

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The "Europe and Food" report presents an assessment of food systems in the European Union (EU) in terms of nutritional challenges, agriculture, food loss and food waste. The analysis covers the EU Member States as well as the United Kingdom. The analysis has generated eight major findings.

1. Alarming trends in nutrition

All EU countries present high levels of overweight and obesity, both among adults and children, as well as insufficient levels of physical activity. Southern European countries and the UK have the highest prevalence of overweight in children and adolescents. In all the countries analysed, adult overweight exceeds 50% of the population. These trends are concerning as a high Body Mass Index and a lack of physical activity are risk factors for the development of non-communicable diseases (NCD) thus burdening health systems and economic development and hindering the well-being of large parts of the population.

2. The potential of healthy and sustainable diets is still to be unleashed

Dietary guidelines are published in all EU countries, but not all of them are updated at the same rate. Only in a few cases are sustainability-related concerns integrated into dietary recommendations, despite the fact that the potential for improving both planetary and human health through diets has been widely studied and reported.

3. The EU faces a nutrition transition towards a Western diet

In the EU, nutrition seems to be transitioning towards a common westernisation of diets. Westernised diets are characterised by a high protein, saturated fat, refined grain, sugar, alcohol, salt and corn-derived fructose syrup content, with an associated reduced consumption of fruit and vegetables. In terms of diet composition, the EU consumes much more sodium than is physiologically necessary. All countries fall within the second quartile or below, with consumption of sodium ranging from 3g/day in Denmark and the Netherlands to 4g/day in all the other EU countries. Lower sodium intake can reduce the burden of NCD morbidity and mortality.

4. At the forefront of global climate action

Agriculture is responsible for about 10% of total greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) in the EU. Livestock rearing contributes to 61% of total GHG emissions from EU agriculture, while crop cultivation produces the remaining 39% (excluding GHG emissions from land use change). The European Green Deal is an ambitious package of measures intended to enable the EU to be the world's first climate-neutral continent by 2050 and decouple economic growth from the use of resources. The post-2020 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) will attempt to place a greater emphasis on the environment and climate. Key enablers for the progress of EU agriculture towards the goals of the 2030 Agenda are also education, training, science, technology, research, innovation and digitisation.

5. Soil degradation is a major area of concern

The degradation of agricultural soils is a crucial issue especially in southern European countries, which are characterised by a soil carbon content, as a percentage of weight, below the critical 1.5% threshold. The soil of 17 out of the 28 countries that were investigated showed soil carbon content below this threshold. Agriculture is a major cause of depletion of the soil carbon content which leads in turn to the degradation of soil structure and consequent increases in soil erosion, nutrient leaching and gaseous emissions. The EU has the greatest proportion of organically farmed agricultural land out of its total area of agricultural land than all of the regions analysed in the FSI 2018. The area taken up by organic farming has increased by 70% in the last ten years and is still increasing.

6. Agriculture lacks youth

Participation of young people (under 35) in farming is generally low in the countries that were analysed, accounting for an average of about 5% of the young population. Romania and Bulgaria are the only two countries with rates higher than 10%. All the other countries are below 10%. The average age of EU farmers is 53. Women account for about 50% of the farming population on average.

7. Food waste is still high

Over 20% of the food produced in the EU is wasted. Every EU citizen generates around 58 kg of food waste per year on average, with the highest level registered in Belgium (87 kg per capita) and the lowest one in Cyprus (36 kg per capita). Food losses account for about 3% of total food production.

	FSI	FOOD LOSS AND WASTE	FOOD LOSS	END-USER WASTE	SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE	WATER	LAND	AIR	NUTRITIONAL CHALLENGES	LIFE QUALITY	LIFE EXPECTANCY	DIETARY PATTERNS
Austria	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Belgium	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Bulgaria	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Croatia	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Cyprus	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Czech Republic	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Denmark	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Estonia	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Finland	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
France	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Germany	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Greece	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Hungary	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Ireland	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Italy	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Latvia	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Lithuania	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Luxembourg	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Malta	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Netherlands	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Poland	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Portugal	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Romania	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Slovakia	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Slovenia	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Spain	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Sweden	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
United Kingdom	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

● Very High ● High ● Medium ● Low

8. Policy responses to food loss and waste are taking place at regional and national levels

Three important steps have been achieved by the EU in the last few years. Firstly, the issuing of guidelines on food donations, secondly, new guidelines for feed use of food no longer intended for human consumption and finally a new common methodology starting in 2020 for measuring food loss and waste (FLW). At national level, noteworthy policy responses can be observed in France and Italy. The former was the first country in the world to publish a national law against FLW in 2016. The latter has issued new legislation to facilitate food donations by easing bureaucratic burden that hinders them, relaxing food safety requirements and regulations around labelling and food safety, and offering tax incentives (i.e., waste tax deductions). Digital tools are offering more and more options to citizens to enable more sustainable lifestyles and reduce the level of food waste. Finally, several cities in Europe are launching significant initiatives to tackle the paradoxes of the food supply chain and set up a true circular economy for food.