

FOODGAP CHRONICLES



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Multilevel Governance, Participation and Vertical Coordination

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The second peer learning webinar of the FOODGaP Project held on 4 February 2026 (11:00-12:30 CET) and led by the EPLO Institute for Sustainable Development, constituted the second peer-learning event of the FOODGaP Capacity Building Programme under WP3.

The webinar confirmed a shared understanding across speakers and participants that the effectiveness of food policies depends less on the formulation of individual measures and more on how governance systems operate in practice.

Across different territorial and institutional contexts, food policy challenges were consistently linked to issues of coordination across governance levels, clarity of mandates, the design of participation mechanisms, and institutional continuity over time, rather than to a lack of strategic ambition. This common framing provided a strong basis for collective reflection on how multilevel governance and participation can be strengthened to support more coherent, inclusive, and sustainable food policies.

Chronicles from the second online workshop - FOODGaP Capacity Building Programme

The second FOODGaP online workshop explored practical approaches to strengthening local and metropolitan food governance, and concluded with an interactive discussion on participation, coordination, and the role of metropolitan governance in shaping sustainable food systems, contributing to the ongoing FOODGaP - Interreg NEXT MED capacity-building process.



Interreg



NEXT MED

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

Multilevel governance as a prerequisite for impact

A first core theme concerned multilevel governance as a prerequisite for impact. As emphasised by Mr. Spyros Kouvelis, food systems inherently cut across multiple policy sectors and governance levels, including urban planning, health, environment, agriculture, and social policy. Inefficiencies in food systems therefore generate cumulative social and environmental pressures, particularly in European and Mediterranean urban contexts.

The discussion highlighted that clear allocation of roles, structured coordination mechanisms, and continuity beyond project-based interventions are essential to translate policy intentions into sustained outcomes. Governance gaps identified in this context were framed as structural challenges embedded in institutional design, rather than as failures of individual local authorities.



Mr Spyros Kouvelis,

ISD EPLO Founder & Director, Senior Associate – University of Cambridge, Board Member – EU Mission Ocean, f. Minister of State, f. Member of Parliament, ex-UNEP



Vertical Governance: Coordinating between City - Region - State

A second major focus was vertical coordination between global, national, regional, metropolitan, and local levels, which emerged as central to governance effectiveness. Dr. Stefanos Fotiou underlined that vertical governance is often misunderstood as an additional coordination forum, while in reality it concerns the explicit structuring of how decisions, resources, and accountability flow across levels. Drawing on experiences from the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub, from countries such as Lebanon, Indonesia, Peru, Nepal, Serbia, and Gambia, he showed that national ambition frequently fails at the point of delivery, as food system policies are negotiated at national level but implemented locally.

Effective alignment across levels requires that local authorities are involved early in policy cycles, that responsibilities are matched with predictable financing, and that minimum feedback loops allow local realities to inform national decision-making. Governance, in this sense, was defined as the alignment of decision rights, financing, and accountability rather than as policy coordination alone.



Dr. Stefanos Fotiou, Director, FAO Office of Sustainable Development Goals; Director, UN Food Systems Coordination Hub

The discussion further clarified that participation is inseparable from vertical governance. Participation shapes outcomes only when it is connected to formal decision points and institutions with authority. Dr. Fotiou pointed out that without clearly defined entry points in the policy cycle, formal links to decision-making bodies, and transparent obligations to respond to stakeholder inputs, participation remains consultative and detached from power. Effective governance therefore requires participation to be embedded within vertical decision pathways, transforming stakeholder engagement into a functional component of policy design, adjustment, and implementation.



The Metropolitan level as Governance Bridge

A third theme addressed the role of the metropolitan level as a governance bridge, illustrated through the Lisbon Metropolitan Area. Dr. Rosário Oliveira demonstrated how metropolitan governance structures can connect municipalities, research institutions, and civil society through network-based models, such as the FoodLink initiative involving 18 municipalities. The metropolitan scale was shown to be particularly relevant for coordinating policies related to food distribution, land use, logistics, and access, which exceed municipal boundaries.

Shared data systems and monitoring tools were highlighted as key enablers of evidence-based decision-making, transparency, and accountability, supporting alignment across sectors and territories. Metropolitan governance was thus positioned as a connective layer that complements local and national action by reducing fragmentation and enabling collective territorial strategies.



Dr. Rosário Oliveira,
Institute of Environmental Health (ISAMB), School of Medicine, University of Lisbon, TERRA - Associate Laboratory for Sustainable Land Use and Ecosystem Services

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The Experience of PAT, France

A fourth dimension concerned institutionalised participation as a driver of resilience and policy coherence, illustrated by the French experience of Territorial Food Projects (Projets Alimentaires Territoriaux), active since 2014. As presented by Mr. Florent Yann Lardic, these initiatives demonstrate how structured participation, inter-municipal cooperation, and subsidiarity can strengthen food governance across areas such as food education, social justice, environmental sustainability, school meals, and land use.

At the same time, the discussion acknowledged the limits of participatory approaches when coordination mechanisms, mandates, or resources are insufficient to sustain engagement over time. Participation was therefore framed not as an isolated process, but as dependent on stable institutional frameworks and long-term governance capacity.



Mr Florent Yann Lardic,
Director Terres en villes

Conclusion - Participation, Coordination and Governance are Foundational Elements of Effective Food Policy



Ms. Christina Deligianni,
Policy and Programs, ISD EPLO,
EU Commission Expert.

The event concluded with an engaging Q&A session facilitated by Christina Deligianni. The discussion was guided by targeted questions introduced by Ms. Deligianni, linking food governance to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the SDGs, and the EU Green Deal. This framing positioned food governance as a cross-cutting policy field contributing to environmental, social, and economic objectives. In this context, Dr. Stefanos Fotiou underlined that food systems are connected to all SDGs, as food security, nutrition, sustainability, and social inclusion are deeply interlinked. This reinforced the need for integrated governance approaches rather than sectoral solutions.

A dedicated question explored the relationship between metropolitan and city-level governance, to which Dr. Rosário Oliveira highlighted the metropolitan level as a coordination space that complements municipal action, particularly for issues extending beyond city boundaries.

The discussion concluded with reflections from Mr. Florent Yann Lardic on governance models that support effective vertical coordination and inclusive participation, emphasising the importance of structured, long-term institutional arrangements over ad hoc approaches.

Overall, the webinar highlighted that participation, coordination, and governance architecture are foundational elements of effective food policy, rather than optional or secondary considerations.



The webinar was dedicated to the memory of **Şadiye Karabudak**, a valued colleague and Project Expert from the Metropolitan City of Mersin, whose commitment to participatory governance and local food policy made a lasting contribution to the FOODGaP project.

In memory of Şadiye Karabudak (Metropolitan City of Mersin), Project Expert and dedicated advocate of participatory food governance.