



## SUMMARY REPORT

### MEETING OF THE EXPERT GROUP ON FOOD LOSSES AND FOOD WASTE

#### DG HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY (SANTE)

*On-site in Brussels, on-line via Interactio*

*7 March 2023*

**Chair:** Ms Alexandra Nikolakopoulou, DG SANTE

**Member States represented:** AT, BE, BG, HR, CY, DE, DK, EE, FI, FR, EL, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, NL, PL, PT, RO, SI, SK, ES, SE

**Observers:** NO

#### 1. Introduction

The Chair presented the agenda of the meeting and informed the group about a similar meeting with members of the EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste and of the Advisory Group on Sustainability of Food Systems to be held on 13 March.

#### 2. New EU food waste data and the first reporting exercise by Member States according to the common EU food waste measurement methodology, presentation by Eurostat ([PDF](#))

The Commission provided information about the first EU-wide monitoring of food waste levels (data gathering, validation and publication process) and invited participants to share observations concerning the findings in each Member State and lessons learned.

**BE** observed significant levels of inedible food waste in the food processing sector, linked to products produced for export. Collecting data for households was challenging in BE, which used to employ diary studies, but now estimates food waste amounts based on mixed municipal waste, due to unreliable data collection (consumers' own record keeping may influence amounts of food waste declared).

**PT** pointed out that the COVID-19 pandemic led to changes in consumption patterns. Due to related closures in the HORECA sector, PT was forced to readjust the measurement methodology.

**FR** found it most difficult to measure food waste in primary production, in particular post-harvest waste, and was not able to cover all agricultural sectors, nor clearly differentiate the waste related to food for human consumption from that related to animal feed. In the case of households, they often consider compost as a prevention measure, for instance, rather than food waste. For collective catering, it was

difficult to identify the best actor for provision of data on food waste (e.g., the catering establishment, the company managing the establishment, the waste collector).

**NL** inquired whether Eurostat is considering the quality of primary data in view of the different methodologies applied by countries and whether the interpretation of 2020 data takes into account the impacts of COVID-19. Some countries (**DE, NO, IE**) suggested that a more detailed report be published, describing the methodologies employed by each country. **SE** believes that the Eurostat guidance is not used in the same manner across countries and reported ongoing work on improving data gaps in the wholesale sector, which may have affected the 2020 data.

**IT** reported difficulties with data collection in the primary production sector. Italy carried out questionnaire-based household surveys, considering diaries too burdensome for consumers. A project monitoring food waste in school canteens using a visual system and an app is currently starting.

**SE** highlighted that reporting on fresh mass is difficult and adds uncertainty to the results, also due to different weather conditions (e.g., temperature). **NO** highlighted that food waste is not measured in terms of fresh mass and also raised concerns about reliability of such data, and whether this should remain an obligation.

**NO** has separate collection in most municipalities and considers data collected for households to be representative. As regards primary production, **NO** inquired as to how countries distinguish between food losses and food waste (e.g. related to animal diseases), how they differentiate between food waste from this sector and the processing sector, and expressed interest in exchanging information with other countries on how to measure food waste in fisheries.

In **ES**, three institutions are responsible for collecting data and a number of surveys were carried out. In particular, there were issues with collecting data from primary production, which are often over-estimated.

**IE** noted that food waste from households is higher in **IE** as compared to other countries and welcomed further exchange of information on measurement methodologies and learn from best practice.

**LV** explained that food waste measurement was a very complicated exercise, all types of data sources were utilised, and the most difficult sector was primary production (both data collection and interpretation). **LV** would like to see a clearer definition of scope (also requested by **NO**) and methodology and raised the need for more guidance on fresh mass. Household questionnaires were very useful and led to a better understanding of consumption patterns. **LV** reported on an on-going LIFE project to improve waste statistics in the country.

**The Commission** noted the advantages and disadvantages of linking food waste to the general waste statistics. While not always adapted to the needs of countries and/or existing systems, certain waste codes have been collected by Eurostat since 2010, allowing cross-comparability of data over time and giving a solid foundation for further work to improve food waste data. The Commission recognised the need to further exchange information between Member States on methodologies and will coordinate with Eurostat to ensure the best forum for such exchanges. For the fresh mass coefficients, information from countries on the estimation of the potential margin of error would be useful. Eurostat will publish new guidance following this first reporting exercise carried out in 2022.

