



FEANTSA

FEANTSA Response to the Internet consultation on The Future of the “Most Deprived Food Distribution” Programme

FEANTSA is the European Federation of National Organisations working with People who are Homeless. It is a European NGO that brings together over 100 member organisations in almost 30 European countries and represents the service provider sector working with people who are homeless across a range of areas and needs (more details on FEANTSA mission, structure and activities can be found at: www.feantsa.org).

Based on its expertise and area of activities, FEANTSA's contribution will focus only on specific questions of the online consultation, as appropriate.

4. Have you heard of the European Union's food aid programme for the most deprived people living in the European Union?

Yes, FEANTSA was aware of the programme. However, not all our members knew about it, although they are aware of free food schemes in their own country.

5. Have you, or has the organisation you represent, ever benefited from the European Union food aid programme for the most deprived persons?

FEANTSA as such has never benefited from the EU food aid programme for the most deprived persons, as its main strands of work are: lobbying and policy work at European and national level; transnational exchange and networking; and research (European Observatory on Homelessness).

6. The European Community is committed to supporting and complementing the activities of the Member States in "combating social exclusion" and "improving public health". Do you agree that these are important tasks for Europe and that food aid to the most deprived people in Member States can contribute?

FEANTSA agrees that the EU has an important role to play, together with Member States, to combat social exclusion, improve public health and ensure that everyone's basic needs are met.

In this context, FEANTSA agrees that the free distribution of food to the most deprived can contribute to these aims. However, it is important to stress in this context that food distribution should be seen as an emergency answer to a situation, which should remain exceptional and temporary. Meeting food needs of excluded and deprived people should be seen as a first step towards their full reintegration into society. In general terms, employment and social policy measures should ensure that anyone has access to sufficient resources and support, for him/her to provide for his/her basic needs and those of his/her family, including food.

Food banks and free food distribution services are useful and necessary. However, they need to be complemented with and backed by appropriate policy measures, including adequate resources, capable of breaking the circle of extreme poverty and exclusion. In some countries, such as Spain, people who access free meals distribution services are given an appointment with a social worker within three days, in order to discuss their overall situation and see what steps can be taken to overcome the difficulties they are faced with. Also, children are not allowed into free food distribution services and are directly referred to the appropriate public service responsible for their welfare, which will find appropriate solutions. This aims at avoiding the risk of marginalisation and further exclusion at an early stage.

Similarly, emergency services aimed at people who are homeless are necessary and should be seen as a first temporary step enabling users to move forward towards full reintegration into society.

**FEANTSA is supported financially by the European Commission
The views expressed herein are those of the author(s) and the Commission is not
responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained herein.**



7. It has been said that "Food security is the most vital of all basic needs. Food insecurity undermines people's ability to learn, work and make progress on other fronts" (L.J.A Mougeot). Do you agree?

There is evidence that malnutrition is an issue among people who are homeless, especially those faced with street homelessness. Of course, food security is a vital basic need, as the alternative is mere survival or starvation. However, FEANTSA would like to stress that food provision is not sufficient and that individual needs should be looked at in a much broader perspective, as fundamental human rights are interlinked. Access to a secure place to live, to health or to employment is crucial to anyone's ability to live a life in dignity. The provision of free food should be seen as a first step in a process. It needs to be part of broader and long term policy framework, which aims at the full integration and participation of individuals in society.

In this context, one problem with free food distribution schemes is that in many countries, the way food is distributed contributes to add to the stigmatisation of the most deprived, especially if there is no perspective for them to move forward to mainstream channels of food provision.

8. Do you think public administrations in each Member State have a duty to ensure that all their citizens have adequate food?

FEANTSA believes that anyone has a right to adequate food.

9. Is it appropriate for the European Union to support Member States in ensuring that all EU citizens have enough to eat?

Yes. As mentioned above, food distribution should be part of a broader policy answer to extreme poverty and deprivation.

10. In view of the growing problems of obesity and unhealthy eating habits, should a future Food Aid Programme for deprived people pay special attention to the nutritional value of the food provided by the Programme?

FEANTSA believes that this is important, as good nutrition contributes to good health, which is a key determinant for individual well being and participation in society. It can be said that ill health conditions can be both the cause and result of social and housing exclusion. Moreover, accessing health care services is often very problematic for people who are homeless, including as a result of stigmatisation, and may imply very late recourse to care.

There is an increasing number of examples of good practice across Europe of healthy eating initiatives in low-income communities and of provision of healthy food within homeless services. The reintegration process can also be linked to the preparation of healthy meals for the whole community.

Also, environmental considerations should be taken into account when designing specific programmes.

11. Up to now, the EU's food aid programme for the European Union's most deprived people has depended on surplus food stocks. Thanks to the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, surplus stocks have practically disappeared. Therefore, do you think the programme should be:

- Phased out gradually as intervention stocks disappear
- Expanded and linked with other EU initiatives to combat social exclusion
- Don't know
- Continued but on the basis of food purchases
- Cancelled immediately.

In general, FEANTSA thinks that food deprivation is very often an element of extreme poverty and social exclusion, including homelessness. These are complex and multifaceted realities, which are partially but not exclusively linked to the lack of adequate resources. Therefore, there is no single or simple solution: extreme poverty and exclusion can be addressed effectively only as part of a wider holistic strategy.

In this context, we feel that the EU's food aid programme for the most deprived people should not only depend on the availability of surplus stocks, but should be more structurally linked to a broader policy framework, both at EU and Member State level.

12. Should the EU target its support, to ensure that deprived people belonging to specific age groups or social categories have access to the healthy food they need (more than one answer possible)

- Pre-school age children
- Single parents
- Homeless people
- School-age children
- Older people (over 70)
- No, all deprived people should be helped.

FEANTSA believes that the programme should target those most in need. Anyone should be able to enjoy his/her fundamental human rights and see his/her basic needs met. When available resources are limited, the urgency of the need should help setting the priorities, in terms of who should be supported first.

13. Would it be appropriate to introduce a European food voucher system to ensure that low-income families and children have access to a healthy diet? For example, eligible households could be provided with an electronic EU debit card, valid for a certain amount each month, with which they would be able to purchase a specified range of food.

FEANTSA feels that this can be an option in those countries where there is already a voucher system open to the whole population, irrespective of their level of income (see for instance Belgium). In other countries however, vouchers might be seen as a measure only aimed at specific groups of the population, such as people who are identified as poor and who risk further stigmatisation when using them. The implications of such a measure should be assessed.

Also, it is important to keep in mind that the administrative procedure for the delivery of the vouchers can be extremely problematic for people who are the most vulnerable and who don't have a place to live, such as people who are homeless.

To conclude, FEANTSA feels that food aid, although a necessary and useful tool to answer urgent basic needs, should be seen in a much broader framework. There is a need for integrated policies, which would have as a general objective to make sure that people are able to achieve food independence through the implementation of a range of appropriate policies. This should be taken into account when discussing the future of the EU's food aid programme for the European Union's most deprived people.

For more details, please contact Stefania.delzotto@feantsa.org.