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Advancing gender equality in the region: update on the progress made

I. Introduction

1. The Thirty-sixth Session of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA)¹ in 2010 decided that the progress made in mainstreaming gender and social inclusion in the work of FAO in the region should be a permanent standing item on the ECA agenda. The objective of the decision was to ensure that, through regular reporting and adequate attention, support from Members for this critical theme of agrifood systems would be maintained. As part of this process, the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) prepared this background paper for the consideration of the Members.

2. The purpose of this document is: (1) to inform ECA Members on the status of implementation of the Regional Gender Equality Strategy and Action Plan for 2019–2022;² and (2) to highlight persistent gender gaps that limit progress among Member Countries towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and that require further attention and action.

3. The Regional Gender Equality Strategy for 2019–2022³ and its action plan continue to be relevant in view of the newly updated FAO Policy on Gender Equality (2020–2030),⁴ along with its goals and objectives. The new policy re-emphasizes FAO's commitment to promoting gender equality as an integral part of its mandate and contribution towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs.

¹ FAO. 2010. *Report. European Commission on Agriculture Thirty-sixth Session*. Yerevan, Armenia, 11–12 May 2010. (also available at https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/reu/europe/documents/ECA/ECA_36/en/ECA_36_10_REPORT_en.pdf).

² FAO. 2019. *Regional Gender Equality and Action Plan for Europe and Central Asia 2019–2022*. Budapest. 100 pp. (also available at <https://www.fao.org/3/ca4521en/CA4521EN.pdf>).

³ Approved by the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia SMT in March 2019 and presented for the Forty-first Session of the European Commission on Agriculture in September 2019.

⁴ FAO. 2020. *FAO Policy on Gender Equality 2020–2030*. Rome. (also available at <https://www.fao.org/3/cb1583en/cb1583en.pdf>).

4. The Regional Gender Equality Strategy affirms the Organization's mandate to address pervasive inequalities between women and men that "undermine food security, hold back economic growth and limit advances in agriculture."⁵ The gender work in the region is also in conformity with the new Strategic Framework 2022–31 and reflects its commitments towards other cross-cutting themes, namely inclusivity and youth, and towards addressing the root causes of gender-based discrimination, protecting the rights of rural women, and leaving no one behind in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.⁶ Indeed, the situation of rural women cuts across the 2030 Agenda, implicating such goals as ending poverty and achieving food security that are bound up with fundamental rights to land and property, decent work, health and education for all.

5. Against this backdrop, the COVID-19 pandemic has threatened not only to delay progress toward achieving gender equality and achieving the SDGs but also to lead to backsliding on the "limited gains" made in recent decades.⁷ The pandemic crisis has laid bare the pre-existing constraints that rural women faced in accessing productive resources, services, technologies, markets, financial assets and local institutions that, in turn, have left them more vulnerable to the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic.⁸

6. This document is structured to: (a) present the progress in implementing the REU gender strategy (section I); (b) highlight priority issues as evidence for continued efforts by FAO, national counterparts and other stakeholders in policy development, project implementation and advocacy; and (c) provide recommendations for FAO and Member States. Comments and opinions from the Members will inform FAO's future work in the region.

II. Progress on implementing the REU Gender Strategy for 2019–2022

7. FAO has been providing gender expertise at regional and national level to 17 countries across the region⁹ to support policies to achieve the SDGs and inclusive and sustainable food systems that leave no one behind through the building of knowledge, the raising of awareness and the sharing of experiences.¹⁰ Emphasis is given to gender mainstreaming within all three Regional Initiatives.

⁵ **FAO.** 2019. *Regional Gender Equality and Action Plan for Europe and Central Asia 2019–2022*. Budapest. 100 pp. (also available at <https://www.fao.org/3/ca4521en/CA4521EN.pdf>).

⁶ For more information, see the general recommendation No. 34 from the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/GC/34&Lang=en); the Beijing Platform for Action (<https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/>); and the Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal 5 on gender equality and empowering women and girls (<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>).

