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# FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR EUROPE

## Thirty-third Session

Łódź, Poland, 10-13 May 2022

## Priorities for FAO in the Europe and Central Asia region under the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31

### 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 will be working towards accomplishing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and achieving country-specific targets.

As food and agriculture hold the key to realizing the 2030 Agenda, FAO is well positioned to act as a facilitator to assist all countries in realizing the goals of the 2030 Agenda, in particular SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) as well as the attainment of all other SDGs. In this context, FAO focuses on agrifood systems transformation that embodies the dynamic links across sectors, actors and countries pertaining to the sustainable use of natural resources, agriculture, food, nutrition and resilience.

This document presents the programme and planning for the biennium 2022-23 as the regional approach towards implementing the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31, the Medium-Term Plan 2022-2025, and the Programme of Work and Budget 2022-23.

Based on internal review and the informal consultation organized in the region in 2021, along with emerging trends and the corporate priority initiatives, this document sets out the priorities for FAO's work in the region during 2022-23 and beyond. FAO's work in Europe and Central Asia will be underpinned by three revised Regional Initiatives (RIs), addressing key priorities of the region as well as challenges for 2022-23 and beyond:

- Empowering smallholders, family farms and youth through inclusive rural transformation, digitalization and innovation (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).

Key aspects include the structural dominance of smallholders in most of the countries, the transformation of agrifood systems, the increasing trend of digitalization, the increased observation of obesity and malnutrition, the importance of striving for affordable and healthy diets, and the importance of defining responses to the impacts of climate change.

Documents can be consulted at [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org)

This document will also present FAO's priority initiatives such as the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, and the emerging corporate strategies of science and innovation, and climate change.

To ensure progress on the SDGs and on agrifood systems transformation, FAO will promote innovative approaches, including the application of modern science and technologies, digital solutions, and the innovation of mindsets and cooperation models.

This document also refers to how the region plans to strengthen efficiency and effectiveness through new ways of working, including strengthening results-based management, engaging in partnerships, and addressing other initiatives such as repositioning of the United Nations development system.

### **Suggested action by the Regional Conference**

The Regional Conference is invited to:

- recognize the importance of FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 in providing direction for FAO's work and contributing to the achievement of SDGs in the region.
- note the strategic narrative guiding FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31, supporting the Agenda 2030 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;
- note that FAO will implement the Strategic Framework through 20 Programme Priority Areas (PPAs), fully utilizing the four cross-cutting accelerators of technology, innovation, data and complements, and embedding the cross-cutting themes of gender, youth and inclusion across FAO's work;
- note the importance of FAO's priority initiatives such as the Hand-in-Hand Initiative and the emerging corporate strategies of science and innovation, and climate change as well as their regional approaches and specificities;
- note the importance of adopting innovative approaches and using modern science and technologies, including digital solutions, to face new situations and challenges;
- note the destabilizing effect that the war in Ukraine has across the globe and reaffirm the pivotal role that FAO plays in safeguarding food security in the region;
- note that FAO, in coordination and collaboration with other United Nations entities and relevant bodies, especially the Rome-based Agencies (RBAs) and international financial institutions, will address within its mandate the consequences of the conflict in Ukraine on food security and agriculture in the region as requested by the 169th Session of the FAO Council on 8 April 2022;
- encourage FAO to adjust and adapt the delivery of the work programme to address emerging issues and changing contexts in the region, giving priority and providing resources for the recovery and building back better of countries affected by the conflict;
- endorse the three revised Regional Initiatives, their alignment with the PPAs, and the priority areas of the region, which will guide FAO's actions in 2022-23 and beyond.

