



# **FEAD Community First Annual Conference**

22-23 October 2020

Full Report



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**Table of Contents**

|   |   |    |
|---|---|----|
| 1 | Introduction .....  | 1  |
| 2 | EU Funding to support the most deprived .....                           | 2  |
| 3 | Challenges and solutions for the current FEAD and the future ESF+ ..... | 4  |
| 4 | Upcoming mutual learning events .....                                   | 10 |
| 5 | Conclusions.....  | 11 |

## 1 Introduction

The FEAD Community organised the first mutual learning event of a cycle of capacity-building activities planned during the transition period (2020-2021) to the next programming period 2021-2027 when FEAD will be integrated into the ESF+. The Conference 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.

During the Coronavirus pandemic, reinforced efforts were made by all Member States to address its socio-economic consequences in a swift, coordinated and efficient manner. This commitment of Member States has also been reinforced by the plan introduced by the European Commission to inject more funds into, amongst other, the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD). In this context, in April 2020, an ambitious proposal for a [Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative](#) (CRII and CRII Plus), which included amendments to the FEAD Regulation, was introduced. In May 2020, [further amendments to the Common Provisions Regulation](#) (REACT-EU) were proposed by the European Commission to increase the resources for FEAD for 2021 and 2022.

This report reflects on the discussions held during the plenary session and the parallel workshops, which focused on identifying the challenges and lessons learned from the health and social crises provoked by the Coronavirus pandemic by sharing information about different and inspiring practices around Europe.

### 1.1 FEAD Community: a space to share good practice and encourage new ideas

The FEAD has evolved throughout the years giving many opportunities to share insights and experience from the ground as it is explicitly envisaged in Article 10 of the FEAD Regulation; **exchange of good practices, capacity building and networking amongst managing authorities, implementing partner organisations and other stakeholders at European, national, regional and local level**. The FEAD Community continues the valuable work previously conducted by the FEAD Network in facilitating regular exchanges between all the actors involved and will reinforce the preparation and sharing of documents and online resources, including case studies and background papers. Participants of the conference echoed the importance of those exchanges, valuing the conference as a great opportunity to obtain deeper knowledge about other countries' practices, in particular in a *force majeure* situation like the current social and health crisis brought about by the Coronavirus pandemic.

The conference was the first mutual learning event for the FEAD Community after the Coronavirus outbreak. In this context, it served as a safe space where all the actors involved could **share the challenges faced at the beginning of the crisis and take stock of the experiences and lessons learnt so far to feed into the planning for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027**. Reinforcement of food and material assistance interventions was primarily needed during the Coronavirus pandemic. Participants reiterated the **added value of FEAD in supporting the most deprived** and shared their concerns about preserving the specific identity of FEAD in the next programming period: they stressed **the importance of preserving the distinctive FEAD interventions, including social and accompanying measures to the most deprived**, especially in the longer term.

**Partnership and cooperation - in particular at local level** - as well as **stakeholder engagement** were highlighted by the participants as key factors to maintain the success of the measures implemented through FEAD. The main aim of the FEAD Community is to **sustain the connections created amongst stakeholders, including civil society organisations involved in the delivery on the ground**, and

to further facilitate the exchange of knowledge through the mutual learning activities presented in Section 4 of this report.

## **2 EU Funding to support the most deprived**

The European Commission's priority is to safeguard the well-being of European citizens, and more specifically of the most deprived ones, in line with the relevant principles of the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#). In addition, all the available means are being used to address the socio-economic consequences of the Coronavirus related crisis in a swift, coordinated and efficient manner.

The conference was an opportunity to update the Community members on the latest [amendments to the FEAD](#) as part of the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative Plus (CRII+) package.

As a response to the crisis, three stages of action have been envisaged at the European level with the aim of gradually returning to a 'new normality':

- **Crisis response (short term):** aiming to provide immediate, short-term support to strengthen crisis response capacity. In April, the Commission proposed two legislative packages, the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII) followed by the CRII+, which were adopted in record time thanks to the thorough work of the European Parliament and the Council. The introduction of these amendments brought in more flexibility for Member States to top up the FEAD funds through their national allocation of REACT-EU. Increased flexibility has proved to react timely and crucially, particularly in such a critical moment.

