



**THE RISE OF FOOD
CHARITY IN EUROPE:**

What is food charity in Europe?

HANNAH LAMBIE-MUMFORD AND TIINA SILVASTI

Summary

This research brief is the first in a series which set out key findings from the recently published book *The Rise of Food Charity in Europe*. This first brief sets out what food charity looks like across Europe. Drawing on data from seven case study countries of Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Slovenia and the UK, this brief addresses the questions: what is food charity in Europe and what are its key characteristics?

THE KEY FINDINGS WERE:

- In the European context, food charity is best understood as a particular type of response to broader poverty. Whilst specific concepts including 'food insecurity' and 'food poverty' were used in several of the cases, no one concept was consistently applicable to current research and policy discussions across all the case study countries.
- Food charity landscapes in different European countries vary widely but have common characteristics that can be categorised. Definitions and typologies were created; these will need to be tested in the next phase of research.
- Food charity provision across Europe is ultimately difficult to quantify. The data which are currently available are not comprehensive and can be problematic, most notably where there is over-reliance on data from redistribution organisations.

THE RESEARCH

The edited book, on which this brief is based, *The Rise of Food Charity in Europe* (Policy Press 2020) provides the first comparative study of food charity in Europe, drawing on case studies of Finland, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Slovenia and the UK. The countries – which formed stand alone chapters in the book - represent a mix of European welfare states usually categorised as having different welfare policy regimes, different histories of charitable and faith-based provision for those in poverty, and divergent political and cultural histories. In all countries charitable food assistance is well established.

Empirical analyses were undertaken for each individual case study; following commonly set guidelines, providing evidence on the dynamics and implications of the rise of food charity in the country. Existing relevant evidence and data from the countries were used and systematic secondary analyses undertaken to provide insight into the unique circumstances of the national context. An inductive comparative analysis was then completed which explored the following areas: the nature and scale of food charity; relationships between changes in welfare provision and the growth of food charity and the shifting role of charity more generally; the role of food supply in shaping food charity; and the social justice implications of changing welfare states and the growth of food charity.

FOOD CHARITY AS A RESPONSE TO POVERTY

Food charities are projects responding to a lack of access to food (see below for a full definition of food charity). As part of this comparative European research we had to address what was meant by a lack of access to food: should we be talking about food insecurity, food poverty, hunger or some other framing?

From the outset, access to food was treated as a key aspect of poverty, one that is worthy of independent investigation and vital in understanding the impact of wider policy shifts. Within this theoretical and conceptual context, the case studies highlight that ‘household food insecurity’ and ‘food poverty’ have variable relevance as specific policy issues across the case-study countries. In Slovenia and Spain both concepts are used (Leskošek and Zidar; Inza-Bartolomé and San-Epifano). The concept of food poverty is favoured in Finland and Italy (Silvasti and Tikka; Arcuri et al) where the term ‘food security’ also means ‘food safety’. ‘Food insecurity’ is now prominent in policy and research terms in the UK (Lambie-Mumford and Loopstra).

Case study authors highlighted the importance of situating discussions on food charity in the context of poverty. Acuri et al point out the idea of food poverty, per se, has varied relevance in food charity practice in Italy. The largest share of services provided by Caritas, a national charitable organisation working to end poverty, entail food distribution yet they state that food poverty is not a specific target to be addressed, rather it is part of a broader definition of poverty. Kessler et al from the German perspective make a similar argument for keeping attention on the broader concept of poverty, suggesting that a focus on food alone could be counterproductive in understanding how to protect standards of living and overcome poverty most effectively. A key conclusion of this research was that it is essential to maintain a focus on the relationship between food experiences and poverty, and not lose sight of socio-economic structural determinants.

DEFINING FOOD CHARITY IN EUROPE

One of the key tasks of the research was to establish some coherence in the terminology applied to food charity across Europe. It is clear from the cross-country analysis that terms are used in slightly different, and even awkwardly overlapping, ways. Words like ‘deliverer’, ‘distributor’ and ‘provider’ are used to describe different kinds of operations working at different scales and in different ways.

