

World wastes 1 billion meals a day, says U.N. report

There were 1.05 billion tonnes of food waste generated in 2022, amounting to 132 kilograms per capita and almost one-fifth of all food available to consumers, it says

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Households across the globe wasted over one billion meals a day in 2022, even as 783 million people struggled with hunger and a third of humanity faced food insecurity, according to the [Food Waste Index Report 2024](#), a study jointly authored by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and WRAP (Waste and Resources Action Programme), a U.K.-based non-profit.

The report, released ahead of the International Day of Zero Waste (March 30), noted that in 2022, there were 1.05 billion tonnes of food waste generated (including inedible parts), amounting to 132 kilograms per capita and almost one-fifth of all food available to

consumers. “Out of the total food wasted in 2022, 60% happened at the household level, with food services responsible for 28%, and retail 12%,” the report observed.

The report stressed the importance of expanding and strengthening data infrastructure to enable the tracking and monitoring of food waste, pointing out that “many low- and middle-income countries continue to lack adequate systems for tracking progress to meet Sustainable Development Goal 12.3 of halving food waste by 2030, particularly in retail and food services.” At present, only four G-20 countries (Australia, Japan, U.K., U.S.) and the European Union have food waste estimates suitable for tracking progress to 2030.

Contrary to popular perception, food waste was not a ‘rich country problem’, the report stated, with observed average levels of household food waste for high-income, upper-middle, and lower-middle-income countries differing by just 7 kg per capita. “Hotter countries appear to generate more food waste per capita in households, potentially due to higher consumption of fresh foods with substantial inedible parts and a lack of robust cold chains,” the report noted.

Detailing the link between food waste and climate change, the report found that food loss and waste generated “8-10% of annual global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions – almost 5 times that of the aviation sector – and significant biodiversity loss by taking up the equivalent of almost a third of the world’s agricultural land.” It estimated the toll of both food loss and waste on the global economy at \$1 trillion.

Another trend revealed by the data was that compared to urban areas, rural ones generally wasted less food, due to “greater diversion of food scraps to pets, livestock, and home composting”.

Noting that as of 2022, only 21 countries had included food loss and/or waste reduction in their climate plans or Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), the report urged governments to “raise climate ambition by integrating food loss and waste” into their NDCs.

The report defines “food waste” as “food and the associated inedible parts removed from the human food supply chain”. On the other hand, “food loss” is defined as “all the crop and livestock human-edible commodity quantities that, directly or indirectly, completely exit the post-harvest/slaughter production/supply chain...up to, and excluding, the retail level”.

The Food Waste Index tracks the global and national generation of food and inedible parts wasted at the retail and consumer (household and food service) levels. UNEP is its custodian.