

Food is a Human Right The EU must guarantee it!

WE CALL ON THE EU TO MAKE THE RIGHT TO FOOD A LIVED REALITY BY:

- 01** Supporting democratic and participatory governance
- 02** Ensuring adequate resources to realise the right to food
- 03** Promoting small-scale producers, agroecology, territorial food systems, and decent work
- 04** Regulating food environments to protect consumers' health
- 05** Implementing social protection measures to realise the right to food
- 06** Prioritising the right to food and policy coherence over competitiveness
- 07** Addressing the drivers of undernutrition and ending the use of hunger in conflict

“The right to food is the right of every individual, alone or in community with others, to have physical and economic access at all times to sufficient, adequate and culturally acceptable food that is produced and consumed sustainably, preserving access for future generations.”

It is recognised in international human rights law and affirmed by all EU Member States. Yet, within the EU, about one in five people at risk of poverty cannot afford a healthy diet. Globally, hunger and malnutrition persist as an enduring injustice and a collective failure, disproportionately affecting children, women and marginalised communities.

The right to food is not simply the right to be free from hunger. It requires States to ensure that people can eat healthy and with dignity at all times, raising fundamentally political questions about how, where and

by whom food is produced, distributed and consumed. Its violation results from political choices that shape food and farming systems, often to the detriment of people, peasants and the environment.

Over time, agri-food products have increasingly been reduced to commodities, and food systems have been shaped by trade liberalisation, corporate concentration and financial interests, diverting them from their original purpose of nourishing people. Corporate capture drives environmental degradation and biodiversity loss, labour exploitation and rising food prices, while widening the gap between the healthy and the malnourished. These dynamics undermine our collective ability to protect food as a shared common good and a fundamental human right.

In recent decades, the realisation of the right to food has been further constrained by climate change, conflicts, pandemics and economic instability, with new geopolitical tensions and El Niño-related risks threatening further disruption.

Realising this right requires promoting food sovereignty, democratic control over food systems, fair prices and market regulation, gender equality, as well as upholding the rights enshrined in a well- established legal framework, outlined below.

Legal Foundations of the Right to Food

The right to food is grounded in a binding legal framework that requires all relevant laws and sectoral policies affecting food systems to be aligned with its content and implementation.

The European Union and its Member States are bound by a range of international, regional and EU-level legal obligations and policy frameworks that recognise and support the right to food, including:

- Article 11 of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR), ratified by all EU Member States, which recognises the right to adequate food and obliges States to respect, protect and fulfil this right.
- UN Economic and Social Council, General Comment No. 12: The Right to Adequate Food (Art. 11 of the Covenant), UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions, which protect the rights of workers across food systems, including labour rights, decent work and social protection.
- EU Treaty obligations on Policy Coherence for Development (Article 208 TFEU), which require the EU to ensure that its policies support development objectives, including food security and the realisation of human rights globally.

To further strengthen their approach, the EU and its Member States should also draw on internationally recognised normative frameworks and guidelines, including:

- The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas* (UNDROP, 2018), notably Article 15, which articulates the rights to food and food sovereignty for peasants and rural workers, strengthening their access to land, resources and participation in decision-making.

- The *Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food* (2004), endorsed by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) and adopted by the FAO Council, provide practical guidance to support the progressive realisation of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security.
- The CFS *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests* (2012), which support secure and equitable access to natural resources, an essential component of the right to food and food sovereignty.

Furthermore, European institutions have repeatedly recognised the importance of a right to food framework in addressing food security and food system challenges, most recently reaffirmed in the COP30 *Belém Declaration*. It is also worth noting that the EU Gender Action Plan III (GAP III) commits to mainstreaming gender equality across all external action sectors, including agriculture, food systems and nutrition, requiring that gender considerations be integrated into programmes addressing food and nutrition insecurity.

A Call for Coherent, Rights-Based EU Leadership

Recognising that the European Union plays a decisive role in shaping global food systems - both within its borders and beyond through its agricultural, trade, development, climate, economic and seed policies - we, the undersigned organisations, echo the voices of thousands of EU citizens who have signed the “Food is a Human Right for All!” European Citizens’ Initiative.

