

# MAPPING LOCAL FOOD POLICIES AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN EUROPE

JUNE 2024



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## INTRODUCTION

### BACKGROUND

Local governments are agents of the state structure, and therefore have the same obligations to protect, respect, and fulfil human rights as national governments. Their proximity to people's realities put them in a potentially important position to fill the vacuum that central governments often leave in addressing social issues and in the realization of human rights. One area that holds great potential for local government action in favour of human rights is the transition towards locally embedded, human rights-based food systems.

Across Europe in recent years there has been a surge in local government policies and initiatives around food (systems) and nutrition. This has been accompanied (and driven) by the emergence of participatory spaces, including food policy councils, that engage in food policy making at the local level. This development can be partly attributed to the increasing role that these issues have at the international and European regional stage. The **2015 Milan Urban Food Policy Pact** and the clear role for local governments in the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have created a strong impetus for policy making and engagement at the local level. Yet, this tendency has also raised some concerns about the need to better understand local differences and build methods in line with the local context to strengthen meaningful participation in democratic life.

Social innovation and experimentation from the bottom-up can fuel the overdue need to transform the global industrial food system, aligning actions at international/regional, national, and local levels to address the profound human rights challenges this system causes. Building on local initiatives which rely on participatory governance structures is key to enabling sustainable human rights-based food systems across different European contexts. However, there remains a gap in our understanding of how these policies can effectively contribute towards the realization of the right to food and nutrition (RtFN) and related rights, or social change for those who are most marginalized. Additionally, there is room to better understand the processes that ensure and open spaces for participation and community engagement, which is an essential component to human rights-based outcomes.

## ABOUT THE CRESS PROJECT

The Collaborative Action and Learning for Local Rights-Based Sustainable Food Systems project (CRESS) looks at the role local governments in Europe<sup>1</sup> are assuming in fostering a transition away from the global, industrial food system towards human rights-based food systems that are healthy, sustainable, and fair. Moreover, it explores how people engage and participate in local food policy making.

The project is a collaborative learning project, carried out by FIAN Austria, FIAN Belgium, FIAN International (project coordination, Germany), FIAN Portugal, Observatory DESCA (Spain), and FIAN Sweden. A central emphasis of the project implementation has been the regular discussion of research results and iterative adaptation of the research methodology in the course of action.

In a second phase of the project, a **Toolkit** has been developed based on the outcomes and lessons learned of the mapping exercise presented here.

## METHODOLOGY

For each country approximately 10 case studies on local food (systems) policies and participatory policy spaces have been selected. These were identified based on:

- Engagement of local government with food systems, progressive action;
- Coverage of a diversity of geographical regions (incl. urban-rural);
- Mix of municipal and regional/state level policies and spaces;
- Type of policies; and
- Country specific selection criteria (e.g., pioneer food councils).

Selected participatory spaces moreover had to comply with the following criteria:

- A direct connection with / advisory capacity to local government;
- Impact on issues related to the right to food and nutrition (RtFN);
- A focus on the local/territorial level; and
- Enable civil society participation and/or be promoted by civil society organisations (CSOs) and social entities.

A common methodological framework was prepared by the project team (in 2022) to reflect different dimensions of the RtFN when analysing the respective policies and spaces. Based on this methodological framework, each project

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<sup>1</sup> Austria, Belgium, Germany, Portugal, Spain and Sweden.

partner conducted a mix of desk research (review of project/space websites, strategies, etc.) and interviews with the respective policy spaces and government bodies. Whenever possible, interview partners were chosen from both civil society and government actors to get a diversity of perspectives. A list of interviews conducted can be found in Annex 1.<sup>2</sup>

Central elements of the methodological framework are:

- The participatory nature of the spaces (and policies): Who participates and with what power, who remains at the margins? How are power relations dealt with, is there any protection against corporate influence and conflicts of interest?
- The concrete structure of spaces and their interface with and influence on public policy making.
- The transformative character of policies/strategies (from a human rights perspective):
  - Do the policies seek a radical transformation of the system (away from corporate control and global supply chains) or just superficial changes (making the industrial food system more sustainable)?
  - Do they seek systemic change across the entire system from seeds to plate?
  - Are health, sustainability, and social justice dimensions considered to equal degrees?
  - Is the envisioned systemic and transformative change reflected in concrete government actions (e.g., cross-departmental working groups, action plans, binding commitments)?
  - Are notions of the RtFN and food sovereignty taken into account or reflected upon?

Moreover, the methodological framework looks at the main measures and areas of intervention, and whether there are any gaps or less emphasised interventions. Similarly, it explores what have been concrete achievements and challenges in building human rights-based food systems and participative governance structures at the local level.

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<sup>2</sup> To ensure confidentiality and encourage open discussion, only the organisations or departments are named.

## STRUCTURE OF MAPPING

A summary of each of the six country studies will be presented following a similar structure. First, there is a brief presentation of the governance/administrative context, i.e., how decision-making power on food and nutrition is distributed among the different government levels. This is followed by a brief overview of the food-related concerns in the country, and whether the country has a national food strategy in place. After this initial contextualisation, there is a summary of the key findings from the cases mapped, with a special focus on participation (especially for spaces, but also in relation to policies and initiatives) and the transformative character of the policies/initiatives put forward by the local governments. Finally, some key achievements and challenges are presented.

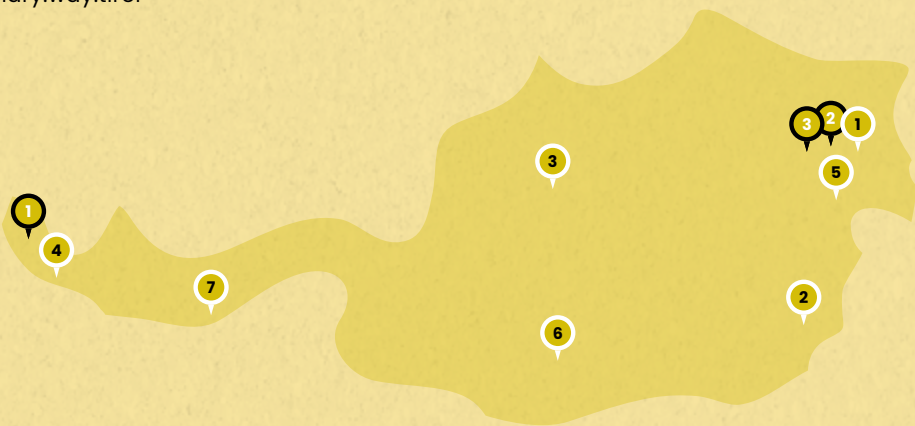
Following the country studies, there will be some overall reflections on the country situations and cases reviewed. The individual case studies on which the country studies are based can be found in an [Interactive Map](#).

# AUSTRIA



## POLICIES AND INITIATIVES

1. Vienna Food Strategy
2. Future of Agriculture Burgenland
3. Appetite for Future/Good
4. Close+supplied
5. Urban Development Area Rothneusiedl
6. Future of Food
7. kids.culinary.way.tirol



## POLICY SPACES

1. Citizen Council Vorarlberg: Future of Agriculture
2. Vienna Food Policy Council
3. RegioLog







## 1. COUNTRY CONTEXT


### Governance structure and division of competences

The country of Austria is composed of nine federal states and 2,098 municipalities, which are the smallest self-governing unit. Furthermore, the capital city of Vienna, itself constituting a federal state, is divided in 23 city districts. Municipal governments are made up of a municipal council, a municipal executive, and a mayor, whose duties are regulated by law. Members of the municipal council are elected by citizen vote.

Distribution of competences regarding legislative and executive power between federal, state, and municipal governments is highly complex. This is true especially for agriculture and food, which is considered a cross-sector matter: The federal government is responsible for all administrative matters explicitly assigned to it in the Federal Constitutional Act (*Bundesverfassungsgesetz*) (mining, water, forestry, plant protection, seeds, livestock trade, peasant inheritance, land lease, health, and food security). Some matters are shared by the federal government and the states (*Länder*) in legislation and execution (e.g., environmental impact assessment), and a large part of public administration tasks falls to the state governments based on a general clause (regional planning, nature protection, soil, kindergarten and after-school care, alpine and forestry education, agricultural and forestry labour).

It can be stated that from a former, almost exclusively federalized distribution of competences in the field of food and agriculture, decision-making and strategic alignment on food and agricultural policies has been more and more taken up by the central government. This refers to the design of agricultural subsidy systems, the elaboration of regulations for nature conservation and environmental law but also the formulation of national strategies on, for example, communal catering or nutrition. Yet, executive power in policy design largely lies with the federal states or municipal governments; this especially applies to the fields of communal catering and public procurement. Despite the national government's attempts and advances to increase its policy-making power in food and agriculture, it has been repeatedly criticized by the National Court of Audit for lack of precise and measurable targets in published programmes and strategies, overarching steering responsibility, and effective monitoring.

In terms of means for direct citizen participation, Austrian law foresees the possibility of citizen referendums (*Volksbegehren*). These can be initiated through the support of 100,000 eligible voters (or one sixth of the eligible voters of three federal states). If the threshold for signatures is met, a citizen referendum is submitted by the federal electoral authority to the National Council for consideration. Some examples for food (systems) related topics



are the referendums on due diligence supply chains, food rescue instead of food waste, implementation of food origin labelling, ban on glyphosate, and the climate referendum (*Klimavolksbegehren*). As a result of the climate referendum, the Austrian government initiated a climate citizen council (*Klimarat*) in 2021 to formulate recommendations for the road to climate neutrality. The council was composed of 100 randomly selected people reflecting different segments of society in terms of gender, age, education, and place of residence. The council was accompanied by a scientific advisory board and a consultative “stakeholder” body made up of representatives from social partners and civil society organizations. The citizen council presented its final report to the national government in 2022. It includes 21 recommendations in the area of food and land use.

On the level of federal states, the constitution of Vorarlberg also contains the possibility to initiate citizen councils (mostly made up of 12 to 15 randomly selected people) on specific topics after the collection of at least 1,000 signatures.

### Food-related concerns

Austria is the only EU member state that has not included fundamental social rights into its constitution. Due to the specificities of the Austrian national legal framework, there is no possibility for direct application of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, despite its ratification. The right to food and nutrition is not implemented in national law, which makes its judicial assertion impossible. Legislation foresees the guarantee of social rights through social transfers, which oftentimes do not suffice to exceed the poverty line. In 2020, 17,5% of the Austrian population were at risk of poverty or exclusion, nearly one quarter being children below the age of 18.<sup>3</sup> Because of rising costs of living and energy, many low-income households have been forced to reduce their food budgets. Since 2020, food prices have been on the rise, especially for meat, dairy products, cereals, vegetable oils, and sugar.

Privately organized initiatives of charitable food distribution play a key role and have been on the rise in Austria. They mainly distribute food donations from food retail due to overproduction, minor defects or soon to expire. Main charitable food distributors are food banks, food distribution points, soup kitchens and social markets. In 2020, food banks in Austria have distributed roughly 4.9 million kg of food to 75,000 people.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Die Armutskonferenz. 2023. *Armut in Österreich*.

<sup>4</sup> FIAN Austria. 2022. Access to food: *Mapping and assessing existing measures in Austria*.

There is high market concentration prevalent in the Austrian food retail sector. Spar, REWE, Hofer (Aldi in Germany) and Lidl claim 91% of market share, which underlies an increasing trend.<sup>5</sup>

The number of farms has decreased significantly by 21% in the period from 2010 to 2020, whereas the amount of farmland per farm has undergone a continuous increase to a mean farm size of 23.6 ha, which is still far below the EU average. Further specificities to the Austrian agrarian structure are the high number of organic farms (22,4%) as well as the high number of mountain farms with challenging farming conditions. Average income of mountain farms lies 43% below that of non-mountain farms. This income gap has increased over the course of the past years.<sup>6</sup>

### National food strategy

To monitor the access to fundamental rights, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Health, Care, Social Affairs and Social Protection publishes a yearly assessment report with consideration of a broad range of indicators tackling standard of living, housing, working life, educational opportunities, and health. Indicators of access to healthy food or food (in)security are not included.


In 2010, the ministry established a **National Nutrition Commission** (NEK) with the aim to implement a National Action Plan for Nutrition (NAP.e). For the first time, the national government made nutritional health a priority and formulated measures to minimize malnutrition and obesity, taking communal catering (e.g., in schools, kindergartens, hospitals, residential or care facilities) into account. While socially disadvantaged groups are explicitly mentioned in the NAP.e, a more comprehensive structural and socio-economic analysis of the enjoyment of adequate nutrition with a focus on financially vulnerable people has been lacking so far. Currently, one of the NEK working groups is working on a publication on “Access to healthy and sustainable diets for all”, which will take a holistic approach to the entire food system.

## 2. PARTICIPATION AND DECISION MAKING

The showcased examples for participatory food policy making at the local level in Austria display a broad range of initiatives. When not civil society driven, these only rarely comprise institutionalized forms of public participation in food system policymaking and have not resulted in more permanent structures for participation. Oftentimes they are project-based initiatives seeking community

<sup>5</sup> Bundeswettbewerbsbehörde. 2024. *Bundeswettbewerbsbehörde präsentiert den Abschlussbericht der Branchenuntersuchung Lebensmittel*.

<sup>6</sup> Statistik Austria. 2020. *Agrarstrukturerhebung 2020*.



members' opinions and engagement for a specific purpose. Only seldomly are the strategies developed in the context of such initiatives binding, nor are there any consequences if agreed goals are not reached. Sometimes government institutions cooperate with civil society organizations within a specific participatory process, which provide them with broad expertise in the fields of food and agriculture.


Initiatives by federal state or municipal government institutions are primarily focused on enhancing competitiveness, market power, and economic performance of regional food production or organic farming, promoting the regional sourcing of food, implementing regional development projects, or education. These initiatives almost never envisage a holistic and strategic transformation of existing food system structures or explicitly address the access or participation of groups most vulnerable to experiencing hunger or malnutrition, such as those experiencing poverty or social exclusion.

