

GHENT BELGIUM

PIONEERING THE FIGHT AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE THROUGH INTEGRATED FOOD POLICIES

This food policy snapshot is based on an interview with Lieta Goethijn, Food Strategy Lead of the Environment and Climate Department from the City of Ghent.

GLASGOW
FOOD AND
CLIMATE
DECLARATION

Grassroots support for integrated food policies has been a mainstay in Ghent long before the City drew up its first food policy. For years, citizens, organizations, and restaurants independently innovated at the local level to shorten food supply chains and encourage a shift to plant-based diets. In 2013, following mounting concerns over climate change, this grassroots momentum was taken up at the policy level when citizens elected the Green Party to the City Council. In the same year, Ghent put in place a FOOD COUNCIL with representatives from organizations across the food system, and collaboratively developed Ghent's food policy, 'GENT EN GARDE'. Gent en Garde has three strategic objectives: to build a short, sustainable food supply chain, ensure everyone eats sustainably, and guarantee no food is wasted. Ghent has been recognized internationally for its successful food policies, including winning the UN GLOBAL CLIMATE ACTION AWARD in 2019. As one of the first European cities to launch an urban food policy and food council, Ghent is a leading example for cities tackling climate change through integrated food policies.

“The cooperation and inclusion of all stakeholders across the food supply chain are central to our food policy and have been from the beginning.”

ENABLERS

INTEGRATED FOOD AND CLIMATE POLICIES

In Ghent, food and climate policies have been integrated from the start. Food policies are written into Ghent's CLIMATE PLAN to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. To ensure buy-in, the City must seek approval from its Food Council to launch new food and climate initiatives or make any revisions to the existing Plan. This dialogue between the City and the Food Council on food and climate policies has resulted in Ghent setting ambitious goals for greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reductions in the food system. For example, as a signatory of the FLEMISH GREEN DEAL, Ghent has committed to a protein transition to shift consumption to 60% plant-based and 40% animal-based protein. Ghent is also following the EU goal to halve food waste in the city and is working with schools, hospitals, care centers, and the hospitality sector to put concrete actions in place to reach this goal.

REPRESENTATIVE AND COOPERATIVE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

One of the essential aspects of Ghent's food policy is its innovative governance model involving stakeholder and citizen engagement. The model is based on co-creation and participation. The Ghent Food Council brings together 32 representatives from the agricultural sector, distribution and trade, restaurants, civil society, and knowledge institutions. It is actively involved in the development of City objectives and priorities. The Food Council also has its own budget, funded by the City, to stimulate innovative projects.

Additionally, the City and the Food Council employ multiple methods for direct dialogue with citizens. The Food Council hosts an annual partner day, where partner organizations and interested citizens are invited to discuss food policy. The City also hosts networking events around specific topics and partners with local institutions, such as the University of Ghent, to organize their events. Ghent also hosts an annual Climate Festival, 'GENT AAN ZEE', with an area dedicated to sustainable food systems. These methods create an accessible and engaging way for citizens to discover and participate in food policymaking.

BARRIERS

MEASURING IMPACT: IDENTIFYING THE RIGHT METRICS AND DATA FOR MONITORING FOOD STRATEGIES

Finding the right metrics and data for monitoring the impact of Ghent's food policies remains a challenge for the City. However, one area where the City successfully measures GHG emission reductions is food waste. A food waste benchmarking study was conducted to track goals, and all waste diverted through the Foodsavers Ghent program is measured, including GHG emissions averted. As a member of the MILAN URBAN FOOD POLICY PACT (MUFPP), Ghent is working to incorporate the MUFPP MONITORING FRAMEWORK into its assessment strategy to ensure greater accuracy in measuring the impacts of its food policies.

LACK OF FOOD POLICY ALIGNMENT AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

The City of Ghent has instituted ambitious food policies and programs, and created links with regional and EU-level frameworks. Still, an equally ambitious food strategy action plan is missing at the national level, where food is not yet viewed systemically or holistically. Many local-level priorities do not align with federal priorities, especially land-use policies and school meals. For example, while Ghent is tackling the protein transition through a weekly vegetarian day and public procurement commitments, there is no equivalent action or support at the national level. Encouragingly, vertical policy integration at the regional level is flourishing. The Flemish government is leading the GREEN DEAL project and initiating a food strategy that cities are invited to collaborate on. Ghent also participates in a learning network on food through the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG). Urban food governance is also being taken up more and more at the European level, where funding opportunities are increasingly being made available for cities.

Ghent is internationally recognized for its ambitious food policy, Gent en Garde. Through integrated food policies, Ghent aims to shorten and strengthen food supply chains in the city, provide better access to food, eliminate food waste, and increase sustainable production and consumption. Initiatives have also included systems to redistribute surplus food to those in need, support for community vegetable gardens, and the weekly vegetarian day. Through participative governance models, including the Food Council and citizen engagement, Ghent's food policies have evolved over the years from tackling low-hanging fruit to more impactful projects to transform the city's food system and fight climate change.

“ One of our projects that is very well known is Thursday veggie day that we started in 2009. Today there are more vegetarians in Ghent than the Belgian average, and we're known informally as the veggie capital of Europe.”

EXAMPLES OF GHENT'S FOOD POLICIES

- VANIER: A business-to-business platform that links local farmers with shops, restaurants, and canteens in the city. Local farmers have connected with over 50 businesses.
- FOODSAVERS GENT: A logistics platform that collects food surpluses from markets and delivers them to social organizations in Ghent. Two thousand tonnes of food have been redistributed through the platform.
- PROTEIN TRANSITION: To encourage a plant-based transition in protein production and consumption, Ghent's schools, day-care centers, and public services provide vegetarian meals on Thursdays. Ghent also coaches and promotes restaurants and shops that offer vegetarian alternatives and organizes cooking workshops. These policies contribute to there being more vegetarians in Ghent than the Belgian average.
- COMMUNITY VEGETABLE GARDENS: Citizens, schools, and organizations receive support and education on establishing and caring for vegetable gardens. 42 schools and 25 community gardens have already participated in this initiative.

