



FEAD, REACT-EU, ESF+ and the European Food Banks Federation

2023 Implementation Report



A photograph of a warehouse with high shelves. In the foreground, a white box of spaghetti is visible. The box features the European Union flag and text in Dutch, French, and English. The text includes 'EU-HULP - VERKOOP', 'AIDE UE - VENTE', 'Pâtes Spaghetti / Pasta', and '24 x 500 g'.

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1.

About this report

This report focuses on the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), which encompasses the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) through direct and indirect material support. The report outlines the activities of the members of the European Food Banks Federation (FEBA) and provides a summary of the final implementation stages, phasing out of the funds and the introduction of the new programming period.

Through their daily activities, **FEBA Members who benefitted from the ESF+/FEAD have been key players** in the objectives of the funds, i.e. supporting the most deprived. For this reason, FEBA drafted and circulated a tailored survey in September 2023 to



gather information about their experiences. FEBA Members provided **qualitative and quantitative data** to inform this report. The report refers to the period from January to December 2023 and is based on the responses of seven FEBA Members.¹

¹ Belgium, Estonia, France, Italy, Ireland, Luxembourg, and Spain. Regarding the quantity of food redistributed, the report includes Czechia, Lithuania, Poland and Portugal and this information is derived from data about the impact of FEBA membership in 2023.

2.

Five years of FEAD, REACT-EU, ESF+, and the European Food Banks Federation: an overview



In 2014, around 122 million people (a quarter of the population) were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the 28 EU Member States (Eurostat, 2015).

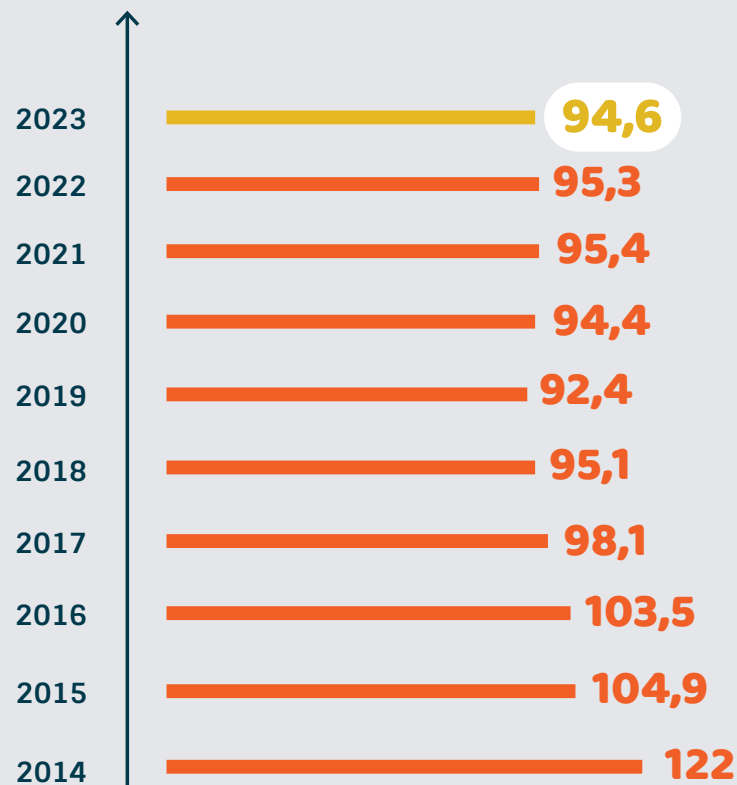
In 2023

94.6M



around 94.6 million people in the EU (21% of the population) were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the 27 EU Member States. In other words, 94.6 million people lived in households experiencing at least one of the three poverty and social exclusion risks: risk of poverty, severe material and social deprivation, and/or living in a household with very low work intensity (Eurostat, 2024).

