

Informal Consultation for Europe and Central Asia
Budapest, 12–15 July 2021 (virtual event)
Minutes¹ by the FAO Regional Office for Europe
and Central Asia (REU) Secretariat

Introduction

The 2021 FAO Informal Consultation (IC) for Europe and Central Asia was held in a virtual format from 12 to 15 July. It brought together 35 Members from the region and ten non-state actors, including from civil society organizations (CSOs) and the private sector, resulting in a total of 106 participants.

Overall, 39 Members registered, out of which 19 European Union countries were present during the main session on Monday, 12 July. On Zoom, 100 participants were following the event, and YouTube² registered more than 800 clicks over time.

In line with the overall objective, the IC usually provides a platform for interactions among Members and non-state actors between sessions of the Regional Conference for Europe (ERC), with the next planned to take place in 2022. The 2021 IC is the eighth since 2010, thanks to the sponsorship and hosting of the Government of Hungary. However, this was the first time the IC was held in a virtual format organized in four half-day sessions. The week was framed by two sessions requiring senior officials' presence – the opening on Monday, 12 July, and a session on Thursday, 15 July, to discuss the results, revised regional priorities and the Regional Conference. The consultation consisted of sessions on country case studies under the region's key priorities and technical topics focusing on digitalization, One Health and nature-based solutions.

The main purposes of the Informal Consultation were:

1. facilitate an exchange of views among all Members of the Europe and Central Asia region; and
2. review the region's priorities for 2022–2025 in preparation for the 2022 Regional Conference.

The agenda, list of participants and session background notes are available at the event's website.³

Welcoming remarks, objectives

The meeting was opened by Mr Vladimir Rakhmanin, FAO Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for Europe and Central Asia; Mr Hans Hoogeveen, Independent Chairperson of the Council; Ms Iwona Krzeszewska, Chairperson of the Europe Regional Group and Deputy Permanent Representative of the Republic of Poland to FAO; and Mr David Bencsik, Deputy State Secretary for International Relations, Ministry of Agriculture of Hungary.

¹ Disclaimer: These minutes and notes have been prepared by the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) Secretariat and reflect the main points of Informal Consultation debates as presented and discussed during the sessions. They serve as *aide-mémoire* and are not intended to be considered as conclusions or decisions, taking the informal character of the meeting into consideration. They are not in any way formal statements or programme recommendations and are intended only as a *pro memoria* record of the Consultation.

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rBbwJs9Ld0c> (DAY 1), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xe9gylFXCk0> (DAY 2), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LdrUY0B9AjY> (DAY 3)

³ <http://www.fao.org/europe/events/detail-events/en/c/1393882/>

Mr Rakhmanin expressed his gratitude to the Government of Hungary for its continuous collaboration in organizing the Informal Consultations since their inception in 2010 and its overall support for the work of the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia. Mr Rakhmanin noted that these Consultations provide great opportunity for deeper and further interaction with FAO's partners on a two-year basis. He stressed that the informal character of the event was one of FAO's particular efforts in adjusting its working modalities for an integrated, horizontal approach, with a strong focus on discussions of working groups. Mr Rakhmanin highlighted key topics of the agenda, including reviewing the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, the implications on the work in the region of the new FAO Strategic Framework 2022–2031, and the preparations for the United Nations Food Systems Summit in September 2021 and the Pre-Summit in July 2021.

Mr Hans Hoogeveen, in his new role of the Independent Chairperson of the Council, expressed his gratitude to the organizers. He stressed the importance of strengthening efforts in light of increasing number of people suffering from hunger and malnutrition, which was aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The United Nations Agenda 2030 and new FAO Strategic Framework provide further ground for collaborative work to overcome the challenges. Mr Hoogeveen pointed out that the IC agenda for 2021 has all the ingredients of a successful consultation, including smallholders, nature-based solutions, One Health and digitalization, among others. He placed special emphasis on youth as a key driving force for innovation and change and highlighted the need for closer cooperation among governments, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and civil society.