With regards to participation, targeted groups, and decision making, there are varying approaches across the cases analysed in Austria. Approaches vary according to the focus and goal of the initiative as well as to whether initiatives are led by civil society or public authorities.

Some of the listed cases involve predefined processes of participation that extend throughout the entire duration of the project or initiative, while others involve a more irregular involvement of affected or interested individuals. Across all analysed policies and spaces, workshop sessions dedicated to specific concerns are organized, with participants intentionally invited. Additionally, open plenary formats or surveys among a broad range or smaller groups of civil society actors are organised in some of the initiatives. All cases use a mix of collaborative formats rather than relying on just one.

The cases of URBAN DEVELOPMENT ROTHNEUSIEDL as well as the CITIZEN COUNCIL VORARLBERG work with a fixed group of actors, which elaborates ideas and contributes throughout the predefined project period. Advantages of these established "citizen advisory boards" are that community members are engaged with the project over a longer time-period and have fundamental influence on the outcomes of the process. However, their exclusiveness (closed group of participants) narrows the scope of participation. Both "citizen advisory boards" take gender, age, and regional representation of participants into account. Despite specific attention paid to these criteria, a two-step selection process, and the provision of childcare, the CITIZEN COUNCIL VORARLBERG was finally composed of 12 men and five women.

The influence of open participation formats on process outcomes, as deployed for example in the CLOSE+SUPPLIED project, are hard to measure, as well as quite more subversive and indirect, due to the specificity of stated opinions and because gathered information is susceptible to getting lost during the



consultation process. The organization of workshop sessions or events with a selected group of actors facilitates the participation of people representative of the whole food system from consumers to producers. In the initiatives FUTURE OF AGRICULTURE BURGENLAND, FUTURE OF FOOD, KIDS.CULINARY.WAY.TYROL, as well as within the formulation process of the VIENNA FOOD STRATEGY roundtables, participative workshops and iterative feedback loops were integrated under the participation of a broad range of people and those specifically affected, such as farmers.

The depth of integration of affected people and their decision-making power differs among initiatives led by civil society and those led by public authorities. Processes led by public authorities are often prone to narrow time schedules, which tend to limit citizen's decision-making power, whereas civil society-led initiatives dedicate larger efforts to the processes of participation itself.


### **3. SYSTEMIC APPROACH AND TRANSFORMATIVE CHARACTER**

Most of the analysed cases incorporate a systemic approach towards food and nutrition, i.e., taking into account multiple sectors (production, distribution, consumption, health, as well as education, social, and ecology, etc.). Even though some of the initiatives focus more on production compared to other sectors of the food system, they still have principles that envision a systemic approach.

With regard to their transformative character, some of the analysed cases stand out. For example, the VIENNA FOOD STRATEGY is dedicated to a systemic transformation, not just addressing production and provision, but also ethical use of food and education. Furthermore, the initiatives KIDS.CULINARY.WAY.TYROL and Future Food try to improve the situation in educational facilities through a variety of measures aimed at ensuring a seasonal, regional, and healthy meal that is accessible for everyone. Urban Development Rothneusiedl aims to follow the concept of an edible city. Accordingly, the city will use areas to produce food and thus supports food sovereignty of its citizens.

Even though only rarely explicitly mentioned, key elements to secure the RtFN are incorporated within the design of policies and policy spaces. Human rights elements including accessibility, adequacy, affordability, and sustainability, envisioning a transformative process of the status quo, are tackled primarily by those cases initiated or led by civil society. The projects led by government actors rather seldomly incorporate a transformative vision of the food system but rather focus on economic development or income generation.

The specific targeting, inclusion, and participation of societal groups most at-risk to or most affected by hunger or malnutrition can be considered a weakness in all analysed cases. Even if taken into account within the initiative's



design, as for example in the VIENNA FOOD STRATEGY, these groups remain underrepresented as they are hard to reach, or due to limited financial and time resources dedicated to the initiative's implementation.

Even though some of the policies and policy spaces display transformative characteristics, the lack of a national strategy, which incorporates and institutionalizes the participatory, rights-based and progressive elements of the individual cases remains a strong obstacle to achieve food sovereignty and national food system transformation. A national strategy could for example set binding mechanisms for participation in food policy making, provide and enhance funding for those initiatives, define holistic fields of action, or set minimum standards and monitoring mechanisms.


#### **4. MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES**

The biggest challenge mentioned by interviewed partners from both civil society and local governments is to manage and facilitate a participatory process. Working hours needed to prepare events and workshops, to invite and coordinate participants, and to consolidate their contributions can be quite expansive and is often done on a voluntary basis. Especially for initiatives that aim for a holistic food systems approach, process management is considered difficult. Furthermore, processes potentially draw a lot of energy from those most involved, such that personal exhaustion is seen as a risk.

Another challenge stated by civil society actors is the cooperation with public authorities due to hierarchical and sometimes inflexible structures. For example, progress and implementation of the VIENNA FOOD STRATEGY is currently hindered due to changes in leading personnel within the municipal department. Furthermore, it is considered difficult to convince public authorities to take a progressive step towards food system transformation as established structures are convenient to maintain.

With participation being organized by volunteers or participation taking place on a voluntary basis, it is a challenge to establish involvement from all those affected by a particular initiative's outcome. Interviewees at APPETITE FOR GOOD, for example, state that higher or deeper involvement is limited, as people active in food-coops often run on a tight schedule, especially small-scale producers. Nevertheless, the initiative's achievement is remarkable: In the region, the number of food-coops increased by 30. Furthermore, nine Community Supported Agriculture projects opened, and 20 other initiatives started, despite not all of them having received funding.

Further achievements highlighted by interviewees, for example from FUTURE OF AGRICULTURE BURGENLAND, are the implementation of a regional coordination platform for regional food producers and the revival of a brand indicating



regionally produced goods. Furthermore, the KIDS.CULINARY.WAY.TYROL itself is an openly accessible guideline, which can be used by educational facilities outside the regional context. Due to the CITIZEN COUNCIL IN VORARLBERG, “Vorarlberg am Teller” was established, a governmental initiative, which tries to increase the use of regional products in communal catering.

For several of the initiatives and policy spaces, tangible achievements have not been achieved so far. This is either because longer-term goals have been set or due to their recent start, like the REGIOLOG, CLOSE+SUPPLIED or URBAN DEVELOPMENT ROTHNEUSIEDL.

In conclusion, the case studies demonstrate that participatory processes are key to locally embedded, rights-based, sustainable food system transformation. For almost all of the interviewed initiatives, the involvement of targeted actors, such as inhabitants of a particular region or farmers as direct target groups of proposed projects, in a participatory manner and the incorporation of their ideas were reinforced as decisive for project success, as it guarantees support for change. Nevertheless, further engagement and a more in-depth involvement of target groups and civil society actors is desired, even in light of the associated increase in workload. In spite of the associated challenges mentioned by civil society actors involved in the reviewed participatory processes, cooperation with public authorities is considered important, because it stimulates their awareness of participatory processes as being a valuable tool to systematic and socially just food system transformation.

# BELGIUM



## POLICIES AND INITIATIVES

1. Gent en Garde Food Strategy
2. Wallonia Eat Tomorrow Strategy
3. Namur Transversal Strategic Programme
4. Brussels Good Food Strategy
5. Flanders Food Strategy



## POLICY SPACES

1. Gent en Garde Food Policy Council
2. Walloon College for Sustainable Food
3. Antwerp Food Policy Council
4. Namur Agrifood Council
5. Good Food Policy Council







## 1. COUNTRY CONTEXT

### Governance structure and division of competences

Belgium is a parliamentary constitutional monarchy, organised in a federal state based on the principle of representative democracy. The federal state is composed of the legislative authority and the executive federal government. It has competencies in foreign affairs, national defence, justice, finance, social security, and public health. The country is then subdivided into two different kinds of federated entities: regions and linguistic communities. The three regions are Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels–Capital. Each region has their own government and parliament. The regions are responsible for issues related to the territory, such as land use, environment and water, rural development, nature conservation, economy, employment, and agriculture. The three linguistic communities are the Flemish community, the French-speaking community (now called Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles) and the German-speaking community. These linguistic regions are mainly responsible for issues related to people and culture, such as education, cultural affairs, social assistance, and family assistance. In addition to the regional division, Belgium is also divided into 10 provinces. Provincial governments handle matters related to their specific territories, including economic development, spatial planning and infrastructure.

Finally, there are over 500 municipalities in the country. Local municipalities have their own elected councils and mayors, and are responsible for a wide range of services and decisions that directly affect residents. Areas of competence include:

- Urban planning, including decisions about land use, zoning regulations, and urban development projects;
- Waste management;
- Public Services, including the management of elementary schools, parks, and local public transportation;
- Local governments can levy certain taxes and fees to fund local services and projects;
- Social welfare programs and services, such as elderly care and support for groups in vulnerable situations; and
- Promotion of local economic development.

The competencies regarding food systems decisions are split between federal, regional, and municipal authorities. Municipalities issue permits for food-related businesses (restaurants, cafes, markets), supervise food safety and hygiene standards, and can support local agriculture and food production initiatives. However, broader food systems decisions, such as national food policies, import/export regulations, food safety standards, and major agricultural policies, are typically managed at the regional or federal level in Belgium.

## Food-related concerns

Existing social inequality and poverty in Belgium has a direct link to the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity, which affects nearly 6% of the population and is second highest among Western European countries.<sup>7</sup> 18.6% of the Belgian population is at risk of poverty or social exclusion,<sup>8</sup> whereas 6.1% of the population in 2023 were in a state of severe material deprivation relying increasingly on food aid.<sup>9</sup> In 2019 about 1.5% of the Belgian population used the services of the Belgian Federation of Food Banks at least once.<sup>10</sup>

Belgium has been facing an increasing prevalence of obesity and diet-related health issues. Nearly 23% of adult women and 25.6% of adult men are living with obesity.<sup>11</sup> The Nutrition and Health Plans adopted since 2005 are based mainly on voluntary measures by the food industry, while binding measures to combat ultra-processed products (“junk food”) are lacking.

Land access remains a big obstacle for young farmers due to different factors such as urbanisation, increase of prices per surface, and the absence of policies on public land and land concentration. Belgium has lost 39% of its farms over the past 20 years<sup>12</sup>.

## National food strategy

The decentralisation of policy and law making has led to the development of three food strategies at regional level. There is no national strategy to orchestrate finance, social security, and public health competences with regional competencies such as land use planning, environment and water policy, rural development, nature conservation and protection, economy, employment, or agricultural policy.

7 FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2023. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023*.

8 Statsbel, 2024. *Risk of Poverty or Social Exclusion*

9 Eurostat. *Severe material and social deprivation rate*.

10 Vandevijvere et al. “Food insecurity and its association with changes in nutritional habits among adults during the COVID-19 confinement measures in Belgium.” *Public health nutrition* 24, no. 5 (2021): 950-956.

11 Sciensano, 2020. *Determinants of Health: Weight status, Health Status Report*.

12 Statsbel, 2022.



## 2. PARTICIPATION AND DECISION MAKING


Governments in Belgium, from local to regional, have understood that collaborative and participative approaches, whether institutionally or community-led, lead to more inclusive and effective policies that address the challenges and opportunities of each territory. Food-related strategies at this level have been associated with the creation of food policy councils.

The co-construction process of the GOOD FOOD STRATEGY 2 in Brussels (region) emphasises the importance of community engagement. More than 300 food actors have been involved in its design, representing associations, federations, companies, universities, and local authorities. The co-construction process also involved the definition of a governance architecture that would implement the strategy. This structure is composed of three different committees: the Government Committee, the Coordination Committee, and the Food Policy Council. The Government Committee involves eight ministries and is responsible for giving political impetus at governmental level to the strategy. The Coordination Committee articulates the thematic axes together with the Food Policy Council.

The GOOD FOOD POLICY COUNCIL has 18 members with seats distributed equally among three groups. One group represents the state – public administration and different sectoral ministries. A second group responds to emergent actors, representing agroecology organisations, sustainable food retailers, new producers, social movements, households in precarious situations, and the health sector. A third group is made up of traditional food actors from the agri-food industry, production, and consumption side. Membership is achieved through nomination and voting by council members. The Policy Council serves as an advisory, non-binding body to the Coordination Committee, with opinions elaborated by consensus.

Similarly, the EAT TOMORROW STRATEGY of Wallonia (region) places considerable emphasis on participatory design and decision-making with a territorial approach. Thirty forums involving around 1000 participants served to identify bottom-up the main areas of action for a reference framework under which local and regional initiatives can be placed, coordinated, and developed. Consultation processes were also a method to foster cooperation between different actors, including farmers, consumers, NGOs, researchers, and local authorities. As a result, a network of food policy councils emerged throughout the territory to implement the strategy in a collaborative manner.

A regional Food Policy Council, the WALLOON COUNCIL OF SUSTAINABLE FOOD (CwAD), promotes the exchange and complementarity among the municipal food policy councils, ensuring convergence in the setting of priorities. It is constituted of 40 members selected after a public call and nominated by




decree. Membership is divided in 8 categories, entailing the local government, professional federations, civil society organisations, academia, agricultural and other businesses, and consumers. It thereby undertakes a multi-dimensional perspective on the ecological transition, agriculture, the environment, regional planning, health, social action, the economy, research and training, and education.

There is an attempt to balance participation in that none of the categories account for more than 25% of total members. At the same time, categories are defined in a broad way, with no specific seats reserved for food insecure groups. Neither power imbalances between different groups nor conflicts of interest are considered. For example, small-scale farmers are not differentiated from agribusiness actors. The CWAD's mission, as an advisory body, is to evaluate the implementation of the EAT TOMORROW STRATEGY, make proposals for improvement, and amendments if necessary.

