

European Competence Centre for Social Innovation:
Community of Practice on Material Support

Exploring Diverse Delivery Methods: Distribution of Food and/or Material Assistance and Voucher Systems

Summary report

On-site event, 7–8 May 2025



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1. Background information

1.1 Objectives

The event aimed to facilitate mutual learning among stakeholders involved in the provision of material support under the ESF+ framework. The main objectives were:

- To highlight diverse delivery methods that are being implemented across EU Member States, with particular attention placed on combining direct and indirect support tools.
- To present the Lithuanian approach to material support, including its new voucher and donation-based distribution system.
- To contribute to the development of the upcoming EU Anti-Poverty Strategy by sharing insights and policy recommendations.

1.2 Target group

CoP members and other relevant stakeholders, including:

- EU policymakers and experts from DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion;
- Representatives from Managing Authorities;
- NGOs and civil society organisations working in the field of social inclusion and material support.

1.3 Number of participants

The event welcomed 64 participants.

1.4 Geographical and typology spread

- Participants were registered from the following 18 Member States: AT, BE, BG, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, GR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LV, LT, MT, SI, PT.
- In terms of affiliation, the participants included representatives from various organisations, such as: 12 National Managing Authorities, 3 Regional Managing Authorities, 3 Line Ministries, 7 Implementing Organisations, 2 Intermediate bodies, 12 representatives from NGOs, 10 non-profit organisations, 12 Competence Centres for Social Innovation, 1 EC representative, and 2 other types of organisations.

2. Main findings

2.1 Key outcomes

The event was opened by **Rita Grigalienė**, Vice-Minister at the Ministry of Social Security and Labour of Lithuania, and **Neringa Poškutė**, Head of the European Competence Centre for Social Innovation at the European Social Fund Agency. They both welcomed participants and underscored the relevance of this thematic focus within the broader ESF+ agenda. Their remarks emphasised the need for innovation in the delivery of material support and the importance of knowledge exchange in shaping effective, inclusive strategies.

Material support system in Lithuania

Lithuania's new approach to material support in the framework of the ESF+ was presented by **Auksė Duksienė**, Senior Adviser at the Ministry of Social Security and Labour. Key features include: (1) social cards that offer beneficiaries the flexibility to purchase goods according to their needs, thereby supporting autonomy and dignity; (2) food donations are provided through a strong partnership with the Food Bank, which operates in the majority of municipalities; (3) accompanying measures, including psychological support, training, and community engagement activities. The system operates under a single, multi-annual national project led by the ESFA, involving 62 partners, including municipalities and NGOs. It has a four-year funding framework and clear allocation rules. **Simonas Gurevičius**, Director of the Food Bank, elaborated on the scale and logistics of food donations, highlighting the challenge of rescuing and redistributing surplus food. He advocated for the more systematic engagement of supermarkets in donation efforts, especially given their parallel role as retailers under the voucher scheme. **Brigita Eidukonytė-Galkina**, an aid recipient and volunteer at the Food Bank, shared her lived experience. She spoke about the importance of the support she received as she called for an increase in the amount provided. **Skaistė Čiurlytė-Danilevičienė**, Head of the Kaunas Branch of the Lithuanian Red Cross, presented their involvement in delivering accompanying measures, emphasising activities related to psychosocial support and local outreach. She stressed the importance of tailoring these measures to the needs of the community needs and the role of trained volunteers in facilitating participation and trust-building among beneficiaries.

Diverse approaches to the provision of material support

Dr **Jekaterina Navickė**, Associate Professor at Vilnius University, followed with a keynote speech 'In-Cash, In-Kind, or Something Else?'. She provided theoretical and empirical insights into poverty and support systems, arguing for a multidimensional, person-centred approach that acknowledges the social implications of different aid modalities.

The panel discussion brought together experts from Member States, civil society, and EU institutions to discuss the implementation and evolution of material support systems across Europe. **Ingrid Mangulson**, Grants Development Expert at the FEAD Managing Authority in Estonia, presented Estonia's voucher-based model, outlining its benefits and challenges, particularly with regard to rural accessibility and the adequacy of support. **Romolo de Camillis**, Director General at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies of Italy, described Italy's mixed approach of combining direct food distribution with vouchers, implemented through a large national network of NGOs. **Eimear Delahunty**, Head of Community Development at FoodCloud, Ireland, outlined a model based on surplus food that operates through an established network of charities, highlighting its integration with holistic services. **Kinga Albert**, Social Inclusion Officer at the Red Cross EU Office in Belgium, acknowledged the vital role of the ESF+, but also stressed that food aid is fundamentally a symptom of deeper structural problems. **Simona Pulbere**, Policy Officer for ESF+ and Cohesion Policy at the European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, reaffirmed the EU's ongoing support for material aid within the ESF+ and highlighted the significance of partnerships and accompanying measures in increasing programme impact.

