

170th Session of the Council

Item 9.3: Report of the 33rd Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe (Łódź, Poland, 10-13 May 2022)

The 33rd Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe (ERC) was held in Łódź, Poland, from 10 to 13 May 2022 in a hybrid modality, with some representatives attending in person in Łódź and others participating virtually. The Session was attended by 269 participants, including 15 ministers, 13 deputy ministers and state secretaries, and representatives from 52 Members, along with more than 50 Observers. The conference was preceded by the Consultation of the Civil Society Organizations and a Consultation of the Private Sector, whose representatives delivered their views during the ERC Session.

The Session was chaired by His Excellency Zbigniew Rau, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, and vice-chaired by Her Excellency Frida Krifca, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development of Albania and His Excellency Marcel Beukeboom, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to the United Nations in Rome. His Excellency Thomas Kelly, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Agencies in Rome, and Mr Jiří Jílek, Permanent Representative of Czechia to FAO and the World Food Programme, were appointed as Rapporteurs.

Regional and Global Policy and Regulatory Matters

The Regional Conference global policy discussions focused on: i) **Implications on world food security and agriculture, including global food prices arising from the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine¹**; ii) **the road to transformative agrifood systems in Europe and Central Asia – Regional actions to implement the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31**; and iii) **sustainable food value chains for nutrition, a practical approach for transforming agrifood systems for healthy diets in Europe and Central Asia**.

Under the item on the **Implications on world food security arising from the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine**, Members adopted by vote² *en bloc* a decision^{3,4} condemning the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, demanding that the Russian Federation immediately cease its unlawful activities and ensure the resumption of shipments of food and agricultural commodities from and to Ukraine, and recalling and reaffirming the decision⁵ adopted by the FAO Council at its 169th Session on 8 April 2022 in this regard. Furthermore, Members requested FAO to safeguard all the rights of Ukraine as a Member Nation of the FAO within Ukraine's internationally recognized borders, extending to its territorial waters and exclusive economic zone adjacent thereto, to assess the damage and the reconstruction and rehabilitation costs to the Ukrainian agriculture and food sector, to prepare and implement short, medium and long-term assistance plans for Ukraine as well as for the most affected countries in the Black Sea region, Central Asia, the Caucasus and Western Balkans, and to contribute to strengthen global market transparency and coordination among Members, through initiatives such as the Agricultural Market Information System. The Regional Conference underlined the impact that the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine is having in stoking prices for food, fuel, fertiliser and other agricultural inputs. As a result of the invasion, food and fertiliser prices have sky-rocketed to record levels. Hence, the Regional Conference expressed grave concerns that the war in Ukraine posed serious risks for short-term global food security outcomes, as well as for the broader 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

¹ Reference is made to ERC/22/INF/14: Letter from FAO Members - request for an additional agenda item at the 33rd Session of the Regional Conference for Europe (ERC).

² 40 votes in favour, 3 against. Reference is made to Appendix C of the Report – Roll call vote results sheet.

³ Reference is made to ERC/22/15: Annex to the letter from FAO Members – proposal for discussion and decision by the Regional Conference.

⁴ Belarus, Russian Federation and Tajikistan disassociated themselves from the content of this decision.

⁵ CL 169/REP, paragraph 11.

The Regional Conference remained seized of the matter and decided to add it to the agenda of the next regular session of the ERC. The Regional Conference requested FAO to report regularly to Members, including through FAO Governing Bodies, and to submit to the next session of the FAO Council a report containing an overview of the work of FAO and FAO-related bodies, including Article XIV bodies and other Regional Commissions. The Regional Conference decided that the decision, together with the decision adopted by the FAO Council at its 169th Session, shall be communicated to all Members and brought to the attention of the general public under the form of a press release published in all FAO languages. The adopted decision as well as all the adopted recommendations related to this matter are available in the Session Report.⁶

In relation to the item on **Road to transformative agrifood systems**, the Regional Conference requested FAO to support Members and agrifood systems actors through implementation of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31, including a focus on accelerators, cross-cutting themes (gender, youth and inclusion) and FAO corporate strategies and initiatives. The Regional Conference requested FAO to continue to support Members to adopt and apply the One Health approach, including providing support to fight antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and zoonotic diseases through effective national action plans. The Regional Conference underlined the need to effectively implement the food systems transformation agenda, including accelerators to fast-track progress and facilitate knowledge platforms, especially to promote innovative solutions in order to maximize prospects for sustainable agriculture development and achievement of the SDGs, while continuing to work with United Nations partners in the regional Issue-based Coalition on Sustainable Food Systems and other multistakeholder partnerships to support regional and country efforts. The Regional Conference called upon FAO to support the follow-up to the United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS), including addressing common regional issues and supporting countries during the implementation of national pathways, in coordination with the UN Coordination Hub in Rome, and relevant regional mechanisms. The Regional Conference requested FAO to support work to increase understanding of true cost accounting of food and redefine the value of food, recognized as a lever of change by the UNFSS.

