FOOD AID FIGURES

Quantitative research

February 2026

CONCERTATION
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Acknowledgments

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Quantification of food aid

A growing and significant share of the Belgian population, including adults, children, families, single individuals, are relying on food aid. In this study, we estimate that 561.000 people use some form of food aid in Belgium at least once a year. This figure has doubled in 10 years.

Moreover, a recent survey carried out by IWEPS[1] shows that while 1 in 16 Walloons (7%) received food aid in 2024, almost 1 in 5 Walloons (20%) found themselves, at some point in the year, in food poverty. The discrepancy between the number of people in need of food support and the number actually receiving aid indicates that the need for aid is not always addressed. Hunger and extreme precariousness are spreading and the latest socio-economic developments combined with inadequate political responses to the problem point to a worsening of the situation.[2]

In estimating the total number of beneficiaries of food aid, it is relevant to look at food parcels distribution as the main form of food aid, since the majority of beneficiaries are concerned by it. Although other forms of food aid exist (social restaurants, social grocery stores, solidarity fridges, food vouchers) and appear, in some respects, to be more respectful of the beneficiaries' dignity, their relative share remains low. According to the names of the organisations listed in this study, less than 10% of the beneficiaries counted are concerned by forms of food aid other than parcels.

Food parcels are distributed by various organisations. These include Vincent de Paul Belgium, the Red Cross, Resto du Coeur, many CPAS[3] and a multitude of local non-profit organisations. The PPS-SI and the Food Banks act as second-line actors that enable, facilitate and (partially) monitor the work done by the first line, i.e. the food aid associations themselves.

On the ground, distributions are organised at regular intervals, often once a week or once a month. Beneficiaries receive the food parcel to which they are entitled. For this purpose, they receive a document certifying their access to food from the CPAS or a food aid association.

With regard to supply, most often, the food stocks are unsold products, recovered from shops, or received as part of European funding aimed at financing food aid (ESF+).

In this report, we cross-reference several databases to determine the number of people receiving food assistance at least once a year. It should be noted, however, that the annual timeframe does not give us information either on the frequency with which the aid is received, or on its concrete modalities, or on the precarious situations that the aid aims to eliminate.

[1] https://isadf.iweps.be/?action=indicateur&droit=02&indicateur=01&type=1
[2] https://www.fdss.be/wp-content/uploads/Carte-blanche_Acteurs-de-laide-alimentaire_Juillet-2025.pdf
[3] Public social welfare centre

In the rest of this document, we begin by presenting the data and their source. Then, using graphs, we present the key figures obtained by compiling the data. We also set out the method used to move from raw figures to data compiled at Belgian level. This allows us to clarify our methodological choices. We conclude this report with a discussion of the contributions and limitations of the figures presented.

Presentation of databases

For the analysis, we had access (1) to data directly produced by more than 1.000 food aid organisations. These data are compiled by two institutional actors independent of each other: the Federation of Food Banks (relating to the private sector) and the Public Programming and Social Integration Service, the PPS-SI (public sector). We also used (2) information provided by the Red Cross and the Fédération des Restos du Cœur, which includes certain partner organisations not included in the set (1) of compiled data.

Data from the Food Banks and the PPS-SI cover most of the Belgian food aid landscape, both in terms of the number of beneficiaries and the number of organisations active in the sector.

First, we used the PPS-SI's data. This institution collects data on the number of beneficiaries supported (in year n_{-1}) by each ordering organisation (in year n_0). In practice, associations fill out an order form addressed to the PPS-SI, in which they must provide a set of information. These include the number of beneficiaries helped by the association in the last year (in this case 2024). They also indicate the region to which they are attached and the registration number which they have under ESF+ program. We rely on this number to identify duplicates. Other data on the number of women, migrants and the elderly assisted are encoded in the form, but as these are not mandatory, the number of missing values prevents us from making a useful analysis.

Second, we used the data transmitted by Food Banks from FoodIT. FoodIT is the computerised data encoding system for each organisation affiliated to one of the nine regional food banks. Being affiliated allows them to have access to unsold or surplus products from the food industry, supermarkets and fruit and vegetable auctions. Data from FoodIT provides us with monthly figures on the number of people assisted.

The main difference between these two sets of data is that in the PPS-SI database, the variable "number of beneficiaries" covers every person assisted *in one year* by each organisation that has placed an order under the ESF+ fund; while in the FoodIT database, the variable "number of beneficiaries" corresponds to the last *monthly* value encoded by the organisation in the system.

Since there is no comprehensive and centralised database giving a total and accurate number of food aid beneficiaries, the goal of this study is to approach this number with an estimate. To compare and add up the different raw figures from the two databases, it is necessary to homogenise them.

Thus, we first studied the difference between the *monthly* value (FoodIT) and the *annual* value (PPS-SI) for each organisation featured in the two databases. The results of this analysis made it possible to estimate the annual (missing) value of each organisation which had provided only one (monthly) value in FoodIT. In addition to these two comprehensive data sources, we also used additional figures obtained from medium-sized actors such as the Red Cross, the Resto du Coeur and Vincent de Paul. These figures allowed us to complete the totals from the first two databases.

Here is how the data are divided according to their origin:

Database	Precision level	Number of raw data & entity
PPS-SI	Organisation	745 (org)
FoodIT (Food Bank)	Organisation	1.369 (org)
Vincent de Paul Belgium	Province	11 (provinces)
Red Cross	Province	6 (provinces)
Restos du Coeur	Organisation	6 (org)

Table 1 - Summary of data sources used. The level of precision 'organisation' means that figures are available at the level of each association, CPAS, etc. The level 'province' means that only a provincial total is available. For the Red Cross and Restos du Cœur, these are the Walloon provinces and Brussels.

Before going into the details of the consolidated figures, it should be noted that the number of beneficiaries provided by the organisations is declarative and that they use various criteria.

Given the diversity of organisations considered (more than 1.000) and their counting methods, we must compile heterogeneous and often partial data. For example, when an individual seeks help from an organisation, the person in charge, who may be a volunteer, is expected to consider not only the applicant but also members of his or her household.

However, it is not possible to ensure rigorous monitoring of this method. As a result, underestimation and overestimation affect a significant portion of the data collected.

In addition, to diversify their sources of supply, organisations rely on both PPS-SI and Food Banks. Thus, they provide their data to the two sources we use. This is both an additional methodological challenge and a bonus. A difficulty, because the raw compilation of the two data sets requires to consider duplicates to avoid counting organisations twice. To overcome this, we identified all the organisations concerned by this risk of double counting and selected a single value. The possibility of identifying duplicate organisations is also a bonus in that it systematically studies the discrepancy between the two values provided, giving information on the quality of the data from the databases, but also on the biases of one counting method compared to the other.