The case of Namur illustrates the dynamics at the municipal level. The NAMUR TRANSVERSAL STRATEGIC PROGRAMME draws upon the strategic objectives of the regional EAT TOMORROW STRATEGY, adapting these to the socio-ecological and economic specificities of Namur and to local competencies and capacities for action. The programme has provided the grounds for setting up the NAMUR AGRIFOOD COUNCIL (CADN) as the space for dialogue between local policy makers and food systems actors in implementing agricultural and food policies. The CADN is coordinated by a City Council public servant, ensuring the information and decisions flow in a triangle between the local government, the WALLOON COUNCIL OF SUSTAINABLE FOOD, and the CADN. Its 24 members are selected after an open call for candidacies. Membership ensures balance in representation with 3 members per each one of 8 categories, following the same classification as the WALLOON COUNCIL OF SUSTAINABLE FOOD.

FLANDERS' FOOD STRATEGY promotes collaboration and knowledge exchange between research institutions, the corporate sector, farmers, and civil society at large. The regional strategy has been developed based on the government-led Go4Food call in 2021 attracting researchers and agrarian entrepreneurs as "food innovators" and "changemakers" to benefit from start-up grants. The strategy took off with a market-driven character that put high-technology innovation at the centre. Participation is therefore interpreted in this region as public-private cooperation rather than as the recognition of communities' political agency in transforming food systems.

The Flemish food strategy had been launched only in late 2022, when several local (municipal) participatory food-related strategies and councils had already been established. One of the cases explored in this project is the city of Ghent and its strategy, GENT EN GARDE, a pioneering urban food policy aiming at transforming food systems to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. In 2013,




the GENT EN GARDE FOOD POLICY COUNCIL was set up to implement the strategy. Currently, the council has 30 members, including representatives of the agricultural sector, retailers, restaurants, civil society and researchers. It works as an advisory board with a strong project-focus for food-related initiatives. The link with the local government is done via the chairpersonship led by the deputy mayor responsible for Climate, Environment, Housing, and International Cooperation, and supported by the city of Ghent's climate and environmental service. An independent moderator facilitates the FPC meetings.

Another Flemish example is the ANTWERPEN FOOD POLICY COUNCIL which, in contrast to other Belgian FPCs, is a community-led initiative with a focus on food as commons. It was a group of active community members, together with social movements and a link to a research project, who took the initiative. The council emerged in an unfavourable political context with little government interest in food policies. Nevertheless, the links created with public servants have allowed them to influence higher levels of decision making to develop a municipal food strategy. The council has no formal structure and participation in the council is open with the main objective of connecting organisations and network building. It promotes political dialogue and collaboration for developing a critical perspective and a 'watchdog' function to hold government accountable on food-related decisions.

In summary, the GOOD FOOD STRATEGY 2 in Brussels and the EAT TOMORROW STRATEGY in Wallonia demonstrate a clear commitment from regional governments to participative decision-making at the local level. Both strategies put in place governance mechanisms where food system actors can effectively participate and treat food as a matter of public interest. These regional government-led initiatives actively seek (non-binding) advice from residents, farmers, private sector, and civil society organisations to shape food policies that reflect the needs and aspirations of the communities they serve. Food policy councils in these two Belgian regions try to ensure a good balance in representation between civil society, private sector, academia, and government. Nonetheless, and despite good intentions in targeting populations affected by food insecurity, there is still a gap in ensuring that the voices of migrants and other people living in precarious situations are being heard. Categories, especially in the case of Walloon, are broad, ignoring existing power dynamics within sectors, including the agricultural sector.

In some councils, the recruitment of members is done via a public call. In other cases, it is done within trusted networks or by word of mouth. And while the GOOD FOOD POLICY COUNCIL reaches decisions by consensus, the rest of the Belgian food policy councils explored in this project use a "one voice, one vote" procedure.




FLANDERS' FOOD STRATEGY emphasises collaboration steered by market-oriented political priorities via public-private partnerships, and thereby permits the corporate capture of the food strategy building process. Although there is not yet a regional food policy council linked to the Flemish strategy, other contrasting local examples are found in the region like in the City of Ghent or Antwerp. Whereas in the first, participation is closed and expert-driven, the latter promotes food citizenship by opening the council to everyone showing interest and with *laisse faire* dynamics allowing every participant to take the lead and responsibility in developing food-related initiatives.

### **3. SYSTEMIC APPROACH AND TRANSFORMATIVE CHARACTER**

The systemic lens is the flagship of all the reviewed food strategies. However, not all of them integrate the holistic and comprehensive vision this requires. The BRUSSELS GOOD FOOD STRATEGY 2 or the WALLONIA EAT TOMORROW reflect a cross-cutting and all-encompassing view relying on human rights principles. Good Food articulates its transformative character through its strategic axis #3 on alternative distribution channels that promote short food supply chains and its axis #4 on ensuring access to food for all. Eat Tomorrow also embraces a transformative character, with the combination of guiding principles of participatory democracy and food as a human right together with six strategic objectives entailing a multi-dimensional and cross-sectoral policy intervention. For instance, making public land accessible for agroecological production or regulating the land market is one of the key political targets to ensure availability and accessibility of food for all and avoid speculation.

Both regional strategies pursue a structural transition by treating food as a public matter with high priority in the political agenda that requires policy coherence and cooperation across government sectors. The strategy in the capital region adopts a territorial anchoring, similar to the Wallonia strategy, that promotes short (local) food circuits and foresees the development of respective infrastructure and new distribution models. The municipal food strategy of NAMUR holds equally the potential for important transformative impact in seeking to make agricultural land available and accessible for young farmers, and in creating a physical and virtual platform so local producers can directly sell their products.

The two regional strategies operate upon the principles of democracy, transparency, and solidarity while promoting fair income and dignified working conditions for all workers across the food system. For instance, EAT TOMORROW emphasizes the need to develop a coherent tax and financial support policy for the availability and accessibility of food in a sustainable food system. At the same time, regional governments lack both competencies and financial resources to implement and make effective those objectives.



The *GENT EN GARDE STRATEGY* holds a narrower vision for food systems transformation. Its final goal is delivering healthy and nutritious food to urban consumers with a low carbon footprint. For that, the strategy tries to eliminate the intermediaries between producers and consumers as much as possible and gain more space for agriculture in and around the city to reduce greenhouse emissions. The *FLEMISH STRATEGY*, far from being ambitious in its transformative character, integrates sustainability standards with business-as-usual models for food production and consumption. Flanders aims to become a “food hub” in Europe via smart climate neutral agricultural practices by agricultural large-scale entrepreneurs and circular business strategies. In contrast to the other two regions, this market-driven approach substantially differs from any territorial perspective that puts at the core food sovereignty.


For integrating the systemic vision required to make social justice objectives effective for a ground-breaking change that addresses structural inequalities, policy interventions are needed at the EU level. Limitation to progress with this systemic transformation are encountered in policies such as the EU trade policy or the Common Agriculture Policy. Political efforts ensuring fairer distribution of subsidies, structural funds for a transition, and social policies attached for granting affordability of food are needed in the shared competencies of the EU.

#### **4. MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES**

Significant steps have been made in Belgium towards the sustainability path of food systems based on participatory processes. Most of the revised initiatives and spaces have been created in an attempt to amalgamate policy areas and governmental competencies at different levels with the purpose of treating food as a matter of public interest from an interdisciplinary vision. In general, a systemic approach is embedded in Belgian regional initiatives. Yet, the transformative character largely depends on the political orientation of the government in power and the strength of social movements in keeping decision-makers accountable for their commitments.

The multiple-phase participatory process initiated with a diagnosis of the needs of the territory and its ecosystem capacities has been crucial as a point of departure in Wallonia. The adoption of a long-term vision in all the initiatives is also fundamental. Nonetheless, the strategies in some cases are not fully actionable as they partially – especially with regard to structural transformations – transcend the competencies and financial resources held at this level of government.

A transformative character requires respecting social processes that emerge and adjusting tempos for social innovation. In some cases, this may result in a tension with administrative milestones and the availability of funds to operationalize them. Mechanisms need to be developed to ensure the autonomy



and participatory decision-making of food policy councils as independent, consent-oriented advisory bodies.

A lesson from the Belgian cases is the creation of thematic forums, such as done in the *EAT TOMORROW STRATEGY*. Those bring together relevant actors into a discussion to define a strategic framework with operational lines of action. Financial and human resources need to be granted for this purpose. Additionally, active engagement from all actors entails becoming knowledgeable about food systems and orientation toward the common good, which requires capacity building and awareness raising targeting both decision-makers and civil society. A further challenge identified relates to the lack of representation of certain minorities and low-income populations in the explored policy spaces, despite in most cases these being the most affected by a lack of access to healthy and sustainable food.

Guiding regional food strategy frameworks, such as the *GOOD FOOD* or the *EAT TOMORROW* strategies provide a cross-cutting, comprehensive, and coherent perspective on policies related to food systems at the territorial level, strategic objectives to be operationalized, and guiding principles. Thereby, they set the direction of travel, connecting different ministerial competencies. Putting this aspired collaboration and transversality in practice can, however, be challenging, in particular when ministerial portfolios or competencies belong to different political parties (i.e., the current social-democrat –liberal-greens coalition in the Wallonian government).

The Belgian case studies highlight the importance of articulated policy spaces, such as food policy councils, attached to food strategies, from design to implementation. The development of a multi-level governance structure that allows the flow of information and decisions from the local to the regional – or even national and European levels – will be crucial for a meaningful transformation of food systems in line with the competences of each level. For instance, the economic viability of short-supply chains requires tax policy interventions that are the competence of the federal state. Similarly, access to sustainable and healthy food needs to be supported through social security programs, which are under the shared competences of federal and regional governments.

A central challenge identified in most of the food policy councils is the need for an independent and professional facilitator. Most of the explored initiatives do not have a budget for such. Also, while most of them are institutionally led and count on a budget to operationalize their priorities, and sometimes to remunerate participation, structural funds are not granted in the long term, which endangers their permanency.

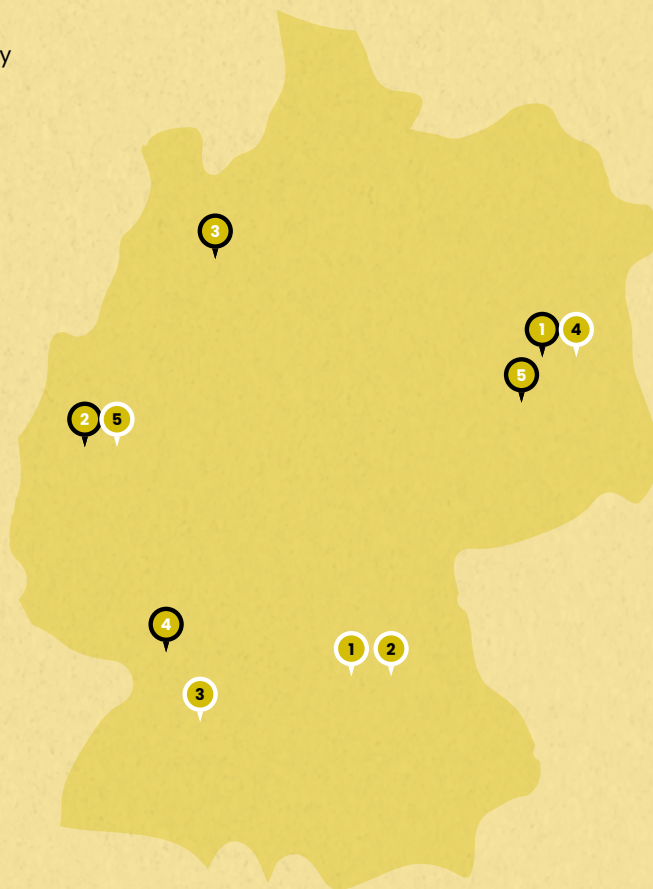


# GERMANY



## POLICIES AND INITIATIVES

1. Organic City Nuremberg
2. ReProLa
3. Baden-Württemberg Food Strategy
4. Berlin Food Strategy
5. Cologne Food Strategy



## POLICY SPACES

1. Food Policy Council Berlin
2. Food Policy Council Cologne
3. Food Policy Council Oldenburg
4. Food Policy Council Heidelberg
5. Food Policy Council Brandenburg





## 1. COUNTRY CONTEXT

### Governance structure and division of competences

Germany is a federal state made up of 16 constituent states. State authority is divided between the federation (*Bund*) and the states (*Länder*), based on the German Constitution. Thereby the states are endowed with wide-reaching governance competences. Each state has its own constitution, legislative assembly, and administrative body. Moreover, states participate through the Federal Council (*Bundesrat*) in decision making at federal level and coordinate their action through so called ministerial conferences. A third layer of government is made up by the municipalities (*Städte/Gemeinden*) and counties (*Landkreise*) – jointly referred to as *Kommunen*. These maintain a right to self-administration on communal matters, while constitutionally they form part of the states that they are based in.

The division of competences in the area of food systems and nutrition is highly complex with responsibilities spread not only vertically across the different layers of government, but also horizontally across ministries and departments (which in turn are organised differently across states). Constituent states hold important competences in the area of agriculture, land use, environmental protection, education, nutrition/health, and consumer protection. More coordinated action on food systems that runs across and integrates these areas is a more recent and still uneven development. The engagement of municipalities in food systems policies is also a more recent development driven largely by civil society action and the rise of food policy councils (see further below).

Particularly prominent is action in the areas of communal catering, including schools, daycare, and elderly homes, largely focussed on transition towards more organic food; strengthening of regional value creation structures (e.g., creation of new markets, distribution channels, and marketing measures); sustainable land use (e.g., protection of agricultural land, establishment of social/environmental criteria for lease); nutrition education; support for urban gardening; and food waste reduction initiatives.

### Food-related concerns

The German food market is dominated by large retailers and highly concentrated, with the four largest retail groups controlling three-quarters of the market.<sup>13</sup> While start-ups and innovative distribution channels flourish in cities such as Berlin and Cologne, they out of reach to many across the country. Farmers' markets are largely dominated by vendors (rather than producers)

<sup>13</sup> *Lebensmittel Praxis*, 5/2023.

and conventional produce, while those offering regional, organic, and artisanal produced food are few, geographically skewed, and unaffordable to many. Socio-economic inequalities and food poverty are increasing and are a central factor in unhealthy diets and related non-communicable diseases.<sup>14</sup>

Organic production in the country is low, accounting for less than 10% of the surface used for agricultural production.<sup>15</sup> The majority of financial support continues to be directed to conventional farming, and many challenges exist for organic producers and those who would like to transition to more sustainable practices. One major challenge relates to access to affordable land for young farmers, as well as the steady decline in agricultural land<sup>16</sup>, especially in (peri) urban areas. At the same time, many farms are faced with closure due to difficulties in finding successors.