In order to gain some comparative clarity, the following broad definition of food charity was adopted:

‘Food charity refers to all voluntary initiatives helping people to access food that they would otherwise not be able to obtain. It therefore covers a variety of provision, including projects that provide food parcels, food banks (of all kinds), soup kitchens, meal projects and social supermarkets. In these projects, food may be provided at low or no cost, with its distribution facilitated by a range of organisations (faith or non-faith) involved in delivery at various scales of operation (local, regional and national).’

A food charity project is therefore the end link in a chain that gives food to people in need. Importantly, these projects are distinct from ‘mid-layer’ food redistribution projects which redistribute food to food charity projects. The redistributed food may include surplus food from producers and retailers or other food donations (including from individual citizens through food drives).

While food charity projects may collect surplus food or donations, and store food themselves (which is notably the case in Germany and the UK), they may also – or instead – use a mid-layer organisation to source food. The case studies highlight the importance and reach of such organisations, particularly in Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and Slovenia, where the practice of surplus food redistribution is more embedded. These organisations’ main role is to redistribute surplus food, which is sourced through EU schemes, as well as other corporate food surplus donations. However, they may also collect and distribute financial donations, and provide training and other support.

The case studies confirm both overlap and divergence in the use of the term ‘food bank’. In four of the countries the Netherlands, Italy, Spain and Slovenia, it is used to describe a mid-layer organisation concerned with food collection, storage and redistribution. In Germany the term is not used, with ‘Tafel’ being the most prominent label, based on the nationwide charity movement with that name. In UK and Finland it refers to a project that provides food directly to recipients.

In addition to highlighting the presence of distinct layers in different European food charity systems, the case studies draw attention to the incredibly wide variety of food charity projects themselves. Many of the case studies mention established food charity projects that have a wide reach. These projects may have been set up to provide social support, of which food is just one aspect (for example, Caritas in Italy, Spain and Slovenia), or they may have food charity as a principal function and provide other signposting or help in addition (for example, Tafel in Germany and The Trussell Trust food banks in the UK). However, beyond these established national food charity organisations, it is clear that a plethora of other projects – either working independently or as part of smaller networks – exist in all the countries studied.

TYOLOGIES OF FOOD CHARITY AND FOOD AID IN EUROPE

FOOD CHARITY: EMERGENCY FOOD PROVISION v FOOD ASSISTANCE

From our analysis, we were able to develop a typology of food charity. Taking the umbrella definition of food charity outlined earlier, the European food charity examined in this book falls into the categories of ‘emergency’ and ‘non-emergency’ support (as identified in the US by Mabli et al).¹ These can then be referred to as charitable emergency food provision and charitable food assistance, respectively.

Charitable emergency food provision includes projects that help with an acute food crisis and includes food parcel and prepared food provision. The key characteristics of charitable emergency food provision are:

- The provision is free.
- The provision is intended to be temporary and meet an acute ‘hunger/lack of access to food’ need. Whilst there may, in fact, be chronic use, the intention is to provide only emergency help.
- The provision is outside the mainstream market.

Table 1: Charitable emergency food provision examples

TYPES OF PROJECT	BROAD DESCRIPTION	LABELS USED	POINTS OF VARIATION	COUNTRY EXAMPLES
Food parcel provision	Provide an amount of food (‘parcels of food’) for people to take away, prepare and eat.	Food bank, food pantry, food project	People may be given a pre-prepared parcel or may be able to choose freely from food stuffs, people may/may not be able to state dietary requirements; the amount of food may vary as may the type of food and whether it is fresh or long-life.	‘Breadlines’ in Finland; food parcel provision by Caritas (Italy, Spain, Slovenia); Tafel (or Tische) (Germany); Food Pantries (the Netherlands); The Red Cross (Slovenia); ‘delivery projects’ (Spain). Food banks (UK)
Prepared food provision	Provide pre-prepared food for people to eat on-site or take away.	Soup run, soup kitchen, breakfast clubs aimed at child hunger relief (as opposed to childcare), school holiday programmes	Food could be eaten on or off site; could be prepared by the project or be pre-prepared food (e.g. supermarket sandwiches)	‘Consumption projects’ in Spain; ‘Give me 5 for a Smile’ (Slovenia); Soup kitchens (Germany, Spain, UK).

