

Informal Consultation for Europe and Central Asia

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Background Note

Session 5

Review the progress on FAO's support to SDG nationalization and monitoring in the region

1. Background and objectives

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, underpinned by the 17 aspirational objectives in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has reached its fourth year of implementation. It sets forth a transformational and ambitious plan to guide the global approach to sustainable development in its three dimensions, through the united effort of all countries and all stakeholders.

Sustainable food and agriculture are critically important for the achievement of the SDGs by simultaneously tackling the root causes of poverty and hunger, empowering rural actors and thus enabling an inclusive society that leaves no one behind, and promoting the sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems.

At the Thirty-first Session of the Regional Conference for Europe (May 2018), Member States were informed about the main support provided by FAO in the European and Central Asia Region on SDG achievement, through an FAO information note.¹

Following up on that information note, this paper presents the progress of FAO's support to SDG nationalization and monitoring in the region, highlighting key results, opportunities, challenges and lessons learned.

The remainder of the document is organized into the following sections:

- Section 2 elaborates on the regional trends related to SDG 2.²
- Sections 3 and 4 present FAO's support on the achievement of the SDGs at the country and regional levels.
- The document concludes, in Section 5, with some points of consideration regarding the way forward.

Member States are encouraged to provide feedback on the SDG support provided by FAO in the region, to share views on recent developments in SDG implementation, and to suggest any further support needed.

¹ ERC/18/INF/11

² SDG target 2.1 (end hunger and ensure access to food) and SDG target 2.2 (end all forms of malnutrition). For a full list of the SDGs, visit <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>.



2. Regional trends related to SDG target 2.1 (end hunger and ensure access to food) and SDG target 2.2 (end all forms of malnutrition)

More than 14 million adults and some 4.7 million children in Europe and Central Asia suffer from severe food insecurity, as defined by the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES).³

Based on FIES data, FAO estimates that some 2.1 percent of the region's total population of nearly one billion were exposed to severe food insecurity in 2015–2017. While this percentage is far lower than the world average of 9.2 percent, it is still cause for concern, especially in those countries with persisting hunger and malnutrition.

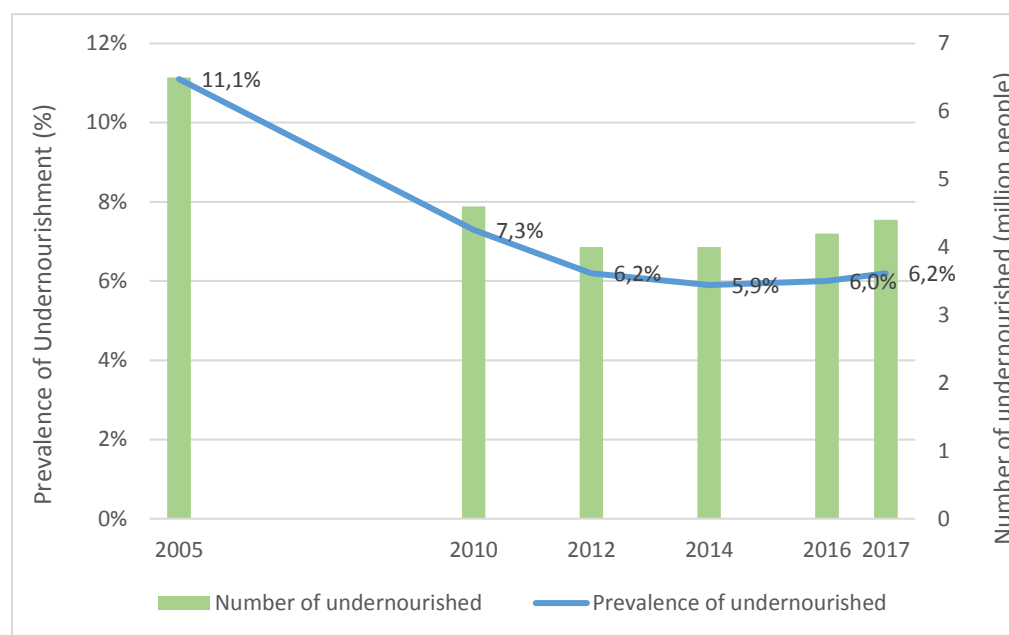
In recent decades, the region as a whole has achieved significant progress in fighting food insecurity; however, since 2014, the decreasing trend of the prevalence of undernourishment (PoU) has been stagnating at 6 percent, and in 2016 and 2017 the number of undernourished people in absolute terms in Central Asia has been slowly growing.