We call on the EU to make the right to food a lived reality by embedding it at the heart of its legal framework and placing it at the centre of all policies and strategies shaping food systems, within the Union and globally. This requires:

01

Supporting Democratic and Participatory Governance

The EU should strengthen democratic, inclusive and rights-based governance of food systems at both global and European levels by:

- Strengthening the role of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) as the foremost inclusive international platform for food governance, including by ensuring sustained political and financial support to its work. This includes reinforcing the meaningful participation of civil society, including women-led and women's rights organisations, and Indigenous Peoples through the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples’ Mechanism (CSIPM), as well as supporting the independent, evidence-based role of the High-Level Panel of Experts (HLPE).

- Ensuring policy coherence with global commitments through the translation of CFS policy outcomes and recommendations into EU action, notably by integrating them into internal EU policies - including agriculture, trade, social and environmental frameworks - and by aligning EU external action, including development cooperation and trade policies, with these commitments, in line with the EU's obligation to Policy Coherence for Development.
- Establishing an inclusive EU-level food governance mechanism by creating a permanent, transparent and participatory platform that ensures the meaningful and institutionalised participation of rightsholders and affected communities, strengthening democratic accountability in food systems policymaking, supporting cross-sectoral policy coherence, and building on existing proposals, including those put forward through the European Citizens' Initiative and the [European Economic and Social Committee \(EESC\)](#).

02

Ensuring adequate resources to realise the right to food

As negotiations on the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), and the Global Europe Instrument progress, the EU must align its financial priorities with the realisation of the right to food and the transformation of food systems. This requires:

- Fully implementing Article 39 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) by supporting the livelihoods of those working in agriculture, including through policies that ensure fair prices and decent incomes across food chains.
- Maintain or increase the CAP budget to support rural development, prioritise food sovereignty, and support young farmers and small-scale producers, while applying payment caps for fairer funding. Ensure alignment with gender equality, climate and environmental goals, and support farmers in transitioning away from industrial animal farming towards sustainable, territorial, agroecological and diversified systems through dedicated financial and technical support.
- Ensure EU external financing and action prioritise the right to food, food and nutrition security, agroecology and locally adapted food systems, through dedicated, non-debt-generating funding, while avoiding support for unsustainable, transactional or extractive models and fully upholding human rights.

03

Promoting small-scale producers, agroecology, territorial food systems and decent work

Guided by UNDROP and relevant ILO standards, the EU must promote small-scale producers, including organic farmers, agroecology and territorial food systems as pathways for social, ecological and economic transformation. This includes strengthening local and traditional knowledge systems, biodiversity, and resilient local economies, by:

- Ensuring fair incomes, safe working conditions and decent work throughout food chains, including through the effective implementation and strengthening of the EU Directive on Unfair Trading Practices, the EU Agri-Food Chain Observatory, and the social conditionality of the Common Agricultural Policy. This must include stronger protection of agricultural workers, particularly migrant workers and women farmers, through rights-based approaches that guarantee fair wages, safe working and living conditions, access to essential services, and protection against exploitation. It should also address structural discrimination, including the specific vulnerabilities faced by women.
- Ensure equitable access to land, seeds and natural resources by addressing land concentration, supporting agrarian reform, regulating markets and preventing speculation, while protecting peasants' seed rights, strengthening farmer-managed seed systems and agrobiodiversity, and curbing excessive corporate control. Through EU external action, support integrated approaches to agrarian reform and pastoralism that recognise secure land tenure, access to water and the mobility needs of transhumant systems, contributing to the prevention of resource-based conflicts in partner countries.
- Advancing a research and innovation agenda rooted in the knowledge systems, needs and priorities of small-scale producers.

04

Regulating food environments to protect consumers' health

The EU must strengthen policies that shape food environments - namely the economic, social and cultural conditions that influence food availability, accessibility and consumer choices - to ensure equitable access to healthy, sustainable and adequate food, while enabling informed decision-making. This requires:

- Regulate ultra-processed and unhealthy foods and harmful marketing practices - especially those targeting children (including digital advertising, misleading health claims, and promotion in and around schools) - and guarantee clear, meaningful, science-based and transparent food labelling, including accessible nutritional information and front-of- pack labelling where appropriate.
- Strengthen the regulation and oversight of agri-food companies and retailers to ensure greater price transparency and limit excessive profit margins.
- Promote agrobiodiversity and diversified diets while preserving food cultures, support territorial food system initiatives that reconnect producers and consumers, and phase out hazardous pesticides and fertilisers while significantly reducing overall pesticide use, with support for farmers' transition to agroecological practices.

