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to the Most Deprived

Achievements of the FEAD Network

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1. Introduction

The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) was launched in 2015 with the aim of eliminating the worst kinds of poverty and material deprivation across the European Union.¹ FEAD supports Member State actions by funding programmes and projects that provide non-financial assistance and social reintegration opportunities to the most deprived. In this way, FEAD seeks to help people take their first steps out of poverty and social exclusion.

The 2019 mid-term evaluation of FEAD concludes that the Fund has successfully fulfilled its objectives.² FEAD has not only supported a large number of **end recipients**, but it has also reached a **variety of vulnerable groups**, in particular families with children at risk of poverty, older people with limited income, homeless people, people with disabilities and people who are often not reached by public services, such as migrants.³ The evaluation also points out that FEAD actors have demonstrated a **high level of flexibility** in adapting their FEAD interventions to better meet the needs of end users.

The success of FEAD in both its reach and its adaptability can in part be attributed to the vast amount of **knowledge sharing** and mutual learning that has taken place around FEAD implementation and delivery. According to the survey undertaken for the FEAD mid-term evaluation, overall, mutual learning is seen as one of the main fields which FEAD contributes to (72% of respondents).⁴ The **FEAD Network** lies at the heart of this. The FEAD Network was created in 2016 and is supported by the 0.35% of the FEAD budget which is allocated to technical assistance under the direct management of the European Commission. As mandated by Article 10 of the FEAD Regulation, it facilitates the exchange of experience, capacity building and networking between key stakeholders related to the implementation of FEAD.

Since its inception, the FEAD Network has become an **open membership community** for people providing assistance to the most deprived in Europe. The FEAD Network – meeting both virtually through online platforms, and physically through Network meetings – is a source of learning for FEAD practitioners across the European Union. FEAD Network members are Managing Authorities, partner organisations and other non-governmental actors working with or representing the interests of the most deprived. Through the Network, these actors can **share challenges and success factors**, and support and inspire each other at all stages of design and delivery of the Fund. The Network strives to **identify, capture and disseminate** the learnings and good practice that emerge from these exchanges, through the publication of thematic dossiers relating to different policy areas, case study catalogues of existing best practices and background papers on the topic of each Network meeting.

Since its creation in 2016, the Network has consistently reached a range of FEAD actors through its online and physical activities. The **FEAD Network database** consists of over 1,000 members from 30 countries. Since 2016, 18 **Network meetings** have taken place in six different countries, bringing together an average number of 93 participants each, consisting of European Commission representatives, EU civil society organisations, national level FEAD Managing Authorities, partner organisations implementing FEAD activities and other relevant national stakeholders working on poverty and social exclusion. **Meeting reports** have captured the key content and learning from each event, whilst the **feedback reports** have given Network members the chance to steer the direction of the FEAD Network with suggestions for future topics to explore. Four **annual surveys** of FEAD stakeholders collected feedback on the FEAD Network and needs and expectations for the future. The FEAD **Facebook group** currently has 545 members and, in 2019, 511 posts from members and community managers were published on the group. A total of four **case study catalogues** have been

¹ 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>.

² SWD(2019) 148 final, Commission staff working document, Mid-term evaluation of the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived.

³ Ibid.

⁴ FEAD mid-term evaluation: Report on the Open Public Consultation, European Commission, 2017, VC/2016/0664.

published, identifying and disseminating 112 examples of FEAD in practice from all EU Member States.⁵ Five **thematic dossiers** have been published on important topics for FEAD delivery, namely social inclusion, supporting diverse groups, the sustainability of FEAD interventions, addressing child poverty, and inclusive FEAD interventions.

This breadth of policy and communication outputs brings together theory and practice: it positions the FEAD in the wider EU policy arena; it places FEAD interventions in a theoretical framework of what works when supporting the most deprived; and crucially, it helps to put policy into use with practical examples of FEAD in action, in an open space of networking and learning.

This Thematic Dossier is dedicated to the **FEAD Network** and the role it has played in mutual learning to support FEAD delivery since its creation in 2016. It will highlight the reach of the Network and the level of engagement with it across the main FEAD actors in the EU. It will examine some of the ways that the Network has contributed to supporting FEAD actors to address the challenges in FEAD delivery, highlighting key lessons learned throughout the process that have a tangible impact for those receiving FEAD support.

