



Europe and Central Asia Gender Newsletter

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FAO's gender-responsive action concerning the war in Ukraine

The war in Ukraine is affecting an estimated 18 million people and forcing massive population displacement. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 5.3 million people, mostly women, have sought refuge in neighbouring countries as of 26 April 2022. The insecurity and supply chain disruptions have immediate and long lasting impacts on food security and nutrition, migration and remittance flows, and rural livelihoods for all countries in the region.

In response to this crisis and in line with the Rapid Response Plan for Ukraine,¹ FAO has identified three main ways in which social protection can help address the crisis.² Through analysing the gender related impacts of the war, FAO has also outlined specific entry points³ for gender responsive and inclusive interventions in Ukraine and other countries affected by the crisis, and the Organization participates in the inter-agency Regional Gender Task Force, co chaired by CARE and UN Women, to coordinate the crisis response, provide technical support, and generate information for gender-responsive advocacy. FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) has set up a working group

to monitor the evolving food security situation in the region and support countries in tackling acute food security and nutrition challenges. Through these immediate response initiatives, FAO is committed to supporting rural communities at this moment of crisis.

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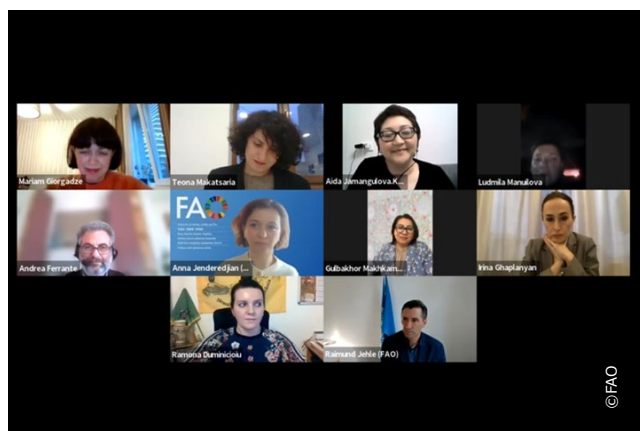
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¹ The Rapid Response Plan is available at <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/cb8935en.pdf>.

² The brief is available at <https://www.fao.org/3/cb9448en/cb9448en.pdf>.

³ The information note is available at <https://www.fao.org/3/cb9419en/cb9419en.pdf>.

Promoting gender equality for sustainable food systems at the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development



Speakers discussing the opportunities and challenges for promoting rural women's empowerment in Europe and Central Asia.

How can we build back better from the COVID-19 crisis while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the UNECE region?⁴ Potential responses to this question were debated at the UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development⁵ (RFSD) on 6–7 April 2022. FAO and Schola Campesina Aps, an international agroecology school based in Italy, hosted an online side event at the forum. The webinar disseminated promising practices, lessons learned and emerging challenges in addressing gender inequalities from selected rural initiatives in the region. The event brought together representatives from governments, civil society, farmers and academia. Moderated by Mariam Jorjadze, Director at Biological Farming Association Elkana in Georgia, and Andrea Ferrante, Coordinator at Schola Campesina Aps in Italy, the event featured the following speakers:

- Dr Irina Ghaplanyan, Senior Advisor on Climate Change to the World Bank Group, former Deputy Minister of Environment of the Republic of Armenia
- Dr Valentina Bodrug Lungu, Gender Centru, Moldovan State University, the Republic of Moldova
- Luda Manuilova, farmer and entrepreneur, Georgia
- Gulbahor Mahkamova, National Association of Business Women of Tajikistan, the Republic of Tajikistan
- Aida Jamangulova, Alternative Development Initiatives/ Women Network for Agroecology in Central Asia, the Kyrgyz Republic
- Ramona Duminićioiu, Eco Ruralis, Romania

⁴ The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) region includes 56 Member States in Europe, North America and Asia. The full list is available at <https://unece.org/mission>.

⁵ Further information is available at <https://regionalforum.unece.org/events/regional-forum-2022>.

