

# FOODGAP CHRONICLES



January 14 2026



## Monitoring for Action.

### Data Needs for Improved Governance of Urban and Metropolitan Food Systems

Maria Fabiani\*

Vincenza Di Malta\*\*

Roberto Marcelli\*\*

\*Independent researcher and evaluator

\*\*Metropolitan City of Rome.

Across cities and metropolitan areas, monitoring is still too often associated with reporting obligations, compliance exercises, or retrospective accountability.

The FOODGaP peer learning workshop challenged this assumption by reframing monitoring as a forward-looking governance function.

Monitoring for action is not about producing more indicators or dashboards, but about creating the conditions for informed decisions, strategic prioritisation, and institutional learning.

In this perspective, data are not an end in themselves, nor a neutral representation of reality: they are a means to clarify what matters, to whom, and at which scale decisions can be effectively taken. The discussion made clear that when monitoring is disconnected from policy coherence, governance capacity, and decision-making processes, it risks remaining a technical exercise. When it is embedded in strategic frameworks and used iteratively, monitoring becomes a lever for action rather than a tool for justification after the fact.

Chronicles from the first online workshop - FOODGaP Capacity Building Programme

The first FOODGaP online workshop offered more than a discussion on data and indicators. It opened a collective reflection on how monitoring can support learning, anticipation and real decision-making in urban and metropolitan food policies.



Interreg



NEXT MED

<https://www.interregnextmed.eu/project-page/foodgap/about/>

# Case cluster - Three pathways to coherence in food system governance and evidence-based decision-making

The three city cases discussed during the workshop illustrate different but complementary pathways through which monitoring can support action, shaped by governance scale, institutional capacity, and policy architecture.

Rather than offering replicable models, they reveal how coherence, vertical, horizontal, or operational, conditions the way evidence is produced, interpreted, and ultimately used for decision-making.

In **Dublin City Council**, food policy is not developed as a standalone domain but is embedded within the statutory Climate Action Plan 2024–2029. The Edible Dublin Food Strategy sits inside a legally mandated framework, aligning food access, social justice, and climate objectives within a single policy architecture.

This integration exemplifies vertical policy coherence, where food-related actions gain legitimacy, continuity, and political traction by being anchored to binding climate commitments and reporting cycles.

Monitoring, in this context, supports action even in the absence of fully mature or consolidated indicators: evidence is mobilised to guide priorities and learning, rather than to prove performance *ex post*.

Public engagement initiatives, such as Eat the Streets, play a dual role: raising awareness while progressively generating locally grounded insights that can inform future indicators and strategic adjustments.

The experience of the **Barcelona Metropolitan Area** highlights instead the importance of horizontal policy coherence at metropolitan scale. Here, the Metropolitan Strategic Plan functions as a shared route map integrating sectoral policies - urban planning, mobility, water, waste, climate and food - within a single strategic vision. The Barcelona Metropolitan Food System Observatory operates within this architecture not as an isolated data initiative, but as a planning tool that supports diagnosis, policy design, and impact evaluation across domains. Its value lies less in the sheer number of indicators than in its capacity to recompose fragmented data sources, address scale mismatches, and support evidence-based decisions in a complex city-region. The case also makes visible the constraints of metropolitan monitoring - data gaps, limited access to private-sector information, and non-standardised definitions - showing that coherence and institutional mandate are prerequisites for making evidence actionable.

A different trajectory emerges from **Mersin Metropolitan Municipality**, where strong field-based action precedes formalised monitoring frameworks. Mersin's producer support system demonstrates high implementation capacity and tangible impacts on rural livelihoods, short food supply chains, and socially oriented food services.

In this case, learning and data emerge from action itself: monitoring evolves as a tool for consolidation, reflection, and gradual systematisation, rather than as a precondition for intervention. Participation is embedded in delivery mechanisms, through direct engagement with producers and beneficiaries, highlighting how governance contexts influence the sequencing between action, participation, and evidence.

Taken together, the three cases show that there is no single model for evidence-informed food policies. What matters is the alignment between governance scale, policy coherence, and institutional capacity to learn over time. Crucially, they demonstrate that evidence-based food policies depend less on the quantity or sophistication of data available than on the coherence of the policy ecosystems in which data are produced, interpreted, and used to support real decisions.



## Eat the Streets - City of Dublin

Eat the Streets is not a side event, nor a communication add-on. It is where climate strategy meets everyday life. By linking food, public space and participation, it turns abstract climate goals into lived experience,

While keeping equity at the centre: who has access to good food, where, and under what conditions. In doing so, it reminds us that climate action is not only about emissions, but about fairness, proximity and the right to eat well.

