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REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Summary of the annual implementation reports for the operational programmes co-financed by the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived in 2018

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) addresses the worst forms of poverty in the EU, such as food deprivation, child poverty and homelessness. A total of €3.8 billion (current prices) is available from the FEAD[1] fund for 2014-2020. The EU provides up to 85% of funding, which is complemented by the Member States' own resources. This brings the total value of the fund to around €4.5 billion.

Member States can use the fund in two ways: (i) for a food and/or basic material assistance operational programme (OP I); and/or (ii) for a social inclusion operational programme (OP II).Food and/or basic material support must be complemented by accompanying measures, such as a referral to social services.

In accordance with Article 13(9) of the Regulation on the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (Regulation (EU) No 223/2014), this summary is based on the information in the 2018 implementation reports, as accepted by the Commission[2]. All 27 Member States submitted an implementation report. The UK did not submit a report since it has not implemented the FEAD so far. As in previous years, this summary report includes developments and financial information beyond 2018 - where available - notably on the next multiannual financial framework (MFF) 2021-2027 and the initiatives of the 2019-2024 Commission.

2. RECENT EU DEVELOPMENTS

The 2021-2027 MFF and the 2019-2024 Commission's initiatives to address poverty

The proportion of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion fell for a sixth consecutive year, dropping to 21.9% in 2018. The proportion facing severe material deprivation fell from 6,6% in 2017 to 5.9% in 2018. In terms of population, this represents 29.7 million people. However, 110 million people remain at risk of poverty and social exclusion. The EU has fallen short of its 2020 target to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by at least 20 million, having only reduced the number by 7 million to date. Children – particularly those with low skilled parents - and people with disabilities face a substantially higher risk of poverty. The growing trend of exclusion from housing and homelessness has not been reversed due to ongoing housing market pressures. FEAD support is therefore crucial for society's most disadvantaged groups.

For the 2021-2027 MFF, the Commission has proposed to merge the FEAD with the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). The ESF+ proposal aims to improve social inclusion by increasing the share of national ESF+ allocations (to at least 25% compared to 20% in the current ESF), and to address material deprivation by establishing an EU-level target of 4% and a minimum allocation of 2% per Member State. The Commission considers that this will allow the funding for material deprivation to remain stable as compared with the current

[1] Regulation (EU) No 223/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014 on the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (OJ L 72, 12.3.2014, p. 1). The Regulation was amended in August 2018, through a revision of the Financial Regulation: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1537946431022&uri=CELEX:02014R0223-20180802

[2] The time lag in overall aggregated reporting was because the implementation reports were submitted by the Member States in mid-2019 and then underwent an approval procedure by the Commission.

MFF. The proposal is currently in an advanced phase of negotiations with co-legislators. In April 2019, the Council agreed on a partial negotiation mandate for the trilogues. In the same month, the European Parliament adopted a report with amendments, confirmed by vote of the new EP. Meanwhile, ESF+ trilogues have started.

The Commission is also preparing a policy initiative on a 'child guarantee'. According to principle 11 of the European Pillar of Social Rights, children have the right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality and to protection from poverty. This principle also states that children from disadvantaged backgrounds have the right to specific measures that increase equal opportunities. The initiative is therefore a concrete deliverable of the action plan that implements the Pillar.

In response to the Coronavirus pandemic, two Coronavirus Response Investment Initiatives were prepared and adopted. The second dedicated Coronavirus Investment initiative (CRII+)[3], adopted in April 2020, provides for extraordinary flexibility in the use of the European Structural and Investment Funds. Moreover, it introduces specific measures to support to the most deprived by changing the rules for the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) and to enable managing authorities, partner organisations and other actors to react quickly to the emerging challenges. For example, it will be possible to deliver food aid and basic material assistance through vouchers and to provide the personal protective equipment, thus lowering the risk of contamination. It will be possible to finance measures at 100% for the accounting year 2020-2021.

In addition, the Commission proposed a revised Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF) in the context of the recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Under this proposal, Member States are given the possibility to reinvest into the FEAD to ensure a continued and reinforced support to the most deprived.

3. COORDINATION OF THE FEAD AT EU LEVEL

The FEAD expert group remains the main forum for managing authorities to exchange information on the fund's implementation. The expert group has met twice - in 2018 and 2019 - to discuss aspects of the FEAD programme's implementation, notably accompanying measures, food donations, audits, and coordination with other structural funds. The Commission presented the findings and recommendations of both the FEAD mid-term evaluation and the Special Report of the European Court of Auditors on FEAD to Member States. It also gave regular updates on the ESF+ negotiations, focusing on measures that aim to address material deprivation and the social integration of the most deprived.

On stakeholder relations, the Commission hosted 18 FEAD network meetings between 2016 and the end of 2019. In each meeting, participants had the opportunity to present case studies and share challenges and solutions on a specific aspect of FEAD implementation, for example targeted outreach to the most deprived - such as children, the homeless and older people. A 2019 meeting focused on the fund's monitoring and evaluation, highlighting substantial efforts by managing authorities and partner organisations. In line with the Regulation, the Commission also hosted annual EU-level meetings in 2018 and 2019, steered by representatives of the partner organisations. These focused on the transition to a new phase of capacity building. In the next 18 months, mutual learning activities will replace the

[3] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_20_574

FEAD network meetings. These should help the 'FEAD Community' discuss the remaining implementation challenges and the opportunities of the upcoming ESF+ more effectively.

4. PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING THE OPERATIONAL PROGRAMMES

4.1.Financial implementation

The financial implementation of FEAD programmes accelerated in 2018. The total eligible public expenditure committed to supporting for FEAD initiatives increased steadily from €564.7 million in 2016, to €637.1 million in 2017, to €762.2 million in 2018. At the end of 2018, the cumulative funds committed (for 2014-2018) amounted to nearly €2,732 million, or 61% of the total resources of the programmes (which include EU funds and national co-financing). Payments to beneficiaries also increased significantly in 2018 (€497.9 million) against previous years (€409.9 million in 2017 and €436.0 million in 2016). See Table I in the Annex[4] for a detailed financial breakdown by indicator and by Member State.

The payment applications submitted by Member States to the Commission in 2018 amounted to €345.3 million in eligible public spending. This was a fall on previous years (€478.2 million in 2017 and €353.4 million in 2016), due in part to the flexibility Member States have in submitting their payment requests. In total, the eligible public spending declared to the Commission for 2014-2018 amounted to €1,223.3 million.

By 31 December 2019, the Commission had paid a total of €1.5 billion in interim payments (€955 million at the end of 2018) – representing more than 38% of the total 2014-2020 allocation.

The FEAD financial implementation is generally on track and matches the programme's progress on the ground (see following section). Indicators show that implementation has generally accelerated despite a stagnation in aggregated payment applications. Moreover, very few automatic de-commitments have been made to date (only under the UK programme - which was not implemented).

4.2 Implementation on the ground

Reach-out of the FEAD and profile of end recipients

FEAD support continued in 2018 in 26 Member States, building on the progress made in previous years. Most Member States (22 out of 26) distributed food and/or basic material assistance and provided accompanying measures (OP I - see Table 1), with CY, HU and LT distributing basic material assistance for the first time in 2018[5]. Four Member States continued to run social inclusion programmes (OP II - see Table 1). RO provided no assistance in 2018 due to delays in redesigning its operational programme following institutional changes, which were compounded by problems with public procurement.

Table 1. Type of assistance delivered in 2018

OP	Type of assistance	Member State
OP I	Food	BE, BG, EE, ES, FI, FR, IT, MT, PL, PT, SI (11)
	Basic material	AT (1)

[4] Several Member States have updated certain values of FEAD common input indicators for 2015, 2016 and 2017. The values reported in this section may therefore differ from those published in previous years.

[5] Italy began with distributing basic material assistance in 2018 under measure 4 but did not enter anything into the monitoring system

	Both	CY, CZ, EL, HR, HU, IE, LT, LU, LV, SK (10)
OP II	Social inclusion	DE, DK, NL, SE (4)

Source: SFC2014

In 2018, an estimated 12.6 million people benefited from FEAD food assistance, 1 million received material assistance, and 39,000 benefited from social inclusion support. Nearly 13 million people in total benefited from FEAD support, according to a conservative estimate based on the annual average reported in the FEAD mid-term evaluation for 2014-2017[6]. The most significant increases in reaching more people were found in HU (185,000 more people than in 2017), IE (92,011 more), BE (82,619 more) and PT (41,276 more though the number is still small). Conversely, 17 Member States reached fewer , notably HR (214,068 fewer people than in 2017), BG[7], ES, FR (though the number is still large) and CZ. RO continues to face implementation issues (more on that below).

Figure 1. Number of people receiving food support and/or basic material assistance

