



# FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION PROGRESS REVIEW

Regional Meeting for Europe and Central Asia

12 March 2024 | Geneva, Switzerland

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SUMMARY REPORT



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### BACKGROUND

The first UN Food Systems Summit +2 Stocktaking Moment ([UNFSS+2](#)) was convened in Rome, Italy, in July 2023, building upon the momentum of the 2021 Food Systems Summit. With over 3300 participants from 182 countries, the UNFSS+2 aimed to review the progress made on commitments, identify bottlenecks, and advocate for sustainable food systems as critical Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) accelerators.

At the end of the UNFSS+2, the [Secretary-General launched a Call to Action](#) focusing on embedding food systems strategies in national policies, establishing inclusive governance, investing in research and innovation, promoting business engagement, ensuring all stakeholders' participation, and securing long-term finance for transformation.

After the conclusion of UNFSS+2, to acquaint participants with the six areas of action outlined in the UN Secretary-General's Call to Action and to prepare for the UNFSS+4 in 2025, the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub (the Hub) organized a series of Regional Preparatory Meetings from March to April 2024. The Hub, along with the UN Issue-based Coalition on Sustainable Food Systems in Europe and Central Asia and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), organized the second regional meeting of 2024 on 12 March at the Palais des Nations premises in Geneva, Switzerland. This meeting convened National Convenors and other experts from across the region to assess progress in transforming food systems, facilitate regional knowledge sharing, and identify emerging patterns and solutions.

This meeting expanded on the discussions from the [Europe and Central Asia UNFSS+2 Regional Preparatory Meeting, held in March 2023](#). National Convenors emphasized the interconnectedness of food systems, the need for peer learning, and adopting a paradigm shift to address challenges such as the war in Ukraine, COVID-19, and climate change, among others. They advocated for a systemic approach, coherence within food systems, synergy between food systems, climate action, and health and nutrition agendas.

This meeting report summarizes the presentations and discussions by National Convenors, government representatives, and stakeholders, including facts and figures shared by the Hub and invited speakers. The report covers food systems progress in the region, identifies good practices, highlights key challenges in food systems transformation (FST), key messages, and next steps.

**List of countries participating:** Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Kyrgyz Republic, Norway, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, European Union.

**Outline of the meeting:** [LINK](#).

**Concept note and agenda:** [LINK](#).

## PROGRESS IN THE REGION AND GOOD PRACTICES

This segment showcased progress and examples of good practices undertaken in countries' journeys toward FST, as shared by National Convenors and their teams. The discussion highlighted the diverse efforts of countries in promoting FST across various topics, with attention to the areas indicated in the UN Secretary-General's Call to Action at the UNFSS+2. The examples provided below are not exhaustive and provide a summary of the discussion areas. Additional good practices will be incorporated into the Hub's [Database Of Practices In Food System Transformation](#).

**Development and update of National Pathways and policies:** An increasing number of countries in the region have integrated their National Pathways or strategies into comprehensive government programmes. These programmes aim to address various sectors to combat food insecurity, improve nutrition and healthy diets, mitigate climate change, manage natural resources and promote sustainability. Currently, 27 countries in Europe and Central Asia have established National Pathways, with 10 among them (Belgium, Finland, Ireland, Kyrgyz Republic, Latvia, Serbia, Spain, Switzerland, Tajikistan, and Türkiye) having reported action plans. Considering recent global challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical shifts, countries have demonstrated agility in adapting strategies to ensure food security. It is noted that the complexity of National Pathways and its integration into national policies varies significantly when comparing European to Central Asian Countries.

**Stakeholder Collaboration, Governance Mechanisms, and Innovative Solutions for FST:** Countries emphasized the necessity of stakeholder collaboration, including government entities, international organizations, the UN system, civil society, and the private sector, with the support of the Hub. This collaboration has facilitated the development of common visions, monitoring mechanisms, and legal frameworks to support holistic approaches to FST, as well as collaborative strategies to promote sustainable production, resilience, and healthy diets. For example, **Norway** convened a dialogue on increasing food production while reducing its carbon footprint in cooperation with six ministries and stakeholders from the private sector, civil society organizations, and local and regional governments. Several countries have continued multistakeholder consultations and dialogues. Notably, countries **such as Norway, Germany, Finland, Sweden, and Tajikistan** have established bodies for ongoing participation and partnership with governments, civil society, farmer unions, and other stakeholders to develop sustainable agriculture strategies. **Switzerland** has also reported increased citizen engagement in food systems structures.

