



# ECHOP

European Cooperation to Help leaders of food aid organizations and Offering Precarious better food choice

## WHITE PAPER

Ensuring Access to Quality Food for All





## Partners

This transnational project brings together four partners from three countries :

**Active, Pôle de l'économie solidaire (France)**, has been a key actor in the Social and Solidarity Economy for 26 years. For more than a decade, Active has supported initiatives aimed at ensuring access to quality food regular, sufficient, and nutritious for people facing precarious living conditions.

**POUR LA SOLIDARITÉ-PLS (Belgium)**, an independent European think & do tank, is committed to building a fair and sustainable Europe. PLS advocates for the protection and reinforcement of the European social model, balancing economic development with social justice.

**Perspectiv' (Belgium)**, a non-profit independent of any religious, philosophical, or political affiliation, provides tailored support and assistance to individuals experiencing poverty, particularly through food aid. The association also develops and supports projects tackling food insecurity in Comines-Warneton (Wallonie picarde).

**CEPS (Spain)**, specializes in the management and implementation of socio educational programs for children, young people, and adults, lifelong professional training, and innovative research and development especially through the successful delivery of European projects.



# Introduction



In 2024, **8.5% of EU residents were unable to afford a balanced meal including meat, fish, or a vegetarian equivalent** every other day<sup>1</sup>. This represents 36 million people across the Union, primarily single individuals, students and young adults, low income families, and migrants.

Food insecurity is particularly acute in Eastern Europe, in countries such as Bulgaria (18.7% of the population) or Slovakia (17.1%), but it is also visible in stronger economies such as Germany (11.2%), France (10.2%), or Italy (9.9%). The energy crisis that followed Russia's invasion of Ukraine triggered soaring food inflation, which in March 2023 reached a record peak of 19.2% within the Union<sup>2</sup>.

Over the years, food aid has become a **structural response** to food insecurity.

Yet, it continues to receive insufficient public support relative to the scale of the challenges it faces, with the sector confronted by a growing number of difficulties:

- **A significant decline** in supplies available to food aid organizations, particularly from large and medium-sized retailers;
- A parallel **increase in both the number and diversity of people in need, as a consequence of recent social crises**;
- **A steady decline in volunteer engagement**, which mirrors wider challenges facing the non-profit sector;
- **The obligation, for certain actors, to reduce the size and nutritional value of food parcels** distributed as a result of the factors mentioned above;
- **Persistent fragmentation across Member States**, where the diversity of actors and target groups hampers the effective allocation of public resources intended to fight hunger.

This situation is unsustainable. The 2024 report of the “**Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture**”, chaired by Professor Strohschneider and bringing together thirty key stakeholders, highlighted the urgent need for action, calling for cooperation and dialogue along the entire food value chain in order to rethink the Union’s food policy

As the report noted, **recent geopolitical tensions have exposed the fragility of our supply systems** and underlined the strategic importance of food and agricultural production as a key component of European security. It pointed to the need to encourage more local consumption to secure production capacity.

**Health and energy crises, along with food inflation, have deepened citizens’ struggles to maintain a decent standard of living.** Meanwhile, the climate emergency compels us to give greater priority to sustainable food systems that are environmentally respectful and rooted in local territories.

The multiple social and economic tensions we are experiencing demand a **paradigm shift** one that places at its heart the **right to quality food for all**. This right is a vital necessity in the truest sense, as research has clearly established the correlation between financial insecurity, malnutrition, adverse health outcomes, and reduced life expectancy.

At the other end of the food chain, the right to food must also be accompanied by **the right of farmers to financial stability and fair remuneration**.







# Recommendations

1

**Promote the right to food for all within the European Union, enabling citizens to reclaim food as a public and political issue**

The right to food does not currently appear in the constitution of any EU Member State, nor is it included in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

Yet momentum is building: in its resolution of 14 June 2023, based on the Mortler report and entitled “Ensuring food security and the long-term resilience of EU agriculture”<sup>3</sup>, the European Parliament emphasized that the right to food is recognized under international law and forms part of the right to an adequate standard of living. It called on the Commission “to present without delay a comprehensive strategic plan to guarantee the Union’s food security.” In September 2024, the new European Commission chose to add “food” to the title of the Commissioner for Agriculture. In October 2024, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe recommended that Member States adopt national framework laws enshrining the right to food (Resolution 2577). In July 2025, the Commission approved the European Citizens’ Initiative (ECI) **“Food is a human right for all! Guarantee healthy, fair and sustainable food systems”**, recognizing that its objectives fall within EU competences.

