



# Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived

Background information on 'Tackling poverty and social exclusion of  
older people through FEAD initiatives'

16<sup>th</sup> FEAD Network Meeting

4- 5 June 2019, Vilnius, Lithuania

Social Europe

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## Introduction

Europe has the oldest and most rapidly ageing population of any continent in the world. It is expected that between 2016 and 2060, the proportion of older people in Europe (those over 65) will rise from **19.3 %** to **29 %** of the total population.<sup>1</sup> In light of this, the EU has acknowledged the need to address this new reality through a range of measures focused on active and healthy ageing. These initiatives focus on facilitating the full participation of older people in society by tailoring public services to their needs. In the context of the Europe 2020 strategy target of reducing poverty in the EU, the specific focus is on the **18.2 %** of the most vulnerable older people at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the EU.<sup>2</sup>

As the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) offers material and non-material assistance to the most vulnerable individuals across Europe, it is used as a tool by Member States to support older people in a variety of ways. During the period from 2014 to 2017, older people made up **9 %** of FEAD end recipients, according to the European Commission's mid-term evaluation.<sup>3</sup> A number of national FEAD programmes (**FEAD OP I**) focus on **food security** for older people by providing food parcels and material aid, as demonstrated in Croatia, Slovenia and Slovakia.<sup>4</sup> In parallel with the provision of food aid and/or material assistance, FEAD support to older people is given as part of **social inclusion initiatives (FEAD OP II)**.

Against this backdrop, the upcoming **16th FEAD Network Meeting on 4 and 5 June 2019** will reflect on how FEAD, in conjunction with national and other EU funding, can support older people at risk of poverty, and particularly social exclusion, across the European Union (EU). The meeting aims to provide a platform for a variety of stakeholders and network members to exchange best practices in tackling poverty among older people through FEAD support. It will also serve to contextualise FEAD activity by providing insight into wider policy measures, strategies and programmes. In supporting these objectives, this background paper seeks to provide insight into poverty and social exclusion currently experienced by older people across the EU. It also highlights existing policy responses and frameworks at European and global level. Lastly, it explores FEAD's role in combatting this issue, through the examination of a variety of approaches across Member States, including specific case study examples.

Despite its ambitious coverage, this paper primarily serves as a reference paper. For a more detailed review, please consult the additional studies quoted in this paper.

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission, *Active ageing*. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1062>

<sup>2</sup> European Commission, *Poverty and social exclusion*. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=751&langId=en>

<sup>3</sup> SWD (2019). 148 final.

<sup>4</sup> FEAD (2018). Case studies.

## Current situation/challenges relating to older people in poverty

The general perception has been that older people were **the most protected age group** in relation to the consequences of the 2008 economic crisis. This is corroborated by the **lowest** and continually **decreasing at risk of poverty and social exclusion rates** (AROPE) for older people between 2008 and 2017, presented in table 1 below and compared by age category. More specifically, in 2017, people over the age of 65 were at **lower risk** of poverty or social exclusion compared with the overall population (only 18 % of older people, compared with 22.4 % of the whole population).<sup>5</sup>

**Table 1: AROPE rates for children, adults and older adults in the EU<sup>6</sup>**

AGE Group	2008 (EU 27)	2012 (EU 28)	2016 (EU 28)	2017 (EU 28)
Children	26.5%	28.1%	26.4%	24.9%
Adults	23%	25.4%	24.2%	23%
Older adults	23.3%	19.2%	18.2%	18.2%

To measure poverty and social exclusion, EU statistics use a composed indicator, the AROPE rate. This estimates the proportion of people who are either at risk of poverty, severely materially deprived, or live in a household with a very low work intensity.<sup>7</sup> The AROPE rate does not, however, take into account factors that are particular to older people and could increase the risk of poverty and social exclusion, which include poor health, age-based discrimination, isolation, abuse, and reduced mental and physical capacity.<sup>8</sup>

Besides additional factors that should be taken into account when measuring AROPE rates for older people, it should be noted that these positive average trends mask significant differences in terms of Member States, gender and the structure of poverty.

