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منظمة
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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), focusing 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 in Europe and Central Asia for the biennium 2024-2025, as the regional approach towards implementing the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31, the Medium Term Plan (Reviewed) 2022–25 and the Programme of Work and Budget 2024-25.

Based on internal review and the informal consultation organized in the region in 2023, along with emerging trends and corporate strategies and initiatives, this document sets out the priorities for FAO's work in the region during the 2024–2025 biennium and beyond.

Additionally, this document will present the regional approach towards implementing FAO's corporate initiatives, such as the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, and the corporate strategies for science and innovation and climate change.

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 the repositioning of the United Nations Development System.

Documents can be consulted at www.fao.org

Suggested action by the Regional Conference

The Regional Conference is invited to:

- recognize the importance of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022–31 in providing direction for FAO’s work and contributing to the achievement of the SDGs in the region;
- note the multiple shocks – including the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine – that have threatened the socioeconomic stability of the region, highlighting the urgent need for resilient and sustainable agrifood systems, and reaffirm the pivotal role that FAO plays in safeguarding food security in the region;
- endorse the four revised Regional Priorities, which will guide FAO’s actions in 2024–2025 and beyond, including the regional areas of emphasis, with their contribution to the Programme Priority Areas (PPAs) and the SDG targets; and
- note the importance of FAO’s corporate initiatives, such as the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, and the corporate strategies for science and innovation and climate change, as well as their regional approaches and specificities.

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I. Introduction

1. The 43rd Session of the FAO Conference endorsed the Medium Term Plan (Reviewed) 2022–25 and the Programme of Work and Budget 2024–25, and approved the Biennial Theme 2024–2025: “Water resources management for the four betters: better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life, to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.¹
2. FAO’s work is guided by the FAO Strategic Framework 2022–31, which seeks to support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) 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. Its 20 Programme Priority Areas (PPAs) articulate FAO’s thematic and technical comparative advantage. Regional Priorities are elaborated with the relevant PPAs and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
3. Beyond the 2024–2025 biennium, and in line with the programming and budgeting cycle elaborated in the FAO Basic Texts,² input on priorities from the 2024 Regional Conferences will guide FAO’s programming for the 2026–2027 biennium and will support the review of the FAO Strategic Framework to be presented to the FAO Conference in 2025.

II. Context

A. Medium- to long-term futures of agrifood systems

4. Strategic foresight at FAO examines the alternative future patterns of agrifood, socioeconomic and environmental systems and the dynamics of their driving forces to identify strategic options for triggering changes towards sustainable and resilient agrifood systems at all levels. Following the guidance of the Committee on Agriculture and other Governing Bodies, FAO is reinforcing its strategic foresight capacity in collaboration with United Nations (UN) bodies, academia, the civil society and other foresight networks. This includes implementing Regional Foresight Exercises (RFEs) in all five FAO regions, involving subregions and selected pilot countries. The RFEs aim to accelerate strategic thinking, increase capacity to support transformative changes in agrifood systems, and inform Members on strategic options available to achieve sustainable and resilient agrifood systems.
5. The recently launched FAO flagship report *The future of food and agriculture – Drivers and triggers for transformation*, which provides the conceptual and methodological grounds for the RFEs, warns that current trends could threaten the sustainability and resilience of agrifood systems and jeopardize the achievement of the *four betters*, potentially leading to increased food crises. Drivers such as population growth, urbanization, macroeconomic instability, poverty, inequality, geopolitical tensions, competition for resources and climate change are already negatively impacting agrifood, socioeconomic and environmental systems while food prices are increasing. Transitioning towards sustainability may require a new mindset that prioritizes long-term objectives and addresses trade-offs through massive investment in domains with high transformative potential, such as the four “triggers for transformation” proposed in the flagship report: institutions and governance, consumer awareness, income and wealth distribution, and innovative technologies and approaches.
6. The FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia has initiated an RFE to identify key regional and subregional drivers of agrifood systems and explore potential futures. Initial findings suggest that **structural transformation** has been a pivotal force shaping production, **consumption and nutrition patterns** throughout the region, subregions and individual countries. Structural transformation itself has been heavily influenced by context, notably **cross-country interdependencies** that become more prominent with landlocked countries to the east. Cross-country interdependencies play a significant influence across various dimensions, from political alliances and

¹ For more information, please see the *Report of the Conference of FAO* at <https://www.fao.org/3/nm800en/nm800en.pdf>.

