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ERC/22/INF/12 – Information paper on FAO support to rural youth in the Europe and Central Asia region

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ERC/22/INF/12	<p>The FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia thanks the European Union for the valuable comments, which have been carefully noted.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Regarding regional-level work, it is important to fully understand the challenges and needs of rural youth. Therefore, FAO plans to analyse the situation of young rural women and men in the region, including their employment opportunities and their prospects for decent livelihoods and fulfilment of aspirations. As a first step, this analysis will be conducted in the Western Balkan countries to provide insights into possible solutions for more informed decision-making at the policy level. Regarding the country-level work, FAO has broad experience in territorial approaches to development and is working in several countries on integrated community development and facilitating the European Union LEADER (<i>Liaison entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale</i>) approach. The work is fully enshrined in the new FAO Strategic Framework 2022–2031 and the four betters, noting that including rural youth in policy processes enhances policy outcomes. In addition, FAO promotes the creation of new employment opportunities, including for youth, both in agricultural production and through the diversification of the rural economy.2. Regarding the promotion of youth engagement in food systems transformation and farming, FAO follows several approaches: FAO promotes both inter- and intragenerational learning processes and the exchange of generation-specific knowledge and skills. The exchange of information among young people in various countries and regions will be continued through the regional and global consultations mentioned in the paper. FAO promotes sustainable and resilient agricultural production practices. This includes supporting the establishment of demonstration farms and FAO farmer field schools, which provide practical and operational transfer of knowledge to farmers. In addition, knowledge about financial management, access to markets – through farmers' fairs, for example – and the alignment of production standards to new regulations also are included in such trainings.

Extension and advisory services are among the critical players that could bridge the knowledge and information gap of rural youth, and FAO makes all efforts for their further improvement. This includes an ongoing regional overview of good practices and strategies for the development of gender-sensitive rural advisory services.

FAO also supports Members in developing active land policy to provide access to land for young and women farmers as target groups, including to youth from urban areas who see a future engaging in farming and/or settling in rural areas.

FAO supports inclusive rural transformation and rural development policies, which may include financial support targeted to assist youth, including young farmers, in starting their own businesses, especially by funding start-ups in social and innovative entrepreneurship, including agriculture.

3. In Europe and Central Asia, in consultation with its Members, FAO has identified four key regional priorities, which are addressed by the three Regional Initiatives (ERC/22/5). The cross-cutting themes of youth, gender and inclusion are critical areas to be taken into account across all of FAO's programmatic work, as reflected in FAO's Strategic Framework 2022–2031. As with gender and inclusion, the goal regarding youth is to promote more systematic mainstreaming across all the work of the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia to develop an enabling environment for youth.
4. It is key to ensure mainstreaming under the leaving no one behind (LNOB) approach in all FAO projects and activities throughout the region.
5. It is well noted that the Committee on World Food Security workstream on promoting youth engagement and employment in agriculture and food systems provides important guidance. This will be duly considered for FAO's future interventions.