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From: Secretary-General of the European Commission,
signed by Mr Jordi AYET PUIGARNAU, Director

To: Mr Jeppe TRANHOLM-MIKKELSEN, Secretary-General of the Council of
the European Union

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Subject: REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL AND THE
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT Summary of the annual implementation
reports for the operational programmes co-financed by the Fund for
European Aid to the Most Deprived in 2016

Delegations will find attached document COM(2018) 742 final.

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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL AND THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT**

**Summary of the annual implementation reports for the operational programmes co-
financed by the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived in 2016**

Summary of the annual implementation reports for the operational programmes co-financed by the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived in 2016

1. INTRODUCTION

The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD)¹ helps to alleviate the worst forms of poverty in the EU such as food deprivation, child poverty and homelessness. Although the situation improved in 2016, the proportion of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion (23.5 %) and those affected by severe material deprivation (7.5 %) remained high. FEAD supports the most disadvantaged groups in society by providing food and basic consumer items such as school supplies and toiletries or by organising social inclusion activities.

The total available amount of FEAD is EUR 3.8 billion at current prices. The EU provides a maximum of 85 % matching funding to complement resources allocated by the Member States, bringing the total value of the fund to around EUR 4.5 billion.

It adds value by providing dedicated support to a group of people who may not be able to directly access and benefit from other EU funding instruments such as the European Structural and Investment Funds². On programme design, Member States could choose to develop (i) a food and/or basic material assistance operational programme (OP I), and/or (ii) a social inclusion operational programme (OP II). They could determine the target groups, the specific types of support provided and the geographic coverage of their programmes. Food and/or basic material assistance must be complemented by accompanying measures, for example a referral to social services.

In line with Article 13(9) of Regulation (EU) No 223/2014 (the FEAD Regulation), this summary is based on the information contained in the 2016 implementation reports, as accepted by the Commission. All Member States except the UK submitted an implementation report because implementation of the fund in the UK has not started yet.

In view of the time lag between implementation and reporting, the report also includes later developments if this information is available.

2. PROGRESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF OPERATIONAL PROGRAMMES

2.1. Overall developments and developments at EU level

By the end of 2016, the Commission had adopted the **legal framework** and published all implementing and delegated acts. It launched a revision of the Financial Regulation³, including amendments to the FEAD Regulation to extend the use of simplified cost options and provide more flexibility. The amendment includes a safeguard on grants to partner

¹ 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 (OJ L 72, 12.3.2014, p. 1).

² Strategic report 2017 on the implementation of the European Structural and Investment Funds, COM(2017) 755 final.

³ Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union and amending Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002, Regulations (EU) No 1296/2013, (EU) 1301/2013, (EU) No 1303/2013, (EU) No 1304/2013, (EU) No 1305/2013, (EU) No 1306/2013, (EU) No 1307/2013, (EU) No 1308/2013, (EU) No 1309/2013, (EU) No 1316/2013, (EU) No 223/2014, (EU) No 283/2014, (EU) No 652/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Decision No 541/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council, COM(2016) 605 final.

organisations. This safeguard ensures that a financial correction applied to purchasing costs of a public body due to non-compliance with applicable law will not lead to a reduction of eligible costs of the partner organisations, provided that they are different bodies.

By March 2015, the Commission had adopted all **operational programmes (OPs)**, all of which are now in the implementation phase except in the UK, where implementation has not started yet. Furthermore, the majority of Member States had completed the process of designating authorities by 2016. A number of operational programmes were amended in 2016 to improve the mechanism of identifying the most deprived, selecting partner organisations (BG, HU) or adding additional measures such as school lunches (CZ).

The **FEAD Expert Group**, which is composed of members of the managing authorities, met twice in 2016 to discuss implementation issues affecting the FEAD programme. During these meetings, Member States provided an overview of a range of issues, including how balanced diet guidelines were established at national level, and an overview of fresh food distribution. It also discussed the potential application of the use of intervention stocks⁴ under the FEAD Regulation. In addition, the Commission hosted 11 **FEAD network meetings** up to July 2017. The network is composed of FEAD stakeholders, and its role is to exchange experience and good practices. In 2016, the meetings focused on the different aspects of FEAD that aim to help support the social inclusion of the most deprived people. Participants presented case studies and shared challenges and solutions on issues of common interest in relation to FEAD programme implementation.

