consequences of their decisions, than those based in rural areas. With the support of the Notary Chambers, these guidelines will be disseminated nationwide and implemented nationally to promote the harmonization of notarial practices, and help women and girls make more informed decisions over their property rights.



Women farmers in the Western Balkans

Reporting on SDG indicator 5.a.2 helps countries realize the role of legal frameworks in achieving gender equality in practice. The reporting process allows them to take stock of the progress made and highlight important achievements. But it also provides an objective baseline for countries to understand where the remaining gaps are, what solutions are available and how to translate policy goals into legal

measures and concrete results. This is why we also invite countries to undertake the reporting on SDG indicator 5.a.1 in conjunction with SDG indicator 5.a.2, as the systematic collection of sex-disaggregated data on secure rights to land will help measure progress on gender equality in land ownership in practice.

FAO and GIZ will continue to support countries in the Western Balkans with their SDG reporting and improving the collection and presentation of gender statistical data by the statistical agencies; and will invite other countries in the region and beyond to undertake this exercise, which has generated such positive results for gender equality in land ownership and control in the Western Balkans.



A woman farmer with her livestock in the Western Balkans

“Breaking bread” or how one Turkish woman farmer transformed her community’s challenges into breadwinning opportunities

Naile lives in a small Turkish rural town called Yolu, situated in Şanlıurfa province, a few kilometres from the border with Syria. From afar, she used to watch her neighbours in Kobani, through the wire mesh of the border fence. With her neighbours, she shared the Kurdish language and a love for the soil. However, when the war hit, hundreds of Syrian refugees fled to her small town, resulting in tensions over cultural differences, resources and, of course, employment. After her husband lost his job, due to the increasing excess of cheap labour, Naile, who was pregnant at the time, had to seek employment in seasonal agriculture, where the daily rate for women is lower, to support her family.

Naile’s life became very challenging. She had to juggle agricultural work in greenhouses and fields with raising five children. At this point, she and her husband decided to rent a small patch of land in the village to grow vegetables. Unfortunately, they both lacked adequate experience and knowledge, and their experiment initially failed: the return on their investment was insufficient to meet basic needs, or to invest in fertilizers and pesticides. At this point, however, a new opportunity completely transformed Naile’s situation. She was selected for an FAO training programme that not

only changed her prospects, but also fundamentally altered her perceptions about people from other cultures.

As Naile explains, “When the war started, we thought that we would have to share our bread with the Syrians, but thanks to FAO, the Şanlıurfa Provincial Directorate of Agriculture and Forestry and the project donors, we now have more bread to eat and to share with others.”



Naile in the greenhouse

In 2019, Naile and a number of others were selected to receive vocational training under a new project by FAO, with the support of UNHCR, in partnership with the Şanlıurfa Provincial Directorate of Agriculture and Forestry. The project combined theoretical and practical training in proven agricultural techniques used to grow peppers, tomatoes and eggplants. During the practical training in farms and greenhouses, Naile was shown a variety of techniques and innovative technologies that helped her to gain new skills that she could apply to her small piece of land. In addition to expanding her knowledge, Naile worked with Syrian agricultural workers – an experience that changed her views about the community. Not only did she learn new skills from them, but she also acquired a greater understanding of their lives.

“The difficult working conditions in the field and the greenhouses united us,” Naile explains. “We understood and accepted each other better because we had passed through the same difficulties together,” she reflects. Naile also made Syrian friends during the training sessions, and together they “became one family, eating and chattering together at the same table.”

Naile and her husband also benefited from another FAO project in 2020, funded by the European Union, which aimed to build resilience and socio-economic integration between the Syrian refugee population and Turkish host communities. During the project, Naile and her husband attended a Farmer Field School for a period of three months to learn from technical experts, trainers and fellow farmers. “My favourite part of the training was the step-by-step guidance we received from our trainers, both theoretical and in the field,” Naile explains. “It has given us an entirely different perspective on agriculture.”

