

Issue-Based Coalition on Food Systems in Europe and Central Asia:

Terms of Reference

1. Background and rationale

Sustainable food systems lie at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. To realize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the global food system needs to be reshaped to be more productive, more inclusive of poor and marginalized populations, environmentally and economically sustainable and resilient, and able to deliver safe, healthy and nutritious food to all. These are complex and systemic challenges that require the combination of interconnected actions at the local, national, regional and global levels.

Food systems encompass the entire range of activities involved in the production, processing, marketing, consumption and disposal of goods that originate from agriculture, forestry or fisheries, including the inputs needed and the outputs generated at each of these steps. Food systems also include people and institutions as well as the socio-political, economic and technological environment in which these activities take place. A sustainable food system extends the scope of a policy outcome to address all three dimensions of sustainability, defined broadly - economic, environmental and social. This means that the outcome of a policy intervention should: i) be profitable throughout (economic sustainability); ii) generate broad-based benefits for society (social sustainability); and iii) has a positive or neutral impact on the natural environment (environmental sustainability). The food system approach can strengthen, among others, also rural urban linkages, better connecting producers with markets, and consumers, rural areas providing ecosystem services, and serves as a way to connect multiple SDG goals through food.

The Europe and Central Asia (ECA) region is unique in many ways. Its vast land area is home to more than 50 countries, and includes a wide variety of topographies, climates and growing conditions. A number of structural transformations are taking place in the food and agriculture sector. The FAO Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia (2019) points to some positive developments towards production diversity and the evolution of healthier diets. Trends towards diversification are indicated by: reduced share in total output of the two main cereals (wheat and maize) in many countries, coupled with the growth of other cereals, rapid growth of fruit and vegetables, and large reductions of cotton in main cotton producing countries.

Main challenges include sustaining the growth of the food and agriculture sector and its resilience to shocks. There are indications of a slowdown in production growth in several countries, with the livestock subsector growing more slowly than crops, especially in Central Asia and European Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Moreover, output growth has been more volatile in recent years, presumably due to shocks related to climate, trade, migration and remittances, and economy-wide fluctuations.

Many countries in the region also need to improve production, both quantity and quality of raw materials, for example milk, address land reform and viability of small farms, improve technologies and efficiencies along value chains, enhance food safety risk management along the food chain, strengthen policies to support farmers and stabilize food market prices for food, strengthen systems

to prevent and manage food chain risks, minimize food loss and waste, focus on local markets as well as export trade.

With regards to food security and nutrition, undernourishment is hardly an issue at the national level in the ECA region, with prevalence of 5 percent or more for just six countries.¹ But other forms of food insecurity and malnutrition continue to be prominent, notably access to quality and nutritious foods, overweight and obesity, and micronutrient deficiencies. The prevalence of *moderate* or *severe* form of food insecurity (SDG Indicator 2.1.2)² remains relatively high in many countries. This indicator reflects concerns over access to, and consumer choice of, quality, nutritious and sufficient food.

Overweight and obesity is a major issue in this region. The prevalence of adult obesity in 2016, was higher than the world average of 13.2 percent in 49 of the 50 countries of the ECA region for which data was available, and more than twice the world average in 14 countries³. Anaemia in both children and women is a public health concern across the region. In 2016, anaemia among women of reproductive age was specifically high in Caucasus, Central Asia and Western Balkans and Turkey sub-regions (prevalence in 30-34 percent range), but also relatively high in European CIS (23.4 percent) and the EU and EFTA sub-regions (17.2-18.7 percent range)⁴.

It is recognized that responding to these challenges requires multi-sectoral approaches involving, among others, food, agriculture, health, social protection and education.

The main rationale in support of the proposal for an Issue-Based Coalition (IBC) on Food Systems in Europe and Central Asia (ECA) is twofold:

1. Strengthen multi-sectoral collaboration and programmatic support to countries for all 17 SDGs, facilitating an integrated approach and coordination with other UN agencies and relevant partners.
2. Enhance the focus on sustainable food systems for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda at the regional level.

2. Outcome, Outputs, Activities

The objective of the IBC on Sustainable Food Systems is to support countries to make food systems more sustainable to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs.

In particular, the main **Outcome** of the IBC is to advocate for and facilitate coordinated support for strengthening sustainable food systems in the region - through multi-sectoral approaches that capitalize on the expertise of several UN agencies - as an important element of the 2030 Agenda, with a strong focus on the most vulnerable groups, in line with the principle of leaving no one behind.

The **Outputs and related Activities** are:

¹ *Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia 2019*, FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia.

² This is derived from the Food Insecurity Experience Scale methodology, based on direct response of surveyed people.

³ Ibid. 1.

⁴ Ibid.

