



Brussels, 15 April 2020

## **European Food Banks Federation Briefing**

### **Challenges and urgent needs of European Food Banks due to COVID-19**

The COVID-19 pandemic is hitting Europe hard. In these challenging times, from Tromsø to Malta, from Lisbon to Kiev, European Food Banks across Europe are doing what they do best – recovering surplus food to assist charitable organizations and feed people in need.

Food Bankers are responding to the present situation by continuing to keep the chain of solidarity alive, and they are creatively and tenaciously adapting their activity to the evolving of the situation. Food Bankers are very practical people who, through their largely volunteer work, are contributing to reduce food insecurity experienced by our most deprived citizens every day, while preventing food waste.

The European Food Banks Federation (FEBA) daily supports its members in this challenging period. FEBA is sharing learnings and coordination organizing a weekly meeting for its membership. Moreover, FEBA weekly drafts a report on the situation of European Food Banks to map how COVID-19 is affecting everyday activities and how European Food Banks are responding and adapting their activities to prevent food waste and help charities and those most in need. FEBA disseminates this report, promoting the sharing of best practices inside the network and stimulating new innovative approaches to deal with the situation. FEBA also publishes articles and news about European Food Banks on a dedicated [webpage](#). Finally, FEBA launched a European COVID-19 Social Emergency Fund, an effort to secure the activity of European Food Banks and address the social emergency today and in the future.

On Monday 23 March 2020, FEBA circulated a survey to its membership in order to have a comprehensive overview on the situation in the different countries and assess the main challenges and needs in this period.<sup>1</sup>

In this report FEBA presents the aggregated results of the surveys filled in by 28 members: Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, and Ukraine.

---

<sup>1</sup> FEBA sent the survey to 29 FEBA Full and Associate Members and gathered information from 28 members, except for FareShare (UK). All the information contained in this report were collected from 23 March to 7 April. The situation may have evolved and significantly changed since then.



## 1. Current situation of Food Banks daily activities in Europe

The challenging situation we are living can be seen as a threat leading to despair or as an opportunity taking us back to the roots of solidarity in Europe. This situation requires the daily search for a challenging balance between the right to health and the right to food. This can be a time of innovation and creativity to respond concrete needs.

### European Food Banks remain open to prevent food waste and provide food to charities and those most in need in our society

**More than 96% of respondents declared that their Food Banks are in operation.** European Food Banks are carrying out their daily activity while ensuring social distancing guidelines and respecting the strict hygienic requirements imposed by the different national authorities to ensure safety and avoid the risk of spreading the pandemic. Only a few Food Banks, especially in Germany, Netherlands, and Norway, are closed due to close and direct contacts with beneficiaries in order to avoid any health risks both for Food Banks volunteers and employees, and final beneficiaries.

### European Food Banks are operating in a new and increasingly complex environment

Food Banks are adjusting their operations to address the current needs, facing unprecedented challenges, and implementing relevant operational and managerial changes. The activity of Food Banks has been reorganized, even reduced in some cases, because of the preventive measures in place to protect food donors, Food Bank volunteers and employees as well as charities. More than **16% of respondents** declared that they **do not have enough protective devices** (e.g. masks, disposable gloves, hand sanitizers dispensers, etc.) to ensure the health and safety of employees and volunteers. The restrictions on mobility are also requiring **reviewing the traditional logistics and transport processes** to recover and redistribute food to charities and people in need (27.78% of respondent).

Finally, European Food Banks are working **to reinforce existing partnerships or establish new collaborations both with private companies and with public authorities** to ensure that Food Banks are effective in addressing the new need for food aid as a result of the crisis.

### European Food Banks are experiencing an increased demand for food while food donations are fluctuating over time

**Food donations are unstable** because some stages of the food supply chain, especially food and drink manufacturers and the distribution sector, are decreasing their donations due to a restructuring of production and panic buying of consumers. On the other hand, other stages of the food supply chain, such as food service and HoReCa companies, are contacting Food Banks and donating surplus food which is generated by forced closure. At the same time, **over 80% of European Food Banks are experiencing an increase in demand for emergency food assistance**, resulting from an increase in the total number of people in need of food aid.