In the meeting with **representatives of the partner organisations at EU level** held on 5 December 2016, the Commission presented the state of play of FEAD based on the previous annual implementation report, together with a short overview of the changes proposed to the FEAD Regulation. A presentation was given that examined how civil society helped to prepare the FEAD Regulation. This was followed by a review of the FEAD network's first year of operation to facilitate exchanges of good practice between all stakeholders involved in FEAD implementation.

The Commission progressed continued to make progress on the **FEAD mid-term evaluation**. The open public consultation with FEAD stakeholders and the general public was completed and was fed into a draft evaluation report together with the structured surveys carried out. The draft report was presented to the FEAD Expert Group. The final version of the mid-term evaluation will be presented to the European Parliament and to the Council by 31 December 2018.

2.2. Financial implementation

Overall, the financial implementation of FEAD programmes had already accelerated in 2015, and the upward trend continued in 2016. EUR 508.6 million was committed to supporting FEAD operations in 27 Member States in 2016, up from EUR 470.0 million in 2015. This brings the cumulative committed expenditure for 2014-2016 to EUR 1 315.9 million, representing 30 % of the total resources of the programmes (EU and national co-financing). Similarly, the payments to beneficiaries continued to rise, with EUR 429.4 million

⁴ Stocks held by national intervention agencies in the European Union as a result of intervention buying of commodities subject to market price support.

paid in 2016 compared to EUR 385.9 million in 2015. The detailed financial breakdown, also by Member State, is presented in the Annex in Table I.

The most significant progress was in payment applications submitted to the Commission. In 2016, 24 Member States declared a total of EUR 353.8 million of eligible public expenditure, which represented a more than seven-fold increase compared to 2015 (EUR 46.3 million). Moreover, cumulative payments totalled EUR 1 022 million by 31 December 2017, EUR 603 million of which were interim payments.

2.3. Physical implementation

In 2016, a total of 23 Member States delivered food and material assistance and supported social inclusion of the most deprived people in the EU. 19 Member States distributed food and/or basic material assistance as well as accompanying measures (OP I), and 4 launched social inclusion programmes by way of OP II (see Figure 1). Obstacles to implementation occurred in 5 Member States, which prevented implementation.

Nearly 16 million people are estimated to have benefited from FEAD assistance in 2016, with significant progress made compared to 2015. This can be broken down into 15.2 million people (96 %) who received food support, over 662 000 (4 %) who received basic material aid, and around 23 000 that participated in social inclusion programmes (OP II)⁵.

Between 2014 and 2016, FEAD delivered support to around 38 million people. OP I and OP II continued to be implemented in 2016, with an additional 2.2 million people receiving FEAD support compared to the figures for 2015. The 4 Member States (GR, IE, MT, SK) that launched the delivery of assistance in 2016 provided food aid to an additional 657 000 people, and another 4 (BG, FI, FR, RO) reached 1.5 million more people than in 2015. The 6 Member States that provided basic material assistance (AT, CZ, GR, LU, LV, SK) reported an almost nine-fold increase in the number of people receiving this type of aid compared to 2015.

