



# **Mid-term evaluation of the EU programme for employment and social innovation - EaSI**

Framework Service Contract VC/2013/0083

Final Evaluation Report

Written by ICF Consulting Ltd  
November 2017



*Social  
Europe*

**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

Directorate F — Investment

Unit F.3 — Programming and planning

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## 1 Introduction

This section presents a short introduction including an overview of the policy context and the purpose of the evaluation.

### 1.1 The mid-term evaluation – scope and purpose

#### 1.1.1 Scope of the evaluation

- Thematic scope: the evaluation covers activities undertaken under the three axes of the EaSI programme (PROGRESS, EURES, Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship) and its transversal issues.
- Stakeholders: the evaluation encompasses relevant stakeholders: EaSI committee, relevant policy committees, social partners, national authorities and bodies, and key EU civil society organisations.
- Temporal scope: the evaluation covers the activity period running from January 2014 until December 2016.
- Geographical scope: the evaluation covers all Member States and other participating countries.

#### 1.1.2 Purpose of the evaluation

The purpose of the mid-term evaluation is two-fold:

- Looking back, the evaluation aims to 'measure, on a qualitative and quantitative basis, progress made in meeting the Programme's objectives, to address the social environment within the Union and any major changes introduced by Union legislation, to determine whether the resources of the Programme have been used efficiently and to assess its Union added value', in line with Art 13 of the EaSI Regulation (paragraph 1).
- Looking forward, the mid-term evaluation aims to recommend adjustments to the way the programme is currently run, so as to improve its performance in the second part of its implementation in line with Art 13 of the EaSI Regulation (paragraph 2), as well as in preparation of the post 2020 period - in line with Art 13 of the EaSI Regulation (paragraph 3).

The mid-term evaluation was structured in a way that shows the strengths and weaknesses of the programme also in view of preparing the renewal post 2020 as the results of the ex-post evaluation will be available only end of 2022.

The evaluation questions cover the five evaluation criteria according to the Better Regulation Guidelines (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and EU added-value), as well as the programme's governance issue.

### 1.2 Report structure

The evaluation report contains the following sections:

- **Section 1:** Introduction
- **Section 2:** Overview of the EaSI intervention logic
- **Section 3:** Methodological approach
- **Section 4:** Findings by evaluation criteria
- **Section 5:** Programme's governance
- **Section 6:** Conclusions and recommendations
- **Section 7:** General conclusion

The evaluation report is complemented by 6 annexes presented in a separate document:

- **Annex 1:** Intervention logics per axis
- **Annex 2:** Evaluation framework for EaSI and per axis



- **Annex 3:** Methodology
- **Annex 4:** Additional findings/information on PROGRESS axis
- **Annex 5:** Additional findings/information on EURES axis
- **Annex 6:** Additional findings/information on Microfinance/Social entrepreneurship axis

Four additional volumes are part of this deliverable and are submitted as separate documents:

- **Volume I:** Case studies reports
- **Volume II:** Open public consultation synopsis report
- **Volume III:** Beneficiaries' survey analysis report
- **Volume IV:** Focus group analysis report

### 1.3 Activities undertaken

0 summarises the work undertaken during the interim stage of the evaluation.

*Table 1: Tasks conducted during the interim stage*

Tasks	Deliverables/timing	Final Report
<b>Focus group</b>	A focus group with EaSI committee members has been conducted in November 2016 identifying EaSI committee members' views on i) the governance structure, ii) governance process, iii) coherence and complementarities, and iv) efficiency of EaSI.  The conclusions are presented in a focus group analysis report.	Section 3.1.2, Annex 3.2 and Volume IV
<b>Semi-structured interviews</b>	10 scoping interviews and one interview regarding data availability have been conducted. Additionally, 51 interviews (45 as part of the case studies and 6 as a follow-up after submission of the draft interim report) were conducted across the axes.	Section 3.1.3 and Annex 3.3.
<b>Open public consultation</b>	The open public consultation ran between 12 October 2016 and 25 January 2017 in the three European Commission working languages (English, French and German) on 'Your voice in Europe' website.  The results have been provided in a synopsis report submitted as the second deliverable.	Section 3.1.4, Annex 3.4 and Volume II
<b>Case studies</b>	In total, 15 case studies across the three EaSI axes have been carried out between May-August 2015.  The individual case studies are available in a separate volume.	Section 3.1.5, Annex 3.5 and Volume I
<b>Beneficiaries' survey</b>	The survey has been conducted between 23 January and 13 February 2017.  The analysis of the responses is presented in	Section 3.1.5, Annex 3.6 and Volume III

Tasks	Deliverables/timing	Final Report
	a survey report.	
<b>Analysis and triangulation of data</b>	Data collected via desk research, beneficiaries' survey, open public consultation, interviews, focus group and case studies have been analysed under each evaluation criteria/questions.	Section 4
<b>Draft key findings</b>	A draft of key findings, conclusions and recommendations has been submitted.	Sections 4-6, Annexes 4-6 (for a detailed overview of the axes)
<b>Final report</b>	This document constitutes the final evaluation report as described in section 1 (introduction).	All sections, annexes and Volumes I-IV

Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation

## 2 Overview of EaSI intervention logic and evaluation framework

### 2.1 Intervention logic

This section presents the reconstructed intervention logic of EaSI<sup>1</sup> on the basis of the evidence collected. The EaSI umbrella federates three axes and allows them to contribute to implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

The **PROGRESS** axis supports policy-making and implementation through promoting a high level of quality and sustainable employment, guaranteeing adequate and decent social protection, reducing poverty and social exclusion, and improving working conditions. The analytical, mutual learning, dissemination and capacity building activities under the PROGRESS axis are expected to produce evidence to inform EU policies and legislation. They contribute to effective and inclusive information sharing, mutual learning and dialogue, better conditions for social policy innovation, and greater capacity of national and EU organisations.

The **EURES** axis facilitates the transparency of job vacancies, applications and any related information for applicants and employers, development of services for the recruitment and placing of workers in employment through the clearance of job vacancies and applications at Union level (in particular, targeted mobility schemes), and the cross-border partnerships. The specific actions and activities under each thematic section aim at achieving greater transparency of labour market information and effective provision of services for recruitment and placing of workers.

The **Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship** axis activities facilitates access to microfinance for vulnerable groups and micro-enterprises, supports social entrepreneurship as well as the capacity building of microcredit providers. The specific activities under these thematic sections are expected to lead to improved access to and availability of finance for vulnerable groups, microenterprises and social enterprises, and increased capacity of microcredit providers.

Bringing the three programmes under one umbrella programme in 2014 was expected to help, among other benefits, build on their past success and achieve common objectives for EU employment and social policies, better coordination between the programmes, as well as greater policy coherence and increased efficiency in management and implementation<sup>2</sup>. A series of cross-cutting issues – such as gender equality, non-discrimination, and combating poverty and social exclusion – are supported by each axis and action.

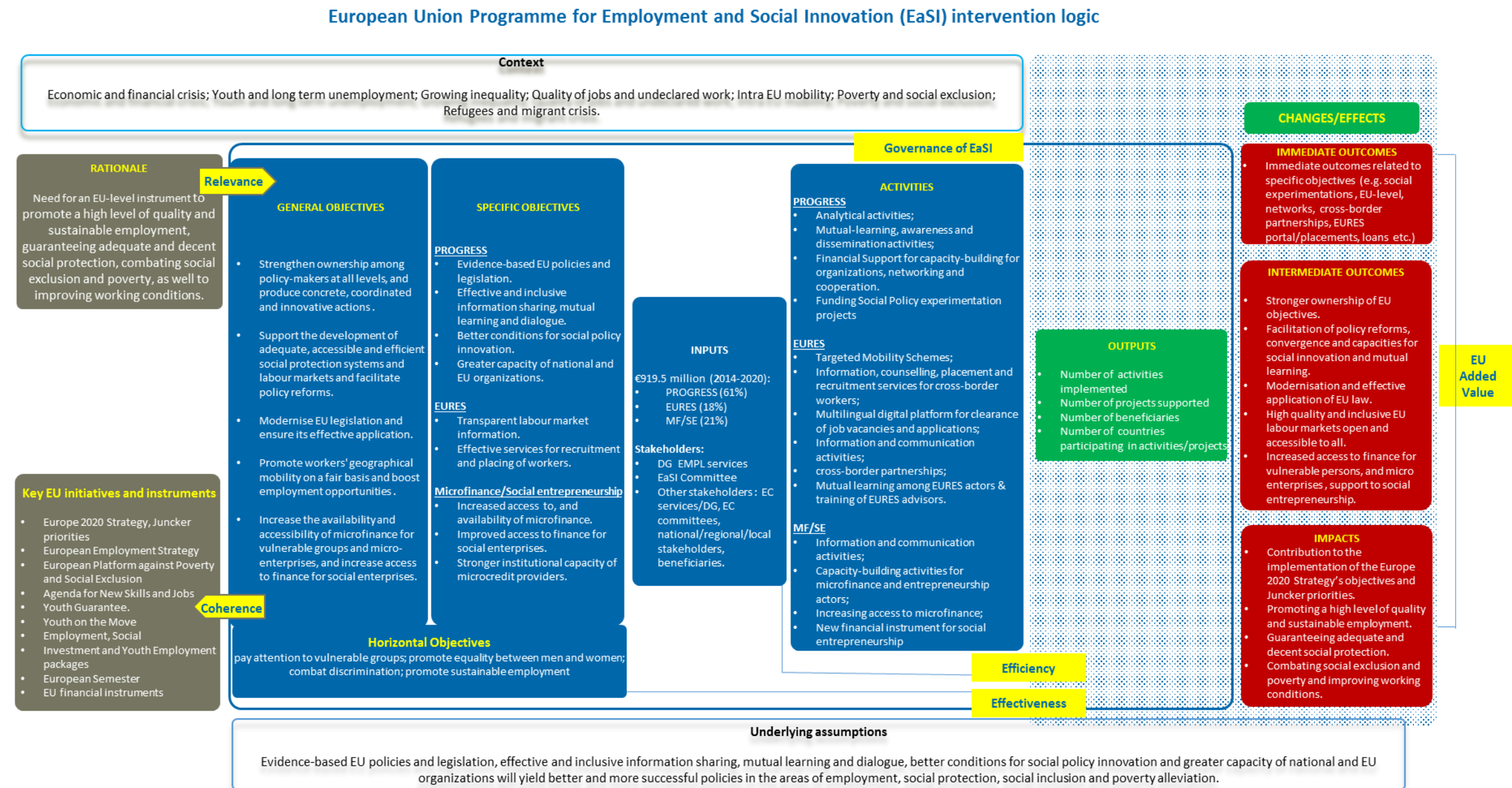
The EaSI intervention logic (0) depicts the pathways through which the activities are thought to bring about the desired changes. It includes the assumptions upon which the success and effectiveness of the programme relies. Assumptions regarding the causal pathways between building blocks clarify the conditions under which programme administrators would expect the delivery of outputs and outcomes. Assumptions regarding the context of the programme concern the political and economic cycle as well as the social and institutional environment in which the programme operates. The EaSI intervention logic also includes the programme's expected immediate, intermediate and ultimate outcomes. The outputs produced by the programme's axes should lead to achieving the programme's general objectives. Attainment of the programme's objectives in turn is expected to contribute to the realization of the "Europe 2020" objectives of promoting a high level of quality and sustainable employment, guaranteeing adequate and decent social protection, combating social exclusion and poverty, and improving working conditions.

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<sup>1</sup> Please also see the intervention logics per axis in Annex 1.

<sup>2</sup> European Commission(2013), EaSI New EU umbrella programme for employment and social policy

Figure 1: EaSI intervention logic



Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation

## 2.2 Evaluation framework

The tender specifications defined specific evaluation questions to be addressed under each of the five criteria - relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and EU added value.

In order to cover each criteria, the research team has grouped the evaluation questions under a number of leading topics and has developed an evaluation framework which includes, key question, sub questions, indicators and judgment criteria (see Annex 2)<sup>3</sup>.

0 below presents the key evaluation questions and topics.

Table 2: Summary of the evaluation topics and questions

Topics	Questions
<b>Relevance</b>	
<i>The extent to which the EaSI programme and its logical framework are relevant in respect to needs, problems and issues identified in target groups.</i>	
<b>Topic 1: continuing relevance of general objectives</b>	<p>To what extent do the general objectives identified in Article 4 of the EaSI Regulation continue to be relevant?</p> <p>What existing/emerging challenges should be taken into account in the second part of the programme (2017-2020)?</p>
<b>Topic 2: continuing relevance of the specific objectives of the three axes</b>	With regard to the programme's general objectives and considering the socio-economic situation and the policy development, to what extent do the specific objectives as well the actions/projects financed of the three axes continue to be relevant?
<b>Topic 3: continuing relevance of resource allocation between the three axes</b>	With regard to the specific objectives of each axis, and considering the socio-economic and policy development, to what extent is the split between the three axes and the split between thematic sections still relevant?
<b>Effectiveness</b>	
<i>The extent to which EaSI has progressed towards its general objectives and its horizontal provisions (Articles 4 of the EaSI Regulation), as well as those specifically defined for PROGRESS (Article 15 of the EaSI Regulation), EURES (Article 20), and Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship (Article 26).</i>	
<b>Topic 4: effectiveness in generating outcomes and</b>	To what extent has the programme as a whole and each of its axes delivered the expected outcomes in terms of quantity and quality in order to achieve the general objectives and its horizontal provisions?

<sup>3</sup> See in Annex 2 the EaSI detailed evaluation framework and the evaluation frameworks for each axis.

<b>achieving objectives</b>	To what extent have the available financial means enabled the programme as a whole and each of its axes to fulfil their objectives entirely and in a timely manner?
	To what extent does the current programme allow for effective upscaling of interventions and for follow-up conditions and mechanisms?
	What have been the good practices in scaling up interventions?
<b>Topic 5: effectiveness in bringing about change</b>	What have been - at this stage of the implementation - the qualitative and quantitative changes/effects of the interventions?
	To what extent can these changes/effects be credited to the interventions?
	To what extent did other different factors influence the achievement observed?
	What have been the unintended effects of the programme?
<b>Topic 6: effectiveness in involving stakeholders</b>	Which targeted groups of the programme have been involved in the programming and implementation of the EaSI programme?
	Has there been sufficient involvement of stakeholders in the programming and implementation of the EaSI programme?
	What were the most effective methods of involvement of the targeted groups and stakeholders?
<b>Efficiency</b>	
<i>The extent to which the intended outputs and outcomes of EaSI have been achieved efficiently, and to what extent flexibility, adjustment and follow-up conditions are being set.</i>	
<b>Topic 7: efficiency of resource allocation and financing procedures</b>	To what extent is the budget allocation and spending as a whole, and by axis and thematic sections proportionate and efficient for achieving the programme's objectives?
	To what extent have the available financial means enabled the programme as a whole and each of its axes to fulfil their objectives efficiently?
<b>Topic 8: benefits accruing (relative to inputs)</b>	Which are the most significant advantages and benefits resulting from these activities for the EU policy makers, practitioners and the programme's final beneficiaries (e.g. social enterprises employees, vulnerable people)?
<b>Coherence</b>	
<i>To what extent to which the programme's activities have been coherent with other interventions with similar objectives.</i>	
<b>Topic 9: coherence accruing from the merging of</b>	To what extent did the merging of the three previous programmes PROGRESS, EURES and PROGRESS Microfinance Facility improve EaSI internal/external consistency, complementarity and flexibility?

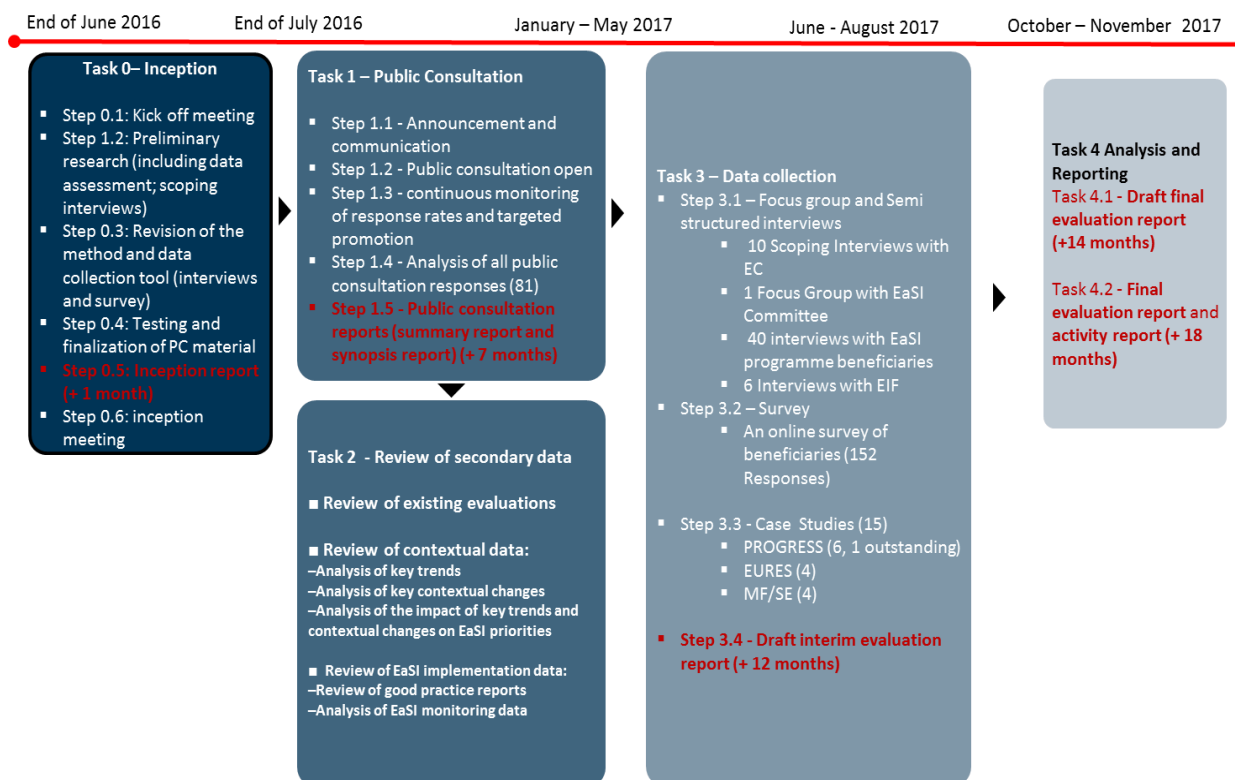
<b>the three previous programmes</b>	What kind of synergies has the programme developed between the axes?
	What level of flexibility - both between axes and between actions – would be required in order to get better outcomes?
<b>Topic 10: coherence with other EU interventions</b>	To what extent is this programme coherent and complementary with other EU programmes (e.g. ESIF, ESF)?
	What kind of synergies or joint actions has EaSI developed with these programmes?
<b>Topic 11: involvement at EU, Member State regional and local levels</b>	To what extent the national, regional and local authorities' are involved in the programme implementation?
	What would best be done at EU level to ensure that the programme's objectives are achieved?
	What would best be done at Member State level?
<b>Added Value</b>	
<i>The additional value resulting from the programme compared to what could be achieved by Member States at national, regional and local levels.</i>	
<b>Topic 12: EU added value</b>	What has been the EU added value of the EaSI programme's activities?
	To what extent did the programme's activities bring European added value and transnational dimension which could not have been achieved (or not as effectively and/or efficiently) if they had been designed and implemented only at Member State level?
	To what extent do the issues addressed by the EaSI programme continue to require action at EU level?
	What would be the most likely consequences of stopping the existing EaSI programme's activities?
<b>Topic 13: communication of the EU added value</b>	To what extent are the results and the EU added value of the programme's activities communicated and disseminated to relevant stakeholders and to the public?
	What have been the good practices in producing EU added value?
	What were the most effective ways of communication and dissemination of the programme's results to the relevant stakeholders and the broader public?

Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation

### 3 Methodological approach

This section provides a brief description of the methodology used for the data collection and analysis as part of the interim phase of this study (see 0 ).

Figure 2: Overview of the evaluation process and methods



Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation

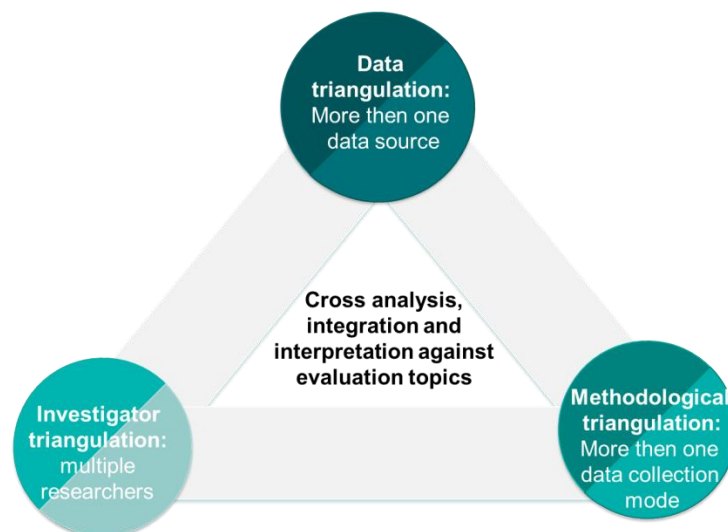
In this context, triangulation was a crucial step in the process of combining the multiple data sources, evaluator's perspectives and methods used. This essentially involved the following steps (0):

- Data triangulation: triangulation of evidence gathered from different primary and secondary sources (for the full list of sources please refer to the bibliography at the end of this document).
- Evaluator's triangulation: triangulation of information collected by different researchers joining-up through regular team briefing/de-briefing sessions.
- Methodological triangulation: triangulation of evidence gathered through different methods (desk research, interviews, beneficiaries' survey, case studies, focus groups and open public consultation).

Synthesis and triangulation has allowed the team to cross-examining evidence and overcome biases that can arise from single method application. Thus, cross-checking multiple sources of evaluative evidence and using different analytical tools allowed the evaluator to double-check the information across stakeholders and methodologies, and to identify common themes and important differences as well as to address discrepancies.



Figure 3: Triangulation of data, evaluators and methods



Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation

Synthesis and triangulation has allowed the team to cross-examine evidence and overcome biases that can arise from single method application. Thus, cross-checking multiple sources of evaluative evidence and using different analytical tools allowed the evaluator to double-check the information across stakeholders and methodologies, and to identify common themes and important differences as well as to address discrepancies.

As such, the data collection and analysis provides analytical and richly contextualised information and validates the 'theory of change' as expressed in the overall EaSI and individual axis intervention logics, as well as helps to make adjustments where necessary. Below summarizes how the different methods approach and tools have informed each evaluation topic across the axes.

Table 3: Methods and tools utilised

Methods and tools	Step	Relevance			Effectiveness			Efficiency		Coherence			EU added value	
		Topic 1	Topic 2	Topic 3	Topic 4	Topic 5	Topic 6	Topic 7	Topic 8	Topic 9	Topic 10	Topic 11	Topic 12	Topic 13
EASI														
Public Consultation (Task 1)														
Analysis of all public consultation responses	1.4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Analysis of secondary data (Task 2)														
Review of existing evaluations	2.1	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓
Data collection (Task 3)														
Analysis of views expressed in semi-structured	3.1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Methods and tools	Step	Relevance			Effectiveness			Efficiency		Coherence			EU added value	
		Topic 1	Topic 2	Topic 3	Topic 4	Topic 5	Topic 6	Topic 7	Topic 8	Topic 9	Topic 10	Topic 11	Topic 12	Topic 13
Interviews														
Beneficiaries' Survey	3.2	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Case studies	3.3		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Focus group											✓	✓	✓	
<b>PROGRESS/EURES/Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship</b>														
Public Consultation (Task 1)														
Analysis of all public consultation responses	1.4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Analysis of secondary data (Task 2)														
Review of existing evaluations	2.1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓
Analysis of key trends	2.1	✓	✓	✓										
Analysis of key contextual changes	2.1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							
Analysis of the impact of key trends and contextual changes on EaSI priorities	2.1	✓	✓	✓										
Review of good practice reports	2.1				✓	✓								✓
Analysis of EaSI monitoring and implementation data	2.3	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓						✓
<b>Data Collection (Task 3)</b>														
Analysis of views expressed in semi-structured interviews	3.1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Beneficiaries' survey	3.2							✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Case studies	3.3		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation

The sections below provide an overview of the utilised methods and explain the limitations occurred.

### 3.1 Evidence-gathering methods

#### 3.1.1 Desk research

Desk research was conducted throughout the evaluation period. This includes secondary data, contextual data as well as a wider literature review. Indeed, a wide variety of documents have been collected and reviewed to provide an understanding of the existing literature on these issues. They came from several sources at internal and external levels. Some documents consulted were provided by the European Commission or available on the Europa website. In this regard, several webpages from the European Commission website such as the 'EURES European Job Mobility Portal' or

'EU Book shop' were particularly helpful as they provide a centralised source of qualitative and quantitative data. A wide range of documents has thus been collected and includes EU Regulations and Communications, brochures or practical guides carried-out by NGOs. This variety of document types helps building a good overall framework to understand all the aspects of the EaSI programme ranging from the technical procedures to the very practical side. The evaluative information about EaSI and its predecessor programmes included a review of the objectives set for EaSI in the Regulation and the documents accompanying it, in particular the ex-ante evaluation. The summary of relevant publications is presented in Annex 3.1<sup>4</sup>.

As part of the inception phase, the availability of datasets was discussed, which aside from two internal DG EMPL applications for projects' evaluation and contracts' management (DEFIS and COLI), the EURES job mobility platform database, as well as non-bespoke sources (e.g. the EEPO portal), which were utilised for the desk research. Of particular interest were the two EaSI Performance Monitoring Reports for 2014 and for 2015-2016. .

### **3.1.2 Focus group**

Following the inception meeting, it was agreed that instead of doing one-to-one interviews with the EaSI committee members, a focus group would be conducted. A focus group method was deemed more appropriate in order to maximise the efficiency of the data collection (all EaSI committee members could be approached at the same time), as well as to limit the 'stakeholder fatigue' of the EaSI committee members. The aim was to gather opinions about four topics: the governance structure, the governance process, the coherence of EaSI with other interventions at EU/national level as well as the internal and external coherence, and the efficiency of EaSI. The overview of the focus group is available in Annex 3.2 and the results are presented in a summary report annexed to this report (Volume IV).

