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Food and Agriculture
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Продовольственная и
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منظمة
الغذية والزراعة
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CONFERENCE

Forty-second Session

Rome, 12-16 July 2021

**Report of the 32nd Session of the Regional Conference for Europe
(2-4 November 2020)**



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

ERC/20/REP

REPORT

**Tashkent,
Uzbekistan**

**2-4 November
2020**

(virtual)

Thirty-second Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe

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Date and place of FAO Regional Conferences for Europe

First	-	Rome, Italy	10-15 October 1949
Second	-	Rome, Italy	10-15 October 1960
Third	-	Rome, Italy	8-13 October 1962
Fourth	-	Salzburg, Austria	26-31 October 1964
Fifth	-	Seville, Spain	5-11 October 1966
Sixth	-	St. Julian's, Malta	28-31 October 1968
Seventh	-	Budapest, Hungary	21-25 September 1970
Eighth	-	Munich, Germany, Fed. Rep. of	18-23 September 1972
Ninth	-	Lausanne, Switzerland	7-12 October 1974
Tenth	-	Bucharest, Romania	20-25 September 1976
Eleventh	-	Lisbon, Portugal	2-7 October 1978
Twelfth		Athens, Greece	22-27 September 1980
Thirteenth	-	Sofia, Bulgaria	4-8 October 1982
Fourteenth	-	Reykjavik, Iceland	17-21 September 1984
Fifteenth	-	Istanbul, Turkey	28 April-2 May 1986
Sixteenth	-	Krakow, Poland	23-26 August 1988
Seventeenth	-	Venice, Italy	3-7 April 1990
Eighteenth	-	Prague, Czechoslovakia	24-28 August 1992
Nineteenth	-	Killarney, Ireland	6-10 June 1994
Twentieth	-	Tel Aviv, Israel	29 April-3 May 1996
Twenty-first	-	Tallinn, Estonia	25-29 May 1998
Twenty-second	-	Porto, Portugal	24-28 July 2000
Twenty-third	-	Nicosia, Cyprus	29-31 May 2002
Twenty-fourth	-	Montpellier, France	5-7 May 2004
Twenty-fifth	-	Riga, Latvia	8-9 June 2006
Twenty-sixth	-	Innsbruck, Austria	26-27 June 2008
Twenty-seventh	-	Yerevan, Armenia	13-14 May 2010
Twenty-eight	-	Baku, Azerbaijan	19-20 April 2012
Twenty-ninth	-	Bucharest, Romania	2-4 April 2014
Thirtieth	-	Antalya, Turkey	4-6 May 2016
Thirty-first	-	Voronezh, Russian Federation	16-18 May 2018
Thirty-second	-	Tashkent, Uzbekistan	2-4 November 2020 (virtual)

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SUMMARY OF MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

MATTERS REQUIRING THE ATTENTION OF THE COUNCIL

- Sustainable Food Systems and Healthy Diets in Europe and Central Asia:
Paragraph 19 m), o) and q)
- FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative: a New Approach:
Paragraph 27 a), c), d) g) and h)
- Solutions for Youth, Employment and Developing Rural Areas in relation to the United Nations Decade of Family Farming:
Paragraph 29 k) to p)
- Decentralized Offices Network:
Paragraph 32 a) to g)
- Results and Priorities for FAO in the Region:
Paragraph 34 a) to m)
- Synthesis of FAO Evaluations 2014-2019 in Europe and Central Asia Region:
Paragraph 36 a) to d)
- Report from the Outcome of the Debate of the 41st Session of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA):
Paragraph 41 a)
- Report from the Outcome of the Debate of the Joint Session of the 40th European Forestry Commission (EFC) and the 77th UNECE Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry (COFFI):
Paragraph 43 e)

MATTERS REQUIRING THE ATTENTION OF THE CONFERENCE

- Sustainable Food Systems and Healthy Diets in Europe and Central Asia:
Paragraph 19 a) to l), n) and p)
- FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative: a New Approach:
Paragraph 27 b) e) and f)
- Solutions for Youth, Employment and Developing Rural Areas in relation to the United Nations Decade of Family Farming:
Paragraph 29 a) to j)
- Report from the Outcome of the Debate of the 30th Session of the European Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Advisory Commission (EIFAAC):
Paragraph 45 c) and d)
- Report from the Outcome of the Debate of the 6th Session of the Central Asian and Caucasus Regional Fisheries and Aquaculture Commission (CACFish):
Paragraph 47 b)

I. Introductory Items

A. Organization of the Regional Conference

1. The 32nd Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe (ERC) was held from 2 to 4 November 2020. In light of the global COVID-19 pandemic and associated public health concerns, the Session was convened virtually on an exceptional basis, after formal consultation with the host country, the Republic of Uzbekistan, and the Europe Regional Group.
2. The ERC agreed to conduct the proceedings virtually, thus suspending the respective rules of the Rules of Procedure of the ERC for holding a physical meeting.
3. The Regional Conference was attended by 315 participants including 16 Ministers, 15 Deputy Ministers and State Secretaries, and representatives from 51 Members. Observers from three Members, eight United Nations organizations, seven intergovernmental organizations, four international non-governmental organizations and five civil society organizations were in attendance, along with five representatives from the private sector and eight representatives from the research and academia sector.

