



ESF+ & the European
Food Banks Federation

2024 Implementation Report →

Published 2025, Brussels.

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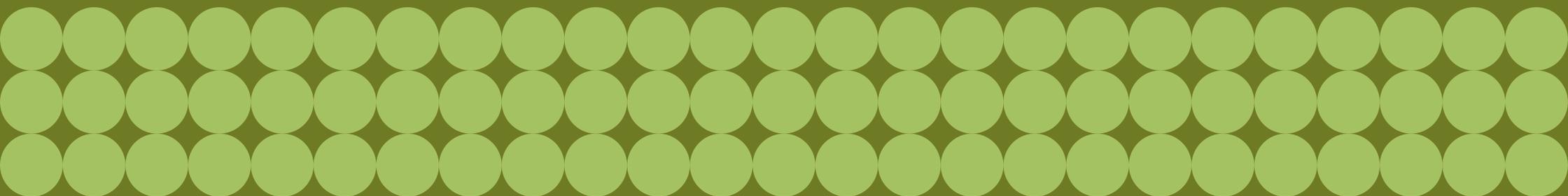
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1.ABOUT THIS REPORT

The **European Social Fund Plus** (ESF+) has been a vital source of support for members of the European Food Banks Federation (FEBA) across Europe. Through direct and indirect material assistance, it has helped food banks reach the most vulnerable communities, reduce deprivation, and improve access to essential goods.

To evaluate the impact of the ESF+ Programme on FEBA members in 2024, FEBA carried out a survey covering the period from January to December. The survey gathered both qualitative and quantitative data from ten member organisations that benefited from the fund, in:



This report provides an overview of the support delivered through ESF+ and highlights the key outcomes achieved by FEBA members during the year.



“ESF+ is more than a funding line, it’s a lifeline. It supports food banks and partner organisations not only in meeting immediate needs but also in fostering resilient, inclusive communities through sustainable redistribution and social support systems. Continued investment in ESF+ is essential to ensure no one is left behind.”

Esteban Arriaga Miranda

CEO of the European Food Banks Federation

2.A FIVE-YEAR OVERVIEW

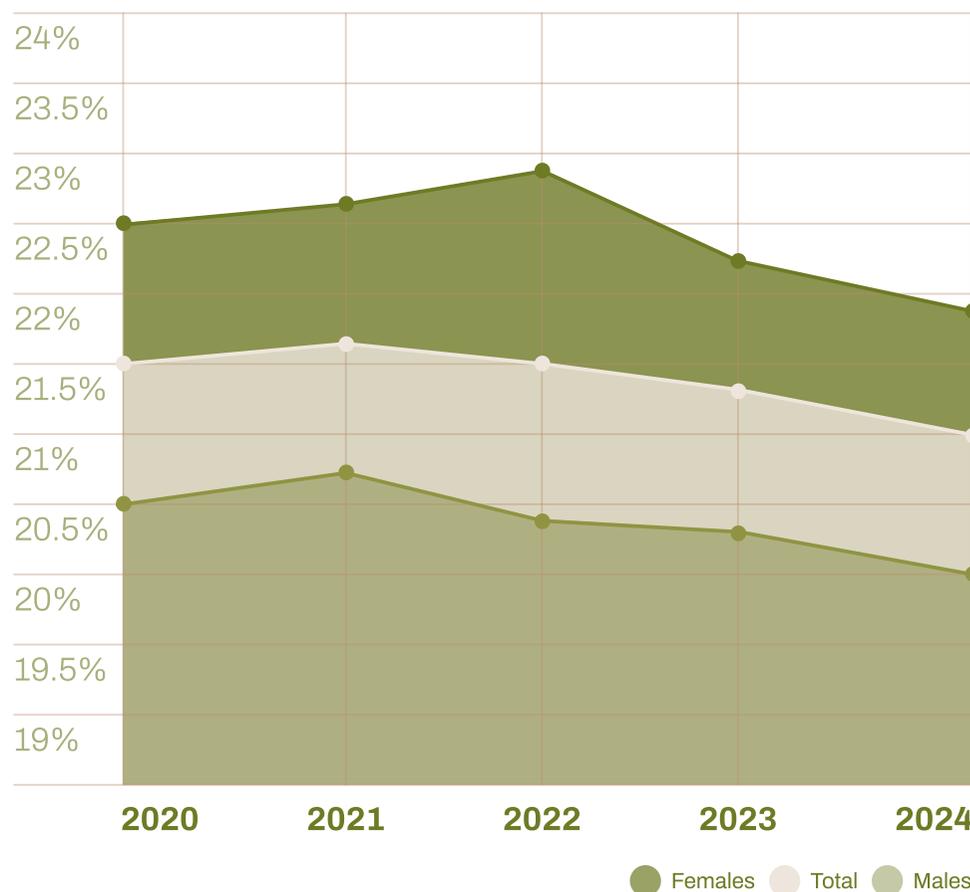
In 2024, around **93.3 million people** in the EU-27 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, i.e., roughly one in five people lived in households experiencing at least one of three poverty and social exclusion risks: risk of poverty, severe material and social deprivation, or very low work intensity (Eurostat, 2025).



