

# ECHOP

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

# GALLERY OF ROLE MODELS

Best Practices in Procurement  
in the Food Aid Sector



# 9 Good practices



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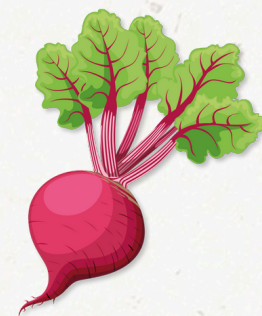
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**This booklet serves as a gallery of "role models," offering a collection of "best practices" observed in four European countries: France (3), Belgium (3), Spain (2), Portugal (1).**

Nine food aid organizations were surveyed, with two main objectives:

**1.** To understand the challenges they face regarding their procurement processes and identify the most common difficulties across these entities.

**2.** To examine the strategies implemented to overcome these challenges and enhance the impact of the organizations on the communities they serve.



credit : José Julián Agudelo  
- #CEPS



# Context

In 2022, 8.3% of the population in the European Union could not afford a meal containing meat, fish, or a vegetarian equivalent every two days, an increase of one percentage point compared to 2021 (7.3%)\*.

This alarming trend continues to grow under the pressure of various economic, social, and health crises, **broadening the scope of food insecurity to an increasingly diverse population.** A few years ago, food aid primarily targeted individuals with no income, undocumented migrants, homeless people, the unemployed, and single-parent families.

Today, students and "working poor" individuals have joined the ranks of beneficiaries. This evolution underscores the magnitude of food insecurity, which now affects segments of the population previously less likely to be impacted.



**This growing pressure on food aid structures is coupled with a decrease in the quality and quantity of food donations from supermarkets,** their main source of supply (either directly via pick-ups or indirectly via food banks), creating significant procurement challenges.

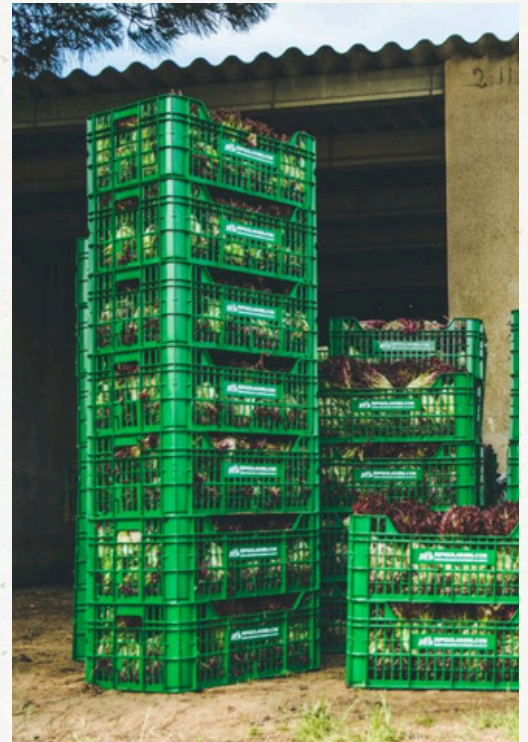
Additionally, the multiplication of initiatives by large and medium-sized retailers to combat food waste—such as "anti-waste" sections, reduced store restocking, and apps like "Too Good To Go"—although commendable from an ecological standpoint, **perversely reduces the amount of food available for food aid organizations.**



Food aid structures, often sustained by citizen-led, voluntary solidarity, **must revise and diversify their supply sources.**

Unfortunately, leaders of these organizations are often not equipped to address this necessity, which is essential to sustain and improve their food aid activities.

This booklet aims to showcase **proactive initiatives in Europe** and provide actors in the sector with **inspiring pathways** to meet current challenges in diversifying their procurement.



# THE ECHOP PROJECT



## What is it?

The Erasmus+ ECHOP project, *European Cooperation to Help leaders of food aid organizations and Offering Precarious better food choices*, aims to tackle the challenge of diversifying procurement sources for food aid organizations.

It positions itself as a necessary initiative to ensure the sustainability of these organizations and, by extension, the quality, quantity, diversity, and regularity of food for the most vulnerable populations.

### Objectives:

- Analyze European best practices in food procurement.
- Facilitate the identification and understanding of innovative practices.
- Strengthen leaders' competencies in this field.
- Disseminate these innovative practices among networks of private and public actors.

## Who is involved?

This transnational project involves four partners from three countries:

**Active, Pôle de l'économie solidaire (France):** Active has been engaged in the Social and Solidarity Economy sector for 26 years and has supported projects to ensure access to quality, regular, and sufficient food for people in precarious situations for over 10 years.

