

Three different models of food poverty intervention: Italy, France, Germany



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“Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life. While poverty persists, there is no true freedom.”

Nelson Mandela, London 2005

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Introduction and analytical framework

1

“Three different models of food poverty intervention: Italy, France, Germany” is the second report produced through the collaboration between Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung Paris and EStà. It presents an overview of food poverty—defined as the inability to access safe, nutritious, and sufficient food—as a sociological and multidimensional condition. The report examines approaches to food poverty (and the management of European funds) in Italy, France, and Germany, highlighting **major structural and governance differences** within high-income countries. These three systems represent divergent institutional models: **France** has a centralized and highly regulated framework with strong State involvement in procurement; **Italy** operates a hybrid public–private model, marked by a significant role of the non-profit sector and decentralized identification of needs; **Germany** relies on a historically decentralized, civic-based system. A brief reflection on Peru illustrates how, in a country with a far lower GDP per capita, responses to food poverty stem from strong traditions of self-organization and popular participation, affirming nutrition as a basic human right.

The report is organized into several sections. The introduction outlines **definitional issues surrounding food poverty**, distinguishing it from food insecurity, relative poverty, and absolute poverty, and reviews key measurement tools. A chapter on food support in the European Union follows, tracing **policy evolution** from the PEAD (European Program of Food Aid for the Most Deprived) to the FEAD (Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived, 2014-2020) and its integration into the ESF+ (European Social Fund Plus, 2021-2027). Three country chapters—built on the same structure—detail **Italy’s, France’s, and Germany’s approaches**, covering the management of EU funds, national measures, and local best practices. The document closes with an overview of the Peruvian self-organization model.

The research adopts a **multi-method approach**, combining a desk analysis of scientific and grey literature with semi-structured interviews with experts in each country to gather contextual and practitioner insights.

The report’s goal is to examine how different policy models address food poverty across three European countries, each **interpreting and implementing the common European framework in distinct ways**. By synthesizing a complex topic, it shows how centralized, hybrid, and civic-based systems present specific strengths and limitations, reflecting contextual priorities, institutional histories, and governance arrangements.

A Definition of food poverty

Food poverty, although lacking a single international definition, is commonly described in scientific, academic, and institutional contexts as the inability of individuals to access safe, nutritious, and sufficient food to ensure a healthy and active life within their social context. This description is linked to the notion of **food security**, defined by the FAO in 1996 as the condition in which “all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food”.

Food poverty is a sociological and multidimensional concept, not an official statistical notion. Therefore, it cannot be measured comparatively across different countries. Its pillars include:

- **Economic aspects**, which comprise insufficient income, the high cost of healthy foods compared to less nutritious ones, and competing expenses (e.g., rent, utilities, healthcare) that reduce the food budget;
- **Social aspects**, which manifest as exclusion and marginalization from social situations revolving around food. This has a negative impact on self-esteem and support networks, in addition to the stigma associated with requesting food aid.
- **Cultural aspects** regard the impossibility of respecting one's cultural and religious dietary habits. They also include the lack of food education or culinary skills, resulting in difficulty making the best use of the limited available food.
- **Health aspects** include the impact on health (malnutrition, chronic diseases) and the diminished capacity to manage specific dietary needs (e.g., diabetes, allergies) or access to healthcare.

Physical access is less problematic in the European countries covered by this report. However, it should not be overlooked for people belonging to certain social groups (e.g., the elderly). These individuals may have difficulty obtaining some foods due to long distances (necessity of transportation) or physical barriers (large, high-traffic roads). Even in European cities, where food businesses are widespread in all residential areas, **potential food deserts** can be identified when considering food accessibility for the vulnerable

groups at a neighborhood level; these areas are characterized by low availability of food supplies, low values of public transport availability, and low walkability/pedestrian accessibility.

The complexity of food poverty derives precisely from its multidimensionality. This means it results from the interaction of all the factors listed above, which influence access to adequate nutrition.

Food poverty and food insecurity

Food poverty and **food insecurity**, terms often used as synonyms, derive from different theoretical perspectives. Food insecurity is a broader category that includes temporary difficulties. In contrast, food poverty refers to a more structural and persistent condition. This is typical of high-income countries, where the issue is not the absolute scarcity of food, but unequal and precarious access to quality food.

In analyses focused on high-income countries, the two concepts are equivalent, but they reflect **different disciplinary contexts and approaches**. According to the NGO Action Aid, “food security” has an institutional and quantitative imprint. In contrast, “food poverty” has a political connotation, as it highlights the effects of neoliberalism and the dismantling of the welfare state. Both terms have limitations: “food security” is criticized for being too neutral, while “food poverty” can be stigmatizing.

Food poverty, relative poverty, and absolute poverty

Food poverty is a phenomenon distinct from—though related to—relative poverty. **Relative poverty** is defined by Eurostat (the statistical office of the European Union) as the percentage of people with an income below 60% of the national median. However, the calculation of relative poverty can vary between different countries. In Italy, for example, the relative poverty estimate disseminated by Istat (the National Institute of Statistics) is based on the use of a poverty line known as the International Standard of Poverty Line (ISPL). This line defines a two-person household as poor if its consumption expenditure is less than or equal to the average per capita consumption expenditure.

Food poverty is also different from **absolute poverty** (or extreme poverty). This is an international concept linked to a fixed economic

threshold—\$2.15 per day according to the World Bank. This threshold represents the minimum level of monetary resources needed for access to essential goods and services, such as sufficient food, potable water, adequate housing, education, and healthcare. This definition represents a very rigid level of poverty, focused on **pure subsistence**. Measurement is based on individual consumption, assessed in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP). This means that the value remains the same internationally but is adapted to different national contexts, considering the differences in the cost of living between countries. For these measurements, the World Bank uses data collected from household sample surveys conducted by national statistical agencies and the Bank's own departments. Italy is one of the few European countries that officially measures absolute poverty via Istat, which defines it as the inability to purchase essential goods and services for an acceptable minimum standard of living. This threshold is based on a basket of goods and services whose value varies by family composition and geographical context, updated according to inflation. Other European countries (Germany, Spain, France) do not have an official and systematic measurement of absolute poverty. Eurostat offers indicators of **severe material and social deprivation**. These cover a wide range of essential goods and activities for a dignified life, such as paying rent or mortgage, keeping the home sufficiently warm, dealing with unforeseen expenses, or eating a meal with meat, fish, or vegetarian equivalent every two days. These indicators come close to but do not coincide with the Italian definition of absolute poverty.

Food poverty is an aspect of absolute poverty and, in some conditions, also of relative poverty. However, absolute and relative poverty are broader concepts. They also concern other fundamental needs besides food. Generally, those living in absolute poverty almost always experience food poverty problems. Conversely, those in relative poverty might not have these problems. However, food poverty can exist even without absolute poverty, especially in advanced societies. In these contexts, the difficulty lies in eating nutritiously and with dignity rather than in the total lack of financial resources.

Key definition

Food Poverty

commonly described as the **inability to access safe, nutritious, and sufficient food for a healthy and active life within one's social context** (a concept linked to the definition of food security).

Four dimensions

- (1) Economic
- (2) Social
- (3) Cultural
- (4) Health-related



Key Distinctions

Food Poverty ↘

a sociological concept referring to a **structural and persistent condition** (typical of high-income countries with unequal access)

Food insecurity, absolute poverty, and relative poverty ↘

Broader concepts than food poverty.

Food insecurity also includes **temporary difficulties**.

Absolute and relative poverty concern other basic needs beyond food.

Absolute poverty almost always entails food poverty, whereas relative poverty may not.

Measurement



Systematic measurement is crucial to recognize **food poverty as a public issue** and to inform policymaking. Measurement should capture its **multidimensional complexity**. It is necessary to move **beyond a top-down approach**.



FIES (Food Insecurity Experience Scale): an indicator developed by FAO, currently also used at the European level to measure individual or household food insecurity.

Measuring food poverty

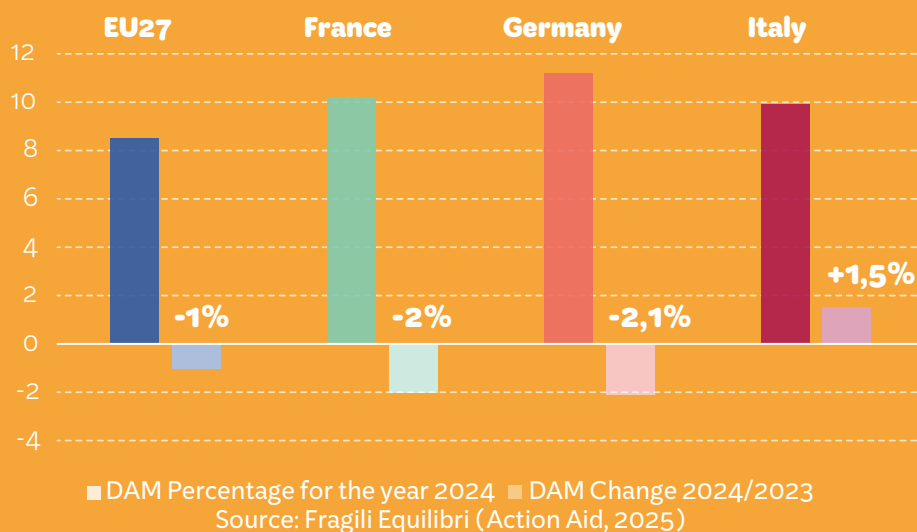
The topic of measuring food poverty is addressed in detail by Action Aid in the report “*Fragili Equilibri*” (2025). **Systematic measurement** is crucial for recognizing food poverty as a public issue and for guiding policies, although numbers can simplify a complex reality. **Conceptualization, measurement, and political response are interconnected.** It is essential that measurements capture the multidimensional complexity of the phenomenon and that indicators reflect democratic and inclusive objectives. It is necessary to overcome a top-down approach. This involves directly engaging people experiencing food insecurity to develop more democratic, contextual, and inclusive metrics, integrating emotional, symbolic, and relational dimensions.

The **FIES (Food Insecurity Experience Scale)** is the indicator currently used, at the European level, to measure individual or household food insecurity. Eurostat has begun integrating it into its surveys, such as the EU-SILC (Statistics on Income and Living Conditions). FIES is a global measurement system developed by the FAO to assess food insecurity as an experiential and multidimensional condition. It is based on 8 binary questions that describe experiences ranging from anxiety to the need to fast, for example “in the last 12 months, was there a period when you were worried about not having enough food to eat? Was there a period when, due to lack of money or other resources, you could not afford to eat healthy and nutritious food?”. The responses are transformed into a measure of severity, distinguishing between **mild food insecurity** (uncertainty), **moderate** (compromises on quality/quantity, skipping meals), and **severe** (without food for one day or more).