Ms Krzeszewska welcomed the Informal Consultation as an excellent platform for Member Countries' interaction on the priorities and challenges in the region and expressed her gratitude to the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia. She mentioned that the Europe and Central Asia region faces similar challenges as FAO globally, having to deal with a high level of diversity among the countries related to economic and natural conditions, and also facing the current crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Ms Krzeszewska mentioned increasing human pressure on the environment. She also highlighted FAO's efforts in the region to support work related to food systems and nutrition, especially in line with the United Nations Food Systems Summit. She stressed the importance of the Informal Consultation as a platform to allow Members to discuss the work plan and budget for the next biennium as preparation for the next Regional Conference for Europe, and the necessity to work together to tackle existing and emerging problems.

Mr Bencsik welcomed the eighth Informal Consultation organized in Hungary since 2010 and emphasized its importance in exchanging views among Members. Mr Bencsik, as national convenor of Hungary, welcomed Hungary's cooperation with FAO in supporting the countries of the region and stressed the importance of the Informal Consultation to the preparation of the United Nations Food Systems Summit and to the European Commission on Agriculture meeting – which, it is hoped, will be held in person in Budapest in October this year. Considering the key topics of the Consultation, Mr Bencsik emphasized the role of family farming in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the sustainable management of natural resources, and the One Health approach in the region.

Session 1.2 - FAO Strategic Framework and Regional Priority Areas & Update on the Implementation of the PWB 2020–21⁴

Mr Raimund Jehle, Regional Programme Leader for Europe and Central Asia, introduced Session 1.2 highlighting the upcoming United Nations Food Systems Summit and its outcomes that are of importance when reviewing FAO regional priorities and Regional Initiatives. He stressed the need for consistency among the outcomes of the Food Systems Summit and the future priorities of FAO in the region.

Members underlined the role of innovation and technology, including digitalization, as key accelerators in the new FAO Strategic Framework and in the regional context. However, the introduction of innovations and technologies should consider the national and regional contexts and a comprehensive risk analysis, in light of differences in the levels of technical development. Furthermore, some members stressed the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and proposed a review of the modalities of the Technical Cooperation Programme facilitating further focus on investment and technology.

Regional Priority 1 - Formulating effective policies, promoting digital innovation and facilitating rural livelihoods, with emphasis on smallholders, women and youth

Session 2 – Case study presentation: Challenges and Solutions for Smallholders and Family Farms⁵

Main discussion points:

- The generational renewal⁶ and digitalization should be tackled jointly in rural areas. The issue of the digital divide can be solved only when rural infrastructure is developed.
- The role of cooperatives was emphasized in enhancing market access and local production/processing, including supporting collective actions and cooperation between farmers and businesses.
- Women's empowerment should stay an important element in FAO's and national strategic frameworks.
- Agroecology should be mainstreamed in national policy frameworks to enhance sustainable local production, including the development of food safety standards adapted to small-scale producers.
- Improving the connectivity of rural areas would better allow the participation of smallholders and rural youth in decision-making processes. This includes access to public infrastructure such as good internet connections, public roads, public transportation and other public services. Governments have an important role in creating an enabling environment for this.

⁴ Background documents: [IC/21/1a](#) - FAO new Strategic Framework and Regional Priority Areas; [IC/21/1b](#) - Update on the Implementation of the PWB 2020–21.

⁵ Background document: [IC/21/2](#) - Case study presentation: Challenges and Solutions for Smallholders and Family Farms in Armenia.

⁶ Generational renewal in a rural development context goes beyond a reduction in the average age of farmers in the European Union. It also is about empowering a new generation of highly qualified young farmers to bring the full benefits of technology so as to support sustainable farming practices in Europe.

- Develop knowledge and skills by providing training and farm advisory services targeting the needs of young farmers is of emphasis.
- Mainstream the human rights approach for smallholders, peasants and family farmers by fully considering the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP).
- Strengthen smallholders' access to markets, natural resources and finance needs.
- Promote financial support to young farmers and women farmers.
- Facilitation is needed to improve veterinary services and improve the access of smallholders and family farms to these services (e.g. to improve milk quality).
- Small-scale processing units could provide additional employment opportunities, reduce food loss and connect smallholders with schools and other public institutions by providing school meals.
- As part of the FAO Strategy for Private Sector Engagement 2021–2025, Members proposed to consider the possibility of creating a fund to respond to problems arising for farmers due to climate change, emergency situations, and price fluctuations in food markets. This may be an investment fund or agricultural development fund.

