POLICY BRIEF

STRENGTHENING FOOD SECURITY AND FOOD SYSTEMS RESILIENCE THROUGH DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND MANAGEMENT

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- **Reducing disaster-related supply chain disruptions, including losses in food production and keeping food access stable,**
- **supporting vulnerable groups in adapting to disaster and disruptions,**
- **ensuring equitable recovery,**
- **promoting food systems that support both resilience and nutrition.**

ABOUT THIS POLICY BRIEF

When disasters occur—such as floods, extreme heat, cyberattacks, or geopolitical disruptions—essential services and supply chains can be interrupted: power may fail, transport systems can break down, and supermarkets and food banks may temporarily close. At the same time, increasing climate change-related hazards, including more frequent and severe heatwaves and flooding, are intensifying these risks. These developments raise a critical question: **How can food access be secured during emergencies, and how can systems be designed in advance to ensure fair and continuous distribution?**

This policy brief examines the link between food security and disaster risk reduction and management (DRR/DRM) in Europe, focusing on how **food access is maintained** during emergencies and what this reveals about the **preparedness of current food systems**. It argues that food should be systematically integrated into DRR/DRM planning and investment frameworks, while also emphasising that the goal is not to build parallel emergency food systems. Instead, priority should be given to strengthening the resilience, equity, and adaptability of existing food systems so they can continue to function under stress. By doing so, the brief aims to inform policymakers and support more integrated approaches that ensure equitable and reliable food access during emergencies.

A well-designed food system that is inclusive, adaptable, and robust can better withstand and respond to crises. **Accordingly, policy efforts and investments should prioritise embedding food considerations within DRR/DRM strategies while strengthening the capacity of food systems to absorb, adapt to, and recover from disruptions**. This includes supporting more inclusive governance, reinforcing critical infrastructure and logistics, and ensuring that all populations maintain access to adequate and nutritious food under both normal and emergency conditions.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

Disasters can disrupt food production, limit access to essential resources and disproportionately affect the most vulnerable communities. Effective policy preparation for disaster risk management must therefore focus on increasing the resilience of food (supply) systems and prioritising people's immediate needs while strengthening their ability to recover and adapt over time. The following recommendations are for policy and decision makers at the European, national, regional and local levels. They are guided by four core objectives:

1. **Reducing disaster-related supply chain disruptions, including losses in food production and keeping food access stable,**
2. **supporting vulnerable groups in adapting to disaster and disruptions,**
3. **ensuring equitable recovery, and**
4. **promoting food systems that support both resilience and nutrition.**

Together, these objectives point to the need to secure more resilient and diverse food production systems, improve efficiency in the use of land and food resources and apply the right to food principle.

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RIGHT TO FOOD AND FOOD SECURITY

The right to food is a legally recognised human right grounded in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). It guarantees that every person must have regular, permanent, and unrestricted access - through their own means or social protection - to adequate, safe, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food. States have binding obligations to respect, protect, and fulfill this right, ensuring that individuals can feed themselves in dignity and have access to remedies when their rights are violated[1,2].

In contrast, food security is a condition, not a legal entitlement. The HLPE (2020) defines food security through six interlinked dimensions:

1. ***Availability** — sufficient food supply;*
2. ***Access** — economic and physical ability to obtain food;*
3. ***Utilisation** — safe, nutritious diets and adequate health conditions;*
4. ***Stability** — reliability of availability, access, and utilisation over time;*
5. ***Agency** — people's ability to make choices about what they eat and how food systems are governed;*
6. ***Sustainability** — long-term environmental, social, and economic viability of food systems.*

While food security describes outcomes, the right to food establishes accountability and enforceable obligations. A population may be food-secure without having legal recourse if access is denied. Rights-based approaches promoted by Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) emphasise that durable food security is strongest when anchored in the human right to adequate food[3].

Policy recommendations:

1. Align disaster risk reduction and management across governmental levels

- Ensure coherent and operational alignment of disaster risk reduction and management (DRR/DRM) frameworks across European, national, regional, local/district levels, enabling effective synchronisation during crises.
- Integrate food system resilience as a binding priority within national disaster risk reduction and management (DRR/DRM) frameworks to prioritise short supply chain management, reinforce food self-sufficiency and improve nutrition before, during and after crises.
- Strengthen multi-sectoral coordination across all relevant levels of governance and between public departments dealing with emergency management, food and agriculture policy, procurement, health services, social security and protection and key food-system-actors (including farmers, cooperatives, and food small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), supermarkets, public catering, NGOs, logistics providers).