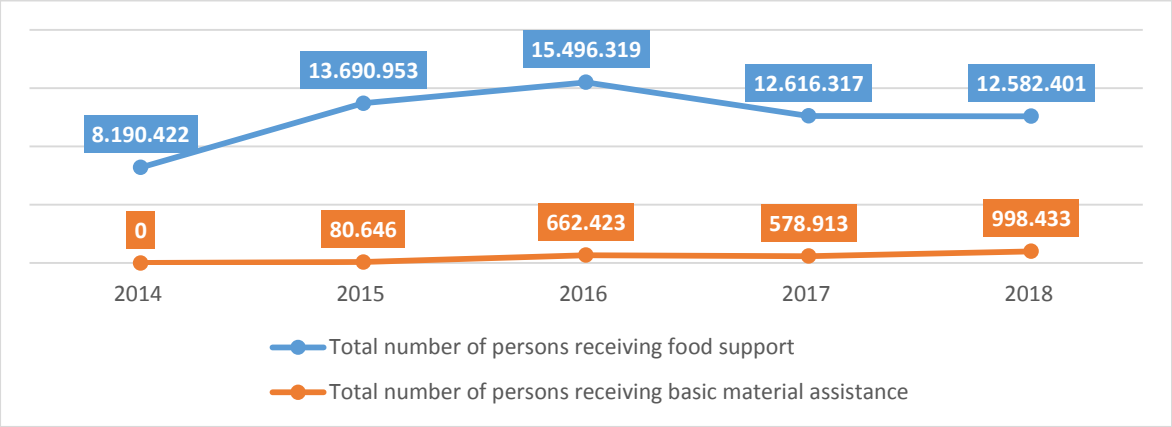
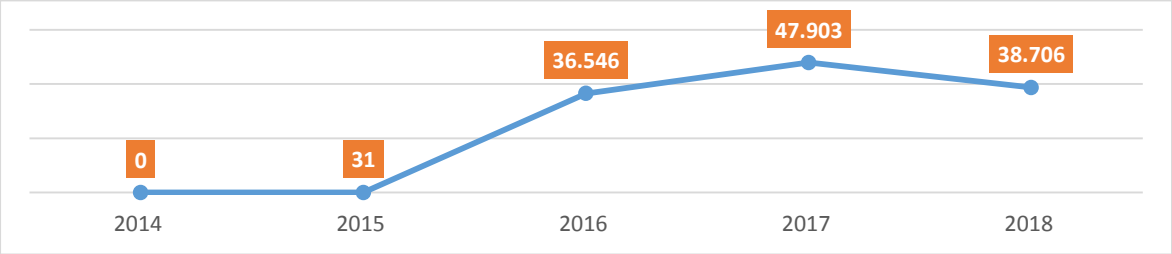


Figure 2. Total number of people receiving social inclusion support



Source: SFC2014

The overall profile of end recipients of FEAD support has remained broadly unchanged. As in previous years, the largest group - at just under half (48%) of all those assisted - were women. Children received almost 30% of the available support, followed by migrants, people with a foreign background or minorities (10%), and the homeless (7%). In 2018, 8% of FEAD end recipients were people aged 65 or above and 5% were people with disabilities. These figures are estimates by the partner organisations and should be treated with caution.

[6] In Operational programmes where both food support and basic material assistance is provided to the same people, the apparent overlap from Annual Implementation Report data has been subtracted for the purpose of reporting aggregated figures

[7] In their 2018 implementation report, the BG authorities revised their output indicators for this and previous years. The values published in this report may therefore differ from those reported in previous years.

Children account for 29% of those who received food, basic material or social inclusion assistance in 2018. This share remained stable compared to previous years. In several Member States, children received the largest share of food support - particularly in CY, HR, MT, HU and CZ – where it ranged between 44% and 92% of the total end recipients. Similarly, CY, IE, HU and AT had a high proportion of children as end recipients of basic material assistance - ranging between 93% and 100%. Programmes in these countries feature specific support to children. Children in other Member States (e.g. BE, ES and FR) represent a high proportion of food aid recipients, as their programmes reach families with children in vulnerable situations.

Box 1. National examples of reaching out to children

The Czech Republic: CZ provides subsidised meals to disadvantaged children in schools. High-quality school catering for children in preschool and primary school age is thought to encourage better school attendance by pupils. The number of schools participating in such schemes is growing steadily. On material assistance, goods distributed in CZ include five types of infant formula and follow-on milk for different age groups, and baby food.

Cyprus: Children account for a large proportion of end recipients of both food (92%) and material assistance (100%). Schoolchildren receive free meals prepared in school canteens.

Croatia: A school programme provides assistance to children living in poverty or who are at risk of poverty. These children receive school meals, as well as school bags and other school material.

Malta: A scheme was launched in 2018 (as an accompanying measure) to distribute fruit, vegetables and milk to schoolchildren, to help create a culture of quality and sustainable food among young ones. Children from vulnerable and very low-income families also receive assistance for their school-related needs, such as procurement of uniforms, stationery, extracurricular activities and other basic needs.

Hungary: Children represent a large proportion of end recipients. Children of poor families receive support in the form of food packages and basic material assistance.

Ireland: Children from families using food banks also benefit from these schemes. Home-starter kits (that include baby kits) that are given to refugee families moving into new homes also benefit children. In 2018, 40,000 schoolchildren and 1,000 children of international protection applicants living in state-provided accommodation received school kits.

Austria: Support in the form of school bags and other school materials is directly targeted to school-aged children whose families receive minimum income.

Spain: To meet the specific needs of children, and to foster their health, growth and development, disadvantaged families are provided with specific food items (e.g. jars of baby food, infant cereals and powdered follow-on milk).

Around 10% of end recipients were migrants, people with a foreign background or minorities. However, note that information on migrants receiving support is not always reported for data protection reasons (EL, FR and SK). Among these groups, the most targeted (mentioned in 45% of the OPs targeting migrants) were refugees and asylum seekers.