Fig. 1 Evolution of number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in EU27 (2014-2023, in millions)
Source: Eurostat





The **European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan** set headline targets for 2030, looking to lift

15M people

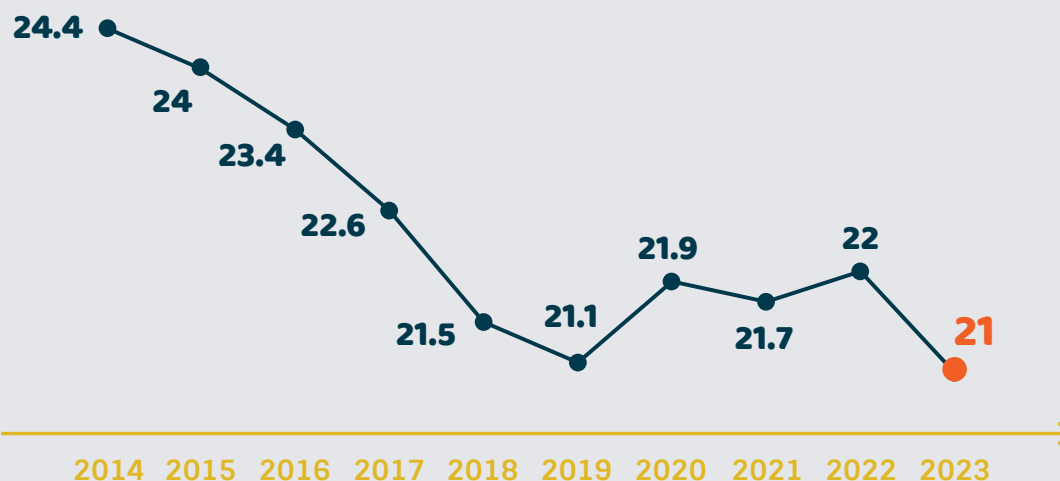
out of poverty or social exclusion, including at least 5 million children, in order to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty.



Up until 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, levels of poverty and social exclusion were falling across the European Union (Fig. 1 & 2). The health crisis provoked by the coronavirus outbreak put a halt to this downward trajectory (Fig. 1 & 2), with the outbreak of the war in Ukraine further increasing the number of people in need.

The most recent figures from **2023** suggest there are currently **94.6 million people at risk of poverty and social exclusion**, which exceeds the **pre-COVID number of 92.4 million people at risk**. However, trends seem to indicate that the EU is back on track to reduce the risk of poverty and social exclusion across the population.

Fig. 2 Evolution of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in EU27 (2014-2023, %), Source: Eurostat





As part of efforts to support Member States' action to alleviate the worst forms of poverty within the European Union (such as food deprivation, child poverty, and homelessness), the **Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD)** was set up in 2014. FEAD has supported Member States' actions to provide food and/or basic material assistance to the most deprived.

This has included food, clothing, and other essential items for personal use, such as shoes, soap, and shampoo. In addition, the **Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe (REACT-EU)** programme has extended the crisis response and crisis repair measures delivered through the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII) and the CRII+, topping up

resources for the 2014-2020 programming period that could also be used for FEAD. The final date of eligibility for this expenditure was 31 December 2023.

Some FEBA Members have been involved in the implementation of FEAD since it entered into force in 2014, and have also been involved with REACT-EU more recently, through which they have contributed to the **delivery of food and/or basic goods to charities helping people in need**. Although the core mission of FEBA members is to prevent food waste and reduce food insecurity by recovering and redistributing safe and edible surplus food that would otherwise become food waste, FEAD has been an important additional supply source.

Since 2019, FEBA has conducted in-depth analysis and assessments of these funds, in order to be able to provide a five-year overview of the developments observed, with a **focus on concluding FEAD and transitioning into ESF+**. Overall, the past **five years have been defined by crisis**. This is reflected in how the fund has developed and evolved to adapt and respond to growing and changing needs and circumstances. This can be observed in 2020 and 2021, two years in which COVID-19 played a major role.

The fund was afforded additional flexibility and resources to cope with the socio-economic impact of the pandemic. This ranged from **enabling the use of indirect delivery modes (e.g. vouchers**

or cards) to lower the risk of infection, to allowing the purchase of personal protective equipment for organisations providing FEAD support, as well as strengthening the liquidity in Member States, making it possible to provide a **100% co-financing rate** for one accounting year.²

Regarding FEAD support, some of the main challenges highlighted by FEBA Members were the difficulties of coping with a higher number of support requests, (with charities in particular experiencing a **rise of beneficiaries**), while at the same time there was a **decline in food distributed through the programme compared to 2019**.

Consequently, some of our members stressed the difficulty of handling bigger quantities of food, especially in terms of logistics and space available in the warehouses.

Moreover, fewer volunteers were available despite activity increasing significantly, especially during the lockdown periods. Most of our members had to quickly adapt to a new reality, in which they faced a shortage of food, equipment, storage capacity and volunteers and had to create new agile ways of delivering food safely and rapidly to local partner organisations. Finally, 80% of FEBA Members said that COVID-19 affected their daily activities in relation to FEAD.

