

# POLICY BRIEF

## PARTICIPATORY LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND EMPOWERMENT FOR JUST ZERO FOOD WASTE TRANSITION WITHIN THE URBAN CONTEXT



*ZeroW tackles Food Loss and Waste (FLW) through a coordinated set of innovations piloted in nine real-world Systemic Innovation Living Labs (SILLs) aiming to achieve significant reductions across all stages of the food supply chain - from pre-harvest to consumption. A dedicated Policy Team complements this work by defining a 'Just Transition Pathway' toward near-zero FLW, offering a practical framework to bridge systemic barriers (e.g., fragmented and lengthy nature of the food supply chains, the digital divide, challenges in scaling innovative waste reduction technologies) and on-the-ground FLW solutions. Drawing on economic modelling and insights from the stakeholders and the SILLs, the team identified key recommendations promoting a flexible, equity-focused transition.*

Though outside the traditional food supply chain, local governments, municipalities, and NGOs play a critical role in advancing a just transition to sustainable food systems and reducing FLW through key levers like procurement, education, and community initiatives. This policy brief urges EU policymakers to strengthen local and regional governments' role in FLW reduction, aligned with the ZeroW project's 'Just Transition Pathway' and the new binding food waste targets adopted by Member States.

### Policy Problem

Urban FLW policies are undermined by fragmented and siloed governance, weak institutional capacity, and power imbalances that exclude smaller actors. Municipalities often lack the mandate or tools to connect different food system actors, yet they are well-positioned to do so. Furthermore, bureaucratic barriers reinforce their exclusion from innovative actionable pathways and hinder scaling or fair access to financial and technical support.





## Evidence from Project

Evidence from the ZeroW project emphasises that reducing FLW in cities requires:

- Cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms;
- Data-driven infrastructure and capacity-building to support effective policy adoption;
- Local implementation strategies that embed equity and justice principles, ensuring small-scale farmers and minority communities are not adversely affected;
- A focus on preventive measures over downstream waste treatment.

## Key Policy Recommendations

To ensure effective FLW policy implementation, EU and national policymakers must create a supportive legal, fiscal, and technological framework to scale urban innovations and enable systemic change. Below are recommendations for EU and national policymakers:

### 1. Strengthen multi-level governance to enable systemic, evidence-informed action on urban food waste

Establish formal cooperation mechanisms across national, regional, and local levels to support the integration of evidence-informed FLW reduction measures into urban planning and food strategies. Initiatives such as the FutureFoodS Partnership and FOODPathS project show how cross-sectoral and cross-level collaboration can accelerate systemic change.

## 2. Promote multi-actor collaboration for urban food waste reduction

Encourage the development of local Food Waste Alliances that bring together governments, retailers, platforms, and NGOs to co-design context-specific solutions (Successful examples: the RÉGAL network in France, and the Food Waste Free United in the Netherlands). EU support for peer learning, digital tools, and inclusive innovation is key to engaging smaller actors, building trust, and ensuring fair participation.

## 3. Incentivise the adoption of national and regional sustainable procurement standards to align cities' public spending with food waste reduction goals

Adopt EU-wide procurement standards that prioritise food waste prevention, encouraging suppliers to reduce waste through surplus redistribution and menu optimisation instead of focusing solely on cost. Tools like the Buy Better Food Manifesto for Establishing Minimum Standards for Public Canteens Across the EU and innovative school food procurement models from the SchoolFood4Change project provide practical guidance.



#### 4. Revise tax frameworks at national or regional level to encourage food redistribution and discourage food waste

Use tax policies to align incentives with waste prevention behaviours. Tax breaks can reward food donations; penalties can discourage landfill use. For example, France's 60% tax credit on donated food and Catalonia's landfill tax redistribution are effective, replicable models.

#### 5. Foster the adoption of monitoring tools focusing not only on waste volume but also on participation equity and systemic impact

Develop urban FLW monitoring frameworks that capture qualitative dimensions along quantitative ones, such as participation equity and governance performance. Indicators should assess how inclusive waste reduction programmes are (e.g., participation of SMEs and minority-led initiatives), and whether governance is coherent and accountable. Barcelona's SILL4 capacity building activity highlights role clarity and coordination needs. Dashboards and transparency tools help reveal progress and gaps.

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