



Brussels, 20.2.2024
COM(2024) 69 final

**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 2021**

Executive summary of the annual implementation reports for the operational programmes co-financed by the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived in 2021

The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) helps alleviate the worst forms of poverty in the EU, such as food deprivation, child poverty and homelessness.

In 2021, the social situation was characterised by increased poverty and social exclusion rates, partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Over 94 million people across the EU (21.9% of the total population) were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2020.

Against this background, Member States used available resources under FEAD operational programmes (OPs) to provide food and/or basic material assistance (23 countries under OP I) and promoting social inclusion (Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden under OP II). This supplemented national action to tackle material deprivation and combat poverty and social exclusion.

In 2021, **EUR 4.6 billion** (in current prices) was available from the FEAD for the 2014-2020 programming period (including an allocation from REACT-EU), bringing the total value of the fund to around EUR 5 billion (including national allocations).

The average EU implementation rate was 63% in 2021. The highest rates were in Bulgaria (91%), Spain (86%) and the Netherlands (86%). In Romania, Hungary and Cyprus, there was a jump in implementation rates compared with 2020.

More than 15 million people received food assistance through the FEAD in 2021 (up slightly from 14.9 million in 2020), and 2.1 million people received basic material assistance. Around 18 000 individuals received social inclusion support in the 4 countries implementing the second type of FEAD programmes (OP II). FEAD support was distributed evenly among men and women (50%/50%). On age groups, 26% of FEAD support went to children, and 11% to older people.

In 2021, the supply of food support and basic material assistance continued to be strongly affected by COVID-19. There was a greater demand for support, and additional groups of vulnerable people had to be included. There were also changes to the way support was delivered and the type of support given (for example, vouchers were introduced in Romania). Local beneficiary organisations found ways to deal with the restrictions in place and managed to continue supporting numbers of recipients similar to those in 2020. Food distribution or material assistance faced logistical challenges. However, these were eventually solved to help respond to the continuous demand for support and maintain delivery levels similar to the previous year of the pandemic.

As regards **food assistance**, the highest absolute numbers of people that received food support were in Spain, France, Italy, Poland and Romania. This is in line with the large budget available to these countries and the additional resources from REACT-EU. Almost 450 000 tonnes of food was distributed in 2021. This included basic products, such as dairy products, pasta, rice, vegetables and fruits, oil and meat, delivered in packages or meals.

In countries delivering **basic material assistance** through the FEAD, more than 2 million people benefited from this assistance. More than half were in Romania, who received hygiene packages and school supplies. Children were the main target for material assistance in Cyprus, Hungary, Ireland and Austria.

Member States that ran food and/or basic material assistance programmes (OP I) also implemented **accompanying measures**. Most Member States continued to carry out a

combination of accompanying measures. These included advice on food preparation and storage, information to promote healthy nutrition, cooking workshops, referrals to relevant services, workshops to improve integration into education or the labour market, counselling on domestic management, and access to childcare.

The four countries implementing FEAD social inclusion programmes (OP II) were Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden. They focused on **social inclusion measures** for specific target groups: older women, migrants, minorities and homeless people. They reached a total of 18 000 people in 2021.

In 2021, the FEAD continued to be highly affected by the consequences of COVID-19. Member States had to reconsider FEAD priorities, the groups targeted, operations, and types of support, while ensuring the continued support of vulnerable groups. The additional resources made available through REACT-EU further supported initiatives designed to address the higher levels of precariousness across the EU. This made it possible for existing FEAD programmes to provide more food support and basic material assistance to the target groups, providing crucial support to people already in precarious situations. Therefore, the FEAD has proven to be an important instrument to support the ambitions of the European Pillar of Social Rights action plan to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion. It has also been a flexible way of spending the additional budget made available by REACT-EU.

The final 2 years of FEAD implementation will have additional challenges. There will be more pressure to complete projects and declare the remaining expenditure, help Ukrainians fleeing Russian military aggression and alleviate the cost-of-living crisis, which could raise demand for material support in the EU.

Summary of the annual implementation reports for the operational programmes co-financed by the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived in 2021

1. INTRODUCTION

The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD)¹ helps address the worst forms of poverty in the EU, such as food deprivation, child poverty and homelessness. A total of EUR 4.6 billion (in current prices) was available from the FEAD for 2014-2020 (including an allocation from REACT-EU), bringing the total value of the fund to around EUR 5 billion (including national allocations).

Member States can use the fund in two ways. They can use:

- the operational programme providing food and/or basic material assistance (OP I); and/or
- the operational programme promoting social inclusion (OP II).

Food and/or basic material assistance must be supplemented by accompanying measures. These can include educational activities to promote healthy nutrition, advice on food preparation and storage, measures facilitating access to healthcare, psychological and therapeutic support, skills programmes, advice on managing a household budget, social and leisure activities, and provision of legal services.

In line with the FEAD's legal basis², this summary is based on the 2021 annual implementation reports, which the Commission received from each Member State.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the already significant challenges faced in combating the most severe forms of (material) deprivation. The FEAD was set up to help respond to the worst forms of poverty in the EU by providing food support and/or basic material assistance (OP I) or support for social inclusion (OP II). Annual implementation reports for 2021 highlight the response to tackle the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the most deprived people and alleviate the worst forms of poverty and social exclusion. Thanks to the additional flexibilities given to the FEAD programmes under Cohesion's Action for Refugees in Europe (CARE), funding from the FEAD has also been crucial in providing much-needed food and basic material assistance to Ukrainians fleeing Russian military aggression.

The FEAD supplements national action to tackle material deprivation and combat poverty and social exclusion. Its focus on food support, basic material assistance and social inclusion addresses challenges such as food deprivation, child poverty and homelessness. This work is aligned with the Europe 2020 strategy and the European Pillar of Social Rights action plan and its new ambitious target for 2030. The Regulation stipulates that food and/or basic

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). The Regulation was amended in August 2018, through a revision of the Financial Regulation (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1537946431022&uri=CELEX:02014R0223-20180802>). Regulation (EU) 2020/559 amends Regulation (EU) No 223/2014 to enable Member States to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak and introduces measures to ensure that the most deprived people can continue to receive assistance under the FEAD in a safe environment. Amending Regulation (EU) 2021/177 allows Member States to use additional funds made available for post-COVID-19 recovery under the REACT-EU initiative in 2021 and 2022.

² Article 13(9) of Regulation (EU) No 223/2014. Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 1255/2014 of 17 July 2014 lays down the content of the annual and final implementation reports, including the list of common indicators.

material assistance must be supplemented by accompanying measures. These are activities promoting social inclusion and tackling social emergencies in an empowering and sustainable way.

The social situation in which the FEAD operated in 2021 was characterised by further poverty and social exclusion challenges, partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Over 94 million people across the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2020³, which is 21.9% of the total population. The figures mask considerable differences between Member States: they ranged from 11.9%, 14.8% and 15.9% in Czechia, Slovakia and Denmark, respectively, to 32.1%, 30.4% and 28.8% in Bulgaria, Romania and Greece, respectively. The increase in 2020 can be associated directly with the socio-economic challenges from the sanitary measures put in place in response to COVID-19. In 2021, the pandemic also likely had a further negative impact on the financial situation of households, playing a role in the rise of poverty and income inequality in the short term.

Despite improvements made between 2012 and 2019, the Europe 2020 target of 20 million fewer people at risk of poverty compared with 2008 has remained out of reach throughout the last decade. The action plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights sets a new target for 2030, seeking to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by an additional 15 million to roughly 76 million by 2030, down from 91 million in 2019⁴. Due to the particular effects that poverty and social exclusion have on children, the action plan also sets the specific and supplementary ambition to reduce the number of children (aged 17 and under) at risk of poverty or social exclusion by 5 million by 2030.

1.1 Future developments

Under the current 2021-2027 EU long-term budget (also known as the multi-annual financial framework), the FEAD is integrated into the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) to simplify funding and improve synergies between the funds. To boost support for social inclusion, the ESF+ Regulation⁵ requires at least 25% of the ESF+ shared management strand to be allocated to social inclusion goals (compared with 20% under the 2014-2020 European Social Fund (ESF)), with a further minimum allocation of 3% per Member State to address material deprivation, the current key objective of the FEAD. Member States have planned EUR 5 billion of ESF+ resources (EUR 4.5 billion EU contribution) to support the most deprived people. This is 4% of the total ESF+ allocation under shared management, going beyond the 3% legal requirement.

Specific rules apply to support addressing material deprivation to keep it as streamlined as possible. Although part of the ESF+, the management of operations included in the priorities or programmes for material support (with simplified requirements in terms of management and monitoring) is designed to be simpler to avoid administrative burden on the organisations involved.

³ These values refer to the EU-27 for all years and can be consulted on Eurostat's website ([ILC_PEP_S01](#)). Missing data for Croatia in 2008 and 2009 was extrapolated on the basis of the value reported for 2010.

⁴ European Commission (2021), Commission staff working document accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan ([SWD\(2021\) 46 final](#)).

⁵ Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013.

1.2 Coordination of the FEAD at EU level

As in previous years, the FEAD expert group remained the main forum for managing authorities to exchange information on the fund's implementation. The expert group met twice in 2021 (together with the ESF technical working group) to discuss the FEAD programmes' implementation. Notable aspects discussed included accompanying measures, audits, coordination with other EU funds, simplified cost options and electronic vouchers, and REACT-EU amendments.

To strengthen stakeholder relations, in 2020 and 2021, mutual learning activities for the FEAD community replaced the FEAD network meetings that had taken place before. Three online thematic seminars, three peer exchanges and two conferences were held during this period, where implementation challenges and opportunities offered by the ESF+ were discussed.

In particular, the seminars and peer exchanges discussed:

- the characteristics of the new final recipients of FEAD-funded measures and new practices implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- possible integrated approaches to support the social inclusion of final recipients;
- monitoring and outreach;
- accompanying measures for social inclusion during and after the pandemic;
- implementation of (electronic) voucher schemes; and
- involvement and role of stakeholders and final recipients.

2. PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING THE OPERATIONAL PROGRAMMES⁶

2.1. Financial implementation

The total eligible public expenditure committed to FEAD support stood at EUR 694 million in 2021. At the end of 2021, a total budget of EUR 5.0 billion was available for FEAD investments. This total budget includes an increase of EUR 0.5 billion related to the REACT-EU package, which was created in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. It includes both the earmarked EU funds and national co-financing for implementation. By the end of 2021, not all REACT-EU amendments had been approved. Based on a review of programme amendments that were still ongoing at the end of 2021, an additional increase in total budget was expected for 2022.

