



# **FEBA Position Paper on the 2025 Action Plan for the Implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights**

Recognising Food Insecurity in the European  
Pillar of Social Rights

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**In this position paper, the European Food Banks Federation (FEBA) highlights its position on the new Action Plan for the Implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights .**

## Executive Summary

The European Food Banks Federation (FEBA), representing a network of over 350 food banks in 30 European Countries, including 22 EU Member States and 5 Candidate Countries, welcomes the new Action Plan for the Implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) and calls on the European Commission to make the fight against food insecurity a strategic priority in the forthcoming Action Plan. In 2024, 93.3 million people in the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, yet food insecurity remains largely invisible in EU social policy, with no common definition or harmonised monitoring.

Food banks provide immediate relief to people in need while acting as a bridge to other essential services such as housing, healthcare, skills development, and employment support. Through a vast network of thousands of local charities and social organisations, FEBA members reach communities across Europe, supporting social inclusion and solidarity.

Recognising food as an essential service within the EPSR framework is crucial. FEBA calls for earmarking at least 10% of ESF+ resources for food and material assistance under the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and for integrating food aid as a permanent element of social protection systems.

**Food redistribution through food banks is one of the most cost-effective social investments:** every euro invested can generate a multiplier effect of up to twelve euros in food and related support, maximising the social return on public and private resources while contributing to environmental goals by preventing food waste.

The upcoming revision of the Action Plan is a critical opportunity to address food insecurity as a structural challenge and to reinforce the EU's capacity to deliver on its social commitments.

With the 2030 targets of the EPSR fast approaching, the revised Action Plan must set out ambitious and concrete measures to ensure full alignment with its objectives. In this position paper, FEBA presents its policy recommendations to strengthen social inclusion and improve the provision of material assistance. These actions are essential to achieving meaningful and lasting poverty reduction across the EU.

## 1. The Role of Food Banks in Delivering Social Rights

FEBA's members are on the frontline in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. In 2024, food banks across Europe redistributed almost 850,000 tonnes of food to more than 12 million people through a network of 45,000 charitable organisations, supported

by over 100,000 volunteers. This daily work not only addresses urgent nutritional needs, but also prevents food waste, strengthens community resilience, and contributes to a more inclusive and sustainable economy. The scale and reach of these efforts demonstrate the unique capacity of food banks to deliver high-impact, cost-effective solutions that benefit people, society, and the environment alike.

Food aid is far more than an emergency measure, it is a critical entry point to social protection and inclusion. It supports individuals experiencing immediate hardship while acting as a referral channel to essential services such as housing, healthcare, skills training, and reintegration into the labour market. This underlines the central role of food banks in advancing the EU's social objectives, as reflected in Principle 20 of the EPSR on access to essential services. Yet, despite their proven contribution, EU policies still fall short of fully recognising food support as a social right and integrating it into broader social protection frameworks.

In the context of the ongoing Strategic Dialogue on the Future of Agriculture and the emerging new vision for food and agriculture within the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), food redistribution stands out as a concrete, low-cost, and immediately actionable tool to support a just transition. Strengthening access to food aid and embedding social inclusion objectives in related policies not only protects the most vulnerable, but also reinforces the EU's commitment to fairness and solidarity during the green transition.

By recovering surplus food and redirecting it to those experiencing food insecurity, food banks reduce environmental impact, prevent waste, and provide essential support to vulnerable populations. This dual benefit bridges environmental ambitions with social justice, creating tangible synergies between the EU's sustainability and social agendas. To fully realise the European Pillar of Social Rights, the EU must recognise food aid as a structural component of its policy architecture, ensuring it is systematically integrated into both social and environmental strategies.

## 2. Gaps in the 2021 Action Plan

FEBA recognises the value of the 2021 EPSR Action Plan in reaffirming Europe's social ambitions and setting measurable targets for poverty reduction, employment, and skills. It also launched important flagship initiatives, such as the European Child Guarantee, which have the potential to improve the lives of millions.

However, material support and with it, food aid — remains underrepresented. While Principle 20 of the EPSR refers to access to essential services such as water, energy, and digital communications, food is not explicitly mentioned, despite its fundamental role in human dignity and social participation.

The COVID-19 crisis exposed the fragility of food access systems and highlighted the indispensable role of food banks and other food aid providers in ensuring continuity of support. During the pandemic, food banks operated as critical lifelines for millions,

demonstrating their ability to mobilise resources quickly and reach those most in need. Yet, food insecurity has still not been mainstreamed into the EU's social agenda. There is no common EU definition of food insecurity, no systematic monitoring across Member States, and no dedicated EU strategy to address it.

