



European Food Banks are a critical lifeline to promote access to food

Impact of the socio-economic crisis on FEBA Members

ASSESSMENT JANUARY - DECEMBER 2023



Released 2024, Brussels.

© FEBA. All rights reserved. Any reproduction in full or in part must mention the title and credit FEBA and its membership as the copyright owner.



Co-funded by
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Contents

1. Introduction / p1

2. Assessing the repercussions of the socio-economic crisis on Food Banks' daily operations / p3

2.1. Surplus and donated food

2.2. National Food Collections

2.3. Evolution of food demand

2.4. Focus: food products of specific demand

2.5. Activities to raise awareness and source more food

2.6. Measures to ease budgetary constraints

2.7. Efforts to operate more (cost-)efficiently

2.8. A glimpse into the future

3. Conclusions / p19

1.

Introduction

The socio-economic crisis and its repercussions continue to take a heavy toll on Europe, with vulnerable societal groups bearing the brunt. Households with no or low purchasing power are hit particularly hard by the growing cost of basic necessities and thus, many face the dilemma of heating their homes or providing nutritious meals to their children, or must decide between buying cooking gas or personal hygiene products.

In these difficult circumstances, **Food Banks play a crucial role in alleviating the pressure on charitable organisations that provide material assistance** to those struggling to make ends meet. However, efficiently and safely recovering and storing fresh, perishable goods in particular comes at a cost. As a result, spiralling prices for electricity, fuel, and rent **eat into Food Banks' operational budget, while the demand for food continues to rise** in most European countries, **putting their capacity under pressure.**

The European Food Banks Federation (FEBA) circulated a tailored, in-depth survey in April 2024, with the intention of collecting **evidence-based insights into the implications of the persisting cost-of-living crisis on the operations of Food Banks** and **the profile of end beneficiaries** supported through charitable organisations.

The aggregated and analysed results presented in this report disclose the impact of the challenging socio-economic circumstances on FEBA Members who are working daily to recover, collect, and redistribute

food to a network of charitable organisations providing food assistance to people in need across Europe.¹ The gathered quantitative and qualitative data covers the period **from January to December 2023** and is based on the responses of **29 FEBA Members** (Fig. 1).²

Key-findings: Impact of the socio-economic crisis on FEBA Members

- 1 The impact of the cost-of-living crisis is still a major concern for 9 out of 10 European Food Banks.
- 2 European Food Banks are facing the perfect storm of declining surplus food availability and rising food demand from a vast societal spectrum
- 3 EU material support programmes are a crucial tool to decrease the supply gap but only benefit some FEBA Members
- 4 Higher financial contributions to European Food Banks are needed to cover inflating costs

¹ In addition to surplus food from the food supply chain, FEBA Members also redistribute food from national and/or EU programmes, such as the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD), REACT-EU and the Social Fund Plus (ESF+), the EU Fruits and Vegetables withdrawal scheme, as well as from individual and corporate food collections.

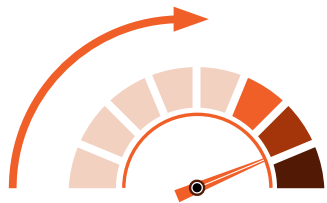
² No information available from FEBA Member in Malta.

Fig. 1. Overview of FEBA Members replying to the survey



2.

Assessing the repercussions of the socio-economic crisis on Food Banks' daily operations



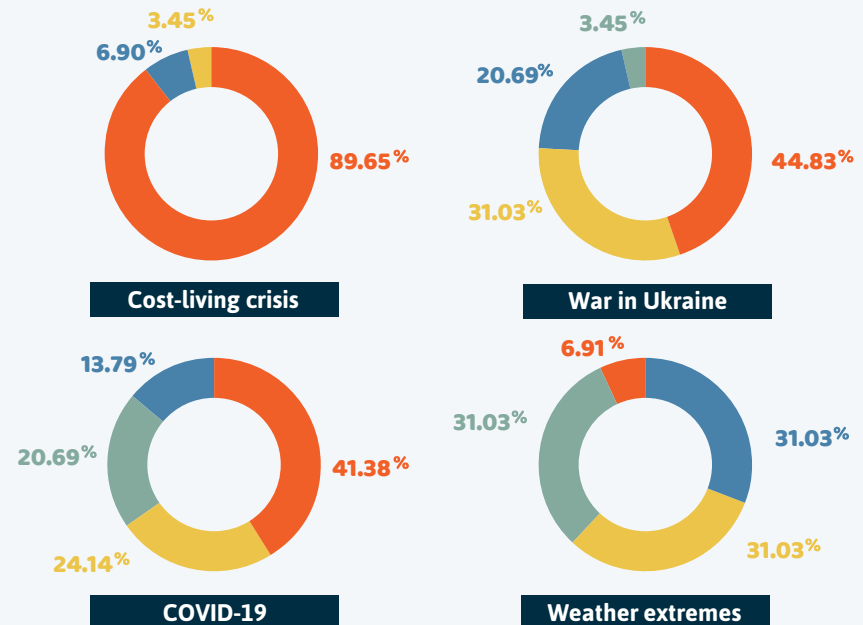
Impact of cost-of-living crisis: still a major concern for nine out of ten European Food Banks

The cost-of-living crisis **remains pertinent**, with **89.7%** of FEBA Members reporting that it had a high impact on their daily operations.

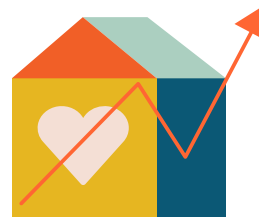
For **44.8%** of the Food Banks that responded, the **war in Ukraine** and its direct and indirect effects were considered to have major consequences on their activities. For **41.8%**, the long-term implications of the **COVID-19 pandemic** are still a serious issue. **37.9%** said abnormal weather events had a high or medium impact.

