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OUTPUT 1.1 JOINT CROSS-BORDER STRATEGY FOR FOOD WASTE AWARENESS, REDUCTION, AND MANAGEMENT

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Reducing Food Waste and its Environmental Footprint through Sustainable Food Systems

OUTPUT 1.1 JOINT CROSS-BORDER STRATEGY FOR FOOD WASTE AWARENESS, REDUCTION, AND MANAGEMENT

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1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGY

This Joint Cross-Border Strategy for Food Waste Awareness, Reduction and Management has been developed within the framework of the Interreg Italy–Croatia Programme, under the ECOFOODCYCLE project. It aims to provide a coordinated and operational framework for addressing food waste across the participating regions, capitalizing on the results, outputs, and knowledge generated throughout the project implementation.

Food waste represents a complex and multi-dimensional challenge with significant environmental, economic, and social implications. In the cross-border area of Italy and Croatia, this challenge is further shaped by shared territorial characteristics, strong tourism dynamics, and sector-specific patterns of food production, distribution, and consumption. Addressing food waste in this context requires coordinated and multi-level action, involving public authorities, economic actors, and civil society, as well as alignment between national and regional approaches.

The strategy builds upon the main project outputs developed by the Project Partners, including:

- *D.1.1.1 Cross-border guide to conduct food waste audit,*
- *D.1.1.2 Food waste audit,*
- *D.1.2.1 Joint analysis of policy framework, included policy brief*
- *D.1.4.1 Stakeholder Engagement Model, and*
- *D.1.4.2 Guidelines to reduce food waste.*

These outputs constitute the analytical and operational basis for the strategy, providing evidence on food waste generation patterns, tested methodological approaches, stakeholder engagement mechanisms, and practical recommendations for reduction



measures. All project deliverables are publicly available in the ECOFOODCYCLE project library¹.

In line with the Interreg Programme logic, this strategy does not duplicate existing analyses, but rather consolidates and translates project results into a structured framework for coordinated action. Its purpose is to ensure alignment among Project Partners, facilitate the uptake of project outputs, and support the transferability and durability of achieved results across the programme area.

The strategy is designed to support both the final phase of project implementation and the continuation of activities beyond the project lifetime. While project activities contribute to testing and validating approaches (e.g. through pilot actions and stakeholder engagement), the strategy provides a reference framework for their further application, scaling, and integration into local and regional practices and policies.

By strengthening coordination, promoting knowledge exchange, and supporting the practical uptake of developed tools and approaches, the strategy contributes to a shared cross-border response to food waste. In doing so, it enhances the long-term impact of the project and supports the transition towards more resource-efficient and sustainable food systems in the Italy–Croatia programme area.

¹Available at: <https://www.italy-croatia.eu/web/ecofoodcycle/library>



2. KEY FINDINGS FROM PROJECT OUTPUTS

This chapter synthesizes the most relevant findings generated through the ECOFOODCYCLE project outputs, providing an evidence-based foundation for the definition of strategic priorities and actions. The analysis builds primarily on the results of the food waste audit and associated methodological framework, complemented by insights from stakeholder engagement activities and sector-specific guidelines.

2.1 FOOD WASTE PATTERNS AND KEY DRIVERS

The analysis of food waste generation conducted within the project highlights significant differences across sectors in both the scale and underlying causes of food waste.

According to **D.1.1.2 Food waste audit**, food waste in households is primarily driven by behavioural factors, including inadequate meal planning, over-purchasing, improper food storage, and limited awareness of food labelling (e.g. misunderstanding of “best before” and “use by” dates). These findings indicate that behavioural change and awareness-raising are critical components of any effective intervention targeting this sector.

In the food service sector, food waste is mainly associated with portion sizes, plate waste, menu design, and operational practices. Constraints related to food safety regulations and limited flexibility in reusing surplus food further contribute to waste generation. The audit findings point to the importance of operational adjustments and staff training, as well as the need for clearer guidance on safe food redistribution practices.

In retail, food waste is influenced by strict quality standards, aesthetic criteria, and inventory management practices, particularly in relation to perishable products. The mismatch between supply and demand, as well as limitations in redistribution channels, further exacerbate the problem.