Session 3 - Closing the digital gap in Europe and Central Asia (technical discussion on digitalization and innovation)⁷

Main discussion points:

- Multiple challenges remain to closing the digital gap: poor quality, affordability and connectivity in rural areas; lack of awareness of the benefits of digital technologies; low investment and return on investment for smallholder farmers; lack of digital skills; and sometimes lack of national digital agriculture framework.
- Tailor digital technologies to the needs of smallholders and formulate national frameworks to reply to these needs. As such knowledge-sharing platforms are a common tool to connect smallholder farmers, public sectors, private sectors and civil society, the provision of information should be adapted to local context.
- One of the biggest concerns regarding digitalization from the smallholder perspective lies in data ownership and how the access of third parties to data will affect their position.
- Better life: People should be at the centre of food systems. From a social innovation perspective, small farmers should be organized to have better access to land, water, markets and the use of the tools – digital or not – that will help them.
- Better production: Digital platforms should be embedded into real-life processes, including interactions that happen between value chain stakeholders and farmers. Delivering platforms to smallholders without clear utilization or involvement in processes with other stakeholders often results in a lack of adoption.
- Better environment: Such approaches and methodologies as agroecological schools, Farmer Field Schools using digital tools for knowledge sharing, and farmer-to-farmer mentoring should be promoted and applied for smallholder farmers.
 - It was stressed that a lack of awareness of the potential benefits of digital technologies remains a barrier, as do a lack of confidence and trust in using these technologies and

⁷ Background document: [IC/21/3](#) - Closing the digital gap in Europe and Central Asia – Regional Priority 1.

- a lack of digital skills. Additionally, digital services available in rural areas need to be improved.
- It was highlighted that providing access to information and knowledge sharing platforms as common elements among the public, private and civil society sectors (e.g. the Georgia extension platform, the AGRIVI platform providing data analysis for decision-making, agroecology schools as knowledge centres and spaces to share with trust, respecting the ownership of knowledge and data) will be important.
 - It was emphasised that collaboration among all actors of the value chain, including smallholder farmers, can benefit all. Smallholders cannot afford to invest in the latest technologies as individuals; therefore, a well-organized collaboration can benefit both ends of the value chain.
 - Innovative solutions – such as a national agricultural extension platform that combines such e-services as e-governance, e-learning, e-commerce and e-health – to address farmers’ problems were highlighted. The platform supports record keeping, the planning of farmers’ trainings, operational statistical data accounting, and messaging. In addition, it provides news and information on projects and programmes to farmers. It also offers an e-library, where farmers can find information on national networks, successful projects and more. Furthermore, a digital animal identification and tracking system has been created. The next step is to provide a mobile application suitable to the rural population.
 - It was emphasized that the raising of awareness and the sharing of information and knowledge should combine all channels of communication, whether digital or face-to-face (schools, conferences, fairs, etc.).
 - It was underlined that individual capacity development is needed to ensure opportunities on digitalization for everyone, including women, youth and the poor.
 - The need of an enabling environment – in the context of promoting digitalization among smallholder farmers – was highlighted, taking into account the voice of the private sector and the civil society.
 - It was discussed that FAO should continue building a stipulated innovative business model that will consider the introduction of modern methods of geospatial modelling and analysis with the implementation of digital technologies for the development of scientifically based decisions to attract investments.
 - Members also supported a previously nominated initiative on the creation of a digital regional platform for the Central Asian countries and expressed their readiness to conduct some joint activities.

Regional Priority 2 – Food system transformation and support in exploring new markets through the alignment of trade, food safety and sanitary and phytosanitary policies to meet World Trade Organization commitments and promote value chain development and the One Health approach

Session 4 - Selection of value chains – country case study⁸

Main discussion points:

- Civil society, the private sector and the public sector highlighted the importance of transforming food systems to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

⁸ Background document: [IC/21/4](#) – Country Case Study for Priority 2: Value Chain Selection (VCS) in Ukraine.



