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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 2022**

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived

The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) complements national efforts to address material deprivation and combat poverty and social exclusion, in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights action plan and its target for 2030. This involves reducing the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by at least 15 million, including at least 5 million children.

In 2014-2020, the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) helped to address the worst forms of poverty in the EU, such as food deprivation, child poverty and homelessness. It made available a total of EUR 4.5 billion (current prices, EU amount) for 2014-2020 (including the REACT-EU allocation for the FEAD), with the fund's total value coming to EUR 5.2 billion (including the national allocation). Around 15 million people benefited from FEAD in 2022, with more than 390 000 tonnes of food and 62 million meals distributed. More than 800 000 people were supported through basic material assistance and almost 225 000 people received vouchers.

In 2020 and 2021, the FEAD helped implement the additional crisis budget made available by REACT-EU to address the increased levels of precariousness across the EU caused by COVID-19. In 2022, Cohesion's Action for Refugees in Europe (CARE) made the FEAD more flexible, so that funding from FEAD programmes could be used to provide food and basic material assistance to those fleeing Ukraine.

Member States can use the fund to finance food support and/or basic material assistance (operational programme (OP) I) or support for social inclusion (OP II). Food and/or basic material assistance must be complemented by accompanying measures, such as activities to promote healthy nutrition, advice on food preparation and storage, helping people to access healthcare, psychological and therapeutic support, skills programmes and advice on managing a household budget.

1.2 The socio-economic context

In 2022, over **95 million** people across the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. While this represents **21.6%** of the total population, there were considerable differences among Member States in the percentage of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, ranging from 11.8% (CZ), 13.3% (SI) and 15.9% (PL), to 34.4% (RO), 32.2% (BG) and 26.3% (EL). Compared to 2019 (the year before COVID-19), the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion went up, reversing the positive trend that started in 2012. This increase

can be linked directly to the socio-economic challenges related to the health and safety measures put in place in response to COVID-19 and to the effects of the war in Ukraine.

In 2022, 24.7% of children younger than 18 in the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, compared with 24.4% reported in 2021. The percentage of children at risk of poverty is higher than for adults (20.9% in 2022).

1.3 Coordination of the FEAD at EU level and future developments

For the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework, the FEAD was integrated into the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). To address material deprivation, which is the FEAD's current key objective, Member States must allocate at least 25% of the ESF+ shared management strand to social inclusion goals, as well as a minimum allocation of 3% per Member State. The Member States have allocated EUR 4.7 billion from the ESF+ (EUR 5.2 billion including the national allocation) to specific objective m) 'addressing material deprivation'.

To follow on from the FEAD community, a new community of practice for material support was created in 2023 under the ESF Social Innovation + Initiative. Its aim is to continue mutual learning activities, exchanges and dissemination of good practices related to FEAD and ESF+ activities for material support.

2 PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING FEAD PROGRAMMES¹

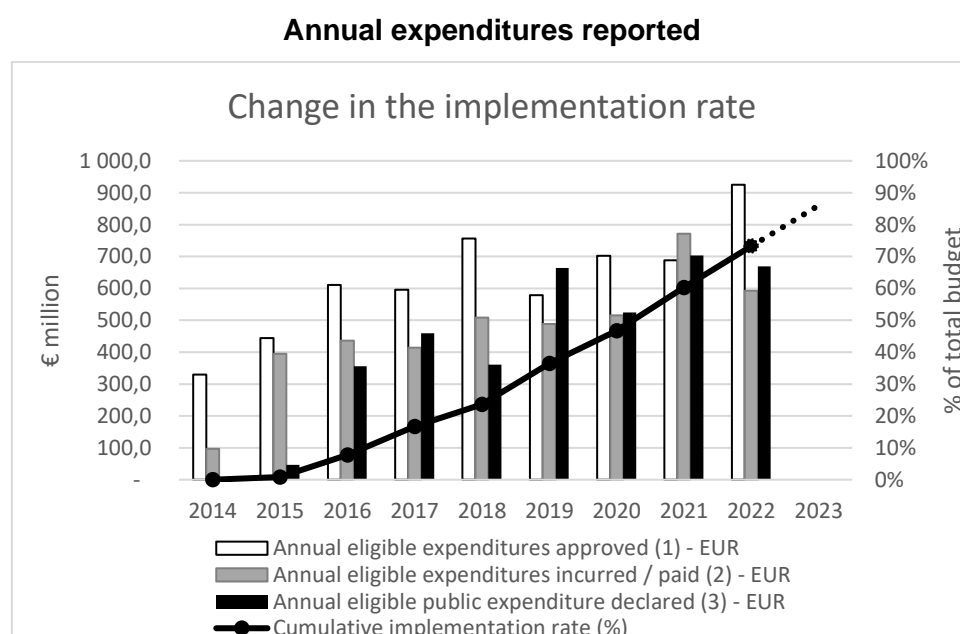
In line with the FEAD's legal basis², this report uses the content of the 2022 annual implementation reports of the 27 Member States that implement the fund to review the FEAD's implementation.