In primary production, losses are largely linked to product perishability, market conditions, and logistical constraints, including overproduction and limited access to alternative distribution channels for non-standard products.



These sector-specific patterns confirm that food waste cannot be addressed through a one-size-fits-all approach, but requires targeted measures adapted to the characteristics of each stage of the food supply chain, as outlined in **D.1.1.1 Cross-border** guide to conduct food waste audit.

2.2 ENVIRONMENTAL AND SYSTEMIC HOTSPOTS

Beyond the quantities of food waste generated, the project findings emphasize the importance of considering the environmental impact associated with different types of food waste.

The audit results presented in **D.1.1.2 Food waste audit** indicate that products of animal origin, particularly meat and dairy, have a disproportionately high environmental footprint compared to plant-based products. As a result, even relatively small quantities of such waste can generate significant environmental impacts in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, water use, and land use.

Furthermore, the analysis highlights that the earlier stages of the food supply chain, particularly primary production, are associated with higher embedded environmental impacts per unit of food lost. This finding underlines the importance of prioritizing prevention measures at upstream stages, while also addressing downstream inefficiencies.

These insights suggest that effective food waste strategies should not focus exclusively on reducing total quantities, but should also prioritize high-impact food categories and critical stages of the supply chain.

2.3 GAPS IN DATA, COORDINATION AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

The project has identified several structural gaps that limit the effectiveness of food waste prevention and management efforts in the cross-border area.



As highlighted in **D.1.1.1 Cross-border guide** to conduct food waste audit, there is a lack of harmonized methodologies for measuring and monitoring food waste across regions and sectors. Differences in data availability, measurement approaches, and reporting practices hinder comparability and limit the ability to develop evidence-based policies.

In addition, the findings indicate fragmented institutional responsibilities and limited coordination among stakeholders involved in food waste management. Public authorities, private sector actors, and civil society organizations often operate within separate frameworks, resulting in duplication of efforts and missed opportunities for synergies.

The absence of structured mechanisms for data sharing and joint monitoring further constrains the development of coordinated cross-border responses.

These gaps underline the need for a common methodological framework and stronger coordination mechanisms, as a basis for effective and aligned action.

2.4 IMPORTANCE OF STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

The importance of stakeholder engagement emerges as a central element in addressing food waste effectively.

The **D.1.4.1 Stakeholder Engagement Model** emphasizes that sustainable solutions require the active involvement of a wide range of actors, including public institutions, businesses, research organizations, and civil society. The model proposes a structured approach based on stakeholder mapping, engagement, co-creation, implementation, monitoring, and scaling.

In particular, the model highlights the need to move from isolated actions towards coordinated, multi-actor processes, supported by shared platforms, communication channels, and joint action plans.

The cross-border dimension further enhances the relevance of this approach, as it enables the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and good practices between regions with similar challenges but different institutional and operational contexts.

This is complemented by the recommendations provided in **D.1.4.2 Guidelines to reduce food waste**, which underline the importance of tailored interventions for different stakeholder groups, as well as the need for continuous awareness-raising and capacity-building activities.

2.5 POLICY AND GOVERNANCE CONTEXT

The analysis of legislative and strategic frameworks, as presented in **D.1.2.1 Joint analysis of policy framework, included policy brief**, indicates that, despite the existence of a comprehensive multi-level policy framework (EU, national, regional), the effectiveness of food waste prevention is significantly constrained by structural and implementation gaps.

Key challenges include fragmented responsibilities across governance levels, the predominance of non-binding and voluntary measures, and the absence of harmonized monitoring systems and measurable targets. These limitations reduce policy coherence, hinder comparability of data, and weaken accountability mechanisms.

In addition, uneven implementation across countries and regions, limited economic incentives for key actors, and insufficient coordination among stakeholders further restrict the operationalization of food waste reduction measures.

These findings highlight that strengthening coordination, improving monitoring and data systems, and enhancing implementation capacity at regional and local levels represent critical preconditions for effective and scalable food waste reduction, and therefore constitute an important basis for defining the strategic priorities of this strategy.