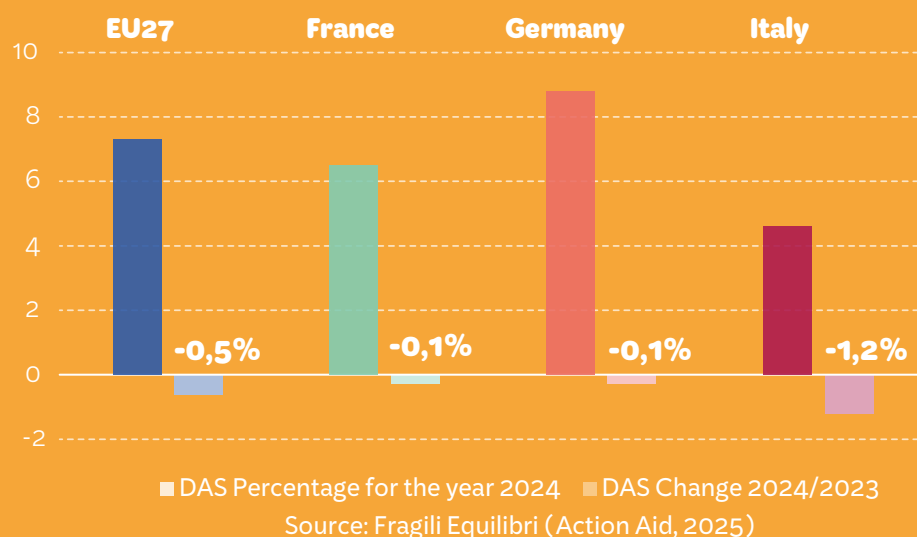
To measure food poverty in Italy, Action Aid proposes a **combination of multiple metrics**, complementing the FIES with two experimental indicators:

- **DAMS (Material or Social Food Deprivation):** this indicator captures the multidimensionality of the problem using EU-SILC data. It combines two questions whose answers determine a condition of material deprivation (inability to consume a meal with meat, fish, or vegetarian equivalent every two days) and/or

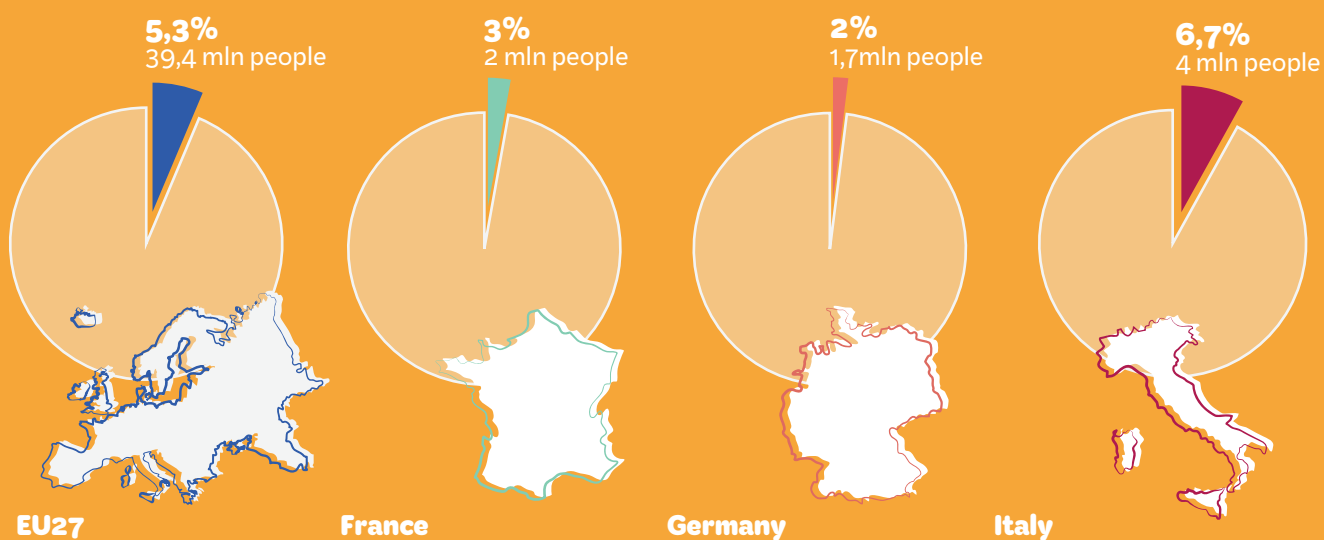
DAM – Material Food Deprivation



DAS - Social Food Deprivation



Proportion of the population unable to afford a healthy diet (%)



Source: The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (FAO, 2025)

a condition of social deprivation (inability to meet with relatives and friends to share a meal at least once a month for economic reasons). DAMS thus includes anyone presenting at least one of these two conditions. Many European countries use EU-SILC data to define similar material deprivation indices.

- **Relative Food Poverty:** this indicator is based on food consumption data from Italian households (Istat survey on Household Expenditures). It extends the concept of monetary relative poverty. A family is considered to be in relative food poverty if its food expenditure is lower than the national average per capita expenditure, also considering the size of the household.

Since every country measures the phenomenon of food poverty using different data, to compare the situation in Italy, France, and Germany, the few available cross-sectional data are used in this report:

- **Material Food Deprivation (DAM) and Social Food Deprivation (DAS)**, found in the Action Aid 2025 report “*Fragili Equilibri*”. The definitions of DAM and DAS have already been provided in the previous paragraph.
- The percentage (and absolute number) of **people who cannot afford a healthy diet**, found in the FAO 2025 report “The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World”. These indicators correspond to the percentage (or absolute number) of individuals in a population whose disposable income, net of the amount required to acquire all basic non-food goods and services, is lower than the minimum cost of a healthy diet. The estimate is obtained by comparing country-specific income distributions with a threshold (r) calculated by summing the cost of a healthy diet in the country with the basic cost of non-food needs (which varies based on the country’s income group, e.g., low-income, lower-middle income, etc.).

The FIES indicator was not used for comparisons because the data are not publicly available systematically and completely.

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European Union: policy architecture and system overview

2

The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (2014-2020)

Despite widespread prosperity, a **high level of poverty** is still recorded in the European Union. The Europe 2020 strategy had set the goal of lifting at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty or social exclusion by 2020 compared to 2008 levels. However, in 2017, 113 million people (22.5% of the EU population) were still at risk, a number slightly lower than the 116 million in 2008.

To support the most deprived, the EU established specific schemes starting in the 1980s. These were initially the European Program of Aid for the Most Deprived (PEAD) and, since 2014, the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD). Established in 1987, the **PEAD** was a **charitable and emergency model**. It allowed Member States to use food products sourced from **public intervention stocks** (surpluses of agricultural products accumulated to stabilize markets when production exceeded demand) to provide food aid to their deprived citizens. Managed by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI), the program became a crucial source of support for charitable organizations. By 2010, over 18 million people in the EU had benefited from it.

The **FEAD** replaced the PEAD in 2014, intending to introduce a **new approach to providing aid** to the most deprived. The Fund is not limited to providing food aid; it also offers **material assistance combined with social inclusion measures** to help people escape poverty. Material assistance includes basic necessities such as clothing, shoes, blankets, sleeping bags, personal hygiene products, baby hygiene products, and school supplies. The FEAD's objectives are to promote cohesion and social inclusion, contributing to the Europe 2020 strategy goal of reducing the number of people at risk of poverty. The Fund was designed to provide basic assistance while simultaneously guiding people toward other national or EU support schemes.

In line with this new approach, the management of FEAD was transferred to the Directorate-General for Employment, Social

Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL). The total funding for the 2014-2020 period amounts to 4.5 billion euros, 3.8 billion of which comes from the EU (with a mandatory national co-financing of at least 15%). Member States can choose between two types of Operational Programs (OPs):

- **Type I OPs** offer food and and/or material aid (food parcels, hot meals, sleeping bags, hygiene kits). They must also mandatorily include **accompanying measures to facilitate social and professional reintegration**. These accompanying measures include orientation towards local social and health services; support in managing household budgets and food education; help in filling out documents or accessing public benefits such as subsidies and housing; collective activities like economical cooking workshops or social horticulture; and individual interviews to define personalized inclusion pathways.
- **Type II OPs** do not provide material assistance but aim to promote the social inclusion of well-defined groups of deprived people. These are more structured programs that finance genuine **empowerment and social reintegration interventions**. Examples include basic training and literacy courses; job orientation and employment support pathways; psychological and social support; cultural mediation for migrants or homeless people; and community actions to strengthen social networks and civic participation.

In both cases, the accompanying, empowerment, and social reintegration measures must be designed in **complementarity with the European Social Fund (ESF)** and linked to national social inclusion policies.

Twenty-four Member States chose Type I Operational Programs, while four (Norway, Sweden, Netherlands, and Germany) opted for Type II. The implementation of FEAD is multi-annual (2014-2020) and follows programming similar to that of the European Structural and Investment Funds. Member States designate a managing authority that selects partner organizations (public bodies or non-profits) to distribute the assistance.

Analysis of FEAD impact

As mentioned, compared to PEAD, FEAD distinguishes itself through a more solidarity-based and inclusive approach. It combines material assistance with measures aimed at social inclusion to prevent or combat impoverishment. The number of final beneficiaries increased over time, rising from 8 million in 2014 to 14 million in 2015 and 15 million in 2016. Despite this, FEAD has essentially remained a **food support scheme**. It

was not always aimed at eradicating the most extreme forms of poverty in Member States. The European Court of Auditors' Special Report on FEAD (2019) identifies its strengths and weaknesses.

Strengths

The FEAD is very favorably received by entities working directly with the deprived. The majority of managing authorities consider it “important” or “very important” compared to other national or private initiatives. Its main strengths are:

- **Shift towards social policy:** one of the most important innovations was the transfer of the Fund's management from DG Agriculture to DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. This change aligned the Fund with social policies (ESF), a recommendation that the Court of Auditors itself had formulated previously for the PEAD.
- **Introduction of accompanying measures:** the most innovative element of FEAD is the obligation to combine the distribution of material aid (Type I OPs) with accompanying measures for social inclusion. These measures, which range from counseling on household budget management to reorientation towards social services, are considered fundamental. The Commission's mid-term evaluation showed that where these measures are more widespread, the overall satisfaction of the final recipients with the program is higher.
- **Valued and useful instrument:** FEAD is seen as a useful tool for providing material and food support, complementing national and private initiatives. In particular, for organizations like food banks, FEAD allows for more stable planning of essential product supplies, such as infant milk, reducing dependence on the irregular flow of donations

Weaknesses

Despite the positive aspects, the Court of Auditors found significant weaknesses that limit the Fund's effectiveness and the measurement of its impact. The main weaknesses are:

- **Contribution to poverty reduction not demonstrated:** due to inadequate monitoring, it was not possible to demonstrate FEAD's contribution to poverty reduction. Specifically: a) Accompanying measures, despite being the innovative element, are often vaguely defined in the operational programs and are not monitored with

common quantitative indicators. Consequently, their impact on social inclusion cannot be measured. b) There is little evidence of complementarity and synergies between FEAD and the ESF. Few Member States monitor how many FEAD recipients are actually placed into socio-professional inclusion pathways financed by the ESF.

- **Prevalence of food support:** despite the objective of promoting social inclusion, FEAD remains essentially a food support program. 83% of the budget is allocated to food aid, demonstrating strong continuity with the previous PEAD program. This trend is particularly evident in France, Italy, Poland, Romania, and Spain, which together absorb 90% of the food aid distributed.
- **Lack of focus in aid:** the FEAD regulation leaves Member States broad flexibility in defining “most deprived people”. Consequently, in half of the Member States examined (including France, Spain, Belgium, and Poland), aid is not targeted at specific vulnerable groups or situations of extreme poverty. This lack of focus risks dispersing the Fund’s limited resources, failing to ensure that support reaches those most in need.

Furthermore, other analyses note:

- **Logistical and administrative obstacles:** several Member States reported difficulties in distribution logistics, public procurement processes, and complex administrative procedures that slowed down implementation.
- **Limited capacity of partner organizations:** in various situations, the managerial capacity of the non-profit sector organizations involved was not sufficient to maximize the coverage and effectiveness of the aid. Therefore, a strong non-profit sector is necessary for the European aid system to function; institutions alone are not sufficient.

Regarding the three European countries analyzed in this report (Italy, France, and Germany), the European Court of Auditors’ special report highlights some important differences.

- **Italy and France** chose **Type I Operational Programs (OPs)**, focused on material and food assistance. Along with Spain, Poland, and Romania, they are among the largest users of FEAD for food support. The Court’s analysis highlights that in these countries, despite the existence of detailed poverty analyses, the operational programs did not target aid toward specific groups. This left broad discretion to partner organizations in selecting final recipients. Specifically

for France, it is mentioned that the ex-ante evaluation criticized the lack of information regarding the interaction between FEAD and ESF measures.

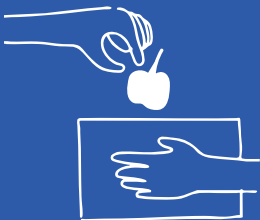
- **Germany** chose a **Type II Operational Program (OP)**. This does not provide material assistance but focuses exclusively on specific social inclusion measures. This approach requires the definition of precise objectives and outcome indicators, making monitoring more rigorous and results easier to measure. The German program targets well-defined groups, such as deprived EU migrants and homeless people, with quantified target values for the number of people to be assisted.

The European Social Fund Plus (2021-2027)

In the 2021-2027 programming period, FEAD is integrated into the new **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)**. This new instrument groups together four pre-existing instruments: the ESF, FEAD, the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), and the Program for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI). The declared goals of this integration are administrative simplification, increased synergies, and strengthening the impact of social interventions at the European level. The interventions previously managed by FEAD are now a structural part of the EU cohesion and inclusion strategy.

