



FOOD AID & COST OF LIVING CRISIS ACROSS EUROPE

ROUNDTABLE KEY TAKEAWAYS

Eurodiaconia  Connecting faith
and social justice
through action



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On April 13, 2023, Eurodiaconia and the Red Cross EU Office (RCEU) organized a roundtable event on food aid in the context of the cost-of-living crisis in Europe at the European Parliament, co-hosted by MEP Brando Benifei and MEP David Casa.

The event aimed to examine the continuous demand for food aid across Europe, the main issues encountered by organizations when delivering food, and the always troublesome access to EU funds to provide support to people in need. The roundtable was also an opportunity to share challenges experienced by NGOs and social service providers across Europe.

Participants included national members of Eurodiaconia and National Red Cross Societies from Belgium, Finland, France, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, and Spain, as well as other stakeholders and partners such as Caritas Europa and the Federation of European Food Banks (FEBA), together with representatives of the European Commission and the European Parliament.

This document provides updated observations and recommendations to EU Institutions for the 2023 mid-term review of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 and for any upcoming work aiming to alleviate food poverty.

Throughout the discussion, the following observations were highlighted:

1

In recent years, as a consequence of successive crises, the profile of people asking for food aid is changing and widening, and the implications for nonprofit organizations providing food aid in Europe are severe. For instance, the Italian Red Cross experienced a 40% increase in the demand for food aid. Similarly, Eurodiaconia member, the Swedish City Mission, has seen a doubling in the number of visitors seeking financial or material support and food, including those who are fully employed.

2

So far, social service providers, NGOs, and food banks have used their creativity and resilience to maintain or increase their capacity and implement new programs to support people experiencing food needs. But frequently, they encounter financial and logistical issues to include new clients with the same or reduced funding and donations, and struggle to increase the quality of the products delivered to meet the needs of end users. This is particularly true for smaller organizations with less access to funds and less capacity to manage them, but who are usually working with people at the very margins of society.

3

The years 2021 and 2022 were meant to be the first two years of the new architecture of FEAD fully integrated into the new ESF+. However, the multiple crises delayed the original plans until 2024. While the results of the new architecture remain to be seen, the continuous increase of transportation and logistics costs, beyond the existing 7% flat rate in some member states, represents a risk for nonprofit organizations to effectively deliver the most valuable products for people. Similarly, the increase in food prices will continue to reduce the purchasing power for end users, particularly affecting those households holding vouchers/e-vouchers.



Based on these observations and assessments, the following can be recommended:

>> Support nonprofits.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine international armed conflict, and the cost-of-living crisis have caused millions of people to struggle to make ends meet across Europe, affecting those who were already vulnerable the most, and pushing more people into poverty. Social service providers and NGOs are bridging the gap between government support and the true cost of living for people in need, but they need more and better access to funds, more sustainable investment, and stronger support to carry out their work.

>> Ease access to funds.

National-level organizations experience difficulties accessing EU funds due to excessive bureaucracy, complexity, and lack of transparency. Enhanced cooperation amongst NGOs and with national managing authorities of EU funds, capacity building, and more flexibility and simplification in the EU funds regulation and structure is necessary towards helping smaller organizations to make use of these funds.

>> Protect existing social inclusion priorities.

Implementing the Action Plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights, and achieving its headline target of poverty reduction by 2030 requires higher ambition. Better access and programming of ESF+ to comply with existing funding earmarks for child poverty (5%), youth unemployment (12.5%), material deprivation (3%), and social inclusion (25%) is needed to achieve this goal and improve the well-being of people in need, particularly in times of crisis.

>> Systemic change is needed.

Food aid should remain an emergency response and must not be normalized. Thus, long-term solutions and systemic change are needed to address the root causes of poverty. Supporting people that are in need of food and helping provide dignity to those struggling the most is part of our organizations' identity, but we should not forget that food aid is not a solution to growing poverty, but an immediate response. We need to continue advocating for long-term solutions, such as adequate minimum income schemes, to address underlying problems.

Eurodiaconia and the Red Cross in Europe, together with other partner NGOs, will continue to monitor the development of the food aid architecture under the new ESF+ and assess how it can better support households in need of food or struggling to meet their monthly payments. At the same time, together with our members, we will continue advocating for social policies at the EU and national level that tackle the roots of structural poverty and inequalities to achieve systemic change.