

Eurocities Working Group Food policy brief

# Food Aid in European cities

March 2021

## Abstract

The first Working Group Food meeting of 2021 was held online in March and it was the occasion to launch an innovative topic for the group, as well as to share a general update on the foreseen activities for the upcoming year.

The meeting was attended by 76 officers from 46 cities from 14 countries, connected to hear and learn from other fellow cities about significant food responses for urban contexts hit by the pandemic.

Other cities, however, are just laying the groundwork. But the new-found interest in food aid is clear: 60% of attendees at the meeting were newcomers to the Working Group Food.

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#FoodAid

#MUFPP

[eurocities.eu](https://eurocities.eu)

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# Looking beyond food banks

## WG Food meeting on 5th March 2021 food aid

A representative from **Madrid's** Department for Families, Equality and Social Welfare presented the city's strategy for food aid to food policy officers from cities across Europe, but one figure in particular turned some heads. The Spanish capital is investing €51 million in food aid. For many cities, this is a figure they could only dream of. But it shows that Madrid is serious about tackling food insecurity worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic.

During the long lockdown from March to June 2020, Madrid launched multiple complementary responses to help vulnerable families in need. A flagship initiative from the city is the "family card". This economic aid is a prepaid credit card that ensures the aid granted to vulnerable families ranging from €125 to €630, depending on the size and income of the family. It's a non-stigmatising response, and its appearance and function are similar to that of an ordinary bank card.

The family card is just an example of an approach to food aid that is centred on dignity, an approach that is becoming increasingly popular among city governments looking for solutions in the wake of the pandemic that has worsened an already dire situation of food poverty.

"Even though food poverty is most visible in relation to food banks, we also need to recognise that it's a very small minority of people experiencing food poverty that make use of emergency food aid projects," Paul Millbourne, Professor of Human Geography at **Cardiff University**, told attendees. Society is faced with a landscape where 'food poverty' is not a clear-cut issue, ranging from parents skipping meals to feed children to people never eating at a restaurant socially due to budget constraints. According to Millbourne, this has led to a situation where food poverty is not considered in political terms. Food aid solutions like food banks have become normalised. Across Europe, initiatives like Madrid's are popping up that seek to break this unconscious association and build on the existing work of food banks to form community-based and dignified responses to food poverty.

Some cities working under the framework of the **Milan Urban Food Policy Pact** (MUFPP) and with well-established experience in food policy, like Milan itself,

have a wide-ranging, integrated plan. As part of the actions put in place against food poverty in 2020 **Milan** opened 10 temporary food hubs, dedicated to supporting food access for 20,000 people during the lockdown. The Food Policy Office and the Social Affairs Department improved the connections and organised different actions during the lockdown and now they are establishing a new food aid local agenda for this new phase, mapping all the food aid infrastructure, measures and different approaches to enhance new solutions.

Larger capital cities at the meeting have been the first to see a need for food aid. In **Paris**, charities have noticed a 25% increase in people seeking food aid, with migrants, homeless people and students at risk, but also families suffering from the effects of the pandemic. That's why the city has undertaken several initiatives, including food distribution, economic aid to low-income families and the development of shared kitchens and community restaurants providing healthy meals to vulnerable people. Now, the French capital will look to carry out a food aid mapping with the aim of fighting so-called 'food slums'.

Opened in September last year, **Glasgow's** Food Pantry offers surplus food and produce to customers at reduced prices and takes inspiration from similar models in Europe. Anyone who wishes to use the pantry can do so by paying £2.50 to get £15-worth of food, with individual items not bearing prices. Since its opening, the Pantry has proved hugely successful. And with the coronavirus pandemic worsening food-related poverty in the UK's most deprived areas, the Pantry is a lifeline for the Ruchazie neighborhood. "You're not coming here because you can't afford to shop anywhere else, you're coming here because it's good to come here" said Councillor Mandy Morgan, who helped with the establishment of the Pantry. Originally set to open in April 2020, the Pantry was planned pre-pandemic to tackle already-critical food-related issues in one of Scotland's most deprived neighbourhoods. It taps into the estimated 250,000 tonnes of edible surplus food in the UK and provides a key service to the neighbourhood that goes beyond a conventional food bank.