⁷ **United Nations.** 2020. *Policy brief: the impact of COVID-19 on women*. 9 April 2020. (also available at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women>).

⁸ **FAO.** 2020. *Gendered impacts of COVID-19 and equitable policy responses in agriculture, food security and nutrition*. Rome. (also available at <https://www.fao.org/policy-support/tools-and-publications/resources-details/en/c/1276740/>).

⁹ These are: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey (Western Balkans and Turkey); Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine (Eastern Europe and the Caucasus); and Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (Central Asia).

¹⁰ **FAO.** 2019. *Regional Gender Equality and Action Plan for Europe and Central Asia 2019–2022*. Budapest. 100 pp. (also available at <https://www.fao.org/3/ca4521en/CA4521EN.pdf>).

8. In order to enhance the capacities of national counterparts to formulate and implement evidence-based strategies and programmes in agriculture and food security, FAO undertakes country gender assessments (CGAs),¹¹ which are utilized as gender mainstreaming instrument to improve the integration of gender-related outputs, activities and indicators in country-level work.¹²

9. Since the start of the pandemic, these comprehensive gender analyses were finalized for Bosnia and Herzegovina,¹³ Ukraine,¹⁴ and Serbia,¹⁵ and draft reports were produced in Azerbaijan, Republic of Moldova and Kosovo.¹⁶ An update of the CGA in Albania is in the pipeline, and plans to produce gender assessments in Belarus and Kazakhstan are underway. The CGAs are based on the qualitative and quantitative data review of key gender issues in agriculture and rural development, including analysis on the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on rural communities and women in particular, and they include recommendations for contributing to policy dialogues and helping to mobilize commitment and action.

10. Additionally, FAO supported several region-specific knowledge products: (1) a study on the gender and socio-economic dimensions of the use of pesticides in Central Asia and Turkey;¹⁷ (2) a regional report on the status of social protection for rural populations in Europe and Central Asia; (3) a guidebook on gender and climate finance investments in agriculture based on FAO's experiences with Global Environment Facility (GEF) and Green Climate Fund (GCF) projects in Europe and Central Asia; (4) and an overview of rural advisory services in the region from a gender perspective. These products should become available for the public in 2022, and FAO is planning a series of awareness-raising and advocacy events accordingly.

11. In order to enhance capacities to formulate and implement evidence-based policies in agrifood systems that are responsive to the needs of rural women and disadvantaged groups in agriculture, forestry and fishery, FAO has been providing technical assistance to the ministries of agriculture in Azerbaijan, Republic of Moldova, Serbia and Uzbekistan. With FAO support, the State Committee of Forestry in Uzbekistan adopted its first sectoral gender strategy which, among other issues, establishes positions of gender coordinators at the province level and aims to provide support to rural women from forest-dependent communities. Similar work is underway with the Ministry of Agriculture.

12. To contribute to the regional dialogue, FAO collaborated with the Moscow National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE) in organizing the International Forum "Food Policy, Rural Development and Gender Equality in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia: current trends and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic." During three virtual sessions (10, 12 and 17 March 2021), 475 participants representing policymakers, civil society organizations, academia, farmers and

¹¹ Country Gender Assessments (<https://www.fao.org/europe/resources/gender/en/>) have been conducted in [Albania](#) (2016), [Armenia](#) (2017), [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) (2021), [Georgia](#) (2018), [Kyrgyzstan](#) (2016), [Serbia](#) (2021), [Tajikistan](#) (2016), [Turkey](#) (2016), [Ukraine](#) (2021), and [Uzbekistan](#) (2019) and are in the pipeline for Azerbaijan, Belarus and the Republic of Moldova.

¹² FAO. 2020. *FAO Policy on Gender Equality 2020–2030*. Rome, p. 13. (also available at <https://www.fao.org/3/cb1583en/cb1583en.pdf>)

¹³ FAO & UN Women. 2021. *National gender profile of agriculture and rural livelihoods – Bosnia and Herzegovina*. Country Gender Assessment – Europe and Central Asia. Budapest/Sarajevo. (also available at <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb5472en>).

