

Urban Agenda for the EU



Food Partnership

**From EU Policy to Local Action - Building commitment
for sustainable Urban Food Systems**

**Policy
statement**

February 2026



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This document was prepared by the Food Partnership as one of the outputs of Action 1 of the [Food Action Plan](#). The aim of this action is to advocate for an EU framework for local food policies, based on policy recommendations developed through the Partnership's work across various actions and feedback from European cities.

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Food Policy Statement

Cities and local authorities ¹play a central role in transforming food systems. As the level of government closest to citizens, they are uniquely positioned to convene a wide range of food system actors, including local businesses, food producers, civil society organisations, citizens, and academia, and to identify local challenges and appropriate responses. Cities are already leading by example in addressing food-related challenges through technical and social innovation, and their potential impact is significant: they manage substantial land resources, procure large volumes of food, shape local food environments, improve access to affordable and healthy food, stimulate local food production, and promote democratic and collaborative approaches to food systems governance. This commitment is reflected in the growing number of signatory cities to the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact and in active engagement in city networks such as Eurocities and ICLEI.

At the same time, the contribution of food systems to climate change, environmental degradation, and rising health costs remains underestimated, and food systems are still insufficiently prioritised within European frameworks on urban issues. The partners of the Urban Agenda for the EU Partnership on Food therefore call on EU policymakers to fully recognise the potential of urban food policies by embedding food systems as a strong cross-cutting component of the EU Agenda for Cities, contributing to the existing areas of focus and supporting the achievement of environmental, social, economic, and territorial objectives. This should be accompanied by strengthened participation of cities in European food policy governance through their involvement in EU Food Dialogues and establishing concrete multilevel governance mechanisms, including dedicated financial resources, tools, and support frameworks, that enable EU, national, regional, and local authorities to cooperate effectively in deploying and scaling up local food policies. Promoting multilevel governance and the full inclusion of cities in the EU's food policy represent not only a democratic imperative but also a necessary condition for building more resilient, innovative, and fair food systems for both urban and rural populations.

¹ In this statement, the term "cities" is used as a general reference to all levels of local government involved in food system governance, including metropolitan authorities.

#Food

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Partnership visit the website**



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The Partnership includes the Food Systems Directorate of the Ministry of Agriculture of Malta; the Municipality of Milan; the Lisbon Metropolitan Area; the Environmental Studies Centre of Vitoria-Gasteiz City Council; the Municipality of Mouans-Sartoux; the City of Ghent; the City of Zory; the Urban Municipality of Kranj; the City of Vantaa; Dublin City Council; the Municipality of Kristiansand; Eurocities; ICLEI European Secretariat; Ellinogermaniki Agogi; the University of Barcelona; AESOP Sustainable Food Planning; the Brasov Metropolitan Agency; the Metropolitan Area of Lille; the Metropolitan Area of Cagliari; and the European Commission Directorates-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO), Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE), Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE), Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI), and Research and Innovation (DG RTD), as well as the Joint Research Centre (JRC).



1



Include Food as a Priority of the EU Agenda for cities

Urban areas are increasingly at the forefront of addressing complex challenges that are central to Europe's future, including the escalating impacts of climate change, threats to democracy at all levels of governance, widening socio-economic inequalities, and the need to strengthen preparedness and competitiveness. Food systems offer a strategic entry point to respond to these challenges, while also promoting public health, supporting local and sustainable farming communities, and safeguarding the environment including, air, water, soil, and biodiversity.

For these reasons, the new EU Agenda for cities should explicitly recognise the potential and cross-cutting nature of food systems, thereby enabling coordinated actions, strengthened multilevel cooperation, a clear policy mandate, and dedicated supporting funding.



2



Promote Multilevel Governance by Including Cities and Regions in EU Food Policy Making

Approximately 75% of the EU population lives in urban areas, yet cities remain largely excluded from EU food policy processes, including the Vision for Agriculture and Food, the Strategic Dialogue for Agriculture and Food, the European Food and Agriculture Board, and discussions on the Common Agricultural Policy. As the level of government closest to citizens, local authorities are best placed to understand on-the-ground realities related to economic conditions, public health, and climate resilience, and to design, implement, and monitor effective food policies that foster food democracy through citizen and community participation.

We therefore call for a shift toward inclusive, multilevel food governance that fully recognises cities and their surrounding territories as key partners in co-creating food policies and that ensures stronger alignment between EU, national, and local food strategies. To this end, local and regional governments should be included in the EU



Food Dialogue and in the development of National and Regional Plans, as foreseen by the Partnership Principle and multi-level governance.