² For more information, please see the Basic Texts of FAO, Volume II, F, Implementation of the Immediate Plan of Action regarding the Reform of the Programming, Budgeting and Results-based Monitoring System available at <https://www.fao.org/3/K8024E/K8024E.pdf>.

trade patterns to foreign direct investment, technology transfer, business opportunities and migration. Their impact extends to economic growth, **public investment and innovation** within agrifood systems, leading to diverse trajectories in agricultural productivity growth and agrifood systems transformations, notably between high-income countries and economies in transition.

7. Food import dependencies also serve as a tangible manifestation of these country interdependencies, emphasizing the critical role that **food prices** play in shaping agrifood systems. However, **geopolitical instability** introduces **risks and uncertainties** that hinder optimal investment in agriculture, thereby constraining productivity growth in agrifood systems. **Climate change** and its associated violent weather phenomena pose additional threats, potentially accelerating the **degradation of natural resources** and exacerbating risks and uncertainties. Amid these challenges, **population dynamics** intertwined with structural changes across the region have given rise to **widespread inequalities**. The RFE of Europe and Central Asia is conducting further analyses to understand the interplay of these key drivers and envision alternative scenarios for agrifood, socioeconomic and environmental systems. As structural transformations unfold, understanding and navigating these complex interdependencies become crucial for policymaking in support of sustainable and equitable development in the region.

B. Challenges and opportunities

8. The timely transformation of agrifood systems is playing a key role in supporting the achievement of **the 2030 Agenda and multiple SDGs**.

9. The current and future impacts of **climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental pollution** affect the production and productivity of agrifood systems, with implications for food security, nutrition and livelihoods.

10. In recent years, shocks – including the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine – have multiplied, threatening the socioeconomic stability of the region and highlighting the urgent need for resilient and sustainable agrifood systems.

11. Current and emerging challenges and opportunities in the region are presented below through the *four betters*.

Challenges and opportunities for better production

12. The multiple crises in the region have negatively affected **farming operations** through the volatility of input and output prices **and disruptions to both domestic and export markets**.

13. The key constraints for value-adding opportunities **are structural problems** (such as inefficient farm structures), **a weak food processing sector**, and **limited access to digital and non-digital technologies, knowledge, innovations and investments**, accompanied by the lack of an enabling political environment and inclusive policies.

14. **Risks in food chains** – including plant and animal pests and antimicrobial-resistant organisms – are not being adequately addressed due to the limited knowledge of preventive control measures and gaps in legal and policy frameworks.

Challenges and opportunities for better nutrition

15. The situation of **food security** and nutrition is characterized by a stagnation in the reduction of food-insecure individuals, multiple burdens of malnutrition and a rapid increase in obesity, including among young people. Contributing factors are associated with, among others, difficulties among vulnerable groups in **accessing nutritious and diverse food and limited data, analysis and capacity** for strengthening the evidence base for policy development and implementation.

16. The war in Ukraine has resulted in substantial trade **disruptions, impacting markets and value chains** for key food commodities, highlighting the risks of high food **export and import dependency** and pointing to the need for **reliable data** for evidence-based decision-making.

17. The reduction and prevention of **food loss and waste** have been undermined by poor infrastructure, limited data and evidence, limited access to innovation and technologies, and limited changes in consumer behaviour.