This absence creates a significant policy gap: without clear recognition, measurement, and strategic integration, the EU risks overlooking one of the most immediate and visible dimensions of poverty, weakening its ability to deliver on the Pillar's overarching goals.

### 3. Food Insecurity: A Growing and Multidimensional Challenge

In 2023, food prices in the EU remained at historically high levels, with inflation exceeding 5% for much of the year. This sustained pressure has not only increased the number of people in need but has also forced food banks in several countries to reduce the size and nutritional value of the food baskets they provide. Vulnerable groups, including low-income workers, single-parent households, large families, and older people living alone, are increasingly reliant on food support to meet their basic needs.

**Food insecurity is both a symptom and a driver of poverty.** It undermines health, limits educational and employment opportunities, and erodes social cohesion. Tackling it is essential to achieving the EPSR's objectives on social protection and inclusion, while also advancing the EU's wider ambitions on sustainability, public health, and equality. By redistributing surplus food to those most in need, food banks contribute simultaneously to poverty reduction, waste prevention, and climate action.

Despite its cross-cutting impact, food insecurity is still not systematically monitored at EU level and does not appear as a core indicator in the Social Scoreboard. This absence hampers the EU's capacity to design targeted interventions and track progress effectively. A structural, data-informed, and coordinated EU response — integrating food aid into the EPSR framework and aligning it with other key EU strategies — is urgently needed to address this multidimensional challenge.

### 4. Policy Recommendations for the 2025 Action Plan

To close the existing policy gap and ensure that food insecurity is addressed as a structural challenge across the European Union, the 2025 revision of the EPSR Action Plan must embed food support as a core pillar of social inclusion. This requires a comprehensive approach that strengthens the policy framework, secures sustainable funding, and reinforces the capacity of civil society actors that operate on the frontline of material assistance.

First, the European Commission should explicitly **recognise food as an essential service under Principle 20 of the EPSR**, alongside water, energy, and digital communications. This recognition must be mirrored in the forthcoming EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, where food insecurity should be addressed as a structural and cross-cutting

issue. A common EU definition of food insecurity, supported by harmonised indicators, should be developed and integrated into the EPSR Social Scoreboard to enable consistent monitoring and policy evaluation across Member States.

Second, a **clear and reliable funding framework** is essential. FEBA calls for earmarking at least 10% of ESF+ allocations under the next Multiannual Financial Framework for food and material support. EU funding rules should ensure continued eligibility for food donation activities, surplus food recovery, and redistribution, while also supporting accompanying measures that connect food recipients to social services, vocational training, and employment opportunities. The high cost-efficiency of food aid must be promoted, with FEBA members able to deliver up to €12 in food and related services for every €1 invested, a multiplier effect that demonstrates its exceptional social return.

Third, **the role of civil society organisations must be preserved and strengthened**. Food banks, charities, and local partners provide not only essential material support but also a referral pathway to other services, forming an integral part of the wider social ecosystem. Any simplification of EU funding mechanisms should avoid reducing the emphasis on material assistance, and instead promote partnerships at national and regional level to embed food aid within social service delivery systems.

By adopting these recommendations, the revised EPSR Action Plan can deliver a more inclusive, efficient, and sustainable social model, one that safeguards the right to food, prevents waste, and ensures that Europe's most vulnerable populations are supported in building pathways out of poverty.

## 5. Conclusion: A Rights-Based and Inclusive EU Response

Food insecurity is neither marginal nor temporary; it is a growing and persistent challenge that undermines the well-being, dignity, and opportunities of millions of people in the European Union. Addressing it cannot be limited to short-term relief but must be recognised as a structural component of the EU's social rights framework. The 2025 EPSR Action Plan should therefore position food aid as an indispensable tool for strengthening social inclusion and reducing poverty.

Investing in food redistribution delivers multiple, measurable benefits: it fosters social cohesion, reduces environmental impact through waste prevention, and represents one of the most efficient uses of public and private resources, generating a significant multiplier effect for every euro invested. No other intervention combines such high social returns with tangible contributions to sustainability and community resilience.

FEBA and its members stand ready to contribute to the effective implementation of the revised EPSR Action Plan, bringing decades of experience, an extensive network of over 350 food banks, and a proven capacity to deliver impact on the ground. Working in close partnership with EU institutions, Member States, and other stakeholders, FEBA is

committed to ensuring that access to adequate food becomes a recognised and protected element of social policy, embedded in a fair, resilient, and inclusive Europe.