



European
Commission



Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived

Towards lasting impact: Exploring sustainability in FEAD interventions

Thematic Dossier 3

August 2018

Social Europe

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This service is provided by Ecorys on behalf of the European Commission. It is financed by FEAD technical assistance, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

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1. UNDERSTANDING SUSTAINABILITY

In the world of social policy, sustainability is typically associated with the idea of **sustainable development**. Consisting of three pillars, sustainable development seeks to achieve economic and social development alongside environmental protection. A life of dignity for all within the planet's limits, which reconciles economic prosperity and efficiency, peaceful societies, social inclusion and environmental responsibility, is therefore at the centre of sustainable development efforts in the European Union (EU) and beyond.¹

The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) was launched in 2015 with the objective of eliminating the worst kinds of poverty and material deprivation across the EU.² FEAD supports Member State actions by allocating funding for programmes and projects that support nonfinancial assistance and social reintegration. In this way, FEAD seeks to help people take their first steps out of poverty and social exclusion.

Within this context, the FEAD Network³ discussions in 2017 focused on addressing the multi-dimensional nature of poverty across a diverse European population. However, beyond the figures, poverty has proven to be not only multi-dimensional, but also fluid in nature. For example, people who have experienced poverty once are far more likely to experience poverty again, and the overall transition out of poverty can be both long and complex.⁴ As a result, durable support structures with **long-term impact** for programme recipients is crucial to ensuring the success of FEAD projects.

Along these lines, the concept of sustainability has also found its way into project management methodologies and practices. **Project sustainability** is understood as the ability of a project to continue its mission or programme far into the future, even after the official project activities are completed or the initial grant has ended. A project or organisation can generally promote project sustainability in a financial, organisational or programmatic manner. Financial sustainability refers to ensuring the steady flow of funds needed to continue the programme's work, while organisational sustainability involves encouraging the development of maintainable institutional structures (e.g. through the incorporation of volunteers). Lastly, programmatic sustainability permits the **continuation of programme objectives** in the absence of donor support, for example by embedding the project in public support structures like the overarching programmes of municipal social services.

The approach and responsibilities associated with project sustainability vary across the different actors involved in FEAD. The European Commission and FEAD Managing Authorities play an important role in regularly reviewing FEAD activities and keeping them fit for purpose. FEAD operations are monitored in Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs) and evaluations, including the recently completed FEAD mid-term review.⁵ These form the basis for the assessment of the overall impact of the operational programmes and the road forward.

From the perspective of partner organisations in charge of the actual distribution of assistance, greater sustainability can mean accompanying the material assistance in Operational Programme (OP) I with the right social inclusion efforts to maximise impact for individual end recipients. For example, **providing information** about available social services alongside traditional food distribution can have a lasting

¹ European Commission (2016), *Next steps for a sustainable European future: European action for sustainability*, COM(2016) 739 final, available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52016DC0739&from=EN>

² European Parliament and European Council (2014), *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, available at <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32014R0223>

³ The FEAD Network is an open membership community for people providing assistance to the most deprived in Europe. This includes EU-level NGOs and EU institutions, organisations interested in or delivering FEAD-funded activities and national Managing Authorities. Organisations working to deliver FEAD initiatives take part in face-to-face Network meetings to stimulate discussion and raise awareness of FEAD-related topics.

⁴ Oxley, H., Thanh Dang, T. and Antolín, P. (2000), 'Poverty dynamics in six OECD countries', *OECD Economic Studies*, No. 30, 2000/1, available at <https://www.oecd.org/eco/growth/2732278.pdf>

⁵ European Commission (2017), *FEAD Mid-term evaluation: Report on the open public consultation*, available at <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/0e03aa7b-025f-11e8-b8f5-01aa75ed71a1>

impact on end-recipients' long-term housing, social welfare, health, education and employment conditions.

In light of the above observations, this thematic dossier aims to highlight the importance of incorporating sustainability in project management approaches when it comes to reaching regional and global sustainable development targets. Correspondingly, it presents in chapter one key findings from recent FEAD Network discussions highlighting effective project sustainability practices and lessons learnt. Chapter two places the EU's contribution to sustainable development in a global context. Chapter three explores project sustainability in the context of FEAD, examining the value of building partnerships, engaging volunteers and fostering community involvement. Lastly, chapter four explores what the future holds for FEAD and poverty alleviation efforts post-2020.

