

Brussels, 13 January 2021

Subject: Feedback on the roadmap on the contingency plan for ensuring food supply and food security in the EU

The European Food Banks Federation (FEBA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a feedback on the roadmap on the contingency plan for ensuring food supply and food security in the EU.

From early March the European Food Banks Federation has tracked the impact and the responses of its membership to the COVID-19, collecting a wide range of information and practices¹. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a wake-up call for the European Food Banks Federation and our members. Since its outbreak, our members have daily worked facing the challenge not just to get food from the food supply chain but also to ensure its safe delivery to charities.

This pandemic has thrown many people into food insecurity overnight, highlighting the **importance of food security in Europe**. Almost immediately, when COVID-19 began to spread across our continent, we recorded a surge of food demand in the communities. It happened quickly, it was dramatic, and it still stays with us today. In terms of need, we had a dramatic increase with peaks up to 91-100% before summer. Then at the beginning of September our members experienced an average 30% increase of food demand at European level, with a range from 6% to 90% in the different countries. COVID-19 has created a new poverty class in Europe: almost 90% of our respondents declared that these new poor are people who have lost the job due to the crisis; more than 60% declared that they are families with children relying on school meals, and elderly people living alone. In this context, the **access to food has proved to be a priority**, underlining the importance of an **easily accessible, affordable, healthy, and balanced diet for all**.

At the same time FEBA members are playing a key role in preventing food waste for a social purpose and are a **point of reference for food redistribution**. Adapting to a new challenging context and despite a huge volatility in the supply of food, our members had to increase significantly and rapidly their operations, with an agile determination, a continuous process innovation, and a widespread coverage of the territory.

The food supply chain has been affected by the effects of the COVID-19, such as the sudden closure of restaurants, hotels, and commercial catering services, as well as mobility restrictions and new sanitary requirements. In this period, FEBA members have faced alternating phases: from managing huge, unexpected amounts of food to struggling to source enough food. At the beginning of the outbreak Food Banks suffered a fluctuation of the supply – the traditional

¹ In 2020 FEBA conducted 3 surveys and released 3 reports:

- April 2020, [Present challenges and urgent needs of European Food Banks due to COVID-19](#)
- July 2020, [European Food Banks in a post COVID-19 Europe](#)
- September 2020, [European Food Banks today: commitment, creativity, and openness to change](#)
- December 2020, [European Food Banks: a wave of solidarity to face COVID-19](#)

donors, such as food and drink manufacturers and the distribution sector had to reorganize their internal procedures and were affected by panic buying of consumers, while the food service and commercial catering sectors and restaurants were forced to close with available quantities of surplus food. This was a tremendous challenge for the logistics of our members: many pick-up points, mainly with chilled and frozen food, in a period when restrictions to mobility were in place in all countries. For instance, food was recovered from the canteens of the European institutions in Brussels when homeworking became the new normal. In some countries, Food Banks reorganized their redistribution model, for instance preparing meals or making food parcels for frontline organisations, so they just had to do the last 100m deliveries into targeted at-risk individuals in isolation².

Furthermore, FEBA members have collaborated with public authorities, from the national to the local level, in the context of public interventions to support producers and donate their surplus food or specific programmes such as the EU school fruit, vegetables and milk scheme.

In addition to regular donations of surplus food recovered from the food supply chain, some FEBA members also benefit of the food assistance provided thanks to the [Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived](#) (FEAD). As highlighted in the report "[FEAD and the European Food Banks Federation. 2019 Implementation Report](#)", the FEAD food redistributed by FEBA members to local partner charities is extremely important because these products are complementary to the surplus food. The FEAD has proven to be a responsive measure that can adapt quickly, especially in such a challenging period: when food demand dramatically increased and restrictions on mobility were imposed by national governments, FEAD food was safely and easily delivered to charities contributing to food security of their final beneficiaries. FEAD food, which is planned with delivery schedules and stored in warehouses, has made it possible to ensure the provision of food products, usually dry and frozen foodstuff, that are not usually recovered as surplus food from the food supply chain. In this way, FEAD products have contributed to quickly respond to the social emergency related to the COVID-19 crisis.

Moreover, FEBA members have received and managed increased amounts of non-perishable food donated by companies as part of their CSR policies.

The European Food Banks Federations and its members are committed to cooperate at local, national and European level to manage through the crisis and contribute to **build a more resilient food supply chain against future disruptions and shocks**.

The European Food Banks Federation welcomes the contingency plan to ensure food supply and food security across the EU in times of crisis, including the development of a common **EU food crisis response mechanism** in order to have a permanent *forum* to build existing coordination processes for present and future shocks. In this context, the European Food Banks Federation is willing to bring the experience and expertise of 430 European Food Banks to brainstorm and discuss on lessons learned from the COVID-19 and other previous crises on food security as well as on potential threats to EU food security. The pandemic has revealed our strengths and weaknesses, highlighting the importance of local communities, ready to cooperate for the good of all with a strong synergy between public authorities, civil society organisations and all the

² To discover more, please access the [latest FEBA report published in December 2020](#) with best practices from 25 FEBA members regarding the impact of COVID-19 and the contribution Food Banks to food waste prevention and food insecurity reduction in this challenging period (interactive map at p. 7).

actors involved. This crisis can be an accelerator of innovation to enhance efficiency and effectiveness and to produce **a beneficial effect on the food system as a whole**.

Food waste is one of the biggest and most profound challenges of our time. We firmly believe that today the Farm to Fork Strategy, part of the European Green Deal, is an opportunity to rethink the agri-food supply chain in the light of the disruptions caused by COVID-19 and move towards a more sustainable food system. By doing so, we can achieve the goal to prevent food waste while reducing emissions and environmental impact, creating business opportunities and alleviating food insecurity in Europe. The Farm to Fork Strategy envisages the development of this contingency plan to be activated when there is a crisis that affects the food system and put the food security in the EU in danger. This transition towards a more sustainable food system should be led by a **comprehensive and structured legislative framework**, together with a **multi-stakeholder collaboration** and based on **measurement and factual best practices**. These are all opportunities that cannot be missed, since they denote the importance of an **integrated approach to reduce food loss and waste** in our food systems, for the people and for the planet.

The European Food Banks Federation, together with its membership, wants to renew its commitment to prevent food waste and reduce food insecurity in Europe. Our daily activity contributes to ensure that no good food goes to waste while meeting the needs of charities helping the most deprived. Food Banks are an integral part of for a more sustainable, healthier, and equitable food system for all.

We thank you in advance for considering the above comments and we are looking forward to collaborating with our expertise in the contingency plan for ensuring food supply and food security, for the benefit of all.

About FEBA

Established in 1986 and based in Brussels, the European Food Banks Federation (FEBA) is a European non-profit organization and works in collaboration with 24 Full Members and 5 Associate Members in 29 European countries. FEBA mission consists in representing its membership at European and international level; supporting, and strengthening Food Banks in Europe by providing training, sharing best practice and knowledge, and developing partnerships; and fostering the creation of new Food Banks. FEBA brings together 430 Food Banks which are committed to prevent food waste and reduce food insecurity. In 2019 our members redistributed 768,000 tonnes of food to 9.5 million most deprived people through 45,283 charitable organizations thanks to the professionalism of 32,280 co-workers (84% volunteers). In addition to surplus food from the food supply chain, FEBA members also redistribute food from the Fund for European Aid to the most Deprived (FEAD) and the Fruits and Vegetables withdrawal scheme, as well as from individual donations.

FEBA contact info

Angela Frigo, Secretary General

Email: info@eurofoodbank.org

Tel: + 32 (0)2 538 94 50