Main results

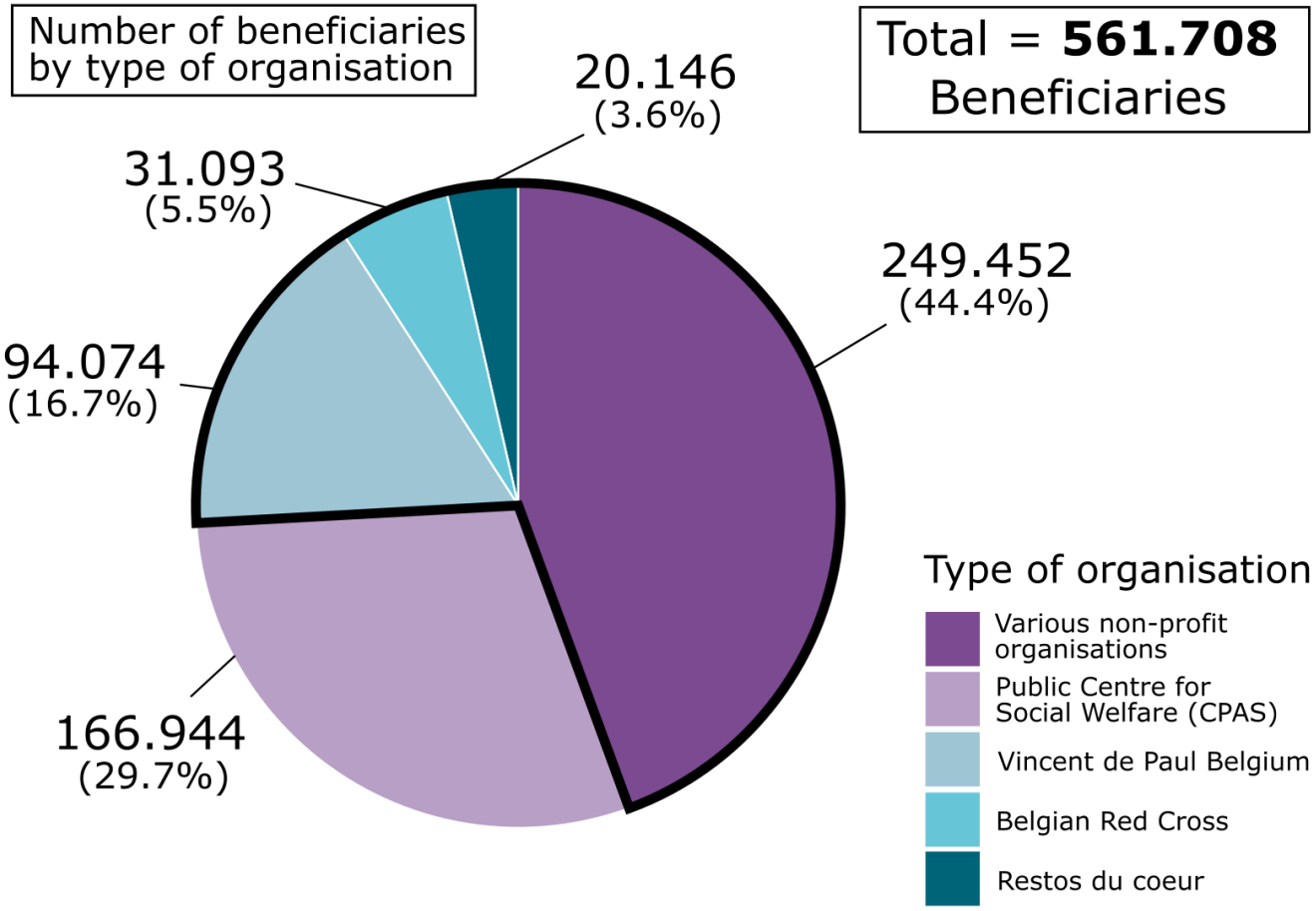

Figure 1 - Overview of food aid by number of beneficiaries

Figure 1 shows the overview of food aid that we obtained based on the data collected and processed. The number of beneficiaries for each type of organisation is shown. The shares in bold correspond to beneficiaries assisted by an organisation other than a CPAS.

