



Side event – 2025 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

Re-imagining the future of women in food systems: harnessing science, technology, and partnership to advance the SDGs

Co-organizers: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), UN Food Systems Coordination Hub, UN Issue-based Coalition on Sustainable Food Systems (IBC-SFS), United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Date/Time: 3 April 2025, 13.15-14.45

Venue: Room III

As we approach 2030, global progress toward the SDGs is at risk, with no country on track to achieve gender equality by the deadline. Between 2019 and 2022, nearly 40% of countries, home to over 1 billion women and girls, stagnated or regressed on gender equality. Ongoing global crises are expected to exacerbate this trend, potentially leaving gender inequality worse in 2030 than in 2015. In recent years, Europe and Central Asia have been experiencing instability in its different forms, endangering the hard-won gains towards women's and girl's empowerment.

Promoting women's economic empowerment is particularly critical in agrifood systems, which serve as a vital source of employment and livelihoods in Europe and Central Asia. Women play crucial roles in both the production, post-production and consumption aspects of agrifood systems, and play a key role in household food security, health, and nutrition. Yet their contribution is often unrecognized.

In Europe and Central Asia, women play a vital role in supporting households and communities. However, they often face constraints such as limited time, lack of empowerment, and restricted access to opportunities that could lead to formal decision-making roles—whether in managing family farms, shaping rural development priorities, or making household income decisions related to food choices. Women's unpaid labour is essential to the well-being of rural as well as urban households, particularly in strengthening food security and nutrition. Despite their significant contributions, women often face marginalization and poorer working conditions compared to men. They are frequently excluded from land ownership, and access to technology, and financial resources, training, and other essential services. Discriminatory social norms are at the heart of gender inequality.

Women should benefit from opportunities throughout the agrifood systems, including innovation, science and technology. Strengthening their access to productive resources and opportunities can play a crucial role in addressing challenges and advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in agrifood systems. Technological innovations can improve women's access to financial services, agricultural information, and markets. Science and technology can create platforms that promote women's education, employment opportunities, support advocacy efforts, and empower them to assume leadership roles. Strengthening women's access to resources and decision-making in agrifood systems is essential for women's livelihoods, enabling income



generation, improving diets and nutrition outcomes, and promoting community and rural development.

The proposed side events will aim to:

- Highlight region-specific persisting and emerging challenges women face in agrifood systems that hinder their equal participation and leadership, limiting their opportunities.
- Showcase regional solutions that leveraged science, traditional knowledge, technology and gender-disaggregated data to break the barriers and empower women in agrifood systems.
- Discuss the interlinkages among SDG 5 and the other SDGs under review, especially SDG 3 and SDG 8, underpinned with SDG 17, highlighting their potential to mutually support and reinforce each other for sustainable and inclusive agrifood systems. The discussion will specifically highlight women's empowerment in agrifood systems and its impact on economic growth and the sustainable development of food systems.
- Identify key opportunities for women to influence dietary choices and contribute to the development of nutrition policies in the region.
- Foster dialogue and facilitate multi-stakeholder discussion on actionable strategies and partnerships to address structural inequalities and advance women's empowerment in agrifood systems.

The discussion will inform regional and global processes, in particular, SDG 5, as well as SDG 3, SDG 8 and SDG 17 in-depth reviews in preparation for the HLPF 2025, the Beijing+30 Global Review, the UN Food Systems Summit + 4 Stocktake (UNFSS+4), the International Year of the Woman Farmer in 2026 and the FAO Commit to Grow Equality Initiative.

Scaling up efforts to advance the SDGs necessitates knowledge sharing, alignment among regional processes contributing to international initiatives affecting rural women, partnerships, and coordinated, evidence-based actions from all stakeholders. To this end, the side events will include a facilitated panel discussion featuring experts, policymakers, practitioners, and representatives from civil society and the private sector.

Agenda

13.15-13.20	Introduction by Moderator	Hajnalka Petrics, FAO
13.20-13.30	Welcoming remarks	Stefanos Fotiou, Director, FAO Office of SDGs and UN Food Systems Coordination Hub Raimund Jehle, Regional Programme Leader, FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia and Co-Chair of the UN IBC-SFS
13.30-13.40	Setting the scene of the status of women in agrifood systems in Europe and Central Asia	Marianna Bicchieri, Gender Officer, FAO REU
13.40-14.10	Roundtable discussion 1: Policy perspectives for women's empowerment in agrifood systems through	Moderated by Marianna Bicchieri, FAO REU



	<p>bridging gaps between science, traditional knowledge, technology and innovation.</p>	<p>Ekaterine Zviadadze, Head of Policy and Analysis Department, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture, Georgia</p> <p>Siri Lothe, Specialist Director, Department of Agricultural Policy, Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Norway</p> <p>Eng. Angela Chiara Corina, Regional Hydrological Adviser, WMO (online)</p> <p>Q&A</p>
14.10-14.40	<p>Roundtable discussion 2:</p> <p>Showcasing practical solutions for empowering women and advancing gender equality in the agrifood sector by non-state actors</p>	<p>Moderated by Hajnalka Petrics, FAO</p> <p>Valbona Mazreku, Executive Director, Milieukontakt, Albania</p> <p>Rita Lousa, Secondee, Agriculture and Food, World Business Council for Sustainable Development</p> <p>Aida Jamangulova, Director, Agency of Development Initiatives, Kyrgyzstan (online)</p> <p>Q&A</p>
14.40-14.45	<p>Closing remarks</p>	<p>Marit Nilsen, Secretary to the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards, UNECE</p>