Fig. 2. Impact of external factors on Food Banks' operations in 2023

● High impact ● Medium impact ● Low impact ● No impact



When comparing the data visualised in Fig.2 with the findings of the 2022 assessment, it becomes clear that the socio-economic crisis strongly affected 90% of European Food Banks for the second year in a row.



European Food Banks are doing their best to provide more food, but struggle to meet the growing demand from charities.

On average, both the coronavirus and the war in Ukraine were perceived as less impactful, although it can be assumed that the consequences of the three phenomena cannot always be separated.

However, weather extremes, such as extraordinary rainfall or heatwaves that caused flooding or forest fires, were considered less significant, with over three-quarters of Food Banks rating their impact high or medium for 2022 compared to just over a third for 2023.

2.1. Surplus and donated food

FEBA Members recover surplus food and non-food products from the entire food supply chain and, in addition, receive items from companies in the framework of their CSR policy (donated food).



Surplus food

Surplus food is edible and safe food that, for various reasons, is not purchased or consumed by the customers or people for whom it was produced, processed, distributed, served, or purchased.

Donating this surplus food is a business-friendly, environmentally sensitive, and socially responsible alternative. **Food donation is the best option when surplus food occurs** because it ensures the highest-value use of edible food resources for human consumption, as highlighted by the Food Waste Hierarchy referred to in the revised EU Waste Framework Directive.³

³ Directive (EU) 2018/851 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2018 amending Directive 2008/98/EC on waste, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2018/851/oj?locale=en>



Donated food

Donated food is usually part of a company’s CSR policy. For instance, food can be specially produced for the Food Bank(s) and/or purchased by the company. For this reason, donated food is not considered surplus food.

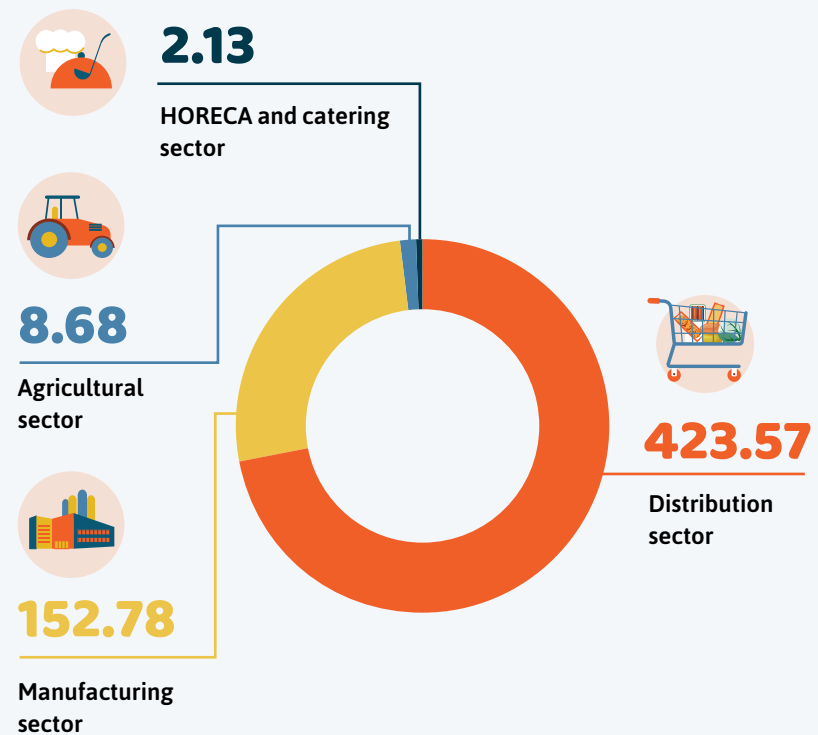
In 2023, European Food Banks received 587,183 tonnes of surplus and donated food from Food Business Operators in different sectors (Fig. 3).⁴

An in-depth look shows a non-uniform **evolution of volumes between 2022 and 2023**. While the quantity of surplus and donated food from businesses belonging to the **manufacturing sector decreased by 6%**, the total volume stemming from **distribution companies**, e.g. retailers and wholesalers, **grew by 4%**. A similar trend is visible for the **HORECA and catering sector** from which FEBA Members **sourced 7% more food**.

Due to a lack of data, this comparison cannot be made for the **agricultural sector**. However, an increase can be assumed, since more and more farmers engage in collaborations

with Food Banks to donate their surplus harvest. Given the freshness and nutritional value of produce as well as the high volumes of food currently not being used for human consumption, the potential of this sector is increasingly significant.

Fig. 3. Food sourced from the food supply chain (in tonnes, 2023)



⁴ The data refers to those 29 Food Banks responding to the survey.

2.2. National Food Collections

In addition to recovering surplus food, national Food Collections are an essential part of European Food Banks' activities. In collaboration with retailers, citizens are invited to make a gesture of solidarity by purchasing non-perishable products and donating them, or their monetary equivalent, to the Food Banks.

The 23 FEBA Members that provided data about the Food Collections organised in 2023 **amassed over 50,717.5 tonnes of non-perishable products** during these events – a **decline of 11%** in comparison with 2022.

