European Commission

EU Programme for Employment and
Social Innovation (EaSI)

Sustainability at the heart of EaSI

Thematic Discussion Paper

Social Europe

EaSI Annual Conference

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1   Overview

Why this thematic paper?

This thematic paper has been prepared for the EaSI 2019 Annual Conference '*From EaSI to ESF+: Supporting the sustainability of social and employment projects'* (30 September 2019, Brussels). This event is intended to be a key structural step in addressing the issue of sustainability in the EaSI programme. Its outcomes are also expected to be a stepping-stone for the future EaSI strand of the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), the main financial instrument to strengthen Europe's social dimension.

The paper is intended to stimulate discussion among conference participants and facilitate their sharing of experiences in implementing sustainable EaSI activities. The paper also aims to foster fresh thinking on how best to take forward the lessons learned into the future ESF+. This should help to reflect on means of improving the current situation, in the absence of any legal obligation to continue the activities when European grants cease.

The thematic paper is structured as follows:

> **Section 1** introduces the aim of the paper and defines sustainability.

> **Section 2** summarises how the challenge of sustainability is addressed in the EaSI, both at general programme level and within its axes.

> **Section 3** considers how sustainability is approached in other EU programmes.

> **Section 4** provides suggestions for practical checklists to support sustainable EaSI impacts.

> **Section 5** poses some questions for reflection at the conference.

What is sustainability?

Sustainability is achieved when the activities funded have lasting results, durable over time, after the public funding has stopped. It can occur at different levels, from the sustainability of funded activities to institutional change and socioeconomic impacts. Sustainability can also be financial (where activities initially funded continue after the funding has stopped) and occur at policy level (where the activities funded influence overall policy framework and concrete practices).

Sustainability is central to ensuring effective and efficient use of taxpayers' money, as it implies continued use and exploitation of results in the short, medium and long-term.

Internationally, the concept of sustainability acknowledges the various aspects involved in publicly funded interventions. For the purposes of this paper, the conceptions of sustainability used by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) are taken as representative of international practice.

Sustainability is defined by the OECD as '*the continuation of benefits from a development intervention after major development assistance has been completed; the probability of continued long-term benefits; the resilience to risk of the net benefit flows over time*'.[i] To contribute to the achievement of the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the OECD advises on Social Impact Investment.[ii] In this context, the
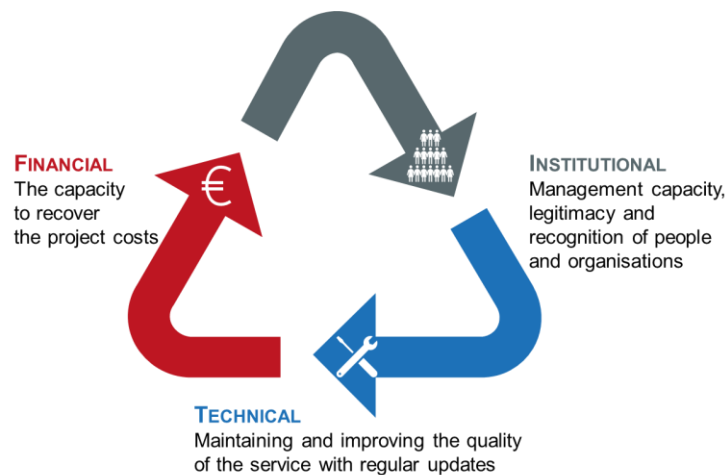
OECD provides new guidance for policy makers, providers, development financers, practitioners and the private sector on sustainable financing, innovation, policy development and data.

For sustainable finance, it recommends **engaging local investors** to support and embed the commercial sustainability of funded activities.

Innovation and experimentation should be **developed in an ecosystem** of enabling organisations, beneficiaries, funders and regulators, and driven by upscaling of pilots by the public sector.

Initiatives should be **evaluated** to support commitment from the public and private sectors to ensure their sustainability.

A transparent, standardised and interoperable **data-sharing infrastructure** is needed to assess impact and its sustainability over time.

