

Informal Consultation for Europe and Central Asia

12-15 July 2021

Background Note

Closing Session

Agenda of the Thirty-third Session of the Regional Conference for Europe

1. The Thirty-third Regional Conference for Europe (ERC) will be held from 2 to 6 May 2022. The Europe Regional Group (ERG), at its meeting on 7 April 2021, discussed the proposal of Poland to host the 33rd Session of the ERC, which was accepted without objection. Based on this consultation the FAO Director-General decided on Poland to host the 33rd Session of the ERC.
2. The purpose of this paper is to obtain input from the Members for preparing the draft provisional agenda for the ERC.
3. Agendas for Regional Conferences consists of the following four standard sections: (i) Introductory items; (ii) Regional and global policy and regulatory issues; (iii) Programme and budget matters; and (iv) Other matters, including Information notes.
4. **Introductory Items (i):** This section consists of standard opening items, such as election of Chairperson and others, adoption of agenda and delivery of several statements.
5. **Regional and Global Policy and Regulatory Issues (ii):** Approximately one to two important topics pertinent for the region are discussed under this section of the agenda. Taking note of the topics covered at previous ERCs (Annex 1), the ERC Secretariat prepared the below shortlist of the proposed topics for this part of the Agenda. Members are invited to discuss and provide their feedback to the Secretariat on their proposed topics to be discussed at the ERC.

A. Greening agriculture and food production for a transformative food system in Europe and Central Asia

Agri-food systems, depend on and can have negative/positive impacts on the environment. Food system contribute an estimate 34% of total GHG emissions, being agriculture and land-use/change activities are among largest contributors of greenhouse emissions to the atmosphere.

Ecosystems and landscapes in Europe and Central Asia are highly fragile and sensitive to environmental shocks due to excessive extraction and waste of water, over felling of forests, and pollution from the use of fertilizers and pesticides, all of which have, in turn, led to biodiversity loss, the incidence of transboundary pests and diseases, land erosion and desertification, which is exacerbated by climate change putting the whole agri-food system and food security and nutrition at risk.

For this reason, to ensure food and nutritional security in ECA region, there is an urgent need to explore the enormous opportunities for environmental, economic, and social synergies that can be derived from green growth models. Thus, it is essential to maintain and further expand the role of the agricultural and food sector as an engine of regional economic development based on more sustainable and climate-resilient food production and processing, making efficient use and management of natural resources and biodiversity, dealing with climate crisis.

The paper will address “*How can Europe and Central Asia move towards a more productive, green, and inclusive agriculture and food sector?*” It will introduce the main interventions in the region to greening agriculture and transforming food systems. It will look at the options to support low carbon agriculture and climate financing in the agriculture sector. Moreover, it will explore the opportunities to promote the nature-based solutions approach in agriculture, mainstream biodiversity in agriculture,



fisheries, and forestry for natural capital investment and cost-efficient solutions. Furthermore, it will address how to minimize food safety risks, food losses and waste, and to manage and prevent spread of diseases in plants and animals, and across to humans in some cases. It will describe the importance of promoting agri-environmental governance, and sustainable bioeconomy, the role of digital innovation, and technology to enhance the attractiveness of green agriculture for the youth and older generations.

The paper will encourage action to be taken to balance the activities to produce food and promote healthy diets, by considering the ecosystem as a whole, while bearing in mind the agri-food chain risks that may arise from the environment, highlighting how green agriculture is laid on the three dimensions of sustainability - economic, environmental and social – and contributes to achieving several Sustainable Development Goals.

B. Leaving no one behind in Europe and Central Asia

While Europe and Central Asia (ECA) is a highly heterogeneous region in terms of political and economic development, climate conditions, and socio-demographic features, agricultural modernization and development has historically been one of the key drivers in reducing poverty and malnutrition.

The FAO Strategic Framework is guided through the lens of SDGs 1, 2 and 10, and identifies Gender, Youth and Inclusion as cross cutting themes to be taken into account in all of FAO's programmatic interventions in order to Leave No One Behind (LNOB).

Despite the progress made in the region, ECA experiences several concurrent and interconnected development constraints, including poverty, food insecurity, inequality, unemployment, environmental degradation and risk of natural disasters. The poorest and most vulnerable groups of the rural population including smallholders, women and youth in particular, face many constraints and have unmet needs. Many of the existing challenges have been further exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic and associated downward economic spirals. These new and existing challenges reemphasize the demands for transformations of agriculture and food systems for attaining the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in particular the principle of Leaving No One Behind. In this sense, strengthened partnerships and regional cooperation among national actors and development partners are essential to provide integrated and targeted support to strengthen the resilience of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in order to reach more equitable and sustainable food systems.

The general idea of the background paper would be to present to Members how in practice the Region can take on the principle of LNOB in all agriculture and rural development efforts. More specifically the paper will explore how all opportunities and innovative practices, including how digitalization can be actively used to address the multiple risks and constraints facing the poor and vulnerable. The paper would place particular emphasis on:

- the economic empowerment of women, including young rural women, and their access to resources and technologies, since women play a crucial role in the eradication of poverty and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
- prioritization of youth as agents of change for the revitalization of rural areas; and
- inclusion of poor, extreme poor, and other vulnerable, discriminated and marginalized groups more broadly, including disabled persons.