### National food strategy

In January 2024, the federal government adopted its first national food and nutrition strategy.<sup>17</sup> Input into the strategy has been sought through consultations with different interest and expert groups (including private sector, academia, and civil society) as well as through so-called “citizen dialogues”. The overarching aim of the strategy is to make the enjoyment of healthy and sustainable diets as easy as possible for all. Central aspects are the creation of healthy food environments and the accessibility of healthy food for disadvantaged and marginalised population groups.

## 2. THE RISE OF FOOD POLICY COUNCILS IN GERMANY: PLACING FOOD ON THE AGENDA OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS


Food and nutrition have been largely absent from the policy agenda of local authorities, especially municipal governments, in Germany. This situation has started changing in recent years with municipalities increasingly recognising the need to proactively shape the food system from the local level in a way that preserves the environment, fosters the health of their population, and contributes to the local economy. Several municipal governments have started incorporating food and nutrition into their agendas, allocated funds to it, and established new positions and units (e.g., BERLIN and COLOGNE). Several of them have, or are in the process of, developing local food and nutrition strategies.

<sup>14</sup> FIAN Deutschland. *Ernährungsarmut in Deutschland*. See also: *Gutachten des Wissenschaftlicher Beirat für Agrarpolitik, Ernährung und gesundheitlichen Verbraucherschutz (WBAE) beim BMEL*, Juni 2020.

<sup>15</sup> See Umweltbundesamt, 2023. *Ökologischer Landbau*.

<sup>16</sup> Alone for settlements and roads/transport, an average of 54ha of agricultural land are lost every day. See: BMEL, *Landwirtschaftliche Flächenverluste*.

<sup>17</sup> See: BMEL, 2024. *Gutes Essen für Deutschland: Ernährungsstrategie der Bundesregierung*.



A central factor in this increased awareness and action by municipal governments has been the surge of and persistent efforts of local, community-driven food policy councils (FPCs). Following the example of food policy councils in North America, the first food policy councils were established in 2016 in COLOGNE and BERLIN, followed by OLDENBURG. Since then, FPCs have mushroomed at an incredible pace throughout Germany. At the time of writing more than 60 FPCs have been established, mainly at municipal but also at regional/state level.<sup>18</sup>

At the heart of the work of food policy councils is the creation of awareness for the need of local food policies that address the imbalances and injustices inherent in the global food system, and the creation of a space for social participation in food policy making (practicing of food democracy).


Food policy councils in Germany are largely civil society initiatives that remain outside the formal government structure. Many have nevertheless developed strong ties with their local governments and have managed to position themselves as the main interlocutors on food and nutrition. The institutional recognition and endorsement that FPCs enjoy relates both to their advisory function/expertise and their role as a platform of dialogue between a wide array of actors and in bringing community members' voices into the policy realm.

In the reviewed cases, the more established food policy councils all have a good relationship with the responsible people in the public administration. The interaction varies between ad-hoc and rather project-based relationships (BERLIN, BRANDENBURG); regular meetings (*jour fixes*), mutual participation in events and working groups, and representation of public officials in the FPC's advisory council (COLOGNE); and participation of public officials in the FPC as well as participation of the FPC's coordinator as advisor in local assembly debates (OLDENBURG).

The four FPCs receive financial support and political recognition as a key partner, or even advisory body, in the case of Oldenburg, from their municipal/state government. The FPCs in COLOGNE, BERLIN, and BRANDENBURG have all played a central role in initiating and developing local food strategies. The FOOD STRATEGY OF COLOGNE has been developed in a civil society process led by the FPC and was then adopted – without any changes – by the city assembly as the blueprint for public policy on food systems. Also, in the case of Berlin, many of the recommendations put forward by the FPC have found their way into the BERLIN FOOD STRATEGY. The OLDENBURG FOOD POLICY COUNCIL is currently in the process of elaborating a local food strategy. The key role of local food policy

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<sup>18</sup> The [Network of Food Policy Councils](#) provides an overview of FPCs in Germany, Austria, Italy, Switzerland, Netherlands, and Luxembourg.



councils, and provision of financial support to them, is also recognized in the food strategy of the constituent state of BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG.

The more recent FPC HEIDELBERG is still in the phase of establishing relationships with the city government – a task that for many FPCs is challenging in the early stage due to the lack of a designated contact point that deals with the topic in the public administration.

Food policy councils are mainly active at the municipal (sometimes county) level, hence their primary interlocutor is the municipal government. As the FPC movement grows, regional networks or associations, formal and informal, between the different FPC's have been established at the state level. One such example is the FOOD POLICY COUNCIL BRANDENBURG, which describes itself as a "Council of Councils". These networks/associations are both spaces of exchange, learning, and mutual support, as well as spaces for advocacy at state level.

In March 2023, a nationwide Network of Food Policy Councils has been formalised and is starting to act as an interlocutor for the federal level.<sup>19</sup> Hence, step by step a structure has been built up – driven by civil society and communities themselves – to transform food systems bottom up, by taking action at the local and influencing policies from the local to the national.


### **3. PARTICIPATION AND DECISION MAKING**

Food policy councils in Germany take various structural forms. One model is to have a fixed number of seats for representatives from different segments of society (like a round-table). For example, the OLDENBURG FOOD POLICY COUNCIL consists of around 70-80 (volunteer) community members, organised in an elected Steering Committee of 9-15 members from civil society, private sector, academia, local politics, and administration. Steering Committee members are elected during an assembly where all citizens of Oldenburg are invited. The role of this body is to represent the interests of the community in local politics and foster dialogue between these different groups. The FPC moreover works through working groups that implement concrete activities and which are open to all interested community members to join.

Other food policy councils, such as in the cases of BERLIN and HEIDELBERG, are organised in very open structures, where in principle everyone interested in the topic can engage. People engage as community members (in personal capacity) rather than representing particular sectors, groups, or institutions.

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<sup>19</sup> Netzwerk der Ernährungsräte. [Das Netzwerk der Ernährungsräte ist gegründet!](#)




Somewhere in-between stands the FPC COLOGNE. It also has a fairly open structure in which interested community members, but also representatives from CSOs or public administration, can join working groups on specific topics. At the same time, the FPC has an advisory council that consists of around 30 people representing the different political parties, public administration, farmers, civil society initiatives, manufacturing crafts/industry, etc. The council meets approx. twice a year (in parallel to the general assembly) to discuss specific topics of interest. It however does not play a strong role in day-to-day work (does not have any decision-making power) and is largely a reminiscence of the earlier structure of the FPC that featured weighted participation. Its members join the council by invitation of the FPC.

All of the reviewed food policy councils feature an open space in which interested community members, as well as private sector food systems actors, can engage. There is generally no need to declare where one comes from, or the interests one is representing. The risk of other groups, such as right-wing groups or corporations, entering these spaces is, at least currently, not perceived as significant. Given that the spaces do not take any policy decisions, they are not seen as spaces worthwhile to undermine/coopt. Moreover, there is a clear understanding of these spaces as public interest civil society spaces with a clear direction of action.

The open approach to participation does not automatically translate into the diverse segments of society, including disadvantaged and marginalised groups, being represented in these spaces. All municipal food policy councils reviewed identify themselves / their members as largely white, academic background, and female. Finding truly participatory and inclusive formats is recognized as being a challenge.

Conscious efforts are made to find ways to reach out to other groups of society. One way to do so is by holding (open) meetings in less privileged neighbourhoods and translating materials and workshops into other languages (e.g., Turkish and Arabic). However, resources rarely permit consistency of such efforts. Another way of involving/getting the perspectives of marginalised groups is through joint activities, for example gardening and cooking, rather than through “hypothetical intellectual debates”. Conversations held in such context informally flow back into the organisation, however not in a structured way. Involvement of food producers themselves is also a challenge for the more urban FPC due to different schedules and geographic distance.

In the councils organised in a representative/round table style, representation is usually according to broad social categories (e.g., CSO, academia, private sector, public administration) rather than specific seats reserved for groups affected by food insecurity and malnutrition, and/or in disadvantaged situations (e.g., low-income groups, migrants/refugees, single mothers). However, there is



ongoing cooperation, for example, in the case of OLDENBURG, with unemployment initiatives, self-help groups, and neighbourhood associations in order to strengthen their involvement and incorporate their concerns.

With regard to decision making, different, in part very innovative approaches are used, also depending on the type of structure adopted. Throughout, an effort is made to include active participants in decision making circles and have the agenda/direction of the food policy council formed from below – driven by community members. For example, in the case of COLOGNE, the formal (elected) board is extended to include representatives from each thematic working group, so that these can actively participate in strategic decision making.


#### **4. SYSTEMIC APPROACH AND TRANSFORMATIVE CHARACTER**

The food strategies reviewed are generally framed in a holistic way that takes a transversal perspective of the food system from production to disposal of food. There is a clear directionality towards more localized/regional and sustainable production and distribution circuits, and healthy diets that are accessible to all. Food and nutrition are understood as cross-sectoral topics, in which health and environmental concerns need to be addressed in an integrated manner across governmental departments.

A central focus of local governments (state and municipal) has been communal catering. The idea is to make such healthier and more sustainable at the same time, largely by increasing the percentage of organically produced food. This is pursued through a variety of measures from training programmes, certification schemes, and revision of public procurement criteria. The inclusion of regionality criteria in public procurement model contracts is desired, but many fear legal repercussions based on European competition rules. Some governments, such as BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG, have come up with innovative ways around the restrictions imposed by the EU, circumscribing regional products and promoting regional quality labels to justify preferential treatment. They thereby act as models to other states and municipalities.

Another crucial area in which some local governments – such as the Nuremberg Metropolitan Region (REPROLA), COLOGNE, and to some extent BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG – are taking action is the issue of sustainable land management in combination with measures to promote regional value creation and market structures. At the heart of this is the preservation of agricultural land and modification of leasing criteria to make the use of such land more sustainable and oriented towards regional markets.

Overall, the social justice dimension does not feature as prominently as environmental and health concerns. In public procurement, social justice has received less attention in efforts to use such as a tool for broader food systems



transformation. Criteria do not (explicitly) prioritise small-scale producers, decent work conditions, and fair prices<sup>20</sup>, nor is concrete support provided to enable small producers and vendors to access public programmes. Also, while ensuring access to healthy food for all is at the heart of all of the food strategies, the measures needed to do so and address the structural barriers faced by low-income and other disadvantaged and marginalized groups are rarely at the centre of proposed actions.

Action by local governments to trigger a transition towards more sustainable production methods is largely through positive incentives rather than through regulatory measures (e.g., eco model regions in BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG). Similarly, healthy eating habits are largely to be achieved through promotional measures – first and foremost through nutrition education as well as changes in communal catering. No example was found of regulatory measures to fundamentally re-shape the food environment, such as the prohibition of marketing to children/adolescents or the sale of ultra-processed products in the vicinity of schools.

As for the food policy councils, these largely depart from the perspective of food sovereignty that recognizes the need for a radical transformation (*Ernährungswende*) away from the global food system towards local food systems in which people hold more control over their food. This perspective is reflected in the food strategies or demand catalogues presented to local governments. In their actions, food policy councils often take up elements from the food strategies to create “model experiences” that can then be taken up by the local government. Examples include the “Star Kita” in COLOGNE or the “Food Campus” in BERLIN. While these concrete projects to advance food systems transformation are important there is also a clear recognition that for achieving a real turn of direction, structural changes are needed that must come from the government.


## 5. MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

Summarizing, one can say that a central achievement of food policy councils has been the placing of the topic on the agenda of local governments and creating awareness for the need to change the food system from the local level. This push from civil society has gone hand in hand with important political commitments from local governments, with the Greens certainly being a driving but not the only political force in this. Across the country, local food strategies have been adopted or are in the process of being developed, providing the political course of direction.

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<sup>20</sup> Aside from some requirements that certain products should be labelled fair trade.





A further central success has been the creation of dedicated departments and positions within public administrations, with a budget assigned to the topic. This is critical for advancing the implementation of food strategies in a coordinated and systemic manner across government departments. Having a person or even department dedicated to the topic also facilitates immensely the communication with civil society.


The creation of platforms across the country where different civil society initiatives, interested community members, and other food systems actors come together to exchange on the topic and join forces to influence politics, is a further critical success and pre-condition for building democratic local food systems. Added to this are the multitude of concrete and innovative activities that are implemented by local governments and FPCs, often in collaboration with other local actors, to transform food systems from the bottom-up.

These achievements are remarkable considering the low level of attention paid to the topic only a decade back and the fact that it is not a traditional competence of local governments in Germany. Yet, while there are many inspiring examples, there are still many local governments that have not incorporated the topic into their agenda or made it a priority. So, sensitizing and building competences within local governments remains a key task in many places.

Even for the governments that have placed food and nutrition on their agenda, there are few that have prioritised the topic in a way that has allowed for a substantial and secure (multi-year) budget. Human and financial resource limitations and insecurities, but also a lack of technical capacities (for a new and complex topic), have hampered the translation of the ambitious strategies into structural actions. Overall, there tends to be a strong focus on projects while programmatic and structural changes remain few.

While some local governments have come up with concrete action plans (Nuremberg Metropolitan Region - REProLA) and time-bound goals such as increasing the percentage of organic food in school meals (e.g., BERLIN), the percentage of organic production (e.g., BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG), or both (e.g., NUREMBERG), binding commitments remain the exceptions and tend to be limited to specific areas and dimensions rather than running across the food strategy as a whole (i.e., a clear time-bound action plan for achieving all required changes).

