



Europe and Central Asia Gender Newsletter

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Speaking of gender equality when we need it most

The past year has posed unprecedented challenges to rural women and men in Europe and Central Asia, with conflicts and wars casting a shadow over their livelihoods. Despite significant progress in the past decade, as highlighted in the recent report¹ by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), there remains a real risk of gender equality being marginalized in national policies. This presents a major challenge, particularly in the context of advancing sustainable agrifood systems. Reasserting gender equality and women's empowerment can be a daunting task. In this edition, we delve into inspiring stories and noteworthy developments spanning the region, to equip gender practitioners with insights for championing the cause of equality within rural communities.

Calls for stronger action for rural justice at the International Day of Rural Women Conference in Budapest

FAO's longstanding civil society partner in Europe, the Union of Hungarian Women, organized the International Day of Rural Women Conference on 17 October 2023 in Budapest. The conference has become a tradition

¹ The digital interactive version of the report is available at <https://www.fao.org/3/CC5060EN/online/CC5060EN.html>

In this issue:

Regional highlights:

- Calls for stronger action for rural justice at the International Day of Rural Women Conference in Budapest
- Advancing gender equality in agrifood systems: inspiration from the 43rd Session of the European Commission on Agriculture
- Promoting women's equal access to and control over land in the Western Balkans
- Gender transformative approaches and agrifood systems: translating goals into FAO's practice in Europe and Central Asia
- Gender responsive policies under the spotlight in a regional workshop in Türkiye

Voices from the field:

- Setting the bar high for gender equality: insights from a parliamentarian

where decision makers, activists, rural women and representatives of international organizations meet and discuss the progress made in realizing women's pivotal role in rural development. This year, the conference focused on sustainability, digitalization, food security and climate policy, with a special look at the situation in Europe.



Nabil Gangi delivered the opening speech at the International Day of Rural Women Conference

“Without women and girls, there is no sustainability of rural development,” said Nabil Gangi, Officer in Charge, Deputy Regional Representative at the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, in his opening remarks. Citing FAO's recent report² on the status of women in agrifood systems, Nabil Gangi highlighted the limited progress made in achieving gender equality in the last decade.

According to the report, the global cost of persistent gender inequality in agrifood systems is estimated to be around USD 1 trillion, which leaves 45 million people food insecure. This global cost has several striking implications. Due to unequal access to various agricultural inputs, the gender gap in land productivity between female- and male managed farms of the same size is 24 percent. Furthermore, women engaged in wage employment in agriculture earn 82 cents for every dollar earned by men.

Progress in the last decade has been mixed, and certainly not enough to achieve the 2030 Agenda. On the positive side, the gender gap in women's access to mobile internet in low and middle income countries narrowed from 25 percent to 16 percent between 2017 and 2021, and the gender gap in access to bank accounts decreased from 9 percentage points to 6 percentage points. Notwithstanding these achievements, the gap in food insecurity between men and women widened from 1.7 percentage points in 2019 to 4.3 percentage points in 2021. Recent shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic do not help the situation – women were four times more likely to lose their agricultural jobs due to the pandemic compared with men.

² The digital interactive version of the report is available at <https://www.fao.org/3/CC5060EN/online/CC5060EN.html>

Nabil Gangi underlined how access to land and secure tenure rights and comprehensive social protection³, including child care and health care, are key to triggering lasting change in improving the status of rural women and girls. Plus, longer term challenges such as climate change foster the need for greater equality in rural areas. Nabil Gangi gave the example that women are more likely to stay on the farm during heatwaves, whereas men tend to adjust their working hours.

Discriminatory social norms are slow to change, but that should not discourage changemakers. It takes courage and dedication to work with men and women at the community level to challenge entrenched prejudices and discriminatory behaviours. The International Day of Rural Women Conference celebrated in Budapest in 2023 provided hope and encouragement to all who believe that things must change to achieve justice for rural women. In his closing remarks, Nabil Gangi reminded the audience of Eleanor Roosevelt's famous quote: “You must do the thing you think you cannot do”.

Advancing gender equality in agrifood systems: inspiration from the 43rd Session of the European Commission on Agriculture



Bizkaigane Cooperative combines agroecological practices with gender responsive measures

Land degradation, soil salinity, lack of proper land tenure mechanisms, water stress and climate change were among the items at the top of the agenda at the Forty-third Session of the European Commission on Agriculture,⁴ convened in Budapest on 27 and 28 September 2023 to discuss how Member States can sustainably manage land and water resources to contribute to more resilient food systems, ecosystem services, and the conservation of biodiversity.