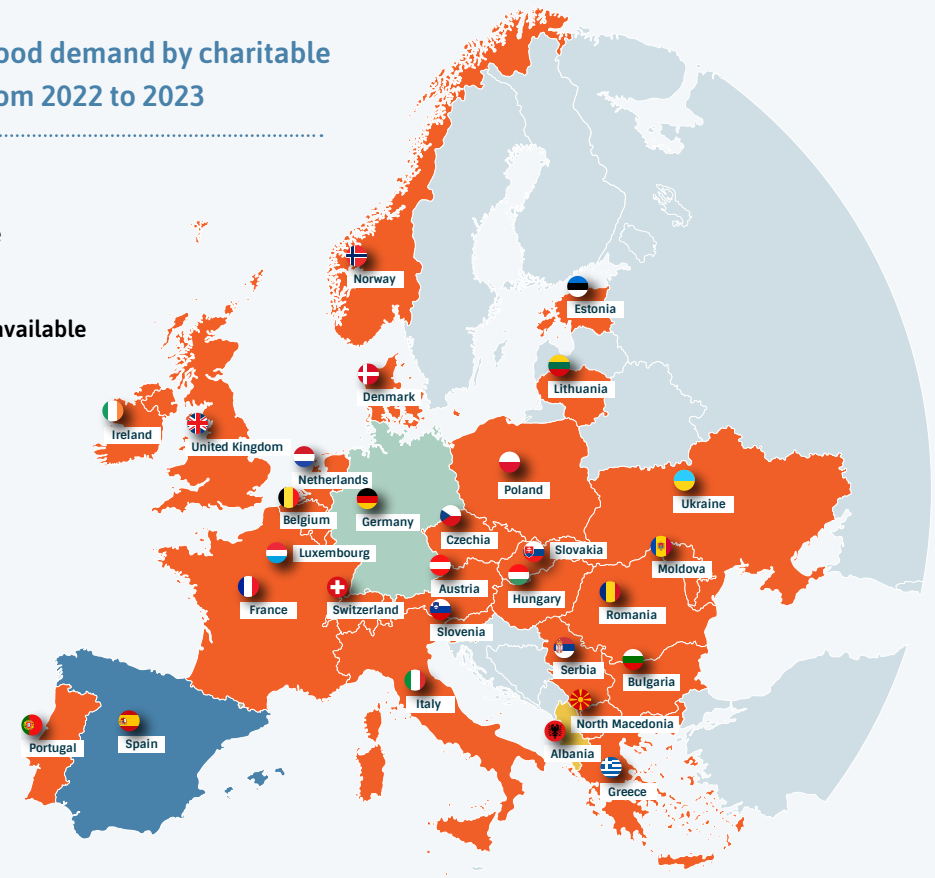
Items received in the framework of these campaigns significantly complement the warehouse stock of food and non-food goods and counteract the common scarcity of ambient staple goods, such as rice, flour, oil, or canned vegetables.

2.3. Evolution of food demand

The consequences of the socio-economic crisis are discernible when analysing the **trend of food demanded from charitable organisations**. A **surge in the quantities requested** is noted among **89.7%** of respondents (26 out of 29) located across Europe (Fig. 4). Taking into account that **85.2%** of respondents highlighted an increase from 2021 to 2022, the issue has grown further in relevance in the past year.

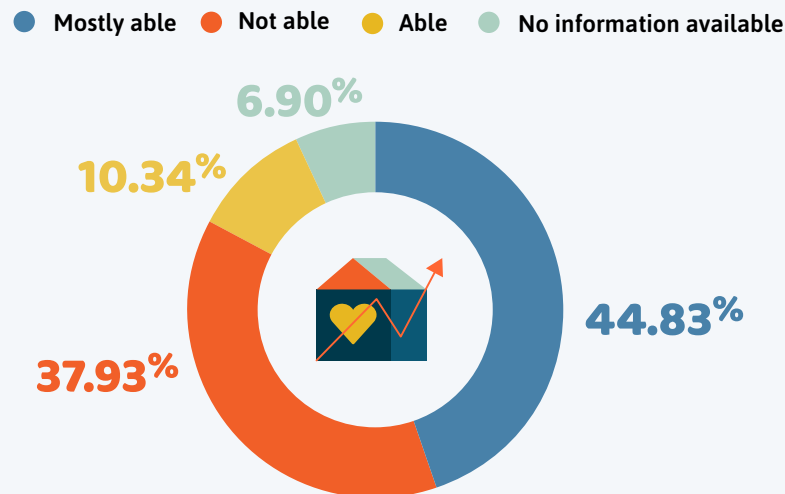
Fig. 4. Trend of food demand by charitable organisations from 2022 to 2023

- Increased
- Remained stable
- Decreased
- No information available



Against the backdrop of this increase and looking at the year 2023 retrospectively, **37.9%** (11 respondents) said that the Food Banks in their respective countries were **not able to satisfy the demand for food**.⁵ Another **44.8%** (13 respondents) said they have mostly been able to assist their affiliated charitable organisations according to their needs, but not always.⁶ Only 3 Food Banks (**10.3%** of those surveyed) said they were able to provide food in line with demand **at all times** (Fig. 5).⁷

Fig. 5. Ability to satisfy food demand from charities in 2023



2.4. Focus: food products of specific demand

When asked about the food category in highest demand, 16 of the 28 organisations surveyed selected **eggs, meat, fish, or vegetarian equivalents (lentils, chickpeas, etc.)**, with **cereals and bakery products** ranked highest by 7 Food Banks.

These foods are some of the **key components of balanced, nutritious diets**, and thus this finding indicates the challenges vulnerable groups face regarding preparing and consuming quality meals.

On the other hand, **confectionary products (sweet snacks, chocolate, candies, etc.)** and **beverages** were less requested by charitable organisations and their supported target groups.

However, the collected data shows that specific country circumstances define the affordability of certain products and thus affect demand. Retail prices for fruits and vegetables or dairy items, for example, can considerably impact the interest of households with no or low purchasing power in these goods.

The analysis of the survey results further shows that the majority of Food Banks name **meat**, in a fresh or canned format, as a product for which demand **exceeded availability**. **Non-perishable, ambient goods**,

⁵ FEBA Members in Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Ireland, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, UK, and Ukraine.

⁶ FEBA Members in Denmark, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Moldova, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Switzerland.

⁷ FEBA Members in the Czech Republic, France, and Luxembourg.

such as cooking oil, pasta, flour, or rice were also frequently mentioned. Given the scarcity of these products, they are in high demand.

Although the recovery of surplus food to prevent waste and support people in need remains the priority for FEBA Members, bridging the growing gap between supply and demand has become increasingly challenging. In 2023, over half (55%) of the Food Banks surveyed felt compelled to purchase food to meet demand.