¹⁴ FAO. 2021. *National gender profile of agriculture and rural livelihoods – Ukraine, Revised*. Budapest. (also available at <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb4501en>).

¹⁵ FAO. 2021. *National gender profile of agriculture and rural livelihoods – Serbia*. Budapest. (also available at <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb7068en>).

¹⁶ All references to Kosovo in this document shall be understood to be in full compliance with UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

¹⁷ The status in Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkey (GCP/SEC/011/GFF).

farmers' organizations discussed pressing issues in agrifood system policies and their connections to gender inequalities in rural areas in the region and proposed solutions.¹⁸

13. Another remarkable result at the regional level has been the collaboration of FAO, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the International Union of Notaries (UINL) to work closely with national authorities in the Western Balkans to assist with the SDG reporting process for indicator 5.a.2 on gender equality in land ownership and control. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) selected this initiative to be featured in the SDG registry of good practices.¹⁹

14. A women's economic empowerment project is well underway in Azerbaijan, and within the framework of the FAO–Turkey Partnership Programme, FAO started a new project in October 2021 that targets policy and grassroots levels in Tajikistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan for socially inclusive agrifood systems that leave no one behind.²⁰ Concrete initiatives at the regional and country levels²¹ have been going in parallel with the strategic thinking, work planning and reporting process to adjust the gender work with the new FAO Strategic Framework, the PPAs and their structural and relational changes, aiming to address the underlying causes of gender inequalities.

III. Key gender issues in agriculture and food security in the region

15. The region is experiencing urbanization and the depopulation of rural areas.²² Addressing gender disparities among the rural population is critical in transforming food systems, reducing poverty and addressing the negative impacts of climate change. The COVID-19 pandemic has also raised new challenges for protecting the most vulnerable segments of the rural population. A review of the FAO country gender assessments allows for the distillation of key priority gender issues that remain critical to address for transformative approaches and recovery efforts:

3.1 The need for gender-transformative agricultural policies that address the root causes of inequality

16. All Member Countries in Europe and Central Asia have legal and policy frameworks that guarantee equal rights and opportunities for women and men. National efforts to increase the capacities

¹⁸ A summary of discussions will soon be released in English and Russian.

¹⁹ **FAO & GIZ.** 2020. *Achieving SDG indicator 5.a.2 in the Western Balkans and beyond. Partnerships for gender equality in land ownership and control.* (also available at <https://www.fao.org/3/cb0173en/CB0173EN.pdf>).

²⁰ Due to the word limitations, the overview of FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia gender work in the region is not entirely exhaustive.

²¹ Starting in 2020, the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia started publishing its quarterly newsletter (in English and Russian) that highlights its best practices in the region. More details and human stories from the projects mentioned above are available at:

- <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/CB1926EN/> (Gender Newsletter No. 1, November 2020);
- <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/CB3707EN/> (Gender Newsletter No. 2, February 2021);
- <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/CB4953EN/> (Gender Newsletter No. 3, May 2021);
- <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/CB6636EN/> (Gender Newsletter No. 4, July 2021); and
- <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/CB7872EN/> (Gender Newsletter No. 5, November 2021).

²² A large portion of the population still lives rurally, varying from less than a third of the entire population (e.g. in Belarus, Turkey and Ukraine) up to more than half of the population (e.g. in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova and Tajikistan).

of public institutions to reflect gender considerations in their work have included the creation of gender units or networks of gender focal points (GFPs) in line ministries or in inter-ministerial bodies. However, the practice of appointing GFPs within ministries of agriculture is not consistent. Plus, their responsibilities and authority vary considerably, and their ability to influence policymaking in the agriculture sector is often very limited. In many cases, this role is a responsibility additional to existing work, without adequate funding or time allocated for this function.²³