Although the share of people at risk declined between 2020 and 2024, poverty and social exclusion remain widespread across the European Union. Women continue to face a higher risk than men (22 per cent compared with 20 per cent in 2024), thus reflecting persistent gender inequalities in exposure to poverty and social exclusion (Figure 1).

The capacity to afford a meal with meat, chicken, fish or vegetarian equivalent every second day is one of the items measured at the household level to calculate the severe material and social deprivation rate. This is one of the headline indicators of the social scoreboard of indicators outlined as part of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Figure 1. Trends in the percentage of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU-27 (2020–2024), by gender.



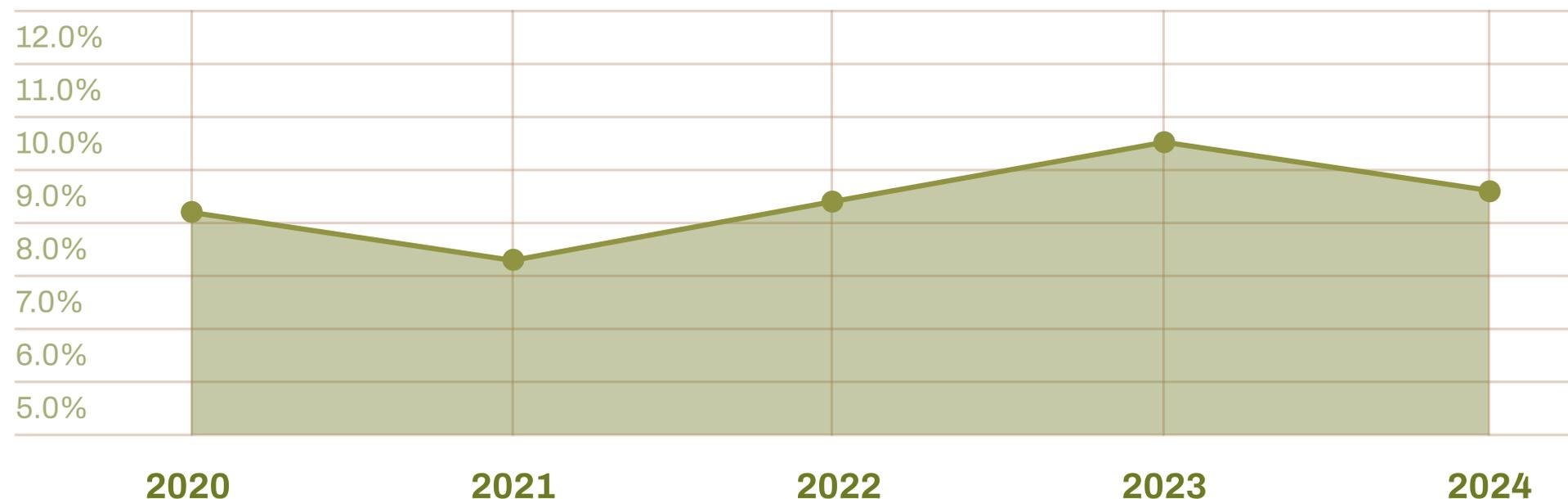
Data source: Eurostat

In 2024, around **38.2 million people** (8.5 per cent of the EU-27 population) were unable to afford such a meal every second day, down by one percentage point (pp) from 2023 (9.5 per cent). This is the first time a decline has been observed in this data since 2021, yet the rate remains above 2020 levels, suggesting persistent pressures on the most deprived households (Figure 2).