Taking a closer look at the products these 16 organisations bought, **cereals and bakery products** were ranked highest by **56% of Food Banks**, followed by **animal and vegetable proteins** (eggs, fish, meat and pulses) ranked top by **25%**.

Dairy products constituted the biggest commercially acquired quantity for 2 organisations and fresh fruits and vegetables for another. Considering the particularly high market prices of animal products, even when obtained in bulk, this observation is in line with the efforts of Food Banks to assist charities with items they most require.

When looking at the **reasons behind the decision to buy food**, we see that FEBA Members aspire to provide nutritionally

balanced food packages in line with governmental recommendations. To replenish missing stocks, in some cases, the opportunity to purchase large volumes of a specific item was made possible through public- or private-sector grants designed specifically for that purpose. However, as in 2022, continuously high inflation levels also reduced the purchasing power of Food Banks and, therewith, the amounts of food acquired.

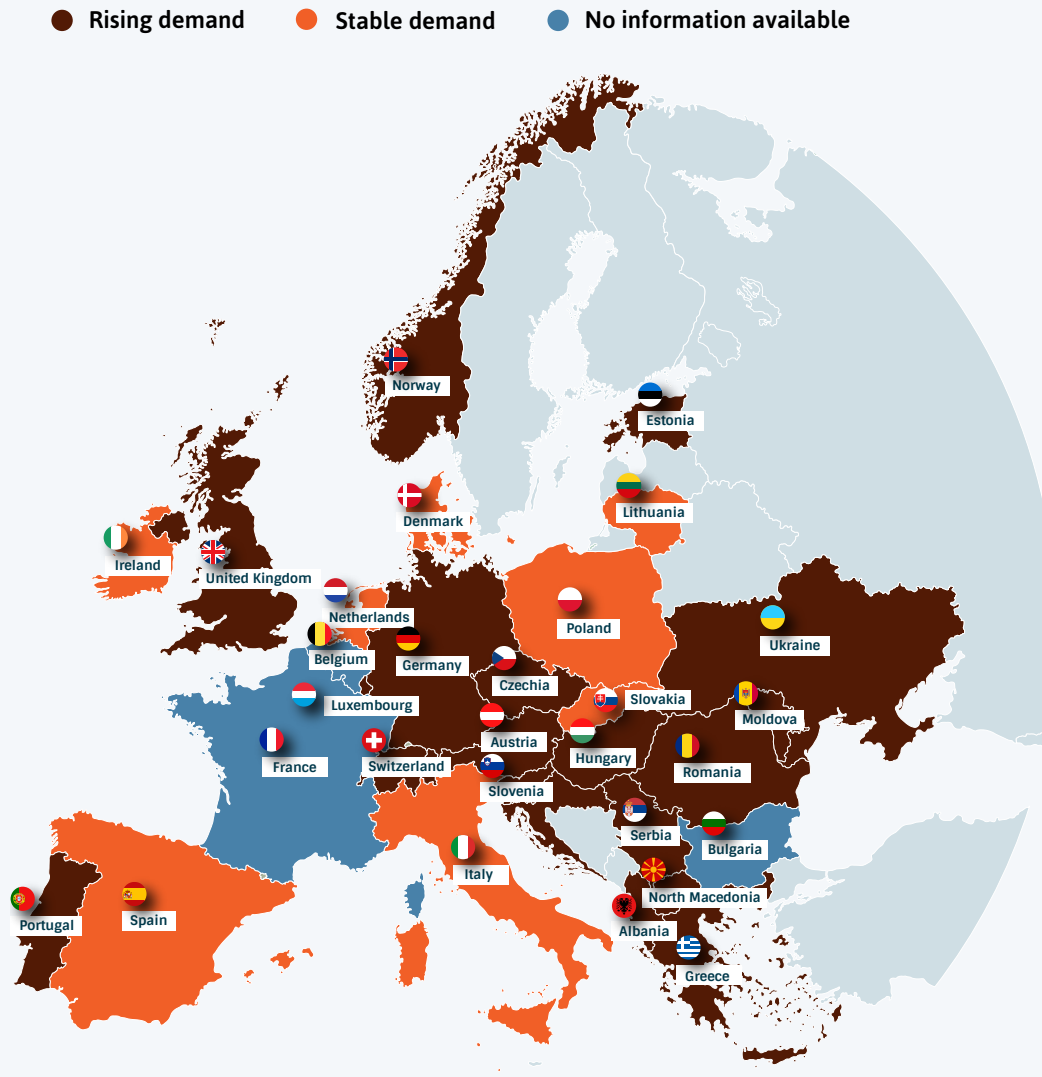


68% of Food Banks redistributing non-food items declare a rising demand for essential hygiene products

In addition to food, many European Food Banks recover and redistribute a variety of basic **non-food items** to assist people in need. These rather expensive goods are of crucial relevance for personal well-being.

Of the 25 organisations for which information is available, **17 declared a rising demand** for these products in 2023 compared to 2022. The remaining 8 did not notice any change (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6. Increase of demand for non-food products in 2023, compared to 2022



In particular, **hygiene articles**, such as soap, toothpaste, toothbrushes, and sanitary products for women, as well as wet wipes and diapers for babies, were in high demand. Moreover, **cleaning products**, including laundry detergent and pet food, were mentioned.

In total, 21 organisations were able to provide information on their ability to satisfy demand.⁸ When asked whether the requested products could be provided throughout 2023, **10 organisations (46.6%)** stated that they were **not able to satisfy the demand for non-food items**, while for **5 organisations (23.8%) this was mostly** the case. Only **6 respondents (28.6%)** replied that they were **capable of catering to the demand**. It was frequently mentioned that there is a gap between supply and demand for most of the needed product categories.

In 2023, 17,135 tonnes of non-food items were obtained and passed on by Food Banks, 2% less compared with the previous year. Taking into account the above-mentioned findings, it is clear that the gap between supply and demand also concerns these products.

