



Contribution to the Call for Evidence on the EU Anti- Poverty Strategy



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Table of content

Context.....	4
The Role of Food Banks for Poverty Alleviation	5
The Right to Food and Poverty Reduction.....	6
Strengthening European Social Funding	7
Engagement of Civil Society.....	8
Adopting a Cross-Sectoral approach.....	8
Ensuring Broader Supporting Measures.....	9
Monitoring.....	9
Overview of Policy Recommendations	10
Conclusion.....	10

Call for Evidence on the APS

FEBA welcomes the European Commission's initiative to develop an EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, which reaffirms the commitment to reducing poverty and social exclusion across Europe. This initiative provides a valuable opportunity to address both the structural and immediate drivers of poverty, including food insecurity, which remains pervasive across Europe. Food banks play a vital role in tackling poverty by providing essential food aid and building resilient communities, fostering social inclusion and creating pathways out of poverty for people in need.

Context

In 2024, 93.3 million people in the EU were at risk of social exclusion or poverty.¹ While this figure marks a slight improvement from the previous year,² the reality remains that millions of people struggle daily to cover their basic needs. Food insecurity highlights the severity of this issue. In 2024, around 38.2 million people, correlating to 8.5% of the EU-27 population, were unable to afford a meal with fish, meat or vegetarian equivalent every second day.³

Due to inflation, the price of food and non-alcoholic beverages increased considerably in 2023, reaching high levels of 12.5%, while overall inflation was above 5% for much of the year.⁴ While the inflation rate for food and non-alcoholic beverages in the EU fell below the average in 2024, food prices remain higher than pre-pandemic.⁵ Simultaneously, FEBA has observed an increase in some countries of the amount and proportion of food purchased by food banks, which could indicate that current food donations need to be supplemented and are no longer keeping pace with demand.⁶ Furthermore, in-work poverty is also a matter of concern to the extent that poor workers are one of the rising new groups seeking assistance from food banks in some countries.⁷

The current framework of EU social policies, including the 2017 European Pillar of Social Rights and its 2021 Action Plan, though nonbinding, set clear targets for poverty reduction and acknowledge the need for social protection, as well as access to essential services. In this regard, the 2021 EPSR Action Plan lays down that the EU aims to reduce poverty by 15 million until 2030, whereby 2019 is the baseline year.⁸ Yet, the EU is still far from achieving this goal.⁹ A new stringent and ambitious Anti-Poverty Strategy (APS) is not only necessary to pave the road to reaching this objective but vital in order to attain Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1 on the

¹ Eurostat, 'Living conditions in Europe – poverty and social exclusion' (Statistics Explained, European Union, April 2025) <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Living_conditions_in_Europe_-_poverty_and_social_exclusion> accessed 23 October 2025.

² European Commission, 'People at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2023' (Eurostat News Release, 12 June 2024) <<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20240612-1>> accessed 09 October 2025.

³ Eurostat, 'Almost 9% in the EU could not afford a proper meal', Eurostat News (28 August 2025) accessed 10 July 2025.

⁴ European Commission, 'Key figures on Europe – 2024 edition' (Publications Office of the EU, Luxembourg, 10 July 2024) 36– 37 accessed 10 July 2025.

⁵ Eurostat (European Commission), 'Key Figures on Europe – 2025 edition' (Publications Office of the European Union 2025) ISBN 978-92-68-24007-6, DOI 10.2785/0857421 <<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/15216629/21862451/KS-01-25-003-EN-N.pdf/0b4b896a-57a9-3348-06d0-319c667b6b08?version=3.0&t=1752741392463>> accessed 23 October 2025; According to the ECB, food prices remain one-third higher than before the pandemic: European Central Bank, 'When groceries bite: the role of food prices for inflation in the euro area' (ECB Blog, 25 September 2025) <<https://www.ecb.europa.eu/press/blog/date/2025/html/ecb.blog20250925~7fd65a388a.en.html>> accessed 23 October 2025.