Firstly, it is important to note that the structure of poverty has changed, with the material deprivation rate decreasing, and the at risk of poverty rate increasing. The 65+ demographic experiences in-work poverty less frequently, with a rate of 6.9 % in 2016, but this is expected to rise due to new employment models, which will have an impact on the level of pensions. For example, in 2017, the average risk of poverty among older people in Spain and Greece

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<sup>5</sup> Eurostat. *People at risk of poverty or inclusion* (2019). Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/People\\_at\\_risk\\_of\\_poverty\\_or\\_social\\_exclusion#Number\\_of\\_people\\_at\\_risk\\_of\\_poverty\\_or\\_social\\_exclusion](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/People_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion#Number_of_people_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion); Eurofound (2013), Third European Quality of Life Survey – Quality of life in Europe: Social inequalities, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

<sup>6</sup> Eurostat. *People at risk of poverty or social exclusion by age and sex* (2019). Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/People\\_at\\_risk\\_of\\_poverty\\_or\\_social\\_exclusion](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/People_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion)

<sup>7</sup> Eurostat. *Glossary: At risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE)*. Available at: [ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:At\\_risk\\_of\\_poverty\\_or\\_social\\_exclusion\\_\(AROPE\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:At_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion_(AROPE)).

<sup>8</sup> AGE. *Poverty Watch* (2018). Available at: [https://www.age-platform.eu/sites/default/files/AGE\\_Poverty\\_Watch\\_2018.pdf](https://www.age-platform.eu/sites/default/files/AGE_Poverty_Watch_2018.pdf)

was 9 percentage points (pp) lower than for the rest of the population.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the share of the older population at risk of poverty was **significantly higher** than for the rest of the population in Estonia (+18.6 pp), Latvia (+15.7 pp), Lithuania (+10.7 pp) and Bulgaria (+10.0 pp).<sup>10</sup> These differences among EU Member States have different causes, but two in particular could be highlighted: the characteristics of pension systems and safety family networks, and the age and gender structure of the older population.

Research has identified certain **effects and characteristics** that contribute to higher rates of poverty and social exclusion among older people:

- **Women over the age of 65 face a higher risk of poverty or social exclusion than men.** Women in general have higher AROPE rates than men in all age groups, but the most prominent difference – of 5.6 percentage points – is for the oldest group (65+). One of the main reasons for this is the **gender pension gap**, which is the result of continuous discrimination against women by means of pay gaps, employment in lower-paid sectors, part-time contracts, and inactive periods spent on caring for children and relatives.<sup>11</sup>
- **Poverty rates increase with age** due to inadequate indexation of pensions, resulting in their decreasing value in the longer term.
- **Enhanced social isolation**, which can result in poverty and exclusion. Contributing factors include: expensive public transport, which can lead to reduced mobility for older people; inadequate public policies that are not tailored to less autonomous older people; and increasing health care related costs.<sup>12</sup>
- **Older people with disabilities and those with a migrant background** may face higher risks of poverty and social exclusion. In terms of older people with disabilities, one of the causes is related to the probability of developing a disability, which increases with age, consequently increasing the need for additional support. In terms of migrant background, evidence suggests that people with migrant backgrounds are in general more affected by socio-economic risks, which might continue in older age. However, these categories are complex and require more research.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, the general perception that older people are at a lower risk of poverty compared to other age groups could be explained by a number of factors. In general, older people are income-poor, but usually hold some types of assets, mostly properties in which they live. However, the value of properties is difficult to estimate, and despite not paying rent, older