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## Introduction

1. The 42nd Session of the FAO Conference endorsed the Strategic Framework 2022-31 (FAO, 2021a) – which guides all of FAO’s work as called for in the Basic Texts – and approved the budgetary appropriations for the 2022-23 biennium (FAO, 2021b). The strategic narrative guiding FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 supports Agenda 2030 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. FAO will implement the Strategic Framework through 20 Programme Priority Areas (PPAs), which articulate FAO’s thematic, technical comparative advantage and competency to deliver. The *four betters* and 20 PPAs are anchored in the SDGs. The Organization will use a systems approach, considering social, economic and environmental development dimensions, and addressing the relevant trade-offs. Action at the country level is at the core of the transformative nature of Agenda 2030, and the PPAs act as a pathway towards achieving the SDGs in alignment with national priorities.
3. The four cross-cutting accelerators – technology, innovation, data and complements (governance, human capital and institutions) – focus efforts in all of FAO’s programmatic interventions to fast-track progress and maximize prospects for contributing to the SDGs while minimizing trade-offs. The cross-cutting themes of gender, youth and inclusion are embedded across all of FAO’s work to operationalize the principle of leaving no one behind.
4. Two new corporate strategies on science and innovation, and climate change are being developed to support the implementation of FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 and provide guidance on i) coherence and alignment to Member-led initiatives for impact at the country level through better use of science and innovation; and ii) strengthened support to countries in their raised ambitions on climate action and the achievement of their nationally determined contributions (NDCs).
5. The updated FAO Policy on Gender Equality 2020-30 provides a corporate framework to orient technical and normative work towards gender equality objectives and prioritizes the adoption of gender-transformative approaches to ensure equal opportunities to all.
6. In the 2022-23 biennium, FAO will continue to maximize impact at the country level through other key corporate initiatives. The Hand-in-Hand Initiative is FAO’s evidence-based, country-led and country-owned initiative to accelerate agricultural transformation and sustainable rural development in support of the SDGs. The COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme aims to mitigate the immediate impacts of the pandemic while strengthening the longer-term resilience of livelihoods, moving towards a green recovery, building to transform agrifood systems, and appealing for immediate-, medium- and longer-term actions to prevent the health crisis from becoming a food crisis. FAO, in coordination and collaboration with other United Nations entities and relevant bodies, especially the Rome-based Agencies and international financial institutions, will address within its mandate, the consequences of the war in Ukraine on food security and agriculture in Ukraine and in the region.

## I. Context

7. As countries are focusing their efforts to achieve the **SDGs** at the national level, the ambition of the 2030 Agenda is increasingly calling for integrated programming, policy coherence, cross-disciplinary synergy and multistakeholder coordination to maximize the impact of efforts and investment being geared towards sustainable development across the globe.
8. The transformation of agriculture and agrifood systems is key to supporting the achievement of multiple SDGs. As a follow-up to the **United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS)**, countries will be supported in collecting and analysing evidence and data (including food system assessment profiles), addressing key policy issues, and using tools and guidance to implement national pathways towards the transformation of agrifood systems.

9. The **repositioning of the United Nations development system** at national and regional levels, with the reinvigorated UN resident coordinator system and FAO's value proposition at the regional level within the development system, has helped to consolidate regional knowledge and technical capacity.

10. The **COVID-19** pandemic has generated a health and economic crisis across the globe. Issues of particular concern to the region include socioeconomic implications for agrifood systems and risks for food security and nutrition for the most vulnerable groups.

11. **Increased energy prices** and subsequently increased input prices and food prices are resulting in a challenging scenario for food security. FAO notes with concern the evolution of food prices and monitors changes in trade policies that could affect the flow of food across the region.

12. FAO notes with concern the socioeconomic destabilizing effect that the **war in Ukraine** is having across the region, including the evolving humanitarian crisis that affects Ukraine and neighbouring countries hosting a large number of refugees. Special attention will be given to the most affected programme countries of the region.

13. Additional external factors and trends in the region will continue to influence the transition to sustainable food and agriculture, and agrifood systems in the coming years. Challenges and opportunities in the region are presented through the *four betters*.

#### ***Challenges and opportunities for better production***

- farm structures in Europe and Central Asia are dominated by smallholders and **small family farms**, which are often not economically viable and have limited access to production factors, natural resources and finance. Outdated technology, low input quality, low labour skills, and inequalities among the members of smallholder farms are the key constraints for value-adding opportunities (SDG 2.3, SDG 2.4);
- furthermore, smallholders and family farmers face problems in **accessing both domestic and international markets**, hindered by poor infrastructure, weak market linkages and inadequate food safety and quality standards and lack of agriculture inputs due to the war in Ukraine and its impact (SDG 2.3, SDG 2.4);
- poorly functioning domestic and regional markets and **inefficient supply chains** – with limited investment, access to credit and technical capacities as well as inadequate agroprocessing facilities – remain a challenge to smallholder market integration (SDG 2.3; SDG 9.3);
- **harmful pathogens** – including zoonotic diseases, antimicrobial resistant organisms, endemic and emerging animal and plant pests and diseases, and contaminated food and water – are threatening the health of people, animals, plants and the environment (SDG 3.d).

