

UPDATE ON THE REVIEW OF PROGRESS MADE BY REU ON PLANT HEALTH-RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 41ST SESSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION ON AGRICULTURE (2019) (IN WRITTEN PROCEDURE)

(prepared by the ECA Secretariat)

I. Introduction

During the 38/6 meeting of the ExCom (March 2021), a paper was presented on REU's progress in the implementation of the recommendations of the 41st Session of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA). The paper covered activities relating to the recommendations on plant protection and on gender. The ExCom reviewed the gender update, but due to insufficient time, decided to review the activities relating to plant protection in the written procedure, which would be carried out after the meeting.

II. The review of REU's plant health-related activities in the written procedure, and its outcome

The review of REU's progress on plant health-related recommendations of the 41st Session of ECA was conducted by e-mail.

ExCom members were glad to see that REU was involved in many activities focusing on providing technical support for countries in building their phytosanitary capacities and raising awareness on the importance of plant health issues and the need for the collection of data linking climate change and pest challenges. They emphasized that several projects were organized in a number of developing countries in the region to address the enhancement of the capacities of national phytosanitary systems or other plant health-related issues. They were disappointed that due to the COVID-19 pandemic a number of meetings to raise awareness of the International Year of Plant Health (IYPH) had to be suspended, and that similarly, FAO was forced to suspend the missions of its officers within projects being implemented. They noted that nevertheless REU was able to organize some meetings, webinars, trainings and workshops.

ExCom members were interested whether REU planned to expand the duration of its projects until the return of FAO officers back to their missions and whether there were any thoughts from REU to assist countries to reorganize suspended meetings and workshops, when it would be safe again.

The Secretariat provided answers to the questions, explaining that FAO, where possible, adopted a flexible approach to the delivery of project activities, in order to provide maximum support to the recipient countries, despite the pandemic. They added that the impact of the pandemic had hit the most the activities which required international travels, and face-to-face meetings – missions of FAO officers or consultants, trainings and workshops, or study tours. Activities, which were conducted within a single country were usually affected less, with the extent of impacts depending on the situation in respective countries. They also explained that the difficulty to conduct activities did not mean that they were immediately given up. FAO was taking different approaches to nevertheless deliver the activities: meetings of project teams and some of the trainings were conducted online, using online communicators. Other activities, such as more practical trainings, which should be conducted on-site or in a laboratory, were postponed, hoping for the

improvement of the situation. The duration of projects was extended, where needed and possible. The development of publications, guidance materials, draft legislation acts or other documents could continue, despite the pandemic. The Secretariat requested the ExCom to note that the duration of projects could not be extended for ever, and had limitations relating to specific biennia. It was used within these limits, however, where it could help in the delivery of project activities. They further explained that in some cases, where activities could not be carried out in face-to-face mode due to risk of infection, and could not be carried out online for technical reasons, they might have to be cancelled. They also noted that where activities had to be cancelled and the project was closed, later implementation of those activities would require starting an entirely new project, through a new process and with new funding.

The ExCom welcomed the explanations provided by the Secretariat. They stressed that while extremely unfortunate that the pandemic had affected important work in the region, it was only right that REU had placed health and safety above all other considerations. In addition, they appreciated REU's work adapting to the challenge presented by the pandemic at short notice to continue to deliver all possible assistance in a safe and considered way.

The ExCom is invited to:

- note the update on the review of REU's plant health-related activities in the written procedure, and its outcome.