B. Welcome from Uzbekistan high-level official

4. Mr Shukhrat Ganiev, Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Uzbekistan, welcomed delegates and expressed his regret that the Regional Conference had to be held in a virtual format. He highlighted that the COVID-19 pandemic has clearly demonstrated the vulnerability of global food supply chains, witnessing the imposition of restrictions on the movement of people and goods, and has become a real challenge for many countries in ensuring food security, especially for the most vulnerable. Such a development threatens the achievement of one of the main Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), namely the eradication of hunger by 2030. He underlined that increased food production could be achieved with sufficient investment in innovation and scientific research, and he emphasized that modern technologies must be equally available for manufacturers in both developed and developing countries, regardless of their level of financial capacity. He underlined that food systems remained one of the key areas in the fight against poverty in the 21st century, and that gross domestic product (GDP) growth in agriculture was the most effective way to reduce poverty. He underlined the need for the coordination of actions with FAO in the fight against the root causes of food shortages, environmental protection and factors impeding rural development in the Europe and Central Asia region.

C. Election of the Chairperson, Vice-Chairpersons and Appointment of Rapporteurs

5. His Excellency Jamshid Abdukhakimovich Khodjaev, Minister for Agriculture of the Republic of Uzbekistan, was endorsed by the delegates to chair the Session.
6. His Excellency Johannes Petrus Hoogeveen, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to FAO, was elected as first Vice-Chairperson of the 32nd Session of the Regional Conference.
7. Mr Taras Kachka, Deputy Minister for Economic Development, Trade and Agriculture of Ukraine, was elected as second Vice-Chairperson of the 32nd Session of the Regional Conference.
8. Mr Alper Tasdelen, Deputy Head of Division, Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture of the Federal Republic of Germany, and Mr Ayhan Baran, Alternate Permanent Representative of the

Republic of Turkey to FAO, Rome, were appointed Rapporteurs of the 32nd Session of the Regional Conference.

D. Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable

9. The Chairperson introduced the Agenda and Provisional Timetable.

10. The Regional Conference adopted the agenda and timetable. The agenda is provided in *Appendix A*. Documents submitted to the Regional Conference are listed in *Appendix B*.

E. Statement by the Director-General

11. Dr Qu Dongyu, the Director-General of FAO, in his statement to the Regional Conference, extended his gratitude to the Government and people of Uzbekistan for hosting the first virtual Regional Conference for Europe in the midst of the ongoing pandemic. He expressed solidarity with the victims and the heroes fighting the COVID-19 pandemic in the region and beyond, and he expressed his tribute to the national authorities of all Members who are hosting FAO offices across the region and who helped keep FAO employees safe in these difficult times. Furthermore, he thanked civil society and the private sector for their efforts in fighting the impacts of the pandemic. He highlighted the recent launch of the FAO global and regional COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme to help countries combat the negative effects of COVID-19.

12. The Director-General outlined the vision for the transformation of FAO, namely creating an inclusive and agile FAO that is entirely aligned with its core vision and mandate and that serves its Members in their achievement of the “four betters”: better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life. He emphasized transforming regional conferences into dynamic and efficient platforms for policy setting. He stressed the importance of obtaining from the ERC guidance and strategic direction to FAO for the achievement of the SDGs and for the provision of contextualized solutions for supplying nutritious and diversified foods, produced in a sustainable way, in the Europe and Central Asia region and globally.

13. The Director-General remarked that innovation, digitalization, policies, platforms and other tools are key promoters of modern sustainable agriculture in response to some of the challenges the region is facing and that are exacerbated under the current pandemic. He emphasized the need for the further promotion of innovative, coherent and strategic approaches and partnerships in the region, such as the FAO Hand-in-Hand Initiative and its Geospatial Platform, and he invited Members in the region to consider joining the Initiative.

F. Statement by the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council

14. Mr Khalid Mehboob, the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council, addressed the delegates on the importance of the Regional Conference as an integral component of FAO’s governance structure, providing regional perspectives into the FAO programme of work. He reminded the Regional Conference of the unique opportunity to give impetus to the innovation at FAO and to the initiatives of the Director-General. He recalled that the Europe and Central Asia region is vast and diverse, providing extensive knowledge and experience central to FAO’s mandate, and he urged Members to ensure that regional priorities were appropriately incorporated in the new FAO Strategic Framework. He noted the convening of the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit and recognized the central role of FAO, reflecting the prominence that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development affords to the Organization’s core mandate.

G. Statement by the Chairperson of the 31st Session of the Regional Conference for Europe (ERC)

15. His Excellency Alexey Gordeyev, Deputy Chairperson of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, delivered the statement as Chairperson of the 31st Session of the ERC. He informed the participants of the 32nd Session of the ERC of the outcomes and the recommendations of the previous session, all of which were endorsed by the 159th Session of the FAO Council and the 41st Session of the FAO Conference. He referred to the role of FAO supporting countries in the region in understanding and addressing the adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on food supply chains in Europe and Central Asia.

H. Statement by the Chairperson of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS)

16. The Chairperson of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), Mr Thanawat Tiensin, briefed the Regional Conference on key CFS activities. He expressed concern about the negative impacts of COVID-19 on agri-food supply chains and food security, further impairing the achievement of SDG 2 and related targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He highlighted the inclusive international and intergovernmental process followed by CFS to develop voluntary global policy guidance for convergence and coherence to achieve food security, improve nutrition and promote the progressive realization of the importance of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security. He stressed the importance of country ownership and informed about policy guidance on new topics such as gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as youth engagement and employment in agriculture and food systems.

I. Statement by the Spokesperson for the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) Consultation

17. Ms Aida Jamangulova, spokesperson for the civil society organizations (CSOs), brought to the attention of the Regional Conference the views of the CSOs, emphasizing the role of resilient agricultural systems based on agroecological farming practices that not only improve food production but also work in harmony with nature. She stressed that COVID-19 is aggravating existing socio-economic inequalities, affecting the most vulnerable, leading to food insecurity and malnutrition, and leading to an increase in gender-based violence. She underlined the importance of sharing knowledge and experiences to inspire and empower food producers, to connect them at the regional level and to benefit from ongoing digitalization processes while protecting small-scale food producers' and indigenous knowledge from data grabbing, and enhancing the digital sovereignty of food producers and indigenous peoples.

