



Informal Consultation for Europe and Central Asia 16–17 May 2019, Budapest, Hungary

Background Note

Session 6

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

1. The Thirty-second Regional Conference for Europe (ERC) will be held from 5 to 7 May 2020. The purpose of this paper is to obtain input from the Members for preparing the draft provisional agenda for the ERC.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. 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. One of these items is the Ministerial round table. The Europe Regional Group (ERG), at its expanded meeting on 28 March 2019, to which Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan were also invited, discussed a long list of potential topics for the Agenda of the Thirty-second Session of the ERC. Following the meeting, additional proposals were collected from Members during April. Based on the received input and taking note of the topics covered at previous ERCs (Annex 1), the Recommendations of the previous three ERCs (Annex 2), and the collected long list of proposals (Annex 3), the ERC Secretariat prepared the below shortlist of the proposed topics for this part of the Agenda. Members are invited to discuss the shortlisted topics and provide their feedback for this part of the agenda, with special emphasis on the Ministerial round table.

Sustainable consumption and healthy diets in Europe and Central Asia

The need to shift to more sustainable diets and food systems is increasingly evident, but achieving these goals is certainly not simple. According to FAO's definition, the sustainability of diets goes beyond nutrition and the environment to include economic and sociocultural dimensions. The preservation of biodiversity, also, is a key factor in developing sustainable food and agriculture; biodiversity influences food security, dietary health and livelihood sustainability. Increases in obesity and its related impacts, such as non-communicable diseases, also present challenges for the Europe and Central Asia region as it works on transforming the food system to produce, process and consume food in a sustainable way, minimizing the carbon footprint.

Within this topic, the Secretariat would outline the status of this complexity and the related challenges, taking into consideration the universality of the Sustainable Development Goals and SDG 2 and SDG 12 in particular. Elements to be considered in this context are different aspects along the food systems, such as nutrition-sensitive agriculture, nutrition-sensitive social protection, and biodiversity. As contributions to solutions, the topic also may include issues of urban agriculture and urban forestry. The background document would outline policy recommendations in addressing the issue.

It would be expected that the Members would review the recommendations and provide their positions, especially with regard to achieving SDG 2 and SDG 12.



United Nations Decade of Family Farming: Solutions for youth, employment and developing rural areas

Rural areas in Europe and Central Asia face multiple challenges, taking into consideration the small farm structure in many countries of the region. Poverty in rural areas has been decreasing over the years, but this trend has slowed and is currently stagnating. Rural poverty has a strong gender dimension; women have less access to land, economic resources, technology, knowledge and extension services, and thus they have limited opportunities for employment and income. Additionally, youth often do not find adequate living and employment conditions in rural areas, thus resulting in outmigration as they seek those opportunities elsewhere.

As there are many concurrent and interconnected development constraints for rural areas, it is essential to address these issues in a holistic and integrated manner. One key goal is to maintain rural areas as a space for providing livelihoods attractive to young people, helping them see their futures in rural areas instead of migrating elsewhere. It also is important to attract investment to agriculture and to support the diversification of the rural economy, leaving no one behind.

Keys to supporting rural development and reverting the trend of outmigration include the creation of employment and alternative income opportunities, support for the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (VGGT), Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems (RAI), and territorial approaches.

The Secretariat would present within this topic an overview of the challenges and trends regarding the situation related to smallholders, with a specific focus on rural youth, in addition to touching on investment needs for rural areas and discussing policy options to revert the trend and provide solutions.

The Members would be requested to share their views and to exchange experiences to support investment in rural youth.

Investing in the development of sustainable value chains: Aspects of plant and animal health and food safety in Europe and Central Asia

Biodiversity is a key aspect of life on earth. Plant resources help stabilize the climate and are a primary source of income for nearly half of the Earth's population. Countries trade plants and plant products to support economic development and assure food security.

The rearing of animals and the production of livestock are important for nutrition, livelihoods and incomes, and thus they contribute in important ways to food security in the region.