Of the EUR 5.0 billion, the total approved expenditure reached EUR 4.68 billion by the end of 2021 (94% of the total budget)⁷. In 2021, the reported annual amounts of expenditure incurred by beneficiaries and paid for implementing operations increased considerably in comparison with earlier years, to EUR 768.3 million, reaching a total of EUR 3 614.5 million by the end of 2021 (or 65% of the total budget). **In terms of declared**

⁶ Figures represent the situation of the implementation of the 2014-2020 OPs up to 31 December 2021 as reported by 12 November 2022 in the annual implementation reports. All reports and data are collected in the System for Fund Management in the European Union – SFC2014 (<https://ec.europa.eu/sfc/en/2014/fund/fead>). SFC2014 is regulated by Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 463/2014 of 5 May 2014.

⁷ By 'approved expenditure' we refer to what the annual implementation reports call 'Total amount of eligible public expenditure approved in the documents setting out the conditions for support of operations' (common input indicator 1 as laid down in the Annex to Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 1255/2014 (OJ L 337, 25.11.2014, p. 46)).

expenditure, an acceleration in comparison with earlier years can be observed as well. The annual amount of declared expenditure was EUR 703.9 million, bringing the total to EUR 3 115.3 million (or 63% of the total budget).

When including the REACT-EU top-ups in the FEAD budgets for 2021, **no FEAD programme had fully implemented the available budgets by the end of 2021; the average EU implementation rate was 63%.** Implementation rates are determined based on the share of the total allocated budget that is currently declared to the Commission. Currently, Bulgaria (91%), Spain (86%), the Netherlands (86%), Finland (83%), Poland (82%), Ireland (80%), Austria (78%), Latvia (77%), Cyprus (73%), and Hungary (72%) are advancing relatively well. Based on current implementation, they are projected to declare expenditure of their entire budgets by the end of 2023.

The largest increase in budget implementation can be observed in Romania (with a 26 percentage point (pps) increase compared with the end of 2020), Hungary (25 pps), Cyprus (21 pps) and the Netherlands (20 pps). Additional action will be necessary to speed up implementation to avoid decommitment of FEAD budgets at the end of 2023, particularly in Italy (current implementation rate of 40%), Croatia (46%), Lithuania (64%) and Slovenia (56%).

The FEAD has proven to be flexible and responsive to emerging needs, such as those emerging from the COVID-19 crisis. The FEAD Regulation was amended in April 2020⁸ as part of the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative Plus (CRII+). This made it possible to use indirect delivery modes, e.g. vouchers or cards (to lower the risk of infection) and to buy personal protective equipment for organisations delivering FEAD support. Moreover, the amendments enabled Member States to use a 100% EU co-financing rate for 1 accounting year. By the end of 2021, 12 FEAD programmes had been amended: 8 of them to benefit from the 100% co-financing rate and 4 to introduce emergency measures to respond to the pandemic.

A further amendment to the FEAD Regulation was adopted in February 2021 as part of the Commission's recovery plan under REACT-EU⁹. This amendment allows Member States to allocate additional funding to programmes under the ESF, the FEAD and the European Regional Development Fund. These additional resources can provide top-ups to existing support, such as food and/or basic material assistance, and social inclusion projects. Additional resources should be in line with each Member State's specific needs and take into account the higher number of deprived people since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 13 OPs were amended (Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Austria, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia), with a total top-up from the 2021 instalment of REACT-EU of EUR 506 million.

On 6 April 2022, the FEAD Regulation was amended¹⁰ again, in relation to Cohesion's Action for Refugees in Europe (CARE). CARE gives Member States and regions more flexibility to use the FEAD to provide emergency support to people fleeing Ukraine following Russia's full-scale invasion. Specifically, it allows Member States to amend certain parts of their programmes to address the crisis, where needed, and simply notify the Commission rather than seeking its approval for the changes. Moreover, it provides for an

⁸ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32020R0559>

⁹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32021R0177>

¹⁰ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/HIS/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2022.109.01.0001.01.ENG

earlier starting date of eligibility for these initiatives: 24 February 2022. It also extends the possibility of 100% EU co-financing to cover the accounting year starting on 1 July 2021 and ending on 30 June 2022. In addition, a Regulation¹¹ to supplement CARE was adopted on 12 April 2022. This amendment provides liquidity and speeds up access to funds for beneficiaries. It does so by adding EUR 3.5 billion in pre-financing payments to the 2021 instalment of REACT-EU for FEAD and cohesion policy programmes.

2.2 Implementation on the ground

FEAD outreach and the profile of final recipients

In 2021, 15.0 million people received food assistance through the FEAD, and another 2.1 million people received basic material assistance. Just under 18 000 people received social inclusion support. Out of this total of 17.1 million, 50% were women, 26% children and 11% over 65 years old. Migrants, people with a foreign background or people from minorities made up 18%, people with disabilities 6% and people experiencing homelessness 5%.

In 2021, the FEAD successfully delivered assistance in 27 Member States, making good progress in achieving its objectives. Most Member States (23 out of 27) distributed food and/or basic material assistance and carried out accompanying measures (Table 1, OP I). Four Member States continued to run social inclusion programmes (Table 1, OP II).

Table 1. Type of assistance – FEAD

Operational programme	Type of assistance	Member State (MS)
OP I	Food	10 MSs: BE, BG, EE, ES, FI, FR, MT, PL, PT, SI
	Basic material assistance	1 MS: AT
	Both	12 MSs: CY*, CZ, EL, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, RO SK^
OP II	Social inclusion	4 MSs: DE, DK, NL, SE
* Cyprus completed its food delivery project in 2019 and has only focused on basic material assistance since then.		
^ Slovakia provided basic material assistance between 2016 and 2020 and has only reported on food support since then.		

Source: 2021 annual implementation reports.

Children account for around 26% of those who received food, basic material or social inclusion assistance in 2021. This share slightly decreased compared with 2020, when it was 28%. In several Member States, children made up a large share of those receiving food support, particularly in Belgium, Croatia, Hungary, France and Malta. Furthermore, Cyprus,

¹¹ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/HIS/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2022.115.01.0038.01.ENG

Hungary, Ireland and Austria only distributed material support to children (so they account for all basic material assistance).

Around 18% of final recipients were migrants, people with a foreign background or people from minorities (including marginalised communities, such as the Roma). However, this share may be underestimated as information on migrants receiving support is not always reported for data protection reasons (Greece, France and Slovakia). Migrants in general are the largest group, followed by refugees and asylum seekers.

An estimated 5% of FEAD final recipients were homeless people; this proportion remained broadly stable. However, the number of homeless people is particularly difficult to estimate as they are not registered and are often reluctant to provide any personal information. In Ireland, Czechia and France, more than 10% of final recipients of food assistance were homeless people. In Italy, the proportion of homeless people receiving food assistance was relatively low (3.7%), but it was the largest group receiving basic material assistance (94% of all final recipients). Czechia also had a relatively high proportion of final recipients of basic material assistance who were homeless (21%).

Approximately 6% of final recipients were people with disabilities. The largest share of people with disabilities receiving food assistance was in Bulgaria and Hungary (31% in both countries). The share of people with disabilities receiving material assistance was relatively high in Romania, Latvia and Lithuania (19%, 17% and 12%, respectively).

Implementing the FEAD against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic

In 2021, the provision of food support and basic material assistance continued to be strongly affected by COVID-19 restrictions and a greater demand for help. Changes to address this introduced in 2020 also continued in 2021. Examples mentioned across programmes in 2021 include changes to the types and number of final recipients, the ways support was delivered and the type of support.

Several programmes mentioned that additional socially vulnerable individuals and families that had not been supported before COVID-19 were included to help them cope with the difficulties created by the pandemic. This is further analysed in specific sections in this chapter. This chapter also highlights the selection of new groups in 2020 (in addition to the continuation of existing support) for food support and particularly basic material assistance. The increased support throughout the pandemic continued in 2021 as detailed in the specific sections below. Latvia, for instance, reported that it extended the eligibility for needy and low-income households during its states of emergency in 2021, effectively ensuring that the programme's recipients were covered for longer periods. In Bulgaria, additional groups were supported, including those that were included based on their socio-economic status and people at high risk of COVID-19 infection (who were reached through home deliveries). While the overall number of final recipients grew during the pandemic, some programmes reported lower numbers of recipients. Ireland, for instance, saw a reduction in the number of final recipients due to national pandemic income support programmes. This enabled the FEAD to focus on supporting charities instead, by improving food quality and variety as well as engaging with the harder-to-reach vulnerable people.

The pandemic also had a considerable effect on the ways support was delivered. To reduce the risks of exposing recipients to infection, programmes expanded home delivery to provide food supplies and basic material assistance, instead of using central pick-up points. This change is mentioned as one of the most visible in various programmes, such as those of Estonia, Greece and Latvia. Estonia reported that a considerably higher number of food packages were delivered to people's homes compared with the period before 2020. Food packages were also delivered directly to homeless shelters. In Latvia, ready-made meals that used to be served in soup kitchens were only available as takeaway. Most programmes reported that COVID-19 caused significant logistical challenges for distribution. In some countries, home deliveries were made by the beneficiary organisations and their volunteers/staff, while others also used parcel delivery services. The pandemic affected the availability of volunteers and other staff to work in distribution centres. In France, these are mentioned as major factors that affected implementation of the FEAD. At the same time, France reported that the role of FEAD food support grew due to fewer donations from supermarkets and agricultural partners.

Finally, the type of support in some cases also changed. While food support and types of food delivered tended to be relatively stable (except in Ireland as noted above), basic material assistance was swiftly adapted to respond to the specific needs emerging from the pandemic from 2020 onwards. Assistance included protective personal equipment, disinfectant and additional hygiene products to help cope with the specific needs of vulnerable groups during the pandemic. Generally, these changes did not mean that existing types of basic material assistance were replaced. In Cyprus, the distribution of products for newborns continued throughout the pandemic. France and Romania reported other changes to how support was organised. In 2021, both countries used vouchers that permitted the direct 'purchase' of food and basic material assistance. Romania reported that the use of vouchers helped it reach recipients of support effectively.

OP I – Food assistance

The highest absolute numbers of people that received food support were in Spain, France, Italy, Poland and Romania (see Table 2). Italy's budget grew considerably by just under EUR 200 million due to REACT-EU, increasing the number of people who received food support. The number of people supported in Romania also rose considerably (from 1.2 million to 1.5 million) compared with 2020. This was related to an increased budget due to REACT-EU (EUR 56 million) and the fact that budget implementation picked up speed. However, the number of people reached in other Member States remained relatively stable compared with earlier years. From 2020 to 2021, France reported a decrease in final recipients (5.1 million in 2021 compared with 5.5 million in 2020), but this is still much higher than pre-COVID-19 levels. France's annual implantation report does not explain this reduction in numbers. However, it does highlight the continued need for the FEAD to provide food support in a context heavily affected by COVID-19 and with fewer donations from the private sector. The more flexible national implementation rules adopted in response to COVID-19 remained in effect throughout 2021. Therefore, this flexibility did not play a role in the decline in the number of final recipients.