Empowered by their new knowledge, Naile and her husband applied for and were granted a loan from the bank to rent five hectares of greenhouses and open fields. In addition, the Provincial Directorate helped them with technical assistance and support to install the greenhouses. Their expanded business allows them to grow peppers and cucumbers in the greenhouse and to cultivate zucchinis, eggplants, peppers and cotton in the open fields. In addition, Naile hired 21 women, most of whom have acquired vocational practical training at her greenhouses. Out of them, 12 are Syrian women and 9 are Turkish women.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on Naile and her fellow farmers, who all experienced a drop in sales. To counter this problem, Naile joined forces with fellow Syrian and Turkish food producers and is now planning to establish a cooperative to sell agrifood products from her town. “My dream is to ensure that no vegetables from the fields of Yolu farmers are left uncollected or unused,” she says. Naile hopes that the support she has received will continue, allowing her to establish the cooperative and hire more people: “Once I realize my dream of the cooperative, I’ll have other, bigger dreams to pursue,” she affirms.



Women farmers in the greenhouse

Greenhouses – a stable source of income for women in Uzbekistan during the pandemic

Khushvakt Khusinova lives in a rural area on the outskirts of ancient Bukhara. Her husband was a labour migrant working in Russia to support their five children, but when the pandemic started and quarantine measures and travel restrictions were introduced, he had to return home and the family had to find alternative ways of generating an income.

The family found itself in a difficult position. Khushvakt herself had previously worked in a textile mill, but she had to leave her job because her five children and the housework took up all of her time. Her spouse’s unstable income – combining seasonal labour with work as a wood craftsperson, carving and making wood products – meant that Khushvakt did not have enough to cover all of her needs.



Khushvakt in her greenhouse

The family were registered in the “iron notebook” – a list of vulnerable groups compiled by the local authorities to provide them with targeted assistance. This is how the family then became a beneficiary of the FAO/GEF CACILM-2 project (“Integrated management of natural resources in drought-prone and saline agricultural production landscapes of Central Asia and Turkey”), which has been implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Uzbekistan since 2018. Within the framework of this project, 34 greenhouses were donated to rural residents living in the Bukhara and Kashkadarya regions. This aid has become part of the national socio-economic response to the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We were all very happy when they came to our home to install a large, spacious greenhouse. They said it would serve as a new source of income for us all year round,” explains Khushvakt, adding, “I have not been involved in greenhouse farming myself, but I still noticed that the construction was made of a sufficiently high quality, with a reliable structure – made of durable material. They said that it retains heat well and is resistant to precipitation, moisture and temperature changes. After this, it was down to us as a family to get as much benefit as possible from the new greenhouse.”

As hardworking people, Khushvakt and her husband proactively set to work. Following the recommendations provided by FAO experts during a special training course for all greenhouse beneficiaries and via a working group established in Telegram messenger, the first requirement was to plant greens – spinach, coriander, dill. And when the first crop was ready, it was immediately successfully sold on the market. The beneficiaries then planted the second batch – cucumbers, tomatoes, green onions. Over time, profits began to increase, and fresh vegetables, grown with their own hands, appeared on their tables.

“The stable income from the greenhouse has allowed us to solve many problems. There is confidence in the future. My daughters need support to continue their education, and our eldest is now preparing to enter university. She dreams of becoming a doctor,” says Khushvakt.

Another beneficiary from the same region, Feruza Ergasheva, talks enthusiastically about the work the project has done. “We got the first harvest in the middle of March. Selling the greens grown in the greenhouse raised about 5 million soums (which is approximately equal to USD 500). This is a significant help in the household. We hope to grow more greens and bell peppers in September. The main thing is that a stable source of income has appeared. Every inch of our land is priceless, and everyone should work for their own welfare,” reflects Feruza, who now feels that she can put the dark days behind her.