Figure 1: Type of assistance delivered in 2016

OP	Type of assistance	Member State
OP I	Food	BE, BG, EE, ES, FI, FR, IE, IT, LT, MT, PL, RO, SI (13)
	Basic material	AT (1)
	Both	CZ, GR, LU, LV, SK (5)
OP II	Social inclusion	DE, DK, NL, SE (4)

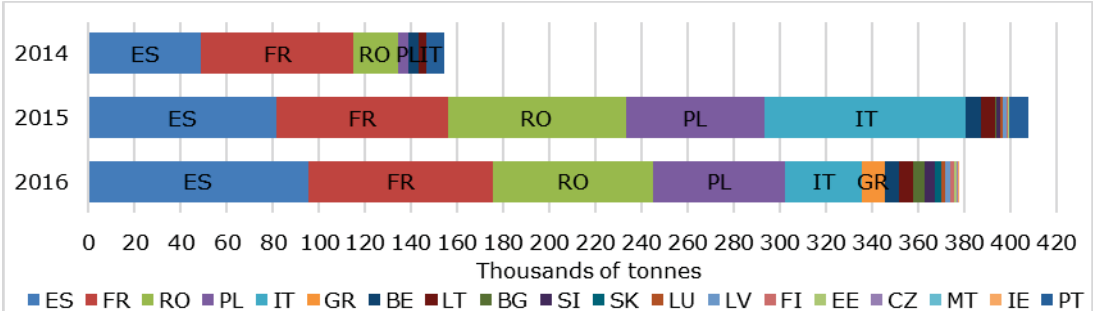
OP I – Food and basic material assistance

18 Member States delivered food aid in 2016. More than 90 % of the food aid in terms of weight was provided by 5 countries: ES, FR, RO, PL and IT. A total of 377 500 tonnes of food were distributed in 2016, amounting to 939 600 tonnes in total between 2014 and 2016. While the composition of types of food remained very similar to the previous year, the total quantity of food support distributed fell 7 % compared to the previous year. This is mainly

⁵ For OP I, the figures presented are based on estimates made by the partner organisations using sampling approaches (e.g. counting recipients on certain days or in certain weeks of the year and extrapolating) or other methods. For both OP I and OP II, it is possible that end recipients are counted more than once; as a result, the total sum of end recipients reached per target group is higher than the total number of end recipients reported by Member States.

because IT reported fewer tonnes of food than in 2015, in part due to delays in tendering. Furthermore, in PT food distribution was interrupted in 2016 because the programme was overhauled. In LT, BE, PL and RO, the amount of food aid decreased slightly. In the remaining 13 countries, the amount of food aid increased, but could not offset the decreases in the other Member States: in absolute terms, there were increases mostly in ES and FR (17 % and 8 % respectively). GR, SK, MT and IE started with food assistance in 2016, and significantly more was delivered in BG and CZ (see also Figure 2). Food donations were part of food aid delivery in 4 countries, although this remained limited.

Figure 2: Food assistance provided in 2014-2016 (thousands of tonnes)

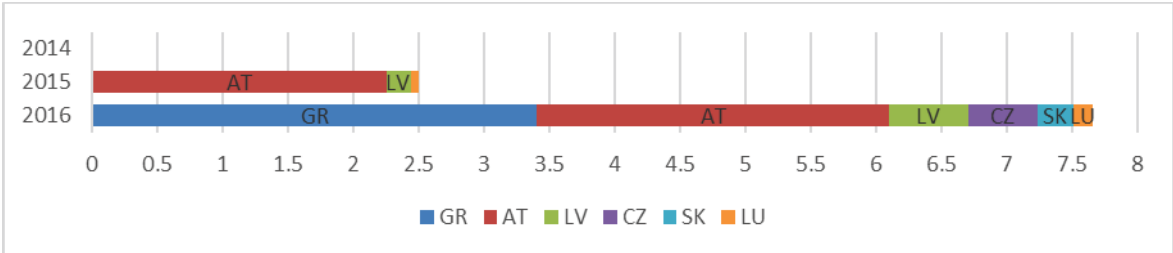


Source: FEAD common output indicator (ID 11), 2014-2016

17 Member States delivered food packages, with 10 of them also providing ready-made meals. The total amount of food packages was similar to that of 2015. There was a 14 % increase in meals from year to year. Food assistance delivered in BG, ES and MT was entirely funded by FEAD. In the other countries, food aid was complemented with food products funded or donated from other sources. In LU, 44 % of the food distributed was donated, for which FEAD covered transport, storage and distribution costs.

