Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) 2014-2020

2011/0270(COD) - 20/05/2019 - Follow-up document

The Commission presents its mid-term evaluation of the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI).

It assessed progress made in achieving the programme's objectives and its continuing relevance, its efficiency and use of resources, its policy coherence in relation to other instruments and its EU added value.

The evaluation covered EaSI activities from January 2014 to December 2016.

The following conclusions were reached on the evaluation's six main themes:

Relevance

The evaluation confirmed that EaSI's rationale and its five general objectives are still highly relevant, particularly in the evaluation time-frame context of the aftermath of the financial and economic crisis — with a welcome but slow recovery — and trends likely to impact the EU for years to come. For instance, with a large influx of refugees and immigrants to EU Member States, the number of vulnerable people has drastically increased, making their successful integration one of the highest EU priorities.

EaSI helped to increase awareness of EU policy inputs into social inclusion and poverty reduction, to improve perceptions of the cross-border potential for employment, to rapidly test and implement innovative measures, and to increase access to microfinance loans and support for entrepreneurship.

Effectiveness

The programme's three axes (PROGRESS, EURES and microfinance/social entrepreneurship) differ in terms of their effectiveness in generating outcomes and achieving objectives, and in bringing about change. Thus, 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 has been contributing to the development of a transparent labour market in terms of demand and supply. Evidence on Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship suggests that EaSI funding has increased the availability of and access to finance across the participating countries

Efficiency

The efficiency of PROGRESS could be further improved by introducing changes and reducing the administrative burden in the project award and implementation stages.

Coherence

Despite efforts to build synergies between the three axes they continue to 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.

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.

Continuous efforts are, however, necessary — mainly in terms of communication on EaSI activities and dissemination of its results.

Programme governance

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

Conclusion

The report concluded that the evaluation had 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. Therefore, future evaluations should be scheduled to allow more results and wider impacts to emerge and support the analysis.

The mid-term evaluation did highlight a number of ways to improve EaSI's implementation before the end of the current Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), especially through:

- enhanced internal budgetary flexibility;

- targeting groups in need of specific support;

- simplifying procedures;

- improving internal coherence and linking EaSI with other funds.

In particular, improved streamlining of funding could have a tangible impact on EaSI's relevance, efficiency, coherence, and effectiveness and EU value added. This could be done in 2017-2020, through appropriate linkages or new mechanisms linking the different EU funds.

After 2020, an 'umbrella fund' called European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) gathering together all funds managed by DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion — including EaSI — will provide one easy-to-use interface with beneficiaries, reduce fragmentation and enhance synergies between funds, thus creating the conditions for more effective policy implementation and EU value added.

Lastly, the mid-term evaluation also highlighted the need to improve the programme's internal and coherence.