2.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR STRATEGIC ACTION

The combined findings from the project outputs lead to several key implications that inform the structure and priorities of this strategy:

- *Food waste generation is highly sector-specific, requiring targeted and differentiated interventions.*
- *Behavioral factors play a significant role, particularly at the household level, highlighting the importance of awareness and education.*
- *Environmental impacts vary significantly across food categories and supply chain stages, requiring prioritization of high-impact areas.*
- *Current systems are characterized by fragmentation, limited coordination, and lack of harmonized data.*
- *Policies are insufficiently implemented and lack effective enforcement mechanisms.*
- *Effective action depends on structured stakeholder engagement and cross-border cooperation mechanisms.*

Building on these findings, four key strategic priorities are identified as the foundation for coordinated cross-border action and are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Strategic Priorities of the Joint Cross-Border Strategy

No.	Priority	Description
1	Awareness and behavioral change	Strengthening knowledge, skills, and behavioral practices across households, businesses, and public institutions.
2	Sector-specific prevention and reduction measures	Implementing targeted actions across key sectors of the food supply chain, based on identified waste patterns and drivers.



3	Stakeholder coordination and cross-border cooperation	Enhancing collaboration mechanisms, knowledge exchange, and joint action among Project Partners and relevant stakeholders.
4	Monitoring, data and long-term continuity	Improving data availability, harmonization of methodologies, and ensuring the continuity and uptake of project results beyond the project lifetime.

These priorities provide a structured basis for the definition of strategic objectives and the implementation framework presented in the following chapters.



3. STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The Strategic Framework translates the key findings and identified priorities into a coherent set of objectives guiding coordinated cross-border action. It defines the overall direction of the strategy and establishes the basis for the development of targeted measures and implementation mechanisms presented in the following chapters.

3.1 VISION

The vision of this Joint Cross-Border Strategy is to establish a **coordinated, resource-efficient, and sustainable food system** in the Italy–Croatia programme area, in which food waste is systematically reduced through aligned actions, informed decision-making, and active collaboration among stakeholders across sectors and governance levels.

This vision reflects the shared commitment of Project Partners to move from fragmented and isolated initiatives towards a **coherent and integrated cross-border approach**, enabling the effective prevention, reduction, and management of food waste in line with circular economy principles and sustainable development objectives.

3.2 OVERALL OBJECTIVE

The overall objective of this strategy is to **reduce food waste in the regions participating in the ECOFOODCYCLE project through coordinated, evidence-based, and stakeholder-driven actions, building on cross-border cooperation and knowledge exchange.**

3.3 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

Building on the key findings and strategic priorities identified in Chapter 2, the following specific objectives define the main directions for action:

- **Objective 1: Strengthening awareness and behavioral change**



To increase awareness and promote behavioral change among households, businesses, and public institutions by improving knowledge, skills, and practices related to food consumption, storage, and waste prevention.

- **Objective 2: Enhancing prevention and reduction in key sectors**

To reduce food waste generation across priority sectors of the food supply chain by implementing targeted, sector-specific measures addressing the main drivers of waste identified through the project analysis.

- **Objective 3: Strengthening stakeholder coordination and knowledge exchange**

To improve coordination and collaboration among Project Partners and relevant stakeholders by establishing structured mechanisms for knowledge exchange, joint action, and cross-border cooperation.

- **Objective 4: Improving data, monitoring and long-term continuity**

To enhance the availability and comparability of data, support the harmonization of methodologies, and ensure the continuity, transferability, and uptake of project results beyond the project lifetime.



4. IMPLEMENTATION AND PRIORITY ACTIONS

This chapter translates the strategic objectives into concrete actions, structured according to the implementation timeframe. It distinguishes between actions to be carried out during the final phase of the project and those intended to ensure continuity and further development in the post-project period. This approach ensures both the effective completion of project activities and the sustainability and uptake of results beyond the project lifetime.

4.1 ACTIONS DURING THE PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

This section defines the key actions to be implemented during the final phase of the project, building directly on the outputs, pilot activities, and stakeholder engagement processes developed within the ECOFOODCYCLE project. The focus is on the practical implementation and validation of solutions, strengthening stakeholder involvement, and ensuring the effective use of project tools and results across the participating regions.