But smaller cities have also needed fresh approaches to food aid. In the first wave of the pandemic, **Riga** expected that this situation would last just two or three months. But as the crisis dragged on, the Riga city council considered its options, a direct food delivery to families or a more digital solution.

The city of Riga very quickly switched to a digital solution because of several advantages. The chosen method was providing aid via the gift cards of well-known supermarket chains in the city, which made use of existing infrastructure – vital in a time of crisis. What’s more, the card could be adjusted to the city’s needs, restricting its use to essential items and banning its use to buy alcohol and tobacco.

And importantly, it also provided a dignified response – it was benign and identical to a regular bank card, meaning that people would not feel stigmatised by using it.

The theme of dignity in food aid is one that ran through all the responses shared at the Working Group Food. With the pandemic far from over and food insecurity more present than ever, moving beyond emergency food aid is a crucial challenge to meet in the future.



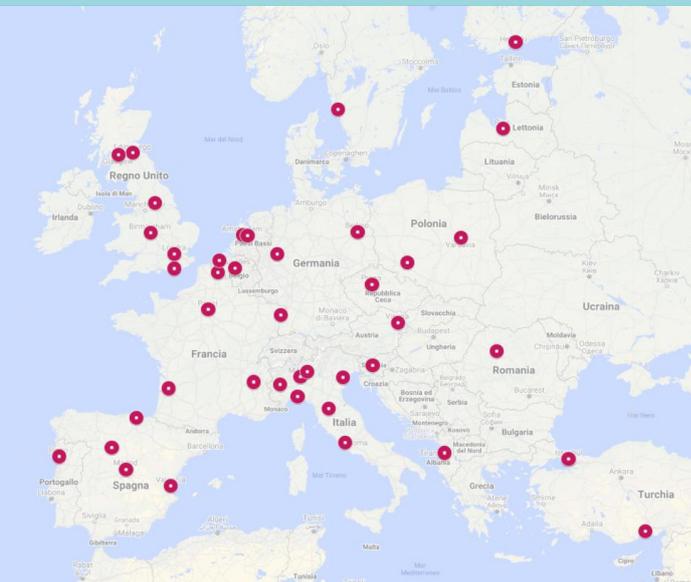
The food aid webinar was the one most attended with

**47 cities registered**  
**76 City Officers**  
**from 14 Countries**

## WG Food meetings

Over the last five years, European cities have organized 10 thematic meetings to share good practices on food system transformation.

- 2016 Brussels - Definition of the field of action
- 2017 Birmingham - Nutrition and food policies
- 2017 Valencia - Food innovation
- 2018 Amsterdam - Food losses and waste
- 2018 Lyon - Periurban agriculture
- 2019 Ghent - Climate impact
- 2019 Montpellier - Governance and commitment
- 2020 Online - Public procurement
- 2020 Online - Farm to Fork



# City knowledge on food aid infrastructure

A survey was circulated among the city officers participating and the results are presented here, showing how the majority of them have an average competency in managing food aid aspects.

With the aim of starting more detailed exchanges on food aid between European cities, the level of knowledge of cities on the infrastructures present in their contexts was investigated. It emerged that:

- Cities have a good knowledge on the charities distributing food aid in their context and are able to map the most vulnerable neighborhoods;
- Municipalities developed an expertise on the management of food vouchers and economic support tools;
- Cities are able to map the soup kitchens in their context, as well as food banks and social food pantry / social markets;
- While cities expressed a large awareness of the main stakeholders at local level active on food aid, they have very little experience on the FEAD system, including local FEAD hubs and partners.

