



Europe and Central Asia Gender Newsletter

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Busy agenda ahead for achieving gender equality for rural women in Europe and Central Asia

In this issue, we spotlight the inspiring efforts and successes of rural women across Europe and Central Asia, as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) continues to support gender equality in agriculture and rural development. This edition includes celebrations of the International Day of Rural Women, highlights from the upcoming 29th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP29) on gender-responsive climate action, and the launch of FAO's latest initiative to close the gender gap in agrifood systems. We also share powerful stories from the field, ranging from gender-responsive pasture management in Georgia to women-led agribusiness innovations in Albania. Join us in exploring these compelling stories of resilience, collaboration, and progress towards a more gender-equal future in agriculture.

Celebrating the International Day of Rural Women

To celebrate the International Day of Rural Women, we highlight the stories of inspiring women in agriculture: their journeys reflect resilience, determination and the transformative power of community.

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Regional highlights:

- Celebrating the International Day of Rural Women
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- Implementing gender-responsive pasture management for land degradation neutrality in Georgia
- FAO supports gender-responsive food security and livelihoods in Ukraine amid ongoing war
- New women-led agribusiness incubator empowers rural women in Albania

In **Armenia**, the “Berd Bean” Women’s Association is a group of women who came together to cultivate beans, creating both economic opportunities and a support network for each other. Through their association, these women have forged new paths, proving that when women stand together, they thrive together.

Kazakhstan takes us to Elmira and her journey from backyard farming to building a greenhouse business. Despite the harsh weather conditions, Elmira has developed a sustainable farming venture, helping to support her family and inspiring others in her community to do the same.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, Jazgul exemplifies the spirit of innovation in agriculture.¹ She introduced vertical gardening techniques, which not only boosted her family’s food supply but also inspired others in her village to adopt more sustainable farming practices. Her creativity and persistence demonstrate the ways in which women are driving change in rural areas.



Turuncu Eller Cooperative processes Gümüldür Mandarin, a geographically indicated product, in Izmir, Türkiye.

Moving to **Türkiye**, we meet the collective strength of women organized under cooperatives.² FAO has supported 19 women-led cooperatives across 13 cities in producing pastry, prepared or preserved fruits and vegetables, herbs, rugs and honey. These cooperatives, with a combined membership of over 380 women, have transformed traditional practices into viable businesses. Their inspiring stories highlight the perseverance and entrepreneurial spirit of rural women. One cooperative member reflects, “By working together, we have not only secured better incomes but also a future for our families and our communities”. These women have driven their own success, with FAO providing technical assistance and facilitating opportunities for them to thrive.

¹ The full story is available at <https://www.fao.org/world-food-day/food-heroes/detail/jazgul-tolomusheva/en>

² Further information is available at <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/dd1aa74c-968e-4031-b9a8-79f53603e597/content>

And in **Ukraine**, Liudmyla stands out as a beacon of strength. Despite the devastation of war, which decimated her livestock and farmland, she remains undaunted.³ With FAO’s support, Liudmyla has rebuilt her farm, ensuring food security for her family and community. Her story is one of survival and hope, showing that even in the darkest times, resilience shines through.

These stories remind us that rural women are the backbone of their communities, driving progress through innovation, collaboration and resilience. Future issues of the Gender Newsletter will cover the stories of these women and groups in more detail.

Planning for the next session of the Commission on the Status of Women

FAO participated in the Beijing+30 Regional Review Meeting,⁴ which was held on 21 and 22 October 2024 in Geneva, Switzerland, and was organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). FAO supported the plenary session on “Closing the Gender Gap: Effective Policies to Achieve the SDGs in the ECE Region,” where Nabil Gangi, the Deputy Regional Representative in FAO’s Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, delivered a speech. Nabil Gangi’s remarks focused on the critical policy measures needed to address gender inequality in agrifood systems and accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the region.

FAO’s “Promising Practices in Gender Mainstreaming in Agriculture” side event served as a space for discussing successful case studies and strategies for gender-responsive agricultural practices in the region. This session fostered a productive exchange on integrating gender equality into agricultural development to address rural women’s specific needs.

