Fighting poverty: Commission commits €3.8 billion to help the most vulnerable in Europe

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The European Commission has adopted the last remaining national Operational Programmes for the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived for 2014-2020. In total this is worth €3.8 billion in assistance to 4 million of the people most in need in the EU.

The Fund supports Member States in their efforts to help Europe's most vulnerable people: those who have been worst affected by the on-going economic and social crisis. Through non-financial assistance, the Fund will help alleviate the worst forms of material deprivation and will make a significant contribution in the fight against poverty.

Commenting on the adoption of the final programmes, Marianne Thyssen, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, said: "The Fund supports people in taking their first steps out of poverty and social exclusion. Around 4 million of the most materially deprived people in Europe will benefit from the immediate assistance of the Fund. This is a strong symbol of EU solidarity."

The Fund focuses on material assistance to those suffering the worst forms of poverty - including food deprivation, homelessness, and material deprivation of children - and can help strengthen social cohesion. The assistance provided by the Fund can include food, clothing and other essential goods for personal use (such as shoes and soap) as well as actions that encourage social integration.

Background

In 2013, 122.6 million people in the EU - 24.5% of the population - were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. 9.6% of the population were severely materially deprived.

The European Union’s main instrument to support employability, fight poverty and promote social inclusion is the European Social Fund (ESF). This financial instrument, worth over €86 billion in 2014-2020, invests directly in people’s skills to improve their chances on the job market. Yet some of the most vulnerable citizens suffering from extreme forms of poverty are too far away from the labour market to benefit from the social inclusion measures supported by the ESF.

Launched in 2014, the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) will ensure that these people also benefit from European solidarity, and will complement existing social cohesion instruments. The FEAD, worth €3.8 billion in real terms from 2014 to 2020, aims to break the vicious circle of poverty and deprivation by providing non-financial assistance to some of the EU’s most vulnerable citizens.

Although competencies for the fight against poverty lie mainly with Member States, the EU can play a supporting role, in particular through the Europe 2020 Strategy. The ESF and the FEAD contribute to the Europe 2020 target of reducing the number of people in, or at risk of, poverty and social exclusion by at least 20 million by 2020.

The FEAD offers considerable flexibility to Member States. Each Member State has defined the target group of ‘most deprived persons’ in its national Operational Programme. Member States have also chosen the type of material assistance they wish to provide (food or basic goods or a combination of both), and their preferred model for procuring and distributing the food and goods, according to their own situation and preferences.

The FEAD replaces the EU’s Food Distribution Programme for the Most Deprived People (MDP). Set up in 1987, this Programme was an important source for organisations working in direct contact with the least fortunate people, providing them with food. It was created to make good use of the agricultural surpluses which existed at the time. With the expected depletion of intervention stocks and their high unpredictability over the period 2011-2020 as a consequence of successive reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy, the MDP was discontinued at the end of 2013.

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