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POLICY BRIEF



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Policy brief

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Executive summary

Waste to Value, A Strategic Pathway to Reducing Food Loss and Waste (FLW) in Europe

Europe is in a position to take meaningful steps forward reducing Food Loss and Waste (FLW). Each year, over **58 million tons** of food (Eurostat, 2024), much of it still suitable for consumption, go unused along EU supply chains. Addressing FLW can support existing policy goals such as the **European Green Deal**, the **Farm to Fork Strategy**, and broader efforts related to climate, social equity, and food security. By embedding FLW reduction into policy and governance frameworks, the European Union can help reduce pressure on farmland, lower emissions, improve access to nutritious food, and strengthen food self-sufficiency without using additional land.

Findings from the **CHORIZO project** suggest that combining behavioural, systemic, and governance approaches can lead to more effective outcomes in reducing FLW. Based on these insights, three mutually reinforcing priorities are proposed:

1. Reframe the Issue: From Technical Challenge to Shared Responsibility

FLW is shaped not only by supply chain dynamics, but also by cultural norms and governance gaps. Integrating FLW prevention into climate, food, and social policies, supported by positive awareness campaigns, trusted local ambassadors, and behavioural tools, can help shift norms and embed change in daily practices.

2. Lead with Strategy, Not Symptoms

Efforts can be strengthened by addressing upstream factors that contribute to surplus. This includes setting national targets, improving monitoring systems, and clarifying legal frameworks for food donation. Support for food redistribution efforts and investment in smart packaging, digital platforms, and valorisation processes can be more coordinated with the objectives of the Circular Economy Action Plan.

3. Make Cities the Engines of Change

Cities and municipalities are well-positioned to implement practical solutions. Incorporating FLW criteria into public procurement, supporting redistribution infrastructure, and promoting food literacy into schools can contribute to both FLW reduction and broader social and environmental goals.

The Call to Action

These three priorities offer a structured approach to support the **2030 EU waste reduction targets** and related initiatives. Advancing these measures will contribute to increased food system resilience, improved resource use, and broader social and environmental benefits across Europe.

1 WASTE TO VALUE

A STRATEGIC PATHWAY TO REDUCING FOOD LOSS AND WASTE IN EUROPE

Europe stands at a critical juncture in the fight against food loss and waste (FLW). Each year, over **58 million tons of food** (Eurostat, 2024), much of it still suitable for consumption, are lost along European supply chains. This reflects not only an environmental challenge but also an untapped potential to advance the European Green Deal, the Farm to Fork Strategy, and the Union's ambitions for food security, social equity, and climate neutrality. By embedding FLW reduction into legal and governance frameworks, the European Union can unlock multiple benefits: contribute to reduced pressure on farmland, lower greenhouse gas emissions, improved access to nutritious food, and enhance food security without the need for additional agricultural land.

Insights from the **CHORIZO project** indicate that combining behavioural, systemic, and governance approaches can lead to more effective FLW reduction. Building on these findings, this policy brief encourages the European Commission and Member States to consider three interconnected priorities in future legislation and operational policy.

1. Reframe the Issue: From Technical Challenge to Shared Responsibility

FLW is shaped not only by supply chain dynamics, but also by social norms, cultural expectations, and governance gaps. Addressing it involves shaping positive norms, challenging harmful ones, and embedding change in daily practices. Policies efforts can integrate FLW prevention across climate, food, and social domains, invest in awareness campaigns, mobilise trusted local ambassadors, and use behavioural tools to monitor and adapt interventions.

2. Lead with Strategy, Not Symptoms

Effective FLW reduction requires attention to upstream factors that contribute to surplus. National targets, robust monitoring systems, clear legal frameworks for food donation, and incentives for redistribution are part of a comprehensive approach. Innovation in smart packaging, digital surplus platforms, and valorisation processes should be coupled with collaboration across the full value chain from production to retail.

3. Make Cities the Engines of Change

Municipalities are ideally placed to test and scale FLW solutions through procurement, public services, and citizen engagement. Including waste-prevention criteria in catering contracts, linking procurement to redistribution, supporting community infrastructure such as fridges, markets, and surplus apps, and integrating food literacy in schools can deliver measurable reductions while advancing public health, inclusion, and circular economy objectives.