**POUR LA SOLIDARITÉ-PLS (Belgium):** A European think & do tank committed to a united and sustainable Europe, working to defend and strengthen the European social model.

**Perspectiv' (Belgium):** This organization provides personalized assistance to individuals in precarious situations, particularly through food aid, and supports projects related to food aid in Wallonia Picardy (Comines-Warneton).

**CEPS (Spain):** CEPS manages and implements socio-educational programs for children, youth, and adults, offers continuing education for professionals, and develops innovative research, particularly through European projects.



# AU CADDY FLEURY

## ASSOCIATION ECONOMIE SOLIDARITE PARTAGE (ESP)

**Type:** Association under French law (1901)  
**Territory:** 30,000 residents – 50 rural municipalities  
**Website:** <https://economie-solidarite-partage.com/>  
**Employees (2023):** 89  
**Volunteers (2023):** 32  
**Beneficiaries (2023):** 600

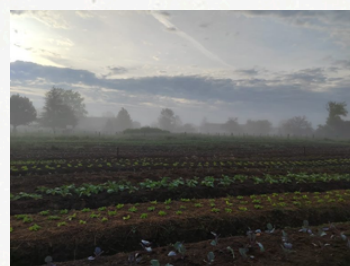
The **ESP association** promotes a **circular, social, and inclusive economy**. It manages a recycling center, a green space maintenance workshop, a social and solidarity grocery store, and an organic farming activity led by Integration Workshops.

ESP is an Integration Structure through Economic Activity (SIAE).

Its social and solidarity grocery store, designed like a traditional shop, **Le Caddy Fleury**, fights food insecurity by offering food items, hygiene products, and cleaning supplies in exchange for a financial contribution ranging from 10% to 50% of the actual market value of the products. People in precarious situations have the freedom to choose their products.



Images of the “**Jardin d’En Breuille**” are available on the ESP website.



# AU CADDY FLEURY

Épicerie sociale pour mangeurs malins et solidaires

## PROCUREMENT CHALLENGES

In February 2016, France became the first European country to adopt legislation against food waste with the Garot Law (Law No. 2016-138), requiring supermarkets over 400m<sup>2</sup> to establish partnerships with food aid associations to donate unsold goods.

However, initiatives such as:

- Discounts on products nearing expiration dates.
- The creation of the "Too Good To Go" app to sell unsold food at reduced prices.

These measures, while commendable, have reduced the volume, diversity, and quality of products available to food aid associations. A negative consequence of these measures is the drastic reduction in the volume, diversity, and quality of products, particularly fresh ones, available to food aid associations. Le Caddy Fleury, whose main source of supply comes from collections at seven large and medium-sized stores, has been significantly affected.



Images of the "**Jardin d'En Breuille**", available on the ESP website

## STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS PROCUREMENT CHALLENGES

- **Creating an organic farming project:** "Le Jardin d'En Breuille" supplies fresh vegetables to beneficiaries and the public through:
  - Seasonal supply to the grocery store.
  - Weekly markets.
  - Local producer stores and vegetable box deliveries.
- **Diversified procurement sources:**
  - **Collections** from seven local supermarkets.
  - **Annual national collections** by the Food Bank.
  - **Local collections** (twice per year).
  - Purchases from local producers practicing **sustainable farming**.
  - Partnerships with **two logistics platforms**.
  - **Occasional food exchanges** with other aid actors.
  - **Unsold goods** from a local producer store.
  - **Self-production of vegetables** through the organic farming project.

JARDIN d'EN BREUILLE

Maraîchage bio de proximité







# VRAC

## VERS UN RÉSEAU D'ACHAT EN COMMUN

Type: Association under French law (1901)

Territory: 19 cities, including 17 in France and 2 in Belgium

Website: <https://vrac-asso.org/>

Employees (2023): 80

Volunteers (2023): 1,500

Beneficiaries (2023): 25,000

The founders' project focuses on enabling broader access to high-quality products from small-scale, organic, and fair agriculture at affordable prices by reducing intermediary costs (short supply chains) and unnecessary expenses (limited packaging).

Thus, **VRAC** allows residents of QPV (Priority Urban Zones), university campuses, and rural areas to adopt sustainable and responsible consumption habits. **VRAC** relies on collective efforts and local dynamics to address precariousness and promotes an alternative relationship with consumption, health, and self-image.



Images from VRAC website



## Procurement Challenges

- **Compensating for inflation**, especially on products historically offered at cost price (e.g., olive oil).
- **Overcoming logistical challenges** related to growing demand for fresh produce (fruits and vegetables).



