



联合国
粮食及
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Food and Agriculture
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Продовольственная и
сельскохозяйственная организация
Объединенных Наций

Organización de las
Naciones Unidas para la
Alimentación y la Agricultura

منظمة
الأغذية والزراعة
للأمم المتحدة

FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR EUROPE

Thirty-second Session

Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 5-7 May 2020

Web Annex

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

Executive Summary

This Web Annex accompanies the background paper that has been prepared in response to Agenda Item 10 (Solutions for youth, employment and developing rural areas in relation to the United Nations Decade of Family Farming) of the Thirty-second Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe (ERC). It provides additional contextual information on the United Nations Decade of Family Farming 2019-2028 (UNDF), quantitative data on poverty and youth in Europe and Central Asia, and an overview description of the three strategic development pathways for smallholders and family farms.

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1. UNDFE and the Sustainable Development Goals

The vision of the UNDFE is: “A world where diverse, healthy and sustainable food and agricultural systems flourish, where resilient rural and urban communities enjoy a high quality of life in dignity, equity, free from hunger and poverty.”

The UNDFE builds on the success of the International Year of Family Farming of 2014. The global launch of the UNDFE, co-organized by FAO and the International Fund For Agricultural Development (IFAD), took place on 29 May 2019 at FAO headquarters in Rome, Italy, where a Global Action Plan (GAP) for the UNDFE was also presented. The GAP aims at accelerating actions undertaken in a collective, coherent and comprehensive manner to support family farmers, who are key agents of sustainable development. The GAP includes seven pillars of work:

- **Pillar 1:** *Develop an enabling policy environment to strengthen family farming*
- **Pillar 2:** *Support youth and ensure the generational sustainability of family farming*
- **Pillar 3:** *Promote gender equity in family farming and the leadership role of rural women*
- **Pillar 4:** *Strengthen family farmers’ organizations and their capacities to generate knowledge, represent farmers and provide inclusive services in the urban-rural continuum*
- **Pillar 5:** *Improve socio-economic inclusion, resilience and well-being of family farmers, rural households and communities*
- **Pillar 6:** *Promote sustainability of family farming for climate-resilient food systems*
- **Pillar 7:** *Strengthen the multidimensionality of family farming to promote social innovations contributing to territorial development and food systems that safeguard biodiversity, environment and culture*

As mentioned above, Pillar 2 of the GAP as a transversal area of work aims to support youth, including ensuring the generational sustainability of family farming through enabling access to land, information, education, infrastructure and financial services, markets and policy-making processes relating to farming. Providing attractive alternatives in rural areas for rural youth, on farms and in rural communities, is a main precondition for keeping agriculture viable and sustainable.

The United Nations Resolution proclaiming 2019-2028 the UNDFE calls upon FAO and IFAD to lead the implementation of the UNDFE. At both global and regional levels, the UNDFE provides an extraordinary opportunity for the United Nations to achieve its Sustainable Development Goals. In Europe and Central Asia, the UNDFE provides an excellent opportunity for FAO to further enhance its support to smallholders and family farms. Support for small farms is one of four priorities of FAO in the region.

2. Data sets

Data are shown for the incidence of poverty and for youth populations and employment in selected countries of Europe and Central Asia.

Table 1: Population, poverty headcounts (%), number of the poor and trends in the eight countries covered by FAO smallholder studies

Country (year)	Population, millions	Poverty headcount, %	Number of the poor*	Trend
Albania (2012)	2.9	14.3	415 000	Increasing after years of decrease
Armenia (2015)	2.9	29.8	870 000	Decreasing
Georgia (2016)	3.7	21.3	792 000	Decreasing, but at a slowing rate
Kyrgyzstan (2015)	6.1	25.4	1 550 000	Decreasing
Republic of Moldova (2015)	3.6	9.6	341 000	Decreasing
North Macedonia (2014)	2.1	22.1	459 000	Decreasing
Serbia (2016)	7.1	25.7	1 775 000	Decreasing
Tajikistan (2015)	8.7	31.3	3 000 000	Stable

Source: World Bank data cited by FAO (2020).

* According to the national poverty line.

