



FEAD Community Annual Conference

Brussels (Belgium) and Online, 19 October 2021

Synthesis report

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**FEAD Community
First Annual Conference
Brussels (Belgium) and Online, 19 October 2021**

*Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
FEAD Community Annual Conference
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1 Introduction

The FEAD Community Annual Conference, which took place in Brussels and online on 19 October 2021, enabled mutual learning exchanges between local, regional and national stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (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 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 the COVID-19 related crisis, as well as its long-term impact.

This report reflects the discussions held during the plenary session and the parallel workshops, which focused on the synergy between accompanying measures and food and 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 EUR 3.8 billion, 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 the use of European Structural and Investment funds. The Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe (REACT-EU)¹, launched in December 2020 under the new instrument 'Next Generation EU', provided 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 have been allocated to FEAD.

1.1. The main activities of the FEAD Community in the transition period 2020-2021

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

The activities carried out by the FEAD Community included:

- The [FEAD Community First Annual Conference \(22-23 October 2020\)](#), which explored the use of FEAD during the COVID-19 pandemic and to address the impact of the crisis in a long-term perspective.

¹ 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>

- A Thematic Seminar (2-3 February 2021), hosted by France, on new beneficiaries (end-recipients) of FEAD-funded measures and new practices implemented during the COVID-19 crisis.
- A Thematic Seminar (29-30 April 2021), hosted by Spain, on integrated approaches to support beneficiaries towards their social inclusion, and creating synergies between FEAD and other funds.
- A Thematic Seminar (6-7 September 2021), hosted by Estonia, on monitoring and outreach of FEAD-funded measures for the most deprived people.
- A Peer Exchange (31 March 2021) on social inclusion during and after the pandemic.
- A Peer Exchange (26 May 2021) on the implementation of vouchers/e-voucher schemes.
- A Peer Exchange (5 October 2021) on designing and implementing accompanying measures and social inclusion programmes by actively involving stakeholders and end recipients (experts by experience).
- A FEAD case studies catalogue on the adaptation of FEAD-funded measures during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- A case studies catalogue, including more than twenty case studies on the use of the FEAD from Germany, Denmark, Greece, France, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Slovenia, Slovakia, Sweden and Finland.

2 Lessons learnt from the COVID-19 related crisis and the way forward

This section reflects the discussions on the lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic and on the future adjustments required. Participants agreed that learning from each other and from the measures implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic is crucial to best prepare for the new ESF+ programming period.

2.1 The use of REACT-EU for FEAD

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the European Commission adopted two Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII and CRII +), which increased the flexibility for using European Structural and Investment funds, as well as FEAD. Moreover, the Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe (REACT-EU)², launched in December 2020 under the new instrument 'Next Generation EU', provided additional resources to cohesion policy programmes, to be used in 2021 and 2022.

This initiative aimed at providing additional support to the most vulnerable groups that have been hit the hardest by the social and economic crisis related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

For instance in Estonia, approximately EUR 4.5 million were added from REACT-EU to the allocation for the FEAD. This allowed a monthly distribution of food aid, rather than a bi-annual one.

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>

In the last year, some Member States experienced a double crisis. This was the case in Croatia, which was hit by a powerful earthquake, and in Belgium and Germany, which were devastated by deadly floods. These countries relied on REACT-EU to provide additional support to the most deprived and to mitigate the impacts of the emergency situations.

Facing a double crisis in Croatia, Germany and Belgium

Croatia, Belgium and Germany faced a double crisis in 2021: while the COVID-19 was ongoing, they were hit by natural disasters, namely an earthquake (Croatia) and floods (Belgium and Germany).

In Croatia the most deprived were particularly hit by the disaster, in particular children. An additional amount of EUR 10 million was used under REACT-EU to provide humanitarian aid to those who were hit by COVID-19 and by the earthquake. Partner organisations played an important role in the identification of target groups, contributing to reaching out to the most deprived. Moreover, there are currently discussion to change the time span of the planning of resources to one year instead of three, in order to better respond to unexpected needs and emergencies.

