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FAO results in the region – 2020-2021

Executive Summary

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development defines the context in which the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and its Members have been working towards accomplishing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and achieving country-specific targets.

The document *FAO results in the region – 2020-2021* provides the 33rd Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe (ERC) with the programme implementation results for 2020-2021 as part of the governing process.

This document lays out the information regarding the results achieved in 2020-2021 in the Europe and Central Asia region as a response to the priorities agreed at the 32nd Session of ERC, held in 2020. It highlights results achieved at the country, subregional and regional levels based on the programmatic framework of the three Regional Initiatives (RIs) (regarding smallholders, agrifood trade and climate change response) and maps out the lessons learned from the implementation of the programme.

The document also highlights FAO's new ways of working, modalities and initiatives introduced in 2020-21 to contribute to supporting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through the transformation to MORE efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems for *better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life*, leaving no one behind.

Suggested action by the Regional Conference

The Regional Conference is invited to:

- note FAO's new ways of working, modalities and initiatives introduced in 2020-21 to contribute to supporting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through the transformation to MORE efficient inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems for *better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life*, leaving no one behind;

Documents can be consulted at www.fao.org

- note the reforms introduced aiming at modernizing FAO and improving its methods of work and transparency;
- note that FAO fully aligned its country-level planning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) process, thus building on UN Development System repositioning efforts to collectively support country ownership and address national SDG priorities and gaps;
- note the importance of strengthened partnerships, including with smallholder producers and food companies, procurers and consumers;
- acknowledge the work of FAO in the region during 2020-21, as well as the achievements under the RIs and other main areas of work in responding to the main priorities identified at the Thirty-second Session of ERC.

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I. Introduction

1. This document presents the major developments and principal results achieved in the Europe and Central Asia region during the 2020-21 biennium. It also highlights FAO's new ways of working, modalities and initiatives introduced in 2020-21 to contribute to supporting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through the transformation to MORE efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems for *better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life*, leaving no one behind.
2. Since Director-General QU Dongyu took office in August 2019, FAO has undergone deep and transformative changes to ensure that it is prepared to face the challenges that lie ahead. FAO has introduced a modular and flexible structure that allows for optimal cross-sectoral collaboration and aims for a stronger and coordinated focus on the SDGs. Among the changes introduced: the new Office of Innovation to consolidate and strengthen FAO's innovative spirit; the new Office of SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs,ⁱ to ensure that the special needs of these vulnerable populations and countries are met; the new Office of SDGs which coordinates the corporate engagement in the 2030 Agenda follow-up and review; and FAO's new position of Chief Scientist which ensures the robustness, breadth and independence of scientific approaches in FAO's work.
3. The reforms introduced also aimed at modernizing FAO and improving its methods of work and transparency, including through the establishment of the Core Leadership Team consisting of the three Deputy Directors-General, the Chief Economist, the Chief Scientist and the Director of Cabinet.
4. In 2020-21, FAO rapidly transitioned to becoming fully digital – further accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, with the expanded use of cloud solutions and the introduction of new technologies facilitating the work of the Organization from any location and paving the way for the “new normal” after the pandemic. Virtual meetings of the Governing Bodies, including the Regional Conferences in 2020, allowed governance processes to proceed smoothly, with interpretation provided in all FAO languages.
5. Furthermore, during the biennium, a number of key corporate initiatives were introduced, such as the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, which is FAO's evidence-based, country-led and country-owned initiative to accelerate agricultural transformation and sustainable rural development in support of the SDGs, and the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme, which appeals for immediate-, medium- and longer-term actions to prevent the health crisis from becoming a food crisis.
6. During 2020-21, FAO fully aligned its country-level planning with the UNSDCF process, thus building on the UN Development System efforts to collectively support country ownership and address national SDG priorities and gaps. At the same time, FAO's country-level process also contributes to shaping the formulation of the UNSDCF, thus ensuring that agrifood system transformation concerns and related SDGs are well integrated and prioritized in the UN common planning documents.
7. Following the 32nd Session of the Regional Conference for Europe held in 2020, the key priorities and challenges of the region have been addressed through the following Regional Initiatives:
 - empowering smallholders, family farms and youth, facilitating rural livelihoods and poverty reduction (RI-1);
 - transforming food systems and facilitating market access and integration (RI-2);
 - managing natural resources sustainably and preserving biodiversity in a changing climate (RI-3).
8. These Regional Initiatives function as the programmatic umbrella to translate FAO's specialized expertise into integrated multidisciplinary interventions tailored to the regional, subregional and country levels, facilitating greater impact of FAO's work on the key priorities in each

