



TACKLING FOOD INSECURITY AMONG CHILDREN

EU Policy Context and the Activities
of European Food Banks



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1.

Foreword

FEBA is a growing network of 30 Food Banks across Europe contributing daily to the reduction of food insecurity in Europe through the prevention of food waste and the call for solidarity by supporting and developing Food Banks in countries where they are most needed.

We work tirelessly to support our members in the pursuit of their mission and advocate for their interests at the European and international levels. Only in 2023, our network of 352 Food Banks redistributed 839,942 tonnes of food through 44,364 charitable organisations, many of whom support families with children.

Today, our work is becoming even more challenging. As operating costs for Food Banks rise - including expenses for energy, fuel, vehicles, infrastructure, and staff - the number of people in need is also increasing - thus raising the pressure on our members and the charities they closely work with.

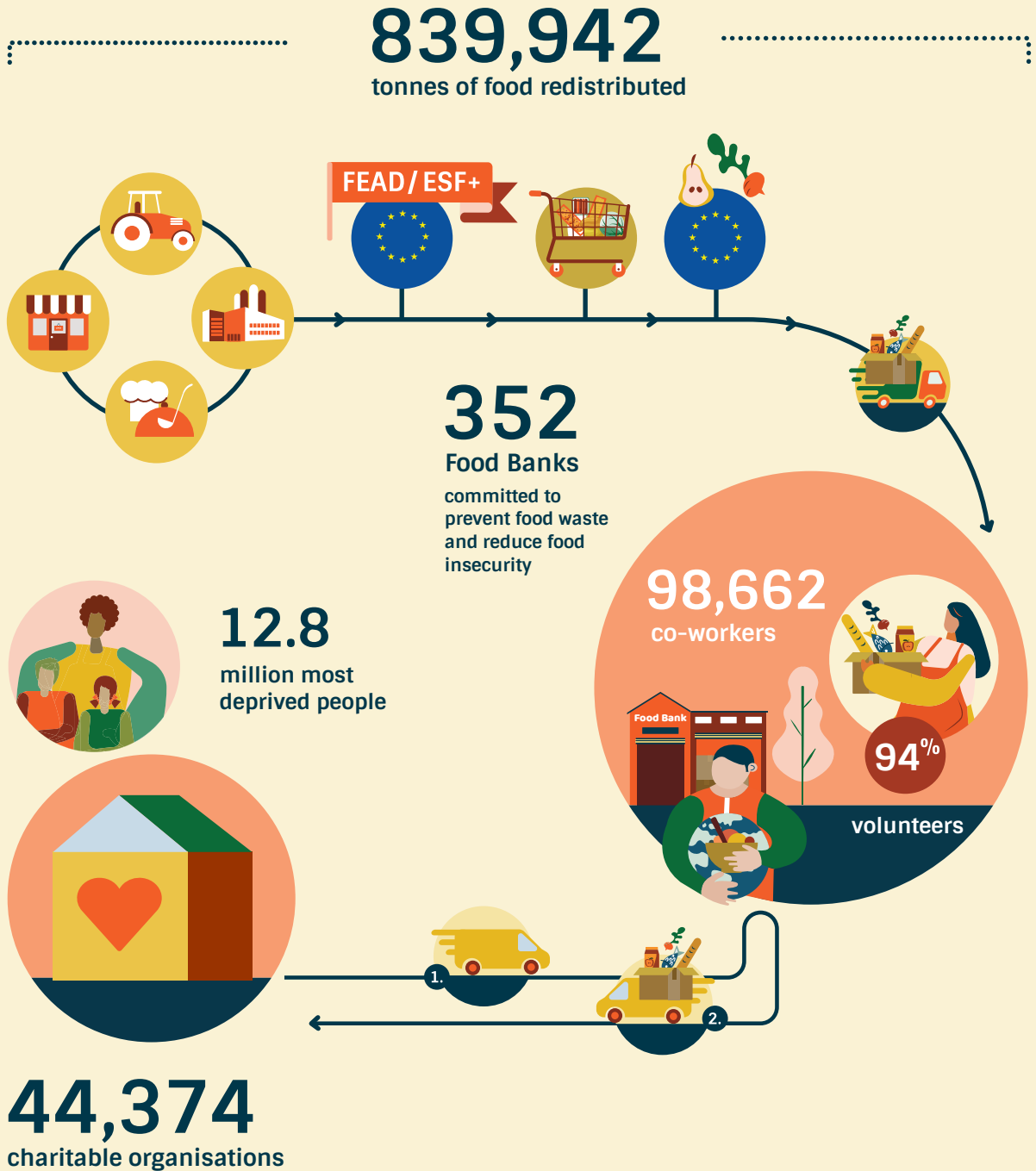


The launch of the European Child Guarantee in 2019 and the recent nomination of the Child Guarantee Coordinators together with the national action plans in each EU Member State, represents a unique opportunity for FEBA and its members to work even closer with stakeholders to tackle child poverty and its root causes in Europe together.

**Esteban Arriaga Miranda, CEO
European Food Banks Federation
(FEBA)**



In 2023, the European Food Banks Federation (FEBA) worked in collaboration with 24 Full Members and 6 Associate Members in 30 European countries.¹



¹ This is the aggregation of data provided by FEBA Full Members and Associate Members at the European level. In some countries, such as Estonia, Germany, and the Netherlands, FEBA Members redistribute food not only to other charitable organisations but also directly to end beneficiaries. In the case of Tafel Deutschland e.V., all data refers to 2022, except for co-workers data.

2.

Introduction

Since 2022, the socio-economic crisis unfolding as a result of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine severely impacted millions of families across Europe. In a few months, energy prices rose dramatically, and many had to choose whether to cover their energy bills, provide a healthy diet to their children or pay their rent or mortgage. In a continent already facing a severe housing crisis, the cost-of-living crisis hit the most vulnerable the hardest.

In order to meet the surging demand, the European Food Banks Federation and our members had to significantly increase their efficiency and develop their donor network.² At FEBA, we believe no parents should face the choice between feeding themselves and feeding their children.

To specifically address the nutritional needs of the youngest members of our societies, European Food Banks redistribute specific



Find out more



Impact of Socio-Economic Crisis on FEBA Members in 2022