The Beijing+30 Regional Review Meeting underscored a range of key insights:

- FAO discussions and initiatives revealed the necessity for greater advocacy in the region, among both Member States and civil society, to provide more visibility and give greater recognition to rural women as one of the largest disadvantaged groups at risk of being left behind.
- The participants emphasized the need for targeted policies and programmes that address rural women’s unique challenges, such as access to resources, decision-making power and economic empowerment.

³ The full story is available at <https://www.fao.org/countryprofiles/news-archive/detail-news/en/c/1712988>

⁴ Further information is available at <https://unece.org/gender/events/beijing30-regional-review-meeting>

- The event highlighted specific policy measures, such as gender-responsive budgeting and inclusive policies, as essential to achieving the 2030 Agenda's SDGs and the objectives of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action.

FAO will ensure that the efforts of the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia Gender Team, along with the insights gathered from this meeting, align with the priorities of Beijing+30. In this context, FAO will continue engaging with Member States in the region to support the development and implementation of effective policies and programmes aimed at empowering rural women.

Preparing for COP29: advancing gender-responsive climate action

Member States and non-governmental stakeholders are preparing for the 29th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change that will take place in November 2024 in Azerbaijan.

FAO organized a workshop on “Advancing Climate Action in Agriculture in Europe and Central Asia” from 25 to 27 September 2024, in Baku, Azerbaijan, to foster knowledge sharing and collaboration among countries and partner agencies in the region. Key discussions highlighted the disproportionate impact of climate change on women, barriers such as limited access to technology, and the importance of scaling up digital solutions for rural women to enhance climate resilience and economic empowerment. The workshop highlighted the need for targeted capacity building, increased digital literacy, and improved access to technology for rural women, emphasizing the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration and investments to scale up gender-responsive climate solutions ahead of COP29.

In this scope, the Harmoniya Initiative was launched by the COP29 Presidency and FAO to empower farmers, villages and rural communities by enhancing agrifood systems' resilience to climate change. The initiative focuses on harmonizing agricultural projects, increasing climate finance, and strengthening the role of women and young farmers. It will serve as a hub for collaboration, experience-sharing, and driving tangible actions to address the impacts of climate change on agriculture, emphasizing sustainable practices and direct access to investments for small-scale farmers.

FAO launches initiative to accelerate gender equality in agrifood systems

FAO has launched the “Commit to Grow Equality” (CGE) initiative to close the gender gap in agrifood systems, which could reduce global hunger, boost incomes, and add

USD 1 trillion to the global economy.⁵ While 75 percent of policy documents in developing countries recognize women's roles, only 19 percent set concrete gender goals, highlighting the need for more focused actions.



Women fishers help dock a returning fishing boat at the Arsuz port in Hatay, southern Türkiye.

The CGE initiative aims to empower women in agrifood systems through investments, financing and partnerships. It encourages diverse stakeholders to commit to specific actions that promote gender equality. FAO Director-General Qu Dongyu emphasized that closing gender gaps could enhance economic growth, food security and resilience, especially in rural areas.

High-level participants, including ministers from Ireland, Norway and Türkiye, pledged new resources to support CGE, which could benefit up to 54 million women globally. The initiative will initially align USD 1 billion in investments to support women in the agrifood sector.

Central to CGE is a Commitments Matrix that guides stakeholders in setting transformative gender commitments, such as increasing the number of projects that address gender inequalities, linking financial commitments to broader challenges like climate change, and enhancing data collection on gender disparities.

FAO is committed to tracking gender-transformative actions in its projects, promoting the implementation of the Committee on World Food Security's Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment, and launching a gender data domain in its FAOSTAT database by 2026. The initiative is part of a broader push, informed by FAO's 2023 report on “The Status of Women in Agrifood Systems,” which highlighted significant gender disparities in productivity, wages and workloads in agrifood systems.

⁵ A longer version of this story is available at <https://www.fao.org/newsroom/detail/fao-leads-new-initiative-and-reinforces-its-commitment-to-accelerate-gender-equality-efforts-in-agrifood-systems/en>

The United Nations has designated 2026 as the International Year of the Woman Farmer, with FAO leading activities to support women in agriculture.

