

Informal Consultation for Europe and Central Asia

4–5 May 2023

Background Note

Session 6

Draft Agenda for the Forty-third Session of the European Commission on Agriculture

The Forty-third Session of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA) will be held in Budapest, Hungary, on 26–28 September 2023, in the face-to-face modality. The FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia and the Executive Committee of the ECA have been undertaking steps to prepare the Session since mid-2022.

The basis for the preparations of the Session have been the Rules of Procedure of the ECA and the recommendations of the assessment of the ECA conducted in 2017. Accordingly, the key issues that needed to be agreed upon were the main technical theme and the draft agenda for the Session.

For the Forty-third Session of the ECA, a new approach was taken to identify the main technical theme. On 30 April 2022, the ECA Secretariat opened a call for proposals for the theme. All members of the Commission were notified and invited to submit proposals. The call resulted in 11 proposals submitted by seven members. The Executive Committee discussed the proposals, considering that the main technical theme should be aligned with the FAO biennial theme adopted by the FAO Conference, which for 2022–2023 is “Agriculture Food Systems Transformation: From Strategy to Action.” The Executive Committee requested that technical officers from the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia review the proposals and provide recommendations. After the review, the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia provided three proposals for consideration by the Executive Committee. The Committee decided that the recommended main technical theme for the Session be “Sustainable use of land and water resources in Europe and Central Asia.” This theme was confirmed by the FAO Assistant Director-General/Regional Representative. The theme will be an umbrella under which three technical subtopics will be presented for discussion by the Commission. The subtopics, along with their brief descriptions, can be found in the draft annotated agenda for the Forty-third Session of the ECA, which is presented in the annex.

Members are kindly invited to note that apart from the technical items, the agenda includes standing items on progress in the implementation of gender equality and in the implementation of the recommendations of the Forty-second Session of the ECA (held 19–21 January 2022). Moreover, as agreed by the Executive Committee, the Commission will be invited to consider the amendments to the Rules of Procedure of the ECA.

As per Rule II and Rule III.1 of the Rules of Procedure of the ECA, at the end of the Session the Commission will be invited to elect from among the representatives the Chairperson of the ECA, the first Vice-Chairperson of the ECA, the second Vice-Chairperson of the ECA, and six other members of the Executive Committee, for a term of two years. The call for nominations was opened by the ECA Secretariat on 28 April. An invitation was sent to all members kindly inviting them to submit their nominations for candidates. The deadline for submissions is 30 June 2023.

Members of the region are kindly invited to:

- note the draft annotated agenda of the Forty-third Session of the ECA and provide comments, as needed.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION ON AGRICULTURE
FORTY-THIRD SESSION
Budapest, Hungary, 26–28 September 2023
PROVISIONAL ANNOTATED AGENDA

I. Introductory items

1. Adoption of the agenda and the timetable

2. Election of the rapporteur(s)

II. Main technical theme:

Sustainable use of land and water resources in Europe and Central Asia

The topic aims to explore in an integrated way challenges linked to the sustainable use of land and water resources in Europe and Central Asia. Land degradation, soil salinity, lack of proper land tenure mechanisms and water stress and climate change are among the main issues at the regional level. Extreme events such as droughts and flash floods have become a reality in many countries, showing that proper water management and governance are a must, and that this must be done in an integrated and transborder way, together with sustainable land and soil management and the proper governance of land tenure. The innovative perspective is to connect these topics at a higher level, with a multidisciplinary/multisectoral approach.

A regional approach for policy guidance and governance structures for land and water is necessary to ensure the sustainable use of these natural resources. It would also contribute to a more resilient food system and promote ecosystem services and the conservation of biodiversity in the region, allowing countries to strengthen their production of goods and services in a sustainable way, improve nutrition and livelihoods, and share good practices, experiences and lessons learned, thus contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly targets 6.4 and 15.3.

Integrated land and water resource management and their governance are essential to the sustainable use of land and water resources, which the Commission will be invited to explore in-depth as subtopics of the main technical theme. Each subtopic will also consider cross-cutting aspects of the land and water nexus, in particular climate change, biodiversity, gender, and food security.