- Civil society organizations emphasized the need to respect, protect and fulfil human rights obligations, notably the right to adequate food in the context of national food security, and in particular the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants. They also emphasized the need to strengthen local food systems as a strategy to protect consumers from events (like pandemics) that disrupt regional and global food systems. Different forms of territorial markets are available for creating agro-ecological value chains that help countries become more food self-sufficient. Local solidarity partnerships among producers and consumers, local participatory certification schemes, and school meals, all of which are supported or driven by local authorities, illustrate how local value chains can contribute to improving food security and nutrition. In addition, studies are available that show that food loss and waste can be reduced through these local schemes to 6 percent. They also emphasized the need to explore the contribution of territorial and local markets that are based on small scale agriculture *vis-à-vis* large-scale and industrialized agriculture.
- The private sector emphasized that while economic and financial values play an important role, the ultimate drivers of food systems transformation are consumer values. In this sense, it is imperative to understand consumer preferences and behaviors and to pass this information upstream in the supply chain. Efforts may be required to change consumer values that play against the achievement of the SDGs.
- Governments presented a balanced approach that recognized the need to address all three value dimensions – social, economic and environmental – if food systems transformation is expected to contribute to the SDGs. In the context of uncertainty, due to the lack of data for monitoring progress in the SDGs, they highlighted the importance of making use of existing ex-ante risk analyses and forecasting as powerful tools to guide action in the field. Numerous scientific community networks and others that include international organizations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development provide substantial information and analyses for this purpose. They also commended FAO efforts in helping countries in the region understand and comply with World Trade Organization trade agreements, develop effective national agrifood trade policies, and facilitate the development of new trade agreements in the region, where the European Union may play a fundamental role.
- All emphasized the difficulties of tracking SDGs targets and measuring progress due to a lack of data. Countries should be supported in the collection of SDG data, with efforts focused on those SDGs that make a direct contribution to food systems transformation. Efforts should take into consideration existing initiatives, for example the Harmonized Indicators for Private Sector Operations.
- All recognized the need to take advantage of the upcoming Food Systems Summit as a playfield where these perspectives should be addressed.
- Two key innovations with high potential to shape value chain transformation that were mentioned are digitalization and participation in decision-making processes. These improve information sharing and knowledge, both of which are fundamental for shaping food systems transformations. Remote sessions of CODEX Alimentarius were highlighted as a recent example of how technology and participation improve access to markets.
- Finally, participants recognized that all the issues mentioned can be clearly linked to the “farm to fork” strategy of the European Union.

Session 6 – Technical discussion on One Health in Europe and Central Asia⁹

Main discussion points:

- The structure of certain farming sectors can create challenges in applying the One Health approach. Small-scale production is scattered, and farmers do not have same access to veterinary and other support services.
- To overcome these challenges, it is essential to promote smallholders' access to knowledge, laboratory services and consultancy about One Health-related risks and prevention measures.
- FAO should act as an intermediary between science and government to ensure that traditional knowledge on animal production is maintained and more focus is given to this area through participatory approaches.
- Legislation is not harmonized adequately among the animal health, human health and environmental health sectors, thus creating inefficiency during activities.
- Financing and cost sharing when dealing with One Health issues is more difficult when the animal health, human health and environmental health sectors are located in different administrations rather than being under the same administration.
- Women, who are more traditionally caretakers of animals, are more exposed to diseases that jump from livestock to humans (zoonotic diseases) due to their involvement in livestock production.
- The resilience of the poor to extreme events and disasters such as transboundary animal diseases (TADs) could be measured by:
 - soft approaches to evaluate such outcomes as increased numbers of family farms and increased profit per family farm;
 - improved market access for smallholders, as a key measurement; and
 - increased number of organizations empowering smallholders.
- Farmers in some cases are afraid to report about zoonotic animal disease due to fear or lack of understanding.
- FAO should help with promoting a “food safety net” to ensure that people are free from hunger.
- The main expectations from FAO on the One Health approach discussed were:
 - facilitate sharing experiences within the One Health initiative and good practices among Members;
 - provide policy advice to improve the alignment of national legislations with One Health concepts;
 - support improving the diagnostic capacity for zoonotic diseases and facilitate mainstreaming the agroecological approach within the One Health concept; and
 - facilitate the mitigation of the imbalance that, while farmers are under strict official supervision, traders and middlepersons are free to buy and sell low-quality or in some cases unsafe animal products.