Plant and animal pests continue to threaten agriculture and food systems in Europe and Central Asia. Both aspects have been discussed at the European Commission on Agriculture in 2017 and in 2019. In addition to their direct negative effects on plant and animal health, pests and diseases or their treatment may present problems within the food chains, affecting the safety of our food supply. Unsafe food has negative consequences for consumer health and socio-economic development.

In the background paper for this topic, the Secretariat would present the current challenges and priorities in this area, with a focus on policy recommendations and actions for the improvement of sustainable value chains.

The Members would be expected to review the recommendations and present their views and actions on how to increase sustainability and address the issues of plant and animal health and food safety risks in Europe and Central Asia.

5. 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.

6. Other Matters (iv): The FAO Council, at its 151st session in March 2015, in reviewing the document "Assessment of FAO Governance Reforms (C2015/26 Rev.1)," endorsed the suggestion "that the priorities identified by the regional technical commissions on forests and fisheries could be included as an integral part of the Regional Conference reports to Council as regard priorities for the work of the Organization in each region," noting, however, that caution needs to be exercised to avoid duplication of work, as the



priorities of the regional technical commissions are already reflected in the reports of the Technical Committees. In line with this, besides the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA), the other two regional article VI bodies – the European Forestry Commission (EFC) and the European Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Advisory Commission (EIFAAC) – also started reporting to the ERC from the Thirtieth ERC Session. From the regional article XIV bodies, the Central Asian and Caucasus Regional Fisheries and Aquaculture Commission (CACFish) decided at its Fifth session, held 10–12 Oct 2016, to 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.

7. 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**

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

Recommendations of previous three Regional Conferences for Europe

Thirty-first Regional Conference for Europe

Ministerial Round Table: Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems in Europe and Central Asia in a Changing Climate

- requested that FAO i) support a food systems approach in rural and urban policies and planning; ii) incorporate agroecological approaches and diversification into the three Regional Initiatives; and iii) further develop its work on agroecology, for example in the context of the United Nations Decade of Family Farming (2019–2028) and the Scaling up Agroecology Initiative, discussing this in FAO’s technical and governing bodies;
- requested FAO to take the lead to facilitate, in collaboration with other relevant actors the development of methodologies to measure sustainability performance of all agriculture and food systems; and
- highlighted the potential of agroecological approaches, in particular for smallholders and family farmers, to accelerate the transition to sustainable agriculture and food systems and called on governments to promote such agroecological and other sustainable agricultural approaches as befits their national contexts;
- emphasized the need for research and quality data on agroecological and other sustainable agricultural approaches;
- emphasized the need for special attention to be given to women and youth, especially with regard to access to resources and innovation.

E-agriculture: the Use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for the Development of Sustainable and Inclusive Food Systems and Trade Integration

- highlighted the importance of ensuring the largest benefits and opportunities of e-agriculture by addressing geographical disparities in remote areas, by bridging gender and generational gaps, and by supporting digital literacy for social inclusion;
- highlighted the importance of youth in e-agriculture and of empowering them to develop e-agriculture solutions, also as a means of addressing rural youth employment;
- recommended enhanced participation in e-agriculture of the private sector, including small and medium-sized enterprises, and consumers to ensure efficient and sustainable food systems;
- requested that FAO:
 - continue to assist countries in Europe and Central Asia in transforming their agricultural sectors and leveraging the livelihoods of farmers, both women and men, through e-agriculture and to foster its responsible use through the three Regional Initiatives;
 - collect and analyse good practices, tools and mechanisms in e-agriculture for knowledge sharing and provide policy advice and capacity development to maximize benefits and minimize risks;
 - develop, in collaboration with national, regional and international partners, an inclusive capacity-development framework and strategy in e-agriculture; and
 - provide a neutral regional platform on which to share knowledge and support the implementation of national e-agriculture strategies for countries in Europe and Central Asia.