In Belgium, national funding was used to quickly respond to the emergency. With REACT-EU, the budget of FEAD received additional EUR 33 million that are being used to support the higher number of people in need, but also to purchase hygiene and medical products, products for children and basic material assistance.

2.2 Lessons learnt and future adjustments

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many partner organisations adapted their projects to align the activities with the restrictions in place (e.g. no group activities, no indoor gatherings) developing new services, such as home delivery, and increasing the use of digital tools. In some cases (e.g. the 'at home' programme of the Red Cross in France) these new services will be maintained after the crisis, as they contribute to reaching out to a wider range of people in need.

The FEAD-funded project 'Better Health II' provided an example of a project being adapted to cover new needs that emerged during the pandemic. For instance the project started to disseminate health-related information about the virus (e.g. on symptoms, prevention) and about the vaccination.

The 'new end recipients' who started to receive FEAD-funded support during the COVID-19 pandemic, have profiles that differ from the more 'habitual' FEAD end recipients. They are often better skilled and have higher levels of education, as they lost their jobs/income because of the pandemic (e.g. people working in the HORECA or cultural sectors). Partner organisations are learning how to better assess the needs of these new end-recipients and 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 the future ESF+ could be used to train and upskill social workers and staff from partner organisations to better support these new groups.

The French Managing Authority carried out a survey on the effect of COVID-19 on FEAD end recipients.

Survey on the effects of COVID-19 on FEAD end recipients in France

As part of the final evaluation of FEAD, France has carried out a sociological survey on the effects of COVID-19 crisis on FEAD end recipients, in partnership with the *Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques* (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies, INSEE). The objective was to assess the correlation between the crisis and the first use of food aid.

The provisional results show that 26% of the overall respondents used food aid because of the crisis; 50% of students surveyed used food aid because of the crisis and among the new end recipients, 50% of respondents used food aid because of the crisis.

In order to support the new' end recipients in recovering their independence after the crisis in the long-term, the implementation of measures related to social inclusion and labour market integration can play an important role. In line with this approach, some countries allocated most of the resources from REACT-EU to active labour market policies (e.g. Sweden).

Besides the economic impacts, the crisis also led to a degradation of mental and physical health (e.g. lack of check-ups for breast cancer); it is important to orient the end recipients to the services they may need. ESF+ could be used to fund and provide psycho-social support to improve the chances of inclusion in the labour market and social inclusion. Moreover, working with specialists can help overcome traumas inflicted by COVID-19.

In many cases, the COVID-19 crisis created a momentum for a closer cooperation between different stakeholders at both national and local levels, in order to find common solutions during the emergency. 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 need to limit the bureaucracy and to simplify administrative procedures, in order to promptly address the growing needs on the ground and to adapt the intervention, also emerged as a lesson learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic. In Croatia, to address the sudden needs linked to the natural disaster and the pandemic, the target group of end recipients was broadened. This resulted in providing resources to more vulnerable people than initially expected. A key element for efficient support was the selection of the target groups in accordance with the main strategy of the Croatian Managing Authority on tackling food poverty and reaching the most deprived. In general participants observed that a higher degree of flexibility in the implementation of the measures can enable a more targeted and adequate support.

During the COVID-19 pandemic there was an important increase in the use of digital tools. Digitalisation of data can improve data mining, monitoring and evaluation. For instance, in Hungary, administrative data on the distribution and handling of food packages used to be entirely on paper and now is in digital format. Through the digitisation process the Hungarian Managing Authority can now collect more data and better use it to evaluate the impact of the support provided to beneficiaries. In the ESF+ programmes, digital tools can offer valuable opportunities also after the crisis and broadly contribute to the EU's objective of a 'green, digital and resilient recovery of the economy'. For instance digitalisation can contribute to the development of digital applications to facilitate the distribution of food aid and services, as well as contribute to the exchange and dissemination of information. Despite the positive impact of digitalisation, participants also acknowledged the centrality of face-to-face contacts with end recipients.