Regional Priority 3 – Promoting sustainable natural resource management and facilitating resilience in agriculture, forestry and other land-use sectors, including mitigating and adapting to climate change

⁹ Background document: [IC/21/6](#) – One Health in Europe and Central Asia – Regional Priority 2.

Session 5 - Country case study: Implementation of the ‘Integrated Natural Resources Management on drought-prone and salt-affected agriculture production landscapes in Central Asia and Turkey’ (CACILM-2) project¹⁰

Main discussion points:

- A need was stressed to support governments using drought assessment instruments and identifying appropriate support mechanisms, as droughts occur more frequently in Central Asia.
- The promotion of a holistic approach and the strengthening of institutional coordination mechanisms related to environmental policies were underlined.
- Support for the incorporation of integrated natural resources management approaches into policies and programmes was suggested.
- Challenges and constraints, including a lack of evidence for decision-makers (no up-to-date maps for the current situation of land in context of decision support tools) and a lack of capacity on integrated natural resources management in the context of rural advisory services, were highlighted.
- Several recommendations were suggested, including: i) an FAO Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (FSAM) to assess the impacts of drought; ii) the development of working groups to facilitate coordination across different sectors and institutions; iii) the development of decision support tools such as land degradation and salinity maps; and iv) the strengthening of rural advisory services, including the methodology for a multistakeholder land-use plan and training materials (e.g. guideline, manual, leaflet, brochure), organized training sessions and field days and workshops.

Session 7 - Technical discussion: Nature-based solutions in Europe and Central Asia¹¹

Main discussion points:

- Nature-based Solutions can provide opportunities to: i) enhance investments in natural capital with positive financial returns and environmental benefits; ii) promote technical and social innovations; and iii) revisit/reformulate the agro-environmental policies that can support the green recovery, green agriculture and green alliances in our region.
- A paradigm shift toward a sustainable bioeconomy is required in Europe and Central Asia to promote the implementation of nature-based solutions. This should be based on the quest for circular and sustainable agrifood system transformation. These systemic changes need the participation of policymakers and other relevant authorities. Furthermore, research and innovation systems must support nature-based solutions techniques for ecological intensification.
- The development of national legislation and capacity-building platforms should be the foundation of nature-based solutions support, including multistakeholder dialogues and national policy harmonization procedures aimed towards nature-based solutions mainstreaming in the region.
- Nature-based solutions provide a critical tool for implementing Priority 3, since they replicate natural processes and aid in mitigating the negative effects of climate change

¹⁰ Background document: [IC/21/5](#) – Environmental sustainability in agricultural production systems – Regional Priority 3.

¹¹ Background document: [IC/21/7](#) – Nature-based solutions in Europe and Central Asia – Regional Priority 3.

while also preserving biodiversity integrity. Nature-based solutions also acknowledge the importance of traditional or small-scale farming.

- Nature-based solutions are a vital complement to decarbonization and the reduction of climate change risks, contributing to the achievement of climate adaptation and mitigation commitments in the framework of the Paris Agreement.
- Nature-based solutions can contribute to the European Union Adaptation Strategy and the Green Deal. It also can contribute to the attainment of SDG 12, SDG 13 and SDG 15.
- The adoption of nature-based solutions is now hampered by a lack of data and information, a lack of understanding and awareness of the economic and environmental benefits, and a lack of research and extension services.
- It is important to support green alliances that can enhance the capacity of countries in adopting and implementing nature-based solutions initiatives.
- Nature-based solutions are largely reliant on constituent ecosystem services that require time to regenerate. Restoration activity should cover the entire ecosystem. Funding and full stakeholder engagement are required.
- The interdependence of food production and environmental health should be at the heart of current and future discussions. A systematic approach is important, focusing on both the primary production and processing of food.
- Organic farming, crop rotation, cover crops and other agroecological practices are examples of nature-based solutions practices that have positive effects on ecosystem services.
- Furthermore, there is a need to form partnerships across the agricultural value chain to enhance local community resilience.
- Moreover, nature-based solutions open great opportunities to promote technical and social innovations and to reformulate agro-environmental policies that can support the development of green agriculture and green alliances in the region.