2. Embed food system resilience measures in climate and disaster risk reduction strategies

- Prioritise climate-resilient, agroecological production as a risk reduction strategy, backed by targeted incentives and public investment to strengthen soil health, ecosystem resilience and local and regional food systems.
- Develop and actively support infrastructure for urban/peri-urban farming and decentralised food storage, processing and distribution at neighbourhood level, strengthening short and regional supply chains to improve supply continuity.
- Strengthen local knowledge, skills, and inclusive participation in food system planning and disaster risk reduction and management (DRR/DRM), including preparedness, response, and recovery processes.
- Improve access to resources and social protection mechanisms for vulnerable households to enhance their ability to cope during emergencies.
- Increase investment in public and charitable food services—such as canteens and school meal programmes —and ensure these essential services are reliably maintained during emergencies.

3. Integrate food systems priorities into disaster risk management (DRM) response systems

- Strengthen food assistance protocols within disaster risk management (DRM) systems to enable timely and equitable emergency response.
- Ensure formal representation of local communities, informal networks, and key food system actors (including farmers, cooperatives, and food SMEs) in DRM governance and decision-making processes, to promote equitable access and strengthen ownership of response and responsibility.
- Develop inclusive early warning and communication systems that ensure timely, accessible information reaches all communities, especially vulnerable groups.

4. Promote innovation, data, and cross-sector research for food systems and disaster risk management

- Support the establishment of local food councils and foster partnerships between governments, NGOs, academia and the private sector to drive innovation and knowledge sharing.
- Invest in comprehensive food system mapping and territorial production assessments, including closed environment agriculture (CEA), to support coordinated strategies for storage, distribution, and supply continuity for enhanced food security and crisis preparedness.

WHAT IS AT STAKE FOR COMMUNITIES IN EUROPE?

Europe's food systems are more fragile than they appear. They are exposed to disruptions in global supply chains, climate and ecosystem impacts, soil degradation, water shortages and price spikes resulting from market speculation and concentration, as well as fossil energy dependence. While the EU is a major agricultural producer, it remains structurally dependent on global markets. Several key food and agricultural categories (e.g. fruit and vegetables, protein crops, feed materials, fertiliser) show import-dependency levels ranging from 20% to over 70%[4]. In 2023 more than 30 million Europeans were unable to afford a quality meal every second day[5]. At the same time, Europe is heating faster than any other continent. Extreme weather events occur more frequently: the 2022 drought, identified by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre as one of the most severe in recent decades, slashed EU maize yields by nearly 30%[6]. Recent shocks - from the COVID-19 pandemic to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and escalating geopolitical tensions in West Asia - have shown how quickly disturbances in one place or sector can ripple across borders and disrupt interconnected supply chains, highlighting the need to better anticipate and manage transboundary and emerging risks.

Gaps in Emergency Food System Preparedness in Europe

Current disaster risk reduction and management in Europe reveals important gaps in how food access is organised during emergencies[7]. In practice, food distribution is either centralised (leaving it exposed to large scale attacks and failure) or not fully integrated into formal disaster management systems. Community supported systems and actors (such as NGOs and community networks), that are overlooked in formal planning, provide a mix of informal and decentralised services, which play a critical but only partially connected role in emergency response. Furthermore, although vulnerable groups—including older people, migrants, refugees, people with disabilities, and those in precarious situations—are formally recognised in policy, food provision strategies are not always tailored to their needs.

These pressures are compounded by structural factors such as rising energy costs, global market dynamics, and demographic change[8]. As a result, food systems are under increasing strain, making it essential to strengthen their capacity to withstand and recover from shocks while ensuring affordable, healthy, and equal access to food for all. These shortcomings in emergency food access are not isolated failures but indicators of weak resilience and structural inefficiencies within current policy structures.