⁸ 8 respondents declare that the requested information is not available.



EU programmes played a key role in counteracting material deprivation

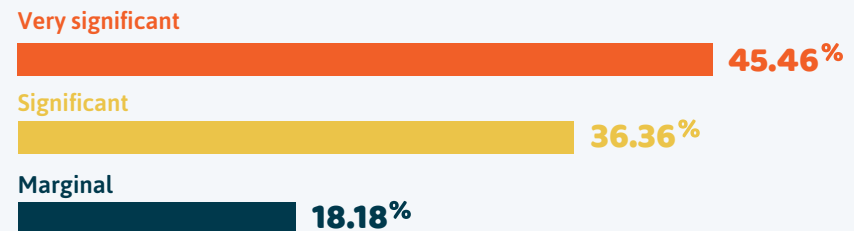
In 2023, **12 FEBA Members** in Belgium, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, and Spain were involved in the **implementation of EU programmes**, such as the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD), the Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe (REACT-EU), or the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). Collectively, they redistributed **over 128,182 tonnes** of food products funded by the European Union to structurally address material deprivation, i.e. the inability to afford basic resources.

107,969
tonnes FEAD/REACT-EU

20,213
tonnes ESF+

In addition, 5 Food Banks said they provide non-food products, such as personal hygiene articles, to charitable organisations.⁹ Of the FEBA Members that are Partner Organisations of EU programmes, **45.5%** rated the goods received through the schemes to be **very significant to reducing the gap of supply** and effectively responding to the elevated demand

Fig. 7. Significance of EU-funded material support in 2023



for usually scarce staple, long-shelf-life food and non-food products. An additional 36.4% highlighted it as significant. 18.2% considered the importance as marginal for their organisation due to relatively small quantities received in this framework (Fig. 7).

However, the end beneficiaries of 18 FEBA Members did not benefit from the programmes, either because they are not located in the EU, because their respective national government opted to allocate the funds to other activities in the areas of employment or education and skills, or because the Managing Authorities work with other organisations for the implementation.

⁹ FEBA Members in Belgium, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Luxembourg, and Slovakia.



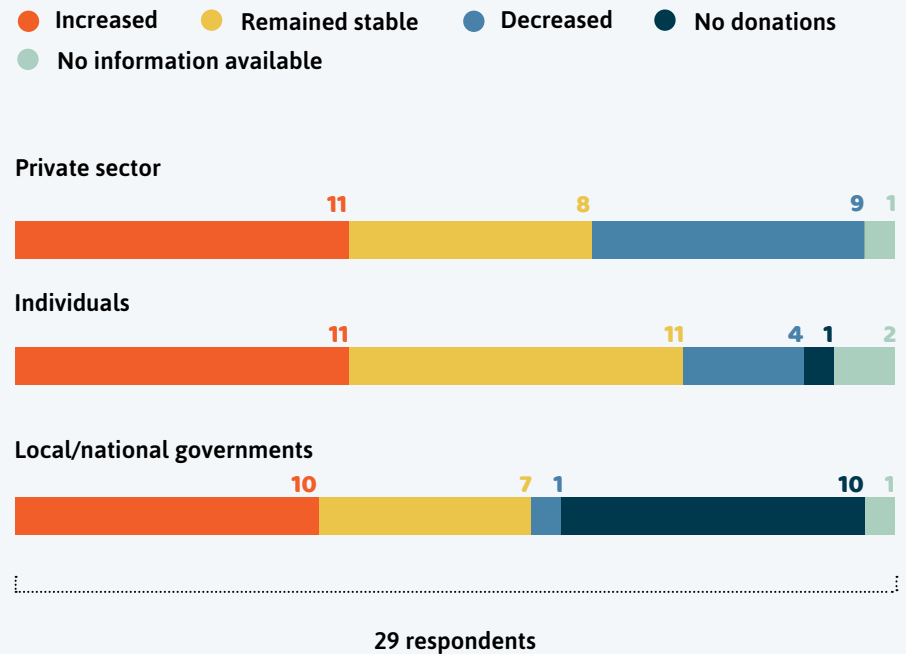
Donations to European Food Banks did not match the spiralling costs of daily activities

Solidarity with people struggling to make ends meet – and with the organisations assisting them as much as feasible – remained high in 2023. As shown in Fig. 8, **37.9%** of the Food Banks reported **increased financial donations** from the **private sector**. However, almost a third of the representatives surveyed (**31%**) indicated falling amounts, while donations remained stable for **27.6%**.

Focusing on donations from the **broad public**, **37.9%** of respondents noticed **higher monetary contributions** compared to 2022. The same percentage reported a stable income from this group and **13.8%** witnessed a decrease.

Furthermore, the results indicate that **engagement from national governments grew for 34.5%** of the respondents. It **remained consistent for about a quarter (24.1%)**. Another **34.5%** said they **did not receive any economic assistance** from public authorities.