2.1 Financial implementation

The FEAD's total budget for 2014-2020 (including Member States' national co-financing) amounted to EUR 5.2 billion at the end of 2022. This included an additional EUR 0.7 billion made available through the **REACT-EU** package, adopted in May 2020 in response to the COVID-19 outbreak and allocated for 2021 and 2022.

The total approved expenditure came to EUR 5.6 billion by the end of 2022, equivalent to 109% of the total allocation of EUR 5.2 billion. This was because annual approved expenditures increased considerably in 2022 to reach EUR 924.9 million. Reporting approved expenditure above the allocated budget is a relatively common practice towards the end of the programming period to ensure full financial implementation. By the end of 2022, the annual expenditures incurred by, and paid to, beneficiaries totalled **EUR 4.2 billion** (or 82% of the total budget).

The figure below tracks financial reporting developments over time, and shows the straight linear increase in declared expenditures since 2015.



Source: 2022 annual implementation reports (SFC2014), updated on 8 November 2023.

The average implementation rate at EU level currently stands at **73%** for the FEAD programmes. Those rates are based on the percentage of the total allocated budget currently declared to the Commission. By the end of 2022, full completion had nearly been achieved by Austria (95%), Bulgaria (96%), Cyprus (93%), the Netherlands (95%), Finland (98%), Ireland

¹ The figures represent the implementation status of the 2014-2020 operational programmes as at 31 December 2022, as reported by November 2023 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>). The SFC2014 is regulated by Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 463/2014 of 5 May 2014.

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.

(94%) and Latvia (91%). Implementation rates were lower for Denmark (69%), Italy (50%), Romania (59%) and Slovakia (63%).

In the last year before the final implementation reports are due, the FEAD must be implemented much quicker to ensure that all budgets are spent. Austria, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Ireland report that they concluded all operational activities for the FEAD before the end of 2022. However, the FEAD programmes in most other Member States are still being implemented. Annual declared expenditures continued to increase in 2022, but not enough to ensure that the goals could be implemented by the end of 2023. In 2022, expenditures totalling EUR 669 million were declared in the 2022 annual implementation reports. This was slightly lower than the EUR 704 million declared in 2021, and resulted in a total implementation rate of 73% by the end of 2022. So far, a cumulative total of EUR 5.6 billion (109% of the allocated budget) has been reported as approved budgets, and a total of EUR 4.2 billion (or 82% of the allocated budgets) was incurred or paid by beneficiaries by the end of 2022.

Overall financial implementation

MS	Total allocated	Approved	Incurred/ paid	Declared	Implementation rate	Increase in 2022
	Amounts (EUR million)				Per cent ³ (%)	Percentage points ⁴
AT	27.21	27.21	25.88	25.85	95%	17
BE	134.30	137.32	110.44	88.59	66%	9
BG	161.88	161.88	159.62	154.70	96%	15
CY	4.64	4.64	4.64	4.29	93%	20
CZ	31.34	42.63	21.96	21.57	69%	8
DE	92.82	107.77	94.12	81.58	88%	22
DK*	4.64	3.76	3.57	3.20	69%	0
EE	13.91	10.57	10.56	8.99	65%	4
EL	323.04	309.44	253.20	252.49	78%	16
ES	839.84	801.70	739.92	657.38	78%	7
FI	26.52	26.52	26.18	26.10	98%	15
FR	691.42	1 031.80	712.95	601.42	87%	32
HR	53.09	63.43	37.19	35.18	66%	20
HU	110.45	130.60	109.69	95.88	87%	15
IE	26.78	26.78	26.64	25.07	94%	14
IT	988.31	930.58	588.55	496.30	50%	10
LT	90.83	90.86	72.45	68.31	75%	12
LU	5.49	5.46	4.70	3.88	71%	15
LV	57.60	57.60	57.21	52.52	91%	17
MT	4.64	4.64	4.43	3.69	80%	1
NL	4.64	4.41	4.40	4.40	95%	13
PL	556.89	591.85	535.81	496.30	89%	7

³ This percentage refers to the total amount of eligible public expenditure declared to the Commission as a proportion of the total allocated budget reported in the latest approved operational programme.

⁴ Difference between the 2021 and 2022 implementation rates, measured in percentage points.

PT	208.17	243.79	157.07	154.79	74%	14
RO	574.84	686.66	365.46	338.44	59%	8
SE	9.28	8.05	7.72	7.40	80%	11
SI	33.03	34.72	27.70	18.50	56%	0
SK	87.77	84.90	56.43	54.98	63%	3
EU	5 163.38	5 629.59	4 218.50	3 781.82	73%	13

*The figures for Denmark express the situation at the end of 2021. DK had not submitted an annual implementation report by 8 November 2021.

2.2 Implementation on the ground

In 2022, 14.2 million people received food assistance, 0.8 million received basic material assistance, and 9 127 people received social inclusion support through the FEAD. The numbers are lower than those in the COVID-19 years of 2020 and 2021, but above the average estimates for 2017-2019. Of this total of 15 million people: 49% were women; 30% were children; 10% were above 65 years old; 12% were migrants, people with a foreign background or minorities; 5% were people with disabilities; and 6% were homeless.