17. In practice, national policies on agriculture and rural development tend to refer to gender equality as a high-level goal but without specifying concrete actions or allocating budgets; at the same time, national action plans and strategies on the promotion of gender equality seldom include topics related to women's roles in agricultural production. In general, a gender perspective is included in policies for issues that are traditionally associated with women, such as health care, education and entrepreneurship, yet is virtually absent from agricultural policy. While there are several good examples in the region of strategies and public programmes dedicated to improving the lives of rural women, the misconception persists that agriculture is a gender-neutral topic. A failure to recognize gender as cross-cutting means that issues such as women's unpaid work on family farms are frequently overlooked, resulting in the further isolation of women from key resources.

18. FAO has consistently raised concerns over the lack of sex-disaggregated data and statistical information to inform policy on agriculture or rural development in specific.²⁴ National data collections generally disaggregate by settlement type (rural/urban) or by sex but not by both variables at once.²⁵ Specialized data collection is also necessary to analyze particular constraints, risks and opportunities for rural women – for instance, surveys on time use, patterns of household decision-making and the prevalence of gender-based violence. Even more so in the post-pandemic period, sex-disaggregated data and gender analyses are vital to assess the differential indirect impacts of COVID-19 in order to design inclusive recovery measures.²⁶

3.2 Gender and rural poverty

19. While extreme poverty has been largely eradicated in the region, inequality and social exclusion have increased, with rising “pockets of poverty and inequalities” within and between individual countries/territories.²⁷ As data remain incomplete, many forms of poverty remain hidden, especially among disadvantaged populations. However, available national data make clear that the risks for poverty and social exclusion remain higher in rural areas than elsewhere. The rural population as a whole

²³ **Economic Commission for Europe.** 2019. *Empowering rural women in the ECE region*. Note by the Food and Agriculture Organization for the Beijing +25 Regional Review Meeting, para. 58. (also available at https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/RCM_Website/ECE_AC.28_2019_11-e.pdf).

²⁴ **European Commission on Agriculture.** 2014. *The gender gap in agriculture in Eastern Europe: results of recent country rural gender assessments*. Section II, paras. 5–14. Thirty-eighth Session of the European Commission on Agriculture, 1–2 April 2014, Bucharest, Romania. (also available at <https://www.fao.org/3/au818e/au818e.pdf>).

²⁵ **Economic Commission for Europe.** 2019. *Empowering rural women in the ECE region*. Note by the Food and Agriculture Organization for the Beijing +25 Regional Review Meeting, para. 57. (also available at https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/RCM_Website/ECE_AC.28_2019_11-e.pdf).

²⁶ **FAO.** 2020. *Gendered impacts of COVID-19 and equitable policy responses in agriculture, food security and nutrition*. Rome. (also available at <https://www.fao.org/policy-support/tools-and-publications/resources-details/en/c/1276740/>).

²⁷ **United Nations Development Group.** 2017. *Building more inclusive, sustainable and prosperous societies in Europe and Central Asia*. Regional advocacy paper. (also available at <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eca/attachments/publications/2017/eca-regional-advocacy-paper-2017.pdf>).

experiences a number of deprivations, including income poverty; lack of decent work; lack of access to basic infrastructure, services and social protection; and risks of environmental hazards.

20. Vulnerabilities to poverty have a gender dimension, and particular groups of women are at an elevated risk of falling into poverty (e.g. elderly women, single mothers, mothers of many children, women with disabilities, women from ethnic minority groups or with lower levels of education, and women in rural areas who may also fall into any of the previous groups). Women's poverty "derives from multiple factors, not only the absence of economic opportunities, but also the lack of access to: economic resources, education, support services and decision-making processes."²⁸

21. Decent employment opportunities for women in rural areas are much more limited than they are for men or for the urban population. Women living in rural areas are especially prone to vulnerable employment – that is, work that is associated with "small-scale activities, low earnings, weak market orientation, informal work arrangements, difficult or dangerous working conditions, and inadequate access to social protection and social dialogue mechanisms."²⁹