2. Building partnerships through the FEAD Network

Effective delivery of the Fund relies on strong partnerships at different levels and between different organisations. Diverse partnerships can increase the impact of the support, by allowing a more efficient use of the available resources, as well as better identifying the needs of target groups. As such, working on partnerships is an area of strategic importance for FEAD actors, and was the most commonly supported activity to improve the quality of FEAD assistance, according to the FEAD Network Survey of 2019.⁶

The FEAD Network has contributed to **partnership building**, by providing a space where FEAD actors can network and interact. The meetings and the online platforms bring together actors from all levels of FEAD design and delivery: the European Commission, Member State authorities, partner organisations delivering support and NGOs representing FEAD target groups. The learning potential of this multi-level participation is multiplied by its transnational dimension: a total of 30 countries were represented in FEAD meetings over the four years of the Network's existence, representing a vast range of FEAD set-up and implementation approaches from both Operational Programme I and Operational Programme II.

BOX 1: FEAD Network on partnerships

The FEAD Network's thematic focus on partnerships has further supported knowledge sharing on this topic. Partnerships arose during multiple Network discussions as an important topic for a range of FEAD actors. The **11th FEAD Network Meeting** was dedicated to exploring the different ways of working with partners in FEAD delivery, as well as how partnerships between FEAD and European Social Fund (ESF) initiatives can increase effectiveness of FEAD assistance.⁷

The background paper⁸ for the meeting brought together EU policy around partnership building, starting from the Partnership Principle⁹ which lies at the heart of all the European Structural and Investment Funds. The meeting built on this in a practical way, showcasing examples of strong partnerships in action and enabling delegates to discuss what works – and what does not work – when partnering for FEAD delivery. The Network was key in drawing some important lessons for FEAD partnerships. Making sure that there is diverse stakeholder involvement emerged as important in maximising the

⁵ The fourth case study catalogue (2019 edition) is due to be published in December 2019.

⁶ FEAD Network Survey 2019.

⁷ The report of the meeting and related documents are available here:

<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1207&newsId=9128&furtherNews=yes>.

⁸ Background paper: Building partnerships to improve FEAD support, available at:

<https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=19704&langId=en>.

⁹ For more information on the Partnership Principle, please see:

https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/what/glossary/p/partnership.

reach of FEAD measures. This can help FEAD actors adopt a ‘whole person approach’ in FEAD support activities, making actions more holistic and sustainable. For example in Italy, the food distribution network is based on a joint planning mechanism that involves a considerable number of actors. FEAD aid is distributed through this complex network of partners, relying on the cooperation of state agencies with several important private and non-profit organisations. Participants also discussed that having clear and open communication and agreed roles and responsibilities, are other important conditions for effective partnerships. This is especially in the case of informal involvement which may not be underpinned by legal/contractual arrangements.

3. Strengthening the community of FEAD actors

The FEAD Network has not only created a community of FEAD actors – it is also empowering this community by building up the capacity of its members. When asked about the results achieved by participating in the FEAD Network, 80% of respondents to the FEAD Network Survey 2019 stated that learning about different methods and approaches to implementing FEAD assistance in other EU countries was the key result.¹⁰

Whilst exchanges and lessons learned benefit all FEAD Network members, they bring a particular added value to partner organisations. Effective FEAD delivery relies heavily on partner organisations having the **resources, tools and know-how** to deliver food assistance and accompanying inclusion measures. The mid-term evaluation of FEAD highlights that partner organisations gain substantially from mutual learning through networking and the dissemination of good practices, as they would be unlikely to have access to such exchange on the European level were it not for the Network.¹¹ The Network allows them to come into closer contact with Managing Authorities – their own, as well as from other countries – giving them access to expertise of institutional actors. This learning is in turn reciprocated as partner organisations help to keep institutional actors in touch with the reality of end users on the ground. The 2016, 2017 and 2018 (and soon 2019) FEAD case study catalogues also act as key inspiration and learning material for partner organisations. They include a wealth of examples of how partner organisations work in a range of institutional settings, with different target groups and with different partners.

BOX 2: FEAD Network supporting partner organisations

Volunteers are integral to the work of partner organisations. Not only do volunteers alleviate some of the financial pressures linked to paying full or part-time staff, they also bring a diverse range of skills and links to the local community.