By the end of 2022, the FEAD had successfully delivered assistance in 27 Member States, making good progress towards its objectives. Most Member States (23 out of 27) had distributed food and/or basic material assistance together with accompanying measures (operational programme I) and four Member States continued to run social inclusion programmes (OP II).

Table 1. Type of assistance - FEAD

OP	Type assistance	Member State
OPI	Food	10 MS: BE, BG, EE, ES, FI, FR, MT, PL, PT, SI
	Basic material	1 MS: AT
	Both	11 MS: CY*, CZ, EL, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, RO, SK^
OP II	Social inclusion	4 MS: DE, DK, NL, SE

*Cyprus finished delivering food assistance in 2019, and has since focused on basic material assistance.

^Slovakia provided basic material assistance between 2016-2019, and has since only provided food support with FEAD support.

The inflow of Ukrainian refugees⁵ fleeing Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 significantly influenced the implementation of the FEAD in 2022. Cohesion's Action for Refugees in Europe (CARE) gave Member States greater flexibility, which enabled them to support the provision of immediate relief to this specific group using the FEAD. While not all Member States reported specific measures or explicitly mentioned Ukrainian refugees as a target group in the annual report, it is likely that existing food / material support measures funded by the FEAD also benefited refugees in most of the Member States. Below we summarise the reporting from Member States that mentioned explicit **measures in relation to Ukrainian refugees**:

⁵ The term 'refugee' is used in a broad political sense rather than as defined in the Geneva Convention and the EU asylum acquis.

- **Bulgaria** mentions specific measures that focus explicitly on displaced persons – mostly mothers with children and older people – from Ukraine. The FEAD supported the Social Assistance Agency in providing vouchers for food and essential goods to all people (including children) with temporary protection status. When distributing these vouchers, the needs of children and their parents/guardians were prioritised. The distributed vouchers are worth BGN 100 (EUR 51) per person and can be used to purchase food products, clothes, shoes, baby food, children's clothes, school supplies, and hygiene products. In addition, the 'hot lunch' initiative was also opened to temporarily displaced persons from Ukraine. Accompanying measures were extended to Ukrainian refugees, so that they could access additional social assistance, legal aid, social integration and find a job.
- **Czechia** reports that its food support in 2022 was particularly affected by the increased number of migrants, most of whom were refugees from Russian's war of aggression against Ukraine.
- **Estonia** mentions the rising number of Ukrainian refugees in 2022, which also led to an increase in demand for food support. These additional resources required were covered by a combination of the FEAD, REACT-EU and national funds. Specific food packages that could be easily prepared without facilities were procured for this target group, as most refugees were staying in hotels and on ships.
- **Italy** reports that it started distributing food support from the FEAD to Ukrainian refugees. In the first half of 2022, 10% of the recipients of food support were from Ukraine.
- **Lithuania** decided to distribute food and hygiene packages to war refugees without assessing their income. The additional demand from Ukrainian refugees was challenging both for the distribution of supplies and for the suppliers themselves. Before the war, the suppliers had used products from Ukraine, Belarus or Russia and therefore had to reorient their supply chains to provide the required quantities.
- **Latvia** reports a variety of different support measures opened explicitly for Ukrainian refugees. This support for Ukrainian refugees provides grocery packages for children, food items for babies and small children, as well as hygiene and household goods, among other things.
- **Poland** provided Ukrainian refugees with food aid the day after the Russian military aggression began. Poland estimates that around 142 000 Ukrainian refugees benefited from support through the national FEAD programme.
- **Romania** extended its social voucher scheme of material support for newborns, which targets the most disadvantaged categories of people, to also cover foreigners or refugees from the armed conflict zone in Ukraine. This includes financial support in the form of a RON 2 000 (EUR 400) voucher per newborn to purchase specific products for infants.
- **Slovakia** mentions that various partner organisations provided daily hot meals for Ukrainian refugees with the support of the FEAD.

2.2.1 Food support

France, Italy, Spain, Poland and Romania reported the highest number of people receiving food support. In France and Italy, REACT-EU boosted budgets significantly to cover the additional people receiving food support. Italy allocated an additional top-up of just under EUR 200 million in REACT-EU funds to the FEAD. In this way, the number of people receiving food support rose from 2.7 million in 2020 to 3 million in 2021. In France, an extra EUR 104 million was made available, with the number of people receiving food support rising from an estimated 5.1 million in 2021 to an estimated 5.6 million in 2022. Member States also mention

that inflation and the influx of Ukrainian refugees increased demand for food support among the most vulnerable.

However, overall the total estimated number of people receiving food support decreased in 2022, with fewer recipients reported in several Member States. This can be explained by: (i) the exhaustion of financial resources in Bulgaria and Ireland by January 2022; and (ii) the exhaustion of the FEAD allocation in Spain, leading to fewer distribution campaigns and therefore fewer end recipients.

