

**An academic perspective on
support systems for the most
deprived.**

**Elements for an alternative
approach?**

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Key topics in this presentation

- Identifying and reaching out to beneficiaries
 - Types of thresholds/barriers
 - Factors that might help to overcome thresholds
- The context of food & material aid
 - Social activities connected with food & material aid
 - The importance of perspectives
 - Criteria for effective policies & governance
- But first: some thoughts about Fead's approach, based on statements

Feed support: statements - 2

- Twofold target
 - helping ‘the most deprived people’: **individual** approach
 - ‘to alleviate the worst forms of poverty’: more **structural** approach
- By **providing**:
 - **non-financial assistance** in the form of food and/or basic material assistance
 - social inclusion **activities** aiming at their **social integration**
- **Relation** between social inclusion measures & material aid
 - ‘Material assistance needs to go **hand in hand** with social inclusion measures, such as guidance and support to help people out of poverty’.
 - ‘National authorities may **also support non-material assistance** to the most deprived people, to help them integrate better into society’.
 - *(Third option) Focus on social inclusion matters, supported by material assistance.*

Fead support: statements - 2

- The **overall objective**: ‘to promote **social cohesion**, enhance **social inclusion** - *therefore* contribute to eradicating poverty’
 - However: strong forms of social cohesion (e.g. within communities, neighbourhoods, subcultures) might imply or lead to social exclusion
- Relation with the **ESF**: ‘**precondition** for them to be able to get a job or follow a training course’
 - However: there is a big gap between the basis aid provided by Fead and the capacities needed to participate in training & labour market. How to bridge the gap?
- ‘**In accordance with the Europe 2020 strategy**’ – is this connection taken up at the member state level?

Food poverty: most basic element

- Main common features in definitions of food poverty:
 - Access: spatial, economic, social, cultural thresholds
 - Quality: nutritious, healthy
 - Quantity: adequate
 - Duration: urgent need or/and start to enter a trajectory
 - Social context: socially acceptable
- Food poverty is the inability of individuals and households to obtain an **adequate and nutritious** diet, often because they cannot afford **healthy food** or there is a lack of shops in their **area** that are easy to reach.
- Food poverty is the insufficient **economic access** to an adequate quantity and quality of food to maintain a **nutritionally satisfactory and socially acceptable diet**.
- In general: also applicable to 'material poverty'

Who are the hardest to reach? - 1

- Definition of 'the most deprived': **statistical** (only 'monetary poverty' or the broader AROPE which includes severe material deprivation and work intensity).
- **High-risk categories**: children, older people, single parents (especially women), large families
- **'Spatial'** differences:
 - Between member states: highest risk in Bulgaria, Romania and Greece; lowest risk in Czech Republic, Sweden, the Netherlands and Finland
 - But also between urban and rural areas, between urban neighbourhoods
 - Differences not only in number, but also in **type**
 - **The lower the poverty line** (the stricter the criteria), the more 'marginal' the population groups
 - Excluded groups facing higher poverty risk: Roma, migrants, people with disabilities, homeless
- Changes over **time**
 - Differences between member states: increases in Greece, Spain, Italy; highest decreases in Poland, Romania and Bulgaria.
 - Increase of some types of most deprived: single parents, newcomers, ...

Who are the hardest to reach? - 2

- **Institutional** definition: entitlement to minimum benefits (guaranteed income)
- Definition by social and other field **workers**
- Those in the margin of **social networks**
 - Those with only 'strong ties' (emotional) and no or very few 'weak ties' (instrumental, reaching further into society)
- Hardest to reach: the **isolated** ones
 - Those **outside** any network (**social** isolation)
 - Those '**included**' in specific groups or cultures (**cultural** isolation)
 - Those who have **internalised** feelings of failure, have accepted their marginal position (**psychological** isolation)

Reaching out

- Which groups are **under-represented** in the national & local initiatives ?
- How **diverse** is the target population? **Specific methods** are needed because of each subgroup's specific problems and needs (migrants, illiterate, low-skilled people, (long-term) unemployed, (ex-)offenders, drug users, people with mental health problems)
- **Active involvement** of the target group in the development of alternative approaches - including their **voice**, knowledge and understanding - will
 - contribute to the **effectiveness and the quality of aid**
 - increase the **credibility** of the providers
 - increase the **willingness** of the target group to participate
 - help to reach under-represented groups
 - **empower** them

Types of thresholds/barriers - 1

- **Legal** thresholds: lack of entitlement to the services or the benefits, whether or not one is eligible.
 - Not all individuals that are in a situation for which a service has been established are also automatically eligible.
- **Situational** thresholds on the side of the service and of the client, and as a result of (inadequate) communication between both.
 - On the side of the **service**: service providers can come across as a kind of **scarecrows** (more formally: 'gate keepers').
 - On the side of the **client**: concrete conditions in one's life at a given moment, such as the lack of child day care or a divorce, illness.
 - The third type may pertain to the **absence of appropriate means** of communication or transportation or to **stereotyping** (see perspectives)

