



FEEDING PEOPLE, NOT LANDFILLS

Using social norms to tackle
food waste in cities

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

CHORIZO
PROJECT



ABOUT THE CHORIZO PROJECT

This document is a deliverable of the CHORIZO (Changing practices and Habits through Open, Responsible, and social Innovation towards ZerO food waste) project, co-funded by the Horizon Europe programme. CHORIZO aims to improve the understanding of the links between social norms, consumer behaviours, decisions of economic actors and food loss and waste (FLW) generation. The project addresses research gaps and to help a range of food chain actors improve their decision-making and engagement to more effectively prevent and reduce food waste.

For more information, visit: chorizoproject.eu.

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ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability is a global network of 2,500+ local and regional governments committed to sustainable urban development. Since 2013, its CityFood Programme (ICLEI CityFood) has leveraged the transformative power of food to build resilience. CityFood accelerates local and regional action for sustainable food systems, fostering collaboration across ICLEI's Regional Offices and key global and regional partners.

ABOUT CSCP

The Collaborating Centre on Sustainable Consumption and Production (CSCP) is an international nonprofit Think and Do tank that works with businesses, policy makers, partner organisations and civil society towards a good life.

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Image: ICLEI / CityFood Programme





About this guidance: how to work with social norms to reduce food waste in cities

Background to the guidance

CHORIZO (Changing practices and Habits through Open, Responsible, and social Innovation towards ZerO food waste) is a project co-funded by the Horizon Europe programme that aims to improve the understanding of the links between social norms, consumer behaviours, decisions of economic actors and food loss and waste (FLW) generation. The project addresses research gaps and to help a range of food chain actors improve their decision-making and engagement to more effectively prevent and reduce food waste. This guidance for cities is part of a series of resources that also focus on: food redistribution and donation; schools; and food services, in particular restaurant and catering services. These guidance documents combine CHORIZO findings with desk-based research and the Academy of Change approach¹.

WHAT ARE SOCIAL NORMS?

In the CHORIZO project, we understand social norms as the unwritten rules and expectations which guide people's behaviour within a society or group. In the context of food waste and loss, social norms influence individual attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours related to food consumption, preservation and disposal.

Figure 1: What are social norms? Description from CHORIZO Deliverable 3.1 "Conceptual framework for behavioural change understanding" (2023), p15.

¹ The Academy of Change (AoC) (<http://aochange.org>) is a capacity building programme first created by the Collaborating Centre on Sustainable Consumption and Production (CSCP) and Behaviour Change (<https://behaviourchange.org.uk>), initially funded by the KR Foundation, to support organisations to develop behaviour change interventions.

How to use this guide

Would you like to reduce food loss and waste (FLW) in your city? Do you have the motivation and the opportunities to do so? Do you already have plans for activities in your city that focus on sustainable food practices? Then you are in the right place! This guide equips you with practical instructions on how to work with social norms in the context of urban food waste prevention, in a structure illustrated in **Figure 2**. Accounting for social norms when planning and implementing your interventions can make them more impactful.

Section 2 equips you with background information about social norms (**Section 2.1**) and how they affect FLW in the many different foodways of a city (**Section 2.2**). **Section 3** provides tangible examples of how social norms affect FLW in cities. You will learn how others have also designed interventions to change social norms and behaviour to save precious food. Then, you are ready to **identify** different kinds of social norms which are relevant to your context and start your own interventions! **Section 4** is designed to support you to easily **plan, design, implement and evaluate** your own interventions with an 8-step guide. This includes **evaluating** your own interventions to understand the impact and areas for improvement. **Section 5** offers additional resources.



Image: City of Bruges

If you already have experience in using social norms in planning interventions, but would like to hear more about the findings of the CHORIZO project, we suggest to start with **Sections 2.2 and 3**, as well as the 8-step guide in **Section 4**.

HOW TO READ THIS DOCUMENT



Figure 2: How to read this document.



Social norms in the context of food systems

What are social norms?

Social norms are unwritten rules which influence people's everyday behaviour, in two ways:

- People might behave a certain way because they see other people doing a certain thing. For instance, a child may not eat their vegetables in the school lunch break, because they see other children leaving their salad on the plate. This behaviour of copying what most people do in the same situation is called a *descriptive social norm*.
- People might behave a certain way because they think that others expect them to act that way. For instance, a person might no longer be

hungry but still finish their plate, since they think that otherwise they might be perceived as being rude. These people react to what they think is a rule of acceptable behaviour – which is called an *injunctive social norm*.

Norms can be static – based on a current situation – or dynamic – articulating a behavioural movement in one way or another. Whichever type or combination – descriptive or injunctive, and static or dynamic – social norms can be powerful tools for change. See **Figure 4** for more examples of these types of norms. The above examples show social norms that can *increase* food waste, but you now have the tools to imagine the impact of changing the behaviours of many people by creating social norms that *reduce* food waste.