Estimated number of people receiving food support – by year

MS (x 1 000)	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
BE	394	359	382	449	463
BG	540	466	494	553	15
CY	2	2	-	-	-
CZ	101	57	78	62	80
EE	23	21	26	24	19
EL	353	290	294	319	281
ES	1 288	1 229	1 496	1 468	1 321
FI	281	316	317	295	105
FR	4 340	4 790	5 504	5 120	5 615
HR	65	53	27	88	10
HU	184	141	182	177	176
IE	152	195	277	157	7
IT	2 678	2 079	2 657	2 984	2 907
LT	197	192	183	195	214
LU	13	13	13	13	13
LV	70	76	75	88	127
MT	13	11	12	10	9
PL	1 385	1 356	1 337	1 254	1 294
PT	79	93	149	170	154
RO	-	-	1 186	1 486	1 186
SI	158	153	157	151	161
SK	192	185	137	7	8
EU	12 508	12 074	14 984	15 070	14 165

Regarding the profile of the end recipients of food support, Croatia and Hungary gave a comparatively large share to **children** (64 % and 60 % respectively), whereas other Member States chose to use the FEAD predominantly for direct food support for **people above 65 years old** (Bulgaria: 55%, Finland: 39%, Latvia: 25%). The overall proportion of **women** among the total recipients of food support was **49%**, although this varied substantially between Member States. For example, 63% of end recipients in Estonia were women, while the proportion of women was considerably below the average in Hungary (22%) and Ireland (29%). The proportion of **migrants** benefiting from food support actions was above the EU average in Estonia, Czechia, Luxembourg and Hungary. The proportion of migrants (mostly Ukrainian nationals) receiving food support in Estonia was particularly high at 70%. Poland reported that it includes Ukrainian refugees receiving support in the food aid programme in the 'migrants' category.

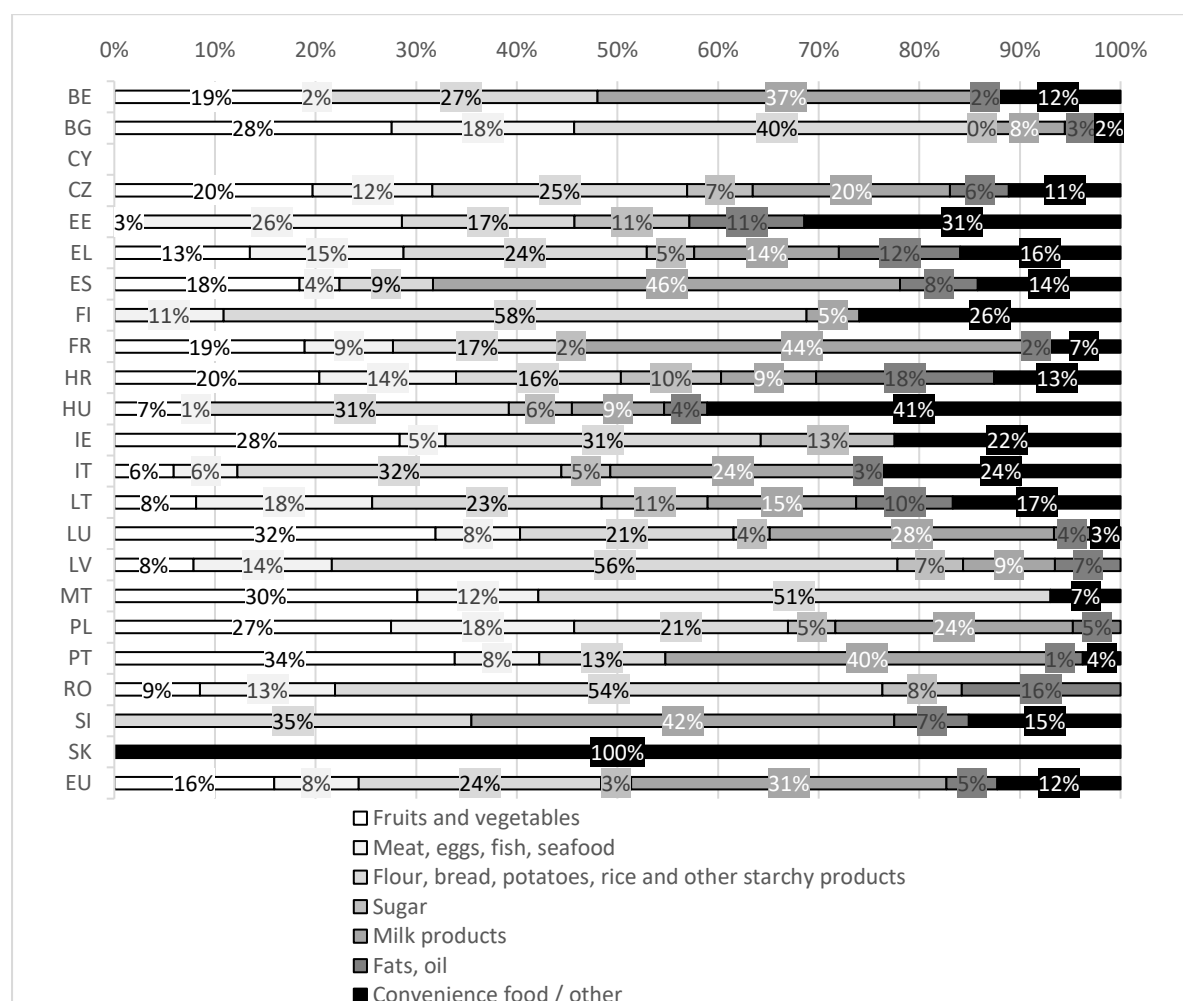
The proportion of people with **disabilities** receiving food support is relatively low (on average 5%). Bulgaria (19%), Hungary (32%) and Romania (24%) provided considerably more support to people with disabilities.

