

Urban Agenda for the EU



Food Partnership

Action No.2 – Regulation

Showcasing the role of regional and national actors in supporting local food policies

Evidence and Policy brief



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**Evidence
&
Policy Brief**





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ACTION 2 - REGULATION

Showcasing the role of regional and national actors in supporting local food policies

EVIDENCE AND POLICY BRIEF

Why this Action matters and how the evidence was produced

Cities already shape food systems through responsibilities they exercise every day: school and care meals, markets, planning, social services, local economic development, waste, environmental policy and emergency support. Yet food is rarely a single formal municipal competence. Action 2 therefore asks a practical governance question: how can national and regional authorities turn widespread local food initiatives into stable public capacity, including in municipalities that lack dedicated staff, finance, legal expertise or access to complex programmes? The issue is not whether every country should copy one institutional model, but whether municipalities can reliably access the functions they need to act.

The research was carried out in four stages. Documentary and policy review examined European, national, regional and municipal sources, scientific literature, programme material and project reports. Comparative institutional analysis mapped responsibilities, funding routes, networks and support organisations. Stakeholder evidence then tested how these arrangements work in practice through interviews, synchronous consultations, written institutional contributions, follow-up clarifications and survey evidence. Finally, the sources were triangulated to distinguish formal policy from actual municipal access and to identify recurring support functions, barriers and transfer conditions.

The final report records 38 interviews or synchronous consultations conducted between 8 October 2025 and 6 July 2026, plus one documentation-and-follow-up contribution, giving 39 substantive entries in total. The synchronous consultations directly represented 12 cities or municipal/metropolitan authorities, alongside national and regional administrations, European institutions, networks, research organisations, civil society and foundations. Written contributions and country-portrait validation were treated separately. This distinction matters because the report does not present one interview as evidence for an entire country or count a written response as an interview.

Note: 27 country governance portraits have been elaborated as an annex to the final report and will be sent to registered participants.

Survey evidence was used to support the diagnosis and guide case selection, rather than being combined into a single European dataset. The comparative analysis of existing urban food policies carried out within the CLEVERFOOD project provided the initial baseline for this work. Building on that analysis, the Food Partnership launched the **2026 Urban Food Policies Assessment**, which received 23 submissions. Among respondents who completed the relevant follow-up questions, formal food plans, dedicated staff and allocated budgets were more frequently reported than monitoring arrangements or routine mechanisms for involving cities in regional and national policymaking. A separate survey targeting national and regional actors received nine responses. Seven respondents reported having a food strategy or an equivalent policy framework, while only four identified a formal coordination mechanism, four reported dedicated funding, and two indicated that cities were systematically involved in policy development or implementation. A third survey, focused on inspiring practices, was used to identify potentially transferable support mechanisms and relevant contacts for more detailed investigation. As all three surveys involved small, self-selected samples, their findings are treated as indicative evidence for refining the research questions and selecting cases, rather than as estimates of how widespread these arrangements are across Europe.

The research deliberately compared what policy documents say with what practitioners can actually use. Official sources were given the greatest weight for legal responsibilities, programme design and funding claims. Interviews were used to understand implementation: whether a municipality knew whom to contact, whether technical advice was available, whether a network depended on one person, whether a successful pilot had a budget after the grant, and whether smaller places could participate on equal terms. This distinction is central to the brief because a formal framework can be strong on paper and still difficult to use.



The Action 2 cases were therefore selected as lenses on particular support functions. France helps examine recognition and regional animation; Flanders and Wallonia show technical assistance; the Dutch City Deal shows formal intergovernmental cooperation; national networks show knowledge retention and representation; FoodLink shows metropolitan coordination; and TETRAA shows multi-year finance for facilitation and capacity. None is treated as a complete model to copy.

What the evidence shows

The central report diagnosis is a gap between local food action and stable public capacity. Political recognition and local strategies have expanded faster than the staff, operating finance, coordination, technical assistance and programme access needed for sustained implementation. A city may have an adopted food strategy but still lack legal advice, time to prepare projects, co-financing, a named regional contact or a route to influence higher-level programmes.

- Formal recognition is useful but insufficient. A strategy becomes operational only when responsibility, staff, finance and technical support are identifiable.
- The most transferable element is a support function, not an institutional label. Different systems can provide recognition, coordination, legal guidance, project preparation, networks and finance in different ways.
- Networks and technical secretariats can retain knowledge, translate rules, convene departments and support smaller municipalities, but they cannot replace public responsibility for mandate, equity, funding and accountability.
- Smaller municipalities face a structural access penalty: limited staff time, legal expertise, cash flow, co-financing and consortium experience can prevent them from using programmes designed around stronger applicants.
- Project funding can initiate work but rarely guarantees permanent coordination or institutional continuity. Municipalities are also often consulted only after programmes, calls or rules have already been designed.