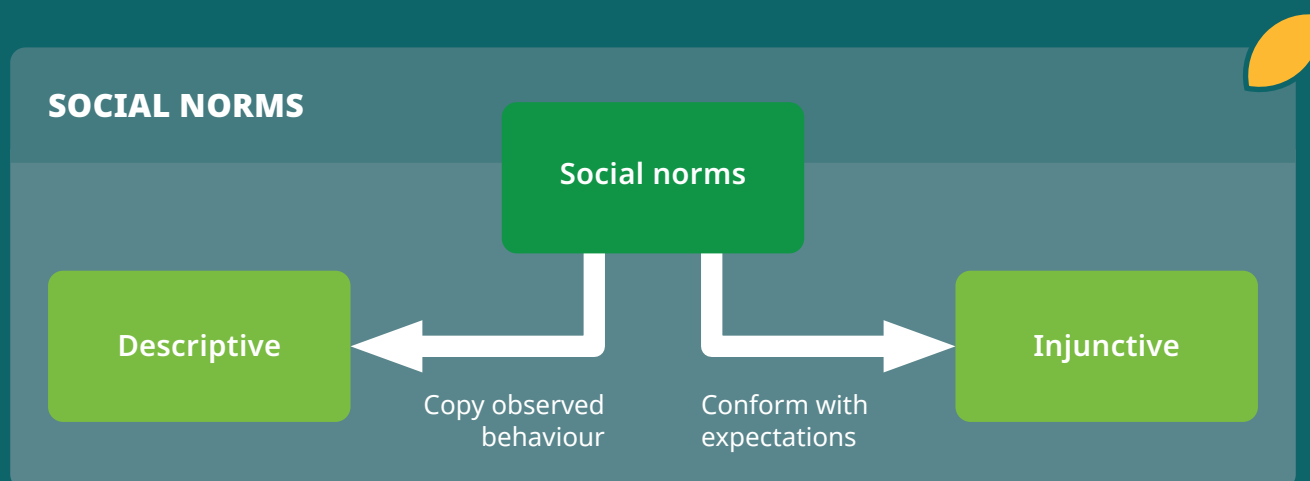


Figure 3: Descriptive and injunctive social norms.

HERE ARE EXAMPLES OF STATEMENTS INVOKING SOCIAL NORMS THAT RELATE TO DEALING WITH HOUSEHOLD LEFTOVERS

- “75% of households reuse leftovers” is a **descriptive norm**.
- “Reusing leftovers for other dishes is regarded as good housekeeping” is an **injunctive norm**.
- “Most people reuse leftovers” is an example of **static framing**.
- “More people reuse leftovers every year” is an example of **dynamic framing**.

Figure 4: Examples of different types of social norms.

How do social norms fit within human behaviour overall?

Besides social norms, there are many other aspects influencing human behaviour. To better understand the degree to which social norms influence our behaviour, the CHORIZO project has combined an agent-based decision model (HUMAT²) with a behavioural psychological model (MOA). The MOA framework, first designed for marketing purposes (Rothschild, 1999), was adapted to analyse Motivation, Opportunity and Ability (MOA) factors affecting food waste behaviour for the EU Refresh project³. The MOA framework is used throughout the CHORIZO project and this document to understand what hinders behaviour change, and how interventions to reduce FLW can overcome these barriers.

In the MOA framework, aspects of motivation, opportunity and ability combine to determine how a person behaves in any given situation. In this model, social norms come under the motivations category, meaning that, combined with attitudes and awareness, social norms change a person's level of motivation. For example, in the case of using up leftover food, if someone is aware that leftovers can safely be eaten (awareness), believe that they should reuse leftovers in order to save food (attitude), and see others cooking with leftovers (social norm), then they are likely to have a strong *motivation* component towards their behaviour. For the person to actually behave in this way, however,

there will also need to be the *opportunity* for them to do so (e.g. time to prepare the leftovers, the right cooking/storage equipment) and the *ability* to enact the behaviour (e.g. knowledge of a recipe to re-use the leftovers and the appropriate cooking skills). **Figure 5** sets out a visualisation of the model and its components.

Aspects of background, demographics or identity may affect the factors influencing the behaviour of your target group members. In particular, gender may have an impact on the MOA. While CHORIZO did not find any existing interventions that explicitly incorporated gender (see *Chapter 6 in Deliverable 1.2 Evidence-based Analysis of Food Loss and Food Waste (FLW) Prevention Actions*), we know that social norms can be differently developed or perceived by individuals depending on their gender. For example, social norms related to gender can affect who in the household shops for food, plans meals and cooks. CHORIZO case studies identified differences between genders in terms of perceived social norms and behaviours around food loss and waste, which are discussed in **Section 2.2**.

Of course, human behaviour is not deterministic. The existence of social norms does not necessarily mean that we conform to these norms. While some norms are helpful, others can lead to unhelpful outcomes (leading to negative societal, environmental or other impacts). You can learn more about the models used in the CHORIZO project in “Conceptual framework for behavioural change understanding”⁴.

² CHORIZO Deliverable 3.1, available at <https://chorizoproject.eu/deliverables-repository>

³ <https://www.eu-refresh.org>

⁴ CHORIZO Deliverable 3.1, available at <https://chorizoproject.eu/deliverables-repository>