⁶ FEBA Data Collection, 2024.

⁷ The French Food Bank Federation has observed this increase: Fédération Française des Banques Alimentaires, *Étude Profils 2025 : Qui sont les personnes accueillies à l'aide alimentaire ?* (Banques Alimentaires, février 2025) <https://www.banquealimentaire.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/Etude%20profils%202025_%20Banques%20Alimentaires_0.pdf> accessed 24 October 2025.

⁸ European Commission, *European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan* (4 March 2021) <https://commission.europa.eu/publications/european-pillar-social-rights-action-plan_en> accessed 20 October 2025.

⁹ Eurostat (n 1).

eradication of poverty in all its forms. Additionally, the integration of food aid into the APS would further contribute to SDG 2 on ending hunger.¹⁰

The Role of Food Banks for Poverty Alleviation

Access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food is embedded in the issue of poverty reduction. Many pathways that contribute to the alleviation of poverty, including education, health care and access to other social services, require that basic needs, like access to food, are met. This is where food banks come in. Food banks provide essential food aid and material support, ensuring that the basic needs of the most deprived people are met.

Simultaneously, food banks are part of a vast and well-connected network of stakeholders, including charitable organisations and other social actors, governmental bodies and private entities involved in the food donation process. This network facilitates accessibility to other pathways out of poverty. In 2024 alone, FEBA Members, including 25 Full Members and 5 Associate Members in 30 European countries, redistributed approximately 834,000 tonnes of food and served approximately 12.2 million people in need. Food banks mostly redistribute food to charitable organisations and social entities that provide services including housing, education, social services and other forms of material and immaterial support. This makes food banks a vital part of Europe's social support structure, offering real solutions to address the complex issue of poverty reduction.

About 90 percent of the daily work of food banks is carried out by volunteers.¹¹ This adds another crucial layer to the ability of food banks to foster social inclusion. For instance, the Algarve Food bank launched the Solidarity Farm project, a social aid programme with the objective of strengthening social inclusion on the one hand and increasing the number of volunteers on the other. The programme involved recruiting people at risk of social exclusion, for instance persons with disabilities or incarcerated people, accompanied by social workers, as volunteers in food banks. This allowed the volunteers to develop their personal and professional skills, such as training in farming, improving their chances of employment after completing the programme. In this way, the Algarve food bank helped several people re-enter the job market. This example therefore showcases the way in which food banks can contribute to social inclusion with the effect of supporting employment, a fundamental pillar of the Commission's agenda to increase the competitiveness of the EU.

The Multiplier-effect: Creating Broader Social, Economic and Environmental Benefits

The profound impact of food banks' work can be demonstrated using the example of the multiplier effect, calculated by applying a Social Return on Investment (SROI) Methodology.¹² Several FEBA Members have carried out SROI studies in

¹⁰ United Nations General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (25 September 2015) UN Doc A/RES/70/1.

¹¹ FEBA Data Collection, 2024.

¹² The Dutch Federation of Food Banks cooperated with the consultancy Deloitte to calculate the SROI: Vereniging van Voedselbanken Nederland and Deloitte Impact Foundation (DIF), *Wat is de sociale impact van Voedselbanken Nederland? Een Social Return on Investment analyse* (presentation, October 2024)

collaboration with research institutions or consultancies to determine their respective impacts.