Results and Priorities for FAO in the Region

- stressed the importance of promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment; and
- requested FAO to:
 - continue the implementation of the two Regional Initiatives (RI1) “Empowering smallholders and family farms for improved rural livelihoods and poverty reduction” and (RI2) “Improving agrifood trade and market integration” and their use as a programmatic approach to ensure coherence and integrated support of the country programme implementation in support of achieving the SDGs;
 - link RI1 with the United Nations Decade of Family Farming 2019–2028;
 - implement the third Regional Initiative “Sustainable natural resource management under a changing climate” (RI3) and ensure the linkage between RI1 and RI3 regarding sustainable agriculture and food systems;
 - support Members in applying Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (VGGT), Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food (RTF) and Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems (RAI), and ensure that the cross-cutting issues of gender, governance, climate change and nutrition are addressed; and
 - continue to support countries in the design and implementation of trade-related policies and strategies in line with World Trade Organization agreements, with a neutral and balanced approach.

Report from the Outcome of the Debate of the 40th Session of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA)

- endorsed the report and recommendations from the 40th Session of the ECA; and
 - ECA requests FAO to support capacity development measures for addressing prevention and control measures of Transboundary Animal Diseases (TADs), with particular reference to the WTO SPS agreement.
 - ECA requests FAO to build on the example of the EuFMD Commission in developing regional approaches to surveillance, diagnosis and control of other emerging TADs
 - ECA requests FAO to reinforce AMR regional interventions through new dedicated results under the new 2018-2019 work plans for REU's Strategic Programme of Work, including its regional initiatives
 - ECA requests FAO to support member countries in developing a multisectoral approach and in implementing national action plans on AMR
 - ECA requests FAO to create mechanisms and models of cooperation between animal production, pharmaceutical companies, the animal feed sector and farmer organizations to address AMR issues
 - called upon FAO to further promote the prudent and responsible use of antimicrobials, the monitoring of such use, and the surveillance of antimicrobial resistance and stressed the need to phase out the use of antibiotics as growth promoters.
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Thirtieth Regional Conference for Europe

Ministerial Round Table: The Sustainable Development Goals and their implications for agriculture and rural development in Europe and Central Asia region

- Urged the involvement and consideration of women and youth in the implementation of the SDGs. (para. 16g)
- Highlighted the importance of tackling food losses and waste as a contribution to sustainable development. Emphasized trade as an important means to implement the 2030 Agenda. (para. 16i)
- Highlighted the important role of FAO's normative work, including in contributing to a common understanding of sustainable agriculture. (para. 16j)

Pulses for improving balanced nutrition and healthy food systems in Europe and Central Asia - International Year of Pulses 2016

- Encouraged Members and FAO to continue raising public awareness on the importance of pulses for food security and nutrition, including during the International Year of Pulses 2016. (para. 18e)

Results from the implementation of the Programme of Work and Budget 2014-15 and update on the implementation of the PWB 2016-17

- Underlined the importance of FAO demonstrating commitment in implementing Conference Resolution 4/2015 on antimicrobial resistance (AMR). (para. 22d)

Priorities for FAO's work in the Europe and Central Asia region

- Underlined the importance of taking into consideration the trends and roles of the fisheries and forestry sectors, particularly their contribution to sustainable management of natural resources and the achievement of the SDGs. (para. 24f)
- Highlighted that attention should continue to be given to addressing gender equality and women's empowerment, young farmers and youth employment, and transboundary animal and plant pests and diseases, and to promoting the use of CFS and FAO voluntary guidelines. (para. 24g)

Report from the outcome of the debate of the 39th Session of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA)

- Acknowledged the main recommendations of the report, namely on a) innovation in family farming, b) combating land degradation for food security, c) gender sensitive analysis of social protection programmes, d) addressing the social and economic burden of malnutrition (para. 26a) Encouraged FAO to maximize synergies by collaborating with other relevant international organizations in the region in addressing the social and economic burden of malnutrition (para. 26d)

Report from the outcome of the debate of the joint session of the 38th European Forestry Commission (EFC) and the 73rd UNECE Committee on Forest and the Forest Industry

