



## Europe and Central Asia Gender Newsletter

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### Empowering women to transform agrifood systems: highlights from FAO's gender initiatives

This edition of our regional newsletter spotlights the efforts of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in championing gender equality in agrifood systems across Europe and Central Asia. From capacity strengthening events like Gender Week in Budapest to the FAO-Türkiye Partnership Programme's transformative project, we delve into how empowering rural women is explicitly linked to sustainable agrifood systems. The issue explores success stories, innovative solutions and actionable insights from regional initiatives, including climate-smart practices and gender-responsive strategies, that position women at the forefront of agrifood system transformation, ensuring no one is left behind.

### Women's empowerment leading change in agrifood systems

On 14 October 2024, the FAO Liaison Offices in Brussels and Geneva hosted a joint virtual side event during the World Food Forum Flagship Event, titled "Women and Girls' Empowerment Leading the Change in Agrifood Systems". The interactive session highlighted women's critical role as agents of change, with 36 percent of working women engaged in agrifood systems.

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FAO's Senior Gender Officer, Clara Park, provided an in-depth analysis of the gender barriers in agrifood systems and the initiatives addressing them, as outlined in the *Status of Women in Agrifood Systems* report.<sup>1</sup> The session also included interactive consultations, where participants contributed ideas and solutions to tackle gender gaps, offering a platform for diverse perspectives on empowering women and girls in agriculture.

<sup>1</sup> The report is available at <https://www.fao.org/gender/the-status-of-women-in-agrifood-systems/en>

Participants shared ideas and solutions on how to close gender gaps, highlighting the power of local initiatives to drive major changes. The event underscored the importance of empowering women and girls to lead the way in creating fairer and more sustainable food systems. FAO remains dedicated to working hand in hand with communities to make this vision a reality.

## Advancing gender equality: insights from FAO's Gender Week



*Presentations in the event showcased how sheep farming is elevating women's economic status within their communities.*

From 25 to 29 November 2024, the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia in Budapest hosted Gender Week, a series of hybrid events dedicated to addressing gender inequalities in agrifood systems. The initiative brought together colleagues from Regional and Country Offices to share experiences, strategies and actionable solutions for gender mainstreaming in FAO's work.

Deputy Regional Representative Nabil Gangi opened the week by emphasizing that integrating gender equality is essential to achieving sustainable rural development and FAO's commitment to leaving no one behind. Throughout the week, presentations and discussions highlighted challenges and successes, showcasing impactful initiatives from across the region.

Among the institutional aspects, the Gender Equality Livestock Strategy for Europe and Central Asia 2021–2025<sup>2</sup> was discussed as a tool for systematically mainstreaming gender issues in the livestock sector and for women's economic empowerment within their communities. The speakers presented specific field interventions that boost women's welfare. For example, one initiative introduced pheromone technology to reduce pesticide use by 70 percent in Türkiye, creating healthier environments for women farmers and promoting environmental sustainability.

Experts stressed the importance of having clear and feasible gender action plans at the outset of project

<sup>2</sup> The strategy is available at <https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/8b46b574-22b7-4225-be94-5e08573a6875>

design to achieve meaningful outcomes. Another point of discussion was the need to ensure and promote the equal participation of young women, noting FAO's cross-cutting themes of gender, youth and inclusion.

Closing the event, Raimund Jehle, Regional Programme Leader, urged teams to build on the momentum, integrating gender perspectives across all interventions. Looking ahead, upcoming training programmes and continued support from the Gender Team aim to empower FAO staff to address challenges and advance gender equality across Europe and Central Asia.

## FAO champions agrifood system transformation at COP29



*FAO Director-General Qu Dongyu delivered a keynote address on climate finance at COP29.*

Agrifood systems account for one-third of global greenhouse gas emissions and are severely affected by climate change. At the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP29) in Baku, Azerbaijan,<sup>3</sup> FAO highlighted the urgent need to transform these systems to enhance climate resilience and sustainability. The event emphasized solutions that align with the Paris Agreement, aiming to mitigate climate change, restore biodiversity and ensure food security.

