



FEAD Community

First Annual Conference

Online, 22-23 October 2020

Executive Summary

The Conference was the first mutual learning event of a cycle of capacity-building activities planned during the transition period (2020-2021), and aiming at improving the delivery of the [Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived \(FEAD\)](#) at national, regional and local level.

The event brought together local, regional and national stakeholders involved in the implementation of FEAD, including: Managing Authorities, Intermediate Bodies, beneficiaries and partner organisations providing support, independent experts, civil society organisations and representatives from the European Commission.

The Conference focussed on: taking stock of FEAD Network achievements so far; drawing lessons from the health and social crises brought about by the Coronavirus pandemic; identifying the challenges that need to be tackled by the stakeholders involved and possible steps to overcome them - not only during the transition period, but also in response to the COVID-19 related crisis and in view of the next programming period (ESF+).

The Conference's agenda included an update on the legal developments, notably on the REACT-EU and the ESF+ negotiations. It also allowed for a presentation of a European Commission's study on the use of electronic vouchers, followed by a dedicated Q+A session on those.

Before and during the pandemic, the FEAD has proved its added value supporting those in need. The crisis has hit vulnerable groups the hardest, including young people, temporary workers, minorities and the poorest in society. Assistance needs to be reinforced rapidly and effectively to reduce inequalities in society; the socio-economic consequences of the crisis need to be dealt with in a coordinated and efficient manner.

The REACT-EU initiative makes additional funds for the 2014-2020 programming available, to be implemented in 2021 and 2022. This will enable Member States to top up their FEAD allocation to support organisations on the ground that are dealing with people suffering the social and economic consequences of the Coronavirus-related crisis. As of the forthcoming multiannual financial framework (MFF) 2021-2027, the funding of the provision of food and material support, as well as accompanying measures, to the most deprived will be integrated into the new ESF+.

The transition period (2020-2021) is an important moment for the FEAD Community to work together to address common challenges, and integrate the lessons learnt from projects using FEAD into ESF+ while preserving the distinctive character of FEAD interventions, including social inclusion and accompanying measures.

Participants shared their experiences from the ground in plenary discussions, panels and working groups and contributed to shaping the upcoming capacity-building

seminars aimed at exploring promising practices and innovative solutions to common issues.

The key policy messages from the Conference can be summarised as follows:

FEAD is an important tool to respond to the crisis in a long-term perspective

The planning phase

- The adoption of a people-centred approach, with a strong role for FEAD beneficiaries in co-designing the programmes, is key to ensure the real needs of the end recipients are addressed. Flexibility should be ensured to develop new (experimental) solutions.
- Expertise on procurement processes within FEAD can be drawn from the main lessons learnt as a starting point to make procedures as agile as possible and be able to react quickly to the identified needs.
- (E-)vouchers are a very effective tool, especially in the context of the crisis related to the Coronavirus pandemic, which can be adapted to local realities. E-voucher schemes can have a greater impact on social inclusion if embedded into broader support system.
- Synergies between FEAD and other European policies and initiatives (e.g. the Common Agricultural Policy, the Green Deal) and the development of strong links between environmental and social aspects could contribute to a more integrated approach to addressing the needs of the most deprived and to effective responses to future crises and needs.
- While flexibility is important for adapting to different situations and addressing people's needs, FEAD should allow for a response to crises in a long-term perspective.

The implementation phase

- Outreach to the target group should be based on trust and should take place within a narrative that does not create stigmatisation. The use of multilingual teams is important to get in contact with people that do not speak the national language.
- Creating spaces for contacts and exchanges between people experiencing poverty can help them realise their situation and develop solutions to address it. Social media are also a useful instrument to connect and share information with the target group (especially in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic).
- Holistic approaches (i.e. the combination of OP I and OP II) respond to both material and social needs and allow for considerations concerning labour market and social inclusion; hence, the importance of implementing accompanying measures along with food distribution. Moreover, counselling can redirect users towards other types of services they may need. The coordination between different practitioners allows an effective follow-up of the needs.
- A certain degree of flexibility in the implementation is important to face unexpected crises and to adapt programmes and projects funded through FEAD to the needs of the target group.

- Discrimination towards minorities and racism should be addressed also in the implementation phase of projects, and not only through awareness-raising activities.

Monitoring and evaluation

- Ongoing evaluations can contribute to readjusting the services. Independent research assessing the projects can identify areas for improvement of implementation.
- Evaluations should be carried out to assess a contribution of FEAD support provided during the Coronavirus pandemic to take stock of lessons learned during this difficult period and prepare the fund for potential future crises.
- Monitoring and evaluation requirements present several challenges. These relate to the limited capacity of the partner organisations to provide timely and reliable data about FEAD end-recipients as well as to the laborious verification of the data provided, which could undermine trust between the Managing Authorities, Intermediate Bodies and the partner organisations as well as end-recipients. To build trust, partner organisations (including their volunteers) should be informed on why and for which purpose data is collected and checked.
- The requirements in terms of monitoring and evaluation should be kept light, using a limited number of key and meaningful indicators, which remain stable throughout the programming period. Other funds (e.g. ESF) are already used in some countries in a complementary way to provide technical equipment for data collection. In addition, ESF+ could increase the funding for administrative cost (flat rate) for beneficiaries/partner organisations also to cover the costs of monitoring.
- The FEAD Community can play an important role in facilitating exchanges of good practices and provide inspiration on how to improve the efficiency of monitoring systems and to evaluate the impact of the support provided, in particular the results of OP II support.

Stakeholders' engagement

- Focussing on solidarity in the community and reaching out to volunteers living in the neighbourhood can contribute to the development of local solutions. The proximity of the partner organisations is an added value of FEAD that should be maintained in the transition to ESF+.
- 'Experts by experience' create a bridge between public administrations and the end-recipients. Their participation is valuable for providing advice to the public administrations involved (e.g. municipalities, hospitals, etc.) and to the Managing Authorities on the needs of end-recipients, the services and products provided, as well as on outreach and awareness-raising.
- The development of trust and cooperation between the relevant actors at the local level (NGOs, local authorities, etc.) is an important element to guide people in need towards the right type of support. It was observed that the crisis related to the Coronavirus pandemic contributed to closer cooperation between the different stakeholders.

Upcoming Mutual Learning activities

Mutual Learning Activities planned during the transition period (2020-2021)

- Three Thematic Seminars (online or in person), hosted by Member States and dedicated to specific topics;
- A Mutual Learning Conference;
- A Case Study Catalogue for disseminating and showcasing examples of good practice within FEAD across Member States and for encouraging the sharing of information.

Participants expressed interest for the organisation of future mutual learning activities focussing on the following topics:

- Follow-up on the future of FEAD/ESF+ programming;
- How to better achieve the social inclusion of vulnerable groups (e.g. migrants, children, people in a situation of homelessness, elderly, low qualified or long-term unemployed people);
- Food distribution, including good practices to improve food donation systems and collaboration with distributors and suppliers;
- The promotion of empowerment and participation of the most deprived in FEAD design, delivery and evaluation.

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