In the **European Union**, members are actively involved in FST through initiatives such as the EU Green Deal, the Farm to Fork Strategy, the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP), and the Biodiversity Strategy.



**Strategies implemented to address climate change and food systems:** The prioritization of climate-smart agriculture, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and reduction of ecological footprint are commendable steps towards environmental sustainability and natural resource protection in the region. For instance, **Germany** has committed 900 million Euros to support sustainable livestock farming as a federal priority, aiming to reduce emissions and enhance animal welfare standards. **Denmark** is channelling efforts toward climate-smart technologies and innovations and adopting a national climate act to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 70% in 2030. Additionally, countries are adopting digital innovation and science to develop more resilient food systems. For instance, **Moldova** and the **Nordic countries** emphasize digitalization, technological innovation, and the integration of artificial intelligence to analyze resilient food systems continuously. **Armenia**, in its government programme for 2021-2026, established 55 new laboratories to enhance self-sufficiency and productivity in agriculture in response to various shocks. **Norway** focused on developing a digital climate emissions calculator, enabling a better understanding of opportunities to reduce emissions at the farm level. **Switzerland** established a new Climate Strategy for Agriculture in 2023, focusing on mitigation and adaptation. It was developed jointly by the Federal Offices for Agriculture, Environment, and Food Safety, which are co-responsible for its implementation.

**Countries are committed to improving nutrition for their population,** with nutrition prominently featured as a priority in several National Pathways and strategies. For example, **Switzerland** is updating its nutritional dietary recommendations, and **Uzbekistan** is developing a monitoring system for health, food, and nutrition, utilizing key FAO indicators. **Germany** introduced a novel food and nutrition strategy in 2023, promoting more plant-based diets and the country's role in guiding and regulating dietary matters. Finally, strategies and programmes are in place in **Tajikistan's** 2015-2024 National Strategy addressing healthy diets and school nutrition.

**Ecosystem of Support (EoS) and Regional Bodies' Engagement in developing or implementing National Pathways:** International and regional organizations in the region have supported the National Convenors in advancing their National Pathways. Examples include:

- **Engagement with UN system and international organizations:** The Issue-based Coalition on Sustainable Food Systems in Europe and Central Asia (IBC-SFS), along with other regional assets, plays a pivotal role in supporting UN Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams' work on FST by fostering collaboration, policy coherence, joint programming, knowledge sharing, capacity development, technical guidance, and joint advocacy. For instance, the IBC-SFS helps address regional and cross-border challenges, ensuring integration among regional, sub-regional, and national dimensions, while the UN Food Systems Task Force mobilizes the UN system to support National Convenors.
- **Engagement with coalitions:** Coalitions are essential in facilitating engagement between National Convenors, UN agencies, and stakeholders. For instance, the Coalition of Action on Healthy Diets, with a four-member steering committee and comprising 20 member countries and key stakeholders, supports countries in integrating healthy diets into climate agendas and addressing food-related issues in the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). Denmark has been a leading country in this coalition, actively participating in drafting the terms of reference, work plans, and other relevant documents. Technical experts from the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration, part of the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, have been heavily involved in coalition activities, sharing experiences on climate-friendly diet guidelines and public-private partnerships at various webinars.

From the Danish experience, coalitions can be an excellent forum for sharing lessons learned and best practices, inspiring others, and gaining insights from other countries' experiences.

However, balancing coalition activities with other responsibilities can be challenging, necessitating clear prioritization and justification for resource allocation. Coalitions must have a clear purpose and strong leadership to drive the work forward effectively.

- **Initiative on Climate Action and Nutrition (I-CAN):** The I-CAN initiative, which involves various stakeholders, aims to connect climate action with nutrition. The 2023 baseline assessment evaluates the integration of healthy diets into nationally determined contributions (NDCs) to identify necessary actions for improved convergence. Baseline studies have been conducted to support the project, focusing on including nutritional aspects in NDCs, incorporating sustainability considerations in national nutrition plans, and integrating sustainability into food-based dietary guidelines. Led by GAIN, this data aims to enhance the synergy between these topics. The private sector enhancement engagement is being discussed, emphasising avoiding greenwashing and promoting sustainable and healthy food production.
- **The Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement:** The SUN Movement started in 2010 with four countries and has now expanded to include 66 countries. The SUN Movement promotes collaborative efforts among countries, private sector entities, civil society organizations, and UN agencies to tackle malnutrition under government leadership. It facilitates learning exchanges and hosts global gatherings to share country experiences and build political commitment to nutrition and FST.