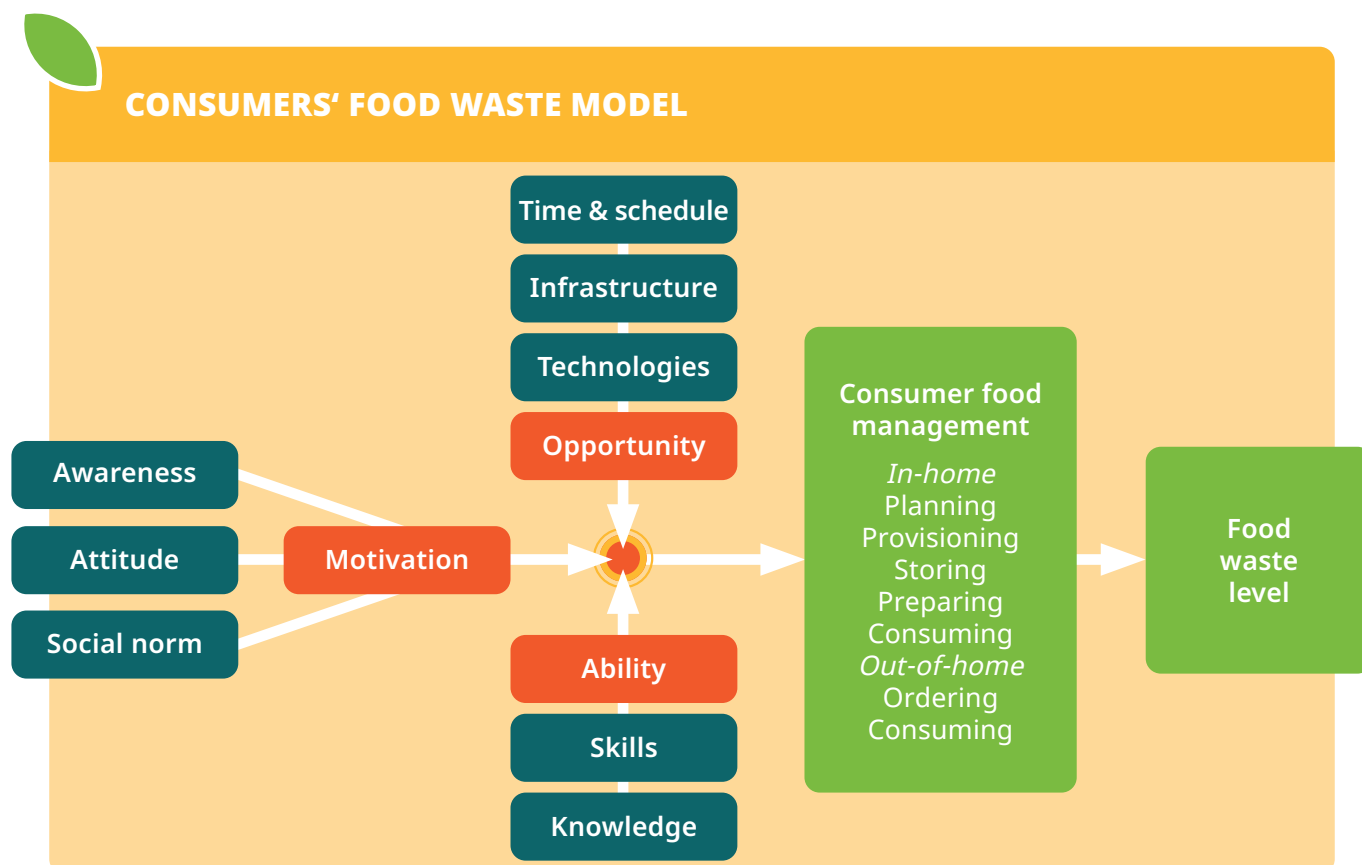


Figure 5: Consumers' Food Waste Model, illustrating the MOA framework (including social norms) in the context of food waste behaviours [Source: Van Geffen, 2025 and CHORIZO D3.1 Conceptual Framework for behavioural change understanding, 2023, p12].

Why are social norms relevant to food loss and waste in cities?

Cities are key actors in creating a more sustainable food system under SDG 12.3 on food loss and waste, and European frameworks like and [Food 2030](#) and the [EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste](#).

City governments have many institutional powers that can help reduce food waste, and they are involved in all stages of the food system. Roles include including planning, regulation, taxes, procurement, city-run food service facilities like school cafeterias, engagement, awareness-raising, and waste management. To reduce food waste, cities generally have the most power to act in waste management, engagement and procurement, and may face more constraints in regulation and legislation. City governments' efforts will interact with those of various food waste generators, including restaurants, schools, hospitals, manufacturers, and households.

Social norms can be powerful drivers of impact when thoughtfully incorporated into city initiatives to reduce food waste. The point of this guide is not necessarily

to urge cities to change the social norms that promote food waste, but rather to **equip city governments with knowledge of social norms as a tool in their toolbox**. If city governments understand the norms that lead people and businesses to waste or conserve food in a specific context, they can use that knowledge to design more effective interventions – and predict how people will respond to them. This guide provides a framework and examples of leveraging social norms to reduce food waste across cities' powers and roles.

Social norms can have positive and negative effects on food waste in cities. City governments can leverage helpful social norms and shift social norms that increase food waste.

Helpful social norms

Some social norms encourage people, institutions and businesses to waste less food. Identifying and leveraging these helpful social norms can unlock greater impact from cities' programs, initiatives and regulations.

For example, emphasising a norm that "leftovers are valuable" can encourage people to save leftover

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF REDUCING FOOD WASTE IN CITIES?

Urban areas currently consume over **70%** of the global food supply. Food waste happens all along the value chain, but in the EU, the largest share of food waste – **54%** – is at the household level. Restaurants and food service (**11%**) and retail (**8%**) are also major sources. Commonly wasted items include fruits, vegetables, and bread.

In European cities, food waste typically ranges from 30–100 kg per person per year. For instance, annual food waste per person is 46 kg in **Paris** and 37 kg in the **Flanders region**, and **London** wastes nearly 2 million tonnes of food every year, with a value of over £2.5 billion.

food, not discard it. Cities can design communication materials to celebrate these behaviours, such as “Our City Values Every Bite,” reinforcing that careful food use is both a social expectation and something to be proud of.

Unhelpful social norms

Some social norms might unintentionally increase the amount of food that is wasted. By addressing these unhelpful social norms, cities can remove behavioural barriers to reducing food waste.

For example, a preference for perfect-looking fruits and vegetables might cause consumers to reject produce with slight blemishes or irregular shapes. City governments can use their procurement powers and visibility to lead by example to shift this norm, by using “ugly” produce in publicly run food service settings like a café in city hall, or to prepare food for large public events.

Targeting with social norms

Identifying social norms within certain groups allows cities to create tailored campaigns or programs that resonate with those groups, such as children or food service workers.