Source: OECD, 2019, Social Impact Investment.[iii]

For the ILO, activities and projects are managed with a focus on results in programme planning, implementation, reporting and evaluation, which then inform subsequent programming cycles. The ILO advises on institutional, technical and financial sustainability as follows:[iv]

FINANCIAL
The capacity to recover the project costs

INSTITUTIONAL
Management capacity, legitimacy and recognition of people and organisations

TECHNICAL
Maintaining and improving the quality of the service with regular updates

Source: ILO, 2014 SYIB Implementation Guide.[v]

Finally, the OSCE's Manual for project managers[vi] defines sustainability as '*lasting political, institutional, managerial and technical change*'. In considering whether or not benefits will last beyond the initial intervention, the following questions should be asked:

Is there ownership of the project results?

Is there a commitment to maintenance of equipment or technology?

Is there lasting institutional capacity (adequate and trained staff, sufficient budget and equipment)?

Are changes in attitudes, behaviour patterns and institutional arrangements likely to last once the project is closed?

Are the benefits inclusive, e.g. considering gender equality, diversity?

Are there policy or legislative changes that impact on results?

Source: OCSE, 2010, Project Management in the OSCE A Manual for Programme and Project Managers.[vii]

2   Sustainability in EaSI

2.1 What is the current approach to ensuring sustainability in EaSI?

Implemented by the European Commission under direct and indirect management modes, EaSI aims to promote a high level of quality and sustainable employment, guarantee adequate and decent social protection, combat social exclusion and poverty, and improve working conditions in the Member States and other participating countries.[viii]

The programme is composed of three axes, each supporting different objectives:[ix]

> **PROGRESS** supports policy-making and implementation by producing policy evidence, organising information-sharing and mutual learning activities, creating better conditions for social innovation, and helping to build capacity for EU and national organisations.

> **EURES** provides information and services for jobseekers and employers and runs targeted mobility schemes to enable people to find work in other parts of the EU.

> **Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship** supports access to microfinance for vulnerable persons and microenterprises, as well as access to finance for social enterprises.

The programme contributes to achieving sustainable outcomes in employment, social inclusion, social protection, mobility and working conditions. An important part of EaSI also provides space for social policy innovation to respond to social needs that are met insufficiently or not at all. The programme therefore provides catalyst funding for field testing of innovative solutions to identify the most effective, with a view to their scaling-up. In this respect, activities with clear EU added value and a multiplier effect are particularly emphasised in the EaSI funding.

Like other EU-financed programmes (see Section 3.1), the preliminary review shows that the dissemination and follow-up of results appear to be addressed throughout the overall EaSI policy cycle:

DESIGN & PROGRAMMING	IMPLEMENTATION	FOLLOW-UP
Projects applying for EaSI funding may be required to indicate how they will ensure the sustainability of their activities, ensuring that it is a formal award criterion for receipt of an EaSI grant.	Projects carry out their planned activities in accordance with the work programme designed to lead to intended sustainable results. Experiences of ensuring sustainability are discussed within the project partnership and across projects (either nationally or at European level, such as this conference). At the end of the implementation period, activities are implemented to ensure the sustainability of projects results, through dissemination, mainstreaming, follow-up or communication actions (as appropriate). All projects carry out dissemination/communication activities on completion but these do not in themselves ensure sustainability. The final project report also addresses the extent of sustainability achieved.	After the EaSI funding has ended, projects continue to follow-up their results, using either other EU funding sources or their own organisational processes and resources. At EU level, EaSI activities' sustainability is assessed through programme evaluation and other studies.

Assessment and monitoring of the EaSI programme show **a range of sustainable results from its funded activities**. The contribution to policy-making is particularly marked, i.e. initiatives supported by EaSI become sustainable policies with lasting effects. For instance, the social pillar approach has become an established policy framework at EU and national level. The social innovation issue is now a permanent priority, having been championed by EaSI for the past 15 years. In addition, the EaSI mid-term evaluation found the programme successful as a whole in **achieving quality results**.[x] Based on this initial assessment, some of the results achieved to date can in turn be expected to be sustained after the end of the EaSI funding period.