Table 2. Number of people receiving food support – by year (in thousands)

Member State	2018	2019	2020	2021	% of EU
BE	394	359	382	449	3%
BG	540	466	494	553	4%
CY	2	2	-	-	0%
CZ	101	57	78	62	0%
EE	23	21	26	24	0%
ES	1 288	1 229	1 496	1 468	10%
FI	281	316	317	295	2%
FR	4 340	4 790	5 504	5 120	34%
EL	353	290	294	319	2%
HR	42	108	23	62	0%
HU	184	141	182	177	1%
IE	152	195	277	157	1%
IT	2 678	2 079	2 657	2 984	20%
LT	197	192	183	195	1%
LU	13	13	13	13	0%
LV	70	76	75	88	1%
MT	13	11	12	10	0%
PL	1 385	1 356	1 337	1 254	8%
PT	79	93	149	170	1%
RO**	-	-	1 186	1 486	10%
SI	158	153	157	151	1%
SK	192	185	137	7	0%
EU	12 486	12 128	14 980	15 044	100%

** The figures for Romania are not based on the annual implementation report but on additional clarifications provided by the managing authority to the Commission due to an inconsistency that will be fixed from 2022 on¹².

Source: 2021 annual implementation reports, updated until 15 December 2022.

FEAD programmes across the EU have focused on different priority target groups, which is directly reflected in the different groups of recipients that received support. This is mainly because FEAD programmes supplement different national policies. Table 3 shows that in Hungary, a comparatively large share of food support went to children (60%), whereas other Member States chose more often to use the FEAD for direct food support to people over 65 years (Bulgaria: 35%, Finland: 36%, Latvia: 31%, Romania: 29%). The overall share of women in the total number of recipients of food support was 50%. However, this also varies greatly between Member States: women made up 59% of final recipients in Bulgaria and 57% in Malta, but only 24% in Hungary and 31% in Ireland (well below the EU average). Belgium, Czechia, Luxembourg, Hungary and Spain reached high shares of migrants with their food support action. The average share of people with disabilities receiving food support in the EU was relatively low at 5% on average. However, Hungary (33%), Bulgaria (29%), Romania (17%), Latvia (17%), Poland (16%) and Lithuania (12%) reached considerably more people with disabilities. Homeless people were not often counted as recipients of food support, except in Czechia (17%), Ireland (17%) and particularly Slovakia (100%). Slovakia directed its entire food support programme to ready-made hot meals for homeless people in five cities.

¹² In its formal figures submitted in the annual implementation report, Romania did not count recipients that already had had food support in previous years, which is inconsistent with the reporting of other countries. The managing authority provided revised figures once this inconsistency was spotted.

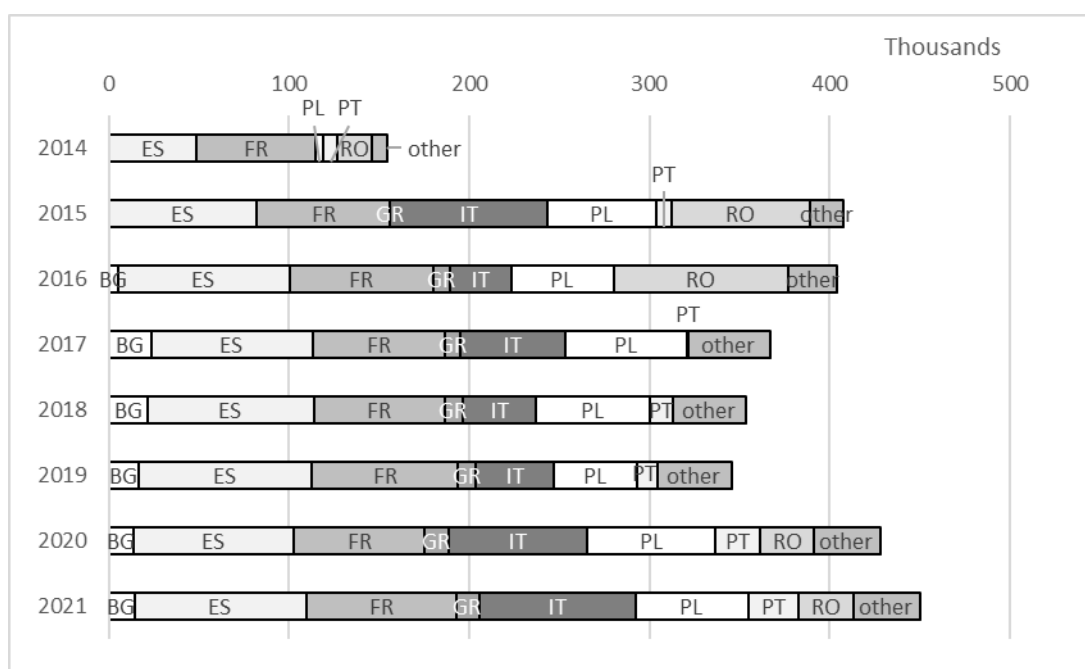
Table 3. Categories of people receiving food support in 2021

	Children	Older	Women	Migrants	With disabilities	Homeless
BE	29%	9%	39%	29%	3%	5%
BG	22%	35%	59%	8%	29%	0%
CY						
CZ	48%	9%	40%	26%	7%	17%
EE	22%	18%	53%	22%	19%	4%
ES	29%	7%	53%	27%	2%	2%
FI	14%	36%	45%	12%	2%	1%
FR	31%	7%	52%	0%	0%	11%
GR	20%	10%	52%	7%	3%	3%
HR	46%	18%	53%	4%	2%	0%
HU	60%	12%	24%	32%	33%	6%
IE	36%	8%	31%	15%	4%	17%
IT	20%	11%	52%	23%	1%	4%
LT	25%	11%	52%	1%	12%	0%
LU	28%	2%	51%	79%	3%	2%
LV	13%	31%	56%	2%	17%	1%
MT	51%	7%	57%	8%	1%	0%
PL	26%	13%	51%	1%	16%	3%
PT	27%	7%	54%	8%	1%	0%
RO	24%	29%	40%	5%	17%	0%
SI	20%	18%	53%	9%	4%	1%
SK	0%	6%	23%	0%	4%	100%
EU	27%	12%	50%	10%	5%	6%

Source: 2021 annual implementation reports, updated until 15 December 2022.

To assess the changes in target groups reached by food support measures funded by the FEAD during the pandemic, the personal characteristics of recipients during the pandemic years (2020-2021) were compared with the aggregated population of recipients of food support in 2014-2019. At EU level, food support during COVID-19 reached a slightly lower share of children (-2 percentage points) than before the pandemic. The share of older people, women, people with disabilities and homeless people all increased by 1 percentage point compared with before 2020. Only a small number of Member States reported substantial changes in the share of individual target groups among recipients. Bulgaria and Hungary stand out with increased shares of people with disabilities reached with food support (10 percentage points and 11 percentage points higher than before 2020, respectively). In both countries, socially deprived people with disabilities were specifically targeted with food support, a focus that had already been in place before COVID-19. The COVID-19 lockdowns made their situation worse, to which the countries' FEAD programmes sought to respond.

Figure 1. Food assistance provided in 2014-2021 (thousands of tonnes) by Member State

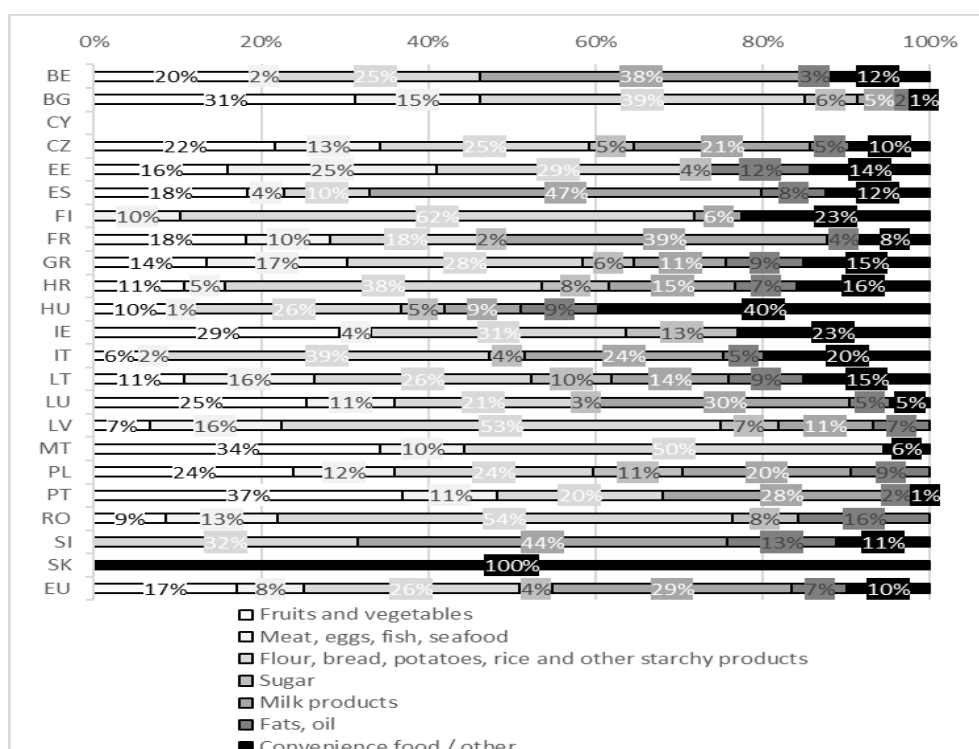


Source: 2021 annual implementation reports, updated until 15 December 2022.

The amount of food measured in tonnes increased steadily from 2019, reaching almost 450 000 tonnes in 2021. The explanation provided most often by Member States was the need to respond to a rise in precariousness during COVID-19 lockdowns. The share of individual Member States in this total has not changed substantially over time. Romania stands out because it did not provide food support between 2017 and 2019 but managed to resume food support from 2020.

All Member States reported in some way that they adhere to the cross-cutting principle that food support plays a role in ensuring a balanced diet for the most deprived people, but their implementation choices vary substantially. Figure 2 provides more insight into the specific choices made in the selection of food products. Bulgaria, Ireland, Malta and Portugal included above-average shares of fruits and vegetables. Starchy products, including flour, bread, potatoes and rice, made up more than half the food in Finland, Latvia, Malta and Romania. In Belgium, France, Spain and Slovenia, milk products made up a share of the overall food composition above the EU average. Convenience food or food that could not be classified made up roughly 10% on average but filled the entire food basket in Slovakia and 40% of the food provided in Hungary. Slovakia provided a hot soup, pastry and a warm soft drink, which it classified in the residual category. There are no figures for Cyprus as it did not deliver food support in 2021; in its last delivery of food support, in 2018, it included predominantly starchy products (45%), followed by fruits and vegetables (27%) and animal products (14%) and dairy (14%) to a smaller extent.