Selected mechanisms - different functions, not a country ranking

France illustrates recognition plus regional animation. [Territorial Food Projects](#) (PATs) create a recognised field of local practice, while Regional Direction for Agriculture and Food (DRAAF) regional services support recognition, convening, methodology and follow-up. The same case also shows the limit: formal recognition does not protect mature coordination when operating support is reduced. Flanders and Wallonia illustrate regional technical assistance as a service. Local4Food and Manger Domain combine mentoring, peer learning and implementation support, but their reach depends on programme continuity and regional budgets.

The Netherlands City Deal shows a different mechanism: a formal national-city-province workspace that addresses legal questions, shared tools and implementation barriers without creating one national food-policy law. National and trans-local networks such as Bio-Städte, the Spanish Network of Municipalities for Agroecology, the Italian Network on Local Food Policies and [Sustainable Food Places](#) demonstrate the value of professional secretariats, peer learning and policy translation. [Lisbon/FoodLink](#) adds a metropolitan route in which an initially informal network becomes connected to territorial planning and regional programme implementation through public metropolitan and regional bodies.

These mechanisms solve different problems. A public programme can establish legitimacy and eligibility; a regional service can interpret rules and accompany implementation; a national network can retain knowledge when staff change and articulate shared municipal concerns; a metropolitan platform can coordinate producers, logistics, land and public demand across municipal boundaries; and a foundation can support experimentation or relationship-building that a standard public call does not finance easily. The report's conclusion is not that all functions should sit in one organisation, but that each function needs a responsible owner, resources, access rules and continuity.



“You cannot finance everything through projects in a network. Once the tool exists, it has to live.”

Stakeholder interview, national support network, June 2026.

This is the recurrent continuity problem. Coordination, facilitation, project preparation and institutional memory are often treated as overhead, even though they are the work that keeps local food policy functioning between projects. The evidence is qualitative and uneven: cities and support organisations are better represented than ministries, Managing Authorities and private value-chain actors, and documentation is denser in Western and Northern Europe. Cases are therefore used to identify functions and limits, not to rank national systems.

How a support system works in practice

A useful support system does not require the same ministry, law or municipal department in every Member State. It does require clear answers to practical questions: who recognises the local public role; who provides legal and technical assistance; who finances coordination and project preparation; how municipalities enter national and regional programmes; how smaller places are included; and what continues when a project ends. These functions can be shared between public authorities, municipal associations, technical secretariats, development agencies, research bodies and networks, provided that public responsibility remains explicit.

Funding should follow the function. Strategy preparation and pilot actions can often use project grants; infrastructure may require ERDF, CAP-related or territorial investment; but permanent municipal teams, regional coordination, professional secretariats and participation need multiannual operating finance. Smaller municipalities may also need pre-financing, proportionate co-financing and shared application support before they can even compete for larger programmes. Fondation Daniel et Nina Carasso and the TETRAA programme illustrate why multi-year support for facilitation, staff, evaluation and relationship-building can matter alongside visible projects. Mouans-Sartoux shows the administrative burden created when mature public functions must be reconstructed through successive grants.

Networks perform different roles and should not be treated as interchangeable. European and international city networks can represent municipal experience and support peer learning; national municipal or food-policy networks can provide closer policy translation and professional support; territorial networks such as FoodLink connect municipalities with producers, research and regional planning; research-practice organisations can provide evidence and methods. None of these actors should be given legal responsibilities they do not hold. Member States and regions remain responsible for mandate, equitable access and long-term public finance, while Managing Authorities can make programme rules and preparation support more usable.

For smaller and medium-sized municipalities, the decisive question is often whether support can be shared. Intermunicipal or metropolitan legal advice, common data services, producer mapping, training and joint applications can reduce duplication without forcing every municipality to build a full food-policy team. This is also a territorial fairness issue: places with fewer staff should not be excluded from regional investment simply because they cannot carry the transaction costs of complex calls.

Continuity should be planned from the beginning of a project. Before closure, the public partners should know who owns the method, service, data or infrastructure; which staff and relationships remain; how the next stage will be financed; and which formal administrative or political decision follows. Responsible closure is also legitimate when continuation is not justified. What should be avoided is an undefined end in which useful capacity disappears because ownership was never assigned.