Tomatoes grown by Khushvakt

In the past, the family had faced many difficulties. Feruza’s husband has a long-term illness, and Feruza left her job in the cotton mill to look after him. Of the three sons, the two eldest are abroad, and the youngest is still a student. In short, there is no one else around to look after the household. And then there were COVID-19 restrictions. It is no surprise that the news of the transfer of the greenhouse was received with great joy in the family. Today, having already mastered the greenhouse economy, after acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills, Feruza plans to generate even more profit from her greenhouse and supply fresh vegetables to the table all year round. As it turns out, the challenges did not hinder Feruza – they strengthened her resilience. Her eyes are filled with optimism, and her commitment to hard work leaves no room for doubt about the successful implementation of all her plans.

In general, the development of the greenhouse industry and the expansion of the vegetable range have contributed to an increase in domestic production of vegetables. This meets the needs of the country’s growing population for high-quality products during the off season. And for many, due to COVID-19 restrictions and related measures, greenhouses have become the optimal community-based solution for generating income.

FAO TeleFood in Bosnia and Herzegovina gives hope to communities

According to the **National Gender Profile of Agriculture and Rural Livelihoods**, jointly produced by FAO and UN Women and released earlier in 2021, rural women in Bosnia and

Herzegovina often perform unpaid work. The 2019 labour force survey estimates that almost 6 percent of all employed women are unpaid family workers, compared with only 1.4 percent of all employed men. Rural women are key contributors to the specific agricultural value chains in the country, such as flower-growing, medicinal herb collection, greenhouse-based vegetables, and fruit production among others. In these value chains, women take the lead as key agents and income-earners. Rural women are also actively involved in livestock care and crop production, as well as in non-farming-based activities, most often as contributing family members.



Biljana Drobnjak, a TeleFood beneficiary on her own land

Irrespective of their fundamental role in rural economies, women still lack access to productive resources, such as assets, inputs and information. However, a positive uptrend has been observed in recent years due to several initiatives on land rights. These initiatives included awareness-raising on the importance of recognizing women’s formal rights to property, along with policy support in legislative reforms initiated by the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina and supported by FAO and partner agencies Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), the World Bank, UN Women and the International Union of Notaries (IUNL). As a result of these policy changes and awareness-raising initiatives, the share of women landowners in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been slowly increasing. Today, 30 percent of landowners are women, often registered as co-owners of land. Yet despite the progress, women who are partial co-owners tend to own less than half of the share in the property. A parallel trend is the increase in the total number of women registered as heads of family farms (from 10 percent in 2016 to around 18 percent at present). This latter change has been attributed to the special measures that have given women farmers priority and additional support for some agricultural incentives. The report concludes that recognition of women’s participation in on-farm and off-farm activities increases women’s capacity to generate income and contributes to an overall improvement in their families’ livelihoods and wellbeing.

However, the National Gender Profile also reveals that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on women and has affected women and men in different ways.

Disruption to agricultural supply chains and job losses in the rural hospitality sector have exacerbated gender-related vulnerabilities. For example, 70 percent of local governments in Bosnia and Herzegovina have reported the increased vulnerability of women, including the occurrence of gender-based violence. The pandemic has also increased women's and girls' caring responsibilities, including cooking, taking care of children (teaching, playing) and looking after elderly and ill family members.



Distribution of seedlings in Rudo

Responding to these challenges, much-needed assistance has been provided to community members across Bosnia and Herzegovina to support income generation and improve wellbeing through access to equipment, materials and training under the framework of “TeleFood”. TeleFood projects are highly targeted grassroots interventions with a short duration and maximized impact in their implementation.

Under the TeleFood umbrella, FAO has already provided requested support to the beekeeping association in the municipality of Bosansko Grahovo, and more recently, to the association of fruits and berries producers in the municipality of Rudo via the “Development of the fruits and berries value chains in the municipality of Rudo” TeleFood project. Rudo has 163 registered producers (all of whom produce fruits and berries), out of which 57 (35 percent) are women producers. In order to provide much-needed support to smallholder farmers and women-led farming households during the COVID-19 pandemic, FAO distributed plum seedlings, fertilizers, fruit sprayers, motor cultivators and other equipment and materials to the Rudo-based producers, linked with training on how to plant and protect the seedlings.