The **9th FEAD Network meeting** examined the ‘role of volunteers in FEAD delivery’, providing partner organisations with the chance to discuss challenges and solutions related to designing and implementing effective volunteer programmes.¹² Partner organisations tend to face challenges in recruiting volunteers – particularly as FEAD end recipients who are most in need may be located in remote and poor areas, where a lower proportion of the community is likely to volunteer. Successful approaches shared include: recruiting volunteers through ‘open door’ events, cooperating with multipliers such as high schools and companies, or launching media campaigns. Managing and retaining volunteers can also pose problems to partner organisations. For example, matching the needs of a particular project with the availability, expectations and skillsets of volunteers can be a primary issue. Solutions which were mentioned in the meeting include creating dedicated volunteer support roles, involving volunteers in the definition of their roles and responsibilities and ensuring the recognition

¹⁰ FEAD Network Survey 2019.

¹¹ SWD(2019) 148 final, Commission staff working document, Mid-term evaluation of the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived.

¹² The report of the meeting and related documents are available here:

<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1207&newsId=9074&furtherNews=yes>

of the skills of volunteers to help improve their employability and increase their commitment to the project.

The Network meeting also presented some innovative ideas to managing volunteer programmes. For example, the Polish Committee for Social Welfare struggles to recruit volunteers, as most people prefer to volunteer in commercial organisations in the hope it might lead to employment opportunities. As the Committee implements seven ESF programmes, end recipients of those programmes are encouraged to become volunteers for the FEAD programme. This has proved to be successful: over 60% of FEAD volunteers were originally ESF recipients.

4. Bringing EU policies to the ground

The FEAD Network has also been an invaluable link between EU level policymaking and national level practice. It is a unique forum through which EU policymakers can share information on European-level policies and priorities with national actors on the ground – be they institutions or NGOs. This helps disseminate EU initiatives, making them tangible to public authorities on national, regional and local level, and to civil society organisations. In turn, this supports increased visibility of these initiatives to citizens themselves.

The background papers of the FEAD Network meetings situate FEAD challenges in the broader European policy arena, supporting top-down information sharing. Input from the European Commission at each Network meeting on latest developments ensures that this information pathway is always open and up to date. For example, FEAD Network meeting participants were kept informed on the state of play and negotiations on the future ESF+, providing ideas and input through discussions at Network meetings throughout the process. The Network meetings thus also function as a feedback loop, allowing the European Commission to be in closer contact with FEAD delivery on the ground. This supports more effective monitoring and evaluation from the EU level of FEAD and of EU policies addressing poverty and social exclusion in general. The forward-looking, idea-driven nature of discussions throughout FEAD Network meetings contributes to ensuring that EU policies are adapted and developed based on the views of the stakeholders directly working with them or benefiting from them.

BOX 3: FEAD Network on the European Pillar of Social Rights

The **10th FEAD Network Meeting**¹³ on ‘FEAD’s contribution to the delivery of the European Pillar of Social Rights’ was a unique opportunity to bring to life a high level EU policy initiative. The meeting allowed FEAD actors to gain an overview of the EU social policy agenda, to understand the principles of the Pillar, and to situate themselves and their work in this broader picture. Interactive workshops helped FEAD actors to bring the EU initiative into their own reality, and to inspire further action to implement the Pillar, contributing to making EU policymaking more tangible to the lives of EU citizens. The feedback report of the meeting found that around 90% of respondents felt that the meeting helped them better understand the Pillar and how its principles apply to FEAD.

5. Supporting first-hand learning experiences

One of the key strengths of the FEAD Network is that it brings theory and practice closer together. This is supported by the ‘marketplaces’ that take place during Network meetings, where delegates have the chance to hear from and exchange with practitioners implementing a diverse range of FEAD projects. The practical element of FEAD Network learning is further strengthened by project visits, which give FEAD actors the chance to get a holistic and in-depth understanding of a project, interacting directly with practitioners at implementation level. The project visits also allow FEAD actors to hear directly from end users that have been supported by FEAD assistance. The hands-on and interactive nature of

¹³ The report of the meeting and related documents are available here: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1207&newsId=9106&furtherNews=yes>.

project visits allows FEAD stakeholders to examine challenges in FEAD delivery in a practical way, and tailor lessons learnt so that they can apply them to their own project delivery.