Fig. 8. Evolution of financial support in 2023 compared to 2022

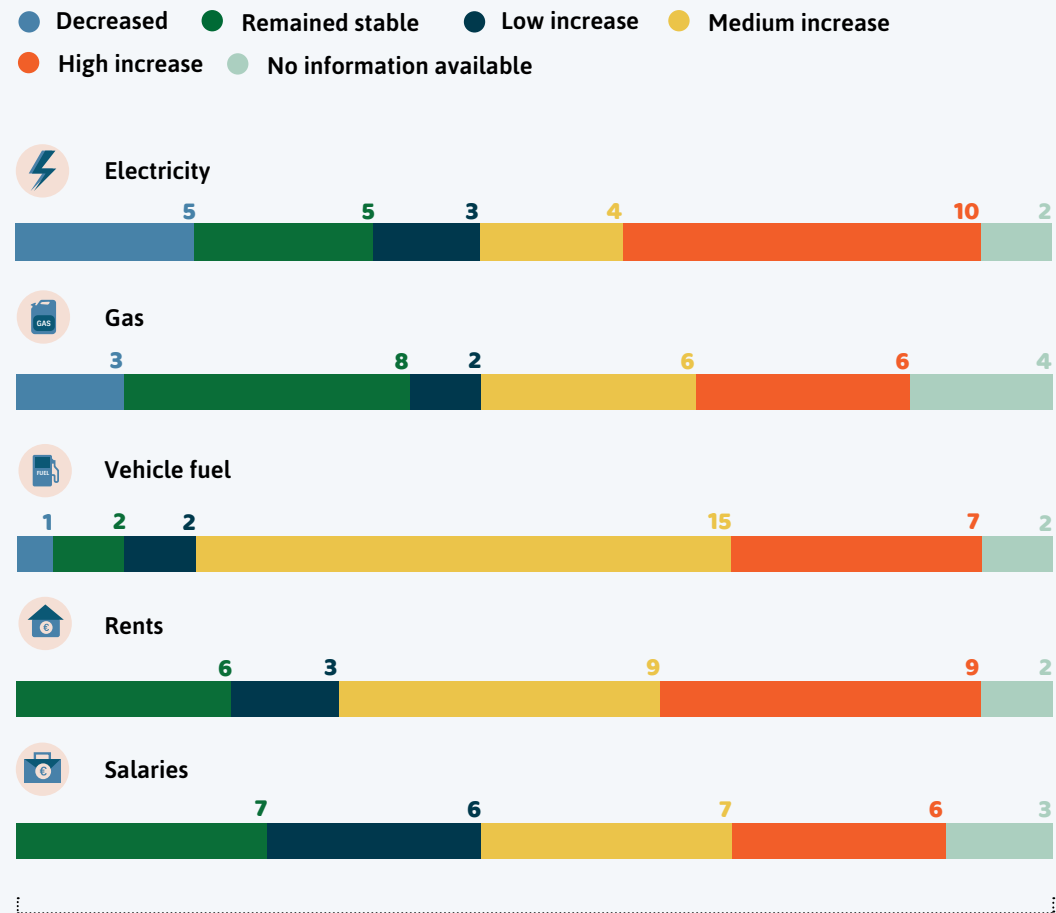


Monetary support is needed to maintain daily activities. 25 out of 27 respondents (**92.6%**) declared that the **overall costs of running the Food Bank were higher in 2023** than in 2022.¹⁰ **Electricity, rent, and fuel for vehicles** are the three cost categories for which the largest increase was detected, as displayed in Fig. 9.

Comparing this with last year’s edition of this report, in which **81.5%** of respondents already stated an increase in operational expenditure, the findings paint a worrying picture. The **continuing trend of food banking becoming more and more costly** may have decisive consequences for organisations’ abilities to maintain their activities.

Faced with these circumstances, scaling up operations to the extent needed to cope with the elevated demand seems an unfeasible endeavour for many.

Fig. 9. Increase of expenses for different cost categories in 2023, compared to 2022



29 respondents

¹⁰ No information was available for FEBA Members in Germany and the Netherlands.



Proactiveness rather than capitulation: every Food Bank conducted measures to cushion the impact of the crisis

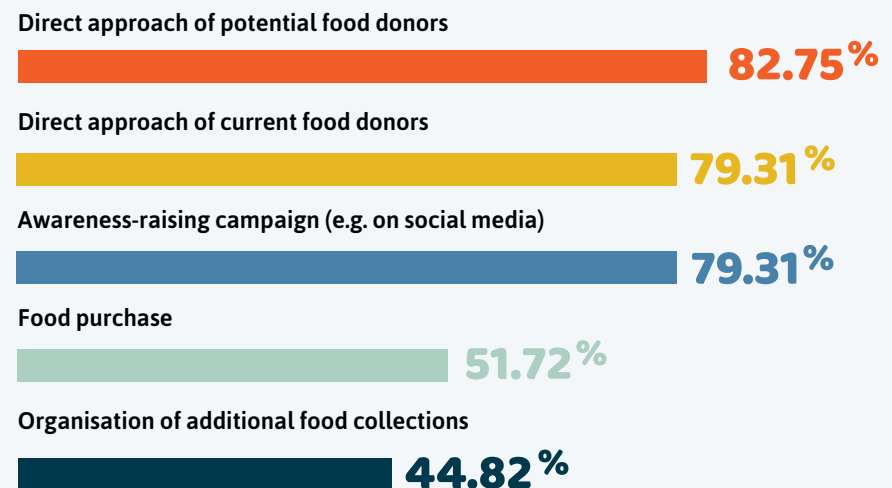
The results of the assessment carried out by FEBA show that Food Banks across Europe experienced the consequences of the cost-of-living crisis in 2023, albeit to a different extent. Instead of succumbing to the pressures felt, they **took a broad variety of actions** aimed at alleviating the effects on their operations and their direct consequences on the well-being of the most deprived.

2.5. Activities to raise awareness and source more food

As a measure to more reliably **satisfy the generally rising demand for food products** (which most organisations were not always able to meet, as shown in Fig. 5 above), **82.8%** of respondents said they proactively and **directly approached potential new food donors**. In addition, **79.3%** turned to **producers and businesses currently supporting them** with items. The same percentage of respondents (**79.3%**) launched dedicated **awareness-raising campaigns**, for instance on their social media channels, to gain visibility and reach a broader

audience. Half of the Food Bank representatives (**51.7%**) said that their respective organisations **purchased food** to fulfill the requests of charitable organisations. Following the same rationale, **44.8%** organised **additional food collections** throughout 2023 (Fig. 10).

Fig. 10. Measures carried out by Food Banks to better satisfy food demand in 2023



Besides these activities, some FEBA Members further engaged in **advocacy campaigns** directed towards the government and/or influential personalities to attract attention and strengthen their voice, especially regarding (legislative) decision-making processes.