In 2024, the Dutch Food Bank Federation 'Voedselbanken Nederland' partnered up with the consultancy 'Deloitte' to conduct an SROI analysis of food banks' operations. In this case, the analysis involved mapping the different outcomes of food banks' activities and calculating the monetary value of each impact. These included benefits such as improved mental and physical health and avoided greenhouse gas emissions from food waste. These societal impacts therefore result in real cost savings for the State. For instance, the case study identified a reduction in mental and physical health care costs, resulting from the mitigation of adverse health impacts caused by malnutrition. Thus, the identified social impacts were translated into economic benefits and compared to the total financial inputs. Based on the calculations by Deloitte and Voedselbanken Nederland, the work undertaken by Dutch food banks was estimated to generate €12 in value for society for every €1 Euro invested.¹³

The Dutch case study demonstrates that the impressive social returns resulting from the work of food banks can translate into significant cost savings for public budgets and meaningful benefits for people in need. Several other FEBA Members have carried out similar studies to determine the SROI of their work, including the Belgian Federation of Food Banks, which partnered up with the VIVES University of Applied Sciences to estimate the SROI of their work. Based on their analysis, it was estimated that through the work of Belgian food banks, the Belgian Federation has generated approximately 383.4 million Euros in added social value, corresponding to 8.95 Euros return on every 1 Euro invested.¹⁴ These SROI analyses show that through the positive social impacts on the communities reached, investments in food banks can translate to real cost savings that would otherwise have to be borne by the State and society at large.

Furthermore, food banks and the social entities they collaborate with continue to develop innovative approaches to expand their operations. For instance, many food banks in the EU have created virtual food banking platforms that digitally connect food donors with community groups and charitable organisations, facilitating efficient food donations.¹⁵ Investing in these types of initiatives would allow food banks to scale up innovation and increase the social impact of their efforts by reaching more communities, with the potential to generate even higher cost savings for the public.

The Right to Food and Poverty Reduction

Under Article 11(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the right to food is recognised within the human right to an adequate standard

<<https://voedselbankennederland.nl/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/5F-20241007-Presentatie-SROI-Voedselbank.pdf>> accessed 4 September 2025.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Fédération Belge des Banques Alimentaires, 'Banques Alimentaires : 1 euro rapporte 8,95 euros de plus-value sociale' (Blog, 4 June 2024) <<https://www.foodbanks.be/fr/blog/123/2024-06-04/banques-alimentaires-1-euro-rapporte-8-95-euros-de-plus-value-sociale%C2%A0>> accessed 23 October 2025.

¹⁵ One example is the Irish Food Bank Federation FoodCloud: FoodCloud, 'Foodiverse' <<https://food.cloud/foodiverse>> accessed 23 October 2025.

of living.¹⁶ Additionally, Article 11(2) establishes "the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger".¹⁷ Despite its recognition as a human right under international law, the right to food is not inscribed in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. Given the importance of securing access to food to facilitate pathways out of poverty, the EU APS must therefore remedy this gap and adopt a rights-based approach that recognises the human right to access to nutritious food. Importantly, this recognition could further counter the stigmatisation of most deprived persons and encourage more people in need to seek essential support. FEBA therefore strongly advocates for the adoption of a rights-based approach to securing access to food within the APS.

Strengthening European Social Funding

The pivotal role of ESF+ to advance social inclusion is clearly demonstrated when considering its supportive function for food banks. To assess the beneficial effect of ESF+ on food banks within its network and consequently on people in need, FEBA carried out extensive surveys among the ten FEBA Members who received ESF+. The surveys showed that with the help of ESF+, the ten FEBA Members reporting to FEBA managed about 58,300 tonnes of ESF+ food products (approximately 6.6% of the total food received by European food banks), which is equivalent to more than 115 million meals in 2024.¹⁸ Additionally, FEBA Members receiving ESF+ were provided with around 341 tonnes of non-food products. As a result of this type of support, FEBA Members receiving ESF+ were able to provide food and non-food products to over 3.9 million people in need. The outcome of these surveys demonstrates that ESF+ funding has had a significant positive impact on the ability of food banks to provide essential food aid to people in need.