However, the preliminary analysis shows that ensuring the sustainability of EaSI results remains a challenge, both at programme level and within the projects implemented under the individual axes. It is hoped that the exchanges at the 2019 Annual Conference will stimulate further thinking on how best to improve sustainability in EaSI projects.

At the level of individual axes, preliminary results were identified in the preparation of this paper, together with an indicative range of factors influencing their effectiveness and sustainability.[xi] Although the combination of factors supporting sustainability is specific to each axis, it appears that **several sustainability factors are common to all axes**. These relate to the commitment and expertise of project partnerships, in particular the effective reach of the key stakeholders and decision makers to communicate and use project results and lessons learned. Continuous communication and dissemination of emerging and final project results is also essential.

Factors specific to each EaSI axis are explored further below.

2.2 Sustainability in the PROGRESS axis

The PROGRESS axis funds analytical, mutual learning, awareness and dissemination activities to promote evidence-based policy-making, social innovation and social progress, in partnership with civil society organisations, public and private organisations. Here, sustainability typically refers to policy makers' use of the evidence and knowledge produced, take-up of the innovations developed in mainstream policy, facilitation of policy reform and further modernisation of EU law. Successful social innovations are also expected to be scaled-up at national level.

Early analysis suggests that **projects implemented under the PROGRESS axis already facilitate policy change at EU and national level** through development of comparative and analytical knowledge, information-sharing and mutual learning, capacity-building, and social experimentation and innovation.

For example, in a DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion survey carried out in 2019, 12 of 16 social experimentation projects reported concrete steps planned or undertaken to use national or EU/EEA funding to scale-up their successful practices. Five projects indicated having scaled-up their activities. Of the 16 projects, 13 reported policy spillover effects at local or regional level, with three noting these effects at national level also.

Based on early research results, **a concrete design feature supporting sustainability in the social experimentation projects appears to be the requirement for the main applicants to be public bodies**. They should therefore be provided with a direct link to national institutional frameworks, as well as the means to directly influence other policy-making bodies in using the results funded by EaSI.

While the social innovation theme is also supported in the European Social Fund (ESF), further efforts seem to be needed

to connect the two funding streams more effectively and further support social innovation.

Specific factors supporting effective and sustainable results in projects vary considerably. First, project promoters should have the capacity/expertise to carry out experimentation, as well as strong partnerships to disseminate their outcomes at national level. The innovations trialled initially appear to be suitable for scaling-up if key decision makers are aware of the results and key lessons learned from the experimentation phase. Effective communication and dissemination and the ability to reach the key decision makers appear crucial to ensuring sustainability.

Preliminary evidence suggests that sustainability may not concern all aspects of a social experimentation EaSI-funded project. For example, some results may be sustained as they have

proven effective and worthy of scaling-up after the experimentation phase. Other results may not have proven sufficiently effective to maintain or scale-up. An EaSI project can thus be

considered sustainable if at least some of its relevant results are maintained, used or further developed after the end of the funding period.

The EaSI-funded MISSION project presented below provides a good example of robust planning to ensure the sustainability of piloted activities.

The MISSION project[xii] in the Belgian city of Kortrijk tests an innovative outreach approach for the integrated delivery of local services, aimed at assimilating disadvantaged families into the labour market.

The case handlers are the single point of contact for these families, providing a one-stop-shop for social welfare delivery. Multidisciplinary case handlers visit a well-defined target group of disadvantaged families and assess the families' specific problems and needs, using a newly developed smartphone application. Then, over a six-month period, they guide the families to find and use the appropriate support systems.

The effectiveness of the MISSION interventions will be determined by a randomised controlled trial, to see if it is successful in increasing take-up of employment support services, and whether it affects a wider range of outcomes. An evaluation of the intervention will examine how it works, for whom and under what circumstances. A comprehensive report will outline the elements that have been most successful, together with KPIs for scaling up the most sustainable aspects of the method to other cities with similar challenges.