¹ Mabli, J., Cohen, R., Potter, F. and Zhao, Z. (2010) Hunger in America 2010: National report prepared for Feeding America, Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research Inc.

Charitable emergency food provision – most notably, food parcel provision – was the predominant focus of the chapters included in this book but it is also important to set out in more detail the work of charitable food assistance initiatives. Charitable food assistance, as non-emergency food charity, refers to projects offering ongoing help with food access, helping hungry or vulnerable people. The key characteristics of this kind of provision are:

- providing ongoing support, which may be intended to support ongoing access to a vulnerable or hungry population but is not designed to meet an acute need;
- subsidised (free or reduced cost), with the aim of easing access to food and reducing costs;
- may have ‘market’ characteristics (supermarket food, monetary exchange) but still outside the primary food market; and
- ways of working would include a membership system, food co-ops, nominal/voluntary contributions and community cafes/lunch clubs.

FOOD AID: STATE AND CHARITABLE PROVISION

It is also important to set out the wider ‘food aid’ context in which this food charity typology fits. Food charity often also sits alongside state-provided support with food in a bigger landscape of assistance, as set out in Figure 1

This typology is an ideal type, meaning that it is formed from characteristics and elements of the food aid phenomenon presented in the case studies but is not meant to necessarily correspond to all of the characteristics of any one particular case study.

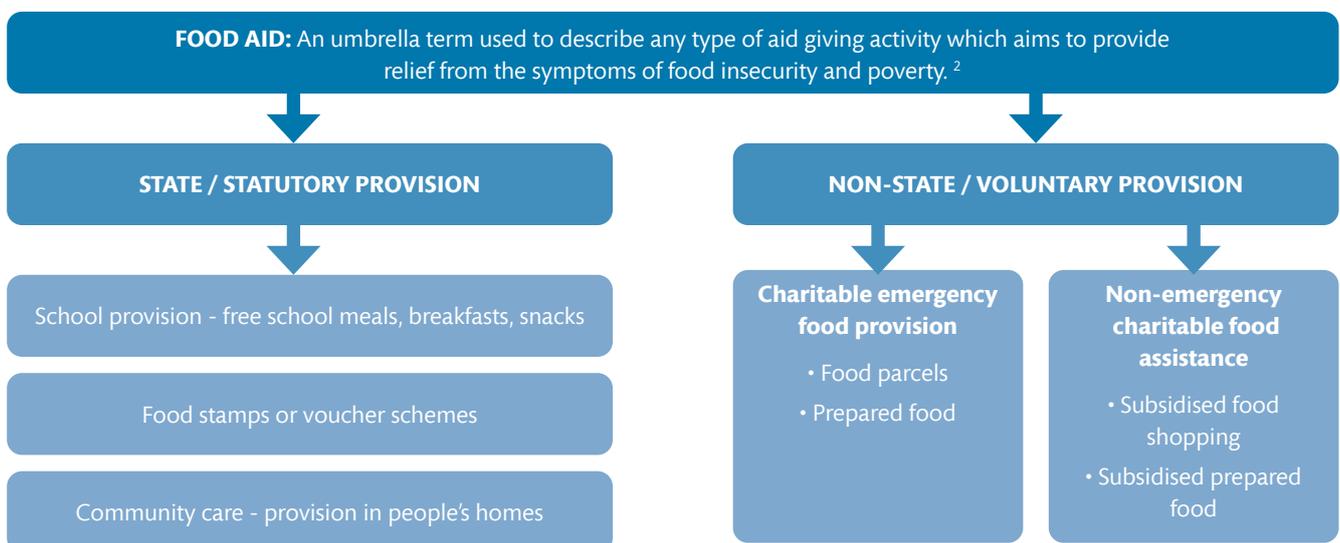
EUROPEAN FOOD CHARITY SYSTEMS: A VISUALISATION

Following this typology and the evidence on the nature of food charity systems in Europe, it also becomes possible to develop a representation of European food charity systems, as outlined in Figure 2.