## We therefore recommend:

1. **Recognizing the right to food in the European foundations** of social and fundamental rights;
2. **Operationalizing the integration of the right to food into EU policies** and national legal frameworks, including the adoption of national framework laws to make it effective;
3. Promoting the dissemination of the ECI **“Food is a human right for all! Guarantee healthy, fair and sustainable food systems”** and ensuring a democratic debate on these issues.

## 2

### Support the development of new models of food aid through stronger backing for the social and solidarity economy (SSE) at EU level

After several years of tangible support from European institutions for the development of the social and solidarity economy, sector actors now fear a reversal of this trend.

After several years of tangible support from European institutions for the development of the social and solidarity economy (SSE), sector actors now fear a withdrawal of this commitment. Yet, to ensure the emergence of a fairer, more local, and more sustainable European food system, the development of SSE structures that promote alternative food models is an absolute prerequisite.

In this mid-term review year of the Social Economy Action Plan, several warning signals have emerged: the dissolution of the SSE unit within DG GROW and the exclusive transfer of this portfolio to DG EMPL; or the European Commission's proposal to merge various social funding lines into "single national and regional partnership funds" under the future EU budget (MFF 2028–2034), raising concerns among SSE actors about a reduction in institutional support.

It should be recalled that the European Parliament had already taken a firm stance in February 2025<sup>4</sup>, by a two-thirds majority, in favor of maintaining the ESF+ as the main instrument supporting a Social Europe—an opinion shared by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)<sup>5</sup>.

#### We therefore recommend:

1. **Supporting the emergence of food aid actors** with hybrid economic models such as social and solidarity grocery stores, which complement emergency food aid;
2. **Strengthening, in view of the upcoming revision of EU public procurement rules, dedicated funding for SSE structures** particularly through the systematic introduction of social criteria and the encouragement of local sourcing in public procurement procedures, as recommended in the European Parliament resolution adopted on 9 September 2025 (2024/2103(INI))<sup>6</sup>;
3. **Opposing the merger of social funding lines into single national and regional partnership funds**, by defending specific and distinct European funds that safeguard support for civil society initiatives—or, failing that, securing ringfenced minimum amounts for social measures.

## Support the diversification of supply chains and the economic transition of food aid structures by strengthening synergies with the agricultural sector, SSE actors, and European institutions

At the crossroads of agricultural policy (a shared competence between the EU and Member States), public health (a supporting competence), social policy (primarily a Member State competence), and trade (an exclusive EU competence), food and food aid are highly strategic issues. However, this institutional fragmentation leads to dispersed responsibilities and hinders the development of effective policies grounded in a clear and ambitious vision. To respond to the social emergency and lay the foundations for the effective implementation of the right to food at European level, it is essential to strengthen cooperation between these policy areas and among the multiple institutional actors involved. The appointment of Christophe Hansen as Commissioner for Agriculture and Food—an evolution from the former title “**Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development**” signals an encouraging institutional recognition of the need to consider the entire food chain, from production to consumption.

### We therefore recommend:

1. Establishing, as encouraged in the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture (2024), institutional mechanisms such as **demand side policies** for example, the School Scheme, which addresses nutritional challenges while steering agricultural production toward more sustainable models. These measures would improve horizontal coordination of food policies and reinforce the coherence and impact of EU action in this field.
2. Encouraging synergies between ESF+ and CAP funds to foster “**win win**” relationships between food aid organizations and farmers for instance, by including in public procurement a minimum quota of goods sourced from local producers, as recommended by the Draghi report and endorsed in the European Parliament’s resolution on public procurement (9 September 2025)<sup>7</sup>, ahead of the forthcoming revision of the EU Public Procurement Directive.

