

Informal Consultation for Europe and Central Asia 4–5 May 2023

Background Note

Session 6

Agenda of the Thirty-Fourth Session of the Regional Conference for Europe

1. The Thirty-fourth Regional Conference for Europe (ERC) will be held within the period of 13 to 17 May 2024. The purpose of this paper is to obtain input from the Members for preparing the draft provisional agenda for the ERC.

2. Agendas for regional conferences consist of the following four standard sections: (i) introductory items; (ii) regional and global policy and regulatory issues; (iii) programme and budget matters; and (iv) other matters, including information notes.

3. **Introductory items (i):** This section consists of standard opening items, such as the election of the Chairperson and others, the adoption of the agenda, and the delivery of several statements.

4. **Regional and global policy and regulatory issues (ii):** Approximately one to two important topics pertinent for the region are discussed under this section of the agenda. Taking note of the topics covered at previous ERC sessions (Annex 1) and the recommendations of last ERC session, the ERC Secretariat prepared the following initial shortlist of topics proposed for consideration and discussion. Members are invited to discuss, elect and provide their feedback to the Secretariat on the topics to be discussed at the ERC.

a) The role of innovation and digitalization in the sustainable use of land, forests and water resources to accelerate the implementation of nature-positive, climate-resilient and low-emissions pathways in agrifood systems.

Under this topic, we will examine the role of innovation and digitalization in improving the management of natural resources to promote low-emission and climate-resilient agrifoods that preserve agro-biodiversity and improve water governance in the ECA region.

The background document will analyse the current status of net zero and climate- and nature-positive interventions for moving toward climate-resilient, low-emission and climate-neutral agriculture in the ECA region, bringing concrete examples from FAO's collaborative activities with relevant partners on green innovative technologies, digital tools and mechanisms for managing natural resources and agrobiodiversity sustainably. It will also emphasize the role of technology and digital solutions in creating an enabling environment for efficient water governance, including in the context of climate change. It is expected that, based on the background document, challenges and opportunities of using innovative strategies and implementing mechanisms will be identified and policy recommendations for natural resources and agro-biodiversity management presented to move forward to net zero agrifood systems in the ECA region.

b) Ensuring sustainable and resilient rural development and local food systems for smallholders, family farms and rural communities through an inclusive policy environment, gender-responsive rural advisory services, innovation, digitalization and social protection.

This agenda item will further discuss the fact that rural populations – including in Europe and Central Asia – are often subjected to specific risks, such as high poverty rates and uncertain and irregular income, lack of access to decent jobs, lack of infrastructure and technologies, food insecurity and malnutrition. In addition, due to multiple crises, inclusive policies are often deprioritized. Nevertheless, the transformation to sustainable agrifood systems, which provide various

opportunities for improved economic and social sustainability, requires addressing equal access to resources, services and information and leveraging gains for economic and social sustainability, leaving no one behind.

The background document will present challenges and opportunities for inclusive policy environment, focusing on the promising entry points for gender-responsive rural advisory services, innovation and digitalization, and social protection.

In the discussion of this agenda item, FAO Members and representatives of civil society, research and academia and the private sector are invited to share inclusive, gender-responsive and innovative good practices and lessons learned, in addition to programmes and governance and policy options that have helped advance rural development and local agrifood systems (including rural–urban linkages as opportunities for short supply chains, local consumers and users of rural services). Guidance will be sought on critical actions, priorities and opportunities for regional cooperation and action.

c) Bioeconomy for sustainable food systems in the Europe and Central Asia region: land, water and labour requirements and the role of green cities.

This topic will discuss the opportunities that the bioeconomy could provide for the transformation to a sustainable food system in the countries of the region. The background document will provide a basis for the sustainability aspects relevant to advancing the bioeconomy in the region in support of ensuring food security and sustainable agrifood systems, based on ongoing work that maps bioeconomy in the region. The result could support a gap analysis exercise on the main social, economic, environmental and good governance issues that could be addressed in the region. Particular emphasis will be given in the background document to reviewing the role of green cities in bioeconomy and sustainable transition and in the context of climate change.

In the discussion, FAO Members are invited to share experiences, good practices and lessons learned resulting in policy recommendations for the utilization of the benefits of the bioeconomy.