II. Regional and Global Policy and Regulatory Matters

Food Systems transformation and the road toward the Food Systems summit

A. Sustainable food systems and healthy diets in Europe and Central Asia

18. The Regional Conference discussed document ERC/20/2.

19. The Regional Conference:

- a) Affirmed the importance of adopting a sustainable food systems approach for healthy diets that maximizes contributions to the three dimensions of sustainability (environmental, economic and social) while addressing trade-offs across activities, actors and overall goals as a key commitment in achieving multiple SDGs and fostering synergies between policy measures;
- b) Stressed that the world was not on track to achieve the SDGs and confirmed that Members were fully committed to building a positive outcome from the United Nations Food Systems Summit as part of the Decade of Action to Deliver the SDGs by 2030;
- c) Underlined that the COVID-19 pandemic further threatened achieving the SDGs, showing the importance of a resilient and sustainable food system that functions in all circumstances; acknowledged the role of smallholders and family farms as key contributors to ensuring food security during the period of the pandemic; and confirmed support for the United Nations Secretary-General's call to "build back better" from COVID-19;
- d) Recognized family farms as a key pillar of food systems in the region and recognized the importance of continuing to empower them and of investing in value chains, including small and medium enterprises, to use untapped potential, and to maximize job creation, prosperity and decent employment opportunities;
- e) Encouraged Members to provide an enabling environment for implementing the food systems transformation agenda, preferably consisting of a national multisectoral coordinating mechanism with a broad mandate to use a food systems lens, with representation from the relevant government and non-state actors, including the private sector;
- f) Emphasized the promotion of dialogue on the roles of various actors and the fostering of policy coherence for sustainable food systems and healthy diets;
- g) Called on Members to exercise their responsibility and ensure the equal access of people to safe, healthy and nutritious food and to raise consumers' awareness of healthy diets and the prevention of food loss and waste;
- h) Acknowledged short supply chains, local markets and agroecological and other innovative approaches as a significant segment in promoting sustainable food systems that are resilient to climate change but also to other shocks (such as those related to the pandemic) while contributing to the reduction of food loss and waste;
- i) Recognized the importance of innovation, research and well-functioning agricultural extension services as an important prerequisite for the technology and knowledge transfer to farmers and small enterprises, and of the new opportunities that digitalization offers to improve not only the productivity and sustainability of food systems but also transparency for consumers;
- j) Stressed the need to invest in data collection for evidence- and science-based policy-making;

- i. for food systems analysis and identification of barriers to transforming food systems, taking account of the COVID-19-induced environment; and
 - ii. to develop analytical capacity for determining appropriate actions and analysing trade-offs and conflicts so as to formulate win-win interventions across the food system.
- k) Emphasized to Members, in the context of social sustainability and leaving no one behind, the need to address inequalities in food systems, foster a more people-centred approach, and empower vulnerable and marginalized groups, in order to provide affordable, healthy diets for all;
- l) Encouraged Members to share experiences of ongoing and planned policy, regulatory and non-regulatory interventions aimed at transforming food systems, including efforts to incentivize different actors;
- m) Acknowledged that the FAO's policy recommendations for a transformative agenda are well-aligned with the Farm-to-Fork Strategy, as well as other national strategies and doctrines;
- n) Highlighted the critical importance of gender equality and the empowerment of women, girls and young people in accelerating progress in achieving the SDGs;
- o) Acknowledged FAO's unique role in promoting sustainable food systems at the global level and in acting on the ground at regional, national and local levels;
- p) Endorsed the policy recommendations as outlined in Section 5 of this document, while noting that they could not be treated as an exhaustive list of measures needed to implement the transformative agenda in the region;
- q) Requested that FAO:
 - i. build on FAO's long-standing expertise and work on developing and promoting the sustainable food systems approach through its contribution to multistakeholder partnerships, in particular the Sustainable Food Systems Programme of the United Nations' Ten-Year Framework for Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production;
 - ii. support, through the Regional Initiatives, governments and non-state actors, in particular the private sector, the development, refinement and implementation of the transformative agenda on sustainable, resilient, inclusive and equitable food systems and healthy diets, taking into account the One Health approach while addressing specific impacts due to COVID-19;
 - iii. work with regional and national coordinating mechanisms and bodies, upon request by FAO Members, in developing a methodology to assess the sustainability of food systems and to analyse, at the country level, the status of current diets and food systems; and
 - iv. support countries in determining appropriate policy measures and building needed capacities and knowledge, including through the provision of statistics and analytical tools and the sharing of best practices from inside and outside the region.

B. Related Information Items

20. The Regional Conference noted under the document ERC/20/INF/9 Rev.1:

- a) ERC/20/INF/9 Rev.1 was presented by Ms Agnes Kalibata, who emphasized that the UN Food Systems Summit will unleash bold new actions, innovative solutions and strategies to transform food systems and leverage these shifts to deliver progress across all

of the SDGs. Five Summit objectives were outlined, emphasizing that the Summit will also address a number of cross-cutting issues, such as finance, policy, innovation, indigenous knowledge and the empowerment of women, young people and marginalized groups. Ms Kalibata observed that the Summit would be both a “People’s Summit” and a “Solutions Summit” and that its work streams were designed to deliver on this vision. Food Systems Summit Dialogues are planned at three different levels, in addition to online engagements.