food products for babies and toddlers, such as jarred fruit and vegetable puree, cereals/porridge, and biscuits. Non-food items are also a valuable part of the products sourced, in particular, diapers, baby cosmetics, and wipes.

Besides providing material support, this report further showcases the involvement of FEBA Members in school meal programmes, weekend or holiday support schemes, as well as counselling services. The relevance of their activities to the key priorities of the European Child Guarantee is underscored by the outlined examples.

² Impact of Socio- Economic Crisis on FEBA Members in 2022 (<https://www.eurofoodbank.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/FEBA-Impact-Report-Final.pdf>).

3.

EU Policy Instruments Fostering the Well-Being of Children

In 2023, **20 million children aged less than 18 in the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion** represented 24.8%, according to Eurostat.³ The highest levels were reported in **Romania, Spain, Bulgaria, and Greece, with 25% to 40% of the total amount of children and adolescents being at risk of poverty and/or social exclusion** in those countries.

At the European level, various initiatives and tools support the well-being of children, especially from a food security and nutritional standpoint. In the next pages, the European Child Guarantee and the EU School Fruits, Vegetables, and Milk Scheme as the two main relevant frameworks in this context are being examined.

Being at risk of poverty or social exclusion often coincides with the lack of access to nutritious and healthy food.



Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (2023, % of population aged less than 18 years)



Source: Eurostat

³ Eurostat (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Children_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion)

European Child Guarantee



#EUChildGuarantee #EUChildRights



2.1

European Child Guarantee

The European Child Guarantee provides guidance for EU countries to ensure every child in Europe at risk of poverty has access to essential services.



1 in 5 children

(under 18) in the EU are living in households at risk of poverty or social exclusion

That amounts to nearly

18 million children

in need⁴

The European Child Guarantee was first introduced in 2019 and is one of the main deliverables of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) to address childcare and support for children at risk of poverty.⁵ **Principle 11 of the Pillar emphasises access for children to affordable early childhood education and care.**

To deliver Principle 11 requires a multi-level joint effort that considers civil society expertise working and supporting children experiencing poverty in Europe. **The Child Guarantee aims to combat child poverty, foster equal opportunities, and prevent and combat social exclusion by guaranteeing access for children in need to a set of key services:** early childhood education and care (ECEC), education and out-of-school activities, housing, healthcare, and healthy nutrition.