The ESF+ has a financial allocation of approximately 99 billion euros for the 2021-2027 period. The new programming ensures the continuity of food aid: **at least 3% of the ESF+ resources are reserved for basic food and material assistance or social inclusion measures** for the most deprived. In addition to this, the ESF+ has expanded support for social accompanying initiatives, job inclusion, and access to services for people in difficult situations. Other mandatory quotas are planned: a minimum of 25% for social inclusion, 5% for the fight against child poverty, and 12.5% for interventions supporting young people in countries with a high percentage of NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training). The ESF+ is fully aligned with the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda. The European Commission has published specific regulations and guidelines for its operation.

FEAD and ESF+ Process

Characteristic	FEAD (2014–2020)	ESF+ (2021–2027)
Strategy 	“Europe 2020” Strategy for combating poverty and social exclusion.	EU Cohesion and Inclusion Strategy (aligned with the European Pillar of Social Rights).
Main Goal 	To provide food aid and basic material assistance (combined with social inclusion measures) to people experiencing severe material deprivation.	To achieve high levels of employment and fair social protection (a broader goal compared to FEAD).
Food Assistance 	Two Operational Programmes (OPs): OP I (food aid and material support + accompanying measures) and OP II (empowerment and social reintegration interventions). 83% of the budget was allocated to food aid (strong continuity with the previous PEAD programme).	Integration of four previous instruments (ESF, FEAD, YEI, EaSI) for simplification and synergies. At least 3% of ESF+ resources are reserved for food and basic material assistance or for social inclusion of the most deprived.
Management / Governance 	National authorities designated by Member States. Each EU Member State designs its own Operational Programme.	No single mandatory model for all Member States. France has a centralized model (several national programmes managed centrally); Italy and Germany have both national and regional programmes; smaller countries have a single national programme and thus only one Managing Authority.
Critical Points 	No proven contribution to poverty reduction (accompanying measures not measurable, poor complementarity with ESF); predominance of food support; lack of focus on vulnerable groups in many Member States.	The transition to ESF+ caused delays and administrative complexity at national level, leading to a temporary reduction in food aid.
Reasons for the Transition from FEAD to ESF+ 	Simplification and rationalization of funds ; a holistic and integrated approach (combining food and basic goods distribution with social inclusion, training, employment, and education support); effectiveness and social cohesion (more effective and targeted interventions, thanks to the possibility of combining different types of support).	

Problems with the transition from FEAD to ESF+

The transition from the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) to the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) for the 2021-2027 period resulted in a **temporary reduction in food aid** across all Member States that previously benefited from FEAD. The new management caused delays and administrative complexities at the national level. This is because each Member State had to adapt its procedures, calls for tenders, and agreements for aid delivery. Distribution interruptions varied in severity depending on the promptness and efficiency of the individual national administrations in implementing the new rules.

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Italy: a mixed public–civil society approach

3

Management of European Funds

In Italy, the food support model for deprived people is characterized by a **medium level of institutionalization**, featuring a hybrid public-private system. The management of the system is centralized regarding coordination (through national and regional programs); however, it is **decentralized in the identification of needs** (which is the responsibility of the Regions and Municipalities). It also involves a **strong operational delegation to the non-profit sector**.

The national reference authority for the ESF+ is the **Ministry of Labour and Social Policies (MLPS)**. The MLPS coordinates planning, manages relations with the European Commission, and ensures the overall coherence of policies co-financed by the ESF+. It is also the Managing Authority for basic food and material assistance (FEAD). The main programming instrument used by the MLPS for managing resources—both European ESF+ funds and national co-financing funds—earmarked for tackling poverty, social exclusion, and material deprivation is the **Piano Nazionale Inclusione e Lotta alla Povertà 2021-2027** (National Plan for Inclusion and the Fight against Poverty 2021-2027). This Plan has an overall allocation of approximately 4 billion euros. Among its priorities, it includes specific interventions aimed at combating material deprivation through the free distribution of basic necessities to individuals and families in severe poverty. Within these interventions, the MLPS defines a basket of goods, approved at the national level, which specifies the categories of products authorized for distribution. This includes food items, hygiene products, clothing, and other essential goods.

European funds are supplemented with national resources. This occurs particularly through the **Fondo Nazionale Indigenti** (National Fund for the Most Deprived), which supports the distribution of non-food items (like hygiene products), and regional funds. Other forms of national support also exist (described in subsequent paragraphs). These include the redistribution of surpluses (regulated by the **Legge Gadda** - Gadda Law), the **Fondo per il Reddito Alimentare** (Food Income Fund), and the **Carta Solidale “Dedicata a te”** (Solidarity Card “Dedicated to You”).

The role of the non-profit sector is very strong, characterized by a widespread territorial presence. Central implementation requires the MLPS to publish tenders and public notices to select the **Lead Partner Organizations** (OpC), which number around 190. These organizations commit to distributing aid while respecting criteria of transparency and traceability. The body responsible at the territorial level for the purchase and distribution of food aid (tenders, logistics, storage) is the **Agenzia per le Erogazioni in Agricoltura** (AGEA, Agency for Agricultural Disbursements). Suppliers deliver the goods to the OpCs across the national territory. The OpCs are then responsible for storage and subsequent sorting toward the approximately 10,000 **Territorial Partner Organizations (OpT)**. The OpTs, using volunteers, distribute aid to beneficiaries and also offer accompanying measures. Accredited OpCs—all non-profit entities or public bodies—can affiliate with one of the major national networks recognized as **National Partner Organizations** (OpN), which perform coordination and representation functions. These include: *Fondazione Banco Alimentare Onlus*, *Caritas Italiana*, *Croce Rossa Italiana*, *Fondazione Banco delle Opere di Carità*, *Associazione Banco Alimentare Roma*, *Comunità di Sant'Egidio*, and *Associazione Sempre insieme per la pace*. The aid modalities provided include canteen services, the distribution of food parcels, solidarity supermarkets (*empori solidali*) / social shops (*botteghe sociali*), street units for homeless people, and home delivery for specific cases.

The **Regions** have their own **Regional ESF+ Programs** (PR ESF+), through which they can: finance active inclusion actions (training, job placement, childcare services); supplement measures aimed at large families, long-term unemployed, and NEETs; support specific initiatives on educational poverty and social cohesion. The PR ESF+ do not finance food distribution but serve to build broader inclusion pathways around it. Many Regions combine European resources and regional funds to strengthen interventions.

Municipalities, through their social services, are responsible for identifying people in severe deprivation and referring them to the OpTs for access to aid (however, not all aid recipients are referred by municipal social services). They collaborate in defining access criteria and verifying requirements. In addition to this, they offer social accompanying services and, in some cases, manage canteens, dormitories, and listening centers. Nevertheless, a large part of the operational work remains entrusted to the non-profit sector.

Overall, the system manages to guarantee material support to millions of people, thanks to several key points.

- **Widespread coverage and structure of the solidarity network:** the system is based on a public-private model and the so-called “*filiera della solidarietà*” (solidarity supply chain). This supply chain is characterized by a **widespread territorial presence**. This mosaic of organizations (OpCs and OpTs) manages to ensure the distribution of large quantities of food to the most vulnerable population. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are considered to have more widespread coverage in the territory and to be more operationally effective compared to traditional social services.
- **Transition towards social inclusion:** with the introduction of FEAD and, more recently, its integration into the ESF+, the system marked a change in approach. It is no longer limited to simple distribution but combines material assistance with social inclusion measures. The ESF+ has expanded support for social accompanying initiatives, job inclusion, and access to services for people in difficult situations.
- **Incentives for surplus recovery (Gadda Law - Legge Gadda, see dedicated paragraph):** policies for the recovery and solidarity distribution of food surpluses have registered significant growth, partly due to tax relief.
- **Grassroots innovations:** “new” practices such as shopping vouchers (*buoni spesa*) and solidarity supermarkets (*empori solidali*) are halfway between assistance and empowerment. They give greater attention to the subjectivity and autonomy of individuals, such as the possibility to choose what to put in the shopping cart. These models, like the **Hub di Aiuto Alimentare Cuccagna** (Cuccagna Food Aid Hub) analyzed later in the report, seek to overcome the welfare approach.
- **Public catering services** (see dedicated paragraph): school catering — net of the problems highlighted in the dedicated paragraph — is configured as a **very effective instrument of social redistribution**. This is because it provides a nutritionally complete meal to children who attend the canteen, regardless of family income.

Distribution of surpluses

The **Legge Gadda** (Gadda Law, 2016) was established to limit food waste and promote the **redistribution of surpluses and unused goods** for purposes of social solidarity. Based on the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity, it has an incentive rather than a punitive intent, recognizing the difficulty of finding organizations capable of managing all surpluses, especially those of fresh products. The approach adopted aims to simplify and harmonize the regulatory framework on donations.

The *Libro Bianco sulla donazione di eccedenze alimentari* (White Paper on Food Surplus Donation) by Euricse (2025) provides some evaluations of the *Legge Gadda*. **The strengths are as follows:** the law simplifies and harmonizes the previous regulatory framework; it extends the possibility of donation to other categories of unsold products, such as medicines, clothing, books, and other goods; it clarifies the difference between “best before” and “use-by date”, explicitly allowing the donation of products that have passed the TMC; it establishes a clear hierarchy that prioritizes the recovery of surpluses for human consumption over other uses and it confirms existing tax benefits and introduces a potential incentive for businesses (a possible reduction in the waste tax TARI, proportional to the quantity of goods donated). In contrast, the Euricse report identifies the **following weaknesses:** the law focuses mainly on managing the problem downstream, meaning the donation of already created surpluses, rather than upstream prevention; many implementing decrees needed to make the law fully operational have not been issued; furthermore, there is a lack of a “control room” or a national directorate to coordinate actions across the territory; the reduction of the waste tax is not mandatory for Municipalities, creating significant territorial inconsistency, unlike similar laws (such as the French one). Finally, the law does not set binding quantitative targets for waste reduction, and a monitoring system to track donation flows and evaluate the law’s actual impact is also missing.

Other national measures

In addition to European funds, there is a national fund for the distribution of foodstuffs (**Fondo Nazionale Indigenti** - National Fund for the Most Deprived), whose resources were increased during the pandemic. This fund, managed by the Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies, acts in a complementary manner to FEAD/ESF+. It provides for the purchase of fresh food (e.g., fruit and vegetables, meat) to be distributed through organizations that support the deprived.

The Budget Law 2023 introduced the **Fondo per il Reddito Alimentare** (Food Income Fund). This is a three-year experimental measure that involves the distribution of food parcels made with unsold goods (despite the name “Food Income,” it is not a monetary transfer). It represents an attempt to integrate the fight against waste with poverty reduction policies. The Fund was established at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies. It foresees initial experimentation in some Italian metropolitan cities (including Genoa, Florence, Naples, and Palermo).

In 2023, the **Carta Solidale** (solidarity card) “**Dedicata a te**” was introduced. This is a one-time contribution in the form of a prepaid card. It was initially €382.5, now increased to €500, for households with an ISEE (Equivalent Economic Situation Indicator) up to €15,000. The cards, distributed via *Poste Italiane*, can be used for foodstuffs, fuel, and public transport. Beneficiary selection is automatic, and the measure is continuous, confirmed for 2025. The “*Dedicata a te*” card has been criticized for its emergency nature, modest impact, and selective criteria that exclude vulnerable categories such as single-person households.

Regarding monetary transfers, substantial funds were allocated during the Covid-19 emergency for the municipal shopping vouchers (**buoni spesa comunali**). These were often aimed at families not covered by other measures. These instruments were managed locally with varying criteria and remained active only for the duration of the emergency.

Regional and local measures

Regions have intensified their interventions since 2020, with a greater number of measures than in the previous ten years. Most measures finance **projects with a predominantly social focus**, often linked to the fight against food waste. Specific attention to the health dimension emerges in only a few cases.