In most Member States, **homeless** people are not often recorded as recipients of food support. Notable exceptions are Czechia (16%), Ireland (20%) and particularly Slovakia (100%), which used its entire food support programme to provide ready-to-eat hot meals to homeless people in five cities.

The amount of food in tonnes ed almost 400 thousand tonnes of food in 2022. The slightly lower volumes of food support provided by the FEAD can be explained by the post COVID-19 situation, the rise in prices and the reduction in the available budget from the programme in some countries because the financial allocation was almost exhausted.

While all Member States report that they comply with the general principle that the food support should contribute to a balanced diet for the most deprived, the choice of products varies substantially. Portugal, Malta, Luxembourg, Bulgaria and Ireland provide above-average proportions of fruit and vegetables. Starchy products, including flour, bread, potatoes, rice and others make up more than half of the food provided in Finland, Latvia, Malta and Romania. Milk products make up an above-average proportion of the overall food support in Belgium, France, Spain, Portugal and Slovenia. Convenience food (prepared meals, ready-to-eat food), or food that could not otherwise be classified makes up roughly 12% of the total food support on average in the EU. However, all the food provided in Slovakia and 40% of the food provided in Hungary falls in this category. Slovakia provided hot soup, pastries and warm and soft drinks, which it classifies in the 'convenience food/other' category.

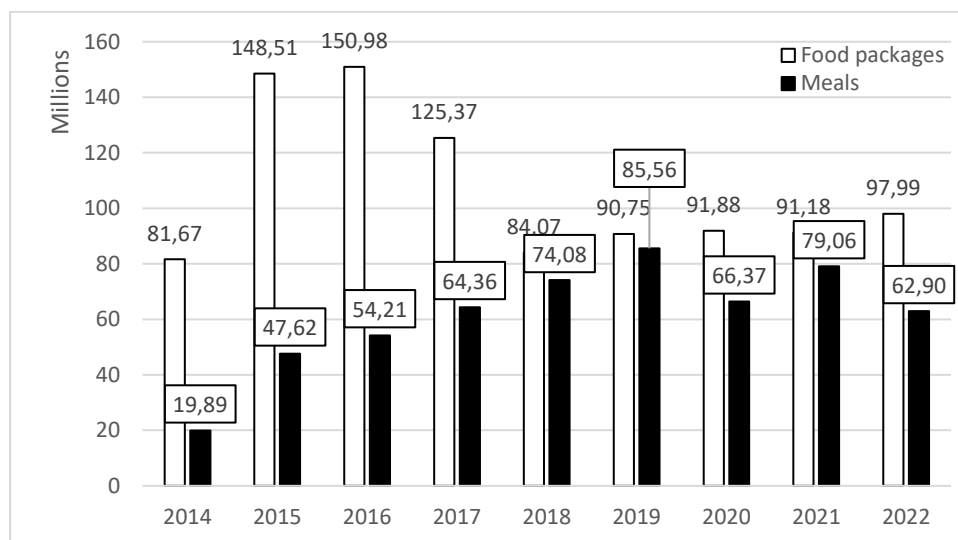
Composition of food support in 2022 by Member State



A comparison over time of the specific composition of food support shows no major changes.

The food is handed out in the form of food packages or meals. Estonia, France, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Portugal, Romania and Slovenia distributed only food packages in 2022, and Bulgaria and Slovakia distributed only meals, while other Member States distributed both.

Development over time in the number of packages and meals distributed



The overall number of packages per person increased slightly in 2022 to just around seven packages in 2022. The amount of food distributed increased substantially in terms of weight, from 18.9 kg per person in 2014 to 28.1 kg in 2022.

2.2.2 Material support

The total number of recipients of basic material assistance reported is lower than in previous years. This is explained mainly by reporting gaps (in Romania) and is not necessarily linked to the socio-economic context. More accurate data will be available once all Member States have completed their reporting for the FEAD's final implementation report.

In Romania, the FEAD supported the purchasing of school materials. Parents of eligible disadvantaged children received electronic vouchers to purchase school supplies and clothing needed by their children to attend school. The programme also supports the purchase of hygiene kits and basic material for newborn children.