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<sup>9</sup> FRA *Shifting perceptions: towards a rights-based approach to ageing* (2018). Available at: [https://www.age-platform.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2018-fundamental-rights-report-2018-focus\\_en.pdf](https://www.age-platform.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2018-fundamental-rights-report-2018-focus_en.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Eurostat. *People at risk of poverty or social exclusion by age and sex* (2019). Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/People\\_at\\_risk\\_of\\_poverty\\_or\\_social\\_exclusion](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/People_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion); More information on EU geographical clusters and older people at risk of poverty: Eurofound (2019), *Age and quality of life: Who are the winners and losers?*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

<sup>11</sup> *Why older women are much more exposed to the risk of poverty than older men* (2015). Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=2349&furtherNews=yes>

<sup>12</sup> AGE. *Poverty Watch* (2018). Available at: <https://www.age-platform.eu/policy-work/news/poverty-and-social-exclusion-older-people-where-are-we>

<sup>13</sup> FRA. *Shifting perceptions: towards a rights-based approach to ageing* (2018). Available at: [https://www.age-platform.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2018-fundamental-rights-report-2018-focus\\_en.pdf](https://www.age-platform.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2018-fundamental-rights-report-2018-focus_en.pdf)

people still need to bear high maintenance and repair costs. Additionally, they might live in housing that is too large for one or two people, entailing higher energy costs.

In terms of factors to help combat poverty and exclusion in older age, **survivors' pensions**, which are welfare benefits paid to a deceased person's relatives (such as a spouse and/or children), are seen as one of the main mechanisms safeguarding women from old age poverty. These pensions compensate women for their lower pensions and can therefore help to bridge the pension gender gap.

## Global and EU policy context

Active ageing with dignity, providing adequate social assistance and care to the older population, as well as access to health care, social inclusion and equality for older people, are all policy goals that have been recognised by policy makers at a global and EU level. Even though many of the strategic policy documents and measures adopted in this area have soft power only and aim to provide recommendations, they highlight the importance of enabling older people to contribute fully to society in a dignified manner.

The **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** presents a universal, inclusive plan to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, leaving no-one behind and paying particular attention to the most vulnerable groups in society, including older people. The aim of FEAD to tackle poverty across different societal groups reflects the Sustainable Development Goals, which in 2016 succeeded the Millennium Development Goals. The FEAD work with the elderly closely links with the first two Development Goals of eradicating poverty and hunger, as well as indirectly relating to other Goals, such as reducing inequalities and ending discrimination against women of all ages.<sup>14</sup>

Another strategic policy document with specific focus on older people is the **Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing**, adopted by the UN in 2002.<sup>15</sup> The three main priorities of the Plan cover:

- Older people and development (in particular social protection).
- Advancing health and well-being into old age.
- Ensuring enabling and supportive environments.<sup>16</sup>

Eradication of poverty for older people is among the key objectives of the Plan, which draws particular attention to specific portions of the group at a greater risk of poverty, such as older women and people with disabilities. Another UN document, **the 2010 annual report**, written by a UN independent expert on extreme poverty, focuses on the poverty experienced by older people, addressing the role of social protection systems in reducing extreme poverty and

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<sup>14</sup> United Nations Development Programme. Sustainable Development Goals. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html>

<sup>15</sup> United Nations. *Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing* (2002). Available at: [https://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/pdfs/Madrid\\_plan.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/pdfs/Madrid_plan.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Zaidi Asghar. *Implementing the Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing: What have we learned? And, where do we go from here?* (2018). Available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/implementing-madrid-plan-action-ageing-what-have-we-learned-and-where-do-we-go-here>

ensuring that people grow old with dignity.<sup>17</sup> This report stresses the measures that should be taken by countries in order to guarantee the continuing existence of social security schemes and the allocation of benefits to older people, ensuring equality between different groups, including men and women.<sup>18</sup>