aidealimentaire@fdss.be

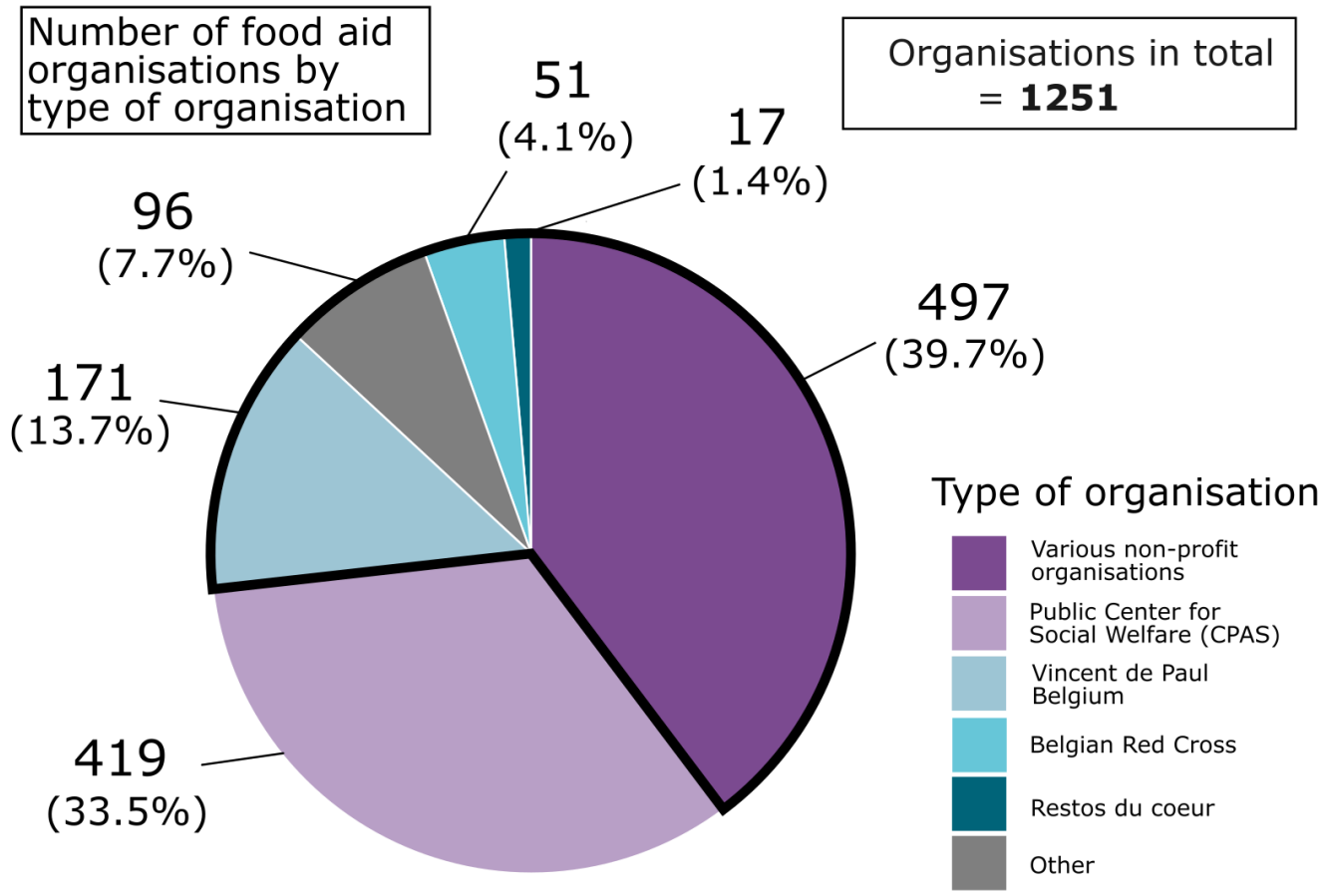

Figure 2 - Overview of food aid by number of organisations

Figure 2 shows the distribution of food aid organisations by type. Within the group of non-profit organisations, it should be noted that some organisations are directly mandated by a CPAS, as part of a partnership, to distribute aid at municipal level. These organisations are classified as non-profit organisations although they have a partnership with the CPAS. The proportion of CPAS on the graph is therefore limited to beneficiaries of CPAS, while beneficiaries of non-profit organisations working on behalf of CPAS are in the category "various non-profit organisations". The shares in bold represent the aid provided outside the CPAS' activities.

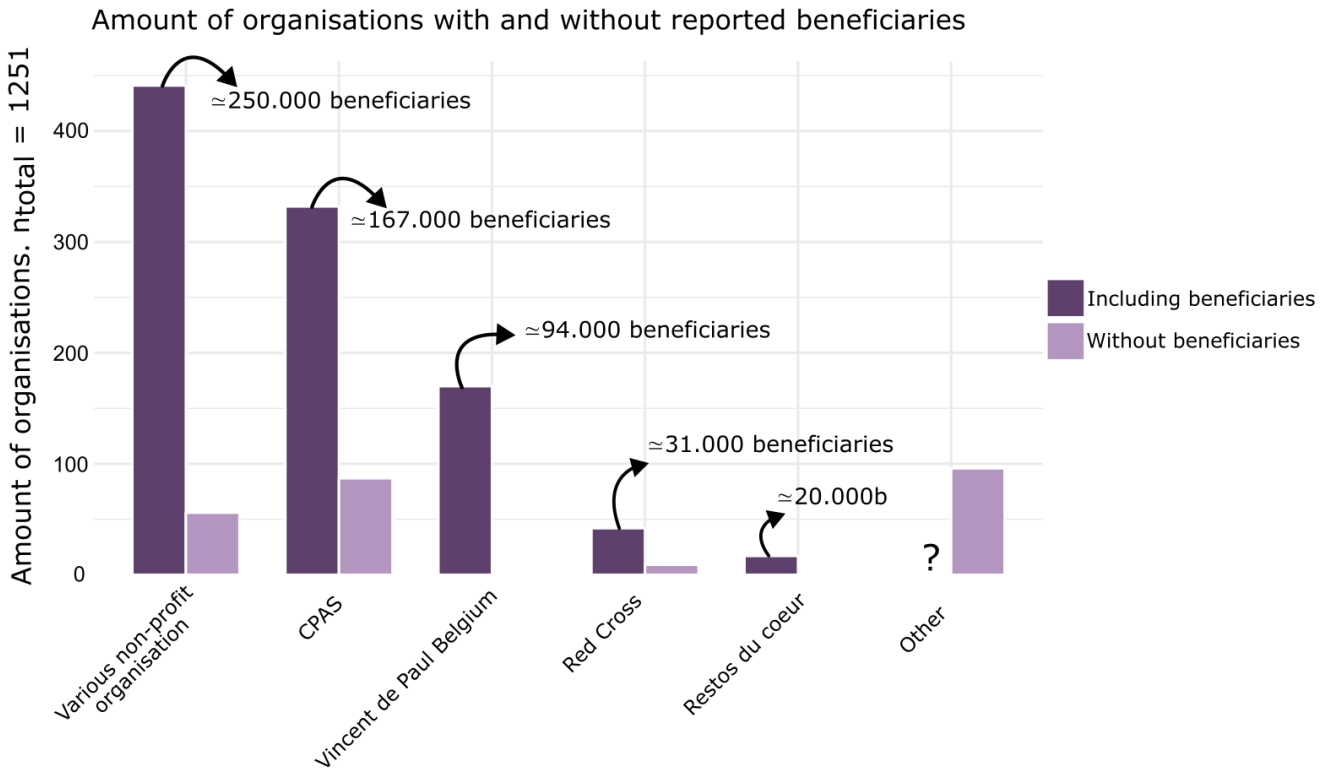

Figure 3 - Proportion of organisations according to the presence of informed beneficiaries in a database

Figure 3 shows the food aid landscape from a different perspective. Here, the category "without beneficiaries" (in pink) includes all organisations that have not encoded anyone. This means that we have a record of their existence in the databases, but we cannot establish a number of beneficiaries for these organisations.

The 'Other' type of organisation contains the highest number of organisations with no encoded beneficiaries. In most cases, these are schools, day centers and night shelters, for which there is a lack of data.[4]

The second group of organisations without registered beneficiaries are in the CPAS category. Some CPAS outsource food aid to grassroots associations, while others are simply not active in food aid. In the first case, the beneficiaries of the municipality are already included elsewhere, in the "Non-profit organization" category.

[4] Most of the missing observations comes from FoodIT, the computerized database of Food Banks. It contains more organisations than in the PPS-SI, but the number of beneficiaries is more often missing.