2. THE EU'S COMMITMENT TO SUPPORTING A SUSTAINABLE EUROPE BY 2030

2.1 The EU's contribution to the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals

The 2030 Agenda,⁶ approved in September 2015 by the UN General Assembly, delivered a new worldwide policy framework aimed at ending all forms of poverty, combatting inequality and tackling climate change. At the heart of the 2030 Agenda are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)⁷ and their related targets, set to be achieved by 2030. The SDGs cover a wide range of social and economic development issues including poverty, hunger, health, education, global warming, gender equality, water, sanitation, energy, urbanisation, environment and social justice.

The 2030 Agenda includes a stronger follow-up and review framework than existed for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), to ensure the Agenda is implemented for all. The SDGs also cover employment and social areas to a greater extent than the MDGs. As a result, at least 8 out of the 17 SDGs relate directly to domains covered by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL). By extension, these goals can be grouped as 'social' SDGs. This strengthening of the SDGs' social dimension accentuates inclusive social development as an indispensable priority within the new framework, underscoring the ambition to leave no one behind.

The EU has taken tangible steps to measure its progress in achieving the SDGs. More specifically, Eurostat has developed a framework to monitor advancements, encompassing 100 indicators with a maximum of 6 per goal. As a result, the EU's contribution to accomplishing the SDGs was detailed in the 2016 Communication on 'Next steps for a sustainable European Future',⁸ and two SDG Monitoring Reports published by Eurostat.^{9,10} A multi-stakeholder platform followed in May 2017, to support and advise the Commission in the implementation of the SDGs by operating as a forum for the exchange of experiences and best practices.

Moreover, the European Commission is progressively integrating a rights-based approach in its development programmes in an effort to deliver on its commitment to the SDGs. Along this theme, the European Pillar of Social Rights was adopted in November 2017.¹¹ The Pillar sets out a number of key principles and rights to support fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems in all Member States. Since the adoption of the Pillar, the European Commission has committed to keeping track of its implementation by Member States. As a response, a 'social scoreboard' now accompanies the Pillar, monitoring its implementation by tracking trends and performances across EU countries.

⁶ United Nations (2015), *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, United Nations General Assembly, A/RES/70/1, available at http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E

⁷ United Nations (2015), *The Sustainable Development Goals: 17 goals to transform our world*, available at <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

⁸ European Commission (2016), *Next steps for a sustainable European future: European action for sustainability*, COM(2016) 739 final, available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52016DC0739&from=EN>

⁹ European Commission (2017), *Sustainable development in the European Union: Monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs in an EU context*, available at <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/8461633/KS-04-17-780-EN-N.pdf/f7694981-6190-46fb-99d6-d092ce04083f> >

¹⁰ European Commission (2017), *Sustainable Development in the European Union: Overview of progress towards the SDGs in an EU context*, available at <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/4031688/8461538/KS-01-17-796-EN-N.pdf/f9c4e3f9-57eb-4f02-ab7a-42a7ebcf0748>

¹¹ European Union (2017) *European Pillar of Social Rights booklet*, available at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/social-summit-european-pillar-social-rights-booklet_en.pdf

2.2 FEAD's role in delivering the principles of the Pillar

The European Pillar of Social Rights goes a long way to address the employment and social goals of the SDGs. A preliminary mapping of 'social' SDGs against key areas of the Pillar has already been highlighted in the 2016 Commission staff working document on 'Key European action supporting the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals'.¹² Three of the eight listed 'social' SDGs (1, 8 and 10) cover most of the twenty principles of the Pillar, whilst the rest of the 'social' SDGs tend to target particular principles. Legislative and policy actions that have been taken as part of the Pillar (e.g. access to social protection for all; increasing gender equality by improving work-life balance; creating more transparent and predictable working conditions), as well as funding, governance, monitoring and social dialogue all add value to the EU's contribution to the SDGs.