Table 2: Charitable food assistance projects

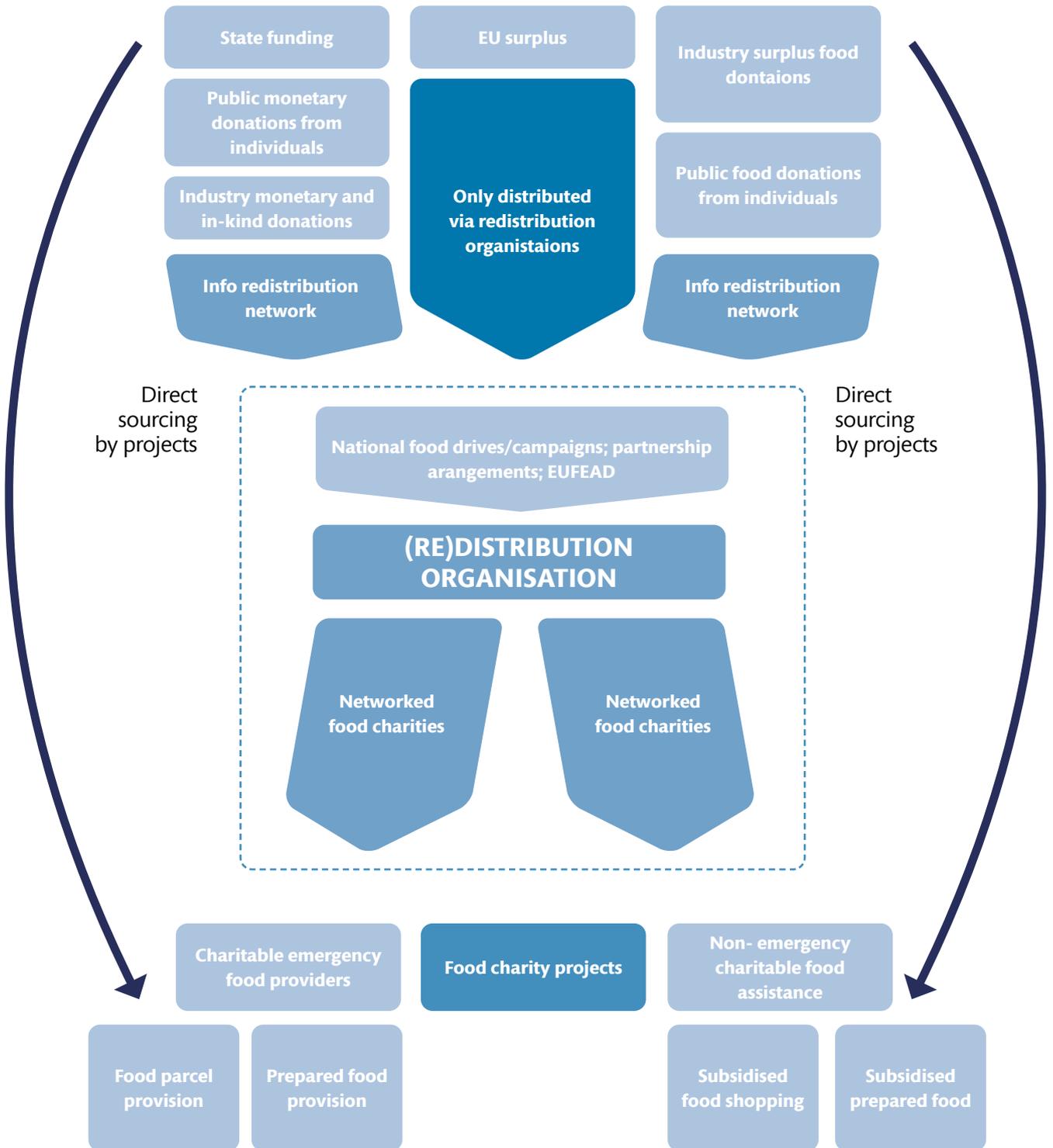
TYPES OF PROJECT	BROAD DESCRIPTION	LABELS USED
Subsidised food “shopping”	The aims of these projects are usually about easing access to food. Where costs are nominal these may be seen as alternatives to food parcel projects but they often also allow people to access the service for a longer period of time.	Social supermarket, food co-operative, food pantries (in the UK)
Subsidised prepared food	May be about promoting access to food or/and a social function of bringing people together or providing a gateway to services for those that may be in need of further support.	Community cafes, lunch clubs