Number of people receiving basic material assistance

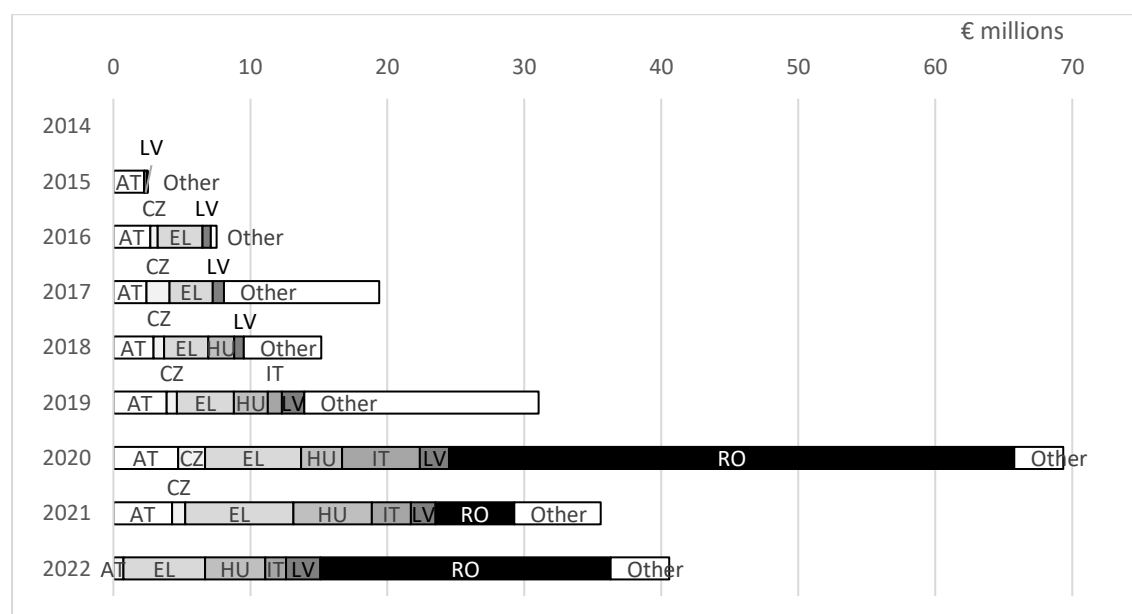
MS	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
AT	44 555	44 245	44 389	41 636	-
CY	413	614	630	840	699
CZ	71 810	34 298	57 624	50 951	49 864
EL	238 971	188 938	265 560	274 620	236 491
HR	7 805	48 197	242	33 929	10 562
HU	25 964	56 868	128 289	149 666	137 832
IE	40 743	40 250	51 201	45 252	-
IT	-	4 758	24 833	29 225	4 054
LT	197 196	191 783	183 411	195 220	213 636
LU	13 016	12 621	12 579	12 706	13 471
LV	17 439	70 341	69 241	81 171	122 245
RO	-	-	1 121	1 188	-

SI			954	269	
SK	110 223	96 782	-	-	55 795
EU	768 135	789 695	1 959 953	2 103 485	844 649

In 2022, Cyprus and Hungary provided basic material assistance exclusively to children. Although such assistance is generally not provided to people over 65 years old, this target group received above-average support (11% at EU level) in Latvia (24%) and Croatia (25%). Women make up an above-average proportion of the recipients of material assistance in Lithuania (54%), Croatia (54%) and Cyprus (100%), where basic material assistance was provided exclusively to girls younger than 15 years old. In Cyprus, Czechia, Italy, Latvia and Luxembourg, above-average proportions of people with a migrant background received basic material assistance, while Croatia and Lithuania focused more on people with disabilities. Homeless people specifically were provided with basic material assistance in Italy (100%). Italy's campaign focused on people in conditions of severe material deprivation, mostly homeless men of foreign origin. Most of the people who received basic material assistance also benefited from food aid. The aim was not only to offer an immediate response to the primary needs of those living in conditions of extreme poverty, but also to include accompanying measures to help recipients overcome their state of severe deprivation.

The annual reporting by Member States shows **a steadily increasing trend in the monetary value of basic material assistance provided under the FEAD, particularly if we exclude 2020**. In 2022, the highest values of material assistance were provided in Romania (EUR 21.2 million), Greece (EUR 5.97 million) and Hungary (EUR 4.4 million).

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



Since the start of the 2014-2020 programming period, the value of basic material delivered has varied in relation to specific target groups. If 2015 is disregarded, children received between one third and two thirds of the value of basic material, and this has now risen to 73% of the overall value. These large shifts were mainly caused by Romania, which targeted a considerable proportion of its significant support for basic material assistance programme almost exclusively at children. While homeless people were a specific target group, particularly in the years of the COVID-19 lockdowns, in 2022 the overall value of the goods they received returned to pre-COVID levels.

Accompanying measures

In line with the FEAD Regulation, Member States that ran operational programme I programmes in 2022 also implemented accompanying measures.

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 2022 included:

- advice on food preparation and storage, recipe books, promotion of healthy choices and preparation of meals using the distributed products (BE, BG, CZ, EE, 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, FI, FR, HR, IT, LT, LU, LV, PT, PL, RO, SI and SK);
- advice on how to reduce food waste (BG, CZ, FI, LU, LV, PL and PT);
- personal hygiene advice (BE, BG, EL, HR, HU, LV, RO and SK);
- referrals to relevant (e.g. social/administrative) services (BE, BG, CZ, EE, FI, FR, IE, IT, LU, LV, PT and SK);
- coaching and workshops, especially to help more people receive an education or find a job (BG, CY, CZ, EL, FI, FR, IE, IT, LT, LV, RO and SI);
- educational activities and skills training/programmes (EL, FR, LV, MT, PL, RO and SI);
- measures facilitating access to healthcare (BG, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LV and RO);
- psychological and therapeutic support (CZ, EL, FI, FR, HU, IT, LT, LV, PL 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, MT and PL);
- workshops on basic first aid skills (SI);
- 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), consisting mainly of personal support services, adult care, social transport, measures facilitating access to housing or shelter, support for access to rights, and school support.