Among the households most affected are:



Figure 2. Trends in the percentage of people unable to afford a meal with meat, chicken, fish, or a vegetarian equivalent every second day in the EU-27 (2020–2024).



Data source: [Eurostat](#)



To help fight the most severe forms of poverty in the EU, such as food insecurity, child poverty, and homelessness, the **Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD)** was created in 2014. Unlike most food redistribution efforts, which rely primarily on surplus food from retailers and producers, FEAD supported Member States by providing long-life purchased food and basic essentials such as clothing, shoes, soap and shampoo to those in greatest need.

During the COVID-19 crisis, **REACT-EU** boosted these efforts by adding extra resources to the 2014–2020 budget, allowing countries to continue supporting the most deprived individuals and communities through FEAD. These additional funds were available until the end of 2023, helping organisations navigate a period marked by unprecedented social and economic challenges.

Since 2021, **ESF+ has replaced FEAD**, strengthening the EU's response to poverty by combining material support with measures that promote social inclusion. For the first time, EU Regulation 2021/1057¹ explicitly requires Member States to complement the distribution of food and basic material assistance with accompanying measures, aimed at helping beneficiaries address the root causes of material deprivation.

This integrated approach acknowledges that while food and material support address immediate needs, they alone are insufficient to overcome the structural barriers that keep people in poverty. ESF+ therefore supports national efforts to provide not only essential goods but also guidance, counselling, and connections to broader social services, fostering long-term resilience and inclusion.



¹ Regulation 2021/1057 - European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) - EU monitor





FEBA members have reported a **diverse set of accompanying measures** implemented alongside material support, tailored to the needs of beneficiaries and the capacities of local partners also funded by ESF+ funds. These include culinary workshops, educational sessions on healthy nutrition, budgeting, and food waste prevention, as well as individual support and counselling, at times provided directly in people's homes.

Some members also implement broader programmes combining social support with nutrition and health prevention (such as the Bons Gestes, Bonne Assiette initiative in France) to promote healthier lifestyles and well-being. In addition, training opportunities and group educational activities are offered to strengthen beneficiaries' skills, confidence, and self-reliance.

Although modest in scale compared to material assistance, these initiatives are widely regarded as essential to fostering social inclusion and strengthening independence, enabling recipients not only to meet their immediate needs but also to take steps toward lasting integration.

For food banks, this dual mandate has reinforced their role as both providers of essential aid and facilitators of broader social participation.

Through this integrated approach, ESF+ not only ensures access to essential, nutritious food and material assistance but also empowers beneficiaries to address the underlying causes of their hardship, reinforcing food banks' role as key actors in promoting dignity, resilience, and social inclusion.

3.ESF+ IN 2024

Over the past ten years (2014 – 2024), European food banks represented by FEBA have redistributed a total of around **1.5 million tonnes of FEAD/ESF+ products**.

In 2024, however, the landscape of food support under European programmes changed drastically, with the volume of food products funded through ESF+ falling to less than half of what was provided under the FEAD/REACT-EU schemes in 2023. At the same time, the number of countries able to benefit from these funds also decreased from eleven to ten. One telling example is Spain, which moved away from the direct distribution of food under the FEAD programme, instead providing indirect material support (meal vouchers via the Red Cross) under ESF+.

This shift has led to several negative implications for food banks and their beneficiaries, including a reduction in the amount of food redistributed, weakened social support from food banks, and the exclusion of vulnerable groups from accessing aid³ (such as homeless people, isolated elderly individuals, and families without dependent children).

² Only 22 EU FEBA members are eligible for ESF+, out of the 30 total members.

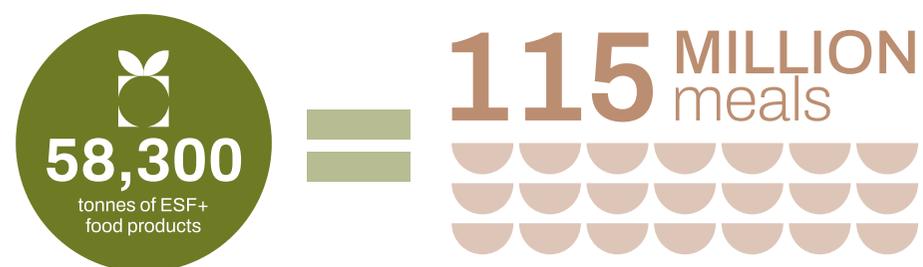
³ [More about ESF+ in Spain replaces food delivery.](#)

10 FEBA members² received and redistributed food financed through ESF+ resources in 2024.



Yet, ESF+ continued to play a meaningful role for those FEBA members still receiving food support:

In 2024, the **ten FEBA members**⁴ reporting to FEBA handled about **58,300 tonnes** of ESF+ **food products** (approximately 6.6 per cent of the total food received by European food banks), equivalent to more than **115 million meals**⁵. In addition, they were provided with a wide range of ESF+ non-food products.



