



UNIVERSITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE

Institute of  
Metabolic  
Science



TRANSFORMING  
UK FOOD  
SYSTEMS  
Strategic Priorities Fund



# Mandala

Transforming urban food systems



# Mapping the evidence on impacts of the redistribution of surplus food through the community food aid sector

## A systematic scoping review

Kehinde Paul Adeosun<sup>a</sup>, [Alexia Sawyer](#)<sup>b</sup>, Viktorija Kesaite<sup>c</sup>, Amy Yau<sup>d</sup>, Struan Tait<sup>b</sup>, Catrin P Jones<sup>b</sup>, Richard Smith<sup>e</sup>, Steve Cummins<sup>d</sup>, Jean Adams<sup>b</sup>, Rachel Loopstra<sup>a</sup>

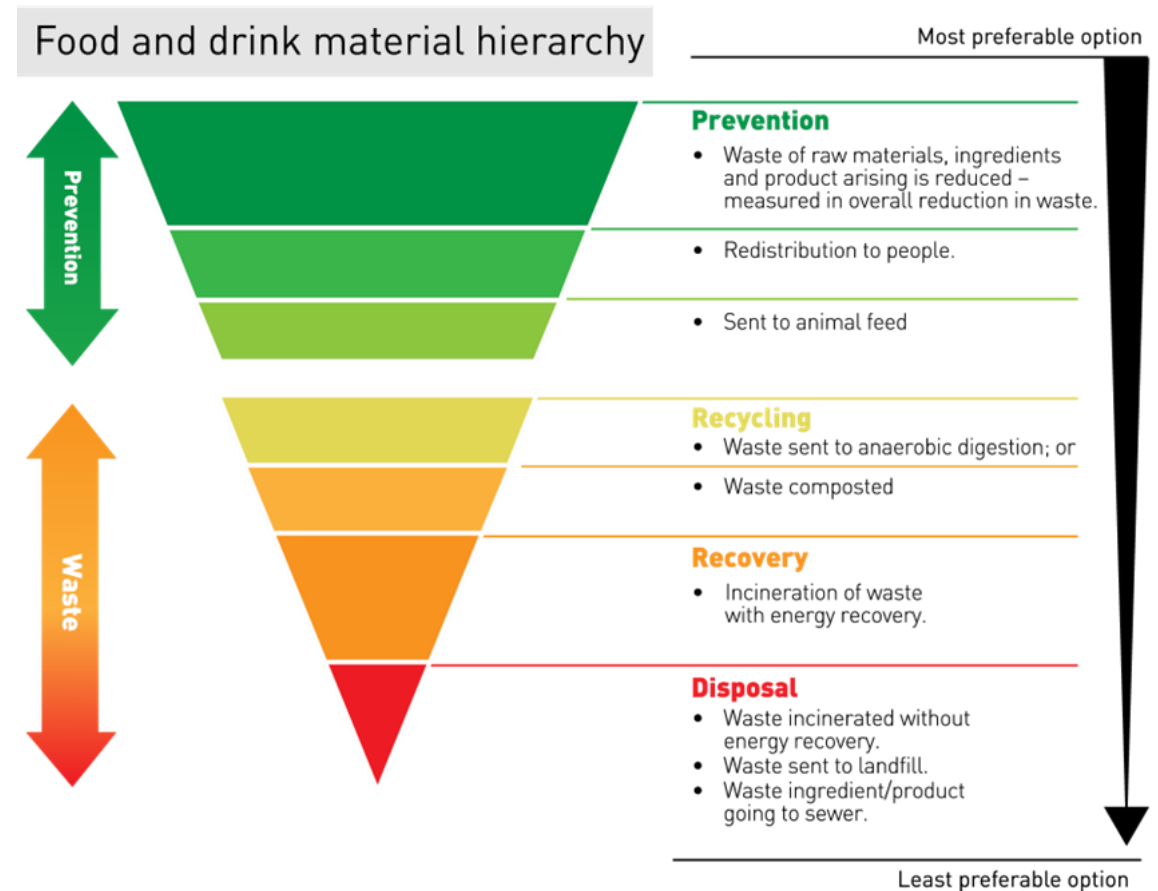
<sup>a</sup> University of Liverpool <sup>b</sup> University of Cambridge <sup>c</sup> Imperial <sup>d</sup> LSHTM <sup>e</sup> University of Exeter

Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March

Birmingham, TUKFS Annual Meeting 2026

# The rise of surplus food redistribution through the community food aid sector

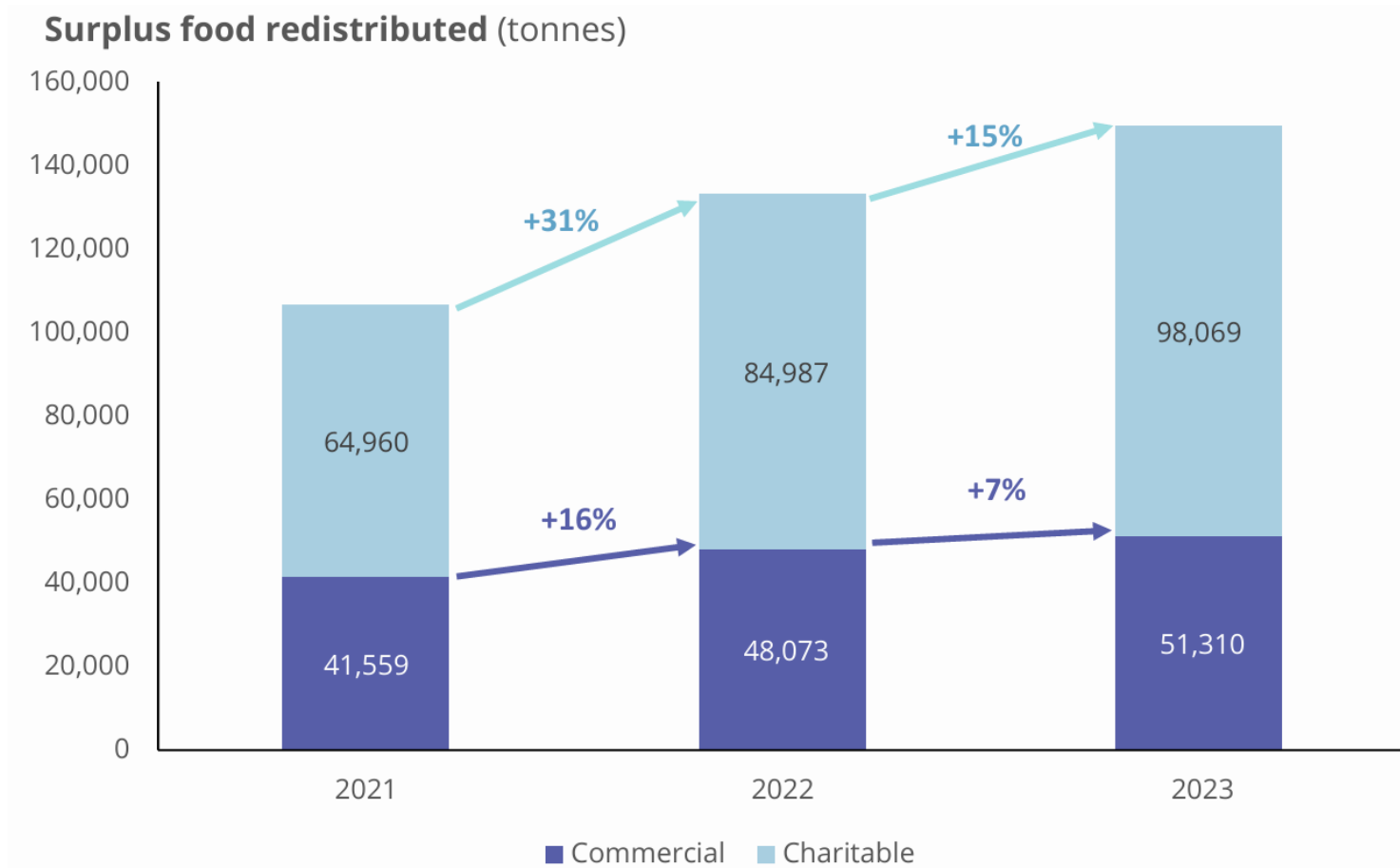
- Surplus food: unused, edible food produced by the commercial food system
- Surplus food from farms, retail, manufacture and hospitality & food service estimated at 4.3m tonnes/yr (WRAP, 2025)
- 10% of households in UK are food insecure (Family Resources Survey, 2023/24)



