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**MID-TERM EVALUATION
of the
European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI)**

Accompanying the document

REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION

**Report from the Commission on the mid-term evaluation of the European Union
Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI)**

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Abbreviations list

Term or acronym	Meaning or definition
COSME	Programme for competitiveness of enterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises
CSR	Country-specific recommendations
DG	Directorate-General
DG EMPL	Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
EaSI	Employment and social innovation programme
ECoGC	European Code of Good Conduct for Microcredit
EEA	European Economic Area
EESSI	Electronic exchange of social security information
EFSE	European Fund for South East Europe
EFSI	European Fund for Strategic Investment
EIB	European Investment Bank
EIF	European Investment Fund
EMCO	Employment Committee
EPAP	European Platform against Poverty
ESCO	European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations
ESDE	Employment and Social Developments in Europe
ESF	European Social Fund
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
ESPN	European Social Policy Network
EU	European Union
EURES	European Employment Services
GDP	Gross domestic product
GFI	Guarantee financial instruments

IARC	International Agency for Research on Cancer
ILO	International Labour Organisation
InnovFin	EU finance for innovators programme
ISSG	Inter-Services Steering Committee
KPIs	Key performance indicators
MF/SE	Microfinance/social entrepreneurship
MFF	Multiannual financial framework
MISSOC	Mutual Information System on Social Protection
NGO	Non-governmental organisations
SLIC	Committee Senior Labour Inspectors
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprises
SPC	Social Protection Committee
SWD	Staff working document
YfEj	Your first EURES job

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose and scope of the evaluation

This European Commission staff working document (SWD) reports on the mid-term evaluation of the Employment and Social Innovation programme for 2014-2020 (EaSI)¹ and identifies avenues for possible further improvements. It is based on an external evaluation report² and other sources of evidence, in particular EaSI performance monitoring reports, the annual management reports of the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, and evaluations of previous programmes. The objective of the mid-term evaluation, as set out in Article 13 of the EaSI Regulation, was ‘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.’

The SWD summarises the main results of the external evaluation and provides the Commission with evidence and data for improving programme performance in later implementation; assessing whether there is any need to amend the EaSI Regulation; and preparing to design the post-2020 programme.

The findings of the mid-term evaluation feed into the European Commission’s mid-term review of the current Multiannual Financial Framework and the preparation of the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF 2021 – 2027). They also serve to inform the programme’s participating countries, the general public and other stakeholders about the performance of EaSI and its achievements. A proposal reflecting the findings and lessons learned will be submitted to the European Parliament and the Council.

In compliance with the Better Regulation Guidelines, the evaluation is based on the following criteria:

- **relevance:** whether EaSI’s objectives as originally defined remain relevant;
- **effectiveness:** the effectiveness of EaSI activities and the extent to which EaSI has delivered against its objectives;
- **efficiency:** the relationship between the resources used and the changes produced by EaSI;
- **coherence:** how well EaSI works with other EU and national initiatives;
- **EU added value:** value resulting from EaSI activities that is additional to the value that would have resulted from other initiatives at national level.

In addition, a sixth topic was included in order to assess the **programme’s governance**, focusing on governing mechanisms, accountability and transparency. The mid-term evaluation covered the period of activity from January 2014 to December 2016 and the activities of its three axes: PROGRESS, EURES and Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship. It covered the programme’s geographical scope and relevant

¹ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0238:0252:EN:PDF>.

² ICF (2017), *Mid-term evaluation of the EU programme for employment and social innovation – EaSI*, ICF, 2017, foreseen on <https://publications.europa.eu> (Catalog number: KE-06-17-495-EN-N; ISBN: 978-92-79-77292-4; DOI: 10.2767/769704).

stakeholders, in particular the EaSI Committee, policy committees, social partners, national authorities and bodies, and key EU civil society organisations.

2. BACKGROUND TO EASI

The European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) — adopted in December 2013³ — is one of four EU financial instruments in the area of **employment and social affairs** for 2014-2020, together with the European Social Fund (ESF), the Fund for European Aid for the Most Deprived (FEAD) and the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund.

EaSI is designed to promote a high level of quality and sustainable employment, guaranteeing adequate and decent social protection, combating social exclusion and poverty, and improving working conditions in the Member States and the other participating countries (EFTA/EEA⁴, candidate and pre-candidate countries). The programme is partly managed directly by the Commission and partly indirectly (for microfinance), by entrusting budget implementation tasks to the European Investment Fund⁵ (EIF).

The total financial envelope for the programme from 2014 to 2020 is EUR 919 469 000.

EaSI's general objective is to contribute to the overarching **Europe 2020 strategy**, including Europe 2020 flagship initiatives such as the 'European platform against poverty', 'An agenda for new skills and jobs', 'Youth on the Move' and 'Innovation Union'. The programme is designed to complement the ESF, which operates under shared management with the Member States and pursues similar general objectives at national level.

When the new Commission came into office in 2014, the focus of the programme was steered towards the objectives defined in the *Agenda for jobs, growth, fairness and democratic change (the Juncker Commission's Political guidelines)*. The 2015 and 2016 EaSI work programmes were the first adopted by President Juncker's Commission. Three of the political guidelines are particularly important for EaSI:

- Guideline 1: New boost for jobs, growth and investment;
- Guideline 4: Deeper and fairer internal market with a strengthened industrial base;
- Guideline 5: Deeper and fairer economic and monetary union.

2.1 Structure of the programme

EaSI has three axes — PROGRESS, EURES and Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship.

PROGRESS supports **policymaking and implementation** by: producing policy evidence, organising information sharing and mutual learning activities, creating better conditions for social policy innovations and helping to build capacity for EU and national organisations. The types of actions funded by PROGRESS are:

³ Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013.

⁴ Iceland participates in all three axes, Norway participates only in PROGRESS and EURES, Lichtenstein does not participate in EaSI at all, and Switzerland participates only in EURES and only at its own expense.

⁵The EIF provides the EaSI guarantee and counter-guarantee to financial intermediaries with the aim of increasing the availability of microfinance (http://www.eif.org/what_we_do/microfinance/easi/easi-guarantee-instrument/index.htm).

- analytical activities, such as conducting studies, drafting reports, and providing technical support for databases;
- capacity building activities to develop, promote and support EU instruments and policies, including outreach to young people, information and awareness raising, and support for social networks, conferences and events;
- information sharing and mutual learning activities, such as organising seminars, meetings, workshops and networks and producing guides, manuals and promotional materials; and
- support for social innovation, including designing and implement social experimentations.

EURES aims to help **workers move freely in the EU** by making recruitment information more transparent and accessible, and by responding to jobseekers' and employers' requests for information, assistance and guidance. The EURES network is composed of various organisations, including public employment services⁶. The types of activities funded under EURES are:

- targeted mobility schemes such as the 'Your first EURES job' (YfEj) scheme, which helps young people up to 35 years old to find a job, traineeship or apprenticeship under employment contract in another Member State, and helps employers to find the skills needed for their hard-to-fill vacancies;
- services provided through the EURES job mobility portal such as advertising vacancies, giving tips on applying for a job, and informing users about companies and about EU Member States' labour markets;
- services to jobseekers and companies provided by EURES staff in cross-border regions, such as providing information on social security, taxation, education and training, living and working conditions, and assisting them with job searching or recruitment (through 'cross-border partnerships');
- operational support for the network, which includes a common training programme for staff, communications, analytical activities and mutual learning support.

Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship aims to improve **access to finance** for vulnerable people (i.e. those at risk of social or financial exclusion), microenterprises and social enterprises through funding for financial intermediaries and capacity building for relevant actors. The European Commission does not directly finance entrepreneurs or social enterprises, but enables selected microcredit providers and social enterprise investors in the EU to increase lending. The types of activities funded under Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship are:

- providing financial guarantees to financial intermediaries;
- providing loans, equity and hybrid instruments.

A very important cross-cutting aim of every part of the EaSI programme is to foster **social policy innovation**. A significant amount of EaSI funding is devoted to this objective, in particular through calls for proposals for social experimentation projects.

⁶The EURES network consists of the EU Member States, Norway, Lichtenstein and Iceland. Switzerland cooperates with the network.

2.2 Management of the programme

EaSI is **directly managed** by the European Commission (DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion) on the basis of calls for proposals and calls for tenders. Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship actions (including the EaSI Guarantee Instrument and the EaSI Capacity Building Investments Window) are implemented **indirectly**: i.e. the Commission entrusts the budget to the European Investment Fund (EIF). The programme is monitored by DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion's 'Programming and planning' unit (Unit F3), which is responsible for formulating EaSI's scope and funding, and for coordinating, monitoring and evaluating its implementation. The unit is assisted by a network of '**EaSI coordinators**' in the operational units that carry out programme activities, and by the EaSI Committee which advises on and examines the work done.

The **EaSI Committee** is composed of a chair from the European Commission and a delegate from each Member State. Other countries eligible under EaSI (EEA countries, candidate and potential candidate countries) may also be represented on the EaSI Committee as observers. In most cases, members of the EaSI Committee are from the ministries in charge of labour and social affairs in their country. Members may ask to be assisted by external experts on particular matters. The EaSI Committee meets two to four times a year. The committee met four times in 2015-2016 and discussed issues such as the monitoring reports and an update of the performance monitoring system, the mid-term evaluation results, good practice projects and the annual work programmes. The Chair drafts the agenda and sends it to the members for approval. Committee members are also consulted between meetings. For instance, they are consulted about the work programme for the year to come, the various types of activities to be launched, their implementation and the funding priorities. Members have an opportunity to give their opinion and exchange views on items on the agenda. For instance, under the advisory procedure, the committee discussed the roadmap for this mid-term evaluation. In other cases, members have a binding vote under the examination procedure, which means the Commission cannot act on a document without their approval. This is the case for instance with the adoption of the EaSI's annual work programmes.

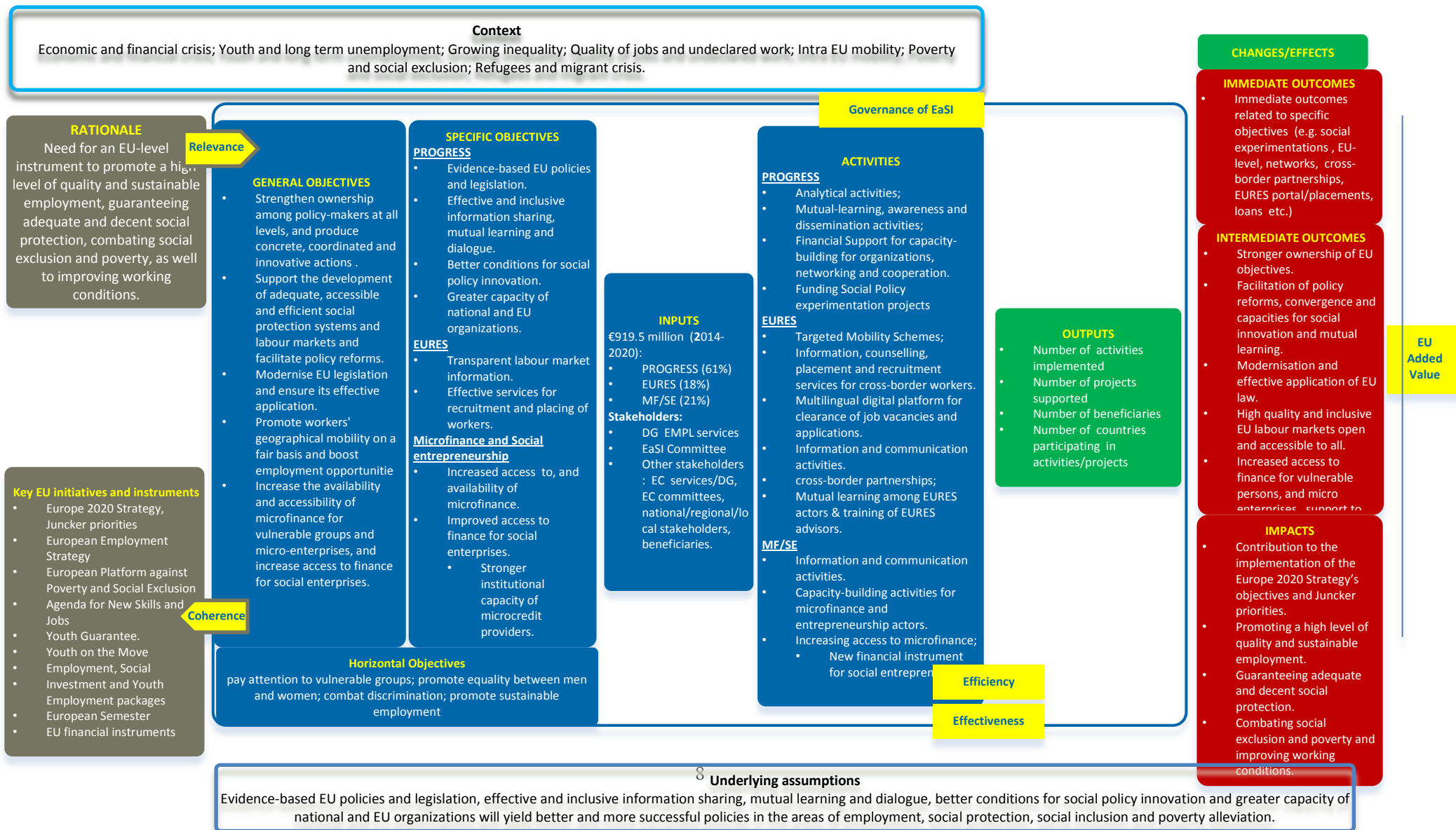
EaSI has a comprehensive **performance framework**, with regular **monitoring** and evaluation of programme implementation. A logical framework explains how EaSI is expected to achieve results and impacts, laying out the process in detail from inputs to outputs and outcomes. It also involves a set of key performance indicators, a system for gathering and storing information and a methodology for analysing and disseminating information about **EaSI-funded projects and organisations**⁷. **Mid-term and ex post evaluation** is also required under the EaSI Regulation⁸. A baseline report was drafted in 2014, and the values of **key performance indicators (KPIs)** observed before the programme were taken as the baseline. The second EaSI monitoring report — published in autumn 2017 — focuses on the outputs delivered and benefits brought by the programme in 2015-2016.

⁷Two monitoring reports are available on the Europa website:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=89&langId=en&newsId=2291&furtherNews=yes> (2014) and <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=89&langId=en&newsId=2875&furtherNews=yes> (2015-2016). Eight reports presenting the projects and organisations supported by EaSI have also been published on Europa.

⁸The EaSI Regulation states: 'the Commission shall draw up an initial qualitative and quantitative monitoring report covering the first year, followed by three reports covering consecutive two-year periods'.

Figure 1: EaSI programme intervention logic



Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation

Figure 1 shows EaSI's intervention logic, which was used for the purposes of the mid-term evaluation. There are three main categories of objectives: alongside general and axis-specific objectives, there are cross-cutting objectives (i.e. paying attention to vulnerable groups, promoting equality between men and women, combating discrimination and promoting sustainable employment) which are incorporated into each programme axis and action.

The intervention logic describes the interaction between the different components of the programme in terms of inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts, and depicts the causal mechanisms or pathways through which the activities are thought to bring about the desired changes (i.e. causes and effect linkages). The outputs should lead to achieving the programme's objectives. The intervention logic also indicates the assumptions made about the political and economic cycle, and about the socioeconomic, institutional and policy environment in which the programme operates, in particular the EU2020 strategy, the Juncker Commission's priorities and the European Semester cycle of economic coordination⁹.

3. IMPLEMENTATION / STATE OF PLAY

EaSI is implemented on the basis of work programmes adopted every year. High unemployment, increased poverty rates, and increasing inequalities between EU countries and among citizens remained the core challenges and issues to be targeted by EU policies and programmes, including EaSI. Specifically, the **2014 work programme** reacted to post-crisis policy challenges such as the high rate of unemployment (especially long-term unemployment), increased poverty and social exclusion, the rise in jobless households and the rise in in-work poverty. The **2015 work programme** focused on the issues emphasised in Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker's *Political guidelines*, such as ensuring that the job-creation and social aspects of the EU are taken into consideration in the European Semester. One of the Commission's key strategies was to enhance convergence of labour markets across the euro area. Social measures were also proposed, notably to sustain welfare systems and to make sure that the most vulnerable members of society are not left behind. The main objective of EaSI's **work programme 2016** was to advance work in the areas identified as priorities in the Commission's 2016 work programme, including initiatives already planned in 2015, such as the proposal for a Council recommendation on integration of the long-term unemployed, to boost integration in the labour market and promote relevant skills.

As shown in the intervention logic (Figure 1; Section 2), the EaSI programme (2014-2020) aims to achieve nine **specific objectives** (see Figure 2) — also referred to as immediate or short-term outcomes — that are expected to contribute to the achievement of the five **general objectives** (intermediate or long-term outcomes) set out in the Regulation. The Regulation set no specific targets for each specific objective's share of funding, so the information provided below was collected only for analytical purposes in order to better understand programme spending and trends¹⁰.

⁹ In 2015, the European Semester was streamlined to provide a stronger focus on employment and social performance, to improve democratic dialogue, to promote convergence by benchmarking and pursuing best practices, and to support reforms using ESIF (European Structural and Investment Funds) and technical assistance (<https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/european-semester>).

¹⁰ The thematic sections are analysed and indicative shares compared in Section 5.1.3.

Figure 2: EaSI specific objectives

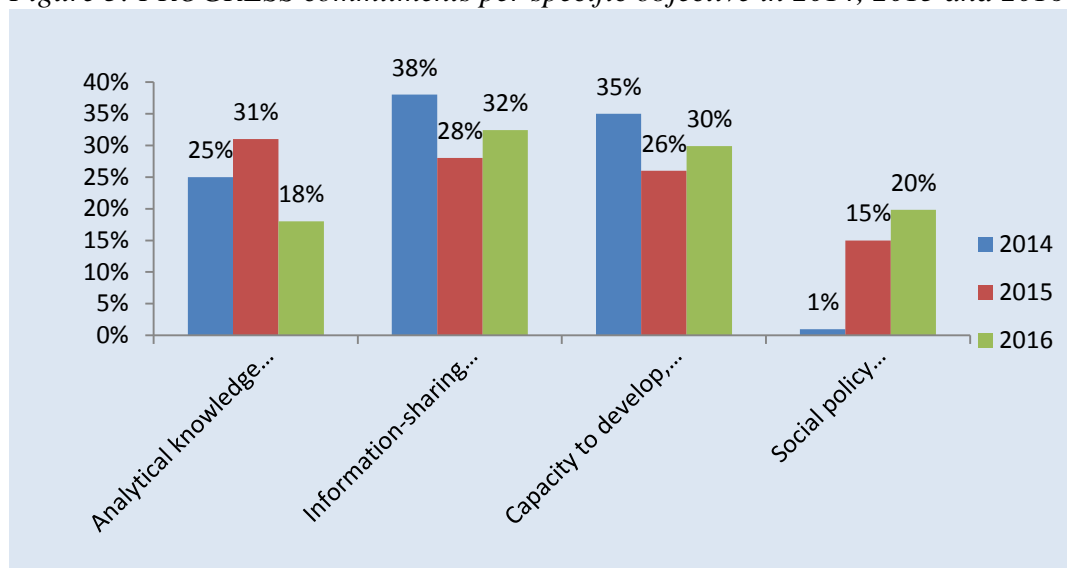
PROGRESS	EURES	Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence-based EU policies and legislation. • Effective and inclusive information sharing, mutual learning and dialogue. • Better conditions for social policy innovation. • Greater capacities of national and EU organisations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparent labour market information. • Effective provision of services for recruitment and placing of workers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better access to, and availability of, microfinance. • Better access to finance for social enterprises. • Stronger institutional capacity of microcredit providers.

Source: EaSI performance monitoring report 2015-2016

Over the entire 2014-2020 programming period, around **EUR 540 million** was allocated to **PROGRESS**, of which 41 % was planned to be committed in the first 3 years of implementation.

In 2014 (Figure 3), the bulk of PROGRESS funding was committed to supporting effective and inclusive information sharing, mutual learning and dialogue (38 %) and increasing the capacity of national and EU organisations (35 %).

Figure 3: PROGRESS commitments per specific objective in 2014, 2015 and 2016



Source: Based on performance monitoring reports 2014 and 2015-2016

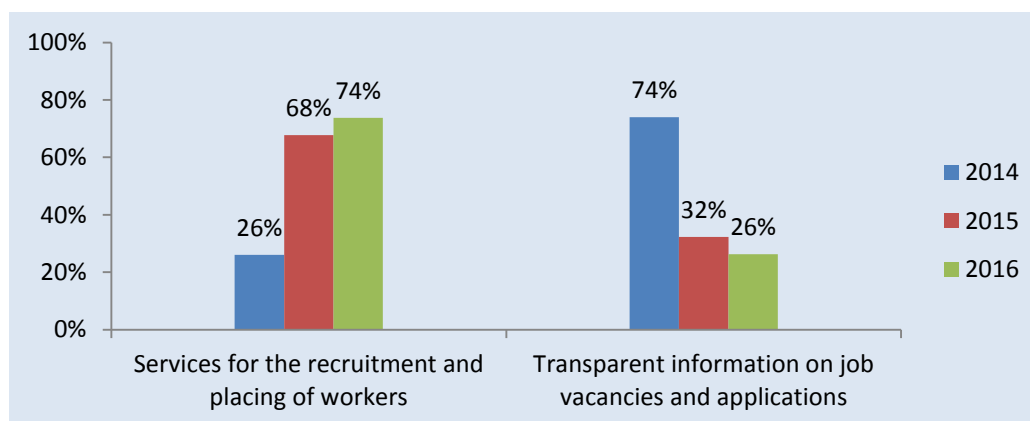
A significant share of funding (25 %) was also committed to producing policy evidence. Commitments in all the areas mentioned largely reflected initial plans. Some 1 % of the overall budget was committed to supporting social innovation. A call for proposals for social experimentation was launched in 2014; however, because the applications were still being evaluated at the end of 2014, the planned commitments were postponed to the following year.

In 2015, around 30 % of funding was committed to each of the three PROGRESS objectives, while around 15 % was committed to social policy experimentation.

In 2016, a smaller share (around 18 %) was committed to evidence-based policy, while information sharing, mutual learning and capacity building objectives each received greater support (slightly more than 30 % each). Around 20 % of funding was committed to social policy experimentation.

Over the entire 2014-2020 programming period, around **EUR 159 million**¹¹ was allocated to **EURES**, of which 40 % was planned to be committed in the first 3 years of implementation.

Figure 4: EURES commitments per specific objective in 2014, 2015 and 2016



Source: Based on performance monitoring reports 2014 and 2015-2016

In 2014, two thirds of commitments went to effective provision of services for recruitment and the placing of workers, while the rest was committed to making labour market information more transparent (Figure 4). The distribution of EURES commitments by objective was very similar in 2015 and 2016. In both years, roughly two thirds of funding was committed to services for recruiting and placing workers (including cross-border partnerships), while one third of funding was committed to ensuring that information on job vacancies and applications is made transparent for EU jobseekers and employers.