⁴ European Child Guarantee (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/european-child-guarantee/#0>)

⁵ European Pillar of Social Rights (2016) The European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles. Online, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1606&langId=en>

Member States have an active role to play to reduce poverty among children. **Each EU Member State has appointed their Child Guarantee coordinators and were requested to submit their National Action Plans (NAPs) to elaborate the national initiatives to tackle child poverty, to cover the period until 2030.**

To achieve the objectives of the Child Guarantee, Member States can draw on EU funding to support their actions under the Child Guarantee, in particular from **the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), which includes an earmarking of 5% for action to tackle child poverty in Member States** with child poverty rates above the EU average, and the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), as part of Next Generation EU.⁶

Other sources of funding such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and InvestEU can fund infrastructure, social housing and early childhood education, and care facilities.

Finally, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) can be used to fund reception facilities, and support services for vulnerable groups.



The main objective of the Child Guarantee is to protect children and young people. EU countries should guarantee every child access to:



free early education and care



free education



free healthcare



healthy nutrition



adequate housing

⁶ European Parliament (2024) Recovery and Resilience Facility, Home. Online, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/recovery-and-resilience-facility/en/home>



Healthy nutrition

The **Child Guarantee** aims to ensure effective access to healthy nutrition. The recommendation underlines the need to support access to healthy meals also outside of school days. COVID-19 showed that the dependency on schools for children's meals can be disrupted if they are closed down.

The goal is to guarantee that nutrition standards in early childhood education and care institutions as well as in schools are linked to specific dietary needs; and reduce the amount of "junk food" in a child's diet.



Spain

- **ESF +:** 'Programme to combat material deprivation' (all the Autonomous Communities will participate) include measures to provide food and basic material assistance to help children in vulnerable situations
- **EU School Fruit, Vegetables and Milk Scheme**



Croatia

- **ESF+ and FEAD** will fund the provision of meals in primary schools

Different studies emphasise the link between the diets of children and adolescents from families with lower socio-economic status and eating too few fruits, vegetables, and plant-based foods.⁷

Some countries use EU funds to provide meals to children, which are the following:



Greece

- **EU School Programme - fruit, vegetables and milk.** EU funding: €14.3 million
- **AMIF** - distribution of meals in centres for third-country nationals and applicants for international protection



Italy

- **ESF+** to be used to reduce the cost of school meals, easing the burden on families in need, and to integrate public (school canteens) and third sector (food parcels) efforts in the fight against food poverty
- **RRF:** School canteens: infrastructure covered by the NRRP - €400 million allocated to canteens for infrastructure works, especially in the South of Italy

⁷ Child Guarantee National Action Plans ([https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/734003/IPOL_BRI\(2022\)734003_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/734003/IPOL_BRI(2022)734003_EN.pdf))



2.2

EU School Fruits, Vegetables, and Milk Scheme

The EU school scheme supports the distribution of milk, fruits, and vegetables to millions of children, from nursery to secondary school, across the EU. It has been applicable since 2017 and a review of the scheme as part of the Farm to Fork strategy that was launched by the Commission.

The scheme supports the distribution of fruit, vegetables, milk, and certain milk products to schoolchildren. **EU countries approve a list of products selected together with their health and nutrition authorities to achieve the schemes' goal of helping children to follow a healthy diet.**

The **priority is the provision of fresh fruit and vegetables as well as plain milk.** To diversify the diet and complement specific dietary needs, **EU countries also supply processed fruit and vegetables, such as juices, and certain milk products, like yoghurt and cheese.**

Seasonality, variety, availability, health, and environmental aspects strengthen the selection of specific products. EU countries may encourage sourcing produce locally, regionally, and organic if possible. No added sugar, salt, fat and sweeteners or artificial flavours are allowed. **The scheme also supports educational measures, such as cooking lessons or visits to a farm, school gardening or tastings.** The goal is to make children familiar again with healthy food and understanding where the food comes from and how it grows and is harvested.