Food Waste Hierarchy. Department of Environment Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) 2024.

UK Food Waste & Food Surplus – Key Facts. WRAP, 2025.

# The rise of surplus food redistribution through the community food aid sector



- In 2023, 140,000t of surplus food was redistributed via charitable channels in the UK. (WRAP, 2023)
  - Organisations with objectives to reduce environmental impact of food system
  - Organisations using free or reduced-cost food to support objectives to alleviate food insecurity

# The rise of surplus food redistribution through the community food aid sector



“ I think it is wrong that supermarkets can record ‘0’ waste when actually we, as a food bank are having to dispose of their waste. ”

Food aid worker at a medium-sized food bank

Participant quoted in *Used by: how businesses dump their waste on food charities*. Foodrise, 2025.

- Growth in scale and infrastructure supporting redistribution, corresponding to increased reliance on surplus in community food aid sector.
- Practice characterised by complexity, involving multiple stakeholders.
- Not clear what the impacts are for commercial businesses, charitable organisations, individuals or the environment

# Aims of review

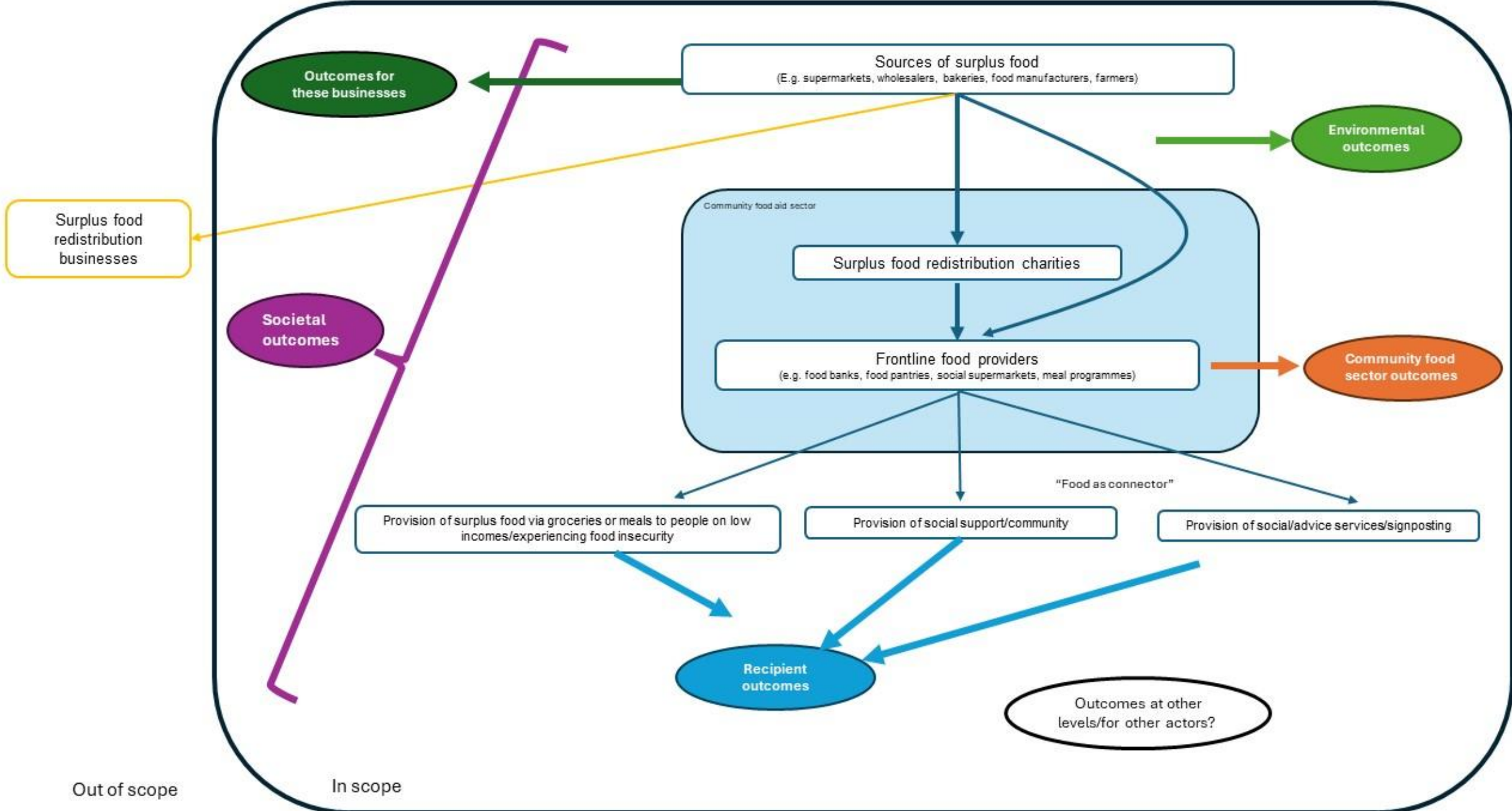
- Which outcomes related to surplus food redistribution to the community food aid sector have been studied in the academic literature?
  - Map breadth of evidence; identify gaps
- What methodologies and approaches have been used to examine these outcomes?