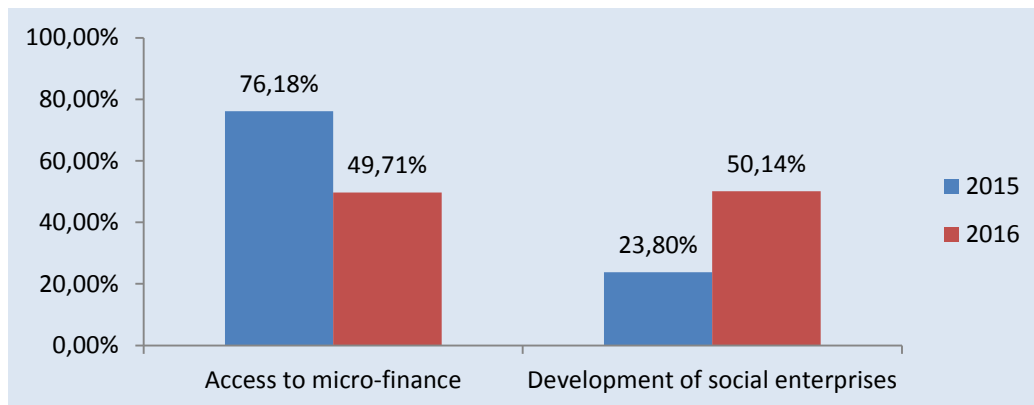
For the full 2014-2020 period, around **EUR 193 million** was allocated to **Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship**. The first year of EaSI implementation was spent negotiating the new funding instruments with the European Investment Fund (EIF), so the expenditure planned for 2014 was actually committed in the years after that. Under EaSI, the Commission entrusted the EIF with managing the following financial instruments:

- the EaSI Guarantee Instrument, to increase access to finance for social enterprises, microenterprises and vulnerable groups, and
- the EaSI Capacity Building Investments Window, to build up the institutional capacity of microcredit and social finance providers.

¹¹ See Section 5.1.3.

To apply for EaSI funding, candidates answer calls for expression of interest on the EIF website¹².

Figure 5: Commitments to Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship by specific objective in 2015 and 2016



Source: Performance monitoring report 2015-2016

Figure 5 shows commitments in 2015 and 2016 to the two main specific objectives of Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship. Work on the third specific objective, building the institutional capacity of microcredit providers, only started in 2017 and so is not covered here. In 2015, around 76 % of funding was committed to supporting access to microfinance, while in 2016 commitments to Microfinance and to Social Entrepreneurship were roughly equal. In addition, a comparatively small amount has been set aside for cross-cutting objectives, including funding for communication and publication activities and for launching the new EaSI-MicPro online platform¹³. In each of the two years, the allocations for both Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship were fully utilised.

Among the most significant benefits of EaSI between 2014 and 2016 were access to high-quality comparative analytical knowledge and sound evidence, and the opportunity to finance projects. Nearly 60 projects were awarded funding each year under the various thematic calls for proposals, including 15 social experimentation projects between 2014 and 2016. EaSI also supported capacity building for 20 EU-level NGO networks each year.

Cross-border partnerships have contributed to better job matching and placement services in cross-border regions. The EURES job mobility portal — which attracted 0.7 million visitors a month and posted more than 1 million vacancies a year — also gained importance in providing public information on job opportunities and labour market characteristics. The number of jobseekers and employers registered on the portal has more than doubled since 2014. Around 3.5 % of people contacting EURES advisers found a job each year as a direct result of this action. Around 5 000 placements are made each year thanks to ‘Your first EURES job’ projects.

By the end of 2016, around 12 000 enterprises had benefited from EaSI funding. Of those supported, 19 % were unemployed or inactive before receiving the microloan. A leverage

¹² http://www.eif.org/what_we_do/microfinance/easi/

¹³ The EaSI-MicPro online platform is an application that: (1) enables micro-entrepreneurs to easily access information on microcredit providers in their country; (2) enables microcredit providers to present information as required by the *Code of Good Conduct*; and (3) assures investors and funders that microcredit providers are operating to transparent and pan-European reporting standards. See the tool’s website: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/easi-micpro/application/>.

factor of 3 was achieved each year, meaning that EaSI provided enterprises with three times more support than the initial amount.

Incorporation of cross-cutting objectives in EaSI has also increased since 2014. The best mainstreamed issue, as seen by EaSI's stakeholders, was attention to vulnerable groups such as young people. Gender equality and non-discrimination continued to be well integrated in EaSI projects. The monitoring data also indicated improved mainstreaming of disability and accessibility aspects across EaSI programme activities.

4. METHODOLOGICAL FRAME, LIMITATIONS AND ROBUSTNESS OF FINDINGS

The mid-term evaluation covered the five criteria laid down in the **Better Regulation Guidelines**: efficiency, effectiveness, coherence, relevance and EU added value. An evaluation roadmap¹⁴ set out the evaluation mandate and the specific contract for the evaluation included terms of reference¹⁵.

The **external evaluation** was carried out by ICF and **coordinated by the Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Inclusion and Social Affairs**, with the support of an Interservice Steering Group (ISSG) including other Commission departments. The research process was carried out in four phases and triangulated a wide range of data sources to answer the evaluation questions.

Evaluation started with a number of **scoping interviews** held with key actors at EU level and analysis of secondary data, including existing evaluations, implementation data and contextual data. An **open online public consultation** was then held for 12 weeks in order to capture wider stakeholder views. An **online survey was circulated to beneficiaries** for feedback. In parallel, 15 **case studies** were conducted to capture more focused and detailed experience of the project selection process and implementation. In the course of the evaluation as a whole, a series of 40 **in-depth semi-structured interviews** with EaSI project partners and EU officials was carried out. A **focus group** of EaSI Committee members was also organised to capture their opinions on specific issues, in particular the programme's governance¹⁶.

The main limitation of this mid-term evaluation is its timing, as it took place only three years after the programme began. This **operating timeframe** was too short for many results and wider impacts to emerge and reduced the explanatory power of the analysis. Any extrapolation to the whole volume of projects running under this implementation period would therefore be risky. Few projects were finished by the end of 2016 and some started in 2015 — for instance, Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship activities. Moreover, capacity building investment only started in 2017 and so was not evaluated.

The **heterogeneity of EaSI** architecture made the evaluation even more problematic. The results and impacts of a complex programme like EaSI, operating in a multifaceted policy context, are difficult to capture: it is difficult to determine what has caused or contributed to the changes observed.

¹⁴http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/roadmaps/docs/2016_empl_010_easi_mid-term_evaluation_en.pdf, Evaluation Roadmap, November 2015.

¹⁵Call for tenders VT/2015/055.

¹⁶Annex 2 to this staff working document gives a comprehensive description of the process and methods applied in the evaluation. The full reports (open public consultation, focus group, beneficiaries survey, case studies) are available in Volumes I-IV of the *EaSI mid-term evaluation report* (November 2017). The synopsis report on the EaSI mid-term evaluation open public consultation is Annex 3 to this staff working document.

Another limitation is the **lack of benchmarks** for performance. Worldwide, there is no programme similar to EaSI in terms of size, thematic coverage and depth. The form of the programme is quite unique. It ranges from the production of policy evidence through information sharing and mutual learning, social policy innovation and experimentation, geographical and occupational mobility and services to jobseekers and employers, to facilitating access to finance for vulnerable people, microenterprises and social enterprises. EaSI's performance should thus be seen in the light of its specific role, scope and scale within a wider support system, in particular as regards its impact on EU and national or regional policy initiatives.

Finally, the relatively **low number of responses** to the open public consultation (81) and to the beneficiaries survey (159) was also limiting. For this reason, generalisations have been avoided; the public consultation and beneficiaries survey results are used in conjunction with other methods or as examples.

A number of **measures were taken to overcome all these limitations**. For example, evidence from a variety of sources was systematically compared to strengthen the findings. This included evidence gathered using quantitative and qualitative methods such as in-depth analysis of existing documentation, the open public consultation of stakeholders, the beneficiaries survey, the focus group with EaSI Committee members, interviews with key informants and case studies. This approach made it possible to collect financial and non-financial data and to produce the necessary analysis for the mid-term evaluation. In particular, multiple case studies were conducted (7 on PROGRESS, 4 on EURES and 4 on Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship) in order to capture more focused and detailed experience on completed and ongoing projects. Multiple sources of evaluative evidence were cross-checked and different tools used in conjunction to validate information across stakeholders and methodologies, to identify common and different views, and to overcome the limitations inherent in each method.

The mid-term external evaluation¹⁷ clearly indicated its data sources and gaps in data availability. All evaluation results were systematically checked against input from stakeholders. Regular presentations were made and progress checked against the evaluation's targets at EaSI Committee meetings.

5. ANALYSIS AND ANSWERS TO THE EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The mid-term evaluation sought to answer questions about five criteria: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, coherence and EU added value. The programme's governance was also examined. Understanding and addressing the key issues of accountability, transparency, participation and inclusion is crucial to ensuring that they are fully embedded in the programme's governance.

Based on the building blocks of EaSI implementation logic, each criterion was detailed with questions, judgement criteria and relevant indicators. The evaluation questions were grouped into key topics to develop a coherent framework and make the final assessment explicit¹⁸.

¹⁷ICF (2017), *Mid-term evaluation of the EU programme for employment and social innovation – EaSI*, ICF, 2017, foreseen on <https://publications.europa.eu> (Catalog number: KE-06-17-495-EN-N; ISBN: 978-92-79-77292-4; DOI: 10.2767/769704).

¹⁸The synthesis of the topics and key questions is provided in Annex 4.

5.1. Relevance

EaSI's relevance was assessed in relation to its general objectives, the specific objectives for the three axes and the allocation of resources between them.

5.1.1. Continuing relevance of the programme's general objectives

The relevance of EaSI's general objectives¹⁹ was examined in the light of the current challenging European socioeconomic context. In the aftermath of the financial and economic crisis, GDP growth has been limited, the unemployment rate has risen (8.6 % in 2016 compared to 7.2 % in 2007)²⁰, and labour markets are uneven across the EU-28, which affects long-term unemployment (4 % in 2016, almost half of total unemployment) and particularly youth unemployment (18.7 % in 2016, against 15.9 % in 2007)²¹.

The seventh edition of the annual report *Employment and social developments in Europe*²² — focusing in 2017 on intergenerational fairness and solidarity — confirms that although there has been moderate growth (real GDP growth was 1.9 % in the EU in 2016) and solid net job creation since mid-2013, the social and economic situation is far from recovering to its pre-crisis levels. So issues such as long-term unemployment, youth unemployment and inequalities are among the most pressing problems to be dealt with. Moreover, the challenges of integrating refugees and making employment more secure further strengthen the case for EaSI's relevance.

One of EaSI's core aims is **help citizens 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 unemployment²³. Encouraging workers to move for work is one way of boosting employment opportunities and reducing unemployment. For instance, although Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands have common borders, the unemployment rate in Germany in 2016 (at 4.1 %) was far lower than in Belgium (7.8 %) or the Netherlands (6 %)²⁴. This is one reason why EU action through EaSI is still relevant: to **help make the labour market more transparent**.

European Investment Fund (EIF) data for 2016 suggests that microenterprises are more prevalent in countries with high unemployment rates such as Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece, where microenterprises account for 40-60 % of employment²⁵. These numbers highlight the **importance of microenterprises in contributing to employment** in the European market and therefore the relevance of supporting them as part of EaSI.

All these socioeconomic and labour market patterns in the EU countries also make the case for the **cross-cutting objectives** linked to gender equality, non-discrimination, vulnerable groups and sustainable development.

Analytical activities and **social experimentation/innovation** featured prominently in the evaluation as activities that were highly appreciated by stakeholders. The evaluation

¹⁹See EaSI Regulation (Article 4) and logical framework (Section 1 of this staff working document).

²⁰See unemployment series: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/lfs/data/main-tables>.

²¹See unemployment series: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/lfs/data/main-tables>.

²²<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8030&furtherPubs=yes>.

²³http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics (Eurostat, 2016 unemployment statistics).

²⁴<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&pcode=tipsun20&language=en> (Eurostat, 2016, unemployment rate — annual data).

²⁵<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&pcode=tipsun20&language=en> (Eurostat, 2016, unemployment rate — annual data).

showed that measures should, however, be taken to improve communication on social innovation as promoted by PROGRESS, and perceptions of it as an issue that cuts right across the programme²⁶. Although social innovation is often a component of EaSI actions relating to cross-border partnerships, microenterprises and social enterprises, it is impossible to estimate the amounts spent on this issue in each axis and their respective impact. There is, however, broad agreement among stakeholders that without EaSI funding, a series of social policy innovations in the programme's participating countries would not have taken place (see also Section 5.5 on the programme's value added). Funding opportunities provided by EaSI enabled stakeholders to test innovative solutions to societal challenges such as ageing societies, migration, poverty and social exclusion with different partners across the EU, which might not be possible through only national funding.

Some **20 social experimentation projects** were awarded grants between 2014 and 2016 as tools to design and catalyse social policy reforms for better economic and social outcomes. The evidence collected on the INNOVCare²⁷ project, selected as a case study for the mid-term evaluation, shows its relevance in addressing the unmet social needs of people living with a rare disease and their families, which affect their dignity, autonomy and fundamental human rights. The proposed holistic, person-centred care pathway for people with rare diseases was tested through a pilot project in a Romanian county. The project team intends to consolidate the work done with financial assistance from from the European Network of Resource Centres and Case Handlers for Rare Diseases, to ensure that the network created under INNOVCare continues to operate when the project ends.

The evaluation shows that in its first implementation period, through support for **peer reviews and other mutual learning activities**, EaSI also contributed to the European Semester. The topics covered by the 2015 and 2016 mutual learning activities — e.g. labour market integration measures for young people, asylum seekers, refugees and long-term unemployed people, future skills needs — were closely aligned with priorities set in the Employment Guidelines and the country-specific recommendations as part of the European Semester²⁸. The European Semester was also supported by other EaSI-funded analytical activities, in particular the *Employment and social development report* and the *Labour force survey*. For the remaining period, EaSI could give analytical and mutual learning activities even higher priority and better link them to policymaking, including the European Semester process. Disseminating good practice from different countries more widely at operational level creates awareness of innovative practices introduced across the Member States and develops the capacity of national and local actors to deliver better services. Exchanges between countries participating in the programme enable them to develop comparable levels of expertise and ensure that a similar range of services is offered to citizens regardless of where they live.

The gradual improvement of EU economies can be further coupled with recent political events likely to impact the EU Member States in the coming years. For instance, with a large influx of refugees and immigrants, the share of vulnerable people has increased. In the next couple of years, integrating these groups will require increased employment opportunities and social care. The EaSI programme could play an important role in this context by continuing to produce policy evidence, facilitating mobility across the EU and

²⁶The concept of social policy innovation is both common to all EaSI activities and specific to the PROGRESS calls for proposals promoting social innovation and social experimentation.

²⁷This project was awarded a grant under the VP/2014/008 call for proposals for social policy innovation supporting reforms in social services. INNOVCare ran from October 2015 to October 2018. For more information, see the project's website: <https://innovcare.eu/>.

²⁸See *Performance monitoring report 2015-2016*.

enabling access to finance for different vulnerable groups should they wish to start their own microenterprise, or become employed in a microenterprise or social enterprise.

5.1.2. *The continuing relevance of the axes' specific objectives*

The analysis of the programme's general objectives was complemented by evaluation of the three axes' specific objectives (see Section 1 — Figure 1 and Section 3 — Figure 2).

The evidence gathered shows that **PROGRESS** remains relevant in terms of its four specific objectives²⁹. Its top priorities remain tackling social exclusion and poverty, and implementing analytical, mutual learning and dissemination activities. Stakeholders are mostly aware of: (i) surveys, studies, analyses, monitoring and evaluation reports; (ii) the labour market policies database; (iii) common methodologies, classifications, micro-simulations, indicators, benchmarks and statistical data. The findings confirm that the demand for analytical, mutual learning and dissemination activities is high, particularly so for policy evidence outputs on social impact measures mapped through statistics, good practice and case studies.

On this basis, PROGRESS could continue to sustain and promote the exchange of good practices between policymakers across Member States by delivering mutual learning, awareness raising and dissemination activities, and training. The analytical tools, dissemination events and innovative projects should continue to focus on vulnerable groups, but also on cross-cutting issues like gender equality. PROGRESS should continue to support EU-level NGO networks with the aim of aligning different policy agendas across different levels of government, and support social policy innovation/experiments with a particular focus on transferability and upscaling.

The evaluation research showed that jobseekers and employers have similar needs and there is great demand for information on cross-border mobility, recruitment and placement, and for counselling activities and training. **EURES'** specific objectives³⁰ address these needs through provision of information and counselling regarding opportunities for young people and SMEs across the EU. There are currently around 2 million to 3 million job vacancies unfilled EU-wide, and unemployment is relatively high³¹. This, together with the fact that young people find it hard to break into the labour market, shows 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 Europeans live and work in another country³². Making labour market information and service provision about living and working conditions transparent across the EU appears essential to help them find work.

The evidence gathered shows that EURES' objectives continue to be relevant to increasing the transparency of the labour markets in the EU and making them accessible to workers and employers. In this respect, the EURES portal is gaining importance as an efficient way to share vacancies on one platform throughout Europe.

Cross-border partnerships also remain relevant, given the many commuters in cross-border regions (for example, in the cases studied this number was around 20.000 to 30.000). Cross-border partnerships provide information and counselling on opportunities

²⁹ Article 15 of the EaSI Regulation.

³⁰ Article 20 of the EaSI Regulation.

³¹ http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics.

³² *Reflection Paper on the Social Dimension in Europe*, European Commission, Luxembourg, 2017 (https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/reflection-paper-social-dimension-europe_en.pdf).

in the different labour markets and on social security systems in neighbouring countries. There are many obstacles to cross-border mobility, mainly because of lack of knowledge about working environments and social security systems in neighbouring countries. In terms of service provision, EURES is also particularly relevant to young people who qualify for specific help from ‘Your first EURES job’. This scheme allows young people, who are more likely to face difficulties accessing the labour market, to find a job; at the same time, it helps employers to fill vacancies in key occupations.

In the light of these findings, EaSI funding could help to further strengthen the role of the EURES portal and continue to deliver services targeted at specific groups (as in the case of YfEj and cross-border partnerships).

Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship addresses three specific objectives³³ through actions to make microfinance available and accessible for existing microenterprises, for vulnerable people wanting to start up a business, and for social entrepreneurs. The EIF does not provide funding directly to individuals or enterprises, but works through local financial intermediaries, such as microcredit providers, social finance, guarantee institutions and banks. It selects intermediaries that have applied under an ongoing call for expressions of interest. The application procedure considers factors such as expected impact (e.g. volumes and geographical reach), financial standing, financial capacity and operational capabilities.

The demand-driven character of these financial instruments explains why, for both microfinance and social entrepreneurship, most funding was allocated to countries with more developed markets for micro-enterprises and social enterprises. For example, in 2016, France, 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 led with three financial intermediaries each³⁴. Country coverage for social enterprises is similar, with France receiving 56 % of the budget available, followed by Spain with 15 %, Poland (13 %), the United Kingdom (9 %) and Austria (6 %).

The evaluation shows that Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship has been relevant both in terms of its general objectives and stakeholders’ needs. Existing market imperfections in both the microfinance and social enterprise markets, along with mismatches in supply and demand for finance in most participating countries, suggest the need to keep promoting financial inclusion by increasing the availability and accessibility of finance for vulnerable people. In some participating countries, underdeveloped markets for lending to social enterprises are likely to remain a key challenge to be solved so the sector can develop further.

Ensuring a larger focus on underdeveloped markets by creating incentives for financial intermediaries to apply — for instance by opening the calls for expressions of interest to a particular group of countries for a certain period — could increase the availability and accessibility of finance for vulnerable people. Furthermore, giving incentives to the financial intermediaries to attract funding to replace EIF funding in order to avoid gaps and ensure sustainability of service provision, could address gaps between supply and demand and ensure sustainability of the services’ provision. Financial intermediaries should be able to attract funding from financial institutions other than the EIF thanks to a good track record of involvement in EaSI.

³³ Article 26 of the EaSI Regulation.

³⁴ EIF. 2016. *Semi-annual operational report*.

5.1.3. Continuing relevance of resource allocation defined in the EaSI Regulation

Activities supported by EaSI are grouped in one or more thematic sections listed in Table 1, which shows the **indicative budget allocation** for each axis and indicative breakdowns of allocations between the different sections of each axis defined in the EaSI Regulation.

Table 1: The minimum indicative percentages by EaSI axis and thematic section

Axes/thematic sections	Minimum percentages
PROGRESS	61%
a. employment, in particular to fight youth unemployment	20%
b. social protection, social inclusion and reduction/prevention of poverty	50%
c. working conditions	10%
EURES	18%
a. transparency of job vacancies, applications and related information for applicants and employers	32%
b. services for the recruitment and placing of workers through the clearance of job vacancies and applications at Union level, in particular targeted mobility schemes	30%
c. cross-border partnerships	18%
Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship	21%
a. microfinance for vulnerable groups and micro-enterprises	45%
b. social entrepreneurship	45%

Source: EaSI Regulation

If warranted by either socioeconomic developments or the findings of the mid-term evaluation, the EaSI Regulation allows funds to be reallocated between axes or between individual thematic sections. This reallocation can exceed the indicative amount set under the EaSI Regulation up to 10 %. The allocation is monitored every year so the European Commission can see where to invest more in subsequent years up to 2020. Any remainder is allocated to one or more of the thematic sections or to a combination of them. ‘Social policy experimentation’ is not a thematic section, but a cross-cutting issue funded from within the EaSI thematic sections. A significant amount of EaSI funding is devoted to **fostering social innovation**, in particular through calls for proposals to support social experimentation projects³⁵.

The evaluation proposed that financial resources should be allocated more equitably and consistently between and within the thematic sections of each axis in order to increase the overall impact of the EaSI programme. The data on resource allocation must be interpreted taking into account that 2014 was the first year of EaSI implementation and

³⁵Article 14 of the EaSI Regulation states: ‘From the overall allocation for the PROGRESS axis, and within its different thematic sections, 15 % to 20 % shall be allocated to the promotion of social experimentation as a method for testing and evaluating innovative solutions with a view to up-scaling them.’

some planned activities were postponed to subsequent years, in particular under Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship.

In 2014-2016, **PROGRESS's** planned and committed funding mostly matched the share of overall funding per thematic section provided for in the EaSI Regulation. However, in 2014, the bulk of funding (71 %) was committed to employment policy, while the other thematic sections committed 39 % of planned expenditure. Compared to the two other axes, PROGRESS has a slight tendency not to commit all indicative funding, which might result in some unused funding having to be returned to the EU budget (EUR 4 million was not committed in 2015 or 2016). Some planned studies and events might even become unnecessary in a better social and economic context, which might lead the Commission to cancel planned activities and related commitments.