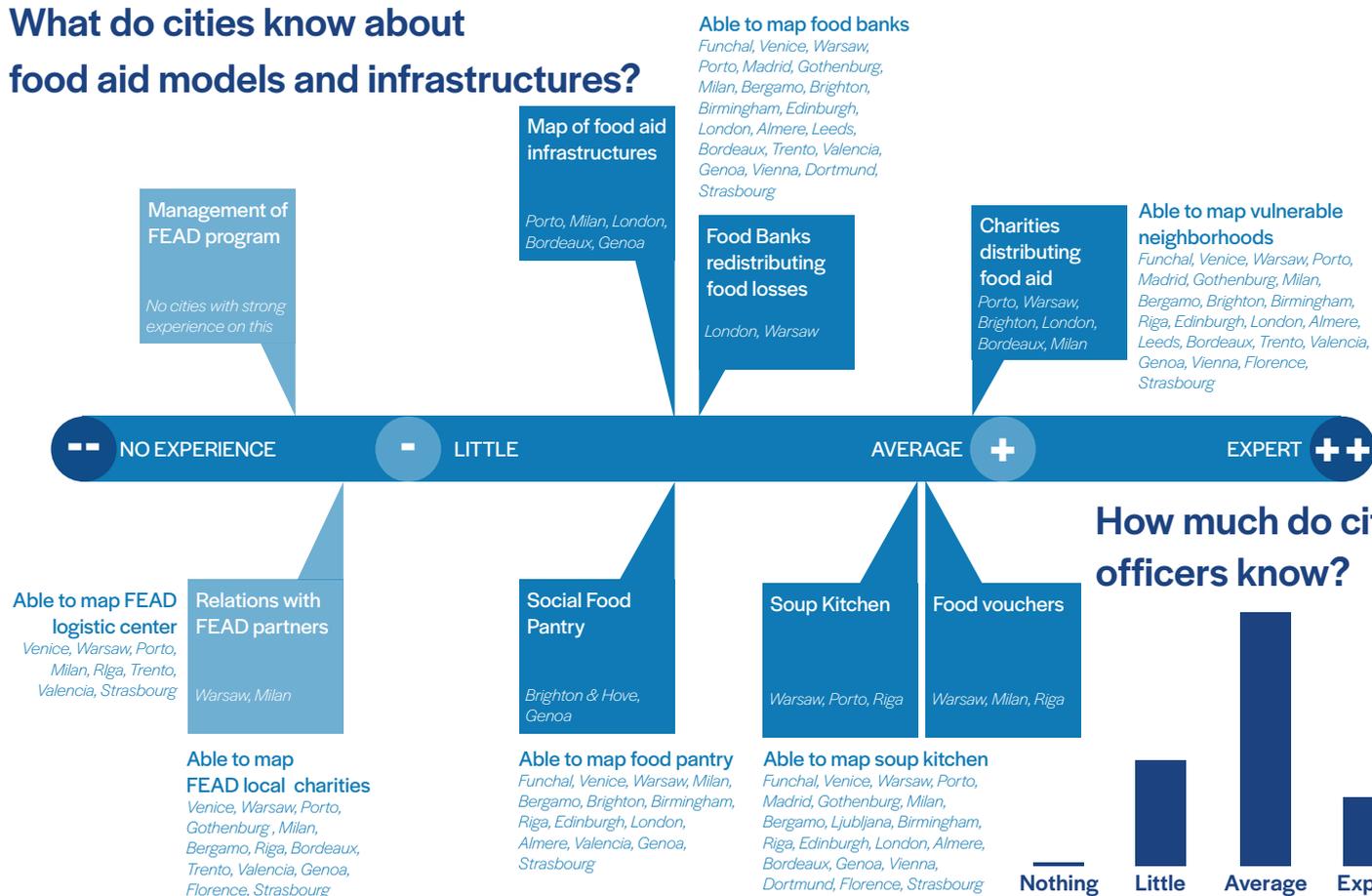
The figure of the on the right page represents a map of the level of knowledge in city. The cities inside the blue boxes have declared an advanced knowledge of food distribution models, while the cities outside the box are only able to map those infrastructures.

The knowledge of the urban partners is the first step to be able to develop local actions, exploiting the existing infrastructures and the skills already rooted in the city.

FEAD is managed differently in various EU countries, with the figure below showing these differences, as well as the national regulatory progress framework on food redistribution. In this context, IT, FR, ES, BE, IE, EE appear more advanced in the FEAD management and food redistribution frameworks.



## What do cities know about food aid models and infrastructures?



## Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD)

FEAD was established in 2014 to contribute to alleviating the worst forms of poverty. It provides €3.8 billion of EU funding for the programming period 2014-2020 (total funding with national contributions is €4.5 billion). UK and GR have not developed FEAD operational programs.

FEAD is implemented at national level through operational programmes and 23 Member States chose a programme focusing on food or basic material assistance. It is provided to the most disadvantaged groups through meals and food packages. More than 1.6 million tonnes of food were distributed between 2014 and 2018.