#### ***Challenges and opportunities for better nutrition***

- Despite progress, the current **food security** situation across Europe and Central Asia is marked by the effects of the triple burden of malnutrition, including children and adults lacking access to healthy affordable diets (SDG 2.1);
- various countries in the region are struggling to align national **trade** policies and requirements with international standards and agreements – notably, the World Trade Organization Agreement on Agriculture (SDG 2.b; SDG 17.11);
- the reduction and prevention of **food loss and waste** has been undermined by poor infrastructure, low use of innovation, limited access to technologies, inefficiencies in the distribution of food, and consumer behaviour (SDG 12.3);
- specific policy interventions can promote **changes in mindset and behaviour** among all food systems actors, bringing about desirable shifts in food production and consumption patterns and leading to more inclusive and equitable agrifood systems (SDG 12.3).

### *Challenges and opportunities for a better environment*

- Europe and Central Asia (ECA) countries face institutional and technical barriers to overcoming and reducing the impacts of **climate change** due to limited capacities to access climate finance sources, and lack of knowledge and capacities on climate adaptation and mitigation, disaster risk reduction, preparedness and resilience (SDG 2.4);
- with the new and updated **nationally determined contributions** (NDCs), there has been increased ambition in the past few years in fighting against climate change. Although the progress to reach the NDC targets is promising in the region, overcoming institutional, legal, technological, financial and associated bottlenecks is a challenge in many countries (SDG 13.2);
- rich **biodiversity and diverse ecosystems** in the region are threatened by changes in land use, intensification in agricultural sectors, forest loss, the proliferation of invasive alien species, and genetic erosion. In Central Asian countries, the combination of excessive water use and limited water resources puts considerable stress on aquatic ecosystems (SDG 2.5);
- the **mismanagement of pesticides and fertilizers and related plastic wastes** in the region still remains a challenge, since these items generate land and water pollution, contribute to the loss of beneficial species such as pollinators and birds, and contribute to the proliferation of obsolete pesticide stocks. Also affected are the quality and cost of food, with impacts to the whole food system, food security, and human health (SDG 12.4; SDG 12.5).

### *Challenges and opportunities for a better life*

- Nearly one-third of the region's population resides in rural areas. In most FAO programme countries in the region, the rural population is the poorest and most vulnerable part of the population, and demographic trends in **rural areas** are characterized by intensive out-migration to urban areas and abroad. This contributes to increasing gender gaps and, in many countries, to the ageing of the rural population (SDG 5.a);
- addressing **gender disparities** remains a priority for transforming agrifood systems, reducing individual and household poverty, and building resilience to climate change impacts (SDG 5.a);
- inefficient supply chains create difficulties among the urban and rural poor and vulnerable groups in **accessing nutritious and diverse foods** (SDG 2.1);
- **investment limitations** for smallholders and in the agroprocessing sector hinder the development of inclusive value chains with strong internal connectivity, which prevents access to markets and the emergence of value-addition opportunities (SDG 2.a).

## **II. Key priorities of the region in 2022-23**

14. This section presents the regional approach towards achieving FAO's vision, the global goals of the Members, 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.

15. The global consultation on FAO Strategic Framework 2022-2031, the review of the challenges for the region, the lessons learned from the implementation of the work programme in 2020-21 (FAO, 2022b), and the informal consultation held with Members in 2021 provided the basis for the revision of priorities for the region.

16. Considering the 2030 Agenda as the overall framework for action, the core mandate and functions of FAO, there are four key priorities of importance for FAO's work throughout Europe and Central Asia for 2022-23 and beyond:

- formulating effective policies, promoting innovation and digitalization, and facilitating rural livelihoods, with emphasis on smallholders, women and youth;
- food system transformation promoting nutrition-sensitive value chains and healthy diets through the alignment of trade, food safety, and sanitary and phytosanitary policies, facilitating One Health;
- promoting sustainable natural resources management and facilitating resilience in agriculture, forestry and other land use sectors, including mitigating and adapting to climate change;
- addressing food insecurity and reducing all forms of malnutrition.

#### **Formulating effective policies, promoting innovation and digitalization, and facilitating rural livelihoods, with emphasis on smallholders, women and youth**

17. Support must aim at income generation for smallholders, economic empowerment for women, and the creation of employment opportunities for youth, while recognizing other interrelated vulnerabilities. It requires embarking on scalable innovations and digital solutions based on innovative technology and an enabling environment to facilitate the dissemination of data, information and knowledge and to support equal access to the benefits of innovations for smallholders. Assistance focuses on smallholders and family farms to increase competitiveness, enhance access to natural resources, and improve market access and rural livelihoods.