Together, these three priorities offer a structured roadmap to help meet the EU's 2030 food waste reduction targets. Advancing these measures will also support broader outcomes related to food system resilience, resource efficiency and social well-being across Europe.

1.1 Reframe the Issue: From Technical Challenge to Shared Responsibility

Food loss and waste is generally viewed as a narrow supply chain inefficiency. However, it also reflects broader societal patterns, including cultural expectations, shared social norms, and structural dynamics. Reducing FLW is not only about improving resource use, it also offers an opportunity to support a more inclusive and resilient food system, aligned with European values of solidarity, stewardship, and equity.

Europe is at an important moment in addressing FLW. Each year, over 58 million tons of food (Eurostat, 2024), much of it still suitable for consumption, are not utilized along EU supply chains. Avoiding this waste would reduce pressure on farmland and lower greenhouse gas emissions. Additionally, reduction of FLW would improve access to healthy food, particularly for vulnerable groups. Evidence from CHORIZO's research confirms that waste patterns are strongly linked to perceptions of abundance, quality, and convenience. These factors are shaped by social and institutional norms rather than individual knowledge alone.

By reframing FLW prevention as an issue of **justice, sustainability, and governance**, the European Commission can align action with broader public concerns, including climate action, healthy diets, and cost-of-living pressures. CHORIZO's research on effective FLW reduction confirms that collaboration through trusted local ambassadors, including teachers, chefs, and food service staff, successfully influences behaviours around portion sizes, acceptance of "imperfect" produce, and food sharing. The project's scenario simulations which can be easily accessed via the **Rapid Appraisal Tool** further demonstrate that individuals' *awareness of sustainability* significantly impacts waste levels.

Reducing FLW requires **active norm shaping**: strengthening positive norms, challenging harmful ones, and embedding change in daily practices. Interventions should draw on behavioural insights, such as the CHORIZO **6+2 step approach** and the **MOA framework** (Motivation–Opportunity–Ability), to design strategies that resonate with different audiences.

Recommended Policy Priorities:

- **Embed FLW prevention into cross-cutting policies** on climate, food, and social welfare, aligning with the Green Deal and Farm to Fork objectives.
- **Strengthen legal clarity and economic incentives for food donation, redistribution, and repurposing**, aligning with the Waste Framework Directive and the Circular Economy Action Plan. Reduce legal and logistical barriers, develop municipal and national platforms for surplus food donations and address competition between resale and free donation models.
- Invest in **tailored awareness campaigns** that connect food waste to shared values, avoiding provocative messaging and instead using positive, relatable narratives.
- **Promote norm-shaping interventions** involving multiple stakeholders and fostering local ownership, such as community-led food sharing, youth-elder exchanges, and municipal procurement of "imperfect" produce.
- **Use behavioural tools and behavioural data platforms** to set baselines, monitor progress, and assess intervention impacts, ensuring adaptive and evidence-based policymaking.
- **Fund applied research** on social-norm-based interventions, integrating perspectives such as gender and cultural diversity, to scale behaviour change towards OFLW.

Deep-dive further reading:

- [CHORIZO's Rapid Appraisal Tool](#): Explore how different behaviours and interventions impact food waste. This tool shows the results of simulations in households and food service settings. Use it to discover what works, compare scenarios, and find inspiration for action.
- [Conceptual framework to understand behavioural change](#): This document presents a framework to better understand and simulate the complex social dynamics that shape FLW-related decisions.

1.2 Lead with Strategy, Not Symptoms

Policy approaches tend to focus on downstream waste (leftovers and expired goods) while placing less emphasis on the underlying behavioural and systemic factors that contribute to surplus generation. Advancing FLW reduction involves setting clear goals, establishing reliable baseline data, and fostering coordination across multiple policy domains: from primary production and processing to retail, hospitality, social services, and municipal waste management.

The European Commission's proposed legally binding targets of 10% reduction in processing/manufacturing, and 30% in retail and consumption by 2030 (European Commission 2024) provide a timely opportunity to formalise action. Achieving these targets will require comprehensive national strategies, underpinned by standardised monitoring systems, behavioural insight, and multi-stakeholder governance. Tools developed by CHORIZO, such as the online scenario simulator Rapid Appraisal Tool and the **FLW Data Hub**, demonstrate how data can be used not only for evaluation but also for anticipating behavioural effects of interventions. Equally important is the enabling environment: legal clarity for food donation, incentives for surplus redistribution, municipal leadership in prevention, and investment in valorisation can help transform surplus and by-products into new value streams.