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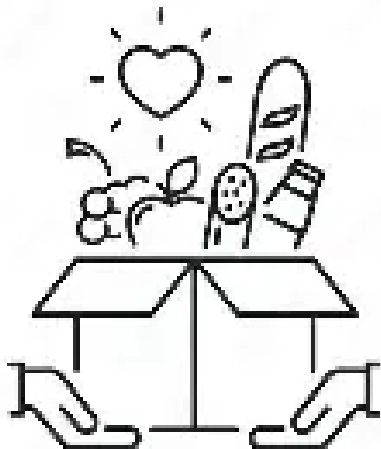
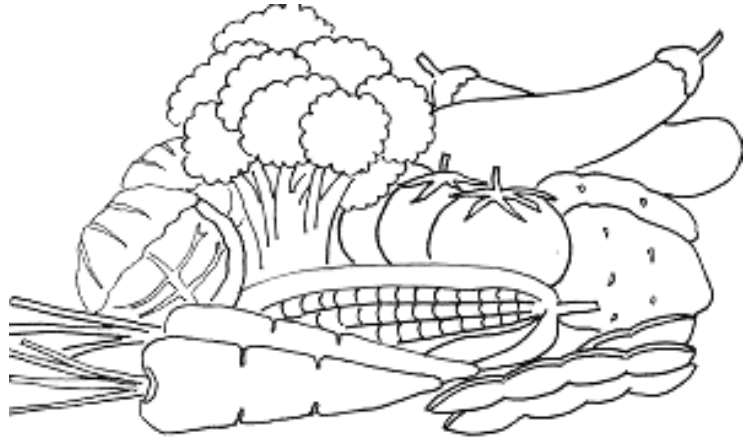
# Focus of review