³ FAO's Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia recently published an analysis of how to improve social protection for rural populations in Europe and Central Asia. This is available at <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cc1925en>

⁴ Further information is available at <https://www.fao.org/events/detail/43rd-session-of-the-european-commission-on-agriculture/en>

The side event⁵ on gender equality highlighted how strong partnerships can support gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of increasing shocks and crises.

Paola Laini is a young farmer based in Italy and is part of Associazione Rurale Italiana, an organization which is a member of European Coordination Via Campesina. She studied organic farming and is now seeking a job on a sustainable farm in the rural area where she has settled. In her speech at the side event, she provided a unique perspective on how collaboration between farmers can address women's and men's specific needs and constraints, while also ensuring the sustainability of agricultural production.

Paola Laini gave the example of "Bizkaigane", an agroecological cooperative located in the Basque Country, in the north of Spain. Established in 1983, the cooperative consists of 12 dairy farmers and produces cheese, yoghurt and raw milk. With around 40 cows and 200–300 sheep, the cooperative farms 100 hectares of land. As well as being a notable example of agroecological livestock farming, the farm also applies gender responsive measures by combining parenthood policies with farming in order to reinforce the cooperative's sustainability.

"During the pregnancies of two members of the project, the cooperative rescheduled the women's workdays and reduced their working hours to support them to continue farming. In parallel, with the assistance of a farmers' workers union, the cooperative recruited new young farmers and grew from 7 to 12 members. What could have become an issue of gender inequality leading to the exclusion of women farmers instead resulted in an improvement in women's working conditions, an increase in cooperative membership numbers and a community supported solution based on solidarity."

The example shows how collective action produces social innovations that can create gender responsive solutions in farming.

"Innovation in food production is often associated with digital and technological enhancements which may result in additional pressures on ecological resources. Social innovation, on the other hand, can trigger women's empowerment at the same time as protecting ecosystem services for the common good," Paola Laini said.

⁵ The concept note is available at <https://www.fao.org/3/cc7911en/cc7911en.pdf>

Peasant agroecology practices⁶ inspire all food system actors with alternative pathways and perspectives that alleviate the pressure on land and water while furthering the gender equality agenda at the community level.

Promoting women's equal access to and control over land in the Western Balkans



Workshop participants discuss potential roadmaps for facilitating SDG 5.a.1 monitoring and reporting

For the past ten years, FAO and GIZ have been working to tackle the gender gap in land ownership and control in the Western Balkans. In 2015, notaries from the Western Balkans gave testimonies on how traditional practices prevent women and daughters from having secure rights over property equally with men and sons. This led FAO and GIZ to team up to (i) identify the strengths and weaknesses for gender equality in land ownership and control, and (ii) facilitate country reporting, monitoring and implementation of the SDG Indicators 5.a.1 and 5.a.2, to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property. Thanks to these efforts, the majority of countries in the Western Balkans monitor their progress in achieving the SDG 5.a target by periodically reporting on SDG Indicator 5.a.2. FAO and GIZ are also supporting countries in the Western Balkans to report on SDG Indicator 5.a.1.

The longstanding partnership between FAO and GIZ has brought about tangible progress:⁷

- Sex disaggregated data generated from the property registration IT systems is showing a significant increase in women's ownership since 2014, for example, a 10 percent increase in North Macedonia.
- The property registration fee in Serbia has been reduced to facilitate women's ownership or co ownership of land.

⁶ Additional agroecology case studies are available at https://www.eurovia.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Agroecology_EN.pdf

⁷ More results are available at <https://www.fao.org/3/cb0173en/CB0173EN.pdf>

- Notaries in the Western Balkans are organizing consultation sessions specifically for married couples, aimed at raising awareness about their rights concerning land and property ownership, as well as co ownership issues.
- Civil registers and property registers have been made interoperable, which facilitates inheritance procedures and transfers of ownership in Serbia and Albania.
- The governments of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia have expressed interest in carrying out a review of their national legal frameworks against the proxies of SDG Indicator 5.a.2.

Representatives from ministries of agriculture and national statistical offices in the Western Balkans met in October 2023 in Rome to exchange good practices, lessons learned and ways forward at the regional roundtable organized by FAO, GIZ and the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group in Southeast Europe. The workshop sought to identify a roadmap for facilitating SDG Indicator 5.a.1 monitoring and reporting.