### **3.1.3 Interviews**

10 scoping interviews and one interview regarding data availability have been conducted in order to cover the following issues: further development of the three axes; changes over the programming period; achievements of the programme; management and implementation of the projects; stakeholders' expectation from the mid-term evaluation; monitoring data (interview with PPMI staff<sup>5</sup>).

Besides the scoping interviews, 51 additional interviews (45 as part of the case studies and 6 as a follow-up after submission of the draft interim report) were conducted across the axes so far. The main findings of the scoping interviews and a list of the additional interviews are presented in Annex 3.3.

### **3.1.4 Open public consultation**

A key component of the mid-term evaluation of the EaSI programme was the design and implementation of an open public consultation in compliance with the Better Regulation Guidelines. The EaSI mid-term evaluation consultation strategy developed by the European Commission has acted as the basis for the development of the public consultation. The period of consultation was from 12 October 2016 to 25 January 2017.

Further details regarding the process of the open public consultation are available in Annex 3.4. The main key findings under each evaluation criteria were summarised and analysed in the synopsis report, available in Volume II annexed to this report.

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<sup>4</sup> Please note that the annexes are presented in a separate document.

<sup>5</sup> The Public Policy and Management Institute (PPMI) provides support and assistance to the European Commission for the implementation of EaSI 2014-2020, in particular supporting the update of its monitoring system and analysis of the Programme's performance regarding its objectives and policy achievements.

### **3.1.5 Case studies**

15 case studies have been selected and informed the evaluation as part of the primary data collection. The purpose of the case studies was to illustrate the 'intervention logic' of EaSI in practice, inform the evaluation questions, point to potential programme and practice improvements and complement the evidence accruing from other methods (public consultation, beneficiaries' survey, monitoring data etc.).

The selection process, the research approach as well as the questionnaires per axis are shown in Annex 3.5. The final versions of the case studies are available in Volume I annexed to this report.

### **3.1.6 Beneficiaries' survey**

The survey was conducted between 23 January and 13 February 2017. In order to access a large pool of potential stakeholders and to avoid 'stakeholder fatigue', the survey was conducted in parallel with the stakeholders' survey for performance monitoring<sup>6</sup>.

The survey aimed to complement the existing surveys and contextual data, to cover additional questions arising from the secondary data analysis, to include the beneficiaries that have not been covered by the open public consultation as well as to inform the evaluative criteria assessment especially the efficiency and coherence of the programme.

The survey approach and the main key findings are summarised in the survey report, available in Volume III annexed to this report.

## **3.2 Key challenges and limitations**

The findings are based on an analysis of both primary and secondary data sources. Each of the methods and tools used had its purpose and methodological limitations. Overall, desk research and interviews provide robust findings, whereas the public consultation and the survey offer convergent but relatively limited number of responses.

With regard to desk research, limited project results were available as few projects were finalised by 2016 and in some cases the project implementation started in 2015. The capacity building investment activity under Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis only started in 2017 and is therefore out of scope for this evaluation. Therefore, the third objective of the axis, namely building up institutional capacity of microcredit providers, was not evaluated under this exercise.

Also, a relatively small number of responses to the open public consultation (81) and beneficiaries' survey (159) were received, despite the communication campaigns undertaken via different channels (e.g. direct mailing, social media). Especially answers provided by axis are limited (e.g. as part of the open public consultation only 30 respondents answered for the PROGRESS axis, 48 for EURES and 14 for Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship). Specifically for the EURES axis, limitations occurred while narrowing down the open public consultation sample to respondents with EURES experience, in order to gain information on this specific axis. Moreover, nearly half of the respondents did not provide an answer or have chosen the option 'don't know' to some of the open public consultation and beneficiaries' survey questions. The replies to the open public consultation and the beneficiaries' survey cannot be considered as representative and should be interpreted with caution. In light of this, the findings were always complemented with other methods and used mainly for exemplary purposes.

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<sup>6</sup> For further information about both surveys, see:  
<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1160&newsId=2721&furtherNews=yes>

## 4 Findings

This section presents the findings of the evaluation organised around the five evaluation criteria and covering the three EaSI axes in the period 2014-2016.

### 4.1 Relevance

This evaluation criterion relates to a series of questions examining the relevance of the EaSI programme. The information on the relevance of EaSI as a programme were mainly collected via the desk research, beneficiaries' survey, interviews and the open public consultation.

#### 4.1.1 Continuing relevance of the general objectives<sup>7</sup>

The mid-term evaluation of the EaSI programme takes place in a challenging social and economic environment as a consequence of the financial crisis started in 2007 that asymmetrically affected countries with a slowed down convergence.<sup>8</sup> Although cities, regions and countries may have different multi-level priorities and political agendas, they all face common challenges.<sup>9</sup>

EaSI general objectives aim to respond to the current challenging socio-economic context characterised by the aftermath of the financial and economic crisis and limited EU GDP growth, rising unemployment (8.6% in 2016)<sup>10</sup> and uneven labour markets across the EU impacting particularly long term (4% in 2016) and youth unemployment (7.8% in 2016) in the EU28<sup>11</sup>.

There are some disparities in the level of employment across Europe. Countries like Greece, Italy and Malta have rates below 50% for the employment of women and average rates for total population far below the 75% target that all countries agreed to reach by 2020.<sup>12</sup>

In contrast, Check Republic, Denmark, Germany, Estonia and Lithuania have rates above 75%. The percentage of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2015 is about 25% for EU27 and remains around 30% for numerous Member States (HR, IT, ES, CY, LT, RO, BG, EL). Overall, women are more at risk compared to the national average and men (see 0 below).<sup>13</sup>

Issues such as long term unemployment, youth unemployment and inequalities are among the top pressing problems to deal with. The *Employment and Social Situation in Europe 2017* Report has focused on 'intergenerational fairness and solidarity', showing that although there has been a moderate growth with increased employment in 2016, the social fabric is far from the pre-crisis levels. This raises concerns that younger generations may end up worse than their parents, leaving a burden on young people<sup>14</sup>. These patterns in the labour market and socio-economic system make also the case for the horizontal objectives linked to gender equality, non-discrimination and attention to vulnerable population.

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<sup>7</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013 (Art. 4), EaSI intervention logic (Section 2) and the mid-term evaluation roadmap ([http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/roadmaps/docs/2016\\_empl\\_010\\_easi\\_mid-term\\_evaluation\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/roadmaps/docs/2016_empl_010_easi_mid-term_evaluation_en.pdf)).

<sup>8</sup> European Commission (2009). Economic crisis in Europe: Causes, Consequences and Responses. Luxembourg ([http://ec.europa.eu/economy\\_finance/publications/pages/publication15887\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/publications/pages/publication15887_en.pdf)).

<sup>9</sup> European Commission (2017). Reflection Paper on the Social Dimension in Europe. Luxembourg

<sup>10</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tsdec450&plugin=1> (Eurostat Unemployment statistics accessed 23.11.2017).

<sup>11</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tsdsc330&plugin=1> (Eurostat Unemployment statistics; accessed 23.11.2017).

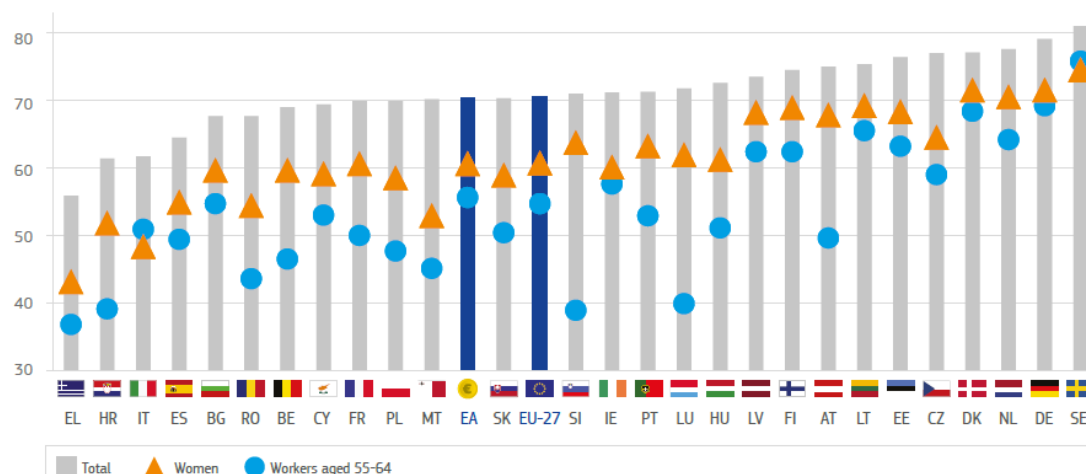
<sup>12</sup> Eurostat, Employment rates by sex, age and educational attainment level (%) [accessed 15.08.2017].

<sup>13</sup> European Commission (2017). Reflection Paper on the Social Dimension in Europe. Luxembourg

<sup>14</sup> European Commission. 2017. Employment and Social Development in Europe. Annual review 2017. Luxembourg.

Figure 4: Different employment rates in EU-27, 2016

Employment rates differ: they are increasing but remain lower for women and older workers  
In %, Q4 2016



Source: European Commission (2017). *Reflection Paper on the Social Dimension in Europe*, p. 10.

The evaluation put forward that EaSI is relevant in facilitating solutions for several challenges, in particular in supporting innovative actions in the social and employment fields. The most commonly identified challenge was the provision of support to vulnerable groups (i.e. young people, long-term unemployed, disabled, migrants, ethnic minorities and women). Other important challenges EaSI addresses are: producing concrete and innovative actions, making labour markets accessible to all, and fighting poverty and social inclusion. On the contrary, EaSI relevance to promoting gender equality and increasing access to finance for social enterprises has been less obvious.

The development of new social policy experiments/innovations and analytical activities also featured prominently during the evaluation process. There is wide agreement that EaSI funding contributed to a series of social policy innovations in the programme's participating countries. The main reasons related to the need to finance such type of projects is so as to develop more efficient policies for different stakeholders across Europe, mainly to support vulnerable groups and to address structural social issues in Member States, such as ageing of societies, migration, poverty and social exclusion. Further reasons include the changing needs of different groups in societies (e.g. disabled or older people). Funding through the EaSI programme enables stakeholders to test innovative solutions for these problems with other partners across the EU, which might not be possible or limited through other means of funding (e.g. national funding).

Each of the three EaSI axes focuses on different general objectives. The three first general objectives of EaSI are mostly related to PROGRESS axis. The general objective 4 relates in particular to EURES, and general objective 5 relates especially to Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis. When looking in more detail at the three axes, the following findings below emerge.

## PROGRESS

Three out of five general objectives of EaSI relate in particular to PROGRESS. The axis first aims to "strengthen the ownership among policy-makers across different levels of governance (EU, National, regional and local) through concrete and innovative actions involving different stakeholders (public/private, social partners, NGOs)".

Youth unemployment remains high across Europe, particularly for some Mediterranean countries (Greece, Espagne, Italy, Cypre, Portugal, Croatia) above 30%.<sup>15</sup> A multi-governance policy strategy involving stakeholders at many governance level is crucial to fight this social scourge. Some projects implemented under PROGRESS axis have contributed to this by promoting EU-wide networks. The beneficiaries' survey<sup>16</sup> put forward that producing concrete innovative actions, and ensuring coordination and collaboration between public, civil society and private sectors in the employment and social fields remain key challenges. The open public consultation<sup>17</sup> also showed that EaSI is perceived as particularly relevant in facilitating innovative actions.

The second and third general objectives related to PROGRESS aim to i) support developed, adequate, accessible and efficient social protection systems and labour markets through mutual learning and social innovation<sup>18</sup> and ii) ensure there is a proper application and transposition of EU law across Member States as well as contribute to modernising Union law in line with decent work principles.<sup>19</sup> PROGRESS is relevant to harmonise and standardise efforts in this field. As a matter of fact, the magnitude of public expenditure in social protection as percentage of GDP varies considerably between Member States, ranging from 15% (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania) to more than 30% (France, Denmark, Germany, Finland, Netherlands).<sup>20</sup> It is clear that there are different financial capabilities and policy agendas.

**Box 1: Case studies examples**

- *Share (wave 6)* is supporting the development of social protection systems and labour market policies in Croatia, a country facing huge challenges in terms of healthcare, pension and social security system sustainability.
- *INNOVCare* is creating a holistic care model for people with rare diseases through an EU wide partnership contributing to the development of adequate, accessible and efficient social protection systems.
- *Eurocarers* is a network targeting EU, national and regional policy-makers and stakeholders active in the fields of care, employment, social affairs, promoting sustainable, equitable and quality long-term care services and the integration and recognition of informal carers in the EU.
- *Nowcasting* is a model with a particular approach to estimating poverty through dynamic microsimulation and social exclusion indicators helping national authorities to design more effective policies to meet the EU 2020 goals.
- *PICUM's* overall aim is to enable migrants to access services based on their needs, regardless of immigration status.
- *Posting workers* contributes to enforce the recent EU directive (2014/67/EU) on posting workers among three Baltic States.

Source: *EaSI mid-term evaluation, Volume I*

Social protection systems differ across Europe in terms of budgets, political preferences, and stakeholder involvement. Again, PROGRESS continues to contribute to the harmonisation of social protection through the support of EU-wide networks, initiatives and sharing of good practices. Examples from six analysed case studies provide complementary evidence on how the interventions are still relevant linked to these general objectives (see Box 1 above).

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<sup>15</sup> Eurostat, Youth unemployment [accessed 15.08.2017], [ta\_wrk\_empl\_unempl\_yth\_\_yth\_empl\_090]

<sup>16</sup> The sample sizes are not high enough to use this evidence as confirmatory but insightful and illustrative to be considered and interpreted along with findings and patterns from other sources (desk research, interviews and case studies). See the survey analysis report in the Volume III annexed to this report.

<sup>17</sup> The open public consultation has limited responses; hence, findings need to be taken with caution, and always in relation to findings from other sources (desk research, interviews and case studies).

<sup>18</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013, Article 4 (b).

<sup>19</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013, Article 4 (c).

<sup>20</sup> European Commission. 2017. Employment and Social Development in Europe. Annual review 2017. Luxembourg.

## **EURES**

The mid-term evaluation takes place in a changing policy context for EURES. EURES itself has undergone recent changes. The former European Employment Service (EURES) was established in 1993 and predates the Lisbon Strategy, the European Employment Strategy and the Europe 2020 strategy. EURES aimed to facilitate the free movement of workers, as one of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Treaty on the European Union<sup>21</sup> and the accompanying legislation<sup>22</sup>. This right to freely move to another EU country with one's family and take-up employment there, applies to EU Member States and to the European Economic Area (EEA)<sup>23</sup> and is also included in the Community rules on free movement of workers.

A core aim of EURES is to facilitate mobility for any citizen wishing to take advantage of the right to free movement of workers in the EU. This has remained particularly important in the current context, with approximately 2-3 million job vacancies unfilled throughout the European Union, coupled with relatively high unemployment<sup>24</sup>.

Promoting workers' mobility is one of the ways which can help boosting employment opportunities and reducing unemployment. For instance, despite sharing a common border, the unemployment rate in Germany in 2016 (4.1%) was far lower than in Belgium (7.8%) or the Netherlands (6%)<sup>25</sup>. In this context, the EU action through the EURES axis is still relevant to create a transparent labour market.

EURES funded several projects around three thematic sections: transparency of job vacancies, job applications and related information for applicants and employers; development of services for the recruitment and placing of workers in employment; cross-border partnerships.

Other tools are also available such as the EURES job mobility portal<sup>26</sup> where employers and employees can find answers to their questions on job mobility and vacancies, or post CVs. During 2014-2016, the EURES job mobility portal received 0.7 million monthly visits which shows its relevance as a tool to enhance transparency of job vacancies in the EU<sup>27</sup>.

## **Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship**

The majority of businesses in Europe (93%) are microenterprises<sup>28</sup> that account for 30% of total employment in the EU. EIF data from 2016 suggests that microenterprises are relatively more prevalent in countries with high unemployment rates such as Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece, where employment by microenterprises accounts for 40-60%<sup>29</sup>. These numbers show the relevance of supporting such entities as part of the EaSI programme.

According to data from the European Central Bank (ECB) survey on access to finance, microenterprises see finance as the second most pressing issue after attracting

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<sup>21</sup> Specifically Articles 3, 39 and 40. It is also developed by secondary law and by case-law of the Court of Justice of the EU.

<sup>22</sup> See <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=457> for an overview of the applicable legislation

<sup>23</sup> This applies to the EU28 and to other EEA countries including Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein. Further, Switzerland has a bilateral agreement with the EU on the free movement of persons.

<sup>24</sup> Eurostat. 2016. Unemployment statistics: [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment\\_statistics](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics)

<sup>25</sup> Eurostat. 2016. Unemployment rate – annual data:

<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&pcode=tipsun20&language=en>

<sup>26</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eures/public/language-selection>

<sup>27</sup> DG EMPL (2016). Annual Activity Report. Annexes. Retrieved from:

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file\\_import/aar-empl-2016\\_annex\\_en\\_0.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/aar-empl-2016_annex_en_0.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> Kraemer-Eis, H. et al. 2016. European Small Business Finance Outlook. Retrieved from: [http://www.eif.org/news\\_centre/publications/eif\\_wp\\_35.pdf](http://www.eif.org/news_centre/publications/eif_wp_35.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem.



customers)<sup>30</sup>. This market failure relates to insufficient supply of capital and inadequacies on the demand side<sup>31</sup> due to information asymmetries (see Annex 6.1). Due to their nature, microenterprises do not possess collateral or track records (i.e. bank statements for the past years), preventing them from minimising the information asymmetries faced<sup>32</sup>.

A way to overcome these barriers is to increase the risk coverage of financial intermediaries that provide microfinance to enterprises and start-ups. Consisting of financial guarantees and counter-guarantees, the EaSI Guarantee Instrument<sup>33</sup> increases the financial intermediaries' risk taking capacity and encourages them to widen their activities to groups they would not otherwise have been able to target due to several risks. As such, the EaSI Financial Instrument is designed to increase the availability of finance for micro-borrowers. The microfinance provider Qredits<sup>34</sup> explained the benefits of the EaSI Financial Guarantee to remedy information asymmetries (see Box 2 below):

**Box 2: Case study example "Qredits"**

Under the EaSI guarantee, Qredits is able to increase lending volumes of investment and working capital loans to financially support underserved micro-enterprises as well as maintain the provision of micro credit at an affordable price. Qredits would not have been in a position to provide micro loans under these conditions due to the high risk profile of their target group as well as the relatively high handling costs of microloans.

Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation, Volume I

Furthermore, vulnerable groups such as ethnic minorities, migrants or female entrepreneurs face additional challenges in accessing finance<sup>35</sup>. Through the EaSI Financial Instrument, the financially excluded benefit from microloans at attractive terms, such as lower interest rates, higher maturity, and lower collateral requirements, which all increase their access to finance<sup>36</sup>.

Social enterprises operate in a social investment market poorly developed and presents a number of market imperfections<sup>37</sup>. Most social enterprises rely on internal resources and subsidies<sup>38</sup> and access to finance is a significant barrier to their development across Europe<sup>39</sup>. Furthermore, the limited range of financial instruments available to investors prevents social enterprises from accessing appropriate funding. Social enterprises usually require large financing amounts and need to go through banks or alternative banks<sup>40</sup>. Information asymmetries, with lack of information on social returns alongside the social enterprise business model, also represent a barrier. As in the case of microenterprises, the above problems can be solved by providing collateral. However, social enterprises often fail to meet the necessary requirements

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<sup>30</sup> ECB. 2014. Survey on the access to finance of SMEs in the Euro area. October 2013 to March 2014. April 2014. <http://www.ecb.europa.eu/stats/money/surveys/sme/html/index.en.html>.

<sup>31</sup> Kraemer-Eis, H., Lang, F., and Gvetadze, S. 2014. European Small Business Finance Outlook. Retrieved from: [http://www.eif.org/news\\_centre/publications/eif\\_wp\\_24.pdf](http://www.eif.org/news_centre/publications/eif_wp_24.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> Interview Senior Microfinance Investment Managers, EIF

<sup>33</sup> *ibid*

<sup>34</sup> Under the call for expression of interest to select Financial Intermediaries under the Guarantee Financial Instrument of EaSI 2015 (case study presented in Volume I).

<sup>35</sup> Kraemer-Eis, H. et al. 2016. European Small Business Finance Outlook. Retrieved from: [http://www.eif.org/news\\_centre/publications/eif\\_wp\\_35.pdf](http://www.eif.org/news_centre/publications/eif_wp_35.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> See Annex 3 for definitions.

<sup>37</sup> Spiess-Knafl, W. and Jansen A. S. 2013. Imperfections in the social investment market and options on how to address them.

<sup>38</sup> OECD. 2015. Policy Brief on Scaling the Impact of Social Enterprises. Retrieved from: <https://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/Policy-brief-Scaling-up-social-enterprises-EN.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> Wilkinson et al. 2014. A map of Social Enterprises and their eco-systems in Europe – France country report. ICF Consulting Services, European Commission.

<sup>40</sup> Interview Head of inclusive finance, EIF.

for a loan<sup>41</sup>. The market's lack of understanding of social enterprises also hinders the development of the social market. For instance, the financial intermediary "La Nef"<sup>42</sup> explained why classic guarantees are not adapted to social enterprises (see Box 3):

**Box 3: Case study example "La Nef"**

The classic guarantees are not always adapted to social enterprises' business models because of complexity as well as price. Involving vulnerable groups, the particular business models of social entrepreneurs might not always be profit generating; therefore they need to be supported by adapted instruments, especially in their early life-stages. Although the eligibility criteria are logical, they need to be clear and adapted to each country so that they can cater the real needs of social entrepreneurs.

Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation, Volume I

The above evidence suggest that social enterprises encounter difficulties in accessing finance and lack appropriate funding. The evaluation shows that access to finance for social enterprises was a challenge to be addressed by the European Commission<sup>43</sup>. The EaSI Financial Instrument contributes to addressing the barriers faced by social enterprises by providing guarantees, allowing financial intermediaries to increase their capacity to lend to social enterprises. However, many social enterprises and Work Integrating Social Enterprises (WISEs), which still rely on subsidies and grants, are not reached through the EaSI Financial Instrument. The EIF focuses mainly on social enterprises that are bankable to some degree and encourages financial intermediaries to work with social enterprises with a turnover, this is because financial instruments function like a bridge to grants for social enterprises.

**Key points on continuing relevance of EaSI**

- The evaluation confirmed the continuing relevance of the EaSI general objectives to test and spread innovative policy solutions in order to foster sustainable long-term growth and jobs, reduce divergence between the EU Member States and make progress towards reducing social inequality. EaSI seems less relevant in promoting gender equality and increasing access to finance for social enterprises.
- The three axes contribute to the relevance of EaSI:
  - **PROGRESS** supports national policies in the field of employment and social affairs through the open method of coordination (OMC) approach. The activities facilitate solutions to key challenges by producing innovative actions, providing support to vulnerable groups and facilitating coordination between policy makers and stakeholders from civil society and private sectors.
  - **EURES** appears to be relevant to the general objectives by promoting job mobility, focussing on vulnerable groups (such as young people) and on strengthening cross-border labour markets, with the aim to boost employment opportunities and reduce unemployment across the EU
  - **Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship** is relevant in light of market imperfections in both microfinance and social enterprise sectors, the important differences in the development of microcredit and social investment markets across the participating countries, and the financial gaps between supply and demand of finance in a majority of participating countries,
- Emerging trends per axis:
  - **PROGRESS** priorities for the following years should focus on the support to tackle social exclusion of vulnerable groups (e.g. young people, women, and people with disability) and provide opportunities to exchange good practices between Member States/policy makers, and testing social innovations.

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<sup>41</sup> EIF. 2017. Guaranteeing Social Enterprises – The EaSI way. Working Paper 2017/39.

<sup>42</sup> Under the open call for expression of interest to select financial intermediaries under the Guarantee Financial Instrument of EaSI 2015 (case study presented in Volume I).

<sup>43</sup> ICF Open Public Consultation. Question: To what extent do you consider EaSI is relevant to address these challenges? Increasing availability and accessibility to microfinance. 51% of respondents agreed (n=41).

- **EURES** trends remain similar namely: tackling (long-term) unemployment, enabling job matching across EU labour markets, strengthening cross labour markets through better involvement of SMEs, as well as enhancing cross-borders public-private partnerships.
- **Microfinance /Social Entrepreneurship**: improving the access to finance for the social enterprises' and micro enterprises' as the markets for lending to this types of enterprises still remain underdeveloped.

Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation

#### 4.1.2 Continuing relevance of the EaSI axes' specific objectives

This section describes the results focussing on the continuing relevance of the specific objectives divided by the three EaSI axes.

##### **PROGRESS**

The four specific objectives of the EaSI PROGRESS-axis aims to support:

- evidence-based EU policies and legislation;
- effective and inclusive information sharing, mutual learning and dialogue;
- better conditions to social policy innovations;
- greater capacity to of national and EU organisations.

Data gathered through the open public consultation and the beneficiaries' survey<sup>44</sup> showed that respondents including individuals and representatives from NGOs, national authorities and public employment services manifested that the top priorities remain: i) tackling social exclusion, ii) analytical activities, iii) mutual-learning, awareness and dissemination, and iv) better employment for young people.

In particular, the relevance of analytical activities is even stronger as shown by a considerably high demand for policy evidence outputs (mapped through downloads statistics), for instance social impact measures, good practices and case studies, as evidenced in the EaSI Performance Monitoring Report. For the monitoring report, two surveys were conducted: a stakeholders survey (EU and national policy and decision-makers, civil society, independent experts and other relevant groups) and another for participants in EaSI-supported events where they have the opportunity to express their views on the value of the events. Most of the respondents in both groups are particularly aware of outputs such as: i) surveys, studies, analyses, monitoring and assessment reports, ii) database on Labour Market Policies (LMP)<sup>45</sup>, iii) common methodologies, classifications, micro-simulations, indicators, benchmarks and statistical data.

