



COVID-19: the commitment of each person for the good of all

Brussels, 17 March 2020

The reality of the Covid-19 pandemic is hitting Europe and the world hard. Seldom in the history of Europe have so many challenges needed so much attention from leaders and citizens alike. The outbreak will inevitably be followed by an economic downturn which could result in further deterioration of our society.

The challenging situation we are experiencing can be seen as a threat leading to despair or as an opportunity that will take us back to the roots of solidarity in Europe. This situation is putting the person back at the centre of our community and shifting the focus back to what is essential.

Food Bankers are responding to the present situation by continuing to keep the chain of solidarity alive, and they are creatively and tenaciously adapting their activity to the evolving situation. Food Bankers are very practical people who, through their largely volunteer work, are contributing to reduce the food insecurity experienced by our most deprived citizens every day, while preventing food waste. As Pope Francis stated during the Private Audience with FEBA members on 18 May 2019, *“Your work is like that of trees – this is the image that comes to mind – which breathe in pollution but give back oxygen. And like trees, you do not keep the oxygen: you distribute the quantity required for living so that it reaches those in need.”*

The activity of European Food Banks is robust, but at the same time it has its weaknesses. It relies on the work of 31,700 people, 85% of whom are volunteers, including seniors and people at particular risk. It collaborates with 45,700 local charitable organizations to reach 9.3 million deprived people in need of food and often in need of hope. This work – distributing the equivalent to over 4 million meals a day – is done with pride but also with silent humility, in material and financial extremely stretched conditions.

As a community of Food Bankers, we have been working closely with the European institutions, the agri-food supply chain, stakeholders, and charitable organizations for almost 35 years. We have been contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals. While Food Banks are often appreciated and considered to be effective and professional food redistribution partners, this is not enough to secure the future.

Therefore, the European Food Banks Federation and its members:

1. Call on **European institutions and national governments to support the initiatives of civil society organizations** to face the challenges of today and the immediate future, with competence and professionalism for the common good.
2. Call on **European institutions and EU Members States to signal solidarity to European citizens, especially to the most deprived**, by increasing the allocation for food and basic material assistance within the European Social Fund Plus to ensure a level of support equivalent to 2014-2020. This would help address the emergency of material deprivation in the short and long term.
3. Call on **European institutions and national governments to allow freedom of movement to volunteers aged 18-64 engaged with civil society organizations** that provide food and/or pharmaceutical aid, in compliance with public health rules, because they are responding to basic primary needs. Supporting volunteers means monitoring marginalized segments of the population already facing greater health risks. If these people are not accompanied, their situation could get worse and lead to the perception that they have been abandoned as second-



- class citizens, which could increase the risk of degeneration into public disorders (for instance the riots taking place in prisons).
4. Call on **corporates to shape partnerships to tackle together this situation, rethinking profit and non-profit collaboration**, fostering food donation, providing financial support, sharing competence and expertise, and building joint innovative solutions.
 5. Encourage **people at less risk, for instance university students, to support the daily activity of Food Banks** recovering, storing and redistributing food or delivering food to charities and those in need.
 6. Ask for **necessary equipment** such as facilities and refrigerated trucks **and essential tools** such as hand sanitizer dispensers, isothermal boxes, carton boxes, disposable gloves, etc. **to ensure the safety of our activities.**

We need the commitment of each person for the good of all.

Jacques Vandenschrik
President of the European Food Banks Federation

About FEBA

The European Food Banks Federation (FEBA) is a European umbrella non-profit organization and works in collaboration with 24 Members and 5 Associate Members in European countries. For more than 30 years, FEBA mission has consisted in representing its membership at European and international level, supporting and strengthening food banks in Europe by providing training, sharing best practice and knowledge, and developing partnerships, and fostering the creation of new Food Banks. FEBA brings together 421 Food Banks and branches which are committed to fight against food waste and to feed the most deprived. Our members provide 4.3 million meals each day to 9.3 million most deprived people through 45,700 charitable organizations thanks to the professionalism of 31,700 co-workers (85% volunteers). In addition to surplus food from the food supply chain, FEBA members also redistribute food from the Fund for European Aid to the most Deprived (FEAD) and the Fruits and Vegetables withdrawal scheme, as well as from individual donations.