Source: Information provided by the project in advance of the conference.

Similarly, the INSPIRE project demonstrates how plans to integrate its activities into local strategic

development plans could facilitate sustainability.

The **INSPIRE project**[xiii] built on Rome's social services reform process to develop a new care system for vulnerable people. INSPIRE identified innovative administrative procedures for the reuse of abandoned and disused spaces for social activities.

To date, several innovative delivery models, processes and tools have been created to address: needs assessment, governance of territorial networks, joint participation procedures, reuse of unused spaces for social purposes, trial of innovative services (socio-occupational laboratories for people with disabilities or suffering mental hardship, supportive residences for frail/elderly people, tutoring for frail adults and social inclusion internships) in five Rome municipalities.

The sustainability of project results will be ensured through the integration of innovative and newly developed processes into the mainstream provision of social services.

Source: Information provided by the project in advance of the conference

Specific factors supporting effective and sustainable results for PROGRESS axis projects relate mainly to their **capacity to respond to social needs** at European, local or national level. This responsiveness increases the likelihood that project results will be used, which, in turn, requires PROGRESS projects to be strongly aligned to national and European policy priorities. Similarly, projects must be **flexible to reach different types of stakeholders** and beneficiaries in order to react to the changing context and evolving societal needs.

2.3   Sustainability in the EURES axis

This axis facilitates dissemination of information and cooperation, including through cross-border partnerships (CBPs). These CBPs promote voluntary geographical mobility of workers and should thus contribute to sustainable employment across the EU. Here, sustainability typically refers to lasting mobility outcomes for workers (with a special focus on young people) and their employers, and sustainable macro effects through filling labour market shortages. Sustainability is also achieved when innovative EURES activities are absorbed into the mainstream practices of participating organisations.

Projects facilitate improvements in access to job vacancies and enhance labour market transparency through the EURES job mobility portal, advice to jobseekers through EURES advisors and better awareness of the possibilities and benefits of cross-border European mobility.

Specific factors supporting effective and sustainable results in projects include supporting the development of **strong and inclusive CBPs**, and better quality joint activities that are more easily integrated into mainstream institutional processes. In this respect, **previous experience** of the consortium partners has emerged as helpful in supporting the institutional capacity and expertise needed to carry out good quality, professional and successful matching and mobility support services.

Strong engagement of key labour market stakeholders throughout the project duration appears to help to source job placements and disseminate the new products or services developed through EURES projects directly to the key target groups.

As shown by the projects presented below, a transversal theme across EURES projects seems to be the critical **role of good-quality partnerships** in ensuring successful achievement and sustainability of results. The preliminary analysis shows that the CBPs themselves are very difficult to sustain in the absence of EaSI funding and often do not continue their activities. Ways to further encourage buy-in and ownership of CBPs would be a useful topic for discussion at the conference (e.g. through asking for a higher co-financing rate).

The **EURES Transfronterizo Galicia-Norte Portugal**[xiv] is supported by a wide cross-border partnership. In addition to Public Employment Services (PES), the project involves vocational education institutions, universities, labour inspectorates and social partners (both trade unions and employer representatives). Project activities benefit from a broad range of expertise and connections, with the partnership based on well-established working relations and a long-standing tradition of cooperation.

The **EURES Scheldemond** project[xv] is a cross-border partnership established on the Belgian-Dutch border, coordinated by their respective PES'. The quality and sustainability of project results is underpinned by the fact that both PES' are highly developed and place considerable emphasis on digital services and products. Recently, partners developed a mobile application for job-matching, which has the potential to be replicated in other cross-border regions.

The **'TMS-Your first EURES job'** is led by the Swedish PES, alongside over 10 partners in other European countries. The support focuses on job-matching and placement for young jobseekers. The quality of the partnership enables the delivery of integrated and targeted support packages to jobseekers, ranging from financial support to language courses and recognition of qualifications. The partnership also covers several types of geographical mobility flows, thus broadening the scope of the EURES project.