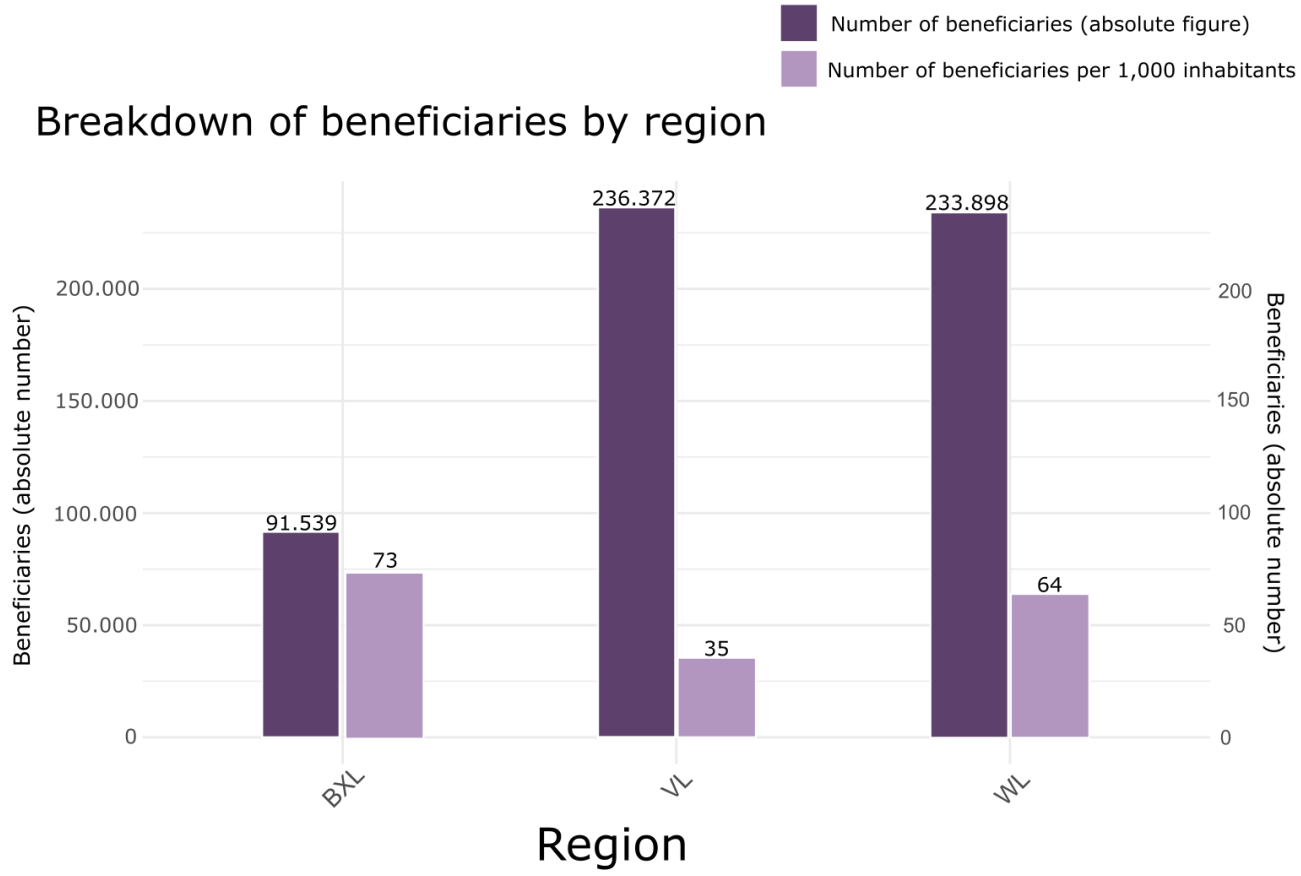

Figure 4 - Distribution of beneficiaries by region

The distribution of beneficiaries by region (Figure 4) illustrates the significant relative share of beneficiaries present in the Brussels Region. Indeed, per 1.000 inhabitants, the Brussels Region has the highest rate of recipients of food aid. Flanders and Wallonia have a similar absolute number of beneficiaries. However, once reduced to the size of the population, the number of beneficiaries is almost twice as high in Wallonia as in Flanders. This proportion is even higher for the Brussels Region.

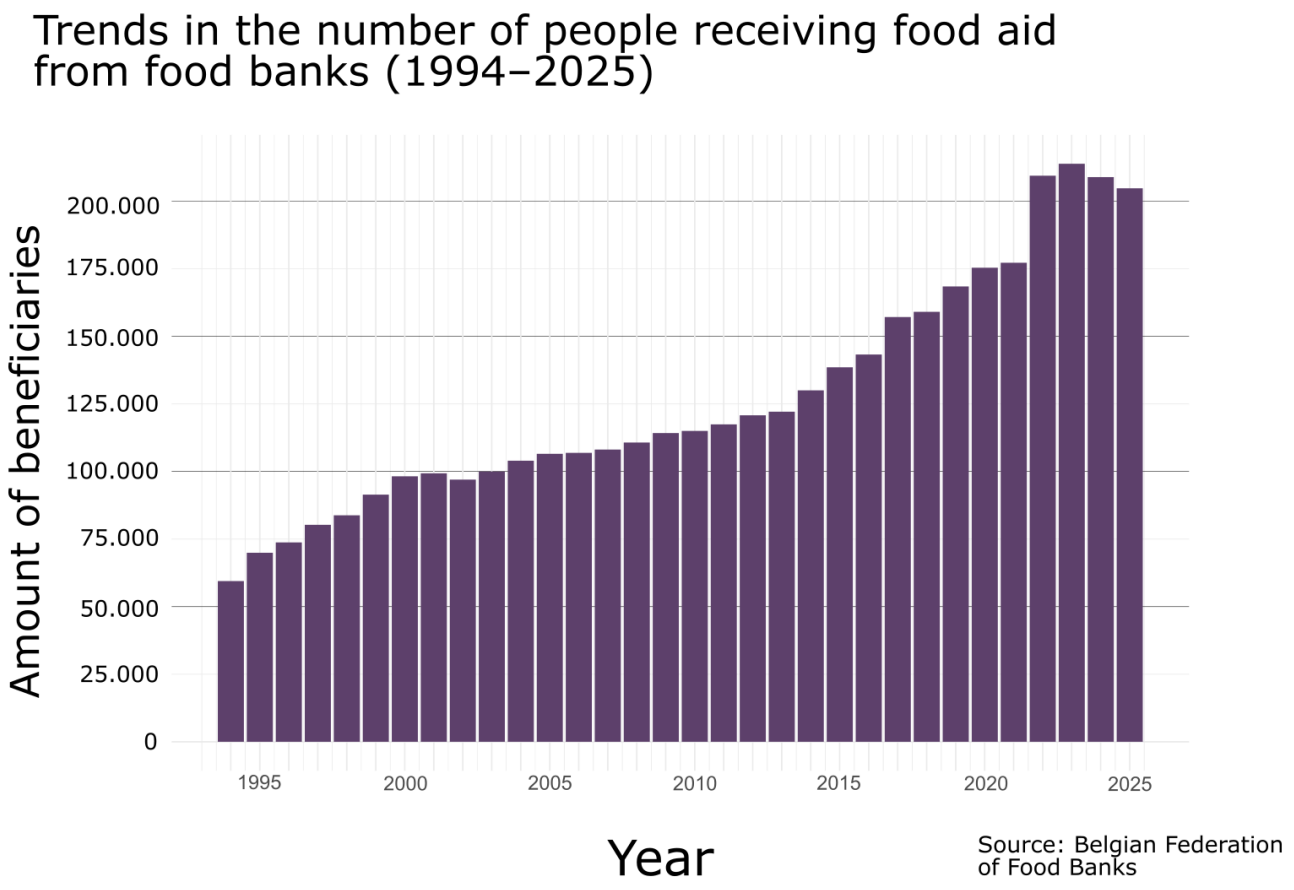

Figure 5 - Evolution of the number of beneficiaries of food banks between 1994 and 2025

Data provided by Food Banks (Figure 5) show that the evolution of the number of beneficiaries follows cycles of moderate and stronger increases. The reasons for the plateau observed in recent years will be discussed later.