Moreover, all three categories around which the 20 Pillar principles are based are key to FEAD's success when it comes to tackling the types of social deprivation found across the EU:



Given the observed synergies in social and employment objectives, FEAD is a key actor in implementing the Pillar on the ground. FEAD contributes in particular to fostering and delivering education, training and lifelong learning (Principle 1); equal opportunities (Principle 3); childcare and support to children (Principle 11); access to healthcare (Principle 16); inclusion of people with disabilities (Principle 17); housing and assistance to the homeless (Principle 19); and access to essential services (Principle 20). For example, the Pillar seeks to ensure the right to quality education, training and lifelong learning for all. FEAD contributes to delivering on this principle through measures such as provision of training and/or educational support. In OP I countries, this often takes place via accompanying measures to FEAD food and material assistance, as highlighted in the 10th FEAD Network meeting background paper¹³.

One example from the above paper features a Maltese project using food distribution as a window to survey families about their educational level and interest in continuing education. Based on this assessment, families connect to relevant service providers such as the National Literacy Agency. The family can then benefit from services ranging from the provision of books for home use, to receiving information about national-level support schemes such as financial assistance for school uniforms.¹⁴ Another relevant OP I country example is found in Slovenia's 'We Are Together' Group. Implemented by Red Cross Slovenia, the project targets school and pre-school children from socially disadvantaged families. In broad strokes, the programme aims to ensure that the children benefit from exposure to

¹² European Commission (2016), *Key European action supporting the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals*, SWD(2016) 390 final, Strasbourg, available at https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/swd-key-european-actions-2030-agenda-sdgs-390-20161122_en.pdf

¹³ European Commission (2018), Background information on FEAD's contribution to the European Pillar of Social Rights, 11th FEAD Network Meeting, available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=19578&langId=en>

¹⁴ For more information about the Malta project 'Foundation for Social Welfare Services', please see the 2017 FEAD case study catalogue, available at <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=9038&furtherNews=yes>

social and cultural experiences that will nurture their personal development. The programme runs throughout the year and offers everything from social excursions to help with homework and mentoring from local high-school volunteers.¹⁵

The Pillar further guarantees the right to equal treatment and opportunities regarding social protection, and access to goods and services available to the public. The majority of OP II projects, and accompanying measures of OP I material assistance projects, directly contribute to delivering this principle on the ground. A relevant example from OP II is the work done by the Acasa organisation in Dortmund in Germany, which uses FEAD funding to provide counselling services to particularly disadvantaged, newly-arrived EU citizens living in precarious situations in Dortmund. The Acasa team delivers targeted outreach work and free guidance and referral services. The multi-lingual staff provide information on an array of topics, such as access to German courses, health insurance, migration and the right to housing. In addition to referring beneficiaries to the relevant municipal support structures and institutions, the service also extends to accompanying the beneficiaries to their related appointments.

Principle 19 of the Pillar seeks to ensure housing and assistance for the homeless through better access to social housing or housing assistance of good quality to those in need; ensure the right to appropriate assistance and protection against forced eviction; and ensure that adequate shelter and services are provided to the homeless. FEAD programmes in Denmark play an important role in putting this principle into action. Through the UDENFOR and COMPASS projects, Denmark combats poverty and homelessness and strives to strengthen the social inclusion of the most socially deprived.

Both the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the European Pillar of Social Rights represent a move towards international policies on development cooperation rooted in stronger monitoring and evaluation frameworks, sustainability practices and social inclusivity. Against this backdrop, FEAD brings a new approach to helping the most deprived persons in the EU (e.g. through its flexible and innovative delivery modes enabling the Fund to reach otherwise inaccessible end recipients in precarious situations). Sustainability in the context of FEAD generally, and the added value of FEAD in fighting poverty and deprivation across Europe more specifically, will be explored in the following section of the dossier.

¹⁵ For more information about the Slovenian 'We Are Together' group, please see the upcoming 2018 FEAD case study catalogue (due to be published in October 2018).



3. SUSTAINABILITY IN THE CONTEXT OF FEAD

3.1 The added value of FEAD in fighting poverty and deprivation

Although FEAD is a relatively small fund (€3.8 billion between 2014 and 2020), it adds significant value to Member State initiatives, in that it accomplishes more than what can be achieved with local, regional or national funds alone.