The revised 1996 **European Social Charter (ESC)** of the Council of Europe envisaged special protection of the rights of older people, set out in **Article 23**.<sup>19</sup> This highlights the importance and need for 'adequate resources enabling them to lead a decent life and play an active part in public, social and cultural life'.<sup>20</sup> This Article is an example of an integrated approach, recognising the importance of different factors that are crucial in ensuring the dignity of older people. These factors include adequate housing and access to health care, respect for privacy and inclusion in society as full members. In addition, **Article 30** of the Charter, establishing a right to protection against poverty and social exclusion (which applies to everyone without prejudice to age or gender), highlights the need for a 'co-ordinated approach' to promote access to employment, housing, training, education, culture and social and medical assistance.<sup>21</sup>

Other strategic policy documents and initiatives which have underlined the importance of active ageing and independent and dignified living for older people include:

- the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing<sup>22</sup> (1982)
- the United Nations Principles for Older Persons<sup>23</sup> (1991)
- the United Nations Open-ended Working Group on Ageing<sup>24</sup> (2010)
- the WHO Global strategy and action plan on ageing and health<sup>25</sup> (2016-2020)
- the Council of Europe Recommendation on the promotion of the human rights of older persons<sup>26</sup> (2014)

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<sup>17</sup> United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. *Older persons and social protection - Independent Expert on human rights and extreme Poverty*. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/Pages/OlderPersons.aspx>

<sup>18</sup> UN General Assembly, Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona. *Report of the independent expert on the question of human rights and extreme poverty* (2010). Available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G10/125/83/PDF/G1012583.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>19</sup> Council of Europe. *European Social Charter (Revised)* (1996) Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/163>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. Article 30.

<sup>22</sup> United Nations. *Report of the World Assembly on Ageing* (1982). Available at: <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/ageing/documents/Resources/VIPEE-English.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> OHCHR, *United Nations Principles for Older Persons* (1991). Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/OlderPersons.aspx>

<sup>24</sup> United Nations, *Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing* (2010). Available at: <https://social.un.org/ageing-working-group/>

<sup>25</sup> World Health Organization. *Global strategy and action plan on ageing and health* (2017). Available at: <https://www.who.int/ageing/WHO-GSAP-2017.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Council of Europe. *Recommendation CM/Rec (2014) of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the promotion of human rights of older persons*. (2014). Available at: [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805c649f](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805c649f)

- the Resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly on ‘Human rights of older persons and their comprehensive care’<sup>27</sup> (2017)

More recent key policy documents related to different geographical regions in the world, such as the **Inter-American Convention on Protecting the Human Rights of Older Persons (2015)** by the Organization for American States, and **the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Older Persons (2016)** by the African Union, have also established a rights-based approach to the protection of older people.<sup>28</sup> Poverty eradication and social inclusion are addressed as one of the major issues to be tackled in order to provide older people with dignified ageing.

### Overview of key EU policy documents and initiatives

Within the overarching **EU 2020 strategy**, the EU has made a commitment to lift 20 million people out of poverty, or the risk of poverty, without prejudice to age or gender.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, special emphasis is placed on reducing health inequalities and the promotion of a ‘healthy and active ageing population’, addressing the needs of the older population in particular. This is seen as an important factor, not only for achieving higher productivity in the EU’s rapidly ageing society, but also for ensuring social cohesion and inclusion of all groups in society.

While the problem of a rapidly ageing society has been approached from an economic perspective in terms of the cost of an ageing society, the EU’s **Fundamental Rights Agency** (FRA) has highlighted the importance of adopting a ‘rights-based approach’ towards ageing, describing it as a ‘fundamental right to equal treatment of all individuals, regardless of age – without neglecting the [protection and support of] those who need it’.<sup>30</sup>

The main human rights instrument of the EU, **the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights**, guarantees that the rights of ‘human dignity, the integrity of the person, social assistance and health care’ are applied to everyone without consideration of their age.<sup>31</sup> In addition, the Charter includes a specific focus on the rights of older people: **Article 25** recognises and demands respect for ‘the rights of the elderly to lead a life of dignity and independence and to participate in social and cultural life’.<sup>32</sup> **Article 34** of the Charter establishes the right for social assistance (social security benefits and access to social services) to be provided to people in vulnerable situations, including the category of ‘old age’.<sup>33</sup> **Article 34** also addresses the issue of combating social exclusion and poverty, stipulating the right to ‘social and housing