Source: Information provided by the projects in advance of the conference

2.4 Sustainability in the Microfinance and Social Entrepreneurship axis

This axis funds activities to promote access to finance for micro-entrepreneurs (including vulnerable groups) to set up a micro-enterprise, as well as for existing micro-enterprises. It also facilitates access to finance for social enterprises. Here, sustainability is achieved by supporting target groups through better access to finance in order to foster job creation and social inclusion. Access to finance remains a major obstacle to business creation and harnessing entrepreneurship potential, especially among those furthest from the labour market.

Projects implemented under the Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis are expected to increase access to, and the availability of, finance for both microfinance (including vulnerable groups) and social enterprises. Specific factors supporting effective and sustainable results relate to:

> **Financial intermediaries' previous experience** of working with vulnerable people;

> Combining financing with providing high quality business development services, such as **mentoring, coaching and training** for the final recipients;

> **Institutional capacity and quality of services** provided by financial intermediaries, including qualified staff (loan officers), ability to hire new people, and modernised internal working procedures and IT systems. These are critical to ensuring high quality support for the final recipients. Robust institutional structures protect the functionality of systems which also increase the likelihood of sustainable outcomes.

The initial review shows how the Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship axis projects exemplify the interplay between these factors in supporting the sustainability of project results. A cross-cutting theme that emerges is the **role of partnerships** in ensuring the sustainability of project results.

ReadinESS[xvi], a project led by the association 'France Active', provided support to facilitate the investment readiness of social enterprises in France. A total of 30 social enterprises were provided with individual and group-based supports to structure their financial strategy and raise financing. A key sustainable outcome was the strong network created among the participating social entrepreneurs and stakeholders.

Most of the stakeholders expressed a willingness to continue and strengthen their networking and cooperation after the termination of the project. The beneficiaries also confirmed that they will use the project inputs for future strategy development and fundraising activities. In a bid to scale-up the project, the key partners (France Active, Mouves and Antropia ESSEC) updated the delivery plan to reflect the lessons learned during the EaSI funding and are now seeking financial support for the next stage of the ReadinESS project.

> **The European Microfinance Network (EMN)**[xvii] covers 114 members in 25 countries and the Microfinance Centre (MFC) covers 113 members in 36 countries. Financed by EaSI, both networks develop advocacy and capacity-building activities among their members. In advocacy work, the networks delivered a series of analytical outputs to capture the latest microfinance trends and organised regular meetings and events with policy makers. This enhanced communication between the microfinance sector and the different policy makers at EU and national level.
>
> The networks strengthened the skills of their member organisations and contributed to increasing their organisational capacity through a series of peer-to-peer visits, webinars, exchange of good practice and communication activities. The sustainability of the outputs is likely to be important and is expected to include research papers, reports and policy notes for further enhancement of microfinance practices and development of tools across the EU. It is worth noting that the networks are likely to be merged.
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> *Source: Projects and organisations funded by EaSI (Report IX)*

2.5 Risks and obstacles to improving the sustainability of EaSI activities

Based on the preliminary analysis, a number of risks and obstacles could negatively affect the sustainability of the EaSI-funded activities.

The follow-up of actions financed by EaSI can be hindered by **the lack of further funding** (via EaSI, other EU funds or national level resources). Stakeholders perceive the lack of available EaSI funding as an obstacle to scaling-up funded interventions.[xviii] For the social experimentation projects, in particular, further funding has been identified as a key obstacle, together with the **lack of conditions and concrete mechanisms for their transferability and upscaling.**

A longer financing period could enable organisations to create a more sustained impact. However, there is a risk of path dependency (particularly for some EURES projects) if the organisations become too dependent on EaSI funding. This could prevent them from fully exploiting national or other EU funding sources or integrating initial project results more sustainably into mainstream service delivery.[xix]

A particular obstacle relates to the limited **capacity of smaller Member States to access EaSI funding**.[xx] This is often because their public administrations lack resources (financial and human) to build capacity or develop the knowledge to implement EaSI activities. Generally, stakeholders from larger Member States have more financial capacity and expertise to build on past experiences and dedicate human resources to support new EaSI projects.