#### **Food system transformation promoting nutrition-sensitive value chains and healthy diets through the alignment of trade, food safety, and sanitary and phytosanitary policies and facilitating One Health**

18. The Organization's support for improving the health and functioning of agrifood systems and nutrition-sensitive value chains will continue in the region, along with assistance directed to protect human, animal and plant health and to facilitate safe trade through the alignment of national standards and controls with global food safety, animal health and plant health standards and requirements. Further support must aim at improving trade and markets, developing the agrifood trade policy environment, and creating opportunities for trade diversification and value addition. In line with the Committee on World Food Security Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition, FAO addresses food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms within a sustainable food systems perspective, incorporating the conceptual connection between sustainable production and healthy and safe nutritious diets for all in the coming years.

#### **Promoting sustainable natural resource management and facilitating resilience in agriculture, forestry and other land use sectors, including mitigating and adapting to climate change**

19. A key focus of FAO's work will be on enhancing the implementation of the forthcoming FAO Strategy on Climate Change at the regional level, focusing on strengthening national capacities to achieve sustainable natural resources management, adapt to and mitigate climate change, and reduce disaster risks in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Support will continue in accessing climate finance, preserving and restoring biodiversity, and promoting innovative and integrated approaches, such as climate-smart agriculture, nature-based solutions, agroecology and ecosystem services. Emphasis must be given to improving environmental sustainability in terms of agrochemical pollution, water contamination and agricultural plastic waste.

#### **Addressing food insecurity and reducing all forms of malnutrition**

20. The overarching priority of food security and nutrition guides the programme of work and partnership engagement towards eliminating all forms of malnutrition, and enhancing equitable access to safe and nutritious food and healthy diets for all. Mainstreaming food and nutrition security across sectors and high-level decision-making bodies to increase investments, influencing consumer desire for healthy diets, and engaging food chain actors to produce and market nutritious and safe foods require a holistic approach and mainstreaming actions in the ongoing programmes of the region while considering the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition and promoting the Urban Food Agenda.

### A. Programmatic approach to address the priorities

21. To facilitate the region's response to the aforementioned priorities of the region, FAO will continue to reinforce its programmatic framework and corporate results-based management mechanisms, bolstering and consolidating the Organization's technical assistance to Members in a focused and results-oriented manner aimed at enhanced delivery and tangible impacts.

22. FAO's work in the Europe and Central Asia region will be underpinned by the three revised Regional Initiatives (RIs) that address key priorities of the region as well as challenges for 2022-23 and beyond:

- empowering smallholders, family farms and youth through inclusive rural transformation, digitalization and innovation (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).

23. FAO will continue leveraging its three RIs in Europe and Central Asia with some adjustment in the areas of emphasis, as elaborated below, to guide its work in the region during the 2022-23 biennium.

*Regional Initiative 1: Empowering smallholders, family farms and youth through inclusive rural transformation, digitalization and innovation*

24. Regional Initiative 1 has a specific focus on better production and better life.

25. Under this Regional Initiative, FAO will address the needs of smallholders and family farmers, including women, youth and vulnerable groups in rural areas of Europe and Central Asia, with a focus on the development of competitive and commercial family farms through enabling policies and innovative practices for sustainable agricultural production, as well as promoting inclusive growth across the region by improving rural livelihoods and enhancing access to natural resources. FAO will support building back better, facilitating increased resilience to mitigate impacts of the war on Ukraine in the region and supporting countries in relevant assessments. FAO supports the implementation of the United Nations Decade of Family Farming 2019-2028 in several countries through the establishment of multistakeholder policy dialogue among key national actors.

26. FAO will further promote integrated and innovative policies and practices, such as agroecology and organic farming practices, address inefficient farm structures and land abandonment, and support the uptake of adaptation and mitigation strategies to reduce smallholders' vulnerability towards climate-related shocks and other disasters. The promotion of access to value chains and finance and of participation in markets will be fostered and further developed, linked with support for accessible and needs-based extension and farm advisory services, and policy dialogue on extending social protection. In this respect, creating an enabling environment for the proper use of digital technologies and innovative solutions is key to addressing the competitiveness of farmers.

27. FAO focuses on the facilitation of territorial approaches to development – especially integrated community development – along with the promotion of grant-schemes and investment support, the development of capacity, and the creation of an enabling environment. Through supporting the diversification of the rural economy, contributing to the development of agricultural and non-agricultural businesses and strengthening short value chains, FAO contributes to the improvement of rural livelihoods and the engagement of rural women, youth and other vulnerable groups in agricultural activities to achieve the generational renewal of family farms.