The CRII+ initiative was particularly important for FEAD as it introduced more flexibility in the provision of the funds and allowed Member States to adopt and endorse improved rules in record time for those working on the ground. It also helped to adopt a more pragmatic point of view in terms of planning and programming within FEAD but also for ESF+. This is particularly important to ensure the continuity of actions, especially in a period when the most deprived are highly affected by the Coronavirus related crisis.

- **Crisis repair (medium term, 2-3 years):** through this phase, the European Commission will introduce amendments to the REACT-EU for 2014-2020 and inject new funding (EUR 47.5 billion) into the current programming period. The aim is to allow Member States and Managing Authorities to invest these funds in their current projects to help prepare the ground for recovery. Moreover, REACT-EU is established on the reprogramming flexibilities which were determined by the CRII and CRII+ packages offering the possibility to transfer funds between programmes like ERDF to ESF or to FEAD and vice versa. The introduced flexibilities in reprogramming are showing that a lot more transfers are being operated for the benefit of employment and social issues, with funding basically redirected towards ESF (EUR 1 billion).

The REACT-EU initiative will exceptionally allocate the additional funds directly to the Member States rather than by categories of regions as in the current allocation. Besides, the allocation will be done per Member State, taking into account the extent of the socio-economic effects of the current crisis.

- **Recovery (longer term):** In May 2020, the Commission overhauled the [MFF](#) by increasing the resources for FEAD for 2021 and 2022 to support the long-term recovery. Additionally, EUR 750 billion of the [Next Generation EU](#) budget will be borrowed on the financial markets. The aim is to channel this additional funding to the REACT-EU new thematic objective under the current common provision regulation "Fostering crisis repair in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and preparing a green, digital, and resilient recovery of the economy". In reality, this objective will allow further investment in job maintenance (including short-time

work schemes), enhancing help to the self-employed and job creation, especially for people in vulnerable situations. Moreover, it will bring increased investment in education, training and skills developments, including digital skills. It is important to highlight that, under CRII and CRII+, a number of operational programmes (OP) have been changed in order to allow ESF funding for additional digital learning and digital training for teachers and pupils in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic.

- Regarding the revised ESF+ budget for 2021-2027 (EUR 87.9 billion), funds will be split across two strands:
  - Shared management (EUR 87.3 billion); of which EUR 473 million will fund the outermost and northern sparsely populated regions and EUR 175 million will be allocated to transnational cooperation supporting innovative solutions.
  - Employment and social innovation (EUR 676 million).

Participants expressed their concerns about the challenging times ahead during the programming phase and raised the point that acting on multiple funds simultaneously might cause slight overlaps in the interventions.

## **2.1 Coronavirus: Using FEAD to continue supporting people in need during the pandemic**

The Coronavirus pandemic profoundly impacted society and raised many challenges for FEAD-funded measures and, most importantly, for those most in need. The rapid response and commitment from the European Commission, Managing Authorities and other partner organisations providing support on the ground, supported by the FEAD instruments, have been key factors allowing to continue the support of those most deprived during the Coronavirus pandemic.

The experiences from the ground shared during the plenary discussions, panel discussion and working group sessions highlighted the speed and thoroughness of Member States' responses during this difficult period. During the panel discussion dedicated to this topic, representatives from the Italian and the Bulgarian Managing Authority and partner organisations from Ireland, Belgium and Sweden shared their experiences on adapting programming and implementation in response to the crisis with participants. There was general consent on the importance of keeping actions steady, functional and effective on the ground. Linked to that, participants welcomed the flexibility of the initiatives introduced by the European Commission, also in view of the growing needs on the ground, allowing Member States to inject further resources into the FEAD.

Many countries encountered similar challenges leading them to readjust their food distribution chains (e.g. Bulgaria, Belgium and Italy) by finding new ways to deliver food (e.g. by appointment rather than queueing in front of the local branch or delivering directly to the end recipients' homes via a drive-in system). Most of the countries highlighted a decrease in the number of volunteers at the outbreak of the pandemic due to the fact that many were over 65 year old, and thus part of the group at risk of severer course of illness.

