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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

of the mid-term evaluation of the Fund of European Aid for the Most Deprived

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document aims to present the main findings and conclusions of the mid-term evaluation of the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) for the period up to the end of December 2017. The evaluation falls within the period of preparation of the 2021-2027 EU Funds, and preliminary results of this evaluation (including the results of the structured surveys of end recipients) have informed the impact assessment for the future European Social Fund Plus that will integrate FEAD and provide support to the most deprived. This is reflected in the continued focus on those who are most in need, specific provisions to maintain the flexibility of implementation, the simplification of the monitoring framework and the expanded requirements for evaluations.

Background

FEAD's general objective is to promote and enhance social inclusion and therefore ultimately contribute to the goal of eradicating poverty in the Union. FEAD is therefore helping to reach the target of reducing the number of persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion by at least 20 million in accordance with the Europe 2020 strategy. FEAD was set up in 2014 and follows on the EU's previous food distribution programme for the most deprived people (MDP). Unlike MDP, FEAD includes an additional social inclusion component and provides material goods, which gives Member States greater flexibility and diversity in the type of support they can provide to tackle the worst forms of poverty. In addition to food and basic material assistance, FEAD also delivers accompanying measures, which consist of providing advice and guidance to end recipients and therefore promoting their social inclusion. FEAD is implemented under shared management between Member States and the Commission. It is delivered via partner organisations.

Resources mobilised by FEAD

Unlike MDP, FEAD benefits all Member States. Under FEAD, EUR 3.8 billion are available in current prices and are complemented by a minimum of 15 % in matching funding allocated by the Member States, bringing the total value of the Fund to approximately EUR 4.5 billion. Up to 2017, 27 Member States accounted for EUR 1 973 million in cumulated eligible public expenditure, representing 44 % of the total resources of the Member States' operational programmes.

Key quantitative achievements

- Based on estimations by partner organisations, FEAD supported on average 12.7 million persons per year between 2014 and 2017. Women make up about half of the total number of people receiving support. Children are a large target group representing about 30 % of all recipients. Migrants and other minorities (11 %), people aged 65 years or over (9 %), disabled persons (5 %) and homeless persons (4 %) are also key target groups.

- Overall, more than 1.3 million tonnes of food were distributed between 2014 and 2017. Social inclusion support reached about 66 000 persons.

Main findings

Effectiveness: FEAD is providing much needed food and basic material assistance to a large number of the most deprived and is complemented by accompanying measures providing guidance and advice for their social inclusion. FEAD is also adaptable and responsive to emerging needs, while other programme changes can be lengthy. All horizontal principles (gender equality and equal opportunities, respect of dignity, partnership) are relevant, but more could be done to reduce food waste by relying more on food donations. FEAD is a means to free up the financial resources of end recipients so they can buy other goods/services. FEAD has many indirect effects and ‘soft’ results (e.g. greater self-esteem). A notable impact FEAD has had in some countries is the increased capacity and professionalisation of partner organisations and organisations involved in the distribution of assistance.

Coherence: Having increased the number and type of end recipients reached, FEAD is coherent and complementary to national poverty alleviation systems. FEAD is coherent with the Europe 2020 strategy and with the newly proclaimed European Pillar of Social Rights. By targeting different groups or providing complementary measures, FEAD also complements other EU Funds, notably the European Social Fund and the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund as well as the EU’s Employment and Social Innovation programme.

Efficiency: Due to the different types and frequency of support provided, and the nature of target groups, there are large variations in costs per food and costs per person across Member States. Rules governing FEAD are simpler in comparison with those governing the European Social Fund, which enables FEAD to address ‘social emergencies’. However, the administrative costs for monitoring, distribution and delivery are still considered to be high. There is consistent evidence of ‘gold plating’, leading to excessive requirements, such as the requirement imposed by most Member States (mostly on the partner organisation) to register end recipients. The two flat rates introduced by FEAD for administrative, transport and storage costs and accompanying measures are useful for simplifying management (compared to real costs).

Added Value: Due to the additional budget, FEAD has a notable positive effect in nearly every Member State in particular concerning new target groups, new activities, and greater territorial coverage. FEAD is a highly visible fund, but there is little evidence yet of national funding taking over from FEAD. There is also evidence of considerable enhanced effects in terms of mutual learning. Discontinuing FEAD would have significant consequences in many Member States where FEAD is the main food and material assistance provider. FEAD

provides unique social inclusion services to target groups who would otherwise receive no comparable support.

Relevance: Poverty remains a persistent problem, although there have been positive developments in recent years. FEAD has reached some key target groups most at risk of poverty and has made a difference in their lives. While there are some gaps (in coverage of target groups, geographical coverage and type of support), FEAD cannot be expected to fill these gaps with its limited size. Member States remain responsible for their public policies to fight poverty and social exclusion.

Lessons learned

Given FEAD's limited resources, it is suggested that programmes continue focusing on those who are most in need in each country.

Earmarking resources for the most deprived is widely supported.

A merger of FEAD and the European Social Fund that builds on FEAD delivery mechanisms would allow for synergies and open up potential pathways from basic support to social inclusion support that lead to people getting training and finding work, when the target groups are the same.

Keeping implementation flexible for both types of programmes is recommended. Formal procedures to amend programmes have been simplified through the recently adopted 'Omnibus Regulation' (Regulation 2018/1046). The proportionate monitoring framework is valuable and is suggested to be maintained (e.g. informed estimates of end beneficiaries) while marginal improvement could be envisaged (by requiring baselines and deleting unnecessary indicators). It is advocated that Member States are encouraged to follow the Regulation closely to avoid 'gold plating', and those Member States who implement the programme without adding excessive requirements should be encouraged to share their experiences.

FEAD's efficiency could be further improved by ensuring better information and doing more to build the capacity of programme authorities and partners to implement FEAD. There is scope for requiring more evaluations from Member States and expanding the scope of structured surveys of end recipients.

All horizontal principles are relevant and it is suggested to maintain all of them in the future.