- Highlighted the importance of boreal forests and their role in regulating global climate, and urged FAO to explore further possibilities for enhancing its work on boreal forests. (para. 30d)

Twenty-ninth Regional Conference for Europe

Ministerial Round Table - Food Losses and Waste in Europe and Central Asia

- stressed that the reduction of food losses and waste should be embedded in the broader concept of promoting sustainable food systems, which encompasses sustainable food production on the one hand, and sustainable diets and consumption on the other, in multi-sectoral approaches and initiatives (para. 23d);
- requested that FAO take the lead in sharing knowledge, information and best practices to reduce food losses and waste (para. 23m);
- endorsed that FAO should continue to address gaps in availability of data and statistics on food losses and waste, including at the small scale farm level in the countries of the Region and assist member countries in developing capacities for value chain analysis with particular attention on food losses and waste (para. 23n);
- endorsed that FAO, in cooperation with donors, continues to support member countries in their effort to include small farmers in value chains in an effort to reduce food losses (para. 23o).

Priorities for FAO Activities in the Region

- called on FAO to concentrate on the identified focus countries and ensure the efficient use of resources by working together with other organizations, civil society and building public private partnerships (para. 33.j);
- requested that FAO addresses food security more prominently, including food security assessments, in line with the VGGT (para. 33.k).
- stressed the importance of capacity development of all actors along the value chain, including vulnerable groups, women and rural youth, and making documents and material available in the Russian language (para 33 l)



Annex 3

Long list of collected proposals for the Agenda of the Thirty-second Regional Conference for Europe

Food security and nutrition

- The burden of overweight, obesity and non-communicable diseases; understanding and addressing the threats (Hunger Eradication, Food Security and Nutrition Programme Management Team, SP1).
- More than half of the population is overweight or obese in many European countries, including in countries in Central and Eastern Europe. The resulting economic and social costs – in terms of foregone productivity and psychological issues and also in coping with health implications like diabetes and cardiovascular diseases – are huge. Reshaping food and agricultural systems from farm to fork to supply nutritious food and promote healthy diets is critical to reduce these costs and address increasing threats.
- United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition and Follow-up to the Second International Conference on Nutrition (Nutrition and Food Systems Division, ESN).
- The Urban Food Agenda. Recognizing the importance of the rural–urban continuum in facilitating the transformation towards more sustainable food systems, an item would provide the opportunity to discuss progress against the FAO Framework for the Urban Food Agenda launched by the Director-General in March 2019 (Food Systems Programme Management Team, SP4).
- New challenges and opportunities for food safety. This would build on the 2019 global conference that took place in Addis Ababa in February, taking a regional look at the challenges, opportunities and strategies to meet the SDGs (SP4).
- Food loss and waste. Recognizing the topic was on the agenda in 2014, and we believe that there is a strong case for including it again in 2020, the rationale being the significant discussion (and interest) during the 2018 ERC, both during the specific side event and plenary, and the many activities that have taken place since 2014 both globally (food loss and waste is the topic of the 2019 State of Food and Agriculture publication) and in the region and the fact that having an item on the agenda would provide an opportunity for a validation of the draft codes of conduct on food loss and food waste to be tabled for discussion at the Committee on Agriculture meeting in September 2020 (SP4).
- Revised Vision and Strategy for FAO’s Work on Nutrition (outline) (ESN).
- The proposed biennial topic for 2020–2021 (“Promoting healthy diets and the prevention of obesity”) should be adapted to the European position presented in the Council. We would like to support the proposal of Italy and the European Union to use “Food systems promoting healthy diets and the prevention of obesity.”

Climate Change



- Supporting the integration of international country commitments – in other words, FAO’s work to align climate change (Paris Agreement), disaster risk reduction (Sendai Framework) and the SDGs (Sustainable Agriculture Programme Management Team, SP2).