22. It is not only the scarcity of off-farm work opportunities that contributes to rural women's economic dependency, but also their triple role in unpaid domestic and care work, which includes housework, caring for children and other family members, and unpaid work on family farms. Additionally, rural women typically look after kitchen gardens and small livestock and prepare agricultural products for home consumption or sale. They carry out their work without the benefit of basic infrastructure or labour-saving devices, further increasing their daily workloads if they also collect fuel and water and rely on limited public transport to schools, health facilities and local markets. Underdeveloped social infrastructure in rural areas (such as early childhood education facilities or care centres for the elderly or people with disabilities) pushes care responsibilities onto rural women and further restricts their opportunities for employment, entrepreneurship, education or involvement in local decision-making.

23. Women's unpaid workload is not valued as "work" that would be accompanied by social protections, such as unemployment, pregnancy or maternity benefits. Nor is it factored into national gross domestic product (GDP), although by some estimations these unpaid activities contribute the equivalent of 10 to 39 percent of the global GDP, more than manufacturing, commerce and other sectors of the economy.³⁰

24. The unpaid work undertaken by rural women contributes significantly to the well-being of rural households, especially in terms of food security and nutrition. The COVID-19 pandemic has had profound economic impacts across the region in terms of lost income and increasing unpaid workloads.³¹

²⁸ **UN Women.** 2019. *Regional assessment of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in Europe and Central Asia*. Istanbul, UN Women. p. 39. (also available at <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eca/attachments/publications/2020/03/b25%20assessment%20report.pdf>).

²⁹ **FAO, IFAD & WFP.** 2020. *Rural women and girls 25 Years after Beijing: critical agents of positive change*. p. 21. (also available at <https://www.fao.org/3/cb1638en/cb1638en.pdf>).

³⁰ **United Nations.** 2016. *Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work*. Report of the United Nations Secretary-General. para. 25. (also available at <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/856760>).

³¹ **UN Women.** 2020. *The impact of COVID-19 on women's and men's lives and livelihoods in Europe and Central Asia: preliminary results from a rapid gender assessment*. p. 17. (also available at <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/07/the-impact-of-covid19-on-womens-and-mens-lives-and-livelihoods>).

3.3 Rural women's limited access to land tenure and farm ownership and management

25. Land is a crucial resource for poverty reduction, food security and rural development, and thus women's secure land rights are essential for their economic empowerment. As the "custodian" United Nations agency for two indicators under SDG 5, FAO addresses women's ownership and secure rights over agricultural land (SDG 5.a.1) and guarantees of women's equal rights to land ownership and/or control (5.a.2). There are no legal barriers in the region to the full respect for women's rights to own and use land and other forms of property freely. Women can inherit, buy, sell, rent or lease land on an equal basis with men.

26. In practice, however, women represent a far smaller share of landowners than would be expected given their engagement in agricultural labour.³² While women are the majority land users and de facto farm managers, they are rarely recognized as landowners or farmers. Positive trends are the incremental increase in the proportion of women as registered landowners (seen in the Western Balkans and Uzbekistan) as well as the practice of co-registration of land in the names of both spouses (Georgia).

27. Women's limited land ownership is not only an issue of discrimination, but it also prevents rural women from utilizing a key economic resource to its full potential. The implications are land insecurity and dependency on male family members to use and access land, reducing access to a form of collateral for credit that can be used to finance other productive resources. Women's reduced power and decision-making over land and family farms ultimately leads to less than optimal productivity.

28. Throughout the region, the "typical" farmer is considered to be a man, the holder and manager of a small family farm.³³ Consequently, when women are not classified as farmers, even if they regularly undertake agricultural activities, they are overlooked in agriculture and related policy development and in the implementation of capacity-building projects.

