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## INTERNATIONAL PANEL

Jacques Vandenschrik, President, European Food Banks Federation  
7 May 2021  
Full speech

### Laura GAVINELLI, Moderator

Welcome, welcome everybody. It's my honour to welcome you to this second day of the FEBA Annual Convention 2021. As you probably could have heard from the first panel, we provided some meaningful insights and inputs to FEBA and Food Banks, discussing specific topics on how to proceed, how to boost a more sustainable food system and concentrated on six main topics, as you might have heard right before.

But that's a time to provide a more strategic vision on what will be in the next future and to organise and to optimise the time of this panel. I would like to propose you three rounds. So, to ask you three main questions on which you feel free to react and to tell me your own daily life, your personal experience. Of course, also providing some information coming from your specific organisation. This is the most global and international panel, and I am very happy to open it.

We know that it was a dramatic year and once again, we'll have the chance to hear from you, so from Lars Battle from CAF America, Jacques Vandenschrik, FEBA, Paul Henrys, Feeding America; Lisa Moon, the Global Food Banking Network; and Nicola Dixon, General Mills Foundation, your perspective. Feel free to react to this first question and you're very welcome again.

So, first question I pose to you all is this one.



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## Jacques Vandenschrik, President, European Food Banks Federation

### 1) **Looking back at 2020, what are the most important lessons learned, challenges and solutions that helped your organisation or your company to face this unexpected year?**

Thank you. Thank you, Laura and I salute also all the members of the panel who are old friends. Fantastic. FEBA had an amazing year in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown many people into insecurity overnight. Suddenly, the importance of food insecurity in Europe became evident. The pandemic revealed our strengths, but also our weaknesses. It also stressed the importance of the local communities and synergised the response from public authorities, civil society as a whole and all stakeholders in general.

We were faced with the immediate challenge of finding food and of distributing it. A survey of our members shows that the demand for food increased by an average of 30% and the new targets of poverty became apparent, jobless people, families overnight, with children overnight in problems, students also experiencing great problems because of the disappearance of their student jobs, elderly people isolated for sanitary reasons. A real concern for the charities we help was the emergence of mental health degradation.

During this period, food recovery or food donations were unstable. We observed disruptions in the logistics. Our members had to face a lack of PPE, a lack of volunteers and an increase in costs combined with a drop in financial resources. Most members of FEBA have been quick to adapt, agile as you said, and have remained open and running. On the back of an increased media attention, there have been several initiatives, such the engagement of new and young volunteers, successful new fundraising activities, advocacy for public support, and new collaborations with corporations and foundations. FEBA launched in March 2020 a call for solidarity and established a COVID-19 special emergency fund to secure the activity of its members. The response has gone beyond expectations.

Between March and November, FEBA has supported its members with over EUR 4.2 million for COVID-19-related actions. These included the covering of additional costs, additional staff, new vehicles, new cold rooms, renting of additional warehouse facilities, PPE, etc. 2020 has also shown an institutional response to the food insecurity scene. EU authorities have adapted rules and regulations to allow a wider utilisation of funds earmarked for food aid and to support increased investment from the member states in the support of the most deprived. Even though it has been a difficult year, in 2020 FEBA members redistributed food to 48 126 charities that help and provide food to 12.8 million people in need. The increase in beneficiaries represents a 37.4% increase if compared to the 2019 figure. The food distribution also increased to 860 000 tons of food, which is an increase of 12% compared to 2019.



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This is I think the challenge of, that we faced during 2020 and the response that was given to those challenges thanks to the support of many, many persons and in particular to the support of those who are at the same panel today and I take this opportunity to thank them.

## 2) What are the key aspects or elements that you see in the future of your organisation?

First of all, when I hear what my colleagues are saying I fully realise that Food Banking in Europe, in America or in Africa or in Asia, is a totally different story. And so, we do, we all do the same job but obviously, emphasis on certain things is more important than on others, depending on the situation, depending on the food supply, depending on food oversupply. And so, with a lot of humility I would say that our key aspects for the future of our organisation are, must be taken as what we believe is going to be important, not for the immediate future, but for the medium to long-term issues.

The digitalisation progress in which FEBA has embarked upon with the support of the European Union Commission and of the General Mills Foundation, is an important element for us to build a collection of reliable data on the activities of our members and other stakeholders. We will need to ensure that all our members, and we have 29 at this point in time, are properly equipped to participate in this digital community and to participate at an equal level of knowledge and be conversant with the system that we are busy putting to place. The constant monitoring of the inevitable food transformation system will also be crucial to assist our members so that they can exploit to the fullest, food donation, food waste avoidance and the promotion of healthy food consumption.

So, funds and food donation raising will continue to be a key element obviously of the activity of FEBA. And whilst we perform a key role in representing food assistance activity in the European Union environment, FEBA intends to stress the role of Food Banks in the food system and to consolidate this position with all stakeholders, including food industry, agriculture, public authorities, other NGOs eventually.

Last but not least, we are I believe, vivid members of the civil society. FEBA's voice will join the voice of all those who fight for the moralisation of our society. I believe food insecurity is more predominant where there is no democracy. Obviously, we have to include in this voice the various aspects that involve moralisation of our society, which is the social, economic, ecological and health chapters. And we can add the voice of our network. I think our network is a vast network. It was said earlier in the day that we don't understand the power of our network, but I'm sure that with the three networks that are participating today at this panel, we would be even more strong and more powerful to make sure that at the end of the day, what we do is actually assisting in the moralisation of our society.



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- 3) **FEBA Annual Convention is a recognised UN Food Systems Independent Dialogue and this is a very precious occasion to ask you this question, what message would you like to share as a contribution to the United Nations Food Systems Summit, which is organized for sure for this year? So, what's the message you would like to share with the UN Food Systems Summit?**

Thank you, Laura. This is a difficult one. I, as I said earlier, I believe that Food Banking is an activity which is multi-faceted. There are realities that vary from country to country, sometimes within a single country those realities are also different. So, in terms of what is the message that we should bring to the UN Summit, I think it should be a univocal message.

I think it should be a message that is written by, I would suggest, all the participants of this panel together, where all those realities and priorities will be actually put forward. The role of Food Banking in the world is so important in today. It has been for many, many years and it's still more important today and for the years to come.

We're not going to recover from the COVID crisis in a couple of months. The economy might do so, the people not. So, I would suggest if my colleagues agreed with me, that we pursue this conversation outside of this public panel and that we try to put together words that would satisfy every party around the table and transfer and promote a single, strong message to the UN Summit.



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