Firstly, FEAD **expands the nature and the reach of Member State initiatives**. In particular, FEAD enables groups to be assisted that would otherwise not receive support. This is partly due to the low and flexible threshold set for recipients of FEAD-funded support, which makes it possible to assist a large spectrum of individuals. FEAD can also offer immediate assistance based on a social assessment rather than a financial one, meaning that the fund fills the gap left by inaccessible national social security systems. FEAD is therefore effective at supporting a wide range of end recipients and, in particular, vulnerable children, workless households, single parents, newly arrived EU citizens, marginalised communities such as Roma, homeless people and disadvantaged children.¹⁶ FEAD food distribution and material support also constitutes a valuable first point of contact for hard-to-reach groups such as homeless people, ex-offenders and drug addicts.

Another way in which FEAD supports Member States is through its flexible and innovative delivery modes. FEAD enables organisations to deliver support as close as possible to the target group, including approaching people in the streets or visiting them in their homes. Through accompanying measures, organisations are also able to implement appealing activities to attract and engage their target group. Successful examples include cooking/culinary workshops combined with the provision of childcare; workshops for children to celebrate traditional festivities; and fishing classes combined with communal cooking. FEAD also encourages innovation in that it helps to establish new delivery modes (e.g. distributing food in social groceries with a voucher system so that recipients can choose their food, distributing fresh food made from unsold supermarket products, or distributing food 'on wheels' with specially equipped vehicles to reach remote areas).¹⁷

FEAD also increases the types and volumes of assistance delivered. FEAD successfully complements existing national measures and programmes, and thus enables them to scale up and, in particular, deliver larger volumes of food and/or material. In some cases, FEAD is the only source of funding for organisations working in the field of extreme poverty. In others, FEAD frees up resources that enable organisations to cater for other end recipient needs (health, psychological support, employment support, etc.). FEAD also provides additional types of assistance through the 5% funding for accompanying measures, which takes a variety of forms.

Moreover, FEAD maximises the impact of Member States' efforts to tackle poverty and social exclusion by **fostering mutual learning, networking and dissemination**. FEAD strengthens local aid networks through increased collaboration and partnerships between organisations. In particular, FEAD successfully encourages new organisations to work with the most deprived. Typically, the launch of a FEAD programme is the opportunity to carry out a mapping exercise of all governmental and non-governmental organisations offering social services in a given area, from which point synergies can be sought. Partnering improves the efficiency of programmes by preventing the duplication of efforts, achieving economies of scale, and favouring the creation of synergies with other initiatives and

¹⁶ European Commission (2018), *FEAD Mid-term evaluation: Report on the Open Public Consultation*, VC/2016/0664.

¹⁷ For more information about the 'Red Cross on Wheels' project, please see: <https://www.croix-rouge.fr/Je-m-engage/Benevolat/Toutes-les-missions-benevoles-de-la-Croix-Rouge/Responsable-Croix-Rouge-sur-roues>

resources.¹⁸ Crucially, partnering contributes to the identification and provision of services that cannot be delivered by an organisation working alone. Partnerships can typically maximise FEAD impact through the provision of accompanying measures by specialised partners or through joint planning between state agencies and/or partner organisations, thereby improving the coordination of FEAD delivery.

Furthermore, FEAD contributes to the learning and dissemination of good practices in the area of non-financial assistance to the most deprived. Over 70% of respondents to the open consultation conducted as part of the mid-term evaluation said that mutual learning is one of the main fields to which FEAD contributes. Through the Network's online platform and five yearly meetings, FEAD stakeholders can exchange their respective experience and learn from other projects. FEAD can also enhance the learning of partner organisations and helped to develop their capacity to address specific target group needs. This is the case in Sweden where a FEAD project seeks to establish a network of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) offering healthcare services, to connect them the public sector and ultimately develop their capacity to address the specific healthcare needs of their target group.¹⁹