Overall, the amounts of funding committed in 2014-2016 were in line with the EaSI Regulation regarding the minimum proportions of funding to be allocated to different thematic sections of **EURES**. The planned commitments for the development of EURES services in 2014 were greater than the percentage set in the EaSI Regulation (42 % instead of 30 %). In terms of actual commitments, development of EURES services was the largest item (at 55 % of EURES commitments), while 'transparency of job vacancies' accounted for 43 %. No funding was committed to establishing cross-border partnerships in 2014. Quite a lot more than the minimum amount (48 % instead of 30 %) was committed in 2015 to developing services for recruiting and placing workers. In 2016, commitments in the thematic section on cross-border partnerships were slightly below the target set in the Regulation (around 16 % of the overall budget, instead of 18 %). Commitments were also lower than expected in the thematic section on the transparency of job vacancies (27 % versus 32 %). Once again, in 2016, more than the minimum indicative share of funding was committed to developing EURES services.

Activities under **Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship** got off to a strong start in 2015-2016, while its predecessor programme — the European Progress Microfinance Facility — continued until 2016. In 2015, a much larger share of funding was committed to microfinance (76 %) than to social entrepreneurship (24 %). This is understandable, since funding social enterprises was a new activity, while microfinance was well established because of its predecessor. This situation means higher funding can be expected for social entrepreneurship in subsequent years to 2020. In 2016, commitments for the two were roughly equal. Some funding — less than 1 % — was also committed to build up microfinance providers' capacity, and for communication and dissemination activities in the areas of microfinance and social entrepreneurship.

Implementation of the EaSI work programme for 2014-2016 was well in line with the EaSI Regulation and the indicative shares of funding per axis roughly matched the shares set in the Regulation. For instance, in 2015 and 2016, a slightly higher share of funding than initially planned was committed to Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship, while a somewhat lower share than planned was committed to PROGRESS³⁶.

As shown by the evaluation, the current split does not reflect the reality of the markets in terms of demand or development stage. A more developed microfinance sector, along with greater demand for microfinance funding in participating countries than for social entrepreneurship funding, could justify allocating more of the budget to Microfinance. This being the case, **a revision of the indicative budget split between Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship** could be explored in the second half of implementation.

³⁶ As stated in the EaSI Regulation, it is not necessary to reach the minimum funding targets every year; the minimum amounts set can be reached by the end of programme implementation.

Making **resource allocation more flexible across axes** would also allow more scope for transferring budgets between them when necessary. This greater flexibility in resource allocation would particularly benefit Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship. Such a shift was already considered in the ‘**Omnibus**’ **Regulation** adopted in 2018³⁷.

5.2. Effectiveness

The evaluation examined how effectively EaSI has delivered its intended outcomes and brought about change.

5.2.1. Effectiveness in achieving its objectives and generating outcomes

The evidence gathered shows that the EaSI programme as a whole has achieved good-quality outcomes, even if they are few given its short operating life so far.

The evidence collected shows that **PROGRESS** contributed to positive outcomes in terms of capacity building and uptake of analytical research outputs which have informed both the European Semester cycle and national policies. **PROGRESS** has proven to be most effective in facilitating inclusive information sharing, mutual learning activities and dialogue. It has also proven effective in developing comparative and analytical knowledge. Overall, **PROGRESS** should maintain the thematic focus on those policy themes relevant to and appreciated by stakeholders, in particular those related to employment and working conditions. For the remainder of the period, **PROGRESS** should continue to focus on activities to disseminate comparative and analytical knowledge by boosting the outreach of events and investing in analytical tools (datasets, statistics and focused studies) linked to national and EU policymaking and the needs of stakeholders (national governments, statistical offices and thematic research networks).

DG Employment started in 2014 to develop a new version of the **EURES** job mobility portal³⁸. In 2015 and 2016 new functions were added, such as automated matching of job vacancies and applications/CVs. This helped to attract a steady number of monthly visitors to the EURES portal in 2014-2016 (0.7 million)³⁹.

The number of employers registered on the EURES portal was 6 800 at the end of 2016 (compared with 5 600 at the end of 2015 and 3 000 at the end of 2014). Member States share only around half of their vacancies on the portal. In 2014 there were around 1 million vacancies registered; in 2015 there were 1.5 million, but this had fallen slightly to 1.4 million by May 2017. The number of contacts by EURES staff with jobseekers and employers rose from 947 489 in 2014 to 1 131 002 in 2016, increasing steadily. 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 2016⁴⁰.

Two calls for proposals — leading to four new ‘Your first EURES job’ projects — were issued in the evaluation period. This scheme helped to increase the number of youth job

³⁷ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32018R1046>

³⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/eures/eures-searchengine/page/main?lang=en#/simpleSearch>. EURES ‘Search for a Job’ tool is available in the 25 EU/EEA languages and users can search in any of them.

³⁹ Following a change in the web application and servers used, in line with Commission IT policy recommendations, the whole time series of data and targets had to be revised for consistency reasons. The milestone for 2017 is 0.8 monthly visits and the target for 2020 is 1 million monthly visits (see DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, *Annual Activity Report 2016* — Annex, page 96).

⁴⁰ European Commission. 2015. Single Market Scoreboard EURES. Retrieved from: 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 Advisers monthly reports.

placements from 3 433 in 2014 to 5 720 in 2016⁴¹. The evaluation revealed several challenges to project effectiveness, mainly in finding the right partners and attracting employers. The projects financed under call VP/2014/013 exceeded their target. The data analysed show that the projects already finalised had several positive impacts on the young people who benefited from YfEj funding, with 68 % of job contracts lasting more than six months, and many being permanent contracts. Given that the projects funded under call VP/2015/006 started after the evaluation period, it was not possible to evaluate their effectiveness.

The results of projects focusing on cross-border partnerships include support for the provision of services in cross-border regions and — in one project — the creation of specific cross-border info points providing information about employment opportunities and social systems in cross-border regions. The evaluation showed that the involvement of employers and employers' organisations could be further encouraged, for instance through more targeted communication activities and incentives provided directly to employers. The evaluation reveals that one particular challenge for beneficiaries of cross-border projects is that grants are made for one year. The majority of these partnerships apply each year for follow-up funding and this may create path dependency on the EU programme. Revising the implementation period and considering a longer one — 2 years at a minimum — might enable project beneficiaries to measure the effectiveness of activities carried out within the project's lifetime and to take measures to sustain it further.

The evaluation shows that **Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship** has been effective in increasing the availability of and access to finance. For instance, a series of quantitative changes were identified, such as increased lending volume, number of loans and number of beneficiaries. Thus, the number of microloans⁴² granted under Microfinance rose from 421 in 2015 to 13 021 in 2016, while 64 social enterprises received support as of 31 December 2016 under Social Entrepreneurship⁴³.

The EIF provides the EaSI guarantee and counter-guarantee to financial intermediaries with the aim of increasing the availability of microfinance. By 31 December 2016, 33 contracts had been signed under Microfinance, accounting for EUR 50.3 million. These transactions alone are expected to unlock more than EUR 637 million in funding. As of 31 December 2016 the leverage factor was 3, meaning that financial intermediaries actually provided the final beneficiaries with three times more support than the funding provided by the EU. The overall leverage achieved to date is lower than the target specified in the EIF call for expressions of interest, which specify a minimum leverage factor of 5.5 for the EaSI guarantee instrument as a whole. Nonetheless, the expected leverage factor is much higher, at 12.7, and should be reached by the end of the five-year period. This suggests that the objectives of the EaSI guarantee will be surpassed by a long way.

By 31 December 2016, 7 contracts had been signed for Social Entrepreneurship. The total amount disbursed under EaSI to support social entrepreneurship was EUR 5.7 million. The majority of loans (around 90 %) were provided by the French cooperative bank La Nef⁴⁴. The target leverage factor of 5.5 was not achieved; nonetheless, the 7

⁴¹ DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, *Annual Activity Report 2016*, Annex.

⁴² For Microfinance, the target is expressed in microloans, not in final recipients.

⁴³ DG EMPL *Annual Activity Report 2016*, Annex, p. 92.

⁴⁴ La Nef implemented all activities planned for 2015-2016. They reached their goal of increasing their social loans production (an eleven-fold increase in the number of final beneficiaries receiving a loan). La

signed transactions are expected to unlock more than EUR 116 million of financing for social enterprises, which means the expected leverage factor is 12.8, well above the target leverage. EaSI support allowed financial intermediaries to provide funding to 64 social enterprises as of 31 December 2016; the average loan was EUR 89 000. Most of the funding went to social enterprises operating in wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles, followed by manufacturing and agriculture, forestry and fishing.

These quantitative effects would not have materialised or would have done so more slowly without EaSI funding, as the financial intermediaries would not have been able to offer similar products. To boost the effectiveness of the support provided, the financial intermediaries also provide mentoring and training activities for final beneficiaries. Of 5 490 final beneficiaries who reported on this issue by the end of 2016, 68 % confirmed that they received training and mentoring services from the microcredit institutions⁴⁵. Financial intermediaries could assess the impact of their activities — particularly mentoring and training activities — on a more regular basis (every 2 years for instance). This could enable the EIF to continuously assess whether the loans provided had the intended outcomes and impacts. Effectiveness in achieving objectives could be also improved by acting on a series of issues such as: delays in making the financial instruments available; flexible allocation of funds between Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship; and coherence and clarity of the *European Code of Good Conduct for Microcredit* (ECoGC)⁴⁶.

5.2.2. Effectiveness in bringing about change

The evaluation examined the extent to which the programme contributed to quantitative and qualitative changes, and the factors influencing those changes.

Attributing impacts to programme implementation is difficult, given that employment and social policies are primarily a national competence. Nevertheless, the data gathered show that several positive changes could be attributed to EaSI intervention. These include increased awareness of and improved information about EU policy efforts on social inclusion and poverty reduction; improved perceptions of cross-border employment and greater awareness among regional employers and jobseekers of cross-border opportunities. Other benefits were rapid testing and implementation of innovative measures; increased access to finance and increased capacity building opportunities in the microfinance and social entrepreneurship sectors; facilitated policy change through research, and exchange and building of advocacy capacity. There was also support for different stakeholders with contributing to formulating and implementing EU policies.

PROGRESS outputs have had a number of qualitative and quantitative effects, helping in particular to develop analytical knowledge, facilitating mutual learning and dialogue, and supporting capacity building activities. For example, the *Labour Force Survey* is in great demand among stakeholders and has a direct impact on policies. The Eurocarers network⁴⁷ contributed to the development of the new national careers strategy in the UK. The knowledge produced at EU level is also used by number of NGOs in their lobbying and advocacy work with policymakers at national and local levels. PROGRESS has also

Nef also reach out to enterprises producing healthy and/or affordable food (45.5 % of final beneficiaries at 30 September 2016) and working towards improving the quality of the environment (13.7 %).

⁴⁵ EaSI performance monitoring report 2015-2016.

⁴⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/thefunds/doc/code_bonne_conduite_en.pdf.

⁴⁷ <http://www.eurocarers.org/>

pinpointed a series of additional positive effects. For example, the Labour Law Network⁴⁸ provided valuable support to DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, and the INNOVCare project⁴⁹ partners cooperated with DG Health and Food Safety to develop an action plan and help improve services provided to people with rare diseases. The ‘Nowcasting’ model⁵⁰ is expected to be applied by Member States to assess the impact of policy reforms (e.g. the pension system).

PROGRESS has also offered major support for the effective implementation of social innovation and experimentation projects. However, the limited funding and lack of follow-up mechanisms (within EaSI or other instruments, such as the ESF) are obstacles to systematically scaling up tested social innovations. At the moment, despite the valuable information provided to policymakers, there are no examples of scaled-up interventions, which is the ultimate goal of the social policy experimentation funded by EaSI.

The evaluation shows that all the activities carried out under **EURES** (see figures in Section 5.2.1) contribute to increasing the number of placements across the participating countries and work towards the EU2020 employment objectives. The evidence collected shows that EURES is effective at improving access to job vacancies and at enhancing labour market transparency by providing information on the job mobility portal and support to jobseekers and employers via the network. For example, respondents to the open public consultation and to the beneficiaries survey believe that job mobility across the EU has become ‘fairer’ due to EURES support, as jobseekers and mobile workers are better informed about labour market conditions and social protection systems in EU Member States.

The evaluation also stated that EURES is effective in supporting cross-border partnerships and cross-border mobility. The data points to positive changes due to EURES support, for instance an improved general perception of cross-border employment, and the development of ‘welcome centres’ and ‘cross-border info points’. An example of the latter is the Information Centre at the border between Lithuania and Poland, set up under the project ‘Posting of workers’, providing services to workers from the three Baltic States. There is also increased awareness among regional employers and jobseekers of the potential of cross-border labour markets. Moreover, the preparatory action under ‘Your first EURES job’ was the basis for developing and testing the national mobility programme MobiPro-EU in Germany⁵¹.

Regarding **Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship**, the quantitative changes resulting from its activities are in its leverage effect, lending volume, the number of loans disbursed and the number of final beneficiaries served (see figures in Section 5.2.1).

Given the timing of the mid-term evaluation, the evidence for assessing the impacts of Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship was scarce. However, at the end of 2015⁵², the EIF had already signed 12 operations with financial intermediaries (11 for Microfinance and

⁴⁸ <http://www.labourlawnetwork.eu/>.

⁴⁹ INNOVCare — Innovative Patient-Centred Approach for Social Care Provision to Complex Conditions (see the case study in Volume IV of the EaSI mid-term evaluation report).

⁵⁰ Nowcasting project (see the case study in Volume IV of the *EaSI mid-term evaluation report*).

⁵¹ Since 2013, this programme has supported young Europeans in finding in-house vocational training positions and has brought them together with project providers and companies in Germany (<https://www.thejobofmylife.de/en/home.html>).

⁵² The vast majority of the availability periods allocated to financial intermediaries under EaSI had starting dates after October 2015. In addition, the operations signed by the EIF and financial intermediaries take some time to materialise.

1 for Social Entrepreneurship), indicating strong initial uptake compared with anticipated demand for the programme. Equally, at first glance the open public consultation and beneficiaries survey show positive feedback on the intended outcomes for both. Qualitative changes observed as a result of Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship implementation include: improved procedures and processes including risk management, reporting and monitoring; improved compliance with the ECoGC; a greater range of provision, with the creation of new financial products; improved portfolio quality by using clear criteria; and a growing interest in social enterprises.

Across the EaSI programme, different factors besides the interventions themselves influence the degree of achievement observed — for example, grant duration, which is sometimes too short for developing and implementing innovative approaches and ensuring their sustainability. EURES beneficiaries expressed a need for more balanced consortia, combining countries that are experienced and those that are new to EURES projects, in order to ensure better implementation of their activities. Similarly, Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship beneficiaries pointed out that the financial intermediaries' lack of experience with micro-entrepreneurs and vulnerable groups can affect the implementation of the guarantee.

5.3. Efficiency

The evaluation questions on EaSI's efficiency were grouped and analysed in one topic, i.e. efficiency of resource allocation and the benefits accruing (relative to inputs). This topic was analysed for PROGRESS and EURES only, as the Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship activities had only just been introduced and benefits could not yet be identified (see the discussion of limitations related to timing of the mid-term evaluation in Section 4).

5.3.1. Efficiency of resource allocation and benefits accruing

Table 2 presents financial information on EaSI's performance⁵³ in terms of planned and total commitments⁵⁴ for each EaSI axis in 2014, 2015 and 2016. The accumulated commitments in 2014-2016 came to EUR 356 million, which represents 97 % of total planned commitments.

Table 2: Planned and total commitments by axis 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: Data from monitoring reports 2014 and 2015-2016

The accumulated commitments for **PROGRESS** in 2014-2016 came to EUR 206.658.435, which represents 95 % of planned commitments. PROGRESS

⁵³The administrative expenditure was not included in the mid-term evaluation that focused on the activities implemented.

⁵⁴The planned commitments represent the amounts planned per axis each year by DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. The total commitments (budgetary execution) are the sum of individual and global commitments.

produced a range of regular analytical outputs such as studies, databases, methodologies and classifications. There were also one-off outputs, such as the Classification of European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO)⁵⁵, the Labour Market Policy Database, the Mutual Information System on Social Protection Database (MISSOC), a Flash Eurobarometer on working conditions, and studies on adequate social protection for long-term care needs in an ageing society and on coping strategies for 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 analytical activities supported were the tax/benefit model EUROMOD⁵⁶, the Social Situation Monitor⁵⁷, and the development and deployment of Electronic Exchange of Social Security Information (EESSI)⁵⁸. 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, the actions EaSI supported included the development of European Statistics on Occupational Diseases and the monographs programme of the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection, managed by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC). EaSI has also funded recurring information sharing and learning activities, such as thematic days and plenary meetings of the Senior Labour Inspectors Committee (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 Organisation (ILO) and annual legal seminars. EaSI-funded evidence also contributed directly to the establishment of the European Platform on Undeclared Work in 2016.

In 2014-2016, PROGRESS also provided financial support for building up stakeholders' capacity to design and implement social experimentation. Three calls for proposals for social policy experimentation⁵⁹ were published in 2014-2016 and 20 projects were awarded funding. PROGRESS also helped up to 20 key EU-level NGO networks each year to increase their capacity to develop, promote and support the implementation of EU policies and law in the area of employment and social affairs. The networks included Caritas Europa, European Social Network, Eurocities, Eurochild, the European Anti-Poverty Network, ENSIE and Microfinance Network.

⁵⁵ EaSI also financed also ESCO hosting, reimbursement of experts and technical assistance.

⁵⁶ EUROMOD is a tax-benefit microsimulation model for the European Union that enables researchers and policy analysts to calculate and compare 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/>).

⁵⁷ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1049&langId=en>.

⁵⁸ EESSI is an IT system that helps social security institutions across the EU to exchange information more rapidly and securely, as required by [EU rules on social security coordination](#) (<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=869&langId=en>).

⁵⁹ The 2014 call for proposals for social experimentation aimed at promoting an integrated approach to the delivery of social services. The 7 projects financed concern social services such as childcare, long-term care and services to prevent early school leaving. The 2015 call focuses on social services for entering the labour market. The 8 projects awarded funding mainly concern employment and training services, housing, health and the provision of a minimum income. The target groups are mainly those furthest from the labour market, in particular disadvantaged young people, low-skilled migrants, Roma and mentally disabled people. The 5 projects awarded under the 2016 call aim at integrating asylum seekers, refugees and their family members into the labour market, with a strong emphasis on women.

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

Information and communication activities were funded in order to raise awareness of 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 for meeting EU objectives and priorities. Another important focus was dealing with issues such as anticipation of skills needs and analysis of skills supply and of labour market needs. PROGRESS analytical outputs were also instrumental in preparing country-specific recommendations and contributed to the implementation of the Employment Package, the Youth Employment Package and the Youth Guarantee. Much EaSI-funded evidence fed directly into key EU policy processes such as the European Semester, including texts such as the Annual Growth Survey, country-specific recommendations, employment guidelines and joint employment reports.

The accumulated commitments for **EURES** in 2014-2016 amounted to EUR 61.817.827, which represents 92 % of the planned commitments. In 2014-2016, EURES funded actions to improve the transparency of labour market information through the exchange and dissemination of information on available vacancies and applications at transnational, interregional and cross-border level.

A key tool in achieving this goal is the EURES job mobility portal, which attracts an average of 0.7 million visitors a month. By December 2016, around 250.000 jobseekers' CVs were available on the portal. The breakdown of registered jobseekers remained largely unchanged in 2016, with most coming from Italy and Spain. The occupations most often selected were waiter/waitress, language teacher, hotel receptionist and administrative assistant. At the end of 2016, a total of 6.800 companies were searching for employees through the EURES portal. Around 50 % of all national vacancies are shared on the portal.

While EURES activities 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 supporting the EURES advisers' network in providing information, counselling, placement and recruitment services for jobseekers and employers and developing targeted mobility schemes to fill job vacancies where labour market shortcomings have been identified. The EURES advisers' network has a fairly steady number of personal contacts⁶⁰ with jobseekers and employers each year (around 1 million per year).

Total commitments for **Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship** in 2014-2016 amounted to EUR 87.657.662., which represents 108 % of planned commitments⁶¹. The financial instruments for Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship were modelled on previous

⁶⁰ The average EURES adviser had 847 individual personal contacts with jobseekers and 130 contacts with employers. As a rule, around 90 % of all contacts are with jobseekers and around 10 % with employers. A total of 902 529 of personal contacts were implemented in 2016.

⁶¹ In December 2016, the Commission also launched the EaSI Capacity Building Investments Window, with the aim of building 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 not included in the mid-term evaluation.

experience with Progress Microfinance programme, so guarantees and funding are provided to financial intermediaries to incentivise them to lend money to final beneficiaries.

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

The majority of funding 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 were disbursed to final beneficiaries in France (27.5 %), Spain (20.6 %) and the Netherlands (15.6 %). The enterprises supported by Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship employed 22.328 employees: 1.168 were employed in social enterprises, the others in microenterprises supported with microfinance. Among the people supported through Microfinance window, 19 % (1.121 in total) were unemployed or inactive before receiving the microloan. EaSI focused on supporting people who are disadvantaged in accessing the conventional credit market. These included women, unemployed people, those with no education, or only primary education, young people and older people.

As concerns the management fees paid to EIB/EIF for manage the third axis financial instruments, they 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). The average fees and management costs per contract signed with financial intermediaries have decreased from EUR 210.069 in 2015 to EUR 138.751 in 2016. 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 evaluation shows that EaSI was efficient in its first implementation period. PROGRESS improved access to reliable data for policymakers at EU and national level (e.g. databases, comparative studies and tested social innovations) and EURES increased the transparency of job vacancies and offered support services for jobseekers/employers across participating countries. Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship also improved access to finance, ensured better terms and conditions for obtaining loans, increased the visibility of financial intermediaries, and improved awareness of microfinance and social entrepreneurship markets.

Analysis of the three axes reveals that while the budget allocation for PROGRESS and EURES remain sufficient, more flexible reallocation between the different strands should be enabled to cover the needs of Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship, in particular. Also, given that the programme's budget could not be increased, greater emphasis on themes where EaSI can make a difference and better thematic coherence in relation to different types of activities (e.g. social experimentation, EU-level NGO networking, cross-border cooperation, microfinance and social entrepreneurship) might be useful.

It has also emerged that EaSI funds are difficult for small participating countries to tap into: they have less capacity and knowledge than other Member States that can build on

their use of predecessor programmes and that have more resources to devote to EaSI participation. In addition, co-financing is becoming increasingly problematic for organisations, not only financially (in particular for small participating countries), but also because it is not always clear to applicants for calls for proposals, for instance, whether they are expected to contribute in labour costs or actual money.

5.4. Coherence

The evaluation questions on the coherence of EaSI were grouped in two topics for analysis: coherence accruing from merging the three previous programmes and coherence with other EU and participating countries' programmes.

5.4.1. *Coherence accruing from merging the three previous programmes*

The aim of grouping the three axes under one umbrella programme was to create synergies and achieve the common objective of promoting employment, social inclusion and labour mobility. Through building on the past success of each axis, the ultimate goal of the new programme launched in 2014 was to achieve improved coordination between activities, greater policy coherence and more effective delivery and management.