Initial findings across the region show inequality between women and men in the prevalence of severe food insecurity. In the countries of the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the European Commonwealth of Independent States, adult women were found to have a higher rate of severe food insecurity than men. This signals more fundamental gender inequalities in societies, reflected in access to food as well as in food utilization.

Moreover, the growing levels of obesity and overweight in the region are cause for serious concern. A recent World Health Organization analysis covering the 2000–2016 period shows a continuous increase in the prevalence of obesity among adults in all subregions of Europe and Central Asia. In 2016, one-fourth of adults in Europe (EU-28 and European CIS) were obese. These trends and related public health implications and costs underscore a need for adequate policy measures, underpinned by regular data collection and analysis to track progress and address shortcomings.

³ Source: FAO's 2018 Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia, available at <http://www.fao.org/3/CA2703EN/CA2703EN.pdf>.

PREVALENCE OF UNDERNOURISHMENT AND NUMBER OF UNDERNOURISHED PEOPLE (POU, SDG INDICATOR 2.1.1) IN CENTRAL ASIA, 2005–2017

SOURCE: FAO (2018).⁴

3. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals at country level

Key results of the SDG support provided at country level by the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia include: 1) increased awareness among the ministries of agriculture and other relevant stakeholders and cross-sectoral discussions on SDG targets and indicators related to the agricultural sector, in line with the FAO SDG guidelines “Transforming food and agriculture to achieve the SDGs”;⁵ 2) development of sectoral baseline reports on the agricultural and rural sector and SDG action plans⁶ and integration of nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and SDGs in national frameworks; 3) increased capacities of national stakeholders on the 21 SDG indicators under FAO custodianship;⁷ 4) dialogue with non-state actors enhanced for the acceleration of SDG achievement;⁸ 5) contribution to the Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support (MAPS) missions;⁹ and 6) support to the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) within the United Nations Country Teams.

⁴ Source: FAO’s 2018 Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia, available at <http://www.fao.org/3/CA2703EN/CA2703EN.pdf>.

⁵ Country coverage: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan (planned), Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Turkey, Ukraine (planned) and Uzbekistan. FAO publication available at <http://www.fao.org/3/I9900EN/i9900en.pdf>.

⁶ Country coverage: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Turkey, Ukraine (planned). Sectoral baseline reports have been produced to map the coverage and gaps of relevant SDGs in policies and statistical frameworks.

⁷ Country coverage: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkey and Ukraine.

⁸ In Albania, a “Private sector sensitization workshop: assessing its contribution to SDG implementation” was co-organized by FAO within the framework of the MAPS mission (April 2018). In Armenia and Georgia, FAO undertook a study with farmers’ associations in the dairy sector in the framework of SDG implementation.

⁹ Countries in which FAO contributed/participated are: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. MAPS missions are technical United Nations missions, led by the United



Countries in the region have taken a number of steps to land the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the national level. In particular, they are: 1) establishing SDG national councils (multi-stakeholder institutional mechanisms responsible for coordinating SDG implementation and ensuring horizontal and vertical policy coherence); 2) setting their national SDG targets and indicators; 3) aligning the policy, statistical and budgetary frameworks with the SDGs; and 4) monitoring and reporting their progress on the Agenda, including through the VNRs.

SDG national councils are critical means of enabling the inter-ministerial and multi-stakeholder dialogue needed for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, considering the importance of breaking down silos and exploring sectoral synergies and trade-offs for the successful implementation of the SDGs.¹⁰ In this context, as stated by Ms. Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, at the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (Geneva, March 2019), the region is still far behind in “break[ing] down the silos that constrain policy action across sectoral lines,” as “we have not yet fully transitioned from the Millennium Development Goals into the era of the SDGs.”

While the institutional SDG frameworks are in place, there is still a long way to go in terms of integrated policy dialogue and innovative budgeting and financing for integrated implementation of the SDGs.¹¹ The concepts of policy integration, the elimination of silos and the overall transformational change foreseen by the 2030 Agenda seem not to be yet fully grasped by national stakeholders. Also, awareness of the key role of food and agriculture for the achievement of the SDGs needs to continue to be built among relevant stakeholders, including among agricultural non-state actors.

The FAO SDG guidelines “Transforming food and agriculture to achieve the SDGs”¹² represent a useful tool to promote policy integration and to strengthen the national focus on sustainable food and agricultural as key to achieve a broad range of SDG targets. It is necessary to further build on these guidelines and operationalize them at the country level, as well as to build partnerships and alliances that allow stakeholders to work in synergy for equal cross-sector impacts.