At the local level, the challenge of food access is also multidimensional and requires the coordination of different departments and local actors. Some cities have begun implementing **urban food policies**. These are shared strategies for managing food in all its phases, with attention also paid to the issue of food poverty (although this is not always the originating theme of food policy experiences). Local responses are based on a complex aid system provided by the social private sector. This sector plays a strategic role in the distribution chain and operates with governance that excludes local administrations from direct access to FEAD funds. Where they function, **multi-actor territorial networks** are founded on collaborative governance, a data-driven approach, and a deep understanding of needs. However, building these networks requires a significant investment of resources and expertise, making it difficult for small cities. Some cities, such as Turin and Bologna, have formally recognized the **right to food in their municipal Statutes** (in Bologna's case, also in the Metropolitan City statute).

School catering

The management of school canteens is the responsibility of the Municipalities. They establish regulations, tariffs, and operational modalities. The service can be managed directly or outsourced to external companies (the last one is the prevalent model). Tariffs, generally calculated based on the ISEE, aim to ensure access even for families with fewer resources. The average cost per meal is around €4.25–€4.30, with sharp territorial differences.

The Budget Law 2025 established a **Fund for tackling food poverty in schools**. This fund is managed by the Municipalities to support primary school families who struggle to pay for the canteen. The fund amounts to €500,000 for 2025 and 2026, and €1 million starting from 2027. Access criteria and modalities are yet to be defined via ministerial decree. However, there are some **main problems related to school catering** identified by *Cittadinanzattiva* and Save the Children Italia (an association and a NGO): lack of school canteens, especially in the South and on the Islands, where the meal at school is often the only complete meal of the day; costs are still high, making access difficult even for families not in conditions of extreme poverty; territorial disparities exist, with strong differences between the North and the South in terms of coverage and quality of service; the absence of recognition of the service as an essential public service leads to fragmented and inconsistent management among Municipalities, resulting in inequalities in access and standards.

Weaknesses in supporting people in food poverty

The problems related to supporting people in food poverty in Italy are complex. They concern both the increase in the phenomenon and the deficiencies in the assistance system.

- **Increase and “invisibility” of food poverty:** as stated in the 2024 Action Aid report “*I numeri della povertà alimentare in Italia a partire dalle statistiche ufficiali*”, food poverty is growing (over 5.9 million people in 2023, +700,000 in one year) and it involves a broad “invisible” segment of the population that, while not formally poor, cannot guarantee itself adequate nutrition. The rise in food prices (+9.8% in 2023) has aggravated the situation, affecting even workers and the middle class.
- **Limited coverage and structural inefficiencies:** only about half of people in absolute poverty receive food aid. The main causes are access barriers, territorial inconsistency, organizational fragmentation, and poor integration between public and non-profit sector networks.
- **Institutional weakness and absence of structural governance:** a unified regulatory framework that recognizes the right to food and coordinates the various measures is lacking. Policies remain emergency-based, fragmented, and unequal between the North and South. Furthermore, there is a reduction in public intervention: measures like the “*Dedicata a te*” Card or the *Reddito Alimentare* (Food Income) have a limited and non-structural scope. There are no shared national indicators to systematically monitor the phenomenon.
- **Inadequate nutritional quality of aid:** food parcels, often standardized and based on surpluses, are nutritionally unbalanced. Packaged and caloric products prevail, while fresh, seasonal, and highly nutritious foods are lacking.
- **Lack of dignity and autonomy** (“leftover food for leftover people”): the approach centered on surplus recovery tends to deny freedom of choice and dignity to assisted individuals. This strengthens logics of dependence and stigma. People are not considered rights-holders but passive beneficiaries of residual aid.

- **Persistent territorial and social inequalities:** aid distribution is highly inconsistent, concentrated in large cities with shortages in peripheral and rural areas. Food poverty primarily affects the unemployed, precarious workers, single-parent or large families, and migrants, particularly migrant women in Southern Italy. The poor integration between social and food policies—for example, the limited spread of free and universal school canteens—amplifies exclusion.
- **Strong dependence on volunteering:** this condition highlights a lack of sustainability and stable planning in supporting deprived individuals. The network of volunteers, although essential for the organization and delivery of aid, cannot replace a structured public system of social intervention. This makes the system vulnerable to changes in volunteering itself, such as drops in availability or burnout, and risks failing to guarantee adequate and uniform coverage across the national territory.

Proposals

To effectively combat food poverty, Action Aid and the Observatory on Food Insecurity and Poverty (**OIPA** - *Osservatorio Insicurezza e Povertà Alimentare*) propose a paradigm shift. This shift should investigate the different dimensions of the phenomenon, moving beyond the sole economic interpretation, and jointly adopting various indicators. This is needed to guide fairer public policies that recognize food as a fundamental right. Specifically, they call for:

- **Shifting the approach from emergency to structural.** Building a public system based on social justice, universalism, and participation. This includes recognizing the right to adequate nutrition and intervening on the deep causes.
- **Adopting a coordinated national policy to combat food poverty.** This policy must be structured and articulated across different institutional levels. It should restore not only access to food but also choice, dignity, and social relationships, transforming food into an opportunity for care and community.

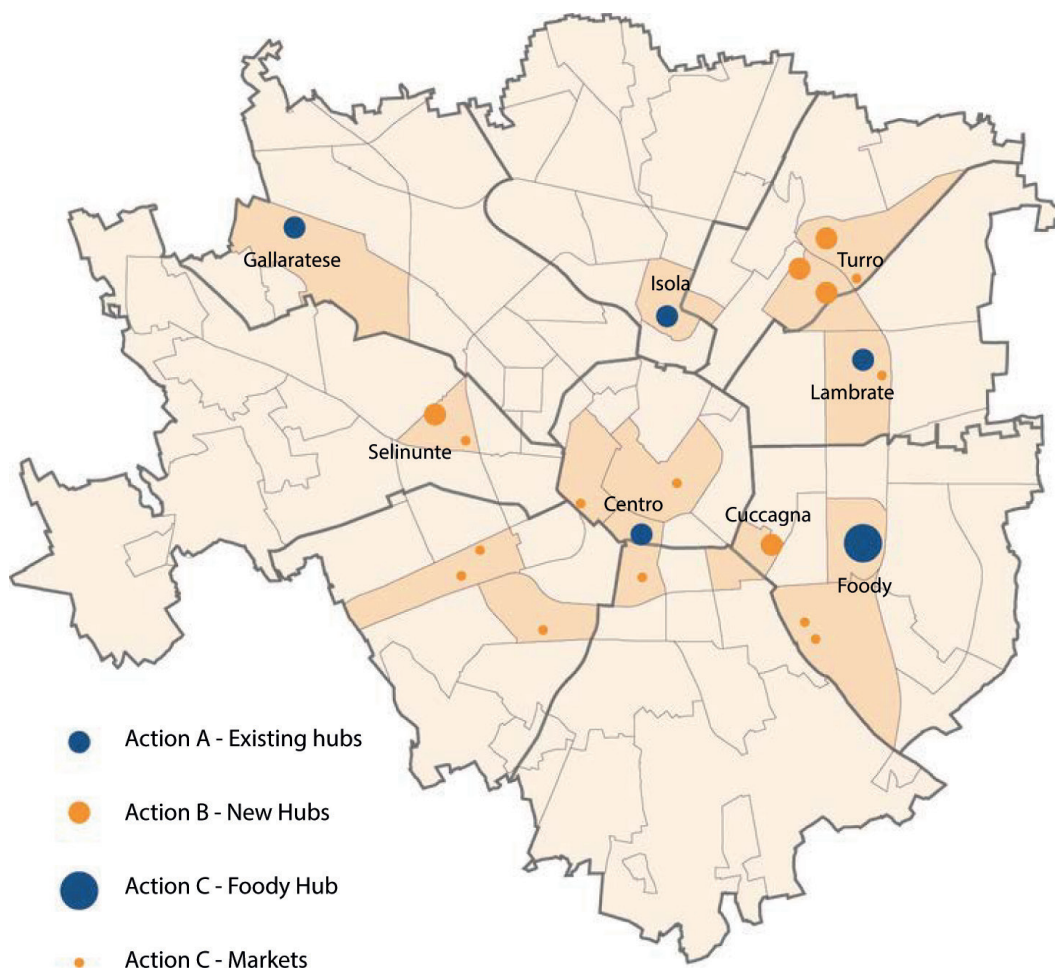
- **Integrating social and food policies and involving local territories.**
This means creating synergies between different policies, strengthening the role of local authorities, and promoting citizen participation for inclusive and dignified solutions. To effectively address food insecurity, strategies are also needed that promote sustainable food systems (e.g., investments in agroecology, waste reduction). They must strengthen food governance and policies, supporting the right to food as a fundamental human right, and implement climate adaptation and resource protection measures. The Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda serve as a framework that highlights the close correlation between food policies, food security, social policies, and environmental policies.
- **Improving the measurement and monitoring of the phenomenon.**
This requires developing more effective and inclusive metrics that also consider the material, emotional, and relational dimensions of food poverty.
- **Recognizing school canteens** as an essential public service and therefore guaranteeing universal access, especially in the most disadvantaged territories.

Hub di Aiuto Alimentare Cuccagna (*Cuccagna Food Aid Hub*)

Urban food policies, in Italy as elsewhere, emerge as “umbrella” policies capable of connecting diverse sectors—agricultural, environmental, social, and economic—through food, considered a privileged lens for reading and addressing complex problems in an integrated way. They aim to overcome the fragmentation of sectoral policies and promote a multilevel and participatory approach. Among their main objectives is the fight against food poverty and the promotion of equitable access to healthy and sustainable food. However, each city adapts these priorities according to its specific characteristics and vulnerabilities.

The experience of the **Cuccagna Food Aid Hub** is situated within this framework. It is one of eight hubs promoted by the Municipality of Milan as part of its food policy. The *Food Hub di Quartiere contro lo spreco alimentare* (Neighborhood Food Hubs against Food Waste), launched in

2019 in collaboration with a **network of public and private partners**, are conceived as **zero-kilometer recovery micro-districts**. They are capable of collecting and redistributing food surpluses at the neighborhood scale. This is a concrete response to the typical challenges of the urban context. In these areas, surpluses vary greatly, and the organizations managing them often have limited logistical resources. The initiative's success has also been internationally recognized: in 2021, the Municipality of Milan received The Earthshot Prize environmental award. These resources were used to enhance existing hubs, open new ones, and integrate municipal markets into the system.



Source: Food Policy, Milan Municipality

The Milanese hub model functions thanks to a dense network of collaborations. This network involves large retailers, neighborhood stores, and local associations. The hubs operate as collection centers capable of creating balanced food baskets. These include fresh and short shelf-life products, which are distributed to people in need. Underlying their success are **participatory governance, trust built among different actors, the support of funders and a continuous monitoring system**. This system allows for improved efficiency and rapid problem-solving.

However, some challenges remain open. These include the management of excess products (such as bread), the not always optimal quality of some food sourced from AGEA, the need to expand the types of donations, the strong reliance on volunteer work and a monitoring system focused solely on the quantity and type of products distributed (and not on the project's effectiveness in relation to the beneficiaries' conditions).

In 2024, the system showed **significant results**. The eight active hubs collectively recovered 795 tons of food, an increase of 25% compared to the previous year. They reached nearly 126,000 people (14,973 households) through a network of 176 associations. Partial data from the first 8 months of 2025 confirm the positive trend. Four hubs recovered 125.7 tons of food, reaching over 22,000 households overall.

Among the Food Aid Hubs, the **Hub Cuccagna**, inaugurated in July 2024 at the Cascina Cuccagna in Municipality 4, represents an emblematic case. It was born from the collaboration of six non-profit sector entities: *Associazione Consorzio Cantiere Cuccagna*, Emergency, EStà, *Fondazione Acra*, Recup, and *il Gabbiano*. Its purpose is not only to distribute food but also **to guide people toward pathways of autonomy**. It integrates food aid with listening, orientation, and inclusion services. The context in which it is located—an urban farmstead, a welcoming and culturally active place—helps reduce the stigma related to poverty and encourages participation. The **“self-service” model** allows users, selected by the NGO Emergency based on a vulnerability index, to choose products directly as in a regular supermarket, safeguarding personal dignity.