The case studies presented in the 0 below show that the projects are also addressing a demand for analytical and policy evidence to support decision making.

The findings emerging from the responses to the open public consultation, interviews with the European Commission staff and participants in the beneficiaries' survey suggest that analytical outputs, dissemination events and share of good practices are still relevant for evidence base policy. Moreover, the case studies are also addressing stakeholders' specific needs by providing evidence for policy making.

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<sup>44</sup> The number of responses in the open public consultation and the EaSI survey are not high enough to use this evidence as confirmatory but insightful and illustrative to be considered and interpreted along with findings and patterns from other sources (desk research, interviews and case studies).

<sup>45</sup> This database comprises annually collected administrative data on public labour market interventions targeting the unemployed, persons employed but at risk of involuntary job loss, and inactive persons willing to enter the labour market.

Table 4: Examples of case studies displaying continued relevance of the EaSI general and specific objectives

Case study	Country	Continuing relevance for EaSI general and specific objectives
<b>Share wave 6</b> Call for proposals VP/2014/006 Contract VS/2015/0193	Croatia	Croatia has a high share of population above 65 years. As such, it faces large challenges on how to ensure sustainability of its healthcare, pension and social security system for the coming years. The project's thematic focus is directly linked to this social challenge through supporting the data collection of the 6 <sup>th</sup> wave of the SHARE survey.
<b>INNOVCare</b> Call for proposals VP/2014/008 Contract VS/2015/0249	EU-wide partnership: Spain, Romania, Sweden, France, Austria Slovenia	This project creates a holistic care model for people with rare diseases and their families. Through PROGRESS financial support, it involves different European public and private partners. It delivers a cost-effective approach helping Member States to implement the sustainable social structural reforms in line with the 2020 Europe strategy.
<b>Eurocarers</b> Call for proposals VP/2014/009 Contract VP/2014/009	Luxembourg EU-level	Carers - including informal carers - are playing a relevant role in supporting health and social care systems, especially in a context characterised by budgetary constraints. Eurocarers supports the integration and recognition of informal carers in the EU.
<b>Nowcasting</b> Call for proposals: VP/2014/006 Contract VS/2015/0179	Belgium	The project aims to improve the information available for analysis which can be used by decision makers planning public policies. The 'Nowcasting' model proposes indicators for poverty and social exclusion measure that can help national authorities to design more effective policies targeting the EU 2020 goals. The project addresses the needs of Member States to obtain updated data on poverty and social exclusion indicators.
<b>PICUM</b> Call for proposals reference: VP/2014/009 Contract VS/2014/0505	24 EU MS plus 7 other countries	PICUM's main objectives are to support undocumented migrants to engage in EU policy processes by improving accessibility and application of EU-driven processes. The overall aim is to enable all migrants to access services based on their needs, regardless of immigration status.
<b>Posting of workers</b> Call for proposals VP/2014/007 Contract VS/2015/0055	Lithuania, Estonia Latvia	The project aims at increasing the cooperation between the public authorities and certain social partners of the three Baltic States to ensure protection of workers' rights along with facilitating free movement of services and businesses. Social partners and national authorities have identified the need to improve the cooperation within the Baltic region to guarantee that workers and businesses are informed and operate by following the existing legal framework.

Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation

## EURES

The specific objective of EURES<sup>46</sup> is "to promote workers' voluntary geographical mobility on a fair basis and boost employment opportunities by developing high-quality and inclusive Union labour markets that are open and accessible to all, while respecting workers' rights throughout the Union, including freedom of movement."

Job seekers and employers have similar needs regarding intra-EU labour markets, including the need for information, counselling and language training. EURES' axis objectives address these needs through provision of information and counselling regarding opportunities for workers and SMEs across the EU. The EURES axis'

<sup>46</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0238:0252:EN:PDF>

objectives contribute to a reduction of obstacles of entering in the labour markets of other Member States through language trainings, information on recognition of qualifications and on job opportunities.

Four projects were selected in the framework of this study as a sample to show how the projects financed by EURES continue to be relevant. Indeed, the projects were evaluated building up on the national context, taking into account factors such as ageing of the population<sup>47</sup>, the deteriorating economic context<sup>48</sup>, the specific mobility flows and the labour market in a given region<sup>49</sup> or the high unemployment rates of young peoples in some EU Member States<sup>50</sup> (see 0 below).

Table 5: Case studies – examples of relevance with the context

Title	Policy area	Assessment
<b>EURES in Grenzregion en Rhein-Waal (ERW), euregio-rhein-maasnord (ermn), Euregio Maas-Rhein (EMR) 2015<sup>51</sup></b>	Cross-border partnerships	The project objectives are relevant in light of this context characterised by the ageing of the society. This makes hard to fill vacancies as well as to meet the needs of certain groups such as the long-term unemployed people.  The project aims to optimise the use of the cross-border labour markets through information campaigns about the existing opportunities for workers and employers, as well as information and counselling about the social security systems in the neighbouring countries etc.
<b>Euradria 2015<sup>52</sup></b>	Cross-border partnerships	The objectives are relevant in light of the existing 20.000 estimated commuters in the cross-border regions involved in this project. Many obstacles to cross-border mobility are reported, for instance the lack of an agreement on cross-border labour (i.e. bilateral double taxation conventions) between Italy, Slovenia and Croatia. The project objectives are relevant as they allow for a more transparent labour market and provide information to job seekers and employers on the several aspects of mobility (taxation, social security, labour law etc.).
<b>Support to cooperation on intra-EU mobility for EEA countries<sup>53</sup></b>	Transparency of job vacancies, applications and related information for applicants and employers	The project objectives are relevant in light of the mobility flows in the EU/EEA countries. In the case of Norway, the inward mobility into the country is larger than the outward mobility. According to the case study, changes in the overall labour market in Norway might contribute to an increased outward mobility in the future. This market situation makes the EURES services in Norway even more relevant.
<b>Your first EURES job (YfEj) - a tool for Mobility<sup>54</sup></b>	Development of services <sup>55</sup>	The project objectives are relevant in light of the high unemployment rates of young people in some EU Member States and a lack of qualified labour in other EU Member States. The project addresses these needs through provision of information and counselling regarding opportunities for young people and SMEs across the EU, language trainings, information on recognition of qualifications and on job opportunities.

Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation

<sup>47</sup> The EURES in Grenzregionen Rhein-Waal (ERW), euregio-rhein-maasnord (ermn), Euregio Maas-Rhein (EMR) 2015 Project; Contract reference: VS/2015/0084

<sup>48</sup> The 2015 Euradria project; Contract reference: VS/2015/0062

<sup>49</sup> The 2015 project to support cooperation on intra-EU mobility for EEA countries (Norway)

<sup>50</sup> Your first EURES job - a tool for Mobility; Contract reference: VS/2015/0251

<sup>51</sup> Call for proposals VP/2014/011; Contract reference: VS/2015/0084

<sup>52</sup> Call for proposals VP/2014/011; Contract reference: VS/2015/0062

<sup>53</sup> Call for proposals VP/2015/008; Contract reference: VS/2015/0269

<sup>54</sup> Call for proposals VP/2015/006; Contract reference: VS/2015/0251

<sup>55</sup> Development of services for the recruitment and placing of workers in employment through the clearance of job vacancies and applications at Union level, in particular targeted mobility schemes.

The beneficiaries' survey results also confirmed that workers and employers are in need of all sorts of information regarding cross-border mobility of workers. The analysed projects were also found to be relevant in light of the stakeholders' needs as they aim to address the challenges faced by specific target groups. The beneficiaries' survey results showed that the most common targets groups were the unemployed and long-term unemployed. Young people, women and those in employment were also considered the final target by the majority of EURES respondents.

The projects also contributed to the exchange of knowledge between the stakeholders in charge of providing this information to jobseekers and employers as well as building their capacity to better coordinate in the future. This was well illustrated by the project Rhein-Waal (ERW), euregio-rhein-maasnord (ermn), Euregio Maas-Rhein (EMR) 2015 as it helped strengthening the newly-created EURES partnership which can now reach more people.

### **Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship**

The specific objective of the Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis is to support is to improve the availability and accessibility of microfinance for vulnerable people who wish to start up a business as well as for existing micro-enterprises.

In order to guarantee a balanced allocation of resources among the programme's participating countries, as specified by the EaSI regulation<sup>56</sup>, a cap amount per country is imposed by the European Commission<sup>57</sup> for both windows. The EIF is also incentivised to cover as many countries as possible given that the management fees are linked to the regional and national outreach. In addition, in their assessment of the transactions the EIF takes into account the national and regional specificities of the market, in particular the number of players and existing resources following an approach of non-substitution of existing schemes. This is the reason why, for instance, the EIF has not supported any financial intermediaries in Germany, where there is already a market for lending to social enterprises in addition to a market where a lot of resources have already been spent. Another example is France, where national initiatives were not able to guarantee loans over €6,000 (see Box 4 below).

#### **Box 4: Case study "ADIE"**

The EIF specified that they would not have provided the guarantee if the loan limit had remained to €6,000; this implies to duplicate the support. The role of the EIF is not to replace the existing national initiatives but rather to provide additional support where needed.

*Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation, Volume I*

Although the cap aims at ensuring a balance between the Member States, having a small mandate and setting geographical restrictions might limit the support that can be provided in some countries (as in France). Evidence collected so far also indicates that for both windows, the majority of funding was allocated to countries with a more developed market. This can be explained by the nature of the call for expression of interest which is open, given that transactions are driven by demand. In 2016 France, followed by Sweden, Romania and Spain received the largest amounts while Slovakia, Estonia, Albania and Austria received the smallest. In terms of numbers of financial intermediaries supported, Greece, Romania and Spain take the lead with three financial intermediaries each<sup>58</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> European Commission. 2013. Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013, Article 30. Retrieved from: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013R1296&from=EN#page=13>.

<sup>57</sup> Interview Head of inclusive finance, EIF

<sup>58</sup> EIF. 2016. Semi-annual operational report.

The country coverage for social enterprises is similar with France receiving 56% of the amount, followed by Spain with 15%. Other countries receiving EaSI support are Poland (13%), United Kingdom (9%) and Austria (6%).

In light of the barriers faced by microenterprises and social enterprises, mainly related to a lack of collateral and high prices, the EaSI Financial Guarantee includes specific requirements with regards to the interest rate, the collateral and the more favourable features of the transaction<sup>59</sup>. These requirements ensure that microloans are offered at preferential conditions compared to other microloans. Terms and conditions however vary greatly both across and within countries as can be seen in Table 19 in Annex 6.1. This might reflect the difference in the country context in relation to economic variables such as GDP, salaries and living costs.

Looking into the countries where a case study has been undertaken (see 0 below), evidence shows that the financial intermediaries have indeed offered loans with preferential terms with the aim to increase the access to finance.

Table 6: Examples of terms and conditions from the case studies

Financial intermediary	Window, country	Examples of terms and conditions applied
<b>La Nef</b>	Social entrepreneurs hip, France	La Nef offers loans to social enterprises that are free (interest rate is 0%) and does not require to provide hard collateral.
<b>ADIE</b>	Microfinance, France	ADIE offers loans to financially excluded microenterprises and vulnerable people at attractive terms (in comparison to microcredits offered outside EaSI), including higher amount (€10,000 instead of €6,000), lower interest rates (2% lower than other microcredits), higher maturity (up to 48 months compared to 30 months), and lower collateral requirements.
<b>Qredits</b>	Microfinance, The Netherlands	Thanks to the EaSI Financial Guarantee, Qredits can lower their interest rate on many of their provided microloans by one percentage point (9.75% instead of 10.75%). In addition, Qredits can provide micro loans with less strict collateral requirements under EaSI – no hard collateral is required only personal guarantee, third party bail and in some cases pledge on specific assets.
<b>Komerční Banka</b>	Microfinance, Czech Republic	No benchmark data was provided. However, Komerční Banka reported that the EaSI Financial Guarantee allowed them to offer a more attractive product to clients as it can give better conditions such as lower interest rates (average 9%) or offering a more flexible arrangement.

Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation

EU support needs to identify areas of market failures to avoid squeezing out commercial lenders or damaging competition. It is important to look at banks and non-banks separately to assess the above. Banks benefiting from the EaSI support become more competitive, which positively impacts micro borrowers who can benefit from better conditions including lower prices and collateral requirements. This might in turn have an impact on rejection rates since more clients are accepted and the lending volumes increase<sup>60</sup>.

Increased competition may also incentivise other financial intermediaries to adapt their activities and rethink their pricing and/or collateral policies; this to the benefit of

<sup>59</sup> Please see Annex 3 for a more thorough description of the terms and conditions.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with EIF (Senior Investment Manager) and follow-up interviews with the European Commission representatives.

the financial recipient<sup>61</sup>. The financial intermediaries interviewed confirmed this, for instance, in Czech Republic, competitors started preparing similar programmes and it has become easier to get a loan<sup>62</sup>. Although EU-support might increase competition, it does not create market distortions, as microfinance is usually a small part of a large bank's activity and only represents a minimal amount on their balance sheet. On the contrary, EaSI support encourages banks to serve this segment of the market and to start providing loans to neglected groups<sup>63</sup>.

The EaSI support, however, has been suggested to have an important impact on microfinance institutions (non-banks); if the support were to be removed, it would immediately be visible in their balance sheets<sup>64</sup>. However, it is not believed to damage competition as there is not much competition among non-banks, as opposed to banks who often target the same customers; non-banks develop their own network of customers. In addition, non-banks do not compete with banks as they target specific groups that are neglected by the banking sector<sup>65</sup>.

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#### **Key points on the specific objectives relevance**

##### **PROGRESS**

Based on the evidence collected, the specific PROGRESS objectives are still relevant. In addition, PROGRESS axis key priorities for the upcoming years should be:

- Analytical activities such as gathering of data and statistics, surveys, studies and reports; evaluations, monitoring and assessment of the transposition and application of EU law.
- Mutual-learning, awareness and dissemination activities such as good practice exchange, conferences and events, as well as trainings.
- Development of new social policy experiments/innovations.

##### **EURES**

- Findings suggest that EURES is relevant in light of the context in promoting workers' geographical mobility through information provision on the EURES job portal and support offered in the cross-border infopoints as part of cross-border partnerships.
- EURES is further relevant in responding to challenges across Member States such as youth unemployment through YfEj.

##### **Microfinance and Social entrepreneurship**

- The relevance of the EaSI Financial Guarantee in light of the context in which the financial intermediaries operate is ensured through taking into account national and regional specificities of the market and through taking an approach of non-substitution of existing schemes.
- Evidence suggests that the rationale underlying the allocation of resources among Member States is less clear, as the majority of funding has been allocated to countries with a more developed market.
- Evidence indicates that the EaSI Financial Instrument is relevant in light of the stakeholders needs. Financial intermediaries benefiting from the EaSI support are able to provide loans at better terms addressing the barriers preventing final beneficiary to access finance.

*Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation*

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<sup>61</sup> Follow-up interview with the European Commission, Programme Manager EaSI Financial instruments and EFSI, and Policy Officer, Management Organisation Unit of Development Programmes.

<sup>62</sup> Follow-up interview with Komerční Banka

<sup>63</sup> Interview Head of inclusive finance, EIF and follow-up interview with the European Commission, Programme Manager EaSI Financial instruments and EFSI, and Policy Officer, Management Organisation Unit of Development Programmes.

<sup>64</sup> Interview Head of inclusive finance, EIF.

<sup>65</sup> Kraemer-Eis. 2014. Institutional non-bank lending and the role of debt funds. EIF Working Paper 2014/25.



#### 4.1.3 Continuing relevance of resource allocation between the three axes

This section provides an analysis of key findings in relation to the continuing relevance of the resource allocation between the axes. Below, each axis is presented.

##### **PROGRESS**

According to the EaSI Regulation, the total amount allocated to the PROGRESS axis is 61% of the EaSI budget representing €560,876,090 for the period from 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2020.<sup>66</sup>

The recent trends highlighted by the Employment and Social Development in Europe (2017) discussed above (Section 4.1.1) show the importance of the addressing youth unemployment, social inclusion and those segments of population, already vulnerable before the crisis but mostly hit by this event.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, as revealed by the Eurobarometer, Europeans are highly concerned with their social situation with jobs and social security as their top priorities.<sup>68</sup>

Respondents to the open public consultation and the beneficiaries' survey<sup>69</sup> agreed that the actual fund allocation for PROGRESS axis is sufficient. Some respondents to the open public consultation (19 out of 81) saw even imagined a fund allocation lower than 61% and only 7 respondents above 80%. An increase of fund allocation to PROGRESS might sound at odds to the fact that the PROGRESS axis was the slowest among the three EaSI-axes to commit the planned funding as per the work programmes in 2014-2016. Indeed, the EaSI Performance Monitoring Report<sup>70</sup> shows that the PROGRESS axis includes many smaller activities (such as studies and events), which takes more time and effort to commit and execute the budget. This might also explains why some of the responses pointed to a lower fund allocation for PROGRESS.

##### **EURES**

According to the EaSI Regulation, the total amount allocated to the EURES axis is 18% of the EaSI budget representing €165,504,420 for the period from 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2020.<sup>71</sup> The number of application for EURES projects remained fairly stable between 2014 and 2016. 0 below shows that the number of projects committed increased between 2014 and 2016.

Table 7: Data on number of applications and commitments

EURES axis of EaSI	Number of projects			Combined value (€ in million)		
	2014	2015	2016	2014	2015	2016
EURES applications	14	15	15	21,4	23,1	22,5
EURES commitments	6	3	8	5,6	6,2	5,9

Source: EaSI monitoring reports 2014 and 2015-2016

<sup>66</sup>European Commission. 2013. Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013. Retrieved from: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013R1296&from=EN>.

<sup>67</sup> European Commission. 2017. Employment and Social Development in Europe. Annual review 2017. Luxembourg.

<sup>68</sup> European Commission. 2017. Reflection Paper on the Social Dimension in Europe. Luxembourg

<sup>69</sup> The number of responses are not high enough to use this evidence as confirmatory, but insightful and illustrative to be considered and interpreted along with findings and patterns from other sources (desk research, interviews and case studies).

<sup>70</sup> European Commission. 2017. EaSI Performance Monitoring Report 2015-2016, p. 14.

<sup>71</sup>European Commission. 2013. Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013. Retrieved from: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013R1296&from=EN>.

The analysis of the data showed that under the EURES axis, there was a significant switch in focus between 2014 and 2016. The committed projects in 2014 and 2015 were almost exclusively focused on providing 'services for the recruitment and placing of workers', while the majority of funding in 2016 have been focused on providing 'transparent information on job vacancies and applications'. Regarding the allocation of the EURES axis in relation to the overall EaSI, the beneficiaries' survey highlighted the need to increase the percentage of EURES funding. A number of respondents also suggested to increase the funding going to cross-border partnerships theme from 18% to 40% and therefore decrease the funding of the other EURES themes. This suggestion should however be analysed with caution, as it is in contrast to the focus in 2016.

Finally, enhancing the flexibility between the annual work programmes and the calls for proposals was regarded necessary, in order to enable the European Commission to include lessons learned from previous projects. This was mentioned during interviews with Commission officials working on the implementation of EURES who highlighted that the texts of the call for proposals has to mirror the annual work programme in all details. The call's text should take into account the results achieved by beneficiaries and change according to the stakeholders's needs . With the current cycle for the planning of the financing decisions and work programmes, the stakeholders's feedbacks - which comes a few months after the elaboration of the financing decision - can often not be timely integrated. In order to integrate changes in a call's text, it would be necessary to start the whole process over again, which would imply another 6 month delay.

### **Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship**

As per the EaSI regulation, the total amount allocated to the Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis is 21% of the EaSI budget representing €193,088,490 for the period from 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2020<sup>72</sup>. Within the Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis - according to the EaSI Regulation - 45% of the budget was meant to be allocated to Microfinance and 45% to the Social Entrepreneurship window over the period 2014-2020.

Both the European Commission<sup>73</sup> and the EIF<sup>74</sup> representatives agreed that the amount allocated was not sufficient to meet the demand. The open public consultation<sup>75</sup> shows that some stakeholders believe that the Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis should receive 22% of the total EaSI budget.

The commitments made in 2014 (worth €28 million) were postponed to 2015<sup>76</sup>. In 2015, a much larger share of the overall funding was committed to the Microfinance window (79%) than to the Social Entrepreneurship window<sup>77</sup>. This was expected considering that the microfinance market is more mature and demand is higher. Therefore, the indicative allocation between the two windows, as defined in the Regulation, does not reflect the reality of the market.

Nonetheless, as one of the objective of such guarantee is also to develop the social enterprises market, it appears justified to set a minimum amount ensuring social

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<sup>72</sup>European Commission. 2013. Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013. Retrieved from: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013R1296&from=EN>.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with a DG Employment/European Commission representative.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with the Head of inclusive finance, EIF.

<sup>75</sup> ICF Open Public Consultation. Question: Please specify the preferred split between PROGRESS, EURES and Microfinance and Social entrepreneurship.

<sup>76</sup> European Commission. 2014. Performance Monitoring Report of the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI). 2014. Retrieved from: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=7824&type=2&furtherPubs=yes>.

<sup>77</sup> European Commission. 2017. Performance Monitoring Report of the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) 2015-2016.

enterprises will benefit equally from the Commission support. The implementation of social enterprise is lagging behind due to the novelty of the instrument.

The box below summarises the key points regarding the relevance of the resource allocation across the axes.

**Key points on the relevance of resource allocation**

- Findings suggest that PROGRESS should see additional funding allocated to social protection, social inclusion and the reduction and prevention of poverty as well as fighting youth unemployment and working conditions.
- Overall, it appears that the amount allocated to the EURES axis could be increased to meet the demand and to ensure a continuation of support for more than one cycle. It also appears that there could be more flexibility in the split in EURES.
- It appears that the amount allocated to the Microfinance / Social Entrepreneurship axis is not sufficient to meet the demand and to ensure a continuation of the support for more than one cycle. Evidence indicates that the split between the microfinance window and the social entrepreneurship window does not reflect the reality of the market; however, it is justified based on the Commission objective to develop the social entrepreneurship market.

Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation

#### **4.1.4 Conclusion: EaSI programme relevance**

The European macroeconomic environment suggests some emerging trends to take into account for the remainder of the EaSI Programme.

Firstly, the European economy is expected to continue growing in 2017 and 2018 at a positive but slow pace. Nevertheless, this economic growth is not expected to strengthen further. In addition, despite increasing employment and declining unemployment rates, the improvement of labour market conditions are expected to realise at a slower pace than they have in the period between 2014-2016, both in the euro area and in the EU. Moreover so, unemployment rates in the euro area have not yet returned to their pre-crisis level<sup>78</sup>. To react to these developments, the evaluation findings suggest that the EaSI programme should prioritise mutual learning, development of new social policy experiments/innovations and analytical activities. Indeed, exchange between Member States enables the development of similar levels of expertise and ensures a similar offer of services for citizens regardless of the Member State they reside in, thus tackling inequalities between the Member States. Additionally, mainstreaming of existing good practices at the operative level creates awareness of innovative practices introduced across the Member States as well as development of capacity of national and local actors to be able to deliver better public services.

The gradual improvements of the euro area and EU economy can be further coupled with recent political events likely to impact the EU-zone in the coming years. For instance, with a large influx of migrants to some EU Member States, the share of vulnerable people has drastically increased. In the next couple of years an integration of these people will take place, ensuring them employment opportunities and social care. PROGRESS and Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axes can play an important role in this process by supporting social inclusion of vulnerable groups and providing access to finance for this specific vulnerable group should they wish to start their own microenterprise, or become employed in a microenterprise or a social enterprise.

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<sup>78</sup> European Commission. 2017. European Economic Forecast Spring 2017. Institutional Paper 053. May 2017. Retrieved from [https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/economy-finance/european-economic-forecast-spring-2017\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/economy-finance/european-economic-forecast-spring-2017_en).

The necessity to tackle unemployment of young people and to enhance the mobility across the EU remains a key priority for the EURES axis. Hence, the main activities for the second half of the programme should focus on continuing to tackle (long-term) unemployment, enabling job matching across EU labour markets, better involvement of SMEs and enhancing public private partnerships.

Specifically for the Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis, from the end beneficiaries' perspective, the barriers to access finance are likely to remain unchanged. This includes lack of collateral, lack of ability to pay interest and an alternative business model where social impact is superior to financial gain. Another trend that is likely to remain is related to the difficulty of supporting social enterprises as compared to microfinance. The still relatively undeveloped social entrepreneurship market is the main reason for the Social Entrepreneurship window's envelope not yet being fully deployed, whereas a large demand has had the Microfinance envelope entirely utilised<sup>79</sup>.

## **4.2 Effectiveness**

This section provides an assessment of the extent to which the programme has delivered the intended outputs, brought about change and effectively involved the stakeholders. The results described below are summarised per axis.

### **4.2.1 Effectiveness in generating outcomes and achieving objectives**

#### **PROGRESS**

This axis seems to be overall effective in terms of quality of output and delivery, considering that the majority were high-quality outputs<sup>80</sup>. Besides the well spread thematic coverage, surveys, studies, analysis and reports are the most well-known outputs, considered as helpful and reliable source of information by most of the stakeholders consulted for the performance monitoring reports purposes<sup>81</sup>.

The PROGRESS axis seems to be more effective in facilitating effective and inclusive information-sharing, mutual learning and dialogue compared to the previous outcome. The EaSI stakeholder survey carried out within the monitoring exercise showed that more than 60% of stakeholders (decision makers, civil society, etc.) agreed that the relevance of these activities was high. Most of the stakeholders share a positive view on the scope, organisation of the events and further use of knowledge gained.

A total of 19 EU-level NGO networks have also been supported under the PROGRESS axis, targeting vulnerable groups such as: children and young people, people with disabilities, people living in poverty, homeless, Roma people and migrants.

Overall, the PROGRESS axis is most effective (in terms of planned, commitment and use of funding shares) - as captured in the EaSI Performance Monitoring Report - in facilitating inclusive information-sharing, mutual learning and dialogue, and producing comparative and analytical knowledge. The PROGRESS axis reaches milestones set in DG EMPL management plan in these areas<sup>82</sup>. The progress in testing of social and labour market policy innovations/experimentations is the slowest. Financial means provided to implement the axis's activities seem to be sufficient.