6 Member States provided basic material aid such as school supplies and hygiene products. Except for AT, all did it in addition to food aid. AT and GR accounted for around 80 % of the total monetary value of goods distributed (EUR 7.6 million). The total monetary value of goods distributed in 2016 showed a strong increase compared to 2015. This was due to AT, LV and LU upscaling the provision of material assistance from 2015 to 2016 and GR, CZ and SK starting to distribute basic material aid in 2016. AT and LV provided school bags and other school equipment (among others stationery, exercise books, pens, art supplies). LV and SK distributed hygiene packages consisting of essential hygiene products. CZ, GR, LU and SK distributed hygiene supplies to both children and the homeless (first aid kits, soap, toothbrushes, disposable razors etc.).

Figure 3: Total monetary value of basic material assistance in 2014-2016 (EUR million)



Source: FEAD common output indicator (ID 15), 2014-2016

The delivery mode for food aid and/or basic material assistance varied across Member States. One of the main differences was the level of involvement of government institutions

(managing authorities, intermediary bodies and/or others) in the process (e.g. identifying eligible beneficiaries, disseminating information, organising logistics and distribution etc.). This is in line with the legal basis of the FEAD programme as it is up to each Member State to decide on its own delivery mechanism. In SK, the government identified eligible beneficiaries based on social security administrative data and planned assistance delivery, in close cooperation with local municipalities. Other countries opted to delegate more to partner organisations. In IE, one national non-profit organisation was responsible for obtaining the food (both through donations and purchases) and channelling it to smaller local charities; these organisations were then responsible for identifying beneficiaries to distribute the food. In FI, partner organisations held mostly “open delivery events” and provided assistance to anybody that requested it. The organisations responsible for providing assistance to end recipients were most often non-governmental organisations at all levels (local, regional, national and international). In some countries, end recipients obtained a package of pre-selected food or other items (BE, BG, LT, LU, LV, MT, PL, ES, SI, SK, RO), while in others, the distributing organisations tailored assistance to the needs (FR, IE, CZ). In AT, the end recipients were given a choice between several types of assistance packages.

Food aid was received by 7.5 million women, and 346 000 women received basic material assistance . Data for specific target groups are based on estimates and are partially overlapping. 4.4 million children aged 15 or under benefited from food assistance and over 246 000 from basic material aid. Around 1.7 million elderly people and over 940 000 people with disabilities were reached, representing 32 % and 21 % more than in 2015 respectively. Elderly people were also one of the groups that grew most in 2016 compared to 2015 and in terms of basic material assistance (135 in 2015 vs. 21 500 in 2016).

In 2016, there was also a significant increase in aid provided to homeless people. In 2015, 42 homeless people received basic material assistance (basic goods) in only 1 Member State (LU), whereas in 2016 this increased to over 8 700 in 4 Member States (CZ, GR, LU and SK). However, according to the indicators, the number of homeless people that received food support overall was considerably lower in 2016 than in 2015 (1.2 million in 2015 vs. 200 000 in 2016). This can mainly be attributed to FR not reporting on the number of homeless people that received food aid in 2016.⁶ CZ, FI and SI showed a significant increase in the number of homeless people reached, and GR, IE and SK started to deliver food assistance to this group in 2016.

Migrants (or people with a foreign background, minorities) were the third largest target group of basic material aid distributed and the fourth of food aid in 2016. The total number of migrants reached with basic material assistance was over two times higher than in 2015 (17 800 in 2015 vs. 40 000 in 2016). However, the total number of people in this group that received food aid was lower than in 2015 (around 2 million in 2015 vs. 1.6 million in 2016). BE, ES, IT, LV, PL and SI reported lower numbers of migrants reached compared to 2015. BG, CZ and FI on the other hand witnessed large increases.

Member States implemented various accompanying measures in 2016. These included:

- counselling services/psychosocial support (e.g. in EE, GR, FI, FR, LV, LT, SI, SK);
- advice/information on social and medical services (ES, FI, IE, IT, RO);
- family budget management (BE, EE, GR, HR, LV, SK),;

⁶ According to FR’s implementation report, the indicator 14f (homeless people) is a “particularly complicated one and has not been collected this year”. In 2015, FR reported that it had provided over 1 million homeless people with food aid.

