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**Solutions for Youth, Employment and Developing Rural Areas in relation
to the United Nations Decade of Family Farming**

Executive Summary

Almost one-third of the population in Europe and Central Asia live in rural areas and face multiple challenges, in view of the predominance of small family farms in many countries of the region. There are several concurrent and interconnected development constraints, including poverty, food insecurity, inequality, unemployment, and risk of natural disasters – all of which often have disproportionate impacts on disadvantaged groups, including youth.

A key goal is to work with communities to maintain sustainable livelihoods in rural areas and improve quality of life by enhancing infrastructure and services. In this paper, a review of the needs, constraints and opportunities for family farms and of the specific challenges faced by rural youth in the region illustrates the need to foster generational sustainability in family farming. Strategies and policies that can potentially foster rural revitalization in order to strengthen the role of family farmers and rural youth in economic, social and environmental development, as well as in the transformational change process, are then described.

The United Nations Decade of Family Farming 2019-2028 (UNDF), with the collective efforts of the international community, national governments, the private sector and civil society, provides excellent opportunities to further enhance support to the development of family farms and rural youth and to assist in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the framework of the UNDF, this paper provides key recommendations concerning: (1) policy in support of family farming; (2) structural transformation of family farms and sustainable productivity growth; (3) investment support and access to finance; and (4) policy in support of rural youth.

Suggested action by the Regional Conference

The Regional Conference is invited to encourage its Members to:

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- 1) Promote the structural transformation of the food and agriculture sector to expand the multidimensional nature of family farming and thus provide tailor-made and context-specific solutions in order to achieve the SDGs.
- 2) Prepare National Action Plans for the UNDIFF that envisage tangible steps and specific undertakings in support of family farming at country level, in the context of the UNDIFF.
- 3) Adopt territorial and integrated community development approaches that recognize the importance and value to local needs of economic diversification, which addresses both the agrifood supply chain and non-agricultural economic activities in rural areas.
- 4) Develop inclusive food systems through the sharing of information, knowledge and expertise among farmers and other actors. Facilitate innovations and introduce digitalization and e-agriculture to ensure the high coverage and efficiency of provided services.
- 5) Increase the level of investment support for small family farms and youth entrepreneurship by enhancing the investment environment and broadening the portfolio of suitable financial products.
- 6) Provide responsible investment in public infrastructure, digitalization, climate change mitigation and adaptation, social protection and the provision of services to ensure that no one in society is left behind.
- 7) Develop policies in support of rural youth, specifically related to access to land and other natural resources, and in support of decent employment opportunities, such as start-up businesses.
- 8) Promote the empowerment of young people through their participation in governance and decision-making, thereby improving their social and economic well-being, addressing the root causes of economic or distress migration, and maximizing the positive impacts of migration for rural communities.
- 9) Request that FAO continue assisting the countries in the region in the sustainable structural transformation of rural areas to expand the multidimensional nature of family farming and leverage the livelihoods of family farmers, including youth.

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I. Introduction

1. The United Nations Decade of Family Farming 2019-2028 (UNDFFF) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2017.¹ It serves as a framework for countries to develop public policies and investments to support family farming and contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

2. On average, almost one-third of the population in the countries in the Europe and Central Asia region (ECA-region) live in rural areas.² In 2015, 28 percent of the population of the European Union lived in a rural area.³ Similarly, according to FAO (2018a),⁴ rural areas are home to an average of 30 percent of the population of the non-European Union and non-European Free Trade Association (EFTA) Member States. Agriculture, forestry and fisheries remain essential parts of many economies of the region. Rural poverty has been declining over the years, but this trend has recently slowed (World Bank, 2019). In many countries, the average income per head is lower in rural areas than in urban areas, the skills base is narrower, and the service sector is less developed. Furthermore, rural people – especially women, youth and other disadvantaged groups – have fewer decent employment opportunities and often do not have access to adequate living and working conditions. With the broad changes that are taking place in food and agricultural systems globally, rural populations across the ECA-region, including farmers, will face major challenges in the coming decades. The UNDFFF aims to focus the collective efforts of the international community, national governments, the private sector and civil society on the design and implementation of comprehensive economic, environmental and social policies that will strengthen family farming's position in agriculture for the overall benefit of rural areas.