3. Integrated land and water resource management

Land and water are essential factors for sustainable agricultural development. Hence, a number of countries in Europe and Central Asia are characterized as water stressed and increasingly impacted by land degradation and soil salinity. Accordingly, growing pressure on limited water resources has led to fierce competition for water among all sectors, reducing the availability of water for sustainable agrifood systems and affecting water, energy and food security and land use and tenure systems. Forest degradation has further exacerbated the problem, as forests play a key role in water security and water regulation, including for agricultural needs.

On the other hand, the progress in the implementation of reformed policies in the agrifood sector has varied among countries, as they still struggle with challenges in identifying properly functioning legal

and practical settings for intersectoral coordination. Analysing the performance of these policies and facilitating the development of improved, integrated land and water policies in the agrifood sector will lead to the enhancement of the sustainable management of both land and water resources in the region.

Integrated land and water resource management will also impact and be impacted by several cross-cutting dimensions. Appropriate governance can only be in place if gender dimensions are properly considered and addressed. In addition, land and water resource management will consider climate change impacts and biodiversity conservation in an integrated manner, promoting the sustainable use of natural resources, restoring ecosystems and enhancing food security.

Members are invited to share their experiences in addressing integrated land and water resource management and possible policy recommendation to support the achievement of the SDGs.

4. Land governance and land degradation neutrality in Europe and Central Asia

Non-transparent land governance systems, land fragmentation and ineffective land use are common problems in several countries of the region.¹ Under this subtopic, the Commission is invited to explore how land governance and land tenure can be enhanced as part of an integrated approach to the sustainable management of natural resources, in particular through large-scale interventions on the management of natural resources, climate change adaptation and mitigation, ecosystem restoration and biodiversity conservation. The potential of multipurpose land consolidation and land banking based on good practices in countries in Western Europe will also be discussed.

Given that sustainable land governance is closely intertwined with achieving and enabling land degradation neutrality, the second part of this subtopic will focus on land degradation neutrality. Driven by biophysical and socioeconomic factors and exacerbated by the impacts of climate change, the degradation of land and natural resources is one of the greatest challenges faced by several countries in the region. Although all countries in the region are members of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, not all have set land degradation neutrality targets, and for all of them the implementation of the convention still presents challenges.²

Restoring degraded land is vital for countries to achieve multiple national and international priorities on mitigating climate change, improving livelihoods, reducing desertification, restoring ecosystems, and conserving biodiversity. A strong system for monitoring land degradation neutrality in the region needs to be put into place, jointly with the strengthening of institutional capacities and designing an adequate policy framework.

Members are invited to share their experiences regarding how land governance and land tenure can contribute to the transformation of the agrifood systems in the region, also considering the restoration of degraded land and ensuring land degradation neutrality. Emphasis also should be given to policy recommendations supporting sustainable land management.

5. Water management in Europe and Central Asia

Water scarcity and droughts in some countries and floods and flash floods in others have become a reality in the Europe and Central Asia region. In addition, uneven distribution at different scales (among regions and societal groups) provides multiple sources of tension, affecting agrifood systems.

¹ For more information, please see “Central Asia performance review in land governance indices and assessment frameworks,” published in the *Central Asian Journal of Water Research* and available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.29258/CAJWR/2021-R1.v7-2/74-96.eng>.

² For more, please see the report *Land Degradation Neutrality interventions to foster gender equality*, available at <https://www.unccd.int/resources/publications/land-degradation-neutrality-interventions-foster-gender-equality>.

Improving water management requires rethinking water issues through multiple perspectives and strategic uses of cooperative partnerships and deliberative processes, using landscape and “water-centred” management approaches. A multilevel approach may cover several levels of water management hierarchy. The aim is to manage the interdependencies among various stakeholders, with the overall goal of contributing to more secure livelihoods, increased environmental sustainability and greater social harmony, including the nexus of climate change, gender and biodiversity. Most of the countries in the region have shifted their national water governance systems to the basin level and have developed laws and regulations for establishing basin management structures,³ but they still have the challenge of identifying properly functioning legal and practical settings for intersectoral coordination and allocation of water resources at the national level.