To address these risks and challenges, a number of possible steps should be discussed at the conference. For instance, **strengthening stakeholder involvement** could help to achieve better and more sustained results from EaSI projects. The most effective involvement methods appear to be targeted information dissemination from the projects to the appropriate stakeholders at the critical points of project delivery process, regular and targeted engagement with partner organisations working with relevant target groups, and inclusion of national/public authorities across the project delivery cycle, from inception to finalisation.

Better dissemination of EaSI results to the relevant stakeholders could also help to scale-up results and mainstream effective solutions trialled with EaSI. This would engage relevant stakeholders more closely with the results of EaSI activities, provide evidence of their impact, and share information on projects, activities and best practices.

Finally, **the current governance structure could be used more effectively to** promote the sustainability of concrete project results. For example, EaSI committee members could be better equipped to act as points of contact and 'coordinators' of EaSI at national level. This could help to monitor project progress, support sustainability efforts and disseminate high quality results at national level.

3 Approaches in other EU funds

This section reviews a series of approaches taken by other EU funds to support sustainability.

Firstly, it is important to underline that the **thematic focus and management modes** of other EU funding instruments differ from the architecture of EaSI. Broadly speaking, there are funding instruments **managed similarly to EaSI** (directly by the European Commission or an EU executive agency), where national level structures are key to their implementation and supporting the sustainability of funded activities. This is the case for the **Creative Europe**, which is the European Commission's framework programme for support to the culture and audiovisual sectors. This programme is implemented by the Executive Agency for Education, Audiovisual and Culture (EACEA) supported by the national desks.

Similarly, the **Health Programme** is managed by the Consumers, Health and Food Executive Agency, with Member States designating national focal points for the promotion of the programme and its results.

Horizon 2020 funding opportunities are set out in multiannual work programmes, prepared and managed directly by the Commission and focusing on specific policy priorities.

By contrast, a number of programmes are **co-managed** by the European Commission and national authorities, for instance the **European Social Fund** (ESF). In the EaSI context, the lessons from ESF are particularly important, as part of EaSI activities will be part of the future ESF+ architecture.

As shown below, the follow-up and dissemination of results throughout the project lifecycle are particularly important for these European funds.

DESIGN & PROGRAMMING	IMPLEMENTATION	FOLLOW-UP
Typically (but not always), the proposed projects/activities need to outline how they will achieve medium or long-term results, measured at individual or system level. Emphasis is placed on the sustainable design of projects and activities, especially via effective partnerships and targeted communication strategies.	Activities are implemented via work plans and project results are disseminated. Outreach programmes (e.g. Creative Europe) have communication activities to maximise results beyond the end of the funding period. Online competitions or communication through social media will be increased to reach larger audiences.	Project results are used and exploited in the longer term, via dissemination or mainstreaming. In research supported by Horizon 2020 or the Health Programme, commercialisation and accreditation are two types of action that may foster sustainability. It is acknowledged that not all parts of a project or results may be sustainable. For example, Horizon 2020 funding supports different research phases from preparation and implementation to long-term effects, via efficient operation, transnational access and use of research infrastructures.

Much like EaSI, independent evaluations of these funds point to a range of positive and sustained long-term effects at individual and policy level. Here, too, however, sustainability varies between countries and activities funded. In general, the funds have positive effects on more effective and efficient public investment, knowledge exchange and support for social experimentation and innovation.

Most programmes achieve positive sustained effects for individuals and organisations. For example, activities funded under ESF often introduced processes (e.g. training, quality management procedures or e-governance) that **continue beyond the lifespan of the original activity.** Similarly, in the Health Programme, the collaboration between EU Health Technology Assessment bodies delivered common tools and standards, offering potentially significant economies of scale.