Panellists emphasized that rural communities in the region currently face multiple crises, centred on climate change, the COVID 19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

Rural women already carry the additional burden caused by climate change; and the war in Ukraine is affecting food and nutrition security, and migration and remittance flows, the latter having a significant impact in Central Asia and South Caucasus. These effects can exacerbate pre-existing gender inequalities in rural areas. Climate forecasts show that women, especially those involved in agriculture, are more exposed to the risks associated with climate change because their access to information, services and finances is limited. Additionally, women's burden in the household increases when men migrate for work.

While women are affected the most by multiple crises, they are also the first to respond to them. Rural women assume responsibility for the care and safety of the family, especially in cases of insecurity, and they maintain household chores, and sustain agricultural production and livelihoods for the family and community for food and nutrition security. Here, panellists highlighted the need for more gender-responsive resources and capacity building on how to respond to multiple crises. Specifically, rural women should be supported through holistic and integrated interventions that simultaneously (i) improve access to information and services, and (ii) strengthen access and de facto control over resources, such as land, inputs (seeds, labour-saving technologies) and services (access to the internet, business education). "Without gender equality today, a sustainable and equally inclusive future remains beyond reach. [But w]e need more effort, more participation, more accountability, and shared responsibility," said Gulbahor Mahkamova. Adding to this, Ramona Duminićioiu called for stronger collaboration: "We need structural, systemic and systematic solutions to achieve the SDGs ... we believe in the role of our states and the importance of public policies. Rural women from farmers' organizations in the region are ready to assist our countries in legislative processes."

In setting collaborative roadmaps, the panellists underlined the relevance of key human rights based frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP), and the UN Framework for Family Farming. To align with normative frameworks, the availability of gender-disaggregated data remains key. For instance, FAO's Country Gender Assessment for the Republic of Moldova was mentioned as a useful tool for evidence-based advocacy concerning the national gender equality agenda.

FAO and Schola Campesina Aps are hosting four new subregional webinars to discuss promising gender responsive practices in agrifood systems. The first webinar of the series was held on 12 April 2022 and showcased women's initiatives linking producers and urban consumers in Central Asia. The next subregional webinars will take place in April and May. FAO will also convene a concluding

side event on UNDROP during the 33rd session of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe on 10–13 May 2022 in Poland.

Gender equality and climate justice nexus at the 66th session of the Commission on the Status of Women



The 66th session of the Commission on the Status of Women poster.

The 66th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 66)⁶ took place on 14–25 March 2022 and focused on the theme of “Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes.”

Anna Jenderedjian, Gender and Social Protection Specialist at FAO REU, participated as a speaker in a side event organized by the Union of Hungarian Women Association. The session highlighted the interlinkages between gender equality and climate change based on FAO’s work in Europe and Central Asia.

During this side event, entitled “Securing a sustainable future – gender equality and climate change” (23 March 2022), a range of experiences were shared on the topics of gender equality and the empowerment of women in the context of climate change, and environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes in EU and non-EU countries. The presentations by Hungary’s Minister for Families, and representatives from the National Assembly of Hungary, the Committee of Hungarian National Commission for UNESCO, COPA-COGECA, Women Entrepreneurship Platform and CSOs from Hungary, Albania and Kenya all emphasized the need for improved climate change policies and programmes that recognize gender gaps and impacts, provide rural women with access to resources, knowledge and skills development, and involve them in decision making. The panellists shared examples on developing information databases and networks to connect

⁶ Further information is available at <http://newsletters.fao.org/c/1fcvam851uRM5DnczZmMwJd8P>.

young women and rural women for learning, business and entrepreneurship opportunities, and on tailoring social protection measures for resilience-building.