The actions are structured according to the defined strategic objectives as follows:

Objective 1: Strengthening awareness and behavioral change

During the project phase, actions will focus on raising awareness and influencing behavioral change among key target groups, including households, businesses, and public institutions. These actions are closely linked to project activities such as awareness campaigns, public events, training schemes, and dissemination activities.

Table 2: Actions under Objective 1 (Project Phase)

Measure	Activity	Key Actors / Stakeholders	Expected Output
Awareness raising and education	Organization of awareness campaigns and public events	Project Partners, local authorities, NGOs	Increased awareness among target groups
Capacity building	Implementation of training workshops and educational activities	Project Partners, educational institutions	Improved knowledge and skills



Behavioral change support	Dissemination of guidelines and communication materials	Project Partners, stakeholders	Adoption of improved practices
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These actions directly address behavioral drivers of food waste identified in the analysis and contribute to building a foundation for long-term behavioral change.

Objective 2: Enhancing prevention and reduction in key sectors

Actions under this objective focus on implementing and testing sector-specific solutions through pilot activities, which represent the core operational component of the project.

Table 3: Actions under Objective 2 (Project Phase)

Measure	Activity	Key Actors / Stakeholders	Expected Output
Sector-specific prevention and reduction measures	Application of guidelines for food waste reduction (D.1.4.2) through implementation of pilot actions in selected sectors (e.g. HoReCa, households, primary production)	Project Partners, businesses, public institutions, sector stakeholders	Adoption of improved practices and tested, validated solutions
Knowledge generation	Identification and documentation of good practices and lessons learned	Project Partners	Transferable solutions and recommendations

These actions provide concrete and tested solutions for reducing food waste and form a critical basis for future replication and scaling.

Objective 3: Strengthening stakeholder coordination and knowledge exchange

In line with the project's emphasis on cross-border cooperation, actions under this objective aim to establish and strengthen stakeholder networks and collaborative mechanisms.



Table 4: Actions under Objective 3 (Project Phase)

Measure	Activity	Key Actors / Stakeholders	Expected Output
Stakeholder engagement	Implementation of stakeholder engagement model (D.1.4.1)	Project Partners, stakeholders	Established stakeholder network
Networking and cooperation	Organization of cross-border meetings and joint events	Project Partners, regional actors	Strengthened cooperation
Knowledge exchange	Organization of workshops, hackathons, and training activities	Project Partners, stakeholders	Enhanced knowledge transfer

These actions address fragmentation and coordination gaps and enable more effective and aligned implementation across the programme area.

Objective 4: Improving data, monitoring and long-term continuity

Actions under this objective focus on applying developed methodologies and tools, as well as creating the basis for long-term monitoring and use of project results.

Table 5: Actions under Objective 4 (Project Phase)

Measure	Activity	Key Actors / Stakeholders	Expected Output
Data collection and analysis	Application of food waste audit methodologies (D.1.1.1, D.1.1.2)	Project Partners, public authorities	Improved data availability
Monitoring and tools	Use of digital tools and web-based support systems	Project Partners, stakeholders	Functional monitoring support
Evidence-based approach	Analysis of pilot results and preparation of recommendations	Project Partners	Evidence-based insights

These actions strengthen the evidence base for decision-making and create the foundations for continued monitoring and policy development.



4.2 POST-PROJECT CONTINUITY AND COOPERATION FRAMEWORK

This section outlines a pragmatic and non-binding framework for the continuation of cooperation among Project Partners and relevant stakeholders beyond the project lifetime. The proposed actions are designed to be low-cost, flexible, and based on the use of existing capacities, networks, and tools developed within the ECOFOODCYCLE project.

Rather than establishing new formal structures, the approach relies on maintaining and gradually expanding existing collaboration mechanisms, ensuring the continued use and uptake of project results across participating regions.

The actions are structured according to the defined strategic objectives as follows:

Objective 1: Awareness and behavioral change

In the post-project phase, actions focus on the continued use and dissemination of developed materials and the gradual integration of food waste awareness into existing educational and institutional frameworks.