FROM LOCAL FOOD INITIATIVE TO DURABLE PUBLIC CAPACITY

Local initiative	→	Recognised public role
Named national/regional responsibility	→	Technical assistance + coordination
Accessible funding	→	Project preparation
Implementation	→	Permanent staff + operating finance
Accountability + learning	→	Durable public capacity

Source: analytical synthesis of M4 evidence; arrangements vary by Member State and region.

The most common break points are visible along this sequence: no recognised mandate, no responsible institution, project-only finance, no access for smaller municipalities and no continuation decision at project closure. For Action 2, these are governance and capacity questions. Technical indicator selection remains with Action 6, detailed sustainable procurement instruments with Action 7, and public-land questions with Action 5; the Action 2 evidence feeds the Partnership's wider Action 1 advocacy on the enabling conditions cities need.



KEY FINDINGS AND PROPOSED POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION 2

KEY FINDINGS

A useful national or regional support system does not require one identical ministry, law or model copied across Europe. It does require a set of functions that municipalities can actually use: recognition of the local public role, a responsible administrative home, technical assistance, coordination, accessible finance, participation before higher-level decisions are fixed, fair access for smaller places and continuity beyond projects. Hybrid delivery can widen capacity, but public authorities must remain accountable for mandate, equity, funding and continuation.

CLARIFY THE PUBLIC ROLE OF LOCAL AND TERRITORIAL AUTHORITIES

Member States and regions should recognise the responsibilities and participation rights of municipalities in food-related governance and regional development, without imposing one organisational model or an unfunded municipal mandate.

Lead: Member States and regional authorities. **Mechanism:** Recognition in relevant food, health, climate, cohesion and territorial frameworks, with a published municipal contact. **Enabling condition:** Clear legal/administrative anchoring, staff time and public accountability.

DEFINE A MINIMUM NATIONAL OR REGIONAL SUPPORT PACKAGE

Every municipality should be able to access a basic offer including a recognised public role, a named responsible body or team, protected staff time, technical and legal support, modest implementation finance and access to relevant programmes.

Lead: National ministries, regions and mandated public support bodies. **Mechanism:** A differentiated service offer with starter, consolidation and mature-policy routes. **Enabling condition:** Multiannual resources and transparent service standards that also work for small municipalities.

RECOGNISE AND FINANCE INTERMEDIARY ORGANISATIONS, TECHNICAL SECRETARIATS AND NATIONAL CITY NETWORKS

Where these bodies perform a defined public support function, public finance should be transparent and linked to minimum services, fair representation, support for smaller municipalities, knowledge retention and accountability.

Lead: Member States, regions and programme owners. **Mechanism:** Multiannual agreements with municipal networks and technical secretariats. **Enabling condition:** Clear mandate, access rules, conflict-of-interest safeguards and public reporting.

MAKE COORDINATION, FACILITATION, PEER LEARNING AND PROJECT PREPARATION ELIGIBLE MULTIANNUAL COSTS

Programmes should finance the people and relationships required for implementation, not only visible outputs, pilots or infrastructure.

Lead: Managing Authorities and national/regional programme owners. **Mechanism:** Eligibility rules and multiannual operating agreements covering coordination, facilitation and preparation. **Enabling condition:** Stable budgets and recognition of these functions as implementation capacity rather than discretionary overhead.

REDUCE THE CO-FINANCING AND ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN ON SMALLER MUNICIPALITIES

Smaller and less-resourced municipalities should have access to differentiated co-financing, pre-financing, starter grants, simplified costs, shared technical services and joint or umbrella applications.

Lead: Managing Authorities, regions, metropolitan/intermunicipal bodies and municipal associations. **Mechanism:** Proportionate finance and shared project-preparation services. **Enabling condition:** Rules that reduce transaction costs without weakening public-purpose, equality or accountability requirements.

INVOLVE MUNICIPALITIES BEFORE PROGRAMMES, CALLS AND RULES ARE FINALISED

National and regional authorities should establish recurring participation routes linked to real policy and programme cycles so municipalities can explain public-service needs, implementation barriers and the operating conditions of smaller territories before decisions are fixed.

Lead: Member States, regions, Managing Authorities and representative municipal bodies. **Mechanism:** Municipal panels, territorial working groups or network-based representation tied to programme and call cycles. **Enabling condition:** Balanced representation of large and small municipalities and a written account of how contributions affected decisions.