Although not inherently designed as a crisis response mechanism, the fund prevailed even in times of crisis and proved itself to be a reliable tool for tackling poverty and food insecurity in Europe. For Food Banks, the fund made it possible to put together a well-balanced food basket, as FEAD products were combined with recovered surplus food and donations, complementing the types of food and the nutritional value of the food provided to people in need.



Over the past nine years (2014–2023), the Food Banks in Europe represented by FEBA distributed a total of around

1.4M tonnes of FEAD products

Thus, an average amount of 150,000 tonnes of FEAD products were handled by FEBA Members annually.



² Official Journal of the European Union, Regulation (EU) 2020/559 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2020 amending Regulation (EU) No 223/2014 regarding the introduction of specific measures for addressing the outbreak of COVID-19, 23 April 2020.

3.

FEAD/ESF+ in 2023: Key Findings

➤ **11 FEBA Members** received and redistributed food financed through FEAD/ REACT-EU/ESF+ resources in 2023.³

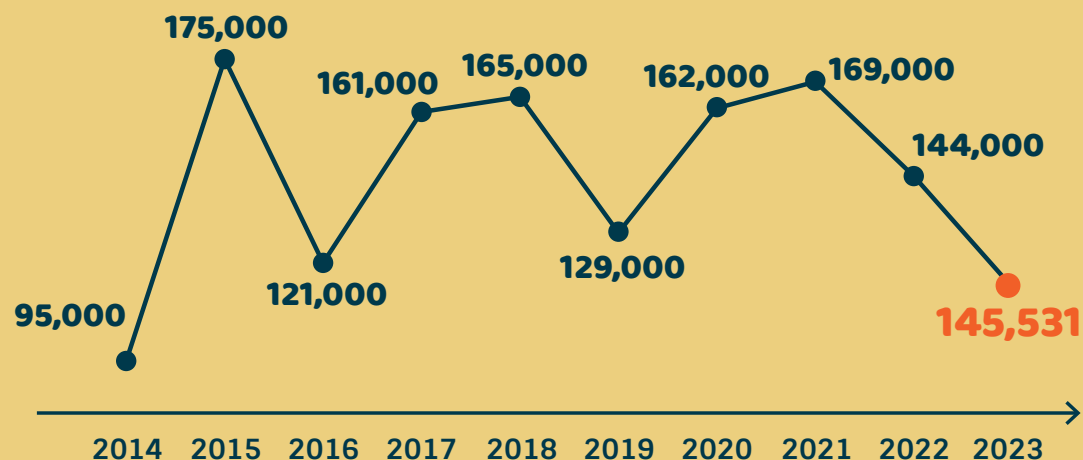
➤ **Almost 90% of FEBA Members** that responded to the surveys consider FEAD/ REACT-EU/ESF+ (food and non-food) assistance to be an important part of their composition of products for redistribution.

³ No information from FEBA Member in Czechia, Lithuania, Poland and Portugal.

⁴ The numbers have been calculated based on information communicated through the online data collection platform underlying the FEBA Observatory on Food Donation combining FEAD, REACT-EU and ESF+ for 2023.

⁵ The numbers have been calculated based on information communicated through the online data collection platform underlying the FEBA Observatory on Food Donation.

Fig. 3 Quantities of FEAD/ESF+ food redistributed by FEBA Members between 2014-2023 (in tonnes)⁴



With regards to the European Food Banks Federation, in 2023 11 FEBA Members, notably Belgium, Czechia, Estonia, France, Italy, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal and Spain, distributed food and/or basic goods funded by FEAD, REACT-EU or ESF+ to charities helping people in need.

In particular, **six FEBA Members** located in France, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, and Spain received and redistributed 99,545 tonnes of food products financed through **FEAD** and **three FEBA Members** based in Belgium, Estonia, and France managed the provision of 8,514 tonnes of food through **REACT-EU** to people in need, including the reimbursement of administrative costs. Lastly **four FEBA Members** based in the Czech Republic, Ireland, France and Lithuania started redistributing food funded through **ESF+**.⁵



Use of FEAD/REACT-EU/ESF+ in 2023

- **6 FEBA Members** received food items, two members received non-food items (such as hygiene products), and one member received assistance to improve their technical capacities as well as support for Partner Organisations.
- **4 FEBA Members** that responded implemented accompanying measures, including providing brochures detailing the closest social resources, culinary workshops, workshops on not wasting food, economic education workshops, financial literacy lectures and volunteering in Food Bank activities.
- **7 FEBA Members** involved in the FEAD received economic reimbursement of some kind for the activities conducted.