Youth and Gender

- The FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia youth strategy, highlighting the main findings of the assessments undertaken and main findings of work that needs to be done (SP2).
- The empowerment of youth and women is closely linked to rural development and is a key priority in supporting smallholders and family farms in the region (Rural Poverty Reduction Programme Management Team, SP3).

Forestry; Fisheries and Aquaculture; Rural Development

- Implementing the International Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030 (Land and Water Division, CBL).
- Access to land/land tenure, noting that the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia regional land consolidation work is quite developed in a number of countries. This work is an important part of support to the implementation, at both regional and country levels, of the VGGT, and it has a strong focus on achieving the SDGs, for example targets 2.4, 1.4 and 5.a (SP3).
- Urban forestry.
- Biodiversity.
- Water Assessment and Productivity for Food and Agriculture (CBL).
- Territorial development/integrated community development, noting that (as in the case of land consolidation) this work is a priority for many of the countries in the region. This aligns very closely to the joint work of SP2 and SP3 and supports Regional Initiative 1 and Regional Initiative 3 (SP3).

Agriculture

- Promoting nutrition-sensitive smallholder agriculture and food systems; social and economic benefits and trade-offs (SP1).
- Nutrition-sensitive food systems require the proper identification of nutrition challenges in the society and the economy. Accordingly, and in order to reshape food systems, it is necessary to jointly analyse and assess all aspects of the food system, with a focus on improving the supply of nutritious foods and promoting healthy diets. For smallholder farms, this could imply additional investments to build capacities for participating in such systems in a profitable way.
- The need to reform agricultural extension services and focus more explicitly on the needs of smallholders is a key finding arising from the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia smallholder country studies, and it links to the introduction of agroecology as a new priority for sustainable production in small farms (SP3).
- Food security and nutrition and sustainable agriculture, including forestry and fisheries and the bioeconomy (SP1).



- It is necessary to transform food systems in order to produce, process and consume food in a sustainable way while using optimally renewable and biological resources. This transformation needs to produce more food while at the same time reducing food losses and waste, and it needs to minimize the use of chemical inputs, maximize the benefits from ecosystem services, and limit greenhouse gas emissions and other environmental impacts while increasing not only the economic but also the social value of food.
- Enhancing national agricultural innovation systems in Europe and Central Asia to mitigate internal and international migration, boost rural development, and address the complex challenges of agrifood systems towards achieving the SDGs.
- Sustainable Soil Management (CBL).
- Implementation of the UN Decade of Family Farming at the regional level, focusing on the development of a regional programme built on results and lesson learned from the Regional Initiatives and on the need for strengthening the political will and mobilizing resources from governments at the Regional Conference in 2020.
- Strategies to diversify cropping systems, through agroecological approaches, to increase production efficiencies and improve ecosystem services (including pollinators and soil health).

Antimicrobial resistance, transboundary animal diseases and plant health

- The International Year of Plant Health 2020 (IYPH 2020) and the consistency of the work of the European Commission on Agriculture and the Regional Conference for Europe. Plant health is becoming an increasingly critical issue in the context of climate change, and many new pests threaten Europe. The theme could be discussed more broadly under the One Health approach.
- Transboundary animal disease threats and the Mediterranean Animal Health Network (REMESA).
- Antimicrobial resistance and mitigating the threat in agriculture: Everyone is responsible.
- The Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) Multi-Partner Trust Fund, a One Health approach to combatting the global threat of AMR. This fund, established by FAO, the World Organisation for Animal Health and the World Health Organization, calls for resources for a ten-year period to counter the global threat of antimicrobial resistance in support of achieving the SDGs (TC-ADG).

Other

- Maybe GCF and GEF 7 reporting on the current status and main issues regarding accessing such funds for governments (SP2).
- Session on United Nations reforms and how they affect the way FAO operates at the country level (SP2).
- Europe Regional Group (ERG) members are asked to prepare a self-assessment of each of our progress with SDG 2. The objective would be to demonstrate our commitment to the SDGs and to our mutual accountability for achieving them and set a good example. It would also send a signal on the importance of FAO's statistical work.