Some examples of its impact include the Nordic nutrition guidelines and the food-based dietary guidelines, which strongly consider climate change and the sustainability of food systems as drivers of a healthy, sustainable diet. Another relevant example is Tajikistan, which, in 2023, participated in peer learning on school feeding with the Philippines, another SUN country, to support its national school feeding program.

In response to growing country demands, the SUN Movement also addresses policy and legislative issues related to the food-nutrition nexus, further demonstrating its commitment to improving global nutrition and food security.

- **Food Systems Countdown Initiative:** Originating from the UNFSS process, this initiative involves over 50 researchers from 30 institutions, aiming to provide actionable evidence for tracking progress in FST, guiding decision-makers, and informing transformation. It complements existing global, regional, and country monitoring systems, focusing on key outcome domains and cross-cutting issues to advance science. For instance, within diets, nutrition, and health, indicators used by Switzerland to track its FST, such as diet quality aligned with food-based dietary guidelines and greenhouse gas emissions from food systems, are included in the initiative framework. Data released in December 2023 reveals that while Europe excels in the affordability of nutritious diets and access to safe water, it lags in consuming unhealthy ultra-processed foods and adhering to dietary guidelines and diversity. These findings underscore that each region and country possesses strengths and weaknesses in FST, indicating significant opportunities for mutual learning and improvement.

## KEY CHALLENGES IN FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION

Establishing and advancing National Pathways to accelerate food system transformation (FST) is country-context-specific. Below is a summary of challenges presented by scene-setting speakers, National Convenors, and government representatives.

Summary points of challenges discussed:

**Challenges persist in aligning policies across government levels** and ensuring effective implementation of countries' National Pathways and strategies across all sectors. The challenges are more pronounced in developing countries in the region, requiring technical and financial support to enable government structures to align their policies.

**According to WHO, less than a quarter of National Pathways in Europe and Central Asia focus on actions needed to address food safety and healthy diets.** This challenge is particularly pronounced in Central Asia, where comprehensive food and nutrition strategies are lacking. Limited policy coherence exacerbates the double burden of malnutrition, with Central Asia experiencing high rates of obesity and unhealthy diets. Approximately 24% of the population cannot afford healthy diets, adult obesity stands at 25%, and childhood overweight is at 7%. Addressing these issues requires measures such as sugar taxes, product reformulation and consumer education, along with coordinated actions among stakeholders in the food system to promote healthy diets and combat obesity.

**Persistent challenges remain in balancing food production with promoting healthy diets.** Initiatives are underway to increase the availability of nutritious foods, combat unhealthy food marketing, reduce salt and sugar consumption, and address barriers such as market access, infrastructure limitations, and land tenure issues. Recognizing the health impacts of dietary choices highlights the importance of prioritizing nutritious options and investing in public health initiatives. Additionally, countries stressed the importance of strengthening the resilience of supply chains, enhancing access to food markets, and improving food safety and quality while reducing food loss and waste. This involves bolstering trade resilience against market shocks, as evidenced during the war in Ukraine.

**Increasing natural resource stress and climate change resilience.** Many countries face the challenge of adapting agriculture to climate change. Erratic weather patterns, extreme temperatures, and changing precipitation threaten crop yields and food security. Strategies for building resilience, such as climate-smart or regenerative agriculture and water management, are crucial. Achieving sustainability in agriculture requires balancing economic and social viability with environmental stewardship. Key challenges include reducing greenhouse gas emissions, minimizing agricultural pollution, and promoting biodiversity while ensuring the livelihoods of farmers and rural communities.

**Inadequate participation and community engagement in some countries.** Active participation in international collaborations, including Coalitions of Action and engagement with diverse stakeholders such as civil society, citizen assemblies, and national dialogues, are crucial for fostering sustainable agriculture and FST for countries in the region. Yet, ensuring meaningful engagement and inclusive decision-making processes remains an ongoing challenge in many countries, particularly for central European countries where policies are insufficiently aligned with farmers' needs.