ⁱ Small Island Developing States (SIDS); least developed countries (LDCs); land-locked developing countries (LLDCs).

region under the results framework for the biennium, as presented in the Updated Results Framework 2020-21.¹

9. Section II describes the achievements of the region in 2020-21, focusing on corporate and regional priorities in the context of FAO's work. The section also highlights relevant cross-cutting themes and thematic areas important for ensuring the quality and integrity of FAO's work.

II. Achievements in the region

A. FAO's new ways of working, modalities and programmes

10. FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative strives to facilitate agrifood systems transformation and sustainable rural development, accelerated through targeting the poorest and the hungry, differentiating territories and strategies and bringing together all relevant dimensions through analysis and partnerships. During the 2020-21 biennium, Tajikistan became the first formal Hand-in-Hand Initiative country in the region, and support was provided for the development of a national investment plan and the mapping of agricultural potential through the Hand-in-Hand Initiative geospatial platform. Recently, Armenia has requested to become a Hand-in-Hand Initiative-associated country as well.

11. FAO's regional programmatic response to COVID-19,ⁱⁱ which is based on the three Regional Initiatives, has built on the seven areas of the FAO global COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programmeⁱⁱⁱ to further develop targeted interventions that emphasize the needs of selected priority countries. FAO consulted current and prospective partners on opportunities to sharpen and realize the proposed response in the region, leveraging data, innovation and responsible investments at a regional dialogue for Europe and Central Asia. Nine action sheets for resource mobilization within the framework of the FAO COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme were developed and shared among donors. Some of them were discussed with Members and used as the basis for the formulation of new projects.

12. In September 2021, FAO launched its Global Action on Green Development of Special Agricultural Products: One Country One Priority Product, aiming to develop sustainable value chains for special agricultural products, support smallholders and family farms in reaping the full benefits of a global market, and ultimately help the transformation of the current agrifood system towards the achievement of the SDGs.

13. The FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia set up a regional organizing group for global action, including Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and the Republic of Moldova. The regional organizing group developed a draft two-year roadmap for the implementation of the first phase, targeting crop products, in order to promote facilitation at the regional level and assist the deployment and implementation of the programme in pilot countries. The regional organizing group also made progress in identifying resources needed and requirements for technical support on trade and markets.

14. FAO's 1000 Digital Villages Initiative aims to convert 1000 villages across the world into digital hubs, with the aim of supporting the transformation of agrifood systems and supporting existing and potential digital villages in their quest to advance and improve livelihoods, agriculture, nutrition, and the health and well-being of their citizens. FAO supports the Digital Villages Initiative with ongoing activities in the region, capitalizing on the experiences of smart villages in Europe and finding suitable pathways to link them with villages in Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe that have the potential of becoming digital hubs. In addition, FAO is fostering the enabling environment for mainstreaming technologies into the agriculture sector, from national to

ⁱⁱ The impact of COVID-19 on food and agriculture in Europe and Central Asia and FAO's response was presented at the Regional Conference for Europe from 2 to 4 November 2020 (ERC/20/5/Web Annex 6).

ⁱⁱⁱ The COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme appeals for immediate-, medium- and longer-term actions to prevent the health crisis from becoming a food crisis. The programme aims to mitigate immediate impacts while strengthening the longer-term resilience of livelihoods, moving towards a green recovery and building to transform agrifood systems. FAO's response to the pandemic leverages the Organization's convening power, real-time data, early warning systems and technical expertise to direct support where and when it is most needed.

village level, by providing support for countries across the region in developing national digital agriculture programmes, roadmaps and strategies.

15. The FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia has established the Regional Technical Platform on Green Agriculture,² which provides a digital, user-friendly, open, intraregional and interregional gateway for sharing information and assisting policymakers and other stakeholders by facilitating discussions on all the aspects of green agriculture. It includes a knowledge repository that facilitates the organization of events and the dissemination of good practices among development partners and technical networks regarding the various technical areas related to green agriculture.