Over 40 producers (18 women) received seedlings, equipment and training in the spring and summer 2021. Biljana Drobnjak became one of the FAO project beneficiaries. Her household grows plums, apples, pears, cherries and sour cherries in their 0.2-hectare orchard. The fresh and dried fruits, as well as processed jams and juices, are used for family consumption and are also sold in the local market. Biljana became one of the recipients of the plum seedlings, and participated in field training on the

best methods of planting and protecting seedlings, as well as on winter and summer pruning.

Biljana is optimistic about the future. She plans to expand the orchard and plant more fruit trees, which should allow her to increase agricultural yields, and as a result, increase processing volumes and sales. This will ensure additional income for herself and her family. Biljana is very grateful for the project's support and signalled that she and other producers from Rudo would be open to participating in future FAO projects, particularly if they specifically targeted women.

“FAO is committed to continuing its provision of all-encompassing technical assistance to the local communities through different avenues, and the FAO Office in the country has immediate plans to widen its engagement in rural women's economic empowerment,” confirms Goran Stavrik, Senior Field Programme Officer, FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia.

“Entrust a garden to a gardener,” says Bakhyt Ainabekova, Kazakhstan

Bakhyt Ainabekova is the Deputy Head of the Department of Forage Production at the Kazakh Scientific Research Institute of Animal Husbandry and Forage Production. As a child, she dreamed of becoming a lawyer:

“I thought that I would grow up and protect people. And now I protect our land! I believe my upbringing played an important role: my parents worked as agronomists all their lives, and I followed their example. I work at the Kazakh Research Institute of Animal Husbandry and Forage Production, and I understand very well that it is impossible to do farming if you do not love your business and the land where you work.



Bakhyt Ainabekova on an FAO fieldtrip in the province of Almaty

For me, sustainable and efficient use of natural resources is not just a very important global issue. We are all responsible for what we leave behind. The practical application of technologies that do not destroy the environment, production of organic food products, and a careful and

competent attitude towards chemicals in farming should become the standard.

The earth must be protected, otherwise it will be very difficult for future generations to live. For me and for our department, where women are a majority, participation in CACILM-2 is, first and foremost, a great responsibility and an opportunity for growth. The project has been operational for one year, but a lot has been achieved already. Land must be handled by professionals because there is a saying: there are several ways to garden, but the best way is to entrust this business to a gardener.

And when we held Field Days, farmers were happy to participate, because they studied, learned new things, communicated, and shared practical recommendations. This is so necessary for everyone! We are now studying ten genotypes of drought-resistant crops – mohar, sorghum, triticale, wheatgrass – which are of great interest to livestock breeders. New things are always attractive. We have never grown African millet before, but now, thanks to FAO experts, we have learned that this crop can grow successfully in our area.

I have a big family: sisters, brothers and nephews who rejoice at my successes and always support me in difficult times. But we do not see each other as often as we would like to, because from early spring to late autumn I am in the fields – an agronomist counts every day! My loved ones understand that this work requires complete dedication. We have big tasks ahead, and we are ready to fulfil them.”

FAO and International Rural Women’s Day 2021 in Europe and Central Asia

On 15 October each year, the United Nations and the global community celebrate International Rural Women’s Day (IRWD) in recognition of the contributions made by women in rural areas and the many challenges that they face. The idea of honouring rural women with a special day was put forward by international NGOs at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 and was established by the General Assembly’s resolution in 2007. The fact that International Rural Women’s Day is purposely held one day before World Food Day (on 16 October) highlights the critical role played by rural women in food production and food security.