05

Implementing social protection measures to realise the right to food

The EU must strengthen the role of social protection in the progressive realisation of the right to adequate food for all by:

- Developing and maintaining comprehensive social protection systems, particularly for those unable to provide for themselves, through integrated systems that include income support, cash transfers, child benefits, and school feeding programmes, building on community capacities and local initiatives where possible.
- Expanding social protection through sustainable public food procurement - particularly in schools and other public institutions - to guarantee access to nutritious, high-quality meals for all, especially children and vulnerable groups. Such schemes should function as universal or targeted public entitlements, while supporting small-scale producers and local food systems. Procurement frameworks should therefore integrate objectives related to health, nutrition, environmental sustainability and social inclusion.
- Strengthening food insecurity monitoring systems as a core component of social protection frameworks, by ensuring robust data systems within the EU - integrated into national public statistics - to better target and inform policymaking, while supporting partner countries through financial, technical and policy cooperation to build robust, rights-based social protection systems and locally grounded food and nutrition data ecosystems.

06

Prioritising the right to food and policy coherence over competitiveness

The EU should shift away from a narrow focus on competitiveness and instead promote a model of cooperation grounded in solidarity and shared resilience, ensuring that all policies, internal and external, are aligned with the realisation of the right to food, by:

- Strengthening human rights and environmental due diligence across global food supply chains and in Global Gateway investments, including by expanding corporate accountability mechanisms and ensuring that affected communities and rights-holders have effective access to remedies and avenues to bring claims.
- Ensuring that agriculture is not treated as an ordinary trade sector within free trade agreements and trade liberalisation frameworks. Trade relations should instead be based on principles of complementarity, solidarity, food sovereignty, and the right to food.
- Prevent exports and business practices that undermine local, diverse food systems - including dumping, unfair competition, price suppression, and the export of pesticides and agricultural inputs banned in the EU - while strengthening public market regulation to ensure fair and stable prices for producers, limit harmful volatility, and guarantee affordable food for all.

07

Addressing the drivers of undernutrition and ending the use of hunger in conflict

The EU must play a decisive role in addressing the root causes of under nutrition world wide and in ensuring that hunger is never weaponised in situations of conflict, by:

- Promoting integrated, context-specific, and conflict-sensitive approaches to address the root causes of food insecurity and malnutrition in fragile and conflict-affected settings, including poverty, displacement, climate change effects, disrupted essential services, and limited access to nutritious diets, in line with the recently adopted Council Conclusions on *A coherent approach to fragility, EU external action instruments and sustainable development outcomes* and the European Commission's Communication on *Defending values, driving reform, delivering impact: the EU's humanitarian action in a shifting global order*.
- Intensifying efforts to address undernutrition, including wasting and stunting, and its structural determinants in non-EU countries through multisectoral and integrated approaches. This includes strengthening data systems to better track malnutrition, scaling up prevention through nutrition-sensitive interventions across key sectors, and ensuring

equitable access to quality nutrition and health services, including treatment for acute malnutrition. To support this, the EU should develop a renewed Policy Framework on Nutrition with clear priorities, a comprehensive action plan, and strong mechanisms to ensure alignment across Commission Directorates and the broader Team Europe approach.

- Ensuring that, when starvation of civilians, siege tactics, or obstruction of humanitarian aid are used as a weapon of war, a coordinated EU response is implemented, including support for independent investigations and evidence preservation, and action to advance criminal accountability for perpetrators of IHL violations. If such efforts fail, restrictive measures, including targeted sanctions, accompanied by the necessary humanitarian exemptions to ensure the continuity of life-saving aid delivery, may be considered.

A Collective Commitment

We stand united in calling for a transformation of food systems that is grounded in human rights, food sovereignty, and social, gender, and environmental justice.

The European Union has both the responsibility and the opportunity to lead this transformation within Europe and globally, in partnership with civil society, food producers and communities most affected by hunger and malnutrition.

Food is not a privilege.

Food is not just another commodity.

Food is a Human Right.

The EU must act now to make this right a reality for everyone, everywhere, at all time

Endorsing Partners