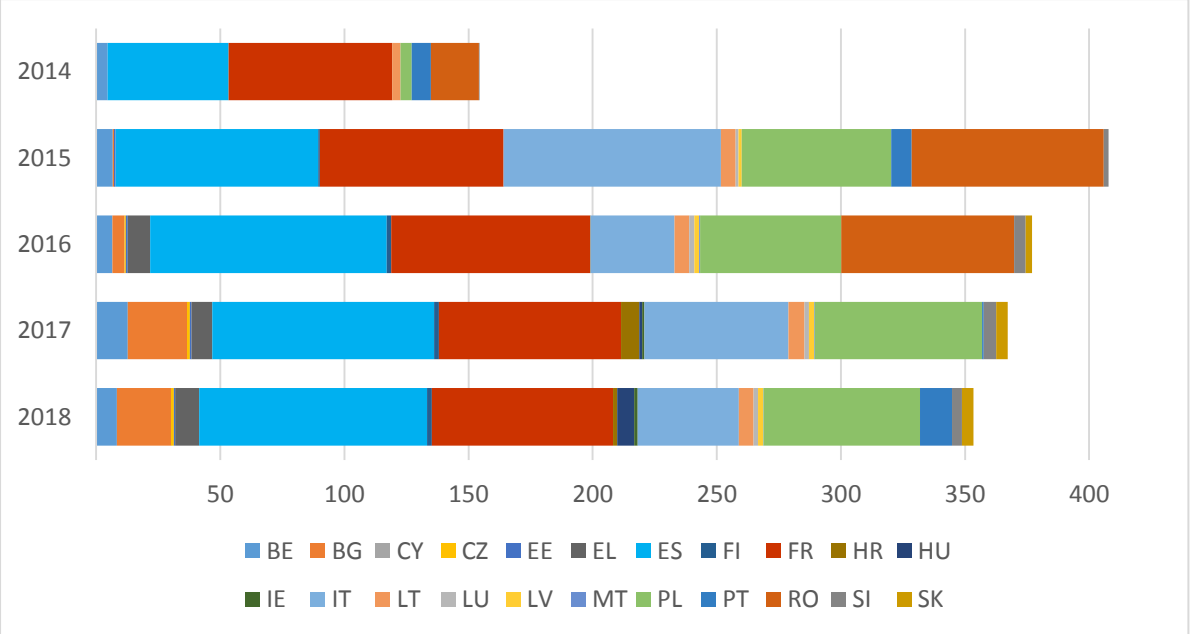
An estimated 7% of FEAD end recipients were homeless people, with a higher proportion in 2018 compared to 2017. However, the number of homeless people is particularly difficult to estimate as they are not registered and are often very reluctant to provide any personal

information. Moreover, the main reason for the increase in homeless people is that FR reported figures for 2018 while they did not do so in the previous year. In CZ, FR, and IE, more than 10% of homeless people receive food support. Apart from in ES, the proportion of homeless people receiving assistance fell in 2018 compared to 2017, notably in IT.

OP I – Food assistance

Food aid remained broadly stable compared to the previous year. Most of the 21 Member States participating in the programme either increased or maintained the quantity of food delivered. Overall, slightly less food was delivered in 2018 than in 2017, as the delivery of meals or food packages fell in some of the bigger Member States. Five Member States (ES, FR, PL, IT and BG) were responsible for 82% of the total amount of food delivered in 2018. Three Member States increased the quantity of food delivered significantly (PT, HU and IE). Ten Member States delivered less food than in 2017 - in the case of BE, EE, HR, IT and SI, significantly less.

Figure 3: Food assistance provided in 2014-2018 (thousands of tonnes) by Member State



Source: SFC2014

Over half (55%) of food aid consisted of dairy products and flour, bread, potatoes and other starchy products. The proportion of dairy products was particularly high in BE and FR. In FI, IT, LV and SK, the proportion of flour, bread, potatoes and other starchy products was high. The amount of fruit and vegetables distributed rose steadily from 9% in 2014 to 17% in 2018[8]. The quantity of fats and oils varied and stands at 6% on average. The proportion of convenience food is quite high in HU and IE but otherwise reasonably low at around 11% across the EU. In IE, convenience food is included in the categories of food requested by partner organisations. This is due to client demand, and therefore to reduce food waste. The cost of food distributed per person varies quite significantly between Member States and from one year to another. This is mostly due to the amount and type of products distributed (e.g. a high rate of fresh produce) as well as the intensity of support.

All 21 Member States that distribute food – except CY - handed it out in the form of standardised food packages. Fourteen Member States provided meals as well: BE, BG, CY,