Empowering rural women for a sustainable future in Central Asia



Stakeholders discussed rural women's pivotal role in agriculture, food security and nutrition in Central Asia.

The Central Asian Forum on “Women, Science, and Innovation for Food Security and a Sustainable Future” was held on 4 October 2024, in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, marking the United Nations’ International Day of Rural Women. Organized by the Senate of Uzbekistan, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Committee on Family and Women, and the “Women-Agrarians of Uzbekistan” Association, and supported by the FAO-Türkiye Partnership Programme, the event brought together policymakers, experts and women farmers from across the region to discuss the critical role of rural women in sustainable agriculture and food security.

Key sessions focused on challenges such as limited access to innovative technologies and decision-making platforms for rural women, especially in the context of climate resilience and natural resource management. Speakers emphasized the need for gender-sensitive policies and strategies to address these gaps.

Participants developed several actionable recommendations to empower rural women. These included expanding access to digital tools and education, increasing investment in rural infrastructure, and creating supportive policy frameworks that enhance women’s participation in agribusiness and leadership. The forum also stressed the importance of regional cooperation to ensure women have equitable access to the benefits of science and innovation in agriculture.

The event concluded with a call to continue fostering collaboration among stakeholders to promote gender equality and ensure rural women are recognized as key agents in achieving the SDGs across Central Asia.

Implementing gender-responsive pasture management for land degradation neutrality in Georgia

Georgia is making considerable strides towards achieving land degradation neutrality through gender-responsive interventions. Nino Chikovani, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Focal Point for Georgia, recently highlighted the achievements of the Global Environment Facility (GEF)-supported project “Achieving Land Degradation Neutrality Targets of Georgia through Restoration and Sustainable Management of Degraded Pasturelands” at the UNCCD Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 21). Her presentation was part of a joint FAO-UNCCD side event titled “The land degradation neutrality (LDN)-tenure-gender nexus: emerging good practices and tools for transformation”.

Recognized as a good practice in gender-responsive project design at the 58th GEF Council in 2020, Verona Collantes-Lebale, GEF’s Senior Gender Specialist noted, “It is encouraging to see Georgia’s success in moving from gender mainstreaming at design to implementation. We look forward to following future gender equality results at reporting periods”. It also featured in the UNCCD’s flagship “Global Land Outlook” in 2024. “The project is a terrific example of how gender-responsive tenure rights go hand-in-hand with sustainable land management,” observed Karen Bernard, the UNCCD’s Gender Policy Officer.



Georgia's gender-responsive land degradation neutrality efforts were presented at the FAO-UNCCD side event in Uzbekistan.

In her presentation, Nino Chikovani explained that the project aims to restore and sustainably manage degraded pasturelands in three municipalities in Georgia – Dmanisi, Gurjaani and Kazbegi – emphasizing that gender and women’s empowerment are critical to combating pasture degradation. In Georgian family farming, the distribution of tasks is highly gendered: men typically handle animal feeding and herding, while women are more involved in livestock care, including milking and milk processing. The health of livestock grazed on pastures directly impacts on

household income and food security, making sustainable pasture management a key concern for women. However, women's roles are often underestimated due to their low social status in rural areas, potentially sidelining them from decision-making and capacity development.

To address these challenges, the project has introduced several measures to enhance women's participation in pasture-related decision-making. The establishment of Pasture Users Unions (PUUs) to represent small farmers and mobile pastoralists includes special provisions to ensure women's equitable participation and leadership in pastureland management. Nino Chikovani also highlighted the importance of challenging gender stereotypes, saying, "We wanted to start addressing gender stereotypes and support capable women as well as men to take up leadership roles".

The project has supported the integration of gender into the National Pastureland Management Policy. Consultations with women's groups and gender analysis of pasture tenure rights have also informed the development of a Land Code that includes specific provisions for gender equality, aligning with the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT).