Regional Priority 4 – Addressing food insecurity and reducing all forms of malnutrition

Session 8 - Country case study: Connecting school food and nutrition programmes with local food systems¹²

Main discussion points:

- The collection and analyses of data on the nutritional status of population subgroups (men, women and children) need continuous investment, including assessing any additional impacts due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Consumers need to be equipped with information and the right food environment to make healthy food choices and to contribute directly to improving their own nutritional well-being. This includes education initiatives (for children and adults) and national food-based dietary guidelines that inform on the right foods and the right balance of foods to consume for a healthy diet.
- Multisectoral and interdisciplinary cooperation and actions can be facilitated through task forces and appropriate governance structures at central and local levels.

¹² Background document: [IC/21/8](#) – Case study for Regional Priority 4: Connecting school food and nutrition programmes with local food systems.

- Holistic systems approaches – including working along the farm to fork continuum – through nutrition-sensitive value chains are required to address all forms of malnutrition.
- The Vision and Strategy for FAO’s Work in Nutrition endorsed in 2021 frames FAO’s support for Member Countries on nutrition, focusing on the role of agrifood systems to ensure healthy diets.
- There is a need for methodological guidance from FAO, working with partners such as the World Health Organization to support countries and policymakers to shift towards sustainable food systems transformation. Clear guidance on where to start and what steps to take to go forward are needed. Indicators are needed to identify the status and measure progress towards sustainable food systems.
- Challenges on healthy food consumption and malnutrition, particularly for women and children, persist in the region. Problems include anaemia in women, stunting and undernutrition among children younger than 5, obesity in both adults and children, and adult cardiovascular diseases, all of which are linked to the lack of diverse foods and unbalanced diets.
- The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on nutritional status need to be monitored to determine any increase in malnutrition in children due to school closures and the failure of distribution of school meals. Trends of increased food prices also may be observed in this period.
- Beyond the quantity of food, quality needs to be assured. Agrifood systems need to be sustainable and resilient to produce high-quality, diverse, calorie-sufficient and affordable foods to all in the population to eliminate malnutrition and reduce poverty, particularly in vulnerable areas.
- Public awareness on nutritious food choices and educational efforts plays a role in enhancing physical and economic access to a healthy diet.

Multisectoral and regional collaboration on ensuring healthy diets play important roles

- Enabling people to access healthy diets that also are kind to the planet does require a range of actions, including policy instruments, programmes and food promotion campaigns.
- FAO’s recommendation to set up inter-ministerial and multistakeholder platforms and frameworks to address the nutrition challenges is appreciated. FAO’s expertise and guidance were requested for adopting a multisectoral framework for nutrition programmes with better targeting and ensuring multilevel interdisciplinary participation and improved policy coherence.
- Recognizing that some of the challenges countries in the region face in terms of achieving sustainable food systems and healthy diets for all are similar, FAO’s ongoing efforts and key role in facilitating cooperation among countries at the regional level were highlighted.
- A need was noted for improving knowledge on food safety, healthy diets and nutrition by the national experts, decision makers, and public authority staff whose work is relevant to improving the nutrition in the country, as well as food chain operators, non-governmental organizations and consumers.
- Addressing nutrition challenges is not seen as the domain and responsibility of the health sector only. The important input from other sectors – including the agriculture, education, scientific and private sectors – was noted.

School feeding programmes benefit the public and the producers

- Programmes such as school feeding and public procurement for group homes and hospitals are proven to be beneficial for ensuring healthy diets for the public, particularly for vulnerable groups (children, women and the elderly) and increasing the income of local producers through a steady market. Successful examples from Armenia, Croatia, Kyrgyzstan and Slovenia were shared.
- The need was emphasized for relevant ministries (e.g. agriculture, education, health) and local authorities to recognize the benefits of school feeding programmes and support the implementation for ensuring good nutrition for children and supporting local small-scale producers who have difficulties in accessing markets.
- The School Meals Coalition is being formed as a part of the United Nations Food System Summit for cooperative and collective action to address the needs, bottlenecks and capacity improvement in school meal programmes. FAO encouraged Members to take part.