8 Also due to the increase in food distribution in PT, which has a high proportion of fruit and vegetables.

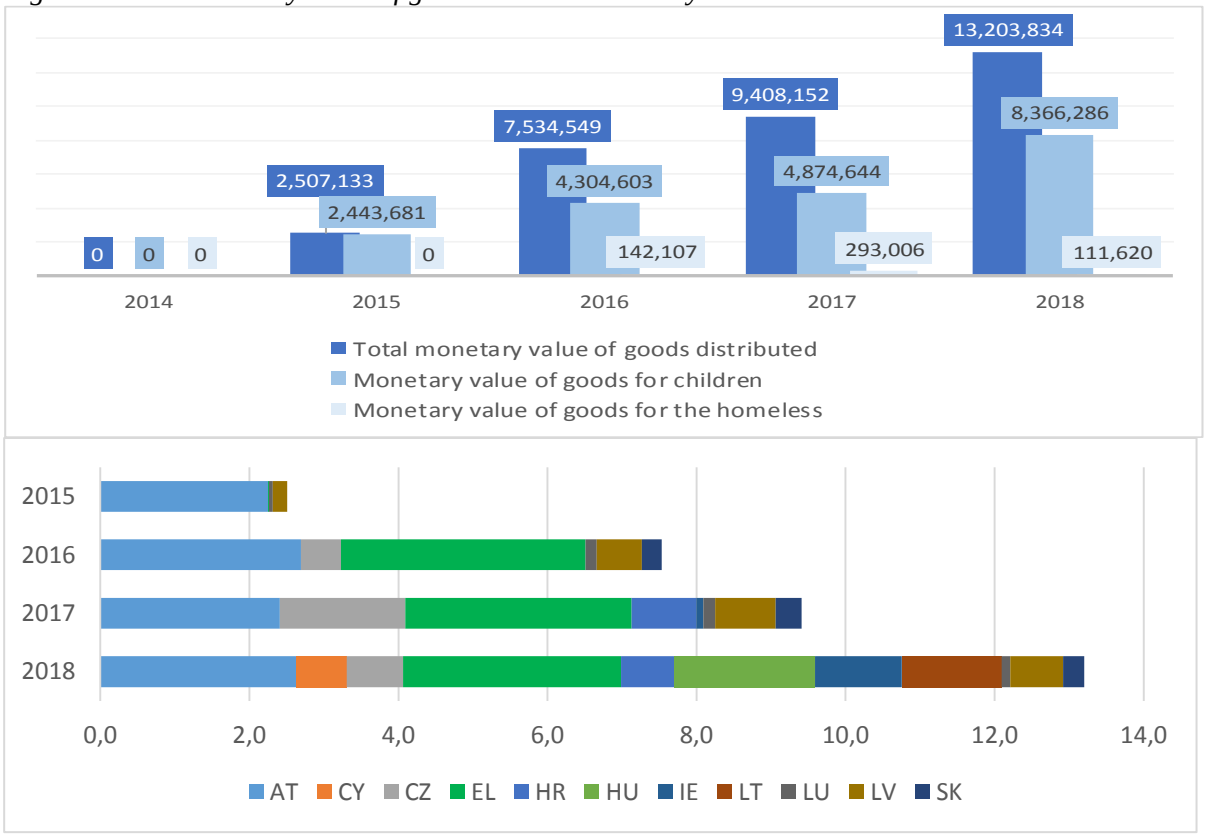
CZ, EL, ES, FI, HR, HU, IE, IT, LV, PL and SK. Some also provided ready-made meals to schoolchildren (CY, CZ, HR and IT) or to homeless people (FI, HU, IT, LV, PL and SK). The EE food bank worked closely with local authorities and cooperated with municipalities to get as close to people's homes as possible. Thanks to good communication between partners, 95% of all food aid packages were distributed during the target period. As in previous years, food deliveries by partner organisations in BG, CY, HU and ES were entirely funded by FEAD, while in the other Member States partner organisations complemented FEAD food aid with food that was donated or funded through other sources.

OP I – Basic material assistance

The number of recipients of basic material assistance also increased significantly. In 2018, Member States distributed €13.2 million in basic material assistance, 29% more than in 2017, which had already increased by 25% compared with 2016. This significant increase was largely due to three Member States distributing basic material assistance for the first time in 2018 - CY, HU and LT. Eight Member States continued to distribute basic material assistance as in the previous year (AT, CZ, EL, HR, IE, LU, LV and SK). Most goods were distributed in three Member States: AT, CZ and EL (see Figure 4). Homeless people were targeted in CZ, EL, HR and SK and were provided with hygiene products and other supplies. In HR they also received kitchen equipment and clothes, and in EL and HR they received sleeping bags/blankets.

School supplies and personal care products for families with children continued to be the main basic material assistance items. In 2018, items delivered to families with children included stationery and school materials (AT, EL, HR, IE and LV), school bags (AT, EL, HR and LV), baby-care packages (HR, HU and IE), diapers and baby wipes (EL), and sports equipment and clothes (HR). In EL, IE, HU, LU, LV and SK, articles such as laundry detergent, washing powder (for coloured linen), dishwashing detergent, diapers, cream and soap for babies and toddlers, wet wipes and diapers were also distributed.

Figure 4. Total monetary value of goods 2014-2018 and by Member State



Source: SFC2014

OP I – Accompanying measures

All Member States that implemented OP I programmes in 2018 also introduced accompanying measures. Successful measures included: (i) communication activities on 'advice on managing a household budget', 'prevention of food waste', and 'selection of food supplies' (PT); (ii) a magazine in Estonian and Russian, called 'Help'[9] distributed to recipients of food aid (EE); (iii) distribution of booklets with recipes that include ingredients from FEAD food packages and commonly donated food (FI); (iv) the 'We Are Together' project by the Red Cross that provides children from socially-disadvantaged backgrounds with cultural experiences, help with homework, mentoring and other assistance (SI); (v) the 'Tackling economic vulnerability through volunteering opportunities' project managed by the Zadar Archdiocese Caritas (HR) which goes beyond material assistance and motivates participants to take action to address the causes of poverty; and (vi) distribution of a brochure with the school bags giving advice to schoolchildren on a range of subjects from school and work, to psychological problems (AT).