As reported by FEBA members, this enabled the distribution of food and/or basic goods to **over 3.9 million people in need**, reaching more individuals than the entire population of Berlin.



This was also made possible thanks to the collaboration of over **100 partner organisations** and **around 9,000 charitable organisations**, whose involvement was supported by ESF+, as reported by FEBA members.

For six out of ten members, ESF+ funds also fostered the involvement of charitable organisations and final beneficiaries in programmes aimed at social inclusion, such as skills development, training, and job search support.



⁴ Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, and Portugal.

⁵ Meals are estimated by converting total tonnes of food into kilograms and dividing by an average meal weight of 0.5 kg, meaning 1 kg of food corresponds to 2 meals.

USE OF ESF+ IN 2024

In 2024, FEBA members made diverse **use of ESF+ funds to support their activities** and enhance their support to people in need. In particular,

9/10 members benefited from the provision of **food products**, and among these, Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, and Portugal

3/9 members also received **non-food items**, such as hygiene products, to complement their distributions.

Belgium, Czech Republic, Luxembourg

What emerges is that the most common type of food received in 2024 was staple food products, such as pasta, rice, and flour, which were provided to all but one member (89 per cent) **eight out of nine**. Oil, canned fruits and vegetables, and canned fish or meat were nearly as widely distributed, with **seven out of nine** members (78 per cent) receiving such items.

Figure 3.1. Number of FEBA members receiving ESF+ food products in 2024, by food category.

Data source: FEBA, ESF+ Implementation Survey 2024

7/10 members benefiting from **ESF+ assistance** reported it to be an important component of their product mix for redistribution.

8/10 members benefited from **ESF+ funding** to cover implementation and operational costs (e.g. accompanying measures, collection, storage, and related activities).

Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, and Portugal

Among the nine members who received **ESF+ food products**, the types of food varied considerably, based on decisions made by the managing authorities and ministries responsible for implementation (Figures 3.1 & 3.2).

8/9 MEMBERS RECEIVED Staple food products (e.g. rice, pasta, flour)

7/9 MEMBERS RECEIVED Oil & canned products (e.g. fruits, vegetables, meat, fish)

More than half of the recipient members also received dairy products **six out of nine** (67 per cent) and other canned foods **five out of nine** (57 per cent), highlighting the breadth of support beyond staples.

Although less common, “snack foods” such as cookies, chocolate, and chips, and coffee or tea were still significant, each reaching **four out of nine** about 44 per cent of members. Finally, **two members** received frozen foods, while baby food and other miscellaneous products were provided to **one member each**. No member reported receiving beverages.

Figure 3.2. Number of FEBA members receiving ESF+ food products in 2024, by food category.

Data source: FEBA, ESF+ Implementation Survey 2024



Regarding ESF+ non-food products, all three members who received these items were provided with personal hygiene products such as shampoo and toothpaste. **Two out of three** received home cleaning products and baby nappies, while only one received tampons (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Number of FEBA members receiving ESF+ non-food products in 2024, by non-food category.

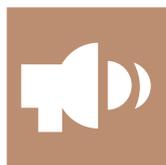
Data source: FEBA, ESF+ Implementation Survey 2024

Among the eight members, who benefited from food and non-food product support, ESF+ funds also covered **essential operational costs**. In particular:

6/8 members received reimbursements for administrative, transport, and storage expenses,

4/8 members benefited from funding for the collection, transport, storage, and distribution of donated food, as well as for direct awareness-raising activities.

3/8 members used the funds to **implement accompanying measures**, including



culinary and educational workshops on nutrition



budgeting, and food waste prevention,



along with individual counselling to promote beneficiaries' social inclusion and self-reliance.

2/8 members benefited from **technical assistance** and capacity-building initiatives that strengthened the skills and effectiveness of their partner organisations.