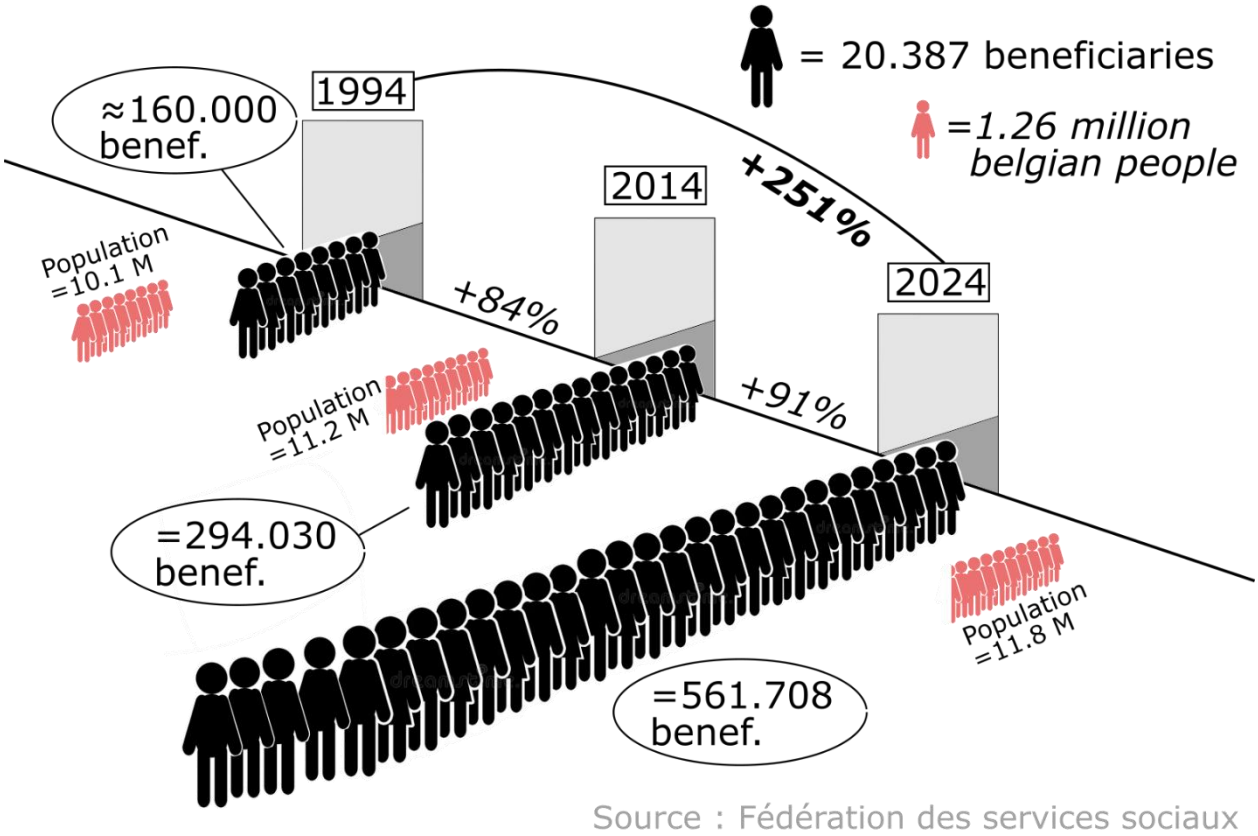

Figure 6 - Evolution of the number of food aid beneficiaries. Source - FdSS

Figure 6 shows that the number of food aid recipients has almost doubled in 10 years, while it has multiplied by 3 to 4 in 30 years (+251%).[5] Over the same period, the Belgian population has only increased by 16%. This means that a significant proportion of the population has started using food aid since the late 1990s, and it amounts to hundreds of thousands of people.

[5] Here, the estimated value for 1994 is deduced from a simple rule of three putting into perspective the data of the Food Banks and the two estimates of the FdSS for 2014 and 2024 (present study).

aidealimentaire@fdss.be

Methodology

In this section, we explain the method used to calculate the results presented in the previous section. We describe the data used according to their sources, the steps to compile them as well as the methodological choices made in the face of uncertainties related to the quality and representativeness of the data.

Homogenisation of data and working hypotheses

In a previous update of the food aid figures published in 2016, we added the PPS-SI data with those of the Food Banks taking into account the overlap of the organisations identified in the two databases (Hubert & Vleminckx, 2016).[6] As a result, we were able to avoid counting an organisation listed in different data sources multiple times. However, the data were not homogenised to take account of the different counting methods.

In this study, we go further by processing the data to account for this diversity and thus homogenise the numbers in question. In practical terms, we convert FoodIT data into an "PPS-SI" database. This data transformation takes place on two fronts.

- On the one hand, the values provided by the Food Banks change from a monthly to an annual basis. In fact, they relate to monthly periods and do not directly represent an annual number of beneficiaries for each organisation affiliated to a food bank.
- On the other hand, we estimate the number of beneficiaries for organisations affiliated to a Food Bank by assuming that the Food Bank follows the same counting methodology as that used for SPP-IS data. Irrespective of the temporal basis of the values provided, the aim here is to assess the difference between the number of beneficiaries notified to the PPS-SI and the number notified to the Food Banks, since these two figures never correspond exactly in practice.

The method is as follows.
Whenever an organisation is identified in both databases, its PPS-SI data is given priority over that of Food Banks.

PPS-SI figures are less likely to be underestimated. Indeed, membership to a Food Bank requires payment of a contribution of €2 per beneficiary. Affiliated organisations therefore have an interest in providing the minimum number of beneficiaries that allows them to have enough food to help as many as possible, while avoiding paying for the maximum number of people. At the same time, the figures provided to the PPS-SI are checked to see the correspondence between the number declared and the official level of the organisation's accreditation. While the figures provided to the Food Banks are limited by the membership fee, those of the PPS-SI are also limited since all the data provided in the context of ESF+ orders are checked and compared, to the organisation's accreditation, which officially determines the maximum number of beneficiaries that can be supported by the organisation.

PPS-SI data cover organisations that placed an ESF+ order in 2025. Among them, 57% are also registered with a Food Bank (=380/672). To obtain the joint total of the two databases (PPS-SI & Food Banks),

[6] H-O. Hubert & J. Vleminckx, 2016, Food *aid today, the right to food tomorrow.* Action research. FDSS.

organisations affiliated to a Food Bank that did not place an ESF+ order in 2025 need to be taken into account. This subset totals approximately 270 organisations, or 43% of all organisations affiliated with Food Banks.

In this particular subset, which represents 270 organizations out of the 1.002 involved in our total, we homogenise the figures to bring them into line with the methodology used by the PPS-SI. The details of our methodology are set out in the annex to this document. Here we present the result of our homogenisation according to the data's source.

Data source	Organisations PPS-SI & FB	SPP Organisations Only	BA Organisations Only	Total
Number of organisations	382	365	255	1.002
Gross number of beneficiaries before homogenisation	267.581	209.877	64.156	541.614
Beneficiary numbers after homogenisation	Unchanged	Unchanged	84.250	561.708

Table 2 - Distribution of organisations and number of recipients by data source.

The widest possible overview

Finally, we obtain a homogenised total number of beneficiaries for all the organisations present in the of the PPS-SI and Food Banks (FoodIT) databases. This includes a large number of CPAS and non-profit organisations, but also the Vincent de Paul Belgium associations, for which the values identified by the umbrella organisation correspond closely to the values provided on a case-by-case basis by the associations to the PPS-SI when ordering FSE+.