The number of people in need of food increased tremendously during the first wave of the pandemic, which became an additional challenge to the distribution of food. In this context, the ability to use FEAD funding in the redistribution of food and surplus food allowed workers on the ground to gain flexibility and to be able to reach out to vulnerable people. Moreover, FEAD has given the possibility to Member States to apply for a 100% temporary co-financing rate to allow more decridity.

Readjustments went in many directions. For instance, some countries adapted their regulations in record time by suspending certain eligibility criteria (e.g. no need of a report on individuals by social services) thus allowing an increase in the number of end recipients. Moreover, the FEAD Community members enhanced cooperation at different levels, namely at municipal level and through local service networks, by introducing

flexibility to transfer the aid from the national civil protection agencies to the local partner organisations. This increased flexibility has also been reflected in other initiatives to make better rules for the workers from the partner organisations on the ground which were swiftly endorsed and adopted, e.g. the introduction of voucher schemes to help the most deprived.

Overall, FEAD has proved to be a powerful tool to fight the crisis by allowing quicker readjustments to activities on the ground, supporting food aid programmes, reallocating resources and building resilience in solidarity and community. It has also become an additional safety net for charity organisations, allowing them to be able to reach out to local communities.

Participants highlighted that whereas it is relatively easy to benefit from programmes in times of crisis, FEAD is seen as an instrument for the longer term. While there were some concerns about how FEAD will prepare for the long term while dealing with the current crisis, participants also mentioned the importance of creating synergies between FEAD and other initiatives at EU level to support farmers through the Common Agricultural Policy and meet environmental targets via the EU Green Deal. The need for consistency between FEAD and other policies and programmes, such as the Action Plan or the European Pillar of Social Rights, was also highlighted.

### **3 Challenges and solutions for the current FEAD and the future ESF+**

This section presents the challenges and solutions for the current FEAD and the future ESF+ that the participants identified and discussed during the conference in relation to the planning phase, the implementation phase, the monitoring and evaluation and securing stakeholders' engagement.

#### **3.1 The planning phase**

##### **3.1.1 The legislation on public procurement**

Legislation on public procurement is deemed very bureaucratic and creates an administrative burden that can limit the flexibility of FEAD-funded programmes. This is particularly the case when procuring is managed centrally in the Member States. On the other hand, it was observed that in Member States where partner organisations are responsible for procurement (e.g. Ireland), there is more flexibility for the charity organisations (e.g. charities can change their food order) involved in FEAD.

Procurement procedures are perceived as too rigid for allowing rapid adaptation to different situations and addressing people's needs. Especially in the context of the health and social crisis related to Covid-19 pandemic, more flexibility could have contributed to a more efficient response. Specifically, the possibility to use FEAD for the distribution of food would have allowed partner organisations to reach more end recipients.

In general, it can be difficult for Managing Authorities and partner organisations to keep up to date with the changes decided at the EU-level in terms of requirements and other details for the implementation of FEAD. This potential lack of clarity about 'what can be done and what cannot be done' with FEAD can result in concerns related to compliance in view of future audits. This can deter the implementation of innovative solutions suggested by partner organisations. Enhanced collaboration between Managing Authorities from different Member States, along with Audit Authorities, could increase confidence about the rules and provide more freedom to implement flexible solutions (in particular during crises).

##### **3.1.2 Eligibility of end recipients and target groups**

The definition of economic and social eligibility criteria for end recipients can create difficulties. In some cases, FEAD can be linked to specific national schemes. For instance in Greece, the FEAD programme is interlinked with the Guaranteed Minimum Income

(GMI) scheme. This means that once people become beneficiaries of GMI they automatically become end recipients of FEAD.

For auditing reasons, projects tend to cover the groups that fit into the requirements of the programme, sometimes at the expense of the most deprived, such as homeless and/or people at the very periphery of society. In general, as minorities (e.g. Roma) are often part of the target groups, it is important to avoid discrimination at all stages of FEAD-funded projects, starting with the planning phase. While the upcoming ESF+ regulation stipulates an obligation for Member States to include the promotion of equal opportunities and non-discrimination in their programmes, no funds are earmarked for these activities. Non-discrimination should be inherent in the planning of all interventions, ensuring that minorities are not implicitly discriminated by how projects are designed.

