



## **FEAD Community – Annual Conference**

Brussels (Belgium) and Online, 19 October 2021

### **Executive Summary**

The FEAD Community Annual Conference was the final mutual learning event of a cycle of capacity-building activities 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, both in Brussels and online, local, regional and national stakeholders involved in the implementation of the FEAD, including managing authorities, intermediate bodies, beneficiaries providing support and their partners (e.g. municipalities), civil society organisations and representatives from the European Commission.

The Conference focused on the role of the FEAD Community in the last two years and on the activities carried out so far, looking back at the lessons learnt from COVID-19 related crisis, as well as the long-term impact of the pandemic. The agenda included also a session taking stock of the provision of food and material assistance within the FEAD, in the programming period 2014-2020. Finally, participants had the chance to explore the provision of accompanying measures under ESF+ to support the social inclusion of the most deprived and to discuss how to use them in synergy with food and basic material assistance to tackle homelessness and support the social inclusion of other vulnerable groups.

Before and during the pandemic, the FEAD has proved its added value supporting those in need. In the programming period 2014-2020, the support of FEAD has brought an important contribution to the fight against poverty and social exclusion. So far FEAD, with a budget of 3.8 billion for the programming has provided support to 13 million people. The social and economic crisis related to the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified and exacerbated pre-existing social inequalities, hitting vulnerable groups the hardest. A rising number of people have fallen into food poverty and are increasingly relying on food banks and social services to meet their basic need.

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the European Commission adopted two Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII and CRII +), which provided more flexibility in use of European Structural and Investment funds, as well as FEAD The Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe (REACT-EU)<sup>1</sup>, launched in December 2020 under the new instrument Next Generation EU, provided extra additional resources to cohesion policy programmes, to be used in 2021 and 2022. This has enabled Member States to top up their FEAD allocation to support organisations that are dealing with people suffering the economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 crisis. According to the information currently available, about 1% of the resources of REACT-EU has been allocated to FEAD.

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<sup>1</sup> 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>

The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan<sup>2</sup>, launched in March 2021, provides an EU-wide framework to tackle poverty, setting up the target to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by at least 15 million by 2030.

In the programming period 2021-2027, FEAD is integrated in ESF+, ensuring the continuity of the provision of support to the most deprived, to which Member States are required to devote at least 3% of their national ESF+ allocated funds. Moreover, in June 2021 the European Child Guarantee<sup>3</sup> was adopted. This focused on preventing and fighting social exclusion by guaranteeing the access of children in need to a set of key services, including early childhood education and care, education, healthcare, nutrition, and housing. In line with the Child Guarantee, Member States with a rate of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion above the Union average, will need to earmark at least 5% of their national ESF+ allocation to fight child poverty and social exclusion.

The transition period (2020-2021) from FEAD to ESF+ has been an important moment for the FEAD Community to work together to address common challenges, and integrate the lessons learnt from FEAD projects into the preparation for the next programming period.

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

### ***Lessons learnt from the COVID-19 crisis and way forward***

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, partner organisations adapted their activities and developed new ways to support people in need (e.g. home delivery of food, vouchers, digital tools). Learning from these experiences can contribute to development of new services, such as home distribution for people living in remote areas or digital platforms, that can also be provided and maintained after the COVID-19 crisis. In many cases, partner organisations and managing authorities have also increased their flexibility and strengthened their preparedness to promptly respond to future possible crises.
- Digital tools have proven to be useful during the COVID-19 pandemic and their use can offer valuable opportunities also after the crisis. However, participants acknowledged the importance of maintaining also face-to-face contacts with end recipients.
- The 'new end recipients' (e.g. people that find themselves in a precarious situation because of the pandemic), that received FEAD support during the COVID-19 pandemic, have different profiles and specific needs. Partner organisations are learning how to support them in the most effective way, including by providing adequate information on how to access the support available and by paying particular attention to their fear of stigmatisation.
- In many cases the COVID-19 crisis created a momentum for a closer cooperation between different stakeholders at both national and local levels. These partnerships, for instance between healthcare services, non-governmental organisations, food banks and local authorities, should be strengthened and encouraged to continue in the future.

### ***The use of FEAD in synergy with other funds to tackle homelessness***

- The combination of FEAD with ESF and other funding can contribute to the development of a comprehensive approach to support homeless people and address their needs through a holistic approach. The ESF+ provides opportunities for better synergies and coherence among funds with a stronger focus on social inclusion. Innovative practices, such as Italy's Trieste Housing

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<sup>2</sup> European Commission, The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, 2021. Available at: <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/empl/european-pillar-of-social-rights/downloads/KE0921.008ENN.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> European Commission, Proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee, Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1428&furtherNews=yes&newsId=10024>

First initiative, combining ESF and FEAD resources to support homeless people, can serve as inspiration for future project in the ESF+.

- Maintaining and further developing monitoring practices for the measures in place to tackle homelessness is crucial to provide a realistic overview of the number of people who have received support and of the impact of FEAD on the target group. Collecting comprehensive (qualitative and quantitative) information about the implementation of the programme is also an important element for the development of an evidence-based approach.

#### ***Combining food and basic material assistance and accompanying measures under ESF+***

- The provision of food and material assistance can be used as a bridge between immediate emergency interventions and long-term social integration measures. Partner organisations can reach out to people in need through material assistance and then facilitate their access to other social integration services. Providing different types of support in one place (i.e. one-stop-shop) can encourage end recipients to use a wider range of services.
- In the programming of ESF+, particular attention needs to be paid to the inclusion of a broad range of end recipients, including most vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups and people with intersecting vulnerabilities (e.g. homeless migrants).
- Adopting needs-based and person-centred approaches for designing accompanying measures within the ESF+ programmes is key to improving the effectiveness of the measures.

#### ***The involvement of all stakeholders across all programming levels and cooperation among FEAD actors***

- The involvement of all stakeholders, including partner organisations, local actors and end recipients is crucial across all programming levels of FEAD-funded measures in order to have a better overview of the needs of the target group and address those needs more effectively. In particular, partner organisations and end recipients should have an active role in the design, implementation, and final evaluation phases of FEAD programmes.
- Concretely, managing authorities can keep partner organisations actively engaged by establishing an engagement memorandum, holding frequent public consultations and organising meetings at different levels (e.g. local, national).
- The perspective of the end users (i.e. the so-called 'experts by experience') is extremely important as it provides a first-hand experience and helps to adapt the support to the specific needs of the target group and provide advice on the effectiveness of the measures in place.
- It is crucial to develop a solid cooperation between the main stakeholders involved in delivering FEAD at all levels to design projects that can successfully address the needs of the target group. At the local level the collaboration with small local organisations, which have a deep knowledge of the local context and are closer to the needs of the end recipients, is considered a key success factor.