5. Implications on world food security and agriculture, including global food prices, arising from the war in Ukraine (*the 33rd Session of the ERC requested FAO to report regularly to Members on this topic and to add this matter to the agenda of the next session of the ERC*).

6. Programme and budget matters (iii): Issues such as the results and priorities for FAO’s work in the region are standard items discussed under this section. In addition, at the Thirty-second Session of the ERC, the Members requested that FAO add a standard item on the agenda on the FAO evaluations in the Europe and Central Asia region, along with a progress report on the implementation of the adopted recommendations. This request was further confirmed at the Thirty-third Session of the ERC in 2022.

7. Other matters (iv): The reports from the latest sessions of the European Commission on Agriculture and the other two regional article VI bodies – the European Forestry Commission and the European Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Advisory Commission – would report to the ERC. As for the regional article XIV bodies, the Central Asian and Caucasus Regional Fisheries and Aquaculture Commission also reports to the ERC, while the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean has so far not entered into a similar formal agreement, hence its report will be presented as an information item. The Multi-Year Programme of Work is also presented as part of this section.

8. Information notes: Documents under this section are presented for information and can be commented on by the Members under any other business. This section will include a document with the outcomes and recommendations of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean. Members are also invited to propose topics for including under this section.

List of regional and global policy and regulatory topics covered at previous sessions of the Regional Conference for Europe

Thirty-third ERC – Łódź, Poland, hybrid modality, 10–13 May 2022 ([ERC/22/REP](#))

1. The road to transformative agrifood systems in Europe and Central Asia – Regional actions to implement the FAO Strategic Framework 2022–2031
2. Sustainable food value chains for nutrition, a practical approach for transforming agrifood systems for healthy diets in Europe and Central Asia

Thirty-second ERC – 2–4 November 2020 ([ERC/20/REP](#)):

1. Sustainable food systems and healthy diets in Europe and Central Asia
2. Solutions for youth, employment and developing rural areas in relation to the United Nations Decade of Family Farming

Thirty-first ERC - Voronezh, Russian Federation, 16–18 May 2018 ([ERC/18/REP](#)):

1. Sustainable agriculture and food systems in Europe and Central Asia in a changing climate
2. E-agriculture: the use of information and communication technologies for the development of sustainable and inclusive food systems and trade integration

Thirtieth ERC – Antalya, Turkey, 4–6 May 2016 ([ERC/16/REP](#)):

1. The Sustainable Development Goals and their implications for agriculture and rural development in Europe and Central Asia
2. Pulses for improving balanced nutrition and healthy food systems in Europe and Central Asia – International Year of Pulses 2016

Twenty-ninth ERC – Bucharest, Romania, 1–4 April 2014 ([ERC/14/REP](#)):

1. Food loss and waste in Europe and Central Asia
2. International Year of Family Farming in Europe and Central Asia

Twenty-eighth ERC – Baku, Azerbaijan, 16–20 April 2012 ([ERC/12/REP](#)):

1. Policies for food security in the region: challenges and perspectives – Food outlook towards 2050

Twenty-seventh ERC – Yerevan, Armenia, 13–14 May 2010 ([ERC/10/REP](#)):

1. Policy response to challenges in agriculture and rural development in the Europe and Central Asia region: sharing experience and enhancing cooperation in the region

Twenty-sixth ERC – Innsbruck, Austria, 26–27 June 2008 ([ERC/08/REP](#)):

1. FAO and adaptation to climate change in the European region

2. Promotion of traditional regional agricultural and food products: A further step towards sustainable rural development

Twenty-fifth ERC – Riga, Latvia, 8–9 June 2006 ([ERC/06/REP](#)):

1. Contribution of rural development in meeting the World Food Summit/Millennium Development Goals in the region
2. The view of the European region on the role of FAO as provider of global public goods
3. Strengthening regional cooperation and assisting countries in controlling highly pathogenic avian influenza in Europe, including Commonwealth of Independent States countries

Twenty-fourth ERC – Montpellier, France, 5–7 May 2004 ([ERC/04/REP](#)):

1. Food safety and quality in Europe: Aspects concerning in particular quality, nutritional balance, the importance of agricultural land and cultural heritage (“terroirs”)
2. Agricultural research: its role and contribution to sustainable rural development
3. Major European programmes, initiatives and fora on agricultural research
4. Review of the state of food and agriculture in the region: focus on rural poverty