A number of programmes achieved behavioural changes among the target group, a finding in line with the objectives of the EU programmes. For instance, the Erasmus+ evaluation points to 'a cultural shift in the perception of mobility and its positive image'. ESF human capital interventions have had positive employment outcomes, as well as improvements in skills and competences. However, there is no common approach to assessing the sustainability of interventions for individuals.

At institutional and policy level, a key sustainable result relates to **increased stakeholder capacity to cooperate (including after the initial funding has stopped)**. In the Creative Europe programme, for example, long-lasting working relationships between partners often saw further civic activities beyond the project's lifecycle. In the Erasmus+, schools participating in the eTwinning Programme often continued their collaboration after the end of the project. Similarly, participants in Horizon 2020-funded research stressed the ongoing access to new partners and collaborations.

Although a number of positive long-term results can be highlighted (such as improved individual skills or partnership created), the sustainability of interventions relies heavily on the continuation of activities. The experience of 2007-2013 ESF investments is important here, as it demonstrates how sustainable effects were achieved when coupled with an **infrastructure investment.** This allowed the practices developed during the project to be mainstreamed.

In Horizon 2020 and the Health Programme, the question of **joint ownership of sustainability aspects** by national and local actors was raised. For example, in Horizon 2020, joint programming is a Member State-led process designed to coordinate research in Europe and to address major societal challenges. However, national co-funding has been insufficient, with few inter-ministerial structures to support the joint programming process.

In general, it is essential to link EU funding programmes to key national policy initiatives and planning. This sustains the follow-up efforts, in particular by considering policy change. Funding criteria need to be flexible enough to experiment - and subsequently mainstream - and link innovations to key current issues, such as climate change.

4 Taking sustainability forward: what more can EaSI do?

It is evident that EaSI project promoters, national authorities and the European Commission have made a good start in supporting the sustainable implementation of the EaSI programme. However, in light of current best practice and advice from international bodies, more could be done to support sustainability.

This section contains some initial practical suggestions based on the preliminary analysis, for further reflection and discussion at the Annual Conference.

DESIGN AND PROGRAMMING STAGE

APPLICATION STAGE

Project promoters

> Define a specific sustainability strategy: what does sustainability mean within the project, how will it be ensured (processes, products, activities), by whom (internal partners and external stakeholders), when and how will it be reported to the Commission.

> Select partners who have the potential to promote, enlarge, enhance and/or replicate the project in their own contexts.

> Consider allocating specific resources to the implementation of a sustainability strategy.

> If relevant, the application should reflect how the lessons from previously funded activities have been taken on board, making the link between previous work (theirs or other stakeholders) and the current proposal in order to show that the proposal is part of a larger sustainability strategy within the thematic area.

National authorities, EaSI committee, ESF management authorities, other national organisations

> Support applicants in defining the sustainability strategy and establish how project activities and results fit into the country's policy and implementation framework.

> Establish a network of national contact points, linking these with similar networks of other EU programmes to allow for experience exchange, promotion and dissemination of information, calls for proposals and results, as well as bringing potential applicants into contact with each other.

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> Check that sustainability is systematically reflected in the grant award criteria.

> Ensure that applicants have sufficient time to prepare, implement and promote their project

> In the calls, define the framework for sustainability and related expectations from projects.

> Set up specific guidelines encouraging new applicants.

> Share learning with potential applicants from past EaSI activities on their experiences in ensuring sustainability.

> Encourage applicants to allocate specific resources to the implementation of the sustainability strategy during project implementation.

> Organise information sessions explaining the guidelines, as well as seminars or mutual learning activities on sustainability strategies.

GRANT AWARD STAGE / INITIAL PROJECT PLANNING

Project promoters

> Review the proposed sustainability strategy with all partners: are the main actions planned still relevant, has the context changed and does it require new activities.

> Confirm the key responsibilities in the partnership: who is responsible for each aspect of sustainability.