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<sup>79</sup> EIF interview with Head of inclusive finance.

<sup>80</sup> ICF Scoping interviews with members of the European Commission.

<sup>81</sup> European Commission. 2017. Performance Monitoring Report of the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) 2015-2016, p.24.

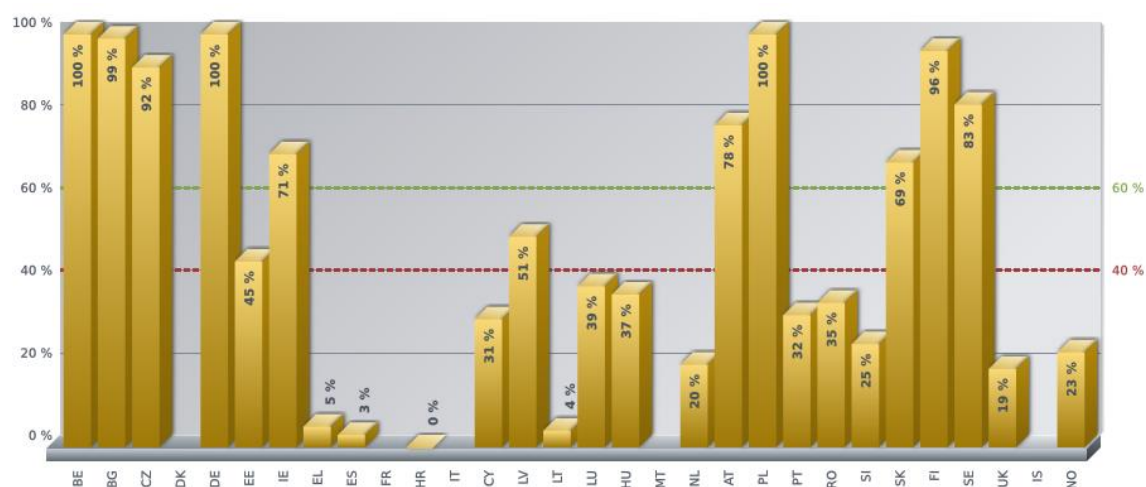
<sup>82</sup> European Commission. 2015. Management Plan, Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

## EURES

The EURES job mobility portal is the main tool that aims to contribute to the transparency of job vacancies. DG EMPL developed a new version of the EURES portal in 2014 with the aim to make it user friendly and effective<sup>83</sup>. In 2015, the portal was further improved, and new innovative functions were implemented such as an automated matching of job vacancies and applications/CVs<sup>84</sup>. The EURES Portal attracts 0.7 million visitors every month. The number of employers registered on the EURES portal was 6.800 end-2016 (compared with 5.600 end-2015 and 3.000 end-2014). The total number of jobseekers registered on 31 December 2016 was around 250.000. Member States share only around half of their vacancies on the portal. While in 2014 around 1 million vacancies were registered, this number rose to 1.5 million in 2015, but slightly fell to 1.4 million as of May 2017.

Since 2015, the number of job vacancies posted on PES websites in the UK has fallen. The number of contacts of EURES staff with jobseekers and employers evolved from 947.489 in 2014 to 1.131.002 in 2016, confirming a regular increase. Hence, the percentage of people who found a job as a direct result of contacting EURES advisers increased slightly from 3.3% in 2014 to 3.7% in 2015 and in 2016<sup>85</sup>. The registered jobseekers are mostly from Italy and Spain (whereby the numbers of jobseekers almost doubled in the 2014-2016 period), and the registered employers are mostly from Germany (throughout the 2014-2016 period). While in 2014 around 1 million vacancies were registered, this number rose to 1.5 million in 2015, but slightly fell to 1.4 million as of May 2017<sup>86</sup>. Based on data from the single market scoreboard (see Figure 5 below), on average 52.3% of all national vacancies are shared on EURES Portal<sup>87</sup>.

Figure 5: Vacancies posted on EURES as a proportion of all national vacancies



Source: Single Market Scoreboard: EURES; EURES portal and quarterly job vacancies figures from EUROSTAT - Comparison is made for the last available figures (third quarter of 2016). Job vacancies figures in Eurostat not available for Denmark, France, Italy, Malta and Iceland

<sup>83</sup> DG EMPL. 2015. 2014 Annual Activity Report.

<sup>84</sup> DG EMPL. 2016. 2015 Annual Activity Report.

<sup>85</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/internal\\_market/scoreboard/performance\\_by\\_governance\\_tool/eures/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/scoreboard/performance_by_governance_tool/eures/index_en.htm). Data for 2016 was obtained from the latest available EURES Advisors monthly reports.

<sup>86</sup> Information retrieved from the performance monitoring report (for 2014), the 2016 Annual report on intra-EU mobility (for 2015) and the EURES portal (for 2017).

<sup>87</sup> European Commission. 2017. Single Market Scoreboard EURES. Retrieved from: [http://ec.europa.eu/internal\\_market/scoreboard/performance\\_by\\_governance\\_tool/eures/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/scoreboard/performance_by_governance_tool/eures/index_en.htm). Please note that Croatia and Cyprus did not publish any vacancies. However, the EURES network is run differently in each countries; in the case of Luxembourg, there is no national website for posting vacancies.

The data shows that the EURES portal has potential for further development. It does contribute to the transparency of job vacancies and labour market information. Nevertheless, the fluctuations of visits as well as the relatively low number of registered vacancies suggests a limited take up of the portal for jobseekers and employees. Additional vacancies would further increase the usefulness of the EURES portal, and potential actions to increase the percentage of vacancies shared by Member States on the portal should be implemented. Additional vacancies would also contribute to a higher number of visitors, coupled with a stronger promotion campaign from the European Commission emphasising the importance of the tool in providing job vacancies, but also additional information related to work and living conditions in EU Member States.

With regard to the provision of services for recruitment and placing of workers, the two most important activities that aim to contribute to this objective - the targeted mobility schemes and cross-border partnerships - are described below.

Two calls for proposals - leading to four new 'Your first EURES job' projects - have been issued in the period covered by the evaluation<sup>88</sup>. Thanks to the contribution of this scheme, the number of youth job placements increased from 3.433 in 2014 to 5.720 in 2016<sup>89</sup>. The evaluation reveals that several challenges impact the effectiveness of the projects, in particular finding the right partners and attracting employers. The projects financed under the call VP/2014/013 exceeded their target. The data analysed show that the projects already finalised had several positive impacts on the young people that benefitted from YfEj scheme funding, with 68% of the job contracts lasting more than six months, many being permanent contracts. Given that the projects funded under the call VP/2015/006 started in February 2017, it was not possible to evaluate the effectiveness of the projects awarded.

YfEj projects face several challenges in the implementation of activities influencing their effectiveness. The project documentation available suggests that one of the greatest challenges faced by the project coordinators was to find the rights partners and build a consortium. For example, an in-depth analysis of the YfEj project VS/2015/0251 managed by EURES France confirmed these issues. In this particular case it was difficult to find the right partners as there were only a limited number of countries ready to be part of the consortium, since several other Member States had decided to apply as lead applicants or have been part of other consortia within YfEj<sup>90</sup>.

Additionally, the consortia face challenges due to the project partners' participating in several YfEj projects simultaneously (see example in the Box 5 below).

**Box 5: Case study EURES Sweden (VS/2014/0584)**

"Due to the fact that this project had to be run in parallel during the first 4 months together with the previous Your first EURES job project, did cause this project to suffer a prolonged start-up phase and thus placed a severe administrative strain on staff resources, which in turn resulted in a negative effect on the project results"<sup>91</sup>.

Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation Volume I

Especially those organisations that participated in the YfEj preparatory action and have been awarded a follow up project, noted that in the first implementation phase of the follow up project, the focus on finalising the preparatory action led to delays and negatively impacted the implementation of the goals in the first year of the follow up project.

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<sup>88</sup> The implementation of YfEj started in February 2015, with the latest projects commencing in February 2017 (see Annex 5.1. for a detailed overview of the implementation).

<sup>89</sup> DG EMPL Annual Activity Report 2016 – Annex.

<sup>90</sup> A more detailed description about the challenges encountered by the project coordinators of VS/2015/0251 is available in the detailed case study description in Volume I of this report.

<sup>91</sup> VS/2014/0584 Final Implementation Report. The case study report is available in Volume I of this report.

The EURES services reach more jobseekers than employers. The consortium partners of the implemented YfEj projects reported issues with the ability to engage employers and ensure a greater collaboration with consortium partners and employers and suggest more targeted communication activities to engage employers better (see also *Topic 6 Effectiveness of involving stakeholders*).

Notwithstanding the experienced challenges, the projects expect mainly positive impacts. For example, the case study analysis of the YfEj project that is currently being implemented by EURES France (VP/2015/006) shows that the project consortium expects positive impacts through the financial support to target groups and the preparation of young people for integrating in a company abroad. The project will help partly erasing mobility obstacles and improve the integration of young people into the labour market. In the long run, the action aims to contribute to the reduction of youth unemployment across Europe by offering sustainable work opportunities. The two projects finalised so far report positive impacts on the young people that benefitted from YfEj funding, as 68% of the work contracts for young people last more than the minimum of 6 months and many are permanent contracts.

The second most important activity in the development of services are *cross-border partnerships*. EURES supports partnerships between organisations providing employment services in cross-border areas and their cooperation with social partners. The partnerships operate in 10 cross-border regions in the EU and include cooperation between public employment services, employers, trade unions, local authorities and other organisations in the cross-border regions. Two calls for proposals have been issued in the analysed period: VP/2014/011 (11 projects) and VP/2015/008 (12 projects).

According to the evidence available, the projects focussing on cross-border partnerships achieved their initial objectives and contributed to a further development of the cross-border regions. The main results include:

- Development of single contact points – cross-border info points - for the cross-border partnerships providing information about employment opportunities and social systems in the cross-border regions.
- Organisation of meetings and various public events.
- Development and extension of cross-border networks and partnerships with tax, social security and labour law authorities.
- Increase in cross-border mobility of workers.

The implemented activities contributed to more transparency at the 'cross-border' labour markets, provided effective information and communication, and enhanced cooperation and learning amongst partners. The most successful activity was the development of cross-border info points through EURES funding (see example in the Box 6 below).

**Box 6: Case study 'EURES in Grenzregionen Rhein-Waal (ERW), euregio-rhein-maas-nord (ermn), Euregio Maas-Rhein (EMR) 2015' (VS/2015/0084)**

The development of the cross-border info point Aachen-Eurode was a success, since the staff in the info point provide over 6,000 consultations / year. This cross-border info point concept is being developed continuously in the partnership and currently there are 4 cross-border info points operational. In 2015, the partners started developing synergies through establishment of the cross-border info points based on their previous experience in the cross-border labour markets, and these synergies were further strengthened in the following years via additional cross-border info points, but also via e.g. diversifying the offer through implementation of mobile cross-border info points (planned in 2018).

Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation, Volume I

The majority of cross-border partnerships applied for follow-up EaSI-EURES funding in 2016 and in 2017 to ensure a continuation of the activities of the cross-border partnerships. At the same time, the stakeholders favour longer funding periods, emphasising that a longer funding period (exceeding 12 months) is necessary to be

able to develop activities that are sustainable. A longer implementation period – minimum of 2 years – might enable stakeholders to: i) develop an innovative activity, ii) implement the activity across the cross-border regions, iii) measure its effectiveness, and iv) ensure the sustainable implementation of the activity<sup>92</sup>. However, the evidence collected suggests that this might lead to path dependency on EURES. Organisations receiving funding rely on EURES funding for several years (and consequently apply for new calls), which in turn does not boost innovation but creates a dependency on EURES funding.

## **Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship**

### **1. Microfinance**

The EIF provides the EaSI guarantee and counter-guarantee to financial intermediaries with the aim of increasing the availability of microfinance. Until 31 December 2016, 33 contracts were signed under the Microfinance window of EaSI accounting for €50.3 million<sup>93</sup>.

As of 31 December 2016 the achieved leverage was 3<sup>94</sup>, meaning that financial intermediaries have actually provided the final beneficiaries with support that is three times larger than the amount of funding provided by the EU<sup>95</sup>. Looking at specific transactions, leverage achieved as of 30 September 2016 ranges from 0 to 11<sup>96</sup>. The overall leverage achieved to date is lower than the target specified in the EIF call for interest, where a minimum leverage of 5.5 for the EaSI Guarantee instrument as a whole should be achieved. Nonetheless, the expected leverage is much higher, amounting to 12.7 and should be reached by the end of the five year period. This suggests that the objectives of the EaSI guarantee will largely be surpassed<sup>97</sup>.

The European Commission baseline data shows that the number of microloans disbursed amounts to 6,278<sup>98</sup>. EaSI support allowed financial intermediaries to provide 13,021 microloans to 12,741 final beneficiaries as of 31 December 2016. This represents an increase of 107% in the number of loans in comparison to the baseline value. The figures show that the average microloan amount has increased under the EaSI programme (from €7,829 under PROGRESS to €11,700 on average). Results from the beneficiary survey<sup>99</sup> and the open public consultation<sup>100</sup> support the above, with a majority of respondents believing that EaSI has provided an easier access to microfinance. The case studies corroborated these findings, each financial intermediary confirming the creation of a new product thanks to the EaSI Financial Instrument.

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<sup>92</sup> Based on interviews with stakeholders of the project: VS/2015/0084 EURES in Grenzregionen Rhein-Waal (ERW), euregio-rhein-maas-nord (ermn), Euregio Maas-Rhein (EMR).

<sup>93</sup> European Commission. 2017. Performance Monitoring Report of the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) 2015-2016.

<sup>94</sup> European Commission. 2017. Performance Monitoring Report of the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) 2015-2016.

<sup>95</sup> Around 9 million EUR were also committed by the EU for fees and management costs. If this amount was added to the calculation, the actual rate of leverage would decrease a bit to 2.2.

<sup>96</sup> EIF. 2016. Semi-annual operational report.

<sup>97</sup> Follow-up interview with Programme Manager, EaSI Financial Instruments and EFSI, European Commission, and Policy Officer, Management Organisation Unit of Development Programmes.

<sup>98</sup> Baseline value from 2014, based on the predecessor programme PROGRESS Microfinance.

<sup>99</sup> EaSI online survey. Question 30. To what extent do you agree with the following statements concerning the effectiveness of Microfinance and entrepreneurship activities? 5 respondents out of 5 agreed. Due to the very low number of respondents caution must be taken in relying to these results.

<sup>100</sup> Open public consultation. Question: To what extent do you agree with the following statements concerning the effectiveness of the activities delivered under the Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis of EaSI? 9 out of 14 respondents agreed that Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis has provided an easier access to microfinance. Due to the very low number of respondents caution must be taken in relying to these results.



Looking at specific transactions, there are important disparities in the number of final recipients and the allocated amount per country. The regional distribution appears similar under EaSI as under PROGRESS with France, Spain and the Netherlands receiving the largest amount. For a detailed overview see Table 21 in Annex 6.3.

The majority of funding went to microenterprises operating in the area of wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles followed by accommodation and food services activities and construction. Moreover, the sector coverage is similar as the one under the predecessor programme except for enterprises operating in the sector of agriculture, which was the most common sector under PROGRESS<sup>101</sup>.

To ensure the highest effectiveness of the microloans provided under the EaSI Financial Guarantee, financial intermediaries "shall undertake to provide directly or indirectly mentoring and training programmes for final recipients"<sup>102</sup>. FIs are required to offer such services but ultimately it is up to the final recipient to take part. There is no prescription in the EaSI regulation on how to implement such services. Out of 5,940 final beneficiaries for which information is available until the end of 2016, 68% have received training and mentoring services from the institutions providing microcredit. However, for more than half of the final beneficiaries, financial intermediaries have not reported on such information. Following the experience with the predecessor programme, the Commission has identified mentoring and training as a key area for improvement under EaSI<sup>103</sup>. The EIF reported that the range and quality of mentoring services vary greatly among FIs while some offer free services, other request attendance to such training prior to applying to a loan. Services range from online training to internal training or training offered via a third party (e.g. NGO, chamber of commerce, etc.)<sup>104</sup>. It appears that such services are not systematically assessed but rather, the EIF relies on contractual undertaking, due to lack of resources.

The overall aim of the EaSI Financial guarantee is to improve the employment situation of socially disadvantaged people and to promote their financial and social inclusion. As of 30 September 2016, 26 financial intermediaries provided data on their final beneficiaries, however some of them did not report information on all the criteria. It is to be noted that data such as age, gender, employment status, etc. is collected for natural persons applying for the EaSI Financial Guarantee only. The picture is therefore incomplete, since a large number of applicants are legal persons (enterprises) and only data on their employees has been collected and not on the owner or a legal representative. However, the data collected to date provides an indication of the overall direction of the Microfinance and Social entrepreneurship axis.

The evidence shows that vulnerable groups have been targeted by financial intermediaries. Some countries seem to have placed a stronger attention on vulnerable groups, such as Portugal who is leading in promoting activities addressed to women and unemployed people; Czech Republic focussing on young people; and Spain promoting access to finance for migrants.

Stronger institutional capacity is expected to be achieved through:

- adequacy of funding, human resources, operational management, systems and infrastructure; and
- compliance with the European Code of Good Conduct for Microcredit (ECoGC), a European wide initiative to promote best practices within the sector.

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<sup>101</sup> European Commission. 2017. EaSI Performance Monitoring Report 2015-2016.

<sup>102</sup> EIF. Annex II to the Open Call for Expression of Interest to select Financial Intermediaries under EaSI, p. 19.

<sup>103</sup> European Commission. 2017. EaSI Performance Monitoring Report 2015-2016.

<sup>104</sup> Follow-up interview with the Head of Microfinance, EIF.

In December 2016, the European Commission launched a tool to strengthen the capacity of microcredit providers funded under the Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis. Given the timeline, the extent to which the Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis has strengthened the institutional capacity of microcredit providers was therefore not assessed under the mid-term evaluation.

As a condition to receive the EaSI Financial Instrument, non-bank microcredit providers have to sign up to the ECoGC<sup>105</sup> while banks have to endorse it. In February 2017, the Dutch firm Qredits was the first European microfinance institution to be certified under the code.

## 2. Social entrepreneurship

In order to assess the extent to which the Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis has improved access to finance for social enterprises, evidence was sought of increased financial support to social enterprises aimed at supporting the development of the social investment markets. As such, these are consequently contributing to the improvement of the employment situation and inclusion of vulnerable groups. At this stage however, it is too early to assess the impact of such support. It is also to be noted that support to social enterprises has been introduced for the first time as part of the EaSI programme, therefore there is no existing baseline data available for comparison.

Until 31 December 2016, seven contracts were signed under the social entrepreneurship window accounting for €9 million. The total amount disbursed to social enterprises under EaSI represents €5.7 million, the majority of loans (around 90%) were provided by the French institution La Nef. The target leverage of 5.5 was not yet achieved<sup>106</sup>. Looking at specific transactions, leverage achieved as of 30 September 2016 ranges from 0 to 1.5<sup>107</sup>. Nonetheless, the seven signed transactions are expected to unlock more than €116 million of financing for social enterprises which leads to an expected leverage factor of 12.8, well above the target leverage.

EaSI support allowed financial intermediaries to provide funding to 64 social enterprises as of 31 December 2016 with an average loan of €89,000. As seen in 0, most transactions have taken place in France.

Table 8: Number of transactions and amount as of 30/09/2016

Country	Transactions to social enterprises (nb)	Amount committed to social enterprises (million €)	Average loan size (€)
France	56	5.2	92,857
Poland	6	0.5	83,333
Spain	2	0.1	50,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>89,063</b>

Source: EIF. (2016). Semi-annual operational report.

Regarding the distribution of loans per sector of economic activity, the majority of funding went to social enterprises operating in the area of wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles followed by manufacturing and agriculture, forestry and fishing.

<sup>105</sup> Please see Annex 3 for a more thorough description of the ECoGC.

<sup>106</sup> Around 9 million EUR were also committed by the EU for fees and management costs. If this amount was added to the calculation, the actual rate of leverage would decrease a bit to 2.2.

<sup>107</sup> EIF. 2016. Semi-annual operational report.

The case studies provided some further insights on the activities implemented. La Nef describes that they have implemented all forecasted activities for 2015-2016. They reached their goal of increasing their social loans production (an eleven times increase in the number of final beneficiaries receiving a loan). La Nef also managed to specially reach out to enterprises producing healthy and/or affordable food (45.5% of final beneficiaries in 30 September 2016) and working towards improving the quality of the environment (13.7%).<sup>108</sup> Moreover, three of the five final recipients were very young firms (less than one year old), suggesting that young firms benefit particularly from the financial guarantee. Despite the uncertainty regarding the eligibility criteria for social entrepreneurs, La Nef mentioned they have exceeded their activities for social entrepreneurs.

Further challenges influenced the effectiveness of the Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis. There have been delays in making available the funded instruments of the programme and the capacity building resources<sup>109</sup>. Due to the important demand for the guarantees, the European Commission has prioritised this activity and has mobilised resources to search for additional sources of funding. However, delays also occurred in the provision of the EaSI Financial Guarantee itself, leading to a gap in provision between the EaSI programme and its predecessor programmes. In France for instance, an agreement was reached between the financial intermediary and a national initiative (France Active) to provide a guarantee until the launch of EaSI<sup>110</sup>.

The complexity of the ECoGC can also be a barrier for microfinance institutions in benefiting from the EaSI guarantee<sup>111</sup>. The ECoGC is considered necessary to raise standards in the sector in order to protect micro-borrowers<sup>112</sup>. Nonetheless, the code is still fairly new, while its application is already a contractual obligation in all contracts signed, with penalties pending if not respected within 18 months of the signature.

EaSI requires financial intermediaries to engage on a certain level of loans to be covered and a fee should be paid when this level is not reached. At the same time, financial intermediaries cannot go beyond this level of loans if the level is reached. Such lack of flexibility in paying commitment fees were reported to engender additional costs for the microfinance financial intermediaries<sup>113</sup>.

Some features of the guarantee for social enterprises, built on the features used for microfinance, were reported as not appropriate. The example of the ex-ante recovery rate was reported as being used for small loans, but not appropriate for bigger loans such as the ones provided for social enterprises (up to €500,000)<sup>114</sup>.

Defining the target group can be a challenge as it should not be too specific but still focus on particular vulnerable groups<sup>115</sup>. For example, Komerční Banka experienced a slow take off of their financial guarantee, suggesting that their target group was too narrow. As a consequence, Komerční Banka is now expanding its target group towards other vulnerable groups<sup>116</sup>. Defining the target volume can also be challenging for financial intermediaries. Here again, the example of Komerční Banka illustrates the

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<sup>108</sup> EIF. 2016. EaSI Guarantee Facility Instrument (EaSI GFI) Impact Report 30/09/2016. Table 1.5 Social Entrepreneurship window, cumulative percentages.

<sup>109</sup> Interview with European Commission representatives.

<sup>110</sup> ICF case study: ADIE.

<sup>111</sup> Interview Head of inclusive finance, EIF and Financial Intermediaries.

<sup>112</sup> Follow-up interview with Programme Manager, EaSI Financial Instruments and EFSI, European Commission, and Policy Officer, Management Organisation Unit of Development Programmes.

<sup>113</sup> Open public consultation on the EaSI mid-term evaluation.

<sup>114</sup> Interview Senior Microfinance Investment Manager, EIF.

<sup>115</sup> Interview Senior Microfinance Investment Manager, EIF.

<sup>116</sup> ICF case study: Komerční Banka.

issue, where the demand was overestimated, suggesting that the target group might have been too narrow and inappropriate<sup>117</sup>.

Another challenge encountered by financial intermediaries relates to the assessment of the risk (i.e. default rate)<sup>118</sup>. This is crucial for financial intermediaries as the difference between the set default rate and the actual default has to be fully supported by the intermediary itself, therefore exposing them to risks and potential cost in the case of default.

When it comes to contracting under the EaSI microfinance financial products, the application of UK law in very long and detailed contracts is another difficulty for microfinance institutional counterparts. They have sometimes to use the services of an external lawyer familiar to this jurisdiction, which is another severe drain on their small resources. The obligation to appoint an agent in the UK risks making the deals unfeasible except for a few larger institutions<sup>119</sup>.

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**Key points on the effectiveness in generating outcomes and achieving objectives**

- Overall, the programme as a whole has achieved good quality outcomes but in limited quantity, given the short timeframe.
- Scaling up of innovative projects remained limited and follow up actions are hindered by lack of funding.
- PROGRESS is most effective in facilitating effective and inclusive information-sharing, mutual learning and dialogue, followed by the the development and dissemination of comparative and analytical knowledge. The progress in testing of social and labour market policy innovations/experimentations is the slowest. Outputs produced under employment and working conditions themes are most highly regarded and considered as useful.
- EURES is most effective in contributing to a transparent labour market. The number of visits to the EURES portal is stable, but the number of registered jobseekers/employers continues to rise. However, Member States share only around half of their vacancies on the EURES portal. With regard to the development of services, the cross-border partnerships provided effective information and communication, and enhanced cooperation and learning amongst partners. The most successful activity was the development of cross-border info points through EURES funding.
- Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship has contributed to an increase in supply of financing for both microfinance and social entrepreneurship, suggesting an increase in availability and access to finance as a result of EaSI. Financial intermediaries have included vulnerable groups in their activities, but important discrepancies remain between countries. However, vulnerable groups do not represent the majority of the final beneficiaries, suggesting that barriers in accessing finance still remain.

*Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation*

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#### **4.2.2 Effectiveness in bringing about change**

With regard to the effectiveness of the EaSI axes in bringing about change, the evaluation examined the extent to which the programme contributed to quantitative/qualitative changes, the factors influencing these changes and any other unintended effects of the programme. The results per axis are summarised below.

The PROGRESS axis outputs have delivered so far qualitative and quantitative effects. As illustrated by some open ended responses in the EaSI online survey and interviewees at the European Commission, the Labour Force Survey is highly demanded with a direct impact on policies; the meeting of Eurocarers network contributed to the development of the new National Careers Strategy in the UK; a

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<sup>117</sup> Case study 'Komerční Banka'.