According to the FEAD mid-term evaluation, over 60% of stakeholders in OP I countries and over 55% of actors in OP II countries believe that the cessation of FEAD would severely hamper the types and volumes of assistance on offer.²⁰ The impact of a potential FEAD cessation on the coverage of target groups is judged as equally severe by over 70% of OP II respondents and around 55% of OP I Member States. More significantly, over 50% of OP I respondents judge that a cessation of FEAD would critically hamper their work on the establishment of networks such as food banks. This reflects how significant the added value of FEAD is when it comes to tackling poverty and social exclusion in Member States, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and meeting the European Pillar of Social Rights principles (in line with the strategy for a sustainable Europe by 2030). Looking forward, one of the main **challenge for FEAD will be to ensure the sustainability of its impact at national and local level.**

3.2 Ensuring sustainability at national and local level

The development, implementation, and sustainability of FEAD programmes – like all social assistance programmes – is subject to a unique set of circumstances, depending on the specific field of action, programme objectives and partner organisations involved. Furthermore, the nature of poverty and social exclusion fluctuates across Member States, calling for interventions to be tailored to suit local circumstances.

Despite local variations, some of the challenges identified by FEAD Network participants that can be encountered when setting up a social assistance programme include:

- a lack of concrete sustainability planning;
- limited resources;
- the superficial involvement of end recipients in project cycle, resulting in a lack of ownership;
- inadequate capacity-building;
- insufficient innovation.

The Network identified several ways to overcome these challenges and promote sustainability throughout the project cycle.

¹⁸ European Commission (2018), *Background information on 'Building partnerships to improve FEAD support'*, 11th FEAD Network Meeting, available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=9128&furtherNews=yes&furtherNews=yes>

¹⁹ For more information about the Frisk project please see:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=7947&furtherPubs=yes>

²⁰ European Commission (2018), *FEAD Mid-Term evaluation: Report on the Open Public Consultation*, VC/2016/0664.

3.2.1 The importance of building partnerships for FEAD delivery

Discussions between FEAD stakeholders at Network events underlined that partnerships among different bodies (e.g. Managing Authorities, NGOs and private actors such as restaurants, supermarkets) can improve the overall impact and sustainability of FEAD, by encouraging the more efficient use of available resources and the better identification of end recipient needs. More specifically, partnering was said to improve efficiency by avoiding the duplication of efforts, achieving economies of scale, and favouring the creation of synergies with other initiatives and resources. Additionally, developing new partnerships can also mean diversifying the project's donor and overall resource base, ultimately ensuring a steady flow of funding even after the FEAD funding ends.

A key recommendation in the European Commission's review²¹ of the European Code of Conduct on Partnerships (ECCP)²² urged Member States to make a more conscious effort to include existing partners, as well as end beneficiaries, in a meaningful way throughout the entire project cycle. Accordingly, the 11th FEAD Network meeting report on partnerships outlines four phases that partners should go through together.²³ The first phase is the so-called 'identification and development phase', which includes partner identification, resource mapping, discovery meetings, relationship building and the final partner selection. In this identification phase, the relevant stakeholders are identified. The second phase is the 'implementation and managing phase'. In this phase the Partnership Agreement and the Governance framework is set up to formulate the overall objectives/actions, as well as the individual objectives/actions of each partner. This phase also involves the documentation of the implementation of the different actions. Thirdly, partners should go through the 'assessing and revising phase', which involves an evaluation of the whole programming phase to assess whether the partnership's objectives are met. Finally, each partnership will face the 'sustaining impact' phase, which includes inviting potential new partners, upscaling the programme, and/or institutionalising the partnership.

In practice, one of the key challenges when it comes to implementing sustainable FEAD projects relates to how FEAD can continue to support the transition of end-recipients out of poverty beyond the provision of food and material assistance. While helping fulfil end recipients' basic needs is important, it is equally important that end recipients receive the support they need to take steps towards re-entry into society. Here, one challenge frequently encountered in OP I countries is that the 5% flat rate to cover accompanying measures is not always enough to provide a holistic approach for end recipients. In response, some FEAD projects are currently exploring synergies with initiatives funded through the European Social Fund (ESF).

