



Promoting access to healthy and environmentally friendly food for the marginalised and vulnerable

Recommendations to policymakers to mitigate the negative impacts of Green Deal policies

July 2023

Access to environmentally sustainable food, urban mobility and urban green spaces – prerequisites for a successful Green Deal.

Access to healthy and environmentally friendly food is limited, especially for those living in marginalised urban (and rural) areas. It often requires much time to find and access food that is locally produced, seasonal, and organic, and when available it tends to be expensive. The current geopolitical situation exacerbates the problem, having led to dramatic increases in food prices all over the EU. Particularly, people with low-income and/or who are marginalised in multiple ways struggle to afford food, especially food that is fresh and healthy. Therefore, it is crucial that local and regional governments adapt their policy measures and make access to locally produced, seasonal healthy food a priority, especially in marginalised neighbourhoods. In doing so, policies concerning the production and provision of local food, urban mobility and urban green spaces are of major concern.

Findings from ACCTING

Based on 410 narratives related to food and transport, the ACCTING consortium concludes that **access to environmentally friendly food is largely connected with urban food systems and mobility issues**: it often requires much time to find and access food that is local, seasonal, organic, and affordable.



Intriguing and innovative observations are¹:

- **The lack of proximity to stores, or lack of knowledge where to find and access stores** that sell environmentally friendly food, is a major hindering factor to changing eating habits.
- **A lack of public transport** in areas where vulnerable people live – even in some areas of big cities – and **lack of access to supermarkets**.
- **Eating seasonal/locally produced food is more time-consuming** because there are fewer stores offering these products, they are more difficult to find/identify; and many of them have a poorly diversified product range requiring customers to go to several stores.
- **Lack of family support, community networks, and access to land or farmer (markets)** are fundamental barriers to behaviour change.



Informants emphasised the **importance of street markets and small market stores** providing them not only cheaper, but also fresher, seasonal, and local produces. In other regions, the use of

urban gardens to cultivate food was found to be a common practice linked to economic needs and concern for sustainable food consumption.

¹ Zorell, C., & Strid, S. (eds.) (2023). D3.2 ACCTING Report on first cycle experimental studies. Confidential report delivered to the European Commission 28 April 2023. 281 pages.

Policy recommendations

Make it obligatory for supermarkets to create a supply of local, seasonal, and organic products

To foster environmentally friendly food consumption in a socially just way, it is crucial to reshape food systems and emphasise the broader and universal provision of seasonal, organic, and locally produced food. A key policy measure to promote such a shift implies the establishment of quotas for supermarkets to offer these products. This can also alleviate accessibility problems related to transport and time poverty.

Include schemes to support community-led local initiatives

Community-led local initiatives and food cooperatives can crucially help facilitating shorter supply chains and broader access to food, and thereby help making small-scale agriculture more viable and strengthening regional food producers and networks. Policymakers can initiate foster programmes to support and promote such initiatives. This should be complemented by sustained financial incentives for urban farming, and for farmers to transition to organic farming.



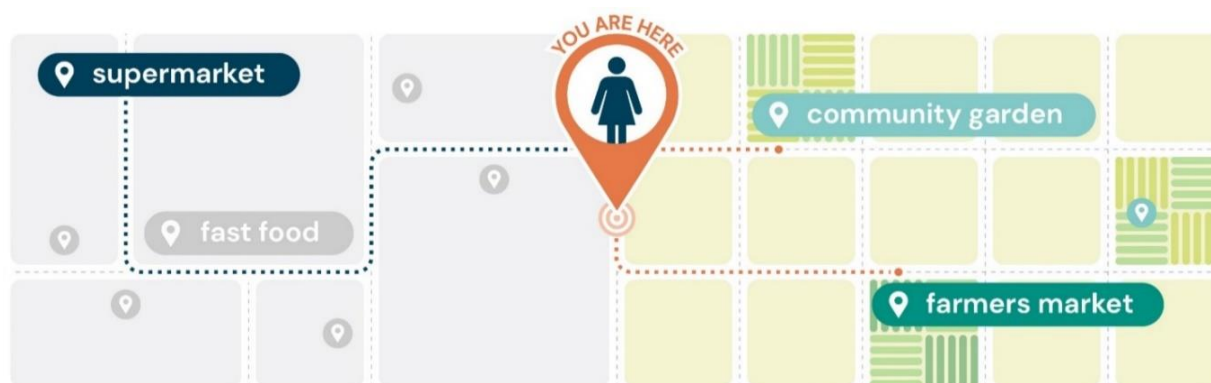
Facilitate access to information where people can find nutritious, environmentally sustainable and affordable food in their neighbourhoods



The establishment of online platforms or databases that collect information about selling points can help establish a more efficient system to inform people where to find local, seasonal, and organic food. This should be accompanied by campaigns that raise awareness about local (farmers') markets and direct-to-consumer food distribution initiatives; particularly targeting those in marginalised neighbourhoods to ensure the platforms and knowledge reach them.

Establish urban gardens in low-income areas

Lack of access to food can be reduced by giving vulnerable groups immediate access to gardening spaces. The creation of urban gardens should also be accompanied by financially supported, educational programs that teach individuals how to cultivate their own healthy food, fostering a culture of self-sufficiency and sustainability within communities.