Most Member States carried out a combination of accompanying measures and only a few chose to focus on only one or two activities. Accompanying measures implemented in 2018 (see Figure 5) included:

- Advice on food preparation and storage (BE, BG, EE, FI, FR, LT, LU, PL, PT, SK)
- Educational activities to promote healthy nutrition / cooking workshops (BE, BG, CZ, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, PL, PT, SI)

[9] The 2018 issue of the magazine was devoted to healthy eating with a nutritionist recommending healthy recipes for the food provided in the package. The magazine also includes contacts of 38 organisations, which can provide further support.

- Advice on how to reduce food waste (BE, BG, LT, PL, PT)
- Personal hygiene advice (BG, HU, LT, LV, SK)
- Referral to competent services (e.g. social/administrative) (AT, BE, BG, EE, ES, FI, FR, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, SK)
- Individual coaching and workshops (BE, BG, CZ, EE, EL, ES, FR, LT, LU, LV, MT, SI, SK)
- Psychological and therapeutic support (BE, BG, CZ, CY, EE, EL, HU, IT, LT, LV, SI, SK)
- Advice on managing a household budget (BE, BG, CZ, EL, FI, IT, LT, LV, MT, PL, PT, SK)
- Social and leisure activities (CZ, EL, FI, FR, LT, LU, PL, SI)
- Educational activities and skills training/programmes (EE, HR, IT, LT,MT, SI)
- Provision of legal services (BE, EE, FR, IT, LT, SK)
- Other (BE, EE, FI, IE, IT, LV, MT, SI)

Figure 5 : Types of accompanying measures implemented in 2018 (n=22)



OP II – Social inclusion

As in previous years, DE, DK, NL and SE implemented social inclusion actions.

In DE, the main activity was to reach out to newly-arrived adults and homeless people and improve their access to counselling and support measures. DE already exceeded various targets in this area. Nearly 90% of those newly-arrived adults and homeless people that participated in 2018 social inclusion activities went on to use social services (against a target of 50%). The total number of homeless people and people at risk of homelessness that had received advice by 2018 stood at 21,564 - which is already above the programme specific target. Good progress was also made on reaching newly-arrived children of kindergarten age (12,237) and their parents (13,734). The goal of reaching 19,700 children and parents by 2020 should be therefore be achievable.

In DK, conditions for homeless people – and homeless people from other EU countries with permits to stay in DK – improved thanks to access to shelters and social workers. Through outreach activities, these people received temporary accommodation, were able to participate in social and networking events, and were able to gain work experience with a private firm. The activities were adapted to the particularly vulnerable situation of homeless

migrants who face language barriers and other challenges. A total of 1,412 individuals benefited from these activities in 2014-2018, already exceeding the target set for the 2014-2020 programming period (1,400).

In NL, the 'Elderly in the neighbourhood' project continued in 2018 with 776 participants. This was fewer than in 2017 but well above the 2016 level. The project seeks to alleviate social exclusion among disadvantaged elderly people. All people reached were over 65. The total number of participants for 2014-2018 was 2,274 – 45% of the target (5,000). A major result was that after 2 years in the programme, around 84% of the elderly people reached were still involved, 45% said that they had extended their social network and 35% had strengthened their digital and financial skills. Much attention was given in 2018 to reaching older people with a migrant background, e.g. with a Turkish or Moroccan origin, who are not easy to reach and therefore tend to be isolated. 29% of the project's participants were not born in the Netherlands.

The social inclusion measures in SE focus on health promotion and basic information on Swedish society targeted at deprived people coming from other EU or EEA countries. The main target groups are homeless people (or people at risk of homelessness), migrants, people with a foreign background, minorities and women. The programme has so far reached 2,016 people, including 414 in 2018. The percentage of individuals who state that they have received support or assistance has risen steadily since 2016 from 43% to 84% in 2018. The proportion of individuals who state that they have improved conditions for managing health and hygiene has also risen – from 38% in 2016 to 82% in 2018. The target of 40% for both indicators has been significantly exceeded.

Obstacles to implementation

Implementation obstacles were reported by 19 Member States. These included: (i) remaining logistical challenges, e.g. delivery and storage (EL, FI, HU, PT); (ii) legal issues, e.g. public procurement or data protection (BE, BG, EE, EL, HU, IT, MT, PT, RO); (iii) lack of capacity of partner organisations (DK, HU, PL); (iv) challenges with reaching out to target groups (EE, HU, LV, PL and SE); (v) challenges with monitoring and collecting data on end recipients (HU, IT, RO); and (vi) problems with the distributed goods, e.g. their quality, diversity and weight[10] (FR, HU). There were also general implementation challenges in RO, notably issues with public procurement and capacity. Despite regular monitoring and support by the Commission, and making active use of the available technical assistance to improve the capacity of the FEAD managing authority, the issues could not be resolved during the reporting year.