Out of scope

In scope

# Methods: search strategy

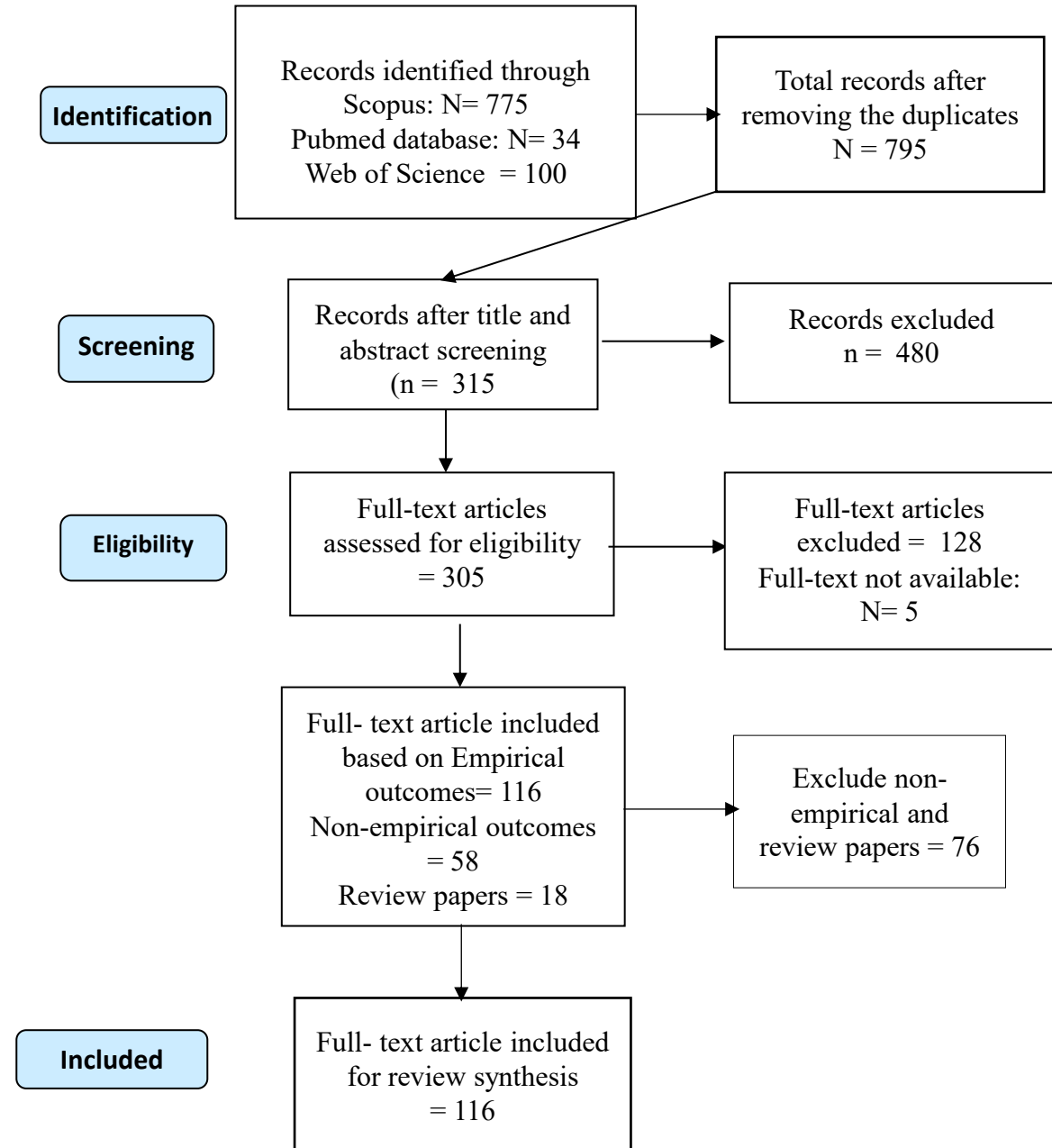


REDISTRIBUTION

- Key terms:
  - Surplus food, food waste, post-harvest losses...
  - Redistribution, sharing, redirection, recovery, recycling...
  - Food bank, food pantry, emergency food, community food store...
- SCOPUS, PUBMED, Web of Science
- 1998-2024; English language; broad inclusion for study design
- Excluding grey literature

# Results

- Selected 116 publications
- Most published in journals covering social sciences, environmental science, health and food systems
- Mix of methods: quantitative (35%), qualitative (41%) and mixed methods (24%)