B. Notable partnerships, innovation and cross-cutting themes

16. FAO has further enhanced bilateral and multilateral cooperation with its key partners in the region under the three Regional Initiatives, including collaboration with the European Commission regarding programme implementation in Georgia, North Macedonia, Tajikistan and Ukraine. FAO continued to cooperate with the Eurasian Economic Commission, with a specific focus on seed systems.

17. Partnership has been further strengthened with regional organizations and institutions, including the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) in Southeast Europe, the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), Slow Food, and the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) as well as with regional technical networks (the Agricultural Trade Expert Network in Europe and Central Asia and LANDNET, the network of land tenure professionals working with land consolidation, land banking and land market development in Europe and Central Asia).

18. FAO continued collaboration and established new partnerships with other United Nations and international development agencies. FAO, the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the World Health Organization (WHO) strengthened their partnership in the region through the establishment of the Regional Tripartite One Health Group. Cooperation has been strong, related to Green Climate Fund (GCF) proposals with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), as well as on agrifood systems transformation with Members^{iv} of the Issue-based Coalition (IBC) on Sustainable Food Systems.³ Partnership was further enhanced with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) at regional and country levels (e.g. on local rural development with UNDP in Armenia) and with UN Women at the country level in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan.

19. The three RIs continued moving from funding to financing, developing new forms of collaboration, fostering investments through further exploring partnership opportunities with international financing institutions, such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), as well with as the private sector, including the Ukrainian Fruits Association.

20. FAO continued expanding collaboration with civil society organizations, academia and research institutions, community-based organizations, producer organizations, municipalities, and other local actors. The dialogue with civil society organizations focused on the UN Decade of Family Farming (UNDIFF), the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP), access to land, rural youth and agroecology. FAO continued working with key partners, such as the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) in supporting climate-smart agriculture and the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) and the Leibniz Institute of Agricultural Development in Transition Economies (IAMO) in regional policy work on SDGs and socioeconomic assessment of the COVID-19 pandemic. Collaboration was also enhanced

^{iv} The IBC is co-chaired by FAO, UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO). Members: World Food Programme (WFP), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

with local academia, e.g. the National Institute for Economic Research of the Republic of Moldova and the Rural and Agricultural Policy and Development Institute in Georgia (RAPDI).

21. The RIs pursued improving linkages with the FAO Regional Technical Commissions⁴ to further expand partnership in the framework of their normative and technical work.
22. The response to the cross-cutting issues of statistics, gender equality and nutrition continued to be an integral part of the programme and policy support of all three RIs and is in line with the main areas of cross-RI collaboration. Highlights of achievements under statistics and gender are described below, while an overview on achievements related to nutrition is provided under Section C.
23. To ensure a deeper understanding of the Operational Guidelines of the World Programme for the Census of Agriculture 2020 (WCA 2020), FAO conducted a webinar⁵ with up to 100 participants from national statistical offices and Ministries of Agriculture from 18 countries of the region. The webinar focused on the practical aspects of the implementation of an agricultural census, from census planning and preparation to implementation and including data dissemination and the archiving of census results.
24. FAO provided technical support in the assessment of the current state of agricultural statistics in the Republic of Moldova for identifying data needs and gaps and addressing the issue of agricultural prices, as well as key recommendations for improving the system of agricultural statistics and inputs for the new strategy on the development of the statistical system. The methodology for data collection for SDG indicators 2.3.1 and 2.3.3 was adapted to the Republic of Moldova and piloted. Furthermore, FAO provided technical and methodological support to the National Bureau of Statistics and other relevant national stakeholders in the calculation of the standard output coefficients relevant for the Republic of Moldova, in line with the European Union requirements, and in the development of the innovative tool of farm typology.
25. In Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, FAO strengthened the capacities of national authorities on the nationalization of SDG indicators under FAO custodianship and on their implementation, monitoring and reporting through workshops and technical trainings. In Uzbekistan, interministerial and multistakeholder technical discussions supported the implementation of the new Agricultural Development Strategy in the context of SDG achievement. While in Tajikistan, FAO facilitated the development of the District Development Plans (DDPs) 2021-2025 to support SDG localization in five districts and, in partnership with the IISD, developed a policy evaluation to assess selected past and current policy measures vis-à-vis their impact on selected SDG targets.
26. To improve the mainstreaming of gender concerns in country-level work, national gender profiles of agriculture and rural livelihoods were developed for Bosnia and Herzegovina,⁶ Serbia⁷ and Ukraine⁸ and country gender assessment reports were developed for Azerbaijan and the Republic of Moldova. A summary paper of country gender assessments was prepared, providing an overview of key findings and recommendations.
27. To contribute to the regional policy 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 pandemic⁹ – to discuss pressing issues in agrifood system policies and their connections to gender inequalities in rural areas in the region – and proposed solutions. Since 2020, the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia has been publishing a gender newsletter¹⁰ on a quarterly basis, highlighting important regional policy dialogues, events and processes and featuring best practices from FAO interventions in programme countries. FAO provided technical assistance to the Ministries of Agriculture and Forestry in Azerbaijan, Republic of Moldova, Serbia and Uzbekistan, and more recently in Albania, in socially inclusive and gender-responsive policy and programme formulation and implementation.