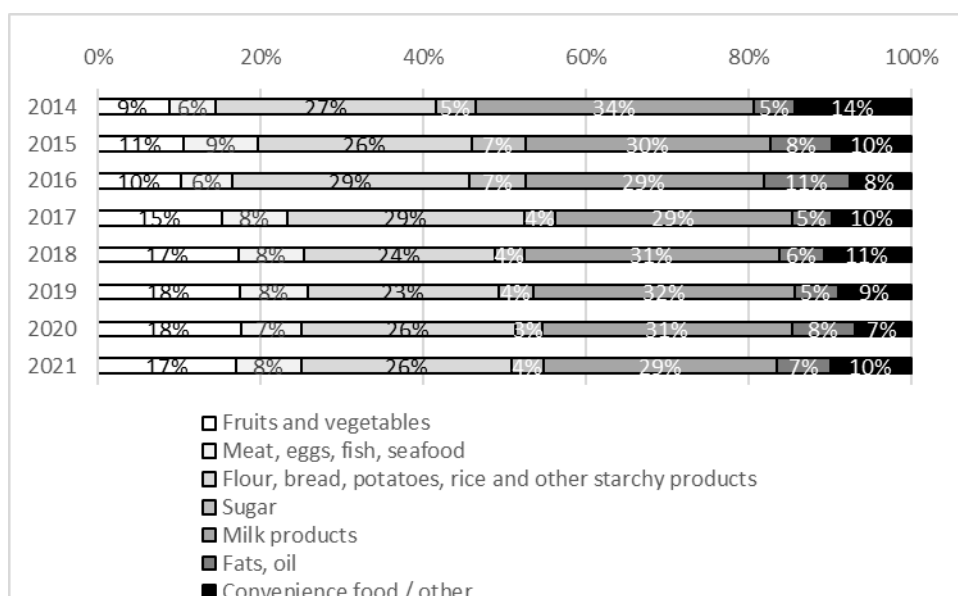
Figure 2. Composition of food support in 2021 – by Member State



Source: 2021 annual implementation reports, updated until 15 December 2022.

The specific composition of food support shows no major changes over time. Only **2014-2016** shows **slightly different compositions of the types of food support provided**, possibly due to the slightly different mix of Member States offering support in those years.

Figure 3. Composition of food support provided (as a share of total support)

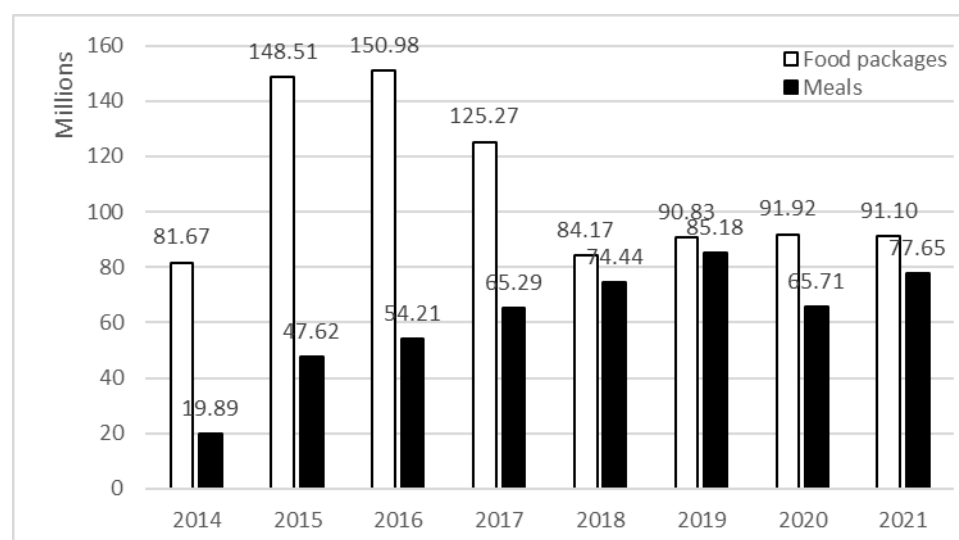


Source: 2021 annual implementation reports, updated until 15 December 2022.

The food was handed out in the form of food packages or directly as meals. Slovakia only distributed meals in 2021, and France, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal and Slovenia only distributed food packages. The other Member States distributed both. Figure 4 shows

that the trend in the delivery of food packages over time has stabilised since 2019; in 2021, there were a total of 91.1 million food packages and 77.7 million meals.

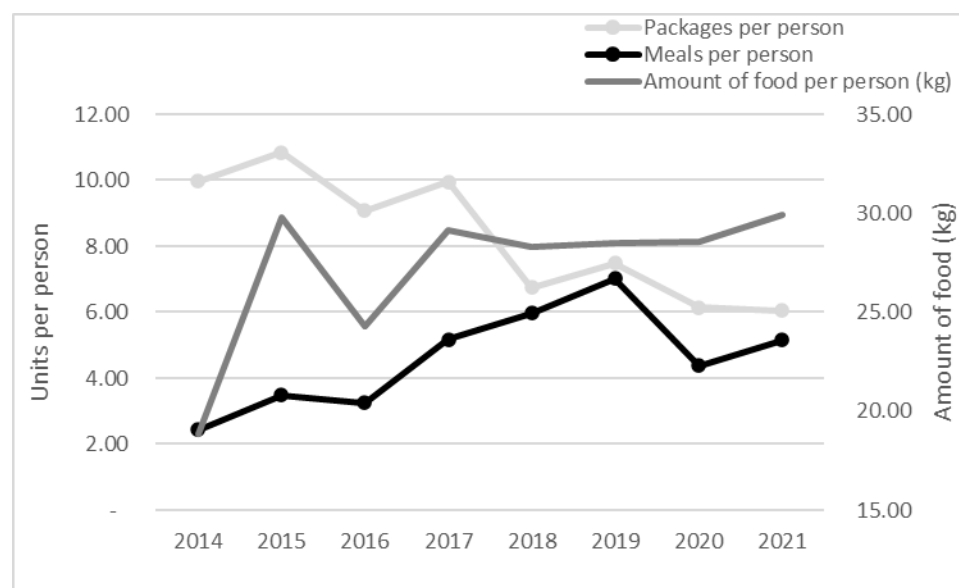
Figure 4. Trend in the number of food packages and meals distributed over time



Source: 2021 annual implementation reports, updated until 15 December 2022.

The review also assessed the trend in the number of packages and meals distributed per person over time. The overall number of packages per person has steadily declined since 2015, from around 10 on average to slightly above 6 in 2021. By contrast, the number of meals distributed per person increased, from just above 2 on average per person in 2014 to slightly under 6 in 2021. The amount of food distributed per person in weight increased substantially from 18.9 kg in 2014 to 30.0 kg in 2021.

Figure 5. Development of food distributed per person – 2014-2021, various indicators



Source: 2021 annual implementation reports, updated until 15 December 2022.

OP I – Basic material assistance

Members States reported a relatively stable number of recipients of basic material assistance between 2018 and 2021 (see Table 4). Romania was responsible for over half of all final recipients receiving basic material assistance in the EU, providing four deliveries of packages of hygiene kits to final recipients in 2020-2021. In 2021, the FEAD also supported the purchase of school materials, by making electronic vouchers available to parents of eligible disadvantaged children. They were able to use these vouchers to purchase essential school supplies and clothing for their children.

Table 4. Number of people receiving basic material assistance (in thousands)

MS	2018	2019	2020	2021	% of EU
AT	45	44	44	42	2%
CY	1	1	1	1	0%
CZ	72	34	58	51	2%
EL	239	189	266	275	13%
HR	24	83	0	15	1%
HU	26	57	128	150	7%
IE	41	40	51	45	2%
IT	-	5	25	29	1%
LT	197	192	183	195	9%
LU	13	13	13	13	1%
LV	17	70	69	81	4%
RO**	-	-	1 122	1 188	57%
SK	110	97	-	-	0%
EU	785	824	1 960	2 084	100%

** The figures for Romania are not based on the annual implementation report but on additional clarifications provided by the managing authority to the Commission due to an inconsistency that will be fixed from 2022 onwards.

Source: 2021 annual implementation reports, updated until 15 December 2022.

Basic material assistance was only provided to children in Cyprus, Hungary and Ireland, and children also made up a high share of recipients in Austria (84%). In general, basic material assistance was not targeted at people over 65 years, although in Latvia (31%) and Croatia (19%), this group was supported more than the EU average (10%).

Women made up an above-average share of recipients of material assistance in Latvia (57%), Ireland (58%) and Austria (63%); in Cyprus, they were the only ones to receive basic material assistance (girls aged under 15 years).

The number of people with a migrant background reached in Austria, Cyprus, Czechia, Italy and Luxembourg was above the EU average. Basic material assistance in Lithuania, Latvia and Romania reached comparatively higher shares of people with disabilities than in other Member States.

Basic material assistance was specifically targeted at homeless people in Italy (94%); the country focused on people in a state of severe material deprivation, most of them homeless men of foreign origin. Italy reported that the majority (72%) of those who received basic material assistance in 2021 also benefited from food aid (up from 46% in 2020). The country

sought to not only respond immediately to the primary needs of those living in extreme poverty, but also to progressively overcome the state of severe deprivation. This shows how the Italian FEAD programme supported recipients more comprehensively from the start of the pandemic in response to a growing demand for help associated with the more difficult situations caused by the pandemic.

Table 5. Personal characteristics of people receiving basic material assistance in 2021

	Children	Older	Women	Migrants	With disabilities	Homeless
AT	84%	0%	63%	67%	0%	0%
CY	100%	0%	100%	66%	0%	0%
CZ	39%	11%	40%	33%	8%	22%
GR	21%	9%	52%	8%	2%	3%
HR	35%	19%	52%	2%	2%	0%
HU	100%	0%	1%	7%	1%	0%
IE	100%	0%	58%	6%	0%	0%
IT	3%	4%	14%	77%	1%	94%
LT	25%	11%	52%	1%	12%	0%
LU	28%	2%	51%	79%	3%	2%
LV	14%	31%	57%	1%	17%	0%
RO	31%	11%	28%	6%	19%	0%
SK						
EU	36%	10%	34%	9%	13%	2%

Source: 2021 annual implementation reports, updated until 15 December 2022.

The categories of recipients of basic material assistance during the pandemic were also compared with those before 2020 (see Table 6). **Differences are larger than those in food support, both at Member-State and at EU-aggregate level.** Basic material assistance provided during the pandemic reached a lower share of women than before 2020 (down 15 percentage points) and more people with disabilities (up 9 percentage points). In Latvia, basic material assistance provided by the FEAD reached much lower shares of children among the total population of recipients (down 32 percentage points) in 2020-2021 compared with the pre-pandemic period. The Latvian report explains this by pointing to the greater needs of older people during the pandemic as well as national legislative changes and specific national support opportunities that focused on families. This reduced the need for the FEAD to focus on these groups. This can also be seen in the overall small increase in the **absolute** number of children reached with basic material assistance. Hungary reports that its basic material assistance reached a lower share of migrants among the total population (-24 percentage points) but did not explain this reduction.