21. The Regional Conference under the document ERC/20/INF/11¹:
 - a) Recognized the relevance of:
 - i. informing about the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture to countries in the region that have not yet ratified it and providing support in the implementation of the treaty to countries in the regions that are contracting parties; and
 - ii. supporting countries in the region in addressing priority activities as identified in the sectoral global plans of action developed by the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.
22. The Regional Conference under the document ERC/20/INF/12¹:
 - a) Recognized the opportunity provided by the Committee on World Food Security Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition, in support of the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition, to address policy fragmentation among the food, agriculture and health sectors.
23. The Regional Conference under the document ERC/20/INF/13¹:
 - a) Noted that the document could benefit from including the relevant definition of the CODEX Alimentarius on food safety into the “Vision and Strategy for FAO’s Work in Nutrition”.
24. The Regional Conference under the document ERC/20/INF/14¹:
 - a) While noting the document encouraged the further creation of synergies between its efforts in the field of food loss and waste, *inter alia*, by interlinking documents that are elaborated in parallel, i.e. making in this document reference to the Voluntary Code of Conduct for Food Loss and Waste Reduction currently under review and using unanimously the definition set out in the SDG 12.3.1 indicator: the Global Food Loss Index.
25. The Regional Conference took note of the document ERC/20/INF/15¹.

Hand In Hand Initiative: Reaching the most Vulnerable

C. FAO’s Hand-in-Hand Initiative: a New Approach

26. The Regional Conference discussed document ERC/20/12 Rev.1.
27. The Regional Conference:
 - a) Welcomed and supported FAO’s new approach for agriculture development through the Hand-in-Hand Initiative and recognized the role that the Hand-in-Hand Initiative can play in strengthening national ownership and capacities to accelerate progress to end poverty and hunger and promote rural development and economic growth;
 - b) Appreciated the strengthened organizational focus on accelerating agricultural transformation and sustainable rural development for the eradication of poverty (SDG 1),

¹ Considered by written correspondence procedure

hunger and all forms of malnutrition (SDG 2) and the confirmation of the potential contribution of the Hand-in-Hand Initiative to the attainment of other SDGs as well;

- c) Underscored the benefit of improved use of data and analytics to enable better-informed decision-making for innovation in practices, technology, investment, policy and institutions and highlighted the importance of making all processed information available to all relevant stakeholders, while asking FAO to clarify its policy on the treatment of information, to ensure taking into account the principles of data protection and privacy, and to provide for Members' monitoring;
- d) Welcomed the flexible and innovative matchmaking approach to building multidimensional partnerships that strengthen the mobilization of the means of implementation (including knowledge, know-how, technology, digitalization, market access, capacity development, and finance and investment) to accelerate progress towards the achievement of national sustainable development priorities for food and agriculture;
- e) Encouraged Members to provide best practices and guidance on the underlying market-oriented agri-food systems approach to support the transformation of agricultural, rural and food systems as integral components of structural transformation to achieve economic, social and environmental dimensions of national sustainable development objectives;
- f) Recognized the importance of strengthening national capacities for improved data integration, analysis and visualization in order to identify interactions and quantify trade-offs among actions designed to address multiple objectives under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with primary ownership of the beneficiary country and the resource partner;
- g) Recommended that FAO closely involve Members in the region in the shaping of the Hand-in-Hand Initiative and its implications for FAO's programme of work and budget and to ensure synergies with other related initiatives and close cooperation with respective implementing partners; and
- h) Requested that FAO consider ways to enhance and extend the Hand-in-Hand Initiative approach to strengthen FAO country support to achieve other FAO priority objectives and, especially, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated impact.

D. Solutions for Youth, Employment and Developing Rural Areas in relation to the United Nations Decade of Family Farming

28. The Regional Conference reviewed the document ERC/20/3 and its Web Annex on Solutions for Youth, Employment and Developing Rural Areas in relation to the United Nations Decade of Family Farming.

29. The Regional Conference endorsed the key recommendations and actions suggested in the background document. In addition, Members:

- a) Recognized the need to revitalize rural areas, with a special focus on empowering rural youth and young women and strengthening rural services and rural infrastructure to ensure the stimulation of inclusive economic development, the empowerment of smallholder farmers and the promotion of sustainable economic growth and green economy;
- b) Highlighted the negative effects of youth migration on productivity, income generation and local supply, recognized that without empowerment and access to decent employment and rural services, young generations will have limited opportunities in rural areas, and called upon Members to strive for similar income levels in urban and rural areas, for reasons of poverty reduction;