Opened in July 2024, the Cuccagna Hub reached 180 families in Municipality 4 in its first year of activity. Surplus recovery regularly occurs from the supermarket chain Coop Lombardia and, thanks to the RECUP association, from the Milan fruit and vegetable wholemarket (*Ortomercato di Milano*) for fresh produce. In the first 8 months of 2025, the hub distributed more than 20,500 kg of food. This consisted mainly of dry goods (7,618 kg), fruit and vegetables (3,984 kg), pastry (3,524 kg), and dairy products (2,225 kg). A detailed analysis of the numbers for the first 9 months allows defining the **following percentages of origin of the food distributed** through the hub (percentages are in terms of units, not weight): donations 64%, *Banco Alimentare* 19%, surpluses 14%, purchases 4%. It is important to highlight some data relating to individual food types based on origin: 100% of bread, fresh fruits and vegetables, and 58% of rotisserie items come from surpluses; 77% of dry goods, 75% of pastry, 49% of fish, and 39% of meat come from donations; 65% of dairy products and 65% of gastronomy and cured meats come from *Banco Alimentare*.

Alongside distribution, the Cuccagna Hub promotes **socialization and training activities**, such as workshops on fresh products and recipe exchanges. It also supports job placement initiatives for vulnerable people, collaborations with schools and local organizations, and exchanges of best practices with Italian and foreign delegations.

The project is based on Emergency's vision that **food is a social determinant of health**. Dietary conditions directly influence physical and mental well-being, as well as social inclusion. Tackling food poverty therefore means intervening on one of the structural causes of health inequalities. Within Emergency's program "**Nessuno Escluso**", the Cuccagna Hub adopts a service delivery model articulated in three phases: needs interception, access to services, and accompanying toward autonomy. Admission criteria are based on universal access, priority for vulnerability, and food support for renewable four-month cycles. The pathway is followed by a team of social workers who, through personalized plans and a digital monitoring system (Whospital NE), ensure continuity and coherence between food, social, and health interventions.

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France: a centralized and state-led model

4

Management of European Funds

The French food aid system is **highly institutionalized**. It is based on close collaboration between the State, the European Union, and large non-profit sector organizations. Since 2021, the ESF+/SEAA program (**Soutien Européen à l'Aide Alimentaire** - European Support for Food Aid, which indicates the specific French section of the European Social Fund Plus) has replaced FEAD. It is the main source of financing for food assistance. The EU contribution covers approximately 90% of the expenses (estimated at 647 million euros), while the remaining 10% comes from the French national budget. This program not only finances the purchase of foodstuffs but also supports social **accompanying measures** aimed at beneficiaries. Overall, more than 130 million equivalent meals have been provided.

The system reflects solid multilevel governance, but it is also highly centralized and bureaucratic, sometimes limiting the flexibility of local actors. In 2018 in France, 335,000 tons of food were distributed to approximately 5.5 million people, a number almost doubled compared to 2009. Despite this, the food aid system only reaches a portion of the estimated 9.2 million poor people in the country. This indicates that a significant share of the population experiencing food insecurity remains excluded from the schemes.

Distribution occurs through **four main pillars**: public procurement of foodstuffs (financed by European, national, and local funds); donations from businesses and private individuals; tax incentives for donors; volunteering, considered the pillar of the system, with over 200,000 volunteers involved. The public body FranceAgriMer manages tenders for approximately 27 products financed by FEAD, which represent a significant portion of the distributed foodstuffs. The main authorized networks that ensure widespread territorial coverage are: *Restaurants du Cœur*; *Croix-Rouge française*; *Secours populaire français*; *ANDES (épiceries solidaires* - solidarity grocery stores); *Fédération Française des Banques Alimentaires* (FFBA).

Alongside food distribution, the ESF+/SEAA program finances an articulated set of **social accompanying measures**. These measures

aim to transform food aid into an inclusion pathway. Such measures include: orientation towards social and health services to facilitate access to benefits such as minimum income or housing support; food education and cooking workshops, which strengthen practical skills and autonomy; support for job placement, through training activities; and the experience of the *épiceries sociales et solidaires* (social and solidarity grocery stores), which combines reduced-price shopping with personalized accompanying interviews. Community and inclusive activities, such as collective kitchens and associative spaces, which help reduce social isolation, are also financed.

Within the ESF+/SEAA system, there is the national program **Mieux manger pour tous** (Eat Better for All). This was launched by the French government in 2023, under the responsibility of the *Ministère des Solidarités* (Ministry of Solidarity). The main objective is to **improve the nutritional quality of food aid**. It aims to ensure that people in precarious conditions can access fresh, organic, and quality products, and not just dry and long-life foods. The program provides for the allocation of state funds—around 60 million euros between 2023 and 2024—to finance the purchase and distribution of fruit, vegetables, fresh proteins, and organic products. This is done in collaboration with the large authorized NGOs (*Banques Alimentaires, Restos du Cœur, Secours Populaire, Croix-Rouge*) and local structures such as the *épiceries sociales et solidaires*. This program serves as an integration to the classic aid system, responding to the problems of the qualitative poverty of distributed food. However, the Court of Auditors recommended evaluating the long-term sustainability and impact of this measure.

The management of the food support system is entrusted to an articulated network of public institutions. At the central level, coordination falls to the **Direction générale de la cohésion sociale** (DGCS, General Directorate for Social Cohesion). This is located within the *Ministère des Solidarités*. The DGCS defines strategies, accredits NGOs authorized to receive contributions, and supervises the use of community and national funds. FranceAgriMer, a specialized public agency, is instead responsible for centralized procurement and logistics. It manages public tenders, relationships with suppliers and the storage of food products intended for distribution.

At the intermediate level, **departmental prefectures play a key role**. They allocate European and national funds to local entities, coordinate territorial NGOs, and monitor compliance with traceability and reporting rules. Only accredited NGOs can receive European and state funds. The accreditation, known as *habilitation*, is issued by the DGCS

in collaboration with the departmental prefectures. To obtain it, the association must demonstrate adequate territorial coverage, solid organizational capacity, structures compliant with hygiene and health standards. It must also guarantee the traceability of funds and products, and **integrate food distribution with social accompanying measures**.

Regarding the food aid system at the local level, the **CCAS/CIAS** (*Centres communaux/intercommunaux d'action sociale* - Communal/Intercommunal Social Action Centers) play a practical, local role. They identify beneficiaries, orient them toward authorized structures (NGOs, *épiceries sociales*, canteens), directly distribute some aid, and collaborate with prefectures for the use of national and European funds. **CCAS** are local public bodies with administrative and financial autonomy, present in every municipality with more than 1,500 inhabitants. Their task is to assist people and families in difficulty, develop prevention and inclusion actions, dealing with emergency aid (food support or temporary accommodation) and coordination with charitable associations. **CIAS** (Intercommunal Social Action Centers) operate on an inter-municipal scale.

The French system is organized into several operating models:

1. **Distribution of food parcels** (*colis*): the most traditional form, mostly consisting of dry and long-life products purchased by FranceAgriMer with public funds or derived from surpluses from large retailers.
2. **Distribution of ready-made meals**: provided through social canteens or mobile units, intended particularly for homeless people or those in extremely precarious conditions.
3. **Social and solidarity grocery stores** (*Épiceries sociales et solidaires*): a more innovative model where beneficiaries pay a reduced fee, usually between 10% and 30% of the market price, and receive personalized social accompanying interviews.
4. **Food cards or vouchers**: instruments experimented with in various departments, which allow for the provision of restricted monetary aid to be spent in affiliated stores, restoring freedom of choice and reducing stigmatization.

All these forms rely on a centralized national logistics system, coordinated by FranceAgriMer, which supplies the large accredited NGOs, thus ensuring widespread coverage.

Distribution of surpluses

One of the pillars of the French model is the management of food surpluses. The turning point came with the adoption of the **Garot Law** (*Loi Garot*) on February 3, 2016, which made France the first country in the world to introduce a legal obligation for large retailers (surfaces > 400 m²) to sign mandatory agreements with charitable organizations for the recovery of still edible food surpluses. The law defines a **hierarchy in the management of unsold food**: prevention of waste at the source, through more efficient planning; food donation, especially to solidarity organizations; reuse for animal feed; composting or energy recovery.

The surpluses—over 10,000 tons of food per year—constitute one of the main flows feeding the aid system, alongside centralized purchases. These are entrusted to the main accredited NGOs, the same ones authorized to receive public and European funds. Operational management is guaranteed primarily by the Food Banks (***Banques Alimentaires***). Departmental prefectures and the DGCS oversee this flow, ensuring that surpluses also comply with hygiene and traceability standards. The redistribution of surpluses thus becomes an integral part of the institutionalized aid mechanism, although limits on nutritional quality persist.

Other national measures

Among the other growing measures are **food cards and vouchers**, which aim to reinforce dignity and freedom of choice. The **ESF+/SEAA** program allows for the funding of such projects, especially when they are linked to accredited NGOs and accompanied by social measures. To provide a local example, the sustainable food voucher (*chèquier alimentaire durable*) in *Seine-Saint-Denis* provides

€50 per month to 1,350 people, with a bonus up to €25 for sustainable purchases; the project, with a total value of €2.3 million, is co-financed by the State for €1.5 million. There are also associative projects linked to the Social Security for Food (*Sécurité sociale de l'alimentation* - SSA). Although parcels (*colis*) and solidarity grocery stores remain the dominant forms, the spread of vouchers is growing rapidly because they are considered more modern, dignified, and inclusive. The Court of Auditors, in a July 2025 report, recognized the potential of these instruments, but emphasized the need to clarify their legal status and ensure structural funding.

Regional and local measures

Regions are not a particularly active institutional level in the management of food aid. At the local level, the **CCAS/CIAS** play a crucial proximity role: they identify beneficiaries, orient them towards authorized structures (NGOs, *épiceries sociales*, canteens), directly distribute some aid, and collaborate with prefectures for the use of funds.

Among the most significant movements at the city level is the **Sécurité sociale de l'alimentation - SSA**. This is a civil society initiative born to rethink the right to food as a social right, integrating production, distribution, and consumer rights into a democratic and sustainable system. The **SSA** originated around 2017 and formally in 2019 with the *Collectif pour une Sécurité sociale de l'alimentation* (Collective for a Social Security for Food), which brings together various associations. In February 2025, a bill for experimentation towards the institution of the **SSA** was examined and approved by the Economic Affairs Committee at the National Assembly, indicating its entry into institutional discussions.

Another significant local movement is that of **VRAC** - *Vers un Réseau d'Achat en Commun* (Towards a Network of Common Purchase): solidarity purchasing groups that make quality products (often organic and local) accessible at reduced prices. VRAC operates by creating local associations rooted in neighborhoods, where members can buy products in bulk at reduced prices. The system

is also educational, organizing cooking workshops and nutrition awareness activities. Many VRAC projects receive support and funding from municipalities, metropolises, or regions within the framework of social cohesion policies. For example, **VRAC Lyon Métropole** works in collaboration with the Lyon CCAS, while in *Montpellier* and *Bordeaux*, VRAC projects are integrated into SSA experiments, co-financed by local authorities.

School catering

School canteens in France represent a fundamental component of food policies. The system is not centralized, it is managed by the municipalities for nursery and primary schools, by the departments for secondary schools (*collèges*), and by the regions for high schools (*lycées*). Tariffs are often calculated according to the family quotient (a french tool for measuring family monthly resources) to ensure equitable access, offering meals at symbolic prices (e.g., €1) for low-income families. The **EGAlim Law of 2018** encourages the introduction of organic and local products, with the goal of reaching 50% sustainable products, of which 20% organic. The State allocated €50 million to support small municipalities, and administrations sometimes also cover transport costs in rural or peripheral areas. Despite the progress, access is not guaranteed as a subjective right, and territorial differences remain pronounced.

Weaknesses in supporting people in food poverty

Despite the widespread network and stable public support, the Court of Auditors, in a July 2025 report, highlighted several problems in the French model:

- **Growing demand and system under pressure:** the number of beneficiaries has increased, but the organizational capacity of associations remains fragile, generating difficulties in guaranteeing homogeneous territorial coverage.
- **Strong dependence on volunteering:** the system relies on approximately 200,000 volunteers, often elderly. This structural

dependence poses a problem of generational replacement and future sustainability.