Data collected suggest that the three axes operate rather independently. Different sources (case studies and interviews) could not identify a clear impact and there was no consensus on these questions in the open public consultation or the beneficiaries survey. Stakeholders' opinions on this issue were mixed. Some of them agreed that the merger had improved the coherence of the programme, while others did not see any synergies between the three strands. Other stakeholders saw the merger as a purely administrative exercise or even believed the programme should be divided into separate programmes again. Stakeholders may have had no strong feelings on this question because they did not notice significant changes in implementation after the merger.

The evidence collected indicates that merging the three predecessor programmes has mainly administrative impacts, i.e. it rationalises the European Commission resources allocated to the programme's coordination and implementation. The evaluation also points out that one of the effects of introducing minimum indicative shares for each axis was that budgets cannot be easily moved to an axis in more demand to ensure faster deployment of funds when needed.

Nevertheless, the evaluation also found that the support provided under EaSI is more effective in some cases than in the predecessor programmes. For instance, the **synergies created between PROGRESS and EURES have resulted in calls for proposals in areas of working conditions and employment**, EU-level NGO network support and mutual learning activities. In the policy area of working conditions, EaSI and its predecessor PROGRESS funded national and transnational cooperation projects through two calls for proposals on posting of workers published in 2015 and 2016. Their aim was to enhance the implementation, application and enforcement of Directive 96/71/EC on the posting of workers where services are provided across borders. In the policy area of employment, PROGRESS has funded awareness raising, dissemination and outreach activities on Youth Guarantee offers. Two calls for proposals on this action were launched in 2015 and 2016. Moreover, mutual learning among EURES actors and training of EURES advisers, including EURES cross-border partnership advisers, are financed under PROGRESS.

PROGRESS also supports **Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship by funding policy evidence activities, information sharing and mutual learning, and support for actors in the microfinance sector** (e.g. the European Microfinance Network, European Venture Philanthropy Association and the Microfinance Centre, and EaSI Technical Assistance for microcredit providers). EaSI Technical Assistance in particular offers assistance to microcredit providers and business development tools for the wider microcredit sector.

EURES focuses on intra-EU labour mobility by providing information, guidance and recruitment/placement services for employers, jobseekers and citizens wishing to take advantage of freedom of movement for workers. This support covers all phases of placement, from pre-recruitment preparation to post-placement assistance. By financing these activities, EURES works towards EaSI's goal of high quality, inclusive EU labour markets accessible to all. So — using different means — **Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship and EURES both support employment** in a coherent and complementary way.

5.4.2. Coherence with other EU and national programmes

The evaluation also examined EaSI's complementarity and synergies with other EU programmes.

The data collected indicate that EaSI complements actions not only under the European structural and investment funds (ESIF), particularly the European Social Fund (ESF), but EU funds such as EURAXESS⁶², Erasmus+, Horizon 2020, COSME⁶³ and SOLVIT⁶⁴. For example, the first cycle of the 'SHARE wave 6 Croatia' project was financed by **PROGRESS** and its project team has already secured funding for the next cycle under the Horizon 2020 programme. Other projects complement EU-level initiatives by other DGs. For instance, the INNOVCare project builds on the project partners' experience in expert groups on rare diseases organised by the Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety.

EURES supports cross-border connections, with a transnational framework, whereas the ESF supports purely national activities, under national rules, so the two complement each other. They do not overlap, because ESF actions focus on supporting individual workers at national level (by providing information and services, active labour market measures) while EaSI supports the functioning of the European job search network as a whole and transparency of labour markets in general. It does this through a common training programme for staff of EURES member organisations and by developing and maintaining the European job mobility portal.

While other EU programmes such as Erasmus+ and EURAXESS encourage labour mobility, EaSI's EURES axis is the only one with a focus purely on cross-border mobility. Moreover, **EURES** supports projects that have a particular added value at EU level. Projects on services for specific target groups, like workers in cross-border regions, fall into this category. But so do projects for particular target groups that can be reached

⁶² EURAXESS — Researchers in Motion is a pan-European initiative delivering information and support services to professional researchers. Backed by the European Union and its Member States, it supports researcher mobility and career development, while enhancing scientific collaboration between Europe and the world (<https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/>).

⁶³ COSME is an European Union programme for small and medium-sized enterprises managed by DG GROWTH (<https://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/cosme/>).

⁶⁴ SOLVIT is a service provided by the national administration in each EU country and in Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. SOLVIT is free of charge.

throughout the EU under the same rules, so there is equal treatment and they have a specific logic ('Your first EURES job'). In this way, specific EaSI-funded services complement the more general information, assistance and guidance that individual countries provide to workers interested in mobility. In this area, a good example of upscaling a project started under EaSI and making it 'national' was Spain's decision to take on project activities first financed by 'Your first EURES job' and run them under a similar national programme co-funded by the ESF.

While there are many programmes funding a variety of stakeholders and target groups, **Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship** is the only one that focuses solely on financially supporting microenterprises and social enterprises. COSME, for instance, promotes entrepreneurship and seeks to improve the business environment for SMEs; but COSME and EaSI differ both in terms of their target groups and in the type and size of the funds. So the two programmes can be seen as complementary and not overlapping.

The InnovFin programme (EU Finance for Innovators)⁶⁵ offers early-stage equity investment to microenterprises, SMEs and social enterprises and so complements EaSI Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship funding. InnovFin aims to support investment in enterprises of any size (from microenterprises and small businesses to large businesses); but its main feature is its focus on research and innovation investments across the entire value chain of research and innovation. To be eligible, businesses therefore need to operate in the sectors listed under Horizon 2020. Given this restriction, InnovFin and the EaSI Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis do not overlap, but complement each other.

Nor were overlaps detected between Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship and ESF microcredit actions. For instance, the ESF Microcredit Fund in the Italian region of Campania — active between January 2014 and December 2016 — improved access to finance for young people, the unemployed, women, migrants and disadvantaged persons in a region of Italy hit hard by the economic and financial crisis. Despite its similarities with EaSI's Microfinance window, the regional focus of the ESF Microcredit Fund makes it different and not overlapping with EaSI.

By contrast, some overlap was detected with another EU regional fund providing financing to microenterprises and small enterprises, the European Fund for South East Europe (EFSE). Operating since 2007, this fund aims to provide financing to micro and small-scale enterprises, together with rural and housing loans, through qualified financial intermediaries in the South East European region⁶⁶. The fund partly overlaps with EaSI's Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship, as they both serve microenterprises by using the local financial sector to provide micro loans, and some of their target countries are the same. Nevertheless, as the main objective of EFSE is to provide 'development finance', the underlying aims of the two programmes differ, and they can be considered complementary.

Finally, no overlaps between the objectives of EaSI and the objectives of national instruments/programmes were found. In particular, the open public consultation shows a significant consensus on the importance of maintaining each type of EU instrument even where minor overlaps are identified. The evidence gathered indicates that EaSI is more complementary with national funding instruments than regional funding. Examples from

⁶⁵ InnovFin — EU Finance for Innovators' is a joint initiative launched by the European Investment Bank Group (EIB and EIF) in cooperation with the European Commission under Horizon 2020 (<http://www.eib.org/products/blending/innovfin/index.htm>).

⁶⁶ European Investment Bank. 2017. European Fund for South East Europe. 2017, 2 June. Retrieved from <http://www.eib.org/projects/loan/loan/20050436>.

PROGRESS show that interventions involving local services require greater involvement by local and/or regional authorities, in contrast with country-wide delivery. The ‘posting of workers’ projects are clear examples of the importance of having regional and national authorities involved when dealing with transnational matters.

For example, **EURES**’ coherence with national programmes could be jeopardised by the dependence that EURES funding can sometimes create for certain organisations. Indeed, they may become dependent on EU funding and eventually not use the relevant national funding. It is important that EaSI funding complements national funding and does not substitute for it.

With regard to **Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship**, EaSI funding and national/regional policies are not always consistent. This is because EaSI’s goals and actions are not always aligned with specific national and regional policies. So efforts should be made to ensure that EaSI actions do not interfere with programmes already under way, and that the EU financial instruments are complementary.

5.5. EU added value

The evaluation shows EaSI’s undeniable added value compared to what could be achieved by Member States at national, regional and local levels. EaSI is the one EU-level programme in the social field that is open to many participating countries⁶⁷ and combines: the production of comparative analytical knowledge (e.g. studies, databases, methodologies); exchange of good practices and mutual learning activities; promotion and testing of social innovations; matching and placement thanks to the combined effect of the online platform matching capabilities (EURES job portal); the roll out of targeted placement services for young workers (‘Your first EURES job’); creation of cross-border partnerships; support for social enterprises; and the provision of loans to microenterprises. EaSI support also fulfilled a vital function by enabling EU-level NGO networking and capacity building for stakeholders across the programme’s participating countries.

These findings tend to suggest that thanks to the EaSI programme, more relevant projects were supported than would have been possible through only national or other EU funding. The implications for employment, social affairs and inclusion — should the EaSI programme be discontinued — would be clearly negative. For instance, both employment opportunities and jobseekers’ intra-EU mobility would decrease, as would cooperation between the stakeholders, the availability of analytical knowledge across participating countries, access to finance and opportunities to test social innovations.

Another added value of EaSI comes from its transnational dimension: there are few equivalents in the programme’s participating countries in terms of scale and scope. The evidence gathered shows that **EURES** is able to support broader cross-border projects than is possible at national level; no other programme combines building cooperation links across borders with delivering services and information to facilitate mobility. **PROGRESS**, too, contributes to building EU-level networks and produces comparative analyses not prioritised at other levels of government, such as multi-country databases, studies, statistics, social policy experimentations, capacity building and mutual learning activities. **Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship** also appears to fill a clear gap in the

⁶⁷ Member States, candidate, pre-candidate and EFTA/EEA countries (Iceland participates in all three axes, Norway participates only in PROGRESS and EURES, Lichtenstein does not participate in EaSI at all, and Switzerland participates only in EURES, at its own expense).

supply of microfinance loans and support to social entrepreneurship in the programme's participating countries.

Nevertheless, there is strong evidence to suggest that it would be useful for organisations and individuals to learn more about the results of EaSI's activities and evidence of EaSI's impact. There is still room to improve communication on programme activities and dissemination of results, for instance by increasing the frequency and adapting the timing of information provision, providing more country-specific examples and examples of good practice, regularly updating the relevant websites, organising specific events, making information available in more languages and making content more accessible for the general public.

The evaluation found that the information on EaSI's outputs has improved in quantity and quality. In particular, some reports have been issued with systematic descriptions and analyses of project results and programme activities. Overall public knowledge and awareness of EaSI's added value could also be boosted through more in-depth meta-analysis of projects, in particular the social experimentation projects carried out as part of PROGRESS, in order to highlight the main messages and to judge the conditions for transferring or upscaling them.

5.6. Governance

The evaluation explored the composition, roles and responsibilities of the levels involved in programme governance to establish whether these are clear and sufficient for effective coordination and coherence in relation to national programmes, and for a high level of transparency and accountability to the participating countries. The evidence gathered shows that DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion's rules and communication channels ensure smooth internal coordination of the programme. So the analysis focused mainly on interaction between the European Commission and the national levels represented in the EaSI Committee. The evaluation points out that perceptions of EaSI differ across the programme's participating countries. For instance, in the countries that are major beneficiaries of the European structural and investment funds (ESIF), there is a tendency to perceive EaSI as relatively minor and difficult to access. EaSI Committee membership reflects this mix of perspectives, which may boost the group dynamic but may also be a potential source of conflicting interests at times.

The evidence — in particular from the focus group of EaSI Committee members — suggests that members' views on appropriate policy choices and the allocation of resources between the three axes are not systematically canvassed to allow participating countries to state their priorities. It also appears that EaSI Committee members are not well equipped as points of contact and 'coordinators' of EaSI at national level. Committee members do not think they are informed in good time of the publication of calls for proposals and notification of the results. Consequently, they consider themselves unable to pass on information at national level at the right time and answer questions raised by potential applicants.

These findings indicate that despite the efficient coordination of the programme, there is still room to improve EaSI's governance. For instance, holding meetings more often and including policy messages from other EU committees, especially the SPC and EMCO committees, could help to optimise inputs from the EaSI Committee. Commission staff and EaSI Committee members could feed 'information memos' to the meetings, covering examples of projects funded and recommendations that could be fed into policy cycles, including the European Semester. Also, EaSI Committee members could be informed by

email when a call for proposals or the results of an evaluation procedure are published on the Europa website.

Inviting an occasional/ad hoc expert to EaSI Committee meetings could be also useful when discussing specific technical topics. EaSI Committee members could also be encouraged to identify a number of ‘agents of change’ at national level whose role would be to ‘mine’ the results of projects and to ensure that those most likely to directly benefit from the findings are informed through direct communications, meetings, seminars and access to dedicated websites.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

This section summarises the key findings and issues for consideration in the second half of the programme’s implementation and after 2020. The conclusions cover the evaluation’s six themes: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, EU added value and programme governance.

6.1. Relevance

The mid-term evaluation finds that all the activities undertaken in the first half of the programme are in line with the goals set in the EaSI Regulation. EaSI’s original rationale and its five general objectives are still highly relevant, particularly in the current challenging socioeconomic context of the aftermath of the financial and economic crisis, with a welcome but slow recovery. The programme’s objectives are also still pertinent in light of recent political events likely to impact the EU in the coming years. For instance, with a large influx of refugees and immigrants, the share of vulnerable people has significantly increased, making their successful integration one of the highest priorities across the EU in the next couple of years and an important challenge for society.

Still, EaSI’s relevance and impacts could be improved. Analytical tools, dissemination events and innovative projects should focus more on gender issues, youth unemployment, inequalities (income, education, skills) and the fight against social exclusion, putting greater focus on transferability and the possibility of upscaling social innovations.

PROGRESS and **Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship** can play an important role in this process by prioritising social inclusion activities and access to finance for vulnerable groups. **EURES** should continue to fund projects targeted at groups with economic needs (as is the case with ‘Your first EURES job’ and cross-border partnerships).

The topics of mutual learning activities — e.g. labour market integration measures for young people, asylum seekers, refugees and long-term unemployed people, future skills needs — closely followed priorities set in the Employment Guidelines and the country-specific recommendations as part of the European Semester cycle of economic coordination between countries⁶⁸. The European Semester was also supported by other EaSI-funded analytical activities, in particular the *Employment and Social Development Report* and the *Labour Force Survey*. In its analytical activities, the programme should prioritise the exchange of good practices between policymakers across the participating countries through mutual learning, awareness raising and dissemination activities.

Similarly, disseminating good practices from different countries — including social experimentation — more widely at operational level creates awareness of innovative

⁶⁸ See *Performance monitoring report 2015-2016*.

practices introduced across the Member States and helps national and local actors to deliver better services and products. So maintaining EU-level networks is crucial to aligning the different policy agendas across different levels of government and the participating countries. In practice, more flexible resource allocation across the three programme axes (instead of the current minimum indicative percentages set in the EaSI Regulation) would allow more scope for transferring budgets between them when needed. This could particularly help Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship, where spending is demand-driven. Greater flexibility would also boost responsiveness to emerging needs (for instance new initiatives such as the European Solidarity Corps⁶⁹ and ‘New start for social dialogue’⁷⁰).

6.2. Effectiveness

Despite the limited data sets available, the evaluation presents evidence that EaSI was effective in reaching relevant stakeholders, producing desired outcomes and achieving its objectives. Hence, EaSI has greatly helped to increase awareness of EU policy on social inclusion and poverty reduction, improve perceptions of the cross-border potential for employment, rapidly test and implement innovative measures, and increase access to microfinance loans and support for entrepreneurship. EaSI also facilitated policy change through comparative research, exchanges and capacity-building, in this way helping different stakeholders to influence the formulation and implementation of socioeconomic policies in the programme’s participating countries.

PROGRESS is most effective in facilitating information sharing, mutual learning and dialogue, and in developing and disseminating comparative and analytical knowledge. One of **EURES’** more effective activities is contributing to the development of a transparent labour market. Evidence on **Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship** suggests that EaSI funding has increased the availability of and access to finance across the participating countries.

In access to finance, promoted by Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship, the evaluation shows that vulnerable groups were already an important focus. However, vulnerable groups do not represent the majority of final beneficiaries. They still encounter barriers to accessing finance. Based on the annual impact data (September 2016), on average 35 % of micro-borrowers are women, over 40 % are below 30 years old or above 50 years old, close to 20 % are unemployed persons (versus 62 % self-employed/entrepreneur) and 10 % have a migrant background (non-EU). More actions need to focus on vulnerable groups, and therefore explore the possibility of introducing minimum targets for them for the remainder of the EaSI programme. For instance, an additional amount of EUR 1 million was added in the EaSI work programme 2017 to help finance non-financial ‘business development services’ (e.g. coaching and training) for refugees and migrants. Policy-based incentives for the EIF could also be considered when designing future instruments to further promote outreach to vulnerable groups.

The evaluation pinpointed a number of ways of improving effectiveness across the programme. **PROGRESS**, while continuing to cover policy themes relevant to and appreciated by stakeholders (e.g. employment, working conditions), should improve efforts to deliver social experimentation by better embedding it in the policymaking process⁷¹. Very often, programmes in the field of social policy lack robust evidence of

⁶⁹ https://europa.eu/youth/solidarity_en

⁷⁰ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=88&langId=en&eventsId=1028>

⁷¹ The social experimentation method allows policy innovation to be tested on a small scale, to determine the impact of changes in social policy. Its significance therefore depends not only on the valuable

what works and what does not work. Social experiments may help to prevent expensive launches of untested programmes, measures or policies that fail; to provide inspiration for policymakers; and to develop comprehensive responses to particular social problems and related policy decisions, resulting in policies that would not be adopted otherwise. For **EURES**, a longer implementation period (2 years at a minimum) combined with measures to reduce the administrative burden of call management should be considered, to enable stakeholders to properly develop projects, implement them, measure their effectiveness and ensure their sustainability. For **Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship**, a stronger focus on vulnerable groups for the second EaSI implementation period is suggested, e.g. by setting a target for the share/number of vulnerable groups in calls for proposals.

6.3. Efficiency

The evaluation provides insights into the match between available means and the programme's objectives. However, due to the type of activity and the influence of conditions outside the programme's control, it proved difficult to conclude much about EaSI's efficiency. While the financial means available were sufficient to implement **PROGRESS** and **EURES** activities, the budget for **Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship** was too low.

The efficiency of **PROGRESS** could be further improved by reducing the administrative burden in the projects' award and implementation stages. Moreover, it is not always clear to applicants whether co-financing should be in labour costs or in actual cash value. This should be clarified. Regarding **EURES**, larger amounts were committed to the allocation for transparency of job vacancies than originally planned, in order to introduce new IT; however, the development of services remained relatively stable. The high uptake of the EaSI guarantee instrument under **Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship** put pressure on its budget and resulted in full utilisation of the Microfinance budget. In response to the strong demand, it is planned to use the European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI⁷²) guarantee to top-up the EaSI loan guarantee instrument in the second implementation period.

Overall, more flexible reallocation between the three axes should be enabled in order to minimise discrepancies between planned and actual commitments, and ensure optimal transfer of budgets between the three where needed.

6.4. Coherence

The overall perception of programme coherence gained through the evaluation is that the three predecessors programmes were merged under the EaSI umbrella more in response to a simplification exercise than to the stakeholders' needs. The evaluation concludes that despite efforts to build synergies between the three axes they operate quite independently. All programme activities should have a stronger focus on the potential benefits of a coherent programme structure, promoting interdisciplinary solutions to multiple challenges.

Regarding consistency with other EU programmes, EaSI is most strongly consistent with the ESF. **PROGRESS** and other EU programmes such as the ESF, Erasmus+, Horizon

information it provides, but also on whether it is used to estimate the impact of new social policies or programmes and on whether they can eventually be replicated and/or upscaled.

⁷² The EFSI is one of three mainstays of the [Investment Plan for Europe](http://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/innovation/funding/efsi_en) and aims to address market gaps and mobilise private investment (http://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/innovation/funding/efsi_en). The EFSI is managed by the European Investment Bank (EIB).

2020 and COSME complement each other in terms of specific objectives, activities and beneficiaries. Complementarity between **EURES** and the European Territorial Cooperation programme (Interreg) was also found. **Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship** also appears to be consistent with other microfinance instruments at EU level. They support either SMEs (like the COSME financial guarantee) or companies up to large caps (InnovFin), where EaSI supports only microenterprises or social enterprises. They also offer larger financing amounts (InnovFin and COSME), and greater variety in terms of financial products (like the InnovFin programme). They focus only on specific groups of beneficiaries in certain countries, while Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship addresses all participating countries.

However, despite the complementarities between EaSI and other EU instruments, further coherence is hampered by the variety of intervention logic and rules governing the funds. The co-existence of different rulebooks (the Financial Regulation for financial instruments, and the Common Provisions Regulations for structural funds) makes it challenging to tap into complementarities between different funds. Specific mechanisms have to be put in place in order to facilitate synergies between different EU funds, for instance enabling the social experimentation tested under EaSI to be scaled up or multiplied with ESF funding.

Streamlining the rules could help to maximise the potential of such complementarities and synergies. One option for ESF managing authorities could be to make a ring-fenced contribution to the centrally managed instruments to benefit from economies of scale and existing expertise. A pilot with a contribution from the Comunidad de Madrid to the EaSI guarantee is under preparation and would provide the first example of a contribution to an EU-level instrument under the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR).

At national level, no significant overlap between EaSI's objectives and those of national instruments/programmes was found. The stakeholder consultation, in particular, highlighted the consensus on the importance of maintaining each type of instrument at EU level, even if minor overlaps between the instruments at EU and national level persist. These overlaps could be overcome by further strengthening national, regional and local stakeholders' involvement in EaSI activities and by providing them with tools, transferable/comparative knowledge and relevant support for the design and implementation of interventions addressing social issues.

6.5. EU added value

EaSI produced demonstrable EU added value in terms of scope and scale, compared to national and regional support. Should EaSI be discontinued, this would have repercussions in many sectors. It would be unlikely that other national or regional funding schemes would be able to support policy experimentation across different participating countries and EU-level multidisciplinary networks, as EaSI currently does. EaSI is also the most suitable vehicle for EU-wide deliverables such as comparative databases, studies and mutual learning activities that are not top priority at other governance levels.

Furthermore, there are no other EU resources available which are specifically designed for cross-border partnerships, although the ERDF's Interreg programmes can support employment policies in cross-border regions if programmed by the Member States concerned. Nor are there EU resources specifically designed for supporting the modernisation and strengthening of online services (portals) provided by public employment services (PES) under **EURES**, although the ESF can support capacity building for the PES if programmed by the Member State concerned.

With regard to **Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship**, support for the social investment market would most likely slow down without funding from EaSI, leading to less social business across the EU and fewer employment opportunities in these sectors. EU support serves as a powerful signal to drive change at national level and helps to transfer expertise and know-how between countries. In addition, the objectives of Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship go beyond disbursing loans to vulnerable groups; its underlying logic is to address market gaps/failures and to develop market-based instruments, while supporting a broader ecosystem for social finance markets. This is in line with one of the Commission's goals in increasing the use of financial instruments to attract private finance and encourage new systemic developments in social finance markets. Indeed, the work carried out under EaSI extends beyond the management of the financial instruments; it drives a variety of measures to develop an ecosystem for social finance markets. Examples include grants to develop both the supply and demand side of social finance, but also non-financial initiatives such as the *Code of Good Conduct for Microcredit Provision*, which helps to raise standards in the microfinance sector.