C. Regional Initiatives and key achievements in 2020-21

28. The 32nd Session of ERC, held in 2020, endorsed regional priorities¹¹ for 2020-21 within the context of the Medium Term Plan 2018-2021, as follows:

- formulating effective policies, promoting digital innovation and facilitating rural livelihoods, with emphasis on smallholders, women and youth;
- food system transformation and support in exploring new markets through the alignment of trade, food safety and sanitary and phytosanitary policies to meet World Trade Organization (WTO) commitments and promote value chain development;
- promoting sustainable natural resource management and facilitating resilience in agriculture, forestry and other land use sectors, including mitigating and adapting to climate change; and
- addressing food insecurity and reducing all forms of malnutrition.

29. In addition, FAO in the region focused its work on ERC recommendations such as strengthening the work in relation to the UN Food Systems Summit held in 2021, food systems transformation, One Health, consumer perspectives and short supply chains, digital inclusion, gender equality, youth empowerment and employment, UNDDF, the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition, the IBC on Sustainable Food Systems, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture, soil and water resources, and restoring biodiversity.

30. In the Europe and Central Asia region, the RIs, as the main programmatic instruments for aligning the Organization's work with the most crucial priorities in the region, were slightly revised for 2020-21 and approved by Members at the 32nd Session of ERC. Food security and nutrition was mainstreamed and embedded in the three RIs as a cross-cutting issue.

31. A description of the highlights of the achieved results in the region is provided below in the context of the RIs and on the cross-cutting issue of addressing food insecurity and the reduction of all forms of malnutrition.

Regional Initiative 1 - Empowering smallholders, family farms and youth, facilitating rural livelihoods and poverty reduction (RI-1)

32. Regional Initiative 1 addresses the needs of smallholders and family farms, women and men, and youth in rural areas of the region. Its main objectives are to support the development of sustainable agricultural production along the agricultural value chain and to ensure inclusive economic growth through improved rural livelihoods, strengthened resilience and reduced poverty. The initiative supports comprehensive multisectoral rural development policies that are based on the principles of leaving no one behind, human rights and gender equality. It facilitates the development and economic empowerment of rural communities, short value chains, statistics and the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT), including addressing land fragmentation and land abandonment.

33. The main SDGs addressed by RI-1 are SDG 1, 2, 5, 8, 10 and 17.

34. Highlights of achievements:

- capacities of farmers, public and private extension services, and academia were strengthened in Azerbaijan through training courses on sheep, cattle and potato production, including a study trip to Turkey, as well as trainings on good agricultural practices. A study on genetic resources conservation and sustainable use for enhanced production contributed to the increased efficiency and sustainability of the hazelnut sector. In Georgia, FAO strengthened capacities on innovative sustainable agriculture production practices through the organization of farmer field schools, demonstration plots and trainings, reaching more than 1 500 farmers;