This support is complemented by accompanying measures to promote the social inclusion of end recipients, e.g. referring them to appropriate services, offering guidance on a balanced diet or providing advice on managing a household budget.

Member States cooperate with partner organisations (public bodies or nonprofit organisations) to implement the FEAD programmes.

4 Member States (DE, NL, DK, SE) chose a programme focusing on social inclusion support to the most deprived through dedicated outreach to specific target groups.

In April 2020, FEAD Regulation was amended to meet the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, including those delivering aid. Food and basic material assistance can be delivered through vouchers, lowering risks of contamination.

In the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2021- 2027), FEAD will be merged with the ESF+ Regulation. This process should allow a better combination of the provision of food or material assistance with social inclusion measures.

# City committment

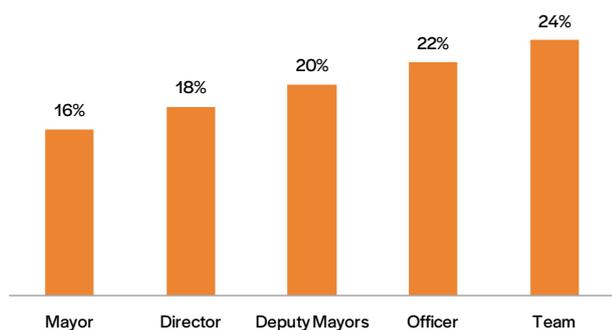
Covid-19 has prompted all cities to question how to provide food assistance to vulnerable groups. A general strengthening of public measures connected to food is emerging across Europe and cities can be the subsidiary platforms to make responses even more efficient, connecting to the more traditional local social services.

Involving a wide range of urban policies is key for the development of a stable food aid commitment, along with ensuring the work from relevant officers and teams, able to manage the complexity of relations with existing actors and design efficient measures.

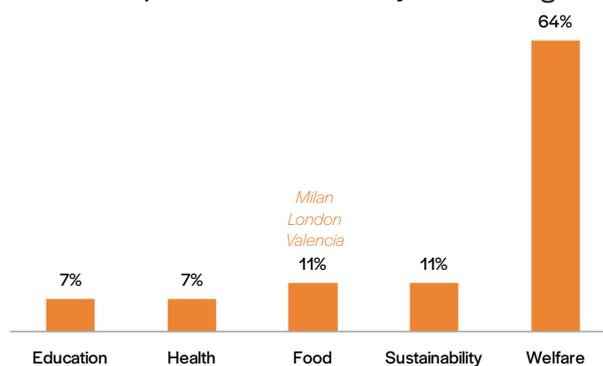
The welfare department and Food Policy teams should be kept as the main managing actor of those measures, maintaining an open exchange with colleagues from other fields of action. The scale of intervention affects the impact of cities' initiatives and, in particular for large cities, coordinating interventions at the metropolitan level is fundamental. The figures below relate to the geography of cities' commitment on food aid actions.



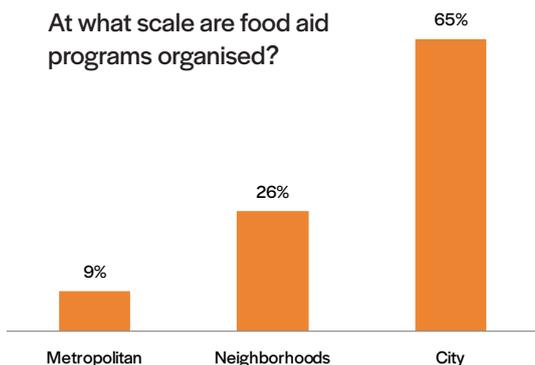
Who is committed in your cities on Food Aid?



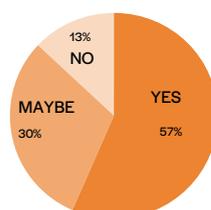
In which department are food aid systems managed?



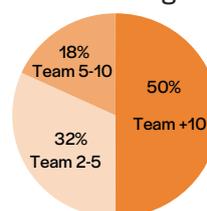
At what scale are food aid programs organised?



Interested in EU calls for food aid systems?



How many people are working on food aid management?



