



**Policy brief on Food Waste Reduction Targets**  
29.9.2023

# Strengthening Food Waste Reduction Targets: SISTERS Calls for a Comprehensive Action

## Purpose and Scope

As part of the activities listed in the Work Package 7 *Synergies with the European Commission Services and with selected and relevant projects* and in the Deliverable 5.1 *Dissemination & Communication Plan for Consumers* of the SISTERS project, the consortium partners deliver this policy brief as feedback to policy-makers regarding the EC Proposal for a directive amending Directive 2008/98/EC on waste ("Waste Framework Directive", "WFD"). While appreciating the recent revision of the Waste Framework Directive and the inclusion of new binding food waste (FW) prevention and reduction targets, which represent an important step towards effective food waste reduction, we believe that the EU must take further steps to match its sustainability ambitions, as phrased in the Green Deal and Farm to Fork Strategy communications. This policy brief, namely addressed to the European Parliament ahead of its reading of the EC proposal, outlines the urgency of instituting and consequently achieving comprehensive FW reduction goals of 50% throughout the entire supply chain, including at primary production level. Subsequently, working towards the achievement of such targets would entail harmonising measurement methodologies for all stages of the food supply chain, including the counting and scanning of food wasted before entering distribution stages. The result of such process would be an amendment of the Commission Delegated Decision (EU) 2019/1597 supplementing the WFD as regards a common methodology and minimum quality requirements for the uniform measurement of levels of food waste.

## Introduction

In late 2022, Eurostat confirmed that approximately 131 kilograms of FW were generated in 2020 per inhabitant. According to FUSIONS (2016), **around 88 million tonnes** of FW are generated each year in the European Union (EU), with an estimated **20% of the total food being** lost or wasted. The same study estimated (EU-28, 2012 situation) the following split of FW: 53% of FW would occur in households, 19% at the processing stage, 11% at the production stage, 12% in food services, and 5% in wholesale and retail.

Such proportions are the result of a scaling result performed by FUSIONS, which acknowledges a certain degree of uncertainty. More data and more accurate measurements of FW are thus still needed despite the 2020 baseline measurement having shed some new light on the figures, namely to increase attention to FW occurring at the primary production level and the early stages of the supply chain. It must be noted that the scale of pre-retail waste in Europe is substantial: it is estimated that 30% to 59% of Europe's total FW occurs at the pre-retail stage, and these numbers are likely to be underestimated.

By reducing food losses and waste (FLW) to help achieve Sustainable Development Goals, EU Member States would:

- support the fight against climate change (FW alone generates 8-10% of global greenhouse gas emissions (UNEP Food Waste Index 2021))
- save nutritious food for redistribution to those in need, helping to eradicate hunger and malnutrition – and thus contribute to food security
- save money for farmers, companies and households

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as “a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity”. Amongst those objectives, **SDG 12.3** aims to “**halve per capita global FW at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses.**”

## EU policies and actions

The 12.3 SDG objective to address FLW issues has been taken on board by strategic communications from European Commission (EC), starting with its 2018 Bioeconomy Strategy. This political pledge to act was further recalled in later key communications: the European Green Deal (EGD) in December 2019 and, more specifically, the Farm to Fork (F2F) Strategy published in May 2020. An action point from the F2F Strategy (already hinted in the new Circular Economy Action Plan published in March 2020) underlines the Commission's will to propose a new revision of the **Waste Framework Directive** (WFD, Directive 2008/98/EC) and the introduction of FW reduction targets.

This Directive already establishes an annual reporting obligation on FW generation as of reference year 2020 (data collection is regulated by the Delegated Decision and the Implementing Decision on FW). As a matter of fact, the first reference year for obligatory reporting is 2020 to be reported before 30 June 2022. Collection of FW data on a voluntary basis had already started through Eurostat in 2020 (reference year 2018), while Eurostat and the Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE) of the European Commission have also called for FW data in 2021 (for reference year 2019).