National authorities, EaSI committee, ESF management authorities, other national organisations

> Engage with the selected projects in concrete planning of sustainability strategies.

> Examine the results of finished projects and assess whether their results could be used at a larger scale.

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> Confirm sustainability expectations and hold initial exchanges on the plans for sustainability.

IMPLEMENTATION STAGE

Project promoters

> Remain flexible and open to reaching beneficiaries and stakeholders not originally included in the scope.

> Implement the agreed sustainability strategy, adjusting it to the changing context and needs of key stakeholders to ensure the sustainability of activities.

> Focus on communication and dissemination to key decision makers at national, regional and local level (as appropriate).

> Fully use the existing partnership and its strengths to communicate and disseminate project results.

> Strengthen the sustainability of the action by creating synergies across projects within the same call.

>

National authorities, EaSI committee, ESF management authorities, other national organisations

> Support projects in their interactions with key stakeholders and communication/dissemination activities.

> Organise joint EaSI and ESF experience exchange and dissemination events.

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> Report on experiences of ensuring sustainability through regular EaSI monitoring activities.

> Actively share emerging learning on achieving sustainability through mutual learning activities.

> Support project promoters and national authorities to create synergies and exchange knowledge and experience with parallel projects in the same call cohort.

FOLLOW-UP STAGE

Project promoters

> Take stock of the degree of success and sustainability results achieved from the project and formally consider how these could be further supported with/without EaSI funding (via other funding sources, mainstreaming of EaSI innovations).

> Formally assess the project activities that can be scaled up and transferred: why, how, who, when, where.

> Continue dissemination activities with project ideas, activities and best practices emerging from EaSI.

National authorities, EaSI committee, ESF management authorities, other national organisations

> Examine the results of finished projects and assess whether their results could be used at a larger scale.

> Support projects in their consideration of how EaSI results could be supported via ESF and other EU or national funding sources.

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> Collect evidence on sustainability in EaSI projects and draw lessons for the next rounds of projects and calls.

> Ensure that the extent of sustainability achieved and reflections on the sustainability strategy implemented are included in the final project reports.

> Assess the sustainability strategies that work best in particular EaSI contexts and share this with future applicants.

> Hold dissemination events/exchanges at European level to promote project ideas, activities and best practices emerging from EaSI, as well as within specific axes and calls.

> Consider granting awards for supporting highly promising projects in their efforts for replication/extension of the activities to other policy areas and/or regions.

5   Conclusions

Sustainability encompasses different aspects of EaSI-funded activities, reflecting the diversity of projects and types of activities funded across the three EaSI axes. To date, a range of sustainable EaSI-related effects has been achieved, at both financial (continuing of activities after the initial funding has stopped) and policy (influencing the overall policy framework nationally and within the EU) levels.

Ensuring the sustainability of EaSI-funded activities remains a challenge, despite the increased attention paid to ensuring sustainability at the design, implementation and follow-up stages at individual project and overall programme level. Although the factors supporting sustainability vary - reflecting the nature of the different projects under the three axes - several are common across the axes. These relate to the quality, commitment and expertise of the project partnerships, which are particularly important in ensuring effective engagement of the key stakeholders and decision makers. Targeted and tailored communication and dissemination of emerging and final project results across the project cycle are also important.

Overall, strengthening stakeholder involvement, enhancing dissemination activities and considering the sustainability aspect more explicitly across the project cycle could be beneficial to strengthen sustainability. Paying particular attention to lessons learned, attracting further funding, upscaling the initial activities and/or mainstreaming projects and results at policy/practice level should be further encouraged. This could build on existing practices in other EU programmes, as well as international best practice.

Further actions suggested should be discussed at the conference, building on the rich experience of participating EaSI projects. The following questions may provide some useful reflections in advance of these discussions:

What does sustainability mean to you in the context of your project?

How strongly do you consider sustainability when implementing your project?

In your experience, what actions tend to work best to ensure that the results you create in your project last?

What elements are missing from the current set up of the EaSI to support your project to achieve better sustainability?

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