

Reducing consumer food waste: recommendations for policymakers

Food waste is a pressing issue with significant environmental, social and economic consequences. In the EU, nearly 59 million tonnes of food waste (131 kg/inhabitant) are generated each year. The largest share of food waste is generated in households and food services. The food groups that are most commonly wasted are vegetables, fruits and cereals.



53 %

of EU food waste is generated in households (70 kg/person/year).



9 %

of EU food waste arises in restaurants and food services, including school canteens (12 kg/person/year).

Consumers can change many behaviours that lead to food waste (e.g. cooking too much), but their capacity to prevent food waste is influenced by a number of factors (e.g. related policies, lifestyle factors). Reducing consumer food waste requires collaboration between all actors in the food system and efforts to address the issue in a broader context (e.g. as part of actions aiming to promote the adoption of healthy, sustainable diets). Policymakers play a key role in this.

The role of policymakers

The engagement of policymakers in food waste reduction – at all levels (national, regional and local) – is essential to create an enabling policy environment that accelerates change and to coordinate related actions by key players in the food supply chain. Policymakers also play an important role in supporting and coordinating research and practical actions to reduce food waste.

To ensure the prompt policy action that is needed to reach the ambitious international sustainable development goals and help achieve the EU's climate policy objectives, the European Commission has proposed setting mandatory food waste reduction targets for Member States. There is a need for an integrated approach to food policy in general, as highlighted by the [EU's farm-to-fork strategy](#), which addresses food waste generation alongside sustainable production and consumption and challenges to food security.



Taking action to reduce consumer food waste – a selection of best practices and recommendations

1 Identify local/national ambassadors (people or organisations) to promote programmes on consumer food waste reduction. They can inspire and set an example in their local networks, thus amplifying the effects of single actions. These actions could include training, events such as ‘waste-free’ weeks or coaching for households. The work of ambassadors can lead to more efficient communication and exchanges of best practices between actors involved in the food supply chain. In Italy, for instance, some food waste prevention actions are coordinated by the [National Association of Italian Municipalities](#). In the Netherlands, the organisation [United against Food Waste](#) orchestrates national-level actions and facilitates stakeholder engagement.

2 Revise national food waste prevention programmes to tackle consumer food waste effectively, taking into account the interdependencies that exist in the food system. Actions at one stage of the food supply chain can trigger unintended consequences at another. Identifying contact points to connect local programmes with the existing national food waste prevention programme is important, as coordination is an essential element for success. EU countries with successful actions addressing consumer food waste under their national food waste prevention programmes include [Germany](#), [Hungary](#) and [the Netherlands](#).

3 Invest in curricula on home economics and sustainable development, including the topic of food waste reduction. The younger generation is a key target audience for developing sustainable food behaviours, including for food waste prevention. Education programmes can have a long-term effect and can also have a spillover effect on households. Recently, [Austria](#) has included food waste prevention in new legislation on education.

4 Orchestrate national food weeks yearly and increase the visibility of ongoing and future actions. Establish recognisable branding for food waste reduction efforts at the national level, change social norms by raising the public profile of food waste prevention, promote positive behaviours that avoid food waste and reach as many consumers as possible. This can trigger further action by players across the food supply chain. Examples of food waste weeks can be found in [Germany](#) (September/October), [Ireland](#) (June), the [Netherlands](#) (September) and the [United Kingdom](#) (March). In addition, the [International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste](#) (29 September) is celebrated in many Member States.

Find more information in the [compendium of tools, best practices and recommendations to reduce consumer food waste!](#)

The [European Consumer Food Waste Forum](#) is an EU pilot project of the Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety and the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission. The project has collected data and identified evidence-based, practical solutions to reduce food waste at the consumer level.

The EU and its Member States are committed to meeting [sustainable development goal target 12.3](#): halving per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels by 2030 and reducing food losses along the food production and supply chains. Learn more about EU actions to reduce food waste [on the Commission's food waste web page](#).

Further information:



Contact: JRC-FOODWASTE-FORUM@ec.europa.eu

EU Science Hub: <https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu>

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