3. This paper is structured in four sections. A situation analysis of family farms in the ECA-region precedes a review of the challenges facing the region's rural youth, which discusses the generational sustainability of family farming. An overview of strategies that can potentially foster rural revitalization follows, and then the roles for FAO and Members in developing family farms and opportunities for rural youth are explored.

II. Structural analysis of family farms in the ECA-region

4. Family farming,⁵ given its multidimensional nature, is – both globally and in the ECA-region – essential for achieving several of the SDGs, in particular SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 5, SDG 8, SDG 10 and SDG 17. In this respect, key SDG targets in the region are SDG Target 2.3 on doubling the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers by 2030; Target 1.2 on reducing at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty; and SDG Target 1.4 on ensuring that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land. Countries in the ECA-region are at different stages of structural (and agricultural) transformation, and their economies differ

¹ Resolution A/RES/72/239. For further information, see <http://www.fao.org/family-farming/decade/en/>.

² In this paper, the Europe and Central Asia region is divided into the following five subregions: European Union Member States and EFTA countries, European CIS countries, Western Balkan countries, Caucasus countries and Central Asian countries.

³ For more information, visit the Eurostat website at https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Statistics_on_rural_areas_in_the_EU#Population_distribution_by_degree_of_urbanisation.

⁴ References in this paper are listed in the Web Annex, Section 4.

⁵ Although there is no single, universal definition of family farming, as part of the International Year of Family Farming in 2014 it was defined in the following way: "Family farming (including all family-based agricultural activities) is a means of organizing agricultural, forestry, fisheries, pastoral and aquaculture production that is managed and operated by a family and predominantly reliant on family labour of both women and men. The family and the farm are linked, co-evolve and combine economic, environmental, reproductive, social, and cultural functions" (FAO and IFAD, 2019).

in terms of the share of agriculture, forestry and fisheries in both gross value added and employment, but they have some characteristics in common, such as land fragmentation, low investment in rural infrastructure and poor access to rural services.

5. In 2016, there were 10.5 million agricultural holdings within the European Union. Two-thirds of the farms were smaller than 5 ha in size (Eurostat, 2018), and 97 percent of all farms were classified as family farms (Van der Ploeg, 2016). A similar situation exists in the Western Balkans, Caucasus and Central Asia (except Kazakhstan) (FAO, forthcoming). The regular agriculture labour force in the European Union declined by 31.7 percent in the period 2005-2016 (Eurostat, 2018).

6. The farm structures across the region are highly diverse, but most of the countries, including those in the European Union, are still largely dominated by family farms. During the period 2018-2019, FAO conducted country studies on the needs and constraints of smallholders and family farms in eight countries drawn from the European Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Western Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia (FAO, forthcoming). The studies found that family farms dominate agricultural production in the eight countries, but their share of the total output of the sector varies depending on the product and country. Serbia and the Republic of Moldova have dualistic farm structures with many small farms but also a relatively high number of larger farms (above 10 ha), while in Albania, Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia and Tajikistan, between 95 and 99 percent of all farms are smaller than 5 ha. Land fragmentation is excessive in most countries in which small family farms dominate, hampering farm productivity and competitiveness.

7. Furthermore, small farms do not constitute one homogeneous group. In considering the ongoing structural transformation of rural areas, three strategic development pathways for small farms – termed the agricultural path, the diversification path and the exit path – can be identified (see Web Annex, Section 3, and FAO, forthcoming).

8. The conditions for economically sustainable agriculture are in general difficult in countries with farm structures dominated by small family farms. Agricultural land market activities vary across the countries, from relatively well-functioning markets in the Republic of Moldova and Serbia to the absence of one in Tajikistan. Family farms have limited access to production factors, natural resources and finance. They often suffer from poorly managed and maintained irrigation and drainage systems and from limited access to land. Outdated technology, low input quality and low skills are key constraints. Contract farming is rare and varies across scales of operation and sectors. Consequently, family farms face high transaction costs in production and marketing, which further contributes to low productivity and high risks.

9. Outside the European Union, funding to develop agriculture is often limited, with few policy interventions targeting family farms, marginalized groups and remote areas. Investment subsidies, if they exist, require high standards and/or are provided with complex compliance mechanisms. The development of small farms is often hampered by a lack of institutional competence, capacity and political willingness. Family farms therefore leverage only limited investments. They lack their own funds and thus need to borrow from banks, but they often cannot provide acceptable collateral. They contend with high interest rates, price volatility, the risk of natural disasters and the effects of climate change. Remittances are an important source of income for recipient families, mainly in the Caucasus and Central Asia, but they are typically spent on housing and consumption, not on investment in agriculture or other rural businesses (FAO, 2018a).