There is also always the risk of a change in government that may lead to a shift in political priorities (as has happened in Berlin) and consequently funding. This makes it difficult to establish more permanent structures and programmes. Besides the question of long-term political and financial commitment, there are also internal barriers – both in terms of rigidity of structures and personal



motivation among public officials – that can obstruct efforts to put in practice an intersectoral approach.

Coping with the slow pace, intransparency, and bureaucratic hurdles of public administration structures can be a source of frustration for civil society and community members eager to take action. Another challenge voiced by some FPCs is that funding is often attached to project work and may result in prioritising such over time-consuming advocacy work. The closeness between Food Policy Councils and local governments, while in principle something desirable, can at times also lead to a confusion of roles when tasks are delegated to the FPC or civil society (as “the expert”) rather than the city/ municipality assuming responsibility.

# PORTUGAL



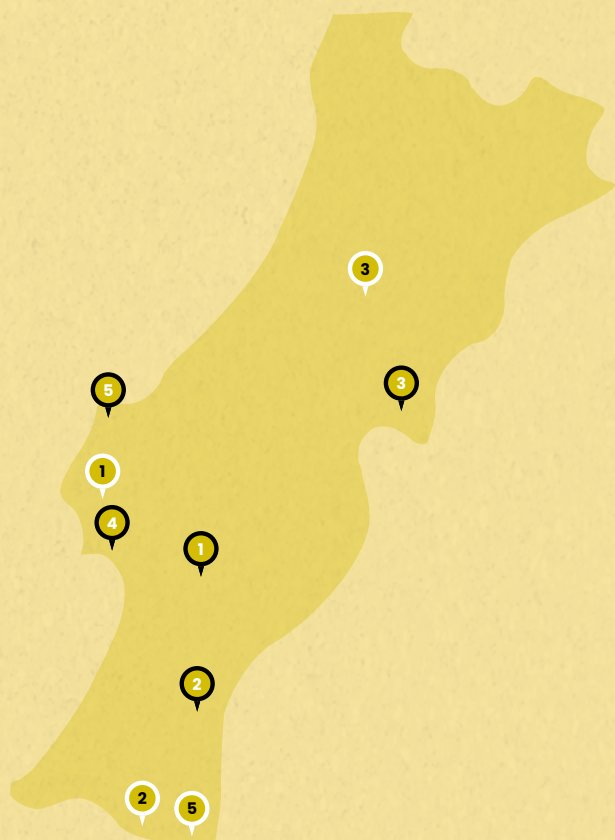
## POLICIES AND INITIATIVES

1. Torres Vedras School Food Program
2. Sustainable Food Systems Algarve
3. Rural Development São Pedro do Sul
4. Funchal Food Strategy
5. Tavira Promotion Mediterranean Diet



## POLICY SPACES

1. Montemor Food Strategy
2. Mértola Food Network
3. Idanha-a-Nova Ecoregion
4. FoodLink
5. Co-Management Committee Peniche





## 1. COUNTRY CONTEXT

### Governance structure and division of competences

The Portuguese administration is organized into a multi-tiered system, with the central government holding the highest authority and responsibility for national policies, laws, and regulations. Led by the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers, the central government oversees various ministries, agencies, and public entities dedicated to specific sectors such as health, environment, education, transportation, justice, and finance. These bodies collectively work to implement policies and deliver public services to the community.

Administratively, Portugal is divided into 18 districts on the mainland and two autonomous regions, the archipelagos of Azores and Madeira, serving as key organizational units for several functions, including electoral constituencies. These districts contain 308 municipalities and 3,091 council parishes, crucial for local service and governance. Since 2018<sup>21</sup>, an important process of transference of competencies from the national level to the municipalities is taking place in the areas of education (management of schools, including school canteens), health, housing, and others. This has been a challenging process, with several municipalities resistant because of a lack of correspondent funds to allow municipalities to respond to their new responsibilities. Also, despite the process of decentralization, local possibilities for action continue to face several regional and national legal constraints.

Portugal's policy landscape is opaque, rooted in the corporatist tradition of civil service and trust-building that favours insider circles and limits public participation<sup>22</sup>. This prompts individuals to bypass formal procedures in influencing policy outcomes. The lack of analytical skills exacerbates this issue, leading to an overemphasis on administrative roles and reliance on ministerial cabinets for policy formulation. Consequently, negative perceptions arise, depicting the process of participation as bureaucratic, lacking trust, and pro forma, mainly based in public consultations. In general, there is a lack of trust in the results of participation in these policy making processes. Historically, Portugal has high abstention levels in elections and low rates of active civic participation and engagement. This is influenced by a dictatorship that lasted 48 years and ended only 50 years ago.

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21 Framework Law on the Transfer of Competence to Local Authorities and Intermunicipal Entities (Law 50/2018).

22 Young and Staronova. 2018. *Policy making in Portugal*. International Centre for Policy Advocacy, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

## Food related concerns

In Portugal, food-related concerns predominantly include food insecurity and challenges related to low income, poor dietary habits, and inadequate nutrition. Between 2020 and 2022, over 12% of the Portuguese population experienced moderate or severe food insecurity.<sup>23</sup>

Food insecurity affects in particular low-income, single-parent and large families, working poor, women, the elderly, and immigrants. Unemployment as well as low levels of salaries and education contribute to this problem, making it difficult for people with limited resources to afford nutritious food and balanced diets.<sup>24</sup>

Poor dietary habits associated with changes in traditional diets have also emerged as a major concern. Although the Mediterranean diet is commonly associated with a healthy diet, characterized by the consumption of fresh vegetables, cereals, and olive oil and the moderate consumption of meat or fish, Portugal is clearly moving away from this dietary pattern: around 57% of the population is overweight or obese and, in terms of eating habits, one of two Portuguese people does not eat the amount of vegetables or fruit recommended by the World Health Organization.<sup>25</sup> Portugal is also one of the EU countries with the largest ecological food footprint<sup>26</sup> and high levels of food waste.<sup>27</sup>

Portugal has a specific national food aid program, and provides support food for citizens with proven economic difficulties. This program has been evaluated as important and necessary, and improvements have been done over the years, including improving the nutritional quality of the food. However, it is operated with a charitable approach and is insufficient to cover the needs of the many food-insecure groups. The rural-urban divide is also an impactful matter on food access and affordability. In some rural regions, limited access to fresh and affordable food options leads to overreliance on certain types of produce.

Family farming plays a critical role to ensure food security and dietary diversity. On family farms, a large part of production is for self-consumption, particularly Mediterranean crops such as fruits, vegetables, wine, and olive oil. Surpluses are often shared with the extended family and close neighbours or enter short agri-

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23 FAO. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023*.

24 Cooreia, Santos, Camolas. 2018. *Acta Portuguesa de Nutrição*.

25 Lopes et al. 2017. Inquérito Alimentar Nacional e de Atividade Física: IAN-AF 2015-2016: relatório de resultados 2017. Porto: Universidade do Porto.

26 Galli et al. 2020. *Sustainable food transition in Portugal: Assessing the Footprint of dietary choices and gaps in national and local food policies*. *Science of The Total Environment*.

27 Baptista et al. 2012. *Do campo ao garfo. Desperdício alimentar em Portugal*.

food circuits. Ironically, Portuguese family farmers are one of the professional groups most vulnerable to poverty.<sup>28</sup> Despite an increase in recent years, the average monthly income of farmers and agricultural, fishing, and forestry workers continues to be close to the poverty line.<sup>29</sup>

### National Food Strategy

The National Strategy for Food and Nutrition Security (ENSANP) was approved by the Council of Ministers in 2021. It falls under the purview of the National Council for Food and Nutrition Security (CONSANP), established in 2018 as an inter-ministerial platform, which foresees the possibility of consulting civil society organizations, although in an ad hoc manner and without any criteria for establishing a balance between representative groups.

ENSANP is structured into four strategic axes: 1) integration of policies and governance; 2) addressing the needs of vulnerable groups, while promoting health and nutrition; 3) efficient functioning of the food chain; and 4) effective communication. ENSANP was developed as an umbrella strategy to integrate and align with other national and international policies, plans, and programs.


The creation of both CONSANP and ENSANP was significantly influenced by the agenda of the Food Security Council of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP). In practice, however, they currently do not function effectively. Amongst others, there is an acute lack of involvement of civil society beyond ad hoc consultation, frigid intersectionality, and the absence of a broad and representative diagnosis of food security in the country.

## 2. PARTICIPATION AND DECISION MAKING

The goals of the analysed policies and policy spaces commonly revolve around promoting sustainable food practices, supporting local economies, reducing food waste, raising awareness, and educating about food issues, while empowering individuals to make healthier and more sustainable food choices. Whereas some policies and policy spaces are initiated by local authorities, others emerge organically as collective processes from other events or working groups. Most of them use a participatory approach that includes representation from and collaboration with various sectors, including academia, research institutions, public administration representatives, private companies, civil society organizations, school communities, farmers, and other local producers. Shared decision making is pursued with governance models

<sup>28</sup> Diogo et al. 2021. *A pobreza em Portugal: trajetos e quotidianos*. Fundação Francisco Manuel dos Santos. Lisboa.

<sup>29</sup> ESAV, ACTUAR, CNA e DGADR. 2021. *Contributos da agricultura familiar para a promoção de sistemas alimentares e dietas sustentáveis*.




ranging from municipal councils to coordination committees, local networks, and operational groups.

The **MONTEMOR FOOD STRATEGY (SMEA)** and the network attached to it started in 2017 as a working group of the Local Agenda 21. Two years later, an intense participatory process took place to co-create the SMEA strategy, a process that had the technical support of the Évora University. All local actors involved in this process signed a commitment letter to collectively implement the strategy and a local network for its implementation was formed. The implementation of the strategic pillars is divided between municipality units and local organizations/projects and other actors who form part of the network.

In the framework of the **SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS IN THE INTERMUNICIPAL COMMUNITY OF THE ALGARVE (AMAL SAS)** project, working groups were formed in each of the participating schools bringing together the respective school communities, including Municipal Education Council (MEC) members, teachers, parents, student representatives, kitchen staff, and family farmers. These working groups coordinate the monitoring of the school meal procurement process, development of trainings, and food literacy activities. Because they were created within the existing structure of the MEC, these working groups have gained institutional strength within the existing formal educational governance space.

While some policies and policy spaces are initiated by local authorities, others emerge organically as collective processes from other events or working groups. In **FUNCHAL**, for example, the food strategy is led and implemented by the municipality, in partnership with local actors, with ongoing work as the strategy is considered a living document. In contrast, in **Mértola**, the creation of the **MÉRTOLA FOOD NETWORK** was a very organic process in which each partner assumed a role and contributed with its own activities and resources to implement the network goals. Currently, the network involves several groups, including local development associations, social/philanthropic organizations, a local cooperative, local entrepreneurs, schools and professional schools, and the municipal council. Also, there are partnerships with other organizations outside of Mértola, including universities and national and international networks.

**SMEA's (Montemor)** governance model is quite interesting: it consists of a general council (that serves as a forum for discussion and decision-making involving all members), a coordination committee, four operational groups (one for each strategic axis), and a coordinator for each group. Although not a legal part of the municipal structures, it forms an integral part of its current political agenda. At least one annual meeting is held with all the partners involved. The municipality leads the strategic axis concerning the revision of local regulations. This includes the revision of the terms of reference for public procurement of school meals to prioritise the purchase of food from local producers. For the other axes, the municipality provides support in terms of human resources,



legal advice, materials, and public equipment. The municipality also created a support office for agriculture with new technical competencies that aim to promote food production aligned with agroecological principles and attract more young people to agriculture.

### **3. SYSTEMIC APPROACH AND TRANSFORMATIVE CHARACTER**

All of the analysed initiatives embrace the idea of a systemic transformation across the food system that fosters socio-territorial cohesion and socioeconomic development, while empowering and building capacity of local communities. There is an emphasis on preserving cultural heritage and encouraging sustainable production and consumption practices, promoting traditional diets and sustainable resource management. Another common feature is the attempt to re-localize food systems based on short circuits to ensure food security, as well as the coordination of food-related activities within regions.

Most of the initiatives promote agroecology, agroforestry, organic or at least responsible food production and consumption methods, fostering a balance between environmental preservation and socioeconomic resilience while stimulating cooperative and reliable resource management.


Several of the reviewed cases aim to integrate social, economic, environmental, and nutritional sustainability within educational institutions. They manage school meal provision while supporting local economies and sustainable practices in public school canteens.

### **4. MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES**

The reviewed cases provide evidence for many inspiring examples of cultivating sustainable and healthy food systems from the local level. Innovative local policies have efficiently managed school meal provision, embraced sustainability in procurement, and minimized food waste. They thereby serve as model for other regions, both nationally and internationally (e.g., TORRES VEDRAS). Rural development initiatives, such as the IDANHA A NOVA ECOREGION, spearhead sustainable practices, bolstering local economies and preserving regional identity. At the same time, collaborative projects, such as TAVIRA, are revitalizing local markets and creating awareness about traditional heritage.

Several policy spaces reflect a grassroots dedication to agroecology, communal association, and sustainable resource management (e.g., MÉRTOLA). Local spatial planning and institutional commitment are visible in targets such as the 15% sustainable food supply objective of the Lisbon metropolitan area FOODLINK network. In the maritime realm, a CO-MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE IN PENICHE sets a pragmatic model for sustainable resource exploitation, blending economic benefits with environmental preservation.






The integration of health and education contributes to a comprehensive understanding of resilient and responsible food systems by young people and children, parents, and broader school communities. The TORRES VEDRAS SCHOOL FOOD PROGRAMME (PSAE) provides an important model for enhancing efficiency and environmentally sustainable management in the provision of school meals – drawing up nutritionally balanced menus, adopting environmental criteria in procurement contracts, reducing food waste, promoting the local economy, and combating childhood obesity. The municipality is part of the BioCantina Transfer Network in which good practices are shared with other municipalities across Europe around school meals.

Similarly, AMAL SAS has managed to provide locally sourced meals in over half of the Algarve region's municipal schools, thereby contributing to the education of the local population, reducing the ecological footprint, and stimulating the local economy.