### **3. Discussion with Member States on the first monitoring results and their implication for food waste prevention and the future legislative proposal setting EU wide food waste reduction targets**

**The Commission** presented a state of play of the legislative proposal, explained the different policy options considered in the ongoing preparation of the impact assessment and their modelling using the MAGNET approach. The Commission welcomed countries' feedback on the modelling of the different target levels and also on their progress towards SDG Target 12.3.

**NO** asked whether there will be changes to the Official Controls Regulation, to avoid non-EU compliant surplus food from cruise ships from going to waste and to allow companies to donate these products to food banks.

**NL** asked if it was possible to have a different target for retail and consumption versus SDG Target 12.3 and inquired about the way in which the modelling influenced the development of policy options. **BE** suggested difficulties in communicating about the future EU and global SDG targets if these are not aligned. The **Commission** clarified that a distinction should be made between EU legally binding targets, which would trigger consequences in case of non-compliance, and political commitments to SDG Target 12.3. The legislative proposal setting EU-wide food waste reduction targets needs to be evidence-based both in terms of impacts and feasibility. The Commission explained that the impact assessment is ongoing and encouraged countries to contribute by sharing their views in the light of the latest measurement exercise.

Some countries (**BE, FI, AT, HU**) asked for the targets to recognise the work of early achievers, allowing baselines earlier than 2020 to be set. Others raised concerns about establishing the same target for all Member States, and not taking into account their different levels of development and specificities (**HR, LV**). **DE** inquired whether 2015 should be used as a baseline to align with global reporting for SDG Target 12.3. The **Commission** explained that the impact assessment does not take into account earlier baselines, but the legislative proposal could allow application of an earlier baseline for target setting, if/where countries can provide credible data to document such earlier baselines.

**BE** suggested that presenting the food waste reduction target as a percentage rather than in absolute amounts (kg per capita) seems reasonable. **HR** proposed considering defining reduction targets for households expressed in kg/capita and, in other parts of the food chain, as percentage reduction, for instance, compared with the total food produced or distributed. The **Commission** explained that setting the same target (expressed as percentage reduction) allows Member States to tailor their efforts to their national situations.

**SI** and **BE** asked whether the targets would apply to total food waste (including inedible fractions of food that are discarded) or only for the edible part of food. **AT** and **HR** highlighted inherent limitations in reducing waste of the inedible fraction of food at consumption level, which were acknowledged by the Commission. JRC estimates that 30% of the total food waste generated at household level relates to edible fractions of food. **BE** pointed out the need to reduce the amounts of food that people buy and throw away, highlighting that the future target would not necessarily reduce discarding the inedible fraction of food (as this is difficult to avoid). The **Commission** explained that monitoring progress towards the SDG Target 12.3 is also based on measurement of total food waste (including inedible fractions of food) and, in developing the EU measurement methodology, the decision to measure total food waste was made,

together with Member States, taking into account difficulties in defining and quantifying the edible/inedible fractions of food.

**LV** inquired as to how the Commission would monitor the impact of target-setting on food waste reduction.

**PT** advocated setting one target across the food supply chain, rather than on selected stages only, focusing on reducing waste of edible food as well as adapting the EU measurement methodology to reflect such an approach. **LV** was also in favour of setting one target covering the whole food supply chain. **NO** would provide the Commission with further comments on the issue of food waste from inedible/edible fractions food in future.

The **Commission** highlighted the difficulties in defining edible/inedible fractions of food, and hence has not considered setting a target for a specific fraction. Whilst it does not rule out this possibility in the future, the current focus is on streamlining/finetuning the current methodology.

**PT** and **ES** raised concerns about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the 2020 baseline. **HR** observed that COVID-19 caused different market disruptions for food business operators. The **Commission** commented that whilst 2020 was marked by the pandemic, Eurostat has not seen related impacts on municipal waste.

**HR** expressed concerns about setting targets without time series data. **HR** has carried out a series of measurement exercises and pointed out that data collected prior to 2020 are difficult to compare as different food waste measurement methodologies were utilised. **HR** also reported quality data available regarding donated food and referred to a reduction in food donation linked to improved efficiencies in the food supply chain.

**FI** also echoed the concerns regarding reliability and comparability of data available; **FI** is still developing measurement methods and reported data may change in the coming years. **FI** also suggested consideration of alternative measures such as setting non-binding targets. **FI** has introduced obligations in legislation, for instance, requiring food business operators to make available surplus food for redistribution and to keep records of food waste amounts generated in business operations. The **Commission** acknowledged the limitations imposed by the lack of data series and welcomed countries' views as to the level of food waste reduction that would be considered achievable.

The Commission closed the meeting by informing Member States about upcoming grants under the Single Market Programme, aiming to further support Member States in improving measurement of food waste.