Figure 1: Typology of ‘food aid’



² Lambie-Mumford, H., Crossley, D., Jensen, E., Verbeke, M. and 16 Dowler, E. (2014) ‘Household food insecurity in the UK: A review of food aid’, London: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Figure 2: Food charity system diagram



FOOD CHARITY LANDSCAPES: what food charity looks like in Finland, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Slovenia and the UK

Table 3 sets out key information on the food charity landscapes of the case-study countries. Food charity across all the countries clearly shares some commonalities:

- The provision is primarily charitable and, for the most part, run by volunteers, though there may be some funded staff.
- In all countries, there are organisations operating at one or both of two tiers in the structure of food charity, with the first tier comprising client-facing food charity projects, and the second tier comprising food redistribution initiatives.

- To access food, recipients have to be assessed to confirm that they are in need – either by the providers themselves (for example, Caritas, Tafel and operators in Slovenia) or through referral processes (the UK, Germany, Slovenia and the Netherlands). Yet, it is not entirely clear how rigorously or consistently these referral and assessment processes are applied, and there appears to be a wide variety of approaches. For example, the Netherlands sets an income threshold for eligibility, while Finland has no officially validated procedure for assessment so practices can vary between operations.

Therefore, while it has been possible to draw out key insights into the overarching nature of food charity in Europe, there are significant gaps in knowledge and issues of incomparability across the case studies. These include matters relating to what food is handed out (in terms of the kind, amount and whether this is standardised), how it is handed out and why people are seeking help from charitable food projects.