A public consultation of the EU school fruit, vegetables, and milk scheme took place from 5 May until 28 July 2022. It was conducted as part of the Farm to Fork strategy that aims to increase the scheme's impact on sustainable food consumption and strengthen educational messages on healthy nutrition for children. The executive summary of the evaluation support study of the EU school scheme is published in order to support the review of its legislative framework.⁸

⁸ Child Guarantee National Action Plans ([https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/734003/IPOL_BRI\(2022\)734003_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/734003/IPOL_BRI(2022)734003_EN.pdf))

2.3

Expert Stakeholder Opinion – Eurochild



Eurochild has been monitoring the implementation of the European Child Guarantee across all member states, supporting its member organisations to advocate for a more comprehensive approach to child welfare.

Member states have adopted various strategies to ensure equal access to healthy nutrition:

- France and Italy emphasise school meal programmes, aiming to improve food quality and expand access in underserved areas;
- Germany and Spain integrate nutritional education into school curricular;
- Poland and Hungary focus on addressing malnutrition and food insecurity through assistance programmes distributing essential groceries to low-income families; and
- Lithuania seeks to improve the legal regulation of free school meals.

Ensuring these programmes are universally accessible requires increased funding and logistical support to reach rural and remote areas. Expanding financial support, such as



Eurochild

Putting children at
the heart of Europe

food vouchers, subsidies, and direct aid, along with policies supporting affordable fresh produce, can improve dietary options for disadvantaged families.

Eurochild's analysis of biennial reports tracks indicators like child malnutrition and obesity rates, the percentage of children receiving free or subsidised school meals, and meal quality. This data-driven approach helps identify gaps, inform policy adjustments, and ensure effective interventions.

Recognizing the interplay of nutrition with broader socioeconomic factors, Eurochild urges member states to adopt holistic child welfare policies addressing poverty, housing, education, and healthcare access to maximise the benefits of nutritional programmes.

Reneta Krivonozova, Policy & Advocacy Officer – Child Poverty, Eurochild

4.

European Food Banks' Activities for and with Children

No parent should face the choice between feeding themselves and feeding their children. However, many European families struggle to make ends meet, a situation frequently aggravated by the cost-of-living crisis.

In particular food and non-food products for infants and toddlers are items of daily use and relatively high costs. Given their crucial importance for nutrition and hygiene reasons, parents with no or low income often decide to prioritise spending their available budget for the benefit of their offspring and, as a consequence, neglect their own needs.

Looking at school-age children and teenagers, many pupils arrive for their lessons without eating breakfast or a packed lunch. If no free meals are provided, this can have serious consequences for their well-being and ability to concentrate, thus affecting their overall performance with a long-term impact on their future socio-economic conditions.

Beyond material aid, education and awareness projects on food waste prevention and

nutrition targeting young people help to consolidate knowledge of the environmental impact of the problem. Moreover, discarding edible food equals an avoidable waste of monetary resources. Knowing how to better store and prepare perishable food offers room for considerable budgetary savings.

In each of those scenarios, the activities of Food Banks can make a decisive difference.

Aiming to **better understand and underscore the impact European Food Banks have on the well-being of children**, FEBA carried out a structured online survey covering the period from January to December 2023. **29 of its 30 members provided qualitative information** that has been aggregated and analysed.⁹ It is complemented with data received in the framework of the annual Data Collection campaign where FEBA Members report statistics on 99 indicators, some of which are related to children.

Three core questions formed the cornerstone of the research.

1. **What is the nature of the support provided by Food Banks?**
2. **What activities are carried out for and with children?**
3. **What educational materials specifically addressing children are available?**

⁹ No information available from FEBA Member in Malta.

The following chapters summarise the results of the assessment and build the basis for recommendations on how the positive impact can be leveraged.

3.1 Material Support Addressing Children's Needs

In 2023, **22 FEBA Members**, 76% of those responding to the survey, **redistributed specific food products for babies and toddlers**, in particular, baby food (62%) and powdered milk for infants (48%). Among the common food items were jarred fruit and vegetable puree, cereals/porridge, and biscuits.