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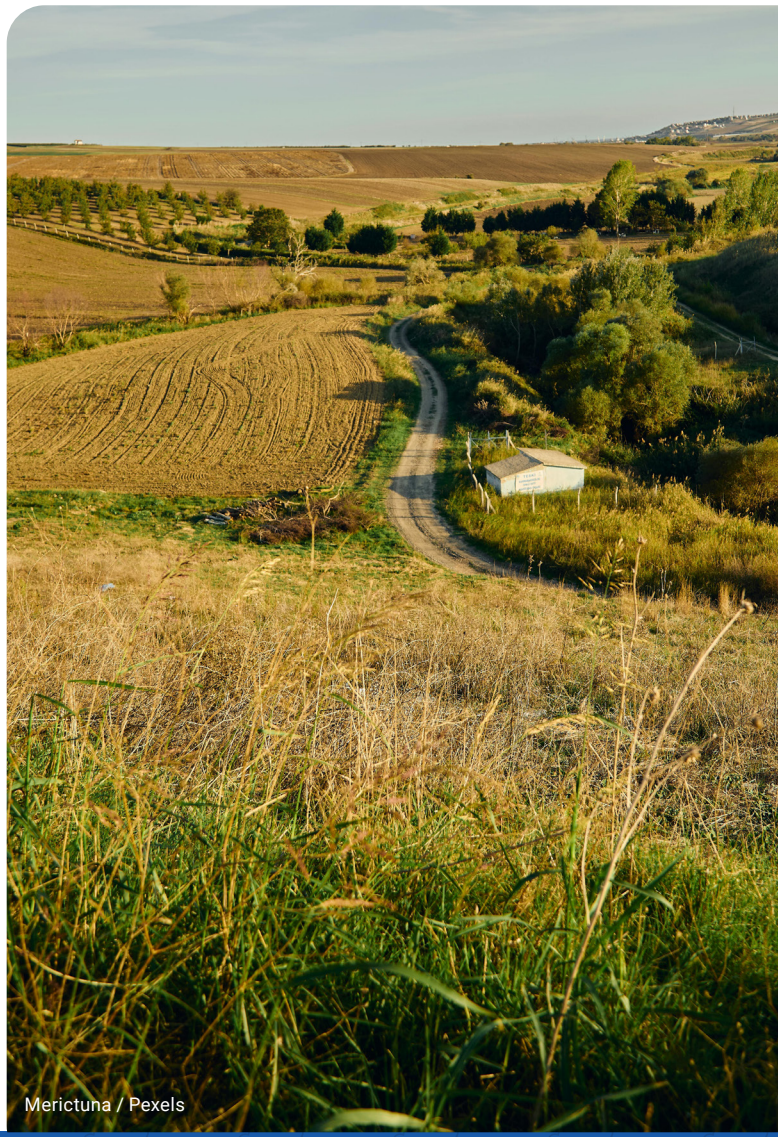
CURRENT EU POLICY LANDSCAPE ON FOOD SECURITY AND CRISIS PREPAREDNESS

The European Union increasingly recognises the need to anticipate and manage risks to food systems in times of crisis within frameworks like the European Commission's Vision for Agriculture and Food[9], the Farm to Fork Strategy[10], the Common Agricultural Policy[11] and the Food 2030 policy framework[12].

The Contingency Plan for Ensuring Food Supply and Food Security in Times of Crisis (2021)[13], developed in the wake of COVID-19, sets out a coordinated EU approach to crisis preparedness, including the creation of the European Food Security Crisis Preparedness and Response Mechanism (EFSCM)[14] to monitor risks, exchange information and support joint responses across the food supply chain. This plan underlines the importance of safeguarding availability, accessibility and affordability of food while maintaining the functioning of the single market, keeping trade flows open and supporting vulnerable actors along the chain. These instruments also echo international agendas on resilience and disaster risk reduction, such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction[15], by stressing the need to identify systemic vulnerabilities, diversify supply sources, and integrate food security into wider climate, health, energy and transport policies.

In parallel, EU climate-adaptation and environmental frameworks increasingly recognise that food-system resilience also depends on the ecological foundations of production. Instruments such as the EU Soil Strategy for 2030[16], the proposed Soil Monitoring Law[17], the EU Climate Adaptation Strategy[18] and the Nature Restoration Agenda[19] emphasise the need to maintain soil health, water retention capacity and ecosystem functioning as buffers against climate-related shocks.