➤ Total amount of FEAD/REACT-EU/ESF+ food received by the 11 FEBA members in 2023

143,888.54
tonnes

of food redistributed

13.6%

of the total amount of food redistributed by European Food Banks (876,316 tonnes of food) was FEAD/REACT-EU/ESF+ food

➤ The work of the FEBA Members that responded to the surveys also benefited other actors



- **37 Partner Organisations** were involved.
- **14,538 Charitable Organisations** benefitted.
- **4,173,497 end beneficiaries** received basic material assistance.



When it comes to the typology of food products, **86% of the respondents** said their Food Bank received **staple food products such as rice, pasta and flour**. The second most commonly received item was **canned fruits and/or vegetables**, with **71% of Food Banks receiving products in this category**.

FEBA Members also received different types of food from other categories, such as canned meat or fish, dairy, oil, coffee/tea, comfort food and baby food. Beverages and frozen food were the least commonly received products.

In relation to **quantity, quality, variety, and nutritional value**, respondents expressed different opinions. Overall, the food quality was judged to be good, whereas a clear decrease in quantity was reported, which reflects the closure of the FEAD programme and the transition towards ESF+.

The variety of food was judged to be good overall, however it lacked nutritional value which can be linked to the products being generally more shelf stable. The frequency was rated as fair, as this was a transition phase in which the product frequency changed due to the introduction of a new programming phase.

Fig. 4 Typologies of FEAD/REACT-EU/ESF+ products received and redistributed by FEBA Members in 2023

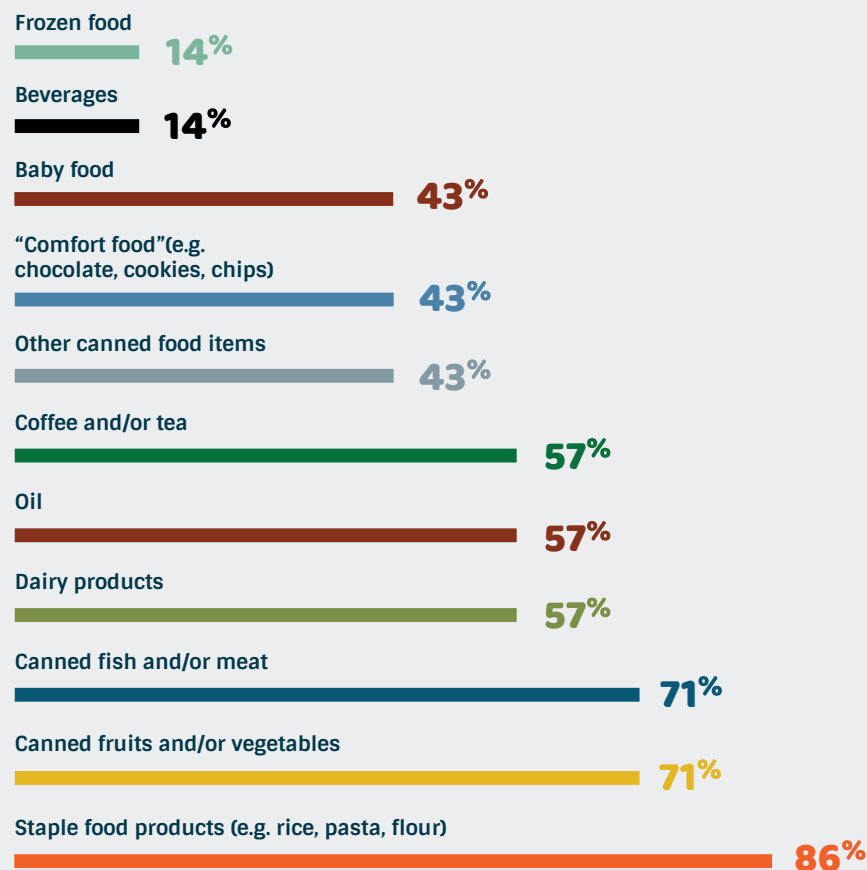
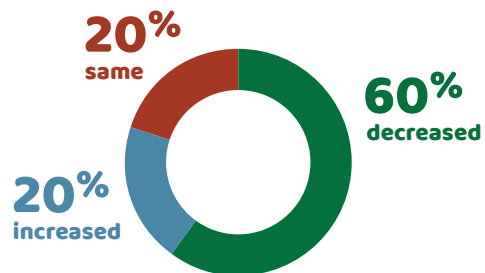