Six FEAD Network meetings have included project visits in different Member States including Belgium, Lithuania, Denmark, Sweden, Malta, Germany and France. The visits have always proven to be successful in providing opportunities for learning about operational experiences of FEAD implementation. They give participants valuable opportunities to see other partner organisations in action, ask concrete questions that are useful for their implementation back home, and expand their knowledge of the needs of end recipients and ways to address them.

BOX 4: FEAD Network visits outreach projects in Berlin

To better illustrate the key success factors and challenges related to reaching out to end recipients, participants had the novel opportunity to visit four projects during the **5th FEAD Network meeting** in Berlin.¹⁴ Participants visited projects covering different target groups, namely newly arrived EU citizens and their families, homeless people and people at risk of homelessness.

During the visit to **Amaro Foro**, which helps to provide a link between migrants and local authorities, the project team presented the range of services that FEAD counsellors offer and the key challenges they face in Berlin. Participants learned that it is crucial to make contact proactively in order to build a good relationship with end recipients.

During the visit to **Frostschutzengel plus**, which provides healthcare and social counselling for homeless people and newly arrived EU citizens, participants visited different parts of the service, including the Caritas walk-in health clinic and the multilingual assistance project Mobi.Berlin. Participants learned that reaching out to the target group informally is important to build trust: counsellors visit the institutions providing low-threshold support on a regular basis to build informal relationships where people feel at ease to share their problems and seek help.

EU Fit In works with newly arrived families and children who are EU citizens to increase their participation in early education and social care, offering access to day care and other pre-school or leisure facilities. Participants exchanged with three partner organisations, visiting childcare centres and a family forum, to observe and learn from the interaction between social workers and children and families.

Wegweiser aus der Ausgrenzung (Guiding the way out of exclusion) provides advice to the homeless and those in danger of losing their homes in Berlin, using mobile counselling and low-threshold social assistance. Participants learned about positive impacts of FEAD from a former end recipient who told them about his personal struggles and the help he received through the project.

BOX 5: FEAD Network on accompanying measures

Accompanying measures are a relatively new element of assistance to the most deprived. In that sense, showcasing existing projects and practical examples of how FEAD actors design and apply these measures has been key in increasing the take-up of accompanying measures in FEAD delivery. During the **12th FEAD Network meeting**¹⁵ organised in Malta, the project visits offered an insight into how Malta is offering accompanying measures in practice, with the aim of inspiring and supporting practitioners to implement similar measures in their own countries. The background paper of the meeting included a range of examples for further inspiration.

Participants visited three different **LEAP centres** that offer support to people at risk of poverty. They learned about critical assistance areas allowing the delivery of optimal services to end recipients, such

¹⁴ The report of the meeting and related documents are available here: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1207&newsId=2790&furtherNews=yes>.

¹⁵ The report of the meeting and related documents are available here: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1207&newsId=9241&furtherNews=yes>.

as nutrition and health, household budgeting and parenting advice. At the Qawra LEAP Centre, which acts as one-stop shop for several services, visitors saw the food distribution process, observed the quality of provided food packages and material assistance. They also learned about social loans offered to first-time property earning a low income, including FEAD end recipients.

The project visits provided an opportunity for first-hand learning, which contributed to identifying the following key lessons in delivering accompanying measures that work during the Network meeting discussions:

- **Raising awareness** of the measure through an info point or helpdesk that is accessible to end users can significantly increase their uptake among participants
- **Looking beyond the 5% flat rate** for financing measures as provided by the FEAD regulation can be key in expanding the reach and relevance of measures
- **Exploring synergies with ESF** and creating links with existing initiatives can also expand the reach and relevance of measures
- **Tailoring measures** to the needs of end recipients is crucial.

Over the years, FEAD partners have adapted the delivery of accompanying measures based on feedback received from participants in order to be more inclusive of target groups, improve procurement and delivery methods, strengthen the skills and capacities of partner organisations and reduce administrative burdens.¹⁶

6. Identifying and disseminating good practices

The FEAD Network has provided an opportunity to identify, collect and disseminate of existing FEAD practices. There are several communication and promotional channels currently in place for this. One of the most visible tools promoting FEAD inspiring practices is the FEAD case study catalogue published on a yearly basis. The catalogues showcase 28 promising practices from different Member States, featuring encouraging examples across the EU28. For the purposes of FEAD Network Meetings, additional practices are collected, summarised in the background papers and presented during the events themselves. The presented projects are selected based on a set of criteria, such as relevance, effectiveness and learning points which could be shared with other practitioners. The strong added value of these promotional activities is their scope, as the projects may otherwise not reach a European arena and inspire other national FEAD stakeholders.