For example, among food service workers at public or private institutions, there may be a norm that “wasting food is part of the job,” if food is commonly over-prepared or discarded at the end of shifts. Cities could address this by providing training on portion planning and facilitating food rescue partnerships. This builds a norm that reducing waste is a professional standard in the industry.

Leveraging social norms can help cities during multiple stages of an initiative

For instance, in the previous example about food service workers, being aware of the norm of “wasting food is part of the job” would allow cities to anticipate challenges they might face when they implement a regulation that limits or penalises food waste. This would enable cities to proactively conduct training or set up partnerships, so that regulations will receive less pushback from affected stakeholders and cities can spend less resources and political capital enforcing them.

Food waste, social norms and gender

Women are responsible for a disproportionate share of household management in most contexts. This means that changes to a city's waste management systems that require more effort from residents – for example, a program that makes it more complicated or time-consuming to sort, clean or drop off recyclable materials – might disproportionately burden women.

In addition, gendered social norms contribute to certain jobs being held predominantly by women or by men. In many contexts, most waste collection workers are men. These jobs are often relatively well paid, stable or public-sector/unionized jobs, as compared to jobs in retail or caregiving which tend to have a higher share of women, and more precarious conditions or lower pay. Cities have an opportunity to ensure that jobs (especially public-sector jobs) that are impacted or created by their food waste prevention programs are good-quality jobs that are accessible to workers of all genders and backgrounds. Local governments can intentionally create pipelines for women and people from under-represented demographics to access those opportunities.



Overview of relevant social norms in cities

The following section offers dozens of examples of how cities can (and already are) leveraging social norms to reduce food waste. Each section contains examples related to one area of cities' roles and powers:

3.1. Strategy and multi-level governance

3.2. Procurement, legislation and regulation

3.3. Cross-sectoral partnerships and private sector engagement

3.4. Communications, public events and awareness-raising

3.5. Waste management and asset management

Each example includes the social norm being addressed, and examples from cities across Europe or idea of approaches that cities could take.



Examples: Strategy and multi-level governance

Cities can lead in reducing food waste, but they cannot act alone. Coordinated multi-level governance is essential because cities may not have the powers to enact certain regulations, legislation or taxes that could reduce food waste and create an enabling environment for city initiatives.

Role, Power or Activity of City Government	Example
Strategy Development	Cities can develop a vision for a sustainable food system, embedded in strategies and roadmaps that leverage and address social norms. In many cities, this is an Urban Food Strategy/Policy . For example, Milan, Italy's widely acknowledged leadership in reducing food waste is anchored in the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact , which helped guide and align many pilots, projects and policies across the city. A city-level food policy or strategy can be made more effective by leveraging helpful social norms and deliberately tackling social norms that encourage wasteful practices.
Food Waste Analysis	Cities could conduct or support data collection and analysis of food waste in the city to understand where waste is being generated and by whom. This could build on the EU methodology for measuring food waste, such as the LIPOR Waste Observatory in Porto, Portugal . Data is key to policy design, so this analysis could inform strategy development and project planning.
Multi-level Governance	Many powers that influence food waste sit with regional or national levels of government, such as changing tax structure to incentivise food redistribution and penalise food waste like in France , Bulgaria or New York State . Cities can advocate to higher levels of government for policies that leverage or tackle social norms to reduce waste, which will support cities' local implementation of national or European policies like the legally binding EU food waste reduction targets adopted by the European Commission in July 2023. Cities can pilot voluntary schemes to showcase their potential impact, making a stronger case for regional and national action. The region of Catalonia's tax return system rewards municipalities that improve their management of recyclable or organic waste, by redistributing landfill and incineration taxes based on performance.



Examples: Procurement, legislation and regulation

Cities can design their public procurement tenders to disincentivize food waste among their contractors or select businesses that minimize waste, and use their regulatory and legislative power to require waste-minimizing practices.

Role, Power or Activity of City Government	This action addresses the social norm that:	Example
Public Procurement	Good planning or hospitality means preparing more food than you need / Food waste is an unavoidable cost of doing business	In public food service settings like school cafeterias (see CHORIZO Actor-Specific Guidance: Schools, page 62), hospitals, or restaurants in public institutions like city hall, cities can establish procurement standards that reduce food waste, drawing on resources like the Manifesto for Establishing Minimum Standards for Public Canteens Across the EU and the best practices from SchoolFood4Change to shift kitchen staff norms around food preparation quantities. It could include training on accurate portion planning, and celebrating kitchens that reduce waste while maintaining service quality. Procurement contracts could be preferentially awarded to companies that redistribute unused food.
Public Procurement / Public Events	Visually “perfect” produce is preferable	Cities can adopt policies to procure “ugly” produce whenever possible, like for schools, municipal offices or public events. Leading by example, cities can challenge the idea that only “flawless” produce is desirable.
Legislation and Regulation	It is risky or irresponsible to donate food because it could make someone ill	Cities could implement or advocate for laws that shield businesses from legal liability if someone becomes sick after eating donated food that was handled correctly. In the US, the Good Samaritan Food Donation Act provides liability protection for people who make good-faith donations of food and grocery products to organizations that feed the hungry. It also provides civil and criminal liability protection for institutions that distribute food and groceries, such as food banks.
Legislation and Regulation	Food donation is an optional charitable activity, not a standard business practice	Cities might have powers to adopt a regulation like the 2016 French law that requires supermarkets over a certain size to sign donation contracts with charities, or else face a fee. This regulation helped establish a norm of viewing food donation as a standard part of running a supermarket, not optional charity.



Examples: Cross-sectoral partnerships and private sector engagement

By partnering with specific stakeholder groups like markets, restaurants or caterers, cities can (co-)develop tailored interventions that have greater impact and smoother roll-out because they account for the groups' social norms.