<sup>118</sup> Case study 'ADIE'.

<sup>119</sup> Open public consultation and case study 'ADIE'.

number of NGOs have used knowledge produced at the EU level in their lobbying and advocacy work with policy-makers and experts at national and local levels.<sup>120</sup>

The beneficiaries' survey examined what qualitative and quantitative changes/effects PROGRESS has delivered. Most of the respondents agreed that it helped to develop analytical knowledge, facilitated mutual learning and dialogue, and supported capacity building activities.<sup>121</sup> Likewise, some open-ended responses in the open public consultation show that attributing impacts to the programme is difficult to assess, given that employment and social policies are national competences. Nevertheless, the programme is seen to have facilitated policy change through research, exchange and capacity building and engagement of different non-governmental actors implementing EU policy guidance.

PROGRESS has also delivered some unintended or unforeseen effects shown in the examples below: support provided by the Labour Law Network<sup>122</sup> to DG EMPL is useful and complemented activities of other DG; partners implementing the INNOVCare project<sup>123</sup> cooperate with DG SANTE to develop Action Plan and contribute to the common goal of improving the services provided to people with rare diseases; 'Nowcasting' model<sup>124</sup> is expected to be applied by other Member States to assess the impact of policy reforms (e.g. pension system); an Information Centre at the border between Lithuania and Poland was established resulting from the project 'Posting of workers', which provides services to mainly posted workers from three Baltic countries.

When looking at the EURES axis, the analysis of the available data<sup>125</sup> identified that EURES is most effective *at improving access to job vacancies and at enhancing labour market transparency* through the information provided on the EURES job mobility portal and contacts of jobseekers with EURES advisors. For example, respondents to the open public consultation and survey indicated that job-mobility across the EU has become 'fairer' due to the support of EaSI-EURES, as jobseekers and mobile workers are better informed about labour law and social security in EU Member States. Further, EURES funding enables organisations to raise awareness among employers and jobseekers and promote labour mobility.

The number of contacts of EURES advisors contacts with jobseekers and employers remained stable in the analysed period. However, the constant increase in 2016 might indicate constant interest for EURES services from both target groups (see **Error! Reference source not found.** below). The EURES advisers' network had quite a stable number of personal contacts<sup>126</sup> with jobseekers and employers each year (around 1 million contacts per year). In 2016, there were 52.282 placements resulting from the consultations with jobseekers, i.e. around 6% of personal contacts resulted in an actual placement (increased twice compared to 2014). With regard to EURES the portal, the number of registered jobseekers and employers has doubled since 2014, and the average monthly visits is stable (0,7 million persons), but Member States share only around half of their vacancies on the portal.

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<sup>120</sup> EaSI online survey and Interviews with stakeholders from the European Commission

<sup>121</sup> Answer based on 22 out of 31 responses. The sample sizes are not high enough to use this evidence as confirmatory but insightful and illustrative to be considered and interpreted along with findings and patterns from other sources (desk research, interviews and case studies).

<sup>122</sup> <http://www.labourlawnetwork.eu/>

<sup>123</sup> ICF Case study report, INNOVCare (Innovative Patient-Centred Approach for Social Care Provision to Complex Conditions) (VP/2014/008 - VS/2015/0249).

<sup>124</sup> ICF Case study report, Nowcasting (VP/2014/006 - VS/2015/0179).

<sup>125</sup> The main sources of information were EaSI monitoring reports, available project implementation reports, open public consultation, survey and case studies of four EURES supported projects.

<sup>126</sup> The average EURES adviser had 847 individual personal contacts with jobseekers and 130 contacts with employers. As a general rule, around 90% of all contacts are with job-seekers and around 10% with employers. A total of 902.529 of personal contacts were implemented in 2016.

Concerning the effectiveness of EURES services that aim at recruitment and placing of workers in employment (namely YfEj and cross-border partnerships), EURES seems most effective in supporting the development of cross-border partnerships and enhancing cross-border mobility. The data gathered points to positive changes due to EURES support: development of 'welcome centres' and 'cross-border info points' in the cross-border regions; increase the positive perception of cross-border employment; raise awareness of regional employers as well as jobseekers of the potential in cross-border labour markets; enabled exchange of information between employers and job seekers. The following case study example illustrates the changes in the cross-border partnerships resulting from EURES funding (see example in Box 7 below).

**Box 7: EURES in cross border regions (VS/2015/0084)**

The consortium enabled synergy creation, single points of contact and the planned quantitative targets:

- Synergy creation between the cross-border regions of Rhein-Waal, rhein-maas-nord and Maas-Rhein: the main result is the merger of several large organisations from separate regions working on cross-border employment issues into one EURES cross-border partnership enabling them to achieve better impact through coordinating their efforts.
- Creation of single points of contact – cross-border info points – for stakeholders, involving not only the main stakeholders (employers and jobseekers), but also other stakeholders, such as pensioners who previously worked in one of the regions and require information about the pension systems, or students who require information about job opportunities while studying.
- Achieving quantitative targets, including: 10,500 direct contacts with employers and jobseekers and organised approximately 100 meetings with involved partners in order to enhance cooperation and the network architecture. Many exchanges of staff working in different national, regional and local authorities of the involved countries were organised throughout the year. In addition, many job fairs and speed dating events were organised and information materials about work and life in the neighbouring countries were published

Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation, Volume I

With regards to the targeted mobility schemes, the "Your first EURES job" has supported positive change in the employment of young people across the EU. For example, the preparatory action under the 'Your first EURES job' was the basis for the development and testing of the national mobility program MobiPro-EU programme in Germany<sup>127</sup>. The following case study example shows the main planned changes that are expected in the project due to the positive role of EURES in supporting young people to enter the labour market (see example in Box 8 below).

**Box 8: YfEj Pôle Emploi (VS/2015/0251)**

The envisaged impacts of the partnership include contributing to the accessibility of job vacancies and applications for jobseekers and employers, providing services for young people and SMEs on intra-EU mobility. The aim is further to enhance the impact of EURES services across the EU through making them known as reliable when it comes to offering recruitment services to SMEs. This will most likely impact the future use of EURES services by SMEs. The project further aims to also make sure that larger groups of young jobseekers have a much clearer understanding of the benefits of working abroad. The planned outputs include:

- Reach more or less 800 placements throughout the duration of the project.
- Deliver 700 allowances for selection interviews, 600 relocation allowances (related to the expected number of placements), 300 SMEs integration programmes' allowances, and finance 400 language trainings, 100 recognitions of qualifications and 50 supplementary relocation allowances.

As the project is ongoing until November 2017, not all results have been achieved so far.

Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation, Volume I

At this stage of implementation, the role of EURES in bringing about change through YfEj can be described as limited, but evolving. One project exceeded the planned

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<sup>127</sup> Since 2013, this special programme supports young persons from Europe in finding an in-house vocational training position and brings them together with project providers and companies in Germany (<https://www.thejobofmylife.de/en/home.html>).

placements, while the remaining three projects are still ongoing; therefore the evaluation is not possible at this stage (see also the previous Section 4.2.1 on the number of placements of the projects implemented so far and Annex 5.1 for a detailed overview).

Finally, Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship, the quantitative changes resulting from the EaSI interventions relate to leverage effect, lending volume, number of loans disbursed and number of final beneficiaries served. The figures are summarised in 09.

*Table 9: Financial impact of the EaSI Financial Guarantee*

Changes	Microfinance	Social enterprises
Leverage effect	3	0.4
Lending volume	€152.3 million	€5.7 million
Number of loans to final beneficiaries	13,021	64
Number of final beneficiaries accessing loans	12,741	63

*Source: European Commission. (2017). Performance Monitoring Report of the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) 2015-2016.*

Given the short timeframe, it was too early to assess the intermediate outcomes of the EaSI support. However, a first glance at the open public consultation and EaSI beneficiaries' survey show positive feedbacks on the intended outcomes for both windows<sup>128</sup>. In terms of qualitative changes observed to date as a result of the Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship facility, the following elements were reported in the beneficiaries' survey<sup>129</sup> and open public consultation<sup>130</sup> and confirmed through interviews with financial intermediaries: improved procedures and processes including risk management, reporting and monitoring; improved compliance with the ECoGC; development of the offer with the creation of new financial products; and growing interest in social enterprises. Such changes however differ widely among financial intermediaries depending on their experience and the procedure already in place<sup>131</sup>.

Across the axes, different factors besides the interventions influence the achievement observed. For instance, there is a need for a longer implementation period that would enable beneficiaries to create more impact. Moreover, still under EURES axis, their beneficiaries expressed the need for balanced consortia including countries who are experienced and those who are new in EURES projects, in order to ensure better implementation of the activities<sup>132</sup>. Similarly, in the Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis, the lack of experience of some financial intermediaries with micro entrepreneurs and vulnerable groups can also affect the implementation of the guarantee<sup>133</sup>. Financial intermediaries who are used to work with this target group were reported to have better implementation processes in place.

#### Key points on effectiveness in bringing about change

<sup>128</sup> Data must be taken with caution due to the relatively low number of responses.

<sup>129</sup> EaSI online survey. Question 33: "What have been - at this stage of the implementation - the qualitative and quantitative changes/effects of the project approved?"

<sup>130</sup> ICF Open Public Consultation. Comment to the question: "To what extent do you agree with the following statements concerning the effectiveness of the activities delivered under the Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis of EaSI?"

<sup>131</sup> Follow-up interviews with financial intermediaries.

<sup>132</sup> EaSI case study reports.

<sup>133</sup> Interview Senior Microfinance Investment Manager, EIF.



- PROGRESS contributed to positive results in terms of capacity building and use of analytical research outputs which have been informing the European Semester country specific recommendations as well policies at national level. The interaction between intervention specific factors with local and national factors can support a successful achievement. For example, local or national demand for deliverables and alignment with the local/regional/national political agenda foster a successful delivery. There is evidence of positive unforeseen effects or intake of deliverables beyond the original plan, such as delivering research used by other DGs, or reaching beneficiaries which were not foreseen at the moment of planning.
- EURES is most effective at improving access to job vacancies and at enhancing labour market transparency through the information provided at the EURES job mobility portal and contacts of jobseekers with EURES advisors. Concerning the effectiveness of EURES services that aim at recruitment and placing of workers in employment (namely YfEj and cross-border partnerships), EURES seems most effective in supporting the development of cross-border partnerships and enhancing cross-border mobility. Other factors play a role in improving EURES axis effectiveness, like project duration and experience of consortium partners.
- The Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis contributed to quantitative changes in terms of lending volume, number of loans and number of beneficiaries, in particular for microfinance. Qualitative changes are however scarce. The main factor limiting the achievement of the results is the delay in making the financial instrument available due to the preparation phase in 2014

Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation

#### 4.2.3 Effectiveness in involving stakeholders

This section examines the effectiveness in involving stakeholders across the three axes.

With regard to the PROGRESS axis, the profile of the target audience remains similar to the PROGRESS 2007-2013 programme<sup>134</sup> and is quite diverse in terms of representation. 00 presents a full breakdown.

*Table 10: Profile of targeted audiences and actual participants in information sharing and learning activities and their participation trends*

Type of participant	2014	2015-2016	Change
Officials from national, regional or local government institutions	33%	35%	+2pp
Civil society and social partners	20%	24%	+4pp
Researchers and independent experts	15%	16%	+1pp
EU officials	14%	6%	-8pp

Source: Performance Monitoring Report of the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) 2014 and 2015-2016.

In relation to stakeholder involvement, most of the data shows that some type of strategies are successful, for example: i) targeting disseminated information, ii) contacting organisations or partnerships of organisations working with relevant target groups, iii) using a range of tools to stimulate interest, iv) encourage participation and attract commitment of stakeholders, and v) targeted choice of partners in a project.

According to PROGRESS beneficiaries relevant stakeholders were involved during the programming and implementation phase<sup>135</sup>. This is confirmed by an overall good self-assessment of interviewed representatives of DG EMPL, who suggested these types of involvement as a key success factor. This type of engagement fora (conferences,

<sup>134</sup>ICF. 2014. Ex-post evaluation of the Programme for employment and social solidarity – PROGRESS 2007-2013 and recommendations for the successor programmes to PROGRESS 2014-2020.

<sup>135</sup> ICF analysis, survey with beneficiaries and open public consultation results.



stakeholder meetings, expert groups, consultations combined with follow-up activities) foster representation of a diverse range number of stakeholder.

When looking at the EURES axis, the analysed data shows that employment services, followed by social partners as well as regional and local authorities were the main intermediate target groups of EURES funded projects. The data shows a need to ensure a stronger involvement of workers organisations and trade unions, but also of NGOs and SMEs. This was mainly indicated by respondents to the open public consultation and beneficiaries' survey. In terms of final target groups, the most frequently indicated were unsurprisingly the unemployed and long-term unemployed, as well as young people, employed (including cross-border workers) and women.

The analysed information suggests that the effectiveness of involving stakeholders was rather negatively influenced by the changing requirements such as the need for more public private partnerships and the EURES reform. This is exemplified in the projects analysed through case studies. These projects vary in terms of number of partners involved (from 8 to 23) and the types of stakeholder engagement strategies applied. 'Your first EURES job' schemes focussed on building a balanced consortium and to enable private-public partnerships, while the projects focussing on cross-border partnerships aimed to adapt their consortium according to the changes based on the EURES reform. For the organisations who are part of the cross-border partnerships, the changes meant that only PES as EURES members could be the coordinators of EaSI-EURES projects, which led to structural changes in the cooperation amongst organisations involved in cross-border partnerships. Annex 5.1 provides information on stakeholder engagement in three of the four EURES case studies, as the case study focussing on EURES Norway did not involve a consortium (VS/2015/0269).

Stakeholders have been involved and consulted in the programming and run-up of the Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis to some extent. For instance, several interviews with key stakeholders were undertaken before the Commission proposal. During the legislative process, hearing and workshops were organised. In addition, various workshops and a survey took place during the design of the EaSI Financial Instrument. Lastly, there are ongoing discussions and regular meetings to address any issues arising<sup>136</sup>. However, over half the respondents to the open public consultation<sup>137</sup>, as well as the EIF representatives interviewed, believe there has not been sufficient involvement of certain stakeholders such as government bodies but also the EIF. Looking further into the stakeholders involved, it appears that certain entities have been regularly consulted at different stages, namely the European Microfinance Network (EMFN) and the Expert Group on Social Entrepreneurship (GECCES).

The case studies also illustrate some involvement of national authorities in the activities of the financial intermediaries. The involvement is not necessarily linked to the EaSI guarantee but to their activities in general. Examples extracted from the case studies are presented in 01 below.

Table 11: Examples of stakeholders' involvement from the case studies

Financial intermediary	Window, country	Examples of stakeholders' involvement from the Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis
La Nef	Social entrepreneurship	La Nef explained that with regards to the involvement of national, regional and local authorities in the EaSI programme, there is no direct involvement of French authorities in the EaSI-project although the French state officially supports social

<sup>136</sup> Follow-up interview with the European Commission, Programme Manager, EaSI Financial Instrument and EFSI, and Policy Officer, Management Organisation Unit of Development Programmes.

<sup>137</sup> ICF Open Public Consultation. Question: "Given the target groups and the programme objectives, do you consider that the most relevant stakeholders have been sufficiently involved? N=14"

	France	entrepreneurs.
<b>ADIE</b>	Microfinance France	ADIE declared having many partnerships with authorities at different levels, especially with local authorities. Although authorities are not involved in the implementation of the EaSI guarantee as such, they help ADIE in identifying beneficiaries and direct beneficiaries towards ADIE.
<b>Qredits</b>	Microfinance The Netherlands	Qredits has an extensive involvement from national authorities in its creation and activities. The Dutch government supports Qredits' efforts to increase entrepreneurship and availability of finance in the Netherlands. Moreover, the Dutch Royal family is involved in Qredits, with the Dutch Queen Maxima as a board member of the organisation. Nevertheless, despite Qredits' involvement of national (and Royal) authorities in their start-up and activities, there are no third parties in the Netherlands involved in the EaSI financial guarantee programme.
<b>Komerční Banka</b>	Microfinance Czech Republic	Within the framework of the EaSI support, Komerční Banka cooperated with the Czech association of SMEs to organise training programmes with micro-entrepreneurs and with the Ministry of Social Affairs and provided two seminars on micro-entrepreneurs in 2016.

*Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation*

In sum, when analysing the key findings on stakeholders' involvement, it appears that there had not been sufficient inclusion of relevant stakeholders in the programming and implementation of EaSI. Among the survey and open public consultation respondents indicating a lack of stakeholder involvement, especially the case of social partners was highlighted. The respondents remarked that their involvement needs to be strengthened in particular in the development of the annual work programmes, the design of the calls and identification of the needs for activities. The most effective involvement methods for stakeholders appear to be targeted information dissemination, contact with organisations working with relevant target groups, inclusion of social partners and main national authorities in the projects.

#### **Key points on the stakeholders' involvement**

- Stakeholder involvement should be strengthened. The most effective involvement methods appear to be targeted information dissemination, contact with organisations working with relevant target groups, inclusion of social partners and main national authorities in the projects; encourage participation and attract commitment of stakeholders.
- Stakeholder involvement per axis:
  - PROGRESS: the profile of target groups was similar to the profile of participants in the predecessor programme. In events organised by the European Commission, national, regional and local authorities were the most represented, followed by social partners and non-governmental organisations, researchers and EU officials.
  - EURES: The analysed data shows that employment services, followed by social partners as well as regional and local authorities were the main intermediate target groups of EURES funded projects. The data shows a need to ensure a stronger involvement of workers organisations and trade unions, but also of NGOs and SMEs. In terms of final target groups, the most common quoted were the unemployed and long-term unemployed, young people, employed, cross-border workers and women. The analysed information suggests that the effectiveness of involving stakeholders was rather negatively influenced by the changing requirements such as the need for more public/private partnerships.
  - Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship: financial intermediaries tend to involve national, regional and/or local authorities in their activities but the involvement is not necessarily focused on the products offered under the EaSI third axis, but directed towards their activities more broadly. Few stakeholders have been involved in the programming of the axis.

*Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation*

#### **4.2.4 Conclusion: EaSI programme effectiveness**

Overall, the EaSI programme has achieved good quality outcomes, but limited in quantity given the short implementation period under evaluation. Further, the beneficiaries experienced several positive changes due to the EaSI programme. However, heavy administrative requirements are felt as barrier for achieving project goals.

When looking at the individual axes, PROGRESS appears to be most effective in facilitating effective and inclusive information-sharing, mutual learning and dialogue and in the development and dissemination of comparative and analytical knowledge. EURES is effective in contributing to a transparent labour market through the EURES portal and the development of services. For instance, YfEj achieved over 78% of its overall placement goal<sup>138</sup>, but projects face implementation challenges. In cross-border partnerships, the most successful activity was the development of cross-border info points through EURES funding. Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship has contributed to an increase in supply of financing for both microfinance and social entrepreneurship windows. However, barriers in accessing finance for vulnerable groups remain.

Overall, several positive changes would not have occurred in the absence of the EaSI intervention. Some of these examples are related to: increase in awareness and information about EU policy efforts in the area of social inclusion and poverty reduction; improved perception of the cross-border employment and raised awareness of regional employers and of the job-seekers on the cross-border potentials; broader and rapid testing and implementation of innovative measures; increased access to finance and increased capacity building opportunities in the microfinance and social entrepreneurship sectors; a more coherent approach towards the needs of the cross border labour market thanks to an improved dialogue and coordination of activities; facilitated policy change through research, exchange and building of advocacy capacity, helping different non-governmental actors to influence the formulation and implementation of EU policies.

Finally, with regard to stakeholder involvement, the data show that it has been quite limited and should be strengthened. Some effective methods have been identified, including targeted information dissemination, regular contact with organisations working with relevant target groups and inclusion of social partners and main national authorities in the projects.

### **4.3 Efficiency**

The evaluation questions on efficiency of EaSI were grouped and analysed under two leading topics, i.e. the efficiency of resource allocation and the benefits accruing (relative to inputs).

#### **4.3.1 The efficiency of resource allocation**

Table 12 below presents financial information in respect to performance of the EaSI programme in terms of planned and total commitments<sup>139</sup> per EaSI axis in 2014, 2015 and 2016. The cumulated commitments in 2014-2016 are EUR 356 million, which constitutes 97% of the total planned commitments.

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<sup>138</sup> European Commission DG EMPL 2017. YourfirstEURESjob Targeted Mobility Scheme, Financed under the EaSI Programme, 2014-2020, 3rd Progress Monitoring Report, July 2016 - January 2017. Luxembourg, p. 22.

<sup>139</sup> The planned commitments represent the amounts planned per axis each year at the level of DG EMPL. The total commitments (budgetary execution) indicate the sum of individual and global commitments.

Table 12: Planned and total commitments by axes in 2014, 2015 and 2016

Year/Axe	PROGRESS		EURES		Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship		TOTAL 2014-2016	
	Planned (EUR)	Executed (EUR)	Planned (EUR)	Executed (EUR)	Planned (EUR)	Executed (EUR)	Planned (EUR)	Executed (EUR)
2014	71.799.500	65.479.469	21.422.355	15.858.011	26.304.151	28.477.451	119.526.006	109.814.931
2015	72.710.574	69.580.317	23.090.525	23.094.474	26.459.001	31.436.141	122.260.100	124.110.932
2016	73.352.883	71.598.651	22.450.000	22.864.342	27.849.770	27.744.070	123.652.653	122.207.068
Total	217.862.957	206.658.437	66.962.890	61.816.827	80.612.922	87.657.662	365.438.759	356.132.931

Source: Based on data from monitoring reports 2014 and 2015-2016.

The cumulated commitments of the **PROGRESS** axis in 2014-2016 are EUR 206.658, which constitutes 95 % of the planned commitments. The PROGRESS axis produced in 2014-2016 a range of regular analytical outputs, such as studies, databases, methodologies and classifications, as well as ad-hoc outputs, for instance the Classification of European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO)<sup>140</sup>, the Labour Market Policy Database, the Mutual Information System on Social Protection Database (MISSOC), a Flash Eurobarometer on working conditions studies on adequate social protection for long-term care needs in ageing society and coping strategies for the unemployed persons,.

A large amount of funding was used to set up the European Network of Public Employment Services (PES) and to establish other key networks of independent experts such as the European Employment Policy Observatory, the European Social Policy Network and the European Labour Law Network.

In the policy area of social protection and social inclusion, notable supported analytical activities were the EUROMOD<sup>141</sup> model, the Social Situation Monitor<sup>142</sup>, the development and deployment of Electronic Exchange of Social Security Information (EESSI)<sup>143</sup>. EaSI also supported the activity of the European Social Policy Network (ESPN) and the development of the European Platform against Poverty (EPAP).

In the policy area of working conditions, EaSI supported, among other actions, the development of European Statistics on Occupational Diseases and the monographs programme of the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection managed by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC). EaSI has also funded recurrent information sharing and learning activities, such as thematic days-plenary meetings of the Committee Senior Labour Inspectors (SLIC), occupational safety and health conferences, meetings of the Group of Directors General for Industrial Relations, high-level meetings between the European Commission and the International Labour Organization (ILO) and annual legal seminars. Moreover, the EaSI-funded evidence has also directly contributed to the establishment of the European Platform on Undeclared Work in 2016.

In 2014-2016, PROGRESS axis also provided financial support to building up the stakeholders' capacity to design and implement social experimentations. Three calls

<sup>140</sup> EaSI also financed also ESCO hosting, reimbursement of experts and technical assistance.

<sup>141</sup>EUROMOD is a tax-benefit microsimulation model for the European Union that enables researchers and policy analysts to calculate, in a comparable manner, the effects of taxes and benefits on household incomes and work incentives for the population of each country and for the EU as a whole (<https://www.euromod.ac.uk/>).

<sup>142</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1049&langId=en>.

<sup>143</sup>EESSI is an IT system that helps social security institutions across the EU exchange information more rapidly and securely, as required by the EU rules on social security coordination. (<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=869&langId=en>).

for proposals for social policy experimentation<sup>144</sup> were published in 2014-2016 and 20 projects were awarded. PROGRESS axis also supported yearly up to 20 key EU-level NGO networks to increase their capacity to develop, promote and support the implementation of EU policies and law in the area of employment and social affairs (e.g. instance Caritas Europa, European Social Network, Eurocities, Eurochild, European Anti-Poverty Network, ENSIE or Microfinance Network).

The PROGRESS axis also funded information sharing and mutual learning activities, such as networks of experts, peer reviews, learning exchanges, trainings, Council Presidency conferences, seminars and high-level events, communication campaigns, good practice guides and informative material, as well as the development and maintenance of information systems.

Information and communication activities were funded in order to raise awareness on priority policy issues. Conferences and seminars focusing on growth and jobs promoted the debate on these issues among key decision makers and stakeholders at national, European and international level with a view to creating support to meet EU objectives and priorities. An important focus was also put in issues such as anticipation of skills needs, analysis of skills supply and labour market needs. The PROGRESS axis analytical outputs were also instrumental in preparing country-specific recommendations and contributed to the implementation of the Employment Package, Youth Employment Package and the Youth Guarantee. Much of EaSI funded evidence fed directly into the key EU policy processes such as the European Semester, including its Annual Growth Survey, country-specific recommendations, employment guidelines and joint employment reports.

The cumulated commitments of the **EURES** axis in 2014-2016 are EUR 61.817, which represents 92 % of the planned commitments. During 2014-2016, the EURES axis funded actions to improve transparency of labour market information through the exchange and dissemination of available vacancies and applications at transnational, interregional and cross-border level.

An important instrument to achieve this goal is the EURES Job Mobility Portal that attracts in average 0.7 million visitors per month. By December 2016, around 250.000 CVs of jobseekers were available on the portal. The structure of the registered jobseekers remained largely unchanged in 2016 with most of the jobseekers coming from Italy and Spain. In terms of occupation, waiter/waitress, language teacher, hotel receptionist and administrative assistant were the most selected choices. End 2016, a total of 6.800 companies were searching for employees through the EURES Portal. Around 50 % of all national vacancies are being shared on EURES Portal.