Non-food items for babies and children of a young age **were received by 13**, or 45%, of the Food Banks, in particular diapers. Baby cosmetics and wipes were also among the products reported.

Besides that, one member mentioned having received vitamin supplements specifically for children which can help prevent micronutrient deficiency.



 Source: Banca pentru Alimente București



According to available 2023 data provided by

19 FEBA Members

in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Romania, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Spain, Switzerland, and Ukraine,

+2,215,750 children and young people under 18

received food and non-food products

This number corresponds to

28% of their total final beneficiaries



3.2 Support in the Framework of FEAD and ESF+

In 2023, 12 FEBA Members in Belgium, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, and Spain were involved in the implementation of FEAD/REACT-EU or ESF+ programmes and collectively redistributed over 128,182 tonnes of food products funded by the European Union.



FEAD/ REACT- EU

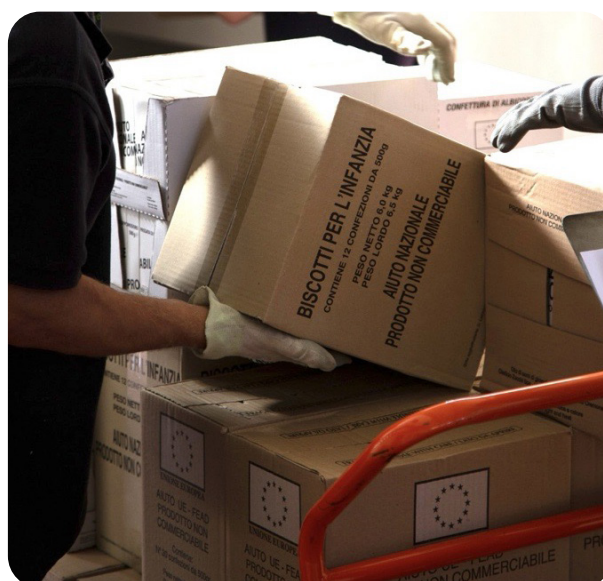
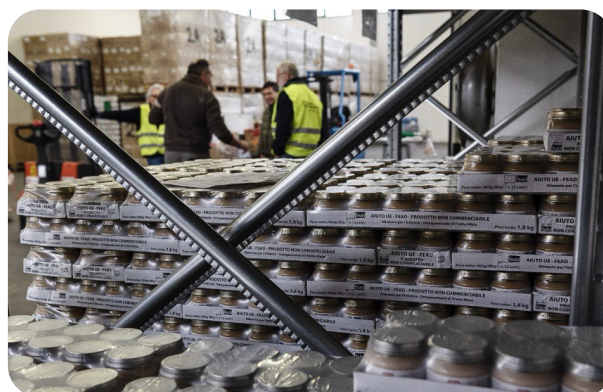
107,969 tonnes

ESF+

20,213 tonnes

3 of the respective FEBA Members (Belgium, Czech Republic, and Italy) received products specifically for children, in particular, hygiene products (toothbrushes, diapers, shampoo), infant milk powder, and biscuits/snacks.

The material support financed through the programmes was **important to close a gap of supply**, especially when it comes to non-food hygiene products, which are not marked with an expiry date and are therefore less commonly received as surplus donations.



3.3 Social and educational activities



19 FEBA Members (66%)

stated that they carried out activities involving children under 18 in 2023

A closer look reveals the bandwidth of projects. The majority of these Food Banks (68%) organised **workshops in schools** to educate children and teenagers about the importance of food waste prevention from an environmental and budgetary perspective, highlighting tips and tricks to verify if products are safe for consumption even if their best-before date has passed.

Leisure-time activities were implemented by 47% and **cooking classes** were offered by 32%, aiming to increase nutritional knowledge and kitchen skills as well as to raise awareness in a child-friendly manner.

Besides these social activities, 37% were involved in **school meal programmes** and 16% provided food in the framework of **weekend or holiday support schemes**. The latter helps families bridge a period where children otherwise risk going hungry if parents struggle to cope with the additional grocery expenses. Two FEBA Members offered **counselling services** for families.