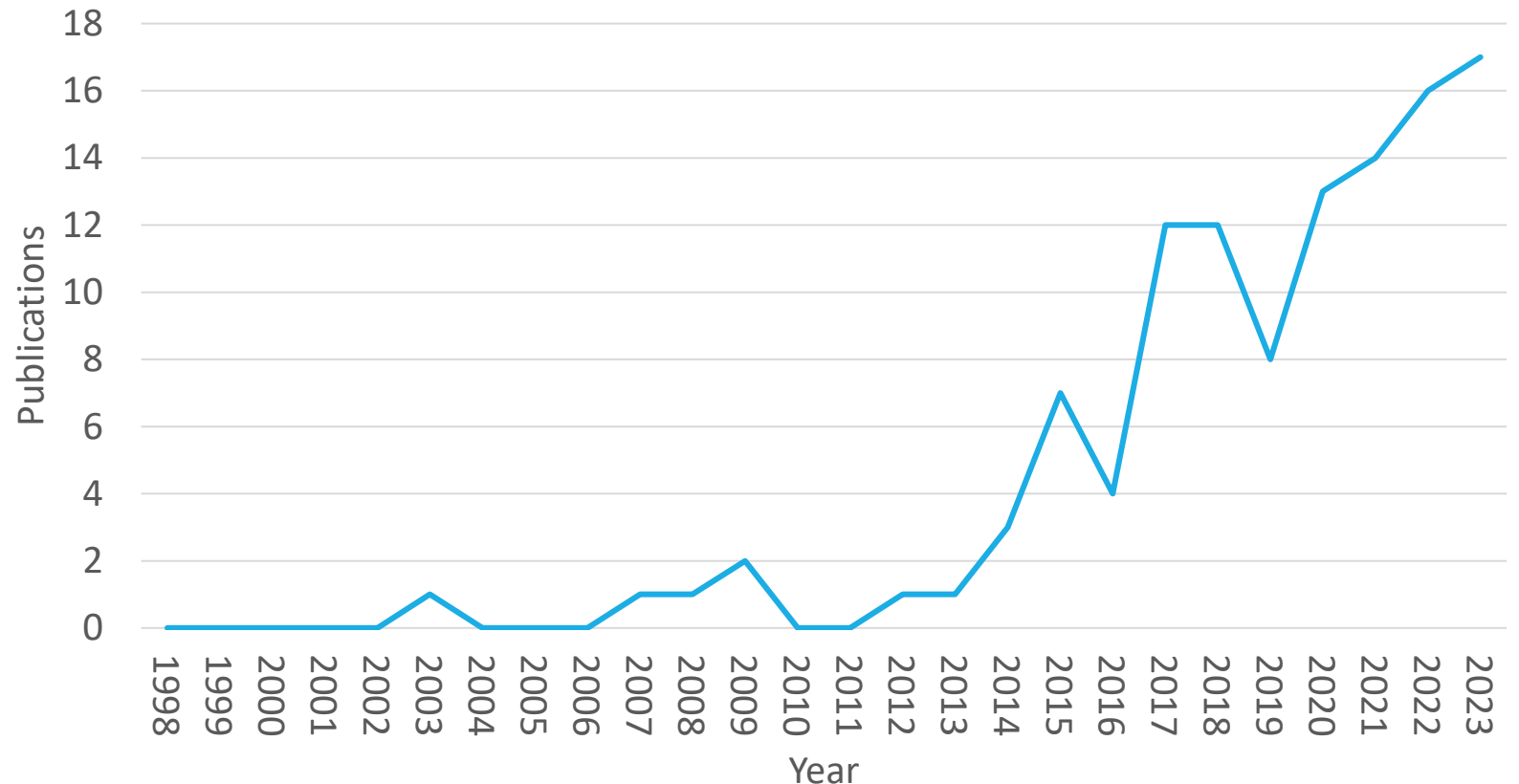


# Results

Studies conducted in Europe (46), North America (45), Australia/New Zealand (11), Asia (8), South America (5) or with a global focus (1).



