

Structured evaluation of the end recipients and partner organisations of Fund for European Aid for the Most Deprived (FEAD)

Executive summary

The evaluation aimed to run two surveys, assess the relevance and efficiency of the FEAD programme, find out the possibilities to using the social cards by the most deprived, and better solutions how to respond to the needs of the end recipients.

In March-June 2022, the project team collected data in the form of surveys with partner organisations (N=53) and end recipients (N=1079). Four in-depth interviews with social workers from municipalities (regions included), Food Bank and Lithuanian Red Cross were conducted. Five interviews were run during the participatory observation at one of the Vilnius municipality distribution centers.

Relevance

FEAD food assistance is relevant and meets the needs of target group in Lithuania. Most of the partner organisations (81,12 percent) and majority of the end recipients (92,8 percent) claimed that the food and/or hygiene packages are very useful or useful for the most deprived. These results were also confirmed by the data gathered from the interviews with end recipients. Comments regarding the FEAD assistance were extremely positive.

Interview participants representing different vulnerable groups said that FEAD support is of a great importance to their quality of life. End recipients experience its effect differently: some people see food packages as a critical means of survival; for other people food assistance is relevant as a way to redistribute income, i.e. instead of buying food, people can save money and spend it for other uses. The majority (92,6 percent) of the end recipients stated in the survey that their situation has improved or partially improved due to the food aid. Among residents of rural areas, this percentage is slightly higher – 93,7.

Survey data show that only 5,3 percent surveyed end recipients (activity is slightly higher in the city – 6 percent) participated in accompanying activities in the past year, and 87,5 percent respondents said that they did not lack the aforementioned activities. Thus, material assistance provided by FEAD functions more like direct assistance with food and/or hygiene goods to the country's population experiencing poverty. However, accompanying measures, even though provided in almost all municipalities, are not very popular and do not always meet the needs of the end recipient at the time. Sometimes the situation and lifestyle of the most deprived do not create suitable conditions for more active involvement in these activities due to the lack of time and motivation.

It is evident that FEAD programme contributes to improving the situation of end recipients, meets the needs of the target group quite well, helps compensate for insufficient income, contributes to the feeding needs of the families, however, it is not a sufficient measure to reduce poverty within the country.

Efficiency

Regarding the accessibility of FEAD assistance, raising awareness among the target group is effective and sufficient. End recipients are generally informed about the assistance programme by social workers or employees of the subdistricts who propose to write requests for assistance. Survey data show that friends, relatives or neighbours are also an important channel of information. The social workers

provide information on FEAD programme more often to residents of rural areas than to urban residents. Also, there were more urban residents who received information via text messages. Thus, information, especially in rural areas, is transmitted through the social workers' personal relationship with the end recipients. All in all, current communication channels are suitable for the target group, and are considered to be the most convenient, thus increasing the accessibility of provided support.

The submission of applications is also a considerably simple and effective procedure. This was also confirmed by the survey data where the majority of end recipients (94,7 percent) claimed that they did not have any difficulties when receiving FEAD assistance. On the other hand, the analysis shows that the accessibility and promptness of assistance might be limited by the income calculation rule (an individual's average income over the last three months), as some people need to wait until their income meets the criteria. Amongst other factors potentially limiting the effective implementation of the FEAD programme are requirement to provide additional documents, long distance, psychological difficulties and stigmatisation that end recipients may face.

End recipients' possibilities of using social cards in the new programming period

As many as 86,8 percent of partner organisations (survey respondents) and the majority of end recipients identified the usage of social cards as a positive idea. According to the end recipients who took part in the survey, buying goods in a supermarket is better than receiving a subsidy because: a) they will be able to buy what's needed most at the time (7,6 percent), b) they will save money when buying (choosing goods with discounts) (53,3 percent), c) they will purchase products at a convenient time, not only when distribution is taking place (33,4 percent). However, not all the end recipients were positive regarding the model of social cards as they noted possible risks: a) they are not able to reach supermarkets themselves and there is no one to help them (7,3 percent), b) they will buy significantly fewer products in the supermarket (9,7 percent), c) they will not know how to use a social card (2,1 percent). Therefore, it is recommended to pay attention to these risks in advance and prepare to ensure the needs of all the end recipients.