- **Limited nutritional quality:** most food aid consists of dry or long-life products (70%), while only 7% is fresh, compromising a balanced and healthy diet.
- **Rigidity and centralization of logistics:** the centralized procurement of FranceAgriMer, while ensuring stable volumes, makes the system inflexible and results in administrative slowness.
- **Territorial inequalities:** “white zones” exist where supply is scarce, especially in rural areas. Access is not uniform and is not guaranteed as a subjective right.
- **Complex governance and heavy bureaucracy:** the accreditation (*habilitation*), management, and reporting procedures are too burdensome and risk penalizing smaller associations, favoring only large national operators.
- **Poor digitalization and weak monitoring:** there is a lack of interoperable IT tools and qualitative indicators. The quantity of meals is measured, but not the actual impact on the health, well-being, and social inclusion of the beneficiaries.

Proposals

The 2025 Court of Auditors report includes eight recommendations for improving the system:

- **Improve data quality and transparency:** the DGCS should complete a reliable framework of data on beneficiaries, intensity of recourse to aid, and access conditions by 2025.
- **Clearly define the stages of social accompaniment:** create clear guidelines covering all phases, from reception to linkage with other public services, to make accompaniment practices systematic.

- **Evaluate the sustainability of the *Mieux manger pour tous*:** question its permanence, efficiency, and the cost/benefit ratio compared to other tools.
- **Integrate food insecurity into territorial poverty strategies:** every department should incorporate food insecurity (*précarité alimentaire*) and map aid supply and demand to identify territorial gaps (“white zones”).
- **Better objectify the allocation of credits for solidarity grocery stores (*épiceries solidaires*):** make the criteria that determine how much state and European resources are allocated to these structures more transparent and stable.
- **Learn from experimentation and foreign experiences of food vouchers (*chèques alimentaires*):** study their costs, benefits, and operational modalities to evaluate their integration into the French system.
- **Strengthen control and governance:** review the methods of credit allocation, improve control over the destination of funds, and make the procedures for authorization and state supervision less burdensome but more effective.
- **Verify the centralization of food purchases:** evaluate whether the logistical benefits resulting from economies of scale (FranceAgriMer) compensate for the logistical complexity and costs, comparing them with alternative models such as vouchers.

Caisse Alimentaire de Montpellier

The **Caisse alimentaire commune de Montpellier** (**CAC**, Common Food Fund of Montpellier) is a research-action experiment, among the most representative born within the **SSA**. Promoted by the City (*Ville*) and the Metropolis (*Métropole*) of Montpellier, it aims to build an alternative model that recognizes the **right to dignified food** as an integral part of social rights, on par with healthcare. The project originated in 2020 within the national *Territoires à Vivres* (Territories to Live) program. The underlying principles of the CAC are: the recognition of the universal right to food as a social right; mutualized funding based on public and private contributions; the democratic accreditation of sales points, with citizen participation in the choice of stores and producers that respect criteria of social justice and sustainability.

The project is based on the creation of a **mutualized food fund**, financed by public contributions and voluntary donations. This fund results in restricted monetary transfers, provided in the form of a dedicated currency (cards or food currency - *monnaie alimentaire*). The credits can be spent at selected sales points that comply with quality and sustainability criteria, allowing beneficiaries to independently choose their food and reducing stigmatization. The management of the fund is handled by a Citizens' Food Committee.

The **CAC** was created as a critique and evolution of the classic charitable model, distinguishing itself on several levels:

- **From charity to right:** it recognizes access to food as a universal social right.
- **From material donation to monetary aid:** beneficiaries receive credits to use autonomously, reinforcing dignity and empowerment.
- **From quantity to quality:** it aims to guarantee fresh and sustainable food, overcoming the logic of standardized parcels.
- **From top-down management to collaboration:** mutualized funding promotes horizontal involvement of supportive citizens.

The construction of the CAC took place through a participatory co-design process involving approximately 200 people. Phase 1 (2021–2023) defined the model; Phase 2 (2024–2025), currently underway, plans for the expansion of food card distribution to a larger sample.

Key actors include the City of Montpellier (political/financial support), VRAC Montpellier (on-the-ground coordination), *Secours Catholique* (social accompaniment), and the beneficiaries themselves who participate as co-creators of the model. The project has significant strengths, such as the restoration of freedom of choice and dignity and the strengthening of local supply chains. Problems include long-term financial sustainability, the need for stable institutional commitment and challenges of scalability.

SSA (*Sécurité sociale de l'alimentation*) is at the center of several experiments distributed across territories such as *Bordeaux/Gironde*, *Toulouse*, and *Lyon*. The common goal is to guarantee universal access to quality food and overcome the assistance-based logic. Operating strategies vary:

- **Montpellier:** pioneer model based on food cards and participatory governance, involving about 400 families.
- **Gironde/Bordeaux:** experimentation started in 2024 (193 families), with greater public financial support and a solid institutional structure.
- **Toulouse** (*Caissalim*): in the start-up phase, with a contained budget (€100 monthly) and a methodical and gradual process.
- **Lyon:** different model, based on cooperative grocery stores (*epicerie cooperative*) and social tariffs, focused on reducing prices rather than distributing food credits.

These experiences contribute to redefining food aid in France, shifting from the charitable model based on surpluses to an approach founded on right, collaboration, and dignity.

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Germany: a decentralized, civil-society-led response system

5

Management of European Funds

Unlike Italy and France, in Germany, the management of European funds intended for food aid is not centralized and is **characterized by a low degree of institutionalization**; access to FEAD is entrusted to a plurality of local actors, primarily non-profit sector organizations (especially *Tafel* - Food Banks, *Caritas*, *Diakonie*), which have a determining role and independently manage the collection and distribution of aid. In this **strongly decentralized governance model**, there is no full integration with social inclusion policies: food support is considered a charitable intervention, while welfare measures (such as *Bürgergeld*) provide monetary resources but without direct links to food distribution systems. Institutionally, there is no national reference authority for food poverty: the BMEL (Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture) deals with food security and production, the BMAS (Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs) with welfare and income, but neither has direct competence over equitable access to food. The Managing Authority for FEAD funds is identified at the federal level, but practical implementation, as mentioned, falls to NGOs and local associations, which must manage bureaucratic complexity to access resources. The role of the **Regions** (*Länder*) is limited but variable: in some cases, they finance canteens or surplus recovery projects, while in others, they leave everything to local initiative. **Municipalities** have a more concrete role, especially in signaling needs through social services, granting logistical spaces or small funding, but they do not directly manage food aid. There is no clear integration between direct food aid and specific national funds, with the exception of the *Bürgergeld*, which represents a general monetary support.

With the transition from FEAD to the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), Germany moved to **a system integrated into broader social policies**. During the FEAD period (2014-2020), food aid and basic necessities were managed as a dedicated and autonomous measure, implemented primarily through NGOs and local charitable organizations (*Tafel*, *Caritas*, *Diakonie*), with the support of national and regional authorities, but with little connection to social inclusion policies. With the ESF+ (2021-2027), however, material assistance has become a specific mandatory objective within the

national and regional programs, managed by the BMAS together with the *Länder* (federal Regions). This implies greater institutionalization and a closer link with other welfare and inclusion measures (fighting child poverty, migrant integration, work inclusion). However, some continuity remains: the operational role of the non-profit sector remains central, Municipalities primarily have support and needs signaling functions, and practical implementation is still based on local networks.

The aid modalities remain predominantly the **distribution of food surpluses through *Tafel*** (Food Banks) and food parcels, integrated with more inclusive experiments. The *Tafel* are the German food banks, founded in the early nineties following the model of US food banks. The first to be founded was the ***Berliner Tafel*** in 1993, and since then, the network has spread widely across the country, reaching over 950 structures, coordinated by the national association *Tafel Deutschland e.V.*. Their operation is mainly based on collecting food surpluses from supermarkets, producers, and distributors, which are redistributed to people in economic difficulty through various channels: direct distribution centers, community canteens, food parcels, or collaborations with churches, cooperatives, and other non-profit sector organizations.

The *Tafel* system now reaches between 1.6 and 2 million people every month, a third of whom are children or youth. Their work is made possible by the contribution of over 60,000 volunteers, many of whom are pensioners, who handle logistics, collection, transport, and food delivery. **Each *Tafel* operates autonomously** and defines its own access criteria, which often require a certificate of need issued by social services. There is no stable national funding: the *Tafel* are supported almost exclusively by private donations and sponsorships, although some access European funds (formerly FEAD, now ESF+). Others, like the ***Berliner Tafel***, have deliberately **chosen to renounce public funds to maintain full ethical independence**. Their role is ambivalent. On the one hand, they represent an extraordinary infrastructure of solidarity, capable of reducing food waste and mobilizing civic energy widely and diffusely. On the other hand, their existence highlights the limits of the German system: access to food is not guaranteed as a universal right but depends on the availability of donations and volunteer work, generating territorial disparities and risks of stigmatization for beneficiaries. The *Tafel* system thus operates within a framework in which the German State refrains from structuring a national food assistance network, opting instead to support citizens primarily through monetary transfers that allow them to purchase food according to their preferences. Within this policy orientation, the *Tafel* system has become one of the main operational instruments for addressing food poverty in Germany, despite the absence of a centralized public infrastructure dedicated to this purpose.

Distribution of surpluses

The operational base of the German food aid system is the redistribution of surpluses along the agri-food chain. Supermarkets, producers, and distributors donate food that is collected and redistributed by a widespread network of *Tafel* (over 970 across the country), coordinated by the *Tafel Deutschland e.V.* federation, along with organizations like *Caritas*, *Diakonie*, and *AWO (Arbeiterwohlfahrt)*. The *Tafel* are financed through private donations and sponsorships, covering logistics, transport, and rent costs without stable national support. The *Tafel* **collaborate with supermarkets, producers, and wholesalers to recover still edible but unsold food**. Distribution occurs through direct delivery centers, social canteens, or food parcels. Unlike countries like France and Italy, Germany does not have a specific national law regulating the redistribution of unsold food. Food surplus donation is therefore voluntary and based on agreements between companies, distributors, and non-profit organizations. From a legal perspective, associations that collect and redistribute food are considered food business operators and must therefore comply with Regulation (EC) n. 178/2002 and EU food safety legislation. This entails obligations in terms of traceability, hygiene, and legal responsibility, which can represent an obstacle for small local entities.

Other national measures

Nationally, the main tool for tackling poverty remains the ***Bürgergeld***, the new basic subsidy introduced in Germany from January 1, 2023, replacing the previous social support system known as *Hartz IV*. It is now the central measure of German welfare for long-term unemployed people and for those who, despite working, have incomes too low to guarantee a dignified life. The objective of the *Bürgergeld* is to **ensure a minimum vital income**

to cover essential needs, such as food, housing, heating, transport, and other basic expenses.

The *Bürgergeld* is managed directly by the **BMAS (Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs)** through the Jobcenters, territorial offices that have the task of dispensing benefits and accompanying beneficiaries in training and reintegration pathways. The amount varies according to family composition and age. Since 2024, for example, a single adult receives about €563 per month, plus coverage for rent and heating costs, paid directly by the Jobcenter. Family members, such as spouses and children, are also entitled to additional allowances. Compared to the old *Hartz IV*, the *Bürgergeld* aims to reduce the punitive and coercive nature of the system, shifting the focus from the mere mandatory acceptance of any available work to building a more sustainable professional reintegration pathway. It provides for less severe penalties in case of non-compliance and greater recognition of individual skills, valuing training as a tool to improve employment prospects.

However, there is no lack of criticism. Many observers and organizations, including Human Rights Watch (HRW), emphasize that the planned amounts remain insufficient to cover the real cost of living in Germany, particularly considering the recent increases in food and energy prices. According to HRW, the measure still fails to guarantee a full right to healthy and adequate food, leaving many families in conditions of material deprivation.

In January 2024, the federal government adopted the strategy “**Good Food for Germany**”, which defines objectives to promote healthy, sustainable, and accessible food. The strategy includes actions on public canteens, sustainable procurement, and consumer information, but does not directly address food poverty or provide dedicated allocations for vulnerable groups.

Regional and local measures

The German national ESF+ program (2021-2027) has an allocation of approximately €6.56 billion, of which about €2.22 billion is at the federal level and €4.34 billion is managed by the *Länder*.

Management is therefore highly decentralized, with the BMAS as the central reference authority, and the authorities of the individual *Länder* as managers of their own regional programs.