2.3 The role of stakeholders

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 them more effectively. In particular, partner organisations and end recipients should have an active role in the design, implementation and final evaluation phases of FEAD-funded interventions.

It is important that managing authorities keep partner organisations engaged and informed about the progress of the programmes, for instance by establishing memoranda of engagement and organising regular meetings and working groups. In Estonia, stakeholders sign a central engagement protocol with the managing authority, defining their roles and involvement in the programme. Another key aspect to develop is a culture of sharing data among different stakeholders (e.g. local authorities, partner organisations etc.) on meaningful indicators and on the end recipients, to gain a better knowledge of the needs of the target group.

Involving end recipients in the design of a programme remains a challenge, however there are several successful examples of how this can be done. In general, it is important to create a 'safe space' where end recipients can express their thoughts and indicate their needs. In Portugal, some partner organisations involve end recipients in the design of accompanying measures through a 'circular approach': this entails that partner organisations collect data from the ground and share them with other stakeholders, including end recipients. On the basis of the data collected, stakeholders use their knowledge on the ground to share suggestions on which measures could be most effective for reaching end recipients. This approach is followed throughout the whole period of implementation of the programme. In Croatia, the design of the measures takes into account the end recipients' feedback. In Belgium, the experts by experience (*experts du vécu en matière de pauvreté et d'exclusion sociale*) are hired and involved in the activities of the managing authorities and provide advice on the needs of end recipients, the services and products provided, as well as on outreach and awareness-raising activities.

In some cases, end recipients are also trained as volunteers, particularly in areas (e.g. rural areas) where there are not enough helpers. This practice contributes to empower end recipients and foster support among peers.

3 The food and material assistance in FEAD and the role of accompanying measures

This section summarises the discussion on food aid and material assistance in FEAD and the synergies between FEAD and other funds to tackle homelessness, including two examples of promising practices: Housing First Trieste and Kompasset Kirkens Korshær.

3.1 Food aid and material assistance in FEAD (2014-2020)

In the FEAD programming period 2014-2020, 23 Member States chose an operational programme focusing on food and/or basic material assistance, to be provided to the most disadvantaged groups through meals, food packages or basic consumer items such as school supplies and toiletries. More than 1.6 million tonnes of food were distributed between 2014 and 2018 through FEAD, of which 162,466 tonnes were redistributed by the European Food Bank Association (FEBA) members.

FEBA conducted a survey of its members to analyse food distribution between 2014 and 2020. The survey showed that 58% of the respondents undertook accompanying measures, such as workshops on dietary needs and budgeting, as well as guidance regarding psychological and physical wellbeing. FEBA members evaluated positively the assistance provided through FEAD (67% indicated that the administration, transport, and storage were good and 25% that the accompanying measures were excellent. The quality of food was reported to be good (81.82%), as well as the variety (45.45%) and the nutritional value (81.82%).

The main challenges related to food distribution were linked with storage and logistical issues, insufficient economic resources for administrative, transport, and storage activities.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, FEBA members experienced an important increase in the number of people requesting food aid, combined with the disruption in the logistics and transport processes, unexpected costs and drop in financial resources, and a lack of volunteers. To address these logistical obstacles, new and innovative operating models were implemented for warehouse management, with a higher level of digitalisation.

Food aid provision: the Spanish example

Before FEAD, the *Fondo Español de Garantía Agraria* (Spanish Agrarian Guarantee Fund, FEAGA) had started food aid programmes between 1987 and 2013, receiving funds linked to the EU Common Agricultural Policy. At this time, Spain's food aid programmes were implemented by two types of partner organisations at local level: the *organizaciones asociadas de distribución* (associated organisations for food distribution, OADs) and the *organizaciones asociadas de reparto* (associated organisations for distribution to beneficiaries, OARs). The beneficiaries were individuals, families or households living in economic poverty identified by the public social services, as well as people experiencing homelessness and other socially vulnerable people. Information on social services, prepared by the Ministry of Social Rights, were offered by OARs as accompanying measures.

