



Europe and Central Asia Gender Newsletter

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Highlights from FAO's gender initiatives across Europe and Central Asia

This edition opens with the launch of the Country Gender Assessment for **Belarus**, revealing gaps and opportunities to bridge the gender divide in rural agrifood systems. It features the adoption of **Uzbekistan's** Gender Strategy for Agriculture developed by the Ministry of Agriculture with technical support from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and progress in **Kosovo**¹ to strengthen rural women's land and property rights.

From **Tajikistan**, we report on a national workshop promoting gender-transformative approaches in fisheries and aquaculture, and FAO's broader efforts to scale up gender equality work in the country. In **Montenegro**, rural women made history as Parliament adopted a landmark declaration on their rights and roles, while in **Kyrgyzstan**, FAO facilitated dialogue on women's leadership in agrifood systems.

We also highlight a new publication on gender dynamics in pesticide use across **Central Asia and Türkiye**, and our *Stories of Empowerment* section features Zarnigor from **Uzbekistan**, a young beekeeper breaking barriers and inspiring women in her community.

¹ References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

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Bridging the gender divide in rural Belarus to unlock agrifood potential



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The report shows that gender disparities across agriculture and rural development continue to persist.

Women in Belarus play essential roles across agrifood systems, from farming and food production to entrepreneurship and market sales. However, as in many parts of the world, their contributions often remain largely invisible and under-recognized, and gender disparities in agriculture and rural development persist. This issue is highlighted in the *National gender profile of agriculture and rural livelihoods: Republic of Belarus*, published by FAO. The report draws on statistical data and qualitative insights gathered from interviews with rural women and other local stakeholders.

This report is the first country-level analysis of Belarus in the FAO global Country Gender Assessment (CGA) series. It provides a comprehensive examination of the roles of rural women and men in agriculture, their access to resources, services and decision-making, and broader labour market and poverty trends. Despite Belarus' strong legal framework for gender equality and commitments to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, agriculture is still generally treated as a "gender neutral" sector. While measures have been articulated for achieving gender equality at the national and regional levels, gender-related targets and goals specific to the agricultural sector are lacking.

The situation is further complicated by the lack of contextual analysis and sex-disaggregated data specific to agriculture. This makes it difficult to fully understand who owns or manages farms, what types of production women and men engage in, or whether they benefit equally from state support. Without reliable data, policies cannot effectively target the needs of different population groups or close gender gaps in rural areas.²

² Read the full article at <https://www.fao.org/europe/news/detail/bridging-the-gender-divide-in-rural-belarus-to-unlock-agrifood-potential/en>

Strengthening legal pathways to land and property rights for rural women in Kosovo

Advancing gender equality and ensuring equitable access to land and property for rural women are essential for sustainable rural development. To promote equitable land tenure security, a series of legal advisory workshops were recently held in Prishtinë/Priština, Prizren and Istog/Istok, bringing together over 130 licensed notaries and municipal cadastral officials from across Kosovo.

Three workshops held in 2025 on 24 May, 31 May and 14 June were organized by a project promoting rural women's empowerment that is jointly implemented by FAO and UN Women, with financial support from the Austrian Development Agency (ADA), and in close collaboration with the Notary Chamber of Kosovo.



The third in a series of workshops with notaries was held in Prishtinë/Priština on 14 June 2025.

Despite the legal framework upholding the principle of equality, women, particularly in rural areas, continue to face barriers in exercising their land and property rights. These challenges stem from deeply rooted discriminatory gender norms, unequal inheritance practices, limited legal literacy and restricted access to legal aid.

Recognizing the central role that notaries and cadastral officials play as the first point of legal counselling for many citizens, the workshops aimed to enhance their capacity to interpret and apply laws in a gender-responsive manner. Participants revisited key legal provisions on property and inheritance rights, exchanged experiences, and discussed ways to promote co-ownership, raise awareness of legal rights and obligations, and provide gender-sensitive legal counselling.

"Gender equality is a key pillar of FAO's development approach and is mainstreamed across all programmes and initiatives to ensure inclusive and sustainable growth," said Naser Krasniqi, FAO National Professional Officer in Kosovo at the workshop held in Istog/Istok, adding, "These workshops directly address one of the most critical challenges faced by rural women. Ensuring equal access to land and property is not just a legal obligation – it is a

matter of social justice, economic empowerment and human dignity”.³

Uzbekistan launches Gender Strategy for Agriculture with FAO support

More than 150 stakeholders gathered in Tashkent on 27 June 2025 for a High-Level National Dialogue marking the official launch of Uzbekistan’s Gender Strategy for Agriculture 2025–2030. The event, organized by the Ministry of Agriculture with technical support from FAO, was a milestone in placing gender equality at the core of agricultural and rural development policy.