The advance version of the agreed conclusions from CSW 66 underlines the pivotal role that women play in addressing climate change:

“[The Commission] acknowledges that achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls and women’s full, equal, effective, and meaningful participation and decision-making in the context of climate change, environmental degradation and disaster risk reduction is essential for achieving sustainable development, promoting peaceful, just and inclusive societies, enhancing inclusive and sustainable economic growth and productivity, ending poverty in all its forms and dimensions everywhere and ensuring the well being of all. [The Commission] recognizes that women and girls play a vital role as agents of change for sustainable development.”⁷

Mainstreaming gender equality in Kyrgyzstan: the profile of a practitioner

Seeking to tackle unequal power dynamics and discriminatory social norms that disempower women? Looking for actions that are better aligned with women’s needs, interests and capacities? Dinara Rakhmanova is the go-to person in FAO in Kyrgyzstan. Serving as the Assistant FAO Representative since 2009 and the gender focal point since 2014, Dinara Rakhmanova has been promoting gender mainstreaming and targeted interventions for women in the country in line with FAO’s Policy on Gender Equality⁸ and UN SWAP 2.0.⁹

“In 2015, when we looked at the project [Towards Sustainable Aquaculture and Fisheries Development in the Kyrgyz Republic] from a gender lens and attempted to mainstream gender in its activities, some claimed that fisheries have nothing to do with women’s entrepreneurship. The gender assessment we conducted showed, however, that women assume a lot of the physical work such as cleaning the fish or taking care of the ponds. We convinced technical officers and beneficiaries to help establish women led fishery cooperatives. Today, these perform much better than men only businesses in the country.”

⁷ The statement is available at https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/CSW66%20Agreed%20Conclusions_Advance%20unedited%20version_25%20March%202022.pdf.

⁸ The Policy on Gender Equality 2020–2030 is available at <https://www.fao.org/3/cb1583en/cb1583en.pdf>.

⁹ Further information is available at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/un-system-coordination/promoting-un-accountability>.

A good example has twice the value of good advice, so the saying goes, and Dinara Rakhmanova identifies some of the good examples in Kyrgyzstan:

- Generate evidence as a basis for gender mainstreaming.
- Ensure both men and women understand that women's equal presence in every aspect of life delivers better results.
- Make sure that the participation and empowerment is sustainable.



Dinara Rakhmanova, Assistant FAO Representative in Kyrgyzstan.

In her daily work, Dinara Rakhmanova is responsible for two critical tasks as the gender focal point.¹⁰ First, she ensures that FAO's projects and programmes in Kyrgyzstan are gender-mainstreamed and that FAO duly advocates gender issues at the UN Country Team level and in other policy discussions. Second, she makes sure that the FAO team, including technical officers, have sufficient capacities in addressing gender equality and women's empowerment. Dinara Rakhmanova is not alone in this endeavour. National gender experts, such as Aisuluu Kamchybekova, support the gender mainstreaming efforts. So far, the team's hard work has delivered promising results including new women led agribusinesses and gender responsive agri services, as well as rural women participating in conflict prevention and peacemaking when local inter ethnic conflicts arise.

These gender mainstreaming capabilities did not emerge overnight. Dinara Rakhmanova identifies the development of a gender focal point network and organizational capacity building efforts from headquarters to regional and local offices as great leaps forward for FAO's gender transformative action. FAO in Kyrgyzstan also prepared and implemented the Gender Action Plan (GAP) 2020–2021, which will be updated soon. Going beyond a box ticking approach, the GAP entailed institutional capacity development and gender mainstreaming targets for local projects. Implementing an ambitious GAP has revealed several important lessons, as Dinara Rakhmanova recounts:

¹⁰ FAO's handbook for GFPs is available at <https://www.fao.org/policy-support/tools-and-publications/resources-details/en/c/1377775/>.

“We know that it is not always easy to work with governments when it comes to gender responsive actions. As FAO, we persuaded our partners ... that economic development cannot be achieved without women's equal participation. In order to support national efforts in that direction, we certainly need better capacity and more resources allocated to gender mainstreaming at FAO's decentralized offices.”

Ending on a less positive note, Dinara Rakhmanova reflects on how rural communities are being adversely affected by the war in Ukraine, in particular because of the country's heavy dependence on remittances which account for one third of GDP. Rural communities in Kyrgyzstan, especially women, face heightened risks of food and nutrition insecurity and poverty due to disrupted remittance flows. According to Dinara Rakhmanova, FAO's mission is now more critical than ever: to empower rural women in addressing food and nutrition security and ensure that remittances are invested for productive purposes.