1. **Advocacy:** High-level political commitment from Member States to strengthen sustainable food systems obtained through multi-sectoral approaches, involving food, agriculture, health, education sectors among others.
 - Develop UN joint statements, issue papers and policy recommendations on sustainable food systems, and support the UN Country Teams (UNCT) in the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) process, contributing to sustainable food systems aspects being adequately addressed.
2. **Capacity development and knowledge sharing:** Capacities developed and improved and knowledge transferred to strengthen sustainable food systems, through support to countries in developing and implementing appropriate policy measures, including through the provisioning of statistics, analytical tools and guidelines, and sharing best practices from within and outside the region. In Central Asia and Caucasus, the Regional Nutrition Capacity Development and Partnership Platform will be utilized and consulted for capacity development.
 - Compile evidence, analysis, guidelines and best practices on sustainable food systems, facilitate policy dialogue and organize trainings on sustainable food systems to support countries in identifying and implementing specific policy measures to make food systems more sustainable, and provide technical support and strategic guidance to strengthen sustainable food systems.
3. **Emergency preparedness and response:** Technical support provided to countries in a coordinated manner to strengthen countries' preparedness and response to food systems challenges caused by disasters and emergencies.
 - COVID-19 Response - Coordinate the assessments carried out in the region on the impact of COVID-19 on the food systems; coordinate key UN messages on COVID-19 and food systems and develop joint regional policy recommendations; compile available evidence, analysis and best practices on the impact of COVID-19 on the food systems; facilitate policy dialogue and organize trainings on COVID-19 and food systems to facilitate the sharing of best practices and knowledge from within and outside of the region.
 - Emergency response for disasters and emergencies (other than COVID-19): Coordinate technical support to strengthen countries' preparedness and response capacity to food systems challenges caused by disasters and emergencies; and develop criteria for conducting food security risk assessments in disaster and emergency situations.

3. Membership

The membership of the IBC on Food Systems is open to all UN funds, agencies and programmes. At any time, interested agencies can notify the UN System of their interest in joining the IBC. Other entities working at the regional level on issues related to food systems may also be invited as observers. Their membership will be determined case-by-case every year based on specific needs or

joint activities included in the annual work plan. Observers may be invited on a case-by-case basis as necessary and when relevant.

Each member agency will designate a focal point and an alternate, ideally a technical officer with extensive knowledge and experience on the work on food systems and food security, or someone equivalent in their respective office. Any cost of participation will be met by each participating member agency.

The focal points represent their agency and are responsible for providing information and knowledge from their respective organization to ensure the smooth identification, formulation and implementation of the activities and plans. The focal point is also responsible for keeping their colleagues in the respective agencies informed on the activities of the IBC.

4. Modalities

IBC members will meet quarterly either face to face or in virtual meetings. Additional ad-hoc meetings may be convened, if deemed necessary, by the members.

Considering the prominent role that IBCs will have on the COVID-19 UN response, the impact of COVID-19 crisis on the food systems as well as the urgency to act promptly, the IBC will begin its work in April 2020 with this draft TOR and a provisional work-plan for 2020, prepared by FAO/WFP/WHO/UNICEF. FAO will take responsibility to act as Secretariat/Chair of the IBC and WFP, WHO and UNICEF to act as Co-Chairs. Chair and Co-Chair/s can be reviewed/officially endorsed at the UN System meeting in the fall 2020.

The IBC on Food Systems will promote inter and intra - regional cooperation, partnership and knowledge and information exchange. The IBC will work closely with other existing regional mechanisms such as:

- Regional Nutrition Capacity Development and Partnership Platform (RNPP)
- FAO Sustainable Food Value Chains Platform
- One Planet Network
- Sustainable Food System Mediterranean Platform (SFS-MED) – currently being established
- Other IBCs from within and outside of the region

On the Regional Nutrition Capacity Development and Partnership Platform in Central Asia and Caucasus, it has been established in July 2018 as a systematic, multi-country partnership-oriented mechanism to develop the nutrition governance and food systems capacities in 8 countries in Central Asia and Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan). This initiative is aiming at equipping countries to better tackle the multiple burden of malnutrition in the sub-region with focus on most vulnerable groups.

In Central Asia and Caucasus, the Regional Nutrition Capacity Development and Partnership Platform's Work Plan will be utilized and consulted for capacity development activities of the IBC in the sub-region. While the IBC on Food Systems will be a multi-agency mechanism on Food System, the Regional Platform will remain a partnership oriented multi-country mechanism to promote nutrition governance and food system in Caucasus and Central Asia sub-region. RNPP secretariat is chaired by one of the 8 countries on rotational basis for two-year terms.

Considering the active engagement of FAO/WFP/WHO/UNICEF in the Regional Nutrition Capacity Development and Partnership Platform, the IBC will regularly engage with the Platform to build on synergies that can maximize the work on food systems in the region. In line with the main objective of the IBC to support countries to make food systems more sustainable, the IBC will capitalize on the Regional Platform on Nutrition to further ensure that IBC's work is demand driven as well as that national stakeholders benefit from the activities implemented by the IBC.