- c) Noted the key role of rural women in performing critical tasks in family and non-family environments and the lack of development opportunities and safety nets among rural women, especially from risks posed by the COVID-19 pandemic;
- d) Recognized the importance of agro-ecology and other innovative approaches, of digital transformation, and of the sharing of information, knowledge and research as key elements to transform the agriculture sector and make it attractive for young professionals;
- e) Acknowledged the need for a systematic approach to stimulate sustainable growth and promote the structural transformation of the food and agriculture sector to expand the multidimensional nature of family farming and thus provide tailor-made and context-specific solutions in order to achieve the SDGs;
- f) Emphasized the role of youth as key agents of change in the revitalization of rural areas and in the transformation towards sustainable food systems and suggested promoting the empowerment of youth through their participation in national and international governance and decision-making processes to improve their social and economic well-being, addressing the drivers of economic or distress migration, and maximizing the positive impacts of migration for rural communities and the use of remittances for investments in agriculture and rural development;
- g) Encouraged the preparation of national action plans for the United Nations Decade of Family Farming 2019–2028 (UNDIFF) that envisage tangible steps and specific undertakings in support of family farming at country level in the context of the UNDIFF;
- h) Stressed the importance of complementing policy support for family farms, particularly smallholders, with a private sector involvement strategy and with the adoption of territorial and integrated community development approaches that recognize the importance of and value the local needs of economic diversification, which addresses both the agri-food supply chain and non-agricultural economic activities in rural areas;
- i) Underlined the need to develop inclusive food systems through the sharing of information, knowledge and expertise among farmers and other actors via agricultural extension and advisory services, to facilitate innovations – in particular the development of dedicated, accessible and affordable tools and applications – and to introduce digitalization and e-agriculture to ensure the high coverage and efficiency of provided services;
- j) Recognized the need for responsible investments for the provision of rural public infrastructure and services, including health and education, and for increasing the level of investment support for small family farms and youth entrepreneurship by providing access to land, enhancing the investment environment and broadening the portfolio of suitable financial products, ensuring that no one in society is left behind;
- k) Highlighted the importance of FAO's Rural Youth Action Plan and other policy strategies and tools in support of rural youth, specifically related to access to land and other natural resources and in support of decent employment opportunities, such as start-up businesses;
- l) Noted that Farmer Field School is a useful, effective approach for introducing new technologies and innovative practices in the agriculture sector in the region and requested that FAO further promote it;
- m) Requested that FAO continue assisting the countries in the region in the sustainable structural transformation of rural areas to expand the multidimensional nature of family farming and to leverage the livelihoods of family farmers, with emphasis on youth and women;

- n) Recommended that FAO take into consideration the policy recommendations of the Committee on World Food Security for promoting youth engagement and employment in agriculture and food systems and include gender equality as a crosscutting topic under all proposed FAO solutions for youth, employment and development of rural areas;
- o) Requested that FAO consider the organization of a youth forum in preparation for the UN Food Systems Summit; and
- p) Requested that FAO work closely with other Rome-based agencies when implementing FAO's Rural Youth Action Plan.

Innovation and Digitalization

E. Innovation and Digitalization special event

30. The Special event provided a platform for countries and other stakeholders to exchange and showcase their innovations in agriculture as well as their views on digitalization in food and agriculture systems, and the measures that can be taken to maximize its potential. Countries were invited to further consider the ways for FAO to support the global knowledge sharing and analysis in order to inform policy-makers and other food and agriculture stakeholders.

III. Programme and Budget Matters

Means of Implementation

A. Decentralized Offices Network²

31. The Regional Conference considered the document ERC/20/4.
32. The Regional Conference:
 - a) Supported FAO management's efforts towards increasing delegations of authority and decentralizing decision-making in administrative and programmatic areas, including human resources and procurement, aiming to improve the overall delivery of strategic programmes and respond to the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development while taking into account the principles of transparency and accountability as well as the need of adequately involving FAO's governance bodies in the decision-making on the opening or closing of Decentralized Offices;
 - b) Requested that FAO further pursue the adjustment of its Decentralized Offices business models – particularly in light of the United Nations Development System repositioning – in order to further align and create synergies with the single action plan under the responsibility of the Resident Coordinator, to ensure greater flexibility and efficiency in the use of the Organization's existing limited financial and human resources, aiming to respond to Members' emerging needs and priorities under FAO's Strategic Objectives and in line with the SDGs and paying special attention to addressing hunger and poverty in the most vulnerable countries, prioritized by the Hand-in-Hand Initiative;
 - c) Requested that FAO continue its efforts to strengthen its technical capacities and policy integration at regional and subregional levels, in particular through further cooperation with the Rome-based Agencies (RBAs) at regional and country level and while maintaining adequate technical capacity at FAO headquarters, to ensure FAO leadership in the region across relevant SDGs, including those under FAO's custodianship, and to contribute effectively and particularly through normative, science- and evidence-based competence to the new United Nations Cooperation Frameworks and common country analyses;
 - d) Requested that FAO shift towards a full programmatic approach at the decentralized level to better demonstrate its valuable contributions to the achievement of the SDGs, in line with the recommendations of the evaluation of FAO's Strategic Results Framework;
 - e) Supported FAO's continued engagement in the implementation of the United Nations Development System repositioning at regional and country levels, highlighting the role of the Liaison Offices in enhancing FAO's visibility on the ground and in strengthening relations with all stakeholders, including the private sector and civil society, and provide guidance on FAO's strategic direction with regard to its value proposition in the region;
 - f) Requested that FAO evaluate, identify and seize emerging opportunities arising from United Nations Development System repositioning at country and regional levels, building on lessons learned and successful experiences in collaboration with other partners, especially in the environment of the RBAs; and
 - g) Supported the idea of establishing an issues-based coalition on food systems and nutrition for the Europe and Central Asia region.