After summarising the results of the evaluation, **it is recommended:**

1. In order to adequately address the poverty problem, it is necessary to invest more in measures aimed at increasing employment and income growth (including among young people, whose unemployment has recently increased), accessibility of public services, as well as in the measures that help to easier find work-life balance, encourage businesses to commit to providing employees with tools that help successfully combine work and personal (family) life commitments.
2. In pursuance to increase the employment of vulnerable groups, it is recommended to make a good use of accompanying measures financed by FEAD, invest in them additionally and seek their synergy and complementarity with other measures. Accompanying measures aimed at increasing the employment and social inclusion of end recipients, including the accessibility of health and social services, can be a great start to a consistent social work with people experiencing poverty. In the long-term it can help to improve quality of life of the most deprived and strengthen their motivation to engage in other activities. To ensure that the accompanying measures are in line with the needs of the end recipients, we recommend conducting short surveys at food distribution centers or other places on the most relevant accompanying services. It is also encouraged to personally invite end recipients to various programmes or activities and to keep in touch with them continuously.
3. When implementing accompanying measures and organizing other activities, it's crucial to encourage municipalities to cooperate with each other, as well as with representatives of NGOs, other partners and various organizations that already provide support to the most deprived. Whereas combining both different experiences and capacities of financial

resources for a common goal (accompanying measures could be financed not only from FEAD programme) is likely to result in a consistent and systematic improvement of the quality of life of the most deprived.

4. To increase the accessibility and promptness of assistance, it's recommended to encourage municipalities to apply exceptions to the usual monetary selection criteria to a wider scope, e.g., include suddenly unemployed people into the list of end recipients. This would contribute to FEAD goal of helping the poor, as well as the opportunity to put a person at risk of poverty early in the interventions of active labour market policies and social inclusion.
5. In order to improve the implementation of FEAD programme, it is proposed to transfer FEAD support to social cards. The suitability and effectiveness of this model has already been assessed in 2021 during the ex-ante evaluation¹, which is also supported by the survey data of this study. Social cards are expected to reduce and eliminate the stigmatization of end recipients, decrease the administrative burden of partner organizations and empower social workers to focus more on social activities.
6. Following the aforementioned recommendation, the professional activities of a certain part of social workers should be directed to a consistent and long-term social work with people considered to be at risk of poverty. Especially since the research data show that end recipients trust social workers and the information they provide. Therefore, constant contribution of social workers can significantly increase the accessibility of services to the population experiencing poverty. It is also essential to continuously organise trainings for social workers, arrange meetings that allow to share good experiences, constantly increase their income, as well as more actively involve them in the process of social policy making.
7. It is recommended to consider the risk that after the introduction of social cards a certain, albeit small, part of the end recipients may have difficulties reaching the shopping centers. At the moment some of the end recipients are also not mobile, therefore in certain municipalities food packages are being delivered to their homes by municipal transport. It is proposed to apply similar practices (ride services) in order to meet needs of all the end recipients (if and when necessary). Therefore, managing authority should provide suitable conditions and opportunities for municipalities (not all municipalities are currently ready to offer a ride-hailing services) to receive the necessary information on how some municipalities practice ride services and initiate experience exchange activities that allow municipalities to share good lessons and advices.
8. In order to enable end recipients to meet their needs no worse than when they received food packages, it is necessary to maintain the existing funding of FEAD support, and preferably increase it in the future taking into account inflation rates and their effects on the prices of food products and hygiene items.

¹ PPMI. Paramos materialiniam nepritekliui mažinti 2021-2027 m. programavimo laikotarpio galimų finansuotinių veiklų išankstinis vertinimas. 2021.