Food-based dietary guidelines are a priority for the region

- Food-based dietary guidelines provide a unique opportunity to impact diet and food systems, from production to consumption, by providing recommendations on nutrients and on balancing food groups and portion sizes for the population (children, adults and the elderly).
- Members recognize food-based dietary guidelines as an effective tool for supporting public health and policies that aim to reach sustainable healthy diets and reduce the triple burden of malnutrition.
- National food-based dietary guidelines should be based on sound evidence and should respond to country-specific public health and nutrition issues, food production, and consumption patterns.
- Many countries in the region are lacking up-to-date evidence and data for different population groups. FAO's guidance is needed for improving the collection of data and generation of evidence.
- Countries need methodological guidance to develop or revise existing food-based dietary guidelines that take into consideration country-specific situations and environment, while considering FAO–WHO guiding principles for healthy diets.
- FAO's support for guidance on the development and enforcement of food-based dietary guidelines and nutrition-relevant strategies and actions, particularly in the Russian language, was noted. Learning from the experience of countries in the region who already have developed national food-based dietary guidelines and enforced policies and actions based on them would be beneficial for the countries in the process.

Session 9: Senior official meeting – Closing session¹³

Regional Technical Commissions' contribution to the regional priorities¹⁴

¹³ Background document: [IC/21/9](#) – Senior officials meeting – closure.

¹⁴ Background document: [IC/21/9a](#) – Regional Technical Commissions' Contribution to the Regional Priorities.

The contribution of the Regional Technical Commissions to the regional priorities was not presented at the Informal Consultation. The information can be consulted in the background document.

Draft annotated agenda for the Forty-second Session of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA)¹⁵

The Secretariat briefly introduced the scope and the agenda of the forthcoming Forty-second Session of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA). The main objective of the discussion was to provide a summary of organizational proceedings towards the Session, in particular the main topic and draft agenda and the date and modality of the Session.

Main discussion points related to the key message were as follows:

- The main technical theme for the Forty-second Session should be “Transforming food systems to address all forms of malnutrition in Europe and Central Asia.”
- Considering the calendar of events, including the Food Systems Summit and other FAO meetings, the proposed dates are 20–21 October or 20–22 October 2021,¹⁶ depending on the modality of the Session.
- The Executive Committee has deferred its decision on whether the Session should be a physical, hybrid or online meeting to a later meeting, when more information is available on the pandemic situation and travel restrictions within the region.¹⁷
- In accordance with the Rules of Procedure of ECA, the Commission will elect one or two rapporteurs. Members are encouraged to consider the nominations in advance.
- In line with the Rules of Procedure, the Commission will be invited to elect from among the representatives an ECA Chairperson, a first and a second vice-chairperson, and six other members of the Executive Committee. The ECA Secretariat has invited Members to submit nominations in advance by 31 July 2021.

Draft provisional annotated agenda for the Thirty-third Session of the Regional Conference for Europe (ERC)¹⁸

The purpose of the discussion was to obtain input from the Members for preparing the draft provisional agenda for the Thirty-third Session of the ERC, in particular the main topics of the session.

Main discussion points:

- The Europe Regional Group (ERG), at its meeting on 7 April 2021, discussed the proposal of the Government of Poland to host the Thirty-third Session of the ERC, which was

¹⁵ Background document: [IC/21/9c](#) - Provisional Annotated Agenda, Forty-second Session of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA).

¹⁶⁻¹⁷ The Executive Committee of the European Commission on Agriculture decided at its eighth meeting on 19 July 2021 to organize the Forty-second Session of the ECA in a hybrid modality from 27 to 29 October 2021.

¹⁸ Background document: [IC/21/9b](#) - Agenda of the Thirty-third Session of the Regional Conference for Europe.



accepted without objection. Based on this consultation, the FAO Director-General decided on Poland to host the Thirty-third Session of the ERC.

- After close consultation with the host government and internal FAO discussions, the new proposed dates for the Thirty-third Session are moved to 10–13 May 2022.
- The draft version of the annotated agenda will be presented at the next Europe Regional Group meeting – inviting Central Asian countries Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – for consultation and decision on the main topics.
- As a custom, the host government will be consulted on the decision of the second main topic selected from the proposed three.
- The issue of changing the official name of the Conference from Regional Conference for Europe (ERC) to Regional Conference for Europe and Central Asia is currently under deliberation by the FAO Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters. After careful consideration by the Committee, the matter will be brought to the attention of the FAO Council for decision.

Tajikistan proposed to host an Agrarian Regional Summit at the end of 2021 and conduct such an event on a regular basis.