The NRPPs should also include mandatory urban chapters to ensure that local needs, including those related to sustainable food systems, are reflected in the national planning. We also call for strengthened cooperation with existing platforms such as the Urban Agenda for the EU Partnerships, the Committee of the Regions, and networks including the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, ICLEI, and Eurocities, as well as support for coordinated rural–urban partnerships to deliver shared governance and resilient, sustainable food systems.

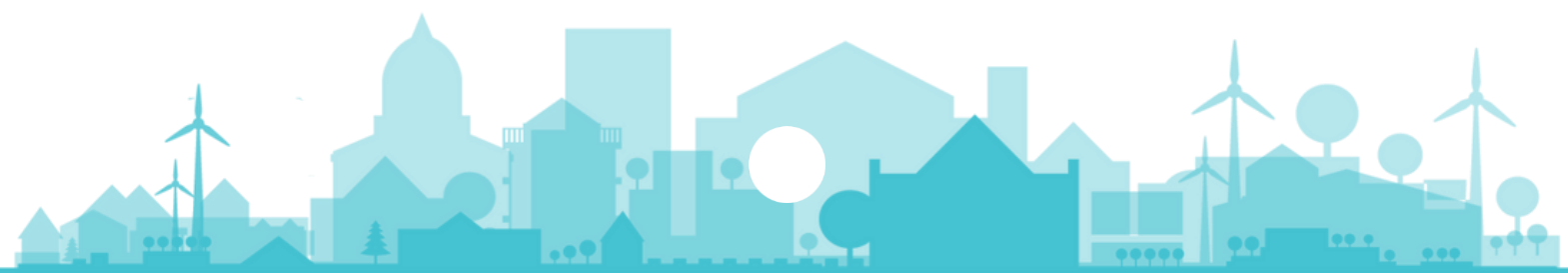


Strengthen Public Food Procurement

Cities and local governments responsible for food procurement have significant leverage to reshape food production and consumption patterns, thereby driving the transition towards sustainable food systems and healthy diets. From schools and hospitals to nursing homes and prisons, local authorities can use public food procurement strategically to deliver multiple benefits, including tackling food insecurity, improving public health, supporting local economies, ensuring fair wages and animal welfare, and addressing climate change.

This potential is already recognised in the EU Vision for Agriculture and Food, as well as in the European Parliament’s own-initiative report calling for more strategic use of public food procurement. Moreover, the EU Agenda for Cities acknowledges the value of public procurement as a policy lever. Building on this, we call on the EU to ensure that food public procurement is explicitly taken into consideration within the Agenda for Cities and systematically included in the technical dialogues with cities foreseen under this framework.

To fully unlock this potential, the EU should also revise the EU Procurement Directives to simplify and enable strategic procurement for cities, provide clear guidance on the integration of sustainability criteria as presented in the Joint Research Center report “Criteria for Sustainable Public Procurement (SPP) for Food, Food services, and Vending machines”, and offer dedicated training and capacity-building support, for example through the EU Cities Platform, to help cities fully harness their food purchasing power.



4



Guarantee Universal Access to Healthy and Sustainable School Meals

Coupled with food education, healthy food provision, and food waste reduction, school meals are a powerful lever for transforming food systems and fostering social inclusion and are key in preventing and reducing childhood obesity, which disproportionately affects children from low-income households. Despite their scale and impact, school meals have remained largely overlooked in EU food policy debates, with existing instruments such as the EU School Scheme, currently limited to milk, fruit, and vegetables, and the EU Child Guarantee, which focuses on ensuring access to free school meals for children in vulnerable situations, falling short of guaranteeing universal access to healthy and sustainable meals. As these initiatives are due to be renewed, local authorities should be fully involved in the design of the national strategies.