Promote farmers markets in marginalised areas and make space for the sale of local produce

Public authorities should explicitly prioritise the allocation of space to farmers, small-scale food producers and other people for selling local and regional, ecological food products. Policymakers can also set incentives to establish more local farmers markets in marginalised areas. This includes streamlining regulatory processes and reducing bureaucratic hurdles.

Extend the concept of the 15-minute city to peri-urban areas

With growing urbanisation and traffic, the concept of the "15-minute city" has attracted much attention, based on the idea that everyone should have access to basic daily needs within a short walk or bike ride. The reach of the "15-minute city" should be expanded to include peri-urban areas, where it would benefit many families, seniors, and other vulnerable groups of people with restricted mobility.

Prioritise local and seasonal food in public procurement

Public actors are role models, and they spend large sums on procurement of food and other products. They need to use this leverage and prioritise the purchase of regional/local and seasonal food products, both to provide for positive examples to the population, and to support the development and establishment of local food producers that sell seasonal and organic produces.

Reflect environmental impacts in prices



Current prices are not reflecting the environmental costs of food. In addition, environmental certification schemes tend to be costly to obtain, altogether making it for small-scale organic producers hard to compete. There is an urgent need for policymakers to introduce a price scheme reflecting environmental costs of food properly, for instance through a tax related to food miles, water consumption, and/or pesticides use. Policymakers should also initiate a

transformation of the certification processes towards prices adjusted to the size of the farm and amount of produce.

Better Stories

In ACCTING, we look for inspiring bottom-up initiatives as Better Stories, a concept borrowed from Dina Georgis² to refer promising practices that can instil ideas for how to advance individual and collective behavioural change as envisioned by the Green Deal.



FINLAND

One such better story comes from Tuusula, Finland, where the ***Oma Maa (Our Land) Cooperative***³ has made city-based citizens become farm co-owners. The members help with certain farming tasks, while also having access to the locally produced food through food pick-up points in the city. This initiative has helped community members lead more environmental-friendly lifestyles and try to be self-sustaining by growing food locally and taking care of each other. The initiative also contributes to strengthening the link between urban and rural settings.



BULGARIA

A similar inspiring story comes from Sofia, Bulgaria, where the members of the cooperative ***Hrankoop***⁴ collaborate with local organic food producers. The cooperative's key activities include having the members work in local organic farms, organising weekly farmers markets, developing educational programs, and the promotion of urban agriculture.



PORTUGAL

The Solidarity Kitchen Garden ***Horta Urbana Solidária de Faro***⁵ is an urban vegetable garden with 100 m2 production area, distributed on the rooftop terrace of the municipal market of Faro. It cultivates vegetables, aromatic, medicinal, and spice plants, following the principles of organic/traditional farming. The main aim of this initiative is to diminish the urban/rural gap (short food supply chain) by promoting organic production in an urban context, to empower and promote the social inclusion of disabled children and low-income families and to promote environmentally sustainable and healthy food consumption practices.

Horta Urbana Solidária de Faro also distributes the production surplus (organic food baskets) to families in need, as recognized by the municipality's Social Action division. In addition, this initiative collaborates with the Social Solidarity Institution, which is responsible for the garden and works with young people and adults with moderate or severe intellectual disabilities.

² Georgis, D. (2013). *The better story: Queer affects from the Middle East*. Suny Press.

³ <https://www.omamaa.fi/in-english/>

⁴ <https://www.hrankoop.com/>

⁵ <https://www.algarveprimeiro.com/imprimir.php?id=27225:%20https://www.barlavento.pt/destaque/mercado-municipal-de-faro-vai-ter-uma-das-maiores-hortas-urbanas-da-europa>

Green Deal policy area

These recommendations are linked to the Farm-to-Fork Strategy⁶ and the Green Deal policy area “healthy and affordable food”. The various recommendations also touch upon the policy areas “fresh air, clean water, healthy soil and biodiversity” (e.g., by reducing the use of pesticides, emissions from transport, combustible waste), “future-proof skills training for the transition” (e.g., providing citizens with skills they will need to cultivate food in times of ecological crisis), and inversely to “more public transport” by aiming to reduce needs for transportation. Finally, strengthening the production capacity and market access of local food production addresses the policy area “globally competitive and resilient industry”.

About ACCTING

ACCTING is an EU-funded project aiming to understand the impact of Green Deal policies on vulnerable groups, prevent inequalities, and produce knowledge and innovations to advance behavioural change at individual and collective levels.

Running until May 2025 and based on two research cycles, ACCTING mobilises research experimentation and innovation to promote an inclusive and socially just European Green Deal, focusing on the inequalities produced by its policies.

Find out more about the project and discover more factsheets at <https://accting.eu>

Follow us on social media!

Contact us: accting-eu@esf.org



Authorship and contributions

Authors: Nikita Sharma (ECSA), Carolin Zorell (ORU).

Contributors: YW and contributions from the ACCTING consortium.

Infographics: YW. Layout: ESF.

Acknowledgment and disclaimer



This project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101036504. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of its authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the European Union.

⁶ https://food.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-05/f2f_action-plan_2020_strategy-info_en.pdf