29. The gender division of labour on family farms reflects long-held stereotypes about "appropriate" gender roles, with women undertaking manual labour with minimal mechanization and men more often performing mechanized work. While women sell their produce in open-air markets or even from their yards, it is usually men who are involved in selling to larger supermarkets, speciality traders or exporters. Concerning livestock, women are responsible for tasks such as grazing and feeding animals, rearing calves, milking and collecting eggs. Men, in contrast, are the ones most often engaged in the purchase and sale of livestock, breeding, slaughtering and marketing. In line with the tasks they perform, men hold more power over farm management and decision-making, especially around high-value financial transactions.

³² Women's limited land and property ownership stems from inadequate knowledge of women's equal rights to land among the rural population, as well as professionals working in the area of land registration (e.g. notaries or staff of cadastral offices), and long-held traditions that land ownership is passed to male family members. Men customarily inherit land and other property, and the bias in favour of male family members is linked to patrilocal marriage practices, common in rural areas. Daughters are expected to join their husband's family when they marry, and sons are expected to remain and run the family farm and support elderly parents economically. In the process of marrying, women either lose or give up their rights to the portion of land from their parents' household and do not gain any rights over land that their spouses owned before the marriage. Women are often unaware of their rights to land when marrying or it is not culturally acceptable for them to protect their right to sell their land share to their families and receive compensation. By default, a woman's share of land goes to her parents and then becomes part of the inheritance of their sons or grandsons. Land is usually registered only in the name of the husband who is considered the head of the household/holding, and women tend not to assert their rights to land when a marriage ends. Even if women are willing to claim a portion of land as part of a divorce, if they are unable to cultivate it, they cede ownership and control to male relatives.

³³ Small-scale family farms (smallholdings) vastly outnumber large farming enterprises in the region.

30. Gender relations are part of the social and economic context that shapes how value chains function. Women occupy the lower value-added ends of agricultural value chains and mainly perform “upstream” activities, whereas men may also undertake such work, but they are generally concentrated in “downstream” activities at the higher-value ends of the chain. Gender relations can also be impacted by shifts and improvements in value chains.³⁴

3.4 Informality of agricultural labour practices

31. The agri-food sector remains a key employer of the rural population, crucial to the livelihoods of many families. More than one-fifth of the working population is employed in the agrifood sector in several countries/territories of the region. The proportion of women working in agriculture, as compared to all working women, could be even greater. Data from labour force surveys often fail to capture all facets of employment in agriculture, including not only formal sector wage employment, but also self-employment, informal work, seasonal/part-time employment and unpaid work. A significant number of women “housekeepers” or pensioners who are classified in national labour statistics as economically inactive (meaning they are neither working nor looking for work) in fact work as farmers on their own land (own-account workers or a type of self-employment) or as unpaid workers on family farms or in kitchen gardens. Women’s contribution along the agri-food value chain also includes seasonal or part-time work on family farms or as hired labourers.

32. Informality in working arrangements is common in rural areas, and a significant share of informal employment takes place in rural locations. The proportions of men working informally in agriculture and construction might be bigger, but for rural women agriculture is their primary source of income. Due to its unregulated nature, informal labour leaves employees ineligible for social guarantees such as pension payments, health insurance, annual leave, sick leave or pregnancy and maternity/paternity leave. Both men and women are at risk for job insecurity, but because rural women have more limited access to formal employment, they are in an especially precarious position that keeps them in a cycle of economic dependency and poverty. In a few instances, farm owners can claim family workers as employees, granting them access to health insurance; or, if the farm is registered, women are entitled to healthcare insurance, pensions and disability insurance. However, such arrangements are not widespread and still place women in a position dependent on their spouse or another male family member to formalize their working status.

3.5 Limited access to agricultural services, inputs and resources

33. Agricultural inputs increase production and productivity. They range from rural advisory services to information and communications technologies (ICTs), machinery and equipment, seeds, fertilizers and pesticides, as well as irrigation and agricultural support (incentives or subsidies). As stated above,³⁵ sex-disaggregated data about access to and ownership of key resources is largely lacking. Agricultural census data and household surveys do, however, paint a picture of the serious constraints that women face in accessing such resources.