The launch event reaffirmed FAO’s role as a strategic partner in promoting gender-responsive agricultural reform in Uzbekistan.

National authorities, parliamentarians and the United Nations joined the launch, with opening remarks from Minister of Agriculture Ibrokhim Abdurakhmonov, Deputy Prime Minister Zulaykho Makhkamova, and United Nations Resident Coordinator Sabine Machl. Sherzod Umarov, Assistant FAO Representative in Uzbekistan, reaffirmed FAO’s continuing support for inclusive and sustainable rural transformation.

The strategy, developed with technical support from FAO, presented by Lola Saidova, Professor and Leading Specialist of the Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies under the President of Uzbekistan, outlines a comprehensive plan to advance gender equality in Uzbekistan’s agrifood systems. It focuses on strengthening women’s land rights, improving access to finance and technologies, promoting female leadership, and establishing a national coordination and monitoring mechanism. Importantly, to support the coordinated implementation of the strategy and its forthcoming roadmap, several memoranda of understanding were signed.

The event drew strong engagement from international partners, with participation from representatives of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Agrifood Systems

³ Read the full article at <https://www.fao.org/europe/news/detail/strengthening-legal-pathways-to-land-and-property-rights-for-kosovan-rural-women/en>

Transformation Accelerator (ASTA) Facility, Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), International Science and Commercial Agricultural Development (ISCAD), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Volunteers and several embassies.

Discussions focused on national and international perspectives, policy coherence, and the role of women in agricultural research, education and innovation. A parallel session highlighted the need to strengthen women’s roles in science, entrepreneurship and knowledge systems across the agrifood sector.

The dialogue concluded with a strong commitment to move from strategy to action, including the submission of an implementation roadmap to the Cabinet of Ministers and the establishment of an inter-agency coordination mechanism. The event reaffirmed FAO’s role as a strategic partner in promoting gender-responsive agricultural reform in Uzbekistan.

From training to action: FAO scales up gender equality efforts in Tajikistan

In June 2025, the FAO regional gender team carried out a mission to Tajikistan to strengthen gender equality efforts across programming and policy support. The visit combined capacity building for the FAO Country Office, a national-level technical workshop, and field engagement with rural women beneficiaries.



In Tajikistan, women are the backbone of agriculture and food security, yet their vital contributions often go unrecognized and underpaid.

In Lolazor village, Tajikistan, women who received training through FAO-supported initiatives reflected on the value of the skills they had gained and expressed a strong desire in continuing their development. They emphasized the importance of ongoing training opportunities, access to markets, and support services to enable full participation in economic activities. The women shared practical ideas for strengthening their livelihoods and highlighted the motivation within the group to expand their engagement.

Conversations with local authorities and community members also explored how existing public infrastructure could support future activities, feeding into current planning to build on the project's foundations.

The mission also featured a training session for the FAO Tajikistan team, focused on gender equality and women's empowerment, including gender-responsive communication. It was designed to strengthen staff capacity to apply FAO's Gender Equality Policy in day-to-day operations. The session covered key concepts, inclusive language, and gender mainstreaming across the project cycle. Staff from various units took part in participatory exercises and reflected on real-life examples from the region, helping to bridge institutional frameworks with practical, field-level application.

Throughout the mission, one theme emerged clearly: rural women in Tajikistan are engaged, motivated, and looking for ways to strengthen their livelihoods. With targeted support and a strong enabling environment, they can continue to lead change in their communities.

Tajikistan hosts workshop to promote gender-transformative approaches in fisheries and aquaculture

Women across Central Asia and the Caucasus play a critical role in fisheries and aquaculture value chains. Typically, they are involved in pre- and post-harvest activities, such as net mending, fish processing, marketing and trade, while men take on fishing roles, particularly in coastal and deep-sea waters. Women's involvement often lacks formal recognition, despite being central to household and community food security. Fishing itself is traditionally considered a male occupation, often involving higher occupational risks.



Participants of the workshop on gender-transformative approaches in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors in Dushanbe.