In this context, a key focus has been the active engagement of women in the pasture use planning process, including the establishment and management of PUUs and equal access to pasture leases. These efforts are aligned with the temporary special measures recommended by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), an international bill of rights for women. Georgia's proposed mechanisms include:

- **Pasture user mapping:** Ensure that women heads of households with livestock are included in pasture inventories and participate in all meetings.
- **PUU membership:** Emphasize the registration of women household heads as members of PUUs and encourage joint attendance by women who co-own livestock with men family members.
- **Gender representation targets:** Aim for a minimum of 30 percent women PUU membership, with at least one woman serving on each executive body.
- **Infrastructure development:** Require local pasture management processes to consider women's needs when planning infrastructure development at the municipality level, and reflect these priorities in manuals and guidance materials.
- **Equitable tenure rights:** Prioritize lease allocations to women-headed households, enhancing women's access to critical pasture resources.

These measures aim to dismantle barriers to women's participation in pasture management and strengthen their role in sustainable land use.

As for results, the impact is already being felt on the ground. Mariam Butkhashvili, Chair of the Pasture Users Union in Ganakhleba village, shared her experiences: "Because most plots have been leased to private companies and enterprises, we locals have very few resources to feed our cattle. Project support for electric fences was crucial for people to mark where they could let their cattle graze. With proper pasture management, there will be grass and livestock won't go hungry. As a result, the livestock are producing milk, dairy products are made, and by selling them, we have income". Her leadership in this traditionally men-dominated field is promoting a positive image of women's capabilities in driving environmental and socioeconomic progress. Monitoring visits have shown increased pasture availability, and the project's success is being scaled out through farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchanges in other regions of Georgia.

FAO supports gender-responsive food security and livelihoods in Ukraine amid ongoing war



A woman transports a sack of potatoes during the distribution of seeds and potato starter kits in Vodiane, Ukraine.

As the war in Ukraine continues to impact on food security and livelihoods, FAO has stepped in to restore stability and support communities. To ensure that these efforts are both effective and inclusive, FAO in Ukraine has conducted a gender analysis to better understand the unique challenges faced by men and women in the current crisis.

This gender analysis builds on an earlier Food Security and Agricultural Livelihoods survey⁶ conducted this year and examines the data with a focus on gender disparities, taking into account factors such as age, location and proximity to conflict zones. The analysis delves into agricultural and

⁶ The full report is available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-food-security-and-agricultural-livelihoods-assessment-december-2023-monitoring-report>

livelihood activities in households led by women and men, exploring intrahousehold shocks, coping strategies and financial governance.

The findings reveal that households headed by women are particularly vulnerable, often relying on non-labour incomes such as humanitarian aid and remittances. The analysis highlights the need for targeted economic interventions to support women-headed households, especially those near the frontlines or in rural areas. It advocates for tailored programmes that bolster these households' resilience, improve food security, and create sustainable livelihoods.

The analysis also explores how household income is managed, uncovering a complex picture of financial governance. In male-headed households, men typically control income from agricultural production, whereas income from farm trade and labour is more likely to be managed jointly. In contrast, women in households they head tend to have greater control over finances, regardless of income source. The report recommends implementing gender-transformative interventions, such as Reflection Action Circles and Gender Action Learning Systems, to foster joint decision-making and promote equitable outcomes.

- Reflection Action Circles: These are participatory learning groups that engage communities in discussions about power dynamics, ensuring that everyone's voice is heard and promoting collaborative decision-making.⁷
- Gender Action Learning Systems: A community-driven empowerment approach that uses inclusive methods to enhance income, food and nutrition security in a gender-equitable way.⁸

These innovative approaches can help households navigate financial governance with greater fairness and cooperation, leading to stronger and more resilient communities.

Building on these findings, FAO in Ukraine is focusing on targeted empowerment programmes for rural women, designed to address systemic gender barriers and enhance socioeconomic resilience. One such initiative is an upcoming pilot project in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), scheduled for the last quarter of 2024. This holistic project will address gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health, and economic empowerment in the vegetable value chains in Mykolaiv Oblast, southern Ukraine. FAO will manage the economic empowerment component, enhancing women's access to productive resources and extension services, while UNFPA will focus on addressing social issues such as gender-based violence and reproductive health.