Continuous efforts are, however, necessary in terms of communication on EaSI activities and dissemination of its results. Stakeholders are eager to receive further information and feel that through better dissemination they could gain great benefits, particularly from country-specific examples and good practices, updated websites and databases, a wider range of languages for communication and content that is more accessible to a broad audience. The benefits brought by the visibility and reputation of the EaSI programme as a whole, in terms of access to finance and the results of the work supported, also need to be communicated better.

6.6. EaSI governance

The evaluation concluded that programme governance and communication between stakeholders need to be improved. It emerged from the focus group with the EaSI Committee that its members would like more ownership of the allocation of funds and the programming of activities, in particular the calls for proposals.

The evaluation also found that thematic working groups would be useful to deepen EaSI Committee members' knowledge of technical matters. The occasional use of expert guidance is also viewed as potentially useful for certain topics. The evaluation also pointed out that the Committee's members do not have enough information on projects selected and implemented in their countries. More and timely information on the programming and publication of the calls for proposals needs to be shared with the Committee so that it can be easily passed to organisations that may be interested in responding to calls for proposals. Similarly, more feedback on rejected applications should be given to candidates to help them improve their applications.

Limited links between the EaSI Committee and other European Commission committees were identified. More cooperation with other committees to exchange information and more regular discussions between the EaSI Committee and the Commission are seen as necessary.

LESSONS LEARNED

- The **mid-term evaluation time frame**, as set out in the EaSI Regulation, was carried out too early. Future evaluations should be scheduled to allow more results and wider impacts to emerge and support the analysis.
- **More flexible reallocation between the three axes** should be enabled in order to minimise discrepancies between planned and actual commitments, and ensure optimal transfer of budgets between the three axes where needed. This could particularly help Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis, where spending is demand-driven.
- Regarding the programme's effectiveness: PROGRESS axis should improve efforts to deliver **social policy experimentation**; for EURES, a **longer implementation period** (2 years at a minimum) should be considered; for Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship, increasing the **focus on vulnerable groups**, e.g. by setting a target for the share/number of vulnerable groups in calls for proposals.
- Despite the complementarities between EaSI and other EU instruments, further coherence is hampered by the variety of intervention logic and rules governing the funds. Specific mechanisms have to be put in place in order to **improve synergies between different EU funds**, for instance enabling the social experimentation tested under EaSI to be scaled up or multiplied with ESF funding. Streamlining the rules could help to maximise the potential of such complementarities and synergies.
- EaSI produced demonstrable EU added value in terms of scope and scale, compared to national and regional support. It would be unlikely that other national or regional funding schemes would be able to support policy experimentation across different participating countries and EU-level NGO networks as EaSI currently does. EaSI is also an **appropriate vehicle for EU-wide deliverables** such as comparative databases, studies, mutual learning activities, support for the social investment market and cross-border partnerships.
- Improvements are necessary in terms of **communication on EaSI activities** and dissemination of its results. Stakeholders feel that through better dissemination they could gain great benefits, particularly in terms of access to finance, results, country-specific examples and good practices, updated websites and databases, a wider range of languages for communication.
- Committee members felt there was a need for **more involvement in decision-making** process and more ownership of the allocation of funds and the programming/topics of the calls for proposals.

ANNEX 1: PROCEDURAL INFORMATION

1. LEAD DG, DECIDE PLANNING/CWP REFERENCES

The mid-term evaluation for the EaSI programme was led by the Directorate-General for Employment, Inclusion and Social Affairs.

2. ORGANISATION AND TIMING

This Commission SWD is based on the outcomes of an external evaluation carried out by ICF Consulting Services⁷³ (Request for Service VT/2015/055 contract VC/2016/ 0367 under the Framework Service Contract VC/2013/0083 — Lot 1: evaluation and evaluative studies). The entire assignment was delivered within 18 months from the date of the signature of the contract (23 June 2016).

The contractor was tasked with providing a report offering answers to the evaluation questions in the form of findings, conclusions and recommendations. The report was also to be accompanied by annexes that provide information on the individual cases (case studies reports). The report draws on a series of qualitative and quantitative information and relies on a variety of sources of information to reach conclusions. To be able to come to a conclusive judgement, the contractor was also tasked with conducting all stakeholder consultations planned, submitting reports on each one of these activities and providing an overall synopsis report covering all consultation work done.

3. EXCEPTIONS TO THE BETTER REGULATION GUIDELINES

All the Better Regulation requirements were fulfilled.

4. CONSULTATION OF THE REGULATORY SCRUTINY BOARD (RSB) (IF APPLICABLE)

Not applicable.

5. EVIDENCE, SOURCES AND QUALITY

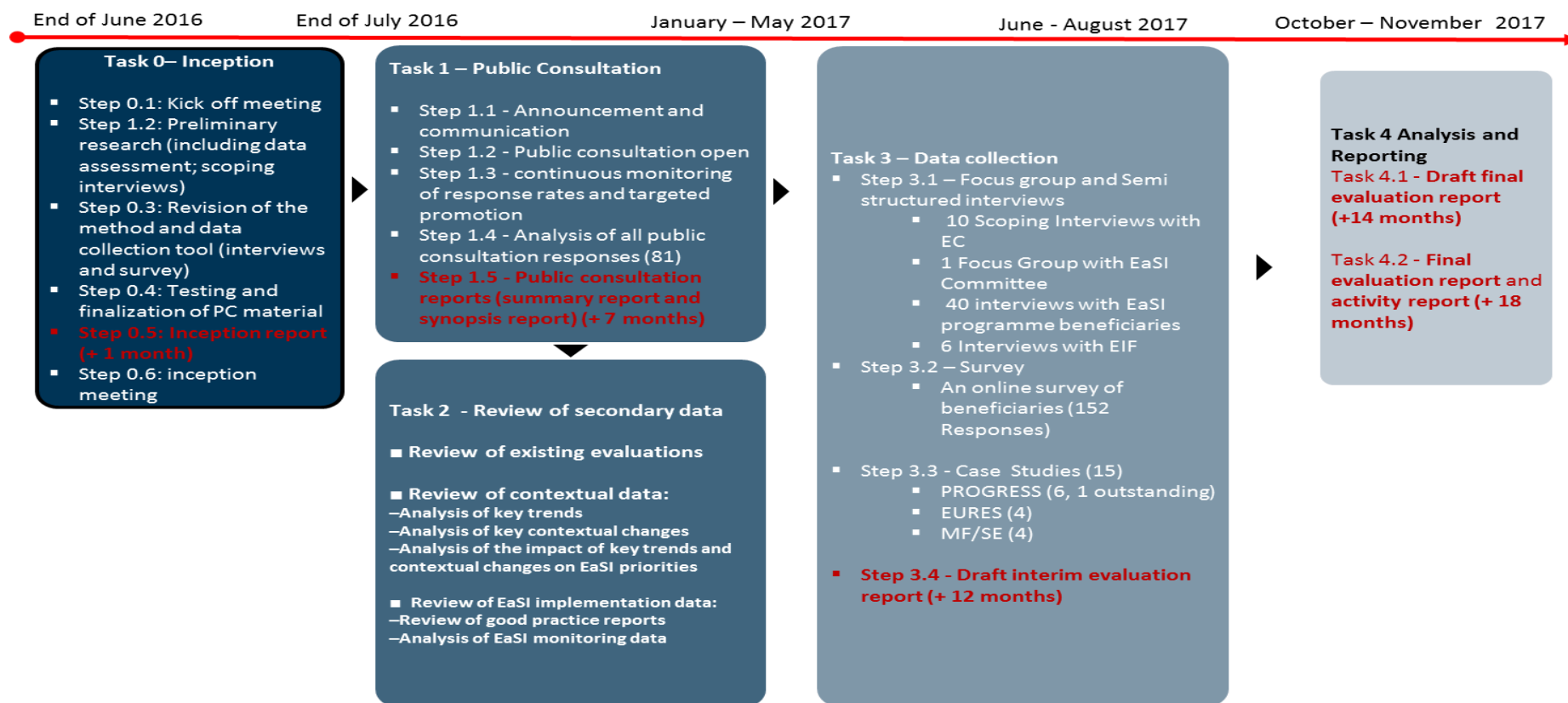
The research combined several secondary and primary sources of evidence to answer the evaluation questions: analysis of secondary data, an open public consultation, semi-structured interviews, a focus group, case studies and a survey of beneficiaries.

The evaluation had however obvious limitations. Few projects were finished in 2016, which limited the data available, while other projects started have not had the time to produce a full set of outputs and impacts. There are also few benchmarks available, as there is no programme comparable to EaSI in terms of scale and coverage. EaSI's performance should thus be seen in the context of its role in the wider support system including EU and national policy initiatives.

To overcome/mitigate these limitations, the mid-term evaluation cross-checked multiple sources of evaluative evidence, combined quantitative and qualitative methods and tools, ensured transparency of data sources and systematically checked findings against input from stakeholders.

⁷³ www.icfi.com

ANNEX 2: OVERVIEW OF THE MID-TERM EVALUATION PROCESS AND METHODS



Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation

1. Desk research

A wide variety of documents have been collected and reviewed to provide an understanding of the existing literature on the EaSI programme. They came from several internal and external sources such as existing evaluations, monitoring reports and related websites. Thus, 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. Other 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 additional documents has also been collected and includes official Regulations and Communications from the EU, brochure or practical guides carried out by NGOs.

The desk research approach involved a close cooperation between the contractor and the Commission's staff to ensure that the external evaluation team had possession of and understood all the data available relevant to the study. This variety of document types helped building an overall framework to understand all the aspects of the EaSI programme ranging from the technical procedures to the very practical side. The desks research made it possible to draw a global snapshot of the evaluation tasks and build hypotheses, which were addressed in more depth during the evaluative work.

A comprehensive documentation mapping is available in Annex 4 to this staff working document as well in the Annex 3.1 to the mid-term evaluation report.

2. Scoping interviews

A number of 11 initial scoping semi-structured interviews have been conducted in order to cover the following issues: vision of the overall programme and of its three axes, changes observed over the programming period, programme's achievements, programme governance, management and implementation, expectation from the mid-term evaluation and data availability. The main findings of the scoping interviews have been used to refine the intervention logic and the evaluation framework.

Interviews were conducted with a set of relevant stakeholders identified through prior stakeholder mapping. Stakeholders interviewed are the officials from the European Commission, country-level government officials, and private, public and civil society sectors stakeholders.

The evaluation team used a semi-structured interview approach that provided a set of questions to be tackled during the interview while allowing the interviewer to ask follow-up questions. That approach enabled the evaluation team to obtain the largest possible volume of information during each interview.

The methodology applied for conducting the focus group (interview guide, list of interviews, summary of the main evolutions, expectation and rationale per axis and for the overall programme) is detailed in the Annex 3.3 to the mid-term evaluation report.

3. Open public consultation

A key component of the mid-term evaluation of the EaSI programme was the open public consultation. Its objective was to ensure that various stakeholder groups can provide input in relation to EaSI programme implementation, as well as ensuring a high level of transparency and accountability in the mid-term evaluation. The open public consultation

had a dual role of adding to the evidence base to inform the evaluation process, as well as providing input to the future development of the programme.

Five sets of questions were developed around the evaluation criteria. All questions were optional except the self-identification ones. The online consultation questionnaire included closed questions complemented with open questions allowing the respondents to identify new issues not captured in the closed-response questions.

The questionnaire was tested with different types of stakeholders and refined according to the feedback received during the testing phase. The online 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. During this period, related promotion and dissemination activities were carried out through different European Commission and external channels (e.g. Your Voice in Europa website, DG EMPL website, social media such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, direct mailing, meetings and fora). Further, the consultation was advertised during the meetings of the Employment Committee (EMCO), Social Protection Committee (SPC), DG EMPL geographical and operational units, and EaSI beneficiaries. All were invited to disseminate information on the consultation. The open public consultation was conducted by using the EU Survey tool.

In total 81 respondents submitted a questionnaire. The in-depth analysis of the answers to the open public consultation for the EaSI programme is presented in the synopsis report available on Europa website and in Annex 2 to this staff working document: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=333&langId=en&consultId=25&visib=0&furtherConsult=yes>. The synopsis report is complemented with the overview of the responses to all the questions. All the replies were published, except where confidentiality was requested by the respondent. The synopsis report is also presented in Volume II accompanying the mid-term evaluation report. The methodology used for conducting the open public consultation (approach and questionnaires) is detailed in the Annex 3.4 to the mid-term evaluation report.

4. Focus group

A focus group was organised with EaSI Committee members in November 2016 after the regular Committee meeting. Its objective was to inform the evaluation questions concerning the functioning of the EaSI programme and the scope for adjustments.

The questions regarding the governance structure focused on the way EaSI is governed, including the composition as well the existing roles and responsibilities of the EaSI Committee and their further developments. Other series of questions concentrated on the internal coherence/complementarity of EaSI as an umbrella programme gathering together three axes and the coherence/complementarity of EaSI with other EU and national instruments. The programme's resource allocation, the costs in relation to the outcomes achieved and the communication of information on EaSI activities were also discussed.

The meeting was attended by 17 EaSI Committee Members and was moderated by the external evaluation team. The methodology applied for conducting the focus group (agenda, background information, objectives, method, questions and topics to be discussed, expected outcomes, minutes of the focus groups) is detailed in the Annex 3.2 to the mid-term evaluation report. The EaSI Committee members opinions expressed during the focus groups are summarised in the Volume IV to the mid-term evaluation report.

5. Case studies

The case studies selected (7 projects for PROGRESS, 4 projects for EURES, 4 projects for Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship) — listed in the table below — are representative in terms of objective, policy field, target group, innovativeness, geographical coverage and amount of funding provided. The selection of case studies does not allow for ‘representation’ of all facets of EaSI, however, the 15 projects selected reflects the diversity and range of EaSI activities and contexts. The purpose of the cases studies were to illustrate the ‘intervention logic’ of EaSI in practice, to inform the evaluation questions, to point out practice potentials and improvements and to complement the evidence accruing from the other methods applied.

Table: EaSI mid-term evaluation case studies

No	Axis	Case study
1		VS/2015/0249: INNOV-CARE - Innovative Patient-Centred Approach for Social Care Provision to Complex Conditions
2		VS/2015/0179. Nowcasting
3		VS/2014/0500. Eurocarers – European Association Working for Carers
4		VS/2015/0193. SHARE wave 6 in Croatia
5	PROGRESS	VS/2015/0055. Posting of workers: enhancing access to info and effective practical collaboration of administrative and social partners among 3 Baltic States
6		VS/2014/0505. PICUM. Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants
7		VS/2016/0105. Youth Guarantee "Three steps to finding a job" (currently being conducted)
1		VS/2015/0251 YFEJ by Pôle Emploi
2		VS/2015/0084 Eures in Grenzregionen Rhein-Waal (ERW), euregio-rhein-maasnord (ermn), Euregio Maas-Rhein (EMR) 2015
3	EURES	VS/2015/0062 Euradria 2015
4		VS/2015/0269 Support to cooperation on intra-EU mobility in the EEA countries (Norway)
1		Social Entrepreneurship - LA NEF
2	Microfinance / Social	Microfinance - QREDITS
3	Entrepreneurship	Microfinance – ADIE
4		Microfinance - KOMERCNI BANKA

Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation

The methodology applied for conducting the case studies (research approach, criteria for the selection of the case studies, questionnaire etc.) is detailed in the Annex 3.5 to the mid-term evaluation report. The case studies are presented integrally in Volume I accompanying the mid-term evaluation report and listed in the table below.

6. Beneficiaries survey

The online survey was designed to support the mid-term evaluation of the EaSI programme. The survey ran between 23 January and 13 February 2017 and was available in one European Commission working language (English).

Following the online launch, related promotion and dissemination activity was carried out through different EC, and external channels: EUROPA/EMPL/EaSI website; social media (Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn), communication channels of PPMI (the contractor for EaSI performance monitoring), meetings and fora, including the EaSI Committee, target organisations (e-mailing), other key stakeholders able to distribute the consultation in their networks.

The questionnaire was structured around the five compulsory criteria (relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, coherence, EU added value) according to the Better Regulation Guidelines. All questions were optional except the self-identification ones. One survey question has been omitted from the analysis due to a low response (less than 3).

To ensure a representative and high-quality response, the online survey was designed with an automated routing structure that disabled questions deemed irrelevant based respondents' answers to previous questions. This effectively shortens the length of the survey and helps minimise question fatigue.

In terms of the data presentation style, due to the often low question response, numbers, rather than percentage of respondents have been reported. The graphs do however provide a visual representation of proportions for each question category, but are labelled by frequency.

A total of 152 respondents submitted a response — 53 chose to answer the questions based on their experiences of previous project(s) they had developed with EaSI funding and 99 with respect to the EaSI programme as a whole.

The methodology applied for conducting the survey (research approach and questionnaire) is detailed in the Annex 3.6 to the mid-term evaluation report. The survey analysis report is presented in the Volume III accompanying the mid-term evaluation report.

ANNEX 3: SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION TOPICS AND QUESTIONS

Topics	Questions
<p>Relevance</p> <p><i>The extent to which the EaSI programme and its logical framework is relevant in respect to needs, problems and issues identified in target groups.</i></p>	
<p>Topic 1: continuing relevance of general objectives.</p>	<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>
<p>Topic 2: continuing relevance of the specific objectives of the three axes.</p>	<p>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 each year of the three axes continue to be relevant?</p>
<p>Topic 3: continuing relevance of resource allocation between the three axes of EaSI.</p>	<p>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?</p>
<p>Effectiveness</p> <p><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/Social Entrepreneurship (Article 26).</i></p>	
<p>Topic 4: effectiveness in generating outcomes and achieving objectives.</p>	<p>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?</p>
	<p>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?</p>
	<p>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?</p>
<p>Topic 5: effectiveness in bringing about change.</p>	<p>What have been - at this stage of the implementation - the qualitative and quantitative changes/effects of the interventions?</p>
	<p>To what extent can these changes/effects be credited to the interventions?</p>
	<p>To what extent did other different factors influence the</p>

	achievement observed?
	What have been the unintended effect of the programme?
Topic 6: effectiveness in involving stakeholders.	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?

Efficiency

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.

Topic 7: efficiency of resource allocation and benefits accruing (relative to inputs)	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?
	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)?

Coherence

To what extent to which the programme's activities have been coherent with other interventions with similar objectives.

Topic 8: coherence accruing from the merging of the three previous programmes.	To what extent did the merging of the three previous programmes PROGRESS, EURES and PROGRESS Microfinance improve EaSI internal/external consistency, complementarity and flexibility?
	What kind of synergies has the Programme developed or improved between the axes?
	What level of flexibility - both between axes and between actions – would be required in order to get better outcomes? (Here need to put forward other resource allocation models)
Topic 9: coherence with other EU programmes.	To what extent is this programme coherent and complementary (Article 7.1 of the EaSI Regulation) with other funding instruments such as the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), in particular the

	European Social Fund (ESF)?
	What kind of synergies or joint actions (Articles 6 and 7.2 of the EaSI Regulation) has the programme developed with these funding instruments?
Topic 10: coherence with national, regional and local programmes.	To what extent is national, regional and local authorities' involvement demonstrating consistency and complementarity?
	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?
EU Added Value	
<i>The additional value resulting from the programme compared to what could be achieved by Member States at national, regional and local levels.</i>	
Topic 11: EU added value.	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?
	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 were the most effective ways of communication and dissemination of the programme's results to the relevant stakeholders and the broader public?

Synopsis report of the open public consultation on the EaSI programme's mid-term evaluation

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND INCLUSION

Directorate F — Investment

Unit F3 — Programming and planning

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March 2017

1. Introduction

1.1 Objective of the online public consultation

The EaSI programme (2014-2020) supports the Member States in their efforts to implement employment and social reforms at European, national, regional and local level by means of policy coordination and sharing of best practices. EaSI also helps the European Commission to increase the policy coherence and the impact of its instruments, and thus to contribute to meeting the Europe 2020 targets.

This document sets out the key findings of the open public consultation, a key component of the EaSI programme mid-term evaluation that focuses on the programme's activity period running from January 2014 until December 2016. The scope of this evaluation covers the activities undertaken under the three axes of the EaSI programme: PROGRESS, EURES, and Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship.

The purpose of this online public consultation — that will fit into EaSI mid-term evaluation — was to ensure that all the stakeholders involved in the planning and delivery of the programme's activities along with the general public have a say on how useful EaSI has been during 2014-2016 with regard to the following criteria:

- **relevance:** assessing the extent to which the EaSI programme was relevant in respect to the needs, problems and issues identified within the target groups;
- **effectiveness:** examining the extent to which EaSI has progressed towards its objectives and its horizontal provisions, as well as those specifically defined for its three axes;
- **efficiency:** determining whether the intended outputs and outcomes of EaSI have been achieved efficiently;
- **coherence:** assessing to what extent the EaSI activities have been coherent with other EU programmes and instruments with similar objectives;
- **EU added value:** comparing the added value resulting from the EaSI programme with what could be achieved by Member States at national, regional and local levels.

Five sets of questions were developed around these evaluation criteria. All questions were optional except the self-identification ones. The online consultation questionnaire included closed questions complemented with open questions allowing the respondents to identify new issues not captured in the closed-response questions.

The online 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' website⁷⁴. During this period, related promotion and dissemination activities were carried out through different European Commission and external channels. The analysis of replies to the closed questions was complemented and illustrated with a selection of the free text comments and suggestions⁷⁵. A summary report providing an overview of the responses to all the questions has also been published on Europa website except where confidentiality was requested.

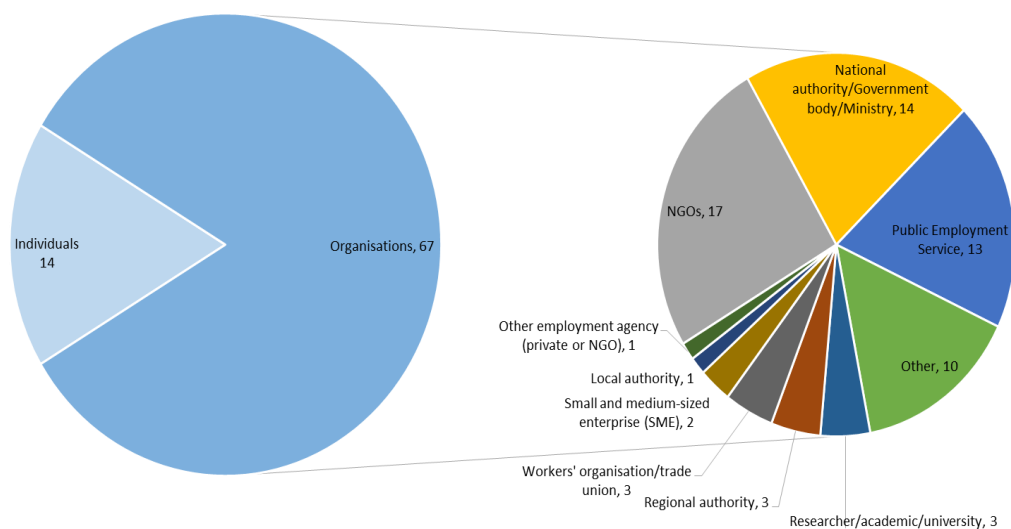
⁷⁴ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=699&consultId=25&visib=0&furtherConsult=yes>

⁷⁵ The replies to all the questions are presented integrally in the summary report annexed to the synopsis report. The replies to the open questions were translated in English when provided in another language.