The adoption of a people-centred approach, with a strong role for FEAD end recipients in co-designing the programmes in the planning phase, is key to ensure that the real needs of the end recipients are addressed. An example of this practice can be found in the *Po Drom* project<sup>1</sup> in Sweden, where partner organisations regularly organise preliminary consultations with the target groups before implementing activities, such as language courses or courses to learn how to use computers (under Operational Programme II - OPII - which supports non-financial, non-material assistance)<sup>2</sup>, in order to get inputs from the future end recipients.

### **3.1.3 The use of e-vouchers**

It has been noticed that non-food support, in the form of clothing or school supplies, may be recognisable as a 'FEAD product', hence creating discrimination for the end recipients. The use of vouchers can be a valid solution to this problem. For instance in Cyprus, end recipients were provided with vouchers to be used directly in stores, instead of receiving a standardised package.

A study currently carried out by Ecorys is analysing the design and implementation of e-voucher schemes (seven such schemes in five Member States) and assessing the feasibility supporting e-vouchers via the ESF+. The results of the study highlight the importance of flexibility in the implementation of the schemes in order to enable targeted and adequate support, as well as the necessity to embed the schemes into broader support systems to increase the impact on social inclusion.

However, it has been observed that the tracking procedures often associated with voucher schemes, especially for the distribution of food, may discourage persons in a situation of deprivation who have no regular permit to stay in the country to access the service. This element needs to be taken into account as it could limit the effectiveness of voucher schemes in reaching out to the most deprived.

### **3.1.4 The logistics of the distribution**

Logistics for the distribution of food and other material support can also pose challenges in the present situation: the logistical arrangements necessary for the rapid distribution can be complex, potentially creating issues around the freshness and the quality of the food distributed.

In Greece, technical specifications by the General Secretariat of Commerce and Consumer Protection set minimum requirements in terms of food quality. Spot checks

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<sup>1</sup> <https://raddningsmissionen.se/verksamhetsomraden/verksamheter/kurs-i-svenska>

<sup>2</sup> 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. Accessed: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32014R0223> (6.11.2020)

are regularly carried out during the distribution process to ensure that the standards are respected.

In general, good communication from the Managing Authorities to the food banks and food bank federations and prompt information about expected delivery times can contribute to the good organisation of the distribution.

Another aspect to consider is that when the planning phase is carried out at the national level (e.g. in Portugal), there is often a need to evaluate at a later stage and to adjust the situation to the specificities of local level territories during the implementation phase.

## **3.2 The implementation phase**

### **3.2.1 Reaching out to the target groups**

Exacerbated by the health and social crisis related to the Covid-19 pandemic, it was more difficult to reach out to the target groups as some of the channels to get in contact with end recipients were not available anymore (e.g. schools).

For countries implementing the OP II, which supports non-financial, non-material assistance, there may have been additional difficulties in reaching out to the target group because of the complexity of the definition of 'socially excluded' people. In some cases, potential end recipients are not aware of the availability of this form of support or perceive a stigma associated with requesting it. This issue was experienced in the Netherlands with the project 'Elderly in the Community'.

#### **Changing the narrative – 'Elderly in the Community' in the Netherlands**

The project 'Elderly in the Community' is aimed at helping socially excluded elderly people to overcome their feelings of loneliness and isolation and at reintegrating them into social life. This is done through the organisation of social activities and training courses in libraries across the country. However, as the project used to explicitly address 'socially excluded elderly people', it encountered challenges in reaching out to the target group because of the perceived stigmatisation inherent to the definition.

In order to solve this issue and to reach the target group with a lesser risk of stigmatisation, the implementing bodies (i.e. the libraries) changed the narrative of the project and their communication style by using messages that presented 'investing in skills' rather than 'social inclusion' as a key objective of the project. This change in how the project was framed and contributed to avoiding the perceived stigmatisation of the end recipients.