# Food aid actions developed by European cities

CITY	POP	COUNTRY	ACTION	Source
Almere	190,000	Netherlands	Many farmers in Flevoland have food surpluses and/or they receive unfairly low prices for their fruit and vegetables. The aim is to ensure that financially vulnerable people can buy healthy, locally produced food every week at low prices.	MPA
Amsterdam	820,000	Netherlands	The Food Bank Amsterdam, which distributes food to low income families, has decided to switch to distributing vouchers instead of food boxes. Their supply has decreased recently, due to the limited distribution of food providers, and because of health risks related to the crisis. The common goal is to return to business as usual, i.e. the distribution of food boxes within the current limits because of the virus.	EUR
Athens	664,000	Greece	Through the "Assistance at Home Plus" programme, more than 16,000 beneficiaries will be receiving food and basic goods packages of from the Greek Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD/TEBA), thus constituting the largest ever at-home service in the City of Athens. 750 families of elderly and vulnerable groups (out of 4,000 families served by the Solidarity Center and the Municipal Social Grocery Store), receive food packages at home. 2,000 families, in addition, will receive Easter food packages due to the suspension of the church soup kitchens.	EUR
Bergamo	120,000	Italy	During the lockdown, the Municipality together with a network of cooperatives, associations, organizations and volunteers took action to reach the elderly and the most vulnerable living alone and isolated in their homes, guaranteeing essential services to all, including food supply. 1,000 volunteers involved, 640 households reached out, 700 meals served for week, 2,150 vouchers from 150 to 700 euros pa.	MPA
Birmingham	1,086,000	UK	The voluntary sector collaborated and co-ordinated efforts to respond to the crisis. A Food Group was established involving Food Banks, Faith Communities and others involved in tackling food poverty in their communities. There were no restrictions to who could join this group. Before lockdown the group met face-to-face. As lockdown approached, a WhatsApp group and other online/digital resources were used to continue planning. The group 'met' every two days to share intelligence and quickly began to re-distribute the food they were collectively acquiring to ensure that any surplus was delivered to organisations/areas in need.	MPA
Bordeaux	235,000	France	Bordeaux has launched a new trial project helping members of a dozen social grocery stores to buy fresh fruit and vegetables by having the city pay the difference between cost price and store price. The city also supports the Food Bank and various other organisations to give access to good quality food to those in need for free. The city and its partners have collected around €300,000 to finance food distribution actions.	EUR
Brighton	290,000	UK	Brighton coordinated an emergency food response involving 62 organisations, volunteering efforts and central food distribution hub and organized a crowdfunding campaign.	MPA
Bristol	463,400	UK	The city municipality has continued strategic work with city partners such as Feeding Bristol to tackle food inequality and ensure that people who needed support with food could access it. Their key approach has been to work with existing community assets and provide collaborative support and coordination where there were gaps. New strategic and community level partnerships have formed, existing ones have been strengthened, people have connected with their local communities, there's more interest for sustainable food.	MPA
Chieri	37,000	Italy	Born during the pandemic, the project's goal is to guarantee access to food for citizens who face huge economic and social obstacles. The Reciprocamenta #acasatua's main activities are the daily home delivery of ready-made meals to lonely or elderly people and the distribution of food bags to families in need.	MPA
Espoo	292,000	Finland	The city and various organisations and parishes have joined forces to provide food assistance during the coronavirus situation. Through the city's resource pool, employees from libraries, early childhood education and social services, have found work in the food assistance project. Food assistance is intended for people with a low income and people who belong to risk groups.	EUR
Funchal	104,000	Portugal	Vital Basket is an initiative addressed to households living in the municipality that have seen their monthly income reduced, due to COVID-19 impacts. With this initiative Funchal has so far delivered more than 3,500 baskets consisting of essential goods, mostly local fresh products and eggs, which have significantly helped Funchal families who were facing economic difficulties affecting their basic needs.	MPA
Genoa	580,000	Italy	The city distributed 30,000 vouchers from 100 € per person. Over 350 affiliated shops. Online application support via dedicated toll-free number (22,922 phone calls received). The local police has ensured the correct withdrawal of shopping vouchers on the 24 delivery stations identified.	EUR
