

# Assessing two modes of food waste reduction governance in Europe

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## Abstract

Food waste is a pressing problem that undermines sustainability of the global food system making its reduction an important policy objective. Following the adoption of global food waste reduction targets, the actual regulatory efforts to unlock reduction occur on the national level. National approaches vary, but there appears to be a discernible division between countries which adopt anti-food waste legislation, and those that rely on voluntary sectoral agreements, with the former solution becoming more widespread. However, this simple image of food waste reduction governance as either top-down 'hard' laws or bottom-up 'soft' voluntary measures is misleading and obscures the variety of approaches, steering modes, actors' constellations and most importantly - sustainability goals. This paper unpacks this variety by studying four exemplary cases of food waste reduction regulation: France and Italy, usually perceived as the champions of the 'top-down' approach, as well as the UK and Norway, boasting a 'bottom-up' outlook. In a structured comparative analysis, drawing on governance theories, we first show how different these cases are in terms of steering modes and actors' involvement. Then, following a close reading of the food waste reduction regulation, we assess the sustainability goals behind each national approach, using the Waste Hierarchy Pyramid as a benchmark.

**Keywords:** food waste governance, food waste laws, voluntary agreements