10. Family farms in the region outside of the European Union are mostly active in short value chains. The agriculture and food processing sector in general, and commercially oriented family farms in particular, face problems in accessing both domestic and international markets. Farmers lack market information and knowledge about where to find it. The small scale of production and the low level of specialization hinder family farms from establishing durable or lasting links within the value chains. This is due to the difficulties of small farms in producing the stable quantity and quality that are demanded by processors and operators in the market. Therefore, long-lasting cooperation among family farms and their clients is rare.

11. Persistent rural poverty in the ECA-region stems from several factors, especially in the Western Balkans, the European CIS, the Caucasus and Central Asia,⁶ and it has strong gender dimensions. Low rural incomes are especially an issue in the region's post-transition economies, and disadvantaged groups – including women, minorities and the disabled – find it harder to secure decent work and tend to be overrepresented in lower-paid, insecure and informal jobs. Women have less access to land and other productive resources (agricultural inputs, financial services) and frequently undertake manual labour as informal, unpaid family workers. In some countries of the region, no more than 10 percent of registered landowners are women and fewer than 10 percent of agricultural enterprises are registered under women's names (World Bank and FAO, 2014).

12. Job informality and limited access to credit also limit entrepreneurship, social protection and decent work. Access to employment and economic opportunities for women, especially young women, is hampered by lack of social services, including childcare facilities, and by social practices that expect them to bear all of the burden of domestic responsibilities (FAO, 2019). Rural women also have less access to training and to agricultural knowledge and technologies, forming just 10 percent of the clients of extension services in some countries. This is important, given that promoting sustainable agriculture practices depends on access to knowledge, information and training.

13. Information and communications technology (ICT) has the potential to enable farmers to access not only information and knowledge but also financial services, credit, insurance, market systems, etc. Access to ICT and digital infrastructure in rural areas is often limited, and this urban–rural digital divide is restraining the stronger contribution of farmers to trade integration processes (FAO, 2018b).

14. Finally, missing from the statistics and trends is the increasing vulnerability of rural populations to climate change and severe weather events, which impede sustainable farming development and create livelihood risks, which in turn could push some people into poverty or to out-migrate (FAO, 2018a). For example, in Central Asia, climate stressors are expected to damage agricultural yields and cut overall food availability across the entire region by 2050 (United States Agency for International Development [USAID], 2018). Farmers lack general climate information and access to agrometeorological tools in this regard. A lack of capacities for data gathering, interpretation and use regarding enhanced climate and disaster risk reduction action is evident. Small farms are the most vulnerable to climate change, as they have limited resources. An adequate response to the threats of climate change is needed to unlock the rural poverty cycle.

III. Specific challenges facing rural youth in the region

15. In 1995, the UN General Assembly defined youth as those aged 15 to 24 but noted that the age range varies among countries and societies. By contrast, for policy purposes, farmers in the European Union younger than 40 are defined as “young farmers.”⁷ “Youth” are a diverse social group that cannot be served by “one size fits all” solutions. As well as cultural differences among countries and regions, there are big differences within communities in terms of, for example, ages, educational levels and aspirations. Hence, it is necessary to promote a diverse set of opportunities for youth, including decent rural employment in the wider rural economy and in farming, while continuing efforts to eliminate the use of child labour.

16. Rural youth in the region face several challenges, involving private-sector development, access to training, education and finance, labour market intermediation, rural development, and much more (International Fund for Agricultural Development [IFAD], 2019). Despite a high general level of development, inequalities are on the rise in all parts of the region, manifested in high levels of youth unemployment, exclusion of marginalized groups, and lack of access to social services (United

⁶ According to World Bank data (cited by FAO, forthcoming), based on national poverty lines there are more than 9 million poor people (24.8 percent of the total population) in the eight countries in which smallholder studies were recently conducted (see Web Annex, Section 2, Table 1).

⁷ Regulation (EU) No. 1307/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 establishing rules for direct payments to farmers under support schemes within the framework of the common agricultural policy and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No. 637/2008 and Council Regulation (EC) No. 73/2009.

