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

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

This European Commission staff working document reports on the mid-term evaluation of the Employment and Social Innovation programme for 2014-2020 (EaSI) and identifies avenues for possible further improvements.

It is based on an external evaluation report and other sources of evidence, in particular EaSI performance monitoring reports, the annual management reports of the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, and evaluations of previous programmes.

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

Key findings of the evaluation's six themes

Relevance

The mid-term evaluation finds that all the activities undertaken in the first half of the programme are in line with the goals set in the EaSI Regulation. EaSI's original rationale and its five general objectives are still highly relevant, particularly in the current challenging socioeconomic context of the aftermath of the financial and economic crisis, with a welcome but slow recovery. The programme's objectives are also still pertinent in light of recent political events likely to impact the EU in the coming years.

Effectiveness

Despite the limited data sets available, the evaluation presents evidence that EaSI was effective in reaching relevant stakeholders, producing desired outcomes and achieving its objectives.

Efficiency

Due to the type of activity and the influence of conditions outside the programme's control, it proved difficult to conclude much about EaSI's efficiency. While the financial means available were sufficient to implement PROGRESS and EURES activities, the budget for Microfinance/Social Entrepreneurship was too low.

The efficiency of PROGRESS could be further improved by reducing the administrative burden in the projects' award and implementation stages.

Coherence

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

EU added value

EaSI produced demonstrable EU added value in terms of scope and scale, compared to national and regional support. Should EaSI be discontinued, this would have repercussions in many sectors. It would be unlikely that other national or regional funding schemes would be able to support policy experimentation across different participating countries and EU-level multidisciplinary networks, as EaSI currently does.

EaSI governance

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

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

Lessons learned and further improvements

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