1.2. Overview of the respondents

A total of 81 responses were submitted for the online public consultation. Fourteen responses were received from individuals. There were 67 responses made on behalf of organisations: 17 NGOs, 14 national authorities/government bodies/ministries, 13 public employment services, 3 regional/local authorities, 3 universities, 3 trade unions, 2 SMEs and 12 other types of organisations (see Figure 1).

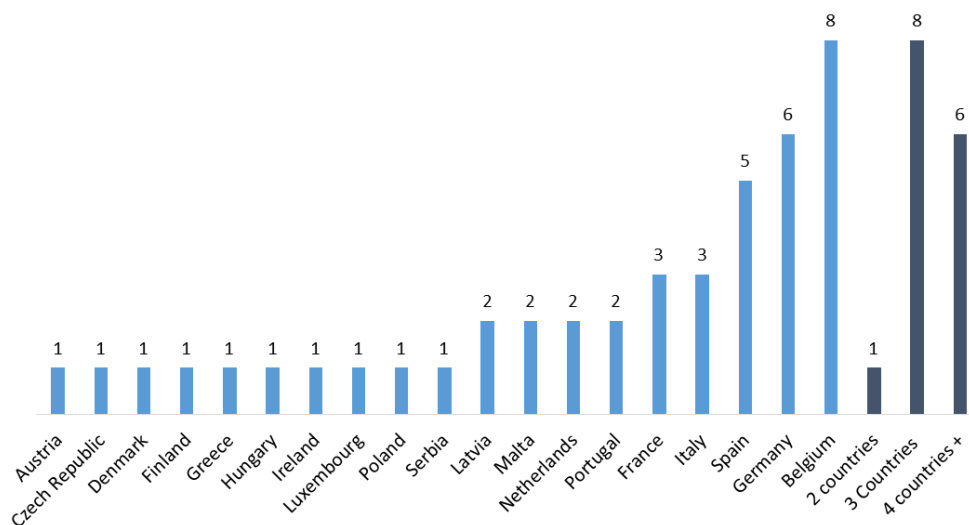
Figure 1: Total number of respondents per categories



Source: Online public consultation

58 respondents had previously been involved in the EaSI programme or its predecessor programmes. 48 of the total number of respondents specified involvement with a single axis: EURES (22), PROGRESS (21), and Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship (5).

Figure 2: Respondents per countries



Source: Online public consultation

Over a quarter of respondents (15) previously involved in EaSI or its predecessor programmes represented two or more countries (see Figure 2). The other 43 respondents answered in relation to just one country, with Belgium (8), Germany (6), Spain (5), France (3), Italy (3) being the most represented.

2. Analysis of the results by consultation topic

This section analyses the responses grouped under the five evaluation criteria and summarises the main messages from the online public consultation.

2.1. Relevance

EaSI is relevant in facilitating solutions for several challenges, in particular in supporting innovative actions in the social and employment fields

Overall, more than half of all respondents to these questions (80) agree that EaSI is relevant in facilitating solutions for each of the challenges it was designed for.

68 respondents agree that EaSI is relevant in producing innovative actions, both in social and in employment fields. This is closely followed by the provision of support to vulnerable groups (64), and ensuring coordination/collaboration between civil society and policymakers (62).

While 40 respondents believe that EaSI facilitates the access to adequate financial instruments for social enterprises, this item was ranked lowest among the challenges, largely due to several respondents (19) being uncertain of the programmes' impact on social enterprise financing. Similarly, 41 respondents think that EaSI facilitates access and availability of finance for vulnerable people and microenterprise, but 21 respondents are however uncertain of the programme's impact on these target groups.

8 respondents disagree with EaSI's relevance in relation to the development of adequate and accessible social protection systems. Similarly, but representing a somewhat more polarised view among respondents, combating long-term employment had 8 respondents disagreeing that EaSI is relevant.

EaSI main rated priorities are facilitating the exchange of good practices and the social inclusion of vulnerable groups

The respondents were also asked about the EaSI programme priorities. Facilitating the exchange of good practices and information between policymakers/Member States features prominently, with 74 of 81 respondents agreeing with this statement. Tackling social exclusion of vulnerable groups is also an important priority with 73 of 79 respondents agreeing with its ranking. 71 respondents also approve that EaSI should prioritise the employment for young people, whereas other respondents indicate that the EaSI programme should contribute to a better coordination between stakeholders when implementing the policies (65) and to the development of new policy experimentations and innovations (64).

Among the priorities with lowest relative importance, the respondents class building institutional capacity of financial intermediaries/entrepreneurship actors (40), and improving the access and the availability of financial instruments for social enterprises (47).

Some respondents to the public consultation have identified additional priorities that the EaSI programme should address. Thus, it is considered that testing innovative approaches

for the prevention of poverty and social exclusion, and improving the working conditions should be among the priorities. EaSI funding should also help building appropriate interfaces between private and third sectors, and support the capacity building and innovative measures in the Member States.

The EaSI programme should also address the social and health inequalities within and between EU Member States, and improve the cohesion and wellbeing by levelling up to the highest standards. For instance, the differences in health status have a huge impact on employability and the ability to maintain the employment, and can potentially reinforce social inequalities.

2.2. Effectiveness

PROGRESS axis effectively facilitates mutual learning, contributes to increase the youth employment and helps developing analytical knowledge

30 respondents answered in relation to the PROGRES axis activities. 25 respondents believe that PROGRESS effectively facilitated mutual learning and 24 respondents agree that this axis contributes to increase youth employment. 23 respondents also think that the PROGRESS axis contributes to develop analytical knowledge.

The respondents were least likely to agree that the activities in relation to poverty reduction and prevention are efficiently delivered under the PROGRESS axis (14 respondents). A number of respondents also disagree with the PROGRESS axis effectiveness with respect to the facilitation of policy application, reform and modernisation (6 respondents).

Some concerns have also been raised about the EaSI PROGRESS's budget and the low number of subsidised projects compared to the previous PROGRESS program (2007-2013). The respondents consider that a stronger financial allocation for grants would lead to a higher level of effectiveness of the PROGRESS axis.

A number of respondents also expressed their satisfaction with the PROGRESS axis support to the policy change through research, exchange, capacity building and engagement of non-governmental actors in influencing and implementing the EU policy guidance. In their view, even if this axis has limited financial resources, it contributes effectively to the sharing of best practices, and to promoting policy transfer and exchanges. Hence, it is suggested that the real impact of the PROGRESS axis activities should be evaluated more on policy transferability and capacity building results than on direct measurement of improved employment and social inclusion.

Moreover, it is suggested that a more strategic/targeted approach to mutual learning — focusing on the issues for which the learning potential is biggest — could have more impact. Furthermore, even if the analytical knowledge improved considerably thanks to the EaSI programme, major gaps remain; for instance there are almost no monitoring/data collection on the issues of homelessness and housing exclusion.

EURES axis is the most effective at improving the access to job vacancies information and at enhancing the labour market transparency

29 respondents answered in relation to EURES axis activities. The respondents rate the EURES's axis pan-EU efforts to improve access to information on job vacancies across the EU and to enhance the labour markets transparency across the EU as the most effective activities (each item with 24 respondents agreeing).

This is followed by 23 respondents agreeing on the effectiveness of EURES to increase the mobility of workers across the EU, to put employers and jobseekers in contact across the EU (22 respondents) and to provide high-quality support to jobseekers and employers (21 respondents). The respondents also agree that EURES contributes effectively to improve the access to guidance on how to move/to work in another Member State (20 respondents), and to increase the quality of intra-EU labour mobility services such as targeted mobility schemes as the ‘Your first EURES job’ (19 respondents).

Where the public consultation respondents think that the EURES axis activities are less effective — with 8 respondents agreeing — is in relation to its contribution to the effectiveness of other intra-EU mobility initiatives (e.g. ESF, Marie Curie, Erasmus+, national funded schemes).

Some additional issues were identified by the respondents, in particular related to the reform of the EURES axis. Hence, it is considered that the focus of the second EaSI axis has been lost in regard to the cross-border partnerships, given that the EURES’ new focus is after its reform — more on benchmarks regarding ‘matching’ and ‘placement’ and less on the quality of the work itself. Furthermore, it is considered that the issue of the support and advice provided by the EURES advisers has also been neglected, with potential negative consequences on job opportunities.

The effectiveness of the Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis needs further strengthening

10 of the 14 respondents who answered this question agree that the Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis effectively provides capacity building investment to microfinance providers, enables financial intermediaries to develop new products or loans, enables microenterprises to develop new activities and supports the individuals to start microenterprises.

9 and 7 out of 14 respondents respectively agree that the Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis facilitates the access to microfinance and supports social enterprises to develop new activities.

Less agreement is gathered around the contribution of the third axis to the effectiveness of other related initiatives (e.g. ESF or national funded schemes).

A respondent suggests that the effectiveness of activities under the Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis could be strengthened, in particular by increasing the frequency of the calls for projects aimed at social entrepreneurship, as well as by ensuring a better match between the available budgets, the amounts granted and the actions requested. Moreover, in order to multiply the positive effects of the actions carried out, the EaSI programme could also support the spin-off of networks and associations involved in the job creation, and finance technical assistance activities.

Other issues that undermine the effectiveness of the Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis have been identified by a respondent as follows: (i) important delays in making available the funding instruments and the capacity building resources; (ii) important bureaucratic and administrative burden; (iii) some lack of flexibility in paying commitment fees for the EaSI Guarantees that engenders additional costs for the beneficiaries; (iv) the application of the ECoGC⁷⁶ that lacks coherence and clarity, and shows rigidity regarding the application of some compulsory clauses.

⁷⁶ECoGC is the abbreviation for the ‘European Code of Good Conduct for microcredit provision’: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/funding/special-support-instruments/jasmine/cgc/.

The same respondent suggests that the EC services should review the management and the responsibility of the ECoGC in order to give the leadership to the microfinance networks that would like also to be more involved in the design and the implementation of EU programmes to support the microfinance sector.

Several positive changes would not have occurred in the absence of the EaSI intervention

49 respondents to the public consultation perceived positive changes that would not have occurred in the absence of the EaSI interventions and 38 respondents offered additional examples related to EaSI programme contributions in the employment and social fields. Some of these examples are related to: (i) increase in awareness and information about EU policy efforts in the area of social inclusion and poverty reduction; (ii) improved perception of the cross-border employment, and raised awareness of regional employers and of jobseekers on the cross-border potentials; (iii) broader and rapid testing and implementation of innovative measures; (iv) increased access to finance and increased capacity building opportunities in the Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship sectors; (v) a more coherent approach towards the needs of the cross-border labour market thanks to an improved dialogue and coordination of activities; (vi) facilitated policy change through research, exchange and building of advocacy capacity, and improved participation of the non-governmental actors in the formulation and implementation of EU policies.

It was equally highlighted that the EaSI programme is the only EU funding that helps civil society and other stakeholders meaningfully engage in influencing the design and implementation of EU policies and funding programmes in the social policy field. Without a deep engagement of stakeholders there would be a growing disconnection between the EU and the Member States policies, and limited opportunity for mutual learning and policy convergence across countries.

Stakeholders involvement in the EaSI programme activities needs further strengthening

When asked to comment on stakeholders' participation in the EaSI programme, 34 respondents think that the most relevant organisations had been involved in its activities' delivery. 23 respondents underline however that EaSI the programme had not involved certain key stakeholders. Among the respondents indicating a lack of stakeholders' involvement, 8 believe that a broader inclusion of workers organisations/trade unions would have contributed to greater programme effectiveness. This was closely followed by the necessity to enhance the participation of NGOs and government bodies/ministries in the EaSI programme (7 respondents each).

Some concerns have also been raised about some specific groups not being sufficiently involved. 24 respondents have put forward their opinion on which stakeholders should be more associated, i.e. target groups' organisations (youth, migrants, Roma, disabled people, jobseekers, unemployed and employers), local/regional authorities, local employment services/agencies, social partners and civil society organisations. With regard to the microfinance sector, a respondent also recommends to develop the design of

future projects in closer cooperation with the Microfinance Centre⁷⁷ and the European Microfinance Network⁷⁸.

64 respondents believe that contact with organisations working with relevant target groups (e.g. NGO, local public services) was an effective method of improving stakeholders' participation in the EaSI activities. Targeted dissemination was mentioned by 54 respondents as an effective method to better involve the target groups in the programme implementation, significantly more than the 11 respondents indicating general dissemination.

In order to improve the stakeholders' engagement, some respondents have made specific proposals. For instance, it is suggested to ensure the direct involvement of the microfinance sector networks in the implementation of the different instruments in order to have a global vision of the sector and to guarantee an optimal adaptation of the programme to the final beneficiaries' needs. Moreover, given that specific partnerships have been established between the European Commission and the microfinance networks, it is recommended to replicate these partnerships between the sector's representatives and the EIB⁷⁹, which is a fundamental partner in the implementation of the EaSI instruments.

Other additional ways of better involving the stakeholders' organisations in the program activities and enhancing their engagement in EU policymaking and programme development at local, regional and national levels were put forward, for instance launching targeted messages, organising meetings and workshops, as well as launching consultation processes in order to stimulate interest, encourage participation and attract commitment.

2.3 Efficiency

The EaSI budget is still appropriate, but should be increased in order to amplify its economic and social impacts

When asked about the efficiency of the EaSI budget, 17 respondents consider that the budget is appropriate and 41 believe that it should be increased. No respondents think that the EaSI budget should be decreased, while 23 respondents do not have an opinion on this issue.

For a number of respondents, the ambitions of the EaSI programme far exceed what the budget allows for. Especially if the current wide thematic scope of action is maintained, the budget does not allow for having much lasting impact. Even if the programme's budgetary means will 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. Thus, it is suggested to make a selection of themes on the basis of their social policy focus, rather than on their capacity to deliver quantitative results (given the reduced means of EaSI and the limited competences of the EU in the area of social inclusion).

⁷⁷ See more information on the Microfinance Centre at: <http://www.e-mfp.eu/users/microfinance-centre>.

⁷⁸ The European Microfinance Network is involved in advocacy on a wide range of issues related to microfinance, microenterprises, social and financial exclusion, self-employment and employment creation (<http://www.european-microfinance.org/>).

⁷⁹ The EIB is the European Union's bank. The EIB is the only bank owned by and representing the interests of the European Union Member States. EIB works closely with other EU institutions to implement EU policy (<http://www.eib.org/>).

It was also underlined that the budgetary allocation for the EURES axis should be sufficient in order to ensure a high quality of services and cooperation, and also to encourage the partners to make financial commitments. Funding for EURES-T⁸⁰ partnerships should be maintained in particular in regions with large cross-border worker flows. The allocation of resources should however be based on qualitative and non-budgetary criteria, given the important role of the EURES-T partnerships as European project incubators and laboratories.

Equally, more financial means would be needed to develop more social experimentations at European level and to monitor the long lasting impact of the projects, while a limited budget is perceived as an obstacle to scaling up the interventions. Also, the joint networking and exchange at the EU level between the Member States' NGOs are considered among the most stimulating EaSI programme' actions; therefore, the budget to involve new stakeholders should be ideally increased.

The financial resources should be allocated more equitably and coherently between and within the three axes

The online consultation asked respondents to express their preference with respect to six hypothetical budgetary scenarios. There was little to separate preferred budget scenarios, with 10 respondents choosing the option 80-10-10, 9 respondents preferring the scenario 33-33-33 and 9 respondents indicating the 50-25-25 percentage split between PROGRESS, EURES, Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship, respectively. More than a quarter (21 of the 79 respondents) were however uncertain and felt unable to indicate the most appropriate EaSI financial resources allocation by axis.

Among the 13 respondents who proposed their own budget split scenario, the average proportions are as follows: PROGRESS (54 %), EURES (24 %), Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship (22 %).

The respondents were also offered the possibility to comment on the different budget scenarios. They raised several points in favour of different axes. For some respondents, the PROGRESS axis is the most important in supporting the EU2020 strategy targets as well as in creating employment and improving working conditions. Also, the PROGRESS component of the EaSI programme appears as being broader and reaching more organisations than the two other axes.

For another respondent, the focus should be on the development and the expansion of the common labour market, meaning that the cross-border and the intra-EU employment should be facilitated and this can be done by enhancing the EURES axis.

Other respondents have identified some deficiencies in the allocation of financial resources for the EaSI financial instruments related to the microfinance sector. They consider that the current allocation is not sufficient in order to increase the investment in a sector that has proved to provide more impact on the final European beneficiaries than other policy approaches, for instance those promoted under the current PROGRESS axis.

A number of respondents believed that the current percentages represent a fair distribution, but increasing the budget of the programme and rebalancing the allocations between the axes would increase the overall impact of the EaSI programme.

⁸⁰The EURES network in cross-border regions may adopt a form of formal EURES cross-border partnerships, called EURES-T, or informal cross-border partnerships (<https://ec.europa.eu/eures/public/en/eures-in-cross-border-regions>).

The suggested allocations of funding within each axis mirror the actual funding proportions

The respondents were also asked to specify what would be, in their view, the most appropriate funding allocation on the basis of the different themes under each of the three axes. Table 1 summarises the respondents' proposals for this open-ended question asked axis by axis. The highest suggested budget allocation under PROGRESS — with a mean of 41 % — is for the sub-theme social protection, social inclusion and the prevention of poverty.

Despite this high budget allocation, this proposal represents a negative 9 points differential with the current funding rate. In contrast, the employment's sub-theme — with a mean of 27 % — is 7 points higher than the current PROGRESS allocation. Social experimentation/innovation sub-theme has the same mean as the current allocation and the working conditions sub-theme has a mean 6 points higher than the current 10 % allocation.

Budget allocations are more evenly distributed under the EURES axis and broadly consistent with the current allocation. Both the transparency of the job vacancies, applications and information, as well the development of services for the recruitment and placing of workers have a suggested mean allocation of 30 %, the same as the current allocation. The largest differential between current (18 %) and suggested (23 %) funding proportions under the EURES axis is with respect to cross-border partnerships. Ultimately, cross-cutting issues has a mean lower than the current allocation.

Table 1: Within each axis, what would be in your view the most appropriate allocation of funding on the basis of the different themes?

Themes under PROGRESS (%)	Mean	Min	Max	Current allocation
Social protection, social inclusion, and prevention of poverty	41	10	100	50
Employment, and in particular youth unemployment	27	0	60	20
Social experimentation	18	0	50	15-20
Working conditions	16	0	50	10
Themes under EURES (%)	Mean	Min	Max	Current allocation
Transparency of job vacancies, applications, and any related information	30	0	100	30
Development of services for the recruitment and placing of workers in employment	30	0	50	32
Cross-border partnerships	23	0	60	18
Cross-cutting issues	17	0	50	20
Themes under Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship (%)	Mean	Min	Max	Current allocation
Social entrepreneurship	46	0	100	45
Microfinance	43	0	70	45
Cross-cutting issues	12	0	40	10

Source: Online public consultation

When coming with the third EaSI axis, the social entrepreneurship section presents the highest mean budget proportion (of 46 %) across all three axes and sub-themes, while the microfinance section's suggestion budget proportion is 43 %. However, the proportions did closely mirror the actual funding proportions (45 %). Cross-cutting issues have a mean 2 points higher than the current 10 % allocation.

2.4. Coherence

The EaSI axes branding needs to be further strengthened and the budgets' transfer should be possible between the axes

A total of 48 respondents declared being familiar with the predecessor programmes of EaSI, namely PROGRESS, EURES and Progress Microfinance (2007-2013). Among them, 22 respondents believe that the merge and subsequent formulation of the EaSI programme had some impacts on its overall delivery. For instance, 17 respondents think that this merge has diminished the visibility of the branding of each previous programme, while 14 respondents believe that merging predecessor programmes has ensured more consistency, complementarity and flexibility.

Respondents also state that the merging of the previous programmes increased the transparency in terms of content and objectives of the three components, thereby improving their coherence, complementarity and synergies. This has also made it possible to avoid duplication of funding and thus ensure the optimisation of financial and human resources. Another respondent believe that every new programme can not be separated from the previous ones and that ensuring the continuity of the programmes ensure their effectiveness.

A number of respondents do not see any synergies of various EaSI components and think that there should be separate programmes again; for instance the content of the PROGRESS and Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axes are not known within the EURES cross-border partnerships.

Other stakeholders participating in the public consultation suggest that the current organisation of the programme should provide the possibility to transfer budgets between the three axes when an insufficient allocation of resources is noticed in one of them and under-used budget is identified in another (for instance lack of resources for the microcredit sector).

EaSI is coherent and complementary with other EU programmes and national programmes

A total of 78 respondents expressed their opinion on the EaSI programme's coherence and complementarity with other programmes. 45 respondents agreed that EaSI complements the actions of other EU-level (e.g. ESF, Euraxess, Erasmus+, Horizon 2020, COSME, SOLVIT) as well national-level programmes (44 respondents).

A similar number of respondents (42) think that even where there is an overlap, it is important to maintain each type of instruments at EU level. However, a number of respondents also believe that EaSI programme's objectives overlap with those of other EU-level instruments (21 respondents) and national-level instruments (20).

The respondents agreeing that EaSI complements other EU-level programmes were also asked to specify which. ESF was the most selected option with 29 respondents, followed by Erasmus+ (24) and Horizon 2020 (21).

Among the 29 respondents who felt that EaSI complements ESF, some highlighted that even though there are some complementarities between the two programmes, their objectives, functioning and impacts are not really comparable. For these respondents, ESF and the different national programmes benefit from much more important funds and therefore they could have bigger and longer impact. EaSI should not compete with these initiatives, but concentrate on transnational mutual learning, research, data collection and monitoring, as well on social innovation initiatives.

Given the limited financial resources of the EaSI programme and its objective of promoting policy transfer and exchanges, its real impact should be measured more on policy transferability and capacity building criteria rather than on direct measurement of improved employment and social inclusion. The crucial policies and measures directly tackling those issues are mostly dealt by the ESF and by the Member States initiatives.

In this context, EaSI should maintain its strategic goal of promoting policy experimentation, supporting EU-level networking and capacity building, while the ESF and the national policies should keep their focus on implementing measures tackling directly the issues of boosting employment and reducing poverty. The added value from EaSI in terms of policy innovation, policy transfer and target groups/stakeholder involvement must be shared with other policymakers and shape the future ESF and national initiatives.

Another respondent believes that the programme should also give more support to advocacy activities both at national and European level as this type of activities are not supported sufficiently from any programmes at national or EU level. However, a certain level of coordination between ESF and EaSI should be guaranteed. Equally, if the ESF funds allow for evidence-based policy recommendations to be formulated at the local/national level, it should be almost automatic to obtain financing under another instrument — such as the PROGRESS axis under EaSI — allowing completing the work done at national/regional level into policy recommendations/proposals at European level.

