



FEAD Community

Thematic Seminar on 'New beneficiaries of FEAD-funded measures and new practices implemented during the Covid-19 crisis'

Online, 2-3 February 2021

Executive Summary

The Thematic Seminar was the second 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, hosted by the French Ministry for Solidarity and Health, brought together local, regional and national stakeholders involved in the implementation of the FEAD, including: managing authorities, intermediate bodies, beneficiaries and partner organisations providing support, members of advisory or monitoring committees, independent experts, civil society organisations and representatives from the European Commission.

The Thematic Seminar focused on how FEAD-funded measures were adapted to address the needs of new beneficiaries¹ and how new practices were implemented in response to the Covid-19 crisis.

Following the Covid-19 pandemic, the European Commission launched a Recovery Plan based on cohesion policy. The Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe (REACT-EU)² will provide EUR 47.5 billion additional funding to current European funds, including FEAD, in 2021 – 2022. The changes introduced by REACT-EU for the FEAD include the possibility to use an EU co-financing rate up to 100%, in order to swiftly implement measures to assist the most deprived. Moreover, in alignment with the REACT-EU, 11% of the additional resources for 2021 will be pre-financed.

REACT-EU provides opportunities for development of crisis repair measures and constitutes a bridge to the long-term recovery plan. Therefore, these additional

¹ In the context of this seminar, the term 'beneficiary' was used synonymously with 'end recipient', meaning an individual receiving food aid and other support funded through the Fund for European Aid for the Most Deprived (FEAD). Organisations receiving funding from FEAD to deliver food aid and other supporting measures are termed as partner organisations.

² Regulation (EU) No 2020/2221 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 December 2020 amending Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 as regards additional resources and implementing arrangements to provide assistance for fostering crisis repair in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its social consequences and for preparing a green, digital and resilient recovery of the economy (REACT-EU). Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32020R2221&qid=1611824380100>

resources should be used for projects that foster crisis repair capacities in the context of the coronavirus crisis, as well as investments in operations contributing to preparing a green, digital and resilient recovery of the economy.

During the Seminar, particular attention was paid to the use of the FEAD in France and on measures introduced as a response to the pandemic by the four partner organisations; namely the French Red Cross, Banques alimentaires, Restos du coeur and Secours Populaire Français.

The Seminar's agenda included also an overview of the thematic background paper aimed at understanding the opportunities and tackling the challenges ahead in the second year of the Covid-19 crisis. Participants furthermore had the opportunity to identify and discuss innovative, promising or good practices from the Host Country (France), as well as from other Member States, and also to look ahead towards the new programming period and the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+).

The key messages from the Seminar can be summarised as follows:

Identifying and reaching out to new beneficiaries of FEAD-funded measures

- The Covid-19 crisis hit the most vulnerable in society disproportionately and increased the number of people in or at risk of poverty. In addition to an increase in the number of beneficiaries, new profiles of people in need of the FEAD support have also emerged. These include, *inter alia*, workers who have been furloughed, students who lost summer jobs or scholarships, families relying on free school meals, single parents (often women) and their children, freelancers, workers without an employment contract, people who live in temporary or unconventional accommodation, homeless people, and isolated elderly people.
- Identifying and reaching out to new beneficiaries has been challenging for partner organisations, in particular in relation to vulnerable groups who have not been in contact with support services before, such as undocumented migrants or people who are not eligible for social protection. In some countries outreach activities are carried out on the street to maintain a physical contact with the target group. In Sweden for example, the Gothenburg Rescue Mission, which works with Roma and homeless persons, organised mobile teams in the streets to carry out awareness-raising activities regarding the pandemic.
- Furthermore, as new beneficiaries are typically not aware of the support available through the FEAD-funded measures, communicating about available support measures is crucial. Local cooperation with municipalities and other local stakeholders is essential to inform to new beneficiaries about existing services (e.g. collaboration with universities to distribute information in campuses).

Identifying and addressing the needs of new beneficiaries of FEAD-funded measures

- Additional needs of new and already existing beneficiaries have emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic. While there has been a considerable increase in the demand for food and other basic material assistance, including hygiene products, lockdown and confinement measures also meant that certain beneficiaries could not travel to food banks and delivery points to collect aid packages. This was the case in particular for elderly people and those with health conditions. Social isolation, the rise of cases of domestic violence and the disruption of counselling and social services also led to increased need for psychological support.

- Measures to provide support to new beneficiaries need to consider their safety (linked to the risk of infection related to Covid-19) as well as their dignity. The introduction of electronic vouchers to deliver food aid and basic material assistance reduces the need for human contact and do not require beneficiaries to queue at food banks, and therefore minimises stigmatisation. On the other hand the lack of contact can be a barrier for reaching out to people in order to address their needs.
- Conducting qualitative studies to understand the real needs of new beneficiaries, such as the 'Study on the impact of Covid-19', carried out by Restos du Coeur, can contribute to the design of appropriate services. To address the needs of new beneficiaries, local support and cooperation with local authorities are crucial.

Challenges faced by managing authorities and partner organisations during the Covid-19 pandemic

- The FEAD managing authorities and partner organisations have encountered various difficulties related to the distribution processes for food and basic material assistance, operating at reduced capacity because of the social distancing measures, insufficient food quantities due to the increase in the number of beneficiaries, working with fewer volunteers and insufficient funding.
- It is difficult to carry out accompanying measures for specific groups. Interaction is reduced and counselling services are being provided online or via telephone. Certain target groups, such as homeless people, are difficult to reach because they do not have access to internet and electronic devices and often lack digital skills.

New practices related to FEAD, inspired by solutions in response to the Covid-19 pandemic

- In response to the Covid-19 crisis, the FEAD managing authorities and partner organisations had to react quickly to ensure that the most deprived continue to receive assistance. The FEAD regulation was revised to allow for an effective response to the crisis, for example, through early eligibility of actions, flexibility of operational programmes' amendments and broadening the scope of eligibility.
- Managing authorities and partner organisations promptly responded to the crisis and found innovative ways to provide assistance and adapt their resources and methodologies to the current situation. For instance, partner organisations had to amend their distribution processes (mostly through home deliveries or smaller collection points) to comply with social distancing regulations. They also found new approaches to deliver accompanying measures, by combining different ways of communication (via telephone or online). Some of these solutions could be used also outside of the context of the pandemic, for instance to deliver food to beneficiaries with mobility issues.
- Digital platforms play an important role in facilitating the distribution of food aid and the provision of support. For instance the [Ruoka-Apu.fi](https://www.ruoka-apu.fi) website (Finland), which collects information from all partner organisations and other stakeholders, is a useful 'one-stop shop' for people to find up-to-date information about food aid operations, and available free meals. In Greece, the online platform [Menoumedytikiellada.gr](https://www.menoumedytikiellada.gr) provides a help line to beneficiaries of the FEAD which directs them to local public services and NGOs that provide them with the support they need. The use of these digital tools can play an important role also after the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Particular attention was also devoted to the recruitment of new volunteers to help supporting the increased number of beneficiaries. New approaches for the onboarding and training volunteers, including online courses and support through digital material,

as experienced by the French Red Cross, have contributed to strengthen the engagement of volunteers, also in absence of face-to-face meetings.