Nations Development Group [UNDG], 2017). Socio-economic forces, such as marginal remuneration, seasonality of work, precarious working conditions, unemployment and persistent rural poverty, are among the key drivers of the migration of youth in search of job opportunities and a more dynamic quality of life in urban areas or abroad. Youth unemployment rates vary widely among countries; they are among the world's highest in Armenia (38.2 percent), Bosnia and Herzegovina (33.8 percent) and North Macedonia (45.5 percent). By contrast, unemployment rates in Kazakhstan (3.8 percent), Republic of Moldova (7.4 percent) and Ukraine (18 percent) were far lower (International Labour Organization, 2017).

17. It is often in the best interests of young people to move away, for example to access higher quality education, especially at tertiary level. Many young women choose to migrate in pursuit of employment opportunities and improved living standards. The exodus of young people to urban areas or abroad in search of opportunity reduces human capital in rural areas (UNDG, 2017). This has led to a policy dilemma in terms of promoting education for young people versus promoting what is best for rural communities (European Parliament [EP], 2010). Youth's access to ICT in rural, especially remote, areas is also limited. Young women are particularly vulnerable to the risks associated with migration, which can outweigh the economic benefits (FAO, 2014a).

18. A key issue, therefore, is to make farming and rural areas more attractive to young people, as youth have a major role to play in revitalizing rural areas in the ECA-region. Integrated and holistic policies are needed, with special attention to leaving no one behind, irrespective of gender, age, ethnicity, disability and social status. If rural areas could be maintained as a space for providing sustainable livelihoods attractive to youth, helping them to see their future in rural areas and improving their quality of life by ensuring basic infrastructure and basic services, there would be a major, positive impact on rural social cohesion.

19. Fostering economic diversification – both in farming and in off-farm opportunities in developing agricultural value chains and in the broader rural economy – is critical to providing a wider base of decent jobs in the rural labour market. As part of this approach, creating a more viable and attractive agricultural sector will encourage young people to enter farming. The European Union's 2014-2020 Common Agricultural Policy emphasizes the importance of attracting young farmers. Their impact is evident in the fact that young people's farms, on average, perform better economically than those run by older farmers (EP, 2017). Young farmers are more open than older farmers to exploring opportunities to generate income from a variety of sources and not only from agricultural production (European Network for Rural Development, 2019). However, current policies and investments are not sufficient to retain youth in agriculture across Europe and Central Asia. Even in the European Union, much remains to be done. "Even though EU assistance has been available to young farmers for more than three decades, the 'young farmer problem' seems to remain. This is due, on one side, to the complexity of the problem and, on the other, to the limited effectiveness of policy mechanisms in dealing with it" (EP, 2017, p. 9).

20. There is also a need to capitalize on new youth employment opportunities along the agricultural value chain as part of an overall food system approach,⁸ whether in mechanized tasks such as operating agricultural machinery or agroprocessing and ICT-related duties. Agriculture is much more than primary production and includes many other activities in the value chain that are also needed and are important potential areas for employment (transport, marketing, packaging, storage and others). In turn, this process will reinforce the viability of other rural businesses, such as retail. Developing rural-urban linkages could also help support stronger economic ties with urban areas while encouraging decent rural employment. However, making rural areas more attractive to youth will involve not only strengthening economic opportunities (USAID, 2018) but also enhancing infrastructure, schools, social services and social cohesion.

21. Failing to ensure a future for young people in rural areas of the region brings the risk of political and social instability, particularly if youth are not engaged in the development process or are unable to develop the right skills and find meaningful work. Addressing the challenges faced by youth across the ECA-region requires targeted programming, as very different dynamics prevail across the region. To

⁸ More details related to the food systems approach are available in document "Sustainable Food Systems and Healthy Diets in Europe and Central Asia." (ERC/20/2). Available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/nc226en/nc226en.pdf>

start with, varying demographics create a complex range of issues (see Web Annex, Section 2, Table 2). The European Union Member States face the challenge of rapidly ageing populations, raising concerns of financial sustainability, extension of working age, and adequacy of benefit levels. On the other hand, Central Asia has a higher percentage of youth, which comes with its own set of challenges and opportunities. Providing the young generation with health care, education, a safe environment and employment opportunities is a major challenge for sustainable development and can potentially result in a demographic dividend.

22. Finally, in support of creating effective policy and stimulating investment, there is a pressing need simply to gather more information to address an overall information gap regarding rural society in the ECA-region. According to Jentsch and Shucksmith (2017), even less is known about how young people live in rural areas of Europe, their incomes and quality of life, their perceptions of how policies impact them, and how they are affected by the dynamics of social and economic change.