³⁴ FAO. 2016. *Developing gender-sensitive value chains: a guiding framework*. Rome. p. 1. (also available at <https://www.fao.org/policy-support/tools-and-publications/resources-details/en/c/1175525/>).

³⁵ Section 1, items 17–18, of this paper.

34. State-supported agricultural advisory services provide almost no educational opportunities that are gender-specific.³⁶ Gender stereotypes impede women from attending training events; often, their domestic workload simply does not allow them time to be away from home. Also, it is widely expected that men, as recognized farmers, attend and convey the knowledge to other family members – an approach that reinforces stereotypes and ignores the role of women in farming. The mobilization of farmers for extension services is carried out via male-dominated channels of communication, through contacts with the heads of farmers’ associations (the majority of whom are men). In only a few cases are men explicitly asked to bring their wives and/or female relatives.³⁷

35. Around 90 percent of agricultural equipment and machinery is in holdings headed by men. Some of the disparity is attributable to the fact that women-headed holdings are smaller on average than those owned by men and may have different cropping practices, but nevertheless the large gap also suggests that women farmers face serious constraints in obtaining equipment.

36. Just as heavy machinery use is seen as a male domain, women traditionally do not exercise control over irrigation.³⁸ In regions with high levels of male labour migration, women often have insufficient access to irrigation for their farms, land plots or kitchen gardens.

37. Rural areas in the region are generally well-covered by mobile and internet services; however, the “triple divide” – digital, rural and gender – places women farmers in “the most marginalized position when it comes to access to and use of ICTs.”³⁹

38. Incentives, subsidies and loans are important means by which farmers can invest in their own enterprises. Such support schemes have recognized the gender gaps in access to resources and give special priority to or have dedicated incentives for women farmers. Women’s uptake of such incentives remains low, however. A combination of reasons could explain the apparent limited access that women have to such support schemes, such as a lack of information about the programs, difficulties in applying, or eligibility requirements that women farmers cannot meet, for example.

39. Women, despite their key role in agriculture, continue to face discrimination in access to productive resources such as land, technical training, irrigation, credit and markets. These inequalities bring poor livelihood outcomes for women and limit what they are able to contribute to agricultural production and food security. The gender gaps in access to agricultural inputs and resources contribute to the lower productivity of women’s farms. If access to key resources were equalized, women’s potential would be increased, likely leading to enhanced agricultural production.⁴⁰

³⁶ Exceptions are donor-led projects that often have particular components for women farmers.

³⁷ **FAO.** 2016. *Gender, agriculture and rural development in Albania*. p. 15. (also available at <https://www.fao.org/family-farming/detail/en/c/854161/>).

³⁸ More details concerning rural women’s access to resources, the root causes of inequalities and unequal power relations at the level of rural households are available in the following publications from the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia:

- **FAO.** 2014. *Rural women in Eastern Europe and Central Asia*. (also available at <https://www.fao.org/3/i3840e/i3840e.pdf>).
- **FAO.** 2018. *Gender and rural development in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: key issues*. (also available at <https://www.fao.org/3/i5497e/i5497e.pdf>).
- **FAO.** 2017. *Gender mainstreaming and human rights-based approach*. Budapest. (also available at <https://www.fao.org/3/i6808e/i6808e.pdf>).

³⁹ **FAO.** 2018. *Gender and ICTs: Mainstreaming gender in the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for agriculture and rural development*. p. 6. (also available at <https://www.fao.org/3/i8670en/I8670EN.pdf>).

⁴⁰ For example, FAO estimates that, worldwide, the yield gap between women and men farmers ranges from 20 to 30 percent, mainly due to differences in resource use. If farm yields for women were equal to that of men, agricultural output in developing countries would be increased by 2.4 to 4 percent, and the number of

IV. Policy recommendations for Member Countries and recommendations for FAO future work in the region

40. Despite some indicators of progress, the five priority areas identified above represent long-standing challenges and barriers to gender equality. FAO and Member States should more persistently pursue a gender transformative approach, requiring going beyond merely improving rural women's access to sustainable livelihoods to also highlighting and challenging the very norms that perpetuate inequalities.