Further enhancement of regional capacity for dialogue and exchange of experience and expertise in water policy development and implementation is recommended to achieve water security, including transboundary water management and cooperation; therefore, the Commission is invited to discuss the different dimensions (social/ecological/political/environmental setting) and levels of water management (macro, meso and micro), as well as the drivers and management practices, such as the importance of transboundary cooperation and water financing under the macro level of governance, paradiplomacy under the meso level of governance, and improving water use efficiency under the micro level of governance. In addition, members are also invited to share their experiences.

III. Other matters

6. FAO’s response to the multiple crises in Europe and Central Asia

The Europe and Central Asia region has been affected by multiple crises stemming from the war in Ukraine, the effects of climate change and, most recently, the devastating earthquakes in Türkiye in early February 2023, resulting in a triple crisis in food, energy and finance. The results in the region have included steeply rising food and energy prices, accelerated inflation, tightening financial conditions, increased import bills, disrupted food supply chains, damaged logistics and infrastructure, and threatened food security. High retail prices of food, gas and petroleum products remain a major concern. Overall inflation has generally slowed since the peak in the first half of 2022, but food inflation remains high. The most vulnerable countries in the region – such as Türkiye and the countries in Central Asia, the South Caucasus, Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans – are most affected by the multiple crises, particularly the poorest segments of the population.

In response to these multiple crises, FAO has provided support to the affected countries in the region through both short-term and medium-term measures. The Commission will be invited to assess FAO’s responses to the multiple crises in the region over the past two years and provide recommendations for improving interventions to better serve the needs of the affected countries and strengthen their resilience.

7. Advancing gender equality in the region: update on the progress made

This agenda item is a standing item for all sessions of the ECA. The FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia Gender Team will provide an update on the work of the Regional Office in meeting its commitments in mainstreaming gender equality concerns in its development interventions and in specific activities aimed at advancing rural gender equality in the region through knowledge building, dialogue and policy advice. A background paper will be presented to the members that summarizes key gender and agriculture issues and findings of the review of the country gender assessments conducted in the countries of the region over the past two years, reflecting regional trends and the situation of rural

³ For more information, please see “Small Basin Governance scheme: linking water sector reforms and governance in the Aral Sea Basin,” published in the *International Journal of Water Resources Development* and available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07900627.2021.1926936>.

women due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Members will be invited to review the efforts of FAO to address gender equality in the region and to present their views and share country practices and cases regarding the mainstreaming of gender concerns in agriculture, food security and addressing malnutrition in their respective countries.

8. Progress made by the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia on the main recommendations of the Forty-second Session of the ECA

Following the recommendations on transforming food systems to address malnutrition adopted by the Forty-second Session of the ECA (19–21 January 2022), the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia will present an update on recent activities carried out by FAO in Europe and Central Asia related to the implementation of the recommendations. The Commission will be invited to note the report and provide comments as deemed appropriate.

9. Amendment of the Rules of Procedure of the ECA

In line with Rule XII of the Rules of Procedure of the ECA, the Commission will be invited to consider the amendments to the Rules of Procedure as presented in the respective Session document. The amendments are aimed at making sure that the provisions of the Rules of Procedure fully respect the FAO gender equality policies, at strengthening the provisions on the replacement of outgoing members of the Committee, and at establishing a clear provision on quorum for taking decisions by the Executive Committee.

10. Election of the ECA Chairperson, the first and second Vice-Chairpersons and the other members of the Executive Committee

According to Rule II and Rule III.1 of the Rules of Procedure of the ECA, the Commission will be invited to elect from among the representatives the Chairperson of the ECA the first Vice-Chairperson of the ECA, the second Vice-Chairperson of the ECA, and six other members of the Executive Committee, for a term of two years.

11. Any other business

12. Date and place of the Forty-fourth Session of the ECA

13. Review and adoption of the report of the Session

14. Closing of the Session