

Press release

European civil society presents vision on food environments: a systemic change that can no longer wait

Brussels, 13 October 2021 – European food policy should focus on creating enabling food environments that make the healthy and sustainable food choices the default and most desirable ones.

In a [joint policy briefing](#) published today, participants in the EU Food Policy Coalition provide a common, evidence-driven understanding of the central role that food environments – *the physical, economic, political and socio-cultural context in which consumers engage with the food system* – play in shaping food demand and their potential to leverage a sustainable food systems transition.

This is critical in today's Europe where food consumption patterns are undermining people's health and perpetuating unsustainable production systems. Current diets also put the attainment of European food policy objectives out of reach.

The briefing describes the main characteristics of food environments and their potential to create unprecedented changes in food systems by empowering, rather than putting the burden on citizens. It especially focuses on the commercial determinants influencing food choices and on the role of actors of the "middle" of the food chain.

Adopting a "food environment approach" means recognising that people's food choices are shaped by the contexts within which they are made. Therefore, the most effective and equitable way to empower changes in consumption is to ensure that the foods that contribute to healthy, sustainable diets are the most available, accessible, affordable, pleasurable and widely promoted.

The briefing calls on public authorities to step-up their role in creating enabling food environments, which can generate important co-benefits, such as driving demand for socially just supply chains, and foster agro-ecological and climate-proof production models with high levels of animal welfare. It identifies seven areas for action to achieve this change.

Quotes

- Nikolai Pushkarev, European Public Health Alliance (EPHA):

"The bottom line is that if you want to change diets equitably and effectively, you need to change food environments. And to create enabling food environments for healthy and sustainable diets, you need regulation as the main driver of change. A food environment approach is about tackling root causes. Faced with multiple crises - from climate to obesity - we can't afford anything less."

- Madeleine, Policy Officer at Slow Food

"We expect the EU to make it easier and more affordable for everyone to have access to sustainable food - food that is healthy and produced in an environmentally friendly way, but also food that is culturally rich, produced by farmers who receive adequate pay and by farm workers who are treated fairly, and which respects high animal welfare standards. Citizens are making clear they want better and sustainable food, and food environments should be shaped to meet their expectations."

- Federica Dolce (SAFE)

“The Farm to Fork Strategy aims at creating a sustainable food system by 2030. If we want to ensure this transition and meet the targets, we need regulations to be shaped within a different narrative. Moving away from the perspective of consumers making right choices will acknowledge the urgency of a systemic change allowing healthy and sustainable options to be the easiest and most affordable ones. Given the crisis we are facing, this is the only way forward.”

- Olivier De Schutter, Co-chair of the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food)

"This new policy brief by the EU Food Policy Coalition confirms what many of us have been saying for years: to get to sustainable food systems, continuing to place too much responsibility on individual consumers misses the mark. Ensuring the food systems transition we need means working to change the very food environments that condition our choices. And only proactive action by EU, national, and local policy-makers, joined up with food industry and civil society engagement will unlock this transition."

Publication details:

Policy briefing. Food Environments & EU Food Policy. Discovering the role of food environments for sustainable food systems (2021) *EU Food Policy Coalition*

Website link:

https://foodpolicycoalition.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Food-Environments-for-SFS_EU-FPC.pdf

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ABOUT US:

The [EU Food Policy coalition](#), brings together civil society and organizations working towards refining and advocating for a [shared vision](#) of sustainable food systems at the EU level such as NGOs from a broad spectrum working on food systems, grassroots social movements, farmers organizations, organizations of fishers, trade unions, think tanks and research groups.

Supporting organisations:

AIM, ARC2020, BEUC, BirdLife, CFFA, CiWF, EEB, EHN, EPHA, Euro Coop, Eurocities, Eurogroup for Animals, Feedback, FoEE, FTAO, IFOAM Organics EU, IPES-Food, OSEPI, PAN Europe, SAFE, Slow Food, Unesco Chair in Sustainable Food Systems, Urgenci, WWF