It is also considered that the actions co-financed under the EaSI programme could constitute a solid baseline to develop activities under the Societal Challenge 6 of the Horizon 2020 programme. Indeed, reaching high levels of quality and sustainable employment, guaranteeing adequate and decent social protection and fighting against poverty and social exclusion (EaSI programme) are just the preamble of reversing inequalities in Europe and building a better understanding of Europe's cultural and social diversity (Societal Challenge 6 of Horizon 2020 programme).

National, regional and local authorities' involvement in the delivery of EaSI activities needs further strengthening

The respondents to the online consultation were also asked to give their opinion in terms of the involvement of national, regional and local authorities in the implementation of the EaSI programme and of each of its axes.

32 respondents think that the national authorities are involved in the implementation of EaSI activities, while 27 respondents and 23 respondents respectively believe that the regional and local authorities are not involved enough in the delivery of EaSI activities. Similarly, 20 respondents think there is little to no involvement of national authorities in the implementation of this programme.

Regarding the PROGRESS axis, the respondents think that the national authorities are significantly more engaged compared to regional and local authorities. 24 respondents indicated sufficient national-level involvement in PROGRESS activities delivery,

compared to regional-level and local-level stakeholders (14 respondents, respectively). Compared to PROGRESS, a larger number of respondents (26) indicated that EURES axis benefits from a greater involvement of regional authorities in the implementation of its activities. The national involvement is rated broadly similar with 25 respondents.

The respondents rated the degree of involvement of the local, regional and national authorities in the implementation of the Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis as lower across the three authority levels compared to EURES and PROGRESS axes. This could be partially explained by a large number of respondents who selected 'Don't know/NA' as reply to this question (40 for national, 45 for regional and 43 for local levels).

2.5. European Union added value

The programme's EU added value is widely acknowledged, in particular with regards to the cross-border partnerships and the exchange of good practices

71 respondents agree that EaSI facilitate the cross-border partnership as well as the exchange of good practices and the team building of stakeholders across the EU. The respondents also believe that EU support is required to increase jobseekers mobility and to fight against social exclusion (68) as well as to improve employment opportunities across the EU (67). Most respondents (60) think that the EaSI objectives are better achieved through EU-level action rather than through varied actions by Member States.

The EaSI support to develop the institutional capacity of financial intermediaries (e.g. microcredit providers) was the least commonly agreed channel of value added, with 45 respondents. Similarly, 47 respondents consider that the EaSI support is required to provide better access to and availability of microfinance for vulnerable people and microenterprises.

Some respondents provided additional insight on the EaSI added value. For instance, it is considered that, while the main responsibility for developing labour market and social policies lies with the Member States, the EU brings added value to their actions by acting as a catalyst and facilitator to trigger national reforms in support of the EU common objectives and priorities laid down in the Europe 2020 strategy.

For other respondents, European-level NGO networks are highly supportive in disseminating the European policy developments at the national and regional level. They are the best placed to share acquired information and know-how with the national actors; thereby, they ensure an important EU added value, but also facilitate the required participation and ownership of the citizens.

Discontinuing the EaSI programme would have negative effects on many objectives, in particular in the employment field

The respondents were also asked about the potential implications in the fields of employment, social affairs and inclusion in case the EaSI programme would be discontinued.

50 respondents out of a total of 78 expressing their opinion on this issue predict that youth unemployment would increase and 47 respondents think that the jobseekers' intra-EU mobility would decrease. 43 respondents also believe that the employment opportunities would decrease, and the financial and social exclusion would increase.

13 respondents submitted additional comments suggesting negative consequences, for example a stable and coherent approach towards the needs of the cross-border labour market would be undermined and the social enterprises support would decrease.

For some respondents, the strength of the EaSI programme consists in the promotion of transnational learning. Therefore, the opportunities for transnational learning in the social fields will decrease substantially if the EaSI programme is discontinued.

Another negative consequence from a discontinuation of EaSI would be — according to another respondent — loosing the main financial instrument aimed at promoting social innovations and a better implementation of the European social policies through policy experimentation and capacity building. The main consequence would be the loss of the whole accumulated knowledge, mutual learning and potential policy improvements related in particular to the role of target groups organisations and local authorities.

Other respondents highlight that the added value of the EaSI programme lies in its ability to build partnerships and ownership for national policymaking in the fields of employment, social affairs and inclusion, to connect practice and research and to support the engagement of civil society. Should the programme discontinued it would affect negatively all these aspects as well the national policymaking processes.

The communication on EaSI activities and the dissemination of programme's results need to be improved

Finally, the respondents were asked to express their views on the communication of information and the dissemination of the EaSI programme results. 45 respondents out of the total of 81 had already heard about the results of EaSI activities and projects. Of these, 30 respondents had been made aware of EaSI impact evidence through their own organisation. 26 respondents sought the information independently, either through general internet searches and/or on the official EU websites. Newspapers were the least used as means of keeping up-to-date with EaSI's results. Among the respondents aware of the programme's activities and results, 17 are satisfied with the dissemination materials and the quality of content. 15 respondents are however dissatisfied with the dissemination activities for raising awareness on the EaSI programme.

According to the respondents who have made additional comments, most of the information concerning the European Union is disseminated only in English; therefore it is considered essential to make the information available in all 27 EU official languages. Timely dissemination of information would be also important, in particular providing more precise explanations accessible to the general public.

Also, email notifications and short country-specific reports on the outcomes of calls for proposals should be circulated regularly to the EaSI Committee members. It is equally suggested to reduce dramatically the administrative burden for applying to calls for proposals. Some respondents also highlight a need for improvement regarding the timely dissemination of information on calls for proposals. Additionally to the written replies to the questions, hotline contacts with the responsible European Commission services would be helpful for the applicants.

The information effectiveness could be also improved using the partnerships with the sectorial representative organisations. These organisations should have access to the information on a first stage in order to forward it to the interested actors on the field. The respondents also consider that there is a need for more coordination between the different organisations involved in implementing the EaSI programme, and that a joint

communication strategy should be developed and implemented using different partners' communication channels.

72 respondents suggest that it would be useful to learn more about EaSI activities and impact. The most mentioned reason is to collect ideas about projects and activities and best practices implemented at EU level. Another quoted reason is to explore potential synergies between the EaSI axes and to establish rules of cooperation between them. 36 respondents declared that an enhanced dissemination of the EaSI programme activities and results will facilitate the creation of partnerships. 48 respondents' preferred channel to receive information about EaSI programme would be via a newsletter system.

3. Other consultations activities

Another information collection tool that was indicated in the consultation strategy was the interviews with relevant stakeholders. This method was used during the overall duration of the evaluation.

11 interviews 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.

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.

3.1. Interview guide

The following interview guideline was used for the interviews and adapted to the needs of each axis.

Purpose of the interview

- Refine the evaluation framework in particular the formulation of expected outcomes and impacts;
- Identify important changes in the programme design / delivery over the programming period that are likely to have affected the type of outcomes / impacts realised as well as overall programme performance;
- Get a preliminary idea of what seems to be working well and what not and why – this will be used to refine the data collection tools;

Vision for the three axes

- What were the main reasons for bringing the three axes together under the same umbrella (EaSI)?
- What are the key issues being addressed by the EaSI programme and by its 3 axes?
- What changes does the programme aim to achieve? (EaSI+ the 3 axes)

Changes over the programming period

- What were the main changes that occurred or that are planned in the programme design / delivery over the period 2014-2020?
- Changes in priorities
- Changes in delivery mechanisms

- Changes in budgetary allocations (increase/ decrease for certain types of initiatives)

Achievements

- Is EaSI achieving its objectives so far? What makes you think so? Which are the key factors influencing programme performance, the performance of the 3 individual axes, as well as the unintended programme effects?
- Which are the main successes and challenges encountered by the programme as a whole and by each specific axis?
- Are there any areas where you think EaSI or any of the 3 axes is performing better / worse than expected?
- Participation in the programme: was it as expected? Who is participating less/ more (both in term of Member states and organizations)?
- The types of projects funded: are there differences in the type and scale of outcomes according to different types of projects?
- Do those types of projects with highest chances to yield positive outcomes get the funding?
- The quality of projects funded: is/was the quality of applications as expected (better/ worse?) – are there major differences per types of actions? Did it change over time?

Management/ implementation

- Were the management and implementation arrangements fit for purpose?
- What were the main objections at the time?
- What are main advantages/ disadvantages of the current integrated programming structure vis-à-vis the predecessor programmes?
- How is programme progress being monitored?
- What indicators are being used?
- What tools and systems are in place?
- Are these adequate?
- Can you provide information on the indicators and perhaps identify which ones are crucial and which ones are not based on the indicators attached?

Expectation from this evaluation

- Are there any gaps in knowledge about the programme which were not filled by earlier evaluations and should be met through this assignment?
- From your point of view, what are the key issues this evaluation should focus on?

3.2. Summary of the scoping interviews

This section provides a summary of the scoping interviews carried out for each axis of the EaSI programme. The interviews provided an overview of the main evolutions, the expectation and rationale of the axes, and focused in particular on certain assumptions about what works well and what is lagging behind, as well as possible implications for the evaluation.

Main evolutions, expectation and rationale

PROGRESS

Scoping interviews carried-out with European Commission officials showed that little changes occurred in the design and delivery of Progress over the period 2014-2016. Apart from the inevitable shifts in the Commission's political priorities, the only changes noted related to an increase in the amount of money allocated to the call for social innovation that went from 2 to 10 million.

EURES

Few changes in priorities were reported during the programming period as they are defined by the work programmes, there is little flexibility to deviate from them.

However, important changes are expected in relation to delivery mechanisms and reporting.

EURES beneficiaries of the Your first Eures Job activities fill out a progress monitoring report that is additional to the EaSI monitoring. For other EURES beneficiaries additional questions were introduced as an annex to the EaSI monitoring template to provide more useful information for EURES. A new template for actions under cross-border partnerships is being developed.

A new way of financing will be introduced in 2017 with projects being financed every two years. Although the budget is yearly, calls for proposals will be split between cross border partnerships and targeted mobility schemes. This initiative was launched to remedy to the lack of applicants which recently prevented to spend part of the dedicated budget.

The calls for proposals were reported by applicants as very time consuming and labour intensive, which to some extent explains the low response rate. It is worth noting that only few organisations have the required knowledge to respond to this type of calls. Therefore, when calls of proposals used to be launched at a time where projects from the previous year were still running, this prevented applicants to respond to them because of the administrative burden.

Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship

As for the two other axes, Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship undertook little significant changes of priorities during the programming period. As this is a new instrument, the programme is very much about testing several options.

Nonetheless, as for EURES, changes occurred in relation to delivery mechanisms. Under the Juncker Plan, additional budget was given for equity instruments. Initially, everything was supposed to be implemented under EaSI but some projects will be implemented under the EFSI equity platform.

Finally, changes in budgetary allocations also occurred with the combination with the European Fund for Strategic Investment which is part of the Juncker Plan. This provides additional fund that could not have been foreseen in the past. This responds to the needs as the budget was considered not to be enough compared to the high demand. Two-thirds of the total budget for the whole programming period (96 million of Euros) has already been used and solutions are now being developed to find additional funding. An agreement is being negotiated to frontload the 2019-2020 budget but this will not address the issue as they will most likely run out of budget before 2020.

Conclusion

The scoping interviews have shown that EaSI enabled to carry-out many projects which were relevant for the goals of each specific axes. Several good quality projects were delivered in this first half of the programming period and this enlightened policy design.

Issues with the administration, the reporting, funding and the lack of flexibility were mentioned as influencing the functioning of the programme. The EaSI reporting documentation should be reviewed in terms of what information is provided and what information needs to be provided for each axis.

Specific attention needs to be paid to the quality of the final projects which is not always up to expectations. In that regard, better quality mechanisms need to be implemented at different levels. This would include amongst others the drafting of better ToR, better communication with the contractor and the possibility for the Commission to have more say during the project phase, in case the project does not deliver up to expectations.

In terms of issues regarding budgeting, some initial changes are being considered and then next programming period might benefit from these initial changes.

3. CONCLUSION

The public consultation shows that EaSI is relevant in facilitating solutions for each of the challenges it was designed for, in particular in supporting innovative actions both in social and employment fields. Furthermore, it indicates that the main rated priorities of EaSI are to facilitate the exchange of good practices, to contribute to the social inclusion of vulnerable groups and to ensure the coordination/collaboration between civil society and the policymakers. Additional priorities are also identified, for instance addressing the health inequalities that could have a huge negative impact on employability and social equality.

The public consultation also points out that the PROGRESS axis most effective activities are the supporting to the mutual learning activities, the contribution to the increasing of the youth employment rate as well its support to the developing of the analytical knowledge. When commenting on the EURES axis, the most effective activities are considered the measures contributing to increasing the access to information on job vacancies and to enhancing the labour market transparency across the EU. The contribution of the third axis to employment, social and financial inclusion and poverty alleviation is also widely recognised among the policymakers. The main benefit for final recipients is an increased access to finance, and improved terms and conditions for obtaining loans.

Several observed positive changes would not have occurred in the absence of EaSI activities implemented during the first two years of the programming period, in particular

an increased awareness about EU policy efforts in the area of social inclusion and poverty reduction, rapid testing of innovative measures as well as an improved access to financing and capacity building opportunities. Also, the EaSI programme appears as the only EU programme which supports the civil society and other stakeholders to have a real role in the design and the implementation of the EU policies and funds in the social field. The positive changes brought about by EaSI are also attributed to the stakeholder engagement which is recognised as very meaningful in influencing the design and implementation of EU policies and funding programmes in the social policy field. However, it was highlighted that more groups could be involved in order to capture a full representation of the different sectors, in particular workers organisations/trade unions, Member States' multi-level authorities as well as NGOs and target groups organisations. Equally, the regional and local authorities' engagement is limited and should be strengthened in order to reinforce the coherence across the EU, national and regional/local actions.

The public consultation highlights that the EaSI budget is perceived as limited, in particular in respect of its ambitious objectives and compared with other EU programmes budgets. Thus, it is suggested that an increase of the EaSI budget and an improved coherence between the axes and the sub-themes would amplify its economic and social results. The financial allocation among the three axes as well as within each axis mirrors the current distribution. Nevertheless, it is considered that increasing the EaSI budget and rebalancing it between the three strands would increase the overall impact of the programme. In particular, the budget as it stands does not allow for scaling up the interventions and ensure the sustainability of the results achieved. PROGRESS remains however the axis that should receive the highest percentage of the budget because of its social inclusion and poverty prevention nature. The merging of the three axes has led to increased transparency, coherence, complementarity and synergies. However, there is still scope to strengthen the EaSI branding. Moreover, financial transfers between the programme's three axes should be allowed. The EaSI programme is also considered as coherent and complementary with other EU and national programmes, in particular with the European Social Funds (ESF). However, the EaSI objectives and functioning are different from those of EU-level or national programmes and should maintain its focus on transnational mutual learning, research, data collection and monitoring, as well as on social innovative initiatives.

It was also acknowledged that, while the main responsibility for developing employment and social policies lies with the Member States, the EaSI programme fulfils a vital function as catalyst and facilitator of national reforms. The EaSI resources are needed in particular for supporting the cross-border cooperation, the exchange of good practices, the stakeholders' capacity building, the jobseekers' mobility and the fight against exclusion. The EaSI programme's discontinuation would have negative effects, in particular an increased youth unemployment, limited job mobility and opportunities, and would translate in increased inequalities and social exclusion.

The public consultation shows that the preferred stakeholder's channels to receive information on the EaSI programme would be via a newsletter system. It is also considered that the communication on the EaSI programme activities and results should be improved, in particular by disseminating timelier, more precise and more accessible information to the general public in all EU official languages. Improvements in the information effectiveness could be obtained by involving the sectorial representative organisations in the communication/dissemination strategy and by mobilising the different partners' communication channels.

ANNEX 5: RELEVANT DOCUMENTS USED FOR THE MID-TERM EVALUATION

The table below maps the documents relevant to the EaSI programme and consulted during the evaluation process. They are split into four categories, namely the three axes of EaSI (PROGRESS, EURES and Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship) and a general category on the overall EaSI programme. The EaSI category contains documents that are common to several axes and concern its overall functioning.

No.	Type of document	Author(s)	Year	Title	Source	Brief description
EaSI						
1.	Regulation	European Commission	2013	Regulation (EU) no 1296/2013 of the European parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on a European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation ("EaSI") and amending Decision No 283/2010/EU establishing a European Progress Microfinance Facility for employment and social inclusion (Text with EEA relevance)	Official Journal of the European Union	Establishes the EaSI programme, its structure, general objectives, budget, monitoring and evaluation principles as well as provisions specific to programme axes.
2.	Communication	European Commission	2010	Communication from the Commission 'EUROPE 2020 - A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth'	Official Journal of the European Union	<p>A strategy to address the challenges resulting from the financial crisis with the following EU headline targets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 75 % of the population aged 20-64 should be employed. • 3% of the EU's GDP should be invested in R&D. • The "20/20/20" climate/energy targets should be met (including an increase to 30% of • emissions reduction if the conditions are

No.	Type document	of Author(s)	Year	Title	Source	Brief description
						right). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The share of early school leavers should be under 10% and at least 40% of the younger generation should have a tertiary degree. • 20 million less people should be at risk of poverty.
3.	Commission Decision	European Commission	2016	Annual work programme for grants and procurement for the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation ("EaSI") for 2016	European Commission Website	The work programme determines the details of the actions based on the 2016 budget, and its purpose is to allow the selection procedures to be launched so that individual decisions on the award of grants and contracts could be taken from the beginning of 2016.
4.	Commission Decision	European Commission	2015	Annual work programme for grants and procurement for the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation ("EaSI") for 2015	European Commission Website	The work programme determines the details of the actions based on the 2015 budget, and its purpose is to allow the selection procedures to be launched so that individual decisions on the award of grants and contracts could be taken from the beginning of 2015.
5.	Commission Decision	European Commission	2014	Annual work programme for grants and procurement for the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation ("EaSI") for 2014	European Commission Website	The work programme determines the details of the actions based on the 2014 budget, and its purpose is to allow the selection procedures to be launched so that individual decisions on the award of grants and contracts could be taken from the beginning of 2014.
6.	Annex to the Work Programme	European Commission	2014, 2015, 2016	Annex 1 to the Work Programmes: Description of the calls for proposals	European Commission website	Lists the calls for proposals to be launched under a given year.
7.	Annex to the Work Programme	European Commission	2014, 2015, 2016	Annex 2 to the Work Programmes: List of activities	European Commission Website	Lists the activities to be launched under a

No.	Type document	of	Author(s)	Year	Title	Source	Brief description
	Programme		Commission		of activities	website	given year.
8.	Report		European Commission	2014	DG EMPL Annual Activity Report	European Commission website	Provides information on achievements funded by EaSI and on the management of financial resources by DG EMPL.
9.	Report		European Commission	2016	DG EMPL Management Plan 2016	European Commission website	Provides information on specific objectives of DG EMPL funded by EaSI.
10.	Report		European Commission	2015	Performance Monitoring Report of the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation 2014	European Commission Website	Conducts a first assessment on the programmes including launch and 2014 work programme. It provides details in the financial implementation as well as a list of outputs, immediate and intermediate outcomes, and key performance indicators (KPIs).
11.	Report		European Commission	2011	Ex-ante evaluation accompanying the document 'Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a European Union Programme for Social Change and Innovation' {COM(2011) 609 final}	European Commission website	Provides a problem and needs assessment and different scenarios for EaSI.
12.	Dataset		European Commission	n/a	EaSI financial data (programming tables)	PPMI	Indicates planned and actual commitments.
13.	Dataset		European Commission	n/a	DEFIS Database	PPMI	Provides qualitative and quantitative data on all funded projects.
14.	Dataset		European Commission	n/a	Final technical reports from EaSI contractors	European Commission	Provides information on the results and impact achieved by the project.
15.	Dataset		European Commission	n/a	COLI Database	PPMI	Gathers information about all DG EMPL direct procurement procedures (not only EaSI).
16.	Dataset		Eurostat	2016	Unemployment Statistics	Eurostat	Dataset on unemployment statistics in Europe

No.	Type document	of Author(s)	Year	Title	Source	Brief description
17.	Survey Report	European Commission	2014-2015	Survey of participants in EaSI-supported events	European Commission	Stakeholder view on EaSI supported events
18.	Survey Report	European Commission	2014	Stakeholder Survey	European Commission	Stakeholder views in the three axes
19.	List of participants	European Commission	n/a	Lists of participants for EaSI-supported events	European Commission	Provides information and contact details of participants to EaSI-supported events.
20.	Inception Report	PPMI (Public Policy and Management Institute)	2016	Inception Report on the specific contract No. VC/2016/0034 “Support to the monitoring of the performance of the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (“EaSI”)”, implementing the framework contract No. VC/2013/0082	PPMI	The report contains information on the EURES axis as well as on available datasets.
21.	Brochure	European Commission	2013	EaSI New EU umbrella programme for employment and social policy	EaSI webpage on the European Commission website	Covers the establishment of the programme in a non-legal language, and highlights some of the ways in which EaSI and its broad stakeholder base can guide policy and action in contribution to the Europe 2020 targets.
22.	Guidelines and Communication	European Commission	2015	Better regulation for better results - An EU agenda	European Commission website ⁸¹	Details guidelines to be followed for conducting transparent, evidence based, quality evaluations.
23.	Communication	European Commission	2008	Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 2 July 2008 - Renewed social agenda: Opportunities,	Official Journal of the European Union	The renewed social agenda completed the Lisbon Strategy for the period 2008-2010. It proposes an integrated approach with a view to responding to transformations in the employment market and European society.

81 Additional [link](#)

No.	Type document	of Author(s)	Year	Title	Source	Brief description
				access and solidarity in 21st century Europe COM(2008) 412 final		
24.	Tender	European Commission	2016	Request for services in the context of the framework contract for the provision of services related to evaluation, evaluative studies, analysis and research work, including support for impact assessment activities: Lot n1 Identification n37 Mid-term evaluation of the EU Programme for employment and social innovation EaSI	European Commission website	Details the request for services and the scope of the mid-term evaluation.
PROGRESS						
25.	Report	ICF International	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	European Commission website	This evaluation analysed the results of PROGRESS funded actions, its delivery processes and governance mechanisms. It covers outcomes of PROGRESS funded actions, as well as its results. Last, it also provides recommendations.
26.	Report	PPMI	June and November 2015	Monitoring good practices in the areas of Employment, Social affairs and Inclusion - Examples of projects funded by DG EMPL in 2011-2012	European Commission website	This report reviews projects supported by Progress in the years 2011 – 2012 to facilitate the dissemination of results.
EURES						
27.	Website	European Commission	n/a	EURES Job Mobility Platform	European Commission website	Gathers all the relevant information about EURES such as information about jobseekers/employers, EURES internal

No.	Type document	of Author(s)	Year	Title	Source	Brief description
						meetings, legislative documents, results of customer satisfaction surveys.
28.	Dataset	Eurostat	2016	Unemployment Statistics	Eurostat	Dataset on unemployment statistics in Europe
29.	Dataset	European Commission	2015	EaSI Stakeholder Survey 2014: EURES axis	European Commission	Survey including opinions of stakeholders involved in the programme design and implementation.
30.	Report	European Commission	n/a	Reports on EURES training events	European Commission	Provides information on the types of training delivered, number of participants etc.
31.	Report	Ecorys	2014	Evaluation of the Your first EURES job preparatory action	European Commission website	Presents the results of the evaluation of 'Your first EURES job' (YfEj), a preparatory action that aims to promote the mobility of young workers aged 18-30 in the EU.
32.	Report	GHK/EPEC	2010	Ex-post evaluation of the EURES programme covering the period 2006-2008	European Commission website	Provides an assessment of the EURES operations in the period 2006-2008.
33.	Regulation	European Commission	2013	Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing 'Erasmus+': the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport and repealing Decisions No 1719/2006/EC, No 1720/2006/EC and No 1298/2008/EC	Official Journal of the European Union	The regulation establishes Erasmus+, including: education and training at all levels, in a lifelong learning perspective; youth (Youth in Action), particularly in the context of non-formal and informal learning; sport, in particular grassroots sport.
34.	Communication	European Commission	2008	Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - New Skills for New Jobs - Anticipating and matching labour market and skills needs	Official Journal of the European Union	The communication aims to enhance human capital and employability by upgrading skills and ensuring a better match between the supply of skills and labour market demand.