7 Food Bank representatives further specified the availability of **educational communication materials** prepared specifically for children, e.g. story-telling books, infographics, or brochures.

An additional 10 respondents indicated their interest in preparing materials in the foreseeable future to reach an important target group.



Types of educational activities conducted by Food Banks (out of 19)



3.4

Consolidating Good Practices: Case Studies from the FEBA Network



Food Bank Albania

Food waste prevention comic book

Through colourful images, a compilation of comics playfully educates children on a variety of topics. Short stories raise awareness of the value of food, the problem of (household) food waste, and sustainable grocery shopping. Easy measures to prevent food waste as well as the activities of Food Bank Albania are illustrated.

Read the book



Die Tafel Österreich

Find out more



GewissensBISS exhibition



The interactive travelling exhibition aims to raise awareness about food waste, offering comprehensive information and practical tips. Pupils from the age of 12 can become familiar with facts and figures through hands-on stations, an interactive refrigerator, a quiz, and a TV corner.



More info



Sensory Laboratory

By stimulating their sensory perception, this activity brings children and teenagers closer to food as a valuable resource through playful exploration and personal experience.

In this way, they learn to individually assess freshness, taste, and quality thus increasing their consciousness for the sustainable handling of food.



Federation Belge des Banques Alimentaires/ Belgische Federatie van Voedselbanken



Cooking classes with children

The Food Bank Namur-Luxembourg regularly invites 6th graders of regional schools for an excursion to the warehouse where they learn about the activities in a hands-on manner.

After taking part in the sorting of surplus products recovered, they prepare vegetable soup together with a professional chef in the organisation's kitchen, using vegetables unfit for redistribution but perfectly edible and safe.

The goal of the workshop is to sensitise the children to food security and safety as well as raise awareness of food waste.



Tafel Deutschland e.V.

Explore the project

Breakfast project “Power Kiste“

Pursuing the goal of enabling children and young people to have a healthy meal in a community atmosphere, every morning, a nearby REWE store packs boxes of food, including wholegrain bread, fruits, muesli, and yoghurt, which are delivered by the local Food Banks to participating schools.

In addition, the project offers workshops in which the students – together with a certified nutritionist – address the topics of balanced diets and the sustainable and conscious use of food.



Food Bank Greece

Have a look



Children’s book “The Dream”

Initiated by the Thessaly Food Bank and edited by Food Bank Greece, the book “The Dream” tells a fairy tale about solidarity, accepting diversity, protecting nature, and fighting food insecurity.

The publication is available for free in English and Greek.



Banca de Alimente Moldova

Educational campaign “Less waste, more good”

In partnership with Kaufland, the Food Bank launched a series of actions, including an educational programme incentivising children to prevent food waste.

A guidebook encourages them to consume responsibly and also serves as educational material for parents and teachers.



Matsentralen Norge



Discover more



School projects

Through different projects, Food Banks in Norway help to raise awareness of poverty and the environmental consequences of food waste.

Besides developing a teaching programme about the value of food and organising warehouse tours, co-workers visit primary schools to foster in-depth learning from an early age.





Federacja Polskich Banków Żywności

Primary school project “EcoMisja”

To increase environmental awareness, including education on how not to waste food and other resources and how to lead an ecological and healthy lifestyle, the “EcoMission” project was launched. In collaboration with Lidl, the 2023/2024 edition focuses on farming and food production.

Various materials on e.g. food safety, storage, and nutrition for children, parents, and teachers are available, including crosswords, a colouring book, stories, a card game and cartoons.



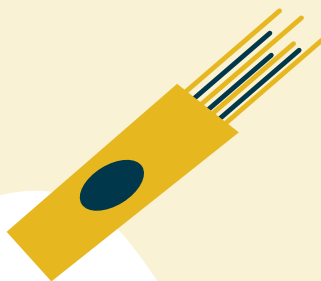
Federația Băncilor pentru Alimente din România



Educational programmes

Each of the nine Food Banks in Romania developed materials for interactive high school workshops where students learn about the rationale behind Food Banks' existence, the environmental consequences of food waste, and how to prevent it at home.

Moreover, they are motivated to volunteer during Food Collections and can participate in a food waste quiz.