Table 3: Food charity landscapes across case study countries

Country	Prominent food charity projects and mid-layer organisations	Food sources	Access routes to food assistance	Rise and scale of food charity (food charity statistics from national organisations)
FINLAND	<p>Food from the EU Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived is distributed by 22 partner organisations, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF), other faith-based organisations (FBOs) and NGOs – for example, associations for unemployed people. They provide food parcels to take away or meals to eat at their premises.</p> <p>Shared Table is an emerging second-tier food re-distribution organization/model that coordinates activities locally with food donors, parishes and NGOs/FBOs. Currently operational in the Vantaa region, but applications of the model are being developed and piloted across Finland.</p>	<p>Most food is donated directly from retailers and food industry without the involvement of a second-tier organisation.</p> <p>Food provision through the FEAD programme is coordinated by the Finnish Food Authority, which delivers food to partner organisations who distribute it to recipients. More coordinated practice (Shared Table) for food collection and short-term storage is under development.</p>	<p>There is no means testing, charities evaluate applicants' need for food. It is generally known that municipal social workers guide people in need of help to the appropriate charities, even if these charities are not part of the official social security system in Finland.</p>	<p>The first breadlines and food banks were set up in the mid-1990s because of the deep recession. Since then, charitable food provision has become established and now covers the whole country.</p> <p>There are no reliable statistics on charitable food aid provision. FEAD food was provided to 284,352 people at least once during 2017. The Church Resource Agency estimates that around 100,000 people receive food aid every year.</p>
GERMANY	<p>Tafel the National Association of German Deutsche Tafel e.V. is dominating the field. Tafel collects, stores and provides food directly to people in need and may provide other goods or social services alongside food. Tafel trains members and manages private donations – for example, from large private donors such as Mercedes.</p> <p>Other organisations include Caritas, Diakonie., Red Cross, Arbeiterwohlfahrt, independent local initiatives.</p> <p>Tafeln or similar food charity organisations are often linked to other social service organisations. Soup kitchens and other projects do exist, but they are talked about and researched less.</p>	<p>Tafel redistributes surplus, runs food drives and receives monetary donations. It does not take food from the FEAD programme. Those funds are instead used to support social inclusion initiatives.</p>	<p>For support through Tafel, people need to 'prove' their need – often through benefit documents. People can also be signposted by state agencies.</p>	<p>Tafel began in the early 1990s. There are no public reports on the growth of the Tafeln. Between 1993-2003 330 Deutsche Tafel e.V. were established. 2003-10 saw a rapid increase, to 877 projects. There has been consolidation since 2010, at 934 projects. In 2017, the 934 Tafel projects (only members of the Deutsche Tafel e.V.) had 2,100 outlets servicing 1.5 million users.</p> <p>The real number of organisations and initiatives will be much higher.</p>
ITALY	<p>Food charity is dominated by the national food bank federation (FBAO) and Caritas, together they account for 70% of all charitable food handed out.</p> <p>The FBAO is a mid-level organisation, redistributing food to providers. Caritas provides food to recipients through its centres and affiliated projects, and Emporia of solidarity – a social supermarket initiative where people 'buy food' using electronic points on a card.</p> <p>In addition, there are also a range of other independent and undocumented projects.</p>	<p>Surplus food – including food from the FEAD programme – as well as food drives and corporate donations.</p> <p>Seven organisations form a network that redistributes food from the FEAD programme including: FBAO (Food Bank Foundation) and Caritas.</p>	<p>Caritas counselling centres assess applicants' need for help with food.</p>	<p>There was a 47% increase in food aid provision between 2010 and 2013 – from 2.8 million to 4.1 million individuals.</p> <p>The FBAO has 21 regional agencies operating at local level.</p> <p>Caritas has registered 3,816 food distribution centres and 353 soup kitchens, with the latter serving over 190,000 recipients. Other, undocumented projects also exist.</p> <p>FEAD food is distributed to 219 second-tier organisations and then to 11,554 front-line agencies. In 2015, this food was distributed to 2.8 million people.</p>