Images from the **VRAC** website

## Strategies Implemented to Address Procurement Challenges

- **Resident purchasing groups:** Residents who are members reserve their purchases from a catalog of around 50 products. The association places the order with producers or intermediaries, receives the products, and distributes them at designated points every two weeks. There is no obligation to order or a minimum purchase required—each person selects the products and quantities they need.

This initiative primarily targets individuals in poverty who:

- Join the association directly and may or may not disclose their financial difficulties.
  - Are prioritized in case of limited stock.
  - Can benefit from prices below cost price.
- **Pooled orders between associations (joint purchasing groups).**
  - **National tenders to obtain quality products.**



Images from **VRAC** website



Procurement



Barter



Supply Chain



Distribution



# LE CABAS SOLIDAIRE

## ASSOCIATION SOLI' NIORT

**Type:** Association under French law (1901)

**Territory:** Niort, France, 120.000 citizens

**Website:** [www.soliniort.fr](http://www.soliniort.fr)

**Employees (2023):** 4

**Volunteers (2023):** 60

**Beneficiaries (2023):** 573

**Le Cabas Solidaire** is a welcoming and vibrant space, rooted in social innovation since its creation, and convinced that tomorrow's consumption models must be inclusive.

The association explores mechanisms of solidarity-based pricing to demonstrate their relevance. Its goal is to provide dignified and sustainable access to quality food for everyone. It manages a mixed-audience grocery store based on values of dignity, non-stigmatization, inclusion, respect for food choices, nutritional quality, and solidarity-based pricing.

### Procurement Challenges

- Supporting **short supply chains** for all consumers.
- Finding **local producers** with sufficient production capacity.
- Overcoming **delivery challenges** from producers.

### Strategies Implemented to Address Procurement Challenges

- **Coexistence of two procurement sources:**
  - 50% purchases through short supply chains.
  - 50% purchases from wholesalers.

This decision stems from the choice not to rely on product donations.

- The grocery store applies **solidarity-based pricing**, offering discounts on sales prices based on beneficiaries' income (-40% or -60%), partly financed by customers paying 100% of listed prices: the "solidarity customers."
- **Involvement and co-decision-making:** Customers are involved in decisions related to procurement.

Images from **Le cabas solidaire** website





espigoladors

# ESPIGOLADORS

**Type:** For-Profit Organization

**Territory:** Catalonia, Spain

**Website:** <https://espigoladors.cat/en/>

**Employees (2022):** 2759

The **Fundació Espigoladors** operates on a social enterprise model addressing and connecting three social needs:

- Fighting food waste.
- Ensuring the right to healthy food.
- Creating employment opportunities for groups at risk of social exclusion.

Espigoladors maintains a robust partnership network with producers, distributors, and agri-food businesses to recover surplus production or “ugly” fruits and vegetables that are unsellable due to appearance. Volunteer gleaning is organized through agreements with producers. Supported by an effective communication and marketing strategy, this approach has ensured the organization's regional success.

## Procurement Challenges

- **Rethinking funding needs** beyond reliance on grants alone.
- Building **trust-based relationships** with producers.



Images from *Espigoladors* website

## Strategies Implemented to Address Procurement Challenges

- Developing **numerous partnerships with businesses**, producers, and distributors committed to ecological and social values for volunteer gleaning.
- Strengthening **partnerships with public authorities** at all levels (local, regional, national, European).
- **Building a strong brand image and an effective communication strategy.**
- Establishing **efficient logistics organization.**



Images from **esimperfect** website

# ES IM-PERFECT

**Type:** Certified public limited company for social inclusion, linked to Espigoladors. *(cf. good practice #4)*

**Territory:** Catalonia, Spain

**Website:** [www.esimperfect.com](http://www.esimperfect.com)

**Employees (2023):** 25

At the **Es Im-Perfect workshops**, vegetable spreads, jams, and sauces are made using local fruits and vegetables that have been excluded from the commercial circuit (due to surplus production or aesthetic standards).

Additionally, the Es Im-Perfect workshop is a space for social and professional inclusion for people at risk of social exclusion.

## Procurement Challenges

- Need for capital; **complex and inflexible funding**.
- **Requirement for resources and infrastructure** (cold storage, diverse equipment).
- Challenges in **managing volumes and logistics**.

## Strategies Implemented to Address Procurement Challenges

- Transformation of **local "imperfect" or surplus fruits and vegetables**.
- **Collaboration with farmers** to recover non-standard or surplus products.