2.2.3 Social inclusion

During 2014-2020, four Member States (DE, DK, NL, SE) implemented the FEAD type II programme to achieve social inclusion objectives. The table below summarises the number of people served by these programmes and shows that only Germany reported participants for 2022. Denmark's annual implementation report had not been finalised at the time of writing this report, and no operational activities took place in Sweden and the Netherlands in 2022.

Number of people receiving support for social inclusion

MS	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
DE	37 062	27 742	28 168	16 787	9 127
DK	454	757	277	570	- ⁶
NL	769	579	366	93	-
SE	414	658	1 175	441	-

⁶ By 8 November, no annual implementation report had been submitted by Denmark.

EU	38 699	29 736	29 986	17 891	9 127
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Unlike in the case of food support and basic material assistance, common indicators are not used in the FEAD's social inclusion programmes to monitor implementation. Instead, operational programmes can set their own indicators, so these can be targeted at the specific types of programmes planned. The definition of the target groups in each country is set out below:

- **Germany's programme focuses on reaching out to newly arrived EU nationals and their children** and supporting them to access early childhood education. It also helps homeless people to access more counselling and support measures. It already passed its target of providing advice to 18 044 immigrants in the first year of the programme, increasing in subsequent years to a cumulative total of over 112 000 immigrants.
- In Denmark, **the programme supported by the FEAD focuses on supporting homeless people** through outreach efforts providing temporary accommodation, storage facilities, social activities and programmes promoting employability. The target of 1 400 individuals was reached in 2018, and by 2021 a total of 3 016 individuals had participated in the programmes (no information for 2022 was available).
- The Netherlands used social inclusion support from the FEAD to **help prevent social exclusion among older people with a low disposable income**. This was achieved through outreach programmes that were held mainly in local libraries in the four largest cities, where social activities and programmes were organised. The programme did not reach its target of 5 000 individuals, as a total of 3 299 people were reached by the end of the activities in 2021.
- **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 who are residing in Sweden for a shorter period than 3 months.** The latter criterion ensures that the FEAD addresses a target group not covered by the Social Services Act. The purpose of the programme is to provide basic information on Swedish society focused on the information needs of the target group, as well as targeted information about health issues.

The FEAD programmes in the four countries that focus on social inclusion have set result targets based on programme-specific objectives. **All result targets were comfortably reached, often already in the first year of implementation.**

In Germany, the targets for **all four result indicators were consistently achieved** each year. The proportion of supported immigrants who accessed counselling was around 90% and continued to rise in 2022. Also, for the other three types of result targets set, implementation has resulted in stable results, well above the targets.

In Denmark, the proportion **of people who also use different services increased substantially** from the early years of implementation to the current level of 89% of targeted users.

In the Netherlands, **most of the result targets were comfortably met**, except for the number of participants, where the target was not reached. The indicators that measure the proportion of participants who: (i) remained visible to the support provider; (ii) had strong social networks; (iii) had improved skills; or (iv) received other types of support were well above the target in practically all years of implementation.

In Sweden, the **target set for improving participants' health and hygiene has been met since 2017**, the second year of reporting progress on implementation.

2.3 Reporting on general principles

Article 5 of the FEAD Regulation identifies several horizontal principles for all programmes, and requires Member States to report on how these principles are reflected. There are two main methods for Member States to report how activities **complement** existing **EU cohesion instruments** and national efforts to address material deprivation and combat poverty and social exclusion, while avoiding double funding. Some Member States provided minimal reporting on preventing overlaps with other social inclusion activities, while others reported in more detail on how their programmes benefit from the possibility of pooling the resources of different funds.

During the 2014-2020 programming period, coordination between the ESF and the FEAD already existed in the form of institutional links between the responsible managing authorities in place, such as participation in the monitoring committee of the other fund. Beyond the formal arrangements, managing authorities have also reported active communication efforts to make sure that beneficiaries, recipients and government partners are aware of the activities undertaken. Both Finland and Lithuania mention several ESF projects that are designed to support FEAD projects and have supporting measures to increase the social inclusion of people receiving FEAD assistance. This is achieved by providing support to these partner organisations for follow-up activities that go beyond the complementary measures of the FEAD. In Poland, too, managing authority guidelines require beneficiary organisations to inform food aid recipients about where they can get relevant ESF support, and to help them to enrol for these support actions.