- the formulation of policies and strategies has been supported through the development of a national organic standard, the regulation of certification¹² and a draft law on organic production¹³ in Kyrgyzstan. FAO also supported the Ministry of Agriculture of Kazakhstan in developing the new strategic document for the agrifood sector, the Agri-Industrial Complex for 2021-2025 and the Concept of Agro-Industrial Development 2021-2030. In North Macedonia, FAO finalized the good practices guidelines for data systems¹⁴ in support of fisheries in the Western Balkans;
- a regional report on the status of digital agriculture in 18 countries of Europe and Central Asia¹⁵ was developed in collaboration with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). The Second Meeting of the Ministers of Agriculture of Central Asia in 2020¹⁶ focused on digital agriculture, particularly on the requirements for developing and implementing a digital agriculture strategy and identifying potential areas where innovative applications of digital technologies can be implemented over the short term. FAO assisted in elaborating the draft digital agriculture strategy of Armenia 2021-2030 and the strategies of digitalization of agriculture in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in Turkey;
- FAO assisted in developing strategies, policies, guidelines relating to land consolidation. The National Land Consolidation Programme has advanced in North Macedonia, including the adoption of the first three land consolidation plans in the country, improvements to local farm structures in the project area integrated with the construction of agriculture infrastructure, and the amendment of the Law on Sale of State-owned Agricultural Land to allow the privatization process to be fully operational, including in land consolidation projects. An analysis on FAO experiences with land market development and land management instruments in the region¹⁷ and a study on the European good practices on land banking and its application¹⁸ were developed and disseminated.
- The capacities of farmers, rural women and youth were enhanced in North Macedonia through FAO support in the policy formulation process to reform direct payment schemes and align it with the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), as well as in the development and piloting of cost of production calculation methodologies. Integrated community development was supported in Georgia and North Macedonia, and national action plans for family farming were launched in Albania, Kyrgyzstan and Republic of Moldova.
- In Albania, FAO conducted tailor-made income diversification training programmes and networking workshops and selected potential value chains to engage with rural women to improve their skills, capacities and managerial competencies. In Turkey, micro-scale agribusinesses under women cooperatives and open field vegetable farms were established, workshops were organized on the role of youth and women in agriculture. Rural women in Uzbekistan were presented opportunities to generate income through workshops on business skills and traditional artisan crafts.¹⁹ The regional report on improving social protection for rural populations in Europe and Central Asia was developed and presented.
- FAO launched a series of youth consultations in 2021 aimed at understanding the challenges and the needs of rural youth and sharing good practices in the region. Among the participants of these consultations were youth representatives and stakeholders from policy, civil society, academia and the private sector who are active in the field of food, agriculture and rural development.

Regional Initiative 2 - Transforming food systems and facilitating market access and integration (RI-2)

35. Regional Initiative 2 aims to support Members in enhancing the agrifood trade policy environment for small- and medium-sized agricultural producers and food enterprises by increasing opportunities for food and agriculture exports to international and regional markets and by strengthening domestic and local markets. RI-2 focuses on strengthening capacity on WTO trade agreements and effective use of WTO procedures; strengthening capacity to implement global food safety and quality standards, including addressing sanitary, animal health and phytosanitary issues; and supporting the diversification and promotion of domestic food markets and food exports, with a view to developing more inclusive and efficient agrifood systems.
36. The main SDGs addressed by RI-2 are SDG 1, 2, 5, 8, 12 and 17.
37. Highlights of achievements:
- the capacities of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) stakeholders in agrifood trade policies and international trade agreements were strengthened through annual Agricultural Trade Expert Network (ATEN) meetings;²⁰ the online courses *Trade, food security, nutrition and Agriculture in international trade agreements*, with 160 participants from 12 countries of the region; and the online workshop *Quantitative agricultural policy monitoring in eight post-Soviet countries*, presenting the preliminary results of a new study;
 - the IBC on Sustainable Food Systems, established in 2020, supported the UN Country Teams in adopting a food systems lens in the development of national processes and guided the UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) country dialogues through a technical note on sustainable food systems. The IBC also developed a repository of key United Nations messages, available evidence and best practices on COVID-19 and food systems;
 - in preparation for the UNFSS, guidance and information were disseminated and national dialogues conducted to support countries and engage relevant stakeholders. Members also benefited from the exchange of knowledge through the regional dialogue on policy and governance issues to transform food systems.²¹ As a follow-up to the UNFSS, the first session of a series of food systems talks – *Shedding light on key game-changing solutions towards food systems transformation* – was organized in 2021. A regional community of practice on the sustainability of food systems was also launched to provide key stakeholders with an inclusive and open digital space to share and exchange information, ideas and knowledge on key regional policy areas related to food systems;
 - the capacities of public sector organizations have been strengthened on inclusive and efficient agrifood systems development through support for the development of agrifood promotion policies in the Republic of Moldova. This was done via the setting up of an inter-institutional working group and the development of an action plan on food promotion and geographical indications, with a view towards further integration into the future Strategy of Agriculture and Rural Development;
 - FAO, OIE and WHO established the Regional Tripartite One Health Group to strengthen multisectoral coordination and efforts to combat health threats in the region. The document *A wake-up call for impact: Animal health and production strategy for FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia 2020–2025*²² was developed. Surveys on antimicrobial use were completed, laboratory equipment was purchased, and pilot training programmes were developed to reinforce antimicrobial resistance measurement capacities in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan;
 - in Tajikistan, a food safety strategy was developed, and studies, policy dialogue and working papers contributed to the development of a national investment plan with the aim of attracting investment into the agro subsector. In Kyrgyzstan, FAO provided support for improvements to safety and market opportunities for the fruit and vegetable processing sector, the review of