The most prominent challenges/limitations in Portugal relate to (in)effective policy implementation and leadership transitions. These pose a risk to continuity of several of the reviewed initiatives, thus requiring meticulous collaboration efforts amongst diverse interests and groups, to ensure maintenance and improvement of efforts, and the required public human and financial resources. Some of the initiatives also face challenges with internal tensions/differences in interests (e.g., PENICHE, FOODLINK), commitment and leadership from the government, as well as questions of how to ensure “neutral” facilitation of the spaces (MÉRTOLA). Especially in the case of loose networks, there are also challenges vis-à-vis monitoring and accountability for commitments.

Implementation of a multi-sectorial approach that links education, health, social justice, environment, agriculture and rural development is one of the most challenging elements. Although important steps have been taken to ensure cross-sectorial and multi-actor collaboration, it is critical to ensure the implementation of policies in a systemic and multi-level approach. This also includes ensuring a smooth dialogue between local and national spaces, where for example decisions on the regulation of public procurement for school meals are taken. Despite challenges, such as the economic organization of the local production adjusting producers' production to meet canteen requirements and potential legal restrictions, the AMAL SAS case or The TORRES VEDRAS SCHOOL FOOD PROGRAMME (PSAE) have achieved significant milestones. In fact, this smooth dialogue among different levels of decision making is even more critical in a country such as Portugal that is currently in the process of transference of competencies from the national level to the municipalities.



While regional food policy councils do not yet exist in Portugal, AMAL SAS could be a possible incubator of such a regional council, fostering the development of institutional frameworks to ensure food security at the municipal level. The initiative started as a project led by AMAL – an entity that gathers all the 16 municipalities of the Algarve region – and has meanwhile developed a Public Procurement Programme involving 11 interested municipalities. There are plans to establish a regional food policy council connected to the working groups that have been established with school communities. Currently there is a new project being implemented, Revital Algarve, which aims to implement this next step of creating a food governance model for the region. Similarly, there are plans for the establishment of municipal councils and a metropolitan council in the context of the Lisbon Metropolitan Area Food Transition Strategy (FOODLINK).

First steps have also been taken towards the creation of a municipal food policy in SAO PEDRO DO SUL. In 2021, as part of a national project in partnership with other municipalities and civil society organizations, the Municipal Assembly established a Food Working Group in charge of creating a municipal council with participation of local actors (local associations, farmers, schools, etc.), which in turn would develop a local food policy. However, due to changes in the municipal leadership, this initiative remains to be accomplished.

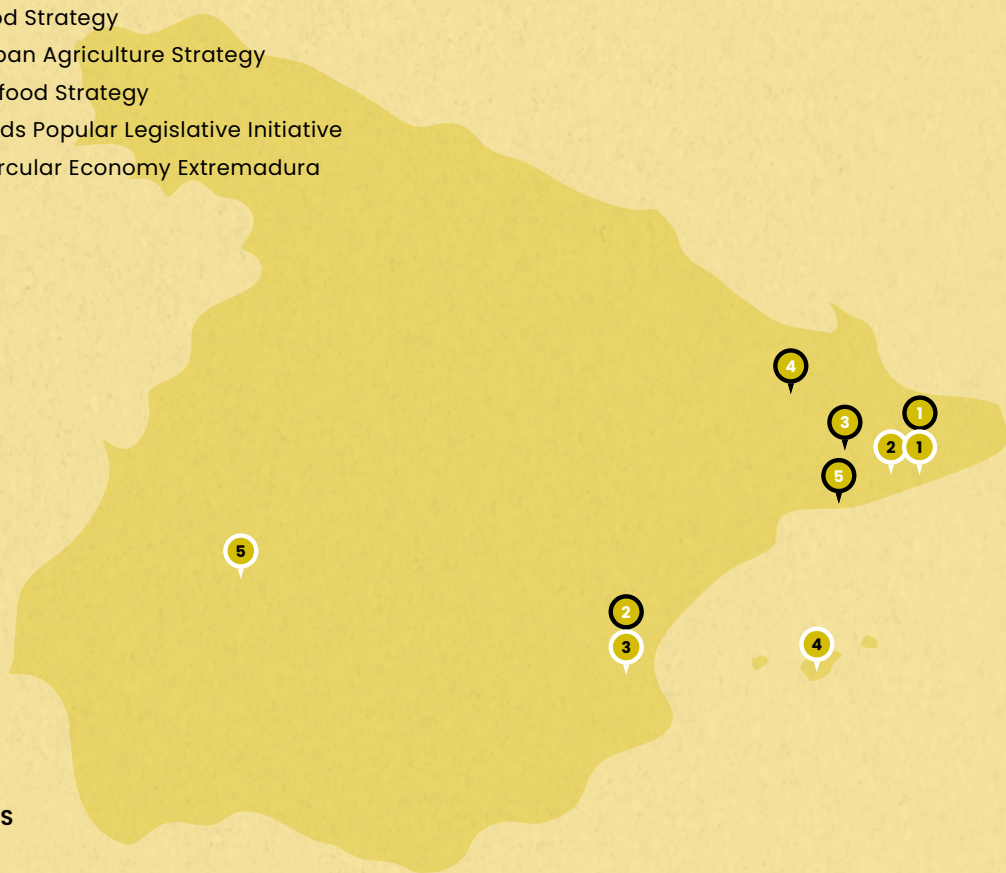
Further challenges include the absence of long-term strategic planning with a systemic perspective, along with financial and human resource constraints that limit impact and resilience. The lack of financial resources has led to a dependency on external funding, which in turn conditions municipal interventions to a project-based logic with sporadic interventions. Furthermore, the spectre of political instability and the ascent of far-right ideology at the national level pose threats to recent efforts to put food on the political agenda, requiring vigilant and operative monitoring to safeguard the momentum.

# SPAIN



## POLICIES AND INITIATIVES

1. Barcelona Food Strategy
2. Barcelona Urban Agriculture Strategy
3. Valencia Agrifood Strategy
4. Balearic Islands Popular Legislative Initiative
5. Green and Circular Economy Extremadura



## POLICY SPACES

1. Agròpolis
2. Valencia Municipal Food Council
3. Water Observatory Terrassa
4. Zaragoza Municipal Food Council
5. School Canteens Catalonia





## 1. COUNTRY CONTEXT

### Governance structure and division of competences

Spain's governance structure exhibits a nuanced distribution of powers between the central government and its 17 Autonomous Communities (CCAA). In the domains of agriculture, fisheries, and food, the State handles economic planning, while the CCAA wield executive and legislative authority to craft specific policies within the framework of State legislation. A similar pattern exists in the health sector, where the State establishes general health principles, and the CCAA manage and deliver healthcare services, resulting in diverse healthcare systems across regions. Consumer affairs follows a shared model, with the State legislating on basic consumer protection, and the CCAA implementing policies within their territories, ensuring alignment with State regulations. Regarding ecological transition, competences are divided, with the State focusing on fundamental legislation for environmental protection, and the CCAA developing policies within defined limits. Importantly, this power distribution may evolve based on changing regulations and agreements between the State and different CCAA, and some competences may be shared or exercised jointly through intergovernmental cooperation mechanisms.

### Food-Related Concerns

Spain's pivotal role as the major producer of fruits and vegetables in Europe, often referred to as the "greenhouse of the EU", is marked by intensive agricultural practices. A significant portion of winter vegetables consumed in Europe originates from the solar greenhouses of southeastern Spain, with 75% of the Spanish production directed to key European markets.<sup>30</sup> However, this model, exemplified by the vast greenhouse expanses in Almeria, comes with substantial environmental and social challenges. For example, Almeria faces threats of desertification and water scarcity, while environmental conflicts such as waste overflow, deforestation, and soil contamination contribute to significant impacts on biodiversity and landscapes.<sup>31</sup>

The social dimensions of this intensive agricultural approach are equally concerning. The demand for a substantial workforce during harvesting periods has led to social dumping, where migrant workers endure low wages, precarious working conditions, long hours without proper compensation for overtime, exposure to pesticides, and even racist attacks.<sup>32</sup> Despite Spain's position as the

30 Ministerio de Industria, Comercio y Turismo (2022). *Estadísticas del comercio exterior español*. DataComex.

31 Agronomy (2020). Identification of Opportunities for Applying the Circular Economy to Intensive Agriculture in Almeria (South-East Spain). See also: Oort-Alonso, I. (2021). *The Environmental Impacts of Greenhouse Agriculture in Almeria, Spain*. Foodunfolded.

32 Filigrana-García, Lalana-Alonso, Ramos-Antuñano & Brigada feminista de observación. (2021). *La situación de las jornaleras en los campos de fresa de Huelva. Informe jurídico*. Jornaleras de Huelva en Lucha.

EU's leading vegetable producer, ensuring the right to food and adequate nutrition for its own people remains a challenge. A study during 2020–2021 revealed that 13.3% of Spanish households, approximately 2.5 million people, experienced food insecurity, highlighting growing concerns about unequal access to nutritious food and its associated health and socioeconomic implications.<sup>33</sup>

### National Food Strategy

There is no national food strategy in Spain covering food production, distribution, and consumption. However, there are separate relevant food-related strategies, such as the Strategy for the Digitalization of the Agri-Food Sector, the National Strategy for the Fruit and Vegetable Sector, or the Strategy for Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity Prevention. Likewise, since the signing of the **Milan Pact** by many Spanish cities, several local and regional administrations have been developing their own food strategies, as will be detailed below.


## 2. PARTICIPATION AND DECISION MAKING

In the Spanish context, the landscape of public-community cooperation is prominently manifested in various initiatives, particularly in food strategies and policy spaces. The reviewed cases not only foster active participatory processes open to civil society but also embody a distinctive feature – the institutionalized representation of the five-fold helix, including public administrations, the private sector, academia and research, community members and civil society organizations, and the media.

Policy spaces, often in the form of food policy councils or participatory structures, typically adhere to a standard structure with a plenary as the main body, accompanied by the presidency, vice-presidency, secretariat, permanent commission, and working groups. However, challenges persist in ensuring the inclusive participation of marginalized groups. Although initiatives like the VALENCIA, BARCELONA, and ZARAGOZA MUNICIPAL FOOD COUNCILS or the WATER OBSERVATORY OF TERRASSA have taken steps to reserve seats for NGOs and entities aimed at representing marginalized populations, the task of ensuring adequate representation remains a challenge. This challenge is particularly pronounced when considering groups essential for safeguarding the right to food and nutrition, including homeless people, socially excluded individuals, the elderly, or migrant agricultural workers. Despite these councils' commendable efforts, there is an ongoing need to address and overcome barriers that impede the effective inclusion of these groups in decision-making processes related to food policies.

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<sup>33</sup> Observatorio del Derecho a la Alimentación de España y Observatorio del Derecho a la Alimentación en América Latina y el Caribe (2018). *El derecho a la alimentación en España. Desafíos y propuestas*. ODA-E.



The selection of participants in these bodies is a critical aspect, influencing the inclusivity and diversity of the decision-making process. Balancing power dynamics and addressing potential conflicts of interest, particularly concerning the food industry, is essential. Nevertheless, the analysis underscores the importance of civil society representation with voice and vote, countering the influence of food lobbies and the private sector within the food system. Examples like the VALENCIA and ZARAGOZA FOOD COUNCILS or the WATER OBSERVATORY OF TERRASSA stand out for prioritizing the inclusion of voices and votes from entities and associations advocating for systemic change in the food system rather than relying heavily on the food industry.

Across different cases, many of these spaces operate as part of local governments, with defined roles within municipal systems. Decision-making within these spaces is primarily consensus-driven or by simple majority if consensus proves elusive. Even though their decisions are not binding, these participatory structures play a role in shaping recommendations that are sometimes implemented in projects discussed within these forums.

In conclusion, while the Spanish initiatives demonstrate progress in public-community cooperation, challenges persist in ensuring the broad representation of marginalized groups. The emphasis on civil society voices in decision-making, as evident in the VALENCIA and ZARAGOZA FOOD COUNCILS, highlights the potential for meaningful change. These participatory structures, although non-binding, play a crucial role in influencing policy recommendations and fostering a more inclusive and diverse decision-making landscape.

### **3. SYSTEMIC APPROACH AND TRANSFORMATIVE CHARACTER**

In the examination of the transformative character of food policies and strategies in Spain, some of them, such as the BARCELONA and VALENCIA food strategies, reveal a diverse landscape marked by initiatives actively steering away from the global corporate production and exchange model. The transformative strategies emphasize local small-scale producers, agroecological methods, and local markets, striving for radical shifts in the food system. For comprehensive transformation, some strategies involve various actors, such as small-scale producers and different municipal departments such as public health, culture, and commerce.

In contrast, policies like the POPULAR LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVE OF THE BALEARIC ISLANDS and the GREEN AND CIRCULAR ECONOMY STRATEGY EXTREMADURA don't explicitly aim to change the food system but acknowledge the need for change. The Balearic Islands' initiative sees a necessary radical shift to avoid adverse impacts on future generations, while the Extremadura strategy views the food system as a sector to develop sustainably within the green and circular economy.




Across ecological, health, and social justice dimensions, most strategies include actions connecting different government departments and levels. For instance, BARCELONA'S FOOD STRATEGY highlights the need to coordinate strategies across municipal, metropolitan, and regional levels. The URBAN AGRICULTURE STRATEGY encompasses initiatives promoting agroecology, green spaces, and community empowerment.

In these strategies, the public administration primarily holds the responsibility for implementation and creation of regulatory frameworks for transformative change. However, in cases like the VALENCIA and BARCELONA food strategies, implementation involves collaboration with community members, businesses, small-scale producers, and civil society organizations. The BALEARIC ISLANDS' INITIATIVE establishes an advisory commission for the well-being of present and future generations.

Regarding overarching objectives, most strategies propose promoting local, organic, and sustainable food, protecting urban and peri-urban agriculture, fostering fair relationships within the food supply chain, and decentralizing power in the food system. Some strategies, like the Popular Legislative Initiative in the BALEARIC ISLANDS, establish principles for sustainable development without specifying food-related strategies. The GREEN AND CIRCULAR ECONOMY STRATEGY EXTREMADURA aims to transition to a sustainable and circular economy with measures like promoting local and ecological production.