- sports and leisure (SI, LV);
- hygiene/health (HR, LV, RO, SK);
- workshops/information on cooking/healthy balanced diets (BE, BG, GR, FI, FR, HR, LV, PL, RO, SI);
- emergency/disaster action (BG);
- social skills training (LV, SI);
- avoiding phone scams (BG);
- preventing food waste (PL);
- shelter for homeless people (BG); and
- promoting social eating events, voluntary work (FI) and literacy/language lessons (FR, SI).

EE also offered special training programmes for former prisoners and alcoholics.

Member States reported that accompanying measures helped to achieve the FEAD's social inclusion objective. In EE, 72 % of beneficiaries were in education and/or were participating in services offered, and almost all food aid recipients under the age of 16 were attending school/kindergarten. In IT, accompanying measures had been fully integrated into FEAD operations, and social inclusion was given a lot of attention by national and local players. In CZ, the homeless could successfully be referred so they could use the services of day centres. In SK, beneficiaries were interested in additional support services after each distribution, such as counselling and other psychosocial services. LV noted that participants of accompanying measures that were introduced (counselling services, advice on budget management, hygiene/health, social skills training etc.) thought that they had been provided with useful information and/or that they had improved their social skills. Member States also encountered challenges. In EE, no beneficiaries took part in the social inclusion activities targeted at adults with low levels of education. IT suggested that the effectiveness of the measures in promoting social inclusion could be improved by increasing support to volunteers and strengthening the role of local services. Nevertheless, overall reporting on accompanying measures remained limited, in part because of delays in implementation.

OP II – Social inclusion

In 2016, 4 countries used OP II to launch social inclusion activities: DE, DK, NL and SE. DE was the only country that started introducing social inclusion activities in 2015, while DK, NL and SE launched such activities in 2016. The 4 countries together reached around 23 000 people in 2016. In terms of target groups (that overlap), migrants (or people with a foreign background, minorities), women and the homeless were the most frequent users of social inclusion programmes (OP II), in this order.

Overall, target groups were well reached. DE was particularly effective at reaching newly arrived adults and children from the EU (mostly Roma people), as well as homeless people. DK is also on track as it already reached 34 % of the 1 400 homeless people it planned to reach between 2016 and 2019 by offering shelters and meetings with social workers in its first year of implementation. Of these, around 30 % used other existing social services after participating in the social assistance programme. NL reached only 6 % of those aged 65 years and over due to late FEAD implementation, which kicked off in 2016. SE focused on EU/EEA migrants, reaching 581 individuals thanks to activities that included community

integration such as directions to shelters, information on rights and obligations in SE, translation services and health promotion.

DE launched 84 projects in 2016 that focused on improving the access of: (1) disadvantaged, newly arrived people from the EU to regular counselling and support measures; (2) newly arrived children to early education and social inclusion measures (e.g. language courses, leisure activities, childcare facilities); and (3) homeless people and people at risk of homelessness to regular counselling and support measures.

Obstacles to implementation

Several Member States were unable to distribute aid in 2016 or started delivery late. Most delays can still be attributed to the late designation of managing authorities. CY had planned to start delivering assistance in 2016, but several factors led to the programme then being reorganised and amended. In HR, there were start-up delays, although projects on the distribution of food aid in schools, to single people and families who live in poverty or who are at risk of poverty were contracted in 2016. In PT, only national budget food aid was started in 2016 due to the need for amendments to ensure a smooth transition from the former MDP programme. HU overhauled its assistance, which meant that operations only started in December 2016. In all Member States concerned, delivery is now underway, bringing the total to 27 Member States. The UK is the only one that has not yet started to implement the FEAD operational programme.