The priority shift at EU level towards security and defence has brought about an increasing risk of spending cuts to social initiatives. This is reflected in the Commission's proposal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework for the programming period 2028-2034. The announced social spending target of 14 percent of the National and Regional Partnership Plans, which correlates to about 100 billion in funding, is reduced in comparison to the current ESF+ envelope of 95.9 billion in funding, when adjusted to inflation and considering the inclusion of broader thematic areas through the merging of funds. Furthermore, the recently approved proposal of the EC to amend the Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 on current ESF+ (2021-2027) already allows the allocation of funding to new and different "strategic priorities", including defence, security and civil preparedness.¹⁹

The resulting threat to adequate social funding is exacerbated by the lack of proposed earmarking for specific social issues. While the current ESF+ requires earmarking for social inclusion of 25 percent and 5 percent for the Child Guarantee, the new Draft Proposal establishing the ESF+ as part of the National and Regional Partnership Plans, makes no mention of specific earmarking for social inclusion or material

¹⁶ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, adopted 16 December 1966, GA Res 2200A (XXI), entered into force 3 January 1976, art 11(1).

¹⁷ Ibid art 11(2).

¹⁸ According to FEBA's calculations, one meal is equivalent to 500 g of recovered food.

¹⁹ Regulation (EU) 2025/1913 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 September 2025 amending Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) as regards specific measures to address strategic challenges, OJ L 19.9.2025, 1913.

deprivation objectives.²⁰ Furthermore, ESF+ should support public and private partnerships if these provide essential material support to people in need.

In order to successfully implement the APS and achieve the objectives set out by the EPSR Action Plan, the EU must provide dedicated, stable EU funding. FEBA therefore supports the earmarking of a minimum of 25 percent within the social spending target for social inclusion initiatives. Furthermore, it is essential that funding for social support remains linked to food aid actions and that a dedicated percentage of 10 percent is safeguarded for material support and food aid specifically.

Without the support of adequate and consistent resources, food banks and other civil society organisations (CSOs) cannot continue to provide material support and carry out the meaningful work to uplift the most deprived persons out of poverty, like the 3.9 million people reached by FEBA Members who received ESF+ in 2024.

Engagement of Civil Society

The new APS will only be effective if CSOs and people with lived experiences of poverty are involved in the policy making and implementation process. This contribution has described the crucial role that food banks play in this regard. Just as the revised Waste Framework Directive recognises food banks as vital actors to be consulted on food waste reduction measures, the APS should recognise their essential function as implementing partners to reach the poverty reduction targets by 2030.

Thus, the APS should establish mechanisms that safeguard the participation of civil society by setting up platforms and fora that allow civil society actors, such as food banks, and people with lived experiences of poverty to share their insights. These inputs should be taken into account in the policy design and implementation stages at EU, national, regional and local level, according to the respective governance competences within the Member States.

Furthermore, to adequately support the work of CSOs and secure their engagement, EU funding opportunities must be more accessible. This will require the clarification of co-financing rules and a reduction of the administrative burden.

Additionally, to translate the broader APS in form of an overarching strategy into practical, concrete guidance for Member States, the APS should facilitate the sharing of best practices and peer learning between governmental bodies and social actors, including food banks and other organisations providing material support.

Adopting a Cross-Sectoral approach

Moreover, the APS must adopt a cross-sectoral approach that reflects the multi-dimensional nature of poverty. Regarding food aid specifically, the APS must reflect its interconnection with wider policy areas, including access to health care, employment, education, housing, as well as environmental issues. It must therefore be embedded within broader strategies that address systemic inequalities and social inclusion, as

²⁰ European Commission, *Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) as regards specific measures to address strategic challenges* (COM(2025) 164 final) <<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/e61160f2-0fae-11f0-b1a3-01aa75ed71a1/>> accessed 20 October 2025.

well as those outside of the social remit. Additionally, the APS must also be aligned with the EU's social policies, such as the EPSR Action Plan, currently under review.

Ensuring Broader Supporting Measures

To address the structural factors causing social inequality and poverty, the APS must protect and strengthen social protection schemes, including minimum income and pensions and ensure that these are adjusted to inflation and the increasing costs of living. Given that measures aimed at the the reduction of poverty are often implemented at the local and regional level, the APS should particularly support the cooperation at these governance levels. Food banks are exemplary of this collaboration, as the food donation process involves governmental bodies, social entities and private actors that provide food aid at the local and regional levels.