Fig. 5 Quantity, Quality, Variety, Nutritional Value, and Frequency of FEAD/REACT-EU/ESF+ food

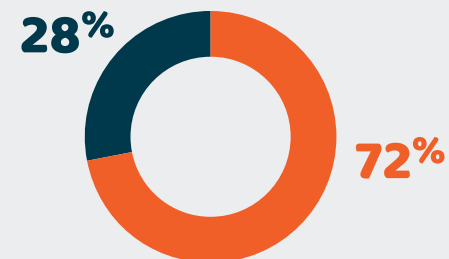
? In relation to FEAD/REACT-EU/ESF+ food, how do you evaluate quantity?



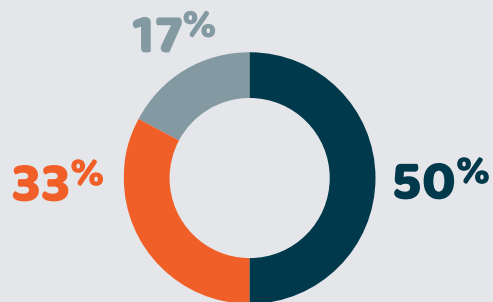
? In relation to FEAD/REACT-EU/ESF+ food, how do you evaluate ...

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

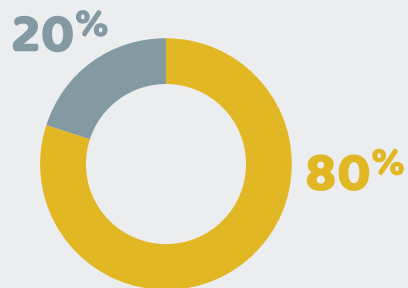
Quality



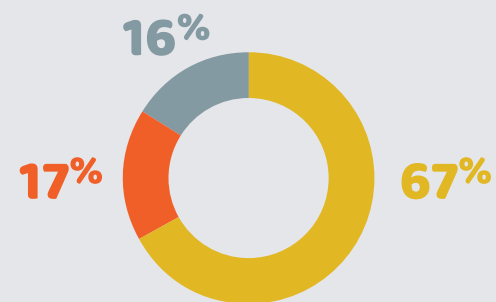
Variety



Nutritional value



Frequency



At the national level, FEAD/REACT-EU and ESF+ are implemented by Managing Authorities (MA) in collaboration with a variety of Partner Organisations (PO) such as FEBA Members and other civil society organisations. Some survey questions focused on the relationship between Managing Authorities and FEBA Members. Most members were able to collaborate mutually with the Managing Authorities, with each organisation working with the other.

Fig. 6 Collaboration with Managing Authority

? How do you evaluate the collaboration with the Managing Authority in your country in 2023?

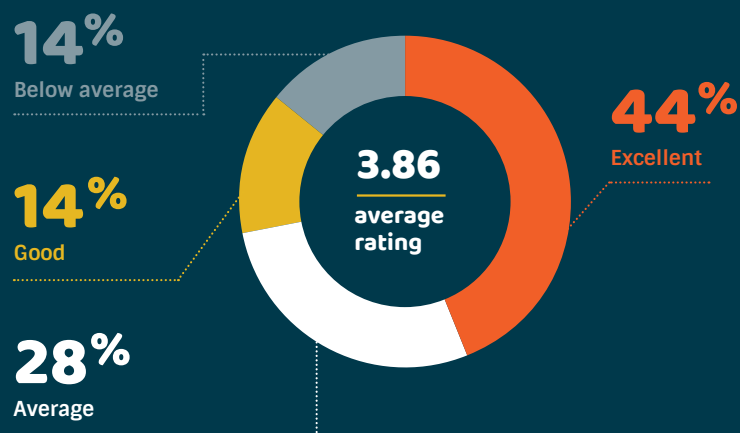
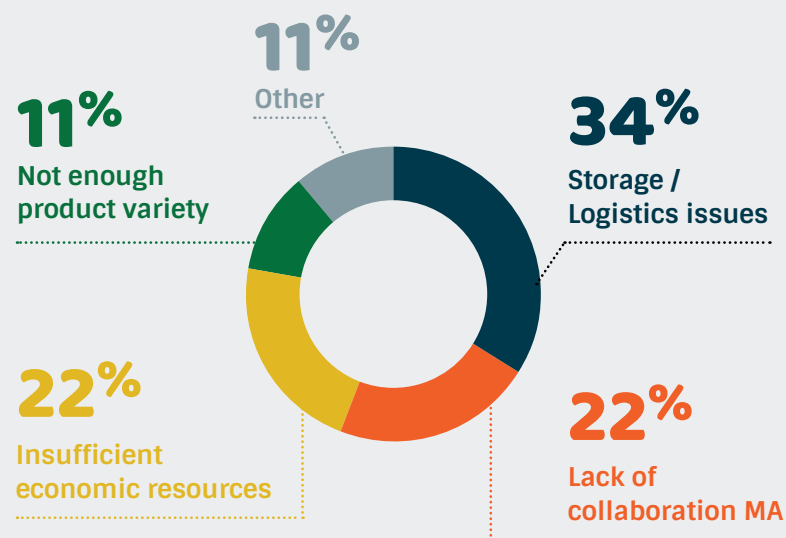