Role, Power or Activity of City Government	This action addresses the social norm that:	Example
Building Multi-Sectoral Partnerships	Food waste reduction is solely an environmental issue	Cities can create or support a Food Waste Alliance bringing together food-related businesses, anti-hunger charities, government agencies, community groups, and other stakeholders, helping establish a norm that food waste is a shared responsibility requiring collaborative solutions. In France, the RÉGAL networks fight food waste at the territorial level by convening all stakeholders in the food chain. This alliance can help shift the narrative from environmental compliance to social and economic opportunity.
Private Sector Engagement & Guidelines	Food waste is an unavoidable part of doing business / Good planning or hospitality means preparing more food than you need	Cities can partner with food service providers or public markets to standardise and disseminate food redistribution practices. Paris City Hall , with a working group of caterers, associations and logisticians, developed a guide for caterers to organize the redistribution of unsold goods to people in need, by systematizing the revaluation of surpluses. By working with food businesses, cities can encourage food redistribution as standard practice, helping shift norms about waste being unavoidable. Cities can also legislate or incentivise businesses to accept bring-your-own containers to take home leftovers, like in Valongo, Portugal or in Brussels' "Rest-O-Pack" initiative in restaurants.
Private Sector Engagement & Guidelines	Bigger portions are more desirable or better value	New York City attempted to ban sodas larger than 16 oz (0.5 liters) to promote healthier diets. Cities can apply similar approaches like banning restaurant promotions that push people to eat supersized portions, or pursue voluntary approaches like engaging with restaurants to develop guidelines that normalise smaller portions, such as offering mini versions of menu items. Co-development ensures that the messaging will not ignore restaurateurs' norms, like that large portions indicate a welcoming environment.
Building Multi-Sectoral Partnerships / Communications Campaigns	It's easier to discard food than to redistribute it / Donated or surplus food is lower quality or undesirable	Apps like Too Good to Go allow consumers to buy surplus food from businesses at a discount, shifting businesses' norms towards seeing food redistribution as easy. Cities could promote similar apps or develop their own like in Almada, Portugal . Offering surplus food in a widely visible, publicly sanctioned app can shift residents' norm of perceiving unused food as low quality or associated with "dumpster diving."



Examples: Communications, public events and awareness-raising

When communicating with residents through campaigns or events, cities can identify what social norms connect to their topic, and then reinforce or counteract the norms themselves – not just the behaviours they produce. For example, to address people's preference for "perfect" produce at markets, cities campaigns can use norm-focused slogans like "Delicious, No Matter the Shape."

Role, Power or Activity of City Government	This action addresses the social norm that:	Example
Data Collection and Monitoring / Awareness-Raising	I waste less than my neighbours	Most people think that their own household wastes less food than average, and that people align with their neighbours' behaviours. Bruges, Belgium trained 50 residents as ambassadors to influence their neighbours to reduce food waste, and they achieved an average of 65% less waste. With growing use of sensors that measure waste before or during collection, cities can collect data on the compost collected from each household, and send households reports that compare their separation rates or waste volumes with city averages.
Communications Campaigns / Public Events	Visually "perfect" produce is preferable	Cities can build on examples like British chef Jamie Oliver's campaign celebrating irregular produce in supermarkets, helping shift perceptions that "ugly" produce is less valuable. Local chefs and could highlight imperfect produce, while supermarkets can set up discounted "ugly produce" areas within campaign signage. For example Disco Soup events use imperfect produce to cook community meals, reducing stigma of "ugly" produce quality in a fun, interactive setting.
Public Events	Donated or surplus food is lower quality or undesirable	Cities can host events or initiatives that highlight high-quality surplus or donated food. At Refettorio Paris , high-end guest chefs cook meals for homeless or precarious residents with surplus ingredients. Associating surplus food with luxury gastronomy is a great way to shift public perception.
Public Events and Festivals / Communications Campaigns	Celebrations or hosting events requires excessive amounts of food	Cities can develop sustainable event guidelines that include responsible portions and sharing practices. Encouraging "thoughtful hosting" practices, including for hosting at home, shifts the norm from associating large quantities of food with event success to viewing responsible portions as the new standard.

Examples: Waste management and asset management

Most city governments have direct control over their waste collection system and manage a significant body of assets, making these low-friction areas for municipal governments to implement innovative measures to reduce urban food waste.

Role, Power or Activity of City Government	This action addresses the social norm that:	Example
Waste Management	Separation Anxiety: Sorting waste is too complicated or time-consuming	Cities can learn about the social norms in a given context and use that to predict and pre-emptively address obstacles to implementing a new regulation or legislation. When piloting kerbside food waste collection, Auckland, New Zealand overcame perceptions that sorting waste was unreasonably complicated. They informed residents with postcards and door-to-door advisors, and distributed bins, caddies, bags, collection calendars and 'how-to' guides. The trial had an approval rating of 93%.
Waste Management / Taxes and Fees	Food waste is not penalized so it must not be a problem	City governments are usually responsible for waste management. The incentives in a city's waste fee structure, and municipal systems for waste sorting and collection, can reflect and reinforce norms about which practices are desirable or harmful. " Pay as you throw " (PAYT) schemes like in Parma, Italy charge residents more for waste collection if they produce more waste, especially mixed waste that is not compostable or recyclable. By embodying the "producer pays" principle, PAYT establishes a norm that producing excessive household waste is problematic and gives financial incentives to reduce food waste. Milan offered a 20% discount on waste tax to businesses that donated surplus food, and gave them a special label.
Asset Management (the use of publicly owned assets like buildings, land or equipment)	Unused space is wasted space / Public assets should serve social and environmental goals	In many cities, including Galdakao, Spain and the Danish cities of Aarhus, Kolding and Copenhagen , local groups have introduced community fridges in public spaces to encourage residents to donate and take excess food freely. Cities can run their own community fridge, like Hernani, Spain's Zero Zabor fridge to share food from school canteens, or can provide accessible public space for NGOs to install them. This helps normalize the idea that public space should be used for communal goals while drawing attention to the twin issues of food waste and hunger. Porto supported the creation of new vegetable gardens using locally generated compost.