The use of expertise from 'experts by experience' that are or have been part of the target group can provide useful insights to the Managing Authorities on the needs of the end recipients and on how to effectively reach people that feel socially excluded, as is done in Belgium, for instance.

To get into contact with the target group, social workers play an important role reaching deprived persons in the street or by visiting places where they tend to go, such as shelters. Multilingual social workers play an important role reaching out to people in the target group that are not familiar with the national language. An example of this is provided by the ACASA project in Germany.

#### **Targeted outreach work – ACASA project in Dortmund (Germany)**

The ACASA project's outreach work targets disadvantaged mobile EU citizens. The staff members in the project are native speakers of the languages of the target groups, enabling them to get in touch with them in their daily environment (e.g.

street, café and public places). This method of work contributes to building trust between the social workers and the end recipients.

For more information on the ACASA project:

[https://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/fead\\_case\\_studies/book/32/](https://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/fead_case_studies/book/32/)

It has been observed that it is important for social workers operating in the street or other public places to direct members of the target groups to an office or a place of reference to go to receive support.

The settings in which people in a situation of poverty and social exclusion are reached can lead to different outcomes. In a group setting, people in a situation of poverty or social exclusion tend to speak more openly about their problems and needs. For this reason, it is important to provide spaces where people that experience poverty and exclusion can meet and be in contact with each other, in order to better analyse their situation and come up with solutions to solve their problems.

As regards the use of social networks, the creation of Facebook groups in Croatia in the aftermath of the earthquake in Zagreb played an important role in reaching out to the target groups and identify their needs.

### **3.2.2 Combination of material and social support**

Participants agreed on the importance of combining material support with social support, as the implementation of accompanying measures - alongside the provision of food and material assistance - contributes to the social inclusion of the end recipients.

FEAD can often be considered as a bridge between the target group and the services they might need. For instance, in Germany, social workers assist the target group (i.e. mobile EU citizens) with a full range of individual basic needs (e.g. taking a shower, going to a doctor) by directing them to the right services.

The combination between FEAD and ESF can provide holistic support, facilitating also the integration of the target groups into the labour market. This is the case in Portugal where accompanying measures funded through FEAD are combined with ESF funding and national funding.

In some places, FEAD and ESF project teams work 'under the same roof', together with other service providers (e.g. health services). This facilitates working in cooperation.

#### **Different services under the same roof – 'Welcome Europe' centre in Germany**

The 'Welcome Europe'<sup>3</sup> drop-in centre gathers several projects and partners, covering a wide range of services (e.g. family support, health, social integration, labour market integration etc.). For instance FEAD project staff often direct or accompany EU citizens seeking work to offices or advisors specialised in labour market integration.

Due to this approach, social workers can direct individuals towards the support they need.

### **3.3 Monitoring and evaluation**

Monitoring and evaluation are important for tracking and monitoring delivery of assistance. However, the evaluation of OP I is done on a voluntarily basis. On the other hand, it is mandatory to conduct structured surveys for OP II (due in 2022).

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.diakoniedortmund.de/migration-und-integration/eu-zuwanderung.html>

### **3.3.1 Availability of data**

One of the main challenges identified by the participants in relation to monitoring and evaluation is the collection of data on the end recipients. Partner organisations can be reluctant to provide data, both because they do not consider it useful, and because they can perceive it as a form of 'control'. Another aspect is that reporting and monitoring activities are time-consuming, and partner organisations are often unwilling to divert the time and resources used for project delivery to the collection of data. Awareness-raising actions to highlight the importance of data collection, how data will be used and by whom, could encourage them to change their approach. Monitoring and evaluation requirements should be kept light, with a limited number of key indicators, in order not to be burdensome for the partner organisations.

Surveys of end recipients are considered a useful tool to assess the quality of the services provided. In Belgium, a structured survey with end recipients and partner organisation was carried out in 2017, and besides the standard closed questions foreseen by the survey, additional open questions were added (e.g. asking end recipients if they liked the food received). Other examples of surveys targeting end recipients can be found in Latvia, where an annual survey is conducted, and in Hungary where small surveys are carried out on a regular basis on the quality of the contents of the food parcels.