IV. Towards the revitalization of rural areas in Europe and Central Asia

23. Family farms are at the core of many rural communities across the ECA region and should not be seen as an obstacle but rather as part of the solution for ensuring long-term global food and nutrition security, rural poverty reduction and environmental sustainability (FAO, 2014a). They have a dual role. First, family farms can make a significant contribution towards the region's economic transition process, particularly as climate change, food price volatility and agro-environmental quality are high priorities. Second, small family farms, if helped to become more resilient, can be a tool to maintain rural social cohesion in the future (Tudor, 2015). The resilience of this type of farming will be measured by its ability to adapt in response to changes in the physical, social and economic environment for agriculture.

24. This analysis is consistent with the fact that many rural households adopt mixed livelihood strategies, and recalling the three main pathways that households may adopt, namely commercialization of farming activities (the agricultural path), economic diversification (the diversification path) and/or exiting agricultural production (the exit path). In line with the aspirations of the UNDFP and to guarantee the success of the SDGs, action – including FAO-implemented projects in Europe and Central Asia – must therefore be supported by coherent, integrated and cross-sectoral policies that concurrently address the environmental, economic and social dimensions of agriculture and rural development in order to contribute to several SDGs. As outlined in the Global Action Plan,⁹ the UNDFP also contributes to the revitalization of the global partnership for sustainable agricultural and rural development (FAO, 2014b) and to the mobilization of the means of implementation in line with SDG 17.

25. In pursuit of the agricultural development path, technologies help farmers – especially young farmers – produce a marketable surplus while market opportunities, conversely, encourage farmers to innovate. With market entry, farmers become part of value chains that extend from input suppliers to consumers. In middle- to high-income countries, value chains become critical. Consumers are demanding more information on the quality and safety of foods, and private-sector standards for food quality and safety are becoming more stringent. Farmers therefore need advice and support on a broad range of topics.

26. Effective farm advisory services can support farm households in pursuing both the agricultural and diversification paths and in managing the consequences of the exit path, including the redistribution of land and the entry of young people into farming. There are substantial differences among countries in the ECA-region in terms of the fitness for purpose of the formal extension services. Many national services need to become better adapted to cater to the needs of small farms, to become more demand-driven, and to become more inclusive in terms of addressing the specific needs of women farmers and small farms. Attention needs to be paid to ensuring the provision of high quality and relevant advice, supported by staff training and renewal, and effective quality control systems. Greater use should be made of activities such as demonstration farms.

⁹ For further information, see <http://www.fao.org/3/ca4672en/ca4672en.pdf>.

27. Nonetheless, major actors, including the European Union and FAO, agree that it is no longer acceptable to focus only on the traditional concept of “knowledge transfer” – with research as the source of knowledge, extension and education as channels of knowledge and information, and farmers as passive recipients of knowledge. The emphasis formerly placed on knowledge flow in a single direction from researchers through advisers to farmers has been excessive, and the consequences of this approach – namely a lack of access to knowledge, insufficient information flow, weak exchange of research results and too little responsiveness to the needs of farmers – have been major barriers to the uptake of innovation on family farms (European Commission, 2013).

28. Digitalization is not only relevant to increasing the impact of advisory services. It serves many purposes for farmers (FAO, 2018b). The information needs of farmers are increasing as farmers must make more complex decisions on land use, crop selection, choice of markets and other areas that impact the livelihoods of their families and communities. FAO (2015) argues that having access to the right information at the right time and in the right form is no longer a luxury but rather a necessity.¹⁰ The enhanced communication opportunities offered by ICTs are of particular relevance to family farming (FAO, 2016). Examples concerning youth/agriculture and technology/innovation include the use of mobile apps for finding jobs or business partners and gaining access to information on crops/packaging/trade and related topics.

29. Investment in agriculture and rural development (i.e. not just farming) is a precondition for more inclusive and sustainable growth, which can result in more decent jobs for young people. Accelerated development based on agroprocessing and manufacturing could facilitate the ongoing rural transformations and ultimately foster the revitalization of both urban areas and agriculture. There is potential for creating rural income through the participation of farmers in producing renewable energy. Farms often have space for wind energy and solar panels and areas for sustainable biomass and bioenergy production. Biomass production cooperatives would allow small farmers to contribute as suppliers for energy production.