An example of this approach is found in the activities of Les Restaurants du Coeur, based in France. By linking FEAD and ESF funding through their food aid and integration project workshops, the organisation is able to target a wider range of beneficiaries, particularly marginalised people who are not reached by ESF measures.²⁴ Another example is found in Finland's 'Cheers for Health' project, which combines FEAD-funded food distribution with ESF-funded health support. The project is led by the Finnish National Organisation of the Unemployed (Työttömien Keskusjärjestö ry) with the support of the Finnish Association for Substance Abuse Prevention (EHYT ry). In addition to the distribution of FEAD-funded food items, the project offers a free elementary health check-up for unemployed people by an onsite nurse. 'Cheers for Health' also helps FEAD beneficiaries to complete health forms and refers them to the relevant mainstream health services.²⁵

Despite the strong consensus regarding the added value of teaming up when tackling complex problems such as social inclusion, partnerships are not without their challenges. Some of the challenges identified

²¹ Review conducted in the context of the ESF Transnational network on partnership

²² European Commission (2014), *Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 240/2014 on the European code of conduct on partnership in the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds*, available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014R0240&from=EN>

²³ European Commission (2018), *Background information on 'Building Partnerships to Improve FEAD Support'*, 11th FEAD Network Meeting, available at <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=9128&furtherNews=yes&furtherNews=yes>

²⁴ For more information about Les Restaurants du Coeur and their projects, please see: <https://www.restosducoeur.org/>

²⁵ For more information about the Cheers to Health project, please consult the 11th FEAD Network meeting report: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=de&catId=89&newsId=9128&furtherNews=yes&furtherNews=yes>

include a prevalence of 'top-down' approaches for policy-making, limited links with on-going initiatives, a lack of identification of clear synergies among different participants, and insufficient knowledge transfer about successful cases.²⁶

Partnerships are a viable platform for the exchange of learning and practices, however. The social impact of the FEAD Network at European level, as well as the various national FEAD Networks, is a clear example of this. By providing a platform through which practitioners are able to exchange information and experiences, the FEAD Network brings significant benefits to the stakeholders involved in terms of processes and allows for experience related to overcoming the abovementioned challenges to be exchanged. The evidence-based and mid- to long-term implementation of FEAD by means of operational programmes can also encourage dialogue between various stakeholder groups and support a strategic approach in the future, by exposing both overlaps and fragmentation in nationwide service delivery.

3.2.2 The engagement of volunteers in implementing FEAD initiatives

Volunteering plays a crucial role in strengthening fundamental European values such as solidarity and community building, but is also essential in ensuring organisational or project sustainability. Not only do volunteers alleviate some of the financial pressures linked to paying full- or part-time staff, but they bring a diverse range of skills, as well as links to the local community.²⁷ Engaging volunteers can also help projects to reach a greater number of end recipients and, in some cases, to meet their needs more effectively thanks to the different skills and life experiences of the volunteers involved. It also enables organisations to increase and improve the quality of their services through, for instance, expanded operation hours or reduced waiting time for recipients.

Volunteers are also important to organisations due to the alternative perspectives they can bring to an organisation, helping projects to evolve and adapt to more effectively meet the needs of end recipients. They provide a different perspective on the local landscape, frequently bringing direct knowledge of situations on the ground that enables the provision of targeted and well-informed activities to those in need.²⁸ Because they have stronger relationships with the communities, including with marginalised recipients, volunteers can play a crucial role in expanding the reach of FEAD-funded services, as well as providing additional services more generally. Involving volunteers in service design can therefore add crucial perspectives and new voices, potentially leading to the development of innovative specialist services.²⁹

Nevertheless, while the added value of volunteering is clear, the volunteering landscape differs significantly across the EU. Several Member States record consistently high levels of volunteer participation, but others struggle to recruit and retain volunteers for social activities. Whilst volunteering can be enormously beneficial to individuals, organisations and society more broadly, challenges can sometimes arise. In particular, matching demand and supply for volunteering can prove arduous within the delivery of FEAD assistance.

