



Food needs in the general population

Survey on the needs of soup
kitchens supported by the Athens
Food Bank

2023

www.foodbank.gr



Food needs in the general population

This booklet is an English translation of part of the research that has been conducted by the **Food Bank**.

Food Bank
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www.foodbank.gr
info@foodbank.gr

#NoFoodWaste

Survey





2023

Contents

1. Introduction	3
<hr/>	
2. Food Bank Survey	5
<hr/>	
2.1. Food Bank	5
<hr/>	
2.2. Soup kitchens in Greece	7
<hr/>	
3. Infographic	9
<hr/>	
4. Examples of Beneficiaries	11
<hr/>	
5. Conclusions	13
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1. Introduction

In 2022
we managed to distribute
2,172 tons of products to
more than **110,000**
people throughout
Greece



Food Bank's main function is to re-distribute food to meet food needs, while also reducing food waste, which is high in Greece. Food which is fit for consumption but cannot be absorbed by the market, along with food purchased specifically to be donated, is offered free of charge to soup kitchens and charities.

We communicate daily with soup kitchens to learn about their needs; they tell us about the difficulties being faced by people they help. We strive to learn more about the problems which exist, so we can be more effective in our mission. This document presents the results of a survey carried out in the summer of 2023. We also set out official Eurostat statistics relating to last year and previous years.

There can be no doubt that thousands of people are turning to soup kitchens and other charities because they are in need. The situation has improved compared to previous years.

However, there is still a large number of people in this category. As in other European countries, we have developed a network of 7 food banks at key locations nationwide. In this way we can know and better serve local needs by managing product donations from

Survey

the various regions of the country.

By way of indication, in 2022 we managed to distribute 2,172 tons of products to more than 110,000 people throughout Greece, with the support of 182 companies and in cooperation with 324 soup kitchens and other charities. As far as the problems are concerned, our capabilities are limited but the results of our efforts are, I believe, significant.

Food Bank is an independent, self-governing public benefit foundation which was established in 1995 and has operated since then without ever receiving any state or EU financing. It is an equal member of the European Food Banks Federation (FEBA) which supports us in our endeavours, and we would like to thank it for that. We would like to wholeheartedly thank all charitable foundations, companies and individuals who support us in our operations, and all food companies (producers, retail chains and merchants) who place their trust in us.

The soup kitchens ecosystem has been operating quietly in the background for years. From time to time, some articles are written highlighting the effort being made but in general it remains unseen, especially by the State. In many cases, it is able to better identify people in need and is more flexible in helping them. We hope that this study will give rise to more synergies because unfortunately there are still numerous needs to be met.

Dimitris Nentas
General Manager

2. Food Bank Survey.

2.1 Food Bank.



2022 in numbers

Food Bank accepts food donations from companies whose products it then offers free of charge to soup kitchens and charities. While these products are suitable for consumption, they cannot be absorbed by the market. The most likely scenario is that they would otherwise be disposed of and end up degrading the environment. These foods are referred to in this document as “surplus food”.

Redistributing surplus food via **Food Banks** is an international best practice which is recommended to protect the environment and meet food needs. At the same time, it ensures that food is rationally managed. After all, valuable natural and economic resources and human capital are used to produce it.

In parallel with such management, Food Bank also implements food collection and purchase schemes to better serve people’s needs. Schemes

Survey

such as “collect” which gathers food from consumers and the “Emergency Food Fund”, a food purchase scheme, ensure items which are not usually donated by companies, but are necessary for all soup kitchens (such as pulses, rice, pasta, tomato juice, etc.), are available.



324
CHARITIES

15 NURSING HOMES

231 SOUP KITCHENS

19 CHILD CARE INSTITUTIONS

4 RESIDENTIAL INSTITUTIONS

34 SUPPORT BODIES FOR DISABLED PERSONS & MENTAL HEALTH CENTERS

6 DRUG REHABILITATION CENTERS

5 SUPPORT STRUCTURES FOR REFUGEES AND IMMIGRANTS

10 VARIOUS SUPPORT STRUCTURES

2.2 Soup kitchens in Greece.

Soup kitchens are facilities which offer food to people who turn to them for assistance. They operate at “neighbourhood” level; they may know the people who need help personally and, aside from providing food, usually support them in other ways as well (clothing, other forms of material assistance, psycho-social support, etc.). In most cases, particularly after the economic crisis, they maintain records on beneficiaries, their family and economic status, any health problems they may have, and so on. This does not apply to soup kitchens which support a large number of homeless or substance-dependent individuals, usually in the city centre of Athens.

The number of people each soup kitchen supports depends on its capacity and a review of people’s needs. It is important that across-the-board criteria are not applied, as in cases of State assistance, but that an overall assessment of the needs of each individual person is made. As a result, a three-member family with a child with disabilities may be in greater need of assistance than a couple, even if that family’s income is higher. Likewise, someone with real estate assets (such as a house in a village) but zero income, who actually needs food, is excluded from official State welfare programmes.