30. Approaches such as these can demonstrate to rural youth that agriculture is much more than primary production but rather is part of an overall food system. Many rural young people may, as a result, choose to move from on-farm activities to off-farm activities and continue to live in their rural locality. Consequently, development strategies should be targeted at different levels, from the individual farm to the entire sector, and should be both holistic (i.e. recognize the diversity of rural economies and the importance of value chains) and territorial (i.e. adopt a local community development approach).

31. In summary, therefore, a paradigm shift is needed in how food is produced and how food is consumed. Investment in rural development and agriculture – including in family farms, technologies, start-ups, businesses and rural services – can promote more sustainable and productive agriculture and rural areas when implemented alongside other interventions such as tax incentives, taxing unsustainable production methodologies and using climate mitigation (e.g. carbon sequestration) as an opportunity to invest in rural areas. To achieve this shift, a territorial development approach that empowers local communities with a focus on local actions and that leaves no one behind is necessary for achieving the effective transformation of agricultural enterprises and farms, restructuring the entire agricultural sector (agroproduction), and in turn providing rural youth with opportunities for decent jobs.

V. Recommendations to foster sustainable family farms and youth employment in rural areas of Europe and Central Asia

32. This paper has outlined the main trends and reviewed key challenges in rural areas for family farmers and youth in Europe and Central Asia. This final chapter provides actionable recommendations with the aim of strengthening the role of family farmers and rural youth in the economic, social and

¹⁰ FAO was invited during the Global Forum for Food and Agriculture 2019 to elaborate the concept of an International Digital Council. The Council will provide solutions for vital digitalization issues, give recommendations, progress the exchange of ideas and experiences, and consequently enable everyone to better utilize the opportunities presented by digitalization. For more information, see https://www.gffa-berlin.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/ergebnisbroschuere_2019-EN.pdf.

environmental development and in the transformational change process. The recommendations vary from country to country, and yet there are generic observations and recommendations across countries.

33. Effective advice must recognize that youth are the future of the region's rural communities and must be enabled to shape their future. To align action with the UNDFP and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas,¹¹ while also ensuring effective progress towards achieving the SDGs, young people across the ECA-region need to have the opportunity to influence the plans and strategies that impact them. Hence, a rights-based approach should be promoted, with youth inclusion as an objective, so that youth will initiate and participate in future policy formulation.

34. The following policy recommendations for governments, civil society organizations and other actors, including the private sector, adopt a medium-term perspective of necessity, as there are no "quick fixes" to the challenges facing rural areas. The first three are generally valid for family farmers and rural youth, while the fourth is focused on youth.

1. Develop policy in support of family farming in a territorial framework

- An overall policy framework is of paramount importance, especially in terms of establishing general political directions for ensuring resilient and socially sustainable agricultural and rural development as an integrated part of an overall food system approach.¹² Therefore, reforms of policy, regulatory frameworks, standards and regimes that govern agriculture, food production, environmental issues and rural life and livelihoods should be prioritized.
- Adopt territorial/integrated community development approaches that recognize the importance and value to local needs of economic diversification that addresses both the agrifood supply chain and non-agricultural economic activities.
- Promote the development, implementation and monitoring of policies that contribute to SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 4, SDG 5, SDG 8, SDG 10 and SDG 17 by facilitating the generational renewal of family farming, including the inheritance rights of women and access for youth to land and other natural resources, productive assets, education, information, services and markets, decent rural employment, and opportunities for both agricultural and non-agricultural youth entrepreneurship.
- Capacities for cross-sectoral cooperation, policy-making and implementation must be strengthened at the subnational levels, especially for authorities dealing with territorial and rural development, social protection, agricultural and environmental issues. The empowerment of local governments is important to address specific local needs. Local policy design and decision-making processes should be guided and assisted and should be responsive to the needs of family farmers.
- Prepare National Action Plans for the UNDFP that envisage tangible steps and specific undertakings in support of family farming and involve a road map for countries to support sustainable development with and for family farming (FAO and IFAD, 2019).

2. Facilitate structural transformation of rural areas and support sustainable productivity growth

- Promote structural transformation of food and agriculture to expand the multidimensional nature of family farming. Strengthen the diverse functions of family farming, including their productivity and income growth (linking to SDG Target 2.3). Consider that complex problems related to family farms demand tailor-made and context-specific solutions (also to be able to achieve the SDGs).