No major obstacles were reported in the remaining Member States. Some problems occurred with (i) transport demands (FI, GR, LV); (ii) regional coordination of food amounts (PL); (iii) insufficient capacities of distributing organisations (GR, PL); (iv) complicated public procurement procedures (HU), and (v) other delays (BE, MT). Member States implementing OP II did not report any major obstacles. In SE, the programme was affected only during the initial implementation phase in 2016 by the slow recruitment of workers and volunteers and the need to adjust the planned activities to specific communities. However, most Member States pointed to a number of broader implementation obstacles. The largest group reported issues linked to the procurement of goods (notably IT and GR) and budgetary/financial management and partner organisation capacities, which caused delays in implementation. A smaller group of Member States referred to various issues of a mainly administrative nature. Overall, most of these obstacles had been overcome, suggesting a faster rate of implementation after 2016.

Horizontal principles

Most of the Member States have coordination mechanisms⁷ in place to ensure complementarity with the European Social Fund (ESF) and other EU policies and to avoid double financing. Member States have mediation bodies or coordination/working groups to ensure that projects and partner organisations do not receive funding from both ESF and FEAD and that activities are coordinated. Several Member States pointed out that having FEAD and ESF under the responsibility of the same managing authority can provide a solid foundation for coordination and avoid possible double funding. Member States noted that the ESF and FEAD support each other and that neither FEAD nor the ESF can tackle social exclusion and poverty problems on their own; further integration of the two and synergies are required. This important finding prompted the Commission to propose a merging of the funds for the post-2020 funding period.

⁷ Article 5(6) of Regulation (EU) No 223/2014.

For example, in MT the LEAP! centres provide social support to disadvantaged communities and were funded by the ESF. Operational implementation of the project was modified to ensure that it allowed not only food package distribution (supported by FEAD), but also helped families and their members to improve their quality of life and free themselves from social benefits. Equally, Lithuania's ESF programme faced challenges to reach its target groups and therefore sought to use FEAD as an opportunity to reach the target groups and encourage them to take part in ESF-financed measures.

Most Member States reported on adhering to gender equality⁸ and non-discriminatory principles. Member States promoted gender equality and gender mainstreaming in various instances of the project cycle. CZ noted that the assistance delivered took the specific needs of target groups into account e.g. by including specific items used by single mothers or mothers in night shelters. DE, LV, SE and SK explained that a gender-sensitive approach was used when selecting employees and partner organisations as well as the type of assistance to be provided to target groups. HU, MT and PL explicitly stated that the needs of people with disabilities were considered in the distribution of food and locations of workshops. SE reported some challenges in applying this horizontal principle, particularly when encountering childhood marriages and other issues linked to violence against women and girls; workshops and meetings with stakeholders were organised to mitigate this in the future.

To address gender equality, LV ensured that the delivery times of food packages remained flexible and included the possibility of home delivery and delivery after work. Accompanying measures on childcare were also adapted to reach people. Babysitting was also provided at distribution points.

The majority of Member States indicated several ways to reduce food waste⁹. Most of the approaches involved distributing food with a long shelf life and tailoring food to the needs/tastes of target groups to minimise the delivery of unwanted products. For example, MT ensured that undelivered food was stored and reused. LV had dedicated places where surplus items could be left to avoid them being thrown away. PL obtained food from dairy farmers who had unsold produce. In summer and during heatwaves, dairy producers also donated products to be distributed to those in need. On climatic and environmental aspects, Member States used sustainable materials that were recyclable and/or biodegradable as well as reduced transport emissions in the distribution chain. For example, BE delivered sustainable food and cereals without GMOs, avoided palm oil, and provided fair trade and organic products.

Almost all OP I Member States highlighted how they helped beneficiaries to achieve a balanced diet¹⁰. In general, countries offered food baskets that were low in carbohydrates, salt, sugar and fat, and high in protein, fibre, vitamins and minerals. 2 countries (ES and FI) also offered food that reduced nutritional deficiencies, such as baby food and milk powder containing Vitamin D. BE introduced a collaborative procedure for selecting the composition of food packages and ensuring a balanced diet. This selection procedure was presented as "good practice" in the catalogue of FEAD case studies published by the FEAD network in 2017.