BOX 6: FEAD Network collecting good practices on the quality of food packages

The Network has provided FEAD stakeholders with the opportunity to identify good practices on providing better quality food parcels. The **4th FEAD Network Meeting** in Brussels focused on 'Good practices in the selection of food products'.¹⁷ The background paper and the meeting itself showcased examples of the potential challenges in relation to the provision of food assistance. Thanks to these concrete project overviews, FEAD actors were able to identify and better understand success factors when deciding what food to include in FEAD packages.

Consulting expert partners was highlighted as one of the success factors for nutritionally balanced food provision. In Belgium, the list of ingredients purchased using FEAD funding is decided through extensive consultation with a range of partners, including nutritional experts and partner organisations distributing the parcels to end recipients. Accompanying measures should be implemented to ensure the optimal nutritional intake of food ingredients provided, as end recipients may lack nutritional awareness or

¹⁶ SWD(2019) 148 final, Commission staff working document, Mid-term evaluation of the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived.

¹⁷ The report of the meeting and related documents available here: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1207&newsId=2749&furtherNews=yes>.

independent skills to prepare the dishes. In Poland, the Federation of Polish Food Banks and 32 affiliated food banks organised workshops where participants learn to use recipes that include products from FEAD food parcels. The workshops were run by trained food bank employees as well as well-known radio and TV chefs. In Finland, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) prepared a ten-page recipe book for FEAD end recipients.

7. Ideas for strengthening the FEAD Network

The FEAD Network has been a key contributor to mutual learning, network building and disseminating good practices around FEAD delivery. In the future, the Network could maximise its impact by further focusing on aspects that members have deemed particularly useful and that would increase its reach, and thus the reach of the funding for the most deprived as a whole.

Diversifying FEAD actors online and offline: The FEAD Network has established a community with a range of expertise on different aspects of FEAD delivery. However, the Network is only as good as the sum of its parts. In the future, FEAD Network could focus on further diversifying the participants, reaching out directly to organisations beyond the well-established and committed Network participants.

Increasing the number of field visits: Given the success of project visits in bridging the gap between theory and practice in FEAD delivery, field visits could be organised more frequently during Network meetings. This correlates with feedback received from Network members¹⁸ suggesting to organise meetings in different Member States more often.

Focusing more on the practical sides of implementation: The Network has explored many areas of FEAD delivery. Recurring topics of discussion have included: reaching target groups, working with partners, procurement processes, the quality of food packages, synergies with the ESF and the practical challenges around food assistance. Network members have identified 'the heavy logistics involved in the collection, storage and conservation of food' as one of the remaining key challenges around FEAD delivery that would warrant further exploration. The FEAD Network could dedicate Network meetings and policy publications to the operational and logistical elements of FEAD delivery. This operational focus could also be important in the context of using e-vouchers to deliver food assistance. Here, the FEAD Network would be an invaluable channel through which to explore the practicalities of implementing this new mode of food assistance delivery.

Exploring other topics: There are also more topics to be explored through the FEAD Network, as identified by participants in the 2019 FEAD Network Survey. These include the future of FEAD in the context of the ESF+ regulation for the next programming period (post-2020) and the sustainability of projects after FEAD funding ends.

8. Conclusion

This paper has provided an overview of the FEAD Network's role in supporting mutual learning over the past few years. The Network has significantly contributed to sharing learning and best practices around different aspects of FEAD delivery. The policy, events and communication strands of the Network have contributed to this in different ways. Together, these strands of work have ensured a wide dissemination of FEAD practices, built bridges between FEAD actors and the developed a strong body of knowledge around how the Fund is delivered in the most effective way for the people it aims to reach. As such, the FEAD Network has become a key instrument for supporting FEAD actors to adapt, improve and maximise the benefits of FEAD interventions. It has created a committed transnational community, bringing together a range of actors in different roles, supporting both cross-border learning, as well as the breaking down of institutional silos in the national and European context. It is as such an invaluable

¹⁸ FEAD Network Survey 2019.

resource for ensuring that EU funds and policies in this field are relevant to the needs of EU citizens, and can help people to effectively break away from poverty and social exclusion.