Because most countries’ current national strategies related to food and agriculture end in 2020, countries are strongly encouraged to use this opportunity to integrate the SDGs in the formulation of new national policies to ensure their contributions to the 2030 Agenda and to identify specific policy measures needed to address the SDG national targets. Improved dialogue across sectors is also needed to ensure support to comprehensive approaches.

Nations Development Programme, that are taking place in several countries upon the request of each country’s government and UN Resident Coordinator. The objective is to assess the process of SDGs nationalization/implementation and to provide recommendations on the way forward. MAPS missions are undertaken as part of the more general UN common approach Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support (MAPS), adopted in 2015 to support SDG implementation at the country level. For more information, see <https://www.un.org/ecosoc/sites/www.un.org.ecosoc/files/files/en/qcpr/doco-summary-brief-on-maps-march2016.pdf>.

¹⁰ FAO is working on the development of specific tools for assessing synergies and trade-offs in project development, policy, and national and local implementation.

¹¹ Even if institutional and cross-cutting programming has been established, budgets still remain linear, with limited innovation in budgeting against SDGs, which requires an equally integrated management of funds. Even when extra budgetary resources are available, they tend to be sectoral, more often subsectoral, with strong focus on monitoring, not translating into integrated implementation across sectors and SDGs.

¹² FAO publication available at <http://www.fao.org/3/I9900EN/i9900en.pdf>.



Regarding statistical support, FAO has alerted countries of the importance of monitoring SDG progress through the globally agreed-upon set of SDG indicators, which should be produced irrespective of whether or not corresponding targets are included in country policy priorities. This is because:

- a) even targets that are not prioritized at the policy level should be monitored; and
- b) all countries need to be present in the global monitoring picture, based on their commitment on the 2030 Agenda.

Many countries in the region are requesting methodological support on the indicators under FAO custodianship, and steps are being taken in this regard.

Lastly, in terms of reporting, a number of countries in the region already have submitted their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) to the High-Level Political Forum 2019.¹³ Despite requiring significant preparation, VNRs can generate broad public debate and encourage discussions among different groups. They serve to increase awareness, identify priorities and undertake new commitments. They can spur roadmaps for implementation that are truly national and participatory, going beyond government-led actions. VNRs provide an opportunity to examine the extent to which implementation either takes place under sectoral programmes or has become truly integrated. The broad mobilization of multiple actors contributes to developing a better understanding of the linkages among different SDGs so that this knowledge can be translated into more effective policy action.¹⁴

4. Supporting SDG achievement at the regional level

In line with the FAO corporate approach, as discussed in the Thirty-ninth Session and Fortieth Session of the FAO Conference¹⁵ and in close collaboration with FAO headquarters in Rome,¹⁶ the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia has strengthened the focus on the key role and contribution of sustainable food and agriculture to SDG achievement through its engagement in a number of regional forums and coordination mechanisms.

First, FAO is actively engaged with the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNDG) for Europe and Central Asia¹⁷ and the Issue-Based Coalitions (IBCs) on gender, health, monitoring and social protection. Established by the Europe and Central Asia Regional UNDG to provide advice and support to countries in SDG-implementation activities, the IBCs constitute a unique feature in the region. Through the

¹³ Some countries are reporting for the second time in a cycle of four years, showing high commitment towards the 2030 Agenda.

¹⁴ ECE/RFS/2019/2

¹⁵ Identifying sustainable zero hunger and malnutrition, achieving sustainable food and agriculture systems, sustainable management and use of resources and ecosystems (with special focus to small scale food producers, family farmers, rural women and youth) as priorities for FAO's engagement in the implementation, monitoring, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

¹⁶ FAO headquarters focal points on 2030 Agenda monitoring, implementation, and follow-up and review: respectively, the Chief Statistician's office; the Strategic Programme Leaders; and the Deputy Director-General, Climate and Natural Resources.

¹⁷ United Nations regional coordination mechanisms mandated to improve the effectiveness of UN development activities at the country level, within the framework of the 2030 Agenda.



