

## **SAFE published its policy report on Food Donations**

**With the need to reduce food waste and to help the most disadvantaged segments of the population, both policy interventions and private initiatives on food donation have multiplied. However, several issues discourage these practices. SAFE calls for common rules and incentives on food donations.**

In 2021, 7.3 % of the overall EU population and more than one sixth of people at risk of poverty were unable to afford a meal with meat, fish or a vegetarian equivalent every second day. While in 2019, according to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Food Waste Index 2021, **around 931 million tonnes of food waste were generated.**

The economic crises due to the Covid 9 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have increased the number of people in need. Food donations have decreased, as the middle class that used to donate food no longer has the economic security to pursue solidarity activities. Many are those who have to decide whether to pay an energy bill or buy food. In recent years, the most immediate help has come from local communities and small organisations that are closest to families and people in need.

Over the last few years, the EU has mobilised to tackle food waste through a set of regulations and policies, which mainly aim at **preventing food waste in the food supply chain**. The European Commission published official guidelines on food donation, while EC Directive 2018/8515 stressed the need to reduce EU food waste by 50% before the year 2030 and the **Farm to Fork Strategy (F2F)** included food donation, proposing binding targets by 2023 to halve EU consumer and retail food waste by 2030. From an operational standpoint, the European Commission also established the **Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste (FLW)**, to share best practices and evaluate progress made over time, stressing the promotion of surplus food donation.

### **Food donation barriers**

EU policies, as well as the FLW platform, seek to break food donation barriers and fight food waste. However, food donation actions face many challenges, as both food donors and intermediary food recipients (mainly food banks and charity organisations) face several **barriers and constraints** during the donation process.

- The issue of **liability** remains the most difficult to overcome, in absence of specific EU rules, and the issue is not addressed by any national legislation, either, making **food redistribution practices risky and unattractive for most food donors**.
- Another problem is **VAT**, which burden normally is borne by the last player which, in this case, is a charity. Donated food therefore carries an unsustainable cost for charitable organisations, especially smaller ones.

- The lack of European harmonisation of bureaucratic procedures required for food safety has particularly affected small local donation communities, limiting their operability and effectiveness.
- Food manufacturers or distributors are required to put date marks on food products to meet food labelling regulations and standards, but these marks could cause confusion to food donors. For example, the "use by" date refers to food safety and health risks, while the "best before" date refers to food quality. A poor understanding of the use of these date marks may discourage food donation.
- Because of the high operating cost and potential liabilities, food businesses have little incentive to donate surplus food.
- Donations by retailers often aim to offload the costs of disposal of products closer to expiry onto charitable organisations, rather than for solidarity reasons. There are many reported cases of retailers 'donating' products very close (one or two days) to the expiry date, which, having to be consumed immediately, causing serious operational difficulties in the management of the warehouses of small local charitable organisations.

## **SAFE calls for common rules and incentives on food donations**

SAFE Food Advocacy Europe, considering the findings of this [report](#), suggests the following recommendations:

- A clear European regulation that addresses these critical issues by harmonising the bureaucratic procedures for food safety and make them easier to deal with for smaller charities, which work more closely with the population
- Regulate food donation so that it is not used as an alternative means to avoid throwing food away, thus dumping it on the next link in the food chain
- Encourage aggregation in farming, processing, and of sales companies to improve the logistics of donated food
- Harmonise the rules on food donation in the EU to favour this practice throughout its territory
- Provide established economic incentives for small local food surplus distribution entities to reach populations in disadvantaged areas
- Reduce liability problems by introducing legal differences between food donors and food business operators.

### **About SAFE**



SAFE – *Safe Food Advocacy Europe* was created with the aim of ensuring that consumer’s health and concerns remain at the core of the EU’s food legislation. SAFE is currently the only Brussels-based NGO specialised in the protection and representation of EU consumers in the food sector. SAFE strives to ensure safer food standards for consumers monitoring the EU food legislation process and cooperating with EU stakeholders to draft comprehensive food regulations. SAFE notably supports the development of policies and awareness-raising actions which jointly address health, environment, food safety and sustainability, all-the-while being involved in several EU-funded projects aimed at reducing the environmental impact of the food sector, increasing sustainability and promoting healthier food environments for consumers.