While the activities under the EURES axis have traditionally contributed to information and dissemination, they are increasingly also focusing on recruitment. EaSI supported services ranging from pre-recruitment preparation to post-placement assistance with a view to the jobseeker's successful integration into the labour market. The main actions funded include the support of EURES advisers' network to provide information, counselling, placement and recruitment services for jobseekers and employers and development of targeted mobility schemes to fill job vacancies where labour market shortcomings have been identified. The EURES advisers' network had quite a stable

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<sup>144</sup>The 2014 call for proposals for social experimentation aimed at promoting an integrated approach in the delivery of social services. The 7 projects financed concern social services such as childcare, long-term care or services to prevent school drop-out. The 2015 call focuses on social services for the integration in the labour market. The 8 projects awarded concern notably employment and training services, housing and health, as well as the provision of minimum income. Target groups are in general those furthest away from the labour market, in particular disadvantaged young people, low-skilled migrants, Roma and mentally-disabled. The 5 projects awarded under the 2016 call aim at the integration in the labour market of asylum seekers, refugees and their family members with a strong emphasis on women.

number of personal contacts<sup>145</sup> with jobseekers and employers each year (around 1 million contacts per year). In 2016, there were 52.282 placements resulting from the consultations with jobseekers, i.e. around 6 % of personal contacts resulted in an actual placement (increased twice compared to 2014).

The total commitments of the **Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship** axis in 2014-2016 are EUR 87.658, which represents 108 % of the planned commitments<sup>146</sup>. The financial instruments under Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis were modelled upon the previous experience with Progress Microfinance; therefore, guarantees and funding are provided to financial intermediaries in order incentive them to lend money to final beneficiaries.

While 2014 was dedicated to the negotiations of the new funding instruments with the European Investment Fund (EIF), by September 2016, 33 contracts were already signed with the microfinance intermediaries for EUR 50.3 million, which resulted in 13.021 microloans for a total of EUR 152.288 million (a leverage of 3 times was achieved). In addition to supporting the microcredit sector, in 2015-2016 EaSI has also released the first funding for social enterprises and first 7 contracts with financial intermediaries were signed for EUR 9 million.

The majority of fundings went to enterprises operating in the area of wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles (around 32% of the overall funding). The highest amounts of funding were disbursed to the final beneficiaries in France (27.5%), Spain (20.6%) and the Netherlands (15.6%). The enterprises supported by the Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis employed 22.328 employees: 1.168 of them were employed in the social enterprises, while the remaining ones in micro enterprises supported under the Microfinance window. Among the natural persons supported through the Microfinance window, 19% (1.121 in total) were unemployed or inactive before receiving the microloan. EaSI focused on supporting persons who are in a disadvantaged position to access the conventional credit market. Such vulnerable persons included women, unemployed, those with no or only primary education, young and older people.

There has been an increased total contract value and increased number of contracts signed, meaning the costs for the EIF have increased as the EIF incurs a cost for every transaction made. Moreover, the average contract value per number of contracts signed has decreased between the two years in both axes. Furthermore, the volume of final recipient transactions signed and reported per recipient of financing have decreased between the two years, but only for the Microfinance window. This implies that the EIF have had many transactions that have been small in size, which drives up the costs.

0 below shows the expected losses for the financial guarantees offered by the EIF, as indicated by the cap rates, range from 4.1% to 20.0% for the microfinance financial instrument and 7%-17% for social entrepreneurship. On average, however, the expected loss (the average cap rate) have slightly decreased between 2015 and 2016 for both for Microfinance and Social entrepreneurship windows. This is also supported by EIF mentioning that there has been less losses than initially thought; the reasons might be that when setting the rates, the European Commission looked at historical

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<sup>145</sup>The average EURES adviser had 847 individual personal contacts with jobseekers and 130 contacts with employers. As a general rule, around 90% of all contacts are with job-seekers and around 10% with employers. A total of 902.529 of personal contacts were implemented in 2016.

<sup>146</sup>In December 2016, the Commission has also launched the EaSI Capacity Building Investments Window with the aim to build up the institutional capacity of selected financial intermediaries that have not yet reached sustainability or are in need of risk capital to sustain their growth and development. Given that this activity was launched in December 2016, it was out of the mid-term evaluation process.

rates, and averages might have been distorted by trends of decreasing risks in some countries<sup>147</sup>.

On the other end, the costs from the European Commission's side are the fees provided to the EIF to implement the Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis. The fees are set only to the extent that the EIF incurs a cost (i.e. conducts a transaction) and are based on the number of transactions as well as the performance according to specific indicators (e.g. microloan inclusion, the number of microloans, the number of countries covered, the number of non-bank microfinance institutions covered). Approximately 50% of the cap fee is linked to performance<sup>148</sup>. Table 23 in Annex 6.4 illustrates that as of 31 December 2016 the total fees and management costs paid/to be paid had almost doubled from 2015, following the sharp increase in number of transactions (see 0).

*Table 13. Cost and output metrics per axis and year<sup>149</sup>*

Window	Microfinance		Social entrepreneurship	
	2015	2016	2015	2016
Total contract value	€23,644,027	€26,707,462	€3,537,600	€5,523,161
Number of contracts signed with FIs	10	23	1	6
Average contract value per number of contacts signed	€2,364,403	€1,161,194	€3,537,600	€920,527
Volume of all Final Recipient Transactions signed and reported	€6,810,210	€145,477,935	0	€5,679,275
Number of final recipients having received financing <sup>150</sup>	416	12,325	0	63
Average final recipients transactions per recipient of financing	€16,371	€11,803	0	€90,147
Expected loss/projected expected loss (average)	12.8% <sup>151</sup>	11.7% <sup>152</sup>	13.4%	11.4% <sup>153</sup>

*Source of data: EaSI – Guarantee Financial Instrument (EaSI GFI) Annual Operational Report 2016 and 2015 (Reporting date 31/12/2015 and 31/12/2016), and EaSI Guarantee Facility Instrument (EaSI GFI) Semi-annual operational report 31/13/2017.*

The average fees and management costs per contract signed with financial intermediaries have decreased between the two years, from €210,069 in 2015 to €138,751 in 2016. The EIF mentions that despite having assumed an average transaction size and having their fees set accordingly, the average transaction size has been much lower than initially envisaged. However, as the number of transactions are

<sup>147</sup> Follow-up interview with Head of Inclusive finance, EIF.

<sup>148</sup> Follow-up interview with Head of Inclusive finance, EIF.

<sup>149</sup> Note: numbers are per year and as of 31 December each year.

<sup>150</sup> The number of loans provided to financial intermediaries was not available on a year-to-year basis.

<sup>151</sup> Average based on 11 available cap rates.

<sup>152</sup> Average based on 20 available cap rates.

<sup>153</sup> Average based on 5 available cap rates.

much higher than thought, this implies that even if the EIF had their fees capped, they have incurred and will continue to incur higher costs over time. This is especially the case due to still relatively few Social entrepreneurship transactions, which presumably will be fewer due to their larger transaction size. Thus, in terms of efficiency, this means increased efficiency from the Commission's point of view, whereas it leaves the EIF with less financial means per transaction for the implementation<sup>154</sup>. Also the average fees and management cost as a percentage of volume of all Final Recipient Transactions signed and reported have fallen sharply from 34% to 3%, suggesting higher efficiency from the Commission's perspective. The same applies for the average fees and management cost per final recipients receiving financing across the two years (please see Table 23 in Annex 6.4).

The leverage of the two windows is another important measure of efficiency. 0 illustrates the (expected) target and actual leverage for the two windows cumulated for the mid-term of the programme (i.e. as of 31 December 2016). Comparing the (expected) target and actual leverages, the target leverage<sup>155</sup> is higher than the actual leverage<sup>156</sup> across both microfinance and social entrepreneurship. As of end-December 2016, the target leverage for both envelopes was 11.0 (9.3 for microfinance and 1.7 for social entrepreneurship) while actual leverage was 2.3 (2.2 for microfinance and 0.1 for social entrepreneurship). Nevertheless, while the actual leverage gives information on the state of lending operations to financial intermediaries up to a certain date (in this case December 2016), the expected target/actual leverages<sup>157</sup> give a more complete picture of the leverage projected over the entire programming period. The expected target leverage was - at the end of 2016 - 12.7 for microfinance window and 12.8 for social entrepreneurship window. These numbers are significantly higher than the expected actual leverage<sup>158</sup> for both envelopes, which was 2.7<sup>159</sup>. Again, as previously mentioned, this suggests that across the entire programming period, the leverage will largely surpass the initial target of €528 million and the minimum target leverage of 5.5 of the EaSI guarantee financial instrument.

Table 14: (Expected) target and actual leverage of operations signed as of 31 December 2016<sup>160</sup>

	Cumulative as of 31/12/2016	
	Target leverage	Expected target leverage
Both envelopes	11.0	12.7

<sup>154</sup> Follow-up interview with Head of Inclusive finance, EIF.

<sup>155</sup> **Target leverage** of operations signed is calculated as maximum amount of financing available to Eligible Final Recipients divided by the total EU contribution committed by the DG for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion to EaSI GFI.

<sup>156</sup> **Actual leverage** is calculated as actual volume of all Final Recipient Transactions signed and reported divided by the total EU contribution committed to EaSI GFI.

<sup>157</sup> **Expected target leverage** of operations signed is calculated as maximum amount of financing available to Eligible Final Recipients divided by total amount of operations signed.

<sup>158</sup> **Expected actual leverage** is calculated as actual volume of all Final Recipient Transactions signed and reported divided by total amount of Operations signed.

<sup>159</sup> EIF, 2016. EaSI – Guarantee Financial Instrument (EaSI GFI) Annual Operational Report (Reporting date 31/12/2016).

<sup>160</sup> Note: Data is as of 31 December 2016. **Target leverage of operations signed** is calculated as maximum amount of financing available to Eligible Final Recipients divided by the total EU contribution committed by the DG for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion to EaSI GFI. **Expected target leverage of operations signed** is calculated as maximum amount of financing available to Eligible Final Recipients divided by total amount of operations signed. **Actual leverage of operations signed** is calculated as actual volume of all Final Recipient Transactions signed and reported divided by the total EU contribution committed to EaSI GFI. **Expected actual leverage of operations signed** is calculated as actual volume of all Final Recipient Transactions signed and reported divided by total amount of Operations signed.



<b>Microfinance</b>	9.3	12.7
<b>Social entrepreneurship</b>	1.7	12.8
	<b>Actual leverage</b>	<b>Expected actual leverage</b>
<b>Both envelopes</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>2.7</b>
<b>Microfinance</b>	2.2	3.0
<b>Social entrepreneurship</b>	0.1	0.6

Source: EaSI – Guarantee Financial Instrument (EaSI GFI) Annual Operational Report (Reporting date 31/12/2016).

The European Commission described the overwhelming demand and following pressures on the budget as the main challenge with the Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis. The allocated amount of €96 million to the Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis was meant to cover the whole programming period, but as 2/3 of the funds were used already after one year. This unanticipated demand determines the Commission to find additional means, potentially under the Juncker investment plan for Europe<sup>161</sup> (this is planned although no contract have been signed as of the date of the interview)<sup>162</sup>.

The allocation of €96 million for the Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis is considered too little according to both the EIF and the Commission. While deeming the €96 million budget allocation for EaSI as sufficient until 2020, the EIF believed it will not be sufficient up to 2023 (the end of EaSI implementation). Thus, they argue, the allocation is sufficient for one cycle only but insufficient in order to support two or three cycles, which is the length the EIF wishes to support the intermediaries. The rationale is that a guarantee can have an inclusion period of two to three years, during which the EIF helps the institution to develop the guarantee, and thereafter the institution returns to the EIF to ask for a continuation of the guarantee. This can negatively affect financial intermediaries as highlighted by the financial intermediaries themselves: "Without a guarantee, the product will no longer be offered"<sup>163</sup> or "this product can only be developed if they are supported with a financial guarantee"<sup>164</sup>.

Examples of efficiency from the perspective of the financial intermediaries interviewed in the case studies are displayed in Table 25 in Annex 6.4. While three of the four financial intermediaries interviewed deem the budget allocation as sufficient as of today, these might face difficulties in receiving a prolonged financial guarantee in the future<sup>165</sup>.

The evaluation shows that EaSI programme was cost-effective during its first implementation period. However, the ambitions and wide thematic scope of EaSI exceed what the budget allows for. While the available financial means were sufficient for the implementation of the PROGRESS and EURES activities, the budget should be ideally increased for the Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis. Given that the

<sup>161</sup> The Juncker investment plan for Europe is focusing on removing obstacles to investment, providing visibility and technical assistance to investment projects and making smarter use of new and existing financial resources. The plan is active in the areas of mobilising investments of at least €315 billion in three years, supporting investment in the real economy, and creating an investment friendly environment. For more information see: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/jobs-growth-and-investment/investment-plan\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/jobs-growth-and-investment/investment-plan_en)

<sup>162</sup> Interview European Commission.

<sup>163</sup> ICF, Case Study: ADIE

<sup>164</sup> ICF, Case Study: Komerční Banka

<sup>165</sup> ICF, Case study: La Nef.

programme's budgetary means could not be increased, a stronger emphasis on themes on which EaSI can make a difference and an improved thematic coherence between the different types of activities (e.g. projects, events, research, EU-level networking) might be useful. A more flexible re-allocation between the three axes should be also enabled when needed.

For instance, the budgetary allocation for the EURES axis should be ideally increased in order to ensure a high quality trans-borders cooperation, as well as to encourage the partners to make more financial commitments. Also, more financial means would be needed to develop social policy experimentations under the PROGRESS axis and to monitor their long lasting impacts. The networking and exchange at the EU level between the Member States' NGOs are also considered among the most stimulating EaSI programme' actions; therefore, the budget to involve new stakeholders should be also ideally increased.

It has also emerged that EaSI funds are difficult for small Member States to tap into given their limited capacity and knowledge compared to other Member States that build on use of predecessor programmes and can dedicate more resources to support EaSI implementation. In addition, the issue of co-financing is becoming increasingly problematic for organisations, not only financially, but also because the nature of this participation is not always clear for applicants to calls for proposals (for instance, whether it is in labour costs or in actual monetary value).

#### **Key points on the efficiency of resource allocation and financing procedures**

- The EaSI budget remains appropriate, but flexibility should be ensured in order to amplify its economic and social impacts. The budget is perceived as an obstacle to scaling up the interventions.
- EaSI funds are difficult for small Member States to tap into. This is mainly because they lack both funding and human resources to build capacity around EaSI.
- Across the axes, different budgetary issues and potential re-allocation of the budget were highlighted
  - PROGRESS: Financial means provided were sufficient and there is no sizeable evidence suggesting otherwise. Still, the efficiency of the axis could be improved by introducing changes in the awarding and implementation process. The allocation could be below the threshold of 61% as established in the EaSI Regulation, for instance by lowering the threshold for the Social Protection theme whilst increasing funding for the Employment and Working Conditions themes.
  - EURES: There are some differences in the planned and actual commitments. While the allocation for transparency had larger commitments than planned, the development of services remained relatively stable. The requirement of co-financing is problematic for organisations.
  - Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship: the overwhelming demand for the financial guarantee under EaSI Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis has put pressure on the budget. As two thirds of the initial amount were used already after one year, EIF suggests that the allocated budget for Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis is not optimal.

Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation

#### **4.3.2 Benefits accruing relative to inputs**

The most important benefit of PROGRESS axis for decision makers at EU and national level is the access to reliable data. According to the EaSI monitoring report 2015-2016, most of decision makers consulted already used or will use in the future analytical outputs for policy-making or advocacy. Most of them admit that knowledge produced by European Commission is useful and reliable. Also, most of participants of events organised under the PROGRESS axis have used or intend to use the information acquired during the events for policy-making or advocacy.

Further, vulnerable groups can benefit easily from the tested policy innovations by getting quicker access to services. This was the case in the project 'INNOVCare' where people living with a rare disease can benefit from a one-stop-shop service combining medical, social and educational services. A similar story is visible in other projects granted under EaSI, like<sup>166</sup>: 'Nowcasting' that will be used by other Member States wishing to implement policy reforms; 'SHARE Wave 6 Croatia' that provides valuable information to policy makers for a future pension reform; 'Posting of workers' that facilitates dialogue between key stakeholders (business, labour authorities, workers and social partners) to better understand the issues and challenge ahead.

The available data for EURES suggests that the benefits resulting from YfEj scheme for jobseekers consist in the financial support received; jobseekers reported that they perceive YfEj as "a stepping stone into the labour market". For employers, the main advantages is also the financial support provided through YfEj. However, some of the employers reported that they would welcome additional support from YfEj to identify the right candidates. The example below shows the expected impacts for different target groups resulting from EURES support.

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**Your first EURES job - a tool for Mobility in light of stakeholders needs (VS/2015/0251)**

Several expected impacts<sup>167</sup> resulting from the project can be seen for beneficiaries, organisations, public administrations or society in general:

- By making the targeted mobility scheme YfEj well known and recognized as an easy, attractive and relevant programme amongst young people and SMEs, the project will enhance job mobility throughout Europe, helping both target groups to become more international in their approach to recruitment and work, making full use of the free labour market in Europe.
- The financial support to target groups and the preparation of young people for integrating in a company abroad will help partly erasing mobility obstacles and improve the integration of young people into the labour market. In the long run, the action aims to contribute to the reduction of youth unemployment across Europe by offering sustainable work opportunities.
- By adopting a more proactive approach towards employers during the implementation of the action, EURES services will be better known as reliable when it comes to offering recruitment services to SMEs. This will most likely impact the future use of EURES services by SMEs. The project will also make sure that larger groups of young jobseekers have a much clearer understanding of the benefits of working abroad.

Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation

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With regard to cross-border partnerships, the available data shows that the implemented cross border info points provide significant advantages for job-seekers and employers in cross border regions, as these are able to gather support on issues with regard to employment, but also other issues (e.g. social security, pension rights, rights to study) by competent authorities in one place. The following examples illustrate the impacts of EURES funding in this area.

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**EURES TriRegio (VS/2015/0266)**

- The EURES TriRegio project (VS/2015/0266) implemented in the cross border region between Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic provides expertise for cross-border mobility in the region. It supported a large increase of employment in the region. For example, the number of Czech employees in the German districts along the border increased by 69% compared to the previous year, while that of Polish employees by 77%. The partnership further supports small- and medium enterprises, who are the main service users.
- Czech and Polish companies are increasingly using the EURES TriRegio services. Their participation in the job exchanges has increased, and for the first time, employers from the Czech Republic have taken part in consultations in Poland and have directly recruited workers.
- In sum, the support services EURES-TriRegio have helped improve the quality of the employment of cross-border commuters, and they helped the commuters to find jobs corresponding to their qualifications. The services also supported workers in disputes with

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<sup>166</sup> ICF Case Study Report

<sup>167</sup> The implementation of the activities is ongoing and it is difficult to measure impacts. Therefore, we will also focus on expected impacts of the case.

regard to labour rights (e.g. they have enabled workers to obtain their rights in terms of maternity leave or to claim compensation in cases of accidents at work).

Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation

Finally, projects focussing on the EU and EEA region provide benefits for employers and jobseekers through job matching activities leading to sustainable employment and mobility in the EU/EEA labour market. For example, the ongoing project VS/2015/0062<sup>168</sup> expects the following impacts for the beneficiaries, as well as for the EU policy makers:

- Through activities such as information, matching, recruitment and placement the project expects to increase the chances of incoming jobseekers to find suitable employment in Norway and of the outgoing jobseekers to find suitable employment in other EEA/EU countries as well as the chances of employers to find suitable candidates. Overall, the project expects to secure mobility in the European labour market and to increase the number of placements in the intra EU/EEA labour market.
- The policy makers will benefit from the project's results insofar as it will enable them to understand the added value of EURES financing and the importance of continuing such a targeted funding. This is in fact connected with the impacts for beneficiaries who are able to find sustainable employment and be mobile in the EU/EEA labour market through EURES financing. The expected results from this project are supporting the implementation of the strategic aims of the EU. Hence, it is important for the EU policy makers to continue supporting the implementation of the fundamental principle of freedom of movement within the EU by providing this targeted funding.

With regard to benefits accruing from the Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis, only limited information is available so far. However, the results suggest that the following benefits occur:

- The main benefits for final recipients are the access to finance, better conditions for obtaining a loan provided, and improved terms and conditions (decreased interest rates, longer maturity, and lower collateral).
- The main benefits for intermediaries are: allow to focus on new segment and increase their market share, increase their visibility and marketing impact and raising their profile.
- Further benefits for the general public include raising awareness of Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis; for instance, in Greece, the Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis has contributed to raising awareness about microfinance opportunities and the Greek authorities are currently debating a legislative change that will allow financial institutions to provide microfinance loans.

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**Key points on the benefits accruing**

- PROGRESS: improved access to reliable data for policy makers at EU and national level (e.g. databases, comparative studies, tested social innovations).
- EURES: transparency of job vacancies and support services for jobseekers and employers across participating countries.
- Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship: improved access to finance, better terms and conditions for obtaining loans; increased visibility and impact of financial intermediaries, increased awareness about microfinance and social entrepreneurship markets.

Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation

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<sup>168</sup> The implementation of the activities concluded end of 2016. However, the final information on the implementation is not available yet, and it is difficult to measure impacts. Therefore, we will focus on expected impacts of the project.

### **4.3.3 Conclusion: EaSI efficiency**

The EaSI budget remains appropriate, but more flexibility should be ensured in order to amplify its economic and social impacts. Similarly, a longer financing would enable organisations to create more impact.

Additionally, it results that the overall EaSI budget is too small in respect of the objectives to be achieved or in comparison to other EU programmes. For some open public consultation respondents, the ambitions of the EaSI programme far exceeds what the budget allows for.

It has also emerged that EaSI funds are difficult for small Member States to tap into mainly because of limited capacity and knowledge of EaSI compared to larger Members States that build on use of predecessors programme and can dedicate human resources at national level to support EaSI implementation.

The analysis of the three axes reveals that while the budget allocation for the PROGRESS and EURES axes remain sufficient, a more flexible re-allocation between the different strands should be enabled in order to cover the emerging needs, in particular for the third programme's axis.

## **4.4 Coherence**

This section analyses the coherence of EaSI accruing from the merging of the three previous programmes, the coherence with the national, regional and local programmes.

### **4.4.1 Coherence accruing from merging EaSI's three previous programmes**

The common goal of the three axes is to promote employment, social inclusion and labour mobility. The aim of collecting the three axes under one umbrella programme was to gain more synergies and achieve common objectives for EU employment and social policies through building on the past success of each axis, achieve improved coordination between the programmes, greater policy coherence and more effective delivery and management.

For instance, there were some activities under the PROGRESS and EURES axes that complemented the Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis, reinforcing the rationale to have these activities under one programme. Indeed, one of the aims of the EaSI programme – to increase access to finance for vulnerable persons as well as micro- and social enterprises – is not only achieved through the Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship but also through the PROGRESS axis.

PROGRESS supports the Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis by funding activities such as policy evidence in the areas of microfinance and social entrepreneurship, information sharing and mutual learning activities in these areas, support for the main actors operating in the field (e.g. the European Microfinance Network, European Venture Philanthropy Association and the Microfinance Centre), as well as the EaSI Technical Assistance for microcredit providers<sup>169</sup>. As a matter of fact, the support from the EaSI Technical Assistance for microfinance providers contributed to the sustainability the Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis<sup>170</sup>. The activities funded through the PROGRESS axis form an important complement to already offered financial services via the Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis.

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<sup>169</sup> European Commission. 2017. EaSI Performance Monitoring Report 2015-2016.

<sup>170</sup> European Commission. 2013. EaSI New EU umbrella programme for employment and social policy, p.7. 2013, November. Retrieved from [http://www.european-microfinance.org/docs/grey\\_blocks/DGEMPL\\_EaSI\\_EN.pdf](http://www.european-microfinance.org/docs/grey_blocks/DGEMPL_EaSI_EN.pdf).

Moreover, there is also coherence between the PROGRESS and EURES axes as some EURES activities and labour mobility topics (specific for EURES) are financed under PROGRESS. For example, in the policy area of working conditions, EaSI and its predecessor PROGRESS have funded national and transnational cooperation projects through the calls for proposals on posting of workers focusing on enhancing administrative cooperation and access to information. In 2015-2016 two calls for proposals were published (VP/2015/007 and VP/2016/006), aiming to enhance the implementation, application and enforcement of Directive 96/71/EC on the posting of workers in the framework of the transnational provision of services.

The budget committed to these calls was EUR 1.650.000 in 2015 and EUR 2.601.638 in 2016. Similarly, in the policy area of employment, EaSI-PROGRES has funded awareness raising, dissemination and outreach activities on Youth Guarantee offers. Two similar calls for proposals on this action were launched in 2015 and 2016 (VP/2015/005 and VP/2016/008) committing funding for EUR 1.076.033 in 2015 and EUR 1.640.033 in 2016 for these calls. And finally, one of the EaSI-PROGRESS supported EU-level NGO networks (PICUM) regularly contributes to improve the evaluation of the Employer Sanctions Directive in the area of undeclared work and in-work poverty and social exclusion.<sup>171</sup>

The objectives of EURES axis are to ensure that job vacancies, applications and corresponding information and advice, as well as any related information, are made transparent for the applicants and the employers; and to support the provision of EURES services for the recruitment and placing of workers in quality and sustainable employment through the clearance of job vacancies and applications. This support will cover all phases of placement, from pre-recruitment preparation to post-placement assistance. By engaging in all these, EURES works towards the EaSI-goal of high quality and inclusive EU labour markets that are open and accessible to all.

Thus, alike the Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis, the EURES-axis supports employment but does so in a very different way compared to the Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis. Therefore the two axes can be seen as coherent (they are working towards the same goal of high quality and inclusive EU labour markets that are open and accessible for all) as well as complementary. The complementarity springs from the very different means used by EURES as compared to Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship in achieving this goal.

There is mitigated evidence for the merging of the three programmes having improved the consistency and the complementarity of the EaSI-programme, according to stakeholders involved in the three axes. Some stakeholders agree this is the case whereas others do not see any synergies between the three axes. They see the merging as an administrative exercise and some even believe they should be divided into separate programmes again<sup>172</sup>. Indeed, the different sources (i.e. case studies and interviews) could not identify any impact and there was no consensus on these questions in the open public consultation.