Challenges and opportunities for a better environment

18. Countries face barriers to reducing the impacts of **climate change** due to limited access to climate finance and technologies; limited capacities on climate adaptation and mitigation, disaster risk reduction, preparedness and resilience; and the lack of an **enabling political environment and scientific data**.

19. **Biodiversity and diverse ecosystems** in the region are threatened by changes in land use; intensification in agricultural sectors; the degradation of agricultural land, pastures and forests; the spread of invasive alien species; and genetic erosion.

20. More than half of Central Asia's land is salinized due to unsustainable agricultural practices, including overgrazing, excessive chemical use and inefficient irrigation. In Western and Northern Europe, urbanization and infrastructure development contribute to land degradation, while the Mediterranean region faces soil degradation, mainly from erosion.

Challenges and opportunities for a better life

21. Nearly one-third of the region's population resides in **rural areas**, with rural residents being among the poorest segments in most countries. Within rural populations, women and girls appear disproportionately among the poorest and most vulnerable groups.

22. Demographic trends in **rural areas** are characterized by a lack of agriculture-based livelihood options for **youth**, intensive outmigration to urban areas and abroad, and an ageing rural population (except in Central Asia).

23. **Investment limitations** for smallholders and in the agroprocessing sector hinder the development of inclusive value chains with strong internal connectivity.

III. Priority areas of work in 2024–2025 and beyond

A. Regional Priorities

24. The Regional Priorities are the regional programmatic approach under the FAO Strategic Framework 2022–31, supporting the 2030 Agenda 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.

25. The FAO Strategic Framework 2022–31, the review of emerging challenges from multiple crises in the region, lessons learned from the implementation of the programme of work in 2022–2023, and the informal consultation held with Members in 2023 provided the basis for the revision of priorities for the region.

26. There are four distinct priorities of importance for FAO's work throughout Europe and Central Asia for the 2024–2025 biennium and beyond, including an overarching priority that cuts across all of FAO's work:

- a. ensuring food security and addressing all forms of malnutrition (overarching priority);
- b. formulating effective policies, promoting digital innovation and facilitating sustainable rural transformation, with emphasis on smallholders and youth;
- c. promoting food systems transformation, including nutrition-sensitive value chains and healthy diets, through the alignment of trade, food safety and sanitary and phytosanitary policies and facilitating One Health; and
- d. promoting sustainable natural resources governance, preserving biodiversity and building resilience to climate change and disasters in agriculture, forestry, fishery and other land-use sectors.



Figure 1: Regional Priorities (RPs) in Europe and Central Asia

Regional Priority: Ensuring food security and addressing all forms of malnutrition (overarching)

27. 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.

28. The focus is on improving food literacy and the consumer food environment, supporting countries in their development of food system-based dietary guidelines and strengthening school feeding and nutrition programmes.

29. Furthermore, mainstreaming food security and nutrition across sectors and high-level decision-making bodies is important to increase investments in developing and implementing nutrition-sensitive policies and programmes aimed at informed dietary choices, influencing consumer desire for healthy diets, and engaging food chain actors to produce and market nutritious and safe foods.

30. In this regard, FAO aims to enhance knowledge on the role of the agriculture sector in improving nutritional outcomes, including the provision of evidence-based advice on food and nutrition policy development.

31. Furthermore, FAO will enhance intersectoral collaboration and coordination and scale up support to food -price monitoring, disaggregated data collection, food security analysis, strategies and monitoring. All of these are key to addressing food security and nutrition challenges, considering the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) *Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition* and promoting the Urban Food Agenda and the “leave no one behind” principle.

32. The Regional Priority has a specific focus on *better nutrition*, but it also contributes to *better production*, a *better environment* and a *better life*.

Programme Priority Areas	SDG targets	Regional areas of emphasis
BN1: Healthy diets for all	2.1 2.2	Supporting access to healthy diets through enhanced evidence and increased multisectoral collaboration. Increasing knowledge and capacity to identify progress and existing bottlenecks in achieving SDG 2 goals.
BL4: Resilient agrifood systems	1.3 1.5 2.4	Strengthening capacities on SDG implementation and monitoring.