8 steps to reduce food waste in cities, including social norms insights

The following 8-step guide breaks down the process of designing and implementing a food waste reduction intervention into manageable steps. Based on established approaches from the behaviour change field, it is adapted from the Academy of Change framework⁵ and combined with CHORIZO findings and case studies, and examples from the wider food waste field.

Figure 6 illustrates the steps of planning and implementing an intervention to reduce food waste. The CHORIZO additions relate to steps 3 and 4, where you can incorporate social norm insights in the intervention. Once you have implemented it (steps 1–7) and evaluated its impact, you can return to steps 4–8 to improve it for future iterations. If you already have interventions in place and would like to refine the social norms elements, you can focus on step 3 onwards.

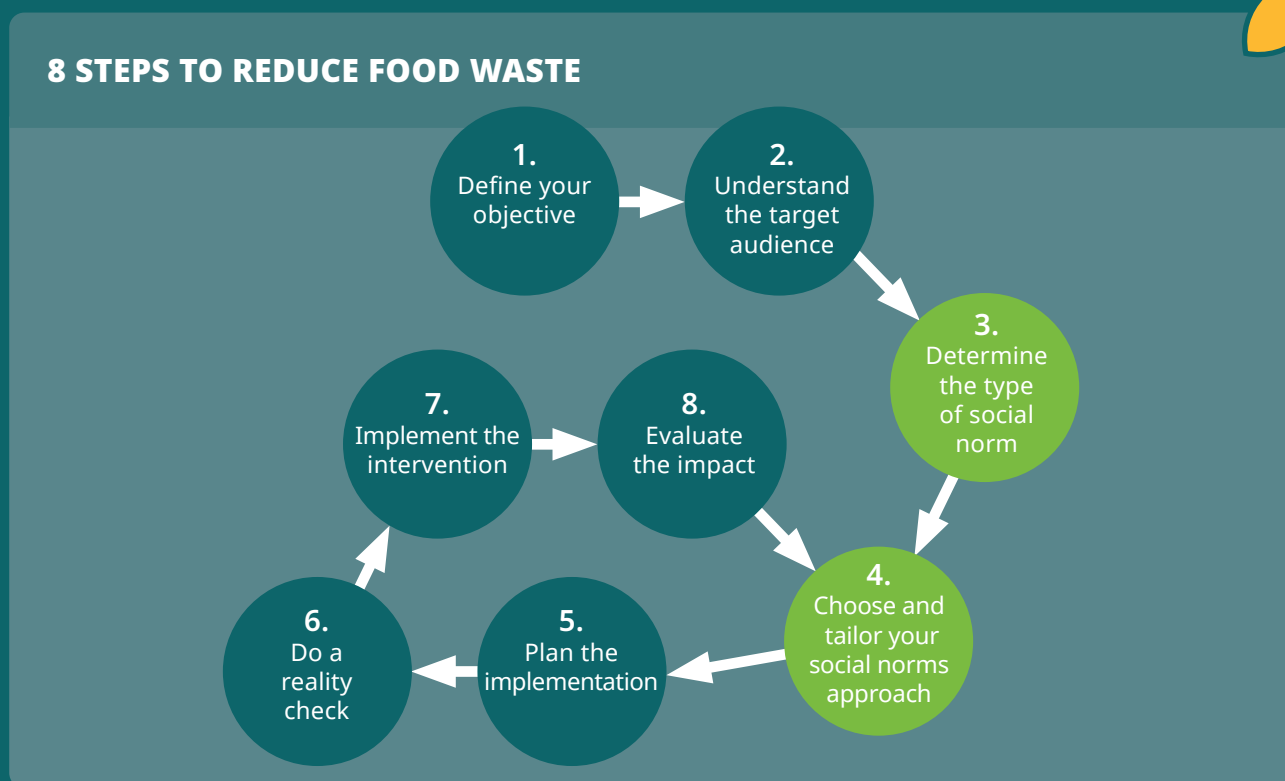


Figure 6: 8 steps to reduce food waste, including social norms insights (steps shown in green).

⁵ See <http://aochange.org>



Step 1: Define your objective

What is the specific, tangible behaviour you're targeting?

In this first step, it's time to get clear about what exactly you aim to achieve with your intervention. Try to focus on one specific behaviour to target, as this makes designing an intervention more manageable because the scale is not too big. It is easier to dive into the factors surrounding one particular behaviour than to try to analyse a complex system of behaviours. To ensure that you are focusing on a behaviour rather than an attitude, see **Figure 7** for an overview of the differences.

What influences your targeted, specific behaviour?

If you do have a specific, tangible behaviour in mind, then dive deeper – analyse the context around this behaviour. Map out the general influences, using a model like the MOA (see **Figure 5** and **Section 2.1**) to capture how various factors in the fields of motivation, opportunity and ability connect and impact upon your objective. Be specific and thorough; it will strengthen your intervention strategy. In this step, try to think in general terms about the MOA of this behaviour in society. In step 2, you will dive into the MOA of your target group more specifically.

How would you like to change the behaviour with your intervention?

Try crafting a clear, detailed objective: define exactly what you want to change in this behaviour and what the desired impacts should be. The more concrete you are, the easier it will be to follow the next steps effectively.