Matching grants mobilize women's investments in rural Tajikistan



Amrinisso Mirzosharipova, an investor and grantee in rural Tajikistan.

Amrinisso is a 47-year-old woman from the Balkhi district of Khatlon region in Tajikistan.¹¹ At the age of 14, she dropped out of school, escaped from the civil war, later resettled in Tajikistan, and had an early marriage. Her husband has been a seasonal migrant worker in the Russian Federation. Heading the household alone, she takes care of the family, dairy cows and the garden to make ends meet. Like many rural women in Central Asia, she did not have adequate access to financial services and was therefore not able to build a cold storage facility required to improve the family's farm and well being. So Amrinisso pitched to become one of 50 beneficiaries of FAO's pilot project which invited remittance receiving farmers to co invest (40 to 50 percent) in a small-scale business idea and receive the remaining funds from the project's grant component. Among the 247 applications, Amrinisso's pitch was successful, and following

¹¹ The story of Amrinisso Mirzosharipova was first published in 2019 and revised in 2021 with up-to-date information.

a series of business training sessions and hard work on the ground, her investment has paid off: “[The cold storage] helps me to keep my harvest and that of my neighbours for long time. My kids and other villagers have access to fruit and vegetables in the winter, and by renting [out the] cold storage facility, I am earning and saving money. My husband is not seeking work abroad anymore. Now he is staying with our family the whole year at home because he has a job. I feel very proud that I did it.”

FAO in Tajikistan facilitated this success through the “Developing Capacity for Strengthening Food Security and Nutrition in Selected Countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia” project, funded by the Russian Federation and implemented in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Armenia between 2018 and 2022. The matching grants pilot programme sought to assist migrants and their families and communities to mobilize remittances for small scale investments in agriculture and agribusiness activities for sustainable development in the districts of Hisor and Balkhi. The project targeted forced returnees (deported), migrants/returnees or their first degree relatives, and women headed households receiving remittances from first-degree relatives.

The project team publicized the call for applications through dissemination events at district, sub-district and village levels, including with existing local women’s committees. In Tajikistan, women own 21 percent of the privately owned dehqan smallholder farms – a number which has grown considerably in the last decade. Within the project, 55 out of 247 applicants were women, and among the 50 grantees, 17 (34 percent) were women. Women’s presence among the grantees was ensured through the dedication of a specific women only category for eligible beneficiaries: women headed households receiving remittances from first degree relatives. The project gave USD 5 000 to each grantee which was then matched by beneficiaries with the same amount in cash. The grants increased the production, productivity and profitability of agribusinesses while creating more than 300 permanent and temporary (including seasonal) jobs. More than half (52 percent) of the migrants from participating households returned from foreign countries to Tajikistan to work in their agribusiness, and 30 percent did not plan to re migrate.

The pilot project’s scope, however, did not include tackling the root causes of gender inequality among rural households engaged in agriculture. Specifically, the project could have delivered better gender equality outcomes if it had: (i) addressed women’s time poverty vis à vis increased workload on family farms; (ii) incorporated gender equality in business training sessions for all grantees; (iii) enhanced women’s voice, participation and influence in decision making mechanisms; and (iv) raised awareness among

decision makers regarding rural women’s needs, interests and capacities.

Reflecting on the project, Ibrohim Ahmadov, the National Project Coordinator, indicates that there have been at least two important lessons learned:

1. **Complementarity:** The project’s gender mainstreaming approach and scope was designed to complement FAO’s Country Programming Framework and other ongoing projects in food and nutrition security and rural development. Although the project was not gender-specific, it piloted the provision of financial resources that led to the improvement of rural livelihoods and women’s empowerment. This result is worth scaling up in other parts of the country.
2. **Outreach:** Women’s committees in villages and sub-districts (Jamoat) were involved in the outreach and implementation activities which ensured the active participation of rural women in the grant scheme. Women’s inclusion at all phases of the project is key for women to reap the benefits of the project equally and continuously.

The project team is currently undertaking a comprehensive impact assessment of the matching grant project, with a view to replicating and expanding the scheme, so that there will be more stories of inspiring women like Amrinisso in Tajikistan.

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