In 2014, with the launch of FEAD, food aid provision in Spain has been reorganised. Spain's Managing Authority (the Administrative Unit of the European Social Fund, UAFSE) oversees the general implementation of the FEAD programme. There are two intermediate bodies: the FEAGA, which manages the tendering, contracting, and supply of food and appoints the OADs; and the Ministry of Health, Consumer Affairs and Social Welfare, who manages the accompanying measures. Partner organisations at national level, namely the Spanish Red Cross and the Spanish Federation of Food Banks (FESBAL), provide food aid through their *centros de almacenamiento y distribución* (storage and distribution centres, CADs), as well as accompanying measures. These CADs, who are members of FESBAL, then deliver food aid to the OAR and accompanying measures.

Throughout the 2014-2020 period, the national programme in Spain was co-financed by FEAD (85%) and the Spanish state (15%). By the end of August 2021, the financial execution of the programme was reported to be 89% complete. According to 2020 data, about 159 million kg of food aid were distributed to approximately 1.6 million end recipients in Spain. FEAD-funded food constituted 30% of the total food distributed by the food banks between 2014-2020. During this period, food banks complemented FEAD aid with food from other sources and types to provide a complete diet to end recipients in quantity and quality.

3.2 Synergies between FEAD and other funds to tackle homelessness

The needs of people experiencing homelessness are complex and call for multi-faceted and holistic support. Combining FEAD with other funding sources, including ESF, can contribute to the development of a comprehensive approach, providing different types of services in parallel.

In the programming period 2021-2027, FEAD has become part of the ESF+, with the aim of improving the synergies and coherence between the different funding instruments.

3.3.1 Housing First Trieste (Italy)

Housing First is an innovative approach to tackle homelessness, where recipients move directly from the streets or shelters into housing, skipping intermediary steps such as

emergency shelter placement or transitional accommodations. Housing First represents an alternative to emergency shelters and to the more traditionally-used staircase approach (i.e. gradual levels of housing and independence for beneficiaries).

The Housing First approach has been implemented since 2014 within Trieste's Municipal Social Service. A selection of people with high support needs, identified by the social services, were provided a permanent accommodation without the need to meet any pre-conditions for eligibility other than being homeless or in unsafe or inadequate housing. The project, funded by FEAD and ESF, defends the right to adequate housing and seeks the empowerment and self-determination of end recipients. A multidisciplinary team (i.e. social workers, psychologists, educators) offers comprehensive support to end recipients in multiple areas through an holistic approach.

The initiative provided 10 apartments to a total of 30 residents in the 2014-2020 period. In parallel, other services were provided to the users. For instance through a cooperation with *Emporio della Solidarietà* (Emporium of Solidarity), a FEAD partner organisation in Italy, material aid was provided to the end beneficiaries in the form of furniture for the houses. Housing First Trieste also provided training and job-placement support to end recipients, as well as budgeting and financial mentoring. In hindsight, the project has been successful, with 16 end recipients having achieved a good level of autonomy. The team is currently working with the Trieste Municipality to make the project a continuously implemented measure.

The initiative represented a paradigm shift in providing housing to the target group, accomplished through training the project team and municipality staff. Cooperation was key at all levels – at the European level with the European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless (FEANTSA), at national level with the Italian member of FEANTSA; at regional level and local level cooperation took place in co-designing the project.

3.3.2 Kompasset Kirkens Korshær (Denmark)

Kompasset was founded in 2014 as a counselling organisation for homeless migrants providing information on how to access the labour market, rights, welfare, social services, and health. The organisation targets unregistered migrants in Denmark living on the streets of Copenhagen, in extreme poverty, often also with psychological and physical issues, and without access to social services.

Throughout the years, Kompasset started to offer additional services, developing a holistic and strategic response to the needs of homeless migrants. At present, the organisation includes a variety of different services, such as day and night shelters, counselling, outreach on the streets, an outdoor café to build trust and relationships with end recipients, an advocacy and rights group to facilitate beneficiaries' access to rights, statistics and documentation for end recipients, and a migrant network to cooperate with local authorities and other organisations. The team conducts an average of 15 to 25 counselling sessions per day and has 76 sleeping places shared between two night shelters. Additionally, they establish 30 to 60 new contacts every month.