The flexibility of FEAD, and the strong cooperation between the managing authorities and partner organisations helped countries overcome many of these obstacles. In IT, the managing authority organised a meeting with beneficiaries of material assistance to offer additional support with implementation problems. In 2018, FR amended its management system and adopted new procedures, notably for internal control, logistics, and technical assistance to finalise the programme's audit trail.

[10] Other more isolated problems were also reported on, e.g.: undelivered food (EL), destroyed or damaged goods (EL), wrong calculation by the MA of one indicator which has to be corrected (CY), not enough food provided for the target group (HR), administrative burden and limited financial resources (EE), low interest of partner organisations (SK), measures not considered appropriate for the time being, leading to delays in implementation (RO), social attitudes towards the target group (SE).

Horizontal principles

Article 5 of the FEAD Regulation identifies horizontal principles that should be applied across the board in the design and implementation of the Fund. These include complementarity of funding, gender equality, anti-discrimination, avoidance of food waste, a balanced diet, and environmental and climatic aspects. Member States should abide by these principles and report on them in their annual implementation reports.

Member States take account of these general principles. They fulfil the complementarity principle by using other funding instruments. In EE, the Ministry of Social Affairs is also the intermediate body for the ESF, which ensures a unified view and flow of information on the services provided by the two Funds. FI has reported synergies between ESF co-financed social inclusion projects, which serve as accompanying measures to FEAD food distribution.

Several Member States have explained how they apply the gender equality principle. CZ reaches out to single mothers, who they consider to be a particularly vulnerable group. DE focuses on advising women on childcare and health issues, and has produced gender factsheets for use by partner organisations. Two projects in SE specifically address women's health, and other projects have been adapted to better target women. In SE and NL 80% of social inclusion assistance recipients were women.

Most Member States explicitly mentioned anti-discrimination actions. DE and LV provide guidelines and workshops on non-discrimination. In HU, the special needs of people living with disabilities are taken into consideration, e.g. food distribution takes place at barrier-free venues and help to collect the food package is also provided. LU ensures accessibility to people with disabilities. BG claims that the FEAD contributes to equal opportunities by supplying specific meals based on ethnicity and religion.

Most national FEAD programmes prioritise measures to tackle food waste. IE reduces food waste by combining food collected from supermarkets with FEAD food deliveries. In MT and ES, food packages are adapted to the needs of the people receiving them to avoid waste. SI prioritises the efficiency of the food distribution system to ensure that people receive food quickly and well before any expiry dates. In BE, fresh soup made with unsold food is distributed as part of the FEAD. BE also encourages food donations with a VAT exemption and a Charter between the food aid sector and mass retailers. In FR, the 2016 'anti-waste' law is widely applied by partner organisations, which has led to a significant reduction in food waste. In their tendering procedure to select suppliers, the criterion to take account of the carbon footprint when transporting foodstuffs was added in 2016. In HR, the documentation for the food deprivation, basic material deprivation and technical assistance call specifies how to prevent food waste, ensure product safety, and protect public health and the environment. In LT, any food package leftovers go to canteens that prepare and deliver food for homeless people.

Many Member States said that they distribute varied and nutritionally-balanced food. In FR, meals are adapted to the age and living conditions of the people receiving them. Food packages in PT aim to meet at least 50% of a person's energy and nutrition requirements and daily portions include each of the seven food groups. SK has had the composition of their food packages assessed by the Public Health Authority to ensure the right nutritional balance. In EE, the National Institute for Health Development was consulted on the food packages and they recommended excluding the most common allergens (e.g. nuts and foods containing nuts). BG took account of the Ministry of Health's instructions, as well as feedback from recipients. LV organised health promotion activities, e.g. on a healthy diet and lifestyle,

childcare issues, addiction prevention, first aid skills, emergency response and disease prevention.

Many Member States take account of climate and environmental aspects. AT reports that high quality, durable products were chosen for environmental reasons. In CZ, only environmentally-friendly products which encourage recycling are ordered through the FEAD. Partner organisations select products from a basket of commodities according to the needs of their clients. This minimises the risk of providing unwanted supplies and avoids waste.

Evaluations

The effects of FEAD activities in individual Member States are generally positive according to in-depth evaluations. For example, the LU report concluded that FEAD support allows the country to free up its budget for other public needs. In PT, a national study demonstrated that food aid has allowed 72% of people covered by the OP to manage their household budget better. The FR evaluation raised uncertainties on the link between the FEAD programme and a reduction in poverty, given poverty's complex and multidimensional nature. However, as food aid is the first contact with people facing difficulty and opens the path to personalised support, its positive impact should be observable over time.

Some Members States used specific evaluation criteria and/or evaluated specific issues. BE carried out a market survey to test which healthy products could be bought and distributed with minimum environmental impact. EL studied the programme's contribution to combatting food insecurity, i.e. whether it achieved nutritional intake in line with the scientific recommendations and improved the recipients' quality of life.