B. Results and Priorities for FAO in the Region

33. The Regional Conference considered the document ERC/20/5 Rev.1 and its seven web annexes.

² Considered by written correspondence procedure

34. The Regional Conference:

- a) Appreciated the results achieved by FAO in 2018–2019 in the region under the Regional Initiatives (RIs) and other main areas of work, as well as FAO's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and welcomed the update on the new FAO Strategic Framework and the adjustments to the FAO Regional Priorities;
- b) Noted the new Hand-in-Hand Initiative, through which FAO will support evidence-based, country-led and country-owned actions in the region to accelerate agricultural transformation and sustainable rural development for the eradication of poverty (SDG 1) and hunger and all forms of malnutrition (SDG 2). These efforts also will contribute to the attainment of all other SDGs in the region;
- c) Noted the importance of adopting innovative approaches and using the potential of modern science and technologies – including digital solutions, while minimizing digital divides – and adjusting related national legislative frameworks to face new situations and challenges;
- d) Noted the renewed emphasis on leaving no one behind and on organizational consolidation to accelerate support for small island developing states, least developed countries and landlocked developing countries, with special emphasis on the Landlocked Developing Countries in Europe and Central Asia;
- e) Noted the importance of strengthened partnerships, including with smallholder producers and food companies, procurers and consumers, as also highlighted in the 46th Session of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), and appreciated FAO's new Strategy for Private Sector Engagement;
- f) Took note of the ongoing progress in elaboration of the CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition, (VGFSyN) contributing to addressing food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms within a food systems perspective in the coming years;
- g) Stressed the importance of food systems transformations that embody the dynamic links across sectors, actors and countries pertaining to the sustainable use of natural resources, sustainable agriculture and food systems, based on the three dimensions of sustainable development, and with the goal of improving food security and nutrition;
- h) Recognized the importance of FAO's Strategic Framework in providing direction for FAO's technical work and took note of the arrangements regarding the proposed revision of the Strategic Framework;
- i) Welcomed the efforts to anchor the revised Strategic Framework to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including to SDG 2 and SDG 1 as cornerstones for all FAO activities, and encouraged the review of FAO's organizational changes introduced in the 164th Session of the Council in light of the new Strategic Framework, once adopted;
- j) Acknowledged the work completed through FAO Strategic Programmes as well as the achievements under the Regional Initiatives and other main areas of work in 2018–2019 in responding to the main priorities identified at the 31st Session of the ERC and under the direction of FAO Strategic Objectives, highlighting the importance of agroecology in family farming as a solution for sustainable agriculture and recalling on the importance of prudent use of antibiotics to fight antimicrobial resistance, including the phasing out of their use as growth promoters;
- k) Endorsed the proposed regional priority areas and the revised Regional Initiatives as a programmatic framework approach for FAO's action in 2020–2021, as outlined in paragraphs³ 41–46 and 50–64, and asked FAO to consider these regional priorities in the

³ www.fao.org/3/nc229en/nc229en.pdf

preparation of its new Strategic Framework and to strengthen the work under respective priorities within the FAO mandate in relation to:

- i. the UN Food Systems Summit and FAO's contribution to it;
 - ii. integrating policy changes related to nutrition and healthy diets and transforming food systems based on the three dimensions of sustainable development;
 - iii. integrating a One Health approach, including tackling antimicrobial resistance, zoonotic and other transboundary pests and diseases – in particular, the invasion of desert locusts;
 - iv. focusing on consumer perspectives and shorter supply chains, while working to achieve more sustainable and inclusive long supply chains;
 - v. promoting equality and digital inclusion, stressing social protection and school food and nutrition programmes, paying special attention to gender equality;
 - vi. integrating True Cost Accounting and consider the United Nations Decade of Family Farming and the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition as well as the Issue-based Coalition on Sustainable Food Systems, in collaboration with the other regional United Nations agencies;
 - vii. forestry, fisheries and aquaculture, and soil and water resources; and
 - viii. restoring biodiversity, considering the work of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, and increasing the focus on nature-based solutions, agroecology and other innovative approaches, and risk reduction and mitigation.
- l) Underlined the importance for a sustainable food systems approach of delivering healthy diets and requested that FAO incorporate this conceptual connection between sustainable production and healthy and safe nutritious diets for all in its Regional Priority Areas for Action for 2022–2025; and
- m) Stressed the contributions of FAO in increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the United Nations system and highlighted that the FAO Country Programming Framework needs to fully align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

C. Synthesis of FAO Evaluations 2014-2019 in Europe and Central Asia Region

35. The Regional Conference welcomed with appreciation the evaluation synthesis report of FAO's Office of Evaluation (ERC/20/6).

36. The Regional Conference endorsed all the recommendations of the Synthesis report, namely:

- a) Improve the existing accountability framework at regional and thematic level, making it fully comprehensive and consistent and ensuring that all projects are based on a robust theory of change.
- b) Implement a consistent and comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system at national, regional and corporate level; strengthen the capacities of regional and subregional offices to provide backstopping support to FAO country offices in project formulation and resource prospecting.

- c) Ensure that all projects include a robust exit strategy, shifting the attention to strengthening institutions as well as facilitating cross-learning, spreading knowledge across the region and capitalizing on FAO's technical expertise to engage with strategic partners.
- d) Continue to develop knowledge and capacity (both within FAO and among stakeholders) on gender equality mainstreaming to ensure that gender equality issues are addressed by (all) FAO's work in the region.

37. The Regional Conference welcomed confirmation that FAO management has accepted the recommendations and requested a progress report on the implementation of these recommendations at the next Regional Conference as well as a similar agenda item on evaluation as a regular feature in future regional conferences.

IV. Other Matters

Means of Implementation

A. Multi-year Programme of Work (MYPOW) 2020–2023 of the Regional Conference for Europe (ERC)⁴

38. The Regional Conference reviewed the document on Multi-year Programme of Work (MYPOW) 2020–2023 of the Regional Conference for Europe (ERC).

39. The Regional Conference:

- a) Endorsed the “Multi-year Programme of Work (MYPOW) 2020–2023 of the Regional Conference for Europe (ERC).”

Food Systems transformation and the road toward the Food Systems summit

B. Report from the Outcome of the Debate of the 41st Session of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA)⁴

40. The Regional Conference reviewed the Report from the Outcome of the Debate of the 41st Session of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA).

41. The Regional Conference:

- a) Appreciated and supported FAO’s work in the region on plant health, *inter alia*, with regard to the International Year of Plant Health, and its interconnection with climate change, food security, biodiversity, invasive species and increasing global trade – including e-commerce – and human mobility; and
- b) Endorsed the report and recommendations from the 41st Session of the ECA.