Monitoring

To ensure Member States' stringent compliance with the APS, the latter must set out a robust monitoring mechanism. At EU level, the main indicator measuring the share of people at risk of poverty or at risk of being severely materially and socially deprived is the At Risk Of Poverty or Social Exclusion (AROPE) rate.²¹ Food security, only serves as one of the indicators monitored to measure the share of people that are severely materially deprived. As a result, food insecurity is not ascribed enough weight in the monitoring process. In this context, FEBA has taken a proactive role in improving the collection and analysis of data on food redistribution and its wider impacts across Europe.

Since 2020, FEBA has implemented the “Quantifying the Impact of European Food Banks - From Farm to Fork” project, aiming to provide a standardized and consistent methodology for data collection across its members. The initiative seeks to assess the economic, environmental, nutritional, and social impacts of food bank operations, translate collected data into actionable insights for impact management and measurement, and foster digital transformation within the network. Through the development of the Observatory on Food Donation, FEBA enables its members to systematically collect, report, and analyse data, including key performance indicators (KPIs)²², thereby promoting transparency, supporting evidence-based decision-making, and enhancing the social and environmental contribution of European food banks.

Building on its ongoing efforts to standardize impact measurement, FEBA has launched a new initiative in 2025 to develop a Unified Data Framework (UDF) for Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) reporting.²³ This framework is designed to provide food banks with consistent, credible, and interoperable metrics that reflect both environmental and social impacts, while meeting the reporting needs of food business partners, funders, and policymakers. By combining standardized environmental indicators, with emerging relevant social impact metrics, FEBA aims to strengthen evidence-based decision-making, enhance transparency, and position the European food banking network as a leader in ESG reporting.

²¹ Eurostat, ‘Glossary: At-risk-of-poverty rate’ (Statistics Explained)

<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:At-risk-of-poverty_rate> accessed 20 October 2025.

²² Examples of KPIs include: the total number of end beneficiaries, the total amount of food received, and the total amount of food redistributed.

²³ The UDF was launched by FEBA in collaboration with FoodCloud and Anthesis.

By systematically leveraging this standardised and comprehensive data, FEBA enables food banks to provide unique insights on the effects of their work on beneficiaries and overall impact, supporting more robust monitoring, more effective evaluations of anti-poverty and social inclusion measures, and reinforcing the role of food banks in addressing food insecurity across Europe. This kind of data collection and analysis could support the monitoring of food insecurity and material deprivation under the APS.

Overview of Policy Recommendations

- 1) Adopting a human rights-based approach to food aid and material support
- 2) Providing essential resources: strengthening EU funding for material support
- 3) Engagement of civil society
- 4) Adopting a cross-sectoral approach
- 5) Ensuring broader supporting measures
- 6) Regular and robust monitoring

Conclusion

The development of an ambitious and comprehensive EU APS represents a crucial step toward achieving the objectives of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the SDGs. As this contribution has demonstrated, food banks play an essential role not only in providing immediate food aid but also in fostering social inclusion, employability, and community resilience. Their work delivers measurable social and economic returns, alleviating pressure on public budgets and providing aid to millions of people in need.

To adequately recognise the foundational role of food and material aid for social inclusion, the APS must adopt a human rights-based and cross-sectoral approach, recognising access to adequate food as a fundamental right and embedding food security within wider social, economic, and environmental frameworks. The importance of EU funding, including ESF+, is vital to allow food banks to continue this essential support. Furthermore, the participation of CSOs and people with lived experiences of poverty is necessary for the successful implementation of the APS. Lastly, the APS should facilitate the improved systematic monitoring of food and material deprivation specifically at EU level. The incorporation of these policy recommendations in the design and implementation of the APS, would meaningfully contribute to the eradication of poverty, ensuring that no one is left behind.