In Cyprus, the share of women receiving basic material assistance rose sharply during the pandemic. It grew from 57% before the pandemic to 100% during the pandemic (an increase of 43 percentage points) as only women received assistance in this period. However, this change is not related to the pandemic but the result of a streamlining of material support to newborns, which has been specifically targeted at mothers since 2020.

Table 6. Change in target groups reached with material assistance between 2014-2019 and 2020-2021

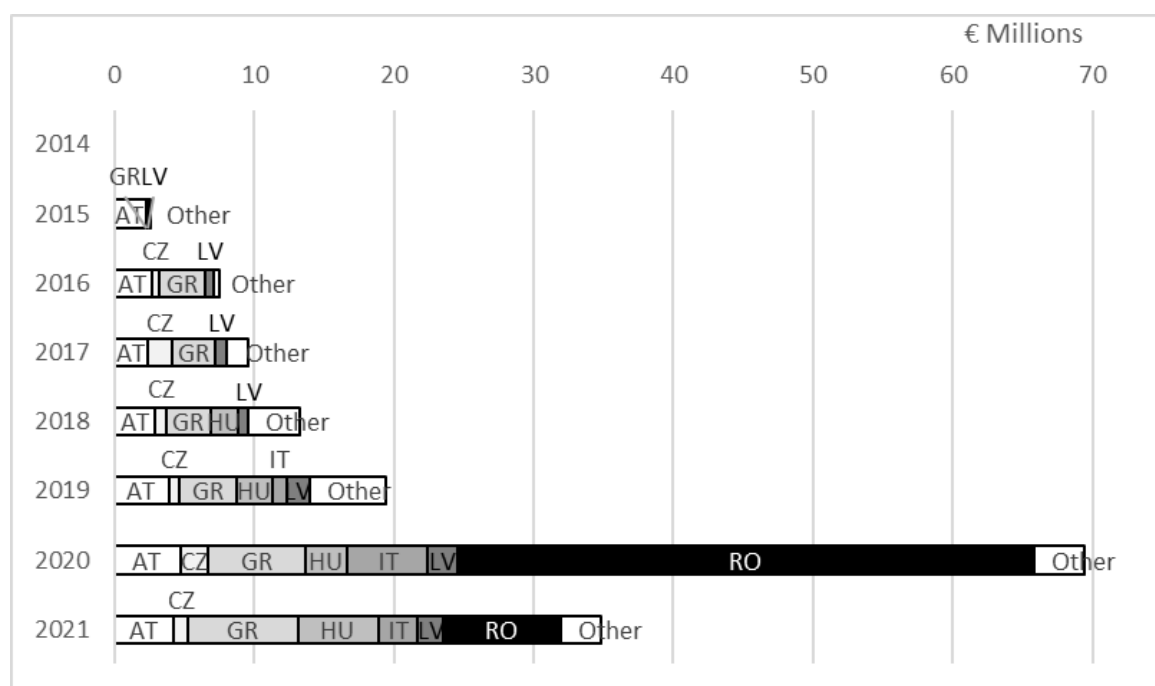
change in percentage points	Children	Older	Women	Migrants	With disabilities	Homeless
AT	-3	-	6	13	-	-
CY	-	-	43	11	-	-
CZ	-4	-4	-10	-1	-1	5
GR	-5	4	0	6	1	2
HR	8	-3	1	-7	-3	-0
HU	2	-	-2	-24	-2	-
IE	2	-	4	1	-	-
IT	5	2	7	-2	-4	5
LT	-1	2	0	-0	1	-0
LU	-2	1	-1	7	-1	2
LV	-32	15	4	-1	7	-0
RO						
SK						
EU	-4	3	-15	-2	9	-0

Source: 2021 annual implementation reports, updated until 15 December 2022¹³.

Member States' annual reports show **an increasing trend in the monetary value of basic material assistance provided under the FEAD up to 2020**. While this trend had already started before 2020, a marked increase in the value of material can be observed from the start of the pandemic in 2020. Romania stands out mainly because it started up FEAD operations again that year. Even if Romania is excluded, Figure 6 still shows a sustained positive trend until 2020, reaching EUR 34.9 million worth of basic material provided. A minor decrease in the total value is reported for 2021, mainly caused by Romania and Italy, but in most countries, the value remained stable or increased. In 2021, substantial values of material assistance were provided in Austria (EUR 4.2 million), Greece (EUR 7.9 million), Hungary (EUR 5.7 million) and Romania (EUR 8.4 million). Italy does not give a clear explanation for the decrease in the value of goods delivered in 2021 compared with 2020. However, the country does mention that the situation had changed following the COVID-19 pandemic, and this made it necessary for implementing bodies to partially reorganise their work in distributing material assistance.

¹³ No data is reported for Romania and Slovakia because they had no recipients that can be compared. Romania did not report recipients before 2020, and Slovakia has not reported recipients of basic material assistance since 2020.

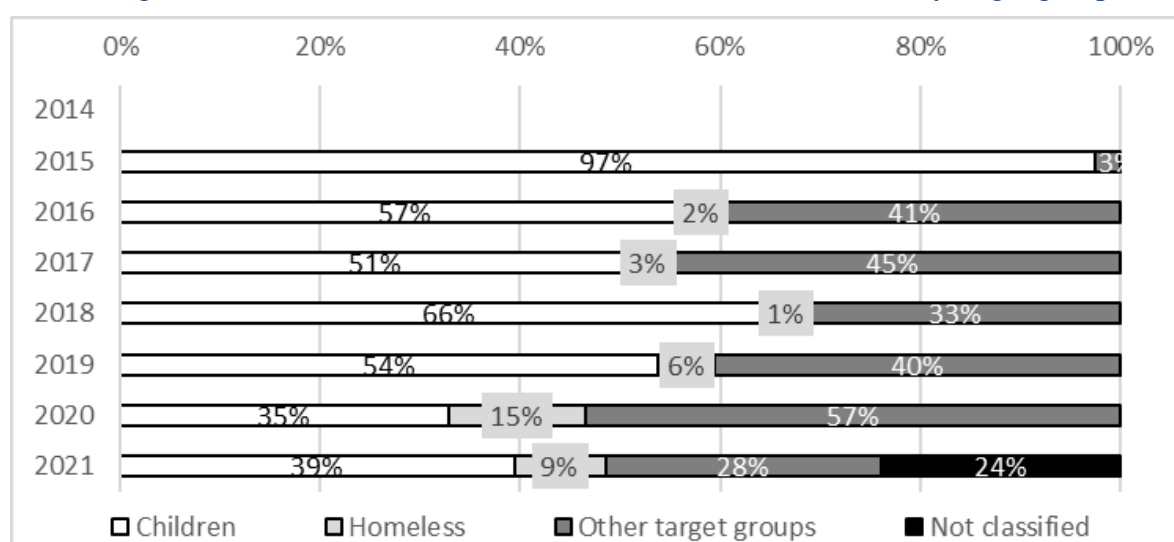
Figure 6. Total monetary value of basic material assistance provided (value in EUR million)



Source: 2021 annual implementation reports, updated until 15 December 2022.

Since the start of the 2014-2020 programming period, the distribution of the value of basic material delivered across specific target groups has varied. If 2015 is disregarded, between one third and two thirds of the value of basic material has been allocated to children, with a growing share of the overall value allocated to homeless people in recent years. At the time of writing, Romania has not yet classified its value of material provided in 2021 by target group; this is the 24% that is not classified in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Share of the total value of basic material assistance by target group

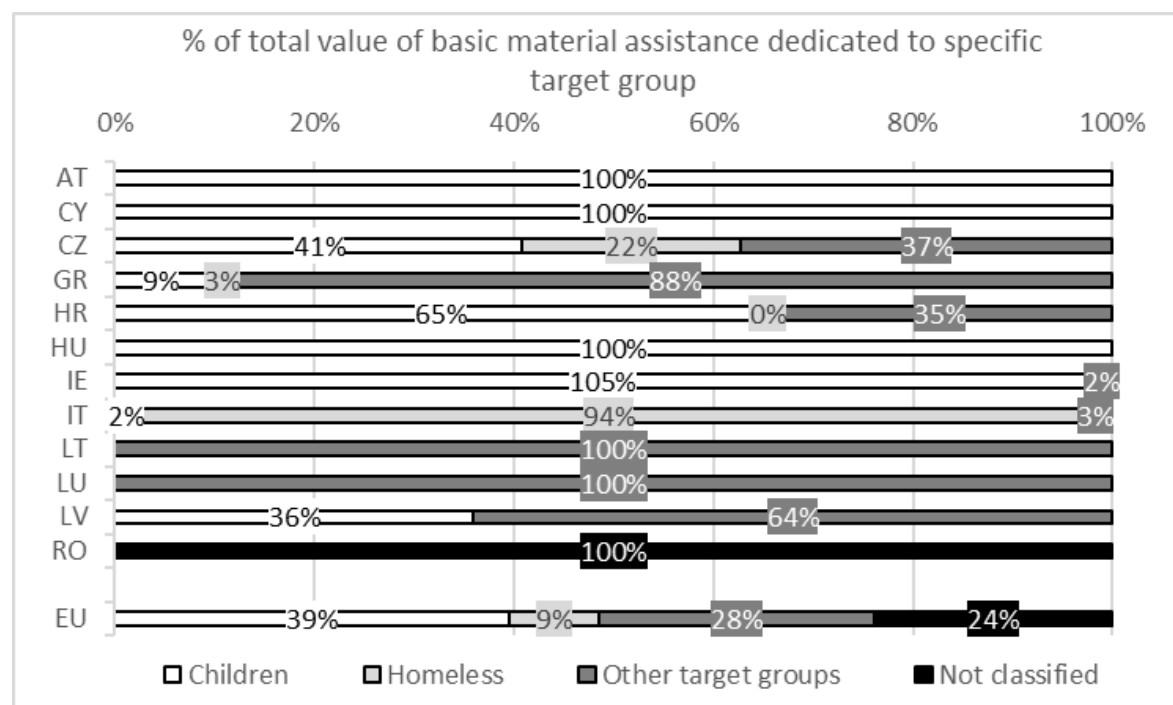


Source: 2021 annual implementation reports, updated until 15 December 2022.

The relative value of basic material provided to target groups in 2021 is further analysed by Member State. This gives an insight into the different ways countries chose the type of basic material assistance. The value of basic material assistance was almost fully allocated to

children in Austria¹⁴, Cyprus, Hungary and Ireland¹⁵ and to a considerable extent in Croatia (35%) and Czechia (41%). In Czechia, 22% of the value of basic material assistance was allocated to homeless people, and almost the entire value of material was allocated to this group in Italy (94%).

Distribution of the value of basic material assistance across specific target groups (2021)



Source: 2021 annual implementation reports, updated until 15 December 2022.