Recommended Policy Priorities:

- **Enact and operationalise binding national FLW targets**, with sector-specific key performance indicators (KPIs), aligned with EU ambitions on food security and autonomy.
- **Invest in robust national baseline data systems and public monitoring frameworks** to track progress, target interventions effectively and evaluate environmental, social, and economic impacts.
- **Encourage multi-actor collaboration across the value chain**, including municipal departments, particularly in processing and primary production, to repurpose surplus food and upcycle by-products.
- **Support innovation** such as smart packaging, digital redistribution tools, and novel valorisation processes, while addressing consumer resistance and ensuring affordability.

Deep-dive further reading:

- [CHORIZO data hub](#): The Datahub is a central platform that provides easy access to empirical data from case studies (surveys, interviews, experiments) and information on over 400 FLW actions across sectors.

1.3 Make Cities the Engines of Change

Cities are central actors in the food system: they shape supply and demand through public procurement, operate food services in hospitals, schools, and care facilities, manage waste services, and maintain close ties to citizens and community initiatives. This proximity positions municipalities as ideal laboratories for scalable FLW solutions.

Public procurement is a particularly powerful leverage point. By enabling cities to embed FLW prevention criteria into catering contracts, such as portion planning, procurement of “imperfect” produce, and formal agreements with charities for redistribution, the European Commission can support cities in sending strong market signals and improving the sustainability of publicly funded meals. Collaboration between procurement, education, and waste management departments can further enhance results.

CHORIZO's research on effective FLW reduction demonstrated that city-led innovation can catalyse behaviour change and infrastructure development. Initiatives like “Pay-As-You-Throw” (PAYT) schemes, municipal partnerships with surplus food apps, community fridges, and public events celebrating surplus

food proved effective in reducing waste, while also delivering co-benefits for social inclusion, public health, and climate mitigation.

Schools are key sites for shaping long-term food literacy and behaviours. CHORIZO findings show that targeted measures (e.g. adjusting plate sizes, involving students in menu feedback, integrating food literacy into the curriculum, and combining education with social norm-informed nudges) can lead to measurable reductions in plate waste and increase student engagement.

Recommended Policy Priorities:

- **Enable FLW reduction standards into municipal food procurement** across schools, hospitals, and care facilities, including portion planning, surplus redistribution, and acceptance of “imperfect” produce.
- **Strengthen operational practices** in public facilities (across all governance levels) through staff training, portion planning, menu optimisation, and clear date labelling, supported by digital tools and smart packaging innovation where appropriate.
- **Strengthen cross-departmental coordination** so that procurement, waste, social services, and education work together towards shared FLW targets.
- **Fund and scale city-led platforms for surplus food redistribution** including paving clear legal guidelines surrounding food safety in pursuit of more human consumption, with targeted support for underserved communities.
- **Invest in community infrastructure** such as food-sharing fridges, local surplus markets and municipal apps to facilitate redistribution and citizen engagement.
- **Promote school-based behaviour change interventions** that integrate small-scale monitoring, food literacy, and social norm informed nudges to foster lifelong “food citizenship”.

Deep-dive further reading:

- [Food waste guidance for cities](#): This guide equips cities with practical instructions on how to work with social norms in the context of urban food waste prevention, to make plans and interventions more impactful.

2 REALISING THE STRATEGIC VALUE OF FLW REDUCTION

Progress toward a more resilient and equitable European food system can be supported through coordinated action on food loss and waste. A wide range of knowledge, tools, and tested interventions is already available, informed by projects such as CHORIZO and Europe's broader innovation ecosystems. The next step involves translating these insights into consistent policy frameworks and practical implementation.

Integrating FLW reduction into European and national strategies can contribute to multiple objectives: reducing environmental pressures, food self-sufficiency without expanding agricultural land, and improving access to nutritious food. These efforts also reflect Europe's broader commitment to aligning environmental responsibility with social well-being and economic resilience.

The three priorities presented here (reframing the challenge as a shared responsibility, leading with strategic and systemic action, and empowering cities as catalysts for change) are designed to work in synergy. Together, they offer a practical and forward-looking pathway for progress by 2030.

Moving from recommendations to action can help ensure that food systems are better equipped to meet the needs of the people, the environment and the economy.

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