Yet despite this broad set of frameworks, many remain either isolated, non-binding, or both. Therefore, they rely on voluntary coordination, soft-law guidance and ad-hoc measures, rather than providing enforceable obligations for Member States or private stakeholders. This limits the ability to ensure consistent implementation, particularly where national resources, political priorities or administrative capacities differ, creating a significant risk of fragmented preparedness and uneven protection of food security during crises. As a result, these frameworks and initiatives point to—rather than fully resolve—the need to embed food security and food system resilience more firmly into disaster risk reduction and management and civil protection arrangements at multiple governance levels, from the EU down to regions and municipalities.



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VOICES FROM THE FRONTLINES

City-region collaborators in the FoodCLIC project describe how food security, when disasters occur, depends less on the availability of food itself and more on how well systems are organised, coordinated and governed before and during crises. They also describe the need to fundamentally shift our food system towards more resilient production and equitable distribution.

In Wrocław (Poland), which is testing the FoodCLIC process[19], they are taking concrete steps to strengthen disaster risk management and resilience of their food system. A wide range of institutions and organisations contribute to food access —including municipal services, supermarkets, public catering systems, NGOs, and community initiatives. However, these actors often operate in parallel rather than as part of an integrated emergency food system, with limited data sharing, unclear responsibilities, and uneven inclusion in formal disaster risk management. This reflects broader shortcomings in preparedness approaches, which tend to prioritise emergency response over prevention and coordination across sectors, including weak integration with related policy areas such as social protection.

In Berlin (Germany), the Berlin Food Policy Council[20] (Ernährungsrat Berlin), a citizens-led assembly for fair access to sustainable food and FoodCLIC partner, has a public food policy but lacks a food-focused policy response in the context of their emergency preparedness and crisis response planning. The Berlin Food Policy Council calls for designing food systems that are inherently more resilient and equitable. Such systems would be better able to adapt and continue functioning during emergencies or disruptions, reducing the need for parallel emergency structures and strengthening everyday food security as the foundation for crisis preparedness.


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Wrocław and Berlin both highlight persistent governance gaps that limit their ability to prepare for and manage disruptions in the food system and food related crises. These include unclear coordination across governance levels, limited mapping of food system actors and flows, and underdeveloped planning for storage, distribution and continuity of supply. More systematic mapping would also help recognise the role of informal food environments and support a shift towards more localised and diversified production and distribution systems. Food is still not consistently recognised as a core element of emergency planning, and preparedness often focuses narrowly on staple goods such as water and grains, with limited attention to nutrition, fresh food or the needs of vulnerable groups. Experiences during COVID-19 and energy disruptions illustrate how these gaps translate into uneven access during crises. The duration and recovery phase of crises vary significantly, underscoring the need to ensure not only immediate food availability but also sustained access to fresh and nutritious food throughout the entire recovery period.

At the same time, the cities' cases demonstrate that many of the building blocks for more resilient food systems already exist. The challenge is not to create entirely new structures but to connect and mobilise existing capacities through clearer multi-level governance mechanisms, systematic coordination across sectors, and defined roles for food actors into disaster risk reduction and management. Recognising food systems as critical infrastructure—on par with energy, water and transport—would help ensure that preparedness efforts move beyond emergency response toward prevention, equity and long-term resilience.

Wrocław, Poland

Wrocław has city-level crisis management structures such as the City Crisis Management Center and relevant municipal departments, with emergency response plans for floods, heatwaves, and other hazards. Food is not yet consistently integrated into these plans as a central pillar, and food access is not consistently treated as critical infrastructure during emergencies.

Food-related emergency response is distributed across institutions, with limited coordination. There is no comprehensive mapping of food resources (production sites, storage facilities, distribution networks), and early-warning systems are not linked to food distribution. Vulnerable groups are identified in policy, but responses are not tailored to their specific needs, and coordination gaps persist between municipal departments, private actors, and community organisations.

Current practice combines formal disaster management structures with ad-hoc collaboration. The city mobilises various municipal departments depending on the type of disaster, while NGOs and community actors often support food collection and distribution. A key strength is the existence of experienced crisis management institutions and active non-governmental and community networks that can be mobilised during emergencies. However, major shortcomings include the lack of integrated food-system planning, missing data infrastructure, unclear roles for key food actors (e.g. bakeries, producers), and weak linkage between early warning systems and food provision. This results in reactive rather than preventive food security responses.