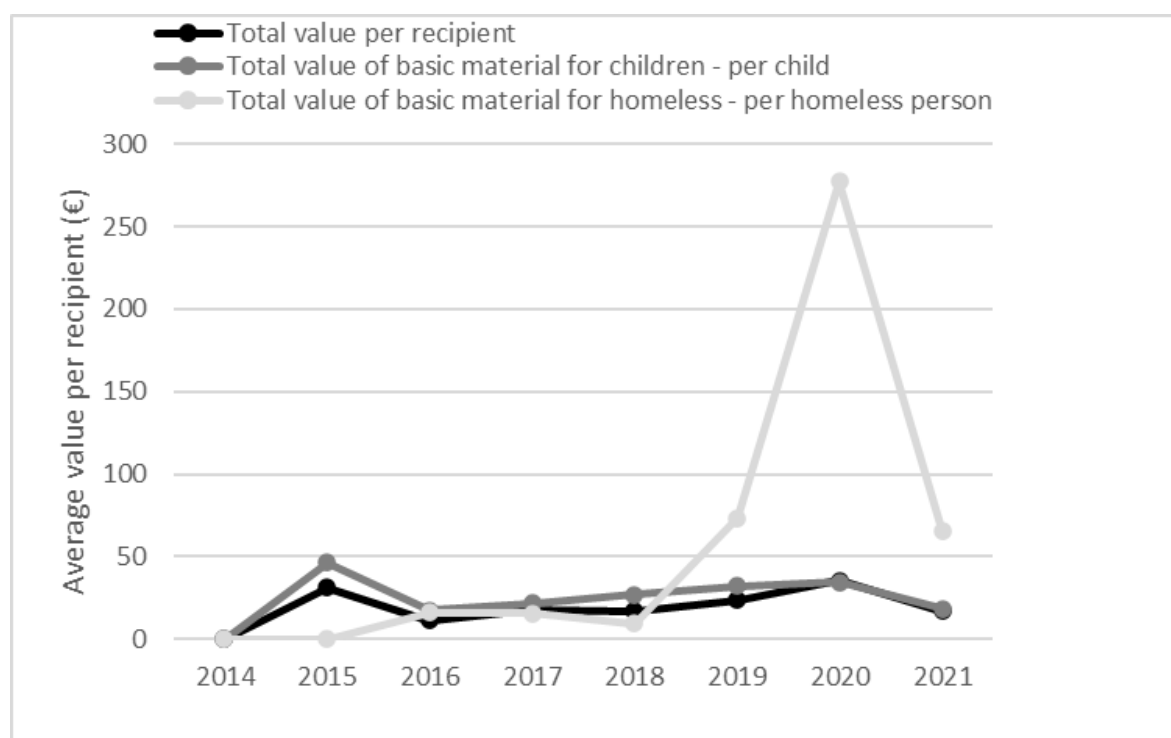
The value of basic material assistance per recipient showed a slightly increasing trend up to 2020, reaching EUR 35.42. In 2021, the average value per recipient dropped significantly to EUR 16.73 (or EUR 29.55 if Romania is excluded). The lower value for Romania is explained by the fact that most of its costs were part of a 2-year support programme recorded in 2020.

The value of basic material support per homeless person has fluctuated sharply over the years, mainly due to a lower number of homeless people reached, particularly in 2020. In 2020, an average value of over EUR 277 per homeless person was reported due to the comparatively high value and limited number of people reported by Italy (EUR 323 per homeless person in 2020 against EUR 98 in 2021). Italy's annual implementation report does not explain this difference.

¹⁴ The Austrian FEAD support was exclusively targeted at pupils in schools. Some of them had already passed the age limit for children.

¹⁵ Ireland reported a higher value of basic material delivered to children than the total value of basic material delivered, representing 105% in the figure. No explanation is given for this in the annual implementation report.

Figure 8. Trend in the value of basic material assistance per recipient over time



Source: 2021 annual implementation reports, updated until 15 December 2022.

OP I – Accompanying measures

In line with the FEAD Regulation, Member States that ran OP I programmes in 2021 also implemented accompanying measures. However, the COVID-19 crisis posed significant challenges to delivering these accompanying measures, and their implementation has generally been uneven across Member States.

Most Member States continued to carry out a combination of accompanying measures, and only a few chose to focus on just one or two activities.

Accompanying measures implemented in 2021 included:

- advice on food preparation and storage (BE, BG, CZ, ES, FI, FR, HR, LT, LV, MT, PL, PT and SK);
- educational activities or information to promote healthy nutrition and lifestyle, e.g. cooking workshops (BE, BG, CZ, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, IT, LT, LU, LV, PT, PL, RO, SI and SK);
- advice on how to reduce food waste (BG, CZ, ES, FI, LU, LV, PL and PT);
- personal hygiene advice (BE, BG, EL, HR, HU, LV, RO and SK);
- referrals to relevant services (e.g. social/administrative) (BE, BG, CZ, EE, FI, FR, IE, IT, LU, LV, PT and SK);
- coaching and workshops, especially to improve integration into education or the labour market (BG, CY, CZ, EL, FI, FR, IE, IT, LT, LV, MT, RO and SI);
- educational activities and skills training/programmes (EL, FR, LV, MT, PL, RO and SI);
- measures facilitating access to healthcare (BG, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LV and RO);

- psychological and therapeutic support (CZ, EL, FI, FR, HU, IT, LT, LV, PL, RO and SI);
- advice on managing a household budget (BG, CZ, EL, FR, HR, IE, IT, LT, LV, MT, PL, PT and SK);
- specific advice on maintaining or restoring family/community ties, including conflict resolution, parental assistance, assistance for home care (BG, CY, FR, IE, LT, LV and PL);
- social and leisure activities (CZ, FI, FR, LV, LU, MT, PL and SI);
- provision of legal services (CZ, FR, IT, LT, PL and RO); and
- other accompanying activities (AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, EE, ES, FI, FR, IE, EL, IT, LU, MT, PL, PT, RO and SI), mainly personal support services, adult care, social transport, measures facilitating access to housing or shelter, support for access to rights, and school support.

OP II – Social inclusion

Four Member States (DE, DK, NL and SE) used the FEAD to meet social inclusion objectives. Each of these Member States has specific types of action that are tailored to specific target groups. This is unlike the more standardised approach taken for action on food support or basic material assistance and is most visible in the indicators set and activities carried out. **This section shows that all four social inclusion programmes faced challenges in reaching the specific target groups in 2021**, due to persisting COVID-19 restrictions. Because of their more specific and tailored nature, these programmes did not substantially change their approach and target groups. As a result, there were fewer recipients in 2021 than in previous years.

The number of recipients is markedly lower than in the other FEAD-type programmes, which is a deliberate design feature. Table 7 shows a substantial decrease in the number of recipients in 2021 compared with 2020, particularly in Germany. This is due to a much lower number of projects that were to continue in 2021 and 2022. Due to budget constraints, only some of the projects could be extended beyond 2020. In its annual implementation report, Germany also points to persisting COVID-19 restrictions as a factor in the decrease. When interpreting the figures, only people using the advisory service of a project for the first time are counted in 2021, whereas many other people continued to be supported.

In Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands, the lower number of recipients was also related to COVID-19 restrictions because physical meetings were often not possible; in the Netherlands, support often took place in libraries, which were closed for the first 5 months of 2021.

Table 7. Number of people receiving support for social inclusion

Member State	2018	2019	2020	2021	% of EU
DE	37 062	27 742	28 168	16 787	94%
DK	454	757	277	570	3%
NL	769	579	366	93	1%
SE	414	658	1 175	441	2%
EU	38 699	29 736	29 986	17 891	100%

Source: 2021 annual implementation reports, updated until 15 December 2022.

Table 8 shows the various target groups that received social inclusion support in the four Member States. The column totals may add up to more than 100% because one individual may have been allocated to several categories. The Netherlands continued to focus only on people over 65 years and mainly reached women (85%). Migrants, people with a foreign background or minorities were among the main groups of individuals who received social inclusion support in the other three countries. Denmark and Sweden focused almost only on homeless people.

Table 8. Personal characteristics of people receiving social inclusion support in 2021

	Children	Older	Women	Migrants	With disabilities	Homeless
DE	16%	1%	50%	82%	2%	38%
DK	0%	1%	18%	92%	25%	100%
NL	0%	100%	85%	31%	18%	0%
SE	0%	3%	52%	83%	0%	97%
EU	15%	2%	50%	82%	3%	41%

Source: 2021 annual implementation reports, updated until 15 December 2022.

The shares of recipients of social inclusion support were compared with those before 2020 (see Table 9). Like food support, **changes across target groups are relatively limited at the aggregated level**. A higher share of homeless people can be observed during the pandemic period (up 14 percentage points), mainly due to the higher absolute numbers in this target group in Sweden and Denmark. Programmes in these two countries only focused on this target group. As a result, the share of recipients at national level is unaffected (100% and 97% respectively), but is affected at EU level, where an increase in absolute numbers is also reflected in the relative share of the overall population. Moreover, the share of migrants among the total recipients in Sweden increased as well; the country reported that, particularly in 2021, people with a migrant background returned to Sweden but often faced more a precarious situation than before because of the pandemic.

Table 9. Change in target groups reached with OP II between 2014-2019 (before the pandemic) and 2020-2021 (in percentage points)

change in percentage points	Children	Older	Women	Migrants	With disabilities	Homeless
DE	-0	0	0	-3	0	-6
DK	-	-0	-1	1	4	-
NL	-	-	-6	2	-3	-
SE	0	-1	2	12	-	-1
EU	3	-1	1	-3	-0	14