Table 2: Youth population and unemployment statistics from selected countries in Europe and Central Asia

Country	Youth (15-24) population (% of total population)	Youth unemployment (% of youth labour force)	Male youth unemployment (% of youth labour force)	Female youth unemployment (% of youth labour force)
Albania	15.5 (2019)	31.9 (2017)	34.1 (2017)	27.7 (2017)
Armenia	11.8 (2019)	38.2 (2017)	32.8 (2017)	44.8 (2017)
Azerbaijan	14.1 (2019)	12.8 (2018)	11.1 (2018)	14.7 (2018)
Belarus	10.0 (2019)	10.7 (2018)	12.7 (2018)	8.4 (2018)
Georgia	11.4 (2019)	29.9 (2018)	26.7 (2018)	35.3 (2018)
Kyrgyzstan	16.2 (2019)	14.2 (2018)	10.1 (2018)	22.3 (2018)
Republic of Moldova	13.1 (2017)	7.4 (2018)	7.5 (2018)	7.2 (2018)
Montenegro	13.0 (2019)	29.4 (2018)	33.3 (2018)	23.6 (2018)
North Macedonia	12.4 (2019)	45.4 (2018)	46.6 (2018)	43.2 (2018)
Russian Federation	10.4 (2018)	17.0 (2018)	16.2 (2018)	17.9 (2018)
Serbia	10.6 (2019)	29.7 (2018)	28.3 (2018)	32.0 (2018)
Turkey	15.8 (2019)	20.2 (2018)	17.6 (2018)	25.0 (2018)
Ukraine	9.6 (2019)	18.0 (2018)	16.9 (2018)	19.3 (2018)
Uzbekistan	16.7 (2019)	n/a	n/a	n/a
EU-28	10.7 (2019)	15.2 (2018)	15.8 (2018)	14.6 (2018)
Norway	12.4 (2019)	9.7 (2018)	10.7 (2018)	8.6 (2018)
Switzerland	10.7 (2019)	8.0 (2018)	8.4 (2018)	7.5 (2018)

Sources: Eurostat, national statistical agencies for population data and ILOSTAT Country Profiles for unemployment data, Eurostat for unemployment data in EU-28.

3. Strategic development pathways for smallholders and family farms

The small farms do not constitute one homogeneous group, and three contrasting strategic development pathways have been identified based on FAO country studies of the needs and constraints of smallholders and family farms in eight countries in the region (FAO, 2020). The three identified pathways are:

- Development of commercial family farms: *the agricultural path*.
- Diversification of the rural economy with the aim of creating new jobs in rural areas that are not directly in primary agricultural production: *the diversification path*.
- Provide decent alternatives to those who wish to remain in rural areas in other economic activities while protecting those vulnerable groups with few (if any) options, with the objective of leaving no one behind: *the exit path*.

In reality, many households and small farms have mixed livelihood strategies. This means that the household has different sources of income, e.g. from farming in combination with off-farm activities and/or from wage labour. Households and farms in the different pathways have different needs for support, which should be carefully considered when designing policy and support measures.

The agricultural path

Farmers choosing the agricultural path will formalize their businesses as commercial family farms that are producing substantially for the market and are fully integrated into market structures. Structural development of the commercially oriented part of the family farms will make it feasible to consider their developing into commercial family farms through investing in mechanization and new technologies and in fulfilling standards. Innovation is a key enabler of the sustainable intensification process. When following the agricultural path, a well-functioning agricultural land market, both for lease and sale, is decisive for the necessary structural development towards larger and less fragmented farms. The need to innovate to generate sufficient income from larger and more consolidated land parcels, reduce production costs and improve the quality of products is necessary to become competitive and to be able to sell to buyers on local or international markets. Young farmers, both women and men, are most likely to have the energy and vision necessary to pursue the agricultural path.

The diversification path

Many smallholders and family farms will have neither the agricultural and economic potential nor the personal interest to develop into commercially oriented family farms. This large group of rural dwellers follows another livelihood strategy reliant on decreasing dependence on agriculture: the diversification path. This path includes on-farm diversification and value chain integration as well as off-farm activities in sectors other than primary agricultural production. This may be on-farm processing, rural tourism and agritourism, rural crafts, services or other gainful, entrepreneurial activities. Alternatively, members of the farm household may seek alternative jobs outside the agricultural sector, for example in services or other production sectors. This strategy has a particular relevance to rural youth and women. A wider variety of employment opportunities would provide youth with an opportunity and incentive to stay in rural areas and curb their need to migrate to urban areas or farther. Agritourism and rural tourism have, especially in areas with rich natural and cultural heritage, particularly good potential, as more and more people are demanding natural products and would even pay extra to support the creation of such products that they will eventually consume, such as cheese, meat, olive oil or wine. Integrated community development can be an option for supporting the rural dwellers pursuing the diversification path.

The exit path

The third livelihood strategy will be, for many smallholders and family farmers, to leave agriculture. Some of these may need to rely on social support for basic necessities, while others will develop alternative livelihood strategies, including migration. Elderly farmers in particular may need to rely on social assistance when their farms have not developed and their children will not continue small-scale farming. They will have no chances in the agricultural path and will find it difficult to follow the diversification path. Thus, exit from agriculture will be their preferred option and is a consequence of structural changes. Early retirement support measures can support older farmers and household owners wanting to leave production and retire. This can make their land available for younger farmers and for farmers with better preconditions to pursue the commercial agricultural path.

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