Food is not yet fully embedded as critical infrastructure in Wrocław's disaster planning. Units responsible for food-related systems are not systematically included in disaster plans, and national-level frameworks do not require food system integration. Strengthening policy alignment would require formal inclusion of food systems in disaster risk management, creation of a food infrastructure database, and clearer role definitions for public, private, and civil

WROCŁAW'S FOOD SYSTEM FEATURES AND VULNERABILITIES AT GLANCE

***Population**: 672,545 (GUS) - 891,500 (MPWiK)* [21, 22]

***Area**: 292.78 km² / density: 2298,31 - 3044,95 people/km2*

***% of households at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) in the Lower Silesian Voivodeship**: 12,2%* [23]

***Relevant hazard exposure** (e.g., flood-prone areas):*
In Wrocław, the following flood-prone areas have been identified: areas where the probability of flooding is moderate with a rate of Q1%, areas where the probability of flooding is high with a rate of Q10%, areas where the probability of flooding is low with a rate of Q0,2%, area at risk of flooding in the event of destruction or damage of a floodbank, and areas at risk of flooding in the event of damage or destruction of water reservoir. In Wrocław, there are also facilities with an increased or high risk of major industrial accidents and electromagnetic radiation hazards.*


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*Flood risk categories are based on annual probability: High-Risk (Q10%) indicates a 10% chance of flooding in any given year (10-year flood); Moderate-Risk (Q1%) indicates a 1% annual chance (100-year flood); Low-Risk (Q0.2%) indicates an extreme 0.2% annual chance (500-year flood). Source: EU Floods Directive (Directive 2007/60/EC).

society actors before crises occur. Strengthening policy alignment would improve the city's ability to ensure more reliable food access during emergencies.

"Strengthening food system resilience requires action in times of stability. Investing in shorter, more regional supply chains can reduce dependency on energy-intensive global systems and improve reliability during disruptions." underlines **Malgorzata Bartyna-Zielinska**, Head of the Climate and Environment Unit, Wrocław Municipality.

Berlin, Germany

The city administrations of Berlin are in the process of revising city and district-level disaster response and risk reduction plans. The process is a response to lessons learned during the Covid crisis and heightened security concerns resulting from, amongst others, Russia's war against Ukraine. Berlin has experienced a number of significant energy outages, including as a result of sabotage, cyberattacks and the impacts of heatwaves and nearby forest fires. While bottlenecks in global supply chains, panic buying and closures of public and community food services during the Covid pandemic momentarily affected the availability of certain products and food services, the power cuts meant that supermarkets and parts of the food processing and distribution system had to cease services without prior notice.

The Berlin Food Policy Council has voiced concerns about insufficient forward planning and weak integration of food policy into disaster risk management across governance levels, alongside the need to strengthen coordination between city and district structures to ensure continuity of food supply during disruptions. As **Saskia Richartz, Campaigner for Inclusive Food Transition, Ernährungsrat Berlin stresses** "this requires recognising food not only as a commodity, but as a basic right that must be safeguarded within crisis planning, alongside other forms of critical infrastructure."

BERLIN'S FOOD SYSTEM FEATURES AND VULNERABILITIES AT GLANCE

***Population**: 3,685,265 inhabitants (2024 estimate) for the city-state of Berlin*

***Area**: 891.1 km² / 4,136 inhabitants/km² (2024)[24]*

***% of households at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE)**: 20.9% of population[25]*

***Any relevant hazard exposure**: Berlin is primarily exposed to heavy rainfall and pluvial flooding, with climate projections showing a marked increase in extreme downpours that can overwhelm drainage systems. The city also faces localized river-flood risks and occasional heatwaves, though other natural hazards such as earthquakes or wildfires remain comparatively low.*

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Berlin's diverse and resilient food landscape provides a key strength, as it includes informal and decentralised food actors and networks such as community kitchens, community supported agriculture (CSA) initiatives, district food systems, supermarkets, and public catering services. These actors already play a key role in everyday food access and form an important foundation for emergency response. Existing practices combine formal and informal systems, which create strong adaptive capacity and multiple entry points for emergency support. Linking these systems with formal disaster risk management protocols could enable a more systematic and equitable response, for example by integrating food actors into emergency plans and expanding the use of supermarket logistics.

Strengthening coordination, training, and integration of food actors into disaster management and emergency response plans could improve the city's ability to maintain stable and equitable food access during periods of disruption. This would require clearer collaboration between city and district levels, more targeted training for emergency planners on food systems, and better alignment of food-relevant policy tools—such as procurement and local and regional supply arrangements—with emergency preparedness processes.