Table 6: Actions under Objective 1 (Post-Project Phase)

Measure	Activity	Key Actors / Stakeholders	Expected Outcome
Continued awareness and education	Ongoing use and dissemination of awareness materials and guidelines	Project Partners, educational institutions, local authorities	Sustained awareness and gradual behavioral change
Integration into existing systems	Inclusion of food waste topics in educational programmes and institutional practices	Educational institutions, public authorities	Long-term integration of awareness measures
Regional outreach	Expansion of awareness activities through existing local and regional initiatives	Local authorities, NGOs	Broader reach and continued engagement



These actions ensure the continuity of awareness-raising efforts through existing structures, without requiring additional financial or organizational resources.

Objective 2: Prevention and reduction in key sectors

Actions under this objective focus on the gradual replication and scaling of tested solutions, relying on voluntary uptake by stakeholders and integration into existing practices.

Table 7: Actions under Objective 2 (Post-Project Phase)

Measure	Activity	Key Actors / Stakeholders	Expected Outcome
Replication of solutions	Voluntary adoption and replication of pilot-tested measures in additional sectors and regions	Businesses, public institutions, stakeholders	Wider application of effective solutions
Policy integration	Consideration of project results in local and regional policy frameworks	Public authorities	Increased policy alignment
Promotion of sustainable practices	Integration of food waste reduction within broader circular economy initiatives	Stakeholders, local authorities	Strengthened sustainability practices

These actions enable the gradual scaling of effective solutions through voluntary uptake and alignment with existing policy and operational frameworks.

Objective 3: Stakeholder coordination and knowledge exchange

The continuation of stakeholder cooperation is based on maintaining the established network and using existing platforms for knowledge exchange.

Table 8: Actions under Objective 3 (Post-Project Phase)

Measure	Activity	Key Actors / Stakeholders	Expected Outcome
Maintenance of stakeholder network	Continued informal cooperation among Project Partners and stakeholders	Project Partners, stakeholders	Sustained collaboration



Knowledge exchange	Sharing of practices, experiences, and tools through existing communication channels	Project Partners, regional actors	Ongoing exchange of knowledge
Development of future initiatives	Identification of opportunities for new joint projects and initiatives	Project Partners	Potential continuation through new projects

These actions ensure continuity of cooperation through flexible and informal mechanisms, supporting long-term collaboration without additional administrative burden.

Objective 4: Data, monitoring and long-term continuity

In the post-project phase, actions focus on the continued use and gradual improvement of methodologies and tools developed within the project.

Table 9: Actions under Objective 4 (Post-Project Phase)

Measure	Activity	Key Actors / Stakeholders	Expected Outcome
Continued use of methodologies	Application of developed audit methodologies in future initiatives	Project Partners, public authorities	Continued data collection and comparability
Methodological alignment	Voluntary harmonization of approaches across regions	Project Partners	Improved consistency of data
Support to policymaking	Use of project findings to inform future strategies and decisions	Public authorities	More evidence-based policies

These actions provide a realistic pathway for maintaining and gradually improving monitoring and data systems, supporting evidence-based decision-making beyond the project duration.



5. MONITORING AND SUSTAINABILITY

This chapter presents a practical and proportionate approach to monitoring the implementation of the strategy and ensuring the sustainability of its results. The proposed framework is closely aligned with the actions defined in Chapter 4 and reflects the overall approach of the strategy, which is based on the use of existing resources, voluntary cooperation, and low administrative burden.

Rather than introducing complex monitoring systems, the approach focuses on a limited number of key indicators that allow tracking of both implementation progress and the continued use of project results in practice.

5.1 MONITORING APPROACH

The monitoring of the strategy is based on a limited number of practical indicators that reflect the implementation of actions and the continued use of project results. The focus is on tracking whether key activities are carried out and whether the tools, methodologies, and guidelines developed within the project are being applied in practice.

In this context, monitoring is directly linked to the strategic objectives and corresponding actions defined in Chapter 4, ensuring a clear connection between planned activities and observed results.