This year, the IRWD was marked in **Azerbaijan** by a series of events held in October to promote awareness of the vital roles of women farmers, entrepreneurs and leaders in rural communities. A conference, “Building Rural Women’s Resilience in the Wake of COVID-19,” roundtables and fairs were jointly organized in Tovuz, Gakh and Baku by FAO Partnership and Liaison Office in Azerbaijan (FAPP), the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), the Agrarian Credit and Development Agency (ACDA) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), in

close collaboration with the Azerbaijan Rural Women’s Association. These events brought together a diverse range of stakeholders, including local authorities, representatives from rural communities and farmers’ organizations. More than one hundred beneficiaries of the FAPP/Government of Azerbaijan project on Women’s Economic Empowerment (WEP) participated, and no fewer than 13 village-based women’s groups – that received support from the project to facilitate group organization – were provided with laptops, printers and ADSL modems to develop their ICT skills and enhance access to information and markets. The events received wide coverage in the national media, highlighting the pivotal role of rural women in the COVID-19 pandemic response, and in particular in transforming agrifood systems during and after the pandemic.



Azerbaijan’s Aghdam district women’s group representing their products at the IRWD fair

In **Georgia**, an awareness-raising campaign on rural women’s unpaid work was carried out as part of the “Strengthening capacities of stakeholders for the implementation of the Strategy for Agricultural Development in Georgia 2015–2020 and the Rural Development Strategy of Georgia 2017–2020” project, funded by the Austrian Development Cooperation and implemented by FAO. To mark the IRWD, the project team collaborated with “Netgazeti”, a local media outlet, and social media, to widely disseminate FAO’s materials and resources on October 15th.

“The share of unpaid labour activities in rural areas is higher than that in urban areas. This includes supplying water and firewood for the household, often in conditions where these vital resources are obtained far away from home. Unpaid labour also includes working on agricultural plots and taking care of livestock. This work is not compensated, recognized or remunerated. The work performed by rural women may require twice as much time as in the city, due to the low level of available social services and infrastructure development. At the same time, women may spend as much as 400 percent more time than men performing these activities in rural areas,” explains Dono Abdurazakova, FAO Senior Gender and Social Protection Adviser, in her interview with “Netgazeti”.

The project, which has been underway since 2018, now provides support to rural women who have been particularly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Priority

has been given to women, primarily single parents with three or more children, women with disabilities, and women taking care of disabled or ill family members.

In **Hungary**, the IRWD has been celebrated for eight consecutive years by the Union of Hungarian Women. While earlier conferences were held in towns to take the events closer to rural areas, this year it took place in Budapest, and was hosted by the Ministry of Agriculture. This hybrid celebration was attended by 60 people, with 900 participating virtually. There were representatives from the Hungarian government, international organizations and networks including Copa-Cogeca (European Farmers and European Agri-Cooperatives) and the World Farmers' Organisation (WFO), and other non-governmental and sectoral associations. FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia has taken part in these events from their inception, to inform participants of the work conducted across the region. Presentations and discussions this year focused on the impact of the pandemic and opportunities ahead. Moreover, special attention was drawn to the key theme of the upcoming sixty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW66) event in 2022: "Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes."



Conference delegates in Hungary

In **Tajikistan**, the agricultural sector is the largest employer of women in rural areas. However, in many cases this work is undertaken by women as contributing family members, especially in the context of increasing male out-migration for work. The Ministry of Agriculture, the Committee on Women and Family Affairs, the Ministry of Energy and Water Resources and other state agencies and institutions came together to organize an IRWD conference in recognition of rural women's role in agriculture. The event was supported by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), GIZ, FAO and other international organizations and NGOs. More

than 50 participants discussed how to develop solutions to address the challenges that rural women face, especially in remote mountainous areas of the country.

In **Uzbekistan**, the IRWD served as an occasion to feature prominent women in the agrarian sector. At a gala event organized by the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Senate of the National Assembly of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Association of Women Agrarians presented a publication and a documentary, produced with the support of FAO, about women scientists in Uzbekistan who have made a significant contribution to the development of agronomy, veterinary science, soil science and other related areas in the country. The Minister of Agriculture and senators gave awards to 39 women farmers from different parts of the country.

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