In Tajikistan, women represent the primary labour force in agriculture and contribute significantly to food security. However, their work is often informal, undervalued and undercompensated. With many men migrating away from rural areas, empowering women has far-reaching benefits, not only for food security, but also

for increasing agricultural productivity and supporting rural development overall.

To address these challenges, the Central Asian and Caucasus Regional Fisheries and Aquaculture Commission (CACFish), in collaboration with FAO, convened a national workshop in Dushanbe to bring together policymakers and practitioners in support of gender-transformative approaches in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors.

The workshop highlighted the importance of fostering gender-transformative approaches as strategies that aim not only to support rural women but also address the root causes of gender inequality by engaging women and men to change underlying discriminatory norms and power structures that underpin inequality.

The workshop drew on findings from a regional gender study conducted by FAO between 2022 and 2024 across CACFish member countries, including Tajikistan. The study⁴ provided evidence-based insights into the specific challenges and opportunities for integrating gender considerations into fisheries and aquaculture policies and programmes.

Participants explored practical ways to embed inclusive and equitable approaches in their work. These efforts respond to persistent challenges rooted in deeply ingrained social norms that limit women's recognition, economic empowerment and participation in decision-making. When left unaddressed, such inequalities reinforce power imbalances and contribute to the invisibility of women as economic actors, knowledge holders and agents of change.

A key message from the event was that sustainable fisheries and aquaculture systems cannot be achieved without addressing gender-based barriers and enabling women to take on visible, empowered roles across the entire value chain. Achieving this requires effective and participatory policy action.⁵

FAO discusses strengthening women's role in agrifood systems in Kyrgyzstan

Empowering rural women is key to building a world free from hunger. That was the central message of the FAO conference "Women in Agrifood Systems: Roles, Challenges, and Prospects", held on 28 July 2025 in Bishkek to mark FAO's 80th anniversary.

Women are farmers, entrepreneurs and community leaders – but too often, they face unequal access to land, tools, training and financing. These challenges were at the heart of the discussions, which brought together government

⁴ The study is available at <https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/2afd55ca-41b4-452e-aebd-538737c8512b>

⁵ Read the full article at <https://www.fao.org/europe/news/detail/tajikistan-hosts-workshop-to-promote-gender-transformative-approaches-in-fisheries-and-aquaculture/en>

officials, parliamentarians, farmers and international partners. “Rural women are the backbone of agrifood systems,” said Oleg Guchgeldiyev, FAO Representative in Kyrgyzstan, “but they still face many barriers. FAO is working to remove these so women can thrive and rural communities can grow”.



Delegates at the “Women in Agrifood Systems: Roles, Challenges, and Prospects” conference in Bishkek, 28 July 2025.

Participants explored ways to strengthen women’s roles in agriculture – through equal access to resources, better training programmes, and support for women-led organizations. The event also included an agricultural fair showcasing women producers from across the country.

As the world prepares to mark the International Year of Women Farmers in 2026, FAO is stepping up its efforts to highlight the vital role women play in feeding families, building peace and protecting the environment.⁶

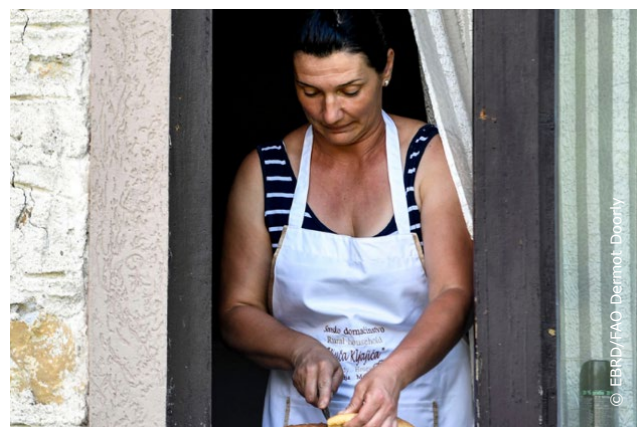
Rural women take centre stage in Montenegro’s Parliament as historic declaration is adopted

On 8 May 2025, the Parliament of Montenegro hosted the 18th session of the “Women’s Parliament”, under the theme “Voices of Women from Rural Montenegro”. The session aimed to amplify the voices of rural women, recognize their contributions and advocate for their stronger representation in public life. It culminated in the adoption of the Declaration of the First Rural Women’s Parliament, a significant step towards inclusive policymaking and the recognition of rural women as key contributors to sustainable development.