The neutrality of respondents on this question may be explained by the fact that they did not notice many changes before and after the merging. This was for instance mentioned in the EURES-Euradria case study where project partners did not perceive changes after the merging<sup>173</sup>.

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**Key points on coherence accruing from the merging of the three previous programmes**

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<sup>171</sup> European Commission. 2017. Performance Monitoring Report of the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) 2015-2016.

<sup>172</sup> Information from the EaSI online survey and open public consultation, which should be analysed with caution given the small number of respondents.

<sup>173</sup>Based on interviews with Euradria project partners.

- The EaSI programme branding needs to be further strengthened and more flexibility in transferring the budgets between the axes should be possible.
- The three axes seem to operate independently one from the other; hence, the umbrella role of EaSI remains limited. The evidence suggests that the merger is regarded as an administrative exercise impacting mainly the branding and programme visibility.
- There is not enough evidence of synergies created or perceived from the merger of the three previous programmes (PROGRESS, EURES and Progress Microfinance Facility).

Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation

#### 4.4.2 Coherence with other EU interventions

The evaluation examined the complementarity with other EU interventions and any synergies developed with these programmes. Data collected indicate that EaSI complements actions under European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), particularly the European Social Fund (ESF). Likewise, a number of open public consultation respondents pointed out that actions co-financed under the EaSI programme can also constitute a solid baseline to activities developed under the Horizon 2020 programme. As an illustration, the project 'SHARE wave 6 Croatia' had its first wave financed by PROGRESS and its project team already secured funding for the next survey wave under Horizon 2020 programme. Other projects, instead, complement to other EU level initiatives from other DGs. For instance, INNOVCare project builds on experience of a project from partners in the expert group on rare diseases organised by Commission. Moreover, one of the members was involved in developing the 'Joint Action on Rare Diseases' financed by DG SANTE.

In the EURES axis, the results from the open public consultation also showed that EaSI complemented actions of other EU-level programmes especially the ESF and Erasmus +. However, there is no evidence to say that other intra-EU initiatives such as the ESF could be more efficient than EaSI<sup>174</sup>. The complementarity of EURES and ESF was explained in the interview with Commission officials who clarified that the EURES axis is meant to support horizontal activities involving regions from different countries whereas the ESF supported national activities at national level. The example of Spain which participated earlier under the former EURES Programme was given. Spain is now carrying-out their similar national programme co-funded by the ESF. This is a good example of upscaling and turning "national" a project initially undertaken under EURES. Complementary between EURES and the European Territorial Co-operation programme (Interreg) was also found. Table 16 in Annex 5.3 summarises the labour mobility initiatives at the EU-level. There are several programmes at EU level encouraging labour mobility such as Erasmus + or EURAXESS. However, EaSI EURES-axis is the only programme with a sole focus on cross-border mobility.

The Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis is complementary to several programmes at EU level that provide financial instruments to various types of stakeholders and target groups. Table 25 in Annex 6.5 shows a comparison between different EU programmes and the Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis. For example, COSME supports the European Commission's aim of promoting entrepreneurship and improving the business environment for SMEs<sup>175</sup>. Given that COSME and EaSI differ both in terms of their respective target groups as well as the type and size of the financial instruments, the two programmes can be seen as complementary and not overlapping. The EIF's representative also thinks that the

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<sup>174</sup> Half of the respondents did not think that other intra-EU initiatives such as the ESF could be more efficient than EaSI, while the rest felt neutral about this question. Similarly, one third of the respondents disagreed with the affirmation that nationally funded initiatives could be more efficient than EaSI, while the other third felt neutral.

<sup>175</sup> COSME. 2017. COSME. Europe's programme for small and medium-sized enterprises. 2017, 01 June. Retrieved from <http://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/cosme/>

EaSI Financial Instrument is complementary to other existing initiatives and that there is no overlap<sup>176</sup>. An example is the microfinance provider Qredits, which operates under both EaSI and COSME, mentioning the two programmes as complimentary rather than overlapping. Also the Czech bank Komerční Banka operates under both facilities seeing them as two complementary programmes.

The InnovFin programme (EU finance for innovators) offers early-stage equity investments to micro-enterprises, SMEs and social enterprises and thus provides complementary financial instruments to EaSI Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis. Moreover, InnovFin aims to support investments in enterprises of any size (from microenterprises and small caps to large caps). Nevertheless, the differentiator of InnovFin is its focus on research and innovation investments<sup>177</sup>; eligible enterprises therefore need to operate in any of the sectors listed under the Horizon 2020. By imposing this restriction, InnovFin is complementary to the Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis.

The Czech bank Komerční Banka, which operate under both EaSI and COSME, also operate under InnovFin programme. Some financial instruments have been implemented also under the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF). One example is the ESF Microcredit Fund implemented between 2014-2016 in the Italian region of Campania. The fund improved access to finance for young people, the unemployed, women, migrants, and disadvantaged individuals in a region of Italy deeply hit by the economic and financial crisis<sup>178</sup>. The regional focus of the microcredit activities implemented under ESF makes it unique and not overlapping with EaSI.

Another European based regional fund providing financing to micro and small enterprises is the European Fund for South East Europe (EFSE). Operating since 2007, the fund aims to provide financing to micro and small scale enterprises as well as rural and housing loans through qualified financial intermediaries in the South East European region<sup>179</sup>. The fund is partly overlapping with Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis as they both serve microenterprises through engaging the local financial sector to provide micro loans. Nevertheless, as the main objective of the fund is to provide “development finance”, the very underlying aim of the two programmes differ, and they can thus be seen as complementary.

#### Key points on coherence with other EU interventions

- EaSI is coherent and complementary with several EU programmes, in particular with ESF.
- PROGRESS: There is complementarity between PROGRESS and other EU programmes such as ESF, Erasmus+, Horizon 2020.
- EURES: ESF, Erasmus+ as well as Interreg are the programmes seen as the most complementary of EURES. No overlap was identified.
- Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis is coherent with other similar instruments at the EU-level like InnovFin and COSME, which either support SMEs or companies up to large caps, offer a larger financing amount, offer a greater variance in terms of financial products and focus on beneficiaries in a certain country/group of countries.

Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation

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<sup>176</sup> Interview Head of inclusive finance and Senior Investment Manager, EIF.

<sup>177</sup> EIB. 2017. InnovFin – EU Finance for innovators. Retrieved from <http://www.eib.org/products/blending/innovfin/>

<sup>178</sup> European Investment bank/fi-compass. (n.d.) ESF Microcredit Fund Campania Case Study. 2017, 02 June. Retrieved from <https://www.fi-compass.eu/publication/case-studies/case-study-esf-microcredit-fund-campania>.

<sup>179</sup> European Investment Bank. 2017. European Fund for South East Europe. 2017, 02 June. Retrieved from <http://www.eib.org/projects/loan/loan/20050436>.



#### 4.4.3 Coherence with programmes at local, regional and local levels

Data collected show a stakeholders' agreement in seeing EaSI more complementary to national funding instruments compared to regional funding<sup>180</sup>. Examples from the PROGRESS axis show that interventions dealing with social innovation and local services would require a stronger involvement of local and/or regional authorities. The 'Posting of workers' projects are clear examples of the importance of having regional and national authorities involved when dealing with transnational matters.

The involvement of regional stakeholders was stronger in the EURES axis compared to the PROGRESS axis, confirming that the regional dimension is a core component of the EURES axis (e.g. the cross-border partnerships). Similarly, the national involvement is also a key aspect, as the EURES network involves partners such as PES and trade unions at national level (as well as regional level). This strong regional and national involvement in the EURES axis implementation have also been noticed in the case studies (see Table 17 in Annex 5.3). However, the coherence of the EURES axis with regional and regional programmes could be jeopardised by the dependence that EURES funding can create for some organisations. Indeed, some organisations may become dependent on EU funding and eventually do not use the relevant national funding. It is important that EaSI funding complements the national funding and does not substitute it.

With regard to the Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis, its actions are not always aligned with the national and regional policies<sup>181</sup>. EIF however receives help and coordination assistance on a regional and national level, ensuring that the Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship actions fit with policies at these levels. In some cases, the EIF deliberately stepped out from making a transaction or adjusted the eligibility criteria so that their action would not interfere with something already implemented<sup>182</sup>.

While it appears that Microfinance window actions are often complementary with programmes at national and regional levels, this is not always the case for actions implemented under the Social Entrepreneurship window. For instance, many regional programmes focus on SMEs and can therefore overlap, especially the programmes implemented outside of EU zone such as the Western Balkan Facility (WBF)<sup>183</sup>. Before each transaction under the WBF, the EIF discusses with the WBF team to ensure there is no overlap and that EIF's actions are complementary<sup>184</sup>.

Interviews with financial intermediaries reinforces the idea that the EaSI programme is unique, either because it is smaller than other similar guarantee schemes in the country, have a different focus or a different size than other national programmes. The financial intermediaries have also indicated that there exists few comparable programmes on a regional level. Oftentimes, the EaSI programme has been mentioned as a complement to other national guarantee schemes financed by the State; for instance, in France, the EaSI programme allowed the provision of guarantees of higher amounts than the State could provide<sup>185</sup>.

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<sup>180</sup> A caveat however is the significant uncertainty surrounding EaSI's coherence and complementarity in the survey sample with approximately one third of respondents selecting 'Don't know' for each category.

<sup>181</sup> Interview Head of inclusive finance, EIF.

<sup>182</sup> Interview Head of inclusive finance, EIF.

<sup>183</sup> "The Western Balkan Facility" (The Western Balkan Enterprise Development and Innovation Facility) is an SME guarantee facility managed by the EIF, aimed to improve access to finance for SMEs in the region, helping to develop the local economy and regional venture capital markets as well as promoting policy reforms to support access to finance through financial engineering instruments. More can be read at: <http://www.eib.org/projects/regions/enlargement/the-western-balkans/index.htm>

<sup>184</sup> Interview Head of inclusive finance, EIF.

<sup>185</sup> Follow-up interviews with financial intermediaries.

As regards the linkages between the EaSI financial instrument's actions and the national, regional or local level programmes, the EIF argues that the EU is the main driver of activities in member states. National actors monitor EU's activities and may try to develop their policies thereafter. Moreover, the EIF sees that many national governments have started to put money into developing their policies according to the EU actions in the fields of microfinance and social entrepreneurship<sup>186</sup>. From that perspective, the EU acts as a source of inspiration for the national actors and policy makers in terms of what is possible to develop at their level. Potentially, depending on how this process of "mimicking" EU's activities unfolds, such market development and increased national involvement could reduce the gaps of and improve the access to financial services at a national level, eventually reducing the need for EU intervention in the future.

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**Key points on coherence with national, regional and local programmes**

- PROGRESS axis: national, regional and local authorities' involvement in the delivery of EaSI activities needs further strengthening, for example interventions dealing with social innovation and local services require stronger involvement of local and/or regional authorities in contrast to a country-wide delivery
- EURES axis: Ways to prevent organisations to become dependent on the EURES funding could help better achieving the objectives.
- Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis: there is not always complementarity between the EaSI financial instrument and national and regional policies, but EU programmes could represent a source of inspiration for policy makers in order to develop the microfinance and social entrepreneurship markets.

Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation

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#### **4.4.4 Conclusion: EaSI programme coherence**

In sum, although the merging of the three previous programmes into EaSI is regarded rather as an administrative exercise, there is some evidence of coherence accruing from mutual support between PROGRESS, EURES and Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axes.

With regard to coherence with other EU interventions, EaSI complements in particular actions under the ESF, Euraxess, Erasmus+, Horizon 2020, COSME, InnovFin and Solvit.

Finally, when looking at coherence with regard to national or regional instruments, the data suggests that EaSI is complementary to national funding and regional. Hence, the involvement of regional and local stakeholders in the delivery of EaSI activities needs further strengthening.

#### **4.5 EU added value**

This section analyses the EU added value of the EaSI programme activities as well as the consequences of stopping the programme. The section also analyses the communication of the EU added value.

##### **4.5.1 Current and prospective level of EU added value**

In the PROGRESS axis, several project results show that an EU-wide implementation fosters standard and coherent delivery across Member States with different national policy agendas and priorities. For instance, as interviewees from the project 'SHARE

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<sup>186</sup> Interview Senior Investment Manager, EIF.

Wave 6 Croatia' indicated, in Croatia no national funding was available for their project due to other most pressing and urgent needs. A similar view comes from 'INNOVCare' and 'Eurocareres' interviewees who agree that it would have been impossible to establish an EU-wide network without PROGRESS support. The same holds for PICUM network that gather together transnational partners.

Below, examples from case studies show how EURES initiatives make a difference compared to strategies at national, regional or local level (0), including enhancing cross-border job movement.

Table 17: EU added value described in case studies

Title	Main added value
<b>EURES in Grenzregionen Rhein-Waal (ERW), euregio-rhein-maasnord (ermn), Euregio Maas-Rhein (EMR) 2015</b>	Regarding the importance of EaSI-EURES funding, the grant beneficiaries pointed out that the funding was crucial to form the partnership to improve their information and consulting services and to better contribute to the functioning of the labour market in the cross-border regions. Before receiving EaSI-EURES funding, the partners were operating separately and on a much smaller scale <sup>187</sup> .  According to the grant beneficiaries, there could be some funding opportunities on national / regional level, however the funding is not available for cross-border partnerships. For example in the Netherlands, the funding opportunities differ from commune to commune, and are focussed on funding of measures in a specific commune, but not on funding of measures to support cross-border movement. However, EaSI-EURES funding enabled the partnership to foster cross-border movement. One of the activities of the partnership focussed on was employment of long-term unemployed workers from the Netherlands. These workers were employed by the German company Zalando and the partnership financed the cost for their transport to work from the Netherlands to Germany, which would have not been possible with national funding.
<b>Your first EURES job (YfEj) - a tool for Mobility</b>	The coordinator has emphasised the importance of the changes in the financing process that were introduced as a result of the EURES reform. Since EURES became part of the EaSI programme, horizontal activities, targeted mobility schemes (such as "Your first EURES Job") and cross-border partnerships are covered under EaSI. National activities implemented at partner level are funded through national budgets or the European Social Fund (ESF) <sup>188</sup> . Before the EURES reform, the EURES activities were funded at Member State level through EU grants via an annual EURES budget. Compared to the financial support under the previous EURES framework, the EaSI-EURES axis provides funding for specific projects that are more customers oriented compared to an annual budget as was the case in the previous EURES framework <sup>189</sup> .

Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation

The case studies conducted in the Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis (Table 18) confirmed that the results would not have been achieved without the support of EaSI, national initiatives being scarce or not possessing the same capabilities or characteristics.

Table 18: Examples of added value of the Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis

Financial intermediary	Window, country	Examples of added value
<b>La Nef</b>	Social entrepreneurship France	In case of not receiving support from EaSI, similar support to social enterprises in France would probably not have happened. Before the EaSI financial support guarantee, they could not find a guarantee solution

<sup>187</sup> See also PPMI. 2016. Report on projects and organisations supported by the European Commission in the areas of employment, social affairs and inclusion in 2013-2016.

<sup>188</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on the European Social Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006.

<sup>189</sup> For further information about the previous EURES framework, see: European Commission (2015), Ex post evaluation of EURES covering the period 2009 – 2013.

		with the same characteristics, good coverage and simplicity of reporting.
<b>ADIE</b>	Microfinance, France	As a result of the regulatory framework as well as of the limited options available at national level, the EaSI Financial Guarantee is of considerable added value for ADIE which was able to continue providing the so called 'Propulse' loans. Without EaSI support, they would have had to limit their activities to smaller loans.
<b>Qredits</b>	Microfinance Netherlands	Qredits believe that in the absence of the EaSI financial guarantee instrument, Qredits would not have been able to provide the same amount of loans. Without the EaSI financial guarantee, the risk to provide a loan for some of their clients would simply be too high resulting in Qredits having to ask for more collateral or not provide a loan at all.
<b>Komerční Banka</b>	Microfinance Czech Republic	Around three months after Komerční Banka launched the product supported by EaSI, the national authority in the Czech Republic launched a programme to support microcredits to start-ups. The national programme also focuses on promoting banks to offer credit to start-ups. Komerční Banka highlighted that although the objective is similar, EaSI programme requirements are easier to comply with (e.g. the guarantee is ensured by the EIF) and the programme works better (e.g. the national programme can have delays).

*Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation*

In sum, EaSI support fulfilled a vital function, facilitating the exchange of information, mutual learning, and capacity building of stakeholders across the EU. Also, EaSI facilitates the development of policy evidence (like studies, databases, methodologies) that supports the policy-making process.

Main implications to the fields of employment, social affairs and inclusion, should the EaSI programme be discontinued would be very strong. Indeed, there is agreement that both employment opportunities and jobseekers' intra-EU mobility would decrease, whereas less impact would be registered on self-employment opportunities and the national provision of microcredit. Ultimately, a consequence of ceasing EaSI programme would be a possible decrease of cooperation between Member States and stakeholders at EU level.

#### **Key points on EU added value**

- The EaSI programme EU added value is widely acknowledged, in particular with regards to the cross border partnerships, the exchange of good practices, and provision of loans.
- The three axes contributed to:
  - PROGRESS: building of EU-wide partnerships, comparative knowledge, databases and policy experimentation, support capacity building and promote mutual learning.
  - EURES: facilitate cross-border partnerships and jobseekers mobility.
  - Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship: provision of loans and tackling market imperfections.
- A discontinuation of the EaSI programme would have repercussion on many fields, in particular on the ONG EU-level networking and availability of analytical knowledge for policy makers, as well as on cross-border mobility and funding opportunities for microfinance and social entrepreneurship

*Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation*

#### **4.5.2 Communication of the EU added value**

There is strong evidence to suggest that it would be useful, for both organisations and individuals, to learn more about the results of EaSI activities/projects or evidence of EaSI impact in order to collect ideas about projects and activities and best practices done at the EU-level.

One of the main channels for dissemination are dedicated websites for the funded projects. Social media is utilised as well, with a focus on providing videos and 'success

stories' via different channels (e.g. Facebook, YouTube etc.). For example, EURES Finland has introduced an Instagram account<sup>190</sup> after seeing that many participants not only looked at platforms such as Facebook, but also shared pictures on Instagram. So far the platform proved useful as a tool for promoting events, although EURES Finland noted that the use of additional social media channels should be evaluated carefully as regards costs and benefits, as they require constant updating, which utilises many resources that might be required elsewhere.

Results from the case studies show that the organisations have also promoted their activities through debates, general public outreach and networking to raise awareness of their achievements as shown in the tables in the Annex for PROGRESS (Table 11 in Annex 4.3) and EURES (Table 18 in Annex 5.4).

It emerges that dissemination activities under EaSI are useful, but more information about the results and impacts of EaSI projects is necessary. According to EaSI committee members, the system of communication needs further development through a professional communication strategy. The quality and content of information is deemed appropriate, but the frequency and timing is very limited and would need to be improved. This could be achieved by involving more stakeholders at regional level. Further, the information flow within consortia could be improved, as well as the coordination and information exchange between the organisations involved in the EaSI implementation, including the European Commission and other partners. The results of the projects financed via EaSI should be disseminated wider through events throughout the EU showing the project results.

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**Key points on the communication of EU added value**

- The dissemination of results could be improved, to enable stakeholders to hear more about the results of activities or evidence of impact to collect ideas about projects and activities and best practices done at EU-level.
- The communication on EaSI activities and the dissemination of information on programme's results need to be improved - i.e. country specific examples, good practices, regular website updates.
- The communication activities could be improved in terms of language availability and jargon free and be made more accessible for the general public by translating to the 27 EU official languages and offering a less bureaucratic lexicon.
- Wider dissemination could be improved, in particular, to collect ideas and best practices done at EU level. Events, conferences and networks linking EU to national context appear to be the most successful way to communicate the added value.
- Increased visibility of networks and awareness among stakeholders thanks to advocacy work and outreach of target groups facilitates the communication of added value.

Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation

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#### **4.5.3 Conclusion: EU added value**

The EaSI programme's added value compared to what could be achieved by Member States at national, regional and local levels is undeniable. Research findings in this respect converge towards suggesting that thanks to the EaSI programme more relevant projects were supported – compared to what was possible at the national level. In the absence of the EaSI programme some initiatives might not receive funding, for instance, those targeting sustained self-employment or facilitating the mobility support.

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<sup>190</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/euressuomi/?hl=en>.

## **5 Governance**

The Programme is managed directly by the European Commission (Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion) assisted by a programme committee. The EaSI Committee is mentioned in Article 36 of the EaSI Regulation, which specify its 'advisory' and 'examination' roles.

The issue of governance of the EaSI programme has been analysed under two different points of view: structure and process. The data was collected mainly via a focus group with EaSI committee members.

EaSI is viewed differently by Member States depending upon its financial importance to them both absolutely and relative to other EU resources. In countries that are major beneficiaries of the ESIF, there is a tendency for EaSI to be perceived as relatively minor and difficult to access. Member States that are more active in EaSI - especially in PROGRESS - tend to be those where there are NGOs and universities with a strong interest in issues related to social inclusion and exchange of knowledge. The interest in evidence-based policy making that underpins the PROGRESS axis is also uneven between Member States. Less developed participating countries perceive the primacy of economic progress as a prerequisite for better social policies. The richer Member States are more interested in the nuances of social and employment policies (what works, where and for whom?-).

The EaSI Committee membership is heterogeneous; some individual members are longstanding and were involved in the previous programmes, mainly in PROGRESS , whilst others have been in place since 2014.

During the focus group, the questions regarding the EaSI **governance structure** focused on composition, roles and responsibilities of the EaSI Committee as well their further development. When analysing the governance structure, the first point explored was whether the EaSI committee should include specialists, given the specificity of the topics covered by the three axes.

The responsibilities of the Committee was the second issue explored in order to establish whether these are clear and sufficient for effective governance.

The picture that emerged suggests that there is still room for improvement on these aspects as the committee members felt they should be more involved and that the frequency of the meetings should be increased. The 2014-2016 period frequency (two meetings annually) was considered by the committee members as not sufficient to maximise the output of the EaSI committee.

The final point covered is related to how effective are the links between EaSI and other EU processes, in particular the other relevant Committees and the European Semester. Committee members would welcome more exchange of views with EMCO and SPC. The extent to which results from EaSI feed into either the European Semester and considerations of country specific recommendations in the social and employment policy sphere or the allocation and prioritisation of ESIF resources at national level (via geographic desks in DG EMPL) is also considered as unclear by the committee members.

The **governance process** analysis has mainly focused on issues regarding the appropriateness and the transparency of the resources allocation as well as the provision of quality information on EaSI activities.

EaSI Committee members perceive that key policy and resource allocation choices are made at different level from the Committee and that EaSI is directly managed by the Commission. EaSI committee members have noted that their involvement should be reinforced, in particular as regards the choice of 'themes' for EaSI calls for proposals.

The EaSI Committee has welcomed some degree of flexibility in the resource allocation, but they would not like the resource allocation procedure to lead to axes

being diminished or lost. There would be merit in systematically canvassing the views of EaSI committee members on the appropriate allocation of resources between the three axes both at European level and at national levels. This would allow for an explicit expression of priorities and the range of views could be taken into account.

The EaSI Committee members are not well equipped as points of contact and 'coordinators' of EaSI at national level. There is concern that they are 'the last to hear' about the announcement of calls for proposals and the results in terms of numbers of proposals and the selection of those for funding. There are likely to be requests for assistance of Committee members from those stakeholders in their countries wishing to participate in EaSI. If the EaSI Committee members are not 'in the loop', they will not be well placed to respond to such requests. Members do not get notified systematically when calls for proposals are issued. It would be helpful to receive the information timely for spreading it among stakeholders. Similarly, members do not get informed of applicants who were successful or not and the reasons for those decisions. This information is capital to help applicants being successful for future calls. This leads to the same people being successful because they have experience and have not shared it.

There would be benefit in the Committee Members having access to 'real time' information on what is happening in terms of alerts on calls for proposals, notification of proposals received and timely notification of the results. This could usefully be provided to them via an 'intranet'. This would empower them in their role of coordination.

As channels for the dissemination of the results of EaSI activities, the EaSI Committee members are not well equipped. Information on the outputs of EaSI has improved; for instance, there have been five reports<sup>191</sup> with systematic descriptions of the results of projects. However, the communication of information about past and future activities for EaSI is not sufficient. The descriptions of projects are helpful, however the information would be more easily accessible if it is contained in an internet based knowledge management system. Also, the results of many projects are very technically specific and for the committee members it is not easy to judge whether or not and in what circumstances they are transferable. Properly communicating the results at the right time and in the right place for them to generate influence over policy and practice is very challenging.

There would be benefit in the EaSI programme including cadre of 'animators' whose job is to 'mine' the results of individual and groups of projects and to ensure that those most likely to directly benefit from the findings are informed, through direct communications, through meetings and seminars and through access to a Knowledge Management System and resource. Such work would be especially useful within each of the three axes. The EaSI Committee Members are well placed to play a role in this process through identifying the 'agents of change' within their countries that would most benefit from the results of EaSI projects and encouraging their involvement in dissemination activities.

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#### **Key points on the governance**

- The members acknowledged that they are not experts in all the topics EaSI covers (such as microfinance), but they liaise with experts in their respective Member States on these topics. However, occasional/ad hoc expert guidance was viewed as potentially useful for certain topics.
- The use of thematic working groups would be useful to deepen knowledge of EaSI committee members on technical matters.
- The committee members felt they do not have enough information on projects implemented in their Member States. This could be improved by receiving more timely information from DG EMPL as well as by setting up a portal with real time information about project submitted and awarded.