3. Improving the resilience of food systems by promoting the emergence **of local food ecosystems driven by the social economy and oriented toward communities**. This includes agricultural cooperatives, cooperative grocery stores, local platforms connecting producers and associations, logistics networks, and local markets. Such initiatives would strengthen ties between civil society, farmers, and citizens, following the model of *Projet Alimentaire Territorial (PAT)* in France, which brings together territorial actors around food issues by integrating social, environmental, economic, and health dimensions.
4. Facilitating access for collective projects to **CAP investment support**, in order to develop processing facilities (e.g. vegetable preparation units, refrigerated cutting rooms) that maximize the value of surplus donations to food aid organizations. At the same time, introducing incentives for partnerships around gleaning activities or farmer-to-farmer mutual aid systems.
5. Reinforcing **European food resilience in both peace and crisis times**, as proposed in the Niinistö report (2024)<sup>8</sup>. This includes ensuring the continuous supply of food aid organizations during major food system crises, for example by creating national and possibly European food reserves, diversifying sources of supply, and building strong partnerships across the sector. In peacetime, surplus food from strategic reserves nearing expiration could be redirected to food banks and other food aid structures.
6. To integrate **the fisheries sector into the common withdrawal mechanisms** supporting agriculture, in order to ensure genuine equity, protect fisheries actors, and strengthen European food security



Despite fragmentation at EU level, Member States retain scope at the national level to take the initiative and implement ambitious food projects. Regional momentum observed both within and outside the EU—in Lombardy, Wallonia, or the Canton of Geneva—can inspire Member States to advance toward recognizing the right to food for all. Even without constitutional change, States can contribute to this effort by improving the effectiveness of their national food aid policies and drawing on best practices already implemented elsewhere.

### **We therefore recommend:**

1. Encouraging **food donations and other forms of redistribution for human consumption**, as outlined in the 2024 EU Waste Directive, drawing inspiration from positive models such as France and Italy;
2. **To move towards the removal of fiscal barriers to food donations;**
3. Supporting **shared procurement and pooling practices** among food aid actors, such as the Soli-Food initiative in Belgium;
4. Developing a **clear mapping of national food aid actors** (headquarters, territorial levels, target groups, etc.) to provide visibility in a complex sector;
5. Organizing **national consultations** on enshrining the right to food in national legislation, ensuring the active participation of beneficiaries and stakeholders, and fostering co-created food aid models aligned with real needs;
6. Promoting **mutual support between food aid actors and the agricultural world**, notably through training and mentoring schemes for organizations wishing to engage in food production, as well as human resource support for farmers;
7. Supporting **regulatory frameworks that enable local authorities to acquire farmland or farms seeking succession**, thereby fostering agricultural production by food aid and SSE actors involved in social reintegration or farm incubator projects. A positive example is the droit de préemption urbain in France, which enabled the municipality of Mouans-Sartoux in 2005 to create a municipal agricultural service supplying school canteens with local and organic produce <sup>9</sup>.

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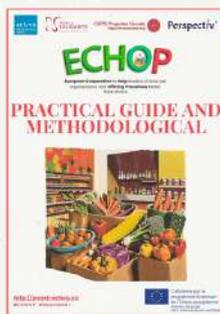
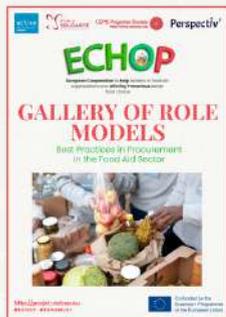
*The preparation of this report would not have been possible without the invaluable contributions of the individuals and organizations who generously shared their experiences and best practices.*

*The ECHOP project partners would like to express their sincere gratitude to all those who participated in this work: your active participation enabled us to gather essential information to strengthen the skills of leaders of food aid organizations, to encourage the diversification of their supply and improve accessibility and quality of food supplies provided to the most vulnerable populations.*

*We sincerely thank you.*

*The four deliverables of the project are presented below.*

Find our other deliverables on : <https://projet-echop.eu/en/deliverables/>



CEPS Projectes Socials  
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