Box 2. Evaluation activities in IE and ES

In IE, the FEAD managing authority regularly conducts stakeholder surveys. The main findings are that the support has a positive impact on disadvantaged people - helping them move forward in life and increase their social contacts, and that it frees up money for other essential actions. The high quality of the school kits was commended, and the children who benefited from them were very pleased to have articles of similar quality to their friends. Another key benefit is that food banks have been able to increase their supplies and ensure their regularity. Moreover, 'FoodCloud Hubs' – the main partner organisation - has been able to combine food collected from supermarkets with FEAD-funded food. This is positive for the environment, as the less food waste sent to landfills for disposal, the lower the carbon emissions.

In ES, the Red Cross and Federation of Food Banks carried out a comprehensive assessment of the FEAD in 2018[11]. Their report concludes that FEAD support is highly appreciated by the beneficiaries - 96 % of them would recommend it to others and 76 % say that the food delivered 'gets them out of many difficulties'. However, it also confirms that - despite helping to alleviate extreme forms of poverty and supporting family nutrition, the programme is not enough to enable families and individuals to lift themselves out of their precarious situation.

11 Spanish Red Cross (2018): FEAD impact assessment in Spain.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Financial commitments under the FEAD programme increased substantially, reaching €762.2 million in 2018. The cumulative committed expenditure for 2014-2018 was nearly €2,732 million, or 61% of the programmes' total resources (EU and national co-financing). This shows that the FEAD budget implementation is on track. Payments also increased solidly, with Commission interim payments exceeding 38% of the total 2014-2020 allocation by 31 December 2019 (25% by end-2018).

Most Member States consolidated their established track record of delivery and made good progress in reaching their objectives. In 2018, 26 Member States successfully delivered FEAD assistance. Food aid remained broadly stable compared to the previous year. The delivery of basic material assistance continued to increase, with 29% more assistance distributed in 2018 compared to 2017. CY, HU and LT distributed basic material assistance for the first time in 2018. Nevertheless, some implementation problems remain, notably delays, and challenges with logistics, legal aspects, reaching target groups, monitoring and evaluation, and partner organisations' lack of capacity. Most Member States were able to overcome these difficulties thanks to the trust and cooperation of stakeholders, although programme amendments were sometimes required. However, despite the Commission's close monitoring, RO did not deliver assistance in 2018 because of institutional changes and persistent procurement problems.

In 2018, almost 13 million people are estimated to have benefited from FEAD support. The FEAD support has proven to be stable over the years. Food aid remains the most frequent type of assistance. Of the total number of end recipients, over 12.5 million (92%) received food aid, and around 998,000 (7%) received basic material assistance in 2018, while almost 39,000 participated in social inclusion programmes (FEAD OP II). As in previous years, children remained the single largest group of recipients (29% of all end recipients). Homeless people (7%) and people with disabilities (5%) were among the specific target groups. An estimated 10% of all those supported were migrants, people with a foreign background or minorities, and 8% were people aged 65 or above.

As in previous years, reports show that FEAD's flexibility has been central to its effective and efficient implementation. The role of the partner organisations in terms of knowledge of the target groups and outreach has been very important. However, the FEAD also helped partner organisations become more efficient, including in terms of delivery times and institutional cooperation. Moreover, Member States and partner organisations have been able to make decisions on how and when to reach target groups, and this was key to establishing mutually-trusting relationships with end recipients.

Accompanying measures have become well established and more diverse. All OP I Member States that implemented the FEAD in 2018 introduced accompanying measures, according to their reports. Educational activities to promote healthy nutrition / cooking workshops were the most common type of accompanying measure, followed by individual coaching and workshops, and psychological and therapeutic support. The referral to competent services remained a crucial first step out of poverty. Overall, a diverse set of good practices emerged.

Generally, Member States report to have complied with the horizontal principles. All ensured that assistance was equally accessible to both men and women and most emphasised that there was no discrimination based on gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation. Some Member States made efforts to ensure that the contents of the FEAD food packages matched the requests of partner organisations and end

recipients in order to avoid food waste. Member States made efforts to provide mainly healthy foods and paid close attention to storage and timely delivery, and to using recycled materials. These aspects also contributed to climate and environmental protection.

As the FEAD enters its final stages of implementation, attention is shifting to successfully integrating support to the most deprived people into the ESF+ programme. With the 2018 ESF+ proposal, the Commission has laid the ground for a successful continuation of the support to the most deprived. The current negotiations by the co-legislators have shown that the intention to create synergies, simplify, and solidly embed the support into a broad social inclusion approach, is well appreciated. It is now instrumental that the negotiations are successfully concluded so that the dialogue on the ESF+ programming can move into its final phase and that programmes can be submitted without delay. The ESF+ programme will be key to supporting the economic and social recovery after the coronavirus pandemic, and to fostering a just transition to a climate-neutral economy in line with the ambitions of the European Green Deal[12], and in combination with the Just Transition Fund[13]. It will also be a key programme for delivering on the European Pillar of Social Rights[14].

12 https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/european-green-deal-communication_en.pdf

13 https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/news/2020/01/14-01-2020-financing-the-green-transition-the-european-green-deal-investment-plan-and-just-transition-mechanism

14 https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1226&furtherNews=yes&newsId=9524