Fig. 7 FEAD/REACT-EU/ESF+ Challenges in 2023

? What were the main challenges related to FEAD/REACT-EU/ESF+ in 2023?



The survey highlighted some **challenges** such as storage and logistics issues, a lack of collaboration with the Managing Authority, and insufficient economic resources for administrative, transport, and storage costs.

4.

Accompanying Measures and ESF+: the perspective of European Food Banks



With the introduction of ESF+, accompanying measures became mandatory in combination with material support. Some FEBA Members were already carrying out accompanying measures under FEAD (such as the Food Banks in Poland), or have organised workshops and programmes prior to it becoming mandatory under ESF+ (like the Food Banks in France). In the following pages we highlight some examples.



France

The French Food Banks have developed many workshops and activities over the years. One focus of the accompanying measures is their social support programme “Bons Gestes & Bonne Assiette” (“Good Gestures & Good Plate”), which includes cooking workshops, food waste workshops, and health workshops, as well as volunteer training.



Key observations

- There is a significant need for support among the people they work with.
- There is a higher prevalence of nutrition-related chronic diseases among populations facing food insecurity.



Objective

The objective of the programme is to rebuild social ties and help improve the health of people affected by food insecurity.



Actions

Three types of actions are thus implemented as part of the “Bons Gestes & Bonne Assiette” programme:

- Workshop series for people who receive support from partner associations.
- Developing free educational tools for all.
- Training for field actors.





Poland

As participants in the FEAD programme since 2014, the Polish Food Banks have already developed and been involved in different accompanying measures. They have developed a variety of workshops and classes throughout the implementation of FEAD.



Key activities

The accompanying activities aim to promote the social inclusion of final recipients of food aid and reduce social exclusion through:

- Strengthening self-reliance and building beneficiaries' competence in household management.
- Social integration by including beneficiaries in local communities centred around food and nutrition.
- Increasing knowledge and skills on the importance of proper nutrition for the beneficiaries' health and counteracting food waste as part of reducing poverty and social exclusion.



Actions

These accompanying activities are implemented in the form of workshops, designed to respond to the individual and group needs of programme participants. They include:

- Culinary workshops for different generational groups with the participation of culinary experts, chefs and nutritionists. These help to demonstrate various ways to prepare dishes and use food that is donated as part of the programme, as well as seasonal products.

- Workshops on not wasting food, offering inspiration on how to make the best use of food products, including FEAD products, and providing knowledge about storing food so that it does not go to waste, including through group activities.

- Economic education workshops, which aim to develop and increase participants ability to consciously manage even a small household budget, make sensible use of available financial services, make appropriate decisions about purchases and spending, i.e. rational consumer behaviour, through group and individual classes.



- Other activities of an individual, collective and cyclical nature, aimed at the social inclusion of those most in need, based on the needs shared by FEAD participants.

When it comes to the frequency of these workshops, they are organised according to the requests and levels of demand in local organisations. Workshops are scheduled for implementation each month.

Participants are informed about the workshops by social workers from the social welfare centre as they distribute food at local organisations. In addition, information about the workshops is posted on the website of the Food Bank among others.

For a more comprehensive overview on the implementation of FEAD by European Food Banks, read our previous yearly reports!





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