Images from **esimperfect** website



# ABUNDANT QUOTIDIAN – ASSOCIAÇÃO (UP FARMING)

**Type:** ONG

**Territory:** Lisboa, Portugal

**Website:** <https://upfarming.org/>

**Employees (2023):** 4

**Volunteers (2023):** 10

**Beneficiaries (2023):** 1665

**Up Farming** promotes food literacy, community development, participatory ecology, and urban well-being by implementing urban agriculture projects.

For example, community gardens—"living spaces in the heart of cities"—allow people to meet and exchange ideas while growing healthy food.

Focusing on disadvantaged neighborhoods, Up Farming helps residents develop social connections, fosters healthier eating habits, and creates new green spaces in urban areas.

## Procurement Challenges

- **Logistics** and **transportation** difficulties for fresh products.
- **Agricultural** production issues due to **pests** and **fungi**.
- Challenges in **predicting production quantities**, given the community project nature and fluctuating number of volunteers each year.

## Strategies Implemented to Address Procurement Challenges

- **Creation of infrastructure** in the city center to support **agricultural self-production**.
- **Collaboration with food banks** and **local associations** to redistribute locally grown products to those in need, promoting food security and community solidarity.



Images from  
**upfarming** website



# ASBL PERSPECTIV'

**Type:** ASBL (Non-Profit Association)  
**Territory:** Comines-Warneton (Wallonia, Belgium)  
**Website:** <https://asblperspectiv.be>  
**Employees (2023):** 3  
**Volunteers (2023):** 0  
**Beneficiaries (2023):** 400

The association aims to provide personalized support and assistance to residents of Comines-Warneton in precarious situations. It coordinates all food aid within the area, particularly through five key projects:

- **Weekly food parcel distribution** (supported by FSE+ and the Hainaut Occidental Food Bank).
- **Two solidarity grocery stores** (one approved by Wallonia).
- **Three solidarity fridges** (supported by Colruyt and Delhaize).
- **Monthly cooking workshops** (in partnership with the Comines-Warneton Neighborhood Agency).
- **A soup bar** (with support from CPAS Comines-Warneton and Action Vivre Ensemble).



# Perspectiv'



Images from **asblperspectiv** website

## Procurement Challenges

- Obtaining the necessary food supplies **to sustain all services and meet growing demand.**
- Complying **with AFSCA** (Food Safety agency) **standards** and maintaining the cold chain.
- Need for adequate **storage space.**
- **Managing logistics** (collecting, storing, and distributing food).
- Ongoing search for **funding.**



## Strategies Implemented to Address Procurement Challenges

- **Diversification of procurement sources and collaborations** (private and public).
- **Opening different access points** in the city to reduce mobility barriers for beneficiaries and increase visibility with funders.
- **Expanding service offerings** (e.g., a solidarity restaurant project).
- **Organizing an annual solidarity event:** the Solidarity Weekend (collecting food and funds while raising public awareness about food aid challenges).



Images from  
**asblperspectiv**  
website





# LES CAPUCINES

**Type:** ASBL (Non-Profit Association)  
**Territory:** Brussels, Belgium  
**Website:** <https://www.capucines.be/>  
**Employees (2023):** 7  
**Volunteers (2023):** 7  
**Beneficiaries (2023):** 1500

The social grocery store **Les Capucines** enables struggling Brussels families to shop for food and non-food items under the "Budget - Health - Pleasure" approach.

Other initiatives include:

- Prepared meals delivered to neighborhood residents.
- Banquets for isolated individuals.
- Cooking workshops for the grocery store's clients.

Les Capucines also acts as a redistribution platform for other food aid associations: 10 associations source their supplies weekly from Les Capucines, with a total of 26 associations listed as redistribution partners.



Images from **Les Capucines** website

## Procurement Challenges

- In 2023, the loss of the Carrefour e-commerce depot, the primary supply source. Replaced by other Carrefour depots, but with **reduced product variety**.
- The need to shift **from a charitable, stigmatizing vision of food aid to a positive one** where people in need can access food they enjoy and need.
- The necessity to secure **upstream supplies** before products reach stores.

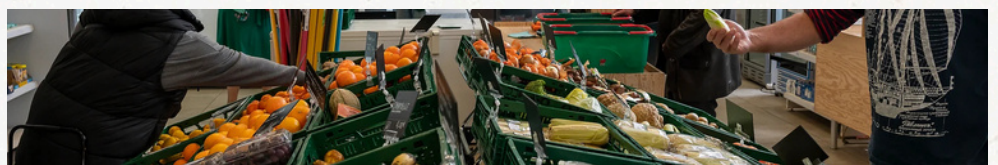


## Strategies Implemented to Address Procurement Challenges

- **Networking:** Group purchasing and redistributing unsold goods to other associations.
- **Advocacy:** Political action to achieve sustainable supply security and political recognition of social grocery stores.
- **Media Presence and Social Impact Evaluation.**
- **Funding:** Seeking funds to purchase products and sell them at low prices.