No.	Type document	of Author(s)	Year	Title	Source	Brief description
35.	Communication	European Commission	2007	Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 6 December 2007 - Mobility, an instrument for more and better jobs: The European Job Mobility Action Plan (2007-2010) [COM(2007) 773 final	European Commission	To address challenges with mobility the Commission proposed the Job Mobility action plan with four strands: i) improving existing legislation and administrative practices; ii) ensuring that the national, regional and local authorities promote mobility; iii) extend the scope and quality of the services provided by EURES; iv) increase citizens' awareness on mobility.
36.	Communication	European Commission	2002	Communication of 13 February 2002 from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Commission's Action Plan for skills and mobility [COM(2002) 72 final	European Commission	The communication aimed to address the need to increase the occupational mobility (i.e. changing jobs) of workers from the poorer regions to those of the wealthier regions of the European Union.
Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship						
37.	Interim evaluation	European Commission	2015	Interim Evaluation of the European Progress Microfinance Facility	European Court of Auditors Website	Progress Microfinance is effective in increasing access to finance for micro-enterprises. It has a positive influence on intermediaries lending activities. The programme is likely to be sustainable but it is too early to assess. There is potential for further synergies with other EU and national programmes. Lower levels of utilisation of the funded instruments than had been projected.
38.	Evaluation	European Court of Auditors	2015	Is EU financial support adequately addressing the needs of micro-entrepreneurs?	European Court of Auditors Website	The Court concludes that for ESF financial support to micro-entrepreneurs there are weaknesses in the programming and the design of the support and a lack of sufficient and reliable monitoring information on performance. The Court considers that these

No.	Type document	of Author(s)	Year	Title	Source	Brief description
						issues may have a negative impact on the effectiveness of EU financial support addressing the needs of micro-entrepreneurs.
39.	Website	CGAP	2016	What is Microfinance	CGAP Website	Definition of microfinance
40.	Website	European Commission	2016	Micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises: definition and scope.	Official Journal of the European Union	Definition and scope of SMEs
41.	Report	European Investment Fund	2009	Microfinance in Europe. A market overview	European Investment Fund Website	The support of the European finance sector is important in developing the market. Financial exclusion in Western Europe is concentrated among people suffering from social marginalization and poverty. There is clear evidence that microfinance is effective for job creation and social inclusion. There is a significant un-served market demand in Europe. SMEs constitute the majority of all companies across Europe. There is no common microfinance business model in Europe. Public finance is critical to provide the initial funding for start-up. Non-financial support measure are crucial.
42.	Report	European Investment Fund	2012	Progress for Microfinance in Europe	European Investment Fund Website	<p>Review of Progress Microfinance. Information available on: final beneficiary profile, EU initiatives, intermediaries business models and products.</p> <p>There are wide spectra of final beneficiaries and intermediaries and there is no common microfinance business model in Europe. The microfinance market is immature and fragmented. Microfinance has the potential to counter poverty and unemployment while</p>

No.	Type document	of Author(s)	Year	Title	Source	Brief description
						<p>fostering financial and social inclusion. Standardised, regularly available indicators to explain market developments for microfinance in Europe do not yet exist (only for Eastern Europe).</p> <p>The European microfinance market presents a dichotomy between Western Europe and Central/Eastern Europe in terms of intermediary profile, target beneficiaries, loan size, etc. Market failure due to insufficient supply of capital (debt or equity) and inadequacies on the demand side. This market failure is mainly based on asymmetric information.</p>
43.	Website	Cabinet Office	2013	Social enterprise: market trends	UK Government Webportal	There is no universal definition of a 'social enterprise'. Social enterprise are significantly more likely to have difficulties accessing finance than other SME and are less likely to eventually obtain it. The UK is considered to have the most developed social investment market in the world.
44.	Report	European Commission	2014	Study on imperfections in the area of microfinance and options how to address them through an EU financial instrument	Online EU Bookshop	<p>The ongoing crisis in several EU MS with high levels of youth unemployment calls for ongoing support of inclusive entrepreneurship and an option to (re-) enter the labour market. There is a significant market gap in the provision of microloans I most EU countries, the gap amount to 2,7 bn EUR in the EU-28. Microfinance providers need additional external funding to be able to close the gap.</p> <p>The main funding needs exist at the level of debt and equity to strengthen and develop the</p>

No.	Type document	of Author(s)	Year	Title	Source	Brief description
						capacity of their model. There is a rationale for a centrally managed facility for EU backed investments into microfinance portfolios and organisations.
45.	Report	Dr. Wolfgang Spiess-Knafl and Prof. Dr. Stephan A. Jansen	2013	Imperfections in the social investment market and options on how to address them	Online EU Bookshop	<p>Most of the analysis of social enterprises and their financing structures is based on a single-country-perspective or the comparison of a number of selected countries. The United Kingdom has the most advanced social investment market in the European Union.</p> <p>Impact assessment still remains vague: although a number of methods have been developed, reporting standards introduced and industry standards defined, there has been no acceptable method developed so far. There is no integrated approach for assessing the social impact. There are two levels of measurement: i) at the level of the intermediary, the additional capital brought in the market and the number of social enterprises financed; ii) at the social enterprise level: theory of change and qualitative description and quantitative information such as sales and nb of employees. Description of financing instruments, revenue streams, actors in the market, delivery options and products.</p> <p>Description of market imperfections: missing link between return and risk, missing pecking order, missing secondary market for equity investment, mismatch between sustainable and needed investment sizes, mismatch of supply and demand.</p>

No.	Type document	of	Author(s)	Year	Title	Source	Brief description
46.	Indicators		European Investment Fund	n.d.	Operational Reporting	European Commission	List of performance indicators
47.	List		European Investment Fund	2016	EaSI – Guarantee Financial Instrument	European Commission	List of signatures as of 30/06/16 for guarantees for both, microfinance and social enterprises intermediaries. Information on country, financial intermediary, type of support and budgetary allocation.
48.	Guidance		E. Varga, M. Hayday for Rand Europe	2015	A recipe book for social finance	European Commission Website	Guide addressed to social finance actors on how to implement their business model. The guide has 7 steps explaining how to create, assess and build a social initiative.
49.	Report		ICF	2014/2015	Mapping of social enterprises in Europe	European Commission Website	Growing interest in social enterprise across Europe, driven by a growing recognition of the role social enterprise can play in tackling societal and environmental challenges and fostering inclusive growth. Little is known about the scale and characteristics of the emerging social enterprise 'sector'. Operational definition of social enterprises developed. Social enterprises adopt a variety of legal forms and statuses. 22 out of 29 European countries studied do not have a specific policy framework for supporting the development of social enterprise. Reported levels of social enterprise activity adopt a variety of definitions and research methods but do suggest recent growth in numbers - although absolute numbers of social

No.	Type of document	Author(s)	Year	Title	Source	Brief description
						<p>enterprise are very small relative to mainstream enterprises. Social enterprises exploit a range of sources and in most countries, but the majority of their revenue comes from the public sector</p> <p>Systematic evidence on the type and prevalence of modes of creation of European social enterprise is lacking. The barriers to the development of the sector include: poor understanding of the concept, lack of specialist business development services, lack of legislative framework, access to markets and finance, absence of common measurement mechanisms.</p>
50.	Report	European Microfinance Network	2014	Overview of the Microfinance Sector in Europe	Website of the European Microfinance Network	Results of the bi-annual survey on microfinance in Europe. Sector information: provision scale, growth, actors engaged. Social performance: target groups, social mission and inclusion. Institutional and geographical diversity: range, diversity, location. Products and services: professional loans, consumer and personal loans, BDS, etc. Financial performance: data, indicators. Policy development: regulation, code of good conduct, networking. Outlook of the sector's development: crisis' impact, trends, fundinPrecedent reports also available.
51.	Report	GECES (expert group advising the Commission on social enterprise	October/November 2016	Report and recommendations	Not available	Social enterprise finance

No.	Type document	of Author(s)	Year	Title	Source	Brief description
						support)
52.	Guidance	European Venture Philanthropy Association	2016	A practical guide to venture philanthropy and social impact investment	Website of the European Venture Philanthropy Association	Practical guide is to assist start-up or early-stage VPOs in Europe by providing an insight into ‘what works’ in a European context, keeping in mind the diversity existing at individual country level. The guide includes information on funding models, management, fundraising and investment strategy and process.
53.	Report	European Venture Philanthropy Association	2016	Impact measurement in practice	European Venture Philanthropy Association	Five-step model to measure impact: setting objectives, analyzing stakeholders, measuring results, verifying and valuing impact, monitoring and reporting. Many VPOs still consider it difficult to implement impact measurement in their daily practice. The report provides 2 case studies going through the 5 steps.
54.	Report	European Venture Philanthropy Association	2014	European Venture Philanthropy and Social Investment 2013/2014	Website of the European Venture Philanthropy Association	Fourth annual survey of European Venture Philanthropy and Social Investment. Provides independent industry on European Venture Philanthropy and Social Investment.
55.	Studies	European Venture Philanthropy Association		Publications	Website of the European Venture Philanthropy Association	Various publications on Venture Philanthropy Organisations.
56.	Indicators/website	European Commission / Salford University		Supporting entrepreneurs and the self-employed - Microfinance	European Commission Website	Information on the European Code of Good Conduct for Microcredit Provision that is obligatory for getting funding / a guarantee under EaSI. The code was created to promote

No.	Type document	of Author(s)	Year	Title	Source	Brief description
						best practices in the field of microcredit. The code includes information on customer and investors relations, governance, risk management, reporting standards and management information systems.
57.	Website	European Commission	2016	Supporting entrepreneurs and the self-employed - Social entrepreneurship	European Commission Website	DG EMPL website on social enterprise support. Complementarity between different initiatives.
58.	Report	European Investment Fund and European Commission	n/a	Monitoring of credit portfolios: semi-annual reports on progress in credit portfolios	European Commission	
59.	Report	European Investment Fund and European Commission	n/a	Annual social performance reports	European Commission	
60.	Report	European Investment Fund and European Commission	n/a	Annual reports on Progress Microfinance	European Commission	

Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation

ANNEX 6: EASI MID-TERM EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Topic	Evaluation questions	Related sub-questions	Judgement criteria
Topic 1: Continuing relevance of general objectives.	1. To what extent do the general objectives identified in Article 4 of the EaSI Regulation continue to be relevant?	<p>1. Is there still a need to promote produce concrete, coordinated and innovative actions at both Union and Member State level in the fields of employment, social protection, social exclusion and poverty and working conditions (general objective a)?</p> <p>2. Is there still a need to support the development of adequate, accessible and efficient social protection systems and labour markets and to facilitate policy reform (general objective b)?</p> <p>3. Is there still a need to ensure that Union law on matters of employment, social protection, social exclusion and poverty and working conditions is effectively applied (general objective c)?</p> <p>4. Is there still a need to promote workers' voluntary geographical mobility and to develop high-quality and inclusive Union labour markets (general objective d)?</p> <p>5. Is there still a need to increase the availability and accessibility of microfinance for vulnerable people who wish to start up a micro-enterprise as well as for existing micro-enterprises, and to increase access to finance for social enterprises (general objective e)?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assumption: needs and demands have evolved since 2014. EaSI programme has kept abreast of these changes. Whether a majority of respondents consider that there is still a need. Whether such a need is felt more strongly by some stakeholder groups or in some countries. Proportion of stakeholders considering this need "very strong" or "quite strong". Evidence and justification provided by stakeholders.
	2. What existing/emerging trends should be taken into account in the second half of the programme (2007-2020)?	<p>1. Is there evidence of new/emerging social issues that should be taken into account in the second half of the programme?</p> <p>2. Is there evidence of new/emerging policy instruments that should be taken into account in the second half of the programme?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assumption: operating context has evolved since 2014.
Topic 3: continuing relevance of resource allocation between the	4. 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	<p>1. Is it still relevant to allocate 61% of the EaSI budget to PROGRESS?</p> <p>2. Is it still relevant to allocate 18% of the EaSI budget to</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence on how needs and demands have evolved since 2014. Views of stakeholders on needs.

Topic	Evaluation questions	Related sub-questions	Judgement criteria
three axes of EaSI.	thematic sections still relevant?	<p>EURES?</p> <p>3. Is it still relevant to allocate 21% of the EaSI budget to Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship?</p> <p>4. Has there been any tangible and material change to the social, economic and political context in which EaSI operates, that would justify a different resource allocation between the three axes?</p> <p>5. Does the performance of the individual axes merit a redistribution of resources?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actual resource allocation to date. • Evidence and justification provided by stakeholders on resource allocation.
Topic 4: Effectiveness in generating outcomes and achieving objectives.	<p>1. 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?</p> <hr/> <p>2. To what extent have the available financial means enabled the programme as a whole to fulfil its objectives entirely and in a timely manner?</p> <hr/> <p>3. To what extent does the current programme allow for effective upscaling of interventions</p>	<p>1. To what extent has EaSI delivered the expected outcomes (specific objective a: develop and disseminate high-quality comparative analytical knowledge)?</p> <p>2. To what extent has EaSI delivered the expected outcomes (specific objective b: effective and inclusive information-sharing, mutual learning and dialogue)?</p> <p>3. To what extent has EaSI delivered the expected outcomes (specific objective c: financial support to test social and labour market policy innovations)?</p> <p>4. To what extent has EaSI delivered the expected outcomes (specific objective d: financial support to increase /improve capacity)?</p> <p>5. To what extent, have horizontal issues (vulnerable groups, equality, non-discrimination, high level of quality and sustainable employment) been integrated across all axes?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence on the strength of relationship between inputs, outputs and outcomes. • Comparison with expectation in ex ante evaluation for general objectives. • Comparison with expectations for horizontal objectives. <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of overall progress. • Views of stakeholders. • Rates of absorption and demand for EaSI resources. <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of upscaling and ‘multiplier

Topic	Evaluation questions	Related sub-questions	Judgement criteria
	and for follow-up conditions and mechanisms?		effects'. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Views of stakeholders. Identification of 'innovations' and social experimentation results that have the potential to act as 'multipliers'.
	4. What have been the good practices in scaling up interventions?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of 'scaling up'. Circumstances enabling 'scaling up'. Evidence of 'good practice'.
Topic 5. Effectiveness in bringing about change	1. What have been - at this stage of the implementation - the qualitative and quantitative changes/effects of the interventions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What have been the qualitative and quantitative changes/effects of the interventions for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> analytical activities mutual-learning, awareness and dissemination activities financial support and capacity building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identification of qualitative and quantitative changes/effects of different types of criteria since the beginning of EaSI. Extent of the work programme's implementation.
	2. To what extent can these changes/effects be credited to the interventions?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is there evidence suggesting that specific outcome 1 should be attributed to EaSI activities? 2. Is there evidence suggesting that specific outcome 2 should be attributed to EaSI activities? 3. Is there evidence suggesting that specific outcomes 3 and 4 should be attributed to EaSI activities? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence suggesting that specific outcome 1 can be attributed to analytical activities. Evidence suggesting that specific outcome 2 can be attributed to mutual learning activities. Evidence suggesting that specific outcomes 3 and 4 can be attributed to EaSI financial support. Assessments of the theory of change at case study level based on evidence of the strength of links between inputs and outcomes.

Topic	Evaluation questions	Related sub-questions	Judgement criteria
	3. To what extent did other different factors influence the achievement observed?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identified external factors and risks influencing the achievement of outcomes were considered during programme design stage Evidence suggesting that specific EaSI outcomes can be attributed to non- EaSI activities
	4. What have been the unintended effect of the programme?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identified unintended effects; External factors and risks influencing the achievement of outcomes considered during programme design stage Evidence from stakeholders.
Topic 6. Effectiveness in involving stakeholders.	1. Which targeted groups of the programme have been involved in the programming and implementation of the EaSI programme?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of programme procedures and involvement of target groups including those concerned with transversal issues. Views of stakeholders.
	2. Has there been sufficient involvement of stakeholders in the programming and implementation of the EaSI programme?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of the level and effects of stakeholders' involvement Judgement of sufficiency based on views expressed by different groups and benchmarks from comparable EU programmes
	3. What were the most effective methods of involvement of the targeted groups and stakeholders?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identification of methods that are available at each implementation stage (programming, calls, projects, analytical activities, mutual learning activities). Comparisons and benchmarks between axes and comparisons with other EU

Topic	Evaluation questions	Related sub-questions	Judgement criteria
Topic 7. Efficiency of resource allocation and financing procedures..	1. 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?	1. To what extent is the overall budget allocation proportionate and efficient? 2. How do the ‘cross border’ aspects of the needs problems being addressed compare with EU resources allocated?	programmes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether the budget allocation is in line with the EaSI Regulation • Whether the costs are reasonable in relation to the outcomes achieved/ expected to be achieved • Views on the hypothetical consequences of increasing the budget • Views on the hypothetical consequences of reducing the budget.
	2. To what extent have the available financial means enabled the programme as a whole and each of its axes to fulfil their objectives efficiently?	1. To what extent have the available financial means enabled EaSI to fulfil its objectives efficiently? 2. Have the procedures been overly complex for the resources involved?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of levels of inefficiency and efficiency in comparison with analogous programmes. • The costs are reasonable in relation to the outcomes achieved/ expected to be achieved • The administrative and governance structure operates efficiently
Topic 9. Coherence accruing from the merging of the three previous programmes..	1. To what extent did the merging of the three previous programmes PROGRESS, EURES and PROGRESS Microfinance improve EaSI internal/external consistency, complementarity and flexibility?	1. To what extent did the merging of the previous programmes improve internal consistency, complementarity and flexibility? 2. To what extent did the merging of the previous programmes improve external consistency, complementarity and flexibility? 3. Is there evidence that merging PROGRESS, EURES and PROGRESS Microfinance improved the flexibility of these programmes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence and views on the internal coherence at EU and national levels • Evidence and views on the coherence of the programme from the perspective of external stakeholders and programme participants. • Evidence with respect to the ease of moving resources between axes as required. • Existence or not of overlaps between PROGRESS and EURES, in particular with its activities relating to the Public

Topic	Evaluation questions	Related sub-questions	Judgement criteria
	<p>2. What kind of synergies has the Programme developed or improved between the axes?</p> <hr/> <p>3. What level of flexibility - both between axes and between actions – would be required in order to get better outcomes?</p>	<p>1. What kind of synergies has the Programme developed or improved between PROGRESS and EURES?</p> <p>2. What kind of synergies has the Programme developed or improved between PROGRESS and Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship?</p> <p>3. What kind of synergies has the Programme developed or improved between EURES and Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship?</p> <p>4. What kind of synergies has the Programme developed or improved between the three axes?</p>	<p>Employment Services and labour market statistics.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of synergies between axes due to merging. • Evidence of potential synergies not being realised. • Evidence of problems due to the combination of axes. <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of negative consequences due to lack of flexibility • Estimates of the consequences of revisions to programme procedures
<p>Topic 10. Coherence with other EU intervention.</p>	<p>1. To what extent is this programme coherent and complementary (Article 7.1. of the EaSI Regulation) with other funding instruments such as the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), in particular the European Social Fund (ESF)?</p> <hr/> <p>2. What kind of synergies or joint actions (Articles 6 and 7.2. of the EaSI Regulation) has the programme developed with these funding instruments?</p>	<p>1. To what extent is EaSI coherent and complementary the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), in particular the European Social Fund (ESF)?</p> <p>2. Is EaSI coherent and complementary with other EU programmes? Which ones?</p> <p>3. Is EaSI incoherent or misaligned with other EU programmes? Which ones?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration of coherence and complementarity with other EU funding at programme preparation stage. • Current level of coherence and complementarity. • Existence of overlaps with other instruments. • Evidence of stakeholder confusion as regards the different programmes. <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existence of synergies and joint actions between programmes. • Evidence of the consequences of synergies and joint actions.

Topic	Evaluation questions	Related sub-questions	Judgement criteria
Topic 11. Coherence of involvement at EU, Member State regional and local levels.	1. To what extent is national, regional and local authorities' involvement demonstrating consistency and complementarity?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of national, regional and local authorities' involvement has demonstrating consistency and complementarity? Views of stakeholders.
	2. What would best be done at EU level to ensure that the programme's objectives are achieved?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consideration of consequences of changes to governance and administrative arrangements at EU level.
	3. What would best be done at Member State level?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consideration of the competences and capacities for Member States to undertake cross border and multinational aspects of the Programme without EU programme and support.
Topic 12. EU added value.	1. What has been the EU added value of the EaSI programme's activities?	1. What has been the EU added value of the EaSI activities? 2. Is there evidence suggesting that the specific outcomes of EaSI could not have been achieved to the same degree without EU intervention?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of different types of EU added value in EaSI. Views of stakeholders.
	2. 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?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence suggesting that EaSI activities could not have been delivered (or not as effectively and/or efficiently) if they had been designed and implemented only at Member State level. EU activities fill a well-defined gap or complement national interventions.
	3. To what extent do the issues addressed by the EaSI programme continue to require action at EU level?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assumption: The same results cannot be achieved (or not as effectively and/or efficiently) if they are designed and implemented only at Member State level

Topic	Evaluation questions	Related sub-questions	Judgement criteria
	<p>4. What would be the most likely consequences of stopping the existing EaSI programme's activities?</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU activities fill a well-defined gap or complement national interventions • Consideration of alternative scenarios for the termination of different EU level activities within EaSI and redistribution of resources.
	<p>5. 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?</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence on the nature and scale of EU added value (economies of scale, cross border learning and transfer of experience, reductions in 'friction' of internal borders, positive effects on national policies) • Evidence on the extent to which EU added value has been communicated to stakeholders • Evidence on the extent to which EU added value has been communicated to the public.
	<p>6.. What were the most effective ways of communication and dissemination of the EaSI's results to the relevant stakeholders and the broader public?</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparisons between different communication means applied (web sites, conferences, etc.). • Views of stakeholders and target groups.

Source: EaSI mid-term evaluation