<sup>27</sup> Council of Europe. *Resolution 2168 (2017) Human rights of older persons and their comprehensive care* (2017). Available at: <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-EN.asp?fileid=23768&lang=en>

<sup>28</sup> Organisation of American States. *Inter-American Convention on Protecting the Human Rights of Older Persons* (2015). Available at: [http://www.oas.org/en/sla/dil/inter\\_american\\_treaties\\_A-70\\_human\\_rights\\_older\\_persons.asp](http://www.oas.org/en/sla/dil/inter_american_treaties_A-70_human_rights_older_persons.asp)

<sup>29</sup> European Commission, *Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth* (2010). Available at: [ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/eu-economic-governance-monitoring-prevention-correction/european-semester/framework/europe-2020-strategy\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/eu-economic-governance-monitoring-prevention-correction/european-semester/framework/europe-2020-strategy_en)

<sup>30</sup> Fundamental Rights Agency, *Fundamental Rights Report* (2018). Available at: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/annual-reports/fundamental-rights-2018>

<sup>31</sup> European Commission. *EU Charter of Fundamental Rights* (2012). Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/aid-development-cooperation-fundamental-rights/your-rights-eu/eu-charter-fundamental-rights\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/aid-development-cooperation-fundamental-rights/your-rights-eu/eu-charter-fundamental-rights_en)

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.



assistance so as to ensure a decent existence for all those who lack sufficient resources', without prejudice to age and other demographic characteristics.<sup>34</sup>

The FRA devotes a special chapter to the rights of older people in its **2018 Annual Report**, concluding that 'the fundamental rights of older people need to be better protected'.<sup>35</sup> This report states that the EU has not developed a comprehensive legal and policy framework for the protection of older people. Nevertheless, secondary legislation such as the **Employment Equality Directive**, which lists age as a non-discrimination ground (though recognising some limitations), has played an important role in moving towards the equal treatment of people of all ages. However, the Directive's scope covers solely the field of employment, leaving out the areas of social protection, health care, access to goods and services or housing.

The **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**, the first international convention to which the EU has acceded as a legal party in 2010, also ratified by all 28 EU Member States, is another key policy document that enshrines the right to "*dignity, autonomy and non-discrimination, full participation and recognition before the law*"<sup>36</sup> for people with disabilities and physical impairments of all ages.

The EU commitment to lifting 20 million people out of poverty has been strongly linked to EU cohesion funding instruments. Moreover, one of the priorities for the **2014-2020 European Structural Investment Funds (ESIF)** and more specifically for the **European Social Fund** is the promotion of 'social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination'. Investing in health (services and infrastructure) is another key issue, eligible for funding from both the **European Regional Development Fund** and the **European Social Fund**, under several of their thematic objectives.<sup>37</sup>

In addition, **ex-ante conditionalities** (horizontal and thematic) have been set in the regulations for the 2014-2020 funding period, meant to ensure that ESIF funding is provided upon respect of certain conditions across a variety of policy areas in all EU Member States. Some of the ex-ante conditionalities stipulate as prerequisites for acquiring European Structural and Investment Funding (ESIF) 'poverty reduction and inclusion of people excluded from the labour market' and 'active and healthy ageing'.<sup>38</sup>

The most recent EU initiative, **the European Pillar of Social Rights**, reflects the EU commitment to a more social Europe, and also pays particular attention to the rights of older people. **Principle 15** establishes that 'everyone in old age has the right to resources that ensure living in dignity', while several other principles, even if not specifically addressed to the older population, encompass the rights and needs of older people in different areas. **Principle 14**, for example, focuses on the 'right to adequate minimum income benefits ensuring a life in dignity at all stages of life'. **Principle 17** recognises the rights of people with disabilities 'to income support that ensures living in dignity, services that enable them to participate [...] in society'. **Principle 18** highlights the importance of 'access to long-term care of good quality',