### European Food Banks are facing unexpected costs and experiencing a drop in financial resources

Most of efforts are focused on immediate response to present needs of charities and people in need, to the detriment of fundraising. The support of Food Banks is required now and soon more than ever. **Almost 80% of respondents highlighted that additional funding is needed during this time to ensure that Food Banks can continue to safely provide food and to scale up operations where necessary.**

### European Food Banks are experiencing a shortage of volunteers

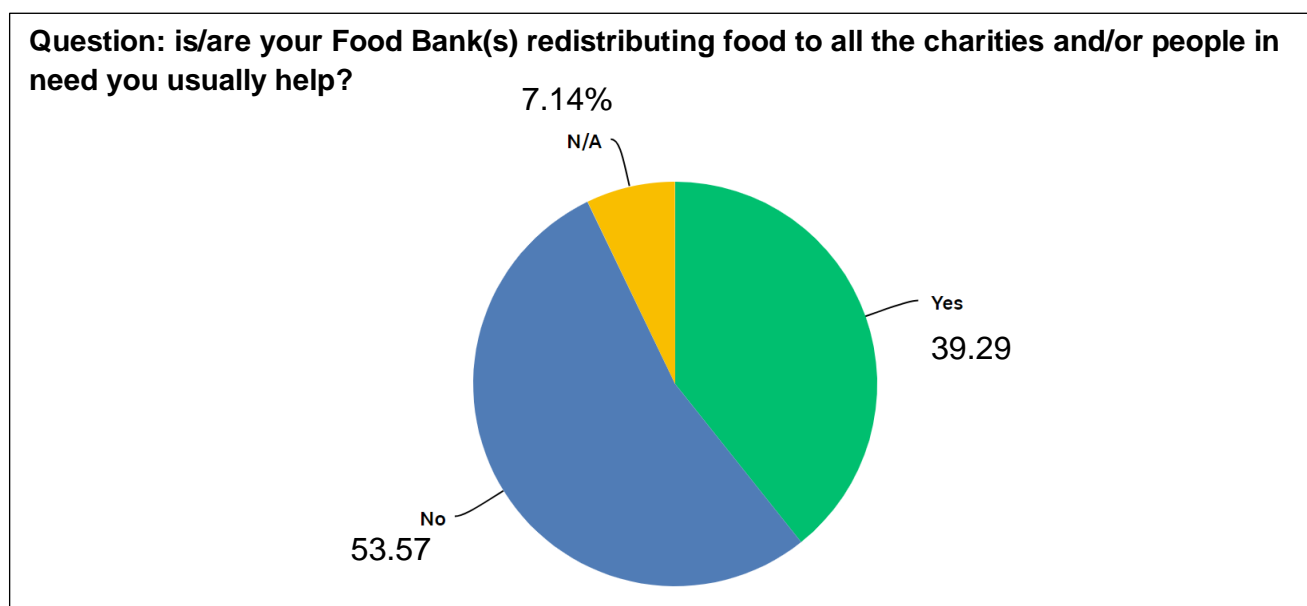


Since **most volunteers are over 65, they stay at home, as declared by about 11% of respondents**. In addition, more than 5% of respondents affirmed that they have no volunteers and/or employees to deal with such a high risk.

In some cases, civil servants and army personnel are supporting the activity of Food Banks. Moreover, in some countries Food Banks made open public calls to recruit new and younger volunteers, especially university students.

### **European Food Banks are responding to the needs of charitable organizations and people in need**

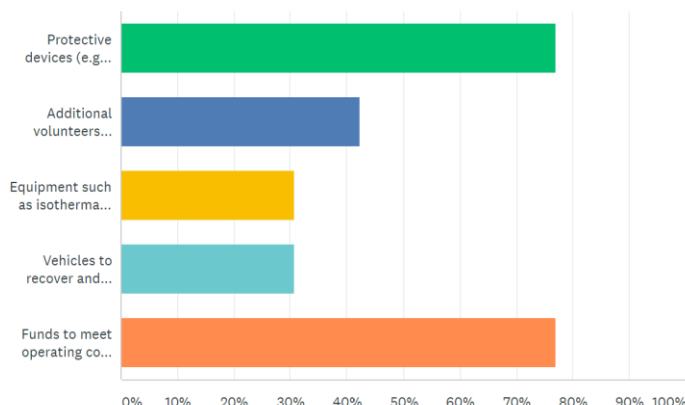
In the different European countries, many charities are struggling to remain open. For instance, in the most affected countries such as Italy and Spain, during the first weeks of the health emergency several charitable organizations closed both for several reasons (restrictions in place, risks of contamination, shortage of volunteers). After the initial period of crisis, most of them are reopening and organising the activity in the best and safest way possible. However, **the closure of charities represents a challenge for over 41% of respondents**. Although **about 53% of European Food Banks are experiencing a decrease of the number of charities and people in need that they usually help**, requests for food aid are increasing, and in some cases, they are almost doubling. To support charities, and especially those which are facing a shortage of volunteers, some Food Banks are delivering food directly to charities or get them prepared food parcels, so they do the last 100m deliveries into targeted at-risk individuals in isolation. This includes school locations to support those families struggling to feed their children in the lockdown period.