IBC mechanism, FAO has sharpened the focus on food and agriculture as key to the achievement of SDG 2 and other related goals.¹⁸

Second, to ensure coverage and focus on food and agriculture as key to SDG achievement, FAO contributed to the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, led by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) in March 2019, to review and follow up on the SDG implementation progress in the region. With the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), FAO co-led a roundtable on SDG 10 (reduced inequalities) that served to spawn a discussion on income and socio-economic inequalities in rural areas and the need for an integrated approach to rural development.¹⁹

FAO also facilitated a case study on the Silviva competence centre, established in Switzerland to promote sustainability through environmental education, which contributed to the discussion on SDG 4 (quality education), and a case study from Tajikistan on strengthening climate action through access to international climate finance, which demonstrated the importance of ad hoc climate resources for the achievement of SDG 13 (climate action) and other climate-related targets across the SDGs.

Third, FAO is ensuring that food and agriculture perspectives are integrated in the discussions under the Istanbul Development Dialogues (IDD), the UNDP-led development forums held since 2015. This year's IDD (28–29 May) will be related to financing sustainable development, and FAO will advocate for responsible investment in agriculture, family farming and rural development as a key to contribute to the achievement of, *inter alia*, SDG 1 (no poverty) and 2 (zero hunger).

FAO in the region is also keen on facilitating partnerships among multiple actors within the framework of the 2030 Agenda, as these partnerships have been identified as a key mechanism for SDG implementation. In this context, FAO is collecting good examples of partnerships for SDG achievement related to sustainable food and agriculture from European Union countries, in order to share them with a wider audience. A regional, multi-stakeholder dialogue on partnerships for the SDGs will be held in the course of 2019.

In terms of regional monitoring of the SDGs, FAO contributes to the analysis of progress towards SDG 2 as presented in Section 2.²⁰ This analysis is a valuable tool to understand underlying causes, tracking trends and linkages with other development challenges, and it is being progressively used in SDG-related discussions at regional level.

The results and robust engagement have been made possible by the upfront internal effort undertaken to integrate the SDGs in the work of the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia at all levels. The regional SDG coordination team has been in place for two years to coordinate and oversee the overall SDG support. Furthermore, the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia has established a network of international and national experts supporting the work on SDG implementation and monitoring across the region. Considering the well-established SDG structure and the extensive SDG support provided in the

¹⁸ Including SDGs 1, 3, 5, 12, 13, 14 and 15.

¹⁹ The roundtable was titled “Bridging the Gap: Achieving Greater Income and Economic Equality.” FAO facilitated a case study titled “Supporting rural livelihoods by bridging the gap between policy and community level in Georgia,” presented by a representative from the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia.

²⁰ In 2018, it focused on “Migration, Gender and Youth: Linkages with Rural Development and Food Security in Europe and Central Asia.”



region, the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia is considered a forerunner – both in FAO and in the United Nations Country Teams – in the implementation of SDG support at regional and country levels.

The Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia is currently planning to undertake an evaluation of SDG support provided at the national level to take stock of progress and provide recommendations on the way forward, particularly on how to strengthen support to SDG policy integration and how to better mainstream SDG approach, targets and indicators in the work of the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, particularly at project level.

Lastly, the Regional Initiatives are key instruments to ensure support of FAO technical assistance at country level for the achievement of the SDGs. The nature of the Regional Initiatives as a programmatic umbrella and their cross-sectoral approach facilitate the integration of sustainable food and agriculture into national policies, with particular emphasis on cross-cutting and universally relevant issues such as governance, nutrition, climate change and gender, reflecting the universality of the SDGs. The Regional Initiatives have been fully aligned with the SDGs, promoting their achievement at country level.

5. The way forward and points of consideration

- Continue the analysis of the progress towards SDG targets 2.1 and 2.2 to inform policymaking processes and SDG-related discussions at the regional and national levels and to track progress and address shortcomings.
- At the national level, continue support for the raising of awareness on the SDGs, including with non-state actors, and facilitate inter-ministerial and multi-stakeholder dialogues on sustainable food and agriculture in order to facilitate synergies among stakeholders across sectors and ensure support to comprehensive approaches.
- Strengthen the focus on SDG national implementation, providing concrete approaches on integrated policies, through the implementation of the FAO SDG guidelines “Transforming food and agriculture to achieve the SDGs.”
- Continue to develop institutional capacities in the collection and analysis of SDG indicators, with a specific focus on data disaggregation.
- At the regional level, continue to strengthen the focus on the key role and contribution of sustainable food and agriculture to SDG achievement through engagement in regional forums and coordination mechanisms, including further increasing the collaboration with other United Nations entities and non-state actors.
- Consider the need for dedicated financial resources, including voluntary contributions, to ensure the continuity of FAO engagement and technical support to SDG implementation, monitoring, reporting, follow-up and review at regional and national levels.