Evaluations carried out

⁸ Article 5(11) of Regulation (EU) No 223/2014.

⁹ Article 5(13) of Regulation (EU) No 223/2014.

¹⁰ Article 5(13) of Regulation (EU) No 223/2014.

In 2016, several Member States (AT, IT, LV, MT and SE) conducted research studies, evaluations and/or surveys to assess the performance of their operations as well as end recipients' satisfaction with the assistance received. AT sent a feedback questionnaire to 10 000 deprived households in 2016. The survey returned favourable results as 86 % of households considered the school bag to offer “very good” support, and 13 % said it was “good”. SE evaluated FEAD management and the first implementation phases of the projects carried out by an external contractor. To address some of the issues identified, the evaluation report included a few recommendations such as clearer programme goals for national social policy objectives and following up on participants' results. IT conducted a pilot study on its food delivery at the end of 2015 and reported on its results in 2016. The study revealed that 71 % of partner organisations that delivered food aid also introduced accompanying measures, which can be considered a good starting point.

Contribution to the overall and specific FEAD objectives

Member States believe that FEAD helps to achieve the Europe 2020 targets of poverty reduction and social inclusion by working together with other EU and national policies and programmes. This is linked to FEAD's overall objective of promoting social cohesion, enhancing social inclusion and helping to eradicate poverty in order to achieve the Europe 2020 target of ‘lifting at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty and social exclusion’. EE reported that FEAD food aid – together with government policies on the labour market, education and social welfare, the employment reform funded by the ESF, the increase in social benefits, and the overall growth of the economy – has had a major impact on poverty, which has been falling since 2012. In DE, FEAD has helped people at risk of poverty to overcome social exclusion. It has also brought them closer to attaining qualifications for the labour market by making it easier to participate in an ESF project. The overall assessment is that FEAD reduced poverty and enhanced social inclusion.

On specific objective 1 (helping to alleviate the worst forms of poverty by providing non-financial assistance to the most deprived people), Member States reported that:

(1) FEAD helped to reduce severe material deprivation: Due to FEAD helping to create synergies with other national social assistance programmes, PL reported that some 13 000 people stopped qualifying for FEAD food assistance due to their improved circumstances. GR noted that FEAD had positive effects in reducing the worst forms of poverty in the country, even though the extent and depth of poverty worsened during the economic crisis. In SK, the provision of food and/or hygiene products helped to secure basic living conditions for beneficiaries e.g. by improving the variety and nutritional value of their diet and their hygiene routines.

(2) FEAD provided relief to the most deprived: In LV and BG, the provision of food helped to free up households' budgets to meet other basic needs. In LV for example, 82 % of the beneficiaries surveyed in 2016 thought that FEAD helped them to save and improved family welfare; 78 % also said that additional savings were used to purchase more food. Some households spent money on paying for children's extracurricular activities, which helped to reduce the risk of social exclusion. Nonetheless, FR reiterated that while food packages allowed people to spend income on other things, food aid alone did not cover daily needs and could not be used as the only tool to fight poverty.

(3) FEAD facilitated people's path out of poverty: Partner organisations in CZ reported significant impacts on the provision of (pre-)school meals, in particular improvements in

pupils' school attendance, physical fitness, mental well-being, ability to manage school activities, and concentration. They also mentioned beneficiaries' improved standing among peers and better social skills. In DK, it was determined that by making existing public social services more accessible to homeless people, the programme increases the possibilities of providing homeless people with more lasting social support, which can help them out of poverty.

On specific objective 2 (complementing sustainable national poverty eradication and social inclusion policies), Member States believe that FEAD complements national policies by:

(1) Assisting groups who would otherwise not receive any help: In SE, FEAD supported EEA/EU migrants who were excluded from national social assistance programmes. In DE, FEAD activities paved the way for target groups to make use of regular social services that they would otherwise not have been able to access. In FI, FEAD allowed it to top up national social assistance to individuals in need of food aid and who could not be assisted by the government given that there is no other government-sponsored food delivery programme.