CONCLUSION

Strengthening Europe's food security requires treating food systems as essential components of disaster risk reduction and management, not as an afterthought. The experiences of Berlin and Wrocław show that many capacities already exist, but they remain fragmented across sectors and levels of government. Food systems must therefore become a binding priority in national and EU-level preparedness planning to ensure continuity of access during crises

Resilience must be built before shocks occur. This means sustained investment in climate-resilient agriculture, local and regional supply chains, storage and distribution infrastructure, and strong social protection systems. It also requires structured coordination across agriculture, health, procurement, emergency planning, and community food networks to ensure that responses are equitable and reach those most at risk.

Europe should therefore integrate food systems into disaster risk governance, strengthen cross-level coordination, and invest in preparedness during non-crisis periods to secure stable and equitable food access under future shocks.


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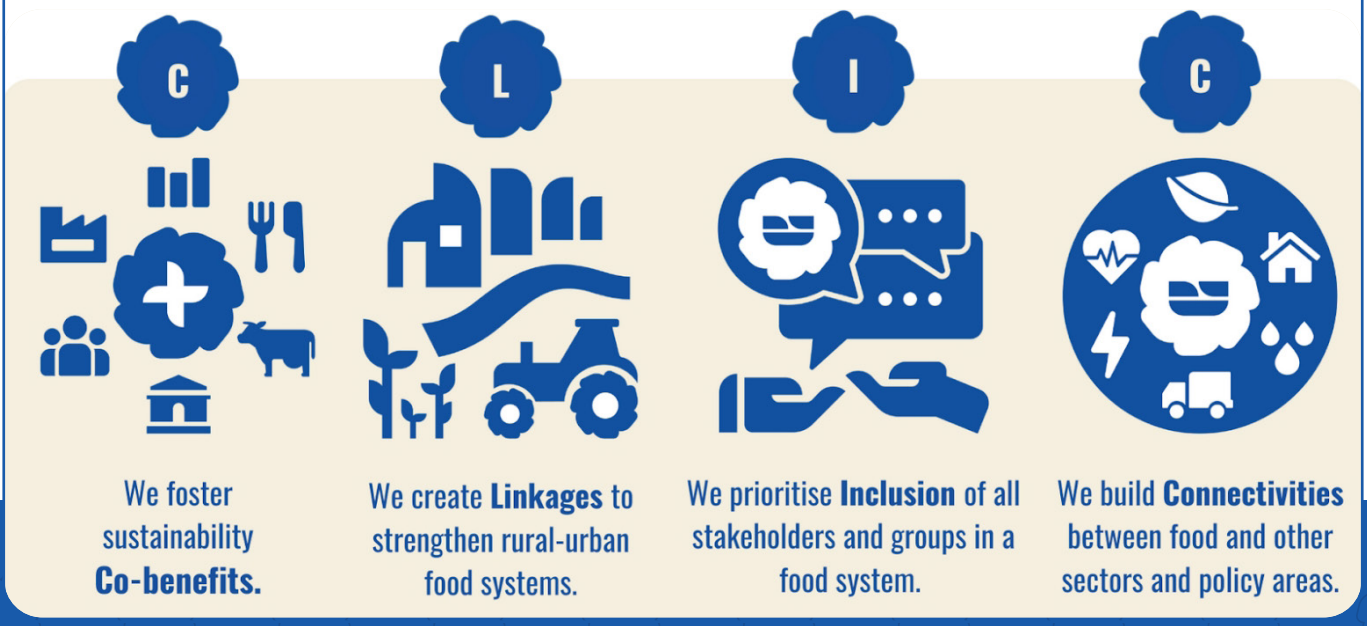
ABOUT THIS POLICY BRIEF

This policy brief is the result of desk research, policy analysis and in-depth interviews with representatives of the city-regions of Berlin and Wroclaw participating in the EU-funded FoodCLIC project. The policy brief is developed considering the strategic CLIC framework to guide effective policy and promote sustainable practices for the benefit of people and the planet. The CLIC supports the just transition to sustainable and resilient food systems by prompting, reminding, and checking that policy and action provide Co-benefits, Linkages (urban/rural), Inclusion, and Connectivities (across topics, departments, geographic)[26].



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