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**FOOD WASTE IN AVIATION: THE STRATEGIES  
FROM THE EUROPEAN AIRLINES UNDER THE ESG  
AGENDA AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

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# **FOOD WASTE IN AVIATION: THE STRATEGIES FROM THE EUROPEAN AIRLINES UNDER THE ESG AGENDA AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK.**

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Sustainability has become a key issue for the airline operators, under pressure of different stakeholders increasingly aware of environmental, social and governance (ESG) aspects. One of the current challenges in this industry is the waste of food served on board, mainly in international flights, also known as international catering waste (ICW). The food waste scenario itself is a major worldwide problem, with around a third of the world's food being lost and discarded. To face this issue, food waste has even been recognized in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with a specific target to halve global food waste per capita at the consumer level and reduce food losses by 2030. Airlines have been developing initiatives to reduce the generation of ICW, however a major impediment to change it is the legislation regarding the management of catering waste from international transport that some governments implement to reduce the risk of animal and plant diseases entering and threatening the health status of their agricultural industries. Moreover, the legislation prevents airlines from making a positive contribution to the European Union (EU) ambitions for a circular economy, for instance, as the EU classifies ICW as biohazardous, and thus subject to disposal by landfill or incineration. The International Air Transport Association (IATA) commissioned a study to determine potential risks to animal health. According to it, there is no evidence that international catering waste from airlines has ever caused an animal disease outbreak, especially considering the strict criteria for preparing meals by catering industry in the world. It is recommended though that more detailed risk assessments should be performed and that coordinated actions between governments and the airline sector could provide opportunities for more cabin waste to be reused. This would result in a positive impact on reducing starvation and increasing the airlines circular economy and sustainability performance. In parallel, some airlines are investing in technology to predict the more accurate number of meals for each flight, using artificial intelligence, for instance, and also offering alternatives as previous food choice for the passengers and even skip meals option too. However, these initiatives are not yet widely adopted. Despite the reduction of single use plastics in the flights, a must in almost every airline

currently, the actions related to food waste are usually a reality in airlines which perform long haul flights. Also, this study performed a survey to understand the passenger's behavior, preferences, and perception from passengers regarding onboard meals and sustainability in the aviation industry. For 78% of the passengers, the possibility of choosing previously the food would be welcomed, and for 72% free meals would not be necessary in flights up to 3 hours. For half of the interviewee, they are not aware of the sustainability initiatives from airlines, what can indicate the need of strengthening communication actions to the market, and to 22% the airlines are not investing accordingly in sustainability. In an industry under constant scrutiny from the media and society, the adoption of more concrete and efficiently communicated actions must be prioritized.

**Keywords:** aviation, food waste, catering, circular economy, sustainability, regulation, ESG.