*Cliona Kelliher, City of Dublin. EU urban agenda food partnership. Workshop speaker.*

## Monitoring as a learning and anticipatory infrastructure

A further insight emerging from the workshop concerns the role of monitoring as a learning and anticipatory infrastructure, rather than as a tool for control or retrospective evaluation. In **Dublin**, data are used to progressively refine priorities within a statutory climate framework, allowing the city to learn while acting and to anticipate future needs even when indicators are still under development. In **Barcelona**, the **Metropolitan Food System Observatory** is explicitly designed to support diagnosis, policy design and impact evaluation, while also enabling forward-looking reflection by connecting historical trends, spatial scales and sectoral interactions within the Metropolitan Strategic Plan. In **Mersin**, learning emerges directly from implementation: field-based action generates evidence that feeds reflection and gradual systematisation, supporting anticipation through lived experience rather than predictive modelling alone.



*Anna Moreso Ventura, Metropolitan Authority Barcelona. Workshop speaker.*

Across these contexts, data are valued not primarily for proving performance, but for their capacity to help institutions surface assumptions, identify emerging signals, and recalibrate strategies over time. In this sense, monitoring functions as a bridge between learning and anticipation. By connecting evidence from past and ongoing action with forward-looking reflection, it enables institutions to explore emerging trends, test strategic

assumptions, and inform decisions before problems fully materialise. Evidence thus supports decision-making not by predicting the future, but by strengthening the capacity to act under uncertainty. This shift, from monitoring for accountability to monitoring for learning and anticipation, emerges as a critical condition for governing complex food systems in a rapidly evolving policy and environmental context.



---

---

## Cross-cutting reflections - Governance, knowledge and the limits of data

Beyond city cases, the workshop surfaced a set of cross-cutting reflections that help clarify what monitoring for action requires in practice. The intervention by **European Public Law Organisation (EPLO)** foregrounded the governance dimension of food policies. EPLO highlighted how local public authorities are often innovative in food policy, yet frequently constrained by misalignment with regional and national frameworks, as well as by overlapping or unclear mandates across levels.

Strengthening food governance therefore requires greater attention to both horizontal coordination within municipalities and vertical coordination across city, regional and national levels. In this perspective, participation is not treated as an add-on, but as a core element of effective governance, calling for more structured and inclusive approaches that remain realistic and context-sensitive. [Continued on page 4]

*Dimitra Psimmenou, EPLO. Workshop speaker.*





Alessandra Manganelli, University of Barcelona - EU urban agenda food partnership. Workshop speaker.

## Transforming food systems requires learning beyond data

Recent FAO analyses underline that transforming food systems is not only urgent but also economically and socially necessary: current food systems generate environmental and social costs that outweigh their contribution to global GDP. The workshop discussions echoed this perspective. The experience of Mersin shows how supporting agroecological production and short supply chains can strengthen livelihoods, equity, and resilience. Dublin highlights how embedding food policies within climate strategies helps reconnect food sovereignty, health and affordability.

At the same time, the reflection introduced by Alessandra Manganelli, University of Barcelona, reminds us that indicators and monitoring choices are never neutral: they shape which transformations are made visible and which remain marginal. Monitoring for action therefore becomes a political and ethical tool to redirect subsidies, rethink climate finance, phase out fossil-fuel-based inputs, defend local food systems and guarantee the right to healthy, culturally appropriate food.

## Cross-cutting reflections - Governance, knowledge and the limits of data

This governance lens was complemented by the contribution of **University of Barcelona**, where Alessandra Manganelli offered an epistemic reflection on monitoring and indicators. She emphasised that monitoring frameworks are not neutral technical devices: they embody assumptions about what counts as relevant, measurable and actionable. Choices about indicators shape how food system problems are framed and which policy options become visible. Evidence-based policymaking, in this sense, is less about identifying perfect metrics than about making explicit the values and priorities embedded in monitoring choices.

Read together, these contributions suggest that the main challenge is not the lack of data, but the risk of disconnecting evidence from governance capacity and policy coherence. Monitoring supports action when it is embedded in clear institutional mandates, aligned across governance levels, and used as a tool for learning and coordination rather than as a retrospective justification of decisions already taken.



## Conclusion - From data to decisions, from coherence to capacity

What ultimately emerged from the workshop is a quiet but demanding shift in perspective. Data do not drive change on their own; institutions do, when they are able to learn, anticipate and decide in conditions of uncertainty. Across very different contexts, the decisive factor was not the volume of information available, but the coherence between policy frameworks, governance scale and the capacity to act.

Participation mattered when it strengthened public responsibility rather than dispersing it. Seen this way, monitoring for action is not a technical upgrade, but a question of institutional design – and of the choices we are willing to make visible.