## **2. Urgent needs of European Food Banks to face the COVID-19 emergency**

To effectively respond this current situation, European Food Banks urgently need **protective devices for volunteers and employees** and **funds to meet operating costs and financial obligations of the activity** (almost **80% of respondents**). Moreover, **42% of respondents** are also looking for **more employees or volunteers to handle the increase in demand**.

### Question: as Food Bank(s), what are your main needs?



- 77% - **Protective devices** (e.g. masks, disposable gloves, hand sanitizer dispensers, etc.) for volunteers and employees
- 42% - **Additional volunteers** and/or employees to ensure the continuity of the activity
- 31% - Equipment such as **isothermal boxes, carton boxes**, etc.
- 30% - **Vehicles** to recover and redistribute food
- 76% - **Funds** to meet operating costs or financial obligations of the activity

Moreover, since it is noted an increase in demand for food assistance, European Food Banks report an urgent need for food. The survey highlighted that the main **typologies of food most needed** by Food Banks in Europe are especially ambient and packaged food which can be easily redistributed with food parcels.

In order of importance, from the most needed to the less needed:

- 1) *Non-perishable foods (e.g. pasta, tomato sauce, rice, oil, UHT milk)*
- 2) *Fruit and vegetables*
- 3) *Fresh protein foods (e.g. meat, fish, dairy products, cold cuts)*
- 4) *Bread and bakery products*
- 5) *Prepared meals*

Respondents also highlighted the need for personal hygiene products.

Despite the crisis and the difficulties, Food Bankers are actively responding to the current emergency and providing a vital support to 45,700 charities and more than 9.3 million final beneficiaries.

“For the first time in its history, the European Food Banks Federation is calling on the largest possible public to assist Food Banks in the whole of Europe”, declared Jacques Vandenschrik, President of the European Food Banks Federation. “This is the time to show solidarity with 31,700 people who mostly dedicate their time and work as volunteers. This is the time to support the values of Europe: solidarity, generosity and care”.



## Annex 1 – Results of the survey

- 1) Following the COVID-19 pandemic, is/are your Food Bank(s) open?
  - Yes 96.43%
  - No 3.57%
- 2) If you answered YES to question 1, are you redistributing food to all the charities and/or people in need that you usually help?
  - Yes 39.29%
  - No 53.57%
  - N/A 7.14%
- 3) If you answered NO to question 1, why?
  - We have no volunteers and/or employees available to deal with such a high risk – 5.56%
  - Most of our volunteers are over 65 and therefore they stay at home – 11.11%
  - We do not have protective devices (e.g. masks, hand sanitizer dispensers, etc.) to ensure the health of our volunteers and employees – 16.67%
  - We face challenges to redistribute food to charities and/or people in need – 27.78%
  - N/A – 44.44%
- 4) If you answered NO to question 2, why?
  - Charities are closed and/or people in need do not want to stay outside – 41.18%
  - We do not have enough volunteers and/or employees to redistribute food – 29.41%
  - Charities and/or people in need are afraid of possible transmission of COVID-19 through food – 17.65%
  - N/A – 23.53%
- 5) As Food Bank(s), what are your main needs?
  - Protective devices (e.g. masks, disposable gloves, hand sanitizer dispensers, etc.) for volunteers and employees – 76.92%
  - Additional volunteers and/or employees to ensure the continuity of the activity – 42.31%
  - Equipment such as isothermal boxes, carton boxes, etc. – 30.77%
  - Vehicles to recover and redistribute food – 30.77%
  - Funds to meet operating costs or financial obligations of the activity – 76.92%
- 6) Can you rank (1 = most needed; 6 = less needed) the following typologies of food?

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Fruit & vegetables	4%	38%	35%	12%	8%	4%
Fresh protein foods (e.g. meat, fish, dairy products, cold cuts)	19%	23%	27%	19%	4%	8%
Non-perishable foods (e.g.) pasta, tomato, sauce, rice, oil, UHT milk)	60%	12%	8%	4%	8%	8%
Prepared meals	7%	4%	22%	7%	19%	41%
Bread & bakery products	12%	0%	8%	19%	38%	23%

- 7) Are you experiencing an increase in the number of people in need of food aid?
  - Yes 81.48%
  - No 18.52%



## Annex 2 – Background documents

- European Food Banks Federation website - link [here](#)
- FEBA Position Paper *COVID-19: the commitment of each person for the good of all* (available in several languages) - link [here](#)
- FEBA COVID-19 Social Emergency Fund webpage - link [here](#)  
In particular:
  - *Section dedicated to donors & supporters*
  - *Covid-19 newsfeed*
  - *Words from Food Bankers*
- FEBA Social Network:
  - [Instagram](#) - *highlights on Covid-19*
  - [Facebook](#)
  - [Twitter](#)
  - [LinkedIn](#)



This publication has received financial support from the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation “EaSI” (2014-2020).

For further information please consult: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/easi>.

The opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Commission.