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Fundamental Rights Agency, *Fundamental Rights Report* (2018). Available at: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/annual-reports/fundamental-rights-2018>

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> European Commission. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/policy/themes/health/](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/themes/health/)

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

while **Principle 19** sets out the right to social housing or housing assistance of good quality and **Principle 20** describes access to essential services of good quality, which should be made 'available for those in need'.<sup>39</sup> All the European Pillar of Social Rights Principles apply to people without prejudice to their age.

## How can FEAD contribute to addressing older people in poverty?

As noted above, older people, alongside children, are significantly at risk of falling into **poverty**: for around 18 % of people aged over 65, poverty is a significant and likely threat.<sup>40</sup> Increased rates of poverty can lead to feelings of **isolation and loneliness, and ultimately social exclusion**, which is defined as the separation of individuals and groups from mainstream society.<sup>41</sup> It is important to stress, however, that older people are not a homogenous group and should not be treated as such. As with the general population, some older people are more privileged than others, whereas some are homeless, have disabilities, live in remote and isolated areas, or have a migrant background. Additionally, the financial situation of older women can differ considerably and more widely than that of older men; in general, women are at a higher risk of poverty than men.<sup>42</sup>

Overall, FEAD aims to enhance social cohesion, ultimately contributing to achieving the goals set out in the **Europe 2020 poverty reduction strategy**. The objective for this strategy is to reduce the number of people in poverty in the EU to less than or equal to 96.1 million by 2020.

Older people are one of the FEAD target groups and FEAD can contribute to addressing poverty among older people through all strands of its programme.<sup>43</sup> In 2017, 12.9 million people in the EU benefited from FEAD, and of these, 7 % (around 935,000) were aged 65 or over. Specific examples of this type of activity in individual countries are outlined below.

Older people benefit from FEAD through the distribution of food and basic material assistance (Operational Programme I - OP I). Accompanying measures focus on mobility services,

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<sup>39</sup> European Commission, *The European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles*, Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en)

<sup>40</sup> EUROSTAT. (2019) People at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/People\\_at\\_risk\\_of\\_poverty\\_or\\_social\\_exclusion#Number\\_of\\_people\\_at\\_risk\\_of\\_poverty\\_or\\_social\\_exclusion](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/People_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion#Number_of_people_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion)

Eurostat. *Europe 2020 indicators - poverty and social exclusion* (2019). Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Europe\\_2020\\_indicators\\_-\\_poverty\\_and\\_social\\_exclusion#Key\\_messages](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Europe_2020_indicators_-_poverty_and_social_exclusion#Key_messages)

<sup>41</sup> Walsh K., Scharf T., Keating N., *Social exclusion of older persons: a scoping review and conceptual framework*. *European Journal of Ageing* (2016). Available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10433-016-0398-8>

Commins, P., *Poverty and social exclusion in rural areas: characteristics, processes and research issues* in 'Sociologia Ruralis' (2004). Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-9523.2004.00262.x>

<sup>42</sup> Antczak, R. and Asghar, Z. *Risk of Poverty among Older People in EU Countries* (2016). Leibniz-Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung an der Universität München, München, Vol. 14, Iss. 1, pp. 37-46

<sup>43</sup> European Commission (2015) The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) Breaking the vicious circle of poverty and deprivation. doi:10.2767/4605 Available at: [http://publications.europa.eu/resource/cellar/5fc535d2-9988-11e5-b3b7-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC\\_8](http://publications.europa.eu/resource/cellar/5fc535d2-9988-11e5-b3b7-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC_8)

access to health care, referral to relevant social services and medical presence in rural areas, amongst other areas. FEAD also supports social inclusion programmes, aimed at enhancing social inclusion and tailored to individual needs (Operational Programme II – OP II).<sup>44</sup>

### Addressing poverty among older people through direct support

There are a series of examples that illustrate how Member States have focused their operational FEAD programmes specifically on supporting the needs of older people.

