



An Interview with Vladimir Rakhmanin, Co-Chair of the Issue-based Coalition on Sustainable Food Systems, FAO Assistant Director-General, and Regional Representative for Europe and Central Asia

1) Why is the United Nations Food Systems Summit Stocktaking Moment relevant for countries in Europe and Central Asia?

The United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) in 2021 aimed to engage all stakeholders in a collective effort to transform food systems. The United Nations Secretary-General committed in his [Chair Summary and Statement of Action](#) on the [Food Systems Summit](#) to convene “a global stocktaking meeting every two years to review progress in implementing the outcomes of this process and its contributions to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.”

The food systems in our region face many challenges, including climate change, land degradation, water scarcity, and access to nutritious food to address all forms of malnutrition. The [United Nations Food Systems Stocktaking Moment](#), to be held 24–26 July 2023 in Rome, will be a great opportunity for countries to assess their progress in addressing challenges and to identify further actions. It’s important for countries in the ECA region to proactively showcase their actions, share their knowledge and learn from others.

2) What are the main legacies of the United Nations Food Systems Summit for Europe and Central Asia?

First, the Summit has helped raise awareness about the importance of sustainable food systems in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. This can lead to greater commitment and investment in sustainable food systems in the region. By participating in the Summit and its follow-up activities, countries can contribute to the global effort to transform food systems to be more equitable, sustainable and resilient. This can help achieve the SDGs and improve the lives of people in the region and around the world.

Second, the Summit has helped strengthen collaboration and partnerships, providing opportunities for stakeholders to discuss common challenges and opportunities. After two years, there remains a need to further strengthen collaboration and partnership among governments, civil society organizations and the private sector to address food security, nutrition and sustainability.

Third, the Summit has led to the adoption of best practices and innovative approaches from the region and world that can be further adapted and adopted. This has helped countries overcome food systems challenges by adopting a holistic lens that has led to more resilient, sustainable and efficient practices.

Fourth, the Summit highlighted the need for increased investment in research and development to address the multiple challenges facing food systems. This, in turn, can lead to the development of new technologies and innovations that can improve food security, nutrition and sustainability.

3) What role could the Issue-based Coalition on Sustainable Food Systems play for the United Nations Food Systems Summit Stocktaking Moment and beyond?

Established in April 2020, the Issue-based Coalition on Sustainable Food Systems in Europe and Central Asia (IBC-SFS)¹ provided key support to United Nations Resident Coordinators and Country Teams during the UNFSS in 2021. The IBC-SFS can now continue to play a significant role in the UN Food Systems Summit Stocktaking Moment and beyond by bringing together diverse stakeholders and leveraging their collective expertise, resources, and influence to address key challenges related to sustainable food systems. The IBC-SFS is constantly in dialogue with UN Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams, promoting multi-stakeholder and holistic approaches to food systems transformation.

The IBC-SFS can help identify and prioritize key issues and opportunities related to sustainable food systems, based on the perspectives and insights of its members. This could inform the discussions and outcomes of the 1st Stocktaking Moment and ongoing efforts to advance sustainable food systems.

Furthermore, the IBC-SFS can mobilize support from its members and beyond, including technical expertise and advocacy, and develop and promote solutions to address key challenges to advance sustainable food systems. This could include the exchange of information on approaches to food production, distribution and consumption, as well as policies and practices that promote sustainability, equity and resilience and amplify the impact of individual efforts. Finally, the IBC-SFS can advocate for policies and practices that support sustainable food systems. This could include engaging with governments, businesses and civil society organizations to promote more sustainable, equitable and resilient food systems.

4) Could you give some examples of the implementation of the [National Pathways](#) in Europe and Central Asia after the United Nations Food Systems Summit?

The UNFSS elevated public discussion about how reforming food systems can help us all to achieve the SDGs by implementing reforms that are good for people and planet. As part of this effort, governments are actively implementing National Pathways that will help achieve the goals of the Summit, supported by Resident Coordinators and Country Teams.

For example, the implementation of the National Pathway in **Albania** is supported through the implementation of a pilot project [SFS-MED: a multi-stakeholder initiative for Sustainable Food Systems in the Mediterranean](#) on agritourism and the preservation of local crop varieties and biodiversity².

The United Nations Country Team in **Armenia** in 2021 provided concrete support to the development of the national food security strategy. The IBC-SFS is also providing technical support on preparedness and response to food systems challenges caused by disasters and emergencies, including the COVID-19 pandemic.

In **Kazakhstan**, the United Nations Country Team has been working with the government to develop a National Pathway that focuses on promoting sustainable agriculture and improving food security.

¹ The chairs of the IBC-SFS are FAO, the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Health Organization. Members are the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Food Programme, the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Office for Project Services.

² The main objective of this project is to shed light on the importance of adopting a sustainable food systems approach that leverages the Mediterranean Diet for sustainable food consumption and production while coping with the intertwined environmental, economic, sociocultural, educational and nutritional challenges that the region is facing today.

It includes a range of initiatives, such as supporting small-scale farmers, promoting sustainable land use practices, improving production efficiency and self-sufficiency in socially significant food products, and reducing food loss and waste³.

According to the National Pathway in **Serbia**, urgent coordinated actions are required to build resilient and sustainable food systems that take into account the country's obligations in the process of its integration into the European Union⁴. National and subnational dialogues have continued since the UNFSS, a multisectoral working group was established and a detailed roadmap of the National Pathway with a strong focus on sustainable production technologies and digitalization was prepared.

These are just a few examples of the implementation of National Pathways in Europe and Central Asia.

5) You are acting as the IBC-SFS Co-Chair, but you are also FAO Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for Europe and Central Asia. In addition or complementary to the role of the IBC-SFS, what further assistance is the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia giving at the regional level?

FAO and the IBC-SFS have distinct but complementary roles in the upcoming Stocktaking Moment and in the broader effort to transform food systems in Europe and Central Asia. At the regional level, in line with the recommendations of the Thirty-third Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe (ERC-33) and the Forty-second Session of the European Commission on Agriculture, FAO has been playing a leading role in collecting and analyzing data on food systems in the region, including through its [Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition report](#), to which the contributions of the United Nations agency members of the IBC-SFS was crucial.

Furthermore, the Regional Office has initiated a 2 year regional project (Technical Cooperation Programme funding) on food systems. Project activities have a strong focus on inclusive, multistakeholder knowledge and experience exchange to support various sectors and disciplines at the country level, the development of case studies analyzing trade-offs and synergies to inform decision-making for the full potential of sustainable food systems⁵.

The FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia also will be working closely with IBC-SFS to support countries in the region in preparing for the 1st Stocktaking Moment in July. While their roles are distinct, both FAO and the IBC-SFS are important actors in the effort to transform food systems in our region.

³ These objectives are reflected in the country's new National Agricultural Sector Development Project Plan 2021–2025, which was prepared in collaboration with FAO.

⁴ These actions must protect the environment while being tailored to local realities, including geographic conditions, agricultural production patterns, technology, innovation, and the needs and priorities of local producers and people, including women and youth.

⁵ The project will build on the application of FAO tools and guidelines and support the implementation of the [Committee on World Food Security \(CFS\)](#) guidelines and policy recommendations. The primary focus will be on the [CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition](#), but it will not exclude the [Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems](#) and [Policy recommendations related to food loss and waste](#) and [agroecology](#). Regional discussions also will address true cost accounting for food.