Table 3: Charitable emergency food provision examples

Country	Prominent food charity projects and mid-layer organisations	Food sources	Access routes to food assistance	Rise and scale of food charity (food charity statistics from national organisations)
NETHERLANDS	<p>The Association of Dutch Food Banks distributes food to 'food pantries'. There are other independent initiatives, including Muslim food banks and food banks for the elderly.</p> <p>One food parcel is provided per week for up to three years.</p>	<p>Mostly surplus redistribution organised at a regional level, though individual projects collect donations locally.</p> <p>Food projects in the Netherlands do not receive food assistance through the FEAD. These funds are instead used to support social inclusion for elderly people on low incomes.</p>	<p>People are referred by a social worker or other professional, and their discretionary income is calculated to confirm they qualify. In 2018, the monthly income assistance threshold was €130 per household plus €85 per person in the household.</p>	<p>The first food bank was established in 2002. In 2014, there were 453 food pantries, rising to 530 by 2017. The number of people receiving help was on the increase until 2014, when it started to fall, and it has remained stable since 2016.</p> <p>As of 2017, 168 food banks were operating in conjunction with eight regional distribution centres, sending food to 453 food pantries to be handed out. In 2017, 132,500 people received help from food banks.</p>
SLOVENIA	<p>The Red Cross and Caritas provide food parcels and manage redistribution logistics. The Lions Club is another key mid-layer food redistribution organisation which also gives food to the Red Cross and Caritas. There are many other local ad hoc food charity projects and other initiatives such as donations for school lunches (Give Me 5 For A Smile!).</p>	<p>Mostly surplus redistribution including EU MDP/FEAD, although there are some public food drives – for example, the school lunch scheme.</p>	<p>People are required to prove their need by showing evidence that they are in receipt of social assistance or being referred by social services.</p>	<p>Red Cross provision spiked in 2013 at the time of the economic crisis and implementation of welfare reforms.</p> <p>In 2017, the Red Cross distributed food to 127,948 people, and Caritas to 94,884 people. The Lions Club delivered food for two million meals.</p>
SPAIN	<p>Nationally coordinated food redistribution through the Spanish Red Cross and Spanish Federation of Food Banks (FESBAL) – both distribute food to smaller charities and provide food directly to people in need. FESBAL distributes food to collaborating entities which might be 'consumption projects' (soup kitchens and so on) or 'delivery projects' (where people take the food away). Various third sector organisations and informal charities collect food from food banks to hand out. There are other independent initiatives which provide food from different sources or money for food. Social discounting projects like social supermarkets also exist</p>	<p>FEAD food redistribution, corporate philanthropy and public support from individual citizens – around 25% of food sourced by food banks comes through twice-yearly national 'Great Food Drives' collecting food donations from individuals at supermarkets. Food banks also receive other kinds of corporate support, beyond surplus food.</p>	<p>Distributors must provide the food banks with information on the final recipients of food.</p>	<p>There are 56 food banks sending food to thousands of projects. Currently, 6,000 registered projects receive food from food banks. This is down from 9,000 in 2008, which the authors ascribe to the introduction of various conditions placed on projects that receive food through the FEAD programme. FESBAL distribution has increased from 60,000 tons of food in 2008 to 151,527 tons in 2018.</p>
UK	<p>Food banks have come to dominate the discourse and landscape of food charity in the UK, as a result of the prominent Trussell Trust Food Bank Network. Food banks are recognised as outlets that provide emergency food parcels (containing a prescribed combination of foodstuffs and sized to household composition) for people to take away, prepare and eat. Other food charity projects do exist, including independent food banks, soup kitchens and other forms of community provision.</p> <p>Fareshare is the most prominent second-tier redistribution organisation sending food to a range of emergency and non-emergency food charity projects, although, in many cases, it does not supply Trussell Trust food banks.</p>	<p>Private food donations from individuals as part of local or national food drives are a key source for food banks. Fareshare handles the redistribution of food industry surplus. The EU FEAD funding is used to provide financial support for breakfast club initiatives</p>	<p>In the Trussell Trust model – and independent initiatives based on it – people have to be referred to a food bank by a professional (for example, state social security adviser, health worker or community worker).</p>	<p>In 2016/17, the Trussell Trust Foodbank Network – the UK's largest food bank organisation with 1,300 food banks which gave food to adults and children 1,182,954 times – an increase from 128,697 in 2011/12.</p>

THE SCALE OF FOOD CHARITY IN EUROPE

It is clear from the case studies that data on food charity – in terms of the scale of provision and need for help – are patchy at best, and what are available are not robustly comparable. However, as demonstrated by Table 3, collectively, these case studies do play an important role in gathering together existing data for the first time.

Several case-study authors highlight problems with the data available and advise caution with its use (Finland, Germany, Slovenia, the UK). The reliance on food charities and mid-layer organisations for data is clearly problematic. Some public food aid distribution channels – for example, the FEAD programme – release annual reports. However, there are numerous independent charitable operators that rely on private donations, and it is very difficult, if not impossible, to obtain precise figures about their activities. Food provision is often counted per parcel/meal provided, not per person, so the exact scale in terms of unique individuals is impossible to discern. Available information also varies in specificity, depth and breadth, and has not necessarily been designed to provide systematic data for national analysis.³ There are also important ethical and logistical questions about how appropriate it is for these data to be collected by charities and the level and nature of information that is collected about the people that they help.