The impact of other types of project, for instance those dealing with the empowerment of end recipients, is more difficult to measure because of the lack of a tangible outcomes during the time periods measured.

### **3.3.2 Resources**

The resources allocated to data collection and monitoring can be covered by the flat rate of 5% of the budget for administration and by the budget for technical assistance. For instance, in Portugal, the technical assistance budget for monitoring purposes was used to provide partner organisations with tablets and information systems to collect data. However, in general the flat rate for administration and the budget for technical assistance are not considered sufficient for carrying out comprehensive monitoring activities, as these two budgets need to be used for other activities as well (e.g. the delivery costs) that partner organisation tend to view as more important.

Data are collected on paper, requiring extra resources for transferring them to a digital format. In some cases the lack of resources can prevent the digitalisation of data collected on paper, hindering their effective use. For instance in Hungary, administrative data on the distribution and handling of food packages used to be entirely on paper and a lot of resources were needed to transfer the data in digital format.

Other funds (e.g. ESF) can be used complementarily to FEAD by partner organisations to obtain technical equipment, as in Hungary where partner organisations used ESF funding for technical equipment to collect monitoring data.

In general, the FEAD Community can play an important role in facilitating exchanges of good practices and in providing ideas on how to improve the efficiency of monitoring systems and to evaluate the impact of the support provided.

### **3.3.3 Quality of data**

Issues around data quality can arise as the data provided by volunteers may be unconsciously biased sometimes or based on non-reliable sources. Moreover, sometimes it can be unclear as to what the data collected represents (e.g. on the number of parcels delivered or the number of individuals receiving support). Moreover, more stability in the monitoring and evaluation requirements over time would allow a better comparability of the data across the years. Collecting data on meaningful indicators while keeping the programme administratively light represents a challenge in many cases.

Independent research assessing FEAD projects can identify areas for improvement regarding implementation. In Germany, an evaluation carried out through an independent research project developed guidelines for improving the implementation of FEAD (see box).

#### **External evaluation of the FEAD in Germany**

In Germany an [independent evaluation](#) was carried out to support the implementation of the FEAD programme. It covers the implementation of an initial period until the end of 2018 as well as the second period until the end of 2019.

The empirical findings of the evaluation are based on a continuous analysis of the programme monitoring, 51 case studies, as well as on two surveys of the offices and institutions involved. Furthermore, expert interviews as well as a literature analysis of gender-based aspects in FEAD-specific areas of activity were conducted.

In particular, the evaluation included an analysis and assessment of the goals attainment in the different areas of the programme, as well as an analysis and assessment of the cross-cutting objectives (e.g. gender equality, anti-discrimination etc.) and an analysis of the cost-benefits ratio, focussing on the efficiency and effectiveness of the programme's implementation.

The evaluation produced recommendations for the implementation of the next funding period.

Source: *Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Summary of the main findings*, 2020. Available at:

[https://www.bmas.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Thema-Internationales/summary-of-the-main-findings.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=2](https://www.bmas.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Thema-Internationales/summary-of-the-main-findings.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=2)

### **3.4 Securing stakeholders' engagement**

It is important to engage stakeholders in the long-run and to keep them constantly informed about FEAD. In Belgium, meetings with stakeholders are organised every three months in order to share information about the programme. Also in Hungary, the Public Foundation for Homelessness organised a series of regional workshops for stakeholders (e.g. big and small/local NGOs, organisations operated by churches and local government providing social services) to explain the mechanisms of FEAD and how to apply them.

#### **3.4.1 Involvement of volunteers**

Another challenge related to stakeholder engagement is the strong reliance on volunteers, whose engagement is on average less stable than that of regular paid staff. Moreover, during the health and social crisis related to the Covid-19 pandemic, partner organisations had difficulties replacing volunteers with higher health risks (e.g. elderly people). In Estonia, volunteers at risk were kept engaged in the activities of the organisations through online tasks or paperwork (delivered directly to their home).

Another solution for engaging volunteers, especially during crises, is reaching out to people living in the neighbourhood who may be available to help. This can contribute to developing local solutions and knitting social relations. The 'local aspect' of FEAD and the proximity of the partner organisations are considered an added value of FEAD that should be maintained in the transition to ESF+.