institutional and governance arrangements for food safety control, and the development of a country profile report with the help of the FAO/WHO food control system assessment tool;

- in Turkey, FAO provided technical support in the development of a national strategy related to food loss and waste and helped raise awareness through the Save Your Food campaign. In Ukraine, the Feed Your Neighbour project organized the provision of surplus food from households and businesses to poor people. Educational packages for children under the heading “Do Good: Save Food!” were made available in Albanian, Lithuanian, Macedonian and Portuguese, with the aim of educating primary and secondary school children on food waste reduction;
- preparedness to prevent, detect and respond to African swine fever was improved in the Balkans²³ through a six-week online training that reached 350 animal health practitioners in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.²⁴ FAO also helped provide hunting ground manager trainings, multicountry simulation exercises, and the piloting of a new tool to survey hunting grounds.

Regional Initiative 3 - Managing natural resources sustainably and preserving biodiversity in a changing climate (RI-3)

38. Regional Initiative 3 (RI-3) supports Members in strengthening national capacities for achieving sustainable natural resources management, including adapting to and mitigating climate change and reducing disaster risk in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. RI-3 aims to provide countries with a mechanism for addressing the interlinked challenges of climate change and sustainable natural resources management through transitioning to more climate-resilient and sustainable food and agriculture production systems.

39. RI-3 contributes to countries’ achievements under the 2030 Agenda, particularly SDG 1, 2, 6, 12, 13, 14 and 15.

40. Highlights of achievements:

- with the aim of increasing productivity sustainably, FAO contributed to climate change technology identification and prioritization in Azerbaijan through a feasibility assessment and training of farmers on the practical use of potential technologies. In Kyrgyzstan, FAO supported the development of the Climate Change Adaptation Plan, strengthening the resilience of village communities and families through agronomic consultations and online certified courses and establishing a dataset merging socioeconomic indicators, emergency/disaster data and climate variables. Small or low intensity managed forest eligibility criteria were used for the first time in Turkey to achieve Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification for non-timber products. In Albania, soil digitalization approaches were piloted, and local soil maps were developed;
- in support of improved policies and capacity development addressing sustainable production, climate change and environmental degradation, a National Pasture Management Policy was developed in Georgia,²⁵ accompanied by a feasibility study, a capacity building programme, a pasture inventory, grazing capacity methodologies and pasture management plans. The Framework on Integrated Land Use Planning was developed to strengthen the Turkish governance framework on sustainable land management, and a set of guidelines was developed to provide recommendations on the conservation of the country’s natural assets. A regional webinar²⁶ was delivered that was aimed at supporting the countries of the region in their preparedness for the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) climate negotiations;
- FAO continued supporting countries in improved access to climate finance through the development of the climate finance toolkit,²⁷ which contains up-to-date information on various sources of climate finance. The Regional Guidebook on Gender Mainstreaming in the Climate