¹¹ For further information, see <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/A/RES/73/165>.

¹² See also the document "Sustainable Food Systems and Healthy Diets in Europe and Central Asia" (ERC/20/2). Available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/nc226en/nc226en.pdf>

- Develop inclusive food systems through sharing information, knowledge and expertise among farmers and other actors. This includes, but is not confined to, support for small farms in accessing markets for their produce, assistance in forming cooperatives (and other methods of cooperation), and the provision of needs-based farm advisory services that adopt gender-responsive and socially inclusive approaches.
- Facilitate innovations and introduce digitalization (marketing information systems, early warning and communication systems, etc.) and e-agriculture to ensure the high coverage and efficiency of provided services. In addition, establish demonstration sites and model farms, in cooperation with scientific centres and institutions of higher education, that are accessible to disadvantaged groups.

3. Facilitate investment support and access to finance

- Increase the level of investment support for small family farms and youth entrepreneurship along the agricultural value chain by enhancing the investment environment and broadening the portfolio of suitable financial products. Facilitate innovative financing (such as blended finance, thematic bonds and crowdfunding) and make investment support schemes available – specifically for small farms and farms managed by young farmers and women – that are packed with various types of financial instruments and that target competitiveness and standards in order to take advantage of development opportunities. Such schemes should comply with the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems (CFS, 2014).
- Invest in climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, considering the observed consequences for agriculture (especially small farms) in all countries.
- Provide responsible investments in public infrastructure – including roads, utilities and digitalization – and ensure access by all groups in society.
- Invest in social infrastructure, social protection and social assistance, and the provision of services, to ensure that no one in society is left behind. Availability and access to day care facilities are critical for young women who would like to continue education and engage in productive employment.
- In an integrated way, address the root causes of economic or distress migration and maximize the positive impacts for rural communities where significant migration has already occurred, such as encouraging the investment of remittances.

4. Develop policy in support of rural youth

- Promote goals, targets, indicators, processes and outcomes that are explicitly relevant to the empowerment of young people, to their social and economic well-being, and to their participation in governance and decision-making. The capabilities and potential of young people as agents of change and champions of the development process are clear arguments for the strong recognition of young people in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- Make available financial support that is targeted to assist youth in starting their own businesses, especially by funding start-ups in social and innovative entrepreneurship, including agriculture. Support the development of the production, managerial and entrepreneurial skills of rural youth.
- Ensure the access of young farmers to land and other natural resources, such as through the rent of state-owned agricultural land.
- Prioritize the employment of youth in the formal sector, whenever investments in new businesses are supported. A wider variety of employment opportunities would provide youth with an anchor to stay in rural areas.

- Promote both inter- and intra-generational learning processes, as well as the exchange of generation-specific knowledge and skills. The exchange of information among young people in various countries and regions should be encouraged.
- Effective interventions to support rural youth require an adequate evidence base. Member countries should share and implement good practices on how to close the information gap regarding rural society, such as through the compilation of reliable data sets disaggregated by locality, gender and age group. In view of the cost of such activities, “smart” approaches that maximize data collection efficiency should be used.

35. In line with its mandate and regional priorities, FAO – through the application of inclusive governance mechanisms and in partnership with governments, civil society, academia, the private sector, international organizations and donors – is well placed to support stakeholders in fostering the development of rural areas, specifically family farms and youth, in the region. This support should draw on FAO’s comparative advantages from being the UN lead agency for agriculture and rural development. Through the programmatic approach of its three Regional Initiatives¹³ on empowering smallholders and family farms, agrifood trade and managing natural resources sustainably under a changing climate, FAO can harness its technical and advisory expertise to assist the countries in the region in transforming their agricultural sectors and in leveraging the livelihoods of family farmers (including youth) to generate and adopt innovations. Youth are especially receptive to innovation and are therefore natural partners for FAO-supported interventions.

36. Such actions can contribute to eliminating rural poverty, improving the resilience and sustainability of rural communities, and boosting inclusive growth for rural economies based on sustainable natural resource use. In doing so, they can help ensure that rural areas in the ECA-region have a genuinely viable and sustainable future.

¹³ For further information, see <http://www.fao.org/europe/regional-initiatives/en/> and the document “Results and Priorities for FAO in the Region” (ERC/20/5). Available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/nc229en/nc229en.pdf>