Another practice mentioned was the establishment of **collaborations with external stakeholders**, such as academic institutions or non-profit organisations with similar interests.

2.6. Measures to ease budgetary constraints

Besides efforts to increase the quantities of food available for charitable organisations and thereby for end beneficiaries, FEBA Members further undertook **measures in response to inflating operational costs**.

69%

launched online donation campaigns targeted at individual and corporate donors

55%

made money-saving efforts, e.g. reducing energy consumption

45%

appealed for governmental support

Additional measures mentioned included approaching companies or foundations with requests for financial assistance and applying for EU grants.

In some cases, the need to tighten the belt led to especially impactful consequences. For example, 2 respondents noted that the respective Food Banks had to **curtail the recovery of fresh and frozen products** to curb the expenses of cold rooms and refrigerated vehicles.

Another representative stated that **paid staff members had to be laid off** due to a lack of resources. Another FEBA Member indicated that, because of extremely high running costs in 2023, the organisation will soon have no choice but to **cancel a warehouse lease** and **sell equipment**.

2.7. Efforts to operate more (cost-)efficiently

By the same token, 23 of the 29 FEBA Members that provided information further adapted their way of operating to become more (cost-)efficient and independent from fluctuating energy and gas prices.

Detailing a partnership with logistic providers, 1 Food Bank highlighted the offer of free delivery services in the framework of their CSR efforts, leading to a win-win cooperation.

62%

collaborated with
transport companies to
improve logistics

52%

optimised vehicle
routes to reduce fuel
consumption

48%

scaled up the
digitalisation level of
activities

24%

invested in solar panels
or other renewable
energy sources

2.8. A glimpse into the future

Despite the hurdles and challenges faced in 2023, European Food Banks plan to **further scout new opportunities to reliably source and redistribute food** to charitable organisations assisting people in need.

Continuing the path of proactively and creatively taking steps to cater to the increasing demand, **82.8%** of respondents plan to approach additional Food Business Operators to enlarge their networks of partners and supporters.

Almost half (**44.8%**) intend to organise further additional Food Collections to increase the availability of shelf-stable products. Moreover, named by **82.8% of respondents**, the launch of awareness-raising campaigns remains a priority measure for Food Banks and is seen as an expedient way to effectively respond to the cost-of-living crisis and its repercussions also in the future.

In addition, several FEBA Members intend to **further digitalise their operations, continue or start lobbying undertakings** aimed, for example, at a more beneficial legislative environment, and **recover food from supply chain segments that offer unexploited potential**, including, among others, the agricultural and HORECA/ catering sectors.



Better together: the strength of a European network of Food Banks to surmount the hurdles encountered

Countries across Europe were in the grip of the cost-of-living crisis throughout 2023, affecting the daily lives of people regardless of their nationality. Thus, despite their operational differences, FEBA Members found themselves confronted with similar challenges.

Harnessing the power of collaboration specifically to relieve the crisis impact, **48.3%** of respondents state that they **occasionally worked with other Food Banks** belonging to the FEBA membership, while **20.7%** did so on a **regular basis**.

In the majority of cases, FEBA Members collaborated with Food Banks in neighbouring countries where the same or a similar language is spoken, facilitating communication especially when it comes to technical or legislative topics.

The **exchange of best practices** topped the list of the most frequent types of collaboration and was named by 18 of the

20 representatives (**90%**), followed by the **delivery of food**, named by **25%** to aim to balance supply and demand even beyond national borders. In addition, 1 organisation also provided direct **financial support**.

When comparing data from 2022 and 2023, it becomes clear that the volume and frequency of food transported between Food Banks from different countries declined.

While this solidarity measure peaked after the invasion of Ukraine and the resulting refugee movements to adjacent countries, as the cost-of-living crisis engulfed Europe as a whole, FEBA Members increasingly faced spiralling needs and dropping food availability at home. This resulted in less capacity to send products abroad. On the other hand, sharing skills and knowledge became a more common activity.