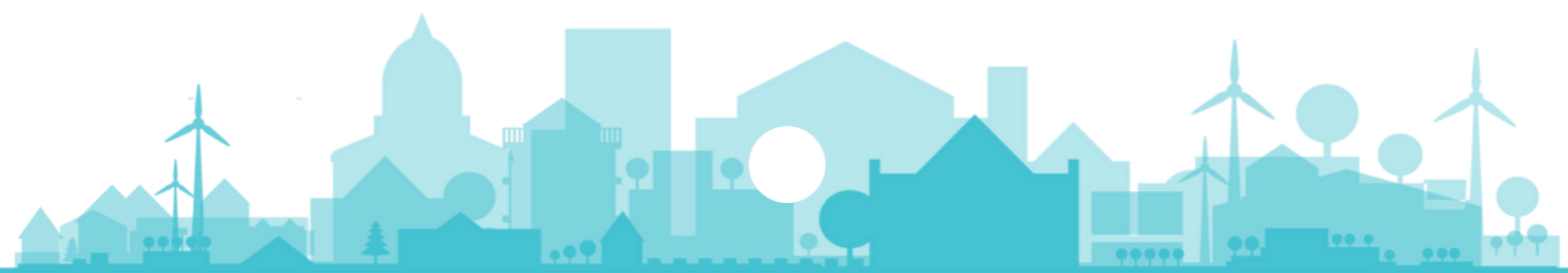
In line with the EU Agenda for Cities actions on social inclusion and equality, we call on the EU to explicitly recognise school meals as a strategic lever to address food poverty and promote sustainable food systems and thereby support cities in scaling up innovation, and ensure that EU funding, legislation, and forthcoming initiatives - including the Anti-Poverty Strategy - promote healthy food environments and enable local authorities to guarantee universal access to healthy and sustainable school meals.

5



Support the development of Urban Food Strategies

Food strategies are comprehensive policy tools developed at the local level to address key food-related challenges in a collaborative and integrated manner, spanning the entire food system, from production to consumption, access to healthy and



sustainable diets, socio-economic fairness, and food waste reduction. A growing number of cities across the EU and globally are developing integrated urban food strategies that engage a wide range of local stakeholders and community-led initiatives to co-design responses to their most pressing food system challenges. These strategies help place food systems firmly on the local policy agenda, break down governance silos by fostering synergies with other urban policies and plans, and address social, economic, and territorial inequalities in access to sustainable food.

Through integrated food policies, cities play a key role in creating enabling food environments that support more equitable access to healthy and sustainable diets and contribute to the prevention of diet-related illnesses, including through measures such as restricting food advertising, improving school meals, and ensuring access to fresh food in low-income neighbourhoods.

Leveraging programmes such as Horizon Europe, Life Programs, the European Urban Initiative and ESF+, the EU should provide enhanced technical and financial support to strengthen cities' capacity to develop, implement, and monitor urban food strategies, including through the exchange of best practices, dedicated funding opportunities, and evaluation tools to assess impacts on public health, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and local economies.

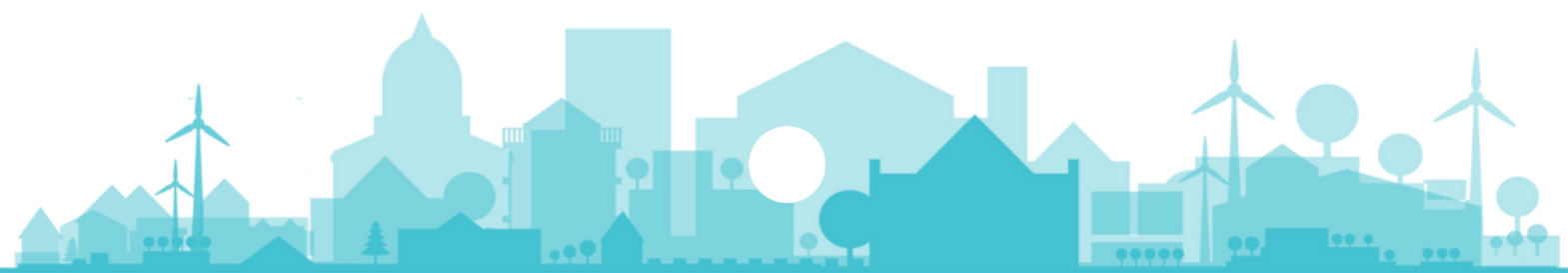
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Adopt EU Food Indicators for Cities

Local authorities are on the frontlines of building sustainable and resilient food systems, yet they often lack the tools, data, and capacity needed to accurately identify challenges, monitor progress, and assess policy impacts. Many cities face difficulties in conducting comprehensive food system assessments due to fragmented data, limited financial and human resources, restricted access to relevant information, and the absence of shared frameworks or agreed indicators. This hampers their ability to track key dimensions of food security, sustainability, and social well-being, to evaluate the effectiveness of food policies, and to inform both policy decisions and citizens.

Building on the EU Agenda for Cities' commitment to develop new knowledge and evidence-based support for cities, we therefore call on the EU to develop a coherent and comprehensive set of quantitative and qualitative indicators tailored to the territorial dimension of food systems, including urban-rural linkages, supported by



accessible data platforms, practical monitoring tools, and targeted training and capacity-building for local authorities on evaluation and monitoring.