Regional Priority: Formulating effective policies, promoting digital innovation and facilitating sustainable rural transformation, with emphasis on smallholders and youth

33. This Regional Priority aims to enhance smallholder resilience to climate change, shocks and crises through the promotion of preparedness, sustainable production practices and technologies, addressing land abandonment and improving farm structures, improving access to insurance and social protection, and strengthening governments' capacities to develop and implement inclusive policies for investment in agriculture.

34. Support focuses on rural livelihoods, income generation and access to investment, the economic empowerment of women,³ and creating employment opportunities for rural youth⁴ and attracting them to agricultural value chains. Improving access to scalable innovations, digital solutions, innovative technology, natural resources, markets, and extension and farm advisory services are of key importance in this regard.

35. The Regional Priority has a specific focus on *better production*, a *better environment* and a *better life*.

Programme Priority Areas	SDG target	Regional areas of emphasis
BP4: Small-scale producers' equitable access to resources	1.4 2.3 14.b	Promoting sustainable agricultural production practices for smallholders, including young farmers. Promoting capacity development for multipurpose land consolidation and land banking and addressing land abandonment.
BP5: Digital agriculture	1.4	Increasing access and capacities to apply digital tools and services in food and agriculture, including through the 1000 Digital Village Initiative.
BE1: Climate change mitigating and adapted agrifood systems	13.1 13.2	Strengthening the resilience and livelihoods of smallholders and vulnerable communities to shocks, with effective disaster risk reduction, emergency response, social protection and climate change adaptation support.
BL1: Gender equality and rural women's empowerment	2.3 5.a	Empowering rural women economically and increasing access to productive resources, markets, decent rural employment and entrepreneurship. Enhancing access to gender-specific policy analysis and research in agrifood systems.
BL2: Inclusive rural transformation	8.3	Empowering smallholders and family farmers, including youth, through the facilitation of territorial approaches, including the diversification of the rural economy, strengthened short value chains, cooperation and collective action . Promoting youth engagement in the rural economy and agrifood systems and enhancing youth participation in policy processes .

³ The *FAO Policy on Gender Equality 2020–2030* is available online at <https://www.fao.org/3/cb1583en/cb1583en.pdf>.

⁴ FAO's *Rural Youth Action Plan* is available online at <https://www.fao.org/3/cc0583en/cc0583en.pdf>.

Regional Priority: Promoting food system transformation including nutrition-sensitive value chains and healthy diets through the alignment of trade, food safety and sanitary and phytosanitary policies and facilitating One Health

36. This Regional Priority aims at the transformation of agrifood systems towards sustainability and resilience, the promotion of a holistic food systems perspective to provide healthy diets for all, and the protection of the planet. Emphasis is given to multisectoral and stakeholder collaboration and policy coherence, contributing to the UN Food Systems Summit commitments.

37. Assistance is directed towards promoting the One Health approach, resulting in preventing and controlling risks related to **food safety and plant and animal health**. Further support aims at improving trade and market access, developing the agrifood trade policy environment, and creating opportunities for trade and market diversification and value addition, including the provision of capacity development to reduce food loss.

38. Enhancing the monitoring of food security and food and agricultural input market prices and the use of qualitative and quantitative agrifood system data, information and analyses are of key importance.