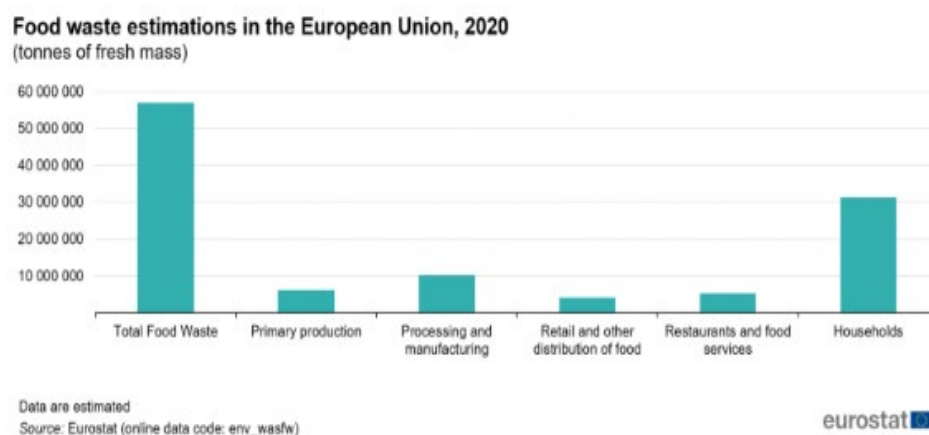


Figure 1 - FW estimations in the EU (2020). Source: Eurostat (env\_wasfw).

The 2018 [revision](#) of the Waste Framework Directive had indeed already laid down some specific obligations for Member States (MS) as regards FW prevention (i.e., the adoption of national FW prevention programmes, and monitoring and reporting on FW amounts). Ahead of the publication of its latest proposal for a revision of the WFD, the EC commissioned an impact assessment on the introduction of Member States' (MSs) FW reduction targets. As a result, in July 2023 the EC published its proposal to set new legally binding targets for MSs to reduce FW.

2030 food waste reduction target on:	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4 (voluntary)
primary production	n/a	n/a	10%	n/a
processing and manufacturing	10%	10%	25%	n/a
retail and consumption	15%	30%	50%	voluntary target 50%

*Table 1 - EC proposed options of reduction targets. Source: European Commission [Staff Working document – Executive Summary of the Impact Assessment Report, 2023](#).*

On 5th July 2023, the EC has published a proposal to revise the Waste Framework Directive (Directive 2008/98/EC), together with several reports including an Inception Impact Assessment. The objectives of the revision were to limit waste generation, increase re-use, and increase cost-efficient preparing for re-use and quality recycling, including for waste oils and textiles. In particular, in its new proposal (art. 9a), the EC has examined policy options to set legally binding EU-level targets for food waste reduction, as called for by the EU Farm to Fork Strategy, and has defined the EC preferred option, Option 2 (see Table 1).

In acknowledgment of the alarming levels of FW in the European Union, with approximately 131 kilograms per inhabitant generated in 2020 (as confirmed by [Eurostat in late 2022](#)), the SISTERS Project advocates for a more ambitious and comprehensive approach to tackle this pressing issue. These targets are in alignment with international commitments, particularly SDG 12.3, and are essential to meeting the EU's climate objectives, as outlined in the Farm to Fork Strategy. Additionally, we stress the need for [harmonised measurement methodologies](#), the [incorporation of primary production in reduction targets](#), and the [alignment of these objectives with other upcoming legislative initiatives](#), in particular the [Legislative Framework for Sustainable Food Systems](#).

## A holistic request

While welcoming the EC Proposal for a directive amending the Waste Framework Directive, SISTERS urges EU policy makers to take this commitment further by [instituting and achieving reduction goals of 50% throughout the entire supply chain](#), from primary production to consumption. These targets align with international commitments, particularly SDG 12.3, and are crucial for achieving the climate objectives of the Farm to Fork Strategy. Raising the targets for reducing food waste would present Member States with a legally binding commitment to reduce food waste. Furthermore, in order to best reflect the efforts already achieved by frontrunning EU MSs on food waste prevention and reduction, [considering setting prevention targets](#) expressed as a maximum of

"kg/capita" per year can ensure fairness and equity for all EU MSs, regardless of the current level of reduction achieved by each of them.

A key policy approach towards sustainable food systems also means raising consumers', food business operators (FBOs) and policymakers' awareness [concerning](#) the true cost of food (including its social, health and environmental impacts), within unsustainable food systems, and integrate FW reduction objectives into any piece of legislation or policy that aims at building sustainable food systems. In order to put in place the effective conditions of food waste prevention (and thus, consequently, its reduction), considering the introduction of reward mechanisms for FW reduction front-runners and, eventually, coercive mechanisms penalizing waste producers ('polluter pays' schemes) and very slow performers should envisaged.

SISTERS believes that [collecting data on food waste and monitoring progress](#) can contribute to initiatives aimed to reduce FW. Mandatory reporting of both public and private sectors' FW can result in the production of comparable data across the food supply chain and would encourage action to address the issue more accurately and effectively. This can furthermore enhance the comparability of reported data on FW levels among MSs and across sectors. It is thus imperative that the EU promotes the use of scientifically evaluated measurement methodologies.

SISTERS is a [consortium of 18 EU stakeholders](#), with different background and expertise. We call for [consistent measurement methodologies](#), that can apply to diverse actors involved in the food value chain.