These varied forms of support highlight how ESF+ has enabled FEBA members not only to deliver food and basic goods but also to enhance their organisational capacity and provide meaningful, holistic assistance to people in vulnerable situations.

ASSESSMENT OF ESF+ PRODUCTS

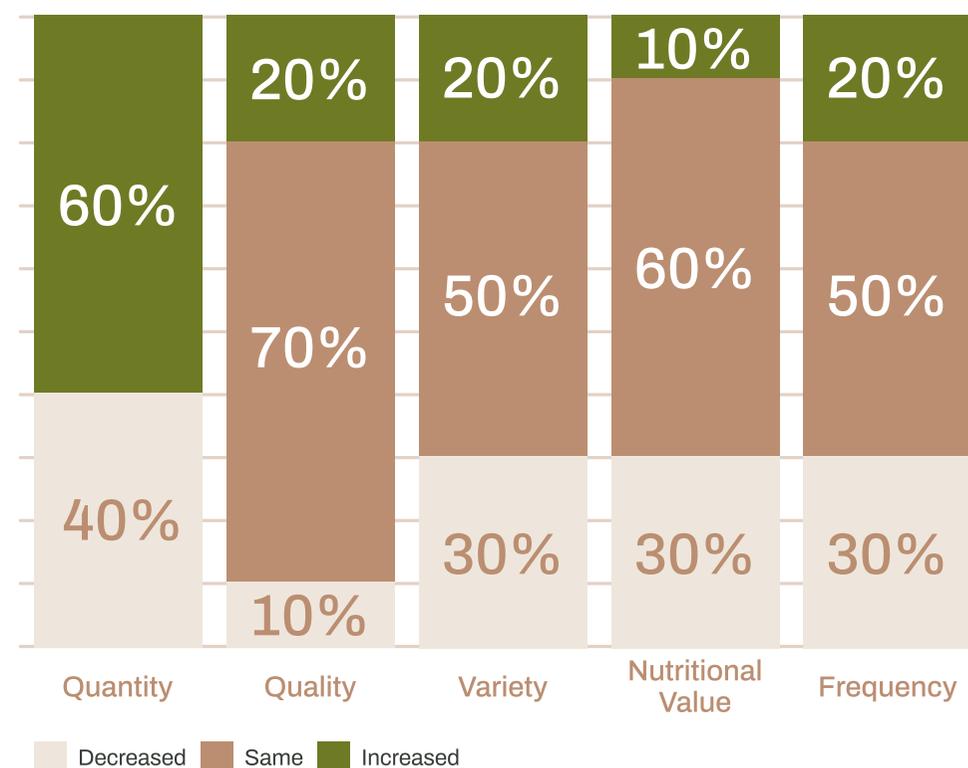
In 2024, FEBA members experienced differing trends in the ESF+ products received compared to 2023 (Figure 5). While **quantity** increased for 60 per cent of members, 40 per cent reported a decrease, likely reflecting differences in national allocation decisions and provision mechanisms under ESF+. Only two members observed an improvement in perceived quality, whereas the vast majority noted no difference from the previous year, suggesting that quality standards of ESF+ products remain stable but rarely exceed expectations.

Although **variety** was generally maintained, with five members reporting no change, one in three reported a decrease, which may be linked to a focus on staple, shelf-stable items. Similar trends were observed for **nutritional value**, with one in three reporting a decrease but most perceiving no change, possibly because the emphasis on durable products limits the inclusion of fresh or perishable nutritious items. Finally, regarding the **frequency** of ESF+ product deliveries, 50 per cent of members reported no change, 30 per cent a decrease, and 20 per cent an increase, reflecting the variability in national implementation schedules, logistical challenges, and adaptation to the current programming cycle.

Overall, these findings point to a mixed picture, with modest gains in quantity but persistent challenges in maintaining or improving the quality, variety, nutritional value, and frequency of ESF+ product distribution.

Most FEBA members reported stable quality, variety, and nutritional value of ESF+ products, alongside an increase in quantity.

Figure 5. Quantity, quality, variety, nutritional value, and frequency of ESF+ products in 2024 compared to 2023, as reported by FEBA members.