39. The Regional Priority has a specific focus on *better production* and *better nutrition*.

Programme Priority Areas	SDG targets	Regional areas of emphasis
BP1: Innovation for sustainable agriculture production	2.3	Improving access to markets by engaging in the development of inclusive and sustainable value chains.
BP3: One Health	3.d	Promoting the One Health approach to prevent and control zoonotic diseases and antimicrobial resistance.
BN1: Healthy diets for all	2.1 2.2	Increasing the capacities of policymakers and food system actors to collaborate on the implementation of UN Food Systems Summit commitments, identifying entry points for food systems governance and investment decisions for sustainable agrifood systems transformation.
BN3: Safe food for everyone	2.1	Preventing and controlling food chain risks related to food safety and plant and animal health .
BN4: Reducing food loss and waste	12.3	Raising awareness on the direct and indirect causes of food loss and waste and promoting subsequent sustainable solutions for food loss and waste reduction.
BN5: Transparent markets and trade	2.b 2.c 17.11	Increasing market transparency through the use of qualitative and quantitative data, information and analyses.
BL4: Resilient agrifood systems	2.4	Increasing the capacities of parliamentarians in sustainable and socially inclusive agrifood systems transformation.

Regional Priority: Promoting sustainable natural resources governance, preserving biodiversity and building resilience to climate change and disasters in agriculture, forestry, fishery and other land-use sectors

40. This Regional Priority focuses on the regional application of the *FAO Action Plan 2022–2025 for the implementation of the FAO Strategy on Climate Change*,⁵ focusing on sustainable natural resources governance, climate change adaptation and mitigation, disaster -risk reduction and climate finance.
41. Promoting biodiversity preservation and restoration,⁶ green technologies, innovative and integrated approaches, sustainable and climate-adaptive natural resources and land management are of key importance in this regard. FAO aims to support the reduction in the region of the environmental impacts of agrifood systems, including through the promotion of bioeconomy and the effective management of **agriculture waste**, recycling and reuse of technologies.
42. The Regional Priority has a specific focus on *better production*, a *better environment* and a *better life*.

Programme Priority Areas	SDG targets	Regional areas of emphasis
BP1: Innovation for sustainable agriculture production	6.4	Supporting advanced strategies and methodologies for managing land and water resources sustainably. Supporting the harnessing of science and innovation to accelerate agrifood systems transformation.
BE1: Climate change mitigating and adapted agrifood systems	2.4 13.1 13.2	Strengthening and aligning policies for informed climate action . Supporting enhanced access and utilization of climate information and services and climate and carbon finance.
BE2: Bioeconomy for sustainable food and agriculture	12.4 12.5	Promoting the effective management of agriculture-related waste based on the principles of bioeconomy. Developing capacities to reduce pest- and pesticide-related environmental and human health risks.
BE3: Biodiversity and ecosystem services for food and agriculture	2.5	Increasing capacities and mechanisms to harmonize policies aimed at preventing biodiversity loss and the degradation of agroecosystems .
BL4: Resilient agrifood systems	1.5	Strengthening preparedness, early warning , anticipatory actions, risk reduction and response to shocks and crises.

B. Accelerators and cross-cutting themes

43. In order to accelerate progress and maximize efforts to meet the SDGs and realize the *four betters*, FAO applies accelerators⁷ (technology, innovation, data and complements) and cross-cutting themes (gender, youth and inclusion) in all programmatic interventions.
44. Focus is given to strengthening the use of science and innovation and intersectoral work to accelerate agrifood systems transformation in the region through the implementation of the Regional Action Plan on Science and Innovation.

⁵ The *FAO Action Plan 2022–2025 for the implementation of the FAO Strategy on Climate Change* is online at <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cc7014en>.

⁶ The *FAO Strategy on Mainstreaming Biodiversity across Agricultural Sectors* is available online at <http://www.fao.org/3/ca7722en/ca7722en.pdf>.

⁷ FAO's *Strategic Framework 2022–31* is available online at <https://www.fao.org/3/cb7099en/cb7099en.pdf>.