Types of thresholds/barriers - 2

- **Informative** thresholds: **not knowing** one's rights, unawareness of what is being offered and available, or being wrongly informed about it.
- **Dispositional** thresholds, based on attitudes and perceptions: not experiencing the **need** for a service/benefit or **refusal** to apply for, or accept, some form of assistance to which one is entitled (fear of **stigmatisation**).
- **Institutional** thresholds: the circumstances and procedures on the supply side that exclude, or discourage, potential recipients from participation, such as the physical (in)accessibility of the service, how the service is provided (opening hours, language proficiency)
- **Financial** barriers, lacking financial resources.
- **Structural** barriers resulting from insufficient investment and leading to insufficient economic, social, cultural provisions (health care, social housing, education)

The context: common features

- It should be **more than** just providing food & material help.
- In order to be successful, it needs to **take account of the context** (apart from the impact of good management and other specific factors)
 - **Part of a complex** of situations and problems, policies and actions
 - **Cultural** dimension: food is more than calories (e.g. religious prescriptions)
 - Eating is a social, that is a **relational, activity**
- **Discussing** material help **with (local) partners (including the target group)** could lead to a broader view on what has to be done to combat poverty.
- Food & material aid should be **the first step** to a more structural approach.
- → Which perspective on poverty (explicit or implicit)?

Six perspectives

	Internal cause	External cause
Individual (micro)	Deficiency perspective (‘blaming the victim’)	Social accident perspective (‘accidents happen’ – different exposure to risk?)
Meso (Institutional)	Institutional deficiency (physical, social, cultural and personal thresholds)	Social status of institution (Stigmatisation of social service)
Macro (society)	Structural model (how society is organised)	Cyclical model (rapid social change, economic cycles)

Key issues for policy makers

- What is their aim?
- Physical **survival** (avoiding starvation)
- **Humanitarian** concerns: 'warm' solidarity (often inspired by religious values), charity
- **Fear** of a new 'dangerous class' (precariat, see Guy Standing)
- **Active labour market participation**
- Reducing costs of existing **welfare state programmes** (replacing the **institutional model** of social policy with a **residual approach**)
- **Citizenship**: promoting fundamental social rights (→ European Social Charter)
- Concern for the **future**: children in poverty (no contribution to society in later life, becoming a burden in stead).

Key issues for social & field workers

- Which **type of relation** with their clients' (beneficiaries) exists?
- Depending on: **professional** framework, organisation culture
- **Participation in organisational** network?
- Type of collaboration with **volunteers**?

Which kind of relation between social worker and client?

Alienating	Promoting autonomy
Distant relation - focus on status differences	Close relation, relation of trust – care provider behaves as 'human' partner
Bureaucratic relation – organisational concerns dominate	Personalised relation – focus on the person, 'tailored' provision
Paternalistic relation – taking over responsibility – 'passive participation' that increases dependence	Emancipatory relation – strengthening of self-image, empowering

From Driessens, K. (2003)

Key issues for target groups?

- **Participation based on economic rationality:** more leeway for non-food expenditure
- Trying to 'meet ends' isn't necessarily rational behaviour
 - Economic rationality versus **social rationality**
 - **To avoid stigmatisation** & further exclusion; to foster chances on inclusion
 - **Coping strategies:** obesity, like smoking or alcoholism, often is one of the results of a strong stress situation (and of optimal intake of calories)
- **Instrumental support** (a job, education) does not suffice
 - Integration in **networks**
 - **Emotional** support
- Food (and material) aid is accepted 'under protest'

Some good practices

- Food banks?
- Poverty associations
- Social groceries
- ‘Eating houses’
- Participation in food provision: transport...
- Healthy eating habits, workshops
- In ‘social economy’ two types of clients mix: 'beneficiaries' accessing mainly food charity stock and 'solidarity clients' attracted by (organic) food sold at fair but full market price to them. Both evolve in the same space the one providing better margin to the shop that are reinvested in giving to the other a discount on organic and fresh food. → ‘meeting places’

Some suggestions

- Providers should build up a **network of cooperation** with other organisations and institutions, which are not automatically involved in the provision of food and material aid **but which help** in identifying and reaching the target populations
- Services that are in direct contact with disadvantaged groups **know** about their specific problems and needs, and can help to reach out: community centres, mental health institutions, grass-root organisations, social services.
- **Integrated accessibility** therefore relates to the capacity of the service providers to:
 - reaching target groups in the **right places**;
 - conducting appropriate, meaningful **communication**;
 - **tapping into their world** and into the conditions in which they live (e.g., through physical proximity in neighbourhoods and districts)
 - engaging '**para-professionals**' with a personal experience of poverty & exclusion.

Checklist: effectivity of poverty policies and a governance model

- **Governance model**
 - Multi-actor
 - Multidimensional
 - Multilevel
 - Well-informed (cross-cutting)
 - Long-term
 - Preventative
 - Structural
 - Bottom-up ('ladder of participation')
- **Traditional model**
 - Single actor
 - Unidimensional
 - Single level
 - Intuitive
 - Short-term
 - Curative
 - Individual
 - Top-down

A European framework for effective poverty policies

- The 'active inclusion' approach is by far the best model developed at the European level
- See Recommendation 2008/867/EC of 3 October 2008 on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market.
- It consists basically of a combination of three strands:
 - Adequate income support
 - Inclusive labour markets
 - Access to quality services
- Can the FEAD strand be integrated into this approach?