Firstly, older people often have **mobility issues**.<sup>45</sup> Loss of mobility occurs when, for example, an older person's physical disabilities interfere with walking.<sup>46</sup> Activity restriction is associated with reduced levels of social participation and therefore linked to social exclusion and an inability to lead an independent and active life.<sup>47</sup> Some Member States have chosen to dedicate, either fully or in part, their operational FEAD programmes to the alleviation of poverty among older people through the direct provision of material and food goods, often to those in remote areas, who find it difficult to travel in light of these mobility issues. Among others, FEAD-funded programmes tackle mobility issues for older people in Slovakia, Slovenia, and Finland by organising food and material distributions to elderly people directly to their home. These are explored in more detail below.

The **Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family in Slovakia** distributes food and toiletry packages to older people living in villages directly to their homes, thus sparing them the need to travel in order to acquire these products. FEAD aid in Slovakia is directly delivered in 2,554 municipalities (out of 2,933 Slovakian municipalities), which are spread across 79 districts. In Slovakia, this distribution intervention also allows the Ministry to gain the trust of older individuals who are at risk of poverty and provides them with specific support, ranging from individual counselling about life choices, healthy eating and hygienic habits, information on how to store and cook the FEAD products provided and how to minimise food waste.

Similarly, **Caritas Slovenia** also helps older people who are unable to leave their homes, personally providing them with food aid. Out of every 1,000 FEAD aid recipients in Slovenia, at least 80 people receive a food parcel directly to their homes. The parcels delivered are personalised according to the needs of the recipients with regards to diet, hygienic needs, clothing and personal items.

Finally, in **Finland**, a programme delivers food to the poorest region in the country, Kainuu, in the area of Kushmo. In this area, there are 300 older people living alone who are dependent on food aid deliveries. When the recipients are not able to go to the main town to collect the food (for example, because of mobility issues), the package is delivered to their homes by a team of volunteers.

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<sup>44</sup> Eurodiaconia. *Briefing on the Fund for European Aid for the most deprived (FEAD)* (2014). Available at [https://eurodiaconia.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/POV\\_62\\_14\\_FEAD\\_briefing\\_for\\_members.pdf](https://eurodiaconia.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/POV_62_14_FEAD_briefing_for_members.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> Mestheneos, E. Ageing in Place in the European Union in 'Global Ageing' Vol. 7. Available at: [https://eurodiaconia.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/POV\\_62\\_14\\_FEAD\\_briefing\\_for\\_members.pdf](https://eurodiaconia.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/POV_62_14_FEAD_briefing_for_members.pdf)

<sup>46</sup> Webber, S., Porter, M., Menec, V. H., *Mobility in Older Adults: A Comprehensive Framework* in 'The Gerontologist', Vol. 50, Iss, 4, August 2010, Pages 443-450,

<sup>47</sup> Groessl, E. J., Kaplan, R. M., Rejeski, W. J., Katula, J. A., King, A. C., Frierson, G., et al. *Health-related quality of life in older adults at risk for disability* in 'American Journal of Preventive Medicine' (2007), Vol. 33, pg. 214-218

## Addressing poverty among older people through accompanying measures (in FEAD OP I programmes) or through social inclusion support (FEAD OP II programmes)

Accompanying measures can help older people to break out of poverty. These measures can include activities that encourage the social inclusion of older recipients through, for instance, psychological support. As mentioned above, older people can often suffer from **loneliness**, especially if they are female, do not have partners, are childless, and are in poverty.<sup>48</sup> In order to tackle this issue, some FEAD-funded programmes have attempted to create connections among older people and the general population.

