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Food Waste Data Reporting to Eurostat 2022: Methodological Challenges and Transparency Issues in EU Member States

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Abstract

The European Union has established one of the most advanced regulatory frameworks for food waste monitoring and reporting (EC 2019), further strengthened by the adoption of Directive (EU) 2025/1892, which reinforces accountability and introduces binding reduction targets. However, significant methodological and institutional challenges remain in the harmonized reporting of food waste data across Member States (Corrado & Sala, 2018; Corrado et al., 2019). This study analyses the 2022 food waste data submitted to Eurostat by 29 countries, with the aim of identifying key limitations affecting data quality, comparability, and transparency. The research combines a systematic review of Eurostat datasets and quality reports with a metadata analysis of applied measurement methods, including definitions, sampling approaches, and extrapolation procedures. Additional methodological information was collected through targeted questionnaires sent to 29 countries and semi-structured interviews conducted with representatives from 18 countries. Results were shared for validation with the national reference points. The results reveal substantial gaps in transparency and methodological consistency. Major challenges include limited data disaggregation, missing indicators, unclear traceability of original measurement methods, inconsistent interpretation of Annex III and Annex IV methodologies, and uncertainty related to scaling and national extrapolation processes. In several cases, food waste data retrieved from waste management companies lacked sufficient documentation regarding sampling strategies, coverage, and applied protocols, while national reference points were often unable to verify the underlying methodological details. Additional concerns relate to institutional memory loss due to staff turnover, outdated proxies, and variable representativeness of samples across sectors and countries. The study highlights the urgent need for stronger methodological harmonization, improved transparency requirements, and enhanced documentation practices within the EU food waste reporting system. These findings contribute to ongoing discussions on improving the reliability and comparability of food waste statistics to support evidence-based policymaking and the achievement of EU food waste reduction targets.

Keywords: food waste reporting, Eurostat, data quality, EU policy, food waste quantification

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