All Member States report that they address the principles of **equal treatment of women and men** (Article 5(11) of the FEAD Regulation) and the prevention of discrimination in general in their FEAD programmes. This can be seen, for instance, in the criteria for selecting partner organisations and specific projects. The outreach strategies that partner organisations adopt to implement projects are based on those principles. The type of data collected in monitoring systems allows ongoing practices to be reviewed. Ireland reports in its annual implementation report how demographics, including gender breakdown, are examined during the quarterly reporting by local partner organisations and during on-the-spot visits to distribution sites.

Regarding **the selection criteria for food products**, Member States confirm that they fulfil objective criteria that take into consideration how the products contribute to a balanced diet. Belgium, for instance, mentions that expert advice on the recipients' specific needs, nutritional quality, shelf life and the glycaemic index is used when selecting food products. Bulgaria makes use of recommendations provided by the Ministry of Health to guarantee a balanced diet. Spain states that it focuses primarily on selecting food staples that satisfy disadvantaged people's nutritional needs as much as possible. Therefore, the basic nutrients (proteins, carbohydrates, fats, fibre, vitamins and minerals) it provides are as varied as possible to reduce nutritional deficiencies. Finland has adopted similar principles, following guidelines from its State Nutrition Advisory Board.

In Croatia, the food distributed must meet the strict quality standards for food set in the national regulations on agriculture and food and be sustainably produced and processed. In Slovenia, food staples, including basic food products (such as milk, pasta, rice, etc.), were selected on the basis of proposals from selected partner organisations. Those products were further complemented by food donated or purchased by partner organisations to form a balanced and healthy package of food products.

Like the Member States mentioned above, Slovakia also follows the requests articulated by partner organisations, considering the comments from the Public Health Office on its alignment with the recommended nutritional requirements established by Slovak legislation.

Reducing food waste is also mentioned as a guiding principle by several Member States. Such efforts are related to Sustainable Development Goal 12.3, which aims to halve per capita food waste by 2030, as well as to European initiatives to reduce food waste, such as the Farm to

Fork strategy. All the Member States mentioned above already take into consideration the experience of partner organisations, which ensures that they supply suitable food products that meet the needs of recipients. Thus, the selection of food products is also regularly updated to reflect changing needs or practical experiences, thereby helping to reduce possible food waste. Several Member States have taken additional measures in this regard. In Finland, for instance, food safety is mentioned as a key concern. Therefore, it takes into consideration the transportability of the selected foodstuffs, the partner organisations' limited storage possibilities and the products' shelf life. For this reason, Finland has not included fresh products or products that require refrigerated transport and storage in the selection offered. Slovakia also deliberately selects products that are easy to store and have a sufficiently long shelf life. Ireland has a particularly interesting approach to food waste through its partnership with FoodCloud, a not-for-profit social enterprise set up to address the problem of food waste. It connects businesses that have large volumes of surplus food with charities in communities across Ireland that need food. This ensures a variety of quality surplus food products for end recipients, while the donating businesses benefit through reduced waste disposal costs and by making a meaningful and practical contribution to society.

Climate and environmental aspects are some of the other significant horizontal aspects that Member States report taking into consideration when selecting basic material assistance. Austria, for instance, reports that care was taken to find durable, high-quality items and to use more recycled products. Since 2020, for instance, all backpacks and school bags provided have been produced with fabrics made from recycled PET bottles. Czechia, too, specifies that its selection of products is based on the principle that they do not burden the environment. It also promotes recycling by selecting, for example, toilet paper made from 100% recycled material. Similarly, Romania underlines that it pays attention to the packaging requirements of the food and hygiene products distributed in its basic material assistance projects. Thus, it complies with the requirement that labelling must provide information on environmental protection and packaging recycling. Romania has also collected and reused wooden pallets for the distribution of food packages.

3 CONCLUSIONS

Throughout the reporting period, the FEAD played an important role in supporting the ambitions in the European Pillar of Social Rights' action plan to **reduce the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion**. It was a versatile way of implementing the additional crisis budget made available by REACT-EU and addressing the increased levels of precariousness across the EU caused by COVID-19 in 2021 and 2022 and the more recent inflation in the prices of basic goods.

The annual implementation reports for 2022 also provide clear examples of how the FEAD was used to provide food aid and basic material assistance to refugees fleeing Russian's war of aggression against Ukraine.

Around 15 million people benefited from FEAD in 2022, with more than 390 000 tonnes of food and 62 million meals distributed. More than 800 000 people were supported through basic material assistance and almost 225 000 people received vouchers.

Annual implementation reports in 2022 declared expenditures totalling EUR 669 million in 2022, resulted in a total implementation rate of 73%.

Around 400 000 tonnes of food was provided in 2022, which is slightly less than in the pandemic years 2020 and 2021, but more than in the years before the pandemic. A rising trend can be observed in the overall monetary value of **basic material assistance** over the entire programming period. This amounted to EUR 40.6 million, of which half was used for voucher schemes in Romania.

Based on the above, the FEAD's final year of implementation will not be without its challenges. While budgets exceed the existing financial allocations, a remarkable increase in implementation in the final year will be needed to achieve full implementation. This may prove difficult in at least half of the Member States. In the meantime, the implementation of ESF+ programmes may already have started, which will allow programmes to be continued under SO(m), the specific objective addressing material deprivation.