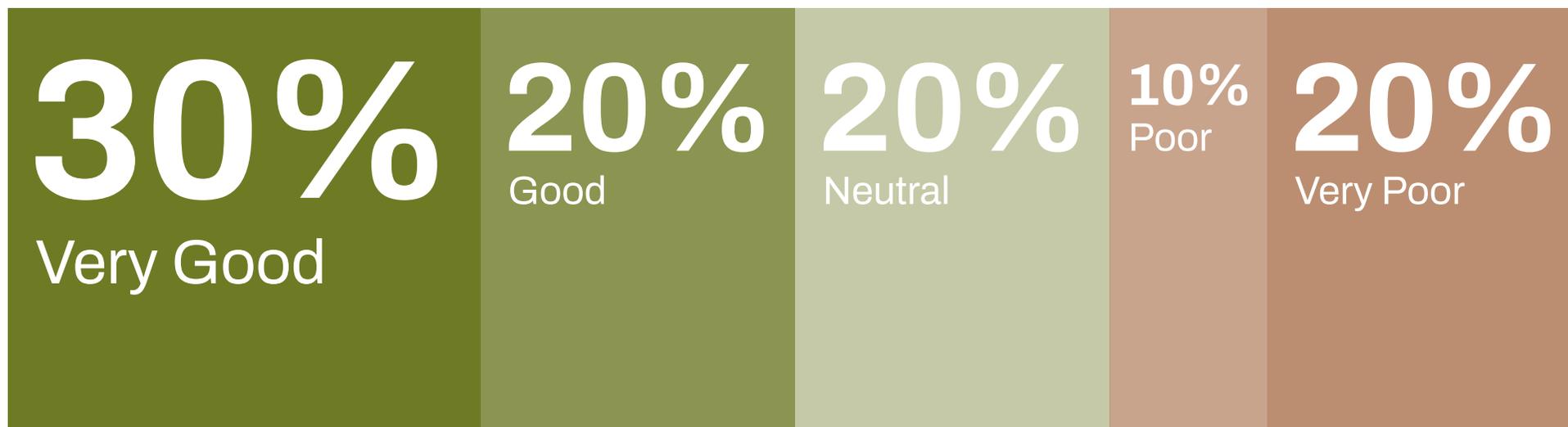
Data source: FEBA, ESF+ Implementation Survey 2024

CHALLENGES WITH ESF+

At the national level, ESF+ is implemented by managing authorities (MAs) that work alongside a variety of partner organisations, including FEBA members and other civil society actors. In 2024, FEBA members' experiences of collaborating with MAs revealed a mixed picture (Figure 6). Half of the members reported positive collaboration, describing their partnership as good or very good. However, one in three reported poor or very poor collaboration.

This contrast between successful collaborations and ongoing difficulties points to the need for improved communication, clearer definition of roles, and stronger institutional support to fully unlock the potential of ESF+ implementation across countries.

Figure 6. Collaboration with managing authorities in 2024.



Data source: FEBA, ESF+ Implementation Survey 2024

Beyond difficulties with managing authorities, FEBA members face a range of other important challenges. Figure 7 illustrates the key difficulties encountered in 2024. For example, the most prevalent issue, reported by 60 per cent of members, was a **difficulty in collecting data** on programme implementation, followed by **limited product variety** (50 per cent), suggesting concerns in monitoring capacity and meeting the diverse nutritional needs of beneficiaries.

As noted, collaborations pose a challenge for several members, with 40 per cent reporting difficulties working with MAs and 20 per cent highlighting weaker cooperation with other partners. Storage and logistics issues also affect 40 per cent, while insufficient funding for administration and logistics (30 per cent) indicates systemic constraints that could hinder efficient delivery and impact.

Insufficient funding for administrative and logistical costs (30 per cent) and **weaker cooperation with other partners** (20 per cent) are less common but persist. Importantly, concerns over **food quality** were less common (10 per cent), indicating that, despite challenges in quantity and coordination, product standards are generally maintained, likely because the foods are specifically purchased rather than sourced from surplus.

Figure 7. Main challenges related to ESF+ in 2024.



Data source: FEBA, ESF+ Implementation Survey 2024



4.WHY DOES ESF+ MATTER? THE PERSPECTIVE OF EUROPEAN FOOD BANKS

The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) is a crucial EU initiative aimed at aiding vulnerable populations and addressing issues like food security. By providing long-life food that can be stored and stockpiled, ESF+ funding complements the often-unpredictable supply of surplus food, helping to ensure a steadier and more reliable provision throughout the year.