Ljubljana	295,000	Slovenia	Ljubljana has organized home food delivery for children from at risk families and elderly citizens. Drivers of city buses are volunteering to perform the deliveries. Over 100 people have volunteered at the Ljubljana Public Transport public company.	EUR
Lyon	720,000	France	€40,000 € for Secours Populaire, which provides food aid to families in great difficulty	EUR
Madrid	3,334,000	Spain	In Madrid there was an unprecedented increase in the number of families in a state of food emergency as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. Between March and September 2020, the City Council has invested 51 million euros in food aids. The Family Card (Targeta Familias) is a financial aid, in the form of a pre-paid credit card that grants aids to vulnerable families.	MPA
Milan	1,400,000	Italy	The City of Milan has put in some specific food aid actions to provide assistance to the elderly and vulnerable people. With the lockdown in force, non-profit associations active in the distribution of food aid. As part of the actions put in place by the System, 10 temporary hubs have been installed, dedicated to the preparation of food aid packages intended to the elderly and fragile people have been opened. With this action we have reached almost 21.000 people.	MPA
Nice	344,000	France	The central kitchen of Nice has been mobilized since the start of lockdown to feed those in need, including the children of health and essential service personnel. Currently, up to 2,000 meals are prepared every day by 60 municipal officers (compared to the usual 102) divided into three brigades.	EUR
Nicosia	224,000	Cyprus	The Municipality of Nicosia and Nicosia Municipality Multifunctional Foundation have prepared and distributed "Solidarity Baskets" supporting with food and basic necessities elderly and families with children. In addition, "Easter Solidarity Baskets" have been offered to single parents, large families, unemployed or self-employed who, due to restrictive measures taken for COVID-19 are no longer working. All the goods are provided by sponsors.	EUR
Paris	2,148,000	France	Covid crisis has shown the limits and the fragilities of food webs: the model lacks autonomy, supplies and the adaptability to face crisis. In order to cope with the sometimes brutal interruptions in the activity of food distribution, and to support associations, Paris distributed more than 17,000 meals every day. Paris gave 3.5 million euros to the most needy families in order to replace the school canteens and the food markets which were closed and to compensate the losses of income incurred by several families.	MPA
Tallin	437,000	Estonia	Students of Tallinn's schools will be able to continue to get a daily free school lunch under a special arrangement approved by the city's authorities. Normally, school lunch is free in Tallinn for the students, but due to the emergency situation, all schools are closed in Estonia. As for some children the school lunch is the only hot meal during the day, Tallinn has decided to continue to offer free school lunches to students who need them.	EUR
Warsaw	1,794,000	Poland	The city distributed to residents and elderly people living alone ? and they also received a special Easter food aid package to celebrate the holiday	EUR
Zagreb	790,000	Croatia	Zagreb is opening several new public kitchens to help the poorest members of society to enjoy a hot meal. This is a collaboration between the City of Zagreb Office for Social Welfare and People with Disabilities and the institution Good Home, which caters for the poorest citizens. It is also carried out in cooperation with the Archdiocese of Caritas, the Croatian Red Cross and the Parish of Sv. Antun Padovansky.	EUR

# The way forward food aid

Cities play a crucial role in delivering access to food aid at a local level. Most of the cities participating in the WG Food meeting developed in the last year, in some cases from scratch, a new knowledge about food poverty and are reflecting on the future opportunities to tackle this issue.

Cities' level of awareness and capacity to innovate varies depending on several issues, mainly connected to the level of maturity of their food policy commitment.

Cities working strategically to improve local food systems, with dedicated food strategies, were able to react promptly to the social consequences of the pandemic and now want to make their food aid environment more cohesive and prepared.

## **This goal will require an intensive activity of networking.**

This involves mapping and starting small with micro and macro associations and charities that manage urban infrastructure against food poverty, and understanding their ability to match the growing need. Municipalities should also reinforce

their existing measures, subsidies them and push for the development of new solutions to the urgent challenges, also exploiting EU funding.

## **Now many EU cities are working to develop long-term food aid strategies.**

Specifically on this matter, cities should activate institutional relations with their national bodies managing FEAD and measures of food aid, advocating on their collective experiences during the pandemic. Finally the Eurocities Working Group Food is a proper platform to share experiences and spread EU opportunities to jointly tackle emerging challenges.



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