This framework should foster greater harmonisation between EU and local-level data and build on, and connect with, existing monitoring initiatives such as the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact monitoring framework and the JRC food systems dashboard. Harmonised indicators should support evidence-based policymaking and investment decisions while contributing to broader sustainability objectives, and should cover the environmental, economic, health, and social dimensions of the food transition, including food access, nutrition, local production, waste reduction, carbon footprint, food environments, and food democracy.



Unlock the benefits of Public Land

Europe is witnessing a rapid decline in small farms, while new generations of farmers continue to face major barriers, most notably limited access to land. Local and regional governments manage significant areas of public land and can mobilise and regulate this resource strategically to support young farmers, foster generational renewal, and promote sustainable and organic farming practices that deliver healthy, climate-friendly food. In doing so, they also play a key role in safeguarding water resources, as land-use decisions directly affect water quality, availability, and ecosystem resilience - areas for which local authorities often hold primary responsibility.

We therefore welcome the European Commission's intention to establish a European Land Observatory and urge that cities and local governments are given a central role in its design and implementation, as well as in the development of CAP national plans, ensuring coherence with EU water-related strategies and objectives of the Urban Agenda for the EU Partnership on Compact Cities of limiting greenfield development. To enable this, public authorities must be equipped with robust data, effective legal instruments, and adequate financial incentives to unlock the full potential of public land as a driver of fair, sustainable, and resilient food systems.



8

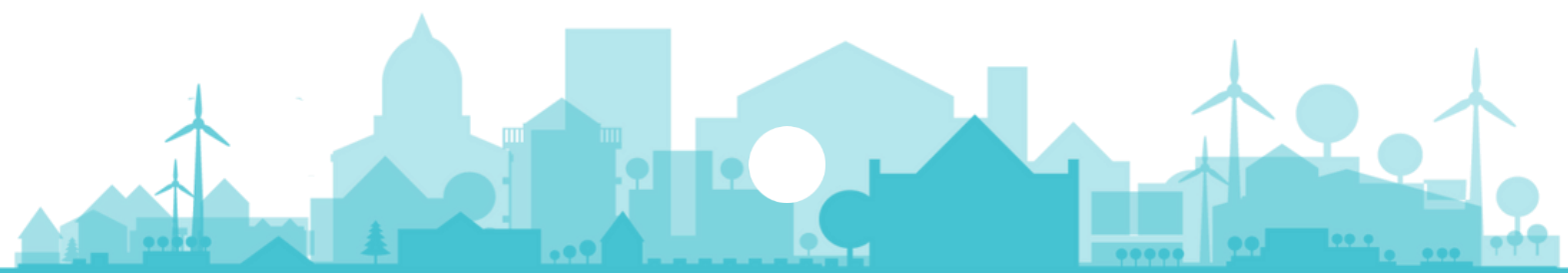


Support the Reduction and Recovery of Food Waste

Cities have a wide range of policy, operational, and community-based tools at their disposal to reduce food waste and recover food surpluses. These include innovative food procurement models that integrate waste prevention measures, partnerships with industry and food system actors to minimise losses along the supply chain, and public awareness campaigns to encourage behavioural change.

Cities can also implement organic waste collection systems, promote the reuse of food waste for soil fertilisation or animal feed to advance circularity, and support community-led food recovery and redistribution initiatives.

In light of this potential, we call on the EU and Member States to provide dedicated technical and financial support to empower cities to implement effective, scalable, and measurable solutions for food waste reduction and recovery. This support should include targeted funding, capacity-building and technical training, as well as robust monitoring tools to assess the environmental, social, and economic impacts of the measures implemented.





Formulating policy recommendations



Action 1

Advocating for a EU framework for local food policies

Supporting local food policies at national and regional level



Action 2

Showcasing the role of regional and national actors in supporting local food policies

Presenting a city-perspective position paper with key data, best practices, and recommendations



Action 7

Promoting Sustainable Food Procurement

Enhancing synergies between local and regional strategies



Action 3

Building bridges between local authorities and relevant regional strategies

Creating online and in-person training



Action 4

Urban Food Policy Training

Identifying indicators to monitor urban food systems



Action 6

Selecting indicators for urban food systems

Creating an Interest Group on Public Land



Action 5

Public land for local food policies



Food Action Plan:

Driving transformative changes in food systems

The Food Action Plan comprises seven complementary actions aimed at driving food system transformation through a systemic approach, with a strong focus on cities as key leaders in this process. It combines knowledge-sharing and capacity-building initiatives to help cities develop, implement, monitor, and finance local food strategies with actions advocating for an empowering EU framework for local food policies, ensuring cross-sectoral and multi-level policy alignment from the EU to the local level.

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