FAO in Ukraine is also updating its Country Gender Assessment (CGA), originally published in 2021, to

⁷ Further information is available at <https://actionaid.se/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Actionaid-Handbook-Reflection-Action-circle-FGM.pdf>

⁸ Further information is available at https://www.oxfamnovib.nl/Redactie/Downloads/English/publications/150115_Practical%20guide%20GALS%20summary%20Phase%201-2%20lr.pdf

incorporate new insights into the impacts of the ongoing conflict. The updated assessment will include data from intrahousehold surveys to better understand the dynamics, roles, access to resources, and decision-making within rural households. These findings will inform the design and implementation of future projects.

In addition to its field initiatives, FAO in Ukraine has joined the Ukraine Alliance for Gender-Responsive and Inclusive Recovery, a coalition that includes the United Nations, the government, non-governmental organizations and donors. The alliance commits to integrating a gender perspective into recovery funding and resources, ensuring that women's rights and needs are prioritized. This commitment aligns with FAO's Policy on Gender Equality 2020–2030, reinforcing its goal of achieving gender equality and supporting the full participation of women in the recovery process.

Through these initiatives, FAO is committed to supporting Ukraine's most vulnerable communities, ensuring that the voices and needs of women are at the forefront of recovery efforts.

New women-led agribusiness incubator empowers rural women in Albania



The women-led agribusiness incubator was inaugurated in Leskovik, Albania.

In a significant step towards empowering women in agriculture, a new women-led agribusiness incubator has been launched in Leskovik, Albania.⁹ Developed by FAO in partnership with the Municipality of Kolonja, the Albanian Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and UN Women, the incubator, named “Duaratat e Leskovikut,” will focus on processing fruits and vegetables, making traditional winter foods (zahire), and packaging artisanal products. These goods will be distributed across domestic and regional markets, boosting local economies and promoting sustainable rural development. This initiative is part of the “Gender, Rural Equality and Tourism” (GREAT) project, funded by the Government of Italy.

⁹ A longer version of this story is available at <https://www.fao.org/countryprofiles/news-archive/detail-news/en/c/1698071>

“This agribusiness incubator, launched in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, FAO and UN Women, stands as a model of social entrepreneurship,” said Erion Isai, Mayor of Kolonja. He emphasized that the women-led venture would bring “Made in Leskovik” products to new markets, fostering economic growth and supporting food security in the region.

Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Enio Civici, reaffirmed the government’s dedication to backing new investments that connect farmers with markets. Speaking at the opening of the agribusiness, Enio Civici highlighted the project’s role in empowering rural women, enhancing their contributions to rural development, and aligning with the broader goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Franco Turri, representing the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS), underscored the importance of integrating modern technologies and infrastructure improvements to create a supportive environment for women entrepreneurs in agriculture. “This investment aims to elevate women’s economic status through knowledge and innovative technology,” he noted.

UN Women Representative to Albania, Michele Ribotta, highlighted the incubator’s role in breaking down barriers and addressing gender-based inequalities that restrict women’s economic participation. “The initiative is crucial in advancing economic empowerment for rural women,” Michele Ribotta stated, underscoring the importance of inclusive growth in rural areas.

Raimund Jehle, FAO Representative in Albania, emphasized FAO’s commitment to boosting rural women’s economic empowerment in the agribusiness sector. “The women-led agribusiness incubator in Leskovik combines

research, knowledge, technology, local governance and women’s groups to explore innovative, gender-sensitive solutions that can unlock the potential of agriculture and contribute to poverty reduction and food security,” Raimund Jehle said. He highlighted the need for investments in income-generating activities that support economic growth and social development, and provide women with the infrastructure needed to thrive.

Supported by the GREAT initiative, this three-year project aims to strengthen the role of women in rural Albania and aligns with the 2030 Agenda’s principle of leaving no one behind. The initiative, funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and implemented by FAO and UN Women, operates in the municipalities of Kolonja and Elbasan. By fostering women’s leadership in agriculture, the project seeks to transform the rural economy and build a more inclusive future for Albania’s rural communities.

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