Beyond material aid, ESF+ also helps food banks promote social inclusion by supporting programmes that offer skills training, education, and job opportunities to beneficiaries, helping them improve their situation and reduce food insecurity. To highlight its real-world impact, FEBA invited members who benefited from ESF+ support to share their experiences, demonstrating how the fund has made a difference in their communities.



For the **Belgian Federation of Food Banks**, ESF+ represents a crucial lifeline, providing the largest share of their food supply in 2024. However, its future is uncertain due to administrative barriers, upcoming federal cuts, and unclear EU budget plans beyond 2028.



“The food from the ESF+ budget remained the **most important supply source for the Belgian Federation of Food Banks** in 2024, accounting for 10,000 tonnes of long-lasting food out of a total of 25,900 tons of food distributed by the food banks in Belgium in 2024.

Unfortunately, a significant part of the nearly 700 affiliated associations has yet to make use of the ESF+ support on offer. The administrative obligations attached to the support pose a significant barrier. Given the importance of the ESF+ support, there is **great concern** within the Belgian Federation of Food Banks **regarding the future of ESF+**. Not only has there already been a decline in Belgian federal support in the context of ESF+ starting from 2026, but we are still completely in the dark about what the impact of the new European multiannual budget will be on ESF+ support from 2028.”

Federation Belge des Banques Alimentaires
Belgische Federatie van Voedselbanken



ČESKÁ FEDERACE
POTRAVINOVÝCH BANK

CZECH REPUBLIC

Česká Federace Potravinových Bank showcases how ESF+ helps support the most vulnerable, both directly through essential aid, and indirectly, via measures addressing long-term poverty and social exclusion.



“ESF+ funding helps people in difficult social situations, enabling them to bridge challenging periods in their lives by providing food or material assistance. At the same time, appropriate **accompanying measures** may direct and motivate them to **address their problems** and the causes of their difficult life situation **in the long-term**. This project enables the purchase and distribution of basic foodstuffs, hygiene products, basic household items and some textiles to the poorest citizens of the Czech Republic. It also distributes tents, sleeping bags and mats to address the emergency situations faced by homeless people, as well as distributing school supplies for children from families in serious social need.

While food and material assistance by its nature can only meet basic living needs, it can facilitate the use of available resources for other purposes, **indirectly contributing to meeting further essential needs.**”

Česká Federace Potravinových Bank



 IRELAND

FoodCloud's testimony highlights how the ESF+ Programme goes beyond food assistance, reaching the most vulnerable while fostering social connection, improved well-being, and the development of essential skills and services for vulnerable communities:



 [Watch the video to learn more!](#)

“The feedback from the community groups has been overwhelmingly positive, both in terms of the way the programme is run in Ireland and the impact it has had. In an independent evaluation in March 2022, over 90 per cent of the community groups agreed that the most vulnerable in society were being reached by the programme and that it was efficient in its use of resources and had achieved more than the groups might do in isolation.

The consistent supply of food helps recipients manage household budgets and prepare regular meals.

Moreover, it allows community groups to reallocate funds to core services and educational support. The community groups that use the products to prepare meals tell us that it is not only a meal that they are providing, but also a place where people can interact and make new friends. It is good for people's confidence, self-esteem, and mental health. Beyond nutrition, the programme fosters community, providing a vital source of connection and opportunities for learning important skills like healthy eating, cookery, and budgeting.”

FoodCloud





Fondazione Banco Alimentare ETS highlights the evolving approach of the ESF+ Programme, emphasising its **shift from basic food distribution to fostering structured social inclusion**:



“Concrete implementation of the ESF+ Programme only started in 2025, meaning it is too early to carry out a full impact assessment. However, the programme introduced a significant change: the integration of accompanying measures as a **tool to promote social inclusion**, going beyond the mere distribution of food.

The operational instructions of 14 August 2024 marked the formal launch of the programme, giving impetus to a process of discussion between the managing authority and stakeholders. This work culminated in 2025 in territorial meetings and technical round tables, training, and the development of shared monitoring tools. This fostered a new shared awareness of the fund's strategic role and helped food-receiving organisations to play a greater leading role in triggering social inclusion processes. The objective is clear: to **transform food aid** into a means for **structured and measurable social inclusion.**”

Fondazione Banco Alimentare ETS

For a more comprehensive overview on the implementation of FEAD, REACT-EU, and ESF+ by European food banks, read our previous yearly reports.

 [Report 2021](#)



 [Report 2022](#)



 [Report 2023](#)





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