

Research paper proposal for stream B.2: Voluntary work as substitute for state responsibility

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The paper I would like to present will deal with the evaluation of the Belgian food aid programme in the context of the 'Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived' (FEAD).¹ In my presentation I would like to focus on the issue of transferring responsibility to volunteers at local food distribution points regarding the identification of the persons entitled to receive FEAD food aid.

FEAD, launched in 2014, appears to be a unique case of a united anti-poverty programme with redistributive mechanisms. The fund aims to help people take their first steps out of poverty. It supports local programmes and initiatives providing nonfinancial assistance and social reintegration measures. EU Member States and their national managing authorities can decide upon the types of assistance. But in the end, local social initiatives and non-governmental organisations based on volunteers are the main actors arranging provision of the assistance. Thereby, regarding the field of action, FEAD is bypassing the national level of social protection systems and directly affecting the sphere of voluntary social work.

In Belgium, the FEAD budget (88,2 million euro for the period 2014-2020) is entirely used for food aid provided by food banks and other small organizations substantially supported by volunteers. Taking into account the EU requirement to provide FEAD aid to people below the national at-risk-of-poverty threshold (at 60% of national median equivalised disposable household income) Public Welfare Centers (PWC) and recognized organisations identify the most deprived persons. This is often done by volunteers. Furthermore, PWC and recognized organisations may also have more 'rules' regarding the identification of the most deprived persons. This means a) that a great responsibility is transferred to the volunteers and b) that there are different criteria for receiving FEAD assistance. How do organisations and particularly volunteers deal with this responsibility? Are there harmonized procedures within an organisation (and/or between different organisations) as well as instructions for the volunteers in order to support the volunteers and also to guarantee control?

Based on the results of the evaluation of the Belgian FEAD programme, I will try to answer these questions.

¹ The paper will be based on the Working Paper "Europe as agent that fills the gaps? The case of FEAD" by Greiss et al., 2019 (<http://www.centrumvoorsociaalbeleid.be/sites/default/files/CSBWorkingPaper1903.pdf>), and particularly, on the evaluation of the Belgian FEAD programme. The FEAD managing authority in Belgium, the federal Public Planning Service Social Integration, commissioned the Center for Social Policy Herman Deleeck to carry out the evaluation of their operational programme. Under the direction of prof. Bea Cantillon I am conducting the evaluation in cooperation with two other researchers. At the moment of writing the evaluation the is still ongoing and will be finished by the end of December 2019.