However, some organisations are not included in these two databases. This is the case for a number of Red Cross or Restos du coeur entities. We therefore used some figures provided by these organisations while combining them with the figures available from the PPS-SI and the Food Banks databases.

Contributions and limitations of the study

A look back at the figures recorded

To summarise, let us return to the main contribution of this study. Having homogenised the data makes it more reliable and enhances the quality of the total we get. The following graph shows how our method corrected the raw data.

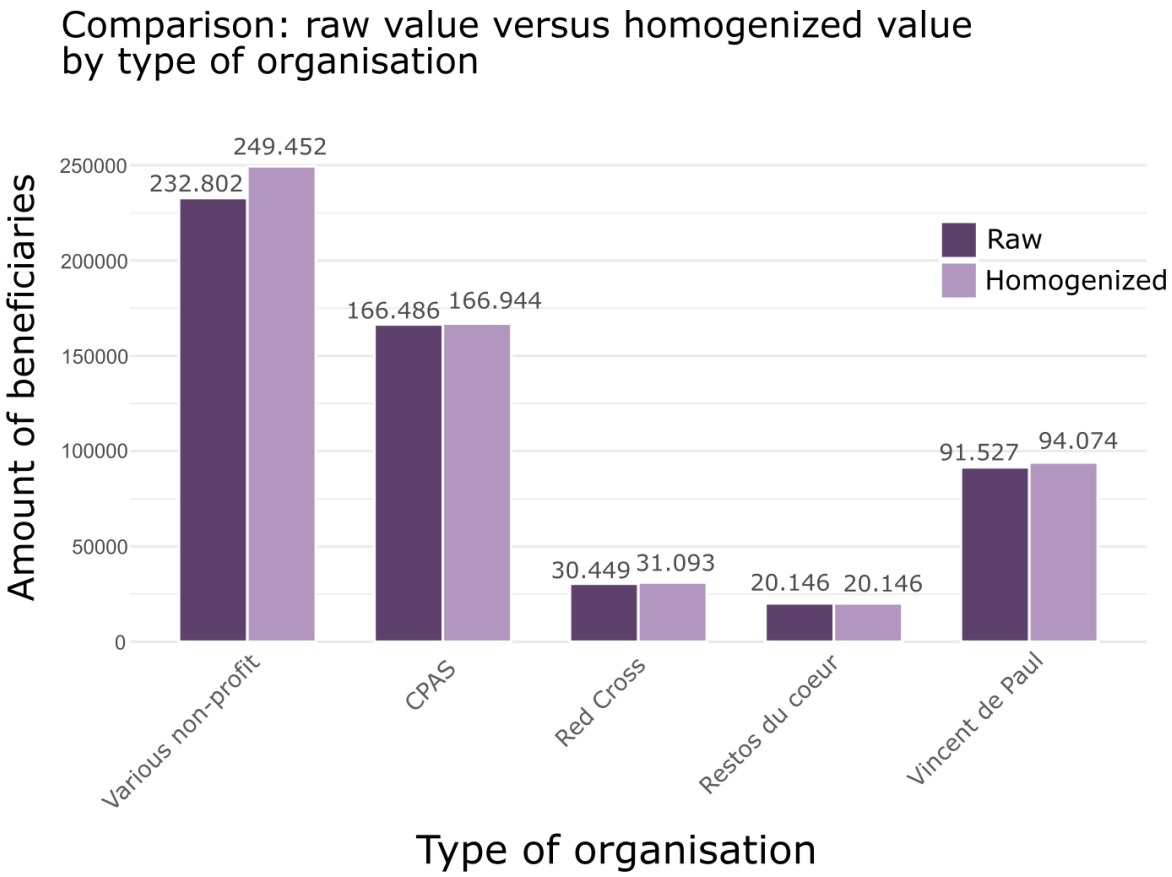

Figure 7 - Chart of the impact of data homogenization for each type of organisation

As shown in Figure 7, the correction remains small. In total, it leads to an increase in the total obtained before adjustment of approximately 20.000 beneficiaries. This difference is small compared to the additional 142.000 beneficiaries listed in the PPS-SI database by organisations that provide figures to both the PPS-SI and the Food Banks.[7]

The correction has the greatest impact on the non-profit sector (category 'Various non-profit organisations'). Most of these organisations are exclusively affiliated to the Food Banks. To explain this small variation compared to the reference sample, it can be pointed out that organisations that do not have an PPS-SI accreditation are generally smaller than those that do. Therefore, the adjusted values in the sample – which

[7] In the reference sample, the number of beneficiaries increases from 125.000 to 267.000 once PPS-SI data are used rather than FoodIT (Food Banks) data.

has undergone data homogenisation – are lower to begin with and their evolution in absolute terms remains limited.

In other words, larger organisations are less likely to go unnoticed by umbrella organisations and census. However, the adjusted sample includes organisations that fall under the PPS-SI's radars. As these are smaller in size, the homogenisation of the data leads to an increase in the estimated total of 38% instead of 113% for the large organisations included in the reference sample.

Beyond the numbers

The interpretation of the figures presented in this study should be compared with statistics on precariousness at a more general level. On the one hand, as we explained in the introduction, food poverty appears to affect a significantly larger share of the population than those receiving support (the share covered by this study). The aid provided remains insufficient to tackle food insecurity in Belgium. In this regard, figures from *the Citizens' Survey on Living Conditions and Access to Fundamental Rights* (ISADF 2025)[8] indicate that almost 1 in 3 Walloons fear running out of food before they have the money buy more.[9]

Our total of 561.708 beneficiaries at national level is therefore to be considered as a minimum value. Both the methodological prudence we have shown, as well as the multiple potential underestimation factors of beneficiaries allows us to state this.

It is worth noting that these figures are an estimate, as accurate as possible based on self-reported data, of the aid received. **The need for food aid is certainly greater than what we can actually count.** There are many reasons for this.

- Some people do **not have access to food aid:** eligibility criteria are often restrictive, lack of food aid services nearby, psychological barriers (shame, fear), saturation of the service leading those responsible to refuse new recipients, …
- Moreover, the **existing data used does not cover all the existing food aid services**. Our study does not take into account a number religious (e.g. evangelical churches or mosques) and citizens' initiatives that operate under institutional radars and outside the scope of the Food Banks and the PPS-SI. The impact this informal food aid remains largely unexplored to date.
- In addition, **the lack of data for more than 100 organisations active** in FoodIT, which are not affiliated with food banks, distorts the total number of beneficiaries. At the same time, some affiliated associations use parallel computer systems or work offline, thus omitting part of their recipients. This under-reporting, although proportionally low, requires a verification of the actual activity of the concerned organisations to refine the estimates. Comprehensive data coverage therefore remains a challenge to ensure the accuracy of the food aid landscape.
- Finally, the figures presented are largely limited to data from PPS-SI and Food Banks. However, as mentioned in the introduction, **food aid is not limited to these sources and forms of aid**.[10] More

[8] Survey conducted in 2025 by the Walloon Institute for Evaluation, Foresight and Statistics (IWEPS)
[9] https://isadf.iweps.be/?action=indicateur&droit=02&indicateur=01&type=1
[10] For example, at the level of CPAS, representing one third of the organisations listed here, only ESF+ support is quantifiable. All other forms of support, food or otherwise, which may contribute to a household's food security, are not counted. E.g. money paid on a case-by-case basis by a CPAS to a beneficiary to give a temporary boost.

generally, food aid takes heterogeneous forms: food parcels, social restaurants, social grocery stores, meals provided in a day/night shelter, informal assistance, financial assistance indirectly securing amounts for food purchases…

While the majority of the organisations involved in food parcel distribution are included in our study, only a part of social restaurants, shelters and social grocery stores are included. However, these organisations are only partially included in our figures, which give an incomplete representation of the beneficiaries of other forms of food aid. It is therefore also a reason to think that our figures underestimate the reality of food aid in Belgium.

