



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

**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**  
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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Objective of the 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, Microfinance and 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' website<sup>1</sup>.

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 suggestions<sup>2</sup>. 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.

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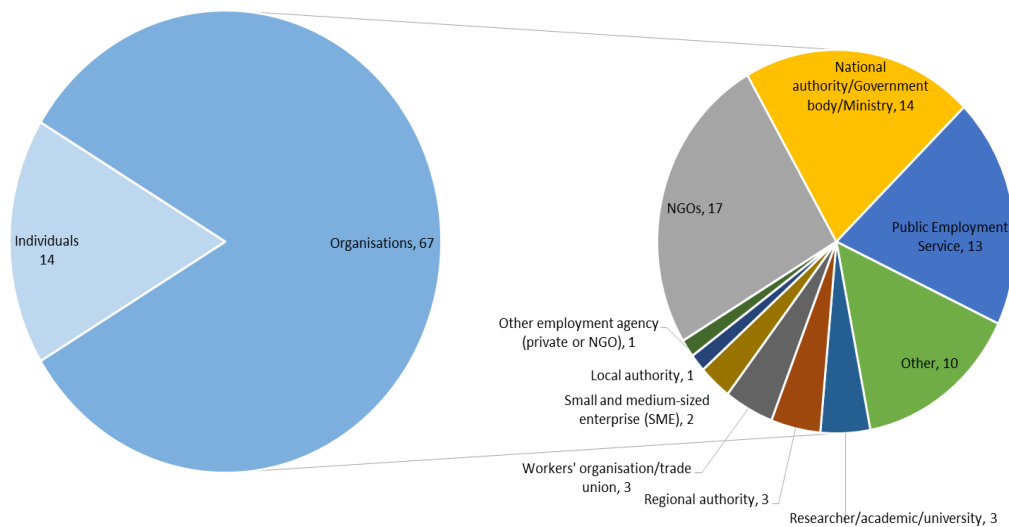
<sup>1</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=699&consultId=25&visib=0&furtherConsult=yes>

<sup>2</sup> 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. 14 responses were received from individuals. 67 responses were 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).

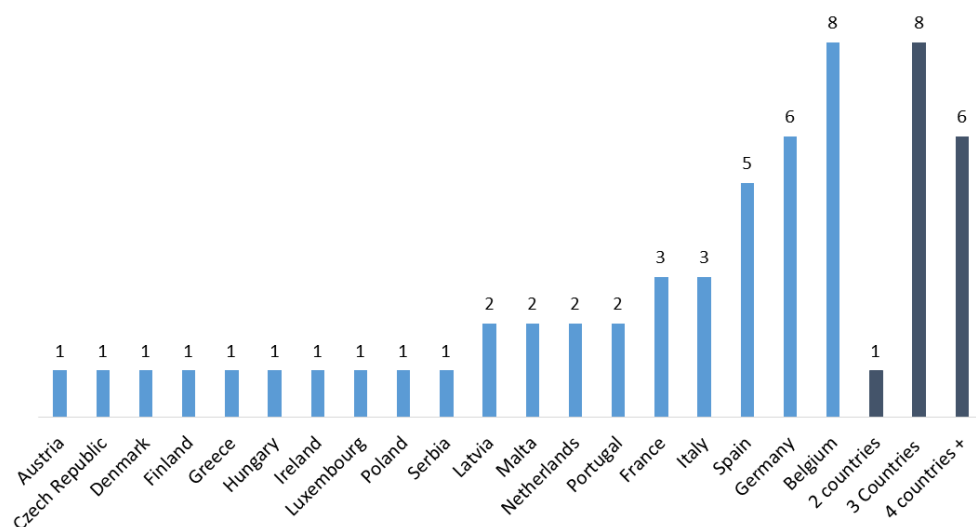
Figure 1: Total number of respondents per categories



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 and 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 policy makers (62).

Whilst 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 micro-enterprise, 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 policy makers/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 subsidized 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 advisors has also been neglected, with potential negative consequences on job opportunities.

### ***The effectiveness of the Microfinance and 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 micro enterprises 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 program 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 ECoGC<sup>3</sup> that lacks coherence and clarity, and shows rigidity regarding the application of some compulsory clauses.

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

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<sup>3</sup> ECoGC 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/](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/funding/special-support-instruments/jasmine/cgc/).

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 awarenesses of regional employers and of job-seekers 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 organizations. With regard to the microfinance sector, a respondent also recommends to develop the design of future projects in closer cooperation with the Microfinance Centre<sup>4</sup> and the European Microfinance Network<sup>5</sup>.

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

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<sup>4</sup> See more information on the Microfinance Centre at: <http://www.e-mfp.eu/users/microfinance-centre>.

<sup>5</sup> The European Microfinance Network (EMN) is involved in advocacy on a wide range of issues related to microfinance, micro-enterprises, social and financial exclusion, self-employment and employment creation (<http://www.european-microfinance.org/>).

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 EIB<sup>6</sup>, 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 policy making 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).

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-T<sup>7</sup> 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

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<sup>6</sup> 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/>).

<sup>7</sup> The 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>).



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.

Amongst 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 EU 2020 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 organizations 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.

***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. The Table 1 below summarizes 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.

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.

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

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

*Source: Online public consultation*

## **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 programs 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 optimization 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 transferrability 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 policy makers 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. EU added value

### ***The programme's EU added value is widely acknowledged, in particular with regards to the crossborder partnerships and the exchange of good practices***

71 respondents agree that EaSI facilitate the crossborder 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 micro-enterprises.

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, the 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 - losing 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 policy making 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 policy making 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 organizations. These organizations 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 organizations 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 the 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. 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 policy makers. 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 policy makers. 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 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's multi-level authorities as well 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 fulfills a vital function as catalyst and facilitator of national reforms. The EaSI resources are needed in particular for supporting the crossborder 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.