While some strategies may have gaps or less emphasized interventions, barriers to a radical shift at the local level include EU free trade principles, which support Spain's producer-exporter model, and the division of competencies with the national level, leading to a lack of coordination and coherence between different levels of government. Additionally, the availability of significant resources, including financial, human, and technical resources, poses a challenge, as acknowledged by strategies like BARCELONA URBAN AGRICULTURE and the BALEARIC ISLANDS' INITIATIVE. Furthermore, political risks exist due to the potential lack of long-term commitment in progressive mandates, given that municipal mandates in Spain last for four years.

In navigating Spain's diverse food policies and strategies, initiatives like the BARCELONA and VALENCIA food strategies emerge as pioneers, actively steering towards localized, sustainable, and equitable food systems. The direct engagement of civil society actors, cross-departmental collaboration, and a focus on systemic change characterize these transformative efforts. Challenges, such as EU trade principles and resource constraints, underscore the complexity of implementing radical shifts at the local level. Despite potential gaps, a shared commitment to promoting local, organic, and sustainable food and fostering fair relationships within the supply chain reflects a collective vision for a resilient and just Spanish food system. While navigating political risks and the need for



sustained commitment, these initiatives exemplify the ongoing journey towards a more sustainable and equitable future for Spain's food landscape.

#### 4. MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

In navigating the achievements and challenges, Spain's food-related initiatives illustrate both progress and areas that demand continued attention and innovation for a more sustainable, equitable, and resilient food system.

Among the major achievements of the cases analyzed, the following stand out:

➤ **Diverse Landscape of Initiatives:** Spain demonstrates a rich tapestry of initiatives, particularly in food strategies and policy spaces, reflecting a commitment to fostering public-community cooperation. Cases like the Barcelona and Valencia food strategies stand out for actively pursuing transformative shifts towards sustainable and localized food systems.

➤ **Institutionalized Representation:** Noteworthy is the institutionalized representation of the five-fold helix in these initiatives, encompassing public administrations, the private sector, academia and research, community members and civil society organizations, and the media. This inclusive approach enhances the diversity of perspectives and promotes a more comprehensive decision-making process.


➤ **Emphasis on Local and Sustainable Practices:** The transformative character of certain strategies, such as those in Barcelona and Valencia, is commendable for their emphasis on local small-scale producers, agroecological methods, and the promotion of fair relationships within the food supply chain. These initiatives showcase a commitment to steering away from the global corporate production and primary export/import-led growth model.

➤ **Participatory Processes:** Participatory structures, like food policy councils, highlight progress in engaging civil society in decision-making processes. The existence of plenary, presidency, vice-presidency, secretariat, permanent commission, and working groups in these spaces demonstrates an organized and structured approach to participation.

Among the main challenges of the cases analyzed, the following stand out:

➤ **Unequal Access to Decision-Making:** Despite efforts to include marginalised and food insecurity affected groups in decision-making processes, challenges persist in ensuring adequate representation. Populations such as the homeless people, socially excluded individuals, the elderly, and migrant agricultural workers face obstacles to participating effectively in food policy decisions.





➤ Limited National-Local Coordination: The absence of a national food strategy and the decentralization of powers to Autonomous Communities result in varied policies across regions. The lack of a cohesive national approach may lead to disparities in addressing food-related concerns and implementing systemic changes.

➤ Resource Constraints: Several strategies acknowledge the challenge of resource availability, including financial, human, and technical resources. Initiatives like the Barcelona Urban Agriculture Strategy and the Balearic Islands' initiative recognize the potential barriers posed by resource constraints to the successful implementation of transformative measures.

➤ Political Risks and Short-Term Commitments: The local political landscape, characterized by four-year municipal mandates, introduces the risk of shifting priorities and potential discontinuity in the commitment to long-term transformative goals. This poses a challenge to sustained efforts for systemic change in the food system.

➤ EU Free Trade Principles: Spain's adherence to EU free trade principles facilitates and maintains a producer-exporter model, potentially hindering efforts to promote local consumption and sustainability. Negotiating a balance between EU trade commitments and local food system goals is a persistent challenge.

In summary, Spain's food initiatives showcase a commitment to diverse, participatory, and sustainable models. These efforts emphasize local practices and institutionalize multi-actor representation. Challenges include unequal access to decision-making, limited national-local coordination, resource constraints, political risks, and barriers imposed by EU trade principles. Despite achievements, addressing these challenges is vital for Spain's ongoing journey towards a resilient and equitable food system.

# SWEDEN



## POLICIES AND INITIATIVES

1. Västerbotten Food Strategy
2. Norrbotten Food Strategy
3. Södertälje Land Use Strategy
4. Stockholm County Food Strategy
5. Malmö Food Policy
6. Sápmi Food Vision
7. Örebro Climate Strategy



## POLICY SPACES

1. Malmö Food Council





## 1. COUNTRY CONTEXT

### Governance structure and division of competences

Sweden has three levels of government: national, regional (counties), and local (municipalities). Regionally the country is divided into 21 counties. In each county, there is a county administrative board serving as the primary representative of the state. Each county also constitutes a region, governed by an elected political assembly. The main area of governance at this level is healthcare and infrastructure and will be referred to as regions. At the local level, Sweden is divided into 290 municipalities. Each municipality has an elected assembly, the municipal council, which takes decisions on municipal matters. It is on the municipal level that public procurement of food is organized.

According to the Swedish Education Act, all children in primary school (age 7–16) and most students in secondary school (age 16–19) must be served free lunch every school day. The public meal is guided by individual municipal food policies, where most highlight how a healthy and sustainable lunch is meant to even out socio-economic differences in health. The municipal food policies are guided by regional food strategies, which in turn are based on the national food strategy (2018). The national food strategy is meant to function as a national policy platform, setting a common direction in which the entire ‘food chain’ (as referred to in the policy, suggesting a linear corporate food system) works together towards 2030.

One of the mandatory requirements that the national policy stakes out is a 60% minimum of organic food in public procurement and 30% of arable land to be farmed organically by 2030. While showing ambitious targets the strategy is criticized for being centered around growth and export rather than a sustainable transformation of the food system. Sweden has a limited experience in local governing spaces such as food policy councils. Despite having food strategies at every level of governance, the very first Nordic food policy council was initiated in 2022 in the city of Malmö.

### Food-related concerns

The Swedish food system is characterized by a decreasing number of farmers, a food processing sector with mainly small to medium sized enterprises, and a highly concentrated retail sector dominated by only a few large retailer chains. The three largest chains, ICA, Coop, and Axfood, together control over 73% of the national food market. Food poverty and diet-related NCDs are on the rise, which has sparked a novel conversation on food environments and food-related concerns as being structural rather than individual. The right to

food is not explicitly guaranteed in Sweden, though the country has ratified multiple human rights treaties protecting the right.<sup>34</sup>

## 2. PARTICIPATION AND DECISION MAKING

The Swedish analysis is done on the three regional food strategies of VÄSTERBOTTEN, NORBOTTEN, and STOCKHOLM. Norbotten and Västerbotten are the two northern regions of Sweden, overlapping these two regions is the traditional Sámi land area of Sápmi, governed by the Sapmi parliament that has drafted its own FOOD VISION, which is also presented as a case. At the municipal level, three policies are presented: the SÖDERTÄLJE LAND USE STRATEGY, the MALMÖ FOOD POLICY, and ÖREBRO'S CLIMATE POLICY. Moreover, one policy space is presented, the newly started MALMÖ FOOD COUNCIL, inspired by food policy councils in other European countries, aiming for participatory change in the local food system.


All regional strategies have been drafted together with the regional branch of Sweden's national farmers federation. The strategies are committed to inclusivity, and they emphasize involving a broad spectrum of actors, including local communities, interest groups, indigenous populations, and industry players, in shaping their policies, aspiring to ensure a comprehensive understanding of regional needs. However, none of the policies presents an actual plan and structure to enable that participation (except for the collaboration with the Swedish Farmers Federation) which makes it hard to evaluate. Small-scale producers or marginalized communities have been given specific attention to address their unique concerns, with invitations to workshops, consultations, and open dialogues in the drafting of the food strategies. However, there is no clear strategy on how to enable a participatory approach in the implementation and monitoring, and it is hard to estimate how power structures will be balanced and conflicts of interest addressed.

The STOCKHOLM REGION FOOD STRATEGY is centered around city committees responsible for executing the strategy and action plans. The strategy covers a broad spectrum of food system issues, and the series of action plans meant to deliver on strategic areas all express transformative character. However, it's noteworthy that this strategy does not have any organic targets for production and procurement of food.

ÖREBRO'S CLIMATE STRATEGY, while primarily focused on climate goals, also connects food system transformation to climate change reduction. Since the strategy was enacted, 71% of food purchases by the city have turned organic.

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<sup>34</sup> The country has ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), but has notably failed to adopt the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (ILO) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP).



Decision-making involves setting clear goals and targets for reducing the climate impact of food procurement, promoting sustainability labeling, and showcasing a commitment to sustainability. During the drafting, workshops and consultations were held with invited actors, however, with no clear structure for participation.

The MALMÖ FOOD STRATEGY emphasizes health and sustainability and incorporates structured decision-making in collaboration with school meal suppliers and public procurement departments. Education and training courses for catering staff ensure informed decision-making aligned with the city's food goals. The policy has already led to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from food by 30%. In addition, the city's food purchases are today 70% organic, aiming to be 100% organic.

The third municipal policy, SÖDERTÄLJE LAND USE STRATEGY, is primarily focused on land use and cultivation and collaborates closely with local farmers' associations and housing companies, ensuring the involvement of those who own land. The strategy addresses the critical issue of making arable land accessible to marginalized groups. The strategy's emphasis on inclusivity and reaching beyond traditional actors reflects a commitment to fairness and equitable access to land for cultivation.

The SÁPMI FOOD VISION is drafted by the Sámi Parliament, a publicly elected parliament, and a state agency of Sweden. The food vision covers the traditional area of Sápmi, which covers large areas of Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Russia. Significant emphasis is placed on preserving indigenous culture and knowledge sovereignty. While not binding, it offers a narrative that envisions a future food system in the Sápmi region. The vision highlights the importance of cultural preservation and food sovereignty among Indigenous Peoples, showcasing a unique and transformative local food policy perspective. As of 2024, the Sápmi Food Vision will work as basis for a food strategy with food sovereignty at its center.

None of the policies or strategies can show an actual strategy for participation, apart from invited sessions when drafting, thereby indicating a potential lack of inclusivity, transparency, and engagement. To overcome this Swedish inexperience in civic participation is one of the goals of Malmö Food Council, which started in 2020 as the first food policy council in Scandinavia. The food council welcomes anyone as a member. There is no balancing of power within the council and hence a risk of takeover.

### 3. SYSTEMIC APPROACH AND TRANSFORMATIVE CHARACTER

In examining the regional and municipal food strategies and policies, it's evident that they share a common commitment to a systemic approach. They recognize that food systems are intricate webs of interconnected components, and addressing one aspect in isolation may lead to unintended consequences. Instead, these policies take a holistic view, considering how various elements – from production to consumption – interact. The VÄSTERBOTTEN and NORRBOTTEN FOOD STRATEGIES both adopt a systemic perspective by engaging a diverse range of actors across the food system. They understand that fostering a localization of the food system involves not only production but also demand, procurement, and waste reduction. These strategies recognize that achieving sustainable food production necessitates a coordinated effort from multiple actors, including small-scale producers and Indigenous Peoples. SÖDERTÄLJE LAND USE STRATEGY extends this systemic thinking by emphasizing land use, recognizing that the availability and accessibility of arable land are integral components of a sustainable food system. It aims to provide opportunities for both conventional farmers and marginalized groups, such as farmers who do not own land, underscoring the importance of equitable access within the system.

What sets the SÅPMI FOOD VISION apart is the transformative character. While it addresses immediate issues related to food production, procurement, and consumption, it also envisions and strives for a future that is markedly different from the present. It does not merely seek to maintain the status quo; instead, it aspires to catalyze fundamental change towards food sovereignty. The policy envisions a future where Indigenous Peoples are empowered to control their food systems, challenging the dominant food paradigm. It is a transformative example of a local policy that seeks to change the narrative around food and culture. Similarly, ÖREBRO'S CLIMATE STRATEGY embodies a transformative spirit. While primarily concerned with climate goals, it has resulted in significant shifts in public food procurement. The municipality's progress in increasing organic food purchases reflects not just a policy change but a cultural shift toward more sustainable and environmentally conscious food choices.

### 4. MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

The national architecture covering policies at local level is in place for transformative change in Sweden. With most strategies aimed for 2030, there is a window of opportunity for influencing their focus. Across regional and municipal food policies, several noteworthy achievements stand out:

- **Increased Participation:** THE VÄSTERBOTTEN FOOD STRATEGY and NORRBOTTEN FOOD STRATEGY have successfully fostered collaboration among diverse actors. They have engaged local government bodies, interest organizations, industry players, and individuals, enhancing the inclusivity of decision-making processes.

Empowering Marginalized Groups: THE SÖDERTÄLJE LAND USE STRATEGY has made arable land more accessible by allocating land owned by the municipality to users. This achievement aligns with the policy's goal of ensuring equitable access to cultivation opportunities.

Sustainability: Policies like the STOCKHOLM REGION FOOD STRATEGY and ÖREBRO'S CLIMATE STRATEGY have advanced sustainability goals. Örebro, in particular, has made remarkable progress, with 71% of public food purchases being organic, by setting promotional targets. This reflects a significant shift toward more sustainable food procurement practices.

Cultural Preservation: The SÁPMI FOOD VISION, drafted by the Sámi Parliament, focuses on preserving indigenous culture and knowledge sovereignty. This policy represents a significant achievement in recognizing and safeguarding cultural heritage.