**Inequitable access to resources persists in some countries.** Access to food and resources such as land, water, energy, and technology remains unequal both within and between countries, as well as between genders. Addressing disparities in resource access and promoting equitable distribution are essential for building sustainable food systems that leave no one behind. While the emphasis on digitalization, technological innovation, and the integration of artificial intelligence for ongoing analysis of food systems is a significant interest for the Nordic countries, ensuring equitable access to technology and addressing digital divides are pressing challenges that require attention from all countries.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS AND NEXT STEPS

- **The importance of implementing context-specific, culture-sensitive solutions in food systems across sub-regions** highlights the multidimensionality of food systems and underscores the need to adopt a holistic approach for effective transformation. While progress has been made, various challenges persist, underscoring the continuous need for collaboration and innovation. The meeting stressed that National Pathways toward sustainable food systems are dynamic documents that should be regularly updated to reflect changing priorities and circumstances. Countries are committed to advancing sustainable food systems by addressing food insecurity, climate change, and malnutrition.

**Fostering convergence across sectors within food systems is essential** as National Convenors collaborate with focal points from various ministries to address interconnected issues such as food production, climate, nutrition, and health. While political challenges may arise, integrating climate action into FST can accelerate progress. Leveraging future milestone events like the UNFSS+4 stocktaking moment and the Nutrition for Growth Summit can serve as milestones to drive this convergence process forward. Convenors also play a vital role in sustaining momentum within their governments.

- **Efforts to foster international and regional collaboration:** Countries in the region are confronting similar challenges and priorities in FST, including climate change impacts, food insecurity, malnutrition, access to healthy diets, promoting sustainable agriculture practices, natural resource management, policy alignment, food loss and waste prevention, resource and investment access, and resilience to shocks. Furthermore, the Ecosystem of Support (EoS), regional networks, and bodies present opportunities for engagement and collaboration with various stakeholders, including farmers and consumers.
- **Climate change adaptation, resilience-building, and addressing malnutrition have been identified as key priorities,** focusing on climate-smart agriculture, water management, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Moreover, promoting diets and addressing malnutrition require action by countries, especially against unhealthy food marketing and reducing salt and sugar consumption. National Convenors welcomed the Hub's Convergence Initiative to facilitate aligning the agendas of food systems and climate action. COP29 being held in Azerbaijan is an opportunity to maintain momentum on food systems and call for actions to transform them in the region to be more sustainable.
- **Accelerating effective policies and rigorous progress monitoring is paramount** to advancing FST in Europe and Central Asia, navigating the intricate challenges, and ensuring sustainable outcomes for present and future generations. Scale, speed, finance, and coordination will also be crucial for advancing FST, emphasizing collaboration at the national and sub-national levels.
- **Countries in the region call for adopting a nexus approach** that combines crisis response, mid-term development needs, and long-term structural changes to transform while building resilience to shocks and threats.

- **Access to finance:** The sustainable transformation of food systems sustainably requires suitable investments from both public and private sectors. Developing countries in the region require improved access to concessional long-term financing for their food systems.

Among the specific requests and next steps raised by the National Convenors are the following:

- **Technical assistance:** Countries request timely technical assistance and flexible funding mechanisms from UN agencies to increase efficiency in implementing sustainable food system strategies.
- **Role clarity:** Countries seek strategic guidance, clarity, and visibility on the role of National Convenors, clarifying expectations and responsibilities. This further enables Convenors to perform their role, particularly regarding coordination with UN agencies and partners. The Convenor Network and peer learning were highlighted as essential tools in navigating challenges, underscoring the importance of sharing experiences and best practices.
- **Engagement with farmers:** National Convenors emphasized the importance of engaging with farmers to reduce the risk of protests and ensure their participation in sustainable food system initiatives.
- **Private sector engagement:** Countries highlighted the need to overcome business resistance and prioritize health over profit in the food industry.
- **Youth engagement:** National Convenors recognized the importance of engaging youth and people's assemblies in sustainable food system dialogues.
- **Fostering continued dialogue:** National Convenors were encouraged to debrief with their constituencies, fostering continued dialogue and engagement on the meeting outcomes.

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A summary of the discussions held at a regional meeting on 12 March 2024 was presented by a National Convenor on behalf of the group during a side event on Food Systems Transformation on 13 March 2024 at the Europe Forum for Sustainable Development. Find the summary [here](#).