Kompasset combines different sources of funding. As of 2021, FEAD represents 43% of the total funding; it provides the basis for many of the services offered and contributes to the financial stability of the activities. Other resources obtained from national funding represent 47% of the total funding and they are used across all services for facilities, logistics and unexpected expenses. Kompasset also receives other funds (10%) which supplement the aforementioned two funds to enable the organisation to adapt to critical and changing needs.

In the future, Kompasset seeks to keep developing new services to better support homeless migrants. In particular, future plans include mental health support, volunteer training, as well as a mentorship programme to improve social inclusion.

4 Accompanying measures under ESF+: supporting the social inclusion of the most deprived

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, with the ultimate goal of reaching independence. In this regards, it is important to better understand why people stop using the support provided and to analyse in depth the success factors and the elements that leave room for improvement.

It is central to focus on the aspects of skills development and education, which are critical to access the labour market, for example through workshops providing advice and support. In some countries (e.g. the 'project of life about education and employment' in Portugal), there is a certification of soft/basic skills and other experiences, which can be part of the secondary education scheme and financed through ESF.

As in ESF+ accompanying measures are compulsory, it is fundamental to keep in mind the specificities of each case and to provide services following an individualised, needs-based and person-centred approach, thus contributing to the efficiency of the support. Taking into account the view of the end users, who are 'experts' concerning their own situation, can contribute to putting in place measures that are in line with their needs.

Improving local networks and increasing cooperation between organisations is a starting point to provide a multi-faceted and multi-disciplinary approach that address different needs. For example, a pilot service in Estonia brings together different professionals (e.g. psychologists, doctors, social workers public employment service case managers etc.) to work together on specific cases.

In the programming of ESF+, particular attention needs to be paid to the inclusion of a broad range of end recipients, thus the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups, including children, long-term unemployed, elderly people and people with intersecting vulnerabilities (e.g. homeless migrants), especially if they are not already covered by national welfare state measures (e.g. third-country migrants). It is important to focus on outreach activities and providing concrete information and counselling about the services available (e.g. school lunches). Providing different types of support in one place (i.e. one-stop-shop) can make it easier for the users the access to a wide range of services.

With a focus on child poverty, ESF+ could also be used to fund school excursions and social activities for all pupils, including those who cannot afford to pay for them.

While it is possible to measure the services provided and the number of users, it is difficult to evaluate the results of the support measures in place. Maintaining and further developing monitoring practices for the measures in place to tackle poverty is crucial to provide a realistic overview of the number of people who have received support and of the impact of the measures on the target group. Collecting comprehensive (qualitative and quantitative) information about the implementation of the programmes is also an important element for the development of an evidence-based approach.

It is also important to keep in mind that ESF+ can play an important role in establishing strong transnational networks of cooperation, to enhance upscaling and support the exchange of knowledge and practices.

5 Conclusions

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 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 needs.

Both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, in the programming period 2014-2020, the support of FEAD has brought an important contribution to the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The accompanying measures and the social inclusion initiatives implemented alongside the delivery of food and material assistance played a crucial role in fighting poverty. Moreover, the use of FEAD in synergy with other funds to tackle homelessness proved to be useful for the development of comprehensive approaches to address the complex needs of people experiencing homelessness.

The lessons learnt from the pandemic, such as the new services developed (e.g. home delivery), the increased digitalisation of the procedures, and the closer cooperation at national and local level between different stakeholders (e.g. partner organisations, municipalities, health services) can provide important inputs to shape the future measures to assist those in need.

Looking at the next programming period, particular attention needs to be paid to the inclusion of a broad range of end recipients, including the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups and people with intersecting vulnerabilities (e.g. homeless migrants). Moreover, within the ESF+ programmes, adopting a needs-based and person-centred approach is key to improve the effectiveness of the measures implemented.

The involvement of all stakeholders, including partner organisations, local actors and end recipients is crucial across all programming levels 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 the ESF+ programming.