The paper would build on the work already initiated by FAO in the Region on developing its approach to Leaving No One Behind in the three REU Regional Initiatives, providing examples of what the LNOB principle in practice can mean in different technical areas of work drawing on the studies, promising practices and lessons learned. The paper will also look into the social dimensions of transforming food systems for advancing equitable rural livelihoods. Through experience and knowledge sharing, this paper will identify promising practices of applying non-digital and digital



innovative solutions that can empower rural populations, with specific solutions tailored to rural women and youth. In addition, following the LNOB principle, the paper will look at the other intersecting social differentiations for a more nuanced understanding of challenges and possible entry points.

C. Sustainable Food Value Chains for Nutrition, a practical approach for transforming food systems for healthy diets in REU

Approaching value chains from the angle of nutritional outcomes is a useful way to analyse and navigate food systems transformation. Notably, this approach helps to identify entry points for policy-making, project interventions and investment opportunities that enhance the supply and demand for nutritious food at each step of the Value Chain (VC). The paper will build on the work that Rome Based Agencies have done in recent years on [Sustainable Value Chains for Nutrition](#), to focus on ECA. It will look at the role of short food-supply chains (SFSC) in providing access to nutritious food, either directly to consumers or through local markets. Other interventions along the VC will be explored, such as public procurement, wholesale markets and supermarkets. Finally, Responsible Business Conduct (RBC) and due diligence mechanisms that address social, economic and environmental risks will be considered. Women, youth and the environment will be cross cutting themes. Background regional data will originate from the last regional SOFI, in particular on the nutrition situation and accessibility of healthy diets, and examples of best practices from the Region and beyond will be presented to show practical approaches.

6. Programme and Budget Matters (iii): Issues such as decentralized office network and results and priorities for FAO's work in the region are standard items discussed under this section. In addition, at the 32nd Session of the ERC, the Members requested FAO to add a standard item on the Agenda on the FAO Evaluations in Europe and Central Asia Region, along with a progress report on the implementation of the adopted recommendations.

7. Other Matters (iv): The report from the latest sessions of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA) as well as the other two regional article VI bodies – the European Forestry Commission (EFC) and the European Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Advisory Commission (EIFAAC) – would report to the ERC. As for the regional article XIV bodies, the Central Asian and Caucasus Regional Fisheries and Aquaculture Commission (CACFish) also report to the ERC, while the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) has so far not made this formal agreement and will thus be presented as an Information item. The Multi-Year Programme of Work (MYPOW) is also presented as part of this section.

8. Information Notes: Documents under this section are presented for information and can be commented on by the Members under Any other business. This section will include a document with the outcomes and recommendations of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM). Members are also invited to propose topics for including under this section.

**List of regional and global policy and regulatory topics covered at previous
Regional Conferences for Europe**

32nd ERC – 2-4 November 2020 ([ERC/20/REP](#)):

1. Sustainable food systems and healthy diets in Europe and Central Asia
2. Solutions for Youth, Employment and Developing Rural Areas in relation to the United Nations Decade of Family Farming

31st ERC - Voronezh, Russian Federation, 16–18 May 2018 ([ERC/18/REP](#)):

1. Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems in Europe and Central Asia in a Changing Climate
2. E-agriculture: the Use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for the Development of Sustainable and Inclusive Food Systems and Trade Integration

30th ERC - Antalya, Turkey, 4–6 May 2016 ([ERC/16/REP](#)):

1. The Sustainable Development Goals and their implications for agriculture and rural development in Europe and Central Asia region
2. Pulses for improving balanced nutrition and healthy food systems in Europe and Central Asia - International Year of Pulses 2016

29th ERC - Bucharest, Romania, 1–4 April 2014 ([ERC/14/REP](#)):

1. Food Losses and Waste in Europe and Central Asia
2. International Year of Family Farming (IYFF) in Europe and Central Asia

28th ERC - Baku, Azerbaijan, 16–20 April 2012 ([ERC/12/REP](#)):

1. Policies for Food Security in the Region: Challenges and Perspectives – Food outlook towards 2050

27th ERC - Yerevan, Armenia, 13–14 May 2010 ([ERC/10/REP](#)):

1. Policy response to challenges in agriculture and rural development in the Europe and Central Asia Region: sharing experience and enhancing cooperation in the Region

26th ERC - Innsbruck, Austria, 26–27 June 2008 ([ERC/08/REP](#)):

1. FAO and adaptation to climate change in the European region
2. Promotion of traditional regional agricultural and food products: A further step towards sustainable rural development



25th ERC - Riga, Latvia, 8–9 June 2006 ([ERC/06/REP](#)):

1. Contribution of rural development in meeting the World Food Summit (WFS)/Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the Region
2. The view of the European Region on the role of FAO as provider of global public goods
3. Strengthening Regional Cooperation and assisting countries in controlling Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in Europe, including CIS countries

24th ERC - Montpellier, France, 5–7 May 2004 ([ERC/04/REP](#)):

1. Food Safety and Quality in Europe: Aspects concerning in particular quality, nutritional balance, the importance of agricultural land and cultural heritage (“terroirs”)
2. Agricultural Research: its role and contribution to sustainable rural development
3. Major European Programmes, Initiatives and Fora on Agricultural Research
4. Review of the State of Food and Agriculture in the Region: Focus on Rural Poverty