(2) Improving existing national initiatives to fight poverty and social exclusion: MT stated that FEAD complements its 'national strategic policy for poverty reduction and social inclusion' and contributes to the Europe 2020 targets. EE mentioned that FEAD complements its Welfare Development Plan (2016-2023) and ESF-financed measures. IT reported that the FEAD programme has influenced new national policies such as the Support to Active Inclusion, now a nationwide programme, and the National Fund for Fighting Poverty and Social Exclusion.

FEAD clearly operates in conjunction with other EU and national policies and programmes to help achieve the Europe 2020 targets of poverty reduction and social inclusion. As such, FEAD's own contribution is modest, albeit a critical component of it. Moreover, there are aspects of the FEAD's objectives that are difficult to measure and quantify, such as social cohesion. The Member States were generally wary of attributing a clear causality between the FEAD's activities and poverty reduction, and preferred to refer to a correlation. Nevertheless, they confirmed that FEAD makes a valuable contribution.

3. CONCLUSION

Despite its limited scope, FEAD has shown that it truly complements national efforts to address material deprivation and combat poverty and social exclusion. FEAD support reached almost 16 million people in 2016, according to data and estimates. In many cases it was able to reach specific groups within the most deprived who would otherwise not receive any assistance. This is the case for example for the most deprived EU/EEA migrants who are not eligible for financial assistance under the laws in the respective Member State. It is estimated that a significant number of homeless people have been reached.

The main success factor in reaching the target groups and providing relevant assistance was the strong cooperation and collaboration established with partner organisations. Partner organisations have the experience and knowledge of who the most deprived people are in their respective community. They know their needs and how best to deliver assistance. Food and material assistance helped partner organisations in various Member States to establish a mutual trust relationship with beneficiaries, making it easier to provide

accompanying measures and other social inclusion assistance. The flexibility of the fund and its capacity to adapt to different situations in different Member States is a key success factor and a distinctive feature of FEAD. In many countries, partner organisations have the flexibility to decide on who receives assistance, when and how, which has allowed them to meet beneficiaries' needs more effectively. The continued exchange of good practice in the FEAD network and the FEAD Expert Group as well as consultations of partner organisations at EU level have helped to further improve this aspect.

There are some indirect effects of FEAD which relate to creating synergies and leverage effects. FEAD has helped to leverage resources and mobilise assistance provided by partner organisations for example by distributing food obtained from other sources (such as dairy farmers who had unsold products), which had broader environmental benefits (fulfilling horizontal principles) and linked producers to other supply chains. FEAD has also helped to raise the awareness of national and local players about the social inclusion aspect of the programme. This has strengthened the role and the network of partner organisations. It has also fostered greater synergies between the national and local players implementing the programme.

Areas for improvement include speeding up implementation in a number of countries, integrating food donations in the delivery and improved reporting on accompanying measures. Delivery was provided in all Member States except the UK by the end of 2017. The Commission will continue to monitor progress, in particular regarding those Member States where programme implementation was under review or was delayed. It will focus on further progress being made in implementing basic material assistance within OP I programmes. Despite significant progress in 2016, it is still lagging behind food support implementation. Dedicated Annual Review meetings between each Member State and the Commission are being conducted to address these concerns. The share of donated food integrated in the programme is still low. The Commission has addressed this concern by amending the FEAD Regulation through the “Omnibus Regulation” adopted by the European Parliament and the Council and which entered into force in August 2018. Member States will therefore be able to define flat rates, lump sums or unit costs (simplified cost options) and use them as the basis for payments to partner organisations that collect and distribute donated food. Accompanying measures are a key element of the fund as they aim to alleviate social exclusion of the most deprived. However, Member States' reporting was limited, which did not allow for an in-depth examination. This was partially due to the above-mentioned implementation delays, but still posed a challenge in terms of the extent to which its contribution to the FEAD's objective of enhancing social inclusion could be assessed.