In recent years, the deterioration of socio-economic conditions in Belgium has led to an increased need for aid and fewer resources to meet it.

Food aid is bearing the brunt of this change: waiting lists and queue are growing. At least half of the food aid services in major cities are affected, according to the umbrella organisations working with the PPS-SI and the Fédération des Services Sociaux. Given the decline in co-financing planned by the federal government to the ESF+ funds, professionals expect the situation to worsen considerably in the course of 2026, starting in spring, when stocks will gradually be emptied.

The combination of this with the expected inflow of people excluded from unemployment benefits and not finding employment raises a lot of concerns. Food aid has not increased substantially since 2023, because services are saturated and no longer able to accommodate new people. The fact that our estimate of the number of beneficiaries has almost doubled in 10 years, rising from 300.000 to 560.000 between the surveys conducted in 2016 and 2026, is alarming.

To estimate the share of unmet need for food aid, saturated services could keep track of the number of people on the waiting list. Although this information would tell us anything about the rate of non-take-up of food aid.

Indeed, our figures show that 50% of all organisations surveyed have fewer than 400 beneficiaries. Together, they account for 20% of the estimated 561.703 beneficiaries. This means that 80% of beneficiaries are concentrated within the largest organisations. It is possible – and even likely – that the number of beneficiaries provided in the other half (representing 20% of beneficiaries) is underestimated, because of poor and inadequate counting methods and tools, and because these organisations, operating mainly through volunteering, lack the means to do so.