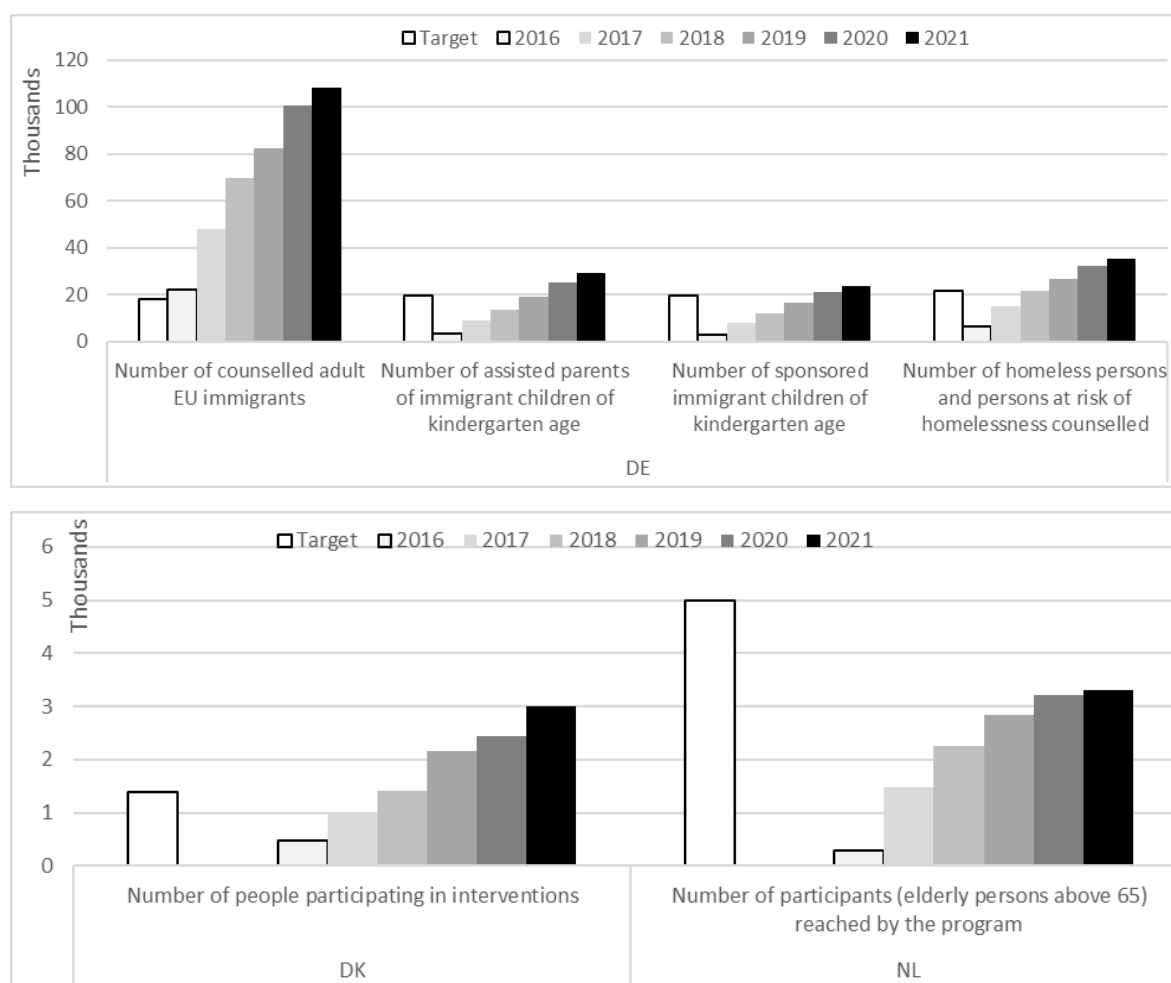
Source: 2021 annual implementation reports, updated until 15 December 2022.

A review of the approach to social inclusion taken by Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden helps clarify their respective programming choices. Unlike food support and basic material assistance, the FEAD's social inclusion programmes do not monitor implementation on the basis of common indicators. Instead, countries can set indicators themselves, so these can be targeted to the specific types of action planned. The choices for the different programmes are reviewed in more detail below.

- **Germany focuses its programme on reaching out to newly arrived EU nationals and their children**, helping them access early childhood education, as well as to homeless people, improving their access to counselling and support measures. Germany had already passed its target of counselling 18 044 immigrants in the first year of the programme. This number further increased in subsequent years to a cumulative total of over 108 000 immigrants. This is a major overshoot of the target for the number of counselled adult immigrants. Its other output targets were reached more recently. For instance, the target for immigrants with children in kindergarten age was reached in 2020, while its target for counselled homeless people was reached in 2018 and the number has further increased since to a cumulative total of over 35 000.
- In Denmark, **FEAD support focuses on homeless people**. They are targeted with outreach support that provides temporary accommodation, storage facilities as well as social activities and programmes promoting employability. Denmark reached its target of 1 400 individuals in 2018, and by 2021, a total of 3 016 individuals had received support.
- The Netherlands uses social inclusion support from the FEAD to **support older people with a low disposable income to prevent and cure social exclusion**. This is done through outreach programmes that take place mainly in local libraries in the four largest cities, where social activities and programmes are organised. The programme is still progressing towards its target of supporting 5 000 individuals; it had reached 3 299 individuals by the end of 2021. The annual implementation report specifies that the programme has chosen to prioritise quality over quantity; in 2020 and 2021, fewer recipients were supported than expected due to COVID-19 restrictions. These restrictions had a major impact on the Dutch support given its exclusive focus on older people. This group was particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 and therefore considerably harder to reach during the pandemic.
- **In Sweden, the FEAD supports socially vulnerable individuals (homeless people or those at risk of homelessness, migrants, people with a foreign background, minorities and women) who are not economically active and have been residing in Sweden for less than 3 months**. The criterion on residence ensures that the FEAD addresses a target group that is not covered by the Social Services Act. The programme aims to provide basic information on Swedish society that is focused on the information needs of the target group, as well as targeted information about health issues. No output targets were set to review progress besides the common indicators.

Figure 9 summarises the progress towards the targets of the output indicators. All targets in Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands were met by the end of 2021.

Figure 9. Progress on output targets – OP II Social inclusion



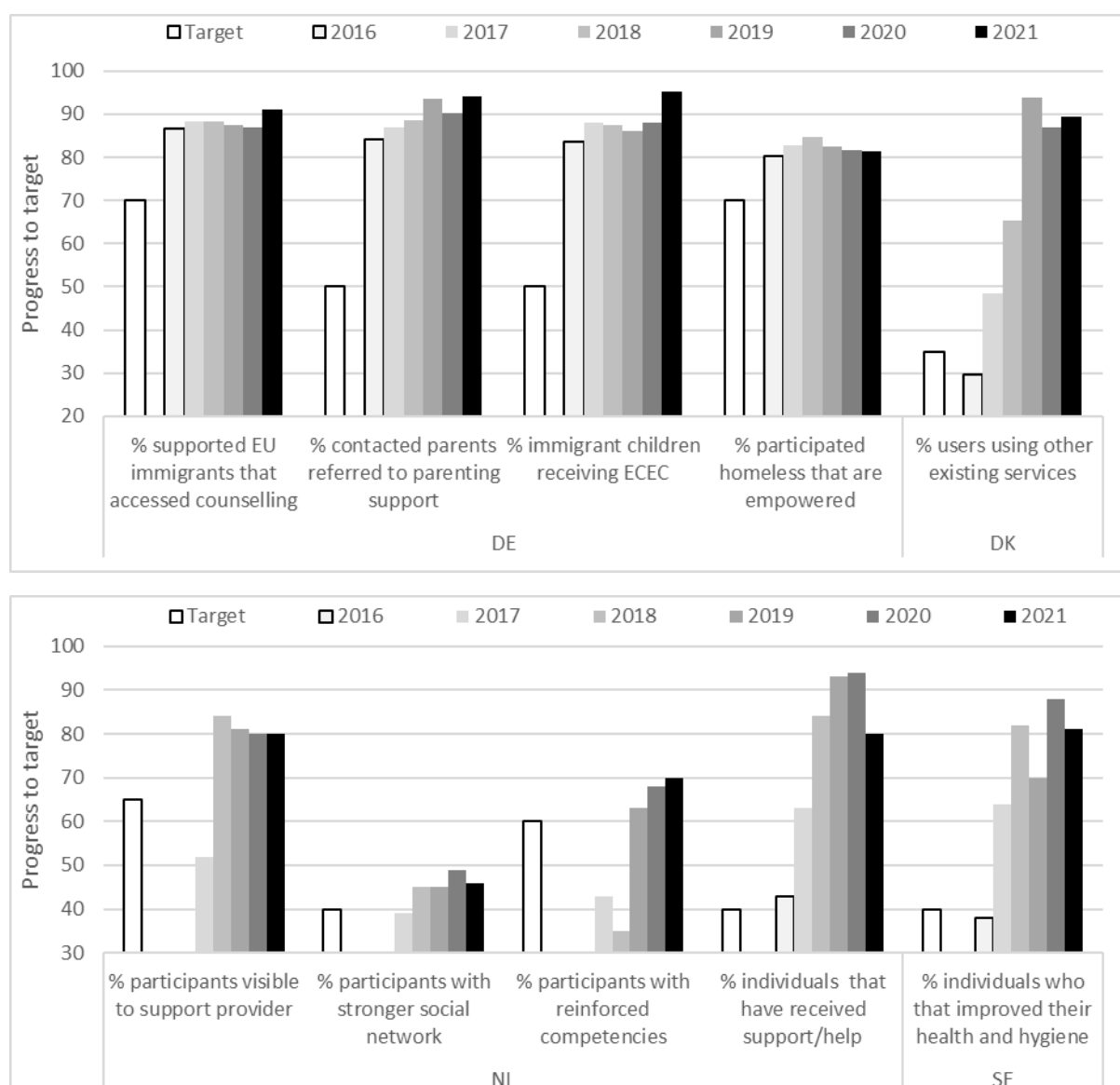
Source: 2021 annual implementation reports, updated until 15 December 2022.

All four programmes set result targets based on specific objectives, which are presented in Figure 9. **All result targets were comfortably reached, often already in the first year of implementation.** This raises some questions about the level of ambition of the various targets.

- In Germany, **all four result indicators consistently reach their targets.** The share of supported immigrants that access counselling has been around 90% and even improved in 2021. For the other three indicators, implementation has resulted in stable or improving results, well above what was set.
- In Denmark, the **share of users that are also using other services increased substantially** from the early years of implementation to its current level of 89% of targeted users. The annual implementation report presents this as an example of the ongoing projects' successful outreach activities, without describing specific success factors.
- In the Netherlands, **all result targets were comfortably met,** although the number of participants (outputs) is behind schedule. The shares of participants that remain in contact with the support provider, have stronger social networks, have improved skills and have received other types of support are well above target in practically every year of implementation.

- Lastly, in Sweden, the **target set for the number of participants that have improved their health and hygiene was already met in 2017**, the second year of reporting progress on implementation.