Step 2: Understand the target group

In this step, we dive deeper into the context of the targeted behaviour to define and understand your target group.

What do you know about your target group?

Remember the MOA Framework introduced in **Figure 5**? You can use the framework to understand the motivations, opportunities and abilities of the targeted group. The following questions may help

ATTITUDES VERSUS BEHAVIOURS

Consider if you are thinking of a behaviour or an attitude. An attitude of believing that we should only take what we can eat in a hotel breakfast buffet is different to the actual behaviour of not overfilling the plate in practice. Attitudes may support behaviour but often are not enough on their own to reduce FLW effectively. For instance, someone might care deeply about sustainability but still choose convenience over environmentally-friendly options (e.g. buying multipacks of food products because there is a deal in the supermarket, while believing that we should only buy what we need to avoid waste). This is called the "attitude-action-gap" – the reality that people's beliefs don't always align with their behaviours, due to habits, social pressures, social norms or practical barriers. Recognizing this gap helps clarify whether influencing attitudes alone will achieve your goal or if your approach needs to address a behaviour directly.

Figure 7: Attitudes vs behaviours.

you to navigate the MOA framework by adding in specific considerations which are of relevance to your target group:

- What is your target group's **motivation** to engage with a new behaviour or to elaborate a new social norm?
- Does the target group have the **opportunity** to take the action? Is there a supporting infrastructure in place, physically and socially?
- What **abilities** do they need in order to enact and establish the behaviour? Consider how existing skills and abilities may differ across a diverse target group.

If you are struggling to answer the questions above, further research on your target group may help. There may be existing evidence or knowledge from other actors in the sector (including, for example, CHORIZO project resources), or gathering your own additional data may support this understanding (e.g. through surveys or interviews with the target group).



Step 3: Determine the type of social norm

Social norms are both a reflection of common behaviours within a group and powerful tools for driving change. Observing norms helps reveal what people already do or value, and strategically highlighting these behaviours can encourage broader adoption. Understanding which type of social norm you are working with will help to tailor your approach and make your intervention more impactful.

As a reminder, *descriptive norms* show widespread behaviours, such as “most households reuse leftovers” while *injunctive norms* reflect what a group considers the right action, like “our community values wasting less to protect resources.” Deciding whether it will work best to use *static framing* around existing behaviours, like “Most people plan meals to avoid waste” versus *dynamic framing* around growing trends like “More people each year are joining the movement to reduce food waste” will make your message resonate even more.

Gather the information you have already brought together on the 1) target behaviour, 2) influences on the behaviour, 3) specific desired change in the behaviour through your intervention, and 4) the motivations, opportunities and (cap)abilities of your target group. With this information, consider the potential relation of social norms to each:

- 1) Target behaviour** – is there already a relevant social norm mentioned in **Section 3** which is known to relate to this kind of behaviour? If not, consider what else may be a norm in the context upon which you are focusing.
- 2) Influences on that behaviour** – consider the environment in which the behaviour takes place. What are the factors which might affect whether someone behaves in this specific way or not?
- 3) The desired change in the behaviour through your intervention** – consider whether the desired change is either a) a wish to make a certain behaviour itself a norm (e.g. taking home a container of leftovers from a restaurant if you don't finish your meal), or b) influenced by social norms which exist around the behaviour and contribute to its uptake (e.g. the behaviour of over-providing for guests when hosting a dinner party is influenced by the social norm of a good host being seen as providing multiple different options and more food than is needed).

- 4) The motivations, opportunities and (cap)abilities of your target group** – map out the MOA of your target audience (those who do/would conduct the behaviour in question) especially focusing on what motivates the target group to perform certain behaviour related to food waste. The social norms are the influencing factors to the motivation. Social norms are most likely to be found in the motivation section (see CHORIZO Deliverable 3.1 *Conceptual Framework for Behavioural Change Understanding* for further information).

With this information, you should have been able to identify a specific social norm or norms with which you can work, in order to change the desired behaviour (whether directly or indirectly).

At this point it is also important to be clear on whether the norm(s) are *helpful norms* which you are looking to support to have a bigger influence (e.g. those which already contribute to lower FLW behaviours but are not yet routine or mainstreamed in your target group) or *unhelpful norms* which reduce the likelihood of the FLW behaviour taking place (e.g. something which influences individuals towards another behaviour than the socially desirable one, or which makes the FLW behaviour less likely or impossible). Examples are given in **Section 2.2**. By identifying this, you know whether your intervention should seek to a) build and support an existing social norm or norms, or b) change or reduce the influence of an existing social norm or norms.



Image: City of Bruges

Step 4: Choose and tailor your social norms approach

Now that you have identified social norms that can influence behaviour, it's time to design your intervention plan by choosing your approach. Referencing **Sections 2.2 and 3** for additional evidence-based insights as you create your intervention plan. Using varied communication strategies – whether static, dynamic, or changing the 'environment' – can help reinforce and spread desired behaviours (for more information see **Section 4.5**).

To effectively use social norms to reduce food waste, consider these three approaches, how they can be used and the potential for tailoring, based on the CHORIZO project's learnings:

1) Reinforce Existing Norms: If an appropriate social norm around reducing waste already exists, emphasize it to strengthen commitment. Reminding people can for example happen like

"most people in our community already avoid food waste" and can build on this established behaviour.

2) Create New Norms Through In-Group Values:

When a norm is not yet present, it should be built by aligning it with in-group values. For instance, messaging like "In our community, we believe in reducing food waste to support sustainability" can shape waste reduction as part of the group's identity.

3) Establish Norms via Environmental Cues:

Modify the environment to signal desirable behaviours. Visible prompts, such as signage promoting meal planning or providing compost bins, illustrate that reducing waste is common here, encouraging others to follow suit.