#### **3.4.2 Support and engagement from public stakeholders**

As regards the involvement of public stakeholders, the cooperation with ministries can be daunting for NGOs, because of the rigid division of competences and the lack of communication between different departments (as is the case in Spain, for instance). The crisis related to the Covid-19 pandemic has contributed to raising awareness about

these issues, and the gravity of the situation has pushed the different stakeholders to develop new ways of collaborating in order to promptly address the emergency.

While FEAD is programmed at the national level, municipalities play a key role in the implementation of the programme. However, their involvement is often hindered by their limited human and financial resources. Bureaucratic procedures often represent a barrier to the implementation of FEAD, especially for small municipalities. In this context, cooperation agreements between municipalities and local NGOs represent a useful tool to develop trust and cooperation at the local level. In many cases, it would be important to better introduce FEAD to the municipalities through awareness-raising activities, and to clarify the doubts they could have regarding responsibilities and funding.

In Germany, the planning of the FEAD programme followed the partnership principle, with the facilitation of fruitful discussions within a mixed and inclusive monitoring committee involving FEAD Managing Authorities, municipalities, welfare organisations, homeless organisations, etc. This approach was considered successful.

### 3.4.3 End-recipients

Participants agreed that involving end recipients can be more challenging than engaging other types of stakeholders, as it can be difficult to find effective channels to reach them and to ensure their contribution results in concrete inputs for the partner organisations and/or for the Managing Authority. This is usually done by monthly newsletters (e.g. Belgium), regular feedback surveys (e.g. Hungary), or through telephone calls and SMS.

'Experts by experience', thus people who have experienced poverty, social exclusion or homelessness, can facilitate contacts between public administrations and the end recipients. For instance, 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.

## 4 Upcoming mutual learning events

The **Mutual Learning Activities** planned for the transition **period (2020-2021)** will include:

- **Three Thematic Seminars** (online or in person), hosted by Member States, dedicated to specific topic and open to 50 participants from across Europe;
- **A Mutual Learning Conference**;
- **A Case Study Catalogue** for disseminating and showcasing examples of good practice within FEAD across the Member States and for encouraging the sharing of information. In addition, under the current circumstances, examples of FEAD-funded measures successfully adapted during the COVID-19 related crisis were compiled to showcase practical approaches to continue support to the most deprived.

During the conference, 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.

## **5 Conclusions**

The FEAD has proved its added value in supporting those in need, both before and during the crisis related to the Covid-19 pandemic. The accompanying measures and the social inclusion initiatives implemented alongside the delivery of food and material assistance played a crucial role during, particularly during the crisis brought about by the pandemic which hit vulnerable groups the hardest.

While the importance of having a certain degree of flexibility in the implementation of FEAD was highlighted during the discussions, participants also insisted on the role of FEAD to provide support in a long-term perspective in order to better target interventions and address people's needs.

The First Annual Conference of the FEAD Community took place at a crucial moment during the transition period (2020-2021) to the future programming period and to the ESF+. In this context, it is important for the FEAD Community to work together to address the challenges and opportunities of the current context and integrate the lessons learnt from projects implemented with FEAD into ESF+, while preserving the distinctive character of FEAD interventions.

A people-centred approach to planning and the use of co-creation methods (e.g. the involvement of experts by experience) are seen as an effective way to address the needs of the target group. Another important aspect is the adoption of a holistic approach to tackling extreme poverty and deprivation. The combination of material support and measures promoting social inclusion is considered essential for an effective response to both material and social needs. In this context, 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.

The coherence of FEAD within the broader EU social policy context, such as the target of reducing the number of people at risk of poverty foreseen by the Europe 2020 Strategy, the European Commission's Communication 'A Strong Social Europe for Just Transitions' or the European Pillar of Social Rights, as well as other relevant policies (e.g. EU Green Deal) is essential to facilitate synergies and to create strong links between the environmental and social aspects of FEAD interventions. This can contribute to a more integrated approach to addressing the needs of the most deprived and to effective responses to future crises and needs.