C. Report from the Outcome of the Debate of the Joint Session of the 40th European Forestry Commission (EFC) and the 77th UNECE Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry (COFFI)⁴

42. The Regional Conference considered the Report from the Outcome of the Debate of the Joint Session of the 40th European Forestry Commission (EFC) and the 77th UNECE Committee on Forest and the Forest Industry.

43. The Regional Conference:

- a) Welcomed the report and appreciated the joint session;
- b) Encouraged further cooperation with all relevant stakeholders while avoiding duplications;
- c) Appreciated the work undertaken by FAO on forest-related topics in the region in light of the importance of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2017–2030 and its implementation for the region;
- d) Welcomed the progress made in implementing the Warsaw Integrated Programme of Work and the establishment of a new Team of Specialists on Boreal Forests;
- e) Requested that FAO incorporate as regional priorities into its Programme of Work and Budget:

⁴ Considered by written correspondence procedure

- collaborating on integrated landscape approaches among various land management agencies responsible for agriculture, forestry and fisheries into relevant national planning processes;
- addressing challenges faced by invasive species, *inter alia*, through support of the Forest Invasive Species Network for Europe and Central Asia (REUFIS);
- identifying and operationalizing opportunities provided by cross-sectoral collaboration; and
- finding nature-based solutions for climate change.

D. Report from the Outcome of the Debate of the 30th Session of the European Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Advisory Commission (EIFAAC)⁵

44. The Regional Conference reviewed the Report from the Outcome of the Debate of the 30th Session of the European Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Advisory Commission (EIFAAC).

45. The Regional Conference:

- a) Appreciated the Commission's work, particularly the adoption of the five-year EIFAAC Strategy for 2020-2024 and its advice on timely scientific data and research findings to national policy-makers;
- b) Discussed priorities of work for inland fisheries and freshwater aquaculture development in the region in line with contributing to the UNFSS and other important global issues as well as achieving the SDGs and the FAO Regional Initiatives;
- c) Called upon Members to nominate and support their operational focal points to EIFAAC, as the only pan-European commission on inland fisheries and aquaculture, and to encourage other countries and non-governmental organizations in the region to participate in EIFAAC sessions as observers; and
- d) Encouraged Members through their operational focal points to participate in EIFAAC projects addressing regional priorities as identified by the Technical and Scientific Committee of EIFAAC.

E. Report from the Outcome of the Debate of the 6th Session of the Central Asian and Caucasus Regional Fisheries and Aquaculture Commission (CACFish)⁵

46. The Regional Conference reviewed the Report from the Outcome of the Debate of the 6th Session of the Central Asian and Caucasus Regional Fisheries and Aquaculture Commission (CACFish).

47. The Regional Conference:

- a) Discussed priorities of work for fisheries and aquaculture development in the CACFish area of competence, in line with achieving the universal goals of the SDGs and the FAO Regional Initiatives, for consideration by the Seventh Session of CACFish in May 2021 in Tajikistan; and
- b) Encouraged relevant Members of the ERC particularly from Central Asia and the Caucasus to announce their intention to join the Commission.

⁵ Considered by written correspondence procedure

F. Related Information Items

48. The Regional Conference took note of the document ERC/20/INF/10⁶.

G. Date and Place of the 33rd Session of the Regional Conference for Europe

49. The date and place of the 33rd Session of the Regional Conference for Europe was not discussed during the virtual event. The Director-General will decide on the venue of the 33rd Session of the Regional Conference for Europe and the exact date, in consultation with the Members.

H. Any Other Business

50. No other matters were raised by the Members under Any Other Business.

I. Closing and Report Adoption***Review and Endorsement of the Report of the Regional Conference for Europe***

51. The Regional Conference unanimously adopted the Report with statements by Members delivered during the adoption session.

Closure of the Conference

52. The Director-General thanked the Government of Uzbekistan for hosting the 32nd Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe under the extraordinary circumstances of COVID-19 that occasioned the need to meet remotely. He noted the attendance of 51 countries - the highest number ever at the Regional Conference for Europe, and that this first virtual Regional Conference for Europe also brought all participants, FAO's Secretariat and all the Ministers, Deputy Ministers and distinguished delegates, closer together. He underlined that although the REU region is one of the most diverse regions in the world, consensus was reached on a number of important issues. In particular, he noted the focus on Sustainable Food Systems and Healthy Diets in Europe and Central Asia, but also the potential this region has to help feed the world in more sustainable, resilient and inclusive ways. He further noted the importance of reducing food loss and waste and underlined the issue of Youth, Employment and Developing Rural Areas in the context of the UN Decade of Family Farming, 2019-2028. In closing, he thanked all delegates for their participation on behalf of the Secretariat and colleagues in Rome, in the Regional Office in Budapest, the FAO Office in Uzbekistan and in each of the country offices throughout the region.

53. Minister Khodjaev, on behalf of Uzbekistan as host, offered his heartfelt thanks to all the participants for the excellent attendance and active participation in this first virtual Regional Conference for Europe and the very positive exchange of views and consensus on very relevant topics important in the region.