Each Land develops its own operational program (defining priorities and objectives) which is approved by the European Commission as part of the national framework. Once approved, the program establishes the regional guidelines, called *Förderrichtlinien*, which contain the eligibility criteria, application procedures, and conditions for fund use. The role of the regional managing authorities is central: they select projects, control reporting, and ensure compliance with community rules. These authorities issue public calls aimed at NGOs, associations, Municipalities, and other entities, which can submit projects consistent with the program's objectives. Selection occurs based on criteria such as social impact, sustainability, and the organizational capacity of the proposing entity.

A mandatory element is co-financing: ESF+ funds never fully cover costs, and expenses must be integrated with resources from the *Länder*, Municipalities, or beneficiary entities. This strengthens shared responsibility but can represent an obstacle for smaller organizations. The approved financing is then paid directly by the Land or the regional authority to the main beneficiary, who in turn can transfer part of the resources to partners or sub-beneficiaries as established in the project. Expenses must be documented in detail and comply with admissibility criteria, as specified in the regional reporting manuals. This system allows the *Länder* a certain flexibility to adapt the use of funds to local needs, while maintaining alignment with European objectives. However, it also involves administrative complexity and significant differences between regions, both in the mechanisms for accessing funds and in the criteria for financing and reporting.

School catering

Another national food poverty support measure is school canteens. In Germany, the **school canteen system is highly decentralized**, because education is the competence of the Länder and the Municipalities, not the federal State. This means that there is no single national rule: each *Land* and, often, each city, independently establishes modalities, tariffs, and access to canteens. In primary schools, in various *Länder*, a hot meal at school is provided, but access conditions change greatly from region to region. An emblematic example is Berlin, where since 2019, all primary school children are entitled to a free canteen meal, regardless of family income, with costs fully covered by the city-state Senate. In other *Länder*, however, families must pay a fee, which can vary between €3 and €5 per day. For low-income families, the main support measure is the federal program “**Bildung und Teilhabe**” (Education and Participation), managed by the BMAS. This program allows beneficiaries of *Bürgergeld*, supplementary family allowances, or housing subsidies to obtain a **total reimbursement of school canteen costs**. In practice, the children of families receiving these benefits are entitled to free meals, even outside Berlin, as long as parents submit the application through the Municipality or the competent body. Alongside these measures, local food support programs also exist in schools. Some Municipalities and private foundations finance projects to guarantee free or reduced-price meals to children from vulnerable families. The European Commission itself has supported, through structural funds and programs like **ESF+**, pilot projects in various *Länder* to improve the quality and accessibility of school canteens.

Weaknesses in supporting people in food poverty

The **Tafel Deutschland e.V.** federation published the report “**30 years of Solidarity**” in 2024, which describes 30 years of the federation’s work and highlights the following problems of the German system:

- **Growing demand surpassing supply:** the increase in prices (food, energy, transport), inflation, and the effects of the war in Ukraine have significantly increased the number of people turning to the *Tafel*.

In many locations, demand is so high that some food banks have suspended the admission of new customers or introduced waiting lists.

- **Decline or stagnation of food donations:** parallel to the increase in demand, food donations have decreased or remained stable in many regions, creating a gap between what people need and what the *Tafel* can provide.
- **Logistical and infrastructural problems:** several food banks report a shortage of storage capacity, particularly for food requiring refrigeration or freezing. High costs for energy, adequate vehicles, fuel, and transport are a growing burden for organizations. Some surpluses must be refused because they cannot be managed (e.g., they are offered too close to the expiry date or there is no adequate space to store them).
- **Pressure on volunteers and limits of volunteering:** the *Tafel* rely on tens of thousands of volunteers; many are elderly. There is a need to find “successors” for these voluntary positions. In many cases, however, the number of volunteers is not sufficient to cope with the increased requests, especially in times of crisis, and the people already working with the *Tafel* often reach their limit, also from a physical and emotional point of view.
- **Imbalance between rising costs and stable funds:** with inflation, the increase in energy and fuel costs, the operating costs for *Tafel* have increased markedly. Financial resources (donations, sponsors, public funds) often do not follow the same pace, putting the organizations’ ability to sustain usual activities at risk.
- **Regional inequalities:** there are substantial differences between the various regions of Germany in the availability of donations, logistics, storage capacities, and ease of access to auxiliary funds. Some areas are more disadvantaged, with fewer infrastructures or dedicated resources.
- **Predominantly material nature of food assistance:** even though *Tafel* offers additional projects (food education, socialization, initiatives for children), aid normally remains essentially material, based on surpluses and donations. For many beneficiaries, it is not possible to have a healthy and balanced diet given the reduced purchasing power.

Proposals

Also from the same 2024 report previously mentioned, the proposals for improving the current system are summarized below:

- **Enhance logistics and infrastructure:** infrastructural transformation to guarantee more storage capacity (especially for refrigerated and frozen goods), more adequate vehicles, improvement of transport, and modernization of structures. *Tafel* has already launched programs like “*Energie-Invest*” (Energy-Invest) and “*Fahrzeug-Invest*” (Vehicle-Invest) for vehicles, and programs to reduce energy costs.
- **Digitalization:** introduction of “major donation software”, use of the eco platform to simplify donations, track deliveries, plan routes, and optimize inventories. The goal is to improve efficiency and transparency.
- **Foundation of special financing programs:** to address increases in operating costs and crises, *Tafel* has obtained extraordinary funds for rapid aid, for vehicles, energy subsidies, infrastructural investments, etc..
- **Closer collaboration with the food industry and trade:** expand partnerships with donors, producers, retailers to increase donations, including large volumes, improve the offer of good quality food, and reduce waste. A “Pact against Food Waste” has been signed with wholesalers and retailers to reduce waste and involve the *Tafel*.
- **State/legal measures to support action on a broader scale:** *Tafel* asks the State to guarantee a minimum dignified subsistence level, that minimum wages are above the poverty line, and that social services are more “poverty-proof”. It also calls for tax breaks for food donations, legal simplification for accepting and transporting them, and incentives for producers and retailers who donate.

- **Programs to facilitate social participation and prevent isolation:** projects dedicated to children, youth, and the elderly to ensure that food aid is accompanied by social and cultural measures such as school breakfasts, community moments, educational support, and inclusion initiatives.

Berliner Tafel

The *Berliner Tafel*, founded in 1993 by Sabine Werth, is the first *Tafel* born in Germany and remains the one with the most marked identity. The choice to consider it as a case study stems from the fact that, in a highly fragmented system like the German one, it seemed appropriate to concentrate the analysis on a scope that is nonetheless representative, even if circumscribed, given that the *Tafeln* represent the most widespread model. The *Berliner Tafel*'s vision is based on two central principles: the fight against food waste and the fight against poverty, with the idea that these two problems can be tackled together. Ideologically, the *Berliner Tafel* distinguishes itself by a strong choice: not to accept public funding, supporting itself exclusively through private donations, sponsorships, and membership fees. The reason for this refusal is one of principle: according to the founder, surplus recovery and food solidarity must not replace the State's responsibilities in welfare matters. This philosophy also translates into projects that are not limited to food distribution but aim to create awareness and dignity. The **KIMBA** program, for example, involves children and adolescents in educational activities to learn how to cook and understand the value of food. The **LAIB und SEELE** (Bread and Soul) network combines direct distribution and community support, strengthening the bond between neighborhoods and volunteers. This model makes the *Berliner Tafel* an independent civic actor, which acts as a catalyst for collective social responsibility.

Most of the other *Tafel* in Germany—over 950 across the country, coordinated by the *Tafel Deutschland* e.V. network—share the mission of reducing waste and supporting those living in poverty, but operate with more pragmatic and less rigid logics from an ideological point of view. **Many accept public funds**, including municipal financing or European funds (ex FEAD, now ESF+), to guarantee economic stability and

logistical capacity. This choice allows for the expansion of infrastructures, the purchase of refrigerated vehicles, and the payment of operating expenses, but it also entails greater integration with local welfare systems. Practically, this means that in many regions, the *Tafel* become stable partners of Municipalities or *Länder* in managing food aid. Access to services is regulated by criteria based on official certificates of need, and distribution focuses primarily on immediate support with food parcels, canteens, and distribution points. Compared to the *Berliner Tafel*, there is less emphasis on ideological autonomy and more on operational efficiency.

The crucial difference lies in the ideological approach to governance. **The *Berliner Tafel* maintains a civic and independent identity**, emphasizing its role as an initiative of citizens for citizens, and refusing to be perceived as an extension of state welfare. Conversely, many other *Tafel* adopt a more institutionalized perspective, collaborating with public authorities and accessing state and European funds to better respond to the increasing demand. This also leads to a difference in image: the *Berliner Tafel* proposes itself as a laboratory of social innovation and civic education, while the other *Tafel* are more often seen as a necessary and functional charitable infrastructure, integrated into the fabric of local social policies.

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Peru: a community- based response framework

6

The Country's situation and the main instruments for tackling food poverty

Peru is a fragile Latin American country, both from an economic and a political perspective; however, its historical capacity to **develop self-organization and popular participation** makes it a particularly interesting case study. In terms of food poverty, the country is in serious difficulty: according to the National Institute of Statistics and Informatics (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática - INEI), in the second quarter of 2025, the percentage of the population suffering from insufficient calorie consumption is 38.5%, almost four out of ten people nationwide.

In Peru, the main forms of response to food poverty are two, both arising from processes of social participation: **popular canteens (comedores populares) and community kitchens (ollas comunes)**. Both operate at the urban level and are present mainly in the capital, Lima. The former are a historical form of self-organization with a higher degree of institutionalization; the latter were born more recently, as a response to the worsening socio-economic situation in the country during the Covid-19 epidemic when the popular canteens had ceased to function. After the epidemic, the popular canteens were reopened, but the lack of turnover in the governing bodies, the limited or non-existent updating of beneficiary lists, and accusations of corruption limited their popularity, while **community kitchens experienced a significant process of diffusion**.

The main differences between the two organizations can be summarized in the following table.

Numerically, the figures for beneficiaries are constantly being updated. Popular canteens reach more than 600,000 people in Lima, while the more recent experience of community kitchens has so far allowed them to exceed 200,000.

Peru



Governance and regulatory references

Popular Canteens (Comedores Populares)

The "Law on Comedores Populares" in Peru (Law N° 30790 of 2018) promotes these canteens as **entrepreneurial units for production**. The law aims to reinforce food assistance for the most vulnerable sectors through the improvement of infrastructure and the provision of resources.

Community Kitchens (Ollas Comunes)

The "Law on Ollas Comunes" in Peru (Law N° 31458 of 2022) recognizes and guarantees the funding and sustainability of the "ollas comunes" as **basic social organizations**, especially in emergency situations such as natural or health disasters. The law aims also to promote the productive entrepreneurship of its beneficiaries.

Location

In impoverished but **consolidated urban areas**, equipped with basic services, with accessibility and equipment within the urban context.

In very impoverished **peri-urban areas, unconsolidated and lacking basic services**, with poor accessibility and without equipment within the urban context.

Beneficiaries

Static **lists of beneficiaries** based on the assigned budget and **not updated for years**. Over 600,000 beneficiaries in Lima.

Constantly updated lists of beneficiaries that register an average of 7 social cases per "olla" (cases assisted free of charge). Over 200,000 beneficiaries.

Source of funds

Resources to assist beneficiaries come from the **public budget and from what they collect for each meal**.

Resources come from the **public budget, from what the kitchens collect for each meal, and from self-sustainability actions** such as the recovery of food, the creation of organic gardens, the rearing of small animals, and the development of solidarity and collective economic activities

Mobilisation and advocacy

Social mobilization to obtain greater funding, new equipment, and overcome the assistance approach of the Food Integration Program (PCA) is **very limited**.

Mobilization and advocacy are their collective hallmark, as demonstrated by their platform for dialogue with the government and food self-management policies.

The relationship with institutions

Both organizational forms (*Comedores Populares* and *Ollas Comunes*) have managed to develop a relationship with national and municipal institutions that has led to their recognition organizationally and financially.

Nationally, the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion (*Ministerio dello Sviluppo e dell'Inclusione Sociale* - MIDIS), through the Food Integration Program (Programma di Integrazione Alimentare - PCA), coordinates and partially finances the popular canteens (*comedores populares*). Funds are transferred at the municipal level, where authorities use them to purchase food for the canteens. The municipal level also performs the function of supervision over the functioning of the organizations.