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<sup>191</sup> Please see: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1081&langId=en&furtherPubs=yes>

- There are no contact points for the EaSI programme in the participating countries, making it hard to monitor the projects' progress.
- The programme is managed by the Commission, therefore, the committee members do not see much influence from their side.
- Limited links between the EaSI and other EU committees were identified, in particular with SPC and EMCO. However, more cooperation is seen as necessary to exchange information and be more aware of the past, existing and future projects.
- Committee members felt there was a need for to give they more decision authority and more ownership regarding the allocation of funds for the calls for proposals.
- The information about past, existing and future EaSI activities is lacking or insufficient. More examples of good practices could help conceiving future projects. More feedback on rejected calls for proposal should be communicated to applicants to help them improve their applications.
- There is a strong need for a database which would include all projects related information and that would be accessible to the National Contact Points.
- More and timely information need to be shared with the Committee so that it can be easily transferred to the organisations that may be interested in responding to calls for proposals.

Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation

## 6 Conclusions and recommendations

This section contains the main conclusions on the programme's relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, EU added Value and governance and proposes recommendations to address the main shortcomings identified.

### 6.1 Relevance

EaSI general objectives continue to be relevant, especially in the current challenging socio-economic context characterised by the aftermath of the financial and economic crisis, with positive but slow recovery. Issues such as long term and youth unemployment, low levels of employment and inequalities are among the top pressing problems to deal with. Moreover, possible future challenges facing the EU-zone, especially related to integration and securing employment among its citizens further strengthens the case for EaSI's relevance.

The EaSI programme is relevant because it provides support to vulnerable groups (i.e. young people, long-term unemployed, disabled, migrants, ethnic minorities, women). EaSI also supports innovative actions, makes labour markets more accessible, fights against poverty and social exclusion. EaSI seems however less relevant in promoting gender equality and increasing access to finance for social enterprises.

In terms of priorities for the next programming period, the EaSI Programme should prioritise the mutual learning, the social policy experimentations/innovations and the analytical activities.

Some key conclusions and recommendations can also be identified per axis.

**PROGRESS** has provided support to national policies in the field of employment and social affairs through the open method of coordination (OMC) approach. Moreover, it has delivered innovative actions to address key challenges by supporting vulnerable groups and facilitated coordination between civil society and policy makers. On this basis, it is recommended to:

- Sustain and promote the exchange of good practices between policy-makers across Member States by delivering mutual-learning, awareness raising and dissemination activities as well as trainings.
- Continue to support EU-wide networks in the fields of social protection, accessible and efficient labour markets with the aim to align different policy agendas across different levels of governance and Member States.



- Increase the support to social experimentations with a focus on creating conditions for their transferability and upscaling.
- Increase the efforts and focus on vulnerable population (youth unemployment, women, and people with disabilities). Analytical tools, dissemination events and innovative projects should focus on gender issues, youth unemployment, inequalities (income, education, skills) and social exclusion.

There are currently around 2-3 million job vacancies unfilled throughout the EU, coupled with relatively high unemployment<sup>192</sup>. This, together with the fact that young people face obstacles when trying to enter the labour market, show that there is a need to promote workers' mobility and encourage jobseekers and employers to consider opportunities beyond their own borders. At the same time, around 16 million EU citizens<sup>193</sup> are living and working in another EU Member State than their own, making transparent labour market information and service provision about living and working conditions across the EU crucial for their success. In this context, **EURES** projects were assessed as relevant to increase the transparency of the labour market and make mobility more accessible to workers and employers through the provision of counselling on labour mobility. The EURES portal – as a platform where vacancies are shared on one throughout Europe – is also gaining importance, reinforcing the relevance of EURES as a way to create a transparent labour market.

With regard to service provisions, EURES is particularly relevant for young people who benefit from a targeted action within the 'Your first EURES job'. This scheme allowed young people who are more likely to face difficulties to access the labour market to find a job while helping employers to fill-in bottleneck vacancies<sup>194</sup>. Cross-border partnerships also remain relevant in light of a large number of commuters in cross-border regions (e.g. in the analysed case studies this number is often ranged around 20,000-30,000 among neighboring regions). However, many obstacles for cross-border mobility exist, mainly due to lack of knowledge about the work environments and social security systems in the neighbouring countries. The cross-border partnerships fill this gap by providing targeted services related to the possibilities in the different labour markets for worker and employers.

The relevance of the budget allocation of the EURES axis is less evident. The amount allocated to the axis could be increased to meet the demand and to ensure a continuation of support for more than one cycle.

On this basis it is recommended to:

- Further strengthen the importance of the EURES job portal and strive to make it the main tool for sharing of information and job vacancies in Europe.
- Continue to fund projects targeted at specific groups (as is the case with YfEj and cross-border partnerships) as this provides them with relevant and practical solutions.
- Increase the EURES axis resources and projects' duration to ensure support for more than one cycle.
- Allow more room for manoeuvre in designing the calls for proposals so that feedback from stakeholders can be taken into account.

The **Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship** axis has been relevant both in terms of its general objectives and the stakeholders' needs. Existing market imperfections in both the Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship markets, along with financial gaps

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<sup>192</sup> Eurostat. 2016. Unemployment statistics [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment\\_statistics](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics)

<sup>193</sup> European Commission. 2017. Reflection Paper on the Social Dimension in Europe. Luxembourg

<sup>194</sup> European Commission. 2014. Evaluation of YfEj- Final Report

between supply and demand of finance in a majority of Member States, suggest the need to continuously promote financial inclusion through increasing availability and accessibility of finance for vulnerable people.

To further reinforce inclusion and the development of the social enterprises market, it is recommended to:

- Further encourage financial intermediaries to reach the social enterprises most in need of financial support, in particular social enterprises with the largest difficulties in accessing finance (e.g. the 'non-bankable' enterprises).

In terms of relevance in the light of stakeholder needs, financial intermediaries benefitting from EaSI Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship support can provide loans at better terms thanks to the instrument. The guarantees have helped to overcome barriers preventing final beneficiaries to access finance, suggesting it is well designed and fit for this purpose. Nevertheless, the majority of funding has been allocated to countries with more developed markets for microfinance and social entrepreneurship. Moreover, the amounts allocated to the axes are insufficient to meet demand and ensure a continuation of support beyond one cycle.

The recommendations would therefore be:

- To ensure a larger focus on underdeveloped markets, as these are markets with the largest development need. This could be achieved through targeted marketing in order to encourage them to apply for the EaSI financial guarantee. Another possibility is to replicate a model already applied elsewhere (see in Annex the project case study carried out in Czech Republic). Other way is through the creation of incentives to apply, for instance through opening the call for expression of interest to only specific countries for a certain amount of time.
- To ensure sustainability of the service provision beyond one programming cycle through alternative ways for the financial intermediaries to attract funding as a replacement for EIF-funding. In essence, this suggests a mechanism working as a catalyst, where the financial intermediaries are able to attract financing from financiers other than the EIF thanks to the "good stamp" that these financial intermediaries have from previous involvement in the Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis.

## **6.2 Effectiveness**

The EaSI programme as a whole has achieved good quality outcomes, even if in limited quantity given the short timeframe. A series of changes can be however attributed to the EaSI programme. For instance, the programme is considered pivotal the testing of social innovations, however the limited funding are an obstacles for creation of conditions for their future scaling up.

With regard to effectiveness of the EaSI programme in involving stakeholders, this involvement could be strengthened through targeted information dissemination, regular contact with organisations working with relevant target groups, inclusion of social partners and main national authorities in the projects.

**PROGRESS** has proven to be mostly effective to facilitate inclusive information-sharing, mutual learning activities and dialogues between stakeholders. The axis has proven to be also effective in developing dissemination of comparative and analytical knowledge. The collected evidence showed that PROGRESS also contributed to positive outcomes in terms of capacity building and uptake of analytical research outputs which have informed the European Semester process as well as policies at national level. On this basis, we recommend to:

- Enhance the dissemination of comparative and analytical knowledge by boosting the outreach of events and supporting the investment in analytical tools (datasets, statistics, focused studies) linked to national and EU policy agendas and stakeholders (national governments, statistical offices, thematic research networks).
- Broadening the stakeholders' profile contributing to the design, implementation and further scaling up of social policy experimentations (social partners, research networks, think- tanks, NGOs, other policy/decision-makers in the relevant areas).
- Maintain the thematic focus on those policy themes relevant for and appreciated by stakeholders (e.g. employment, working conditions) for the development of analytical knowledge.

In the **EURES** axis, while the number of CV's and companies registered on the EURES Portal has doubled in the analysed period, the number of visits remains stable, while the participating countries share about half of their vacancies on this platform. Further, the structure of the portal remained unchanged, with most jobseekers who are registered being from Spain and Italy and most registered employers being from Germany. The EURES ex-post evaluation identified similar characteristics for the predecessor programme. On this basis it is recommended to:

- Ensure that Member States post vacancies on the EURES job portal by setting targets per Member State. A higher number of vacancies posted on the portal would increase its attractiveness and usefulness for jobseekers and employers alike.
- Ensure a more balanced representation of Member States' jobseekers and employers on the portal, by taking into account national contexts. Similarly to emphasis in the ex-post evaluation of the predecessor programme, this can be achieved via support in building national capacity (e.g. number of advisers, skills, technical capabilities etc.).
- Implement a promotion campaign for the EURES portal and ensure that the Public Employment Services (PES) put an emphasis on advertising the importance of the EURES Portal in providing job vacancies, but also additional information related to work and living conditions in EU Member States.

The results outlined in Section 4.2 show that the four projects implemented under 'Your first EURES job' differ in their success rate. Two projects finalised so far report positive impacts on the young people that benefitted from this targeted scheme. However, several challenges impacted the effectiveness of the projects, including finding the right partners and attracting more employers in the partnerships. On this basis it is recommended to:

- Facilitate partnership development, and ensure a balanced representation of the participating countries in the consortias. Some organisations are reluctant to integrate new partnerships in case they are already part as lead applicants or even co-applicants. A possibility is to limit the number of projects running simultaneously to ensure a wider availability of different partners across the Member States for the consortia.
- Facilitate the involvement of employers through more targeted communication activities and incentives.

The projects focussing on cross-border partnerships achieved their goals and contributed to a further development of the cross-border regions. One successful example is the creation of cross-border info points providing information about employment opportunities and social systems in several cross-border regions. The main challenge for the stakeholders involved in these projects was the grant duration of 12 months which is not sufficient to achieve sustainable results. Hence, the majority

of the cross-border partnerships applied for follow-up funding, which in turn could result in path dependency on EURES. Therefore, we recommend to:

- Revise the implementation period and consider a longer period – minimum of 2 years – which might enable stakeholders to develop an innovative activity, implement it across the cross-border regions, measure its effectiveness, and ensure its sustainable implementation.

The **Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship** axis has been effective in increasing the availability of and access to finance. Clear quantitative changes are increased lending volume, number of loans and number of beneficiaries, in particular for the axis' Microfinance window. These effects would not have materialised or done at a slower pace in the absence of the EaSI funding, as financial intermediaries would not have been able to offer similar products without support from EaSI. Evidence of qualitative changes is however scarce given that the Financial instrument has started to be implemented in 2015. Moreover, financial intermediaries have not yet reported information on the mentoring and training for more than half of the final beneficiaries at the end of 2016. It is therefore recommended:

- To put more emphasis on the mentoring and training activities provided to final beneficiaries. This can be achieved through requiring financial intermediaries to disclose in the calls for expression of interest more information on the training and mentoring they can offer, in order for the EIF to easily assess the results.

Although financial intermediaries have included vulnerable groups in their activities, they do not represent the majority of final beneficiaries. It is therefore recommended that there is a stronger focus on vulnerable groups for the second part of EaSI, similar to the recommendations made for the previous programme PROGRESS Microfinance Facility. The following approaches are recommended:

- Integration in the call for expression of interest of requirements related the share/number of targeted vulnerable people (for example x% unemployed; y% women etc.).
- Suggested for EIF to take measures where necessary in cases where financial intermediaries are not targeting vulnerable people sufficiently.
- Suggested for the EIF to put more emphasis on selecting financial intermediaries focusing on vulnerable groups in general and not only on unemployed people.

Effectiveness in achieving the results was constrained by a number of factors such as delays in making the financial instrument available, lack of flexibility in paying commitment fees, or some uncertainty surrounding the interpretation of the definition of social enterprises in the early stages. The success of financial intermediaries in meeting their objectives also depended on their experience in the area, and on their ability to define the correct target group and to assess the risk properly.

Entering the second half of the EaSI programme, it is suggested:

- To ensure all key stakeholders (including the EIF and final beneficiaries) are involved to a larger extent in the programme. This could be done through conferences, meetings, surveys, focus groups or workshops.
- To broaden the definition of the different types of organisations counted as "social enterprises in order to allow it to be more in line with national definitions and also circumvent leaving out important groups of organisations, such as cooperatives or self-employed from applying to the EaSI financial instruments.

As some features of the guarantee for social enterprises were built on the features used for microfinance, they need to be further adapted to the specific context of social entrepreneurship.

### 6.3 Efficiency

Overall, the EaSI budget remains appropriate, but there should be a more flexible allocation between the axes in order to be responsive to emerging trends and social impacts.

Below, the key conclusions and recommendations per axis are listed.

**PROGRESS** axis takes longer to commit allocated funds compared to EURES and Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship. However, the axis has a high financial implementation rate, which means that all of the specific objectives of PROGRESS are likely to be met. A number of respondents in the EaSI survey and the open public consultation highlighted that there was no issues with available funding but more flexibility could be introduced in the allocation by themes which could improve the axis's efficiency. Stakeholders have also suggested that the access to reliable data for decision makers was among the most appreciated features of PROGRESS. On this basis, it is recommended to:

- Lower the allocation below 61% as currently established in the EaSI Regulation.
- Improve the awarding and implementation process by minimising any administrative burden both in the bidding and implementation stage.
- Continue to sustain social policy experiments focused on measures addressing the needs of vulnerable population.

Looking at the **EURES** axis, the analysed data shows mitigated results on the efficiency of its financial procedures. To maximize the impact of this axis, it is recommended to:

- Balance resource allocation in order to minimize discrepancies between planned and actual commitments.
- Review the co-financing rates to make EURES more accessible for organisations and public sector entities. Indeed, the requirement of co-financing is becoming increasingly problematic for organisations as it is not always clear whether it has to be expressed in labour costs or in actual monetary value.

Early findings for the **Microfinance/Social Enterprises** axis suggest that the overall efficiency of the EaSI financial instruments as shown by a reduction of the management cost per contract signed. Nevertheless, the overwhelming demand for the financial guarantee under the Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis has put pressure on the budget. This suggests that the allocated budget for the third programme's axis is not optimal in order to ensure the sustainability of the final beneficiaries activities.

A recommendation is to closely monitor the efficiency figures for the second programming period. As social enterprises usually require much higher loans compared to microfinance, there might be less social entrepreneurship loans provided whereas their sizes are much larger. This will therefore impact efficiency measures expressed in terms of the number of contracts signed.

### 6.4 Coherence

The evidence suggests that the three axes seem to operate independently. There are mixed evidence for the merging of the three programmes having improved the consistency and the complementarity of the EaSI-programme. The different sources, in particular case studies and interviews, could not identify clear effects of the merger on the overall programme efficiency. The neutrality of respondents on this question may be explained by the fact that they did not notice many changes before and after the merging. The merging of three predecessors programmes responded more to an

administrative needs and that changes affected more the financial and human resources of the European Commission rather than the beneficiaries. The opportunity to adopt a more holistic approach in the provision of the various instruments was also mentioned by the Commission representatives as an expected result of the programme's umbrella design.

EaSI is mostly coherent with ESF compared to other EU programmes. For example PROGRESS is complementary with ESF, Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 in terms of specific objectives, activities and beneficiaries. Complementarity between EURES and the European Territorial Co-operation programme (Interreg) was also found. The Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis also appears coherent with other microfinance instruments at the EU-level supporting SMEs like the COSME financial guarantee or InnovFin.

No overlaps between the objectives of EaSI and national level instruments/programmes have been identified. The stakeholder consultations highlighted an important consensus on the importance to maintain each type of instruments at EU level even where minor overlaps were identified. The involvement of regional stakeholders is stronger in EURES than in the the PROGRESS axis implementation, showing the strong regional dimension which is a core component of the EURES axis. However, this implication of the national and regional stakeholders in the EURES activities could be jeopardised by the dependence that EaSI funding can create for some organisations. They may become dependent on EU funding and eventually do not use the relevant national funding. It is important that EaSI funding complements the national funding and does not substitute it. With regard to Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis, there is not always coherence between the EaSI and national and regional policies, as goals of the EaSI financial instruments are not always aligned with national and regional policies. To maintain complementarity, nevertheless, the EIF undertakes efforts to ensure their achievements do not interfere with programmes already implemented.

On this basis, we recommend to:

- Further strengthen the EaSI programme as a whole and ensure there is no overlap between the axes..
- Coherence from merging the three previous programmes could be further improved through ensuring more flexibility in transferring budgets within EaSI.
- Strengthen national, regional and local authorities' involvement in the delivery of EaSI activities, in particular PROGRESS and Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship. Provide national/regional/local stakeholders with analytical tools, transferable knowledge and relevant support for the design and implementation.
- Adapt the implementing mechanisms in order to prevent organisations to become dependent on the funding
- The efforts aimed at ensuring coherence with other microfinance instruments should be continued. Nevertheless, in the light of limited funding of the Commission together with the difficulties to cope with the high demand in the microfinance sector, a suggestion is to adopt an approach for identifying whether applications are more suitable for other instruments than EaSI. Especially because other microfinance programmes cover microenterprises but in a much broader setting, there are possibilities to streamline the Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis further by redirectioning applications to the most appropriate programme.

## **6.5 EU added value**

The main added value of the EaSI programme comes from its transnational and multi-disciplinary dimensions, with few other equivalents in Europe. EaSI is able to support projects with a larger scope, compared to what is possible at national level. The EaSI EU added value is widely acknowledged, in particular with regards to the cross border partnerships and the exchange of good practices.

For example, one of the key features of EaSI is to be the most suitable to build EU wide networks and partnership as well as produce EU wide deliverables that are not top priority at other governance level, such as databases, studies, social experimentations, capacity building and mutual learning activities or support EU-level networks. Also, the EaSI financial instruments appears to fill a clear gap in the supply of microfinance and the EURES portal in supporting workers' mobility across participating countries. Should EaSI be discontinued, it would be unlikely that other funding schemes at national level would be able to support social experimentations across participating countries. Further, there are no comparable funds available for cross-border partnerships, which are currently supported under the EURES axis. With regard to Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis, the support for the microfinance and social entrepreneurship sectors would most likely slow down without funding from EaSI, leading to fewer business and employment opportunities in these sectors.

Improvements are however necessary mainly in terms of dissemination of the programme's results. There is room for improvement of the awareness in particular of the EaSI-umbrella advantages and social experimentations results. The branding of the EaSI umbrella is less visible than the three axes, which are known thanks to the three previous programmes.

On the basis of the evaluation's findings it is recommended to:

- Continue to invest in particular in cross-border partnerships, social experimentations and analytical knowledge.
- Improve the visibility of partnerships between EU and national/regional/local stakeholders.
- Particularly, the EIF is suggested to focus on those countries where the microfinance and social entrepreneurship markets are less developed.
- The communication on EaSI activities and the dissemination of information on programme's results need to be improved - i.e. providing more country specific examples, good practices, websites regularly updated,, expanding the available languages and making contents more accessible to a broad audience..
- Consider communicating on the benefit brought by the EaSI Programme as a whole.

## **6.6 Governance**

Findings suggest that the EaSI Committee members would like to be more involved in decision making and would like to see the frequency of the meetings increased. The current frequency (once per semester) is not sufficient to maximise the output of the EaSI committee. Related to this, the EaSI Committee members feel that their role in acting as catalyst for EaSI is hindered by the fact that they do not have enough information on projects implemented in their Member States. This could be improved by the Committee members receiving more timely information from DG EMPL as well as by setting up a portal with real time information about project submitted and awarded. Indeed, an internet based knowledge management system has been advocated as the main improvement that would allow the committee members to effectively full fill their role as points of contact and 'coordinators' of EaSI at national level.

There is also a need for regular contacts between the EaSI committee and other EU Committees (e.g. SPC, EMCO). The content of the discussions should be not only

“stock taking” but also “forward looking”. Ultimately, it appears that some Member States are less active than others in accessing EaSI funding. This seems to be mainly due to the lack of resources and staff for managing the projects (in particular in the small participating countries with ministries disposing from limited resources) and limited information about EaSI at national level. The EaSI Committee could be a place for peer learning so that smaller participating countries could benefit from the experience of other countries. This could be achieved by adapting the meetings' format to serve also as a platform for networking and regular exchange of good practices.

## **7 General Conclusion**

The purpose of the mid-term evaluation was to measure the progress made in the EaSI objectives, to determine whether the resources of the programme have been used efficiently and to assess its EU added value. The evaluation further aimed to improve its performance in the second part of implementation and to prepare the post 2020 programming period.

The operational approach for the EaSI mid-term evaluation was to answer the five criteria and related evaluation questions by reordering them in a logical sequence that follows the intervention logic of the EaSI operations. The mid-term evaluation analysed the different elements of the intervention logic, including the relevance of the general, specific and horizontal objectives as well as their coherence with other interventions. Further, the effectiveness and efficiency of the inputs, activities and outputs was analysed as well as the EU added value of the changes and impacts resulting from the EaSI intervention. In addition, a sixth topic was included in order to assess the programme's governance focusing on the programme's governing mechanisms, accountability and transparency.

The methodological framework employed primary and secondary data sources. As part of the primary data collection tools, the evaluation included an open public consultation, a the beneficiaries' survey, semi-structured interviews, a focus group and 15 case studies. The secondary data sources included previous evaluations, EaSI monitoring reports, good practice reports and other related documents.

During the evaluation, limited project results were available, as the period under evaluation was rather short. The availability and quality of evidence varies for each case study; some of the projects analysed were still ongoing, hence the information to assess their effectiveness and efficiency was scarce. Therefore, for these projects, only emerging results were presented and analysed. Due to the relatively small number of responses, the open public consultation results were used only for exemplary purposes. Moreover, a generalisation of results of the beneficiaries' survey was not possible due to the small number of replies that were also used for exemplary purposes.

Overall, the analysis shows that the assumptions set out in the EaSI intervention logic continue to require action at EU level and that no major changes to the programme's framework are required.

The EaSI general objectives remain **relevant** in order to foster sustainable long-term growth and jobs, reduce divergence between the EU Member States and make progress towards reducing social inequalities. To ensure continuing relevance in the current socio-economic context, the EaSI programme should continue to prioritise the following objectives for the next programming period:

- Sustain the exchange of good practices between stakeholders across EaSI participating countries through mutual-learning, awareness raising and dissemination activities.
- Continue to test and spread innovative policy solutions.



- Continue to support EU-level networks in the fields of social protection and accessible labour markets with the aim to align policy agendas across different levels of governance and participating countries.
- Increase the means for and focus on vulnerable population (migrants, youth, women, people with disabilities).
- Introduce more flexibility in the budget allocation across the axes (instead of the current indicative percentages).

In terms of **effectiveness**, the EaSI programme as a whole has achieved good quality outputs. The PROGRESS axis was most effective in facilitating information-sharing, mutual learning and dialogue, while the EURES axis was most effective in contributing to a transparent labour market and the Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis in providing access to microfinance. In sum, EaSI has brought about positive changes. However, the use of social experimentations findings for further scaling up remains limited and the national and regional stakeholders' involvement in the programme needs also to be strengthened. Based on this, the following recommendations should be taken into account:

- Creating the conditions for an effective future scaling up of the the social experimentations carried out under the PROGRESS axis, revising the projects' duration under the EURES axis and place a stronger focus on vulnerable groups under the Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis.
- Facilitate partnership development and ensure a balanced representation of participating countries in the consortia through more targeted approaches in involving stakeholders.

When looking at the EaSI **efficiency**, the results show that the EaSI budget remains overall appropriate, but that the allocation between the axes could be revised to easier reflect the socio-economic needs. The following recommendations should be taken into account for the following programming period:

- Ensure a more flexible budget re-allocation between different axes and the themes within axes.
- Improve the awarding and implementation process by reducing administrative burden in bidding, evaluation and implementation stages.

The **coherence** between the different axes remains limited. However, EaSI is coherent with other EU and national programmes. To strengthen the internal coherence and to ensure a continuation of external coherence, the following recommendations should be taken into account:

- Strengthen the EaSI umbrella through reinforced mutual support between the three axes facilitating synergies.
- Continue to facilitate synergies/complementarities with other EU level programmes.
- Reinforcing complementarities and avoid overlaps with national or regional schemes.

The main **EU added value** of EaSI are the transnational and the multidisciplinary dimensions of the programme.

EaSI is able to support projects with a larger scope, compared to what is possible at national level. Improvements are necessary mainly in terms of dissemination of results. Thus, the main recommendations are:

- Continue to invest in those fields where the funding on national level is insufficient.

- Improve the communication on EaSI activities (e.g. country specific examples, good practices, databases, updated websites).

There is room for improvement in the structure and process of the EaSI **governance**. The EaSI committee members could be more involved in decision making and the frequency of the EaSI committee meetings could be increased to maximise the output of the committee. To ensure a better decision making process and information dissemination on national level, the members should receive timely information through, for example, an internet based knowledge management system. Additionally, the EaSI committee could support peer learning between the Member States, therefore, smaller Member States could benefit from the experience of other participating countries.

Overall, the rationale and objectives of EaSI remain relevant to address current and future challenges in the fields of employment and social inclusion including: the effects of the economic and financial crisis, unemployment (specifically youth and long term unemployment), intra-EU mobility as well as poverty and social exclusion of vulnerable groups as summarised in the EaSI intervention logic. Thus, the programme contributes to the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy's objectives and other key EU initiatives and instruments (e.g. the Youth Guarantee, and the European Employment Strategy).

However, several shortcomings identified, in particular in terms of effective and efficient use of the monetary inputs, flexibility between budget allocation between the axes and projects' duration.

Finally, the EU added value of EaSI is undisputable, since the programme addresses EU wide actions that cannot be addressed on national level. The programme outcomes need to be better communicated to different stakeholders across the EU to ensure a good visibility of the EaSI programme activities and results. The role of the EaSI committee could be further enhanced to ensure a better dialogue among participating countries as well as between the countries and the Commission.

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*Additionally: available calls for proposals and implementation reports for projects under the three axes*

*Additionally: data received via email from the EIF and the European Commission.*

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The following annexes are provided in a [separate document](#):

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