Partage

Summer food aid programme

The Food Bank launched a support scheme that enabled families in a precarious financial situation to feed their children during the summer closure of school canteens.

1,400 children under twelve from very low-income families in the canton of Geneva were given bags containing various nutritious products such as fresh fruits and vegetables, pasta, rice, tuna, cereals, cheese, and compotes/pouches.



Ukrainian Food Banks Federation



Drawing competition

Under the title “My New Year’s Dream”, a drawing competition for children aged 3 to 14 years was organised, addressing specifically large, low-income families or those located on the frontline and de-occupied territories, orphans, and children with special needs.

10,250 youngsters in 23 regions took part, benefiting from a moment of joy and distraction from the fears and sorrows connected to growing up in a war zone. The pictures receiving the most public votes received a tablet.

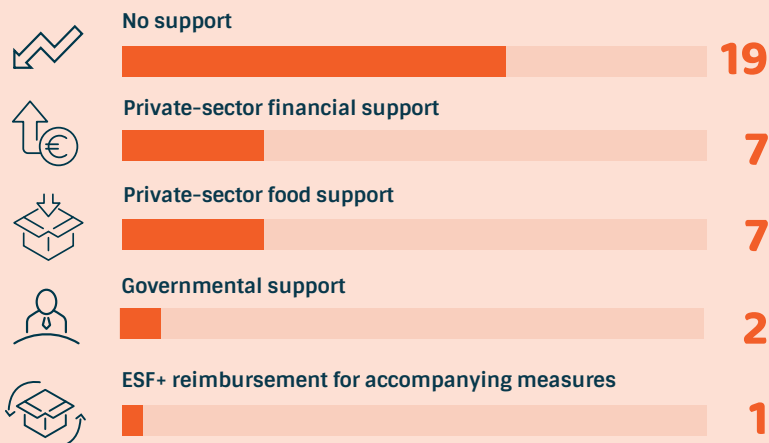
3.5 Support from External Stakeholders

Being asked about the **support received from external parties** to carry out activities for and with children, 10 Food Banks mentioned support from the **private sector** (7 received food, 5 received funds), 2 were assisted by their respective **governments**, and 1 specified carrying out **ESF+ financed accompanying measures** for the benefit of children.

19 FEBA Members (66%) highlighted the **absence of support** of any kind.



Type of support that Food Banks received for children (out of 29)



5.

Conclusions

The La Hulpe Declaration on the Future of Social Europe signed in April 2024 emphasised the importance of the **European Pillar of Social Rights** including priorities on education and the welfare of children.¹⁰ The implementation and strengthening of the **European Child Guarantee** continues to be of importance. Children therefore remain a priority at the EU level but also for Member States, which should be closely monitored as well as the element of nutrition through tools such as the **EU Fruits, Vegetables, and Milk Scheme**.

The outlined results of the assessment of FEBA Members' activities underscored that **children are an important target group for European Food Banks**. On the one hand, material aid provided to charities, care institutions, or directly to end beneficiaries **supports their physical development and relieves the budgetary concerns of parents**. However, in many cases, the quantities of child-friendly products recovered and redistributed cannot meet the increasing need.

The **worrying trend of mismatching supply and demand** threatens to negatively impact the well-being of infants, children, or young people relying on food and non-food products for their physical and mental development.

Besides that, **social and educational activities and materials** play a key role in fostering awareness of the gravity of food waste as a key environmental problem and showcasing measures to prevent it. Children often act as **multipliers of knowledge and good practices** and by engaging with them, Food Banks can also reach the wider family.

All of these **activities are related to operational expenses** for salaries, utilities, equipment, and infrastructure needed for their implementation. With Food Banks being non-profit organisations, **financial help is paramount** and its absence or scarcity is frequently a barrier to scaling up the ability to assist more people in need.

The assessment showed that the large majority of FEBA Members already foster children's well-being in various ways. A closer look revealed that there is yet potential for **upscaling and outscaling**, which could be **unlocked with more support in terms of food and funds** from public and private external stakeholders.

¹⁰ La Hulpe Declaration on the Future of Social Europe <https://belgian-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/media/bj0adazv/declaration-finale.pdf>



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