Images from  
**Les Capucines** website





# ADRA. THE SOCIAL FOOD TRUCK

**Type:** ASBL (Non-Profit Association)

**Territory:** Brussels, Belgium

**Website:** <https://adra.be/>

**Employees (2024) :** 4

**Volunteers (2024) :** 3

**Beneficiaries (2024) :** 42795

(3609 beneficiaries + 670 solidarity customers)

**ADRA Belgium**, through its initiative **The Social Food Truck**, actively fights poverty by providing quality vegetarian meals weekly to the most vulnerable individuals.

Their reasons for avoiding unsold food donations:

- Sensitivity to handling during redistribution.
- Lack of guarantees regarding quality and quantity.
- Increased competition among associations to obtain these products.
- The perpetuation of commercialized food waste.

Instead, the organization prioritizes direct purchases from suppliers that meet strict standards of quality, sustainability, and corporate social responsibility.



Images from  
**ADRA** website

## Procurement Challenges

- Financial difficulties **in securing sufficient funding** to purchase food.
- Challenges in obtaining advantageous prices and **specific products in small quantities**.
- The need for **adequate storage space** and managing expiration dates.



Images from  
ADRA website



## Strategies Implemented to Address Procurement Challenges

- **Avoiding unsold food** to ensure quality and supply stability.
- **Fundraising and partnership building** to ensure financial sustainability:
  - ▶ Participation in festivals and private events to generate revenue.
- **Developing a strong commercial branch** to self-finance the social mission:
  - "One meal purchased by X = One meal donated to Y" (**solidarity customers**).
- To better develop its commercial branch, ADRA enlisted a **commercial engineering intern** from September 2023 to June 2024 to identify sustainable development opportunities.



# Conclusions

## WHAT ARE THE SUCCESS FACTORS IN DIVERSIFYING PROCUREMENT FOR LEADERS OF FOOD AID ORGANIZATIONS?

Through the study of best practices collected as part of the ECHOP project, *several success factors emerge*, offering valuable insights for leaders of food aid organizations seeking to diversify their supply sources effectively and sustainably.

First, **establishing strong partnerships with a variety of stakeholders** is fundamental.


Collaborating with local producers, distributors, and civil society organizations creates an essential support network to ensure a continuous and diversified food supply. These partnerships facilitate access to quality food products, enable resource pooling, the sharing of best practices, and strengthen solidarity within the community.



Next, **promoting agricultural self-production** represents a promising strategy to ensure a regular and diversified supply of fresh produce. Initiatives such as community gardens or urban farms not only provide healthy and nutritious food but also create spaces for community interaction and exchange. These projects foster local resilience and strengthen social ties while contributing to food education and ecological awareness.

Simultaneously, **innovation in logistics and distribution** plays a significant role.

Models such as purchasing groups, resource pooling, redistribution platforms, or donation management apps optimize food supply flows and reduce waste. These logistical innovations ensure the efficient and equitable distribution of food resources, minimizing waste while maximizing social impact.



Finally, **implementing innovative financing mechanisms and solidarity-based pricing policies** is necessary to ensure the financial accessibility of food products for the most vulnerable populations.

Initiatives such as solidarity purchases, participatory donations, and income-adjusted pricing enable individuals in need to access nutritious and quality food. These strategies not only ensure an equitable distribution of food resources but also support the economic viability of food aid organizations, allowing them to operate effectively and meet the growing needs of their beneficiaries.

*In conclusion, diversifying procurement is both a challenge and an opportunity for the food aid sector. These concerted efforts will strengthen the social, economic, and environmental impact of food aid initiatives while promoting a culture of solidarity and sustainability.*

*Finally, one of the key levers to meeting the needs of beneficiaries is **the involvement and active participation of users of food aid organizations**. By engaging beneficiaries in the decision-making process and the implementation of projects, food aid organizations can better understand and meet the specific needs of their communities, foster a sense of belonging and empowerment, and create more inclusive and tailored solutions.*

# ECHOP

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

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

*The **ECHOP** project partners wish to express their sincere gratitude to everyone who participated in this work: your active involvement provided essential insights to strengthen the skills of leaders in food aid organizations and improve the accessibility and quality of food offered to the most vulnerable populations. We thank you wholeheartedly.*



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Perspectiv'

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<http://projet-echop.eu>  
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