Finance Investments accumulated the experience of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and GCF projects in the region. North Macedonia was supported in developing the GCF Country Work Programme, a draft catalogue on climate technologies, and a readiness and capacity development needs assessment; identifying potential direct access entities; and enhancing private sector engagement through a toolkit;²⁸

- FAO supported Albania, Tajikistan and Ukraine in updating their nationally determined contribution (NDCs). In Azerbaijan, several studies were conducted, including an assessment of the implementation of the NDCs, a technology needs assessment, and a feasibility study on prioritized technologies for climate change adaptation and mitigation. Moreover, a remote training was conducted on capacity building initiatives on NDC implementation, GCF accreditation, international climate finance and climate solutions technologies;
- in order to enhance agrifood systems resilience and environmental sustainability, FAO supported countries in mainstreaming nature-based solutions and biodiversity in agricultural sectors. The publication *Hand in Hand with Nature: Nature-based solutions for transformative agriculture*²⁹ introduced nature-based solutions in the region, and a study mapped the agroecological approaches to promote nature-based solutions, focusing on seven countries with good practices for increasing crop productivity and providing ecosystem services;
- to translate global instruments and specific regional challenges of biodiversity conservation into policies and actions at the country level, FAO conducted the first regional dialogue on mainstreaming biodiversity in the agricultural sectors³⁰ and developed a report on monitoring schemes and data collection on biodiversity for food and agriculture,³¹ exploring the need to improve the conservation and use of biodiversity for food and agriculture in the region;
- In order to support countries' reporting capacities on land degradation neutrality (LDN), an overview of LDN in Europe and Central Asia was developed. In Serbia, a road map was developed for the adoption of the legal framework, and the LDN target setting process was completed. FAO supported the development of a LDN decision support tool³² in Turkey.
- the national carbon monitoring system was established in Kyrgyzstan through a map of land use and baseline research on carbon content in forest, pastures and land;
- to strengthen capacities on risk monitoring and early warning systems in the agriculture sector, country studies on early warning systems and disaster risk reduction were prepared for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, FAO and other UN agencies supported local development strategies – including disaster risk reduction and crisis management – along with risk assessment tools and a guidance note on integrating disaster risk reduction and climate change into local development strategies.

Addressing food insecurity and reduction of all forms of malnutrition (cross-cutting)

- To reinforce countries' commitments to eradicate hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition, a Food Security and Nutrition Strategy was finalized in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and related capacity building was organized.
- To improve governments' and stakeholders' capacities to analyse food insecurity and malnutrition, FAO, in close collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), UNICEF, WHO and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), published *the 2020 Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia*,³³ focusing on a quantitative analysis of the cost and affordability of healthy diets at national and subnational levels. In addition, *the 2021 Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia*³⁴ was developed and published to assess how food security and nutrition indicators in the region, subregion and countries have changed due to the pandemic and to monitor the region's progress towards achieving the SDGs.

- FAO provided support to the Economic Cooperation Organization Regional Coordination for Food Security Centre (ECO-RCCFS) in developing a regional food security data portal³⁵ for its website and organizing a series of webinars within the framework of sustainable food systems. A draft ECO Regional Programme for Food Security (RPFS) and an Overview of Food Security 2020 in ECO Members has been finalized, and the results were shared with ECO Members.
- In cooperation with UNICEF, a cross-country webinar on national food-based dietary guidelines was organized in 2021 and attended by more than 70 government officials, non-governmental organizations, academia and partner agencies from beneficiary countries.
- Nutrition education materials were developed for use by schoolteachers in Albania, and key points on food and nutrition literacy were discussed with national stakeholders in Turkey in order to develop a national policy document and identify priorities, targets groups, gaps and opportunities.
- In order to make use of early warning against potential, known and emerging threats, the Food Security and Livelihoods Cluster of Ukraine developed a transition plan in response to the existing scenario of political instability and potential crisis escalation in conflict-afflicted regions. Work included contingency planning and identifying food security needs and gaps.