One of these, the **Konginkangas Church congregation in Finland**, aims to create a sense of community for older people and the general population who live in Konginkangas, a sparsely populated village in central Finland. Because of the size and low density of the village, loneliness and isolation are considered significant and dangerous issues. The congregation of Konginkangas Church therefore introduced the concept of a communal morning table that gives older people the opportunity to enjoy a free breakfast (usually porridge) with others who might be in similar life situations. Moreover, the venue, situated in the heart of the parish, is accessible to those whose mobility is restricted.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), approximately 15 % of adults aged 60 and above suffer from a mental disorder.<sup>49</sup> This means that older people in Europe often need **psychological support** alongside **medical support**. A number of Member States have put into place a series of FEAD-funded programmes that provide psychological support as accompanying measures in addition to the food and material distribution measures in order to tackle the mental health challenges faced by some older people.

For instance, in order to support lonely older people who are at risk of poverty due to insufficient pension funds, **Caritas Slovenia** has put into place a number of accompanying measures that include home visits by social workers. Additionally, this initiative organises informative workshops tailored to older people in order to best fit their needs.

Similarly, in **Bulgaria**, a FEAD-funded programme combines food distribution with counselling and information distribution to, among others, older people in poverty. In the designated distribution centres, information on local relevant social services is also available, alongside tailored counselling and support from representatives of local partner organisations.

Finally, the programme **Zadar Archdiocese Caritas in Croatia** uses volunteers to distribute medication and food parcels directly to the homes of older people who may have mobility issues and lack access to pharmacies, or who may live in rural areas where medical services are not as accessible.

Older people, and especially those with migrant backgrounds, may have a **lack of education**, which can place them at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Those with migrant backgrounds often cannot speak the language of the host population proficiently and can have a low level of pension entitlement, which can increase their risk of poverty and social exclusion. In order to combat this, in the **Netherlands**, a series of libraries have been set up in Utrecht, The

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<sup>48</sup> Vozikaki, M., Papadaki, A., Linardakis, M. et al. J Public Health (2018) Vol. 26, Iss. 613.

<sup>49</sup> World Health Organization. *Mental health of older adults* (2017). Available at <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-of-older-adults>

Hague, Rotterdam and Amsterdam in cooperation with the Mira Media Foundation. This initiative, part of a social inclusion programme (FEAD OP II), aims to support vulnerable older people by encouraging them to become more socially active and to take part in a range of activities, ranging from computer courses to coffee morning meetings with other people. In this way, alongside creating a sense of community between the people who take part in this initiative, the project also allows recipients to stay active and gain new life skills.

## Conclusions

Within the context of an ageing population, Europe's social and economic future is greatly reliant on its capacity to break down disadvantage across generations, and in particular to enable older people to lead fulfilling lives with dignity. At present, a significant number of older people are vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion, for the reasons that have been discussed in this paper. Putting into place a full range of measures to alleviate poverty and social exclusion in older age is, therefore, among FEAD's priorities. As has been set out in this paper, much is being done in Member States, with FEAD support, in order to tackle issues related to the physical, material and mental wellbeing of older people in Europe.

Nevertheless, within this context, a number of questions arise:

- How can FEAD optimise its role in contributing to the alleviation of poverty and social exclusion among older people in the EU?
- What types of partnerships and synergies can FEAD create with other initiatives and funding programmes, in order to strengthen sustainability and impact?
- How can ESF+ best capitalise on the lessons learned through FEAD, in terms of the protection of older people from different backgrounds against poverty and social exclusion?

The 16th FEAD Network Meeting provides a valuable opportunity to raise awareness and to further discuss these issues. By relying on the knowledge and experience of the FEAD community on this subject, it is expected that this meeting will make a strong contribution to combatting poverty and social exclusion among older people in the EU.



## Contact us

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**We look forward to hearing from you!**

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