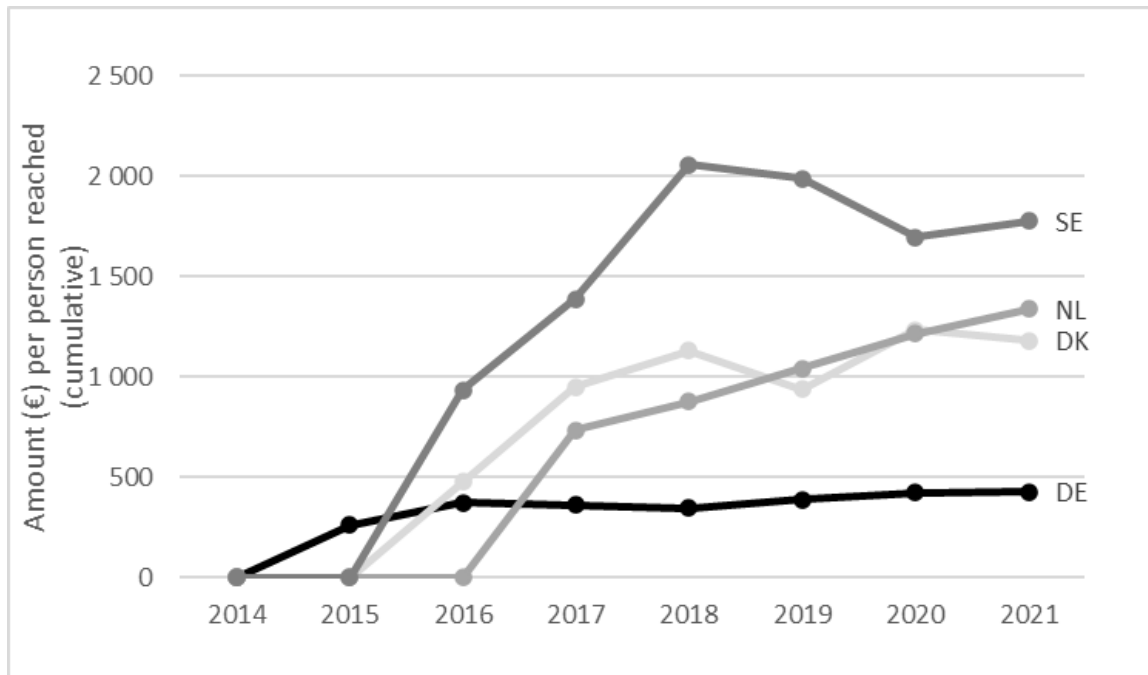
Figure 10. Progress on result targets – OP II Social inclusion



Source: 2021 annual implementation reports, updated until 15 December 2022.

The development of total cost per individual reached by social inclusion support was also assessed (see Figure 10). As the values reported in individual years can vary substantially, and sometimes certain costs are related to participation in different years, the analysis is restricted to cumulative unit costs. As programmes progress, peaks (or troughs) caused by differences in the number of individuals or costs reported become less likely because these are absorbed by the overall totals. **This review shows comparable unit costs across three of the four social inclusion programmes. Germany reported significantly lower unit costs (EUR 360) compared with those in Sweden (EUR 1 776), the Netherlands (EUR 1 336) and Denmark (EUR 1 182).** These differences can be best explained by the different levels of intensity of the support. The figures also highlight an overall increasing trend in the costs per individual in these three last countries. The annual implementation reports do not provide consistent explanations for this trend.

Figure 11. Annual cost incurred/paid per individual reached – comparison by Member State – OP II Social inclusion



Source: 2021 annual implementation reports, updated until 15 December 2022.

2.3 General principles

Article 5 of the FEAD Regulation identifies a number of cross-cutting principles that all FEAD programmes must adhere to. Member States are required to report on how these principles are taken into account. The most relevant ones are discussed in more detail below.

There are two main ways in which Member States reported how activities supplement existing EU cohesion instruments and national action to address material deprivation and combat poverty and social exclusion, all while avoiding double funding. Some Member States provided some minimal reporting on preventing overlaps. For instance, Latvia reports that beneficiary organisations need to sign a statement that they will not seek support from different EU funds for the same activity. Others, such as Portugal, rely on unified information and monitoring systems to prevent double funding.

A second group of Member States reported in detail on how their programmes benefit from possible synergies between the funds. Coordination between the ESF and the FEAD is organised through institutional links between the responsible managing authorities, such as participation in the monitoring committee of either fund. Beyond formal arrangements, active communication initiatives are also reported by managing authorities to ensure that beneficiaries, recipients and government partners are aware of the activities carried out.

A number of specific projects sought to capitalise on possible synergies between the funds. Both Finland and Lithuania cite a number of ESF projects designed as ancillary measures to strengthen the social inclusion of those also receiving FEAD assistance, supporting similar partner organisations in organising follow-up activities. In Poland, managing authority guidelines require beneficiary organisations to give food aid recipients information about

how they can benefit from relevant ESF support, and to assist them in signing up to these measures.

All Member States reported that the principles of equal treatment of women and men and the prevention of any discrimination more broadly (Article 5(11)) are addressed in their FEAD programmes. This is, for instance, visible in the criteria for selecting partner organisations and projects. The outreach strategies adopted by partner organisations to implement projects are based on these principles. The data collected in monitoring systems makes it possible to review ongoing practices; Ireland reported how demographics, including gender breakdown, are examined during the quarterly reporting by local partner organisations and during on-site visits to distribution sites.

On selection criteria for food products, Member States underline that they adhere to objective criteria that take into consideration the products' role in ensuring a balanced diet¹⁶. Belgium refers to expert input provided in the selection of food products, taking into account specific needs of recipients, as well as nutritional quality, shelf life and the glycaemic index. Bulgaria refers to following recommendations from the Ministry of Health on how to guarantee a balanced diet. Spain states that its primary focus when selecting food staples is to satisfy the nutritional needs of disadvantaged people as much as possible by providing basic nutrients (proteins, carbohydrates, fats, fibre, vitamins and minerals) with as much variety as possible, and to reduce nutritional deficiencies. Finland adopts similar principles, following guidelines from its State Nutrition Advisory Board. In Croatia, distributed food must follow strict quality standards, as set out in the national legislation on agriculture and food, and be sustainably produced and processed. Malta used part of the FEAD food support programme to launch a campaign to distribute fruit, vegetables and milk to schoolchildren. The campaign aimed to help create a culture of healthy and sustainable eating habits in young children. In Slovenia, food was selected on the basis of proposals from selected partner organisations, including food staples (such as milk, pasta and rice). This was further supplemented with food donated or purchased by partner organisations, to create a balanced and healthy package of food products. Like the countries mentioned above, Slovakia also follows partner organisations' requests, taking into account comments from the Public Health Office on the need to comply with the recommended nutritional allowances set out in Slovak legislation.

Reducing food waste as a guiding principle is also raised by a number of Member States. Such action is related to UN Sustainable Development Goal 12.3, which aims to halve food waste per person by 2030, and to EU initiatives to reduce food waste, such as the Farm to Fork Strategy¹⁷. All Member States mentioned above already take into account the experience of partner organisations, which enables them to provide food product supplies that meet the needs of recipients. Food products selected are changed regularly to reflect developing needs or practical **experience**, all of which help reduce possible food waste. A number of Member States have taken additional measures. In Finland, food safety is a major concern, and the country takes into account the transport of the selected foodstuffs, the limited storage capacity of partner organisations, and products' shelf life. For this reason, Finland does not offer fresh products or products that require refrigerated transport and storage. Slovakia also deliberately selects products that are easy to store, do not require

¹⁶ Article 5(13) of 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).

¹⁷ European Commission (2020), *A Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system* (COM(2020) 381 final).

specific storage conditions and have a sufficiently long shelf life. Ireland has a very interesting approach to food waste through its partnership with FoodCloud, a not-for-profit social business set up to tackle food waste. FoodCloud connects businesses with large volumes of surplus food to charities in communities across the country. This ensures a variety of quality surplus food products for final recipients. Businesses donating food benefit by reducing their waste-disposal costs and making a meaningful and practical contribution to society.

Attention to climate and the environment is another important cross-cutting aspect that Member States reported on when selecting basic material assistance. Austria reports that care was taken to find long-lasting quality items, increasing the use of recycled products; since 2020, for instance, all backpacks and school bags provided have been produced with fabrics made from recycled PET bottles. Czechia also specifies that its selection of products is based on the principle that these do not harm the environment, and the programme promotes recycling. This is done, for instance, by selecting toilet paper made from 100% recycled material. Similarly, Romania underlines its attention to packaging requirements of hygiene products distributed in its basic material assistance projects. The labelling of these products must contain information on environmental protection and packaging recycling. Romania also pays particular attention to the protection of natural resources by reusing the wooden pallets on which food packages are supplied, and reducing paper consumption by communicating on projects by email.

3. CONCLUSIONS

In 2021, the FEAD continued to be highly affected by the consequences of COVID-19. Member States had to reconsider FEAD programme priorities, target groups, operations, and types of support, while ensuring the continued support of vulnerable groups. The additional budget made available through REACT-EU further supported initiatives designed to address the higher levels of precariousness across the EU caused by COVID-19. It enabled existing FEAD programmes to **offer more food support and basic material assistance to its target groups, providing crucial support to people already in precarious situations.** Therefore, the FEAD has proven to be an important instrument to support the ambitions of the European Pillar of Social Rights action plan to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion. It has also been a flexible way of spending the additional budget made available by REACT-EU.

In 2021, the annual declared expenditure was considerably higher than in previous years, which boosted the overall implementation rate. Up from EUR 525.2 million declared in 2020, the 2021 annual implementation reports declared a total EUR 703.9 million in 2021. This improvement in implementation was needed given the total implementation rate of 63% (EUR 3.1 billion) at the end of 2021. With 2 years of implementation remaining, higher rates of implementation will be necessary in the coming year to avoid decommitment. By the end of 2021, a cumulative total of EUR 4.7 billion (94% of the allocated budget) had been reported as approved budgets, and EUR 3.6 billion (or 72% of the allocated budget) had been incurred or paid out by beneficiaries.

The estimated number of recipients of food support (15 million) and basic material assistance (2.1 million) remained relatively stable in comparison with the previous year. The amount of food in tonnes increased steadily from 2019 to almost 450 000 tonnes of food in 2021. The overall monetary value of basic material assistance also followed an increasing trend and reached EUR 34.9 million of basic material provided. No major changes to the types of recipients before and during the pandemic were observed, except in a small number of countries. However, this does not mean that programmes continued operating in the same way as before COVID-19; in fact, programmes reported adjusting their target recipients to respond to specific needs during the pandemic. This is not always visible in comparisons because in some cases, the **scope was redefined within the same type of category.** For instance, support was extended to cover existing recipients, such as children, older people and migrants.

In their annual implementation reports, Member States report that the potential outreach of the FEAD continued to be affected by the capacity issues of partner organisations and logistical challenges (home deliveries, mobilising volunteers, identifying recipients) mainly related to the COVID-19 pandemic, already mentioned in 2020. Local beneficiary organisations found ways to deal with restrictions in place and managed to continue supporting similar numbers of recipients as in 2020. In the social inclusion initiatives (in the OP II programmes of Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden), the impact of COVID-19 restrictions was more acutely felt, particularly because the facilities used for outreach (libraries, community centres, etc.) often faced mandatory closures during lockdowns. Food distribution and material assistance also faced logistical challenges of their own, but these were eventually solved to help respond to the continuous demand for support and maintain delivery levels similar to the previous year of the pandemic.

Given the stable numbers of recipients during the 2021 COVID-19 lockdowns, it can be concluded that these challenges have been offset by the greater demand caused by the pandemic.

The final 2 years of FEAD implementation will have their challenges. With more pressure to complete projects and declare all relevant expenditure, FEAD implementation is likely to be affected by uncertainties on potential health restrictions, migration flows caused by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, and other external challenges.