A major highlight was the launch of the Baku Harmoniya Climate Initiative for Farmers,<sup>4</sup> a collaboration between FAO and the COP29 Presidency. This initiative focuses on empowering farmers, particularly women and young people, by providing resources, knowledge and access to financing to support sustainable practices and resilient rural communities. "Farmers are the backbone of agrifood systems. By equipping them with capacity and resources, we can drive the change needed for a sustainable future", said Viorel Gutu, FAO Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for Europe and Central Asia.

The need for increased climate finance was a central topic at the conference. In 2022, only 23 percent of climate-related

<sup>3</sup> This article's original version is available at <https://www.fao.org/europe/news/detail/cop29-fao-promotes-sustainable-agrifood-systems-transformation-for-europe-and-central-asia-to-drive-climate-action>

<sup>4</sup> Further information on the initiative is available at <https://cop29.az/en/pages/baku-harmoniya-climate-initiative-for-farmers-concept>



development finance was directed towards agriculture – a significant gap given its importance to livelihoods and mitigation potential. FAO estimates that an annual investment of USD 1.1 trillion is required until 2030 to meet global goals, underscoring the critical role of public-private partnerships and innovative financing solutions. FAO has previously reported that there is a pressing need for stronger gender-responsive finance in climate action, specifically in agriculture. Although gender is a significant factor in 40 percent of climate finance allocations in agriculture in the land use and agricultural sectors in Asia and Europe, over one-fifth of all climate finance allocations in these regions have not even been assessed from a gender perspective.<sup>5</sup>

Looking ahead, the 2025 updates to countries' Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) offer a vital opportunity for achieving sustainable agrifood systems and activating women's pivotal role. FAO urged nations to integrate agrifood systems into climate strategies, translating global commitments into tangible actions that reduce emissions, enhance resilience and secure food systems.

Regional cooperation also took centre stage, with FAO promoting collaborative initiatives like the [Regional Technical Platform on Green Agriculture](#). Highlighting the interlinkages between water, energy, food and ecosystems, FAO underscored the need for integrated approaches to tackle shared challenges and maximize impact.

## Milestones in gender equality through FAO-Türkiye partnership



*The FAO-Türkiye partnership programme reaches its concluding phase after delivering impactful outcomes across the region.*

A high-level delegation from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Türkiye joined counterparts from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan for a field mission under the FAO-Türkiye Partnership Programme on Food and Agriculture (FTPP)<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Further information is available at <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/5029827e-235e-4a99-b593-5388315baa49/content>

<sup>6</sup> More information about FPPP is available at <https://www.fao.org/europe/work-in-the-region/programmes-and-projects/fao-turkiye-partnership-programme/en>

from 18 to 22 November 2024. This mission was part of the regional project, “Leaving No One Behind: Harnessing Opportunities for Economic Growth through the Greater Involvement and Empowerment of Rural Women”, which concluded on 31 December 2024 after 3 years of impactful work.

The mission highlighted the power of knowledge-sharing and hands-on support. In Tajikistan's Lolazor village, 12 women trained in advanced fruit drying and mushroom cultivation received equipment, including solar fruit dryers and mushroom blocks, to enhance their livelihoods. Soon, these women will receive additional processing equipment such as drying cabinets, industrial mixers and packaging machines, enabling them to establish a women-led processing workshop.

Meanwhile, in Uzbekistan's mountainous Bo'stonliq district, women trained in dairy processing and beekeeping received equipment to expand their enterprises and enhance income-generating opportunities. These efforts align with the project's goals of fostering economic independence and improving livelihoods for rural women. “Promoting gender equality in the agriculture and forestry sectors is vital to ensuring women's full participation in agrifood systems' transformation”, stated Aghasi Harutyunyan, FAO Representative ad interim in Tajikistan.