As part of the programme, participants visited **Food Bank facilities in Vilnius and Kaunas**. Divided into two groups, attendees were introduced to the full scope of the Food Bank's activities in Lithuania, including the logistics of food distribution, the operation of social supermarkets, and the implementation of accompanying measures. The visits provided a first-hand look at the infrastructure, volunteer engagement, and practical challenges of running a nationwide food support network.

Enhancing participation

On the second day, **Rimgailė Baltutė**, Lead Thematic Expert of the Community of Practice on Material Support, presented the Recommendation Paper 'Strengthening End Beneficiary Participation in Material Support Interventions'. The session underscored the importance of involving people experiencing poverty in programme design, planning, implementation, and evaluation of material support programmes. Practical suggestions included embedding structured participation mechanisms, fostering close cooperation with NGOs, tackling access barriers such as digital exclusion and stigma, and ensuring adequate funding and capacity to support meaningful engagement.

Insights on shaping the first-ever EU Anti-Poverty Strategy

Jessica Machacova, Senior Policy & Advocacy Officer at the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), presented EAPN's proposals for the upcoming EU Anti-Poverty Strategy (APS). Key proposals included embedding the participation of people experiencing poverty, establishing measurable targets, and linking the APS to the Multiannual Financial Framework.

Following this, **Rimgailė Baltutė**, Lead Thematic Expert of the CoP on Material Support, provided an overview of the initial discussions held within the CoP and other forums on shaping the APS. She highlighted recurring themes such as the role of material support, the need for inclusive governance, and the importance of aligning national policies with EU-level commitments. This laid the groundwork for further discussion and contributions from participants.

In the final session, participants engaged in a structured workshop to discuss how material support and the fight against material deprivation could be effectively reflected in the forthcoming EU Anti-Poverty Strategy. The outcomes of the workshop can be found in the Annex 3.

2.2 Participant feedback during the event

The feedback from participants during the event was consistently positive. Attendees expressed strong appreciation for the opportunity to engage directly with the practical and strategic dimensions of material support. Several common themes emerged:

- Recognition of Lithuania's system as a valuable example of innovation in combining social cards, food donations, and accompanying measures.
- High interest in comparative approaches, with many participants welcoming the diversity of models presented during the panel discussion and calling for continued exchange on effective practices in different national contexts.
- Strong support for enhancing participation, particularly including lived experience in programme cycles.
- Value for practical site visits, which provided concrete insights into the implementation of food support, logistical operations, and volunteer engagement.

2.3 Impact

- Enhanced mutual learning by exchanging national experiences, in particular the Lithuanian model and comparative insights from other Member States.
- Strengthened commitment to participation, emphasising the integration of the voices of people experiencing poverty at all stages of support programmes.
- Concrete input was gathered to inform the forthcoming Recommendation Paper on the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, reinforcing the strategic relevance of material support.

3. Lessons learned

The event effectively combined strategic discussions, academic insights, and on-the-ground practices, offering participants a comprehensive overview of material support systems under ESF+. The Lithuanian model and the site visits stood out as particular highlights. The interactive nature of the sessions fostered meaningful exchanges, with the presence of lived experience being widely acknowledged as having an impact. Suggestions for future events included providing more opportunities for direct interaction with service users, increasing the use of smaller, thematic discussions and ensuring sufficient time for practical engagement.

4. Next steps

4.1 Follow-up actions

The outcomes of the interactive workshop on the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy will be consolidated and included in the forthcoming Recommendation Paper within the Community of Practice.

4.2 Future events 2025

- October: Social Innovation Forum
- November: Follow-up on-site event with the CoPs on Employment, Education and Skills, and Migrant Integration
- December: Online wrap-up meeting

Annexes

- Annex 1: [Agenda of the event](#)
- Annex 2: [Presentations of the event](#)
- Annex 3: Key findings from the interactive workshop on the EU APS