Jana Schumann, GIZ Programme Leader, emphasized that “data on landownership divided by gender is crucial for monitoring gender equality, promoting women’s empowerment, and crafting effective policies and programmes to address gender disparities in land rights”. At the same time, Jose Rosero Moncayo, FAO Director of Statistics, highlighted FAO’s commitment to supporting the collection of data for SDG Indicator 5.a.1 through “tailored technical assistance and capacity building activities”.

At the event, Anna Jenderedjian, Gender and Social Protection Specialist at FAO REU, discussed the challenges and gaps identified in FAO’s Country Gender Assessments⁸ (CGAs) of countries in the Western Balkans, such as migration and depopulation of rural areas and the gender gap in access to productive resources. She added that there is often a lack or inconsistency of information about the sectors where disparities are most pronounced, which hampers the integration of gender responsive targets and indicators into national plans, confirming the relevance of the FAO–GIZ partnership.

One of the areas for addressing the gaps is “establishing the digital connection between property registers, civil registers, business registers and others to simplify the work of the notaries and registration offices,” said Veronika Efremova, GIZ Senior Project Manager. Despite data challenges, ministry representatives from the region demonstrated the progress being made in integrating gender equality principles and setting specific goals in rural development, including through designating gender focal points (GFPs). However, as the roundtable discussions highlighted, GFPs still lack resources

⁸ The CGA series is available at <https://www.fao.org/europe/resources/country-gender-assessment-series/en>

for properly mainstreaming gender equality and a higher level uptake of gender policies depends on the level of gender awareness. Hence, addressing advocacy and capacity building efforts within institutions should remain a priority for FAO and other development actors.

Going forward, the participants agreed on the sources for collecting data for SDG Indicator 5.a.1 following the internationally recommended methodology. Agricultural censuses are planned in the Western Balkans over the next two years (2024–2025) and there are preliminary plans to integrate a module on gender disaggregated ownership of land in the majority of upcoming surveys, including in Montenegro, North Macedonia, Kosovo,⁹ and Bosnia and Herzegovina. FAO and GIZ will continue to promote regional cooperation to support the national stakeholders in formulating evidence based policies for improving women’s access to land ownership and control and other resources in the Western Balkans.

Gender transformative approaches and agrifood systems: translating goals into FAO’s practice in Europe and Central Asia



Regional workshop participants visit rural producers in Georgia

Gender focal points (GFPs), technical officers and experts from FAO’s Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia met in Tbilisi on 29 November 2023 for a three day regional workshop. Each year, the capacity development workshops convened by the FAO REU gender team offer an opportunity to enhance knowledge, learn best practices and exchange ideas. This year’s workshop also included a field trip to FAO project sites. The workshop followed the release of FAO’s flagship report *The Status of Women in Agrifood Systems*¹⁰ which highlighted the importance of moving beyond addressing specific gender gaps towards adopting gender transformative approaches that explicitly address the structural barriers to gender equality. To this end, the report outlined three major tasks ahead:

⁹ References to Kosovo shall be understood in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

¹⁰ The report is available at <https://www.fao.org/3/cc5343en/online/cc5343en.html>

- a) produce high quality research and disaggregated data;
- b) leverage successful approaches beyond households and communities to markets and policy spheres; and
- c) integrate explicit actions towards gender equality and women’s empowerment in agrifood systems.

In this context, the regional workshop has created a promising momentum. The event offered hands on capacity building and peer exchange opportunities. The agenda included a field visit to Ateni, a medieval city situated northwest of Tbilisi in the valley of the Tana River. Fieldwork participants met local families and young women agrifood entrepreneurs including those who have recently returned to Georgia from working or studying overseas. The region’s bustling winemaking scene and the renaissance of local grape varieties offer fruitful opportunities for returnees, and in recent years, the number of winemaker families also running agritourism facilities in the village has increased as a result of seed grants provided through FAO’s projects.

Local women in Ateni highlight the persistent challenges of the village environment that cause women to emigrate to urban areas to make a better living. These include the limited diversity of occupations and demanding working conditions in the local rural economy. To tackle these challenges, Ateni, like other rural communities in Europe and Central Asia, needs further diversification of work opportunities in local agrifood value chains, for example through agritourism and retail, and support for local women to become asset owners which improves economic entrepreneurship.