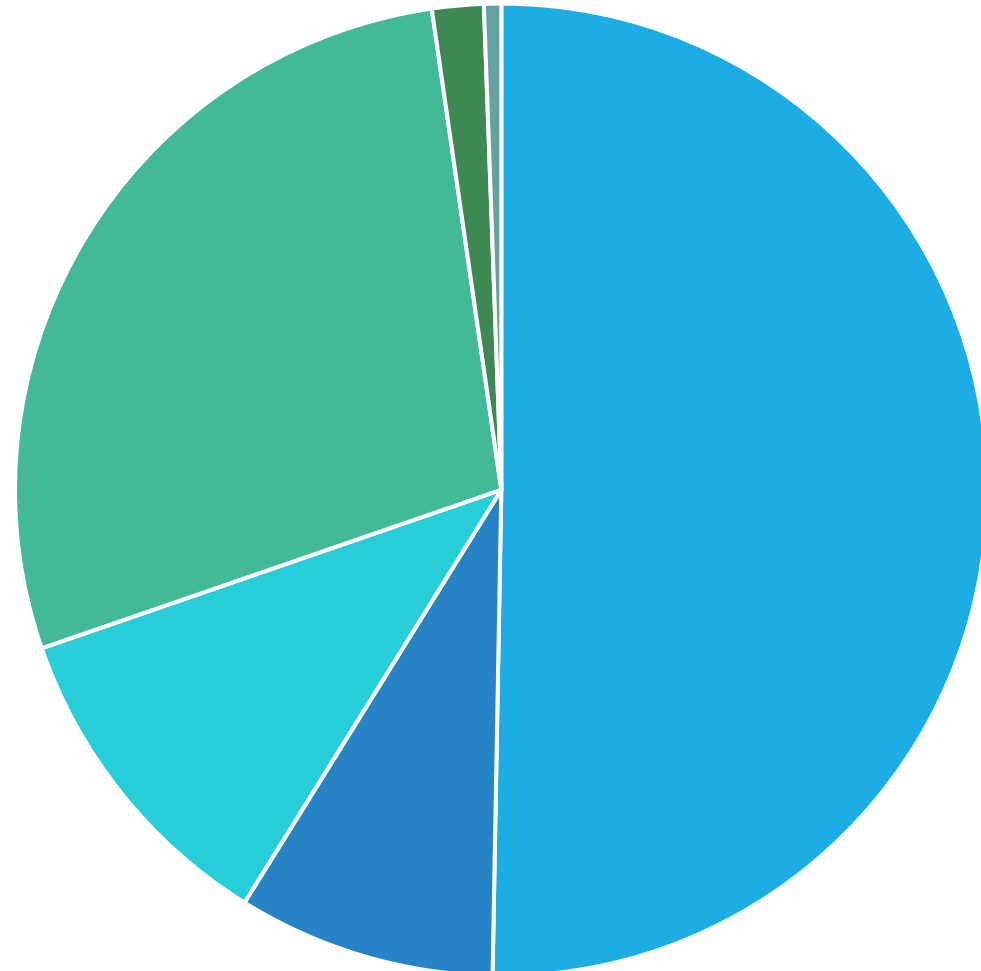
Publications by year



# Results

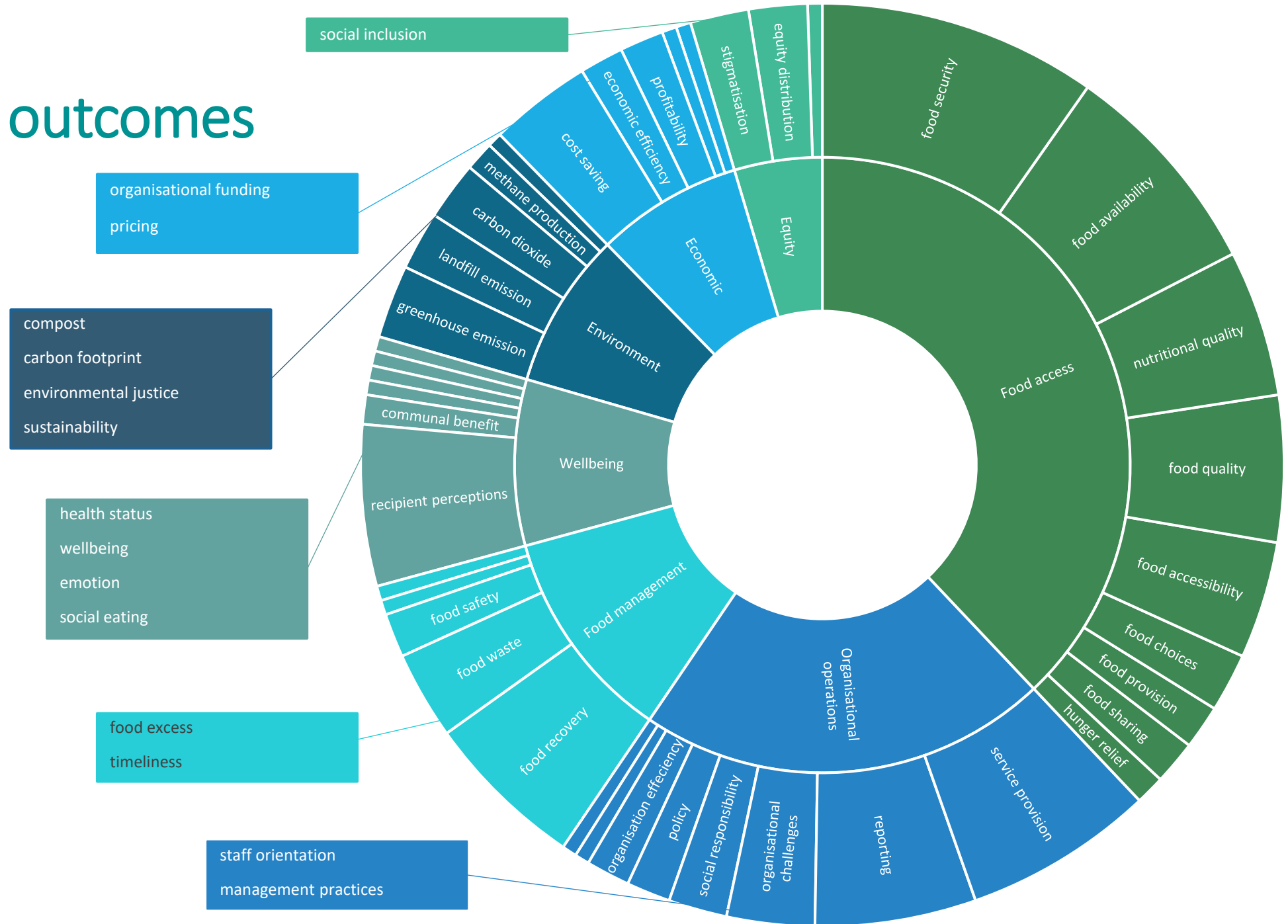
- Studies examining outcomes in:
  - One category: 53.5%
  - Two categories: 42.2%
  - Three categories: 4.3%

Entity of focus for outcomes



- Community food sector
- Recipients
- Business
- Society
- Environment
- Justice

# Results: outcomes



# Conclusions



- Growing, international interest in the impact of surplus food redistribution through the community food aid sector.
- Impacts have been examined from a range of angles, although there is more focus on the community food aid sector and recipients of food aid.
- Consideration of this practice should consider the range of stakeholders impacted as well as wider impacts on society and the environment.
  - Adopt a systemic view of the practice to capture unintended consequences, longer-term implications and trade-offs.
- To better *understand* the impacts, we must also understand the drivers of this practice.
  - “left over food for left beyond people”? (Riches, 2018)
  - ‘No-cost’ disposal entrenching production of surplus food in the food system?
  - Why is 100,000t/yr surplus food currently going to animal feed or waste? (WRAP, 2023)



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**Thank you for listening.**

**Dr Alexia Sawyer, IMS Epidemiology, University of Cambridge**  
**[as3213@cam.ac.uk](mailto:as3213@cam.ac.uk)**