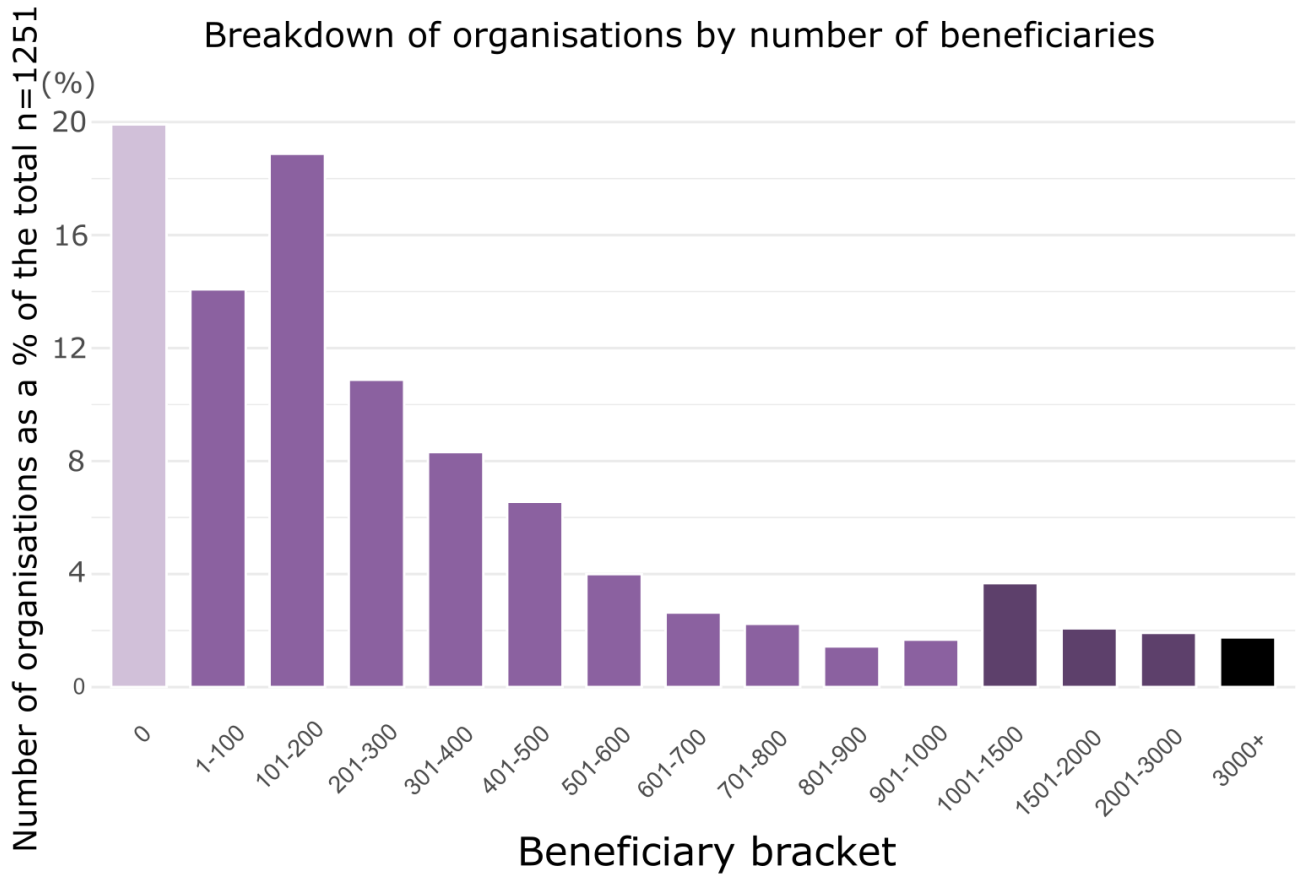

Figure 8 - Histogram of organisations by size

aidealimentaire@fdss.be

Annexes

Methodology: general logic of correction

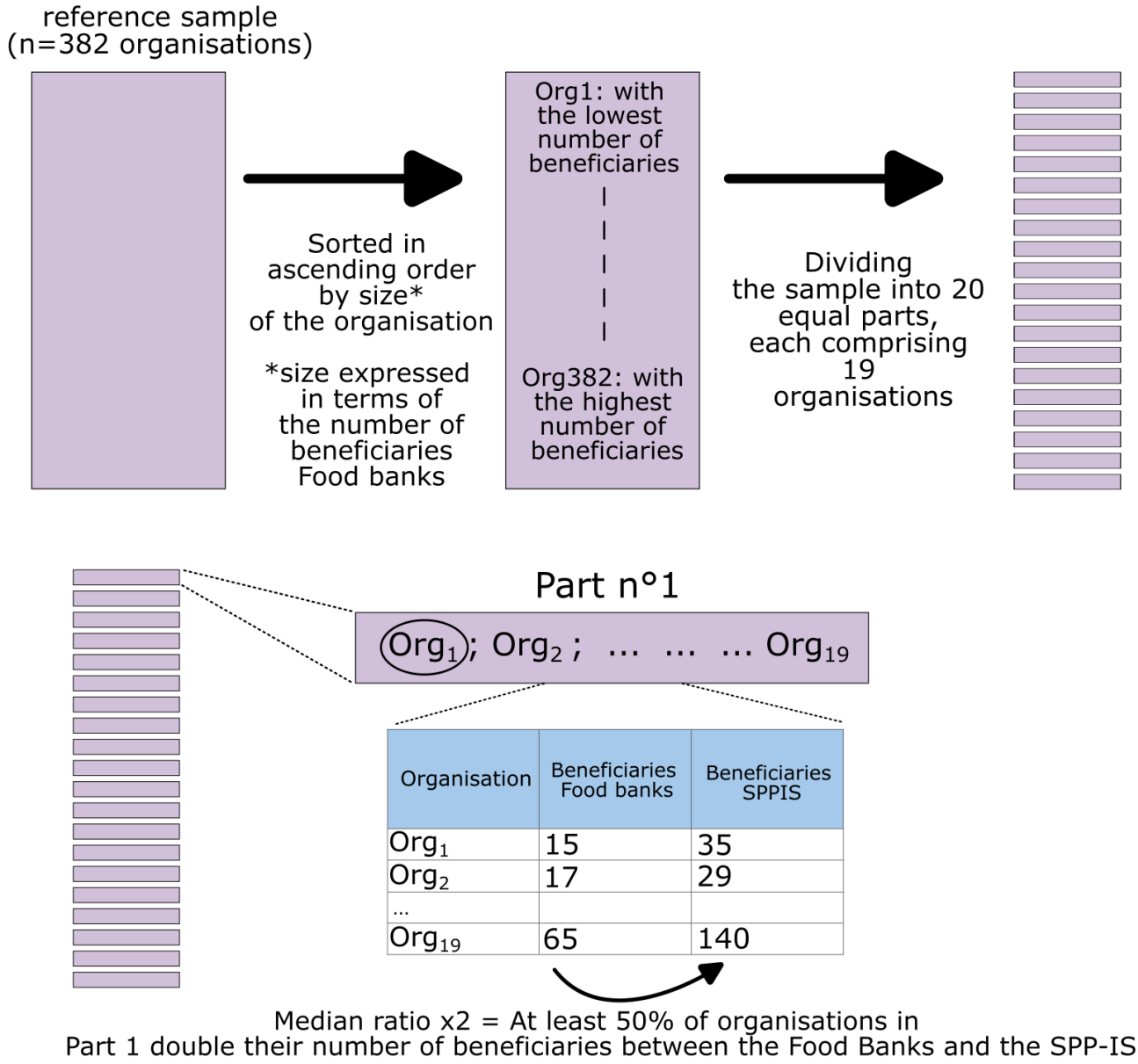

Figure 9 - Explanatory diagram of the method for calculating the correction coefficient

To homogenise the FoodIT data on the basis of the PPS-SI data, we use the reference sample (n=382, **Figure 9** above). It is composed of all duplicate organisations, present both in the PPS-SI (following an FSE+ order) and FoodIT (Food Bank) databases. Each duplicate organisation therefore has two different values. The in-depth analysis of the reference sample makes it possible to deduce two crucial pieces of information. First, the difference between a monthly figure (FoodIT) and an annual figure (PPS-SI). Second, the difference in the data collection methods between the Food Banks (FoodIT) and the PPS-SI.

With this information, we can homogenise the "adjusted" sample (n=255) which brings together all the organisations listed only in FoodIT and not in the PPS-SI databases. The treatment is the same as the one we summarized in the diagram above. The adjusted sample is ranked in ascending order and divided into 20 equal parts, containing 12 or 13 organisations each, instead of 19 in the reference sample.

Only one "number of beneficiaries" value is identified for each organisation. The adjustment is made by multiplying the number of beneficiaries by the corresponding coefficient, deducted from the reference sample.

Here are some examples of correction.

Name	Beneficiaries FoodIT	Quantile	Coefficient	"Adjusted" beneficiaries
Le Chant d'Oiseau, non-profit org.	65	5	X1.9	121
Satelliet, non-profit org.	148	12	X1,4	209
Ougrée Red Cross House	220	15	X1,1	237

Table 3 - Examples of raw data adjustment

Instead of applying a single correction coefficient to the whole test sample, 20 different ones are applied, and each one has a better statistical representativeness. Samples with small organisations have coefficients up to X3, while larger organisations have coefficients between X1 and X2. Thus, the same coefficient is used to correct the figures of similar sized organisations.

The decrease in the coefficient with the size of the organisation is explained by the fact that it is easier to underestimate by half 150 beneficiaries than 1.500. Therefore, the difference between FoodIT and PPS-SI values can vary from double to triple for small organisations, but not for large organisations that help more than 1.000 people for example. To miss such a mass of individuals when counting the organisation is materially and statistically unlikely. In other words, missing 100 people out of a total of 1.000 individuals is relatively less impactful for the coefficient (10% missed) than missing 100 people out of a total of 200 individuals (50% missed).

The high sensitivity of the average to extreme values has therefore made us prefer the median. This is why the coefficient we use calculates the median difference between the numbers of beneficiaries identified in FoodIT and the PPS-SI.

Data cleaning

Compiling data from PPS-SI and Food Banks databases is a task that requires being able to distinguish each organisation. A food aid service appears in one of the two databases following encoding by an organisation manager. The name of the organisation that appears in the data therefore varies according to the information that the person in charge wanted to encode. Thus, a non-profit organisation is not always informed as such, nor is a parcels distribution service or a social grocery store. Extensive research on each of the services, one by one, is necessary to ensure that a difference in name between the two compiled databases reflects the existence of two different services, and not a different naming.

Many duplicates may have appeared in the data following this cleaning procedure. This is why the gross number of organisations registered with the Food Banks (FoodIT) decreases from 750 to 650 organisations (approx.) once the cleaning had been carried out. Another useful identification variable to discriminate against duplicates is the ESF+ registration number available for organisations that have already placed an order with the PPS-SI.

Among organisations with zero beneficiaries informed, the risk of overlooking organisations that are in fact active and helping a significant number of beneficiaries is limited. These organisations are probably inactive, or grant aid only based on their own funds or donations. In this case, the number of beneficiaries that slip under the radar remains limited. However, we do not have the means to ensure this.

In addition to these organisations, much of the Food Banks database that were not considered in the total are organisations that do not grant direct aid to beneficiaries. These can be, as we have seen, logistics platforms whose mission is to store the products for food aid organisations. They may also include institutions such as schools that have used FoodIT in the past to manage food stocks, whether or not linked to food aid. We still find day or night shelters for homeless people and finally freight transport companies. Whilst these organisations can be linked to a food aid, it is nevertheless impossible to determine the scale of their activities in terms of the number of beneficiaries.