The project's final milestone was a regional conference held in Ankara on 10 and 11 December 2024, bringing together representatives of the ministries of agriculture and forestry from Türkiye, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, alongside FAO experts, and representatives from civil society and academia. Participants reflected on the project's achievements and discussed strategies for sustaining gender-responsive practices. Notable accomplishments include the establishment of gender units in the provincial agricultural directorates of Türkiye, which became operational under the project, and the empowerment of women across the region through access to technical training, equipment and markets.

During the conference, sessions addressed critical issues such as institutionalizing gender mainstreaming in agriculture and forestry and creating evidence-based policies. Delegates also shared key lessons learned, including the importance of participatory approaches that give women a voice in decision-making. “Through this project, we have seen how empowering rural women can transform entire communities”, remarked Viorel Gutu, FAO Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for Europe and Central Asia.

A major theme of the discussions was sustainability. Participants emphasized the need to integrate gender-responsive approaches into all stages of decision-making and implementation. Knowledge products developed during the project, including best practices and advocacy tools, were presented to ensure the project's legacy continues to drive change.

The FAO-Türkiye Partnership Programme, established in 2007, has been a cornerstone for advancing food security, rural poverty reduction and sustainable forest management across Türkiye and Central Asia. With USD 30 million in contributions from the Government of Türkiye, the programme has implemented over 30 projects, reaching 16 countries.

As the project concludes, the message is clear: gender equality is not only a matter of rights but is also a catalyst for economic growth and sustainable development. The journey from field missions to the closing conference demonstrates the transformative power of collective action in ensuring that rural women are not just beneficiaries but leaders in agrifood systems, leaving no one behind.

## Country Gender Assessment highlights solutions for gender inequality in rural Georgia

### *Nino Kavtaradze's story as an example of empowerment*

Women are ten times more likely than men to work in food production, particularly in processing agricultural products for household consumption, yet they continue to bear a disproportionate share of unpaid work. Despite their significant contributions across all facets of the agrifood systems, including food production, processing, and sales, rural women in Georgia face considerable barriers and challenges, limiting their access to income generation and better quality of life. The FAO National Gender Profile of Agriculture and Rural Livelihoods: Georgia<sup>7</sup>, released in January 2025 updates on the progress since the release of the first Country Gender Assessment in 2018, examining gender issues within rural households and across various agricultural subsectors, including fisheries and forestry.

Rural women in Georgia encounter significant barriers due to discriminatory norms and the socio-economic challenges of rural, mountainous, and remote areas. These challenges limit their access to essential assets, infrastructure, services, and opportunities.

The report also guides FAO's ongoing efforts to narrow gender gaps and enhance women's empowerment with context-specific strategies. The assessment, drawing on the policy successes, highlighting the continuous need for

<sup>7</sup> For further details, read the full article: <https://www.fao.org/europe/news/detail/gender-inequality-in-rural-georgia--challenges-and-pathways-for-parity-in-agrifood-systems/en>

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agricultural support programmes that effectively targets women as active participants and beneficiaries.

The example of Nino Kavtaradze demonstrates the powerful potential of context-specific and gender-responsive policies in addressing the inequalities faced by rural women. Nino, a skilled dairy farmer, confronted both economic hardship and health challenges, struggling to afford the necessary treatment. Like many rural women, she faced barriers such as limited access to resources and infrastructure. Through FAO's support, Nino participated in Farmer Field Schools, where she received valuable training in modern dairy practices and gained access to essential equipment, such as a milk pasteurizer and a grinding mill.

This support not only improved her production capacity but also enabled her to afford life-saving cancer treatment, ensuring she could continue supporting her family and expanding her business.



*Nino showcases her diverse cheeses and pepper jams, thanks to FAO's support for over 600 women dairy farmers in Georgia.*

Nino's story shows that rural women, need targeted support to enable them to fully engage in agrifood systems, contribute to their communities, and become leaders for change and progress.<sup>8</sup>

## Acknowledgements

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<sup>8</sup> Read Nino's full story: <https://www.fao.org/newsroom/story/the-skills-that-saved-one-georgian-womans-life/en>



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