The regional workshop aimed to boost the participants’ commitment to promoting the gender equality agenda in their respective communities through solid evidence. The real life stories shared in Georgia resonated with many workshop participants, inspiring them to make more tangible progress in gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Gender responsive policies under the spotlight in a regional workshop in Türkiye

Government officials working in the areas of agriculture and forestry in Tajikistan, Türkiye and Uzbekistan came together in Ordu, Türkiye on 13 and 14 December 2023 for a regional workshop organized under the project “Leaving no one behind: Greater involvement and empowerment of rural women in Türkiye and Central Asia”. The project is funded by the Government of Türkiye under the umbrella of the FAO–Türkiye Partnership Programme. Participants exchanged insights on effective practices concerning socially inclusive and gender responsive policies and activities that align with the goals of the 2030 Agenda, and visited the gender unit within the Provincial Directorate of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, as well as two women’s cooperatives in Ordu.



Practitioners and government officials from Tajikistan, Türkiye and Uzbekistan meet for the regional workshop

During the workshop, lead researchers presented the key findings of the Country Gender Assessments for Türkiye and Tajikistan – to be published soon following their finalization. These country case studies show that women are mostly concentrated in irregular, labour intensive and vulnerable jobs in agriculture. Rural women also continue to bear the burden of household chores and taking care of family farms, which causes time poverty and limits their access to agricultural extension, information and development opportunities, including the adoption of technological tools. Participants discussed and committed themselves to taking the next steps in coming months through their respective ministries to integrate gender responsive action into their decisions and policies.

Setting the bar high for gender equality: insights from a parliamentarian



Khatia Tsilosani, Member of Parliament in Georgia, is steering gender mainstreaming efforts for rural communities in Georgia

Khatia Tsilosani, a Member of Parliament (MP) in Georgia, has been a key contributor to the gender mainstreaming efforts for Georgia’s rural communities and shared her experiences at FAO’s regional workshop in Tbilisi on 29 November 2023 when FAO’s gender focal points, technical officers and experts met. As a parliamentarian, Khatia Tsilosani underlined the importance of the political ownership of tackling gender based inequalities in her speech. The parliament has been

central to political debate and progress in Georgia because it is the highest level institution that represents Georgian people and communicates laws to constituencies.

A key driver of the reforms has been Georgia's quest for candidate status to join the European Union. Khatia Tsilosani highlighted that, "Gender equality is among the conditions for EU candidacy since equal participation of men and women is crucial for a democratic society and government. With recent reforms introduced in Georgia, we are confident that we will be investing our experience and our knowledge to the agenda of the European Union related to gender equality".

Khatia Tsilosani drew attention to four remarkable steps taken recently in Georgia. First, gender mainstreaming training is now obligatory for parliamentary staff working in law making to build capacities in legislation. Second, women's empowerment has become a new pillar under the parliament's supervision. The parliament can request information from government bodies on gender equality matters and government reports must now include gender aspects.

Third, to deliver gender transformative impacts in real life, a total of 64 gender equality councils have been established in municipalities. Last but not least, gender impact assessment (GIA) has become mandatory in law making, which holds the public sector accountable in terms of gender equality. Khatia Tsilosani emphasized how GIA helps to assess the tangible impacts that legal documents deliver in households across the country.

"Without gender budgeting, the policy could not bring about the intended impact," Khatia Tsilosani also noted. Hence, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture and the Ministry of Finance collaborates on a gender responsive support scheme for cooperatives in the country.

Khatia Tsilosani additionally underscored the need for greater support to women smallholders considering the impacts of climate change. Rural women, who make up nearly half of Georgia's smallholder farmers, are increasingly concerned about selecting and accessing climate resilient crops and seeds. It is therefore imperative for lawmakers to consider the gendered impacts of global challenges, such as climate change, to ensure that rural women and men are equally equipped with the necessary tools to cope.

Securing the commitment of parliamentarians and maintaining open communication with the Georgian electorate has been key to advancing the gender equality agenda. Yet, well rooted reforms also require community ownership and bottom up feedback mechanisms. Khatia Tsilosani emphasized that behavioural changes in society are necessary to ensure that communities contribute to law making processes and demand equality and empowerment for rural women. The ongoing reforms in Georgia are intended to trigger behavioural change and empower rural communities for lasting change. The case of Georgia showcases how parliamentarians across Europe and Central Asia have a fundamental responsibility in unlocking pathways for gender equality.

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