Soup kitchens are not part of a unified and organised network, nor is it possible to obtain an overall record of how many soup kitchens there are. Most are run by church parishes, various organisations or unofficial voluntary groups. They endeavour to find food donations from donors in the area in which they work, while also buying food with their own funds (membership fees, fund-raising bazaars and events, etc.).

The soup kitchens ecosystem has been operating quietly in the background for years. From time to time, some articles are written highlighting the effort being made but in general it remains unseen, especially by the State. In many cases, it is able to better identify people in need and is more flexible in helping them.



One strict principle we apply at **Food Bank** is that we only supply soup kitchens and non-profit organisations which have legal personality and are registered for tax. Goods are distributed with packing slips with appropriate codes for the soup kitchens and products provided by special (EKP) software. This makes it easier to handle products and ensure food traceability, while making it possible to keep complete statistical records.

A survey on the needs of soup kitchens supported by the Athens Food Bank

Eurostat EU-SILC survey [ILC_MDES03]



10%

1 in 10 people in Greece faces food insecurity in 2022.



33,3%

1 in 3 people living below the poverty line cannot feed themselves properly.

This is the third paper prepared and published by Food Bank. Responses to the questionnaires were collected in the period from 27 June to 17 July 2023. As in previous cases, the questionnaire was aimed exclusively at soup kitchens serving the general population, while Food Bank also supplies charities serving social groups with different and special characteristics (nursing homes, orphanages, institutions for the disabled, drug rehabilitation centres, etc.).

The **Food Bank** survey

The

61%

of soup kitchens report that the people they help are unable to provide at least one meal a week for themselves.

The

30%

of soup kitchens receive daily requests they cannot handle.

The

27%

of soup kitchens respond that they adequately meet people's needs in foodstuffs.

People who turn to soup kitchens have particularly low incomes (for various reasons) while the difficult family situations they face increasingly put pressure on their family income and lead to a situation of food insecurity.



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Redistributing surplus food via **Food Banks** is an international best practice which is recommended to protect the environment and meet food needs. At the same time, it ensures that food is rationally managed. After all, valuable natural and economic resources and human capital are used to produce it.

Food Bank’s contribution

By managing **Surplus Food**

83% of soup kitchens were able to offer a greater variety of food to the people they help.



We support the viability of soup kitchens.



48% of soup kitchens managed to increase the number of people they helped.



We protect the environment.



Families sharing the same roof.

The couple are **65** and **62** years old respectively. They live with their youngest son's family, their two grandchildren as well as the **82**-year-old grandmother. Of the entire family, only the son works; they also have the grandmother's pension, but she has many health problems. The entire family faces major difficulties in getting by.

A low-earning family with 3 girls.

Both parents work part-time and receive a very low salary. They live at the grandmother's house since they cannot afford to rent. They primarily receive food aid but also need school supplies and clothes for the children.



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3. Examples of Beneficiaries.



A divorced mother, suffering from cancer, with one minor child.

A single-parent family comprised of a divorced mother suffering from cancer and a minor child who is an adolescent. The child's school-related costs are borne by the family, but the mother needs large amounts of money to treat the disease at hospital and for medical examinations.

A low-earning family with 3 girls.

Both parents work part-time and receive a very low salary. They live at the grandmother's house since they cannot afford to rent. They primarily receive food aid but also need school supplies and clothes for the children.

An elderly widow.

She lives at home but her living conditions are poor. She does not receive a pension and tries to get by on an allowance of € 200. She faces normal age-related health problems and has no help from her children who live far away. During the winter months she cannot meet her heating needs using any means. She visits the soup kitchen daily for hot meals and is also supplied with non-perishable goods by the soup kitchen.

A disabled family.

The family consists of two parents and a disabled child (85% quadriplegia). They live in a privately owned house. The father and mother are elderly without a pension and cannot work because they need to look after their child who needs daily, expensive medical care.

A large family with 4 children.

A married couple living in a home purchased with a mortgage. Both are on low salaries. They have four children, two of whom are on military service in the provinces. The two girls are students in Athens. Recently one of the children underwent surgery to fix an issue with their spine. Each month they receive assistance in the form of basic foodstuffs and occasionally clothing.

A single parent family with a disabled child.

A single parent family comprised of a mother and bed-ridden child with disabilities. They live in a privately owned house but there is no support system around them. The mother, who is retired, receives food and other goods from soup kitchens, mainly detergents which she needs to look after her child.

An elderly family.

An elderly couple living in a privately owned house. Only the husband receives a low pension while the wife has chronic psychological problems due to loss of a child and needs Medicare. Their income is not sufficient to cover their basic living costs. Each month they receive food donated to us such as rice, pulses, tomato juice, pasta, etc.

A large family.

The father works normally while the mother works occasionally. They have taken out a loan which they find difficult to repay due to the family's increased needs. In addition to food, they also need financial assistance to buy some household appliances such as a washing machine and a small air-conditioner to heat the children's rooms.

A large family with 8 children.