Highlights of the response to COVID-19 in the region

- A task force on COVID-19 was set up by the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia in 2020 to coordinate the programmatic response in the region. Through the rapid survey of food supply chains, some 500 key informants along food supply chains in 18 countries have been regularly contacted since April 2020 to assess the functioning of major agrifood value chains. Key findings and recommendations of the survey have provided inputs for two regional food market situation and policy bulletins.³⁶
- FAO has facilitated cross-country learning through a webinar series on issues such as the impacts of COVID-19 on smallholder farmers, migration, social protection and agricultural trade. Two ministerial meetings and regional dialogues with representatives from civil society organizations and the private sector were organized to aid in the understanding of the implications and to facilitate a multistakeholder response.
- A socioeconomic impact assessment methodology was developed, based on which ten socioeconomic and impact assessments of COVID-19 in agrifood sectors were carried out and reports focusing on the Western Balkans³⁷ and on the Central Asia and Caucasus countries³⁸ were developed and published. In collaboration with the Leibniz Institute of Agricultural Development in Transition Economies (IAMO), the policy brief *Food policy measures in response to COVID-19 in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Taking stock after the first year of the pandemic*³⁹ was developed and published.
- FAO's regional programmatic response to COVID-19 under the FAO Global COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme is presented in paragraph 11.
- In Kyrgyzstan, FAO supported the provision of emergency technical support to the farmers most affected by the COVID-19 crisis. In all, 1 067 farmers who were severely affected and left without funds to buy agricultural resources (e.g. fertilizers, diesel fuel, seeds) received support.
- In the Republic of Moldova, capacities were strengthened in assessing the impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak in agriculture through the preparation of a detailed study on the outbreak consequences for the food security situation, with concrete recommendations and follow-up actions.
- In Serbia, FAO contributed to the UN's comprehensive Socio-Economic Impact Assessment⁴⁰ (SEIA) Report and a follow-up Socio-Economic Response Programme.⁴¹ A specific in-depth

report was finalized on the COVID-19 pandemic's consequences on the food system. Stakeholder consultations were organized to present the findings and recovery/resilience options of the reports and assessments. FAO issued regular country situation reports, rapid assessments and specific studies (in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Tajikistan) to attend to specific country needs.

- In Tajikistan, FAO and WFP carried out the Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM) in 2020, to assess the overall food security situation in the country in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The main findings of the mission were shared widely through the dissemination workshop, and the final report was published on the websites of FAO and WFP.

D. Gaps and lessons learned

41. This section presents gaps in addressing priorities and lessons learned from implementation of FAO programmes, including implications for future priorities.

- The RIs have been a good basis for facilitating cross-sectoral dialogue and linking up with external processes, further strengthened with the preparation of a sharpened theory of change for each of the RIs.
- The RIs have served as a programmatic umbrella facilitating holistic approaches and responding to regional priorities and achieving greater impact at the country level.
- Cooperation among UN agencies in the region was further enhanced through the Regional Tripartite One Health Group, the Issue-based Coalition on Sustainable Food Systems, the FAO-IFAD Joint Secretariat of the UNDF, and the collaboration on the repositioning of the UNDS.
- FAO's support should be further enhanced related to rural youth in Europe and Central Asia and cooperation on youth-related issues through the World Food Forum (WFF), further introducing land market development projects and further developing FAO's approach to address the issues of rural migration (RI-1).
- As a follow-up to the UNFSS, countries need further support to collect and analyse evidence and data, address key policy issues, and use tools and guidance to implement national pathways to transform food systems (RI-2).
- FAO's assistance in fostering bioeconomy for reducing agrochemical pollution, water contamination, agricultural plastic waste, and agricultural waste generation should be further strengthened (RI-3).
- Embarking on scalable innovations and digital solutions, based on innovative technology and an enabling environment, is crucial to supporting equal access among smallholders to the benefits of innovations.
- Special attention should be paid to FAO's key initiatives (such as the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, the 1000 Digital Villages Initiative, One Country – One Priority Product, and the Regional Technical Platform on Green Agriculture), considering that they were found to be relevant and useful for the region.
- The commitment of countries and UN organizations to respond to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has triggered strong demand for further support to SDG nationalization processes in the region.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has generated a health and economic crisis around the globe. Issues of particular concern to the region include socioeconomic implications for agrifood systems and risks related to the food security and nutrition of the most vulnerable groups.

Notes:

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