The FEAD recipients who are most in need tend to be located in remote and poor areas, where a lower proportion of the community is likely to volunteer. Low volunteer numbers are not always the main challenge faced by organisations reliant on volunteers; rather, matching the needs of a particular project with the availability, expectations and skillsets of volunteers can be a primary issue.³⁰ Matching

²⁶ European Commission (2018), *Background information on 'Building Partnerships to Improve FEAD Support'*, 11th FEAD Network Meeting, available at <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=9128&furtherNews=yes&furtherNews=yes>

²⁷ NCVO (2017), *Why involve volunteers?*, available at <https://knowhownonprofit.org/people/volunteers-and-your-organisation/why-involve-volunteers#>

²⁸ GHK (2010), *Study on volunteering in the European Union: Final report*, available at http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/doc1018_en.pdf

²⁹ NCVO (2012), *Open public services: Experiences from the voluntary sector*, available at https://www.ncvo.org.uk/images/documents/practical_support/public_services/open_public_services_experiences_from_the_voluntary_sector.pdf

³⁰ GHK (2010), *Study on volunteering in the European Union: Final report*, available at http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/doc1018_en.pdf

volunteers with meaningful tasks can also be difficult, with management potentially being torn between accepting all volunteers and balancing recruitment with actual organisational needs.³¹

Related challenges may also arise in relation to standards and codes of practice for professionals, which can be more difficult to apply in the case of volunteers in comparison to paid employees. Tension can also arise when the roles of volunteers and paid staff are similar, with the potential for resentment to build when volunteers are doing the same work as paid staff or when volunteers feel able to take on more complex tasks that are reserved for paid employees. Furthermore, just like paid staff, volunteers need support, guidance and training to accomplish their duties. It is therefore crucial to allocate adequate resources and time to manage them, which can prove challenging for small-scale organisations.

Despite these challenges, the FEAD Network agreed that it was important for partner organisations to invest in the recruitment of volunteers, as well as in retention activities. Ultimately, volunteers represent a resource that maximises the impact of FEAD funding by extending the reach and longevity of FEAD-funded initiatives, as well as embedding the initiatives within the local community.

3.2.3 Fostering community involvement around FEAD activities

Involving the community at various stages should be key in any project sustainability approach. It encourages local ownership and there are higher chances that residents may continue with some project aspects even after the original project has ended. Additionally, in a participatory process, the skills and knowledge gained by end recipients will likely be transferable and replicable. According to FEAD stakeholders, some of the effects observed when communities participate in their own projects include greater transparency and accountability, enhanced service delivery, the kick-starting of local service providers and the harmonisation of donors.

Some experiences further highlighted that when given a clear framework, access to information and appropriate support, project beneficiaries themselves can also be encouraged to actively participate in the organisation and delivery of initiatives. For example, the client-to-client based initiative 'Chefs without borders' successfully brings together FEAD end recipients from local asylum houses in the town of Trinec, the Czech Republic, to cook three-course lunches using FEAD products. The participants subsequently go into the local community and share the meals they have cooked with residents.³² Such examples illustrate the potential of local communities to plan and implement programmes when given the power to participate and negotiate.

What's more, involving local governments and departments can help carry forward project objectives. It can also ensure improved access to government initiatives in the field. As these agencies are permanent, they can help to sustain project activities beyond the project duration. A compelling FEAD example is the FAWOS project, a German housing security initiative. FAWOS support centres filled a gap in the pre-existing support system, through the provision of timely advice and support to tenants in at-risk tenancies, preventing homelessness before it occurs. The centres also advocate for the preservation of affordable and adequate housing at municipal level. Through its cooperation with the municipal authorities in Ludwigsburg, the programme is set to be incorporated into the public assistance system.³³ Similarly, another German FEAD project ('Krisenhilfe Wohnungsnot') that provides counselling services in Bonn has been successfully integrated into the existing range of support and counselling services in the regular assistance system. For this reason, the independent project ended mid-2017.³⁴

³¹ Joy, S., Hendry, L. and Nzegwu, F. (2011), *Quality volunteering at the British Red Cross*, available at <http://www.redcross.org.uk/Get-involved/Volunteer/Thinking-of-volunteering/-/media/BritishRedCross/Documents/Get%20involved/Volunteering/Research%20report%20quality%20volunteering%20at%20the%20British%20Red%20Cross.pdf>

³² For more information about the Chefs Without Borders project, please see the 11th FEAD Network meeting report: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=de&catId=89&newsId=9128&furtherNews=yes&furtherNews=yes>

³³ For more information about FAWOS, please see the upcoming 2018 FEAD case study catalogue (expected to be published in October 2018).