<b>Programme priority areas</b>	<b>SDG targets</b>	<b>Regional areas of emphasis</b>
BP1 - Innovation for sustainable agriculture production	2.3	Promoting sustainable and innovative production practices for smallholders.
BP4 - Small-scale producers' equitable access to resources	1.4, 2.3	Promoting capacity development for land consolidation and land banking. Promoting good practices and building capacities on investment and grants for smallholders.
BP5 - Digital agriculture	1.4	Developing capacities related to innovative solutions and digital innovations.
BE1 - Climate change mitigating and adapted agrifood systems	13.1, 13.2	Enhancing smallholder resilience to climate change.
BL2 - Inclusive rural transformation	8.3	Promoting territorial approaches to development.

*Table 1. Relationships between Regional Initiative 1 and the PPAs, SDG targets and areas of emphasis*

### *Regional Initiative 2: Transforming food systems and facilitating market access and integration*

28. Regional Initiative 2 has a specific focus on better production and better nutrition.

29. With this Regional Initiative, FAO will promote a holistic approach to improving the health and functioning of agrifood systems, leaving no one behind, in which the nutritional needs of men, women and children are balanced with economic efficiency, social well-being and environmental sustainability. It contributes to agrifood systems transformation through market development and the alignment of trade, food safety and sanitary and phytosanitary policies to meet World Trade Organization (WTO) commitments.

30. Through analysing and disseminating evidence, sharing best practices, and promoting dialogue, Members will be better able to formulate inclusive and effective policies that foster healthy diets, leaving no one behind. RI-2 will address specificities of food availability, affordability, use and efficiency in both rural and urban contexts. Sustainable value chain development will support the implementation of policies leading to more efficient agrifood supply chains, improved nutritional outcomes and environmental sustainability, while preventing and reducing food loss and waste.

31. Support in the formulation of legal frameworks aligned with the Codex Alimentarius, the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), will contribute to protecting human, animal and plant health. This will require increasing capacities for food safety, animal disease and plant pest risk assessment as well as laboratory capacities for surveillance, prevention and control using a One Health approach. In order to contribute to increasing private sector responsibilities, the capacities of food producers and food business operators will be developed through the promotion of good practices.

32. Trade will be facilitated through better functioning markets, utilizing policy dialogues through the Agricultural Trade Expert Network (ATEN). This requires building national capacities related to market access, domestic support measures, technical barriers to trade, trade dispute resolution mechanisms, WTO regulations, and Codex, IPPC and OIE standards. FAO will support policymakers and key stakeholders in developing sustainable agrifood value chains; addressing major market access constraints; and developing innovative financing and risk management instruments, technology and organizational arrangements. Emphasis will be given to supporting countries in the region in the framework of FAO's Global Action on Green Development of Special Agricultural Products: One Country One Priority Product and to promoting sustainable certification standards.



33. In coordination and collaboration with other United Nations entities and relevant bodies, especially the Rome-based Agencies and international financial institutions, within its mandate FAO will address the effects of the conflict in Ukraine on agrifood systems, notably its consequences for food security, agricultural production, as well as agricultural trade and markets in the region based on the evidence-based analysis and the formulation of relevant action plans at country level.

34. Building on countries' work to develop holistic, sustainable food systems, and capitalizing on the momentum created by the UNFSS, FAO will strengthen its strategic and programmatic approaches to better respond to country and regional needs. As a follow-up to the UNFSS, countries will be supported in collecting and analysing evidence and data, addressing key policy issues, and using tools and guidance to implement national pathways to transform agrifood systems. Regional evidence will be made available on the status of food security and nutrition through the annual flagship publication *Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition* and the publication *Overview of Food Security in the Countries of the Economic Cooperation Organization*.

Programme priority areas	SDG targets	Regional areas of emphasis
BP1 – Innovation for sustainable agriculture production	2.3, 2.4	Promoting agrifood market development and value addition. Enhancing sanitary and phytosanitary standards.
BP3 – One Health	3.d	Promoting a One Health approach.
BN1 – Healthy diets for All	2.1	Supporting agrifood systems transformation. Improving food and nutrition governance.
BN3 – Safe food for everyone	2.1	Enhancing food safety.
BN4 – Reducing food loss and waste	12.3	Reducing food loss and waste, focusing on the retail, hotels, restaurants, catering and consumer level.
BN5 – Transparent markets and trade	2.b, 2.c, 17.11	Strengthening agrifood trade policy and market development.