[The European Commission's commitment to publishing legally binding FW reduction targets has been very welcomed by the SISTERS partners. In spite of this, however, we call on the EU Parliament to take a step further during its reading of the proposal and increase the reduction target levels to match the initial ambitions of the European Commission based on international commitments \(SDG 12.3\), i.e., by ensuring that comprehensive and ambitious FW reduction targets of 50% are set for the whole food supply chain, from farm to fork. Only in this way can this multifaceted challenge be effectively addressed and fathomed.](#)

## Conclusions

Food loss and waste (FLW) is an issue of importance to global food security and good environmental governance. It is directly linked to environmental concerns facing the lack of comprehensive data on food waste at European (EU) level, the European Commission has for some time started a process to assess what is the impact of FLW and what are the best actions to reduce it. Around 8-10% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are associated with food that is not consumed (UNEP, 2021). Reducing food waste (FW) at retail, food service and household level can provide multi-faceted benefits for both people and the planet. However, the true scale of food waste and its impacts have not been well understood until now.

Reducing FW is becoming a factor of growing importance to improve the total performances of the modern retail sector since FW is a critical issue affecting the efficiency of business operations. Retailers are called to a greater effort to improve their operations sustainability, including the prevention and management of FW. In the EU, about 5% of the total food waste is generated at the retail level, while this value raises to 13% in the United States. Retailers are regarded as major stakeholders to manage the FW issue, as their strategies exert an influence on consumer preferences and, at the same time, on the upstream actors of the supply chain.

Therefore, the SISTERS Project urges the European Parliament to take bold and comprehensive action to address the pressing issue of FW. The establishment of targets that demand a 50% reduction throughout the entire supply chain, the inclusion of primary production, the adoption of uniform measurement methodologies, and alignment with other initiatives are critical steps toward building a more sustainable and responsible food system. By embracing these recommendations, the EU can demonstrate its unwavering commitment to achieving international sustainability goals and fulfilling the promises of the F2F.

For a sustainable future and a responsible food system, we implore the European Parliament to lead the way in addressing the urgent matter of FW by implementing the recommendations put forth by the SISTERS Project. The establishment of targets demanding a 50% reduction in food waste across the entire supply chain is a crucial and ambitious step towards achieving a more sustainable and responsible food system.

Furthermore, the inclusion of primary production in these targets acknowledges the importance of addressing waste at its roots and promotes a holistic approach to tackling the issue. By adopting uniform measurement methodologies, the EU Parliament can ensure accurate and consistent monitoring of food waste reduction efforts, allowing for effective evaluation and comparison of progress made by different stakeholders.

Moreover, the alignment of the EU Parliament's actions with other initiatives, both within the EU and on an international level, will contribute to a coordinated and impactful global effort in combating food waste. By demonstrating its commitment to achieving international sustainability goals and fulfilling the promises of the F2F, the EU can serve as a role model for other regions and inspire further action on this critical issue.

In conclusion, the SISTERS Project emphasizes the urgency of addressing food waste and calls upon the EU Parliament to take bold and comprehensive action. By embracing the recommendations outlined, the EU can lead the way towards a sustainable future and a responsible food system. The time for action is now, and by taking decisive steps, the EU Parliament can set a new standard for food waste reduction and pave the way for a more environmentally conscious and socially responsible future.

## About SISTERS

The **SISTERS** project (granted under the topic LC-GD-6-1-2020 – Subtopic E. [2021] Reducing FLW at every stage of the food chain including consumption, while also avoiding unsustainable packaging (IA) of the H2020 Green Deal call) aims to contribute to the call topics by proposing a set of systemic innovations addressed to reduce FLW generated at every stage of the Food Value Chain in Europe, namely, production, processing, marketing (retailing/wholesaling), consumption, and logistics.

The partners are developing tools and technologies, such as ICT-based applications, to generate innovative solutions for monitoring and predicting food demand within the dynamic food supply chain, in collaboration with farmers and private sector stakeholders. These innovations are inclusive and have measurable impacts. Moreover, thanks to these tools, the SISTERS project will improve education and awareness at all levels, including better communication through school programs, social and traditional media, and involvement of stakeholders. As partners of the SISTERS project, we want to bridge the gap between consumers and primary production by aligning consumers' desires and needs with the challenges of primary production.

Together with other EU funded projects, SISTERS is also creating a set of policy recommendations to help the EU institutions integrate FW reduction into overarching policies, such as those addressing food packaging and the Sustainable Food Systems legislative framework, to create a holistic and effective approach to reducing FW.

For further information about the project, please do not hesitate to visit our [website](#), our social media profiles ([Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#)), or to contact [Carolina Peñalva Lapuente](#) or [Federica Grassi](#).



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