

FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR EUROPE (ERC)**Thirty-first Session****Voronezh, Russian Federation, 16-18 May 2018****Gender, youth and migration in Central Asia: Translating needs into action****Side Event 5****Friday, 18 May 2018****14.00 – 15.00 hours****SAPPHIRE Meeting room****Background**

Countries in the region of Central Asia experience high levels of out-migration, both internally, particularly from rural to urban areas, and from one country to another. This comprises mostly seasonal labour migration to countries such as Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation and other countries both inside and outside the region. Migration-origin countries in Central Asia include Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, all of which are facing development challenges such as rapid population growth, rural poverty, malnutrition, and pressure on water and land resources. Agriculture alone cannot offer sufficient employment opportunities, which forces rural women and men, and youth in particular, to migrate. Above all else, migration should be **a choice**, not an act of desperation. Migrating in search of employment and income, young people face particular challenges and vulnerabilities. Their departure also creates a vacuum in a generation that is needed to support their countries' economic development.

Labour migration from Central Asian countries has direct implications on agriculture, food security and rural development and vice versa, as unfavourable conditions in these essential elements of livelihoods may trigger migration. There is increased evidence that labour migration may have both positive and negative impacts on local developments in rural areas. Positive effects of labour migration may include financial remittances, which can help improve rural infrastructure and nutrition in households, strengthen women's decision-making power, and contribute to broader socio-economic and human developmental aspects. Additionally, social remittances can occur in the form of skills learned abroad and in attitudinal factors, such as openness to the acquisition of new approaches and techniques. Social remittances also may take the form of socio-cultural change, which may in turn lead to enhanced practices that are favourable to gender equity and justice. Out-migration also momentarily reduces unemployment, social tensions and pressures on local labour markets. At the same time, adverse effects of migration could include depopulation of rural areas, loss of the most productive and dynamic share of the agricultural workforce, greater inequality at local level between remittance-receiving and non-receiving households, the 'feminization of agriculture' (especially where the majority of migrating groups are male), lack of investment (which may challenge livelihoods and food security), and longer-term impacts on separated families, disproportionately affecting children, women and the elderly.

Agriculture and rural development can be instrumental in addressing some of the root causes of migration, including rural poverty, food insecurity, gender inequality, unemployment and lack of social protection. It can *create an enabling environment* to harness the development potential of migrants, especially as regards to poverty reduction, agriculture and rural development. Agriculture and rural development also can address and prevent the environmental degradation process through the sustainable management of natural resources such as water, soil and pasture lands. Concurrently, other efforts can help address challenges associated with migration. For example:

- investment in food security and agriculture through gender-sensitive policies and practices that involve interventions focusing on income diversification and investments in inclusive value chains linked to sustainable agriculture;
- support to small- and medium-scale entrepreneurship;
- community development;
- rural education and vocational training that match labour market needs;
- enhancing rural capacities to use remittances for investments in agriculture and natural resource management;
- reintegration of returnees in rural areas through promotion of employment and entrepreneurship opportunities and assistance with property and land tenure rights;
- enabling access to social protection measures for migrant household members.

Objectives:

Migration, youth and gender equality dimensions are essential to all aspects of economic and social development, and as such, they need to be addressed in the region as a prerequisite for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. In particular, rural youth can be the driver for inclusive rural transformations that create opportunities for sustainable development, as emphasized by the G20 Initiative for Rural Youth Transformation (2017).

FAO is well placed to address these dimensions in a holistic and integrated manner. The drivers and impacts of labour migration, especially of young women and men, are intrinsically linked to FAO's global goals of fighting hunger, achieving food security, reducing rural poverty, and promoting the sustainable use of natural resources. At global level, FAO committed to improve evidence on rural migration patterns, drivers and impacts and to strengthen policy coherence between migration and agricultural and rural development policies, in particular towards the adoption and implementation of the Global Compact on Migration at the regional and national level.

FAO is in a unique position to support countries by promoting comprehensive responses and implementing the interrelated goals of eradicating poverty, increasing food security and decreasing distress migration. Examples of FAO interventions include the Regional Initiatives, with the overall goal of empowering smallholders and family farmers to improve their livelihoods with respect to youth, gender and vulnerable groups.

The proposed side event will provide a platform for discussion of the links among rural youth, gender equality, employment, agriculture, rural development, food security, and migration in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Discussion also will include measures for developing inclusive and sustainable value chains and providing greater and more diversified income opportunities to small-scale producers and family farmers (youth, women and men). Participants will identify opportunities and promising practices for the creation of better conditions and resilient livelihoods in rural areas, in support of the Sustainable Development Goals¹. These would allow women and men to continue farming, investing in their family plots, and engaging in non-farming activities in rural areas, thus providing them with alternative and sustainable livelihoods options for moving out of poverty. A reduction in migration also would mitigate vulnerabilities and reduce at-risk employment, risky behaviour and social isolation at the place of destination.

The event will take the format of a presentation by members of a panel, followed by a discussion, sharing of experiences, and a review of promising practices in agriculture and rural development that have implications on rural-to-urban migration and on external labour migration. The event would thus provide a forum for dialogue to identify cases of successful policies and practices and to support the

¹ Sustainable Development Goal 2 is to “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.” In point 2.3, it states: “By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous people, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment.” This implies specific policies and action to support small-scale food producers and family farmers, with particular attention to women and other disadvantaged groups.

formulation of effective strategies at country and regional levels. The event will showcase FAO's activities in the region, with a focus on creating decent employment and income-generating opportunities for youth and women and thus ensuring access to and control over productive resources and markets.

Core questions

- What are social and economic measures that may prove to be effective in reducing migration from rural areas?
- What are the solutions and best practices that can be replicated in the region?
- How will these solutions minimize the adverse effects of migration in the region and enhance its positive impacts and contribution to development?

Key messages/expected outcomes

The major outcome of the side event is a common vision and general agreement among the key stakeholders in the region for collaborative efforts and joint actions under a gender, youth and rural migration platform, in order to provide a coherent and integrated response to developmental challenges in Central Asia, in line with the 2030 Agenda.

Expected outcomes include policy and programmatic recommendations to the Central Asian countries based on the promising practices presented and discussed at the side event. These recommendations can be used to develop a portfolio of interventions for:

- supporting initiatives to integrate migration into national development plans and agriculture and rural development policies and programmes;
- creating job opportunities for rural (and urban) youth and women;
- creating opportunities to empower youth and women to actively participate in and benefit from sustainable food and agricultural systems;
- eradicating poverty and malnutrition;
- complementing the ongoing efforts of governments addressing the needs of the most vulnerable social groups; and
- synchronizing efforts of various partners on the ground, including UN agencies, international financial institutions, resource partners and other stakeholders to ensure efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the development interventions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Language: The Side Event will be interpreted in English and Russian language.