While these policies have achieved notable successes, they also face distinct challenges:

Implementation and Monitoring: In general, the regional and municipal food strategies and policies lack a formulated strategy for monitoring their goals. Achieving the goals requires continuous efforts and resources, resources which for the majority of the cases are described as in conflict with other priorities of government.

Equitable Access: The SÖDERTÄLJE LAND USE STRATEGY has addressed the challenge of making land accessible to marginalized groups. However, sustaining these efforts and ensuring long-term support for small-scale farmers remains a challenge.

Organic Targets: The STOCKHOLM REGION FOOD STRATEGY faces criticism regarding the lack of organic targets, which is striking since the national strategy that it is based upon has such targets.

Participation: While showing ambitious food policies in every municipality and region of the country, there is a lack of experience in structured participation, in which power is balanced.



# FINAL REFLECTIONS



The country studies show the diversity that exists within Europe when it comes to local food policy making and participatory spaces.

Of the countries reviewed, only Sweden (2018) and Portugal (2021) have national food and nutrition strategies in place that provide guidance on food-related matters at a national level. Germany adopted its first national food and nutrition strategy in the course of the writing of this paper (January 2024), whereas Austria and Spain only have more specific strategies or action plans in place (e.g., on nutrition). Sweden is the only country in which the national food strategy serves as an umbrella for regional food strategies, which in turn guide municipal food strategies. As for the other countries, it is local governments, both regional and municipal, that have pioneered the development of food strategies and hence filled an important policy gap left by national governments. They have done so sometimes independently, sometimes, as the case of Belgium, in an articulated way (municipal strategies following regional strategies, though not always). In most cases, the development of local food strategies comes as a response to demands by communities and civil society organisations in their localities. The Milan Food Pact has also been an important trigger for the development of local food policies in some countries, such as Spain.

All reviewed countries have decentralised systems of government in place, in which regional and municipal governments have far reaching competences that allow them to steer the direction of the food system. In the case of Portugal, the decentralisation of powers to local authorities is a rather recent development that still encounters its challenges. However, even for countries with a long-standing tradition of federal/decentralised governance, the use of local government competences and the importance dedicated to the topic of food varies significantly, and is for some countries, such as Germany, a rather recent development.

## AREAS OF INTERVENTION

### Areas of intervention of local governments include:



**Communal Catering** in schools, daycare, hospitals, elderly homes is a central area of local government action across countries. Communal catering and related **public procurement** is seen as an important lever for change, both in terms of ensuring access to healthy and sustainable food, and in contributing to a broader food systems transition towards ecological and/or regionally produced food. Adaptation of public procurement criteria, education and training (of chefs/kitchen personnel), and positive incentives such as certification schemes are measures applied.

Most of the reviewed strategies and initiatives seek to strengthen **regional production and exchange circuits** and foster a transition to / enhance **ecological or at least more sustainable production** and consumption models. This is often connected to efforts to boost local economies and preserve regional identities. Measures to achieve this include:



- Support schemes and incentives for ecological production;
- Food distribution infrastructure/logistics;
- Markets for regional/ecological products;
- Marketing of regional products (e.g., branding campaigns, quality labels);
- Education and training to enhance demand; and
- Introduction of sustainability/regional criteria in public procurement contracts.



Measures to address **food waste** (e.g., in public canteens).



Enhancing **accessibility** to healthy and sustainable food in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, urban and peri-urban gardening.



**Preservation of and access to agricultural land** for young farmers and sustainable use of such land. While these are rather exceptional efforts in some of the cases reviewed, they are critical for ensuring the RtFN in light of the exponential loss of farmland and challenges faced by (young) farmers in Europe.

Overall, an emphasis on training/education and positive incentives can be noted, while regulatory and restrictive measures (e.g., to restrict use of pesticides or sale of ultra-processed products) are largely absent. This indicates both a potential gap in competences at this level, as well as a general trend by European (local) policy makers to opt for “softer” measures in the transition to more sustainable and healthy food systems.

## **TRANSFORMATIVE SPIRIT AND LIMITATIONS**

The transformative character varies across case studies, with some strategies/initiatives, especially those led or developed in close collaboration with civil society and social movements, taking a broad and more radical approach (a shift away from the industrial food system), and others remaining more at the surface (e.g., enhancing sustainability of the industrial food system, or increasing competitiveness of regional food production). Importantly, many strategies and initiatives recognize food as a public matter that needs to be addressed in a systemic way across government departments.

Throughout the case studies an emphasis has been placed on integrating environmental, health, and social justice objectives (e.g., in public school meals).

The social justice dimension is however often limited in its focus and scope. The emphasis, especially in the more urban cases, is placed on accessibility of healthy and sustainable food, with less attention to small-scale producers' and food systems workers' livelihoods and rights. Moreover, few strategies tackle structural barriers to access, such as income, social protection, labour rights, and gender inequalities. One limiting factor in this is that social protection and finance are often dealt with at the national level, hence are out of the realm of local governments. This leaves at the margins an important dimension of the right to food and the transition towards human rights-based food systems: addressing the social injustices that run across the food system.

Not only the national division of competences places restrictions on local government action. Throughout countries, EU regulations, such as EU competition and trade laws, have been functioning as significant barriers to local government action when it comes to strengthening local/regional food systems and prioritizing local production, including in public procurement. While some governments have found innovative ways around them, for example, establishing quality labels for regional products, many are hesitant to do so, fearing legal and financial repercussions. This is an important stumbling stone when it comes to transitioning to more sustainable, territorially embedded food systems.

Human, technical, and resource constraints are further common challenges faced by local governments. The closer collaboration with civil society, via food policy councils or other cooperation arrangements, has been an important strategy for addressing these constraints while fostering greater public participation in policy making. This may, however, also lead to an overdependence on civil society and other actors in implementing food strategies or joint projects, thereby weakening government owner- and leadership.

Whereas most of the reviewed strategies recognize the importance of a systemic approach, in only few cases, mainly in Spain and Belgium, correspondent institutional structures have been set-up to facilitate collaboration and anchor food strategies across government departments – a precondition for effecting systemic change. This is an important gap in most of the reviewed cases. As a result, strategies often remain at a visionary level or in practice are implemented in a fragmented, project-based way rather than in a more structured way, with concrete action plans, time-bound goals, and monitoring systems attached. Related to this is the planning insecurity, caused by short-term budgets and (potential) shifts in political priorities (changes of political parties in power), that many public administrations have to deal with. The role of organised civil society and institutionalised structures of participation is critical in this context to ensure continuity of government efforts and uphold political pressure. However, civil society is often itself struggling to obtain resources (core funding) that would allow for more consistent engagement and monitoring of policy processes beyond the implementation of individual projects.

Hierarchical structures, lack of transparency, rigidity, and slow pace of public administrations have been sources of frustration, especially among civil society, but also for dedicated government personnel in many countries, and can function as an important barrier to implementation even when commitments at the political level have been made. Furthermore, the lack of national strategies to provide minimum standards, for example, with regard to participation, as well as the often limited communication and coordination between the different levels of government, are other challenges.

## **CIVIL SOCIETY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

The structures for civil society participation in public policy making related to food and nutrition vary considerably across and within countries. Broadly speaking, institutionalised forms of participation, in the sense of food policy councils that are integrated or formally linked to public decision-making structures, exist more commonly in Spain and Belgium. Many of these spaces are attached to / have been created in the context of municipal and regional food strategies. Some structures, however, also have a mandate that goes beyond the implementation of specific strategies to advise the local government on all food-related matters (e.g., Food Council of Valencia). Usually, the local government (political representation and public administration) forms an integral part of these institutionalised councils. Thereby these spaces not only play an important role in facilitating the participation of civil society, but also foster exchange and collaboration among government departments critical to implementing the systemic changes envisioned.

Germany, in turn, has seen civil society/community-driven food policy councils mushroom throughout the country in recent years. These are autonomous spaces with the clear intent to democratize food policy making, thereby maintaining different degrees of closeness with their local government. While not part of the official government structure, many of these councils are enjoying the recognition or even formal endorsement of their government and are consulted on food-related matters. Some FPCs also take the form of round tables that have the public administration directly represented.

Similar civil society structures exist also in Austria and Belgium, though these are not as common, nor do they take such a prominent role in local food policy making. In the case of Austria, more common are project-based initiatives that seek community opinion/engagement for a specific purpose. In the case of Sweden, participatory structures to accompany the implementation of local and regional food strategies are an important gap, with only one young example in the city of Malmö.

As for Portugal, a diversity of collaborative arrangements exists at the local level that bring together civil society, the local government, and other actors in a common effort to advance a transition towards sustainable territorial food systems. While these tend to be more at the implementation rather than the policy level, some governance structures have emerged from these efforts, both loose and more formalised ones. These in turn have laid the ground for pioneer efforts to build local food policy councils in the Algarve region and in some municipalities.

In addition to the more permanent structures of participation, temporary spaces of participation also exist that can be invoked by civil society and have been used to discuss food policy at the local level. Examples are the citizen councils in Vorarlberg, Austria, or the popular initiative in the Balearic Islands, Spain.

The interface and degree of influence on public decision making varies considerably across and within countries and is difficult to define (especially in the case of more open formats of participation). What can be said is that decisions taken by food policy councils (or similar spaces) tend to take the form of recommendations (of varying weights) to local governments, rather than having a binding character. Nevertheless, they can carry important political weight, especially where the local government itself participates in these spaces. While civil society organisations and communities are a driving force behind and within food policy councils, these spaces commonly also involve a multitude of other actors, drawn from the private sector (across the food system), academia, professional and business associations, public administration, and political parties. The role of food policy councils in providing a platform for different actors within the food system to come together to exchange, including on divergent views, and collaborate has been considered an important asset of these spaces.

None of the food policy councils makes a clear distinction between public and private interest groups, and rights holders more specifically. Nor do any have institutional safeguards in place to protect against undue influence by private companies and conflicts of interest. In general, this is not perceived as a major risk. This is partially due to the notion that the spaces are civil society-driven with a clear directionality that would be difficult to “capture” by corporate interests, and that corporations have their own more direct channels to influence governments and hence do not need to go through these spaces. Overall, the spaces are very diverse with some being more social movement and civil society driven, with a more radical agenda, and some more private sector driven, with a more mainstream, less ambitious agenda.

Despite efforts to include marginalised and disadvantaged groups in several of the initiatives, their actual (direct) participation remains low, with some groups, such as agricultural workers, migrants, and poverty-affected groups, largely

absent. For the initiatives with a fixed representation-based structure, only few go beyond broad categories of actors and reserve seats for more specific groups, including marginalised groups. However, even in these cases, no specific measures are in place to elevate the voice of these groups, and counter existing power imbalances vis-à-vis other groups.

While overall a positive trend towards participation in food systems policy making can be observed, such participation is rarely human rights-based, in the sense that the voices of marginalised and food insecure groups are prioritized. Most initiatives and platforms depart from the idea of bringing all food systems actors on board as condition for effecting change across the food system. Differences between actors in terms of interests and power thereby tend to be overlooked, foregoing the opportunity to use these spaces more proactively to counter existing power imbalances within and beyond the food system.



## ANNEX 1: LIST OF INTERVIEWS

### A. AUSTRIA

Food Policy Council Vienna. 26/04/2023, 22/05/2023.  
KBB – Kultur-Betriebe Burgenland. 05-06/2023.  
Bio Austria. 11/05/2023.  
Büro für Freiwilliges Engagement und Beteiligung, Bregenz. 28/04/2023.  
REGIO Klostertal Arlberg 05-06/2023.  
City of Vienna, Municipal Department for District Planning and Zoning. 27/03/2023.  
Zukunft Essen – Gutes Schulessen für Alle. 12/05/2023.  
Agrarmarketing Tirol 19/06/2023.

### B. BELGIUM

Food Policy Council *Gent en Garde*. 02/04/2024.  
Food Policy Council Antwerpen. 27/04/2023.  
Food Policy Council Namur. 28/04/2023.  
Food Policy Council of Wallonia (CwAD). 02/05/2023.  
Good Food Policy Council Brussels. 21/06/2023.

### C. GERMANY

Food Policy Council Berlin. 25/04/2023.  
Food Policy Council Brandenburg. 01/02/2024.  
Food Policy Council Cologne. 14/08/2023.  
Food Policy Council Heidelberg. 26/04/2023.  
Food Policy Council Oldenburg. 25/04/2023.  
Berlin Senate, Department for Consumer Protection. 28/06/2023, 30/06/2023.  
City of Cologne, Department for Environment and Consumer Protection. 24/08/2023, 25/08/2023.  
City of Nuremberg, Organic City Nuremberg. 27/04/2023.  
City of Nuremberg, REPROLA. 27/04/2023.  
Baden-Wuerttemberg, Ministry of Food, Rural Development and Consumer Protection. 25/08/2023.



#### **D. PORTUGAL**

Torres Vedras, School Food and Health Area of the Education Division (PSAE team). 31/03/2023.  
Montemor-o-Novo, Economic Development Planning and Support Division of the Municipality. 18/04/2023.  
Terra Sintrópica - member of Rede Alimentar de Mértola. 26/04/2023.  
São Pedro do Sul, Rural Development Support Office of Municipality. 11/04/2024.  
Inter Municipal Community of the Algarve Region. 15/04/2024.  
Associação para o Desenvolvimento Sustentável da Região Saloia - member of FoodLink AML. 18/04/2024.  
Education and Social Development Department of Funchal Municipality. 18/04/2024.  
WWF-ANP member of the Co-management Committee for the Harvesting of Barnacle. 18/04/2024.

#### **E. SPAIN**

Consell Alimentari de València. Head of Ariculture. 09/2023.  
Agròpolis. 04/2024.

#### **F. SWEDEN**

Västerbotten Food Strategy. Government representative. 02/2023.  
Norrbotten Food Strategy. Government representative. 03/2023.  
Södertälje Land Use Strategy. Government representative. 03/2023.  
Stockholm County Food Strategy. Government representative. 03/2023.  
Malmö Food Policy. Government representative. 01/2023.  
Örebro Climate Strategy. Government representative. 04/2023.  
Malmö Food Council. Civil society representative. 12/2022 and 01/2023.





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