By tailoring these approaches – reinforcing, creating, and establishing norms – to specific communities and behaviours, social norms can inspire and drive lasting change in achieving zero food loss and waste.





Step 5: Plan the implementation

Now it is time to devise a plan for implementing the intervention by considering the following three **key Steps for Designing an Effective Plan**:

- 1) Define setting, delivery and timing:** Determine *where, how, when* and *by whom* your intervention will be communicated to the target group/ audience. Find the best setting: in which location or situation can you get closest to the target behaviour? What is the right place and time to reach your target audience? Interventions can be targeted communication at points of action, appealing to people's identity, or altering the choice environment (the space or set of conditions in which they make a decision). When is your target audience most receptive? What are their relevant moments of change (e.g. is there a seasonal point when people already take action in this field)? Target locations where waste behaviours are most relevant – like meal prep areas or trash disposal points – and time your intervention when people are most receptive, such as before meals. How will you communicate your intervention? See **Section 2.1** for the
- 2) Identify Tools and Add Fun Elements:** Use tools like *nudging, self-commitments, or gamification* to engage participants. For instance, place reminders near waste bins or introduce rewards for reducing waste. Make the initiative fun and memorable – use engaging visuals, creative prompts, or interactive elements to boost participation.
- 3) Collaborate for Greater Impact:** Team up with diverse partners to broaden reach and share resources. Collaborating with unexpected allies – like local businesses, schools, or community groups – can amplify the intervention's effectiveness and encourage a community-wide commitment to reducing waste.

By carefully coordinating these steps, your intervention can promote lasting change, making food waste reduction a shared, impactful effort.



Image: Municipality of Valongo



Step 6: Plan the implementation

Before launching your intervention, it's essential to do a reality check to ensure it is as effective and user-friendly as possible. This step helps identify any obstacles that could hinder participation and allows you to refine your approach for maximum impact.

- 1) Make It Easy:** Simplify every step. Remove barriers, streamline interventions, and, if possible, eliminate unnecessary choices to guide participants naturally toward the desired behaviour.
- 2) Choose Clear Language:** Use accessible, relatable language, avoiding overly technical or distant terms. Language should connect with the audience and reflect shared values, making it easy for others to support and spread.
- 3) Did you think of everyone?** Consider whether your approach is truly inclusive. Are there potential biases, like assuming certain cultural norms or access to resources? Tailor your plan to include diverse perspectives (considering e.g. gender, disability, socio-economic background and other factors) and adapt it as needed to make sure no group is overlooked.

Conducting this reality check ensures your intervention is clear, simple, and inviting, ultimately making it more likely to achieve meaningful change by many people.

Step 7: Implement the intervention

Now it's time to bring your plan to life! Implementation is all about making your intervention visible, accessible, and impactful. To ensure your planned project reaches people effectively in the right place and at the right time, keep these steps in mind:

- **Prepare Your Resources:** Confirm locations, timing, and materials to make sure your messages and tools are available exactly where and when people need them?
- **Coordinate with Your Team:** Align everyone involved, so they're prepared to answer questions and make adjustments on the go. Plan in time for feedback talks.
- **Start with a Pilot:** Testing in smaller settings first can reveal what works best, letting you refine and scale up smoothly.
- **Stay Flexible:** Watch how people respond, and be ready to adapt! If certain elements are more engaging than others, adjust your approach to enhance impact.

A well-implemented plan brings your ideas to action, helping people connect with the message and inspiring them to reduce food waste.





Step 8: Evaluate the impact

Evaluating impact is crucial to see if the action you took truly made a difference. This step focuses on measuring real behaviour changes and understanding the broader effects of your intervention.

Measuring change is always a crucial and important action in any intervention. Amount of food waste is easy to understand and is always a good measure. However, collecting data can be tedious and challenging. It's important to find easy ways to measure but also consider possible proxies or indicators for the actual amounts. Such proxies are often easier to measure through questionnaires and surveys and can include topics such as knowledge about the goals, skills to carry out the intended action, willingness to act or simply knowledge about the intervention program. Often it is a good idea to have multiple outcome measures to verify that the intervention is actually working.

Here's a guide to effective evaluation:

- **Define Key Metrics and Collect Evidence:** Set clear measures like waste volume reduction, participation rates, or uptake of new habits like meal planning. Combine this quantitative data with feedback to provide you a full picture.
- **Measure Behaviour, Not Just Attitudes:** Track real actions (like reduced waste) instead of relying only on survey responses. This helps address the *attitude-behaviour gap*, where people's stated values don't always align with their actions.
- **Monitor for Rebound Effects:** Monitor whether reduced waste in one area causes increased waste elsewhere, helping you avoid unintended consequences.
- **Tailor Evidence to Your Audience:** Think about who you need to convince – community members or stakeholders. Collect the evidence they'll find most compelling.

By tracking outcomes and refining your approach based on real-world results, you can enhance the long-term impact of your interventions.





Additional resources



Image: ICLEI / CityFood Programme

Have you read the guidance and feel inspired but unsure how to get started? In 2025 we are running a European capacity building programme designed specifically to help you put these ideas into action!

The online and physical workshops will provide you with practical skills, examples and tips to design your own behaviour change intervention using fresh findings from the CHORIZO project and the

relevant tools to use social norms in the reduction of food waste. Sign up to the [CHORIZO newsletter](#) to hear about the latest information and capacity building registration.

Additionally, the [CHORIZO Insider Data Hub](#) contains dozens of datasets collected through the project's case studies and research on FLW and social norms.





cityfood-program.org



www.iclei-europe.org



www.cscp.org



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Image: ICLEI / CityFood Programme