Table 2. Relationships between Regional Initiative 2 and the PPAs, SDG targets and areas of emphasis

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

33. Regional Initiative 3 focuses on better environment and better production.

34. Under this Regional Initiative, FAO will support Members in strengthening capacities to achieve sustainable natural resource management, preserve biodiversity, adapt to and mitigate climate change, reduce disaster risks, including assessment of possible losses in agriculture and development of action plans for mitigating the impacts. It supports policy processes to address climate change, biodiversity loss and agricultural pollution in the region. It also offers a regional programmatic umbrella to assist countries in accessing climate finance, including tools and thematic support to formulate interventions at the nexus of climate change, food security, gender and rural poverty.

35. FAO will further facilitate the collection and management of data and information on climate-related vulnerabilities, environmental shocks and disasters as an important basis for evidence-based decision-making and policy integration for climate change adaptation and mitigation, and disaster risk management.

36. FAO will continue to promote utilizing science and economic analysis on nature-positive approaches such as climate-smart agriculture, nature-based solutions and sustainable land

management, agroecology towards enhancing sustainable intensification of agriculture production and reducing agri-input dependency, mainstreaming ecosystem services and biodiversity, and better tackling water scarcity and droughts.

37. FAO will promote maintenance of local breeds and plant varieties, safeguarding their genetic resources, ensuring their medium- or long-term conservation for food and agriculture and returning them to production, as well as supporting national seed systems.

38. FAO will collect data, prepare guidelines and support the formulation of policies and the proper monitoring of agrochemicals and plastics, including promotion and capacity building related to international multilateral environmental agreements on hazardous waste and the establishment of waste management systems contributing to water and soil quality.

39. FAO will develop within its mandate a Regional Action Plan for assessing and addressing the consequences of the war in Ukraine on agrifood systems, including action plans based on the country context. In the short term, and on request, FAO will support countries towards the analysis of the consequences and the development of plans in the framework of the Regional Action Plan.

Programme priority areas	SDG targets	Regional areas of emphasis
BP1 - Innovation for sustainable agriculture production	2.4, 6.4	Promoting green and climate-resilient agricultural practices. Enhancing water policy in Central Asian agrifood systems.
BE1 - Climate change mitigating and adapted agrifood systems	13.1, 13.2	Promoting nature-based solutions addressing climate change. Enhancing policies to combat climate change.
BE2 - Bioeconomy for sustainable food and agriculture	12.4, 12.5	Promoting bioeconomy and sustainable management of agrichemicals.
BE3 - Biodiversity and ecosystem services for food and agriculture	2.5, 15.3	Mainstreaming biodiversity. Supporting achievement of land degradation neutrality.
BL4 - Resilient agrifood systems	1.5	Enhancing disaster risk reduction and resilience.

Table 3. Relationships between Regional Initiative 3 and the PPAs, SDG targets and areas of emphasis

## B. Accelerators and cross-cutting themes

38. In order to accelerate progress and maximize efforts in meeting the SDGs and to realize the *four betters*, FAO will apply four **cross-cutting accelerators** in all programmatic interventions to enhance impact while minimizing trade-offs:

- a) *Technology* for sustainable agrifood systems can be defined as the application of science and knowledge to develop techniques to deliver a product and/or service that enhances the sustainability of agrifood systems. Access and use of technologies must be available and affordable to all, being mindful of possible risks of increasing inequality, market concentration and the degradation of natural resources.
- b) *Innovation* is a central driving force for achieving a world free from hunger and malnutrition and includes technological, social, policy, institutional and financial innovations. Innovation can be defined as doing something new and different, such as solving an old problem in a new way, addressing a new problem with a proven solution, and/or bringing a new solution to a new problem.

- c) *Data* products contribute to strengthening evidence-based decision-making and include the development of methods, standards and frameworks and the collection, processing and dissemination of data, together with required capacity building and partnerships.
- d) *Complements (governance, human capital and institutions)* are necessary and complementary dimensions of effective collective action at all scales, considering in particular that while technology and innovation have achieved important progress over the last decade, many stakeholders remain excluded from their benefits.

39. The promotion of digital **technologies** and other information and communications technologies in Europe and Central Asia will focus on smallholders and extension and farm advisory services through establishing platforms, developing capacities and creating an enabling environment. FAO promotes technological tools such as animal identification, traceability and e-phyto certifications, and e-commerce, in addition to the most appropriate climate and green technologies. Coordination will be further enhanced with the United Nations Digital Transformation Group for Europe and Central Asia (UNECE, 2022a).