The event was organized by the Committee for Gender Equality and the Women’s Club of the Parliament, in collaboration with the Rural Development Network of Montenegro, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management and FAO. It brought together Members of Parliament and representatives of rural communities,

⁶ Read the full article at <https://www.fao.org/countryprofiles/news-archive/detail-news/en/c/1740925>

line ministries, civil society organizations, the diplomatic community and international development partners.



Montenegro’s Women’s Parliament adopted a landmark declaration for rural women.

“This declaration must shape an institutional response to the needs of rural women, from education and health care to support for entrepreneurship and equal political participation,” said Vice President of the Parliament Zdenka Popović. She emphasized that rural women are often the foundation of their communities but remain underrepresented in decision-making processes.

“FAO’s commitment to gender equality in agriculture is not only a matter of principle, it is a key driver of progress,” said Nabil Gangi, FAO Deputy Regional Representative for Europe and Central Asia and Head of the FAO Office in Montenegro, as he addressed the gathering. He described the session as a powerful and symbolic moment of change but stressed that rural communities deserve more than recognition and must be fully included in public life.⁷

New publication: Gender dynamics in pesticide use and management in Central Asia and Türkiye

The new publication *Gender dynamics in pesticide use and management in Central Asia and Türkiye* explores how gender and age shape pesticide use, exposure and decision-making across Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Türkiye.

Based on farmer surveys and expert interviews conducted under the Global Environment Facility–FAO project “Pesticide Life Cycle Management and Disposal in Central Asia and Türkiye”, the policy paper sheds light on the often-overlooked roles of women and children in pesticide handling. While men are typically responsible for application and decision-making, the findings reveal significant exposure risks for women and children – exacerbated by limited access to protective equipment and safe products.

⁷ Read the full article at <https://www.fao.org/europe/news/detail/rural-women-take-centre-stage-in-montenegro-s-parliament-as-historic-declaration-is-adopted/en>

The study highlights how women's overrepresentation in unpaid and informal agricultural work contributes to underreporting of their pesticide use and exposure. It also points to systemic barriers, such as financial and mobility constraints, that lead women to rely on inexpensive, often unregulated pesticides within their communities.



The policy paper sheds light on the often-overlooked roles of women and children in pesticide handling.

Gender dynamics in pesticide use and management in Central Asia and Türkiye identifies key gaps in knowledge and practices throughout the pesticide life cycle. It calls for more inclusive pesticide policies and targeted training that reflect the diverse realities of farming households. The publication is available in English⁸ and Russian.⁹

Breaking barriers with bees in Uzbekistan

In Bo'stonliq, a mountain district in Uzbekistan, Zarnigor Yakubova is turning tradition into transformation. A single mother and former language student, Zarnigor returned to beekeeping, a skill passed down by her father, after facing personal and economic hardship. With limited job opportunities, no outside support, and the responsibility of caring for her young son and ill mother, she made a bold choice: to build her own future from honey.

Through the "Leaving No One Behind" project, funded by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Türkiye, Zarnigor received training, modern tools and the encouragement of

⁸ The English version of the paper is available at <https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/85ad7278-c6a1-4130-92ac-05de9a0de0c2>

⁹ The Russian version of the paper is available at <https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/f10ce1e8-3a5d-452a-84cc-ad1530f0a005>

a growing peer network. She learned how to manage hive hygiene, prevent disease and improve honey production. The project also provided her family with essential equipment, allowing her to work more efficiently and independently.



A former language student, Zarnigor returned to beekeeping after facing hardship.

Today, Zarnigor runs her own beekeeping operation with 40 hives. She sells honey, wax, royal jelly and propolis directly from home and is mentoring other women in her village who once believed beekeeping was "too hard or too dangerous" for them.

For the first time, she sees women entering a space long dominated by men – and thriving. Traditionally considered a men's value chain, beekeeping is now becoming more accessible to women in her community thanks to her example and support.

Her vision doesn't stop there. Zarnigor dreams of opening a branded honey shop and teaching more women the skills to succeed. "I've faced judgement, poverty and isolation," she says, "but I'm still here. I'm building something lasting, with bees, with my own hands, and with the belief that I can do more".

Acknowledgements

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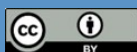
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