45. Increasing capacities to apply information and communications technologies in agriculture and access to **digital tools and services**, including climate information and services, is of key importance, with particular attention to rural communities.
46. FAO continues to give particular attention to SDG implementation and monitoring; the collection and use of qualitative **data** on farm structure, market information, food security and nutrition; and management of natural resources.
47. Regarding **complements**,⁸ FAO is focusing on improving governance and the adoption of holistic, sustainable agrifood system policies and approaches, and supporting evidence-based policy dialogue for improved nutrition, market access and livelihoods.
48. FAO will continue its already well-integrated work on **gender** and women's employment and empowerment – including enhancing access to gender-specific policy analysis, knowledge and skills – to formulate and implement gender-responsive and inclusive policies.
49. Supporting the empowerment and employment of **youth** in rural areas remains an important priority for FAO in the region. It is supported by building evidence and providing a platform through the [Regional Rural Youth Forum for Europe and Central Asia](#) for informed policy design.
50. FAO ensures **inclusion** through its focus on nutrition-sensitive social protection, climate change resilience and adaptation, support for orderly migration policies, and decent rural employment to provide attractive opportunities, including for youth, for the revitalization of rural areas.

C. FAO's corporate strategies and initiatives

51. In 2024–2025, FAO will continue to maximize its impact at the country level through the implementation of corporate strategies and initiatives in the region.
52. The FAO Science and Innovation Strategy and the FAO Strategy on Climate Change 2022--2031 will be implemented through regional action plans, focusing on promoting tools and mechanisms to harness science and innovation to accelerate agrifood systems transformation, strengthening and aligning **policies** for informed **climate action**, and supporting enhanced access and utilization of climate information and services.
53. FAO is taking a conceptual approach to making agricultural data and knowledge available to all stakeholders related to the implementation of the Hand-in-Hand Initiative in the region in order to accelerate agricultural transformation, sustainable rural transformation and targeted investments.
54. Through the One Country One Priority Product and Agrifood Systems Transformation Accelerator programmes, FAO will support the development of special agricultural products at country level, including the development of sustainable food value chains, building on lessons learned from the regional implementation of the first phase of the One Country One Priority Product.
55. The 1000 Digital Village Initiative in the region focuses on increasing rural communities' access to digital tools and services, with particular attention paid to smallholder farmers, women and youth, supported by increasing capacities to apply information and communications technology in agriculture, awareness and outreach.
56. By further developing the Regional Technical Platform on Green Agriculture, FAO is advancing interregional learning, sharing knowledge, strengthening the Green Practices Repository and building capacity via expert webinars, cross-regional study tours, innovation labs and on-the-ground pilot programmes.

IV. One FAO

57. FAO's programme of work and its project portfolio in the region are fully coherent in contributing to the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) at

⁸ The term "complements" refers to the governance, human capital and institutions needed to ensure an inclusive agrifood systems transformation.

country level through each Country Programming Framework, which in turn are linked to subregional and regional priorities and guided by the FAO Strategic Framework PPAs, facilitating the achievement of the SDGs.

58. Key emphasis will be given to further strengthening the programmatic approach, utilizing FAO's specialized expertise on innovative multidisciplinary intervention and integrating the growing portfolios of the Global Environment Facility and the Green Climate Fund. Outputs will be formulated as programmes of work (Regional Priority Programmes) aligned with the *four betters* and the respective PPAs to ensure the coherent and holistic implementation of the areas of emphasis within each of the Regional Priorities.

59. The region is piloting an improved results monitoring framework enhancing results-based management. Emphasis will be given to further strengthening the capacities of Country Offices in field programme delivery, and in reducing operational constraints, utilizing innovative solutions and management approaches.

60. Partnerships with international financial institutions, the private sector, civil society organizations, research and academia remain of particular importance, given the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia's limited presence at country level.

61. FAO will continue its collaboration and partnership with other UN agencies, with a special focus on the partnership under the Regional Quadripartite One Health Group and the Issue-based Coalition on Sustainable Food Systems.

62. The Europe and Central Asia region became one of the pilot regions for the adoption of the new UNSDCF, within the framework of the UN reform, with 12 countries now following the first generation of the UNSDCF cycle.