Table 10: Key Monitoring Indicators by Strategic Objective

Strategic Objective	Indicator	Timeframe	Description	Source of Information
Awareness and behavioural change	Stakeholders engaged	During project / Annually (post-project)	Number and diversity of stakeholders involved in awareness, training, and engagement activities	Project Partners, stakeholder networks
Prevention and reduction in key sectors	Actions implemented	During project / Annually (post-project)	Number and type of sector-specific measures and pilot-based solutions applied or replicated	Project Partners, activity reports



Stakeholder coordination and knowledge exchange	Stakeholder cooperation activities	During project / Annually (post-project)	Number of joint activities, meetings, and knowledge exchange initiatives	Project Partners, network communication
Data, monitoring and long-term continuity	Uptake of tools and guidelines	During project / Annually (post-project)	Use of project-developed methodologies, guidelines, and tools by Project Partners and stakeholders in their regular activities	Project Partners, public authorities, stakeholders

During the project implementation phase, monitoring is primarily based on existing reporting mechanisms, including activity reports, records of organized events, and documentation of pilot actions. This ensures that no additional administrative burden is created.

In the post-project period, monitoring is carried out on an annual basis in a simplified and indicative manner. It relies on voluntary information sharing among Project Partners and stakeholders, focusing on whether project results continue to be used in practice. This includes, for example, the application of developed methodologies, the use of guidelines in operational or policy contexts, and the continued use of tools and materials in everyday activities.

5.2 SUSTAINABILITY OF RESULTS

The sustainability of the strategy is based on the continued use and gradual integration of key project outputs into existing practices, policies, and cooperation mechanisms. The approach does not require the establishment of new formal structures but relies on maintaining and utilizing the capacities, tools, and networks developed within the project.

The following components represent the core elements of long-term sustainability.



Table 11: Sustainability Components

Component	Description	Sustainability Mechanism
Tools and guidelines	Methodologies, guidelines, and digital tools developed within the project	Continued use in daily activities of Project Partners and stakeholders
Stakeholder networks	Cross-border cooperation structures and stakeholder engagement established during the project	Informal continuation of collaboration and knowledge exchange
Methodologies and approaches	Food waste audit methods, monitoring approaches, and analytical frameworks	Application in future initiatives, projects, and policy processes

The sustainability of these components is ensured through their practical applicability, low implementation requirements, and relevance for stakeholders. Their continued use is expected to be driven by the benefits they provide rather than by formal obligations.

The proposed monitoring and sustainability framework provides a balanced and realistic approach, ensuring that the implementation of the strategy can be followed without creating additional administrative or financial burden. By focusing on a limited number of key indicators and relying on existing structures and voluntary cooperation, the strategy supports the continued use, replication, and further development of project results. This approach enables long-term impact while remaining fully aligned with the capacities and resources of the participating regions.



6. CONCLUSION

This Joint Cross-Border Strategy provides a coherent and practical framework for addressing food waste in the participating regions of Italy and Croatia. Building on the key findings of the ECOFOODCYCLE project, it translates analytical insights into clearly defined priorities, objectives, and actions that support coordinated and effective interventions.

The strategy recognizes that food waste is a complex and multi-dimensional challenge, shaped by sector-specific patterns, behavioral factors, and institutional frameworks. In response, it proposes a targeted approach that combines awareness-raising, sector-specific measures, stakeholder coordination, and improved data and monitoring systems.

A key strength of the strategy lies in its balanced and realistic design. Actions are structured across two complementary phases: the project implementation phase, focused on the application and validation of solutions, and the post-project phase, aimed at ensuring continuity, replication, and long-term impact. This approach enables both the effective use of project results and their gradual integration into existing practices and policy frameworks.

Importantly, the strategy is based on principles of flexibility, voluntary cooperation, and efficient use of existing resources. Rather than introducing new administrative structures, it builds on the tools, methodologies, and stakeholder networks developed within the project, ensuring that implementation remains feasible and sustainable.

By strengthening cross-border cooperation and supporting the uptake of tested solutions, the strategy contributes to a more coordinated and resilient approach to food waste reduction in the programme area. Its implementation is expected to support not only environmental objectives but also broader goals related to resource efficiency, circular economy, and sustainable regional development.

Overall, the strategy provides a solid foundation for continued collaboration and action, enabling participating region



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Table 11: Sustainability Components