41. This document reiterates the recommendations made by FAO in previous submissions to the ECA as well as those derived from regional review events and requests that Member States reinforce their commitments under the SDGs.⁴¹

42. The contributions of rural women to the agrifood sector value chain as household members and farmers remain largely invisible. The development of normative, legal and policy frameworks in Member States should reflect a gender perspective and include the collective views and priorities of rural women.

43. Member States are requested to further strengthen the evidence base and gender statistics relevant to agriculture and rural development so that policymaking, programme implementation, monitoring and evaluation are gender-transformative and, thus, effective and sustainable.⁴²

44. Member States and FAO need to conduct thorough analyses of gender gaps in access to inputs – and the origins of gender gaps – so that interventions address persistent barriers that rural women face in accessing resources (including knowledge and skills) that are critical for agricultural production.

undernourished people would be reduced by 12–17 percent. **FAO**. 2011. *The State of Food and Agriculture*. p. 5. (also available at <https://www.fao.org/3/i2050e/i2050e.pdf>).

⁴¹ For more information, see:

- **FAO**. 2017. *Promoting socially inclusive rural development in Europe and Central Asia: Action for the 2030 Agenda*. FAO Regional Conference for Europe. Vilnius, Lithuania, 30 January to 1 February 2017. (also available at <https://www.fao.org/3/i7020e/i7020e.pdf>).
- **UN Women**. 2018. *Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls*. 2018 Commission on the Status of Women, agreed conclusions. (also available at <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/62/CSW-Conclusions-62-EN.PDF>).
- **UN Women**. 2019. *Regional assessment of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in Europe and Central Asia*. Istanbul, UN Women. (also available at <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eca/attachments/publications/2020/03/b25%20assessment%20report.pdf>).
- **Economic Commission for Europe**. 2019. *Empowering rural women in the ECE region*. Note by the Food and Agriculture Organization for the Beijing +25 Regional Review Meeting. (also available at https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/RCM_Website/ECE_AC.28_2019_11-e.pdf).

⁴² For more information, see:

- **FAO**. 2016. *Agri-gender statistics toolkit*. Ankara. (also available at <https://www.fao.org/3/i5769e/i5769e.pdf>).
- **FAO**. 2017. *FAO regional workshop on statistics in agriculture and rural development*. Report. Almaty, 23–24 June 2016. (also available at <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/8370cab9-2cf4-49cc-b738-f4887a00f3b4/>).
- **FAO**. 2016. *Core set of gender indicators in agriculture*. (also available at <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/7bf039ca-5a61-4629-bbe5-593d9a8d5d86/>).
- **FAO**. 2017. *Gender equality in agriculture toolkit* [video]. https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZp5NgJ2-dK4Ei-CY1kLCQwzuA5_iXbKo.

45. Member States and FAO should continue to implement targeted economic, social and environmental policies and projects that empower rural women by providing them with diverse and viable opportunities for income generation, decent work, entrepreneurship and inclusive value chains and by reducing the gender pay gap and women's unpaid workload.

46. Strategic planning and decision-making should be inclusive of rural women from various backgrounds. FAO and Member States should consider support to empower rural women as leaders in their households, as farmers, and as stakeholders in rural development and governance at all levels.

47. Social protection policies have a strong potential to improve rural women's lives and livelihoods. Member States should continue to invest in physical and social infrastructure and recognize women's role in unpaid domestic and care work to reduce this burden.

48. Member States are requested to continue their advocacy and development initiatives around the above priority issues, in partnership with FAO and other development actors. Member States are important allies in conveying information about critical gender gaps to national stakeholders and the wider public and are the ones who can commit to taking concrete actions to end persistent inequalities that are holding back progress towards sustainable agriculture, food security and an end to poverty.