Community kitchens also benefit from national funds provided through the Food Integration Program (PCA), but these funds are supplemented by a plurality of other resources, both at the local public level (municipalities) and through actions aimed at collecting donations and economic self-sustenance. However, **the relationship between community kitchens and local public authorities is often conflicting**, with the former engaged—through practices of both social conflict and negotiation—in obtaining the recognition of food as a fundamental human right and, as such, deserving of a specific and adequate budget. Furthermore, **community kitchens claim an additional social role beyond food assistance**, believing, for example, that caring for the children and elderly population is not a goal, but a means to enable the expansion of access to work by the adult population. The combination of these practices makes community kitchens an organization that exceeds the role of simple management of practices to combat food poverty and takes on a political and social function of expanding the rights of the most disadvantaged population.

Conclusion: synthesis and key takeaways

7

From the charitable model to the right to food

The report revealed that food poverty, far beyond the mere lack of economic resources, is a multidimensional condition that requires an approach based on justice and dignity. Although the European Union has taken an important formal step in this direction by integrating FEAD (Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived) into ESF+ (European Social Fund Plus) and reserving at least 3% of resources for material assistance or the inclusion of the most deprived, the comparative analysis of national models (Italy, France, Germany) and the impact of the previous FEAD have shown that assistance has remained predominantly a food support regime (83% of the FEAD budget).

The three analyzed case studies reflect this tension between assistance and right:

- **Berliner Tafel** (Germany): represents a model of civic charity and fight against waste, supported almost exclusively by private donations and volunteering. Its effectiveness in recovering surpluses compensates for an institutional void but poses the limitation of not guaranteeing access to food as a universal right and generating territorial disparities.
- **Hub di aiuto alimentare Cuccagna** (Italy): promotes a model of empowerment and reduction of stigma, operating as a “self-service” recovery micro-district to restore autonomy of choice to users. Although integrated into Milan’s urban food policies, it faces the structural problems of inadequate nutritional quality of traditional aid and dependence on volunteering.
- **Caisse Alimentaire de Montpellier - CAC** (France): this experimentation proposes a radical alternative to the charitable model, adopting a social-rights and mutualistic approach. Through restricted monetary transfers (food currency – *monnaie alimentaire*) and participatory management, it promotes freedom of choice, dignity, and food quality; however, being a very localized pilot, its future development, potential scaling, and concrete impact remain uncertain.



1| Food Hub Cuccagna (Milan, Italy)

2| CAC Montpellier (Montpellier, France)

3| Berliner Tafel (Berlin, Germany)

Underlying logic and philosophy

Empowerment and support for people on their path toward autonomy, **reducing stigma**. Food as a social determinant of health.

Social rights and mutualism. Recognizes the right to dignified food as an integral part of social rights, overcoming a charitable logic.

Combating food waste and poverty through a charitable model. A civic initiative that does not aim to replace the state welfare system.

Governance and funding

Co-design between the Municipality of Milan and the non-profit sector. **Mixed funding** (public/private).

Participatory co-design promoted by local institutions (City and Metropolis) but managed by a Citizens' Food Committee. Food fund financed through **public contributions** and voluntary donations.

Civic and volunteer-based model. **Independent**. Sustained almost entirely by **private donations and sponsorships**. The Berliner Tafel explicitly **refuses public funds** (including ESF+/FEAD) to maintain ethical independence.

Main source of food resources

Mixed sources: donations, Banco Alimentare, recovery of surpluses from large-scale distribution and wholesale markets, direct purchases.

Partner stores where beneficiaries can do their shopping.

Food surpluses and donations.

Distribution/aid mechanism

"Self-service" model, with availability of **fresh products**.

Conditional monetary transfers. Provision of credits (cards or "monnaie alimentaire") to be spent in selected stores, giving full freedom of choice.

Distribution through local centers (e.g., LAIB und SEELE), community canteens, or food parcels.

Food quality and choice

Emphasis on **balanced food baskets** and fresh products

Strong emphasis on quality, with **credits usable only in stores that meet shared standards**.

Availability of healthy and balanced food not guaranteed, as it relies exclusively on food surpluses and donations.

Social inclusion and accompanying measures

Nessuno Escluso ("No One Excluded") program: personalized autonomy plans, listening and guidance services, and job inclusion. Digital monitoring of individual pathways.

Emphasis on **dignity and participation**. Strong component of participatory governance and involvement of beneficiaries as co-creators of the model.

Primary aid remains material, but **includes support programs** for children and adolescents (e.g., KIMBA for food education) and initiatives to prevent social isolation.

Competitive advantage

Reduction of stigma and strong integration with the non-profit sector through a **neighborhood-based model**.

Redesign of food assistance in terms of social rights, **overcoming the logic of charity**.

High efficiency in food recovery: exceptional solidarity infrastructure and civic mobilization to reduce waste.

To overcome structural problems (inadequate quality of aid, stigma, limited coverage, and fragmentation of interventions), the report synthesizes the following proposals for improvement at various levels of intervention.

At the level of community and national governance, the proposals aim to make **ESF+** interventions more effective and systemic:

- **Improve measurement and monitoring:** it is crucial to develop common quantitative indicators to monitor the impact of accompanying measures on the social inclusion and health of beneficiaries, not limiting measurement to counting distributed meals.
- **Strengthen ESF+/assistance complementarity:** synergy between material assistance and socio-professional inclusion pathways financed by the ESF must be increased, actively monitoring how many aid recipients actually transition into reintegration pathways.
- **Institutional Integration:** review the methods of credit allocation and bureaucratic procedures to make them less burdensome but more effective (proposal for France). Nationally, adopt a coordinated national policy against food poverty (Italian proposal) and guarantee tax breaks and legal simplification for donations (German proposal).
- **Evaluation of Vouchers/Food Cards:** structurally evaluate the experimentation of restricted monetary instruments (food vouchers - *chèques alimentaires*) to understand costs, benefits, and operational modalities for their potential integration into the system, as a more dignified alternative to the distribution of standardized parcels.

The infographic on page 74 summarizes the content of the preceding chapters concerning the three countries analyzed (Italy, France and Germany). Below are the country-specific proposals, with a focus on the shift from emergency to a structural framework and improving quality.

For **Italy**, the national proposals concentrate on overcoming fragmentation and establishing a system based on social justice:

- **Adopt a coordinated national policy:** it is necessary to structure a national policy against food poverty that is articulated across different institutional levels and that restores dignity and choice to people, transforming the intervention from emergency-based to structural.

	 Italy  France  Germany		
Degree of institutionalization	  		
System type	Hybrid system (public-private), centralized coordination with strong delegation to the non-profit sector. Centralized national system , strong role of the State, operational role for the non-profit sector. Decentralized system , assistance managed autonomously by a plurality of local actors (non-profit sector).		
National reference authority	Ministry of Labour and Social Policies (MLPS). Directorate-General for Social Cohesion (DGCS) within the Ministry of Solidarity. Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS).		
Role of the third sector	 Very strong and widespread (OpC and OpT); essential for implementation and distribution across the territory (about 10,000 OpT).  Crucial ; only NGOs accredited by DGCS can receive European/national funds.  Central and autonomous (Tafel, Caritas, Diakonie).		
Social integration	  		
Food aid distribution methods	Meal services, distribution of food parcels, solidarity stores/social groceries, street units for homeless people, home delivery for specific cases. Distribution of food parcels, ready meals (social canteens and mobile units), social and solidarity grocery stores (low-price purchases). Free distribution of donations and food surpluses (direct distribution centers, community canteens, food parcels, or collaborations with churches, cooperatives, and other non-profit sector organizations).		

- **Recognize food as a right:** it is necessary to intervene on the deep causes and adopt more effective and inclusive metrics to guide public policies.
- **Improve quality and dignity:** overcome the approach based on surpluses (“leftover food for leftover people”) which reinforces stigma.
- **Guarantee public catering:** recognize school canteens as an essential public service and guarantee universal access, especially in the most disadvantaged territories, given its effectiveness as an instrument of social redistribution.

For **France**, the recommendations aim to overcome bureaucratic rigidity and enhance the quality of aid:

- **Evaluate monetary instruments:** study and evaluate the costs, benefits, and operational modalities of experimentations based on food vouchers or food currency such as the CAC model of Montpellier, for potential structural integration into the system.
- **Improve the quality of aid:** evaluate the sustainability and efficiency of the *Mieux manger pour tous* program, which aims to improve nutritional quality by introducing fresh and organic products.
- **Strengthen governance:** review the accreditation procedures to make them less burdensome and strengthen transparency and control over the destination of funds.
- **Territorial integration:** explicitly integrate the fight against food insecurity into territorial poverty strategies to map supply and identify gaps (“white zones”).

For **Germany**, the proposals focus on strengthening infrastructure and requesting greater state commitment:

- **Guarantee dignified subsistence:** demand that the State guarantee a minimum dignified subsistence level and that minimum wages are above the poverty line, thus reducing pressure on charity.
- **Enhance logistics and infrastructure:** invest in infrastructure (refrigerated vehicles, storage) and digitalization to optimize surplus recovery and inventory, addressing increasing operating costs.
- **Support social inclusion:** finance programs dedicated to vulnerable groups



Strenghts

Extensive solidarity network
Partial transition toward social inclusion

Incentives for surplus recovery (Gadda Law)

Bottom-up innovations (solidarity stores and food hubs)

Public catering

Consolidated and stable structure
Social support and focus on quality (*Mieux manger pour tous*)
Integration of purchases and surplus donation (*Loi Garot*)

Regional subsidy and flexibility
Partial transition toward social inclusion

Civic mobilization

Weaknesses

Increase and “invisibility” of food poverty

Limited coverage

Strong dependence on volunteers

Institutional weakness and lack of structural governance

Inadequate nutritional quality

Lack of dignity

Territorial inequalities

Growing demand and system under pressure

Limited coverage

Strong dependence on volunteers

Complex governance and heavy bureaucracy

Limited nutritional quality

Territorial inequalities

Rigid logistics and centralization

Weak digitalization and monitoring

Demand exceeding supply

Decline or stagnation in food donations

Pressure and limits on volunteers

Imbalance between rising costs and stable funds for the Tafel network

Regional inequalities

Limited assistance beyond food support

(e.g., the KIMBA program for minors) to ensure that material aid is always accompanied by social and cultural measures aimed at preventing isolation.

- **Legal incentives:** introduce tax breaks and legal simplifications for food donations by producers and retailers.

The analysis of the European models (Italy, France, Germany)—which oscillate between bureaucratic institutionalization and dependence on civic charity—finds an important contrast in the **Peruvian experience**. In Peru, where almost four out of ten people suffer from insufficient caloric consumption, the response to food poverty emerges from a high **historical capacity for self-organization and popular participation**. In particular, the recent community kitchens (*ollas comunes*), born as a response to the Covid-19 emergency, exceed the role of simple food assistance. Distinguishing themselves from the more institutionalized popular canteens (*comedores populares*) by their strong mobilization and advocacy, the community kitchens **claim food as a fundamental human right**. They not only distribute food with updated lists but also integrate self-sustenance actions (organic gardens, economic activities) and take on a political and social function, for example, by enabling access to work for adults through the care of the children and elderly population. The Peruvian example highlights how the fight against food poverty can be a vector for expanding rights and co-construction from the bottom up, an approach that critiques and contrasts the assistance-based logic prevalent in high-income countries.

In conclusion, the goal is not only to provide food but to guarantee access to adequate, healthy, and dignified food, **transforming the intervention from a gesture of charity into an act of justice**.

“Three different models of food poverty intervention: Italy, France, Germany,” compares three distinct models of intervention against food poverty revealing how social, institutional and civic traditions shape responses to the right to food. Through a multidimensional lens that links welfare, governance, and community action, it examines European programs such as FEAD and ESF+ alongside grassroots innovations like Milan’s Food Aid Hub, Montpellier’s *Caisse Alimentaire*, *Berliner Tafel* and the Peruvian community kitchens. The study highlights the transition from charitable assistance toward approaches based on dignity, participation, and social justice.

Report available at:

<https://fr.boell.org/it>
www.assesta.it