

FEBA's Position on the Proposed Multiannual Financial Framework and ESF+



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A Social Pillar Without a Foundation

The European Food Banks Federation (FEBA), representing a network of more than 350 food banks operating across Europe and supporting over 9 million people in need each year, expresses concerns over the European Commission's proposal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034) regarding the merger of social funding under one unified social spending target. Without adequate earmarking, this simplification of funds could impede considerably the EU's capacity to achieve its social inclusion objectives in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR).

FEBA welcomes the EU's commitment to strengthening social rights, reflected in the advancement of several key legislative initiatives, including the revision of the Action Plan on the European Pillar of Social Rights, the new EU Anti-Poverty Strategy and the EU Affordable Housing Plan. This includes setting concrete targets, as in the case of the EPSR Action Plan of 2021, which sets out the EU's goal to reduce poverty by 15 million people by 2030.¹ For reference, in 2024, around 93.3 million people in the EU-27 were at risk of poverty or social exclusion.² Without the allocation of adequate spending towards concrete social targets, these policy initiatives will fall short of achieving the social objectives that they are designed to achieve. As such, these initiatives risk becoming symbolic gestures without substance.

In March 2025, the European Parliament adopted a landmark resolution with a remarkable two-thirds majority. It made one demand unmistakably clear: *"The European Parliament insists that the ESF+ MUST continue to be the key and primary instrument for supporting Member States, regions, local communities*

¹ European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan* COM(2021) 102 final (4 March 2021) <<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/b7c08d86-7cd5-11eb-9ac9-01aa75ed71a1>> accessed 10 July 2025.

² Eurostat, *People at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2024*, Eurostat News (30 April 2025) <<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20250430-2>> accessed 10 July 2024.

and people in strengthening the social dimension of the Union...”.³ The resolution highlights the vital role that ESF+ plays for the achievement of social inclusion, recognised by the co-legislator.

Similarly, in the Opinion on the Proposal for a Regulation establishing ESF+, the European Economic and Social Committee, expressed the need to continue to support vulnerable and marginalised groups with ESF+.⁴ Additionally, FEBA reiterates the EESC’s call for a strong participatory process of civil society organisations and social actors regarding the allocation of ESF+.⁵

The Importance of ESF+ for Food Banks

The pivotal role of ESF+ can be illustrated when considering the work of food banks providing crucial food aid and material assistance. In 2024, around 38.2 million people (8.5% of the EU-27 population) were unable to afford a meal with fish, meat or vegetarian equivalent every second day.⁶ Due to inflation, food prices have skyrocketed: in 2023, the prices for food and non-alcoholic beverages in the EU rose to historically high levels reaching 12,5%, while overall inflation exceeded 5% for much of the year.⁷ This sustained pressure has not only increased the number of people in need but has also forced FEBA Members in several countries to reduce the size and nutritional value of the food baskets they provide. As a result, food banks have increasingly had to purchase food products to fill the gap left by lacking food donations.

In order to assess the beneficial effect of ESF+ on food banks within its network, FEBA carried out extensive surveys among its Members. The survey showed that with the help of ESF+, the ten FEBA Members reporting to FEBA handled about 58,300 tonnes of ESF+ food products (approximately 6.6% of the total food received by European Food Banks), equivalent to more than 115 million meals in 2024. In addition, they were provided with around 341 tonnes of ESF+ non-food products. ESF+ funding has therefore had a significant positive impact on the ability of food banks to continue to carry out their operations. This allowed FEBA Members receiving ESF+ to provide food and non-food products to over 3.9 million people in need.

FEBA reiterates its position that the right to nutritious and safe food is a human right and a prerequisite to all other social services. For the EU to deliver on its social

³ European Parliament, *Report on the European Social Fund Plus post-2027*, A10-0014/2025 (21 February 2025) <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-10-2025-0014_EN.html> accessed 2 October 2025.

⁴ European Economic and Social Committee, *Opinion on the Proposal for a Regulation amending Regulations (EU) 2021/1058 and (EU) 2021/1056 as regards specific measures to address strategic challenges in the context of the mid-term review; and Proposal for a Regulation amending Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 establishing the European Social Fund + (ESF+) as regards specific measures to address strategic challenges* EESC, Opinion 2025/01236 (29 April 2025) <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ad570a0e-2f35-11f0-8a44-01aa75ed71a1/language-en> accessed 10 July 2025.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Eurostat, *Almost 9% in the EU could not afford a proper meal*, Eurostat News (28 August 2025) <<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20250828-1>> accessed 10 July 2025.

⁷ European Commission, *Key figures on Europe – 2024 edition* (Publications Office of the EU, Luxembourg, 10 July 2024) 36– 37 <<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-key-figures/w/KS-EI-24-001> accessed 19 August 2025> accessed 10 July 2025.

commitments, it must adopt this rights-based approach and ensure that this is reflected in the next EU budget.

Policy recommendations

In the new MFF, material support delivered via food banks should be prioritised and financed in both its direct and indirect forms, as an effective lever to reduce poverty and social exclusion. In addition to that, MFF should continue to include the possibility to use funds for food donation ([Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1057 – Art. 22 1 d\)](#)) to address root causes of food waste and food deprivation.

The European Food Banks Federation is proposing the earmarking for food aid and basic material assistance for the most deprived persons to be raised to 10% under the new MFF, because food inflation has been above 5% over the past 2 years.⁸

Priorities for the upcoming programming period should include

- Accompanying measures to facilitate social inclusion, addressing the root causes of poverty;
- Direct material support in order to enhance the diversity and nutritional value of food provided by Food Banks (complementarity of shelf stable food products of ESF+ and fresh surplus recovered from the food supply chain);
- Food donation funding possibilities to enhance surplus recovery and contribute to a more systemic social and sustainable transformation.

Reduced earmarking for food aid and basic material assistance would weaken the support for vulnerable groups across Europe, which increased due to COVID-19 and the cost-of-living crisis. Increasing focus on employment, labor and skills development, without including the role of social inclusion and material support.

Civil society and local communities play a vital role in delivering material support, this should be maintained. Forums such as the Community of Practice on Material Support and the Social Innovation Forum offer a great platform to bring together all involved stakeholders and foster dialogue between civil society, managing authorities and other organizations which should be kept during the upcoming MFF.

⁸ Ibid