40. Key **innovations** that inspire youth participation in agriculture, and accelerate sustainable food value chain development and the use of sustainable approaches and practices from farm to fork, will be the focus of FAO's regional work. Additional crucial elements of FAO support include fostering green innovative solutions, utilizing tools and digital innovations in agrifood systems for climate change mitigation and adaptation, and sustainably managing natural resources.

41. In the region, particular attention is given to **data** on farm structure and performance in rural areas, market prices, market information, diet and nutrition, food security and nutrition, as well as climate-related disaster impacts on agriculture and the management of natural resources. Specific focus will be given to the key processes related to SDG implementation at policy level and to strengthening national capacities on SDG monitoring. FAO will closely coordinate with the Regional Coordination Group on Data and Statistics (UNECE, 2022b) as part of the Regional Cooperation Platform of the United Nations.

42. Related to **complements**, FAO is focusing on supporting local development and improving local governance in the region by promoting the participation of rural communities in decision-making processes. It also aims at improving governance and the adoption of holistic, sustainable agrifood systems approaches, focusing on transforming agrifood systems, improving trade and market access, and ultimately providing healthy diets for all. Furthermore, FAO promotes evidence-based policy dialogue and governance analysis to incentivize the uptake of green innovations.

43. The **cross-cutting themes** of gender, youth and inclusion are critical areas to be taken into account across all of FAO's programmatic work in order to ensure the achievement of the United Nations programming principle of leaving no one behind, as reflected in FAO's strategic narrative.

44. At the regional level, FAO will continue its already-well-integrated work on **gender** (FAO, 2022e) and women's employment and empowerment. As gender and youth are represented in dialogues on agrifood systems transformation, FAO advocates for their engagement in country-level activities and discussions, including the follow-up to the UNFSS. FAO seeks to promote gender-responsive climate policy and mainstream gender perspectives, aiming at promoting labour-saving agricultural practices and improving resilience.

45. Supporting the empowerment and employment of **youth** in rural areas will be an important priority for FAO in the region (FAO, 2022c), including supporting their social and economic well-being, improving their capacities on green agriculture and their involvement in green jobs (ILO, 2022), and enhancing their participation in governance and decision-making.

46. FAO considers **inclusion** through nutrition-sensitive social protection, climate change resilience and adaptation, rural-urban migration, and decent rural employment. It also focuses on improving the enabling environment for inclusion and developing the capacities of marginalized groups to participate in and benefit from agricultural supply chains such as dairy, grains, fruits and

vegetables, meat production, textiles and handcrafts. FAO will promote inclusion through capitalizing on efforts to establish an inclusive global movement on ecosystem restoration, among other efforts.

47. FAO has identified three main ways in which social protection can help address the current crisis and its aftermath in the region. These include: (1) Enhancing the capacity of Ukraine's social protection system to respond to the crisis and help rebuild rural/agricultural livelihoods after the war; (2) Strengthening social protection systems to support the socioeconomic integration of refugees and vulnerable host communities in host countries, in coordination with agricultural sector actors; (3) Responding to increases in food and fertilizer prices in net food-importing countries and reduction of remittances in Central Asia and South Caucasus. These interventions should be gender-responsive, as well as ensure that older people and people living with disabilities have access to appropriate assistance.

### C. FAO's corporate strategies and initiatives

48. FAO priorities for the next biennium and beyond also embody the renewed corporate emphasis on such efforts as leaving no one behind, the new Hand-in-Hand Initiative, promoting innovative approaches and modern science and technologies (including digital solutions and strengthening partnerships), and following an agrifood systems transformations approach that links sectors, actors and countries pertaining to the sustainable use of natural resources, agriculture, food security, nutrition and resilience.

49. 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. FAO will continue to facilitate partnerships and provide advanced geospatial modelling and analytics through the Hand-in-Hand geospatial platform, to identify the biggest opportunities to raise the incomes and reduce the inequities and vulnerabilities of rural populations.

50. FAO is committed to making agricultural data and knowledge available to all stakeholders in the region as well. Leveraging the Hand-in-Hand geospatial platform, FAO will create a live open repository of over 200 practices and digital solutions that are transforming agriculture in Europe and Central Asia. FAO also will keep monitoring digital agriculture developments and collecting practices, products, services and data stemming from the region, making them openly available.

51. In September 2021, FAO launched its Global Action on Green Development of Special Agricultural Products: **One Country One Priority Product (OCOP)**, aiming to develop green and sustainable value chains for special agricultural products (SAPs). SAPs include various agricultural products with unique qualities and special characteristics associated with geographical locations and cultural heritages, which can significantly contribute to ensuring food security and healthy diets, supporting farmers' livelihoods and economic growth while protecting the environment and biodiversity.