With regards to the item on **Sustainable food value chains for nutrition**, the Regional Conference requested FAO to assist countries in Europe and Central Asia in upscaling the use of the nutrition-sensitive value chain approach as part of the agrifood systems transformation and the implementation of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31. The Regional Conference requested FAO to help countries implement all relevant Committee on World Food Security (CFS) products and recommendations in their specific contexts, promote CFS policy recommendations on agroecological and other innovative approaches as well as on the development and updating of sustainable national food-based dietary guidelines. Furthermore, the Regional Conference requested FAO to assist countries in developing the UNFSS national pathways through the United Nations Regional Coordinators and work on the Summit follow-up through the UN Coordination Hub in Rome. The Members further requested FAO to support the development and implementation of voluntary tools, mechanisms or instruments that encourage the adoption of responsible business conduct and enterprise risk-based due diligence, and to provide technical assistance to existing extension and advisory services for the delivery of nutrition-sensitive solutions in value chain development as well as to facilitate collaboration, knowledge sharing and capacity development, and to promote investment in a nutrition-sensitive value chain approach. The Members also requested FAO to promote the establishment of an international measurement standard for true pricing and to identify and share best practices of nutrition-sensitive social protection measures that improves access to healthy diets.

Programme and Budget Matters

Under the item of **Regional results, priorities, the four betters and the Sustainable Development Goals**, the Regional Conference endorsed the three revised Regional Initiatives maintaining emphasis on poverty reduction, their alignment with the Programme Priority Areas (PPAs), and the priority areas of the region, which will guide FAO's actions in 2022-23 and beyond. The Regional Conference also called upon FAO to further improve the reporting process, including against targets set out in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) and Country Programming Frameworks (CPFs) and increasing transparency by publishing more information on FAO websites. The Regional Conference further

⁶ <https://www.fao.org/3/nj289en/nj289en.pdf>.

called upon FAO to step up efforts to better promote gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment in all activities across the region by generating sex-disaggregated data and by interweaving regional policies with the Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment in the context of food security and nutrition, which are being developed by the CFS. The Regional Conference called upon FAO to fully align with and integrate the Rural Youth Action Plan and embrace the policy recommendations for youth engagement developed by CFS. The Regional Conference called upon FAO to pay due attention to the accessibility and affordability of digital technologies for small-scale farmers in order to avoid the digital divide. The Regional Conference recalled that the region should remain at the forefront of the fight against AMR, mainstreaming biodiversity, and continuing to develop nature-based solutions.

The Regional Conference encouraged FAO to adjust and adapt to the delivery of the work programme to address emerging issues and changing contexts in the region, giving priority and providing resources for the recovery and building back better of countries affected by the conflict. The Regional Conference noted in this regard the destabilizing effect that the war in Ukraine has had across the globe and reaffirmed the pivotal role that FAO plays in safeguarding food security in the region⁷ and that FAO, in coordination and collaboration with other United Nations entities and relevant bodies, especially the Rome-based Agencies and international financial institutions, should address within its mandate the consequences of the conflict in Ukraine on food security and agriculture in the region, as requested by the 169th Session of the FAO Council on 8 April 2022.

The Regional Conference welcomed development and latest drafts of both the **FAO Science and Innovation Strategy** and the **FAO Strategy on Climate Change** and provided further recommendations for the finalization of the strategies.

As regards the **FAO Science and Innovation Strategy**, the Regional Conference recommended that the strategy should rely on a human-centered, ethical and responsible vision of science, data use, innovation and technology. Clear linkages with FAO's policies on data protection and intellectual property rights as well as private sector engagement should be established, providing safeguards. The strategy should be participatory and demand-driven, leading to and building on stakeholder-driven innovations that are adaptable and responsive to local contexts and needs. Also, the strategy should aim for innovations to be accessible and affordable to small-scale and family farms, women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, people with disabilities and other marginalized groups.

With respect to the **FAO Strategy on Climate Change**, the Regional Conference recommended FAO to ensure that the strategy is ambitious in promoting a shift that will tackle the root causes of climate change impacts on the agrifood system in ways that address the vulnerability of countries and communities in the region. The Regional Conference further recommended FAO to support learning and exchange among countries in the region and globally on applying innovations, technologies, and stronger engagement of stakeholders in the agrifood system, as well as to encourage best practices on developing multistakeholder partnerships and facilitate access to climate finance, including innovative financing options, including by providing guidance to processes such as the Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture. FAO should also ensure that the specific needs of Members and agrifood system stakeholders from Europe and Central Asia are considered in the strategy and during implementation. Moreover, FAO should ensure that the implementation of the strategy includes more emphasis on the role of the One Health approach and promoting a wide range of solutions, including nature-based solutions, agroecology and other innovative approaches, ecosystem-based adaptation, social and governance innovations and technologies, in order to enhance the implementation of Members' climate commitments.

The Regional Conference noted the **Synthesis of FAO Evaluations 2020-2021 in Europe and Central Asia Region**, encouraging the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia to draw on the key lessons learned and to pursue actions in response to the emerging issues, constraints and gaps identified in the report. The Regional Conference called upon FAO to improve mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment; increase the focus on the voice of youth as well as the need for more policies that promote the inclusion of rural populations; introduce a level of flexibility in FAO theories of change so as to be able to

⁷ Belarus, the Russian Federation and Tajikistan disassociated themselves from the content of this part.

quickly respond in times of changing local, national and regional contexts that could impact the ability to produce and supply safe and healthy food in the region and better contribute to food security and nutrition outcomes. Finally, the Regional Conference requested FAO to strengthen its monitoring, evaluation and reporting processes to deliver sustainable and lasting impact on the ground. Evaluations should also serve to review and adjust the ongoing interventions and feed into the design of new ones.

Zbigniew Rau
Chairperson of the 33rd Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland