

POLICY BRIEF

GAPS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT CITY-REGION FOOD SYSTEMS



Food systems are under high pressure due to many challenges including climate change, environmental pollution, obesity and non-communicable diseases, and an increased demand for food. A multi-stakeholder, cross-sectoral approach is needed in order to create food environments that are healthy for people and the planet. Action is needed at the local, national and EU levels to align food system priorities across sectors and scales – from local to global. The tables and text below reflect the gaps and opportunities identified by FoodCLIC partners, grounded in the experiences of multistakeholder Living Labs in eight city-regions in Italy, Denmark, Germany, Romania, Portugal, Spain, Hungary, and the Netherlands, during the first phase of the FoodCLIC project.

GAPS: CITY-REGION AND NATIONAL LEVELS

- ▶ **Lack of cooperation** across different administrative levels, agencies and departments (including urban/ rural, government and civil society)
- ▶ **Lack of understanding of the impact (and return on investment) from sustainable food practices**
- ▶ **Insufficient resources** and accessibility **for vulnerable groups** (e.g., women, children, elderly, low-income, rural areas) **and small producers**
- ▶ **Lack of overall food-related education and understanding about where and how food is produced and processed**, as well as, health, environmental and societal impacts of production, processing, consumption, and food waste
- ▶ **Lack of regulations for the private sector**, including appropriate advertising standards and health guidelines
- ▶ **Imbalance of power** in the food retail value chain

OPPORTUNITIES: CITY-REGION AND NATIONAL LEVELS

- ▶ **Foster inclusivity and collaborative spaces** for exchanging knowledge and experience to build trust, and better understand, analyse and address challenges. To that end, **be selective of terminology used in meetings and in policy writing to ensure core messages of inclusivity are maintained**
- ▶ **Encourage co-creative, multi-stakeholder and multi-level governance approaches** to developing food policies and planning frameworks by engaging the people intended to receive the benefits of the policy as well as stakeholders who can drive policy implementation (e.g., vulnerable groups, farmers, procurers, health practitioners, urban and regional planners, energy managers, social services, schools and education services, food policy councils etc.)
- ▶ **Conduct and support pilot cases** for sustainable and healthy food practices with multi-level governance and cross-sectoral approaches to better inform decision-making and planning processes, including cost-benefit analyses

- ▀ **Mis-alignment of city-regional and national food-related policies** and guidelines (e.g. urban planning, nutrition, procurement)
- ▀ **Lack of acknowledgement and integration of the interconnectedness between water, energy and biodiversity policy frameworks with food security** (e.g. national determined contributions (NDCs) to climate change, water quality, green space planning)
- ▀ **Support local economies and production** through permissive legislation and quantifiable benchmarks for regional products by incentivising local production and processing, food markets, minimum health and sustainability standards in public food procurement, community supported agriculture and local certification schemes
- ▀ **Encourage healthy eating habits** (e.g., regulatory guidelines, food advertisement standards, financial incentives for healthy and sustainable food in public canteens, VAT schemes associated with health and production metrics)
- ▀ **Develop minimum standards for community-led food infrastructure and plan for food system logistics** (e.g., urban gardens, food-sharing, farmers markets, healthy and sustainable school food, food hubs, transportation, storage, and compost in both urban and rural areas)
- ▀ **Increase and protect capacity of small producers** and processors by developing legislation
- ▀ **Include indicators on food justice and community resilience** in policy monitoring (e.g., access, hunger, affordability)



GAPS: EU AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS

- ▀ **Differing use of terms and concepts, no standardised way to talk about sustainable food systems** (e.g. small-scale farmers, animal welfare, regenerative agriculture, industrial meat production)
- ▀ Food systems and food environment issues are not integrated into the political agenda; **lack of understanding and use of a systems approach to food-related policy**
- ▀ **Lack of capacities and capabilities of local authorities** to access EU funding to implement food-related policies and projects

OPPORTUNITIES: EU AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS

- ▀ Improve the availability, accessibility and affordability of culturally preferable and healthy diets by **encouraging policies, trade and market interventions as well as subsidies for food that is good for the people and the planet from production to processing to consumption to disposal**
- ▀ Legitimise and centralise the **needs of vulnerable and marginalised groups** (e.g. through supporting food redistribution, (free) universal healthy and sustainable school meals)
- ▀ Incorporate food-related topics into policies and initiatives related to **resilience, circular economy, urban greening, soil, health, biodiversity and climate change activities**

- Lack of integration of food into strategic policy frameworks** related to topics such as climate, water, energy, biodiversity, health and well-being, and urban greening. (E.g. water is needed to produce food and energy. Energy is needed to store and distribute food; and extract, convey, and treat water. Ecosystems underpin water, food, and energy security. Any limitation in inputs from one of these components disturbs the quantity, quality and access of all the others.) (EU Commission 2023)
- Disproportionate concentration of power in the agrifood chain and influence of private interests on what is produced and sold**
- Encourage legislation and initiatives that support small producers, processors and retailers** via access to resources such as land and finance, education and data
- Establish enabling environments for **science/ policy/ society interaction** through partnerships and research agendas that encourage inclusive participatory research and action
- Finance pilot projects** that include local stakeholders in the co-creation of interventions that target urban/ rural relationships as well as marginalised and vulnerable groups

ADDRESSING CITY-REGIONAL NEEDS AT LOCAL, REGIONAL, NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN LEVELS

Across scales – local, regional, national, European and global – there is a growing acknowledgement for the need to radically and holistically transform food systems. Transforming food systems helps to address health problems, food security and sovereignty, the climate and nature crises and to meet the needs and desires of urban and rural populations. Food-related policies, planning frameworks and initiatives seek to facilitate this transformation by including diverse stakeholders and making sustainable and healthy food more available, affordable and attractive by simplifying supply chains. However, many **actions are limited and fragmented in scope or concentrate on isolated concerns, resulting in the failure to create synergies between social, economic and environmental sustainability goals and often overlooking critical issues such as power dynamics or social justice concerns.**

Support is needed to connect sectors for **collaboration across policy areas** (e.g., climate, agriculture, procurement, health, environment, urban planning, education and social services) **in order to encourage co-benefits** and anticipate unintended trade-offs and consequences. Informing such governance and decision making processes with bottom-up and cross-sectoral knowledge and needs can foster **cooperation across scales and between multiple stakeholder groups and activate rural and urban linkages.**

Furthermore, **centralising the voices of socially and culturally diverse communities** is vital to **ensure inclusive policy making.** For example, prioritising the needs of small food businesses, particularly those led by women, migrants, refugees and artisans, could serve as a pathway for creating equitable and just food systems. Integrating **indicators that recognise this cross-sectoral activity and focus on food justice and community resilience** in policy monitoring frameworks is essential to understanding if the intended outcomes are being achieved.

Integrating food system priorities into urban, land-use and transportation planning, as well as, connecting water, biodiversity and climate strategies with food policies creates linkages between what and how food is produced, available and accessible, how food is packaged and distributed and how food waste is managed.



This provides additional opportunities to address the needs of food-deprived people and realise sustainability co-benefits for people and the planet - moving away from a linear system **towards a just, circular and nature-positive economy**. Taking this one step further, **development policies that are human and nature-centered** enable regions to focus on their competitive strengths and prioritises what their economies can do best – not necessarily what they should do or used to do.

While research funding from EU funding programmes, such as Horizon Europe and H2020, play an important role in creating an evidence and knowledge base for sustainable food systems, sustainable food initiatives and policies often struggle to provide clear evidence of their return on investment. Demonstrating the economic advantages and showcasing the social and environmental impacts justifies public expenditures in this regard, but is often a challenge. Continuing to invest in science/ policy/ society relationships to support the implementation and monitoring of food-related policies and ground them in local action is critical. Additionally, **funding to encourage social innovation and experimentation at the local level is imperative** for local and regional governments to see real transformation.



CO-BENEFITS



LINKAGES



INCLUSION



CONNECTIVITY

In summary, to ensure that the food system is sustainable, just and resilient, there needs to be **co-benefits** between economic, social and environmental objectives; **linkages** between planning and policies for urban, peri-urban, and rural areas; the **inclusion** of marginalised and vulnerable groups in the design, implementation and monitoring of policies, planning frameworks, and initiatives; and **connections** between food system actors and priorities with other sectors' initiatives and policies.

A comprehensive, robust, and binding legal framework for sustainable food systems (FSFS) is needed. FoodCLIC supports the Farm to Fork strategy and the Sustainable Food Systems Law to encourage the transition to a sustainable and just food system across the EU and its Member States.

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