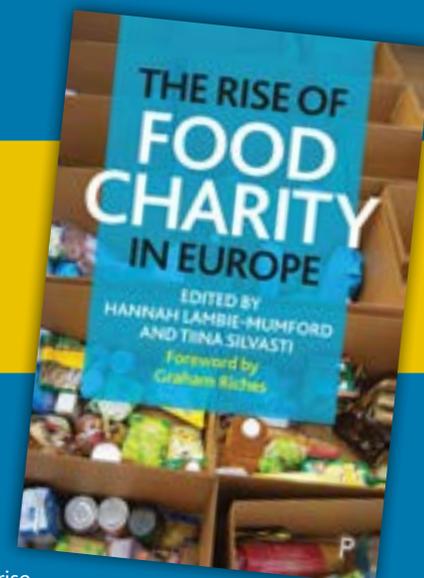
³ Lambie-Mumford, H. and Dowler, E. (2015) 'Hunger, food charity and social policy – challenges faced by the emerging evidence base', *Social Policy and Society*, 14(3): 497–506.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Further systematic comparative study is required in several key areas. In the first instance, it will be important to develop and test the typology of European food charity and mid-layer organisations set out here. It will also be crucial to obtain a more systematic and reliable understanding of the scale of food charity provision, its operation and the drivers of need for help with food across the continent.



THE RISE OF FOOD CHARITY IN EUROPE



As the demand for food banks and other emergency food charities continues to rise across the continent, this is the first systematic Europe-wide study of the roots and consequences of this urgent phenomenon.

Leading researchers provide case studies from the UK, Finland, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Spain, each considering the history and driving political and social forces behind the rise of food charity, and the influence of changing welfare states. They build into a rich comparative study that delivers valuable evidence for anyone with an academic or professional interest in related issues including social policy, exclusion, poverty and justice.

- **New Frames for Food Charity in Finland** ~ Tiina Silvasti and Ville Tikka (pp19-48)
- **Social Exclusion and Food Assistance in Germany** ~ Fabian Kessl, Stephan Lorenz and Holger Schoneville (pp49-78)
- **The Role of Food Charity in Italy** ~ Sabrina Arcuri, Gianluca Brunori and Francesca Galli (pp79-110)
- **Food Banks in the Netherlands Stepping up to the Plate: Shifting Moral and Practical Responsibilities** ~ Hilje van der Horst, Leon Pijnenburg and Amy Markus (111-134)
- **Redistributing Waste Food to Reduce Poverty in Slovenia** ~ Vesna Leskošek and Romana Zidar (pp135-164)
- **Food Aid in Post-crisis Spain: A Test for this Welfare State Model** ~ Amaia Inza-Bartolomé and Leire Escajedo San-Epifanio (pp165-190)
- **Food Banks and the UK Welfare State** ~ Hannah Lambie-Mumford and Rachel Loopstra (pp191-218)

policy.bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/the-rise-of-food-charity-in-europe

AUTHOR BIOS

Hannah Lambie-Mumford is Lecturer at the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Sheffield. Her research focuses on food insecurity, food charity responses and the role of public policy. h.lambie-mumford@sheffield.ac.uk

Tiina Silvasti is Professor of Social and Public Policy at the Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy at the University of Jyväskylä. Her research interests focus on charitable response to food poverty. tiina.h.silvasti@ju.fi

HOW TO CITE THIS BRIEF

Lambie-Mumford, H. and Silvasti, T. (2020) *The Rise of Food Charity in Europe Brief 1: What is food charity in Europe?*, available from enuf.org.uk/resources

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