³⁴ For more information about the Krisenhilfe Wohnungsnot project, please see: https://caritas-bonn.de/wohnungsnot/krisenhilfe_wohnungsnot/

Lastly, community involvement in FEAD can help tackle different forms of social exclusion in a holistic way, by helping people who are experiencing poverty to become actively involved in addressing their situation. This is also central to preserving a sense of dignity and agency on the part of end recipients. Acting on this observation, Secours Populaire Français (SPF) provide two particular services – the ‘Solidarity Reception Centres’ (PASS) and ‘Solidarity Self-Service’ (LSS). The PASS are places where people (families as well as individuals) from the local community can receive help and enjoy a welcoming and respectful atmosphere. Alongside these permanent reception centres, SPF has also established a mobile outreach service in order to respond to the specific needs of homeless people and those living in rural areas. The LSS provides food support, as well as clothes, cleaning products, cultural items (e.g. books and CDs) and home equipment. SPF aims to work in true partnership with end recipients, with whom volunteers aim to develop mutually trusting relationships based on equality. This approach enables volunteers to work closely with end recipients, develop a better understanding of the challenges they face in their day-to-day lives, and jointly find the best ways to address them.³⁵

As opposed to a traditional system based on the distribution of food parcels, the LSS gives end recipients the opportunity to actively choose products they need and the food they prefer. This is considered a critical way to respect and preserve their dignity. End recipients can also attend workshops to learn how to become volunteers; of 80,000 volunteers currently working with SPF, between 15-20% were initially end recipients themselves. As volunteers, former end recipients can demonstrate their initiative, take responsibility and strengthen their network of contacts, all of which are key components for successful social integration. Becoming volunteers also helps them to develop their professional skills and to regain their sense of self-confidence and self-esteem.

³⁵ For more information regarding Secours Populaire Français projects, please see: <https://www.secourspopulaire.fr/>



4. LOOKING BEYOND FEAD: TACKLING POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION POST-2020

FEAD is a relatively new and small fund that only represents 1% of the EU budget for cohesion policy. It aims to alleviate the worst forms of poverty and social exclusion across the EU, reaching out to the 'hard-to-reach' individuals that are excluded from mainstream national social services. It is a flexible fund, given that Member States are not only able to determine whether they adopt an operational programme focusing on addressing food and material deprivation or social inclusion, but they also have the discretion to implement a programme that addresses the needs of the most vulnerable individuals in each national context. The European Commission earmarked €3.8 billion for the Fund across 2014-2020, and sought to support 15 million people annually through FEAD-funded initiatives.

As the current multi-annual financial framework draws to a close, the European Commission has launched internal and external consultations to determine the shape of the post-2020 framework. Recognising the complementary nature of several of the funds managed by DG EMPL, it was proposed to bring together the ESF, the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI), the EU Health Programme and FEAD under one umbrella fund: the European Social Fund+ (ESF+). In doing so, the European Commission reaffirms its commitment to pursuing a social Europe and ensures that there are synergies between the various instruments in place to tackle the social challenges faced by Member States.

ESF+ will be closely aligned to the SDG and will be the main funding instrument for implementing the 20 principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights. This will ensure that the various social initiatives in place across the EU are cohesive and that progress made against the social priorities of the EU can be clearly monitored. All initiatives funded under the ESF+ Regulation will therefore relate to the principles of equal opportunities and access to the labour market (including quality and inclusive education and training systems), fair working conditions and social protection and inclusion. The will look to improve employment opportunities, raise the standard of living and increase labour mobility and economic, social and territorial cohesion.

The ESF+ Regulation will capitalise on the lessons learned through the activities of the FEAD Network, and will actively seek to promote sustainable initiatives to address poverty and social exclusion. For instance, it will encourage the development of partnerships between civil society organisations and other actors active in the social field, encourage mutual learning and exchange, and build the capacity of partner organisations (e.g. by harnessing the benefits of a structured volunteer programme). It will additionally retain FEAD's flexibility in adopting delivery mechanisms suitable to localities across Member States, to allow for tailored support that meets the needs of Europe's most vulnerable individuals in each specific context.