⁶ Considered by written correspondence procedure

V. APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – AGENDA

I. INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

1. Election of the Chairperson, Vice-Chairpersons and Appointment of Rapporteurs
2. Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable
3. Statement by the Director-General
4. Statement by the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council
5. Statement by the Chairperson of the 31st Session of the Regional Conference for Europe (ERC)
6. Statement by the Chairperson of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS)
7. Statement by the Spokesperson for the Civil Society Organizations (CSO) Consultation

II. REGIONAL AND GLOBAL POLICY AND REGULATORY MATTERS

Food Systems transformation and the road toward the Food System summit

8. Sustainable Food Systems and Healthy Diets in Europe and Central Asia

Information Note: Status of Biodiversity in Europe and Central Asia – Challenges and Opportunities for Dynamic Conservation of Biodiversity

Information Note: United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition and Follow-up to the Second International Conference on Nutrition

Information Note: Update of the Vision and Strategy for FAO's work in Nutrition

Information Note: Food Loss and Waste Measurement linked to the Food Loss Analysis Methodology

Information Note: International Year of Plant Health (IYPH) 2020

Information Note: UN Food Systems Summit 2021

Hand In Hand Initiative: Reaching the most Vulnerable

9. FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative: a New Approach
10. Solutions for Youth, Employment and Developing Rural Areas in relation to the United Nations Decade of Family Farming

Innovation and Digitalization

Special Event: Innovation and Digitalization

III. PROGRAMME AND BUDGET MATTERS

Means of Implementation

11. Decentralized Offices Network
12. Results and Priorities for FAO in the Region
13. Synthesis of FAO Evaluations 2014-2019 in Europe and Central Asia Region

IV. OTHER MATTERS

Means of Implementation

14. Multi-year Programme of Work (MYPOW) 2020-2023 of the Regional Conference for Europe (ERC)

Food Systems transformation and the road toward the Food Systems summit

15. Report from the Outcome of the Debate of the 41st Session of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA)
16. Report from the Outcome of the Debate of the Joint Session of the 40th European Forestry Commission (EFC) and the 77th UNECE Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry (COFFI)
17. Report from the Outcome of the Debate of the 30th Session of the European Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Advisory Commission (EIFAAC)
18. Report from the Outcome of the Debate of the 6th Session of the Central Asian and Caucasus Regional Fisheries and Aquaculture Commission (CACFish)

Information Note: Report from the Outcome of the Debates of the 42nd and 43rd Sessions of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM)

19. Date and Place of the 33rd Session of the Regional Conference for Europe
20. Any Other Business
 - Review and Endorsement of the Report of the Regional Conference for Europe
 - Closure of the Conference

APPENDIX B – LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Symbol	Title
ERC/20/1 Rev.1	Provisional Annotated Agenda
ERC/20/2	Sustainable Food Systems and Healthy Diets in Europe and Central Asia
ERC/20/3	Solutions for Youth, Employment and Developing Rural Areas in relation to the United Nations Decade of Family Farming
ERC/20/3/Web Annex	Solutions for Youth, Employment and Developing Rural Areas in relation to the United Nations Decade of Family Farming
ERC/20/4	Decentralized Offices Network
ERC/20/5 Rev.1	Results and Priorities for FAO in the Region
ERC/20/5/Web Annex 1	Overview of FAO's Strategic Objectives Programme
ERC/20/5/Web Annex 2	Contribution of Results in the Europe and Central Asia Region to FAO Strategic Objectives in the 2018-19 Biennium
ERC/20/5/Web Annex 3	FAO Country Planning and Programming in the context of repositioning the United Nations development system
ERC/20/5/Web Annex 4	Corporate Outcome Assessment 2019 Europe and Central Asia Regional Results
ERC/20/5/Web Annex 5	Update on the development of the new Strategic Framework
ERC/20/5/Web Annex 6	The impact of COVID-19 on food and agriculture in Europe and Central Asia and FAO's response
ERC/20/5/Web Annex 7	The future of food systems in Europe and Central Asia – 2022-2025 and beyond
ERC/20/6	Synthesis of FAO Evaluations 2014-2019 in Europe and Central Asia Region
ERC/20/7	Multi-year Programme of Work (MYPOW) 2020-2023 of the Regional Conference for Europe (ERC)
ERC/20/8	Report from the Outcome of the Debate of the 41st Session of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA)
ERC/20/9	Report from the Outcome of the Debate of the Joint Session of the 40th European Forestry Commission (EFC) and the 77th UNECE Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry (COFFI)
ERC/20/10	Report from the Outcome of the Debate of the 30th Session of the European Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Advisory Commission (EIFAAC)
ERC/20/11	Report from the Outcome of the Debate of the 6th Session of the Central Asian and Caucasus Regional Fisheries and Aquaculture Commission (CACFish)

ERC/20/12 Rev.1 FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative: a New Approach

INF SERIES

Symbol	Title
ERC/20/INF/1	Information Note
ERC/20/INF/2 Rev.2	Provisional Timetable
ERC/20/INF/3 Rev.2	Provisional List of Documents
ERC/20/INF/4	Statement by the Director-General
ERC/20/INF/5	Statement by the Independent Chairperson of the FAO Council
ERC/20/INF/6	Statement by the Chairperson of the 31st Session of the Regional Conference for Europe (ERC)
ERC/20/INF/7	Statement by the Chairperson of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS)
ERC/20/INF/8	Statement by the Spokesperson for the Civil Society Organizations (CSO) Consultation
ERC/20/INF/9 Rev.1	UN Food Systems Summit 2021
ERC/20/INF/10	Report from the Outcome of the Debates of the 42nd and 43rd Sessions of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM)
ERC/20/INF/11	Status of Biodiversity in Europe and Central Asia – Challenges and Opportunities for Dynamic Conservation of Biodiversity
ERC/20/INF/12	United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition and Follow-up to the Second International Conference on Nutrition
ERC/20/INF/13	Update of the Vision and Strategy for FAO's work in Nutrition
ERC/20/INF/14	Food Loss and Waste Measurement linked to the Food Loss Analysis Methodology
ERC/20/INF/15	International Year of Plant Health (IYPH) 2020
ERC/20/INF/16	Statement of Competence and Voting Rights Submitted by the European Union and its Member States