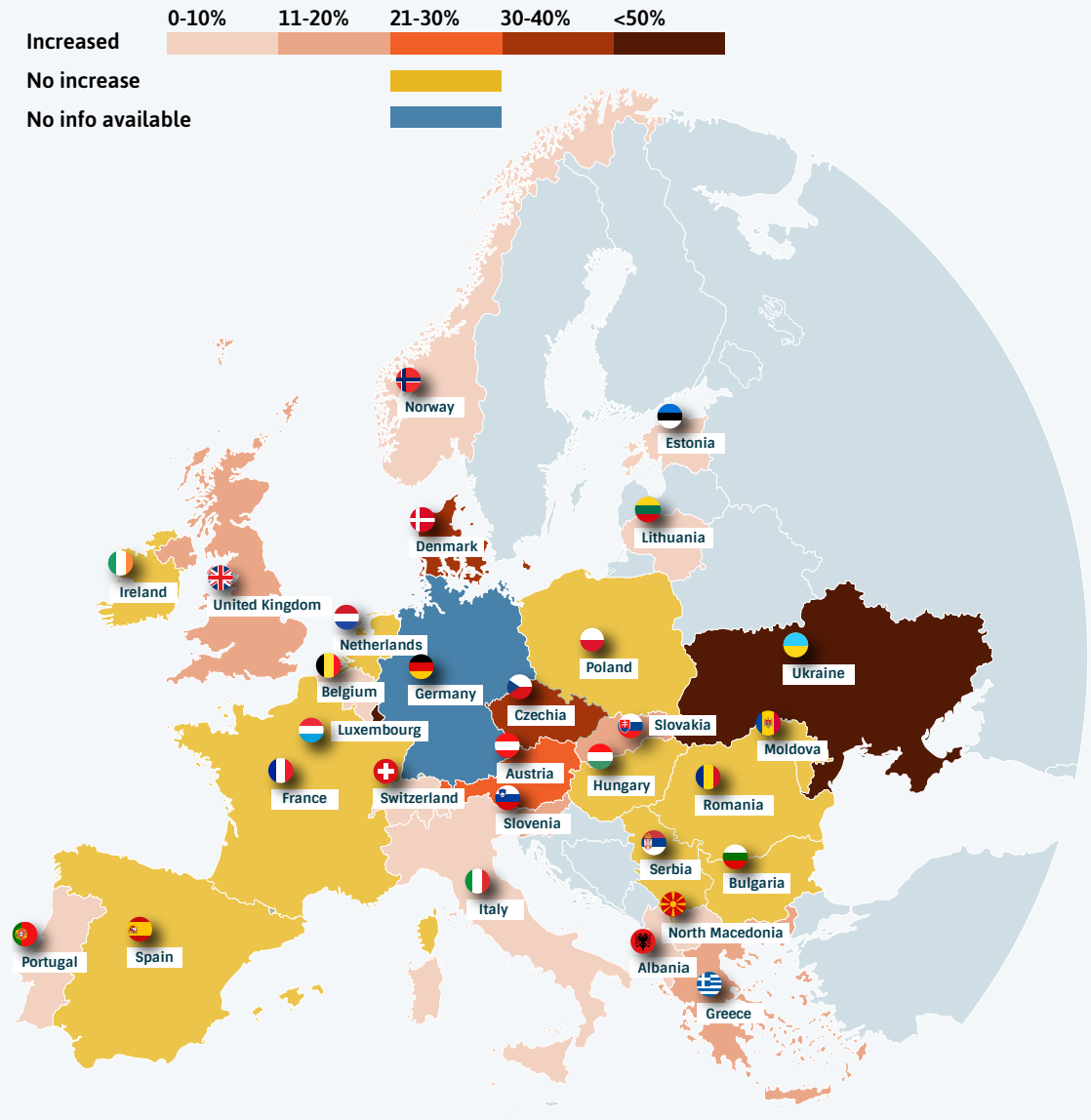


European Food Banks are faced with an increasing need for material support from a vast societal spectrum

In 2023, the 29 FEBA Members who this report focuses on **redistributed food to more than 12.7 million people in need**. Compared to 2022, the total number of end beneficiaries increased by over 300,000.

Zooming in on the situation at the country level, the **evolution of final recipients varies across the FEBA network**. 19 Food Banks reported an increase, ranging from single-digit percentages to significant surges, as visualised in Fig. 11.

Fig. 11. Evolution of number of end beneficiaries in 2023 (compared to 2022)



As already visible in 2022, the cost-of-living crisis continues to have an impact on the **profile of end beneficiaries**, i.e. the social and demographic characteristics of people being supported.

When asked to specify the **categories of end beneficiaries** turning to charities for assistance most frequently, **65.4%** of those able to provide information selected **families with children or single parents**.¹¹ Almost a third of the 23 Food Banks with available data (**30.4%**) indicated that **seniors or retirees** constituted their biggest target group.

Students or trainees, who often live on a tight budget, were also named as common recipients by over half (56.5%) of those respondents. Apart from these clusters, Food Banks across Europe assisted **persons with disabilities** and **homeless people**.¹²

Monitoring and understanding **trends in the composition of final beneficiaries** over time is key to the ability of Food Banks to expediently source products responding to their needs as well as attracting the attention of financial donors and other

supporters. In particular, **households with children** and **elderly people** were named as groups that approached charities on a more regular basis in 2023 compared to the previous year.

Several FEBA Members further reported an increase in the number of **refugees and migrants** seeking help.

Last year's edition of this report discerned **gainfully employed persons** as a new group in need of material support. The analysis of the 2023 data shows that many continue to suffer from the disadvantageous economic situation characterised by salaries that are insufficient to cover the surging costs of living. Of the 23 FEBA Members that provided information, **73.9%** stated they **frequently support** people falling into this category.

¹¹ No ranking data available from FEBA Members in Denmark, Hungary, the Netherlands, and Slovakia.

¹² No ranking data available from FEBA Members in Belgium, Denmark, France, Hungary, Netherlands, Norway, Slovakia, and Spain.

3.

Conclusions

As was already the case in 2022, the findings of the analysis detailed in this report show that, in 2023, European Food Banks found themselves in a quandary: while the demand for food from charitable organisations and the number of end beneficiaries were rising in the majority of European countries, soaring running costs prevented many FEBA Members from scaling up their operations to the extend needed. Some were even forced to cut back on their activities.

However, the results demonstrate the ability of European Food Banks to **cope with unprecedented challenges by flexibly and creatively adapting their activities** to volatile circumstances. All took proactive measures to gain visibility and source more food and funds. We cannot allow an increasing number of people, especially vulnerable groups, such as children or elderly persons, to plunge into food insecurity because the organisations that act as vital safety nets are constrained in their operational capability.

Therefore, solidarity and financial contributions from private and public entities are crucial to ease budgetary constraints, recover higher quantities of food, purchase those items that are lacking, settle the invoices, and pay salaries, i.e. to allow Food Banks to respond to the growing need for assistance.

In the future, **non-traditional food sources**, such as the agricultural or HORECA sectors, will play an increasingly important role in bridging the gap in supply that is already visible. However, the recovery of fresh produce from farms or cooperatives and ready meals from hotels, restaurants, and catering outlets is an expensive endeavour. It requires additional financial and human resources.

European Food Banks are doing their best to help those in our societies struggling most to make ends meet. Nonetheless, they rely on support from external stakeholders to fulfill their mission, especially during challenging times.



European Food Banks Federation asbl - FEBA

Chaussée de Louvain 775
Brussels 1140, Belgium

+32 2 538 94 50

info@eurofoodbank.org



@EuroFoodBanks



European Food Banks Federation



@EuroFoodBanks



eurofoodbanks



eurofoodbanks



eurofoodbank.org

#WeAreFEBA