52. The initiative was launched in the region in March 2022. A Regional Organizing Group will coordinate the activities at the regional level and facilitate the formulation of OCOP strategies at the country level based on the analysis of the market potential and comparative advantages being developed in collaboration with the Leibniz Institute of Agricultural Development in Transition Economies (IAMO). Europe and Central Asia is well positioned on two out of the three agro-ecological priorities of OCOP, namely arid zones and mountain terrains. FAO will focus on three pilot countries in the region starting in May 2022.

53. **FAO's 1000 Digital Villages Initiative (DVI)** aims to convert 1000 villages across the world into digital hubs with the aim of supporting the transformation of agrifood systems. Furthermore, FAO is operationalizing the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture to provide a venue for dialogue, policy-making and the strengthening of linkages among agriculture and digital economy

fora, supporting governments to enhance the benefits of digital agriculture and leap forward by learning from their peers while addressing potential concerns.

54. FAO will support the implementation of the DVI in the region by elaborating regional guidelines for identifying candidate villages and rural areas to be revitalized through digitalization, raising awareness and promoting adaptable approaches. FAO will pilot a “town-twinning DVI approach” that aims at connecting existing smart/digital villages from the region with potential villages that have expressed interest in joining the initiative. Furthermore, FAO will explore options for building an e-community of connected villages that exchange knowledge, technology and practices to advance and transform their food and agriculture systems.

55. FAO has established the **Regional Technical Platform on Green Agriculture** (FAO, 2022a), which provides a digital, user-friendly, open, intraregional and interregional gateway for sharing information and assisting policymakers and other stakeholders through the facilitation of discussions on all aspects of green agriculture. A knowledge repository will be maintained, regional dialogue will be promoted, and good practices will be disseminated among development partners and technical networks regarding the various technical areas related to green agriculture.

56. FAO responds to the **war in Ukraine** within its mandate, with humanitarian assistance, technical support and policy advice both in the country and across the region. It contributes to humanitarian efforts by the international community that target vulnerable groups affected by war, and takes a leading role in the provision of technical assistance, policy advice and agricultural inputs that contribute to the recovery of agrifood systems in Ukraine and the region.

### III. Towards a reinvigorated business model

57. To align the Organization’s work with the priorities in the region and to translate FAO’s specialized expertise into integrated multidisciplinary interventions tailored to the regional, subregional and country context, the three Regional Initiatives provide the programmatic framework and platform for concerned actors in the region to engage and contribute towards common objectives by exploring and enabling innovative, high-impact solutions.

58. In order to strengthen results-based management and further increase the Organization’s programmatic focus in Europe and Central Asia for 2022-23, a theory of change has been developed for each Regional Initiative following the evaluation presented to the Regional Conference for Europe in 2020 (FAO, 2020). The theory of change and the regional programme allow for a better integration of accelerators and cross-cutting themes and also provide an opportunity to strategically contribute to the PPAs and accelerate the achievement of the relevant SDGs at the national level.

59. In line with the Director-General’s proposal on regional office restructuring, and in order to strengthen the programmatic approach and contribute effectively to the implementation of the Strategic Framework and the United Nations development system repositioning, the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia and Country Offices have improved their business model, working as one FAO. Further emphasis will be given to advocacy, communication and visibility. It is expected that the structural review of the Subregional Office in the region will be concluded in 2022.

60. Resulting from the repositioning of the United Nations development system, the FAO Country Programming Framework (CPF) will be fully aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) (UNSDG, 2019), the most important instrument for the planning and implementation of United Nations development activities in each country. The CPFs remain FAO’s planning and programming documents at the country level and ensure that FAO’s comparative advantage contributes to achieving the results of the UNSDCF and to achieving the SDGs at the national level.

61. In view of the Regional Office’s limited presence at the country level, partnerships with regional organizations, international financial institutions, the private sector, civil society organizations, research and academia remain of particular importance, and will be further strengthened

and promoted to help achieve the SDGs and contribute to efficient delivery at country and regional levels.

62. FAO will continue to collaborate and partner with other United Nations and international development agencies, with special focus on the partnership under the Regional Tripartite One Health Group and the Issue-based Coalition (IBC) on Sustainable Food Systems (UNECE, 2022c) and the UN partnership responding to the refugee crisis. The Regional Initiatives will pursue improving linkages with FAO Regional Technical Commissions (FAO, 2022d) to further expand partnerships in the framework of their normative and technical work.

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