The father works and they live in their own home for which they pay a mortgage. The two older children work occasionally wherever they can find work and contribute to the family budget. One child is a student, three children are school pupils and the other two are younger. The family faces various problems since two of the children are in speech and occupational therapy, while the youngest has Down syndrome. The soup kitchen supports the family providing food, products, and financial assistance insofar as is possible.

A single parent family.

A single parent family comprised of a mother and two young children of school age. They live in rented accommodation. The mother is divorced and there is no support system around her since she is raising the children on her own while working at the same time.

A family whose father was involved in an occupational accident.

A family of three children, economic migrants of Albanian origin with children of primary school age. The father was involved in an occupational accident; a heavy lifting object fell on him, breaking both his legs. For a year now the father has been unable to work and has undergone multiple surgical procedures. The family relies on food, school supplies and pharmaceuticals.

An elderly mother with a substance-addicted son.

The mother is 70 years old and lives with her substance-addicted son, aged 45, in a privately owned house. She cleans and does small jobs insofar as she is able to. She receives food once a month.

A family with two children.

Both parents are unemployed. They get by on unemployment benefit but have a mortgage. The soup kitchen primarily helps them with food but they have a multitude of needs. Clothing and household items such as detergents are also needed.

Families sharing the same roof.

The couple are 65 and 62 years old respectively. They live with their youngest son's family, their two grandchildren as well as the 82-year-old grandmother. Of the entire family, only the son works; they also have the grandmother's pension, but she has many health problems. The entire family faces major difficulties in getting by.

4. Conclusions.

Eurostat data

According to Eurostat, 1 in 10 people in Greece is food insecure (2022 data) while for people below the poverty line, 1 in 3 are food insecure.

International developments

Food insecurity was particularly high during the period of economic crisis and rose again in 2020 due to the economic problems created by the pandemic. In general, the rates for Greece have improved significantly, although they remain higher than the European average. At global level, the World Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) warns that the Sustainable Development Goal 2 of Zero Hunger will not be achieved due to international developments ⁶, while the impacts of the climate crisis are also affecting food prices in Greece ⁷.

People below the poverty line

Food insecurity among people below the poverty line is high. These people find it difficult to benefit from wider economic growth, are vulnerable to crises which arise (pandemic, inflationary trends, energy costs, etc.) and have to face various family problems that necessitate additional expenditure.

Food Bank's survey allows us to capture needs as they currently stand, especially relating to people who receive assistance from soup kitchens, and is not representative of the general population.

People's needs

61% of soup kitchens report that the people they help are unable to provide at least one meal a week for themselves, while 30% of soup kitchens receive daily requests from people which they cannot handle.

The capabilities of soup kitchens

The soup kitchens are there to provide a helping hand, but meet less than half of the need which exists. It is not possible to fully meet food needs due to the limited capabilities, and in addition the purpose is to support people and not to render them "institutionally" dependent on the soup kitchens. The responses we received from soup kitchens show that food and clothing needs are better served, and they face greater difficulty when it comes to addressing emergencies, helping people pay utility bills or helping with housing.



⁶ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO (2023). The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023. Urbanization, agrifood systems transformation and healthy diets across the rural-urban continuum. Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc3017en>, p. 9 "No doubt, achieving the SDG target of Zero Hunger by 2030 poses a daunting challenge. Indeed, it is projected that almost 600 million people will still be facing hunger in 2030. This is 119 million more people than in a scenario in which neither the COVID-19 pandemic nor the war in Ukraine had occurred, and around 23 million people more than in a scenario where the war had not happened."

⁷ Karabatsakis, A. (2023, July 03). Bad weather and inflation raise prices for fruit and vegetables [in Greek]. Vradini. Retrieved from: <https://www.vradini.gr>



The main source of food supply is Food Bank. 83% of soup kitchens say that thanks to the food they receive from Food Bank, they can offer a greater variety of meals to the people they help, while 48% of soup kitchens managed to increase the number of people they help.

Food Bank's contribution

Surplus food management is particularly positive in meeting food needs. While these products are suitable for consumption, they cannot be absorbed by the market. The most likely scenario is that they would otherwise be disposed of and end up degrading the environment. Soup kitchens can utilise such products without any problem, providing better meals to people and ensuring their sustainability, while at the same time reducing food waste.

Use of surplus food

In recent years, we have witnessed multiple and major crises, while there has been an increase in the number of people in the international and domestic press openly discussing the further increase in food insecurity in Europe. The long-term poverty in which a section of the population finds itself can be explained by modern ideological and political trends, creating a negative legacy for the future. For the time being, it appears that society is bearing up, finding ways to deal with these difficulties. Civil society organisations have acquired significant experience and despite negative examples many organisations offer important, irreplaceable services. They often have the ability to better identify people in need and to assist them more flexibly.

Civil society organisations

Our **Food Banks** continue their own work. There are now 7 food banks in operation in Thessaloniki, Thessaly, Drama, Epirus, Crete, Patra and Athens. This is a growing network which supports many thousands of people free of charge, in cooperation with local soup kitchens, charities and food companies. Redistributing larger quantities of surplus food for human consumption and implementing more programmes in cooperation with other institutions and organisations can generate even better results.

Food Banks



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